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Striking back against rats and crappy video games

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Trash Wars was created by a fledgling Flash games developer named Q-Kmbr as a way to sate Toronto's unfulfilled bloodlust brought on by the never-ending civic strike.

It is the first game of its sort that I've heard of, so on Wednesday I decided to give it a try. It turned out that *Trash Wars: Toronto Garbage Strike '09* (as it is formally called) distinguishes itself not only as the first strike-centric game, but also as a boring, desultory experience. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

The game is very simple. Crudely animated rats scuttle at various speeds toward a trash pile that your crudely animated avatar stands atop. This vigilante, or messiah, depending on your point of view, has eight bullets and must shoot each rat a certain number of times before they overrun the dumpsite, creating an infestation. If the infestation becomes too great then it's game over. If you shoot the rats, they die. So (let me get this straight here), to win, you must shoot. Then reload. And keep shooting. And reload...

With a few exceptions, the game is mind-numbingly repetitious. After passing the third, sixth and ninth stages, you can modify your gun to kill the rats quicker. As the game progresses, the small rats become harder to kill and a few gigantic rats appear, their inspiration perhaps drawn from the hideous specimens on Spadina.

To call this particular medium "animation" is generous; the mockups of the characters resemble the discarded sketches of a six-year-old. Besides pointing and clicking, there's not much going on - there's more action in a eunuch's bedroom. The background music is so grating that its original use must have been in the torture of suspected terrorists.

After six unsuccessful attempts I finally beat the game on my seventh try, killing 580 rats and boring myself to tears. Any pride I had at attaining the 20th highest all-time score was immediately erased by the realization that my time would have been better spent chasing real rats on Spadina than playing this snoozer.

A humble suggestion, if I might, on how to improve the game. Broaden the challenges beyond these heaps of trash. Rename the game *Strike Wars* and make it a 10-part game. A strike decathlon, of sorts.

Picket-Breaking would pit your character, a scab, against an ever-increasing mound of workers as you build up enough power to break through them using battering rams, cannons and Trojan horses. There's *Mild Child/Wild Child*, a complicated strategy game in which, with a limited supply of funds, you must find affordable but fun summer programs for your ten children, keeping their "happiness meter" high so that they don't go from "mild" to "wild." *The Untested Island Swim* would have your character dog-paddling to Toronto Island with a giant E. coli bacteria and mutated pike in hot pursuit. Add a few more challenges - *The Permit Shuffle*, *No-Brains Bargaining* and the *Grand Theft Auto*-like rampager, *CentreKILL*, except in this case, you're driving a rogue Centre Island ferry.

With just a few quick additions I've transformed a dull game into a rollicking epic. Such vision Infinite wisdom They should sit me down with the unions and the city. I'd have some creative solutions for them, too.