

COMMENTS & LETTERS

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Swallow the bile and click your way to resolution

MY AWESOME COLUMN

by Michele Legendre

Over a year after publication, *Super Columbine Massacre RPG*, a downloadable computer game that puts players in Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold's shoes as they execute their plan to kill Columbine High School students, is sparking controversy among relatives of the victims, the media and general public.

The game goes through the life of Eric Harris, as he wakes up on April 20, 1999 and prepares for the day he and Dylan Klebold have been planning for. The plot line is very much based on the events that were described to have occurred that day, from the time the propane bombs were to explode and how they were placed among the cafeteria and parking lot.

In addition, the game features photographs of Columbine High School from the media to act as the backgrounds in the game and audio clips from local television stations on scene.

Controversy seems to be sparking over the violence of the game and how creator Daniele Ledonne ruthlessly made a game based on the deadliest school shooting in the history of the United States, killing a dozen students, a teacher, and wounding more than 20 others. Surely the subject matter draws most of our attention and disgust, lives were lost and we should respect those who have lost their lives in the tragic event.

But people need to actually go beyond the satirical title and play the game in order to understand Ledonne's creation of "Super Columbine Massacre RPG." The event is a sensitive matter to many, but has been depicted in the media, books and film. At the Cannes Film Festival, the prestigious Palmes d'Or was awarded to Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* (documentary) in 2002 and Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* (film with similar events as Columbine) in 2003.

Elephant received some mixed reviews and rather tame criticisms due to its subject matter; *Bowling for Columbine* was well-received, with controversy - possibly more over Michael Moore than the subject matter itself.

This is where video games seem to hold a larger scrutiny than films and books. We interpret video games of a violent subject matter to be problematic, leading to aggressive behavior in teenagers, which results in events such as the Columbine shooting - and most recently the Dawson shooting. Hence, where most get distracted in filmmaker Daniele Ledonne's work, he used the medium (video game format) itself in order to create the desired atmosphere and message he wanted to present to those who were to understand the satirical characteristics of the game.

The minute details throughout the game are impressive and truly show its message, in all its circa 1995 RPG greatness; Harris and Klebold are dressed in black trench coats, and collect items such as a Marilyn Manson CD and a *Doom* CD-ROM in a room playing Nirvana's *Smells Like Teen Spirit* in MIDI format with a KMFDM poster, a band whose lyrics from *Son of a Gun* and *Stray Bullet* were posted on Eric's website. Harris was also known to take a popular anti-depressant and can collect several amounts of Luvox in return for killing certain schoolmates, such as the Nerdy Girl. Furthermore, the dialogue between Harris and Klebold is based on their writings (which are abundantly available online) and homemade videos, where some of the stills were used in the video game as backgrounds in the development of the plotline.

A little more information than what the news provided you with while informing you of the *Super Columbine Massacre RPG*, no? From all the media coverage I've read and seen, there is no mention of *Super Columbine Massacre RPG*'s satirical views. If a viewer is to be exposed to a report stating the complete disgust and shock parents of victims face with the creation of a game based on the event that

killed their child, we know damn well what they'll think of the video game without the mention of its content or violence factor.

This game goes beyond commenting on the assumptions made by the media of violence in video games: Luxor making individuals manic, anyone sporting a trench coat and black hair should be associated with the Trench Coat Mafia, to be approached with caution, and parents should look for warning signs of their teens having such associations. Ledonne goes on to show how we've become a culture that would rather not talk about anything in order to avoid any uncomfortable situations with others.

Certainly, the Columbine shooting is not something to bring up at the dinner table, but we should not stand silent about such issues, point the finger at irrelevant factors and simply wait for things to resolve on their own.

Super Columbine Massacre RPG brings something to the table which is different from most video games, and portrays the consequences of violence through a mildly-violent game. A very mild sociologically cultured individual that knows how to play *Pac-man* would be capable of understanding this game and Daniele Ledonne's intentions.

Different from any other game, *Super Columbine Massacre RPG* informs the gamer of an uncomfortable event and challenges them to think about the issue. We have been fed information so hard to digest with violence in video games; a good reference would be CNN or even Jack Thompson's website, www.jackthompson.org.

We are led to think of the sake of our children, our 'future' and how parents should be informed of how these violent video games lead to aggressive behavior in our children. Daniele Ledonne commented to *Next Generation* that; "...[s]ome of the controversy surrounding the gaming industry is a result of the largely inaccurate assumption that only children play video games and thus the realm of gaming must remain on a PG-level."

Honestly, blaming violent video games is one thing, but no matter what, we are always going to have a handful of people who we just cannot aid, no matter how manic-depressive-aggressive or a downright threat to society they may be - where a video game may be a fragment of the problem, if any.

Dawson college shooter Kimveer Gill played *Super Columbine Massacre RPG*, a game that requires much more information than supplied in order to result in what happened on September 14. The game was to blame, because it was thought to be violent and a step-by-step manual on how to kill students in a building. Again, this is where we are left uninformed; the game requires a lot of reading (dialogues from Harris and Klebold), there are no recipes for explosives, there is a menu-based gunfire with no visible gun (just pixelated flashes and beams) and puzzle solving.

Daniele went on to comment publicly about Kimveer Gill's use of *Super Columbine Massacre RPG* before the Dawson College shootings: "The entire correlation between the Dawson College shooting and my game is unfounded. Though it was far from shooter Kimveer Gill's favorite game, it was among the list of games he liked to play. I can only assume, after 150,000+ downloads of the game, that it is also a game that other people like to play (ones who won't be going postal). What else did Kimveer like? Black clothes? Goth music? Pizza?"

Perhaps, instead of harbouring feelings of complete disgust because of the information that was delivered to you by the media and others, think for yourself. This game was not to be the subject of blame or assumptions, but rather to be consciously played and have us think about the matter without being told what to do, or to believe that everything will resolve itself in a culture of violence.

Our culture does not see videogames as an intelligent or educational field; perhaps look beyond the assumption of plastic packaging and playtime and see what *Super Columbine Massacre RPG* challenges.

Mom, I need some money!

MUGWUMP

by Tony von Richter

After two weeks away from Mugwump, it's back into the thick of things with everybody's favourite topic: tuition! Now, I know what you're thinking, 'yeah, we get it. Tuition is too high, we pay it too, you know,' but hear me out.

Way back in the early days of freshman year in 2003, I ventured down to Financial Services to pay my tuition and get started on this whole university thing. I saw the amount online for tuition - it was about \$4,500 - and thought, 'that's not too bad, it could be worse.' Of course, no one told me that there was around \$400 of fees stacked on top of tuition. So, in total, it cost me just under \$5,000 for one year of enrollment at UNB.

Now jump ahead to this September, and I'm up at the South Gym getting ready to say goodbye to my summer pay cheques - now I pay around \$5,200 in tuition, with another \$600 in fees. So, if I pay an extra \$600 for my education, it stands to reason that it's worth the extra money, that the university has built in some added value to the experience to offset the rising cost. Unfortunately, as every UNB student knows, that's not the case.

Ok, just to make things clear, I know that things could be worse and we could be paying the crazy tuition costs that students in American universities pay, but that's not really the point. If the cost to students increases every year we should get some added benefit that we didn't have when we started out. What other business (and yes, even if it is non-profit and a school, UNB is still a business) treats their customers this way?

Can you imagine any other company raising their prices year after year, but still giving you the same product they did last year? Of course not. If they did, you'd probably go somewhere else and forget about them. That's

not really an option for university students, as you can't just walk across the street and get the same service you'd get at UNB.

To be fair to the university, it would be almost impossible to increase services on a yearly basis, but if they don't increase the value of our experience, is there any way they can justify the annual cost increases?

Not really, and ideally the costs would be the same for students until they graduate, but that isn't possible since everyone finishes their degree in different time frames and the university can't have thousands of different tuition rates every year.

So, if we can't get increased services and we can't get individual tuition rates, what's the solution? Are we just doomed to pay more for our education year after year? It looks that way for the time being, but hopefully with a new government that could change at some point in the future.

A few weeks back, while examining the Liberal party's education promises, I proposed that tuition be frozen in four-year blocks, and I still believe that practice is a sound one. If enacted, it would permit most students to finish their degrees by paying the same amount in the first year as they do when they graduate. Aside from the obvious financial benefits of not increasing costs, it could also help with retaining students, as they wouldn't have to leave school in the middle of their programs just because they couldn't afford the extra \$200 that school costs this year.

Odds are this type of policy won't ever be enacted and we are stuck dealing with yearly tuition increases, but that doesn't mean we should just sit back and be happy about it. Maybe we should put pressure on the university to justify these annual tuition increases rather than just grumbling about them while taking out another student loan.

If you've got any comments on tuition at UNB or have any ideas on how to fix this issue, let us know at managing@unb.ca.

Imperial America: A good thing

REALITY CHECK

by Tanner Phillips

One of the most defining aspects of the post Cold War world has been the phenomenon of American Empire. With the rapid collapse and decline of the Soviet Union in the late

1980s and early 1990s, a global power vacuum emerged, quickly filled by the awesome

political, economic, and military might of the United States. Not since Roman times has one nation so dominated the world order. Not even Britain at its height in the 19th century could compare to the level of military power now possessed by the United States.

Consequently, the U.S. has become the main target of global outrage and ridicule. Anti-Americanism has been fuelled in recent years by the War on Terror and the subsequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, which have been perceived as Imperialistic. The critics are right; the United States is an aggressive Imperial power intent on maintaining its own global prominence for decades to come. However, is Pax Americana a bad thing? The answer is no, in fact, the world is extremely fortunate to have a secular and democratic sole superpower.

One of the most common misconceptions of American foreign policy is that it revolves around the control of global oil supplies, specifically the oil fields of the Middle East. The myth does have a lot of truth to it, but is the U.S. selfishly attempting to keep control of the world's energy supplies for itself? In reality, only about 20 per cent of American energy imports come from the Middle East, and the entire basis of future American energy policy is geared towards reducing that percentage. Continental Europe and Japan are utterly dependent on Mid East oil, not the United States. On October 28, Iraq formally invited Chinese oil companies into the country. Now, if the "no blood for oil" types had any common sense, they would realize that if the invasion was about oil, the United States would not allow its probable future enemy to reap the benefits. The simple fact of the matter is that American oil companies want nothing to do with Iraq. So why the invasion in the first place?

The truth is the invasion was about removing Saddam Hussein, a brutal dictator that murdered hundreds of thousands of his own citizens and who actively boasted of his WMD stock (he lied). As much as many people would not like to admit it, human rights do play an important role in decision making at the White House, much of it due to the influence of certain neo-conservatives and the evangelical movement. On the other hand, human rights do not even come into the picture with the foreign policies of Russia, France and China. France may seem like a glowing beacon that presents a Western alternative to the American orbit, but looking closely at French activities in Africa, a pattern emerges of extensive meddling in their former colonies and those actions had nothing to do with human rights. Also, let us not forget that it was the French Army that prevented justice after the Rwandan genocide by protecting the Hutu militias. Even more, the French only opposed the 2003 Iraq war because Saddam was a close ally and energy provider. France a center of responsible

world leadership? I think not.

The blame for the ongoing tragedy in Darfur can firmly be laid at the feet of those three geopolitical rivals of the United States. All three have systematically opposed intervention at the UN Security Council. The U.S. will probably not act unilaterally in this instance, which is a shame. It was American leadership that led to the humanitarian military intervention in Kosovo, and before that, in Bosnia. It was the Americans that tried to save Somalia and punished Indonesia for the oppression and slaughter in East Timor. It is the might of the U.S. Navy that keeps the world's shipping lanes safe and secure, and consequently keeps maritime insurance rates down to a level that allows trade to flow at such a pace. The American market has a voracious appetite that keeps the world economy afloat. The U.S. will lead the free world into the long war against Islamic extremism. I have hope that the United States will eventually lead the fight against climate change, AIDS, and general environmental degradation. No one can be ignorant enough to believe global problems of the present and future will be solved without American leadership.

Some say it would be better if the world was multilateral, if only the United States withdrew to isolation after the Second World War like it had in the 1920s. This argument is inherently flawed and dangerous. Let us pretend that the Soviet Union became isolationist and actually did not try to paint the world Red. We would have a situation much like that of 1914, with many different powers, armed to the teeth, in endless competition with each other. War would be inevitable, and since it is the nuclear age, humanity would probably take a severe beating. It is American hegemony that keeps the peace. The U.S. forced peace on post war Europe, made France and Germany friends, and re-armed the continent in order to face the communist threat. Make no mistake; Europe would have been swallowed by Stalin in the 1940s and 1950s if it wasn't for an aggressive, Imperialistic America. In Asia, the American nuclear umbrella covers Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. All three are politically opposed by communist nuclear armed states (China and North Korea), and they are all hesitant about developing nuclear weapons precisely because they can hide under American military might. The very idea of a sole superpower therefore limits nuclear proliferation. It is a fair bet to say that without the American umbrella, South Korea and Taiwan, both dynamic democratic nations, would not even exist.

I can only hope the United States will assume more of the "Imperial Burden" thrust upon it. A democratic, secular and capitalist superpower is naturally beneficial to other democratic nations. Is it not better to have the United States figuratively calling the shots rather than a brutal and authoritarian regime like China or the former USSR? Alas, as the 21st century continues, the United States may be eclipsed in power by rising Eastern powers as it becomes increasingly bogged down in the never ending War on Terror. There may be a time when an exhausted America refuses to continue to be the global policeman. The odds of the next superpower believing in human rights, democracy, and freedom are not very good at all.

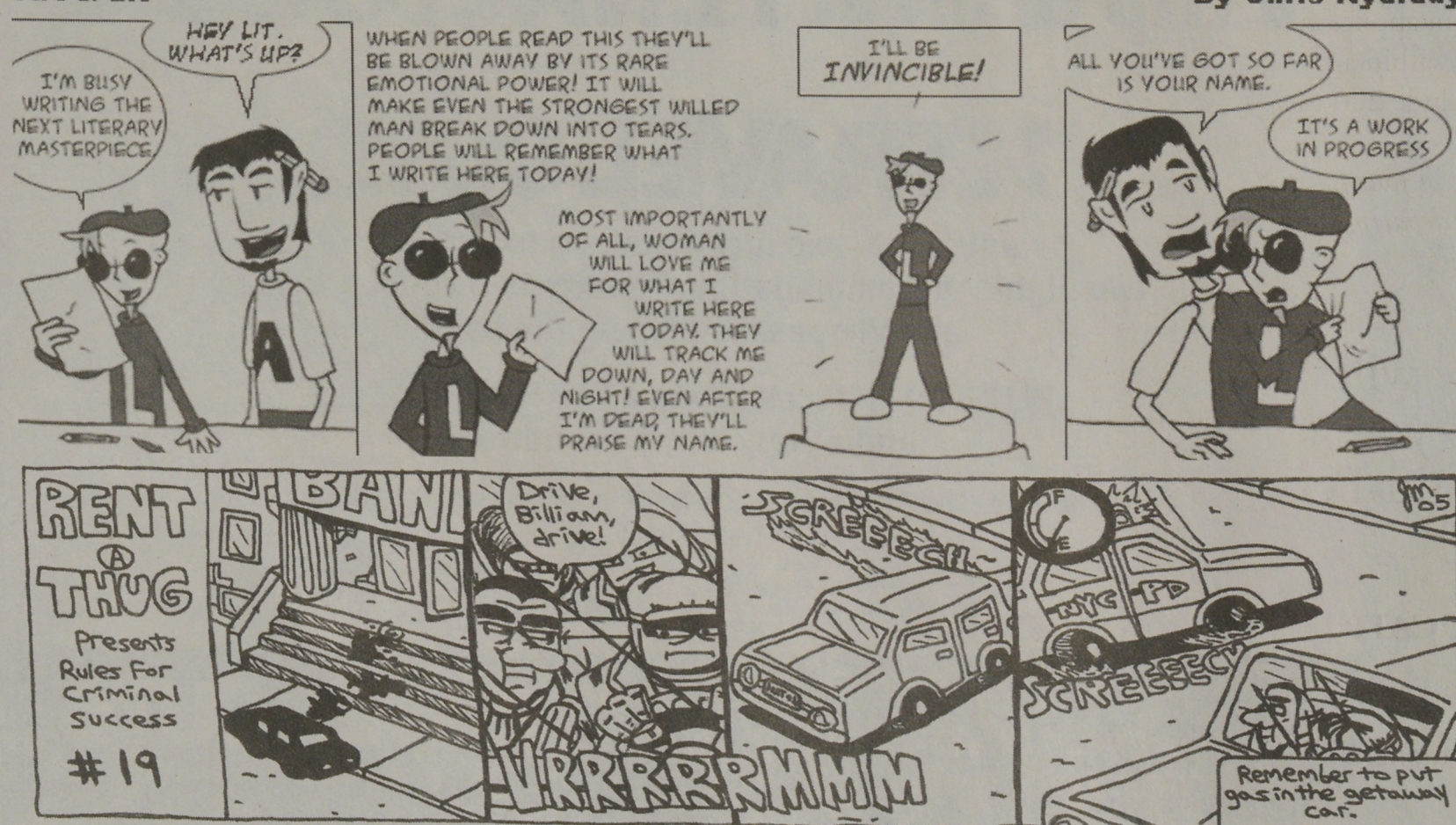
The newest addition to the Brunswickan... COMICS!!

AT LAST, TED HAGGARD'S SECRET IDENTITY IS REVEALED!



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Art & Lit



Jeff Martin /The Gateway (University of Alberta)