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Staying In To Play

By John Paul Bichard

Morality and Immortality - the games industry under siege

staying in to play This review was going to be themed around the morality of computer games and the responsibility that games developers may or may not have regarding the exponential increase in influence that CV games are having upon broad sectors of Western society, as well as those sectors' responses to these new 'uncontrollable' media which present different world orders, scenarios for the destruction and reconstruction of society and the reassessment of personal and societal power structures. Furthermore, the intention was to assess the ethics of an entertainment industry that has a direct bearing on the physical state of its consumers: the ways in which the physical self is altered through intense concentration, continual rushes of adrenaline and heightened and focused aggression and how this impacts literally on the way that the individual functions in the 'real' world post-gameplay. The problem was and is that one of the very games that I was using took over my life. I found myself psychologically transported to a world not dissimilar but harsher to the one I am used to: my legs started to shrink, whilst the joints in my arms and wrists became increasingly supple, the vertebrae in my back fused into a perfect exponential curve, my kidneys and liver started metabolising at an extraordinarily low rate, my heart rate dropped to 20 bpm, my eyes started to self lubricate and my arse became completely flat. So I write this article from a zero gravity tank in a decompression chamber in extremely painful traction and awaiting a full heart, lung, liver and kidney transplant - but hey, lets not wallow in gratuitous self indulgence, on with the games.

A big thank you to two hardware companies without whose support, this section would not be possible: Creative Labs for the superb kit that has powered this column's journey through the outer reaches of games heaven for most of 1998 and beyond - a 3D Blaster Voodoo2 3D graphics card and Soundblaster awe64 gold sound card, (lovely bit of kit), and to Evergreen for their support in providing upgrade CPUs for our ageing PC's: accelerating a P133 up to a P200 (the minimum spec for most top games) and a Pentium upgrade for an ancient steam driven 486 that allows you to play network Quake and heaps of £10 white label classics - thanks guys and gals.

That's life.

Half-Life

It would be an insult to describe Half-Life as a game. Half-Life is a story, a beautifully crafted story of scientific excess, of government treachery, of terrifying encounters with alien races. If Half-Life was merely a novel or film it would be thrilling but, with you as one of the main characters taking the lead role in the action, it becomes something quite different to anything I have yet experienced. As Dr Freeman, you start at work on a usual morning, wandering around the research complex, chatting with the guards and your colleagues. It's your turn to work in the accelerator core when a mountain of shit hits an immense fan as the space-time continuum ruptures. From this point onward, you better move fast, rally the remaining survivors, gather as many resources as you can and be prepared for a terrifying, gruelling, holiday in hell. What puts this (game) head and shoulders above any other is the combination of a superb plot, an extraordinary array of weapons (including biological ones), and an awesome onslaught of foes. You will jump out of your seat, dread the next corner you turn, dive for cover as half a dozen machine guns rip into you, taste the bitter pill of betrayal as you fight, hour after hour, to reach the surface and freedom? I just got there and it ain't looking too good from where I'm crouching. Forget interactive movies, forget virtual reality and non-linear fiction, Hollywood action films and second-rate cyber-fi novels, get real, get Half-Life.

999/1000

Real life - Sierra /Valve - PC

ay anything

staying in to play staying in to play **Tomb Raider 3**

Picture this - the Natural History museum in all its Victorian gothic splendour, illuminated in red and orange, the huge diplodocus in the entrance hall lit up blood-red amidst the swirling mist, chamber music echoing around the galleries and corridors filled with silent, staring creatures, maidens wafting through the mist bearing vast cushions laden with all sorts of sweetmeats, wine flowing by the gallon, lapped up by the bleary-eyed doyens of the gaming fraternity. The lights are killed, noise pumps out to shatter the calm, a spotlight burns bright on a figure leaping down the vast stairway, plait waving, breasts heaving, leather shorts rubbing between the hot... shit I'm dribbling again. The launch party for Tomb Raider 3 with the latest real fake Lara Croft (lovely Geordie lass with charming personality - really - see the piccy), Jonathan Woss (overweight pervert, half decent chat show host and celebrity) more alcohol than you can wave a stick at and a glorious limited edition Lara Croft figurine that I wouldn't dream of picking up, running out with past the bouncers (real bouncers) and sticking in a safety deposit box in Switzerland (see other piccy). So much for the launch, but what about the game - well, it's great. Granted it is more of the same, but 3 is everything 2 tried and should have been with an extra couple of cup sizes thrown in. The thrills are bigger, the foes more convincing, the atmosphere is spot on and Lara is looking a whole lot better with her new improved polygon count. With action that takes you all across the globe, from India to Shoreditch (cor blimey) to Area 51, to the Arctic and beyond - this game certainly deserves your hours of unnatural devotion.

910/1000

Big girl adventure - Core/Eidos

PC/PSX - #30

Instructions: how to change the world

(Be your own censor)

Carmagedon2

1. Buy the full-on squat-em-up car demolition / slaughterfest Carmagedon2 in which you get to motor around some pretty fucked-up 3D environments, denying other road users the use of automotive transport with extreme prejudice and relieving pedestrians and their pets of life and limb in a very messy manner (remember - pets mean prizes).
2. Ensure you are residing in the UK or Germany where censorial policy regarding Computer and Video Games (and just about anything else that is fun) is completely fucked.
3. On finding that the US-full gore version with human blood, guts and limbs has been altered to fit into the bizarre censorship laws in the aforementioned territories (UK version - green zombie blood, guts and limbs; German version - alien blood, guts and limbs) simply whizz along to the SCI website and pick up the full-gore game patch.
4. Cut out a 1.5 cm diameter, white, sticky label and with a red felt pen, draw a circle around the perimeter of the label and the number 18 inside.
5. Stick the label on the front of the box and tell your family and friends that the game is only to be used by responsible, mentally balanced adults over the age of 18.
6. You are now a censor and a valuable asset to the law enforcement authorities - you can practice your new-found skills on the liberation of video nasties, the emancipation of consensual adult pornography, the legalisation of non-prescription chemical substances and the lowering of duty on imported alcohol.

Fighting was never this BAD

Tekken 3

How the hell do you keep 5 or more adults amused for 2 hours every day for 3 months on a budget of £40? Easy, get along to your local store-that-sells-computer-games and get a copy of Tekken 3. Yes it has been out for a few months but, as one of the best games of 1998 and a touch of genius in terms of multiplayer megalomaniac-mayhem, it is sheer beat-your-brains-out heaven. A superbly crafted 1/2 player beat-em-up with even more characters than the respectable 2 previous incarnations (including a panda and the very suave and nimble South American Capoeira contortionist Eddy) and literally hundreds of moves per character, Tekken 3 just keeps on getting better and better the more you play it. Truly a masterpiece and one that should grace any decent games collection, every studio, office, factory floor, club, living room, bedroom and caravan throughout the inhabited universe (well maybe scratch the caravans).

950/1000

[IMAGE] **One for the kids**

Wargasm

It's odd how disappointing war is these days on the TV. I mean, gone are the days of bouncing bombs or week-long bombardments, of napalm attacks or millions of tonnes of carpet bombing. Now it's either a bunch of Yugoslavian horse rustlers, playing ludicrous and deadly games with innocent civilians or footage of tracer bullets and the occasional flash over Arabian night skies. Let's face it, war just isn't glamorous enough any more, there's no suspense, no terrifying excitement - or is there? There is if you have a crack at Wargasm: the most excellent battlefield strategy and first person war scenario simulation in which you not only get to direct your tanks, troops and helicopters in a series of offensive or defensive missions, but you can also take the place of any of your troops or weapons on the battlefield in full glorious first person 3D, or track an unwitting trooper from the telescopic scope of your M1A Abrams main battle-tank before letting loose an HE salvo, then watch him crumple as the blast sends little bits of him around the surrounding countryside. Mmm, the smell of plastic trim and air conditioning in the morning! But don't just take my word for it, this game is so realistic that the MOD are using it at tournaments and fairs to get youngsters interested in warfare - train 'em young and fling 'em out onto some remote cyber-battlefield of the not so distant future-it seems that society may have a use for games after all. War is dead, long live warfare.

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