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# Oral Histories of the Video Game Industry

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THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT: A HISTORY OF THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

Interactive Qualifying Project Report completed in partial fulfillment  
of the Bachelor of Science degree at  
Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Worcester, MA

Submitted to:

Professor Dean M. O'Donnell (advisor)

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February 18, 2009

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Advisor Signature

This report represents the work of one or more WPI undergraduate students submitted to the faculty as evidence of completion of a degree requirement. WPI routinely publishes these reports on its web site without editorial or peer review.

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this IQP is to add to the ongoing Oral History project. The project consists of videotaped interviews with game developers. First, we learned interviewing and editing techniques from Dean O'Donnell, Jason Scott, and by watching other documentary films. After that, we conducted interviews with Paul Neurath, founder of Looking Glass Studios, and Brian Sullivan, founder of Iron Lore Entertainment. These interviews were then edited to make clips suitable for a museum exhibit.

## **Acknowledgements**

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**Paul Neurath**  
Interviewee.

**Brian Sullivan**  
Interviewee.

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Provided us with insights into the process of making a documentary film. He provided feedback on all aspects of the project.

**Jason Scott**  
Taught us some very useful techniques in both interviewing and editing. He also provided feedback on how we were doing.

**Jacleen Becker**  
Provided training on editing software.

**Rodney Obien**  
Coordinated with us and the WPI Archives to reserve a room for us to conduct an interview in and items associated with Brian Sullivan.

**WPI Academic Technology Center**  
Provided us with the necessary camera equipment to conduct our interviews.

**WPI Archives & Special Collections**  
Provided paraphernalia and a room to conduct one of our interviews.

## **Authorship Page**

Our project began with a series of practice interviews. We conducted these interviews with members of the WPI undergraduate class. Frank and Chris both took turns being the interviewer and the secondary cameraman. After we gathered the footage, we edited them to make short clips. We divided the editorial work in such a way that both authors did about the same amount of editing. Frank did the majority of editing on one interview, and then Chris did the majority of editing on the next interview. We made sure to critique each other and provide help when necessary. Chris handled communication with the WPI Academic Technology Center to take out the necessary equipment needed to conduct the interviews.

For the next phase of the project we had to contact possible interviewees. Both of us researched possible candidates, and we compiled a list of them. Frank asked the potential subjects to do the interview and coordinated an interview date with them. Once Paul Neurath and Brian Sullivan agreed to do the interview, each of us chose one person to focus upon for research. Chris researched Paul Neurath, while Frank researched Brian Sullivan. Once the research was mostly done, we reviewed each other's work and made suggestions and improvements.

For the actual interviews, Chris once again coordinated with the Academic Technology Center and the Gordon Library Archives to reserve the equipment and a room to conduct one of the interviews. In the case of Paul Neurath, we drove to Waltham, MA. Once there, Frank operated the HD camera and conducted the interview, while Chris operated the secondary camera and got footage of the environment. For Brian Sullivan, we conducted the interview in the Archives room at

the Gordon Library. Once again, Frank conducted the interview and Chris operated the secondary camera.

After the interviews were conducted, the footage needed to be edited. To split up the work, we decided that Frank would edit the Paul Neurath interview and Chris would edit the Brian Sullivan interview. Although the two interviews were split up, we each did work on the other and acted as quality assurance agents.

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## 1. Introduction

The goal of this project was to add video clips suitable for a museum exhibit to the ongoing Oral History project. We were tasked with conducting interviews with two game developers considered pioneers in the industry. Our first interviewee was Paul Neurath. He is a programmer that worked with Origin Systems and later founded the game development companies Looking Glass Studios and Floodgate Entertainment. Our second interviewee was Brian Sullivan. He was one of the founders of Ensemble Studios and later founded his own studio, Iron Lore Entertainment.

The IQP took place over three terms; each term had separate goals and milestones. For the first term, we learned about the process of interviewing and editing. To do this, we watched documentary films, such as *First Person*, *The Aristocrats*, and *BBS: The Documentary*. After watching these documentaries and discussing the different techniques involved, we conducted several practice interviews and edited them. We conducted them with each other and with other WPI students. After we had done a few practice interviews, we met with Jason Scott, an independent documentary film maker, to learn even more about the process of interviewing and editing. He gave us helpful tips and pointed out what could be done better in our own interviews so that we may be more successful. Some of the things he taught us was to use secondary shots, to make sure that the audio quality was superb, and to ask questions that would invoke a better response from the interviewee. While we were learning the process, we were also tasked with figuring out which game developers we were going to interview. We did preliminary research on several candidates, and contacted them. Eventually Paul Neurath and Brian Sullivan agreed to be interviewed.

The second term of the IQP was focused on the actual interviews. For the first half of the term we researched our two subjects. We needed to know about what they had done in order to ask relevant questions during the interview. Once we had the research, we began coming up with questions. Although we created a list of questions, they were only used as backups if we ran out of things to ask. During the final few weeks of the term, we settled on interview dates with both subjects and conducted the interviews. The first interview was with Paul Neurath. We drove to his office in Waltham, MA. and conducted the interview in about two hours time. The second

interview took place on the WPI campus. We couldn't get an interview set up at Brian Sullivan's house, so he thankfully came to WPI. The interview was conducted in the archives room at the Gordon Library in about two hours.

The third and final term was spent finalizing the project. First, we had to edit the raw footage that we gathered so they would be in a format more suitable for a museum exhibit (short, coherent clips). Throughout the editing process, we continually used feedback from Dean O'Donnell (the project advisor) and Jason Scott to make the clips better. Besides working on the actual clips, we had to do the necessary paperwork, prepare the DVD hard copies, and start converting some of the project to become the IGDA Oral History project.

## **2. Background**

The following two sections contain the in-depth research we did on both Paul Neurath and Brian Sullivan.

### **2.1 Paul Neurath**

Origin Systems was founded in 1983 by Richard and Robert Garriott. Prior to this, Richard had made a couple of games, including *Ultima*. His initial games were so successful that he had enough money to found a company, named Origin Systems.<sup>1</sup> The company was originally located in Richard's parent's house in Houston, Texas, where Richard gathered his close friends: Chuck Bueche and two ex-Sierra On-Line workers, Mary Fenton and Jeff Hillhouse.<sup>2</sup> Robert, who was living in Massachusetts at the time with his wife Mary, actually commuted to Houston to work at the company. In 1983 the company relocated to Massachusetts to end Robert's commute. There, they published their first game together: *Ultima III*.<sup>3</sup> In 1995, Origin released *Ultima IV*, the first *Ultima* game to feature moral components and the first time Origin topped the best-seller list.<sup>4</sup> By 1987, Origin had moved to New Hampshire because they needed more office space.<sup>5</sup> Richard eventually grew tired of New England, but Robert wanted to keep the company in New Hampshire. After much feuding, Richard moved the development team back to Austin and, gradually over the next year, most of the team followed.<sup>6</sup>

Origin System's main focus was on quality and innovation. Producer Warren Spector stated in an interview that "There was a feeling of creating something new, of being on the cutting edge; that was incredibly exciting. That more, than anything else,

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<sup>1</sup> John Borland and Brad King, *Dungeons and Dreamers* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 60.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-63.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 62-72.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-76

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

drove people to do exceptional work.”<sup>7</sup> When Richard got back to Austin, he started recruiting talented individuals. For example, Chris Roberts joined the company and created the *Wing Commander* series.<sup>8</sup> A major reason why *Wing Commander* was so successful was its revolutionary sound and music: it began with a virtual conductor direction a symphony.<sup>9</sup> Another example of them going to extreme lengths to make a quality and innovative game was their efforts on *Ultima VII*. When *Ultima VII: The Black Gate* was estimated to require a megabyte of graphics, which wasn’t available at the time, they went ahead and created their own operating system for the game.<sup>10</sup>

Eventually, Origin found itself in financial trouble. The troubles began for Origin when it was decided that *Ultima VI* would not be ported to the IBM PC, because Richard thought it was a “...piece of garbage.”<sup>11</sup> This miscalculation could have put the Garriott brothers in \$1 million dollars of debt; however, the game did come out, on time and intact. They decided to sell the company to EA in 1992 to provide more financial stability.<sup>12</sup> Origin’s creative, innovative and quality driven style did not meld well with EA’s business style.<sup>13</sup> In 1997, Origin launched *Ultima Online*, whose huge success of 250,000 subscribers helped launch the MMORPG genre.<sup>14</sup> In 2004, EA shut down Origin Systems. Matt Scibilia, president and CEO of Critical Mass Interactive Inc., said that the closing came as no surprise: there wasn’t a lot happening at Origin besides *Ultima Online*.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Allen Varney, "The Conquest of Origin," *The Escapist*, 11 October 2005; available from [http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/issues/issue\\_14/87-The-Conquest-of-Origin.3](http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/issues/issue_14/87-The-Conquest-of-Origin.3) ; Internet; accessed 11 October 2008.

<sup>8</sup> *Dungeons and Dreamers*, 76.

<sup>9</sup> Steven L. Kent, *The Ultimate History of Video Games*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001) , 456.

<sup>10</sup> Varney, “The Conquest of Origin.”

<sup>11</sup> *Dungeons and Dreamers*, 78.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-80.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>14</sup> Varney, “The Conquest of Origin.”

<sup>15</sup> Ann Hatchitt, “Origin Systems to close Austin operations” *Austin Business Journal*, 26 February 2004; available

Paul Neurath joined Origin Systems in the mid 1980's, while the company was in New England. The earliest game that he has received credit for was *Ogre*. Neurath started as a play-tester and programming assistant on games like *Ogre* and *Autoduel* and worked his way up to lead programmer and designer on *Space Rogue*; he was also a programmer for *Omega*, the last game he worked on at Origin.<sup>16</sup>

When Origin moved back to Austin, Neurath and a few of the other programmers stayed behind and formed a new company, Blue Sky Productions in 1990.<sup>17</sup> Neurath started by hiring a few MIT graduates, like Doug Church. In 1992, Blue Sky released their flagship game *Ultima Underworld*. Neurath oversaw the production of it. Blue Sky strove to break new ground in the gaming industry. Most RPGs at the time were 2D and featured an overhead perspective. *Ultima Underworld* on the other hand, had an advanced 3D engine, with full 360-degree movement capabilities;<sup>18</sup> it established the first-person RPG genre. In an interview, Doug Church stated that the most important thing *Ultima Underworld* did was to show the power of freedom and open-endedness in games.<sup>19</sup> It was an inspiration for various other games, such as the *Elder Scrolls* series.<sup>20</sup> Soon after the release of *Ultima Underworld*, Blue Sky merged with Lerner Research, who they had been collaborating with, to create Looking Glass Technologies.

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from <http://austin.bizjournals.com/austin/stories/2004/02/23/daily37.html>; Internet; accessed 13 November 2008.

<sup>16</sup> MobyGames. "Paul Neurath." Available from <http://www.mobygames.com/developer/sheet/view/developerId,5226/>; Internet; Accessed 11 November 2008.

<sup>17</sup> *Dungeons and Dreamers*, 102.

<sup>18</sup> The NextLevel. "TNL Developer Spotlight: Looking Glass Studios. Available from <http://www.thenextlevel.com/features/developers/looking-glass-studios/history.shtml>; Internet; accessed 12 November 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Mallinson, "Games that changed the world: *Ultima Underworld*." Available from <http://www.computerandvideogames.com/article.php?id=28003>; Internet; accessed 11 November 2008.

<sup>20</sup> "Arena – behind the scenes." Available from [http://www.elderscrolls.com/tenth\\_anniv/tenth\\_anniv-arena.htm](http://www.elderscrolls.com/tenth_anniv/tenth_anniv-arena.htm); Internet; accessed 12 November 2008.

Looking Glass went on to produce games such as *System Shock* (1994) and *Terra Nova: Strike Force Centauri* (1996).<sup>21</sup> *System Shock* was a first-person shooter/role-playing/adventure game. In an interview, Warren Spector said “[*System Shock* was so incredibly immersive. It was hard NOT to feel like you were actually up there on Citadel station. . . Everything that might have reminded you that you were just playing a game was just stripped away”.<sup>22</sup> *Terra Nova* featured strategic, mission-based action game play, like *MechWarrior*, but played like any other first-person shooter.<sup>23</sup> Both of the games are extremely important in Looking Glass’s history because they were both unsuccessful, yet very innovative. *System Shock* was unsuccessful. It was overshadowed by *Doom* and *Quake*.<sup>24</sup> *Terra Nova* was very unsuccessful partly due to its mediocre graphics and the missing multiplayer component.<sup>25</sup> *Terra Nova*’s failure was especially detrimental to Looking Glass because they published it in-house. These set-backs left Looking Glass in a bad financial position.

In 1998, Looking Glass published one of the first stealth-based games, *Thief: The Dark Project*, another game Neurath oversaw. *Thief* featured game play that promoted the avoidance of combat, which was revolutionary at the time. In a post mortem of *Thief*, Tom Leonard, the lead programmer, discussed how the sound played an intricate part in the experience. He believes that the sound in *Thief* played more of a central role than any other game. “It was the primary medium through which the AIs communicated both their location and internal state to player,” and the sound generated

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<sup>21</sup> MobyGames. “Paul Neurath.”

<sup>22</sup> Gamespy, “20 Questions with Warren Spector” p. 3. Available from [http://archive.gamespy.com/legacy/interviews/spector\\_c.shtm](http://archive.gamespy.com/legacy/interviews/spector_c.shtm); Internet; Accessed 12 November 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Gamespy. “Looking Glass and Terra Nova: Strike Force Centauri;” Available from <http://www.gamespy.com/articles/495/495425p1.html>; Internet; Accessed 12 November 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 1-3.

by objects would also inform the AI of their surroundings.<sup>26</sup> *Thief* was one of the first stealth-based games and one of the first games in which sound played a major role in game play, both for the AI and the player, as opposed to the normal visual cues.

The last game Looking Glass would release, before shutting its doors, was *Thief II: The Metal Age* in 2000. Looking Glass was forced to lay off its 60 employees the week of May 26, 2000, when publisher Eidos backed out of a plan to acquire Looking Glass. Eidos spokesman Greg Rizzer attributed this to the fact that a lot of people were buying low-end PCs at the time and they couldn't run Looking Glass's high-end, 3D games.<sup>27</sup> While working at Looking Glass, Neurath oversaw the development and design of such titles as *Ultima Underworld*, *Terra Nova* and *Thief*.<sup>28</sup>

After Looking Glass went under, Neurath founded Floodgate Entertainment and is the creative director there. Floodgate is comprised mostly of members of the deceased Looking Glass.<sup>29</sup> Floodgate has been working on major brand mobile titles, such as *Age of Empires for PocketPC*, *Nascar '07* and *Pirates of the Caribbean Multiplayer*.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Gamasutra, "Post-mortem: Thief: The Dark Project," p. 3. Available from [http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/3355/postmortem\\_thief\\_the\\_dark\\_project.php?page=3](http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/3355/postmortem_thief_the_dark_project.php?page=3); accessed on 12 November 2008.

<sup>27</sup> "Looking Glass Closing, Laying off 60 Workers Failed Deal Cambridge Game Developer." Boston Globe, 26 May 2000. Database on-line. Available from LexisNexis Academic.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew S. Bub, "Rick Ernst and Paul Neurath on NWN: The Shadow of Undertide (PC)," available from <http://www.gamespy.com/pc/neverwinter-nights-shadows-of-undrentide/6532p1.html>; Accessed on 12 November 2008.

<sup>29</sup> Floodgate Entertainment, "About Floodgate," available from <http://www.floodg.com/company.html>; accessed on November 11 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

## 2.2 Brian Sullivan

In the mid 1990's, the Dallas IT-scene was booming. There were many professionals and companies in the area. In 1995, two brothers, Tony and Rick Goodman, wanted to begin making games. They envisioned a real-time version of Sid Meier's *Civilization*. They asked Bruce Shelley to join them, and he took the job. Shelley previously worked at MicroProse with Sid Meier.<sup>31</sup> Around the same time, Brian Sullivan also found himself in the Dallas area wanting to get into the game industry. After graduating from Carnegie-Mellon, he moved to Dallas and had a successful Software Engineering career. Soon after the Goodman brothers had picked up Bruce Shelley, Brian Sullivan joined the team as the last co-founder.<sup>32</sup> They called their company Ensemble Studios.

Ensemble went on to create their flagship product, *Age of Empires*. It was met with initial success, although it had its problems. Brian Sullivan worked as a designer for the title.<sup>33</sup> The design team and studio executives all felt that they had made a good product. There were many design philosophies that went into the making of *Age of Empires*. First of all, the game's setting was a shift from the norm. Instead of a science-fiction or fantasy setting, *AoE* was set in a historical setting. It was the first real-time strategy game to have a historical setting that changed throughout the game. The game was built to be very easy for users not familiar with RTS games to pick up and play. They made sure that the game would appeal to the casual market. They also included features for more advanced users to use, but new users didn't have to even

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<sup>31</sup> Rusel DeMaria and Johnny L. Wilson, *High Score!* (McGraw-Hill Professional, 2003); Internet; accessed 11 November 2008.

<sup>32</sup> Iron Lore, "The People"; Internet; accessed 31 October 2008.

<sup>33</sup> Moby Games, "Age of Empires"; Internet; accessed 13 November 2008.

know about them.<sup>34</sup> Ensemble is also notorious for stressing quality in their games. They often delayed games so that they could polish them more and make sure they had great products. For example, Bruce Shelley directly attributes the long-term success of the series to sacrificing an early release for more quality.<sup>35</sup>

Even with the release of Blizzard's blockbuster hit, *Starcraft*, Ensemble was still seeing success. In 1998, *Age of Empires* was honored with awards at the Game Developers Choice Awards, including a spotlight award for Game Design for the design team (including Brian Sullivan).<sup>36</sup> They began work on an expansion pack, and a sequel. The sequel, *Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings*. The game was scheduled to be released in 1998, but was delayed for quality concerns. Instead, Ensemble released the mildly successful expansion to *AoE*, *Rise of Rome*. By this time, Mr. Sullivan had moved over to the production team.<sup>37</sup>

There have long been stories of poor work conditions in the game industry. Unlike these stories though, Ensemble strove to make sure that they had a great work environment. Ensemble did more than just have picnics, company outings, gaming events, etc. though. The philosophy was to bring in talented individuals and keep them there for a long time. For example, instead of giving out large bonuses (the company was healthy enough to do so), they gave out stock options to the employees and fostered the mentality that the company belonged to everyone in it. They strove to make the environment a family. They didn't want Ensemble to be just another filler-

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<sup>34</sup> Chase Murdey, "Age of Titans: Brian Sullivan's Latest Adventures," *Gamasutra*; Internet; accessed 31 October 2008.

<sup>35</sup> Mark Walker, *Games That Sell!* (Wordware Publishing, Inc., 2003); Internet; accessed 11 November 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Game Developers Choice Awards, "Archive / 1998 Spotlight Awards"; Internet; accessed 13 November 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Moby Games, "Age of Empires: The Rise of Rome."

job.<sup>38</sup> Ensemble also had an innovative recruiting process, as far as the gaming industry is concerned. Ensemble allowed their members to veto potential employees. The main benefit for this is that it helps ensure team cohesion; it helps ensure that the new employee will work well with the current group of developers. Sullivan would later use this at his company Iron Lore.<sup>39</sup>

Ensemble continued to use their proven strategy to make many more games. Some of the top sellers include *Age of Empires III* and *Age of Mythology*. After the release of *Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings*, Brian Sullivan left the company and headed to New England. On February 8, 2001, he announced that he had officially created a new company with life-long friend Paul Chieffo, called Iron Lore Entertainment.<sup>40</sup> Although the company was announced in 2001, it was actually created in October 2000.<sup>41</sup> About two months after his new company's announcement, Ensemble ceased to be an independent company. On May 4, 2001, it was reported that Microsoft would be purchasing the RTS powerhouse, Ensemble Studios.<sup>42</sup> After the purchase, Ensemble continued to make strong sales for Microsoft. It was even contracted to make a *Halo* RTS, which is Microsoft's largest franchise. Recently, it was announced that Microsoft would be closing down Ensemble Studios. This announcement came as a shock because Ensemble was doing extremely well. On the company's website, Bruce Shelley has conveyed the news. Since Ensemble continually

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<sup>38</sup> Bruce Shelley, "Sells like team spirit"; *Game Developer*, July, 2002, in Academic OneFile [database on-line], accessed November 11, 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Francois Dominic Laramée, *Secrets of the Game Business* (Charles River Media, 2003); Internet; accessed 11 November 2008.

<sup>40</sup> Iron Lore, "News Archive."

<sup>41</sup> Jeff Goodsill, "Iron Lore's TITAN QUEST"; *Game Developer*, October, 2006, in Academic OneFile [database on-line], accessed November 11, 2008.

<sup>42</sup> Alex Pham, "Microsoft Buys Ensemble," *Los Angeles Times*, May 04, 2001, C-3, <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/may/04/business/fi-59169> (accessed November 11, 2008).

saw good sales, it didn't seem like Microsoft would close the studio down. The company will still be finishing the upcoming game *Halo Wars* for Microsoft though.<sup>43</sup>

Brian Sullivan and Iron Lore began working immediately on *Titan Quest*. *Titan Quest* is an action-RPG set in a mythological time period. Sullivan came up with the idea for the game while he was working on *Age of Empires*. The two games have many similarities. Besides the obvious, such as the overall setting, many of the same philosophies of Ensemble were used at Iron Lore. The game was designed so that anyone could play the game, not just the hardcore action-RPG fans.<sup>44</sup> The early stages of the development of *Titan Quest* were very shaky. The demo team worked extremely hard to try and get a publisher signed.<sup>45</sup> It wasn't until July 21, 2004 that Iron Lore announced its partnership with THQ to publish *Titan Quest*.<sup>46</sup>

Iron Lore saw some initial success with the *Titan Quest* and even produced an expansion for it (*Titan Quest: Immortal Throne*). After the *Titan Quest* expansion, Iron Lore produced *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War – Soulstorm* with Relic Entertainment. It seemed as though Iron Lore was off to a great start and would continue making games, but that wasn't to be the case. On February 19, 2008, Iron Lore announced it was shutting down. Apparently, THQ decided to stop funding the studio, so there was no income or contract to make a new game.<sup>47</sup>

Although *Titan Quest* was fairly well-received, it did not come without criticism. The main criticism of the game is that it is too much like Blizzard's *Diablo II*. Sullivan, in an interview with Gamasutra, does not deny that the game is very similar, but instead

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<sup>43</sup> Ensemble Studios, "Ensemble Studios Closing"; Internet; accessed 13 November 2008.

<sup>44</sup> Chase Murdey, "Age of Titans: Brian Sullivan's Latest Adventures," *Gamasutra*; Internet; accessed 31 October 2008.

<sup>45</sup> Jeff Goodsill, "Iron Lore's TITAN QUEST."

<sup>46</sup> Iron Lore, "News Archive."

<sup>47</sup> Iron Lore, "News."

states his reasons for why that is the case. “Core *Titan Quest* game play is very similar to *Diablo*, because *Diablo* basically defined the genre,”<sup>48</sup> In his perspective, he is making a game of the same genre, in the same way that many of the RTS games are of the same genre. The difference is that there are many RTS games, and far fewer action-RPGs. He also goes on to state how games such as *World of Warcraft* may have played a role in keeping away potential customers. Since MMOs are so engaging, it seems as though people don’t have time for other games (or do not want to play them).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Chase Murdey, "Age of Titans: Brian Sullivan’s Latest Adventures.”

<sup>49</sup> Chase Murdey, "Age of Titans: Brian Sullivan’s Latest Adventures.”

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Learning the Process**

Before we could conduct the interviews, we needed to learn how the process of interviewing and editing works. Some of the first resources we used were documentary films. We watched *The Aristocrats*, *BBS: The Documentary*, and *First Person* to see how the craft is done. First of all, we learned that there are many ways to conduct and edit an interview. There isn't really a right or a wrong way to do things, but there are some general guidelines and tips that we learned. When a subject is talking about something that might not be common sense, it is a good idea to use shots showing visual aids that illuminate what the subject is talking about, also keeping the audience entertained in the process. Clips should generally not last more than thirty seconds because the audience might get tired of seeing someone drone on about something for too long. The interview should be edited to be as succinct as possible, without losing meaning, which provides a more enjoyable experience for the audience. The background of the interview should contain many items that help explain the subject; the items should provide clues as to who the subject is, because a short interview might not provide that information.

Besides watching documentary films, we conducted practice interviews. First, we took turns interviewing each other about what our favorite games were. After editing, we got feedback from Dean O'Donnell as to what worked and what didn't. Our background was boring and didn't provide too much information about the subject. Also, our sound quality was very poor. We edited that interview again and made it shorter and changed the topic. We didn't use any additional footage, so changing the

topic seemed pretty difficult at first. This was a purely editorial exercise to see if we could juxtapose various segments together to form one coherent clip. Not only did this provide us with practice editing and moving segments around, but it also showed us the importance of asking good questions during the interview. The editing process can often be open ended, and it is better to prepare for a broader range of possibilities, without being too vague.

After conducting interviews on each other, we began conducting interviews with other WPI students as the subjects. The goal of these exercises was to practice working with two cameras, a better microphone, the high-definition IMGD camera, to practice asking questions on the fly, and to see which one of us was better at certain aspects of the process (like asking questions, operating the cameras, etc.). We continually made progress with sound quality and the backgrounds through trial-and-error. We also gained confidence in our ability to come up with questions impromptu, because preplanning an entire interview does not take into consideration what the subject likes to talk about.

Near the end of the first term of this project, we made a trip to Jason Scott's house, where he and Dean O'Donnell taught us even more about the interview process. Jason Scott makes his own documentary films, so he was an invaluable resource to this project. Jason looked at our work, and provided us his thoughts on what worked and what didn't. The most important issue was our sound quality. He taught us that video clips can be replaced, but the sound must absolutely be clear. For example, an overlay of a game could be shown instead of the interviewee, while the interviewee is talking about the game. Also, people are more willing to forgive visual blunders, but they are not as willing to forgive poor audio. He also showed us many other videos that show

how different people edit documentary films. He even showed us how he conducts the interview. We learned that the questions should be urging the subject to tell a story. So, if someone isn't talking about one thing, it is best to try and find a question that the person will talk about.

### **3.2 The Interviews**

The first interview was with Paul Neurath. It took a while to finally select a time that both parties could commit to, but we eventually settled on one. We conducted the interview at his office in Waltham, MA. When we arrived, we were told that we could use the conference room and that he only had about an hour. We quickly set up the equipment and began as soon as we could to maximize the amount of footage we could get. We had a high-definition camera, a standard-definition camera, and a wireless microphone with a clip. When setting up the equipment, we tried to get some of the posters of games that Paul had worked on in the background. Since there wasn't much in the room, the only other object in the background was the white wall. We had previously figured out what we wanted to ask him about (questions pertaining to his past) and stayed pretty much within those confines. We managed to get through all the main questions we wanted to ask. Throughout the interview, we moved the second camera around the room so that we could have many different kinds of shots.

The second interview was conducted at WPI with Brian Sullivan. He could not conduct the interview at his home, so we reserved the archives room. We set up the room to have a lot of paraphernalia associated with Brian (which was generously provided by the WPI archives). We placed those items around a chair for Brian and off in the background. As far as the equipment goes, we used the same set up as the first

interview. For this interview, we got through our main questions, but had more time to explore other avenues; we had a chance to ask follow-up questions that helped clarify what he was saying. At the end of the interview, we even got some footage of Brian standing next to a very large *Titan Quest* statue that is in the library.

### **3.1 Editing**

To edit the interviews, we focused first on content and being succinct. Since our questions were already split up into various categories, we used those categories to make the different clips. We took all of the footage pertaining to a clip and segregated it from the rest. We did this for each category. Once each was split up, we arranged the segments so that they would answer a question, or tell a story (so each clip would make sense). We also cut out portions that were superfluous or unnecessary. Again, the goal wasn't to just have a pioneer talk, but to provide something worthy of a museum exhibit.

Once we had the clips edited for content (or arranged in a succinct way), we focused on improving the entertainment and informative aspects. Generally, we tried not to have clips that were longer than thirty seconds. Since we did have a bunch that were longer (because what was being said was important), we decided to cut to the secondary camera to at least break up the visual clips into shorter segments. Also, we made sure that transitions from segments that had been juxtaposed switched from one camera to another to disguise the fact that the segments didn't occur next to each other in the raw footage. We also went through and put in game box shots and game footage so that the audience can see what the subject was talking about. For example, when

Brian Sullivan was talking about how units looked in *Age of Empires*, we showed a screenshot of the units lined up.

The final stage of editing was used to do touchups to make the quality of the clips better. If there were any glitches in the way transitions from segment to segment looked, we made sure that they were smoothed out. We also had to do some color and light correction. Since the two cameras were different cameras filming at different definitions, we had to make sure that they at least looked similar in the final product. Besides the lighting, we also had to boost the audio on the Paul Neurath interview so that it was more audible.

## **4. Results and Discussion / Analysis**

For the most part, the basic core of the project was successful, but there was a lot that could be different with the final quality of the project. Overall, we made clips that were succinct, showed the interviewee, had visual aids, and had no jarring technical errors. This means that all the content needed for this project is sound. As with most other art forms though, there is a lot that could have been done differently to make the project better on the surface.

As far as the questioning is concerned, we asked enough questions that were fairly well informed, so the clips have good points being made about the subjects. There are many other questions we could have asked, though, that would have elicited even better responses. This is largely a product of practice though, and probably cannot be mastered easily over the course of a three term project.

Our lighting and sound quality was decent enough to have a pretty good final product, but could have been better. For Paul Neurath, we used completely environmental light because the room we were in had one whole side covered by window. The lighting for that interview came out pretty good, but the sound quality suffered because of the close proximity to the street. At one point, sirens from outside overwhelmed the sound from the inside, which rendered that portion of the footage unusable. The Brian Sullivan interview was quite the opposite. The archives room was quiet and wasn't close to the street, so the sound quality came out great. Unfortunately, the lighting suffered a bit because of our inexperience. On the far right side of Brian, the ceiling lights were not on. Over him and on his left the lights were fine, and seemed fine at the time, but presented problems with the secondary camera. We had to darken

the main camera shots and brighten the secondary camera so that they looked the same.

Editing, like many of the other aspects, seems to be a product of practice. We did a good enough job that there aren't major glitches (transitions from cut to cut are smooth), but our choice of different shots might not have been the best. We could have used more visual aids to help explain what the interviewee was talking about, and we could also have put more reason into camera switches. For the most part, we switched cameras to hide transitions and to break the clip up so it wouldn't feel like one segment was lasting too long. Jason Scott pointed out that the cuts seemed to be too random, but we felt that we needed many of the cuts, lest the clip contain jumps and glitches.

Besides work related with the actual video clips themselves, there were some other issues that came up during the project. First of all, we didn't get confirmations from our interviewees until the first week of the second term. It was a challenge to try and get people considered pioneers to agree to do the interview because many of them are busy. Once we confirmed who we were interviewing, it was also a problem trying to coordinate a good time. We managed to pick a date with both of them, but with not a lot of time left to spare.

## **5. Conclusions & Recommendations**

### **5.1 Conclusions**

Overall, the goals of the project were met. We created seven clips for both Paul Neurath and Brian Sullivan that are short and coherent. They are suitable for a museum exhibit. There are always things that could be better, but much of the improvement comes through practice. We have seen through our own experience with this project that the ability to operate the cameras and ask meaningful questions during an interview improves as one does more and more interviews.

There are several keys to success when conducting videotaped interviews. First and foremost, the interviewer needs to be prepared. This applies to both content and operation. The interviewer needs to know enough about the subject to be able to ask good questions that will make the subject give great responses. Also, the interviewer needs to make sure that all the equipment is in working order. Besides the equipment, a careful preparation is paramount. The location, lighting, and setting need to be taken into careful consideration. The stuff in the background says as much about the subject as what the subject is saying. Lighting needs to be good in all places that the filming might take place. The sound needs to be clear, so the location should be a quiet place that doesn't distort the sound (such as an echo). Once the footage is obtained, the editing process begins. The editor needs to focus on cutting out anything that is not needed. The editor must also make sure to make use of visual aids and secondary shots to provide extra information and to possibly cover up camera blunders.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

The most important thing that future IQP teams need to keep in mind is to pay attention to both Dean O'Donnell and Jason Scott (and anyone else who is providing help). They know what they are doing, so it is best to listen to them. Also, make sure to seek help from them and to arrange a meeting with Jason as soon as possible. The earlier the meeting with Jason, the more practicing can get done.

As far as the interviews go, start early (as in the first day) on finding an interview subject. The field of pioneers grows thinner and thinner each year and it will be hard enough just to find a person's name, let alone actually get said person to do the interview. This is especially true when doing multiple interviews. We had to do two, and the first was supposed to be done several weeks before the second. Unfortunately, they were done within a week of each other, so we weren't able to learn as much from the first one going into the second one.

Finally, make sure to be prepared. Asking good questions isn't as easy as it sounds, so make sure to do plenty of research. The more that is known about someone, the better the quality of the questions can be. It is also advisable to make sure that you reserve the cameras and other equipment in advance. It seems like it shouldn't be a problem taking out the IMGD equipment for an IMGD IQP, but the cameras are used by others. Making a reservation a week or two in advance can prevent many headaches from trying to scramble around last minute.

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## **Appendix A: Practice Interviews**

## **Appendix B: Paul Neurath**

## **Appendix C: Brian Sullivan**