

THE NEXT 10 YEARS OF GAME DEVELOPMENT



Illustrations by Steve Munday



ALTHOUGH IT MAY BE HARD TO BELIEVE,

Game Developer magazine turns 10 years old this month. While this may seem like a perfect opportunity to indulge in a sepia-tinted stroll down memory lane, we covered that ground with *Titanic* subtlety in our recent 100th issue. Instead, as we consider what the next 10 years of postmortems, columns, and features might look like, our gaze naturally turns to what the next decade of game development itself might look like.

A wise green fellow once pointed out that “always in motion is the future.” However, there

are several industry veterans who have successfully weathered market cycles and generation transitions, and industry leaders who have demonstrated a keen sense of prescient awareness, who seem better qualified than most to give us all a sense of what’s coming next. To that end, we asked a cross-section of them to look into their collective crystal ball, and tell us where the next technical and conceptual breakthroughs are likely to come from, what the development landscape will look like, and where gaming will go over the next 10 years.

Developers experienced a revolution a few years ago when 2D representation gave way to real-time 3D. There is no 4D out there, so we might be forgiven to think the revolution is over, and from now on it’s just a matter of tying up loose ends. And maybe that’s true.

However, hardware people want to sell upgrades, and they need a breakthrough. Here’s what I think it will be: real-time language production combined with real-time speech synthesis. Both are tough nuts that will require hot hardware and software to crack, and they will liberate game design like nothing before. Instead of writing scripts, I’ll massage data in some expert system and, lo, my characters will talk and react on their own. Suddenly, mere social discourse will actually be interesting. Something besides brutal combat may get gamers’ attention. Will this happen sooner or later? Ahh, the big question.

I’m betting sooner. Who needs a 5GHz processor to run Word?

—Hal Barwood, *Finite Arts*

Today, we are locked into a TV and console model of gaming. I see the industry developing completely new styles of play that break that model. One example is connecting the GameCube to the Game Boy Advance, which amounts to a new style of game.

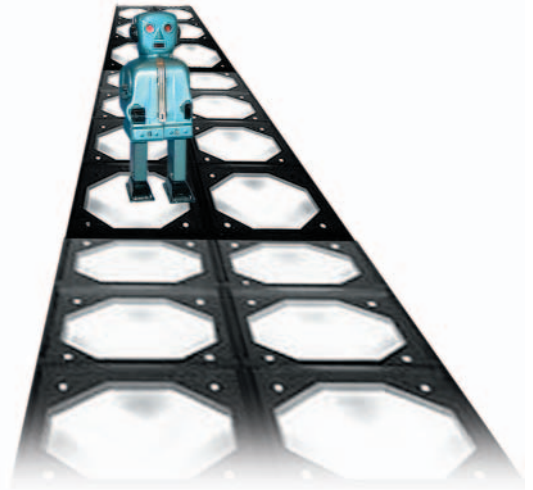
As for development, hardware tends to push technology, but the team sizes are also growing. For *THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER*, we had a huge staff, with escalating costs. Successful companies in the future will meet the challenge to find ways to work with shorter time frames, and develop more innovative titles. It’s a struggle to make a game new and refreshing. Take the example of *ZELDA*. New gamers come into the franchise, and we have to maintain interest by continuing to innovate. Hopefully *ZELDA* will still be around in 10 years so I can use that as my answer!

—Eiji Aonuma, *Deputy Manager, EAD, Nintendo Co., Ltd.*

By 2014, we will be building games for the next-gen systems. These will be 100 to 150 times as powerful as this generation of PlayStation 2, Xbox, and GameCube, with more RAM and polygon performance than today’s designers can imagine. I’ve been working on games for more than 20 years, and frankly, I’m finding it difficult to imagine what to do with so much power.

I predict that our industry will turn to Generation D, the digital kids now in high schools and colleges around the world. These kids have grown up always digital, and have formed their tastes and personalities on the Internet, cell phones, and videogames, with new kinds of time shifting and communication via TiVo, AIM, Friendster-socializing, and e-commerce. Their energy and instincts will reinvent interactive entertainment.

—Bing Gordon, *Co-founder and Chief Creative Officer, Electronic Arts*



I see online console gaming leading to a huge surge in user-generated content, certainly by the next generations of consoles. In fact, already, the best minds in the industry are interested in concepts that foster online communities faster, such as downloadable and, more important, uploadable content, rather than limiting their focus to straight head-to-head play. The first companies with a successful approach to user-generated content on the console, rather than the PC, will define the next generation. This trend also has wider implications as gaming becomes more and more of a compelling use of an individual's time—driven by the interactive and immersive experience it provides—meaning, gaming will continue its drive toward being the center piece of multi-functional consumer devices.

Conceptually, I see changing the way people interact with games, through the use of sight and sound, as being a huge focus. For example, the EyeToy USB Camera points the way forward in terms of how new technology can completely redefine the gaming interface—which is for some people still a big barrier to entry. With EyeToy, we are attracting new gamers who previously didn't participate in gaming because they didn't have the time to invest in learning how to interact with games [conventional controllers and lots of buttons]. Through the integration of such second-nature interactions as sight and sound, the walls come down and a new market of consumers become engaged. And not only will technology like EyeToy change the interface for competitive games, it provides a huge creative pallet for the development community to explore new modes of games that were not possible with a standard interface.

I also see wireless technology as a huge focus—in the coming years a whole generation of gamers will come to expect connectivity as standard. This trend has huge implications for game design and modes of play—wireless technology provides an endless array of possibilities.

In terms of the development landscape, given the continued growth of the industry, it's safe to assume that game development will become more expensive. However, the ability of developers/publishers to manage their game portfolios and franchises across a greater product lifecycle [for example, the PlayStation is entering its 10th year, and we plan to achieve the same with PlayStation 2] should, we hope, more than offset the increased cost of production. Not to mention, with continued growth comes a larger audience—and a greater audience to whom to market content.

—Andrew House, Executive Vice President, Sony Computer Entertainment America

The next technical breakthrough certainly sounds like it's going to be XNA. If XNA does what Microsoft says it will, it will be a major breakthrough. As for a conceptual breakthrough, in the MMO space, it could be the first truly successful mass market pay-for-play MMOG. In terms of the development landscape, I think it will be pretty bleak for independent developers. The growing consolidation of power in the hands of a few major publishers combined with the rising costs of game development, will make it very hard for independent developers to exist. In terms of gaming itself, we'll see less in terms of hardware breakthroughs in the second half of the decade than we'll see in the first. I also expect we'll see continued growth of the consoles and a slowdown in the growth of PC-only games. We'll also see the trend of using licensed products continue to explode.

—Mark Jacobs, President and CEO of Mythic Entertainment

the future of game developer magazine

