

the Escapist

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and I needed the
money

by Richard Bartle

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EDITOR'S NOTE

by **Julianne Greer**

Hello fellow Escapists, I have some exciting news. Our clan just grew one larger. Russ Pitts, previously of Gamers with Jobs, has joined our editorial team as Associate Editor for Acquisitions. We're all pretty excited to have him, and look forward to incorporating his ideas into *The Escapist*. Everyone please welcome Russ!

And now, onto this week's issue – "Rated M for Mature." This title is taken from the ESRB's rating system. From the official ESRB site: "Titles rated **M (Mature)** have content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. Titles in this category may contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content and/or strong language." This is quite similar to the MPAA's "R" rating for movies.

But, rather than taking on the whole range of topics covered under this M rating, we have focused on the sex part. Yep, we talk about kink, teledildonics, cybersex and sexgames in this issue. We have tittered, blushed and sat in uncomfortable silence all to bring this issue to you, our readers.

Why?

Because it's out there. We should talk about it. If we don't talk about it, it's more likely to go places that's not healthy. If we try to sweep it under the bed, it will be hidden in the darkest, dirtiest crevices of the internet that are not always safe. So, let's bring it out in the open – we're all adults here.

What? Adults play games? They're not just child's toys? Yes, that is correct. And as such, we need to make it very clear to the mainstream media and the masses that we are adults and sometimes look for adult content. And I firmly believe it is our responsibility, as media, to convey this message.

You see, in the past, we've had messaging problems. The gaming media is largely to blame. Mainstream media will look for information on games from what's familiar – games media. And when they look at that media, if what they find is pictures of scantily-clad, large-breasted women and taglines advertising the Most Mayhem Ever, things smacking of immature, masculine fantasies, they make broad assumptions. Those assumptions are: Immature males

are all that play games. Immature is the same as youth. Young! Our young boys are being exposed to age-inappropriate material!

Can you blame them? I sure can't. What needs to happen, before games can comfortably be seen as accepted entertainment for people over the age of 18, is not just that developers need to make games appealing to adults (which many are), but the media needs to change our message and the ways in which we convey it. *The Escapist* was born of this need, and this is our take on sex in games.

Cheers,



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor: In "Scratching the Surface" Richard Garriott is quoted as saying:

"Well, it's like 20% of the population [of the country] is in this game. Out of five

people, someone is going to commit suicide."

Indeed, *The Escapist* picks out this observation as worthy of highlighting in a larger font alongside the article. But did he really mean this?

It seems rather more likely that this is two observations combined. 20% is one "out of five people" in the country. And: with a sample that large "someone is going to commit suicide". I certainly hope there are no countries where one person in five commits suicide.

I'm sure the journalists involved didn't actually misquote him, but it seems cruel to highlight his slip of the tongue in this way!

- **Dom Camus**

To the Editor: I really enjoyed the "We Play" article, although I'm not quite sure I fully agree with its presumption that the world hasn't noticed Eastern European gaming.

Most of Eastern Europe's new democracies have now joined the European Union, or are on course to do

so soon. While these countries are poor in EU terms, you only have to look at Spain, Greece or (most dramatically) Ireland to see what EU membership does to poorer economies: it drags them up to or beyond the EU average.

As the new democracies to the East achieve economic parity with the West, they will give a boost to the whole European gaming market, which is well on its way to being the worlds biggest. Watch this space: the winners of the coming console generation will be the developers who account for European tastes.

- Jim Caris

From The Lounge: [Re: "Gaming on the Orient Express" by Nick Bousfield] I remember reading a small preview for this game in an old gaming magazine. After reading this article I really feel sad about what a wonderful experience one seems to have missed. Being in India, I only have access to the mainstream games, and apart from the rare budget release, adventure games are a virtual impossibility.

I am hoping that online distribution systems like Steam will one day allow for the viable resurrection of lost classics such as this.

Thanks for the piece, I'll definitely be looking around for this.

- Ravenus

To the Editor: First off, I'd like to state I've read a few of your articles and love it. They have been well thought out and quite interesting. But I was wondering if there was a way to get the subscription emails done using text instead of PDF to reduce the amount of space it takes up in the email. Thanks for your time I'm looking forward to seeing more from all of you.

- Rabite

Editor's Note: *This demonstrated to us that we had some misleading language on our site regarding subscriptions, which we have since fixed. When you sign up for a subscription to The Escapist, you are not going to receive the pdf in your inbox each week - not*

only would this be harsh on your inboxes, but our servers would likely rise up in rebellion. With a subscription, each week we send out a handy HTML email with a link to both the web version and to download the pdf.

To the Editor: I've been with you since Issue #1, and have enjoyed every issue since. I'd like to applaud your efforts and wish for their continued success, but it would seem that *The Escapist* has recently been directly involved in death.

You see, my favorite podcast has ceased to be, because one of the hosts has moved into the fold of the wonderful *Escapist*. Understandably I'm somewhat saddened that this exceptional podcast has been discontinued (although I'm thrilled that such a talent is joining your ranks). Simply put, this radio program wasn't like many of the other ones out there: it was informed, entertaining and dealt with more than just reviewing games. Purposeful in its drive, it wasn't like a lot of the self-congratulatory media we've seen in gaming for the past little while, since it dared to be critical and dole out praise when needed.

I'm saddened by the fact that I won't be able to tune and catch up with the hosts every week, but I'm encouraged that *The Escapist* has inherited such a fantastic talent. To say that I have mixed feelings on the matter would be somewhat accurate.

- Ben



I WAS YOUNG and I needed the money

by Richard Bartle

So, it's the year 2000, at the height of the dot com boom. You've just been hired as Head of Online Games for a company with a paper value of over a billion dollars. You're promised a team of 30 people and as much time as you want to create the world's best massively multiplayer game world. What do you do?

What you **should** do is hire the first 30 people you see on the street, irrespective of their skills, abilities or state of sobriety. What you **shouldn't** do is advertise, interview applicants, assess what they can bring to the project, and make appointments only after careful consideration.

The reason you should do the former is because that's what everyone else will do. Thus, when the company's directors realize that expansion is happening too quickly and they impose a recruitment freeze, you have all the job **slots** in place, if not any people who can actually **do** those jobs. You won't be calling a producer and telling him he should take his house off the market because we can't hire him after all, you'll just be replacing the Australian gap-year student you met playing snooker in a pub.

This explains how I was left to develop a virtual world with a team consisting of three programmers, a level designer and me, when there were six people officially working on the company's single-page WAP site.

Oh, we were given a more concrete deadline, too: one year. We were also given a budget: nothing.

What kind of massively multiplayer game could we write in 12 months from a standing start, with only three programmers, a level designer and me? No producer, no artists, no QA; no design document, no tools, no middleware; no hardware, except our 700MHz PCs and a 250MHz server.

Hey, I know this one – we write a text game!

This **did** make horrible sense. I already had all that was needed to build and operate a textual world, because I'd spent 20 years building and operating them. It would be a push, but we could **do** this.

All we required was some fiendish mind-control system to persuade people to play a text game when they really wanted to play *EverQuest*.

So, that would be sex, then.

I'd written a pitch for a sex MUD about five years earlier, but the funding fell through. Now was the time to dust it off! The thing is, sex in a text world has three things going for it that sex in a graphics world doesn't:

- 1) It's freeform. You don't have to motion-capture every position in the *Kama Sutra* and beyond, because people can animate it themselves using words.
- 2) It's legal. You can write about antics that you would be jailed for depicting visually. The word is **pornography**, not **pornotexty**.
- 3) For a basic sex game to work, you need comparable numbers of both men and women. A female-friendly game, by virtue of its having women in it, is male-friendly; therefore, you need to attract women. And hey, guess what? Study after study has shown that, in general, women

prefer words to pictures – especially when it comes to sexual fantasizing.

We toyed with the idea of creating a game for the gay market, on the grounds that there might be more homosexual male gamers than female gamers of any flavor, but unfortunately we were all straight so we weren't sufficiently engaged with the culture to know if this was indeed the case. When I approached the one gay guy in the office to ask him what he thought, he indignantly told me that he wasn't gay, and if I spoke another word on the subject he'd have me for harassment.

As luck would have it, around this time we noticed our level designer was female. This settled it: We decided to go for the broader market, as clearly one person is able to represent the views of 50% of the population with absolute accuracy. We'd program in functionality for non-straight encounters, but wouldn't build the game around them.

The atmosphere we strove to engender was one of wit and humor. Whether players would continue with this when they got down to business would be up

to them, but we assumed they probably wouldn't. Humor was important for us, though, because it lightened the mood, giving a liberal and liberating "anything goes," fun impression. And, frankly, if you have to implement fetishes for opera gloves, headphones, feathers and being stuck in a car in a muddy field, well, how can you **not** inject humor into it?

The overall premise was that players were executives staying in a hotel in downtown Anonymous American City. While they were logged off, they'd be buying or selling or whatever it is executives do, their performance at which would be tied directly to how satisfied they were with their life. In other words, the better the sex they had in their time off (that is, while playing the game), the more money they'd make in their work time (that is, while logged off). They could spend this money on a better hotel room with better facilities

All we required was some fiendish mind-control system to persuade people to play a text game when they really wanted to play *EverQuest*. So, that would be sex, then.



the *Escapist*



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and lots of clothes, toys and other goodies – so long as they could fit all these into their suitcase. This was so people who wanted, say, BDSM would visit a BDSM club and mix with other like-minded people, rather than kitting out room 419 with a rack and electrodes and sitting there glumly all alone.

Geographically, we arranged the world using the traditional grid system of every Anonymous American City. The hotel Blue Heights occupied the middle block, with two blocks on either side for us to

fill with **stuff**. The further from the center you were, the more colorful the services on offer you were likely to find. Horizontal thoroughfares were numbered, from 69th Street (what else?) to 74th Street. Vertically were named (therefore themed) avenues: Peters, Queens, Great Union, Straight, Bohemia and Bacchus. Thus, if you wanted something to pep up your performance you might visit the Chinese medicine shop on 73rd between Gt. Union and Queens, but if you just wanted to mail something to someone you'd go to the post office on the corner of Straight and 72nd.

We decided to allow some real-world illegal activities such as narcotics, but to make them losing strategies for gameplay. If you wanted to get high on cocaine and point a gun to a character's head, you'd get associated medical and police problems that would cost money to address and would never go away entirely. Still, if this is your bag, better you do it in a game than in real life. That said, consent was central to everything: Thus, no bestiality and no pedophilia. You can make love to a beanie baby (people do, I've seen the web sites), but not to a squirrel, no matter how much it's giving you that come-hither stare.

So far, so good, but you'll have noticed we were making some moral judgments here. Many people in real life insist on no sex before marriage; we, however, were condoning sex with people who were complete strangers five minutes previously. How did we make these decisions? Well, we basically determined to allow anything implementable, whether we ourselves were in favor of it or not, so long as it was not so emotive as to break the "magic circle": If any one of us felt something came with too much

Reality, we didn't put it in. For example, some people - interestingly, many more women than men - have rape fantasies. Should we have implemented rape? Well, no, because that's too serious for a game. Even if characters were allowed to flag themselves as "rape-able," it would be too much. You're probably balking even reading about my discussing it, it's so emotive.

It was clear to us that not only should everything be consensual, but it should be personal to individuals: You could say, "These specific people are allowed to make love to me," but not, "Anyone in this room is allowed to make love to anyone else in this room." To this end, we implemented a fairly neat permissions system whereby every character had an attitude toward every other character. The default was **stranger**, which meant all physical contact was forbidden. Next was **acquaintance**, which allowed formal contact only. You could get to this stage either by setting it manually using a permit command, or by doing something that implied it; for example, proffering or accepting a handshake. From here we



went to **friend** (non-intimate contact), **boy/girlfriend** (intimate contact), **lover** (sexual contact) and, for the sub/dom community, **master/mistress** (unrestricted – they could control you as a puppet if they wanted).

Sex in the real world has biological consequences, the main ones being sexually transmitted diseases and children. STDs were present only when curable; you might catch chlamydia, but not AIDS. Children, we completely ruled out as an option; characters might suffer gameplay-affecting is-she-pregnant anxiety after a wild night of unprotected sex, but it would last a (game) month at most.

As for the sex act itself, we implemented it using a modification of the classic MUD combat system. Before you get all uppity and insist that it's disgraceful to associate sex with fighting and I should not be allowed within looking distance of women for merely harboring such thoughts (and I have, indeed, had people say that), let me highlight the word **modification**. The mechanics are similar (automatic exchanges of interactions, qualified by inputs

undertaken during the process), but that's where it ends. For example, in a combat MUD, your actions typically determine how many points you get; in this game, your actions determined how many points your **partner** got. In other words, your partner benefited from your sexual prowess, not you.

Lest you gain the impression that the only interesting thing about this game was its subject matter, I'd like to say, categorically, right here and now, that OK, you're probably right. As a designer, I was personally very excited by some of the concepts we developed, but there are probably fewer than 20 people in the whole world who would share my enthusiasm in this regard; sadly, therefore, there's not much point in my boasting about it. I would, however, like to mention our superb system for automatically monitoring the ability of body parts to function.

For instance, take room descriptions. They would change on-the-fly if you were unable to see or hear or whatever; commands which required the use of fingers (such as playing the piano)



You might catch chlamydia, but not AIDS.

wouldn't work if your fingers were restricted (such as they would be if you were wearing mittens). This worked across all sensory modalities and all components of the body (and yes, male and female bodies did have some different components). It remains cutting-edge stuff for textual worlds, but of course only designers are likely to care much about it; as a player, you just want to play. The reason I mention it is that although it's something that would enhance all MUDs, it was developed specifically in response to a sex game requirement: bondage. If you're

blindfolded and have a horse bit in your mouth, you can still make out some of the environment ("hmm, that feels like the heat from a branding iron") but you can't always perform everyday commands ("I'd shout for help if it weren't for this horse bit in my mouth").

Plus, I **do** want to boast, dammit!

I could continue for pages and pages, here. I could tell you about the fetish system, the mad cultists, the Little Black Book, how fashion worked, interactions with NPCs, layers of clothing ... but I can't right now, so I'll have to stop. I will say, though, for you designer types out there, we did account for my player types system, and I didn't advocate having permanent death...

But it all fell apart with some four months to go. Despite the fact we were on course to go into open beta by the end of our allotted year, the company didn't have a year's worth of money. Somehow, hiring 800 people on the strength of a business plan that could be paraphrased as "spend what we have and then figure out how to get some more" was not sustainable. We lost our jobs and the game went into mothballs.

Would it have worked? I was cautiously optimistic, even though there was no support in the company itself for the product. ("We can't be associated with sex games, only with violent games" - actual quote from a member of the sales team!) I don't think it would have been a huge storming success, but I figured we could have got maybe 10,000 regular

players within six months of opening - perhaps more, if AOL had banned it.

Would I do it again? Well, I'd certainly think about it. It raised some very interesting design issues that produced some highly novel solutions, which I'd like to see in action. The subject matter isn't itself remarkable, though: Rather like writing for a franchise, you can stray within the confines of the defined world, but you don't get to change the Unique Selling Points.

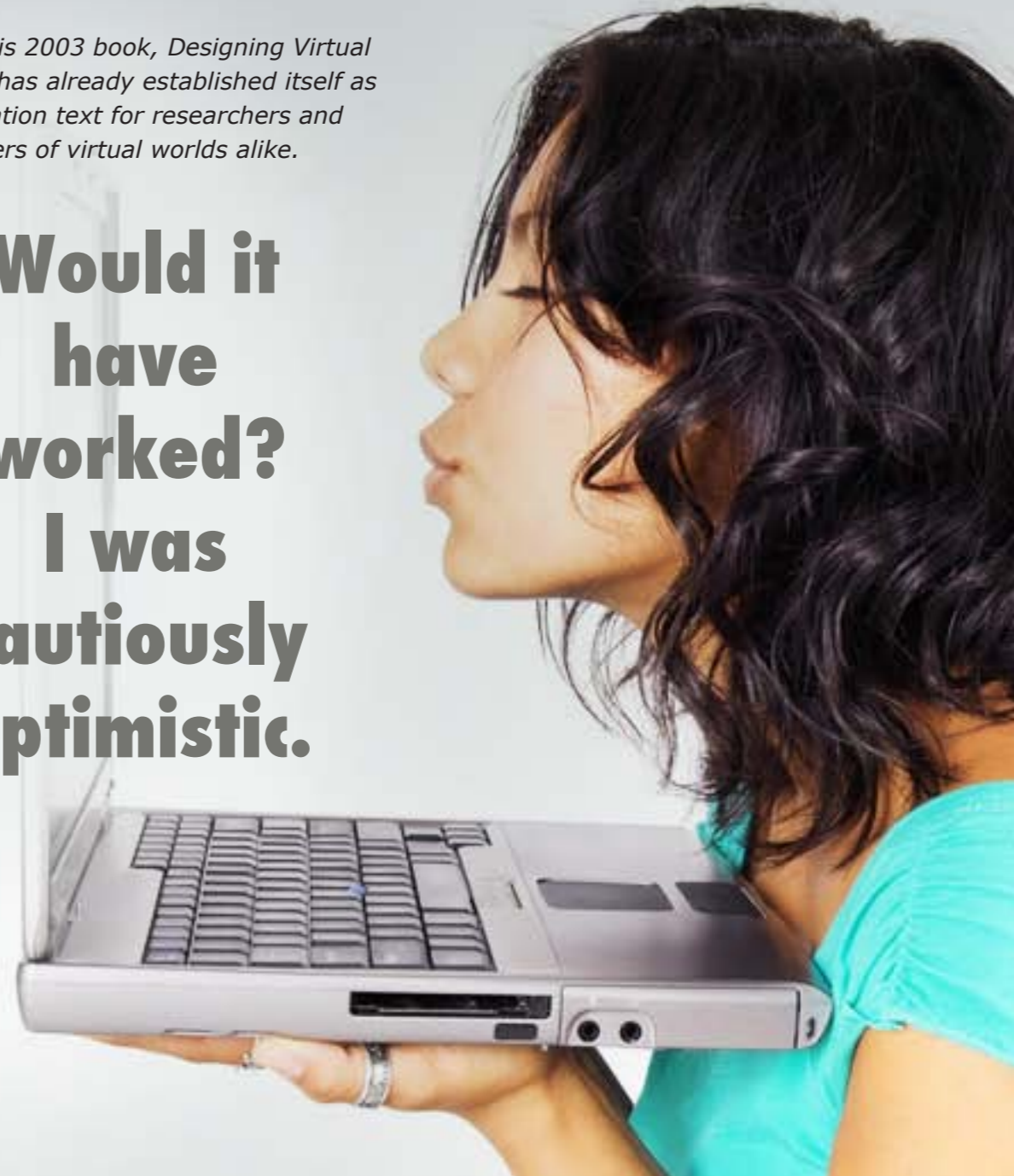
It beats the hell out of WAP, though.

 [COMMENTS](#)

Dr Richard Bartle co-wrote the first virtual world, MUD ("Multi-User Dungeon") while an undergraduate in 1978, and has thus been at the forefront of the online games industry from its very inception. A former lecturer in Artificial Intelligence and current Visiting Professor in Computer Game Design (both at the University of Essex, U.K.), he is an influential writer on all aspects of virtual world design, development and management. As an independent consultant, he has worked with most of the major online game companies in the U.K. and the U.S. over the past 20

*years. His 2003 book, *Designing Virtual Worlds*, has already established itself as a foundation text for researchers and developers of virtual worlds alike.*

**Would it
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Kink: a question of play

by Bonnie Ruberg

Whenever there's a norm, there's a way to break it ... and someone willing to do just that. The same rule applies for sex. Wherever we find socially-accepted ideas about what makes for "normal" or "healthy" intercourse, we also find people who are defying those rules, testing boundaries, acting in ways the world at large may consider "strange," or just "sick." In short, these are people performing kink. But kink – as a concept and as a practice – can't exist without a predominant, normative sexuality from which to break away. Lucky for kink, sex is everywhere.

In real life, plenty of people are kinky in plenty of ways. The possibilities are endless. Maybe they like to be tied up and flogged; maybe they prefer to roleplay as children; maybe they're just really into enacting rape fantasies. Such people walk among us. And sometimes we read a "true story" piece about them in a magazine, or walk past a collared sub on the street and wonder, what is that thing around his/her neck? But, for the most part, real-life kinks are kept quiet, either locked up in the closet or ignored by more proper society. Despite the efforts of individuals and organizations to

educate the world about kink, the world doesn't seem to want to know.

The internet, however, is a whole other story. Kink thrives online. Some might even say it rules. Whatever it does, it doesn't have to do it quietly. From chat rooms to message boards to web sites, from erotica to photo shoots to sex shops, from porn to porn to porn, the internet is a kink fan's dream. It can offer everything except the actual lashes landing on your back. Of course, that's where virtual worlds come in; MMOGs like *Second Life*, where a few clicks really can have you splayed, strapped to the wall and whipped for bad behavior. Or good behavior. Whatever your fancy may be.

Not that there's any shortage of vanilla (i.e. plain, non-kinky) sex on the internet. For those with more traditional tastes, there will always be sites and other users oriented toward a hetero-normative canoodle. But it can be surprising, wandering a world like *Second Life*, just how many people have kink on the brain. This preoccupation doesn't just limit itself to sex. Kink has inspired building and business of all kinds: clubs, clothing, communities.

Here, kink is more than just an act, it's a way of life.

From subbies to furies to orgies

In virtual worlds, as in real ones, kink can take on many different forms. Innumerable variants inevitably crop up. Some are more popular than others. All are uniquely transgressive.


Perhaps the most common – or at least the most basic – of all *Second Life* kinks is a penchant for BDSM: bondage, discipline, submission, mastery (or sadism, masochism). Maybe it's because, as a sub myself, I unknowingly seek such people, or maybe because a dash of BDSM goes nicely with many so other kinks, but it seems that every person I meet in-game is already a self-declared top or bottom. Whatever the reason, the interest appears pervasive.

Virtual BDSM can manifest itself in a number of varying ways. Some doms take pets, players attached to them as submissives through a sort of long-term agreement. These pets may wear ball gags, refer to themselves in the third person, or be forbidden to have virtual intercourse with, or sometimes even

speak to, other players. Other BDSM enthusiasts take a more casual approach, allowing themselves to be bound and beaten without such permanent commitments – though free, un-collared subs may run into trouble from would-be masters. On the other end of the spectrum sits Gor, an increasingly popular system of willing slavery, with character death as the potential punishment for defiance.

Furries – animalistic avatars with often equally animalistic sex drives – make up another popular sub-category of kink in *Second Life*. These players wear the skins of foxes, skunks, horses – you name it. They dot the landscape of a busy dance floor with the bob of their bushy tails. In the sack, they, too, have many different ways of going about things. Some engage in rather “normal” sex, while referencing their non-human parts. Others are more focused on animal-associated acts like urine play, or “water sports.”

Other popular *Second Life* pastimes might be described less as kink and more as plain old kinky. Homosexual intercourse, while more common in some



Other BDSM enthusiasts take a more casual approach.

Less than socially-acceptable real-life possibilities become run of the mill in the sexual openness of a virtual world.

areas than others, is hardly something to bat an eye at. Orgies, too, though harder to coordinate and so a bit more sparse, largely follow the same pattern. And selling – or purchasing – sexual services for money... All of these less than socially-acceptable real-life possibilities become run of the mill in the sexual openness of a virtual world.

The advantages of cyber kink

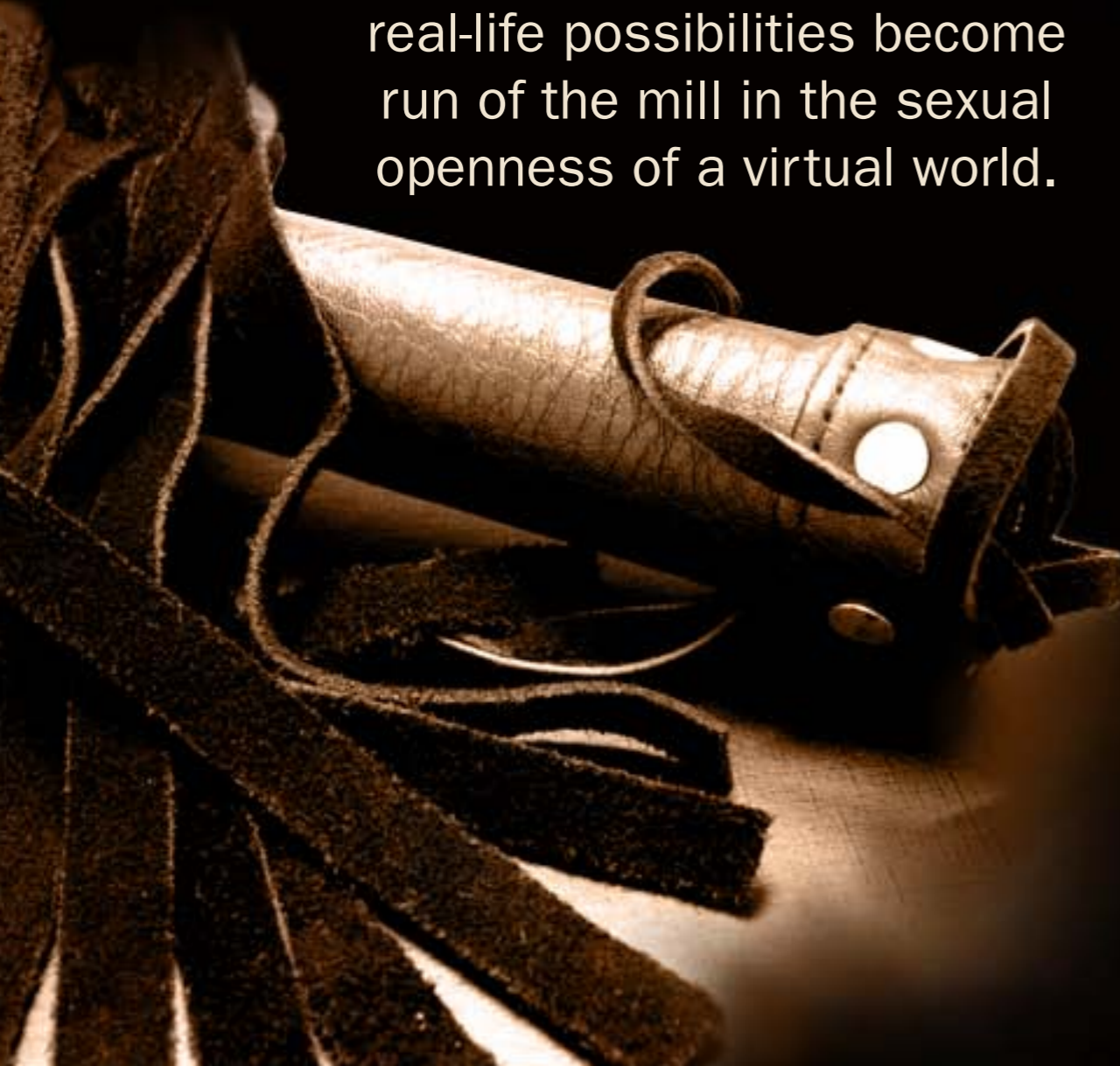
Why does kink flourish online? Internet experimentation does offer certain advantages that can make it more appealing than testing the waters non-virtually. For one, it's more accessible than kink in the real world, and cheaper. Purchasing real-life, quality BDSM equipment, for example, if you can even find it, will set you back a whole lot further than purchasing similar equipment in Linden dollars. Plus, with *Second Life* sex, you don't ever need to leave the comfort of your desk chair. Or, if it's safety you're worried about, what could be less risk-free than not actually being smacked or cut or forced into submission, but witnessing it happen to your avatar instead? As for the guilt of performing these normally taboo sex

acts, where better to watch your worries and social hang-ups wash away than the anonymity of the internet?

Also, certain kinks, by their nature, lend themselves to virtual worlds for more reasons than convenience. Think of bestiality, which, in many countries, is illegal. Because bestiality can't be practiced in real life – or at least can't be talked about, photographed and publicized as if it's happening in real life – it automatically enters the domain of the imaginary, and, specifically, the realm of the textual. Online chat and online stories; these are the forms, in effect, left for the expression of bestiality. BDSM, too, has something in common with virtual worlds that could never be expressed as strongly in the real world: an obsession with aesthetics. In *Second Life*, not only equipment and clothing but also bodies can be altered to create the perfect look, the perfect sub as visual object.

A question of play

Kink on the internet isn't just about recreating a virtual version of kink in real life. After all, a whip swung in *Second Life*



will never hurt. No number of physical upgrades or interactive bits will change that. There must be something else.

The key, perhaps, lies in the very idea of play. In the language of real-life kink, the idea of performance dominates. Participants don't just perform sex acts, they enter into "scenes." Different types of interaction are labeled as "play": cutting becomes blood play, submergence becomes breath play, so on and so forth. Individuals themselves are said to take on "roles," roles that they will discard at the end of a scene, or if a partner utters a safe-word, allowing him/her to stop the performance and reinstate the safety and logic of the real world.


Videogames, too, another center for play, exist on the basis of performance. Virtual environments like *Second Life* are not mirror images of real life, but an enacted, self-conscious recreation of life: a play. Here, our actions are not real actions, but the performance of actions. We are very familiar with the idea of roleplaying in games, with the innately dual nature of both being and playing

through our avatars. We are also familiar with taking on new personas, new personalities, new desires by way of the characters we control. We know that play – whether sexual, technological or both – is not life, but something much like it.

In entering the game space of a virtual world, we also enter the possibility for play. And wherever there is the possibility for play, there is the possibility for kink. Even if we keep our cybersex entirely free from BDSM, from furies, from orgies, from whatever else might be out there, we are still being kinky. Because what is sex in a videogame, in the end, but the biggest kink of all? Any time we engage in sex online, be it vanilla or otherwise, we do not use our bodies to enter into the act, but our minds to recreate it. We play out a scene, with the monitor as our stage and the power switch as our safe-word. We perform kink by playing in the game.

[COMMENTS](#)

Bonnie Ruberg is a sex and games writer, a MMOG researcher and an all around fun-loving dork. Check her out at Heroine Sheik.



In the language of real-life kink,
the idea of performance dominates.

knocking PIXELS

the evolution of Cybersex

by Mark Wallace

Hot Coffee was child's play. The unlock-able sexual content hidden in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* may have caused the biggest videogame controversy of 2005, but the truth is that it was far from the most titillating or lascivious material to be found in games these days.

Single-player games have long made a habit of occasionally coloring outside the lines of "family entertainment," but the "sex" that takes places in games like *Leisure Suit Larry* or *Playboy: The Mansion* barely scratches the surface of what crops up when more than one player at a time gets together in the virtual world.

Online sexual encounters, or "cybersex," as it's often known, have of course been taking place since before games hit the internet in a big way. As soon as there were chat rooms, there were people talking dirty in them - not as a way to harass each other (though that took place, as well), but because they got off on it. The cybersex that takes place today is no different, at a fundamental level. But the advances in network and graphics technology over the last 30 years mean the world of cybersex today is a much richer and more colorful one than ever before. And that's putting it nicely.

According to Richard Bartle, who helped create the first virtual world, *MUD1*, in the late 1970s, it took cybersex a few years to really take off. Though the early text-based adventure worlds probably saw the occasional encounter, it was not until *TinyMUD* came along in 1989, Bartle says, that cybersex became a commonplace of virtual worlds, as it is today. *TinyMUD* was a text-based ancestor of *Second Life*, a virtual world with almost no "game" to it at all. Cybersex flourished there, and in its descendants. "Whether this was because the worlds or the players were more social, or because there wasn't a great deal else to do in them, is a matter for conjecture," Bartle writes in his book, *Designing Virtual Worlds*.

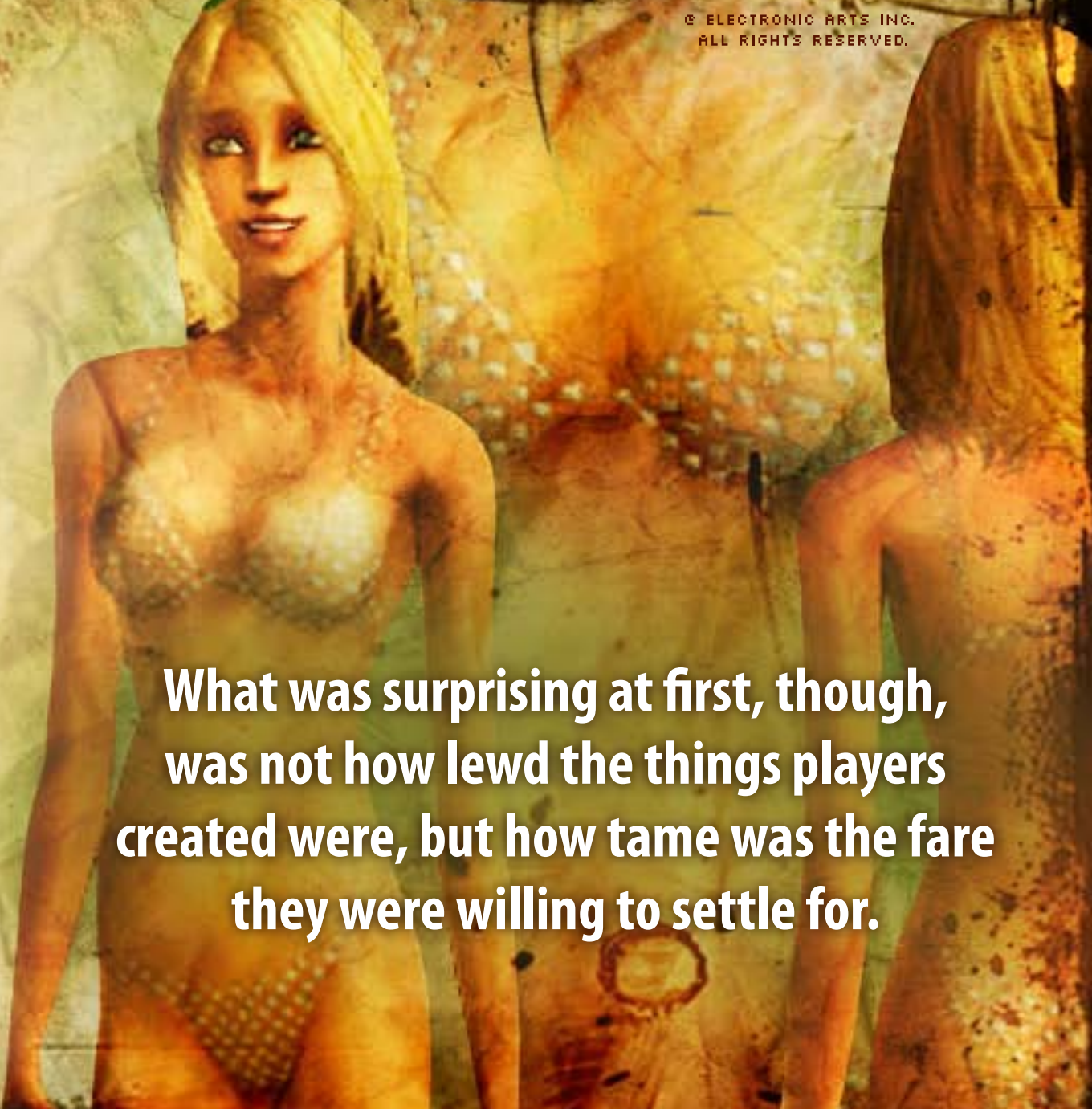
From there, it was off to the races, and though cybersex remained, for the most part, little more than dirty chat, it was only a few years before the text-based world of *LambdaMOO* saw an alarming instance of virtual rape, as journalist Julian Dibbell chronicles in his book, *My Tiny Life*. Though the rape happened only in text - via a "voodoo doll" plug-in that forced a character to perform actions that were not under its typist's control - it was a harsh example of how "real" such virtual interactions could be.

In the nearly 15 years since then, sexual interactions in cyberspace have only gotten more vivid. Even game-worlds like *World of Warcraft* see more than their fair share. It's not at all uncommon to hear reports of players happening upon an abandoned hut in Azeroth, only to be surprised by the nature of the chat that's being emitted from within. Though what passes for endowment in WoW is sometimes surprising: In one cybersex chat log that made the rounds of the internet recently, one of the participants took great care to link each of his

weapons and pieces of armor as he disrobed, so his partner would know exactly how uber he was.

And with the advent of player-created software add-ons for graphical MMOGs, cybersex took another quantum leap forward. What was surprising at first, though, was not how lewd the things players created were, but how tame was the fare they were willing to settle for. In *The Sims Online*, for instance, a piece of player-created software called the "Nude Skin Patch" simply made avatars appear naked if they were wearing certain items of clothing. (Needless to say, sales of these particular garments shot through the roof.) That, a simulated slow-dance and a few good lines of sex chat passed for the cyber equivalent of a roll in the hay - and did such a good impression of it, a number of *TSO* players were actually able to charge money for their services, according to reports.

As MMOGs have evolved, though, so has their player-created sexual content. Some things remain the same: World of



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What was surprising at first, though, was not how lewd the things players created were, but how tame was the fare they were willing to settle for.

Warcraft recently saw several enterprising players create nude skin patches after the fashion of those found in *TSO*, including the flagship "World of Porncraft."

But where it's actually possible for players to add their own content to the world, they have done so in spades.

Some of the most varied player-created sexual content can be found in the virtual world of *Second Life*. Because players are free to create their own appearance and living spaces from scratch, the world has become the perfect venue for people to play out elaborate fantasies. In *Second Life*, cybersex grew balls - quite literally. A range of elaborate genitals are available to apply to your avatar, and recent models such as the Xcite! line can even be "stimulated" by another player. (And once brought to "orgasm," they aren't good for much of anything for half an hour or so.)

With such high-tech sex on offer, *Second Life* has seen a number of dedicated sexual communities spring up, including


a significant population that's into bondage and domination. The more sexually minded among the "furry" population - people who like to dress up as animals, even in real life - have found *Second Life* to be the perfect place to make their fantasies more real.

One of the most interesting such communities are the Goreans, who use the virtual world to live out the science fiction community described in John Norman's *Gor* novels, where women live as sexual slaves in a society of rigid rules and protocols. Many of those protocols have been imported to *Second Life*, and the Gorean community there publishes its own virtual newspaper and even holds classes on how to be a good slave or master.

Even X-rated movies are available for rental within *Second Life* - the same ones available at your local video rental store, mind you, not machinima pieces featuring avatars (though that's available' as well).

One of the more disturbing recent trends in *Second Life* cybersex has been known

as "ageplay," in which one of the avatars engaged in the encounter will have been created in the image of a child, though both typists are consenting adults (*Second Life* admits only those 18 and older). Though the practice caused much controversy on *Second Life's* forums and

A man with a shaved head and a dark shirt is looking intently at a laptop screen. The screen is the central focus, displaying large white text. The background is a textured, light-colored wall.

**Even X-rated movies
are available for
rental within
Second Life.**



**But real knickers
are coming off now.**

in the blogosphere, Linden Lab, the company behind the world, has acknowledged that there's no action to be taken on its part, since the Supreme Court long ago ruled that no laws are broken where no children were actually involved in the creation of the content.

The fact is, it's not at all surprising to find cybersex running rampant in virtual worlds. Sex is among the first uses for any new technology; the first dirty pictures were being shot almost as soon as the camera was invented. Though politicians may have their knickers in a twist over games' sexual content, it's only to be expected that virtual knickers would come off almost as soon as they appeared.

But real knickers are coming off now, too. Kyle Machulis, who goes by the name of qDot Bunnyhug in *Second Life* and runs MMOrgy.com, a web site devoted to all things cybersexual, recently demonstrated his prototype "teledildonics" line of sex toys that can be controlled from within virtual worlds or other videogames. Often attached to

console controllers (one such device has come to be known as the "seXbox"), the sex toys are controlled by a user at one end of a network connection and enjoyed by a user at the other. To Machulis, such devices are not mere diversions, but can be used to bring people closer together who, for whatever reason, aren't able to be in the same room together. Read more (if you dare) at Slashdong.org.

It may be that new technologies like teledildonics are moving cybersex out of the realm of the naughty and into the area of intimacy. Just as sex in the physical world can be an expression of love, not just lust, cybersex may be coming into its own as part of some relationships. In any case, it's come a long way, baby. It certainly makes Hot Coffee look like a very tepid drink.

[COMMENTS](#)

*Mark Wallace can be found on the web at Walkering.com. His book with Peter Ludlow, *Only A Game: Online Worlds and the Virtual Journalist Who Knew Too Much*, will be published by O'Reilly in 2006.*



Hold Me, Thrill Me, Kiss Me

by Chris Dahlen

I remember playing *Planescape: Torment*, the cult classic roleplaying game from Black Isle, a few years back. The game matches you with a handful of companions, including a woman with crazy hair, a Scottish accent and a gigantic flesh-toned tail. Partway through the game, she started flirting with me in an edgy, uncommitted way: She would start a conversation and then confront and light into me, and I knew if I responded poorly, she'd laugh in my face. I got sucked into roleplaying against her, and it wasn't my imagination or the one-and-a-half-inch tall image of the character on the screen that drew me in so much as the knowledge that I had to make the right decision to see where this could go, and the wrong decision would derail whatever was happening between us. It was fascinating to have a game put me back on my heels, not with a blow-out combat scene, but just with a conversation.

Romance drives many game stories, but often it feels like windowdressing over a simple, goal-oriented experience. Dating games end when you get a date, as

surely as a shooter ends with a boss fight; hentai games are the same, but more explicit. And sex games often settle into a linear bump and grind, as a status bar measures your progress toward climax. Take away the context and you may as well be running a race or filling your gas tank.

But a number of single-player roleplaying games – specifically, the last five years' worth of titles from BioWare, Interplay and Black Isle – put an intriguing spin on romance: They invite the player to flirt. As a gameplay mechanic, flirting is more complicated, more engaging and far more suspenseful than an outright "save the princess" romance – and some players fall deeply under its sway.

The process is simple. All of the NPCs who follow you through the game engage you in conversation to further the plot, or discuss tactics, or simply to swap backstories with you. But once in a while, you'll find a character – mostly, but not always, of the opposite gender – who starts flirting with you, whether it's

Silk Fox, the bristly mystery woman in *Jade Empire* or *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic's* Carth, who treats female characters to his awkward advances. You know something's up when it starts, but you have no idea how far the game will take it; your partner alludes to an entanglement without promising it'll happen, or even admitting that he or she's inviting it.

If you play your cards right, the object of your affections will join you in an open

many times you try to strike up a conversation with your new girlfriend or boyfriend. Also, the gender balance is off: Men get far more suitors than women. And for better or worse, flirting and romance rarely impact the main game. I was so caught up in the give and take with Annah in *Planescape*, I didn't notice the payoff for winning her affections was a slight boost to her ability scores. Technically, that makes the Annah romance a "sidequest," but improving an NPC's stats hardly seems

A follower who has a romance is typically about twice as expensive as a basic follower.

confession of love and sometimes, off-screen nookie. Jealousies and romantic triangles crop up if more than one NPC has an eye on you, but if you keep missing your chances or behaving offensively, the relationship fizzles.

The flirting technique still has several shortcomings. Your partner's lines are scripted, which means they end where the writer did – and after you hit the end of the romantic story, you may never hear about it again, no matter how

like the point. You do it to enjoy the experience.

BioWare's *Baldur's Gate II* set the bar for RPG flirting, with four complete romances spanning dozens of hours of gameplay. But in its early days, the technique was controversial, as lead designer Kevin Martens and senior writer Luke Kristjanson recalled in a recent e-mail interview. "When we first proposed

player/NPC romances as a feature for *Baldur's Gate II*, there was a great deal of distrust on our forums toward the idea," recalls Kristjanson. "Players imagined everything from forced soap opera cut-scenes to NPCs simply throwing themselves at you.

"We went forward with the concept because, during *Baldur's Gate I*, many players assumed such romances were already in place. After adventuring with characters like Imoen for hours on end, the perception that relationships were forming between members of the party just seemed to be natural. We wanted to explore that without obstructing the importance of the main plot."

It also wasn't cheap. "A follower who has a romance is typically about twice as expensive as a basic follower," explains Martens. "There is a significant amount of testing, [voice-over], scripting and, of course, writing in order to do a romance properly. Despite this cost, I wouldn't call the romantic storylines extremely expensive, because we often get more player experience out of them than what we actually write in. The goal of a romance is to add a layer of immersion



beyond the moment-to-moment gameplay, and this tends to lead to emergent storytelling that the player writes him or herself. In the feedback that we get from players, they fill in a larger experience or personal story with the romantic character beyond what we've written."

Martens and Kristjanson say it enhances the experience of roleplaying in the game. "Romantic plots, whether a player goes all the way through them or not, tend to add to the world or game experience by offering a deeper level of interaction," says Martens. "If you can get a player to be more invested in the fate of his followers, then you can underline the seriousness of the decisions that the player makes, because they will be more personal."

"From a structure standpoint, we view the romances differently than other side-plots," adds Kristjanson. "They are not so much riddles to be completed, as stories to explore. The rewards are often not as tangible as a typical quest, so to make them compelling and rewarding, we try to tie them into the world as much as possible. While a romance can't

interfere with the main plot, it needs to reinforce why that character is on the journey, and perhaps alter the player's perception of the world as a whole."

Baldur's Gate II offered four very different love interests – and yet, many players weren't satisfied. Female characters could only woo the Paladin, who was widely considered a schmuck; and while the guys had three choices with very different personalities, all three were high-maintenance elves. To fill the gap, modders started adding their own romantic

storylines to the game; some of them even created completely new characters.

Before he became a *Baldur's Gate II* modder, Jason Compton of the Pocket Plane Group was just a huge fan of the game. But after reading criticisms about the lack of male love interests, he decided, "I'd heard people complain about it long enough, and I wasn't a fiction writer, but I thought, 'I could

probably do this, and I enjoyed the romances in the game, so sure, I'll give it a shot.'"

That led to Kelsey, a red-haired human Sorcerer with killer cheekbones. "Kelsey was more of a regular guy than the player. The player in the game is this spawn of a god that came down to Earth ... and Kelsey was like, 'Yeah, that makes you really cool, but I'm just a guy.' People liked this idea – 'This character loves my character even though he's afraid of her in a way, and

doesn't really understand her. But that's OK, he'll hold her and understand her anyway. She's cooler, and he's not competing with it.'"

The project was a huge success for Compton and the Pocket Plane Group, a modding label with under a dozen members. With help from a couple of other modders, Compton finished Kelsey – a fully-functional NPC with a portrait,

voice-overs, and 3-4,000 lines of dialogue – in about a year, and in the first year Kelsey was available, he scored over 20,000 downloads.

While Pocket Plane offers a range of mods, Compton says the romantic enhancements get the most traffic. "Most players of these CRPGs ... want this character to be special in some way. So whether that means they've got the best weapons in the world, or everybody wants to get in bed with them or whatever, it's all coming from the same," says Compton. "You can win the game without the +12 hackmaster, you can win without sleeping with Jaheira – but if you can have both? Or all three? Then great. That's part of the appeal."

Compton and his colleagues are taking their experiences to a game of their own – *The Broken Hourglass*, which they're developing as Planewalker Games, LLC, and which will include some romance. And the team wasn't afraid to hack *Baldur's Gate II*'s design: For example, the recent "NPC Flirt Pack," extends the original romances from *Baldur's Gate II*, adds more lines of dialogue and more explicit scenarios – like an R-rated bath

Female characters could only woo the Paladin, who was widely considered a schmuck.

scene with the dark elf Viconia. But more significantly, with the flirt pack, players can keep flirting with the NPCs even after the original romance has run out.

“You can run out of the love talks, but even still, every 45 minutes the character will stop and give you a pat on the butt, or give you pieces of chocolate or whatever,” says Compton. “A lot of players respond to that, because [they think], ‘Oh yeah, this character is still thinking of my character.’”

And the player can also initiate a flirt instead of waiting for one. Compton’s code logs the number of times a player flirts with the NPC, and “when people sent me their saved games for debugging, I could see just how often they were using the flirt options. Hundreds of times, it turns out, in some cases.”

Of course, romantic NPCs were never written to give the player cuddle time; they were meant to add suspense and tension to the story. But arguably, the flirt technique was already running out of surprises. For a tactic that counts on suspense and guesswork, the romance

storylines have become predictable and, in some cases, stale. Veteran players could see them coming from a mile away in *Jade Empire*. *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II* had romantic elements, but it emphasized an “influence” system that affected all of the characters, whether or not they thought they wanted to get inside your Jedi robes; and while *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* boasts a vast NPC AI system that powers over 1,000 independent agents, it doesn’t let you sleep with any of them.

But that doesn’t mean the demand for flirty NPCs has dropped. While most of the online sex games slated for the near future expect the players to keep each other busy, there’s likely also a demand for erotic experiences with artificial intelligences and fictional characters. Some players want the kind of companionship and high romance you’d get in a novel, instead of the confusing, hormone-addled relationships we get from real people, in-game or out; they don’t (just) want cybersex, but the tense exchanges, sweaty palms and high drama of a full-blown – and perfectly choreographed – romance.

But the flirting mechanic has value beyond NPC relationships: you could apply the same ideas and the same tactics to any long-term experience that has no purpose but to pull you deeper into the gameworld. Imagine if more games offered side exercises that players would just enjoy for their own sake– and we’re not talking about cordoned off mini-games, but experiences that are woven into the regular game, and that only reveal themselves after hours of play. Most games chain you to a task list or pull you along a rail from the first cut-scene to the last boss fight. How often do they flirt with something greater?

COMMENTS

Chris Dahlen also writes about technology and culture for Pitchforkmedia.com, The Onion AV Club and Paste Magazine, where he is games editor.

While most of the online sex games slated for the near future expect the players to keep each other busy, there’s likely also a demand for erotic experiences with artificial intelligences and fictional characters.



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Youthful INDISCRETIONS

by Charles Wheeler

The game industry isn't in its infancy anymore. No, the game industry has entered its pimply, squeaky-voiced adolescence. Its body has started to change and things like "stories" and "emergent behaviors" are starting to grow in new places. It wants to smoke behind the gymnasium with Cinema and Literature. And, of course, it has started thinking about what people have underneath their clothes.

At the time of this writing, the Electronics Software Rating Board has produced content ratings for over 11,000 games. Of these, only 69 have been considered to have "Strong Sexual Content" and only 93 to contain "Sexual Themes." All told, fewer than one percent of all games rated by the ESRB contain any measure of significant sexual

content, representing a drastically smaller figure than that found in any other entertainment industry. Hyrule may contain the Master Sword but not, it appears, master bedrooms.

However, the scarcity of sexual content in games is only one aspect of the problem, for the sex that games do have is shallow, unsatisfying and ultimately more trouble than it's worth.

This is exactly what the mod community discovered about Hot Coffee before it erupted into a national scandal. Once the initial shock value had worn off, one could begin to understand why a developer might have chosen to cut the feature: It simply wasn't very interesting. This wasn't a question of game mechanics, as some clever game designer could surely have solved that problem. It was a question of motivation. At the end of the day, players were playing the mod for completion, for a laugh or simply to see what all the fuss

was about. These are the exploratory motivations of juveniles, not the reasons that most adults choose to have sex.

If asked, most people would probably tell you that they care deeply for the individuals with whom they choose to have sex. Despite our society's increasingly liberal views toward sex, particularly among the youth, it is still rare for people to maintain sexual relationships that service purely physical needs. This should be unsurprising, as a broad array of biological and cultural factors conspire to ensure that sex be more than a purely physical activity. Without appealing to the emotional dimension of sex, sexually-oriented games cannot help but be incomplete experiences.

The developers of sexually charged games such as *Rumble Roses* and *Dead or Alive* understand this problem well. It may seem strange that despite existing as almost purely sexualized objects, the

The scarcity of sexual content in games is only one aspect of the problem.

women in these games offer little more titillation than can be found on basic cable. In fact, these women do not engage in explicitly sexual activities precisely **because** they exist as purely sexualized objects. The game developers realized that for sexual content to be truly compelling, it would require emotional attachment.

Cultivating such an emotional attachment is a difficult task, but not an impossible one, as can be attested to by the legions of fans who have mourned the loss of their favorite characters over the years. If the ability to create both emotional attachments and sexually desirable characters exist, why are they rarely, if ever, combined into a single product? It may be because the power of emotional attachment ensnares not only the players of games, but the developers, as well.

Tomonobu Itagaki, the creator of the *Dead or Alive* series, once explained in an interview that *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* was “not really a sex game,” and that he thought of its

characters as “like daughters.” “What kind of father,” Itagaki asked, “would want to show his daughters naked?” When such feelings of pride are generated by what are essentially polygonal china dolls, imagine the feelings that might develop for a character with whom a player could begin to fall in love. What kind of lover would want to show his beloved naked?

But what kind of father chases suitors away just as his daughter is blossoming into womanhood? The idea of creating emotionally interesting characters is still fairly new, and developers are filled with the passion of youth and its concomitant jealousy. This jealousy, like many adolescent passions, is misdirected. Developers must realize that they’re making lovers not for themselves, but for their audience. They’re fathers, not suitors, and the most important lesson a father will ever learn is how to let go.

No matter how hard we try, gaming won’t stay sequestered forever. Hot Coffee was only the mainstream gaming industry’s first clumsy attempt at sex. It

was awkward, embarrassing, and everyone involved wishes it had never happened. But the awkwardness will pass, the embarrassment will fade, and this newfound interest certainly won’t go away. Gaming is going to want to get better at sex, and the only way to get better is to practice. [COMMENTS](#)

Charles Wheeler is a game developer currently working at gamelab in New York City.

Hot Coffee
was only the
mainstream
gaming industry’s
first clumsy
attempt at sex.



As Sands Through the Hourglass:

The
Evolution of
Armageddon's
Policy on
Roleplayed
Cybersex
by Cat Rambo

When I first started mudding, I wasn't aware of cybersex. I hadn't even dreamt it existed until my friend Brian told me about it. The night before, our characters had been hanging out in the Kurac wagon, talking, when another female character wandered in and joined the conversation. At bedtime, I logged out without thinking much more about it. The next morning, he messaged me with, "Holy s---, you abandoned me and then all of a sudden it was all silken thighs and molten heat emotes." We were both, I think, appalled but intrigued.

The MUD we played on, *Armageddon*, was the first MUD that required - rather than merely recommending - roleplaying, which meant one always worried that invisible staff members were there watching and evaluating one's play. No one was quite sure where the staff stood on the cybersex issue, but there were rumors: Supposedly, one set of mansions in the Elementalist's Quarter had been written by a staffer specifically for his favorite player and their more intimate moments. Certain clans had particular reputations for licentiousness: the highly sexed gypsies

of the Tan Muark or the fierce Blackwing elves, to name a couple.

Early on, at a gathering of *Armageddon* people in Iowa City, I heard a story about players who were powergaming and having cybersex at the same time. "They'd stand, cast a spell, then rest and go back to the sexy emotes while waiting for their mana to regen. Very efficient," one staff member said with relish at an early morning pancake breakfast, where I sat with Tan Muark players on one side of me and Blackwing players on the other. I was the only female in the room.

Later, I became part of *Armageddon's* game master staff, and as I moved up the chain of command, I leaned on people to not do things like provide blow by blow commentary on the immortal channel (a special staff-only chat channel) or create off-color items to waggle at each other. Thankfully, the staff usually kept their illicit transgressions quiet.

I learned to not monitor certain characters and to ignore the fact they had been hanging out in the back of the

Gladiator and Gaj tavern for six real-life hours. I figured those who wanted to engage in such activities were doing it with other consenting adults.

Every once in a while, people's activities would turn from sexy to hilarious. For instance, a female character had received all sorts of attention from one staff member (he had even made a character to play with her) until the real-life gathering, where it emerged that both were male outside the confines of the game. The staff member abruptly lost interest.

Armageddon had always been a bit of an old boy's club, with no codified rules

I figured those who wanted to engage in such activities were doing it with other consenting adults.

My main take-away from my experience has been learning a wide variety of words for genitalia.

addressing inappropriate activity. But there are always people who want to test limits. Somewhere along the line, a female player reacted badly to an inappropriate emote, since her character was unconscious and unable to tell the other player to knock it off. This led to all sorts of outrage on both sides of the fence, and, eventually, definitive policies emerged. For instance, our consent policy now says players can roleplay adult situations on *Armageddon*, but before instigating one with another player, they must specifically ask for consent.

My stance has always been that whatever people wanted to do within the confines of their character, it's all fine. On occasion, though, people have let their enthusiasm for cybersex drive them to actions that didn't make sense for their characters: Four-day-long stints of necking or forgetting about the virtual crowds passing through a room where one is humping. In one place, however, I've had to draw the

line: Players and staff having cybersex together, since that seems to inevitably lead to charges of favoritism.

A rich vein of player gossip concerning which staff member is playing which character, runs through *Armageddon*, and, for the most part, staffers are extraordinarily cautious about revealing the identity of the person behind the avatar. I've tried to quash controversy wherever it has reared its head, although I'm sure there have been unobtrusive instances going on. Perhaps I am thwarting true love with this policy, but there are plenty of other ways to find it behind the keyboard.

Sex in the game world even affects those who are merely watching. The *Armageddon* staff has learned not to go away from the keyboard for extended periods of time while monitoring clans, lest one come back to screens scrolled with graphic lines. Indeed, the code for

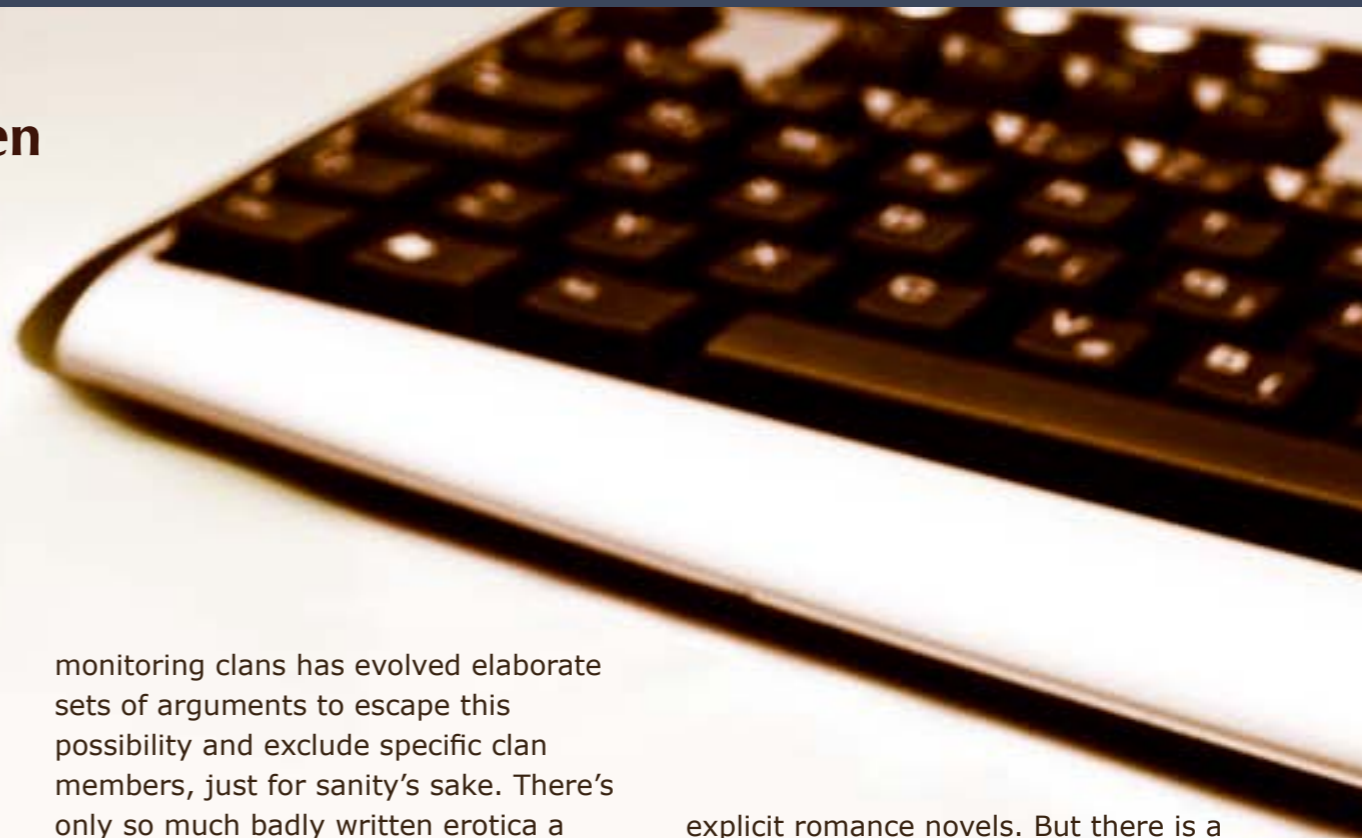
monitoring clans has evolved elaborate sets of arguments to escape this possibility and exclude specific clan members, just for sanity's sake. There's only so much badly written erotica a person can take.

My main takeaway from the experience has been learning a wide variety of words for genitalia and that there are people in the world that refer to their nether regions as "purple-headed desert stallions" or "yonis." Silken thighs and molten heat seem to prevail during these moments, and the exchanges usually read like smutty and overly

explicit romance novels. But there is a sincerity of roleplay among many of the encounters that is touching. Just like romance novels, the quality benefits greatly from the collaboration.

[COMMENTS](#)

Cat Rambo is a science fiction writer and one of the implementors of Armageddon MUD. She can be found on the web at kittywumpus.net.



I Want My MMM TV

by Hitchhiker

I was nine or ten years old when I looked into her eyes and our worlds collided. Mine; the abstract arena of electrons and colors pulled together to form a new age of entertainment with limitless possibilities. Hers; the realization that dodgy graphics and limited memory couldn't get in the way of cheap erotica. She was *Blue Angel 69*, an astute example of how the chase is often better than the goal.

The expectation that the videogames industry would at some point deliver promises of truly interactive sex (but not with a real woman) remained with me throughout my teenage years - right up to the point where I installed a 14.4k modem and loaded up the internet for the first time. The need was no longer there for games to satiate my pubescent fantasies, it seemed. Here was a utopia where the floodgates of information had been thrown open, resulting in the widespread availability of pictures of naked women. The fact it neatly sidestepped both the disapproving shop owner I'd had to buy jizz-mags from previously, as well as the U.K. censors, meant it was all the more accessible.

Videogames? They were for shooting people in the face.

It was, then, with some trepidation that I eventually installed *Lula: the Sexy Empire*. I'd certainly been aware of the sex in games issue before this: *Leisure Suit Larry*, *DreamWeb* and a plethora of other titles had either attacked the issue head on or featured controversial elements. But *Lula* purported to be something different; you could directly interact with this woman and make her do things. Sometimes with friends.

Obviously, it was a disappointment that amounted to far less than the many hentai titles that emerge from the East on a weekly basis. It did make me realize, however, that there was a potential there that could exceed the lures of IRC and "OMG! Got n e pix of J-Lo?" Sure, I never reached *Lula's* climax, but the possibility of her followers giving me greater satisfaction was clear. And the adult industry is always on the crest of any technological wave, right? Those guys and gals are like the space race of yesteryear; poking technological boundaries just to see how far they can shoot next time out.

Unfortunately, they seem to have gotten distracted by DVDs and the continued explosion of internet usage. Multiple viewing angles, "Virtual Sex" titles that let you control the action by selecting chapters, and cheap-to-manufacture and distribute discs have all meant the

activities of our various favorite stars and starlets have remained in the living room or on the web in all their moaning, writhing glory. High definition is the next big movement, but I'm uncertain just how much detail I need to see. But I digress.

Videogames are what I want. *3D SexVilla* and its current ilk offer the most advanced of the Western solutions to my need, yet are oh-so-woeful. Badly animated models manipulate themselves, each other and toys as their skin glows with the artificial sheen of computer sweat. Unenthusiastic grunts and groans blast from the speakers as I desperately try to wiggle the mouse in the right motion to provide the NPCs with the fix they need. Growing bored, I switch the scene to automatic and let them go at it for as long as I can stand to watch. I leave the room to make a cup tea with a mind full of questions, such as "Why didn't I just download a

High definition is the next big movement, but I'm uncertain just how much detail I need to see.





movie?” and “Is there anything less erotic than a woman being attacked by a badly rendered floating dildo?” Even the lazy addition of a Jenna Jameson model – Ooh! Ooh! Jenna Jameson! – doesn’t help things at all.

No, this just will not do.

Our pursuit for carnal entertainment knows no boundaries.

The adult industry has failed you and me, ladies and gentlemen. They have failed to exploit an emerging market, they have failed to engage in any real experimentation with a unique interface for porn aficionados, and they have failed to milk us of all the money that they can. Our pursuit for carnal

entertainment knows no boundaries, but while the stars engage in ever more depraved acts accessible only through traditional video and pictorial content, we gamers remain at our desks, wondering when they will try something different.

The developer illuminati exchange ideas, hold discussion panel meetings and continue to explore methods of engaging the player through traditional narratives, new control interfaces and the number of polygons whizzing around the screen.

Good games are often held up simply because they manage to exploit one of the basic emotions of the human psyche; the truly great are cherished because they hook in to our core emotional centers in some way, achieving true psychological buy-in by pressing the right buttons. Truly a set of worthwhile and lofty aims for any budding potential art form.

Me, wanting truly interactive porn that allows for the satisfaction of my basic sexual desires without me having to confront who I am and what I look like as I look down the barrel of loaded gun that’s held by a real woman who’s ready to let me know just how inadequate I am and just how little she wants me (hey, marriage can be hard)? That doesn’t sound like too much to ask. [COMMENTS](#)

Hitchhiker is a freelance videogames journalist who spends too much time playing multiplayer games all alone. It does give him a sense of belonging, though, so that’s ok. He hangs out at www.alwaysblack.com.

MEET THE TEAM

Each week we ask a question of our staff and featured writers to learn a little bit about them and gain some insight into where they are coming from. This week's question is:

"What are you wearing right now?"

Richard Bartle, "I was Young, I Needed the Money"

Clothes.

Charles Wheeler, "Youthful Indiscretions"

Let's see, a t-shirt, jeans - what? What do you mean I'm supposed to answer sexier? Uh-huh ... Yeah ... Oh! I get it now. Umm ... can I get a do-over?"

Cat Rambo, "As Sands Through the Hourglass"

Blue and purple Polar fleece socks, black jeans, the requisite underwear, yin-yang earrings, and a black t-shirt with an enraged monkey on it.

Mark Wallace, "Knocking Pixels"

Black jeans, white T-shirt, and a pair of Chuck Ts.

JR Sutich, Contributing Editor

Mandalorian Armor. I have a Boba Fetish.

Joe Blancato, Associate Editor

Christmas lights.

Russ Pitts, Associate Editor

Flannel PJs and a terrycloth robe. I'm like Hefner, but ... fuzzier.

Jon Hayter, Producer

A large pink bunny suit made of fiberglass insulation. This is to bait furries into getting near me, at which

point I shake my bunny tail of pain and force them to recoil and collapse to the ground, itching and bleeding from every pore.

Julianne Greer, Executive Editor

Bright green corduroy pants, black tank top and flip-flops.

