



Immortality for Game Developers

was thinking in the shower the other day about the notion of immortality. It's among the most ancient of human fascinations, and a subject of philosophy and spiritual thought since before recorded history.

Well, pyramids are expensive, and they take up a lot of space. So, we turn to the question of leaving a legacy in memory, rather than stone. But the work of game developers suffers from a kind of technological decay that is not experienced by other artists. To illustrate this I want to quote Bruce Sterling, the science fiction author, from a speech he gave at the 1991 Computer Game Developers' Conference. He was talking about a hypothetical — and now not-so-hypothetical — device, the "electronic book," and he said:

"Now I'm the farthest thing from a Luddite ladies and gentlemen, but when I contemplate this particular technical marvel my author's blood runs cold. It's really hard for books to compete with multisensory media, with modern electronic media, and this is supposed to be the panacea for withering literature, but from the marrow of my bones I say get that little sarcophagus away from me. For God's sake don't put my books into the Thomas Edison kinetoscope. Don't put me into the stereograph, don't write me on the wax cylinder, don't tie my words and my thoughts to the fate of a piece of hardware, because hardware is even more mortal than I am, and I'm a hell of a lot more mortal than I care to be. Mortality is one good reason why I'm writing books in the first place. For God's sake don't make me keep pace with the hardware, because I'm not really in the business of keeping pace, I'm really in the business of marking place..."

"You folks are dwelling in the very maelstrom of Permanent Technological Revolution. And that's a really cool place, but man, it's just not a good place to build monuments."

He's right, of course. Our work is as bright and as beautiful as the wildflowers of a Sierra mountain springtime... and just as ephemeral. Our games cannot serve, unaided, as our monument. When we die, we leave nothing to remember us by. We need something else.

If you want to live forever, you have some options: spiritual immortality (religion), practical immortality (don't die), or virtual immortality (fame). The disadvantage of spiritual immortality, at least for the rationally-minded, is that there doesn't seem to be any evidence that it exists. And we're a long way, technologically or medically, from achieving practical immortality and conquering death. So, that leaves virtual immortality: fame, and the knowledge that you counted for something and will be remembered by those who follow you. How can I, as a game developer, be remembered?

Now, you might say, "So what? The vast majority of the world leaves no legacy. What entitles you to a monument?" I don't have an answer to that, except that I know that I want one. And not just for myself. There's someone else that I want people to remember as well.

Danielle Bunten Berry is dead. And in a few years the work of her heart and hands and mind are going to be dead too, and that is not right, my friends. Her imagination, her contribution, was too important to be forgotten. We need a way to remember her. We need a Computer Game Hall of Fame. Not just a list of names printed every month in *Computer Gaming World*, but a real memorial. But what kind?

Now, I have stood in the tomb chamber at the heart of the Great Pyramid. One of the most common reactions to the Great Pyramid is, "My God! What an ego that guy had, to build such a monument to himself." But there's nothing intrinsically evil or immoral about building monuments, even to yourself. We no longer have to use whips and slaves to get it done. Why shouldn't Dani get a pyramid, if we want one for her?

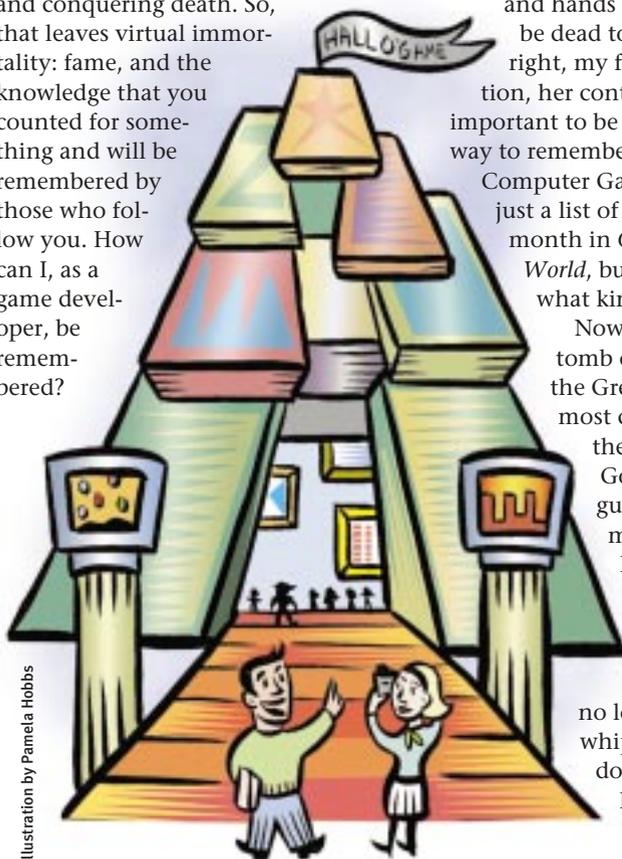


Illustration by Pamela Hobbs

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The Computer Game Hall of Fame would be a place where the great games are kept, and talked about, and studied for the wonder and truth that they contain. Above all, it would be a place where their designers are honored. It should consist of two things: First, a permanent site on the World Wide Web (which, in my opinion, is soon to be the collective cultural memory of mankind). Second, a phys-

ical place. A building, a museum — an arcade if nothing better — where people can go and admire, play, learn, and remember.

Now some will say, “A museum about outdated video games? Pathetic.” But consider this: I work on a game about professional football. There’s nothing very world-shaking about professional football. It doesn’t change the fate of the human race. Professional football is about the exer-

cise of athletic skill for the purpose of excitement and entertainment. Excitement and entertainment is our business too. If professional football can have a Hall of Fame, then by God, we’re entitled to one.

Who’s going to build it? I don’t know. I don’t have the time. I don’t have the money. But it needs to be done, so that our great works can live on. They can be remembered, but only if we choose to remember them. ■