

Off the Bookshelf: *Queer Game Studies*

This anthology, edited by Bonnie Ruberg and Adrienne Shaw, presents a variety of challenges to our understanding of video games.

Its contributors include critic Leigh Alexander, activist Mattie Brice, and game designer Naomi Clark. What unites them is their desire to “queer” games, which doesn’t mean simply adding some LGBT content. Instead, it’s about destabilizing assumptions and asking how games might be “otherwise.”

The book arrives at a curious moment: Just when video games finally gained some legitimacy, thanks to casual gamers and “gamification,” the industry (and subculture) was rocked by #GamerGate, a ferocious backlash against critics and designers advocating idiosyncratic

games made mainly by outsiders. Interestingly, many #GamerGate targets also supported diversity, feminism, and LGBT rights.

What if video games actually respected difference? Maybe then they’d allow creators to make genuinely personal statements like Anna Anthropy’s *dys4ia*, based on her experience of gender transition. Or they’d confound players’ expectations the way that *Gone Home* leads players to imagine a gory outcome when it’s actually about two young women falling in love. Perhaps, as Jack Halberstam suggests, “winning” a video game is much less interesting than losing one.

These are provocative ideas, but the future of video games depends on them. ■



Noir & Nutcases

Thimbleweed Park, the latest game from Ron Gilbert and Gary Winnick of Monkey Island fame, mixes sleuthing and satire in equal measure.

There’s a noirish, ‘80s vibe to the game; think *Twin Peaks* and *The X-Files*—with a smidgen of *The Simpsons*, just for laughs.

The setting, Thimbleweed Park, is a town whose glory days are long gone. Its stores are boarded up and the town’s big employer, a pillow factory, has been burned down. Even worse, a corpse is found, “bloated and pixelated,” reducing the town’s population to 80 people, mostly nutcases.

There are five playable characters: Ransome, a profanity-spewing clown; Agent Ray, a hard-boiled, chain-smoking Fed; Delores Edmund, an ingénue who just wants to design games; Franklin, her father’s ghost; and the “boyish looking and dangerously naïve” Agent Reyes.

These five scour the burg looking for clues and getting into scrapes. Along the way, they solve a few puzzles, too.

Do they nab the murderer? As Ransome says, “If you think this is a game about figuring out who killed the stiff out by the bridge, you’re #S!%ing wrong!”

So relax and enjoy this tongue-in-cheek game that’s also an homage to off-kilter mysteries.

To learn more, visit www.thimbleweedpark.com. ■



Lollapuzzoola Returns

Cruciverbalists, if the dog days of summer have got you down, Lollapuzzoola is sure to provide some relief.

This amusing indie crossword tournament, now in its 10th year, takes place on Saturday, August 19, at All Souls Church on New York’s Upper East Side. Attendees will exercise their noggins on five puzzles over the course of the day. Past constructors have included folks like Brendan Emmett Quigley and Elizabeth Gorski. Only two things are certain: Constructors will keep solvers on their toes and the fourth puzzle is a doozy.

Lollapuzzoola was started by Brian Cimmet and Ryan Hecht in 2008, when 30 crossword lovers crammed into a kindergarten classroom. The tourney has grown dramatically since then; last year, almost 300 people signed up to compete on-site. And, in 2011, puzzle maker Patrick Blindauer joined as Cimmet’s cohost.

Solvers are slotted into two categories: Express, for those who’ve finished in the top 20 percent at either Lollapuzzoola or the ACPT; and Local for everyone else. There is also a Rookie designation and a Pairs Division. Best of all, those who can’t make it to Manhattan can register to play at home.

To learn more, follow Lollapuzzoola on Twitter @lollapuzzoola or visit www.bemoresmarter.com. ■

