

When discussing the future of video games, imagery of black masks strapped to people's faces typically comes to mind. The current state of virtual reality comes in the form of these black masks, the glowing screen moved from the living room wall to directly in front of the optic nerve. In this exciting time of digital media, the human viewer inches closer and closer to the screen, pining for the day they truly interact with the virtual world inside it. Soon, with currently unknown technology, we will be able to feel fully immersed, body and soul, in a video game. But to do what, exactly? What does the player do once inside the digital world? Stare into the virtual sky and contemplate the virtual universe? Sit in the grass and sing "Kumbaya, my Lord?" From what the scope of human history would indicate, as well as the general trajectory of the market for games and entertainment media, we'll most likely want to shoot stuff.

There exists an obsession with aggressive gun-based fantasies in Western culture. From before the earliest video games, to the advent of written language, people have relished tales of daring heroics, brutal combat, and the horrors of warfare. But violence in stories would lead to interactive and engaging activities designed to satisfy some fundamental desire to better others on the field of battle, from sports that mimic the physical attributes of combat to table-top games that cater the more cerebral qualities of war. These two qualities of interactive entertainment with violent themes would culminate, over hundreds of years of evolution, into the most popular video game genre around the world: the first-person shooter (FPS). *Call of Duty*, a 13-year old video game franchise, is the 4th best-selling game franchise in history, at 250 million copies sold. These sales trail behind only *Mario*, *Super Mario*, and *Pokemon*, which have been around nearly twice as long (McWhertor). Of course, *Call of Duty* is not the only FPS title to dominate the gaming market, and the list keeps growing.

What is it about violence, especially from an immersive perspective, that makes it so appealing to watch and play? Why has generation after generation learned and expressed the absolute horrors of nation-against-nation warfare to person-to-person murder, and yet children clamor for plastic guns with orange tips and urban fashion lauds epaulettes, olive drab and combat boots?

As more advanced computational and graphics processing technology becomes more accessible to the average consumer, violence in games can only become more graphic and more immersive. To reference Moore's Law, over the history of computing hardware, the number of transistors in a dense integrated circuit has doubled approximately every two years. Considering this trend, what video games can accomplish graphically and mechanically will only continue to advance. Players want to feel part of the game, or escape their world and into the artificial game world. Furthermore, indicative of current trends in popular video games, players will want to feel like they are the ones in aggressive situations, to feel fully immersed in a warrior fantasy. Violent content attracts people to entertainment media, as seen throughout history because of a global heritage of violence and violent stories. However, as shown by findings in game research, psychology, and cultural analysis, as games exhibit more realistic and immersive violent aesthetics, an interesting parity occurs. Violence in video games improves player performance and enhances virtual fulfilment of fundamental psychological needs due to validation of fantasy play; however, forms of violence beyond a certain threshold of graphic nature and amoral purpose, especially when experienced in an immersive gaming experience, reduce player

performance and enjoyment due to negative emotional response and empathy for virtual entities. Regardless of the outcome, because of the prevalence of violence in popular games and the amount of interest surrounding the subject, and because immersion plays a significant role in the future of video games and will only improve with better technology, it is imperative that we explore and assess the role of violence in video games.