



## An Alternative Review of Doom 2

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A fellow graduate student described the new video game he got for Christmas. ``It's so gross. You shoot something and it explodes into a million pieces and the blood drips down the walls," he explained. ``There are even gross sound effects to go along with the graphics." I was just about to offer my condolences that he had gotten such a terribly disgusting game as a Christmas present when he added with a smile, ``It's great! I played it constantly until I got a headache." Another satisfied Doom 2 customer.



I first learned about Doom 2 when I received a rough draft of [Terry White's game review](#) for the December 1994 issue of *Crossroads*. Despite White's rave review (9.5 on a scale from 1 to 10), I was left with absolutely no desire to play this game. When I mentioned this to other *Crossroads* editors they were quite surprised -- it seemed that most of them listed Doom! among their favorite games. But you must remember that, at the time, all the other editors were male.

There are undoubtedly some women who enjoy playing Doom 2. Come to think of it, I know one woman who admits to enjoying Doom! But I suspect these women are few and far between. In fact, according to a *Wall Street Journal* article 99 percent of the buyers of most video games are male. One notable exception is Tetris: only 60 percent of Tetris buyers are male.

How do video game manufacturers explain this phenomena? Nintendo hired a sociologist who hypothesized that women enjoy Tetris because they crave order. But

when someone mentioned this hypothesis on an all-female electronic mailing list last summer, the participants were skeptical. Almost all the participants agreed that the reason most women like Tetris more than other video games is that it is one of the few interesting video games that doesn't involve killing things or driving cars or space ships. Most of the popular video games are violent and destructive, some are downright gross, and a few treat women only as sex objects. Games with these properties tend to be unappealing to women. But they appeal to men. According to [Wired](#), the ultra violent video game Mortal Kombat II garnered \$50 million in sales during its first week on the market last fall, earning more first week revenue than any movie has ever earned. I would be willing to bet that at least 49 million of those first week dollars were paid by men.

I used to play Zork on my family's PC, but I was never persistent enough to finish the game. In high school I sometimes played Pac-Man and Load Runner when I needed some mindless entertainment. A few years ago I become a pro at Minesweeper and some of the Tetris variations. But I have never had any interest in playing a computer game that involves staring down the barrel of a gun and blowing humanoid monsters into bits of virtual blood and guts. Shoot-em-up games neither relax nor entertain me. At best they disgust me. At worst they remind me of the real life violence on the evening news. Either way, they don't put me in a pleasant mood.

As a believer in personal freedom, I won't go so far as to advocate the banning of violent games anywhere except on the 386 machine that resides just outside my office door (but it's not really equipped to play any of the popular games anyway). And it's hard to find much evidence that violent video games increase the frequency of real life violence. After all, the relationship between sex crimes and pornography remains ambiguous, even after years of study. But I don't believe that violent video games are completely innocuous.

One effect of video games in general (and, I suspect, violent video games especially) has been to interest young boys in using computers. This is usually viewed as a good thing, as many of these boys quickly advance from playing games to learning how to program their own primitive games to eventually becoming budding computer scientists. Of course, there are also those boys whose desire for games they can't afford to pay for out of their small allowances drives them to learn about hacking, phone fraud, and credit card fraud. But what about the girls? It seems that most girls have little interest in most of the popular video games (although they seem to enjoy

some of the non-violent games quite a bit). And recent attempts to market video games to young girls have been disastrous -- would you buy a game that features a talking doll going shopping? As a result, young girls tend to ignore the family computer while their brothers monopolize it. When it comes time to use computers in school, girls are much less familiar with them than boys. This may be one reason why the percentage of female computer science students has *declined* over the past several years.

Speaking from personal experience now, my interest in computers waned during high school when I observed my male classmates flocking to the computer lab after school to play games. As I sat in the lab trying to finish my homework so I could leave, I watched groups of geeky guys huddled over computers, downing Cokes and Dorittos, squealing with excitement. By my junior year, I had completed the advanced placement computer science curriculum and convinced myself that I had no desire to be a computer scientist. I managed to completely avoid the computer lab during my entire first year of college, never even stopping by to pick up my password. Things changed when I took some required computer courses and discovered that there is more to computer science than games. But if you stopped by a typical college computer lab on a Saturday night and saw all the guys huddled around the computers, staring down the barrels of virtual guns, and blowing virtual monsters out of their virtual skins, you might wonder.