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GAMES

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In the summer, Shine Studios premiered the adventure computer game *Saints of War*, which was available only in the Christian market, said Bud Gillan, a company founder.

"They want stuff for their kids, and the kids want something that the parents will allow them to play," Swan said. "I know the need is there. The first real one out of the block did not blow doors open."

Some, however, said they are concerned that the violence in *The War in Heaven* may be unappealing to many Christian consumers.

Family Christian Stores' Mark Beyer, who oversees software purchases for the Grand Rapids, Mich.-based chain of about 340 stores, describes the game as "edgy." He said it spawned complaints from customers who were concerned about the combat portion.

Beyer declined to say how many copies of *The War in Heaven* his stores have sold. But the game was one of the more popular products in a small line of Christian computer games, he said.

Game developers Andrew Lunstad and Westmoreland said they make no apologies about the game's violence. It was designed to catch the attention of teen-agers while injecting eternal lessons, Lunstad said.

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"For a kid who plays these games ... this was a way of reminding them of what is true," he said.

Part of the sales problem for *The War in Heaven* was that the game appeared to fall between secular and Christian markets. For the secular market, the Bible verses that appear throughout the adventure may be a turnoff. And in the Christian market, computer games are a new genre.

The War in Heaven, which costs about \$24 in stores, hit the market in October. Of the approximately 20,000 copies that were shipped to Christian and mainstream retail stores, about 4,000 have been sold, Westmoreland said.

In comparison, *Final Fantasy VIII*, a secular adventure game similar to *The War in Heaven*, has sold more than 14,000 copies since it debuted in December, according to figures from PC Data of Reston, Va. Overall, action-adventure computer games generated about \$1.4 billion in sales in 1999, according to the market research firm.

Westmoreland said he is disappointed that *The War in Heaven* didn't thrive in the secular market.

"We are still trying to evaluate what we did right and what we did wrong," he said. "We figured it would do much better."

But the game had takers in the Christian market, Swan said. Family Christian Stores sell about 60 copies of it each week, he said.

In some ways, brandishing swords and spears to slay demons was simply new for the Christian market, Swan said. But computer games in general are not an easy sell in a market dominated by Bibles, books and gifts.

"It is starting to expand a little bit," Beyer said of the market for Christian computer games. "At this time, there is a lot more out there than we pick up."

LifeWay Christian Store in

North Richland Hills does not sell video games — combat or otherwise, manager Matt Jagers said. "Just from my standpoint, in this location alone, I've not had any calls for a Christian video game," he said.

Christian products have difficulty competing with the graphics and technology of secular games, Beyer said. Development costs make producing games for the Christian market prohibitive, he said.

As a result, some Christian products have not measured up, Beyer said.

Even for Top Meadow, a Christian computer game company with software experts from the secular market, the key has been to educate the market about what is possible, said Brian Supple, chief operations officer of the California-based company.

"When you say 'game,' even in the Christian community, people don't embrace the idea," Supple said. "You can't put the Bible and game together. That is one of the roadblocks a person runs into when you design products like this."

Supple's company produces *Heaven Quest*, a 3-D board game in which computer players proceed through the game answering biblical questions. The game was released in November 1998 and has sold about 3,000 copies, the company said.

Next month, the company plans to release *GI's Bible Jumble*, a game that tests the biblical knowledge of children older than 5.

Top Meadow also plans to develop a game for the teen-age market. But it probably won't be a combat game, Supple said.

"There is enough violence in the world," he said. "We don't see any reason for shadowing that in our products."

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Bloomsburg Press-Interpreter/TOM ADAMS/STP
Firefighters in Bloomsburg, Pa., work to extinguish a blaze in a house occupied by six college students.

Fraternity house fire kills 3 in Pennsylvania

BLOOMSBURG, Pa. — A fire in an off-campus fraternity house near Bloomsburg University killed three people early yesterday while others jumped to safety from a second-story window.

Five male fraternity members and an alumnus who was visiting were sleeping in the Tau Kappa Epsilon house when the fire broke out about 6 a.m. Three got out safely, university spokesman Jim Hollister said.

Hollister said it was too soon to tell whether the bodies were those of the missing students. He said the victims will be identified through dental records.

The cause of the fire was not immediately clear. The 2-story wooden house is in a hilly neighborhood about two blocks from campus. A neighboring white 3-story home was scorched, and police said it sustained severe damage inside.

Bloomsburg University President Jessica Kosloff said the building was owned by the fraternity and had been maintained well. City officials cleared the house for occupancy after noting a down code violation in October, including a battery missing from a smoke detector, five electrical heaters being run on an inadequate electrical system, a missing doorknob and an empty fire extinguisher, code enforcement officer Dean Van Blöhm said.

Boeing engineers, technical workers vote to end strike

SEATTLE — Striking Boeing engineers and technical workers approved a new contract yesterday, ending one of the biggest white-collar walkouts in the country's history.

Members of the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace plan to return to

work at 9 a.m. today. Some 9,660 of 13,440 eligible, dues-paying union members cast ballots, spokesman Bill Dagovich said.

Both the technical and engineering sides approved the contract by more than 70 percent, said union Executive Director Charles Boffending.

The latest offer included guaranteed wage increases of at least 9 percent over three years and bonuses of up to \$2,500.

Boeing deliveries have slipped by more than 15 airplanes, and work on some government contracts has also suffered during the walkout of about 15,000 to 17,000 workers that began Feb. 9.

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