

# Slate

## A View to a Kill

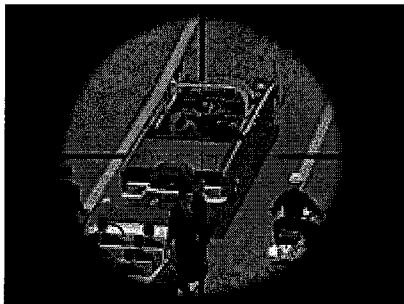
JFK Reloaded is just plain creepy.

By Clive Thompson

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As I watch the limo creep down Dealey Plaza, I put my finger on the trigger and peer down my rifle's telescope. I can see my target in the cross hairs. It's Nov. 22, 1963. I'm trying to kill the president.

The game I'm playing, JFK Reloaded, was released today by the Scottish company Traffic, on the 41st anniversary of the Kennedy assassination. Not surprisingly, it provoked a backlash before anyone ever played it. "It's despicable. There's really no further comment," said a spokesman for Ted Kennedy.

On the surface, the game certainly seems

like a loathsome piece of opportunism. The designers, though, claim the game's intent is to educate. The stated goal of JFK Reloaded is to debunk assassination conspiracy theories by buttressing the Warren Commission's conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone and fired only three bullets. So, the game places you in the precise place where Oswald stood—the sixth-floor window of the Texas Schoolbook Depository—and challenges you to re-create his three shots. One shot missed the car entirely; another hit JFK in the neck; and a third hit the president's head, causing what the commission called "a massive and fatal wound." The closer you get to matching those three trajectories, the closer you get to a perfect score of 1,000. (The game designers are also offering a cash prize to the player who gets the

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When I play blood-soaked shoot-'em-up games, the vamped-up violence doesn't really bother me—the more cartoonish the action, the fewer consequences the game seems to have. Even war games where you're theoretically fighting a real enemy—like German or American or

When I finally managed to kill JFK and watched his head blow open while he flopped forward like a rag doll, I was genuinely horrified. The game wants you to think about what's happening as a mere physics experiment, but you can't, nor would you want to. Because it's focused solely on the narrow question of whether you can replicate Oswald's



shots, it doesn't try to achieve the sort of catharsis that is supposed to come from wrenching art. When the ballistics reports told me, for example, that one of my shots hit JFK in the right shoulder, exited his chest, bounced off his right fingers, and ricocheted through the limo until it hit Connally in the shin, I wasn't really thinking about how if I just aimed a little higher, then I could've gotten closer to 1,000 points.

After about an hour, I got my score up to 430. I was pretty good at the game, but I didn't feel like I'd won anything.

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