The game journo's guide to gamifying girlfriends

"**W**e want violence, people's heads exploding, fast cars, big jets, and gouts of hot arterial blood splattered against cobblestones. We want wars and vast armies of ourselves crushing other vast armies of people different to us into the dust." According to the May 1999 issue of PC Zone magazine, it's these violent delights that draw men to video games. The only problem? Women are more interested in stuff like "talking to people, reading books, watching films, living life."

At least that's the relationship conundrum posited by PC Zone's '*How to Get Your Girlfriend Into Games*'. The article goes on to offer a twelve-step programme that guys can use to introduce their girlfriends to video games, including picking the right game (complete with talking points to sell her on selected titles), tidying up their gaming space and deleting any porn from their PC before getting started, and, in a *Clockwork Orange* twist, adjusting the room's lighting so "she has nowhere to look if she gets bored."

Amidst PC Zone's attempts to mine the 'nagging girlfriend' stereotype for comedy, it's a boxout exploring the alleged science of why women aren't interested in games that presents its most laughable claims. Waving its hand vaguely in the direction of scientific studies, the piece suggests: "For some women, the 3D space and layout of an area in a game like *Quake* is not immediately obvious to them. Tunnels which lead off from a room, or even the entire architecture of the room itself, may be 'invisible.'"

I'm not so sure explaining to your girlfriend that her lady brain might be incapable of perceiving complex 3D spaces is the best way to get her into video games.

PC Zone wasn't alone in running dating tips alongside its more conventional game reviews and
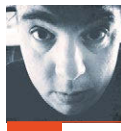
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strategy guides; similar pieces appeared in many gaming magazines at the turn of the millennium, likely driven by the then-burgeoning popularity of 'lad mags' like Maxim and FHM. For instance, Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine published '*10 Games Your Girlfriend Will Play*' in its January 1999 issue, again presenting the girlfriend as an adversarial figure who must be persuaded – or even tricked – into giving games a whirl. Meanwhile, the February 2000 issue of PC Accelerator tweaked the formula with '*A Game Geek's Guide to Getting Girls*', abandoning the pretence that its readers might already be in a relationship. In a passage that reads today like a severely downvoted Reddit post, the article asks, "What if we're so good at gaming, it somehow triggers an 'I want the alpha male' response in females?"

Make no mistake: these articles were intended, by and large, as satire. While the humour falls flat today – and likely didn't bring the house down 20 years ago either – I doubt readers were meant to take this relationship advice too seriously. Nevertheless, these relics of the late 1990s and early 2000s have a lot to teach us about gaming culture, both then and now.

There's, of course, the implicit assumption of a straight male readership that forms the basis of these articles. There's also the reinforcement of a certain brand of dude masculinity, defined by a love of violence and retrograde attitudes toward women who are simultaneously presented as both objects of desire and obstacles to boys having their hard-earned fun. Perhaps most significantly, there's an underlying judgment about who video games are for. Mainstream games, these articles imply, are made for men. Women – including girlfriends – are outliers, welcome to join the fun by invitation only. It's a lesson certain pockets of gaming culture are still struggling to unlearn today. ⓦ