THE THRILLVILLE QUARTERLY

Pondering about LucasArts past, present and future.

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Those Fools Who Could Not Rest

Write on this issue:

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"We are those fools who could not rest
In the dull earth we left behind,
But burned with passion for the West,
And drank strange frenzy from its wind.
The world where small men live at ease
Fades from our unregretful eyes,
And blind across uncharted seas
We stagger on our enterprise."

— Unknown author, *The Ship of Fools*, 1577(?).

Masthead

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Letter From The Editor

The Empire Strikes Back

by SANTIAGO MÉNDEZ

Dear reader,

What is a quarterly, exactly? If you were to measure it by the time it took us to release a new issue, you can say that a quarterly is equal to nearly two LucasArts presidencies. That would be correct; not only the refreshing era of Darrell Rodriguez has ended, but also the quiet presidency of his successor, Paul Meegan. These events are at the same time surprising and expected, and it is that unusual contradiction which seems to accurately define the latest years of LucasArts. Not much is known of what Paul Meegan did, yet under his wing *Star Wars 1313* was recently announced. A "third person action adventure game", a Star Wars game that intends to be more mature in tone than most of their other recent games. On my first draft of this letter, I wrote the following: "A truly mature and adult oriented Star Wars universe would be an interesting thing to explore, even if it departs a bit from the innocence of the original movies. If we are going to be presented with a truly gritty, lawless subterranean world that level 1313 of Coruscant is supposed to be, then I would expect to see allusions to drugs, slavery, corruption, abuse, gambling and what not, blurring the line between right and wrong (taking it beyond the good natured bad guy, Han Solo type of character), presenting a multi layered and complex reality. Hopefully, *Star Wars 1313* will explore some of these notions in an interesting way. But in all honesty, I doubt it." However, shortly after I wrote that, some concept art images were released that truly surprised and impressed me. This leads me to believe that the things this game needs are being seriously considered, and that can only be a good thing.

And that's not the only news on the Lucas front: wonderful film producer Kathleen Kennedy is now the co-chair of LucasFilm as George transitions to his retirement. Mrs. Kennedy is one very talented producer, whose work I've been admiring for years. She produced most of the Spielberg films, as well as many other well known titles throughout a lengthy career. In her extremely competent hands, the overall future for the company seems bright, and hopefully she will have a say on who the next LucasArts president will be.

There is something even more important that has happened ever since our first issue came out. Something historic. As many of you know, Double Fine (the company of former LucasArts luminary Tim Schafer) created a Kickstarter early this year, to raise funds for an adventure game (of which I'm a proud backer). It should be noted that in a move that could be defined as treacherous and amazing in equal measure, it was later revealed that the game Ron Gilbert had been designing at Double Fine (*The Cave*, an upcoming game published by SEGA), was also an adventure game (albeit not a 2D point-and-click one). The Double Fine Kickstarter collected the second (recently beaten by the amazingly successful OUYA) largest amount of money (over 3 million dollars), the largest quantity of backers (over 87 thousand), and it holds the record for getting to a million dollars in the shortest amount of time (23 hours). And yet these are not the most important accomplishments of that endeavor. Not only did it validate the people's interest in adventure games to the public eye, but most significantly it sparked a wave of change. Following on the success of Tim Schafer's campaign, other well known game designers have used Kickstarter in an attempt to finance projects that no publisher would have funded. Al Lowe, creator of *Leisure Suit Larry*, raised 650 thousand dollars to remake the original game and release it in a variety of platforms. Brian Fargo, producer of memorable RPGs like *Fallout* (1 and 2) and *Baldur's Gate*, amassed 2.9 million dollars for a sequel to his 1988 RPG, *Wasteland*. Jane Jensen, creator of the Gabriel Knight games and *King's Quest VI*, got over 430 thousand dollars to make a new adventure game called *Moebius* under her new studio, Pinkerton Road, dedicated to adventure games. These are only some of the biggest examples, but there are many more (including several more adventure games, and even the Idle Thumbs podcast). Change is in the air, and the democratization of production is a reality that's here to stay.

Let us now talk about what's important, shall we? The magnificent issue of **The Thrillville Quarterly** that is about to explode in your face in all its greatness. The first thing you'll have noticed is the delightful cover (which, in true adventure game fashion, features an easter egg), illustrated by the wonderful artist Jón Kristinsson. He has a terrific Tumblr full of endearing adventure game tributes. As for the articles available for your reading pleasure, we have the first of a two-part story (featuring some poor quickly-made doodles by yours truly, meant to make the story, in comparison, even better) by the talented writer (and also our copy editor) Jan Jacob Mekes. In it, you'll find an intriguing adventure featuring two suspiciously familiar characters and a plethora of references. From our vault of unreleased material, we finally reveal a very peculiar interview with Dave Grossman, which Jan conducted in 2010. We also have a new contributor, the astute Daniel Wishart, who writes about the Double Fine Adventure and Tim Schafer. Gabriel Schenk takes the opportunity to reflect about imagination and *Escape from Monkey Island*. As for myself, I chose to ponder on the mystery that is Paul Meegan's presidency. That comprises our entire team of contributors, of which every single one is located in a different country (Denmark, Netherlands, United States, England and Argentina), making us a true multi-cultural publication. May this issue make you choke with joy and satisfaction, and stimulate your brain. Be sure to follow us on Twitter or Facebook to be occasionally reminded of our existence. I'll be seeing you, dear reader, before the end of the year with the next issue, this time respecting the prevalent definition of "quarterly".

Yours faithfully,

— The Editor

The Adventures of Ronald and Timothy,

as documented by Timothy Gilbert, Esq.

by JAN JACOB MEKES

Part I

It was a fine morning upon which I decided to pay my good friend, Dr. Ronald Schafer, a visit. We had oft discussed the possibility of working together again, but practical impediments always got in the way. Today however, I resolved once and for all to stop worrying about future or past. I put on my best spats and went on my way to Dr. Schafer's mansion.

It was a strange place, but I had grown fond of it in the many years our friendship had accumulated. The fountains in particular were off-putting to most visitors, but I saw a certain charm in them. While the vogue at the time was to litter one's grounds with statues of naked ladies holding pitchers from which flowed an abundance of clear liquid, Ronald—we are on first-name terms—had boldly elected to have grotesque depictions of tentacles decorate his garden. What is more, they spewed forth not water, but a gruel that looked like toxic sludge.

I could go on describing the estate, with its kumquat trees, the statue depicting a drunken sailor holding a spyglass, and countless other extraordinary features, but I do not wish to bore you with such trifles. Therefore, let me get straight to the point where Dr. Ronald Schafer and myself, Timothy Gilbert, sat down with a glass of the finest whisky and ditto cigarillos, to a most interesting conversation that would forever alter the course that the vessels of our lives would take.

"I say, Timothy, how good of you to come. And not just that, it is of a coincidence most extraordinary too! Why, if I were not a man of science, I would have had great trouble believing it to be mere coincidence."

"How so?" I inquired, utterly discombobulated at this most unusual remark by which my good friend welcomed me.

"I have been thinking about your proposal of working together again. At first it seemed impractical and even ill-advised. We are both men who have achieved success on our own merits, and to throw that independence away seemed, to me at least, folly. But then I started thinking… what if… what if we could change the world?"

At this, I merely looked at him. He must have spotted the look of incredulity on my face, for he continued thus:

"Yes, my dear Timothy, I am talking about changing the world as we know it. Fondly do I remember the times when we sat down together, making great works of art, unleashing the very fire of Prometheus on the unsuspecting souls inhabiting this mortal coil. We can do that again, Timothy, but we must look beyond the capabilities of mere humans. Long did I pour over the many pages contained in the local library—"

"The one with the picturesque lighthouse model, and the loudmouthed bespectacled lady who is always telling others to shut up?"

"The same. And finally, my search ended when I came upon this book."

Here my friend produced a leather tome with strange markings on its front cover.

"What is it?" I said, shaking my head, for I knew not how else to react to such an unusual piece of literature, if literature it was.

"This, Timothy, will change our lives, and not only ours, but those of everyone who walks upon the face of the earth."

"But what is it?"

"I am struggling to find words to describe it."

"But what is it?"

"It is a book of necromancy."

"My God!"

"Rest assured, I am still merely Dr. Ronald Schafer, a mere mortal. But with this, we can at least assure that our names will never be forgotten. We shall make history, Timothy, my friend."

I knew the request that was burning on my lips was nothing less than profane, but still I could not contain my excitement, and asked my friend to share with me the book's contents.

"I could go on and on about my findings," said he, "but for brevity's sake I shall distil them down to the one major insight I have gleaned, which will aid us tremendously in resuming our business of producing great works of interactive art. Do you know of the alchemists?"

"I beg your pardon? The alchemists? Do you propose to turn mundane materials into gold?"

My friend shook his head. "No, you have it the other way around. What I propose to do is to take gold and turn that into something even more magnificent."

I could not contain my laughter. "My dear fellow, I hope you have not gone completely mad. What is it that you intend to do?"

"Simple. Once we have amassed enough gold, we can use it to follow the formula propounded within the pages of this book."

"But how do we get an amount of gold, such an amount as would surely be quite astronomical, and dare I say humongous, in the face of the task you see before the two of us?"

"That question," said the doctor, tapping the book he was still holding as if it were his firstborn, "is also answered within these very pages. All the steps to resurrect our ancient profession are mentioned herein. We shall have to gather something of the thread, something of the head, something of the body, and something of the dead."

"My friend, you speak in riddles."

"Not at all. It is all quite clearly explained by the author of this book, whose name I sadly have not been able to uncover. For now, let us concentrate on the first task. By 'something of the thread', the author means we should come into contact with likeminded individuals, who, although not as artistically or intellectually gifted as ourselves, have nonetheless the best interest of our particular genre of interactive amusement in mind, and, moreover, oodles of gold."

"You are proposing that we rob them?"

"Naturally I am not. I say we should ask them to give it to us."

"Ha, ha! Ho, ho! Heh, heh!" I said, and stood up to feel my friend's forehead, for at this point I truly believe he had been seized by a terrible fever. He, however, assured me this was not the case, and calmly continued his explanation.

"We shan't ask them to give us their precious gold for naught, of course. According to this book, we need merely visit a public house, a place where all the people who matter gather themselves; the equivalent of the Forum Romanum or the Areopagus in ancient times."

“But what, pray, do we have to offer in return?”
“The promise of a grand work of art.”
I was well and truly perturbed, but at the same time, a glimmer of elation sprang up in my heart. What if my friend was right? That the promise of residing in the company of Apollo himself would be reason enough for people to part with their monies? I dared not dwell on that thought, but my heart had started beating faster, and in the end it was I who proposed, nay, demanded that Ronald accompany me to Mucks’ Bar, the public house where all the beau monde of the interactive literature world, both proponents and critics, gathered together to drink and make merry.

“Hullo, Mucks,” said my friend as we entered the bar.
We were greeted at first not by the proprietor himself, but by a small dog, that came running up to us and started scratching at our pantaloons.
“Here, Spiffy,” the innkeeper, a jolly man with a handlebar moustache, called to the dog. “Now, how may I serve you fine gentlemen?” he asked, before polishing the glass eye that had popped out of its socket.
“We—” began my friend, but he was cut short when Mucks actually saw who it was that addressed him.
“Great Scott, why, if it isn’t Dr. Schafer! To what do we owe this great pleasure?”
All at once, the bar went silent. The pianola stopped playing, the murmur of the patrons died down, even the alcohol fumes seemed to dissipate.
“Why if it isn’t that good for nothing quack Ronald Schafer!”
“Here we go,” my friend said to me from between clenched teeth at the corner of his mouth. Then, addressing the base fellow who had spoken to him in such a vulgar manner, he said: “Frederick Anboy… of all the lowdown guests I would expect to find in such an establishment as this… no offense meant, Mucks.”
“None taken,” said the bartender, who was hoping for a nice fight. There would be none of that, however. My friend, with admirable composedness of manner, explained the purpose of his visit. At first, the assembled company reacted rather sceptically, but after Ronald produced from his pocket some pieces of pasteboard with artistic imagery related to his planned project, the worst critics held their mouths shut. When next he showed a flip book with a very amusing animated sequence showing a pirate getting such a scare that his wig jumped into the air, even Mr F. Anboy held his tongue.
When Ronald then began telling of his plan to offer everyone present a far, far greater beauty in return for a sum of money, little or small, the bar was enraptured, and soon all the patrons were lavishing us with their riches.
As we walked home, I commented on the singular occurrence at the public house, but my friend seemed not at all surprised.
“Timothy,” he said, “I told you we could make this happen, but you would not believe me. Surely now your scepticism has subsided?”
“Yes, a thousand times yes! That book of yours must truly be magic. Now,” I said hurriedly, “tell me again, what is the next step we must take?”
“We must go to the Lucas Institute of Beaux Arts, where we shall enter into the deepest vaults to reclaim what is ours.”
“You mean… the very documents that detail how to make almost superhuman creations? The Sacred Codex Used to Make Magic?”
“That is the collection of scrolls I am speaking of.”
“But they are guarded by an impenetrable fortress! And some say they do not even exist.”
“Nevertheless, they do. They are in actual fact the ‘something of the body’ the book speaks of. To get to them, we must first solve a collection of puzzles.”
“Something of the head?”
“Something of the head. Come, my friend, let us go.”

The fuzzy light of the street lanterns, shining through the evening mist, bathed the river banks in a soft, almost unearthly glow. A feeling of Unheimlichkeit came over me, but my friend seemed unaffected. He strode resolutely towards the Lucas Institute of Beaux Arts, but suddenly halted when he spotted a guard outside the entrance, which was no more than a wooden door in an inconspicuous brick wall.
“Who goes there?” the moustachioed guard demanded.
My friend, thinking quickly, responded: “Nobody but us two fine upstanding gentlemen, who wish to seek shelter for the night within the catacombs of your reputable institute.”
“If you are such fine upstanding gentlemen, then where, pray, are your moustaches?”
“He has us there, Ronald.”
“Not quite, my friend. Follow me.”
He led me to an old shed we had passed by earlier.
“Here lies the solution to our problem, friend Timothy.”
“But how? Is there perchance a secret entrance here to the Lucas Institute?”
The doctor shook his head and pointed to a hole in the door of the shed. The look in my eyes conveyed that not only did I not catch his drift, but I was sailing on another ocean of understanding altogether.
“Look, Timothy, look! Do you not see the black hairs? When we passed here earlier, I spotted a black cat who was apparently running away from some fight or a situation akin to it. Upon entering the hole, some hairs were caught on the wood. Surely we could use that to decorate our upper lips to the guard’s satisfaction.”
“But, how on earth do we affix those hairs to our faces?”
Hereupon, Ronald produced from his waistcoat pocket a small bottle of maple syrup.
“By George,” said I, “what in the Devil…”
“I must confess, my love of pancakes is such that I always carry a little bottle of maple syrup, so that I am never unprepared when this treat is served me unexpectedly. But in this case of emergency, we shall use it not to adorn a meal, but as a substitute for glue.” Having thus pasted the black cat hairs on our upper lips, we had little difficulty gaining entrance to the catacombs underneath the Lucas Institute for Beaux Arts. What we found there defies description, but for clarity’s sake I shall make a brief attempt at relating the contents of the subterranean antechamber. Lit only by a few torches, it was hard to see anything in the dark tunnels. What we could see lying about were a rope, two revolvers, a pocket knife such as recently came into common use among Swiss officers, and a bag of wooden nickels.
“Ah,” said Ronald, “it seems advisable to pick up anything that may be of aid to us later on. I shall take the rope and the knife, while each of us will grab hold of one revolver.”
Several minutes later, we had traversed a number of rooms without incident, when we came upon a locked door. Next to it was a machine that purported to vend tin containers with a corrosive liquid under the name of “Grog”, in return for a wooden nickel, which had to be inserted into a slot designated for the purpose. There was nothing for it but to go all the way back to pick up the bag of wooden nickels.
When we finally returned, quite out of breath, I ventured to insert a wooden nickel into the device. A can was shot from the machine into a hole in the wall opposite, out of our reach. My friend had the presence of mind to remove his tailcoat, which he hung upon a hook that was suspended above the hole into which the grog had disappeared. When next I inserted another nickel, Ronald’s coat caught the

can in flight; however, much to our dismay the can fell not onto the floor but into a drain, again out of reach.
By now we were beginning to despair. I laid my hat upside down over the drain hole so as to catch the next can. This appeared to do the trick, however, as soon as the can had entered my hat, a rat appeared and scurried off with it, can and all. At this point I took my revolver, and not knowing what to do, I first shot at the machine, and then at the lock. To my amazement, the shot completely destroyed the lock and the door opened.
"Sometimes the most obvious solution is the one that works best," my friend said.
"Yes," I agreed, "perhaps our minds have been twisted from designing all those puzzles and riddles. We are not thinking straight."
Ronald nodded. "But let us not give up now. We are so close to our target, I can almost smell it!"
In the next room however, our progress was halted by a ferocious-looking animal. It was a hell-hound, a dog with three heads, its eyes glowing red.
"You shall not pass," it said, "unless you can guess my name."
At this, I smiled. "Why, it is a good thing I was a valedictorian at grammar school. Roman and Greek mythology hold no secrets for me. Your name, infernal dog, must be 'Cerberus'."
The hound shook its three heads. "Sometimes it is wise to think backwards," it said.
"Ah... in that case your name cannot be anything else but 'Surebrec'."
Again though, the dog shook its three heads, prompting me to give up. My friend was scribbling furiously on a piece of paper however, as if decoding a cipher. I dared not interrupt him, partly for fear of yet another disappointment. After what seemed like an hour, although it could not have been more than a couple of minutes, Ronald announced he was ready to try the riddle, and spoke the hell-hound's name.
"Xviyvifh," he said.
I must admit at this point I thought that he had been struck with apoplexy, or perhaps the dog had bit him and he had contracted rabies. However, to my astonishment the dog began to dissolve, and disappeared into thin air.
"My friend," said I, "I do not know what just happened, but you are truly a brilliant man! How did you work out the beast's name?"
"I shall explain it all in detail to you later on, when we are at home enjoying a nice cup of cocoa in front of the fire, but now let us press on and finish our quest to find the sacred scrolls!"
I agreed and followed him into what would be the last chamber separating us from the Sacred Codex Used to Make Magic. In this room, we found nothing but a door in the far wall, and a skeleton lying next to it. Upon opening the door, we found it led to an empty space in the wall, a dead end. Likely the skeleton belonged to an adventurer that had died exploring these catacombs. So this would be our fate... "Despair not, friend Timothy! Let us search this skeleton for a key."
Ronald, being exceedingly familiar with human anatomy, began to search the bones. Now it was my time to display my clever wits.
"Ronald! I think I have it. What we need is not just any key... but a skeleton key. If we assume that this door is not merely a door that leads to an empty space, but the lid of a coffin or sarcophagus, it follows logically that it wants filling. I propose we pick up the skeleton and insert it into the empty space."
After we did this, it turned out my estimation was indeed correct. As soon as we closed the lid, the coffin began to slide away, revealing an aperture leading to the treasure chamber where the Sacred Codex Used to Make Magic was kept. The events that befell us upon taking the scrolls and invoking its magic are too elaborate to pen down here. For that reason I shall relate them in a second part of this extraordinary history, which you will undoubtedly be able to read in the next issue of this excellent periodical. ●

Changing Marketplace Realities

by DANIEL WISHART

In 2004 LucasArts chose to not-publish an adventure game called *Freelance Police*. It seemed like a strange decision at the time, because the game was nearing completion and had already cost the company several million dollars to produce. Why would LucasArts write off that loss when they could release the game and try to claw something back?
The reason can be summed up by the famously depressing phrase "Marketplace Realities". This is the only reason LucasArts ever gave, and even then it seemed like a weirdly passive-aggressive thing to say. It meant Adventure Games don't make money. Nobody plays them. I looked at the sprawling fan community centred on Mixnmojo and thought: What about us? Doesn't our money count?
The thing is, it wasn't even about the game itself. Freelance Police was hugely significant to fans as a symbol – however good or bad the final product would be was irrelevant, because as long as it existed at all then there was hope. It was a statement from LucasArts that said "we are still in the adventure game business", which meant more than any one game ever could. It was a statement of intent and of desire that called upon the wealth of heritage that we had all fallen in love with. To take that away wasn't cancelling a game, it was cancelling the entire company – hell, the entire genre of adventure gaming.
We had been waiting for this moment to arrive for years, while all along kindling a stupid hope that it never would. That's why I knew the Save Sam & Max petition would never change anything. We all knew it – but we signed it anyway, just to see, and by the end there were thirty-five thousand names on the thing. Needless to say, if every single one of them had sent LucasArts forty bucks, they would not have broken even on the game. It was just the last dying breath of optimism.
But then, eight years later, Tim Schafer decided to make a petition of his own. There was an interesting difference to it, like the *Freelance Police* scenario turned on its head: where before we signed up to try and save a game that already existed, here we would be paying to play a game that hadn't even been made yet. He was proposing a change to the standard model of video game development, crowdfunded through Kickstarter. So, obviously, I was incredibly sceptical.
For about a second, anyway.
See, the thing was, I wasn't online when the news broke. By the time I heard about it, it was already eight hours old. And it had already reached its funding target. In eight hours. Or, to put it another way, Tim Schafer had asked for some cash to make a game, and then received something like fifty thousand dollars per hour from a bunch of strangers. Clearly, Marketplace Realities had changed. And now that the game has been funded, with a total of over three million dollars, Tim Schafer and Double Fine are in a unique position. They have, in equal part, freedom and responsibility. Under the standard model of video games, if you make a bad product it will review badly and sell badly. If you make

a good product it will review well, and it might sell well. Here, under the Kickstarter model, the sales are irrelevant. Even if this is the worst game of all time, it will still break even. No studio will collapse, no employees made redundant. There is safety in this model.
But does that afford unlimited freedom? Where is the line between what the creator wants to create and what the fans feel they are owed? The last straight-up adventure game that Schafer made was in 1998, and was full of the classic trappings of the genre – dialogue trees, inventory puzzles, the abstract logic born of finite interactive choices. But adventure games have taken leaps into the unknown since then – it has been argued that games as diverse as *LA Noire* and *Professor Layton* are adventure games, and even the more traditionally styled Telltale fare has evolved into something bold and experimental in *The Walking Dead* series. So if Double Fine stray too far from the established path, is that okay? Or have people paid for an old style 2D SCUMM game?

As far as Schafer fans go, I'm pretty critical. I tend to think of his career as having two parts – the collaborative games, and the solo games. Of these I think the collaborations show far better game design, but the solo efforts tell the stronger stories – and there's no real reason why that should be the case. *Day of the Tentacle* is arguably the most brilliant piece of game design within the confined structure of a 1990s adventure game, yet the lauded *Grim Fandango* includes several puzzles of such obscure difficulty that they're genuinely hard to defend. In effect, the puzzles feel tacked-on to the story to make it more challenging, whereas everything you do in *Monkey Island* or *Day of the Tentacle* actually feels like it's a part of the narrative and gives the puzzles a sense of context[1]. The nuances that started to appear in *Full Throttle*, and carried into later games – wider worlds, a greater sense of pace – are there in order to facilitate a narrative. People will complain that *Throttle* is too easy, and *Fandango* is too hard, but they're strangely appropriate levels of difficulty – one is a game about a freewheeling biker, and the other about a guy who is stuck in limbo. These things feed into the experience on a subconscious level, more than anything. And the only thing anyone remembers about *Grim Fandango* is that the story is superb.

Is it possible for Tim Schafer to tell another great story like that, while at the same time fixing these minor mechanical hindrances that keep his games from mainstream success? Or will the financial security of the project inadvertently make the game less accessible – a love letter to his most hardened of fans, but nothing more? What gives me optimism is that Schafer is an admitted fan of Amanita Design's *Machinarium*. The game is a classic point and click, but it's lean and stripped of unnecessary clutter – there are no verbs and no dialogue, yet it draws you into its world with its charming style, oozing atmosphere, involving you in a narrative that is quietly emotional and uniquely charming. It is in direct opposition to the verbose *Grim Fandango*, and just as excellent. It tells a powerful story without cutscenes and exposition, while still remaining – crucially – fun to play. It's the evolution of LucasArts principles taken to the limit; the bare minimum required for it to be a challenging game and also a compelling narrative.
So perhaps the Double Fine adventure might rely less on traditional game story telling techniques, but not at the expense of the player. And I do think that there will be fewer compromises with this game than with previous Schafer titles – less publisher-related concessions to market research, a stronger emphasis on design quirks. All of those wild ideas that have come along over the years but have been thrown out due to the unyielding need for financial success. This might be a chance for a mass market adventure game that takes risks, and that hasn't happened since Roberta Williams retired[2].

If there's one thing I've learned from adventure games it's that setting doesn't matter. A game about a dufus who wants to be a pirate is just as funny as a game about a genetically engineered tentacle, and a game about non-verbal robots can be as engrossing as an epic tale of crime and corruption in the land of the dead. I don't care what the Double Fine Adventure is about. I don't care if it's funny, or straight, or somewhere in the middle. It just has to be good.
So when I think about it, maybe that's the only responsibility Tim Schafer has right now. He has to make a game that can stand next to the titles he made at LucasArts. He has to make a LucasArts adventure game. Isn't that what we wanted all along? I guess this is just the first chance we've had to put our money where our mouths are. ●

1 There are notable exceptions to this, but ultimately the whole genre falls apart if you challenge the fundamental principal of: pick up every item and use it on everything until something happens. Sometimes the only context you need is that it's an adventure game.

2 Some risks are just really, really stupid.

Why is Paul Meegan Smiling?

by SANTIAGO MÉNDEZ

Unlike the many mugshots of Steven Paul Meegan, a 62 year old repeat offender from Portland, Oregon, all the available pictures of former LucasArts president Paul Meegan depict him with a smile. Why is he smiling?
On August 2, 2012, he stopped working at the company that was long ago known for releasing memorable games. LucasArts had this to say of Mr. Meegan: "Paul has been a valuable member of the Lucasfilm leadership team and we wish him the best in his future endeavors." "Valuable," like a leftover hamburger when you come home at 3 in the morning without having had dinner. "LucasArts has come a long way and I'm extremely proud of what the teams have accomplished," said Meegan, "we had a great E3 with *Star Wars 1313*, and have other exciting projects in the works. It's been a privilege to be a part of Lucasfilm." Then why did you leave, eh, Paul Meegan?

We can trace Meegan's career as far back as 1997, when he co-founded (with Ken Klopp) Sinister Games, a company that produced a handful of IP games no one has ever heard of (*Batman: Gotham City Racer*, *The Dukes of Hazzard: Racing for Home*) before they sold it to Ubisoft in 2000. He is also the designer of the 1999 game *Shadow Company: Left for Dead*, a fairly decent-looking RTS game. In 2002, he moved to China (working mostly for a number of video game companies), and remained there until he came to LucasArts in June 2010. In 2007 he gave a keynote speech at GDC China as the CEO of Epic China, entitled *The Possibilities and Perils of Production Outsourcing, And How It's Changing the Way Games Are Made*. He seems to be a savvy and budget conscious producer who strives for efficiency.
"We're surrounded by staggeringly bright and creative people at the top of their games," Meegan said in one of the very few interviews he gave as president of LucasArts. I wish I could ask him which games are those (in fact I tried, but neither

he, nor his former partner, Ken Klopp, replied to my request for comments). Yet he also said something with which I agree completely: “Star Wars lends itself to all kinds of games”. This is something that so far has only been occasionally explored, with one big exception: the Lego Star Wars games. There is such a wide variety of characters and creatures in the Star Wars universe, which could be used in any number of game genres. Alas, LucasArts has always had a tendency to pursue the hardcore gamer target exclusively. Meegan also stated that he intended to focus mainly on Star Wars games, and by that I'm assuming that the first person shooter and the possible flight simulator in development, were/are/will be Star Wars games.

What has he done at LucasArts exactly? We can only speculate. There's been talk of changing the production pipeline, restructuring the company, and so on and so forth, but we haven't yet seen any tangible results of those alleged achievements. On his LinkedIn profile, he describes himself as a “change agent” with experience in turnaround management, a sort of company saving ninja. However, if his job at LucasArts was completed, there is no good reason why he wouldn't have said so in the press statement. “Rebuilt production organization and product pipeline culminating in unveiling of *Star Wars: 1313*, winning 31 nominations and 10 awards at E3 2012. Managed MI-6 award winning launch of *Lego Star Wars III*” says Meegan of his Presidency at LucasArts. Which I can rephrase as “Presenting a tech demo at E3”, but the more I see of *Star Wars 1313*, the more I hold back my skepticism. For all we know, he might as well have pushed LucasArts closer to where it needs to be as a big video game company, even if he sacrificed the love for their legacy. His LinkedIn cites no current job (other than being on the board of directors at GameDesk Institute, a position he took in 2011). I'm inclined to think that his departure from LucasArts was not something he wanted; one of those management disagreement situations.

You can probably tell I did my homework for this article (you had better; I spent some good hours researching this, I’m trying to be journalistic here). I turned as many stones as I could find, I tracked down relevant people only to be ignored by them. I didn't find anything particularly interesting, only little bits and pieces of the puzzle I conveniently decided Paul Meegan is. Every person has a story, but I don't really know what his is. I think I'm fine with that, I think I prefer not knowing what his Rosebud is.

One thing I can assume: unlike former LucasArts president Jim Ward, Paul Meegan likes games. I can easily picture him playing them, and he has also worked on a few. His smile seems honest, the kind of smile which is the result of being unable to contain or hide one's joy. A family man that probably enjoys life, a man who doesn't look like someone who lives under stress. Does his smile hide more than it lets on? I don't think so, but I believe it does hide something. On the day of his resignation he opened a Twitter account and wrote: “Farewell to my friends and colleagues at LucasArts & Lucasfilm. It's been a privilege. Now, next up.”

Why is Paul Meegan smiling? I don't know, but it makes me feel like everything is going to be fine. I like to think he now smiles because he knows what the *Handsome Halibut* is. •

Two Gentlemen Converse on the Subject of Monkeys

by JAN JACOB MEKES

The year 2010 AD had only just begun, when I had the extraordinary pleasure of conversing with a brilliant mind, instantly making that year unforgettable. The mind I speak of is that of Dave Grossman, the genius behind such electronic games as the Monkey Island series. The interview below must be read while keeping in mind that it took place when said series was just resurrected. I am confident though that the reader will find much pleasure in perusing these questions and answers, so I now present you with the questions asked by myself, and answered by Dave Grossman, who displays himself, through his words and actions, to be a true Renaissance man.

When you heard Monkey Island was to make a grand return from the grave, did you shed tears of joy or sorrow?

Neither, my good man: my tears were those of abject terror. Resurrecting a beloved series is ever fraught with peril, for the faithful have had much time to dwell upon their expectations, and if one fails to produce something which is both entirely familiar and scintillatingly new, one faces the wrath of the disappointed. A thorny tightrope to walk, indeed. Fortunately, my fears were unfounded, as the good people here at Telltale & Company proved valiantly up to the task.

You were employed at LucasArts during the heyday of the two-dimensional point-and-click adventure. Currently, you are crafting three-dimensional, episodic adventure games. How have things changed? Does Telltale recall your days at LucasArts in any way?

The atmosphere at Telltale does recall somewhat the halcyon days at Lucasfilm Limited, with its lively group of spirited craftspeople, collaborating openly on products about which they feel passionately. But there is also a certain maturity, with many of these professionals being older, having lives outside of the walls of the studio, gym memberships, even offspring. The audience has undergone a similar transformation, and so the games, too, have changed, to align with modern sensibilities and schedule requirements. Our revolutionary Episodic Format has been designed by top scientists with these elements in mind, calculated to bring you the maximum enjoyment with a minimum of fuss.

Not to step on the toes of those fine people you have just admirably described, but did Ron Gilbert play an important part in letting these episodes come to fruition? And how was it to work side by side with your former associate?

Indeed, the inimitable Mister Gilbert paid us a visit early on, whilst we were engaged in the planning of the season, and we discussed the project for several days before he was whisked away to attend to other responsibilities. His input was decidedly helpful, and I make particular note of his comments on the treatment of Elaine as a character. In our early drafts she was a bit more of a pawn, and it was his opinion that she generally should have a firmer grasp of what’s really going on than do most of the other participants. We rectified this and the story is better for it. And, since you asked, I will add that Ron was his usual insightful, engaging and very humorous self, and was a delight to collaborate with, as always.

Now that *Tales of Monkey Island*

has seen its conclusion, what are your feelings about this product, that has been added to Telltale & Company's already impressive and varied spectrum of electronic entertainment?
If Telltale and its numerous subsidiaries last for a thousand years, men will still say, "This was their finest hour." Or actually probably not, but it is surely our finest work to date. Which is not surprising, as it stands on the shoulders of its predecessors in so many ways. It is certainly our most adept use of the episodic form thus far, and I think it stands as a worthy heir in the proud lineage of Monkey Island games. I couldn't be more pleased unless someone brought me a coconut pop.

Does any of the five chapters particularly strike your fancy?
The chapters are all somewhat different from one another, and are specifically designed to be so, in fact, which makes it difficult to play favorites among them. All have their moments, and they strike my fancy in different ways. Were you to pressure me, or to ply me with sugary treats, I would be tempted to settle upon the middle chapter, Lair of the Leviathan, as noteworthy for having been the one most effectively devoted to the development of a nuanced character relationship – that between Guybrush and Morgan. We received a great deal of positive feedback over events concerning those two characters in the subsequent episode, but the reason those events resonate as well as they do has much to do with the fact that Lair caused one to care about the relationship.

In the third episode of *Tales of Monkey Island*, we met an adventurer called Coronado DeCava. He reminded me – and some others – of Don Quixote, with his eternal questing for a mysterious lady. Was this intentional, or am I seeing a Fata Morgana?
DeCava is meant as a reflection of Guybrush himself, taken to extremes. His obsessive questing on behalf of the Voodoo Lady, as well as his preposterously elaborate puzzle-solving schemes, warn us that even our most charming proclivities can acquire a weight which is unwieldy. No particular reference to Don Quixote is intended, but it pleases me to hear that literary comparisons are drawn.

From what sources do you generally draw inspiration?
Why, all of them, of course. Sometimes from other media, for example, I read, watch tele-vision and moving pictures, play parlor games, and so forth. But I'm equally likely to draw upon a chance encounter with a stranger had while walking Faithful Gomez, or something my father told me in my youth (did you know that washing your automobile will cause it to rain?). Inspiration can be found everywhere, and is too vitally important to leave any potential sources unplumbed.

If you were to compare writing and designing games with another art form, which one would it be?
Conversation, perhaps. At least with the sorts of games with which I am typically involved. An imaginary conversation with an imaginary person who will later be replaced with a real person after I've finished.

You are not just a game designer, but also an accomplished poet. What attracts you in writing a weekly poem? Would you like to include poetry in future games of your design, in any shape, way, or form?
Your familiarity with my humble humorous scribblings indicates a discerning eye on your part, for which I commend you. I began the *Poem of the Week* nearly fifteen years ago, simply as an excuse to write regularly, with public display included so as to create a responsibility which would be more difficult for me to avoid. I have found much value in the poetic form; its brevity keeps the author focused and honest, as each stanza, each line, each beat must contribute usefully to the scene, the mood, the lyrical quality, the evolution of the idea – therein lie fine lessons to be learned for work in any medium, including that of computer gaming entertainments. As to including poetry within such games, I have already done so on several occasions, perhaps most notably in *The Great Cow Race*, an early Telltale title which boasts a puzzle in which the protagonist must compose an effective love poem by choosing and arranging ideas which he gleans from conversations with other characters throughout the village. Indeed, if you have yet to play *The Great Cow Race*, then I fear I must call you charlatan and retract what I said regarding your discerning eye.

Indeed, how could I forget that fine game? On account of those adaptations of the *Bone* graphic novels lying so far in the past, they have managed to evade my otherwise fine memory. Continuing on this question, do you feel that an adventure game that focuses entirely on poetry would work?
Certainly such a thing would be feasible, and probably quite enjoyable. What I'm unsure about is whether we would actually be able to persuade the public at large to purchase a game of that nature – it is a well known aspect of the life of the typical poet that the audience for one's efforts tends to be small, and remuneration absurdly minimal.

Rest assured that our culturally inclined readership would gladly count itself among the audience for such a game, if that is any comfort. I would like to thank you for this agreeable tête-à-tête, and I hope that you found it as enjoyable as I have.
Thank you, it has been delightful. •

"Lords of Unspecified Treasure in Undiscovered Lands":

Narrative technique in *Escape from Monkey Island*

by GABRIEL SCHENK

Storytelling in video games has been given scant critical attention outside games journalism, but this is undeserved: not only because many games' story lines are ranked alongside the plots of the most celebrated novels, but also because games offer unique storytelling conditions. *Half-life 2* (2005), for example, communicates a detailed backstory despite the protagonist never asking a single question, and with no narrative voice to provide answers outside the protagonist's own experiences. Video games, in general, lack narrative voices. Sometimes cutscenes are used, which are often the video game equivalent of a narrator: points at which the creators pause the player's actions, in order to deliver the information they think is needed. Not all games do this, though, and Ron Gilbert argues against their use, calling

them "the cancer of the industry", because their lack of interactivity pulls away from the game itself.

Other means of storytelling are of course possible: for instance, stories in which information is gradually acquired through exploration. It is this type of storytelling that this short article concerns itself with – not with storytelling that is a sequence of events for the point of advancing action or revealing character details (conveyed through cutscenes), but storytelling that is an end in itself (delivered through exploration).

Adventure games excel at explorative storytelling. The verb interface is the best example of this, with players constructing sentences ("use the monkey with the dishwasher") whenever they attempt to do anything. Even dialogue, when done through a dialogue "tree", is an exploration rather than a progressive sequence. Unlike cutscenes, dialogue trees have more room for being merely entertaining, or giving extra (but not strictly necessary) details. These techniques place the player's actions at the heart of storytelling, so that they, in some sense, become a narrator.

In "On Stories" (1947), C.S. Lewis describes the pleasure in adventure stories, and his comments are directly applicable to adventure games as well. He uses the example of a pirate, arguing that it is not the fact that the pirate is dangerous that makes a pirate story worth reading. If that were the case, the fact that a character was a pirate would be arbitrary; "the ordinary enemy may easily be made just as lethal as a pirate". Instead, it is the particular type of danger that is important:

"the whole image of the utterly lawless enemy, the men who have cut adrift from all human society and become, as it were, a species of their own – men strangely clad, dark men with earrings, men with a history that they know and we don't, lords of unspecified treasure in undiscovered lands".[1]

This kind of excitement works as an associated idea rather than as something directly conveyed; to explain it clearly removes its mystery, and restricts its scope. If we know what the pirate's name is, and why he is pirating, and how old he is, he becomes less like the idea of a pirate, and more like a person who has simply turned to crime. The latter would be the goal of a psychological study, but not necessarily an adventure story.

In *Escape from Monkey Island* (EMI, 2000), Herman Toothrot's character is fully described in a cutscene that reveals his full name, background, and his relation to other characters. He is no longer the lonely castaway figure, like Crusoe or Gulliver, with the whole image of island survival surrounding him. Instead, he is Horatio T. Marley. There is no longer any mystery about him. On the opposite side of the spectrum we have LeChuck's backstory, as told in *The Secret of Monkey Island* (SMI, 1990). Unlike Toothrot in EMI, LeChuck is not described in an information-dump, but through talking to pirates in the Scumm Bar. A few details are given – a jealous lover, a fight, and a vow that transcends death. A world of piracy is glimpsed: desperate, violent, and something not quite human.

Similarly, EMI explains (again, in a cutscene) that the "secret" of Monkey Island is a giant monkey robot lying underground. In the first game, however, the secret of the island itself is a secret, with its undefined location and history. This secret is explored throughout the game (and beyond, on fan forums, for many years). It is not delivered in a narrative chunk like Herman Toothrot's story in EMI; it is experienced, like the flashbacks of LeChuck in SMI.

It's not just the way the information is given to the player that makes it less imaginatively exciting: Herman Toothrot's backstory about the boat race does not have as many "piratey" images associated with it as LeChuck's does. Likewise, a giant monkey robot will be a disappointing "secret" to many players, whether it is revealed in a cutscene or not. The problem is that cutscenes, and other forms of direct storytelling, limit the extent to which a story is concerned with larger worlds; it becomes, instead, simply a sequence of events told to reach a plot point. As Lewis writes, "the elements which it [cinema] excludes are precisely those which give the untrained mind its only access to the imaginative world. There is death in the camera".

The Giant Robot could have been gradually explored, with a whole imaginative world associated with it – for example, mysterious ancient machines, so neatly explored in *Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine* (1999). The robot would have still worked against the different kind of image that Monkey Island has – that of the magical, mysterious island – but at least it would have been interesting on its own. Instead, the Giant Monkey Robot is used in a different kind of storytelling: one that aims to excite and surprise, without any kind of exploration or development. The information is bluntly given to the player. Exploration of an imaginative world has been jettisoned in favour of a giant robot exploding out of a stone head.

Lewis uses the example of *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) to describe different types of excitement. In Haggard's book, the heroes await suffocation, "entombed in a rock chamber, and surrounded by the mummified kings of that land". A film adaptation "thought this tame" and added a "subterranean volcanic eruption, and then went one better by adding an earth-quake". The excitement should be doubled, but instead it is ruined. The situation is more dangerous, but it is the wrong type of danger: what is lost "is the whole sense of the deathly (quite a different thing from simple danger of death)—the cold, the silence, and the surrounding faces of the ancient, the crowned and sceptered, dead". Likewise, what is lost in EMI is the sense of a mysterious magical island. It may be considered more exciting for a giant monkey robot to explode out of the giant monkey head, but it removes the previous excitement of ancient civilisations untouched by outside influence, and of strange, arcane rituals.

In *Tales of Monkey Island* (2008), Jake Rodkin placed an inaccessible location in the Crossroads map for Episode 5, stating that "I wanted there to be a place you couldn't go, to keep people wondering... and to screw with them".

This encourages players to feel that they are only seeing part of a world. It is not just the things we see in the "crossroads" that are exciting, but the whole idea of an afterlife, a world that is bigger than the game itself, which gives an imaginative thrill hard to capture through cutscenes. It is this "promise of infinite possibility" that Tim Schafer identified as a core appeal to adventure games. It is also why J.R.R. Tolkien left blank spaces on his map of Middle-Earth; he thought that *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55) had "an attraction like that of viewing far off an unvisited island, or seeing the towers of a distant city gleaming in a sunlit mist. To go there is to destroy the magic, unless new unattainable vistas are again revealed".

More generally, EMI pulls against the world of pirates in a way that other titles in the series do not, castrating them in a plot about commercialisation, that has nothing to do with swashbuckling on the high seas. The game is about pirates being tamed, but nowhere do we see (as we do in the other games), pirates being pirates. There is one exception, though – one element that captures the spirit of piracy and

1 C.S. Lewis, "On Stories", *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1982), pp. 3-20 (9).

adventure; that imaginative exploration of other worlds that C.S. Lewis wrote about. Unlike all other maps featured in the Monkey Island games, the Tri-Island Area map in EMI includes two islands – Spittle and Pinchpenny – that are never visited in the game. You can even see small details, like a pool and a house. They are small, never spoken about, and completely open to the player's imagination. They are the best locations in the game. ●

Letters to the Editor

Once more we have very little in the way of correspondence. It would seem that either our readership is shy, or that they don't have much to say. Or perhaps we just don't have all that many readers. I'm reluctant to decide and I would rather continue in encouraging all of you to have your say, to have your words immortalized in this humble and occasionally ambivalent publication. What is that? We have actually received an electronic letter? Well, what do you know... and it's old too, from late 2009, shortly after our first issue was released in the form of a blunt PDF. Let us read it, shall we?

Dear Editor,

I was delighted to receive a copy of the Quarterly this Sunday past, to which I contributed my little piece to. However, I did notice one point that needs to be corrected: you call me Sir Gabriel Schenk, which is technically incorrect. Though it is true that I was knighted in 1978 for services to the British Empire, I was forced to renounce my knighthood three years later, when I became an honorary Texan. Regrettably, using my title has since then become a beheadable offence. Whilst it is unlikely that Her Majesty will read the Quarterly, one does feel that the "safe side" is altogether the best place to be in this situation. I have, after all, grown rather attached to my head being connected to my shoulders.

I remain, sirs,
Your most obliged, obedient
Servant
G.W.J. Schenk
B.S., M.B (Dunelm), F.R.F.P. & S., F.R.S.Ed.

Good old Mr. Schenk... of course Her Majesty reads *The Thrillville Quarterly*. That's why I proceeded to amend this mistake right away, since a decapitated writer is of almost no use to me. Allow me to also take this opportunity to thank you for another sterling contribution to this issue; having never played *Escape from Monkey Island*, I found your piece to be rather insightful nonetheless. I trust your words will grace our next issue as well; Her Majesty would like that.

I feel obliged to indulge in another writing spree of imaginary correspondence that will serve as an example and inspiration to all of you.

Dear Editor,

Even though we have never met, I feel as though you know me intimately. The Thrillville Quarterly appeals to my tastes and interests to such a stunning degree, that it makes me wonder if it wasn't indeed tailored especially for me. It wouldn't be the first time such a thing has occurred. Maniac Mansion, one of the most enjoyable games I have played, features my favourite seven kinds of people: Nerds, hapless boyfriends, photographers, punk chicks, new age musicians and unassuming white girls. It was Ron Gilbert's kind gesture towards me.

I impatiently look forward to the next issue of this magnificent publication.

Yours sincerely,
Elizabeth R.
Queen of The Commonwealth Realms,
Buckingham Palace, London, England.

Another brilliant example my fingers have produced. You are welcome to write about as varied a subject as you wish. Not only are you encouraged to express your opinion regarding the articles we have published, but also of any thought you may have on LucasArts. Maybe you want to express your concerns about whomever might be the next President of the company. Maybe you wish to share with us the point in life in which this current issue finds you. Whatever it might be, cake and a warm blanket await your words, so do not hesitate in sending them our way.

Yours faithfully,
— The Editor