

GAME DESIGN AND HISTORY

UNIVERSITY OF WALES
TRINITY ST DAVID



Games and Society

- Games in the Media
- Controversial Games
- Reactions in Society
- Censorship and Control
- Microtransactions in Games



**GAMES
AND
SOCIETY**

**GAMES IN THE
MEDIA**



Video games have been a part of modern culture in society for over 40 years, but have only recently been embraced by a wide audience of all backgrounds, genders and ages.

‘Family Friendly’ or gaming as part of a ‘normal’ lifestyle is a **relatively fresh perspective** judging by the typical media portrayal of interactive entertainment.





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- **Addictions and dependencies**
- **Deterioration of moral standards**
- **Promoting violent behaviour**
- **Degradation of mental health and wellbeing**



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- **Causing seizures**
- **Addictions and dependencies**
- **Deterioration of moral standards**
- **Promoting violent behaviour**
- **Degradation of mental health and wellbeing**
- **Decreasing attention spans in children/young adults**



RISK AN EARLY DEATH, JUST DO NOTHING

9 out of 10 kids risk growing up to have unhealthy amounts of fat in their bodies. Even if you think they look healthy today, adulthood could bring an early death from heart disease, Type 2 diabetes or cancer.

So make sure your kids are active for an hour a day. Reduce how much fat they eat. For help and advice visit 4yourkids.org.uk



CANCER RESEARCH UK



In support of the Change4Life movement

This **Change4Life** advert campaign caused outcry in 2009, offending the UK games industry when it was a boost to the economy in a time of recession.



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Sony issued a statement describing the negative portrayal of gamers as:

"a serious issue for the video games industry and one that needs to be dealt with by the industry as a whole."

**GAMES
AND
SOCIETY**

**CONTROVERSIAL
GAMES**



Video games seem to be a perpetually popular target for **negative attention in the media** – possibly due to perceived depictions of violence, especially where the player takes an active role in these actions.

We will look at some case studies in this session.

Note that **these are not the only examples of controversial games** – though they are among some of the more high-profile examples that have not been created explicitly to shock or offend.

CONTROVERSIAL GAMES

**DEATH RACE
(EXIDY, 1976)**



Death Race (Exidy, 1976)

Exidy's *Death Race* caused controversy in 1976 with its depiction of violence.

To earn points, players had to **run over pedestrians**.





Death Race (Exidy, 1976)

The stick figures were actually supposed to be **skeletons** escaping from a graveyard.

Death Race began a general debate about video game violence which continues to this day.





Death Race (Exidy, 1976)



CONTROVERSIAL GAMES

NIGHT TRAP
(DIGITAL PICTURES, 1992)



Night Trap (Digital Pictures, 1992)

Night Trap was a game about vampires attacking a group of teenage girls at a slumber party. The game was more silly than violent.

It was accused of “endorsing violence”, featuring heavily in hearings in the US at the time that investigated the marketing of videogame violence to minors.



CONTROVERSIAL GAMES

**MORTAL KOMBAT
(MIDWAY, 1992)**



Mortal Kombat (Midway, 1992)





CONTROVERSIAL GAMES

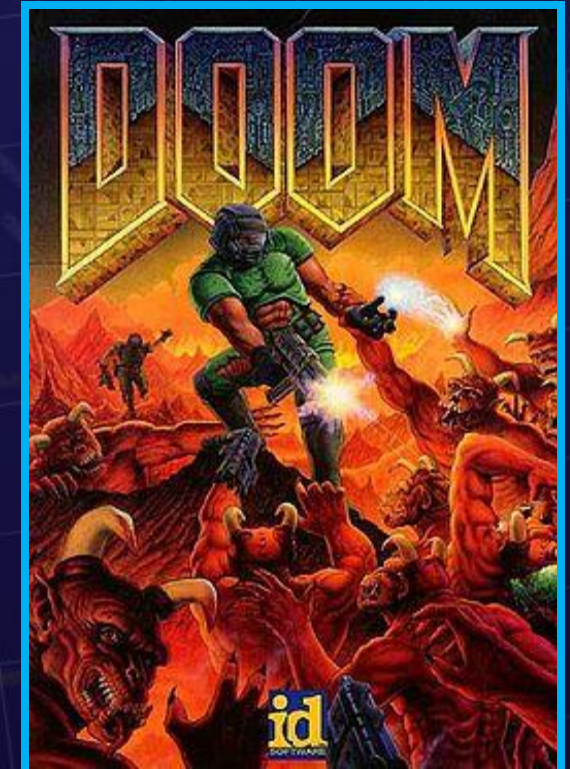
DOOM
(ID SOFTWARE, 1993)



Doom (id Software, 1993)

Doom, one of the first and most well-known 3D FPS games, was created by id Software.

The game features gore and violent combat from a first person perspective, and was immensely popular.





Doom (id Software, 1993)

The **Columbine** shootings in 1999 were perpetrated by Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold.

It was reported that Harris was a *Doom* fan and had created his own deathmatch maps using the game's level editing tools.

The media blamed the incident on influence from video games, 'goth' subculture and heavy metal.

'Suicide mission' at Colorado high school leaves as many as 25 dead

From Daily Herald news services

LITTLETON, Colo. — The young gunmen moved calmly through the school library, giggling as they shot point blank at students cowering under their desks. Stunned teenagers at Littleton's Columbine High School described Tuesday's attack as a horror movie come to life, fingering a group of school outcasts known as the "Trench Coat Mafia" as being likely suspects in a rampage that cost as many as 25 lives.

Two heavily armed gunmen, dressed in black trench coats and ski masks, blasted their way through the large suburban high school as students were going to class or headed for lunch.

When it was over, the two gunmen — identified as Eric Harris, 18, and Dylan Klebold, 17, lay dead in the library with what police reported to be self-inflicted wounds. Police also said the students had what appeared to be bombs around their bodies.

One female student, her arm splattered with the blood of her fellow students, sobbed as she told KMGH television, "He was shooting people right in front of me. He was shooting people of color and people who play sports."

"He put the gun right in my face and started laughing and said it was because people were mean to him last year."

It was by far the bloodiest of several school shootings that have rocked U.S. communities over the past two years.

Littleton Sheriff John Stone said up to 25 people had been killed, students and teachers alike. But by early evening, officers had yet to recover any bodies because of the danger of explosives and need to preserve evidence. FBI agents and police SV teams slowly made their way through the building.

"It's just going to take us some time because of many rooms we have bodies in," said sheriff

INSIDE

School reacts

■ Lake Zurich High toughens security plans

— Page 6

Warning signs

■ Almost certainly, there were warning signs

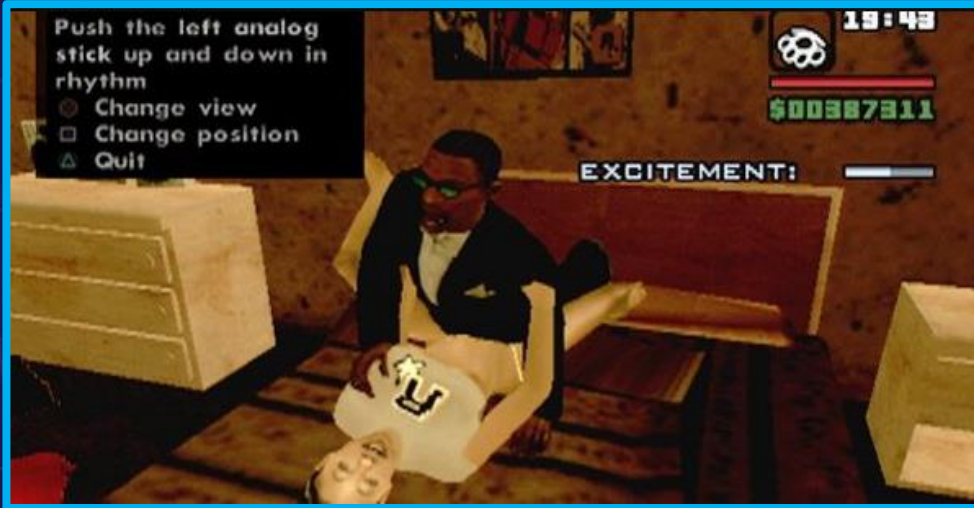
— Page 7

CONTROVERSIAL GAMES

**GTA: SAN ANDREAS
(ROCKSTAR, 2004)**



GTA:San Andreas (Rockstar, 2004)



A third-party mod, known as **'Hot Coffee'** allowed the player to access hidden files on the game disc that depicted **sexual acts** that were omitted from the game.



The game was withdrawn from sale in Australia until Rockstar released an updated version with the relevant files removed.

CONTROVERSIAL GAMES

**CALL OF DUTY:
MODERN WARFARE 2
(INFINITY WARD, 2009)**



Modern Warfare 2 (Infinity Ward, 2009)



A hand-drawn diagram on a chalkboard background. A large white oval in the center contains the text "GAMES AND SOCIETY". A curved arrow points from the right side of this oval to a yellow rectangular box in the bottom right corner containing the text "REACTIONS IN SOCIETY". In the top left, there is a blue rectangle with diagonal hatching and a blue arrow pointing towards it from the left. In the top right, there is a blue sketch of a building with a dome and a blue arrow pointing from it towards the yellow box. The entire diagram is enclosed in a white rectangular border.

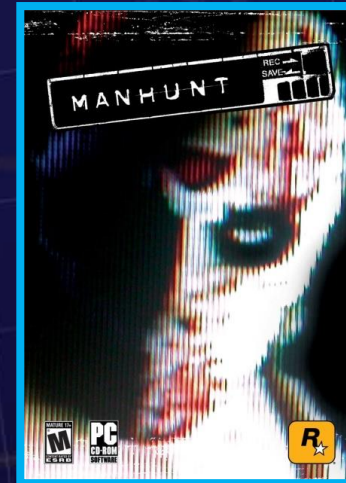
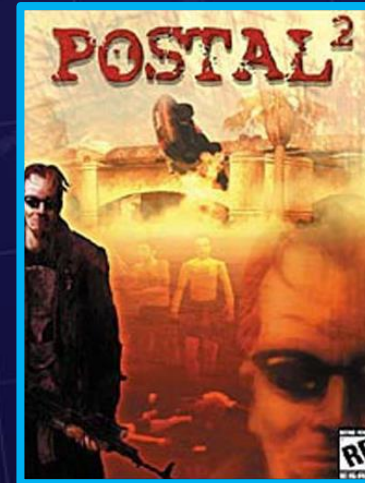
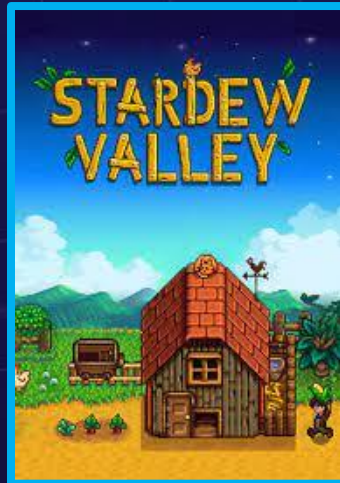
**GAMES
AND
SOCIETY**

**REACTIONS
IN SOCIETY**



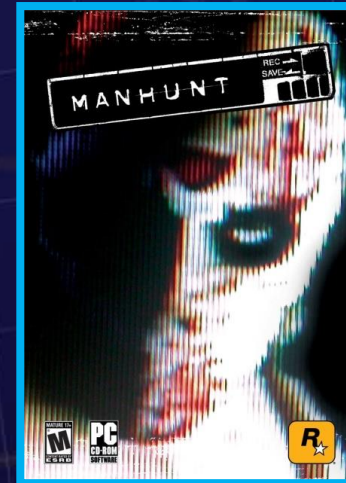
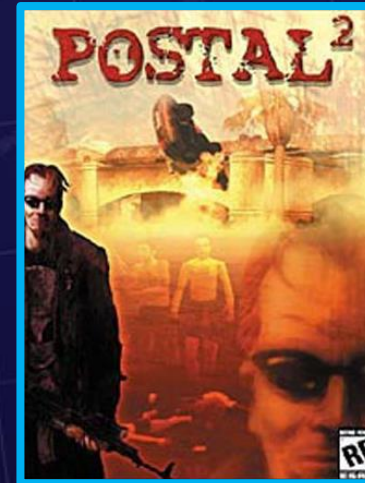
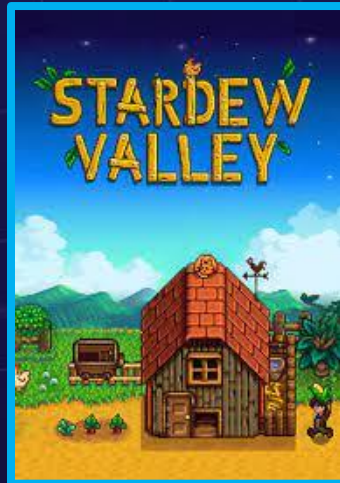
There are countless examples of good quality games that provide **harmless entertainment** for millions across the world.

Unfortunately, there are also many games which give the industry a bad reputation - a significant number of which are relatively easy to obtain.





Some of these titles are intended as **parodies or homages** but are easily taken out of context, fuelling the opinions of those with anti-videogame agendas.





“I remember saying to Fischbach and to Rob Holmes [also of Acclaim],”I can guarantee you with Night Trap and now Mortal Kombat, we’re all going to end up in front of Congress”.”

- Howard Lincoln, Chairman, Nintendo of America



In 1993 **Joseph Lieberman**, A democrat in Connecticut became concerned about video game violence when Bill Andersen, his Chief of Staff, told him about *Mortal Kombat*.

Andersen's **nine year old son** wanted a console copy of the game but Andersen refused to get it due to reports that it was “incredibly violent”.





Lieberman suggested they should get a copy and see what it was about.

He then proceeded to arrange a hearing on the marketing of video games. They began on **December 9, 1993.**





A few hours before the hearings, representatives of large game manufacturers announced they would **endorse a rating system**.

This timely news was referred to by senators throughout the meetings.

Realistic characters in games were at the forefront of the issues here – games like *Street Fighter II* and *Doom* were seldom mentioned.



In the three months between the first and second hearings, Sega had suggested that other companies **adopt the rating system** they had created for games such as *Night Trap*, but the industry worked on a new system.

Additionally, as a result of the hearings, *Night Trap* had **sold out all across the US**.



“Sega wound up selling way more copies of Mortal Kombat, probably as a result of the hearings. Night Trap came back to life. You know, I sold 50,000 units of Night Trap a week after those hearings.”

- Tom Zito, President of Digital Pictures





Two organizations were formed as a result of the hearings:

The **Interactive Digital Software Association** (IDSA), the games industry's own trade association, which would prove to be very effective when the industry was under siege.

The **Entertainment Software Rating Board** (ESRB), an independent organization to rate games, was also created.





In response to the hearings, Ed Boon and John Tobias made a **modification** to *Mortal Kombat 2*, adding a new type of finishing move:



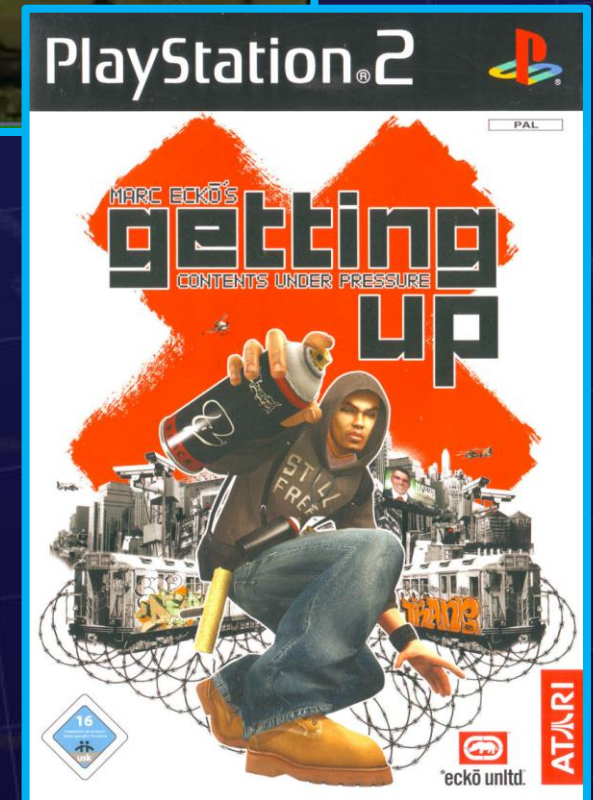
GAMES AND SOCIETY

**CENSORSHIP
AND CONTROL**



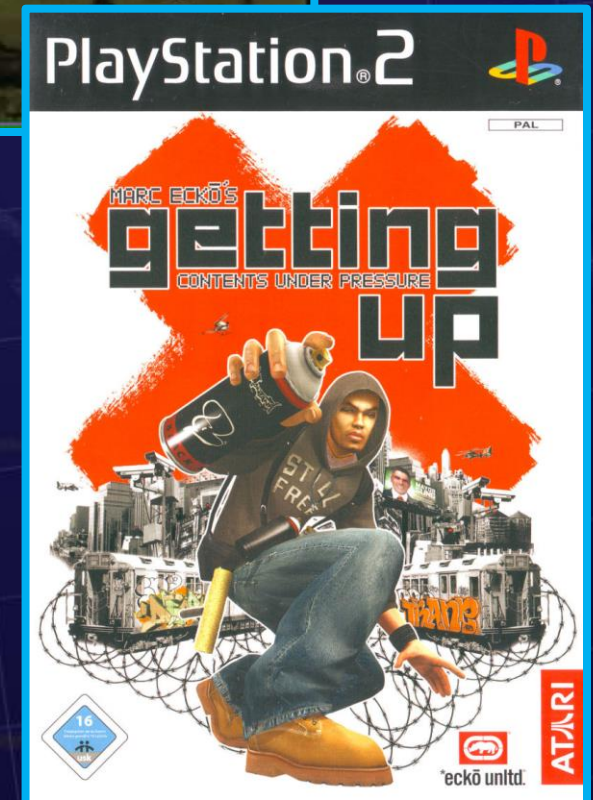
Some territories have measures that attempt to **reduce the availability of games** which are perceived to be unnecessarily violent or contain mature material.

Australia did not have a 'mature' age rating until **2011**. Many titles available in other countries, such as *Postal* and Marc Ecko's *Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure*, were **banned for their portrayal of violence or glorifying illegal activities**.





A government-commissioned survey of 2226 Australians released in December 2010 found 80 per cent supported the R18+ rating.





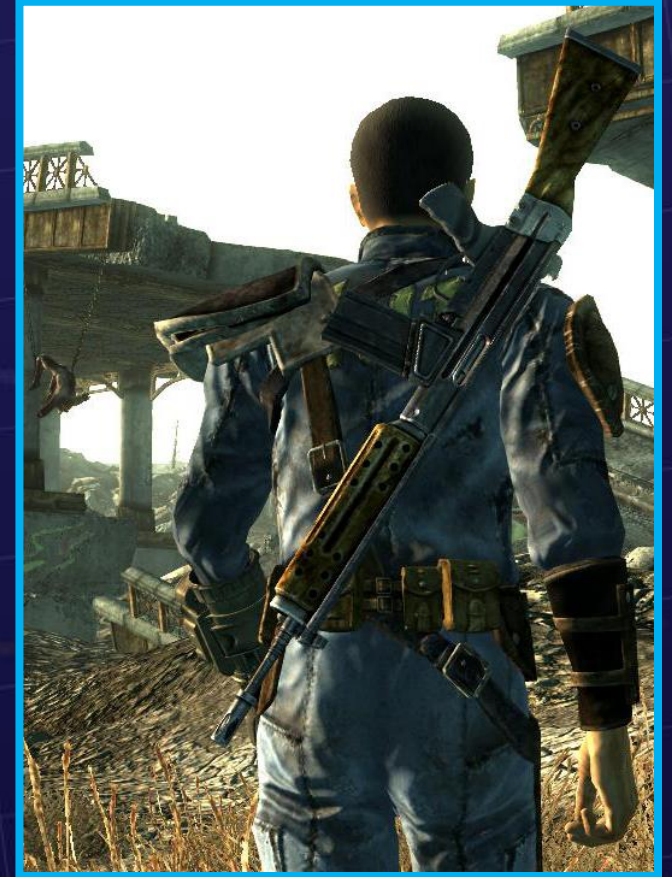
Some examples of regionally-censored games:



*Command and Conquer:
Generals*



Left 4 Dead 2



Fallout 3



With online gaming becoming one of the most popular ways to purchase and play games, **regional restrictions on games are harder to enforce.**

This, along with widespread **piracy of digital media**, is viewed by some as a negative effect of technological evolution.





In 2011, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to let California outlaw the sale of violent games to minors.

The state **didn't have enough evidence to prove** that violent video games cause violence.

The Obama administration wanted Congress to fund **research into violent video games.**





Former US president Obama asked Congress to allocate \$10 million for a study by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) looking at the relationship between video games, violence in the media, and gun violence.

The proposed study was one of several proposals Obama made in an attempt to address gun violence in the U.S. following a school shooting in Newtown, Connecticut in December 2012.





When we think of controversial games, many people associate this with in game content linked to **violence**.

However, violence is not the only controversial aspect of videogames.

Controversy comes in many forms, from **in-game content** to **insidious and damaging industry practices** and even how consumers respond to **media trends or announcements**.

PC GAMER THE GLOBAL AUTHORITY ON PC GAMES

News Reviews Hardware Indie Best Of Magazine

Nearly half of game devs work more than 40 hours per week, survey finds

By Andy Chalk April 28, 2021

The 2021 State of the Industry survey indicates that long working hours remains an issue for the game industry.



GAMES AND SOCIETY

**MICROTRANSACTIONS
IN GAMES**



One of the biggest controversial developments in recent times has been the integration of **microtransaction models**, particularly in games that are already sold for a price.

A growing topic of debate in the mid-to late 2010s was the number of **micro transactions** featured in games.





Loot boxes, season passes and additional paid content have all been heavily criticised by players.

One of the most public of these instances was the controversy surrounding EA's *Star Wars Battlefront II* and its 'pay to win' approach to game balancing in 2017.





Microtransactions in games began in **free-to-play** mobile apps but have been adopted by larger publishers and AAA titles and are increasingly normalised and incorporated into game design with each passing year.

These have evolved into '**Season Passes**' in recent years.



Microtransactions in the form of Loot boxes have even **come under scrutiny at a government level** after reports of excessive and unauthorized spending.

In 2018 the Netherlands and Belgium both declared that **loot boxes were a form of gambling** in games, and therefore subject to gambling laws.



EUROGAMER

Now Belgium declares loot boxes gambling and therefore illegal

Hazard warning.



News by Wesley Yin-Poole, Editor
Updated on 27 April 2018



Hot on the heels of [the Netherlands declaring loot boxes are gambling and therefore illegal](#), Belgium has had its say.

The Belgian Gaming Commission looked at Star Wars Battlefront 2, FIFA 18, Overwatch and Counter-Strike: Global Offensive and found only Star Wars was not in violation of the country's gambling legislation - and that's only because EA stripped out the game's loot boxes after its launch debacle.

It determined FIFA 18, Overwatch and CS:GO's loot boxes are a game of chance and so are subject to Belgian gambling law. Battlefront 2, at the time the investigation was conducted, did not have loot boxes, so escapes unscathed.

[A statement from Minister of Justice Koen Geens](#) said FIFA 18, Overwatch and CS:GO were therefore illegal and demanded their loot boxes removed. If they're not, the publishers "risk a prison sentence of up to five years and a fine of up to 800,000 euros". When minors are involved, those punishments can be doubled, Geens added.

Belgium expressed a particular concern about the impact loot boxes have on young people. "It is often children who come into contact with such systems and we cannot allow that," Geens warned.

In fact, Geens requested the Belgian Gaming Commission investigated video game loot boxes after the Star Wars blow up. "Given the importance of the protection of minors and vulnerable players, this was very worrying," he said.



Some companies in the games industry have responded to these accusations, defending their actions. Naturally, this is then reported on and responded to by consumers, **usually in negative ways.**





GAMES AND SOCIETY

SUMMARY



What was once a very niche pastime has grown to become one of the **biggest forms of popular entertainment** in the 21st century.

As video games continue to grow in popularity they also become a **larger and more prominent** part of modern society.

[Agenda](#) [Events](#) [Reports](#) [Platforms](#)



Video games are transforming how we communicate with each other - and they could fix a range of other global issues too



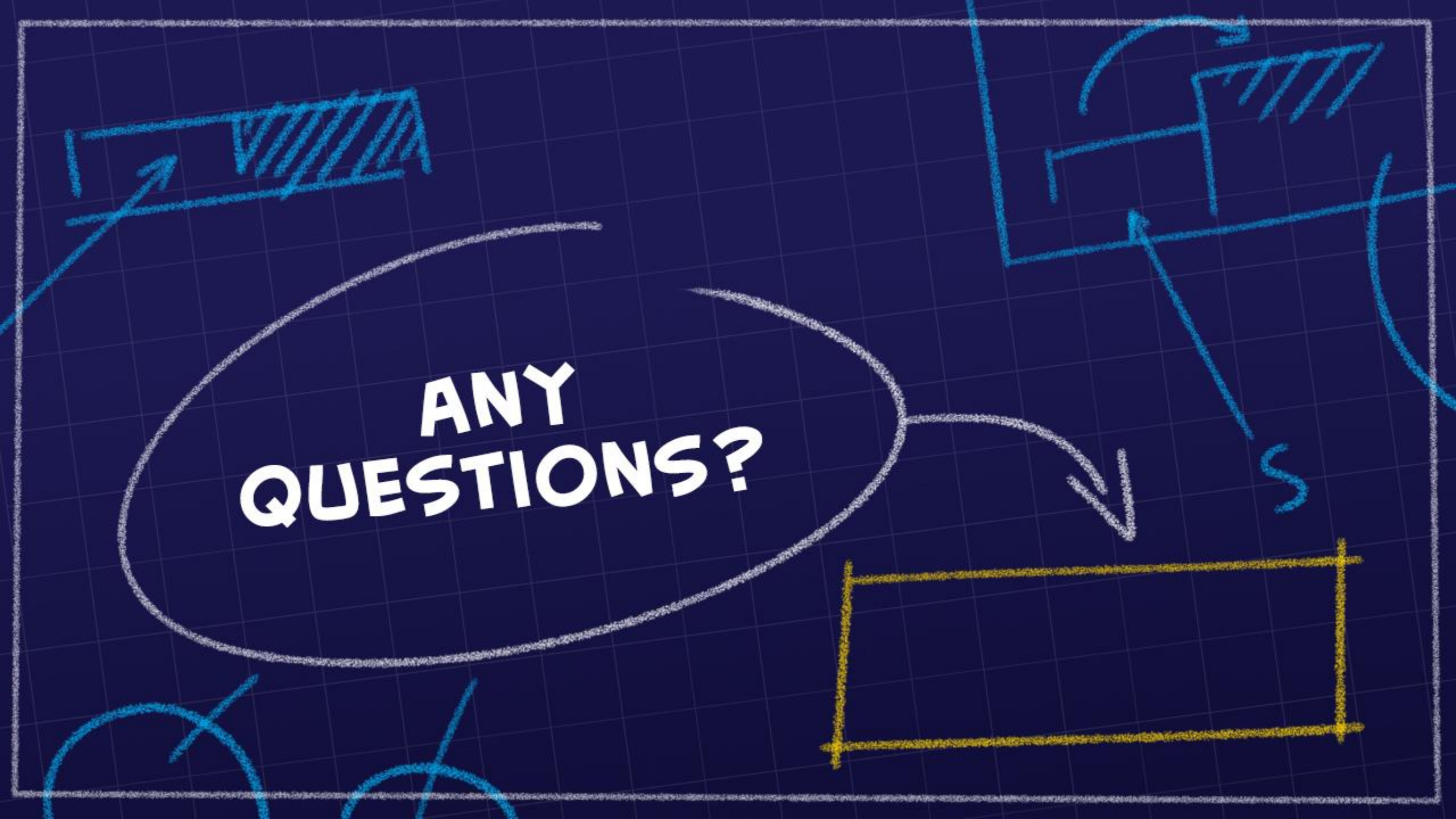
Games will undoubtedly play a part in shaping our future – for better or worse – but it is clear at this stage that they are a **powerful medium**.

A medium with which it is as easy to **exploit, offend and segregate** as well as having the power to **engage, entertain and educate**.

[Agenda](#) [Events](#) [Reports](#) [Platforms](#)



Video games are transforming how we communicate with each other - and they could fix a range of other global issues too

A hand-drawn diagram on a chalkboard background. The central element is a large, hand-drawn oval containing the text "ANY QUESTIONS?". To the top left, there is a rectangle with diagonal hatching and an arrow pointing towards it from the left. To the top right, there is a complex diagram with a rectangle, a curved arrow, and a letter 'S'. To the bottom right, there is a large rectangle drawn with yellow chalk. At the bottom left, there are some faint, hand-drawn circles and lines. A curved arrow points from the right side of the central oval towards the yellow rectangle.

**ANY
QUESTIONS?**

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