

## Additional Newsletter Materials

The following items are available for use as you design your Dispatches newsletter. Some are graphic elements and others are straight text. Use whatever items you like but make sure they fit with your overall design and the strategy for the newsletter. Images are at low resolution to save space on the server, so don't worry that they don't look ideal in print.

The files are located in your lab's folder on the classes server in a folder called "newsletter\_additions." The file names are noted below each item.



CPV logo -- color is Pantone Solid Uncoated 287 at 80 percent tint  
-- do not use Pantone Process or it will be a different color (CPV\_logo.tif)

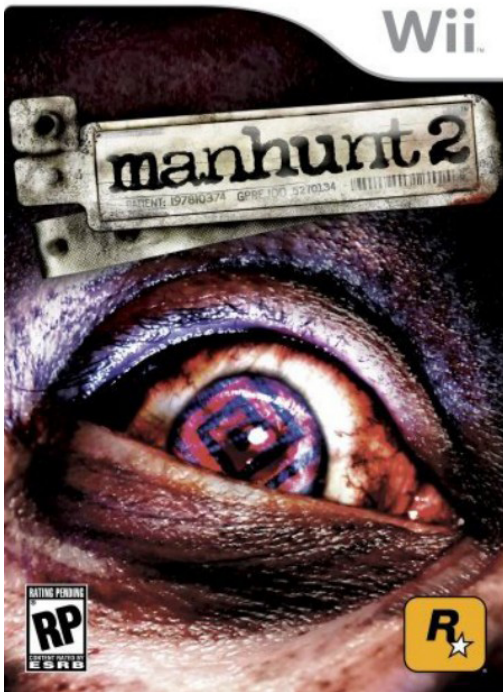


Mugshot of CPV Legislative Manager Byron Black (byron\_black.tif)



CPV Research Manager Karen Handler leads a discussion of violence in schools at the CPV national conference in Dallas in July, including coverage of congressional testimony on the issue. (conference.tif)

Cover art and screen shots from Manhunt 2. (filenames mh1.tif to mh6.tif)





Varying photos of CPV Director Jim Peasy.

File names clockwise from top left:

- jim\_peasy1.tif
- jim\_peasy2.gif
- jim\_peasy3.tif
- jim\_peasy4.tif
- jim\_peasy5.tif

Game ratings: ratings.tif

### Video game ratings self-regulated

The video game industry, with the help of a selection of New Yorkers invited to play the games, decides ratings.

#### Existing rating categories



RATING	EC (Early Childhood)	E (Every- one)	E10+ (Everyone 10 and up)	T (Teen)	M (Mature)	AO (Adults Only)
AGES	3+	6+	10+	13+	17+	18+
MAY CONTAIN	No material parents would find inappropriate	Minimal cartoon, fantasy or mild violence and/or infrequent use of mild language	More cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild profanity and/or minimally suggestive themes	Violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, minimal blood and/or infrequent use of strong language	Mature sexual themes, more intense violence and/or strong language	Graphic depictions of sex and/or violence

June 25, 2009

## VIDEO GAMES

Gore Galore but a Violent Game Can't Hold a Gutbucket to the Movies

By SETH SCHIESEL

Some people like being grossed out.

I'm not one of them. I once tried watching "The Shining" alone in the middle of the afternoon and had to turn it off. In games, I can do without blood everywhere.

But when ratings boards in the United States, Britain and other nations effectively killed the game *Manhunt 2* last week, I got set for gore. And I found plenty. Though Take-Two, the company behind the game, has suspended plans to ship it next month, I spent three hours playing it at the company's Manhattan offices on Friday night.

Before experiencing the game I met Strauss Zelnick, the media investor who took over as chairman of Take-Two in March after a shareholder revolt. *Manhunt 2* reflects the kind of innovation that gamers are looking for, he argued, but added: "That said, it is a horror game. It fits squarely within the genre."

The game is aimed at players 17 and older, Mr. Zelnick said, noting that the average age of consumers who play the company's games was 33.

"This is still animation," he added. "It's not photo-realistic. It's not live action. And compared to an R-rated movie, which is intended for 17 and above, like 'Saw' or 'Hostel,' it's actually pretty tame. But you make your own conclusions when you play the game."

I did. American raters, somewhat surprisingly, don't actually play the games. Instead they base their decisions on a videotape compilation, a kind of highlight reel, of the bloodiest or raciest scenes. But after playing I found the Adult Only rating from the Entertainment Software Rating Board, an independent industry group, entirely reasonable. The rating essentially killed *Manhunt 2*, because Sony and Nintendo have said they won't allow AO games on their systems. (In Britain the film classification board, citing extreme violence, refused to rate it. The denial of a rating makes it illegal to sell the game there.) The first *Manhunt* game, which also drew attention for violent scenes, was released in 2003.

But given the structure of *Manhunt 2* it should be fairly simple for Take-Two and the boards to reach an accommodation and release a redacted version rated M for Mature in time for the December holiday season. Whenever it does ship, *Manhunt 2* is likely to enjoy a level of public awareness (and potentially sales) that it could never have attained without the ban. That of course may well have been what its makers intended all along.

The idea in *Manhunt 2* is that you, the player, control Dr. Daniel Lamb, a young doctor who once worked for something called the Project. At the start of the game you wake up under mysterious circumstances as an inmate in an insane asylum where the security system has malfunctioned. Your job is to avoid the guards searching for you, escape and figure out how you got there.

Perhaps the most striking thing about the game is how conventional most of it is. You look around for tools like a crowbar to open a door, and figure out small puzzles (like throwing a brick through a window to enter a building). Of course there's creepy music and wacky leather fetish outfits, but that's de rigueur. The story was suitably interesting though not overly creative.

The problem is that in addition to just hitting a bad guy a couple

of times with a bat, there are other options, like slitting his throat, sticking a scythe in his nose and yanking his head back. Rather than stab him with a shard of glass, you can stab him, wrap a cord around his neck, stuff his head in a toilet and smash him on the back of the head. With the motion-sensitive controller on Nintendo's Wii, that means jerking and shaking the controllers around in vague imitation of the mutilations on screen. There are three levels of executions, with escalating levels of savagery: Hasty, Violent and Gruesome.

But these execution scenes are optional and don't seem to last more than 10 seconds. If a highlight reel was largely made up of such clips, it could give a skewed impression of the overall game. Instead players spend most of their time thinking about how to move and avoid being swarmed by guards.

The intensity of the execution scenes seems to warrant the AO rating. Then again, simply eliminating the top tier or two of executions might go a long way toward reconciling Take-Two with the ratings boards.

I did not find *Manhunt 2* particularly frightening or sickening, more like a violent interactive cartoon. But I'm used to games. As Mr. Zelnick suggested, I wanted to see how the game stood up against the latest horror films.

After visits to two Manhattan DVD stores I found an R-rated version of "Saw II." (For "Hostel" and "Saw III" I could find only the more extreme unrated cuts.) With some trepidation I put it on and the first scene was of a young man in a bleak cell being taunted to find a key by digging into his own oozing eye socket. If he does not yank out the key in 60 seconds, his head will be crushed in a spiked metal "death mask" around his neck.

Later, after someone else is burned to death in an industrial oven, a character cuts a hole into the back of his own neck. As the camera cut in for a loving view of the gaping wound, it was clear why the genre is sometimes called "torture porn." Unlike the digital models in *Manhunt 2*, these were real people.

Banning the original version of *Manhunt 2* may be a good way to demonstrate that the industry can police itself. Side by side, though, movies seem to be way ahead of games in delivering top-notch gore.

"We're very comfortable letting people know what is in the box before they bring it home," Mr. Zelnick said. "I know I'm not curing cancer. I get that. Our job is to delight consumers in their free time, and yet I believe in doing it in a really responsible way."

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(nyt\_story.doc)

By Byron Black  
Legislative Manager, Center to Prevent Violence

As I sat and pondered my choice between a “hasty,” “violent” or “gruesome” execution, I knew I was armed enough to take out my prey but wasn’t sure I was skilled enough yet. This was my thinking. Not “should” I take him out, but “can” I take him out?

That’s what worries me.

I wasn’t out on the streets of my town pondering this choice, mind you. I was in the alternate reality known as the “Manhunt 2” video game. This issue of Dispatches addresses a Center to Prevent Violence survey that showed some disturbing trends in violent video game use.

Before I addressed those trends in this column, however, I thought it wise to check out what is widely considered one of the most violent games. So I called up one of my teenage son’s friends and asked if I might come over and hop on his computer for an hour or so.

What I found astounded me. First of all, an hour quickly lapsed into nearly three. I was so caught up in the ebb and flow of the game that I completely lost track of time. This prompts me to wonder whether kids whose game play isn’t monitored by parents can really control their own time spent in front of the screen.

Next, I could not believe the sophistication of the graphics and action. When I grew up, the game of choice was a thing called “Pong.” In Pong, a white blip bounced back and forth from side to side, and I used a white line “paddle” to bounce it back the other way.

In Manhunt 2, I used a shovel to smash in the face of a

nemesis.

As my awe of the power faded, I noticed how “real” things felt even though the scene looked cartoonish. Screams grew louder as I neared a victim. When I beat another character in the scene, his blood flowed and pooled on the ground. As I came in and out of consciousness, the scene blurred and cleared as my vision might. I could easily tell from the scene that this was not reality. Yet it felt real enough that it became some alternate reality for me.

When I finished playing the game, I felt energized. I certainly didn’t feel like going out and bludgeoning an orderly or hacking a hooded enforcer. But I felt like doing something. I had energy to burn.

My test of the game was not scientific study. It was meant only to give me perspective, and it worked. I concluded that Manhunt 2 isn’t going to make a guy like me head out and commit a violent crime. But if someone is predisposed to aggression, the game may indeed work him up enough to act on it.

Further, I suspect this kind of play desensitizes all of us to violence. It’s a lot easier to dismiss murder and mayhem when you’re racking up victims in the “Dixmor Asylum for the Criminally Insane” than it is when you sit and read the victim profiles in this very newsletter.

Losing sight of the tragic effects of violence is simply something we cannot allow. If you live in the alternate reality of Manhunt 2, you must always remember the actual reality of the world around you. Violence steals our loved ones and robs our humanity. The vice is forgetting that. (black\_column.doc)

## 10 Cool Games That Are Uncool for Kids (and 10 Alternatives)

Assassin’s Creed II  
Alternative: Mirror’s Edge

Borderlands  
Alternative: Infamous

Brutal Legend  
Alternative: Ghostbusters: The Video Game

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2  
Alternative: Battlefield: Bad Company

Dead Space: Extraction  
Alternative: Deadly Creatures

Dragon Age: Origins  
This is a masterly crafted but combat-heavy game featuring decapitations and swords plunged deeply into monsters’ chests.  
Alternative: Braid

Grand Theft Auto IV: The Ballad of Gay Tony  
Alternative: Batman: Arkham Asylum

Demon’s Souls  
Alternative: Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

Left 4 Dead 2  
Alternative: Overlord II

Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown  
Alternative: C.O.P.: The Recruit

## 10 Bestselling Video Games in the U.S. in 2009

1. Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 (Xbox 360)
  2. Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 (PS3)
  3. New Super Mario Bros. (Wii)
  4. Assassin’s Creed II (Xbox 360)
  5. Left 4 Dead 2 (Xbox 360)
  6. Wii Sports Resort (Wii)
  7. Wii Fit Plus (Wii)
  8. Assassin’s Creed II (PS3)
  9. Dragon Age: Origins (Xbox 360)
  10. Mario Kart Wii (Wii)
- Source: Commonsense Media