Romero Eternal

Interview with John ROMERO

John Romero
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John Romero is a Mexican and Native American designer, programmer, and developer in the digital-gaming industry and a co-founder of 10 game studios, including id Software and Ion Storm. He is the author of dozens of games, among others the iconic titles, which started world-famous game series like Wolfenstein 3D, Doom, and Quake, and significantly formed the modern concept of the first-person shooter (FPS) genre, leading to its mass popularization in the 1990s. He also came up with the term 'deathmatch', concerning FPS multiplayer. In 2010, he acted as guest editor for the gaming magazine Retro Gamer. Currently, he is working in Romero Games, a multi-award-winning AAA game studio based in Galway, Ireland.

Interviewer

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Zdenko Mago is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication at the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia. He particularly focuses on interconnections between games studies and marketing communication. In 2014 and 2017, he was a program committee member of the international scientific conference Central and Eastern European Games Studies. At the beginning of 2018, he acted as a visiting researcher at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, Japan. Currently he is editor-in-chief of the scientific journal Acta Ludologica.

Zdenko Mago (Z. M.): People usually know you as an iconic game developer particularly thanks to Doom, but which of your games is truly your most favourite?

John Romero: Doom is my favourite. Next to Doom would be Quake. In general, I really love the Ghost Recon series. Currently, Ghost Recon Breakpoint is my favourite. My favourite indie game at the moment is A Short Hike.

Z. M.: Many of your successful games after Doom, like Heretic, Quake, Daikatana as well as Doom's sequels and versions, were based on violence and gore. How were you and did you become so certain even about Doom, that violent games with gore effects were the way to success?

John Romero: The answer was simple: that's the kind of game that I liked myself. I played and made games for 13 years before making Doom. I used to draw gory comics in the early 80's, and frequently drew violent things. It was natural for me.

Z. M.: Doom was officially released on December 10, 1993, the day after the first congressional hearing on violence in digital games and its impact. Since Doom is considered an icon regarding violent digital games even until today, what were your feelings related to Doom's fate before and after that hearing? Did you ever think about or did you have a plan about what kind of games you would make if violence in digital games was banned?

John Romero: I never thought about the possibility that I could be stopped from making violent games. Movies and books were violent, so I saw no reason why games couldn't be violent as well. I didn't pay attention to what was happening in Congress as I was too busy making the game, so I didn't know it was happening.

Z. M.: In the early stages of Doom development, did you ever consider that the Doom Marine (also Doomguy or Doom Slayer) could be female?

John Romero: At the time we didn't consider it – we thought of the player as a Rambo-like character, but named the character Doomguy since multiplayer mode meant anyone could be that character. We never thought of including a female avatar because our idea of a space marine was male, and games rarely had female avatars back then.

Z. M.: Have you ever been concerned about the potentially negative effects of your games?

John Romero: We really didn't think about the effects of our games except for our players really liking them. I don't make games that make me worry about the negative effects on players because I don't design games to harm my audience. My kids loved playing Doom for the first time when they were 8 years old.

Z. M.: Both gamers and critics have been rating modern remakes of your first-person shooters pretty highly. How do you personally rate the shift of Wolfenstein and the Doom series? Why did you not participate in their development?

John Romero: I think id Software, Bethesda Softworks and MachineGames have done a great job on the modern sequels/remakes of my games. I didn't work on them because I'm

not employed by them anymore, and no one asked for my help. If they did, it would depend on the work situation. If I had to move back to the United States to work on a game with id Software, I wouldn't do it. I love Ireland and I'm staying here. If I could work from Ireland, I would probably be okay with that. However, I'm really busy with my own games right now, so the timing would have to be right.

Z. M.: An interesting fact is that the remakes were released in the same order you created the original games (first Wolfenstein, then Doom). Following that logic, Quake is next. What do you think it will be like?

John Romero: The most recent sequels released were Wolfenstein: The New Order (2014), Wolfenstein: The Old Blood (2015), Doom (2016), Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus (2017), Quake Champions (2018), Wolfenstein: Youngblood and Wolfenstein: Cyberpilot (2019), then Doom Eternal (2020). I hope the next Quake game goes back to the original H. P. Lovecraft style, and is a single-player FPS. The original Quake had a unique design. When id Software made Quake II, they threw out the original setting and basic ideas and made a totally different game that was closer to Doom than Quake with biomechanical characters, enemies that were military troops, and a far more military-themed game.

Z. M.: Have you ever thought about developing a modern remake of any of your games by yourself?

John Romero: I remade my 1990 game, Dangerous Dave, in 2015 for iOS. I'm currently working on a desktop and Android version of Dangerous Dave that I will release in 2020. I might have some other remakes or re-releases of prior games in the works, but those are side projects. My main projects are always new games.

Z. M.: Your newest project, Empire of Sin, is one of the most highly anticipated games of 2020. However, it's quite a deviation from your previous work. Is this an indication of your future development direction?

John Romero: My wife, Brenda Romero, is the lead designer of Empire of Sin. The game is her idea and inspiration. I work on the game as well, but she's the Game Director and makes all the decisions about it. I can't say whether Empire of Sin is an indication of my future games because I've traditionally worked in several genres.

Z. M.: Currently, game studies are progressing and developing considerably in the academic world. Do you think studying games is important? Do you have any advice for game studies' students?

John Romero: The study of games is of critical importance to becoming a great game designer, even if that study has other benefits outside the game itself. Understanding how a game works is very different from understanding why a game works. Focus on the "why" and you will learn more about why we play games, and like certain ones more than others.