







## **Dedication**

To everyone who still gives enough of a damn to do something about injustice, inequality and anything else that they see as just plain wrong. Please keep the faith during the death of politics and keep fighting for what you believe in, even if it is something I don't agree with.

Liberty, equality, fraternity!

Also for our kitten, Charlie, whose love of mouse, keyboard, stylus and Caps Lock key made the creation of this book so much more... *interesting*.

## **Note About the Front Cover**

You will note that the front & back covers of *@ctiv8* are a collage. This collage is made up of a great many avatars taken from *Livejournal* and other sources. Now, many people get extremely 'pissy' at credit not being given for the use of their avatars and there is worry about using copyrighted material, such as film or other identifiable commercial images.

It is *my* interpretation that the front cover collage meets the following criteria as I understand them under *US law*.\*

- This collage is protected from prosecution under the *de minimus* doctrine. Avatars are small parts of pictures, series of pictures or stills from films that fall under 5/10% of the original work.
- It meets the definitions of 'fair use' of Criticism, Comment and Research when taken as part of the overall work that forms *@ctiv8*.
- The collage constitutes a new and original work in and of itself.

It is my hope that none of this ever needs to come up and that both the 'owners' of the avatars and IP in question are complimented by their inclusion and can see from it how far their influence and creativity has spread throughout the net from its representation here.

\*US Citizens and companies being the most litigious and US copyright and IP law being the most stringent.

**Cover:** James 'Grim' Desborough

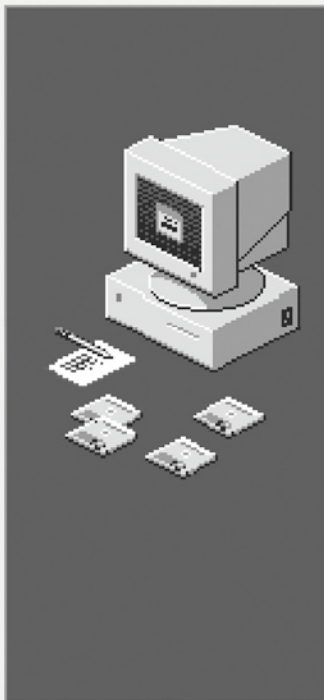
**Internal Artwork:** Daniel Schenstrom, James 'Grim' Desborough

**Writing/Editing/Layout:** James 'Grim' Desborough

*@ctiv8*, text content and non-illustrative design and art ©Postmortem Studios (James Desborough) 2005.

Illustrations ©Daniel Schenstrom and Postmortem Studios (James Desborough) 2005

## Welcome



This will install the @ctiv8 system on your computer. This program will use up a small amount of background bandwidth while you are connected to the internet and it would be helpful to the whole @ctiv8 network if you remained connected as much as possible.

The @ctiv8 system will enable you to keep in touch with activists, agitators and experts of a similar political bent to yourself. It will help you organise, give you access to many different experts on many different subjects and network you with people who feel similarly to the way you do and are willing to act upon it.

The @ctiv8 system involves a profiling system, please be as accurate and as honest as possible when filling out the profile to ensure the system can integrate you as fully and cleanly as possible. Your profile can be updated later if your political and other beliefs significantly change.

Press 'next' if you are ready to install @ctiv8

Next >

Cancel

# Introduction

@ctiv8 is an experiment and another dare, the last being *Hentacle*. The experiment here, the dare – though not an explicit dare – was to make an overtly political game. Not political in the sense of intrigues and Machiavellian schemes which has come to be the definition of ‘political’ in most games that define themselves that way, but rather a game that takes an explicit political stance and expresses it.

Conventional wisdom is that taking a political, or religious, stance is commercial suicide as you will alienate far more people than you attract. While there are plenty of games that play *with* religious or magical themes and concepts none of them take a stance on what they regard as being real or their own religion for fear of inciting fundamentalists into an 80’s style witch hunt or alienating their customer base. It’s not hard to see with many games however that their authors or contributors do have a particular stance or belief. Strangely, politics seems completely beyond the pale for people to comment on or play with even at the arms-length with which we play with religion.

The politics and ideas upon which @ctiv8 are based are expressed more than adequately elsewhere in the book. You can play @ctiv8 without acknowledging these and play it as a more straightforward conspiracy or hero type game. The main thrust of the game is that anyone can be a hero, anyone in the right place at the right time with the right skills, connections or just a willingness to do something can make a positive and measurable change to the world. If you don’t like radical politics or controversial views on the status quo skip the whole introduction!

I hope that @ctiv8 encourages people to become more aware of things going on around them, of how things work, of how they can help each other, help their communities and make the world a better place. After all, the best stories are those that inspire as well as entertain.

## @ctiv8

@ctiv8 is a role-playing game of people taking the law, right and wrong, life and death and many other issues into their own hands. It is a game about actually acting on what you believe in, in striving to make a difference and, in some small way, to make the world a better place. These are people who actually have the will or capability to do something and who don’t defer to authority or another organisation to do it for them. They get their hands, their minds or whatever else they can use dirty to make that difference.

@ctiv8 is not truly an organisation per se, orders do not come from on high to be doled out to people lower on the rungs of a hierarchical ladder. Instead purpose and direction filters up from the grassroots level through the system to people with helpful skills, positions and other capabilities whose political and social bent - and willingness to act - make them useful and compatible with the aims of the proposed action.

If the problem presented was the aftermath of a natural disaster

along with the slowness of governments to mobilise and deal with the problem, then the people selected might be drivers, pilots, people who work in customs and excise, people with access to food, medical supplies or other material that might be needed. With willingness and a little disruption of the normal status-quo, a disparate group of people, who may have never even met or talked before, can be organised and brought together to make a genuine difference.

So what is @ctiv8? It is a computer program, an amorphous, anarchistic, self-organising collective; it is a secret organisation with no goal, no aim and no agenda other than in the loosest terms of ‘making the world a better place’. Its members don’t necessarily agree on what should be done to achieve that goal, most of its members aren’t even aware of each other’s existence most of the time. It is an underground method of communication that acts as a spur to action, to finally get up and do something. As that, it excels.

## Activism

*ac-tiv-ism*

*n.*

*The use of direct, often confrontational action, such as a demonstration or strike, in opposition to or support of a cause.*

Activism goes beyond its dictionary definition in common usage more and more. The dictionary implies a necessarily ‘hands on’ approach in the promotion or opposition of causes but this physicality is not necessarily required for someone to participate in activism. More and more activism and single issue politics replace the importance of voting or parties in people’s minds. Politicians are seen as always being the same, no matter who you vote for, nothing substantially changes and politicians argue over points that are esoteric and meaningless to the common man. A cause however? That is something you can get behind. Be it saving starving children in Africa or preventing a new housing development on ancient woodland, activist issues are clear cut, straightforward and can be cherry-picked to ones own political and social bent. No wonder party politics suffers, turnouts are so low and activist causes are on the rise.

We mostly associate activism with ‘right on’ causes. Racism, sexism, ageism, road protests, the environment and other, similar, cases but there are many less palatable causes that are equally vehemently promoted and defended. A good example would be the rise of the Minutemen and Save Our State, the unofficial border patrol of the United States, volunteers who hold vigils and watch the borders for Mexican immigrant entering illegally to the US. These people have been met by other groups, anarchists, race relations and Amnesty groups, all protesting what they are doing and interfering with it, while also garnering additional support from racist and neo-Nazi groups. Like the Anti-Hunt and Pro-Hunt lobbies in the United Kingdom the two sides are bitter enemies but share the same tactics, both are activists. They have a commonality between them.

Activism ranges from the simple petition all the way up to

sabotage, tree-spiking and even actions that could be regarded as terrorism. Activists could be anyone from the man who writes to his newspaper every week decrying the modern youth all the way up to the masked protester beating down a riot cop with a pickaxe handle. Each cause is a singular issue, each person promoting that cause, attacking what they see to be wrong in their own way.

Most activism is concentrated on bringing pressure to bear on existing institutions, methods or practices. The road protest movement uses a lot of direct action, the digging of tunnels, tying themselves to trees and so on, but they are still applying pressure economically, trying to make it too expensive for the government and the companies to continue on the projects. Other groups lobby parliament, make protests and riot to show their displeasure and to try and influence the ruminations of parliaments and politicians so that they will modify their behaviour. Often this doesn't work and simply demonises the groups in the eyes of the semi-mythical 'general public'.

@*ctiv8* tends to be even more direct, even more hands on, if there is a problem then they do not apply pressure and wait for someone else to fix it, they get it done themselves by any means necessary. They see that often protest achieves nothing, even moves people further away from understanding the position of activists, hardens the government or corporate line and so they work more quietly, more effectively.

## Internet Communities

The internet has, for something that involves people so often far apart, always been about creating communities and the exchange of information. From its earliest days as part of the military communication system in the US and as a method for academics to cross-pollinate ideas and combine work on projects, it has grown to become a global phenomenon. The basics of the internet, e-mail and newsgroups, can be accessed on outdated technology, mobile phones and just about anywhere there is a communications link or a satellite transceiver.

The internet, therefore, provides the *opportunity* for people to communicate outside their usual circle of friends and their usual interests. In a medium where the message can be read away from the context of the person creating the message ideas and communication *can* cross boundaries of race, age, politics, gender and all other factors with less preconceptions than face to face communication.

But we're human, we like the familiar and comfortable, we like to share with others of similar mind, we like to have our beliefs affirmed rather than challenged and so we tend to gravitate towards similar people. That creates internet communities.

These spring up around newsgroups, forums, *Livejournal* and elsewhere, forming up around shared interests, shared politics, or a topic of discussion that people feel passionately about. This usually creates a closed loop, a self-referential and internalised culture of endless argument over the fine points of the latest episode of that show or interminable rehashes of the same debates over Nazism. Some services and sites have begun to

spring up exclusively serving this sort of community building, *tribe.net* or *Friendster* being the most widely known, though they seem less successful than spontaneously organising groups.

Still, internet communities combined with modern communications technology have allowed for the organisation of activism on a whole new level. People from across a country, from across the world, can be reached and to some extent supported. Groups can concentrate their efforts and organise their protests to an unprecedented degree often catching authorities off guard or outmanoeuvring them. They can create sudden and spontaneous events or share 'intelligence' and acquired skills with other groups. Activist pamphlets and political works can also be stored online and shared or printed out allowing the people with the best skills from similar groups around the world to apply their skill to the actions of others. It even allows for the alliances of many different protest groups to come together, to swell their numbers and to provide more emphasis to their collected causes, as has been seen in the anti-globalisation protests and rallies.

@*ctiv8* works by bringing together people of compatible beliefs and different skills, networking them together in a dynamic manner, bringing together the people with the right skills and the willingness to do what is required by the task at hand. The communities it creates are changeable, anonymous and focussed upon a particular result in the real world. Groups come together to address specific problems, deal with them and then break apart again, preventing stagnation and helping make the group hard to track.

## The Collapse of Democracy

*'Democracy is the worst form of government except for all those others that have been tried.'*

- Winston Churchill

Strong words 'The Collapse of Democracy' but with a seemingly ever-falling level of voter participation in elections, save when they are fuelled by hate and fear, it doesn't seem too extreme a statement to make. Political parties are increasingly disconnected from the people they serve, increasingly mediocre as they battle it out over a grey and uninspiring middle ground of 'maximum appeal' or seeking out relatively powerful and motivated minorities that bother to turn out to vote, giving themselves an unrepresentatively strong hand.

People believe that voting doesn't change anything, that whoever you vote for *The Government* always gets in and that nothing meaningful changes. Others vote simply as they have always voted, regardless of the changing policies or image of the party between elections, voting by tradition. Of those who do vote only a relatively small number of 'swing voters' ever move between parties or groups. All of which distorts the process.

The UK and US systems are based upon 'First Past the Post' systems of 'representative' democracy. The Electoral College and the UK system of seats. Taking the UK example each seat has an approximately equal number of people within it, so seats in London are small, geographically and seats in Scotland are