

■ Reporter's notebook

Low lighting, variety of gory games feed addiction

Classic and newfangled massive slaughter games make up for lack of zombies at The Break Pool Hall & Arcade

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PULSE EDITOR

Ah, those happy childhood memories of sitting vacant-eyed in front of the television, my hands in a death grip over a controller as I blasted my way through endless streams of digitized violence, sending little computerized creatures to their untimely demise. It was a happy childhood, marred only by the rare times when the game system overheated or my eyes started bleeding.

I have long since given up such a fanatical addiction to video games, having thrown myself into a "Diablo 2" binge with a little too much vigor during my freshman year, emerging from my dorm hole days later, dehydrated and babbling about necromancers.

But like any recovered addict, I occasionally imagine a relapse and fantasize about the days of yore, when complete mental catharsis could be found with nothing more than a small plastic gun and some quarters. It was with this feeling of nostalgia that I entered The Break Pool Hall & Arcade, downstairs in the EMU, on a sunny afternoon and headed straight for the arcade, my pockets full of change and my headphones blaring a soundtrack of Naked Raygun and the Damned. Nothing like listening to an endless loop of

"Surf Combat" to get in the mood for pixelized blood-letting. The Break Arcade is a standard-issue kind of place: low lighting, plenty of shiny screens to minimize the chance of human interaction, a couple of scattered stools so the hours of standing won't hinder people's gameplay, a couple of sweaty guys staring intently at an obscure game from the 1980s, etc. Its most appealing attribute is the wide variety of games, ranging from classic to newfangled.

Of course my first stop was "Time Crisis 3," the latest of the classic shoot-and-duck series of games. Mass slaughter and an endless ammo supply? Gee, Davy, do you think it's Heaven? My only complaint about the game is the distinct lack of zombies, which is something I require out of any POV shooter. There is truly no greater pleasure than gunning down swarms of undead from the safe haven of a dimly lit arcade.

Also involving a cheap plastic gun, though less "ducking and hiding" crap, is "Ranger Mission." This one has the advantage of using a pump shotgun as the control, as opposed to the classic pistol, but also suffers from the setup of the game, which requires you to complete specific scenarios, rather than just shoot everything willy-nilly. Also, there is not a



NICOLE BARKER | PHOTOGRAPHER

The arcade in the EMU Break offers a video game for everyone.

zombie to be found anywhere in sight.

Unfortunately, the only game with zombies is the cartoonish "CarnEvil," which is like a Saturday morning cartoon with blood and guns. So yeah, like a Saturday morning cartoon. I'm sorry, but I take my zombies very seriously. Moving away from the shoot-em-ups, The Break Arcade also has not one but two dancing games, "In the Groove" and "Dance Dance Revolution Extreme." These are the games in which people hop around like automatons and stare at the screen with cult-like devotion as any semblance of original thought or personality seeps from their mind and they end up talking and walking like cerebral palsy victims. No offense intended.

The arcade also has a fair collection of hand-to-hand fighting games, "Tekken 4" the best of them. I've always appreciated the "Tekken" games because they require no

knowledge of special moves or any other such pap that never belonged in a fighting game anyway. If I wanted to throw fireballs around, I'd go join the D&D game in the next room. Unfortunately, "Tekken" does involve combination moves, which annoy the hell out of me. Whenever I try them, my character ends up moving around like a "Dance Dance" player, if you know what I mean. Can't two digitized characters just beat the tar out of each other and be on their way?

The game closest to perfection is, of course, whichever game in the "Metal Slug" series the arcade currently has installed. Simple, unadorned violence. No special moves, no arcane button combinations, no insider-only secrets. Just good old fashioned slash-and-burn gameplay. Massacre never felt so good.

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