

SPACE QUEST III

THE MEN WHO DESIGNED THE GAME

by Nancy Grimsley

Mark Crowe and Scott Murphy are the designers of the *Space Quest* adventure games put out by Sierra On-Line. Not only did they conceive the idea and write the story, they are the major programmers on the game—to oversimplify their roles Mark does the pictures and Scott makes the characters move and respond. In a recent interview they talked about the process of creating an adventure game.

As the interview progressed I had an opportunity to notice their partnership in action. After I asked a question, one of them would have a response and often no sooner would he finish than the other would smoothly dove-tail an additional response. Some of the answers came from both of them contributing phrases in turn that fitted together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. It didn't look to me like a particularly conscious process, but it appeared to be a comfortable technique, without any taint of contentiousness, irritation, or competitiveness. They laughed a lot. See for yourself. Here is how it went.

How did you each get your start in your craft, programming and computer graphics?

Mark: I started with Sierra six years ago working for the Art Department designing packaging and documentation and what not, so I used my illustration skills there. My first computer graphics project was creating the graphics for *Winnie the Pooh and the One Hundred Acre Wood*. Then I did animation for *King's Quest II* and following that I did some animation for *Black Cauldron* which was the first project Scott and I worked on together. I believe that was also his first job creating source code for the games.

Scott: I didn't start doing this. It was an accident. I saw an adventure game before I worked here and I liked it. I had a job I hated and I kept bugging Sierra until they let me come and work as a

dealer returns person. And I kept learning things. I kept learning product in my spare time and learning how to support stuff. So I became a support rep for games and then for business products, then I ended up managing the support



Mark Crowe and Scott Murphy
Two Guys from Andromeda

department. Then the big crunch hit and I started doing QA work as well as support stuff. As I got closer to where they were creating the games I saw Mark and Doug MacNeill working on graphics for *King's Quest II* and *Black Cauldron* and I started bugging Ken (referring to Ken Williams, the company president) to let me try. I saw people working on programming and I knew that if they could do it, I could do it. So I kept bugging Ken and finally he let me try it. I put in a lot of free time over a summer spending nights out at his house debugging *Black Cauldron*. And then I ended up being the only one working on it. After a while Ken and Al Lowe bailed out on me. So I got *Black Cauldron* shipping and that was the first thing I worked on as far as a game. I got bit by the bug then.

It sounds like a story of persistence paying off.

Scott: Yes, exactly. Exactly.

How did you two get started together?

Mark: We were both working on *Black Cauldron* together. We're real-

Continued on page 7

FROM SUPERTRAMP TO SPACE QUEST III

AN INTERVIEW WITH BOB SIEBENBERG

by Kirk Green

For someone who has seen the heights of superstardom in the rock band Supertramp, Bob Siebenberg is a pretty down to earth guy. He gets up every morning and is at work in his home studio by 9:00 am and works till early afternoon when he heads out to a local baseball field to coach little league.

"Hey my greatest day is working in the studio and then heading out to baseball practice by 4:15pm," said Siebenberg.

Married, with two children, the 39-year-old Siebenberg has worked in his ranch home studio over the past few months on the



Bob Siebenberg
From rock band Supertramp

soundtrack for *Space Quest III: The Pirates of Pestulon* for Sierra. We spent some time with him recently, after he finished putting the final touches on his new solo album, to see how he became part of the Sierra family.

Most people are surprised when they hear that the drummer for Supertramp is producing a musical soundtrack for a Sierra 3-D Animated Adventure Game.

Continued on page 8

ly into science fiction and space and that sort of thing and together we decided to work up an idea for a game that would deal with that genre—science fiction—and we wanted it to take place in space. So we put together a demo. I did the graphics, and Scott did the code.

Scott: We showed it to Ken and he said sure it looks like a game. Go with it. About a year earlier we had asked Ken about a space game and he said no it doesn't sound good. So this time we just had it all ready and showed it to him, rather than just approaching him with an idea. And once he saw what was on screen and how it looked and how it felt, that really helped a lot. Mark's graphics did a lot, too.

How do you two work, together or apart?

Mark: We both have a real strange sense of humor. So we bounce weird ideas off each other and use each other as a catalyst.

Scott, as an aside: Fortunately for people who play the games, most of them don't get in.

Mark: We spend time working alone at our houses and we work together here at Sierra. It works out real well.

One of the things I really enjoy is the humor in the games. How do you go about trying to cover all the bases that a user might try.

Mark: You have to sit down and go through each picture and try to put yourself in the mindset of someone who has never seen this before. You have to ask yourself if you were walking around in this world, what would you try to do.

Scott: You can only do it so well, unfortunately. That is where QA people and the Beta testers come in. They type in weird stuff and sometimes that may prompt a weird response, and it will end up staying in the game. Something specifically addressed to one person gets into the game and sometimes it sounds funny enough and

it stays. I keep finding messages that I forgot I put in.

How long does it take you to design a game from conception to shipping?

Mark: We've been on this one for a little over a year.

Scott: But this one was a special case. We have a brand new development system. I had to learn a whole new language to program. The other two were done on AGI and this is SCI. (Editor's note. See article in this issue about The Making of King's



Quest IV for more information on the two.) Totally different worlds. I had to learn something and understand something I had no concept of to start with. The other two came out in a period of approximately 9 to 11 months. So we were pretty consistent there. We don't start out with a huge document. We start out with a couple of ideas, where we are going to start and where we are going to end, and some of the things that are going to happen in between, and work our way there.

Does it change substantially from your original design by the time everybody else who is involved in it gets through?

Scott: Not a great deal.

Mark: We always start aiming really high and we always fall short of our goal, I think, but in the long run we come up with a pretty good product.

Our customers are beginning to become familiar with SCI and AGI. How is it different to work with SCI, from your point of view?

Scott: It has its advantages. First of all, you have better resolution on the screen.

The graphics look a lot better. Mark has more room to work. You have more control of what's going on in the screen. There are a lot of neat things for the programmer, but at the same time when you get those neat things you also get more neat ways of messing up. (They both laughed here.)

I was fascinated with some of the depth perspective I saw. For example in the opening credits—the letters are in the foreground and the stars far in the back.

Mark: The new interpreter has allowed us to come up with a lot of great special effects and from a graphics standpoint the new language gives us twice the resolution. I don't want to say pictures take twice as long, but they do take a lot longer because you have more to work with. You can put more detail in the graphics. Folks out there will have to be a little more patient about

how soon we can get these things out.

Scott: Before, Mark had a limited area to work in and he could only do so much. Now he's tempted to think "Wow! I could do this," or "Maybe I could add that." So he's trying to restrain himself.

I wanted to ask about the sound effects, too. The other day I chased a wind sound clear across the room to see what it was, and it was from Space Quest III. It was so real I could practically feel the chilliness of it. How do you develop your sound effects?

Mark: That is the work of Mark Siebert, our in-house music person using the Roland MT-32 synthesizer.

Scott: Mark (Siebert) has learned a lot of ways to push the synthesizer around and make it do things. He's come up with good effects that weren't available for some of the earlier games. We are benefiting from his time on the earlier projects.

I understand the MT-32 is the equivalent of 8 synthesizers in 1.

Continued on page 25

How did you become involved in the project?

There was an advertisement in the paper.

No, really.

Yes, I was reading the Sierra Star (a local paper) and there was an ad for some one who knew how to work with MIDI. I had just come off the Free As A Bird tour with Supertramp and I was looking for something new to get involved with. I met with Rick Cavin (Sierra General Manager) and right away he realized I wasn't the

Some of the music on *Space Quest III* is very beautiful, on a level of an epic film score. Then you have music such as "Festers Theme," which is light and funny. Where do you draw your ideas from?

I just pull it out of thin air in a sense. I just put in the time needed to produce the music. Something I tried to achieve with *Space Quest III* is to expand the size and dimension of the game with music.

How does the work on *Space Quest III* differ from your solo album or work with Supertramp?

Working in the band (Supertramp) you have four or five people and I'm part of that band. For my solo projects and working on the soundtrack to *Space Quest III*, it is down to me. There are no short cuts, it is just me putting in the time producing the music. With the game music I can be a little goofy, like with "Festers Theme," that wouldn't work in my solo projects.

Sierra has had William Goldstein and you write and produce music for our games. Do you see any of your fellow musicians doing similar projects?

Some of the people who worked on my solo record thought that the graphics and music was a great concept. I'm sure there are people who would want to jump on it, but I still want a job too!(laughing)

You've talked a lot about this new album you have been working on...

Yes, that is "Long Shot," an album I've done with a band I formed with Dennis O'Donnell called Heads Up. For right now it is being released in Germany on Polydor Records. Germany is actually the second largest market for music in the world. So we'll see how it does and eventually we might release it in the UK and the US. The album has a lot of keyboards and new sounds from different keyboards, but it is not computerized. We've got Reno Wilde doing lead vocals, Scott Gorham from Thin Lizzy on guitars and three members of the Supertramp tour band playing on the album. It has got a Procol Harem feel to it and we had John Punter, who worked with Procol Harem, produce the album.

How about Supertramp?

Supertramp is still together technically. Sometimes when you are with a group for a long period of time you want to branch

out and get away from the pressures that are part of the band. Then when you've spent some time away you appreciate the dif-

"I would like to hope that someday the five of us (Supertramp) would get together again."

ferent things that made up the band. I would like to hope that someday the five of us (Supertramp) would get together again.

So what is in store for Bob Siebenberg in the coming year?

Well I hope to do more for Sierra. I enjoyed working on *Space Quest III*. I want my solo work to do well and I'd like to win the 13-year-old All Star Division in little league.

Sounds like Bob Siebenberg has the best of both worlds and has his priorities straight. ■

*Police Quest Review
continued from page 5*

drive as copy protection has been eliminated. This also means that back-up copies can easily be made for floppy disk drive only use. You also receive a map of the town of Lytton. This is handy for learning the patrol area. The Indoctrination Guide is a must read. It covers everything from law to personal hygiene. When starting the simulation, you find yourself in the station hallway in the persona of Sonny Bonds. The shift is about to begin and you have to obtain your equipment and go to the shift briefing. During the course of the simulation you have several tours of duty. You will experience real-life law enforcement situations and be asked to make decisions which will effect the outcome of the simulation. You will meet the lowest of the low, high-rollers, ordinary citizens and even a few women that your mother—and definitely your wife—would not approve of.

If you do well in the game you will rise to undercover narcotics detective and solve the case. If not, well, you will spend a lot of time using the restore game command. ■

This review was written by Sgt. Harry Johnson of the Allegan Police Department, Allegan, Michigan.

"There are no short cuts, it is just me putting in the time producing the music."

nine-to-five guy he was looking for, but on the other hand there might be something that I could do—write music for some of the new games.

So one thing led to another and soon you were writing a soundtrack for *Space Quest III*.

That's right. I got some equipment from Sierra: a Macintosh, a Mastertracks Pro and the MT-32 and used it with my own equipment. That includes MIDI keyboards, my 24 track Otari tape deck, and a Neotek recording console. I do most all of my work at home in my own studio. Over the years I've spent so much time away from my family—that is why I moved up here, to be able to work and spend time with my family. In fact my last solo effort was completely recorded at home.

How does the whole process unfold when you are working on music for a game? Where do you start?

I like to start with the image. The creators, Mark Crowe and Scott Murphy, give me a VHS cassette of what the game looks like. I pick their brain about what a certain character's personality is like. The music should enhance the personality. Then I just put in the time writing and producing. I look at the game as a little movie and the music as the soundtrack for that film. It is challenging to come up with something that Mark and Scott want in the way of music. The feel of the music, rather than simple melodies, using the MT-32, Ad Lib or IBM music cards adds a vibe to the whole screen.