12-1-2009

This is Not a Game. A Novel.

Jeffrey Barlow
Pacific University

Follow this and additional works at: http://commons.pacificu.edu/inter09

Recommended Citation
This is Not a Game. A Novel.

**Description**
Review of *This is Not a Game. A Novel* /

**Rights**
Terms of use for work posted in CommonKnowledge.

This book/site review is available at CommonKnowledge: http://commons.pacificu.edu/inter09/73
This is Not a Game. A Novel.

Posted on December 1, 2009 by Editor

Review by Jeffrey Barlow

Jon Walter Williams is one of the most prolific writers in the Sci-Fi Fantasy genres; in fact, he is several of them, having also published successfully and repeatedly an “alternate history” series as Jon Williams [1]. His works have been nominated for an astonishing number of the key honors in these genres, including Nebula, Hugo, and Philip K. Dick awards. In addition to novels, short stories and teleplays, he has written games, including related fiction and rulebooks. He is sometimes said to have a cyberpunk flavor to his work [2].

The work under review here, This is Not A Game, can be said to combine cyberpunk with gaming, and is presented as an “alternate reality” in effect, though usually this genre branches off a specific real event by answering questions such as “What if Lee had won at Gettysburg?” The book is narrated in a just-around-the-corner setting which is easily recognizable from today’s events and technology, with a bit of extrapolation.

This novel is worth consideration by anyone interested in the impact of the web because the game presented, while not digital as such, is computer enabled. It is a live-action role-playing game presented on a global scale with hundreds of characters, a few of whom we get to know. It also deals with the impact of digitally enabled currency arbitrage.

Here is an excerpt from the book, which introduces the central character as well as the game which features prominently in the book. It provides a strong flavor of the work’s tone:

Dagmar’s job was to create online games for a worldwide audience. Not games for the PC or the Xbox that gamers played at home, and not the kind of games where online players entered a fantasy world in order to have adventures, then left that world and went about their lives. Dagmar’s games weren’t entertainments from which the players could so easily walk away. The games pursued you. If you joined one of Dagmar’s games, you’d start getting urgent phone calls from fictional characters. Coded messages would appear in your in-box. Criminals or aliens or members of the Resistance might ask you to conceal a package. Sometimes you’d be sent away from your computer to carry out a mission in the world of reality, to meet with other gamers and
solve puzzles that would alter the fate of the world.

The types of games previously described, Alternate Reality Games or ARGs, are, in truth, quite popular and just as intricate as the game that drives the plot in this work [3]. The author, as might be expected, has considerable experience with them.

The title of the work comes from a frequent statement made in such games: “This is not a game,” sometimes abbreviated TINAG. The work begins with the protagonist, Dagmar, caught in a chaotic social breakdown in Indonesia, and as she seeks help, her worldwide audience assumes that this is, in fact, a new game; hence, TINAG.

As the plot develops, perhaps predictably the boundary between real world events and in-game events begins to blur and real deaths begin to occur, which the protagonist brilliantly works into an on-going game in order to put the gaming world to the task of solving the crimes.

One of the attractions of science fiction or fantasy is seeing a well-prepared and technically knowledgeable author playing with reality. One of the central issues of This is Not a Game is the nature of fluctuations in the world economy, all too real-world an issue over the past several years. In this work the fluctuations result from an attempt to use artificial intelligence to improve currency trading. Software—“Forlorn Hope”—was set up on a net of illicitly hacked computers which housed “bots,” or computer programs which function almost autonomously as agents—a common enough occurrence on today’s World Wide Web. Here is the flow of the resultant developments in the words of Charlie, another central character:

“I checked the Forlorn Hope account every hour, then every day. ...And then I looked at the Forlorn Hope account for the first time in a couple of weeks, and there the money was, just sitting there.” He looked at Dagmar. A loose-lipped grin spread across his face. “Eleven point two million dollars. All grown from that twenty-thousand-dollar seed...

“And then, back in June”—face turning blank—“the bots leveled.” Leveled. A term from gaming, where a character cashed in experience points and gained a host of new magical abilities. “The agents started crashing whole countries,” Charlie said. “The day that Indonesia started to go down...I saw all this cash sitting in the offshore account, and I knew that something bad had to have happened somewhere, on the other side of the date line, where it was already Monday.” He looked up at Dagmar. “I would have warned you if I’d known you would head for Jakarta that day. ....He looked at her. “Back in ‘ninety-two, George Soros crashed the English pound with ten billion in positions. The bots now have twice as much money as Soros did.” “More than twelve billion?” “More than twenty now. Now that Chile’s burned.”

It would be a plot spoiler to reveal much more than this, but the work is a worthy addition to the literature which gives us insight into the many impacts of the World Wide Web. This plot, of course, turns on extrapolations from present conditions, but they are believable possibilities.
considering the rapid pace of technological development and the close ties to current political and economic trends.

The work should be a good read for anyone willing to suspend critical judgments and, as the characters say, “break the glass wall” between the real and the virtual. And any gamer or sci-fi fan will very much enjoy the combination of the two as created by a highly accomplished author.


[3] For a thorough explanation with many examples of the genre as well as a general introduction to gaming in general, see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternate_reality_game

This entry was posted in Uncategorized by Editor. Bookmark the permalink [http://bcis.pacificu.edu/interface/?p=3713].

18 THOUGHTS ON “THIS IS NOT A GAME. A NOVEL.”

best basketball shoes
on January 29, 2014 at 4:43 PM said:

Touche. Sound arguments. Keep up the great effort.

headlines
on January 30, 2014 at 1:55 PM said:

I have mastered some crucial things via your site post. 1 other subject I wish to talk about is that there are many games offered on the industry produced specially for toddler age children. They include pattern acceptance, colors, family pets, and shapes. These generally focus on familiarization as an selection to memorization. This keeps little young children engaged without sensing like they’re studying. Thanks

Battlefield 4 Trainer
on January 30, 2014 at 6:03 PM said:
Hello! I’ve been following your web site for a while now and finally got the bravery to go ahead and give you a shout out from New Caney Texas! Just wanted to say keep up the good work!

plotka  
on February 1, 2014 at 1:46 AM said:

Be beneficial to each other is one of my common quotes. I practically wrote an article about that last week! Party on, dude.

Zielona Góra  
on February 1, 2014 at 3:40 AM said:

These days the world wide web technologies provide us using a quite certain possibility to pick what exactly 1 requires

call of duty ghosts Hack  
on February 2, 2014 at 6:55 PM said:

The upcoming DLC packs will be arriving first on the Xbox platforms.

It’s almost as amusing as it is pathetic, just because the ratio of “f-word to regular word” is about 120:
1. Meanwhile, armed with only a knife, the enemy becomes a cross between Chuck Norris and the Terminator in a John Woo movie, minus the pistols.

social network  
on February 3, 2014 at 1:45 AM said:

Attractive section of content. I just stumbled upon your internet site and in accession
capital to assert that I get actually enjoyed account your blog posts. Any way I will be subscribing for ones augment and even I accomplishment you entry consistently rapidly.

---

**infrared grill reviews**

on February 3, 2014 at 8:48 PM said:

An impressive share! I’ve just forwarded this onto a co-worker who was conducting a little research on this. And he in fact bought me breakfast simply because I discovered it for him… lol. So let me reword this…. Thanks for the meal!

But yeah, thanx for spending some time to talk about this issue here on your site.

---

**best folding bike**

on February 3, 2014 at 8:59 PM said:

You could certainly see your skills within the article you write. The arena hopes for more passionate writers such as you who are not afraid to mention how they believe. Always go after your heart.

---

**best rifle scope**

on February 3, 2014 at 10:55 PM said:

After exploring a number of the blog articles on your site, I honestly like your way of blogging. I book-marked it to my bookmark website list and will be checking back soon. Please visit my web site too and let me know what you think.

---

**humidifier reviews**

on February 3, 2014 at 11:29 PM said:
I every time used to read piece of writing in newspapers but now as I am a user of net so from now I am using net for content, thanks to web.

**recumbent exercise bike reviews**
on **February 3, 2014 at 11:37 PM** said:

This article will help the internet people for building up new website or even a weblog from start to end.

**best shoes for crossfit**
on **February 4, 2014 at 3:00 AM** said:

Thanks for sharing your thoughts. I really appreciate your efforts and I will be waiting for your further write ups thanks once again.

**best vacuum for hardwood floors**
on **February 4, 2014 at 4:27 AM** said:

Heya! I know this is sort of off-topic but I needed to ask. Does building a well-established blog like yours take a lot of work?

I’m brand new to running a blog however I do write in my journal everyday. I’d like to start a blog so I can share my personal experience and thoughts online. Please let me know if you have any recommendations or tips for new aspiring bloggers. Thankyou!

**nigeria entertainment news**
on **February 4, 2014 at 10:41 AM** said:
I also agree with you. I feel that there are numerous lessons being learned from this book. By not reading the book, we miss out on some points that are a positive impact to our life. However, I do think you need to be a particular maturity in order to get from this book what you need.

**espresso machine reviews**  
_on February 4, 2014 at 4:37 PM said:_

This website truly has all of the information and facts I needed about this subject and didn’t know who to ask.

**jig saw reviews**  
_on February 5, 2014 at 12:13 AM said:_

Nice replies in return of this query with solid arguments and describing everything regarding that.

**garbage disposal reviews**  
_on February 5, 2014 at 2:07 AM said:_

Good day! Would you mind if I share your blog with my twitter group? There’s a lot of people that I think would really enjoy your content. Please let me know. Thanks