Byteme

Cyber Suds

"Do you like sex? I don't know, that's just a question I ask every stranger I meet. I know it's a disgusting habit, but I just do it anyway."

That's the opening diary entry from Devin, a small-town student at a fictitious Los Angeles college. Her college life drives the plot of *Devin's Chronicles* (http://www.devins.com), one of many serial dramas soaping things up on the Web. Since its Sept. 23 debut, *Devin's Chronicles* has had more than 35,000 hits a week.

More than 84 online soaps now flood the Internet. Serials like *The Spot* (http://www.thespot.com) and *The East Village* (http://www.theeastvillage.com) offer the same melodramatic fare as their daytime and prime-time counterparts — torrid tales of love, betrayal, murder and more.

So are Web soaps just computer knock-offs of *Melrose Place* and *General Hospital*? Hardly.

Most cyber soaps are updated daily and archived. It's up to viewers to decide when and how long they watch. Terri Chan, a grad student at U. of Southern California, tunes in to *The Spot* for two hours a day. "It's definitely my biggest procrastination tool at work," she says.

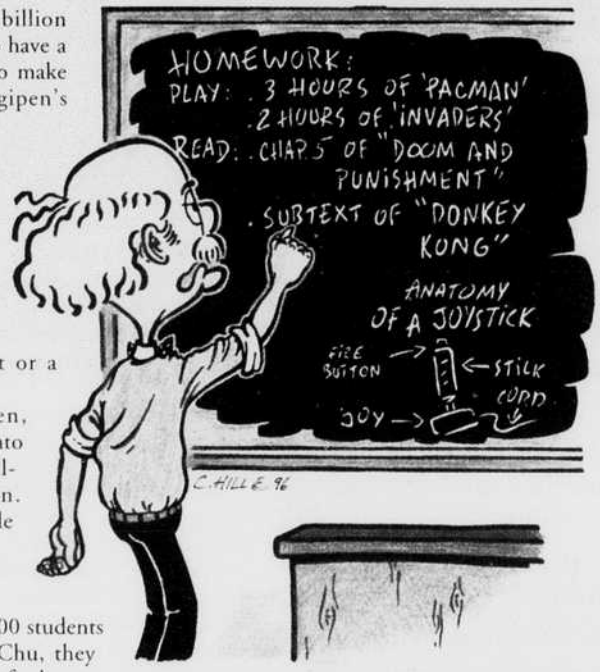
Most electronic dramas offer chat room options for viewers to dish about characters and plots. *The East Village*'s e-mail clique gives viewers the show's gossip before it's posted. And *Spot* browsers can post comments on the Spotboard.

Amy Hewitt, a sophomore at the U. of Pittsburgh, likes the interaction. "I usually check *The Spot* every day. I like the Spotboard more than the articles."

By Patrice Robinson, California State U., Sacramento / Illustration courtesy of Devin's Chronicles

Gameboy Tech

Rather play video games than go to class? At Digipen Institute of Technology, it's possible to do both. But life at this newly accredited four-year institution is not all fun and games.



"Video games are a $15 billion industry, so it's only logical to have a school to teach people how to make them," says Jason Chu, Digipen's senior vice president.

The fledgling program, which opens in September in Seattle, is modeled after a two-year version run by Digipen Corp. in Vancouver, British Columbia. But contrary to the jokes, you can't get a master's in Mortal Kombat or a doctorate in Donkey Kong.

For students at Digipen, time at the computer turns into a bachelor of science in real-time interactive simulation. School specialties will include three-dimensional animation and video game programming.

The program will accept 100 students the first year. According to Chu, they can land $50,000-a-year jobs fresh out of school. The tuition hasn't been set, but an early estimate is $300 a credit.

Sound good? Don't think of switching majors just yet. Students at Digipen graduate after taking 154 credits in areas typically associated with an engineering degree.

"The nature of the program doesn't leave much time for a social life. They always have to kick us out [of the labs] at night," second-year Vancouver student Mike Ockenden says.

Classes will be held 13 hours a day Monday through Saturday. Six of those hours will be lecture; the rest will be spent tinkering in labs supplied by Nintendo of America. The final project is to design an original game for Super Nintendo.

"I would recommend the program with the following caution: Programming games is not playing games," Ockenden says. "There's a lot of theory, math and time involved. However, if you can handle the work and love games, this is definitely the place to be."

By Scott Henkel, Western Michigan U./ Illustration by Christian Hill, U. of Missouri, Columbia

Sites for Sore Eyes

A Man's Life
http://www.manslife.com
If it's macho you're looking for, he's the man with all the answers.

Internet Fraud Watch
http://www.fraud.org
Too good to be true? Probably is — especially online.

Dead Presidents
http://www.csn.net/~mhand/Presidents/
Death becomes this grave tour of dead chief execs.

White Trash On-Line
http://virtual.union.edu/~spitzera/trash/
More fun than a night of WWF, Elvis channeling and cheap beer.

The Southern Word
http://ua1vm.ua.edu/~crispen/word.html
A student's decoder manual for Southern speak.

The '80s Server
http://www.80s.com
Sample selective memory — the '80s were never this good.

Bits & Bytes

• Education takes you a long way — into cyberspace. On Jan. 1, Peterson's, a college and career information provider, and the Electronic University Network opened the World Learning Network (http://www.worldlearning.com), the first global virtual education community. It offers credit-bearing and short-term courses. Colleges can establish a custom online campus, complete with student union, bookstore, library, admissions office, counseling center and lecture and academic halls.

• Want to volunteer, but don't know where to start? With 74 percent of young adults reporting they don't volunteer for that reason, you're not alone. SERVEnet and Youth Service America want to start you off on the right foot. Check out their new site (http://www.servenet.org) dedicated to matching volunteers with local organizations. It also includes polls, an interactive library and newsgroups.

• It's no Bytes Over Broadway, but the first free Internet musical has a clear message. Charles Ortleb and Tom Steele produced more than 100 songs, a script and several cartoons to examine the AIDS epidemic and the search for the truth about the virus. The story, partially based on research by a Harvard U. and former Boston U. professor, can be found at http://www.theaterweek.com.

• Many people who brave winter wonderlands quickly learn that hot water and icy objects don't mix — unless they go to Michigan State U. MSU has plastic pipes built into the concrete sidewalk that are filled with hot water to melt the ice and snow. A moisture detector and temperature sensor keep track of when ice and snow are likely to make sidewalks treacherous and — voilà! — hot water rids pedestrians of wipe-out blues.

Joe Kristosik, football, U. of Nevada, Las Vegas Listens to No Doubt on the bus on the way to a game.

Maureen O'Neill, track, U. of Delaware Eats Twizzlers.

John Beckwith, football, Trinity U., Texas Has worn the same pair of unwashed maroon socks for the past four years.

Ben Sturner, tennis, Boston U. Chills out to a relaxation tape on his Walkman, then gets pumped with the *Rocky* soundtrack.

Matt Sauk, football, Utah State U. Wears the same wristbands throughout a good practice week.