

Sessions of Interest

We read the program.
Did you? Probably not.
Read this instead.

by Steve Gaynor and Chris Remo

Evolving Game Design: Today and Tomorrow, Eastern and Western Game Design

Goichi Suda a.k.a. SUDA51
Fumito Ueda
Emil Pagliarulo
Mark MacDonald

Wednesday, 10:30am - 11:30am
Room 132, North Hall

Overview: What are the most important recent trends in modern game design? Where are games headed in the next few years? Drawing on their own experiences as leading names in game design, the panel will discuss their answers to these questions, and how they see them affecting the industry both in Japan and the West.

"Creating a session that combines iconoclastic Japanese designers Fumito Ueda (Ico, Shadow of the Colossus) and Goichi Suda (Killer7, No More Heroes) and accomplished Bethesda writer-designer Emil Pagliarulo (The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, Fallout 3) seems inspired. Considering the broad spectrum of styles, settings, and gameplay exhibited across the trio's games, there should be no shortage of contrasting opinions and design approaches." -C.R.

Fault Tolerance: From Intentionality to Improvisation

Clint Hocking

Wednesday 10:30am - 11:30am
Room 2002, West Hall

Overview: As a follow-up to the second-highest rated talk of GDC 2006, this presentation looks at the specific challenges of designing game mechanics that both allow and encourage players to play expressively, while opening the door for them to accept small incremental failures and set-backs as an engaging element that adds depth and variety to dynamic play.

"Simply put, Clint Hocking's talks are routinely the most thought-provoking and engaging at GDC. A 'sequel' to his excellent GDC 06 session is hard to resist." -S.G.

Spore: Fulfilling the Massively Single-Player Promise - How'd We Do?

Caryl Shaw

Wednesday 10:30am - 11:30am
Room 135, North Hall

Overview: This presentation will cover the specifics of working with the community-created content in *Spore* during the first six months after ship. Topics include information on how the online systems in *Spore* both met expectations and were stretched in ways that weren't anticipated, how the team adjusted their systems, and the goals created in order to meet the needs of customers while trying to foster a sense of community and an atmosphere of creativity.

"The volume and range of user-generated content seeded throughout Spore's servers ended up surprising even its developers, forcing them to go back and modify the systems themselves. How does one even define degrees of success within such an unusual game design? Hopefully, producer Shaw will answer the session's title question in an intriguing way." -C.R.

Lighting with Purpose

Jay Riddle
Paul Aylliffe

Wednesday 10:30am - 11:30 am
Room 2022, West Hall

Overview: This session offers attendees a guide to better understanding both the aesthetics of lighting and its practical application in game development. By sharing recent examples, the speakers will demystify the process and bring insight to the how and why of its use. Don't just throw lights in your worlds willy-nilly. Light with purpose!

"Lighting is just as much of a design element as it is an art element. Hopefully,

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Yuan-Hao Chiang

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFER

Moscone Center to host industry notables, others

As in many past years, a group of video game developers is scheduled to gather at San Francisco's Moscone Center to discuss their craft and related subjects. Programmers, artists, designers, and others are likely to derive great pleasure from the presentations, panels, and product exhibitions conducted at the Game Developers Conference 2009 event from March 22 to 27.

And alongside GDC, the Idle Thumbs *Journal of Games* is here to

give you unparalleled context and insight into the proceedings. Within these lavish pages, the discerning reader can expect to find only the most incisive commentary, indispensable recommendations, and unerringly up-to-the-moment news items of concern to those entrenched in the making of video game entertainment products.

An attendee of the Game Developers Conference 2009 might reasonably ask himself, "What design-focused pre-

sentations might be most worthy of my time?" Look no further, sir, than to our handy "Recommended Sessions" feature located slightly to the left of where you're currently looking. He might also ask himself, "Is 'video games' one word, or two?" "How many Jäger shots should I take each time a presenter says 'procedural?'" "What is immersion and how do you make it?" "Are players creators, and if so how many types are there?" "Does Hideo Kojima need an editor?"

All these topics and more are covered by our expert columnists and reporters here within the gilded pages of the *Journal*.

So please – kick back between sessions with your free turkey wrap and immerse yourself in the rich pages of this fine publication. Then sally forth, aglow with the inner serenity that only the unique perspective of the *Journal* can provide, the envy of your peers and inferiors.

★ Industry Desk

Optimistic GDC veteran returns to conference

by Journal Staff

Game development professional Brian Landman is attending his fourth straight Game Developers Conference, the Seattle-area designer told the *Journal* today.

"I get really psyched up for this conference every year," Landman said. "Even just being around all these guys always completely opens my eyes to new avenues of game design and implementation."

"Plus, where else can you see so

many visionaries of the video game medium gathered in one place?" he asked.

"It's true; he always comes back to the office full of ideas," a development colleague confirmed to the *Journal*, before adding that most GDC-gleaned knowledge has traditionally made its way out of Landman-designed games prior to their ship date, due to a combination of rousing but vague topics, marketing department-related budgetary decisions, and a deficit of legible session notes.

★ Press Desk

Industry session deemed unnewsworthy, inspiring

by Journal Staff

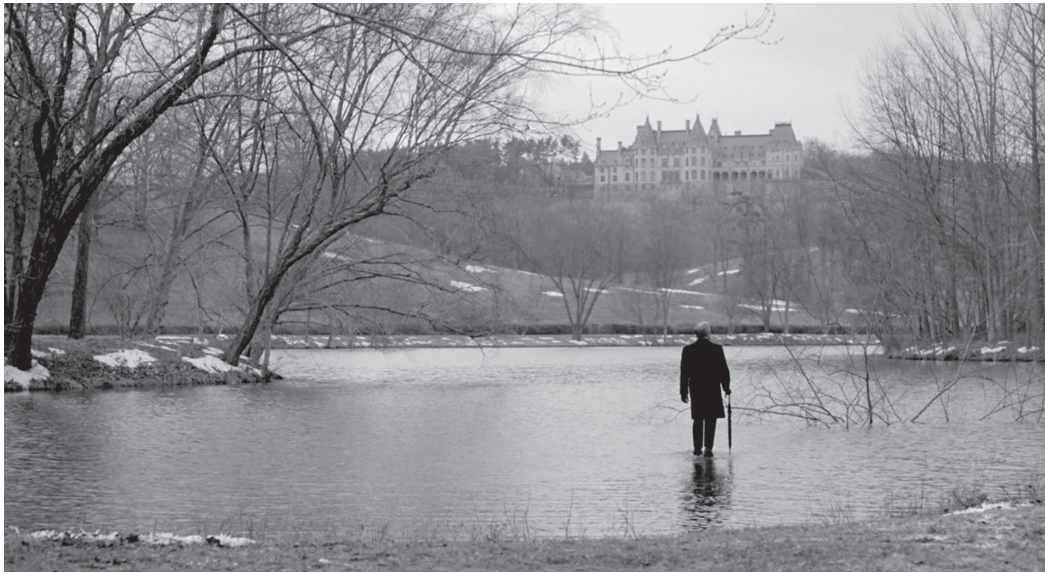
A visibly-overwhelmed writer for a major video game blog was overheard complaining about the morning's keynote, delivered by a major industry luminary, due to its lack of valuable link-generating news bytes.

"It's pretty cool that he successfully tackled the topic of creating games with heretofore unseen emotional weight and resonance," the journalist said of the talk, which reportedly left designer Warren Spector in catatonic shock, and

coaxed tears from the sorrowful eyes of ng:moco co-founder Neil Young. "It's too bad he didn't dump on one of the consoles, though."

The *Journal* was unable to interview those present, as those in attendance were left so moved that they did not respond to outside stimuli.

"I really wish they had brought a new build or gameplay trailer," the blogger griped. He then disappeared into the press room in an awestruck trance, commenting, "Boy, I'll never think about games the same way again."



United Artists / Warner Bros.

Being There

Thoughts on immersion in games, part 1

by H. Scoops

I've been thinking a bit about the strengths of video games as a medium, as well as why I'm drawn to making them. One colors my perception of the other I suppose. But in my estimation every medium has its primary strength.

Literature excels at exploring the

internal (psychological, subjective) aspects of a character's personal experiences and memories.

Film excels at conveying narrative via a precisely authored sequence of meaningful moments in time.

And video games excel at fostering the experience of being in a particular place via direct inhabitation of an autonomous agent.

Video games are able to render a place and put the player into it. The meaning of the experience arises from what's contained within the bounds of the gameworld, and the range of possible interactions the player may perform there – the nouns and the verbs. Just like in real life, where we are and what we can do dictates our present, and our

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Former developers sue 3D Realms

Computer game entrepreneurs claim Duke Nukem copyright infringement

by Chris Remo

Two founders of long-defunct British computer game developer Crumpetsoft Disk Systems have sued 3D Realms, claiming the latter's hit game series *Duke Nukem* infringes copyright of Crumpetsoft's vintage game character, The Duke of Newcolmb.

The character's first adventure, *The Duke of Newcolmb Finds Himself in a Bit of a Spot*, was the Walton-on-the-Naze-based studio's thirty-seventh game title. Released in 1986 for the Amstrad CPC 6128, it features its titular protagonist in a sidescrolling adventure of derring-do, pitting him against a wide array of ruffians, bounders, and cads for the glory of the crown. The game was succeeded by the release of 1988's somewhat less fondly-remembered *The Duke of Newcolmb Versus the Radio-active Time Mutants*.

Now, computer game entrepreneurs Arthur Pembrook and Bernard Harrington say Duke Nukem, who first appeared in the original *Duke Nukem* DOS game a full five years after Newcolmb's debut, is a clear and unlawful derivation of their own dapper duke. In a joint statement released yesterday, Pembrook and Harrington called Nukem's virtual career, which has now spanned nearly a dozen published games, a "reprensible incursion upon our creative endeavors – indeed, upon the very honour and memory of Crumpetsoft's fine compugraphical lineage."

The co-founders took issue with a number of alleged similarities between the two dukes, at one point citing Nukem's catchphrase, "It's time to kick ass and chew bubblegum, and I'm all out of gum," and claiming it bears a striking – and potentially copyright-infringing – resemblance to Newcolmb's own signature quip, "It's time to shoot grouse and take a snifter of port, and I'm all out of port."

Speaking to the *Journal* immediately following the announcement of legal action, Harrington said the duo failed to act within the first 18 years of Duke Nukem's existence because, due to their then-recent departure from the games industry, they simply

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The Four Types of Player/Creators

by Bronstring "Marek" Bronstring

User generated content is playing an increasing role in gaming. Gamers are not just able to customize aspects of the experience, but many games now feature rich and deeply integrated authoring tools. As more games become at least partially reliant on player creativity, it's useful to think about the different kinds of players who create and share content.

It's agreed upon amongst game designers, as well as Web 2.0 developers, that not all users want to be creators. The so-called 90-9-1 rule says that generally 90% of the userbase consumes, 9% creates from time to time (or engages in low-level participation, such as tagging or commenting) and only 1% are heavy contributors. The numbers may be different for games that make it exceptionally easy to be creative, but in any case, it's widely understood that not everyone will want to create, and most games are designed around that understanding.

That's generally where the thinking stops, though. We make distinctions

between "creators" and "consumers" and take those two groups into account, but what happens when we zoom in on the creators? Are they all the same? Actually, not everyone wants to create in quite the same way. Inspired by the Barle types of MMO players, I wondered if it was possible to determine different types of player-creators.

Searching for a creator typology

What set off my train of thought was recalling my experiences with Lego, the granddaddy of user generated content (well, kind of). I absolutely loved playing with Lego as a kid. I played with Lego bricks in a specific way, and was often surprised by the completely different styles of playing that other kids had.

I always thought about what I wanted to build with Lego. Was it going to be a spaceship? Or the Eiffel tower? Or a medieval castle (like the one I built in the picture)? I conceptualized what I was going to make and then set about to do it.

When I constructed, say, a wall of a

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Interactive Journalism

by Duncan Effe and Bronstring "Marek" Bronstring

If you are in the game industry and privy to scintillating inside information, you'll occasionally find fault with news stories as they appear in the gaming press. Usually, they're a paraphrase of the press release, containing only the readily available details. That's where the reportage ends. The story then disappears from the front page, replaced with the Top 5 Hottest Babes In Game Development and you're left saying to nobody listening, "Wait, aren't you interested in... don't you want to ask about...?" Writing a more robust feature doesn't require access to classified documents, it typically just entails a Google search and maybe a phone call. You can't fill in the blanks for everyone due to NDAs or etiquette or that it's not your job to do their job. You can't be Deep Throat in the underground garage dishing dirt to Bob Woodward. Sometimes, though, you do feel like Deep Throat and Woodward's not giving you his full attention because at that moment he's booked for three other garage appointments where he's going to be told all about new Xbox 360 faceplates, a Mean Girls-branded Puzzle Quest clone, and "what's next" for mobile gaming. You urge Woodward to follow the money; Woodward instead writes a post briefly announcing the existence of the money.

It isn't as if game journalists are closer than they'll ever know to uncovering an international criminal conspiracy. Research simply makes for a more complete story. The September NCsoft reorganizations/layoffs were portrayed largely and generically as the company renewing its commitment to competi-

tive and triple-A MMOs. To look at the information more critically would reveal that 70 NCsoft Europe staffers were made redundant; that the company was ceasing European development; and that the political power within NCsoft US was moving from Austin and the Garriott brothers to Seattle and the ArenaNet founders – a conclusion pretty well borne out by the recent resignation of returning astronaut Richard Garriott. It still wouldn't be Pulitzer-winning material by any means but certainly a far more interesting and worthwhile comment on the state of MMOs than a rote preview of the latest sci-fi/fantasy endeavour, wherein the author disingenuously hypothesises that maybe this will be the game to take down World of Warcraft, concluding "we'll see." With the NCsoft story, the writer even has an easy poetic lede all ready to go: "As Richard Garriott left the earth's orbit, the world too was in the process of leaving him behind."

Game journalists are never expected to be crack investigators, but in fact they sometimes do demonstrate intrepid lust for detail. Unfortunately, they only unmuzzle that nose for news when analysing marketing stunts like the Halo 3: Recon teaser trailer. The press watch Lost too and can't resist the cryptographic intrigue of decoder rings and freeze-framing grainy video. With the Bungie trailer, and the Diablo III teaser before it, the press are determined to uncover the truth. They give their own theories, their reader theories (no idea is too extreme to consider when there's so much on the line), put the story up on the front page, and will stay on the case for as long as it takes. They dig into the HTML, check what trademarks the company registered recently, what retailers are listing,

what was on an old Powerpoint slide from a previous shareholders' meeting or GDC presentation. Everyone's on red alert for the hottest story of the news cycle and they work tirelessly to solve this manufactured puzzle which was created to provoke this exact reaction. Here's some sample coverage from the last time this happened: IUP, Eurogamer, Kotaku, Joystiq, NeoGAF. NeoGAF isn't a press outlet but at this level there's functionally no difference.

The question becomes, for those who care about such things, how to translate that journalistic zeal to the cause of something greater than theorising over an incoming product announcement. How does one get the press to pay attention to the "real" story? The solution, obviously, is to remake the entirety of game journalism as an elaborate ARG to play.

In many ways, an alternate reality game is a lot like journalism. Within the basic information of a press release, there may be one or more strategically-placed phone numbers for the reader to call and glean more details about this crazy story. If they read further into the press release and Google some of the names they see mentioned, they'll see all sorts of other websites that presumably the company put up themselves to expand this complex fiction.

Those similarities alone evidently aren't doing the trick. Game journalism could do with some Web 2.0 flourishes.

Arbitrarily-selected passages on company websites or press releases should appear in code; something confusing at first but easily decipherable. To make sure it can be understood by Continued on page 6

★ Activity Zone

Head to Head



"In five years, a game will make you cry."
- Neil Young, GDC 2004



"The real indicator will be when somebody confesses that they cried at level 17."
- Steven Spielberg, September 2004



"The iPhone just changed everything."
- Neil Young, GDC 2009



"War has changed."
- David Hayter, Metal Gear Solid 4



"War never changes."
- Ron Perlman, Fallout 3

Gaming retail chain reveals original roleplaying game

by David Eggers

GRAPEVINE, TX - Electronic entertainment retail giant GameStop (NYSE: GME) announced today that it will be publishing its own roleplaying game early next year. Set in the modern day, players will assume the role of a typical GameStop customer and choose from three career tracks: assistant manager for a movie theatre, graphic designer, or your ex-roommate who now works as a night clerk at a local convenience store.

Players will then use their characters' wages to buy as many new games as they can afford from the in-game GameStop. Within the world of *Return to GameStop*, each of these purchased games will be playable as a mini-game, with the goal being to complete its achievements within a set amount of game time (measured in dollars), to boost the character's overall score. Once completed, however, players

The Official Idle Thumbs GDC Session Drinking Game

The Game Developers Conference is a conductor of crackling development creativity, an island of optimism for even the most hardened industry cynics. Why not facilitate communication with your fellow professionals during sessions, with the aid of some social lubricant? Our Official Idle Thumbs GDC Session Drinking Game will make sure you're open to all kinds of new (design) experiences – just down the specified number of shots or drinks when you see or hear these classic GDC touchstones!

"Immersion" or "Atmosphere" – take one shot

"Social networking" – take one shot

"Procedural" or "Systemic" – take one shot

"Emergence" – take one shot, move back four spaces to GDC 2005

"Visceral" – take one shot

"Goes viral" – take one shot

"Scrum" – take one shot

"Free to play" – take one shot

"Freemium" – take two shots

"Ludonarrative dissonance" – take two shots

Comparison of games and Hollywood – take two shots

Something is taken to the next level – take two shots

Comic use of Google Image Search on slide – take two shots

Zimmerman – take three shots

A game makes you cry – get completely smashed

Sued Nukem

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were not aware of the character. Crumpetsoft closed its doors in 1990 when the declining user base for Amstrad's CPC line of personal microcomputers led parent company Hallsworth Crum-pets Co., Ltd. to divest itself out of the software development business.

"We were taken completely by surprise," Harrington told the *Journal*. "We absolutely consider this an affront to the integrity of our valuable holdings."

Furthermore, the *Journal* can exclusively reveal that the pair is considering a return to game development, in order to execute on an idea that so far has existed only in napkin sketches and early design documents.

Said Pembroke, "We've been tossing around an unproduced Newcolombe concept, *The Duke of Nukem Persists Throughout the Ages*, for – well, I do believe it must be more than a decade by now," at which point Harrington nodded, adding, "Quite so. Quite so."

Additional reporting for this story by Lawrence Bishop and James Spafford.

Being There

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possible futures. Video games provide an alternative to both the where and the what of existence, resulting in simulated alternate life experiences.

It's a powerful thing, to be able to visit another place, to drive the drama onscreen yourself – not to receive a personal account of someone else's experiences, or observe events as a detached spectator. A modern video game level is a navigable construction of three-dimensional geometry, populated with art and interactivity to convincingly lend it an identity as a believable, inhabitable, living place. At their best, video games transmit to the player the experience of actually being there.

Video games are not a traditional storytelling medium per se. The player is an agent of chaos, making the medium ill-equipped to convey a pre-authored narrative with anywhere near the effectiveness of books or film. Rather, a video game is a box of possibilities, and the best stories told are those that arise from the player expressing his own agency within a functional, believable gameworld. These are player stories, not author stories, and hence they belong to the player himself. Unlike a great film or piece of literature, they don't give the audience an admiration for the genius in someone else's work; they instead supply the potential for genuine personal experience, acts attempted and accomplished by the player as an individual, unique memories that are the player's to own and to pass on. This property is demonstrated when comparing play notes, book club style, with friends – "what did you do?" versus "here's what I did." While discussing a film or piece of literature runs towards individual interpretation of an identical media artifact, the core experience of playing a video game is itself unique to each player – an act of realtime media interpretation – and the most powerful stories told are the ones the player is responsible for. To

the player, video games are the most personally meaningful entertainment medium of them all. It is not about the other – the author, the director. It is about you.

So, the game designer's role is to provide the player with an intriguing place to be, and then give them tools to perform interactions they'd logically be able to as a person in that place – to fully express their agency within the gameworld that's been provided. In pursuit of these values, the game designer's highest ideal should be verisimilitude of potential experience. The "potential" here is key. Game design is a hands-off kind of shared authorship, and one that requires a lack of ego and a trust in your audience. It's an incredible opportunity we're given: to provide people with new places in which to have new experiences, to give our audience the kind of agency and autonomy they might not have in their daily lives; to create worlds and invite people to play in them.

Kojima has said that game development is a kind of "service industry," and I think I know what he means. It's the same service provided by Philip K. Dick's Rekal, Incorporated: to be transported to places you'd never otherwise visit, to be able to do things you'd never otherwise do. As Ebert says, "video games by their nature require player choices, which is the opposite of the strategy of serious film and literature, which requires authorial control." I'll not be the first to point out that this is an astute observation, and one that highlights their greatest strength: video games at their best abdicate authorial control to the player, and with it shift the locus of the experience from the raw potential onscreen to the hands and mind of the individual. At the end of the day, the play of the game belongs to you. The greatest aspiration of a game designer is merely to set the stage.

On Invisibility

Thoughts on immersion in games, part 2

by H. Scoops

When one is moved by an artist's work, it's sometimes said that the piece 'speaks' to you. Unlike art, games let you speak back to them, and in return, they reply. If the act of playing a video game is akin to carrying on a conversation, then it is the designer of the game with whom the player is conversing, via the game's systems.

In a strange way then, the designer of a video game is himself present as an entity within the work: as the "computer" – the sum of the mechanics with which the player interacts. The designer is in the value of the shop items you barter for, the speed and cunning your rival racers exhibit, the accuracy of your opponent's guns and the resiliency with which they shrug off your shots, the order of operations with which you must complete a puzzle. The designer determines whether you win or lose, as well as how you play the game. In a sense, the designer resides within the inner workings of all the game's moving parts.

It's a wildly abstract and strangely mediated presence in the work: unlike a writer who puts his own views into words for the audience to read or hear, or the painter who visualizes an image, creates it and presents it to the world, a game designer's role is to express meaning and experiential tenor via potential: what the player may or may not do, as opposed to exactly what he will see, in what order, under which conditions. This potential creates opportunity – the opportunity for the player to wield a palette of expressive inputs, in turn drawing out responses from the system, which finally results in an end-user experience that, while composed of a finite set of components, is nonetheless



a unique snowflake, distinct from any other player's.

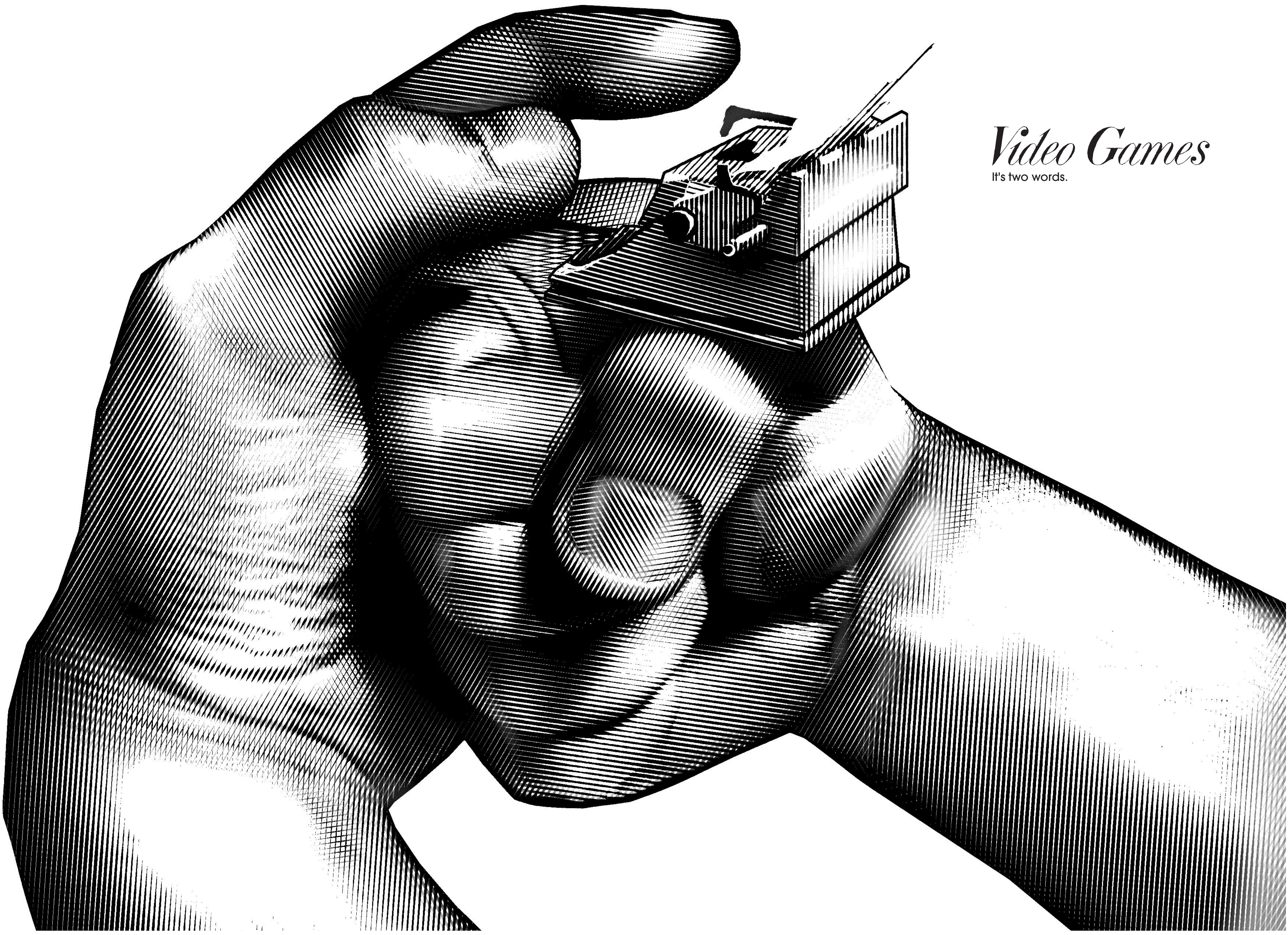
One overlapping consideration of games and the arts is the degree to which the artist or designer reveals evidence of his hand in the final work. In fine art, the role of the artist's hand has long been manipulated and debated: ancient Greek sculptors and Renaissance painters burnished their statuary and delicately glazed their oils to disguise any evidence of the creator's involvement, attempting to create idealized but naturalistic images – windows to another moment in reality, realistic representations of things otherwise unseeable in an age before photography. Impressionist artists, followed by the Abstract Expressionists, embraced the artist's presence

in the form of raw daubs and splashes of paint, drifting away from or outright opposing representational art in the age of photographic reproduction. Minimalists and Pop artists sought in response to remove the artist's hand from the equation through industrial fabrication techniques and impersonal commercial printing methods, returning the focus to the image itself, as a way of questioning the validity of personal and emotional artistic themes in the modern age.

The designer's presence in a video game might be similarly modulated, to a variety of ends. If a designer lives in the rules of the gameworld, then it is the player's conscious knowledge of the game's ruleset that exposes evidence of his hand.

Take for instance a game like Tetris. Tetris is almost nothing but its rules: its presentation is the starkest visualization of its current system state; it features no fictional wrapper or personified elements; any meaning it exudes or emotions it fosters are expressed entirely through the player's dialogue with its intensely spare ruleset. The game might speak to any number of themes – anxiety, Sisyphean futility, the randomness of an uncaring universe – and it does so only through an abstract, concrete and wholly transparent set of rules. The player is fully conscious of the game's rules and is in dialogue only with them – and thereby with the designer, Alexey Pajitnov – at all times when playing Tetris. While the game's presentation is artistically minimalist, the design itself is integrally formalist. But whereas formalism in the fine arts is meant to exclude the artist's persona from interpretation of the work, a formalist video game consists only of its exposed ruleset, and thereby functions purely as a dialogue with the designer of those rules. Embracing this abstract formalist approach requires the designer to let go of naturalistic simulation, but allows the most direct connection between designer and player: a pure conduit for ideas to be expressed through rules and states.

Alternately, the designer's hand is least evident when players are wholly unconscious of the gameworld's underlying ruleset. I don't mean here abstract formalist designs wherein the mechanics are intentionally obscured – in that case, "the player cannot easily obtain knowledge of the rules" is simply another rule. Rather, I refer to "immersive simulations" – games that attempt to utilize the rules of our own world as fully as possible, presenting clearly discernible affordances Continued on page 6



Video Games

It's two words.

Sessions of Interest

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this session will present principles of direction and readability to lighting artists – and such pointers could be equally applicable to designers as well.” -S.G.

The Unique Lighting in *Mirror's Edge*: Experiences with Illuminate Labs Lighting Tools

David Larsson
Henrik Halen

Wednesday, 10:30am - 11:30am
Room 2012, West Hall

Overview: We will present the technology and ideas behind the unique lighting in MIRROR'S EDGE from EA DICE. We will cover how DICE adopted Global illumination into their lighting process and Illuminate Labs current toolbox of state of the art lighting technology.

"Mirror's Edge's bounce lighting off bright orange paint onto white concrete walls was just beautiful, and integral to the visual style and cohesiveness of the game. The explanation of

how DICE achieved it is sure to be instructive." -S.G.

The Game Design Challenge: My First Time

Eric Zimmerman
Steve Meretzky
Kim Swift

Wednesday 2:30pm - 3:30pm
Room 135, North Hall

Overview: Welcome back for another year and another Game Design Challenge, where three amazing game design greats create original concepts around a very unusual game design problem. Join us as returning champ Steve Meretzky squares off against two new challengers.

"The Game Design Challenge usually skews more towards wackiness and pure entertainment than meaningful design insight – but it's also a rare chance to see designers attempt to stretch their abilities to fit a set of criteria that would likely never arise professionally. Plus,

you can't discount the 'I was there' potential of a session that saw Tetris creator Alexey Pajitnov solemnly declare, 'Once, I made pants for myself.'" -C.R.

Stop Wasting My Time and Your Money: Why Your Game Doesn't Need a Story to be a Hit

Margaret Robertson

Wednesday 4:00pm - 5:00pm
Room 2022, West Hall

Overview: Stories help sell games, but they help break them, too – adding expense, frustration and inflexibility to the design process. Drawing on first-hand experience of troubleshooting a wide variety of story-based games, this session will demonstrate how you can deliver high levels of emotional engagement and strongly marketable themes without bogging your game down in cut-scene hell.

"It's interesting that, despite how forgettable most video game stories are, it seems simply

a given in the modern games industry that all releases still need one. Returning after a hit session last year, former Edge Magazine editor Margaret Robertson will be claiming that, actually, they don't. Substance without unnecessary plot should be a more common goal!" -C.R.

Valve's Approach to Playtesting: the Application of Empiricism

Mike Ambinder

Thursday 9:00am - 10:00am
Room 2002, West Hall

Overview: This talk will focus on how Valve is broadening its playtest program to apply methodologies from behavioral research which should serve to both increase the stock of useful information and to decrease the collection of biased observations.

"When it comes to gathering hard metrics, one couldn't ask for insight on the matter from anyone better than Valve, the masters of data-based design." -S.G.

GDC Microtalks - One Hour, Ten Speakers, Unlimited Ideas

Richard Lemarchand
Robin Hunicke
Eric Zimmerman
N'Gai Croal
Frank Lantz
Jenova Chen
Tracy Fullerton
John Sharp
Clint Hocking
Jane McGonigal

Thursday 9:00am - 10:00am
Room 2007, West Hall

Overview: Imagine this: Ten visually intense game design micro-presentations in a row, given by ten great speakers in the course of one fascinating hour! Come along to have fun, be challenged and get creatively inspired, or use the session to preview speakers who are talking elsewhere at the conference to see if you like their style!

"A rapid-fire session like this one might end up being hit-and-miss, but with such a diverse and interesting group of presenters, scoring a number of hits seems like a safe bet." -C.R.

All About *Noby Noby Boy*

Keita Takahashi

Thursday, 1:30pm — 2:30pm
Room 132, North Hall

Overview: Takahashi will talk extensively about his new game *Noby Noby Boy*.

"Defying all previously-held beliefs about the nature of reality, Keita Takahashi's latest game Noby Noby Boy eclipses his debut effort Katamari Damacy in sheer weirdness. Takahashi is known for his unique, stream-of-consciousness approach to design lectures, and this one will continue the trend. As the abstract promises, 'This class will be a refreshing change of pace.'" -C.R.

10 Things Great Designers Exhibit

Gordon Walton

Thursday 1:30pm - 2:30pm
Room 2020, West Hall

Overview: The speaker shares his condensed, 10-step version of his 25+ years of experience in hiring and working with game designers, focused towards emerging challenges in game development. Expect to learn what to look for in a successful designer, and be entertained and inspired simultaneously!

"Anyone with three decades of design experience in an industry that has only even existed for about four decades can't help but have plenty of knowledge to share – and Walton seems interested in getting down to brass tacks. Designers should take notes." -C.R.

Helping Your Players Feel Smart: Puzzles as User Interface

Randy Smith

Thursday 3:00pm - 4:00pm
Room 2014, West Hall

Overview: This presentation examines the predictable series of steps players take when approaching a puzzle or challenge and describes a set of principles adapted from user-centered design that can be employed to keep players on the path to discovering the solution for themselves. Examples are drawn from the presenter's experience on the *Thief* series and *Dark Messiah of Might & Magic*, and from Valve's *Portal*.

"It goes without saying that Randy Smith is a smart developer with valuable experience in the area of puzzle design – a chance to glean some of his knowledge should not be passed up!" -S.G.

Failure is NOT an Option - Basic Survival Techniques for any Pro-Durver/Designer

Rich Vogel

Thursday 3:00pm - 4:00pm
Room 2020, West Hall

Overview: This session gives you important insight on why games fail and by providing these insights we learn how to survive. The speaker will provide examples and give his personal experiences fire fighting in the trenches. Expect to see lots of examples.

"High theory is useless without the ability to get the game done right and out the door. Ship it, ship it good!" -S.G.

Master Metrics: The Science Behind the Art of Game Design

Continued on page 7

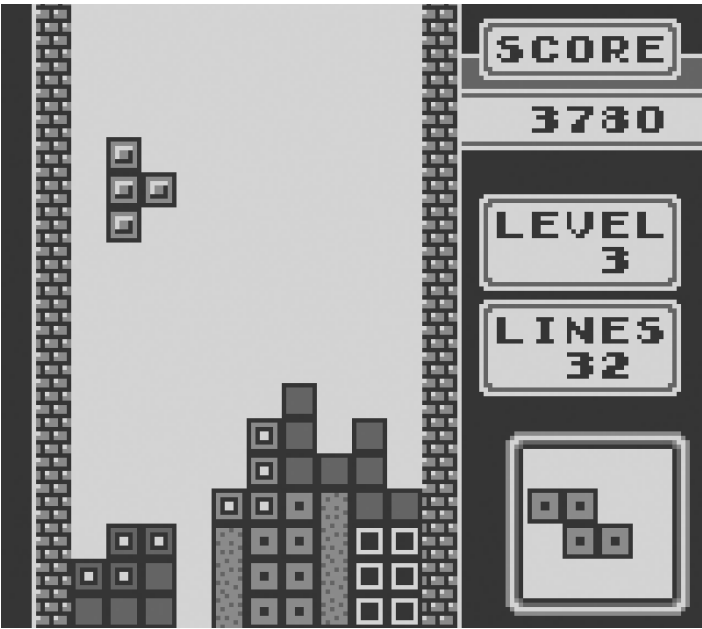
On Invisibility

from Page 3

and supplying the player with appropriate inputs to interact with the gameworld as he might the real world. The ultimate node on this design progression would be the experience of The Matrix or Star Trek's holodeck – a simulated world that for all intents and purposes functions identically to our own. This approach to game design bears most in common with Renaissance artists' attempts to precisely model reality through painting, to much the same ends: an illusionistically convincing work which might 'trick' the viewer into mistaking the frame (of the painting or the monitor) for a window into an alternate viewpoint on our own reality.

However, where Renaissance artists needed to model our world visually, designers of immersive simulations strive to model our world functionally. This utilization of an underlying ruleset that is unconsciously understood by the player allows the work of the designer to remain invisible, setting up the game as a more perfect stage for others' endeavors – the player's self-expression, and the writer's and visual artist's craft – as well as presenting a more perfectly transparent lens through which the game's alternate reality may be viewed. Every time the player is confronted with overt rules that they must acknowledge consciously, the lens is smudged, the stage eroded; at every point that the functionality of a simulated experience deviates from the Holodeck ideal, the designer's hand is exposed to the player, drawing attention away from the world as a believable place, and onto the limitations of an artificial set of concrete rules governing the experience.

Clearly, the ideal, virtual reality version of 'being there' is impossible with current technology. Tech will progress in time; the question is, how do current design conventions unintentionally



draw the designer's hand into the fore, sullyng the immersiveness of the end-user experience?

One common pitfall might be an over-reliance on a Hollywood-derived linear progression structure, which in turn confronts the player with a succession of mechanical conditions they must fulfill to proceed. If I, as a player, must defeat the boss, or pull the bathysphere lever, or slide down the flagpole to progress from level 1 to level 2, then I understand the world in a limited, artificial way. Space doesn't exist as a line, nor are our lives composed of a linear sequence of deterministic events; when our gameworlds are arranged this way, the player must be challenged to satisfy their arbitrary win conditions, which in turn requires that they understand the limited rules which constrain the experience. The designer's role is dictatorial, telling the player "here are the condi-

tions that I've decided you must satisfy." The player's inputs test against these pre-determined conditions until they are fulfilled, at which point the designer allows the player to progress. Within this structure, the designer's hand looks something like the following:

Creating games without a linear progression structure, and therefore without overt, challenge-based gating goals, allows the player to inhabit the space with a rhythm that better mirrors their own life's than a movie's pacing, as opposed to focusing on artificial pinchpoints that cinch the gameworld's possibility space into a straight line.

Another offending convention might be a question of where the game's control scheme lives. In character-driven games, the player's inputs most commonly reside in the controller itself, requiring the player to memorize which button does what. The simple fact that the player can

only perform actions which are mapped to controller buttons confronts them with the limitations of their role within the world; the player-character is not a 'real person' but a tiny bundle of verbs wandering around the world. Run, jump, punch, shoot, gas, brake, and occasionally a more nuanced context action when they stand in the right spot – this is the extent of the player's agency. More pointedly, having to memorize button mapping is a ruleset itself, and one that pulls players out of the experience. "How do I jump?" "What does the B button do?" These are concerns that distract from the experience of being there.

Alternatively, the game's control scheme might live largely within the simulation itself. If the player's possible interactions lived within the objects in the gameworld instead of within the control pad, the player's range of interactions would only be limited by the extent to which the designer supported them, as opposed to the number of buttons on the controller. Likewise, the more interactions that are drawn out of the gameworld itself, as opposed to being fired into it by the player, the more immersed the player is in the experience of being there, as opposed to the mastery of an ornate control scheme. This control philosophy does not support many games that rely on quick reflexes and life-or-death situations, but perhaps that isn't such a bad thing. One need only look at the success of The Sims and extrapolate its control philosophy outward: each object in the world is filled with unique interactions, resulting in seemingly endless possibilities spread out before the player.

A related convention that unduly exposes a game's underlying mechanics results from our need to communicate the player-character's physical state to the player. In many genre games, the

player must know his character's current level of health, stamina, and so forth. In real life, one is simply aware of their own physical state; however, since games must communicate relevant information almost entirely through the visuals, we end up with health bars, numerical hit-point readouts, and pulsing red screen overlays to communicate physical state. The player then is less concerned with their character being 'hurt' or 'in pain' as with their being 'damaged,' like a car or a toy. The rules become transparent: when I lose all my hitpoints I die; when I use a health kit I recover a certain percentage of my hitpoints; I am a box of numbers, as opposed to a real person in a real place.

Similar to the prior point, the hit-point problem presents a limitation native to game genres which rely on combat and life-or-death situations as their core conflicts, as opposed to implying an insurmountable limitation of the medium as a whole. If I am not in danger of being shot, stabbed, bitten or crushed, then I am free to relate to my player-character in human terms instead of numerical status, thus remaining unconscious of the designer's hand.

All this isn't to say that downplaying the designer's hand is an inherently superior design philosophy; clearly, many of us connect deeply with the conscious interaction between player and machine. But as our industry rides a wave of visual fidelity ever forward, our reliance on game genres tied to the assimilation of concrete rulesets only deepens the schism between player expectations and simulational veracity. It's been posited that games are poised to enter a golden age – a renaissance, one might say – and as designers, we might do well to step out of the spotlight, stop obscuring the lens into our simulated worlds, and embrace the virtues of invisibility.

Interactive Journalism

from Page 3



the gaming press, it should be written in one of the two official languages of the internet: binary and Elvish. Also, game developers should post a seemingly random series of numbers all over their website, stirring the internet into a speculative frenzy. At the climax, they announce that those numbers are their parent company's annual profits.

Discreetly, of course, so they think it was a result of their own cunning, journalists should be furnished with fictional account details with which they can "login" to a developer's website and access secret developer diaries. These entries recount the developers' personal lives up to the point where their domestic worlds are rocked by the announcement that Activision is buying them out. Also, studios might consider releasing a series of confessional YouTube videos from "lonelydeveloper15" wherein this hopefully attractive female developer extemporises on her boyfriend and general relationship issues,

building up the audience's sympathy before it is revealed to them that, really, she's even lonelier now that she and her whole department have been laid off.

It goes without saying that all televised press conferences and stockholders' meetings should be alarmingly interrupted by a video transmission of a panicked woman shouting "S.O.S.... this is Lieutenant [bzzzzzt] [krrrcchh] they're... everywhere... [kzzt] oh, God... [scchhhh]... they got Mendez... [brtt] coming from... all directions..."

The journalist, sitting at his computer, pores through pages of commendably plausible company backstory and trades e-mails with a possibly fictitious creative director, extending his reality by arranging an interview. I'm in deep, he thinks.

This article originally appeared in Duncan Fyfe's Hit Self Destruct - http://www.hitselfdestruct.com

The Immersion Model of Meaning

Thoughts on immersion in games, part 3

by H. Scoops

Being There was quoted in Jonathan Blow's revision of his talk "Conflicts in Game Design," which he recently presented as the keynote of this year's Montreal International Game Summit. I'm honored to have one of my essays, which stole most of its ideas from Doug Church, referenced by someone who drives so much discussion in the industry.

Though it was only touched on lightly in his keynote, Blow raised an interesting concern: does abdication of authorship have the potential to convey profundity or deep meaning?

The question begs a definition of "deep meaning." Can such meaning only be derived from a sender-receiver relationship, where the genius author cooks up deeply meaningful thought in his head and hands down his superior understanding to the waiting masses? This is the artistic mode which Ebert relies on to judge traditional media, disqualifying video games from consideration wholesale. And it is this very mode that Blow acknowledges as unsuited to our interactive medium, referring to it as the staid "message model of meaning." He notes that when games rely on linear, Hollywood-style stories, or when art games attempt to convey

moralistic platitudes through systemic play, they are perpetuating the message model, and wonders aloud what valid alternatives might be.

I would argue that abdication of authorship, when paired with certain existing game forms, points toward such an alternative: a mode that trades painstakingly-paced plot points or densely symbolic mechanics for a matrix of unstructured potential personal revelations; one that trades grand, orchestrated received meaning for the encompassing sensation of visiting someplace outside the player's prior experience, with the potential to return deeply changed. The immersion model of meaning, as it might be called, takes the act of travel as its primary touchstone, instead of relying on traditional media such as film, the novel, or even sculpture, music or painting to inform the author's role.

Consider a trip you've taken to a faraway city or country. You leave your home, arriving in an unfamiliar place, and are set loose in this new context. You are unfamiliar with the layout of the streets or public transportation; the language and customs might be different from your own; even little things like signs indicating a bathroom or payphone may be alien to you. You begin to explore your new surroundings, perhaps guided by a tourist's handbook or a friend who

knows the area, and begin mapping this new place into your mind. You meet new people and gain perspective by learning about someone who's known this place their entire life; you discover the history of the place and how it may have impacted the residents. You find out how the person you are changes when introduced to someplace new and strange. And then you return home, bringing a little bit of that changed person back with you.

Video games have the ability to provide these new contexts of experience, and maybe to change the people who visit their gameworlds in much the same way. The immersion model of meaning arises from design focus along two primary axes: providing a believable, populated, internally consistent, freely-navigable gameworld for the player's avatar to inhabit, and robust tools of interactivity that allow the player to build a personal identity within that gameworld through his own actions. Video games are already capable of doing these things; they are far less capable of providing the authored pacing, composed framing and predictable event flow of film to convey a linear narrative, and yet this is almost always a central focus in character-driven games. Embracing the immersion model of meaning requires the designer never think of the game as a story, but as a place filled with people and things that

the player is free to engage with at his own pace and on his own terms.

Using three-dimensional space primarily to convey linear story constrains the high-level experience into two dimensions, and two directions – forward and back. To paraphrase Blow, this dichotomy is inherently conflicted. Games have the potential to present experience that works like our own world – where there's no one clear 'path' forward except the one we choose, and one's larger individual story is the sum of many smaller personal ones – but video games' reliance on linear core narrative funnels the possibility space into one line, one story, that may twist and branch, but that nonetheless serves to homogenize the potential experience across all players who choose to visit your gameworld.

Under the immersion model, instead of relying on an authored message encoded in a single traditional narrative stream, meaning arises from the content developers' ambient characterization of the gameworld itself and the non-player characters who inhabit it. Instead of gaining perspective by seeing specific events through the eyes of a particular character, the player gains perspective by himself inhabiting a world apart from his own daily experience and coming away with a sense of meaningful displace-

Continued on page 7

Sessions of Interest

from Page 6

E. Daniel Arey
Chris Swain

Thursday 3:00pm - 4:00pm
Room 131, North Hall

Overview: Seven cutting-edge metrics-based game design techniques have been gathered from some of the leading game designers in the world via personal interviews. All are presented visually and in a hands-on style. Each is intended to be practical for working game designers who seek to make better play experiences.

"While designer instincts are important, cold hard numbers cannot be denied. Gathering hard metrics along with soft playtest interview feedback is essential, and so input on best practices in gathering and utilizing this data is always valuable." -S.G.

Experimental Gameplay Sessions

Jonathan Blow

Thursday 3:00pm - 5:00pm
Room 135, North Hall

Overview: A series of short presentations, where game developers demonstrate and talk about their new and experimental games. Independent games, academic projects, and AAA mainstream games are all represented.

"Blow's annual showcase of design is always interesting. Although for the most part you could approximate the benefit of this session by taking its list of games and downloading the titles yourself, the developers' takes on their pieces add useful context, and often, some of the titles covered aren't yet available to the public at the time of the session. Expand your horizons!" -S.G.

Read Me: Closing the Readability Gap in Immersive Games

Patrick Redding

Thursday 4:30pm - 5:30pm
Room 3006, West Hall

Overview: Visual fidelity and procedural complexity have grown independently of one another. This disconnect means that game information presented to players often provides little feedback about their actions. Patrick Redding (Ubisoft Montreal) discusses why the disparity must be addressed before games can tackle more complicated problems in narrative and AI.

"In his talks, Patrick Redding (Far Cry 2) tends towards higher-level elements. This will likely be less an in-depth examination of specific techniques, as much as an overview of limiting factors to addressing through game mechanics issues more complex than shooting, jumping and driving." -S.G.

The Brutal Art of Brütal Legend

Lee Petty

Thursday 4:30pm - 5:30pm
Room 132, North Hall

Overview: A behind-the-scenes look at creating the art for a highly ambitious, heavy metal-inspired original game, this talk examines how the look of *Brütal Legend* was defined and realized. Details on how Double Fine met the challenge of creating a unique, stylized look while also delivering a "AAA looking" game on the current generation of consoles are revealed.

"High-budget action games rarely stray outside a fairly limited range of settings and visual styles – but Brütal Legend strays a considerable distance. With Double Fine having

already developed the visually unique Psychonauts, the studio has experience working with a highly-stylized aesthetic." -C.R.

Everything I Learned About Level Design I Learned from Disneyland

Scott Rogers

Friday 9:00am - 10:00am
Room 2024, West Hall

Overview: Scott Rogers (*God of War, Maximo*) reveals his secret weapon for designing levels: Disneyland. Learn how to inject the genius of the Magic Kingdom into your own game designs. Topics include player's thematic goals, pathing techniques, and il-lusional narrative. From skeletons to trash cans, there's a lot to learn from Disneyland!

"Comparisons are often made between a game and a Pirates of the Carribean-style ride, which are worrisome – i.e., 'keep your hands inside the cart while you watch interesting things pass by' – but as this talk seems to recognize, there's more to 'learn from Disneyland' than there is from a single ride. An analysis of the park as a whole could touch on some interesting approaches to spaces that are both directed and open." -S.G.

Beyond Balancing: Using Five Elements of Failure Design to Enhance Player Experiences

Jesper Juul

Friday 10:30am - 10:50am
Room 2022, West Hall

Overview: This 20-minute lecture presents a toolbox for improving the design of failure in video games. Based on research on player reactions and attitudes towards failure across different audiences, the lecture identifies Five Elements of Failure Design for better failure design in single player games.

"How to handle player failure is an interesting and long-standing problem in game design – and one that can easily be over- or under-solved. Any further discussion of it is beneficial." -S.G.

10 Perspectives on Staying Passionate about Games

Don Daglow

Friday 10:30pm - 11:30pm
Room 2020, West Hall

Overview: The games business keeps spawning more mega-corporations. It's tempting these days for individuals to start thinking of ourselves as depersonalized cogs in a big machine, or as boats torn from our moorings by distant storms and tossed around in the surf. Are we in creative careers or grueling jobs? Does the answer seem to change day by day and week by week?

"The informed perspective of such an industry veteran as Daglow is always welcome, more pointedly so as the president of Stormfront until it closed, probably right around the time that this talk's proposal was being submitted. He's been in it for a long, long time; what's the secret to staying engaged?" -S.G.

Creating First Person Movement for Mirror's Edge

Tobias Dahl
Jonas Aberg

Friday 10:30am - 11:30am
Room 3007, West Hall

Overview: Dice has taken the first person genre to new grounds with the free running first-person adventure *Mirror's Edge*. Learn what some of the challenges were and how we successfully overcame them when creating a believable first person full body experience

"First-person body awareness is an excellent thing to represent in a game – and still surprisingly uncommon. Seeing DICE's processes for conceiving and implementing its first-person parkour mechanics sounds extremely interesting." -S.G.

The Human Play Machine

Chaim Gingold

Friday 12:00pm - 1:00pm
Room 2020, West Hall

Overview: Every game we make or play engages a human faculty, whether it's movement, make believe, or flirting. But are we, as game designers, using the full range of the human animal's play capacity? What latent play faculties have the Nintendo Wii, casual games, and player authorship games (*Spore*, *LittleBigPlanet*) tapped into that makes them so novel, fun, and broadly appealing? What play faculties do we traditionally engage, and what play potentials are still out there?

"Exploring fresh avenues of play and mediated creativity is incredibly important. Presumably, one of the designers of Spore's Creature Creator knows a thing or two about the subject." -S.G.

The Iterative Level Design Process of Bioware's Mass Effect 2

Corey Andruko
Dusty Everman

Friday 4:00pm - 5:00pm
Room 2007, West Hall

Overview: This session examines the BioWare *Mass Effect* team's new level-creation process, which is focused on maximizing iteration for quality while minimizing re-work and cost. It shares some of the lessons learned from creating *Mass Effect* and evaluates how well this new process is working based on current experiences.

"Iteration in level design is beyond essential. In the current age of high-fidelity visuals, agility can be hard to maintain. It is always illuminating to see how other studios tackle common problems." -S.G.

Player's Expression: The Level Design Structure Behind Far Cry 2 and Beyond?

Jonathan Morin

Friday 4:00pm - 5:00pm
Room 3007, West Hall

Overview: While designers often want to support player's expression, it rarely materializes in the end. This lecture describes how this particular problem was approached on *Far Cry 2*. It explores its level design structure at every level and concludes with examples on how it could be applied to other projects.

"Far Cry 2's wide open African savannas represent a type of level design that is relatively infrequent in first-person shooters, in terms of scale, procedurally-assisted creation, and structure. Discussion of the team's process and potential lessons learned might have relevance even to those working in a much different style." -C.R.

The Immersion Model of Meaning

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ment. Content creators still have the immense power to render interesting characters with engaging personalities, behaviors and desires, and to create unique locales with their own histories; the Hollywood screenwriter simply need not apply.

I've gained unique perspective by engaging with the fictional people and places of recent games: combing the starscape for descriptions of unexplored planets in *Mass Effect* painted a vision of the fantastic possibilities that might lay beyond our solar system; engaging with the outright gonzo civil-ians and unstructured side missions of the *Yakuza* games gave me the feeling of visiting modern Japan through a particularly twisted lens; traipsing about the savanna doing the increasingly grim dirty work of *Far Cry 2*'s procedurally-generated faction representatives conveyed a unique sense of a place in the grip of nihilistic self-destruction; freely exploring the Capital Wasteland in *Fallout 3* and choosing to complete unanchored quests like Agatha's Song illustrated just how much our world, and humanity's value systems, might change when faced with global catastrophe.

The most memorable stories I re-

call from these games lay outside the narrative spine; the immersion model of meaning would be best served by a game that had no static central story weighing it down at all, just as our own lives have no predetermined single path.

The purest and most unassuming current example of the described approach must be *Animal Crossing*: it's a highly interactive other place filled with a loosely-arranged rotating cast of quirky personalities, which the player is invited to visit as often as he likes. Engagement with the game comes from the desire to visit this little world, see what it's like, see how it changes with the seasons, how the animals' child-like whims come and go, and how the player is able to craft his own identity within this wonderfully surreal and innocent context. There are elements of progression – buying a bigger house, filling out the museum's collections, collecting sets of rare items – but no authored story or mandatory participation of any sort; there is a beginning, when you first step into your town, but no "end" in a traditional sense. It is a pocket world that goes about its own business on its own time, but also responds to any presence the player may

have in it. Its message is not inherently grand or profound – but the experience of having been there creates genuine memories, and points toward a form that holds the potential to foster deep meaning in the individual who chooses to become immersed in it.

We already build incredible, vivid places, but feel the compulsion to pave over them with our attempts at compulsory pre-authored story structures. In embracing the immersion model of meaning, one's approach would shift away from building games around a core of Hollywood-style narrative, and toward building unique, convincing, open, integrally full gameworlds, populated by intriguing people to meet and things to do, and providing the player with tools of meaningful self-expression within that context that he might return changed by his experiences.

Often our attempts to bridle the player's freedom of movement and force our meaning onto him are misguided. Rather, it is that distinct transpor-tative, transformative quality – the ability of the player to build his own personal meaning through immersion in the interactive fields of potential we provide – that is our unique strength, begging to be fully realized.

A Lesson from the Past; A Treatise on What Is Now; Into an Immersive Future

Thoughts on immersion in games, part 4

by H. Scoops

The question then becomes how precisely to achieve the immersion so desperately sought by the modern video game designer. As with most deadly-serious problems, we need only look to the lessons of the past through a novel lens. If the goal of immersion is to make the player feel like they're "in the game," which it is, then one asks oneself – what obstacles keep me from feeling like I'm truly "inside the thing" while playing a video game?

The HUD is one obvious culprit, as I don't see any numbers right now while I'm writing this. If you were seeing your "Reading Meter" and "Attention Score" while reading this article, you would know you were in Newspaper Reading Video Game. So that's right out. But this is a known issue that's been addressed by forward-thinking video games already. It's also only part of the problem, as I didn't truly mistake my living room for a dinosaur-infested swamp while playing Peter Jackson's *King Kong*: The Official Video Game of the Movie.

Which brings us to another emerging technology, the Rock Band Stage Kit. This peripheral emits smoke and light in time with the songs one plays in Rock Band, convincingly "tricking the mind" into believing that one is on a stadium stage, playing "Tom Sawyer" (As Made Famous by Rush) before a crowd of thousands. Could this technique be used to convince me that I'm in, say, a sweltering steam room, or one

of Peter Jackson's *King Kong*: The Official Game of the Movie's misty swamps? Philips' amBX technology says yes. But again, this leaves us with a half-solved problem: I don't have any "immersion-breaking" numbers or "health counters" floating over the action; my living room has been transformed into an extension of the swamp/stage I'm standing in/on; and yet, I'm seeing everything through a window, a flat rectangle surrounded by a black frame. If I'm in the swamp, why is everything that happens there on the other side of a weird window? And why are my hands so far away? I, the player, am in the space – the smoke and lights are all around me. And yet the "game" is not.

What might the visionary thinker reach into the past and pluck from obscurity? Simple, really, when you think about it a little: Sega's Time Traveler holographic arcade cabinet. And while the content of the game was brilliant, it was but one vision of a possible future – a future I urge us all to step into boldly.

Imagine: a home video game solution involving a built-in, holographic display. The images are projected into the center of your living room, truly "occupying the space" along with you as you play. You almost feels as if you could reach out and touch them – but don't! Direct physical contact with the high-precision display crystals is ill advised. There is no screen separating "You" from the experience, no "HUD" separating you from the lifelike images floating in space before you. Atmospherics from your Stage Kit-like device

emanate from an unseen source, surrounding you with the gameworld, just as are the characters in the holographic round. Instead of a cowboy dodging lasers, the content of your holographic play could be anything you might imagine – stoic guardsmen on a faraway planet; adventurers in a fantastical land filled with treasures – and dangers! – beyond your wildest fantasies; football players; and more!

What are Immersive Controls? Well, one naturally assumes a sort of theremin-like interface allows me to reach my hands towards the illusion, interacting with the experience in a much more natural way than fondling a piece of plastic for hours on end. But that goes without saying, and deserves no further mention here.

To be immersed is to remove all traces of remove from the experience being projected "onscreen." One day, some fifty to fifty-five years from now, "screen" will be an outdated concept. Our grandchildren and great-grandchildren will look away from their holographic projection of Super Mario Theta and ask, "Grampy, what is screen?" As the misty swamp and flashing lights of the Neo Mushroom Kingdom surround you, you'll look down, and with a tear welling in your eye, say to them, "Ah, we were so young then. So, so young. We were yet to experience... *true immersion*."

This article series, with the exception of part four, originally appeared in H. Scoops' Fullbright - http://fullbright.blogspot.com

The Problem with Games Journalism: Part Two

by Snap E. Gamer

This piece is the second part of what was originally going to be one article, but unfortunately the course of games journalism could not be corrected in only one missive on the personal blog of yours truly. While clear evidence shows that the state of SELF-IMPORTANT GAMES JOURNALISM PRETENTION is absolute bollocks, with your average video gamer only able to find endless treatises on the deep meaning behind Bubby 3D or the emotional resonance of the writer's relationship with Sonic the Hedgehog when scouring the internet, I intend to put forth a new approach, a sort of "People's Game Journalism," or "New Games Journalism" if you will, centered on telling people whether a game is good or not, and if they should therefore spend their money on it, not some high-falutin' intellectual poppycock that wouldn't be out of place in my graduate dissertation.

I'm picturing an earthy, no-nonsense publication which doesn't provide some failed amateur novelist's self-satisfied "opinions" or "ideas," but unblinking evaluations of the most populist sort.

This would be the average gamer's destination to get informed about games, a spot that the gaming everyman could go for refuge from the inescapable Tennyson-quoting bluster of games journalism as it stands today, some sort of Internet Gaming Network for the rest of us. The journalist employed by this theoretical "pub" would play through a given title in a timely fashion, then assign it a useful, objective rating, measured in dollars. So for instance, where a contemporary "college educated" intellectual-elitist games journalist like Keiron Gilliam might offer his reminiscence of tears shed over Kirby's Canvas Curse, my vision of the "People's Journalist" would say the game had nice graphics for the DS and good replay value but not-so-good-stylus-controls, and score it a \$32.99/\$39.99.

Would N'Gai and his gang of big-word-using ruffians ever give the people the hard monetary data they demand when picking up their wallets and heading to the video game outlet? What use could any reader have for any information aside from "should I spend money on this title, and if so how much?" To listen to one Leigh Alexander, you'd think we wanted nothing but touchy-feely

pseudo-psychobabble concerning the "personal feelings" evoked by "Innocent Sister: Doki Doki Rub Tension" and other such twaddle. I say no thank you, Mr. Alexander. And I plan to take my appeal to the gaming populous.

That's right: the only way this revolution can happen is if we, the Average Gamers, rise up as an unstoppable mass, pitchforks in hand, and demand an end to the reign of thoughtful introspection in games journalism. We want previews. We want reviews. We want scores that tell us whether to buy a game or not. "Neo Ludum Escribat!" shall be our battle cry – down with pretentious writing about games! We must put an end to these stuffed-shirt journo's providing "critical analysis" on their personal blogs, stamping out all vestiges of useful consumer reporting, and demand cold, hard, safe, unchallenging numbers and dollar figures. Only then will games journalism have its equivalent of The Sun, and finally gain the respect it deserves. Until that glorious day arrives, I remain,

Snap E. Gamer



Watermelon Headshot
First Person Fruit Punch
Beat-em-up Boisenberry
Champion Japanese Ping Pong Player Focus
OMGWTFBBQ Barbecue
Raspberry Random Encounter

Uncanny Valley Cream Soda
Left Analogue Fish Sticks and Chips
Sneak Attack Sausage
Teabagging Tea Tree Extract and Tartar Sauce
Turn-Based Ranch
Third Person Pineapple

Achievement Whore Whiskey
Voicechat Tough Guy Vanilla
Barbie Game Magic Chocolate
Next-Gen Brown 'n Bloomin' Butterscotch
LAN Party Aftermath Flat Beer & Cold Pizza Swirl
German-style Board Game Xbox Live Arcade Port Churro

Ultra**Boost**
Hardcore Gaming Nourishment

