

Necro Enema Amalgamated *interviewed 1993*

Eric Swenson and Keith Seward are Necro Enema Amalgamated, and created Blam! in 1993, a user-hostile digital rant with contributions by stars of the downtown art world. Authored in Hypercard, originally distributed by Voyager on floppy disks, it drew attention for its low-bandwidth technological feats, almost as much as for its controversial content. Here, they talk



about the translucent, ticklish interface of Blam! and the bodily functions that inspired it. WARNING: This interview contains graphic language which may be offensive to some.

Swenson is a competitive intelligence consultant, and Seward is the Principal of creative consulting firm Supervert.

What kind of books and music do you like?

KS: I read a lot. Gilles Deleuze, the French philosopher, is one of my heroes. De Sade is -- you know, I have mixed feelings about Sade, because he's really not a very good prose writer. I really like how rational he is. *Philosophy in the Bedroom* is probably one of the most influential books I've ever read, more so than *120 Days of Sodom* and *Justine*, because they're not as idea-driven, and I really like that *Philosophy in the Bedroom* is so idea-driven.

ES: I like Ayn Rand a lot. *Atlas Shrugged* is a really good book. I like [Georges] Batailles.

KS: He's in *Blam!* He's great.

ES: I like to read war books a lot. I used to be obsessed with the Beats, until I got to be friends with Gregory Corso and Peter Orlovsky. Then I got burnt out, because they're really taxing.

KS: [Laughs] That's a euphemism.

ES: Yeah. [Laughs] I read anything I can get my hands on. *Toilet Training the Retarded* is my favorite book ever.

Is that a real book?

KS: Yeah, it's a real book. I can dig it out and show it to you later on. It's a fantastic book, my favorite book. Just anything I can get my fucking hands on.

You were going to sing a song -- feel free.

ES: Yeah, I just wanted to share this, because *Mr. Rogers Talks with Parents* is my favorite book, next to *Toilet Training the Retarded*. It really is by Mr. Rogers, and when I first discovered this song, I realized that I actually have musical potential. The way I imagine myself performing this song someday is with Kim Gordon [of Sonic Youth] behind me, with her magical bass, and the guys from Ween, accompanying me. So if you can imagine this musical scenario while I begin to sing this song --

KS: Are they making music, or are they wearing tight, bicycle-short, clown outfits, just dancing around?

ES: Yeah, that. So, this is called "Everybody is Fancy."

[Makes guitar sound]

Some are fancy on the outside,
some are fancy on the inside.

Everybody's fancy,
Everybody's fine.
You're body's fancy,
and so is mine.

So...

Boys are boys from the beginning,
Girls are girls right from the start.

Everybody's fancy,
everybody's fine.
Your body's fancy,
and so is mine.
So is mine...

Only girls can be mommies,
Only boys can be the daddies.

Everybody's fancy,
Everybody's fine.
You're body's fancy,

and so is mine.

I think you're a special person,
and I like your in- and outside.

Everybody's fancy,
Everybody's fine.
You're body's fancy,
and so is mine.

Very interesting.

KS: You know how you see those documentaries where some horrible fat person is sitting there saying something really embarassing. And they're being so sincere about it, but they're only saying it because the camera is there -- it brings out the sincerity in them. Somehow, I think we just witnessed something comparable to that.

ES: I can sing another song. I know them all.

KS: I think we should move on to the talk section of this interview.



Who is the audience for Blam!? Did you make it for a certain group of people?

We made it specifically for ourselves, and no one else. That's the honest-to-God truth. When we were first flown to Santa Monica to present *Blam!* to the Voyager people, before we ended up signing up with them, we had a big, communal meeting in the Voyager lounge. Some woman stood up in the back, and she pointed her finger at us, and she said, "What would you die for? What would you die for? Really? Tell us -- what would you just die for?"

I stood up and said, "I would die for *Blam!* and everything that it represents." And then she stood up again, and she said, "Why are you doing this? Why are you making this? Why do you want to put this stuff out? Why are you going to try to put this in people's faces?"

And again, I stood up and said, with heartfelt sincerity, "We do this because it gets us off." That's why we do it, because it gets us off. There's no other reason.

You held a reception for Blam! in a church. That seems kind of ironic.

ES [Laughs]: Again, we didn't go to them; they came to us. The church came to us -- the St. Marks Church. It's funny, but it's true. It's the same, isn't it, for me and you. We were honored that they wanted us to participate there.

KS: We're too proud to go to other people. And if we're too proud, does that mean we're not good Christians?

ES: No, we've just been blessed with so much thanksgiving. Thus far, we haven't had to exercise that product. We really are incredibly thankful to all the people who helped us. We're incredibly thankful to Voyager, TimeOut Trust, the St. Marks Church.

KS: And Rita.

ES: And Rita.

KS: Our cover artist.

ES: She's very hot.



How did the interview with Lydia Lunch come about?

ES: I went up to Henry Rollins after a speaking thing he did, and I told him that I'd had a dream of Lydia when I was about 11 years old. And in the dream, she was my sister, and we were playing Frisbee. I was really, really in love with her, had been since before I even knew who she was, as a personality. I think the reason that Lydia's image was in my head at that

age, is that I must have been going through a record store, looking for an Abba album, and seen a Lydia Lunch, probably *1313*, and just seen that beautiful face, and it was engrained into my subconscious. So I had these dreams about her being my sister. I always wanted a big sister. So one day, I met Henry, and I told him this, and I asked him for her phone number. He gave it to me, and I called her the next day, and it just so happened that I needed to be conducting some interviews for some other research I was doing at the time. I called her up, and did this interview over the phone. This was years ago. And I just kept this interview lying around for years. It just sort of came in handy, didn't it, when it was time to produce *Blam!*?

I didn't even need to re-interview Lydia, because the material that I had was brilliant enough as it stood. What I wanted to do was create a piece in which Lydia was allowed to do what she does best, which is to speak at you, unencumbered, at high-velocity. And that's what my piece ends up doing -- it allows Lydia to do what she does best. You can't turn her off, you can't shut her up. The only way to get out of the piece is to let it finish, to let her have her say, and then it gives you the option of watching it again, or going back to the primary *Blam!* navigational interface. On that level, I think it's an incredible success.

I think that it's also really pushing the boundaries of sound in multimedia; it's a very sound-oriented piece. I don't think enough people are concentrating on sound when they produce these digital products. I hope it's something that more people concentrate on. You don't need to point and click just because you've created something that's digital. Don't limit yourself.

How about Kim Gordon? How did that interview come about?

ES: We wrote her a letter, we said, "Hi," and --

KS: She's having a baby.

Yeah, I saw her last week at that show at the Thread Waxing Space, which was really great -- ten bucks, four bands, all great.

KS: Is she showing yet?

No, I don't think so. Didn't look like it.

KS: Eric wanks off to pictures of pregnant chicks, so I'll bet he's really excited about that. Are you excited about Kim Gordon being pregnant, or do you think it's a sign that she's getting up there and mellowing out?

ES: No, I think it means that she's just kicking off. She's like a punter.

KS: [Laughs] If she's a punter, who's the field goal post?

ES: All of humanity.

KS: Wow, that's beautiful.

Are there any other CD-ROMs out there that you like?

KS: No.

ES: There's not one.

KS: Dumb, boring, and stupid.

ES: There are plenty of people whose egos we should probably be stroking, but there's not a single product out there that we like. I have several products that I have obtained with various types of discounts, or have gotten for free. But I bought my CD-ROM player about a year ago, and the only shit that I ever watch on it voluntarily is *Blam!*, and this one CD I have that's got the world's best literature on it. I just use that to pick shit out randomly, when I'm writing letters to people.

KS: Really?

ES: Yeah. I like to pick out Machiavelli, Thomas Paine, just do these random searches. It's great....

KS: What about that Christian interactive thing that you wrote about in *Ben is Dead*?

ES: Oh yeah -- *Morning Star*. That's not a CD-ROM. If you just want to talk about digital shit in general, there are a couple digital products that exist that we sort of like. *Morning Star* is a Christian publication that you can download on a lot of online services such as America Online, and from their BBS directly, I think. It just kicks butt. There are incredibly insightful articles about Satan in today's popular music, about Satanic computer viruses, there's some really great stuff about Nazi rebels in Uganda, and there's some really good exposes on Martin Luther -- past, present, future. You never know what you're going to find in *Morning Star*. It's incredibly clip art-driven, and that is what gives it its beauty -- the profane ignorance which goes into designing it. The aesthetics are grotesque, but they are so grotesque that they just make you love it.

KS: [Laughs] Profane ignorance!

ES: Another product that I really like is *The Interactive Adventures of Seymour Butts*. So I'd like to amend something that I said before. There is one interactive product that I do like that is on CD-ROM. The porn that's out there right now is really the most innovative stuff that's out there, in terms of any kind of mainstream, digital spew.

The Cookie products from Japan are incredible. Cookie is the best producer of interactive, adult-oriented material in the world. *Dr. Amour* is the best title, period. Next to *Blam!* It has the most incredible, hot, Oriental chicks you've ever seen in your life. You have to help them get to the Love Institute, and once they get there, amazing things happen. There's this amazing, amazing scene, with this woman loving a man very tenderly, while she's at the gynecologist. And there is another incredible, incredible scene of a man who ejaculates

downwards, because he's so incredibly excited by the beauty of this young virgin.

KS: What do you mean downwards?

ES: Well, he has an erect cock, but somehow or another, he's able to keep it almost pointing directly to the floor. And he's able to jerk it off, and he shoots. But they fuzz out the juice. It's incredible. And the production on these things -- the people who produce these pornography products kick the shit out of any other hypermedia producer that's out there, or any of the American companies. Nobody comes close to Cookie -- nobody, except for us. Also, when you go to trade shows, the Cookie people have the hottest chicks, who are distributing the Cookie propaganda -- a really beautiful, bald, Oriental woman, wearing a kimono, and she gives out stuff -- free Dr. Amour.

KS: Did she rub your butt with her hand?

ES: No, she was just very nice.

KS: It would be nicer if she rubbed your butt with her hand.

ES: I'm very sensitive about my ass. I had an anal fissure. I was about 18 when it first sprouted up.

KS: I had an anal hunter.

[laughter]

ES: No, I did -- I had this anal fissure that opened up, and amazing things happened to me. I used to have to shit onto clear plastic cellophane, and cut it up, and put it into these little petri dishes, and take it to the doctor. I had barium enemas, I had to go into the Wheel of Misfortune, where they had to shave me, and stick a barium enema up my butt while I went on this hamster cage --

KS: They shaved your butt? Just the cheeks, or in-between?

ES: In between.

KS: Did it feel good?

ES: No, it was very itchy. I'm not into shaving like you are.

KS: Who did it? A nurse?

ES: A female nurse had to shave my crack!

KS: That's great, man! You didn't like that part?

ES: No. I had to go onto this hamster cage with a barium enema up my butt. It filled up my entire large intestinal tract, you couldn't let go of it. The purpose was to search for bleeding ulcers. Because I'm v ery high-strung. They suspected that the reason I was shitting blood was that I had an internal ulcer. So it was this humiliating time of my life, because up to that point, I had never seen a woman as beautiful as this particular nurse that I just referred to.



KS: She's the one who shaved your butt?

ES: Yeah, and she was the one with the clipboard, and she stood next to me the whole time, while I was being rotated 360 degrees, so the barium could go into every section of my intestinal tract that they needed to photograph. And when it was all said and done, they end up evacuating your bowels. So, essentially, you are taking the biggest shit you ever taken in your entire life. You fill up the bag from which it originally came, almost completely. The thing that really sucks is the voyage back down through the rest of the hospital is filled with little side trips to the closest bathroom. Finally, your bowels are emptied, the barium is gone.

It turned out that I didn't have a bleeding ulcer. The fact that I was high-strung didn't, at that time, seem to be responsible for this malady. It seems to be some other biological dysfunction. It was discovered by a Navy doctor that I had a tear in my rectum. They wanted to know, "Are you a homosexual?" No, I'm not a homosexual. "Do you insert foreign objects into your rectum?" No, I do not. And so on and so forth. It's just a thing that I have. Once in a while, I'm taking a dump, and it will bleed.

KS: You mean it just tears every now and then?

ES: Yeah. That experience has really helped shape my overall philosophy on digital media.

KS: How did it tear in the first place? No one knows?

ES: It just happens. It could have been a vitamin deficiency, it could have been because of all the asthma medicine that I take.

KS: Could you be one of those people with repressed molestation memories -- that you don't remember, but you have the physical signs of abuse, without necessarily having the mental memories of it? You could be one of those people.

ES: Well, I do have a shy kidney, and I do know why I have a shy kidney. One time I was in a public bathroom in my father's office. My dad left me alone to go get a sandwich, and then come back up. I was in the bathroom in the lobby of this very nice building. And I was going in the little boy's -- the smaller urinal. I was there taking a pee, and all of a sudden, this ancient, fucking scarecrow of a man walks in, and he just starts going, [makes loud gibberish

noises]. The urine stopped, man, and it never came back. I don't know where it went.

KS: It never came back.

ES: It never came back. It was absorbed into my overall system. And ever since then, it's been almost impossible for me to piss at one of those unshielded urinals. I can't do it. I have a shy kidney. I prefer to pee with the door closed, in a bathroom stall. But if I can't do that, I have to sort of wait until people are gone.

KS: I'm the exact opposite lately. It's the worst thing in the world to have dinner with my family. My parents are divorced. Either side of my family -- within three seconds, they'll be sitting there, telling stories. My dad will say, "I remember, we were having a Memorial Day picnic one time, and Keith was standing up on the tailgate of my pickup truck. And my sister called over, 'Hey Roger, your kid's peeing on me.' So I said, 'Well, move!'"

[Laughter]

KS: I was always whipping it out and peeing all over the place. There are a million stories like that.

ES: I pooped in a pool once, at a pool party. It was on purpose, because, as I told you, I've always been very responsive to my bowels. I was about five years old, and I often enjoyed the feeling one gets from holding in a shit. I still do like to --

KS: If you have to take a shit, do you like to jerk off, and hold the shit?

ES: Yeah.

KS: And then when you come, you let the come come out?

ES: Yeah. I think it has something to do with the pressure applied to the prostate. But anyway, I must have been swimming around. I used to do this a lot as a little kid -- just holding the shit in as long as I could. Somebody must have made me laugh or something, and I just let it out, and forgot about it, until a few minutes later, when somebody said, you know, "Shit in the pool! Shit in the pool!" It's just like in the movies -- everybody just evacuated. My father, I think, was left to scooping it out with a fishnet. The party was over.

KS: That's hysterical.

ES: They had to shock the pool after that, with chlorine.

So you're Enema, and, Keith, you're Necro.

KS: Yeah, I'm Necro, he's Enema.

Now I kind of understand one-half of it. But why are you the Necro side of it?



KS: I prefer not to be interrogated psychoanalytically. I think all desires are good desires, and you should just run with them. Whatever attractions I have toward death and desire, I don't think we should try and seek... origins. It's not "Where do they come from?" it's "Where do they go to?" and "What do they connect to?" In the first place, I don't think it really starts with death, I think it starts with death, I think it started with blood, really. And then I realized that if you take enough blood

out of somebody, they die, and that could be very exciting too.

ES: Keith likes to munch, well, I've been told...

KS: You were going to say, like, a menstrual thing?

ES: Yeah. You like to eat chicks out when they're on the rag.

KS: That's really great.

ES: And I can't fucking stand blood. I hate it.

KS: The other day, my girlfriend had this tampon in, and it was totally skanky and bloody. So I grabbed the end with my teeth, and I started fucking her with it. [Both laugh] It was so great. Then I yanked it out, and we fucked, and it was so great. She was totally on the rag. We fucked like mad. Then, when we got done, I pulled out, and I came on her stomach, right? And there was this skanky-ass pool of blood, man, a half-inch-deep pool of blood under her ass. My futon's a wreck; I have more blood stains all over it.



ES: Fucking sick, man. I get in trouble all the time for not wanting to have sex when my girlfriend is on the rag.

KS: Chicks are so horny when they're on the rag. That's the best thing in the world, that they're so horny. It's just blood, man. Especially if you get a chick to shave when she's on the rag. Then it's like the coolest-ass thing in the world -- this nice, clean, sweet little pussy, but it's just got, you know, blood.

ES: Blood and sperm, man. That's sick.

KS: I think it's really exciting. I remember...

ES: [with British accent] Bloody sperm!

KS: When I was a kid, I wanted to be a poet. It's really embarrassing, but one of the first poems I ever wrote, the first line was something like, "Reality is a prostitute!" And then I had this whole fantasy about murdering this prostitute, and jerking off in this pool of blood after I stabbed her. Then there's some line comparing the sperm and the blood to clouds in a red sky.

ES: When you've had blood come out of your asshole, drip into the bowl, like I have, the blood takes on a whole new meaning. It makes me very scared, because there's this history of cancer in my family. So when I think of blood and sex, I think, all of a sudden, even though I know it's not what's happening, if I see a pool of blood and come mixed together, I think that that bloody come came out of my dick, all at the same time. And the idea of ejaculating blood horrifies me.

KS: God, that's the biggest fucking turn-on on the face of the planet. Cutting and stuff like that, it gets me so hot, I can't even tell you. It's just so sexy. How can you not think that chicks bleeding is sexy? If I could shoot blood out my dick, onto a chick's tits, that would be so great.

ES: I think that girls in locker rooms in their panties is really cool.

KS: Yeah, then you just make them bleed!

[Laughter]

KS: Then you lick the blood up. I'd lick it out of the fucking toilet. Menstrual blood -- it's the best thing.

Let's talk about interface design.

KS: There are major lips and minor lips, and you get your face down there, and lick. It's really intuitive.

ES: That's a good way to start, actually.

KS: Yeah, because the vagina is the metaphor that influenced our ideas and helped create the *Blam!* interface

ES: That's true.

KS: Yeah, we were thinking of vaginas, not penises. There's nothing penis-like about our interface.

ES: We consider the interface to be somewhat biological.

KS: Gynecological.

ES: Gynecological.

KS: There are pleasure spots; if you hit just the right spot, *Blam!* will perform for you. If you don't, maybe it's a little sluggish or slow, a little distracted.

ES: *Blam!* is ticklish.

KS: Very ticklish.

There are hot spots that are not apparent?

KS: Exactly.

ES: Correct. We actually call the interface "the translucent interface."

KS: I thought it was "the transvestite interface."

ES: No, it's the translucent interface. And the reason it's translucent is because there are portions of it where it becomes partially visible, and other times when it's completely invisible. But it becomes visible at all the right moments. When you're in the textually-based pieces, such as the *Bataille* piece, the interface is invisible when you're not moving through, and/or looking for contextual clues or interface clues. You are left alone with the piece, with the text, with the content, when we want you to be. However, when it's time to navigate, when it's time for you to explore the interface, the essential elements become crystal clear, and a small child can learn how to use them, in three steps. You discover the zones, you discover the implications of the zones. Once you learn the interface in one piece, you've learned it for the whole of *Blam!*.



We did a lot of user testing, and we found that most people are incredibly comfortable with this interface. A few people were somewhat shocked and amazed that we didn't have some

sort of control panel, and they wanted to search the screen for some sort of zone that would bring out a standard palette or menu. But once they found that there was none, they discovered the beauty of three - forward, backward, back to splash. That became consistent throughout the rest of their experience, and they seemed to very much enjoy themselves.

Interactivity is really kind of limited in Blam!, isn't it?

ES: No, interactivity is not limited. Interactivity is just applied in new and different ways. *Blam!* is more interactive than any other digital product out there. It's more interactive because it's intelligent, and because it's personable, and because it's ticklish. We push your buttons so that you'll want to push ours.

Blam! is the most interactive product. But you have to know how to think about interactivity. Don't limit your perspective on interactivity to concepts of point, click and move on. You have to look a little deeper than that. And if you are not intelligent enough to understand this, you really don't deserve to be reading this interview.

Kevin Walker