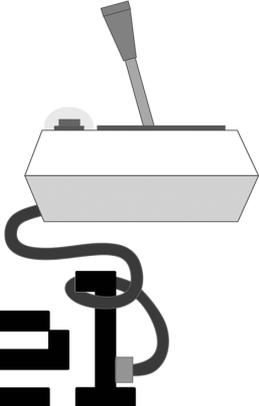


Gaming in the Gospel



May the 4th be with you!

PREVIEW

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**Thanks for checking out this early preview
of Gaming in the Gospel!**

**All content, formatting, layout and other nonsense
is all subject to change.**

*Please pardon all the blank pages,
this version is set up for print.*

There is no official release date yet.

**Please feel free to email feedback to
book@gaminginthegospel.com**

Gaming in the Gospel: when one more turn just isn't enough...

by David Lee Wright
Edited & Formatted by Beatriz G. Wright

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This book is dedicated to the memory of my dad, Dean Wright,
35 years of quality engineering at IBM,
keeper of all the floppy disks and all the secret phrases...

Gaming in the Gospel

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Foreword



“Stay awhile and listen!”

- Deckard Cain *Diablo*¹

Greetings fellow gamers & geeks! My name is Dave Nash² and I'm a lifelong gamer turned game developer who found Christ at age 30. I met Magic Dave through church and was humbled one afternoon when he asked over coffee if I'd be interested in writing the foreword for a book he was working on that had to do with video games and God. How could I turn down such an offer? The topics are two of my favorites! If there was somehow pizza in these pages, Dave would have achieved perfection.³ Alas... Anyway, I digress.

It can be argued that how one's life is lived is the result of thousands of choices that we begin to make from a very young age. The gaming geek in me has sometimes thought of this as the great role-playing game that we humans are all involved in. What shall we call it? *Life: The Grand RPG*.⁴

As I said, the choices are plentiful in this life. What sort of character will you be? Which skills will you level up, and which will you let languish? What will you pour your heart into, and who will you try to impress? Will you fight for good or for evil? Will you live by truth or otherwise?

1 Blizzard North 1997: David Brevik

2 Legendary Lead Designer at Epic Games

3 Ahem... see page 27

4 RPG=Role Playing Game

Gaming in the Gospel

For many years, I was on the wrong side of many of those questions, including during my first seven or so years of game development. I've been a game designer for almost 25 years now, working on a few titles that many have heard of (*Medal of Honor*, *Gears of War*, *Fortnite*) and a few that most people haven't (*Interstate '82*, *Paragon*). The entertainment industry, for whatever reason, tends to lean heavily towards an atheistic, secular worldview. This was fine when I was younger, as I was right there with them. In fact, my younger self and probably the majority of other developers who don't follow God don't realize just how atheistic and secular the environment really is. Those who are in it don't know anything different and thus the environment perpetuates, I suppose.



But during the second half of my career, once I'd discovered the truth of Jesus, things began to change. For one thing, I began to care a lot more about how the content I helped put into video games affected the lives of those who played them. Previously, I would only think about what would be fun. God got me starting to think about what would be wrong. If I'm being honest, I haven't been able to imbue the games I've worked on with my faith as I wish I could have. But I have done things differently than my former self would have when the opportunity arose. For example, I was a big proponent of adding a mature language filter to the *Gears of War* series, a little thing perhaps, but something I thought at least some number of gamer parents would enjoy. I've also personally done my best to follow Jesus' servant-leadership model, and this has paid great dividends in my relationships with the guys I work with.

I also began to wrestle with some very important questions as my faith worked its way deeper into my life, into the parts that I formerly had full reign over. What does God think about the game I'm working on? Or the one I'm playing late at night? Are violent games okay? Is it all right to pretend to be this character? How

Foreword

much gaming over any given time period is too much? These are the sort of issues that Magic Dave dives deeply into in this book, and as you read it I'm sure you'll find that he will give you plenty to think about in these areas and beyond. I encourage you to not just blast through these pages, but rather to take the time to examine yourself and what your relationship with the Lord is like in the context of the entertainment that you consume.

So kick your feet up, turn the page to chapter one, and get ready for Magic Dave to level up your knowledge of gaming, past and present, and how it relates to playing this game of life as a human character that the God of this universe created.

David Nash

Lead Designer at Epic Games

LOADING...

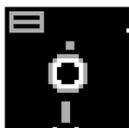
A pixelated computer monitor with a dark grey frame and a black base. The screen displays a title screen with a dark, pixelated background featuring a landscape with trees and a sky with clouds and stars. The text is rendered in a white, pixelated font. The title 'Gaming in the Gospel' is centered at the top. Below it, the text 'press START to begin' is displayed, with 'START' enclosed in a white rectangular box.

Gaming
in the
Gospel

press
START
to begin

**Enter Player
Name**

Hello World.



“Beep, Beep, Beep”

- Leonard Nimoy quoting Sputnik in *Civilization 4*¹

I am typing to you the very first words of this book!

I feel like I should christen these first words with a classic “icanhascheezburger?” .gif or something of that sort. But alas...we do not live in a world where physical books are free to have moving images in them...yet... The revolution of the .gif book has not yet begun. But lucky for me, ASCII² still rules the print world.

```
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Ello Ello! I am Magic Dave and I am a big dork and a geeky kid turned sound guy turned author. I previously wrote a book called *Sound in the Gospel: for the knucklehead tech in all of us*. If

1 Firaxis Games 2005 : Sid Meier

2 Credit to someone named Zachtroid on the internetz

Gaming in the Gospel

you read that book, happened to have enjoyed it, and now you're reading this one...well then I am so sorry to utterly³ disappoint you. This book will have absolutely nothing to do with sound. But it will have everything to do with video games. And if that's why you're here, then hooray! That probably means I sold another book! A high five through space and time to you, person of interest!

This book has been a long time coming. I've gotten a lot of weird looks from people when I've told them I was writing a book about gaming and the gospel. But, then I always get weird looks from people when I tell them what I'm working on... Anyways, this book has been a strange journey of awkwardness and self-awareness and, to be honest, rather uncomfortable to write about at times as I found myself processing my thoughts as I wrote them.

I've always gotten excited about video games and if you've bought this book, I hope that means you do too. But if that's not the case and you have a very casual relationship with gaming, I'd encourage you to read this with a wider view of gaming, to technology in general or, perhaps more on point, to all the screens that populate our daily lives. So whatever it is that you geek out about--your iPhoneGalaxyPlusX32, favorite sports team, YouTube channel, Instagram, Snapchat, latest AAA video game title, favorite movie, Netflix show, book, board game, or band (if I left out your thing please forgive me!)--if you find yourself not relating to my experiences, then please insert your own and see how it might apply.

That being said, I'm going to assume you have at least a working knowledge of video gaming and its history. And if you don't then, "Hold onto your butts."⁴ I'll do my best to point out things as they zoom by! Also, I'll definitely be dating myself with the games and technology I'll be referencing throughout the book.

I wrestled with how comprehensive this book should be concerning gaming. I really just wanted to relate my gaming experiences to your own. I have no idea whose hands this book will fall into and that made for a pretty impossible task. So I decided to

³ Insert cow meme .gif here

⁴ One of many *Jurassic Park* references that I'm always ready to use.

Hello World.

stick to what I know, early consoles and PC gaming, in an effort to be relatable and genuine. We may not have played the same games or played on the same hardware, but I can promise you this...our gaming experiences and the emotions we feel while gaming are really similar.

I hope you'll stay with me on this journey, no matter what age or background you might be.



THE SILLY DISCLAIMER

Also, let's get something straight before we continue, this book is not about how terrible video games are or how horrible the industry is that creates them. I still in fact... love games. I have a bookshelf full of '90s PC gaming memorabilia, game boxes, strategy guides, PC Gamer magazines from '94 to '01, and other nonsense. For me, the 1990s were an incredible time for PC gaming. When I first got my own IBM PS/1 Consultant with one of those glorious multimedia drives, otherwise known as a CD drive, there was no turning back.

And as silly as this next bit may be, I think I actually have to say it. Because I talk a lot about how technology affects us. At first glance it might be easy to assume I'm saying, "TECHNOLOGY BAD. If you do this, use this, or play this you are a BAD person." No. I am not saying that. There are many good things about technology, I think we can all agree on that. However there are also some negative consequences to having so much of it in our daily lives.

At no point during this book do I want you to feel guilty because you enjoy gaming. It's okay to have fun and enjoy video games! (See isn't it silly to actually say it?) I never want you to feel shame because you play or enjoy any particular game or whatever it may be that you love. I hope to help point out when the things we enjoy turn into things we worship, and it happens more often and more frequently for myself than I'd like to admit.

Gaming in the Gospel

As much as I want to take you on a nostalgic and whimsical journey into the world of gaming's past, I certainly don't want to set myself up as an expert on the topic here. There is a lot of ground to cover concerning video games and the culture that surrounds it, and with that, lots of opinions! So there's no way I will be able to cover all the issues in one book or reference all of your favorite games and platforms. I'm sorry. Also you may not agree with my stance on certain issues. And that's totally okay! 'Cause we're all in this thing together. It's my hope that this book will spark conversations and questions to ask ourselves as we all wrestle with the question of the importance of technology in our lives.

There is something about the human condition that perpetually causes us to trip over ourselves in pursuit of happiness. To reference C.S. Lewis' Space Trilogy, "We are all bent." We have a core issue that drives us: our separation from God. And over the course of this book, I'd like to show how that separation plays out in our daily lives and most importantly, how it applies in the realm of gaming. Or at least, how I think it does.

This book is broken into nine chapters or devotionals. Each chapter's subject matter could be expanded into books themselves, but I've decided to cover each of them in broad strokes in hopes that they will generate healthy conversations. How you choose to use this book is up to you. If you want to go through all of it in one sitting or do a weekly or daily study with a friend or small group that's perfectly okay. I wrote this for you, a fellow gamer trying to grip and understand the importance of gaming in relation to the gospel of Jesus.

And because I am a dork and I wanted you to have some fun while reading this book, at the end of each chapter is a stat page where you answer questions about yourself and current situation. And while some of these questions will be uncomfortable, know that they are meant to help you become self-aware of your relationship to gaming and the gospel.

Frankly, some of these questions will suck and you won't want to answer them. I don't want to answer them. I compiled these questions from my own experiences and also from a lot of fellow gamers who were willing to ask themselves these hard questions. I

Hello World.

encourage you to answer as honestly as you can. Be real with God about where you're at.

You add and subtract the totals and use the multipliers if scored. You total up each section and add up your total on the FINAL LEVEL. Each question is meant to help you identify your strengths and weaknesses. And while fun, I hope and pray the Holy Spirit uses it to convict and identify red flags in your life.

Ultimately your final score doesn't really matter. It's simply a gauge to determine what's important to you and hopefully reveal areas you didn't know were there. The only 1 or 0 that really matters is if you are following Christ or not. So no matter what your final score is, remember we're all in this together.

And I would hope you would re-read this book every once in a while. Maybe every 6 months? Rescore yourself and see where you're at. Have you improved? What can you work on now? And you are welcome to share these results or keep them to yourself. I hope you find the questions helpful and I really hope you'd pray that the Holy Spirit would use this book in the way that pleases Him and helps you the most. It is my dearest hope this book will help you see a bigger image of JESUS!

Enjoy.

LOADING...

LOST IN THE WOODS

The wind whispers across your nose, it's brisk and smells of pine. You are dreaming in deep slumber...Whisper.

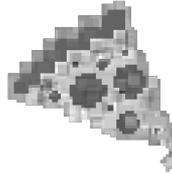
Your eyes dart awake, you stare into the tree branches above, birds are singing and the wind moves the needles of the pines. It's peaceful here, the pines whisper to you in the breeze.

You sit up and find yourself covered in pine needles. You brush them off and look around. You are in a dense forest. The horizon can not be seen. You notice what seems to be round sewer cover about 16 paces ahead of you. It obviously doesn't belong here in the forest, you proceed to get up and examine it.

As you struggle to get up you also notice a small shiny object to your left. You clear the pine and dirt covering it. It is a gold signet ring with the letters JN on it. You decide to put it on... 'cause it looks good on you.

You walk toward the sewer cover, it has the initials NYC written on it. You open it and, perhaps against your better judgment, you decide to go in...

001 Back to the Future-Past



*“Being human totally sucks most of the time.
Video games are the only thing
that make life bearable.”*
- Ernest Cline : *Ready Player One*

Growing up in the early '80s...it was a time like no other, a time of innovation and pixelation that would shape the world, and my life. I was first introduced to the world of computers when my dad brought home a then-blazing fast IBM PCjr. with a whopping 8088 Processor and modified 128k memory.¹ My father worked for IBM as a quality engineer and was privy to some of the latest tech. He primarily worked with the keyboards and was proud of his work. He was always excited to try out the latest keyboards, especially since IBM had learned its lesson with the “Chiclet Keyboard,” where if one was to press too hard, a key might pop into your eye. The later keyboards which my dad worked on provided a much better user experience.

I suppose the first game I ever played on a computer was *Frogger*² via 5.25" floppy disk.³ I remember having to wait on the

1 Basically this computer was slower than a first-generation flip phone.

2 Sierra Games 1981 : Robert Papas

3 Yes, it was literally a disk that flopped.

Gaming in the Gospel

IBM PCjr a good 30-45 seconds just to boot up into DOS⁴ and then switching out the floppies to load *Frogger* into memory. It always seemed like it took an extraordinary amount of time and my dad knew all the secret phrases to typ in to get my pixelated frog on the screen. Then I would hop across the road, narrowly dodging traffic, and into the river only to be eaten by an alligator, repeatedly. It was a tough game for a 5-year-old but it was a special time with my dad.

I have great memories of low-resolution graphics, wonderful new things like *Space Invaders* with the proprietary IBM PCjr. Joystick,⁵ and printing off party invitations on the nearby printer. Not to mention the beeps and boops of the ice skating Charlie Chaplin IBM Christmas demo in glorious CGA.⁶

But my fascination with PCjr would soon fade to the glory that was the Nintendo Entertainment System in 1985, which I bought with my very own money, I might add, by yard-selling my entire collection of He-Man toys and accessories. The jury is still out on if that was a wise move though...a good set of He-Man toys go for hundreds these days on eBay. But I digress.

I was hooked, I was a gamer.

Like all my friends in the neighborhood, I traded NES cartridges and Nintendo power magazines. And don't get me wrong, the Atari 2600 was still in the mix back then too. Even at an early age, I had multiple options to feed my new found passion for gaming. The world didn't know it yet, but an obsession was forming... an old and deep desire rekindled and re-envisioned in our collective hearts.



Everyone was playing as fast as they could, I knew I was. I'd get a new NES game for Christmas and beat it in a day or two. The classic conversation, "You beat it already? But didn't we just

⁴ Disk Operating System; The first OS

⁵ See cover of book for said joystick.

⁶ 640x200 at 16 Colors... in otherwords the HD of '85

001 Back to the Future-Past

get that one?" was far too common in my household. I'm pretty sure I still hold the self-proclaimed World Record for *Super Mario Bros 3*.⁷ Beat that bad boy the day I got it, post-tonsillitis surgery and all.⁸

But then there were the games like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*⁹ for NES that could grind you into a pulp with their difficulty. *TMNT* is one of the hardest games of all time, for me at least.¹⁰ I never beat it without the help of an emulator or Game Genie. Countless hours of focus and frustration. Comparatively, *DuckTales*¹¹ on NES could be beaten in an hour or so.

This pattern of devouring games was definitely formed early. As with most of us, the excess became my normality and the ease of reach only accelerated my desire for more. As technology grew, my speed and dedication doubled. My attention firmly focused on the challenge at hand. I must beat this game and then I must master it, if only for bragging rights on the lunch room floor. There was always a desire to thoroughly defeat a game. Then there was the challenge to find all the secret areas. And once found, that cartridge would gather dust. Guess it's time to go bug the parental units for a new game.

This pattern grew with me as I grew and I got more into music, movies, TV shows, and social media in particular. It seems I've done this with most things in my life. Go from one tweet to the next, barely reading or understanding it so that I can get to the next .gif. Maybe my post got a new like, just one more episode of *StarGate SG-1*¹² because I have to binge three seasons in a day for some reason. Or maybe one more time through the *Hamilton*¹³ soundtrack...I've got some time to kill.

My attention, halved and halved again until deep down I had this need to always feel entertained. When I wasn't anymore, no problem...I'll just move on to the next thing. I would consume

7 Nintendo 1990 : Shigeru Miyamoto & Takashi Tezuka

8 P-Wing Mario glitch for the win

9 Konami 1989 : Jun Funahashi

10 And every NES gamer ever...

11 Capcom 1989 : Yoshinori Takenaka

12 I shared candied ginger with RDA one time at a convention

13 Don't throw away your shot.

Gaming in the Gospel

and consume hoping to find whatever I was looking for. The desire for just one more show, one more play through, one more click, one more turn never seemed to scratch the itch. When I was done, I was left feeling close to the same as when I had begun. On an emotional level, I think I had made myself like Jabba the Hutt, “Just one more...Huh huh huh huuhhh...”¹⁴



The things of life I had chosen to ignore through my binge were still there, namely homework. And as I grew older, the things I ignored had more and more consequences. Am I going to play games all day or look for a job? Do I do that thing I said I would do? Nah, on to the next thing! I mean I wasn't even tasting these things as they went down. There was no savoring or understanding of texture. It was consume and move on. I might wow over the new graphics or a new game mechanic. But it would always fade. And at long last I would reach that terrible abyss. BOREDOM. I'd wallow in that misery until my needs were met, with great pathetic naggings and grumblings.

This binge habit lasted for a long time and some days I still fall into that pattern. I'm not exactly sure when I became aware of my habit of withdrawing and dwelling in my binge. Probably once I got married. There is nothing like having another person look into your life day after day and ask that question that burns us all, “Uh...Why do you do that?” And as hard as that question can be, I am grateful for it.

Once I started asking myself, “Why do I binge my games so much?” I found my perspective began to change. I stopped looking at them as things to consume or just be entertained by, but to be enjoyed on another level. Once I began to realize that these games were designed and dreamed up by real people, I started to actually chew them. Instead of swallowing them whole, I slowly began to understand the joy of appreciating games as an artform. So instead

¹⁴ My wife thought this was weird, but Jabba no bother.

001 Back to the Future-Past

of sprinting through a game, I'd slow down and take a week, maybe a month, or, GOD FORBID, a couple of months.

And what did this look like? I no longer spent four or six hours locked into a screen, but would do my best to do play only an hour at a time. (Gasp.) Once I was done with my session, I'd move on to something physically productive and hopefully creative.

No one goes to a steakhouse, drops \$60 bucks on a meal and rushes to eat it in five minutes.¹⁵ No, you savor the flavors, the textures, the effort put into the spices and ambience of the restaurant, and, hopefully, good company. Speaking of which, one thing I really miss about early console gaming before the internet, was that if you wanted to game with someone, they physically had to sit next to you. It's awesome that we live in the future and I can play with someone in another country. But there is nothing like having someone right there with you, especially to talk smack to.

One of my favorite gaming memories was the time I didn't have a PC that could run *XCOM2*¹⁶ (unacceptable!). So I teamed up with my buddy Brian and went over to his house to play through the campaign together as co-commanders. It took us about a month and a half and we had a blast doing it. It's one of the most satisfying gaming experiences I have ever had.

It makes me wonder if gaming is best served...shared.

*Hear, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart
in the way. Be not among drunkards or among
gluttonous eaters of meat, for the drunkard and
the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber
will clothe them with rags.*

Proverbs 23:19-21

¹⁵ Though my wife would say I basically do this every night at dinner.

¹⁶ Firaxis Games 2016 : Jake Solomon

Gaming in the Gospel

**How many hours a day do you game?
(PC, Console and Mobile)**

Number of Hours

①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨	⑩
10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Score for this section

**How many hours a day do you watch
TV/Videos/Movies?**

Number of Hours

①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨	⑩
10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Score for this section

**When's the last time you gamed
with someone in person?**

How many days ago?

①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨	⑩
10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Score for this section

Gaming in the Gospel

How likely are you to
take breaks while gaming?

Lots of Breaks

Very likely

No Breaks



Score for this section

How likely are you to
sprint through a game or show?

I take my time

Very likely

Sprint!



Score for this section

Install a Mod
(optional)

Custom Question



Score for this section

Gaming in the Gospel

Score Totals

Total your scores here
from the previous
sections

BONUS

**Are you able to stop binging on your own?
Or do you need someone to tell you to stop?**

YES

x2

Double your Score

NO

no bonus

**Area 001
Cleared!**

FINAL SCORE

Write in your final
score including bonuses

LOADING...

NEVER PAY FULL PRICE FOR LATE PIZZA

Thankfully the smell of the sewer was better than expected. As you step off the ladder you find yourself in some sort of a military facility. You notice a large security large door that is opened just enough to see two large eyes glaring at you.

“DID YOU BRING IT?” said a voice that seemed to be coming from inside your own skull. *“It’s Thursday,”* said the voice, annoyed. Not sure what to make of this, you try to respond from within your mind. *“No. Just stop it... It doesn’t work like that. Just say it out loud.”* surprised, you simply respond, *“No???”*

The door slams and the voice trails off in your mind. *“Ugh...typical earthi...”* The echo of the door is only eclipsed by the sounds of men shouting and machinery whirling from down the corridor.

Suddenly, from behind, you are swept into a formation of soldiers, handed a rifle and marched into some form of a helicopter. Confusion at this point is a luxury, but maybe this is who you are?

002 Outta Time Units



*“Those who play with the devil’s toys
will be brought by degrees to wield his sword.”*

-Buckminster Fuller

intro from *XCOM: Enemy Within*¹

I still remember the first time I saw *X-COM: UFO Defense*². I was spending the night at my friend’s house. We were in the basement and he had a good ole 486/33Mhz PC with 8 megs of RAM, maybe even 16?³ We played all sorts of stuff. *Dark Forces*,⁴ *DOOM*,⁵ *Ultrabots*,⁶ and then he gets excited and tells me about this new game. *X-COM*.

I remember the green hills, fog, darkness, and strange aliens in orange robes. He was late into the game. Plasma bolts ran wild. I didn’t understand a bit of it. Why were these aliens firing out of nowhere? ...Mind control? It looked complicated and really confusing. I loved it.

¹Firaxis Games 2013

²MicroProse 1994: Julian Gollop & Nick Gollop

³The Ferrari PC of ’95.

⁴Lucas Arts 1995: Daron Stinnett, Ray Gresko & Justin Chin

⁵id Software 1993: John Carmack, John Romero, Sandy Petersen, American McGee, & Shawn Green

⁶Novalogic 1993 : John Butrovich, John A. Garcia, David Seeholzer

Gaming in the Gospel

I borrowed his copy and installed it on my PS/1 Consultant, using my sweet 3.5" floppy disc drive.⁷

Back then, copyright protection meant actually reading the manual. So to even get in the game, it would ask for a serial number from a certain page in the manual. And I may or may not have written down every single one of those serial numbers and corresponding page numbers.⁸ In fact, I still have that page. I think I should frame it. A lot of work went into that. A '90s gamer had to do what he (or she) had to do.

Now, it was as illegal to share or copy games in that day and age as it is now, but when I was a kid, it was rampant. I mean even grandmas were pirating copies of Microsoft Works from their grandkids. It was strange how little I valued the effort, time, and money that went into programming. And I'm not certain that's changed much. We're all glad to grab that sweet app, you know that "free to use, pay if you want" app that someone spent a lot of time working on.

But don't worry. I've bought PLENTY of copies of *X-COM* over the years. And I've found myself buying a lot of old games and programs as some form of cathartic guilt release.⁹ But I think it's important to remember that humans made these games and programs and these humans put considerable effort into making them. And maybe it's at least a little bit ironic and sad that abandonware has become such a thing. All these games we used to shell out \$40-\$60 for are now absolutely free. Maybe it's still an incredible time to be a '90s gamer?

When I started this book in 2018, I was 37 years old. I've been playing PC games since the early nineties.¹⁰ But there are a number of games I'll always come back to, *X-COM* being one of them. Usually once a year I'll reinstall and go through a campaign, fighting my way to Cydonia. Like a good book, I want to revisit those memories and experiences. It's an old friend...that you get to beat to a pulp...again.

7 Not the the Ferrari PC of'95.

8 Don't judge.

9 Looking at you Adobe.com... In fact, I'm paying you right now as I write this.

10 Don't do the math.

002 Outta Time Units

There are days I just sit in front of my computer and there is a yearning I can't verbalize. Sometimes life just hits you, anxiety and depression swell, and the desire to withdraw and escape feels overwhelming.

So what will it be today? A game? Movie? Netflix? Or maybe I'll check my Instagram and see how many likes I got today. How can I escape the pain this time? What will be my drug of choice to ignore this distance in my soul? And really, this is just life.

We're emotional creatures and we feel things deeply at times. And if you're like me, I don't even know what to do with all the "feels" that happen throughout a day. I can't tell you how many times I do whatever I can to stuff that daily anxiety and ignore it as best I can.

Maybe I want to play something like *Civilization II*¹¹ and run a Roman domination campaign to rule the world. If I can't control these emotions, maybe I can control something. Usually, these feelings are based on some form of control. And games are great at letting us feel in control. Games like *Warcraft 3*¹² give you the affirmation of every decision. "Yes, m'Lord!"¹³

It may sound silly, but as much as I want to deny it, I like that. Someone is doing exactly what I want and my plan is followed regardless of victory or defeat.

Or maybe I'll boot up *Fallout*¹⁴ and wander the wasteland. Somewhere deep in my soul, I feel like I'm in a desolate place. The yearning turns into anxiety the longer I can't fill in the pain. This anxiety is real, and if I ignore it, I win right? Or maybe I just boot up *Minecraft*,¹⁵ dig a hole deep down into a mountain, put up a torch, close the opening, and just sit there where no one can find me so I can escape from all the things of life that are hurting me deep down inside. What will it be today?

X-COM was often that drug of choice. It would always get the dopamine¹⁶ flowing, getting to lead an international task force

11 Microprose 1996 : Brian Reynolds, Douglas Kaufman & Jeff Briggs

12 Blizzard Entertainment 2002 : Rob Pardo

13 As said by the peasants that builds things for you

14 Interplay Productions 1997 : Christopher Taylor

15 Mojang 2011 : Markus Persson & Jens Bergensten

16 The "happiness hormone."

Gaming in the Gospel

to repel the alien invaders. Every choice was mine: Research, Purchases, Equipment, Tactics. I could create my own narrative and reinvent myself as the commander of X-COM. As long as I would or could play for, I would find some illusion of worth. If I felt I needed to challenge myself, I'd up the difficulty setting. After my binge was over, I was only left with regret for wasting so much time on a video game, regret and shame for wasting my day. But it was all to numb the pain, this feeling in my soul that I couldn't express or see but lived with every day of my life.

Even the physical stress my body would undergo during those binges would be an echo of the strain in my soul. My jaw would tense, my eyes would hurt, I'd forget to eat or drink, and if anyone tried to speak to me... I found I couldn't respond as a human being in my gaming-induced coma.

I mean, I just dominated the world as Austria in *Civilization 5*¹⁷ and built coffee houses in each of my conquered cities,¹⁸ I should be feeling great! But frankly, I feel like crap afterward, mentally and physically, because of how tense I had made my muscles and mind. And this was just a turn-based strategy game! God forbid I play a scary first-person shooter with headphones in the dark.

Games give us all sorts of experiences: tactical simulations, adventure, magic, flight, and, of course, combat. So I'll sit at my laptop while I yearn for something. I pour over the pages of all the abandonware sites or glance through the Steam sales page or the app store on my phone looking for a new experience, for something to block the static, the noises of life, and sometimes, the pain of life.



The reality? These games just create more noise. It's all just noise, noise to fill the void. My soul burns with desire to separate itself from the pain of life. So I run back to experiences that make me forget the pain, where I can be someone else. All I want is to step out into a world unknown, wander, kill, loot, and explore.

¹⁷ Firaxis 2010 : Jon Shafer, Ed Beach, Scott Lewis

¹⁸ I call this a caffination victory.

002 Outta Time Units

To what end? Digital currency? To level to the highest rank? To acquire and craft the Brotherhood armour? I can achieve that, but for what? Sometimes I'll even install a mod to make it easier, and how powerfully I long for it to be real. To be reality. "Look what I've done. I have achieved!" But I know it's not real and I feel sick to my stomach, but this is supposed to be fun. I can't stop now, I run back to it, I vomit. I run back. I vomit. I indulge. I vomit. Just one more turn. I run back to it.

I vomit.

But this is fun right?

It's entertainment right?

*Like a dog that returns to his vomit
is a fool who repeats his folly.
(Proverbs 26:11)*

I'm not using these games for joy or entertainment. They are a distraction. This desire is nothing new. Man has always found a way to distract himself from the pain of life, the lack of God in his life. It is an ineffable pain, a separation from our creator, the void. I want and dream to tell you that once I found Christ and was saved by His perfect sacrifice it felt like that void was filled. Some days it feels like it is, but other days... it just doesn't. So I run back, indulge, and vomit.

I'd like to think that Jesus played games with His brothers and sisters as a child and maybe even with His disciples. His parables are basically riddles that we're trying to figure out to this day.¹⁹

Games and entertainment have always been there. Every generation invents some new pastimes that the previous generation thinks is wrong or evil. Gambling, Theater, Alcohol, Card Games, Board Games, Motion Pictures, Phones, Cars, Sports, Radio, Television, Atari, Computers, The Internet, Smartphone...

¹⁹ Jesus was essentially the first Bible Quiz Master.

Gaming in the Gospel

In modern days, we've gotten good at creating enough distractions so that there's something for everyone. The advent of technology has allowed us to get REALLY good at it. Do you realize that the computer is only 30-something years old? This is a new variable to an already complex and increasing problem of distraction.

We are all just looking for ways to pass the time. Time is fleeting, it's precious, and we want to just pass it? Perhaps there is a basic need in man to forget. To forget the pain that is the separation from God. Even for believers there is that pain. We are not yet with our heavenly Father in person, in perfection. He is always with us, but we yearn for the day to always be with Him in person, face to face. Thus we pass the time until we're reunited with Him.

But I'm not passing time, I'm killing it.

*O LORD, make me know my end
and what is the measure of my days;
let me know how fleeting I am!*

Psalm 39:4

Gaming in the Gospel

How prone are you to escape into a game
(or other media?)

Not prone

Very likely

Escape



Score for this section

Are you using games for entertainment
or distraction?

Entertainment

Distraction



Score for this section

How well do you physically feel after gaming?
Or watching a show?

Pretty Good

Okay

Terrible



How likely are you to pirate
a game or app?

NO

Maybe

YES

10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
----	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Score for this section

Install a Mod
(optional)

Custom Question

10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
----	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Score for this section

Gaming in the Gospel

Score Totals

Total your scores here
from the previous
sections and chapters

BONUS

Can you recognize when you're
Killing Time vs Passing Time?

YES

x2
Double your
Score

NO

No Bonus

**Area 002
Cleared!**

FINAL SCORE

Write in your final
score including bonuses

LOADING...

OPERATION GRAYLORD

Conversation is difficult at best when you're thrown into a loud helicopter surrounded by stoic comrades at arms. A red light flashes and the helicopter begins to land. Soldiers begin to prepare their weapons as the copter descends and thumps the ground.

The ramp slams to the ground as those around you rush into the night to face an unknown enemy. Green plasma shots fill the helicopter. You do what any sensible person would do in this position and hide in the back of the craft. The soldiers are proving no match for the forces just outside.

You peek around a crate, gun fire and plasma continue to rain inside and outside the craft. And that's when you see it...a tall, slender, gray-skinned alien at the base of the ramp, touting an otherworldly weapon of destruction. It notices you.

In a panic you grab your rifle, somehow point it in the correct direction, and exclaim what probably won't be your best catchphrase as you pull the trigger. "Ack! ALIEN!"

003 The Edge



quake2.exe +set game dedicated
+set game lithium map q2dm1
Server Commands for *Quake II*¹

The sounds of familiar footsteps, the random gusts of wind, and grinding of mechanical things underground connects with me. The orange sky, the brown metallic walls, circles, and cliffs. The boxes and lights, a stairway to a forbidden place known as the “Rabbit Hole.” This is home. Q2dm1 “The Edge.” This is one of the most popular deathmatch maps of *Quake II* and, for a group of college students huddled in B Quad on Snodgrass Hill, a sanctuary, a refuge from responsibility, homework, and schedules. A homemade LAN² with a ten-meg switch formed a bridge into the world of *Quake II*, ethernet cables hung literally everywhere. We all grappled, jumped, raced for the super health and fragged late into the night.

My first semester at Kentucky Christian College was pretty lackluster. I had been slated to Waters Hall, a long, narrow, boring building made of white cement blocks to contain the mass of freshmen. My first roommate was a drummer and insisted on bringing his full kit into our already “spacious” room, and needed to rehearse...a lot. I didn’t know a snare could be hit that many times. We didn’t connect at all. He requested a roommate change three weeks in. I was immediately saddled with a new one. He was awkward, but I was awkward too, which kept the peace.

¹ id Software 1997 : Kevin Cloud, American McGee & Tim Willits

² Local Area Network

Gaming in the Gospel

I just wanted to play *Quake II* so I requested the fast network, the legendary “Token Ring Network.”³ Denied. 38k dial-up for me. No competitive *Quake II* for me or pretty much any internet. 500 ping to the closest *Quake II* server,⁴ communal public showers with no curtains, couches from the ’70s with fungus inside, and then there was the smell...oh the smell. Need I say more? The hope and dream of ever being in the dormitory on Snodgrass Hill was a pipe dream, a Q2dm3 “The Frag Pipe Dream”⁵ you might say.

Snodgrass was a quad setup, eight guys. One bathroom and a shower, a shower with a curtain. As C-3PO would say, “Oh praise the maker!” But it was only a minor upgrade to the smell. Most importantly, it was wired for Token Ring! Snodgrass was reserved for upperclassmen. I was just going to have to slug it out down there in Waters Hall.

How I found myself in B Quad on Snodgrass Hill one day I don’t fully recall. Was I invited, did I just walk in, or was fate playing out before me? The familiar sounds of *Quake II* caught my ear and before I knew it, I was hanging out with upperclassmen who were excited that I had any fragging experience. I quickly exceeded their expectations when I began to play. I recall Chris “Whosyourdaddy” Tanner was amazed that I knew to count down the mega health respawn.⁶

At this point, things started looking up. I had finally found my people.

Tanner and Shawn “Traumatico” Young⁷ helped me meet more Quakers and fellow Snodgrass roommates. I somehow got connected to a fellow who had his own room in Snodgrass and actually wanted to move to Waters Hall because that’s where his people were. He wasn’t into *Quake* or anything like that. Our conversation quickly worked into an arrangement. We swapped rooms and I found myself in D Quad. One level above B Quad. I thought

³ The fastest network prior to ethernet networking, also very unreliable.

⁴ This speed to the server made it unplayable

⁵ Q2dm3 was entitled, “The Frag Pipe”

⁶ We always called it super health; 20 seconds btw.

⁷ Shawn would later crash the entire Token Ring Network by using Napster too much.

003 The Edge

I was the luckiest second-semester freshmen ever, and I probably was. An ethernet cable was easily dropped out of the window to B Quad. I was in the loop. I was plugged in. Logged in. Things would never be the same.

That community meant so much to me then, and still means a lot now. I host a *Quake II* server out of my house, a lamppost for any of my clan mates to find their way home. Some of them do from time to time. And for whatever reason, I always keep “The Last Lithium Quake 2 Server” running. I know it doesn’t make sense, but it doesn’t use much power or bandwidth. It’s a relic of a bygone era.

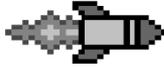
I still connect and hop around Q2dm1 “The Edge” with my trusty blaster at my side. I’ll make a couple of laps, bunny-hopping and grappling as quickly as I can, but I always stop at the same place, the ledge with the rocket launcher that overlooks the cliffs and stairways of the arena. The wind blows here, one of several random sound effect locations.

I stop and I wait. I even make my character crouch and I imagine myself sitting on the ledge I always assumed “The Edge” got its name from. And I wait to see if anyone connects. I check the server status... No connections made.

It’s just me and the simulated wind, sitting on the edge, looking out into the abyss of my loneliness... My soul yearns for days gone past. In pensive thoughts I think of all those matches: the time spent, friendships, laughs, Ale8s⁸ and camaraderie. I would be lying if I said I didn’t speak into the nothingness of the server via chat.

This desire for friendship and camaraderie certainly isn’t wrong. It is good to not be alone. But I sometimes wonder if my search for connection, just for a friend, is maybe something else deep down in my soul. What if this simple desire for companionship and connection was something my soul was yearning for? As much as I miss my friends, I miss my Creator, my God. My soul yearns to be reconnected, but can’t just yet.

⁸ Simply the best gingerale ever made.



When I experience these desires and deep emotions, particularly with gaming, I think of myself, my soul perhaps, standing on the edge, looking out into a place I call the void (void, void, void... it echos forever) on a plane of existence we cannot see, but I feel it deep within my bones. There exists a gap in my being, a place so vast and immeasurable it can only be expressed as a void...a placeless place. A seemingly bottomless pit filled with an ocean of nothingness.

I think of this place as our separation from God. The distance between man and God. Adam's defining sin in the garden was the seed of the void and when he and Eve were cast out of the garden, this gap, this split appeared in their souls and every soul that would be. Where we once had complete communion, community and fellowship with God, we are now torn apart by the void. Our original sin gave birth to this.

In this void is chaos and forgetfulness.

We stand at the edge and look into it. Sometimes it drives us into madness.⁹ The void hurts us. We don't understand it or know why. We dare not approach it, but there is something from across the way, beyond its dark shore is a light that beckons us. It pulls on our heartstrings as if it were programmed into us like androids or maybe it's in our DNA. There is a burning desire to go into the void in spite of the fact that it burns us and cuts at our flesh. We still try. There is something calling us...

So we stand at the edge. And instead of walking into it with confidence, a fear-filled idea forms. In frustration we take whatever we can grasp and hurl into the gap.

"Maybe I can fill it??" we think to ourselves desperately. "What if I can fill up the void and make a way across to fulfill these burning desires?"

⁹ Like the Reavers from Firefly, or a young boy on Gallifrey being forced to look into the Time Vortex.

003 The Edge

So in goes *Quake II*, my hopes for connection and friendship, another round of *Civilization*, my need for control. I turn and find one more video on YouTube, one more Xbox achievement, one more Netflix episode. In goes my money, in goes my success. It feels good, howbeit temporary, as it disappears into the vastness that is the void. One more trip to Starbucks, maybe I'll run into a friend. One more refresh on social media for a message back, one more like. I throw relationships, lusts, self-pity, and indulgence as far as I can. If I can just make a bridge of stuff, I can walk across...

And with each thing thrown, I lie to myself.

This one is it. This is the one. This is the one thing that will make me happy.

I never hear it hit the bottom.

Anything I wanted, I would take. I denied myself no pleasure. I even found great pleasure in hard work, a reward for all my labors. But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless—like chasing the wind.

Ecclesiastes 2:10-11 (NLT)

Gaming in the Gospel

Out of 10
How happy do you feel
in general?



Score for this section

How often do you turn to a game or any
other kind of media when you feel sad?

Never

Very likely



Score for this section

How often do you consider the
health of your relationship to God?

Often

Never



Score for this section

63

How often do you throw things into the void?

Never

Very likely



Score for this section

**How likely are you to communicate
what you're feeling to God?**

Very likely

Sometimes

Never



Score for this section

Install a Mod
(optional)

Custom Question



Score for this section

Gaming in the Gospel

Score Totals

Total your scores here
from the previous
sections and chapter

SECRET BONUS

Have you been reading all the footnotes?

'Cause I spent a lot of time doing those...

YES

NO

**Turn to
Page 198**

No Bonus

**Area 003
Cleared!**

FINAL SCORE

Write in your final
score including bonuses

LOADING...

ROCKET MAN

A human doesn't fully understand scorn until they see a Gray tilt its head in confusion, after said human has completely missed every single shot from their assault clip.

Although, this confusion is in fact a luxury. As you fling yourself over the crate in the back of the helicopter, you happen to process what is in this crate. A rocket launcher?! Have you ever used one? Nope. Do you even know who you are? Not a clue.

But this Gray is toast.

You fumble through the foam peanuts until you've found your prize. *"Wait... You don't belong here,"* a voice like before echoes in your mind. You pick up your weapon and prepare to fire, thankfully double-checking which direction is the business end.

AND BOOM!

A large crater has now been created at the base of the ramp. Things are quiet, that or you are now deaf. Smoke is everywhere, you jump off the ramp and take refuge behind a strut. You see bodies everywhere. No Grays though, at least for now.

END OF LINE.

**Thanks for reading
this preview!**