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Dani Bunten Berry:
Lifetime Achievement Award (1998)

This is a transcript of a presentation delivered on 7 May 1998, at an awards ceremony hosted by the Computer Game Developers Association, held aboard the [Queen Mary](#) in Long Beach, California.

Dani died of smoking-induced lung cancer on 3 July, less than two months after receiving the award.

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I try to have as little as possible to do with awards. So far I'm doing pretty well; nobody's offered me any lately. However, tonight the organizers of this Conference have asked me to present the first of a distinguished category of award that I am delighted to support.
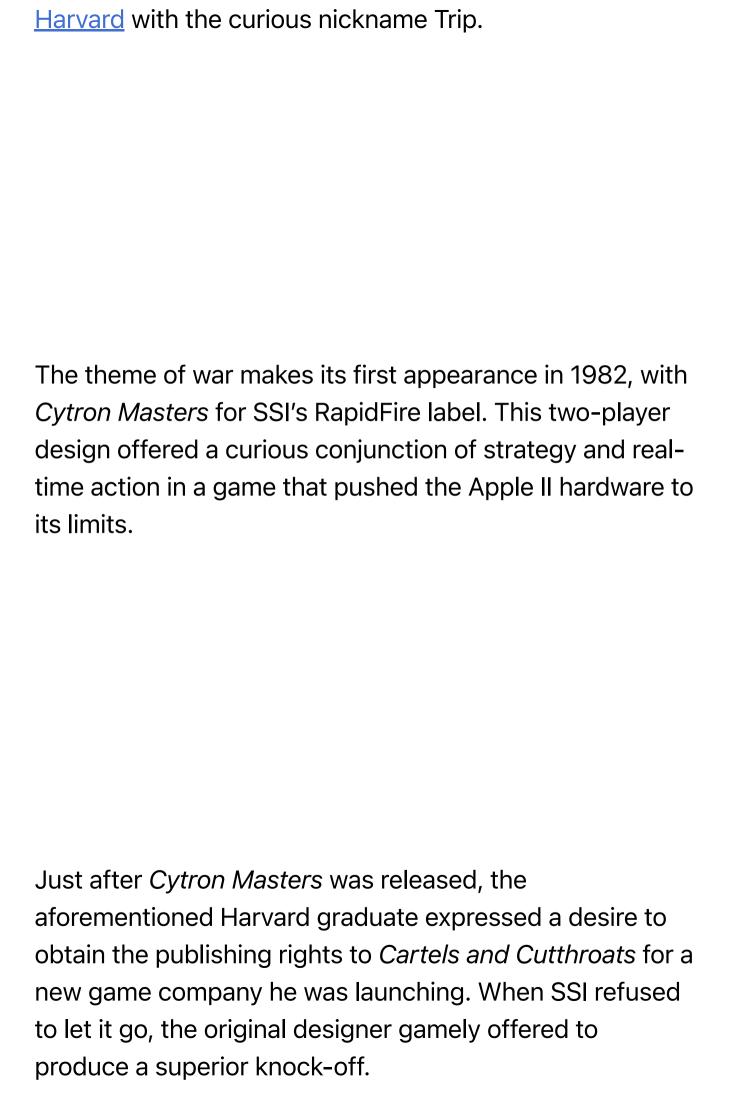
The CGDA's Lifetime Achievement Award honors those individuals whose careers have had a demonstrably profound and lasting impact on computer gaming, both as

an commercial industry and as an art form.

It's fair to characterize tonight's honoree as an old-timer. Her first published title, *Wheeler Dealers*, was released back in 1978. This Apple II cassette was rather unusual. It came in a cardboard box instead of a ziplock bag. It sold for thirty-five bucks at a time when most games sold for ten or fifteen. Strangest of all, it wasn't designed for a single user. An array of push-buttons included in the box allowed up to four people to join in a real-time stock market simulation.

Wheeler Dealers sold only around 50 copies But it marked the beginning of a preoccupation with a design issue 20 years ahead of its time: multiplayer gaming.

Computer Quarterback, published in 1979, was originally designed to support exactly two players. It was ported to Apple BASIC from a mini-computer simulation written in Fortran. In an amusing reversal of recent industry practice, it was the *single*-player mode that was reluctantly added at the last minute at the request of the publisher, [Strategic Simulations](#).

"1981 saw the release of a second Apple title for SSI, *Cartels and Cutthroats*. An economic simulation designed for up to six simultaneous players, the box copy promised that the game was "so much fun you may overlook its use as a superb educational tool." One of the early admirers of *Cartels and Cutthroats* was a game theorist fresh out of

[Harvard](#) with the curious nickname Trip.

The theme of war makes its first appearance in 1982, with *Cytron Masters* for SSI's RapidFire label. This two-player design offered a curious conjunction of strategy and real-time action in a game that pushed the Apple II hardware to its limits.

Just after *Cytron Masters* was released, the aforementioned Harvard graduate expressed a desire to obtain the publishing rights to *Cartels and Cutthroats* for a new game company he was launching. When SSI refused to let it go, the original designer gamely offered to produce a superior knock-off.

Nine months later, [Electronic Arts](#) bamboozled the industry with a flattering new vision of what computer gaming was all about. Their slick and glamorous promotional campaign turned publishers into record labels, developers into movie studios, and game designers into rock stars. For a few short months, the prospect of fame, wealth and a matching wardrobe inspired game designers to new heights of personal ambition and creativity; an ideal atmosphere for creating a masterpiece.

M.U.L.E. was multiplayer from the ground up. It used the joystick array of the Atari 800 to connect four people in an unprecedented example of computer-moderated parlor gaming. By combining the resource management of

Cartels and Cutthroats, the auctioneering of *Wheeler Dealers* and the futuristic setting of *Cytron Masters*, *M.U.L.E.* sustained an exquisite play balance of teamwork and rivalry, bitter cooperation and delicious treachery. Although the original version sold only 30,000 copies, *M.U.L.E.* developed a base of passionate fans that remains active even today. It is required study for anyone interested in the design of multiplayer computer games.

M.U.L.E. was the first title attributed to Ozark Softscape, an Arkansas design collective marketed by Electronic Arts as a hip back-country boutique, computer gaming's answer to the [Allman Brothers](). Expectations were high after the induction of *M.U.L.E.* into *Computer Gaming World's* Hall of Fame. Astonishingly, their next EA release actually lived up to the hype.

Seven Cities of Gold was a solid commercial triumph. It brought together real-time action, strategy and exploration in a historical adventure with a genuine smudge of educational value. In fact, the much-despised term 'edutainment' was originally coined to describe this game. With sales of 150,000 copies across several platforms and numerous design awards, *Seven Cities* catapulted Ozark into the ranks of the elite developers; and nobody complained about the fact that it was designed for only a single player.

Ozark wanted to follow up *Seven Cities* with a computerized edition of one of the classic Avalon Hill board games, but Electronic Arts had other ideas. Some

executive arm-twisting and a substantial cash bribe resulted in a sequel, *Heart of Africa* for the Commodore 64, which continued the formula of action and strategy, exploration and history. It achieved less than half the sales of its predecessor.

A few years later, another designer tried his hand at that old Avalon Hill game, *Civilization*.

Heart Of Africa was to be the last product Ozark ever designed for a single user. In fact, their next design took the multiplayer option to a provocative new extreme. Not only did *Robot Rascals* have no single-player mode, it actually required the participation of no less than four human players. Daringly billed as a "family game," this peculiar fusion of turn-based action and strategy, augmented by a deck of real playing cards, received a polite but puzzled critical reception, and was carefully ignored by everybody else.

A final title for Electronic Arts broke even more new ground. 1988's *Modem Wars* was the first game released by a major publisher to support modem-to-modem multiplay. A futuristic synthesis of toy soldiering and football, *Modem Wars* was a technical *tour de force*, offering a surprisingly brisk interactive experience within the severe constraints of 1200-baud modems. Many of the latency and synchronization challenges faced by today's network game engineers were solved first by *Modem Wars*.

[Microprose](#) took up the cause of modem-based wargaming in a big way with the 1990 release, *Command HQ,* which boasted a simple, clean user interface that

made historical strategy more accessible than ever, and racked up impressive sales.

Its successor, 1992's *Global Conquest*, was the first four-player network game released by a major publisher. Its absorbing mix of real-time action and resource development was the design prototype for an entire generation of combat simulations, including *Dune II*, *Warcraft* and *Command and Conquer*.

The constellation of classic games you see here is just one dimension of a professional career in which the joy of communication has played a central role. Her long list of publishing credits includes columns and articles for virtually all of the leading industry journals. She delivered the first keynote address at the legendary 1988 Game Developer's Conference in Milpitas, and hosted a series of highly-regarded lectures, seminars and roundtables at most of the subsequent conferences.

In an industry where many celebrity designers have become remote and unapproachable, she has never failed to remain near the center of social activities, freely sharing her company and expertise with the shakers and the shaken.

In the early 90s, this beer-guzzling Arkansas code wrangler undertook a transformation which dramatically exemplified the gamelike nature of social reality. The broadened perspective gained by her friends and business associates as a result of this transformation has been one of her most precious contributions to the industry.

It is no exaggeration to characterize tonight's honoree as the world's foremost authority on multiplayer computer games. Nobody has worked harder to demonstrate how technology can be used to realize one of the noblest of human endeavors, bringing people together.

Historians of electronic gaming will find in these eleven boxes the prototypes of the defining art form of the 21st century.

On behalf of the community of game developers and game players worldwide, it is my great pleasure to present this Lifetime Achievement Award to one of the pioneers of interactive entertainment, my courageous teacher and fascinating friend, Dani Bunten Berry.

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