



[HoustonChronicle.com](http://www.HoustonChronicle.com) -- <http://www.HoustonChronicle.com> | [Section: Weekly Tech Features](#)

May 30, 2005, 11:37PM

AT HOME

New Christian games are praiseworthy

By ANNE REEKS
For The Chronicle

Religion and computer games are new best friends.

The combo caught me by surprise. In the past couple of months, I've had two close encounters with Christian software — after 10 years of reviewing in which only one such title crossed my desk. It was long ago, amateurish and altogether forgettable.

Now comes Digital Praise, which released its first two titles with the sort of polished public relations effort usually mounted by big-league software publishers. To wit: wide distribution of product samples, a professional press release and an experienced publicist.

The games are as well done as their rollout. *Adventures in Odyssey and the Treasure of the Incas* and *Adventures in Odyssey and the Sword of the Spirit* (ages 8-12, \$29.95 each, Win/Mac, www.digitalpraise.com) exhibit excellent animation, engaging characters, intriguing plots, ingenious logic puzzles and interactive bells and whistles.

Both are based on the conservative Christian group Focus on the Family's radio series *Adventures in Odyssey*. AIO, as it's known, revolves around a fictional small town and a trio of residents. *Treasure of the Incas* follows an adventure-mystery format, with players tracking down missing persons and stolen artifacts. *Sword of the Spirit* is more arcadelike.

Positive values are woven in. For instance, in *Sword of the Spirit*, players face a Gauntlet of Virtues, challenges that emphasize nine character traits, including gentleness, kindness and patience. There is no specific mention of Jesus or the Bible.

Still, the Digital Praise CD-ROMs may raise some hackles. The opening screen proclaims the Fremont, Calif., company's motto, Glorifying God Through Interactive Media, in bold letters below a figure with upraised arms. That evangelical overtone could offend non-Christian families or even Christian ones who prefer to keep religion separate from other aspects of life.

Tom Bean, president and CEO of Digital Praise, hopes not: "Were not putting anybody down or elevating ourselves, just identifying what we are about."

ADVERTISEMENT

find what's
hard
to find
in hair care

Bumble &
Bumble

GET FREE SHIPPING NOW

drugstore.com



Another recent sighting of religion in a computer game snuck under my radar. I was trying out *Word Play*, a game in which kids connect blocks to form words and win letters to spell a secret message. One of them was Jesus is Lord.

No fair. My Game Company, did not disclose the Christian connection or content. I'd already reviewed its *Fashion Cents* (At Home, May 3), a wonderful little diversion without a hint of deeper meaning, and felt "had."

Troy Hepfner, half of the mom-and-pop venture, admitted such messages shouldn't blindsides users. They'll be removed from *Word Play* and confined to a Bible add-on pack, he said. Hepfner changed the company's About Us info to note the couple's Christian beliefs.

"We need to pay closer attention to what we are doing in our games and to be upfront about who we are and what is in our games," Hepfner wrote in an e-mail.

My take is the virtues of the product, good graphics, rich game-play, intellectual edge — are more important than the values of its maker.

"A good game comes first," Digital Praises' Bean said. "It has to be challenging, it has to be entertaining, it has to be fun."

As for the values conveyed in *Treasure of the Incas* and *Sword of the Spirit*, Bean sees them as universal ones "common to people of all faiths or no faith."

a4anne@swbell.net

[HoustonChronicle.com](http://www.HoustonChronicle.com) -- <http://www.HoustonChronicle.com> | [Section: Weekly Tech Features](#)

[This article is: http://www.chron.com/cs/CDA/ssistory.mpl/tech/weekly/3204237](http://www.chron.com/cs/CDA/ssistory.mpl/tech/weekly/3204237)