Rebel Alliance members (to borrow Markey and Ferguson's invocation of a *Star Wars* metaphor) are framed in the service of the book's larger message—in particular, the discussions with Dmitri Williams (the founder of Ninja Metrics and an early pioneer of game studies) related to the very real threats made to his career for publishing work that was decidedly not antivideo games. The authors also cover a possible watershed moment for media scholars involving an increasingly infamous televised debate between Phillip Zimbardo and Andrew Przybylski. And, although it might appear to be a tangential celebration of their Rebel Alliance, the story is intricately woven into the book's larger message as a cogent and salient representation of the debate between an established (antigames) school of thought and an emerging (progames) movement. Video of the debate is also accessible online and should be required viewing for anyone with even a passing interest in game and play studies (see reference 84 in the book).

The manuscript's significance lies not so much in its claims—Markey and Ferguson's statements have been echoed by many—but in its delivery: it offers a remarkably candid, often sardonic, at times oversimple, but ultimately accessible and decidedly insightful look at the sausage making that is social science. Level 6 perhaps best exemplifies the core qualities of this book, because it provides a frank discussion of video game addiction that slices through hyperbole, dispelling the myth that "video games are like heroin" and instead focusing on the descriptive (rather than normative) symptomology offered by Mark Griffith (p. 143).

General audiences will be relieved (or perhaps, disappointed) to learn that video games do not have the direct, powerful, and universal effects so many claim for them. In fact, latter chapters demonstrate prosocial impacts related to mood management, socialization, and physical fitness. Games and play scholars will find a mirror of their own world, which may trigger honest and humble reflection about their very own scientific process. The authors deserve bonus points for the "Easter eggs" hidden throughout the volume and the discussion about the Entertainment Software Ratings Board and the politics and politicking behind it (not unlike those behind Frederic Wertham's crusade against comic books that ultimately lead to the Comics Code Authority in 1954). *Moral Combat* does not decide the debate surrounding the uses and effects of violent video games, but it adds a refreshing salvo into the discussion that should be required reading for anyone involved, regardless of experience or position.

—Nicholas David Bowman, *West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV*

Mixed Realism: Videogames and the Violence of Fiction

Timothy J. Welsh
Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2016. Preface, introduction, acknowledgments, notes, and index. 206 pp. $26.00 paper. ISBN: 9780816696086

Do violent video games cause violence? Despite countless publications, legal battles, and media firestorms, the territory

between video games and violent behavior remains a murky one. In this book, Timothy J. Welsh takes a new delve into the matter, bringing along a novel framework that shines a fresh and much-needed light on the relationship between video games, representation, play, violence, and the wider media landscape in which we consider these questions.

Welsh begins with an overview of ongoing debates about violence in video games. At the core of these, he identifies a paradox: On the one hand, as virtual worlds, video games are fictional and distinguishable from real life and therefore pose no more a threat to society than any other work of fiction. At the same time, video games allow players to act out fantasies of spectacular violence, which both resemble and sometimes seem to encourage real-world violence. These debates are undergirded by a binary model of real and virtual, which carries into popular theories about video game play, including concepts of immersion and flow. This brings Welsh to the central contention of his book: The prevailing understandings of play mischaracterize the media ecology and culture in which video games operate. Welsh's concept of "mixed realism" is therefore predicated on an understanding of reality and virtuality as sets of interlocking frames that can overlap and configure in any number of ways through mediation.

The third and fourth chapters examine the place of the video game player in a mixed realist framework. Welsh considers how video game worlds, more than those in immersive fictions, are tailored to the embodied context of play. He considers three case studies in which the structure of the game leverages the porousness of

reality and fiction: by accommodating the play context in the narrative, by extending the narrative into the context of play, and, finally, by fictionalizing the very act of video game play.

The fifth chapter closes the book's first section with a look at the wider context of video games, which Welsh describes as one of "ubiquitous mediation." He traces a culture of irony and skepticism at least as far back as the 1980s, which has been provoked and rewarded by the media—particularly television. He situates mixed realism as a primary form of practice for making and consuming media emerging from this culture. Not limited to just video games, mixed realism suffuses the entire media landscape, including television, web interfaces, and postmodern fiction. As inhabitants of a mixed realist paradigm, video game players are adept at the fine modulations of irony and suspended disbelief these objects require. However, Welsh notes the more chilling aspects of living in a world where nearly all information arrives through mixed-realist practices—namely an experiential *ambivalence* of real and virtual at the cost of factuality.

The sixth chapter introduces the theme of the book's second part, the ways in which mixed realism reaches beyond its mediated context, through an analysis of Mark Z. Danielewski's novel *House of Leaves*. Here Welsh partakes in some mixed realism of his own, seamlessly shifting between summary, analysis, secondary material, and the book's effects. In so doing, he demonstrates the central function of *House of Leaves*—to underscore the fundamental ambiguity of mediated communication.

In what is surely the book's most

complex portion, Welsh spends the seventh chapter applying his framework to a typical violent game—the blockbuster, first-person shooter, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*. Returning to the question of the relationship between video games and real-world violence, he explores the similarities between *Modern Warfare* and actual modern, drone-enabled battle, which both depersonalize the enemy and mechanize war through remote action and technological mediation. He notes the real-world military use of video-game interfaces for recruitment, training, and actual combat. At the same time, he observes how the game reproduces discourses of "valorous" war through face-to-face interaction. Welsh concludes that *Modern Warfare* digitizes the human and humanizes the digital.

So, do video games cause violence? Welsh's concluding chapter argues that this question misses the mark. Rather than capitulate to a yes or no, he explores, through Rockstar's *Red Dead Redemption*, the complexities of simulated violence in video game fiction. That is, video games can reinforce the kind of terrible equivalencies mobilized in actual warfare and, perhaps, some of the terrible incidents blamed on games, but they can also give place to moments of compassion and empathy for victims. The question therefore is not the technology so much as how it is used, or the culture of games' creation, distribution, and consumption.

Welsh's book offers some excellent tools for such questioning. The book clearly demonstrates the usefulness of his theoretical approach for finding meaningful connections across seemingly disparate contexts and posits novel fusions of real and virtual. It provides an excellent framework for examining video game play from a perspective which combines game design, literary analysis, communication, and cultural studies. It is, furthermore, an incredibly enjoyable read, expertly combining academic rigor, creative research techniques, philosophical complexity, and remarkably accessible language and tone.

I highly recommended this book for scholars studying video games and their play. Scholars examining violence in specific games will find it especially helpful. Communications scholars and students of other media will also find much to work with in the book's methodology, if not its case studies. However, those considering larger matters of video games and systemic violence may find Welsh's lens a little too narrow. Parents, educators, and those concerned about the effects of violent gaming on children will find few easy answers in this text, though they may encounter some pressing cultural questions. Overall, *Mixed Realism* provides a nuanced and compelling read with real potential to affect future research on games and play, with a critical eye toward both games and the wider media culture. It is a timely and welcome addition to the literature.

—Alex Chalk, *Ryerson University and York University, Toronto, Canada*