Oral History of Video Games

An Interactive Qualifying Project
submitted to the Faculty of
WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Bachelor of Science

by
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Report Submitted to:

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Abstract

The purpose of the 2018-2019 Oral History of Video Games IQP was to contribute, in a meaningful way, to the Oral History of Video Games project at WPI. To do so, Solaimon Saqib, Isaac Donkoh-Halm, and Can Alper underwent the process of honing the technical and interpersonal skills required to conduct interviews on industry professionals, and then applied those skills to capture a narrative of the history of that industry for the purposes of contributing to a larger academic resource.

Acknowledgements

The Oral History of Video Games project cannot be maintained and expanded without the efforts and inputs of a variety of individuals. The authorship of this report would like to thank and acknowledge all those who have contributed to its cause.

Foremost, we would like to thank our project advisor, Professor Dean O'Donnell, of the WPI IMGD program. As the original founder of the Oral History of Video Games, and through his knowledge of media production, Professor O'Donnell helped guide us through the process of learning to create and conduct interviews meant for use as an academic resource for research purposes, while also assisting us with the challenges of a long term project.

We would also like to thank the various faculty and staff members of WPI who assisted us in completing this project. The staff of the Academic Technology Center was incredibly helpful with providings us with high quality technical equipment and assistance. Lab Coordinator Mike Voorhis is responsible for maintaining the server that this project is running their website from and providing us with credentials to update the website, and we would like to extend our gratitude to him.

Furthermore, we would like to extend our thanks to all of those who have participated in this year's project and provided their valuable contributions to the efforts of creating and preserving the history of video games and the video game industry. We would like to thank Kent Quirk, Nick Troy, and Professor Lee Sheldon, for their valuable contributions to the Oral History of Video Games project, and for providing us with their personal recounts of their time in the video game industry, their lifestyles as it related to the industry, and their opinions on the

industry going forward. All of these contributions have been instrumental in the creation and

maintenance of the Oral History of Video Games Project.

Executive Summary

Oral histories are a helpful and engaging way of providing access to first hand accounts of prominent events and timelines as they occurred, while also incorporating the personal experiences and narratives of the individuals that experienced them. The Oral History of Video Games project seeks to provide a similar resource as it pertains to the videogame industry through the personal testimony of those involved. This year, for the 2018-2019 Oral History of Video Games IQP, several members of the video game industry were interviewed for the purpose of expanding the project and further capturing the experiences of those involved with video games, especially concerning work-life balance and the previous and current states of the industry itself. This year's IQP was carried out by Solaimon Saqib, Can Alper, and Isaac Donkoh-Halm, with the intention of adding to the Oral History of Video Games project in a significant and informative manner. In order to accomplish this, each of the members of the project team conducted background research on the concept of oral history, as well as underwent training in order to hone their skills with the equipment and practices necessary to conduct a successful and insightful interview. The training involved a combination of mock interviews and testing different types of equipment and editing styles in order to determine the best methods for capturing each interview and crafting a cohesive narrative about the history of video games. The team then went on to interview Kent Quirk, Nicholas Troy, and Charles Lee Sheldon, three individuals with experience in the industry that could offer significant contributions to the project. This IQP report will attempt to discuss the purpose of the project in further detail, as

well as the methods and practices involved with the interview process and the results of those

efforts.

Authorship

This Report was written and edited in equal parts by Solaimon Saiqb, Isaac Donkoh-Halm, and Can Alper. Each member worked on and reviewed each part of this report, however their primary responsibilities are as follows:

Solaimon Saqib: Abstract, Executive Summary, Acknowledgments, 2.3 Preliminary Training, 4.0 Results, 4.1.1 Interviewing Kent Quirk, 5.1 Discussion of Interviews, 5.2 Considerations, and 6.0 Conclusions

Can Alper: 1.0 Introduction, 3.3 Video Editing, 3.4 Uploading to the Website, 4.1.3 Interviewing Professor Sheldon

Isaac Donkoh-Halm: 2.1 Definition of Oral History, 2.2 The Oral History Project, 2.2.1 Oral History Project 2018-2019, 3.1 Finding and Contacting Candidates, 4.1.2 Interviewing Nicholas Troy, 5.0 Discussion, 5.2.1 Interviews that fell through

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1.0 Introduction

This is a conjoined project with the IGDA's Game Preservation Special Interest Group. The purpose of the project is to interview people in the video game industry about their experiences, and create a coherent narrative and recollection of the video game industry as a whole. This projects is extending on the previous works of IQP students and advisors in WPI under the same project title. The goals for the project were stated by the Advisor as:

- Find people who are no longer in the industry and have no plans to re-enter

- Interview these people within the general guidelines of an Oral History.

- Edit the interviews to reflect the relevant parts.

- Upload the edited highlights and full interviews to the Oral History website.

These goals came with extensions that dictated how the project would progress such as learning the guidelines for an Oral History interview or learning to setup the filming equipment.

This project aspires to document historical events and also preserve the culture, beliefs and opinions of the interviewees, as well as paint a picture of their lives in the industry to serve as a source of information for others. This project also aims to eliminate restrictions on interviewees by ensuring that they have left the industry so they can be as filterless about the real events and problems that the industry might possess.

2.0 Background

2.1 Definition of Oral History

Oral History is the retelling of events spoken or otherwise communicated by the people who have firsthand experience with the event. It provides context to the event itself along with how it shaped the lives of those telling the history. Because of the source's first hand knowledge of the experience, Oral Histories are considered primary sources in research. Oral Histories can come in the form of written letters and interviews, both written and verbal. It should be important to note that due to the personal nature of the source, it is usually biased one way or another. Some of what is explained by the subject of oral history is also opinion.[1]

2.2 The Oral History Project

The Oral History of Video Games (OHVG) project specifically focuses on archiving the history of video games and game development through video interviews. The earliest iteration of this project had students interview Ralph Baer in 2007[2]. Baer, who was typically regarded as "The Father of Video Games", was responsible for creating the Brown Box Prototype which served as

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[1]Smithsonian, What is a Primary Source?
https://siarchives.si.edu/history/featured-topics/stories/what-primary-source
[2] http://alpheus.wpi.edu/imgd/oral-history/interviews/rbaer.html

the blueprints to the Magnavox Odyssey, the first home video game system releasing in 1972. [3]

Each year, students are tasked with conducting interviews with various developers, producers, authors and archivists who have stories to tell about video games. Each group performs a full interview with a subject that typically lasts about 1-2 hours, and then edits 3-5 highlighted clips of questions or segments of the interview that are the most interesting or provide new information. The full, unedited interview is also available to download from the website. Past subjects include R.A. Salvatore, Gary Vincent, Stu Galley, Jennifer Lesser, Brenda Romero and John Romero. The project has been continuously advised by Interactive Media and Game Development Professor, Professor Dean O'Donnell.

2.2.1 Oral History Project 2018-2019

For the 2018-2019 iteration of the project, the objectives are as follows:

      1. Film and interview at least 3 subjects

      2. Highlight 4-5 sections of each interview, and edit them into separate clips

      3. Upload the clips and raw footage to the website

      4. Provide a transcript and closed captioning for easier searching.

The first 3 objectives have been shared between the projects of previous years, while the last one was recently added for this year's project. With a full written transcript of each interview, it would be easier to search for certain sections and topics without having to watch the entire interview. The project group recommends that groups in the future also create transcripts for

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[3] https://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2014/12/08/369405270/inventor-ralph-baer-the-father-of-video-games-dies-at-92

their interviews. They are extremely valuable for scholars looking for information about the subjects through various databases, and is also a benefit for those who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The interviewees for this year's project were Kent Quirk, Nicholas Troy, and Charles Lee Sheldon. Each of these individuals were previously involved in the video game industry in some form, whether it be in game development, running a video game company, or general employment in the videogame industry.

Kent Quirk

Kent Quirk is a software developer who has worked with technology companies like Bose and SolidWorks, as well as gaming studios like Linden Labs and Playdom. In 1997, he founded his own company, CogniToy, in Acton, Massachusetts and worked as the Chief Technical Officer. Their first shipped game, *Mindrover*, was released on November 11th 1999, and was a critical and financial success.[4] [5]Afterwards, he moved on to work for various tech companies in the Boston area, including Linden Labs, the studio behind the multiplayer online virtual world *Second Life*. He is also responsible for co-founding Boston Post Mortem, a monthly social event that takes place in and around Boston that brings together game developers from the area. Given his experience as a leader, developer, and founder of the video game scene in Massachusetts, Kent Quirk was determined to be a valuable

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[4] https://web.archive.org/web/20050107061041/http://www.cognitoy.com/aboutus/pr111199.htm

[5] https://web.archive.org/web/20040603062550/http://www.mindrover.com/mindrover/reviews.htm

Nicholas Troy

Nicholas Troy is an Information Technology manager and a former Quality Assurance (QA) tester at Irrational Studios working on *Bioshock Infinite*. As a QA tester, he was responsible for playing through sequences of gameplay in order to document any appearances of failures in the game's code to send back to the programmers. Shortly after the completion of the game, the studio was closed, and he found a new job as the IT director at Innovation Academy Charter School in Tyngsboro, Massachusetts. Through his experiences as a "bug hunter" and game tester, Nicholas Troy was sought out to provide his perspective on the development cycles of major video game titles.

Charles Lee Sheldon

Professor Charles Lee Sheldon is a WPI IMGD professor who mainly teaches writing courses for the IMGD Program. He is known for the "Multiplayer Classroom" system, which takes Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) and Role Playing Game(RPG) elements and incorporates those designs into his teaching.[6] His resume boasts writing credits on both television shows like *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Charlie's Angels,* and *The Edge of Night*, alongside video games like *Murder on the Orient Express* and *The Lion's Song*.[7] Professor Sheldon's experience in game

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[6] https://hechingerreport.org/qa-with-lee-sheldon-turning-the-classroom-into-a-multiplayer-game/

[7] https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0791044/

development in the past as well as in recent years made him an ideal candidate for contributing to the OHVG project.

2.3 Preliminary Training

In order to most effectively accomplish the objectives of this project, the project group was introduced to several different styles of oral history and video interviews in order to become familiarized with the processes involved. This was done by viewing the work of several prominent directors who specialize in documentary-style interviews. Through this process, each member of the group gained insights into the proper techniques involved with conducting a successful interview, as well as learned the fundamentals of documentary style filmmaking as it pertains to capturing interviews on film. This includes proper lighting, camera, and editing techniques, the use of B-roll, background research, and creating a narrative by asking meaningful questions that prompt insightful responses.

After learning from prominent examples of video interviews, the project group began the process of conducting mock interviews in order to acquire hands on experience with the process itself. Each member was required to interview someone they knew on a subject that the interviewee was passionate about. The interviewees and the subjects chosen were left completely up to the members of the project group. Each member would perform background research on their interviewee and draft a set of questions to guide the interview based on the narratives they wished to capture. The group members were then required to schedule and conduct the interviews as a group. These were meant to be 15 minute long interviews that would be edited into a five minute clip centered around the most important points in the interview. As these were

mock interviews for the purposes of learning the process, the interviews would not be released publicly and therefore the names of the interviewees and the subjects they touched upon will not be included in this report, however the interviews themselves were instrumental in providing the members of the project group with the preliminary experience necessary to conduct the industry professional interviews later in the year.

Following the completion of the preliminary mock interviews, the group submitted the edited clips to the project advisor, Professor O'Donnell, who reviewed them and provided constructive criticisms and noted points of improvement going forward. With this feedback in mind, the group was then tasked with editing these clips down further to fit under a three minute time constraint. The purpose of this process was to provide the team with further experience in editing, while also requiring them to consider the characteristics of the most essential parts of an interview which would help in the creation of the five, two-minute clips that were to be created from the interviews of the industry professionals. Following the editing of the initial mock interviews, the group was tasked with producing three more mock interviews, this time using one another as the primary subjects. This was meant to further increase each group member's understanding of the techniques behind the interview process, provide additional experience with the lighting, sound, and video equipment used, as well as provide additional experience with editing, as these new mock interviews would need to be edited down into 3-minute clips as well. In addition to the technical experience gained, the second round of mock interviews also gave each group member experience in front of the camera, allowing them to understand what the interviewee is experiencing, and therefore be more accommodating and effective as interviewers

themselves. After the end of the mock interviews in A-Term, the group began the process of the conducting the main interviews during B-Term.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Finding and Contacting Candidates

In this project, students are typically tasked with finding a game developer in the area. Social circles like Facebook Groups and regional game developer meetups are used to find potential subjects. This year, Professor O'Donnell wanted to focus on documenting the lives of the game developers without celebrity, and so he instructed the group with contacting former game developers in the area. This would require the project team "cold call" developers who were interested in telling their stories, which would likely be difficult for multiple reasons: either the potential subject would refer us back to a project lead or director, or the subject may not want to talk about their experiences working at a game studio if their employment ended badly for them (layoffs) The group is also limited to developers who are from/currently residing in New England due to travel costs, and the developer must be physically present for the interview in order to produce high quality footage and to reduce any chance of technological errors that may arise when using a remote video service like Skype, Google Hangouts, or Zoom. Professor O'Donnell provided the group with a number of candidates that he personally knew and would most likely be interested in contributing to this project.

Once we were given a candidate, the group set out to research them in order to create more informed, personal questions for the interview. To start, the group would use the business-based social media website Linkedin to find out the companies the subject worked for in the past and investigate those companies. The group also searched names and related keywords to the subject and the company to locate any previous interviews the subject has already done in order to avoid repeating questions. For Ralph Baer, he required the project team to read his book *Videogames: In the Beginning,* before conducting the interview. This was to prevent any basic question he's been asked before previously by other interviewers from coming up and for the project team to have more historical context for their questions. This year's project group sought to replicate this by doing extensive research in order to create interesting and thought provoking questions. Alongside these research based questions, the group would also ask questions that were considerably more casual in order to give the subject a mental break between heavily detailed questions.

Once enough questions were made, the group would then send emails to the subject asking for a date range for the interview to be done. With the given time frame, the group attempts to find the most convenient time for the group and the subject, and makes an agreement on when the interview should take place. A back-up date is also proposed to the subject in case there are some last minute rescheduling issues.

3.2 Equipment and Hardware

Just before an interview was conducted, the group needed to set up the filming environment. With the experience they gathered from the mock-up interviews, the group was able to multitask during the setup, increasing efficiency. The list of equipment and set up steps are as follows:

A. Lighting equipment

    a. Place the stands and assemble the pivoted end connectors on the stands

    b. Slide the lighting devices through the pivoted connectors

    c. If needed, adjust the panels on the side of the lighting devices or use paper and tape to direct or dissolve light

B. Boom mic

    a. Place the stand for the boom mic

    b. Attach the microphone on the boom

    c. Attach the boom to the stand.

    d. Position the stand so that it points to the interviewee from a relatively close distance.

    e. Warn the interviewee about the boom mic in case they decide to stand up (To prevent them from accidentally hitting the boom mic.)

C. Main video recorder

       a. Place the stand and connect the camera

       b. Turn on the camera

       c. Check color of the image

       d. Check the sound recorded through the indicators on the side screen

           i. If a boom mic is used, connect the aux cable to the camera and then make sure the sound is recorded.

    D. Secondary video recorder

       a. Place the stand and connect the camera

       b. Turn on the camera

       c. Check the color of the image and compare it to the main camera for consistency

       d. Check the sound through the indicators on the main screen

3.2.1 Final Checks

Once the equipment setup is complete, the group member that is interviewing explains the interviewee their contribution and thanks them for their cooperation. The interviewer then asks the interviewee for a signature on the OHVG release paper to get their official consent. Once the interviewer reads and signs the required fields, the interviewer asks everyone in the room to silence or turn off their mobile devices. The interviewer also makes sure to either reduce or silence external noise sources such as an air conditioning unit. Just before the interview, the interviewer asks the interviewee and everyone else present in the room for a moment of silence to record the room tone generated by the devices so it can be easily identified as a noise print later in editing in order for it to be removed.

3.3 Video Editing

To fulfill the requirements of the project, the group collected all of the raw footage from each camera and transferred them to computers with video editing capabilities. To better determine how the clips would be cut, the group decided to transcribe the clips first in order to have a way to search keywords related to specific sections of the interviews that were determined to stand alone and represent the contexts of the entirety of the interviews as a whole. To accomplish this, the group used a tool called Sonix(https://sonix.ai/) . Sonix is a tool that uses machine learning to automatically transcribe videos and sound files, returning the transcription in the form of a downloadable srt file. After each interview was transcribed, certain parts of the interviews were selected, and the editing commenced.

To properly edit the videos and to make sure the added elements were standardized, the group created a template in Premiere Pro. When a user opens this template they will see the following screen capture:

[Figure 1: Title page of the Premiere Pro Template]

This capture is part of the starting sequence in the template:
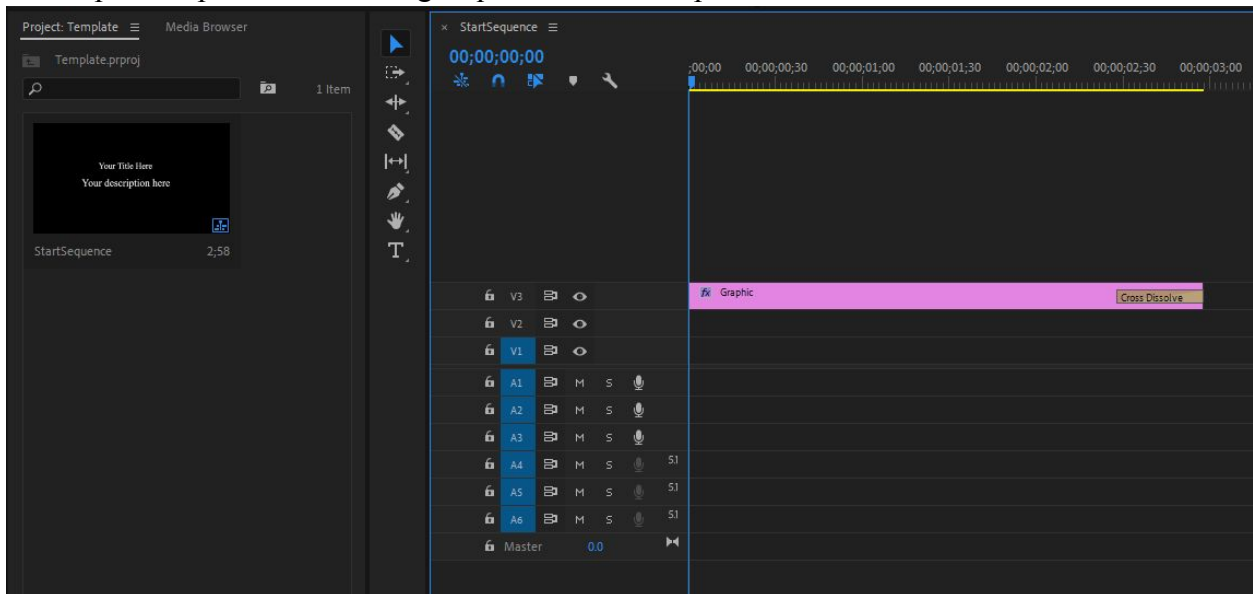
[Figure 2: Premiere Pro template timeline with the title caption]

Any user that wishes to use this template can open it in Premiere Pro and then save it as a new

project in order to preserve the template. The user can then change the title and description in

addition to importing raw footage and the caption files.

The next step in editing any captioned video, is to align the captions with the sound of the raw

footage. To do this the user can drag both the raw footage and the caption file to the desired

channels in Premiere pro:
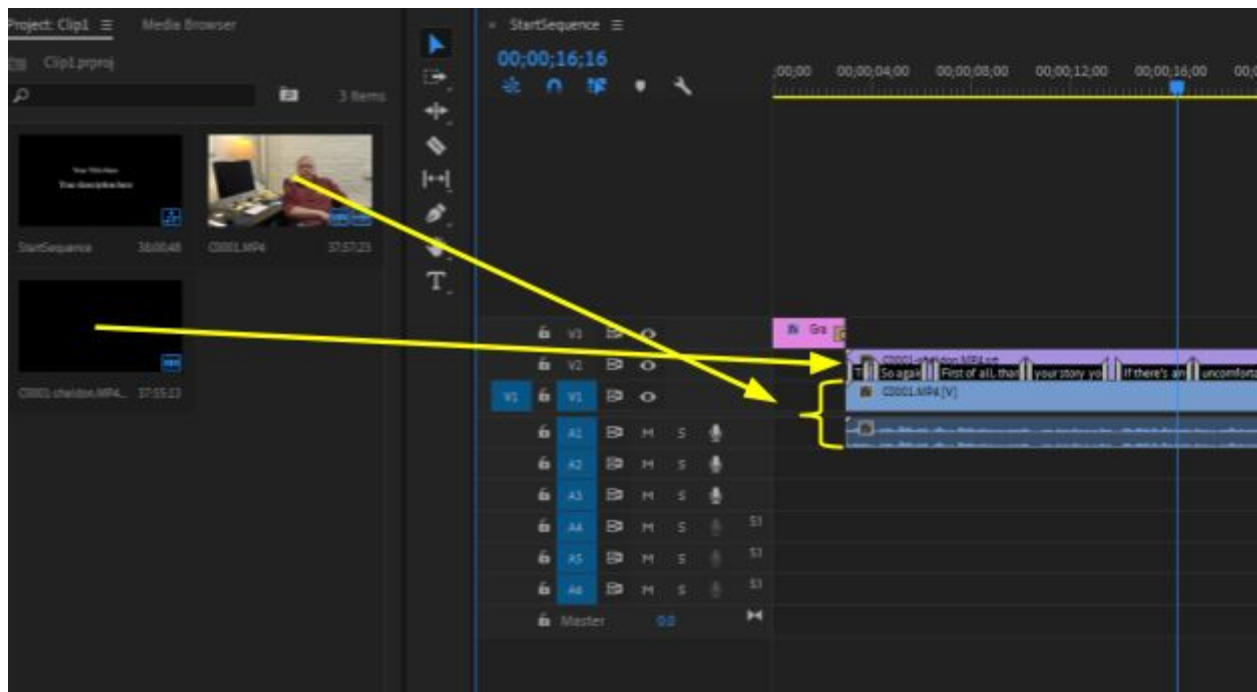
[Figure 3: Footage and generated captions in render channels]

After the channels are set the user might want to create a nested sequence of the content in these

two channels since it will lower the cutting operation to a single click instead of two. To do this

the user needs to select all of the desired sub sequences and choose the option "nest" through

right clicking. Once the setup for an interview is complete, the user can than save this as a secondary template to save time for the other clips.

The guidelines on how to cut the clips were set by the group's advisor are as follows:

- Take out unnecessary parts such as breaks, stammers, and pauses

- Take out irrelevant parts that do not reflect the content wished to be displayed.

- Put a crossfade or fade in/out effect when switching context (usually at the start and end of a clip)

- Set the starting title and description accordingly

To cut the video, the group used the standard tool and cut the video in appropriate places. This tool can be accessed through the tools panel:
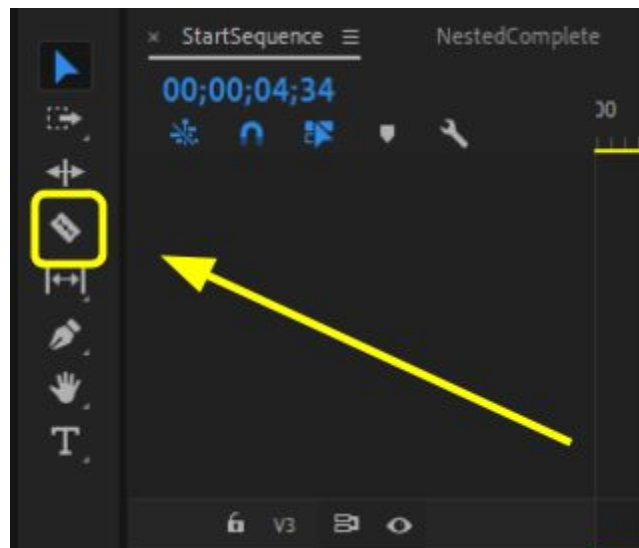
[Figure 4: Cut tool aka "Razor"]

Once the tool icon ("Razor") is clicked, the channel window will react by changing the mouse icon. This icon snaps to places that are determined by the Premiere Pro and when clicked, the sub-sequence will be separated from the click point:
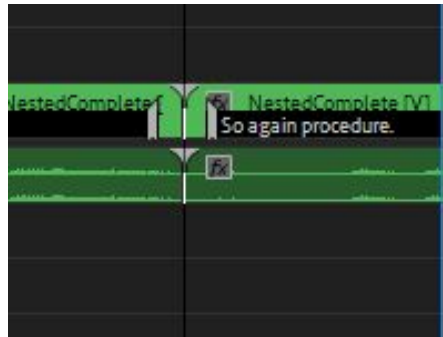
[Figure 5: Effect of the cut tool after user performs a click on a subsequence]

To add the cross dissolve effect, a user can access the effects menu by clicking on the effects title at the top bar in Premiere Pro. Once they do so a new tab will open. In this new tab, users can go under "Video Transitions" and under "Dissolve" they'll see the "Cross Dissolve" among similar effects. They can then click and drag "Cross Dissolve" to one of the sub-sequences. Cross dissolve can only be dropped to at beginning of a sequence or at the end of a sequence. The user can also adjust the duration of a cross dissolve by clicking the edge of the icon on the sequence and dragging it.
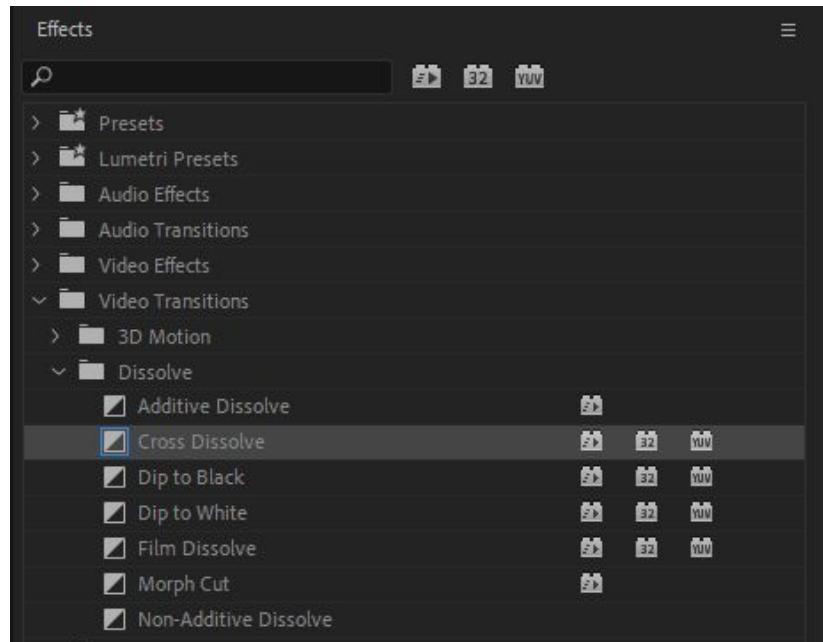
[Figure 6: Effects panel with expanded options, User selection on Cross Dissolve]

3.4 Uploading to the Website

After processing the videos, the group was tasked with uploading the five selected clips and the raw footage to the Oral History of Video Games website. To accomplish this, the team contacted Mike Voorhis, the Lab Coordinator of Computer Science Department at WPI, as well as the personnel in charge of maintaining the server that hosts the OHVG website, and asked to be provided with the details necessary to accessing the server. In return, user accounts for each member of the current team were created, giving them access to the host directory. The given website has an SSH port hosted on alpheus.wpi.edu:22. With the passwords acquired from Mike Voorhis, the team logged into the server. To access the server, the following command was executed in a terminal:

```
ssh  <username>@alpheus.wpi.edu
```

After logging in, a search method a search method was utilized to find the location that contained

the index.html file:

```
find / -readable -prune -o -print | grep index.html | grep oral
```

This command returned the following locations:

```
/home/www/alpheus-docs/imgd/oral-history/old/old-index.html
/home/www/alpheus-docs/imgd/oral-history/old/index.html
/home/www/alpheus-docs/imgd/oral-history/index.html
```

Results indicated that the root file for the website was hosted from

/home/www/alpheus-docs/imgd/oral-history/ directory within the server.

There was also a symbolic link at /home/vghistory/oral-history.

The next step for the group was to copy essential files. A quick disk usage command using du

(disk usage https://www.freebsd.org/cgi/man.cgi?du) Showed that the file sizes including the

original interviews and the clips were too large and unnecessary to transfer. A command to zip

the files were used (executed from home directory of a user):

```
zip ohvg.zip -r ../vghistory/oral-history/ -x *.rar *.zip *.mp4 *.flv *old*
```

The generated file was then transferred to a local computer using scp

(https://linux.die.net/man/1/scp) :

```
scp <username>@alpheus.wpi.edu:/home/<username>/ohvg.zip .
```

Using the acquired files, the team found out that the website was separated into modules. The index.html used common html commands to separate interviews. In order to insert the new interviews, the group filled out the template for each interview and updated the index.html file. Following lines were added (<flast> stands for initial-lastname):

```
<div class="interview">
  <a href=interviews/<flast>.html>
   <div class="container">
     <div class="floatleft"><img src="media/thumbnails/<flast>.PNG"></div>
       <h3> name surname (year)</h3>
       <p> BIOGRAPHY </p>
   </div>
</a>
  </div>
```


John Romero (2015)
One of the fathers of the modern first-person shooter. Worked on Wolfenstein 3-D, Doom, and Quake.

[Figure 7: HTML code and the generated index header]

In the inner division tag a source for an image is given. This image points to the media/thumbnail

folder. Along with this a reference is given to the interviews/<flast>.html file that corresponds

with the interviewee.

The group was then required to fill the individual interview pages with the clips. To accomplish

this, the group looked at the template from the previous groups. Here are some of the template

elements:

```
<!-- BIOGRAPHY STARTS HERE -->
   <div class="biotext">
      <div class="container">
    <!-- EDIT THIS PICTURE LINK -->
        <img src="../media/biopics/bmoriarty.png" align="left"
style="padding-top:30px;"/>
        <h1> NAME LASTNAME </h1>
        <p>Lorem Ipsum Dolor Sit Amet.</p>
      </div>
   </div>
   <div class="player">
      <div class="container">
```


NAME LASTNAME

Lorem Ipsum Dolor Sit Amet.

[Figure 8: HTML code and the generated image of a Interviewee page header]

To fill this part out, the group cropped suitable frames from the raw interview footage and placed the images in the media/biopics folder. In the individual interview pages, these images were used. Along with the images, names and the short biography were also replaced.

The interview page was then edited to display the clips for each interview. For each clip following piece of code was appended to the appropriate place in the html files:

```
<!-- COPY THIS FOR EACH VIDEO -->
        <p> Getting Into Gaming Industry </p>
        <video class="video-js" controls preload="auto" width="800"
height="480" data-setup="{}">
      <!-- EDIT THIS VIDEO LINK -->
         <source
src="../media/video/bmoriarty/Getting_Into_The_Business.mp4"
type='video/mp4'/>
        </video>
<!-- VIDEO ENDS HERE -->
```

Getting Into Game Industry
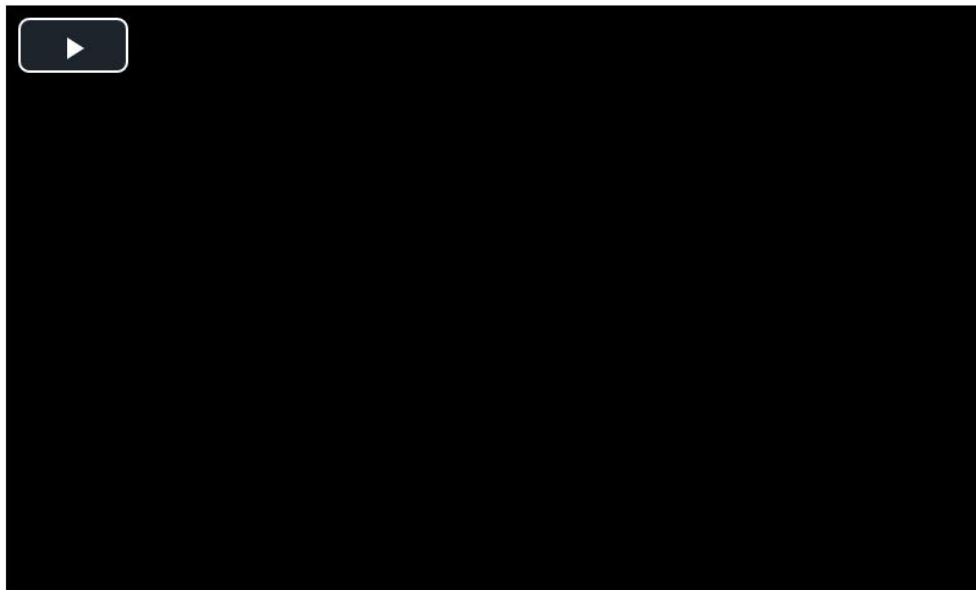
[Figure 9: HTML code and the generated video player]

New folders were created for each of the new interviewees and their clips were added to those folders. In the html code, the appropriate fields were filled to correctly display the videos.

In addition to changing the fields in the html pages, the group was required to upload subtitles for the videos in display. To accomplish this the group added another line to the video tag for each video, such as:

```
<track label="English" kind="subtitles" srclang="en"
src="../media/video/ntroy/ntroy_getting-into-gaming-industry.vtt"/>
```

[Figure 10: HTML code required to add captions in a video header]

In the actual video tag:

```
<video class="video-js" controls preload="auto" width="800" height="480"
data-setup="{}">
        <!-- EDIT THIS VIDEO LINK -->
        <source
src="../media/video/ntroy/ntroy_getting-into-gaming-industry.mp4"
type='video/mp4' />
        <track label="English" kind="subtitles" srclang="en"
src="../media/video/ntroy/ntroy_getting-into-gaming-industry.vtt"/>
    </video>
```

[Figure 11: Complete HTML code to display a video player with captions]

The file format accepted by html-5 for captions or subtitles is WebVTT however the group only had access to srt files. So a conversion was performed by using https://atelier.u-sub.net/srt2vtt/ .

After all of the html and content files were set changed files were zipped and send back to the server using scp:

```
scp ohvg.zip <username>@alpheus.wpi.edu:/home/<username>/ohvg.zip
```

Upon approval the server can be updated by moving the folder to the host directory.

4.0 Results

After contacting each interviewee, determining the logistical elements of each meeting, and thoroughly preparing for the process, the group conducted each of the main interviews. Beginning with Kent Quirk, followed by Nicholas Troy, and concluding with Charles Lee Sheldon, each interview held a duration ranging between one and two hours in length, and required an additional thirty minutes to one hour of time dedicated to the setup and breakdown of the filming equipment. The outcomes of each interview process varied depending on location, time, and the experiences of each individual, but all of them resulted in the successful capturing of a personal recount of each individual's experiences with the video game industry. This report will not provide an all-inclusive, detailed account of the information discussed in each interview, but will attempt to provide a general summary of the results of each interview, which includes the outcomes of the applied methods, notable events or circumstances, and a basic recap of the interview itself.

For the full interviews, along with the transcripts and clips, please visit the Oral History of Video Games website at http://alpheus.wpi.edu/imgd/oral-history/index.html

4.1 Conducting The Interviews

4.1.1 Interviewing Kent Quirk
(Wed. Dec 5, 2018 | Duration: One and a half hours)

After arranging an evening meeting time, the project group traveled to Quirk's home in Connecticut using the rental car service Zipcar. Solaimon Saqib conducted the interview while Isaac Donkoh-Halm worked the camera and Can Alper monitored the audio. The setup time totaled about forty minutes, with the main focuses being the creation of a proper lighting environment and acquiring the proper angles to best represent Quirk and create a feel for his personality based on the environment of his home. As it turned out, Quirk decided to include his dog Shiner in the interview, who can be seen entering and exiting the frame throughout the interview, while also napping and moving beside him as well.

The interview began with a recap of Quirk's background, schooling, and early employment. From there he moved onto his journey into the gaming industry. He began working for companies involved in electronics, but found a passion in coding while living in France, after which he went on to begin to code for games. The main points of his interview involved his time as the founder of CogniToy, working with Linden Lab, founding Boston Post-Mortem, and his work/life balance across each endeavor. He touched upon the struggles of maintaining a healthy family life while running a company or developing an idea, as it requires a huge commitment for often little reward. He contrasted these experiences to his time working for large companies such as SolidWorks and Disney, where he made a decent living while also having a lot more structure

to his work schedule which provided him with more free time. Beyond his work/life balance, Quirk touched upon how he had made many connections in the video game industry, which allowed him to found Boston Post-Mortem, a monthly social-networking meeting for those involved in the gaming scene. Through this event, many found ways to connect with others, find jobs, start companies, and explore their desire to be a part of the gaming industry and community. Quirk himself had directly contributed to helping other industry professionals find major footholds and begin careers of their own. When asked to summarize his experiences in the industry and his overall purpose, Quirk responded with "I showed others the way".

After the interview had concluded, the team checked the footage to ensure there were no major issues, broke down the equipment, and thanked Mr. Quirk for his time and willingness to participate. After reviewing and transcribing the interview, the team created four clips that focused on Quirk's work/life balance, his journey into the industry, experiences as both an employer and employee, as well as his overall retrospective on his time in the industry.

4.1.2 Interviewing Nicholas Troy
(Wed. Dec 12, 2018 | Duration: forty-five minutes)

Next was Nicholas Troy. He worked with Isaac Donkoh-Halm previously at Innovation Academy Charter School, so he performed the interview while Soliamon monitored the audio and Can controlled the camera. We arrived at his apartment in Cambridge and started to set up the equipment for the interview. While Troy was out of the video game industry, he very much retained his love of video games, displaying a large collection of games and game paraphernalia

in his living room. While the equipment was being set up, he talked about some of the games he was currently playing and also discussing developing a social hub for gamers with a focus on removing toxicity in online chatrooms. The interview needed to be cut short because he needed to meet with his roomates for a gaming session.

The interview began with Troy's career before he became a videogame tester, working as an IT director for Benson-Henry Institute at Massachusetts General Hospital[8]. He later decided he wanted to work in games, and attended professional development and networking events such as Boston Post Mortem before eventually being hired as a contract worker for Irrational Games, the studio responsible for the *Bioshock* series.

His first job working for Irrational was as a QA Tester for *Bioshock: Infinite*. He describes working at Irrational as "tough", with his 6 months of tenure at the studio was almost entirely "crunch time." He recalls that he was working 12 hours a day, 6 days a week throughout his time at the studio, often staying for dinner with the rest of the team as they were all frantically busy with development and did not have time to go back to their homes. Despite the "brutal" treatment, he mentions that he had a lot of fun working at Irrational and would gladly return to video game development some day.

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[8] https://www.innovationcharter.org/staff-members/nicholas-troy/

4.1.3 Interviewing Professor Sheldon
(Fri. Feb 15, 2019 | Duration: one hour)

For the third and final interview of th 2018-2019 OHVG IQP, the team decided to interview

Charles Lee Sheldon. Given that Sheldon currently holds a teaching position at WPI, the logistics

of the interview were convenient. The team met Sheldon in his office, where they rapidly setup

the equipment and began the interview. Can Alper performed the interview while Solaimon

Saqib monitored the sound and camera. Similarly to the other two interviews, Alper asked

Sheldon to briefly introduce himself. Sheldon explained his history as a writer and how he has

been writing stories since early childhood. He emphasized his passion to tell rich and interesting

stories, as well as briefly touched upon his early writing habits. This passion for writing lead him

to pursue a career in television, writing for shows as notable as *Star Trek: Next Generation.*

Going forward, Sheldon described his transition from working in the television industry to

writing scripts and storyline for video games. He began with some background as to how he was

introduced to games while working on a pilot episode for an Atari television show. He soon grew

fond of the way games could tell interactive stories in a way that no other medium could, and

with this new passion realized, along with mounting friction between him and other television

writers, Sheldon decided to make the switch to games. In order to contrast the two forms of

media, Alper questioned Sheldon about the differences in storytelling in video games compared

to in television. Sheldon stated the fact that videogames are more interactive in their nature,

therefore they require more attention to the choices that the player might make. He went on to

stress the importance of the writers' involvement during the game development process. He

stated that the industry is not very kind to writers as they are not usually provided with benefits

or job security, yet they are integral to the success of a game's story, and should involved throughout the process. He stated the intense nature of the writing that goes into the games and how his interactions with the programmers went. Upon hearing the hardships of Sheldon's experience, Alper asked him to touch on his work/life balance, where he stressed the difficulties of crunch, and how changes were often made without consulting the writers, causing more issues with the writing process. Once the interview had concluded, the group thanked Sheldon, checked the interview footage, and bid farewell with the professor.

Since the answers from Prof. Sheldon were chronological and reflective of his time in industry the group decided to take the footage from the answers and compress them to the 2 minute clip sizes. The group ended up creating 6 clips for Sheldon which touched upon the key aspects of his transition between TV and games, his work/life balance, the importance of writing in games, and insights into how writing in games has changed.

5.0 Discussion

After completing each interview and reflecting upon their outcomes, there are many points of discussion to mention in regards to the overall process, challenges, failures, successes, and the narrative of oral history that was obtained from the experience. One of the biggest challenges the group faced was scheduling, and not just with the potential interviewees, but amongst themselves. While this was not observed through the first phases of the project, the signs of miscommunication and bad scheduling emerged during the C term. The group slowly became

more independent from each other while working through the final stages of this project, and oftentimes there would be multiple group members working on a singular task that was initially assigned to one person, causing confusion. The group also faced some problems they did not anticipate. For example during the interview with Quirk, the group did not utilize a second camera. While the footage from the singular camera the group had used was complete and working fine, having a second camera as backup was strongly preferred in the event of corrupted files, incomplete footage, or bad image quality. For subsequent interviews, the group had experienced technical difficulties ranging from fairly minor (camera out of focus) to extremely major (camera turned off halfway through interview), but the interview was saved thanks to the use of a back up camera provided by Can Alper.

5.1 Discussion of Interviews

Each interview contained its own in-depth, personal accounts of each individual's time in the industry. From the development and business perspective that was provided by Quirk, to the insights and hidden nature of bug hunting from Troy, to the writer's perspective provided by Sheldon, each interview, while different in experiences, helped to touch on common themes in the gaming industry. Some major themes that were consistent across all of the testimonies were related to work/life balance and the struggles of working in the industry. One of the most common topics discussed was the crunch and its place in the industry. Every member mentioned how there were moments when poor management and tight deadlines caused workers to have to

commit significant amounts of overtime in order to complete a project by a specific date. This added to the stress the industry put on each of their lives, and for someone like Kent, who was raising a family, such issues proved to be incredibly taxing on their personal lives. Such circumstances lead to frustrations for each interviewee, which definitely negatively impacted their experiences. This is a common theme seen throughout the industry today, and likely contributes significantly to burnout, which causes many industry members to exit the realm of game development.

There were also some surprising circumstances that connected each of the interviewees. These typically revolved around Boston Post-Mortem, which was founded by Kent Quirk. As Quirk had stated, he believed that his purpose was to "show others the way" in their careers in games, and much to the groups intrigue, it turned out that Nicholas Troy had actually gotten his start through Boston Post Mortem, which demonstrates how Quirk, although he never met Troy, was able to provide the mechanism that allowed Troy to "find his way" into the industry.

5.2 Considerations

Overall, this project was fairly successful. The project group accomplished the main goals set by the IQP project advisor, and further contributed to the academic resource that is the Oral History of Video Games project at WPI. Three interviews were conducted by each of the three members, providing them with ample experience with all of the facets of video production and the interview process. Each interview went smoothly, and each of the interviewees seemed to appreciate the the experience.

One consideration that should be emphasized is that the success of this IQP largely revolved around the connections the group members and the project advisors had to the gaming industry. Without Professor O'donnell's connections to Kent Quirk, or the connections Isaac Donkoh-Halm had to Nicholas Troy, the whole process could have been very different. The team would have likely had to constantly send out many emails to former industry professionals in the hopes of possibly getting a few people to offer their contributions to the project. This would have drastically changed the nature of each interview, as well as added a tremendous amount of uncertainty to the process. For that reason it was very fortunate that the group was able to bypass the challenges associated with that circumstance.

5.2.1 Interviews that fell through

Although the group was successful levying connections in order to more easily find potential interviewees, which saved significant hassle during the process of researching and contacting prospective candidates, there were still many promising interviews that fell through.

Scott Macmillan

The first of the interviews was originally going to be with Scott MacMillan, a local game developer who previously worked with Blue Fang Studios who created the *Zoo Tycoon* series as a producer. before creating his own company, MacGuffin Games. Professor O'Donnell

introduced the group to Kent Quirk and MacMillan and we created questions for Scott and Kent Quirk around the same time to set up the interview while Professor O'Donnell corresponded with him via email. During one of the weekly check-ins with Professor O'Donnell, he advised us against asking too many questions about MacGuffin Games, which was shutdown after a failed launch of a video game and eventually running out of funding, as he may still be sensitive to the topic. While the group was working on editing the questions to reduce mention of the studio, MacMillan later emailed Professor O'Donnell stating that he was no longer interested in being a part of the project.

Additional Irrational Developer

Isaac Donkoh-Halm had a connection to another developer who worked at Irrational Studios and worked on *Bioshock Infinite* during its troubled development. However, the developer was living in Texas at the time of the project, so it was decided that they drop this interview due to the high travel costs.

Women in Games Member

Women in Games is a video game developer group based in Cambridge Massachusetts that meets monthly to discuss topics, share demos, and more. Donkoh-Halm had expressed concerns about the low number of female developers and developers of colors of the Oral History page. Professor O'Donnell agreed, noting that most of his contacts come from his own time working in game development, and it was also mostly male developers. He suggested that we attend a meetup and announce our project to the group with the hopes that they're would be anyone

interested in performing an interview with us at a later date. Due to time constraints, the group was unable to attend one of the upcoming meetups, however Donkoh-Halm has expressed interest in performing interviews with Women in Games members as an extracurricular activity.

Les Nelken

Les Nelken was the last subject Professor O'Donnell suggested to us. He worked at Turbine (now known as WB Games Boston) and now works as a professor of game design at Fitchburg State University. The group reached out to Professor Nelken in C-Term via email to arrange a potential interview, but the plans fell through due to time constraints. Similarly to Women in Games, Donkoh-Halm may perform this interview as an extracurricular activity.

6.0 Conclusions

The 2018-2019 Oral History of Video Games IQP was an enriching and challenging experience that provided the undergraduate group members with valuable lessons in scheduling, filming, editing, web-development, and interpersonal skills. The IQP also provided the team with significant experience in the processes involved with undertaking a long-term project. As a result, the team's understanding and appreciation for the work required to complete large projects, along with their ability to work in teams for a common purpose, have dramatically increased. It was an incredible privilege to have the opportunity to delve deeper into the vibrant industry of video games and learn these valuable lessons along the way.

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8.0 Appendix

Oral History Release Form

ORAL HISTORY RELEASE AGREEMENT

Thank you for agreeing to share your story with the IGDA Game Preservation SIGand WPI and for allowing your story to be archived. The IGDA Game Preservation SIG's mission is to document the history of videogames and the industry around them.

Audio visual recordings resulting from the interviews conducted have become part of the IGDA Game Preservation SIG's archive and are available for viewing and downloading on the website of the same, unless there are restrictions on their use by the interviewee and/or interviewer. Participation in the Oral History of Video Games interviews is entirely voluntary

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We the undersigned have read the above. The interviewer affirms that they have explained the nature and purpose of this oral history research. The interviewee affirms that they have **consented to the interview**. The interviewee and interviewer hereby give, grant, and assign all rights, title, and interest, including copyright, of whatever kind from this information and interview to the IGDA Game Preservation SIG and WPI.

Date of interview   _____

Name of interviewer   _____

Signature   _____

Address   _____

City, State, Zip   _____

Name of interviewee   _____

Signature   _____

Address   _____

City, State, Zip   _____

Professor Sheldon Questions

General Questions
1. Can you introduce yourself to us?
2. What do you primarily do for your career?
    a. What led to this? Education? Passion?
3. What other paths did you consider taking when you were looking for your first job?
4. How do you feel about the current game development scene in general?

Writing in Games
1. How did you make the switch to the gaming industry ?
2. What is the process of writing a singular scenario/game?
3. What are some of the biggest differences between writing for games and writing for television?
4. What tools did you use when making a game ?
5. What were some of the things you took inspiration from at the time ?

Crunch and Work Ethic
1. How was your work life balance when you were working on games ?
2. What were some of your rituals ?

Nicholas Troy Questions

1. Can you introduce yourself to us?
2. What do you primarily do for your career?
    a. What led to this? Education? Passion?
3. Relationship to video games? Tabletop games?
4. Can you talk to us about your time at Irrational Games?
    a. Was this one of your first jobs in the video game industry? In the tech industry?
    b. How did you receive the job?
    c. What was your average day like?
    d. Did you have any rituals you performed after work? Such as going to a certain restaurant after shifts?
    e. Did you have a decent work-life balance while working there?
    f. What is something you wish you knew at the time when you got the job?
    g. Do you still keep in contact with any of the developers of either game company you worked at?
    h. Do you see yourself coming back to the game industry in the future? Why or why not?
5. What are you doing now?

Kent Quirk Questions

1. Can you talk to us about your time at Cognitoy?
   a. Your first shipped product, Mindrover was a success. Can you tell us a bit more about dealing with a successful first product and also managing the game with content updates?
   b. What made Mindrover unique from other educational games in your eyes?
   c. What was the biggest challenge during that time ?
2. Can you talk to us about your time at Linden Labs?
   a. What did your day to day schedule look like ?
   b. How did you spend your free time ? What did you do on (lunch or other) breaks ?
   c. Was your social life affected by your work ?
   d. Did you work outside of your hours ? Did you have to do extra work ?
3. What led you to found Boston Post Mortem?
4. Do you still keep in contact with any of the developers of either game company you worked at?
5. Are you satisfied with the New England game development scene in its current state?
6. How do you feel about the game development scene in general?
7. Do you consider game development to be a passion of yours or a side hobby. Have these feelings changed at any point?

General Questions
1. How did you first get started with game development? What got you interested?
2. What other paths did you consider taking when you were looking for your first job in game development?
3. What did your day to day schedule look like ?
4. How did you spend your free time ?
5. Was your social life affected by your work ?
6. What was the most fun project you worked on ? // Which project did you enjoy the most ? (If they worked on multiple games)
7. What was your main reason to leave the gaming industry ?
8. Was there a time where you wished you could go back and make a change while working in games? If you could change three things for that time period, what would they be ?