

COMPUTER GAMES: THE CINDERELLA ARTFORM

Francis Breen investigates the poor reputation of computer games

You are on a battlefield, surrounded. You are fighting for your life. You taste the fear. You smell the victory, so sweet, so close. Adrenaline courses through your body like a tsunami.

In the almost entirely male world of computer gaming, killing sells. The target market for most games is men or young males. Game-makers are mostly men, as are the majority of players. I don't know a single female who plays games regularly and if they do it certainly isn't a first-person shooter. Every single person on my *Xbox* friends list is a male.

This would lead one to the conclusion – a rather sad one – that men just like violence, it's hardwired into us, a relic from our prehistoric days. Think of young boys playing with guns while playing cowboys and Indians or cops and robbers. This is no different.

I have to admit, I enjoy killing games. I resisted them until very recently. I was a bit too squeamish; I couldn't see the fun in killing people, even if it was only a game. It all just seemed a bit morbid to me. I was also a bit embarrassed for others to see me enjoying these games. I worried they would think of me differently – think that under my polite, reasonable exterior, lurked some seriously psychopathic tendencies.

To an extent, I'm still embarrassed by my love of this type of game - they are a guilty pleasure, I still hide away in my room with the doors closed while playing in case my parents think they've raised the next Jack the Ripper.

But what is the problem? If I'm not hurting anybody, why do I feel guilty? To answer that question, I think it's necessary to look at the media's portrayal of such games. The media looks down on computer games and paints them in a bad light. They are portrayed as the Cinderella artform, far beneath the lofty highs of literature and music. Well, I'd like to alert you to the many similarities between Homer's *Odyssey* and the quest narratives of many computer games. So, any problems with Homer? Nope, didn't think so.

What is the difference between playing a violent game and watching a violent film? *Goodfellas* is considered a modern classic. Nobody worries about your mental health if you enjoyed it, though.

In the 1990s Jack Thompson, a lawyer and anti-games protester, sued the makers of various computer games on behalf of parents who had lost children at school shootings. He drew a link between violent computer games and murders. He claimed that playing such games makes us less sensitive and more violent. He also said that games can offer training on how to kill people.

I would have to argue that a responsible player can easily tell the difference between games and reality. People responsible for murders have problems well before they play computer games. It is a lazy excuse to blame the computer games rather than

look at the actual sociological and psychological problems responsible for these tragic deaths.

The game creators put incredible effort and artistry into their products. Modern games are as well-written as many Hollywood films and feature the voices of well-known actors. It is about time that games got the respect they deserve. They are just as valid an art form as any other media and tell vivid, dramatic stories. Additionally, they are unique in that the player has a chance to directly interact with the story themselves. In films and books we can only empathise with the characters but in games we actually are the protagonist.

So, as a gamer I await the release of the newest first-person shooter, *Call of Duty Modern Warfare*, probably the most anticipated game of the decade. The genre has come a long way since its beginnings but now it is at its peak. I am proud to be a gamer. I am not ashamed to admit that I enjoy first-person shooters. The games contain violence but I feel as a responsible adult I can play these games and understand that they are just games. Meant to be enjoyed and not taken too seriously.