

Game|Life The Video 19: *Guitar Hero* for the Blind

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I was into music games before music games were cool, but now everybody's got to get into the act. Even people with vision loss. And Wii owners.

On this week's Game|Life The Video, we test out *Rock Band* for the Wii, available in stores this week.



But first, we talk to [Elke Folmer](#), an assistant professor at the University of Nevada, Reno, who's doing some fascinating work creating videogames for the blind and disabled.

Folmer's most awesome project thus far is informally referred to as "Blind Hero." It's a guitar-based music game that can be played without looking at the screen. Folmer's group developed a glove that vibrates your fingers a split-second before you're supposed to play each note in the game. It's difficult to play, but with enough practice you can experience the sensation of playing guitar without the onscreen commands.¹



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They're also working on other intriguing projects that we didn't get to during the video, many of which are centered around "one-switch" gaming -- games that can be played with just one input, like hitting a giant

red button or even blinking an eye.

One example of how this works is a modified *Mario Kart*-style game for PC. The player's kart automatically accelerates and steers to the right. Pressing the switch allows the player to steer to the left. A modified version of *Half-Life 2* that Folmer showed us puts the player into the body of an automatically controlled bot, and the player simply needs to press the fire button when an enemy gets in his sights.

Folmer stresses that his group's ambition is not to create new game designs for people with disabilities, but to modify already-existing games, to show that any game can be rendered accessible. To that end, he's pushing his contacts in the professional game-design biz to add accessibility options to their games, like full closed-captioning.



Although he admits an "anti-commercial" attitude toward his creations, it's clear that Folmer would love to see his group's work get out to the masses. The "Blind Hero" glove cost \$1,500 to make, but I think it would be excellent PR if Harmonix, for example, manufactured them and sold them at cost alongside a specially modified version of its game.

As always, if you're having trouble viewing the embedded video above, this week's episode of Game|Life The Video is also available on [Wired's YouTube channel](#) and on iTunes.

¹After the publication of this article, it was brought to our attention that "Blind Hero" is primarily the creation of University of Nevada Ph.D. student Bei Yuan.