

Halloween Themed YA Videogames

By: Tara Rumsey

While there has been a great deal of research focusing on the negative aspects of video game play on adolescent development, the positive aspects of gaming seem to be yet understudied. There are many possible benefits of video gameplay for teens, however. Improved hand-eye coordination, improved spatial perception, and cooperation (when gaming is undertaken as part of a team or group) are all possible outcomes from video gameplay.

Olson et al. (as cited in Adachi & Willoughby, 2012, p. 159) discovered that “adolescent boys play video games to express their fantasies of glory and power, and because they are attracted to qualities of the main characters, such as persistence and strength.” Empowering youth with strong role models, even if they are fictional characters, is a step in the right direction.

In terms of socialization, Olson et al. (as cited in Adachi & Willoughby, 2012, p. 159) also observed that “boys believed that video games are...a vehicle to cooperate and network with people.” Providing multi-player games for use in the library and incorporating them into programming events

could help facilitate sharing, cooperation, and teamwork among youth.

Gaming, while certainly beneficial for social reasons, can facilitate learning and skill development. Adachi & Willoughby (2012) assert that “video games involve learning new skills and solutions to problems, retaining those skills and solutions, and then applying them to future problems or challenges” (p. 156). While youth tend to see gaming as entertainment, they can learn coping mechanisms and strategies that will help them with real-life problem solving.

Beyond intellectual strategizing and problem-solving, gaming can also help with physical or sensory processing such as hand-eye coordination. Donohue, Woldorff, and Mitroff (2010) have found that “people with extensive experience playing video games display benefits that extend beyond the visual modality to also impact multisensory processing” (p. 1120). In this way, gaming can not only help with intangible development such as socialization and cooperation, but also tangible development of physical faculties.

The subject matter of certain video games can be a point of contention. Much of the research focused on the negative outcomes of gaming point to violent games and their influence on the behaviour of adolescents. As such, promoting gaming in libraries, especially those that fit into the horror genre or Halloween-related theme, can be a tricky undertaking. However, Neiburger & Gullett (2007) highlight several benefits of gaming in libraries, not the least of which is expanding the library's appeal to a wider audience of youth. They point out that "one of the most positive benefits of...gaming events [is]...the relationship that staff [can] build with an audience that previously could not have cared less about the library" (p. 38). The important thing is to screen possible video game selections before they are introduced into the library collection or used for programming events to ensure that they are appropriate for in-library use. Some library policies require that games in the collection have a "Teen" rating or lower ("E" for everyone, for example).

Below are some ideas for Halloween-related games that can be used in the library as part of Halloween programming and events, or simply highlighted in a display for the month of October. The games are available on one or more of three popular gaming

consoles: Nintendo Wii¹, Sony Playstation 3, and Microsoft Xbox 360.

Fragile dreams: Farewell ruins of the moon

This role-playing video game is set in a post-apocalyptic world where players assume the role of a young boy named Seto who seems to be the only survivor of an unknown disaster that stuck Earth. Seto must navigate the remains of Earth in search of other survivors, fighting off ghosts and demons along the way. Players will be entranced by the many horror settings such as a run-down hospital and a dilapidated subway station. With its desolate and gloomy setting, *Fragile dreams* is the perfect game for Halloween.

Rating: T for Teen, for youth 13 and over

Console: Nintendo Wii

Animal crossing: City folk

Certainly a change of pace from most Halloween-themed video games, this game is fun for teens but acceptable for use by younger kids too. Though not specifically a Halloween title, *Animal crossing* incorporates the holiday into game-play on October 31st. In-game neighbours dress in costumes and trick-or-treat around the village causing mischief. Players search for

¹ I chose Nintendo Wii over the newer Wii U as the game selection and uptake for the console is limited at the time of writing.

Jack, the Czar of Halloween, and upon finding him they are rewarded with furniture that is not available at any other time of the year. This game is a perfect one to play on Halloween!

Rating: E for Everyone

Console: Nintendo Wii

Batman: Arkham Asylum

In this fun-filled game, players square off against traditional Batman villains such as The Joker, Harley Quinn, and Victor Zsasz. The premise is that the Joker has trapped Batman in the famous Arkham Asylum with several of his incarcerated enemies. Players take on the role of Batman who must fight his way through the enemies within the asylum and eventually defeat the Joker. The focus of play is on hand-to-hand combat and exploration.

Rating: T for Teen, for youth 13 and over

Consoles: Sony Playstation 3 and Microsoft Xbox 360

Ghostbusters: the video game

Set two years after the events of the *Ghostbusters II* movie, this video game picks up from the movie franchise but incorporates a whole new storyline. Players can access eight different Proton Pack weapons to fight a ghost and use a trap to capture it. Gadgets from the movies and

cartoon such as a Ghost Light and PKE Meter are also incorporated into play. This game is a must-try for fans of the franchise!

Rating: T for teen, for youth 13 and over

Consoles: Nintendo Wii, Sony Playstation 3, and Microsoft Xbox 360

Until Dawn

Set to be released some time in 2013, *Until Dawn* has been eagerly anticipated by the online gaming community. The game starts with the main player and seven other teenagers standing on a mountain on the anniversary of a friend's mysterious death. There is no power and no phone reception. The challenge is to keep yourself and your friends alive during a scary night in a cabin in the woods. The experience is made interactive with the use of the Playstation Move controller. Keep an eye out for this highly-anticipated game next Halloween!

Rating: To be determined, but thought to be T for Teen according to internet buzz

Console: Sony Playstation 3

References

Adachi, P. & Willoughby, T. (2012). Do video games promote positive youth development. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 28*(2), 155-165. doi: 10.1177/0743558412464522

Amazon.com (n.d.). *Batman Arkham Asylum product description*. Retrieved from http://www.amazon.com/Batman-Arkham-Asylum-Xbox-360/dp/B001E8VB3C/ref=cm_lmf_tit_1

Donohue, S., Woldorff, M., & Mitroff, S. (2010). Video game players show more precise multisensory temporal processing abilities. *Attention, Perception, & Psychophysics*, 72(4), 1120-1129. doi:10.3758/APP.72.4.1120

IGN Entertainment. (n.d. a). *Ghostbusters: The video game review*. Retrieved from <http://ca.ign.com/games/ghostbusters-14218865/xbox-360-14218846>

IGN Entertainment. (n.d. b). *Until dawn preview*. Retrieved from

<http://ca.ign.com/games/until-dawn/ps3-139128>

Knezevic, K. (2011, October 31). *Top ten: Halloween video games*. Retrieved from <http://www.nintendojo.com/features/columns/top-ten/top-ten-Halloween-video-games>

Neiburger, E. & Gullett, M. (2007). Out of the basement: The social side of gaming. *Young Adult Library Services*, 5(2), 34-38. Retrieved from www.ebscohost.com

Petit, C. (2010, April 2). *Fragile dreams: Farewell ruins of the moon review*. Retrieved from <http://www.gamespot.com/fragile-dreams-farewell-ruins-of-the-moon/reviews/fragile-dreams-farewell-ruins-of-the-moon-review-6254616/>