

D = Davin Loh
Z = Zack Klima
S = Sunny Yang

D: Are you guys looking to go into video game development, or is this just--

S: So, again, we're studying the history of video games, and one of our, really, main focus[es] was [the] arcade.

D: Ok.

S: And old games, so right now we're doing a project on that, so that's why we are doing this interview. So, just to repeat ourselves, I'm Sunny, and this is Zack, and we're students at IIT studying the history of video games. Thank you for coming here with us.

D: Oh, no problem.

S: So, you kinda just ask us if--uh, we're gonna ask you like do you have any questions-- (inaudible) So, when did you first start playing pinball?

D: Pinball... Well. Um, let's see, pinball actually came a little bit later because actually I started playing video games first. Upright cabinets. Pinball probably, uh... Maybe when I was like 8, or 9. And the first one I ever played was probably Pinbot. And that was probably like, '87 or '88. So that was a while ago. But um, pinball never really grabbed me. I did... I--I was more, like, not so much playing, but I liked observing because I wasn't that good at it, so I liked observing other people, like, older kids, play, because they were really talented. And the lights, and the sounds, and the flashing and everything... it was really cool.

S: Yeah. Ok. So uh, so the first game that you ever played was um, [it was] not pinball right?

D: Um, probably the Star Wars game, the one with the vector graphics. I don't know if you ever saw that one. It's basically, if you guys have seen the movie, basically re-enacts the final trench run on the Death Star. Yeah, and so it was all with vector graphics. That was the first game I ever played.

S: Ok, so I'm guessing then, pinball is one of your favorite games, or..?

D: Ah, actually, well, I still love the uh, you know, going to arcades and playing. You don't see them much these days, but uh, there are a few places in Chicago that are still keeping, uh, you know, classic arcade cabinets, you know, maintained, and you can play them. So...

S: Ok. I see, I see. Um, what makes a good pinball game? Is it, um, effects, or the--the way that...?

D: That's a tough one, because I think that it all comes down to personal preference. Like, for me, um, one of the cool things about a pinball game is if it's got like a really cool theme, or really great aesthetic design. Uh, one of my favorite classic pinball machines is uh, The Creature From the Black Lagoon, you know, the old 1930, 1930's, uh, horror movie. Um, what really makes that one great is that (inaudible) it's pretty modest when it comes to effects on the actual pinboard, the actual pinboard, but uh, on--on top of the machine is this really great, uh, plastered casting of the actual, of the actual monster, and the eyes light up every time you get a big score. So it's really, it's got that really great aesthetic design. I think, um, like with anything, it just has, like, like uh, a good pinball machine has a good personality, like, has good character, and I think that's one of the coolest things.

S: Ok. Um, so what are all the games that you've earned a record on, for...?

D: *laughs* You can actually, uh look--there's an actual website that keeps, you know, keeps record of all this. It's called "Aurcade.com". A-u-r-c-a-d-e, dot com, and basically what it does is there are certified score keepers and referees that, you know, that keep a-a record of all your high scores. I currently hold 10 high scores right now, um... They're almost all fighting games. Um, some of the more memorable ones are, uh, Capcom vs. SNK2, um, X-Men: Children of the Atom, and then uh, Samurai Showdown 1 through 4, and uh... Ninja Baseball Batman. That one came, uh, just this month.

S: Interesting.

D: Well, October.

S: And...So, out of all of those records, was pinball one of [them]?

D: Um, not really. Like I said, I'm more just--like to admire other people play, but um... Uh, the arcade where I go, they just added a pinball section. They have over 70 original arcade pinball machines, and they have to keep them all in storage because what they're doing is they're undergoing a renovation, and they're making room for more pinball machines, so they didn't have them out for people to play. But now, you know, as time--they've started the first phase of the renovation and now they put the pinball machines back in, so.

S: Ok, I see, I see. Um, how do you train for those games that you just talked about? Like, how long does it take to, like, to kinda get good at one?

D: Well, I mean, with fighting games, that's just been a lifelong love affair for me. Like, um, Street Fighter -- Street Fighter 2 came out in 1989? No, not '89, '91. And, you know, the first time I played that game, it was like a love affair. It was like, "Wow, this game is great, it's so cool, it's, like, so much fun". And then like, you know, you start to learn and you play and then basically, over time, like, you know, those games made by Capcom? The mechanics have largely stayed the same, you know, like the special moves, the timing, the button layouts, all that mostly has been preserved and stayed the same. Um, so basically, my skill to this point on those fighting games all come from being, you know, in eighth grade and playing Street Fighter, and then just, as, you know, Capcom kept making more iterations of Street Fighter or you know, the um, Versus series. Marvel vs. Capcom, Street Fighter, X-Men, um, you know. Those things stayed the same, they just put more mechanics on top of it. And so it's just learning the new things while keeping your old skills fresh.

S: Ok. So you started out around, like, eighth grade?

D: Yeah. Like, sixth, seventh, eighth grade, that was a time when, you know, friends would... Obviously, you couldn't drive, so we would um, get on our bikes, and we would bike to the local arcade, or the local 7-11, anywhere they had an arcade cabinet for us to play.

S: Ok. How about like, the people that you observe, like, the really, really good players, like, do you ever ask them, "How long do you play?" or "Do you guys share techniques?" or like... Because to really be one, do you guys hang out in the same group to share your techniques?

D: Mhm. Well, specifically for fighting games, that's been a great thing. The internet has been a real blessing for people who want to learn not just for video games, but any kind of skill or learn about people who are good in their region. The things like YouTube, or websites dedicated to video game fandom. Me myself, I've been a huge fan of the fighting game community, and Chicago is known for being kind of a smaller branch of the fighting game community because it's mostly East Coast and West Coast, but I have been lucky to travel to the big competitions like Evo in Las Vegas or to see professional players play. I'm sure you've heard names like Justin Wong, Seth Killian, these kinds of names; then you see their replay matches online or on YouTube, and I've actually been lucky to meet a few of these individuals at conventions or at tournaments. And it's been really great just to talk, and just get to know them as people, but then also to see how they train, how they play, and how much time they dedicate to that. That's specifically for fighting games.

S: I see, I see. So, is there a record that you see that other people hold it that you just really wanted to hold or...

D: Get a shot at it? Yeah, well, here's something I should definitely share with you guys. Just west of Chicago in Brookfield, IL, there's an arcade known as Galloping Ghost Arcade that's at 9415 Ogden Avenue, and that is where a lot of my friends that I've met through the arcade-- that's where they go to play to hang out and just to play games and achieve world records, and it's a real honor to see these guys just set so many world records at so many different kinds of games. A lot of those guys have really, like, those shooters, those bullet hell games, they love those. Just a great variety of different kinds of games, and they're very, very talented. So, like, when you see them play, or when they're streaming online for a world record attempt, it's always great to see them play. And then, kind of just ask them, "How do you play? Strategies, little tricks and tips?". But yeah, seeing some of those guys play is just really impressive. I could never do what they do when it comes to those kind of games.

S: Wow, alright. I see, I see. So for pinball--well, maybe not for pinball, but for those fighting

games, why do you specifically choose that game? (unnecessary)

D: Well, as someone who's been playing video games his entire life, I like different kinds. I love music games, rhythm games, shooters, action/adventure; and games that have been only on consoles: The Legend of Zelda, Super Mario Bros., I'm a huge fan of video games in any genre almost any type, but something about fighting games is just like poetry. It's like a really great thing. Seth Killian really made this really great analogy about video games, relating it to poker. You're not so much playing the game as you are playing your opponent. So, I think it's this really great idea of--a whole bunch of things. The artwork that goes into it, the mechanics that go into it, the personalities that play the game, it's this whole swirl of ideas and concepts mashed together. It's, in a kind of cheesy sense, it's like being romantic of that system and that world.

S: Ok, I see. And you really like that psychological aspect of it.

D: Yeah. One of the--a lot of the pro players in the fighting game circuit are also poker players. Really good poker players. And it's that whole idea of not playing the cards that are in front of you, but playing the opponent. It's that psychological warfare, and that's a really cool aspect to bring to this entire thing. You think, "Oh, it's just a video game" or "Oh, it's just a card game"--No. It's psychological warfare. And that, that's a really cool aspect.

S: Do you play poker?

D: I do, actually.

S: Interesting.

D: Huge fan of Texas Hold 'Em and watching the World Series of Poker and all that.

S: I see, I see.

Z: So, I'd actually like to ask something here. When we saw an interview with Justin Wong, he said that his parents just didn't know what he did. Is that nearly the same for you?

D: Um, I mean, my parents were pretty aware of what I was doing with my time. And, the first video game system I ever owned was an Atari 2600, and they're the ones who purchased it for me. And as I grew older, and as time went on, I got that greater education in video games, the 8-bit NES and the Super Nintendo and Sega Genesis, and as we made more friends growing up in middle school and high school we'd cultivate friendships, like, "Woah, this guy's got a turbo graphics" or "This guy's got Neo Geo" and it's like "Oh, we'll go to his house" and then "he'll bring his system over" and so we got this really great, wide spectrum of video games. We all got to play, we all got to learn, and that's how we fostered friendships. And that was how we learned the whole spectrum, and so my parents were aware I was going to friends' houses, sleeping over, playing video games and whatnot, so for the most part, they were pretty aware. They were not entirely thrilled with it, but they were aware.

Z: Do you think that kind of environment, that group aspect of, "Hey, I'll go grab my stuff and go over to his house", do you think that still exists today, or..?

D: I mean, it doesn't exist in that form, but a different way. [There are] so many things that the Internet has either transformed or forced to into obscurity. That happens. I'm sure you guys have video game systems: you've got Xbox Live, Playstation Network, you've got all that stuff. And it's great, because you can play with people around the world and have that social aspect, but there's something very different from having four guys on the same couch, switching controllers, and trash-talking next to each other. That's one of those aspects that's preserved when you go to a place like Galloping Ghost in Brookfield. When you're playing a fighting game, you guys've gotta share the same cabinet, and you gotta jockey for elbow room to hit the buttons and everything, and that's a great aspect. That social aspect is what's lost. You know, it's not so much lost, but it's kind of transformed when you do it over Xbox Live or the Internet, so.

S: So, do you remember your first world record attempt or first competition that you ever did?

D: It's funny, actually. Two years ago--no, actually three years ago, now--when Galloping Ghost first opened, they were just casually taking down records, in-house records for certain video games, and on my first visit I actually set the house record in Tekken 4, and for Capcom vs. SNK 2. And then, through the course of time, these past three years... Tekken 4 is way out

of my reach now. Somebody beat that game in less than two minutes, and so I don't think I'll ever touch that. A friend of mine at the arcade and [I] have been going back and forth on Capcom vs. SNK 2 for the last three years. He'll set a score, and three months later I'll come back and I'll set the score, and it goes back and forth. Right now, I'm currently holding it, with a world record of, like, 3062, and he's in second at like, 2700, so I'm sure he's training right now, trying to get it right back.

S: Ok, ok. We watched that movie [on competitive gaming]. Was it a nervous feeling, or was it chill?

D: It's kind of weird, because it's like... If you go there with the intention of... It can be a totally random thing. Sometimes, you'll set the record on the first attempt, and then sometimes you won't get it the whole night, and then... It's like alchemy. It kind of all comes together, or it doesn't. So, it's just, when you feel like you're in the zone and you're playing well and things are just coming together, and then it happens. And then sometimes, it just doesn't. So, it'll depend.

S: I see. I see. Are you based in Chicago?

D: Actually, I was born in this country. I was born in Philadelphia, and then I lived in Evanston until I was about five years old, moved to northwest Indiana, and then I lived in Indiana until I graduated from high school. And then I did my undergrad at University of Indiana in Bloomington down south. Then I moved to New York for a couple of years--that's actually where I met Justin Wong, at the New York Chinatown Fair, and that was shortly before he moved to California. And then I lived in San Francisco for a little bit, and that's where I met some other great, top players like John Choi and Albert Carmona, these guys who are really deep into the scene. And then I came back to Chicago.

S: Alright. You like it here?

D: Oh, yeah. As someone who's been able to live on both coasts and see what they offer... I mean, New York is a great city, San Francisco is a great city, but something about Chicago just is really great; it feels like home. And the great part about it is, time was that everyone was just concerned what was happening on either the East Coast or the West Coast, and then the news would come towards the Midwest. Now, Chicago is becoming prominent in a lot of different areas in culture and food and entertainment and especially in video games. I don't know if you guys know this, but Nether Realm Studios, the studio that was responsible for Mortal Kombat games, they were formerly known as Midway games. And they were based in Chicago and they were on California in the Avondale neighborhood. They were across the street from the-- I don't know, have you guys ever had hot dogs on California? The hot dog stand?

S: No.

D: Ok, well they've recently just closed and so Midway was right across the street from the hotdog stand, and you've got a great culture there of these video game developers in this city. Iron Galaxy is another studio that's based in Chicago. They're responsible for the Killer Instinct series on Xbox 1 and Dive Kick, and you have a lot of smaller indie gamers, indie game studios here that are working and trying to make a name for themselves, and there's a really great, rich video game culture in the city, so it's pretty great.

S: Alright. Does living in Chicago really impact how you play games, or..?

D: Yeah, because like I said before, when you meet top players in this country they're always either East coast or West coast. And so Chicago has to fight a little harder to get a little bit of name recognition. One thing I will say is that the fact that having Nether Realm in Chicago, there's a team of professionals. Like that arcade I mentioned, Galloping Ghost. What they do is they sponsor a pro team. And that pro team always takes top honors at Injustice and at Mortal Kombat, and they always want to hold up that reputation because it's like, "This is our game, this is our town, this is our scene". And I think that just makes it that much more of a better competition with other people from around the world competing at like Evo or any other big tournaments.

S: Ok. I see. So, you play at a pinball/coin-op league?

D: Oh, no, no league. I just like to go check out different places that actually have the cabinets or the pinball machines. I'm sure you've been to places around the city like Head Quarters or Emporium Arcade. Those are the two big ones I can think of, and then of course Galloping Ghost down in Brookfield. Because it's not just going to play the game but also to check out the bar that it's in and get a feel for the place and what the owners are like and things like that.

S: Several minutes ago you kind of mentioned, you know, sometimes you just go in and you play and then you can set the world record. But do you really have a plan figured out? Or is there a set of steps?

D: Well, it depends on the game. For a fighting game, it's just knowing that as you progress through each level it's when the computer picks this character, it's going to fall into this specific pattern, and then you can outsmart it or know when they're going to attack and you can counterattack and things like that. When it comes to games like Ninja Baseball Batman that's more of a side-scrolling beat-'em-up, it's basically just having a strategy and just knowing... It comes down to repetition and just knowing, well, these enemies come out at this time, they do this kind of damage, and you either have to avoid them or take them out before they attack, so it comes down to muscle memory and (?) memorization.

S: Alright. That's cool. What do you see as the future of coin-op? Do you think it will just continue or do you think that it's still growing?

D: That's the thing. In countries like Japan you see they're still innovating. It's slightly waning, but it's still kind of a sustainable market there. I don't know if you guys read over the weekend, but Luigi's Mansion, that game from Nintendo -- Capcom has actually built an arcade cabinet starring Luigi's Mansion. So in that way you still see that kind of innovation and being built and stuff, but as a whole, as an industry, I don't see it resurging back any time soon. We kind of just have these places where you have a bar and then somebody's gone to the trouble to bring back classic cabinets or classic pinball machines and that's kind of the appeal, this retro appeal of "Oh, that's cool. Let's play Mortal Kombat on the original cabinet" or "Let's play NBA Jam on the original cabinet" or "Let's play a couple games of pinball". So, I don't see it coming back as a full industry but there are these pockets of people that are just sustaining it and keeping it alive. Just last weekend, a pinball company just released a new Walking Dead pinball machine, and I went to go see it. It's a very nice pinball machine and it looks nice, and I just don't see if they're going to be cranking out tons of these, but it's just nice to know that it still exists in that form. It's mostly going to be people who are going to keep it as a novelty or as a niche market.

S: So, do you think there's a major change from 10 years ago and now? Like before, you mentioned bars, did you still do that 10 or 20 years ago when it was still popular?

D: Well, like I said before, the Internet has basically taken away. And you know, the whole home console video game industry, it got so good over time that not only could you play anything you wanted that you could in the arcade, it surpassed it and was even better in a lot of cases, and that's why that went away. Currently I just, I see, fingers crossed, that the people who own places like Underground Retrocade or these kind of Barcade kind of places, hope that they'll kind of keep that alive and just maintain it because... It's hard to believe, but there's actually a lot of innovation, a lot of creativity that you can still find in arcade machines that you can't see--You can't replicate that experience on a home console. So fingers crossed that that'll still be preserved for years to come.

S: I see, I see.

Z: Do you own any foreign games?

D: Oh, import games, yeah. *laughs* This was a thing in college. We discovered, my friends and I, discovered that we could solder chips to our Playstations and our Dreamcasts and basically make them region-free. That was another great way to discover "Well, what do Japanese people... How do they approach gaming and what's culturally different?" Funny story, I actually drove from Bloomington, IN, all the way to Arlington Heights, IL, to have my Playstation 1 modified, and I picked up a copy of Tekken 3 which just came out in Japan and still wouldn't come to the US for another four months. And I did it. It was a four-hour drive

and I did it in one day, and it was just a great thing to have at the time. And yeah, just culturally and seeing the difference between a Japanese game ported to a US market or seeing a game that would never come to the US market because it's just deemed too foreign. It's a great way to see cultural differences and game differences between Japan and the US.

S: So which culture do you kind of lean towards? Is it the Japanese's, or American's?

D: It's all swirling together, because at this point... A great example of this is, I don't know if you guys have ever played Gears of War. Gears of War, the lead developer Cliff Bleszinski always said--huge, huge influence on... An example that he took was from Resident Evil 4, and that's a very Japanese game, and they would just go back and forth and have these ideas cross-pollinate each other and having ideas just being exchanged freely, and that's the really great thing. It's no longer that Japan is the one making all these innovative games. The US and Europe are making these really terrific games too, and they influence each other, and that's a really good thing to see.

S: Ok. How would you describe the people in the field that you play? Are they kind of a little bit more social than guys who would just stay home and play console? Are they just normal people?

D: I think the crew that I play with at Galloping Ghost, they're a really diverse bunch. One of them in his spare time is a musician for a band, and he plays with his wife; another guy just had his first baby and he's just experiencing fatherhood for the first time; another guy just got married, and so basically you get these guys, very social, very friendly. They come to the arcade just to unwind and play and maybe set a world record or two, but they're just very normal guys. They're not social misfits or anything like that but it's very cool to see that they have lives outside of the arcade and they're very plugged in to society and everything.

S: That's good, I see. So you went to East Coast arcades or West Coast; is there a huge difference between Chicago and East Coast/West Coast with the scene, or is it pretty much the same?

D: Well, at its core, the core elements, it's pretty much the same. I think it's just a level of intensity and the degree of dedication that people bring to it. When I was living in New York, going to New York's Chinatown fair where Justin Wong would play, you would see not just him but a whole bunch of great guys coming to play. Every time I was there, they would always be there. They were always dedicating so much time, and not just fostering relationships and friendships with people around them, but also honing their skills, eliminating their mistakes; just making themselves ready for tournament play when it came down to it. I think it just comes down to the level of intensity. Chicago is just smaller scene, so it's a little harder to garner that kind of excitement, but at its core it's still the same.

S: Do you play with a family member, or most of your family, or cousins or anything?

D: I'm at this point in my life where it's harder and harder to devote free time for pursuits like this, so it comes really infrequently. I'll go over to someone's house when their kids have gone to sleep and we'll stay up and play, or we'll play online through Xbox Live or Playstation Network. At the same time it's great to have all this technology but when you're faced with real world responsibilities of paying the bills and getting to work and all these kinds of things it's hard to make time for that. For me personally, I try to keep that going even though it's kind of difficult because it's the only way I can keep in touch with some friends who have fully gone into adulthood with full-time jobs and spouses and kids and stuff like that.

S: I see. So, did you expect that a few of the games you play have a high level of entry? Did you expect it was going to be competitive when you first started, or was it just like a hobby and later you realize that it was competitive?

D: Yeah, I mean, when you think about it, Street Fighter IV is now in its fifth iteration, and it's hard to believe that people are still playing this game which is basically the same one that it was back in 1991. It's really shocking to me to think that now that people are making not just a living from it but a successful career out of it. Not just fighting games, of course, things like League of Legends, that's huge, and this competitive gaming scene, I think it's just great. I think it's a really wonderful thing to see that flourish, and it kind of guarantees that...

Gaming was kind of looked down upon as a bad thing but people thought the same thing of

television and movies back in the day. So I'm glad that that culture exists, I'm glad that people are able to innovate and move that forward as a career; as a field of entertainment. So I think that's really great.

S: Just curious, do you play League of Legends, or..?

D: Like I said, I like playing different kinds of games, and I just gave it a shot just to see what it was like, and I was like, "Yeah, this is actually pretty cool". I don't think I could ever be in that competitive circuit, but it's always definitely fun to play because I just love seeing the innovation and where the creativity comes into play and I think that that's a really good thing to have. I'm from Korea, and the big thing there is still Starcraft, and they love playing professionally and it's insane how popular it is over there. You see two guys that are sponsored by big, corporate sponsors like Samsung and LG, and they're wearing these coordinated track suits and all this stuff, and they all hang out together and train together and all this stuff, so it's kind of cool to see that.

S: You kind of mentioned that arcade or pinball games is the way how you maintain the friendships you have. But is there a more personal reason as to why you still go with it, even though you have more responsibilities?

D: A friend of mine asked me a few years ago, "Do you ever see yourself fully giving up video games?" And I thought about it for a second, and I was like, "You know, I really can't." Even if I'm not playing at like the arcade or on a home console, video game culture is still around me. I still like listening to video game soundtracks, seeing video game artwork from different studios and artists. That aspect of video game culture is still around me and I think that me personally, as a player, I would love to keep playing because I think it's a valid form of entertainment, and it's definitely... I mean, there was this whole thing back a few years ago that Roger Ebert made this thing that "Video games are not art" and then people jumped all over him in this whole thing, and I think that mostly went away. It's just that for me personally I do believe it's an art form because there's just so much creativity and so much passion that goes into it, and it just influences people in these really wonderful ways that you could never imagine. I look at it not just as a form of entertainment but also as a form of art and I love to see that and be influenced by that and see how people continue to move it forward.

S: So, is there a specific game you kept with you for the past 20 years that you just don't see yourself getting bored of?

D: Fighting games. If there's any genre of game I would give even a little bit of leeway to, it's fighting games. Of course you've got Street Fighter, Mortal Kombat, you've got KoF, King of Fighters, you've got Samurai Shodown; you've got all these wonderful games, and then you've got licensed ones: Injustice, and there was a Ninja Turtles game back in the day that I loved. Something about fighting games is just a terrific genre and I don't ever see myself--I might give up other kinds of games, but that'll be the last one I ever give up.

Z: I mean, you've played a ton of games.

D: I have.

Z: Were there ones that you started to play and you went, "No. I just don't like this game", and do you know maybe why that would have been?

D: I think when I first saw my friends playing games, roleplaying games, like Final Fantasy... Watching it is a very boring experience. Unless you're the one playing it, you're not the one gaining anything. So of course, when I would watch I was like, "Ugh, this is boring. I'll never play an RPG". And then, down the line, I was given the opportunity to try different RPGs, and then I was like, "Wow, these are actually pretty cool". They have great art design, and in some cases you have really great stories. Two RPGs that have really stuck with me through time have been Final Fantasy IV and Chrono Trigger. And those two games have been two of the most amazing experiences. To this day, those are the ones that I feel like... You know you have all these (?) and there've been sequel after sequel with better, improved graphics and mechanics, but I still just love Chrono Trigger and Final Fantasy IV. Those are the ones that just made such a deep impression on me. And like I said before, I like seeing different types of games. I'll give them a shot. If they don't click with me, that's fine. But I always love to

give them a shot. There's probably not a game out there that I genuinely can say I dislike or hate, unless I'm playing and get frustrated with something like that, but yeah, there's not a game out there I can honestly say I can hate.

S: So it's the intensity aspect of it that makes you want to stick with it. A fighting game would be so much more intense than the roleplaying and that's maybe what keeps you [interested].

D: It's just different aspects of each different kind of game that keep you engaged. For fighting games, it's that competitive, fighting setup. For RPGs it's story and the music is amazing, and then for an adventure game it's like these crazy mechanics or this crazy art design. So it's just, every game has just got to have some sort of hook. If it hooks you then it's got your attention for a good while.

S: So do you still travel to tournaments or like (inaudible) "You know what, this is happening, I'm gonna go"?

D: Absolutely. Smaller tournaments that are held at those Emporium Arcades. Actually, this coming Sunday, they're gonna have a WcW vs. NwO arcade tournament for Nintendo 64. I don't know if you guys ever played that way back in the day, but it was a wrestling game and it was a lot of fun because you could plug four controllers in and it was 2 on 2 or 4 on 4, whatever you wanted to do, and if you're not going to participate, it's still fun to just go and watch and see these guys play. I still love traveling to conventions where they have impromptu tournaments. Actually, Chicago is a qualifier for the Evo tournament in July. They're not sure if they're going to have it next year, but fingers crossed that they do. Yeah, it's just a great thing to see, to bring people out from different backgrounds and different cultures and see how they interact and how they... This is the game that brings them together and to see how they play and how they approach it is a really cool thing.

S: But, do you (inaudible), would you say that you were more like "I have to go" or now it's still the same?

D: Well, when I was younger it was weird because it took me a little longer to learn how to play a fighting... I was actually really terrible at fighting games for the longest time. And then, you know, over the course of time, just having those skills build up, well, I consider myself halfway decent now. Back then I didn't have a car, so if it was too far to go by bike I couldn't go. But now that I have mobility I can go wherever I want, it's... I would love to go and see... I still haven't gone to an Evo yet, but I would really love to see an Evo tournament.

S: So, I mean obviously different games require different skill sets, but do you think that for example, if you took a player that's like 20 years ago and say "Come and play this new game right now", do you think they'd require the same skill set, or do you think the skill set had to change over time in (?) or something like that

D: I think the baseline skills to be a good gamer: having good hand-eye coordination and reflexes and being able to see mechanics as they play out on the screen, I think those kind of skills are inherent in any good gamer. For something like a fighting game, they've remained largely the same. There's, you know, like, Street Fighter basically just came forward and put down this, instituted this kind of system, and everyone just kind of copied that template. You have the

quarter-circle forward with the punch and Dragon Punch motion and everyone sticks to that, and that makes it easier for some people to just jump in and kind of be able to play that.

S: So, do you think [games have made an impact on you]?

D: Absolutely. Like just in every aspect of... Like I mentioned before that when you play a game it's not just the actual playing it but the music, the artwork. Friends of mine have original artwork from the game, they play the music on their stereos. It's impacted them and followed them through the course of their lives. I can say a good chunk of the friends that I've met in the later half of my life from New York and San Francisco I would not have met without that common ground of video games. I was temporarily a freelance video game reviewer for a publication in San Francisco and I made a lot of my industry context through being out there and meeting them and having this common love of games and video games all coming together like that.

S: Is that just one part of your career that has been impacted, or do you think that even your career choice could pass?

D: Yeah, you could definitely say that. As a freelance writer, there's other things I write about. Video games is a huge part of e-culture right now along with certain television shows and movies. And so you have that aspect and it all kind of crosses over and bleeds over and has cross appeal. So when you see a movie about a video game or comic book and then a comic book about a video game and it goes back and forth. So for me personally, somebody who still reads comic books and watches shows like The Flash or sees movies like Guardians of the Galaxy, it all stems forth and it's all cross-pollinating between the things that came before and breaking new ground for the future. And so you have this whole cross-pollination of ideas and a lot of that stems from video games.

S: Do you have any hobbies or interests besides video games, or does it just take up a lot of your time?

D: Yeah, actually, I've got a ton of different hobbies. I love reading all different kinds of books. One of my favorite genre of books is autobiographies, learning about the real life stories of people, because sometimes the truth is stranger than anything you can make up. I love watching movies. Cinema's been a big part of my life recently, just seeing a lot of different kinds of movies in recent history. I love to swim, I love to play basketball; I love watching basketball. What else. I love writing as well. I'm a huge collector of toys and action figures, like vintage toys and action figures. Yeah, so a lot of different interests outside of video games.

S: What do you study? What was your major in college?

D: When I was an undergrad I was studying biology, with a particular focus in biochemistry, and then I thought I was gonna go into Healthcare, but some point during my junior year I was like "I don't think I wanna do this anymore", and so I just started studying different things. Studied anthropology, psychology, just to get a different feel for what's out there. Took some freelance journalism classes, classes about social media and marketing, things like that. So those are the kind of things that I definitely have more of a focus and passion for than science. I still love science, I love learning about science and technology and reading about all that stuff. I also love telling people about it. I love making it relatable and bringing it forth to other people as well.

S: Did you ever see yourself become like a game [developer] -- because this is what a lot of people dream for really pro gamers, "I wanna become a game developer". Did you ever have that kind of thought, or was it just "I'm just gonna play the game"?

D: Kind of. Just in flights of fancy. Another aspect of gaming that has really taken off is mobile gaming. And you know, a lot of people are making it big by making apps or cute little games that become viral and just take off. I think it would be cool just to learn that skill set and see what goes into it, and to learn the ins and outs of it. At the same time, I have friends that were part of the video game journalism business that crossed over to the development side. And just hearing private conversations about not meeting deadlines, and stressing out, and having to stay over, and when a game doesn't sell a certain amount of copies and people flip out. It's just a really stressful environment to be part of and of course that's part of the creative process and I respect them for going through that. I just don't know if I would particularly want to be a part of that.

S: Do you play any mobile games?

D: A few, not too many. I just got a smartphone last year. This is my first smartphone. Just kind of messing around with it. I have never played a single game of Angry Birds, never played a single game of...

S: Flappy Bird?

D: Yeah. Any of that. But as a platform, you can't deny it. It's the easiest way to get gaming into somebody's hands because it's like "Oh, I have this smartphone and I have it for internet and everything else. Oh, I can download a game for free or for like a dollar, I'll give it a shot", and that's a good way to get gaming into their hands and keep that gaming-in kind of... People consciously thinking about it.

S: Is it very, very different from a classic arcade, or do you think it's a lot easier, or harder, or the same?

D: It's just a different platform. Because what you have to do is, for any good game, you have to know what platform you're on and be able to play to its strengths, because you don't actually have buttons and a joystick on a smartphone, so you've gotta take advantage of the limited screen space you have and just use the mechanics for it. There have been a few really good games on mobile platform that have made significant impact and can be considered world-class games. These are actually really valid, fully developed, and fully matured games. So yeah, I would never look down on, you know, "Because it's on a mobile platform it's terrible"; a good game is a good game. Just being able to take advantage of the platform and limitations and the abilities of whatever platform you're on.

Z: Some of the games that you currently hold records in I haven't heard of. What are these, the publishers? Are they Capcom, or?

D: Yeah, most of them are Capcom. The X-Men game is a Capcom game, Capcom vs. SNK 2 was a cooperative project between Capcom and SNK. Samurai Shodown is a fighting game series published by SNK. I don't know if you know this, but SNK was responsible for the Neo-Geo home console back in the day. It was this massive beast. It was basically an arcade cabinet condensed down into a console, and it had this ridiculous \$600 price tag and the games were \$200, so basically you were shoving a gigantic arcade board into this console and getting the game. So you're getting the actual arcade experience, but you're paying at least \$800 to play this ridiculous thing. The other game I mentioned, Ninja Baseball Batman, that's from a Japanese company called IREM, I-R-E-M. And I don't know if they're still in business, if they're still publishing, but yeah, so a lot of these games are from those old-school developers and publishers.

S: So from your world record, which one has the most rush or excitement? Is it the first one, the most recent one?

D: Just because I've been going back and forth with that friend of mine these past three years, it's definitely Capcom vs. SNK 2 because we're the ones constantly pushing that high score higher and higher. It's always fun to see people try to take your score. They just want to learn how to play it, and it makes that competitive nature just a lot more fun and makes it that more exciting when they come in and say "I'm gonna take your score today!" and it's just kind of fun to have that competitive nature.

S: Was the first record expected, or was it like "Wow"?

D: Well, when I looked at the score, I was like "I can do that," and so I put down... and so I sat down at the machine and just started playing and I was like "Ugh, I messed up. Ugh, I messed up. Ugh I messed up." And then the fourth try I was like "Yes! I got it, I got it," and then there was a really great feeling. And that score didn't stand for another 6 months. 6 months later my friend took it back and I was like, "Aw man, I gotta come back in and I gotta do it again", and so we'd just go back and forth like that and it was a really great thing.

S: So, [is there fear] that someone's gonna take your game?

D: Yeah! Of course, definitely. Because sometimes when a score sits for a long time, and then somebody takes it, it's like "Aw man, somebody took it, I never thought anyone was gonna take it. Man, I gotta get back in shape, I gotta train again, I gotta remember the mechanics and the timing and everything". And it kind of keeps those competitive fires going. With my friends, one of the things my college friends and my high school friends that I can only play online with, that was one of the great things that keeps the friendship alive. We always had something to talk about. "Aw man, those last two matches I could've taken you if I didn't mess up!" and it's, that competitive nature keeps it fresh and exciting.

S: What kind of advice would you give someone who wants to become a competitive gamer?

D: What kind of advice would I give them? Well, like with anything that you want to take up, it's frustrating when you're not good at it right away. I would probably say the simple things like, "Just keep at it". Because no one was ever born good at anything, so you just gotta keep trying and keep practicing. For specifically fighting games, I would definitely recommend

reading The Art of War by Sun Tzu.

S: Oh, wow.

D: I know that sounds ridiculous, but it's kind of that idea of strategizing and being able to... you know, this entire philosophy that doesn't just apply to video games, but to life, and moving forward in life. So yeah, The Art of War is a great thing. Maybe start watching competitive poker playing and see how opponents try to psyche each other out. Because as much as a video game is about your physical skills, in a competitive video game it's also about playing your opponent. Being able to control the situation, being in control at all times.

That's the most important thing about being, not just in video games, but in life and in sports and in anything, is being in control of your situation and what you can do and then let everyone outside of that sphere to just kind of take its course. Because the only thing you can control is you and your skill set, and everything else you just kind of let happen.

S: Is managing your emotions part of it, or do you think that that's an okay skill?

D: That's part of it. Like, some people, they're fueled off their passion and they get excited and they get pumped and they get rowdy and loud at some guys. They just keep it all inside-- they're a quiet storm--and they're in control of their emotions until they have the victory and then they let it all out. So it will just play to your personality, I think. I think it's just to have an idea of "Well, this is my personality, I'm going to let it show". It's like being able to utilize your personality and skills to the best of your advantage and then try to just go with the flow with that.

S: So, do you think that aggressive player versus a quiet player, which one of them are usually better, or is it a mix?

D: It's a mix, because sometimes the loudmouth big-talker sometimes, he's the one that doesn't have any skills at all and the quiet little guy that comes in is the world champ. You'll never know until you actually get in front of the machine and start playing. And that's like the great equalizer. You've got the big tough guy and the little small guy and on screen, this player is the one that has the advantage, that pulls all the strings. I think it's just a great, Brimwhixer.

S: I understand that in poker you kind of have to be, I'm just guessing, you have to be able to be more poker faced, and calm.

D: Sometimes you can use that to your advantage. Some people think that if you look at a player long enough, you'll see their tells. Well, if they know they're giving a tell, they can do that and psyche out their opponent and be able to trap them and be able to take them for all their money. I think the idea of being able to-- Seeing your opponent and then sizing him up and then-- It's basically point, counterpoint. It's like a chess match. Just being able to think a few moves in advance and seeing how they're going to react and how you're going to react and then just going back and forth to see who's going to outlast the other person.

Z: So on the topic of difficulty, do you think there's a positive correlation between how difficult something is and how fun it is?

D: Yeah. I think at some point it's-- The classic example that everyone used to think about is-- I don't know if you guys have heard of the game called Ghost and Goblins. It's the most ridiculous arcade game ever. Because not only do you have to go through the game, which progressively gets harder and harder and harder. When you reach the end of the game they tell you "Oh, no, this is not the true ending". You have to go back all the way to the beginning of the first stage and do this game completely over again, and fight the final boss again, and if you beat him that time, then you get the real ending, and it's just like "Oh my god, this is like the most impossible game, and you're asking me to do it twice?" It's like the most ridiculous thing. So a game like that, some people will stick with it and they see the difficulty like "I know that I have to do it twice, I know that it's going to be this long, it's gonna be this hard", and they're fine with it. And then you get games that just have broken mechanics or sloppy graphics, these things. It's just a broken game. You're basically--It's like trying to run a race when you have one broken leg, when you have broken mechanics like that. And people who can muscle through it and beat the game like that, that's an impressive set of perseverance and skill too. It's all a matter of the difficulty whether it's because the game is

inherently challenging, or if it's just cheap and unfair, and sometimes you get a mix of both. And so, it really just kind of depends.

S: For the challenge aspect of it, do you think that the popularity of ticket-redemption or the high score, what motivates you?

D: For me personally, I think it's just being able to put your name out there and say you're the best at something. I think that's a really huge motivating factor. A game that you know that a lot of people are playing and that gets a lot of recognition, when you set an impressive standard on that, then of course that's going to keep you pretty excited and pumped. And when you have a smaller game that nobody has even heard of and nobody ever plays, and you have a world record on it, it's not going to feel as satisfying as exciting because no one's paying attention to it. That idea of it.

S: If you have to choose a game that represents the coin-op industry, the coin-op world, what game would you [tell them]?

D: I hate to say it, but probably Street Fighter. It's weird because... This'll seem weird to you guys, but at the time Street Fighter was more than just a game. When it landed, everyone was just blown away. And it was just like, "What is this game?" And this was before the Internet and before anyone could spread the word around, it just caught word of mouth and everyone was talking about it. Street Fighter is one of those games that's not only endured but basically, it's thrived through the passage of time. People who grew up playing it as kids are now these pro-level tournament players now, and they're keeping the name up there. They're keeping it in the social consciousness of people, of video gamers. And, you know, Street Fighter has permeated to other things. You have video games, you got toys, you got movies, you got... It's music and everything is out there. In terms of the coin op industry, I think that's one of the biggest ones. I honestly can't think of another one that would... No, I can't. I really can't.

S: So how it relates to that, if you think that the coin op industry has to survive in the long run, what do you think their challenges are? What do you think their strengths are?

D: Well, as an industry, basically in this country, video games are pretty much dead. The only (?) video games that you really see coming out and being mass produced are those big light gun games that you see at Dave and Busters or Gameworks. I mean, there's nothing wrong with those games, they're still fun, but there's something to be said about those smaller coin-op cabinets that only cost a quarter to play and you didn't have to swipe a card or anything like that. One aspect that a friend told me was that there's still a great deal of creativity and innovation that can be found in arcade cabinets and--not just arcade cabinets, but those big machines that you ride in, or that have sound effects and music and flashing lights and all this crazy stuff. I don't ever think it'll go away completely, I think it'll just continue to be dictated by what people continue to play and what not, and then you'll still have certain companies and certain publishers that will make crazy machines for amusement parks or for those redemption kind of arcades like Dave and Busters and Gameworks. So you'll have basically the old cabinets that are still being maintained by a small population, and you'll still have the big machines over here, and you'll just be able to see it going back and forth, I think.

S: Do you set, like, mini-tournaments with your friends; you guys are competing with each other-- Do you ever see yourself doing that, and set up a tournament, or is that kind of a hassle?

D: That's something, It kind of is a hassle-- When UFGT was the Evo qualifier here in Chicago and-- the one that was here just this past April, no past March, that was my first one attending in person. And the amount of manpower and the amount of time and dedication that goes into it is just, it's so overwhelming. I definitely appreciate what Adam, he was the one running it, I definitely appreciate what he did, running it, and making sure it ran smoothly, and everything, but I don't think I could do something like that on my own. But I think it's just more fun when you get with your friends and you talk trash and sometimes they wanna make bets like, "Hey if I win this match you have to take a shot" or "You have to buy me dinner" or something stupid like that.

S: What is your view on joysticks versus handle games, ones with gun pieces?

D: Oh, I mean, they both have their fans and their detractors. Light gun games, I think those are still a lot of fun. One of the light gun games I loved as a kid a lot was Alien 3. That was a really fun one. And recently, there was one based off of the Terminator movie series; that was a lot of fun too. Those kind of games are a lot of fun to play, and as opposed to something that you control, like a character on-screen, it's a different aspect of the game, and they're both fun to play for different reasons.

S: And your favorite, is it joysticks, or is it a mouse like on computers, or-- Which one is your favorite?

D: It depends on the game.

S: (repeating) Depends on the game.

D: A Real-Time Strategy, the only real way to play that was mouse and keyboard, and for light gun games the best way is to have an actual gun, and for Street Fighter you obviously want to play joystick and buttons. It really just depends on the game and the platform it's on.

S: What do you think about arcade equipment? Do you think it was a really cool invention?

Racing simulators, special mission cabinets, what are your views on those?

D: Oh, those are terrific. There's so much innovation and creativity you can find there [in the arcade]. One of the games I recently discovered-- Did you guys ever hear of the game series called F-Zero?

Z: (nods)

D: Yeah, did you know that there's an F-Zero arcade machine?

Z: Mm, no.

D: (laughing) Yeah, there's an F-Zero arcade machine. It was a project between Nintendo, Sega, and Namco, and basically Nintendo handled all the programming, and Sega and Namco basically put up the hardware, and so basically it's this giant harness that you're actually able to sit in, and there's a seatbelt and everything. And you're actually able to drive and control the different cars and everything and it is a really cool experience playing. You could never replicate this on a home system, and that's part of the experience you get at an arcade. I think those kind of games are really amazing and really fun to have.

S: What do you think about the Oculus Rift system? Do you think that would really, really improve your (inaudible)?

D: Well, 3D as a medium is one of those tricky things because-- In movie theaters, I'm not a fan of 3D movies because they haven't perfected the technology yet. When they reach a point where you're able to have a 3D movie without having glasses or any kind of outside equipment, then I think 3D's really going to take off. In terms of Oculus, that whole immersion kind of thing, I think that's an important step to take between improving and perfecting the technology. A few years ago we were thinking to ourselves, "There's never going to be motion gaming". Well, then the Wii came out. And we have the Kinect now, and Playstation Move, and it hasn't been a perfect system, it hasn't been perfected. But these small steps that they need to take and they have to make mistakes and say, "Ok, well in the next time, we know not to do that. We know to make this better." And so technology like Oculus, I think it's going to be really amazing. At some point my friend was saying, "At some point you are actually going to be a character in the video game". Like, Star Trek. The whole idea of the Holodeck, and being able to-- Full immersion. And that's a really great-- I think we're still a few years off from that, but Oculus I think is a step in the right direction.

S: Sorry, what was--

Z: We are at an hour and ten.

S: (to Zack) Do you have any--

Z: So, were there professional players when you started out? When you first picked up--

D: Street Fighter? Yeah, um--

Z: Was there someone you could look up to? Or were they not really--

D: Well at that time, arcades were sort of a sketchy kind of place where it was really dark inside and you could smoke inside and it was all these terrible things, and basically you'd meet some shady guy playing Street Fighter and he'd be like, "Hey. If you give me a dollar, I'll

teach you how to throw a fireball” or something like that. It was kind of how it worked. So at that aspect, we didn’t have tournaments. We didn’t have organized-- We didn’t have a community where we all rallied together and got organized and we moved the medium forward, we were basically just playing this game and just figuring it out as we went along. Man, if there was professional gaming back then, I think that would have just blown my mind. “I can make a career out of this?! Amazing!” But, at the time, we didn’t have-- It wasn’t until I moved away slightly from video games and was more focused on school and socializing and making new friends and stuff like that-- And when I got back into college, it was like “Oh, somebody brought this video game system, this one’s got Street Fighter, let’s play it”, and that kind of just rekindled it all over again.

S: So, what currently do you own right now? Maybe not just consoles, but--

D: Currently, right now, I own a PS3, a Nintendo DS--Nintendo 3DS. Right now, just kind of playing around with Tomodachi Life a little bit--I picked that up just for fun. And for PS3, just kind of playing Street Fighter with my friends, keeping-- staying with my friends, playing online with them and what not. And a lot of my time when I go gaming is to actual arcades like the one out in Brookfield, so that’s where a lot of my gaming time is going to.

S: Do those pro plays actually own an arcade part or do you think that’s not (inaudible) own that at home?

D: Oh, to have cabinets at home?

S: Yeah, I don’t think it’s realistic now, but maybe before, back then--

D: Well, you know, if you had an arcade cabinet in your house, like in your bedroom or something, like “Oh my god, he’s so rich” and all this crazy stuff. As we’ve gotten older and gotten more nostalgia for those kind of times-- I have friends now that tell me “Oh, I’ve just bought a Donkey Kong cabinet. It’s in my living room”, got stuff like that--

Z: (interrupting) So, we actually need to get going. There’s another-- somebody has a reservation, so if there’s anything last minute we didn’t ask?

D: No. I mean, I’m fine, like if you guys have anything last minute you wanna ask me before we have to-- Or did you want to reschedule for more time? Is this good enough?

Z: Uh, well, we might have to...

D: Oh, that’s right, it’s due tomorrow.

Z: I mean, we have an hour and ten minutes of material. That’s...

D: Alright. Whatever you need to do.

S: Cool. Well, thank you so much.

Z: Thank you very much.

D: Yeah. No problem.