

# Goodbye

*Chris Crawford*

This is the last issue of *Interactive Entertainment Design*.

Yes, I have decided to make Volume 9 (#6) the final issue of this journal, and the most painful aspect of this decision is the requirement to explain the decision to you, my readers.

The easy explanation is that subscriptions have fallen below the sustainable level. When I started this journal nine years ago, I promised my wife that I would abandon the effort if it failed to garner at least 100 subscriptions within a year. I made that target easily, and in fact the subscriber base eventually peaked around 350. Those were heady days, but it's been downhill for the last three years. We're now down to 61 paying subscribers, well below any reasonable threshold.

Of course, I've done my part to drive subscriptions down. For the last two years I've been cutting down on marketing efforts. I stopped sending out my annual reminders to lapsed subscribers; then I gave up sending out my immediate reminders to lapsed subscribers; I even stopped attaching the reminder labels to the copies of those whose subscriptions were about to expire. With no marketing efforts on my part, subscriptions were bound to fall.

There's also the shift in editorial content. The single most critical decision I made was to shun technical content in favor of more esoteric design issues. This drove away a large number of subscribers. I don't regret the decision; when I peruse the sterile pages of game design magazines that are really just programming journals, I smile with satisfaction at my decision. But it wasn't good marketing. I must say to those of you who re-subscribed after such essays as the one on theology, quantum mechanics, determinism, and game design—you've got guts, that's for sure.

There's also my sense that a print journal—for this audience—is rapidly becoming anachronistic. The world will always need print media, but publishing a journal for computer people in hardcopy is just silly. I have already set up an experimental operation via Internet and I'll see where it takes me.

But the most powerful reason for my decision is really an emotional one. Three years ago I gave the finest speech of my life, "The

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Dragon Speech" (available at [http://www.erasmatazz.com/library/JCGD\\_Volume\\_6/Dragon\\_Speech.html](http://www.erasmatazz.com/library/JCGD_Volume_6/Dragon_Speech.html)) in which I declared that it was time for me to move beyond computer games. The field had gotten too durned civilized for me; people like me belong on the rough frontier, cussing, spitting, and fighting bears with knives, far from shopkeepers, property lines, and lawyers. Then I ignored my own eloquent wisdom and hung around the gaming world like some pathetic old man clinging to past glories, too tired to forge new triumphs. What a waste that was!

There was a time, years ago, when our dreams of computer games were illuminated by sparkling visions of artistic aspiration and emotional power. We had no idea how we might achieve these glorious dreams, but we all seemed to think that the daily grind of bits and bytes was the dirt we shoveled to build a stairway to heaven. Someday we'd get there, we knew, but for now the task was to lay foundations. Early issues of this journal crackled with idealistic energy. Looking back, I realize that such idealistic fantasies were hopelessly naive, but I still can't get over how quickly we discarded our noblest aspirations.

The computer gaming community has lost its soul. The gold rush mentality has swept over us, robbing us of higher values and a sense of community. The most recent E3 show left everybody with a sense of disappointment, a sense that the creative lifeblood has drained out of computer games. Yes, this Christmas might be a good one—but nobody except the accountants seems to care any longer.

In the first issue of this journal, on the first page, I declared two goals in creating it: 1. "a sense of community among ourselves...we need to work together to address our common problems." 2. "The purpose of this Journal is to foster the development of the art of computer game design."

On both points, further effort is pointless. There is no artistic potential left in a marketplace that has grown crasser than television. Nor is there any longer a sense of community among computer game designers. The most recent CGDC was big, it was huge, it was important, but it lacked any sense of community spirit. I remember that at the second CGDC, with 175 attendees, we had a banquet dinner with Dan Bunten as our banquet speaker. After Dan's speech, Brenda Laurel surprised me with a presentation of a little trophy that proclaimed me "Zee Greatest Game Designer in Zee Universe," a cognomen I had self-mockingly embraced earlier. Everybody stood up, whistling and clapping, and I very nearly lost my poise. That moment had the sense of community that we have lost.

But enough of this maudlin nonsense. We've got a frontier out there to conquer, and this journal ain't gonna get us there, so let's just dump it and move on to something better.



**Part III:**

**Games and  
Social Engineering**