

Interview: Those Two Guys from Andromeda— Mark Crowe & Scott Murphy

Yes, yet another QuestBusters' exclusive—the first major interview with the authors of Sierra's hit *Space Quest* series! This interview transpired while we stretched out in Sierra's stretch limo, returning from lunch (see April issue for menu) to a top-secret location where they gave us a fly-through of *Space Quest III*'s stretching highlights at the January CES in Las Vegas).

QB: How did you become the Two Guys from Andromeda?

Mark: What is Andromeda, anyway, a planet or a star system?

Scott: It's a star system. (Obviously we're not hard-core astronomers.)

Mark: That shows you what I know...so forgive my intergalactic ignorance.

Scott: We liked the name because it rolls off the tongue easily, so we thought it was a good one.

Mark: But as far as the "Two Guys" thing, it's really a take-off on the "Two Guys from Italy" pizza chain. Unfortunately, I don't think anyone ever got it.

QB: Oh, *that's* it.

Scott: When we did *Space Quest I*, we thought it would be funny to have these alter egos. We thought it would be a neat gimmick, that it would sell a lot of games.

Mark: Yeah, ok, that's it, that's the bottom line! Actually, we just figured that if we were going to be silly about it, we might as well be silly from start to finish.

Scott: Everybody's real big on having their names on the box and all that stuff. It was our little way of poking fun at that, I guess.

Mark: We don't care, as long as they spell our names right on the checks!

Scott: Definitely!

QB: And who does what on the games?

Mark: I do the graphics, he does the programming.

Scott: I've really enjoyed it. I had no idea anything like this existed. It's funny being the only person in the room programming who doesn't have a college education.

QB: So tell us a little about yourselves: how long have you been writing games, what did you do before then, what did you do in your previous lifetimes?

Scott: I have no idea what or who I was in my previous lifetime, though I may have been a doormat. I came to Sierra with no computer background as far as school goes. No college time except one course in vocabulary and entomology, which I sometimes don't believe I actual-

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ly passed. I moved to Yosemite because I liked the outdoors, and I was working in restaurants when a friend (also working restaurants) got a job at Sierra. The first adventure games I played were *Wizard and the Princess* and *Softporn Adventure*. All I had seen till then were arcade games, and I was really fascinated by the adventures. So I started reading books, manuals for Sierra's products, and got a feel for what was going on—so that they'd *have* to give me a job eventually, if I knew enough and was standing around not doing anything. And they did.

QB: How long ago was that?

Scott: That was almost six years. I started out handling paperwork in dealer returns, answering questions about adventure games, data bases and word processors in customer support. In six months I ended up managing that department, before the big crunch, or crash, I forget when that was.

QB: '83, early '84.

Scott: Yeah, right in that area, when we almost took the big dive.

QB: So how old are you now?

Scott: I'm 34, couple of kids, a wife, and even a grandchild, as a matter of fact.

QB: So you went to Yosemite to backpack and ended up writing *Space Quest*?

Scott: Yeah, I started working for Sierra and never getting a chance to go out hiking or backpacking, because I've been so busy since.

QB: And how did you actually move into writing games? Did someone just walk in and say, "Quick! We need a funny game!"

Scott: I was working in customer support, and was burned out on phone calls and explaining things to people, and so on. And I saw the games being developed, being worked on. I had some ideas, and I knew this one guy who was working on a game, and I thought, "If he can do it, I *know* I can." It was that kind of a deal. So I kept bugging Ken [Williams], saying, "I'd like to be involved in product development. Why don't you give me a chance?" And he gave me a shot working on *Black Cauldron* with he and Al Lowe, so I ended up debugging the thing, fixing all their code and stuff (not that they code bad).

Mark: That was our first project together.

Scott: Mark was in the art department, doing a lot of box art, and got drafted into graphics for the computer. We'd be sitting there messing around, thinking up funny messages and things.

Mark: Like the Bat-Mobile in *King's Quest I* or *II*. It comes out of this cave, turns around and goes back in. We didn't tell Roberta about it until after it was shipping [maniacal laughter ensues from the Two Guys].

QB: So Mark, how old are you?

Mark: Twenty-nine.

QB: And what did you do before Sierra?

Mark: I was going to school for awhile and decided to quit delivering singing telegrams.

QB: What did you dress up as when you did the telegrams?

Mark: You name it—a gorilla, Cupid, Superman (that was back when I had a build) and all kinds of crazy things.

Scott: He had a beeper, and they'd beep him when they had to dispatch him somewhere.

Mark: I totaled my car once, out in the middle of nowhere, and was wearing a belly-dancer outfit at the time. Which consisted of pants. Baggy pants and shoes with curled-up toes. The Highway Patrolman really got a kick out of that. I did some graphic arts jobs, then got a job at Sierra designing packages for games like *Flip 'n' Match* and *Lunar Leeper*. *King's Quest I* was in development about that time, which was a real hush-hush project, since IBM was in on it. That's when I got moved into the graphics department, because everyone was working on that, so they were shorthanded. My first project was *Winnie the Pooh and the Hundred Acre Woods*. From there I worked on animation for *King's Quest II*. It was when I was doing some animation on *Black Cauldron* that Scott and I thought, "Hey, let's do a space game, let's get together and do something fun." Because we weren't really into the medieval, swords, dungeons and dragons-type stuff. And we wanted to do something funny, because we both have a pretty sick sense of humor.

Scott: So we did a demo. Mark drew up a few pictures and I coded them and put in some funny messages. And we showed it to Ken: "Come here and take a look at this." And he looked at it and said, "Ok, make me a map." [Both laugh so hard at the memory, they fall out of their seats and onto the plush floor of the limo.]

Mark: That's exactly what he said. "Ok, it's a game, it's a project, let's go."

Scott: I don't think he or anyone else ever thought we'd do it, because at that time, Roberta was the only one who'd designed a game. Now everybody's doing it, which is great.

QB: So the "Two Guys" led the way?

Mark: Yeah, and I feel we kind of helped with the recovery of the company, because it was a project that came out of nowhere and really helped us to stabilize

after the shaky times. It just came out of the blue, so it was revenue the company certainly didn't expect. And the development cost was quite low, so the profits were good. We weren't paying out huge royalties all over the place. I don't think they expected it to do as well as it did. I wasn't sure.

Scott: I never thought we'd be doing *Space Quest III*—or *II*, for that matter.

QB: What can you tell us about *Space Quest III*?

Scott: Take it, Mark.

Mark: Let's see, duh...the universally acclaimed software authors, I guess—The Two Guys from Andromeda—have been kidnapped by the Pirates of Pestulon and forced to churn out boring arcade games for a disreputable software company known as ScumSoft. And Roger Wilco's challenge is to rescue them, which becomes your goal in the game.

Scott: Of course, after you get yourself out of the mess that you're in with the robots in the garbage freighter, you have to build a space ship from parts you find in this intergalactic junkyard. From that point, you can fly to several different planets. You actually have control of your ship, whereas in the previous games you were kind of limited as to where you could go.

Mark: It's a little less linear than the other games have been.

QB: Yeah, the controls looked a little more sophisticated.

Scott: You have more control over where you go and when you go there. It's not a set series of areas that you have to go to one after another; you can go just about anywhere you want.

QB: So it's not as linear.

Mark: That's a good way to put it.

Scott: Are you saying that our other games were?

Mark: Truly, they definitely were. We're trying to improve on it. As we go along, we become more sophisticated as designers. We've got two games on the market, but they were our first two games. We're learning as we go along. Hopefully we're learning from the criticisms and so forth that we've heard. With the exception maybe of the arcade sequences, learning what people like and don't like, and trying to keep them happy. We like people telling us they enjoy playing the game.

Scott: When they say things like, "I really had a great time and I laughed a lot," that's really important to us. It makes it seem worthwhile. Aside from the checks...

Mark: The money doesn't really matter—it's the acclaim.

Scott: Yeah, yeah...

Mark: Yeah...

QB: Hold it—you're starting to sound like the Beatles.

Scott: What really feels good is when someone tells us something was funny. Or when Roberta walks up and goes (he makes sound of resigned exasperation), then we *know* it's good. I shouldn't say that.

Mark: But if you can't kid (pauses to flip through *Bartlett's Book of Familiar Quotations*)...

QB: If you can't kid yourself, who can you kid?

Mark: Who said that?

Scott: Can we take our nap now?

QB: This is the third *Space Quest*? Will we see another? Is it going to be *Space Quest* forever?

Mark: We're kind of doing a "wait and see" to find out if people are getting tired of it or not, if we've gone too far already...

Scott (shouts): It depends on *sales* for this year!

Mark: Or on whether or not everyone

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Crowe & Murphy, headed back to Andromeda after a hard day's night at Sierra

Those Two Guys

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reads the press release that calls it the "last of the *Space Quest* trilogy," which we knew nothing about.

Scott: But I think it's inevitable there'll be another one, because they've all been real successful.

Mark: It seems like we have sequel fever, but there appears to be a good following. We keep getting calls and letters asking when the next one will be out. As long as they keep doing that, we'll keep turning something out for them.

QB: Technically this stands out from your previous games because it has the double hi-res graphics and the improved music. Is there anything new or different in terms of puzzles and other aspects?

Scott: There are more close-ups of the characters [also referred to as first-person illustrations]. We're trying to give more of a feeling that you're taking part in a movie rather than a game—that you're actually *in* a movie. Showing things in different perspectives, rather than just flat screens with a little character walking around...

Mark: Try to give it a little different feel...

Scott: ...show close-ups of the aliens you encounter, to give them more personality...

Mark: Yeah, that's one thing that's really good. We had Tiny's Used Space Ships in the first game, and he seemed to go over quite well. He had a personality, even though it wasn't large: a salesman-type rap, he's a sleazy guy, selling you a ship he doesn't even own. That kind of thing. So we're trying to put even more personality into the characters in the game. Puzzle-wise, I don't know that we've done much better. We've got puzzles, obviously, but sometimes I think that all puzzles are recycled [laughs] from game to game.

QB: Or a lot of the objects, at least. I forget which games were involved, maybe *Manhunter* was one of them, but I was going over two solutions that turned out to use almost identical objects in the end game. You know what I mean: crowbars, shovels, keys...

Scott: Yeah, we've been trying to come up with some real off-the-wall puzzles and tools.

Mark: Like using a jock-strap for a sling.

Scott: That was pretty unique.

QB: Wait—it was *Space Quest II*, not *Manhunter*. Wasn't that the one that used a toilet plunger at the end? Because there was another game, out about the same time, that used a toilet plunger in one of the last puzzles—*Dream Zone*—and I was going, how can that be?

Scott: Yeah, it's strange. And it bothers me—I hate it when things like that happen, where you seem to have done something that someone else has already done.

Mark: It gets tougher and tougher each time you do one of these, to come up with something original.

Scott: It's hard to break out of the mind-set. You kind of get locked into things and seem to have trouble thinking differently.

One of the reasons we don't want to do another one too soon is to give ourselves time to come up with some more original stuff, not just keep following the adventure game pattern.

Mark: I find that real frustrating. I hate it when I look at stuff and say, "We've done something that's pretty close to what they've done, or isn't that original, maybe just in a different form."

QB: Well, the keycards are in the game again, right?

Scott: No. They were in the first two, but not in this one.

Mark: In a futuristic game, keycards are as common as keys are in any other adventure.

Scott: Yeah, we're changing them to keypads, so you have to punch in a code to get into your office. We're becoming more sophisticated, so we're going to get rid of the keycards.

Mark: No, actually, we don't have anything like that. In fact, you're not locked out of anything, really.

Scott: It's kind of a throw-away puzzle [both Guys from Andromeda erupt in un-

controllable fits of chuckles, snorts, guffaws and rabid belly-laugh].

QB: Where did Roger Wilco come from?

Scott: Wasn't it an old World War II thing? Like "four-niner-bravo, roger wilco?"

Mark: The reason we used it was because of a cartoonist, Kliban, the one who did cartoon books like *Never Eat Anything Bigger than Your Head*.

Scott: Stuff that was so bizarre...he's like Gary Larson, only a couple of steps weirder.

Mark: And he was doing it before Larson. He did drawings of people and had weird names for them—and one of them was Roger Wilco. He looked like one of the guys in high school who was in audio-visual or

something: not quite a nerd, but sort of.

Scott: We thought it was appropriate, a space jockey type of guy.

Mark: In reality, we gave people the opportunity to name their character in the first two games, so Roger Wilco probably wasn't the name used by many of them.

Scott: So, are we done?

Mark: Are you out of tape yet?

QB: No, the tape's still running, so we're still stuck here.

Scott: Can't leave till the tape's finished.

QB: Let's see, it's 2:35, it's still Monday. I don't know, is there anything you wanted to say about *Space Quest*, or about anything? (I can't get any more vague than this.)

Mark: Just keep that fan mail comin' in.

Scott: That's true, we do get a lot of letters, and it's really great to read some of them. We get them from parents, from kids, so we've got a pretty wide audience. That's been a challenge, to keep it clean.

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Murphy & Crowe: those Two Guys again, lounging in the five-acre terrarium inside Sierra's Coarse-gold, California, headquarters.

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BattleTech

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We'll Be Right Back

Fans of the paper and pencil RPG may recognize that this game barely touches on the totality of the *BattleTech* universe. Don't be distraught, for a sequel is already in the works. The owners' manual explains the operations of the game and gives some history of the successor houses and biographies of important members of the Youngblood clan. A flyer will familiarize you with hand-weapons and the four light Mechs.

There's also a FASA ad highlighting no fewer than 44 *BattleTech* products: from complete board games and individual RPG campaigns to technical blueprints and biographies of the five houses. Even novels about some of the major characters and battles are offered (some written by *Wasteland* co-designer Michael Stackpole). With this incredible wealth of history from which to draw, it's easy to predict that this may turn into the next major game series.

It supports one or two floppy drives and hard disks. Two 5.25" disks and one 3.5" disk are in the box. There are two variations of key word copy protection. Every time you go to the Mech training facility, you have to identify key parts of a Wasp Mech from a diagram in the manual. This repetition would get annoying, but you never have to do it again after completing the training missions.

Additionally, there is a star map that you need to solve the final puzzle. This is far more subtle than the first scheme, because it really is a legitimate game puzzle. It's up to the player to figure out which of the many planetary common denominators define them as a likely part of the ultimate password.

Conclusions: If *BattleTech* is any indication, Infocom's commitment to the all-text adventure will surely carry over into graphics gaming. The visuals are excellent, yet don't suffer the corresponding loss in speed that hampers games like *Future Magic*. I'd like to hear better sound and see a larger slice of the *BattleTech* universe in the sequel—but as the first game in the series, this one is top-notch.

Skill Level: Intermediate

Copy Protection: Key Word

Price: C 64, \$39.95; others, \$49.95

Company: Westwood/Infocom

What Two Guys?

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Mark: But we don't need any more game ideas.

Scott: Yeah, people keep submitting things like 'Attack of the Killer Turtles.'

Mark: We laughed at 'Killer Turtles,' and now 'Teenage Mutant Turtles' is a big hit!

Scott: But I really appreciate people who take the time to sit down and write a letter and tell us their judgement on what we did—that's really gratifying.

Mark: Yeah, that's almost as important as the check! I remember one call I got before my phone number was unlisted (people will call any name on the box). It was from some guy in the Deep South, who sounded like: "Ah'm playin' yall's *Space Quest* gaaame heah, and ah'd lahk ta know how ahm s'posed ta get past these heah lazuh beams." It seems like the most unlikely people are playing these games.

Scott: Another thing that's been a surprise is that the age range we appeal to is so wide. It's so tough to put stuff in that will entertain adults without offending younger people or their parents.

Mark: I got one letter from a feminist who was upset about the jock-strap, she called it a male-oriented game that had no females in it. Supposedly her thirteen-year old son was offended by the fact that there was a jock-strap in it.

Scott: I still wish we'd sent her a *Leisure Suit Larry*. But that wouldn't be right.

Mark: I'm too tired from lunch, I can't think anymore.

Scott: I remember one letter we got from a guy, who obviously wasn't very bright and didn't know how to write, either, or spell...

QB: That was my letter!

Mark: Oh, you're the guy we sent the *Wizi-Type* to.

QB: Any more interesting behind-the-scene stories?

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Waiting for Duffy

Duffy's busy studying his "Be a Super Tanker Captain" mail order course, so contact these people if you can help.

Need maps to Wizardry 1, also Book of Adventure 1 & 2. C. Gregor, 4260 Clayton Rd #74, Concord, CA 94521

Manhunter: what do I do on day 3? What's note UCUC for? Dan Bartram Jr, Box 2398, APO NY 09009

Wizardry 2: Found the 3 clues, still don't know what killed the king. Joseph Cade, 9009 N McGee, Kansas City, MO 64155

Neuromancer & Ultima 4: need help, maps, tips. J. Ransbottom, POB 491, Chesapeake, OH 45619

Corruption: How do I get out of hospital ward? J. Figaro, 3538 Grantwood Way, Carmichael, CA 95608

Usurper: how do I light the lantern? R. Loveland, 7721 Sundial Lane, Orlando, FL 32819

Manhunter: What do I do after getting the message "UCUC"? Police Quest 2: Have field kit but can't get out of station. Fletcher tells me to answer calls about "dirtbag" but yells at me when I get in the car. How do I drive around? Kevin Wagner, POB 36, Fombel, WA 16123.

Neuromancer: need more Zen, money & chips. How do I enter Biolabs? Gary Hollis, HHC 4-67 AR, APO NY 09074

Wizard's Crown: Can't get good party started, need tips. Joseph Smith, 69-43 B 210 St, Bayside, NY 11364

Ultima 5: How does Lord Kenneth help me get Sandalwood Box? Matt Danbenspeck, Rte 2 Box 466, Tuttle, OK 73089

Ultima 5: How do I get through Dungeon Hythloth to Underworld? Where's the Sandalwood Box? How do I get out of first room in Shame? P. Gardner, 2038 New York Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11210. Same questions, plus will playing harpsichord help me? R. Loveland, 7721 Sundial Lane, Orlando, FL 32819

Neuromancer: Where is Commlink 4, what are passwords for Chiba Tactical Police and SEA? P. Meehan, 2555 Giant Oaks Dr, Pittsburgh, PA 15241



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APPLE

Wanted: Impossible Mission. L. Brooks, 425 East Dr, E. Alton, IL 62024

Will trade Deathlord with clue book for Might & Magic II. Bruce Menard, 324 S Boyer Ave, Sandpoint, ID 83864

Sell, \$10 @: Gemstone Warrior, Gemstone Healer, Expedition Amazon. \$15 @: Mystery House, Empire of Overmind, Realms of Darkness, Suspended. \$20 @: Bard's Tale, Ultima 5, Wizardry. Will trade for or buy Timeship. Write 1st. Gayle Ann Stanford, 3281 Foxgate Dr, Memphis, TN 38115

Sell, \$10 @: Hitchhiker's Guide, Ballyhoo, Mind Forever Voyaging, Wishbringer, Apshai trilogy. \$20 @: Might & Magic, Wasteland, 2400 AD. Will trade for Police Quest, Beyond

Zork, Wizardry 5. Jeremy Gorr, 2017 W. 27 Place, Sheboygan, WI 53081

Selling RPGs with hi-level characters: M & M 1, Bard 1, Wizardry 1-4, & others. Can include maps. Jon, 1201 N. Alvernon #46, Tucson, AZ 85712

Sell, \$15 @: Autoduel, Bard 1 & 2, Empire 1, King's Quest 1, Sundog, Ultima 3, Wizardry 2-3, Zork 2. Steve Depetris, 8 Admiral Dr #327, Emeryville, CA 94608

Sell: Wizardry 5, \$30. \$15 @: Ultima 4, M & M 1, Phantasies 3. \$8, Bureaucracy. Want to buy Bard 2, Neuromancer, Pirates. Andy Webster, 2012 Cedar St, Jacksonville, IL 62650

Macintosh: 15 original Mac adventures, write for list. D. M. Campbell, 9772 Via Pavia, Burbank, CA 91504

GS: Dungeon Master, Warlock, War in Middle Earth, Shadowgate, Queston 2, Bard 1-2, Tower of Meglan. And Apple 2 versions of M & M 1-2 and Wasteland. \$20 @. P. Matta, 113 Carriage Crossing, Middletown, CT 06457

COMMODORE

Sell—\$10: Breakers (or trade for Essex). Paul Shaffer, 1705-C O'Shea Ave, Bowling Green, KY 42104

Trade/sell: Autoduel, Faery Tale, Alter Ego, Shard of Spring, Roadwar 2000, Dark Lord, Tass Times, Defender of Crown, Beyond Zork, Friday 13th, more. Send your list. Bob Greenfield, 106 Heritage Dr, Freehold, NJ 07728

Sell: Pool of Radiance & hint book, \$25. Times of Lore, \$20. Eric Hunter, 6160 Hickory Dr, Forest Park, GA 36050

Trade: Faery Tale, Deathlord, Moebius, Phantasia I, more. Send SASE for list. Want Neuromancer, Wasteland, Times of Lore, Mars Saga. Jason White, 4205 Oats St, Houston, TX 77020

Trade/sell: Pool of Radiance, Border Zone, Zork trilogy, Beyond Zork, Plundered Hearts, Zorkquest I. Brian James, 7111 S. Albion St, Littleton, CO 80122

Sell—\$15 @: Deathlord, Bard's Tale 2, Bard's Tale 3, Faery Tale, Moebius, Captain Blood. \$12 @: Defender of Crown, Vampire Empire, Legacy of Ancients. Paul Breen, 1228 Bacon Ridge Rd, Crownsville, MD 21032

AMIGA—\$10 @: Dark Castle, Barbarian, Arctic Fox, Beyond Zork. \$5 @: Trinity, Moonmist, Mind Forever Voyaging, Ballyhoo, Wishbringer. Paul Shaffer, 1705-C

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The Two Amigos of Outer Space

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Scott: We got into a little bit of trouble with Disney for putting messages in *Black Cauldron* that they didn't find particularly tasteful. I remember writing my first message: when I saw it on the screen, it made me chuckle, and I thought, "This is really fun." The Disney people didn't think so, though. I didn't know Disney was going to get a copy of that version, because I thought I'd get a chance to clean it up first. When they saw it, I had to print out all the text files for them, so they could look over them and make sure we hadn't screwed anything else up.

Mark: They had no sense of humor.

Scott: Oh, it was *fun* working with Disney. In fact, they gave everybody a list of words that could not appear in the software, or anything Disney ever published, for that matter. And it was the most obscure list of words: all the dirty words, of course, but then there were some that could mean just about anything...

Scott: Another interesting story involves

Space Quest I, which had the robot place called 'Droids R Us.' We got a nasty letter from Toys R Us, who wanted to sue us, wanted us to 'cease and desist.' Change it, or take it out, whatever. They thought we were infringing on their trademark. I guess they have a trademark on the 'R' or something, even though ours wasn't a backwards 'R' like theirs.

QB: That's funny, because the masthead in a recent issue of *QuestBusters* said it was published by 'Orbs R Us.'

Mark: Then a few weeks later, Ken walks up and says to change it.

Scott: We changed it to 'Droids B Us.'

Mark: So anyone out there who has a *Space Quest I* with a 'Droids R Us' in it has a collectors item.

Scott: Not many of them got out the door.

QB: Well, I'm out of tape, I'm out of questions, you're out of answers...

Mark: How much can you write about Two Guys from Andromeda, anyway?

Adventure Hotline

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unsure of it, they sent it to game reviewers (!) to find out if it was any good.

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