

EXCLUSIVE DAVE CHAPPELLE SPEAKS

TIME



**INSIDE
BILL'S NEW**

X-BOX

Microsoft has finally made something hip—the killer app of video games. The boss tells how they did it

BY LEV GROSSMAN

\$3.95US 21>

10090

Who Is Playing Games—and Why

Imagine, if you will, the average games player. What do you see? A twitchy teenager mashing buttons on his controller, lost and alone in a violent onscreen world? Or a sad-sack Peter Pan type, the geek who never grew up? Sorry, you lose. The average American gamer is starting to look, well, pretty much like the average American. For the first time, according to a poll commissioned by AOL Games and obtained exclusively by TIME, roughly half of Americans ages 12 to 55 are tapping away at some kind of electronic game—whether on a console, a PC, a cell phone or another handheld device—for an average of three hours every week.

The games you play say a lot about who you are. As you might expect, there are clear game-playing divisions along the fault lines of sex and age. Consoles like the Xbox and PlayStation 2 are predominantly the territory of twentysomething men, who prefer to picture themselves as sports stars (like *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005*) and racing drivers (*Gran Turismo 4*). Men 50 and older prefer martial games like Tom Clancy's *Rainbow Six*. Teenage girls are much more likely than boys to play games on their phone, while older women make up the majority of people playing card games such as *Hearts* online.

Women may favor more social games, but that doesn't make them any less ambitious. If you're playing the best-selling Sims games—and 60% of you are women—your goal is to have it all: great house, killer job, hypersmart, multigenerational family. Judge for yourself whether that's more constructive than having the most spectacular car crash.

Is it good for us, all this time spent in virtual worlds? Or is it as pernicious as television, sucking us ever further from reality? The AOL survey suggests we're in denial about the extent of our habit. One in 10 gamers claims to be addicted; 1 in 4 admits to losing a night of sleep to play games; and another quarter has been engrossed enough to skip meals. *Club Pogo* and *Sims* players average 18 and 20 hours a week on their games. Like a Vegas casino, this is a world in which the sun never rises or sets and your new best friends are arrayed around the card table. All that's missing is the free drinks.

But don't think we're heading into a video-game version of *The Matrix* world with everyone plugged into his own pod. Quite the contrary: gamers appear to be more engaged with reality than other kinds of couch potatoes. According to a comprehensive survey by the Entertainment Software Association (ESA—whose members, of course, want you to think video games are wholesome), gamers spend an average of 23 hours a week volunteering and going to church, concerts, museums and other cultural events. Hard-core gamers who play 11 hours a week or more spend even more time out in the cultural world (34 hours). "Anyone who still thinks gamers are single-minded loafers is living in a fantasy world," says Doug Lowenstein, president of the ESA. We're all Peter Pans now—and that's no bad thing. —By Chris Taylor

CAST OF CHARACTERS Who do you want to be today? Four hard-core gamers and their alter egos

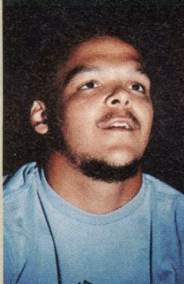
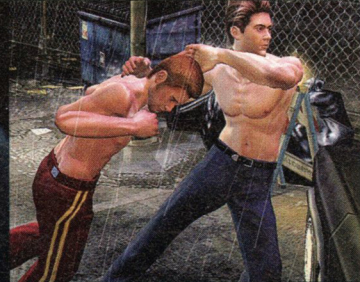
SHAUNA FRISCHKORN FOR TIME (4)



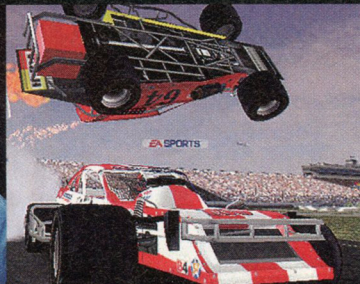
BRANDON MARTIN, 19, battles through *Halo 2*



CRAIG FRISCHKORN, 42, won't talk about *Fight Club*



BOB HENRY, 26, on *NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup*



MELISSA VAN SCYOC, 21, playing *Pac-Man World 2*

