



Extra Lives: Why Video Games Matter

By Tom Bissell

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Tom Bissell is a prizewinning writer who published three widely acclaimed books before the age of thirty-four. He is also an obsessive gamer who has spent untold hours in front of his various video game consoles, playing titles such as *Far Cry 2*, *Left 4 Dead*, *BioShock*, and *Oblivion* for, literally, days. If you are reading this flap copy, the same thing can probably be said of you, or of someone you know.

Until recently, Bissell was somewhat reluctant to admit to his passion for games. In this, he is not alone. Millions of adults spend hours every week playing video games, and the industry itself now reliably outearns Hollywood. But the wider culture seems to regard video games as, at best, well designed if mindless entertainment.

Extra Lives is an impassioned defense of this assailed and misunderstood art form. Bissell argues that we are in a golden age of gaming—but he also believes games could be even better. He offers a fascinating and often hilarious critique of the ways video games dazzle and, just as often, frustrate. Along the way, we get firsthand portraits of some of the best minds (Jonathan Blow, Clint Hocking, Cliff Bleszinski, Peter Molyneux) at work in video game design today, as well as a shattering and deeply moving final chapter that describes, in searing detail, Bissell's descent into the world of *Grand Theft Auto IV*, a game whose themes mirror his own increasingly self-destructive compulsions.

Blending memoir, criticism, and first-rate reportage, *Extra Lives* is like no other book on the subject ever published. Whether you love video games, loathe video games, or are merely curious about why they are becoming the dominant popular art form of our time, *Extra Lives* is required reading.

From the Hardcover edition.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. *Grand Theft Auto IV* is both a waste of time and the most colossal creative achievement of the last 25 years, according to this scintillating meditation on the promise and discontents of video games. Journalist Bissell (*Chasing the Sea*) should know; the ultraviolent car-chase-and-hookers game was his constant pastime during a months-long intercontinental cocaine binge. He's ashamed of his video habit, but also ashamed of being ashamed of the dominant art form of our time; by turning the eye of a literary critic on the gory, seemingly puerile genre of ultraviolent, open-ended shooter games, he finds unexpected riches. Bissell bemoans the uncompromising stupidity of their story lines, wafer-thin characters, and the moronic dialogue, but celebrates the button-pushing, mesmeric qualities and the subtle, profound depths these conceal—the catharses of teamwork and heroism in the zombie-fest *Left for Dead*, the squirmly moral dilemmas of *Mass Effect*, the mood of wistful savagery suffusing the rifles-and-chainsaws-bedecked denizens of *Gears of War*. Bissell excels both at intellectual commentary and evocative reportage on the experience of playing games, while serving up engrossing *mise-en-scène* narratives of the mayhem. If anyone can bridge the aesthetic chasm between readers and gamers, he can. (June 8)

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From [Booklist](#)

Might as well get this out of the way: Bissell is addicted to video games. So much so that he pretty much missed the last presidential election because he was playing a new and highly anticipated game. Here he explores not just his own affection for video games but also the games themselves. What separates good games from bad? Where do video games fit on the sliding scale of art? A video game, Bissell tells us, is a form a self-surrender, but a different form than, say, a movie. We have no influence over what happens in a movie, but we do in a video game. In playing a video game, we are, in a sense, the authors of the stories we're acting out. Bissell explores the key elements of video games: dialogue, character design, voice performance, visual appearance. Do the best games approach something akin to virtual (or perhaps alternate) reality? Not just for gamers, the book should also appeal to readers who have some serious questions about the nature and impact of video games and their increasing popularity. --David Pitt

Review

"Tom Bissell is a Renaissance Man for our out-of-joint time . . . His descriptions of simulated gore and mayhem manage to be clinical, gripping, and hilarious all at once. He transmits to the reader the primitive, visceral excitements that make video games so enticing, even addictive, to their legions of devotees. One can almost understand why an intelligent, cultured man such as Bissell has been driven to dedicate large chunks of his adult life to bouts of gaming."

—*The New Republic*

"Even if *Extra Lives* wasn't the only book to deal with the future of videogames in a serious manner, it would probably still be the best one."

—*Newsweek*

"What should videogame criticism look like? Bissell's book offers plenty of tantalizing possibilities. . . A deeply personal work, as entertaining as the video games it profiles . . . It's also the first book about videogames that non-gamers can actually enjoy."

—*Entertainment Weekly*

"For anyone who has spent a weekend thrilled by the prospect of beating a game, "Extra Lives" will cast the addiction in a new, cerebral light."

—*Washington Post*

"An important, relentlessly perceptive book . . . Bissell proves that it's possible to ruminate on the past, present, and future of video games in a way that is both intellectually rigorous and consistently entertaining."

—*San Francisco Bay Guardian*

"Bissell has written the finest account yet of what it feels like to be a video game player at 'this glorious, frustrating time,' a rare moment when humanity encounters, as he writes, 'a form of storytelling that is, in many ways, completely unprecedented.'" —*New York Times Book Review*

"Fantastic . . . I wish, someday, to play a game that will stay with me as long as this book about games."

—Farhad Manjoo, *Slate*...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Michelle Beltran:

This Extra Lives: Why Video Games Matter are generally reliable for you who want to certainly be a successful person, why. The reason why of this Extra Lives: Why Video Games Matter can be one of the great books you must have is giving you more than just simple studying food but feed a person with information that probably will shock your prior knowledge. This book is definitely handy, you can bring it everywhere and whenever your conditions at e-book and printed versions. Beside that this Extra Lives: Why Video Games Matter forcing you to have an enormous of experience including rich vocabulary, giving you tryout of critical thinking that we all know it useful in your day task. So , let's have it and luxuriate in reading.

Josue Denson:

The guide untitled Extra Lives: Why Video Games Matter is the publication that recommended to you to read. You can see the quality of the reserve content that will be shown to you actually. The language that writer use to explained their way of doing something is easily to understand. The writer was did a lot of research when write the book, to ensure the information that they share to you is absolutely accurate. You also might get the e-book of Extra Lives: Why Video Games Matter from the publisher to make you considerably more enjoy free time.

Robert Eslinger:

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