

the Escapist

I Will Survive

by Allen Varney

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Pastimes Defining a Civilization:

VIDEOGAMES

by Dana Massey

EDITOR'S NOTE

by Julianne Greer

The en vogue topic of many U.S. State Legislatures these days appears to be videogames – violent ones, to be specific. Some are using pre-existing guidelines for the direction of game sales to minors, such as ESRB ratings. Some congressmen are attempting to draw lines around the nebulous concept of violence on their own. But interestingly, they are all being shot down. Why?

Games are art. In the U.S., art is protected under the Constitution.

To prove this, I could get into a long discussion here of the etiology of the word art and how that applies to videogames; I could give a nice comparison of the process behind various accepted-as-art forms and the creative process behind games; I could even discuss various philosophers' and critics' ideas of what constitutes "art." But really, if you don't believe it, I cannot convince you with finely worded arguments. In fact, that is one of the things that makes art so wonderful – its subjectivity.

So, let's assume, for a moment, that videogames are not art, that they are afforded no protection from the laws of our land. Let us pretend that we might legislate against videogames that include violence. While we are going about this supposition, let us not forget that violence is itself a very subjective notion, and that some feel that nearly all videogames are violent ("Super Mario Brothers is violent – it's all about killing"). Where does that leave us?

Well, if you think about that, and then hyperbolize the situation, one might imagine how a world without videogames might form. And this hyperbolized situation is exactly the theme we posed to our writers this week. Allen Varney responds by asking several game designers what they might do if making games was illegal – and receives some interesting responses. Tom Rhodes discusses how that situation is really not a possibility and how games were inevitable. Dana Massey looks at the issue from a slightly different angle and suggests that the real problem we need to look at is not the videogames themselves, but other past civilizations' violent entertainment and what that

might portend. Find these articles and more in this week's issue of The Escapist.

Cheers,

Julianne Greer



Evidence



I Will Survive When game design is outlawed, only outlaws will design games

by Allen Varney

"If you were legally enjoined from creating games, what would you do instead?"

The Escapist asked this question of many professional game designers in both electronic and tabletop paper-and-dice gaming. Their answers fell into several broad categories.

Good Citizens

- (1) Appeal!
- (2) Retire and play games.
- Steve Jackson

If I couldn't work on games, I'd probably teach young aspiring game developers. I've lectured at DigiPen and Full Sail, and really enjoyed my time with their students. I also might work on non-game software, but I tried quitting the game industry once, and that didn't last. Teaching would probably be the right answer.

- Ellen Guon Beeman

In my case, I'm a designer, writer and web monkey, so I guess I'd design web pages and write books.

- Hal Barwood

I also write rulebooks for sports. Between that and coaching (creating new plays), I imagine I wouldn't

end up in a bell tower too soon.

- Larry D. Hols, freelance paper game designer

If I hadn't become a game developer, I probably would have become a plumber. My father, grandfather and even great-grandfather were all plumbers. In many ways my work is similar to that of my dad. Plumbing and programming are both about logic and working solutions. They both have complicated innards, and a polished presentation to the end user. Maybe I'll come full-circle one day when I finally get around to writing that little game I've been thinking about. Called "Hammerhead Jack," it will star a bullish little plumber blasting through walls, laying pipe.

- Tom Gilleland, BeachWare

Turn to drugs, live on the street and sell myself cheaply to get by.

- Mike Kasprzak, sykhronics entertainment

Evidence

Subvert from Within

That's easy. I would become a lawyer.

- John Ebbert, Arkadium, Inc.

I'd play music in seedy bars, and write, and maybe draw cartoons. All the while, I'd secretly develop games, passing them around on illicit CD-Rs, always tempting fate. Sprites would be traded in back alleys with other like-minded ludotraffickers, and I'd be looking up algorithms on a loose network of pirate BBSes that would go up and down. Eventually, my counterculture existence would attract attention, and depending on how the roll of the dice goes, I'd end up raided by the FBI, a martyr to the movement, and a cause celebre; or I'd be vanished, to work for the NSA providing military-grade puzzle games to keep the troops amused.

Or maybe I'd be an accountant.

- Raph Koster, Sony Online Entertainment

I'd stop designing games immediately. Then, I'd proceed to start designing, pastimes, sports, challenges, puzzles, contests, interactive activities, simulations, abstractions, etc.

- Jeff Siadek, *Battlestations* board game designer

Given how such prohibitions often increase the demand and the prices paid for the illicit materials, I'd set myself up as the Al Capone of the gaming industry, supplying that demand through black market means. I'd ruthlessly wipe out rivals who tried to smuggle in Canadian games.

- Matt Forbeck, writer/paper game designer

A) I'd write fiction about my game worlds, or

B) I'd move to someplace where I could create them legally, or failing that

C) Do it over the internet via anonymous means, or

D) Found the militant National Roleplayers Association, or NRA ("You can have my dice when you pry them from my cold, dead hands...")

- Greg Porter, Blacksburg Tactical Research Center

I'd probably teach. One of the tremendous benefits of gaming is its ability to engage and educate its audience (often subtly and incrementally). So, if some entity were brazen enough to prohibit us from constructing this generation's greatest new medium, I would translate my game development experience into immersive "lesson plans." These exercises would teach the intended curriculum, but they would also encourage children to explore their worlds, to challenge their preconceptions, and to "think outside of the box" so that, in the end, they may still create new worlds of their own ... and make the one we live in a far more interesting place.

- Jamie Carlson, Sonalysts Combat Simulations

I would begin a high-profile game project in an attempt to get arrested, make a giant splash in the news, and begin the process of overturning the law.

- Sandy Petersen, Ensemble Studios

Create a political modeling system where individual politicians are "tested" by simulation on their policy decisions to model their effect on things like economy, freedom, health



**“Maybe
I’d be an
accountant.”**

the Escapist

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**“Make games.
Just try to
stop me.”**

and education. This rating would then be attached like a tag to every statement by every politician so that their quality/competence could be judged immediately by the eBay generation.

A variant would extend to lobbyists and lawyers ...

- Andrew McLennan, Slam Games Limited

Get Out

Escape.

- Daniel Kinney, Solari Studios

Well, I'm already an expat, but if developing games were illegal where I lived [Thailand], I'd move somewhere else. If games were illegal where most games are sold and the legal market was wrecked, then I guess I'd become super-rich, since as we all know, the main benefit of any contraband is that prices go way up! And I'd be all over that black market. "Psst... hey you... wanna match three? Swap jewels? Psst! Yeah, you... 50 dolla..."

- Steve Verreault, Twilight Games

Pay No Attention

Make games. Just try to stop me.

Who cares?

- James C. Smith, Reflexive Entertainment

Write, paint, draw, make music, make movies ... all the forms of creative expression that go into a game besides actual game making! But since I can't make a living with my skills in those areas, I'd also flip burgers. But secretly at night I'd join

James' underground indie cabal.

- Mike Hommel, Hamumu Software

Put it this way: If the government suddenly made selling games illegal, and anyone caught selling games would be summarily executed by beheading with a large traditional katana, I would still be making games - just giving them away for free.

- Dan MacDonald, Rainfall Studios

Write and run more RPG scenarios.

Write more fanfic.

And, of course, make games anyway, just more quietly.

- Georgina Bensley, Hanako Games

I'd do the same thing I do because I'm legally enjoined from smoking pot - I'd create games illegally.

- Steve Meretzky, Floodgate Entertainment

+5 Interesting

I would build another exciting and fun business: a trading company selling high-density polypropylene plastic T-shirt bags to mom-and-pop grocery stores.

- Steven Zhao, Blue Tea Games

I'd invest heavily in law enforcement equipment and arms trading. When all the psychos who currently use videogames as an outlet for their murderous impulses no longer have games, there'll be nothing left for them but the real thing. I'd step up to be the principal arms supplier to both the police

and the rocket whores.

- Darren Pye, Vorax Games

I'd start a high-end sex party business near a major city (LA, Chicago, Houston, or NYC). It would offer anonymity via cloth masks and would be very expensive. It's a way to watch the rich play their games and take away a lot of money in the process. Who knows? Maybe I'd take a week off and participate sometime. That's what the masks are for!

- Don Perrin

Stick it to the Man! Power to the People!

I'm not really sure. Try to take over the world for real, I guess.

- Dustin Sacks, Sillysoft Games

There's plenty of other creative things I would happily do, so I'd probably do them instead. Except I wouldn't. Because if games were illegal, I'd have to make illegal games, just on principle. Take my s*** underground, yo.

Hey, it might even be better that way.

- Anthony Flack, Squashy Software

I hope I would have abandoned such a silly enterprise as making games to participate in the struggle against evil, well before such an injunction appeared.

- Mike Bennighof, Avalanche Press

I would suddenly find myself involved in a very individual war. It'd be Me vs. Them, and I'd hate to be Them. If I'm not allowed to create my own worlds, then the next available world for sculpting as I see fit is the one they inhabit. Is that what they want? To set a game designer loose upon the comfortable and familiar fabric of real life? They wouldn't be so bold ...

- Tim Scheiman, Indie Madness

If I were legally prevented from making games, I would probably foment revolution a bit more intently than I do now, due to my current lack of free time.

- Matthew Ford, Auran

I would dedicate my life to overthrowing the government, destroying corporations and writing evil viruses. The fact that I have moved to Bulgaria may help me in this endeavor.

- Julian Gollop, Codo Technologies (Sofia, Bulgaria)

It's a ludicrous supposition. The "anti-game activists" aren't trying to ban games entirely... they're just trying to ban the games they don't like (or at least criminalize the sale of such games to minors).

A far more interesting question would be, What are you, dear game developer, doing to prevent further constraints on your creative freedom? Do you write letters to the editor, your congressmen, the IGDA, ESA,

“I would probably foment revolution a bit more intently than I do now, due to my current lack of free time.”

ESRB, etc., expressing your views? Do you vote for candidates who support freedom of expression in all media? Have you considered running for office yourself? How about a game industry PAC doing what every other big industry does: make contributions to those politicians willing to let you write the legislation that benefits your industry. That's a strategy that seems to work pretty well.

Playing games is older, deeper and more fundamental to human nature than storytelling, and I am confident games will endure.

- David Wessman, Backbone Entertainment

[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.



William UNREMEMBERING

by Tom Rhodes

The blood was crimson in the light of the setting sun. There was a sound, like a flop, as my victim's body fell hard onto the ground, kicking up a puff of dust. I raise my arm and display my prize to the crowd surrounding me: his severed head. A cheer rises from the stands, and I see the emperor is pleased.

"Tom, did you do the dishes?"

Blast, it was my mother.

"Not yet, Mom!" I replied, setting down the controller. The blood sport I was currently involved in would have to wait; the dishes called.

Pastimes: They are how we define ourselves and our culture. From actual, non-polygonal gladiators to Shakespearean actors and actresses, from reading to watching films, the way we while away hours of boredom that can creep into our lives is a defining characteristic of the times in which we live.

You may not know the name William Higinbotham, but he's an important guy. In 1958, he is believed to have invented

the first videogame: a tennis simulator with a simple *Pong*-like interface. Its purpose was to illustrate how scientific endeavors have relevance to society.

But what if that hadn't been invented? What if interactive content of that nature was never created? What would it mean? What would happen if we forgot all about William and his bouncing ball?

It might very well be that one of two things could happen without games to entertain us: (1) We might become more productive without such distractions, or (2) we maintain the same level of sloth, wasting time with other technology. For instance, the internet is becoming more enmeshed in everything, and that is one of the world's most popular time-wasters. In the future, high-speed access (and I mean **high**-speed) will be all over the place. Not to mention, with recent advances in technology being debuted, screens and computers could become as thin as paper, echoing the interactive newspapers of *Minority Report*. Movies will be available on-demand not only from set-top boxes, but from computers everywhere, and for

every device imaginable (assuming content companies can work out this digital rights management nonsense).

While the Video iPod's screen is less than adequate, smaller screens can produce bigger results. We've all seen the ads for glasses that can broadcast a television signal to the inside of the lens. Imagine that, but without being tethered to anything, and storage either in the rims of the glasses, or in a small, wireless remote system, like the iPod Nano.

Without videogames to bind us to MMOGs or other online-enabled titles, it might very well be that chatting, already an important aspect of online gaming, would become **the** central time-waster, rather than peripheral. Perhaps the long wondered about videophone would finally make a bigger splash than it has in the past. Even if it didn't, connectivity would increase, as it already has, and probably much in the same way. Ten years from now, dropped signals and line problems will be a thing of the past, as wireless would be the word. I even imagine that the person-rating system Allen Varney speculated about would

come about even faster than it no doubt already will.

One thing is clear, however: We are becoming content consumers. With the advent of file-sharing, our patience has moved from several days to several hours to several minutes. We're entering the "I want it now" age, if we aren't already there. If you hear a song on television, you want to know where you can get it, and you want to download it **now**. Those DVDs of *My So-Called Life*? They'd take too long to get here. BitTorrent to the rescue!

Years from now, everything will be able to fulfill that instant gratification we all seek without having to resort to piracy or subversion. There would be no more wireless "hotspots," as **everywhere** will be a hotspot.

Of course, these are all moot points. It's pretty clear, as I go through all these examples, that someone, somewhere, would have thought to make games for these advancing systems. There's so much in our increasingly technobabbled society with which games are so

interwoven, not creating them would be impossible.

I, for one, think it's a good thing. Despite what Roger Ebert may say, games are an important part of a lot of people's lives, and not mere distractions from making oneself more cultured. And with the fracas over videogames and violence, it's important to remember they are responsible for advances in technology, and in the very way we think about interactions with each other. They are, and will be, an important aspect of developing not only technology, but our culture.

So, let's all give thanks to William. From his tennis game sprang the feast of options we see before us. Because that's all culture is really: a series of choices of ways to entertain ourselves.

Now, if you'll excuse me, nostalgia has gotten the best of me, and I feel like chopping off some heads. [COMMENTS](#)

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

**Those DVDs of
My So-Called Life?
They'd take too long
to get here.**

**BitTorrent to
the rescue!**

Pastimes Defining a Civilization: **VIDEO GAMES**

by Dana Massey

Pastimes help define a society. The Ancient Romans were known for their love of gladiatorial combat, the English have soccer and, as a Canadian, I am assumed – correctly – to be a rabid fan of hockey. Yet, what do these pastimes say about us? Some point to the Roman practice of gladiatorial combat as a root from which the doom of their civilization was born. The mob was educated to believe the idea of killing other humans was acceptable.

Today, in our global culture, we have seen the rise of videogames, movies and

television as nearly global pastimes. These pastimes, which are often violent, have been cast by both supporters and detractors as our gladiatorial games. They provide entertainment and allow people to escape and see things they could never personally hope to experience. Yet, it was not until the advent of violent videogames that the line was crossed between observation and participation.

Unlike ancient times, when distance could entirely cut off one culture from another, we now live in a world where

the boundaries between societies are much harder to define. Different cultures still have their preferences – try to find more than two North Americans who know the rules to cricket – but as time passes, these differences are being supplemented with common interest. Most of the world watches American films and television. And while there are differences based on language and regional preferences, the developed world plays videogames.

Rapidly, our industry has joined the big leagues. We're one of the largest global

creators of pastime content for all ages. What we create is, in part, determined by what the market wants to consume. Thus, when the world shows relentless demand for violent and otherwise morally gray videogames, it makes some question the state of our global society.

History repeats itself. That's right; I pulled out that cliché. But, if you are someone who believes this, there is a mountain of evidence that indicates we should be worried. Where Romans had increasingly violent gladiatorial combat, we as a society have had wrestling and

boxing. In recent years, we've seen the emergence of ultimate fighting, which is like a combination of the two: Keep the story from wrestling and the actual hitting from boxing, then remove the protective gloves. It's not to the death, but we're getting closer.

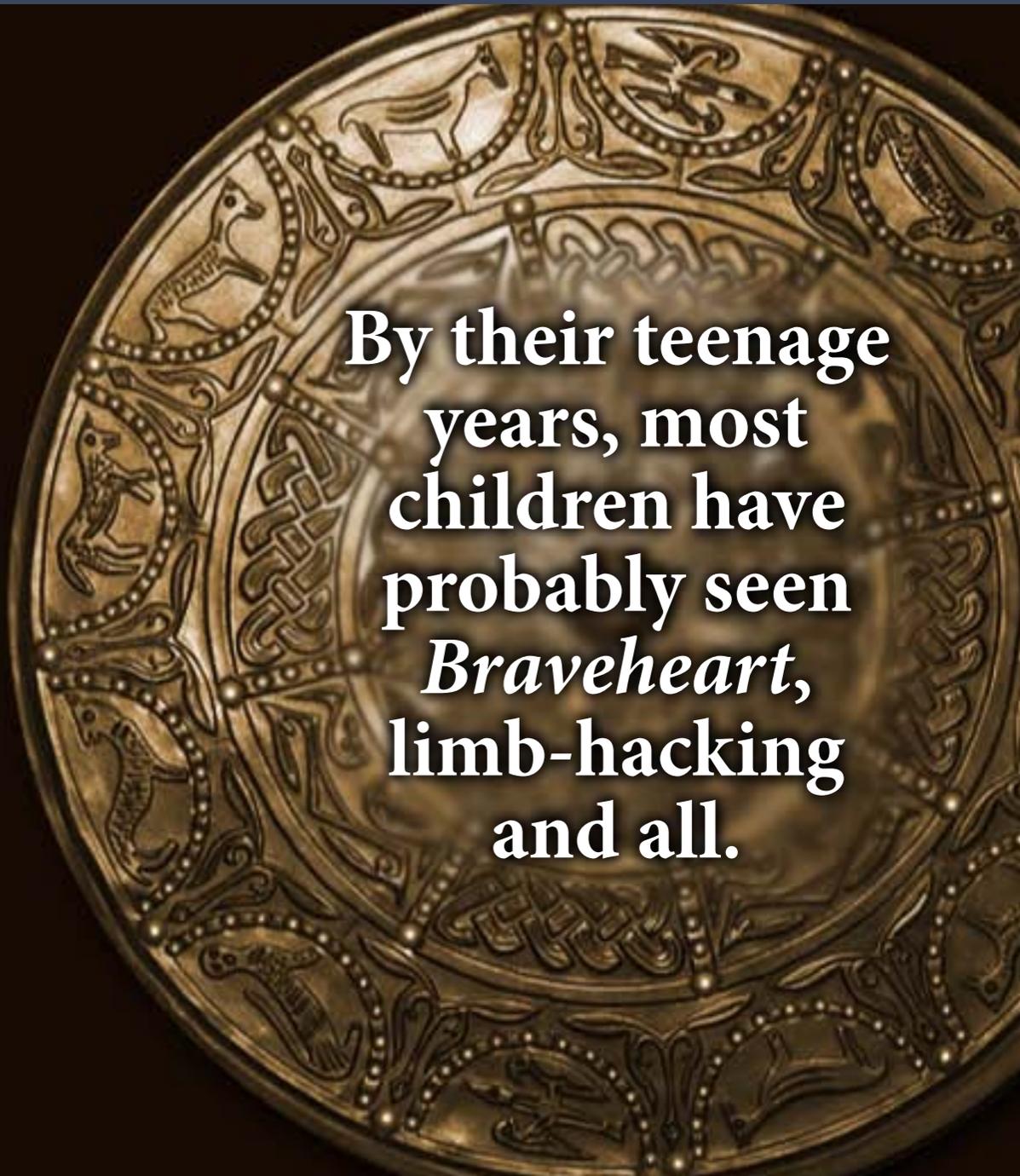
On the videogame end, we've gone from shooting alien spaceships on 2-D arcade machines, to games that let you do virtually whatever insanely violent thing you want (think *Manhunt*). Our pastimes have increased in violence over the years. Enabled by technology, we've seen movies with severed limbs, videogames with mindless rampages and TV shows where we eat popcorn while real people beat each other into oblivion.

Let me be clear: I believe it's absolutely ludicrous to use *Grand Theft Auto* as a legal defense against a rampage. In the personal sense, it's no excuse. If someone is crazy enough to shoot up anything after playing a videogame, they've got other issues. The videogame represents the form the violence ultimately takes, not the impulse to commit it. However, the overall trend of our love of violence in all forms worries

me. Trace things back only one century. In the early part of this century, it is entirely conceivable that a child could grow into adulthood without ever seeing anything more violent than a school-yard brawl. Boxing was popular, but that was about the extent of it.

Modern entertainment media means that by age six, kids are quite probably actively controlling cartoons killing each other. By their teenage years, most children have probably seen *Braveheart*, limb-hacking and all, and by adulthood, they've probably personally conducted an all-out suicidal rampage on their PC or console. More alarming, the above example assumes responsible parental monitoring. I have met 6-year-olds who've already reached the *Grand Theft Auto* stage. This doesn't mean society is on the verge of collapse, but it is impossible to just accept that all this exposure to violence means nothing and affects no one.

The game industry has to be careful. I am hardly the only one worried about violence in videogames and what it says about our culture as a whole. As such, I believe it's important that we continue to



By their teenage years, most children have probably seen *Braveheart*, limb-hacking and all.

Can we do anything? Can the videogame help turn the corner?

self-regulate the industry to ensure games are rated appropriately. I am also totally supportive of legislation that limits who can and cannot buy games, based on rating. Videogames are always going to be perceived – fair or not – as the most dangerous medium by virtue of the fact that they enable people to personally commit the violence, no matter how fantastical.

In the Valentine's Day issue of *The Escapist*, Editor Julianne Greer wrote that it is "the active nature of playing games together is what makes them special." She was talking about love and how they are, by definition, more social than TV, books or films. However, where the positives apply, so do the negatives. In games, you decide when and where to shoot. In a movie, you simply watch someone else do it. It is a fine line, but as games get more realistic, it becomes a greater concern. It is this distinction that has been at the root of the recent controversies about games.

At its worst, Hot Coffee showed nothing worse than I can see on late night TV. The difference is, on late night TV, I would simply be observing, not

participating. This point may be negligible, but it must be kept in mind when it comes to creating games.

There is, however, the possibility that all this worrying is really meaningless. Take Canada, for example. Canada has the reputation of being a polite, peace-loving and relatively non-violent nation. Yet, as far as pastimes go, our favorite one is arguably the most violent of any mainstream North American sport. Hockey encourages throwing people into walls at high speeds, fighting and all other sorts of bloody activity. Not a year goes by where someone isn't maimed, prosecuted, paralyzed or even killed playing hockey at some level. Yet, Canadians have been lining up for years to watch and participate in this sport. If pastimes were totally indicative of a society's temperament, the United States would have a seriously belligerent neighbor to the north. Canada is anything but.

What does all this mean? Can we do anything? Can the videogame help turn the corner? Who knows? Probably not - and almost certainly not. This is a big question with very few answers.

Perhaps, this is the natural course of things. Over time, as societies age, they become more and more enamored with violence. If the game industry were to take a stand and outlaw all violent content, the videogame industry would be doing a disservice to its investors - to whom they are ultimately responsible - and people would inevitably just find an outlet for their entertainment somewhere else. We're hardly the shepherds of the developed world's morals - and we should not be expected to be - but like all genres, we must continue the precarious balance between responsibility and freedom of speech.

It is all fine and good to say parents should be responsible for what their kids consume, but let's face it: Many are not, and it can't possibly harm anyone to put some rules in place to make it hard for a kid to buy the most violent or graphic of games. The lust for violent pastimes may be inevitable, but at least then, we could be contented to know we're at least not making things worse. [COMMENTS](#)

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A Question of MANNERS

by Spanner

Videogames have been mired in controversy ever since their conception, providing an all-you-can-eat buffet of flavorless nourishment for the Thought Police to gorge themselves on, before spewing forth self-righteous subjugation in Mr. Creosoteian proportions.

And no bad thing, I say.

If videogames provide the sanctimoniously pious with fodder for grievance, it follows that players must also be enjoying a certain freedom of entertainment with which to annoy them. Keeping an eye on what's got the lobbyists up in arms can be an effective method of deciding on the next game to play.

Were we to remove all vestiges of luxury and pleasure from our lives (aside from an ostentatiously bound *Bible* or *Quran*, perhaps), think only Puritan thoughts and wrap ourselves tightly in wool, would it finally silence the twittering voices of those who would have dominion over us?

But people's reasons for protesting about the content of videogames can't be as

one-dimensional as having irrepressible control issues. Games, movies, books and TV are a major part of our influences, and shallow as it might sound, these things matter. They have a profound impact on our day to day existence and people have a right to worry about them.

But what's so offensive about someone else enjoying the violence of a computer game? Is it a heartfelt concern that we (the players) will become so immersed in these fantasies that our perceptions will break down with axe-wielding consequences? We hear all the time how inadequately expressed grief and depression cause psychological fatigue, and even damage. So, why wouldn't stifled violent tendencies do the same? Maybe suppressed happiness would cause psychosomatic hemorrhaging if it weren't so acceptable to laugh out loud. Spock certainly had more than his share of emotional problems, didn't he?

The main argument for tighter control of our videogames always seems to stem from a concern that playing out violent or decadent behavior on the screen could



ultimately lead to living out similar behavior on the streets. Dick Cavett is well quoted for posing the wry question:

“There’s so much comedy on television. Does that cause comedy on the streets?”

Well, kind of. Yeah. Who hasn’t re-enacted a funny scene, or retold a joke, or quoted a catchphrase from a film or TV program? It’s only reasonable to surmise that videogames **also** have an impact on a player’s behavior. The mistake is in not granting people the credit to be able to differentiate between reality and fantasy; after all, if the distinction between the two was so easily blurred, wouldn’t the censors themselves be blood crazed, flesh hungry psychos after screening everything they wanted to ban?

Neither does the gaming industry do itself any favors with feigned surprise and knee-jerk contrariety, claiming all the events, stories, gameplay and gore in videogames is “within context” or “demonstrative of consequence,” raising no issue of commerce over morality. These weak, head-in-the-sand arguments don’t fool anyone, and serve only to lend weight to the lobbyist’s

arguments. A videogame developer cannot talk about ongoing commitments to their customer’s psychological welfare while holding a chainsaw shaped controller behind his back. These are nebulous wiles that insult the intelligence of players, lobbyists and the public in general. Who wouldn’t think more of a developer who stood up and admitted they make violent games because **we** buy them, and they are not obliged to justify their actions to anyone? Another quick word from the sagely Mr. Cavett:

“As long as people will accept crap, it will be financially profitable to dispense it.”

Now, I don’t think these controversial games are “crap”; quite the opposite. I am happy to admit that I enjoy, nay love, the violent behavior I live out when playing *Double Dragon*, *Resident Evil*, *Virtua Fighter* or *Spyro the Dragon*. I also get considerable gratification from being drunk and having sex for non-reproductive purposes (or any combination of the three). I find them all very enjoyable ways to pass the time and make no excuse for doing so. If only the industry was less defensive and more candid about their policies, arguments proclaiming the evils of

**There is so much comedy on television.
Does that cause comedy on the streets?**



videogaming would be far less persuasive.

I think the campaigners' problems stem from a fear of realizing the human condition is not based in a just and moral world, yet to sit back and avoid acting on the principle that some form of cosmic justice will make things right is a luxury far more decadent than any amount of time spent on a depraved videogame.

And the inherent principle of censorship carries severe problems of its own, easily outweighing the consequences of our youth being entertained by blood and mayhem. You needn't look far into history to see the types of people and organizations who made considerable use of censorship, and many of them undoubtedly believed they were acting for the greater good. The freedom to make, play and protest about such controversial forms of entertainment is part and parcel of our quest to become a more advanced civilization; it's no use complaining when it tastes bad.

It's quite clear that restricting people's privilege to disagree with each other is wrong. Coupled with the fact that players

and anti-gaming lobbyists are never going to convince each other to see reason, common ground must be found. Luckily for the free world, I have a solution. It's so simple and so easily implemented, no one'll ever go for it, but here it is anyway.

Whether we like it or not, none of us have (and **should never** have) any control over the beliefs of others. The plus side is, so long as our willpower is fortified enough to mind our own business, neither do we have any responsibility for other peoples' actions, issues or demands. But it's of vital importance that we **do** take control and responsibility for ourselves and all the cumbersome emotional baggage that accompanies a fully developed personality.

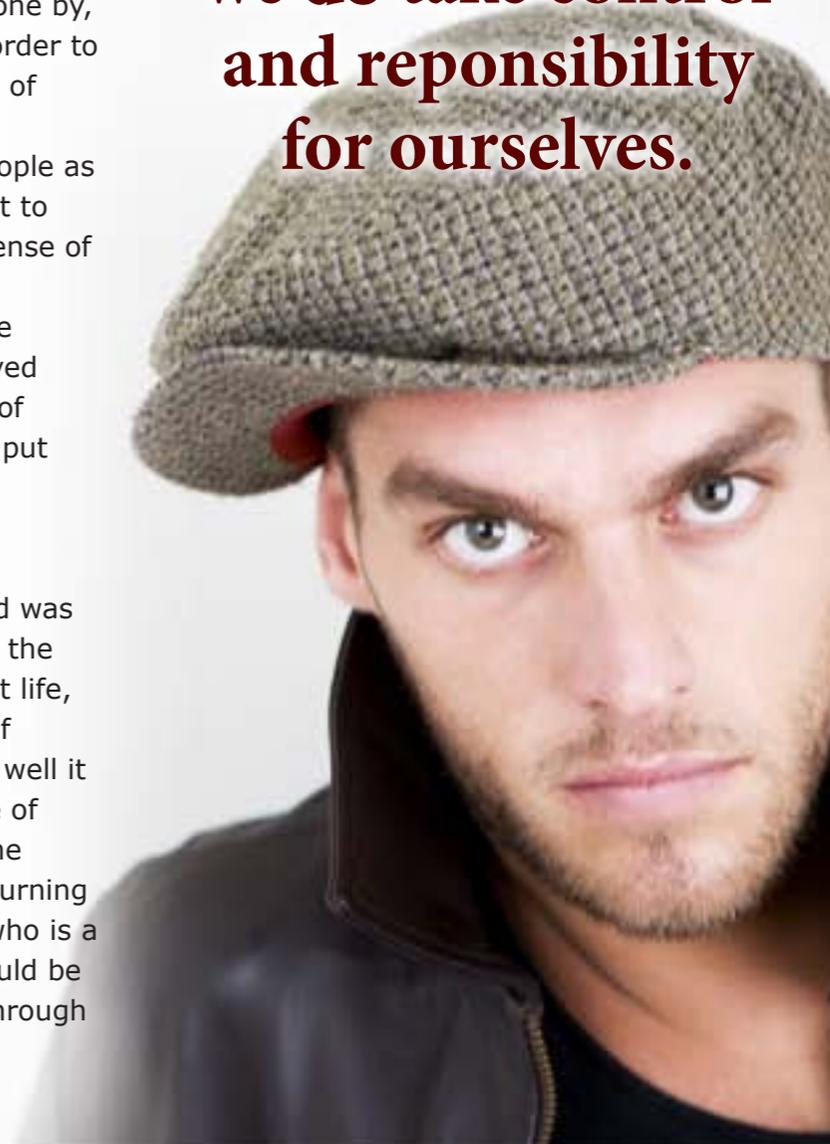
It's all a question of having good manners. If a person exhibits a pleasant demeanor to the people around him - despite the fact that most of the time it will not be reciprocated - many of the most destructive and antisocial elements of modern society become impossible to enact, such as intolerance, oppression or hatred. And other than the way in which

you deal with people, having good manners won't affect your own beliefs or your way of life one bit. Let me give you an example.

Take the witch hunters of years gone by, who would burn heretics alive in order to "cleanse" their souls for the crime of non-belief. Once again, it's too convenient to portray all these people as malicious, twisted malcontents out to murder and maim for their own sense of self-satisfaction. (Kind of like videogamers of today!) Many were deeply religious people who believed what they were doing was an act of charity, even though it effectively put their own immortal soul at risk.

Let's assume for a moment that everything a witch hunter believed was 100% correct: If you didn't follow the correct religion and led a decadent life, you were doomed to an eternity of hellfire and torment. Knowing full well it could jeopardize their own chance of getting into Paradise, they save the everlasting spirits of heretics by burning them at the stake. For someone who is a devoutly religious person, this would be an extremely difficult act to see through

It's of vital importance that we do take control and responsibility for ourselves.





**If you find sex
and violence entertaining,
make no apologies for it.**

and would take a tremendous toll on them. So, assuming everything they believed was factually correct, their actions were of kindness and self-sacrifice, even though the people they were saving would never thank them for it.

But, had the hunters followed an additional doctrine of showing good manners to the people around them, matters would have been completely different.

"Is burning a heretic alive an act of kindness?" **Yes.**

"Is burning a heretic alive the right thing to do?" **Without question.**

"Is it good manners to burn someone alive against their will?" **Absolutely not.**

Regardless of personal belief, the certainty of the facts or the nature of the consequences, the unequivocal answer is "no." By applying that simple question to the everyday events of your life, "Is it good manners?" all number of problems and conflicts are solved preemptively,

including how other people (be they gamers or conscientious objectors) conduct their social activities.

Common ground becomes the only place to exist, leading to the realization that your only responsibility is to ensure **you** behave in a polite and appropriate manner to everyone you meet, and to follow **your own** perceptions of what constitutes an enjoyable life, regardless of what others may think.

If you find sex and violence entertaining, make no apologies for it. Just be aware that no matter how immersive the gameplay can be, you must always behave in a courteous and good-natured manner to everyone you meet. Any subsequent arguments that your choice of escapist entertainment is harmful to society will be proven unjustifiable by your smiling, agreeable, good mannered self. [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.

EMPOWERMENT OF THE INNOCENT



by Ian Easton

The years spanning the late 1930s through the early 1950s are often referred to as the golden age of comics - and with good reason. Serving as a cheap escape from the grim reality of the Second World War, comic books came into their own as a medium. What began as a ragtag band of publishers turned into a multimillion dollar industry: popular titles such as *Batman* and *Green Lantern* sold over a million copies in a single issue, and the industry experienced wild growth.

As the war drew longer, comic books' audience changed: The children who read them grew older, and many GIs who received issues for free overseas got hooked on comics. As their demographics changed, the industry's focus shifted to cater to their new audience. Publishers like EC Comics created books centered on more adult themes - gritty crime stories, and horror comics. By the early 1950s, comics weren't just for children anymore.

Does this sound familiar to you? Even if you aren't a fan of comic books, it should. In terms of history, comic books

and videogames have a lot in common. With this in mind, there's a great deal that we can learn from them. In particular, we can learn from the mistakes of 1954 - the year the golden age of comic books came crashing down.

The comic industry's woes began when Dr. Fredric Wertham, a German-American psychiatrist, published *Seduction of the Innocent* - a book which warned that comic books were turning America's youth into juvenile delinquents. Wertham's book attacked comics for their violence and strong sexual themes which, he argued, young readers were likely to imitate. Much of the book was backed by undocumented anecdotal evidence, but it managed to cause a stir among concerned parents, and prompted a congressional subcommittee to launch an investigation into comic books' effects on youth.

Frightened by the possibility of federal regulation, the comic book industry rushed to create its own set of decency guidelines. The resulting entity was the Comics Code Authority (CCA), a regulatory organization with a strict set



of rules. In its first incarnation, the Comics Code barred depictions of sex or excessive violence, forbade any depiction of disrespect towards authority figures and decreed the forces of good must always win. While the CCA didn't have legal control over the industry, most shops and distributors refused to carry comic books which hadn't been approved. Many publishers, such as Marvel and DC, simply cancelled books which contained questionable content, but for publishers who thrived on the edgy themes, the impact was devastating: Almost overnight, entire comic book genres ceased to exist.

With the fate of comics in mind, it's easy to see just how vulnerable the videogame industry is. It's only in the past 20 years that comic book industry has begun to recover from the destruction brought about by the Comics Code. And while videogames have yet to suffer under anything as oppressive as the CCA, the industry has come dangerously close on a number of occasions. This is why we need to learn from the comic industry's mistakes while

there's still time. The gaming industry itself, in the form of the ESA and ESRB has done a lot to defend itself, but there's still a lot gamers themselves can do.

The first thing we need to do is ask ourselves an important question: Why do politicians go after targets like comic books and videogames? The answer is simple: We let them. Politicians live and die by public opinion. If nobody votes for them, they don't get elected. Indeed, most politicians regularly poll voters when deciding what issues to address. Since they go where the votes are, you'd expect politicians to represent the interests of everyone in their jurisdiction, including gamers - after all, there are a lot of us.

The problem is, when people don't vote, this system breaks down. Many gamers are in their late teens or early 20s - a demographic which is notorious for not voting. By not defending our interests at the polls, we become our own worst enemies. The politicians who are elected don't understand gaming because there's

no political gain in it. Worse yet, our apathy makes gaming an easy target. Older voters don't identify with videogame culture, so when games are demonized, the average voter doesn't know enough to disagree. In effect, decrying games is about as politically dangerous as saying, "Murder is bad."

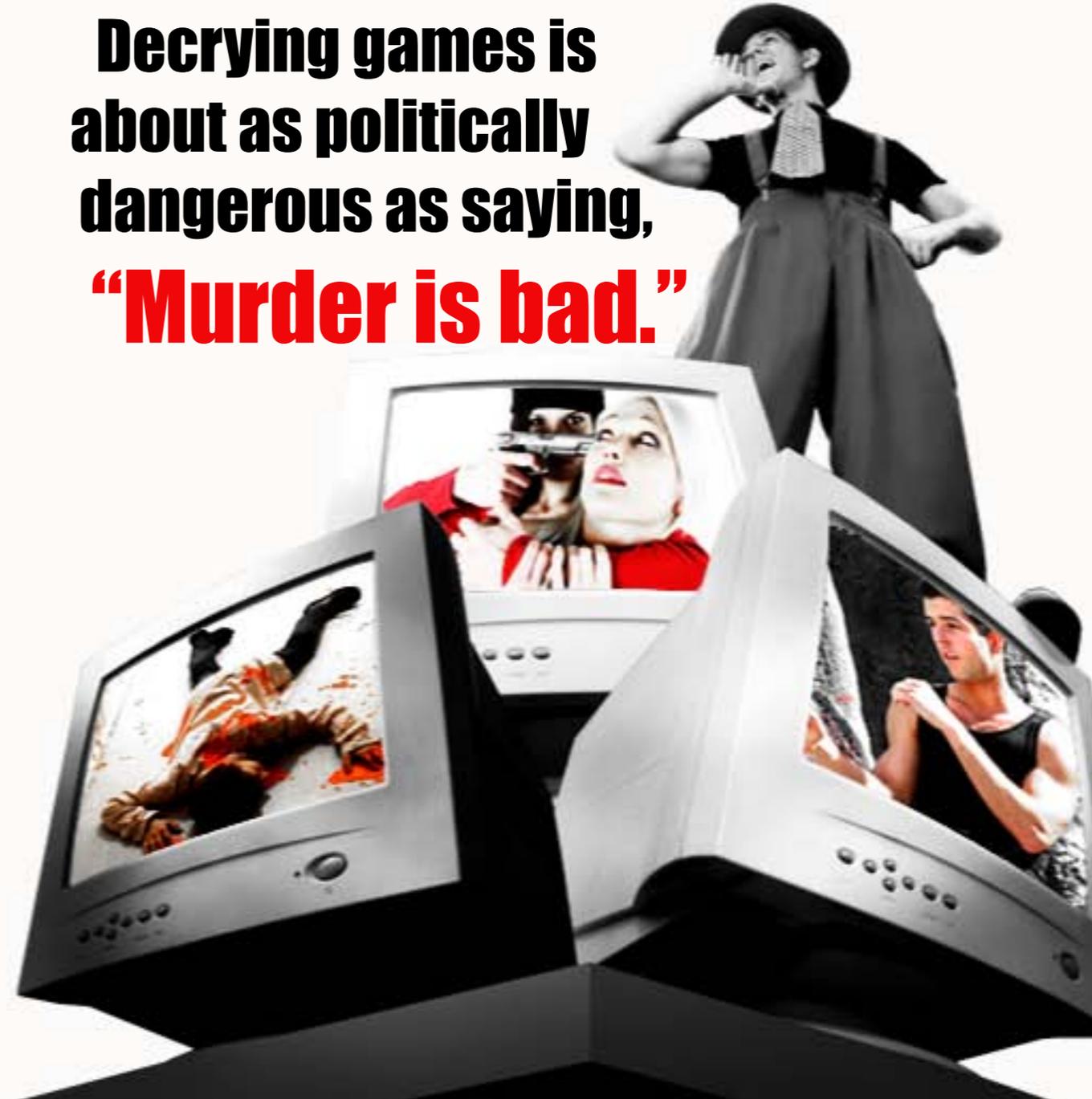
As we're all aware, the wolves are already at the gate. Opportunists like Jack Thompson have set their sights on the videogame industry, and have already had a disturbing level of success. If we want to avoid the fate of the comic book industry, we need to take control of the gaming industry's political situation. The industry itself has begun to take action on the political front- The Interactive Entertainment Merchants Association recently hired a political lobbyist to push their interests in Washington, but there's still plenty we as gamers can do. Some have suggested running a pro-gaming political candidate, but that isn't likely to work. As important

as games are to us, it's a single issue - not nearly enough to build a political platform upon.

The real answer is much simpler: Make our cause worthwhile for politicians. If you don't vote, register now get yourself to the polls. The more of us who vote, the harder we are to ignore. If you're already registered, it's time to take an active stance in defending your hobby. Writing your local congressman is a great start, and getting organized is even better. Being a concerned voter doesn't have the political pull it used to, so a few scattered gamers may not have much clout; but if we organize ourselves into a special interest group, we have the numbers to effect real change in Washington. Working together we can have some real power in the struggle to defend the industry. [COMMENTS](#)

Ian Easton is an aspiring technology journalist with plans to attend graduate school in the fall.

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MEET THE TEAM

Each week we ask a question of our staff and featured writers to learn a little bit about them and gain some insight into where they are coming from. This week's question is:

“In a world without videogames, what type of outdoor activity could you see yourself engaging in to fill up those recreation gaps?”

**Allen Varney,
“I Will Survive”**

Outdoor activity? Please. I live in Texas.

**Tom Rhodes,
“Unremembering William”**

Y'know, videogames have always distracted me from my real passion: world domination. Watching the population scream in fear as my army of giant, evil robots descended upon the land, fire everywhere...yeah, that's quality time.

**Dana Massey,
“Pastimes Defining a Civilization:
Videogames”**

Just in case anyone didn't know I was Canadian... hockey. Regardless of video games, hockey in some form is always entertaining.

**Ian Easton,
“Empowerment of the Innocent”**
Well, I have a friend who once broke his nose during a casual game of dodge the

stick. That sounds like a lot of fun to me, so maybe I'll try my hand at it.

**Spanner,
“A Question of Manners”**

I think gang fighting would be a pleasant pastime for me. I'd probably pit myself against an onslaught of generic thugs for a while, then take on someone much bigger with an unfair advantage. It'd keep me fit, and I'd get to see parts of the city that tourists often miss out on.

**Joe Blancato,
Content Editor**

I'd probably go back to my middle and high school routine. Baseball, pickup basketball, street hockey and bike riding.

**Julianne Greer,
Executive Editor**

Well, I might try to get involved with a softball team. And I'd probably have to move somewhere I could have a garden cuz you can't beat fresh tomatoes.

**Jon Hayter,
Producer**

In a world without games ... Huh. I'd probably do a lot of growing-grass watching. Maybe some observing of drying paint? Probably some reading

too. Life under the daystar is a pale, washed-out version of life under the phosphor glow of a high resolution monitor.

**JR Sutich,
Contributing Editor**

I think that outdoor activities should have some inherent chance for grievous bodily injury. I would have to say Rochambeau fits the bill rather nicely. If I get a thirst for blood, there's always Mumbly-Peg.

