

## 'Oh, wouldn't it be great to make video games for a living?'

WATERLOO (CUP) – Jonathan Mak has a simple goal for the new game he's working on – he hopes it doesn't suck.

In 2007, the independent developer released Everyday Shooter, a downloadable game for the PS3's Playstation Network, after being noticed by Sony at an indie game festival.

A simple top-down shooter, Everyday Shooter is an album of games, with each unique level corresponding to a song, and the background music and sound effects of the game completely made up of guitar music recorded by Mak.

Mak's new game is happening because of the success of his last project and the support of a government grant, but he can't really talk about it in detail.

He did, however, have lots to say about the success of Everyday Shooter, the status of games as an artistic medium, and what it's like to be an independent game designer in Canada.

Trevor Loughborough: So what are you up to now? What's happened since Everyday Shooter (ES) came out?

Jonathan Mak: I hooked up with this local musician called I Am Robot and Proud, and we got a government grant to work on our new game, and that's what I've been working on now.

TL: How did the reception to ES affect you as an inde-

pendent game designer?

JM: Coming into it, I was just hoping to make enough money to survive – you know, pay rent for a year. So obviously, when the Sony deal came down, I was unsure at first because I lost my IP rights to it, but it gave me so much exposure and it also gave me more than enough money to work on the next game.

Obviously it's very exciting, actually being able to do this now, what I've been trying to do for 10 years. I still remember, when I was a kid thinking "Oh, wouldn't it be great to make video games for a living?" And now I am.

TL: Do you feel, with the second game, like you have to make it for a mass market?

JM: No, my main concern has just been to make it so that it doesn't suck. My belief is that as long as the game is really good, the audience will come. That's a piece of advice I got and it helped me get ES out. I mean, I thought: "Who's

going to buy this? Abstract shapes, a shooter . . . there are a billion shooters out there."

But my buddy said: "Make what you think is good, and people will play it."



That's been the hard part, trying to make it so that I like it.

TL: What's it like to make a game all by yourself, and how is it different from what you're doing now?

JM: Well to contrast with my current collaboration, but – and this doesn't always mean a better result – but it's easier to do it by myself. If you can do the graphics, programming, and music yourself, you can do it really quickly because you don't have to explain it to anyone else. But when you're working with others you have to spend more time sitting

down, explain ideas, and make sure everyone's on the same page.

TL: Games like yours and the recently released Braid have gotten a lot of positive attention. Has something changed to allow for a wider audience for indie games?

JM: I think a big thing is that just a lot more people are playing games now. I wonder if the percentage of people into indie games has stayed constant, but as the population of gamers increased, the

population of indie gamers increased.

TL: What do you think about the games as art debate?

JM: I wrote an essay about games as art in high school ten years ago – for me it was never a debate. I think the artistic merit of anything is based on the person perceiving it. Someone told me about an art show a while ago where there was just pieces of shit on the floor, and that's art. Someone can take a dump on the street and someone can find meaning in that.

Even when I play Tetris

now, I can see it as a metaphor, about life giving you all these pieces and how you have to do your best to make them fit together.

TL: Do you think indie games have a part to play in fleshing out the artistic role of games?

JM: I think it's up to the audience. I think one thing indie games do is insert more variety, bring more people in, and then maybe get them to read things into the games. But that's not necessarily a distinction of indie games as opposed to mainstream games – a lot of indie games are very niche. There's a huge indie shooter scene and they're breaking new ground in the shooter genre, but to someone who's not really into shooters they probably won't appeal to a new audience as much as, say That Game Company's titles like fLOW and Flower.

TL: You mentioned at the beginning about the grant you received. Have you found Canada to be a good place to be a game designer?

JM: I remember talking to some people and they were surprised with how much Ontario offered in grants. I think we're very fortunate here; there are these programs set up where two dudes can be given a whole bunch of money by the government to make a game.

TL: So can we get any hints on what's coming up next?

JM: Not really. Hopefully it won't suck.