

## A Thought on Box Copy

*Chris Crawford*

Jason Kargill sat alone at a table in the darkest corner of the little cantina. His fingers idly/nervously caressed the handle of the laser blaster strapped to his hip. Through eyes narrowed to slits, he watched the steady stream of customers coming and going. They widened slightly when the zlarix walked in. So this was the one he'd been waiting to see all this time. This was the partner who would teach him to be a

STARLANE RAIDER!!!

How many times have we all seen opening lines like these on our games? Dripping with purple, the text shouts romance, excitement, and adventure. It makes you want to buy that game, rush home, and enter the colorful world it promises—which of course is the whole purpose of the prose.

There's a problem with this, though: have you ever noticed that the game you play really has nothing whatever to do with the text? You don't get to idly/nervously caress the handle of your laser blaster; instead, you jerk your cursor all over the screen and blast hundreds of little green monsters over and over and over. You don't narrow your eyes to slits as you watch etc., etc. Instead, you wander through a bunch of cut screens showing a random collection of absurd aliens. You don't betray your expectation when your new partner walks in the door; instead, you wander through long confusing mazes in search of obscure puzzle parts.

Do you see the difference between the purple prose and the game? The purple prose drips with overdone emotion, but the game doesn't have any emotion, just a lot of logic and action. Isn't that odd? If our opening text were more honest about the gameplay, it would read like this:

Jason Kargill hunched forward. Streams of odd-shaped blue things with big teeth appeared in the room in front of him. He pointed his laser blaster frantically around

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the room, blasting them. They kept coming, bigger and faster, and he kept blasting. Then there were green things with bloodshot eyes, and he blasted them, too. After a while, they stopped coming, so he walked into another room where there were a bunch of orange things with claws, and he blasted thirty or forty of those, then walked into another room....

Now, this would be a lot more honest, wouldn't it? This would really communicate what the game is about. So why do we need that other kind of introduction? What deficiency in our games does the original text make up for?

We really are like a little kid on a tricycle. We pedal our tricycle furiously, shouting "Vroom!" at the top of our lungs. "Here comes the fire truck!" Then we point our fingers at the tree and make watery noises with our mouths. "Put out the fire!" we cry gleefully. It's all great good fun.

But what's really odd is that, instead of building fire trucks, we just keep building bigger tricycles....