

# A Veto on Video Games

A parent speaks out on why he has barred TV video games from his home.

BY LLOYD GARVER

**M**y wife and I are the kind of mean parents whom kids grumble about on the playground. We're among that ever-shrinking group of parents known as video game holdouts. We refuse to

**1. What is the author for or against? What specific words tell you?**

buy a video game set. Around Christmas-time, my son made a wish list, and I noticed that Nintendo

was No. 1. I said, "You know you're not going to get Nintendo." He said, "I know I'm not going to get it from *you*. But I might get it from *him*." Alas, Santa, too, let him down.

I don't think that playing a video game now and then is really harmful to children. But the children I know are so obsessed with these games that they have prompted at least one second-grade teacher (my son's) to ban the word *Nintendo* from the classroom. When I asked my seven-year-old if the teacher wouldn't let the kids talk about the games because that's all they were *talk-ing* about, he said, "No. That's all we were *thinking* about."

Our society is already so computerized and dehumanized<sup>1</sup> that kids don't need one more reason to avoid playing outside or going for a walk or talking with a friend. I'd still feel this way even if there were nothing wrong with games whose objectives<sup>2</sup> are to kill and destroy.

**2. What reason for his position does the writer give in this paragraph?**

I know, I know.

There are games other than those like Rampage, Robocop, Motor Cross Maniacs, Bionic Commando, Dr. Doom's Revenge, Guerrilla War, and Super Street Fighter. But aren't the violent games the ones the kids love to play for hours? And hours. And hours. My son told me he likes the "killing games" the best, hasn't had much experience with "sports games," and likes "learning games" the least because they are "too easy." (Manufacturers take note.) My five-year-old daughter told me she enjoyed playing Duck Hunt at a friend's house. The beauty of this game is that even very young players can have the

**3. What audience concern does the writer address in this paragraph?**

1. **dehumanized:** machinelike; lacking emotion or individuality.

2. **objectives:** aims or goals.

fun of vicariously<sup>3</sup> shooting animals. And then there's the game with my favorite title—an obvious attempt to combine a graceful sport with exciting action—Skate or Die.

'Promote habituation'<sup>4</sup>: The January issue of the Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry featured an article entitled "Pathological Preoccupation with<sup>5</sup> Video Games." The author believes that some game manufacturers try to develop programs that "deliberately promote

**4. Why do you think the writer includes these quotations?**

habituation," and the goal of some of the people who make up these games is "to induce<sup>6</sup> an altered

level of concentration and focus of attention in the gamer."

If you have children, or know any, doesn't this "altered level of concentration and focus" sound familiar? If not, try talking to a child while he is staring at that screen, pushing buttons. He won't hear you unless the words you happen to be saying are, "I just bought a new game for you."

In case you couldn't tell, I'm worried that electronic games are dominating children's lives. There are games that

**5. What point is the writer trying to make in this paragraph?**

simulate sports like baseball and basketball, and that's all some kids know about the sports.

Someday soon, a young couple will take their children to their first baseball game and hear the kids exclaim, "This is great. It's almost like the *real baseball* we play on our home screen." When I took my son to a recent Lakers basketball game, the thing that seemed to excite him most was a video game in the lobby. You see, if a kid didn't want to be bored watching some of the greatest athletes in the world play, he could just put a quarter in the machine and watch lifeless electronic images instead.

My son's teacher was right. Kids do play and talk about these games too much. They even have books and magazines that kids can study and classes so they can get better at the games. And that's what's got me worried. I'm just concerned that this activity is so absorbing, kids are going to grow up thinking that the first people to fly that airplane at Kitty Hawk were the Super Mario Brothers.

I don't like to discourage children from doing something they're good at; in this case, I must. And believe me, my desire to see them play the games less does not diminish how impressed I am by their skill—they seem to be getting better and better at these games at a younger and younger age. ■

**6. Why do you think the writer includes this story about his son?**

3. **vicariously**: experienced in one's imagination by watching someone else.

4. **'Promote habituation'**: cause addiction.

5. **"Pathological Preoccupation with . . ."**: total focus of attention on, to the point of obsession.

6. **induce**: to cause.