



## Against Humanity

**F**ar Cry 3 is a ridiculous game. A crew of twenty-somethings skydive onto a Pacific island where the heavily armed local paramilitary group immediately kidnaps them. The game's narrative arc follows one of those twenty-somethings, Jason, as he develops from an entitled, aimless dudebro into a magical soldier-of-fortune covered in pseudo-tribal tattoos, slinging an AK-47 and a bazooka in holsters made from the skins of animals he killed with his own two hands.

In interviews, *Far Cry 3*'s lead writer Jeffrey Yohalem has indicated that the game is intended at least partially as satire, implicating the player in Jason's increasingly enthusiastic bloodlust, but there's very little in either *Far Cry 3*'s gameplay or storytelling that tries to convey a sense the game's mayhem should be thought of as anything other than a spectacle of adrenaline awesomeness. Jason/the player gets bigger and bigger guns to kill more despicable bad guys

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*Far Cry 3:*  
*Blood Dragon*  
2013  
System(s):  
PC,  
PlayStation 3,  
Xbox 360  
Played on:  
PlayStation 3

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and make even bigger things go boom. One of *Far Cry 3*'s two possible endings seems to try to indicate that Jason making the choice to go full-on supervillain would be bad for him and the people around him, but then it places the player in the exact same position they're given if Jason chooses the "good" ending instead. Save your friends or murder them, it doesn't really matter one way or the other.

In this sense, one can argue, that *Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon*, a downloadable not-quite-sequel released less than six months later, is the game that *Far Cry 3* really wanted to be.

The best way to experience *Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon* might be through the game's trailer. After the shuffling sounds and rough tracking of an aging VHS tape, and the period-correct detail of random commercials preserved forever from a recorded TV broadcast, the trailer settles into the poetry of the 1980s action/sci-fi absurd.

*It is the near future.*

*The apocalypse has had an apocalypse.*

*A rogue cyborg army is reshaping the world into cyber-hell, and only one thing can stop them.*

*"Let's show them how Cyber Commandos get it done."*

*"Mark IV style, motherfucker!"*

*From the toxic ashes of Vietnam War II, a new breed of renegade soldier is born. Part man, part machine, all Cyber Commando.*

The visuals are the dark and neon of a blacklight poster on the wall of a teenager's bedroom, and the action is *The Terminator* as imagined by someone too young to watch it in anything more than furtive snippets during clandestine late-night TV sessions. The narrative is delivered in the kind of semi-static 8-bit cutscenes that seemed so stunning in *Ninja Gaiden*. There is a sidekick killed early on who must be avenged. There is a woman whose short, gelled-to-nearly-vertical hair and power blazer let you know she is a Very Modern All-Business Force To Be Reckoned With. There is a bad guy who used to be the good guy's mentor/father figure.

The first thing *Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon* has the player do, even before the tongue-in-cheek tutorial, is to blast some sort of a military compound from a

minigun on a helicopter, like Schwarzenegger in *Terminator 2* dropped into an *Apocalypse Now* scene glitched into *Blade Runner*, with a side of *Predator*.

If on the other hand, you are interested in a game that takes on the cultural context of the 80s rather than its trappings, then this is not the game for you. *Blood Dragon* nods at the way that the memory and cultural trauma of the Vietnam War pervaded stories in the 80s, but it's not intended to do more than elicit a chuckle of recognition.

(Vietnam was everywhere in the 80s. Obvious in places, like *Rambo* and *Platoon*, but 'nam was a background issue in *The A-Team*, where the characters are fugitives after being [wrongly] accused of war crimes. Even in the lighter sci-fi series *Quantum Leap*, Sam Beckett's older brother is revealed to have been killed in Vietnam, and Sam's comic relief semi-virtual guide through time Al spent four years as a prisoner of war. You can even see traces in the way that videogames like *Contra* treat war as a thing that takes place in jungles compared to the more frequent desert levels of games in our post-Desert Storm/Iraqi Freedom era.)

The pleasures that *Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon* promises are those of power and violence beyond the possibility of consequence or responsibility. Which, in the end, is just the same as *Far Cry 3*, only stripped of the veneer of message or relevance. *Far Cry 3* asks the player to take down the world to save Jason's friends. Rex Power Colt doesn't have any friends. He doesn't even have any real enemies. There are faces in cutscenes and voices that hijack Colt's intercom, but *Blood Dragon's* climax isn't a battle between Colt and the mad Colonel Sloan. It's a ride on an armored battle dragon with laser eyes – not a boss fight, but an apotheosis into a weapon of mass destruction.

It's . . . not un-fun, and if *Blood Dragon* leaves the player with the sense that it comes down on the side of the T-800 walking across a field of skulls, then that still might be closer to cultural critique than *Far Cry 3* ever gets. The future is trash, *Far Cry 3* says. The future has always been trash, *Blood Dragon* responds. The pursuit of moral solipsism disguised as self-realization isn't a Millennial innovation. It's the American Dream.

Mark IV style, motherfucker. 🇺🇸