Brian Moriarty | Articles | On Dead Island Riptide

On *Dead Island Riptide* (2013)

My contribution to [an article](#) by Laura Parker, "*Dead Island Riptide* and the problem with video game marketing," published 22 January 2013 by [Gamespot](#).

§

It happens that I am teaching a course called "Social Issues in Interactive Media and Games" this term. Last week, I was deciding which topics to discuss in the next day's class, when the *Dead Island Riptide* controversy flashed across the web. Talk about a gift! All I had to do is drop Deep Silver's hi-res promotional image of a dismembered bikini-clad torso into my PowerPoint, sit back and watch the fireworks.

Or so I thought.

The big moment came. After a bit of build-up, I flashed the gruesome torso onto the screen. First, I asked the three females in the lecture hall what they thought of it. Then I asked the remaining twenty-two males. The ones who responded said approximately the same thing: "Yeah, that's offensive, but ..."

There was a brief discussion of whether it would make any difference if the breasts were realistically smaller. A few praised the canniness of the marketing. One woman pointed out that the bottom of the bikini would never really stay on like that. Nobody seemed interested in buying one, especially when I estimated what £100 was in American dollars.

The general reaction could be characterized by one word: *Whatever.*

I told them about a couple of similar controversies in my youth. One was a 1966 album cover released by Capitol which showed the Beatles draped with bloody strips of raw meat and baby doll parts. Another was in 1972, when Warner Bros. wrapped each copy of Alice Cooper's *School's Out* LP in a pair of girl's panties.

So I asked my students, does this zombie-kitsch *Dead Island* torso objectify and degrade women or not? Does it

contribute to the popular image of video games as violent, sexist and depraved? Do game companies bear any responsibilities to society beyond their mandate to make money? Would you work for a company that resorted to marketing gimmicks like this?

They looked down at me, silent, fidgeting in their stadium seats.

Maybe I shouldn't have showed the torso. Maybe I should have stuck to my lesson plan and played through Jason Rohrer's *Passage* instead, explicating the elegance of its procedural rhetoric, and holding it up as an example of how games, unlike any other medium, have the potential to instantiate beauty and truth in a *process*.

Or whatever.

. . .