

Portrait of a video game junkie

BY JOHN CULLEN

It is a little known fact that sometimes I jump to conclusions — and this time is no different. I have never had an affinity towards video games. In fact (and this is where I start jumping) I

clockwise and then jump while pressing the A and C buttons repeatedly, yet alternately. It's that easy."

Easy? Yeah, right I thought. Ah, but how I would eat these thoughts for a midnight snack. Nothing could prepare me for the ensuing madness.

The Sega Saturn came in an unassuming white FedEx box, void of any in-dignities it contained inside. I took it home and connected the CD-based unit to the TV. Game #1 was called VirtuaCop. The system comes with one of those fake interactive guns, so you can shoot your TV without the hassle of expensive repair bills. I expected a simple game, but this one was fully 3D, so the range of motion messed me up big time. Since our generation expects violence to be bloody, I was pleasantly surprised with the graphics of the game. There were no gaping entry holes or fountains of red spurting from arterial wounds; just a generic blue flash when you hit someone. But this doesn't make the game dull, the bad guys react as if they really were shot — keeling over when hit in the groin and falling off buildings with a resounding "thud."

Then I tried Daytona USA, a snazzy little driving game that allows the player different perspectives of the track. However, I find car games boring, so I quickly turned it off and let the CD collect dust on my floor.

The system came with two more games. The first one was World Cup Soccer, which was too

confusing (you can trade players and set up a whole season of games — cool if you know soccer, but I'm a golf man myself) and had none of the instant gratification of the other games. Daytona USA was happy to have another CD to talk to on that lonely floor. But the last game was the mother of them all — VirtuaFighter 2. This home version of the arcade game is a 3D knock-off of Street Fighter, but more fun. Some moves were incredibly hard to do, so I would resort to banging on the controller in every conceivable way to defeat my opponents. No, not very professional, but sometimes my character (you have a choice of about eight) would do some ass-kicking-mid-air-ninja-flying-

eight different stunt courses and race tracks. Exhilarated with the new game, I called Andrew, my co-editor, and told him to come over. Now Andrew and I don't spend a lot of time together outside of the office, but I noticed that he started coming over way too much. He was hooked, too. He even had the audacity to crash on my couch two nights in a row so that he could get his fix early the next morning. It got to the point where his girlfriend (yes, ladies, he is taken) was calling my house. That's when I kicked him out.

"It's for your own good, junkie!" I yelled as he rolled down three flights of stairs.

"Go clean yourself up and don't let me see your degenerate face until you've gotten some help!"

It's been a week, and I haven't seen him since. The grape vine tells me he's running systems down to Maine...sad, sad life. Funny how I

was acting the role of God, all the while playing Super Mario 64 like a ravenous dog. But aren't we all hypocrites?

In the end, it was my mother who made me see the light and change my ways. When she made her weekly call, all I could talk about was how high my score had been on Mario 64.

"Video games?" she queried. "Aren't you a little old for that kind of stuff?"

She was right. I am too old for that. So I packed up the machines and sent them back to their respective companies.

In a way, I have come back to my original point about jumping to conclusions. The people who

own these machines are not nerds per se. They are addicts to some pretty high-tech game systems. They are made with just enough difficulty so the novelty doesn't wear off too quickly, yet not so difficult you break the cartridge in a fit of passion. The companies involved have done their fair share of market research and probably realize that some of their prospects lose their minds. And with that, Andrew, if you are reading this, please come back from your life of crime. All is forgiven.



looked upon these things as inferior forms of entertainment, operated by people who were pure and unabashed nerds. As always, I was to be proven somewhat wrong.

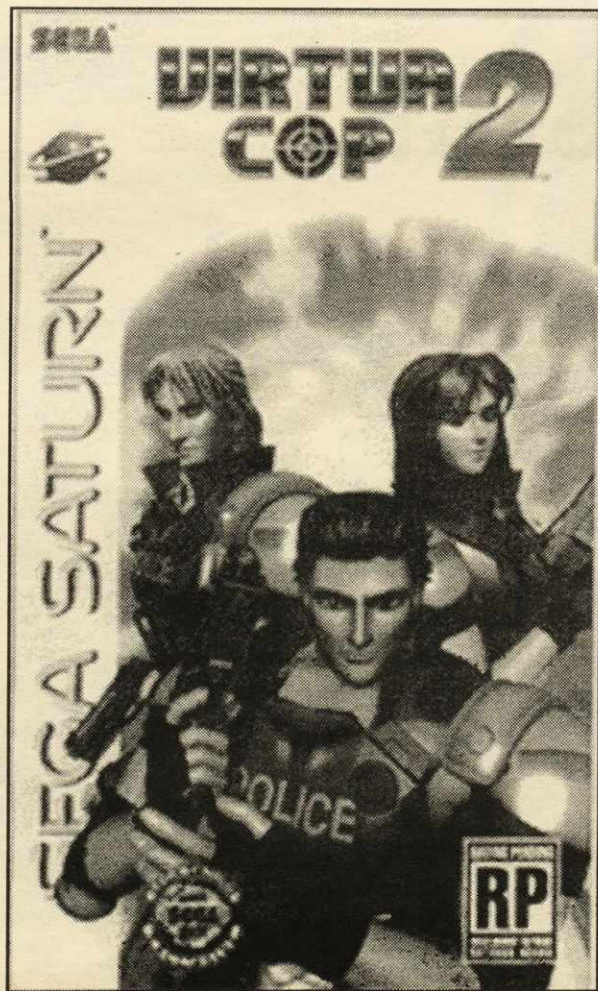
A woman named Tina from the marketing firm that represents Sega called me up in December. Her offer was simple: try the new Saturn System for a week and see how you like it. Being responsible for you, the student consumer — and because I love anything free — I grudgingly agreed. Tina, who was one of the nicest women I've had the pleasure of dealing with, said they would send one out free of charge.

Things like this don't happen to me very often, so I thought I would push the limit. I called Nintendo.

"Hello, my name is John Cullen, and your competitor just sent me one of their systems," I said in my best Troy McClure voice. The man on the other end got my point immediately, and said that the Nintendo 64 was on it's way. Wasn't it wise old Aristotle who once said, "Go big or go home..."

The only video game I played prior to all of this was the Galaga machine inside the Birdland. It's perfect: one button, one joystick and one objective (shoot everything that moves). You can even play it drunk, and the difficulty level rarely changes. I could never be bothered to try those Mortal Kombat type games — too much brain power involved.

"Well Bob, if you want to hop off your opponent's head, just spin the joystick counter-



throw that pleased everyone watching so much, they couldn't help but scream their approval.

"Kick the *shit* out of him!"

That's when I knew something was wrong.

By THE TIME the Nintendo 64 arrived, I was up to 3 hours a day. But my habit had yet to reach the depths hardcore addiction can

achieve. My roommates noticed a distinct change in me. No longer the suave dictator of the house, I had degenerated into a pale, haggard and hollow shell of a man surrounded by his own detritus: half eaten bags of chips, slices of pizza, and one heavily resinated bong. I could tell my lifestyle was changing, but I cared little — the Nintendo supported every kind of stimulus I needed. Violence, a love story, and wicked crashes you could control yourself.

On a more negative note, the Wayne Gretzky Hockey game sucked as bad as his performance last season and joined the party on the floor. However, Wave Race 64 was the crack of the video game drug world. The game consists of those noisy little SeaDoo's which can zip around

Suicide for artists

BY KAREN DENSMORE

A ghostly voice fills the air. It flows from a shadowy figure entering the room in a wheelchair pushed by a young lady named Victoria. A doctor emerges and moves toward the slides...autopsy photos of real suicide victims. Simultaneously the doctor and the spectre speak, "A, A is for asphyxia."

One might think I was in a Boris Karloff movie, but instead I was attending the dramatization of *Suicide for Artists*. The production, incorporating slides from the Dalhousie Medical School, was shocking yet represented the reality of the subject. The show was for a mature audience as the slides were purposely not altered by the artist. I questioned if I was mature enough to handle the dark humour. Don't get me wrong, though — this was not a comedy.

The show was captivating.

The voices of the actors flowed through my head and slides flashed in and out of my conscious state like a dream.

How does one approach the alienated subject of suicide that is such a taboo in today's society? Andreas Guibert, the artist behind this well thought-out work, perceived the ideas and expressed it superbly. When talking to Andreas afterwards, he enlightened me on the different layers of his work, layers which were also demonstrated in the three characters. *Suicide for Artists* portrays how political, cultural and human aspects affect suicide and how different cultures reflect on it.

Andreas, a very cultured and intellectual individual, was a pleasure to meet. It is too bad that this was his only show in "ACTION", The Halifax Festival of Time Based Art. The festival began January 9 and will run until February 27. Most of the shows will be held at the Dal Arts Centre.