

Someplace you've never even heard of is suddenly in the news, and you find yourself staring glumly at the "Troublestan at a Glance" box in the *New York Times*. What I need, you say to yourself, is an "at a glance" box that answers my kind of questions. What you need is *World View 1984*, edited by Francois Geze, Yves Laco te and Alfredo Valladao, the French-based publication now in its second year as an English-language version of a year-book offering "an alternative, critical view of the world." Most useful are its short, punchy and analytic articles on major issues—international trade, for example—and its debates on such topics as the Palestinian state question and the New International Information Order (the ostensible grounds for our huffy pullout from UNESCO). Sometimes the articles answer questions you never would have thought to ask. There are pieces on sex tours of Southeast Asia, on how banks rate countries and on mystical religion in Brazil. An innovative section on culture includes articles on feminist fiction, Japanese comics and the following excerpt, an analysis of video games as nuclear culture by culture critic Ariel Dorfman's (author of *The Empire's Old Clothes*). —Pat Aufderheide

The Empire's

By Ariel Dorfman

AS THE VIDEO GAME craze spread across the U.S., parents complained of coins vanishing and doc-diagnosed new ailments, like "joystick hand" and "asteroids finger." Some towns prohibited the coin-op games; others issued ordinances regarding age limits and the times that arcades should close; and certain countries even forbade the entertainment as pernicious.

The Amusement Game Manufacturers of America, however, did not complain. In the midst of the recession they reported that 32 billion 25-cent coins had been played into the machines during 1982. In fact, until E.T.'s phenomenal success saved the film industry, video games had been the year's top money-spinner in entertainment, ahead of movies and records.

With such profits to be had, it is not strange that many justifications have appeared for video games. Educational consultants find them a means of acquiring computer literacy; behavioral scientists speak of "interacting with the technology of the future" and "confidence building"; psychologists point out that kids are working out their aggressions on the games rather than spending their money on drugs, and that unathletic youths can use the games to acquire status with their peers.

Many of these explanations are probably true, but they do not account, by themselves, for the games' popularity. There may be another explanation. Video games in their present form would be inconceivable if the world did not have the means to blow itself to pieces—because the same computer technology that spawned real missiles with warheads also spawned those mock missiles with psychedelic flares on the screen.

Video games imitate the strategy, the targeting, the jargon of the "war games" played in real rooms by real adults in uniform. (*Newsweek* reported that the Pentagon has been using versions of video games as training devices.) However, the relationship is deeper: electronic games are the product of a society where apocalypse is possible. Though the scenes on the screens supposedly occur in faraway constellations where indefinable aliens are opponents, they are really ways of acting out, at another level, the nuclear predicament.

This is overtly so only in "Missile Command," a game where the player must defend six U.S. cities (in a more "international" version, "Red Alert," there are five foreign cities plus New York), with a final annihilation by a mushrooming of clouds as the words "the end" flash on a spasmodic farewell. In other games, though the alien may have an extraterrestrial name, the result and the process are the same: in "Asteroids," "Defender," "Omega Race," "Galaxians," the triangle, the humanoid, the ship are ultimately melted, vaporized and zapped out of existence no mat-

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examines nuclear videos

New

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