

# the Escapist

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

by Julianne Greer

Capcom, a name derived from capsule and computer, started like so many of the long-lived game developers, creating arcade games. Since, they've gone on to produce some of the bestselling game franchises (*Street Fighter*), most beloved game characters (Mega Man) and most critically acclaimed games (*Okami*). Not bad.

When we were brainstorming companies to profile for our editorial calendar several months ago, Capcom seemed a natural fit. And so we bring you this week's issue of *The Escapist*, "Still Street Fighting After All These Years." Russ Pitts discusses the recent trend of zombie games and how these belie our fears as a society. Shannon Drake profiles Clover Studios, the developer behind *Okami*. Allen Varney explores the spirit and history of the bestselling *Street Fighter* franchise. Lara Crigger returns to discuss the sexy feminism of *Resident Evil*. And Spanner relives the arcade beginnings of the game giant. Enjoy!

Cheers,



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### In response to "Mid-Level Exceptions" from The Escapist

**Forum:** Loved the article; it captured exactly what's a big part of what makes Civilization and some soccer management simulation game I used to have back in '99 so replayable: Seeing how things unfold from the early game to the mid-game, and then how the rest of the game is channeled by the way things unfolded. Other games this reminded me of are Master of Orion (every game the ships were different), the Railroad Tycoon series (every game the rail net/industry distribution is different), and the Europa Universalis series (every game each county winds up with different provinces by the end/the composition of the armies is different).

In fact, to take it back to board games, reminded me of what I loved about the old Avalon Hill monster games like Empires In Arms and Siege of Jerusalem. Also brings to mind an old GDW title, Bloodtree Rebellion. Really wish those would just be ported over to the

computer by Hasbro for Avalon Hill, and whoever owns the rights to the other developers' titles.

### - Cheeze\_Pavilion

**In response to "Knowing Your Enemy" from The Escapist Daily:** "If gaming is to be mainstream, it must accept its own civic responsibilities and realize that not all criticism is ill-informed."

Why?

"Can gaming make the same claim?"

Not always.

You are looking at this entire situation from the same bad angle the mainstream press does. Let's assume that games can cause people to act violently, that still would not give the federal government of the USA the right to regulate the sale of video games. As long as they are protected under the first, which should always be the case, then congress's power to regulate commerce cannot be construed to be used to deny the rights of others whom are trying to express themselves.



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I can say things that can cause violence in other people, that does not mean my act of saying them is the criminal offense, and it can't be.

- **FatHed**

**The Author's Response:** Let me clear a few things up.

First of all, any suggestion that government regulation is what is needed was mistakenly inferred, and not implied. And although I am not in favour of government regulation of games content, please do bear in mind that not everyone reading or writing on the Internet, including myself, is American and subject to the US constitution.

The point of the article was not that games cause people to be violent. I do not believe that for a second. I favour self-examination, not outside regulation. The point was that because we react, as FatHed has done here, in such a knee-jerk fashion to the very suggestion that games might cause violence or should be regulated, that we tend to miss the other issue. That is, is it really a good thing that so many games are so violent? Don't we have any other ideas?

I believe that the use of violence in gaming stems from a simple lack of creativity. It seems that we don't have any other thoughts for how to create or market games. And it's not that there's anything wrong with violent content in and of itself - I'm a big fan of many violent games, and my favourite game of recent years, Resident Evil 4, was dripping in gore. But while I might enjoy 24, if all TV series were like that, you'd get bored very quickly. And sure, there are puzzle games and platforming games and sports games and so on, but as the reviewer quoted said, in games where you play a person what you're most likely to be doing is killing people. I'm not saying either that games should hammer in moral messages, but art should have something to say for itself, and gaming very rarely seems to say anything.

- **Gearoid Reidy**

**In response to "Next-Gen Storytelling" from The Escapist**

**Forum:** The question of interactivity in narratives, I think, is still too new to give a real strong guideline to game narrative - which is why it's a good thing that there's articles like this. The Interactive Fiction movement has found a

standardized set of tools in the Z-Machine interpreter, which is simultaneously freer and more limited than any video game. Would a better framework be preferable? Well, certainly a parser that doesn't require a strict verb-noun construction, but that's just a readability improvement. I'm not convinced that new ways to interact with the world are needed in IF's case (just new ways to get that interaction from the user to the game).

Some stories are not well-served by allowing the player to interact with the game world in any way they can imagine. In fact, I would say that, generally, the most satisfying examples of any medium are the ones conceived of as if operating under severe limitations, and then made without them (but acting as if they were largely still there).

I would agree that, without any way to put real actors in an interactive medium, simplifications and abstractions of the story's elements would without a doubt be the ideal choice. Don't assume that's automatically a "cartoon" thing, though. Even books provide only a very limited description of a thing's traits. A cartoon is just one example of excluding detail in





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a visual medium. Detail does need to be excluded, however.

## - Bongo Bill

**The Author's Resaponse:** Bongo Bill makes some interesting points. To clarify, I'm not proposing that more world interaction is necessarily The Right Answer and I'm CERTAINLY not saying that total freedom from constraint leads to a better player experience or story. I'm often accused of promoting the idea of choice above all else, but I don't believe that at all--as you point out, operating under "severe limitations" often results in the best experience.

I guess my issue is with an industry and an art form that could and should be built around interactivity choosing to impose too MANY constraints on players. We do that routinely--i.e., limit player choices to which weapon to use... binary choices that are clearly Good or Evil, with little or no consequence associated with the choice... putting players on rails and giving them a "cinematic" experience that has almost nothing to do with player expression or creativity... That's the stuff that drives me mad. And we do it to OURSELVES. Amazing...

As far as "cartoon" imagery goes, you're absolutely right that cartooniness isn't the only viable way of limiting graphical detail to accomplish some greater narrative or gameplay goal--it's just a personal preference of mine. (Given the games I've worked on, most people have no idea how cartoon obsessed I am. But that's probably a subject for another time and place...)

## - Warren Spector





## STREET FIGHTING

After 19 years, Capcom's classic fighter demands a **WARRIOR'S DISCIPLINE**

by Allen Varney

**Puny reader!** Your feeble willpower is as nothing to my limitless skill in stylish browbeating! Submit, and read this masterful article on Capcom's top-selling fighting game series, *Street Fighter*!

**"Praise me! Extol me! My beauty is unparalleled!"**

In the late 1980s, in testosterone-charged coin-op arcades loud with explosions, when manly self-esteem compelled you to face your rivals like a rutting stag, you played *Street Fighter II*. No game compared; it was exhilarating, gladiatorial.

Trouncing earlier 2-D fighting games – outstripping even its own weakling precursor, Capcom's original *Street Fighter* – *SF2* offered a wide range of fighter characters, each with distinctive moves, all (well, most) game-balanced to katana sharpness. Above all, *SF2* offered **combos**, unique moves you triggered by pressing a certain button sequence with split-second precision. With these combos, a landmark innovation, *SF2* recruited, almost overnight, legions of players vying for supremacy. The world had never yet seen such an efficient outlet for adolescent male rage.

More than many other arcade games, *Street Fighter* inspired a culture, a code. Among friends, you might taunt and talk trash as you played. Against a stranger, etiquette dictated an attitude of couth – a regal aloofness. To silently duck or overleap your opponent's attacks, to pull back and then, with a light touch on the joystick and decisive stabs at the six buttons, to land three or four telling jabs and kicks – all with a cool, fated composure – that was the tao of *Street Fighter*. And then, having initiated with musical precision your final, killing combo, to turn from the console, silently, dismissively, feigning to chat idly with a friend while the hapless loser viewed his fighter's humiliation ... **Boooo**-yah!

An instant hit at its 1987 debut, *Street Fighter II* went through five revisions and spawned a prequel (*Street Fighter Alpha*, five revisions), a sequel (*Street Fighter III*, three revisions) and multiple console ports. Capcom says the SF franchise has sold nearly 30 million units worldwide. Then there's the terrible 1994 movie (Rotten Tomatoes score: 29%), anime, manga, comics, art collections, action figures, a collectible card game, a tabletop roleplaying game and *Street Fighter* "sound drops," pushbutton



keychain fobs that issue trademark taunts. (Relive these *Street Fighter* taunts on Wikiquote.) And in August 2006, *SF2* itself, now a venerable master, became the fastest-selling game yet released on Xbox Live Arcade. After 20 years, while nearly 200 other fighting games have risen and fallen, *Street Fighter* still holds its ground.

Yet this may not speak well for the form. Like the tournament competitors they depict, the ranks of fighting games are thinning.

**"If you are not merciless, your soul will be slaughtered!"**

Clearly, the ranks of devout fighting game fans remain pretty thick. Every year, more fighter fans attend the Evolution tournaments; in 2007, there are four regional Evo tourneys, ahead of August's big championship in Las Vegas. (For a memorable battle from Evo 2004, see "Fei Long and Justin Wong" in The Escapist issue 88.) Evo's sponsor is the leading *Street Fighter* fan site, Shoryuken, named for the original game's single unstoppable fighting technique.

Evo features lots of manly self-esteem. Like fighting games themselves, the

competition uses a ruthless double-elimination format: Lose two matches and you're out, you miserable worm. As consolation, you can buy the Evolution tournament DVDs, and if you're lucky, you may see the unreleased 2002 *Street Fighter* documentary *Bang the Machine*. (Brad King summarized the film for Wired.com, and FilePlanet hosts the *Bang The Machine* trailer.)

Each year, various versions of *Street Fighter* still hold the place of honor at Evo. The game's near-faultless balance is proven by the range of different characters the tournament winners employ, in marked contrast to (say) *Marvel vs. Capcom*, where you play Magneto and Storm or you go home early.

In fact, outside the *SF* series, not many fighting games, and certainly few recent releases, are popular at Evo – or anywhere else. *Virtua Fighter*, *Tekken*, *Soul Caliber*, *Super Smash Bros.*, *Capcom vs. SNK* – hello, what decade is this? Even Capcom's own *Rival Schools* went nowhere. The most recent entrant to find a modicum of favor is the *Guilty Gear* series, which has at least produced new installments this century.

Beyond these aged champions, there's little to talk about. There hasn't been a new hit property in years. Commercial fighting games have gone stagnant.

**"The only way a true fighter can suffer is by not fighting."**

Is it bad that we can't do better than *Street Fighter*? It probably doesn't matter, business-wise; publishers nowadays usually won't fund fighting games. To a publisher, they're just another genre with a substantial yet insufficiently profitable niche. The market for cooperative games is larger. It's also hard to make fighters work online, because precision timing is crucial to their gameplay. The clearest sign of publisher apathy came in 2004: Capcom Japan passed the *Street Fighter* rights to its USA division, saying the game had run its course in Japan.

But, commerce aside, it's baffling and irritating that it's so hard to improve on a 2-D sprite-based game two decades old. Clearly, fighters are a royal pain to balance – but so are lots of genres, yet they have evolved. Why not fighters, too?

In December 2006, fighter fan Daniel "RedSwirl" Sims offered insight in a 1UP.







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//  
**The Earth trembles in awe of my  
FIGHTING PROWESS!**  
//

com blog entry, "Are Fighters Dying in America?":

"When I first picked up [*Soul Caliber III*] last year, I'd noticed, for instance, that Kilik's 2-1-4 Tribute stance (which I thought was really cool) had been taken out in favor of a stance that led to slightly weaker combos. On the other end, though, his classic 2-3-6 Monument Stance had a whole extra combo string added to it. The kick in his 2-3-6-K could be preceded with A and B attacks in any order. Mitsurugi's old B+G Koreifuji throw now had to be performed in his 6+B+K Mist stance in order to make room for all his new throws. Now how many of you reading this understood all that? Fighting games actually do make significant improvements from game to game; it's just that the only people who notice them enough to care are the hardcore players."

Sims is talking about **grognard capture**. "Groggnards" are a genre's most passionate devotees, the ones who know the field down to their DNA, who order their own custom controllers. "Grognard capture" describes a development process entirely dominated by this hardcore elite.

Fighting games were captured long ago. Fighting grognards passionately seek victory, through total, personal domination of the opponent. See David Serlin's self-published treatise *Playing to Win: Becoming the Champion*, an expansion of articles from his blog, Serlin.net. Serlin, a fighting game tournament champion, describes a regimen of mental training for videogame dominance: "Those who try to win are wildly misunderstood by the masses, and all sorts of negative things are ascribed to them. In fact, the journey of continual self-improvement that a winner must walk is good, and right, and true ... but it's not for everyone, nor should it be." The book includes close analysis of Sun Tzu's *Art of War*.

Can designers with this outlook develop fighting games that appeal to a broad audience? You have to wonder ... or, instead of wondering, you could just go to Japan.

"Get on your feet! That can't be all you got!"

The upside of a passionate audience is a continual ferment of community activity. Each year, Japanese fans create new homebrew indie "doujin soft" fighting games, like *Melty Blood* and *Eternal Fighter*



Zero. (See John Szczepaniak's "Doujin a Go Go, Baby!" in The Escapist issue 44.)

Some of these doujin games have earned great popularity with the community. On the other hand, there are weird Japanese mutations like the girl-fighting game *Line-Kill Spirits*. From its Wikipedia entry: "The girls will slowly regenerate damage unless the player takes a picture of their panties. Therefore, the objective of the game is to deal damage to the enemy while creating chances to take pictures of her panties, and then repeat until she is knocked out. All panty shots are kept in a photo album the player can view any time."

So, uh, anyway ... the successful Evolution tournament scene highlights a revenue stream neglected by publishers, and thus a possible opportunity. Is there a new business model here? Could a small developer create a 2-D fighter with low-end graphics but extremely deep gameplay, release it as shareware, then stage tournaments and charge admission to passionate grognards? That business would call for good software design and good event planning, skills seldom found together. But a committed developer could view the prospect as, you know, a journey of continual self-improvement.

Meanwhile, Hyde Park Entertainment is working with Capcom on a new *Street Fighter* movie. The 20th anniversary of the original *SF* game is imminent. It's possible we may see a new entry in the series. The old fighter climbs to his feet, ready for action.

And now, hah! I have compelled you to read this entire article! My victory is complete! **Boooooo-yah!** [COMMENTS](#)

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

**// WHAT STRENGTH!** I won't forget that there are others like you all over the world! **//**





## WESTERNIZATION BY ZOMBIFICATION

by Russ Pitts

**Apocalypse:** c.1384, "revelation, disclosure," from Church L. *apocalypsis* "revelation," from Gk. *apokalyptein* "uncover," from *apo-* "from" + *kalyptein* "to cover, conceal"

-Online Etymology Dictionary

Fiction is a mirror. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, it reveals the truth that reality obscures. Horror fiction in particular, for through its fictional terrors, we begin to see glimpses of what truly frightens us, the fears we'd prefer to hide.

In the '50s, during the first nuclear age and the rise of global communism, our fears were of malformed monsters and invading aliens, and our fiction reflected those fears. In the '70s, after runaway industrialization taught us to fear our own inventiveness, disaster films led us through the dark night of our terror of a global catastrophe. In the '80s, when we learned that our own blood and lust for life could be our undoing, visions of vampires helped us keep things in perspective. After all, what's HIV and an SEC investigation got against eternal damnation?

We face our fears in fiction so that we may be stronger, more capable of dealing with them should they ever erupt

into reality, and so that lesser fears, like getting in a car accident, or being robbed, take on a paler shade of terror and become more manageable. We also fictionalize the imagined outcomes of our worst, darkest fears out of hope that by showing that the world ends not with a bang, but with the accumulation of thousands of nuclear weapons (for example), we may prevent or forestall the very holocausts we fear.

This decade's fictionalized menace would appear to be the zombie. Mindless, crazed, hungering creatures created from our own kin. As the representation of a seemingly unstoppable, never decreasing army of mindless thugs bent on destroying the beauty and culture our society ought to represent, the zombie is the perfect enemy. You never know where they'll come from, where they'll strike or how to take them down. Our Second Amendment guaranteed firearms don't harm them, and free speech can't sway them. We, the most powerful people on Earth, are powerless to stop them. They are the unknowable, the unkillable - the ultimate American terror.

It's no surprise then that Capcom, the storied Japanese game developer, has





**Once the dead  
have risen,  
all bets are off.**

turned to this most American of hysterias in an attempt to “Westernize” their offerings. Following up their immensely popular, 30-million unit selling *Resident Evil* games, Capcom turned again to the reliable zombie for their first “true western” title for the quintessentially western console, the Xbox 360. The result? A best-seller.

“Response to *Dead Rising* from the trade, press and consumers has been tremendous,” said Charles Bellfield, Vice President, Marketing, Capcom Entertainment. “The success of the game is a result of Capcom’s recognition of Xbox 360 system’s possibilities and starting development early on in order to deliver such a high-quality game.”

“The fact that we’ve reached the important one million milestone with our first two 360 titles (*Dead Rising* and *Lost Planet* - their other “Western” game - *Ed.*) makes our success that much more phenomenal,” said Mark Beaumont, Executive Vice President and Officer, Capcom Entertainment and Capcom Europe. “It speaks volumes

for the quality of games Capcom produces, as well as the potential for Japanese publishers and new intellectual properties on the system.”

“*Dead Rising* delivers a truly unique, exciting gameplay experience and has been an incredible addition to the lineup for Xbox 360,” said Jeff Bell, Corporate Vice President of Global Marketing, Interactive Entertainment Business, Microsoft. “Quality titles like this attract additional gamers to the system and exemplify the amazing capabilities that next generation gaming has to offer.”

“We’ve already seen great results for *Dead Rising* which has been fueled by the national coverage it has received from its various marketing campaigns,” said Bob McKenzie, Senior Vice President of Merchandising, GameStop Corp. “With the additional exposure from Capcom’s expanded TV campaign, we look forward to continuing the momentum into the crucial holiday season.”

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*“The zombie story is less about zombies than the human survivors; a tool for social, psychological and economic commentary.”*

- Joshua Bearman, writing for *LA Weekly*

Once the dead have risen, all bets are off. Society, necessarily, breaks down, and the Maslow pyramid contracts to a single tier. Facing off against the undead horde, therefore, we find our petty insecurities erased; clothes, cars, who’ll win *American Idol* - all become meaningless. What’s left is what will get us through the night, and the day, and the next night ... until the zombies are vanquished. And it’s this deconstruction of the pillars of our culture, this sifting through the waste to find what’s really important - a gun perhaps, or a propane tank - that makes for such cathartically good storytelling. By fighting zombies, in other words, we’re actually fighting ourselves.

Which is why Capcom’s take on the zombie apocalypse is so telling. *Dead Rising* stars an American photojournalist named Frank West who breaks past military and police roadblocks to infiltrate a once peaceful Colorado town and



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discover the truth behind the rumors of a mysterious disturbance at the local mall. The answer, and there is one (at least - depending on how you play the game), is that we did it. Not humanity in general, the other we: Americans.

*Dead Rising's* plot suggests that scientists tinkering with the genetics of plants unleashed a killer swarm of insects which, instead of killing humans, zombified them. Plot-wise, this isn't breaking any new ground in zombie horror circles. Most zombie tales feature some form of "man tampering with nature" scenario, but the agricultural take is a new twist, playing on the perception of Americans as over-fed gluttons swarming over the globe like English speaking locusts, and adding a new dimension to the "man vs. himself" archetype. (Man taxes man's agricultural infrastructure, man accidentally zombifies man in response, man must then begin bashing man's brains all over the place using every imaginable household implement as a weapon, and for this, man earns Xbox Live Achievements.)

As a mirror, then, *Dead Rising* exposes a fear of ruining the Earth and destroying nature's balance with science. But is this

an American or Japanese fear? *Dead Rising* holds a unique place in the horror fiction genre as a Japanese constructed nightmare designed for American consumption, and as such it's apparent that many of the scares therein seem designed less to inspire fear in the hearts of its audience than to illuminate the fears of its authors.

As Bearman says, in zombie films origins are irrelevant, so we'll instead look at the game's survivors, or to be more specific, those survivors against which Frank must battle as he goes about his business subjugating zombies and uncovering The Truth. *Dead Rising*, in addition to about a thousand and one ways to kill a zombie, features that uniquely Japanese staple of game design so inured in Capcom titles, the Big Boss Battle, and these Big Bosses are no mere monsters. In fact, a list of them reads like a menagerie of American stereotypes: the deranged clown, the gun store owner, the lesbian law enforcement officer, a diabolical cult leader, gun-toting hunters and the black ex-cons riding a gigantic SUV. In these characters we see ourselves, reflected in the mirror of a different culture, and we

## ***Dead Rising* holds a unique place in the horror fiction genre as a Japanese constructed nightmare designed for American consumption.**

slowly begin to imagine how we're viewed from the outside.

The boss enemies aren't given a plausible excuse for behaving like crazed lunatics, they're just drawn that way. One assumes they happened to be





shopping at the mall on Zombie Day, and the unimaginable strain of finding themselves seemingly alone against the teeming horde of undead unhinged whatever shred of sanity had been holding back their mania. The clown, with no more children left to entertain, turned mad and took to chainsaw juggling. The cop, with no more order to maintain, revealed her true, sadistic nature. The father and his sons, with expired hunting licenses, took to chasing larger game. It's also telling that so many of these characters are licensed to carry firearms. Japanese society abhors firearms, yet we embrace them and lawfully allow certain people to carry them in public places. Each of these people, it would seem, is represented in *Dead Rising* as a menace, capable of going mad at a moment's notice and turning their weapons - or ours -against us.

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*"The Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race."*

- Ted "The Unabomber" Kaczynski

The *Dead Rising* team reportedly visited a number of American shopping malls in order to perfect the virtual look and feel of that most American of edifices for their game. And in this regard the game succeeds magnificently. As has been reported here and elsewhere, the mall depicted in *Dead Rising* is spot-on, and the eerie accuracy of the displays and layout adds an extra dimension to the game's horror. The sound of Muzak blaring from a tinny speaker as one attempts to evade the assault of the undead is uncanny and strangely terrifying. One has to imagine though that Capcom's cultural investigators brought home far more than detailed architectural drawings and decorating plans. Perhaps they, on their own journeys, discovered their own fears.

It's important to reiterate here that the blame for the horror and carnage presented in *Dead Rising* lies entirely at the feet of America, whose scientists, attempting to feed its gluttonous people, caused the outbreak in the first place. Considering America is a global, scientific, military and consumer superpower rivaled by none, this blame

is not entirely unwarranted, but what's remarkable here is that this isn't the first time Capcom has pointed its finger Westward. In the *Resident Evil* series (games arguably designed first and foremost for the Japanese audience), it was also an American concern, The Umbrella Corporation, which started the zombie fire, unleashing a plague that threatened to destroy mankind.

This fear of American creations threatening the survival of the human species harkens back to one of our previous cultural fears - that of nuclear devastation - which was more than a theoretical neurosis for the Japanese once upon a time, and perhaps remains a visceral concern to this day. To make matters worse, in *Dead Rising* it would seem we've once again encroached on lands belonging to indigenous people to practice our nefarious nematode niggling, this time ruining the lands of certain native Central Americans. The game's "antagonist," Carlito, is actually a freedom fighter working to expose the damage done to his homelands by the evildoing American Scientists. Thus, the circle is completed, American gluttony





forces expansion and experimentation which leads to the destruction of a foreign civilization. Again.

All of this paints a uniquely disturbing portrait of the American Self, which Frank West, as observer, is unable to alter. The major players in this tale, Carlito, the government agents sent to stop him and the scientist who holds the key to solving the mystery, are not playable characters, and are not influenced by Frank's actions. Frank, and therefore the player, is merely a witness, the action undertaken in the playable portion of the game merely serving as interactive placeholders, busywork, while the story tells itself. West, the eponymous avatar of the American audience, is helpless to affect the outcome of this story, or make amends. The only thing we can do is survive, but even then it's not clear what reprieve that grants us, if any. In one version of the game's ending, the player survives but misses his chance to escape, and the credits roll over Frank standing alone, surrounded by a growing mob of zombies.

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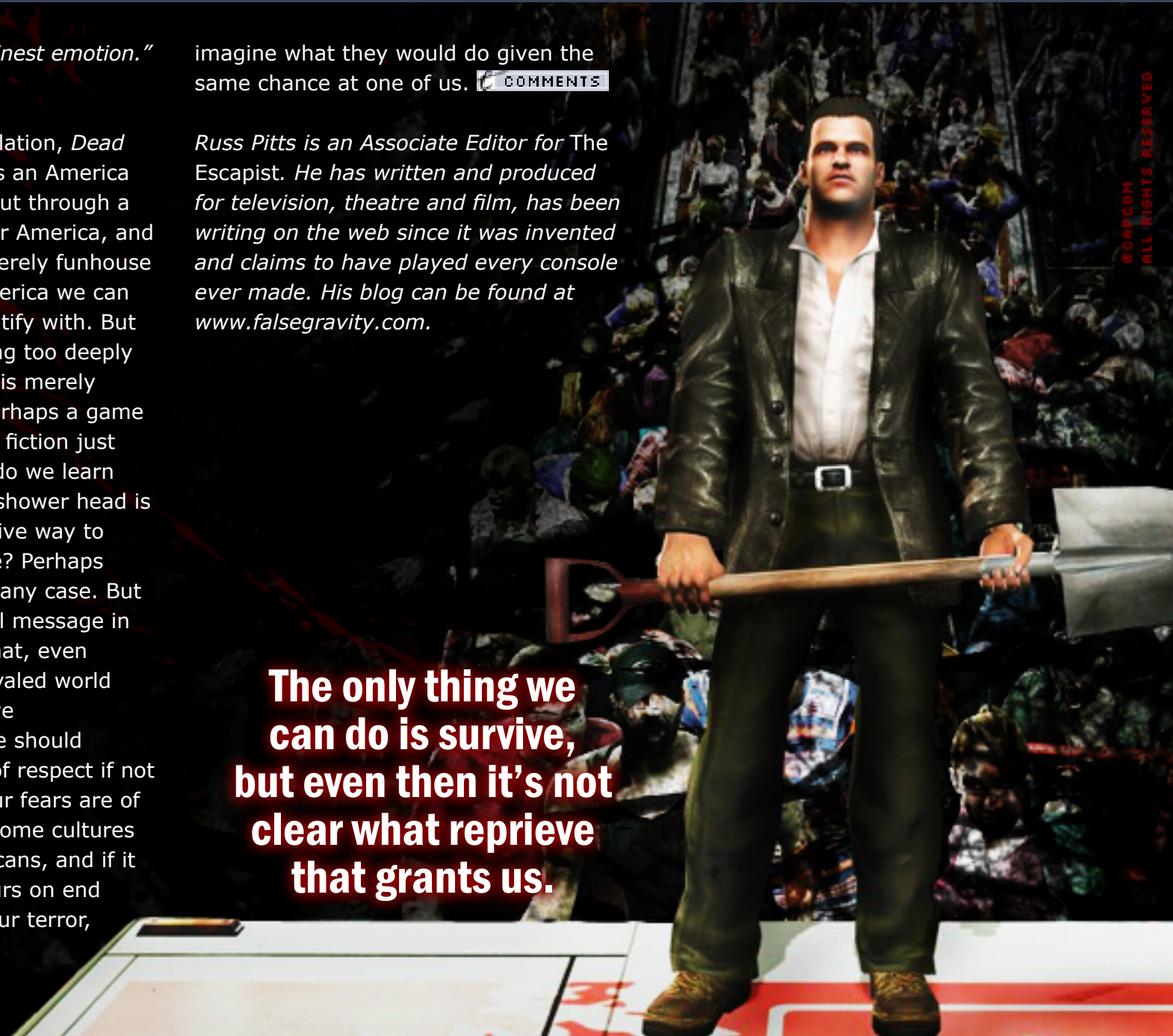
*"I recognize terror as the finest emotion."*  
- Stephen King

If the apocalypse is a revelation, *Dead Rising's* apocalypse reveals an America immediately identifiable, but through a distorted mirror. It isn't our America, and its characters aren't us, merely funhouse recreations, but it's an America we can easily recognize if not identify with. But perhaps all of this is digging too deeply into what, by all respects, is merely popcorn entertainment. Perhaps a game sometimes is just a game, fiction just fiction. If so, what lesson do we learn from *Dead Rising*? That a shower head is an entertaining **and** effective way to stave off the zombie horde? Perhaps that's a valuable lesson in any case. But if there is a deeper cultural message in *Dead Rising* perhaps it's that, even though America is an unrivaled world power, our actions still have consequences, and that we should learn to tread lightly, out of respect if not deference. For although our fears are of mindless zombie hordes, some cultures are clearly afraid of Americans, and if it entertains us to spend hours on end mutilating the objects of our terror,

imagine what they would do given the same chance at one of us. [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. His blog can be found at [www.falsegravity.com](http://www.falsegravity.com).*

**The only thing we  
can do is survive,  
but even then it's not  
clear what reprieve  
that grants us.**





## RESIDENT EVIL'S SECOND

by Lara Crigger

# Sex



I have a complicated relationship with Ada Wong.

My first impressions of her were embarrassingly Pavlovian. Ada, the undercover spy first introduced in *Resident Evil 2* who also played a pivotal role in *Resident Evil 4*, is undeniably an attractive woman. OK, fine, she's a total fox. In her sleek bob and her backless red dress with the slit up to **there**, she's the femme fatale archetype given pixilated form. Men want to sleep with her, and women want to steal her shoes. As a self-professed and proud feminist, I instinctively recoiled from Ada when I first played *RE2*, thinking her obvious sensuality meant the developers, leaning on familiar and tired stereotypes, had once again objectified a powerful female character. It wasn't until I sat down to write this article that I realized I'd fallen into the trap of equating sexiness with sexism. Clearly, a woman's attractiveness to the opposite sex is not an indicator of her explicit surrender to gender-based oppression. Why couldn't a strong, feminist role model also be beautiful and sexual?

Which raises the question: **Is** Ada a strong, feminist role model?

Yes, I know, plowing through a lumbering mob of the undead with a flamethrower doesn't exactly call to mind bra-burning protests. But there's something about Ada, something curious that sticks with you long after you've finished the games. The Leon-Ashley interaction might be the impetus of *RE4*, but Ada is its soul, its *raison d'être*. She's a different kind of heroine, if you can even call her that. Unlike Jill and Claire, whose cleverness and puzzle-solving skills were well-matched to intricate, booby-trapped mansions and police stations, Ada's character has been molded to fit the Leon scenarios' faster-paced, shooter-style gameplay. Even in *RE2*, she is a character explored entirely in sound bites: Charismatic. Single-minded. Cunning. Vixen. **Mysterious**. She's definitely the modern image of "girl power," but is that enough to make her an admirable feminist?

Feminist, yes. Admirable, I'm not so sure. She reminds me of Simone de Beauvoir's peculiar brand of French existentialism; which, I guess, is a good thing.

\*\*\*



# the escapist

Like all great existentialists, Simone de Beauvoir's life was a soap opera of VH1 proportions. The late 20th century French philosopher, a mathematical and linguistic prodigy, is most famous for making a pact with her life-long partner, Jean-Paul Sartre, that allowed each party to have affairs outside their relationship as long as they told each other everything that had happened. Naturally, that led to some steamy exploits, especially one interlude in which Beauvoir's lover married the sister of Sartre's mistress (who Sartre had initially pursued, only to be rebuffed by Beauvoir, who wanted the underage student for herself). But aside from her sexual escapades, Beauvoir was also one hell of a philosopher, and by tying women's rights to the robust existentialist movement, she managed to greatly advance the cause of both.

In her 1949 work, *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir observed that all societies hinge upon an us vs. them mentality: That is, the group higher in the social hierarchy ("the One") inevitably stereotypes the group lower than them, assigning them the role of "the Other" in order to justify their respective rankings. It doesn't take a French existentialist to see ample support

for her claim in race relations, class struggles, religious conflicts, even *American Idol* voting patterns. But nowhere, Beauvoir writes, does that One vs. the Other conflict occur with such frequency and consistency as between the sexes. Historically, she says, men in positions of power have assigned women a "false aura of mystery," a quality subtle, ill defined and - obviously - entirely made up. To Beauvoir, that mystique is an excuse for men to consciously ignore the thoughts, voices and opinions of women: Why should men work to understand women, when feminine traits are inherently incomprehensible to the male mind?

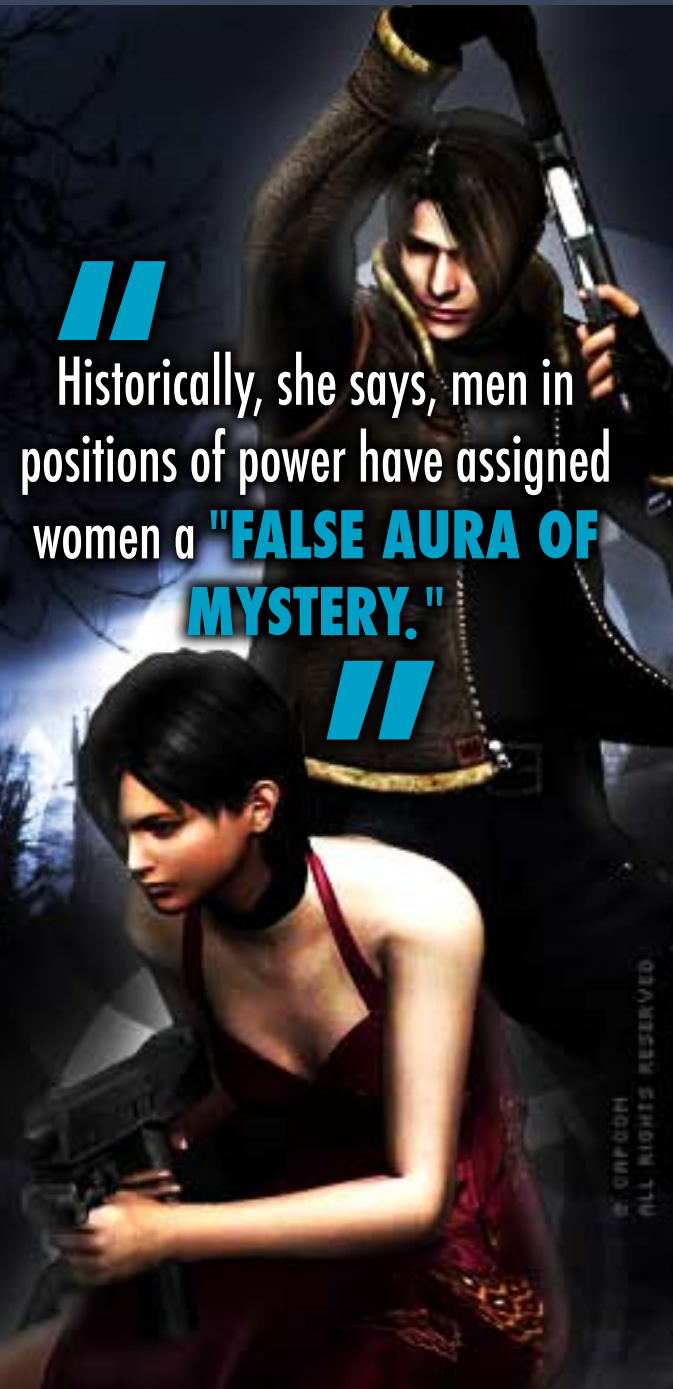
You have to admit: As far as justifications for oppression go, that one's pretty clever; and even better, it works like a charm. According to Beauvoir, that role as the Other is fundamental to women's oppression in society, and neither gender is blameless in the situation. Men may do the marginalization, but by allowing it to happen, women are complicit in the act.

Beauvoir writes that often, the only solution apparent to the Other is to emulate the One, in a sort of if-you-can't-beat-'em-join-'em approach. To

find acceptance and success, women, as the supposed deviation from the norm, assume they should strive to be more like men. I speak from five years' experience in the sciences and 10 years as a gamer when I say that yes, this is a **very** tempting thought. I've often imagined that all my social and professional problems would vanish if only I were more like a man - or, at the very best, a neutral target, with all trace of femininity suppressed.

Beauvoir, of course, would have none of that. She explains that the solution isn't for women to become men, since that acquiescence affirms the artificial One vs. the Other nonsense in the first place. Instead, we should shrug off notions of hierarchy altogether. "People have tirelessly sought to prove that woman is superior, inferior or equal to man," Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex*. "If we are to gain understanding, we must get out of these ruts; we must discard the vague notions of superiority, inferiority, equality which have hitherto corrupted every discussion of the subject and start afresh." Women, she concludes, are just as capable of choice and freedom as men are, so they should choose to elevate themselves, taking

// Historically, she says, men in positions of power have assigned women a **"FALSE AURA OF MYSTERY."** //





responsibility for their own persons and for the world.

Which brings me back to *Resident Evil*. I'm certainly not about to claim the games are modern-day sequels to *The Second Sex*, or that the series' developers clearly had Beauvoir's notions of One vs. the Other in mind when they created the Umbrella Corporation. But as a consequence of certain creative decisions, *Resident Evil* does look somewhat Beauvoirian in the zombie-consecrated moonlight.

That impression comes from more than just the conspicuous lack of glass ceilings in Raccoon City, although that, in itself, is worthy of note. The *Resident Evil* universe supports a relatively even mix of male and female characters. Players can choose from male and female protagonists (Jill and Chris in the original *Resident Evil*; Leon and Claire in *RE2*); do battle with his and her mad scientists (particularly the Drs. Birkin); and consort with guy and gal spies, like Luis and Ada. Even the enemies split down gender lines: The peasant housewives in *RE4*, for example, are just as nasty and ravenous as their Ganado husbands (not to mention the chainsaw-wielding Bella

Sisters). It's a pleasant change of pace from many other videogames that rely on machismo and adrenaline to create a tense, suspenseful atmosphere.


The series takes a progressive approach toward the actual character and personality of its women, too. Simply put, the *Resident Evil* girls don't suck. For example, take Jill Valentine. Within the *Resident Evil* universe, she's invaluable to her Alpha Team; competent, clever and professional, she's the resident bomb expert and, of course, the master of unlocking. But she also

offers certain advantages to the player. While she can't take as much damage as Chris can, she does have those two extra inventory slots, which, when you've discovered a cache of shotgun shells, can make all the difference. Jill is an asset, both inside the story and out; she's not "good, for a woman" but simply "good." And while Rebecca, Claire and Ada each have their individual strengths and weaknesses, like Jill they are all powerful and competent human beings.

That's the key point: The *Resident Evil* women are judged on their worth as

human beings, and not just as women. Ultimately, there is no One or Other status in Raccoon City; or, if there is, it's between human and zombie, not man and woman. The characters forever race against infection, time or death and in the process must cast away everything that's not absolutely essential to their own survival, including philosophical distinctions between the sexes. After all, it's hard to find time to subjugate and oppress an entire gender when you're both running from a guy with a flaming axe. Zombies are equal opportunity killers, and they're not about to refrain from sucking on your skull-goo just because you've been designated "the weaker sex."

But then there's Leon Kennedy. The likable rookie cop is the only person in the entire series who seems to buy into the idea of women as the Other - and even then, just for one person: Ada Wong. He trusts Claire readily enough, leaving her to deal solo with the zombies in *RE2*, but he acts far more protectively with Ada. He tries to take care of her, even over her own protests, protecting her from zombies, reassuring her they'll survive and watching over her when she's injured. Granted, part of Leon's



// the *Resident Evil* girls  
**DON'T SUCK."**



motivation is he has fallen instantly in love with Ada, and, intoxicated by adrenaline and terror, he wants to play her knight in shining armor. But he also underestimates her, judging her weaker and less capable than he. Especially in *RE2*, Leon's actions suggest a conviction that he's the only who really gets Ada, and that he believes all she needs is a good, strong man like himself to take care of her on an emotional level.

I don't blame him for thinking that way. As I said before, Ada looks like the stereotypical "girl power" sex kitten, and many such female characters in other stories are waiting for a man to do just that. For instance, recall Cameron Diaz's character in the second *Charlie's Angels* movie, which was at the time lauded for its "strong" female protagonists; Natalie Cook's physical prowess was unequaled by anything but her emotional insecurity. Or consider the young, professionally successful main characters in modern chick lit, who are, for the most part, elaborately self-destructive nut jobs. The overwhelming theme is women really aren't as strong as they seem; while they may appear attractive, intelligent and capable, emotionally they are weak. It's the natural product of a competition

between two paradigms: The feminist ideal of strength, freedom and competence, and women's continued status as the Other in society. Leon is just a product of his environment, and he assigns Ada that "false aura of mystery" mostly out of habit.


However, while Ada isn't exactly forthcoming with her true purpose, she isn't nearly as mysterious as Leon seems to believe. For a woman with so much to hide, she's terrible at lying when it counts. She drops numerous hints in *RE2* of her motives, such as running off whenever new, critical information about Birkin and his G-Virus is revealed. In *RE4*, she all but tells Leon that she needs a Las Plagas sample before she forcibly takes his. Yet, at the end of the game, as Leon zooms away with Ashley on the jet ski and pines for the woman who got away, it's clear he still thinks of Ada as a mystery, something unintelligible and Other in essence.

Obviously, Ada likes Leon, and she even claims to love him at one point. But Ada also reflects Beauvoir's philosophy in many ways. She never truly relies on Leon's protection in either game, and by doing so, she also refuses to share any

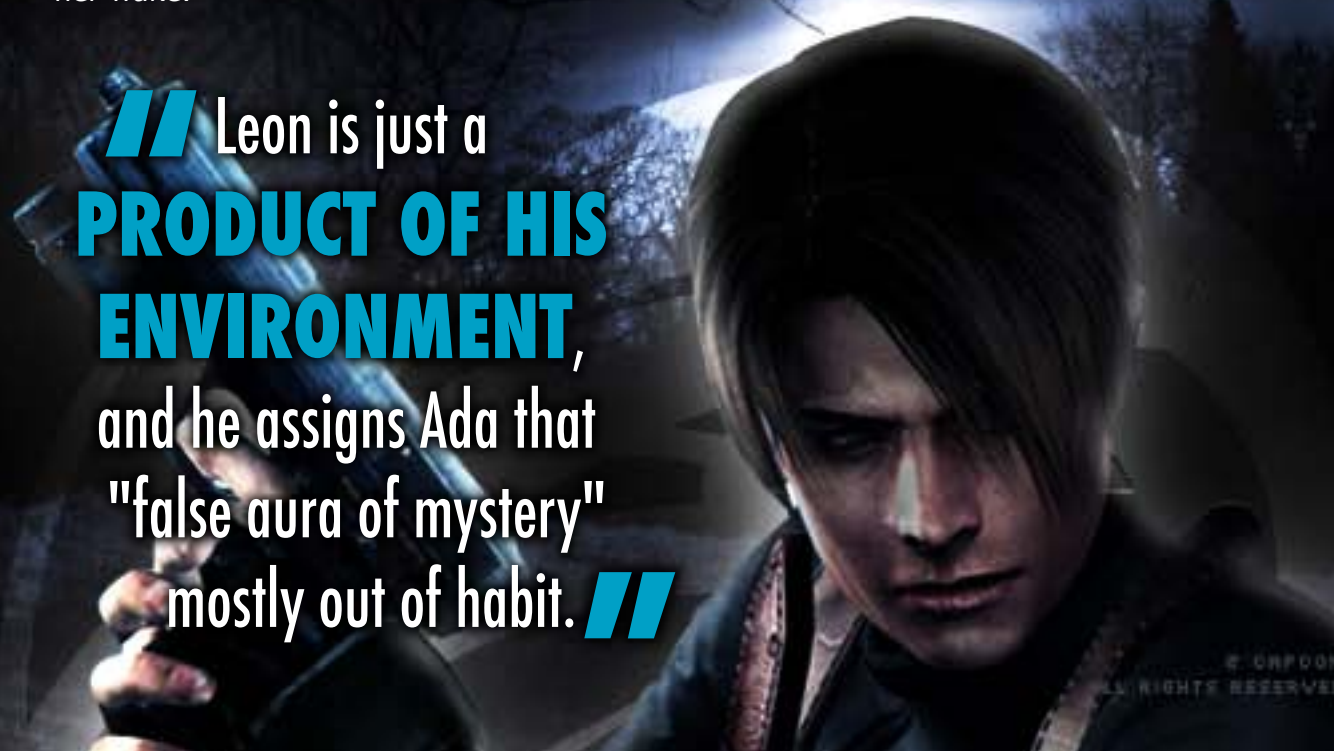
responsibility for her actions and well-being. Her decisions are her own, and thus her fate is hers alone, too. Ada has already elevated herself in exactly the way Beauvoir prescribed, even if Leon can't see it yet.

As Beauvoir says, interaction between the sexes is not a matter of superiority, inferiority or even equality; it's about relating, person to person, human to human. Ada is already there, relating to Leon on a level even he hasn't quite achieved and leaving him floundering in her wake.

So yes, Ada is definitely a feminist icon, and an admirable one at that. But, you know, that doesn't make her **nice**. Because when all is said and done, existentialism is still kind of a bitch.

 [COMMENTS](#)

*Lara Crigger is a freelance science, tech and gaming journalist whose previous work for The Escapist includes "Mind Over Matter" and "Searching for Gunpei Yokoi." Her email is [lcigger@gmail.com](mailto:lcigger@gmail.com).*



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# VISION DOESN'T SELL COPIES

## The short life of Clover Studios

by Shannon Drake

Founded in the midst of a Capcom shake-up in 2004, Clover Studios was a development group formed to “bring more originality to [Capcom’s] products, thus leading to higher profits and better brand recognition.” Clover’s team was a deep well of talent that represented the best titles in Capcom’s arsenal, from CEO Atsushi Inaba (*Devil May Cry*, *Steel Battalion*, *Viewtiful Joe*) to Shinji Mikami, best known for his work on *Resident Evil*, and Hideki Kamiya, a director on *Devil May Cry*. This talented team put together three original, cutting-edge games and, for their troubles, the studio was shuttered and the team dispersed. While most tales of talented developers that collapse involve big promises and little delivery, the fall of Clover is more tragic, largely because they accomplished their goals, furthering the budding *Viewtiful Joe* franchise and releasing two startlingly original games, *Okami* and *God Hand*.

*Viewtiful Joe* is a side-scrolling brawler on speed, the gaming equivalent of sitting down with a bowl of cereal on Saturday morning and watching brainless cartoons with flashing lights while sugar and bad translations rot your

brain. In other words, it’s visceral fun unhindered by any notion of seriousness. The Clover-produced sequel, *Viewtiful Joe 2*, continued that formula and piled on more madness than any action movie fan could handle. *Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble* continued the series’ run on the GameCube, and *Viewtiful Joe: Double Trouble* brought the franchise onto the Nintendo DS. Reviews for all of the games ranged from good to great, earning the series praise for its old-school action and sense of humor. The DS title won an Editor’s Choice award from IGN, and Clover was quickly making a name for itself.

Their second project, *Okami*, was much more ambitious. *Okami* took players through a Japanese fantasy world that popped with color. The quirky storyline featured Amaterasu — the Okami — a sun goddess in the form of a white wolf. Amaterasu travels the world fighting creatures from Japanese myth to recover “brush techniques” that grant her the power to challenge the evil spirits plaguing the world. These techniques are the game’s real standout, as players actually use a Celestial Brush to draw on the screen and influence the course of



**Clover was riding high with games that were winning awards by the fistful and amassing a cult following of rabid fans. Unfortunately, that same accomplishment ultimately led to their demise.**

the gameplay. Instead of mashing a button for a special attack, *Okami* lets players draw simple symbols. If they're successful, the result shows up in the game world — a bomb to blow up a wall, a sword strike to defeat a foe, or even the sun itself, which brings the world to magnificent life.

*Okami* garnered a tremendous number of awards, including Game of the Year, Adventure Game of the Year, Best Artistic Design, Best Story and Most Innovative Design from IGN; a Game of the Year award from *PlayStation Magazine*; and Game of the Month awards from *Game Informer* and *Electronic Gaming Monthly*. *Okami* amassed an impressive Metacritic score of 93 and ranked 21st overall in Metacritic's Best PlayStation 2 Games category, behind the likes of *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence* and ahead of *Final Fantasy XII*, not bad company for the fledgling studio.

Finally, in 2006, Clover released *God Hand*, the quirkiest game in their lineup. *God Hand* was a bizarre beat-'em-up with a weird sense of humor, a very original style and a very high level of difficulty. Critical reaction was mixed, but most praised the game's nifty style and action, and for fans, it featured more in-crowd references than a Tarantino movie, though this was more about classic fighting anime and games than about Quentin's film collection.

Clover was riding high with games that were winning awards by the fistful and amassing a cult following of rabid fans. Unfortunately, that same accomplishment ultimately led to their demise. While niche gamers clamor for original titles with stylish graphics and new models of gameplay — and Clover delivered original titles with stylish graphics and new models of gameplay — it seems mainstream gamers would rather buy something else. *Okami* offered a fanciful adventure through Japanese mythology and sold 266,000 copies in North America and Japan. Inaba's first *Viewtiful Joe*, which offered wild, hilarious 2-D action, sold only 275,000 copies against weak competition



on the GameCube, and rattled to a stop with 46,000 sold on the PlayStation 2. The Clover-developed sequel, *Viewtiful Joe 2*, sold 61,000 on the GameCube and 18,000 copies of the PlayStation 2 version through December of 2004. *God Hand* fared no better than its more famous siblings, and, while hard numbers are hard to come by, sales were poor enough that the studio's life was on the line.

Selling hundreds of thousands of copies might have been enough to keep a scrappy independent developer running, but for a division of Capcom, they were a stinging disappointment. By contrast, *Dead Rising* for the Xbox 360 racked up a million sales by the end of 2006. In January of this year, *Lost Planet*, another Capcom title, racked up 329,000 sales in North America alone. In one month, and one market, *Lost Planet* beat the entire lifetime sales of one of Clover's titles. Ironically, the studios with the financial wherewithal to roll the dice on an artistic title can't afford the low sales figures those games bring in.

At the end of 2006, the Board of Directors decided Clover's time had

come. The press release took the calm distance of an ER doctor, saying, "[While] Clover Studios Co., Ltd. has met the goal of developing unique and creative original home entertainment software," their current business strategy demanded they focus "management resources on a selected business to enhance the development power of the entire Capcom group." We like our illusions that everyone likes to make good games, sales be damned, but laid out in stark black and white is the truth of the gaming industry: Publishers will cut away the developers that don't produce games that make them money.

Game Development by Darwinism demanded the dissolution of Clover, and the board complied, scattering the team. Some moved inside Capcom and some moved to Clover vet-friendly studio Seeds to lick their wounds and try again.

What if you made a compelling, original game and nobody bought it? In a post-shutdown interview, Inaba reflected, "I think that it is becoming almost 'impossible' for an original game to succeed financially. This can't be blamed on anyone, but it's a simple fact that an

original game doesn't appeal to the majority of gamers." In other words, to read review sites and look around the community at large, what reviewers say they want are artsy, original games. The "vision" of games and game designers is trumpeted as a catch-all remedy for the heartless money grubbing of the big publishers, but when it comes time for that all important last step — the exchanging of money for goods and services — vision doesn't sell games.

 [COMMENTS](#)

*Shannon Drake is a Contributing Editor for The Escapist and changed his name when he became a citizen. It used to be Merkwürdigeliebe.*

**Game Development  
by Darwinism  
demanded the  
dissolution of Clover.**





# HERO WORSHIP

by Spanner



Capcom might have an army of powerful brand name mascots and endless regiments of game franchises standing in tight formation on game store shelves the world over, but it wasn't always so. Twenty years ago, the closest approximation to any kind of recognizable character was a weak pun on the company name called Captain Commando.

**CAP**tain **COM**mando – do you get it? Some advertising intern must have been promoted to tea boy for that one.

The Captain may have been a shallow attempt to compete with Mario, but he was fortunate enough to be cast as the main character in a trilogy of games that have had a massive impact on Capcom for over 20 years. Now, unlike many a defining moment in a developer's history, this one has gone somewhat unmarked, and didn't really influence so much as inspire, but even today Capcom's early experiments with the *Jet Pack Hero* trilogy is very noticeable – if you know where to look.

Capcom clearly knows what it achieved during those embryonic years, as it's shaped the company's personality in a very particular way. Maybe developers at

Capcom today don't worship before a *Jet Pack Heroes* altar, or light three joss sticks and stand them in a bowl of rice in front of an effigy of Captain Commando on their way into work, but the subtle intricacies first seen in *Section-Z*, *Side Arms: Hyper Dyne* and *Forgotten Worlds* are so ingrained in the company's creative process that the old trilogy has become a natural jumping off point every time the market demands something new and adventurous.

In 1985, the arcades were graced with an unusual space-based shooter called *Section-Z*. Colorful, boisterous, sci-fi inspired coin-ops were in high demand, and although *Section-Z* was, to some degree, camouflaged by the incessant white-noise of game development gone mad, it united a cult of followers who still remain disturbingly loyal. Other games would come along very soon afterward and do everything *Section-Z* did – and do it better – but Capcom, at least, can lean back in its chair and with hands behind an indifferent head, say, "We did that first."

By the mid '80s, game developers were well aware that each title needed a recognizable identity just as much as the company did, and with powerful brands



like Mario and Pac-Man becoming household names, Capcom can be forgiven (to a degree) for rushing into the mascot race and creating something of an action-man cliché to star in one of its most popular and respected titles. Captain Commando wasn't actually named as such until the NES version was released, and the instruction booklet gave some vague reason as to the surreal adventure the jet pack pilot underwent in *Section-Z*.

The unusual little shooter from the arcades was earning a reputable status, and although the hurriedly-designed Captain bore little resemblance to the red-suited flying gunman from *Section-Z*, he did provide a pretty solid foundation for a few years' worth of coin-op games and high-tack advertising campaigns. Initially, the *Section-Z* star could be found littering the pages of instruction manuals, flyers and other merchandise, thanking people for purchasing from Capcom. Not a particularly fitting job for a superhero wannabe, but it was nice to see that characters wearing big, "C"-shaped medallions could still get work in the 1980s.

Capcom supported their mascot as well as he supported them - despite being

not much more than a shallow, piecemeal, tough-guy stereotype - and was even given his second starring role in 1991's arcade beat-'em-up, aptly named *Captain Commando*. Unfortunately, there was only so much an armored, muscle-bound, sunglasses-wearing mish-mash of a character could do to capture the fickle gamers' attention. Capcom refused to send him to the old heroes' home, however, and have continually rejuvenated their original standard bearer since his first outing in *Section-Z*, both in starring roles and in cameo appearances (often so fleeting, only the trained eye of a Capcom employee could spot them).

When *Side Arms: Hyper Dyne* - the second title of the *Jet Pack Hero* trilogy - appeared on the sticky arcade floors in 1986, it was something of a surprise that the blonde haired Captain was nowhere to be seen. He was replaced by two fully armored, transforming mechs; and the gun-toting, thrill-a-minute, roller coaster ride of destruction such machines deliver was an immediate hit with increasingly hungry mid-'80s gamers.

*Side Arms* borrowed heavily from Japanese pop culture (the *Mobile Suit*

*Gundam* anime and manga series in particular), while retaining the unusual, bi-directional shooting gameplay of its predecessor, *Section-Z*. Unfortunately, unlike Captain Commando or the Unnamed Warriors who would follow in the third and final part of the trilogy, the *Hyper Dyne* mechs were less suitable for revival in future starring roles.

Even so, the Hyper Dynes have made many cameo appearances in Capcom's impressive catalogue, sometimes as background color and other times as collectable bonus items. In much the same vein as Captain Commando was reinvented, *Side Arms* provided inspiration for another short series of mechanized fighting games, beginning in 1994 with *Armored Warriors*.

This scrolling beat-'em-up didn't take directly from its ancestor in terms of character revival, though the gameplay and designs were thoroughly saturated with *Hyper Dyne* chic. The broad range of mechs, on both sides, was a superb technical evolution of the *Side Arms* style, while the ability for players to briefly join their characters together into a "mega mech" was also retained to great effect.

“the gun-toting, thrill-a-minute, **ROLLER COASTER RIDE OF DESTRUCTION**

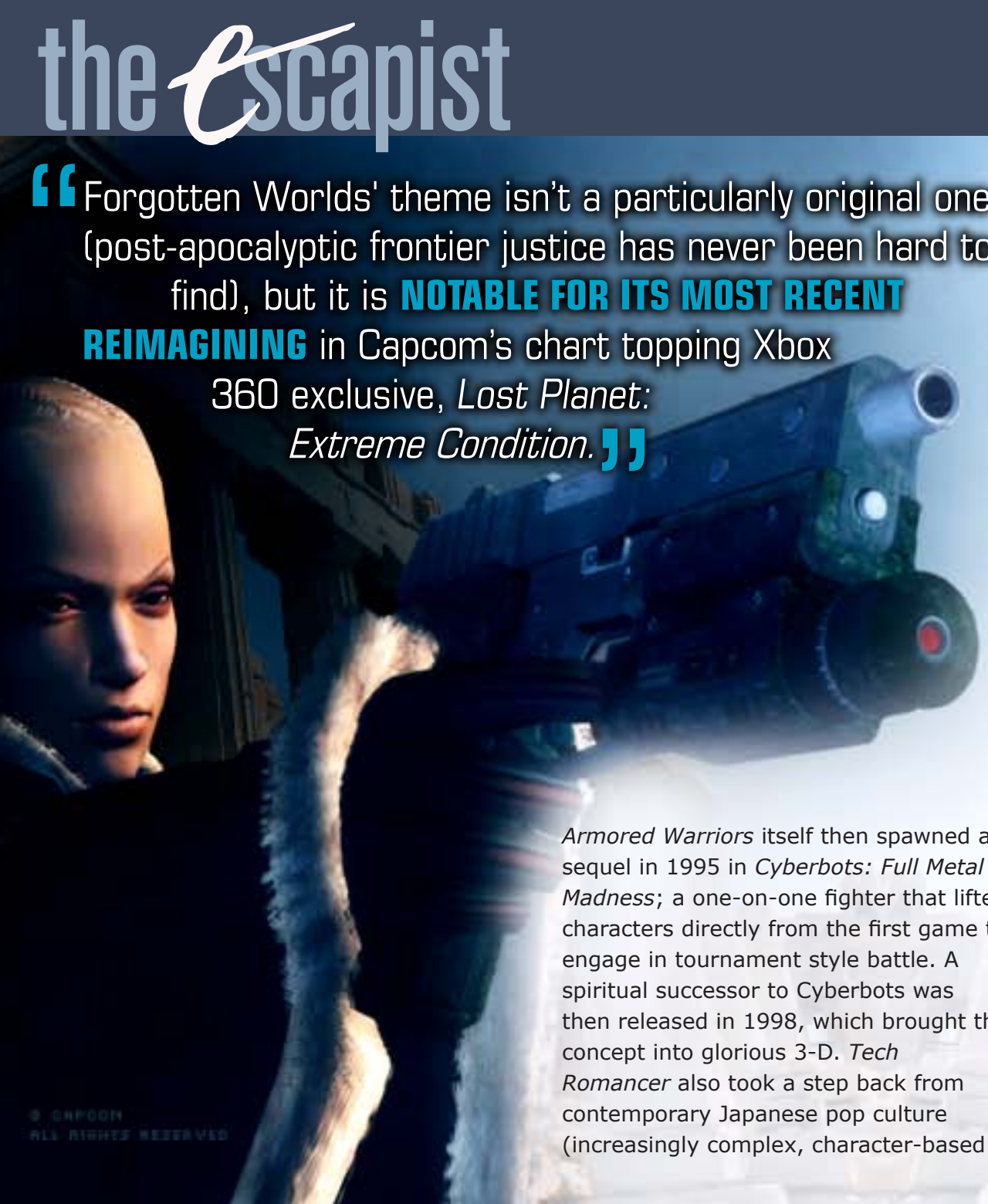
such machines deliver was **AN IMMEDIATE HIT** with increasingly hungry mid-'80s gamers.”





# the escapist

“Forgotten Worlds’ theme isn’t a particularly original one (post-apocalyptic frontier justice has never been hard to find), but it is **NOTABLE FOR ITS MOST RECENT REIMAGINING** in Capcom’s chart topping Xbox 360 exclusive, *Lost Planet: Extreme Condition*.”

A close-up of a character's face, likely from the game Lost Planet: Extreme Condition, looking intensely at the viewer. The character has dark skin and is wearing a dark, textured garment. A large, futuristic weapon with a blue and black color scheme is visible in the foreground, partially obscuring the character's face. The weapon has a prominent barrel and a complex, mechanical design.

*Armored Warriors* itself then spawned a sequel in 1995 in *Cyberbots: Full Metal Madness*; a one-on-one fighter that lifted characters directly from the first game to engage in tournament style battle. A spiritual successor to *Cyberbots* was then released in 1998, which brought the concept into glorious 3-D. *Tech Romancer* also took a step back from contemporary Japanese pop culture (increasingly complex, character-based

mech) and went unexpectedly old school with its tank designs – far closer to its ancestor, *Side Arms*, than either *Cyberbots* or *Armored Warriors* had achieved. This organic development of the original side-scrolling shooter into a 3-D tournament fighter was a superb, and very well received, homage to what has become a classic arcade franchise in its own right, every bit as much as the rest of the *Jet Pack Heroes*.

Out of the trilogy, the third and final installment released in 1988, *Forgotten Worlds*, has had the most impact on Capcom as a game developer. While this title was the refined culmination of the more adventurous aspects from the previous *Jet Pack Hero* games, it was also an incubator for many experimental gaming systems and techniques attempted by Capcom down through the years.

The courageous cheeseball, Captain Commando, was once again absent (although Player 1’s blonde-haired, blue-armored character strikes a remarkable resemblance), but the well-established “divergent shooter” gameplay was built upon once again, this time incorporating a hybrid paddle controller and fire button alongside the standard joystick. Rather

than the bi-directional shooting capabilities seen in *Section-Z* and *Side Arms*, *Forgotten Worlds* allowed players to fully rotate their character to shoot in 16 different directions.

It worked quite nicely on an arcade cabinet, where dedicated hardware isn’t really an issue, but the home systems struggled with conversions due to the lack of available controls to fully replicate *Forgotten Worlds’* unusual controller. This resonates rather profoundly with another famous attempt made by Capcom to add extra dimension to an otherwise ordinary game by way of unique hardware, in *Steel Battalion*. Many people will remember the enormous, complicated, dual joystick cockpit controller for the Xbox mech game

*Forgotten Worlds’* theme isn’t a particularly original one (post-apocalyptic frontier justice has never been hard to find), but it **is** notable for its most recent reimagining in Capcom’s chart topping Xbox 360 exclusive, *Lost Planet: Extreme Condition*.

While technically very different (the games are separated by almost 20 years), the premises are uncannily



similar. Both games are based on remote, alien-besieged planets previously occupied by humans, now on the losing side of a war with the unknown invaders. Their only salvation lies in the intervention of lone warriors, armed with an array of diverse weaponry and mechanized war machines.

The decimated, dystopian environments in both games are replete with savage, larval life forms that leave behind collectable elements to be used by the player to extend his abilities and overall game time. This might not be unexplored territory for videogames – and Capcom itself has made plentiful use of many individual aspects gleaned from the *Jet Pack Trilogy* – but a side-by-side comparison of *Forgotten Worlds* and *Lost Planet* reveals distinct and identifiable parallels: the crumbling concrete pillars jutting from the ground, burned out vehicles, long abandoned civilizations, menacing alien creatures and rogue humans gone bad (even the names are practically interchangeable).

Alongside the trilogy's well of inspiration for future games, their own resale value has proven to be a genuine commodity for Capcom, especially in today's

summery "revival hungry" climate. In 2005, Monolith Soft made excellent use of the *Jet Pack Heroes* in the star-studded and surreal RPG, *Namco X Capcom*. Characters from the extended universes of both companies came together in cross-corporate harmony, bringing with them a wealth of wonderfully familiar moves, music and nuances from their respective games.

Most recently, the Heroes have lent their popularity to the multi-format Classics Collection. *Side Arms*, *Section-Z* and *Captain Commando* were all present in the lineup, even if the strong family heritage of these titles went unmentioned. Even now, reviewers of the compilation (and its several "remixes," updates and sequels) sing the praise of the trilogy when labeling the collection's finer points.

This latest re-re-re-rerelease highlights the anomaly that has dogged the *Jet Pack Hero* trilogy since its inception. Despite providing untold inspiration and being a continual source of familiarity throughout Capcom's videogaming history, a collective acknowledgment is rarely spoken, let alone actively celebrated. Without the Captain, the Hyper Dyne

units or the Unnamed Warriors, Capcom's character catalogue would be severely depleted, and the company's personality far less distinguished.

Perhaps the simple fact Capcom and its creative heads have repeatedly drawn upon the trilogy as a valuable resource is homage enough, though it doesn't hurt to openly rejoice, every so often, in a brand which has proven as consistently popular with Capcom's own workers as it has with gamers. Of all the unsung heroes that have been passed over by videogame history, few have yielded such rich and diverse benefits for their creators, and we can only hope they continue to do so for another 20 years.

 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.*



“ Alongside the trilogy's well of inspiration for future games, their own resale value has proven to be a **GENUINE COMMODITY FOR CAPCOM** ”



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