

## MORE THAN JUST CHILDREN PLAY

### College players change the face of the gaming industry

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THE BATTALION

After a hectic day of walking around campus and attending classes, Gerald McCarty doesn't relax by taking a nap, having a bite to eat or surfing the Web. Instead, his relaxation process consists of killing demons, stealing cars or maybe even fighting with a sixth century Chinese monarch; in other words, playing his favorite video games.

"I have been playing video games since I was young," said McCarty, a senior construction science major. "Playing games is a more stimulating and interactive pastime compared to activities like watching a movie."

Video games have come a long way since their modest beginnings as bulky arcade games in the local pizzeria. The simple yet first widely successful Nintendo system, released in the 1980s, paved the way for what would become a constantly evolving technological medium.

Their latest form, the PlayStation 2, the Xbox and the Game Cube, come equipped with high-tech graphics, three-dimensional games, memory cards and a variety of peripherals, making their predecessors seem prehistoric.

The PS2 and Xbox come with additional features such as DVD and CD playback, pushing the cost of the systems and complementing equipment to hundreds of dollars.

Despite the hefty price tag that comes with the new consoles, the video game industry is one of the forerunners in the entertainment business; its \$7.7 billion revenue in 2002 put it ahead of Hollywood for a second consecutive year, according to Game Informer magazine Issue 102.

A survey conducted by the Interactive Digital Software Association in May of 2002 showed the main reasons people enjoy playing games are because they are fun, challenging and can be played with family, friends or alone.

"When I get together with my friends we really like to play competitive games such as NCAA or other sports games," McCarty said. "We love the control you have over the characters, and we use them to mess around with each other."

Like McCarty, older audiences have embraced gaming as one of their choice pastimes. With deeper pockets than the younger demographic and just the right amount of independence, college-age consumers have become a prime target for the game industry.

Andy Thorson, a senior education major, is an associate for Best Buy, a leading video and home computer game retailer. Thorson, an avid fan of video gaming, and a product specialist in the department of video games, said the gaming industry played off nostalgia to bring back its original audience and subsequently increase its revenue.

"The industry sensed an economic opportunity to attract the attention of the group who grew up playing video games but then had abandoned them for a while," Thorson said. "The original market had grown up and matured. The business saw a lot of potential in older players but were lacking the right titles to lure them back."

Thorson said better technology and games geared toward older audiences have been key factors in the emergence of older players over the last few years.

"Once they broke back into the older markets, it just blew up from there," he said. "Now, most of our PS2 and Xbox Purchasers are college-age students who spend anywhere from \$20 to \$50 for each new game and up to \$250 per system they buy."

Doug Lowenstein, president of the IDSA, recently told www.idsa.com "the consumers of video games fall mainly under the ages of 6 to 35, two generations that find interactive media as natural as watching TV. It's clear the industry's surging growth is not a passing trend, and the millions of

Americans who played video games yesterday play them today and will still play them tomorrow."

A long-standing notion about video games is that they are solidly gender-biased.

Although their combative titles and rough play might back up this idea, Leslie Rasch, a freshman recreational parks and tourism sciences major, says action is what games are all about.

"There are some quest games like 'The Legend of Zelda' that could appeal to some girls," Rasch said.

"Personally, I love playing combative and strategy games because they are so challenging. I think if a person doesn't like the fighting and shooting in video games, then they just shouldn't be playing them," Rasch said.

Jupiter Research analyst Jay Horowitz compiled a gaming market research report posted on gamemarketwatch.com. In the report, Horowitz

said, "I don't fundamentally think that boys like games more than girls. My assumption is that the market is underserving women."

Rasch said the gender bias is implicit in how the industry depicts its female characters.

"All of the women in games are unrealistically portrayed, with oversized breasts and thin waists," she said. "They should have their characters more like if they want to attract more female audiences."

With the maturation of its niche, the video game market has been producing titles that are increasingly targeted for the older audiences, thereby creating a danger zone for its younger players. This tactic has led the business to receive heat from different sectors.

According to Issue 102 of Game Informer, "Mortal Kombat," released for home systems in 1993, was the first to bring video game violence to public attention.

The high level of brutality and gore in the uncensored version of the title led to the first Senate hearing on video game violence in December 1993.

The hearings resulted in the creation of a standardized video game rating system by the then-newly created Entertainment Software Ratings Board.

Game Informer also reported the gaming industry was dealt another blow in 1999 when it was discovered that Columbine shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were fans of the notorious personal computer shooting game "Doom."

Many opinions have been raised denouncing the theory that media violence leads to aggressive behavior.

In a recent article published on www.abffe.com, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Richard Rhodes said "there's no evidence that mock violence makes people violent; there is some evidence that it makes them peaceful."

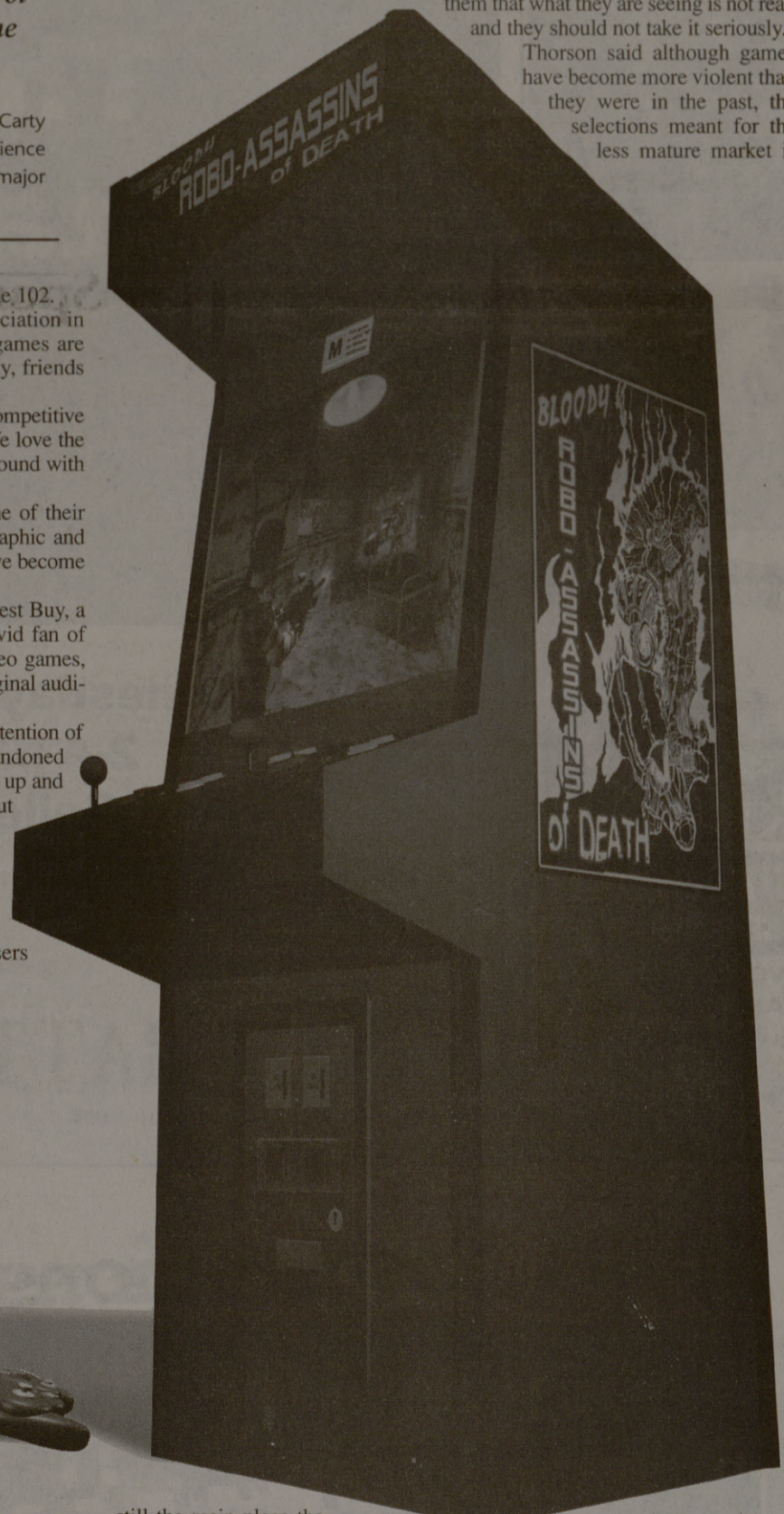
For some critics, precaution is better than a cure when it comes to media violence.

"Compared to the games that were around when I was young, the present games have a lot more exploding, killing and other sequences in them," Thorsen said. "Personally, I think the adults in charge of the children should explain to them that what they are seeing is not real, and they should not take it seriously."

Thorson said although games have become more violent than they were in the past, the selections meant for the less mature market is

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—Gerald McCarty  
Senior construction science major



**Super Mario Bros**

Nintendo, a small playing card company formed in 1889 in Japan, changed the face of home entertainment when it struck a deal with Sharp Electronics in the 1980s to become the first toy company to use electronic components in its products. "Super Mario Bros," released in 1985 as a complement game to the Nintendo Entertainment System, became their trademark title. As the gaming industry progressed, the "Mario Bros" franchise remained a constant favorite among all sectors of players and is still producing new titles.

**Mortal Kombat**

Mortal Kombat, released for home systems in 1993, was the first game to bring video game violence to public attention. The fighting game consisted of "fatality moves" as a conclusion to a match. These moves, which include ripping an opponent's heart out of his chest or extracting his skull and spinal chord, were as risky as they were popular and led to a 3-to-1 ratio by which the uncensored Sega version outsold the censored one on the Super Nintendo console.

**Grand Theft Auto 3**

Released in October 2001, "Grand Theft Auto III" is being hailed as the most popular title of all time. The franchise, created by Rockstar Games in 1997, is credited for being one of the forerunners in bringing mature audiences back to video games.

**Tomb Raider**

After years of having numerous failed attempts at crossovers from console to Hollywood, "Tomb Raider," released in 2001, becomes the first successful video game franchise to conquer the movie market. The 2003 sequel, "The Cradle of Life" produced more than \$62 million at the box office to date.

**BMX XXX**

Deemed too controversial by his management, Dave Mirra, the original sponsor of "BMX XXX," dropped his name from the title. The adult-themed biking game, based on strippers on bikers, was released in the manner it was first envisioned: with strong language and nudity.