

**WIRED NEWS****Etoy: 'This Means toywar.com!'**by Steve Kettmann

11:40 a.m. 17.Jan.2000 PST

A lot of people who tuned in late to the wrangling between eToys and etoy knew right away who the online toy company was but kind of wondered about the Internet artists based in Zurich.

That's fair enough. Their dry-as-dust irony and seemingly affectionate mockery of corporate-type tics is a little arcane. Their new online game at toywar.com -- their way of celebrating their pending victory over eToys -- may offer a better tour of their world and what they're all about.

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The humor is often puckish. To gain access to the game, you not only have to be invited, you also have to swear you have nothing to do with Santa Monica-based eToys. Then you must answer various questions designed to test whether you're uptight or not.

"WAR is a hard business," you are warned. "The TOYWAR.board needs to test your performance to make sure you will perform at your best in the most dangerous situations. The following test will expose you to psychological stress in order to determine your mental integrity."

Then it's on to standard questions about whether you've killed anyone, or at least thought about it, "Or have you ever dreamed of being the opposite sex?" or "Did you ever wake up at night and realize you had real sick dreams?" or "Have there been situations where you enjoyed physical pain?" or "Do you think that you are suffering from neurosis, psychosis, severe depression, schizophrenia or any other grave mental illness?"

The idea, of course, is that only a sick, sick person would answer NO to any of these questions -- at least within the context of the joke. Corporate-style screening of who fits and who doesn't is turned on its head.

Inside, don't expect Nintendo. You are represented by a character -- an unsexy icon, to be sure -- but the character doesn't get to do anything. However, you can whirl around a little and see who else is around, and you get a radio to talk to people.

There were, however, various interesting icons to explore [quoted here verbatim], like the one of a big bomb.

"WOW! you found a highly explosive INFORMATION BOMB before it could cause further damage on the etoy.SERVER-INFRASTRUCTURE," you are informed. "Since the beginning of the lawsuit eToys vs. etoy many TOYWAR.agents had to defuse legal-bombs and propaganda-bombs placed by eToys Inc.... They caused damage for about 50.000 \$. This is just one reason why the etoy.ENGINEERS introduced

the resistance platform [www.toywar.com](http://www.toywar.com). Do you have the skills and the luck to defuse this bomb?"

Get lucky and choose the right switch -- after first being warned to store all documents, because "an explosion can crash your system."

One icon it may be wise to stay away from blares "The etoy.RESISTANCE-ALERT!" It proclaims: "As soon as the borders of the etoy.PROPERTY are crossed by one single crappy plastic soldier from [any] law firm hired by eToys, A GLOBAL ALERT GETS TRIGGERED."

If that sounds a little breathless and self-aggrandizing -- at odds with the usual etoy cool detachment -- etoy folks will be the first ones to admit they've been transformed by their battle with eToys.

The big company backed down only when a wide range of Internet users decided to speak out on behalf of etoy. So to them, the sense of community means something. "This whole thing proves that the Internet definitely works differently," said the etoy spokesman who calls himself Zai.

"People could really see that and they are totally excited that they have something to say here, because they are connected. They don't have to go out and make riots and run the risk of being tear-gassed if they want to say their opinion, they can do that with their email. People can really have an impact. This was always a priority in our art concept."

The latest status report from etoy, mailed worldwide on Saturday, declared, "It only looks like there is no war anymore!" It called on supporters to send still more emails to eToys to keep up the pressure.

"We don't see ourselves as political activists," said Zai. "There is a political layer, maybe, but it's an abstract layer. We don't want to be the freedom heroes of the Internet. It was the people who fought. We were just lucky that the people like our art."

"But we do want to generate an impact. We can't really imagine our work being isolated. Toywar is a good example of what we want to do, because it's a living system. We have no idea what people do who meet here. They talk to each other. They can make deals. It's a living system which generates an impact. We can prove that the whole etoy concept fits into a big picture."



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