

# Flaming Fur Ball? Radioactive Rabbit?

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What do flaming fur balls and radioactive rabbits have to do with small-cap stocks? Everything, if you're Interplay Entertainment Corp (OTCBB: IPLY) and you're in the competitive gaming industry. Recently, Interplay engaged SG Capital to explore strategic alternatives designed to enhance the value of its stock to its shareholders. Part of Interplay's strategy is to secure additional capital for product development and operations. In addition, SG Capital will assist the company with general business strategy and advice about potential transactions, including a possible sale of the company or its operating units.

Interplay's strength has been in its role-playing games, targeted to console gamers as well as PC gamers. Its newest games, *Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel* and *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II*, are sequels to earlier successful games.

*Fallout*, a sequel to a 1997 game of the same name, features a post-apocalyptic setting that seems to borrow from both *The Road Warrior* and *Leave it to Beaver* in terms of naivety. The setting is the star for *Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel*, where shotguns and laser rifles are the weapons of choice rather than swords or axes.

*Brotherhood of Steel* uses a linear campaign and can be played by either one or two people. Gamers take the roles of initiates in the brotherhood, who are really a bunch of knights who attempt to bring order in the post-nuclear nightmare. There are three characters initially, Nadia, a tough guy named Cyrus and a mutant ghoul named Cain. As you make your way through the game, additional characters are unlocked, but they all play pretty much the same way.

The idea is to track down your brotherhood comrades from whom you're become separated. In the course of doing this, you free a village from hideous raiders, run into more ghouls, find the vault where people saved themselves from nuclear destruction and uncover an evil mutant plot – among other things!

Basically, play involves running around enemy-infested territory and slugging it out with anything that stands in your way. Given that you have three weapons at any given time, this isn't a hard proposition.

According to the resident gamer at my house, the coolest games are the ones whose levels, adventure, and characters are most interesting. Clearly, *FIFA Soccer* isn't going to fill the bill – but it's the one game that I'm allowed to play on whatever console is operating in his room. Various or severally, I know that there's a PS2, N64, Super NES, GameCube and Game Boy Advanced (color version) in my house somewhere – and *Street Fighter* games rule. The consultant is 19, so age-appropriate issues aren't.

*Baldur's Gate*, the other recent offering from Interplay, got a "thumbs up" from my consultant. The story takes place along the Sea of Swords, which contains a multitude of

ecologies and terrains. The Sword Coast, as its known, includes mountains, forests, swamps, marshes, ruins, plains and cities, and attracts both adventurers and evil alike, who take part in an epic adventure.

In this version of an advanced Dungeons and Dragons scenario, a player starts with one character, although five other adventurers can join the central character as the game proceeds. The starting point is the castle of Candlekeep and you proceed from there as an orphan who seeks self-knowledge.

In this game, chaos threatens to overwhelm the Sword Coast, where the state of Amn is under siege to the south, the High Moor is being overrun in the north and the region around Baldur's Gate is in turmoil. Generally known for its ample resources, a crippling shortage occurs to the iron supply – used for everything from swords to forks. When ore from “outside” reached the region, the smelted metal is so brittle that it cracks and breaks with little more than normal use. Worse, trading caravans who enter Baldur's Gate are under constant attack from looters who want gold and gems as well as iron.

Some blame Amn, some blame the trade cartels and others blame the dukes of Baldur's Gate. This all may be nothing but an omen of greater evil.....

With a story line like this, you have wonder if this is one of the “fun” small-cap stocks you might want to consider – or maybe you just want to buy the game and give it a whirl.