



On Wednesday

Barbara Kafka's new cookbook is an ode to vegetables. **Food**

Tuesday, January 3, 2006

Section E



Dan Hanf

Hard-core gamer tries to back off

Well, Christmas has come and gone, but since I didn't write a Thanksgiving column, it is time for me to tell all of you loyal readers what I am thankful for.

One of the things I am thankful for is that I recently shook an addiction that I've had for a while. This monkey has been on my back since I was in about sixth or seventh grade, and I just won the battle this past summer. It was tough because some so-called "friends" have tried again and again to pressure me into taking up the habit again, but I have resisted.

I am talking, of course, about video games.

I can recall clearly my gaming days. On Fridays after school, I would meet up with one or two friends and we'd head to the grocery store to pick up a six pack of an energy drink called (I kid you not) BAWLS. This potent beverage is a freakish blue drink that is powered by guarana, a berry from that Amazonian forest that yields caffeine 2.5 times more potent than the caffeine from coffee, tea or soda.

It's popular with hard-core gamers, especially those who hold all-night LAN parties because it somehow allows you to stay awake, with superhuman alertness, for many more hours than ever would be considered healthy or normal.

Drink in hand, we would drive to Blockbuster to pick out two or so games. Then we would drive to one of our houses and play these games nonstop until Saturday night or later.

If I were to make a conservative estimate, I would say that I have spent 987,126,491,911 hours of my life playing video games. I now realize this was unwise, to say the least.

I have to admit, though, it was a lot of fun. Playing video games can be a very social activity if you're with the right people. The real reason I stopped is because I started playing a lot of games by myself. It is a truly depressing thing to be alone in a dark room at 2 a.m. hunched over a keyboard.

However, if you have to be addicted to something, video games are probably the best. The EB Games guy has shown up at my house demanding his "dues" once or twice, and he was easily distracted by doughnuts or a girl for me to make my escape, whereas I have heard that this is a big problem with drug dealers. Plus, my family didn't call for an intervention, although I have a feeling it was coming soon enough.

Quitting wasn't really that hard for me. I know alcoholics use some sort of 12-step program to stop drinking. Perhaps they'd be interested in my one-step program: sitting down one day and realizing that I haven't played video games in a while.

The good thing is that I can still break out the ol' controller whenever I feel like I need a little game time without the fear of falling back into the habit. Games are a great stress reliever. After a hard day of avoiding work at school, shooting Nazis, the Viet Cong or aliens is surprisingly soothing.

After all this, it probably seems like I haven't recovered at all, I know, and maybe I haven't. At the very least, though, I've really cut down, and that's reason enough for me to celebrate.

Dan Hanf, 16, is a junior at Charleston County School of the Arts. E-mail him at Pony_Whipper@bellsouth.net.

GAME ON

INSIDE THE WORLD

OF LAN PARTIES AND

MARATHON

VIDEO GAMING.

BY PAUL BOWERS
INK Contributor

The battle lines are drawn. The soldiers man their stations, eyes wide and palms sweaty. Controllers in hand, they brace themselves for the skirmish. Just before the first bullet is fired, utter silence falls over the room.

This is no war; it's a multiplayer Xbox game. The video game arena has undergone quite a transformation since the days of "Pong" and "Pac Man." Gone are the simple games of reflex and skill. The modern video game is a highly involved, technologically mind-boggling marvel.

To the uninitiated layman, the rapidly expanding world of Xbox may seem childish or confusing, but a genuine subculture has arisen among the masses of thumb-twitching video game fanatics: the gamers. Blending into cliques ranging from jocks to goths to rednecks, they are a thriving component of the high school social structure.

Some gamers are in the closet, while others wear it on their sleeves, but they all share a common passion for onscreen entertainment.

The scene previously described is a common occurrence in living rooms around the world in the 21st century: an Xbox LAN (local area network) party. With only an Ethernet router and a few LAN cables (basic equipment for any serious computer user or gamer), Xbox owners can link up to four systems together for a 16-player virtual slugfest.

Graham Small, a 17-year-old

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRAD NETTLES/STAFF

Graham Small, a Stratford High School senior, hopes to parlay his video game obsession into a career as a game programmer. Here, he plays "Call of Duty 2" on his Xbox 360 during the holiday break from school last week.

XBOX 360

Advanced game system becomes an obsession

BY ZACH LAMB
INK Contributor

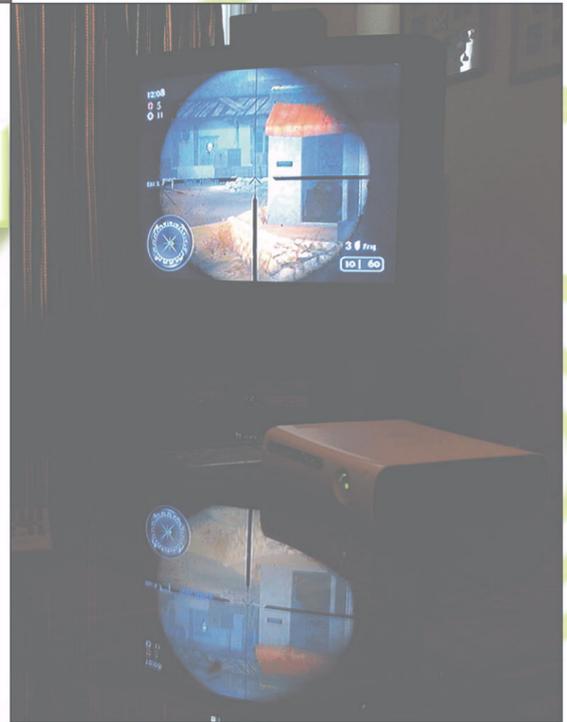
Xbox 360 is the most powerful and advanced gaming system known to man, so far. Its obsessive control over humanity began in early November, when Microsoft announced it would release the much-anticipated 360 in the United States on Thanksgiving weekend.

As soon as the boxes hit the shelves, they were gone, snatched up by players young and old who lined up outside stores hours before the game box went on sale. In a feat of commerce that illustrates America's undying love of video gaming, many of the systems were resold on eBay and other auction Web sites for double, triple and even quadruple the original price.

What is this super obsession about, exactly? Harley Mills, who works at GameStop in the Target shopping center on Rivers Avenue, shed some light on this question.

"People really want the best system that is out there," he said. "It has the best

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A view of "Call of Duty 2" reflects onto the table in front of Graham Small as he battles it out in a multiplayer version of the game on Xbox 360 in his darkened living room.

What's ahead on Tuesdays



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HELPING PAWS: Therapy dogs travel to hospitals and nursing homes to provide therapy.



01.17
Ed. 101

TV TIME: What should you let your child watch and how much?



01.24
Get Out!

BULL'S ISLAND: Get a closer look at a Lowcountry treasure.



1.31
ink

MOTHER/DAUGHTER BONDING: Is anyone as close as the Gilmore Girls?

