Introduction

by **Paula M. Bach**, Managing Editor

Computer entertainment is fast becoming a big industry. Computing fields work with artistic fields to create virtual adventures and interactions that bring players into the game world more than any film can engage a moviegoer. Some say that a good measure of how engaging a video game is depends on whether or not you lose your sense of reality during game play. As an example, a gamer playing *Star Wars* lands on the floor and does not know how he/she got there. Another indication of engagement is when a player plans to play a game for a given amount of time or until the next level but ends up playing much longer. Engagement is the ultimate goal for game designers.

This issue of *Crossroads* is dedicated to computer entertainment. Our feature article, "Interesting Complexity: Sid Meier and the Secrets of Game Design," unleashes secrets of the great game designer, Sid Meier. Meier stresses fun and a keen sense of how games work. Knowing how to put together a "series of interesting choices" for the user is key to good game design. In addition to one of gaming's greats, we offer three interviews with other big names in the gaming industry: Russel Kay, Colt McAnlis, and Pierre Pontevia. Kay, the creator of *Lemmings*, speaks frankly about his background and the gaming industry, while McAnlis offers practical advice for students wishing to pursue a job in the gaming industry. Pontevia, based in Paris, France, shares insights into the three elements needed for a startup, his company, Kynogon, and the company's AI middleware called Kynapse. Kynapse is important for gaming for three reasons: path finding, team behaviors, and spatial reasoning.

Four other articles in this issue represent the vastness of the computer entertainment industry. Nick Datzov gives us a brief but intriguing overview of the installation of a

computer in an automobile to play games, watch movies, or browse the Internet. Damien Marshall, Tomas Ward, and Séamus McLoone explore the past, current, and next generation of gaming interaction devices and methods, looking at the latest research. Caio Camargo writes about a trend in gaming called "modding." Modding is gamer terminology for modifying a game, and Camargo explores this phenomenon and also talks with a successful modder. Chris Dondanville gives an overview of the *Sims 2* expansion called *Open for Business* and presents some practical tips for succeeding with a virtual business in the *Sims 2* life simulator.

Finally, *Crossroads* is undergoing some exciting changes. We have started a recurring column called "At a Crossroads" that addresses student issues. This issue's version, titled "At a Crossroads: Video Game Addiction," touches on some important issues related to this poorly understood form of addiction. Another recurring addition is a comic titled "The Digital Divide," written and illustrated by Scott Dyer, a talented graphic artist who also has designed the last two covers of *Crossroads.* We have also included a technical article looks at issues related to computing and molecular biology. This article represents the increasing interdisciplinarity evident in computer science. This diversity in computing articles is what *Crossroads* strives for in our new format. Look forward to more changes throughout the year.

Biography

Paula Bach (pmbach@acm.org) is a PhD candidate in the College of Information Sciences and Technology at Penn State University. Her research interests include HCI, usability engineering, design theory, community computing, and design in open source software.