

# the *Escapist*

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

by Julianne Greer

Two weeks ago, a majority of *The Escapist* crew trucked off to Los Angeles for E3. We spent three days traipsing about the LA Convention Center and three nights popping about Downtown LA and West Hollywood ... networking. And for those of you who may have missed it, we wrote all about it at *The Lounge*.

But really, what is E3? From the official site: "E3 is the world's premiere trade show for computer and video games and related products." Hmmm. So, what is a trade show, exactly? According to the good people at investorwords.com, a trade show is "an event at which goods and services in a specific industry are exhibited and demonstrated."

This sounds pretty cool. One might glean from this that at the videogame and related products trade show, attendees would be able to get a clear idea of what the next wave of games, consoles and peripherals will be like. But then, we cannot forget the implication of two very important words in the definition of trade show: exhibited and demonstrated.

These two words mean that the viewers (aka attendees) are by proxy passive participants in the whole event. Any stories we went there to find, scoops we hoped to get were closely guarded by the powers that be, while they showed us and told us exactly what they wanted us to see and hear.

This came home to me this year when I went to an invite only party with a demonstration of a game. An interstellar war was started in the demonstration of the game. It was fun. I was invited back by a member of the company's PR team to see more of the game. Of course I went. An interstellar war was started **in the same spot** by a different demonstrator. Even though the whole process seemed to be rather spontaneous, the entire demonstration was **scripted**. I was speechless.

Later I thought back on the tidy little package presented at E3 by many (certainly not all companies). The one that's scripted; the one about which you ask a question, and if it's outside the parameters of what's accepted, a side-step answer to dizzy even a politician is issued. Why is this? What has built this solid wall, manned by PR gurus, between

gaming press and the developers/publishers of games and consoles?

I don't think it's the developers – have you ever asked a developer about the game they've been pouring their heart, soul and bank account into for months, even years? There's this little smile that creeps up, you know, that one that makes you do the same. And that smile travels up into their eyes, tinged with just a bit of mischievousness. No, it's not because they want to be limited.

So, I look at the other part of the equation, the press. With one ten minute presentation, developers must show what it has cost millions of dollars and years of people's lives to create. And with one hastily written 300 word preview/review, the press can help make or break a game. It doesn't seem fair.

This is not to say that we, as press, should not give our true impressions of a game, even if negative; we have a responsibility to our audience for that. But we also owe the developers fair and unbiased/bias disclosed coverage. And if we don't give that, the package with which we are presented will likely be very controlled and scripted with the

purpose of minimizing our biases, as they are now.

Hopefully this can change. Hopefully we can establish trusting relations wherein we can talk to developers about their games instead of doing the carefully choreographed song and dance which just makes everyone feel tired and just a little awkward.

Cheers,



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**In Response to "Don't Roleplay the Bugs":** I just rolled my eyes when I read this beginner's description of playing DM'ed sessions in *Neverwinter Nights*. Try talking to someone who has been running them since 2002 over at Neverwinter Connections. You absolutely can emulate the PnP environment, and in many ways do it better, since combat is essentially real time with the computer



# the Escapist

doing all of the rolls for you and the immersion is far greater. You can reduce your build time by downloading campaign modules, same as you do in PnP by buying published modules, except they're free.

I have fond memories of my tabletop days, but I have no desire to return to them. *NWN* is the superior game. That it takes more than a few sessions to do it well should come as no surprise to someone who has played a lot of tabletop. Picture what your first few sessions of tabletop gaming were like. I doubt it was the Lord of the Rings.

**-Brian**

**To the Editor:** I just wanted to drop a note saying that I really enjoy reading *The Escapist*. As the President of Red 5 Studios and former Team Lead for *World of Warcraft* at Blizzard, please let me know if there is any way I can contribute.

**-Markus**

**In Response to "From '94 to Infinity: Before Halo" from The Escapist Lounge:** I wept - wept! - at this article. A sophomore in high school in 1994,

Bungie was one of my all-time favorite companies. Still is, and ranks right next to Ambrosia Software as one of the best game makers of all time.

Thanks for the memories. I'm off to install Aleph One now.

**-Chris Brinkley**

**In Response to "The Left Behind" from The Escapist Lounge:** I'm definitely one of the gaming homeless as well. I agree about *Quake 2*... in fact, I was playing it the other day, and after playing both *Q3* and the *Q4* demo, I realized how great that game was and still is. It wasn't really nostalgia either, side-by-side the gameplay was just more gripping and intense. I wanted to plow into the next level, story or no story. A lot of games these days are missing that hook that pulls you in. I'm not talking about addictiveness, either - I mean a devotion to beat the game. You don't hardly get that feeling anymore.

**-Ray**

**To the Editor:** I was refreshed by the notion of a person who does not consider themselves a gamer, but happens to play

a lot of games. This is me in a nut shell, and it resonated very clearly.

Thank you.

P.S. - are casual gamers a real commercial market, or a post-content design add-on? What tools/services link groups together that also happen to game (x-fire, trillian, google, skype, ventrillo, teamspeak, etc), and why can't I have just one?

**-Andrew**





## I HATE YOU, E3

by David Thomas

I like LA.

### Like.

I'm no Randy Newman, who professes a melodic love of the place. Rather, I've grown to appreciate Los Angeles, even as I look out on the street and see an urban civilization dying, one homeless drug zombie at a time.

Come to LA early on a foggy Sunday morning and you can see it, too. Downtown Los Angeles only compares favorably to places even more bleak and empty, like downtown Phoenix. No one lives here. And the people that commute in during the week to work here are exiles, looking forward to leaving as soon as possible. So, you never come to the nominal center of the massive SoCal megaplex expecting much. There's a bunch of office buildings, the Lakers play in the Staples Center down the street. And this is where they put the convention center.

I came here, once again, to attend a convention.

For the 10<sup>th</sup> year in a row, I've tossed aside other responsibilities to attend the Electronic Entertainment Expo. For the past eight years, E3 has put on its call girl circus of marketing come-ons and sultry promises in an effort to woo videogame buyers and press. And, by and large, it works. We show up the Sunday before the expo spreads her legs. We flock here on an annual pilgrimage and help make E3 into one of the most successful industry commercials ever. Maybe the Super Bowl does a better job in its ability to sell product in guise of sharing news.

Maybe.

Wandering the streets of early morning LA stokes a love/hate relationship that would fill a season of *Oprah*. From the scabby man blocking the door to the bathroom in Starbucks, to the white Rasta kid toking up in front of Macy's and screaming at some hobo incoherently, to the three city blocks cordoned off for some film shoot, LA is like a cancer patient that just keeps going to work. "What else am I gonna do? Just sit at home and die?"



George Romero shot *Dawn of the Dead* in Pennsylvania. But he could have saved money on extras and just filmed the whole lurching masterpiece in downtown LA.

I'm here because of E3, and E3 lives in LA for what might seem like an obvious reason. One of the major power centers of game development and publishing, Southern California provides a magnet for people with digital stories to tell, entertainment to shill.

Eight years ago, the whole sultry shebang moved to Georgia for two years. The suits behind the decision explained the relocation in terms of needing more space and something to do with making it more convenient for the Europeans because, technically, Atlanta is closer to the old country than California.

And while I'm sure Georgia has its charms, they don't include providing a place that game people want to be. That's why the whole tawdry mess was shipped back to LA, where it started. Because, like LA itself, the game business feels like an unhealthy entity

kept alive by a bubbling mad scientist's cocktail of dreams, greed and a vaporous aroma of the future.

LA is fantasy, to be sure. But, maybe just as important, LA is the city of hope.

## **Like LA itself, the game business feels like an unhealthy entity kept alive by a bubbling mad scientist's cocktail of dreams, greed and a vaporous aroma of the future.**

Every once in a while, I pick up my copy of Lester Bangs madness and read a little. I'm not so much looking for tips on how to put more "new" in my journalism as much as I like to get a feeling for what it's like to be really, crazy, passionately in love with something. Rock 'n' roll broke Lester's heart because he loved it so much. And I think the reason why is that he was there, man. He was there when it all happened. And he was young. Rock changed everything and he wanted it to keep on mattering. He got older, but he wanted to stay young. He never lived to see a creaking The Who smirk as they sing "I hope I die

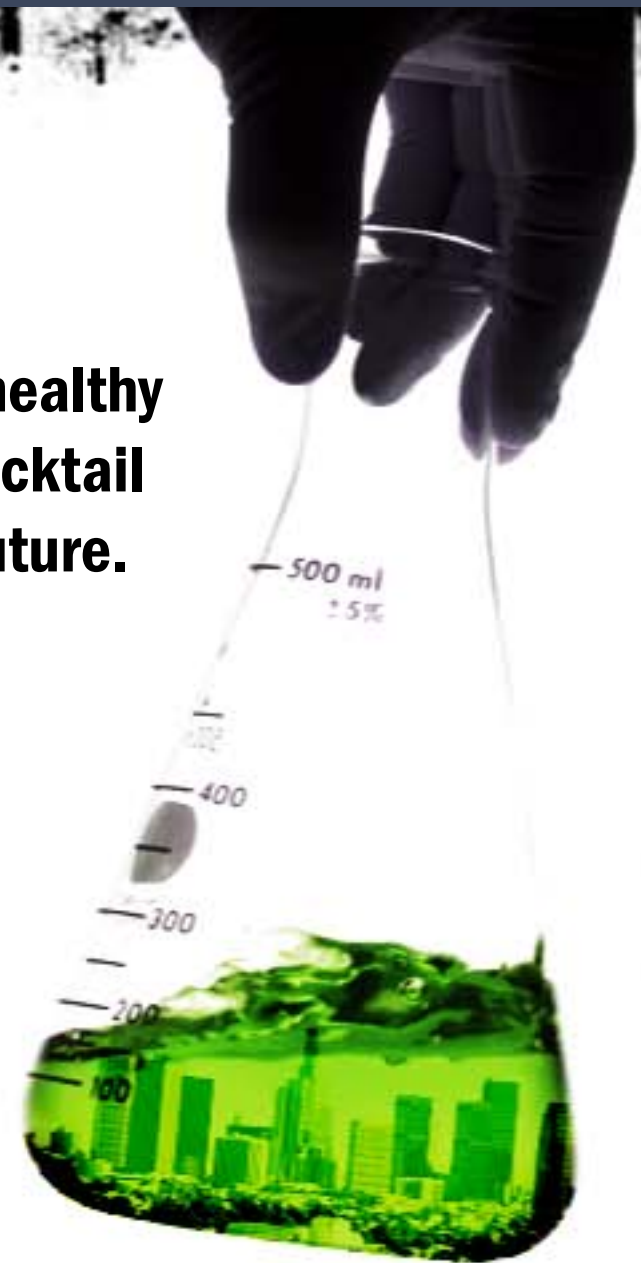
before I get old," or to marvel at a geriatric Sir Mick Jagger strutting in front of NFL fans crowing about his general lack of satisfaction. Rock grew up; Lester couldn't, and it killed him.

At least, that's my theory and the base of my sympathy with Lester's prose.

I don't think attending E3 will kill me. I don't think I care enough. Really, I just wonder why I despise this event so much and why I hate myself for going year after year.

Like every really screwed up relationship, this takes some explaining.

From what I can tell, there are two big groups of people at E3: those that fundamentally love it and those that either dread or despise it. If people are



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honest, you can break down these groups into the people that have been only a few times and the people like me, who have trudged out year after year. I suppose you could say familiarity breeds contempt, and this wouldn't be a bad cliché to apply to the process. But the soul of it is a little trickier than that.

Sitting in a bar, I've often found myself laying down the psychological rule that "Your biggest strength is also your biggest weakness." I've applied this principle to everything from trying to understand my ex-wife's behavior to explaining why I liked or didn't like some boss. So, if someone is really generous, and you think that's a real strength, then if you look long enough you are bound to find out that giving spirit comes from a very selfish place. If someone is organized, it's naturally bound to inner feelings of not having any control. Or, as Robert Duval drove the point home to me many years ago watching the Marine tear jerker *The Great Santini*, when the tough old soldier is asked by his gape mouthed, sensitive young son if he ever gets scared, the tough as nails leatherneck



barks, "Of course. That's what makes me good."

This all gets worked around into a notion I kneaded out of the first few hours of sitting around in LA waiting for E3 to start: I hate E3 because I love it. The people that love E3 really just hate themselves. You see, that's how the principle works. It's a yin and yang thing, interior and exterior, good and evil. It's the cosmic balance, dude.

I hate E3 because it boils down everything into a residual hype. I hate

E3 because it's reporting in Sodom and Gomorra. You want to stay above the muck, but everyone is passing around everything, we all slip and slide in the same marketing offal and promotional waste. You can't report about sin without becoming a sinner. And in spite of all the efforts to keep clean, no one is. It doesn't matter whether you slam free drinks at parties given by companies with products you'll never cover or haul home a suitcase filled with plastic swag begging you to point a little of your reader's attention in the direction of a game pushed by a logo on a t-shirt,


plastic game character or piece of computer hardware that you don't need anyway. No, it doesn't matter what you take, because if you are at E3, you are going to give. If E3 is the blood-bloated hide of game industry's malarial beast, every reporter is a mosquito, sucking out the disease and passing it along to the public. Reporters make E3 matter because we keep telling the world it matters. E3 compromises every ethic we could have ever claimed to have, and we assuage our guilt by reporting harder, faster, more. We're as stupid as the dog chasing his tail, but more so: We start with the tail in our mouth.

I don't think you can see how ugly this is until you've been to the show a few times, maybe 10 times. It takes a while to see your part in the machine and wonder why you've been doing it. It's like waking up after 20 years in a dead-end job or a lifeless marriage and wondering whether its more noble to just stick it out or to face the embarrassment of admitting you should have moved on sooner.

Or maybe it's a deep down, dark and sticky love.



## I can see LA is dying.



Look, not every day in every relationship is a beautiful thing. You can't make your choices about the rest of your life based on an argument about who left dirty socks on the bathroom floor. Or, as a guy who I used to work with who always managed to avoid conflict said, "You got to choose your battles. You can't win them all." It's practical advice. It's also shorthand for the deeper truth, that some things are just worth sticking with, no matter how you feel about them in the moment.

That's the other side of E3. Somewhere behind the four-story promotional banners and eardrum-crushing multimedia, smiling temptresses waving you toward games they can't play and the seemingly endless river of booze, you'll find the games. And if you concentrate on the games, the crazy retail patter with men wielding guns like cocks and women promising sex **and** death with every play, well, you'll find a little bit of redemption. People hate me for pulling out *Matrix* metaphors because they see the film as a cheap looting of science fiction in an effort to sell a lightweight S&M fantasy. But you can't

look at E3, I mean really look at E3, and not see that dribbling green *Matrix* type.

We get used to looking at images on our screens and seeing Dodge Vipers and orcs, breathtaking landscapes and wookies. They don't look real, but we like to think of them as if they were. In the same way, we have happily digested the idea that games are just a business, so all the soapbox puffery and marketing confetti-throwing is to be expected. In our world, lightsaber battles to the death are meaningful and good games exist to make money. What we keep missing is the idea behind it all. We keep forgetting that, well, here it goes again with *The Matrix*, "There is no spoon." Except, there is a spoon. And E3 is spoon-fest.

Sitting in the musty lobby of my hotel, waiting for lights of the big show to start their blinding strobing, I can see LA is dying. But the idea of LA continues to go on in spite of this. I like LA because I grew up watching television and movies, and to my mind, the world is LA. Every cop looks like one of the guys from *CHiPs*, every doctor is either Barnaby Jones or Quincy and my editor is Lou



Grant (if Lou Grant grew a mustache and wasn't morbidly obese). When the sun sets in my town, I can only reflect that it looks like the sun setting over Hollywood.

LA the city will die; maybe it already has. We can't tell because the idea of LA lingers - or echoes - or maybe it's just painted so thickly on the urban façade that it will take a long time to wear off. It doesn't matter. LA remains. There still is a spoon, after all.

## **I get hot and my heart beats faster to think about all those people, all those gamers - me - getting sucked into this vortex of living proto-meaning.**

Videogames come to worship at the shrine of LA because they share a lineage, some of the same genetic stuff. What makes the game industry matter, and matter in spite of the obvious corporate evils of sweatshop work schedules and amoral content programming; what makes it matter in spite of the overwhelming number of young men who make and cover games, and have no sense of style, or history or

purpose; what makes games matter even in the face of fans who defend the medium's supposed virtues while dropping away from personal meaning and purpose to pretend to be an elf night after night; what remains is the central fission of the digital medium. All that code that makes all of those games go, that makes trees grow and suns set, cars roll and bullets fly, dragons soar and childlike men jump from box to box, is this plastic, sticky medium of the computer, the substrate of ideas.

Inside the computer, there is no difference between a rape and a rescue, between saving a life and taking one. It probably seems cheap to say this, because it sounds like you end up trivializing the notion of games. The point is, you can't find right and wrong in the code. It's not there. It doesn't parse, as the programmers would say. You have to find that yourself. You have to invent it with the machine.

That's what I love. I get hot and my heart beats faster to think about all those people, all those gamers - me - getting sucked into this vortex of living proto-meaning. It's like holding the secret stuff of life in your hands. Games are the Silly Putty of philosophy.

I know, I know. WTF? How could you spin something as trivial as videogames into something so big? You big faker.

All I can say is that's probably true. I like LA. But I love videogames. I just have to remember to forgive them for the little things and keep in mind what started this love affair in the first place, that craziness. Those happy times when E3 didn't really matter, and I couldn't or wouldn't see the flaws and blemishes. Those feelings might not be torrid any longer. That happens. But real love remains. It lingers. [COMMENTS](#)

*David Thomas is the founder of the International Game Journalists Association. He also provides commentary and criticism at [buzzcut.com](http://buzzcut.com).*





# wait, this party has a purpose?

by Dan Dormer

It was getting late on Thursday and I was running out of time. I felt like Kiefer Sutherland's "Jack Bauer" from Fox's hit TV show, *24*, checking my watch as the terrorist threat went from looming in the distance to punching me vigorously in the face. That was probably because I was hanging out near the *24: The Game* kiosks located in Sony's booth. However, I still had a dire problem of my own to correct (albeit, it was nowhere near as cool as saving the country from weaponized anthrax.): It was 3:00 p.m., and I still hadn't managed to score myself a ticket to the hottest party in town. I'm sure some kids from USC were going to have a killer kegger, and the Hollywood A-listers probably had some function thrown by Diddy to attend. But we, the E3 show goers, had only one party on our list: Sony's soiree.

Why did I want to go so bad? I wasn't cruising for free booze. If that were the case, there were plenty of other places I could sneak/talk my way into for a cold one or a mixed drink. Any journalist, of age or under, can get plenty of free

drinks at E3. The real reason I wanted to attend was who because of was rumored to be performing at Sony's party: the word on the street said Franz Ferdinand would be on stage, which made sense. Their song, "Take Me Out," had just been used on Sony's major PSP ad campaign. I knew I couldn't miss a chance to see a free set.

I slowly made my way to Sony's massive media relations center. I was trying to keep a low profile. Not just anyone can get an invite, and I was worried that a wary security guard would ask the wrong question and end my quest prematurely.

I had learned nothing from *Metal Gear Solid*, because a man in a tan shirt started staring at me right away. It wasn't that I was frightened or that Sony's PR department is made up of villainous hell-beasts, it's just that the whole process reminded me of the archaic and merciless selection for dodgeball in grade school: If you weren't one of the big guys, you could find yourself being picked dead last, or not at



all. I couldn't stand that type of humiliation. I didn't want to be jumping rope by myself again. He spoke as I approached.

"Hi, is there anything I can help you with?"

"Yeah, I heard that there might be a few party invites still available, and was checking to see if that was the case." He looked me up and down. He was sizing me up like a team captain. I half expected him to hand me a round rubber ball and ask me to peg someone to see if I was a worthy selection for the squad.

"Sure, can I see a business card?" I handed him one. He gave it a quick glance, and then grabbed an envelope and presented it to me. "You're all set, Dan. See you tonight."

I had made it in.

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Dinner ran late, and I ended up heading with a group over to the party a little after their official start time. They offered free shuttles, but we ended up taking a cab. Studying the contents of

the envelope I had been given, it was nice to see that the invite encouraged party participants to not drink and drive. I made my way out of the cab and up to the entry. I gave the bouncer a casual nod, donned my acceptance-assuring orange wristband, and walked in.

Flashing lights, loud noises, people talking in groups, drinks being constructed in assembly line fashion - and no Franz Ferdinand. Not that I was overly disappointed. I had made it to **the** party. All of a sudden I was one of the guys getting picked first to pick off the little guys with the red rubber playground balls.

As I made my way into the main section, I soon discovered there were multiple segments cordoned off: There was something for everyone, like an amusement park.

As I cut away from the main section - where a massive stage had been erected and some artist I didn't know performed a song I hadn't heard - I found a completely different area, a covered dining space with a buffet, tables and



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plenty of chairs spread out. Then, 50 feet later, I was in a section with benches and tables set up for casual conversation, the starry sky the only ceiling. I spotted the first un-crowded bar since my arrival and promptly got a vodka sour to nurse, as I continued to explore the venue's interior.

I managed to meet up with a few people, and we settled near the luchadores battling inside a wrestling ring. We watched as the night got cooler and cheered on Chilango, as we talked about E3. A few PR contacts I knew fairly well from past dealings ran into me during the match, and we talked about the expo. They asked what I thought was the best of the show, since they hadn't been able to leave their booths much. I asked them what secrets they hadn't shown me during my various appointments. It was an alcohol-aided game of trying to coerce information out of one another. They wanted info on their competitors, I wanted access to knowledge not yet offered for public consumption.

That's when it hit me (somewhere between the seventh and eighth

beverage): That's what the Sony party was about in its truest sense. The party wasn't truly a way to unwind after almost a week of unending work, it was another networking session; but instead of doing a graceful dance of words with PR people, you were doing a drunken jig in an attempt to grease the wheels. The Sony party, despite all its glamour and allure, is no different than any other time of the year, except the drinks are on Sony.

But is that really a bad thing? They provide a nice atmosphere away from the crowded, hot floor of the LA Convention Center for the industry's movers and shakers (and bottom feeders like me) to meet and discuss business without it feeling like we're working. Hey, if anything, it's more enjoyable than getting beamed in the thigh by the school bully. Charlie horses suck. [COMMENTS](#)

*Dan Dormer is a videogame freelancer who keeps a poorly updated blog at his personal site. You can also sing his name in time to "The Imperial March," a fact he learned at E3 this year while not attending the Sony party.*



## Game Industry Katamari

- A quick look at  
all the Other Stuff  
that Happens at E3

by Jason Della Rocca

I feel like crap. The small cough and sneeze I was nursing heading into E3 – thanks to my constantly goobered 3-year-old son – has matured into a full-on hacking cough and apparent sinus infection. On my flight out from Los Angeles, it became clear that I wasn't the only one to have taken a beating.

In the line to use the bathroom, the gentleman ahead of me noticed my vintage GDC:04 T-shirt and asked if I had had a good E3. I responded with a "Yes, very busy" type answer. He asked if it was my first one and what I had been doing there. With a certain pride I told him how I've survived a grand total of 10 E3s. However, I couldn't quite express what I was doing there – or why I had gone ...

He, of course, went to scope out the competition. Ironically enough, in this case, the "competition" was the U.S. military. This particular fellow represented the Canadian Armed Forces and was curious to see what the U.S. military's latest initiatives were in terms of using games and game tech for training and recruitment. I handed him my business card and told him I knew

some folks involved in the "serious games" space.

Three quick lessons: 1. E3 starts the moment you leave your home and ends only when you walk back through the door; 2. Always ensure you have enough business cards for the trip home; and, 3. You can never guess who's going to be attending E3.

### See Any Good Games?

The previous night, despite my festering cold, I managed to enjoy a pleasant sushi dinner with an academic researcher from a prominent business school. It was partly a chance to catch up with a good friend, but we also discussed plans to initiate a new program to study the economics and demographics of the game development industry.

Between the sashimi and an extra order of unagi, I tried to talk about what cool games we saw during E3. I noted that EA's *Army of Two* and Ubi's *Assassin's Creed* looked particularly promising. Sadly, she didn't really get a chance to see any games, despite being at the show for the whole week.

This was the more common response during most of my meetings and social encounters during the week. As it turns out, a lot of folks at E3 don't actually go there for the games.

Never mind the general chaos or the fact that the line at the Nintendo booth was over four hours long at times. To many attendees, the games are an afterthought, and it's too busy a show to waste time standing around. I walked up to the line, sighed, took a picture and just kept walking. No Wii for me.

Most game developers in attendance are there to work. That is, to run the demo

of their game at their publisher's booth, or do press interviews, or have meetings with potential publishers and business partners for their game-to-be, and so on. It's rare for development staff to be at the show just to be at the show, despite the fact that "competitive analysis" is a totally defensible excuse to be there!

#### **Parasite and Prey**

Admittedly, I was not a fan of E3 in the early years (doubly so when it was in Atlanta). The hectic nature of things, the noise and fact that I was always too

busy to wait in line to see the coolest stuff added to my frustrations.

Further, I always felt that the extravagance that went into most booths and related trappings from publishers was a waste. Current estimates place the total E3 tab in the \$100 million range. All that money could have been going into funding new, innovative game projects.

Over the years, however, the true value of E3 became clear: E3 serves as a big "katamari" for the game industry, attracting all kinds of people and stuff that would not otherwise have a chance to connect.

With each successive year, this katamari-like action becomes more evident, as I participate less and less in the primary role of the expo and see more of the activities happening on the periphery.

#### **Two of 60**

While the conference program is an official part of the E3 schedule, a scant 3% of attendees bother to register for it. The topics are generally business-oriented and don't offer the same rigor



**With each successive year, this katamari-like action becomes more evident.**



as the Game Developers Conference's more robust program. Still, the lineup of speakers is often top notch, and the freeform panel format allows for some heated debate and sparks of insight.

(Hint, hint, nudge, nudge to the 97% who missed out: Gamasutra has done a particularly good job this year of covering the conference content.)

Interestingly, the demographics of the conference attendees are quite diverse. There are very few – via my anecdotal estimates – actual mainstream industry folks in attendance (as noted above, they are all working their booth). Instead, you get a mishmash of folks trying to learn more about the game business – from academics to amateurs, from Wall Street bankers to Madison Avenue marketers, all the way to the mayor of Los Angeles.

It is no surprise that googling "videogame conference" or "videogame expo" brings up E3. (Sadly, doing the same in Google Images now brings up a picture of Paris Hilton promoting her *Jewel Jam* mobile phone game. Ugh.)

So, can it be assumed that anyone sitting at their computer and thinking, "You know, I really need to go to some game event to learn more about this business" will first come across E3?

Others have leveraged the magnetism of E3 to host related events and conferences. For example, this year the Serious Game Initiative hosted a games-for-health conference up the street at the USC campus on Tuesday. Along the same lines, Henry Jenkins and his MIT crew hosted the Education Arcade parallel to the E3 conference program in past years.

The Entertainment Software Association (ESA), the mother organization of E3 itself, often embeds its own special activities. Doug Lowenstein's annual "state of the industry" speech runs Wednesday morning, and does well to fill an auditorium that fits 500 people (*Doug's speech was full to the point of overcrowding this year. - Ed.*). The ESA's intellectual property rights division held a special panel to discuss issues surrounding the global economics of game sales and implications with the

World Trade Organization. And the ESA's government relations group holds an annual lunch for various organizations that support game anti-censorship efforts (e.g., IGDA, IEAM, AIAS, ESRB, VSDA, MPAA, RIAA). Alphabet soup is not on the menu.

There was a Global Game Summit preview panel on Thursday evening. *Wired* magazine hosted a special "screening" of *Spore* at LA Center Studios (special guest Robin Williams was quite a hoot). The Game Audio Network Guild hosted a session and

mixer on the Friday evening for game music and audio folks.

No doubt, there was a ton of other conference and presentation oriented action going on. It is hard to keep track of it all ...

### **Government Intervention**

E3 is crawling with government officials from all over the world.

During the week, I met with government officials and representatives from various U.S. states, Canada, the U.K., France,



**Others have leveraged the magnetism of E3 to host related events and conferences.**



Sweden, Denmark, Korea, China, Portugal, Australia, Singapore – among other quick in-the-hallway encounters that I’m probably forgetting.

The majority of these folks are from the IT or economic development arms of government. Others might be from the culture or publishing/arts side of things, but those individuals are more rare. Many countries have government game industry promotion agencies with a

mandate to promote and grow their local game sector (the Korea Game Development and Promotion Institute wields an approx U.S.\$16 million annual budget to do just that).

This year, many of the government-subsidized pavilions have graduated from out-of-the-way Kentia Hall into the South and West Halls. A quick scan of the exhibitor page lists pavilions for Canada, the U.K., Nordic countries, Korea, Australia, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Scotland, Singapore and Taiwan. And I

suppose we can count the U.S. Army booth in the West Hall, as well.

These pavilions allow for many – often smaller – companies to distribute the expense of mounting a viable presence at the show. Many countries also provide some level of travel expense assistance in addition to the subsidized booth space. Nice.

In addition to their efforts to get local companies into E3, many governments also host receptions or events in parallel to the expo itself. On Tuesday, the U.K. Consulate General welcomed a few

hundred guests to his posh estate on the outskirts of LA. Roughly at the same time, Quebec was welcoming guests to the hip Standard hotel for a cocktail. Wednesday evening, France held a nice open-air reception. The Canadian government hosted a breakfast networking and panel session early Thursday morning just up the street from the convention center. Korea held a lavish dinner party on Thursday night for 300 guests at the same time Singapore was doing the equivalent across the street.

And those were just the ones I had on my schedule. There were other similar receptions and events driven by the various governmental bodies throughout



the week; certainly a nice change of pace over the traditional negative attention games get by government.

## Social Circuits

I'm not sure if the E3 party scene should be considered as "other stuff" going on, as it is so integral to the E3 experience. A lot of value is derived from networking at these events.

Not counting the government receptions mentioned previously, I was aware of the following parties/hosts:

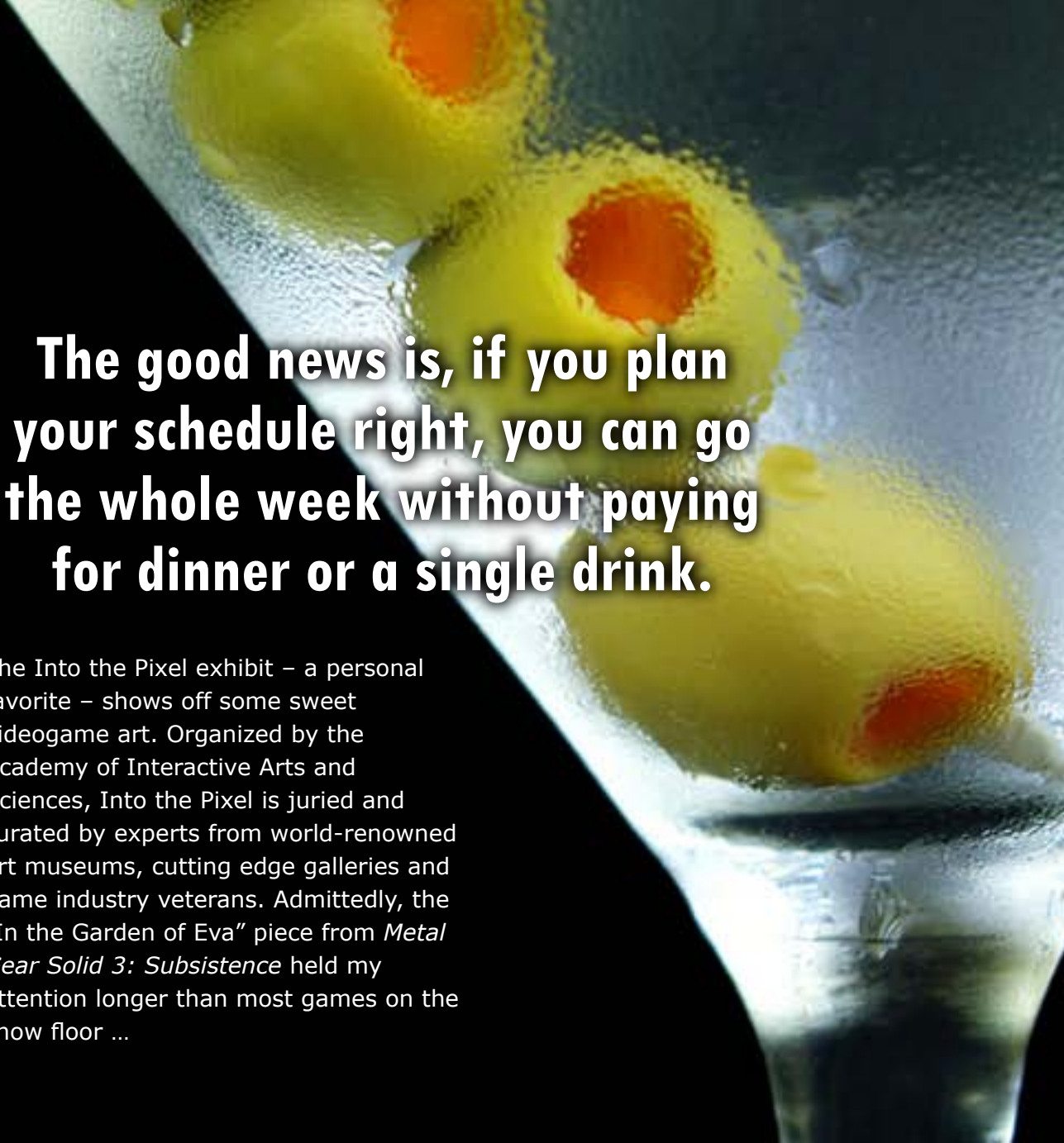
- International Game Journalists Association (Monday)
- Union Entertainment (Monday)
- Nintendo (Tuesday)
- Pandemic & BioWare (Tuesday)
- International Game Developers Association (Tuesday)
- Intel (Wednesday)
- Wedbush Morgan (Wednesday)

- Minna Mingle/Casual Games Association (Wednesday)
- Access E3 Party at the House of Blues (Wednesday)
- Vivendi (Wednesday)
- IGN (Wednesday)
- *The Escapist* (Thursday)
- Sony (Thursday)
- Ubisoft (Thursday)
- House of Moves (Thursday)

No doubt, there were others. It is just impossible to keep up. The good news is, if you plan your schedule right, you can go the whole week without paying for dinner or a single drink. The bad news is you'll take a physical pounding standing around and talking all night.

## Art Appreciation

E3 attracts many noble efforts related to games, often angling on the artistic or social impact side of things.



**The good news is, if you plan your schedule right, you can go the whole week without paying for dinner or a single drink.**

The Into the Pixel exhibit – a personal favorite – shows off some sweet videogame art. Organized by the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences, Into the Pixel is juried and curated by experts from world-renowned art museums, cutting edge galleries and game industry veterans. Admittedly, the "In the Garden of Eva" piece from *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence* held my attention longer than most games on the show floor ...

In addition to having a gallery of all the works lined up between the West and South Halls, there is a nice cocktail reception (of course!) to initially unveil the art and introduce the artists, jurors and organizers that were involved. Sadly, the game press barely picks up on it, and I have yet to see much in the way of coverage of the exhibit.

While the Into the Pixel exhibit is an official part of E3, there are many smaller off-the-record efforts going on. For example, there are usually a handful of documentary filmmakers at the show covering one aspect or another of the game business. This year, I did an on-camera interview for one doing a film on the controversy over booth babes and sex in games. Last year, another filmmaker was doing a piece on industry working conditions.

Other groups are out garnering support for their own local conference or games festival. Still others are making plans to build games for charity. The list goes on.

## Other Politics

Taking an even broader view, we start seeing some of the weirder activities occurring on the periphery.

One example is the booth babe protesters. No, not people protesting the booth babes, but protesters who **were** booth babes. Right, you got that. There were booth babes outside of E3 protesting the new, stricter babe and clothing policies. In the end, it turned out to be a marketing stunt, but it **did** seem legit when I first heard about it. Really.

More seriously, there were scammers distributing the "Electronic Entertainment Show Daily," a rip-off of the usual "Electronic Entertainment **Expo** Show Daily." They were hitting up exhibitors with special discounted advertising rates due to a last minute cancellation. Not sure if they phished any one in, but that's just not cool.

Perhaps most amusing are some of the folks who get refused entrance due to lack of industry credentials. At times, locals come and hover around the convention center. Justine, the PsychicGirl, should have known her registration was going to be rejected due to stricter admittance policies ...

## 1000m View

As our big E3 katamari continues rolling, more and more stuff keeps sticking to it.

It didn't take long for the core of the show to be overtaken – perhaps not in appearance, but more so in importance – by all the other stuff stuck to it.

One has to wonder if E3 went away (as some jaded industry vets usually do), what would happen to all that other stuff. It would be like an ecosystem's food source disappearing.

Or, perhaps it's just me and the odd route I push my way through in LA. Regardless, I don't think I'll ever have the luxury of waiting in line to get into the Nintendo booth. No worries. In my opinion, the best place to get the scoop on all the games is via the web anyway. It's all the other stuff one has to be there for! [COMMENTS](#)

*Jason Della Rocca is the executive director of the International Game Developers Association. (Opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the IGDA.) Jason blogs at Reality Panic and wishes he could just camp out in front of the vintage arcade machines in Kentia Hall every E3.*





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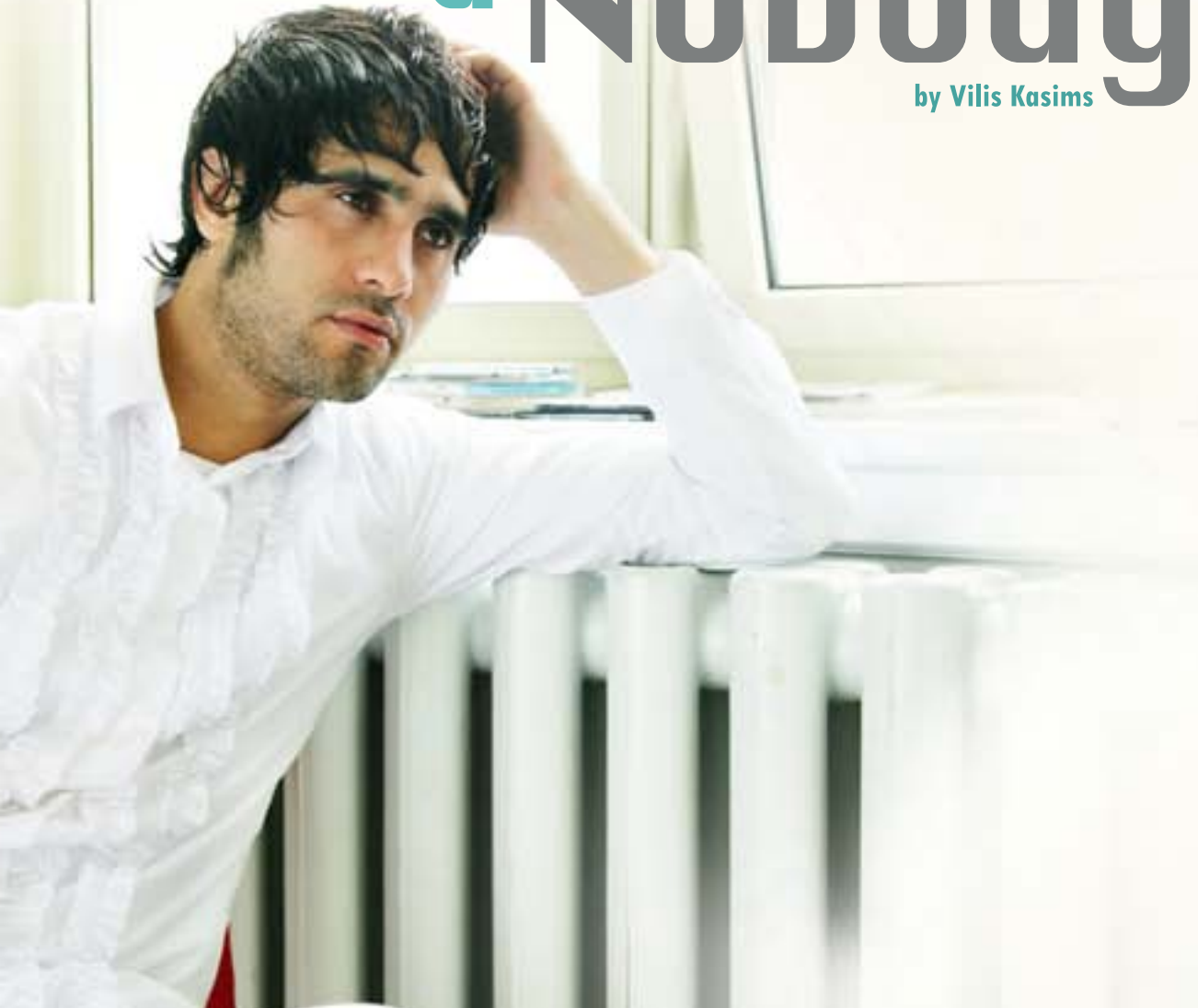
Casual Friday

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## Reflections of a Nobody

by Vilis Kasims



"It was magic," I say quietly, as *Contra's* end credits roll by for the first time. My brother nods his head in agreement. We both smile.

"It's magic," I think today, 13 years later, looking out the window at the urban landscape on the other side, where burly oil-cars are lined up by the river. A drunk strolls by in the soft light of the full moon. He stops for a moment, throws an empty bottle of vodka under a bush and walks away. It's three o'clock in the morning.

OK, enough of this. I get back in my chair, press F5 hurriedly and look around for some news. Nothing ... nothing ... ah, there's a piece on some German FPS. And, even though I haven't played an FPS in the last couple of years, I open the article and start reading it.

E3: It has to be magic. That's one of those rare beliefs I try to leave unquestioned. Fairy tales, science fiction novels, movies – all have had a place in my heart, but now they've gone somewhere deep in the vaults of the Time itself – together with unicorns, plastic soldiers and miniature Ferrari models.

"Awesome graphics ... Thirty highly designed levels ... Fully implemented RPG elements ... " Why do I still believe in all of this?

I want to. I want to see impossible things come true, no matter how trivial or unimportant they might feel to the others. It's the sensation of seeing my dreams coming true I want to experience. For quite some time, I've mourned the loss of that magic feeling that filled my soul while I was reading stories about wonderful journeys to the Moon or the center of the Earth. And, if it's possible to partially recover these feelings, I'll do my best to hold onto them.



Of course, all this endless F5'ing stems from more than just my childish obsessions. After all, if all I wanted was a dream to believe in, I might as well go on thinking Elvis and Lennon are still alive somewhere in Peru.

No, I'm way too deep into the world of videogames; and this wave of previews, news and trailers could excite me even without a three-day spectacle surrounding them. Also, it's the feeling of being somehow tangled up in the biggest event in the game industry. But I wouldn't be awake this late at night if it was just that. No, the fundament of my unhealthy obsession is the desire to believe in a miracle; believe that somewhere in this stream of graphical depravity and booth babes would emerge something incredible, something that would not only make me register it somewhere in the depths of my memory, but also get up, re-read the story a couple of times with a doubting smile and then stroll through my apartment to and fro, trying to imagine how it would look in reality.

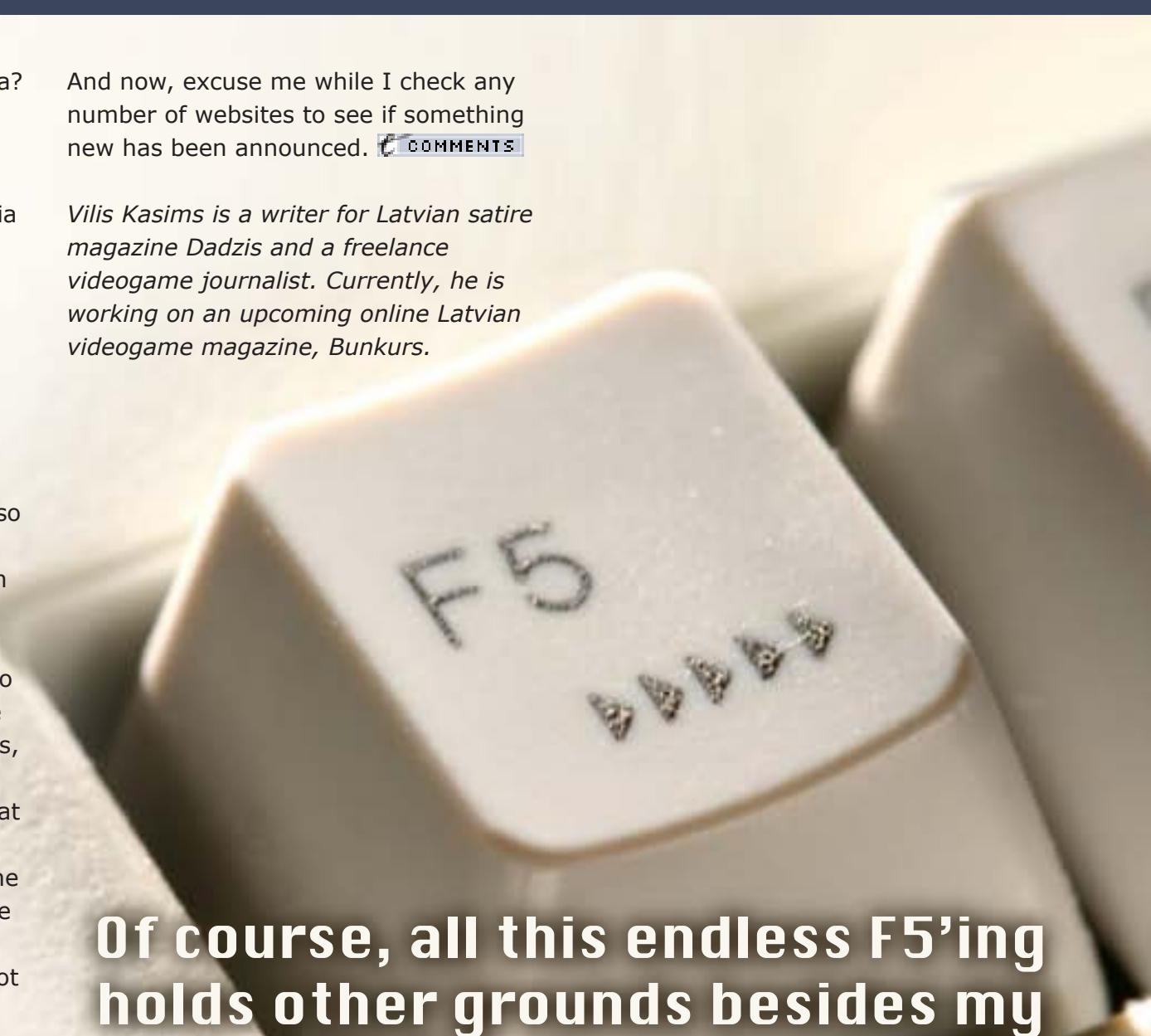
Why, then, am I still here, in my flat, filled with books and loose-leaf paper, not

**there** with Miyamoto, Wright and Kojima? I'm scared. Scared I might lose the innocent belief in the magic of the E3. Scared of discovering the stories aren't coming to the minds of the journalists via an astral link, but are gathered one by one in a long and dismal effort. Queues as long as several hundred meters; endless movement from morning to evening; the noise, the fights with security – sitting near the PC; it sounds like a minor effort compared to the possibility of being the first to see *New Super Mario* or *Gothic* in action. But I also know that if I were there, on the show floor, it wouldn't take long for me to turn into a fire and sulfur spitting dragon.

That's another reason I don't want E3 to come to Europe. I just wouldn't be able to refrain from paying a visit. Sometimes, it's better not to know than to become disenchanted. And you, the journalists at E3 – I really admire your effort, but, please, don't write about queues and the intolerable noise. Deep in our minds, we already know how tiresome it can be, but in that one week it's much better not to be reminded, so we can keep on believing that E3 is guided by the power of a good-natured wizard.

And now, excuse me while I check any number of websites to see if something new has been announced. [COMMENTS](#)

*Vilis Kasims is a writer for Latvian satire magazine Dadzis and a freelance videogame journalist. Currently, he is working on an upcoming online Latvian videogame magazine, Bunkurs.*



**Of course, all this endless F5'ing holds other grounds besides my childish obsessions.**

# Recipe to Disaster

by Kyle Orland

Imagine a rock concert. The loudest rock concert you've ever been to. Make it a little louder, just for good measure.

Throw it into a Las Vegas casino, except instead of the glitz of Vegas you're in the middle of the decay that is Los Angeles; and instead of jangling coins and neon there are surround sound explosions and endless rows of flashing video monitors.

Stir in a good-sized dollop of siege-mentality warfare, complete with realistic sound effects and panicked jostling for limited resources.

Add in a little dash of sci-fi convention decoration and just a pinch of overpriced food.

Dump in tens of thousands of bewildered, sweaty males (sprinkled with a few scantily-clad booth babes and fully-clothed female PR reps for flavor).

Shake well.

Welcome to E3.

Now, try writing a story in this mess.

To an outsider, going to E3 as a journalist seems like a dream come true: You get to see all the latest games, meet all the coolest people in the game industry, and generally putz around in a giant arcade for three straight days in the center of Hollywood. But ask those that have been writing about the show for years, and you'll find covering E3 has its share of problems - especially when it comes to getting actual work done.

Chief among these problems is the crowds. Though it's not open to the public, E3 still manages to attract nearly 60,000 people that are somehow "affiliated" with the game industry. That number inevitably includes more than a few people who wrote one article for some three-month-old fansite along with your local Gamestop manager's cousin. It's inevitable. Don't even bother complaining.

Despite the throng of humanity, the 870,000 square feet of exhibit space seems downright spacious. That is until you clog up the floor with awkwardly placed demo stations, oversized statuary and narrow choke points. "It's hard enough to keep moving," GamePolitics



Editor and nine-year E3 veteran Dennis McCauley writes in a post on his site. Then, “the attendees who are walking ahead in the traffic lane ... suddenly stop to stare up at some whirling bright lights or booth babe. Or maybe to have a conversation with a friend they bumped into. That’s when our latent South Philadelphia cab driver persona emerges. ‘Hey, buddy, move it to the side of the road!’”

Once you finally work your way to a game demo kiosk, the experience is less than ideal. Good luck focusing on the game while ignoring the swirling mass of people, noise and lights around you. Sure, your press pass can bump you to the front of most lines, but if the game is popular at all, a PR attendant or an impatient expo attendee will hurry you along before you can play for more than five minutes. Suddenly, formulating those “Best of E3 Award” impressions doesn’t seem so easy.

You can avoid the tumult of the kiosks by arranging a private “booth tour” or a behind-the-scenes appointment with a PR contact at most major companies. With literally thousands of outlets vying

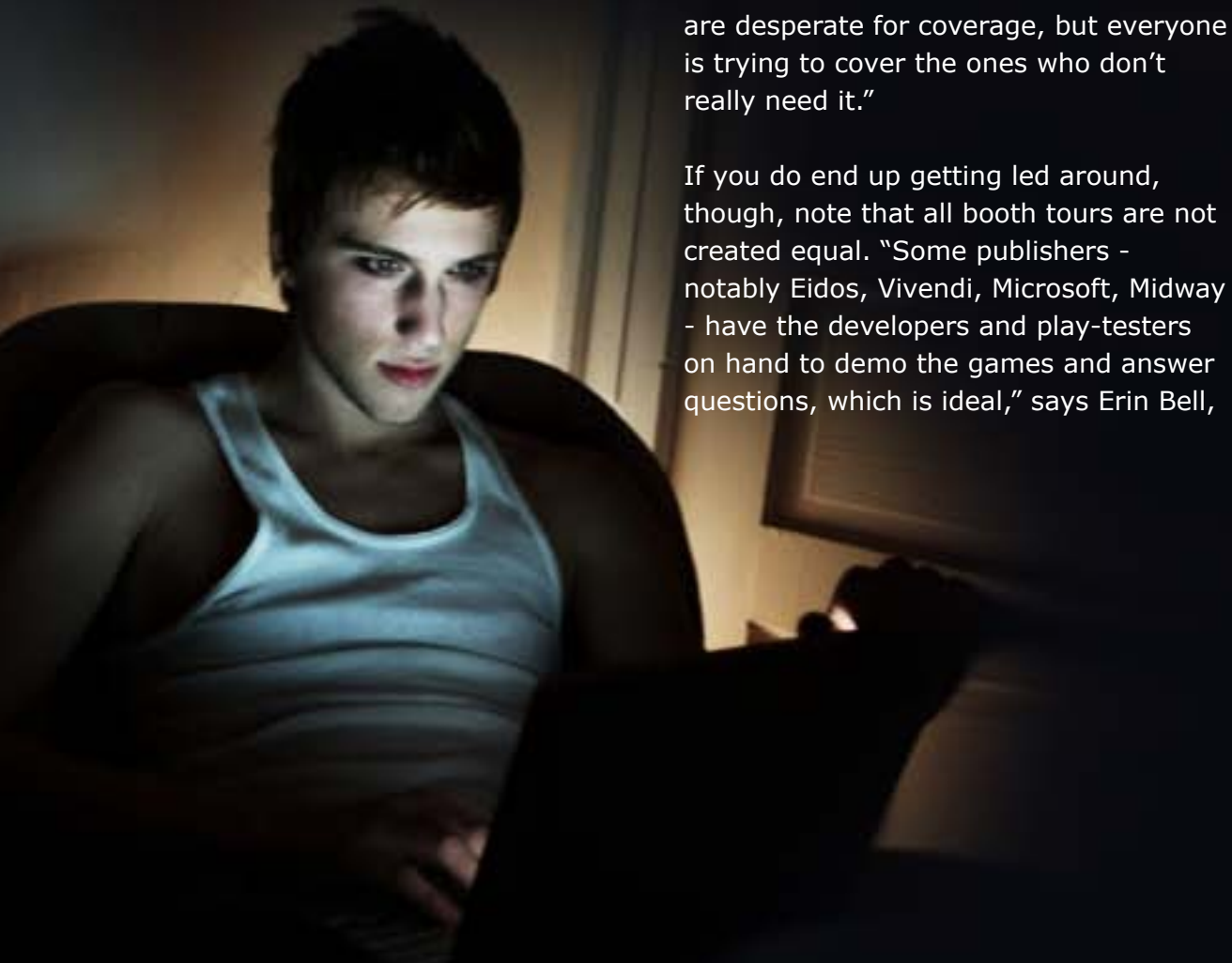
for precious time, though, only the big dogs of the game journalism machine can guarantee VIP press access at the bigger booths.

“If you’re working for a web site that has a small ‘unique visitor’ count and no real focus, it’s more valuable for publisher X to turn your request down and spend that time with a larger site that reaches a wider audience,” says CNN/Money’s Chris Morris. In short: more readers equals more access, which in turn leads to more readers. “It’s a Catch-22 – and having experienced it myself, I know how frustrating it is – but I don’t think there’s really a lot that can be done.”

But this limited access can actually be a blessing in disguise for a small outlet, says *Computer Games Magazine* Editor-in-Chief Steve Bauman. Getting rejected by the big boys “gives smaller outlets an opportunity to find the stories other guys are missing or skipping because they’re fixated on whatever Sony, Microsoft, Nintendo and Electronic Arts are selling.” Bauman recommends that struggling journalists “go to Kentia Hall and discover something weird. Those people



Only the big dogs of the game journalism machine can guarantee VIP press access at the bigger booths.



For the sort of stuff I do, it's not a place where the actual work gets done - more of a place where ideas for things start.

are desperate for coverage, but everyone is trying to cover the ones who don't really need it."

If you do end up getting led around, though, note that all booth tours are not created equal. "Some publishers - notably Eidos, Vivendi, Microsoft, Midway - have the developers and play-testers on hand to demo the games and answer questions, which is ideal," says Erin Bell,

editorial assistant for Canada's *HUB* magazine. "Other publishers, such as Namco, seem to just hire some booth babes, give them a point-form info sheet about each game, and set them loose, which is a waste of my time."

For all its problems, E3 does still have value to the intrepid journalist. The sheer number of actual developers wandering around E3 and its environs makes it easy to just grab someone working on a game and make contact outside PR's stifling gaze. "For the sort of stuff I do, it's not a place where the actual work gets done - more of a place where ideas for things **start**," says British game journalist Kieron Gillen.

The key to a good E3, according to many journalists, is to stay away from the standard post-everything-and-sort-it-out-later coverage that has dominated E3 in the internet era. E3 is a chance to "meet developers you won't usually see [and] find obscure companies, products and hardware that hasn't been seen before," says *insert credit* Senior Editor Brandon Sheffield. "It can really be an eye opener, if your eyes are just a bit open to begin with."

The best way to cover E3, though, might be to simply not go at all. *Slashdot Games'* Michael Zenke doesn't have the time or budget to attend this year's show, but he will be covering it from home, where he can "watch the keynotes on Gamespot and gain a gestalt view of the E3 experience through the lens of everyone on the ground. I can then successfully reprocess that experience for the readers in the form of copious linkage. I hope to ... provide the users some understanding of what's going on out there."

And that's the real key to successfully consuming the rock concert/war zone/casino/arcade stew that is E3. At some point, you have to take a step back, put down your spoon, and excrete a couple hundred words about the sleep-deprived week you spent eating it all in.

Bon appetit! [COMMENTS](#)

*Kyle Orland is a video game freelancer. He writes about the world of video game journalism on his weblog, Video Game Media Watch.*



## 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 was the best, worst or ugliest thing you've seen at E3?"

#### **David Thomas, "I Hate You, E3"**

Like many people, I've seen Robin Williams at the show. Not sure whether that is best, worst or just ugly. A favorite memory: The year Nintendo shot free *Pokemon* stuffed animals every hour out of a cannon into a mob that got so crazy and violent they had to stop.

#### **Kyle Orland, "Recipe for Disaster"**

For all three, I'd have to say the mad dash for the Nintendo booth on day 1 and the resulting 4+ hour line to get a hold of the Wii.

#### **Jason Della Rocca, "Game Industry Katamari"**

Oh boy, where to start? E3 is so overwhelming to the senses that I normally flush my memory banks shortly after each show ... I suppose seeing Gary Coleman traipsing around with posse in tow a few years back was kinda scary.

#### **JR Sutich, Contributing Editor**

The worst thing I've seen at any E3 was *Shadowrun* for the Xbox 360.

#### **Russ Pitts, Associate Editor**

Ugliest thing I saw at E3: The carpet in Kentia. Seriously. I got dizzy and almost vomited walking down the main aisle to the restroom - and this was way after that Privilege party hangover had subsided. E3 2006 marked the first time I wore sunglasses indoors since that Corey Hart song went off the airwaves. Next time guys, try a color other than lemon yellow. My (now blind) eyes will thank you.

#### **Joe Blancato, Associate Editor**

The best, worst and ugliest: The throng of humanity milling through South Hall.

#### **Julianne Greer, Executive Editor**

The worst (and maybe ugliest): My feet after dancing till 2 am at Privilege in West Hollywood Thursday night. But it was very worth it.

