

Don Foster [Liberal Democrat Shadow Culture, Media and Sport Secretary]

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PH: Don, thank you for your time and for agreeing to this interview. I truly appreciate it.

The purpose of this article is to be published in an upcoming edition of GamesTM.

Let's jump right into the questions.

Firstly; all forms of art and entertainment share a use of ancient mythological subject matter and imagery. With Dante's *Inferno* and *God of War*, we are finally beginning to see a more mature use of these subjects in games. Why have these century-old figures and stories (be they of God, ancient Grecian beasts or other) remained with us for so long?

DF: The reason is rooted in the fact that these figures, characters and stories remain as enthralling now as they have for hundreds of years. They've stood the test of time because within these narratives we are exposed to drama, fantasy, and humanity all at once. The simple notion is that we all love a good story, and these old ones are some of the best! These tales expose us to familiar human emotions but in the most dramatic settings. They capture the imagination. If we take Homer's *Iliad*, for example, you've got the lot! War and peace, love, treachery and heroism... How can one not be interested?! As the success of films like *Troy* and *300* show, the drama of the ancient myth is still embraced by the modern audience. I'm not surprised that the gaming industry has started to take make more in-depth titles as a result.

PH: Do you believe the depiction of mythology in games will bring the ancient themes, personalities and stories to life in a new way? Could games educate society about these stories, which are gradually becoming lost?

DF: Most certainly. I'd hazard a guess to say that games are already educating people in a variety of ways. The beauty of video games is that they represent another platform on which to engage. Of course, they provide escapism, but I believe they offer so much more. If you take the *Call of Duty* games, the game centres on real life military missions of World War II. Now, I'm not saying that they give players an unabridged account of past events, but they can introduce people to the stories of history. By the same token, I believe video games could be a

marvellous way to further inform people of ancient eras, tales and characters. The popularity of games such as *Age of Empire* suggests there is an interest in this area and I'm sure audiences would be receptive to playing well-made games that are centred on old stories.

PH: For centuries, old stories and philosophies have been carried by literature, a form of media that no longer accesses all sides of society, particularly children. How important do you believe it to be that gaming now does its share, using its mass popularity, to aid in communicating these works?

DF: I think it can definitely play a role in popularising ancient works – though I would never advocate that it serve as a replacement for literature. In my opinion, there is no substitute for literature, but we have to be realistic. Not every child (or adult for that matter) will pick up Dante's *Divine Comedy* and read it from cover to cover. But does that mean they should be excluded from its brilliance? If games can be responsibly made and they can introduce people to these classics then I'm all for it. With a bit of luck, some may be inspired to go and read the original to check for accuracy!

PH: Do you think the interactivity offered by games, as opposed to the static nature of movies and literature, offers a unique angle for social/philosophical messages to be conveyed?

DF: It most definitely offers a unique angle. I think interactivity is drawing more and more people toward video games for sure. For instance, not so long ago there was a certain stigma attached to computer games. Gaming was seen largely as a pastime that kept teenagers in isolation. Now consider the contrast today. The success of the Nintendo Wii, coupled with communal games such as *Singstar*, *Rock Band* et al has made gaming socially acceptable. The industry has been revolutionised now that video games are viewed as something you can enjoy with your family and friends. Over the next 5 years I fully expect to see the industry get stronger on the back of this. Moreover, I certainly believe interactive learning can play a big role in education. The possibilities for positive development in that sector are huge.

PH: Does the interactivity make its use of mature subject matter (be it violence, cursing, sex or other) more dangerous than in other media forms?

DF: As I have said before, the incorporation of 'mature subject matter' into computer games need not be a risk to society as long as it is properly regulated. Interactivity is a complex issue and it comes with a unique set of challenges. However, managed properly I'm confident that the benefits of interactivity will shine through. The gaming industry needs to work with PEGI to make sure that interactivity becomes a positive tool rather than a negative one.

PH: Do you think that by introducing these mature stories, gaming will change its image and be taken more seriously as an intellectual art form, rather than pure escapism?

DF: Well I'm not sure I've the gaming expertise to make such a prediction! That said, as stated earlier I do think the industry is evolving. If gaming continues to push itself into the mainstream of society then who's to say it won't become a forum for intellectual engagement? It's clear that the video games are no longer played just for escapism. Of course, that's a big part but now you have people playing games with the sole motivation of getting fit or improving their verbal reasoning. If games can be played for practical reasons then it's possible that future games will be viewed as intellectual art in the future.

PH: Don, on behalf of GamesTM, thank you for your time and for your insight. We truly do appreciate your input.

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