

POWER ON

Loading...

Select:

Continue or New Game

"Hey," he greeted her with a flash of his too-white teeth and a flick of his over gelled hair.

Select:

Greeting Style:

- *Flirty greet*
- *Amusing greet*
- *Rude greet*
- *Friendly greet*

She brazenly stepped forward and dropped a small peck on his cheek, as well as a breathy giggle against his throat. *Flirty greet.*

"Hi, I'm Saranda." She rolled back on her heels and smiled, nervously hiding her teeth.

"Richard," he returned.

Put him in control. Make him feel protective, dominant, powerful.

Select:

Response:

Flirty response:

- "Huh, do your friends call you Dick?"
- "Finally, there's someone here that is actually worth talking to."
- "I've never been to a place like this before."
- "Shut up and kiss me."

"I've never been to a place like this before." His grin grew.

"Then it would be rude of me to not show you around personally, as I am well acquainted with this place." He latched on to the easy prey she was. Taking her hand and guiding her through the different rooms, the different erotic areas where one could lose one's self in desire and... BEEP- BEEP- BEEP.

Select:

Pause or Quit

Charlie exited the game. She left her apartment and walked down the pathway. New grey sealed roads wove through the towering old brick buildings. Flaking brick work and crackling old oaks suffered the wind's howl. Red dust flew, twirling through the air. It fell on Charlie's nose, adding another layer of orange freckles.

The arrow pointed left, she walked left.

A network of paths lead to an occupation- your occupation. Charlie had always taken

path32. At times her path would cross with another's, path68 or path21, sometimes that path held a person.

She'd nod at them in greeting or not acknowledge them at all. Some paths were always full of people, their occupants moving at a steady march. Some, like hers, were mostly deserted.

They never talked on their way to work. Paths had to be travelled on at a reasonable pace, an efficient pace. This left no time for socialising. Her watch would let her know if she wasn't going fast enough.

A soft beep sent her gaze downward to her wrist watch. *Time to run.* Charlie complied with the order, jogging the rest of the way to her destination.

"I lost another Sim."

"How?"

"I was killed. Those new battle levels are dangerous. I'll have to work double shifts now. I've lost six this year." The other man's eyes widened at the news.

"Six? You're kidding." Beep- beep –beep. The men broke apart; their animated faces falling into dull stares as they walked quickly down their path.

Charlie continued on to her occupation building. Its ancient bricks were at odds with the standard grey door which slid open with a small whoosh of air. She was met with a corridor, white walls and tiled floors with grey doorways scattered down the hall. The simplistic perfection of the room caused Charlie to smile. Luckily the building had been renovated inside.

She began to walk down the corridor. Door one, two, three, four. She stopped in front of

the engraved number seventeen, pressing her right pointer finger to the glass panel. A beep accompanied the sound of the opening door.

She relished the chance to help her Sector prosper. She felt content.

She felt like she had a purpose.

She felt alive.

"...the streets were not safe before the revolution! Monsters with guns and knives hung on corners, preparing to jump unsuspecting women and children. Creatures with uncontrollable urges to commit heinous sexual acts, with no care.

They roamed the streets like cancer in the body. Mutating, killing, destroying. Flesh was sweet upon their knives, upon their bullets, upon their tongues. It splattered on the old streets unnoticed.

The people bred as the days passed them by. They tried and failed and tried no more.

They let life ooze away, down the drain in a slow drizzle.

Then life bloomed!

The sun's rays caught the Maker's eye and it sent down a message, it sent down a purpose. A new world full of possibility. The invention of life, of lives. One option and one chance is not enough if it lives only to be slashed apart by a blade, by a bullet and tasted upon a tongue. The Game offers chances, chances to have more life, and aids the journey to the new world..."

The passionate voice followed by thought provoking silences hung in the air, swallowing

the workers in its never ending loop. Dean scanned the room, the regular cracks in the paint glared back. He guessed that the other workers just never noticed, or maybe their work stations were maintained better than his. Then he'd question whether it was a sign that he wasn't as valued as the others or that his task wasn't as important. The Officials always said that people were equal, that if one was to work below their maximum effort level that the efficiency of the world would in turn decrease. That worried Dean. That motivated him. Unlike the others. The warning of increased lag, increased log in time got the others working at full capacity. Dean readied his hands as the sound of a package sliding down against the metal chutes caught his attention. He grabbed the soaring package and placed it into the metal bin labelled 'fragile'.

"Hey Deano!" Dean turned to towards the friendly call. He'd been about to ask how the man knew his name, until he felt the sting of cold metal against his chest and remembered that he had his name tag pinned to his shirt. He smiled and returned the greeting.

"Have you tried the new battle levels?" Dean turned back to receive an incoming package.

"Yes." A cluster of packages came at once, causing Dean not to realise the pregnant pause. The worker's plastered smile faltered.

"Oh, okay." The worker smiled shakily and hurried off.

"Hey Joey!"

Dean continued to work until the buzz from the speakers signalled the end of his shift.

Those who were scheduled for double shifts continued to work.

He followed Path52 home. He walked down steel grey roads that were painfully clean,

shielding his eyes from the light reflecting off them. The short and stumpy brick buildings crumbling at their seams were considered an eyesore to those of Sector C, but not to Dean. He found the unsound structures to be a welcome stain on the otherwise sanitised city. Their sector, Sector C, was the last of five to be refurbished. It was set out like a level. Its imperfect structures adding mystique to the world, a sense of uncertainty and danger. Red dust from the crumbling bricks would fall then come to lie like freckles against the surface of the roads when the wind picked up. It reminded him of snow on the Skiing Level. He'd often wanted to make a snow angel in the dust like you could in the game, but didn't dare do it in public.

Dean entered his building. He took the delivered meal parcel from under the food chute and quickly scooped down its nutritional contents.

4:50pm. Curfew began at six.

He threw the empty package in the rubbish chute and slipped out the back door. He jogged without the encouraging beep of his watch. The watch monitored his heart beat, to make sure he was getting enough exercise. The beep really pissed him off so he made sure to jog regularly.

Once Dean reached the 54th apartment block he stopped, just before the path met the train station. He slinked off to the left, diving behind the cover of a withering tree and entered the lower apartment. He'd learnt to always expect someone to be watching. If people aren't living the way you're living, don't trust them. Basically, if Dean wasn't gaming with them they weren't to be trusted. Gaming was a solitary activity by law. "Tiko?" Dean whispered after he shut the front door, wishing locks hadn't been outlawed. The only light in the house spilled in through the cracks from the front

windows, highlighting the dust hanging in the air. He heard a muffled reply and followed it. The room had its windows securely fastened. The only form of light came from the blaring computer screen, illuminating Tiko's face in a ghostly hue, his wide eyes looking corpse-like in their blankness.

"Tiko?" Dean nudged his shoulder, knowing he wasn't dead from the erratic clicking of the mouse. Tiko flinched and swore. He clicked on the pause option and punched Dean in the stomach. As he fell to the ground clutching his gut, he cursed Tiko and his mother in a snarl.

"For the prosperity of Sector C, what is wrong with you?" He laughed at Dean's curse.

"Do not use the Sector's name in vain," Tiko replied, placing his hand against his heart in mock shock. Dean rose from the floor, patting the dust from his knees. He pretended to lunge at Tiko and smiled when he saw the resulting flinch. "When's your next shift? 'Cause I'm about to lead a raid in the Jungle Warfare level and I could use another member." Dean checked his watch. The left hand corner of the watch counted down the time he had left before his next shift. 5:13. Five hours of gaming.

"I've got enough time."

Loading...

Select:

Level:

- *Jungle Warfare:*

In a world without structure and authority chaos is forever present. Your objective is to obtain more land to expand your own camp. Fight against the enemy, the wildlife and

the landscape on your raids. Fight within a team of fellow Sims. For most of you, it's a fight to the death. This is the sacrifice you must make for your chaotic world. This is jungle warfare.

Controls:

Right click: attack

Left click: parry/defence

J: journal

I: Inventory

...

“Just skip this part, it’s pretty self explanatory.” Dean complied and clicked on the ‘continue’ option.

The image on the screen slowly revolved around his character, a Sim decked out in camouflage complete with war paint and an array of weapons strapped to belts, tucked in pockets and held in sheathes. The image stilled.

1.

2.

3.

FIGHT!

Dean's Sim charged forward, knives held at the ready. Dean began to slash...dodge...parry...duck.

He slipped into a rhythm. His feet tapped with the Sim's lunges. He cried out in triumph when he got a kill. Tiko howled in the background as he took down an enemy in the trees. They both laughed together at the beginning then slipped into silence, a tense concentration, as they stared at the screen like children gazing at the moon. The slivers of light faded from the hall. Time and place fell away as the screen became their world.

Dean slashed and stabbed to the sound of beeping in their fifth raid.

He fell asleep against the keyboard, dreaming of battles filled with blood and gore and glory.

"Shit!"

Dean awoke to cursing. Images of body parts strewn on blood soaked forest floors faded. He heard the click of a light switch and felt the stab of pain in his eyes. He growled for Tiko to turn it off and threw the cordless mouse at where he guessed he was standing.

"It's 5am; you've missed your shift." Tiko pulled back Dean's chair and tipped him out of it. He landed with a thud. "Get out. Go home. Quick." Dean sat dazed and groggily stared at Tiko trying to decipher his words.

Missed a shift? He blinked a few times and rubbed his eyes then swore. Dean pushed himself up off the floor and dashed towards the hall.

"You better be able to lie well!" Tiko called after him as he snuck out the front door.

Dean stuck to the shadows, silently praising the sun for not fully rising yet. He hid behind the crumbling brick fence which lined the front of Tiko's apartment building. He sat, he watched, he waited. He neither heard nor saw anything. Taking a few deep breaths he slipped away from the low brick fence and began to jog. He imagined black suits morphing out from the brick walls of the buildings and solidifying in the shadows, stalking him, charging him, taking him down.

Dean sprinted the rest of the way back to his apartment. He leaned heavily against the hall wall after he'd slipped through his front door. He expected to be pounced on as soon as he entered. The wheezing quality of his breathing ripped through the eerie silence of the apartment. He held his body completely still fearing movement would restart time within the stillness of his apartment.

Elated, he shifted his hands to his knees and released a shuddering breath. Maybe he'd gotten away with missing a shift, or maybe time had truly stopped. Nervous giggles gurgled in his throat, surging from his mouth in a choking bark. He'd been about to sink to the floor in relief when a loud knock at the door shattered the silence. Dean yelped and clung to the wall, wishing the standard grey paint would swallow him up.

"Resident 286 022, we demand entry."

He stared at the door as if it were the only barrier between him and a boss enemy from one of the battle levels. They emerged every thirty minutes while you played. They were bigger, stronger and better equipped. You could never defeat a boss, you could only run.

He squawked a reply which resembled the dying screech of an enemy goblin in the Enchanted Forest level. Smoothing down his cowlick and roughly scratching the sleep

out of his eyes, he opened the door.

The two men nodded in greeting and marched through the doorway. Dean automatically shuffled back for their ascent into his apartment. He followed behind them, feeling as if he were the guest in their home. They stood around the lounge and indicated that he should take a seat in the chair opposite them. He complied.

Silence returned to his apartment. Instead of shrouding him with a calming stillness it pushed against his skin, the pressure increasing in his temples. They stared at him. His nervous gaze went from their suits, to their dull eyes and back to his hands knotting in his shirt.

"What is your reason for missing your shift today?" His gaze ricocheted between the two men, wondering which had spoken and which he should address.

"I was ill?" His nerves twisted the statement into a questioning mumble. The stare-off continued as he felt his body sink further into the chair, the silent tension weighing down on him.

"I am going to assume that you have forgotten why we work so hard in Sector C." The man's bland expression twisted into mockery with his sneering tone. "Ours is yet to be refurbished which is why we must work regular and long hours. We work hard so that we can live in an ideal city. We work hard to please the Maker. We work hard because that is our duty." The Official paused. His tone turned deceptively friendly. "The game is a reward. Our new world doesn't have a place for people who aren't hard workers. Keep that in mind." Dean nodded earnestly.

He politely followed them to his front door. Something large fell from the Official's coat. It thumped against the floor. The inky black taser gun looked like a waspish bug against

the cold white tiled surface. The Official glanced down at the weapon and back up at Dean, his smile was a toothy grin as he politely bent over and picked up the taser gun and slowly tucked it back into his coat, his eyes never leaving Dean's pale face.

The threat was clear.

This was a warning.

Charlie sprinted home after her twelve hour shift, her legs shaking from the lack of use. She dashed past the steaming package of grey mush sitting on the counter and collapsed at her desk. She pressed the on button and waited, her nails rapping against the chipped and scratched wood covered in a layer of clear laminate. Her fingers flew over the keys as she typed her username and password. The loading logo spun as she waited to log on. A window appeared before she could click on *Select*.

Newcomers:

How to play the game is simple. You construct a Sim. You can model it on yourself or create the person you've always wanted to be. Either gender, any age, any eye colour or hair colour or ear size. You have complete control.

You choose the world you want to live in, a fantasy land of pirates or a peaceful settlement of Inuits. The opportunities are endless. The power is yours.

Charlie quickly clicked on the 'continue' option and began to play.

Selected:

Level:

- *Time To Cook*

Loading...

Her body began to relax, her lids began to droop and her mind settled.

Dean quietly closed Tiko's front door and rushed into the computer room. He knew he shouldn't have snuck back to Tiko's, especially now since he'd had a warning, but after spending a day in his cold, quiet apartment he couldn't take it anymore. He was starved for the liveliness of the game play.

It had taken him twice as long to travel to Tiko's apartment this time, he'd been extra cautious, extra paranoid.

He found Tiko at his desk, his mouse shifting and clicking erratically, his eyes glazed over. He wouldn't make the same mistake twice, so instead of nudging Tiko he leaned over and tapped the Esc key on the keyboard.

Tiko spun around eyes blazing, his fists clenching, ready to lunge. Dean reacted, tackling him to the ground and punching him in the face. They continued to brawl on the ground, knocking over chairs and tangling themselves in cords and cables.

They stopped when they saw blood.

"It's better seeing it in real life." Dean agreed with him, staring at the brilliant red dripping from Tiko's nose. "You fought back this time. I'm guessing the Officials put you on

edge." Tiko jumped up from the ground, unwinding the cables that were biting into his forearm. "But you came back."

"I was bored," Dean mumbled, pushing himself up from the ground. Tiko grinned and picked up his computer chair. He dropped himself into the seat and began typing.

"I'm bored too, so I was thinking we could try something new, something more fun, more dangerous." Tiko motioned Dean over to the computer. "I found a glitch we can use. You go into the Medieval Quest level, equip your Sim with a shitload of weapons, and if you're standing in Pete's Tavern, you know the one where you go to ask Esmerelda about the frog prince? Yeah, well if you're standing in Pete's Tavern and you transfer your Sim to another level -BAM- you keep all your weapons." Dean couldn't help smiling at the passion in Tiko's voice.

"I don't see how that's fun."

"We can kill outside of the battle levels, new territory, new victims."

Dean stepped back, shocked at what Tiko was suggesting.

"Are you talking about killing other people's Sims?"

"Yeah, you gonna join me?" Dean thought back to the taser gun on the floor, the cold, dull eyes of the Officials. No doubt they would kill him if they were ordered to. He imagined the life the Officials wanted him to live, working for the good of Sector C, playing the game only enough to keep him sane. Work, eat, play, work. The monotony, the sickening balance of his emotions, the sitting in his cold apartment with glazed over eyes, leading his Sim through its life as a voyeur.

"Sync my computer with yours."

Loading...

Select:

Level:

- *Night Out: date night*
- *Time To Cook*
- *Medieval Quest*
- *Farm Life*
- *The Detective Lifestyle*
- *It's An Alien Thing*
- *Deep Sea*
- *Myths and Legends, Fact*
- *Enchanted Forest*
- *Let's Operate*
- *Battle Knight: protect the fortress*
- *Dance Revolution*
- *Build It*

Loading...

Freshly polished wooden floors. An old Persian rug, fluff bunnies collecting at its sides, nestling up against the fringing on the edge. Case files piled on top of the desks, soared like sky scrapers and toppled like Jenga towers. People rushed past, arms clutching cream manila folders, suit jackets splattered with coffee stains. Their hair a mass of oil,

smoothed back with gel to mask their lack of personal hygiene. Their eyes bloodshot.

Donovan strode forward, his scuffed, mud caked dress shoes leaving a trail to his desk.

He dropped into the chair and unbuttoned the top button on his pants. He scrubbed his hands down his unshaven face, letting his eyes slowly rise to the cork board.

"They found another body."

Select:

Response:

- *"Again? When's it going to stop?"*
- *"It's not in a swamp, is it?"*
- *"Let's go!"*
- *"...get someone else to deal with it."*

"It's not in a swamp, is it?" He hit his shoe against the leg of the desk. The dried clumps of dirt fell and broke apart on the wooden floor, a spray of dirt flecks following it down.

"Nah, dumpster." Donovan sighed, sucking in his stomach and redoing the button on his pants. He stiffly rose from the chair and traced his dry mud tracks back out the door.

He met his partner out the front,

Select:

Action:

- *Decline coffee*
- *Accept coffee*

- Ignore

accepting the foam cup from his partner's outstretched hand. They got in the car and crawled through the traffic. Every light they met was red. They finally got to the dumpster.

"Nice place to dump a body." Donovan agreed slamming the car door behind him and striding towards the police tape. He slipped under the barrier and made his way to the dumpster, a police officer lead the civilian who found the body to him. He listened to the woman talk whilst he glanced over at the dumpster, nodding as she babbled.

Select:

How to proceed:

- Ask what she was doing looking in a dumpster
- Ask her to leave the taped off area saying, "This is police business now."
- Begin to cry, hoping she'll hug you
- Stroke her hair when she isn't looking and pretend it was the wind

He turned back to the woman, planning to ask her what she was doing looking in a dumpster. As he turned, a sharp pain wracked his body. He looked down and found the handle of an antique knife protruding from his chest and a Sim in leather armour twisting and thrusting it deeper.

GAME OVER

Dean leaned back in the seat, letting the air whoosh from his lungs. Tiko shoed him from the chair and sat in it himself. He entered the Medieval Quest level.

“That was intense,” Dean whispered. His heart felt like it was in his throat.

He felt like throwing up.

He felt alive.

Selected:

Level:

- *Time To Cook*

Loading...

Steam hung in the air as thick as a blanket. Pots smashed against pans. People swore and yelled and joked. Snooty waiters navigated their way to completed dishes and scooped up three plates each, balancing them precariously on their arms. Saranda, head chef, sprinkled herbs into pots and screeched at apprentices to chop up vegetables faster. She plated a set of dishes and watched them be carted off in a proud smile.

“There is a customer demanding to speak to the head chef.”

Select:

How to proceed:

- *Tell the messenger to deal with it himself*
- *Deal with it personally*
- *Resign on the spot*

"I shall deal with them." Saranda tossed her apron at the messenger and walked through the door leading into the dining area. If this was another complaining customer accusing her staff of sending out another dish cold she was going to slip chilli into their next meal. She hated complaining customers.

Leaning against the wall was a Sim in the armour of a knight.

Select:

How to proceed:

No suggestions available.

Saranda stood motionless. The Sim produced a broad sword from his back and slowly strode towards her.

Select:

How to proceed:

No suggestions available.

The Sim swung the sword in the air. Cuts formed along her body.

Select:

How to proceed:

No suggestions available.

Slash. Her body fell to the ground in a bloody heap.

GAME OVER

Charlie stared at the screen. Her finger stopped clicking on the *Select* button. She'd been murdered.

Her hands began to shake, her eyes began to water. She hadn't worked enough hours to purchase another Sim. There were six hours until her next shift. Charlie pushed away from the computer desk and stood and paced around the room. The apartment now offered her nothing. She ran her hand across the top of the computer, it was ice cold. She felt lost and alone.

She felt useless.

They did it multiple times.

Tiko and Dean played with a wicked laugh and a rush of pure enjoyment, the ruby simulated blood flashing on the screen, the only thing they could see.

Dean stopped as the oven alarm rang. Tiko was in the middle of another kill. Dean

picked up the fallen alarm and switched it off, placing it back on the counter. He could see his friend was about to slash a Sim in fairy garb across the throat. He called goodbye to an unhearing Tiko, wondering if what he had done was the right thing. He dismissed the thought with a roll of his eyes and wondered about how much trouble he'd get in, and if an Official would be waiting at his door when he came home.

Dean slid from his bed the next morning and went through his regular routine. As he stepped outside he noticed there was something different.

People milled about, staring up at the buildings, at the sky, as if they'd never seen them before.

They were surrounded by large brick buildings with smooth, sleek pipes tunnelling in and out of the different apartments. The rusty old buildings clashed with the flawless silver pipes. The afternoon sun lit the streets with a warm golden glow. Peoples twirled around, seeing the light shine against the leaves, leaving shadows against the brick and reflecting dazzling shafts of light off the pipes. They spun and softly laughed.

His next shift began in four hours.

Dean joined them, asking people what they were doing.

"I had nothing else to do, I was bored, so I came outside."

They all had had their Sims murdered.

Dean felt proud, smiling at their child-like wonder.

"Return to your apartments or to your workplace," the voice ordered over the speakers.

"Force will be used if you do not comply. Return to your apartments or to your workplace. Force will be used if you do not comply." The crowd began to trickle away.

Anger overtook Dean as the streets became empty. He ran to Tiko's apartment, craving

the sight of blood.

"When I first heard I thought you'd been playing one of those battle levels. You must be upset." Charlie nodded at Doris, agreeing with her assessment. She still felt the aching loss of her Sim.

"Charlie." Bob, a hunched over man with an abnormally long forehead, limped over in a hurry, laying his hand on Charlie's shoulder.

"I heard about your Sim and I'm pretty sure I was eating one of the last meals you created," he leaned in and whispered, "I was in the restaurant on the Night Out level," he straightened. "It was an honour."

Charlie smiled and nodded in thanks.

"It looked delicious, thank-"

Beep- beep- beep.

Bob limped off. Doris turned back to her work station.

Charlie didn't want her shift to end, didn't want to return home to nothing. She didn't want to feel useless again.

Her watch announced the end of her shift. She walked away from her occupation building reluctantly. She found people wandering around, walking off paths and staring up at the sky. She stopped in shock and followed their gaze. Looking out at the blue endless horizon made her want to roll up into a ball and hide. It spread out above her, making her feel small and insignificant.

The uncertainty of it made her want to cry.

“Return to your apartments or to your workplace. Force will be used if you do not comply.” Charlie happily complied with the voice’s order, sprinting to her apartment and keeping her eyes on the grey road below her.

Dean rushed through Tiko’s front door. He heard the smashing of glass and plastic. Half a keyboard was launched into the hallway.

Tiko was in a rage. Dean had seen his gamer rage before, like when they’d failed a raid or his Sim had been killed in one of the battle levels.

But this was different, this was pure rage. Tiko had trashed all his computers, their wire guts were strewn across the room. He stopped when he noticed Dean standing in the doorway.

“Tiko, calm down.” That pissed him off even more. Dean could see him trying to control it. A vein pulsed on his forehead from the exertion. He pointed towards the laptop in the corner, the one computer he hadn’t massacred yet.

“A glitch has been found and removed from the game. Players who have been affected have been reimbursed.”

A message from the Officials.

“Do you know how long it took me to find that?” Dean placed the laptop on the only standing desk and turned to look at Tiko, his face twisted in a scowl.

“Who knows if I’ll ever find another glitch like that, they’ll be searching for them now. I can’t go back to killing boring computer opponents.” Tiko pulled on his hair, his hand clutching a few strands and ripping them out. “I’m not doing that. I can’t go back to that.

It was so much fun killing actual Sims, it felt real. It felt amazing.”

“What can we do now?” Dean looked up at Tiko, searching for answers. Tiko’s face hardened with resolve.

“We started playing the game together because it felt more real, it was more fun, yes?”

“The game isn’t fun anymore,” Dean answered.

“No, it’s not. So we’re not going to play anymore. Let’s have fun in the real world, we make the rules and we can play for as long as we want.” Dean imagined the taser gun, the lack of compassion in the Official’s eyes as he pulled the trigger. Tiko smiled at Dean’s hesitation.

“Have I ever suggested something to you that wasn’t fun?” Dean shook his head and agreed.

“I’m in.”

Charlie read the message the Officials had sent and sighed. Her muscles had been tense ever since her Sim had been murdered. Logging on and selecting a level, she felt her perspective on life shift back into place.

No more chaos. No more uncertainty.

Her eyes glazed over and her lower lip jutted out as she stared, mesmerised by the screen.

Tiko lead Dean out of his apartment, legs from the computer desks clutched in their

hands. They stuck to the shadows, their weapons gripped to their bodies. Dean couldn't help the soft laughter that bubbled from his throat as they snuck through the moonlit streets. Together they felt invincible.

Dean would point at an apartment building and Tiko would inspect it and shake his head. They had to find one that they could easily break into.

Dean felt like a hunter in the Alien Invasion level, prowling the streets for his next victim. He didn't need the multiple arms or the super speed of an alien. He didn't want to have the brute strength and the ability to throw sludge balls like a goblin. He felt invincible as himself.

He felt powerful not having to click on *Select* to do something, to choose an action that the Officials had programmed.

He felt like screaming and hitting something with his make-shift weapon, just to see how it would smash and to hear the noise it would make as he destroyed it, to remind himself that he could do it, that it was real.

Dean pointed at another housing block and this time Tiko nodded. Dean felt giddy as he approached the apartment. He stayed low and crept towards a window.

Tiko grabbed him by the neck and pushed him in the direction of the front door.

"You'll make too much noise trying to get through the window, idiot." Dean let the insult roll off him as he pushed open the front door.

They both paused, expecting an Official to emerge from the shadows and gun them down.

"It's clear, c'mon."

They continued into the room, make-shift weapons held at the ready.

A woman sat at the computer, her eyes blank, and her face gaunt under the dim lighting of the screen. She looked dead.

Tiko motioned for Dean to go first. He imagined her as a zombie.

It was evil.

It was the enemy.

It had to be destroyed.

He shook with anticipation. He couldn't wait to hear what killing something really sounded like, what it really looked like. He lifted the weapon in the air and brought it down against the skull. There was a grunt of pain.

Tiko laughed and joined in.

"Select: swing." He swung the weapon at it.

"Select: kick." He kicked it.

"Select: stab." He stabbed it.

"Game over," Tiko laughed. They both ran from the apartment, still giddy, still laughing.

What he had done didn't sink in until he was in bed.

Dean remembered running from the apartment with Tiko, going back to his place and changing out of their stained clothes. He felt so dirty once the adrenalin rush had faded.

He felt emotionally numb.

He'd showered and fallen into bed, expecting to go to sleep as soon as his head touched the pillow. He felt like they were going to come and get him. That the Officials would break into his apartment and attack him with their taser guns.

No one came to get him while he slept.

He went to his occupation building in the morning, keeping his eyes firmly ahead of him.

If he couldn't see an Official then they weren't there, he told himself.

It was an average day and yet he kept expecting something to happen, someone to yell and point the finger at him, for a group of Officials to attack him.

He expected some sort of monumental death, that they'd come and take him down in front of everyone.

Because he knew they would, he knew they would annihilate him for what he had done.

"Resident 286 044 has passed away." The voice announced over the speakers. And that was all.

Dean heard people whisper about it.

"Who was that? Was it an old person?"

"No, young. I think her name was Charlie." Attaching a name to his victim caused the guilt to weigh down heavier on him. Waiting for them to appear was excruciating, so he ran.

Dean ran along path52, flinching at movement in his peripheral vision. He looked up at the sky as he ran, imagining he was in a level, a peaceful level, that there was no death and that he hadn't killed, that he didn't want to kill.

He barged into his apartment without bothering to shut the front door. Whilst sitting at the desk he logged on.

Selected:

Level:

- *Farm Life*

Loading...

Bales of hay lined up against faded red walls.

His lids began to droop, his muscles loosened.

The morning sun lit the fields with a golden hue.

He faintly heard the sound of shoes against a tiled floor.

*An old flea infested dog dragged itself along the dirt road, staring out at the fields,
searching for rabbits.*

A hand gripped his shoulder and slammed his head against the computer desk.

GAME OVER

REFLECTION STATEMENT

I've always considered reality to be boring when compared to the power of the imagination. In my Major Work I have explored power and control and the relationship between reality and the imagination through the basis of a computer game, a topic which is relevant in the modern world, particularly with young people as it is in the headlines for corrupting teenagers and, more recently, with the debate on whether the classification of R18+ games should be legalised in Australia.

My original concept was influenced by studying the Ways of Thinking- Extension 1 English and how the Romantics viewed imagination as a form of freedom, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau states, "the world of reality has its limits; the world of imagination is boundless." I applied this idea to the themes of control and power in a totalitarian society and created a concept which I believed was original and challenging. My original idea was to create a world where the population's imagination had been suppressed so that the government could have complete control. It enabled the leader to eliminate the threat of a revolution, if the people couldn't imagine a better life they wouldn't fight for one. Imagining a world without imagination lead me to question what it means to be human, whether our ability to imagine outcomes instead of only being able to instinctively respond separated us from the animal kingdom.

Studying Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein' and Ridley Scott's 'Blade Runner' in Advanced English enabled me to explore the idea of what it means to be human in my Major Work more effectively by giving me insight into how other fictional

characters were portrayed when the line was blurred between human and creature. Creating a new world which I was confident writing about proved more challenging than I first thought. Aldous Huxley's language in 'Brave New World', in particular the explanation of the breeding program, revealed to me that I'd have to immerse myself into this world completely to create an authentic piece of writing. This immersion proved to me that my original concept would be more suitable for the novel format rather than the short story form. John Marsden's 'Everything I know About Writing' caught my attention with the quote "imagination is a vital essence that gives life." The chapter 'Using Language to Good Effect' also reassured me that in most cases less is more, which was beneficial with the short mechanical sentence in my final idea.

Beth Revis' 'Across the Universe' caused me to become completely disenchanted with my original idea. The setting was different but the idea of suppressing human emotion and imagination, and the people reverting to a primal state, all for a leader's control, was present. My concept had already been done. My intended teen audience had already been exposed to an animalistic world with an absence of imagination. Reading young adult post-apocalyptic books such as 'Enclave' by Ann Aguirre, 'The Maze Runner' by James Dashner, 'Divergent' by Veronica Roth, 'The Hunger Games' by Suzanne Collins and Beth Revis' 'Across the Universe' reinforced this awareness.

The final idea for my Major Work, titled 'Power On', came from my obsession with 'The Sims'. The idea of simulated life and the quotes from the game's designer Will Wright, "there's no win-lose" and "you just play to play" resonated with the new world I wanted to create. I toyed with the idea of life as a game and of the blurring of

reality. The game was to be the people's reality and a means of suppressing potential social unrest. The basis for 'The Sims' is that you can live any life you want. You have the power to stop your character from aging, to choose the path of their life, who they're in a relationship with and their eye colour. It can be a utopia for those who are dissatisfied with their own lives.

Karl Marx stated that "religion is the opiate of the masses", I wanted the game in my Major Work to be the opiate for the people. Instead of suppressing the people's imagination I attempted to give them an outlet in which they have complete control over their world so they wouldn't notice the lack of freedom in their real lives. This shift in my concept removed the restraints I felt whilst writing in an unimaginative world with characters lacking complex emotions. The absence of complexity in what the characters would feel was revealed to me through internet research on the relationship between the imagination and emotions. John Marsden states that "to write fiction convincingly you need an 'out-of-body' experience, imagining yourself into your character's skin". I couldn't do this with my previous concept. I felt that I could relate to the characters in my new game-based idea, which indicated to me that my intended audience of teenagers would also be sympathetic to this world and characters.

I originally chose teenagers as my intended audience because I felt that the technological world has, in most cases, reduced their imaginative thought. 'Power On' is more suited for a teenage audience because of their familiarity with games and their infatuation with them; I'd even modelled moments of game play in my short story from memories of watching my brothers play games as teenagers.

My short story is a post-apocalyptic world in transition, a world where the final outcomes for society have not yet been realised. This setting is still familiar because the world they live in isn't alien, there are still remnants of our civilisation in the story found in the red dust flaking off the ancient bricks.

I used language that was mechanical to depict the power which the Officials have over the populace, "The arrow pointed left, she walked left." As well as emotive language to inspire fear. The population does not question what the Officials tell them to do. Like the motif of eyes in 'Blade Runner' evoking the feeling of being watched, I wanted to convey the omnipresence of the Officials through voice-overs, their lack of personal identity and through the paranoia of the character Dean.

I used game jargon loosely based on 'The Sims'. Options are listed for the audience to read, as if they were making the decision themselves. This technique strengthens the audience's relationships with the characters and allows them to experience the game personally, to engage with the story in the same way the game engaged the people in my post-apocalyptic world.

The idea of ending my Major Work with an anti-climax where the protagonists had made no lasting impact on their world came from the play 'Waiting for Godot' by Samuel Beckett. This ending reinforced the control the Officials and the unnamed Power have. Their subjugation is complete when Dean and Tiko's minor rebellion is dealt with efficiently. The social isolation of the characters strips the people of unity and enhances the power of the leaders. The lack of relationships is shown through the wearing of name tags, there is no familiarity. The paths leading off in unknown

directions, the people following the one they are told to, their heads bent down in submission as they walk, highlight the dictatorial control that exists within this universe. The people embrace reality with their gazes turned upward. There's a realisation that a virtual world cannot satisfy their need to experience sensations completely, particularly with Dean and Tiko and their acceptance of death, that they'd rather die than go back to a false reality.

The pun in the title 'Power On' plays with the idea of power as well as the reference to turning on a computer. It represents the power and control the leaders have over their people by their playing of the game.

I chose the short story form because I believe it is the best medium for me to communicate my ideas and thoughts on topics. I have found the process to be more challenging than I previously expected and have become more critical of my writing and the language I use.