the escapist

EDITOR'S NOTE
by Julianne Greer

Before starting this letter, I sat down to find the actual definition of "journalism." We all have a hand-wavey idea of what it means – likely very close to at least one of the definitions listed in any reference tool. I looked in many different sources, you know, to try to get some sort of consensus.

I will give only one set of definitions here, to save room, but be assured the other ones were quite similar – in content and indecisiveness. I have chosen Merriam Webster, partly because it's one of the most trusted sources for all your dictionary needs, but also, it's the most concise. I guess it's that origination in print.

jour·nal·ism
Pronunciation: `'j&r-n&-"li-z&m`
Function: *noun*
1 a : the collection and editing of news for presentation through the media **b :** the public press **c :** an academic study concerned with the collection and editing of news or the management of a news medium

2 a : writing designed for publication in a newspaper or magazine **b :** writing characterized by a direct presentation of facts or description of events without an attempt at interpretation **c :** writing designed to appeal to current popular taste or public interest

The first set smacks of Circular Definitions. I may have just made up this term, but what I mean is a definition in which the definition leads to another word, whose definition leads right back to the first word. Not overly helpful.

The second set of definitions is where this gets a little more interesting, particularly B and C. Definition B suggests a simple, straight reporting of stuff that's happened or going to happen. In definition B, one should not express a viewpoint. All sources reported this definition as applicable to "journalism."

Definition C suggests tailoring one's writing to appeal to a specific set of people. All sources also listed this, or something very like it, among their definitions. But is not the tailoring of writing to appeal, whether by subject covered, viewpoint covered, or details covered, a form of interpretation?

Designing writing to appeal to taste aside, don't all newspapers and magazines have some manner of editorial injection of interpretation by placement of articles on the cover or on a certain page within, by allocating word counts per story, etc.? Try as we may to report just the facts, we interpret of a necessity, as there's limited room for input, both in publications and in our readers' brains.

So, where does that leave me and my research on journalism? Well, I have discovered that journalism is a nebulous, nuanced beast which cannot be defined without exceptions, contradictions and much argument. But, in some attempt to discuss journalism further, as it pertains to our beloved Game Industry, we present this week's issue of *The Escapist*, The Rest of the Story. Enjoy!

Cheers,

Julianne Greer

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor: I don't play a whole lot of MMOGs, but I do know your writer, Whitney Butts ("OMG! Girlz Don't Exist on The Intarweb!!!!1"), is wrong and although her article was great, she has a little bit to learn herself. See, just as boys don't always understand the nature of girls, most girls are not exactly experts when it comes to boys (as is alluded to, by Miss Butts).

However, she doesn't understand why the boy is looking at his shoes, when talking to her. It really bothers her. She actually thinks it has something to do with *Warcraft*, and something about the guy not wanting to believe in women on the internet etc. - which is absurd.

I think this is where she gets confused, and doesn't understand social dynamics of boys-girls. The boy is nervous, when talking to women - it's normal. The only thing Warcraft/internet may have had to do with this is the fact that he's a nerd and so is extra nervous when talking to women (because he doesn't talk to many ordinarily).

-raj

In response to "Pattern Recoginition" from The Escapist Forum: I might be going a little too doomsday with this statement.

I think that the process is speeding up. I think that the increase in the rate of new technology is going to create new media platforms rapidly and the groups of people who make up a "generation" will become smaller and smaller. I will have trouble understanding the people born at the other end of my decade, much less the next one. I think eventually it will hit a limit where everything breaks down at once and people are forced to rethink things as a whole.

- TomBeraha

In response to "Canadian Content" from The Escapist Forum: Well, I live in the Montreal suburbs and I am quite aware that Ubi Montreal created *Splinter Cell*, *Prince of Persia* and *Assassin's Creed*. Actually, I am quite proud of it too and I tell everyone I know any chance I get, like when a TV ad is playing.

I may not know where every single game I play is made, but when it does come to my attention that a development studio close to my home is making games I really enjoy, it doesn't matter if the company is Canadian or not. It still makes me proud because I know lots of its employees are fellow French-Canadians and that fact alone makes the government help worth it.

- lpellerin

In response to "The Double-X Factor" from The Escapist Forum: Thanks again Erin, for describing much of my struggle in this industry. I just recently started in computer games, but I've been in the hobby game industry for the last 5 years. It is really just as cut-throat as computer games, and has a far longer history.

I guess if I were able to talk to young teen girls who might have any interest in this industry I would tell them that together we can change things.

- julzerator

In response to "Atari Founder Slams Former Company, PS3" from The Escapist News Room: There's something else that I think needs saying here: It is perfectly possible to respect someone's opinion and be very interested in what they have to say and still disagree with them.

That's how I feel about Nolan Bushnell's commentary in this case. It's interesting to me that he thinks this, but I completely disagree with him about the nature of the PS1 and PS2 successes. I'm not yet certain the PS3 will trump all in quite the same way but the idea that Sony has somehow lost the new gen battle already is an extreme viewpoint in support of which he makes a very weak case.

- Dom Camus

game journalists on game Journalism

by Michael Zenke

"Game journalism" has been a murky term ever since it became a buzzword a couple years ago. While some critics debate whether or not the people who report on games are journalists at all, a number of individuals have been working to improve the space in which they work. I had the pleasure of speaking to 10 such people, to ask them what they felt about issues ranging from the definition of game journalism to the dense corruption that permeates the videogame industry.

Here, then, are the words of Brandon Sheffield, Brian Crecente, Chris Grant, Chris Kohler, Chris Morris, David Thomas, Frank Cifaldi, Greg Kasavin, Luke Smith and Simon Carless.

The Escapist: Briefly, what do you think it means to be a game journalist?

Chris Kohler: It means you somehow managed to scam one of the best jobs ever.

Frank Cifaldi: I think the more important question here is what it means to be a **journalist**; the "game" part is secondary, it's merely a specialized form. Ideally, a journalist is someone who is able to acquire facts, compile them and then present them to the reader in a clear, definitive, objective way. The role of a journalist is to relay information; the role of a **good** journalist is to make this information interesting without showing personal bias (or, in many cases, hiding it really damned well).

David Thomas: I used to care a lot about that question. But I realize, now that you're asking it, it's sort of an easy one. ... Journalism, in general, has turned into this fresh-faced hucksterism where "journalists" pretend to be interested in getting the story when they really care more about winning some prize or looking good on their interview

on *Nightline*. The whole planet has gone mad when we think of people like Rush Limbaugh and Ann Coulter as journalists. Even Thomas Friedman, as smart as he is, is just a wag. ... The trouble with game journalism is that most often we are neither comforters nor afflicters. We just create a marketing echo chamber that amplifies whatever the industry happens to want us to say.

TE: Many game journalists believe there are substantial problems with the way game news is reported. What's the biggest problem in game journalism today?

Simon Carless: I'm tremendously fed up with 'game journalism' being in some way tarred with a brush that implies it's sick, unwell, or in some way broken. Lots of people write about games - in the same way that lots of people write about music, or film, or other creative endeavors. And if you look at the game media compared to much of the extremely popular celebrity press right now (*US Weekly, Star*?), it's a model of fairness and restraint. Sure, there are issues. But it's the excessive and twisted introspection that is doing us harm. Let's

just write good copy, instead of picking at why we aren't.

Luke Smith: The biggest problem isn't necessarily the **way** information is reported, per se. Oftentimes "reports" are simply regurgitations of information that we're sent, instead of information we pursued. The problem, as I see it, is

often how "news" editors are treated by PR -- more often than not it seems like we're looked at as just another part of a PR plan - i.e., they send us information and we post it. It can be a very one-sided relationship. Even worse, gamers get used to that as the "norm," so "game journalism" is reduced to the aforementioned regurgitation. I think

that's why we've seen the rise of blogs like *Kotaku* and *Joystiq* who report on the reports and infuse personality into their reports -- I think, in some cases, gamers want that, and it can sort of alleviate some of the problems of PR-regurgitation.

Brian Crecente: I think there needs to be refocused attention placed on having a journalism background. That doesn't mean that the writers need to be trained journalists, but someone involved in the process of writing, editing and printing a particular story should be.

Brandon Sheffield: I think the fact that we're not teaching the skeptical audience about our industry is the biggest failing. My mother recently said to me, "You don't associate with those games about raping people, do you?" I remarked that there were no such games for general consumption, and she said, "You know, the one where the object is to rape a Native American?" Turns out, some news source told my mother about the existence of *Custer's Revenge*, which was released for the Atari 2600 in extremely limited quantities, before quality controls even existed. My mother doesn't know what an Atari 2600 is, but she's heard of the "Indian raping game."

That tells me we're letting the pundits do the reporting for us.

TE: Many journalists, regardless of their field, feel the pressure of conflicts of interest. How hard do you work to avoid developer/publisher/PR interests from conflicting with those of your news organ?

Brandon Sheffield: Pretty hard. In the interest of maintaining that, I won't go into details, but we do our best to make sure that nothing we get from developers is overly filtered. One example I can give is that when doing interviews with Japanese speakers, I'll go back after the fact and retranslate a close approximation of the speaker's own words. PR or translators can often cut out choice bits of information in the interest of shifting a discussion in a certain direction.

Chris Morris: Personally, I work pretty hard at it. (And I have CNN's Standards and Practices team backstopping me and I certainly don't want to incur their wrath.) I don't let any gaming outlet (developer, publisher, trade organization, etc.) pay for my travel or room. When my company declines to pay the way - and I feel it's important - I pay out of

pocket. I don't accept fees for speaking at industry events. It's pretty basic stuff.

Simon Carless: As I was discussing on *GameSetWatch* recently, we do, on occasion, accept the odd cupcake and can of Red Bull from people like Sony when attending its Gamer's Day, but I'm confident that we are adult enough to present a fair depiction of the PlayStation 3, despite the caffeine boost.

David Thomas: I try so hard on this subject that I can measure my success each year by the number of PR people who wont return my calls. ... We are all tainted. We have all sold out. We all will (or did) write about the PS3 launch as if it were news. ... It seems to me that conflict of interest is built into the job. And as long as we have to play nice to get review hardware or games, we'll be as big a sellout as those movie reviewers who always seem to have thumbs-up quotes on the ads for movies we would not [pay] money to go see. A snarky blog post here or there isn't enough to balance out all the free s---. We can pretend that we are not in the pocket of the big companies. But we cover an industry rather than an art form.

TE: Blogs are increasingly becoming the news outlet of choice for hardcore gamers. How do you think this shift is affecting more traditional online news outlets and print magazines?

Brian Crecente: In general, I think blogging scares print publications. But I do think that the gaming press is more able to quickly respond to that threat by changing their writing and reporting style, something I believe we've already started to see.

Chris Grant: I think there are two sides to this relationship. First, I think it's undeniable that the growth of blogs has come at the expense of some of the larger portal sites and magazines. Readers have become dissatisfied with their content and presentation and find blogs a more palatable, savvy and syndicated alternative. Of course, this isn't relegated to the gaming industry; it's a phenomena happening all over the web. On the other hand, there's a symbiotic nature. Often, we'll rely on the larger sites and magazines to score their exclusives or use their considerable clout to get responses from major players, which we'll link and add to the growing

conversation in the blog space. Similarly, we find they read our site daily, and the stories we turn up often reappear as features on the portal sites or the magazines weeks, if not months, later.

David Thomas: Shift? Hey, the war's over. Like those crazy Japanese soldiers they found on isolated Pacific Islands years after WWII, just waiting, still defending their position, print hangs in there as if there was still a victory on the horizon. Bulls---. I'm more or less a print guy, but I can smell death all around me. And as far as game journalism goes, the only reason I still have a job is that most people don't read the game sites.

Greg Kasavin: I think blogs have emerged as a threat to the online status quo, and I like them if only for that reason. This year, *GameSpot* started

live-blogging from key events, like the E3 press conferences, and we surely wouldn't have done this were it not for competitive forces that inspired us to come up with a way to report faster when time was of the essence. In turn, these forces allowed us to create something better for our audience. As for the print media, I think this makes it all the more necessary for print to focus

on what it can offer that online can't. Online, I can get news the instant that it happens and I can get video of the games I care about. As a result, I rarely read gaming publications anymore, and when I do I'm more interested in the nicely presented, well-researched, well-written, in-depth feature articles than in old news or short, premature reviews.

TE: Robert Summa's dismissal from *Joystiq* resulted from him hyping an upcoming update that turned out to be a banal press release. Did the punishment fit the crime? What is your take on hype and sensationalism as tools for game journalism?

Chris Kohler: I'll answer this tomorrow, when I reveal some exclusive news you won't believe about the Wii.

Greg Kasavin: I think as audiences grow older and in some cases more mature, they begin to see hype more transparently for what it is. And in many cases, they still might be OK with it, like someone who enjoys reading tabloids for what they are. Games are an entertainment business, and people like getting excited and worked up about games they care about. In turn, I think

the gaming media can and should express natural excitement when it arises. And I also think bait-and-switch, "boy who cried wolf"-style tactics of hyping stuff followed by it under-delivering on the promises results in natural consequences. I think people interested in games will always prefer a trustworthy, dependable source of information to one that builds a track record of letting them down.

Chris Morris: Hype and sensationalism are regrettable, but they've been a part of media for longer than gaming has been around. They'll continue to be a part of any media for a long, long time. Certainly some organizations go to the extreme in an attempt to win eyeballs - and it hurts us all. But let's be honest, every media outlet has been guilty of some type of sensationalism before.

Luke Smith: How many times have you gone to a major game site because they've told you to check back at such-and-such-a-time for "something awesome"? If you've gone more than once, that's too much. Hype gets so out of control, gamers are living in the age of the megaton and whatever desperate hope they have that *Final Fantasy XIII* is coming

to Xbox 360 is only fueled when websites pull shenanigans like that - it's almost **never** as big of a deal as people want it to be. We have to be responsible for our actions and held accountable when we manipulate the expectations of gamers.

TE: Many gamers seem increasingly jaded toward previews. Some have leveled charges that preview writers for many sites and magazines tend to hold back their true impressions of a game. Should preview writers hold back, or expose readers to every harsh opinion a preview build elicits?

Greg Kasavin: I think preview writers should be responsible about giving works-in-progress the benefit of the doubt. Any game that isn't finished has the opportunity to get better. This doesn't mean a previewer shouldn't cite perceived issues in a preview build, but he or she probably shouldn't pass final

judgment on that preview build, either. I think transparency and context is key to a good preview. If I was really excited by something I saw or played at E3, I'd be more than happy to express that as best I can, but I'd also remember to qualify the remarks by saying that all I saw was, say, a 15-minute non-playable demo and who-only-knows when the final game will come out. If there's

jadedness toward preview stories, I think it's more due to the limited amount of access previewers get when creating those previews, or due to there being one too many previews of a given product from a single outlet.

Frank Cifaldi: This is actually a major annoyance for me and always has been. Back in the Dark Ages when I actually had to preview games, a certain unnamed magazine encouraged me to up my would-be preview score by at least 15 percent, because it was their policy and always had been.

Chris Grant: The real ill is when publishers gain permission from outlets to use rose-colored quotes to promote their products to retailers, earning them proportional shelf space before the title is even released. There is no meritocracy in gaming, and one need only look at the relative failures of games like *Psychonauts* versus junk like *Splinter Cell Essentials*.

TE: Overall, do you think game journalists are doing a good job?

Chris Grant: Like anything, I think some are and some aren't. Speaking broadly though, overall, I'd say there is a great deal we could improve, including engaging non-gamers outside of the enthusiast press.

David Thomas: No. No I do not. I think we are doing an OK job. I think we are doing a remarkably better job than we were doing even five years ago. But now that we are off the short bus, that does not mean we're heading for graduate school. We have a lot of work ahead of us.

Chris Morris: I'd say it's a mixed bag. Truth be told, there isn't a good definition of who is and who isn't a game journalist at this point. I mean, do you include people who simply regurgitate press releases and link to (or worse, rewrite) other people's stories? I wouldn't. Do you include fansites? Do you include bloggers who don't verify information? ... Until we know who qualifies as a game journalist and who qualifies as an enthusiast with a reader base, it's pretty hard to say if those people are doing a good job or not.

Simon Carless: Absolutely.

Greg Kasavin: I can say with confidence that I don't know. I know there are many game journalists who work very hard. The tireless work ethic is something I've always admired about the game industry in general, especially since the reality of it is so different than the lazy slacker stereotype that's still associated with game players. I suppose our collective audience can be seen as our stock value. If our audiences keep growing, we're doing all right. And if our audiences keep growing faster than the industry is growing overall, then we're doing better than all right.

Many thanks to the respondents for their time. [COMMENTS]

Michael "Zonk" Zenke is Editor of Slashdot Games, a subsite of the technology community Slashdot.org. He comments regularly on massive games at the sites MMOG Nation and GameSetWatch. He lives in Madison, WI (the best city in the world) with his wife Katharine. Michael is not a game journalist.

FANATICAL OPINIONS:

Game Writing's Troubled Adolescence

by Russ Pitts

"When I look back on it, it was obvious that I was gonna end up doing this because my two big obsessions were always music and writing. It's an outgrowth of being a fanatical record collector and a fanatical listener. You have fanatical opinions that you want to inflict on people."
- Lester Bangs, Rock Critic

In April of 1982, Lester Bangs, legendary rock critic, gave his final interview to 17-year-old journalism student Jim DeRogatis.

"I told the Gang of Four," Bangs recounted to DeRogatis, describing his encounter with the seminal, yet commercially unsuccessful, punk band, "I went to their dressing room when they were down in Los Angeles on their first tour, I said, 'Hi. I know you guys have been getting your asses kissed ever since you got to this country because you're English. I figured you'd appreciate one person coming up and telling you what a bucket of shit you are.'"

Such iconoclasm was the trademark of Bangs' career. Whereas some writers of the time would literally go out of their way to write glowing reviews, Bangs seemed to revel in doing the opposite, earning himself a reputation as something of a troublemaker, if an honest one.

His first review for *Rolling Stone* was a negative one, and his confrontational interview style eventually led to his dismissal from the magazine in 1973 for reportedly being "disrespectful to musicians." Bangs went on to write for nearly every print publication with a music beat and was frequently mentioned in the same breath as the likes of Hunter S. Thompson and Charles Bukowski; writers who Bangs himself cited as the inspirations for his work.

"The way I look at it," said Bangs, when asked about his comment that "almost all current music is worthless," "the only reason I have any credibility in the first place is because I'm willing to say things like that. And if anything does happen again, I'll have more credibility for the fact that I did say it."

Two weeks after the interview, after more than a decade of being the most influential rock critic on the planet, Bangs died in his New York apartment of an apparent drug overdose. His interviewer, Jim DeRogatis, would go on become one of rock's most influential (post-Bangs) writers, get fired from *Rolling Stone* himself and write a book about Bangs called *Let it Blurt*.

"There was a time in my life," Bangs told DeRogatis, "when you would have come up here and I would have got all drunk and everything like that and you might have preferred it that way and I would have been all exhibitionistic and like that, but if I act like that, I might live a

long time, but I won't live very long as a good writer.

Boys Will Be Boys
Jim DeRogatis: Do you think there's a danger of rock 'n' roll becoming extinct?
Lester Bangs: Yeah, sure. Definitely.
JD: What would there be to take its place?
LB: Video games.
- "A Final Chat with Lester Bangs"

According to The Entertainment Software Association, "Ninety-three percent of game players also report reading books or daily newspapers on a regular basis." This tells us that people who play games read. Not just that they **can** read, but that they **do** read. "**On a regular basis**."

In 2003, the U.S. Department of Education-sponsored National Assessment of Adult Literacy found that literacy in America (unsurprisingly) fell along a fairly predictable bell curve. Those with "below basic" literacy (the lowest score, "no more than the most **simple** and **concrete** literacy skills") constituted about 14 percent of the population, while those referred to as "proficient" (the highest score, "can perform complex and challenging literacy

activities") constituted 13 percent. Between the two extremes were two more categories: "basic" and "intermediate," which constituted 29 and 44 percent respectively.

What this shows us is that there is a small minority of people in the U.S. who can barely read, a similarly-sized minority who are extremely literate and a large swath of people who fall somewhere in between, capable of reading, but choosing not to do so enough to become proficient. It's fair to say that these people in the middle do not spend the majority of their time reading videogame news - or, to remain on statistically safer ground, that the people who do read extensive news and reviews of videogames are toward the top end of the NAAL's scale, most likely in the "proficient" category.

This, however, is not a Pulitzer Prize-winning revelation by any means. Once the province of the rare few who not only owned a computer, but also knew how to operate it, games have never been in danger of association with illiteracy. Games' association with adolescence is another story.

Were we to base our understanding of world events solely on television news and political speeches (which a large majority of Americans apparently do, according to the NAAL), we'd have a hard time believing that mature, responsible adults play videogames. Even the people doing the videogame marketing seem to be of the belief that their products are solely for the benefit of pimply-faced latchkey kids looking to get their next high-octane, adrenaline-fueled, boobie-infested entertainment high. Those who Microsoft's Peter Moore calls "Boys in Their Bedrooms."

The phrase brings to mind seedy activities: taking pictures of naked children, manufacturing counterfeit currency, viewing pornography and masturbating. This is no accidental collision of phraseology. To many people, "boys in bedrooms" can only mean one thing. Whether the joystick is made of plastic or flesh, it's still wankery. Moore uses the phrase to distance noble Microsoft from the still somewhat disreputable practice of playing videogames, and suggests to his shareholders that the goal for Microsoft, in its quest to make its

videogame division profitable, is to expand its reach beyond this core market and woo more moderate consumers. Yet, according to a recent study by NPD, so-called "heavy" gamers, almost half of which include the magic 18-34 demographic, only constitute about 3 percent of the total game-playing audience, which lends a lot of credence to the assumption that the game audience is maturing, and that games are playing a more viable role in society, not just as youthful diversions for wankers.

More fuel for that fire is the recent finding of an (admittedly biased) study conducted by casual game maker PopCap, suggesting that almost half of the 150 million casual game players are over 50. The ESA's data concludes that these over-50 casual gamers only make up about 25 percent of the total game-playing audience, but that almost half of the total game-playing audience is between 18 and 49 with an average age of 33. Again, the bell curve. The ESA's data agrees with NPD's, concluding that only about a third of all gamers are younger than 18; which, while substantial, is a far cry from being a majority of the audience.

So it's fair to say that regardless of what Mr. Moore may believe, the "boys in bedrooms" mystique may not be entirely accurate. The videogame audience has matured, and so has the industry. One would expect, therefore, the industry's attendant press to have kept pace. Unfortunately, the gaming press seems to be just as confused as Peter Moore.

The Lester Bangs of Gaming
"There's only a few writers who are any good and I'm not saying who they are. … [Most writers] don't have the passion for the music that somebody who gets into it because they really love music has. … I hate that kind of shit. That's what I hate anywhere, people who are just being trendies or opportunistic."
- Lester Bangs

It's possible that Dan Hsu started it. In January of 2006, Hsu, the Editor-in-Chief of *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, published an editorial slamming some of his colleagues for accepting advertising money in exchange for favorable editorial coverage.

"My industry pisses me off," he said, then - without naming names - described encounters with ad buyers who had demanded that various publications "play ball" or else lose access to pre-release games and exclusive interviews. "Those guys can kiss my ass," wrote Hsu. Meaning, one assumes, both the ad buyers and the editors who would deal with them.

One month later, in the very next issue of *EGM,* Hsu published an interview with Peter Moore, Corporate Vice President of Worldwide Retail Sales and Marketing for Microsoft's Home and Entertainment Division (aka: Head Xbox 360 Cheerleader), in which Hsu had apparently decided to pull out all the stops, all but calling Mr. Moore a liar and a thief directly to his face.

"The [Xbox360]'s awfully loud, isn't it?" Hsu asked, criticizing Microsoft's just-released console, an almost unheard of blasphemy in such an exclusive interview setting. Hsu also took Moore to task for the Xbox360's lackluster support for original Xbox games, the so-called "backwards compatibility," which

Regardless of what Mr. Moore may believe, the "boys in bedrooms" mystique may not be entirely accurate.

Microsoft had heavily advertised, yet (as Moore himself would later admit) had failed to deliver. Hsu asked Moore to pick his favorite game from among three pairs of games. Moore, predictably, picked the more popular of each pair.

Hsu then sprang the trap: "So here's what we're getting at: You picked three Xbox 1 games that aren't backwards compatible on the Xbox 360, and the
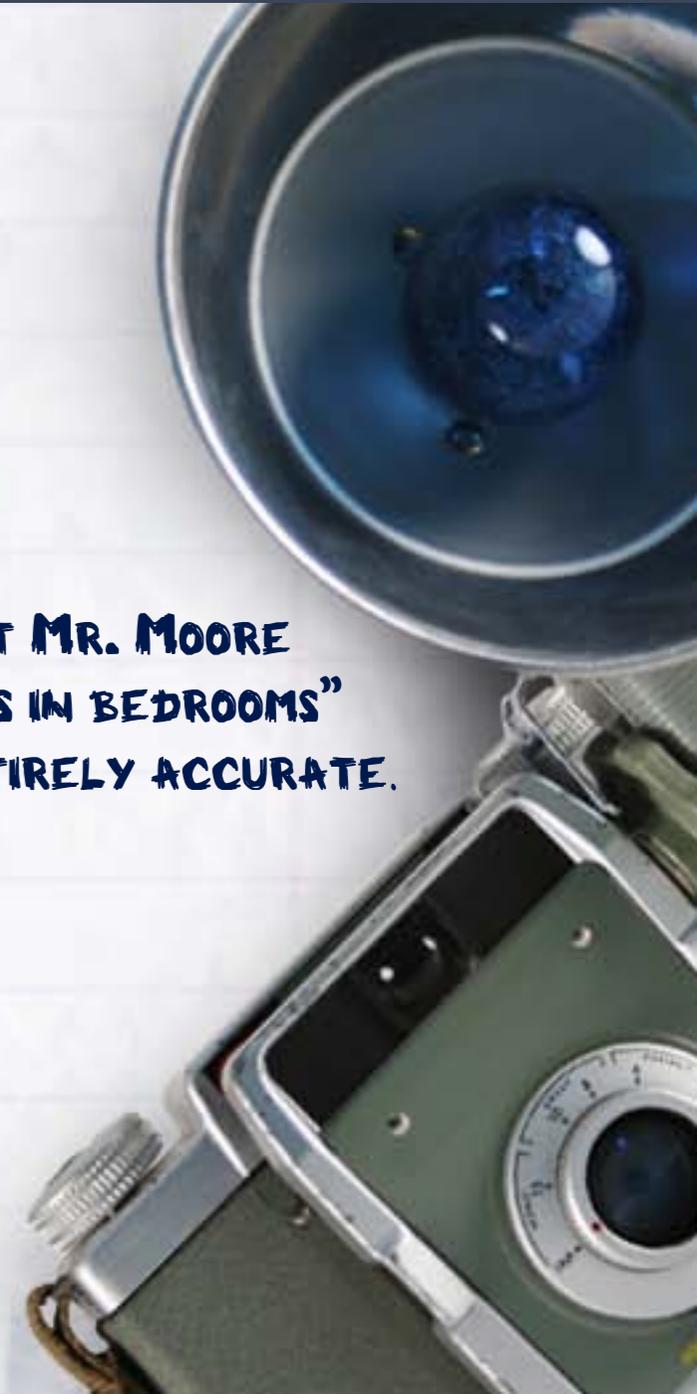
other ones — *Sneakers*, *Kabuki*, and *Barbie* — are. It's a weird list."

The interview was seen by some as a bold step forward for videogame journalism, by others as a step in the wrong direction and by still more as another day in the life. Nevertheless, regardless of which side of the fence readers (and writers) found themselves on, there was no mistaking Hsu's message: It was time for game writers to grow a pair. Like, one assumes, Lester Bangs.

"I wrote that ["kiss my ass" editorial]," Hsu later told *The Escapist*, "because I was angry because I knew … stuff was going on that was very blatantly bad - very obvious things that you should not do whether or not you have any proper journalism background. … [I thought] if I throw this out there it's probably going to do me more harm than good, but at least it might shake people up, some of my peers might be like, "He's right, we want to do a better job, we want to be more honest.' This way all of us as an industry can grow together to be a little bit more respected."

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THERE WAS NO MISTAKING HSU'S MESSAGE: IT WAS TIME FOR GAME WRITERS TO GROW A PAIR.

"As far as I can tell, there is no major critic who specializes in explaining what playing a given game **feels** like, nor is anyone analyzing what specific games **mean** in any context outside the game itself," wrote Chuck Klosterman, several months later in an article for *Esquire*. "There is no Pauline Kael of video-game writing. There is no Lester Bangs of video-game writing. And I'm starting to suspect there will never be."

Klosterman's treatise, titled "The Lester Bangs of Video Games" prompted what seems now to be an unrelenting stream of introspective game journalism "how-to" articles; in essence, a veritable roll call for Lester Bangs wannabes (this writer included), all of whom seem to be saying the same thing: Klosterman don't know jack.

"The point is, gaming culture is **on fire** right now, for God's sake!" wrote *Wired*'s Clive Thompson. "It's just not happening in print media or on TV; it's online, the natural environment for gaming criticism, because gamers are total internet freaks. Klosterman can't find a Lester Bangs because he's looking for a glossy-mag-anointed critic. There's no there there."

"Want to get into game journalism?" says Bill Kunkel. "Learn journalism."

Thompson suggested that there was actually not one Lester Bangs of videogaming, but several, perhaps hundreds, and that they were all active on the internet, out of the sight of the old guard and out of the mind of the mainstream.

"You see so many stories about how bad game journalism is," says Bill Kunkel, also known as "The Game Doctor," co-founder of *Electronic Games* in 1981, author of the book *Confessions of the Game Doctor* and now Editor-in-Chief of *Tips & Tricks* magazine. "There are more great game journalists now than there

were 10 years ago. They're just spread out over a broader terrain."

Since Klosterman's assault, the gaming press has been subjected to one bombardment after another, all from supposed experts claiming to know just what the industry needs and how to go about creating it. The latest, a step-by-step examination of how one should go about becoming a game writer, published by CMP Media's *Game Career Guide*, would seem to have struck such a sore nerve among game writers that nearly everyone who's ever played a game has felt the need to respond in some way or another, most offering their own opinion on the subject. Most of these responses, taken as advice from a stranger, are perfectly harmless but use too many words to say basically the same thing: Be lucky, be good.

"I don't want any credit for [this] at all," says Dan Hsu, referring to the recent wave of "how-to" editorials. "There's no way I would tell you that I'm the best videogame journalist around. … I'm sure when I'm 45 or 50 if I'm still in this business that I'll be a very different journalist and editor. I have a lot of things to learn yet."

"Want to get into game journalism?" says Bill Kunkel. "Learn journalism. If you're a journalist, you can cover anything. … [There are] so many places [on the internet] for [young game writers] to write and share their opinion. Magazines are in trouble because you can get virtually any kind of material online, instantaneously. I think [in the future] you're going to see a combination of print and online journalism."

Let It Blurt
Jim DeRogatis: If anybody can play rock 'n' roll, anybody can write about it?
Lester Bangs: Fuck yes!
- "A Final Chat with Lester Bangs"

Setting aside for the moment the inherent differences between videogames and rock songs, there's just no way the culture of videogames will ever produce the kind of journalism championed by Mr. Bangs.

Game developers don't go on tour, nor do they perform in front of an audience. They sit at computers and type - not a sexy cover shot. When a writer interviews a band, they are interviewing the people making the product - the musicians themselves. When a writer

interviews a game company, more often than not they're interviewing people like Peter Moore; the person hired to talk to writers. The rock writing analogue would be like reading a Lester Bangs interview with *The Who*'s tour manager, conducted in his Ohio apartment, on the subject of what Pete Townshend had for breakfast. If punk rock was an existential "F--- you" to the entertainment mainstream, videogames are more akin to the publication of a quarterly journal, complete with footnotes.

Those who attempt to breathe life into game writing, the so-called "New Game Journalists," can only describe what it's like to play a game, but even then the writer doing the playing (regardless of what drugs he's taking) is sitting in a chair, staring at a screen, not careening across the desert in a stolen Cadillac, hiding barbiturates from highway patrolmen. Picture Hunter Thompson playing a *Fear and Loathing* videogame and then writing about the experience. "We can't pause here, this is bat country!" It somehow fails to capture the imagination.

There will be no Pulitzers awarded for the best description of an afternoon playing *Second Life*, no schools of journalism named after the guy wearing a Zelda T-shirt under a corduroy blazer and no posthumous Medals of Freedom awarded to game journos killed in action serving as embedded correspondents at Ubisoft Montreal. Those of us who write about games are preaching to a singularly insular choir, all of whom already believe they know the sermon, verse-by-verse, and who check in merely to affirm that knowledge, then blog about it on their own site; rarely to learn something new.

In an entertainment medium, the media coverage is part of the entertainment, and we, the writers, are all actors on that stage. So should the Lester Bangs of videogaming ever make his entrance, what kind of writer will he be? Honestly, I don't care and neither should you. As Bangs himself might say, f--- Lester Bangs, I want the Party. And to hell with all of this sentimental, pedantic journalistic saber-rattling. As important as the quality of game journalism may be to the maturation of the industry, of far more importance should be the quality of the games themselves and the explanations of why **that** should matter to people who don't yet know.

I think it is time to come out of the bedroom, stop fiddling with our joysticks and get serious; but not about games, and not about game writing. We've spent far too much time wanking over that diorama. It's time now to get serious about communicating; our thoughts, our ideas and our love of the industry and why any of that should matter.

Maybe Klosterman was right. Maybe if we're still looking for our Lester Bangs, it's because we don't yet have a writer who can communicate those thoughts. Or if we do, and he's sitting around waiting for his muse, then the question he needs to be asking isn't "How do you become a serious journalist?" but rather "How do you become a serious industry?" COMMENTS

Russ Pitts is an Associate Editor for The Escapist. *He has written and produced for television, theatre and film, has been writing on the web since it was invented and claims to have played every console ever made.*

THERE WILL BE NO PULITZERS AWARDED FOR THE BEST DESCRIPTION OF AN AFTERNOON PLAYING *SECOND LIFE*.

Bankrupt
BRITISH FREELANCERS

by Sandy Morris

Being a fulltime freelance game writer - sorry, journalist - is like living a glamorous rock 'n' roll lifestyle. You get paid fabulous money simply for playing and writing about your favorite games before anyone else even sees them. You rub shoulders with your industry heroes and exotic booth babes at swanky conventions, while partaking in the endless free rivers of PR-provided software and booze. Plus, being freelance means you can get up late, hung over, and sit around in pajamas all day getting paid to enjoy your hobby.

These are lies.

At the very least they are gross exaggerations, perpetuated by God knows whom, especially when it comes to freelancers. Fulltime freelancing is gruelingly hard work, and it can only be born out of obsessive passion. Industry

veterans might choose to replace "passion" with other dissimilar words, though. You don't get into this work because you want decent pay or a successful career; you can only do it because there is fire in your guts which won't let you stop. The U.K.'s national average annual income is estimated somewhere at £20,600, while full time game magazine writers earn roughly half this amount. When you earn less than your secretary, you need passion to carry on. It is also a career fraught with terrifying risks.

What I want to tell you about is two publisher bankruptcies, a little whiskey and a lot of articles. Or should that be a lot of whiskey? I've left the names as is, since I'm telling you just the facts of what happened from my perspective. Not passing judgment on those involved. Everything contained within happened to

me as is, with no embellishment – apologies if there's no three act structure - this is real life, chaps. Specific times are taken from memory and forum archives, so they may not be accurate to the last second.

Like many game writers, I started by volunteering on hobbyist websites. These are (mostly) without the politics that money brings, and they also allow you to improve your writing skill painlessly. No deadlines, no guidelines; write what you like when you please. But this is dangerous, since it implies in the young, untrained writer's brain that the work is fun and that it might make for a good career. Some show such natural talent that they get spotted by magazine editors who browse the forums of such websites. I have no formal training in "actual writing" beyond the British A-level classes I took in Philosophy and Sociology. So, when, sometime mid-2004, an editor asked me to expand some of my website work for inclusion in his popular print magazine, I was only too eager. I was paid nothing for website work, but he was offering a few free games and my name in print. How could I refuse? Free games and the adulation of my not-so-fortunate peers, not to

mention my hallowed words immortalized for eternity by the printed press.

I expanded the article. They liked it and the readers loved it. So, I agreed to do another, on whatever subject I wanted, they said. After the second batch of games, and requests for a third article, I demanded monetary payment. They agreed, and so sent me an official freelancer contract. It was very strict, far stricter than the contracts at any other publisher, I would soon discover. They basically owned all submitted content, entirely and forever. Payment was £50 a page (roughly 500 words), which I am certain must seem like a fortune to every gamer alive, considering you're only writing about stuff you enjoy and know anyway, and especially if you've ever done any kind of low-pay manual-labor. It sure as hell beats buzz-sawing wood for a living!

The feeling was what I imagined joining the most exclusive club in town must have been like. I was officially a freelancer for Highbury House, the second biggest game-magazine publisher in the U.K. I left the website and

proceeded to write many articles to supplement my buzz-saw job.

In early 2005, one of the people from the original website, who would later become a close friend of mine, came to me and asked how to go about freelancing for Highbury House. I provided the details of the editor who headhunted me. In return he informed me of Live Publishing, a very small and very niche publisher for which he had recently started freelancing. They dealt with computers and videogames, covering specialized subjects. Freelancing had become addictive, and I wanted to expand. So I, too, began writing for Live Publishing, which also paid £50 a page. Except there was no contract, meaning once published, you could do as you pleased with work.

I was invited on February 24th to join a private freelancers forum. It was set up independently and management didn't have access. It was mainly a place to discuss ideas and events. Then, my first article was published, which included some very exclusive and highly desirable content. I received my first paycheck in mid-March. (As a freelancer, you usually

receive checks for your work **after** what you write has been published. By the time this happens, you may have already written and submitted further work, so signs of trouble arrive too late.)

During coming months, I tripled my freelancing efforts, producing an incredible amount of content very quickly. Seeing how much money all these different publishers owed me (at one point five separate publishers), I decided to go "career" with freelancing, believing I could live off it.

Big mistake.

To maintain momentum, you need to work like a Trojan, relentlessly pitching work to anything and everything that pays, then staying up until the small hours of the morning sweating the stuff onto paper. Eventually, you end up even writing technical guides for some nobody publisher in the Southern hemisphere, which no one has ever heard of, for £25 a page, just to keep things together. While freelancers normally earn more per page than their in-house cousins, you'll seldom get enough decent work to live off.

I decided to go "career" with freelancing, believing I could live off it. Big mistake.

After that first check from Live Publishing, I didn't receive any further payment. We assumed April's was simply a little late; the publisher had a reputation for this, so few were concerned. But even then, I had been forewarned, almost as if by fate. Looking through my archives, it shows that on April 20th I raised the alarm about Live Publishing's PS2 magazine mysteriously disappearing from their website and store shelves. But nobody paid any attention. I didn't want to face the truth, either, so work continued. It wasn't until June that our suspicions were truly ignited, but by then we were all owed vast sums of money. Without divulging the full amount, I was owed a very healthy four-figure sum – and that doesn't include pennies.

In June, our private forum had 18 members, and only 20 posts. Between months, the numbers were not accumulative. In July, there were 105 posts, while in August there were 380 posts. Throughout this time, all of us were phoning Live's offices, daily, to demand answers. There was a new excuse each day, urging us to continue working. Only on July 13th did I make a

stand: I was the first in the group who refused to write anything more. Afterward, we collectively drafted a letter to management, explaining that we were pulling copyright on all work, so it couldn't be printed, and that we would no longer be writing anything. We also demanded all the money we were rightfully owed. Management pleaded with us; assured us that things were fine, and that it was just a small delay. The checks would go out soon, they said.

After this, we were made aware that a computing magazine of Live's had folded, with six people losing their jobs. Around this time, the aforementioned management made a request for further subscriptions to be taken out. They were offering a very generous deal, and many readers eagerly started signing up. This concerned us, since the combination of not being paid, another publication closing and these pleas for subscriptions all meant that a company called Live would soon be very dead. There was a general feeling in the group to warn readers that their subscriptions would never be honored. On August 18th, we revealed the situation on the company's public forum; only in polite terms, and

only to warn readers against subscribing. Two minutes later, our words were censored, our accounts on that forum removed, and management accused us of being "unprofessional." Many continued to subscribe, unaware of what happened.

On August 22nd, the company went into administration and the staff was laid off. The administrators explained that freelancers were not "secured creditors" and as such would not see a penny of their owed money. This revelation encouraged some detective work. Government website Companies House provided us some much-needed answers. We discovered that many of Live Publishing's magazines were now owned by a publisher called Magnesium Media. It turned out that Magnesium had apparently been incorporated sometime during the August pre-administration period, and that it was owned, or at least part-owned, by the exact same gentleman who owned Live. We even acquired several key figures' dates of birth and housing addresses, along with the dates of when they were appointed. Magnesium was based in the same building, with the same directors and key

members of staff, and now owned many of the same assets that Live had previously.

No combination of words can ever describe or explain what each of us was feeling at that point. The brain's higher functions shut down, relying on some kind of primitive reptilian instinct. Waves of uncontrollable anger wash over you, and you can do nothing but go along with them. We had worked hard and had rightfully earned the money we were owed. From our perspective, it appeared that those in charge were simply washing their hands of the debt while keeping all the valuable company assets.

Worse still, the law backed up our presumptions by stating that it was perfectly legal. I want to emphasize this. The people behind this scheme were perfectly within their legal rights to do all of this. Morally, though, I leave judgment up to you.

The website administrators eventually sent us all a thick booklet detailing exactly how far in debt Live was. I won't reveal the whole figure, but let's just say that my four figure sum was a tiny percentage.

My problems didn't end there, though.

Roughly three months later, Highbury House also went bankrupt. I was only owed a few hundred pounds, but the situation beggared belief, and I can hardly find the words to eloquently describe it. There it was again. Waves of the most indescribable and uncontrollable anger, but now also mixed with a deep sorrow. Having seen how hopeless it was pursuing my money, I chose simply not to bother and didn't fill

in any of the administration forms. I instead poured myself a whiskey and got back to work.

There is no rest for a freelancer.

[COMMENTS]

Sandy Morris is a freelance contributor to The Escapist.

The website administrators eventually sent us all a thick booklet detailing exactly how far indebt Live was. Let's just say that my four figure sum was a tiny percentage.

HURRY UP AND BLOG ME

by Hitchhiker

On March 11, 2006, Kotaku published an article by Wagner James Au called "Blogging Down the House." In it, he claimed that the gaming press is the primary reason we're forced to wade hip deep through a pool of overhyped games with quotations like "This game might be the answer to your prayers!" scrawled under their titles, just to find something we like. Au says people buy bad games because previews don't actually tell us whether or not a game is worth playing.

The cure for this cancer, argues Au, is the humble blog. It's something that's transformed the media, politics and movie making, so why not use it to change the videogame media? Surely, if the everyman on the internet makes his displeasure about the state of game journalism known, professionals throughout the industry will wake up and realize they're failing their readers by not looking at games through a more critical lens. Right?

Wrong. Fast forward to October 2006: Kotaku's own initiative to lead the rebellion, "Preview Ho," is dead in the water. Ludicrous micropayment schemes have made the leap to mainstream titles. You can see an ad for Huggies in your favorite first-person shooter. Videogame blogs, both professional and amateur, are on fire about such issues, yet the print media makes almost no mention of such things, least of all in a negative light.

Blog culture, particularly in relation to videogames, is special in that it crystallizes the internet in an ideal form: Millions of people are able to communicate with one another, more or less free of regulation or cost. Developing an intricate network, blogs almost endlessly rely on each other for content. You could own the least-visited site ever, only to see your bandwidth explode when someone links to someone who links to you and, say, Joystiq sees it. A simple innocuous message can be seized upon and delivered to tens of thousands of readers in a single day.

Example: Electronic Arts released Battlefield 2142, but didn't think it'd be a good idea to publicly mention the "tracking software" included in the software. Instead, they slipped a short note into the box explaining that when you play BF 2142, software

within the game will scan your computer for your internet browsing habits in order to provide you with better-targeted in-game ads. A few years ago, players concerned by such a tactic wouldn't have had an outlet to alert the world en masse. But nowadays, sites like Digg and Shacknews mean the message can reach a massive audience within minutes of you getting home and being horrified. With photographic proof.

If anything, blogs already exert more influence over the buying habits of gamers than the printed press, particularly the professional ones such as Joystiq, Demonoid et al. In the U.K., Official PlayStation 2 sells around 100,000 copies per month, and *GamesMaster* sells around 50,000. *Kotaku* records around 85,000 visits per day, has a constant online archive of its content being picked up by search engines and has the ability to revise its position on anything at a moment's notice.

Given enough time, it's entirely possible for me to build a connection with any author. I can compare his opinions with mine, hear his views on issues I care about and discover if we have the same favorite games. With blogs, this intangible rapport can be built in weeks, or even days. With printed media, it takes months for this to happen, if it happens at all. Add in the fact that readers' comments appear alongside official views, and it's clear that the printed press simply cannot compete.

The lack of "commercially aware" control mechanisms, a pure focus on gamer culture and an acute awareness of what matters now mean these unique voices among the media can instantly spread whatever word they want. It's enough to make you wonder if we even need print magazines to change. Maybe blogs are the future of all media.

They keep us abreast of upcoming games and the teams that are developing them, the latest industry rumors, conversations with Important People, rediscoveries from the past, web-based memes, and the general reaction to the latest releases; all on a minute-to-minute bases. With such unique abilities, should the focus really be on destroying the corrupt power of another institution? Why not learn from the old medium to refine the new?

> "if the everyman on the internet makes his DISPLEASURE about the state of game journalism known, professionals throughout the industry will WAKE UP and realize they're failing their readers by not looking at games through a more critical lens. Right? WRONG."

> **"RANTING** on a videogame **BLOG** is like standing up in a church service and **telling** people how **GREAT** **God is** and what a *tricky* fellow **LUCIFER** can be."

Print media has done a few things right, especially when it comes to exposure. By their very nature, blogs appeal to the non-casual, "hardcore" gamer. A close friend of mine became hopelessly addicted to both World of Warcraft and Planetside, achieving high levels of success in both. He also buys every soccer management game available. He even bought an HDTV just to play his Xbox 360 on it. But just last week, I mentioned 1UP to him, specifically talking about the numerous blogs on the site. He'd never heard of it, nor had he heard of Kotaku, Joystiq or any of the other publications I've discussed here.

Put simply, ranting on a videogame blog is like standing up in a church service and telling people how great God is and what a tricky fellow Lucifer can be. You're preaching to the converted, the faithful few. Your real effort needs to be spent on drawing new listeners to your sermons, which means your message needs to be refined and easy to follow. This is already beginning to happen, but not because the blogs are trying. Instead, it comes from a general fascination with all things "web."

All facets of the entertainment industry are completely turned on to the internet, the powerful word of mouth it generates and its potential to influence a product's success. That is, all facets except the videogame industry, it seems. Online rants that cross forums, websites, blogs and even consumer action groups are typically ignored by publishers and their marketing departments.

This should tell blog operators something. Whatever they're doing, they ain't doing it right. Going back to Au's comments, attacking what you perceive to be a problem is easy. What's hard is building something so good that everyone else has to follow your example simply to stay in the game. Blogs have that potential, but they're not there yet. Traditional printed press outlets have started blogging to make sure they're there when that potential is realized.

As game blogs have become more popular, they've fallen back into the old habits of journalism. What was once a medium that subverted pandering to the industry, large blogs have begun reporting press releases, interviewing developers and relaxing their critical eye,

all in an effort to be the first to publish news. This came to a head when Joystiq and Kotaku blogged about an upcoming blog post, which was supposed to contain big news about Nintendo's Wii. Teasers like that are the business of second-rate local news broadcasts: "What does Nintendo have in store for he Wii? Find out ... at 11:00!" And usually, whatever gets reported is less interesting than the actual teaser.

In the case of Joystiq and Kotaku's self-promotion, it was no different. The "big news" was that IBM shipped some CPUs. This was a prime example of two leading blogs fighting for readership to satisfy advertisers. In order to "win," they reverted to the old sensationalism of journalists before them. However, publicly visible comments from their readers caused both Joystiq and Kotaku to acknowledge their mistake quickly.

Amateur blogs tend to avoid this specific pitfall, as they have fewer worries about advertisers and funding. They're about fun, about telling you about cool things you perhaps weren't aware of, about exploring the things we're all interested in as gamers.

Videogame blogs have the power to become the defining voice of a generation. They can communicate the gamers' passions, likes and dislikes to publishers and developers like never before. But in order to keep the industry's ear, blogs will have to exhibit all the good habits of traditional journalism while shedding the bad. Blogs may someday become the new standard of responsible, candid reporting, as long as they use their power for good, not evil.   **COMMENTS**

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

Videogame blogs have the power to become the defining *voice* of a GENERATION.

So you want to make a
fansite
by Kyle Orland

Everyone is the world's foremost expert on something. This one fact is the cornerstone of much of the internet. How else do you explain elaborate web pages devoted to everything from shoelace tying to Slurpees? If you're reading this, though, chances are your expertise falls in the realm of some sort of obscure videogame that only earns you derision when you bring it up in polite company. Not to worry; the internet is there to indulge your obsession and let you actively share it with the world.

Unfortunately for you, the key to making a successful fansite seems to be starting in the mid to late '90s. It worked for my own fansite, Super Mario Bros. HQ, which started on a free, AOL-hosted member site in August 1997 and still lingers on today at smbhq.com (albeit with much less direct input from me - more on that later). In those early, untamed days before Wikipedia and Everything2, bored web users were just as eager for random information. While there were fewer web users, there was also less competition from other sites, meaning any fansite that started during the '90s had a much better Darwinian chance of surviving into the brave new

world of today's internet. Getting an early start also gives a site an air of authority ("est. 1997") and a backlog full of updates to discourage any pretenders to the fansite throne.

Which brings up a major challenge of starting a good fansite today: finding a game that isn't taken. Just skimming the partial list of fansites hosted by Classicgaming.com is enough to give pause to any potential creator. Everything from *Ninja Gaiden* to the obscure Windows game *Kye* is already well represented online. And new sites are popping up constantly: The NES' Ice Hockey seems to have just been taken. More popular series can already have dozens of sites devoted to them, which is no doubt discouraging for an expert such as yourself looking to share your unique and vital information. Will you take the weak-kneed approach and volunteer to work for an established site? Or will you be bold and wade into the internet waters of fandom on your own?

Competition among game sites can cause a destructive feedback loop, leading to a bunch of pages with the same information and resources linking

back to each other in a big circle of "thanks to XXX for letting me use the contents of this page." But competition can also be good for a site, forcing the creator to think outside the box for new content ideas. When I was starting work on SMBHQ, my major competitor was The Mushroom Kingdom, a site that actually started months before mine and had much better design and information. In an effort to avoid wasting time and web space, I tried to make everything on SMBHQ unique in some way – either by creating completely original sections or adding my own original writing to any totally repetitive sections. Knowing that TMK was around forced me to add my own spice to my content instead of just becoming an aggregator for information easily found elsewhere, a lesson that can apply to any game journalist.

That doesn't mean everything on your site has to be original. One of the cornerstones of the fansite is the list – the comprehensive, anal-retentive chronicling of every little thing in a game or series. Some lists, like the items in *StarTropics*, are relatively easy to compile. Others, like the list of "virtually

every character, item and enemy from the Mario universe," are a bit more complicated. But a fansite just isn't a fansite without them. Visitors love reliving memories through compilation, poring over the details they forgot they remembered or just skimming to see what they've missed. Don't make the mistake of compiling a totally comprehensive list before launch, though. Starting with a small core and creating a feature like the "item of the week" is a good way to spread out what might seem like an overwhelming task as well as a way to get people to keep coming back to your site.

Which brings up another challenge of the fansite creator: posting regular updates. Unless you simply want your page to sit around as a static online reference, you need something new to put up week after week to keep people coming back. This can be tough if your game doesn't have much back story or ephemera associated with it, but there's always something more for the creative fansite creator to do. Write an editorial about some obscure element of the gameplay. Create a trivia quiz for other obsessed fans. Make up original stories starring your game's characters. Regular updates

are what separate the determined fansite creator from the bored weekend tinkerer

Keep up the regular updates long enough and you'll likely attract the attention of a small-to-middling chunk of internet traffic. You may also attract the attention of the company that created your game, which may lead you to wonder whether they will appreciate all the potentially copyrighted information and images used on your pages. Not to worry, though, most companies turn a blind eye on these matters when it comes to sites that are actively promoting their products. Some even encourage these sites to flourish, creating elaborate fansite kits to get you started (though by now you must realize a true fansite comes not from a kit, but from the heart!).

Attracting fans also means attracting sometimes obsessive attention from them, which is something you'll have to get used to as the webmaster of a thriving fansite. Some fans will e-mail you thinking you're the creator of the game, begging you for a sequel or an update to their favorite franchise. Others will ask you nonsensical questions about a character's back story ("Who is Mario's favorite Spice Girl?"), and they'll expect
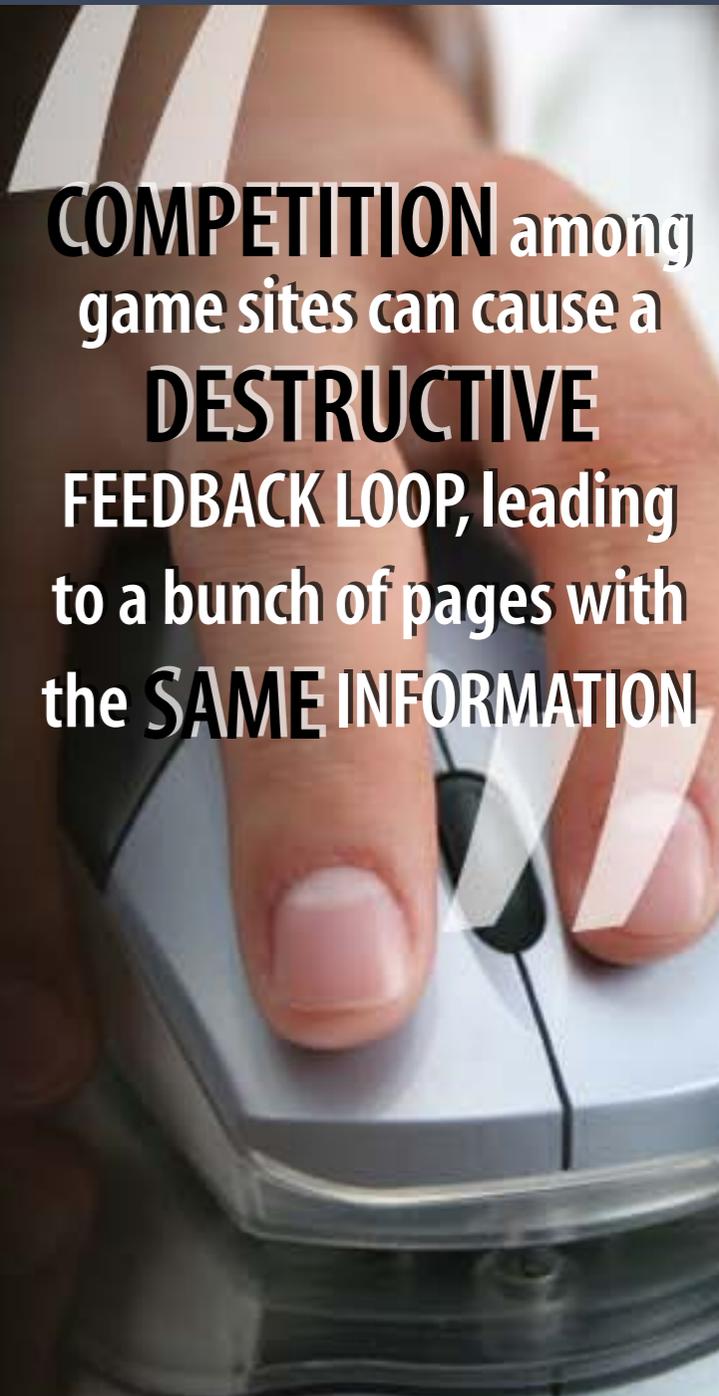
COMPETITION among game sites can cause a **DESTRUCTIVE** FEEDBACK LOOP, leading to a bunch of pages with the **SAME** INFORMATION

you to have an answer! By maintaining a site, you become a resource for the community at large - a locater of both in-game secrets and real-world Halloween costumes.

While fellow fans can be annoying, they can also be your site's greatest resource. As the amount of reference information to post starts to dwindle and your zest for covering one game or series exclusively inevitably begins to fade, your fans can be your lifeline, providing content so you don't have to. If your site is well established and popular enough, you won't even have to work at it – the fans will come crawling out of the woodwork asking if there's any way they can help with the site. You can actively encourage this community by creating whole fan-created sections devoted to art, fiction, even things like gameplay memories and cosplay. The really devoted fans might be motivated enough to spin off a whole subsection of the site, leaving you with more content and more time to actually play the games you enjoy instead of writing about them.

And this massive fan involvement often leads directly to the last leg of a fansite's existence – the time where the original creator realizes he's devoted years of his life to his obsession and decides to move on. Sometimes, this will happen quickly with a curt message on the front page announcing the site's death to the world. Sometimes, the torch will be passed to a new generation of fans who will continue the spate of updates. Sometimes, it doesn't happen at all, and the site's original creator maintains his public service fandom for years. Whichever fate befalls your site, though, you'll be able to look back and know that you've made your mark on the ephemera of the internet and that, because of you, someone can now google "Mario Trivia" and find something to occupy their time.

`COMMENTS`

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

> **By maintaining a site, you become a RESOURCE for the COMMUNITY at large - a locater of both in-GAME SECRETS and real-world Halloween costumes.**

the Escapist

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