the Escapist

SEARCHING FOR Gunpei YOKOI
by Lara Crigger

A NATURAL Born INVENTOR
by Shannon Drake

PETER MOLYNEUX: *THE ESCAPIST* INTERVIEW
by Howard Wen

EA IS A STARTUP
by Russ Pitts

ALSO:

THE INDIE GURU
Steve Pavlina helps indie game developers wake up by Allen Varney

EDITOR'S NOTE

by Julianne Greer

What does one say about Rainmakers? These are the people that have so profoundly affected their realm of work with their ideas, innovations and products that they are nearly synonymous with it. Personal computing? Steve Jobs and Bill Gates. Immunology/microbiology? Louis Pasteur. Civil Rights? Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr.. Physics? Albert Einstein. Really, all of them speak for themselves.

And yet, there are many unsung heroes for those fields that are small or young or so highbrow that the masses are not aware of them, or simply do not understand. And within each industry, there are several more Rainmakers whose achievements are known only to those … well, in The Know.

Why?

Because they are still busily working, heads down over their work, in the trenches. Because they have been taken from the world all too soon. Because perhaps we just weren't yet ready for their ideas. Because they have made the first of something that's so outdated, now, that their groundbreaking contribution is often overlooked.

But that makes them no less important and special. And it is for this reason *The Escapist* brings to you this week's issue, "Rainmakers." These are the stories of five great names in the interactive entertainment realm, stories you should know. Our writers share with you stories and histories of Ralph Baer, Joe Ybarra, Gunpei Yokoi, Steve Pavlina and Peter Molyneux. Enjoy!

Cheers,

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

In response to "Be Men, Not Destroyers" from The Escapist Forum: I find I have a need I have a hard time defending. I like gore in my games. I'm not a slaughter flick fan, never had a taste for the lure of disemboweled teenagers. But in gaming I want gore. I want the mess because it reminds me of what's really going on.

I like to be occasionally reminded hacking at a mostly unarmored, and frequently nearly-naked, human body would result in horrific wounds. We, myself and the game's own developers, need to be reminded on occasion that underlying the pursuit of perfected violence is death. It's not a spiritual evolution or philosophical abstract, it's perfecting the conversion of some cheeky leathervixen into a steaming pile of sundered anatomy.

I love Soul Calibur, but whipping a 25lbs razor-edged slab of steel into someone doesn't make them bounce. Same with shooters.

I haven't killed anyone in real life, and despite the occasional vitrolic diatribe driven by some new political shennigan I have no real drive to do so. But every so often I need to be back in touch with what the violence really creates, to be forced to face that I'm tearing at the canvas of humanity's own image with my brutally quick reticule and snap head-shots.

For all the escapism involved I want to sometimes face what a rifle bullet through the skull really does look like, so I can be sick and glad and move on to the next episode.

- Beretta

In response to "Be Men, Not Destroyers" from The Escapist Forum: I managed to play through the first half of SCMRPG and found it rather ... enjoyable, er, informative. I believe that the game does a great job at providing human motivations to the killers' actions, and I think that by playing them, we even get a better image. Some of the gameplay mechanics were extremely annoying though such as avoiding hall monitors to go plant the bombs in the cafeteria. I also feel that the violence continued on for too long, and I had trouble finding a trigger to end it.

When I got to the second part of the game, I just turned the game off immediately as from the first few minutes of playing in it, I felt it lost all value worth playing.

- Slybok

In response to "Creative Hari-Kari" from The Escapist Forum: So, on the issue of protecting your game, I know a lot of publishers don't accept unsolicited game proposals, because if elements from the given proposal work their way into other games from that publisher, it would be a lawsuit waiting to happen. Is there a similar fear of misconstrued infringement with (relatively) solicited proposals? And, if so, do you think that this is enough protection for a freelance developer?

Your article demonstrates that there are publishers who are reluctant to deal with developers who take extra steps to protect their games, but are there publishers out there (no need to name names) who'll screw over developers who don't take steps to protect their work? You say it's more like book publishing than invention; did you uncover any trends about what segments of the industry are more like which model?

- Bongo Bill

Author's Reply: I do think there is that same amount of fear of semi-solicited game proposals. A few publishers do actively seek game design documents from developers. However, in these cases, the legal agreement that you must agree to when submitting your game states clearly that 1) they could be working on a similar game, and 2) there is no real protection for the game developer. Submitting a design is just telling someone your idea, and there is no kind of agreement or protection (aside from copyright protection) for doing that.

It's not a lot of protection for a freelance developer. The problem is, I can understand why publishers are so shy of NDAs and such. In many cases it's just best to avoid legal issues altogether than to get into a fight which involves lawyers. One bad lawsuit at the wrong time could probably sink a publisher.

I think there are a lot of similarities between book writing and game design. By nature both are big, long-term, creative endevors. Though the medium is very different, the role of a publisher is pretty similar (albeit with a few extra hurdles). I also think manuscripts are like unfinished game designs. There are some interesting manuscripts out there, but finding them amidst the drivel is a daunting task.

Unlike books, games allow (require) you to define the means of interaction, which opens up lots of new venues for invention. Books, legally, are fairly simple. You have copyright protection, and that's about it. Of course, it'd also pretty difficult to disguise one book as another... By the time you've done that, you might as well have written the book from scratch. In games, I would say it's easier to plagarize game mechanics. Tracking down the geneology of ideas or interactions is a pretty daunting task. The controversies over the modern Graphical User Interface which involved Xerox PARC/Apple/Microsoft/etc. would be one example of the kind of conflict an exposed idea can create.

- Blake

PETER MOLYNEUX: THE ESCAPIST INTERVIEW

by Howard Wen

To say Peter Molyneux is a moral game developer is to be interpreted literally. The idea of incorporating morality - the choices one makes between "good" and "bad" behavior and the results of such personal actions - into gameplay has fascinated him throughout his career. While his work spans various genres (either as designer, programmer or producer), he is most known for his "god games," of which *Populous* and *Black & White* are best associated with his style and creative passions.

It's unanimous within critical circles that Molyneux has been an influential innovator when it comes to game design. It's also been lobbed that, at his worst, quite a number of his games have turned out to be failed, though interesting, experiments.

In April 2006, Microsoft purchased Lionhead Studios. Molyneux founded Lionhead in 1997, after leaving another game development firm he founded, Bullfrog Productions. Despite its being absorbed by the Microsoft collective, he still remains with the company.

Over the 2006 holiday season, the "god of god games" took a moment to reflect with *The Escapist* on the approaching 25-year mark of his career. Blessed be the gamer with the power to be divine, so giveth Molyneux.

The Escapist: Since Microsoft's acquisition of Lionhead, what have your day-to-day duties been? Are you still actively involved in game design?

Peter Molyneux: Since the acquisition, I've been able to focus far more on game design. I've always had two roles at Lionhead - one as the head of the company and the other as head of design. While we were independent, there was a huge amount of work needed to run a company of 200 people. Now [that] we're a part of Microsoft, there is a huge team of people in Redmond helping me to do that. This has enabled me to focus much more on Fable 2 and our other super secret game.

TE: Early in your career, starting with *Populous*, the concept of the "god game" became synonymous with you. This label has been also ascribed to your most recent titles - like *Black & White* - and with your overall game design sensibility. Though there have always been games made by others that featured "god-like" game play, why is it that your games get that label the most? Or, do you think it's not valid?

PM: My games *Populous*, *Powermonger*, *Theme Park*, *Black & White* and *The Movies* are obviously strongly god games. Other games such as *Syndicate*, *Magic Carpet* and *Fable* are not. So I've

done more god games than any other genre. But it is kind of my dream to bring elements of god games to games like *Fable*, and I'd like to think, although it is not strictly a god game, you can still [play] elements of a god game in it.

TE: Personally, what about games where the player can determine the morality and guide the lives of other beings appeals to you? Basically, why do you like "playing God"?

PM: Morality is a fascinating issue. The greatest of all fantasies, in my book, is being able to play [a] god in world that recognizes you as that. A world where morality changes around you and which starts to craft itself around what an individual player is like, rather than expect players to be a certain type of character. I guess my long-term ambition is that morals in a game are constantly shaped by the person playing it, which kind of means that the player is more like a god.

TE: What's your feeling about religion and videogames, and the likely controversy surrounding it? There's been recent fuss over the *Left Behind* PC game, which makes any controversy that *Populous* had - over its "savior" character - back in its day very minor in comparison.

PM: I think religion is an intrinsic part of the world and part of our evolution. What is fascinating is that every culture has its own interpretation of religion, and that religion has featured throughout history. As cave drawings show, even as early as then primitive man had his own perception of religion. The problem with religion is that it is one of the easiest ways to offend the vast majority of people, and so any videogame, whether it be *Populous* or *Left Behind*, has to realize that any reference or treatment of religion is risky, to say the least.

TE: Your fellow contemporary Will Wright has made a name for himself with games that, in their essence, are "god games" as well - especially *The Sims* and *Spore*. But his body of work appears to lack the morality-as-gameplay element seen in your best-known titles. What are your thoughts about this?

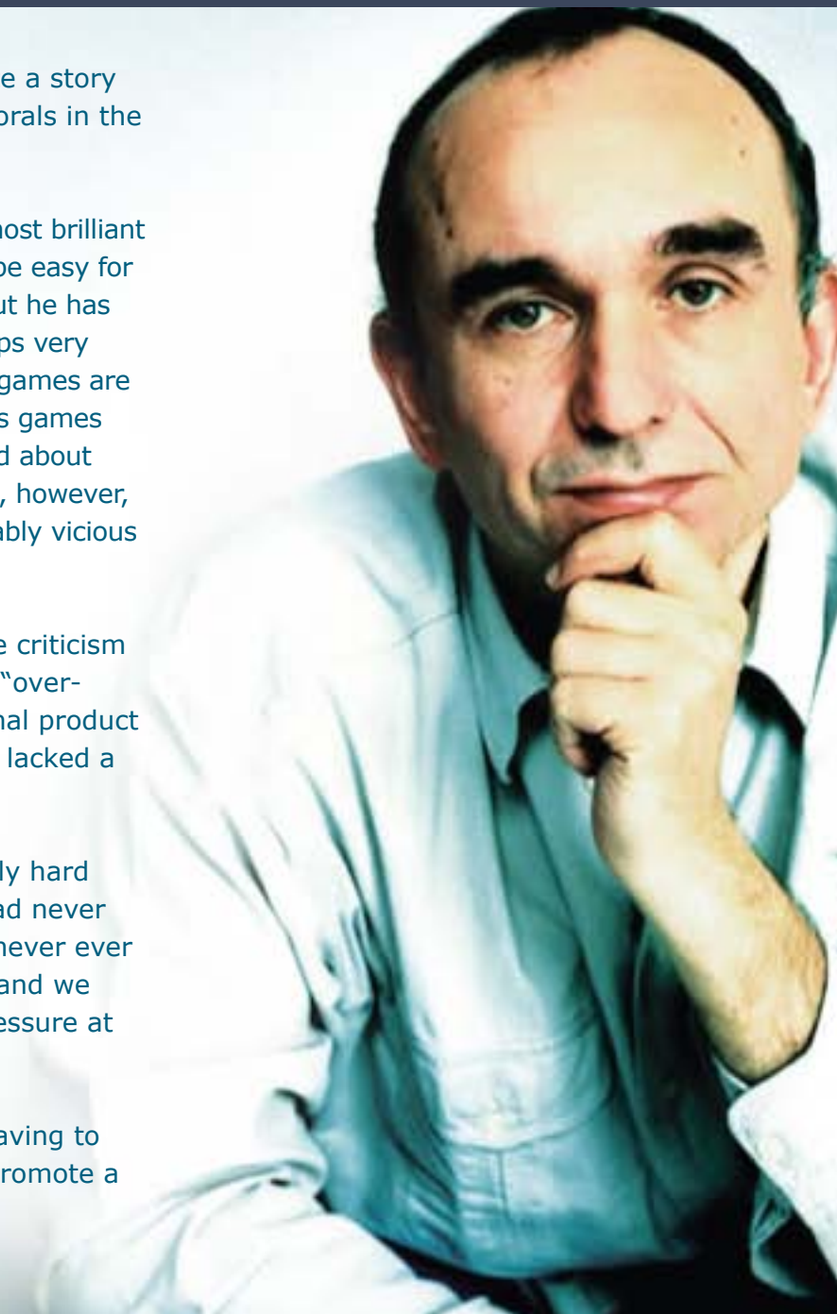
PM: I think it's easier to create a story and character around fixed morals in the case of story-based games.

Will's games are some of the most brilliant ever created. II think it would be easy for him to create a moral game, but he has chosen not to do this for perhaps very good gameplay reasons. Will's games are interesting, because most of his games are based on current issues and about characters you create. He does, however, allow you to do some unspeakably vicious things to your characters!

TE: How do you feel about the criticism that a number of your games "over-promised" compared to the final product (e.g., *Fable*), which critics felt lacked a bit in gameplay?

PM: *Fable* proved to be a really hard game to finish, because we had never done an RPG before and had never ever done a console game before, and we were under a great deal of pressure at the end.

TE: Is this the result of you having to balance between needing to promote a



POLITICIANS CONSIDER VIDEO GAMES TO BE AS DANGEROUS AS GUNS AND NARCOTICS.
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game early in its development vs. what the finished title turns out to be?

PM: I do get into an awful lot of trouble for doing this. It's just that I get so passionate and excited when I'm explaining a game to anyone, be they a journalist or someone I just met down the pub. The root of this is probably that I genuinely want to create the best game ever, but such a statement requires an explanation about how this will be possible.

I have tried to "restrain" myself in recent interviews, but found it really hard to answer a simple question like "Why are you doing *Fable 2*?" without launching into a detailed explanation. When I meet with the team, usually I say, "Let's make *Fable 2* the greatest game ever." At least I'm consistent!

Fable 2 in my opinion - here we go again - will live up to expectations.

TE: The vast majority of your games were developed originally for the PC platform. Can you explain why this has been the case?

PM: Part of the reason for our PC past is where we started game development. *Populous* began on the Amiga and moved to the PC, and this was our home for a very long time.

TE: Did you feel the game consoles released over the past two decades lacked the capabilities to present the kind of games you wanted to make?

PM: It wasn't that we didn't like consoles, but it seemed a very long stretch from PC to console development. Then came the Xbox, and I could see that this console shared many characteristics with a PC, and so it was a very familiar development environment. So, we were persuaded to make the move from PC development to console development. Now, with almost 2.5 million units [of *Fable*] sold, I think we made the right choice.

TE: What do you think about the next-generation of consoles? Any of them interest you as a game developer?

PM: For any game developer, any innovation is fascinating, and this generation is the most fascinating of all. For me, personally, the fact that a huge number of consoles are now connected to each other, connecting players to friends and the world, is a huge deal for me. I think that we are seeing the seeds of what will be a huge change in gaming over the next 10 years.

TE: What can you reveal about your top-secret project - if not a title or game concept, at least the theme or idea behind it?

PM: The only thing I can reveal is that I'm developing something new. There are two teams at Lionhead, one of which is working on *Fable 2* and the other working on this new project.

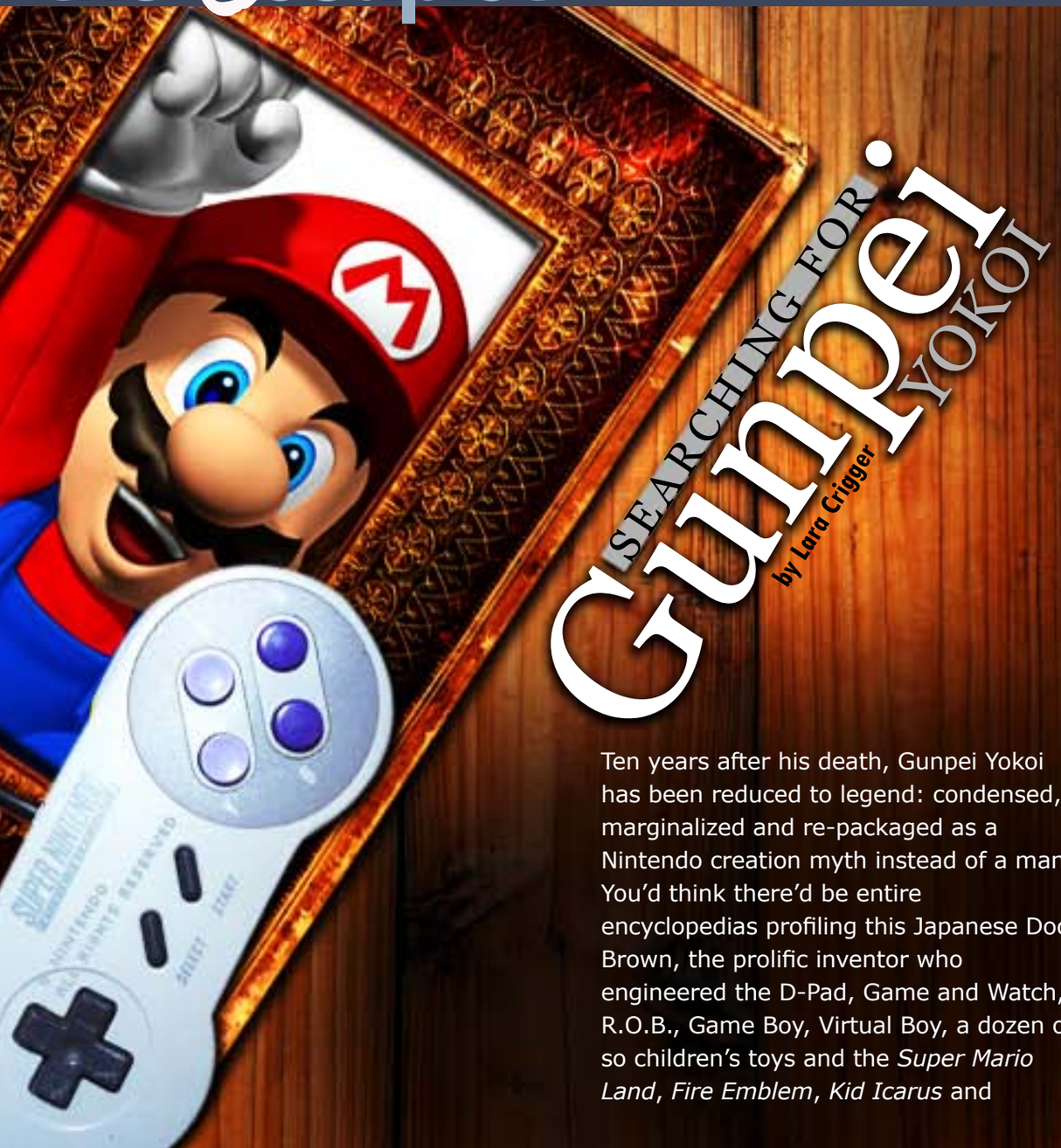
TE: You've made videogames professionally for 25 years and today are regarded as an influential figure and pioneer in the still-young history of videogames. Looking back over the years, what are your thoughts on this notoriety - for example, how do you feel about the way the media has depicted you?

PM: I still have to pinch myself that people still want to hear what I have to say.

Maybe the reason for that is that I am still as enthusiastic about computer games as ever, and that enthusiasm is, I hope, what comes across when people talk to me. If I ever lost that, the best thing to do would be to lock me in the attic and throw away the key!

COMMENTS

The closest Howard Wen has been to being with the game gods was the time he interviewed John Romero in his penthouse office, high atop downtown Dallas. It was like being inside Mount Olympus overlooking the Sim City*-like land below.*



Searching for Gunpei Yokoi

by Lara Crigger

Ten years after his death, Gunpei Yokoi has been reduced to legend: condensed, marginalized and re-packaged as a Nintendo creation myth instead of a man. You'd think there'd be entire encyclopedias profiling this Japanese Doc Brown, the prolific inventor who engineered the D-Pad, Game and Watch, R.O.B., Game Boy, Virtual Boy, a dozen or so children's toys and the *Super Mario Land*, *Fire Emblem*, *Kid Icarus* and *Metroid* franchises. Not so. Instead, most official Nintendo histories gloss over Yokoi's contributions, and many books and websites - if they're even translated into English - echo the same rudimentary, unsubstantiated stories. Even Yokoi's own obituaries wander off topic. The man was so vague and ghostly, he may not have even existed at all.

The only hard proof we have that Gunpei Yokoi graced this mortal soil is a few faded black and white photographs. Eerily, in each one, he looks exactly the same: gray hair, cleanly brushed back; a crisp, dark suit; and a faint but cheerful smile toying at his lips.

So how did Yokoi become such an enigma? The man only died in 1997, and yet his name has already evaporated from history. Like the shadows scorched into rock by an atomic blast, we know he existed, but his motivations and personal life remain a mystery. The true Gunpei Yokoi has vanished, leaving only his inventions behind.

The Ultra Hand

Most chronologies of Yokoi's life begin in 1970, which implies that he'd skipped childhood entirely and instead sprung full-grown from a box of Nintendo playing cards. Facts on his early life are sparse. Yokoi was born in September 1941, during the thick of WWII, to a wealthy pharmaceutical factory owner. Instead of following in the family business, he attended Doshisha University, graduating with a degree in electronics. In 1965, the Nintendo Playing Card Company hired the young grad to maintain the assembly-line machines regulating its cash crop, hanafuda cards. Affable but quiet, Yokoi worked the conveyor belts for years, building a reputation among his peers as an electronics whiz who built toys and gadgets in his spare time.

Shortly after the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, the playing card market collapsed, and Nintendo struggled financially throughout the rest of the decade. Desperate to keep his family business afloat, President Hiroshi Yamauchi branched the company into everything from taxi services to "love hotels," but nothing worked. Nintendo's only commercial successes were a few children's toys, which in part inspired the anxious Yamauchi to establish a new Games division in 1970.

> "he proved to be a **MECHANICAL MIDAS**,

Yamauchi called Yokoi into his office one day, asking the engineer to develop something - **anything** - for the Christmas rush. Gunpei produced an extending arm toy he'd constructed in his spare time, a wood lattice that could reach and grab when its handles were pushed together. Yamauchi was delighted, and Yokoi's toy, dubbed the Ultra Hand, was hustled to the market that year.

Surprisingly, the Ultra Hand blossomed into an overnight sensation, selling more than 1.2 million units. Yokoi was quickly promoted from maintenance duty to research and development, where he proved to be a mechanical Midas, creating many of Nintendo's best-sellers, including: the Ultra Machine, an indoor baseball-thrower; the Ten Billion Barrel, a Rubix Cube-like puzzle; and the Love Tester, an electronic gadget that measured a couple's compatibility. One of his most successful toys, a joint venture with Masayuki Uemura, was the Beam Gun, a plastic light-gun that was the predecessor to the NES Zapper. Before long, Yokoi's string of successes netted him his own creative team, the Research and Development 1 Group (R&D1).

Game and Watch

Yokoi's next big hit came to him as he rode home one evening on the bullet train. The exhausted engineer noticed the gentleman next to him fiddling with an LCD calculator. Yokoi watched, fascinated, as the bored man punched buttons in idle boredom. Suddenly, Yokoi wondered if weary commuters, looking to pass the time, might be interested in a portable gaming device. Thus was the Nintendo Game and Watch born.

The first Game and Watch system, *Ball*, launched in 1980, and over the next 11 years, 59 more titles would be released, from *Donkey Kong* to *Oil Panic* to *Balloon Fight*. Each handheld sported an LCD screen printed with a specific scene, such as a house or a forest. Buttons on the side cycled through Alarm, Time and Game functions, and some models even used a dual-screen set-up, like the Nintendo DS. But most importantly, the Game and Watch handheld included a cross-shaped directional button named the D-Pad, eliminating the need for a joystick (which Yokoi insisted was too clumsy for a handheld device). An engineering revelation, the D-Pad has been used on every controller for every console for every company since its inception.

Although fancier, more powerful handheld technology existed at the time, Yokoi maintained that the Game and Watch systems should use affordable components that offered a decent battery life. Consumers, he believed, would prefer cheaper products with fun gameplay over the hottest, cutting-edge gadgets. This design philosophy, which Yokoi would later dub "Lateral Thinking of Withered Technology," guided most of his inventions; to this day, Nintendo still gravitates toward well-understood technologies to design their novel, reinvented gameplay.

The R.O.B.

Since the late '70s, Nintendo had been experimenting with the home videogame market, and by 1983, the company was ready to release its first gaming console, the Famicom (NES). But that was the same year the infant videogame industry, wracked with price wars and a glut of crappy titles, crashed spectacularly. Faced with indifferent customers and bargain bins brimming with videogames, retailers refused to stock more consoles. Nintendo realized it needed a clever marketing ploy to trick store owners into supplying the Famicom.

Again, Yokoi saved the day, this time by devising the Robotic Operating Buddy, or R.O.B. (the Famicom Robot in Japan). Released in 1985, the R.O.B. was a one-foot tall toy automaton that didn't do much of anything, except consume AA batteries at an alarming rate. But the R.O.B. was bundled in the NES Deluxe Set, which also included a console, a

creating many of Nintendo's **BEST-SELLERS**"

Zapper gun, two controllers and two games (*Duck Hunt* and *Gyromite*). This clever packaging convinced retailers that the NES was not a videogame console but a robotic toy, and stores hesitant to stock other videogame products ordered the Deluxe Set instead. The trick worked: In its first year, the NES sold more than 1 million units, and having served its purpose, Yokoi's R.O.B. was quickly dropped from the line-up the next year.

Yokoi designed many other products for the NES, especially with 25-year-old Shigeru Miyamoto, who joined Nintendo in 1977. Yokoi took to the young man, acting as his mentor. Together the pair produced two of the most memorable franchises in history - *Donkey Kong* and the original *Mario Brothers* - before Miyamoto moved to his own R&D group in 1984. Afterward, Yokoi kept producing games, including *Kid Icarus*, the original *Fire Emblem* and, of course, *Metroid*.

The Game Boy

Despite his successes with the Famicom, however, Yokoi preferred portable gaming, and in 1989, R&D1 released the first Game Boy, a revolutionary handheld that had been in development for three years. The system, which combined the portability of the Game and Watch with the interchangeable cartridge technology of the NES, was an instant success. When the Game Boy launched in Japan, its initial shipment of 300,000 units sold out in two weeks. Later, when it migrated stateside, U.S. shoppers snatched up more than 40,000 units on the first day alone.

As with the Game and Watch, the Game Boy eschewed the sexier, cutting-edge technologies available at the time - particularly a full-color screen - in favor of longer battery life and cheaper price points. This decision made many Nintendo higher-ups nervous: Atari had just released their own handheld, the Lynx, which featured full color and a backlit screen. But once again, Yokoi's intuition proved correct. Consumers ignored the pricy, power-hogging Lynx, which required six AA batteries for only four hours of play time, and purchased the Game Boy instead. Sega's Game Gear - also a technologically superior product - would suffer the same fate in the 1990s.

Yokoi stuck by the Game Boy for years, producing many of the handheld's various iterations and some of its most famous games: *Dr. Mario*, *Metroid II* and *Super Mario Land*. The Game Boy's success catapulted Yokoi into megastar status at Nintendo. Even more so than before, he was considered an unbeatable golden boy and one of the company's most valuable assets.

If only he'd stopped there.

The Virtual Boy

In 1993, fresh off his Game Boy triumph, Yokoi began work on the Virtual Boy, which would be Nintendo's only entry into 32-bit gaming. Two years later, the company released the final product. Essentially a set of goggles mounted on a tripod, the Virtual Boy projected monochrome images in a headset, using parallax to create 3-D graphics.

But for the first time, Yokoi's principle of "Withered Technology" failed him, as consumers recoiled from the awkward, uncomfortable device. The Virtual Boy used red LEDs, chosen for their affordability and low battery drain, but the black-and-red display gave players headaches and eyestrain. In addition, the Virtual Boy was extremely delicate; if the console were bumped or knocked

YOKOI KEPT PRODUCING games, including *Kid Icarus*, the original *Fire Emblem* and, of course, *Metroid*.

over, the mirror arrays inside could easily break. This, combined with its small game library and $180 price tag, kept customers away from the Virtual Boy, and Nintendo discontinued the console after only one year.

Rumors swirled that because Nintendo execs wanted another console out before the N64, the Virtual Boy had been rushed to market against Yokoi's wishes. Indeed, in retrospect, the system's design flaws all run counter to Yokoi's philosophy: The Virtual Boy had short battery life, it was difficult to use and it was too expensive. Yet, even with twice the development time, the console might still have failed, since consumers have been stubbornly resistant to adopting VR technology.

Koto Laboratories

Yokoi was personally crushed by the Virtual Boy's flop. The former Nintendo superstar became an outcast, and many wondered if the old man still had his creative fire. In August 1996, just days after the Japanese release of the Game Boy Pocket, Yokoi resigned.

Officially, his departure had no connection to the Virtual Boy. However, insiders claimed Nintendo hadn't exactly discouraged Yokoi from leaving the company, either. Still, the engineer remained close to Nintendo, publicly waxing fond of his former employers.

Shortly after his resignation, Yokoi launched a development firm called Koto Laboratories. Koto was a fresh start for Yokoi, where he could be free to focus once more on the handheld systems he so loved. First, the company released a line of LCD keychain games in the style of *Tamagotchi*. Then, signing with Bandai, Koto began work on a competitor to the Game Boy, later dubbed the WonderSwan. For Yokoi, things were finally looking up again.

Gunpei's Legacy

On October 4, 1997, Yokoi and an associate were driving on the Hokuriku Expressway when they rear-ended the truck in front of them. The two men stepped out of the car to inspect the damage, and a passing car sideswiped them. Yokoi was grievously injured and pronounced dead two hours later. He was 56.

Since his passing, Yokoi has received some industry recognition, particularly the 2003 GDC's posthumous Lifetime Achievement Award. In addition, Yokoi's legacy of "Lateral Thinking of Withered Technology" lives on at Nintendo, obvious in the design schemes of the DS and Wii systems.

But the real Gunpei Yokoi remains a man within his machines, unknowable apart from his inventions. In this age of celebrity game developers, the idea that a titanic genius would be content to be eclipsed by his products seems incomprehensible. But for the thousands of nameless developers in the industry toiling away on games and consoles, Gunpei is nothing short of an inspiration. He is proof that the best legacy is not a name place in the history books, but rather the gift of joy, be it to one person or 100 million people around the world.

Every gamer, every child, every person who has ever loved a Nintendo product owes their smiles to Gunpei Yokoi, the quiet engineer with the faint, cheerful smile, the crisp, dark suit and nothing much else to distinguish him, who remains a god without a name, a burnt impression upon the rock, a ghost, a myth, a memory, a legend.

Lara Crigger is a freelance science, tech and gaming journalist whose previous work for The Escapist includes "Playing Through The Pain" and "How To Be A Guitar Hero." Her email is lcrigger@gmail.com.

"Yokoi was **PERSONALLY CRUSHED** by the Virtual Boy's flop."

A Natural Born Inventor

by Shannon Drake

Videogames entered the world not with a bang, but as a series of stutter steps that culminated in the humbly-named Brown Box. From such humble beginnings, a dynasty strides forth, a multi-billion dollar a year industry birthed almost entirely by a persistent television engineer named Ralph H. Baer. His idea was a simple one: Make a box that attaches to television sets and provides some kind of additional entertainment, the kind that people will pay for, and if even 1 percent of TV owners purchase one, a business is born. It was a simple idea, but the execution took quite a bit of work.

The idea first came to him in the summer of 1966, but from there, it was a start and stop affair. The late '60s weren't a good time for playful things, especially among weapon-makers. His work started at Sanders Associates (a defense contractor), in "late '66," Baer says, but progress moved in fits and starts. This was largely because Sanders had bigger projects on hand, Baer's was "a couple guys in a room, and they were called away half the time to go do more important work. … [We had] engineers and techs worrying about military programs [and] putting stuff on the moon. Not games. The only reason I did it was because I'm a TV engineer by degree."

The business logic was easy to see, he said. "If I can license somebody to build a box that attaches to 1 percent of [TVs], in any sense, we've got a business. It turned out to be a lot more than 1 percent." They made progress through the years, and "for the better part of two and a half years, we went through a series of models, which finally wound up with the Brown Box." A problem remained with the prototype, which was: "Now that we've got it, what the hell do we do with it?"

Convincing TV set manufacturers that the Brown Box would make them a mint took some work, he says. A number of deals fell through with big television manufacturers, like RCA and Zenith. "Everybody was impressed, but only RCA tried to give us a contract," Baer said, adding, "But they tried to snooker us, and we finally decided to walk away from

that." Fortune smiled upon them after "somebody [Bob Enders] on the RCA team left and became a VP of marketing for Magnavox." Enders worked to arrange a meeting at Magnavox, and the company executives were impressed enough to start production. The humbly-named Brown Box would create an industry, in 1972, as the Magnavox Odyssey, the first widely-available, commercially-backed game console.

"The Odyssey came out in May of '72," Baer says. "By December, 100,000 of them had been sold. That probably means that 2-300,000 people had [access to] one," though they shared his earlier dilemma. "They had to figure out what the hell videogames were in the first place, simultaneously." The arcade business soon followed. "The *Pong* arcade game showed up in fall of '72. It was a knockoff of the Odyssey game, because Nolan Bushnell, he'd played an Odyssey game at a dealership, a Magnavox dealership, in May of that year, and he started the arcade business going." Magnavox would go on to win a patent infringement lawsuit against Bushnell, but the electronic gaming genie was out of the bottle. "By the time '74 came, the Odyssey was already obsolete," Baer says. "We'd sold 350,000 of those, which wasn't too shabby," especially considering it was the first of its kind.

Unlike the cutting-edge consoles of today, Baer describes his first effort as "primitive. We repurposed stuff with discrete transistors when integrated circuits were already available, but we couldn't use them. … It was too expensive. So, in a sense, we already built the stuff one generation behind [the] current technology. Now, four more years passed before we could get a license fee. Now we're two generations behind." That gap has narrowed over time, he says. It's "extremely small nowadays, compared to what it was 20 years ago," though that's largely because "so much money is thrown into every product."

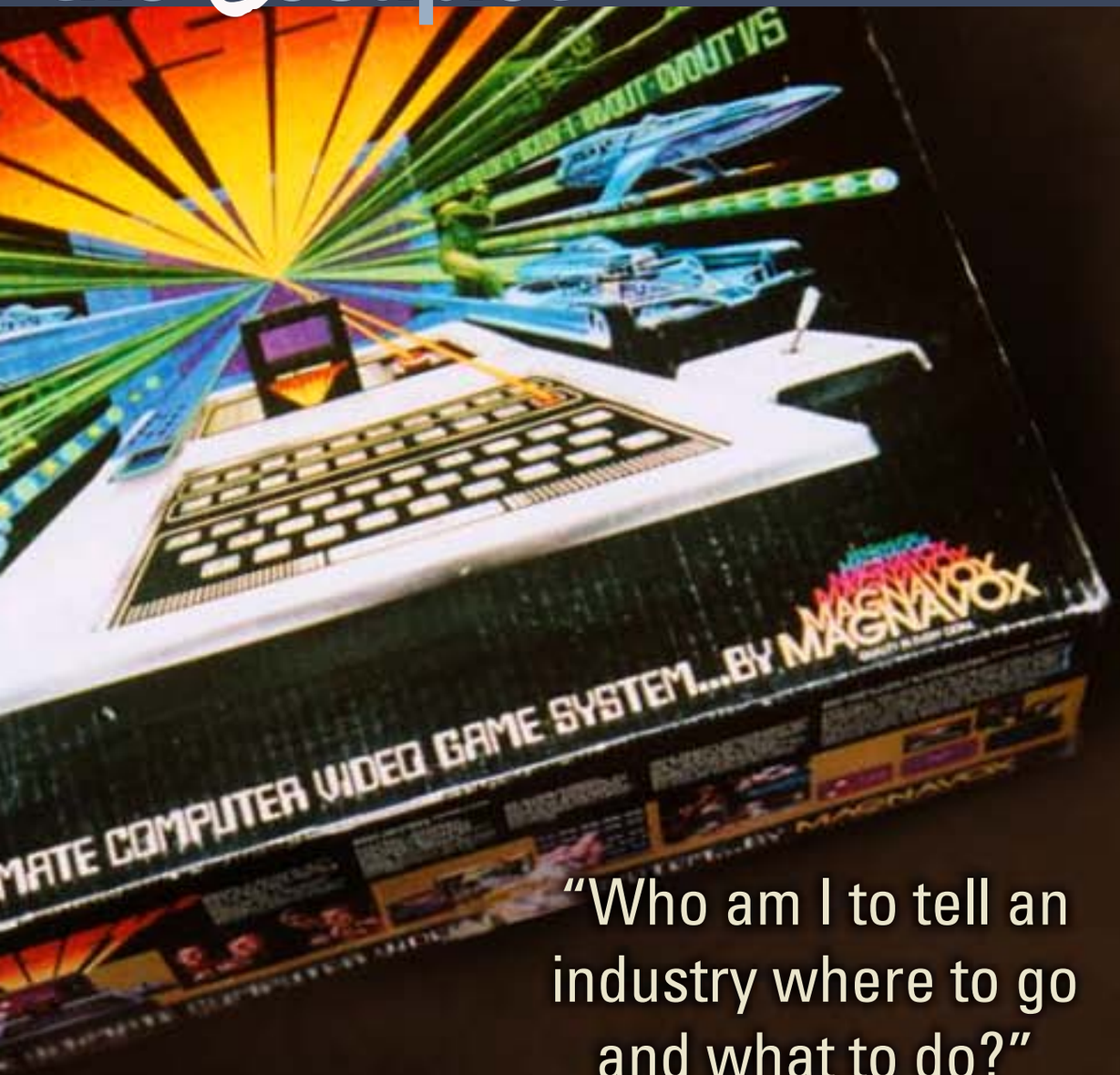
With the Odyssey at the forefront in the home and *Pong* leading the charge in the arcade, the electronic gaming industry was off and running. Magnavox reaped most of the profits, though in an earlier interview Baer said, "I was well taken care of. I have no complaints."

And Baer went right on inventing things, like the first light gun for home games, *Simon*, and a number of other electronic toys and games. Indeed, on the day we spoke, he said he'd "just signed a contract with a major manufacturer." While he couldn't tell me exactly what he was designing, it is supposed to be something to communicate with both the PlayStation 3 and the Xbox 360. He's not doing videogames, but he stays busy, describing himself as "a natural-born inventor, apart from 50 U.S. patents and 100 foreign ones. I've invented hundreds of things over 30 or 40 years."

Looking back, Baer sees an industry still grappling with the very first challenge he faced all those years ago: making games fun. "All we have now is a bunch of interactive movies," he says. "And any challenging part is not necessarily fun to play, which is why so many people go back and play regular games, especially now that they're available on media like cell phones and handheld stuff. When people play, they don't play complicated modern games, they play real stuff."

I asked if he had a favorite company that did things right. "I can't really answer that question. Look at the bottom line, who sells the largest number of games? And clarifying that, they all do many things right, and lots of things that are not so great, but what do you expect? People have been publishing books for

Baer describes his first effort as "primitive."



"Who am I to tell an industry where to go and what to do?"

hundreds of years. Some are great, some are lousy, some in-between. And that decision making is in the eyes of the beholder anyhow. There's a lot of great stuff out there, and I don't even know about it. What I know about present games is what I watch over the shoulders of my grandkids."

However, he will offer some advice to the developers of today. "Make games that people like to play." He elaborates, "If you want to stop right there and think about it, we still play boardgames we played in 1880. We play other boardgames that were invented 5,000 years ago. They're totally different and a hell of a lot simpler than all this electronic stuff."

He cites the pursuit of graphics over gameplay, saying, "In the beginning, yes, things were so primitive that there was a definite need for things to improve the graphics. But now, the graphics … have taken on a life of [their] own. It's one generation from having total reality out there." Additionally, "the idea of playing games over the web, it's just taken hold and it's pretty prevalent right now. It's a hell of a good idea." However, the pursuit of graphical realism means designers have lost focus on gameplay, and the anonymity of the internet means people don't get quite the social experience they used to have. "[That] was the concept in the very beginning. You don't play Ping Pong with yourself, you play it as another person. In these massive games, you don't even see the other person; they are an idea. They don't want to be known, because they're not playing themselves. They're playing the avatar they created, the guy or gal they **want** to be. That's not really socializing."

With that said, though, he urges the industry to "keep going. Who am I to tell an industry where to go and what to do? I expressed my opinion earlier that there should be a little more stress on having fun. The quest for being king of the hill in some bloody game doesn't sound to me like socializing or something very fun. That seems like work to me."

COMMENTS

Shannon Drake is a Contributing Editor for The Escapist and changed his name when he became a citizen. It used to be Merkwürdigeliebe.

EA Startup

by Russ Pitts

Joe Ybarra is currently the Vice President of Product Development at Cheyenne Mountain Entertainment, the company attempting to bring the *Stargate* franchise to an MMOG near you. His resume boasts an astonishing array of credits and stints with companies such as Apple, Activision, Broderbund, Sierra On-Line, Microsoft Game Studios and Ubisoft. He's also one of the co-founders of industry giant Electronic Arts.

I first met Joe at last year's Austin Game Conference, where he and various other Cheyenne employees (most veterans of other studios) were busy drumming up attention for their fledgling game, *Stargate Worlds*, set in the *Stargate* universe somewhere along the timeline of the television series.

Stargate Worlds is eagerly anticipated by both fans of the television show and devotees of sci-fi MMOGs (of which there are very few), but after speaking with Joe and his team for an hour or so in Austin, it became clear that the real story behind *Stargate Worlds* was its developer, Cheyenne Mountain, and beyond that, Joe Ybarra.

As we talked about *Stargate*, his plans for the franchise and Cheyenne's operating philosophy, a picture emerged of Joe Ybarra; a portrait of a true veteran developer, a man who's weathered the storms of a juvenile industry and has emerged, if not always victorious, determined to wave the twin flags of common sense and attention to detail in the face of an industry which has grown far too comfortable with throwing the dice and occasionally getting lucky.

Joe was kind enough to sit down recently with *The Escapist* for a follow-up interview.

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The Escapist: Tell me a little bit about how you started in the industry.

Joe Ybarra: How did I start in the industry? I had to wait for the industry to be created before I could start in it. I've been a gamer all of my life, and it really wasn't until I went to work for Apple Computer in my late 20s before - you know, this is right at the peak of the Atari 2600 revolution, if you could call it that - and it was pretty interesting, because I

knew I wanted to be in electronic games, it's just there was no business.

At any rate, what [working for Apple] does is it leads me to the opportunity of getting a chance to work in the same company that Trip Hawkins is working in.

I actually never met Trip until he left Apple, and then I went to work for him at EA, but essentially our reputations intersected with each other, even though we ourselves never intersected. And so … he called me up and said, "Hey, I'm interested in starting a computer game company, and are you interested in being involved in that?" And I said yes, absolutely. So that's how I became one of the founders of EA, and the rest is history from there.

EA for me is very much of a start-up type of experience, because the first couple of years that I worked in EA we didn't have more than 40 people working in the entire company, so we all knew each other very well; we worked very closely together. The [idea of a 100-hour work week] easily started in that time period, so I saw more of my co-workers than any other human being, wife and children included. So they were very close experiences. … There were no producers there; we had no methodology for doing things, we had no money either, and so it was very much a "if we don't get this done we may not survive" kind of an existence for several years while I was there.

TE: I think you're one of the few people I could talk to in the universe that would think of EA as a start-up. How do you feel now about the fact that they're still sort of running on start-up times, still having those 100 hour weeks and still doing constant crunch time?

JY: Well, I don't see why they do that. I think now it's more of a cultural thing than anything else. I mean, they've been doing it for so long - since the beginning - that they don't know how to do, probably anything else. It's kind of frustrating from my point of view, because I would like to think, especially now that I have the degree of control that I do in the environment I work in, that I'm really anti-crunch, and I'm adamant about making sure that we do our job in finding the projects and allocating enough resources and biting off as much as we can chew ... that I feel it's my responsibility to make sure we don't have to work like crazed animals for extended periods of time.

So I feel kind of bad about it, in the sense that there was no reason for them to do that. And of course, EA being the monstrous engine that it is right now, you would think that by now they would've figured out a way to not have to do that, but I don't know what to say. But you know what? I've worked in other companies where crunch was part of the culture. I mean, the employees liked doing it, which I thought was crazy, but what do you do with that?

TE: What do you think, do you think that's an industry impetus, or do you think it's a symptom of the kinds of people that gravitate to the industry?

JY: I think it's more of the latter, because gamers - as a generalized statement - people in the gaming space tend to be nocturnal kind of people that are very focused and high-energy kind of guys, so they're kind of used to the idea: "When I get started on something I'm going to stay with it for 12, 14, 16 hours or whatever it takes, and if that happens to be overnight, so be it because I'm nocturnal anyway, I don't care." It's just

sort of the personality profile. You see a lot more of those kinds of people than you see the early morning, 8-5, you know, "I better go home and play with my kids" kind of people. Although, we have a lot of those kinds of people here, because you see a lot more of them now in the industry than ever. And I certainly, personally respect that kind of attitude.

I like the guys that can come in do their nine or eight hours or 10 hours get the work done and go home and leave the job at work. That's really almost impossible to do in our industry, because even if you leave your job at work, you still go home and play games. So it's pretty tough to not be working constantly, but nonetheless, as our industry matures we're getting more people that don't do that. That's a good thing from my point of view.

TE: How do you gel those two different types of personalities, the more mature developer who may have been in the industry for a while or for whatever reason doesn't crave crash time and the young energetic folks like you were just describing? How do you make those two work together?

JY: You know, the key to all of this good stuff is making deals that stick. So the idea is, if you have people working together and they say Hey, I'm going to get this done by XYZ time, this is what a deal that sticks is all about. So he's going to make a commitment to the other employees to the effect that the piece of the puzzle that [he's] working on, [he's] going to deliver to you in this time period, and he actually gets it done. So, if you can do that, then it doesn't really matter how the folks are working in terms of their work style, because everybody is making commitments. And as long as the commitments are being upheld, then it can be relatively transparent to everybody how they got there.

So, if I've got one guy that does nothing for two days and stays in the office for 48 hours, and he gets it all done, but he makes it deliverable on the day that everybody said that he needed it, then he's just as good as the guy that comes in and works eight hours a day and gets it all done and has a normal life. It makes no difference to me. Whatever floats your boat.

TE: So you think it's the tolerance of the different personalities then?

JY: Yeah. In fact, [the] one thing you've got to be in the game industry is really tolerant of different personalities. We get our unusually large spread of strange and interesting personalities in our business. I have no problem with eccentric people or people that are not necessarily polished in their personal relationship skills or whatever, but if they get the job done and you see the passion in their work, [who cares?] … One of the things I talk about with everybody is that nobody works in the game business unless they want it; everybody that's here has a passion for being involved in games. So I want to see that passion exhibited in the output of their work, because I think customers see it. When the people that build the game really love their product, really care about it deeply, then you see it in the end result.

TE: Let's go back to EA a little bit and tell me, if you can, one of your most memorable experiences working with that company.

JY: Wow, there's a lot of them. I guess probably one of the most interesting [lessons] I've learned is ... you can't hide a hit. If you're working on a product that's going to be a top-selling product,

you know it pretty early on, and one of the ways I learned that was working on *Seven Cities of Gold*.

After we got about four months into the project, it was pretty widely known in EA that I was getting a build every other Friday from the developer, Dan Button, over in Little Rock, Arkansas, and so one day I remember doing a build, and I looked up and outside my cubicle there was literally a line of 12 people. And I looked up and asked, "Why are you people here?" And they said, "Well, you've got a new build for *Seven Cities of Gold*, and we all want one." So that's when I started to learn, wait a second, if I'm still building this thing and I've got people lined up outside my door, then I know I must be onto something special here.

That phenomenon got repeated several times actually, when I worked on *Bard's Tale* and *Starflight* and on *Madden Football* and on all the projects that I worked on. I could tell whether or not my product was going to really go, just by the number of people that were waiting around to get builds. It was pretty entertaining and exciting, too, and very nerve racking by the way.

TE: Can you ever say the opposite is true? Is it possible to detect a flop in the same way?

JY: Oh God yeah. Flops are easy to spot, because if I boot it and I don't even like it, then I know we're in big trouble. Yeah, I've worked on a few of those. I remember one that - I'm not going to mention any names - but I remember this product was so bad that nobody on my team wanted to have anything to do with it, including me. And so I told the team, Look, there's really only three ways to [finish] a project: you can ship it, you can kill it or you can give it away.

Well, EA is not going to let us kill this game, and there isn't anyone crazy enough in this company to take it away from us, so I guess the only way for us to get rid of it is to ship it. So we did. That was not the wisest of decisions, but it did get it out of our faces. … So somehow we overcame it that time, but I can tell you there's nothing worse than when you're working on something and you know that it's awful.

TE: What's interesting in talking to you about this, Joe, is that talking to a number of other developers or producers, you hear things like, "capture this genie" or "put this lightning in this bottle," but talking to you, taking the context of your words away, it's like you're describing making any other kind of product. Do you think that's really the key, approaching it from that point of view?

JY: Absolutely, where the secret sauce is going to come in is by parsing the talent of the team and giving them the freedom to really do cool and clever stuff. Because I can't dictate at the beginning all the characteristics that are going to make my product an amazing product, what's going to end up happening is during the course of construction, opportunities will arise while I'm building the product that will transform it from being a product into being an amazing thing. I mean, that's where the secret sauce kicks in, right? And the thing that's really hard to do is trying to figure out what the secret sauce is going to be from the very beginning.

Where the secret sauce is going to come in is the passion of the folks that are working on the game. They will find a way to get it in there. And I've seen some products with some nice last minute finishing touches, maybe not so much last minute, but nice touches get put in or somebody raises their hand and says, Hey, I've got this idea about this feature, and you kind of look at it and say, Wow, why didn't we think of that? And [you] stick it in there, and by George, you have something pretty astonishing.

You know, one of the things that I believe in is if you don't have any rules, you don't know when you're breaking them, so we have lots of rules for how our project works. So if you have to break one of these rules, raise your hand and let's talk about it, and if it makes sense that we should break this rule, then let's go break it. But at least we knew consciously what we were doing when we did it. So rather than let this stuff fumble its way to the finish line, I like attacking the finish line.

TE: You've been in the industry, it's fair to say, since the beginning. Is there anything you can see at this point in time that you would say is the number one problem facing the industry?

JY: Yeah, I can certainly say that the number one problem right now is how expensive these damn products have gotten. You know, because they've gotten so expensive, it's discouraged people from taking risks. And because we're not taking risks, we're not getting the opportunity to innovate as much as we might otherwise.

I don't see any barriers to it stopping, actually. I mean, look at movies, movies got ridiculously expensive because you're always going to have the top-three list. ... The potential in revenue and the audience is so big, that as long as people feel that by spending more money [they'll] have a better shot at getting that bigger audience, then people will keep doing it. And a lot of the decisions that get made in our industry are not done with rational thinking, so we're just going to see these numbers getting bigger and bigger.

The thing that's fun about this is every now and then, one of those really big-budget projects is actually going to do what everybody expected it to, which is sell a gazillion units and be a watershed product, blah, blah, blah, and all this does is throw more gasoline on the fire, so it's just going to keep going.

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And talking to Joe Ybarra, it's clear he's trying to do just that; make his next game the next game, and with Stargate Worlds, he's in position to make that dream a reality. The amount of raw talent being thrown at the game, and the rampant consumer demand (the Stargate franchise continues to grow, with a third TV series in the works) would seem to point to a sure-fire hit, but we won't know for sure if Cheyenne has a hit on their hands until either it launches or people start lining up outside of Joe's office to get a look at the code. That uncertainty, that gamble, is what makes this industry so unique, and rainmakers like Joe Ybarra such a powerful force.

Check The Escapist Daily throughout the week for more on Joe Ybarra and Stargate Worlds. COMMENTS

Russ Pitts is an Associate Editor for The Escapist. He has written and produced for television, theatre and film, has been writing on the web since it was invented and claims to have played every console ever made.

The indie guru

Steve Pavlina helps indie game developers wake up

by Allen Varney

I'm moving to Southeast Asia because of Steve Pavlina.

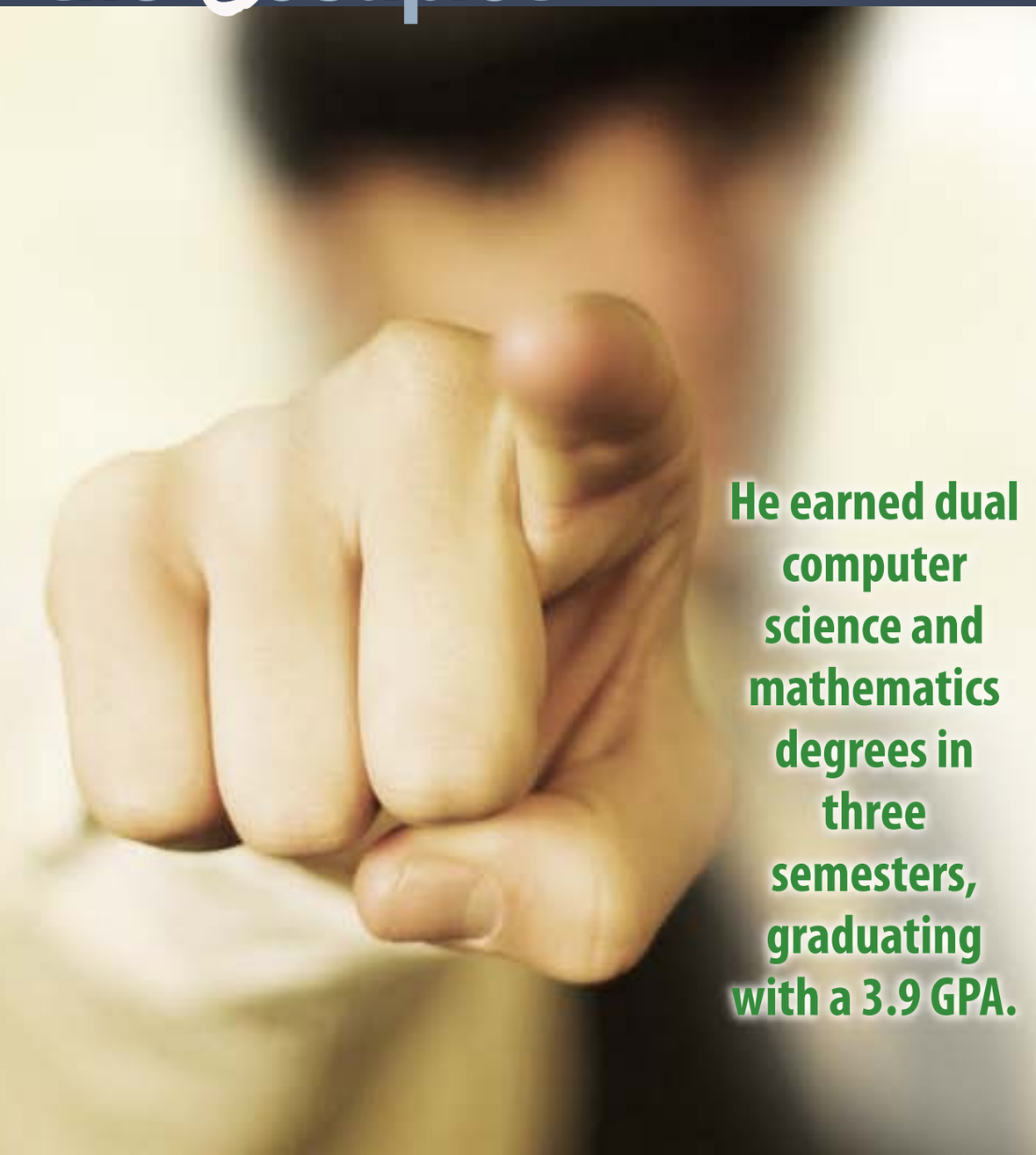
I'm not the only designer who has taken bold steps after reading Pavlina's articles about independent game development. Jake Birkett of Gray Alien Games says, "I read his stuff in November 2004 and became very inspired. One year later, I released my first commercial game, *Xmas Bonus,* and now two years later I've made four commercial games and a game framework. Of course, lots of people are dubious of this kind of stuff, but it totally works for me, and that's what's important."

"Steve inspired quite a lot of game developers, and I'm certainly one of them," says Cliff Harris, who started Positech Games in 1997. "He wrote some fantastic articles on game development and marketing. I would regularly e-mail [one] to all the developers where I worked, back in my retail dev days. Of course, nobody paid any attention, which is why they all still sit in a cubicle on minimum wage."

Gabriel Gambetta co-founded casual game developer Mystery Studio in Uruguay. "Back in 2001, I found Steve's site by chance – and it changed my life. For the first time, I saw we could make games, even from this remote corner of the world. Steve's motivational articles were always helpful. ... Not to take as The Truth (and I don't think that's Steve's intention), but to make you think or consider new perspectives on everyday situations."

"You can't overestimate the impact of Steve's willingness to share his successes and failures with the indie dev community," says Nick Tipping of MoonPod in Sheffield, U.K. "Without Steve showing us the light, there'd be no MoonPod here today, and I bet we'd be missing many other developers."

Chris Evans started Outside the Box Software in early 2004 with minimal experience. "For those thinking about going indie full-time, it's probably better to have some game development experience first. However, I'm still very happy with my decision. Many of my former co-workers are just now getting into game development, whereas I've released several games, learned 3-D modeling, gained industry contacts and made some money in the process. This is why I wanted to make games in the



He earned dual computer science and mathematics degrees in three semesters, graduating with a 3.9 GPA.

first place. I'll be forever grateful to Steve Pavlina for lighting that spark."

Then there are the ambitious newcomers. After reading Pavlina's articles on the independent game business, Gianfranco Berardi woke up. "I didn't have to work for some large company to work in the videogame industry! I could form my own company! Last March, I officially formed my own LLC [limited liability corporation], and I am currently working on finishing my first commercial game when I am not working my day job. Steve Pavlina's writing let me know I was gravely underestimating what I could do with my life."

Historically, Pavlina's articles have ranked with Garage Games among the most alluring siren calls to the rocky straits of indie design. Some might denounce such persuasion as irresponsible, even dangerous. Many developers who tried the indie life gave up within months, sometimes with angry, bitter public goodbyes on Pavlina's online forum. The path of self-reliance, though available to anyone, has never been for everyone.

The thing is, none of us know if it's for us until we try.

That's why, by the time you read this, I'll have relocated to Malaysia to start my own company. Because, like many before me, I got inspired by Steve Pavlina.

***

Pavlina was born in 1971. Raised a devout Catholic, he became an atheist in high school. As a bored and amoral student at the University of California at Berkeley, he turned to theft. After several run-ins with the law, Pavlina was arrested in 1991 for felony grand theft. Later, through a lucky legal oversight, he was convicted of petty theft and sentenced only to brief community service.

But while sitting in the county jail, Pavlina experienced an awakening. He cleaned up his life and developed a remarkable ability to focus and manage his time productively. Attending California State University at Northridge, he earned dual computer science and mathematics degrees in three semesters, graduating with a 3.9 GPA.

After graduating, Pavlina started his own game company, Dexterity Software. He spent six months programming a shareware puzzle game, *Dweep*, about a

cute little purple guy who rescues his children from mazes of deadly obstacles. Made for basically no cost, *Dweep* won several awards. Over the next few years, Pavlina constantly revised and expanded the game, turning it into a major casual hit. The final version, *Dweep Gold*, has 152 levels.

In September 2002, Pavlina started a forum on his site as a gathering place for independent game developers worldwide. He began posting articles about making successful shareware. In "Shareware Amateurs Versus Shareware Professionals" and a dozen companion articles, Pavlina discussed professionalism as a goal, a state of mind and a set of best practices:

- Plan for the long term.
- Do basic market research.
- Stick with one product and refine it incrementally.
- Give unique value.
- Constantly reassess and experiment with your marketing.
- Measure the results of everything you try.

His tone was pragmatic yet upbeat, his approach methodical and success-oriented – precisely the right way to reach would-be designers and programmers. Jaded by frustrating no-win deals with rapacious publishers, many professionals hearkened with glad heart to a prospect of game development where **every single element** of success was potentially under their control.

Dexterity's success made Pavlina financially independent. His articles and posts, both on the Dexterity forum and on Gamedev.net, began to reflect larger developmental topics. He started talking not just about games, but about avoiding procrastination, developing focus and enlarging scope – about using game development and entrepreneurship as a path to personal growth.

In summer 2004, Pavlina retired from game design and started a blog about personal development. When he closed the Dexterity Games forums, indie designers Steve Verrault, Mike Boeh and Dan MacDonald started the IndieGamer forum. IndieGamer hosted the Dexterity articles for several years; the site still archives old Dexterity forum threads, though they are only accessible through external search engines.

Pavlina still ran his game business in desultory fashion until October 2006, when he finally shuttered the Dexterity site. (*Dweep* is still available at shareware download sites.) Having completely left the field at last, he has not looked back.

***

StevePavlina.com is subtitled "Personal Development for Smart People." His approach matches Tony Robbins, Jay Abraham and a long line of ultra-motivated business coaches reaching back to Dale Carnegie and Napoleon Hill.

Pavlina's advice is mostly sensible and unobjectionable. His message of conscious living echoes every self-help guru since Gautama Buddha. He has written many articles about success and purpose:

- "The Courage to Live Consciously"
- "30 Days to Success"

- "10 Reasons You Should Never Get a Job"
- "10 Stupid Mistakes Made by the Newly Self-Employed"
- "How to Discover Your Life Purpose in About 20 Minutes"
- And (almost forgot!) "The Meaning of Life"

But the main traffic drivers to Pavlina's blogs are his more mundane self-help articles, such as "How to Become an Early Riser" and "How to Give Up Coffee." (Hey, a purpose-driven life has to start somewhere.) A committed vegan, he has written of his attempts at an all-raw diet, a regimen so austere that, hearing of its rigors, even the most condescending vegetarian may feel, briefly, less smug. Pavlina also drew much attention for his experiment with polyphasic sleep, a regimen of reduced sleep-time based on frequent naps. He sustained his polyphasic schedule (four hours awake, then a 15-minute nap) for over five months. In "The Return to Monophasic," he says he could have maintained it indefinitely, but it was too inconvenient to coordinate with the monophasic world.

"Bear Bombing" advocates jostling ursine peers out of their hibernation by, well, being a jerk.

Notwithstanding these superhuman feats, it's clear Pavlina is no saint. His least likable articles divide people into "bears" and "eagles." Bears are ordinary people who sleepwalk through life; eagles, no surprise, are those who think like Pavlina. "Bear Bombing" advocates jostling ursine peers out of their hibernation by, well, being a jerk.

Today, Pavlina practices what he calls "a religion of personal growth": "My religion is based on working actively on my personal growth and helping others to do the same." Though he never describes them as such, his beliefs represent a form of Hermetic magick, the practice of self-transformation, empowerment and imposition of the will to reshape external reality. If you don't believe it, check his podcast "The True Nature of Reality" and the article "Cause-Effect Versus Intention-Manifestation." The blog's most overtly magickal exercise to date is the Million-Dollar Experiment, "an attempt to use the power of intention to manifest $1 million for each person who chooses to participate."

Pavlina is well on his way to his own million. Though he charges nothing for his writing or podcasts, the ad-supported blog is quite profitable. In October 2006, he claimed the site earned $1,000 daily. Characteristically, the author has turned his experience into an article, "How to Make Money From Your Blog."

***

The last section of Pavlina's essay "The Courage to Live Consciously" is titled "Embrace the Daring Adventure." Even now, as a fan of his writings, I read this cornball phrase with a reflexive snort of contempt.

Which is odd, because I'm doing that.

Pavlina is the only game developer (that I know of) who migrated to self-help. But leaving aside the game angle, his story, and his message, follow the conventional American myth of early mistakes, redemption, hard work, persistence and ultimate success. Every personal-growth guru tells that exact story. Yet each guru appeals to a different base, a particular audience receptive to his or her unique approach.

Pavlina connects with game designers not only through his analytical method, but through his understanding of their issues. Some of them feel trapped and powerless in dead-end jobs. Others, for various reasons, disdain marketing or the overhead involved in running a company. Some of them have wasted six years in a dull and sterile suburb, stuck in a torpid life of web surfing and dog-walking, feeling old and stiff and mean. One of them, anyway.

This rarefied demographic, and increasingly the broader internet audience, responds to Pavlina's restatement of timeless lessons. See, for instance, his conclusion to "The Courage to Live Consciously":

> "Don't die without embracing the daring adventure your life is meant to be. You may go broke. You may experience failure and rejection repeatedly. You may endure multiple dysfunctional relationships. But these are all milestones along the path of a life lived courageously. They are your private victories, carving a deeper space within you to be filled with an abundance of joy, happiness and fulfillment."

The people I tell about Malaysia wish me well, but I see the questions in their eyes. It does sound weird. Yet Malaysia has skilled coders who work cheap, and I can base the business in nearby Singapore, where the business climate is good. The government of Singapore offers loans and perks for new game companies. (I'd live in Singapore myself, but it's too expensive.) If I planned to smuggle drugs or chew gum, I wouldn't go. But if I'm choosing a censorious money-mad paternalistic police state, I could do worse.

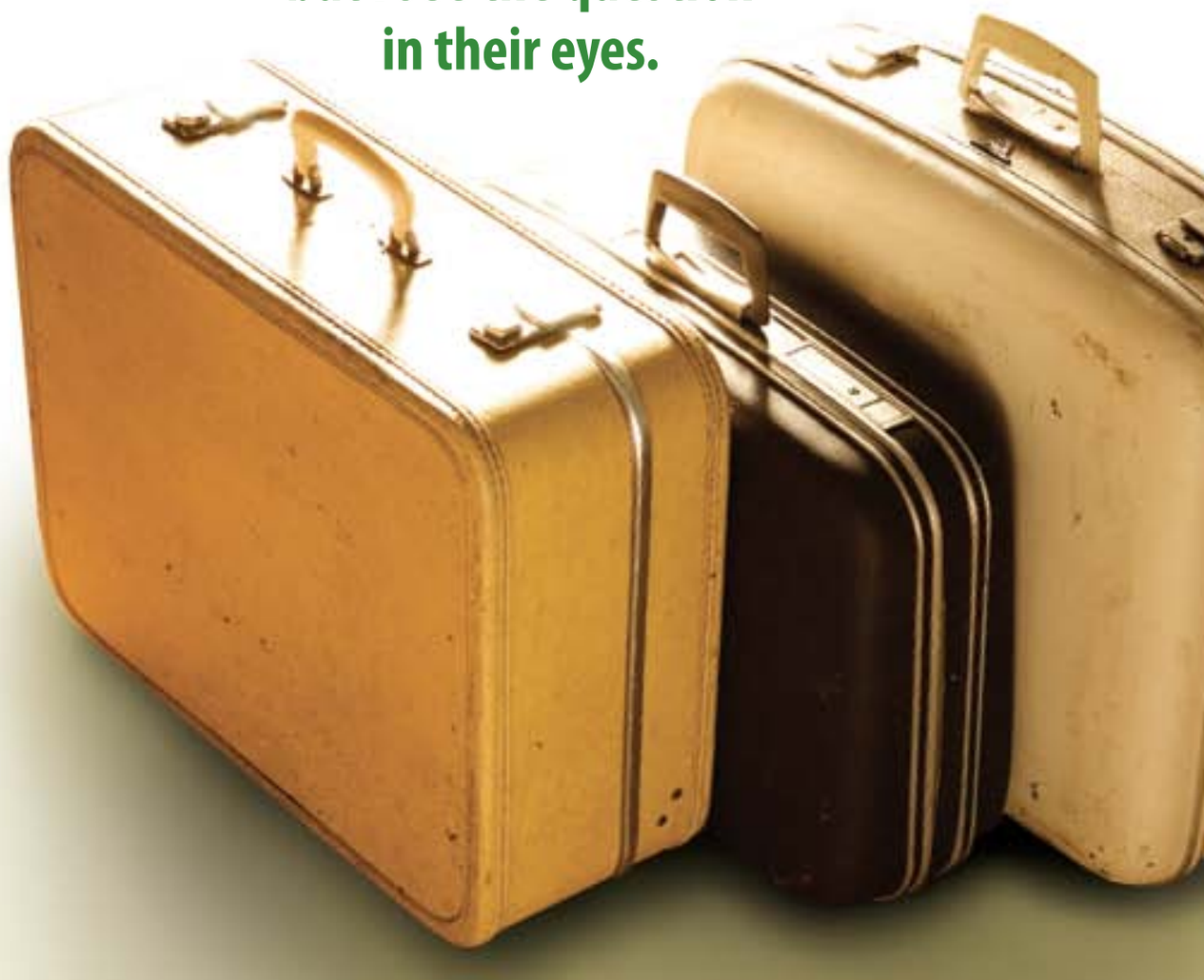
One friend, acting with good will, thought it prudent to caution me about what could go wrong. I could lose all my money (he pointed out helpfully), or get sick, or have language difficulties, or have software trouble, or fall desperately behind schedule, or discover my project won't work. That I still snort at "Embrace the Daring Adventure" shows my commitment is weak. The whole thing could blow up in my face.

All of that may be true. But you know what? I'm moving to Southeast Asia, and he's not going anywhere.

Are you? COMMENTS

Allen Varney designed the PARANOIA paper-and-dice roleplaying game (2004 edition) and has contributed to computer games from Sony Online, Origin, Interplay and Looking Glass.

The people I tell about Malaysia wish me well, but I see the question in their eyes.



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