1066 - The game

Team Description
Preloaded is made up of the very best, talented, creative and multi-skilled individuals with the common goal of making great work. Everyone in the company is creative and has involvement in every project we do - a genuine team effort - which makes our products better as a result.

Because everything we do involves the whole team, we don't highlight individuals. That's why none of our awards have individual's names on them - it's the Preloaded team all the way.

In short, we believe that great products come out of close working relationships. That’s why our team are all carefully selected for their brilliance.

Team Questionnaire
What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
1066 was our first project with C4 Education, commissioned to coincide with a two-part TV drama produced by the folks at Hardy Pictures. C4 Education's brief was to develop a game that was both entertaining and educationally robust. The subject matter suited this brief perfectly, and working alongside Greg Jenner (the historical consultant) and Hardy's Art Department we collected historic and visual resources to act as reference for our early ideas.

Alongside this research, we also conducted some qualitative research with school children who helped steer us towards a blood-thirsty, strategic incarnation ("I just like to hit penguins": Child, aged 7). This loose direction formed the basis for our concept development.

The game's design references many games which have inspired us (Total War, Desktop Tower Defence, Worms, Another world) but the biggest influences came from the awesomely styled Patapon and 'strategy-made simple' Advanced Wars. Additional to this, Channel 4 lobbied for the inclusion of mini-games to introduce a more casual aspect to the gameplay. This mixed bag of of references became the starting point for the game design process.

Artistically we took a lot of inspiration from the Hardy Pictures TV drama, which concentrates on the rural farmers who made up the armies, rather than the kings who command them. We wanted to create a something stark that reflected the lonely brutalness of battle and felt the dark textured earth and realistically animated silhouettes against the blood red sky captured this perfectly.

A Slow Year
Team Description

Dr. Ian Bogost is a videogame designer, critic, and researcher. He is Associate Professor at the Georgia Institute of Technology and Founding Partner at Persuasive Games LLC. His research and writing considers videogames as an expressive medium, and his creative practice focuses on political games and artgames. Bogost is author of Unit Operations: An Approach to Videogame Criticism, of Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames, co-author of Racing the Beam: The Atari Video Computer System, and co-author of the forthcoming Newsgames: Journalism at Play. Bogost's videogames cover topics as varied as airport security, disaffected workers, the petroleum industry, suburban errands, and tort reform. His games have been played by millions of people and exhibited internationally.

A Slow Year

Team Questionnaire

What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)

The game tries to accomplish several feats. One is to translate the goals of deep compression in poetry, particularly that of haiku and the Imagism, into game form. Another is to show that the 1977 Atari Video Computer System is a living platform capable of producing new games of interest beyond the hobbyist community (there will also be a PC/Mac release). And another is to explore extremely slow gameplay, while still offering four real games, rather than just interactive explorations.

As games, these rely on the procedural representation of an idea that the player manipulates. As poetry, they rely on the condensation of symbols and concepts rather than the clarification of specific experiences. As images, they offer visually evocative yet obscure depictions of real scenes and objects. They are inspired by ideas or experiences I encounter, as attempts to capture something fundamental about how they work. Game poems aspire, perhaps, toward a kind of videogame version of Imagism, if we expand "image" to include a logic or behavior as its subject.

I created A Slow Year for the Atari Video Computer System (also known as the Atari VCS, or the Atari 2600). A standard Atari cartridge rom is 4 kilobytes in size. Each game in A Slow Year occupies 1K of space in the ROM. The player can select a particular season or play the games in order.

While it's true that I am very fond of the Atari VCS (I co-authored a book about it), I did not choose it as a platform for this work arbitrarily, nor in the interest of retro nostalgia. The Atari applies certain constraints that contribute the ideas I wanted to get across with this work.

For one part, it all but eliminates the need (or indeed the possibility) of creating complex instantial assets like images and sounds. Many of today's "artgames" adopt coarse visual and sound design as a way of recovering the simplicity of earlier games while extending them to new subjects. The Atari invites such

designs by necessity. Its limited technical abilities and small file size demands invite symbolism.

For another, it lets me harness the platform's history of more abstract gameplay, even if such gameplay was once about concrete things like dogfights or dungeon crawling. This fact should remind us that older forms are worth returning to for their aesthetics. Just as we might still choose to write a sonnet, take a black and white photograph, paint with oil on canvas, or construct relief prints with a letterpress, so we can also choose to write new games for a machine like the Atari.

For yet another, even in its commercial heydey Atari games were created by a single person, which mirrors the production process for a poem. And for yet another, it imposes serious constraints on development while still allowing for many different kinds of games. And finally, it gives me a natural excuse to adopt a very small file size as a constraint.

What was your design/brainstorming process like? What is a day in your team like?
Occasionally, over the course of many months, some image or idea would come to me and I'd be interested in seeing if I could give it form on the Atari in an effective yet condensed way. Then I imposed additional constraints: I'd try to complete a draft of the game on the day the image appeared to me, and I'd limit myself to 1k of ROM space for it.

How long have you been a game designer and what compelled you to the medium? What (other) media, books, films, music, theater, art, influenced the game's direction or influence your overall approach to design?
I'm a professor at Georgia Tech and I own a game studio called Persuasive Games, which makes games about social and political issues (this game is an independent endeavor separate from the studio). I've been making and writing about games for ten years or so. I've written a number of books about games, one of which is about the relationship between the Atari's hardware and its game design (Racing the Beam: The Atari Video Computer System, which I co-authored with Nick Montfort).

What have you gained from this process, in terms of learning and ideas, that you want to apply to your next game, either a sequel to this one, or an entirely new project?
Patience.

A Slow Year is an incredibly slow game. Oppressively slow, perhaps, to play. But it was also a slow game to release. It's a simple game but it will have taken almost two years to complete and release at the time of the Indiecade festival. This feeling of not being rushed was tremendously liberating compared to the go-go-go development and hardware cycle in the commercial industry. How many different

iPhones were released in the last two years alone? Yet, the Atari remains the same, just waiting for me to do something with it.

I want to carry some of that feeling of patience into my other work.

Auditorium
Team Description
Cipher Prime Studios, Inc., is a small independent studio based in Philadelphia. 2009
saw the release of their debut game Auditorium win many awards such as Most Creative
Game of the Year Award by Mochi Media, 2nd Best Browser Game of All Time by Tech
Crunch, and many other awards. They are committed to empowering other developers by
sharing business knowledge and helping grow the independent developer community.
Dain Saint
Technical Director
Dain Saint is a programmer, designer, writer, and musician. As a time-traveling hobo,
his existence is largely responsible for the devastating Chronal Wars of 3092.
William Stallwood
Creative Director
William Stallwood is an accomplished designer, developer, gamer, and juggler. His
hotly anticipated self-help book entitled “The Power of Girth” will be availble this Winter.

Team Questionnaire
What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
We had started the project in the attempt to make a new modern-day shmup. When confronted by the particle engine, we got lost. The simple beauty of the particles swirling around just inspired us. Once we had the brilliant idea to add audio-containers to the experience, our journey down the game dev road truly began!

What was your design/brainstorm process like? What is a day in your team like?
We do a lot of paper prototyping and yelling at each other. We have an internal process called WhyPlayAgain, which we use to evaluate our games when we're in the prototyping stage all the way through the development process.

How long have you been a game designer and what compelled you to the medium? What (other) media, books, films, music, theater, art, influenced the game's direction or influence your overall approach to design?
Auditorium was our very first game. Up until this point we had never taken game design seriously and really just wanted to have some fun. There have been many influences, but Flow probably had the biggest impact on us at the time.

What have you gained from this process, in terms of learning and ideas, that you want to apply to your next game, either a sequel to this one, or an entirely new project?
We've really learnt how to work as a team. We're a lot better at estimating deadlines and we now actively try to get away from 24 hour dev sessions in favor of some real-life quality time.

B.U.T.T.O.N. (Brutally Unfair Tactics Totally OK Now)
Team Description
B.U.T.T.O.N. is a project by the Copenhagen Game Collective. Copenhagen Game Collective is a multi-gender, multi-national, non-profit game design collective based in –
surprise! – Copenhagen, Denmark. The collective comprises a tight network of different companies, non-commercial projects, and creative individuals.

Team Questionaire
What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
B.U.T.T.O.N. was originally created for Kokoromi's GAMMA IV party. The contest constraint was to design a game played with only one button. We realized that one way to subvert this constraint was to incentivize players to push each others' buttons.

Our goal was to push gameplay "outside" the computer – to make a physical game that just happens to use a computer. We figured that, in a loud party setting, most people just want to laugh and horse around together, not play some complex game system.

In B.U.T.T.O.N., what players are "allowed" to do will depend on the specific community of people playing. The computer, of course, cannot detect if players are taking a full six steps back, or if each player really completed five pushups, etc. This is not a shortcoming, but a feature. Rather than let the computer carry out all the rules, the players are themselves responsible for enforcing (or not enforcing) the rules.

Instead of forcing the players adapt themselves to suit the game, we wanted to make a game which players would adapt to suit themselves. As play theorist Bernie DeKoven puts it: "Rules are made for the convenience of those who are

playing. What is fair at one time or in one game may be inhibiting later on. It's not the game that's sacred, it's the people who are playing."

Sometimes inspiration comes from a frustration with the limitations of what's already out there. Are/ were there any negative inspirations, things you were trying to work against, that drove your vision?
Games are not just fucking "systems"! They are also festive contexts – opportunities to celebrate one another's company. B.U.T.T.O.N. represents an effort to reclaim the kind of festivity and laughter that has been marginalized by modern sport culture and by digital game culture in particular.

In designing B.U.T.T.O.N., our hope was that the rounds would be too short and the rules too contentious for players to get so invested in winning and losing. It's not that B.U.T.T.O.N. isn't played competitively. Rather, it's that the competitive play gravitates towards the self-ironic, tempered by an awareness that the real stakes exist at the level of the meta-game. The "true" competition, if "competition" is even the right word here, is to see who can make the funniest cheat or the cleverest improvisation.

Intentionally, B.U.T.T.O.N. is a kind of "broken game." The very obvious gaps, between what the system tells us to do and what it is actually able to monitor, set the tone for a kind of generalized mischief. If even the system doesn't take the game so seriously, why should we? What B.U.T.T.O.N. does is try to convince its players that any "meaning" ultimately resides in themselves, not in the system.

What was your design/brainstorming process like? What is a day in your team like?
Like most of our projects, B.U.T.T.O.N. is very much a product of our social environment. The game was originally conceived at Doug's birthday party in early 2010, in impromptu fashion. Four of us were sitting around drinking, and we got to chatting about the GAMMA IV contest. Without any prior plan that we were going to brainstorm a game idea, we stumbled on a humorous idea for subverting the one-button constraint. Free GDC passes (the contest reward) is a very powerful motivator indeed!

Later that month, we would prototype the game late one night at our annual "Winter-Een-Mas" retreat on the west coast of Sjælland. The very first playtest ended in hysterical laughter. Immediately, we knew we were onto something.

In short, the design of B.U.T.T.O.N. reflects a deeply collaborative endeavor. Creativity is not just a property of individuals, but also of the relationships between them. Innovation often happens in those idle "in-between" moments – when you're just hanging out, shooting the shit in a laid-back environment.

What have you gained from this process, in terms of learning and ideas, that you want to apply to your next game, either a sequel to this one, or an entirely new project?
In late 2009, after months of concept work and prototyping, we received a grant to develop a wizard dueling game for the Nintendo Wii. A larger team from the Copenhagen Game Collective – which includes most of the B.U.T.T.O.N. team – spent the first six months of 2010 refining the idea and developing a vertical slice.

Much to our amusement (and to our chagrin), this is not the game that was selected for IndieCade 2010. Instead, the game that we're showcasing, B.U.T.T.O.N., is a silly "wouldn't-it-be-funny-if…" side project, developed in just a weekend or two. Hell, we were even drunk during most of the concept generation and development.

We don't mean to imply that B.U.T.T.O.N. isn't a worthy game – after all, we do have a blast playing it. But to channel our inner Michael Bluth, we have to ask: "Her?"

Credits
Design – Lau Korsgaard, Douglas Wilson, Lawrence Johnson, Nils Deneken
Programming – Lawrence Johnson, Douglas Wilson
Art – Nils Deneken
Sound and Music – Nicklas "Nifflas" Nygren
Though we still think the wizard dueling game is going to be good, the takeaway lesson here is that the design ideas that look sexiest on paper don't always translate (at least not immediately) to the games that are catchiest in practice. The corollary lesson is, sometimes the stupidest games are the most memorable ones. After only a weekend of development, B.U.T.T.O.N. was already deeply fun, right from the get-go.

In the future, we'd like to embrace this mantra of "stupid fun." Sometimes, it makes more sense to try a bunch of quick ideas rather than keep chasing one particular idea for months. On a similar note, our experience with B.U.T.T.O.N. shows us that it can be productively refreshing to blow off steam on small side projects while working on a larger production. You never know – a silly side project might unexpectedly turn out to be the real gem.

BIT.TRIP RUNNER
Company Description
Gaijin Games is an independent video game development studio founded by industry veteran Alex Neuse in 2007. Located in beautiful Santa Cruz, CA, Gaijin Games operates in an agile development environment and creates unique gaming experiences for digital distribution. We view video games as an art medium and approach it as such.

A core belief of the Gaijin Games team is that great people accomplish great things together, and this mantra drives us to find only the best collaborators to work with. Our staff is full of passionate, disciplined, and talented people who exhibit foresight and have strong wills. Every team member works to uphold the company's pillars, which are:

* Work on games which satisfy a unique vision and push the envelope of what games are
* Take on projects that are financially responsible to the company and the team which the company supports
* Make decisions that are respectful of the current and future goals of the team and the company
* Work on projects that we believe we can have fun working on
* Work with great people

Every video game company on Earth should make awesome games, and Gaijin Games strives to fulfill that goal by working with fantastic people on refreshing projects in a cutting-edge development environment through the use of scrum and green company practices.

Team Questionaire

What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)

Early games--those of the pre-Atari 2600 era were abundant with creativity. They had little else to fall back on. Creating games that are simplistic in their design, implementation, look, and feel but that are also fun is something that gives true and lasting importance to the medium. We wanted to see if we could make games that had the ability to move people in a simple, elegant way.

Sometimes inspiration comes from a frustration with the limitations of what's already out there. Are/ were there any negative inspirations, things you were trying to work against, that drove your vision?

With a small team like ours (three people), we know that we can't accomplish every idea that pops into our heads. We can't even accomplish half of them. The limitation of being such a small studio only heightens the importance of embracing simplicity. This idea drives our vision every step of the way.

What was your design/brainstorming process like? What is a day in your team like?

The brainstorming process for BIT.TRIP RUNNER ended up being something like this: "Ok dudes. We're going to make a side-scrolling platformer with severely old-school aesthetics. But it can't look exactly like a 2600 game. And it has to be music/rhythm based. This is our puzzle. Now let's solve it." From there, we started prototyping against the goals we decided on at the beginning. We kept what was necessary, what was fun, and cut everything else.

A day in the life of our team is pretty standard, I think. We roll in between 8 - 9:30, and leave between 5 - 6:30. We don't work a lot of overtime. Generally speaking, we talk a lot in the mornings, but then after our morning scrum and any meetings that follow it, we pretty much put our headphones on and plug in. We work hard, but by staying focused and avoiding long hours we retain our sanity.

How long have you been a game designer and what compelled you to the medium? What (other) media, books, films, music, theater, art, influenced the game's direction or influence your overall approach to design?
I've been a designer in the industry since the year 2000, the future. I initially entered the industry in 1997 with a passion for film. I wanted to tell stories, and the only related things they were teaching in college back then was how to be an author, a playwright, or a film director. There were no college-level courses in video game design. I ended up getting my degree in Theatre with a focus on film direction. After college, I found my eventual love in the video game industry. The other members of the team each went to school for their disciplines (Art & Engineering), and pursued their career in games after realizing that it's much more fun than CAD or so-called "serious games". We all had prior industry experience before going totally independent.

What have you gained from this process, in terms of learning and ideas, that you want to apply to your next game, either a sequel to this one, or an entirely new project?
I have learned that in order to find success, you need to yearn for something greater than money or fame. You need to be happy with your product in the end. That happiness alone is success. Everything else is icing on the cake. This is an idea that we will continue to uphold with every game we create--all successes.

Blue Lacuna
Team Description
Aaron A. Reed's fiction has appeared in "Fantasy & Science Fiction" magazine, and his interactive fiction has won acclaim from indie gaming, electronic literature, and new media circles. Reed is currently working with the Digital Arts & New Media program and the Expressive Intelligence Studio at UC Santa Cruz.

Team Questionaire
What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
I wanted to tell a story where you could build a unique relationship with its central character-- where his emotional journey's climax could be directly attributed to the way you'd treated him, the things you'd said to him, the decisions you'd made in his world. On a simpler level, I wanted to create a game that engaged the sense of exploration, wonder, and imagination that the adventure games from my childhood tapped into: a place you could discover without necessarily needing to conquer or defeat.

Sometimes inspiration comes from a frustration with the limitations of what's already out there. Are/ were there any negative inspirations, things you were trying to work against, that drove your vision?
Though in recent years story in games has been getting more respect, I still feel that mainstream games have a long way to go to produce compelling interactive stories that aren't centered around killing people. While the bar to producing "interactive movies" has been raised high enough to require millions of dollars and dedicated teams to produce, the beauty of interactive fiction is that a single developer can tell a rich, compelling story with hundreds of locations, complex characters, and multiple plot threads.

What was your design/brainstorming process like? What is a day in your team like?
Lacuna went through many iterations of design before settling into its final form. The questions that kept shaping the revisions were "Is this scene meaningfully interactive?" and "Can the choices you make in this scene be significant?" I had countless discussions with friends and early testers trying to make the story truly participatory, so those who finished it really felt like they'd had a hand in shaping it.

How long have you been a game designer and what compelled you to the medium? What (other) media, books, films, music, theater, art, influenced the game's direction or influence your overall approach to design?
Lacuna was heavily influenced by the great adventure games: Infocom of the '80s, LucasArts of the '90s, and Cyan's Myst, Riven, and Uru. The writing is heavily influenced by authors like Mark Danielewski, Bruno Schulz, Samuel R. Delany, Stanislaw Lem.

What have you gained from this process, in terms of learning and ideas, that you want to apply to your next game, either a sequel to this one, or an entirely new project?
My current focus is on trying to tell more of a story procedurally: letting it emerge through gameplay mechanics and emergent exploration of the story space, while still finding a place for fine-crafted prose. I'm experimenting with ways of creating an experience that's emotionally satisfying without having to engineer the player into an exact, pre-scripted scenario, and then giving him or her free reign to explore the consequences of that experience, and its personal significance to each player.

Cargo Delivery
Company Description
Adriana Kei is responsible for the game design and production of all our games. She is, actually, a university professor of a BA in Game Design. Gabriel Ochsenhofer is our programmer. He had launched, among other games, Totem Destroyer and Totem Destroyer 2 before becoming a partner of Cats in the Sky.

Guilherme Asthma is a BA in Animation. He is actually the art director of the team. Murillo Denardo is our sound designer. Christopher Nomi is a talented artist of our team.

Team Questionnaire
What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
First of all, the behavior of objects in games in general, especially those physics based games, they always catch our attention, so, we have emphasized the physics in our games.

Puzzles use to inspire us a lot and in Cargo Delivery, it was our greatest source of inspiration. The whole game was developed from the idea of making a puzzle. We wanted a puzzle of stacking objects, that came from the idea of all kinds of toys piled up in a kid's messy room. This was the first idea for Cargo. The sea theme was almost random. When we defined we wanted an original stacking puzzle game, we had the idea to work with water then we debated which environments could provide us a puzzle that involves water. We got to the conclusion of a boat in the water.

For Cargo Delivery, we wanted a theme that wasn't very common in casual or indie games.

For this project, the chosen style had more organic and loose traces, with a painting that was close to watercolor painting. The intention was to achieve an art that was different from other games developed in Adobe Flash, we were also inspired by some animations like “Howl Moving Castle” and “Après La Pluie” and films like “Finding Neverland”.

At last, part of our inspiration was the trend of games with objects, scenes and characters customization increasingly growing, especially observed in the popularity of social games.

Sometimes inspiration comes from a frustration with the limitations of what's already out there. Are/ were there any negative inspirations, things you were trying to work against, that drove your vision?
In our case, our biggest frustration is with the gaming market in Brazil, it has to do with the idea of starting a game development company. There are not many or big developer companies in our country. Ubisoft has just arrived and we have Glu among the few big developers, foreigners. Among all the national companies that work with games, there are very few ones who develop entertainment games. The gaming market in Brazil is almost entirely focused on educational games, promotional/advertising games and games for training. We spent some time doing a survey of Brazilian entertainment games, published in Brazil or worldwide, and we realized that there was practically nothing.

Cats in the Sky came from that idea, which went against the majority of games production in Brazil. Although the Brazilian market had all the evidence that casual gaming and entertainment were not a strong point as business for a game studio, yet we wanted to take that risk. Our strong point is that we are almost exclusive in this kind of games in Brazil. The weak point is precisely the lack of national clients interested in such business. However, we bet we will still have the chance of growing, investing primarily in games to entertain people without straight engagement with the educational, training or even advertising areas, which is the case of almost all game developers in Brazil.

What was your design/brainstorming process like? What is a day in your team like?

The starting ideas for our games com form different ways. Sometimes they are things that we observe in our daily lives, the news, a situation or a fact we live. In our first game, the idea came from Kei's cats behavior. Since our company already had a name based on them, we thought the first game should be about cats. We like having physics in game therefore we saw a way to apply it in a game, using cats.

For Cargo, after the first idea of a stacking game, we had a meeting with all partners: Kei, Gabs and Gui to discuss what kind of objects would be stacked and what characteristics we would want for these objects. As ideas were being listed, the main concept took shape: objects with different shapes, sizes and other physical properties, then we got to the idea of putting this mixed stacking with something that involves water. We naturally ended up with a boat and focusing the game to stacking and transporting cargoes.

After this brainstorming, the gameplay started to become more detailed and documented. With the first draft of the game's documentation (gamedoc) it was possible to establish a task schedule for each member of the team. We conducted several researches on cargo transportation, freighters, ports, cargo containers, sea, sea storms, some unusual phenomena like fish rain and some obstacles that the freighter could face on their journey.

The choice of doing a more organic art, close to the films and plays (scenery), made that the team had the need to work with one more artist. Gui began developing the first concepts for objects and characters of the game and it was an early option to develop an art of unique style, using traditional resources such as frame by frame drawing on paper, before being scanned. Anyway, all the drawings for the game were drawn on paper and then received digital painting and texturing. Part of the scenario was done through drawing and painting by hand to achieve the result we wanted. As this game demanded intensive artwork, Kei invited Christopher (our second artist) to join the project. Chris and Gui started to work together, with the art direction and drawings made by Gui, and all the painting and digital interface design made by Chris. As the gamedoc became more specific about the gameplay, many digital prototypes were developed for

testing mechanics (water physics, buoyancy, cargo behavior, cargo shapes, interface feedback etc.). The typography was another graphics choice made by the team. All the UI typography were created and designed by our artists. Like the game logo. We always seek to have the maximum of authorship in all aspects of our games. Cargo Delivery was designed and tested constantly until the game was finalized. The game's documentation has undergone many changes arising from the testing, new concepts and new ideas that emerged during the process. After each change, each team member received the newest version of the gamedoc. The initially established schedule also suffered some minor amendments. Murillo created the sound design of the game, preforming several tests especially for the sound “texture” of the game. Some in-game sound compositions were made, but we noticed that throughout the gameplay, the music was repeatedly playing, causing tiredness to the player. We decided to leave only a lifelike sea environment sound in-game, then these songs were used for the main menu and stores.

This game took about five months to be designed and implemented by a team of five people. We all have other professional activities at the time and we worked in the company in parallel because the company doesn't have enough income to sustain itself. For the same reason, each one worked on this project activities remotely, most of the time. What kept us organized was the constant exchange of information and the agility in the changes promoted in the game and the task schedule, dividing tasks and responsibilities.

How long have you been a game designer and what compelled you to the medium? What (other) media, books, films, music, theater, art, influenced the game's direction or influence your overall approach to design?
We are involved in game design for some years. Considering the average of the team, we can say that game design is part of our lives for nearly four years. The approach to the universe of video games has always been great because we were and are gamers (some to a greater degree, others a lesser degree). Kei was a designer already and she became a lecturer at a BA in game design which got her in contact with very specific (games) bibliographies. In addition, she completed a master degree in 2007, with a research in video games and Imaginarium. Gabs started with programming for video games because he was curious and interested to know how a game was structured. Practically everything influences us or becomes a reference for game ideas and game design. People behavior, animals, historical facts, news, nature, cinema, comics, plays (theater), books, events, even the video games that we played and of course, our routine and daily lives. The little things and details of our daily lives helps us to have enough ideas that can turn any idea or solution to a game, things that we observed during the course of work, streets etc.

What have you gained from this process, in terms of learning and ideas, that you want to apply to your next game, either a sequel to this one, or an entirely new project?

When we were starting the Cargo Delivery project, we received an e-mail from a guy who lived in Florida. His name was Cleve “Elvis” Otte and he praised the team because of our first published game: Sally's Cats. The boy said that our game made him smile, something that did not happen very often because he had a serious cancer. He called Sally's Cats as a “heartwarmng game”. He encouraged us to continue with our projects saying that he hoped that our games would bring joy to others as it brought to him. As Cargo Delivery prototypes were being built, they were sent to Cleve so can could play, send feedback and have fun. It was basically an exchange: we gave him a little joy and fun to his short life and he gave us support and motivation. Unfortunately Cleve passed away before Cargo Delivery was finished. Cleve “Elvis” Otte was our greatest encouragement to continue with projects for entertainment games because we never realized before that a game could cause such an impact in someone's life and make a notable difference.

The visual reference, thematic and physics researches are always very helpful to develop our initial ideas for games and solve gameplay issues. We started a new project in XNA and we are digging a research of some physics behavior of objects for this game. Also, we like to work with water so we are working to introduce some fluids physics to this new game. This new project is not a sequel of Cargo Delivery, but a whole new Totem Destroyer with a more robust and challenging gameplay, with a lot of new elements. In parallel to this new game, we are initiating some research and studies for a 3D game in Unity 3D.

Castle Vox
Company Description
Dustin Quasar founded Sillysoft Games in 2002 with a focus on thoughtful strategy games and community involvement. When not working in the Sillysoft code mines, he enjoys sunshine, music, and exploring the multiverse. Dustin lives in a castle in the sky, in beautiful Vancouver, Canada

Mark Bauer is a game designer and filmmaker, with a passion for history. Mark likes to throw himself into interesting projects, so it was a natural progression to design strategy games with a historical slant. Borrowing elements from his film making helps craft the story and guide the map. Mark lives in scenic Tallahassee, Florida.

The Sillysoft Games team also includes a variety of netizens who have contributed maps and code mods for our games. Thank you internets!

Team Questionnaire
What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
The inspiration for Castle Vox came from the love of classic strategy board games such as Risk, Axis and Allies, and Diplomacy, combined with a love of Castles!

Our previous game Lux Delux inspired us to create another highly-moddable game. This allows creative players to build on the foundations, and take the game to places we never would have thought of. Creating add-on maps and AIs make for another game, on top of the game.

Sometimes inspiration comes from a frustration with the limitations of what's already out there. Are/ were there any negative inspirations, things you were trying to work against, that drove your vision?
Castle Vox is an attack against board games that take a really long time to set-up and break down, and force players to wait long periods of time doing nothing while their opponents take their turns.

What was your design/brainstorming process like? What is a day in your team like?
Our design process was long, leisurely, and fun. The main gameplay mechanic of Castle Vox slowly bubbled to the surface of our brains, after having built and played with Lux Delux for years, and becoming more aware of the limitations inherent in it.

Our team is on opposite sides of the continent in 2 different countries, so all of our brainstorming takes place over email and during online game chats. We're fans of getting a playable prototype ready quickly, and iterating on it with plenty of trial and error, and endless fine-tuning. The original Vox prototype had issues that caused it to get shelved for 2 years while we worked on more immediate releases and updates. A fresh look at Vox in 2010 showed that it still had great potential, and it was slimmed down to focus on the best parts.

With boards games such as Castle Vox and a small company like Sillysoft, there's a lot of balancing that needs to be done. Both balancing of the game play and balancing of "needs" and "wants." It's fun to have grand ideas, but at the end of the day it's up to us to do all the work. Taking it step-by-step during development is the way to end up with a shippable game for people to play.

How long have you been a game designer and what compelled you to the medium? What (other) media, books, films, music, theater, art, influenced the game's direction or influence your overall approach to design?
Dustin Quasar: I've been designing games in various forms since playing Dungeons & Dragons as a young boy. Fun is what brought me to the medium. Games are fun!

Mark Bauer: I have been designing game maps for about 5 years. I've been an avid board game player all my life, and I've been artist for almost as long. It seemed a match made in heaven when I was able to combine the two. The love of history, what history can teach us, and the wealth of great stories that come from history, really inspires a lot of my maps and ideas.

What have you gained from this process, in terms of learning and ideas, that you want to apply to your next game, either a sequel to this one, or an entirely new project?
We've gained experience, hunger and happy times from the development of Castle Vox. Hunger to expand upon Castle Vox, hunger to create many more games, and hunger to push the limits and reach of Sillysoft Games to new horizons. Also, a great delight. Delight at how we can turn our ideas into reality, and spread them to the world. We've learned to stay adaptable and ready for the game to change as we stumble upon new ideas and directions.

Continuity
Company Description
Continuity was developed by Ragtime Games, a team of four students in Gothenburg, Sweden. Everyone on the team was responsible for designing and programming the game. Elias composed and performed the music and sound effects. Continuity was their first released game.

The team completed their master's degrees in June 2010. Currently, they are scattered: Elias and Stefan are in Sweden, Guy is in the USA, and Dmitri is in Moldova.

Team Questionnaire
What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
The main motivation for Continuity was to make a finished game in a short period. We had previously worked on an uncompleted project and desired to get something completed and distributed. Much of the game's gameplay and aesthetic design decisions came from trying to prioritize simple solutions that we could easily implement and test. We desired a finished, more polished game over a more interesting, uncompleted work.

We were inspired by games like Portal and Closure to try to limit the explicit instruction of the game. Those games make learning the game's rules an enjoyable part of the experience. We hoped to create a game with levels that would facilitate the player learning the game mechanics through interaction in a language-agnostic manner.

What was your design/brainstorming process like? What is a day in your team like?
We started from a vague notion of a game about manipulating the location of segments of the world. Sliding tiles was simply one easy way to implement and communicate the concept. In general, our design process mainly consisted of trying to get good solutions in place as quickly as possible rather than testing tons of variations. We avoided any design decisions that would require lengthy implementation in favor of those that we could easily test. In general, we tried to

get the game's features set in stone early, so that we had more time to iterate on the level design and difficulty curve

What have you gained from this process, in terms of learning and ideas, that you want to apply to your next game, either a sequel to this one, or an entirely new project?
The biggest lesson we gained from creating Continuity is that limitations can be useful. We had a limited schedule and no talented artist. These limited resources forced us to really try to distill the game to its essence and explore that with the game's levels. We have tried to limit ourselves similarly as we develop an iPhone sequel to Continuity.

Creaky Old Memory
Company Description
Creaky Old Memory was made by DADIU Team 3. The team consists of 13 students with vastly different educational backgrounds, who were challenged to create a digital game in just one month.
DADIU (The Danish Academy for Digital, Interactive Entertainment), is a collaboration program between 9 different Danish universities and art schools. The purpose of the program is to educate students in the development and production of digital games.

Team Questionnaire
What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
The initial inspiration for the game came from research into Alzheimer's disease. We were frustrated with the general lack of narrative depth in online puzzle games, as well as the lack of games tailored to older audiences. By injecting narrative, progression and mystery into the puzzle genre, we aim to create a more involving and deep experience than the usual run-of-the-mill web puzzlers are able to offer.
The core of the game lies in the two-fold structure of the gameplay: First, the player must collect paintings which tell the story of the main character's past. Then, the player is challenged to search for clues and hidden meanings in the paintings. These clues provide the player with the means to progress through the game.

Sometimes inspiration comes from a frustration with the limitations of what's already out there. Are/ were there any negative inspirations, things you were trying to work against, that drove your vision?
The general lack of narrative depth and lack of mature themes in online puzzle games.

What was your design/brainstorming process like? What is a day in your team like?
Our creative process was based on rapid prototyping. We started out with an initial vision of a game with a main character with an unreliable memory. From there on, the game took on a life of its own, constantly developing and changing based on user tests and creative input from the team.

How long have you been a game designer and what compelled you to the medium? What (other) media, books, films, music, theater, art, influenced the game's direction or influence your overall approach to design?

What have you gained from this process, in terms of learning and ideas, that you want to apply to your next game, either a sequel to this one, or an entirely new project?

Every Day The Same Dream

Company Description
Molleindustria (soft-industry) is a project of reappropriation of video games as tactical media. Since 2003 we make games dealing with various social issues such as labor, religion, gender and ecology.

Team Questionnaire
What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
The game is based on comic I made about 10 years ago. A major inspiration was my partner's monotonous job as cubicle worker.

Sometimes inspiration comes from a frustration with the limitations of what's already out there. Are/ were there any negative inspirations, things you were trying to work against, that drove your vision?
I'd have to spend a day only to list all the things "out there" I don't like.

What was your design/brainstorming process like? What is a day in your team like?
My brainstorming session are quick 'cause I usually agree with myself. I make some sketches (mostly list of features to be implemented) on pieces of paper that get lost or trashed. I don't work more than 20 minutes a day on games, most of the days I don't work at all. I enjoy many things in life. I like sleeping.

How long have you been a game designer and what compelled you to the medium? What (other) media, books, films, music, theater, art, influenced the game's direction or influence your overall approach to design?
I made my first game around '98, then I stopped and start again in 2003.
Everything listed except theater.

What have you gained from this process, in terms of learning and ideas, that you want to apply to your next game, either a sequel to this one, or an entirely new project?
With this specific project I learned that people like cheesy, simple, seemingly-universal, open to interpretation, emotional, winnable games filled with tropes they are already familiar with and packaged with pretty graphics and pretty music. I kinda knew that already.
I plan to do pretty much the opposite in the next projects.

Faraway
FATALE
Feelforit

Company Description
For 7 months between 2007-2008, developer Chris DeLeon created 219 experimental gameplay projects, 1 each day. After co-developing the 2008 iPhone hit Topple (published by ngmoco) with John Nesky, Chris went on to adapt several of his experimental projects to iPhone and iPad apps (Burnit, Tumult, feelforit). He then developed a series of games for publisher Sonic Boom (Alice in Bomberland, iZombie: Death March, Games that Blow), and other original designs about meaning (Transcend, LASEReflect).

Team Questionnaire
What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
I was chasing my tail in life, working very hard at doing something better, without questioning whether what I was working so hard to become better at was an activity that it was worthwhile to be better in.

Sometimes inspiration comes from a frustration with the limitations of what's already out there. Are/ were there any negative inspirations, things you were trying to work against, that drove your vision?
I am restless and frustrated by how long people spend working on videogames that are so much like what has already been made. In contrast to that, I focus on working extremely quickly, not dwindling too long on any one idea, and trying to devote time to those ideas which are the most original. I also find myself with the dominance of top-down design in the market, games which are being made "about" things in a very literal sense so that they are easier to market - I long for the arbitrary surrealism of bottom-up design that filled the videogame market in the 70's and 80's into the early 90's.

What was your design/brainstorming process like? What is a day in your team like?
I built feelforit in less than 6 hours. Mechanically, it began as an exploration of implementing my experimental gameplay project RoboDefuser (from the Interaction

Artist series) on iPhone, and it rapidly took on a life of its own as I worked with it. Every day of my life as a developer is different - which day would you like to know about?

How long have you been a game designer and what compelled you to the medium? What (other) media, books, films, music, theater, art, influenced the game's direction or influence your overall approach to design?
I have been developing videogames for 14 years. I grew up playing videogames - Bubble Bobble was and remains my favorite - and I initially was intrigued by the activity's potential as a technically challenging endeavor which has no right or best answer. Gradually it become my most comfortable form of communication, and so for the last 5 years or so I have been compelled to continue doing it as a means to get things off my chest; there are things I can say clearly through videogames that I cannot put into words.

Every book, film, song, play, painting, sculpture, videogame, and dance I have ever seen has influenced my approach to design.

What have you gained from this process, in terms of learning and ideas, that you want to apply to your next game, either a sequel to this one, or an entirely new project?
I wish to continue down this path of using videogame technologies to communicate ideas that are perhaps difficult, inefficient, or impossible to express through more conventional means.

Fractal

Company Description
Cipher Prime
Cipher Prime Studios, Inc., is a small independent studio based in Philadelphia. 2009 saw the release of their debut game Auditorium win many awards such as Most Creative Game of the Year Award by Mochi Media, 2nd Best Browser Game of All Time by Tech Crunch, and many other awards. They are committed to empowering other developers by sharing business knowledge and helping grow the independent developer community.
Dain Saint
Technical Director
Dain Saint is a programmer, designer, writer, and musician. As a time-traveling hobo, his existence is largely responsible for the devastating Chronal Wars of 3092.
William Stallwood
Creative Director
William Stallwood is an accomplished designer, developer, gamer, and juggler. His hotly anticipated self-help book entitled “The Power of Girth” will be availble this Winter.
Ben Ells
Power Intern
Ben Ells is a computer science intern from Deep River, Ontario. Like all Canadians, he enjoys coding, hiking, and cutting down trees with his chest hair.

Team Questionnaire

What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
Our inspiration was as follows:

André Michelle
André Michelle is a great guy and has inspired us in ways he cannot even begin to understand. His ToneMatrix was one of the major forces behind the music system we created for Fractal.

Frenzic
The Iconfactory really took out all the stops on Frenzic. The gameplay is amazing and just looks gorgeous. Frenzic is the perfect illustration of a small idea done amazingly well. It sets a new bar for production quality.

Lumines
There have been very few "new" puzzle games in a long time. However, Lumines has definitely crossed the river from a re-invented game all the way to a completely unique one. What really makes the game special to us is the great merger between gameplay and audio.

What was your design/brainstorming process like? What is a day in your team like?
We do a lot of paper prototyping and yelling at each other. We have an internal process called WhyPlayAgain, which we use to evaluate our games when we're in the prototyping stage all the way through the development process.

How long have you been a game designer and what compelled you to the medium? What (other) media, books, films, music, theater, art, influenced the game's direction or influence your overall approach to design?

Fractal is now our second title. Both our titles have taken around 1 year to complete. That puts us now around the 2.5 year mark. For us, making games is love! What other job can push your creativity and intelligence in so many different ways?

What have you gained from this process, in terms of learning and ideas, that you want to apply to your next game, either a sequel to this one, or an entirely new project?
We had the chance to find out all about downloadable distribution. Hopefully, this will really help us understand how to distribute games a bit better. Maybe we can finally solve our dilemma of wether or not we should make downloadable or online-playable-only games.

Groping in the Dark
Humans vs. Zombies

Company Description
Gnarwhal Studios is a small game design company focused on developing and organizing innovative social games. The core of Gnarwhal Studios is the "Humans vs. Zombies"

Crew, which has been working together to develop and organize games since meeting at Goucher College in 2005.
Although no longer at school and living in Baltimore, Chicago, Pittsburgh and New York, we continue to work on Humans vs Zombies collaborating remotely.

Team Questionnaire
What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
Gameplay design started with the classic game assassins and the desire to do something fun with NERF blasters.
The first few iterations of the game were spy themed, and although they were fun, they didn't provide the actiony gameplay we wanted. More importantly, because it was easy to be removed, much of the fun was spoiled by worrying about the consequences of losing. Wile watching Dawn of the Dead the idea of turning removed players into a second team came about, and the rest fell together from there

Sometimes inspiration comes from a frustration with the limitations of what's already out there. Are/ were there any negative inspirations, things you were trying to work against, that drove your vision?
In general, before we created the game, we felt that an average college day could be more fun. We saw potential in the close community that campus and dorm life create, and it was frustrating not to see it taken advantage of or even rightfully appreciated. In our attempt to create HvZ and take advantage of campus life, the limitations and frustrations grew considerably. With the first few games we had to organize a large event and have it fly under the radar of the school administration. We also had to be relatively sure that our players would not do anything illegal or cause harm to the rest of the campus. Our rules had to be responsible as well as fun. Even with all of the consideration we gave the first ruleset, our players found holes everywhere. It's easy to be frustrated, but looking back, patching these holes has led to solutions that have improved the game greatly.

What was your design/brainstorming process like? What is a day in your team like?
Because we work as a distributed team, most communication happens through email. We have a weekly phone call to go over open issues and figure out who's working on what, and we're half of the people who've had luck using google wave to hold agendas and documents. We all work hard to make sure everyone has enough input.

How long have you been a game designer and what compelled you to the medium? What (other) media, books, films, music, theater, art, influenced the game's direction or influence your overall approach to design?
We've always loved games, how agreeing to a set of rules can put everyone involved on equal footing. There is also something intimate about playing a game with someone, you're able to make assumptions about their motivations and interpret their actions on a pretty deep level. And acting according to seemingly arbitrary rules is astonishingly natural for people. That a kid can learn and intuitively understand freeze tag in a matter of seconds is fascinating. For us, game design is all about the power of rules. It's about figuring out why they're powerful, and how we can use rules to make people's lives

better. Right now, games are mostly about giving people the opportunity to play and have fun. We think that's super important by itself, but there's potential for so much more.

What have you gained from this process, in terms of learning and ideas, that you want to apply to your next game, either a sequel to this one, or an entirely new project?
In running HvZ the most valuable lessons we learn seem to always be about how players understand and react to the rules and limitations we present them with. We've learned that, especially for a game that aims to be accessible to anyone, keeping the rules as simple as possible is a must. Creating interesting gameplay that can be understood quickly is something we're always getting better at. And even the simplest rulesets can be exploited. Winning competitive games is all about exploiting the rules better than anyone else. There are problems, of course, when players put winning above having fun - it can ruin it for the rest of the players. It's taken us a while to learn to counteract that tendency, and to understand exactly how we influences the tone of the game. Every game of HvZ is different, and we learn something new every time, but at the end of the day the most important thing is that we have fun doing what we're doing, and that we share that fun with our players.

LIMBO

Company Description
Playdead was founded in 2006 by Arnt Jensen and Dino Patti. The sole focus of the company was the development of LIMBO. Gradually Arnt and Dino build the organisation and added key staff like Thomas Krog - responsible for the programming and animation of the boy, Jeppe Carlsen - lead gameplay designer, Martin Stig Andersen - composer and sound designer and Morten Bramsen - the one man art production army. Also on the core team are Kristian Kjems, lead programmer, Peter Buchardt, designer and scripter and Mads Wibroe, producer.

The team is situated in a loft in central Copenhagen.

Team Questionnaire
What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
Life

Miegakure

Company Description
Marc ten Bosch is an independent game developer based in San Francisco, CA.

Team Questionnaire
What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
As a programmer I knew that position in a game does not have to be limited to three coordinates, and collision detection often isn’t much harder to program in higher

dimensions. I started prototyping game ideas but only really made progress once I read Flatland by Edwin A. Abbott. It's a famous 1884 Novella that explains higher dimensions by analogy to the perspective of a two-dimensional character living in a two-dimensional flat plane (a piece of paper for example). A number of actions we three-dimensional beings take for granted feel like absolute magic to this two-dimensional character. For example, if there is a circular wall around an object in 2D, it is essentially closed-off, since to reach it one would have to leave the 2D plane. It is also impossible for an outsider to know what is inside. But us 3D beings can see the object from above, and also simply lift it off the ground to move it outside, essentially teleporting it. Now by analogy a four-dimensional being could perform many similar miracles to us living in only three-dimensions. My goal was then to make a game that would allow you to perform these "miracles."

Sometimes inspiration comes from a frustration with the limitations of what's already out there. Are/ were there any negative inspirations, things you were trying to work against, that drove your vision?
I'm trying to create a four dimensional world that is a natural extension of a realistic 3d universe. What would it feel like if there really was a fourth dimension that we can't see? Well, we would always see a 3d dimensional slice of that 4d world, just like Flatlanders only see a 2d slice of the 3d world they live in. I want that 3d slice to behave realistically; for example gravity should be present and work the same way, rocks and buildings need to look the same, etc...
That means I need to develop techniques that compute and display the 3d slice in real time. This is a fun constraint. How do you extend a typical 3d graphics pipeline to work in 4d instead?
Design-wise, a more realistic looking universe is both helpful and not. It offers cues to the players but it might be too complex to handle at first.

What was your design/brainstorming process like? What is a day in your team like?
I expected the concept of a fourth dimension to be naturally brain-teasing; it is just a matter of exposing it in interesting ways. I want to make each level show off some interesting aspect, rather than increasing its difficulty for arbitrary reasons like increasing the number of steps required to solve it. Actually, I try to simplify the levels as much as possible, keeping only the essentials, and leaving out elements that only add clutter and possible confusion.

How long have you been a game designer and what compelled you to the medium? What (other) media, books, films, music, theater, art, influenced the game's direction or influence your overall approach to design?
Games are a very powerful, barely explored medium. This fascinated me even at an early age.
I already talked about Flatland, but there are countless books on the subject, as well as paintings from the cubism and surrealism movements. When the idea of fourth dimension emerged, it captivated the imagination of the public and people tried to imagine potential consequences. My goal was then to give the player the ability to directly experience these consequences.

What have you gained from this process, in terms of learning and ideas, that you want to apply to your next game, either a sequel to this one, or an entirely new project?
I think I got a better sense of how to build puzzles that teach the player something about the game world. If the player can just solve a puzzle by accident, then they haven't actually learned anything, and the next puzzle potentially becomes too hard. Even if my next game is not a pure puzzle game, it will also contain a strong learning element

Monsters (Probably) Stole My Princess!

Company Description
Formed in 2005, Mediatonic is an independent developer focused on producing high quality original games on a variety of platforms including the web, social networks, iPhone, XBox and PSP.

Based in the west end of London, England, Mediatonic's team of 20 is dedicated to creating the best games they can, packing each release with passion, love and the utmost attention to detail.

Team Questionnaire
What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
Monsters is one of our first self-published games, Sony approached us about making a new game for their PSP minis platform and we thought it was a great opportunity to try a new platform.

We wanted to create a game that worked really well on the platform with short gameplay sessions and high replay value which was really the basis for our ideas.

With our games our focus is always on compelling story and narrative combined with tight, focused game-play – giving games a real heart and personality is something we really believe in. When we approach any new project that's what we concentrate on.

Sometimes inspiration comes from a frustration with the limitations of what's already out there. Are/ were there any negative inspirations, things you were trying to work against, that drove your vision?
Nothing in particular!

We're very internally focused during our development process so negative inspirations don't tend to drive us in this manner.

What was your design/brainstorming process like? What is a day in your team like?
We like to get as many people on the team involved in our design process as possible, we do this in a number of ways from mass-brainstorms to ideas pitches and game jams. In an

ideal situation we would start off with a huge number of ideas and then refine them down to the core essence of each concept over several rounds of discussions, meetings, etc. If we come up with an idea that we really like then we'll go on to create a small prototype so we can test it out before we put it into full production.

With Monsters we were focused on creating tight, focused experience for the new PSP minis platform. We wanted the game to be really easy to learn and pick-up and play but hard to master. Humour and story are really important for us in our games so we also knew that it needed to have a strong narrative and character. The idea of a vertical jumping game came first, when Jim (the games writer / producer) suggested the main theme everything fell into place.

How long have you been a game designer and what compelled you to the medium? What (other) media, books, films, music, theater, art, influenced the game's direction or influence your overall approach to design?
As a company, we've been around for 5 years. Everyone on the team is really passionate about making games and I think that really shines through in the games we make.

Our influences come from everywhere! We try to play a lot of different games in the office – primarily board games – the raw mechanics of board games are open and exposed compared to most video games so it's a great source of inspiration.

Movies, books, the internet memes and popular culture are also strong themes for us, in general we like to make games that are a little bit quirky or edgy and tap into a popular genre or theme.

What have you gained from this process, in terms of learning and ideas, that you want to apply to your next game, either a sequel to this one, or an entirely new project?
We learned a lot from making Monsters, in the past we've primarily made web games and this was our first console title, so there was a lot to learn on the way as we built the game. In addition Monsters was one of our first self-published original IP titles so we had to do a lot of work on the marketing and PR side which we don't generally do when we make our client games.

In general we had a great experience on the platform and we took all our learnings forward to our next PSP Minis game – 'Who's that flying!?'. It's an all new title which will be coming out very soon on the PSN.

Recurse

Company Description
24 Caret Games consists of two full-timers, Justin Wilder and Matt Gilgenbach, who handle the programming and design aspects of the game. We work with various contract artists.

Team Questionnaire

What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
We were inspired by how interesting reversed video looks. We thought a video game that is actually played while time is reversing would be visually compelling and unique.

Sometimes inspiration comes from a frustration with the limitations of what's already out there. Are/ were there any negative inspirations, things you were trying to work against, that drove your vision?
Since most mainstream game developers have hard ship dates and a huge monthly burn rate, they can't afford to experiment. As an indie developer, we are afforded the freedom to try new and creative things.

What was your design/brainstorming process like? What is a day in your team like?
We iterate, iterate, and iterate. We try a lot of ideas and see what fits and what doesn't. We constantly refine, tweak, and tune everything until it meets our high standards. Everything in Retro/Grade evolved from countless iterations, so every day, we try to improve our game with new graphics, gameplay features, musical improvements, pattern adjustments, etc, etc.

How long have you been a game designer and what compelled you to the medium? What (other) media, books, films, music, theater, art, influenced the game's direction or influence your overall approach to design?
I've been making games since I was 9 and discovered programming. Interactive entertainment is currently in its infancy as an artistic medium, so being a game developer is extremely exciting. Since the medium is not as well defined as traditional forms, we can constantly push the boundaries of what interactive entertainment can be and help shape its direction for years to come.

We have been influenced by a number of different media. The works of Kurt Vonnegut have been particularly inspiring. He can take a completely ridiculous situation and make it seem only natural. We are trying to make Retro/Grade's premise seem as natural as some of the crazy situations in his works.

We've also been inspired by both the music and simplicity of old school games. Our original music has a chip tune feel to it. Also, Retro/Grade would work just fine on an NES gamepad, which I think is a good test for accessibility

What have you gained from this process, in terms of learning and ideas, that you want to apply to your next game, either a sequel to this one, or an entirely new project?
We have learned too much to list, but here are a few things. We've gained a better understanding of our strengths as a team, so we can design our future projects around them. We learned how incredibly supportive the indie community is. When we started, we came from traditional retail game development, so we were unaware what a tightly knit community indie development was. Without the help of other indie developers,

Retro/Grade wouldn't be nearly as good. Since this is our first indie project, we've learned the ropes of running a game studio. When I started, I underestimated the amount of work that goes into a game besides actual development.

Retro/Grade

Company Description

Matt Parker is a new media artist and game designer. He is currently a resident researcher at New York University's Interactive Telecommunication Program. His work has been displayed at the SIGGRAPH Asia, the NY Hall of Science, and Sony Wonder Technology Lab. He and his team created the game Lucid, which was a finalist in Android's Developer Challenge 2, and his game Recurse is currently on display in the NYU Game Center Gallery.

Team Questionnaire

What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)

Recurse was intended to be installed in a public place as a game that would engage people in an area and entice passers-by to play. The goal was to make a game that would take people who had no expectation of encountering a game and turn them into such passionate players that they abandon all modesty.

Sometimes inspiration comes from a frustration with the limitations of what's already out there. Are/ were there any negative inspirations, things you were trying to work against, that drove your vision?

I wanted Recurse to have no input other than the camera. This created many challenges in terms of game play. How would players start a game? How would people enter their high scores? This ended up resulting in some of the features of the game that I think are most effective. The game is on a loop, so people are drawn in by the game screen and then see the high scores and instructions. The high scores are taken from screen grabs of players while in the midst of play, making for entertaining and embarrassing images of them marking their high scores.

What was your design/brainstorming process like? What is a day in your team like?

Generally, I either start with an idea for a mechanic that would be fun and try to build a quick test, or I find a real world activity I enjoy and try to think of how a game can be built around it.

How long have you been a game designer and what compelled you to the medium? What (other) media, books, films, music, theater, art, influenced the game's direction or influence your overall approach to design?

I've been building and designing games for 6 years. I think games are a unique medium where the creative process does not end with the designer. A game becomes a conversation between the designers and the players, where the player can be as

expressive as the designer. I would say new media art, such as the work of Danny Rozin, was a large inspiration for Recurse.

What have you gained from this process, in terms of learning and ideas, that you want to apply to your next game, either a sequel to this one, or an entirely new project?
I think the most important lesson I've learned from creating Recurse was that people enjoy moving and performing. It's a truly transformative experience when people let go of their normal inhibitions and just play.

Sixteen Tons

Company Description
Nathalie Pozzi, Architect
Eric Zimmerman, Eric Zimmerman

Team Questionnaire
What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
Designed specifically for a gallery, Sixteen Tons has to work in that context: seductive as an art object but also easy for visitors to learn how to play. Sixteen Tons needed to have bona fide cultural smarts as well as elegance and beauty in its game design.

The cultural content of the game references forced labor and debt bondage, which was the subject of the folk song Sixteen Tons. The gameplay evokes these themes through the heavy steel pieces and the fact that other players pay you to make your moves for them.

As the game is played and the dollars fly, Sixteen Tons transforms the supposedly neutral gallery space into an intense betting pit, giving the lie to the commercial nature of contemporary art.

Sometimes inspiration comes from a frustration with the limitations of what's already out there. Are/ were there any negative inspirations, things you were trying to work against, that drove your vision?
We wanted to make a game that truly did justice to the idea of making a game as art. Our intention was to tightly integrate innovative game design and player experience into a game that took on unusual cultural content. Hopefully Sixteen Tons works successfully on many levels, from material and aesthetic to narrative and cultural to social and strategic.

What was your design/brainstorming process like? What is a day in your team like?
We live together and when we're working on a project we tend to get obsessive. It's often hard to separate life and work, despite our best efforts.

We do a lot of prototyping and playtesting, which can be challenging with large-scale work. Luckily our friends don't seem to mind being constantly roped into playing our games in progress.

How long have you been a game designer and what compelled you to the medium? What (other) media, books, films, music, theater, art, influenced the game's direction or influence your overall approach to design?
Eric has made games his entire life and has worked in the industry for more than 16 years. Nathalie spent a childhood improvising spatial games in existing rooms and buildings. Her career includes many game-like projects that combine art and architecture.

Sixteen Tons is inspired on a material level by a mid-century color palette and industrial materials like steel and kraft paper. Its gameplay references classic bidding games like Poker and Cosmic Encounter.

What have you gained from this process, in terms of learning and ideas, that you want to apply to your next game, either a sequel to this one, or an entirely new project?
We continue to work together. Cross My Heart & Hope to Die - a game featuring a life-sized labyrinth - premiered at the Come Out & Play festival this summer. Our dream collaboration would be an entire building which is also a game.

Socks, Inc.

Company Description
The Socks, Inc. team is collaboration encompassing the core team as well as numerous game designers and storytellers, working together to create an ecosystem of sock tales. Heading up the project is Jim Babb. Jim is best known in the ARG community for his game Must Love Robots, a real-time immersive transmedia adventure, in which players helped a robot find love. Jim's background as a filmmaker, combined with his expertise in digital strategy and game psychology, provide him with the dynamic abilities needed to deliver transmedia tomfoolery.

Team Questionnaire

What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
The idea for Socks, Inc. was born out of a meditation on the English Muffin-like nooks and crannies created by stories as they move across platforms. These spaces are richly open for imagination and play. This, coupled with the natural desire to tell stories, inspired Socks, Inc.

Sometimes inspiration comes from a frustration with the limitations of what's already out there. Are/ were there any negative inspirations, things you were trying to work against, that drove your vision?

The idea for Socks, Inc. was born out of a meditation on the English Muffin-like nooks and crannies created by stories as they move across platforms. These spaces are richly open for imagination and play. This, coupled with the natural desire to tell stories, inspired Socks, Inc.

This talk from ARGfest 2010 elaborates on the theory behind Socks, Inc.
http://vimeo.com/13713185

What was your design/brainstorming process like? What is a day in your team like?
Smushing brains together until the good stuff comes out. We smush via video Skype using our sock puppet avatars.

How long have you been a game designer and what compelled you to the medium? What (other) media, books, films, music, theater, art, influenced the game's direction or influence your overall approach to design?
My passion for Avante-Garde films led me to explore of how people manipulate and experience stories. At some point, my experimental films became so alternative, they simply became games.

Solace

Company Description
One Man Down is a game team from DigiPen Institute of Technology. Consisting of three
sophomore Real Time Interactive Simulation students and one senior Fine Arts student, One Man Down is a team driven to provide a unique emotional experience for their players.

Team Questionnaire
What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
Our game originated with a single goal in mind: making a 2D game for our sophomore year at DigiPen. This is a rather broad assignment, considering how there are an endless number of 2D games that can be made. Since sophomore year was rumored to be the hardest in our degree, we wanted to create a game with a very simple concept that could be scaled according to our academic workload. A top down shooter seemed ideal. With our style of game chosen, we needed to determine our overall goal. Looking at our individual talents (and love for music) we declared our mission statement: to provide our players with an aesthetic experience.

During the first few months we tossed around prototype ideas, and ended up building your typical Bullet Hell type game, but with music tracks that would turn on or off depending on how well the player does. Ample play testing showed that people enjoyed the pretty bullets and the fast paced action, but unfortunately no one understood how the audio was affected by the gameplay. We had hit on something fun, but it didn't relate to our mission of "creating an experience".

Halfway through our first semester, tragedy struck when Robert's twin brother passed away. With such a small team, the emotional impact affected all of us. At the start of second semester Dan rewrote the audio engine, allowing the player have direct control over the music being played. Jordan then arranged a piano for our initial demo and we got chills. This was definitely the direction we needed to take the game. The drastic change inspired Jami to completely redo our visual design. Our player was no longer just a circle, but had wings, beautiful wings.

As we continued on this new route, constantly chasing after our initial ideal, it became apparent that our game needed further direction and refinement. While sitting in a lab, discussing how many levels we should have, the suggestion of each level being themed to one of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' Five Stages of Grief came up (inspired by recent events). This idea was met with opposition. We would have to redo all of the visuals - again. After much deliberation (and some Jamba Juice bribery) we were all convinced that this is where the game needed to go. And so it went. We ran in this direction, allowing our creativity to flourish as we expressed OUR representation of the Five Stages of Grief.

Sometimes inspiration comes from a frustration with the limitations of what's already out there. Are/ were there any negative inspirations, things you were trying to work against, that drove your vision?
Bullet Hell games are generally thought of as a rather niche genre for masochistic players. We were inspired by their beautiful bullet patterns, but wanted to make sure that the players could survive long enough to appreciate them. Countless hours of play testing helped us make a bullet hell game for the casual player. Some even call it a Bullet Heaven game. The biggest complement we continue to receive is players telling us that they loved our game, despite always having hated the genre.

What was your design/brainstorming process like? What is a day in your team like?
Since we agreed on a general direction for the game early on, most of us tended to have moments of inspiration pop up at random times after that. There were very few times where we had straight up brain storming sessions. We discovered that when we got together for the purpose of “being creative” the exact opposite is what happened. So instead, we had technical goals to achieve, and ideas tended to result from there.

Additionally, an advantage of working on a small team is that everyone can contribute to the game. Someone comes up with an idea. Everyone shoots it down. Two weeks later, we do the idea anyway and it turns out to be amazing. The team apologizes to each other, hugs, and gets Jamba Juice.

How long have you been a game designer and what compelled you to the medium? What (other) media, books, films, music, theater, art, influenced the game's direction or influence your overall approach to design?
Everyone is a game designer ever since they are born; finding enjoyment out of everything around them, making up games while playing on the jungle gym, or riding bikes and imagining you're a starfighter pilot (true story). As soon as you let your

imagination run rampant through the remote alleys of your mind for the sole purpose of having fun, you are a game designer.

Dan was personally inspired by his philosophy classes as well as his media theory and design courses. The original design for our audio engine came from William S. Bourrough's cut-up method. Design-wise, we took a lot of notes from Jenova Chen (fl0w, Flower). His idea of trying to provoke a unique emotional response from players drove a lot of the production behind Solace.

What have you gained from this process, in terms of learning and ideas, that you want to apply to your next game, either a sequel to this one, or an entirely new project?
Naturally with this being the first larger scale project for the programmers on the team, there was tons learned by way of technical design, implementation, and scalability. As far as design goes, we definitely learned the power of starting with a small idea and allowing it to bud into its own entity. Being open for iteration is essential; our game would be drastically different if we never took chances on new ideas. A lot of people tend to be afraid to admit that there might be a flaw in the gameplay direction of the project, because that usually means scrapping a lot of work. They would rather keep pressing forward to finish a mediocre product, than take a step back and potentially turn it into something amazing.

Spirits

Company Description
Mattias Ljungström has a long background in game development and worked as an Assistant Professor in Game Design at the University of Applied Science in Potsdam, Germany. Marek Plichta works as an independent game designer and illustrator in Berlin and teaches Interface Design at the Design School in Schwerin, Germany. Martin Straka is a studied musicologist and works as a freelance sound designer based in Karlsruhe, Germany. Andreas Zecher works as a web developer and game designer in Stockholm, Sweden.

Team Questionnaire
What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
Mattias has done research on the combination and relationship of game space and game rules. Thinking about digital play spaces was a strong inspiration for Spirits. (Obviously, that’s also were the name Spaces of Play comes from.) Another inspiration was allowing player freedom and creativity in the game. The player should reshape the game world while playing in order to reach the goal.

Marek loves to explore, also in the digital world. He wants to challenge players to constantly shift their way of thinking. Every situation in a game should add something new that has not been experienced before.

The first prototype of the game featured ants digging through the ground. We liked the game idea, but thought there might be some people who are afraid of insects and wouldn't want to touch them on their iPhone. Instead we came up with the idea of using ghost-like characters as the protagonists. The character design was still inspired by insects that mimic their environment for camouflage. With the game being set in a forest, we decided to give the spirits a leaf-like form.

We wanted the game to be more dynamic and the look of the spirits inspired us to try out the wind mechanic. We also wanted to create a calm and poetic game experience which would be challenging at the same time. The player should not be able to predict a solution by looking at a level, but instead try out different things to reach the level goal. Manipulating the wind turned out to be a great solution to this.

When composing the music for Spirits, Martin worked like a conductor of a classical orchestra setting specific parts of the gameplay to music. For the sound effects he assigned the „drummer" in his virtual orchestra so that every action in the game is made audible by the sound of a percussion instrument.

Sometimes inspiration comes from a frustration with the limitations of what's already out there. Are/ were there any negative inspirations, things you were trying to work against, that drove your vision?
It's not a coincidence that there is no violence in Spirits, but we would almost count this as a design goal more than a reaction to other games. Visually we probably have lots of anti-inspirations, but we just focused on creating something unique that we really like and that stands out. We were a bit frustrated both by games that take a long time to learn or never seem to end, but also by shorter games lacking depth. So we tried to make a game that is not too hard too learn and not too long, but still has a lot of depth.

What was your design/brainstorming process like? What is a day in your team like?
Mattias and Marek meet once a week where they discuss a certain aspect of the game and then build it. We try out how the feature works, sometimes test it with people who haven't played the game before and redesign it if necessary. We are also using paper prototypes to quickly try out ideas. Before deciding on the actions the spirits can do, we sketched out possible level designs first. This was sort of a dry test of how the game actions would interrelate to possible game spaces. Overall we tried to keep a very holistic approach to the game's design. We would think about how a feature would fit into the game and how everything would work together. We threw away things that were cool, but didn't fit in.

We are all working from home and in three different cities, so we use the group chat tool Campfire as a virtual office, where we quickly can discuss things. Campfire is pretty unobtrusive and works really well even if not everyone is online at the same time.

How long have you been a game designer and what compelled you to the medium? What (other) media, books, films, music, theater, art, influenced the game's direction or influence your overall approach to design?

Mattias made his first, humble game in 1984 in „Simon's Basic" on his C64. He finds it hard to trace down his direct game design influences for this game, but he finds inspiration in books, fine art and architecture. Books because one can create his own vision of what is going on, it's a very participatory medium. Architecture because he always looks for structures and spatial elements that could be used in games. And fine art because it often questions our reality, world view and existence.

Marek has been a professional game designer since he finished his studies in Interface Design in fall 2009. He was fascinated by games since he was a kid. By the time he finished high school though, he had the feeling that digital games were mostly evolving on a technical level but not regarding content or player experience. Being uninterested in drawing space barbarians and half naked women with laser-guns, he turned away from the plan to work in the game industry. But during his studies he started to see games as a medium of expression which offered new ways of sharing and exploring experiences, something he had always done using drawing and illustration. During the design process he tries to put himself into the player's shoes: „How could I make myself see the world differently?"

What have you gained from this process, in terms of learning and ideas, that you want to apply to your next game, either a sequel to this one, or an entirely new project?
We learned a lot about how to prioritize and focus on the things that will get the game done. We put a lot of attention into detail and want a polished game experience, so it's easy to get lost in that. How to effectively communicate ideas within the team is something else we learned along the way. We also learned much about player behavior and interaction through our gameplay testing, but we're sure we'll learn even more once the game is released.

Our next game will probably be very different so it's hard to say what we can apply from Spirits in terms of game design. What we learned is that exploring one idea thoroughly leads to a better game then taking a lot of ideas and wildly mixing them all together.

The Cat And The Coup

Company Description
The Cat and the Coup was developed by Peter Brinson and Kurosh ValaNejad at the University of Southern California. It was funded in part by USC's Advancing Scholarship for the Humanities and Social Sciences and the Game Innovation Lab. Students from the Animation and the Interactive Media Divisions of the School of Cinematic Arts also make up an essential part of the team.

Team Questionnaire
What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
We were primarily inspired by the game's subject, Mohammed Mossadegh. His story and his role in U.S. history is well documented, but little known to Americans. Most players are surprised to learn that Iran had a secular, western educated leader.

And considering the ongoing interest in serious games, we were motivated to make a game that demonstrates that there is nothing contradictory about making an important subject playful.
Finally, the art direction is influenced by the Iranian political satirist Ardeshir Mohasses, and is a celebration of the rich history of Persian miniatures.

Sometimes inspiration comes from a frustration with the limitations of what's already out there. Are/ were there any negative inspirations, things you were trying to work against, that drove your vision?
U.S. wars are well represented in game history. Popular game series such as Medal of Honor, Call of Duty, and Company of Heroes (to name a few) focus on reenacting American victories and reinforcing well-known lessons from history, such as the cruelty of Nazis, the heroism of American soldiers, and the sacrifices of war. The Cat and the Coup revisits the history of the U.S. warfare, but focuses on an aspect that has essentially no presence in game history - the covert military interventions carried out by the Central Intelligence Agency since World War II.
Although a comprehensive game about CIA foreign interventions could be very long indeed, The Cat and the Coup is specific. It is about a particularly interesting leader of the Middle East, Mohammed Mossadegh.

Tic-Tac-Totum

Company Description
My team is so awesomely mysterious, I don't even know who's on it yet. Are you? Think hard. If so, please let me know ASAP—I have some stuff for you to do. Thanks!

Team Questionnaire
What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
I lack the capacity for direct introspection, so instead here are seven quotes that repeatedly popped into my head while working on Tic-Tac-Totum:

1. “Modest needs, met lavishly.”

- Lawrence Weschler, Class Lecture

I took a Creative Non-Fiction class with Weschler at NYU, and this was his self-proclaimed motto. If I ever hear a better one, I imagine it will pop into my head instead.

2. “We know that when children program they come the closest to thinking about thinking. When they debug, they are learning about learning. This is key.”

- Nicholas Negroponte, Letter to India

This is from a recent letter Negroponte wrote about India's planned $35 tablet computer, but it’s a sentiment he’s expressed in slightly less elegant ways many times before.

Negroponte is absolutely right to imply that metacognition is the key educational skill of the 21st century, and that the act of being instrumentally creative—the process of taking a beautiful perfect thought from your mind, bringing it into the real world, watching it objectively flop in on itself like a collapsed souffle, fixing it, watching it objectively fail in an entirely different way, fixing it again, watching it now flop in the first way again but worse with a little of the second failure still mixed in for good measure, asking someone else's advice, having lunch and doing something else for a while, fixing it again, etc., etc.—is the best way to develop it. I would only point out that, if you want to get as close as you can to thinking about thinking and learning about learning, what better computer to have children program than one made of chips and dice and their own mind?

3. "Nearly all their [puzzle columns in popular newspapers] immense popularity is a tribute to the drawing power of rudimentary mathematics, and the better makers of puzzles, such as Dudeney or 'Caliban', use very little else. They know their business; what the public wants is a little intellectual 'kick', and nothing else has quite the kick of mathmatics."

- G. H. Hardy, "A Mathematician's Apology"

This is one of my favorite books to reread when I feel like I've lost my way. Someday, when I am also too old to be willing to look in mirrors, I hope to write an extensive game design apologia, or at the very least an overpriced gift book of ad hoc rationalizations.

4. "The compression of patterns into a single space is not a poetic and exotic thing, kept for special buildings which are works of art. It is the most ordinaray economy of space. It is quite possible that all the patterns for a house might, in some form, be present and overlapping in a simple one-room cabin."

- Christopher Alexander, "A Pattern Language"

This quote always makes me happy: it encourages me to believe that, with enough smart game designers taking a stab at it, there's no reason that the best minigames within Tic-Tac-Totum, despite their brief length and humble nature, can still manifest the sort of underlying complexity and depth exhibited by the best folk games. Even better, it makes me feel better about living in a Manhattan studio apartment where a significant chunk of the storage space is occupied by bags of chips and dice.

5. "Most situations—perhaps every situation for people who are practiced at this kind of game—provide some clue for coordinating behavior, some focal point for each person's expectation of what the other expects him to expect to be expected to do. Finding the key, or rather finding _a_ key—any key that is mutually recognized as the key becomes _the_ key—may depend on imagination more than logic..."

- Thomas Schelling, "The Strategy of Conflict"

Schelling is a fucking genius, and I could spend a happy decade just stealing game ideas from his books. This is the paragraph which originated the idea of the "Schelling Point"—an idea that powers, among other things, the power laws that drive the Internet. Why does everyone go to ebay and Facebook and Wikipedia? Because we know that everyone else does, and they know that we know that, and so on ad astra. Personally, I've got too many other games to make to devote all my time to this one—if Tic-Tac-Totum and its accompanying website gain some traction, I hope to hand off the reins to someone else within a year or two. But someone's got to get the katamari rolling.

6. “I once invested a dollar when Mantle raffled off a ham. I won, but there was no ham. That was one of the hazards of entering a game of chance, Mickey explained.”

- Jim Bouton, "Ball Four"

It’s always good to remember that, even when you’re not interested in reality, reality remains interested in you. And makes its own rules.

7. “Somehow, you always sell out for a cheap victory somewhere along the way.”

- Charles Schulz, Interview

Ever since I first read this quote, I’ve found myself able to relax a little.

Sometimes inspiration comes from a frustration with the limitations of what's already out there. Are/ were there any negative inspirations, things you were trying to work against, that drove your vision?
I'm more inspired by _not_ being frustrated with limitations, the self-consciously rhetorical implication of a history of making games with pretty much nothing but standard cards, dice, chips, coins, pen and paper, etc. I guess if there's something I was working against, it's the hegemony of More as the default solution to the inexorable homeostasis of dissatisfaction. As Richard Feynman said in a slightly different context, there's plenty of room at the bottom.

What was your design/brainstorming process like? What is a day in your team like?
Words fail me.

How long have you been a game designer and what compelled you to the medium? What (other) media, books, films, music, theater, art, influenced the game's direction or influence your overall approach to design?
1) I have designed/mutated games for as long as I can remember—birds gotta fly, fish gotta swim, revenants gotta reven, etc. I still have some of the dot-matrix printouts of coin/pen/paper games I created in elementary school and sold to my friends for a quarter or two, depending on complexity. They are okay but could use more playtesting.

Anyway, a couple of the many things I like about the medium of games are:

• As an introvert, I like that their interactive nature forces me to get outside myself and engage with my audience's POV in a way that other art forms tend not to. I've written plenty of songs that I liked, but I still have no idea whether anyone else "got them" or not. With games, if people don't get it, it usually becomes clear when they start heedlessly smashing their way through the ruleset like an angry Mar[ma]duk[e]. Playtesting advice teaches you how to listen to criticism, separate the wheat from the chaff, and roll your way between the twin gutters of pandering and onanism.

• Games teach empathy, even if only in the most instrumental way—if you can't step outside your own instinctive selfishness for long enough to at least figure out your opponent's goals and likely means of achieving them, you are screwed. Overcoming this does not make you a nice person, but it’s a start.

• Games (including, of course, sports) also serve well as ethical models—arguing over a whether someone was out or safe in an umpireless sandlot, Magic card rules arguments (especially before ubiquitous Internet), or sober playground disquisitions on whether Blue Shells/Designated Hitters rule are feasible fixes or clunky kludges is good practice for keeping your limbic system under control during more serious arguments over politics, ethics, metaphysics, etc. Anything that increases our vocabulary of communicable and chunkable concepts is a good thing, and games are where my prefrontal cortex seems to be its most naturally neologistic.

• Games are a great way for the socially awkward to interact with each other without either staring at a screen or tensing up at the inevitable lulls in conversation. (See "introvert" above.)

• Toys are fun—in fact, I'm pretty sure that's why they're called "toys". Games are just advice as to what to do with toys, which people can choose to follow or not follow as they see fit. This generally seems like an inherent good, and one that fits my diffidently avuncular temperament.

2) In terms of this game in particular, the influences are wide and obvious: the history of dice games, the history of board games, and the god whom walks among us known as Mr. Bob Barker.

In terms of my overall design approach, to paraphrase Sonny Sharrock, I essentially see myself as a cartoonist with a really fucked-up pen. I tend be most influenced by cartooning, hip-hop, and indie rock, as for me they exemplify the innumerable ideas residing within humble material conditions, to be seen or missed like creatures in a rainforest. Although my tastes as a consumer are eclectic, I tend to be most directly influenced towards minimalism verging on Platonism: Charles Schulz, Saul Steinberg, DJ Shadow, Rakim, The Magnetic Fields, and Spoon are probably the artists that I draw on the most for random inspiration.

Living in New York has also given me the opportunity to playtest my games with artists from other fields who have a sympathetically analytic bent. The viewpoints offered by

people like Art Spiegelman, Stephin Merritt, Bob Christgau, and Jason Shiga has been immensely helpful in improving my games and seeing useful parallels between different art forms.

Lastly, (closed) games are ultimately just fun isomorphs of mathematical algorithms. My relation to mathematicians and game theoreticians such as John Conway, Paul Erdos, John Von Neumann, Kurt Gödel, Thomas Schelling, etc. is essentially analogous to Liberace's relationship to Chopin, Beethoven, Liszt, Brahms, etc. Or, to quote Fozzie Bear in a slightly different context: "I'm not a real bear. But I _am_ a real puppet."

What have you gained from this process, in terms of learning and ideas, that you want to apply to your next game, either a sequel to this one, or an entirely new project?
The same lessons I learn from every game and keep not quite remembering: Somatic pleasure trumps cerebral pleasure, Meaning is use, Representation is the best mnemonic device, Most people believe in luck, Logic is symmetrical but our brains aren't. In this particular case, I guess the main lesson is that, if you're going to make an ostensibly user-generated-content-oriented site and not have it seem all Potemkininny, you might want to recruit other people straight from the get-go.

The Games of Nonchalance

Company Description
We are a hybrid arts consultancy in San Francisco with an expertise in Situational Design. Our mission is to provoke discovery through visceral experiences and pervasive play.

Team Questionnaire
What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)
Our primary creative influences include the artistic schools of Situationist International, and the Post-Graffiti Movement. We utilized the inventive, scrappy ethos of street artists to construct real world happenings, where players experience our game on a visceral level. We were also interested in taking the fantasy world of amusement parks, and offering those types of delightful interactions across the civic landscape in a way that opens participants to unexpected experiences and challenges them to look at their everyday surroundings in a new light.

Narratively, this tale has a lot to do with the counter-cultural history of San Francisco, in all it's manifestations throughout the decades. Technically, we were inspired by retro / low-tech / antiquated forms of technology, so that's why things like VHS cassettes and low powered FM radio transmissions are used as media delivery tools throughout the Games of Nonchalance. These older, analog technologies also require a different type of interaction than most players encounter in their daily, primarily digital, lives. Often they require a more social, hands-on approach that plays out at slower pace, encouraging participants to re-consider the narrative content in new ways.

Sometimes inspiration comes from a frustration with the limitations of what's already out there. Are/ were there any negative inspirations, things you were trying to work against, that drove your vision?
Too many "social interactions" happen on a monitor, so we were motivated to create real world based experiences as the platform for our game. We also wanted to challenge the limitations of sanctioned uses for both public and private spaces, and invite audiences to re-examine those spaces.

Another inspiration came from visiting amusement parks and wishing that those experiences were available in a form without the clearly defined boundaries of where the experience stopped and started. We wanted to see this level of interactive play spill over into spaces where we might start playing before we understood the rules of the game or were able to see its edges.

What was your design/brainstorming process like? What is a day in your team like?
On a new projects we start from the physical and social dimensions of the space as it already exists. We look for interesting opportunities that we can re-frame through our project, places that suggest a different narrative than their initial face value. This approach also includes historical research to complement our multiple site visits. We really try to understand a place for what is currently present before we frame our project.

After this initial phase of research is complete, we brainstorm interactions and ideas for new ways that the space can be used / navigated. After isolating our favorites from this list, we look at the story that they tell when put together. We ask ourselves what elements we can add or subtract to strengthen or further develop this emerging narrative.

After this blue-sky phase, we look at what will actually 'work' from both a physical site perspective and from a player perspective. A large consideration at this point is the relative timeframe of the project: how long does each element need to last and when does it need to be ready for launch? We also start any conversations with local collaborators (retailers, property managers, performers, etc.) with whom we would like to work. At this point the project really takes shape, and new discoveries emerge as we actually put our ideas in physical form.

How long have you been a game designer and what compelled you to the medium? What (other) media, books, films, music, theater, art, influenced the game's direction or influence your overall approach to design?
We do not consider ourselves "game designers". We are storytellers from a less ordinary world with a focus on 'play' and 'adventure' in real space. Our "game" includes books, film, live performance and theater, automated environments, sculpture, radio, micro-installations, and group dynamics and we certainly look to the wide range of artists and designers working in these media. Other specific influences that we haven't mentioned above include discovery museums (like the Exploratorium in San Francisco) that blend art and science principles with an emphasis on experiential learning. Some of our favorite

authors, working in more traditional linear narrative prose, are those in genre of Magical Realism (spanning the globe from Gabriel Garcia Marquez to Toni Morrison to Haruki Murakami). We draw a huge inspiration from the way that their writing blends the 'real' and the 'fantastic' -- presenting them together in such a way that, from the characters perspective, there is no distinction between the two.

What have you gained from this process, in terms of learning and ideas, that you want to apply to your next game, either a sequel to this one, or an entirely new project?
We have learned so much about the way that people process information, and how to thoroughly beta-test for the best results. We have gained a much clearer understanding of the many tools that participants use to understand everything from the parameters of the game to way-finding and how to better communicate these ideas employing multiple senses and learning styles.

The Gentlemen of the South Sandwiche Islands
TRAUMA
VVVVVV

Company Description
I'm Terry Cavanagh, a full time indie game developer from Ireland. In the last couple of years I've made dozens of freeware games including Don't Look Back, Pathways and Judith; VVVVVV was my first shareware game. I'm currently living in Cambridge, England, where I help organise local game jams and our weekly indie developer meetup, the Official Cambridge Friendship Club.

Magnus Pålsson is a Swedish chiptune composer known online as "Souleye". I got in touch with him after hearing his fantastic song "Retrotune" in Charlie Kinght's shooter Space Phallus. He was involved in the game from very early in development.

Dr. Bennett Foddy is a Senior Research Fellow at Oxford University, and the creator of the popular flash games QWOP and Evacuation. Bennett started an 80 page thread on TIGSource where he critiques game names. After playing an early prototype of VVVVVV, he offered to name every room in it.

Sam and Pauli are the YouTube Let's Play'ers DeceasedCrab and Madumluna. They got in touch just before the first beta, and I asked them to help me test it. They ended up recording their first playthroughs of the game for me and narrating their experience with it, which was incredibly helpful when it came to fine tuning the game for the final version.

Team Questionnaire
What inspired you to make your game? (creatively, artistically, narratively, technically...)

VVVVVV was initially supposed to be a short, throwaway project, something I hadn't planned to spend more than a few weeks putting together. In a lot of ways, it's very different from other games I was making in 2009.

The game was inspired by its constraints: I had a completed engine, with a complete set of mechanics after about three weeks of development. I loved challenging myself to see how many interesting things I could do with such a small set of mechanics; I was surprised at how there was to explore. I enjoyed the process of creating the game so much that I just kept working on it.

The game's visual aesthetics are very strongly inspired by the games I played growing up on the Commodore 64; games like Monty on the Run, Head over Heels, the Dizzy series, among others.