

Introduction: The Second Edition

Stories have a way of finishing on their own time. Even in 2003, when we completed and released *Dungeons & Dreamers: The Rise of Computer Game Culture from Geek to Chic*, the definitive history of computer game culture, we had an idea the story wasn't over.

It wasn't a bad time to release the book. The game industry was exploding, the world-building craze was reaching its height, and the wave of creativity and mainstream interest that would push computer games and gaming to new societal relevance was just beginning to crest. But for that very reason, we could see that much of the sociocultural arc we'd sketched wasn't yet complete.

We went on to other things. We had imagined writing a series we referred to as the Geek Canon, which would have tied together much of what we considered to be the foundational components of cultural geekdom: computer games, anime, and science fiction. It may still be a good idea, but like many such, it got lost in the passage of time.

But our original story didn't. Titles like *World of Warcraft* and *Second Life* seemed to complete arguments we'd left hanging. More sobering, *Dungeons & Dragons* co-creator Gary Gygax passed away in 2008, followed not long afterward by his former gaming and business partner Dave Arneson. Perhaps more than anything, this provided a sense that both a narrative arc and a gaming era were coming to a close.

Maybe, we thought, it was time to revisit the story.

When we initially began the first edition of *Dungeons & Dreamers*, there had been plenty of other books about games themselves, but none that focused broadly on the creators, the players, and the culture to which

the games had given rise. We spent the better part of a year interviewing designers and players, game-business and technology-company executives, and cultural commentators studying the growth of these virtual worlds.

By the time we'd finished our reporting and writing, we'd spoken with more than a hundred people. It was a fascinating journey through time. We talked with Gygax and Arneson. We talked with Nolan Bushnell, one of the original figures behind Atari, at Buck's of Woodside, the famously kitschy restaurant at the epicenter of Silicon Valley's venture-capital scene. We spent many hours with Richard Garriott, the primary subject of our book, and John Carmack, id Software's co-founder and, in many ways, a foil to Garriott in the game-design world.

We also had the chance to speak with characters you absolutely could not make up. Perhaps our favorite: David Shapiro, better known as Dr. Cat, one of the merry band of pranksters who seemed to follow Garriott through the various incarnations of his game companies. Cat simply arrived on Garriott's doorstep one day, car filled with all of his belongings, and set about working on the early *Ultima* games.

By the time we finished, we had vastly more material than we could use. We had been thorough, and we were consistently amazed at the historical threads that tied these designers, players, and cultural commentators together in a logical way. We'd felt we'd written a story that illuminated the complexities and importance of the industry's burgeoning virtual worlds, from a social rather than a business or technological perspective.

The first edition was published in 2003 and there it sat, to our mind increasingly and obviously unfinished as the world went on. But luckily for us, very little about this industry is set in stone.

Through our negotiations with McGraw-Hill/Osborne, we received the rights to the book back after it went out of print. In 2006, our friend Dr. Drew Davidson at Carnegie Mellon's Entertainment Technology Center agreed to publish an updated version of the book. We imagined this as including several new chapters, as well a substantial rewrite of the main narrative to make the story cleaner. We expected to finish the second edition by the middle of 2007, with a publication date sometime soon afterward.

We were excited to write the book.

We didn't write the book.

In 2007, we spent hours arguing about the structure of the story, the

extent of the rewrites, and the amount of research we would need. We made a timeline, and divided up tasks.

Time passed. We again failed to write the book.

In 2009, following the news of Gygax's and Arneson's deaths, we decided again to tackle the project, which now didn't loom over us as much as it pricked us like a thorn in our asses. The mere mention of the book brought audible sighs, ruining whatever good time we were having *not* working on the book. It really was time to write the book, we agreed. The game landscape demanded we update the story. The console wars between Sony, Nintendo, and Microsoft had virtually eclipsed the computer-game industry, while alternate-reality games had matured enough to create a whole new subgenre of mixed-media, often even live-action play.

We were set to go. Again. We thought we'd have everything outlined and ready to go by the end of December.

We think you know what's coming.

December came and went. At a certain point, the story of us *not* writing the book began to bore even us. We no longer brought it up in conversation, even involuntarily. It became the bad relationship we'd finally escaped. Even the topic of games became taboo, which was more difficult for Brad, as he taught courses that dealt with games, writing, and storytelling. Still, we managed to stay clear of anything that could pull us back into the book.

And yet, if you are reading this introduction, you've probably gathered that we have, in fact, finished the second edition.

What continually brought us back to the project was the memory of the experiences we had tracking down the stories, interviewing this wide range of characters, and discovering their communities. Their stories resonated with us, in large part because they were so often about something other than just playing with a computer. In virtually all cases, the stories were about making connections with other people, and collectively finding the fun in creation and play.

As we've revisited our characters, we've seen some big changes since 2002. Here's where some of the major players are now:

John Carmack, the genius behind id Software, told us that he was tiring of the game industry, and wanted to pursue his dream of working on space flight. His aerospace company, Armadillo Aerospace, has spent nearly

\$3.5 million developing low-orbit vehicles, and it continues operations today. He continued to do development for id Software until late 2013, when he joined Oculus VR, a company creating an advanced virtual-reality headset.

John Romero, the more flamboyant co-founder of id Software, has pursued a wandering course through the game-design world. He now runs Loot Drop with his wife, Brenda Romero, and id Software alumnus Tom Hall.

Will Wright, the developer of *SimCity*, *The Sims*, and *The Sims Online*, created a think tank called the Stupid Fun Club after leaving Electronic Arts. This ultimately grew into a gaming and entertainment company called Syntertainment.

In 2004, Brad took a job as the executive producer for *MIT's Technology Review* magazine Web site, where he had the opportunity to edit a handful of columns by Henry Jenkins, then director of the Comparative Media Studies department. Several of those columns were rolled into Jenkins's seminal work, *Convergence Culture*, an analysis of transmedia storytelling. Jenkins left MIT in 2010 to take a joint professorship at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and the USC School of Cinematic Arts.

The Cyberathlete Professional League, which organized some of the largest and most lucrative computer game tournaments in the 2000s, is still operating after years of financial problems. In 2010, Angel Munoz sold the CPL to WoLong Ventures Pte. Ltd. of Singapore.

Longtime anti-video game crusader Jack Thompson, a lawyer who for years brought negligence cases against video game companies after school shootings and other violent events, was disbarred by the Florida Supreme Court in July 2008 after he made a string of abusive threats toward game companies, litigants, and even judges.

As for Richard Garriott, the main character in our story . . . well, we'll get to him in the book's new chapters.

We hope you enjoy reading the book as much as we enjoyed writing it (once we got around to it). It might even take you a little less time.