

Video gamers aren't too proud for 'Beg'

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Daily Mess Maker

OCEAN PARK BLVD. —

Creative types stuck dreaming their days away, wishing they could get out there and live la vida local, if just for a day or two, are in luck.

Activersion, makers of such popular video games as the war-themed "Call of Duty" and "Tony Hawk's" skateboarding offerings are allowing gamers to step inside the reeling minds of Santa Monica's homeless population in the new role-playing game "Beg to Differ,"

See **A WORLD A CART**, page 19



Boogaloo Shrimp/Daily Mess

GOT BEER? A Playstation gamer trying the new 'Beg to Differ' video release by Activision waits while his player 'Shaky Steve' sleeps one off on a Santa Monica street corner before re-engaging in society.

Gamers out there and loving it

A WORLD A CART, from page 1

due in stores this summer for Xbox and Playstation 3 consoles (retail \$49.95).

As the tagline on the box cover states: "Pitch a tent and stay awhile."

Featuring the voices of actors Nick Nolte, Sam Elliott, Tara Reid, Suzanne Pleshette, the late Katherine Hepburn and other husky, smoker's voice Hollywood luminaries, "Beg" takes its players on a maniacal journey like no other through the alleys, easy-picking tourist spots and closed-for-the-night storefronts of Santa Monica.

Players can choose from a multitude of characters in which they traverse the city's seedy underbelly — the ranting lunatic with grease-formed dreadlocks, the threatening Vietnam vet, the young red-haired Hacky Sac player, the girl who looks like she may have been hot four years ago, the masturbating man in the wheelchair, and many, many more.

With a booming soundtrack by the likes of the Soggy Bottom Boys, the Butthole Surfers and Celine Dion, players traverse the alleys collecting cans and bottles from city-owned dumpsters, filling their "borrowed" grocery shopping carts and alluding the SMPD's finest. Sure to be a popular feature are the "bumfights" wherein players will be told to "put up their dukes" when their carts collide with one of the many, many others sweeping through the alleys. But have no fear, a player whose energy level teeters on the obsolete can get a boost by attending public feedings in the park, or preferably, shaking down tourists on the Promenade, near the Pier and anywhere else they spot people with clean clothes and a camera. Players get extra energy for crossing the north of Montana line. For every minute you stay NOMA, you get an extra 1,000 points.

Oh, and don't forget to catch some Zzz's for your overall health meter. Just stop and drop anytime, anywhere.

"Honestly, I'm not typically much of a gamer, but I thought I'd give 'Beg to Differ' a whirl as I was scheduled to attend a conference in Santa Monica this summer," said Harley Heareng, of Baltimore, Md. "This was quite an eye-opener. I may have canceled my trip to that infested city, but the game is quite a ride.

"You should have seen the bonus points I got last week for discovering all the empty liquor bottles in the bins behind Hank's Liquors," he beamed. "My character just laid there for hours. It's ridiculous. I'm hooked."

Primed to capitalize on the instant success of "Beg to Differ," programmers at Activision are already working on next year's installment, "Home Is Where the Cart Is," in which the stakes will be raised considerably. During gameplay of "Home Is Where the Cart Is," gamers can join ranks online and form a gang on the lawns of City Hall and Palisades Park, from where they will launch a multi-faceted campaign of fear on residents in efforts to take over the city, or at least influence city officials to appease them at every turn.

Taking the game's rising stature among the 18-35 demographic into account, the city's Convention and Tourism Bureau is working in conjunction with Activision on next year's version.

"We just want people across the country to come away with a realistic version of the wonderful city of Santa Monica," said Eileen Left, of the SMCTB. "This part of the population is part of the overall experience. We wouldn't want it any other way."

Even so, the rent on a studio apartment in Santa Monica is \$1,500, even south of the 10. Street parking is not included.