

'Grand Theft Auto' as a Reflection on the State of the Nation

The article in the *NY Daily News* about the release of *Grand Theft Auto V*, a video game expected to make \$1 billion in the first month, began with these words: "The game of crime pays—even in the wake of another gun massacre."

The article continues, "The latest installment of the ultraviolent video game franchise Grand Theft Auto will generate \$1 billion in sales in one month, analysts predict—despite Monday's massacre at the Washington Navy Yard that killed 12 people."

These are staggering numbers. How many products of any kind—let alone a \$60 video game—make that kind of money? And what, exactly, are people getting for their bucks?

Writing with concern from England, James Delingpole reports, "Yesterday, in the process of robbing a bank, I beat up an elderly security guard before shooting dead perhaps 15 policemen, exulting in their murders with the flip dismissal: 'Shouldn't have been a cop.'

"After that, I stole a succession of fast cars, evading my pursuers by driving on the wrong side of the road, mowing down passers-by and killing more police by ramming straight into them.

"Then I went home for a change of clothes, a nap, a beer and a joint before getting into my stolen vehicle to wreak more mayhem, pausing briefly to enjoy the services of a prostitute."

But this is only the beginning (and note that there's no

mention of the flood of profanity that fills the dialogues):

“Had I kept going with this spree of orgiastic destruction and drug-fueled violence, I would have got the chance to use much heavier weaponry, take stronger drugs, and not only murder people but torture them by pulling out their teeth with pliers, waterboarding them with flammable liquid, kneecapping them with a monkey wrench and making them scream with electric shocks.”

And remember that many kids will play this “game” by the hour, totally giving themselves to it as they enter into its depraved world, one in which “the worse you behave, the greater your rewards,” one which “even a gushing five-star review in *The Guardian* had to admit, is ‘troubling,’ and makes the experience of playing something so ‘misanthropic’ and ‘unremittingly violent’ a guilty pleasure,” one which “normalizes extreme violence and cruelty, so the longer you play, the more you not only become inured to it, but start to find yourself gripped—and even sickly amused—by the action unfolding before your eyes.”

Delingpole says, “As a middle-aged parent, I like to think I’m mature enough to be able to appreciate the game’s cartoonish, ugly, misogynistic, ultraviolent, pornographic worldview with a certain wry detachment.

“But whether the game’s teenage target market is so readily capable of making such distinctions, I’m not nearly so sure.”

His skepticism is justified, regardless of whether researchers have come to definitive conclusions about the effect of these games on those who play them. Common sense would tell you that games like ***Grand Theft Auto V*** cannot possibly contribute positively to our society—to morality, to compassion, to civility, to honor, to discipline, to respect for authority, to respect for women and to respect for one’s neighbor.

At best, these uber-violent games will desensitize those who

play them and produce hardness of heart; at worst, they will contribute to acts of cruelty, sadism, violence and perhaps drug and alcohol abuse as well.

But why should that matter? Gratuitous violence and pornographic images and misogyny sell, and as the *Daily News* reports, "In gaming circles, *GTA V* is being hailed as a masterpiece. Its over-the-top violence didn't bother gaming website IGN, which gave it a perfect 10, calling it 'preposterously enjoyable, breathtaking in scope and bitingly funny.'"

Words fail after reading a description like that.

As for the Navy Yard shooter, a report in the U.K. *Mirror* states, "Crazed Aaron Alexis was treated for mental illness after playing **violent video games** for up to 18 hours day and night." And even though he "told psychiatrists he heard voices in his head long before he went on the rampage at a U.S. naval base and slaughtered 12 people before being shot dead himself," his friends claimed that "the length of time he spent glued to the 'shoot 'em up' games on his computer, including the popular *Call of Duty*, triggered his dark side that had previously landed him in trouble with the police on gun crimes."

Unfortunately, at this point, we don't know what Alexis was suffering from when he went on his deadly rampage, and we may never know the connection between his violent behavior and his reported obsession with violent video games.

But this much is clear: Something is fundamentally wrong with a society that finds demented, sick video games like *Grand Theft Auto V* to be "preposterously enjoyable, breathtaking in scope and bitingly funny," spending billions of dollars to buy them and wasting countless thousands of hours to play them.

If you or your kids find them fun, I suggest you go cold turkey, spending your time instead reading wholesome, edifying

literature; watching morally uplifting programming; learning a craft or a language or an instrument or a sport; having some wholesome family fun; or helping someone in need. (For the spiritually minded, there's nothing better than reading the Scriptures and prayer.)

Anything but wasting your time and money on this "torture and murder with the addictive glamor of Hollywood."

With good reason, Delingpole writes, "The fact that this is the most popular computer game on the market should make us all shudder, and pray that the violence on the screen doesn't bleed into Britain's streets."

Here in America, our streets are already bleeding. It's high time we stop being entertained by this flood of blood and gore on our video game screens.

Michael Brown is author of *The Real Kosher Jesus* and host of the nationally syndicated talk radio show *The Line of Fire* on the Salem Radio Network. He is also president of *FIRE School of Ministry* and director of the *Coalition of Conscience*. Follow him at AskDrBrown on Facebook or at @drmichaellbrown on Twitter.