

ridden to full power by a part ng, a Saturday, over on came early one

that Australia's most celebrated Place, across George Street time princess: She-Ra. site, above the tarted-up ban the sixth floor of the historica and into a 1920s building of the bottom of Sydney's Martin micorns live - their lair on Cut to now – tumbling to

roof (for bank employees to shooting range on the building's entering the three-storey set-up welcoming blue-tabric couc eisure) prompts a smirk on sellets wedged into the folds of tractise their aim in hours of foam, orange-tipped Nerf gur nnovation and Science. That there was once a

play, of creativity. speaks of an office of youthful It's a theme that continues

The presence of these 'bullet

the unicorns we've come here mix of objets; random, except selection of battered couches the central, green-felt table company employees, includin 12 bobble-headed dolls sitting surrounded by a standard The latter's as lifted from nodding interpretations of key oride of place are miniature ning pong table and poolroom mented by a random

has 'Smplity' written large across at an airy main hub smacked by natural light. A nearby white wal Into another lift - the place

an adjective and correctly spelt uniform that doesn't go far approach of the workers in view we'd use to describe the sartoria most sporting an unofficial It's a word (albeit twisted into



passionate, all-night gamers. a scent often found clinging to machines, lightly spiced with with the tinny heat of the many The air they work in is heavy defining 'Windowlicker' video. arse-shaking of Aphex Twin's cool, memorable limo and minus the niche sense of Think Richard D James,

Australia's greatest ever start-up each sliding towards their forties our unicorns – two Sydneysiders who late last year became It's at this point we first sight

now tech folklore. and Scott Farquhar founded mates Mike Cannon-Brookes success story with a \$10,000 credit card is Atlassian. That they did so It was in 2002 that university

> Bey cotton Ditch Expanses Sizif yanger, 5700, by Saturdays NYC, black cotton Yuln jeans, \$380, Acres Studies, logop, Mike's enn. Bowery Open Mouth' movement. \$160, by Saturdays NYC, navy jersey T-shirt, \$390, by Giorgie Mike (right) wears of we wook angora felt cost, \$2995, by Bally Scott (left) wears black cotton jeans, \$250, by APC

FOUNDERS MI HE
CANNON-BROOKES
AND SCOTT
FARQUHAR MET AT
UNDERSTE

be here a while. Skyscanner... seriously, we could Media, Audi, CISCO, LinkedIn that NASA – Twitter, Tesla, customers, from companies including Facebook, NASA - yes, by more than 50,000 global of software products is used \$7bn and the company's suite eBay, Amazon, Cochlear, Virgin Atlassian is valued at more than are worth a billion-plus each; Today, those same two guys

site, one in Austin, Texas, namely a lavish, San Francisco spread across global offices -Sydney with a few hundred 1500 employees work out of London and smaller spaces in The bulk of the company's

Manila and Amsterdam. In tech terms, Mike and Scott

of this homegrown outht. the achievement and positioning Uber, Airbnb, Snapchat, SpaceX there's now a growing list of more than a desirable tech myth, at US\$1bn or more. Once little as a unicorn – a start-up valued well, Atlassian, is what's known company that, again, highlights largely disruptive global players -

Coca-Cola Amatil. 'Iwiggy' Forrest's Fortescue and Resorts and which easily eclipses more than James Packer's Crown footing to Qantas, worth a slice that rests on an equal financial the fact they've built a business and Farquhar runs well beyond the tale of Cannon-Brookes For all the money and success

achieved so much, from The simple fact they've

> and attractive tech player. as a viable, globally recognised the country to reposition itself discussion about what can be Australia, adds to a larger about the glaring necessity for achieved by the local sector;

inspirational, but very important these two unassuming men have what Atlassian represents, what like 'innovation' and 'ideas', Canberra, is littered with words may not have done with a fork in by what Peta and Tony may or chat that, when not dominated managed to achieve, is not only In a time of federal political



of New South Wales. Murray Rose, a former Sydney rollcall features Packers James accruing Qantas frequent flyer He'd return four times a year, continual travel (father, Michael Lord Mayor and Chief Justice and Kerry, David Gyngell and School, where the old boys Sydney's prestigious Cranbrook settling into high school at points like few his age, eventually boarding school in England. commute for the youngster lengthy and lofty primary school nere in the '80s), meant a Cannon-Brookes, set up Citibanl water-lapped east. His parents' aware of money in Sydney's ike Cannon-Brookes grew up

the top of his year group. a couple of seasons of rugby (he played fullback) sitting alongside harbourside education "broad" egular academic placing towards Cannon-Brookes labels his

academic but I wasn't particularly "I'd have been regarded as

removed, he's sporting a pair white T-shirt and jeans. Shoes low, a soft, bearded jawline, called Mike: baseball cap slung Brookes, a tall man who looks a hard studier," says Cannonlike you'd imagine a techje

a problem. though I would pick subjects that I enjoyed, so it wasn't such natural ability, I did pretty well by," he continues, "and with of kaleidoscopic socks, "I'd do just enough to get

He opted for two-unit maths

to write a bit of it back then. a "thing off life as an architect. proposed future path – eyeing prize "a few times". It suited his the school's technical drawing and computing and claimed interestingly, poetry was also enjoyed it more than literature "Yeah - I liked it, and used

shouldn't accommodate four (the nondescript glass office that reall: next to his billionaire buddy in a sneakers, mind). He's perched navy T-shirt and jeans (maroon face of Farquhar, himself in across the lightly stubbled, lithe make up all sorts of bullshit..." more about meaning so you could there were fewer words and it wa The recollection sets a smile

continued to dominate a subject It was geeky (his words) and he Agricultural public high school at the selective James Ruse technology prize before landing saw him claim a year-6 An early interest in computing Sydney's working-class west ability to bullshit." lobs Farquhar. "That and an The 36-year-old came from

the attention span of a gnat," she's just doodling?). eagerly taking notes – or maybe other, beyond GQ, a PR woman

"You liked it 'cause you have

Schools Certificate (HSC). ahead of completing the Higher placement, on scholarship, Wales, Each had been offered at the University of New South intormation technology (BLT) together – freshmen in business and Cannon-Brookes first came It was in 1998 that Farquhar

physics and chemistry. list inclusive of maths, English,

enjoyed computers.. says Cannon-Brookes was a \$15,000-a-year course] because it half computer science and economics and half commerce, finance And the course was left turn, but I'd always 'I guess it was a bit of a "I certainly did [the

it at the time." of about 40 scholarship students be perfect for what we ended tech stuff. So it turned out to up doing - not that we knew BIT meant a tight-knit class

wasn't instantaneous. bond of camaraderie. But it riendships under a faternal aware of each other, forming all of whom quickly became

the recollection delivered with impression of his co-founder, says Farquhar of his first "Mike was pretentious,"

a grin and locked gaze. For Cannon-Brookes, opportunity to meet people university was fun, and an further afield from his clique)

were from the east and, yeah, Rose Bay school set. with people that you wouldn't liked uni for the fact we mixed "All my friends growing up

the relative freedom of areas, with different attitudes." As it does for the majority,

engaged in work placements.

By now, Farquhar was

"MIKE AND SCOTT

FOR THE ACTIVE

together people from different have otherwise - it brought

THE COMPANY
NAME IS TAKEN
FROM THE GREEK
TITAN ATLAS A lot. meant drinking. tertiary education

OF ENDURANCE AND ASTRONOMY WHO WAS CONDEMNED TO HOLD UP THE SKY FOR FTERNITY. "You'd rock up to the bottle cruise," offers student association years and tenure as his formative party Farquhar, was the harbour president. eminiscing about "The highlight

shop and say, 'I need \$3000 wasn't all that sanitary particular punch that perhaps ust ridiculous and involved a worth of alcohol please.' It was

of cask wine, four litres of orange of boozy ingredients - four litres ottle of rum. uice, a bottle of vodka and a He rattles off a brutal measure

52 in my last." rather than too much punch, saw from a HD in semester one to from core course study, "I went slip as his attention was diverted Cannon-Brookes' grade average Tinkering with side projects,

school couldn't simply replace scholarship student. a contentious move given the Shortly after, he dropped out

sorts of random things' came 'shop' work doing "all to blink.com in the US. Then the technical business, The Bookmark Box, which was sold He went on to co-found

doing boring things be working with average people horrible building on Bathurst when I graduate - I don't want to Fuck, I just don't want to do this get better results. And I was like, and then I'd do it another and how to do something one way, badly. I remember they'd tell me was a developer] and it was going "I was at Sydney Water, in thi

> us just that - they'd be like, 'And at the local Thai place was \$6. skewers and satay sauce and rice live on. I remember three chicken

"And they never wanted to sell

Yeah, they were tight times. here's my \$6. In 50-cent coins. for main?' 'No, that's it', and

Atlassian started out providing

a week, so that left \$175 a week to 300 bucks a week. Rent was \$125 [across] the first two years - that's

"We paid ourselves \$15,000

classmates – curious to learn if fired off an email to a few former new start-up. anyone wanted to join him on a In 2001, Cannon-Brookes

more interesting simple note. 'Atlassian is far 'Bored of studying,' read the

> city Glebe, behind the thendeveloped by others. Based in a customer service on products

popular Valhalla Cinema, house shared terrace in Sydney's inner

it was the worst ever time to be showed initial interest, Farquhai tech industry deflated after the considering such a move, the actually pursued it, even though collectively moonwalking away dotcom crash; financial backers While several BIT students

confirm, didn't run beyond

Their initial ambition, they

desire to eventually make

weren't working.

through debugging or why things call at 2/3/4am, talking the client sober of the pair would take the aid in the early hours. The most by overseas phone calls seeking parties were often interrupted

together and for themselves. from the sector. Atlassian forged ahead. Still, the pair wanted to work

where many of their former

"They were the biggest

poverty. And chicken skewers the experience was lined with positive and had fun, though Silium Valley. The pair remained amaganed - especially if you watch The early days were as

> and were able to make the same program... so if we did something recruiters out of the scholarship BIT classmates ended up. owned by IBM) at the time starting salary at PwC (now \$49,500 a year – the graduate



work around an organisation." and into yours, or sharing getting things out of my head the bottlenecks are really about smarter or faster, actually all by teams. People aren't getting how complicated the world is single person, but if you look at could accomplish a lot as a now]... things are accomplished over the individual - is key. "Go back 200 years and you That the focus is to assist teams

well-supported by Confluence project-tracking tool, JIRA, Atlassian's first product, the productivity and communication achieve increased, streamlined

such as Bamboo, Clover, and HipChat, alongside others remains the flagship. Today it's

SECTOR. THEIR SUCCESS,

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YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS

PLAY IN THE LOCAL TECH

**LEADERSHIP ROLE THEY** 

suite of products that aim to and project managers with a

Targeting fellow developers

MALCOLM TURNBULL

ACROSS THE COUNTRY."

to help people be more creative. products, packaged or sold online

"We make and sell software Crucible, FishEye and Bitbucket



make them more productive." whole bunch of different ways to local teams; helping them in a to finance teams to HR teams to from technical teams to IT teams domains and different teams we're in a whole lot of different says Cannon-Brookes. "And

the same page and not duplicating information or getting people on

> classmate Niki Scevak, himself ups eyeing off global greatness. founded which funds local start-Ventures, a company he coa tech success with Blackbird about doing things differently a point furthered by former The company's success is also

products, not just one." customers giving them money, says Scevak, "but it was really [Atlassian] producing multiple this longer term view of down at every stage and [formed information - they doubled their reaction to that positive well - straightaway they had "The first product sold really

product and sticking to it. "They concentrating on a single traditional tech wisdom about went against the grain of standard It's an approach that bucks

rewrote the sales book. advice early on," adds Scevak What's more, they also

the budget. is, and magically, the price of then he'll ask what the budget what the price of the software is with some guy in a suit. You ask of golf or have a steak dinner the software matches what's in price – you have to play a round software you never know the "Usually with enterprise

let's make it really low friction, person who uses the software. and accessible and let's sell to the let's be transparent, make it cheap "Mike and Scott said screw it,

Continued on p183. critical to their success," absolutely ground-breaking and sound like a big thing, but it was "I realise that this mightn't

Milke (laft) wears alive woo lingora felt cost, \$295, by Bally, grey cotton 'Dreb Explanation Start' jumper, \$170, by Saturdays NYC, black cotton 'Van' jeens, \$380, Acre Studies, Scott wears black by Saturdays NYC; navy jersey T-shirt, \$390, by Giorgio Armoni; Hugo Boss; black catton 'Bow Open Mouth' sweatshirt, \$1 indigo cotton "Ferr Standard Jeans, \$250, by APC Greening Garin nd black jacket, \$1299, by



## THE BILLIONAIRE BOYS, CONTINUED FROM P155.





t's December 10 of last year and Cannon-Brookes and Farquhar are riding on a sack of mixed emotion. They're also riding in the back of a stretch limo, belting towards downtown Manhattan after opening on the NASDAQ.

They're content. If tired. After ringing the bell and watching the stock launch, the day was spent in back-to-back media interviews – interest coming from here and abroad.

Lunch meant a 10-minute break and whatever pizza slice was available from a joint across the road.

Still, it was a good day – Cannon-Brookes and Farquhar confirmed billionaires and Atlassian ending the day's trade with a cool \$7.87bn evaluation, well up on forecast.

That said, there remains one small, niggling issue. For all its tacky fluoro lighting and various TV screens, the ridiculous car is lacking one key ingredient – booze.

On sighting a pokey liquor store, Farquhar, familiar with the grog runs of his uni days, instructs the driver to pull over. He heads from the car and asks the bloke behind the counter for his most expensive bottle of champagne. On eyeing it, he decides to ask for the most expensive bottle that's actually cold – a \$30 bottle of non-vintage muck, it turns out.

Consumed, it's on to dinner with family and the dozen staff – most instant millionaires – they flew in for the float.

"Look, the IPO [Initial Public Offering] hasn't changed anything about the company, though it's obviously big for some employees; those people who've been here 10 years realised some of the value they've created," offers Cannon-Brookes, adding that he likes reading various staff letters he's received, thanking he and Farquhar for allowing them to pay off the mortgage or "have my wife stop work and pursue her art, that kind of thing".

While the pair's sloppy attire may, in fact, sport internal labels from Ermenegildo Zegna and Hugo Boss, and Cannon-Brookes last year dropped \$12m on a sprawling, inner-Sydney pile, what they've been working towards has never been about money. And it never will be.

Most billionaires love the sound of their own voice, openly rate their opinion and eagerly splash about in the personal praise thrown their way. This is not Cannon-Brookes and Farquhar. Instead, they enjoy reinvesting in the sector - tens of millions between them - raising their families (three young kids apiece), donating money and time to charitable pursuits and hanging with other two-dude start-ups trying to get ahead. This is the world in which they're comfortable - it's why you don't know their story, and why, today, they remain curious, cautious even, about allowing the 'outside' world in.

"They may live in nice houses and have some nice things, but not to the extent of others," says Scevak. "They've always lived non-billionaire lives – wealth hasn't affected them. And their real ambition is to build Australia's largest company, to build one of the world's greatest companies – something that survives them and which is around for hundreds of years. It's why they've turned down lots of acquisition offers."

The word 'inspiration' is also bandied about quite a bit.

"I certainly think that's the best thing they've done – to create this inspiring story for others, to raise their ambition, to try different things, to forge their own paths, all with the knowledge that it's completely possible to be done from Australia, because these other two blokes have done it. Also, start-up communities are a function of how many lighthouse companies there are – because lighthouses like Atlassian provide the inspiration for more people to start companies like it; provide the journey that hundreds or thousands of employees go on."

It's sentiment backed by the Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull telling GQ: "Mike and Scott should also be applauded for the active leadership role they play in the local tech sector. Their success, combined with their passion and advocacy for Australian start-ups, is helping to inspire young entrepreneurs across the country."

Beyond influence and inspiration sits investment – central to the PM's desire to drive a new techno-train that reroutes current economic maps, pulling away from 'traditional' sectors in favour of a viable future market that's only going to continue to grow.

"I think people still think of technology as this little corner of the world of nerds in a backroom tapping away," offers Scevak. "Whereas Apple's now the world's largest company."

In fact, by market share, three of the top five and four of the top 10 global companies are in technology.

"As a nation we have to be involved in that," states Cannon-Brookes. "Think about it – the majority of jobs are going to be involved in some form of technology in 20-25 years time, and if we're not creating that technology in Australia, or creating some portion of it, we're going to be buying it from overseas and it'll have a bad flow-on effects for our economy. We have to innovate and be creative."

So Australia as a recognised, future tech hub is feasible?

"There are huge opportunities for tech, biotech, infotech – though I'm not sure which one will work out," says Farquhar. "But one of the biggest problems we have at the moment is that we generate a lot of companies but then they gravitate overseas for a variety of factors - some we can fix easily, some will take time."

Both Turnbull and Cannon-Brookes believe Australia has the resources, the latter adding that they now need to be given greater opportunity.

"Talent-wise we have great universities, we're just not quite orienting them – encouraging people and showing where they can make business in this space. If those two start coming together, there's no reason we shouldn't be able to have a vibrant technology industry – and I suppose that's what the goal is."

Conversation meanders into whether the pair ever steps back, to look upon what they've been able to achieve.

"Sometimes we don't realise just how far we've come, because your journey is different to everyone's perception of that journey," says Cannon-Brookes. He details a "company picnic" for family and friends – that is, a 3000-strong gathering filling a festival site in Sydney's Centennial Park, stacked with rides and amusements that showed up Luna Park for its age.

"You look around and are like, 'Fuck, there's a lot of people here.' I mean, day-to-day it doesn't feel like there's a thousand people in this building; day-to-day you just do what you do and we get bigger and better and are trying to constantly improve. But there are moments where it strikes you a little bit more."

To look down on what they've done also pushes towards another word regularly offered in relation to the pair – Gods. That these unassuming men were able to turn \$10,000 into \$8bn, in little over a decade, is indeed a parable of arguably celestial proportions (dare we suggest close to a man who can turn water to wine), though how does such sit with them?

"If you believe that stuff, it gets in the way of making a difference," says Farquhar. "If you think you've already made a difference then you may as well pack up and go home. Personally, I think we're just getting started."