Reality and Terror, the First-Person Shooter in Current Day Settings

Michael Hitchens, Bronwin Patrickson and Sherman Young

Games and Culture 2014 9: 3
DOI: 10.1177/1555412013496459

Article

Games and Culture
2014, Vol 9(1) 3-29

DOI: 10.1177/1555412013496459
gac.sagepub.com

Reality and Terror, the First-Person Shooter in Current Day Settings

Michael Hitchens[1], Bronwin Patrickson[2], and Sherman Young[2]

Abstract

The first-person shooter (FPS), with its subjective view point and relentless action, gives its players an intense, often violent, virtual experience. There has been considerable debate about the effects of this mediated experience. Of particular concern is whether these games stage a propaganda campaign for the interests of governments and the military–industrial complex. Some fear that these games are leading us toward a perpetual state of war. However, such discussions have usually focussed on a very narrow selection from the FPS genre. This article examines a large sample, over 160 individual titles, of FPSs with a contemporary setting. The enemies presented by these games are analyzed and found to be far wider than a narrow examination of games based on topical conflicts would suggest, being instead inspired by a range of political, cultural, and literary sources. Any analysis of FPS games needs to take this diversity into account.

Keywords

first-person shooter, history, militarization, survey, opponents

[1] Department of Computing Macquarie University, New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
[2] Media, Music, Communication & Cultural Studies, Macquarie University, New South Wales, Sydney, Australia

Corresponding Author:
Michael Hitchens, Deptartment of Computing, Macquarie University, New South Wales 2109, Sydney, Australia.
Email: michael.hitchens@mq.edu.au

Introduction

Recent events indicate a close alliance between real-world combat and virtual-world combat gaming. For example, on the May 2, 2011, Osama bin Laden was killed by the US Navy seals during a raid on his compound in Pakistan. Part of the news coverage showed pictures of the U.S. President Barack Obama watching a live feed of the raid taken from cameras carried on the Navy Seals' headgear, a viewpoint not far removed from that offered to a player of a first-person shooter (FPS) within video gaming. Less than a week later, Episode 107 was released for the FPS Kuma/War (KumaRealityGames, 2004), allowing players to recreate that real-life mission (Gaudiosi, 2011).

Even 7 years earlier, a 2004 Daily Telegraph (November 9, 2004) report stated U.S. troops referred to combat as "like a video game" (Farley, as reported by Toby Harnden, November 9, 2004). As yet, however, no in-depth studies have been released regarding the U.S. soldiers' psychological transition from computer gameplay through to real-world combat, but perceived similarities between the two pose contentious questions. Although enthusiasts argue that it is obvious when playing these titles that they are only games that offer players exciting, but essentially, harmless entertainment (Snider, 2004), nevertheless other commentators (Deck, 2004; Der_Derrian, 2001; Power, 2007; Roberston, 2011; Stahl, 2006) question whether this sort of hyperreal play, straddled somewhere between real combat and fun, feeds off its blurry distinction between phantasm and reality to create a dangerous propaganda campaign. "Over time such propaganda has the power to transform war into a way of life, into a seeming inevitability" (Deck, 2004).

Such debates about the effects of staged or mediated experience have a long history. Plato (Plato & Jowett, 380BC/1894) warned about the insidious influence of dramatic stage plays. More recently, the possible negative influences of numerous types of media such as novels, comic books, jazz, rock and roll, and television also came under scrutiny. As a result, some theorists (Kutner & Olson, 2008; Sternheimer, 2003; Trend, 2007; Wright, 2008) argue that warnings about the dangers of various media are propelled by cycles of moral panics that only intensify when that media is participatory. Computer gaming adds a further dimension—in computer games where blood is gore and death is merely a brief hiccup in a player's score, hyperreality can present as a provocative opportunity. The ability to master death and repeatedly test that mastery in terms of skillsets in highly responsive and spectacular simulations has created a boom in fast-action gaming. Combat games are particularly popular, (Cifaldi, 2006), many of which belong to a genre known as FPS or FPS games. These games are characterized by the first-person viewpoint, with a heavy emphasis on combat involving the use of firearms. By their nature, military scenarios are compatible, and arguably, contemporary FPS games are at the center of the current moral panic around game violence and notions of social militarization.

This article analyzes FPS production over time to discover what changes, if any, have occurred in terms of the numbers of military-themed FPS games being made.

It would be difficult, within a single article, to examine the entire spectrum of video games. The range of possible setting and gameplay is vast, making it problematic to attempt generalizations across the entire spread of available games. Instead, we proceed on the expectation that if video war games are in fact contributing to the militarization of society as commentators such as Deck (2004) contend, then FPS with a contemporary setting will be the most likely category to reflect that. The current work does not attempt to answer the question whether or not FPS games can be part of a propaganda campaign, let alone the more pointed question of the dangers inherent in such a campaign. Instead, it attempts to give a context to discussions of the relationship between the content of FPS games with a current-day setting and the corresponding societal and historical setting by providing detailed analysis of the changes in that content and how they may have been influenced by the concerns and attitudes of contemporary society.

The FPS game genre has a history extending over 20 years from its earliest titles such as *Catacomb 3D* (idSoftware, 1991) and *Doom* (idSoftware, 1993) to more recent examples such as *Homefront* (KaosStudios, 2011) and *Crysis 2* (CrytekStudios, 2011). Hundreds of titles lie between these examples, with settings ranging from fantasy worlds to historical battlegrounds and futuristic civilizations in outer space. FPS games with a contemporary setting are the focus of this study, as they are more likely to include direct or analogous representations of the opponents currently engaged by the Western military forces and are also more likely to engage players in a military role. Although there are many FPS games without a contemporary setting, the enemy in those games bears little relation to the current political entities. For example, no FPS set in the far future depicts members of groups currently labeled as terrorists. Conversely, many games with a current setting do. If we are exploring contemporary concerns, it appears reasonable to limit ourselves to games with a contemporary setting.

Machin and van Leeuween (2005) have described the basic form as the "special operations discourse" where "a band of hardened men 'doing a job' to protect a weak 'society', relying on 'professional' skills." They list a number of stages in this script, mission statement, technological support, approach, engagement, setback, partial achievement of mission, and achievement of goal. This sequence would be familiar to any experienced FPS player, whether the games played have a contemporary setting or not.

The producers of the games will sometimes try to split hairs very finely over the realism of their games. For example, Mark Long of Novalogic, talking about their game *Delta Force: Task Force Dagger* (Zombie_Inc., 2002), emphasizes a desire to "bring more realism to the game," but adds "we'll leave the politics to the Department of Defens" (Butts, 2002; interestingly not the Department of State).

Our efforts are designed to shed new light on some of the pressing questions characterizing current debates (Huntemann & Payne, 2010) about the meaning of unreal reality war gaming in contemporary society. Thus far, the contention that these sorts of games have deleterious effects has been hampered by the fact that feared

influences such as the militarization of society (Deck, 2004; Der_Derrian, 2001; Power, 2007; Stahl, 2006) are generally long term and therefore also heavily influenced by broader contexts of play, lifestyle, and culture. As a result, any conclusions about effects are impossible to confirm. Although social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) might observe that people emulate behaviors and attitudes modeled in the world around them including the media with which they engage, the numerous studies exploring what links, if any, exist between violent video games and aggressive behavior are either inconsistent or methodologically flawed (Freedman, 2002).

Roger Stahl (2006) proposes that Western consumers have already been transformed into virtual soldiers through the seductive spectacles (devoid of any reflective debate) staged by the creations of the "military–industrial–entertainment complex" (Der_Derrian, 2001). Stahl supports his claim with comprehensive evidence of the numerous ties that now exist between the military and gaming industries through lures such as lucrative simulation, training commissions, and the level of consultation necessitated by the perceived need for authenticity within consumer titles. The U.S. army, for example, provided consultants for the latest iteration of EA's *Medal of Honor* series (EALosAngeles et al., 1999-2010). Also. the version of *Full Spectrum Warrior* (Pandemic_Studios, Institute_For_Creative_Technologies, & Mass_Media_Inc., 2004) available for sale in stores was very similar to the one used to train U.S. Army recruits. Both were produced by a U.S. Army-Funded Simulation Research Institute. Other evidence indicates game companies make a point of employing retired soldiers (e.g., *Rogue Warrior,* Rebellion, 2009, and *Kuma/War*). Observing these sorts of ties, numerous researchers (Leonard, 2004; Machin & van Leeuwen, 2005) have argued that such games are, at least in part, tools for conveying particular political messages. Leonard contends that they "elicit support for the War on Terror and United States imperialism" (Leonard, 2004, p. 1), while Halter calls them the "next generation of wartime propaganda" (Halter, 2002, p. 1).

A review of social commentators reveals similar concerns. For instance, Andy Deck's ideas of militarization focus on both violence and the propaganda potential of various media forms. He uses a few, select examples to suggest that FPS games, as a genre, contribute to both a more violent society and a predisposition to accept the rhetoric of real-world military action. He writes:

> In games as well as news, heroes (sic) and enemies are constructed to appeal to audiences. This intersection of the real and the imaginary is a potent staging ground for propaganda, which is most effective when it's least noticed. As game producers strive to make their combat adventures more realistic, arcade-era enemies like the space invader have been replaced by less abstract villains. Often the game developers have turned to the national enemy *du jour* for ideas. Almost as soon as a new rogue nation has been identified by Washington, there is a combat game fashioned to exploit the thrilling potential of slaughtering its people. (Deck, 2004)

Similar arguments have been strongly presented by other theorists (Power, 2007; Stahl, 2006); however, they have usually been discussed in relation to particular

opponents, such as Islamic terrorists and the war on terror with little consideration of how representative this is of the entirety of FPS games with a contemporary setting. Power contends that "game developers often turn to the national enemy *de jour* for ideas" (Power, 2007, p. 272).

In the Frontline special "Digital Nation" (Dretzin, 2010b), protestors were shown vehemently chanting "Shame, shame, shame, war is not a game!" outside the Philadelphia Army Experience Center that houses a free to play, multimillion dollar budget, military-themed computer games arcade, the army's replacement to its previous recruitment centers in the area. Interviewed inside the center, Major Larry F. Dillard Junior pointed out that "90% of young boys aged 16-22 are playing military-themed video games almost every week, so this is what kids are doing" (Major Dillard, 2010). The controversy surrounding these sorts of statistics does not deny their potential accuracy, or the U.S. military's desire to capitalize upon them in order to recruit soldiers. Given this, the rise of reality war games deserves closer scrutiny.

But are collaborations between military personnel and game developers truly evidence of an industry-wide propagandist campaign, or do they merely reflect the current marketability of these titles? For example, are the close ties between some parts of the gaming industry and parts of the military simply a reflection of the industry striving for realism in their representations; and turning to those experienced in the real, to inform their creation of the hyperreal? Arguably, this quest for realistic simulation is present in other video game genres—sports and motor racing simulations for example—and while there is little doubt that Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) intends that football games are a good marketing tool for the broader soccer products globally, it may be a stretch to suggest that the FIFA collaboration with Electronic Arts is a conspiracy of the global sporting–industrial complex. Rather it may simply be an effective commercial arrangement between the parties involved. Similarly, ties with military institutions may be driven less by political motivation and more by simple recruiting targets that are part of the key performance indicators of an army's marketing arm.

These questions are not intended to downplay the potential for the video games' industry to become a propagandist force for perpetual war, but given that societal effects are extremely hard to isolate, let alone discern it is proposed that there is great value to be had from a closer examination of what *can* be accurately documented and measured, the games themselves.

Just as recent mainstream movies paint a complex picture of war, modern FPS games do not fall into simplistic and singular stereotypes. At its simplest level, any perusal of the enemies presented in such games will show that the reality is not quite as simple as suggested. For instance, Islamic terrorists did not completely replace drug runners as the enemy du jour after September 11, 2001 (nor in the years immediately following). These games may be asking players to take part in a virtual simulation of a war, but it is a war being carried out on many fronts. Notwithstanding the complexity of individual games, how "often" is the "often" in Power's contention? Statements such as Power's tell us little about how representative such games are of

FPS with contemporary settings, or how these games have evolved over time. It makes a considerable difference to their place in relation to society whether such games are a majority of the contemporary FPS or a small minority.

Although previous detailed study has been made of the evolution of player avatar identities in FPS games over time (Hitchens, 2011), this article focuses upon the identities of the player's *opponents* in order to examine whether and if so how they align with military agendas. More bluntly, if FPS games are militarizing society, what exactly is society being militarized against? In addition to highlighting military-themed games, this oppositional focus provides more detailed insights into the characteristics of popularly perceived social threats. In both real and imaginary combat, the enemy, or challenger can be the object of fear, suspicion, disgust, rage, and even obsession. Yet however realistic military simulation games may appear to be, they also inevitably evoke the mythologies of personally charged experience. War gaming involves "peering into the void of the future and the blurry shapes of the present . . . . . (It) has to draw on culturally tutored imagination, fears, and wishes. To look at . . . war games, then, is to see certain American anxieties played out as if to tame them" (Lutz, 2001, p. 87).

Charting the identity of FPS enemies over time provides insight into the ways that public fears and concerns have also changed over time. Specifically, the focus of this research is upon the identities of opponents in FPS games set in contemporary times and the potential consequences of this sort of participatory game design. Crandall (2005), for example, has argued that militarization is expressed, in part, through consumer items and "tied into the media and entertainment industries and very much a player in the youth-driven field of video game culture" (Crandall, 2005, p. 20), of which the FPS is a well-known and common representation.

This study represents a content analysis of FPS games. Clearly, content analysis is only a starting point. As the basis for media effects approaches, it is arguably meaningless without parallel cultivation analysis (George Gerbner, 1998; George Gerbner & Gross, 1976) to determine whether user attitudes parallel the dominant themes in media content (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011, p. 159) However, it is also clear that if content analysis reveals that a perceived message is not dominant, and then its relative absence would suggest that panics over that message are misplaced. For example, if analysis of children's television were to conclude that there were no fast food advertisements during peak viewing hours, then any moral outrage over a supposed link between such advertising and children's consumption habits would have to be rejected. And so it is with games—the generalized attribution of military propaganda amount to little, if in fact the enemy within the game does not conform to the proposed myth.

Reality Games

Since the mid-1990s, there has been a rising number of FPS placed in a contemporary time frame (Hitchens, 2011). With settings that range from Afghanistan to the

Middle East to South America to the United States itself, players have been confronted with many different perceived threats to the status quo of Western nations. A perusal of releases reveals titles such as *Terrorist Takedown: War in Colombia* (CityInteractive, 2006), *Spec Ops: Rangers Lead the Way* (Zombie_Studios, 1998), *Delta Force* (Novalgic, 1998), and *Navy SEALs 2: Weapons of Mass Destruction* (JarheadGames, 2003).

Kuma/War's "reality games" offer perhaps the most ambitious example of this popular blend of virtual battle and real play. Through news-styled reportage, the producers aim to give players an authentic, insider view of America's real-world battles. In these games, the players are invited to take a virtual part in the conflicts they hear about in the news. CEO Keith Halper explains that by providing in-depth logistical, interactive coverage (not political analysis) of select military events together with news-styled reports and first-hand soldier commentaries, *Kuma Reality Games* aim to provide an alternative news source. "For many of our customers, gaming is the main way they pick up on the news anyway" (Halper, 2005).

Shelley contends that for game developers, realism is a supplementary tool to help add interest and atmosphere for players (Shelley, 2001). The notable growth of FPS titles with a contemporary setting over the last 20 years suggests that their collaboration with current events is also a successful marketing strategy for game producers. But what happens to a society when the seemingly real, yet highly charged theatrics characteristic of military-themed computer games invade the public sphere to become part of everyday experience tied to current events? Referring to Littre's observation that "whoever fakes an illness can simply stay in bed and make everyone believe he is ill. Whoever simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms" (Littré, in Baudrillard, 1981/1994 p. 3) French theorist Jean Baudrillard concludes that "simulating is not pretending ... Therefore, pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the "true" and the "false," the "real" and the "imaginary" (Baudrillard, 1981/1994, p. 3). His argument was directed at media in general, the simulacra that are not merely copies of the real, but something else in their own right. Indeed, in this thinking, a game (irrespective of how 'realistic' it may appear to be) is a simulacrum, his fourth phase of the image which "has no relation to any reality whatsoever." (1994:6)

Despite their apparent authenticity, many FPS games are far from realistic, being simplified according to the needs of the form. Most game designers allow their players the opportunity to "win," even if victory in the real world is a slippery concept. In order to do so, players need to defeat enemies using the violent means provided by the game. Weapons, ammunition, and even first aid kits can appear out of nowhere to aid these efforts. Guns are generally more powerful than in real life and in terms of the simulation render more spectacular damage. Bodies fall more artfully or make more gore when they do. Stirring music plays and points accrue. Even the more news-styled games recall Baudrillard's point that, "What is actually occurring ...

is a transition from the historical stage to a mythical stage: the mythic—and media-led—reconstruction of all these events'' (Baudrillard, 1990, p. 92).

Political intrigue and strategy, as Mark Long has indicated (Butts, 2002), is not the realm of these games. Instead, players need an enemy they can shoot down with enthusiasm. Following the long tradition of cops and robbers, or cowboys and Indians (Hutchinson, 2007), opponents tend to be stripped of their human, political complexity in order to become clear targets in a dualistic split between good guys and bad guys, or just us and them. In order to win the battle, players generally need to shoot enemies down through a sort of repetitive, skill practice made possible by nonserious real-world consequences such as numerous lives and the ubiquitous save function.

For an FPS game to maintain interest, there generally needs to be numerous opponents providing ongoing threats that players must respond to quickly. Given this, enemies tend to be generic. In the contemporary FPS, the enemy the player faces is homogenous. Van Leeuwen (1996, p.49) describes this as ''collectivization.'' The enemies are not visually distinguished, instead they look ''identical, facially and in their ... clothing'' (Machin & Suleiman, 2006). Apart from the odd ''boss'' character whose personality and description might be designed to operate as a target that marks the end of the game, or drives battle play between levels, the multiple enemies that players encounter as they fight their way through the levels of a game are usually not given individual names, let alone personalities.

This trend toward essentialism has led to stereotyping as reported by Sisler (2008) who found the representation of Arabs in more than 100 computer games (and military action games in particular) was consistent. Middle-Eastern men are routinely represented as terrorists or Islamic extremists who laugh mockingly after they have killed American soldiers (Sisler, 2008, p. 207-8) Referring to this study, Hoglund (2008) points out that military-themed games also invariably portray Middle-Eastern cities as dark, chaotic mazes, rife with terrorists and not much else (Hoglund, 2008). The more generic one size fits all enemy that features in the *America's Army* (U.S.Army, 2002) games is a self-professed bid to transcend the limits of specific conflicts or ethnic associations and replace racism with a focus on team play (Roberston, 2011). In order to do so, opponents were signposted with alternative identifiers such as ski masks, darker fatigues, or different weapons and in later games players regularly swap sides in the conflict.

The amount of conflict in the real world, let alone the virtual world of gaming, underlines the fact that dealing with other people and cultures is a core human challenge. Philosopher Rodolphe Gasche (Gasche, 1986, p. 101) proposes that Western philosophy is essentially an attempt to domesticate otherness. Neumann (1996) presents an extensive review of the collective theories and countertheories of identity formation that have been used to try to assist this integrative task from the psychological, to the social, to the ethnographic, to the philosophical, to the blatantly opportunistic such as the advice that good leaders know that there is nothing like a shared enemy to unite a country (Schmitt, 1936). Many contradict each other or counter

dialectical attempts to establish one, unified truth with dialogical attempts to respect difference, but all add something to the debate. In an attempt to create some semblance of order out of this clatter of interpretation, Neumann ends this sweeping overview with his preferred list of standout, overview principles:

- identity formation is active and ongoing;
- formation of the self is inextricably intertwined with that of its others;
- any social field will harbor more than one type of collective identity;
- the creation of social boundaries is not a consequence of integration, but one of its a priori ingredients;
- marginal characters become important signifiers;
- more study needs to be made of how these boundaries are constructed and maintained.

Although the classic FPS narrative is focused around action, not cultural studies, the choices that designers make about which potential enemy the consumer is more likely to want to destroy appear to negotiate the realm of (national) identity formation. If an FPS game is played through an avatar, then customization may make the games attractive to a wider audience. However, when examining the contrast between avatar and enemies these choices are effectively cosmetic, as the avatar's background and place in the world are rarely, if ever, given to the player to choose. Most FPS games that have current-day opponents, such as terrorists or criminals, have avatars that come from the military or similar backgrounds, such as the police or intelligence services. This reinforces notions of the state as opposed to what the state is not and drives much of the game play. FPS enemies may be essentialized and stereotyped, but they may still need to touch a chord with player perceptions in order to motivate aggression.

The FPS, which revels in the individual perspective, is the product of the Western video games industry. The earliest examples were made in the United States. For example, *catacomb 3D* (idSoftware, 1991), *Wolfenstein 3D* (idSoftware, 1992), *Blake Stone: Aliens of Gold* (ApogeeSoftware, 1993), *Lethal Tender* (PieInTheSky-Software, 1993), and *Pathways into Darkness* (Bungie, 1993) were all produced by the U.S. studios. Since then, production has spread much further afield; however, production has remained centered in, or aimed at, a Western, or at most, Western and Eastern European market. The Japanese games industry has produced very few FPS games. Even those created under Japanese lead, such as the *Metroid Prime* series (RetroStudios, NintendoEAD, & NintendoR&D1, 2002-2009), were often developed in the U.S.-based studios. There is also an active Eastern European FPS industry, creating well-known titles such as *Operation Flashpoint* (Codemasters, 2009), *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* (GSCGameWorld, 2007), and *Call of Juarez* (TechlandSp.-z.o.o., 2007) as well as a host of lesser known ones, including a vast range of military-themed FPS games from the Polish publisher City Interactive. What is interesting is that even the titles produced in Eastern Europe generally place the

player in the shoes of an avatar from Western societies, for example, the U.S. military in *Operation Flashpoint*, cowboys in the U.S. old west in the *Call of Juarez* series, and members of various Western military forces in the City Interactive games. There can be little doubt that, for far the greater part, the FPS is a product of Western society or made for the consumption of members of those societies.

The Current Study

For this study, over 160 FPS games with a contemporary (or near-contemporary) setting, released between 1993 and 2009, were analyzed. The study was not limited to military-themed games. This broader frame provides a greater understanding of the relationship between such games and other FPS with a similar time frame. The study ends at 2009 for two reasons. First, this gives a reasonable balance of data both before and after September 2001. Also, with the recent proliferation of mobile phone games, it is difficult to gather exhaustive data for recent years.

The early choices in a survey of this nature concern the sample size and how the data are to be gathered. A smaller sample allows more detail, but risks statistical anomalies due to accidents of chance in the sample taken. In choosing games for inclusion in our study, we have followed the definition of the FPS given in (Hitchens, 2011) with the added restriction that they have a contemporary setting. We have included as many games as possible that meet our criteria. No claims are made that our sample is complete, but at over 160 games it is extensive.

Although a sample of this nature significantly decreases the chances of statistical anomalies, it is not possible to play that many games for a single study. For the greater part, reliance was placed on secondary sources for information. The most important of these were www.mobygames.com, which includes images of many of the game boxes (front, back and, where applicable, inside covers). Also consulted were Reviews from magazines such as PC Gamer and PC Powerplay, online sites such as www.gamespot.com and screenshots, hosted at various online portals including those already mentioned.

The accuracy of these secondary sources was verified by comparing them to first-hand information about a selection of the games. Approximately 10% of the games were played in whole or part, and the findings compared to the secondary sources. In no cases were any errors found in the secondary sources, giving a high level of confidence in their accuracy concerning the remaining games.

Based on the survey, the enemies confronting players of the games were divided into seven categories, as shown (with a chronological spread) in Table 1.

This table gives a broad overview of the changes in contemporary FPSs in the period surveyed. The first column gives the category. The second column divides the data for each category into four subperiods, while the third column gives the number of games in that category for each subperiod. The final column gives the translation of those numbers into a percentage of the total number of games surveyed in that subperiod. Although it might be thought that a year-by-year, rather than 4 (or

Table 1. Overall Study Data.

Category	Period	Total	Percentage for period
Aliens	1993–1997	4	26.7
	1998–2001	6	21.4
	2002–2005	0	0
	2006–2009	3	4.8
Criminals	1993–1997	5	33.3
	1998–2001	4	14.3
	2002–2005	12	18.2
	2006–2009	12	19
Political enemies	1993–1997	0	0
	1998–2001	5	17.9
	2002–2005	9	13.6
	2006–2009	18	28.6
Rogue govt	1993–1997	0	0
	1998–2001	1	3.6
	2002–2005	5	7.6
	2006–2009	0	0
Science	1993–1997	0	0
	1998–2001	2	7.1
	2002–2005	5	7.6
	2006–2009	6	9.5
Supernatural	1993–1997	3	20
	1998–2001	1	3.6
	2002–2005	7	10.6
	2006–2009	7	11.1
Terrorists	1993–1997	3	20
	1998–2001	9	32.1
	2002–2005	28	42.4
	2006–2009	17	27

Note. govt = government.

in one case 5)-year periods would have been more informative, the number of games in each category/subperiod grouping should be noted. In many cases it is single figures. More fine-grained (such as yearly) division would produce small totals with marked variation from year to year. The aggregation carried out here gives meaningful totals while still showing variations over time.

As Tudor (1989) noted "A genre is, after all, a social construction, and as such it is subject to constant negotiation and re-formulation" (Tudor, 1989, p. 6). We employ these categories here to give some shape to the analysis, not to be definitive, nor do we claim strict identification criteria.

Data indicate the number of games in each subperiod differs considerably. In the early years of FPS, the contemporary setting was far from popular. Science fiction settings in a distant future, such as that of *Doom*, were far more prevalent. In addition

Figure 1. Damage incorporated depicting terrorism on the U.S. Soil.
Note. Image reproduced by permission of Richard Rouse/Paranoid Productions.

to *Doom*, there were titles such as *Powerslave* (LobotomySoftwareInc., 1996), *Blake Stone* (ApogeeSoftware, 1993), and *Star Wars Dark Forces* (LucasArts, 1995). A study of over 500 FPS titles (Hitchens, 2011) found only eight with a contemporary setting released in the period 1991–1996. Of those, most presented situations far removed from reality. For example in *Bad Toys* (TiboSoftware, 2000), the player is pitted against toys gone berserk, in *Shadowcaster* (RavenSoftware, 1993) demons. None sought to base themselves on contemporary events, although some presented adversaries more likely to be found in the real world, such as criminals in *Lethal Tender* (PieInTheSkySoftware, 1993) and terrorists in *Operation Body Count* (CapstoneSoftware, 1994) and *Terminal Terror* (PieInTheSkySoftware, 1994).

Unlike some of the more recent antiterrorist-themed games, the early games were often coy about the identity and motivation of their antagonists, preferring to paint them in broad but ill-defined terms simply as "terrorists." Deck (2004) claims that "most combat games do not portray the streets of the US, but rather places that look like the most recent war zones visited by US troops." However, many early FPS with contemporary settings did base the action in the United States, for example *Damage Incorporated* (ParanoidProductions, 1997; see figure 1) and *Operation Body Count* (CapstoneSoftware, 1994) set in the UN Building in New York.

From 1997, the percentage of FPS releases with a contemporary setting rose rapidly, becoming the most dominant variety of the form with a consistent 40%–50% of releases. In form, the FPSs with a contemporary setting follow the basic conceits of

the genre. For single-player titles, the game is divided up into levels, the vast majority of computer-controlled characters are hostile, and the intent of the game play is for the player to blast those enemies with an array of increasingly powerful weaponry. In the following sections, each category of enemy will be examined in light of the questions posed thus far.

Aliens

Defense of the earth from inter-stellar invaders has long been a staple of speculative entertainment across all media platforms. The alien enemies in FPS games with a contemporary setting are universally hostile, often to an exaggerated degree. They do not simply attack; they aim at complete conquest of the earth and humanity. To this agenda of world conquest, further twists are often added, such as plans to use humanity as food (*Prey* (HumanHeadStudios & 3DRealms, 2006)) or its female members as breeding units (*Duke Nukem 3D* (3DRealms(PC), 1996)). This depiction of a direct threat to humanity's existence justifies the extreme measures players are intended to take.

Hostile aliens are markedly more prominent in the earlier periods of the survey than in the latter. This may indicate that FPSs were not at that time as reflective of topical events as they have later become. It is possible that the relative lack of graphical sophistication dissuaded designers from attempting to include in their games situations and enemies where the quality of the visual representation in the game would compare unfavorably with visual images in other media. However, this appears unlikely, given that one of the very early FPS, *Wolfenstein 3D* (idSoftware, 1992), had among its enemies WW11 German soldiers, who, while not contemporary, are well represented pictorially in the records of the time. It may simply be that the genre needed some time to develop before its practitioners were willing to take on contemporary issues. It would be understandable if in its early days the FPS, in searching for enemies, took those from other media, in this case the science fiction films that designers may have seen in their youth.

In the latter half of the surveyed period, this category almost disappears, as the genre focuses on enemies based more on the real world and less on those drawn from the imaginary. Where aliens remain in the FPS, they have more recently been placed in more obvious science fiction settings, such as in the *Halo* (Bungie, 2001) series, surrendering the current day to enemies with origins much closer to home.

Criminals

Criminals are defined here as enemies with predominantly elicit financial motives. This stands in contrast to those with a political agenda or a supernatural or alien origin. Criminals were the dominant category of opponent in the earliest period of the contemporary FPS. They range from the diabolical tycoons of the James Bond Games (such as *Goldeneye 007*, Rare, 1997; and *007: The World is not Enough*,

Eurocom(N64) & BlackOps(PS1), 2000; through Russian mafia, Chinese triads, South American drug smugglers to urban gangs. In some of the earliest games, such as *Lethal Tender* and *Island Peril* (ElectricFantasies, 1995), their identities are ill defined but are clearly of a homegrown (at least from a U.S. viewpoint) origin. In later games, they are cast as distinctly foreign (again, from a U.S. viewpoint).

The earliest period of this survey, 1993–1997, is before the high-profile terrorist attacks on the United States in the years 1998 to 2001. With criminals, not political opponents, being the most notable real-world enemies during that period, perhaps it is no surprise that they dominate the 1990s FPS markets. Many of the criminal villains in these games are easily recognized from their long established depictions in other media, such as Chinese triads (*Shadow Warrior* (3DRealms, 1997)) or U.S.-based organized crime (*Lethal Tender* and *Island Peril*).

Later in the period, the appearance of criminal enemies has declined, but not disappeared. South American drug dealers are still represented (e.g., in *White Gold: War in Paradise*, DeepShadows, 2008; and the oddly named *Terrorist Takedown: War in Colombia*, CityInteractive, 2006) where the enemies are drug dealers, not terrorists, as are the Russian mafia (in *Marine Sharpshooter 4*, GrooveMedia, 2008; and *Bad Boys: Miami Takedown*, BlitzGames, 2004), and street gangs in *Urban Chaos: Riot Response* (RocksteadyStudios, 2006). Their motives can be found in current news reports. Apart from the drug trade, one of the primary motivations is arms trading, both in conventional weapons and in weapons of mass destruction (typically, but not completely, nuclear). The first located appearance of arms traders as enemies is in *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear* (RedStormEntertainment, 1999).

It is also notable that this category has fared better in terms of numerical representation than aliens and the supernatural. While those extraterrestrial categories combined to represent over 40% of contemporary FPS in the earliest period of the survey, they account for less than 15% in the latest period. Criminal enemies, while they have suffered a decline from around 35% to just fewer than 20%, appear to be growing in number again. This may indicate that designers of the contemporary FPS increasingly prefer in game enemies cast from the array of real-world entities that mainstream political western thought deems to be hostile, over those drawn from more speculative realms.

Political Enemies

In the early part of the period covered by the survey, the enemies presented to FPS gamers were those at the margins of global society (such as criminal and terrorists) or beyond it (aliens and the supernatural). Direct political issues were avoided. Even the terrorists tended to be generic, their particular objectives ill specified, if mentioned at all. Starting in the late 90s, FPS gamers were given the opportunity to pit themselves against armed forces of various nation states, or rebel groups attempting to achieve government. Perhaps unsurprisingly, two common foes have been the armies of Iraq (four games) and North Korea (six games). What is interesting to note

is that both these enemies appeared before President George Bush's inclusion of those countries in the "Axis of Evil" in 2002 (Korean soldiers in *Spec Ops II: Green Beret*, ZombieStudios, 1999; and Iraqi soldiers in *Soldier of Fortune*, RavenSoftware, 2000). It appears that designers were reacting to the events that culminated in that political move, rather than waiting for presidential approval.

Out of the 160 titles surveyed, only 1 game, *Marine Sharpshooter 3* (JarheadGamesInc., 2007), was found that included the official forces of the third member of the Axis of Evil—Iran—as an enemy. Also of interest is the fact that it took until 2000 for Iraqi soldiers to appear, given that the first Gulf War ended almost a decade before that. While the appearance of the forces of these three countries in FPS games argues for a relation between real-world events and the choices of FPS designers, it is not an exclusive relationship. These 11 games mentioned above do not constitute the majority of this category. Various fictional enemies make an appearance, such as the central American rebel forces in games such as *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter* (RedStormEntertainmentInc., GRIN, UbisoftParisStudios, & UbisoftShanghaiStudios, 2006) and *Conflict: Denied Ops* (PivotalGamesInc., 2008). The United States has long had significant political interests in that area of the world. Other known political foes of the United States make rare appearances, such as Cuban soldiers in *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon* (RedStormEntertainmentInc., 2001) and the Chinese army in *IGI 2: Covert Strike* (InnerloopStudios, 2003) and *Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising* (Codemasters, 2009).

What is perhaps surprising is that some of the states presenting a more obvious challenge to the United States have not found themselves in the virtual firing line more often. As noted, Iran only once; and China, the current direct challenger to the U.S.'s global military hegemony only twice. The first of those, in 2003, is presented as the work of a rogue Chinese general. It is only in 2009 that direct state-to-state conflict is contemplated, in *Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising*. The more traditional enemy of the United States, Russia, has found itself the target of FPS players much more often, six examples being found (*Soldier of Fortune* 2000, *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon* 2001, *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* 2007, *Battlefield: Bad Company*, EADigitalIllusionsCE, 2008; *Rogue Warrior 2009*, and *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, InfinityWard, 2009). In a period when the U.S.-Russian diplomatic relations are probably at their best since the end of the Second World War, this total equals the most times that a nation from the Axis of Evil was represented, North Korea's six. Despite the weakening of Russian power after the fall of the Soviet Union and a declared end to the cold war, the depiction of Russia as a threat in FPSs has not been overtaken by the rise of other more obvious perceived political rivals. FPS designers may be pitching more to popular conceptions than the reality of current events.

Rogue Government Activity

Unsurprisingly foreign enemies are much more likely to be cast in the role of opponents than officials of the U.S.'s own government. However, when enemies engage

in underhand, organized antigovernment conspiracies (as opposed to individual betrayals) in the world of the FPS, they are uniformly U.S. government agents, not those of other western governments. This may reflect a higher level of distrust of U.S. government agencies by its own people. Indeed, the rogue government conspiracy is a theme far from unknown in other media. Numerous Hollywood movies use this theme as a basis, for example *Mercury Rising* (Becker, 1998), *Enemy of the State* (Scott, 1998), and *The Recruit* (Donaldson, 2003). Indeed both of the earliest games in this category *Ecks vs. Sever* (CrawfishInteractive, 2001) and *Ballistic: Ecks vs. Sever* (CrawfishInteractive, 2002) are linked to a movie as was *Ice Nine* (Torus Games, 2005).

The relatively small number of such games found may reflect a difficulty in depicting such scenarios within the structure of an FPS. The murky political and motivational issues that surround betrayal are not well suited to the straightforward world of the shooter. It should also be remembered that a classic FPS format game needs a constant supply of disposable enemies to constantly challenge the player. Designers perhaps find it a difficult task presenting that many rogue agents in a believable way and therefore the enemy within is a much more difficult opponent to base an FPS around. Designers have tried to overcome this problem by giving secondary roles to other types of enemies. In *Shadow Ops: Red Mercury* (ZombieStudios, 2004) Congolese rebels, Syrian terrorists, and Russian soldiers all appear. In *Conspiracy: Weapons of Mass Destruction* (KujuEntertainmentLtd, 2005), the rogue agents are developing biological weapons for sale to terrorists.

Science

The rogue scientist has been a staple of speculative fiction at least since Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. As pointed out by Weingart et al. in a study of 222 movies, "modification of, and intervention into the human body, the violation of human nature and threats to human health by means of science are depicted as the most alarming aspects of scientific inquiry." In analyzing horror films, Tudor termed the mad scientists and their creations as "secular" enemies as opposed to the "supernatural" threat of vampires, werewolves, and the like. Given the extent to which mad scientists and their creations feature in films and other speculative media, it is surprising that foes created by aberrant science, or aberrations of nature scientifically explained, are rare in the FPS.

One possible explanation is technical. The typical zombie plague, as seen in many movies, usually involves attacks by an *extremely* large number of enemies, numbers that for many years were beyond the capability of FPS engines to simultaneously display on screen. It is notable that the first zombie FPSs found were from 2005, *Deadhunt* (RELGames, 2005) and *Land of the Dead: Road to Fiddler's Green* (BrainboxGames, 2005). From 2006 to 2009 there were another five, including the highly successful *Left 4 Dead* (ValveCorporation, CertainAffinity, & TutrleRockStudiosInc., 2008) series. It may also be that FPS designers are reluctant to tackle

a style where escape is the prime motivation. The typical FPS climaxes with a confrontation between the player and some primary enemy that can be destroyed. This basic form can be seen from *Doom* to *Portal* (ValveCorporation, 2007).

Supernatural

Supernatural foes have long been a staple of horror films and literature. They were relatively popular enemies for early FPSs, as well as being the enemy in one of the first FPS with a contemporary setting, *Shadowcaster* (RavenSoftware, 1993). Supernatural enemies would appear to be readily adaptable to the FPS setting. They can be easily presented to the player as hostile and their appearance in large numbers required by the form requires little in the way of justification.

Marked differentiations can be found from the typical antagonists of horror films, however. Tudor gives as examples of supernatural foes "vampires, witches, werewolves." Such monsters are rare in the FPS games examined here. By far the most common terminology for enemies in these games is the generic nomenclature "demon." Fifty percent of the games examined had such enemies. They are spread evenly throughout the period, from *Shadowcaster*, as already mentioned, to *Painkiller: Resurrection* (HomeGrown Games, 2009). "Demon" is a powerful word. It brings with it connotations of religious evil, even beyond the types of creatures noted by Tudor.

Horror films tend to localize the threat. It might be lonely travelers happening on a vampire's castle, or an isolated village under threat from a werewolf. The enemies also tend to occur in relatively small numbers, from a single enemy to a small band. In the majority of FPS games the demonic threat is much more ambitious, the term demon bringing with it associations such as the phrase "legions of hell." Rather than creating an isolated, perhaps claustrophobic atmosphere, the FPS demons are much more ambitious, aiming at worldwide domination and destruction. This exaggeration of the stakes confronting the player is typical of the contemporary FPS. While not universal, for example *Dementium: The Ward* (RenegadeKid, 2007) presents a very personal struggle between the protagonist and the monsters, it is very common.

Terrorists

From Table 1, it can be seen that terrorists have been a staple enemy for the contemporary-setting FPS since its inception. Indeed, much of the literature that deals with such games focuses exclusively on this subcategory (e.g., Deck, Machin, Power). Such work has examined the role of the FPS, and the wider entertainment industry, in relation to the so-called war on terror and the increasingly sophisticated relationship between the U.S. military–industrial complex, the entertainment industry, and wider society. However, it is worth noting that U.S. President George W. Bush began using the phrase war on terror in the aftermath of the September 2001 attacks. Terrorist enemies were found in FPS as early as 1994, *Operation Body*

Count, and *Terminal Terror*. Even allowing for the fact that the September 2001 attacks were far from the first Western experience of terror, these games were a significant portion of FPSs with a contemporary setting well before the rise to prominence of al-Qaeda and similarly motivated organizations.

Terrorism is not new. The September 2001 attacks have been called part of the ''fourth wave of terror'' (Rapoport). The other waves were the anarchist-driven assassinations beginning in the 1880s, anticolonialism inspired activity from the 1920s to the 1960s and revolutionary ''international terrorism'' arising in the 1960s and 1970s. The latter included such groups as the Italian Red Brigades, American Weather Underground, German Red Army Faction, and the French Direct Action. Also associated were the Irish Republican Army and the Palestinian Liberation Organization. This third wave was the most recent Western experience of terror when the FPS first ventured into contemporary settings.

Comparing the third wave to the fourth wave some immediate differences can be noted. At the advent of modern international terrorism of the major identifiable terrorists, none had religion as the primary motivation (Hoffman 1995). This has changed with the fourth wave. In the words of Hoffman (1998) ''the religious imperative for terrorism is the most important characteristic of terrorist activity today.''

The earliest games in this subcategory reflected the then-current (third-wave) terrorist experience of Western society. From the beginning of the surveyed period until 1999, only one game with terrorists as the enemy, *Spec Ops: Rangers Lead the Way* 1998, depicts terrorists who could be said to be part of the fourth wave. In the earliest two games, mentioned above, the terrorist leaders have European names (Victor Balock in *Operation Body Count* and Bruno Riggs in *Terminal Terror*). Another early game *Damage Incorporated*, 1997, features homegrown U.S. terrorists who are distinctly Caucasian in appearance, as can be seen in Figure 1. This physical appearance matches the characteristics of members of many third-wave terrorist organizations. It is also worth noting that *Damage Incorporated* was released 2 years after the Oklahoma City bombing carried out by Timothy McVeigh in 1995.

In the early part of the surveyed period, this subcategory, while popular, did not possess the dominance in the contemporary-setting FPS that it latter assumed. Terrorists as enemies became the largest single subcategory only from 1998. That this occurred prior to 2001 reinforces the impact of general current affairs reportage on societal fears. The surge in the number of terrorist enemies found within FPS with contemporary settings coincides with the rise of fourth-wave terrorism in the western public view, which can be said to have begun with the bombings of U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998. However, while the percentage of such games was rising, the change of enemy was not immediate—almost half, but no more, of such games in the period 1998–2001 had religiously motivated Islamic terrorists as the enemy. More traditional, third-wave, style enemies continued, in games such as *Delta Force*, *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six* (Rebellion, RedStormEntertainmentInc, PipeDreamInteractive, CrawfishInteractive, & SaffireCorporation, 1998),

and *SWAT 3: Close Quarters Battle* (SierraEntertainmentInc., 1999). However, we found no game released prior to 1998 that had fourth-wave enemies. Perhaps the attacks of 1998, continuing with such events as the bombing of the USS Cole in 2000, were contributory causes to the rise to prominence of this subcategory and in the changes observed in the enemies presented. As western society's attention was drawn to the new form of terrorism, the medium of the FPS reflected this new concern.

This trend continued after the events of September 2001. Of the 45 games in this subcategory released in the period 2002–2009, 27 of them had as enemies Islamic terrorists that could be identified as fourth wave. The period, 2002–2005, immediately after the September 2001 attacks, is dominated by this subcategory, when makes it makes up nearly half of all contemporary-setting FPSs found. Of these, nearly 70% of the enemies are identifiable as fourth wave in nature. The link between the in-game enemies and real-world terrorists is not always direct. Some games, such as *Kuma/War* 2004 and *Fugitive Hunter: War on Terror* (BlackOpsEntertainment, 2003), use real-world enemies and locations. Other games use fictional organizations, such as the Elzar Organization from *Stealth Force: The War on Terror* (MidasInteractive, 2005), but ones which are clearly of the same origin and motivation as actual fourth-wave terrorist groups. Some games, though, still had enemies that appeared to be third-wave inspired, such as *Cold Winter* (SwordfishStudios, 2005) and *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Lone Wolf* (Rebellion, 2002).

In the last period of the survey, the dominance of this subcategory begins to decline. Also, the proportion of fourth-wave enemy contracts to roughly half. It appears that, if the U.S. industrial complex is attempting to use FPSs to keep the focus on the war on terror, then FPS designers are not cooperating as much as they did in the immediate aftermath of September 2001. As Morgan has noted, "Islamic radicalism is not the only form of apocalyptic, catastrophic terrorism," and it should not be expected that FPS games would limit themselves to such enemies. Certainly FPS terrorists tend to aim for high levels of destruction, from the plan to destroy London with a nuclear weapon in *The Mark* (T7Games, 2007) to the worldwide ambitions of those in *Operation iWolf* (MASQInteractive, 2009), regardless of whether a causal relationship is drawn between the decline in fourth-wave terrorism in FPS games and declining public support for the war on terror (PewResearchCenter, 2007). Rather than military directives, the enemy of choice appears to more closely reflect the course of public opinion as reflected in support for the military activities. As the war on terror continued, public enthusiasm was tempered by the time it took to hunt down Bin Laden and the discovery that there were in fact no *Weapons of Mass Destruction* to be found in Iraq.

Conclusion—The Human Factor

When asked about the military's enthusiastic embrace of gaming as both a recruiting and training vehicle in the PBS Frontline Special *Digital Nation: Life On The Virtual*

Frontier (Dretzin, 2010a), James Paul Gee notes that militarists engage and train their recruits well, because they have to, because when the game stops and the real war starts lives are at stake. With that in mind military strategists take video games very seriously and according to Gee they have learnt a lot through their deployment. One of the key principles they have observed is that games by themselves are not enough. In order to effectively train, or indoctrinate recruits "you have to have what they call after action reviews. People have to be able to get out of the game, talk about their strategies and compare strategies and think about it. Then when you do that the game does work" (Gee, 2010). Singer echoes this insight when he notes that the military has discovered that although video games provide the opportunity for reinforcement through repetition the best training methods involve all the senses and combine both human and digital elements (Singer, 2010). At the Philadelphia Army Experience Center, for example, soldiers casually mingle with civilian players. Reportedly, their directives are not to push but to be friendly and open in order to help players form an affable, human connection with army culture. These seemingly nonthreatening connections and engaged conversations are considered to be key in efforts to recruit potential soldiers (Dretzin, 2010a).

These sorts of strategies might work both ways. Perhaps these same techniques are already being employed by civilians to safeguard an affable, human connection with a nonmilitarized society. The authors believe that consumers experience the world through their geo-located lives situated physically, mentally, socially, and culturally within potent real-world networks and public discourse structures that together negotiate the line between real, unreal, subjective, objective, mythic, and documentary. Kingsepp argues that when the selectivity and theatrics of simulations are apparent to the user, Baudrillard's notion that users experience an existential state of lack and longing caused by their engagement with the inherent emptiness of hyperreality is not entirely accurate. Instead, referring to the game *Return to Castle Wolfenstien* (Gray_Matter_Interactive & id_Software, 2001), she proposes that the arena of simulation gaming also becomes an "oppositional response to postmodernity, using the hyper-real as an arena for playfulness and rebellion. The game's acclaim for the irrational, the mystical, and the occult, lots of blood, gore, violent death, and even the living dead, gives it a fabulous character close to that of gothic horror novels. By that, I would say that it comes closer to a negation of the hyper-real values than an affirmation of them" (Kingsepp, 2007, p. 374).

The videogame hero can, on the one hand, revel in the subjective *feeling* of *really being there*, sort of, while at the same time always knowing that *there* is inevitably anchored to the everyday space in front of their video game monitor. What becomes of these sorts of dualistic, consciously delusional entertainment experience in the real world depends as much on the player as the pathways to action available to them. As previously discussed, pinpointing the ways that hyperreal types of experience translate in terms of private and public attitudes is difficult, but if social discourse and/or public systems align with the sort of simplistic, mythologized narratives that FPS present, their propaganda potential may be enhanced.

On this point, it is worth noting that *America's Army's* much touted success (Li, 2004, p. 7-9) as a recruiting tool occurred in the context of a country that, post-9/11, harbored widespread popular support for the aggressive, campaigning political rhetoric of the Bush administration of the time that urged the country to flex its military muscles and fight terror on all fronts. In other words, the congruence between the two reinforced them both.

In the absence of definitive data proving the veracity of this possibility, we propose that just as military-themed video games have the potential to create enthusiasm for military operations (*America's Army*) through repetition over time, so public discourse and community networking has the potential, by extension, to become an equally potent tool to ensure that this sort of enthusiasm is tempered by both reason and humanism.

Such a conclusion is supported by this study: The fall in the number of fourth-wave religious inspired terrorist enemies, for example, appears to reflect the decline in public enthusiasm for America's war on terror (Polling_Report_Inc. & Polling_Organizations, 2006–2012). Whereas strong ties may be forged between military and gaming enthusiasts, the video game industry is primarily a commercial operation and as such appears to be more squarely concerned with market sales than government agendas. Despite the surge in militaristic intent in post-9/11 American society, the national psyche appears to be less and less within the grips of that rage and increasingly sensitive to more pressing, internal instabilities. Again, this implies that where war is cast as a form of entertainment that link is negotiated as much by societal forces as it is by simulated spectacle and gore.

FPS play, for example, introduces the potential to experience first-hand the nature of the form and as a result the role that signs, iconography, and perhaps even stereotypes plays in this genre. In turn, these extended explorations can even spurn experimental efforts to deepen the notion of a hero's journey, without dismantling the pleasures of virtual combat in future iterations of the genre. Arguably, the extent to which video war games can militarize society is negotiated as much by the context of play as it is by the perceived desire for this sort of fantasy enrichment.

This article began by retelling the dual story of both the real and simulated killing of Osama bin Laden. That simulation game has been announced as the last episode to be published in the series. While this matches the standard form of the FPS—the main boss has been defeated, the game ends—it ignores the reality that the war in Afghanistan goes on. Here we see a slippage between fiction and reality. The fictional world of the game is trying to impose its rules on the real world. By stating that one man's death achieves the final objective and hence no more need be said there is an attempt to apply the dialogue of the entertainment industry to its source material rather than just its representation. Perhaps what it also does is affirm a growing consensus among the American public that it is time for the war to end (Polling_Report_Inc. & Polling_Organizations, 2006–2012).

Despite fears that the spread of military-themed computer games is turning contemporary Western society in to a war machine, it appears that the situation is not

quite that simple. Just as many factors other than video games led to war in the Middle East, so too it appears that many factors, other than the state military agenda affect, led to the rise and fall in demand for military-themed video games.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

3Drealms. (1997). *Shadow warrior: GT Interactive*. Garland, TX: Author.

3Drealms. (PC). (1996). *Duke nukem 3D: GT Interactive*. Garland, TX: Author.

ApogeeSoftware. (1993). Blake stone: Aliens of gold. Garland, TX: Author.

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. New York, NY: General Learning Press.

Baudrillard, J. (1981/1994). *Simulacra and simulation*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Baudrillard, J. (1990). Necrospective. In *The transparency of evil. Essays on extreme phenomena* (pp. 89–99). London, England: Verso.

Becker, H. (Writer), & U. Pictures & I. Entertainment (Producer). (1998). *Mercury Rising*. U.S.A: Universal Pictures.

BlackOpsEntertainment. (2003). *Fugitive hunter: War on terror*. San Diego, CA: Encore, Inc., Play It Ltd.

BlitzGames. (2004). *Bad boys: Miami takedown: Empire Interactive*. Newport Beach, CA: Crave Entertainment.

BrainboxGames. (2005). *Land of the dead: Road to fiddler's green*. Toronto, Canada: Groove Games.

Bungie. (1993). *Pathways into darkness*. Bellevue, WA: Author.

Bungie. (2001). *Halo: Microsoft games studio*. Bellevue, WA: Author.

Butts, S. (2002). *Zombie president speaks: An interview with Mark Long*. Retrieved from IGN pc.

CapstoneSoftware. (1994). *Operation body count*. Miami, FL: Author.

Cifaldi, F. (2006). Analysts: FPS most attractive genre for publishers. Retrieved from *Gamasutra*

CityInteractive. (2006). *Terrorist takedown: War in colombia* Warsaw, Poland: Author.

Codemasters. (2009). *Operation flashpoint: Dragon rising*. Warwickshire, England: Author.

Crandall, J. (2005). Envisioning the home front: Militarization, tracking and security culture. *Journal of Visual Culture*, *4*, 17–38.

CrawfishInteractive. (2001). *Ecks vs. Sever*. San Jose, CA: Bam! Entertainment.

CrawfishInteractive. (2001). Ecks vs. Sever: Crawfish Interactive. San Jose, CA: Bam! Entertainment.

CrytekStudios. (2011). *Crysis 2*. Redwood city, CA: Electronic Arts Inc.

Deck, A. (2004). No Quarter: Demilitarizing the Playground, self-published web essya. Retreived from http://artcontext.com/crit/essays/noQuarter/DeepShadows. (2008). *White gold: War in paradise*. Russobit-M: CIS.

Der_Derrian, J. (2001). *Virtuous war: Mapping the military-industrial-entertainment network*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Donaldson, R (Writer), & Epsillon Motion Pictures (Producer). (2003). *The Recruit*. U.S.A.: S. E. Touchstone Pictures.

Dretzin, R. (Writer), & C. M. Rachel Dretzin, R.A. Fedde (Producer). (2010a). *Digital Nation: Life On The Virtual Frontier*. U.S.A.: PBS: Frontline, available online at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/digitalnation/, accessed 30.10.11.

Dretzin, R. (2010b). Digital nation: Life on the vritual frontier. Retrieved November 10, 2011, from http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/digitalnation/

EA Digital Illusions, CE. (2008). *Battlefield: Bad Company*. Redwood city, CA: EA Games.

EA LosAngeles, EA Digital Illusions CE, Dream Works Interactive, 2015 Inc, Rebellion Developments, Netherock Ltd., et al. (1999-2010). *Medal of Honor (Series)*. Redwood city, CA: Electronic Arts.

Electric Fantasies. (1995). *Island Peril*. Atlantean interactive games. Van Nuys, CA: Atlantean interactive games.

Eurocom(N64), & BlackOps(PS1). (2000). *007: The world is not enough*. Redwood city, CA: Electronic Arts.

Farley, L. J. (as reported by Toby Harnden, 9 Nov. 2004). I got my kills . . . . I just love my job *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/1476221/I-got-my-kills- . . . -I-just-love-my-job.html

Freedman, J. L. (2002). *Media violence and its effect on aggression*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press Ltd.

Gasche, R. (1986). *The tain and the mirror: derrida and the philosophy of reflection*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Gaudiosi, J. (2011). *Kill bin laden yourself: First video game rushed to market.* Retreieved from The Hollywood Reporter.

Gee, J. P. (2010). Playing America's army in waging war: A new generation. *Digital Nation: Life On The Virtual Frontier* Retrieved October 30, 2011, from http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/digitalnation/waging-war/a-new-generation/playing-americas-army.html?play

Gerbner, G. (1998). Cultivation analysis: An overview. *Mass Communication & Society, I*, 175–194.

Gerbner, G., & Gross, L. (1976). Living with television: The violence profile. *Journal of Communication*, *26*, 173–199.

Gray_Matter_Interactive, & id_Software. (2001). *Return to castle wolfenstien*. Vivendi, SA: Activision.

GrooveMedia. (2008). *Marine Sharpshooter 4*. Scranton, PA: Author.

GSC GameWorld. (2007). *S.T.A.L.K.E.R*. Moscow, Russia:1C Company.

Halper, K. (2005). quoted by Colin Freeman in Battles re-enacted in video arcades / N.Y. gamemaker lets players portray Iraqi or U.S. troops. *The SanFrancisco Chronicle*, p. 3. Retrieved

November 05, 2011, from http://articles.sfgate.com/2005-01-16/news/17355002_1_iraqi-police-kuma-war-iraqi-forces/2

Halter, E. (2002). War Games: New media finds its place in the new world order. Retrieved from Village Voice

Hitchens, M. (2011). A survey of first person shooters and their avatars. *Games Studies*, Retrieved December 3, 2011, from http://gamestudies.org/1103/articles/michael_hitchens

Hoffman, B. (1995). Holy terror: The implications of terrorism motivated by a religious imperative. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, *18*, 271–284.

Hoffman, B. (1998). *Inside terrorism*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Hoglund, J. (2008). Electronic empire: Orientalism revisited in the first person shooter. *Game Studies*, *8*, Retrieved November 10, 2011, from http://gamestudies.org/0801/articles/hoeglund

Human Head Studios & 3D realms. (2006). *Prey*. Novato, CA: 2K Games.

Huntemann, N. B., & Payne, M. T. (2010). *Joystick soldiers: The politics of play in military video games*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hutchinson, R. (2007). Performing the self: Subverting the binary in combat games. *Games and Culture*, *2*, 283–299.

idSoftware. (1991). Catacomb 3D. Shreveport, LA: Softdisk.

idSoftware. (1992). Wolfenstein 3D. Garland, TX: Apogee Software.

idSoftware (1993). Doom. Richardson, TX: Author.

InfinityWard. (2009). *Call of duty: Modern warfare 2*. Santa Monica, CA: Activision.

InnerloopStudios. (2003). *IGI 2: Covert Strike*. Warwickshire, Englnad: Codemasters.

JarheadGames. (2003). *Navy Seals 2: Weapons of mass destruction*. Retrieved from ValuSoft.

JarheadGamesInc. (2007). *Marine sharpshooter 3*. Paris, France: Vivendi Games.

Kaos Studios. (2011). *Homefront*. Agoura Hills, CA: THQ.

Kingsepp, E. (2007). Fighting hyperreality with hyperreality: History and death in world war ii digital games. *Games and Culture*, *2*, 366–375.

KujuEntertainmentLtd. (2005). *Conspiracy: Weapons of mass destruction*. Northamptonshire, England: Oxygen Interactive Software Ltd.

KumaRealityGames. (2004). Kuma\War. Retrieved November 10, 2011, from http://www.kumawar.com/

Kutner, L., & Olson, C. (2008). *Grand theft childhood: The surprising truth about violent video games*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Leonard, D. (2004). Unsettling the military entertainment complex: Video games and a pedagogy of peace. *Studies in Media and Information Literacy Education*, *4*, 1–8.

Li, Z. (2004). *The potential of America's army the video game as civilian-military public sphere*. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Lobotomy Software Inc. (1996). *Powerslave*. Playmates Interactive Entertainment Inc. Costa Mesa, CA: Playmates Interactive Entertainment Inc.

LucasArts. (1995). *Star wars: Dark forces*. San Francisco, CA: Author.

Lutz, C. (2001). *Homefront: A military city and the American 20th century*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Machin, D., & Suleiman, U. (2006). Arab and American computer war games. *Critical Discourse Studies*, *3*, 1–22.

Machin, D., & van Leeuwen, T. (2005). Computer games as political discourse The case of Black Hawk Down *Journal of Language and Politics*, *4*, 119–141.

Major Dillard, L. F. (2010). *Digital nation: Life on the virtual frontier*. Retrieved November 10, 2011, from http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/digitalnation/waging-war/a-new-generation/the-army-experience-center.html?play

MASQInteractive. (2009). *Operation iWolf*. Shanghai, China: Author.

Midas Interactive. (2005). *Stealth force: The war on terror*. Essex, England: Author.

Morgan, M. J. (2004). The Origins of the New Terrorism. Parameters, *34*, 29–43.

Neumann, I. B. (1996). Self and other in international relations. *European Journal of International Relations*, *2*, 139–174.

Novalogic. (1998). *Delta Force*. Malibu, CA:Author.

Pandemic_Studios, Institute_For_Creative_Technologies, & Mass_Media_Inc. (2004). *Full spectrum warrior*. Agoura Hills, CA: THQ.

Paranoid Productions. (1997). *Damage incorporated*. Minneapolis, MN: WizardWorkds.

PewResearchCenter. (2007). America's image in the world: Findings from the pew global attitudes project. Retrieved August 4, 2011, from http://pewglobal.org/2007/03/14/americas-image-in-the-world-findings-from-the-pew-global-attitudes-project/

Pie In The Sky Software. (1993). *Lethal tender*. Coral Gables, FL: Froggman.

Pie In The Sky Software. (1994). *Terminal terror*. Coral Gables, FL: Expert Software, Inc.

PivotalGamesInc. (2008). *Conflict: Denied ops*. Wimbledon, London: Eidos Interactive.

Plato, & Jowett, B. (380BC/1894). *The republic.* New York, NY: Vintage Books. Retrieved January 25, 2011, from http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html

Polling_Report_Inc., & Polling_Organizations. (2006 - 2012). Iraq polls. Retrieved January 3, 2012, from http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq.htm

Power, M. (2007). Digitized virtuosity: Video war games and post-9/11 cyber deterrence. *Security Dialogue*, *38*, 271–288.

Rare. (1997). *GoldenEye 007*. Kyoto, Japan: Nintendo.

RavenSoftware. (1993). *ShadowCaster*. Austin, TX: Origin Systems.

RavenSoftware. (2000). *Soldier of fortune*. Santa Monica, CA: Activision.

Rebellion. (2002). *Tom clancy's rainbow six: Lone wolf*. Montreuil, France: Ubisoft Entertainment.

Rebellion. (2009). *Rogue warrior*. Bethesda, MD: Bethesda Softworks.

Rebellion, RedStormEntertainmentInc, PipeDreamInteractive, CrawfishInteractive, & Saffire Corporation. (1998). *Tom clancy's rainbow six*. Cary, NC: Red Storm Entertainment.

Red Storm Entertainment. (1999). *Tom clancy's rainbow six: Rogue spear*. Cary, NC: Author.

Red Storm Entertainment Inc. (2001). Tom clancy's ghost recon. Montreuil, France: Ubisoft Entertainment.

Red Storm Entertainment Inc., GRIN, Ubisoft Paris Studios, & Ubisoft Shanghai Studios. (2006). *Tom clancy's ghost recon advanced warfighter*. Montreuil, France: Ubisoft Entertainment.

RELGames. (2005). *Deadhunt*. Perm, Russian Federation: Author.

RenegadeKid. (2007). *Dementium: The ward*. Austin, TX: Gamecock Media Group.

RetroStudios, NintendoEAD, & NintendoR&D1. (2002-2009). *Metroid prime*. Kyoto, Japan: Nintendo.

Roberston, A. (2011). The unreal enemy of America's army. *Games and Culture*, *6*(1), 38–60.
RocksteadyStudios. (2006). *Urban chaos: Riot response*. Wimbledon, London: Eidos Interactive.
Schmitt, C. (1936). *Der begriff des politischen*. Munich: Duncker & Humblot (Originally published, 1932).
Scott, T (Writer), & Don Simpson/Jerry Bruckheimer Films (Producer). (1998). *Enemy of the state*. U.S.A.: B. F. Touchstone Pictures.
Shelley, B. (2001). Guidelines for developing successful games. www.gamasutra.com. Retrieved November 10, 2011, from http://www.gamasutra.com/features/20010815/shelley_01.htm
Sierra Entertainment Inc. (1999). *Swat 3: Close quarter's battle*. Moscow, Russia: 1C Company.
Singer, P. W. (2010, October 30). Waging war: Virtual training. In *Digital nation: Life on the virtual frontier*. Arlington, VA: Public Broadcasting Service. Retreived from at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/digitalnation/waging-war/immersion-training/virtual-training.html
Sisler, V. (2008). Digital arabs: Representation in video games. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *11*, 203–220.
Snider, M. (2004). Big-selling war games may carry bigger cost. *USA Today*. Retreived from http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/lifestyle/2004-06-09-war-video-games-inside_x.htm
Stahl, R. (2006). Have you played the war on terror? *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *23*, 112–130.
Sternheimer, K. (2003). *It's not the media: The truth about pop culture's influence on children*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
Swordfish Studios. (2005). *Cold winter*. Santa Monica: Activision Blizzard Inc.
T7 Games. (2007). The mark. Liezen, Austria: JoWooD Productions Software AG.
Techland Sp. z.o.o. (2007). *Call of juarez*. Montreuil, France: Ubisoft Entertainment.
Tibo Software. (2000). *Bad toys*. Pardubice, Czech Republic: Author.
Torus Games. (2005). *Ice nine*. San Jose, CA: Bam! Entertainment.
Trend, D. (2007). *The myth of media violence: A critical introduction*. Malden, Englnad: Blackwell.
Tudor, A. (1989). *Monsters and mad scientists: A cultural history of the horror movie*. Oxford, England: Wiley-Blackwell.
Zombie Studio's Inc. (2002). *America's army*. Washinton, DC: United States Army.
Van Leeuwen, T. (1996). The representation of social actors. In C.R. Caldas-Coulthard & M. Coulthard (Eds.), *Texts and practice* (pp. 32–70). London, England: Routledge.
Valve Corporation. (2007). *Portal*. Bellevue, WA: Author.
Valve Corporation, CertainAffinity, & Tutrle RockStudios Inc. (2008). *Left 4 dead.* Redwood city, CA: Electronic Arts.
Weingart, P, Muhl, C, & Pansegrau, P. (2003). Of power maniacs and unethical geniuses: Science and scientists in fiction film. *Public Understanding of Science*. *12*, 279–287.
Wimmer, D. R., & Dominick, R. J. (2011). *Mass media research: An introduction*. Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

Wright, T. (2008). Violence and media: From media effects to moral panics. In R. Anderson & J. Gray (Eds.), *Battleground: The media* (Vol. *2*, pp. 549–557). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Zombie_Inc. (2002). *Delta force: Task force dagger*. Malibu, CA: Novalogic Inc.

Zombie_Studios. (1998). *Spec ops: Rangers lead the way*. Santa Clara, CA: Ripcord Games.

ZombieStudios. (1999). *Spec ops II: Green berets*. Santa Clara, CA: Ripcord Games.

ZombieStudios. (2004). *Shadow ops: Red mercury*. Paris, France: Atari SA.

Author Biographies

Michael Hitchens is the chair of Faculty Standards and Quality Committee of the Faculty of Science at Macquarie University. He is part of the department of computing, where he led the development of the bachelor of information technology—games design and development. His research interests include player experience, story and narrative in games, and the relationship between player and player character. He has a bachelor of mathematics (Hons) and a PhD in computer science.

Bronwin Patrickson, a PhD candidate at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia, is a digital media researcher and teacher. Prior to her academic career, Bronwin worked as a cross media producer for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, making documentaries and features for radio, TV, and online (*Swingers, fan.au, Postcards From Halls Creek*). Building on this experience, Bronwin has taught across an extensive range of media subjects at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Her research interests include the theory and practice of interactivity, the application of drama modalities to computer-mediated environments, audience participation and cocreation of texts that emerge from a network of transmedial productions, cross-cultural anime and manga production networks, computer-mediated game design extensions, digital media, and communication modalities. In addition to her research publications, Bronwin has made cross-platform documentaries for the ABC and published creative fiction and feature articles for a range of publications, magazines, and online sites.

Sherman Young is the associate dean of learning and teaching (Faculty of Arts). He is also deputy head of the Department of Media, Music, Communication and Cultural Studies at Macquarie, researching and teaching new media theory and production. Sherman is the author of *The Book is Dead*, *Long Live the Book* (UNSW 2007), and coauthor with Graham Meikle of *Media Convergence: Networked Digital Media in Everyday Life* (Palgrave 2012). He has a BSc in design, an MA in media, technology, and law, and a PhD in media and cultural studies. Prior to becoming an academic, Sherman ran a multimedia production company building interactive media for a range of corporate and publishing clients.