# the *e*scapist

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

**by Russ Pitts**

We were all wearing eye patches, there were toucans, and we were all singing. Even the toucans joined in. Amy Claire Kingston's 12th birthday party may not have been in the Caribbean, nor on a sailing vessel, but for a day we were all pirates and she, our pirate queen.

The toucans were actually cockatiels or some such domestic bird, but they played their parts well. There was grog of a sorts (Hawaiian punch mixed with club soda), booty (chocolate coins wrapped in gold foil) and an honest to Davy Jones treasure hunt in the back yard. We were each given a map and tasked with charting a course around elephant ear plants, monkey grass and the big elm in the corner to find the giant X marked on the map, under which (we hoped) would lay every pirate's dream: a sunken chest.

Amy Claire's father escorted us below decks three by three, where we, blindfolded, met with The Old Pirate Ghost. He told us the tale of how he lost his leg and his life fighting a Spanish Frigate off of Hispaniola. We each held his ruined eye (a peeled grape), touched his exposed brains (bowl of spaghetti) and shook his cold, lifeless hand (Mr. Kingston's ice-cooled hand in a glove). After the treasure hunt, Amy Claire's award-winning fondue and a round of "Pin the Tail on the Pirate" (and more grog), it was time to go home, although we all wore our eye patches out the door and, in my case, for several hours afterwards.

We know a lot about the life of pirates on the Spanish Main, and it wasn't always as much fun as Amy Claire's birthday party, nor as romantic as the stories we see on TV and in the movies, but nothing ever is. We know that most pirates were murderers, rapists and thieves, and that aside from the act of stealing a ship in the first place (a crime punishable by death) most had records as long as their wooden legs, and lived brutal, short and miserable lives, often dying as they lived by - the cutlass, pistol or cannon, if they weren't captured and hanged first.

We also know that piracy on the high seas didn't cease with the conquering of The New World; that it, in fact, continues to this day. Armed gunmen aboard stolen yachts and cigarette boats patrol the waters off the African coast, boarding luxury liners, stealing whatever isn't nailed down and occasionally taking hostages. And that's not the only form of piracy alive and well in the 21st century. Digital pirates are far more numerous and claim residence on almost every shore, downloading bootleg copies of songs, movies and games without paying a doubloon to the proper rights holders.

Few of us haven't dreamed of sailing the seven seas in a stolen ship, casting off all bonds of lawfulness and responsibility to be the captain of a merry band of pirates, seeking romance and adventure wherever the wind may take us. Likewise, few of us haven't downloaded a song, copied a movie or bootlegged a game, taking our enjoyment without paying for the privilege. But most of us realize this is nothing but a dream. That the first star on the right will always be farther away than we can sail and that the X, more often than not, marks an empty hole in the ground. We realize that rules also apply to us, that stealing isn't a victimless crime and that the merry band of pirates will be just as likely to slit your throat as any one else's.

Being a pirate, in real life, isn't all it's cracked up to be, but it's still fun to pretend, still fun to put on the eye patch and drink grog, fondle the wenches and order the lubbers off the plank. And the issue of digital piracy is one that won't be settled overnight.

In Issue 93 of *The Escapist*, Mur Lafferty wonders whether pirates are an idea past their prime, Allen Varney and Shannon Drake interview men who are living their own pirate dreams, and making games in which you can do the same, John Holowach looks at the Digital Rights Management (DRM) debate from the consumer's point of view and Leonardo Pose shares his amazing story of third world game piracy.

We hope you enjoy the voyage, and please, no wenching on the poop deck. Yarr!

*Russ Pitts*

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**To The Editor:**
Superior media regularly wash out because of a mismatch with the consumer. Not just media varieties, but

forms of expression. To coin a term, I'll call it the Coltrane-Betamax Effect. John Coltrane pioneered, with a few others such as Miles Davis, the late sixties/early seventies over-the-top innovations in free jazz, perhaps bounded by Coltrane's OM disc, Pharoah Sanders's work at the time, Ornett Coleman & the Art Inst. of Chicago's music, and Davis's Bitches Brew. Yet, as was observed at the time, this superior and inventive pioneering of forms did not have a mass audience waiting at the station to greet them with cheers. I would say that it's only been a strange historical accident that an audience has been growing up to it over the past 40 years (e.g., Ornett Coleman could get a Lifetime Achievement award from Grammy).

The Betamax part of the effect hardly needs elaborating. Often hailed as a superior technology, it failed because of accidents of marketing, etc., not because of the qualities of the product.

One of the first musical products using CD-ROM technologies to explore creative ends was the "failed" work of Todd Lundgren of CDi for Phillips, particularly

his "No World Order" disc. (At the bottom of the letter I have a link and quote from the Wikipedia article covering this.)

Closer to our resident Visigoth Gamer is the "wild" proposals by Scott McCloud, who details the (in the words of his newest book Making Comics) "Storytelling Secrets of comics, Manga and Graphic Novels." There are many many new ways of telling stories, as McCloud notes.

I for one am largely persuaded by the likes of Vincent Kang and Scott McCloud. I'm primarily an educator and a philosopher, deeply committed to adjective-burdened lyrical texts, but in love with comics, and excited by the possibilities of what Kang describes.

But--and here's the rub, as the immortal Bard of Avon would say--I've never been able to "save the princess." Having introduced my formerly eleven year old son to Super Mario II and Duck Hunt, I have seen him turn into a Linux software engineer professional. But I was never able to guide Luigi through the maze, and have stood by and watched Sim

Railroads and Worlds go through Warfare and Civilizations rise and fall and whole Second lives go to hell in a handbasket.

So I love a good story. I love to tell good stories. I've got the content, at least as much, by golly, as that Frank Miller fellow with his 300 fallen heroes at Thermopylae. I've got metaphysics and history and the extremes of world thought and culture coming out the wazoo. But as Kang (wonderful name for a gamer!) points out, there is a missing audience--of which I am among the missing, ironically.

Blame it on the Coltrane-Betamax Effect.

**- Bruce C. Meyer**

**In response to "I'd Rather Play a Game Than Read A Book" from The Escapist Forum:** This opinion piece is a new low for unsubstantiated ranting at the Escapist. At least it was mercifully short.

Because visual media are so different from textual ones, there's no point in comparing them. It comes down to personal taste, which is the only

argument that the author puts forth. He likes video games more, therefore video games are better. That's the kind of opinion one would expect a grade 2 student to have. I expect better from a paid writer.

**- arrr_matey**

**In response to "I'd Rather Play a Game Than Read A Book" from The Escapist Forum:** The comparison was between "a critically acclaimed" videogame, and a "universally loved" novel. This is inferring that they are equal in credibility as far as their respected mediums are concerned.

Because of this fallacy - comparing one of the best videos of all time to a book written for a franchise - the argument is weaker. Bioware vs Timothy Zahn; an industry leader vs a franchise writer. Surely it would have been better to compare KOTOR to something written by Iain Banks.

The fact is, you would not compare the game series Elder Scrolls and submise that it is narratively better than the book series Discworld. Where the characters and locations in Discworld are often full of life and charm, Oblivion's are mostly forgettable. True, Oblivion has a lot of things going for it, and the painting quest was excellent, but these only stand out because of the limited supply of other *gasp* events. Aeris' death in Final Fantasy is constantly talked about because it has very few peers. There are very few games that you can compare to books - Final Fantasy, Monkey Island, and perhaps Half Life 2 being noticeable examples, but even games that have tried so hard, such as Fable, end up coming tacked with a clichéd uninvolved plot and numerous cardboard characters.

I agree with the notion that video-games can be the ultimate media, but right now they are not, and if we truly want to get them there, then this kind of optimism really isn't helping. The best books are full of life and charisma, only a select few video games can claim that. The time-stop conversations and random babble that NPCs spew out to each other in Oblivion can't, nor can the standing-around-aimlessly, whilst-repeating-phrases-every-now-and-then characters in most story-led games can't either. Too often do games seem robotic and forced, and this is partly to do with technical limitations and also to do with the lack of imagination that goes into titles.

**- drunkymonkey**

**In response to "Strangers in a Strange Land" from The Escapist Forum:** It's a shame there's no way to expose her to any kids who've grown up with gaming parents. My wife and I are both gamers and our kids have gained all sorts of benefits from early exposure to gaming. More encouraging still, the mainstream culture *they're* growing up in values gaming as a positive trait. The Nintendo DS is the most sought after toy in the playground and my daughter had a very positive response the day she took some of my polyhedral dice in to "show and tell".

**- Dom Camus**

**In response to "Digital Footprints" from The Escapist Forum:** The true value behind a MySpace page like this is that it connects everyone in their grief. I know people that, through the tragedy of having a friend or loved one die, have discovered things they never knew and people they'd never met before. Having someone who knows them from a different perspective is amazingly refreshing in such times of pain, and deep, lasting friendships have been forged by people that otherwise may

have not noticed each other on the street. The parents and family of someone who's died can also benefit from such an outpouring of sympathy, emotion, and love.

A friend who I had been out of touch with after moving died in a car accident a few years ago, at age 19. She was sweet, pretty, and outgoing, and there were no shortage of people who came to the funeral. There was a surprise, though: dozens of people who she kept in touch with (or knew exclusively) online had written in or sent video expressing their sadness and how much she'd meant to them, and a few flew or drove to attend in person. Her best friend had gotten onto her MSN, website, and forums accounts and let everyone know what had happened, and had to compile the overwhelming response. Most people were either smiling or tearing up, many both, as the beautiful, heartfelt prose was read out, and afterwards, some people who only knew each other through her references in conversation were meeting each other and sharing stories.

While the comments may never be read by the 'intended' person, they have something that's both epitaph and community, a break and a rejoining. And that's the best we could hope for.

**- Evil Timmy**

# THE JOHNNY DEPP FACTOR

by Mur Lafferty

In sumo wrestling, wrestlers work hard to achieve different ranks, and once a wrestler reaches the peak rank, *yokozuna*, he cannot be demoted. However, he is expected to retire if his skills falter. Leave at the top, keep your honor and make sure people remember you as young Elvis. The concept of stepping down when you are at your peak is admired, however rarely followed (who still enjoys *Garfield* – really?).

Pirates are currently at a peak in the social consciousness of the U.S. One only has to look at the success of *Pirates of the Caribbean* (including Johnny Depp's Best Actor nomination) to see how much we love pirates. We have Talk Like a Pirate Day, where we, well, it's one of those self-explanatory holidays. And of course there's the extremely popular tabletop/collectible ship game from WizKids, *Pirates of the Spanish Main* (and all of its expansions).

And hey, I'm addicted to pirates as anyone. I have scores of those little ships sailing the *Spanish Main*. The game was fun, sure, but I became absolutely addicted to collecting and putting together those little boats. After I filled three sectioned boxes with ships, I decided it was time to stop. It's like any CCG, only worse, since it takes up so much more room. On the MMOG front, the upcoming *Pirates of the Burning Sea* focuses on sea battles. And for those of us who have been used to taking the subway as a superhero, the prospect of captaining your own pirate ship is very attractive. It's exactly what the pirates enjoyed – freedom from the rule of law and mastering the sea.

However, I am going to be the bold and say, with pirates at their peak, it's time for them to step down. They're done. We've been saturated. Anything more and we'll become sick of them, like when a good song is overplayed on the radio. Pirates need to go out in a blaze of glory. This will likely happen during the third *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie: One more look at staggering Johnny Depp with lots of eyeliner, and then, boom – stick a cutlass in them; they're done.

But this culture, especially our geek culture, needs a specialized group to cling to, like baby sloths. We need a fringe group to love. We need to bring someone else into the limelight. It is the

nature of our culture to obsess about something and then move on, only a few things really leaving a permanent mark (*Star Wars* and *Counter-Strike* are perfect examples).

Now, I know what you're thinking: The ultimate enemy of the pirate – the ninja – is poised to take over. The ninja waits in the shadows, waiting for the pirates to

sail into the sunset so they can take their place as number one. But pirates and ninjas have been fighting for so long I don't think they would know what to do without the other. Once pirates fall from grace, their nemeses, with nothing to counter them, will lose their cool factor. They will melt into the shadows and look for another enemy. Or perhaps follow the pirates.

**We should apply litmus tests to each group: can we make a good computer game out of it, a good tabletop game, and can Johnny Depp play in the movie?**

So I humbly present three dark horse groups waiting in the wings to take over for the pirates. Three groups that hope to be **the** group to inspire the next Johnny Depp blockbuster as well as the next Hallmark holiday. I give you: zombies, hoboes and Cthulhoid monsters.

Zombies have been part of our social consciousness for decades. Who doesn't like a good zombie flick, our motley heroes fighting the slow-moving, ever-hungering living dead, dying one by one? But that **does** get old: Unlike vampires, who can have personalities, zombies are fairly one-dimensional, brain-eating automatons. Only recently has the myth transformed into something else.

"I think it has to do with the series of shows and movies ... out there that aren't as campy as the old Roger Corman stuff," said Michael R. Mennenga, director of FarPoint Media, a company that produces and develops sci-fi and related podcasts, and the developer of the Zombie Channel, a hub for internet media dedicated to zombies. "There're new aspects of zombies that are piquing the sci-fi community's interest again. There's just been some really great stuff

that's come out recently: *Shaun of the Dead* [and] *28 Days* [*Later*]."

*Shaun of the Dead* provided a different view of zombies, allowing the monsters to make some (admittedly limited) logical leaps, such as being fooled by Our Heroes when they act like zombies to blend in, and to show ghosts of their former personalities by the end of the movie. *28 Days Later* was much darker, and the people were never called zombies, but most fans agree it was a zombie flick. Still, those "zombies" were fast-moving, terrifying beasts, much harder to outrun than classic zombies.

Mennenga thinks pirates are over, and zombies are already the next big thing. "Zombies are fun. They are popular, and I think they have more staying power than pirates."

We should apply litmus tests to each group: can we make a good computer game out of it, a good tabletop game, and can Johnny Depp play in the movie? For zombies, we already have several undead games. Best known would be *Resident Evil* and the undead race in *World of Warcraft*. The popular

*Zombies!!!* board game has enjoyed a lot of success (even if the gameplay goes about as slow as a zombie can walk). However, I'm not sure if Johnny Depp would really shine in a zombie movie. Although, to be fair, he doesn't shy away from the strange, compelling makeup.

The hobo group is less obvious than the zombie, but they need some attention. John Hodgman, author of *The Areas of My Expertise*, has a hobo section in his book that includes hobo chalk marks, as well as 700 hobo names (including Doc Aquatic, Drinky Drunky Tom, The Drunk and Dora the Explorer). Mark Frauenfelder, co-founder of the Boing Boing Blog and the driving force behind the effort to get drawings for all of Hodgman's 700 hoboes, favors hoboes as next in line for the pirates' spot.

"I think that one of the things that might have kicked in the hobo [popularity] was the war chalking thing," Frauenfelder said. "People use chalk symbols near Wi-Fi hotspots to indicate an open or closed hotspot, and this was inspired by the old hobo chalk marks that indicated a nice widow who will give you a meal if you clean up her yard. … Another [influence] is Hodgman's 700 hobo names." Because of Frauenfelder's suggestion on Boing Boing, over 1,000 illustrations have been added to Flickr, and the site E-hobo.com was launched.

The popularity of hoboes also comes from peoples' desire to leave their lives behind; people get a grass-is-always-greener view of lifestyles they don't have. Frauenfelder agrees: "Every once in a while people get nostalgic for riding the rails, living a life footloose and fancy free, and there's the notion that being a hobo is romantic, even though the reality is pretty grim. It's the same for pirates; I'm sure the life of a pirate, 99 percent of the time, sucked. But there's that romantic notion again."

Frauenfelder feels hoboes are the definite favorite for the next big thing. He even thinks Johnny Depp would star well in a hobo movie, so the Hollywood angle is safe. Remove the eyeliner and add a cigar to his character in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and you've pretty much got instant hobo. However, hoboes seem to be weak in the gaming category, with no computer games featuring hoboes coming to mind (hoboes as NPCs that are cannon fodder do not count), and only the board game *Arkham Horror*, with the character Ashcan Pete, comes close in tabletop games.

Frauenfelder did admit that if hoboes can't topple the pirates, a long shot for the title may be the mythos of HP Lovecraft, what we'll call Cthulhoid. In

**Johnny Depp would star well in a hobo movie, so the Hollywood angle is safe. Remove the eyeliner and add a cigar to his character in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and you've pretty much got instant hobo.**
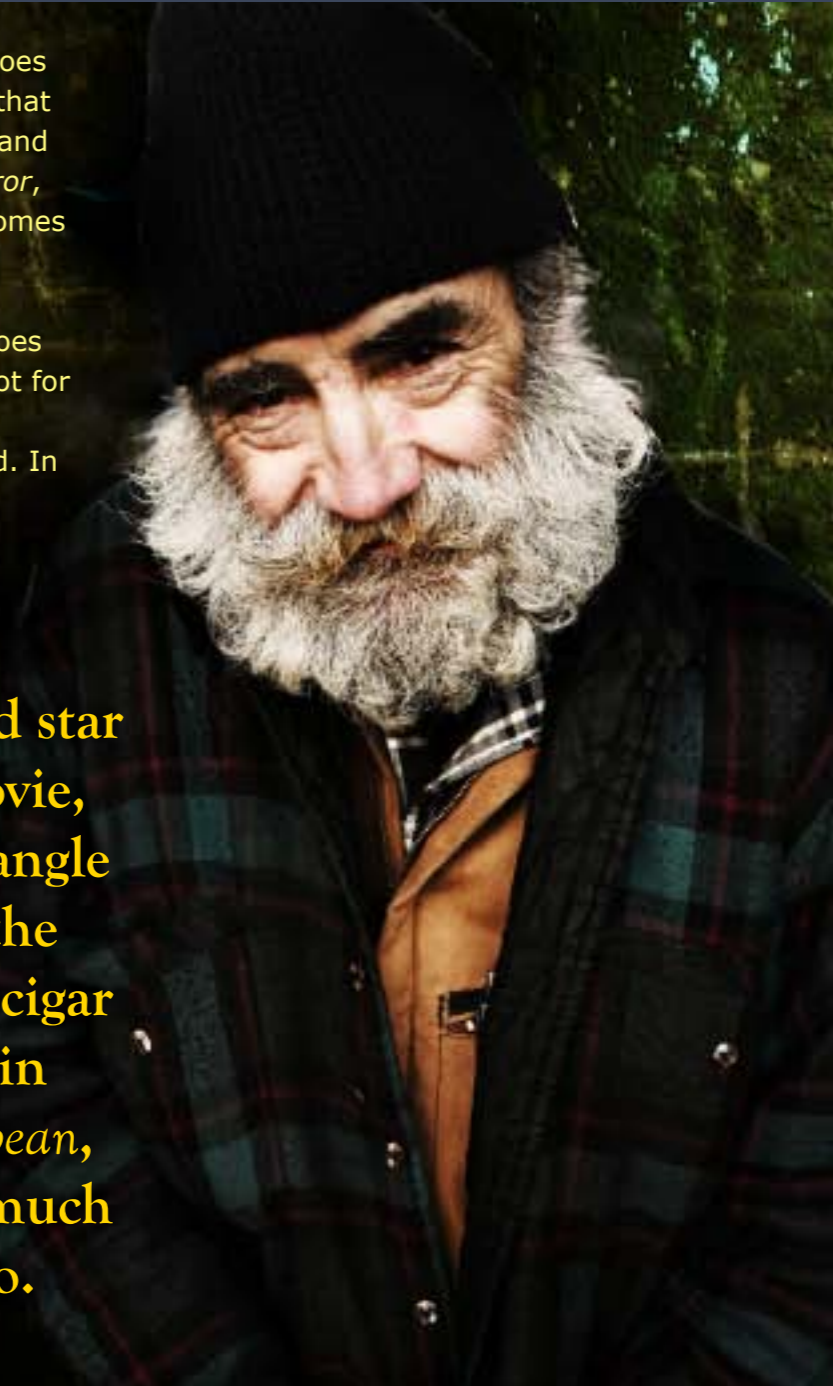
fact, his fellow Boing Boing blogger, Xeni Jardin, has recently blogged about the 70th anniversary of the death of H.P. Lovecraft. She mentioned how Cthulhu, Azathoth and Nylarhotep, to name a few, were enjoying more popularity now than ever. And everyone wants a baby shoggoth under the Christmas tree.

Horror writer and occasional independent Lovecraftian scholar Richard Dansky believes it's time for the Cthulhoids, and he cites Johnny Depp as one of the plusses in his category. "Johnny Depp has already been in one Cthulhu-inspired movie – *Pirates of the Caribbean 2* – and he's already been the perfect Lovecraftian protagonist in *Sleepy Hollow*: a shy intellectual who faints a lot and goes investigating things he oughtn't."

Like hoboes, Lovecraftian monsters are re-entering the consciousness of the world. "Lovecraft is enjoying a wonderful renaissance in all sectors, academic, commercial, you name it," Dansky said. "[Because] tentacles are cool, and because there's so much room to maneuver within Lovecraft. He doesn't actually describe anything; he gives you

bits and pieces and lets you build your own horror."

Honestly, by our litmus tests, the Cthulhoid have the strongest chance against the pirates. As Dansky said, they already have the Depp factor based on Davy Jones' imagery from the second movie. They have tabletop games tied up with the popular RPG *Call of Cthulhu* and the board game *Arkham Horror*. *Call of Cthulhu* has come to the Xbox as well, in the guise of a first-person action-adventure game.

So can Cthulhu and his ilk be the next big thing? People have mixed Hello Kitty with Cthulhu, the Jesus fish car magnet with Cthulhu and even Christmas carols (Very Scary Solstice tunes like "Oh Cthulhu!" and "Have Yourself a Very Scary Solstice"). We like the fear of the sanity lost, we like the prospect of not being killed in battle, but having all of mankind devoured. We're really masochists, I suppose.

When asked who would take over if it weren't the Cthulhoids, Dansky said, "Whatever the next big thing is, the

Cthulhoids will eat it. But honestly: '70s cops [could replace them]. Preferably with huge, bushy, porn moustaches." Imagine Johnny Depp starring in **that** movie.

Pirates, take heed. Your time of reckoning is at hand. The zombies, hoboes, Cthulhoids and the (shudder) '70s cops are coming for you. Better keep you guarrrrrd up. COMMENTS

*Mur Lafferty is a freelance writer and podcast producer. She has dabbled in as much gaming as possible while working with Red Storm Entertainment and White Wolf Publishing. Currently she writes freelance for several gaming publications and produces three podcasts. She lives in Durham, NC.*

Whatever the next big thing is, the Cthulhoids will eat it.

BECAUSE
WE CAN.
Yarr!

by Shannon Drake

While others chase the Tolkien-ripoff dream, one MMOG company cast its eyes to different seas. Three Rings went a different route, producing a game steeped in sea lore that caters to the puzzling crowd. They followed *Puzzle Pirates* with *Bang! Howdy*, another unique spin on a genre. *Bang! Howdy* put the traditional Three Rings humor in a world of cowboys and steampunk robots dueling on turn-based strategy ground usually occupied by complicated (and serious) Japanese titles. Their next project is *Whirled*, "a web-based social world for chat, games and player-created content," though, hopefully, without the flying penises of previous efforts. At the center of it all is Three Rings' CEO and Designer, Daniel James, known for his unique vision and piratical apparel.

He says his background is "mostly start[ing] companies. I started MUDding on Essex MUD — the one written by Roy Trubshaw and Richard Bartle — in 1982. It used to run on the university DEC 10 between 1:00 and 7:00 a.m. On the weekdays, I would get up around 5:00 a.m., before school [to play]. On the weekends, I'd stay up all night. I made Wizard and wrote my own MUDs with friends on the school BBC Micro network."

His first company was related to these late-night hobbies. "My first company was the commercial text MUD Yehuda Simmons and I started in 1990, *Avalon*. It ran out of the back room of my mum's house." *Avalon* used "eight phone lines and 2400-baud modems that would periodically melt and fail, necessitating me shuffling the dead ones to the back of the line. The game ran on an Acorn Archimedes, an old RISC computer, with a 286 as the multiplexer. We had some terminals, and my friends would come over and play until 6:00 a.m., when they had to leave, lest my poor mum awake to discover them bleary-eyed in the dawn light."

1992 brought what he calls "Hostplay." He describes it as "an *Avalon* PC-Baang [with] 14 phone lines and 14 terminals, before going on ye olde internet in 1994. We had a 64KB leased line, which cost over □1,000 a month. We used to charge $0.50 an hour, and suddenly, we went from break-even to quite a profitable business. It's still going now, but I'm no longer involved."

Money from that allowed him to "narrowly avoid getting a real job — or, as was the case, signing on to unemployment benefit

along with all my mates after graduation." Some of James' projects during this time included "a 3-D game developer [called] D3 that folded when its Japanese publisher got shut down, and a web company, Sense Internet, that's doing really well 11 years later, still run by one of the four co-founders, Aidan Cook. Funnily enough, Sense is about the same size as Three Rings."

In 1996, he developed a new fixation, which was "the idea of doing *The Lord of the Rings* as a 3-D MMOG — though the term had yet to be coined, this was pre-anything much graphical except for *Meridian 59*. The literary rights owner and I had a deal that nearly got signed, but instead, negotiations dragged on for two years, and Sierra Online woke up and stole it away. Precious. So, in 1998, I came out to work for them in the mountains o' California, a nice change from London. That project didn't go so well, and three years later, I washed up in Berkeley watching the dot-com boom collapse over the Bay. It was then that *Puzzle Pirates* and Three Rings fermented with co-founder and CTO Michael Bayne."

*Puzzle Pirates* "started with pirates," James says. "I was invited to a pirate party, and it was ridiculously fun. Everyone knew what to say and the outfits were awesome. I knew I had to make a pirate MMOG, to [call it] *Yohoho!*, but I was lacking the core game mechanic. You had to sail around on a ship together as a crew, and everyone had to be doing stuff that wasn't whacking a monster … but I wasn't going to have a clickfest like bad MMOG crafting — click the wheel, drag the slider, click the … Oh, God.

"Then, Bejeweled shipped, and my girlfriend at the time, Brooke Pannell, and I got addicted. She deserves a credit on *Puzzle Pirates* for beating me at *Super Puzzle Fighter* at the dime arcade on our third date." On one particular day, "I left her playing on the laptop in bed, and came back five hours later. She was still playing. The pieces fell together; bling bling! Puzzle games had a flow of intensely fun concentration but left you feel[ing] like you'd wasted hours. MMOGs had the long-term achievement and social dynamics but lacked a fun core game mechanic." Adding the pirate aspect gave it a "strong accessible theme," which seemed like sure success.

With the idea and mechanics nailed down, they started building the game itself. "*Puzzle Pirates* was built by six people: three engineers, two artists and me. It took around 18 months to get to closed alpha testing." Alpha testing took them from an online population of 10 up to 100 over nine months, and during beta, that climbed to 1,000 simultaneous players. "We probably could have started charging with a mid-alpha version," James says, "but we were building a subscription game, so we felt that we had to get up over the $10/month 'cliff.'"

During that development time, he says they were "funded by Michael and I and a few friends and family. Nobody would have funded us back in 2001/2002; angels, publishers, VCs, nobody. Things are different now, kids! Because of this relative financial freedom, and the lack of a fiasco-oriented external factor" - their motto during this time was "Nobody can *@!# this up but us" - "we were able to take our time and have a very smooth development cycle and launch. We did work very hard, though, especially Michael, who deserves (another) prize."

> "Their motto... was "Nobody can *@!# this up BUT US""

## "we couldn't resist STEAMPUNK

The launch and success of *Puzzle Pirates* servers didn't keep Three Rings from trying new things. They've been one of the few developers to make a successful go of the micropayment model. On some *Puzzle Pirates* servers, Three Rings sells Doubloons for in-game items in lieu of charging a subscription fee. "We wanted a new model for *Puzzle Pirates* that would have an easier conversion path than a $10 a month commitment," James says, adding that they'd considered several different options, "but we very much wanted an indefinite 'Free to Play' offering. Around the end of 2004, we settled on the Doubloons model we have now."

Overall, it has "worked very well. Over two-thirds of our revenues are from Doubloons. That said, we have a lot more players on the Doubloon servers, and overall revenues per new user are comparable. Revenue per individual customer is much higher, because Doubloons allow a smaller group of well-endowed players to subsidize the play experience of the vast majority of free players. This is facilitated by our support for transactions between the attention/time currency — Pieces of Eight — and the Doubloons (hard currency)."

Virtual currency and item sales have numerous detractors, but James "believe[s] that the virtual currency and associated 'item' sales model is the future model for the online entertainment industry," primarily because "it provides the commercial relationship that people will expect with a virtual world; it's another country with a currency that can be exchanged. Developers will make money by renting or selling real estate, items, taking a rake on the exchange, etc." As for his own players, he says "the Pirates have not moved a lot between Doubloons and Subscriptions. Certainly some have, but the subscription and Doubloon oceans

are separate servers, so people tend to stick where they got comfortable."

Three Rings' latest release, *Bang! Howdy*, also embraces the micropayment model, but they weren't just trying to make a sequel to *Puzzle Pirates*. It stemmed from "a number of ideas for a sequel to *PP* — code-named SOY for 'Son of *YoHoHo*' — but Michael was keen to not do another full MMOG right away. ... Instead, we decided to take a stab at *Bang!* — a Korean-style 'casual' game — and develop our experience with 3-D and the pay-for-item model. *Bang!*'s actual design emerged from Mike's experiments with strategy game designs that avoid the 'build up for 30 minutes, battle for five, then wait 30 minutes to be crushed' syndrome of most RTS games. The theme fell out of a group brainstorm; we couldn't resist steampunk cowboy robots."

Indeed, Three Rings' games always have that sort of whimsical element to them. *Puzzle Pirates*' swear filters turn obscenities into hilarious sailor slang. James was too coy to lurch into windy vision statements when I asked what makes a Three Rings game, saying, "Hah! We're just a bunch of dorks. I'm not sure that I'd care to put a label on

what makes a Triple-O game, but you will definitely see some different things from us. We've only made two so far, after all. Maybe the next one will be very, very gray and serious." I'm not too sure about that, though, especially after he adds, "We'll get the Ministry of Silly Walks right on it."

In future games, they'd like to "make spaces that actively facilitate people reaching full potential. This has creative, spiritual, intellectual and sensual aspects," though before he reaches full-blown Visionary, he heads back to Earth and adds, "That said, mostly, I'd like to make some fun games. I think our future leisure-lover will have a giant brain the size of a planet; if you can make

## COWBOY ROBOTS."

> ## they also run the Game Gardens program, where they offer free tools and hosting to a community of **BUDDING GAME DEVELOPERS.**

something fun for them, you're rocking all of the above." He was tight-lipped about how they planned to do that, but would say 2007 "should be an interesting year." Some weeks after we spoke, Three Rings announced *Whirled*, which may just challenge *Second Life* for the player-created content throne.

They've also been busy working on free software. There are several free programs on the company site for enterprising programmers to take advantage of, and they count contributions to FreeBSD and MySQL among their accomplishments. On top of that, they also run the Game Gardens program, where they offer free tools and hosting to a community of budding game developers. "Game Gardens actually emerged from our practice of having potential engineering hires devise a 'challenge' game," which Three Rings pays for if they hire the person or not, "using our tools. We wanted somewhere to put them."

James comes from a distinguished group of former British MUDders currently busy pushing the envelope — KFR from RedBedlam and Paul Barnett from Mythic being two more — and I wondered if

there was something in those old MUDs that encouraged experimentation. "Maybe it's because we got our goblin-bashing grinding out of our systems back in the mists of ye olden times!" he cracked, but it is undeniable that Three Rings is chasing a different sort of player than most MMOG developers.

"We set [out] to make *Puzzle Pirates* for the classic U.S. 'casual gamer' audience, that is, mostly women in their 30s and up. We also thought we'd do well with the MMOG players, but we didn't want to aim for that audience. This has worked out — we attract about 50/50 male/female, and a very broad spread of ages. We've got a lot of teens playing. It can be hard to integrate the two (or three) audiences."

As for the typical MMOG crowd, he describes them as "absurdly over-catered-to. There's a plethora of free MMOGs, along with gorillas like *WoW*. The publishers who are investing tens of millions of dollars to compete by making yet another whack-a-goblin game, in my humble opinion, are crazier than us. I believe that MMOG players are looking for new and innovative experiences like *Puzzle Pirates*," though he adds, "We probably would've made more money

from a men-in-tights game, so perhaps we're the crazy ones."

Speaking of crazy, the Three Rings crew — James included — has been known to indulge in little bits of madness, be it making a casual puzzle MMOG or, well, dressing as a crew of pirates. While he won't name a favorite in-game swashbuckler, saying, "Cleaver can't be playing favorites. The wenches will get upset," Calico Jack Rackham is his favorite real-life swashbuckler, "because of the *Tintin* books and his fraternizing with two legendary female pirates." He's forthright about the reasons for his occasional outing in the rags of an old sea dog. Why dress like a pirate in an industry that can be very serious business? "Because we can! Yarr!" And if there's anyone who can get away with the unexpected, it's Three Rings.

[ COMMENTS ]

*Shannon Drake is a Contributing Editor for The Escapist and changed his name when he became a citizen. It used to be Merkwürdigeliebe.*

# Third-World pirate

by Leonardo Pose

I've been a third-world pirate for almost 20 years, starting when my father bought the first PC we had, a Commodore-128, continuing up until last weekend when the Mule completed the download of the latest expansion for a popular RTS full of Marines and Orks. I don't necessarily like being a dirty pirate, stealing thousands of man-hours of programming and hard work. I would love to own boxes and manuals. But I can't, and in the past, it wasn't even a viable option. This is my story.

Around 1986 my father bought the C128 from a guy that "imported" them from Brazil. Personal computers were something really new in Argentina, where I live, and almost nobody beside large enterprises owned them (not even the government had them; they kept – and in some places keep– using typing machines). The box included a couple of games (one of them was *F-15*, manual included, which my father and I played for months). When we got tired of those my brother and I went to the only computer shop we could find and bought more: *Giana Sisters*, *Green Beret* and *Ghost N' Goblins*, which of course weren't originals, just black disks with the names written on them. The disks

were defective half the time. There was no place in the country to buy an original game for the C128 or anything else, mostly due to the terrible inflation that followed the overthrow of a military dictatorship in 1982, which made importing things like PCs almost impossible.

That was the beginning.

By 1990 we were over the C128, and we got ourselves an IBM PS-1. The first game we got was *Prince of Persia*, a pirate copy bought at a perfectly legal computer shop … that didn't have original games. Then came *F-19*, *Battle Command*, *Flashback*, the *LucasArts Adventures*, *System Shock* and *Ultima Underworld*. All pirate copies, because it was the only way to get them.

By this time, the routine was I'd take the bus with a couple of friends on Saturday afternoons, travel around an hour to get to a pirate joint we found in a newspaper ad, armed with five or 10 disks each (we would pool disks to buy *Wing Commander II*, for example), pick a game and wait while the Pirate Lord copied the game. Then, we would go back to my house, install all the games we had bought (pizza break included

here). Finally, I would give my disks to the other guys, and they would repeat the process on their PCs over the weekend. Many times there would be an error in one of the disks; insults would fly, next Saturday we would go to the Pirate Lord again. *Ad infinitum*.

Then, one day the Pirate Lord disappeared. When we got to his house, one neighbor said he had stuffed everything (family and furniture) into a truck the week before and never came back. The last game he copied us was the first CD game I had: *Rebel Assault*. Times were changing.

In 1991 a new president was elected, and one of his first actions was to establish that from then on, our national currency, the Peso, would be equal to the U.S. dollar in value. Imports were on the rise, electronics were booming, Argentineans were traveling all around the world and the first genuine PC games were appearing, supported by the first anti-piracy measures ever. The anti-piracy campaign was actually requested by the software companies coming to Argentina for the first time, like

Microsoft. Only top-tier enterprises like Ford and the like were using legal software - and even then, not all of it was legal. (Eventually, even Microsoft relaxed on this, because so few people could afford the cost of the software.) Every other user, gamer or not, used pirated software.

After our guy disappeared, it became really difficult to find another den of piracy, but things finally cooled down a little, and we found this downtown gallery filled with pirates. Among them was our guy, who still remembered us and gave us *MechWarrior II* for free. But now the CD was in vogue, and by the time *Baldur's Gate* came out, it was **cheaper** to buy the original than to pay for five copies.

Around the same time, my family and I were visiting Miami, and on our last day I bought some games at a place called Electronics Boutique. With the peso equal to the dollar, games were cheaper in the U.S. than in Argentina (this ridiculous policy finally caught up with us). Those original multi-CD titles are my most appreciated game-related possessions,

and the boxes decorate my home office. My wife calls them "dust collectors."

We now trade 3-to-1 with the dollar after our currency was devalued in 2001. Argentina has been improving financially since then, but imports are again quite expensive: I would need to spend around 10 percent of my middle-class salary to buy a single PC game. Additionally, the darker side of capitalism rears its head when retailers - aware that people in the upper-upper-class will pay whatever they charge for games - price games well beyond the exchange rate. Since a broadband connection costs around one third of what one game would, I go that way.

All of this is because I'm completely addicted to PC gaming. I can't let the hobby go. Ironically, since I've become more knowledgeable about the inner workings of the game industry, I'm more

aware of how damaging piracy can be, especially for small studios, and I feel guilty for what I **have** to do to play games. Game studios don't really take Argentina - and other third-world markets - into consideration when balancing their budgets, but it still feels like I'm trying to justify my actions. I just wish there were a way for me to enjoy my hobby without taking food out of people's mouths, but a lot above me would have to change. I hope it does someday. COMMENTS

*Leonardo Pose is a student who lives (and pirates games) in Argentina.*

I would need to spend around 10 percent of my middle-class salary to buy a single PC game.

# CAPTAIN OF THE BURNING SEA

### And *Pirates of the Burning Sea* producer John Tynes is a right good captain too

**by Allen Varney**

John Scott Tynes, longtime designer and publisher in paper gaming, wrote a monthly column, "The Contrarian," for early issues of *The Escapist*. (See, for instance, "Nintendo is Doomed," "Fight the Future" or "Growing Out of the Stone Age.") "I had a great time writing that column," he says, "but ended it because I just got too busy. It's funny to look at it now and see how wrong I was, which is always great comeuppance for a pundit."

John has earned his enlightenment at Flying Lab Software, working on an independent massively multiplayer online game (MMOG) he calls "something of a contrarian position": *Pirates of the Burning Sea*. This summer, soon after the release of Disney's third *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie, Flying Lab's MMOG finally launches – after four years, **four years**, in development.

Four years! What has that been like? "It's like I went to the best grad school in the world," John says. "I've done tons of game design, learned the basics of 3-D modeling, learned enough programming to code our first mission system, created sound effects, tracked down and hired an Oscar-winning sound designer to replace the crap I made, founded the content creation team and hired 10 people to staff it up, done a lot of business development, and eventually became producer for the entire project."

That won't surprise anyone familiar with John's career. At 19, while still in college in Columbia, Missouri, he started an excellent gaming fanzine, *The Unspeakable Oath*, supporting Chaosium's Lovecraftian tabletop roleplaying game *Call of Cthulhu*. Forming a company, Pagan Publishing, he edited and published many amazing RPG books, notably *Delta Green*. Best described as "John LeCarre meets H.P. Lovecraft," *Delta Green* makes *CoC* players part of an illegal conspiracy inside the U.S. government that fights Mythos corruption. Originally published as an *Oath* article in 1992 – long before *The X-Files*, please note – *Delta Green* appeared in book form in 1997. Powerfully conjured, amazingly useful, it remains one of the roleplaying field's best regarded campaign books.

John also designed the surreal "New Style" RPGs *Puppetland* and *Power Kill* and (with Greg Stolze) the highly regarded postmodernist horror RPG *Unknown Armies*. Working freelance for Wizards of

the Coast, he edited a version of the *CoC* rulebook using Wizards' d20 system. John's book line, Armitage House, published Chris Jarocha-Ernst's useful Cthulhu Mythos bibliography as well as his own *Delta Green* novel, *Rules of Engagement*.

Finally, though, 12 years of cash crunch wore him down. In a 2002 Gaming Report interview, John announced his retirement from paper gaming; he called publishing *Call of Cthulhu* supplements "a labor of love, not a reasonable business endeavor." On his blog, he announced plans to write movies. He and a partner even sold a horror screenplay, *Red Zone*, which was never produced. Yes, he was preparing to work in the one other realm that treats writers almost as badly as paper gaming: Hollywood.

Fortunately, as it has rescued other penurious talents from the paper world, computer gaming rescued John Tynes.

He joined Flying Lab in 2002, shortly after the Seattle-based company shipped its first game, Rails *Across America*. "They were big fans of the work I'd done at Pagan Publishing," he says. "One of them was having a birthday, so Russell [Williams], the CEO, e-mailed me and

asked if I'd be their guest at dinner. It was like hiring a celebrity impersonator to entertain, except it really was me. Running my own little starving-artist company, I was in no position to turn down a free gourmet meal, even if I'd had to jump out of a cake."

Hitting it off, John and Flying Lab worked together to adapt *Delta Green* as a videogame. "We spent a year building prototypes, but no publisher was willing to commit to the project." (The *Delta Green* website is fossilized but still up.) "We decided our next game needed to be something we could control and even publish, and *Pirates* was born."

**\*\*\***

Set in the Caribbean in 1720, *Pirates of the Burning Sea* makes every player captain of his (or her!) own ship. Players can play not only pirates, but also naval officers, privateers, traders and smugglers. The *Pirates* features list includes tactically rich player-vs.-player ship combat, swashbuckling battles, an extensive loot system, a player-driven economy and interesting realm-vs.-realm strategic conflict involving English, French, Spanish and pirate factions.

John started low on the project, writing missions. But on a small team, as *Pirates* had at the time, nobody does just one thing. John's previous paper game work called for many skills: editor, art director, graphic designer, webmaster, business manager. Working like that, he says, "You go through a sort of mental expansion where you lose all fear of scrambling up yet another learning curve. When our lead programmer said, 'OK, learn this language and code our mission system,' I sort of gulped and dove in. I was a terrible programmer, of course. But I could get the work done and keep things moving, because I'm just not afraid of work in any form. Spending a decade as an entrepreneur means you face the world every morning and think, 'Bring it on!'"

Hardscrabble gumption, fostered in paper gaming, helped John thrive in the cushier environs of computers. Over three years, he took on more and more varied tasks at Flying Lab. In early 2006, aged 35, he became the *Pirates* producer. "I'm now running a team of 63 people. As producer, I interact with every team on the project all the time, and I pretty much know what every member of our staff is up to. It's a lot like the

> **"HARDSCRABBLE GUMPTION**, fostered in paper gaming, helped John thrive in the cushier environs of computers."

jack-of-all-trades thing, in that my work as producer is hands-on and interdisciplinary. But unlike Pagan, there are dozens of people I can delegate to."

After sailing the barren waters of roleplaying for a decade or more, John has finally found in online gaming a sheltering, if not yet safe, harbor: "This is the best job I've ever had. While the last four-plus years were long ones, I've learned so much I don't regret a single day. I am glad every day to work on a project like this: different genre, different gameplay, different art direction and stable, independent financing.

"On the other hand, it would be great if my next project didn't take four years!"

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While *Burning Sea* burned slowly toward beta, the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie made pirates cool again. Now we can spy a packet, if not a flotilla, of imminent swash-and-sail games: not only *Burning Sea*, but Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean* Online and a Korean import, *Tales of Pirates*. All join the pioneer in these waters, *Yohoho! Puzzle Pirates*.

"We started work on a pirate MMOG well before the [first] Disney *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie came out," John says, "just because we thought doing yet another elves-and-dwarves game was a terrible idea. And it **was** a terrible idea indeed – for everyone except Blizzard!"

He hopes *Burning Sea* and its piratical companions, if they succeed, will confirm online games can find an audience outside fantasy. "*City of Heroes* already did that, happily, so it's up to us to prove they weren't a fluke. I really, really want more genre diversity in online games. There's absolutely no reason why an MMOG has to conform to existing tabletop RPG genres, which is pretty much where they've been so far.

"Sometimes I think about a *This Old House* MMOG – a team-based game where you're crafting and building stuff together, experimenting with different technologies and tools, trying to make the coolest house ever. It's an extreme example, but why not? MMOGs really are team games, and the varieties of human collaboration are endless. Fantasy sports leagues are interesting, and yet it's like they don't exist to MMOG people; ditto other web-based multiplayer games like

*RuneScape* or *Neopets*. The MMOG business has blinders on. At this rate, the game that kills *World of Warcraft* won't come from a traditional MMOG company.

"There isn't a game publisher in the world that would have paid us to spend four years to develop *Pirates of the Burning Sea*. Flying Lab is self-funded by the founders." (Lab CEO Russell Williams was an early Microsoft millionaire; he wrote code for Windows 95 and *Microsoft Golf*.) "It's kind of like working for Batman – international playboy race-car driver by day, computer game mogul by night.

"But that doesn't mean we eat caviar. We're going to deliver *Pirates* for a very

> " He hopes *Burning Sea* and its piratical companions, if they SUCCEED, will confirm online games can find an audience OUTSIDE FANTASY. "

reasonable budget, and we have managed our growth carefully. Even two years into the project, our staff was only about a dozen people. The key is to prototype cheap, iterate cheap and don't go big until you really, deeply know just what game you're going to ship."

Even more than he did running cash-starved Pagan Publishing, John reveres good financing. "I want *Pirates* to be successful enough that we can keep doing it a long, long time, and also start a second and a third project down the road, on our terms. In business, money means freedom. Look at the botched launches of other MMOGs to see what happens when studios don't have the freedom to do it right – and 'freedom' means 'payroll,' keeping those people working and iterating and making things better. Only money gives you that freedom.

"Money doesn't guarantee success – rich people make stupid mistakes every day. But it at least means you can succeed or fail on your own merits, not because you shipped six months early when the money ran out, or the publisher needed something shipped to shore up a bad quarter. We've spent four years making the game we want to make, and we have

no excuses if we fail. Nobody in a suit has been telling us what to do.

"That's the dream of Caribbean piracy, after all. Pirate ships were the first true democracies the world had seen in centuries. Pirate crews drew up articles of cooperation and voted for their officers. They ensured the maimed were compensated and everyone got a fair share. They weren't under the iron fist of a national military or corporation, so they had to find their own discipline, their own motivation and their own courage. Pirate crews succeeded or failed on their own merits, and if they succeeded, they had the resources to keep going, keep striving. That's what we're doing, and if we succeed, we'll keep on doing it. I hope to be here making great games for a long time."

`[ COMMENTS ]`

*Allen Varney designed the PARANOIA paper-and-dice roleplaying game (2004 edition) and has contributed to computer games from Sony Online, Origin, Interplay and Looking Glass.*

> " Pirate crews succeeded or failed on their own merits, and if they succeeded, they had the resources to KEEP GOING, KEEP STRIVING. That's what we're doing "

# Pro-CHOICE

**by Tom Rhodes**

I confess, I've never bought anything from iTunes. I don't own an iPod, an MP3 player, or even have a CD player in my car. I mostly listen to music on my computer, occasionally disrupting the neighbors by blasting Muse at 3:00 a.m.

I had never before considered purchasing anything from iTunes for one reason: DRM (or digital rights management), an acronym that has taken on Orwellian significance in online communities. It elicits everything from utter hatred to disinterested acceptance. Many web commentators, like Cory Doctorow at BoingBoing, have made it part of their life's mission to rid it from all digital media, including games, DVDs and downloadable videos. While I'm not quite as vicious as all that, I wouldn't ever buy something that was DRM'd.

For those not in the know, DRM is a technological lock on a digital file that prevents it from being used in a way that the content provider (like a record label) wants it to be used. In the case of Apple's DRM – FairPlay – it restricts you from playing the music in anything but iTunes or on iPods, and from transferring it to more than five computers. To change the computers, one has to go through the task of de-authorizing the music and reauthorizing it on another system.

There is a workaround whereby you could burn the track onto CD and then rip it back in an unprotected format, like MP3, but this degrades the sound quality and is a hassle, even if you had a CD-RW to burn with over and over again.

Then, on April 2, industry-changing words were uttered by a music executive from one of the most lawsuit-happy companies under the RIAA umbrella: "We have to trust consumers."

EMI became the first of the "Big Four" music labels (made up of Warner, EMI, Universal and Sony) to drop DRM from their catalog entirely. And, not only that, but Apple would be selling these DRM-free tracks at a higher bit rate, making it the best-sounding offering in the online music arena (save for some rare "lossless" sellers like Magnatune).

My first reaction to this news was utter and complete shock. Having been researching this issue since I first heard the term "DRM" uttered back in 2003, as well as the labels' insistence that it was necessary to protect the future of

content from piracy, it came as a surprise that a major label would suddenly decide to just drop that protection entirely.

I suppose this was a long time coming, though. After all, DRM is completely ineffective. For example, music that appears on iTunes, even exclusively encoded with DRM since its inception, ends up on the P2P networks within 180 seconds. Despite insistence that it's necessary and only fair from the RIAA, MPAA, BSA and advocate organizations like the PFF (Progress and Freedom Foundation), it didn't change the fact of its uselessness.

After hearing about EMI's decision, the PFF's James DeLong, a longtime advocate of using DRM to weed out "free riders" from not paying, wrote, "If the new format quickly turns up on the P2P sites, and if sales start off high and then fade away as the songs spread virally from iPod to iPod, then we will have learned something." This, of course, is silly. DRM has never prevented files from ending up on P2P networks. Even iTunes-exclusive content that has been DRM'd from the get-go ends up on the networks. The fact there's another format to share won't

really change that, and it can only increase sales for the struggling EMI. For instance, I wouldn't feel any qualms about purchasing from them.

There was something curious that happened during the Apple/EMI announcement: Steve Jobs, founder and

head of Apple, had to back-peddle a bit. Asked by a questioner whether Jobs would now advocate for DRM-free videos, like those from Disney, of which he owns a major stake, he responded,

"Video is pretty different than music right now because the video industry does not distribute 90 percent of their content DRM free; never has, and so I think they are in a pretty different situation and so I wouldn't hold the two in parallel at all."

This is a change from his "Thoughts on Music" letter where he stated, pointblank, "DRMs haven't worked, and may never work, to halt music piracy." Same for video, Steve - both Blu-ray and

HD-DVD, two formats built with DRM in mind, have recently been cracked.

But what about games? Game-makers have been some of the ones most concerned with piracy, and have often implemented very complex and onerous systems in order to try and prevent it. The nastiest of which is Starforce, which Allen Varney covered in great depth in a past issue. To summarize, Starforce, a product of some dark PC magic in Russia, created great problems for gamers, sometimes making their CD/DVD drives utterly useless. The copy protection dug its claws into their systems and refused to let go. And the company that produces it, Protection Technology, is quite sleazy. When *Galactic Civilizations 2* went without DRM or copy protection of any kind, PT railed against them for being foolish and even posted links from torrent networks that could let people illegally download it.

Thankfully, most companies shirk using StarForce nowadays but are still left with trying to make DRM work for them. Valve tied *Half-Life 2* to their Steam platform, requiring an online activation before people could play it. Often Steam wouldn't load, or it would take an

interminable amount of time to auto-update. Despite the protection, however, HL2 arrived on the P2P and torrent networks the day of release, available without the restriction of Steam.

Looking up similarly protected games, like those with StarForce, turned up the same type of situation. Despite what the developers are trying, it hasn't worked.

I sympathize with them, I really do. Working in film and music, I understand how difficult it can be to see something you slaved over for months or years be distributed freely without your consent. On this, James DeLong and I see eye to eye: If you want to play it, listen to it or watch it, you should pay for it. While there's a certain satisfaction in giving the finger to The Man, you're also giving that finger to everyone who works under him. Even then, there usually isn't a Man to battle, because you're harming indie studios and directors. Having worked on several film sets in different capacities, I know what a complicated, expensive and taxing endeavor it can be. To see all that time and energy disappear in a melange of torrents is heartbreaking.

Ragnar Tornquist, creator of *The Longest Journey*, wrote on his blog, "I'm not defending StarForce, but there's no way we can justify the cost of making a single-player PC game without mechanisms in place to battle piracy - we'll just lose money." Unfortunately, DRM and copy protection don't seem to be accomplishing the task of combating piracy. As Steve Jobs wrote, "there are many smart people in the world, some with a lot of time on their hands, who love to discover such secrets and publish a way for everyone to get free (and stolen) music." Or movies. Or software.

And the arguments for piracy don't really fly either, I'm afraid. Increased exposure? Maybe, but more likely just a bunch of people getting stuff for free. It doesn't make an impact? I think it does. As an example, I was in a group that released an album on CD Baby, iTunes, Amazon and several other places. This was a Creative Commons group, which allows artists to release their work freely to be downloaded, shared and remixed among people without restriction. It lasted for awhile without being ripped, selling quite well, but as soon as someone did, sales petered off to mostly nothing. These two events were certainly

not unrelated. Imagine walking into work for two weeks and then, when it comes time for your paycheck, to be given a shrug and a promise that your work was given more exposure.

I'm not going to sit here and tell you I'm perfect in this regard; far from it. I was there with Napster in its heyday, right alongside everyone else booing Metallica and wishing horrible diseases on Lars Ulrich. It's been a slow, gradual realization, but people deserve to be paid for their hard work and not have it indiscriminately posted and downloaded.

But DRM is not the answer. It only frustrates and angers legitimate consumers who have already purchased the content. But, if you must, why not take a note from Steve Jobs and EMI and offer DRM and DRM-free versions of your movies and games? Give people a choice. Who knows, it might just be the thing that makes you stand above the rest. COMMENTS

*Tom Rhodes is a writer and filmmaker currently living in Ohio. He can be reached through Tom.Rhod@gmail.com.*

> While there's a certain satisfaction in **GIVING THE FINGER TO THE MAN**, you're also giving that finger to everyone who works under him. Even then, there usually **ISN'T A MAN TO BATTLE**

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