

the Escapist

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by Lara Crigger

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by Russ Pitts

The sun was shining - it was a beautiful day, but I didn't know it. I'd raced from school to bike to house in record time, barely feeling the physical weight of the books on my back or the mental weight of the homework assignments I'd no intention of completing. I dumped the dumped bike in the yard, my books on the bed and my troubles out the window and fired up my Nintendo Entertainment System and *Tetris*.

Day turned to night. Nine hours later, I sat up from my chair and could no longer feel my toes. I hadn't eaten, spoken or moved. My eyes felt glued in place, my head throbbed faintly and my fingers were cramped from holding the NES' fiendishly square controller. That night I would dream of falling blocks as my mind rotated and revolved the events of the past few days in order to fit them into place in my psyche. I would even once, for lack of sleep, begin imagining **people** as *Tetris* blocks, and wonder how to go about fitting them, too, into proper place. This has been called The Tetris Effect, but *Tetris* was not the only

game to have captured my attention in that way - merely the most efficient.

All of us who play games or have played games have experienced immersion. It's the stated goal of many developers, but is not unique to videogames. Movies, books, even conversations can be immersive. Where games differ is in the possible depth of immersion, the sheer scope of the engagement of one's brain in the activity. Whereas television, movies and books are passive in nature, often requiring little more on the part of the consumer than a willingness to sit still, videogames engage the mind actively, putting the player into the experience in a way many other forms of entertainment simply can't.

As videogames, and the technology driving them, have evolved, so, too has the nature of video game immersion. Fully-rendered 3-D worlds, authentically textured human faces and emotions, dynamic lighting and environmental effects, surround sound, and more have been employed to put the player further into the game than ever before. The inevitable conclusion of this mad drive for bigger and better immersive

technology, the Holy Grail of gaming is, of course, total immersion - creating a world so believably realistic as to perceptibly blur the line between the game and reality. Perhaps some day we'll get there. If so, I'll be waiting in line to grind all of your asses to paste (and, in turn, have my own ground to paste) in *Halo 237* (or whatever), but until then I console myself during the long wait with the knowledge that even a simple, 8-bit game starring colored blocks can be just as immersive, if not more so.

In this week's issue of *The Escapist*, "In Too Deep," we explore the subject of immersion, tackling both the good and bad aspects of digital escapism. Allen Varney shines the bright light of reason on the ongoing debate amongst academics over the very nature of immersion; Gearoid Ready talks Havok, the leading purveyor of physics technology; Tom Rhodes wanders back into Arcadia; Lara Crigger confronts the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, DS-in-hand; and yours truly shares a theory on the fate of adventure gaming and the creation of the world's most popular game.

Enjoy.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

In The Escapist Issue 54, "In Spaaace!", we published an account of the creation of Chris Roberts' popular space combat simulator, *Wing Commander*, written by long-time contributor Allen Varney. In addition to becoming one of our more popular articles, Allen's account of *Wing Commander*'s first showing at the 1990 Consumer Electronics Show has drawn sincere criticism from a number of developers involved with *Wing Commander*'s leading competitor in the space-sim arena, LucasArts' *X-Wing*.

The Escapist

To the Editor: I was surprised by some statements in the recent article by Allen Varney entitled "Wing Leader". I was the producer on *Battlehawks 1942* and worked



closely with its main creator, Larry Holland, who was responsible not only for the line of WW2 flight simulators but also the *X-Wing* line of games at LucasArts.

It's true that there was rivalry between Lucasfilm Games/LucasArts and Origin, but it was friendly and full of mutual admiration. We would go to the June and January Consumer Electronics Shows and happily show each other our latest advances - in fact, often discussing technical aspects that weren't even public, as there was a strong respect and healthy rivalry between developers at both companies at all levels. In fact there were several discussions about direct collaboration, including a *Star Wars* RPG from Richard Garriott, and the possibility of Chris Roberts doing an *X-Wing* game. So when Allen Varney describes the "fear in the eyes" of the Lucasfilm staff, it is specious speculation. I remember a lot of cross-fertilization of ideas and inspiration, but not fear.

- **Noah Falstein**

To the Editor: I wasn't at CES in 1990, but I have to question the veracity of some of the statements in Allen Varney's

article on *Wing Leader*. I entered the industry as a tester at Lucasfilm Games in 1991 and at that time Larry Holland was working non-stop on completing *Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe* (which shipped that year). Work on *X-Wing* did not begin until December 1991. I left LucasArts and joined Larry's team in August of 1992 when *X-Wing* was still pre-Alpha.

Now the story I've heard from a few different sources is that Chris Roberts pitched a *Star Wars* flight combat game to Lucasfilm and was turned down. It's not surprising - he had no experience with flight combat games, while Lucasfilm already had a partnership with Larry Holland that resulted in 3 very successful World War II flight combat games.

As for the technology in *Wing Commander*, Chris Roberts openly boasted to Larry that he had reverse-engineered the code from *Battlehawks 1942*. I've heard from former Origin coders that this was not actually true, that the engine code was original - just that Chris didn't write any of it. Either way, it's not a terribly flattering picture of Mr. Roberts.

X-Wing owes nothing to *Wing Commander*. We were building on a successful engine that predated Chris Roberts' efforts by 3 years. I think it is pretty clear who influenced who.

- **David Wessman**

Author's Reply: In my article "Wing Leader," I mistakenly described Lucasfilm Games as showing *X-Wing* at the 1990 Consumer Electronics Show, when the record shows it was *Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe*. I regret that error. With that correction, the CES anecdote happened as I related it in my article.

- **Allen Varney**

In Response to "You Got Your Race in My Video Game" from The Escapist Forum:

I don't claim to be a sociology expert or anything, but I do have a minor in the field. I don't think race is the most important divider among the real world or a videogame world. Class is way more important in today's society than race, although we hear about race-related incidents happening in the United States and around the world. It isn't that nothing is

racially charged, but that class stratification should be what people focus more on.

- **Yadam Siegfried**

In Response to "You Got Your Race in My Video Game" from The Escapist Forum: I'm glad the Escapist published this article, as racial issues in video games is an important topic to discuss and has for far too long been buried. I think we need more talk about how political messages are in our games.

My first take on the topic is that this is just how capitalism works. If people are racist, it is inevitable that consumer-driven media will be racist as well. And if a richer group of people are racist, then it's inevitable that more racist media will be produced for them than for poorer groups. There's simply more money to be made.

What most people want is to be constantly patted on the back. To be cheered on, and to not be criticised in any way. It's the nature of the entertainment industry. Games may be "interactive", but few are interactive in a way that, say, a political science

classroom might be at a university. But games aren't there to make people better citizens, more moral or ethical. They're there to entertain you. In a way, games are similar to prostitutes. You pay it money, it pleases you without question.

- **shihku7**

In Response to "You Got Your Race in My Video Game" from The Escapist Forum: Ignorance is bliss and we - as gamers - like to ignore issues of race in games so that we might blissfully enjoy the game itself, free of such concerns.

- **theCardinal**

In Response to "iMob" from The Escapist Forum: My big worry is that people will start forming iMobs for offenses not done. This kind of vigilantism is all very empowering, but it's problematic when innocents are being harassed because some 12 year old is good at feigning crying foul to the right people.

- **geldonyetich**

In Response to "Live Disruption" from The Escapist Forum: I have a

relevant, but totally anecdotal observation to add to this, Dean. I noticed it immediately upon picking up the Xbox 360 on launch day and logging on to Xbox live. Perhaps it was the pure joy of unleashing the power of a new system, or some kind of honeymoon period of Xbox Live Love, but whatever the cause, the effect was a kind of eerie calm. Players were actually nice to each other. Common practice in *Project Gotham Racing* was to warn your opponents if you were pulling out of a draft maneuver to pass them or (gasp) even apologize if you bumped their car into a spin on the way by. On two occasions I even got into real conversations with other players I'd never met before.

When did this strange calm period end? When did *Project Gotham* players start slamming you into a wall and cursing your mother on the way by? Why December 25th of course, when hundreds of thousands of pounds of teenagers ripped the wrappings off their shiny new 360's and joined the fray. Perhaps the solution is as simple as requiring a mandatory verified birthday entry somewhere in the signup process, and allowing players the option to filter

out their matchmaking by age. I know I yearn for those days of the 360 launch when, "hey, passing on your left, man" was much more common than, "bleep your bleeping mom on the wall bleep!"

- **Jacob.pederson**



Escaping Katrina

by Lara Crigger

November 24, 2005. 6:00 p.m. 10,000 feet over New Orleans and descending. Below the plane, most of the I-10 East bridge has vanished into Lake Pontchartrain, swallowed by the gray, invariable flatness. More than five miles of lonely, sun-baked highway now lie submerged, fighting tidal waters that still refuse to ebb.

Land curves into view, and through the smudged windowpane, I notice a black, creeping mass on the beachfront: power outages threatening a loose confederation of sodium streetlights. "That's Lakeview," says George, my boyfriend. Slouching in the window seat next to me, he casts swift, tightened glances at the ravaged earth below. Somewhere, down there, is his family. "Over there," he gestures vaguely. "That's where the levee broke."

Through the foggy glass, I can make out other patches farther inland and to the south, and the Lower Ninth Ward is like a thick, dark nebula nestled among orange terrestrial constellations. In the deepening twilight, the water glistens.

Three months after Katrina, the greater New Orleans area is still a war zone

without a war, a battleground of castaways, driftwood and foam. With hundreds of thousands homeless, residents here have become refugees in their own city. It is almost December, and the Red Cross supply trucks still patrol the streets twice daily, doling out MREs and clean drinking water to families camped in FEMA trailers. Immense, ancient oaks still lay in and on roofs, where bright blue tarps have bloomed around them. And on every street corner waits a mound of refuse and rotted wood, guarded by broken toilets, washing machines and refrigerators.

That people still live here, that some of the evacuees have returned to their homes, that must mean something. But what home can stand firm on a foundation of mold and tears?

For weeks I've grappled with guilt and fear, at a loss for how best to prepare myself for this trip. I knew, for instance, that I wanted - needed - to give George's family a gift; not just something to replace what was lost, but also something for peace of mind: a housewarming present for a home re-occupied. But gift giving in the South is a

tricky, subtle beast, especially in times of need; charity is the worst offense to Southern pride. How I should reconcile convention and my want to help, I did not know. Could I bring clean sheets? Dishtowels? Plungers? A toaster oven?

I couldn't decide. So I brought my DS.

The Nintendo DS had only been out for a few months, and not many games had been released for it yet. But I figured it might appeal to George's younger brothers: two sturdy, weedy teenagers who, when I last saw them, had prattled on in tandem about the handheld's impending release. They'd lost most of their gaming devices in the floods, and perhaps a round or two of *Mario Kart* might ease their minds, if only for awhile.

At least, that's what I told myself as I stuffed the DS into my carry-on. But who am I kidding? The DS is really for me as my last resort; it is a warm hat into which this rabbit may vanish should there be a need. It can be my reserve of sanity, just in case I close my eyes and am unable to erase afterimages of this broken city, this graveyard of mud and jazz.

But even when lying to myself, I am true to my word. Not long after we arrive in Louis Armstrong International, I reluctantly present my DS to the boys. But both appear politely yet fundamentally uninterested - bored, even - as if I'd offered them Prada handbags or hairdryers. They exchange glances, and I realize that my offer is so absurd, so tangential that it would be rude, if it weren't so clueless. As it is, I know they're thinking of me as yet another nice but ridiculous person who just doesn't get it.

They're right, of course. I don't get it; not at all.

We assume that in times of crisis, people will flock to diversion; that we'll deify our books, TVs, computers and other escapisms like modern messiahs. The truth is, only the safe, comfortable people can do that, the ones saddled with the luxury of survival. The rest become painfully conscious of the transience of frivolity, growing heartsick at the thought of having fun when there is a city to rebuild. This self-reproach is like some secret breed of survivor's

guilt: No matter how fleeting or momentary your escape would be, you feel you just can't leave everyone else behind.

So, despite how much he talked about it last spring, the DS is utterly irrelevant to a 14-year-old whose school opened two months late, whose girlfriend now lives in Alabama and whose house now bears a permanent line of demarcation 24 inches high. For a life uprooted, videogames lose their glammers, reverting back into plastic, silicon and dust.

When the 17th Street Canal levee broke less than a mile from George's family's house, most of the water flowed southward and to the east, infamously pooling in the concavity that is downtown New Orleans. As for the western side of the rift, events transpired differently. Luckily, the Metairie canal wall held, and the suburb managed to avoid most of Katrina's tragic aftermath. Although the town still experienced significant flooding, it is situated a few inches higher than the

neighboring parishes, and therefore, the waters stayed relatively low.

**We assume that
in times of crisis,
people will flock
to diversion.**



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the *Escapist*



the *Escapist* lounge

Kick back, share your thoughts and
experience even more of what you love
at the official blog for the magazine!

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George's family's house sustained moderate damage, mostly from the initial hurricane strike. At its highest, the water only rose two feet; not inconsequential, but minor enough that George's mother and brothers refused a FEMA trailer (opting instead to live in the second floor of their house until the first could be repaired). Aside from a ruined porch and a fugitive shed, the only structural damage was located in George's old room.

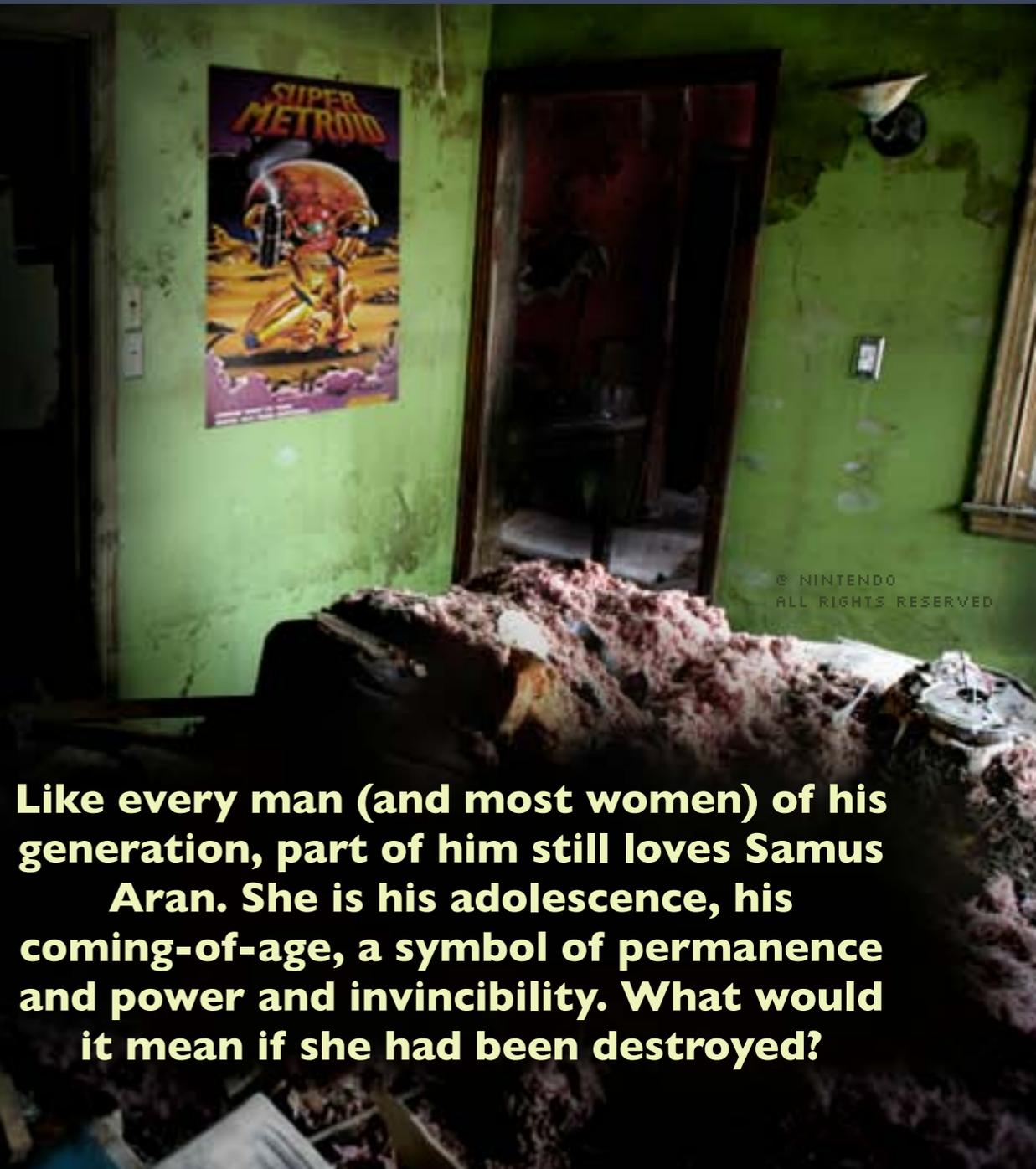
During the ride home from dinner and the airport, George is like a pillar of Grecian marble, pale and blank. That water has warped his old *Magic* cards and wrinkled his high school yearbook doesn't bother him, not really. If anything, it's the possibility, the unknowing, that does. But there is one object about which I know he's concerned: A childhood treasure, one he's had for more than a decade.

Hanging close to a window now smashed in by Katrina is a limited edition poster of Samus Aran, circa *Super Metroid* era. Gleaming in her Varia Suit, she kneels among sand and rocks, with her smoking arm cannon raised upward and the

lonely Zebian desert reflected in her visor. Only 2,000 were ever made, and he has #1,968. But it is more than some collector's item; this poster is a tintype of the first girl to ever steal his heart. Like every man (and most women) of his generation, part of him still loves Samus Aran. She is his adolescence, his coming-of-age, a symbol of permanence and power and invincibility. What would it mean if she had been destroyed?

The drive to his house seems to last longer than usual. When we finally arrive, George immediately shuffles upstairs, walking with awkward and forced slowness. Our luggage leans against the stairs, completely forgotten.

I follow him into his old room where a musky, sweet pungency hangs in the air; it is the smell of water stagnated, evaporated and re-condensed over many months. Perfectly nonchalant, George glances at the wall by the window. He pauses. Clearly, it takes him a few seconds to process the swirl of red and yellow, to register that, indeed, Samus Aran still crouches on his bedroom wall. His eyes linger on her for many moments, until quietly, privately, he

A photograph of a room with green walls, a doorway, and a poster of Samus Aran from Super Metroid. The room appears to be a bedroom or a study, with a doorway leading to another room. The walls are a light green color, and there is a poster of Samus Aran from the Super Metroid era. The poster shows Samus Aran in her Varia Suit, kneeling among sand and rocks, with her smoking arm cannon raised upward. The room is dimly lit, and there is a small table or desk in the doorway. The overall atmosphere is one of a lived-in, somewhat cluttered space.

Like every man (and most women) of his generation, part of him still loves Samus Aran. She is his adolescence, his coming-of-age, a symbol of permanence and power and invincibility. What would it mean if she had been destroyed?



sighs and looks away. With furrowed brows and a frown, he turns to survey the damage to the rest of the room.

Maybe some talismans really are magic.

But as we clean, I can't help but feel something indistinct and odd has transpired. I notice he avoids looking Samus' direction. Even as he carefully packs away the poster to be sent by mail to our apartment up north, he does not look too closely at her, and he does not idle in his task. Briefly, I wonder if he might blame her somehow for surviving the hurricane. Or, in light of his subtle detachment, if she had really survived at all.

Late one evening, the five of us have gathered in the dusty, empty kitchen for dessert. George sits with his brothers at a shabby card table, dining on pre-wrapped cookies and warm Coke. Valiantly, he tries to make conversation, but his formerly gregarious brothers are now sullen and quiet. I can hear the frustration creep into his voice. Maybe there's no use in even trying anymore.

Abruptly but hesitantly, the youngest brother asks George if he's played *Half-Life 2* yet. George looks confused but relieved. No, he answers, he hasn't; it just came out and he's still a little leery of Steam - and then the older brother chimes in, saying that now that they'd gotten their internet connection back, maybe they could get it soon. Which prompts the younger brother to make some comment about how much he loved the first game, and George adds, "Except for the headcrabs," and then like a crashing tide, they all begin to talk at once.

I watch them parley in the language of brothers, laughing and one-upping and pontificating over videogames, as if there weren't water stains on the ceiling or a faint brown line on the wall. Through the thickening dialogue, I can see the burden gradually lift, ever so slightly, for the three of them. It is still there, of course, hovering in the hollows once occupied by furniture. But it is less dense now, separating from their bodies like oil from water, skimming the surface of the conversation but never truly penetrating it.

I turn to George's mother, who stands beside me. She has tears in her eyes that her sons do not see. She places her Styrofoam cup of black instant coffee on an empty box, and suddenly, I've never felt more like an intruder in all my life.

But as I watch these three brothers chatter so happily, I think I now understand the rejection of my DS offer and George's strange reaction to finding his poster unharmed.

Hurricanes destroy more than just property; they destroy the **sense** of property, as well. They smash that universal belief that objects intrinsically carry some emotional gravity or weight. Acts of destruction remind us that physical substances are only equal to the exact sum of their parts: Plastic and cotton, metal or wood. What's left over is a painful buoyancy, an unbearable absence of feeling; you mourn not just your lost PS2 games or your Xbox controllers but also the fact that these once precious things have been proven completely meaningless. Even if they do remain intact after the storm (like the Samus poster), the only entity that really survives is you.

Thus, life is distilled into your relationships with ideas, not objects; family, friendship, emotions and memories. These abstracts are what remain significant. Everything else is washed away.

Videogames retain importance only in the impressions that they've made on us: Memories of playing them, opinions of their value, hopes for the future, how we relate to other players. Therefore, the pursuit of electronic escapism is, at its core, an internal one. What matters more than videogames is the **idea** of videogames.

From this logic, there is only one conclusion, and I can see it now as I watch George's family growing, if not happier, more peaceful: Once done, the act of escapism lasts forever. Your mind files it away in some remote corner, only to retrieve the moment later and replay it, cherish it, when the time is right. Even at your lowest point, you will never be abandoned by your memories of happiness.

You will never forget a videogame you've played. You may forget the plot and the characters and even the title, but once

you have played a videogame and loved it, that happy fact remains with you when you need it most. It is a promise that no hurricane can destroy: You once were happy; you will be again.

[COMMENTS](#)

Lara Crigger is a freelance writer whose work about videogames has appeared in Computer Games Magazine, Gamers With Jobs and The Escapist.

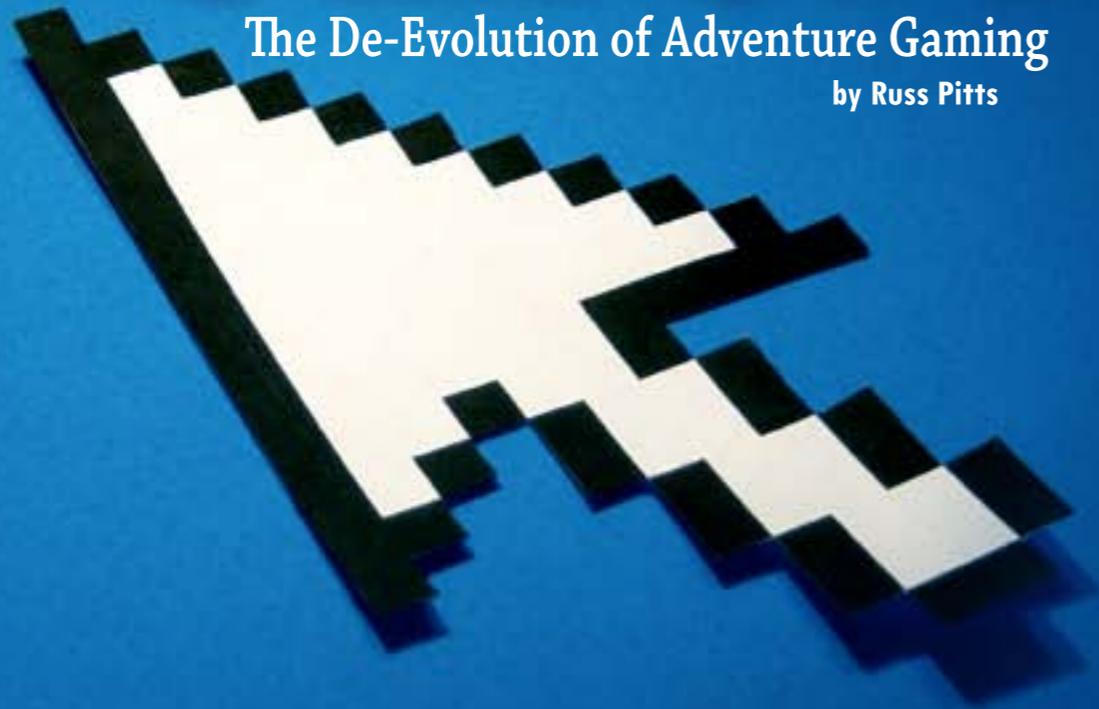
Hurricanes destroy more than just property; they destroy the sense of property, as well.



NOT BANG, WITH A BANG, BUT A CLICK

The De-Evolution of Adventure Gaming

by Russ Pitts



It's a situation we're all likely to face eventually: There's a hooker upstairs, behind a locked door, and she's waiting, willing and ... waiting. Problem? A burly bouncer bars the way. He wants a password before he'll open the door and let you find your own personal nirvana in the arms of the woman-for-hire. But even if you were to somehow find the magic word, he's not likely to step aside and let you ride for free. You're broke, see, and you seem to have left your marketable skills in your - erm - other pants.

What to do?

Well, if you're playing *Leisure Suit Larry in the Land of the Lounge Lizards*, the solution is simple: **examine everything**. Upon doing so, you will find that a number of everyday household objects may be used to solve seemingly insurmountable puzzles. This, after all, is the magic formula for adventure gaming. Long before MacGyver macgyvered his way out of every tough spot imaginable (using only a thumbtack, a piece of chewing gum and a leaf), adventure gamers had been using a similar assortment of "found items" to construct insanely complicated Rube Goldberg-ish

solutions to outlandish puzzles in the world of the adventure game.

In *Leisure Suit Larry*, the drunk at the bar, for example, will give you a television remote control if you lubricate him with enough whiskey, and a graffiti-encrusted bathroom stall will reveal the password if you look at it long and hard enough. Whisper the password through the door, then, once you've penetrated the inner sanctum, use the remote control to turn on the TV and **BAM!** Bye-bye bouncer. He'll be too busy leering at the boob tube to pay you any mind. Now, mount the stairs (but don't forget your condom) and you've got it made. Literally.

Released in 1987, Al Lowe's *Leisure Suit Larry* was not the first of the great adventure games, but it was the most salacious. It was also graphical, which the earliest of the genre were not. Games like *In Search of Dr. Livingston*, released in 1980, were text-based and, in lieu of a high-end graphics card, required instead that the player have a high-end imagination. Players had to mentally visualize the scene being described in on-screen text in order to arrive at (often through trial and error)

the best course of action. To make your character look to the left, for example, the player would type "LOOK LEFT" into the game's text entry box, which would then (if you were lucky) trigger a response from the game. Some of these games added a bit of extra frustration through persnickety parsing of commands. In *Dr. Livingston*, for example, the player (on a quest through the African jungles to find the elusive Dr. Livingston) was required in most cases to input text in all caps, but occasionally (and inexplicably) the game would require lower-case text input. It didn't tell you when to use which - you just had to guess.

Still, like a book, these games had the redeeming virtue of offering experiences limited only by the player's imagination and are fondly remembered to this day as creative masterpieces, often before their more graphically advanced descendants; frustrations and all.

Show Me, Don't Tell Me

As computers became more powerful, game makers began throwing their efforts behind graphical adventures, like *Leisure Suit Larry*. Some of these were

merely updated versions of old text adventures, but some quite literally created new worlds.

The first of the graphical adventures was Ken and Roberta Williams' *Mystery House*. Based on an Agatha Christie mystery novel, *Mystery House* was little more than a text adventure game with overlaid static images, but the resulting immersive effect was startling. Gamers ate it up and demanded more; which the Williamses and their company, Sierra On-Line (originally On-Line Systems), were happy to deliver. Sierra would go on to make hundreds of adventure titles, including the innovative and award-winning *King's Quest* and *Space Quest* series, and naturally, imitators followed suit.

Some, like MECC's *Oregon Trail*, and Broderbund's *Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?* attempted to capture the rapidly-growing educational software market, blending newly-immersive game experiences with adventure gaming's storybook roots to create a whole new genre of "edutainment." But the most successful and innovative game manufacturer to follow in Sierra On-Line's footsteps was LucasArts.

LucasArts focused on the possibilities of more cinematic entertainment. Not surprising from a company built on the back of the most successful film franchise ever made. In 1987, LucasArts (then known as Lucasfilm Games) released *Maniac Mansion*, offering gamers a number of radical departures from the standard adventure game formula. Among them: multiple playable characters **and** multiple endings. Both introduced the concept of replay-ability, allowing players to experience the game from the multiple perspectives of the

various characters. But the innovations didn't stop there. Sensing that gamers had become frustrated with the tired mechanic of guessing and typing, LucasArts simplified the text entry command structure by reducing the number of valid commands to just a few verbs and identifying objects with which the character could interact. It was, in effect, a prototype of a point-and-click interface. And in simplifying the act of playing the game itself, LucasArts opened the door to a whole new market for the adventure game genre while simultaneously pounding nails into its coffin.



Like a book, these games had the redeeming virtue of offering experience limited only by the players imagination.

id Software and the Decline of the Attention Span

As is the case with so many stories about the game industry, the next chapter in this tale begins thusly: In 1991, four guys started a company to make games.

The company was id Software, and the games they created - on the back of technology chief John Carmack's innovative game engines - were dreamed up primarily to relieve the four gamers' boredom with the current state of PC games, which by-and-large moved slowly and weren't all that colorful. Like adventure games.

Their first official product was a so-called "action-platformer" liberally copied from the successful *Super Mario Bros.* series for Nintendo's NES home console. It was, in spite of its relatively simple appearance, a programming coup. No one, anywhere - ever - had been able to make images appear and move as fluidly on the PC as *Mario* moved on the NES. No one, that is, until John Carmack. Over the course of six installments, id's *Commander Keen* made PC gaming history and helped launch id Software

from its humble beginnings as a moonlighting gig conducted on the sly into the realm of successful entertainment software enterprises.

Having thus made their mark on the world of PC platform games, id then turned their attention to the next frontier: 3-D games. Their first, *Wolfenstein 3D*, was so successful it attracted the attention of none other than the king of adventure games himself, Ken Williams, who in 1992 offered to purchase id for \$2.5 million and add the four young men to Sierra's prestigious stable of high-profile game designers. id declined, opting instead to carry on as independents. The next year, they released *Doom*.

For PC gamers bored and frustrated with the clunky, imprecise and bland games of the early '80s, id's offerings hit just the right spot. Few could deny the thrill of "running" through Castle Wolfenstein, sending a hailstorm of bullets into zombified Nazis, who would then die horribly detailed deaths, clutching their hearts and saying "Mein leben!" There was no story to speak of, no mysteries to solve and no puzzles requiring quantum

leaps of ingenious item combination in order to solve. Just running, gunning and dying. id's games were blockbusters and at retailers across the country they literally pushed adventure games off of the shelves. The four brains behind id would go on to gaming stardom, and their games would change the world.

The reign of the adventure game was over, but adventure gamers were having the time of their lives. Instead of going quietly into the dark night, they'd found

id's *Commander Keen* made PC gaming history and helped launch id Software from its humble beginnings as a moonlighting gig conducted on the sly into the realm of successful entertainment software enterprises.

a new sensation; a meta-game, an extension of quest-driven exploration into the very fabric of their lives; a new form of entertainment unlike anything the world had ever seen.

Spinning the Web

Concurrent with id Software's gaming revolution - changing the world, one gruesome animated death at a time - personal computers were rapidly becoming more powerful and less





expensive. Consumers were practically lining up in droves to take the odd, beige boxes home with them. The invention of the CD-ROM had as much to do with this as anything else, offering consumers

entire volumes of books worth of data on a single, shiny disc. But the most exciting development driving the popularity of computers in the '90s was the World Wide Web.

Tim Berners-Lee, working at the CERN laboratory in Switzerland was building upon the theory of "hypertext," a method of linking multiple documents together by keywords or "links," to create a whole new method of organizing information

across multiple sources. Imagine reading a book, then clicking on a single word to produce a definition of that word, without ever once taking your eyes off of the page. Today, this method of "browsing" information via the world wide web is as natural to most westerners as breathing air, but in the '80s, few had even conceived of the idea, much less thought of how to make it happen. Tim Berners-Lee was different.

In 1991 Berners-Lee produced the world's first "web site": essentially an explanation of the work Berners-Lee had done at CERN, instructions for how to use his new invention, and a growing list of web sites, all of which (including the technology responsible for making it happen) he offered for free to anyone who wanted to use them. Berners-Lee's Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) provided a framework for creating, managing and interconnecting vast stores of data, and it was so simple that almost anyone could use it. Almost.

At the University of Illinois' National Center for Supercomputing Applications, an undergraduate named Marc Andreessen was taking the next logical

step. Working from Berners-Lee's foundation, Andreessen developed a more user-friendly method for viewing pages constructed using HTML. He created Mosaic, one of the earliest web browsers, and the first to run with Microsoft Windows. Andreessen then used his Mosaic technology to found a company (Netscape) and re-launched his pioneering web browser as The Netscape Navigator. Initially distributed for free, Navigator had finally made the internet's store of knowledge readily available to anyone who could click a mouse. Images, text and soon even video and audio files were accessible via the internet by anyone anywhere. Navigator forced software behemoth Microsoft to develop its own browser, based on earlier versions of the Mosaic technology, which, when combined with Microsoft's best-selling Windows 95 operating system, propelled the web into the mainstream consciousness practically overnight.

By the mid '90s, Berners-Lee, Andreessen and Microsoft had made good on the promise of the information superhighway, developing a system by which an ordinary person, with little or no computer expertise, could browse the

the Escapist

web, finding answers to questions they never knew they had and filling their days with the pursuit of nearly limitless knowledge. It was all, literally, just a click away, and the clicking hasn't stopped since.

Those who owned computers and paid for accounts with internet service providers after the arrival of Navigator most likely spent the better part of their time sitting at a desk in front of a computer either A) designing and publishing web sites, B) browsing web sites created by others or C) both. What these innovators soon discovered was the joy to be found in sifting through nearly limitless information, and - by clicking a mouse - examining everything. A web site created by a man in Wisconsin to display pictures of his cats, for example, could contain a link to a site devoted to the making of bombs from household chemicals, which could (and usually did) lead to a site containing another person's half-baked theories on every possible conspiracy since the dawn of time, which would eventually lead the user back to a bona

fide (if misquoted) university source on the nature of all of the above.

The usefulness of the majority of this information aside, collecting and examining it became an activity of its own. Very few people would ever make their own bomb, but knowing how to do so was exciting. So was the idea that every bit of information contained in every library in every city of the world could one day be accessed with a web browser, then clicked and examined endlessly.

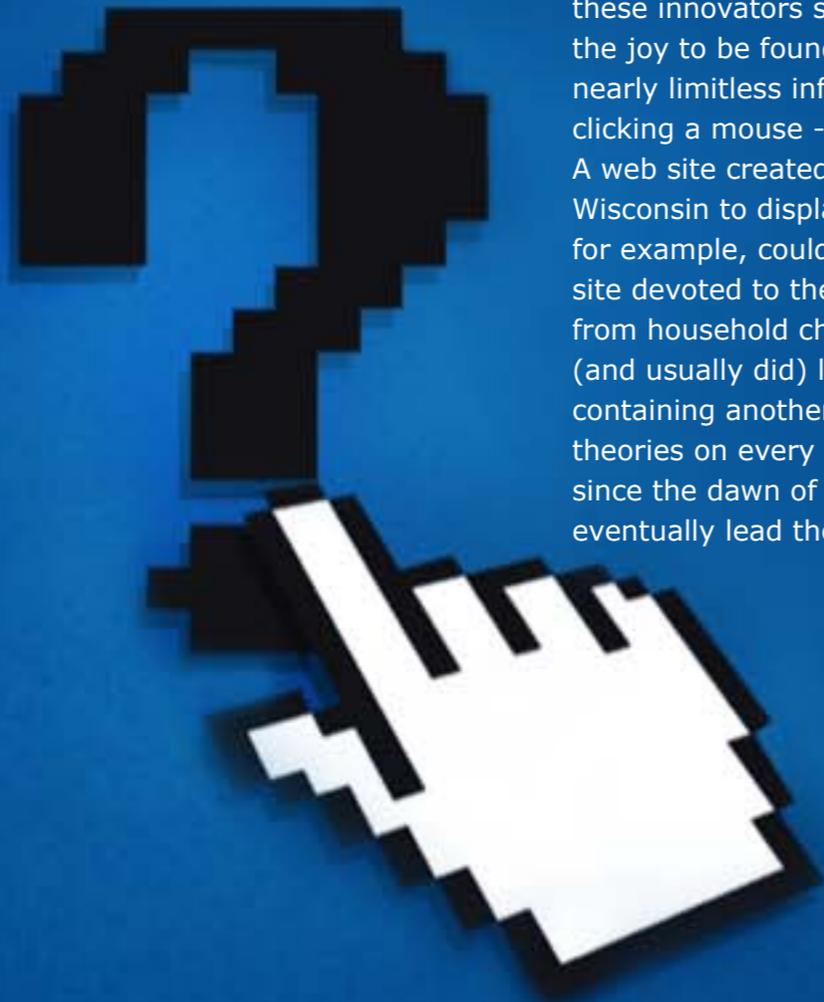
What is Your Quest?

By the mid 90's, the web had become so thickly populated with data that an entirely new technology, the search engine, had become an indispensable tool to help ease the strain of this embarrassment of informational riches. The earliest search engines were merely web-based extensions of pre-web search technologies (programs like Archie and Gopher), but it wasn't until the 1994 release of the aptly-named WebCrawler that the search engine as we know it today came into being. WebCrawler was one of the first engines able to search the entire text of an HTML document. To find a document anywhere on the web

and literally "go" to that site, a user need only type a single word into Web Crawler's text entry box. The answers to most questions and the solutions to most quests could be found, just like in the text adventure games of old.

With a foundation for creating, delivering and sifting through web content thus established, internet entrepreneurs then set about trying make money from this new invention. With so many eyeballs looking at so many screens, advertising soon swarmed the net like a plague of popup locusts, but the established commercial concerns immediately discovered that the denizens of this new virtual market were far more interested in conducting business with **each other** than with any large corporation.

Launched in 1995, eBay, the world's first online auction house, provided a means by which two people on opposite ends of planet could buy and sell from each other without ever meeting in person or even seeing the item to be sold, or the money used to purchase it. It was the most radically innovative new use for web technology ever devised, and after only five years the site hosted more than 4 million auctions, generating over \$300



million in revenue; all brought home by a company that doesn't manufacture a single thing.

eBay makes its billions by charging a small fee for every item bought or sold, and its clientele consists of web travelers searching for a long-lost items, hard-to-find trinkets or powerful icons of cultural significance. Buyers need only enter a description of the item they seek, and eBay's search engine helps them complete their quest, connecting them to a seller and providing the means by which the two can complete the transaction. It is simple, efficient and fun; possibly even addictive, fueling a secondary market for therapists specializing in online auction addiction recovery. Some of whom accept eBay's PayPal as payment for their services.

Today, many people who've never even heard of adventure games nevertheless spend their every waking hour playing one. They seek lost treasures on eBay, play Flash-based mini-games when the boss isn't looking, interact with characters from all over the world via instant messaging services, type search terms into Google to retrieve arcane lore

and use email to collect and keep track of assignments.

The history of gaming is one of a continual lessening of demands upon the player; an ever-widening accessibility which has brought more and more players into the market, widened the scope of the media and moved the industry into a position rivaling that of Hollywood for "dollars spent" and "eyeballs served," the watermarks of the language of advertising. While traces of the adventure games of the past can be found across the entire spectrum of gaming genres, the true inheritor of the crown is not really a game at all, but the web itself. Containing information, stories, puzzles and games and propelled by the simple mechanism of clicking and exploring, the web has become the single most successful form of entertainment in the world, played by gamers and non-gamers alike, most of whom use it every day. There are even old-fashioned stories there, too, if one should care to look for them.

Al Lowe's hooker has, in other words, been supplanted by literally thousands more, each accessible with less frustration, interface-wise, and

(graphically speaking), far more titillating. But after more than two decades of evolution, the magic formula remains the same. [COMMENTS](#)

Russ Pitts is an associate editor of and frequent contributor to The Escapist and is the host and producer of The Escapist's podcast, Escape Radio. Pitts is the former producer and head writer of TechTV's The Screen Savers, and has played every game console ever made.



Many people who've never even heard of adventure games nevertheless spend their every waking hour playing one.

Look around your computer. Pick up something – your mouse, the coffee mug, that box-set of *Desperate Housewives* DVDs that you, er, are keeping for a friend. Look at it. Turn it around. Throw it up in one hand and catch it in the other. Now, put it down.

Congratulations. You've just accomplished something that Mario, Lara Croft or the Master Chief never could.

You'll have noticed that your fingers did not partially pass through the object when you picked it up, that when you caught it, it did not automatically glue to your hand – in other words, it behaved like you expected it to.

Wouldn't it be nice if gaming worked the same way?

We are instinctively aware of the physics of the world we inhabit. If something doesn't interact properly – from something as ridiculous as an enemy's gun poking through a wall to clothes that are static when they should flutter – it jars, shattering the illusion of immersion. That's where Havok comes in.

"Suspension of disbelief is the key thing," says David O'Meara, the CEO of physics engine creator Havok. "That's what immersion is about, isn't it?"

Dublin, Ireland-based Havok is a world leader in physics middleware – the tools that let developers create worlds where their imaginations can run wild. You can see their work in *Half-Life 2's* gravity gun, or in a battle in *Oblivion*. In a world based on rules, Havok is the rule maker – and having just launched the latest version of their software development kit, Havok 4.0, they are becoming an integral part of the immersion process.

Instead of having to code real-world physics from scratch for every game, Havok gives developers a much-needed shortcut, allowing them to concentrate on making fun games.

"Havok physics is a foundation," says O'Meara. "Developers see us as a core component of the game now. No matter how beautiful your animation or whatever is, if the objects are all stuck to the ground, you won't get immersion."

eru
havok
by Gearoid Reidy

Havok is an unlikely world leader. Although modern Ireland is a hi-tech hub, with companies like Microsoft, Dell and Intel basing their European operations out of the increasingly wealthy and metropolitan country, Ireland's image is still one of rolling green fields and quiet country pubs.

So, in an industry dominated by multi-million dollar giants, how did a small university project turn into the engine that powers worlds? "I think it really comes down to a question of vision and then not letting the vision blind you," says O'Meara.

Havok was founded in 1998 as a result of computer science research undertaken in Trinity College Dublin by Hugh Reynolds and Stephen Collins. What would become Havok was "a really exceptional bunch of guys working together, who had the vision to see that videogames would eventually develop a need for real-time physics - that more interactive and realistic experiences would be the next thing that the industry was looking for."

Developers have flocked to Havok since its 1.0 release in 2000, with *Halo 2*, *Perfect Dark Zero* and *Age of Empires III* among the titles making use of Havok physics - as well as movies like *The Matrix Reloaded*. From their office in Dublin's Digital Hub, Havok has expanded to such locations as San Francisco, Calcutta and, most recently, Tokyo.

Havok is a step closer to truly immersing the player in a created world. Game developers don't have to waste time thinking how, say, an empty bullet clip might fall down a staircase, because Havok does the hard work for them. Recently, Havok has also branched out into development kits for character behavior, animation and special effects.

Still, sometimes it seems that the more games engines do, the less convincing things become. With modern games getting closer and closer to representing reality, the gamer can get frustrated when you can't do what you logically should be able to do. If my rocket launcher lets me blow around all the tables and chairs in a room, why won't it let me blow a hole in a thin wall?

Sometimes it seems that the more games engines do, the less convincing things become.



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Better emotion through physics? Its enough to make your head spin.

"It's a problem for the industry, but not specifically for us," says O'Meara. "The game developers create the rules and they're always having to balance the storyline with the representation of reality. It's about getting the balance right.

"We've seen some fantastic scenes with the new PS3, Xbox 360 and Nintendo Wii, scenes that would have been impossible until really recently. We're talking about massively destructible worlds, amazing scale and realism of effects. You see the physics, the

animation and the behavior stuff all coming together for a really realistic, compelling experience for the gamer."

It's still the early days: As *The Escapist's* own Shannon Drake has noted, when it comes to physics, developers are still "using Swiss Army knives as simple hammers."

O'Meara agrees. "We're only seeing the start of what physics can do in games. [There is] a lot more that can be done. For example, at the moment, in a crowd scene, you're limited to your key characters having full physical and behavioral effects. But we see a stage where a whole street of people will all have the full panoply of behaviors available to them and will be able to interact with you the player and with each other."

It might sound like the stuff of virtual reality dreams, but O'Meara says we'll be seeing this kind of immersion toward the end of next year.

It's a brave new world for the industry. In addition to superior graphics and physics, new ways of interaction –

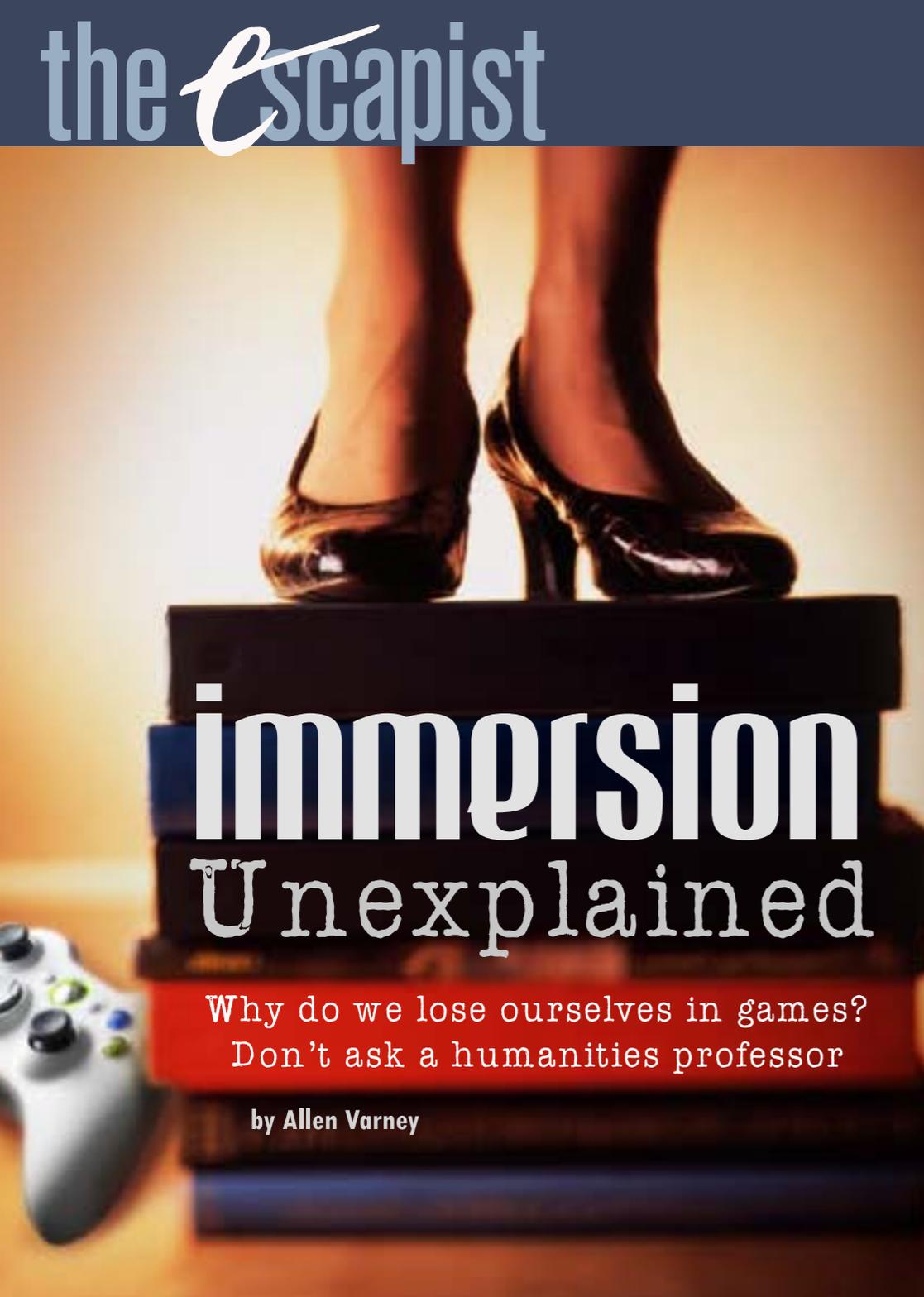
typified by Nintendo's Wii controller – will open radical new ways of playing. "All the next gen stuff is really going to have some form of 3-D controller - whether camera or game pad," says O'Meara. "We've always wanted players to be able to interact with our physics as much as possible. This new 3-D world will really be the next leap in game interaction as far as physics is concerned."

Where do we go from there? O'Meara says "the next step is to make characters more believable. What I'm talking about is performance - reactions that can elicit empathy from the player. When you mesh physics properly with an animated character, you'll get proper 'performances,' human-like reactions."

Better emotion through physics? It's enough to make your head spin – if they can figure out how to model that.

[COMMENTS](#)

Gearoid Reidy is an Irish journalist working in Japan whose game-playing time is sadly limited by the laws of real-world physics. You can find him at www.gearoidreidy.com.



immersion Unexplained

Why do we lose ourselves in games?
Don't ask a humanities professor

by Allen Varney

"My freshman college roommate bought *Civilization* when it came out in '91," my friend Rob recalls. "We brought it back to his dad's place. His dad had just moved some stuff, so there was only one chair in front of a desk with the computer. Mike installed *Civ* and started playing. Another friend and I stood behind him, watching and kibitzing. I asked what time it was; my friend said 8:30 p.m. Next thing we knew, Mike's dad woke up and asked us what the hell we were doing, standing around a desk at 5:30 in the morning."

Immersion: *intense focus, loss of self, distorted time sense, effortless action.*

Game designers and reviewers universally recognize immersion as a signal virtue of games, perhaps the central virtue. Nonetheless, they seldom analyze the idea. Possibly, recognizing the elusiveness of immersion, they fear (in Alexander Pope's phrase) breaking a butterfly upon a wheel.

The ones who write a lot about immersion are tenure-track academics in the humanities, the new breed of "videogame theorists." They break

butterflies for a living. Yet, you'd look hard to find anyone less likely to explain immersion. Why? Let the analysis draw you in ... come, drift free of your body ...

This is Your Brain on Immersion
For starters, academic game theorists argue endlessly the importance of "narrative."

Many gamers can name a favorite story presented in a computer or videogame, whether the *Zelda* or *Fighting Fantasy* series, roleplaying games from BioWare or Origin, a classic adventure like *Grim Fandango* or *The Longest Journey*, or even the old *Sierra Quest* series or Infocom text adventures. These games use a storyline to assign meaning to your actions. Playing your own favorite game, did you feel caught up in a compelling narrative, the way you'd be mesmerized by a terrific book or movie? It felt like that, didn't it?

Except it didn't, really. When the game ended and you returned to reality, you felt spent, maybe exhausted, as if after a workout. In contrast, when the novel or movie ended, you probably felt like you'd awakened from a powerful dream. (The

exceptions are horror and action stories, which can wring you just as dry as a game.) In both cases, you felt stiff, but the game immersion left you shaky for hours. Some kinds of games might have influenced your behavior long afterward. How many *Quake* or *Unreal* players, immediately after they finish a marathon deathmatch, head to the kitchen for a snack – and peer carefully around the door jamb, scouting for enemies? Are you nodding? Uh-huh. Bet that didn't happen after you watched *Return of the King*.

Think how you feel when, after a long struggle through a shooter level, you reach some non-player character and suddenly the game shifts to a cut scene that advances the narrative. Maybe you're interested, maybe relieved or annoyed; regardless, you sit back, draw breath and feel different. Your mode of thinking has abruptly changed. You're no longer immersed.

This happens even in non-shooters, and even when the game's story is good. The narrative may inform your actions – for instance, it may present you with a choice of allies or victims – but obviously you aren't sitting back and giving

yourself over to the storyteller, as you do when reading a good novel.

Narratives and games inspire contrasting kinds of immersion; different brain-states. Caught up in a story, you are cooperative, yielding, in a state akin to hypnosis. In a game you are ceaselessly active, in a state of **flow**. Proposed in the 1990 book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* by Hungarian-born psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (pronounced, he says, "chicks send me high"), flow is the zone, the groove – an enjoyable feeling of oneness with the activity.

Designers would love to comprehend the exact causes of immersion. In a more practical world, this task would fall to those who theorize about games for a living. Oh well.

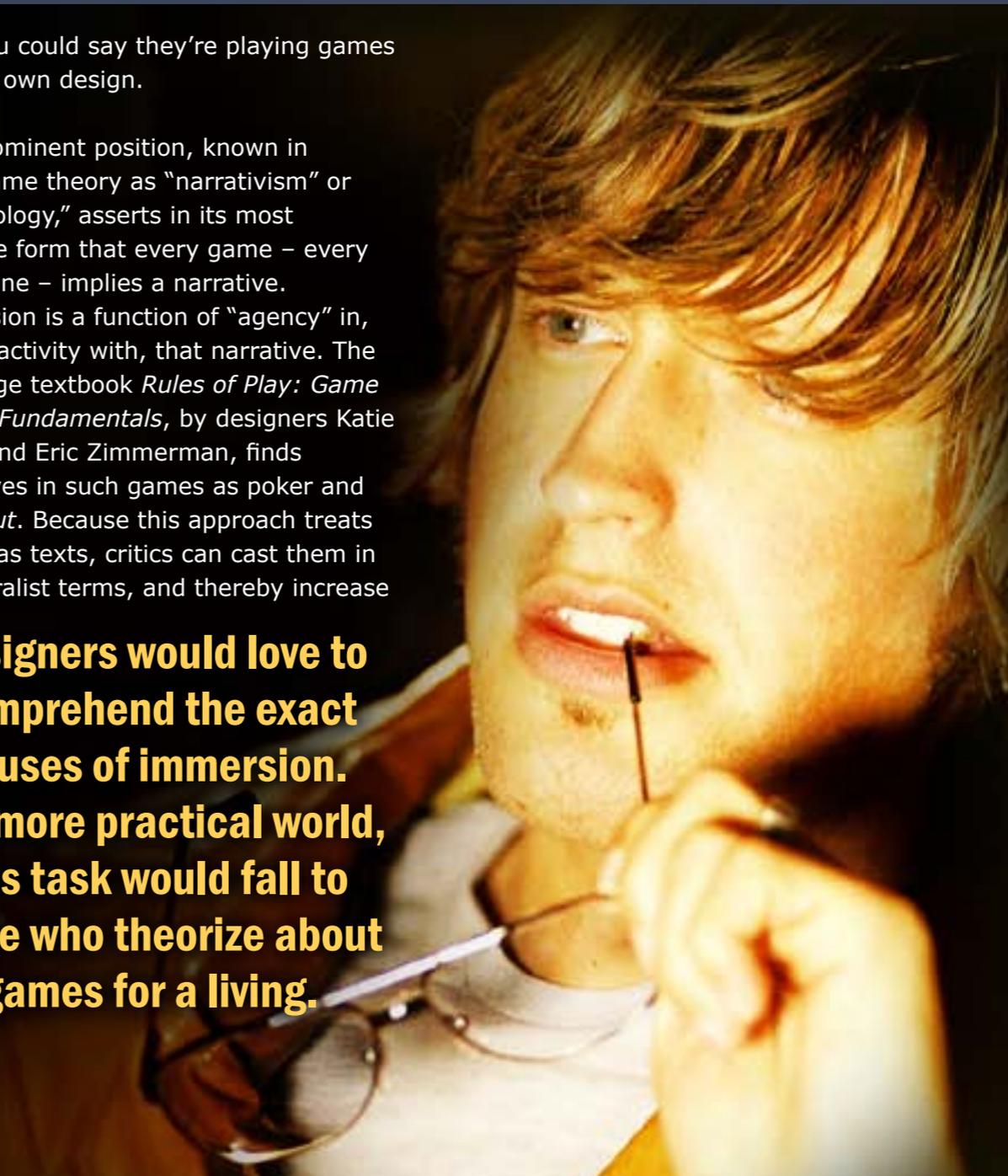
Theorists vs. Theorists

For most of the young history of videogame theory, humanities scholars have taken game immersion to be the same as the story-based variety. Publish-or-perish lecturers have written lots of journal papers that turn everything imaginable into "narrative," and so have stretched the idea beyond any possible

use. You could say they're playing games of their own design.

One prominent position, known in videogame theory as "narrativism" or "narratology," asserts in its most extreme form that every game – every single one – implies a narrative. Immersion is a function of "agency" in, or interactivity with, that narrative. The 688-page textbook *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*, by designers Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, finds narratives in such games as poker and *Breakout*. Because this approach treats games as texts, critics can cast them in structuralist terms, and thereby increase

Designers would love to comprehend the exact causes of immersion. In a more practical world, this task would fall to those who theorize about games for a living.



their credibility rating with peer reviewers and conference organizers.

The main alternative approach is “ludology,” which discusses immersion in terms of gameplay: Rules, interface and actions. Ludological theorists say, though games have elements in common with narratives, they are fundamentally different. Using this strategy, ludologists get cited by narrativists who try to repudiate them, and citations earn credibility points with journal referees and tenure committees.

Believe it or not, the ludological approach is relatively recent in videogame theory. Uruguayan game researcher Gonzalo Frasca popularized the term “ludology” in 1999, though it originated in board gaming in the early 1980s. Derived from *ludus* (Latin, “game”), “ludology” may be a back-formation from “ludography,” designer Sid Sackson’s term for a bibliography of game designs.

Ludologists differ from narrativists because they admit they actually play games. Nordic theorist Espen Aarseth wrote in his 2004 article, “Genre

Trouble,” “Among the many differences between games and stories, one of the most obvious is that of ambiguity. In *Tetris*, I do not stop to ponder what those bricks are really supposed to be made of. In *DOOM*, there is no moral dilemma resulting from the killing of probably innocent monsters. ... Adventure games seldom, if at all, contain good stories. Even the most entertaining of these games, like Warren Spector’s *Deus Ex* (1999), contains a clichéd storyline that would make a B-movie writer blush, and characters so wooden that they make *The Flintstones* look like Strindberg.”

To ludologists like Aarseth, immersion is a function of non-narrative gameplay: “What makes such games playable at all, and indeed attractive,” he wrote, “is the sequence of shifting, exotic, often

These being humanities professors, no one has yet offered a testable, falsifiable hypothesis.

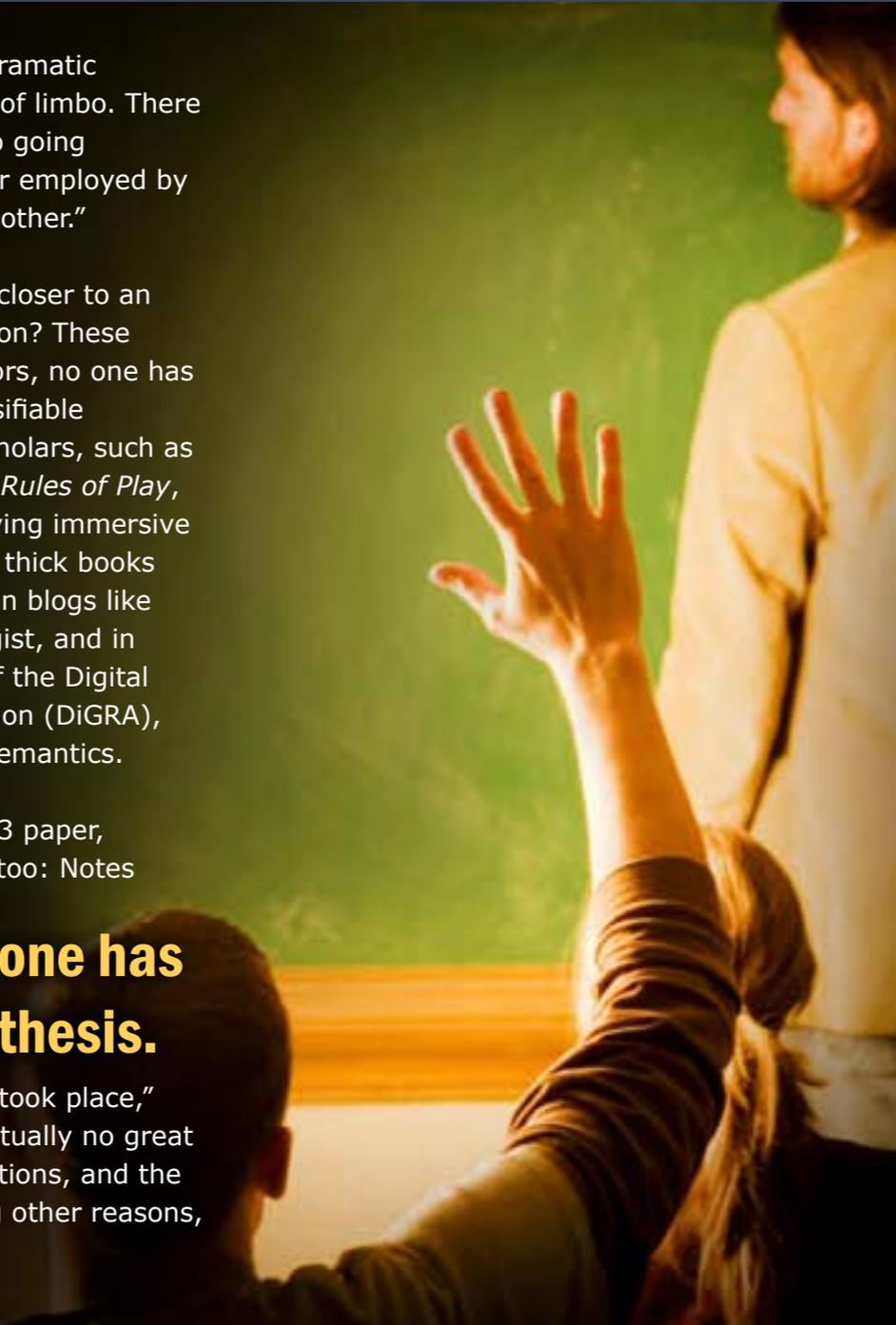
fascinating settings (levels), where you explore the topography and master the virtual environment. The gameworld is its own reward, and the end, if and when

it comes, does not offer dramatic satisfaction, but a feeling of limbo. There is no turning back, and no going forward. You are no longer employed by the game. Time to buy another.”

Does any of this bring us closer to an understanding of immersion? These being humanities professors, no one has yet offered a testable, falsifiable hypothesis. Only a few scholars, such as Salen and Zimmerman in *Rules of Play*, seem interested in improving immersive game design. The rest, in thick books from university presses, on blogs like Ludology and The Ludologist, and in conference proceedings of the Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA), squabble endlessly over semantics.

In his DiGRA LevelUp 2003 paper, “Ludologists love stories, too: Notes

from a debate that never took place,” Frasca claimed there is actually no great gap between the two positions, and the controversy arose, among other reasons,



from confused definitions of “narratology,” “ludology,” “narrativist” and “ludologist.” Frasca’s paper prompted a testy response from University of California Irvine professor Celia Pearce at DiGRA 2005. In “Theory Wars: An Argument Against Arguments in the So-called Ludology/Narratology Debate”, Pearce

accused Frasca of “deepening the gap by further polarizing the alleged two sides.

“I describe in detail ways to think about the term narrative as descriptive of specific types of experience, as narrative ‘operators’ that function at different levels to support gameplay,” Pearce wrote. “Frasca asserts that I ‘claim chess is a narrative.’ In fact, I do no such thing. Rather, I use the thought exercise of comparing the ‘plots’ of chess and *Macbeth* to make a point about the differences in the way narrative operates in both. I specifically use the word ‘plot’ because it has particular implications, and represents a higher level of specificity. To savor this point, I thought we might wish to take a moment to meditate on the various common meanings of the word ‘plot.’”

It’s hard to read all this airy palaver, this baffleheaded pedantry, without shouting, “Get a job.” Can these detached

structuralist and post-structuralist critics help us understand immersion? Could they ever, ever admit becoming immersed themselves, in anything?

The teapot-tempest debate of narrativism versus ludology may well be promoted as long as the wind blows, the sun shines and academic conferences seek papers. Yet, there was a voice of reason (or something approximately like it, depending on semantics) at DiGRA 2005.

The keynote speaker was Harvard literature and media professor Janet H. Murray, whose *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* was a seminal text in game narratology. In her speech, optimistically titled “The Last Word on Ludology v Narratology” (.PDF), Murray said, “No one has been interested in making the argument that there is no difference between games and stories or that games are merely a subset of stories. Those interested in both games and stories see game elements in stories and story elements in games: interpenetrating sibling categories, neither of which completely subsumes the other. The ludology vs. narratology

argument can never be resolved because one group of people is defining both sides of it. The ‘ludologists’ are debating a phantom of their own creation.

“No one group can define what is appropriate for the study of games. Game studies, like any organized pursuit of knowledge, is not a zero-sum team contest, but a multi-dimensional, open-ended puzzle that we all are engaged in cooperatively solving.”

Well said, Dr. Murray. Of course, her address up to that point included a few snipes at the ludologists - she accused them of opposing narratology out of anxiety, so they could “reorder the academy” - so in all likelihood, the academic spat will continue. Meanwhile, working game designers must still struggle to make their games immersive the old-fashioned way: by playing them.

[COMMENTS](#)

Allen Varney designed the PARANOIA paper-and-dice roleplaying game (2004 edition) and has contributed to computer games from Sony Online, Origin, Interplay and Looking Glass.



Its hard to read all this airy palaver, this baffleheaded pedantry, without shouting, “Get a job.”



two MORE DAYS IN arcadia

by Tom Rhodes

I breathed in the air whipping around the city, shadows lying across it from the auburn sun. But wait - this wasn't Newport. Where was I? And who was I?

Thus began something that I had been hoping and wishing for over the past several years, but also dreading. Those who read about my prior journey into the land of Arcadia will recall how much I truly appreciated *The Longest Journey*. So much so, in fact, that I tried as best I could to live as April Ryan, the female protagonist, did. I ate when she ate, slept when she slept and on and on.

Obsessive? Well, duh. But through my protracted exposure, I was enriched by the experience. Ever tried to watch all three extended editions of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy? That's the filmic equivalent.

It was with this mindset that I began to play *Dreamfall: The Longest Journey*, the sequel to my favorite game of all time.

I decided right off the bat that I deserved to clear my schedule and play this as I had the first one. Now, of course, would be different: I would play as three distinct characters rather than

one. Their lives and fates would be intertwined with my own as I traveled to the twin worlds that were both familiar yet strange.

When I first installed it and executed the program, my pulse quickened just a little bit. The music rose, the screen faded in from darkness and my journey continued ...

What is it about sequels? Hell, what is it about continuing sagas? Sometimes they come to a satisfying conclusion, while other times ... well, we won't talk about them. More than what they are, however, is what they say about us.

I spent a total of six years exploring Stephen King's seven-book *The Dark Tower* series. I breezed through the first four while waiting patiently for King to finish the remaining three. He started the series back in 1982 with *The Gunslinger*, addicting the first of several generations to the heptalogy.

When the final three were released, one by one, I ate them up. On the last book,

though, I took my time; edging patiently through page after page, not wanting it to end. As it turns out, I was right to do that.

The Dark Tower had one of the most unsatisfying conclusions I have ever read, nearly leaving me with whiplash by the way it stopped me dead in my tracks. How could King have done that to me? How could I have spent all those years with those characters and be left with that?

People can get so wrapped up in characters that they want to know what happens next, even if it's an answer they won't like. Even though I felt the first game was perfect, I had the urge – the need – to discover more.

But why? Several reasons, I think. First and foremost, we feel that we've been entertained by the stories and characters before, so why not again? Second, and most importantly, we have this strange fascination with wanting to know what those characters are doing after something is over. The truth that they are just figments of an overactive imagination has no bearing on us,

because we know that – somehow, somewhere – they're real, if only to us. Finally, are they also not connected with our own destinies in a way?

After all, if those characters can so easily be gone with the turn of a page or the closing of a program, what's stopping us from being just as insignificant?

We use these continuing stories as guidelines for our own lives: If there's always another *X-Men* film being released, we are always going to be there to watch it. Or read it. Or play it.

When the outcome fails to live up to our expectations, we are left with a mild depression. We spent a portion, sometimes a significant portion, of our lives devoted to a universe that was created for us to explore and revel in. If that vision, that purpose, is shattered, with what are we left?

Philosophical rhetoric aside, what happened to me? Did I find that the second in the planned three-part saga all that I wanted it to be?

No. It's not for lack of trying, though.

Ragnar Tornquist, the creator and writer of *The Longest Journey*, has crafted a beautiful and fascinating world, populated by a multitude of races, creeds and peoples. The story is obviously a labor of love, and he deserves credit for all that he did with it.

That said, I ran into a few problems. First off, the controls were clunky.

Was the second installment in the planned three-part saga all that I wanted it to be?



After *Half-Life 2* spoiled me, the facial expressions here seemed lacking, although the voice work was some of the best I've ever heard in a game, including the original. The music itself was a step up, actually, and the new composer, Kelly Bailey, deserves applause for that. But most importantly, the story, while interesting, didn't live up to the epic nature of the first.

For me, *Dreamfall* was supposed to continue my investment in the characters and stories from the first game. I was really rooting for Tornquist to pull another rabbit out of his hat and wow me with something that would stay with me as long as his prior brilliance. What *Dreamfall* did, instead, was create a new and interesting setup for a conclusion, but without the same power and strength as similar Tolkien midpoints. The quintessence of this game was supposed to be cleansing and renewing, giving me a breath of fresh air that I hadn't felt in a long time. Unfortunately, it fell far short.

In *The Longest Journey*, April Ryan was transformed from a confused, whiny girl

into a warrior for The Balance, dealing with her difficult past and finding her way into a fantastic world. In *Dreamfall*, everything felt less important, less necessary, and the characters were not nearly as transformed. Not to mention that April seems like a dour goth chick this time around, which made me somewhat dislike her. April! I mean, how did that even happen?

In the end, I suppose I was hoping for too much, and expectations are what sink sequels. But maybe we all expect too much, especially when we want to relive the experience that we loved so much. It's the reason that Kubrick never made a sequel and why J.D. Salinger became a hermit and disappeared into a farmhouse.

So, remember my words the next time you're hoping for a sequel: The original was much better. [COMMENTS](#)

Tom Rhodes is a writer and filmmaker currently living in Ohio. He can be reached through Tom.Rhod@gmail.com.



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In *Dreamfall*, everything felt less important, less necessary, and the characters were not nearly as transformed.

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