

the *Escapist*

OK COMPUTER

Teledildonics and You

by Russ Pitts

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EDITOR'S NOTE

by Julianne Greer

Fighting with a broadsword is **hard**. First there's all the trouble of swinging a large steel object around with one hand, much less one that requires two hands. And then add on top of this the trouble of armor; whether you use chain mail (which is silly heavy) or you use leather (lighter, but a little more stiff) you just really don't know the extent to which until you've been there. Trust me. I've done it.

Yes, I've donned the leather armor and stepped into the ring. I've used a one-handed sword, and a two-handed one to more success. I've dealt with the relative inability to duck or twist my upper body to anything approaching my full flexibility range because of the armor, while wielding a several pound steel blade.

These were not fully choreographed demonstrations our troop put on, but rather, a few choreographed moves inserted here and there into a contest, much like that of a fencing match. We were attempting to show audiences what battle in medieval times may have been like, using replica equipment and moves.

Do I think it worked? Somewhat. Certainly, during the demonstrations, people got very into the fights – they cheered and crowd favorites were chosen. Afterward, we got tons of questions: How heavy is the sword? Quite. Isn't it hard to move in the armor? It is. Did you know that sparks flew from the swords? Yep. Can I have a picture with you? Um, sure. People were getting that this wasn't something that was something you could walk off the street and do easily. But they still didn't **get it**. They were just watching.

Now, had we been demonstrating moves and having them mirror us, they may have gotten it a little better. True, they wouldn't have had the armor or the weight of the sword, but they would have been moving, employing the mechanics and touch sense. And that extra stimulus would have conveyed more, been more of an experience.

What is the nature of "experience?" Do we not experience the world through our senses; are these not our inputs describing what is around us that our brain might better understand? Thus far, games have focused mainly on two: sight and hearing. Over the years, the audio

and visual have been improving, becoming more and more realistic, so much so that we've pretty much reached a point of diminishing returns, when comparing financial input to visual and audio output. In addition, we've reached a point where many of the games' offerings outclass the hardware on the gamers' end – graphics are now only as good as a player's HDTV, if he even has one.

Where does that leave us when we are looking to improve the gameplay experience? It's time to start incorporating the other senses. And since Smellyvision hasn't really caught on (can't imagine why), and developers will be hard pressed to get a gamer to stop drinking Bawls long enough to taste some blood-on-your-lip-ambience, we're left with touch.

And really, the touch output is the one over which a developer can have the most control. Games like *Guitar Hero* prove that a gamer will go out and buy a controller made for one game and one game only, provided it's a great experience. So, it makes sense that this is the next step in game design, why we're starting to see more games involving movement. It is the easiest

next sense to involve. Plus, the tactile nature gives a feeling of **doing**, rather than just **watching**. It makes the game more of an experience, and isn't experience what it's all about?

Cheers,



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor: How many best of issues are you guys gonna put out? This is getting a little ridiculous here. Do it once a year, not once every few months for christ's sake.

- Ryan

Editors' Reply: Thanks for dropping us a line (and for being so honest with your feelings). We appreciate all of the feedback we get, even the negative stuff.

First, allow me to suggest the possibility that you're confusing our Issue 60 "Editor's Choice" with a "Best Of" issue. The two are actually very different. Issue



60 was all-original content from our various contributors - it just didn't fit into any one category. (We have more of those coming up, so prepare yourself.)

A "Best Of" is what we published [last] week, and it is, in fact, a reprint of material previously published. But it is only the second such issue we've ever published, and we don't publish those lightly. The fact is that we're determined to provide our readers with fresh, original content every week, but sometimes we just can't.

The last time we published a "Best Of" Issue was in May (Issue 45) while we (and everybody else) were attending E3. This time around, as Julianne Greer describes in her Editor's Note, we had planned to do an issue that didn't pan out, and decided coincidentally that this would be a nice time to give some of our staff their first vacation in over a year. So we did.

The most ironic part of all of this is that the most frequent criticism we receive is that we produce **too much** content, and most readers simply can't keep up. Clearly, you are not among them, but rest assured that we will be presenting a

full issue of all-original content next week, and that we have no immediate plans for another "Best Of" anytime soon.

Thanks for reading,

- Russ

In Response to "Gran Turismo: Game Not Included" from The Escapist Lounge: I think the idea of micro-transactions for that much content is one of two things: retarded or complete genius. If it were to come in large packs for cars and maps for example - all the rally stuff for 5 dollars, supercar 5 dollars etc. - and there was a clear price difference where it evened out to the price of a full game I could deal.

- Lex Darko

In Response to "Gran Turismo: Game Not Included" from The Escapist Lounge: Disclaimer: I bought a PS2 to play *Gran Turismo 4*. I also bought the Logitech Racing Wheel. **You could say I'm a fan.**

A micropayment strategy for online games is still novel in the US; compare that to Korea, where developers have

created a bustling market for add-ons purchased online. Many of the games eschew subscription fees in favor of allowing no-payers to play, but be significantly handicapped through game-mechanics (didn't buy that turbo boost?), or socially handicapped in the world (their avatar isn't decked out in the latest sprite fashion).



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It is my understanding that alternate forms of payment, like gamecards or charging items to your mobile phone account makes billing less painful (and more impulsive). The bottom line is that this model is appropriate for some types of online games.

- **Steven Rokiski**

In Response to "How Do You Read Game Reviews" from The Escapist Forum: I only read reviews once I'm actually playing the game. When trying to decide what I want to play I go to gamerankings.com or [metacritic](http://metacritic.com), look up the game, discard the highest and lowest scores and then find the mean of the remaining scores. Then I'll see if I like the game's subject/style/genre. For instance, I'm not a huge RTS fan so an RTS has to be pretty freakin' awesome to interest me. Alternatively, I really like horror based games so I know something like *Call of Cthulhu* will be of more interest to me despite mediocre reviews.

Of course, if I can get a game for \$2 brand new like I did with *Max Payne 2* from Gamestop.com a couple weeks ago,

I'll play it no matter what unless I've heard that it's really really terrible.

- **DrRosenRosen**

In Response to "Microsoft Reimburses first-run Xbox360 Buyers" from The Escapist Forum:

It's nice to hear that MS is going to take a bit of a financial bite to assuage the complaints of costumers who got a lemon from the first run, but what about some of the inherent design issues? Namely putting a hot, power-hungry system in such a small poorly-ventilated case?

I know it is quite a challenge to satisfy customer design expectations with the real engineering constraints inherent in computer design, but until they get more efficient components inside the case, the 360 will still have problems.

- **heavyfeul**



OK COMPUTER

Teledildonics and You

by Russ Pitts

When talking about "hands on" gaming, there are multiple avenues of respectable journalism to pursue, as my colleagues in this issue will ably demonstrate. There is, however, really only one road down which my own mind was willing to travel, and not because both road and mind are seedy, dimly-lit corridors bypassing all that is right and good with the world (which is nevertheless true).

Rather, it's because the mechanisms and theories of force feedback and tactile-responsive videogame play - the vibrating motors, ergonomic designs and tactile response actuators - originated, or were perfected, for use in sex play. After over a century of advances in the science of masturbatory technology, modern vibrating massagers are now quite small and require very little power

and practically zero maintenance to operate, making them perfect for insertion into a phallus ... or a game controller. Or perhaps, as some enterprising minds have discovered, a game-controlled phallus.

First called "teledildonics" in the 1980s by Ted Nelson (the same man who coined the term Hypertext), the field of electronically-enhanced cybersex has more or less exploded in recent years. Encouraged by websites like Slashdong, outspoken columnists like Regina Lynn, online communities like Second Life and a number of singles-oriented web-based



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dating services (many of which offer “have sex toy” as a profile checkbox), more and more people are trying (or perhaps admitting to trying) teledildos. To cover every available device would require more space than we have here. So I’ve narrowed it down to the most stimulating of the bunch, and invited a few of my colleagues to help me get a grip on the subject.

We’ll start with the first teledildo, because, as with martinis, movie trilogies and love, it’s the one we usually remember.

All in the Suit That you Wear

Imagine a device combining three of the world’s favorite things: the internet, pornography and self-pleasuring. Imagine that it’s wearable and connected to your computer. Imagine that you can use it with an online partner and that your partner can control the device from afar. Imagine watching a pornographic video clip (try hard, some of you), and feeling the general effect of the acts depicted onscreen in the appropriate erogenous zones of your own body. Now imagine, doing all of the above - with the same device - all while having both hands free for ... whatever. Sounds (if

you’ll pardon the pun) quite stimulating, doesn’t it?

David James thought so. In the late ‘90s, Mr. James, the founder of America’s most successful pornographic entertainment company, Vivid Entertainment, invested at least \$180,000 in R&D for what his company called The Cyber Sex Suit. The suit was a wetsuit-like garment, enhanced with 30 or so tiny sensors, wired to a device that could be plugged into a DVD player or an internet-enabled computer and could be manipulated remotely to deliver tiny electric shocks to the more tingly bits of the wearer’s body; in other words, it was an internet-enabled sex simulator.

Kyle Machulis, founder of the website Slashdong and creator of the SeXBox

teledildonic videogame peripheral, tells the story like this: “Rich guy decided he wanted a *Lawnmower Man* flavored sex rig.” According to Kyle, it “sounded kinda spiffy.”

Indeed. So where is it? According to Mr. James, the suit combined with phone sex services was to be “very big money in the future.” In reality, the device never made it to market, and outside of a few test subjects, and perhaps Mr. James himself, no one has seen it since.

Ultimately, in spite of the backing of the most powerful pornographer on the planet, The Cyber Sex Suit failed to pass the most basic safety regulations. The Federal Trade Commission feared that the electrical current running through the suit could lead to trouble for people with pacemakers, or people who got sweaty or secreted other fluids while

... just about everyone was at risk from the suit.



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at the official blog for the magazine!

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“I’d feel claustrophobic in a suit, I think.”

I asked Regina Lynn, sex tech columnist for *Wired*, whether she thought there was still a need for a device like The Cyber Sex Suit.

“A need?” she responded. “No. But a desire? Yes. And I should not be so quick to dismiss it as a need, actually. We’re always finding new ways to have sex. I think the first application of a sex suit would be for parties and sex workers, though - too expensive to have just as a home toy, for the average person.”

But would she use one?

“Of course I would give it a try,” she replied. “Why not? As to whether I would buy one, I doubt it. For me, the stimulation of long-distance sex is almost entirely mental, emotional, spiritual - the physical kicks in at the end, but it’s a long delicious gradual building of desire and pleasure and want. I’d feel claustrophobic in a suit, I think.”

What about Kyle? As one of the foremost experts on teledildonics, I was curious to hear his opinion of the device, if he’d used it, would use it and why.

“There’s not that much to be an expert on, honestly,” Kyle points out. “This isn’t rocket science. Hell, it’s hardly high-school-level engineering. There’s very, very little that you could call technologically advanced about the current state of commercial teledildonics. It could’ve been done a decade ago, people were predicting it two decades ago, and yet, here we sit with the same ol’ boring hardware that’s existed for years.

“But, for all intents and purposes, sure, I’m an expert.”

But what about The Cyber Sex Suit?

“I only deal,” he claims. “I don’t partake. I’d probably rip it apart and figure out how it worked. Then use it for something non-sexual.”

“I’ve noticed that many teledildonics aficionados suffer from a certain level of schizophrenia,” says Lara Crigger, a technology and game industry journalist who’s extensively researched the subject of teledildonics for both the web and print publications. “Some are the kind of people who do it just to get a kick out of shocking the naïve or closed-minded. People who see prurience as like an art form. Something to be embraced, even celebrated.”

using it to have sex. In other words, just about everyone was at risk from the suit.

Vivid’s thrust to penetrate the market, therefore, was blocked, and The Cyber Sex Suit had to hit the showers. But cybersex and the so-called “feel-good internet” lived on, fed by consumer concern that, as Kyle Machulis adroitly surmises, teledildonics were long overdue: “Full body actuation of virtual environments is something we’ve seen in sci-fi for decades, so it’s probably coming at some point. Whether it will be next week or the same time as the flying car is a good question.”

After all, it's not like having rubber genitalia lying around is exactly acceptable in polite society.

"But then, there are others who like to pretend that their hobby isn't about sex; or, at the very least, that the sex is some First Principle that they try to move on from. It's almost like they're trying to transfer the kink from the maker onto the observer; that is, should you focus on the toy's sexual possibilities instead of its schematics or design, well, then **you're** the one with the dirty mind."

So it would seem that one of the major roadblocks to mainstream success for teledildonics, in addition to fear of electric shock, is the acceptance gap: the perception that online-enabled sex toys are just for pervs. To bridge that gap, one would have to convince people that the toys themselves are safe for non-perv usage. After all, it's not like having rubber genitalia lying around is exactly **acceptable** in polite society. A

new generation of toys, however, promises to help remedy that.

Next stop: masturbating with an iPod.

Groove is in the Heart

"Everyone loves music. Everyone loves sex," claims Suki, the maker of the stylish-looking iPod accessory, OhMiBod. The device is, in essence, a sleek-looking vibrating dildo that plugs into an iPod or any other device with a headphone jack, and then vibrates to the rhythm of your music. It even comes with a splitter so that you can have your iDildo and headphones plugged in at the same time.

Suki offers the device for \$69, as well as a host of accessories and a community site called, appropriately, Club Vibe, which lists a growing number of DJs who are spinning out music specially crafted to hit just the right spot and a slew of user-submitted, iTunes-enabled playlists. With OhMiBod, Suki promises more than just a one-night stand - they're selling the idea that sex play is cool, and are hoping that users will see their device as a gateway to a larger community of Jacks and Jills who are into getting off on their music.

And it seems to be working. The OhMiBod is (at the time of this writing) currently listed as "out of stock" on the OhMiBod website due to "orgasmic demand," and has been covered by practically every blogger on the net, as well as such mainstream outlets as the supermarket-friendly *Redbook*.

According to Regina Lynn, while playing country music, "the vibrator almost leaps out of my hand with its full-speed-ahead buzz, only easing off for a breath between verse and chorus." One can only imagine how it would respond to electronica.

As with the iPod itself, the fact it works as well or better than similar devices is beside the point; it looks cool, which, if the success of its parent device is any indication, could do more for the field of dildonics than rechargeable batteries.

See Me, Feel Me

So, if a stylish, iPod-colored magic wand has the potential to entice a whole new generation of sexual beings to pick up a dildo, what would it take to get those same people into a teledildo? I asked our three "sexperts" what lies in the mind of those seeking cybersex. What kind of

person needs a teledildo? Who's the target audience?

"No one needs it," says Regina Lynn. "But it's a fun addition to have. I'd say it appeals to three groups:

1. Long distance lovers. You and your partner live far apart and don't get to see each other every weekend. Teledildonics becomes one of the ways you stay connected. Not every day, but something fun to pull out of the closet once in a while.

2. Online lovers. You and your online lover can't get together in the flesh for whatever reason - or you don't want to and the relationship is entirely online - but you add teledildonics as one of the ways you play.

3. Online sex work. A performer, whether a cam girl or a *Second Life* escort or porn star, can offer teledildonics to her clients as a way to increase her earnings. And clients can take advantage of the opportunity to touch the professional (by proxy, anyway) without worrying about STDs or getting arrested."

So, basically: those who have sex for love, those who do it for fun and those who do it as a job? Sounds like everyone. Why isn't everyone using a teledildo?

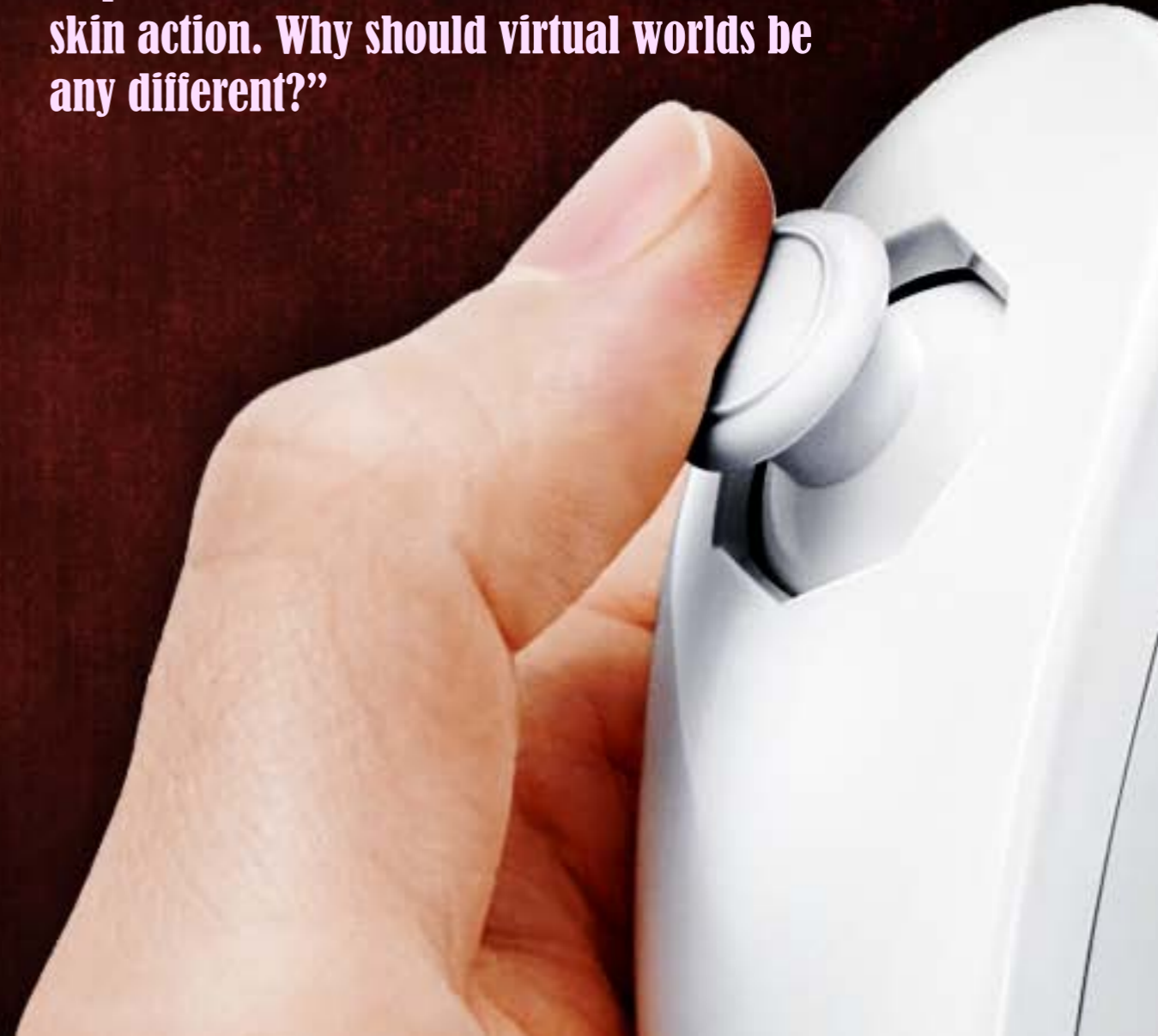
"I dunno," says Kyle Machulis "Really, I don't. Sex is a very personal matter. There's gonna be the obvious answer of physical actuation for distance relationships, but there's also going to be people who want to sit in rooms in the same house and use it."

"I do think it's unfair to dismiss teledildonics as purely the product of pervy miscreants," says Lara Crigger. "That would be really oversimplifying the matter. I think it all comes back to the human need for affection, acceptance and love.

"These days, it's completely acceptable to try to find love online - as long as it's just the emotional kind. The moment you try to express love through physical means - teledildonics, emergent sex, cybering, whatever - you're seen as creepy and weird.

"But sex is a natural, genetic impulse. In the real world, no truly fulfilling

"In the real world, no truly fulfilling relationship can work without at least a little skin-to-skin action. Why should virtual worlds be any different?"



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relationship can work without at least a **little** skin-to-skin action. Why should virtual worlds be any different?

"So, in essence, teledildonics is just an attempt to reintroduce that physicality back into digital search for love. It tries to act as a sexual liberation of sorts, a fumbling attempt to free our libidos from self-imposed inhibition. Sure, it usually doesn't work. But at least it **tries**."

Tries. But how hard? I wondered. To answer that question, I sought out information on what's being billed as the most successful - or at least most-widely available - teledildo around: The Sinulator.

Radar Love

The Sinulator is more than a teledildo, it's a teledildonics interface compatible with a number of different toys, including a male masturbation sleeve, which can then be used in tandem with the standard teledildo for true male-female cybersex - or the closest we've come yet. The company even offers connections to popular online dating and "swinger" services, through which you can find and cyber with other Sinulator-owning netizens.

"Here's how it works," reported Regina Lynn, in September of 2004. "Your Sinulator package includes the transmitter, a vibrator and a receiver. You download the client application from Sinulator.com. During installation, you connect the transmitter to a USB port.

"When you're all installed and have the client running, you attach your toy to the wireless receiver and switch it on. Finally, you go to Sinulator.com and choose a name for your toy. After that, anyone who knows your toy's name can set your toy a-buzzin' using the Sinulator control panel. Neither of you has to register or divulge any personal information - not even an e-mail address."

But does it work?

"I'm enjoying the novelty of it," she says. "I can honestly say that the Sinulator beats the pocket rocket hands down."

Wicked Game

Having satisfied the sexual cravings of audiophiles, long-distance lovers and the mildly curious, one then has to wonder what teledildonics will do for gamers. After all, the success of *Rez*, its optional



vibrator accessory and a host of websites dedicated to perfecting the use of rumble-enabled controllers as sex toys (teaching gamers everywhere how to hit just the right sequence of buttons to maximize in-game vibration) have shown us that there is at least a token demand for game-related sex play. So who's feeding it?

Kyle Machulis, for one.

"I created the SeXBox back in February of 2005," Kyle says. "Which was a joke. Xbox controllers vibrate, vibrators vibrate, put the two together, and ...

games become sexual environments, which was lots of silly fun. However, it branched out to be much more than that as I got interested in sex technologies and what was happening with them."

Kyle's original SeXBox was a do-it-yourself project requiring (among other things) a vibrator, an Xbox controller and a soldering iron. His technique has since been refined and expanded upon by others, but he continues to push the

"You shouldn't have to deal with someone else's idea of what's a good UI for your sexual fantasies ..."

envelope, looking for the perfect hybrid of technology and prurience.

"[SeXBox is] an open source sex platform. People should be allowed to [have sex] how they want, even if it is computer-controlled. You shouldn't have to deal with someone else's idea of what's a good UI for your sexual fantasies, nor should you have to worry about paying their monthly fee to use the hardware you bought.

"Outside of that, I've also become interested in the idea of intimate interfaces. Right now, we're still on the UI paradigms PARC gave us in the late '70s. These don't translate well to software made to control sex. Once people can build their own interfaces, it'll be interesting to see what they come up with in order to control what is considered to be one of the most intimate experiences one can have as a human being. Maybe it'll be something we can learn from."

Lara Crigger is not so sure.

"Even if we didn't already have preconceived notions about the propriety of electronic sex toys," she says, "I still

think teledildonics would probably never take hold, or even make a noticeable dent, in the gaming industry. For one, it's too much of a novelty act. Even regular, run-of-the-mill sex toys serve only a niche market.

"The fatal flaw of teledildonics is not that it's weird. It's that although the toys can stimulate most body parts and orifices reasonably well, they can't stimulate the most crucial sex organ of all: the brain. Teledildonics tends to separate the mind from sex. But the mind makes sex fun, addictive. Without it, you just get friction, fluids and occasional release. So, I think that's why the technology hasn't succeeded yet; few people find anything mentally stimulating about an Xbox controller.

"It doesn't necessarily have to be that way. If a sex toy were developed in tandem with a game release, then sure, I could see it succeeding. But the sex toy and the game would need to be closely interlinked. They'd need to work together, instead of parallel to each other, to satiate a player's desires.

"Of course, I'm mostly speculating. Although I've been curious enough about



teledildonics to write about it, I'm still too timid to have actually tried any of these devices myself. But the truth is, I can't think of anything less sexy than gaming electronics. They're hard, cold and plastic. It would be like masturbating with a coffee maker, or a steering wheel or a potted plant. Sure, you could do it, I guess, but why? And I think that's the question that needs to be answered before teledildonics will ever see any mainstream success (if ever)."

Longview

"I've written about the human side of technology my entire career," says Regina Lynn. "But since I started 'Sex Drive,' I've focused on the relationship between sex and tech. I have had long-distance relationships and cyberspace relationships in my life where these 'intimate interfaces' would have been a boon!

"In 10 years, everyone will know that you can control a sex toy over the internet. (It's amazing how many people don't know this already.) In 20 years, no one will care - or rather, it will have the same reputation that cybersex does now, because it will simply be another way

that people have cybersex. Like now, some prefer webcams, some prefer avatars, some alternate. But I think it will take closer to 20 years ... for intimate interfaces to become that ordinary. The technology develops faster than Americans' ability to handle it."

Kyle Machulis, as one might expect from the quirky creator of the SeXBox, sees the future of teledildonics as far more bleak.

"On the macro scale," he says, "we've got a long, long way to go in terms of realism. Right now, all we've got is a vibration motor you can remotely change speeds on. That's not exactly like real sexual interaction. We'll start to see machines that can imitate the experience, and then possibly build on it.

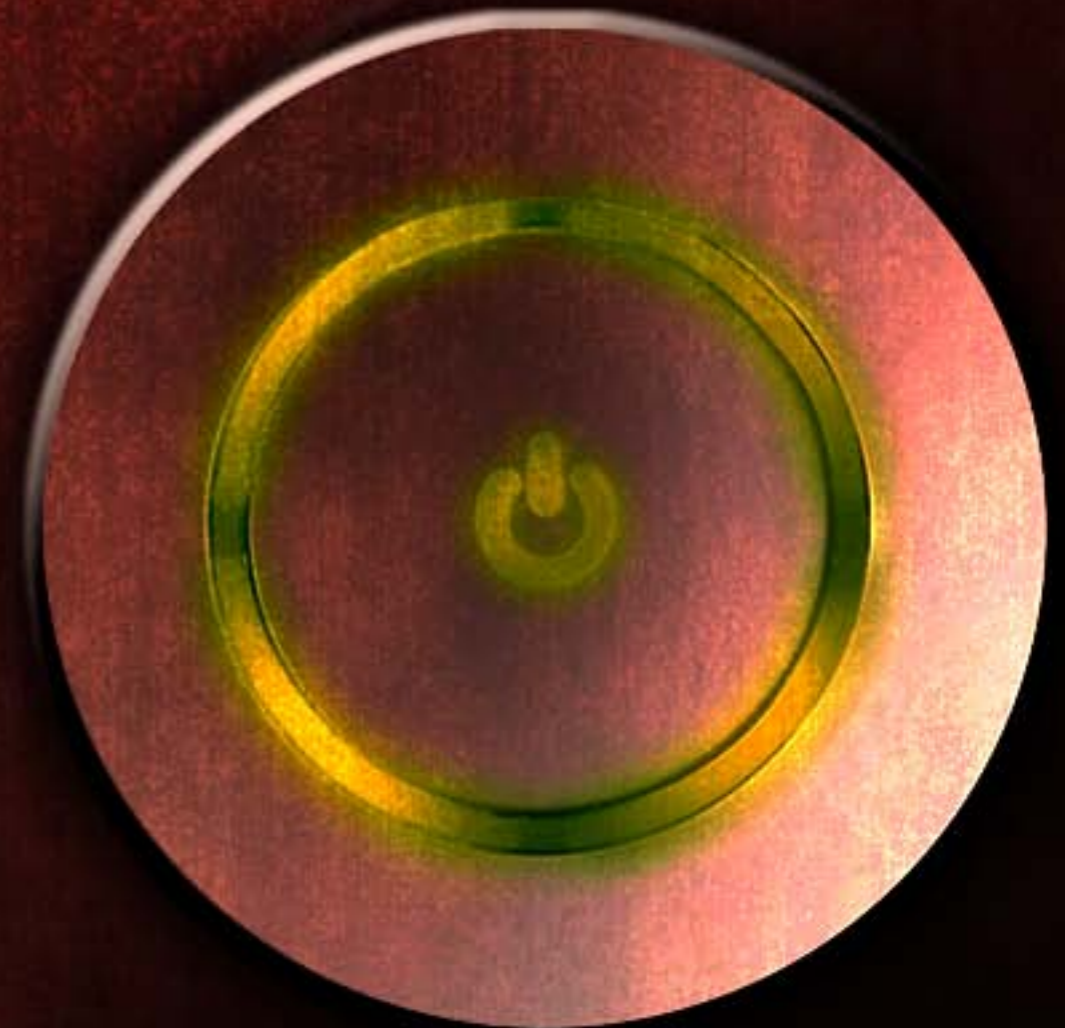
"Then, someday, it'll become better than having sex with other people and we'll all forget how to screw each other and reproduce and the species will die out.

"Except for me. I know what's coming. My plans are in place. I will be King."

[COMMENTS](#)

Russ Pitts is an Associate Editor for The Escapist. He has been writing on the web since it was invented and claims to have played every console ever made. He also mixes a fantastic Perfect Manhattan.

"On the macro scale," he says, "we've got a long, long way to go in terms of realism."





STARING DOWN THE **barrel**

by Spanner

With its simplistic point-and-click interface, handheld portability, multi-format compatibility and chic social accessory status, it's no wonder the common household gun has had such an impact on the videogame world.

And why wouldn't they? Guns are tremendous fun. With a little bit of imagination and a bucket load of gratuitous violence they can transform an average game into blood-splattered, lead-filled, cap bustin', thrill-a-minute pandemonium. If only more game developers would stop shirking their responsibilities and ensure at least half the titles they turn out have some semblance of firearm-related entertainment, the videogame market might not be faced with such a depressing sales slump.

Now, I realize there are some gamers out there who like their toast lightly buttered, their seats well cushioned and their games filled with cutesy cartoon characters who are assailed by nothing more threatening than a brightly colored mushroom, but I'm confident that even you tedious pacifists can enjoy light-gun

themed videogame carnage if properly educated. The gun has a rich and magnificent history in both the arcades and the home gaming arenas, and I'm here to celebrate the wonderful world of the virtual shooter.

When Ralph Baer invented the home videogame way back in the late '60s, one of the first human interface devices he and his engineering team at Sanders Associates (which just so happened to be a military contractor) devised was a makeshift light-pistol. Not really anything more than a light "detector" with a handle, the pistol was used to select bright white squares against a black background in various test routines. It was then re-engineered to fit inside a toy rifle bought at a local department store, and was finally redesigned one last time as a pump-action shotgun accessory for the first ever videogame console released in 1972, the Magnavox Odyssey. Not only was the console a commercial success, but the high-priced rifle accessory also sold extremely well, shifting around 80,000 units during the console's lifespan.



When the U.S. market devoured itself and the public began lynching anyone who even uttered the word “videogame,” Nintendo of America was faced with the monstrous task of duping the jaded consumer back into buying home entertainment equipment.

Perhaps not the exact model upon which subsequent light-guns were based (as players could effectively cheat at Odyssey games by pointing the rifle at a light bulb instead of the TV screen), but the impressive sales certainly established the public’s willingness to loose digital light-bullets at anything and everything that moved onscreen.

Whether or not it was a deliberate marketing strategy (and I suspect it wasn’t, since the light-gun apparatus had already been established out of necessity rather than commerciality), the introduction of a light-gun to the new and untested videogame market was undoubtedly a lifesaving move. Kids had been playing with toy guns ever since real firearms were invented, so weaning them into a whole new concept of entertainment through an established, tactile symbol of youthful recreation provided a valuable introduction to a future market that might otherwise never have developed an interest in videogames.

In 1984, when the U.S. market devoured itself and the public began lynching anyone who even uttered the word

“videogame,” Nintendo of America was faced with the monstrous task of duping the jaded consumer back into buying home entertainment equipment. Once again, the toy gun was used to tempt us into the videogame section of toy stores. Nintendo’s tactic was risky, but brilliant.

The Famicom had been selling terrifically in Japan and was remarketed to apathetic middle-America as an accessory to a couple of moderately dispensable electronic toys. One was R. O.B. the robot – a bug-eyed little critter who struggled around the floor in accordance with the onscreen antics of a couple of rubbish games - and the other was a considerably more interesting device: a futuristic looking light-gun called “The Zapper.”

The addition of these two accessories quickly paid off, and they did indeed kick start the collapsed industry; getting kids off the streets and back in front of TVs where they belonged.

And it wasn’t long before some genuine sidearm style made it across the borders and into our arcades. In 1987, Taito graced us with the awesome one-man

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war machine known as *Operation Wolf*. This spectacular scrolling shooter featured mediocre graphics, standard sound effects and uninspired music. But none of that mattered once you saw the kick ass Uzi mounted on the coin-op's cabinet!

This magnificent piece of hardware catapulted *Operation Wolf* into arcade Valhalla overnight. The realistic looking submachine gun (which has been considered the pinnacle of designer weaponry ever since Arnie first brandished one with indiscriminate style in *The Terminator*) was precisely what the melancholic arcade creeper was looking for. The recoiling action gave the Uzi a sense of dynamic realism that belied the cartoony graphics onscreen, and coupled with a grenade launcher button on the front of the gun, the delightful power of carnage suddenly placed in the hands of a deranged youth was a wonderful feeling.

Op Wolf completely did away with an inherently tedious aspect of practically all light-gun games that came before it: an unreasonable emphasis on single shot accuracy. We were constantly obliged to refine our sharp shooting skills before

any kind of progress within previous games was made, while *Operation Wolf* set us free to riddle the screen with virtual lead without care of consequence. There was no point having an Uzi and trying to save bullets with frugal sharp shooting; strafing every living thing and needlessly blowing shit up was the only method of progress here, and we finally got to know what it felt like to go to war as a well-armed, invincible maniac.

Once the sequel, *Operation Thunderbolt*, was released, we were naturally very excited about the prospect of a two player version of the classic *Op Wolf* mayhem. Unfortunately, the limited magic of the original meant the novelty had already passed, leaving behind a decidedly average game which could never recapture the cold steel thrill of the original Uzi-'em-up. And so it was with many light-gun games down through the years. The genre had reached an inevitable impasse that occurs when clone after clone revisits the same old tired gameplay.

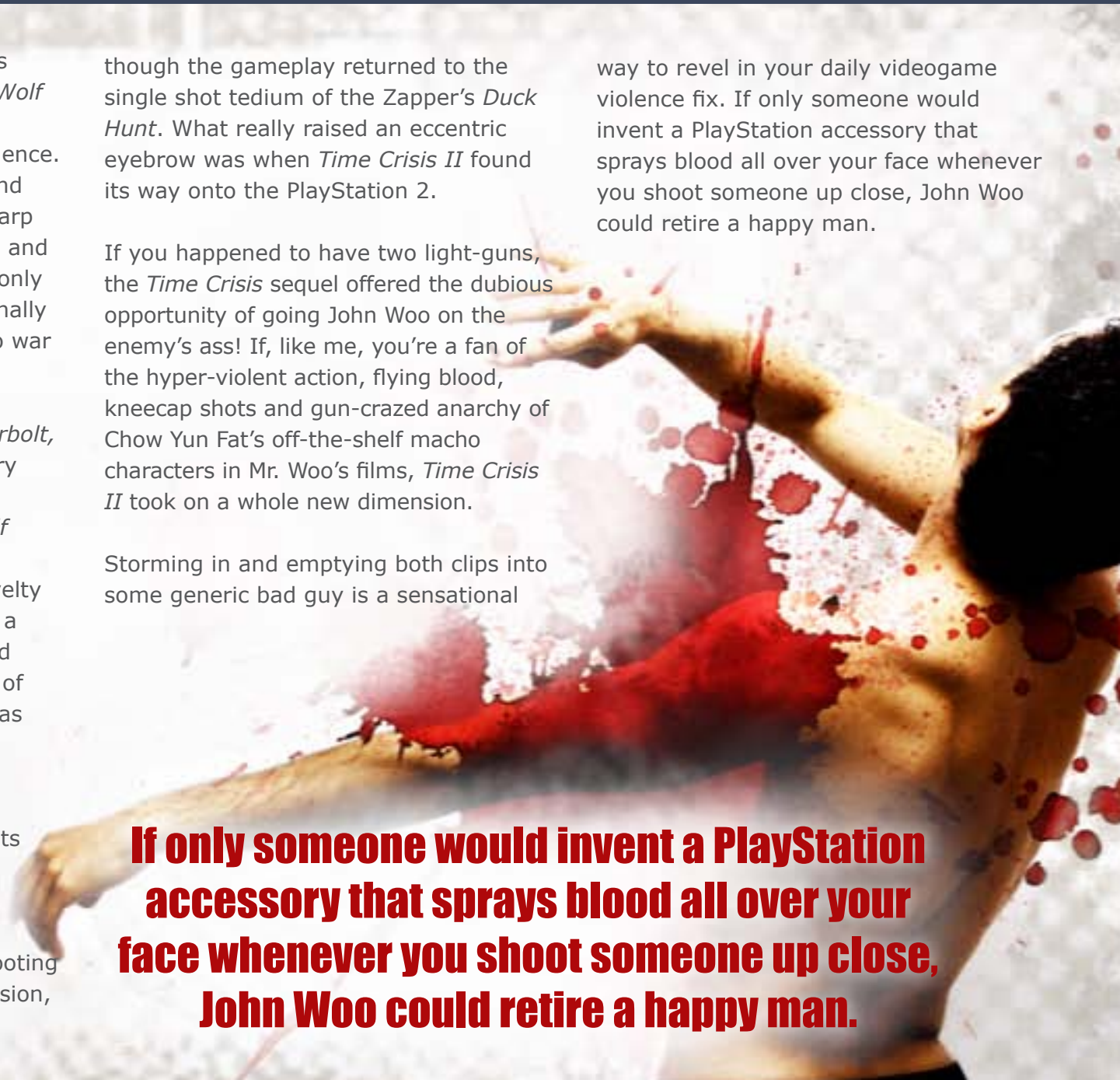
Sega's 1994 *Virtua Cop* refreshed matters somewhat when it took shooting games into that elusive third dimension,

though the gameplay returned to the single shot tedium of the Zapper's *Duck Hunt*. What really raised an eccentric eyebrow was when *Time Crisis II* found its way onto the PlayStation 2.

If you happened to have two light-guns, the *Time Crisis* sequel offered the dubious opportunity of going John Woo on the enemy's ass! If, like me, you're a fan of the hyper-violent action, flying blood, kneecap shots and gun-crazed anarchy of Chow Yun Fat's off-the-shelf macho characters in Mr. Woo's films, *Time Crisis II* took on a whole new dimension.

Storming in and emptying both clips into some generic bad guy is a sensational

way to revel in your daily videogame violence fix. If only someone would invent a PlayStation accessory that sprays blood all over your face whenever you shoot someone up close, John Woo could retire a happy man.



If only someone would invent a PlayStation accessory that sprays blood all over your face whenever you shoot someone up close, John Woo could retire a happy man.



For all my ranting and raving about letting the bullets fly free without care of accuracy, a more recent venture into the arcades left that notion fully turned on its head. Konami's 1999 sharp shooting extravaganza, *Silent Scope*, took the concept of single-shot accuracy in shooting games and expanded it to dramatic new horizons. The light-gun in question was a superb rendition of a sniper's rifle, complete with spotting scope, quivering crosshairs and blissfully unaware enemies.

The cabinet's monitor displayed an exploded view of the entire scene, while pressing one's eye up to the mini screen mounted within the spotting scope of the rifle provided a cleverly calculated magnified target. Holding the highly accurate rifle steady was no small feat, particularly with the long range shots, but as soon as that bad guy ambled unknowingly into your crosshairs, a slow exhale and gentle squeeze of the trigger would cause his head to explode like a watermelon in a microwave. Bloody marvelous! *Silent Scope* offered an embarrassingly absorbing voyeuristic experience; assassinating wrong-doers

from a safe distance with the perilously long arm of high-velocity justice.

Of course, it's not just the hardware that makes a decent shooting game work. An example of both how to do it right **and** wrong can be found in Sega's magnificent zombie wasting gore-a-thon series, *House of the Dead*. The third installment most accurately touched on the hallowed ground of the living dead movies, with a wonderfully tactile pump action shotgun for putting the undead back in the ground. The scope of such a weapon was far reaching; no more unrealistic shooting off screen to reload, a weapon that could actually cut a swathe through the stumbling hoards and, most importantly (and this might seem insignificant, but bear with me), you can attach a torch to the barrel.

While this might appear a minor aspect of the thrill-a-minute zombie-thon, the gun-mounted searchlight was an important aspect of *HOTDIII*'s gameplay. Any zombie film fanatic will agree that no living dead film is complete without our protagonist tiptoeing through a pitch black room with a distinctly insufficient

torch, only to illuminate a ghoul crouching on the floor two feet away, feeding on the last poor sucker who wandered through the room without turning the lights on. This small, but vital, aspect of gameplay made for a spectacularly chilling few minutes of tension; scouring the dark room for that elusive flesh muncher, then firing in panicked fury when it turns out to be right in front of you. You feel a genuine sense of relief when the lights come back up and it's open season once again.

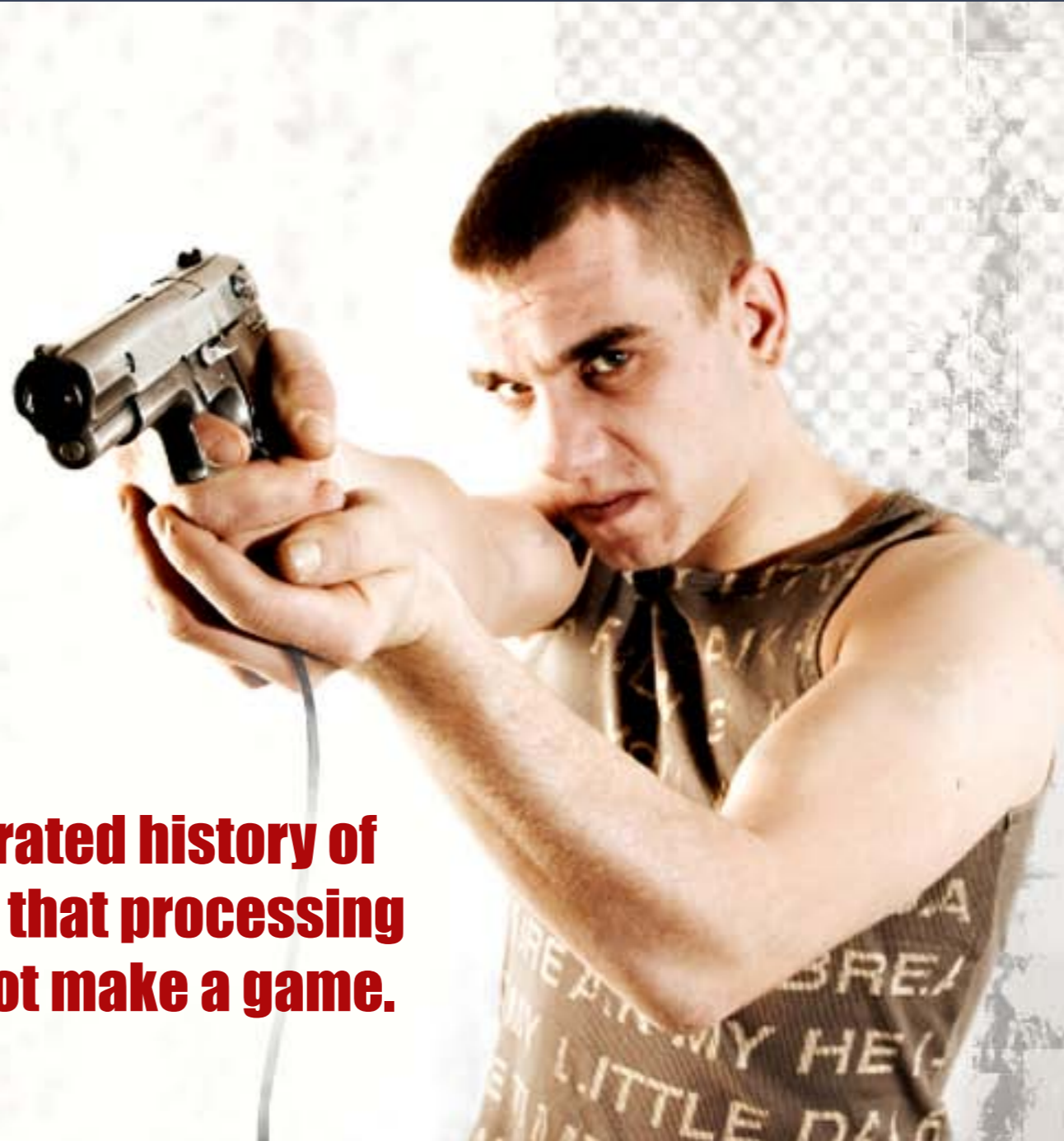
The fourth (and current) game of the series, however, fell into the same trap as many other shooting games. Rather than examining the undead genre and tailoring the game to reflect the many well-established premises, the designers simply stuck a different gun on the cabinet. This time, it was the faithful old Uzi, but *House of the Dead IV* completely botches the reloading process *HOTDIII* mastered. Rather than fluidly reloading a high-powered shotgun, the player has to vigorously shake the Uzi to simulate inserting another magazine into the gun,

leaving the player feeling like a total spaz on the arcade floor, vibrating themselves for the want of repelling a standard zombie drone.

The long and celebrated history of the light-gun proves that processing power alone does not make a game. It takes an inordinate amount of inspiration to build a success around this most popular of videogame peripherals, which is also an integral aspect of one the most unforgiving genre's the industry has ever known. [COMMENTS](#)

Spanner has written articles for several publications, including Retro Gamer. He is a self-proclaimed horror junkie, with a deep appreciation for all things Romero.

The long and celebrated history of the light-gun proves that processing power alone does not make a game.





by Shannon Drake

eFocus is the anti-E3. It's small and comparatively quiet - dancing girls, rock bands and fire twirlers tend to be absent - so it's possible to have a conversation without shouting. Most of the attending companies are small and eager for attention, so there's no half-assed display with a big sign and a monitor cycling expansion pack screenshots. It's an event that showcases cool, upcoming products, like the NIC that (I think this is what they said) reads your thoughts to determine which packets are important and makes your gaming faster, and thus merits its \$100 price tag.

In other words, eFocus is a singles bar around closing time. The girls can be pretty hot, sometimes there's desperation in the air and hustlin' skills earn you much more than a big name on a badge. More importantly, there's free drinks. As we rolled in, I maneuvered onto Contributing Editor JR Sutich's wing, and we began to prowl. In between checking out new games and thought-reading hardware, we fed outrageous lies to cute female PR reps ("JR used to be an East German swimmer. And a woman.") because they'd believe it, or they'd pretend to believe it, and that was good enough for us.

When we stumbled on a dance pad in the middle of the floor, the logical thing for me to do was give JR a hearty shove in its direction. I mumbled "C'monishllbefun" as he stumbled toward the table and the waiting representatives, concealing my intentions to make another man dance for my entertainment. They looked at us somewhat askance, giving the half-filled glasses we were carrying a rather suspicious look, for make no mistake, Captain Morgan was the Third Man in attendance that evening.

Something seemed amiss as the rep scrolled through the songs to begin the demonstration. I'd never heard of any of them, which forces me to admit to a quiet interest in rhythm games. Sometimes, I go home, shut the blinds and show off my dancing skills when I am absolutely, positively sure I am alone. This is my secret shame. I'm no connoisseur of the rhythm genre, but something about the song titles just seemed off. I didn't have time to share my thoughts before he was on the pad, bouncing up and down to a cheerful-sounding synthesizer and guitar opening that lacked the Pocky-covered intensity of a typical *Dance Dance Revolution* track.

Lyrics scrolled across the screen, and clarity came upon me with strange and terrible speed. The words were not the mangled Japanese-English or nonsensical techno lyrics so common in this genre. No, I'd thrown a friend and colleague head-first into the den of piety. A quick glance at the sign above the booth confirmed my suspicion: Digital Praise. And even I was socially aware enough to realize that stumbling up to a Christian game publisher with a drink in each hand was a bit of a *faux pas*.

Obviously, there was only one thing to do. Mumbling, "Do what you want to the girl, just leave me alone," I attempted to make good my escape. The crowds were tightly packed around us, though, and making matters worse, JR had finished his song. He turned to me with a Cheshire grin and gave me a "Come on! It'll be fun!" as he dragged me toward the waiting dance pad. The rep was eager, now, either hoping for unbiased journalistic coverage or because turning the tables on two drunken idiots was hilariously funny. I prefer to think it was the former.

I had fantasies of the liquor giving me some kind of crazy dancing skills, but these were the desperate hopes of a man facing a firing squad. I have no rhythm, and my normally terrible dancing skills had a layer of fine Caribbean rum over them. I was about to make a tremendous ass out of myself. Halfway through my complete and utter failure at a Christian dance game, I wondered if this was a penance of some kind and I slinked away to attempt to regain my dignity.

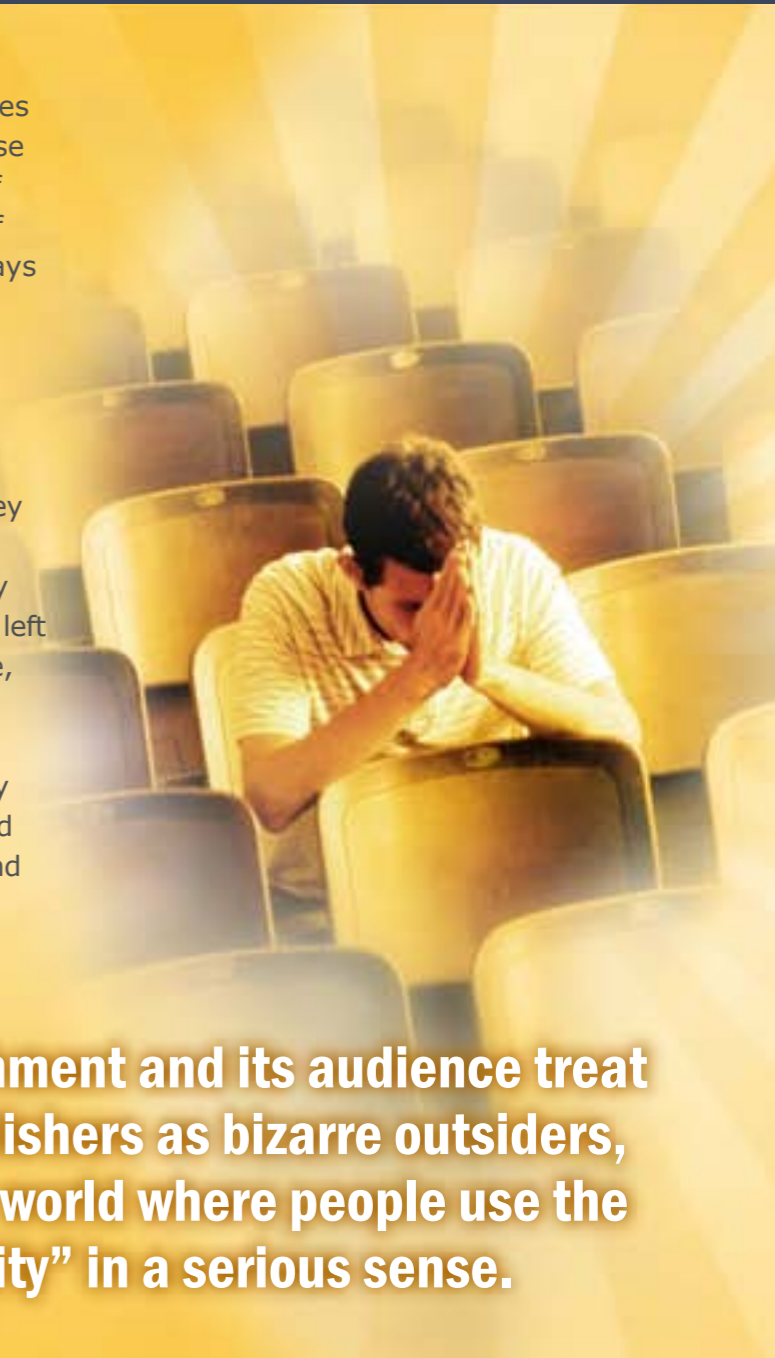
It was a classic clash of cultures. The gaming establishment and its audience treat Christian game publishers as bizarre outsiders, aliens from another world where people use the word "spirituality" in a serious sense. While the "Are games art?" debate rages endlessly in "our" circles, these same outsiders seek to make games that are spiritually enriching. Disagree with their conviction all you like, but few publishers seek enlightenment in addition to fabulous cash prizes.

Musing on the difficulty of being an outsider in an industry that's indifferent,

if not actively hostile, to the very values you hold dear, I contacted Digital Praise and arranged an interview with one of the founders. Call it the aftereffects of an angst-filled adolescence, but I always like talking to the outsider.

Peter Fokos is one of the founders of Digital Praise, and serves as their CTO/Creative Director. He has an insider's pedigree, with stints at Activision, Disney Interactive and even The Learning Company. When The Learning Company shut down their Fremont office, he was left looking for work. Around the same time, he tells me, "I had read a *Wall Street Journal* article about Christian games. [Being] a Christian in the game industry had been a challenge, as the games had become progressively [more] violent and obscene, so the idea of working on Christian games was very appealing."

The gaming establishment and its audience treat Christian game publishers as bizarre outsiders, aliens from another world where people use the word "spirituality" in a serious sense.



“Christians read books, watch movies, listen to music and play videogames. The difference is, they are more selective of what they choose to read, watch, listen to and play.”

He looked to an existing Christian game company first, but they lacked the resources to offer him a position. His wife suggested starting his own business and, he admits, “I was rather skeptical at first, but God kept opening doors for me [that] I didn’t think would open. I also asked two friends I knew from my church to join me: Tom Bean, our CEO, and Bill Bean, our VP of Sales and Marketing. After much discussion and prayer, we formed Digital Praise.” What they saw was “a glaring hole in the game market. While Christians have been expressing their faith through other media, such as books, radio, television, music and movies, other than Bible software, there was very little quality Christian software. With my background in the game industry, I knew it could be done, just no one had done it yet.”

Entering into the Christian software market wasn’t easy, he says, adding, “There are a number of challenges. First is that most people have never heard of Christian games, and if they have, they do not have a high opinion of the games they have seen. The second challenge is getting our products into stores. Christian bookstores have only sold Bible software. They were not aware of Christian games.” By contrast, “Mass market retailers understand games, but they look at revenue per foot of shelf space. Christian games do not get special treatment in these stores. We need to sell through just like the rest of the games. Thankfully, we have overcome these challenges.”

After their games won some awards, it got a lot easier, and Digital Praise’s games had another advantage that soon got them shelf space. “Christian bookstores that have put our games on the shelves have found that they bring in customers that may not have been visiting their stores before. And mass market retailers have found that our games can hold their own alongside the traditional games on the shelves.” When I asked if they’d run into any resistance -

as I anticipated their audience was the same people frequently quoted decrying videogames to the press - he said that they had not. “Christians read books, watch movies, listen to music and play videogames. The difference is, they are more selective of what they choose to read, watch, listen to and play.”

The inspiration for the dancing game I played, *Dance Praise*, was simple, he says, “My daughter, Samantha, is home-schooled. We wanted to find a way for her to get some exercise on rainy days,” but they wanted something that would be fun. “We looked at some of the dance games on the market, but didn’t like the way they portrayed women or the music they used. Samantha suggested that we create our own dance game using the music our entire family enjoyed: Christian music.”

They explored the idea, looking at “a couple of the other dance games on the market, but [we] decided we wanted to do something more than just dancing to a beat. *Dance Praise* displays all the lyrics of each song. The difference between Christian music and secular music are the lyrics, of course, so we felt

that they had to be in the game." In seeking to turn the game into a group-friendly activity, they "added some unique features like Shadow Dance, where one player creates the dance steps and the second player has to match their steps. We also added an Arcade mode, so you had to think about which steps you should hit and which to skip, [as] some steps had negative consequences for you or your opponent. We also added a duet mode where you dance along with another player and work together to get the highest score."

I asked if there were any special considerations they needed to make in the game's design, considering their audience. "First of all, we need to design a fun game," he said. "If it's not fun, then any message we hope to express will not be heard. We don't approach a game idea by deciding if it's appropriate. We start from the view of the message we want to communicate and go from there." That's not to say their religious views aren't a factor, he tells me. "We believe the Bible is the inspired word of God. If one of our products uses the Bible or a Bible story as part of the game, then it needs to be correct. Even if there are no direct Bible references, it

has to be in line with what is written there. Many of our people go over the game designs, and we even have our pastor look at some issues when we have a question."

With the design complete, they needed music and a distributor. "Our distributor into the Christian retail market is EMI CMG," Peter says. "They also happen to hold the license to many of the top Christian artists in the industry. Our CEO, Tom Bean, also happened to meet Joey Elwood of Gotee Records. Both Gotee and EMI were very helpful in securing the music rights for the game. They play videogames, too, and were very excited by what we were doing."

The rampant cynicism of the gaming industry doesn't seem to dent their morale at all. "We have actually received a lot of good press," he says, though he adds that there have been some cynical remarks. "But for the most part, people are curious if there is anything to this." I asked if those cynical remarks got to them, and he responded, "No, it does not bother us. We would be bothered if no one was talking about us at all. We are more concerned [with whether] we

are doing everything that God wants us to be doing."

They don't even consider themselves outsiders, he continues, "We have published nine games in the last two years. Our games are in many traditional retailers like Circuit City, CompUSA, Office Depot, Fry's, Apple Stores and Amazon, so no, we don't feel that we are outsiders. We may be a niche market right now, but we are praying that it will grow. I have faith that it will." These outsiders-but-not see "a lot of great games out there. There are some bad ones. We are just trying to bring a new perspective to games. There are a lot of people out there that want the games they play to reflect their values." Digital Praise tries to do just that. [COMMENTS](#)

In 1972, Shannon Drake was sent to prison by a military court for a crime he didn't commit. He promptly escaped from a maximum security stockade to the Los Angeles underground. Today, still wanted by the government, he survives as a soldier of fortune. If you have a problem, if no one else can help, and if you can find him, maybe you can hire Shannon Drake.

"We would be bothered if no one was talking about us at all."





Guitar Heroics

by J.R. Sutich

Every console I have ever owned was purchased to play only one of the titles available on each system. Sure, I've gone on to buy more games for the platforms later, but that first cherry high has been because of a singular entity. For the Sega Genesis and SNES, it was *Shadowrun*. On the N64, it was *GoldenEye*. Xbox? *Knights of the Old Republic*. For the Xbox 360, it **won't** be *Shadowrun* again. But for the Playstation 2, the game was *Guitar Hero*. And it almost cost me my soul.

"It all started with an open box and a dream."

The day I spent \$250 to play one game started like any other in our office. I had been reading through some industry news, and at least two cups of coffee were running through my veins. It was a good day. Until the box arrived. Stamped with Amazon.com on the side, I first believed the box contained nothing more than books for the IT Department. What we didn't know was the code monkeys knew how to rock.

Out of the large Amazon box sprang forth a videogame box about the size of a keyboard. Inside, though, was what

shocked me into a \$250 purchase. For everyone who has ever strummed a badminton or tennis racket while rocking out in their childhood bedroom, *Guitar Hero's* guitar-shaped controller was like laying your eyes on the Holy Grail.

The owner booted up the game on the office PS2 and began to thrash. Well, sort of. Unfortunately for him, buying the game did not buy him any sort of rhythm whatsoever, and I quickly stepped in. I may as well have tied off and injected myself with Black Tar. Thirty minutes after first picking up the plastic controller, I became the proud owner of my own copy. The added cost of a Playstation 2, high definition cables and a memory card brought me up to \$250.

The events of the next few months were something that could have been chronicled on an episode of VH1's *Behind the Music*. "When we come back, after a meteoric rise to the top, we'll tell the story of how JR Sutich and his band, Juggernaut, came crashing down to earth, self-destructing in a fireball of alcohol, pain and broken dreams."

I played *Guitar Hero* for hours on end, every day, for weeks. I became the best

player out of the group I spent most of my time around. I put on exhibitions, playing "Unsung" by Helmet on Hard with my back turned to the TV. Don't you know that I was a shooting star? Unbeknownst to me, however, my arch-rival, my nemesis, my ex-wife had gotten her own copy of the game. And after selling her soul to the devil at the crossroads, did the impossible: She beat "Bark at the Moon" by Ozzy Osbourne on Expert. In front of me. Using my plastic axe. Just like castles made of sand, my sense of superiority collapsed.

"And then, things started to fall apart."

I began to practice even more intensely, without any progress. I had hit my peak and could not get any better. The game that had become my obsession now mocked my efforts. I actually started getting worse, becoming unable to complete songs that I had finished earlier. I avoided playing at parties, in case my friends, my fans, discovered my shameful secret. Eventually I came to terms with my failure to finish the game and stopped playing altogether. The one

simple truth that I realized during all of this is that those who cannot **do**, teach. My success didn't just have to be measured by my actions and achievements. My vindication could come at the hands of my son.

Shortly after the "passing of the torch" idea went up in flames (the poor little guy's fingers were just too small to hit the fifth fret), *Guitar Hero 2* was announced. Finally, my prayers had been answered, for I had a new inspiration. I picked up my axe again and started to shred. No longer was I concerned with merely playing well enough to get through a song, I played my own version of practice mode. Failing a song no longer discouraged me if I had managed to refine my technique. And slowly, the results of my re-dedication began to show. My practice paid off at E3 2006, when faced with the demo version of *Guitar Hero 2*. Russ Pitts and I blitzkrieged through "You Really Got Me" by Van Halen, with me on Expert and him on Bass/Medium.

"After the break, Juggernaut prepares for their reunion tour, talks about plans for

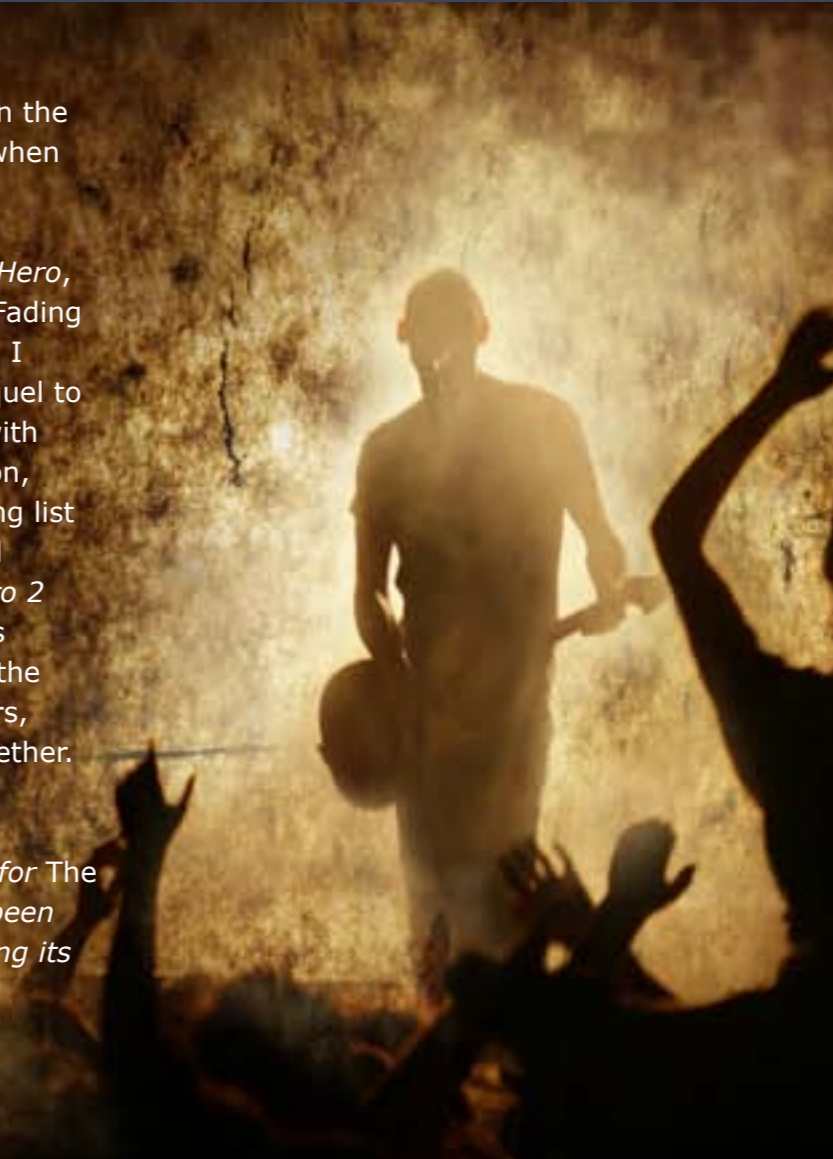
the future and pauses to reflect on the long, hard road they've traveled when we go *Behind the Music*."

If I learned anything from *Guitar Hero*, it's that Def Leppard was wrong. Fading away is preferable to burning out. I follow the development of the sequel to the game that almost broke me with earnest. Every scrap of information, every rumor and every leaked song list becomes something to collect and analyze. Now, with the *Guitar Hero 2* demo disc coming in next month's *Official Playstation Magazine* and the game itself available for pre-orders, it's time to put the band back together.

COMMENTS

JR Sutich is a Contributing Editor for The Escapist and is rumored to have been banned from an online game during its initial design stage.

If I learned anything from *Guitar Hero*, it's that Def Leppard was wrong.



ONE HAND BEHIND MY BACK

by Pat Miller



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There is a reason why I managed to finish *Mother 3* on a Tokyo train.

There is also a reason why I managed to finish *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* on the toilet.

My *Animal Crossing DS* town has long since been overrun with weeds, my *Ouendan* save file is stuck on Ready Steady Go, my *Mario Kart DS* time trials are old and *Mr. Driller* can't get past India. But I managed to finish *Mother 3*. Yes, *Mother 3* was a labor of love that shows in the writing, animation and game design, and I say that even though I have more or less moved past the stage of my life where I have the patience for Japanese roleplaying games. I really, really liked it.

But that wasn't why I finally finished it on my way home to Matsudo-shi, Chiba, about an hour or so out of downtown Tokyo. The reason why I made it through *Mother 3* has very little to do with its game production values and much more to do with the L button on my Game Boy Advance SP.

Those of you who played *Mother 2* might remember that the R button on the

SNES pad was the default Action button. It's more of a natural fit for a gamepad, really; your left hand is busy with the directional pad, and your right hand is free to control five of the six main gameplay buttons. *Mother 3*'s default control scheme keeps the Action button set to L. To those of you who are sitting down and playing it right now in the comfort of your own homes or offices or schools or buses, this might seem rather unusual. After all, unlike most roleplaying games, *Mother 3* requires a fairly strict command of rhythm to hit combo attacks during battle sequences, and for most of us right-handers, we're going to be at less than full musical capacity if we have to rock out with our left hand.

But to me and the development staff of *Mother 3*, and perhaps even to the producer, Shigesato Itoi, this makes perfect sense when we're standing on our packed Tokyo trains with our GBAs in one hand, the overhead handles in the other and our Nintendo DSes sitting mournfully in our backpacks. For all of the DS's potential for innovation, it simply can't overcome the environmental pressures of Tokyo's 12 million people, unless you're one of the lucky few who

the Escapist

can consistently get a seat on your morning commute. And the PSP doesn't handle much better; holding up that beautiful screen with one hand is work enough, never mind playing *games*.

Finishing *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* on the toilet had nothing to do with its plot or art direction or character design, though I didn't particularly like a whole lot of those. This had *everything* to do with the fact that I had to spend five minutes remembering my skills, equipment, missions - basically, whatever I was thinking of the *last* time I played the game. And since most of my opportunities for quality time with the GBA came in at approximately five to 10 minute increments, that relegated *FFTA* to a year or so of toilets all across the world. To *FFTA's* credit, that year's bathroom breaks were comparatively epic.

Designing a game for one or two players sitting in front of a TV or an arcade cabinet is a challenging enough task; what about designing a game for a crowded subway car? I don't know a whole lot of Americans with long commutes via public transportation -

cars are common, and the public transportation options tend to be sufficiently roomy compared Tokyo's notoriously packed trains. What other design choices get, well, lost in translation?

A few features have made it easier to play more conventionally-designed games on the go: Quicksave and sleep mode functions are standard for any game that requires your long-term attention, like the *Castlevanias*. Other designers might choose to find compromise halfway: Treasure's *Gunstar Super Heroes* is designed so that each level is comprised of a few mini-levels, and the player's progress - including score, damage and time elapsed - is saved after the completion of each mini-level, each of which takes a few minutes at most. Rather than the epic battles of shooters like *Contra*, *GSH* adjusts its required attention span to the very real possibility that the player is simply picking up the game for a quick shot at beating his high scores. They're not so friendly as to be playable one-handed, though. Fighting games are, likewise, out of the question; while there are fairly compelling *Guilty Gear*, *King of Fighters*



and *Street Fighter* titles out for the GBA, they're just as technically demanding as their console counterparts. I thought *I* was dedicated because I practiced Dee Jay combos on the way to work; *real* winners have to fight hard enough to get one of the coveted corner spots by the train doors so they can lean against the wall and play with both hands.

Other games, however, aren't nearly as fun *until* you start playing them on public transportation. I generally consider my time to be too expensive to bother with level treadmills in *any* roleplaying games. However, for the player on the go, it's not such a drag. *Pokémon's* design made a lot more sense after getting used to a regular bus ride. Sitting down in front of your TV and mindlessly leveling up or hunting for rare Pokémon isn't that fun, but as something to do while I'm taking the bus, it feels pleasantly productive. And when I can maintain a slightly longer attention span, beating a level of *Advance Wars 2* on my way to work is enough to make me feel downright *accomplished*. Perhaps I could have picked my battles a little more wisely, though: Missing my train stops and getting to class

late introduced an unfortunate meta-game element to the fight.

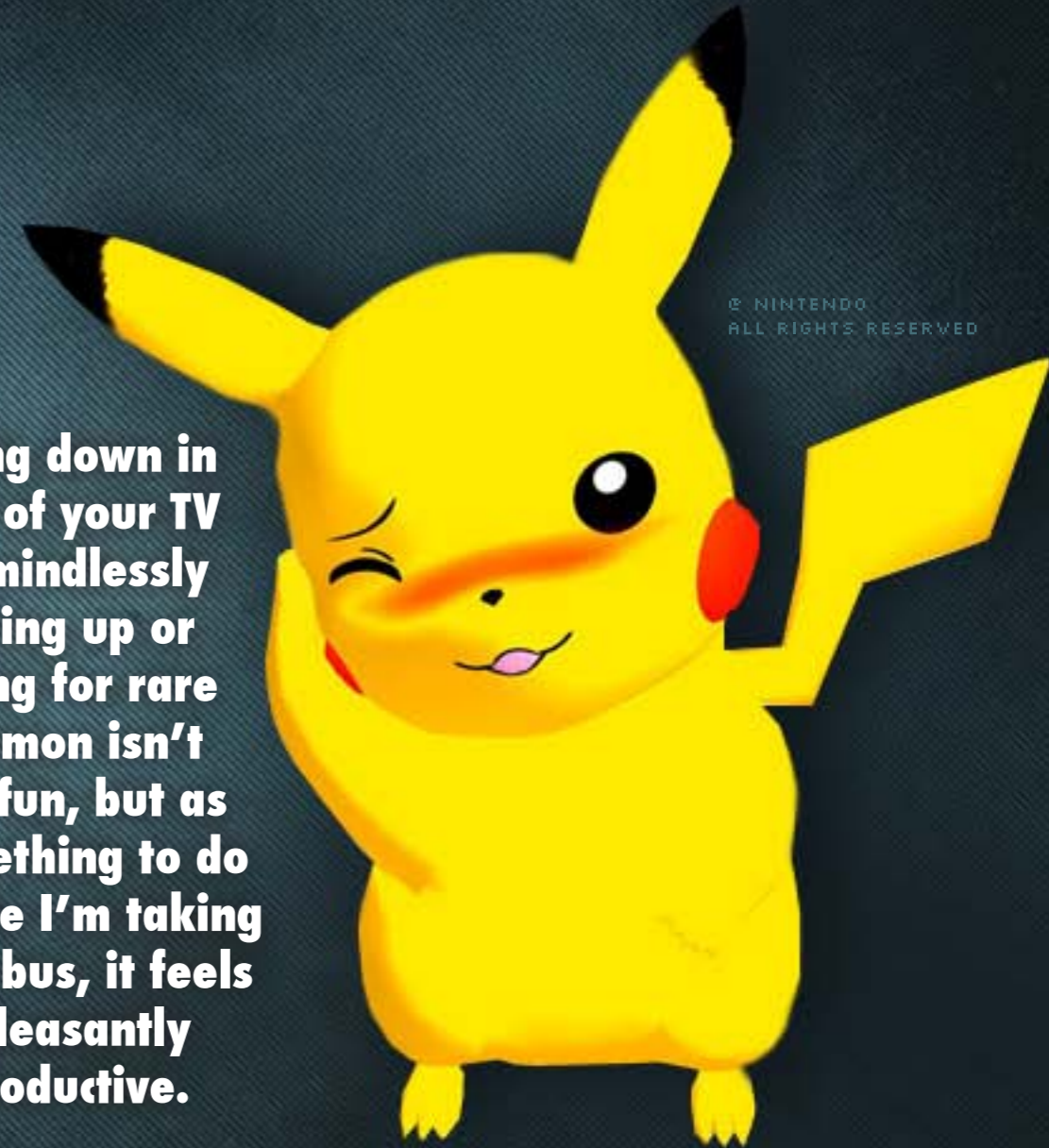
Getting used to the portable lifestyle puts some otherwise radical game design choices into a certain kind of context, too. *Wario Ware* and *Rhythm Tengoku* both share a mini-game structure that seemed much more alien and innovative until I tried playing it en route to school. They're already *so* disjointed that to take a break to switch trains or get off the bus doesn't disrupt my flow in the least. Likewise, the *Bit Generations* series keeps the graphics and gameplay so simple that they're ideal for picking up and playing, no previous time investment necessary. I don't even have to play it on the john.

Kind of humbling, isn't it? We can spend days sitting and reflecting on lofty theories of game design, attaching highfalutin academics to explain why we like what we like. But sometimes what we play is simply a function of where we are.

[COMMENTS](#)

Pat Miller has been doing this for way too long. Stop by his blog, Token Minorities, for more on race and videogames.

Sitting down in front of your TV and mindlessly leveling up or hunting for rare Pokémon isn't that fun, but as something to do while I'm taking the bus, it feels pleasantly productive.



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