

NCSOFT Realignment: From Heroes to Hooters

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City of Heroes is, according to the official announcement that was the shocking first word of its impending closure, the "first and greatest" superhero online role-playing game. Employees of the studio producing its content and fans alike were stunned by the announcement from NCSOFT, the company which publishes and owns the Intellectual Property rights to this family-friendly comic-book themed game, because by all measures it was a profitable product that more than pulled its own weight.

Explanation from NCSOFT cites a "realignment of company focus" that was incompatible with City of Heroes. What is the new focus? In June of 2012, they released in Korea a new game called Blade and Soul, prominently advertising the art and style done by Hyung-Tae Kim in designing all of the visuals, particularly graphical exaggeration of the female characters that is extreme even by the standards of the Korean "manwha" style that already emphasizes their sexuality. Though the release date of this new game in the West is yet to be announced, it will almost certainly come in the fiscal year which starts with the final shutdown of the servers for City of Heroes (on Nov. 30, 2012).

As one person observed, it seems this realignment of focus is to replace this:



...with this:



While comic books have always had a spotty reputation with regards to their heroines' state of (un)dress, they have also had a reputation for wholesome messages and even the most swimsuit-model-esque super heroine was still an empowering figure, inspiring many girls as much as the muscle-bound heroes with their spandex uniforms inspired boys to fight for truth and justice. Even four-color villains are good, clean, cathartic fun, with plans so over-the-top that they're only taken seriously in a fictionalized context.

In the choices for which products to support and which to terminate in NCSOFT's "realignment," some are concerned that they close the family-friendly game which attracts and empowers girl gamers as well as boys even as they open a salacious new title that objectifies women in extreme ways.

One [blogger wrote](#), "As a parent, I will not be buying this game. I do not want my children exposed to this kind of material. I had no problems with them playing City of Heroes/Villains, but I refuse to allow them to even get a glimpse of this game. I'm far from a prude, but this is just too far." Her blog referenced these two images, created by a fan of City of Heroes to emphasize the point:



This blogger is not alone in noting this as a development which could herald a “disturbing trend.” With “the number of family friendly titles ... limited” in this day and age, writes Nathaniel Downes of [Addicting Info](#), “eliminating one of the largest and most successful of those titles for the gaming equivalent of a Victoria’s Secret catalog bodes poorly for the future.”

City of Heroes brings together parents and children; one player is particularly upset because he had to recently ground his child from the internet, which means they will likely miss their last chances to enjoy this virtual world of comic-book heroes together.

Another player has cited City of Heroes as the only place she and her father (who is fighting cancer) can really spend time together. "I really hope we save this game because he loves it sooooo much and he doesn't get to see me except on it most of the time," she wrote in a forum post on a [site](#) dedicated to saving their online meetingplace, "I don't live down the street and haven't had a car in years. This is the world we connect in and where he's a hero, not sick."

The sentiments from those who use this virtual city as a community to connect with family and bridge the generation gap seem unanimous: comic books are a great way to bond, but this "soft-core porn" (as one player termed it) with which NCSOFT would replace their City sends them, at best, "to their bunk." "What?" said one player somewhat shamefacedly, "It's evil, but it's sexy evil."

It is clear, however, that City of Heroes is, to its players, more than a game. It is a community. A community that crosses gender and generational lines in a way that would be inappropriate to impossible for them to share with the new "realigned" focus of NCSOFT's products designed to be enjoyed but a narrower and - NCSOFT doubtless would claim - more grown-up masculine demographic...in private.