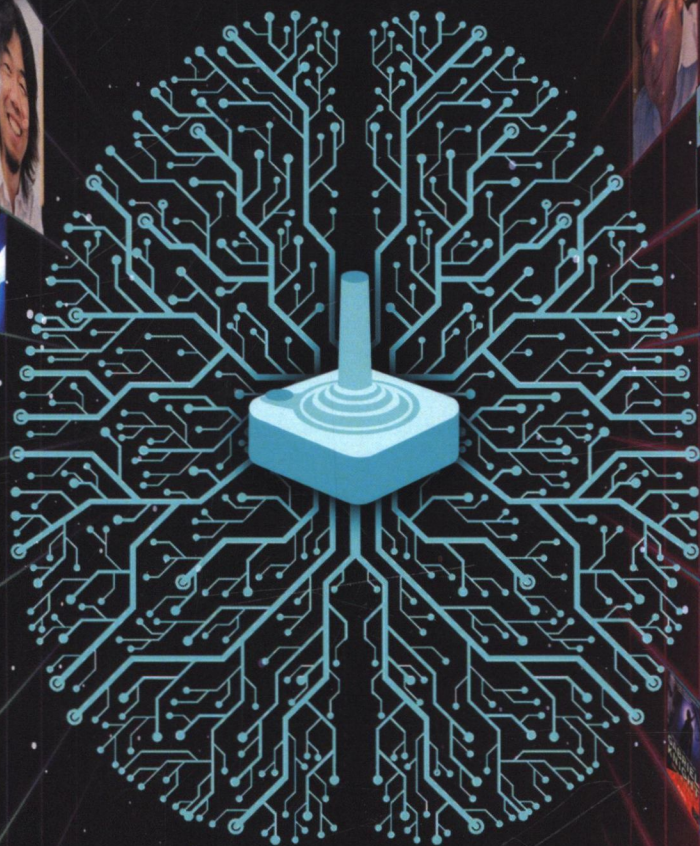


# THE MINDS BEHIND THE GAMES



Interviews with Cult and Classic  
Video Game Developers

**PATRICK HICKEY, JR.**

*Foreword by Brett Weiss*



Studies in Gaming

SERIES EDITOR *Matthew Wilhelm Kapell*



“From arcade rats to indie developers, Hickey gives an intimate look at the personalities behind gaming with the passion of a fanboy and the attention of a scholar.”

—CESAR R. BUSTAMANTE, JR., *New York Daily News*

“*The Minds Behind the Games* reads like a personal voiceover for a ESPN 30-for-30 documentary on every classic video game mentioned in the book. This is a must-read for classic gaming fans and anyone interested in learning about the thought process of game developers.”

—BRIAN MAZIQUE, *Forbes*

“Patrick interviews some of the greatest pioneers of the gaming industry in his book. He treats us to a factual, yet accessible look at some of the most influential games ever, created through first-hand interviews with the developers.”

—PETE PAQUETTE, senior animator, *Bioshock: Infinite, Overwatch, Madden NFL 18*

Featuring interviews with the creators of 36 popular video games—including *Deus Ex*, *Night Trap*, *Mortal Kombat*, *Wasteland* and *NBA Jam*—this book gives a behind-the-scenes look at the creation of some of the most influential and iconic (and sometimes forgotten) games of all time. Recounting endless hours of painstaking development, the challenges of working with mega publishers and the uncertainties of public reception, the interviewees reveal the creative processes that produced some of gaming’s classic titles.

PATRICK HICKEY, JR., is the founder and editor-in-chief of *ReviewFix.com* and a lecturer of English and journalism at Kingsborough Community College, in Brooklyn, New York. Over the past decade, his video game coverage has been featured in national ad campaigns by Nintendo, Disney and EA Sports.



McFarland



Front cover images  
from iStock and  
author’s collection

HICKORY The Minds Behind the Games



# The Minds Behind the Games

*Interviews with Cult and Classic  
Video Game Developers*

PATRICK HICKEY, JR.

*Foreword by Brett Weiss*

STUDIES IN GAMING

*Series Editor Matthew Wilhelm Kapell*



McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers  
*Jefferson, North Carolina*

Each photograph of an individual was provided by the individual shown therein. All illustrations of games and box covers were taken from the game's official site, thecoverproject.net, from the developer or from capturing live gameplay, with the exception of the following: illustrations for *The Suffering*, *Pro Wrestling X*, *Voodoo Vince*, *Squids*, *ToeJam and Earl* and *Mutant League Football* were provided by the developer.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGUING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Patrick Hickey, Jr., 1983– author.  
Title: The minds behind the games : interviews with cult and classic video game developers / Patrick Hickey, Jr.  
Description: Jefferson : McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2018 |  
Series: Studies in gaming | Includes bibliographical references and index.  
Identifiers: LCCN 2018004761 | ISBN 9781476671109 (softcover : acid free paper) ∞  
Subjects: LCSH: Video game designers—Interviews. | Video games—Design. | Video games.  
Classification: LCC GV1469.3 .P38 2018 | DDC 794.8092—dc23  
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018004761>

BRITISH LIBRARY CATALOGUING DATA ARE AVAILABLE

**ISBN (print) 978-1-4766-7110-9**  
**ISBN (ebook) 978-1-4766-3123-3**

© 2018 Patrick Hickey, Jr. All rights reserved

*No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying or recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.*

Front cover images from iStock and author's collection

Printed in the United States of America

*McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers*  
Box 611, Jefferson, North Carolina 28640  
[www.mcfarlandpub.com](http://www.mcfarlandpub.com)

The Minds  
Behind the Games

## STUDIES IN GAMING

*The Play Versus Story Divide in Game Studies:  
Critical Essays* (Matthew Wilhelm Kapell, editor, 2016)

*Player and Avatar: The Affective Potential of Videogames*  
(David Owen, 2017)

*Responding to Call of Duty: Critical Essays on  
the Game Franchise* (Nate Garrelts, editor, 2017)

*Speedrunning: Interviews with the Quickest Gamers*  
(David Snyder, 2017)

*Storytelling in Video Games: The Art of the Digital  
Narrative* (Amy M. Green, 2017)

*The Minds Behind the Games: Interviews with Cult and Classic  
Video Game Developers* (Patrick Hickey, Jr., 2018)

*The Postmodern Joy of Role-Playing Games:  
Agency, Ritual and Meaning in the Medium*  
(René Reinhold Schalleger, 2018)

## FORTHCOMING IN THE SERIES

*Teach Like a Gamer: Adapting the Instructional Design  
of Digital Role-Playing Games* (Carly Finseth)

To my wife, Melissa, and my daughter, Josie.



## Acknowledgments

It's no small task being married to and the daughter of a man that teaches college full-time, runs an entertainment website, freelances and runs retro gaming tournaments and now, writes books. My wife was six months pregnant when the idea for this book came to me. When everyone told me I was crazy to even think about doing this, Melissa told me simply "just do it." Talk about supportive. Adding this book to my already exhaustive schedule was a dream come true though. But it was also one that was an emotional and intellectual journey. One that I was sometimes not prepared for. Melissa, thank you so much for understanding and just listening, even when you had no idea who or what I was talking about. Throughout the six months that it took to write this book, I know that while I never slacked in the foot massage and home responsibility department, my mind was often heavily concentrated on video games and not more "adult" responsibilities. I know there were late night feedings and dog walks I complained about too. You always handled it with patience and resolve. Thank you.

And Josie, while you're too young to understand, I want you to know that this book was not only for me, but for you as well. Throughout my life, I've heard the credo from my parents that their goal was always to make sure I had it better than them. My goal is so much more than that. I want to be a person you can look up to. To be someone of strong mind, body and spirit. The publication of this book allows me to accomplish one of my biggest dreams and to now focus on being the parent you need so you can dream and aspire for your own successes.

Melissa and Josie, thank you both for loving and accepting this big dork for who he is and will always be, a gamer and a journalist that loves you both with all of his heart.

I'd also like to thank the following people—Esteban Sosa, Ben Fong and Andy Flores and the crew at Brooklyn Video Games for giving me access to their collection and minds for the sake of research, as well as Sulaiman Larokko, Brad Hopkins, Anthony Frisina, Christopher Saenz, Thomas Henrich, Devin Harner, Joakim Morales, Leonard Herman and my nephews Kevin Dalton and Frankie Asta, as well as anyone else that let me bounce ideas off of them while writing. As well, I'd like to give a special thank you to my former student Koyuki Inoue for her expert translation for the *Wonder Boy in Monster Land* chapter and publicist Emily Morganti for helping me get sources for the *Voodoo Vince* and *Maniac Mansion* chapters. This book could have taken anyone else three times as long without all of you being there and supporting this crazy endeavor.

And lastly, thanks Mom and Dad. Allowing me to stay home from kindergarten every few days and play *Contra* ultimately created a monster.

# Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
FOREWORD BY BRETT WEISS	1
PREFACE	3
INTRODUCTION	6
Michael Mendheim, <i>Mutant League Football: The Gruesome Sports-Hybrid That Could</i>	11
Petri Järvillehto, <i>Max Payne: From the Basement to the Norse God of Noir</i>	17
Mike Skupa, <i>Bully: Jimmy Beats World</i>	23
Ryuichi Nishizawa, <i>Wonder Boy in Monster Land: Countdown to Major Tom-Tom</i>	29
Howard Scott Warshaw, <i>E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial: The Best Game Ever Made in Five Weeks</i>	34
David Crane and Garry Kitchen, <i>A Boy and His Blob: The Best Game Ever Made in Six Weeks</i>	40
Sarah Jane Avory, <i>Fighting Force: From Streets of Rage 3D to Core Classic</i>	45
Dane Bigham, <i>Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego?: Explorational Not Educational</i>	50
Richard Rouse III, <i>The Suffering: The Shining in the Darkness</i>	55
Rob Fulop, David Crane and James Riley, <i>Night Trap: The Truth About Catz and Dogz</i>	61
Greg Johnson, <i>ToeJam &amp; Earl: Sega's Funky and Fantastic "Other" Mascots</i>	72
Julia Keren-Detar and Itay Keren, <i>Mushroom II: Appetite for Destruction</i>	77
Kan Gao, <i>To the Moon: John's Tale</i>	82
Emeric Thoa and Audrey Leprince, <i>Squids: The Game That Beat Those Angry Birds, for a Little While</i>	87
Matt Thorson and Alec Holowka, <i>Towerfall: From Arrows on the Ouya to Ascending on the PlayStation 4 and Beyond</i>	92

---

Eric Holmes, <i>Hulk Ultimate Destruction: The Big Green Monster That Could, and Did</i>	97
Jamie Fristrom, <i>Spider-Man 2: Great Power = Great Fun</i>	102
Howard Scott Warshaw, <i>Yars' Revenge: From Star Castle Port to Game-Changing Shooter</i>	107
Dan Geisler and Randy Breen, <i>Road Rash: The Game That Kicked Hang-On and Akira, in the Face</i>	113
Mike Posehn and Richard Robbins, <i>Desert Strike: From Killer Choplifter Clone to Classic</i>	119
Garry Kitchen, <i>Bart vs. the Space Mutants: The First and Best Simpsons Game Ever</i>	124
Jane Jensen, <i>Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers: Voodoo Chile</i>	129
Ron Gilbert, David Fox and Gary Winnick, <i>Maniac Mansion: Point-and-Click's Original SCUMM-Bags</i>	134
Clayton Kauzlaric, <i>Voodoo Vince: Pain for Pleasure</i>	139
Warren Spector, <i>Deus Ex: From Troublemaking Shooter to Genre-Defining Conspiracy Theory</i>	144
Jon Van Caneghem, <i>King's Bounty: Putting the "Heroes" into "Might and Magic"</i>	149
Garry Kitchen, <i>Super Battletank: Even Better Than the Real Thing</i>	153
Taichi Ishizuka, <i>The Firemen: Through the Fire and Flames</i>	158
Dave Wishnowski, <i>Pro Wrestling X: A Decade-Long Dream in Development</i>	163
Mark Turmell, <i>WWF Wrestlemania: The Arcade Game: Scotch and Treadmills</i>	170
John Tobias, <i>Mortal Kombat: Enter the Fatality</i>	174
Michael Brook, <i>NHLPA '93: Fighting for Fun Before "If it's in the game, it's in the game"</i>	179
Craig Broadbooks, <i>NHL FaceOff: A Christmas Story</i>	185
Mark Turmell, <i>NBA Jam: The Birth of Boomshakalaka</i>	191
David A. Palmer, <i>Doom: The Little Jaguar That Could</i>	196
Ken St. Andre and Brian Fargo, <i>Wasteland: Fallout's Unlikely Papa</i>	200
CONCLUSION	206
INDEX	207

## Foreword by Brett Weiss

Are video games important? Everyone knows they're fun, but are they important? Good question.

If you're just talking about pushing buttons and staring at a screen, video games aren't much more important than bouncing a tennis ball off the side of your house or twiddling your thumbs.

But we're talking about much more here.

Recently, I solicited stories from people about some of the video games that were, yes, *important* to them, for a Super Nintendo book I've been working on. The stories ranged from receiving a special game for a birthday to Saturday night marathons with friends to bonding with a grandparent over a favorite title. Phrases like "dear to my heart" and "remember it fondly" in conjunction with words like "amazing," "awesome" and "happy" were batted around like the ball in *Warlords* for the Atari 2600.

One physically challenged contributor to my SNES book wrote at length about how *F-Zero* let her compete on an even playing field with her able-bodied friends and siblings.

To put it mildly, the better responses were awesome and even life-affirming.

Video games are important in numerous ways. We've all heard about the vaunted improvement in eye-hand coordination one can gain from video games, and of course they are an excellent way to blow off steam and relieve stress at the end of a tough day. The artistic and interactive story elements of games have been touted as well.

With *The Minds Behind the Games: Interviews with Cult and Classic Video Game Developers*, Patrick Hickey, Jr., focuses on the people and the stories behind the making of the games, and anyone who's not a sociopath knows that people and the stories they tell are important. Stories are the most interesting way we communicate with one another, and with future generations. Tell someone a list of dry facts, and they're eyes will likely glaze over. Tell someone a story—a good and interesting story, that is—and they'll sit up and listen.

*The Minds Behind the Games* is filled with good, interesting stories about such lore-ridden titles as *Yar's Revenge*, *Night Trap* and *Road Rash*. These are important (there's that word again) games that influenced the industry far beyond giving gamers a different sequence of buttons to press and more images to watch. The book also sheds light on such lesser-known titles as *Fighting Force*, *Gabriel Knight* and *Mushroom 11*. If variety is the spice of life, this book is ghost pepper chili.

Rather than searching the web for rehashed and possibly inaccurate info, Hickey did his legwork and went directly to the source, interviewing such industry luminaries

as Mark Turmell, Rob Fulop, Garry Kitchen and Warren Spector, along with people even I had never heard of, such as Sarah Jane Avory and Clayton Kauzlaric. If these names are unfamiliar to you, they certainly won't be by the time you're done with this book.

Are video games important?

Turn the page and discover for yourself.

Longtime gamer Brett Weiss is the author of more than 1,500 published articles. His work has appeared in numerous publications, including *Game Informer*, *Gameroom Magazine*, *Classic Gamer Magazine*, *RETRO Magazine*, *Fangoria*, *Filmfax*, and *The Miami Herald*, among many others. He is also the author of eight books, including the "Classic Home Video Games" series and *The 100 Greatest Console Video Games: 1977-1987*.

## Preface

Video game journalism has existed since the industry was born, but there has often been a disconnect between opinion and fact. Anyone who has read a video game magazine today (the ones that are left, that is) or has gone on the internet to find out the latest information on an upcoming game may not see evidence of this, but it's always been there. At times, covering the video game industry feels like that episode of *South Park*, where ads and opinion are everywhere, even as people and facts are nowhere to be found.

Simply put, there's a plethora of opinion and a diminishing focus on reporting in general media coverage today. In the case of video game journalism, it's just as bad. For every Danny O'Dwyer and Chris Plante there are out there, there are fifty reporters more concerned about page views than telling a real story that matters. One outlet writes an excellent interview and by the end of the day, everyone links to it and along the way, like a game of telephone, the information gets twisted and distorted to the point where its value is completely diminished. The invention of platforms the likes of WordPress, Instagram, YouTube and Twitch means that everyone who plays games has a voice, which is fantastic. However, the need for factual information is stronger than ever before.

I have covered the industry for over a decade, and have seen the people who are more interested in getting free games and going to lush parties with developers than doing real work. It would be too easy to blame game publishers for throwing swag and pleasantries to every reporter and critic for positive coverage. Ultimately the onus falls on the writers and personalities—their credibility and accountability must always be their most valued commodity. At the same time, if the field was different, this book wouldn't need to be written.

This book was written to let some of the most influential and interesting developers tell their stories. Because ultimately, you don't care if I love a game or if a certain one is my favorite. You don't care about the hundreds of pitches sent for this book or the hours of telephone conversations and the mornings, afternoons and nights I spent typing and scribbling away. And you definitely don't care about the nights I spent sending pitches to developers with one hand and massaging my pregnant wife's feet with the other. You came here to find out what inspired the games that inspired you. And that's exactly what I've tried to provide here: an accurate and passionate sharing of facts that led to the creation of some of the most important games of the last forty years. At the end of the day, this book is a love letter to my passion for the industry and the hard work that these creators have put into the games featured. Video game journalism deserves better and my hope is that this book will help foster a change.

Let's get things straight, though. Saying there is absolutely zero opinion in this book

is like asking for fat free ice cream—it's not going to happen. Opinion always exists. I understand that in order to cover this industry or any topic, you need to love it, but that love can never supersede your objectivity and quest for the truth. Throughout the writing of this book I made sure that my love of all of these games was as invisible as possible and that every developer was given a platform to share from their heart. All I've done in this book is create the road for their words to travel on. The words of each developer are the vessel, the most important element, without a doubt.

Creating that road has been one heck of a challenge, but it has been a purposeful one. As an owner of over thirty consoles and thousands of games, I thought I was pretty knowledgeable about the industry and its history before I started writing this book. I have run tournaments at a retro video game store, frequented sites like MobyGames, Gameasutra and yes, Wikipedia, and read all the long features on Polygon that the people who care about the odd and ends of this industry love. Over the course of my decade-plus as a gaming journalist for NBC, Examiner and my own site, ReviewFix.com, I've interviewed dozens of mainstream developers and hundreds of indie ones, but all of that was nothing compared to the educational journey this book was. Simply put, there were times when I was reading answers from developers or on the phone with them and I realized I had just found out something no one else in the world knew. At times I wanted to smile and cry at the same time. Add in all of the reading of interviews, books, listening to podcasts and of course, playing games and all the other research that has gone into this book, hundreds of hours later and I can say I am far more educated today than I ever was before.

But nothing else proved how worthwhile this adventure has been than seeing how my wife responded to me when I told her about the progress of the book as it was developing. I remember the first time my wife saw my game collection in 2010, while we were dating. She was mortified. She had just walked into a world she didn't understand. Fast forward seven years and I can tell you that while she still doesn't "get" why I love games so much, she understands it makes myself and millions of other people happy. The smirk I'd get when I told her I got a new developer for the project and the "I know, it's cool" answer she'd give me when I got excited was proof that this project was far from a waste of time. As arduous an effort it was for me, it was an opportunity to give back to a medium that has gotten me through and been a part of my entire life.

From the moment I could hold a controller, I've been a gamer. Games the likes of *Contra* and *RBI Baseball* were reasons I faked being sick in kindergarten, while games the likes of *NHLPA 93*, *Desert Strike*, *Road Rash*, *Kings Bounty* and *Super Battletank* were ways I'd spend time with my father as a pre-teen when it was nasty outside. As a teenager I was bit by the RPG bug on the PlayStation and the long list of great wrestling games on the Nintendo 64, as well as *Pokémon*. The *Diablo* and *Fallout* series were and still are my escape after a long day of work and *TowerFall* is a game that my nephews and I can play for hours together. Moving forward, I hope the memories of gaming with family and friends never stop. The hope is that this book ignites those feelings in your heart and possibly opens it up for a few more with a few new games and friends.

Every single game in this book is here for a reason, whether it be critical reception or even a complete lack thereof. But there will be no "this is the best game in this book," or subjective rankings either. Like athletes in different eras or sports, there's no way to say definitively what game did more for the industry or which one is the greatest of all

time. Anyone who tells you otherwise isn't nearly as educated in the field as they claim and like I said, the whole point of this book is to share experiences and not rate which ones were better than the other. As well, the faster you understand that there's no such thing as an expert in any field and that there's always more to learn about everything, even the things you love, the more you'll get out of this book.

To stretch that notion even further, there are possibly games featured in this book that you have never heard of, or feel don't feel belong. That's fine too. Don't let your opinion or feelings stop you from appreciating how much work and passion went into creating each of these games and the effort it took to chronicle them. If you do, then you're missing the point. In the end, this book is about creating a platform for developers to discuss their projects and to swoon you. Yes, you read that right. Swoon. Like a great song, journalism and even educational books, just like games, should never forget to inspire and invigorate the mind. That being said, the end goal of this book is to create some type of passion. To get you excited. To make you want to read more. If someone reading this book ends up going online and continuing to read more about these games or even play them, then the professor in me will be a happy man.

This book has the honest, unfiltered stories of game developers from the earliest days of the arcade and Atari 2600 to the graphical powerhouses of today that changed the industry. And make no mistake, every developer featured in this book is a part of this book because they wanted to tell their story. Their quotes will not stop in order for an advertisement to play and there will be no in-book purchases needed to unlock anything extra. This book is as pure a journalistic endeavor as possible. None of the developers have been paid for their words. They have taken part because they want to share their experiences. That is what journalism is all about. It's magic. It's all about passion. And that's what video game journalism should be about, too.



## Introduction

It's a crazy notion to think that the first home video game consoles hit store shelves over forty years ago. An even more bizarre thought is that many of the creators of the games on those consoles are now old enough to have a Social Security check sent to their home. Sadly, some of the greatest creators in the industry are no longer with us as well. As a result, it's obvious that the earliest video game stars, Donkey Kong, Pac-Man and Pitfall Harry, are no longer spring chickens. Even their replacements as the mascots of the industry, Super Mario and Sonic, are old enough to have a master's degree and a family. Make no mistake, if you are a teenager reading this, your grandfather could have been playing a Magnavox Odyssey well before your mother or father was born. Scary stuff indeed.

Once you're done thinking about where all that time went, it's easy to see that the history of the medium is a lot deeper than you think. Regardless of all that time that's passed and the richness of the history of the medium though, the games you played as a kid still have that resonating effect on you—enough for you to want to share that experience with your friends and children. They are timeless. Unfortunately, most of the time, we don't know who created them. That's quite the opposite of the faces and voices behind our favorite films and music. And unlike the stars of the stage and big screen, the artists that brought and continue to bring you these gifts of game don't feel the need to talk politics on Twitter. Playing their game and having an opinion on it is more than enough.

And play you did—and still do. Many of the games featured throughout the pages of this book affected you as kid even if you don't know they did. And if you're in your thirties, many of the games featured in this book were born when the industry, too, was still discovering itself—a time when the company producing the game was often seen as more important than the person who created it. The same time when one person, or a small team, usually had an idea pitched it to the powers that be and went off and made a game. There's something special about that. Something that is explored throughout the course of this book—that one person could create something and like a piece of art or a poem, people, decades later, still want to experience it or in this case, play it. Even today, games the likes of *TowerFall* are proof that one man, or a small group of people, can disrupt or make an impact on a billion-dollar industry with an excellent idea and enough passion.

At the same time, even games made with teams of thirty or more people are special. In this day and age of self-obsession, where the word selfie found its way into the dictionary, people can share a passion for the same thing and create something wonderful that stands the test of time. A game such as *The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction*