

I <3 Gears of War

**Podcast: Breaking
the Game**

**Unconditional
Gaming Love**



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February; the so-called month of Love, is upon us and I'm still trying to figure out what the big deal is about it. As I look back over the years and the things I love; they just didn't happen in February. I didn't buy the first car I loved in February. I didn't get married in February (then again I didn't get divorced in February either). What I do know about February is that there is a high profile holiday called Valentine's Day dedicated to showing your love with gifts. Even as children, we give Valentines to all of our friends at school. Then, when we get older, we're supposed to show extra love and consideration to our "partner," and people in general. Why does there have to be a holiday to get us to behave lovingly? How hard is it to turn to your loved ones daily and say "I appreciate you," or "I love you." How many battles happen because a man doesn't do the 'right thing' on Valentine's Day? And what about single people, or those too new to an area to have a Valentine? It seems to me that this 'Love' holiday seats many people up to feel hurt, disappointed, or lonely. Where is the Love in *that??*

That's why I declare every day "Love Day." Who needs some once-a-year, arrow shooting, cherub to target our hearts for us to appreciate one another? Why not do something special for them on February 29th, or even April 4th—it's a great day for people to celebrate love. As for me, my affections are free to all my loved ones each day of the year; I think that's what Love is about—giving it away daily. Have you shown your love today?

Speaking of love, this issue the Skittle staff brings you a veritable Celebration of Love, with articles covering our love of videogames, consoles, and even our communities. I'd also like to take this opportunity to spread even more of the Love to you, our readers, because it's your support and encouragement that makes creating The Blue Skittle such a joy.

Love,

Ooopy



GEARS LOVE

Just over a year ago I fell in love. It wasn't the first time, nor will it be the last. Around that time I was daydreaming, baking cookies, dressing a bit sexier, and doodling. I soon found I was re-arranging my life to spend more time with this new love. I contemplated a tattoo, but I know those always end badly. Somehow a tattoo becomes the kiss of death to any relationship. This time last year I fell in love with the sexiest game I have ever played. Yes, I am talking about a videogame. Not any videogame, but one that actually seduced me with its graphics and game play.


I had many firsts with this game. It was the first game that I actually wanted to play through all three difficulties. I didn't feel pressured to, nor did it have to make promises it would never keep in order to make me stick around. Yes it boosted my ego with compliments; showering me with achievements and sweet words that made me feel so special. It was also the first time that I was convinced to bring someone else into the relationship. I knew I could get further with the game if I had help. Since I preferred to spend the late nights with my new love it wasn't easy to find a willing participant at first; but when I did it was good...*real* good.

But it didn't stop there. It wasn't all about looks and hard fast seduction—it was about excitement too. Each time I had an encounter with the Berserker I was on my feet fighting furiously.

I knew I loved this game, but soon I was in full blown lust. The action was non-stop. As soon as one of us went down, the other one was right there to coax them back up. There were no awkward pauses or silences between sequences; it was just one action packed moment after another. I had never felt more alive; my heart pumped, my breath quickened, and I felt warm and tingly all over. Every time I ran up to a wall, car, tree, gravestone, or any other solid object, and slammed my back into it, I felt a rush like never before. Just the whooshing sound and the solid 'boom!' as I slammed into hard objects was enough to get my adrenaline going.

But it didn't stop there. It wasn't all about looks and hard fast seduction—it was about excitement too. Each time I had an encounter with the Berserker I was on my feet fighting furiously. I screamed each time she rushed me and giggled nervously when she was near. Her sly movements around the screen and then sudden rush toward me made me feel like I was holding onto the edge of a cliff and kept losing my foothold. When the moment of her defeat finally came, and she screamed her last scream, I didn't think my heart would ever stop pumping so furiously. But this love affair isn't all about the action. Sometimes it begs to be played longer rather than harder

Safe word; that's what I'm reminded of when the red gear appears informing me I am near death. I feel like the game is telling me to just "slow down, I am uncomfortable with this part," so I know that I need to just back up a little, and think about what I am doing before I rush right back into battle. Sometimes I have to try a new technique or weapon. I have that choice. No need to rush in and have it be over with in two seconds, now with this 'safe word' I can be reminded that sometimes it is better to take things a little slower.



And then there is the chainsaw—there is no way anyone can hold such a massive piece of equipment and not scream as they hear and feel it slashing through an unsuspecting victim. The vibrating controller and splatters of blood across the screen bring out the animal instinct in a person and leaves them wanting more.

That is what happened. I was left wanting more. I played through all three difficulty levels; from casual to insane, and I wanted more. I tried going online and playing battles there but it just wasn't my scene. I didn't like the whole group action and I missed the story line. I missed meeting Baird and Cole and all the time we talked about that one guy that was so unlucky to sit up right when the bullet was heading toward his head. I miss the Berserker and the scary exploding wretchers that climbed along the walls. I miss exploring the ruins and visiting friends. I miss the moonlight walks, searching for secret areas to get away from it all. I miss driving at night with a gentle breeze and dodging kryl that were swooping down to devour our flesh. I miss you *Gears of War*, but I am so happy that we met; life will never be the same after the time we spent together.



An Xbox 360 Elite is hooked up to a 50" LCD screen. On top of the screen sits a Master Chief action figure next to one of the last unopened cans of Mountain Dew Game Fuel. *Rock Band* idles in the background, playing a demo of Foo Fighter's "Learn to Fly" as an attract loop over a Bowers & Wilkins 5.1 digital surround sound system. It's followed by a random sampling of a half dozen other master tracks that Harmonix included in the first installment of its new franchise. And while the guitar/drum/microphone combo set may not quite make it to the top of everyone's must-have list with a final price tag pushing \$180, more than a million people (including myself) have picked it up so far, and millions more have made it over to those homes and at least tried it out.

GAMING LOVE

My story may not be all that different from yours. I work full time, in a sort of customer service role for a very public organization. I deal with an unfathomable number of stupid people every day, most of whom are weekly repeat offenders. After a hectic workday, I find that there are few things that compare to the release which regularly comes from spending some quality time unwinding with my trusty console. Consider that, even in its most basic and offline form, this 4kg amalgamation of plastic and circuits can replace the mundane routine of my life by placing me into an interactive environment where I can pretend to have musical talent, save the galaxy from alien civilizations, take a first-person look into armed conflicts that happened decades before I was born, drive faster than is safe in vehicles I'll never be able to afford, coordinate my favorite team to glorious victory against a savage AI opponent, or just explore an environment that I've never seen before. I'm one of those esoteric gamers that will play anything put in the 360's DVD drive, even if it's really complete crap. And you know what? I love it.

All the same, I think there's a big difference between playing something and continuing to play something. Personally, I believe that games that ship without some form of online play are only "half-games" and won't be able to keep my attention past a single play through. When it was first released, *Bioshock* from 2K Games received a wide spectrum of praise from many different review sites. Now don't get me wrong on this one, *Bioshock* was a pretty good game. Truthfully, its largest fault was that there wasn't any form of multiplayer in it. And who among those of us that have played it would argue that some kind of arena-based all out plasmid battle isn't precisely what that game could use to make it even better? Conversely, *Rock Band* is a great

example of what I call a 'complete game'-- even though it's a generation-one product and is far from a perfect implementation. Its combination of a great offline solo experience is exponentially enhanced by its unique ability to include group multiplayer sessions, both in the comfort of your living room and with friends or across the planet. In this way, these highly-social games are appealing to an expanding audience, which helps even more people to see why we love gaming for themselves.

One of the most compelling reasons to get and keep playing games on a 360 comes from Xbox Live (XBL). It's something that can't be explained, but once you experience it in the right environment, it can (and likely will) hook you and change the way you approach gaming for years to come. Naturally, if you venture into the realm of online gaming, you will invariably find prepubescent children playing mature-rated titles, with voices either too whiny or irregularly pitched, which can make you hate gaming in general. I've found the best way to counter that is to seek out a group of like-minded gamers with whom I share some fundamental principles. What kind of analysis should one make that could assist in making a good choice for compatible online friends?

I learned early on after I started picking up a controller that I'm really not all that competitive. Sure I believe in supporting the team and I definitely enjoy winning, but at the same time I can also have fun even when I lose, as long as I'm spending that time with people I love to be around. Ever since I created my XBL account back in 2004, I've been plastered with incessant invites to 'clans' or other similarly-titled organizations that were allegedly the most 'hardcore' and 'elite' out there. I never felt any

compelling reason to join those though, and ultimately, the list of places I've affiliated myself with is kept to a minimum.

For more than two years now, I've hung my hat at the online community that goes by the handle of Frags Unlimited Five www.fu5.org. And while its member base has changed quite a bit in that time frame, the basic ideology remains squared with my personal goal in gaming – to have fun. I can't emphasize enough the need I have as a gamer to find a sense of contributing to something greater than random people scattered over the entire globe. Our group is definitely growing closer together. And as we continue to adjust and understand each other better, we realize that we're actually closer to a giant dysfunctional adopted family than we often care to admit. And you know what? We wouldn't have it any other way!

You get to know people on levels so much deeper than simply what they look like or small talk about what they do for a living or the names of their kids. The dynamic is something incredible to be a part of. You find the cocky self-assured ones gaming right alongside the paternal and respectful, and the obnoxious younger hotshots on the same squad as the quiet and calculating. All of the individual personalities meld and intertwine around our basic theme. We get to learn more about our gaming family through our website where we have regular and open discussions in our forums about anything the members care to contribute. We care for each other, we meet needs that come up, we

notice when somebody isn't online, and we call each other and do things offline as well as on Xbox Live. In that sense, the community structure we've got set up there goes way beyond gaming, and that type of closeness is something that can be difficult to find in places that are only focused on how many wins they can put up. Hey, gaming is supposed to be a recreational pastime, not some work supplement, right?

I'm very glad I found a gaming haven at FU5. I also found dozens of brothers and sisters I never knew I had; people I know not only by their online handles but also on a first-name basis. Of course, there are so many other amazing groups of gamers out there that the current limitation of 100 friends on Xbox Live can make choosing which ones you keep in contact with a very difficult choice. It's because of the games that I get to play in that environment, and I get to enjoy them and the people that I compete against. It is for all of these reasons that I absolutely and unconditionally love gaming!

Xbox 360, WILL YOU BE MINE



Love can be a difficult thing. It's hard to describe, hard to rationalize, and even harder to understand. We all know it's there, however. We have love for one another as well as love for television programs, movies, and music. We can love a good book or a song that moves us just the right way. We, as gamers, can also fall in love with a title or even a console.

I am twenty-four years old and I have been playing videogames since I was old enough to put my paws on a joystick.

As I grew up I developed an interest in creating art. My drawing skills were noticed by friends, family, and teachers, so creativity became the very core of my being. Every song, movie, book, and piece of art I digested was not only something that I enjoyed, I also connected with it on a deep, intimate level. I loved the subtle elements that made up all quality entertainment and applied them to my own creativity; as videogames grew up alongside me, so did the creativity.

I quickly began to fall in love with videogames. Graphics and sound began to improve, stories deepened, and I began to realize that games were becoming my favorite entertainment. They provided pure fun in both the short and long terms, memorable soundtracks, some fantastic art design, and compelling stories. Every few years the bar was raised a little higher and I saw the videogame industry become a juggernaut on par with the film industry.

Like most gamers I have a profound love for Nintendo. Nintendo was the company that pulled the games industry from the jaws of death in America and became a household name. I loved Nintendo and still do, but there were many other game consoles that came to be as the years rolled on. I was able to play pretty much all of them. Each had their own unique successes and failures and some of them were graced by memorable titles that are still dear to me. Nintendo, however, stood on top consistently with each generation of hardware. One day, though, software mammoth Microsoft revealed that they, too, would enter the videogame race. Xbox was born.

The launch title that captured the hearts of so many gamers was *Halo*. I, however, was not immediately

swayed. Nintendo had my heart and even Sony's Playstation (and PS2) had my affection. Both companies were providing awesome games with a quality that was steadily increasing. I kept hearing good things about Xbox over time, like it's ground-breaking online gaming service and top notch graphics, but the titles available didn't really excite me. Most were IPs that I had never heard of or just looked like desperate attempts to copy the competition.

Eventually Xbox made a name for itself and even I, the proud Nintendo fanboy, admitted that Xbox was looking better every day. I finally caved in and bought one. I remember the game that pushed me over the edge—Namco's *Breakdown*. I saw it on display at my local Game Stop and was floored by the presentation. It was an interactive first person film and I had to play it.

I then began to buy other recommended titles. It became an exciting journey for me. Xbox was a brand new console with all new licenses and a very unique community. The Xbox Live service made gaming less of a localized interest and more of a worldwide social experience, yet I felt a little dirty. I felt that I was cheating on my beloved consoles.

Time passed and Nintendo came out with Wii, which is unbelievable. It's revolutionary interface excited me, and the promise of downloadable classics grabbed my heart. The successor to the Xbox was out there too and, like before, I resisted. Nintendo had really established itself as a creator of exotic gaming experiences. The DS seemed like it would never gain mainstream popularity and Wii seemed like it was going down the same alley. The

Xbox 360, on the other hand, was lauded as the ultimate games console. It's graphics were amazing, but graphics never made a game worthwhile for me.

But, just like last time, I bit the bullet and jumped in.

Today I can comfortably say that I love the Xbox 360; it's easily my console of choice. This love note comes shortly after I was struck with the dreaded red-ring of death. The system failure we, as Xbox 360 owners, all fear. Without my system, awaiting its repair, I began to realize that I was appreciating it even more in its absence. It's a gaming console that provides me with so many benefits. There are some fantastic retail titles like *Bioshock* and *Mass Effect* that have stories that had my jaw on the floor. *Halo 3* and *Gears of War* had multiplayer that was quick, fun, and frenetic. I could kick back with *Viva Piñata* or even rock out with *Guitar Hero 3* and *Rock Band*. This all doesn't even cover the fact that Xbox Live Arcade has expanded to include some amazing independent projects and fun little time-wasters like *Puzzle Quest* and *Space Giraffe* (a personal favorite). The demo system blows me away. Being able to play trial versions of nearly every game that exists on the console without leaving my couch is amazing. You add TV and movie downloads on top of that, and my professed love should be of no surprise to even the hardest sceptic.

There is one thing, on top of all of this, that is my greatest reason for making Xbox 360 my valentine. Xbox Live on the 360, like its younger incarnation, has the greatest gaming community out there. Period. The unified online service that allows everyone to chat, message, and invite across every single game is unrivalled. The ability to display your gaming history and achievements for all to see is also unmatched. It is the culmination of these services that really create a unique family. Through the service I can connect with people all over the world who are of similar ages, and have similar interests and gaming habits. As a result I have been able to not only meet

some fantastic friends, but also to play some really great matches with really great people in some really great games.

Every relationship has its rocky parts, however. When Xbox 360's began dying all across the world, people worried. It became fodder for critics and people got upset. It's understandable. If you pay several hundred dollars for a game console that is of high quality in many ways, the idea that so many could be defective is upsetting. I, like so many others, felt I would never be attacked by this rampant problem.

I was wrong. When I went online to tell my friends my woes, one said something that was the inspiration for this article. She told me that she never intended to buy an Xbox 360 because the failure rate was so high. Honestly, if Microsoft hadn't done the right thing and extended the warranty period for this very problem I might have a different opinion, but I responded to her saying, "I understand what you mean, but the system provides me with games both old and new, TV and movie downloads, computer connectivity, great friends and fantastic family. That's no advertising slogan. Those are my words, a life-long Nintendo supporter. The system failures are inexcusable, but even being without it for a few weeks while it gets repaired, it's still worth it." So, on this Valentine's Day, I proclaim my love to the Xbox 360. You may not be perfect, you may get stressed during the holidays, and you may have the occasional total breakdown, but on your good days you are so good to me. You're worth it. After all, didn't we pledge to be together "in sickness and in health"?



How *Microsoft* Sold Me a PlayStation 3

Two failed consoles, nearly three months of waiting, and a gamer determined to engage his hobby—what happens when a company loses the trust of its customers and forces them to seek consolation elsewhere.

Microsoft[®]

It was understandable at first. After all, I managed to find a Premium Xbox 360 just a few months after its launch when it was still nearly impossible to buy at retail price. But there it was, sitting unassumingly on a shelf at Target. I still recall the intoxicating blend of consumer euphoria and impulse-buyer's guilt I felt when the salesman swiped my credit card. I was joining the few, the proud, the Xbox 360 gamers. I had picked my side.

When my 360 failed after a few months of use, I took it in stride, attributing the incident to the same manufacturing glitch and possible overheating issues others were experiencing with the console. I've had a few high-dollar, high-tech devices tank on me over the years—it's an inevitable consequence of being an early adopter. I was reasonably unaffected, save for the disappointment of a few weeks with no gaming. At least the console was still under its original 90-day warranty.

All things considered, my repair went as planned. I received a shipping box in the mail, sent it back with the console and about three weeks later, I got an Xbox 360 in the mail. It came with a note, informing me that the console Microsoft returned to me was indeed a replacement console, complete with a different serial number. Though slightly miffed that the manufacture date was prior to that of the console I sent for repairs, and a bit concerned after hearing nightmare tales of gamers with two, three, four and five console failures, I once again took it in stride under the assumption that my replacement console was fixed and operational. And it was—for a while. Then it, too, died in early November of 2007. Three red rings.

This repair did not go smoothly. A total of 85 days passed before I received a replacement console.

More than a month after I sent my console back for service, Microsoft informed me that my replacement console wasn't eligible for in-warranty repair because I wasn't the retail purchaser (as I mentioned, my original Xbox proved defective and was replaced at Microsoft's discretion). I've

had to prove I did buy the first faulty Xbox with an eight-page fax including my original purchase receipt, Microsoft's own letter informing me the console they shipped back after the first repair was a replacement, and a copy of the additional two-year (\$60) warranty (valid through July 2008) that I purchased from Microsoft specifically for the replacement console. Nearly four weeks after I faxed my proof, Microsoft acknowledged that I was indeed the owner of my console and removed the red flag keeping my console from repair. But not before I was stood up for more follow-up calls than I can remember. While I continued to wait, I've discovered my Microsoft Wireless Racing wheel has been recalled for its propensity to cause fires. I was forced to cancel my Xbox Live subscription after the first two months of waiting to avoid auto-renewing while I had no Xbox on which to enjoy the service. As a result, I've lost any faith I'd ever had in Microsoft to manufacture reliable products, repair broken ones, or even provide competent customer service.

One evening while on hold with the folks at Xbox Customer Service, I became aware of myself staring blankly at the stacks of now useless Xbox 360 games I'd amassed over the past year-and-a-half. *The Orange Box*, *Halo 3*—games I had only recently purchased and played collectively for no more than an hour, sat untouched. I reminisced about the unprecedented Charlotte Bobcats season I started in *NBA 2K8*, put on hold indefinitely courtesy of a second failed console. I felt my shoulders drop helplessly as my eyes wandered to the two plastic guitars leaned precariously against nearby shelves. I thought of the money I once spent so willingly on each of these games, and how now each translucent green case caused pangs of regret. I wondered how much longer and how many more times I would find myself in the same spot, disappointed, with a broken console keeping me from returning to the hobby I enjoy so much and the games I invest in so heavily. Eventually, the customer service representative informed me, yet again, that I'd have to wait until the service center provided an update to customer service on the status of my repair, and only then would they be able to gauge when I might possibly have my console returned to me. Mine was another call in vain.

There was no red-faced rage, only the overwhelming sense of dismay, defeat and powerlessness that comes from accepting an unwanted reality. Even if I received my console back, I would still feel the same undeniable lack of trust for Microsoft. I would forever wonder, with each gaming session or Xbox 360-related purchase—the expression of my loyalty to a brand—if I would be rewarded as I had thus far, with hardware failures and inept service. Knowing full well I would never be able to change Microsoft, I decided it was time for me to make a change.

So I bought a PlayStation 3 (PS3). It works. I trust it to continue doing so.

Already I've picked up multi-platform titles for the PS3 I would have otherwise purchased on the competing console, and I'll continue to do the same until I have reason to stop. *Fifa 2008*, *Unreal Tournament III* and *Rockband* earned my post-holiday dollars. *Burnout Paradise*, *Call of Duty 4* and *Devil May Cry 4* are next on my list. Then there are the top-tier exclusives I purchased shortly after buying the console, *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* and *Ratchet* and *Clank: Future Tools of Destruction*, either of which would have justified my PS3 purchase in and of themselves. I'm back to gaming, and I couldn't be happier.

The simple fact is that I want to play the games I buy and use the devices I pay for, and the only platform currently offering me a high-quality, high-resolution, reliable and trustworthy means to do that is the PlayStation 3.

I'm not naïve or arrogant enough to believe that my defection will amount to anything more than a new Sony customer. After all, Microsoft already has plenty of my money, a fact reinforced by the software I presently use to type this article. But the one small thing I can do is choose how and where I spend my gaming money, and no longer will it go to Microsoft. Even if I were to sell all the Xbox 360 hardware, games and accessories I own, I'd still be creating or abetting Microsoft customers who would likely continue to buy games and accessories from Microsoft. I'd also be forced to endure the significant disparity between what I paid and the paltry

sum I'd receive from those sales. I'd much rather play the games I've paid for, and simply stop the flow of my gaming money to Microsoft from here on out. And I will. I'm happy to have some form of consolation.

I've heard it said that the most important interaction in customer service is the last one. That's the experience that often becomes most of what a customer remembers and uses to form a general impression of a company or product. Mine with Microsoft did nothing to reverse the disdain that grew over the quarter of a year I waited for resolution. Receiving a credit for one month of Xbox Live Gold, which I suppose Microsoft felt was sufficient compensation for the 75 days of the service I paid for while waiting, and a replacement console that's red-ringed twice while powering down but still manages turns on has been my final interaction. My lasting impression manifests each time I power on the console, hoping to avoid its inevitable demise while I finish playing through the handful of games I purchased months ago. With any luck, I'll plow through these lingering titles before the next failure, and my money spent won't feel like an utter and complete waste.

Meanwhile, on the other side of my entertainment center, I've found an absolutely tremendous console with which to spend my gaming time and, consequently, my gaming dollars. In this sense, I am immensely grateful there is competition between console manufacturers. In the absence of legitimate competition, I'd be forced to either continue dealing with Microsoft's defective consoles in order to continue engaging my hobby, or abandon videogames altogether. Competition, however, gives me alternatives—excellent alternatives.

Instead of establishing a prideful tolerance for suffering the constant frustration and disappointment of owning only an Xbox 360, I've instead chosen to embrace the competition and enjoy everything this remarkable generation of gaming has to offer. I've chosen my sides.

Tell me a bit about yourself and your podcast

My name is Andrew Carr a.k.a. DarkLordofChaos. I am a married and a father of twin boys. We live in Long Beach; CA. My wife, bless her, is my biggest fan & supporter. I love gaming (of course!) and hope to instill that same love of gaming in my boys. The idea of podcasting and starting my is the brainchild of me and my mentor; Coola, from xbox365.com. After two years of working with him, he encouraged me to start my own community site and podcast. We decided to focus on the actual Design of any given game & how it affects the playability and community. We have been getting great advice from other podcasters and community members, which is why I love doing what I do. My long time friend and co-host Daniel Burch a.k.a CrazyEcho decided a month after starting our site, to jump feet first into podcasting. Daniel is a single guy living the high life in Redmond, WA. He is my eye on ground zero, and anytime there is an event in WA, he is there. We also have been lucky enough to get theblueskittle's very own kiki kat to join us as a third host and community expert. You can catch us in Halo 3 on Xbox Live (XBL) every weekend.

How do you put each show together?

Since Daniel, Kiki and I are pretty far apart, we turned to Xbox Live for meetings & brainstorming. It usually happens during the furious battles of *Halo 3*. We also trade ideas back and forth during the week via E-mail and instant messaging. After that, it's just a Skype call away & we try to use different intro music every episode. Editing it all together can be tricky and seeing as how I don't own a Mac; thus no Garage Band, I use premiere to bring it all together. Basically since we are still so new at the podcasting gig we are just feeling our way through this & take all criticism to heart. We love getting feedback from the community for ways to make the podcast better.



Breaking The Game

What highlights have you had since the show started?

Since the show has been started, We've actually gotten the chance to be part of some pretty cool events, one of which was the Para Los Ninos even on Skid Row in L.A. Not only were they extremely greatfull for us participating, I got to meet some great people from the community and Even have dinner with Aaron Greenburg from Microsoft. As great as that event was though, the biggest highlight for me is having a different member of the community join us for the shows. So far we've had Coola; from xbox365.com, Parris; from Unclegamer.com, and recently Kiki from theblueskittle.com!

Any future plans for the show?

We are going to try to keep up the guest hosts as I feel that it brings a really cool vibe to the show and it allows all gamers to get to know all of these other really cool sites. We also have some a pretty cool three part series we are getting ready to run that I feel is pretty cool and special. I'm really looking forward to seeing how the community reacts to it, but you'll have to watch the site to find out what it is! We are also trying really hard to get listed on the Zune Marketplace, and aside from that, we are looking at doing some more in depth reviews and some charity events. It's all about giving back!

What are some of your favorite podcasts?

Well, on my Zune, you will find Achievementjunkie, UncleGamer, Major Nelson and the Gamerscoreblog. I love the Zune Marketplace and hope to find some hidden Gems in there to check out. Podcasts in general really excite me. I love the fact that anyone can get out there and say their piece; not having to worry about what other people may think about them. I really love the "indy" podcasts because they are there for the love of their topic; nothing more.

gamertag:

Bloody Baroness

THE OTHER ME: PROFILE OF A GAMER

It's difficult to group the average gamer into a common stereotype, since they are so diverse. Today's gamer may be the mother of five standing in line in front of you at the grocery store or the swimmer up at six a.m. each morning for practice. For some people, gaming takes on a life of its own, separate from any day-to-day activities people find themselves involved with, while others have made a career out of gaming. But one thing gamers have in common, besides their love of games, is that they have a wide variety of interests and hobbies. Videogames aren't what made them who they are; they are just an important part of their already full lives.

Welcome to "The Other Me." Each month we will take a look at some of the more interesting hobbies and activities people find themselves doing when they aren't gaming. This would include things such as flying airplanes, playing paintball, volunteer work, collecting coins or even amassing the largest matchbook collection ever. So if you have a hobby or interest you want to share, send an email to kiki@theblueskittle.com and tell me all about it.

THE OTHER ME: MONTHLY FEATURE



I chose this month's profile because the gamer is a great friend of mine. I first met Bloody Baroness (formerly known as Queen Femme Fatale) on the Xbox.com forums. I had noticed how calm and even-tempered she was in a thread where

she was being attacked by another poster and quickly sent her a private message thanking her for her patience and complimenting her on how well she handled the other posters' comments. I soon learned that it was in her nature to

keep a calm head and express her self articulately and recommended her as a moderator on the Xbox.com forums. Not long after I was pleased to hear that she had been offered a moderator position. It was during one of our many MSN conversations (where we liked to chat in between slamming down the ban hammer in the Xbox.com forums) that I learned about one of her many hobbies... making AMV's.

Words or phrases used only when creating AMV

Effects, Transitions, Overlay,

"SAVE, SAVE, SAVE,"

and "Sync, you bastard!"

Tell me about AMV, what it is and why you do it.

During the time of the PS1/2 I found that I had a love of AMV's; these musical wonders amused me. For those who don't know AMV's (Anime Music Videos) are clips from video games or anime that are done in time to a song, the results are to have the clips express the song in a form of music video performance. I wanted to learn how they were done; so with my trusty computer, a few meager clips I found online, some nasty confusing programs that made no sense, and a freshly broken heart (as the result of a man); I decided to seek revenge through song and video games in a way AMV's only could, and set to work.

It was crude, and obviously amateur, but I managed to put together my first one. Getting great feedback from friends and family on the outcome only drove my perfectionist desire to do better. I dove onto the net, wanting a better program to work with and a way to rip the videos right off the games for a better quality. A year passes and information flew through my head, this is where I realized....my computer sucked... So in order to stop it from crashing with over loaded RAM, I went Dr. Frank'n'Furter on it and turned my boy into a man. Only to later find out it still couldn't cut it after I upgraded my programming even more in order to create longer and more complex videos. So...now; diving myself into debt, I customer built myself BigRed—my beloved gaming/video creating laptop of love.

This is far from where the story ends, but all good writers know to leave their viewers wanting more.... Oh look... more questions...

Any coordinating accessories when creating AMV

Nope...but BigRed is pimped out with LED's; I make sure to match the color it is...guess what color it is? Come on...guess...

Best time of day to work with AMV

Roughly between the hours of 3pm and 5am...it really depends on when I hear the song that strikes the chord. I hear a song that causes me to zone out with clips in my head, and then get to creating.

What has been your most exciting AMV moment?

Creating my first, good video. After finding out the wonders of Adobe Premier Pro, I finally saw what I could do, and put together my best work. It's to the song "Hello" by Evanescence and done to Sailor Moon clips. It can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSshz3vIQ3U> . That site hasn't been updated in a while as I'm working on some new stuff. ;)

Gaming preferences

Xbox 360 by far...though if you asked me that question two years ago, PS2. Thankfully the better console got the RPG's.

Where/how does gaming and creating AMV's overlap/interact?

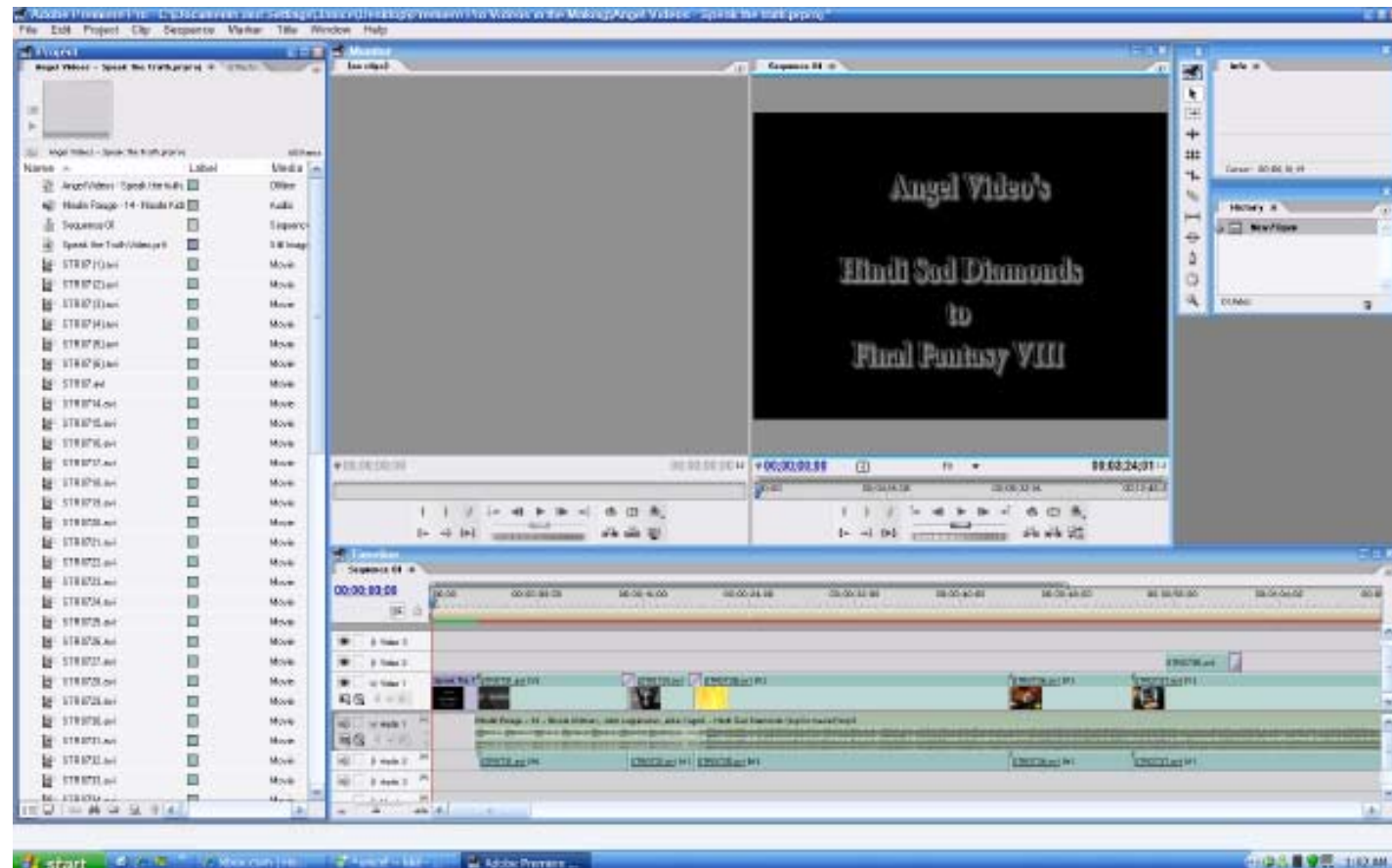
Aside from the obvious? *chuckles*

What do you think of while you are working with AMV's?

“Dear God, it’s late! Have I really been here that long?” And “FINALLY!”

Best snack food/drink when creating AMV

Cheese, jalapeño peppers and pizza sauce on English muffins and a diet coke. When I’m lazy or want something sweet; a fluffernutter on toasted English muffins and a black coffee.



My father told me this when I was a little girl and I love retelling it: There was a man walking down the street and the sole of his shoe started flapping as it was about to fall off. It started to get on his nerves and he was late getting home so he tore it off and tossed it over a fence. Later down the street the sole of his other shoe started flapping; now he's really ticked off. He stops and looks down at his shoe and begins to curse at it at the top of his lungs.

A priest comes out of the church he stopped in front of and says; "My son, do you know where your soul is going to go with a mouth like that?"

The man replied "Yes, I do Father. Over the fence with the other one."

The end!

JOKE

How did you first start creating AMV?

When a guy dumped me I wanted a creative way to get my feelings out, so I made my first video to the song "Fuck It" by Eamon.

How much time do you spend on creating AMV?

It can vary depending on mood and creative appeal—if it's a fairly easy song that doesn't require a lot of editing, around 6 hours. I did spend up to three weeks perfecting one video.



Chicksdiggames.com

Behind it's adorable and colorful dexterity, I discovered that Chicksdiggames.com (CDG) is a well elaborated, tough, and witty community. More into the thought-provoking and culturally and socially relevant articles and reviews, CDG really likes to focus on creating authentic gaming criticism from a unique perspective - largely a female perspective. With upcoming game releases and a very chattery forum, they have this really cool page on the site which is a place where you find out reactions on the women who don't play video games and are introduced to them for the first time. You can find that under "Chicks Who Don't Play". All in all, Chickdiggames.com is the place for hardcore gamer chicks can call home.

Gamingpassions.com

Gamers looking for their Player 2 this is the site for you! Gaming Passions is one site within a 100+ site network of online dating/social networks based on everyone's interests (music passions, nerd passions, ect.) on the Passions Network. All you do is register...for Free! After you register you are free to surf through pages and pages of good looking, gaming, nerdy individuals. On the forums you can talk about gaming on the Xbox 360, Wii, or PS3 to Dating and Sex. You can go to the blogs and read some of the blogs that the members write about anything that comes up. You can also visit the chat room to get to know your gamer friend as soon as you send the first message! Gamingpassions.com is where you will find your Princess Peach and your Masterchief.

XboxGameZone.co.uk

Xbox community, this is your place! If your in the United Kingdom, even better! Xbox Game Zone (XGZ) is a UK based Xbox communtiy site bringing you all the latest news and reviews. The main focus of XGZ is that their whole site is focused on their tournaments that they hold on their very own Xbox Community Network (XCN). No matter the age, gender or Pwn level you currently hold. Just make sure you bring a good attitude so your fellow gamers can enjoy a smack talk free gaming experience. The forums have anything from "Chit Chat" where you can chat anything gaming related or not, to the more in depth "The Box" where you can speak about Xbox and Xbox 360 hardware. The forums are my favorite part due to the funny stuff you will see...what? You think I am going to tell you? Go join and find out! XboxGameZone.co.uk is the place to sip on your tea and enjoy great tournaments. Cheers!

The logo for 'CITY ON THE STREETS' is displayed in a bold, yellow, sans-serif font. The text is arranged in two lines: 'CITY ON' on the top line and 'THE STREETS' on the bottom line. The logo is set against a white background with a subtle drop shadow, giving it a three-dimensional appearance.

CaveGirlForums.com

For all my girl gamers: You know them, you love them -- that's right! The women badasses of the gaming community! The Cave Girls are a very competitive, tough, beautiful women entering tournaments and taking names. When you enter the forums, just sign up and you can check out everything Cavegirl! From the "Cavegirl History" where you can check out all the articles and events they have been featured in, to the Cavegirl and Non-Cavegirl profiles where you can learn more about your favorite girls of gaming. Want to become a Cavegirl? Just log into the forums, Click "Cavegirl Applications", Make sure you read the Application Outline and Application Guidelines and your golden! Show your support by buying some really cool Cavegirl merchandise! Cavegirlforums.com us the place for lady gamers that want to be part of one of the best girl gaming clans around!