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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT: A HISTORY OF THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

An Interactive Qualifying Project Report

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Degree of Bachelor of Science

By

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This report represents the work of two 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.

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this IQP is to add to, and improve on, the ongoing IGDA Oral Histories Project. The project consists of videotaped interviews with game developers, and other influential members of the early video game industry. We interviewed Dave Lebling, one of the founding members of Infocom, and Gary Vincent, the curator of the American Classic Arcade Museum. In addition, we redesigned the Alpheus website to be more modern and intuitive, including streaming video instead of download-only.

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# **Acknowledgements**

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Interviewee.

## **Gary Vincent**

Interviewee.

## **Dean O'Donnell**

Advisor and guide to the process of making and editing documentary film.

## **Michael Voorhis**

Provided necessary credentials to update the Oral Histories webpage.

## **WPI Academic Technology Center**

Provided us with necessary camera equipment to conduct our interviews.

## **WPI Interactive Media and Game Development Program**

Provided us with necessary lighting equipment to conduct our interviews.

## Authorship Page

Our project began with a series of practice interviews. We conducted these interviews with members of the WPI undergraduate class and other associates. Each of us conducted two interviews apiece, practicing as both cameraman and interviewer. After gathering the footage, we edited them into documentary style clips. We both individually edited our own interviews, and used the other member to critique on techniques and style. The two of us took turns interacting with WPI Academic Technology Center to borrow the video equipment, and Eric interacted with members of the Interactive Media and Technology Department to borrow the lighting equipment.

For the next phase of the assignment, we performed research and contacted possible interview subjects. Both of us researched possible candidates, by first researching the companies which existed during the infancy of the industry and researching their employees, and we compiled a list of them. Eric contacted the potential subjects for interviews and coordinated interview dates with them. While waiting for responses, we spent our time researching interview subjects. Eric researched and contacted Eric and Terri Brosius, Dave Lebling, and Gary Vincent, and Frank researched and contacted Linda Currie, Andrew Plotkin, and David Kaemmer. Other interview subjects that were researched but not considered were Steve Aarnio, Seamus Blackley, Doug Church, Austin Grossman, Allen Varney, Andrew Greenberg, Doug Woods, and Mark Blank. The initial four interview subjects we contacted (The Brosius', Lebling, Currie, and Plotkin) were selected within a variety of parameters. We

knew that we would be unable to travel great distances to interview subjects, so we removed any subject who lived too far away (such as Andrew Greenberg, who lives in Florida.) After this, we began to narrow our list down subjectively. After performing research on a subject, we would draft up a list of accomplishments and points of interest about the subject and see if we could write 20 questions to ask them in an interview. If we were unable to accomplish either of the aforementioned tasks, we determined that the subject was ill-suited for the purposes of the project and elected not to contact them. When we were left with our remaining subjects, we felt confident in our selections and drafted up four letters, which we sent out in the beginning of the second term. We followed up on those letters as soon as we could, and had gotten responses from Lebling, Plotkin, and Currie by the beginning of the third term. We were unable to receive contact back from the Brosius'. After Currie had canceled her interview, we returned to our list and determined that it was insufficient for generating another appropriate interview subject. Professor O'Donnell suggested Gary Vincent and Dave Kaemmer, who we researched and, in Vincent's case, interviewed in the third and final term. Once the research was completed, we brought our research to Professor O'Donnell for suggestions and improvements.

For the actual interviews, we both took turns interacting with the WPI Academic Technology Center to borrow the video equipment, and Eric interacted with members of the IMGD Program to borrow lighting equipment for the Dave Lebling interview. For Dave Lebling, we drove to his home in Concord, MA and for Gary Vincent, we drove out to the American Classic Arcade Museum in Laconia, New Hampshire.

Once the interviews were finished, the footage needed to be edited. Eric was solely in charge of editing the Dave Lebling videos, while the work was shared for the Gary Vincent videos. Although Frank did not perform any editing on the Lebling videos, he reviewed the edited clips for errors and assisted Eric in searching for the B-roll footage used in the videos.

From partway through the second phase until the completion of the project, Frank worked on redesigning the Oral Histories webpage. Starting from scratch, Frank recreated the webpage with a more modern and intuitive look. Each interviewee was given their own personal page, with a brief bio on them and the segments of their interview. Each interview segment had to be re-rendered in order to be displayed properly while streaming directly from the website as opposed to being downloaded directly.

# 1. Introduction

This project works with the IDGA's Game Preservation Special Interest Group. Their goal is to interview inventors, developers and artists that were around at the birth of the industry. They seek honest interviews with pioneers who can discuss how the industry got started. The goal of this project was to contribute video clips suitable for use in the virtual museum created by the ongoing IGDA Oral Histories project. We were tasked with two separate goals- one, to conduct interviews with two game developers considered pioneers in the video game industry. Our first interviewee was Dave Lebling. He was one of the four creators of Zork, one of the most well-known video games ever created and certainly the most well-known interactive fiction game. He went on to found and work for Infocom, a 1980's video game developer focused on developing interactive fiction titles. Our second interviewee was Gary Vincent, who, while not a game developer himself, is the curator of the American Classic Arcade Museum. Up until now, the Oral History project has had no insight into the world of arcade games, which constituted a large part of their early history and culture. By interviewing Gary Vincent, we have been able to shed light onto this previously undiscussed section of video game history.

The IQP took place over three terms: each term had separate goals and milestones. For the first term, we learned about the processes of interviewing subjects and editing footage. To do this, we did three things: first, we watched documentary films, such as *First Person*, *The Aristocrats*, *BBS: The Documentary*, and *Get Lamp*.



Second, we studied the interviews performed in the past as part of the Oral Histories project. Third, we conducted interviews of our own with members of the WPI community and others. In addition to learning interview techniques, we began to perform preliminary research on several prominent interview subjects, Dave Lebling, Eric and Terri Brosius, and Linda Currie.

The second term of the IQP was dedicated to contacting interviewees and obtaining interviews. We put additional research into more potential subjects, like Linda Currie, and sent out letters to our interview subjects. Dave Lebling quickly agreed, and we began to prepare for the interview. After several drafts of questions, we were ready to interview Lebling, and set up an interview just before the end of term. We drove to his house in Concord, Massachusetts, and conducted the interview over approximately two hours. In addition, Linda Currie was successfully contacted and agreed to an interview, and negotiations for a time slot were being discussed through the beginning of the third term.

The third and final term of the IQP was spent in crisis mode- Linda Currie canceled the interview a week into term. The majority of the remaining time spent was between contacting new interview subjects, as Eric and Terri Brosius did not respond to our attempts to contact them, and Andrew Plotkin was unavailable to be interviewed. We attempted to contact several other individuals but did not have any success in reaching another interview subject until we contacted Gary Vincent, curator of the American Classic Arcade Museum. Professor O'Donnell assured us that, even though Vincent was not a game developer, he was a knowledgeable source of information for the development of the video arcade games, and would satisfy the criteria of the Oral

Histories project. After obtaining the interview, we spent the remainder of term editing the videos, writing the final report, and creating the new face of the Oral Histories webpage. Throughout the editing and web development process, we continually used Professor O'Donnell to assure quality of work.

## 2. Background

Before we could conduct any of the interviews, we spent a significant amount of time researching and preparing a small biography of the subject and their careers within the fledgling video game industry. We gathered our information in two primary sources. As not many physical articles have been written on either subject, we primarily gathered our information from articles on the internet. We attempted to confirm our information from multiple resources to make up for the potential discrepancies. In addition, we used the documentary *Get Lamp* to gain more information for Lebling's interview.

### 2.1 David Lebling

Dave Lebling's story begins at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Lebling was an avid computer scientist and gamer (he played *Dungeons and Dragons*), and majored in Political Science. Lebling's interest in computers led him to MIT's AI lab.

Within the AI Lab, Lebling used his first computer, the Imlac. Imlacs were made in 1970 by the Imlac corporation, with 4096 16 bit words or core RAM, and was one of the first graphical minicomputers.<sup>1</sup> Imlac minicomputers were used by the AI Lab to run ITS, an early time-sharing operating system developed by MIT (also the AI lab).<sup>2</sup> Lebling used the Imlac to learn how to program, and used the Imlacs to develop his early attempts at games.

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<sup>1</sup> Uban, Thomas W. "Computer Museum - Imlac Anatomy." *Uban Productions*. Web. 22 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.ubanproductions.com/imlac.html>>.

<sup>2</sup> Thompson, Greg. "The AMazing History of Maze." *The DigiBarn Computer Museum*. DigiBarn. Web. 22 Nov. 2010. <[http://www.digibarn.com/collections/presentations/maze-war/index\\_files/frame.html](http://www.digibarn.com/collections/presentations/maze-war/index_files/frame.html)>.

David Lebling contributed to his first game in 1974. *Maze*, also known as *Maze Wars*, was created on the Imlac PDS-1 across the Arpanet with Greg Thompson and Steve Colley.<sup>3</sup> The game was a pioneer first person shooter, and was fairly simple. Players roamed through a maze, and when they encountered other players (represented by eyeballs) they were able to shoot them.<sup>4</sup> Lebling's initial gaming success with *Maze* was not his last at MIT- in 1975, Dave Lebling was introduced to *Colossal Cave Adventure*<sup>5</sup>- the first interactive fiction game.

*Colossal Cave Adventure*, also known as *Adventure*, was designed by Will Crowther, and was later improved upon and distributed by Don Woods. It was released in 1976 across the ARPANET, a forerunner of the internet. *Adventure* was an incredibly popular, and spread quickly across the ARPANET, and eventually was published by DECUS.<sup>6</sup>

Lebling and his friends at MIT were taken by the idea of *Colossal Cave Adventure*, but quickly found that the mechanics of the game were not very good. *Adventure* operated on a parser<sup>5</sup>- a program that read and interpreted user input. The parser that was released with *Adventure* was not very advanced- it could only interpret a maximum of two words at a time.<sup>7</sup> Dissatisfied with the *Adventure* parser and intrigued by the idea of interactive fiction, Lebling teamed up with Marc Blank, Tim Anderson, and Bruce Daniels to make a game that would eventually become *Zork*.

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<sup>3</sup> Colley, Steve. "DigiBarn Events: Steve Colley Describe's Maze's Earliest History at NASA Ames (1973-74)." *The DigiBarn Computer Museum*. DigiBarn. Web. 20 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.digibarn.com/history/04-VCF7-MazeWar/stories/colley.html>>.

<sup>4</sup> Bigkif. "YouTube - Maze War on Xerox Alto." *YouTube - Broadcast Yourself*. 17 Nov. 2007. Web. 15 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7chDlySxK2Q>>.

<sup>5</sup> Granade, Stephen. "Dave Lebling - Interview." *Adventure Classic Gaming - ACG - Adventure Games, Interactive Fiction Games - Reviews, Interviews, Features, Previews, Cheats, Galleries, Forums*. 22 July 2001. Web. 22 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.adventureclassicgaming.com/index.php/site/interviews/171/>>.

<sup>6</sup> "Here's Where It All Began..." Web. 6 May 2011. <[http://www.rickadams.org/adventure/a\\_history.html](http://www.rickadams.org/adventure/a_history.html)>.

<sup>7</sup> *Get Lamp*. Dir. Jason Scott. Creative Commons, 2010. DVD.

In 1979, Lebling, along with Al Vezza, Joel Berez, and a handful of other MIT students and staff, decided to form a company, Infocom, to create business software.<sup>8</sup> However, the founding members of Infocom needed a project to get them started. The group decided to sell games, and *Zork* was chosen as Infocom's first product.

*Zork I* (as the *Zork* game was too large to easily fit on a single computer, it was segmented into three parts) hit the shelves in 1980 available only for the DECsystem-10<sup>9</sup>, and was a quick success. Infocom began to focus on creating more interactive fiction titles, and in 1981, they released their first non-*Zork* title, *Deadline*, along with *Zork II*.<sup>10</sup> Soon, the company was producing multiple interactive fiction titles per year. Lebling developed five titles within the first four years, including all of the main *Zork* titles, *Enchanter*, and *Spellbreaker*.<sup>11</sup>

Infocom soon began to develop the software they had intended on making from the start- they began to develop a relational database DOS called *Cornerstone*. *Cornerstone* was a large financial commitment and, upon its release, the product failed miserably. While the program had focused on usability, they had not focused hard enough on performance- the program used a virtual machine, the same virtual machine used by their interactive fiction titles, to store an increased amount of data within a computer. This virtual machine, also known as the "Z-machine", was incredibly slow. The advantages offered by the increased storage size were quickly overrun by the developing market, as computers were able to store more data individually.

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<sup>8</sup> "History of Infocom." *Infocom - The Master Storytellers*. Infocom. Web. 20 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.infocom-if.org/company/company.html>>.

<sup>9</sup> Galley, Stu, and Tim Anderson. "The History of Zork." *Department of Computer Science - UWO*. Web. 1 Dec. 2010. <<http://www.csd.uwo.ca/Infocom/Articles/NZT/zorkhist.html>>.

<sup>10</sup> Scheyen, Peter. "Infocom Timeline." *Department of Computer Science - UWO*. 14 Sept. 1995. Web. 22 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.csd.uwo.ca/Infocom/Articles/timeline.html>>.

<sup>11</sup> "Games by Infocom." *Infocom - The Master Storytellers*. Web. 20 Aug. 2010. <<http://www.infocom-if.org/games/games.html>>.

*Cornerstone* sold a mere 10,000 copies, and combined with further unfortunate circumstances, caused Infocom to acquire severe financial difficulties.<sup>12</sup>

Activision was founded in August of 1979, from a combination of disgruntled Atari employees who thought that they were being underpaid and from Jim Levy, who had money and a great business sense. They made and sold cartridges for the Atari 2600, and were incredibly successful. In 1983, Activision went public. Due to an inflation of game companies producing games for the Atari, the cartridge video game market crashed shortly thereafter, and Activision looked for new places to create games, and Jim Levy decided to steer the company towards computer games. Since they did not have enough in-house expertise, they decided to use their money to buy smaller companies. They bought a grand total of six companies, the largest of which was Infocom in 1986. However, later in 1986, Levy stepped down from the board of directors and Bruce Davis stepped in, who had voted not to buy Infocom earlier that year. In 1988, Activision changed its name to Mediagenic after reorganization. Activision would later be bought by the BHK Corporation, with Bruce Davis being replaced by Robert Kotick.<sup>13</sup> Since then the company has risen in the entertainment software business and is currently the interactive entertainment software industry's leading publisher.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Briceno, Hector, Wesley Chao, Andrew Glenn, Stanley Hu, Ashwin Krishnumurthy, and Bruce Tsuchida. "Down From the Top of Its Game." *MIT*. 12 Dec. 2000. Web. 3 Dec. 2010. <<http://mit.edu/6.933/www/Fall2000/infocom/>>.

<sup>13</sup> "Gamasutra - Features - The History Of Activision." *Gamasutra - The Art & Business of Making Games*. Web. 07 May 2011.

<[http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/1537/the\\_history\\_of\\_activision.php?page=5](http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/1537/the_history_of_activision.php?page=5)>.

<sup>14</sup> Activision. "Latest Annual Report." *Activision | Blizzard*. Web. 7 May 2011. <<http://www.activisionblizzard.com/corp/index.html>>.

In 1986, Activision bought Infocom, paying off Infocom's large debt. The company continued to produce games until 1989, whereupon a combination of poor management from Bruce Davis and a changing market led to Activision shutting down Infocom for good.

During his years at Infocom, Lebling was credited with 9 individual titles out of the 35 total titles Infocom made. These titles are : *Zork I*(1980), *Zork II*(1981), *Zork III*(1982), *Enchanter*(1983), *Spellbreaker*(1985), *Mini Zork I: The great underground Empire*(1987), *Starcross* (1982), *Suspect*(1984), *The Lurking Horror*(1987), and *James Clavell's Shogun*(1989).<sup>11</sup> In addition, Lebling is credited with partial creation of the ZIL, Zork Implementation Language, the LISP-esque language that was used to write all of the Infocom games.

Feelies were a development of Infocom that functioned as both a way to enhance the limited gameplay available with the current level of technology and as a form of copy protection. Feelies were small objects or papers that Infocom would package with their games. These feelies would be used to not only enhance the immersive experience, but in some cases they would contain clues necessary to solve puzzles within the game.<sup>15</sup> Feelies also served as an early form of anti-piracy measures, as certain puzzles within the games could not be solved without the help of the feelies; which a person would not have if they illegally downloaded the game from a BBS.

*Starcross* was Lebling's first non-*Zork* title. Released in 1982, it was a sci-fi game and was heavily influenced by Lebling's reading habits. *Starcross* was ultimately available on nine different operating systems. The feelies included with *Starcross* were

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<sup>15</sup> Varney, Allen. "Feelies." *The Escapist*. Web. 22 Nov. 2010. <[http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/issues/issue\\_62/365-Feelies](http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/issues/issue_62/365-Feelies)>.

a log of the M.C.S. Starcross (the ship on which the player begins the game), a letter from the "Bureau of Extra-Solar Intelligence, and a partial space map which contained instructions for using a navigation device in game. The box for *Starcross* is somewhat famous, as it was a silicone-mold of a flying saucer. When Activision switched the packaging to their in-house publisher, they switched *Starcross* to the "gray box" format.<sup>16</sup>

*Suspect* was released in 1984, after Lebling was inspired by Mark Blank's *Deadline* title. *Suspect* was a murder mystery where you were the suspect, and had to prove their own innocence by finding the real killer. The game was available on 10 different platforms.<sup>17</sup> Feelies packaged with *Suspect* were a book, a business card, a receipt, an invitation, a note from the editor of the paper you work for (in game) and a page from a fake magazine.<sup>18</sup>

*Enchanter* was released in 1983, and was Lebling's first non-*Zork* game. It was a fantasy game, which he cowrote with Marc Blank. The game focused on a novice magician's quest to defeat a powerful warlock. The game was eventually released on 22 separate systems.<sup>19</sup>

*Lurking Horror* was a horror genre released in 1987. Lebling was in large inspired by H.P. Lovecraft's work as a horror novelist and decided to try his hand at making a horror game. He based the work off of an aspect of the world that H.P. Lovecraft created- Miskatonic [sic] University. He theorized that MU acquired funding

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<sup>16</sup> "Infocom Games - Starcross." *Infocom - The Master Storytellers*. Web. 22 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.infocom-if.org/games/starcross/starcross.html>>.

<sup>17</sup> "Infocom." *Adventureland*. Web. 22 Nov. 2010. <<http://adventure.if-legends.org/Infocom.html>>.

<sup>18</sup> "Infocom Games - Suspect." *Infocom - The Master Storytellers*. Web. 22 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.infocom-if.org/games/suspect/suspect.html>>.

<sup>19</sup> "Infocom Games - Enchanter." *Infocom - The Master Storytellers*. Web. 20 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.infocom-if.org/games/enchanter/enchanter.html>>.



through a sponsor, George Underwood Edwards, and the university was renamed as the George Underwood Edwards Institute of Technology, or GUE Tech. GUE Tech and had continued its arcane studies that it started in the 1920s and was involved in a mass of demon summoning. The campus on which the game takes place is nearly geographically identical to MIT's campus.<sup>20</sup> The game was released on 10 different systems, a sign that times were changing within the world of computers.

Lebling's final game at Infocom was *James Clavell's Shogun*, as part of a licensing deal made with Mr. Clavell. The story followed a sailor shipwrecked in Japan, and follows the story of how the man rose to become the advisor to the shogun, a militaristic war general. The game was released in 1989, and was available on only 4 systems.<sup>21</sup>

After Infocom, Lebling worked on GUI spreadsheet programs with Avid and designed server applications at Ucentric. He currently works for BAE Systems as a programmer.

## 2.2 Gary Vincent

Gary Vincent, unlike those who have been interviewed before him, is not a game developer. However, his expertise in the Video Arcade Industry is considerable and the IGDA Oral Histories project has yet to document this subsection of the Video Game

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<sup>20</sup> "Infocom Games - Lurking Horror." *Infocom - The Master Storytellers*. Web. 22 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.infocom-if.org/games/lurkingh/lurkingh.html>>.

<sup>21</sup> "Infocom Games - Shogun." *Infocom - The Master Storytellers*. Web. 22 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.infocom-if.org/games/shogun/shogun.html>>.

Industry. We felt that his contribution to the project would be significant, as it highlights a section of the history of video games which does not often receive proper recognition.

Originally an employee at Funspot located in Laconia, New Hampshire since the summer of 1981, Gary is now the curator of the American Classic Arcade Museum. Before the museum existed, Funspot had the “classic” games scattered throughout the entire arcade. Gary, had the idea to consolidate all of the classic games into one location within the arcade in order to preserve the feel of a classic arcade. With the permission of Funspot’s owner, Bob Lawton, he started the American Classic Arcade Museum in 1998.<sup>22</sup>

The goal of the museum, as one might guess, is to preserve classic arcade games and the feel of a classic arcade. Gary, along with his fellow employees and volunteers, works hard restoring and refurbishing broken games. The museum tries to acquire all arcade games which were created before 1987. In a previous interview, Gary is quoted saying: “We set the cutoff date as 1987 because that is pretty much about the time when we noticed that the videogame industry was starting to change. Instead of having fantasy-based games, puzzle-based, space shoot ’em up games or whatever, it seemed to switch over to more of what I call ‘kick-punch-shoot’ games.”<sup>23</sup> Kick-punch-shoot games are games in which the only goal is mindless violence. They can range from games where two players beat each other up until one falls or where a player or players mindlessly shoot at enemies until they die themselves or attain victory; but they lack any real form of plot or storyline.

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<sup>22</sup> [Inside the World's Largest Arcade]. Edge Magazine. August 29, 2008. Accessed July 11, 2010

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

The American Classic Arcade Museum acquires some of its games through purchase, but has obtained a large portion of them through donation and the kindness of other classic arcade enthusiasts. Revenue from visitors playing the arcade games goes towards maintaining the games and refurbishing newly acquired games. They maintain a list of games they would like to obtain and parts they need in order to repair the games they do own on their website so others can donate if they are willing.

Of course, this was all made possible by the fact that the arcade existed in the first place. In 1952, Bob Lawton founded Funspot with a seven-hundred fifty dollar loan from his grandmother.<sup>24</sup> Back then, Funspot was mostly just an indoor golf course, and Bob had never imagined it becoming the place it is today. Funspot is currently the world's largest arcade by number of machines.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Basch, Marty. [Pinball wizards, Frogger fanatics flock here](#). The Boston Globe May 10, 2009. Accessed April 11, 2011

<sup>25</sup> [Inside the World's Largest Arcade]. Edge Magazine. August 29, 2008. Accessed July 11, 2010

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 The Learning Process

Before we could contact the interviewees or conduct the interviews, we needed to learn how the process of interviewing a subject then editing their footage worked. Some of the resources we used were the documentaries we watched throughout the first term of the IQP. We watched *BBS: The Documentary*, *First Person*, *Get Lamp*, and *The Aristocrats* to study how professional documentaries are made. First, we learned that there are many different ways to conduct and present an interview, and while some of them were appropriate for our purposes, some techniques were not pertinent to the nature of the interviews we would conduct, and as such made note of shots and techniques that would be most useful when conducting our interviews. Several points of interest were how shots were angled to create interesting visual effects, or how B-roll, footage that is not of the interview, but relates to the topics being discussed in the interview, can be edited into the video to bring life to a long section or develop some understanding on a topic that is not commonly known. Besides watching documentary films, we also conducted two practice interviews apiece on members of the WPI community and other individuals.

We began with two simple interviews: Eric interviewed one of his roommates and Frank interviewed his brother, (as during the week we were practicing, Franks was out of town). After some editing, we got feedback from Dean O'Donnell on what worked and what didn't. We learned that an interviewee takes time to warm up to the process

of an interview. At the beginning of an interview, the interviewee speaks more slowly and stumbles more often. Our lighting was also very poor, as we used natural light to illuminate the video, and it was not enough for a full-fledged interview, and we would need to create our own lighting for the actual interviewed. We also discovered that our sound and video quality was unprofessional, and would not suffice for one of our actual interviews. We attempted to reedit these videos to improve the content, but we discovered that our strategy for asking questions did not provide us with enough flexible content to generate more interesting clips. We also discovered that we had no b-roll or external footage, so we had a difficult time making our already difficult clips more interesting. Overall, these first interviews were an educational exercise for us, to really see what could make an interview fail, and also to allow us to begin to adjust to the process of conducting and editing an interview.

After those first interviews, we each conducted another interview with another subject; Frank interviewed Eric and Eric interviewed one of his classmates. We used the techniques that we determined we needed in the first interviews to improve the second, and we also acquired better equipment, from a microphone to a high definition camera, to lighting kits borrowed from the IMGD Program. We edited these second interviews again, and found that we were much more able to create content-relevant videos with quality B-roll and ultimately found that our abilities had improved dramatically.

At this point, in previous years, groups would travel out to meet Jason Scott, documentarian and creator of *BBS: The Documentary*, which we studied previously. However, due to circumstances beyond our control, (Jason Scott had moved to New

York City) we were unable to meet with Jason Scott to learn techniques from him. Instead, we watched more documentaries and studied the work of the previous years to better obtain an idea of what would be required for our interview.

### **3.2 The Interviews**

The first interview was conducted with David Lebling. Lebling was very cooperative in scheduling an interview, and we were quickly able to set a date. We conducted the interview in his home in Concord MA. We set up the equipment inside of his living room, with some of one of his bookshelves and his lamp (reminiscent of his interview in Get Lamp). We had two high-definition cameras and a standard-definition camera, although the backup HD camera ran out of batteries halfway through and could not be charged, and the standard-definition camera was handheld by Frank. Eric conducted the interview and managed to cover all twenty of our pre-written questions within approximately an hour and a half, and as Lebling had more time, he was able to discuss questions that we had not written ahead of time and were able to discuss in depth the specific games he had worked on. In addition, Lebling had a modest collection of Infocom products (Including the bulk packages Atari made and Cornerstone). Throughout the interview, we repositioned the regular camera, but ultimately did not use the footage as it was shaky and did not look as good as the high definition footage.

The second interview was with Gary Vincent, which we conducted inside the American Classic Arcade Museum. Unfortunately, unlike Lebling's interview, Vincent did not have a sufficient amount of time to conduct a longer interview and had requested that the interview take no longer than an hour, and as such we revised our interview topics to better suit Vincent's availability. We had changed our equipment for the interview- we determined that only having two members, it would be best to only use one high-definition camera on a larger tripod, so we could have at least one person

focused on the interview and Vincent while the other was free to operate the cameras. Frank performed the interview while Eric manipulated the camera. The interview itself was conducted in two stages- our first question requested a tour of the museum, with Vincent pointing out machines of interest and facts about the arcade industry. The second stage was more directed at specific questions in regards to arcade games, which we filmed in different locations of the American Classic Arcade Museum, to make the shots more interesting. After the interviews' conclusion, we roamed the museum and got footage of games being played and footage of gameplay of famous games and games that Vincent had mentioned during the interview.

The Brosius' and Kaemmer were never contacted outside of the initial letter. We were unable to acquire the contact information. Furthermore, at the very end of the second term, we received contact from Linda Currie. We spent two weeks trying to set a date and time to conduct an interview, whereupon she canceled, citing that she no longer had the time for an interview. Attempts to contact Plotkin after this point were unsuccessful, as he was no longer living at the address we had originally contacted him with.



### **3.3 Editing**

To edit the interviews, we focused first and foremost on content. Eric was in charge of dividing up the videos into content-ready formats, and divided up Lebling's interview into 14 segments and Vincent's into 10 segments. Our questions had done a fairly good job of splitting up the content, but there was a lot of overlap which we used to combine similar segments. The objective was to split the video up into segments appropriate for a virtual museum. We set up our clips to reflect the topics we derived, and split up the video editing. Eric did the majority of the editing for Lebling and half of the editing for Vincent, while Frank did the other half of Vincent's editing.

Once we had edited the clips into appropriate content drafts, we focused on improving the entertainment aspect of the videos. Our videos generally lasted between thirty seconds and two minutes. We used primarily two techniques for providing B-roll. We had some B-roll worthy footage from when we toured Lebling's Infocom collection and a lot of extra footage from the Classic Arcade Museum. We also used the Internet to gather images pertinent to the games, people, technology, and companies being discussed during the interviews and inserted some videos and some stills, which helped break up the videos well. The Internet footage was particularly useful in Lebling's interview, as the B-roll obtained from his Infocom collection was short, and missing several games.

The final stage of editing was primarily going through and improving the videos we had made- from choosing better B-roll, to using the occasional editing effect (such as the Ken Burns effect, where we scroll and zoom across a shot, which creates an interesting visual effect), to completely re-editing the content. We also had to spend a

fair amount of time adjusting the audio in Vincent's clips, as the microphone had to be adjusted for more/less noisy areas.

## **4. Website Revisions**

In addition to the interview requirements of the previous years, our team was also tasked with redesigning the website (<http://alpheus.wpi.edu/imgd/oral-history/>) to be more modern and up-to-date.

### **4.1 The New Design**

After discussions with our advisor, we decided upon a simple layout for the website that would be easy to navigate and simple for teams in the following years to maintain and update. The goal was to create a new website with as few pages as possible while still presenting the documentaries in an intuitive manner.

The homepage of the site contains information regarding the project and the IGDA Game Preservation SIG (containing links to both the IDGA Site and the IMGD Program site). At the bottom of the page are links to each of the interviewee's personal pages. The interviewees are listed in alphabetical order for ease of reference. Each interviewee has a brief statement about who they are. The personal pages contain a short paragraph about their interviewee and each of the interview segments are displayed. At the bottom is a link to the unedited version of the interview as well as the appropriate IQP report associated with that person.

### **4.2 Maintaining and Updating the Site**

This section is intended for future students who participate in this IQP or anyone else who wishes to make changes to the site. The website was designed in Adobe Dreamweaver CS5, though any html editor should work.

Videos which are on the website appear in 720x480 and are in the FLV format. They must be rendered as FLV files so that they can stream easily. The Videos are stored in folders identified by the last name of the interviewees, inside of the Videos folder in the root directory of the website. The pictures on the homepage are 140x125 pixels and care should be taken to ensure that future additions maintain this format to maintain consistency. The images located on the personal interview pages are 265x195 pixels. The interviewees on the homepage, and the interview topics on the interview pages, are organized alphabetically for ease of reference.

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

Our project's basic requirements are all successfully met, although there is potential room for improvement. While our edits and the content of our interviews are sufficient, having footage of the interviewee talking, visual aids, and no significant jarring technical errors, demonstrates from a technical level the content was completed. However, like any art form, our work could be improved with further edits from insightful individuals, or a revision by a professional documentarian.

Other issues we encountered during the project was the availability of our interviewees. We had four separate interview subjects agree to our interview out of the five we initially contacted, (The exception being the Brosius's, we were unable to gather their telephone number to contact them in the home). In spite of having twice the number of positive responses, we were canceled on three separate occasions. Andrew Plotkin was unavailable after PAX East, Gary Vincent initially cancelled when he was given an additional 1200 feet of space to place his arcade machines, and Linda Currie

canceled for unexplained reasons. When we realized we were two weeks into the final term without a second interview, it was difficult to find another person. We managed to first contact Vincent, then convince him not to cancel in order to obtain the interview. Ultimately, we did not have enough time to get the best edits out of Vincent's interview due to time constraints.

As far as the content of the interviews goes, we asked well-formed questions with sufficient research, giving the videos a knowledgeable and informative base. While there are many other questions that we would like to ask (especially in Vincent's case, as his knowledge is more extensive than we had time to interview for), we feel that the interviews we conducted were sufficiently useful towards the purposes of the Oral History project.

In regards to the technical aspects of filming (lighting and sound) we feel that we were able to perform quite well, given our environments. Lebling used four main sources of light- light provided from three light kits we had borrowed from the IMGD program and additional light in the background from the bright window. In addition, our sound quality was good, although our inexperience caused the sensitivity of the microphone to be a small amount too high, and we picked up interference whenever Lebling moved. Most of these instances were removed during editing, but some clips have small pops in them caused by the microphone's sensitivity. Vincent's interview brought up many concerns that we had not been prepared for. Our practice, while useful for making interviews in the same style as Lebling's, was not well adjusted towards an interview in Vincent's style. We were walking around in a poorly lit museum, which was filled with sounds of arcade machines and construction. As such, the audio

quality changes from clip to clip, and at least one shot was ruined by the advent of a nearby hammer's use.

Editing is a skill that takes time to improve. Eric had extensive experience in other video editing equipment, and so volunteered to handle most of the editing. We used Adobe Premiere to edit the interviews, but was still not prepared for the techniques needed to edit a video in a documentary based style. While there are not glaring technical glitches, we do not consider ourselves to be professional level cameramen or editors, and do not claim that our work is 100% soundproof. However, as individuals with limited training and experience, we have done a satisfactory job.

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 6.1 Conclusion

All of the objectives for this project were met, and the interviews are in line with the goals of the IGDA's Game Preservation SIG. We created 10 or more clips for each interviewee which are short enough to remain interesting, while still long enough to properly discuss each topic. As with all art forms, there is always room for improvement however, each video clip is of a high enough quality to be included in a museum exhibit. We have learned that creating a documentary requires much more work to do properly than initially anticipated.

There are many things which go into crafting a documentary. First, and perhaps most importantly, the interviewer needs to be prepared. This means an extensive amount of research should be done on the interviewee to assure that the questions asked are pertinent, meaningful, and have interesting answers. Second, lighting can make or break an interview, so it is extremely important to make sure that the area is well lit and the lighting is consistent. If the lighting changes even slightly, making edits, even subtle edits, can become extremely obvious. Third, getting good sound is extremely difficult. A clip-on microphone is susceptible to the natural head movements of a speaker, and as the distance from mouth to microphone receiver fluctuates, the subtle changes in sound volume can be amplified by the sensitivity inherent in the microphone; which is difficult and time consuming to reverse. Lastly, it is imperative that the interviewer reviews the questions beforehand; you do not want to be fumbling

through your questions during the interview or ask a question which the interviewee has already answered previously during another question.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

If we had just one recommendation to give it would be to spend a lot of time practicing with Premier Elements. As the number of years in which this project has spanned increases, it will be harder and harder to find available and willing candidates, so it is important to make sure that you communicate with the professors to find out who they may know. Dean O'Donnell and Brian Moriarty have proven to be invaluable resources in finding candidates.

While it may seem like you have a large amount of time to do the project, it is imperative that you begin researching potential candidates from the first day, as the more time you have available to set up an interview the better off you will be. Editing the videos is also extremely time consuming and so the more time you can dedicate towards doing that the higher quality they will be.

Make sure to be prepared for the interviews, this includes making more than one draft of the questions and having Dean review them at least once. Reserving the camera, lighting, and sound equipment in advance will also save many headaches as the equipment is not always readily available. On the day of the interview, make sure to leave early if you have to travel, as arriving late could mean the person is no longer willing to work with you.

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