

## Technology

# Christians convert to gaming

Sophisticated games aim to make sure players keep the faith

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Gaming has found god. The Christian right has figured out that, instead of rallying against video games as morally deficient purveyors of violence and apathy, it's better off embracing them as a medium for spreading the message of God.

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Last month, a Christian version of Guitar Hero was released, called Guitar Praise. It's not affiliated with Activision's official game, but Guitar Praise features a plastic guitar with five buttons and a selection of God-friendly songs.

The same company also produces Dance Praise, an unabashed copy of the popular Dance Dance Revolution.

Products like these allow Christian kids to play the same kinds of games as their secular peers.

The most spectacularly popular game of this kind is Left Behind: Eternal Forces, a companion to the massively successful series of Left Behind books. The books, which have sold over 63 million copies and counting, are based on the New Testament Book Of Revelation and delve into the post-apocalypse world the rest of us will supposedly find ourselves in after God has sucked all the born-again Christians up to heaven.

Released in 2006, the game was marketed to accompany a poorly received movie starring a born-again Kirk Cameron as one of the poor souls left behind after Christ's second coming.

Typically, video games that follow a religious theme skimp on graphics and story in favour of moral dogma, ensuring that they'll be played only in Sunday school while a receptive pastor looks over a student's shoulder.

Left Behind: Eternal Forces is different. The producers spent the money for a slick, three-dimensional recreation of the streets of New York, and modelled game play after the successful Sims games.

Players must convert heathens and build cafés, houses and churches for their faithful followers, all the while avoiding the temptations of the secular hordes.

Looming in the background is the spectre of the emerging Antichrist, Nicolae Carpathia, a product of the godless process of artificial insemination, who works his evil through the United Nations. The UN peacekeepers are the bad guys under his command. Players are allowed to beat up the "global community" peacekeepers as they attempt to eat away at your faith points.

If it sounds absurd, know that 72 per cent of the series' readers have also played the game. That amounts to 45 million game players – numbers that would make any game company salivate.

This is probably why the game isn't produced by a tiny fundamentalist media company but by Microsoft Windows.

This is certainly a change from the first wave of morally righteous video games that hit the shelves in the late 80s. Games like Bible Adventures and Super 3D Noah's Ark were terrible. I'm sure even Christians were baffled by the nonsensical storylines and boxy graphics.

These games also had a decidedly positive outlook, presenting the stories in the Bible for consumption by children. Eternal Forces is darker, appealing to grown-up gamers who prefer complex game play.

Other Christian video game companies have aped the first-person-shooter format (Axy's Adventure: Truth Seeker), fantasy games (The Rebel Planet) and historical role-play (Catechumen).

Will they bring new recruits to God?

Download the demo version of Eternal Forces and decide for yourself ( [eternalforces.com](http://eternalforces.com)).

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