

David L. Bishop
Executive VP of Namco USA – Schaumburg, Illinois

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Interviewer: Parnell Tesoro, Colt Scroggins

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00:00

Colt Scroggins [CS]: My name is Colt Scroggins, audio equipment, Humanities 380: History of Video Games. Today we are interviewing Mr. David Bishop, executive president of Namco USA, and interviewing him is Parnell Tesoro. Date is October 1st, today is Thursday, and time is 4:46 PM.

Parnell Tesoro[PT]: So the first question is: what is your dream job as a kid?

David L. Bishop[DB]: As a kid, I'm pretty sure I wanted to be an astronaut, or a scientist, I'm not exactly sure which one. I went to school for engineering, so I was going to be at first an aerospace engineer because I thought it was the coolest in the world to build spaceships, and in my freshman year I figured out really quick that it was really just a glorified mechanical engineering, and how much it being deflected, you know, with a load of at the end, really isn't that exciting. So I discovered video games, and then I got into electrical engineering and fell in love with the game business, and that's how I ended up here.

[PT]: So how's your first experience with a coin-op or a video game?

[DB]: First experience? So when I was like in high school, we didn't have that many video games, it was really all about pinballs, so it was late 70s. So video games were just starting to come out there and starting to hit. Most video games were monochrome monitors, pretty basic, you know, the Pong's style stuff, but everybody plays pinballs. So I probably started playing pinballs around the mid-70s, which is really just exercise and physics, and had a lot of fun and spend a lot of time with that, and it wasn't, I didn't discover video games until probably late 70s, 78 or 79, probably 79, when games just really first started becoming a lot more common, and they really exploded around 79-80. By 81 they were everywhere, but it started with pinball and gradually kind of move into video games because that was something really new and cool.

[PT]: So, like, what was your first video game?

[DB]: First video game? Wo, wow. The first one I remember, I mean there was a lot of game floating around back in the late 70s, by 79 I remember there was a number out there. I think the first one I remember playing was when I was still in high school, or maybe I just graduated or [inaudible] in high school, was the game called Starfire. That was actually really cool because it has what is called a monitor, which is actually a big deal, and actually the game was a big cabinet you sat in, and had a little tiny color TV in there for a monitor, and when Starfire came out what, around 1978, 78-79. So it was right around the time Star Wars came out, and it kind of emulated a Star War star fighting game. It was really a cool game, it was created by a company in California called Exidy, but that was the first game I really fell in love with and said "Oh my God! This is really the coolest thing ever to play these, these interactive movies.

So that when I started up. Up until that time, it was black and white things like Gun Fighter, and, you know, Sub Destroyers, and tank games, and things are really basic stuff, but that was the one that kind of got me excited about games. Probably 79, 78-79.

[PT]: So in high school, I mean during college, you said you wanted to be an engineer?

[DB]: Yeah, during college, I started out I really wanted to be an engineer, I mean that was really what I wanted to do, and I was pretty sure I was going to be an Aerospace Engineer. Like I said, at that time, so I was working for Chick-fil-A. Back in the old days, Chick-fil-A, when Chick-fil-A was still relatively new. And that was a great job. If you want to work fast food, like that was the place to work, because it's a great eat-all-you-want, they only open 6 days a week and they were really good people. Chick-fil-A did a wonderful job with their employees and team members. So I loved - I worked for Chick-fil-A 2 to 3 years while going to school. Then, you know, arcades were starting to pop up all over the places, so in the streets, and shopping malls, and one of my buddies in high school, one of my best friends in high school got a job in an arcade in ... which is where we all grew up, and it was like that coolest job ever: didn't have to clean up the fire, you didn't have to do ... it was all about walking around and giving out change, and you got to play any game you want, which was like "Oh my God, this is awesome"

So he went to work for a company, a company names Barrel Fun, based on Atlanta. They started, they were starting, they only had like, when I joined, when I applied for the company they only had like 10 stores open, that was it. And it just sounds like a great job, so I applied for the job, and a few months later I got hired at ... ,Alabama when I was going to school, and I fell in love with games at that point because in 1981, working in an arcade, you are like a god: everyone in the mall wants to be your friend, you got the key to all games, you got to play what you wanted and everybody wanted to know you, so it was really cool, and so that's how I fell in love with games, and I changed my major to Electrical Engineering, because I wanted to program games and wanted to build games, and it all came down to the game called Defender. You guys know Defender?

Awesome game made by, designed by a guy names Eugene Jarvis who lives in Chicago. Really terrific guy, terrific game. I played it nonstop. I played it so much I got blisters on my hands. I actually bought, as geeky as it sounds today, that was like 1981-1982, I actually bought a glove. They were selling video game gloves at that point with fingers cut out, they were like golf gloves, with fingers' off, but because my hands were rubbing up and down the control panel all the time with the joystick, I was having blisters on my hands. So actually I had a glove, play it nonstop, and that was the game that really made me want to get into the game business, and it was amazing. And so I wanted to design games and build games, and then one thing leads to another, I ended up working for more on the business side than the design side, but it's a living, it's fun.

[PT]: So what you said is the particular reason you guys got into the business?

[DB]: Oh Yeah, Yeah. I was absolutely, the reason I was absolutely, I love playing games. I played games nonstop in those days. We weren't working; we were still in the arcades. So

every 80s movies you've seen about what it was like to be high school and college [inaudible] in the 1980s it was true. [inaudible] I mean they were all just wacky, we all hung out with them all. You go to school [inaudible] day, so when school's over we head to the mall, we hang out in the food court, maybe go to the movies but most of the time we hang out in the arcade, get to know all your friends, show off, play games and, I probably spend most of my waking hours if I wasn't in school I was probably in the arcade working or actually just hanging out playing games. And that's how it started and I just, I fell in love with the business, I wanted to be in the business from that point forward and I have been. Ever since, I have been in the game business. I got lucky; I was in the right place for the right time.

[PT]: Yeah. So what was like, your favorite experience working as like, in the arcade?

[DB]: Oh my gosh! Most of them I can't repeat. It was so amazing once I wanted to put on tape. But it was great, I mean, in those days, I mean, it was literally. So I am, you know, we were working in the arcade part time, but we're, they were smaller, 2000 square foot arcade. We have 40, 50, 60 video games in there. Now when I started it was half pinball and half video, but eventually, video quickly started pushing the pinballs out. I still love pinballs till this day, and I think they are fabulous pieces of, a nice pinball is a terrific piece of equipment. But it got so busy, I mean like a Friday or Saturday night trying to walking from the back of the store to the front of the store, which is one fifth, not even one fifth, it's 20% of the size of this [inaudible] today, it's very, very small, it would take 20 minutes to walk from the front of the store to the back of the store because you get stopped every 3 feet: somebody needs change, somebody needs help with the game and it was just so amazing everybody in town was at the arcade on Friday night and Saturday night. So you made lots of friends, got to know lots of people and it was just a lot of fun. I mean, It was just, it was a glorious time, it really was. I can't even, I look back and I'm like "Oh my god, it was so much fun. It's terrific." I can't even explain to you all the cool stuff that happened at that point. Made a lot of friends, you know. A really interesting time.

[PT]: Do you still keep up with the friends?

[DB]: Uh, some of them. I mean, some of the ones that we stayed, you know, some of them worked together for the company. I've known some people in this business for decades, you know, so I've a couple of guys I work with for, you know, for 30 years, and you know, they kind of started the same way I did, and we're so in love with game, it was so cool we just want to be a part of it, and we all stayed together, you know, working forever. So yeah, missed a few, I mean let's face it, most people you don't stay in contact with, but there's a few that we hung out a long time, so to this day, I still talk to and some people I haven't worked with in more than 10 years we still talk with so well and Facebook really help with that, things like Facebook, and you know, we're still friends. I'm friends with guys on Facebook that we haven't seen each other for probably 20 years, but we worked together, for a really, you know, important part of our lives earlier on and we stay in touch ever since.

09:11

[PT]: So, working in the arcades, how did you end up working for Namco?

[DB]: Well, ok. So, back in those days, you know, arcades were popping up everywhere, and there's a lot of little mini pop-arcades popping up, and then the chains started coming up, and you have a few major chains that were starting to pop arcades all over the place. And so I was working for a brand new chain called Barrel O'Fun, and like I said, they only had like 10 stores when I started with for the company, and, but there were starting to popular, but really South East of United States mall type stuff, and there were a lot of much larger players out there. So we started, you know, we were growing, we were opening new locations, and in the early 80s, new arcades were popping up every week, I mean there really are new arcades popping up everywhere. And so we started growing, and then the bottom [inaudible] of the industry, probably around 1982-3, somewhere around that, it suddenly was like went up like a rocket. 81 was just incredible. 82, late, by late 82 it started going down the other side, and by the end of 82, the business was just kind of collapsed, the coin-op business. So everyone had to retrench, kind of redo, rebuild themselves, and video games business went to heck, and there's a lot of a reasons, it's a really complex subject, but a lot of it was the, you know, video games were fed to a large degree, but, they were more than that, but at that time, they were just so popular they became such a large part of pop culture that it wasn't sustainable the way they were, the way people were all over it and then needed to kind of reset, and it did. It did for a lot of different reasons.

So what happened was, everybody kind of retrenched to the arcades and then we had to learn to do something besides just the fed video games, and we struggled with that for a couple of years and then we got into ticket redemption. You know - we discovered - you know - skee ball machines, we fill out tickets and we get lower prices and we discovered crane games. We put in one single crane into a video game arcade and suddenly the arcade revenue is doubled, and half of the revenue just came out of this crane machine because people have seen them on Jersey Shore or in carnivals but no one has ever seen one in a shopping mall before, so the business exploded again.

And at that time, Namco owned Atari Games, half of it. They owned about – I think 51% - 50%, roughly, whatever it was of Atari Games Corporation, and Namco started pushing Atari to get back into the operating business. Namco was founded as an operating company. They were literally -- our company was founded in 1955 in Tokyo, Japan [inaudible] on the roof of Tokyo Department Store. And it was always an operating company first, and then we started designing games and building games. But back in those days Namco wanted Atari to start owning arcades and owning lots of locations again, and so Atari started looking for companies to buy, and long story short, they ended up talking to our company based on Atlanta, Georgia and our deal was done.

And so my company Barrel O'Fun became Atari Operations Inc., and went over to Atari. And then they moved me to California from Atlanta, which is a massive cultural shock, I can't even describe that one to you. Moving to California after living in Georgia and Alabama was a really different experience. Loved California, but – incredible experience, I mean just the cost was staggering. If I've been smarter, or little older, or little bit wiser or – I never would have done it, because it was insane, I mean the cost difference was huge, I was just – I was so

excited to go to work Atari. “My god, I’m going to work for Atari” I would have done anything at that point. When I got out there – literally [inaudible], they flew us out there, we’re going to look for a place to live, my wife cried the entire first night. It was like “Oh my god, we even afford a shoe box here”. But it didn’t matter. So we went to work for Atari, and that lasted about 3 years, and long story short, Namco and Atari kind of went separate ways, and Namco sold all their stocks in Atari back to Warner, and we established Namco operations, so I stayed with Namco. That was 1990, and I’ve been with Namco ever since.

So we started building Namco up at that point, but that point, when I – Namco literally they only have an office here in the US, and I think it was Mountain View, California. There was one guy that did licensing, and he licensed every game to Atari. So, yeah, and he [inaudible] 2 female assistants. It was kind of cool, but there was nothing there, so we kind of -- we took Atari Operations, made it Namco Operations, started doing everything from a Namco perspective on our arcade and our game business and initialized game manufacturing, because up until that point all Namco were being done by Atari, and afore Atari they were by Bally/Midway here in Chicago, So like when Pac Man and Galaga, Galaxian were being built, they were Namco games but they were licensed to Bally/Midway. And then when they bought Atari from the mid 80s to 1990, everything was done by Atari Games in the US; it wasn’t Namco. And then after about 1991, we started releasing under our own name, so it became Namco at that point.

[PT]: So, when you move from Alabama, what did you do in Atari?

[DB]: Whatever they needed done [laugh]. So at that point, we had – Gosh, I wanted to say we had about – We weren’t really big. We had maybe, you know, I don’t know, 25 mall arcades, you know, not real big. 25 – 30, I have to go back and look, I don’t remember the exact number, but -- So I was a -- There were me and another guy that were kind of primarily running the arcade chain, and I move to California and he stayed in Atlanta, and we kind of split the country in two, and we didn’t have really much of west of the Mississippi anyway, so I moved into California and we started building stuff on the west coast, so we started building things west of the Mississippi. And -- so what I did at that point was setting up the new business in the western half of the US, and building arcades and building -- you know, hanging out and designing and building arcades and putting them together in malls, and you know, it was what you think of, I mean it was literally -- they were 2 or 3 thousand square foot arcade full of games.

[PT]: So, was the coin-op industry different from California than where you are from or it was just kind of similar?

[DB]: I certainly perceived it is different, you know, I - part of that could have been, you know, when I live in Georgia, I was working for a small independent arcade company, and when I moved to California, I was part of Atari Games, I mean – so it was like – it was a very different perspective because Atari Games, back in, you know, mid 80s, I mean, they were one of the dominant manufacturers. Certainly from video game stand point, you can argue that Atari Games was, you know, one of the people that really made video games work in America.

Today, I'm biased, I mean I would say Namco really made Atari Games, I mean video games work and if you think back about Pac Man, really established game genre, but even in the early days, the early video games, all those early Bally/Midway games that were earlier popular, a lot of them were Namco titles, you know, like Galaga and the Galaxian, and the Mappy and -- I mean all these beautiful titles from the early days.

So Namco [inaudible] -- so going from a small arcade company to work at Atari Games, it was -- yeah -- it was really different perspective. I mean I got to be involved with the manufacturers, with the R&D team, it was fun. So I got to -- I got to see that guy who was developing the [inaudible] we all work in the same building, so it was a lot of fun, and we go to see the new games in development. I got to talk about it, got to give my opinions as little as it was worth about what we needed in the arcades but you know -- and that was a different day, and game development in those days was really all about coin-op, it was really all about the arcades. So consumer games, you know, that we were still kind of looking [inaudible] at consumer level at that point, you know, the [inaudible] had kind of come and gone, or actually Atari. I should go back and say the Atari 2600 and the 5200, the old Atari home games that were there and they kind of went away, and we really --

We kind of like "Well, consumer games, home games can never do what we do in the coin-op arcade", and we always had something bigger, faster, more immersive in the arcade. We were really, really smart, looking forward enough, but, because you can do great stuff at home now, but, yeah --

It was a little bit different animal, so everything in the games business revolved around the arcades and revolved around coin-op, being at Atari was -- it was like a dream come true, you know, I was still a young guy and I got to be at Atari Games, and it was like the heart of the game business, video games business anyway, at that point.

[PT]: So how did you end up moving from California to Chicago then? How was that different, the coin-op business?

[DB]: So we were in -- Working with Namco has been an amazing experience, and the earlier days in Namco, the founder of the company, Masaya Nakamura, was very involved. He's still around, I mean he's not very involved any more but he's still a major stockholder, but he -- In those days, he was very vital and he was very involved in everything and he really wanted us to grow, and so he was over here on a regular basis from Tokyo and talking us about growing and pushing us to grow the company. And we were growing, we were adding locations, but then opportunities started to come in to do acquisition, so for the first maybe 2 or 3 years we were just doing growth work organically, we're doing leases, and [inaudible] mall leases, and building these arcades and putting them all out there and stocking them up, but that's too slow.

So long story short, there was a company based here in Chicago, called A Land's Castle, which was previously owned by Bally, and then we had an opportunity to purchase A Land's Castle, and we did. We cut a deal and bought the company, and one day my boss looked at me in California and said "One of us is moving to Chicago, and it's not going to be me" [laugh]. I said "OK, I guess I'm going to Chicago", and we did, and it is great.

I mean I've lived in all parts of the country, this is the first time I've ever in a place with snow, I mean I -- you know, in California, we lived in San Jose in the big area, the weather really doesn't change much year around. The only different between winter and summer: summer, all the grasses - it's kind of golden, it's dead, brown; the winter it's green because there is enough water to make it work, but that's really the difference. Otherwise, I -- In San Francisco, you could go out there and wear a coat in August, I mean the temperature is really not that variable. I had a house in San Jose that didn't have air conditioning, didn't need it. One week out of the year, it was hot enough I needed air conditioning. Otherwise, you can just open the window, and it was beautiful. Grew up in Alabama, Georgia, you know, I needed air conditioning most of the year. But either way, never real cold weather until I got here, and when I moved here from California, I was thinking "Oh my gosh! Chicago? I was envisioning this, you know, this tundra and [inaudible] snow on the ground 12 months out of the years, or maybe 9 months out of the year, I just couldn't imagine what it was going to be like, and it's -- I like Chicago, I really come to enjoy it and we moved here in 94, and it's been great, I've been here ever since. This is the longest I've ever stayed in one spot in my entire life. So I've been here since 94, it's been great.

But it was really different again, it was -- financially, you spend just as much money as in California, you just get more for it, you know, you not living as much of a shoe box here in Chicago as you are in California, but I wasn't as much of a cultural shock. It wasn't -- Actually, it was really cool. So, my wife and I, we didn't have kids when we were in California, we just had my daughter right before we moved and it worked out really well because the whole Midwest family [inaudible] is real, I mean it is really different. In California, [inaudible] it's really nice, but you don't really know your neighbors. I mean, I knew a person directly across the street from us, and you've met the people to the sides of us, but they really worked really hard during the week, and in the weekends they scattered, because you can go to the ocean, you can go skiing in the hills, I mean, no one really hangs out in California because they're all doing their own thing, and -- So we're used to that, so it's like "OK. You don't" -- you sort of know who your neighbors are, but that's really it. You don't get really heavily involved in them. And then we moved to Califor[nia] -- moved to Chicago, and like, we were moving in and people were knocking on the door and bringing pies to us, and it was like "Can we play with your daughter?", and I'm like "This is weird. I shouldn't even be meeting for 6 months, much less you guys coming and talking to us," so I -- it was really different, but it was fun. It was really good. It's a great place to raise a family, compared to California. I mean, I like California, but it's not great for family, I don't think -- not as great, I shouldn't have said that. So, that'll make a lot of people in California angry at that statement, but I loved California. Living there, I think it was great, being there with my family earlier on, but raising a child, it's probably better here in Chicago.

22:14

[PT]: I see. So, considering Namco's origin, have you ever been to Japan to, and how was your experience?

[DB]: I love Japan. I love Japan. I love Namco. I mean I – but I – it's - you know, I feel like it's part of me. You know, I've probably been to Japan, I've lost track, I don't know, 30 times. Yeah. So it's – it's interesting. It's very different [inaudible]. When I went to work for this company, I had never had sushi at all. I didn't know what sushi was. I grew up in Alabama, if we had fish, it was catfish, and we fried it, and that was it. There wasn't going to be any hanging out so, I didn't have sushi until I went to work for Atari or Namco, I can't remember which. I think we probably had some, you know, a -- no, I don't think I've ever had any raw fish at Atari. I don't think I have ever had any sushi until the day when we did the changeover in Namco. And so I had to learn a whole new culture. But look, I love Japan, it's fabulous, it's a lot of fun. And in those earlier days particularly, it was a -- it was great, because we would go to Japan, and we would spend a week over there, and we go through the entire R&D department and they would bring out all the guys with -- all the R&D guys. They had hundreds of engineers, and they kind of had all these game ideas and concepts, and, we got to talk about it and have some input of what they are doing, and its - it's a lot of fun. It's a lot of work, and as much fun as it is, I mean that game business is still a business, and it's probably not nearly as much fun as it looks from the outside, but you know, I can't imagine doing anything else. It's been a great experience.

I'm all over that question, not sure if I answered all right or not [laugh].

[PT]: So where in Japan did you like – Tokyo? Or ...

[DB]: Yeah, mostly Tokyo. Most of my trips have been to Tokyo. I've done a few other places, but our headquarter is in the suburbs of Tokyo, so that's of course where my work is most of the time. But it's fun. You guys have ever been?

[PT]: No, hopefully.

[CS]: Planning on it

[DB]: Planning on it?

[CS]: Yeah.

[DB]: It's an amazing culture. It's great. I feel more comfortable in downtown Tokyo than I do in downtown Chicago. Part of that is because I'm just so – I'm probably more familiar with downtown Tokyo than I am with downtown Chicago, but it's really safe. I feel – I've been walking around in downtown Tokyo at 1 o'clock, 2 o'clock in the morning after having a couple of beers too many, and it's incredibly safe. Everyone is very friendly. You know, you just feel good, and it's very easy to navigate. Having a car is the worst thing you can do, you'd learn to use the train. The transit system is awesome, it's an amazing transit system, it's fast and it's – you can sit and watch by when those trains arrive and leave; they're flawless. So it's a pretty amazing place, and see if you can – see it's really easy to navigate. It's really great.

[PT]: [inaudible] some Japanese students?

[DB]: I know enough to get in trouble, so that's about it [laugh]. So I – Earlier on, I tried to, you know, talk and say a few things, and try exercising my skills, and I figured out really quick that's a mistake, because the second they think you might speak a little bit Japanese up to their standard, they just started talking to you in Japanese, and I don't understand a word. I mean you – it may be, you know, word here and here, and I'm like “OK. This - I didn't even say anything anymore.” Even if I understand a couple of words, I don't say anything because it – it's just too hard to carry on conversation. The last thing I wanted to do is to give someone the idea that I may actually understand what they're saying. So, you know -- and I think the Japanese kind of did the same thing unless they are really comfortable with English. I mean, most Japanese understand English relatively well but, you know, a lot of them don't speak it because they are not comfortable with it and they don't want to – they don't want to give you the wrong impression, but yeah. It's actually -- I find it a difficult language because I didn't – I wish I'd learnt it, you know, 20 years ago, I wish I really kind of dug into it and tried to pick it up, but yeah, fun culture for you if you have the chance to go but I love the culture in Japan now.

[PT]: So, how was it like with the coin-op industry in Japan? Is it like, different from here, or is it like ...

[DB]: Yeah, there are differences. I mean it's really kind of funny. You go to Tokyo now and it's still -- they're still much more traditionally focused on the arcades, I – it's – so here, there aren't that many arcades out here anymore, I mean they're really fine. I mean I remember when there used to be one every few blocks there's another arcades. Every mall had at least one arcade. Some malls had 2 arcades and then they are all [inaudible]. Today it's pretty hard to find arcades, and the real dedicated arcades today, and we have about a thousand locations that we operate, but there's only maybe - I don't know – two, three dozen that are arcades, real arcades. Most of them are smaller game installations and we do like - we do games in theater lobby or things like that from the retail store and, that's a lot of our locations. This is the other end of the spectrum obviously.

But Japan still had what I consider very relatively traditional arcades where you'll have, you know, good size arcade with a hundred – in a minute - they're cram, they're tight, but they have about 100-150 games in there, video games, maybe multiple floors because everything – the geography is so tight there, but a lot of video – a lot of fighting games, a lot of – a lot of music and rhythm games. Today, it's a little bit different, there's a lot of crane games, so – I mean the big chunk of the business are all cranes. Cranes business works very different than it does here in the US.

In the US, Americans are all about winning. So if I had a crane game, I'm going to put a bunch of stuff in it, and you want to walk up to it, drop a quarter in or drop a dollar in, depends on what kind of crane it is, and pick up something and win it. You know, that's it, it's just – it's about the win for Americans, I just want to win, and I want to win it in one shot, and then I “Yay, I won”.

In Japan, doesn't work like that, you don't pick anything up. The cranes – the claws come down and basically you kind of knock the stuff around, and you kind of pick it up and flop it around and you try to get it closer and closer to the hole until it falls in. Everything is win over win in Japan, you can absolutely win it. The skill in Japan comes in how many times are you going to hit that and touch it and knock it around until I win and let it fall in, so you're not going to win it in one shot, and really it's all about – I call it – it's more of a retail experience in Japan when they are doing merchandise in games, because every game has exactly one game – one item in it, you know. If this one has Pacman plush in it, that's all it has, Pacman Plush. And this one has Ghost Plush, you know, maybe this one got Blinky and this one got Pinky, you know, this one got calculator, this one got -- and you walk up and down the house of cranes and pick up the items that you like, and once you pick up the item you like then you do the calculation and it's going to take me ten times to win that, do I want to pay ... 10 dollars to win that calculator, and that's kind of what you have to calculate in your head because everything there is 100 yen, like a buck, to play one game and you know, there's 50 yen shops, you know but that's - they're kind of like down scale, the discount shop so ... it's not the same experience, but if you go to a Namco arcade or Sega arcade or Taito arcade, they all tend to be, you know, 100 yen or 200 yen, and for the brand new games that could be 500 yen to play, I mean so it's just kind of depend on what you're dealing with, so the price is going to be a little bit different.

Still very much a family experience too. It actually cuts across the demographic spectrum, so it's much more socially acceptable to play games in Japan than probably here in the -- I mean when I was growing up, my parents were all like - Dang - it was like, you know - I played D&D when I was in high school, I played video games and it was like, you know, I was practically a drug user at that point, as far as most people - as far as most adults were concerned. In Japan, it always has been very socially acceptable, it always has been something grandparents do with the kids and with the parents and the family. It - It's experience that everybody accepted and kind of embraced, and here in the US, for a lot of years, it was very segregated, it was just - it was very - back in the earlier days, it was very much a male - young male, teenage male, testosterone driven and till this day, it probably still is - video games still are to a large degree. And I said that my daughter will kill me for saying that because she plays games all her life, too, and she's 22 today and she still plays games, so -- But it's still predominantly, there's a lot of males involved in it, it tends to be that, that one special area, except that we're starting to see the wave in nostalgia kind of coming back now. Suddenly, it's not just the hot new games because if I want to play hot new games, then I'm playing Halo or Destiny at home on my Xbox as opposed to "let's go out and let's be hanging out together, spend some time together and hey, let's play some Donkey Kong or whatever out here, pick up some - a couple of beers, I've got a couple of great craft beers here, let's play some Donkey Kong, chillax and just have a good time with it."

It's -- In the US, we're just seeing a lot more of that starting to come back now where it's becoming - a lot of older people, they didn't - they kind of left games, you know, I never did, but a lot of - I have a lot of friends that kind of grew up with me with games and they got real jobs, and went along and kind of stopped playing games, and now suddenly they're coming

back to games, saying “Oh my god! I remember doing this when I was, you know, 20 something years old, I was playing Centipede, and now they’re kind of doing it again.” And so, there’s this whole nostalgia wave coming back across, people are trying to collect it more, it’s becoming a lot more collectible. Old games are tough to find now. So -- But very different, Japan still very traditional, still everybody plays games all the time, and it just a - it’s a different environment to this day.

31:29

[PT]: So, as a VP in Namco, so what do you - what do you usually do, what is your ... specific job?

[DB]: OK. So I currently - What I do is -- Well, the last couple of years has been - I’ve been considering primarily on what we think are the ways we are going to expand out of home entertainment in the future. Level 257 has been kind of the flagship of that. We’re talking about -- It’s really not about just games. Games are part of our DNA. I love games, I mean, games are fabulous. But I think out of home entertainment, there’s a lot more than just games. I think games are another part of what you do to entertain yourself, but it’s really about how we help people - how we enable people to socialize with each other and have a good time out of home. I have a lot of fun at home playing a game, and I can play with my friends, it’s -- playing at home to me is a very social experience, because you’re on the headset, we’re talking. I spend a good year or two of my life on World of Warcraft and, you know, we had our own Namco guild for God’s sake, you know [laugh]. We had -- we were really going at it.

But for us, what we were talking about we want to be able to let people have a great time and spend time together and we have to be the enabler for that. Games are one tool, ended up an important part of what we do, but food places an important element other than that. I mean entertainment begins with food, I think, and then a lot of things go along with food. I mean, obviously food and beverages are a big deal for us, and this clever 257 concept was really designed for less of an arcade friend of mine, but more of an entertainment friend of mine for adults. I mean we really say we want to do something -- I’ve been doing this my whole life, I love playing games, but I also want to have a great bottle of wine and a great beer, so -- basically club 257 was all about trying to find ways that we can help people have a good time. Part of it is playing game, part of it is bowling, part of it is having a great meal, a great bottle of wine, some fun craft beer, we’re having a lot of fun with craft beer now, particularly here in Chicago, there are so many microbursts. But that has nothing with Namco, so I just look at our home entertainment, and trends, how we apply those trends.

[PT]: You’re planning on opening new locations, or adding new concepts/ideas?

[DB]: Yes, absolutely. You know, entertainment is a constant evolution. I mean, we’re constantly looking at what’s working, what’s not working and this is a - because it’s a new prototype, we knew that not everything is going to work. We’ve a lot of ideas, we want to try out a lot of different things. Some stuff has worked incredibly well, better than we expected them to. And then other things have done what we were, unfortunately what we’re afraid that they might do is that they haven’t really paid out the way we thought. So it’s been a situation

where we've turned them off a lot in a short amount of time, and yeah, the next generation I think would be a lot better, and as we started to evolve these and build more of these, I think it will become a lot better as we go.

[PT]: So thinking about the future, what do you think about the coin-op industry in general? Do you think it was growing, or it's stagnating and becoming obsolete, or ...

[DB]: It has changed a lot. I mean it's not the business it used to be, you know. But entertainment is not what it used to be, and I think it's OK. It's -- It's OK. I mean everything changes, everything evolves, you know, we'll probably never build locations just to put games in there anymore. I mean games are an important element, but it's an element, and it's like everything else that we do as well. So, I think that as far as coin-op goes, you know, the - the term coin-op kind of makes me a little bit crazy, because how many coins do I have in your pocket right now, I don't have any. I mean most people don't carry a lot of coins, they all carry cash, so we had to change how we look at how you do payment system, how you do play. Level 257, we want to try out a really different paradigm of play here, so there's no per play pricing. And then we did that for decades, and it worked, it made a lot of sense, I mean for this particular environment, because we're trying to be very adult, and we're trying to make it very accessible, so people would come in. We want to do games - people don't know normally play games, mainly the older crowd. You don't play per game, you just say "Hey, I want to play for an hour, or 2 hours, whatever you want, and we give you a card, and for the next hour, 2 hours or 15 minutes, whatever you signed up for, you can activate any game in here, whether it's a, you know, 35 year-old Pacman machine, or the brand new Star Wars Battle Pod, doesn't matter, you can activate every game in here, you don't have to worry about how much it costs, I don't have to worry about, you know, I don't know enough to play this, I'm wasting my free dollar to activate this game, yeah, dude, don't worry about it. We want to make it really, really simple, because I a mental philosophies here is to make this incredibly approachable. I really want to get people playing games who don't normally play games anymore. We want to kind of bring everybody back that kind of quit, come back and try it again, it's a lot of fun, and that's part of that. We want to introduce some to all the new stuff that we were doing and recognized the Asteroid, and the Pacman and Galaga, and all the custom stuff we used to do, but I really want to show them, you know, Destron Pirates, and Dark Escape, and Star Wars Battle Pod. This stuff has come off with similar lines the last couple of years, which is really fabulous stuff, and that's kind of our sub-text here: How do we get people excited about playing games again. And then, I want to show them new stuff that we were doing, you know, kind of exposed to what is happening until today. There's still a market out there for out-of-home entertainment with games, there absolutely is. It's changing, it's not what it used to be, games are a lot more expensive than what they used to be. You know, a 2000 dollars in the early 80s was an expensive game, but, you know, it was a game, you buy pretty much any game out there, 1500-2000 dollars, you know, you can choose - Donkey Kong. I remember driving to Atlanta from Tuscaloosa, Alabama to go get a Donkey Kong when it first came out. I was like "Oh my god! This is a fabulous game." Today, you know, you can't buy much for that, and some of the new games we have cost 5 figures and a - so they're kind of crazy investment [inaudible].

So you have this - kind of this polarization in the game business today, so kind of the haves and have not. You have the really big, elaborate locations that you probably know what I'm talking about, because we 200 games in a giant facility, and a - you know, it's a - those alcohol and food and everything, but it's all about this 200 games in the space and - beautiful job, I mean, beautiful games and they have everything new, and it's really expensive, it's really expensive layout, and it's per play pricing and it's very confusing how it all works.

And then you have the guys at the other end of the spectrum, they can afford to buy everything and they do a good job with it, and there's the guys who can't afford to buy everything and so now, they have to go back and figure out "I can't afford to keep up with these guys, this in this spectrum, so how do you position yourself so you can make things work?" And that is why you see things like the barcades popping up all over the places.

[PT]: Like the Gameworks?

[DB]: Well Gameworks - Gameworks is a - I mean they do a really nice job, Gameworks really - the big Gameworks like the one located in Schaumburg , they did a really nice job, it's more of a traditional arcade model, to be honest. They're doing -- The new stuff they're building is actually a lot more interesting because they're adding a lot more of the Nine Gaming elements to it, so I think the food becomes more forward in some of their newer locations. This one is really, from my perspective, is really about games, primarily.

But then there's guys -- What I'm really interested in seeing lately are all the barcades, so it's ... the Logan Hardware, or the Headquarters, you know, downtown, these guys are doing these really cool things and then they're - the games are - we took a page out of the book to do 257, the games are not necessarily in the focus, they're there, but it's really all about entertainment and a lot of that, it maybe food, it maybe beverage, it maybe beer but it's really all about the package and games are an element, but it's not primary element, not necessarily. And I think you're going to see a lot of that coming on where you had guys using games, and games are still pretty vital part of that out-of-home entertainment and it's a good way to socialize and hang out with your friends, but it's not necessarily the main reason that you're coming out to do it, because like "Hey, I want to go out. Let's go out and have a good time. We're going to have some appetizers, some great craft beer and we'll play some games, we're just hanging out." And you see that a lot - I'm seeing that a lot in downtown Chicago, a lot of that popping up, a lot of the urban - a lot of cities were popped - a lot of it is popping inside the urban environment. So you'll see more and more of that.

[PT]: The barcades?

[DB]: Yeah, the barcades, yeah. I'm sure about the barcades. Yeah.

Different investment level though, because they are not buying the brand new stuff. I mean - so, what you'll see is some great places, they'll have some great - a lot of 30-year-old equipment or 20-year-old equipment, but they won't have the brand new stuff because it's ... the economic models that work, I mean, to be able to buy that and put it in location, it's just -- it's a tough model. And the guys that make that work are the guys like, you know, the

[inaudible] guys like Dave & Busters, and here in Chicago, Round One in Bloomingdale, where they're having - they have these really great games around, and they have massive amount of new games, they're putting a lot of money out to put in the brand new equipment. Tougher mall operators do that, I mean, that's a really tough model.

And so that's why I was thinking of seeing a lot of barcades, but the barcades that are coming up are more classic, not much new games. Different, different environment. And then you got guys like Galloping Ghost, you know Galloping ghost in Brookfield. Great guys, they've got, I don't know, almost 500 games now, I'm sure by the time someone listen to this it's going to be a lot more, because I was down there this week, and they're going to be expanding again, and adding more games and they're - I think they're officially now the largest arcade in, if not the US, maybe in the world, I don't - it's -- But they're amazing. And they have all these great old games that are - it's almost collector items now. I mean, a lot of them I haven't seen in -- They have some in there that I haven't - I never saw, I don't even remember those games coming up. But, you know -- and again, that's not our model.

So there's games - there's a lot of different ways to play games. There's a lot of little -- There's a lot of ways to operate games, and still make money, and it's just a matter of trying to find the economic model that works, but it's out there. And so I think it's still - it's still a business you can make a lot of money out. You just have to be a lot smarter about it.

42:04

[PT]: So -- So then -- I mean, right now, what is your like -- Working for Namco, what is your favorite memory so far? Something you enjoyed [inaudible] ...

[DB]: There's a million great memories working for Namco, it's a great company. I've been with them for a long time, so I literally have had a Namco logo on my paychecks since 1990, so, it's a big deal for me. But, you know, I think I said it earlier and the best job I think I've ever had was working part-time in the arcade because it was just an amazing time and it's been when games were at their peak. But even today, I mean, I love going to Tokyo, I love looking at new games, I love getting to try out new technologies where people are going, we're starting talking about Head-Mounted Displays and building virtual worlds that you can roam in. I mean, there are so many cool things that are happening out there in the technology, the pace of change is accelerating, so it's really -- It's amazing some of the stuff we're doing today, and the stuff we're talking about for ... not even long term but very short term, [inaudible] some really cool stuff coming out commercially available and, I love that stuff. I think it's really fun looking at technology.

But at the end of the day, you just need to keep in mind that you can't do technology for technology sake, just because it's really cool technology doesn't mean it's going to be fun to play with. At the end of the day, it's still about building a great story, a very compelling gameplay experience, and the technology is an extra layer on top of that, but it's fun to look at. I enjoy the heck out of looking at all that stuff, how we can apply it to let people have fun.

[PT]: Do you think you'll ... apply those [inaudible] to ... like, 257?

[DB]: Yeah. You know, we've talked about it a lot. We've talked about what games are -- Right now, the games we have - we have these really, you know - these -- We're split personality on our games here. We have these really cool classics that have been completely restored and renovated, and then we've got these brand new games that we've wanted to showcase once you get them - get you playing the older games to add the high tech - No no, none of it is high tech, a lot of it is chosen to be social or intuitive, so we didn't - we specifically chose to not to get maybe the best video games out there; we chose to get the games that would fill the niche.

When we start talking about things like Virtual Reality and Head-Mounted Displays, and there's some really cool stuff coming, and I know a lot of the guys working on this stuff and ... I just think that it's -- you're starting to get to a point where it's starting to get too high tech for the mass market, I mean, for the people at large. I think if you're a hardcore gamer, you can be all over it. But if you're "Hey, I'm just, you know, your normal American and I just want to go out and have a good time, and playing games can be part of that", and I kind of put myself in that category, it might be too much, you know, because it's - it's not necessarily intuitive how to play a lot of those games, and you have to start -- So even the games we have, like some of the immersive games, we have some games upstairs, we have a couple of games that are - I tell people it's like sitting inside half a ping pong ball, hemispherical screen, so you got this real peripheral vision thing going on, really beautiful games. They're kind of an experiment as much as they are a game, but really need graphical presentation, and it's a lot of fun but they're not that easy to play, and then it's easy to become disoriented if you don't know how to interact with the game environment.

And so, I - I look at that, and I look at new people that are playing it, and I'm saying "You know, we're creating a really, you know, hardline there." This is, you know -- If we get -- There's a lot of cool stuff you can do but I'm not sure if we should do it for the mass market. It was all hardcore gamers, yeah, I think it'll be great, I mean it'll be kind of cool but we're trying to do something here that I think is approachable by everybody, and it's not necessarily the most social experience because some awesome stuff out there, I mean from a technological side point, stand point, it's great, I'm just not sure how much of that will implement. And there are games where we've chosen to not implement here because we're afraid it was too hardcore, you know, I don't have a late model Tack In game upstairs, you know, because we - and it's a great game, I love Tack In, but it was - it was too, too typical, niche-y, you know, hardcore gamer mode. I wanted to make it much more approachable, so we chose to have games that were - kind of spoke to everybody at large, not just the very small set of really dedicated players.

[PT]: Do you think you'll open up facilities just for hardcore gamers?

[DB]: We talked about that. We actually talked about -- We white boarded a lot of stuff, and we've talked about going the other extreme and just saying "Hey, what if we did a really hardcore, high tech experience?", and I've got some of them things and others like that, we could talk about that. If we come with a really compelling idea, we could - we could certainly go there. And there's some stuff in R&D right now that are really pretty awesome, and I'm not

quite sure how it's all going to fit into place. We'll just see -- Basically, a lot of these things -- The fun part about the game business: a lot of technology, particularly in the early - if you go back in the 80s and 90s, a lot of things - we were playing with things in the games business that really weren't necessarily polished, you know, for public presentation, but it was OK, it was like "It's not a weapon system where we need to sell the military. It's a game, so let's try this. Here's a new chip, let's see if we can make this to do what we want it to do. Let's, you know, better graphical system out of this."

And we -- So we did a lot of experimenting. That's kind of the fun of games. It's, you know, it's not generally a life or death situation so you can experiment, and there's a lot of experimenting going on. And I think the game business has allowed us to kind of push the envelope a lot when we're starting talking about new technology. And I think that will continue, absolutely is, I know it's going to.

[PT]: I mean, is that what you're working on right now, for the future, or it's just like ... a broad type, just like any ...

[DB]: You know, my focus right now for what we are - what we're going is to - is not to - I'm kind of going the opposite direction here, a lot of it I've just talked about, and I love technology, I mean, I'm techy from way back, I always have been. But, we really kind of really want them to go the other way and say "Hey, can we get - just help people have a good time, and if technology plays a part in it, great. If it doesn't, oh, that's OK too, you know." And so it really is not about the specific game technology or the really - having the cutting edge technology out there; it's really about just how I help people have fun. And that's the constantly moving target, and right now, we're choosing to do it this way, but in 6 months, we may say "You know what, let's go back and try this", and that's the fun of a prototype like this is -- You get to do a lot of experimenting, and you get to say "I have a theory that A equals B. Let's test it and see." And if it actually turns out that A equals C, then we've got to back up and retour a little bit, you do - but you do that all the time, so I'm not going to say we'll never implement any of the technology but, you know, it's not what we're focusing on today for this concept. Now another concept, another story.

[PT]: I was thinking about technology, you were talking about having electrical engineering background. Were you able to like, fix a machine that were like, broken or ...

[DB]: Yeah, I can fix anything that is 30 years old, like I can pretty much fix anything, if anything newer, it's not necessarily so well, but I did at one point in my career I was, you know, we were -- everybody did everything in the early days; there wasn't -- you didn't have the stuff to segregate and do this, so I was our head technician for a number of years and, I worked in the office in Atlanta before I moved to California and I was the parts buyer, the technician, the - our receptionist to answer the phone, and the part time district manager that they were kind of did audit, so of - of stores, so, yeah.

I mean, but yeah -- In the early days, it was fun. That was one of the appealing parts of the game business when I first started out. Being a nerd, a techno-nerd, was we did all the repair ourselves, and all I needed was a good logic probe and a volt meter, and you can pretty much

work on anything, and the - the system was slow enough back in those days, that I can take a logic probe and just see, yep, I can see an END gate, and I can see the change in state and we literally look at the pins on the - on the chip and say "That one is not working and that one is working". We actually did a lot of troubleshooting in the -- I remember in the early 80s fixing a lot of games with a logic probe and a meter, that's all it took to fix logic boards.

50:26

[PT]: Even the refurbished machines [inaudible]? You can still fix those too?

[DB]: You know, I'm not as good as I used to be but, I could find my way through it. I mean the hardest part -- I've spent -- I've probably spent a lot of years in the early days - I mean everything was like those - in a minute -- we started talking about Pongs and things like that. There was the raster monitors, you know, where you - it draws the raster across the screen and changes the intensity of the electron beam. Then they went to the vector beam monitors, and so there were a of vector beams that literally draws it with a-- draws the pictures with electron beam like Tempest, or Rip Off, or Battlezone, if you know really, the beam didn't go across and, it actually drew the pictures, and we had a lot of monitors like that. I spent probably a good few years doing nothing but working on those monitors and they were - it was a weird kind of animal, it's not like it was made for TV or anything. They were specifically made for our product for doing games. And, I can probably still fix those today, I know most of them. I still remember the parts that's going in all this stuff, I can still fix. There aren't that many of them. I have vectors upstairs. We got Little Lander, which is from 1979. It's just a fabulous little game where you have to land your Little Lander on the moon, and it's all black and white vector beam, but yeah, I can still fix those, and I can push [inaudible], I can fix most Pinballs.

[PT]: Did you hire anyone or you just fix them? [laugh]

[DB]: You know what? It's probably not the best use of my time to be out doing all the game repairs myself, but I can do it in a pinch. I've helped out a few cases. It's fun to do. I like fixing games, it's almost relaxing. If you like solving puzzles, it's really just about thinking logically and if you know how it works, you just got to need to work your way through it and troubleshoot it.

[PT]: Is it feel like nostalgia back?

[DB]: Yeah, it is. No, it's fun. It is. I mean I saw -- We've got some guys here, and you know, taking care of Pinballs is actually a really laborious process; Pinballs took a lot of time. I love a Pinball that is well-maintained. It's a play field swag and every light works and every solenoid works. It's a beautiful piece of equipment. So we were trying to train these guys. I do it because nobody knows how to maintain Pinballs anymore. There aren't that -- They're really not something you do and usually make a lot of money with. Select locations can do well with them, a lot of them going to the home today, they're collectors by then. But it's still - they're tough to maintain and the guys that make them -- there are only a few factories that make them; the primary factory that makes Pinballs today in the world is here in Chicago [inaudible] Stern Pinballs. They do a fabulous job, and they've got them designed so that it's

hard to mess them up. Now, you don't have to put all the labor into them. We've got some older classic Pinballs up here that kind of back to the 70s, and those are old-school Pinballs, electronic Pinballs still though, but you really have to wax the play field once or twice a week, you keep got to come back and clean all the rubbers on a regular basis, and it's a lot of work, so it could take a - you know, put an hour a week into a Pinball machine just to kind of maintain it, just to keep it clean and waxed. So, it's actually kind of fun to do this stuff, because when I was a part-timer, that was how I spend half my life, was cleaning Pinball machines. Feeling all nostalgic kind of doing all that. It is fun.

[PT]: So, were you trained with this or it's just like, it just happened ... where like, they taught you or you have to learn for yourself?

[DB]: Yes and yes. So I mean -- Yeah, they teach you a little bit, but in those days, again, in the early 80s, I mean, games weren't that complex, you know, actually really simple. You open up the box, and the box is mostly air. And there's a little logic board, and there's the power supply, and there's a monitor, you know it's pretty much -- and then there's a, you know, control panel, and a bunch of wires, but basically wires and contact switches. I mean, you can sit here and you could work your way through it, you can troubleshoot it easy, there's not much to it. So in the early days, yeah, it was - a lot of it was self-taught. It's like, we used to teach guys electronics. I remember in the early days, we had a lot of guys out of the military, and they did a few years in the air force or - and they had some electronics experience. We bring them in and teach them how games work and, the games are -- it's actually -- most of them work the same way. They may have different power supplies, or different chips or the making of the logic board but, fundamentally, it all kind of worked the same way, and once you know how the pieces work together, it's - you can do it, you can work your way through it. So a lot of it is self-taught, and to this day, a lot of it is self-taught. There aren't really schools that teach you how to troubleshoot video games. Today, if you go to school to do electronics, you go to [inaudible] and do an electronic/technician degree, yeah, a lot of what they teach you is how to troubleshoot down to the sub-system and say "Oop, that is a bad board. Throw it out and drop the big board in." So, we have to -- we can't do that, we have to troubleshoot down to the chips or down to the capacitors, or down to the resistors, so we're really getting down to component level, and there's not a not of places that train to that level anymore, so yeah, a lot of it is self-taught.

[PT]: So, you're just thinking about some of your memories and greatest times and like, over the time in the game industry, what are some of the times, like, there's a failure - failed - like, you'd wish you had done something better about it ...

[DB]: Times we failed we wished we could do something better about ...

[PT]: Like times you - you can learn from, times you could have done better.

[DB]: That's like every week. That a lifetime of, you know, we talk, we kind of laugh about it sometimes, and everybody makes mistakes, you're going to make mistakes all the time and, you know, you beat yourself up, and there's mistake I made even on those projects that, you know, in retrospect, I wish I would have done it differently but we're talking about all the time

and see you know, if - if you - if you don't make mistakes here and there, you're not trying hard enough. You got to make some mistakes and learn -- As long as you learn from the mistakes and then you go on and you - you just can't repeat the same mistake over and over again but - I tell them all the time "It's OK to make mistakes. You got to learn from it and then we got to adapt it and move on, but, we're always making mistakes and then, the trick is just to learn from it and not to beat yourself up over too much". But, you know, I make mistakes to this day. I mean, on this project, I mean, there's - there's - I can't - I couldn't - I couldn't count how many mistakes we've made and I said "Ok. Next time I know how to do this a lot better." And that's true, and there's a million things I have learnt out of this about how to do a 40 000 foot facility a lot better, and next time, we can do it faster, cheaper and better.

We - We won't -- Because we had to do things and had to back up and redo them because we did it wrong in the first time but, we've done a lot of things that no one has done before, you know. In retrospect, there's a reason why people haven't done it and we had to learn the hard way when they didn't do it, but we had to -- we want to try out a lot of different things, you know. It's a big facility, we want it to -- we wanted to serve - to be able to serve you something from anywhere, so we have wireless tablet -- you know, we have this massive wireless network system in here, [inaudible] routers and access points and, it's a really robust wireless system, and it wasn't cheap. But, everything works out. The wireless tablet, you can - they can be sitting, they can order drink from anywhere, the meal goes back to the wireless system, so the drink quarter drops off at the bar, if you need a new shoe for the bowling lane, it goes back to the shoe room, if you want an appetizer, it goes back to the kitchen. It all handles it automatically, and runners bring out everything out that you've ordered so you don't have to walk way across the place to try and do it. We had to do all the from scratch, because nobody really does that to the level we're talking about here, and the system didn't exist, so we have to go back and do a lot of custom - proprietary programming. No one gives us credit for that, no one really cares. You guys don't see it, we didn't want you guys to see it, it is all back [inaudible] stuff, but there's a lot of things that we had to experiment and try to make it work, and not all of it worked, you know "Well, it isn't as easy as we thought I would be," you learn from that and you move on, so ... yeah.

Stuff we've done here, you know, there's designed stuff I don't like, you know, there's a big disconnect between upstairs and downstairs so, you know, fundamentally we have to change that, you know, so we're redesigning the downstairs right now. Starfront didn't turn out though - exactly what we all wanted. You know, bowling, the work flow for bowling didn't work the way we wanted. We wanted it to be a really premium experience and you sit down and then we -- somebody bring you - your balls to you, and then we clean it off and present you the ball and bring your shoes out to you and it was a really cool idea, it is really premium experience. Figured out the first weekend was a [inaudible]. You know, we didn't want the balls out there, we wanted to make sure they're all clean and sanitized and, it really didn't work. We tried it, we couldn't make it work. It was too hard to get the balls in your hand so you can start bowling. It took too long, it's really slow, so we ended up -- we kind of gave up on that and say "You know what? The balls are out there." Wolf wipes them off and stuff, but we're not kind of - we're not going to bring the ball to you that you need for your size or anything; it's

just taking too long. So we - we - we tried a lot of different things like that and a lot of it seems really simple but we started this - we did this project, we said "Let's still wait, everything we've known, that's correct for the last 30 years" and say "Just because -- and eventually you start to do the same thing over and over and over again.

59:09

[DB]: You buy your own propaganda, and you, you, you, you forget the question why am I doing this? So we threw everything out and we let the game design the game room design without the people who don't know how to design game rooms

[PT]: Yeah.

[DB]: And the bowling design was designed by guys that don't normally do bowling, so we took our teams and we swapped them and said, okay, you work on bowling, and you work on games, and you work on the restaurant and we- that way we get some really fresh ideas, and we did, and we made some mistakes too, but we got some really great ideas out of it. I think you've got to constantly challenge yourself or you're never going to get better. So we don't sweat too much about making mistakes because you know you're going to make a few, and that's part of the process and I think that's true in every game we do, when you're designing a game you've got to push yourself, you've got to try.

[PT]: So what's the tablet, is it NAP or is it a tablet upstairs?

[DB]: So, every, every, every server watch around they've got a tablet on them, they've actually got a wireless tablet and they can do every- all the orders on it, so every one of them upstairs, so if they're walking around, if you, If you're in the dining room and you're placing an order for your dinner you're doing it on a wireless tablet or if you're in the bowling lane we can serve you in the bowling lanes so if you are in one of the lanes and you want to order a drink, you just do it on the wireless tablet. And she doesn't- so the beauty of that is, most places you have to give your server the order and they have to walk over to the computer terminal and they have to type it in and then walk over to the bar and then get your drink and then they walk back to bring it to you and they spend 60% of the time walking.

[PT]: Yeah.

[DB]: It's crazy. This is a 40,000ft facility, this is not a 3,000 square foot restaurant. So we said that's not going to work so the whole idea here was how do we let the server stay with you and talk to you and build a relationship with you and then- but still get your orders in and get

everything out there and then have someone else bring it over so that she doesn't have to spend 60% of her time walking, because that's a waste.

[PT]: Yeah.

[DB]: So we had all these ideas like that we thought through everything, we thought through the bowling, we thought through the game play, we thought through the dining room, how we- we spent literally spent years talking about all this stuff until we came up with here's how we're going to work flow all of this and you know it's a lot of it's worked out really well, some of it hasn't. It just you just got to go back and re-tool it.

[PT]: So speaking of like hobbies like what games like do you play most often?

[DB]: What games do I play most often?

[PT]: That you like the most.

[DB]: I spent, during times of my life I've really gotten into different stuff I mentioned earlier I mean there was a few years like I lost my life in *Warcraft* like every- like most of America and we had a hardcore group of Namco employees in different parts of the world they were all kind of working together on the same server. It was a lot of fun I enjoyed the hell out of that.

[PT]: Do you work and play at the same time?

[DB]: Do we what?

Parnell: Do you work and play at the same time?

[DB]: Well no, no we didn't do that no. Although part of my work where in Tokyo was playing games. I have some great memories of playing games in Japan, You know I like socially interactive games. I mean or thinking games so I spend a lot of- before I got into *Warcraft* I was spending a lot of time on real time strategy games mostly PC gaming late the last few years I'm doing a lot more role playing games mostly on *Xbox*. *Xbox* is probably my console of a choice at the moment. So I just got through just finishing up *Dragon Age Inquisition*. I like- *BioWare* and *Bethesda* are probably my two favorite manufacturers of role playing games. Very different types of games if you know those two guys I mean it's- you know- that's why I love games like *Fallout*. *Fallout 3*, I spent a lot of time on *Fallout 3* from *Bethesda* but I also spend a lot of time on the *BioWare* games which is *Dragon Age*- is a *BioWare* game, different, different, different systems. *Bethesda* seems to have wide open worlds,

[PT]: Yeah.

[DB]: And you can get lost in the game track. I mean you get off on some side quest and I had literally forgotten what I was supposed to be doing at some times because I've spent hours, I start doing, I'm so anal retentive with how I play games, I gotta to pick up every freaking tin can, I have to do every little quest and then I forget what the main quest line is and the problem with this is sometimes you get a little bored you start wandering off and after you think, this is not as much fun as it was because now I'm just being obsessively collecting things. *Bioware* tends to have you a little more on a rail so they don't let you get too far off the- off the main path, at least until *Inquisition*. Now the previous *Dragon Age's* had you on a rail. *Inquisitions* got a little bit more you can get lost in but I like role playing games - it's more of a- for me it's a diversion, it's the one time I don't think about oh my gosh I have to do this work or I need to get this accomplished or we got these goals were not meeting.

[PT]: Yeah.

[DB]: You know, and so when I'm playing a game, I get, that's the only time I get to not worry about what I missed at the office or what I need- my wife needs me to go do, or I can just concentrate on playing the game and just having good experience and for me that's how I relax- is playing games.

[PT]: During class I remember like one time in an event like they would keep score on all of the machines, the high scores.

[DB]: High score tables, yeah.

[PT]: Yeah. Did you ever want to get a high score or participate in an event like that?

[DB]: You know, we've talked about a lot, I know a lot of quote "Champions" on games, and the guys down at *Galloping Ghost*, which we were talking about earlier do a great job at that, they've got high scores on their games. I think *Galloping Ghost* is probably one of the places people go to set their high scores, world records on, got a lot of world records set down there. You know the guys that, that take it really, really seriously and it's really important to them and I don't think I'm hardcore enough to be able to do that. I mean I'm not disciplined enough to sit there and play for hours and hours and hours and hours on one game to perfect getting that high score and those guys are special, they really are focused on it, and they really are good at it, you know that takes a lot of discipline so I'm probably not that disciplined to be able to do it. I don't think I'm- I tend to be competitive if I can't think I can win I'm probably not going to play.

[Laughs]

[PT]: I mean, that concludes all my questions, do you want to- do you have anything else to add?

[DB]: Wow, anything else to add.

[PT]: Some other though?

[DB]: Some other thought, you know it's been, I mean there's- the history of games has been really neat. I mean there's a lot of research engineers are doing right now on games- massive roller coaster we have some real high's we have some real lows but it's a process and we're not finished, games are evolving and for us I think it's going to be really interesting to see where games go next but I think they're becoming incredibly immersive. I like that, I love games have become immersive it really really- suck you into the story line. Technology is not as important to me as story and I talk to a lot of people about- every college out there now has degrees in game development, game design, the game business is tuff to get into and it's a really tough, it's a tough business to live and work in but if you really want to get- as important as it is to know how to program or to do graphics systems I think it's more important to know how to tell a story because the future of games is really about getting people immersed into your story and even a first person shooter, the storyline is becoming more and more important and it's a big deal so- you're always going to have that sub set of people that wants nothing but pure action for first person shooters. Frag-fest's you know, just kill everybody but I think it's more important to really talk about you know, how you develop a story line so I think the future of game development has as much- holds as much attraction for English majors as does it does for programmers because it really is, it's a new media, it's how do you tell a story, It's like being a filmmaker now, it's all about, how do you tell story and how do you get people really tied up in the story and then in that regard it absolutely is an art and it's absolutely a lot of fun and I think people that are really interested in that- it's a beautiful process so, I love games.

[PT]: Speaking, what was your favorite game that told a story?

[DB]: Favorite game that told a story.

[PT]: From like the 2000's, like.

[DB]: My favorite game, the first game that really told a story for me I mean, we talked earlier about *Myst*, and you know *Myst* was a genre changer, I mean it was just so different from the games that we were playing at that point and it really was a story behind it and it really sucked you into the story. I love *Dragon Age*, not because it's a really great, you know hardcore game series that I can- that has a great combat programming but it's really about this fabulous story and it's a really immersive and very deep story that you can get into. I love games that tell stories, I

mean the *Fallout* series great storyline, you know *Dragon Age*, what else, gosh. I'm just drawing a blank now. *BioWare* games space version of *Dragon Age*, what am I thinking of.

01:08:30

[PT]: Oh!

[DB] and [PT]: [Laugh]

[DB]: I played the heck out of it, I can't remember it now, and they're coming out with a new version. Oh god, well you know what I'm talking about.

[PT]: *Mass Effect!* There you go.

[DB]: *Mass Effect*, thank you. Oh my god I can't believe I had that brain lock. I love *Mass Effect*, great storyline, really really deep storyline; the games became more complex as you got further into them. I don't know if you guys have played them all the way through, the ending of the third game really angered me, but it angered me, in retrospect I was angry for about 2 months at the ending of that game and after I got past that I said you know what I'm angry because I really got sucked into the storyline and I didn't like the finish and that's good. You know what because it's not the way I envisioned it but I was so it was so personal to me the story that I think it was good that was very successful because it sucked me into storyline and I love games that do that and I think I get a little upset when I see a lot of players that are just playing for the action and not playing for the story because you're missing so much of it and you have to get a little bit older and really start appreciating the games for the story lines behind them but there are some beautiful story lines and I've seen a lot of people just kind of blow through the story line and say I'm not really going to read all that stuff I'm just going to go and shoot something.

[PT]: Didn't they have a DLC with a different ending?

[DB]: They did, they did, so they- because the first endings were kind of vague and they added on some downloadable stuff.

[PT]: Did you get the ending for the-

[DB]: Well, my ending I did not like, I will say. I'm really objective to my character dying in the end, that was a spoiler for anybody who hasn't heard that. Yeah it was very upsetting but it was good it was good because I was really into the storyline. So, I love games that tell stories or that are puzzles, I do a lot of puzzles. When I said puzzle games, I mean that are logic games, so if I want something quick and easy I'll do a logic game but if I have got a few hours to spare then I'm going to go into a really heavy storyline games like *Mass Effect* or *Fallout*, you know *Dragon Age* something like that just fun.

[PT]: What kind of puzzle games?

[DB]: What kind of what?

[DB] and [PT]: Puzzle games.

[DB]: You know what- so if I'm going to play something on my phone, I'm going to whip out my phone and I'm going to play a logic game on my phone, where you know-

[PT]: *Candy crush?*

[DB]: No, no those are not puzzle games, [Laughs] something with a little more logic to it than that. Nothing against those games.

[PT]: Yeah.

[DB]: They're great. A lot of people play them, that's terrific. You know, I think any game that people enjoy is good. You know if you enjoy- everybody has different taste, I'll never put any game down and I think it's crazy to say all those games are awful, you know it's not, it's fun. If somebody enjoys it it's great. It's okay to play whatever you like. I like to play games that are- if I'm doing something quick I'll just play- I've been playing a lot of the *New York Times* crossword puzzles lately just on my iPhone because I can sit down and I can do it for 10 minutes and then walk off and it's fine but that's for the short games. For the longer games I'm going to do the other stuff. I love console games, although I'm firing up my PC rig, gaming area, and I haven't had a PC gaming rig going for the last couple years. I've been getting the urge to go back and play some old PC games again so I've been working on that for the last two days trying to get it running again.

[PT]: Are you planning on getting the new games coming out this fall?

[DB]: Oh yeah absolutely, I'm dying right now, what's coming out now, *Fallout* the next *Fallout* is coming out real soon.

[PT]: *Halo* and *Battlefront*.

[DB]: You know *Halo*, *Halo*, I liked *Halo* and it's actually a decent story. I kick myself because I never finished- I did the first one, got part of the way through the second one- I don't think I ever finished the second one and then I never finished anything more, I just moved on. You can't play every game as frustrating as it is, because you could spend a lot of time playing games you just can't do it all- but I try, I love games so. I got to go back to do *Halo*. I want to do *Destiny* I haven't played *Destiny* yet either so I want to go back and really try that. I'm scared to play really immersive game like *Warcraft* you know, a large MMO, you know massively multiplayer online

game because it'll suck the life out of you. I don't know if you guys have ever done- I had a month on my back for over a year and a half, two years I don't know. I probably spent more time online than I did offline. It was that bad, I mean there were days when- works over when you get home at 8 o'clock, okay everyone let's meet up at this one spot at 8 o'clock we'd all have our headsets we'd be playing and then next thing I know the suns coming up and we've been playing all night and It got to be a little cumbersome there for a good year or so, it was probably destroying my family life, [Laughs] you know the only way my daughter got to spend any time with me is if she started playing, so we would play together and it was actually fun, it was fun, we had a good time with it but eventually I was like okay I got to balance your work life, it's tough.

[Colt Scroggins]: Its so funny to hear that, the game that got me into the MMORPG's was *Runescape*

[DB]: Yeah.

[CS]: And I just remember playing that.

[DB]: I never played that one, I came close, somebody suckered me into *Warcraft* and I successfully avoided playing those, because I always heard going back to *Everquest*, everyone called it evercrack, and I figured out pretty quick, the reason everybody's doing this, I don't want to get involved in that, I don't have time to do that, and somebody thought it was funny, someone at Namco one year at Christmas decided to get me a copy of *Warcraft* and I was like, "I got it, I got to go install it now" and try it out. If I had to buy it, I probably never would have gotten it. So he bought it and gave it to me and said here go put it on, and that was a mistake. So I put it on and the next thing I know, I'm hooked like everybody else, and literally at one point I think a good third of our office was all playing at the same time together and it was fun, it was fun. We got- to this day we still laugh about stuff that happened because when you're playing the game like that with people you really know and you know well enough that you can laugh and talk about it and it becomes this real socially bonding experience and there were lots of things literally- to this day we talk about when this one event happened or when one of our guys got the heck beat out of him by a bunch of the other guys of the alliance guys, they were a hoard, they came over the hill and started beating the hell out of him, and I was on top of the hill watching, saying, "Guys we have a problem" and we just swooped in and just kicked their butts and just wiped them all out because they didn't know we were there. It was just fun it was just so much fun stuff when guys are so drunk they just passed out on their keyboard and their character took off running into a tree and into a bunch of mobs, and just all this really fun stuff we talk about its a lot of fun, great memories, I mean I had a lot of fun doing that but it will suck the life out of you.

[CS]: Just throughout this whole thing I noticed that friendships and creating a bond and relationship with other person you're playing with has been a big thing. Do you think you could like elaborate any more on it, because I mean you've explained a lot but is there anything you want to say more about the bonding aspect of gaming?

[DB]: Yeah, you know that's been a lot of what we talked about for the last five or ten years we've had a lot of conversations about, gaming is a tool to help people interact socially and that's really, to us that's a fundamental part of the process we're going through right now, the game- the game is not the end all, the game is a way that we help people do this, it's a tool, and so a lot of what we're doing now revolves around how do we just get people to interact and to bond and have a good time together, it's all about socialization and we probably spend more time talking about the social aspects of everything we're designing and developing than anything else that we do its like how do you get people to work together on this stuff and I say it all the time we're supposed to be social priest, that's our job. We're there to just grease the runway to make it easier for everybody to hang out together and have a good time whether we're hanging out at a bar and playing some new games having some great beers or we're hanging out together online and we're playing a game together online we're still it's still very social experience. I mean, playing *Warcraft* to me was incredibly social experience and all the online RPG's really are they can be very very social if you play them properly. You can play them solitary but they're not as much fun. They become fun when you got other people that you can play it with, and that's the beauty of it, so, we're spending a lot of time talking about how we develop more than the future.

[CS]: This is a really open ended question but if you could craft your own game, anywhere, you can explain anywhere from characters to storyline or whatever; how would you explain your perfect game?

01:17:18

[DB]: Well, that is a very open ended question. I'm not sure what a perfect game is. From my perspective it would be incredibly immersive and very social and if I could have a *Star Trek* 3-D holodeck version of *Warcraft* that would be like awesome. Where you could really be there in real life and I think that- and a lot of things that are being worked on are like that. You know, what we're trying to get you more immersed and play the same games, but play them so that you're much more sucked into the action and then I start to worry about, is it too immersive? Are we going too far? is it too- A lot of the cool stuff is being done right now. The technology behind head mounted display is moving so quickly. I'm staggered at the quality of some of these head mounted displays today. They are amazing and I remember back, going back, when was it? In the 1990s mid-1990s, 95-96 range; Virtuality was really the first commercial virtual reality head- we had commercial units where, the big ring, you stood in the ring, when you had the big head

set on. They were really crude but we have them out there, we had a bunch of them and they were really neat. At the time they were cutting edge but the stuff that we're developing right now is amazing. It's almost scary how good it is. I start to worry that - I'm sure along the way for the last, for decades people have been saying the exact same thing. Like "oh my god is this video game too immersive? Is *Mortal Kombat* too realistic when you're ripping someone's spine out?" Not that I've ever seen anybody rip a spine out, but I'm sure people are always worried about that, and I think he was like, "You get to a point where how realistic does it become?" You know, if you really- If I'm starting to feel like I'm really in the environment and I'm using augmented reality with head mounted display and so I can see things that really look like look like the really there in the real world environment. At what point do you start to lose the separation between, "hey this is real and this is not" and I've actually started thinking about that. Look at some of the stuff that's being worked on, that's, not tomorrow coming out, but in a few years it'll be out. It's like wow, this is really cool, but how are we going to deal with this stuff later on? And I'm just fascinated by that, I'm fascinated by disruption; I'm just fascinated by anything that says, "Hey this is the way this has been working for decades and now let's throw it away". I'm fascinated by how *Apple* threw away the music industry and started over again. How digital downloading the music replaced CDs and or how books are being replaced. There used to be - Every mall used to have an arcade, used have a toy store, used to have a bookstore, you used to have a music store. A lot of that stuff doesn't exist in shopping malls anymore because it's all been disrupted and there's technology has allowed us to do so many really cool things and it's really disruptive and that's sort of, kind of, half the fun. It's disrupting what we've been doing for decades and finding a different way to do it. And you're seeing that a lot in the technology in games as of right now. The way we've been doing it, is not the way we're going to do it going forward so, I didn't answer your question because I think it's really hard for me to tell you

[CS]: Oh no it's fine.

[DB]: What is a perfect game. I don't know. It would be something very social and very immersive. That's all I know. But I have to think about that one.

[CS]: Being a long time employee of Namco; What would you say are some of your favorite game franchises Namco branded.

[DB]: Namco branded game franchises I really love. I love *Time Crisis*. I've always thought the *Time Crisis* franchise was awesome! It was awesome because of the blow back on the gun. And there was lots of gun games out there, a lot of them were incredible, but here was a game where it had a blow back and it was a beautiful franchise. I've played the heck out of that one, got *Time Crisis Five* upstairs. It's really a wonderful game - newest latest versions of *Time Crisis*. You have to go play it before you leave. It's a great game. I always liked - when it comes to fighting

games, I've always liked the *Soul Calibur* series. I wasn't a *Tekken* player I was more of a - and the guys that were really into *Tekken*, I'll tell you, because I'm a button masher. *Tekken* takes some skill. You got to know what you're doing. You got to know what's you're playing and skill really matters. *Soul Caliber*, *Soul Edge*... not as much. You know a good button masher that's flopping right at the buttons - you can still hold your own against somebody else. The skill level is a little bit different in style than indifferently and I feel like as a non-hardcore fighting game player I can hold my own, in a *Soul Calibur* game with most people - I've always loved *Soul Caliber* when it comes to fighting games, probably over *Tekken*. What else is really cool? - Other than that I'm probably going to go back and look at the classics. I love all the driving games, they're always great. Even the classic driving games. Going back to *Pole Position*, which was actually released by *Atari* here in the U.S. but then *Final Lap*, *Final Lap 2*, *Final Lap 3* - we've got some great drivers. *Mario Kart*, which everyone loves *Mario Kart* at home. We've got the commercial version, so we've got - I love our *Mario Kart* implementation with *Pac-Man* in it. And again it's not because it's a great driving game, it's a realistic driving game, it's not. It's just fun. It's just stupid fun. It's just - We can four, three or four of us can get up there and we can play together and the rubber band really tight so, the game's never going to let the one person that's so far ahead so that it's not competitive all the way to the end and it does a great job, so I love games that are fun like that when you're talking about coin-op games, which is much different that consumer games, I mean the home games, the home games you can - the skill level's going to be a much different setup so that skill matters much more, you can have much more realism, you can take a much longer time to learn how to play it. With coin op you got to be intuitive, it's got to be real instant, and it's got to be competitive so that you can't let skill, generally, let one person get so far ahead of the other person so that it's not a contest because coin-op games are all about us having together - a lot of fun together in two or three minutes of fun. You've only got a few minutes, you've got to get in there, you've got to have fun, all the way through from the beginning to the end, so it's a different type of game play. And I love those type of games, I love racing games on multiplayer racing games and I think Namco's always had- *Reach Racer*, *Dead Heat* we do now. *Mario Kart*, which is kind of silly fun, and that's fine, I love those because it's competitive, it's just fun. It's mean to be a social game.

[CS]: Speaking about franchises I know Japan has started a lot of game franchises that haven't really sold well and sort have stopped on it. I'm not sure if you are familiar with the *Tale of Tales* series.

[DB]: I am familiar with it. Japan, Japanese style games, that's really kind of a Japanese RPG game. The audience - it's kind of niche audience in the U.S for that. I like those games, actually my daughter plays a lot of those games and she loves those. Not something that translates to a certain commercial environment, you're trying to do that, you can't really do a Coin- Op game

with that, so it's kind of this very specialized market, but they're still playing with it. They're still working on new ones. New iterations so they're out there. I like them. Small subset of the market though,... not small, but it is a subset.

[CS]: You say that Namco really does care about its gamers and the market they're selling to because it seems that even though you guys still make games for the masses you still leave a little for the hardcore gamers.

[DB]: I think so I think that Namco, and really Namco is part of the Bandai Namco group now so it's a big global group, but at the end of the day it's really about a bunch of guys that really like to entertain that like games and there are different types of games we have different R&D groups that specialize in different types of games and I think every one of these groups takes what they do very very seriously. They're really hardcore about what they do. Some is more casual some of its really- there are games that we do that are fabulous games that I hate them because I don't like- I play a game to never die I play a game- there are certain games we've done in recent years it's like you're going to die you're going to die a lot and you're going to die often and you're going to-it's just like rinse and repeat. Die- "You died, okay start again, try again, oh, you died" you got another foot- you're going to die over and over and over again those games drive me crazy because it's just like I feel like I'm successfully failing over and over but I know that people that like those games love them and I think there's a lot of attention we got games like that in development to this day. I mean so people love that and I think that what our group tries to do is we tried to give people what they want you know and that's part of it and sometimes give people you know- I feel like we've done things that necessarily weren't the most popular thing out there but it was important to the guys that were making it to do this particular game in a certain way. So I think they care I mean I absolutely, I care. I believe all of our guys care, so yeah, I would say yes.

[CS]: This might be a little backtrack but if you had to choose one single game title or coin-op that spurred you towards this career in gaming which one would it be?

[DB]: *Defender*

[CS]: *Defender?*

[DB]: *Defender* Yes, *Williams Defender* that was my game I played that for months on end and I got to be really good at it. Today I actually- I think let's see, I believe I'm trying to remember if I have- upstairs I've got a *Defender* I don't think it's upstairs on the floor, I've got, I've actually owned a *Defender* myself that I've kept for years but I was actually told the guys to get ready and put on the floor and let people play it. It's a great game at its time it was a very complex game at its time and I liked it and I think part of it was I was much more when I was younger I was more

hardcore much more of a hardcore gamer and *Defender* was about as hardcore as you got back in those days because it had like seven buttons a joystick it was a really complex game but most games had a paddle and or maybe a couple buttons maybe a joystick I mean it was most control schemes were pretty simple. *Defender* was a very complex control scheme there was a lot going on and you had to be doing a lot of the same time, you had to watch your radar, you had to watch what was going on, you had to line everything up for the shots exactly, it was a tough game and that was the game that really said “Oh my god this is like the greatest thing in the world I want to do this for a living” and that was it, that was it.

[CS]: From before you said that when you are working at the arcade everybody wanted to know you. Would it be fair to say that you are popular because?

[DB]: Well I was definitely a geek nerd but most of us were but yeah if you work in the arcade everybody. Like the manager *Ruby Tues*'s he's across the hall from us, he was a hardcore gamer, came in to play *Galaga* everyday. He was our buddy so the next thing I know-if I walk into a *Ruby Tues*'s I was going to get some free beer.[Laughs]And he would come over every day and the manager was going to let him play a few games of *Galaga* you know and you got to be friends with everybody. There it was a lot of dating that you picked up in the arcades in those days it was really cool-I dated a lot of girls that were hanging out in the arcade all the time. It was an amazing time where people were all kind of sharing in this common, it was such a big deal games were such a big deal for everybody in America. I mean for that one or two years that's all anybody talked about. It was on TV it, was in music, it was on radio it was all everyone talked about it was either disco or video games that's all everyone really talked about and I felt like the arcade King at that point. You know it was amazing, so if you had a job at the arcade you are like amazing. I just-I got lucky I was in the right place at the right time and yeah there were like four of us that worked in arcade and everyone in the mall knew us if you wanted to play games they know who we were so yeah I think in our own little weird way we were very popular.[Laughs]It was fun, it was fun. A lot of good times.

[CS]: Taken back on that would you say you seen any major cultural shifts or changes in attitude towards gamers now like in today society?

01:29:52

[DB]: Oh yeah absolutely. There was a long time that games were not socially accepted. I mean it was very segregated, we went through the whole violence, the anti-video game violence stuff for a long time. At *Mortal Kombat*'s peak we were getting people picketing the arcades you know parents and things and a lot of it is whatever is popular as culture moves on. Whatever the young people really like the older people are nervous by it they don't understand it so they tend to

demonize it. Set rock and roll in the fifties, video games and the eighties. It's happened over and over again it'll be something else in the next decade but it's okay I mean I seen that happen over and over again and I mean today it seems kind of ridiculous that was a big deal about video game violence but it was massive. I mean we had Congress coming down and you know looking into what we were doing. Everyone was trying to pass laws outlawing violent video games we got long lawsuits, freedom of speech and a lot of the laws that were passed were overturned because they violated First Amendment rights, you know because at the end of the day it is art form and its freedom of speech. So I've seen a lot of things happen like that today though it's not really an issue I mean the games aren't violent to be gratuitous isn't violent. I mean it's not like that's not the whole point of the game maybe like it was once upon a time that's really not the issue anymore. I see games becoming-I think games are much more socially accepted today because a lot of people that are 40 and 50 years old kind of grew up playing games and it's okay to play games you know. Guys like me that are playing games their whole life and so I think attitudes to have definitely changed, I think people are feeling different about online presence you know things like Facebook has changed people viewed being online interacting with other people online and so yeah it's absolutely- it is dramatically different then it was I've seen a change over and over again it keeps evolving and it's going to continue I mean that process is going to continue. I don't really think of any real negative issues today about games you know the biggest issues today, you know some of the sexes issues that come up because you know the girl gamers think or girl programmers think that the guys are being unfair about them and sometimes they are. You know but it's kind of silly stuff it's all minor stuff I don't know what I really see what I'm really excited about people accepting games as art you know when I see the Smithsonian doing art exhibitions and I see the museum of modern art you know buying picking up a Pacman putting it on permanent exhibition and people are recognizing games for what they are really is an expressive art form I think that's really cool because I always believed that and to me it says okay well we're going up as a culture and we know that it doesn't have to be- art is not narrowly defined by this one thing, it's a much broader and you can express art in lots of different ways and interactive media is a valid art form and I still know people today that would deny that but I don't think it's true. It's becoming more and more obvious that it's becoming accepted as a legitimate art form today, interactive media and a few years ago it really wasn't. There's still a lot of argument about it but that argument's kind of going away, so I think that we'll continue to see that evolution taking place. As culture shifts it'll continue on.

[CS]: Would you care to tell us your personal experience with the, I guess you could say the dog days of gaming, like when it was demonized?

[DB]: Wow, the weirdest thing I ever did is I got disposed for a lawsuit with a municipality here in the United States that actually became a test case and I got called into- as a witness kind of

representing arcade operators of America and that was probably at our peak we had about nearly 500 shopping mall arcades in the United States and we had most of the arcade in the US at our peak and that was probably late, by the late 90's and, so- at one point I felt kind of weird about it because I felt like I was a poster child for a violent video games, and I was out there saying well you know, this laws unconstitutional you can't do this, well it's like okay well, I mean, I love playing games I mean do I think some games are over the top and they were just kind of doing some things just to get your general attention yeah they were of course. It happens in every medium but that wasn't the point. It-That didn't last very long it was done, the first time you do something that's really over the top, everyone gets a lot of attention and it's out there and yes you can make money out of it but the second and third time you do it it's just not as an unusual anymore and so eventually from an economic standpoint that all kind of goes away but when games are demonized I mean I felt like weird because I was running the arcade chains in America. I was running the big arcade chain and there were a lot of times that I felt like people were kind of demonizing arcades & demonizing games I was like wow there were times where it felt like a personal attack. That people were saying, well you know, I might as well be a drug dealer because I got all these video games out here that are corrupting our youth and they're bad for perceptions of reality by our kids. I'm messing up all these kids minds and there were times where it was hard because I didn't think that, I didn't believe it, but I thought it was really unfair, it's a social phenomena. It's people that are uncomfortable with this new product, and this new art and they don't know what it is, and if they don't know what it is, and they don't understand it, and they don't take the time to understand it, then it's wrong, and you always have that in society and you always have that in culture and we went through that process in games and it was tough but you know you get through it and today is largely gone, I really don't see those issues anymore, but it was hard, for a while. I recall, I remember I had worked with guys and they were like, you know what, yeah they're making a lot of fuss. I mean we had literally had people picketing, adults picking in front of the arcade where we had violent video games and the sad part is, it drove sales. So the more attention you got and the more publicity it got and suddenly everyone's gotta come out to see why they're picketing and so the more the people picketed the more complaining they did, the higher the sales went up. So it was a real cash 22, I really feel bad that you guys are out here doing this but the business, it's not exactly hurting the business so you just kind of live with it and deal with it and deal with it the best you can and frankly it probably helped the business for a few years.

[CS]: That's an interesting aspect getting sales through media.

[DB]: Yeah well it's controversy, so as soon as somebody says "oh my god these things are horrible" everyone got to come out to see it so- that's what happened as soon as it was on the news and how horrible they were then suddenly everybody had to come in and play it and see

how horrible it really was. It literally, I remember talking about it with the guys it was actually literally when they were doing news stories they were picking it was driving sales, it drove the sales up when they did that stuff it was weird, it was ironic, but at the end of the day it was a tempest in a teapot, it didn't matter because it was literally just something that was very short-lived and it wasn't-those games were done that way with ultra violence just to generate attention you know, and that's fine, its served an audience , it did what it was supposed to do and that's terrific, but it wasn't going to last long. It wasn't because that's- either it's a great game or it's not, the most famous one is you know, Mortal Kombat. Mortal Kombat is a great game, it's a great fighting game. It would have been a great fighting game without the ripping out the guy's heart or ripping out the spine, but that generated a lot of attention and it probably submitted its place in history as a really fabulous fighting game. It probably, it would have been a good fighting game regardless but yeah honestly being known for that probably just helps everyone to know the name Mortal Kombat, it helped them you know.

[CS]: So just going off the selling aspect how would you say Namco reaches out to gamers and non gamers alike to play their games?

[DB]: I think it depends on the games and it depends on the platforms. We do a lot of different platforms now, we do a lot of mobile games you know for phones and tablets and we still do we're still one of the last great manufacturers of "coin-op" games, in quotes. You know, so we still do a lot of console games and we do a great job at a lot of the console games. So I think they sit you know and I'm not involved with all these things. I'm involved primarily on the coin op side but when we sit down and we talk about how do we do things there are attractive we really just talk about our platforms in the market for those platforms and then try to find ways to do the things that they want us to do. I mean every game is out there, they're literally targeted to specific audiences and we're trying to build something that audience wants to see no matter if it's a new game or it's a new arcade or if we're doing an entertainment facility were definitely trying to position that thing that fits a need or desire by a certain market segment. So I think that the ways you do that it just depends on the platform. We do it by trying to find a way to speak to our guys either online or in person because a lot of what we do is personal and the advantage we have on the arcade side is that we build a relationship one on one with a person. As opposed to trying to build a relationship so that you will buy our software at a retail store and put it on the game we are actually looking at you face to face. I think the disadvantages that guys like the guys that do the disk for Xbox and PlayStation, Wii- our sister company is- they're building something and they're designing this great game and they go through their testing procedures and they get to do their, you know let players come in and try it out and get all the feedback and they do they get a lot of that they get a lot of player feedback, they do a lot of player testing they do all the stuff to really try to make sure that they're doing what fits the market and even then

though designing a new game is kind of, it can be a crapshoot I mean honestly. You never know 100 percent what the games are going to do on until you put it on the shelf and get it out there, but they do all this work but it's really hard for them because I think it's harder for them in some ways you don't have, get to have that personal one on one relationship. So they don't get to- We establish a new facility like this we're here every day we're talking to the guest and were talking to the players and we're getting that's the right feedback. When you're talking about console games you get feedback on online forums and you're getting feedback and there's always a local minority. I was worried that you're getting filtered feedback when you start talking about what people are posting online because you're not getting the whole story, you're getting a story from the local minority. At the end of the day I think we also have to try to work out what's going to work best for the market and put it out there. Again it's different for every platform. I couldn't even tell you how they do it for some of these guys because I know they go through a lot of work to try to dial everything for their audience, and we do, and in even doing that you make mistakes and you have to back up and try again and every gamer knows that. You know, there's very rarely a new game that comes out that, "Okay well we got to listen to new patches because this didn't work" or "Everyone hated this play mechanic" or you know, there's always something. No matter how good you are, you're always going to go back in and probably end up re-tooling a little bit.

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[PT]: Have you gotten feedback from like customers that used to play Coin-Op games here at...

[DB]: At 257?

[CS]: Yeah.

[DB]: Yeah you know, so we've actually, it's been a lot of fun. So we've had people playing games, so the fun part for me on this side, is giving people that haven't played games in years or decades and talking them to go back into just trying, just try to play this stuff and I've had people that were 60-70 years old and I've got enough to go back and play some games and they're like, "Oh okay I'll play asteroids, let me try it. I haven't played it in 30 years but okay fine, I'll play asteroids again", or "I'll play centipede" and it's a lot of fun because some of us are playing and it exactly what we wanted to happen. They're enjoying it! And as soon as they start enjoying it, we just start having conversation about the other games back there. And we try to make it really accessible and really inclusive, so if you don't want to play asteroids, that's fine. If you want to play chess, I got a chess set back there. If you want to play backgammon, play for free, I don't care. You can play board games, you want to play board games, card games, play them. That's fine. Just sit back here, hang out, relax, play. If you do that for a little bit, though, you're probably going to say, "You know I should go play centipede - I should go play Pac-man, try it

out again just for old times' sake and as soon as that happens, then we can start getting them excited about game play again and that was part of a deal here games are so great, I wanted to get people to try it again, they haven't played it in years and that's been fun for me here, is getting some of those people to play it again, and we've had a lot of people do that and that's been a thrill for me, I've had people back there, That have literary said, "Ah, I haven't played games in decades", okay, well let's try it. You know, you don't have to worry about the pricing you're not to worry about the cost. Just go ahead and play it, here, have a card, next hour, you can activate any game in here, play what you want. Yeah we can sit down and have a drink, whatever you want to do, you can do whatever you want, but just try it. And when you start to take off all those limitations and all the barriers, it becomes a lot more accessible and they just start realizing they're having fun and that's been a blast. I've enjoyed the heck out of that. Giving people to play games that haven't played games in years. That's been fun, so, yeah. We've had a lot of feedback on that too and I've had a lot of positive feedback,...you always get a little negative feedback too, but we try to take the negative feedback as a positive so we learn from it. And yeah, it's been good. That's been one of the pluses about what we've done here is the positive feedback we've gotten. Our goal there was to get people to play games that don't normally play games and its working, so I've been really excited about that.

[CS]: Just to wrap up - You say a lot of the people that are playing these Coin-Op games usually have had history with them or have played it one time in their lives and come to play it again. Where do you see, in your personal opinion, the future of coin-op going as far as, like, game play or audience?

[DB]: Well, it won't be Coin-Op, it'll be another time of payment system but, I think it's becoming - I think the style of game play is going to be largely the same because it's really, when you're talking about an environment like this you don't have a half hour to learn how to play a game. You're talking about something you have to be able to pick up and play it relatively naturally. You know, you can't have a big barrier or obstacles to figure out how to play and have a good time with it, and we want people to have a good time quickly, pick it up and go. So I think that style's going to continue on. I think the mechanism that we deliver it's going to change, I think that technology is going to force us to change that, I think that what you're seeing now is a new revolution in games and a lot of it comes back to the bar-cades and they're using old games but they're making games really socially acceptable again with older people that haven't played games in a long time. I love that about bar kids and the fact that they're taking all this wave nostalgia, I'm bringing these games back like. I think you're going to continue to see that, and again, that was part of our motivation here. Let's take that as its starting to work and use that as a launching to get people to see this new stuff that were doing because some of the new technology we have today and the stuff coming down the line over the next couple of years is

really amazing And we've got to get that in front of people again, until we can get them out there just having a good time it's really tough to get them to see have an open mind about, "Hey look and try this new technology so try out this spherical screens, try out this new head mounted display". And there's a lot of obstacles with that but I think technology is going to change a lot of the delivery systems that we have and that'll be the fun part, experimenting with to see what people will accept and what they won't accept and how it changes the way we interact, not just with us versus the machine but us against another person or with another person, cooperatively. I love cooperative play, as opposed to, maybe competitive play and I think that you'll see a lot more cooperative play in the stuff that we're doing in the future and this environment as opposed to competitive. You know, it's not necessary you against the other person but you and the other person working together towards a common goal.

[CS]: Just a last question. Not really a question, but, is there anything that you would like to add or tell everybody that hasn't been covered already or that they should know?

[DB]: [Bishop laughs] Games are fun. I hope everyone knows that already! But if not, then everyone should know that games are fun, it's okay to play games and I think that games are a big part of what we're going to be doing in the future still. It's a really important part of my life and I hope it's an important part of everybody's life, moving forward. Yeah, I think it will be.

[CS]: Thank you for your time, thank you for accepting this interview.

[DB]: Thanks guys, no, thanks for coming out.

1:47:30