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"I Hope You Never See Another Day Like This": Pedagogy & Allegory in "Post 9/11" Video Games

by Marc A. Ouellette

Abstract

Although critics and scholars have considered the extent to which the terror attacks of 11 Sept. 2001 influenced subsequent media productions, video games comprise a largely unexamined form. This oversight also applies to related forms of media production and among those who study video games is in part attributable to the ongoing debate regarding the relationship(s) between narrative and play. Even so, as early as 1997, JC Herz was investigating the role of video games in the military-entertainment complex. That said, the focus of this paper will not be the obvious games which draw settings and plots directly from the terror attacks, from the "war on terror" or from the overwhelming popular responses to them. Instead, it will consider games which function allegorically (at the very least metaphorically) and pedagogically through their imbrication with the web of so-called "post-9/11" narratives. *Syphon Filter 3* and *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* both represent installments of successful video game series which were affected by the post-9/11 mindset. Through an examination of the games' content and pedagogical functions, the tension between audience expectations and the media's ideological manipulations will be examined, including how this occurs in and through the playing of the games.

Keywords: Cultural Studies; intertextuality; play; 9/11; narrative; ludology; digital culture; allegory; pedagogy

Introduction

Although critics and scholars have considered the extent to which the terror attacks of 11 Sept. 2001 influenced subsequent media productions, video games comprise a largely unexamined form. Most noteworthy in this exclusion is that the critical commonplaces of violence, racism, sexism and the presumed effects on young audiences have generally escaped scholarly and popular scrutiny.[1] Examinations of violence, gender stereotypes, anti-social behaviour abound, but David Leonard finds that "critical examinations of the relationship between games and the hegemonic practices of the military-entertainment complex are virtually absent." This oversight also applies to related forms of media production and among those who study video games is in part attributable to the ongoing debate regarding the relationship(s) between narrative and play. Even so, as early as 1997, JC Herz was investigating the role of video games in the military-entertainment complex. Rebecca Bell-Metereau observes that since the "events of September 11th," media commentators simply "don't bother to subject the current rash of war and spy films to the kind of scrutiny they often apply to films of other genres" (160). Yet the primarily youthful demographic, the fact that video games continue to surpass movies in terms of sales, the direct involvement of movie makers in video games and the transparent interactivity of the form combine to make video games an excellent site from which to theorize media effects on consumer beliefs, media collusion in the project(ion) of nationalism and the extent to which the "events of 9/11" actually inspired the creation of what is popularly termed a "new normal."

That said, the focus of this paper will not be the obvious games which draw settings and plots directly from the terror attacks, from the "war on terror" or from the overwhelming popular responses to them.[2] Instead, I want to analyze video games which function allegorically

(at the very least metaphorically) and pedagogically through their imbrication with the web of so-called "post-9/11" narratives. Leonard is one of the few scholars to recognize the importance of video games among the variety of media outlets. He cautions, "Rather than eschew games as irrelevant child's play or lowbrow popular culture, educators must begin to think about ways to use video games as means to teach, destabilize, and elucidate the manner in which games employ and deploy racial, gendered, and national meaning, often reinforcing dominant ideas and the status quo." However, Leonard only considers games directly drawn from contemporary current events following from the terrorist attacks of 11 Sept. 2001. Even the fictional games that Leonard examines are based on contemporary terrorists threats. If significant, the themes of "post-9/11" media will have metaphorical as well as literal effects.

Syphon Filter 3 and *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* both represent installments of successful video game series which were affected by the post-9/11 mindset. *Syphon Filter 3* was originally scheduled for release on 25 Sept. 2001, but this was delayed because the game's plot—which was in fact a continuation of games dating to 1999—was deemed to be "too close" to the events of 11 Sept. 2001 and those which immediately followed. However, the combination of terrorism, missions in Afghanistan and viral attacks in Washington, DC, were appropriate in time for the all-important Christmas season only three months later. Indeed, it might be argued that the profit motive outweighed Sony's other considerations in delaying the release. *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* more properly belongs to what Marsha Kinder calls a "network of intertextuality that cuts across several modes of image production" since it is one of many products—including movies, miniseries and video games—which Stephen Spielberg Productions has set in World War II (52).[3] What sets *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* apart from its (more mainstream) "band of brothers" is not just the fact that at the time of its release it was the only game in the series which the enemy is Japan instead of Germany, but also the fact that the game includes scenarios based on American losses, most notably Pearl Harbor. The game turns America's losses early in the Pacific War into victories. Moreover, in the context of media producers' complicity (and collusion) with the Bush regime's "war on terror," *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* can be read as an allegory not just of American resolve in a time of struggle but as a simultaneous echo of the current conflict. Through an examination of the games' content and pedagogical functions, the tension between audience expectations and the media's ideological manipulations will be examined, including how this occurs in and through the playing of the games. While this type of analysis has been common fare for studies of post-9/11 radio, television, journalism and film, scholars have not considered the ways in which video games are, as Bourdieu says of television, "permanently subject to trial by market" and the extent to which that market is created rather than found (71).

"A Struggle Between Good and a Struggle Between Evil": The Post-9/11 Period

One of the challenges in studying so-called "post-9/11" anything is the rather dodgy definition of "post-9/11." The very names— "September 11th or "9/11"—which have been popularly attached to the terror attacks of 11 Sept. 2001 immediately problematize any study of the event(s) and the cultural productions which follow.[4] The labels implicitly define a singularity; that is, there is (and will be) only *one* September 11th. As much as the lexicon defies analogy—in some ways this is the intent—it paradoxically invites analogy with other horrific events which are also popularly defined as singularities. In this regard, the various others featured in *Film & Television After 9/11* note repeatedly that the two historical episodes most frequently offered by commentators and politicians as analogues to the terror attacks of 11 Sept. 2001 are the Holocaust and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.[5] However, the presidential call to demonstrate American solidarity and resolve placed a return to consumerism— including the consumption of film, television and of present concern, video games—on a footing roughly equal to the variety of security measures adopted concurrently. Although he does note productions which carefully avoid issues attached to the terrorist attacks of 11 Sept. 2001, Winston Wheeler Dixon finds "a renewed audience

appetite for narratives of conflict [. . .] centered on a desire to replicate the idea of the 'just war,' in which military reprisals, and the concomitant escalation of warfare, seem simultaneously inevitable and justified" (1). These fall into two primary groups: those which seem to encourage the "warrior spirit" and those which seem to question it (1). Respectively, *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* and *Syphon Filter 3* reflect this duality. Video game producers and the United States Army recognized this trend and responded to it. The US Army was quick to participate in the game, with *America's Army* and later, *Full Spectrum Warrior* making no bones about their intended purpose as recruitment tools and and their derivation from the "war on terror."

In addition to outlining the immediate reaction, Wheeler maps an approximate timetable of Hollywood's response to the terrorist attacks of 11 Sept. 2001. Initially, some films "were temporarily shelved, sequences featuring the World Trade Center were recut, and 'family' films were rushed into release or production. Predictably, however, this reversal of fortune did not last long, and soon Hollywood was back to work on a series of highly successful 'crash and burn' movies" (3). In the first category, the release of the Arnold Schwarzenegger vehicle, *Collateral Damage*, was moved from Oct. 2001 to Feb. 2002. Similarly, *The Sum of All Fears*, an installment in the successful Tom Clancy franchise, was delayed until May 2002. In contrast, romantic comedies such as *Love Actually*, which had references to the terror attacks of 11 Sept. 2001 added as voice-overs at the beginning and at the end, offered an escape. In the last instance, formulaic Hollywood action movies, the production of *Black Hawk Down* and *When We Were Soldiers* was actually accelerated so that they could be released sooner, and some might say to act as shameless propaganda and to cynically capitalize on contemporaneous jingoism. While one cannot be certain of the exact duration of the "post-9/11" period, any concerns about the propriety of media content eroded quickly among producers *and* consumers: "Perhaps the best gauge that things had returned to business as usual was the success of *The Sum of All Fears*, which was released in May [2002]" (Ansen). If not the end of the period, it signals a different phase of it. The two video games which provide the primary focus of this paper represent examples of video games whose production and distribution fall into the first and last categories. They bear the signs of the entertainment industries' graduated responses to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. *Syphon Filter 3* was scheduled to be released on 19 Sept. 2001. However, Sony Computer Entertainment America, Inc. delayed the release until 23 Dec. 2001. More subtle in its implementation, but no less effective in terms of its message, was Stephen Spielberg Productions' allegorical treatment of the Pacific Theatre of World War II in the Electronic Arts release, *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*, which was released two years later.

"So Close, and Yet So Far": *Syphon Filter 3*

Syphon Filter 3 features a familiar formula for an action adventure video game: a secret government agency,"The Agency", has developed a viral weapon which it plans to use to take over the world. There are government cover-ups, conspiracies and double agents. This basic narrative kernel is used in the *Metal Gear*, *Resident Evil*, *Final Fantasy* and *Deus Ex* series. Since the series begins with an existing problem, *Syphon Filter 3* provides background information which fills gaps in the narrative and in the characters' lives. In fact, most of the game's missions are based on flashbacks deriving from the characters' testimony before a Congressional hearing. In other words, *Syphon Filter 3* attempts to function as a prequel. In industry-speak, it is also an example of "stunting" because its overall format is different than the examples which precede and which follow it.[6] The histories included in the gameplay and in the cut-scenes give the game a pedagogical function. Thus, *Syphon Filter 3* was destined to stand apart from its cohort regardless of the timing of its release. However, *Syphon Filter 3* was temporarily shelved by its creators. Less than a week before the game's release date, Ami Blaire, Director of Product Marketing for Sony Computer Entertainment of America made the following statement:

> After careful review, we felt that the premise behind

> *Syphon Filter 3* packaging, and the direction of its corresponding advertising and promotional push, might be too sensitive to introduce during this time of tragedy [. . .] Out of genuine concern for the welfare of the victims and the families of those involved in the attack, as well as empathy for our fellow Americans, the company has decided to take time to modify the marketing and advertising campaign for *Syphon Filter 3*. (qtd. in ign.com)

The game, which was originally announced at the E3 trade show, in May 2001, and which was part of an long-running series, had too many reminders of current events.

Ostensibly, the logic behind Sony's decision to delay the release of *Syphon Filter 3* derives from the "reality" of the game's fictive world, or what game developers and players call "player immersion." Richard Rouse, a designer for game company Paranoid Productions explains the phenomenon: "the player sees their actions carried out by the movement of the camera through the world as viewed by their character. Thus the player is more drawn into the game and might—for brief moments in time—even think they actually are in the game world" (10). Citing *Deus Ex* as archetypal for the genre, Espen Aarseth explains the opposing view that

> the aesthetic problem in [such] games is a conflict between the opposing goals of gameplay and storytelling. Adventure games seldom, if at all, contain good stories. [. . .] The gameplay is constrained by the story in unrealistic ways. What makes such games playable at all, and indeed attractive, is the sequence of shifting, exotic, often fascinating settings (levels), where you explore the topography and master the virtual environment. The gameworld is its own reward (51)

The first Afghanistan level in *Syphon Filter 3* does not occur until the eleventh (of eighteen) level, but in keeping with Aarseth's claim the game features exotic locales from Costa Rica to Australia and several of these are rewards in the form of bonus minigames. What is interesting, though, and suggests a complexity Aarseth perhaps did not foresee, is that the timing of the level —as a prequel—places it during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. This might remind players of a topic which has been taboo since the terror attacks of 11 Sept. 2001: the American support (and subsequent abandonment) of the Afghan resistance, including the Taliban, during that conflict. In a rather Orwellian turn, popular media elided previous US involvement in Afghanistan.

Interestingly, this involvement was covert, as are the missions performed by Gabe Logan and Lian Xing, the primary characters in *Syphon Filter*. Both Logan and Xing act in support of Afghan rebels, against the Soviet Union. Gonzalo Frasca explains that the "potential of games is not to tell a story but to simulate: to create an environment for experimentation" (2003 225). In this regard, *Syphon Filter 3* functions differently than *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* for although it falls under the rubric of what Frasca call "ludus" games, the player is able to make specific choices about tactics and strategies which can result in a less certain narrative ending (2003 230). Frasca concludes that "all military games are *ludus* because they do not admit options that break its binary logic (friend or foe, dead or alive, with us or against us)" (2003 230). *Syphon Filter 3* is not entirely as binaristic as Frasca's position would have it, although it is clearly a "good vs. evil" binary. Where I draw a distinction is that the game's "manipulation rules" allow for the completion of Kabul, Costa Rica, Australia and South Africa levels (a pair for each) through different routes, through stealth means and without killing all of the enemies (Frasca, 2003 231). Indeed, there are occasions—most notably during the SS Lorelei, the C5 mission and the Pugari missions—when the player must decide whether or not to kill the crew of the ship and plane, respectively. In both cases, the player is rewarded with a bonus minigame for choosing the benevolent option. In its reward structure—its "goal rules"—then, the choice of whether to inflict "collateral damage" does have an implication in terms of the game's moral choices (Frasca, 2003 232). Furthermore, the game's first level awards another bonus minigame to players who complete the first scene using only a taser. Here, it is worth noting a gendering of the game insofar as the missions featuring Lian Xing as the avatar are more likely to require rather than to reward stealth. Even so, the

narrative and the gameplay choices intersect (rather than diverge) at a point which depends on the player's choices. Ian Bogost writes of *GTA3* that "those who argue that one can 'do anything' in Liberty City are mistaken; the game constantly structures freeform experience in relation to criminality" (157). Clearly *GTA3* offers more latitude for players than a more linear shooter like *Syphon Filter 3* can. Still, the topography of the game world does include caves, tunnels and the ruins of Kabul. These are all elements of the current conflict. As well, the ultimate prize is a "weapon of mass destruction" of the sort supposedly sought by Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden.

Admittedly, this line of argumentation threatens to push the analysis away from game studies as it has evolved. Simply put, Aarseth argues that "games are not intertextual [. . .] games are self-contained" (48). McKenzie Wark adds that a game's violence might be "shocking to the literary or cinematic imagination [. . . but] to a gamer, it's just a means to discover an algorithm" (120). However, I do not think that an analysis of a game's narrative elements needs to be considered separately from its play. Here, the addition of "elements" is an acknowledgment that many games do not have fully elucidated plots and this does not detract from play at all. Furthermore, as Bogost writes, "Ludology has been characterized by its coverage of the unique features of games, and narratology in the traditional sense of the word is the study of narratives across media, including oral and written language, gestures, and music. Interestingly, this variety of narratology is much more similar to ludology than its detractors may acknowledge" (68). If one were to frame the argument in the structuralist terms, Bogost suggests, it would be to differentiate, as Saussure did, between "langue" and "parole" (Chandler 12). In fact, as Chandler notes, Saussure focused on langue; one could argue that ludologists concentrate on parole. The latter is the language of the individual text and—as Aarseth—would have it—is immanent and particular. The former is the more conventionalized, codeified system which is prior to the subject. Without naming it, Bogost recognizes the potential for an intersection between the two when he wonders about the "discursive relationship between games built on common engines," especially if the manipulation rules are differently oriented (63). Taking a cue from Bogost, one might immediately wonder about machinima produced using *GTA*.

Admittedly, Aarseth and those of his school are not just new New Critics. In clarifying his position that play elements should be considered at least on equal terms with narrative, Aarseth writes, "Genre theory can help us describe" relations between games and other texts:

> Cawelti's distinction between "underlying form" and "specific cultural conventions" would tell us that the underlying form (narrative structure or games rules) remains untranslatable, but the cultural conventions, such as the setting and character types [. . .] are translated. [. . .] So, although nonnarrative and nonludic elements can be translated, the key elements, the narration and the game play, like oil and water, are not easily mixed. (50-1)

It is worth emphasizing that Aarseth does not say that such a mixing is impossible or should not happen. His position is not incongruous with Steve Neale's differentiation between a film's status as an individual text (immanence) and as a cultural production (intertext). This was an important debate in film studies and in the case of games with linkages to crucial events such as 11 Sept. 2001 would be worth considering.

In cinematic terms, the connections might enhance the game's verisimilitude, which Steve Neale defines as "'probable' or 'likely' [. . .] what is appropriate and therefore probable (or probable and therefore appropriate)" ("Questions" 46). In an earlier study, Neale maintains that

> verisimilitude is never a question of "fidelity to the real" (however one defines the real). It is always a function of systems of credibility [. . .] genres function so as to provide and to institutionalise a variety of the possibilities of fictional credibility allied to a variety of the possibilities of "cinematic credibility," thus binding the two together all the more strongly as the very

Thus, verisimilitude is a public, institutional and industrial expectation
for any production. Neale further differentiates between "cultural
verisimilitude"—that is, cultural credibility and "generic
verisimilitude"—that is, a production's fidelity to members of its class.
As Neale elaborates, "in the case of Hollywood, generic regimes of
verisimilitude are almost as 'public,' as widely known, as 'public
opinion' itself. It is not simply in films or in genres that the
boundaries between the cultural and the generic are blurred: the two
regimes merge also in public discourse, generic knowledge becoming
a form of cultural knowledge, a component of 'public
opinion'" ("Questions" 48). However, as became evident, public
opinion was not consulted in the process. It was taken out of the
cycle production, distribution and exhibition which is generally
assumed for culture industries. Indeed, public opinion regarding
Syphon Filter 3 did not demonstrate any effects of the terror attacks.
GameSpot, one of the more prominent Internet sites makes no
mention of any connection in its review, which considers the game's
play and generic rather than cultural features. GameSpot reviewer
Brad Shoemaker finds that it plays like "expansion pack" rather than
an actual game. Although scoring the game lower than the average
review GameSpot's review mirrors that of the others surveyed on
metacritic.com. Reader responses to the industry reviews give
Syphon Filter 3 a more favourable rating than the "official" reviews,
but the primary foci of both kinds of reviews are the obsolescence of
the game's animation and its fidelity to the earlier *Syphon Filter*
games. It should be noted that these responses came months after
11 Sept. 2001.

No link has ever been established between the terror attacks of 11
Sept. 2001 and the subsequent anthrax attacks. I can only conclude
that *Syphon Filter 3*'s combination of terrorism, biological weapons,
conspiracy and settings in Washington, DC and in Afghanistan were
"too sensitive" not for the public, but for Sony and its distributors. In
turn, the producers and distributors ultimately took their cue directly
from the Bush regime. David Sterritt explains that shortly after 11
Sept. 2001, "representatives of George W. Bush's administration
(including Karl Rove, the president's chief of staff) met with the chief
of the Motion Picture Association of America, Jack Valenti, and other
powerful figures of the film and television world to discuss options for
handling the newborn 'war on terrorism' and related matters" (65).
As it had during World War II, Hollywood would support the war
effort. Judd Ruggill notes that the logic of Hollywood's content rating
system—that is, the film industry's form of in-house censorship—
currently plays a large role in shaping game content: "by sanctioning
a rating system modeled after the MPAA/CARA system, the
Subcommittee on Juvenile Justice and the Subcommittee on
Regulation and Government Information effectively reshaped 'game'
content into 'film-like' content" (64). Ruggill traces this collusion to
the "advent of the ESRB [which] meant that game themes,
narratives, aesthetics and ideologies would from 1994 on be
evaluated in precisely the same fashion and according to the same
standards as film content and imagery. The two media would thus be
imagined analogously, or at least regulated so" (64). The game
industry's participation in the "new normal" of the "post-9/11" era
represents a more comprehensive program rather than a new
standard. As Ruggill concludes, "the federal government and major
game companies agreed that the future of gaming lay in the ability to
design, build and evaluate games according to the aesthetic and
ideological criteria of cinema" (65). Increasingly, the ideological
criteria are those of the Bush regime and this remains largely
unquestioned, both among reviewers and among scholars. Although
the story and setting of *Syphon Filter 3* were largely in line with the
previous releases of the game, the resonances with the then current
situation in the US and the concern about the public's sensitivity to
reminders of the terrorist attacks of 11 Sept. 2001 and the
subsequent "war on terrorism," obviously influenced Sony's decision
to delay the release of the game. However, the game's ambiguities in
play, in narrative and at their intersection may have contributed to
the decision to delay the game's ultimate release since *Syphon Filter
3*, like its predecessors, relies on a government riddled with
conspiracies for its narrative momentum and for its game dilemmas.

"Two Out of Three Ain't Bad": *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*

Medal of Honor: Rising Sun, like *Syphon Filter 3*, also figures as an example of media "stunting" since it was the first installment in its series to feature the fight against Japan during World War II.[7] Several of the metacritic.com reviewers note a planned sequel which was not produced because of the poor reception of *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*, which averaged 68/100, or five points lower than *Syphon Filter 3*. However, its position in the stable of Stephen Spielberg Productions makes the entire series an exercise in the "repurposing" of other productions. GameSpot reviewer Greg Kasavin acknowledges the Spielberg inspired games' debt to movies, including *Saving Private Ryan*, *The Thin Red Line* and *Pearl Harbor*. Indeed, *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* begins in the bowels of the USS Oklahoma at the moment the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor begins, and the attack encompasses two the game's eight levels. The Pearl Harbor attack and the terror attacks of 11 Sept. 2001 have since become closely linked in the American psyche.[8] Recently retired CBS anchor, Dan Rather's almost immediate observation was that the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 are "the Pearl Harbor of terrorism" (qtd. in Landy 79). Additionally, Marcia Landy documents that such analogies were frequently accompanied by supporting statements from historians such as Doris Kearns Goodwin and Michael Beschloss, and reminders of how the events "unified the nation" when then rallied to fight a just war. Responding to a question about the veracity of his—thanks to his Canadian speech writer, David Frum—frequent comparisons with earlier struggles, George W. Bush tells NBC's Tom Brokaw, "Exactly what my [axis of evil] speech said. I said there were similarities to World War II [. . .] we were attacked in an unprovoked fashion in World War II and on September 11, 2001." Brokaw himself makes the analogy explicit in an interview on CNBC in which he referred to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 by restating a line from his narration of the National Geographic special about Pearl Harbor which calls on the "determination to defend all we believe in" (qtd. in Landy 86).

Not surprisingly, as Lynn Spigel observes, "the histories mobilized by the media after 9/11 were radically selective and simplified versions of the past that produced a kind of moral battlefield for 'why we fight'" (245). Also not surprising was that the histories tended to emphasize World War II and "narratives [which] offered people a sense of historical continuity with a shared, and above all moral, past" (245). In this regard, a video game offers the perfect sort of narrative. The entire war in the Pacific is reduced to only eight missions, which are themselves based on brief episodes of that war. The total time to complete the game varies, but *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* is somewhat shorter and the product feels somewhat rushed. It only requires about four hours for an experienced player to complete the eight missions. The first level, "Day of Infamy," takes the player through the opening moments of the war. Many video games have preliminary "training" levels, but the designers of *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* included this function in the first level. Thus, "Day of Infamy" has two pedagogical functions: first, to teach the player the controls of the game; second, to teach the player the history of World War II. The trip from the depths of the Oklahoma to the deck adds to the history lesson through game play and through a reward for that game play.

Most of the level occurs without the avatar having a weapon in his hands. Instead, the linear action requires that the player follow his sergeant to the upper decks while stopping along the way to perform benevolent tasks while learning the controls: assisting in the closure of a hatch, using a fire extinguisher to rescue a trapped crewman and helping a cook put out a fire. Only after reaching daylight is the player given a gun. At this moment, a plane slams into the ship and the player loses control to an FMV; however, the dual shock registers the thud. As discussed with respect to *Syphon Filter 3*, one could conclude that the intersection of story and action registers the myth that America stood peaceful and innocent. Certainly, what follows— seven levels of killing every last enemy in a fairly repetitive fashion— reflects the response to both attacks. As often occurs in action-adventure video games there bonus packages hidden in each level. In *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*, the developers placed two "film canisters" per level. Finding the film canisters allows the player to

access video clips that are included with the game. The clips feature historical footage narrated by Capt. Dale A. Dye, a noted military consultant whose credits include Spielberg's other World War II productions, or they feature "Letters from home." The latter vignettes feature readings of actual letters written by soldiers. In this regard, *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* contrasts Microsoft's *Combat Flight Simulator 2*, which Patrick Crogan explains repuposes "historical narrative to perform a supporting role in the staging of gameplay" (282). The roles are reversed in *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun.* As well, *Combat Flight Simulator 2* omits Pearl Harbor so that Crogan concludes "the Pacific theater conflict can be experienced in gameplay less as a predetermined history and more as a series of contingent moment" (282). Making Pearl Harbor the focus of the cover art, one-quarter of the game, its didactic core both for controls and content, and its most carefully animated section reinscribes the popular mythos surrounding not only this event but those that followed, along with their contemporary analogs. The player's minimalistic participation—save everyone like you; kill everyone else—reaffirms this central message. It simply does not reduce to a matter of the first level being a training and/or introductory level.

The effect of such ploys is to provide a shadow, accompanying text, so that the game (world) cannot stand alone. The specific correlations between the Pearl Harbor attack, as depicted by the game's designers, and the terror attacks of 11 Sept. 2001 begin with the trip up a series of stairways and a fire which should remind some that following 11 Sept. 2001, firefighters and paramedics everywhere were recognized as heroes. The benevolent tasks are furthered by the first rooms the player's on-screen surrogate transits: the sleeping quarters, showers, barber shop, mail room and the galley. Along the way, the player learns that the on-screen surrogate is named "Joe." All of these features emphasize domesticity despite the setting on a warship. The domesticity occurs again in the Philippines mission, another American loss repurposed as a victory in the game. The path of the game takes the player to a baseball field—America's pastime exported in an apologetic version of colonialism—which has been turned into an array of machine gun nests. Further, the baseball field offers one of the few opportunities for the player to explore a vast space—that is, once the Japanese have all been eliminated—but the space is completely flat, empty and lacks points for interaction. The export of democratization is also represented within the game. This pattern repeats when the player meets "Martin Clemens," who is based the real British officer who worked with natives on Guadalcanal to resist the Japanese. Here we are reminded of the British as allies and also that there are "friendly natives" who can be converted. In all of these levels, America is not under attack; rather, the American way of life is under attack. This is a key reason why the player does witness or participate in the war until he or she reaches the main deck of the ship. At that precise moment, the game removes control from the player and shifts to a cut scene. The cut scene centres on a Japanese plane slamming into the superstructure of the USS Oklahoma.

While there is still debate as to whether such acts occurred during the attack this is more than a reference to the legendary *kamikaze* attacks. Cynics and the observant will recognize this element was included as a reminder of the suicide flights which occurred nearly sixty years later. The fanatical, suicidal behaviour of the Japanese characters in *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* differs significantly from the portrayals of America's other enemies in the video game series. Shoemaker and many other reviewers in the metacritic listing complain about the artificial intelligence of the Japanese soldiers. When confronted, the Japanese will charge with bayonets and even with swords. When making such attacks, the Japanese emerge from systems of caves and tunnels, which figure in half of the game's levels. At gamershell.com, one can find at least ten screenshots detailing such attacks. These occur in every level—except the two Pearl Harbor levels—including "Supercarrier Sabotage," which takes place on a ship at sea. Its confines seem an unlikely place for sword play. The allegory, then, extends past the initial Pearl Harbor episode and into the subsequent action. Associated Press writer Calvin Woodward connected the two wars in a Dec. 2001 column: "Japan's World War II ethos, not unlike the fanaticism of the Taliban and al-Qaida now, taught soldiers that a purposeful death would bring honor and fulfillment. [. . .] Like the terrorists of Sept. 11, Japan used suicide pilots [. . .] In Afghanistan, the martyr's code of death has

been the stuff of both caricature and fatal reality." It is worth noting that earlier *Medal of Honor* games include a "movie mode" for the German soldiers' dialogue. When activated, the German soldiers speak English with phony German accents to make light of the cartoon-like depictions of Germans in movies.

Such a portrayal does not exist for the Japanese in Medal of Honor: Rising Sun, but it does occur during the "Singapore Sling" mission in which the player encounters German liaisons. In other words, it is not enough that the Japanese are animated as other, their behaviour sets them apart and their language is replete with stereotypical grunts, groans and shouts of "Banzai!" Shehla Burney examines the narrative strategies through which the American media deploys its recent collective memory to define the currently accepted version of nationalism. She finds that in times of crisis culture is often aggressively deployed to differentiate the nation from its rivals; that is, "us" from "them":

> This 'US[A]/THEM' discourse has been a mainstay of much representation in the media in its coverage of post September 11 events through motifs that spell patriotism, stories that reinforce nationalism, narratives that demonize the *other*, and representations that construct nationalist ideologies, which by any other name would imply propaganda or indoctrination.

Here, the attackers are always foreign and neither white nor black. In other words, they do not fit into the existing American binarism—with us or against us—which makes them somehow more threatening. This strategy is furthered by the lack of African-American characters in the *Medal of Honor* games. The game's reward system encourages the process of dehumanization. The body count affirms the heroism of the player. As Patenaude's strategy guide details, the path through the game necessitates that every Japanese encountered should be killed. He and the reviewers note that "head shots" do not guarantee an immediate kill as they do in other games, but players are rewarded for them through the game's medal system. Following his study of post-9/11 video games which deal directly with the "war on terror," David Leonard concludes that "In a very real way, war games construct racialized meaning, thereby providing ideological sanction for America's War on Terror and its aggression in the Middle East." Based on his students' responses to games which portray Arabs in contemporary settings as savage or primitive warriors, Leonard argues for a greater emphasis on media literacy. I agree, but this should be included in analyses which consider more than literal readings, especially when the Bush regime, aided by the culture industries, looks for legitimacy through legacy.

Clearly, any understanding of this legacy is shaped by media portrayals. Bill Schaffer notes that many survivors, witnesses and news reports responded to the terrorist attacks of 11 Sept. 2001 through direct comparison with movies, and being in a movie. The opening of *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* affords players a similar experience. Not only do the levels begin and end with movie clips, game play is interrupted by more clips and the player is rewarded with still more historical footage. However, Schaffer also finds that the when witnesses made comparisons between the terror attacks and movies, the "question of the moving image's fidelity to the real did not arise." In other words, movies became the standard against which extraordinary events are gauged—at least for this event—as opposed to the other way around. However, the issue of verisimilitude did matter to producers and distributors of material which was intended for release following the terrorist attacks of 11 Sept. 2001. "Day of Infamy" ends once the player shoots down the requisite number of Japanese planes and the avatar is thrown into the water and is recovered by a passing patrol boat. The mission ends in victory: the player has successfully defended the USS Oklahoma. The next mission, "Pearl Harbor" takes the player through the harbor on a mission to defend the remainder of the fleet, and eventually the USS Nevada.

In contrast to the first level, "Pearl Harbor" is virtually uninterrupted violence and really sets the tone for the remainder of the game. In this regard, *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* is far less ambivalent both in plot and in play than *Syphon Filter 3*. The player simply rotates a turret and shoots at Japanese planes. This is not the realm of experimentation Frasca stipulates and which we find (to some extent)

in *Syphon Filter 3. Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* is a game of repetition so that the pattern of each level, especially the first two, repeats precisely that it can be memorized and replayed until the goal is reached. Where *Syphon Filter 3* might fall under the rubric Marku Eskelinen who echoes Aarseth in writing, "ludology, like the games it studies, is not about story and discourse at all but about actions and events, the relations of which are not completely fixed" (42). With its system of checkpoints, *Syphon Filter 3* prevents players from going back and undoing choices. In contrast, *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* has (infrequent) save points which allows for repetition and redoing but there are no choices. The are no events. It is pure action which is fixated on one story. In a subsequent development of his own position, Frasca recognizes that "simulation [. . .] is an ideal medium for exposing rules rather than particular events" (2004 87). He also cautions that "videogames are not a good realm for historic events or for making moral statements" (2004 86). Yet, that is what happens in *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* through play and through narrative.

For example, the goal of the level is to shoot down forty planes. A secondary bonus occurs if sixty planes are downed. While I have not yet accomplished this, the existence of the bonus and my frequent scores between fifty-five and sixty suggest that it can be achieved. As well, the waves of planes appear in predictable fashion so that Spielberg's game makers turned Pearl Harbor into a slaughter; a slaughter of Japanese. I mention this because the combined efforts of all American forces and losses due to attrition accounted only for only twenty-nine Japanese planes lost during the battle. Jonathan Markovitz finds a similar trend in "post-9/11" films such as *Black Hawk Down*, which "may have less to do with their correspondence to real-life events and more to do with playing to an audience desire for revenge" (201-2). *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* gives audiences a chance to participate in that revenge. Not only do they have the privilege of buying the game, the prescribed form of resistance, they get to shoot at Japanese. At the end of the level, the cut scene features a group of Marines cheering, "We've got them on the run!" as the Japanese air armada returns to its awaiting carriers. A Marine sergeant then chides others that their cheering might be premature. He admonishes them to "look around" and states "I hope you never see another day like this." The pan of Pearl Harbor and one last shot of the plumes of smoke rising from the Hawaiian islands again evokes the terror attacks of 11 Sept. 2001.[9] Continuing the parallel must then include the "just war" which inevitably follows. This is the ultimate lesson of the game.

One especially significant scene in the "Pearl Harbor" mission occurs during the computer graphics re-enactment of the sinking of the USS Arizona. Along with the extra-diegetic music, this scene is one of the few sections of the game to draw praise and is the most frequently cited for brilliant animation work. This is a poignant scene worthy of the effort but given the obvious intertext, its clear cut superiority to other efforts becomes more significant. The event functions almost like a cut-scene but with two notable exceptions. First, there is no break in the animation of the scene despite the player's control of the game being suspended. Second, the player cannot skip the episode as in a typical cut scene. The overall effect is that "to be 'one the scene' of a life and death event, in the very midst of the action, is *not* like being 'on the scene,' but far more like being a spectator" (Schaffer). Simply put, there is no way to avoid watching—witnessing—the bombs' inevitable impact on the deck of the doomed ship. This event clearly evokes the scenes of the ill-fated 767s flying into the twin towers of the World Trade Center. Images of the towers, as Steven Jay Schneider remarks, "satisfy a somewhat masochistic, if not *sadistic*, desire to reexperience our collective trauma" (36). Here, I think one of the shortcomings of *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* as a game is that with its host of non-game features and its reward system, it strays into the realm of what Bernard Perron calls the "interactive film": "like interactive narrative in general, the interactive movie is seen as an oxymoron. It is not possible to tell a story by putting the story telling in the hands of the spectator. And the linearity of a story is going against the non-linear nature of a game" (239). In what is its most important scene, *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* takes most or all of the control away from the player. It is a simple turrent (never mind rail) shooter which reminds the author of *Neutral Zone* on his Commodore 64. The player, in Perron's terms, "knows that the rules of a given game (or even of play, as we'll see) will limit his moves. But he accepts those by playing" (241). Perron

concludes that a particular kind of gamer is required to play a game such as *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*: one who is more than aware of the intertext. Perron differentiates between "player" and "gamer" on the basis that for players it is not "a question of playing the game but of playing freely *with* the game" (252). Whereas *Syphon Filter 3* allows for players to determine elements of their path, directions, violence and speed through the game, *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* has only one mode. While the intact towers were deleted from several films, the media replayed the images of the towers burning and collapsing almost incessantly in the weeks following the event. [10] For Shehla Burney, the "act of witnessing—being physically present at the space and time of the ritual performance—is also a form of respect in most cultures and religions." This is exactly how the Arizona cut scene functions and how the game proceeds. One finds oneself largely watching what transpires with no way to respond other than shoot, and this is supposed to be the pleasure of the game.

Game Over: Conclusions

In the case of *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*, I run the risk of being accused of imposing a reading on the text. There are two main reasons to ignore such charges. First, the American news media, aided by their military and history "experts," and the Bush regime drew on the Pearl Harbor analogy early and often. Second, the omnipresence of these allusions renders my reading an analysis of the preferred, or hegemonic reading, rather than an imposed or appropriative one. In the case of *Syphon Filter 3*, it could be argued that the delay was a well-intentioned method of coping with coincidental connections and a Christmas release puts Sony's sincerity into question. However, any "post-9/11"depiction of fighting in present-day Afghan caves begs the analogy. David Leonard puts it succinctly: "Americans of all ages are thus able to participate collectively in the War on Terror and in Operation Iraqi Freedom, just as if they were members of the military." More than cinema, video games offer the player the chance to "be there" but not as a mere witness.

However, Leonard examines a literal, not an allegorical relationship and many in game studies confine themselves (too) narrowly to play. They are not cast into the figurative basement; they are locking themselves in it. As Stuart Mouthrop notes:

> If digital game theory concerns itself primarily with choices that lead to winning solutions—solutions circumscribed within a narrow calculus of outcomes—then it may be just as inimical as any narratology to a proper understanding of configurative practice. Limiting the definition of games to systems with simple distinctions between winning and losing could restrict this study to zero-sum antagonism, a domain that seems every bit as constrained and potentially obscuring as narrative. It might also lead to the uncritical acceptance of existing genres. To be blunt, if we tie configuration inflexibility to some duelistic (sic) protocol, we might produce a game theory whose insights are limited by its gunsights. (66)

If we consider choices and solutions then we should be able to ask "why those choices?" and "why those solutions?" and consider their implications. Any consideration of the pedagogical aspect of the games must include the careful implementation of history to enhance the legitimacy of America's aims. Thus, a World War II narrative provides a sufficiently distant setting for a more violent portrayal against a racialized other; a fictional narrative set on the same terrain provides a suitably distanced version of a more recent history. In this regard, video games are able to surpass the possible portrayals of television or cinema. The principal limitation of the less interactive forms, Jake Wilson, is their dependence on spectacle: "Typically, the ethical critique of spectacle proceeds on two flanks. First, it's alleged that spectacle brings us *too close* to particular events, and hence prevents us from thinking through their broader implications [. . .] The second complaint is just the opposite: spectacle *distances* us from violent events, rendering us indifferent to the suffering of [the] victims." Cinema must placate both concerns simultaneously. However, video games work to dissolve the distinctions. They offer the possibility of being close and yet removed, watching and yet in control.

While it appears that the game playing public was not affected by the ministrations of the government and the entertainment industry, this should not be taken as a positive. The call to return to normal—that is, unquestioned consumption for the sake of consumption—following the "events of September 11th" has outweighed the impact of the actual event. Although I concur with Lynn Spigel's statement that "the scholarly focus on news underestimates (indeed, it barely considers) the way the 'reality' of 9/11 was communicated" (238), I cannot entirely share her optimism:

> In the end, I suspect that the current situation is ripe for new versions of apocalyptic techno-futures, with satellites, guided missiles, surveillance videos, and communication media of all kinds at the core of an ongoing genre of techno-warfare criticism [But] this is really just the easy way out. [. . .] it seems more useful to think about how cultural studies and media studies in particular might hold on to a politics of hope. [. . .] situated in a confrontation with the actually existing historical divisions around us. (263)

As an outlet of the public's frustrations *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* has more in common with the currently inconvenient propaganda cartoons of the war years than it does with the kind of game Colin Pearce envisions: "Games do not ask the player to construct or interpret what the author is trying to 'tell' them. Rather they function as a kit of parts that allows the player to construct their own variation thereof" (147). *Syphon Filter 3* is closer to Pearce's view than *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*. *Syphon Filter 3*'s play gives the player room to make moral choices as well as pathway choices. Its narrative allows for ambiguity at its allegorical level. In these regards, the game's last two levels find the player defending survivalists against the FBI! This combination of narrative and play ambiguity certainly lends more credence to the position that the game might be "too sensitive" for viewers in the opinion of its producers and their cohorts in government. It might make them think before acting as opposed to the simplistic jingoism of Spielberg productions. In the latter regard, Pearce's formulation only applies partially. There is no room for interpretation in *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*. The didacticism along with the franchise, both in games and in other productions, offer evidence of Spigel's observation that the frequent "post-9/11" calls to history are as connected to the urge to return to the dominant economic practices as they are to nationalism.

In addition to being the privilege of the state, violence is one of the expectations of video games at all three levels: institutional, industrial and audience. This concern is more significant now. As Sterritt observes, for viewers and producers of even the earliest "post-9/11" cinema, "standard-issue special effects, might have appeared not too troubling but too *tame* after ubiquitous television coverage [of the World Trade Center collapse][author's emphasis]" (66). For players, one of the attractions of video games is that they typically surpass cinema in terms of the violence depicted. Indeed, until video games became imbricated with the "war on terror," this line of critique was its own industry. Landy concludes that the popular adoption of Hollywood-style metaphors does not necessarily signal that the American consciousness is indebted to Hollywood. Instead, scholars should consider whether "Hollywood is indebted to these visions of American exceptionality [. . .] and the sense that Americans have an ordained destiny in the world, which may involve the uses of war and violence to stop those forces that seek to impede [their] 'progress'" (Landy 96-7). While *Syphon Filter 3*'s ambiguity might exclude it from such a project, *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*, like so many other Spielberg productions, appeals to this sense of entitlement and its contingent revenge motive. It also suggests that the makes do not trust players to make choices by limiting not just their choices but also their actions.

While the initial "sensitivity" of the period suggested that a trend away from traditional violent depictions was likely, this did not prove to be the case. Either consumers of video games are more concerned with their own recreation than the implications of the terror attacks or they are not sufficiently media literate to recognize the collusion between the entertainment industry and the Bush regime; the metaphorical linkages between what they are seeing and the project of nationalism. A third, and worse, possibility is that they simply do

not care. Anticipating both this possibility and the need for work which considers a game's status in the culture that consumes it, Wark recognizes that the "interests of the military-entertainment complex dominate policy, and policy's goal is the threat of boredom. What is good for the military-entertainment complex is good for America" (175). Recalling Bourdieu's earlier cited thoughts about trial by market and Sterrit's comments about the spectacle takes on greater significance when one recalls as well that *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* did not receive positive reviews and a sequel was cancelled. In the reviews, the most common complaint was that its socially sanctioned killing was not spectacular enough. Perhaps players care, but it is the location of that care that gives pause. Here, I join Bogost in stating that "exploring manifestations of game rules in player experience is perhaps the most important type of work game criticism can do" (131). Finally, scholars have too long ignored the narrative content of video games in favour of the sensational, if they have considered the form at all. Scholars must, then, consider the enabling discourse and its cultural antecedents or they risk allowing the violence of nationalism to be the only lesson of the selective histories offered by the game industry.

Notes

[1] In a version of this paper presented at the Southwest/Texas Popular and American Culture Association conference in 2008, I included a chart listing eighteen school shootings in the US since 11 Sept. 2001. For none of these was there mention in the media of the shooter's video game habits as had been the automatic response following the Columbine massacre. Only a shooting in Montréal received video game related headlines but this was only in the headlines of the sensationalistic *Toronto Sun.* Articles on the shooter instead focused on his status as a racialized other. Bill Schaffer observes "that no commentator dared to invoke even a shadow of the rhetoric of 'video causality' so often resorted to in the wake of comprehensibly violent acts" for the terror attacks themselves. In this context, many current video games quite simply are too closely aligned with the war on terror for the violence to be considered negatively.

[2] Most (in)famously, a list of 100-150 songs supposedly banned by Clear Channel Communications circulated via the Internet. Clear Channel will only admit to "hypersensitivity" and practices consistent with other media outlets "in light of the mood in America today" (Allmon and Taylor).

[3] The obvious members of this roster are *Schindler's List*, *Saving Private Ryan* and *Band of Brothers.* Critics and scholars tend to overlook *1941* (and perhaps they should) and the video games in the *Medal of Honor* series. With the exception of *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* and the similar *Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault* which appears on a different machine, all of the games focus on the war against Germany, and especially the war in Europe. For example, *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* and its expansion packs roughly parallel the events featured in *Saving Private Ryan* and in *Band of Brothers.*

[4] By popular I mean the literal definition, "of the people." However, the notion of "most liked" applies since contemporary media outlets typically their own titles, graphics and even theme music for extraordinary news items. Although some might be reluctant to state it explicitly, the effect is such that "post-9/11" and "September 11th" have effectively become brand names in contemporary popular culture.

[5] Here, I deliberately use the singular and popular names for the events. Without bogging the argument in a debate as to the singularity of any genocide or surprise attack, the point is to highlight the fact that in many ways depictions of these events are taboo, but for varying durations, and that representational strategies themselves have pedagogical functions insofar as they provide models for future producers.

[6] It is worth noting that *Syphon Filter 3* was one of the last major titles to be released for the PlayStation 1 (PS1) console. The more advanced PlayStation 2 (PS2) had already replaced the original box. Moreover, playing *Syphon Filter 3* after having played the first two

games gives one the sense that the missions were actually left-overs that were cobbled together to produce a stop-gap game prior to the release of a very ambitious PS2 offering.

[7] The *Medal of Honor* series includes more than a dozen versions of games and/or expansion packs developed for virtually every contemporary game platform; that is, GameCube, Xbox, PS1, PS2 and PC. *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* was the only title based on the Pacific War until the late 2004 release of *Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault* for the PC.

[8] For example, www.pearlharbor.org sells T-shirts, which are also sold in Hallmark and other gift stores, that include Pearl Harbor references to commemorate the attacks of 11 Sept. 2001. The shirts combine the image of now-famous tattered flag from the New York site with FDR's statement, "No matter how long it may take us to win through to absolute victory . . ." Representatives of Living Waters Publications left pamphlets in computer labs at my home university which advertise a Pearl Harbor Collectible. The accompanying text connects that attack with the attacks of 11 Sept. 2001 *via* Biblical prophecies.

[9] David Sterritt finds a pronounced tendency among North American media to portray and represent the terrorist attacks of 11 Sept. 2001 in terms which echo, allude to or directly recall representations of the Holocaust. He opines, "One might easily think this was the Holocaust in miniature or the first act in a larger Holocaust-like tragedy fated to unfold in days to come. Video coverage shown on television took similar tacks" (63). Holocaust representations were often complemented by references to the attack on Pearl Harbor. One might contend that the designers of *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* employ the smoke in a metaphorical triad evoking Pearl Harbor, the Holocaust and "Ground Zero." The symbolic smoke follows the convention of avoiding images of atrocity, a convention Spielberg breaks in *Schindler's List* and in *Saving Private Ryan.*

[10] *Zoolander* and *Spiderman* were among the films which had images of the towers hastily removed by computer animators. Along with the radio, film and television censorship, Microsoft created a patch for its popular—and non-violent—flight simulator program which removed the World Trade Center from the virtual world. Such was the climate at the time that the author's brother spent two months removing images from *The Rats*, which used Toronto as a stand-in for New York, and which only featured stock images. Such alterations reflect producer tastes. Especially in the well-documented case of *Zoolander*, viewers were displeased by the moves.

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