

**THE ORAL HISTORY OF VIDEO GAMES**

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)

Andrew Brockert  
Kristina Davenport  
Kyle Horn  
Matthew Ivory

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Advisor Signature

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submitted to the faculty as evidence of completion of a degree requirement.  
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## **Abstract**

The purpose of the Oral History of Video Games IQP this year was to conduct and add our own interviews to this ongoing project as well as create a website to showcase everyone's work. We watched various documentaries and learned filming and editing techniques from Jason Scott, a documentarian. We spent the second term conducting the actual interviews for the project. Finally, the last term was dedicated to editing the interviews and integrating the website.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. What We Did</b>	
2a. Learning the Process	6
2b. The Interview(s)	9
2c. Bringing It All Together: Editing and the Website	11
<b>3. Developer Backgrounds</b>	
3a. Richard Garriott	14
3b. Mike Dornbrook	19
<b>4. Results, Reflection and Recommendations</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix A: Practice Interviews and Website Files	26
Appendix B: Mike Dornbrook Interview	27
Appendix C: Questions for Richard Garriott	28
Appendix D: Website Screenshots	29

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*Interviewee who agreed to let our group conduct and film an interview for the oral history project.*

**Dean O'Donnell**

*Our project advisor who helped guide us with related assignments and constructive feedback on our progress.*

**Jason Scott**

*Documentarian who provided us with professional advice concerning filming and editing techniques which we would later use to conduct our interviews.*

**Brian Moriarty**

*WPI professor and acclaimed game developer who helped us contact various game developers.*

**WPI Academic Technology Center (ATC)**

*Provided us with the camera equipment and necessary training used for conducting our interviews.*

## 1. Introduction

There were two primary goals for this year's Oral History team. First, we each needed to pick one game developer, four in total, that would be suitable to interview for the project. Our final list of developers consisted of Doug Church, Mike Dornbrook, Richard Garriott and George Sanger. Each interview was to be videotaped and edited down to short clips that would be suitable for something like a museum exhibit. Our second goal was to create a website that would showcase all of the information and footage that has been collected by the groups over the past few years.

The IQP was conducted over three terms, where each term was designated to specific goals. The first term was dedicated to a few tasks; first, we began watching documentaries like *BBS: The Documentary* and the *Aristocrats*. We made notes of things like camera shots, use of B-roll footage and other techniques used in documentary filmmaking. B-Roll is supplemental footage that is used with the main shot. For example, if you had someone talking about the origin of Pacman you might show a video of Pacman being played rather than the person talking about it.

We put these notes to use by conducting our own practice interviews. This was essentially our time to get familiar with equipment and editing software as well as a time to practice proper technique in lighting, sound and filming. We sent our first practice interviews to Jason Scott, a documentarian (*BBS: The Documentary, Get Lamp*), who helped point out our mistakes and offered his expert knowledge in documentary filmmaking. He taught us how to frame our shots, to make sure that the background speaks for the person being interviewed and we also learned editing techniques with b-roll footage and footage manipulation that would help us develop a more professional looking interview. After studying the assigned documentaries, meeting with Jason and more practice interviews we started gathering ideas for possible interviewees.

The next term was spent scheduling and conducting the interviews with our chosen game developers. Our initial list consisted of Richard Garriott, creator of *Ultima Online* and other famous titles,

Mike Dornbrook, the COO of *Harmonix* and also an early member of *Infocom*, George “The Fat Man” Sanger, a musician that composed music for video games as early as 1983, and Doug Church, who currently works as a producer at *Electronic Arts*.

We unfortunately ran into problems scheduling our interviews with three of the four candidates. We discovered that our attempt to interview these highly acclaimed game developers, two of which resided in the distant city of Austin, Texas, wasn’t going to be as easy as it seemed. In one case we had initially contacted the developer himself but we were then directed to his publicist who kept suggesting there was no time in his schedule when in fact the developer said there was. Our persistent emails and requests were consistently turned down or ignored.

The third term’s initial goals were to edit all of our interviews into final clips and launch the website. Due to our lack of interviews though, we had to double up on work and still try to find three more interviewees. We also dedicated time to the final report and other similar conclusive work to bring the project all together. The website was also a priority so we made sure to take time to collect, organize and upload all the necessary assets from the entire project.

## 2. What We Did

### 2a. Learning the Process

The beginning of the project was concerned with equipping the entire team with the necessary skills and knowledge to conduct our own interviews and create our own clips. We started off watching Jason Scott's *BBS: The Documentary* with the intentions of taking notice of Jason's filming and interviewing techniques. We continued to watch other documentaries throughout the term with similar goals including the *First Person* series by Errol Morris and *The Aristocrats*, each one offering their own unique approach to documentary filmmaking. From watching these films we were able to learn about many things we would have otherwise overlooked in our own interviews like the background, framing a shot properly, using different angles and multiple cameras and various editing techniques. Properly framing a shot requires a few things. This may not hold true when setting up shots from other angles, but generally your subject should be in the center of the frame. Also, it's important to consider how much of the subject is going to show. If you cut them off at their bottom lip it's going to make for an awkward shot. A general rule of thumb we learned was to cut the subject off at their joints, like their shoulders, elbows or hips. The background tells us a lot about the subject being interviewed so it's important not to misrepresent the person and to make sure it's free of unwanted things (like the sweatshirt in the figure below). The figure on the left below is from Kyle's first practice interview of Kristina. There are a number of things to point out for improvement including framing, lighting and



background. The subject is off-center which makes the shot look very strange. The background does nothing to inform us about Kristina and there's clutter in the bottom left corner of the shot. For lighting we only used one small halogen lamp

and the ceiling light so we didn't achieve the best quality shot. You can see a large cast shadow on the right of the subjects face. To the right and below is a screen shot of our interview with Mike Dornbrook where the group achieved the best background, framing and lighting during the entire project.



Notice how he is centered, the background tells us a little bit about him since it's his office, and the lighting is good enough to where the subject is fully illuminated and there aren't any awkward shadows being casted that would interfere with the quality of the shot.

Throughout the term we put all this new knowledge to use when we conducted our own interviews. Overall we each made two or three of these interviews during the first term. We familiarized ourselves with the process of checking equipment out of the Academic Technology Center and obtained two cameras to start our own practice interviews. At first, we rotated between interviewer and interviewee in the group and conducted all the interviews in Kyle's apartment. We learned quickly that where the interview takes place is one of the most important things because it suggests the character of the interviewee. By interviewing everyone in Kyle's apartment we confused the viewer (in this case our advisor, Dean) that we all lived together. These practice interviews were very valuable because it allowed us to develop all the necessary skills we would need for the project; filming, asking provoking questions, and editing. We also received valuable feedback from our advisor and Jason Scott that helped us achieve a higher quality product each time.

Jason Scott has been nice enough to work with this IQP over the years offering his expert knowledge and advice in documentary filmmaking. Another highlight of our first term was getting to visit Jason Scott for a night and exploring all the different dimensions one needs to consider when making a documentary from the very beginning stages all the way to editing the final cut. In past years



it seems that other groups received a more thorough demonstration when visiting with Jason Scott where they actually set up proper lighting and sound, filmed a short clip and edited to a final cut with Jason. In our meeting he reviewed the practice interviews we all made, pointing out different ways we could all improve in all aspects of filmmaking. He also spent a lot of time showing us clips in his archive that demonstrated the use of specific techniques. The group could have benefitted from the hands on work that other groups experienced but meeting with Jason Scott was still valuable in moving us towards our ultimate goals.

After meeting with Jason, we went back and conducted more practice interviews, trying to master the new knowledge we had obtained and integrating it into our work. Each successive interview had the goal of obtaining better a better shot, light and sound as well as looking more and more like a professional documentary. We had struggled with the light and sound quality for some time. We learned that in order to establish good lighting we would have to use multiple sources of light from different directions. This will essentially help to eliminate awkward shadows and fully illuminate the subject. There was also another technique we learned where you could “splash” the light off of a bright wall. This is effective when you don’t have enough light sources or the shot your filming doesn’t allow for lights to be placed all around your subject. At first we didn’t have a very good understanding or means of producing such quality, but eventually through practice and repetition we managed to set up professional looking lighting with good sound quality.

Towards the end of the first term we started to create a list of possible interview candidates that were of interest to the group members. We met with Professor Moriarty who was kind enough to allow us to use his array of contacts in the game industry as a starting ground for the next phase of our project.

## **2b. The Interview(s)**

By the beginning of the second term we had a list consisting of Mike Dornbrook, Richard Garriott, George Sanger and Doug Church. We also looked towards the upcoming Penny Arcade Expo where many famous developers would congregate. We had our hopes set high for this term and we were confident we could accomplish the goals we set for the project.

Krissy, who was primarily in charge of contacting the developers, had successfully contacted Mike Dornbrook and Richard Garriott about conducting an interview for our project. We had planned on going to Austin, Texas to interview Richard Garriott but he had mentioned that he would be in New York City a few weeks after we first talked to him. Seizing the opportunity to save money, we thought that would be a great place to meet up and do the interview.

Since we had successfully contacted these two developers, Matt began research on Mike Dornbrook and Kyle did so on Richard Garriott. This background information about the developer was essential so we could conduct a valuable and accurate interview. Like our advisor said, it would be pretty rude for us to walk in to the interview and not know a thing about the person we were interviewing.

Later on, Krissy had mentioned that she hadn't heard from Mr. Garriott for an extended amount of time and we were scheduled to interview him in less than two weeks. She had been turned over to his publicist as a mean of communication. Despite Garriott's obvious willingness to do the interview, his publicist insisted that he did not have time for us. With no response from Garriott himself and the impassable wall that was his publicist, we lost hope of obtaining this interview.

We maintained contact with Mike Dornbrook and set a definite time and date for us to interview him at *Harmonix Music Systems Inc.* in Cambridge, Massachusetts. We were already a couple weeks into the second term though and still hadn't heard back from the other two developers, Doug Church and George Sanger. Krissy was persistent with her emails but still received no response from

either one. With time running out and a lack of interviews on our hands, we began to suspect we may have set our hopes too high to obtain interviews with such acclaimed and busy game developers.

Despite our setbacks we encountered with three of the four developers, we did manage to conduct a very fun and interesting interview with Mike Dornbrook. We brought all of our equipment to Harmonix and set up a great shot in his office where we would be able to capture not only his great stories but his character too, through all the different toys and games he had on display. We made sure to incorporate all we had learned in the first term to ensure that we would have a professional looking interview to add to the archives.

None of us were sure what to expect when we got there but once we met Mr. Dornbrook all anxieties were relieved when we realize how laid back and welcoming he was. One funny thing that happened was that Mike Dornbrook didn't know we were going to be filming him, he was surprised at first when we showed up with all the equipment but he did not seem to mind after the initial shock. On our part, the video recording was a detail we took for granted when we contacted the developers.

The actual interview took on a much less formal procedure than we had expected. Rather than just one person interviewing him, we had more of what might seem like a round table discussion. We each had a knowledgeable understanding of who he was and what he had done so we all had different questions to ask him about his history in the game industry. Krissy was technically the main interviewer, Andrew maintained the HD camera shot, Kyle set up the lighting and Matt and Kyle both took turns maintaining the B-Roll camera. One immediate issue we ran into was that we didn't have a tripod for the B-Roll camera so the shots we did get were done so with unsteady hands. Though we all had designated stations, I mentioned that we all took turns asking him different questions. It was very effective because we all had different interests in our mind about his history and by having a group discussion we were able to exert more history and stories than we would if only one of us had interviewed him.

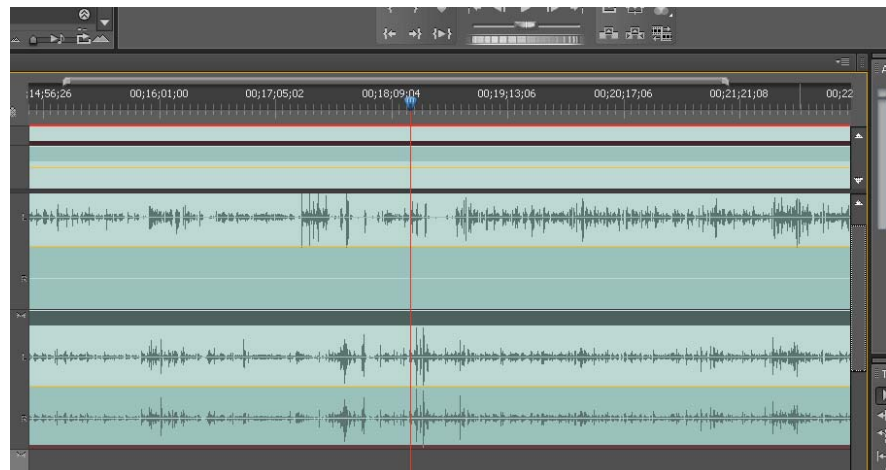
Overall we managed to meet one of our goals this term, which was to interview Mike Dornbrook. With one successful interview in the bag we still had the daunting task of finding three more candidates with very little time to spare in our second term. It looked like we would have to derail our set schedule for the project and allow work to overflow into the next term.

## **2c. Bringing it All Together: Editing and the Website**

Editing was undoubtedly one of the most time-consuming aspects of the project. We received training in Adobe Premiere so that we would be familiar with the basic editing tools we would need. The training was sufficient for us to start our practice interviews but it was all the outside information we learned that was necessary to integrate into our editing process.

The first step in editing our recordings was to go through the raw footage and get rid of all the parts that were irrelevant to our analysis such as our own voices asking questions and pauses in speech.

To save time, we synchronized the footage from the two cameras so that when we made a cut, it would appear in the same place on both tapes, avoiding the need to find the same point on two tapes



separately. The easiest way to do this is to find a loud noise and match up the peaks in the audio. The audio waveforms don't match exactly, so it takes some work to match up, but it saves a lot of editing time later. Then, we went through the valuable footage and organized it by subject matter. When it came time to putting B-roll footage in, it was just a matter of deleting the parts we did not want. We learned to do this from our practice interviews and we have found that it saves a lot hassle and time.

Overall the hardest part of editing was taking all the small cuts we had and using them to tell a coherent and logical story. This is where our meeting with Jason Scott really helped. Since making documentaries takes a certain amount of artistic sense and skill, by watching Jason go through the steps of how he works, we had a better understanding of how we should do it.

The string of small clips that we put together acted as a base for our B-roll clips and transitions. These parts were fairly straight forward. When adding the B-roll, our strategy was to find places that were not visually pleasing on the main shot and use B-roll to 'cover' it up. We also used B-roll to break up the flow of the main roll to make the overall documentary clip more interesting. In the end, B-roll came in and out of the clips multiple of times depending on the duration. Whenever there was a clean cut between clips, we used a simple transition know as 'cross dissolve'. This visual effect blends the clips together to create a nice fade which we used throughout all our clips including the B-roll.

At the beginning of our project, our IQP advisor stated that editing the footage would take the most time and, undoubtedly, he was correct. Countless hours and late nights were spent putting together the main shot, B-Roll, and transitions to create our finalized documentary clips.

In addition to the documentary aspect of the project, we created a website to house all of our oral histories, past, present, and future. Creating the site involved taking the videos from past years, splitting them into clips where necessary, transcoding it to a format suitable for web viewing, capturing still images to put on the site, and creating the site itself.

The interviews with Ralph Baer, Paul Neurath, and Brian Sullivan were all on DVD, so we used DVDx to capture it to a format we could edit further. The Brian Moriarty interview was in MOV format on the Gordon Library's project collection, so we downloaded that and worked with the files directly. The video from the Ralph Baer interview was all in one title on the DVD, so it needed to be manually split into clips by subject using Adobe Premiere Pro. Once every interview was separated into clip files,

we transcoded it to WMV format using Windows Media Encoder. This format was chosen because it compresses aggressively, which makes for better web viewing, and because the ATC had trained us in Windows Media Encoder.

The site was created in Adobe Dreamweaver, though most of the HTML and CSS was edited directly. This allowed a great degree of control over the layout and appearance, while providing a convenient way to quickly preview changes.

We spoke to the IGDA at the beginning of the project and established that we would be creating a website for the Oral History of Video Games project at WPI. Our website will be linked from the IGDA's Game Preservation SIG, as part of their Oral Histories project. This collaboration might prove helpful to future years, as the Game Preservation SIG may be able to provide contacts to interview, suggestions on how to improve the project, or other support.

### 3. Developer Backgrounds

#### 3a. Richard Garriott

Though we did not successfully interview Richard<sup>1</sup> Garriott, research was conducted because upon first communicating with him it was established that he would be able to do the interview in New York City during the weekend of March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

Richard Garriott was born on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1961 in Cambridge, England but moved to the U.S. soon after to Nassau Bay, Texas<sup>1</sup>. He was raised by his father Owen who was an astronaut as well as a physics professor for Stanford University, and his mother Helen who was a “free-spirited” artist<sup>2</sup>. He grew up in a very modern household that helped influence his rise to become one of the greatest game developers in this day and age.



He grew up with a father who was always tinkering with different technology from NASA. In high school, he won the U.S. National Science Fair with his project concerning “Wave Propagation with Computer Analysis. His father helped him understand the science while he created a computer program which simulated radiowaves<sup>3</sup>. He grew up being urged especially by his mother to think big and to always follow through with whatever project he may find himself invested in. He built things all the time with his brother Robert, including the “Nauseator” which was essentially a do-it-yourself G-Force accelerator inspired by his father’s stories about one<sup>4</sup>.

The family moved to Palo Alto, California for a year in 1976 where Richard worked on computer terminals at Palo Alto’s high school. His family then moved to Houston, Texas where he began

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<sup>1</sup> John Borland and Brad King, *Dungeons and Dreamers* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11, 15

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17

programming in 1977<sup>5</sup>. In the summer of 1977 Richard was shipped off to a seven week-long computer camp at Oklahoma University<sup>6</sup>. This camp, although dreaded at first, was life changing for Garriott. It was here he discovered the imaginary world of Dungeons and Dragons (DnD) as well as the fact that there was a community for all of this that he thought was “nerdy”<sup>7</sup>. He carried the experiences he had at camp back home and formed a DnD group. The popularity of this game spread like wild fire and eventually the entire Garriott household was an epicenter for the role playing game<sup>8</sup>.

Garriott wanted to merge the interactive experience with his skills in computer programming. By the beginning of his junior year there were no more computer classes for him to take. As clever as he was he proposed to the principal that he conduct an independent study where at the end of each semester he submits a functional computer game<sup>9</sup>. When he saw the game “Escape Maze” his view of games completely changed. He was exposed to the idea of vector graphics which drew lines on the screen to simulate a 3D space<sup>10</sup>. He immediately began working on the newest version of his most recent adventure game, receiving help from his mom with art and his dad with the complex math the vector graphics posed<sup>11</sup>.

Finally, in 1979, after two years of work Richard finished his first real game entitled ‘Akalabeth’. He spent \$200 on the production and distribution of this game which included a ziploc bag and photocopies of a manual and cover<sup>12</sup>. He made sixteen copies and sold fifteen at his job at



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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 21

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.11

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.13, 15

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 18,19

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.23

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.35

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.36, 37

<sup>12</sup> David Kushner, *Masters of Doom*, (Random House, 2003), 81.



ComputerLand. His boss took the last copy unbeknown to Richard and sent it to California Pacific, a game company<sup>13</sup>. He sold 30,000 copies totaling an income of \$150,000. This was a huge, unexpected step for Richard and his future.

The summer before he would leave for college Richard was teamed up with a friend named Ken Arnold and they were both working on a new title, "*Ultima*". It was finished and sent off to publishers in 1980 but before they received any royalties, the publisher went under<sup>14</sup>. His creativity wasn't deterred and he began working on the sequel, *Ultima II*. After many companies shot down his elaborate ideas for his product (cloth manual, etc..) Ken Williams of Sierra On-Line agreed to fund the production<sup>15</sup>. Garriott soon left Sierra though because of a rising disagreement over porting *Ultima II* to the IBM PC as well as overall dissatisfaction with the lack of cooperation from Sierra.

With little faith left in corporate game publishers, Garriott (along with his brother) took matters in their own hands and formed Origin Systems who employed two Sierra-online 'refugees' Mary Fenton and Jeff Hillhouse as well as a strange Dr. Cat from Indiana later on<sup>16</sup>. The company started out in Garriott's garage but eventually moved to a small office in Houston. Less than a year later the company found itself moving to the east coast to Massachusetts. Their first title released was *Ultima III* in 1983<sup>17</sup>. Since this was the first time Richard was distributing his game on a large scale he directly received feedback from fans, which was completely new to him. He learned that people were reading so far into his game that they thought he was embedding hidden messages, which struck him as an interesting idea.

For his next project, Garriott really took into consideration how the actions of the player could affect game play, like real life. He wanted to have the player explore eight virtues, where each city in

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<sup>13</sup> Borland and King, *Dungeons and Dreamers*, 34

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 50

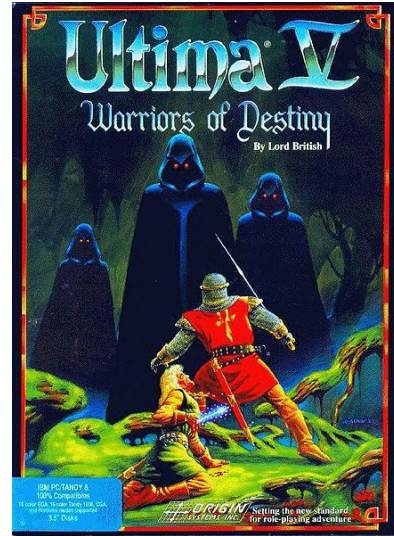
<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 58

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 60, 62

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.69

the game represented one of a combination of the virtues. This game would come to be known as *Ultima IV*, which earned its right in 1985 as a top seller, selling 200,000 copies<sup>18</sup>.

Finally in 1987, after a three year stay in New England the company (after a tug of war between Richard and his brother Robert) relocated to Austin where Richard purchased his famous “Britannia” castle based on the world his game *Ultima* takes place in<sup>19</sup>. In 1988, *Ultima V* was on the market and two years later *Ultima VI* followed. By this time though, Origins and the 80 employees was in financial trouble. Richard worked on *Ultima VII* to ease his mind which was the first to be released for PC. In 1992



the company was sold to Electronic Arts, who had more interest in Robert’s idea about the Wing Commander Series<sup>20</sup>. EA would eventually release the second and third *Ultima VII* in 1993 but it was losing its steam as a series.

To Garriott the next logical place for games to go was online. It took three pitches to convince EA to fund the beginning of what became *Ultima Online*<sup>21</sup>. During the same time *Ultima VIII* was released but didn’t receive the attention his earlier titles did. Garriott blames this on rushed production and distribution of the unfinished product which was very buggy<sup>22</sup>. The beginning of *Ultima Online* was rough. The team worked in a space that was being renovated so they were constantly moved around. In March of 1996 they had their first pre-Alpha test for which they chose 3,000 people. In mid-1996 they were ready for a full beta test but had used up virtually all their funding for the project. In an effort to make it possible an ad was placed online for \$2 production fee for the beta discs. To the team’s

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 73-75

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 71

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 80

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 148

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.151

surprise over 50,000 sent checks to fund the beta test. With *Ultima Online* seemingly underway, Garriott focused his attention on *Ultima IX* which would conclude the final trilogy of this series. With such a hype over *Ultima Online* developers working on *Ultima IX* were eventually put to tasks to work on the completion of *Ultima Online*. Finally in July of 1997 the beta was released for the first Massive Multiplayer Online Game (MMOG)<sup>23</sup>. After reviewing feedback and finely tuning the game *Ultima Online* was released on September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1997. It sold for \$64.95, sold 40,000 units and hosted an average of 5,000 players at a time. By November it had sold over 65,000 copies and became Electronic Arts fastest selling title<sup>24</sup>.

Eventually in 1999, *Ultima IX* was released but seemed to have already missed its mark<sup>25</sup>. When EA asked Garriott to begin working on *Ultima Online II* (which he thought was unnecessary) he decided it was time to leave the company in March of 2000. He then formed Destination Games with his brother Robert and *Ultima Online's* producer Starr Long. A year later they partnered up with Korean game company NCsoft who produced the game *Lineage* and eventually would produce *Lineage II*. He worked as a producer and developer for the company and has most recently produced the MMORPG *Tabula Rasa*, which was released in 2007<sup>26</sup> though servers shut down in early 2009.

In 2008 it was speculated that Garriott was going to leave NCsoft after his dabbling with space but that ended up to be a forged letter in an attempt to force him out of position. Recently, mid-2009 Garriott filed a claim against NCsoft in which he says that the Korean Company "breached its stock

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 150-157

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 163

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 169

<sup>26</sup> Wikipedia, *Tabula Rasa (Video Game)*, available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tabula\\_Rasa\\_\(video\\_game\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tabula_Rasa_(video_game)); Internet; accessed 2/1/10

option agreement with Mr. Garriott and/or sought to defraud Mr. Garriott of the value of those options. He claims they defrauded him in excess of 27 million dollars<sup>27</sup>.

Though I've only speculated on Richard Garriott's success as a game developer he's also traveled to space aboard the Russian Soyuz TMA-13 as the sixth public person to do so<sup>28</sup>. He's certainly an adventurous person spanning things from a trip to Antarctica to scuba diving, hang gliding and skydiving<sup>29</sup>. He was undoubtedly in the right place at the right time and consequently has made a lasting impact on the video game industry.

### 3b. Mike Dornbrook

Michael Dornbrook did not start working in the video game industry until 1979 when he was hired on by his former MIT roommates Marc Blank, Joel Berez and Dave Lebling.<sup>30</sup> They formed a company called *Infocom* located in Cambridge, Massachusetts.



Their first game, a text adventure called *Zork I*, was created at MIT in 1977 and ended up being very successful with selling over 1 million copies. During this period, Mike was the official *Infocom Play-tester*. After the games release, Mike helped with customer support and some marketing. Mostly the people who called in or mailed were players that we stuck on a puzzle more often with those who had technical problems. Soon enough, he decided to move on when he graduated from MIT, however he did not want to abandon *Zork's* support group. But *Infocom* denied the option to hire someone to replace

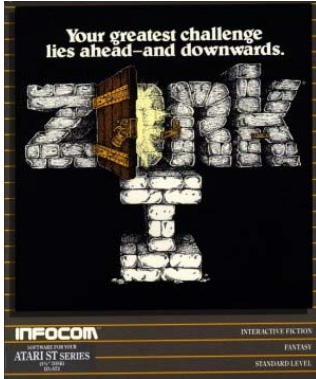
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<sup>27</sup> *Garriott v. NCSoft (Court Claim)*, available from <http://cdn2.libsyn.com/gamepolitics/Garriott-NCsoft-complaint.pdf?nvb=20100202020821&nva=20100203021821&t=06c43ae22396c9e53f4c9>; Internet; accessed 2/1/10

<sup>28</sup> Richard Garriott, *About Richard*, available from [http://www.richardinspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=About\\_Richard.Space](http://www.richardinspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=About_Richard.Space); Internet; accessed 2/1/10

<sup>29</sup> Richard Garriott, *About Richard*; Internet; accessed 2/1/10

<sup>30</sup> Spoke.com, *Mike Dornbrook*, available from <http://www.spoke.com/info/pwRG21/MikeDornbrook>; Internet; accessed 2/6/10



him (since they were busy already creating *Zork's* sequels). He eventually made a compromise that with *Infocom* that allowed him to borrow their trademark which allowed him to establish '*Zork Users Group*' in 1981<sup>31</sup>.

A year into this new found group he came up with a unique and influential hint book for *Zork* called *InvisClues*. These guides were made up of questions that the user would have and then provide the answers below in invisible ink that they could see once they went over it with a highlighter-like tool. The answers were vague and the book had plausible-sounding "fake" questions to hopefully stop the reader from finding out more than they intended. This was over all a big hit and added to the popularity for *Zork*.<sup>32</sup>

In 1982 Mike ended up writing for the *New Zork Times*, which was a monthly newsletter for *Infocom*. Only a year later he became the product manager of *Infocom* to become the Product Manager (1983) and then Vice President (1988). Eventually *Infocom* merged with Activision briefly in 1989 until they closed later that year.<sup>33</sup>

Mike and the people he previously worked with at *Infocom* (Steve Meretzky and Leo DaCosta) formed a company known as *Boffo Games* (1994) best known for *The Space Bar* game. They went on to create one more game, *Hodj 'n' Podj*, before they closed.<sup>34</sup>

In 1997, Mike was hired by *Harmonix* where he manages the company's finances and legal and administrative affairs. His official title is Chief Operating Officer and Executive Vice President and remains working there as of now.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Jason Scott, *Mike Dornbrook*, available from <http://www.getlamp.com/cast/20080123dornbrook/index.html>; Internet; accessed 2/6/10

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, accessed 2/7/10

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, accessed 2/7/10

<sup>34</sup> *Boffo Games*, available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boffo\\_Games](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boffo_Games); Internet; accessed 2/7/10

#### 4. Results, Reflection and Recommendations

Overall the project was an array of successes and failures. While we succeeded in learning about the process of documentary filmmaking and conducting one successful interview we were unable to achieve our ultimate goals of interviewing four game developers. We were also successful in creating a webpage that would host all of the work done over the years for the public to easily access. In a collaborative effort with the IGDA we were able to get our site recognition on the IGDA Game Preservation SIG and we added our URL to the IGDA Oral History Wiki page.

Our original goal was to interview four developers and create a collection of two to five minute clips on various topics covered in the interviews. We failed to reach this goal in the end but we were otherwise able to learn from the experience.

The group certainly underestimated the challenges that we would encounter in trying to contact and meet such busy people. Not only is it hard to actually get an initial response from an acclaimed developer, but it's just as hard to maintain contact with them as well. If we could start over again we would have began contacting developers in the first term, rather than waiting for the designated second term to roll around.

We also speculated on the goals we set, specifically for the interviews. We didn't foresee any problems contacting the developers and we were really intent on interviewing the ones we had chosen so we didn't really consider even having to think about other developers until it was too late. It's easier to look back now and realize that we should have anticipated these problems that we faced. That said, future groups should set bold goals but insure these goals with an even stronger back-up plan. If we concocted a more detailed list, rather than just 'Go to PAX', we would have undoubtedly gotten at least

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<sup>35</sup> Spoke.com, *Mike Dornbrook*; Internet; accessed 2/6/10

one more interview. Also, another preventative measure (which we've already mentioned) would be to start making your list of developers and to contact them as soon as possible.

One last behavior of the group that held us back was our habit of meeting outside of the scheduled meeting time with Dean. At first, when we had the documentaries to watch and the interviews to conduct we met out of class frequently. Once the second term rolled around though communication dwindled and outside meetings were few and far between. We think this partly was a result of the division of labor. We were all working on things separately rather than cooperatively, therefore we saw no need to collaborate. Unfortunately, we again realized something too late. The need for collaboration, communication and outside meetings is imperative to move the group forward.

Our interview with Mike Dornbrook was our most obvious success. We were able to conduct a lengthy interview, surfacing a lot of great stories about his early days at Infocom and his role in the gaming industry. We used studio lighting as well as the ceiling light in his office which allowed to capture a well lit shot. Though it may not be of Hollywood standard, we managed to achieve the best lighting we've been able to get in the project. Another notable success was our sound quality. We believe that the practice interviews were responsible for our new ability to light and record a well lit interview. We were also all prepared for the interview. We had the cameras and other related equipment checked out days ahead. There was a prepared list of core questions that would allow us to spring off into other infinite discussions. Also, we were all familiar with his background, which allowed us all to be able to interview him. The combination of all this preparation and our skills with editing and filming allowed us to create a professional looking interview for the Oral History archives. It's important to realize that everything you are exposed to in this project will eventually be put to use in some way or another.

The group came up with some other general recommendations for future projects that will definitely help make things easier in the long run. First, get trained on the HD Camera that you'll be using for the interviews as soon as possible. We didn't get training until the second term and we discovered it would have been valuable to have been using that camera all along just to be familiar with how it works and how long things take like getting the actual video file off the camera (which is a very long time). Another thing the group should do is apply the information you learn from the documentaries and other sources and apply them seriously to your practice interviews. The more work you put in early on, the easier things like lighting, sound and editing will be in the long run. Another important task to direct focus to early on is editing. It is very time consuming to go through a clip, let alone a 2 hour interview, and cut and rearrange all of the footage into a coherent and fluid story. Most of your time will be spent importing the video and editing the footage during this project so it's a good idea to become comfortable and familiar with the tools you need to do so. This project calls for a constant active role from all of its members. If you stop this project you will have an immediate build up of work so it's best to stay on top of things and maybe even get ahead. Like we mentioned before, create a list of developers you're interested in and contact them as soon as possible. That may be the most beneficial thing you can do early on because that is undoubtedly the most dynamic and unpredictable aspect of the project.



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## **Appendix A**

### Practice Interviews and Website Files

Could not access this practice interview file so we added the URL to the YouTube Video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJQZFFjTL64>

**Appendix B**  
Mike Dornbrook Interview

## Appendix C

### Questions for Richard Garriott

- 1) 1977 - Tell me about the camp you attended at Oklahoma U.?
- 2) Do you think your childhood influenced your seemingly endless creativity when you started making games?
- 3) What was it about escape maze that changed your perspective on games?
- 4) 1979 – Akalabeth:World of Doom – Did you ever anticipate what this would become?
- 5) How did you feel after you gave California Pacific your second title (Ultima) and didn't hear a word after?
- 6) What went on at Sierra that caused you to leave after the production of Ultima II: The Revenge of the Enchantress for the Apple II.
- 7) Origin Systems – This was your first company built from the ground up, it must have been difficult at first...why did it last less than a year in Austin?
- 8) What was the advantage to distributing the games yourself now, rather than having California Pacific or Sierra do it?
- 9) 1983 – First Origin Systems release: Ultima III:Exodus
- 10) 1985 - Ultima IV was a big release, it was pioneered these new ideas of players actions actually having in-game consequences, what went into developing such a novel idea?
- 11) 1992 - Was it difficult to give up Origin to a big name publisher like EA?
- 12) What happened with Ultima VIII?
- 13) What did it take to convince EA to fund your seemingly crazy idea for Ultima Online?

## Appendix D

### Website Screenshots

Home:



Links:



Contact:



## Reports:



The screenshot shows the top portion of the website. At the top left is the igda logo, followed by the WPI logo and the text "Oral History of Video Games". A dark red navigation bar contains the links: Home, Interviews, Reports, Contact, and Links. Below the navigation bar, the text "Student reports from past interviews:" is followed by a list of links: [Ralph Baer \(2007\)](#), [Brian Moriarty \(2008\)](#), [Paul Neurath, Brian Sullivan \(2009\)](#), and [Mike Dornbrook \(2010\)](#). The bottom of the page is a solid dark red bar.

## Interviews:



The screenshot shows the "Interviews" section of the website. It features the same header and navigation bar as the Reports page. Below the navigation bar, the text "Past interviews:" is followed by a list of interviewees, each with a list of interview topics and a small video thumbnail to the right. The interviewees and their topics are:   
Ralph Baer (2007): "His History" (1:10), "With Smarby Bear" (1:13), "TV Game #1" (1:04), "New Technology" (1:28), "Marketing" (1:45), "The Patent System" (1:13), "As Dean at TV Game #2" (2:27), "TV Game #1 - The Brown Box" (1:06), "The Creative Process" (1:59), and "Violence in Video Games" (1:12).   
Brian Moriarty (2008): "The Infocom Ethic" (1:12), "Gearing Into the Business" (2:06), "The State of the Industry" (2:51), "Violence in Video Games" (1:54), and "The Future of Gaming" (1:23).   
Brian Sullivan (2009): "Early History" (1:46), "Age of Empires" (2:20), "Tetris Progression" (1:20), "Titan Quest" (2:13), "Market Driven Design" (1:11), "Boston" (2:39), and "Violence" (2:04).   
Paul Neurath (2009): "Early History" (2:43), "Underworld" (2:01), "Physics" (1:16), "The" (1:58), "Mobile" (2:14), "Boston" (2:24), and "Violence" (2:05).   
Mike Dornbrook (2010): "Creation of the New York Times" (1:51), "Things looking up..." (0:34), "Evolution of Answering Questions" (2:13), "TetrisClues" (1:10), "Activision Takes Over" (1:23), "Infocom & Douglas Adams" (1:43), "Working with Douglas Adams" (1:21), and "Life at Infocom" (1:40).   
The bottom of the page is a solid dark red bar.