PRODUCTION POST-MORTEM

My name is Gregory MacMartin, and this is the story of a stubborn, determined and creatively-mad game designer who left traditional AAA game development behind in order to bring something unique to the videogame market. I am going to attempt to touch on all the pitfalls and lessons learned over the course of this seven-year journey: from what was only a dream, to the rigors of practical application, and, finally, to a shipped videogame.

Consortium is a game that attempts to realize the broad scale FPS/RPG genre typically seen by AAA games flush with multi-million dollar budgets, but done so with a small team of six people who embody design and creativity over mass market appeal and the bottom dollar. Its roots and inspirations lie squarely in the first-person single-player narrative games of old: *System Shock, Ultima Underworld, Deus Ex, Half-Life*, and the NPC interaction side of RPGs and adventure games.

Violence in videogames has always been a concern for me, especially since the birth of my daughter, and is one of the primary motivations which led me to Consortium. I had become fed-up with contributing to games that boasted little more than hours of repetitive, mindless violence. My breaking point came after I had completed work on *Scarface: The World is Yours* for Radical Entertainment. It is a definitive fact that I heard more F-bombs and killed more virtual bad-guys during the making of that game than I had in my entire life - personally and professionally - up to that point. I just couldn't do it anymore.

With the above in mind, and knowing exactly what kind of videogame company I wanted to create, I drew up the iDGi mandate and never looked back: ***"To advance the art form of interactive storytelling through the creation of emotionally compelling, immersive, first-person experiences with a moral compass."***

The road from "idea" to "finished game" in this case (and in most cases!) was extremely arduous. There was laughter, there were tears, there were creative strokes of genius from everyone involved, and then there was plenty of wasted creative effort. Not everyone who started on the Consortium production journey made it to the end. In an age dominated by the fiercely competitive rush to engage as much of the mass-market as possible, we worked steadily in relative obscurity to make a progressive experience inspired by old-school single-player games.

WHAT WENT RIGHT

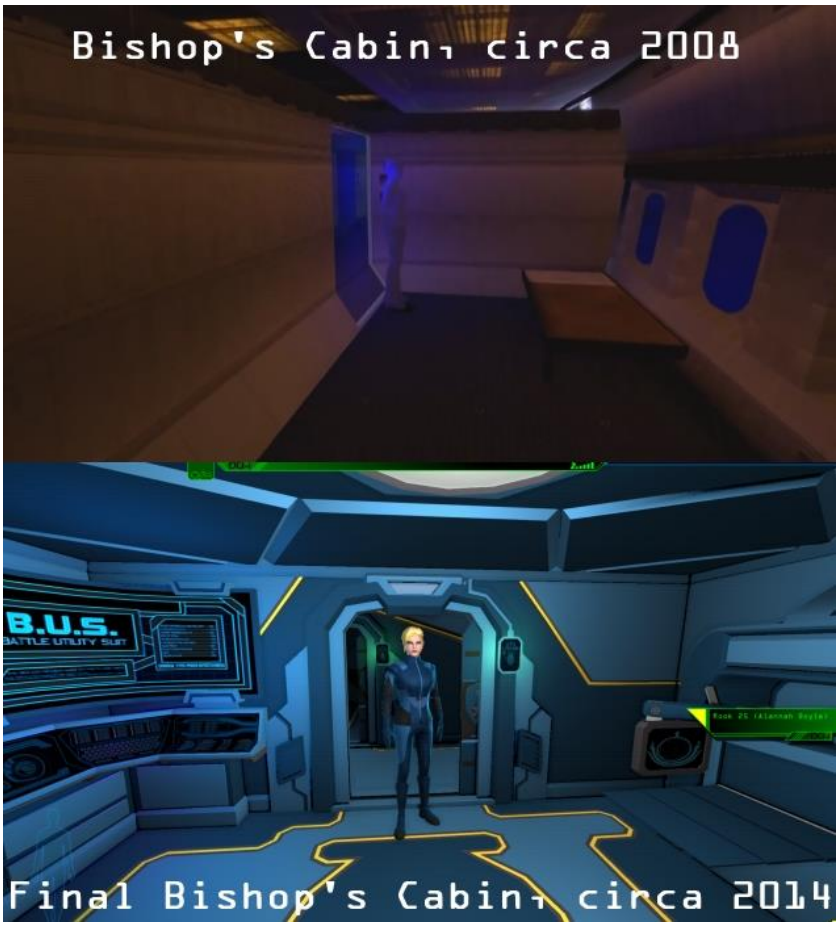
1. Pre-Production, Worldbuilding and the A.R.G.

We worked hard toward the goal of creating the deepest lore we possibly could for the Consortium world. We felt that creating a game with a large number of realistic characters meant that a dedication to worldbuilding was extremely important. The world

had to be vast, believable, interesting and, most of all, consistent, otherwise no amount of even masterful writing could make its characters worth investing in.

The first prototype

Before any worldbuilding had even begun, and armed with only a general idea of what I wanted to do with this game, early development officially kicked off in 2008 via a Half-Life 2 mod prototype for Consortium which I created. I had this idea for a game that took place entirely aboard a fairly small aircraft, but one that felt realistic with a crew of authentic and original people you could interact with. The mod really only consisted of the Zenlil interior (a large triple deckered aircraft, built entirely with CSG) and roughly re-purposed Half-Life models with bad skin jobs. The conversation system was visualized, and turned out to be remarkably accurate to how it would end up being in the final game. While I actually did have a screenplay written at that time, the story itself was rudimentary and I realized that the project was going to need a full-time writer.



The above links to a video that showcases the progression of the game from the original prototype to the almost finished version.

Crafting a world

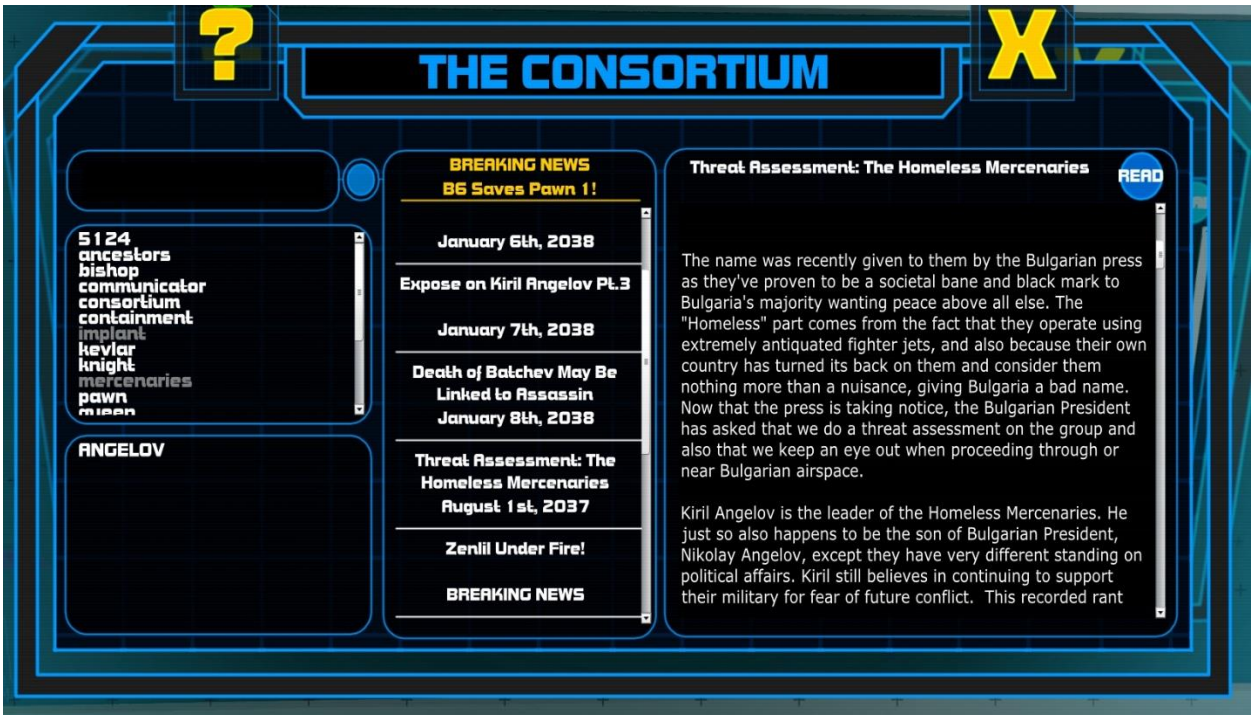
From there, I brought on my youngest brother Steve in order to begin fleshing out the world I had envisioned for years. He had never written anything professionally, but I knew he had been writing and developing stories for fun his entire life. Frankly, I greedily wanted to harness what I saw as a real burgeoning passion for the craft of writing. The ultimate success or failure of the game I imagined would hinge on many things, but I knew that the writing and voice acting would make or break it. One of the core goals of making Consortium was to create an experience that was derived from an Interactive Screenplay just as much as it was derived from a plethora of Game Design Documents we had created – including a two hundred page "Story Bible," "Character Bible," "World Bible," and a Core Game Design document that detailed all of the mechanics. Steve was immediately excited about inventing an interactive storytelling system with me (what eventually became our iDGi-1 Interactive Storytelling technology), while at the same time getting in on the ground floor to create a universe. Our creative compatibility is a powerful one as we complement each other perfectly in addition to constantly challenging each other – I'm the optimist and he's the pessimist. We are both picky, detail-oriented and to-a-fault perfectionists.

The iDGi-1 Alternate Reality Game

Then came the Alternate Reality Game (A.R.G.). Following that link, simply click on "Experience" in order to launch the still-playable Flash-based interactive experience we began in January 2010. We must acknowledge the creative genius of Nathalie Lawhead here, as she is wholly responsible for the Flash wizardry that makes up the fabric of most of the A.R.G. It was a fantastic collaboration that we'll never forget, and we are proud to say that Nathalie has since gone on to win a well deserved IGF award for her intensely creative solo-work!

We sent out our first press-release for the A.R.G, a prequel-to-Consortium of sorts, and it was almost immediately picked up by the world's largest ARG community, UnFiction. It attracted a good number of players as the experience unfolded, many of which dived deep into the framework we had established and ended up forever becoming part of the Consortium lore as literal characters of the gameworld. While the A.R.G. did not really break out of its niche, it did help us build a deep and stable foundation for everything that happens during Consortium and its two planned sequels.

As Steve would undoubtedly say, the best part of the A.R.G. experience was that because of its "fourth-wall breaking" format, much of our early story development came from in-game choices made by players themselves. In many cases we simply took their responses to what we were doing and ran with them in order to move forward the narrative.



As development was in full swing we then began work on what became the Information Console. Think an in-game Google, accessible from several areas throughout Zenlil, which incredibly ended up being over 150,000 words of in-game news articles, mission reports and other informational tidbits meant for anyone looking to expand their knowledge of the gameworld. This is what you might call Consortium's "codex." To do this right, as Steve barely had the time to complete the screenplay, we brought on the amazing Bob Edwards, our official lore and info console writer. Technically Bob helped out with late-stage A.R.G. writing as well, but his real contribution came with his insane dedication to the info console – it would not be anywhere near as extensive and far reaching if not for his hard work.

2. Core Team Dynamic

The "Core Six". From left to right, clockwise. Ben Bernard, Gregory MacMartin, Jason Zayas, Ryan Sheffer, Steven MacMartin and Travis Wilson. More folks ultimately contributed to making Consortium into a reality, but these guys were the true stalwarts that stuck it out through to the end and did what was necessary to ship the game.

We consciously shed all genre conventions in the making of Consortium, and instead stuck fast to specifically realizing its rather fourth wall breaking concept. I can say with all honesty that it was *only* because of the unyielding dedication and go-for-broke passion of the core full-time iDGi team that Consortium, in all its bizarreness, was ever able to reach the finish line.

Ryan Sheffer deserves specific mention here. As the sole C++ gameplay programmer throughout most of production, he single-handedly wrote most of the code for Consortium and was instrumental in solving most of the difficult technical challenges the project faced – and they were as plentiful as dandelions in the spring. Our close working relationship yielded results unlike anything I'd seen before in my years of experience because we worked hard to keep each other in check when things got crazy. And things always get crazy at some point. I've personally found that game designers and programmers can speak a different language oftentimes resulting in disagreements leading to an indecisive compromise, and so I was exceedingly happy to have found a programmer on the same wavelength as Steve and I.

Being a mostly distributed and virtual team meant that team members burning out on the project was in fact the biggest threat to our core team dynamic, and possibly my biggest concern throughout production. Pacing ourselves and maintaining a life outside of work was paramount, except our setup as a company allowed team members to work from home and at their own pace. Normally you would think this opens the door to slacking off and wasting time, but our experience was quite the opposite: *people*

wouldn't stop working! In fact, we actually lost a few strong team members to this incredibly frustrating pitfall.

Despite a policy decreeing weekends to be sacrosanct and work-free, it was still very difficult to know for sure just how much time team members spent working at home. We had daily scrums over Skype that everybody had to attend, yes, but I did not want to limit when the team had to put in their 8'ish hours a day. We had some team members (like Steve) who worked best throughout the night and chose to sleep all afternoon, and I generally felt that whatever worked best to keep any particular team member creatively entangled was fine by me. That said, "Don't think that just because you *can* work over the weekend, that you should!" quickly became an important mantra of mine.

So the team changed shape and form over the three core years of production, from May 2011 to May 2014. While this caused some difficulties of course, what ultimately occurred is that we gradually became more focused, lean and mean. Everyone eventually grabbed a hold of a big section of the game that they could *own* and then proceeded to dig in and fully realize their piece of the puzzle. In some regards by this point, the Producer aspect of my job became to sit back and let the well-tuned team run itself.

It all starts with a clear shared vision, but in the end it's the vision and dedication of every single individual actually doing the work that decides how the final experience turns out.

Some of the team at Pax Prime 2014. From left to right: Bob Edwards, Ben Bernard, Ryan Sheffer, Hansina Whitford, Gregory MacMartin

3. Art Style and Direction

We set out to make the most immersive videogame we possibly could, drawing upon our idea to harness the fourth wall itself to further bolster the potential level of player immersion. We've received plenty of feedback from folks who say that the game had an extraordinarily high immersion factor for them, and that this came as a surprise considering "immersion" is often tied with photo-realistic graphics in modern gaming. However, we managed to achieve this with an art style just about as far removed from photo-realism as you can get.

We knew going into the project that we had a tight budget to work with, and so we knew we would need to focus on every *other* way of achieving immersion: narrative context and pacing, sound FX, music, lighting/environment FX, voice acting, scripted sequences, etc. We would have to conceive of a smart art style that would be doable within our budget while also specifically benefitting the story.

We had previously developed the concept of the iDGi-1 satellite for the A.R.G. The idea was that a satellite in "our world/the real world" could stream first-person control of a real human being within an alternate, future dimension. With this in mind, our initial idea for Consortium was to have a "stripped down" realistic look to the game – a lot of the unnecessary aesthetic details were to be thrown out by the satellite in order to make efficient use of its limited "quantum bandwidth." So, realistic shapes and sizes kept in proportion to the real world, but nothing too detailed. The result of this approach in late 2011 was a haphazard mish-mash of stuff that really didn't have an overall cohesive direction.

Jason Zayas then came in and took on the heroic task of establishing a fresh and cohesive look to the game that A) looked completely original (you can never mistake a Consortium screenshot for any other game), B) further helped sell the iDGi-1 satellite concept, and C) would not take millions of dollars and a team of a hundred artists to accomplish. With Jason working closely with Ben Bernard, our prolific and amazing environment artist, all three of these goals were met.

A fun fact: all of Consortium's 3D graphics were limited to a 16-color palette.

There are no traditional texture maps, only polygons with solid colors. This approach was the essence of the original idea we had conceived of before Jason took charge of the art direction, but the ideas he brought to the table were what truly gave us the consistent and cohesive look we had been looking for.

This was a watershed moment for the project, and while certainly not everyone appreciates our art style, many people seem to and it really was the ultimate and best solution for us given our two-man 3D art team.

4. Screenplay, Casting and Voice Recording

Left: Karin Inghammar (voice of Alannah Boyle / Rook 25) and Brian Dobson (voice of Wade Harris / Rook 9)

Firstly, check out Consortium's entry in the Behind The Voice Actors database. Our game includes 23 fully voiced characters, most of which have multiple deep conversation trees.

This aspect of the project was generally a resounding success. All of the time that was spent building up the world and lore before writing the game's story meant that there was a level of depth inherently built in to everything.

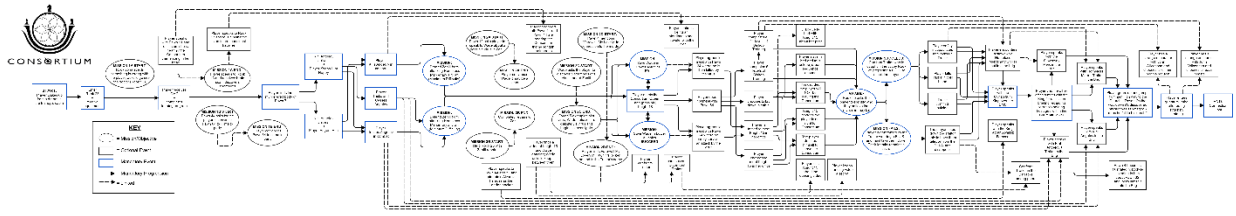
This depth and attention to detail was appreciated by the 20+ voice actors (most of whom reside in the Vancouver area) who signed on with us to help bring Consortium to life. We were so incredibly fortunate to attract the talent we managed to attract, considering our lack of experience on this front. I still remember seeing Steve nearly brought to tears when he first saw Michelle Livingstone (Knight 15) do her thing in the studio. My suspicion is that they loved Steve's writing, or at least I like to think so. I know he looks back in hindsight on some of the lines he wrote for the game and can't help but cringe (he's learned *a ton* over the last few years!), but his incredibly fresh approach to how the narrative elements were so seamlessly woven into the game experience was really inspiring for all of us. And even beyond that, I think it was how his characters felt so real, so believable, and so *human* that our cast really enjoyed.

While recording (Steve and I co-directed every recording session) we fed our actors the player's speech and responses, so as to allow their lines to feel as convincingly conversational as possible. Everyone seemed to appreciate this, and furthermore it helped keep things light and fun. In short, we loved working with the entire cast of our game and have big plans for their characters moving forward.

Paul Ruskay of Studio X and his core audio team, Rob Plotnikoff and Greg Sabitz, are absolutely amazing to work with. We recorded over 4,000 lines in their studio with over 20 cast members, and it was always a rewarding and fun experience. We just simply “clicked”, and we are all eager to get back into the studio again for The Tower.

5. Inventing the iDGi-1 Interactive Narrative Technology

I am very proud of the fact that we successfully invented an original way of blending narrative and interactivity.



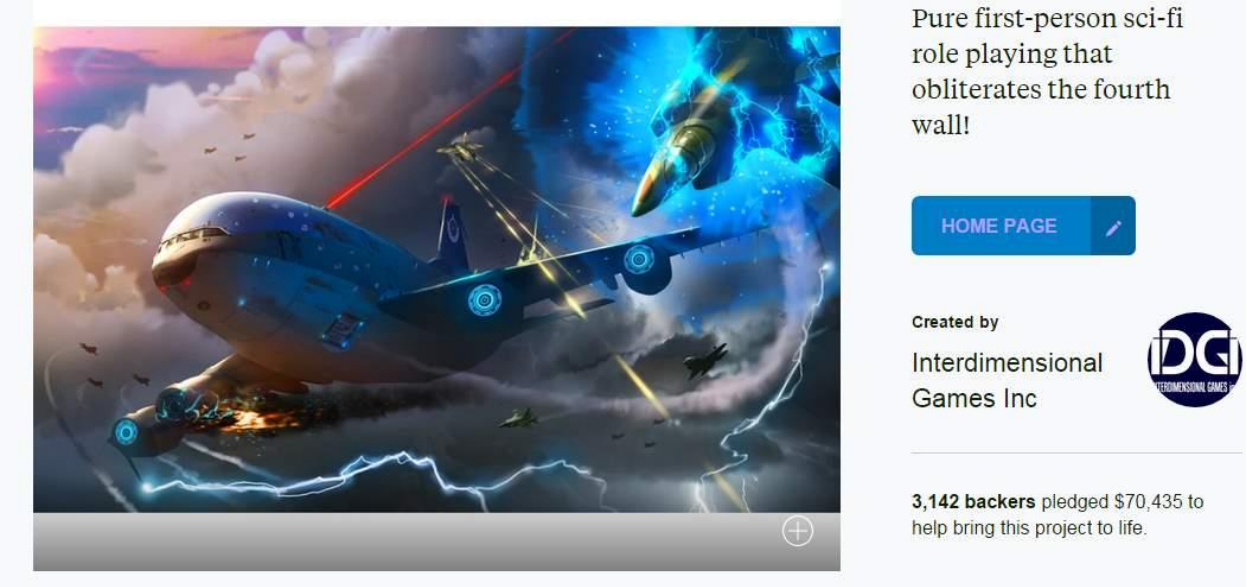
This is a chart lays out the story structure of Consortium, exactly as it is. (Major spoilers removed!)

The iDGi-1 Interactive Narrative tech was a system that began with the invention of our screenplay template by the incredibly talented Colin Fox. He worked his magic by writing a system which allowed for the open source OpenOffice software to directly speak with the Source engine. Steve took this tech and ran with it to create over a hundred “waterfall” dialogue conversations, making up the meat of our game. What makes the conversations in Consortium unique from other games is that we wanted them to feel as realistic as possible – this means that you can never see repeated dialogue options, and conversations always move forward fluidly. Quite a few single conversations have upwards of 30-50 lines of possible dialogue, and every single one can be “skipped” by simply choosing to say nothing or by walking away at any time. Many conversations allow for very long, surprisingly deep engagements that can be drastically different each time you play through them.

Our full-time choreographer, Travis Wilson, then went and harnessed a very particular part of the Source engine, the magical powers of Face Poser, in order to process the choreography necessary for every single line in the game. Normally a choreography task of this size would require a large team of people working collectively, but Travis pulled it off almost singlehandedly.

So all in all we managed to make/iterate/polish brand new technology and still make use of it for a massively complex narrative spanning 500+ pages of Interactive Screenplay. This was an incredibly difficult challenge, but because it made up the essence of our game it was one we were up to.

6. Kickstarter



Admittedly some things went *wrong* with Kickstarter, but in the end a lot of things went *right.*

In December 2012, almost two years into production, we launched our first Kickstarter campaign having put a ton of work into it. A very elaborately produced pitch video was created that was essentially crafted in a way to tease folks with only a hint of the game itself, hoping that intrigue and an original idea alone would get folks interested in us. Well, we learned the hard way that this is NOT how you approach a Kickstarter. To be successful with a crowdfunding pitch lacking celebrity game designers or a nostalgia factor, you must *fully* divulge and clearly explain what the game is that's being proposed to potential backers. No tip-toeing, no vagueness, no bullshit.

So this first campaign failed to make any traction and we cancelled it only after two weeks into a one month campaign, realizing our mistake. We had a PR disaster on our hands, not to mention a financial one given all the money we had spent on the campaign. This was a pretty serious blow to the morale of all of us.

However, from the ashes, we worked out what we did wrong, went back to Kickstarter in early 2013 asking for much less and, this time, succeeded! The amount we asked for this time around was truly the absolute bare minimum amount we would need to get the game to the finish line. The income from Kickstarter was only about 11%

of our total budget, but what mattered most is that its success was the only reason we were able to finish the game without the entire team becoming homeless.

Our Kickstarter campaign also brought about forty individual contributors to the Information Console. A few of our backer rewards allowed folks to create their own ideas for characters (could put themselves into the gameworld), corporations, news headlines, and even changes to historical events. Steve and Bob were matched with these backers one-on-one to develop fitting news articles or mission reports. Some of their ideas were absolutely batty, but this only added to the challenge of making them work within the gameworld. I know our two-man writing team had an absolute blast with this and Steve especially counts it as the most rewarding aspect of the Kickstarter campaign.

Right near the end of this successful campaign in 2013, we wrote a sort of "how to" article for the Vancouver Film School's website that some of you may find useful.

WHAT WENT WRONG

1. Marketing, Promotion and the Game Launch

We had a PR problem after we had to cancel our first attempt at Kickstarting the project. However, even after our follow up and successful Kickstarter campaign, we still had no dedicated PR or marketing people on staff to help sell the game to enthusiasts, etc. Just Steve and myself doing what we could do ourselves in addition to heavy production task loads. This meant, of course, that word-of-mouth, post-launch reviews and a strong front-page Steam launch were going to be instrumental to our success.

Tight but doable budget: GET THE GAME DONE

Fast-forward to the last month or so leading up to Consortium's official release. Most of the team were spending 15+ hours a day playing the game over and over again, testing it to the best of our ability. What bugs were found were mostly then fed to me, the only person capable of fixing about 70% of them, and I found myself fixing 50 or so bugs, big and small, each and every day, 6-7 days a week during the final 2-3 month crunch to ship. I should acknowledge here the awesome work by Steve "Duke" Cohen. Originally a player of our A.R.G., Duke went on to become the best, most meticulous tester we have right up and to this day.

By the last week or so before release it got to the point where the bugs started drying up! Many successful playtest reports were coming in. Hurray! We legitimately believed that because our small team was not finding any more issues that the game was finally clean and ready for release. The simple fact is that this was a stupid assumption borne from exhaustion – there are probably a hundred or more choices and path variables throughout Consortium, all of which had to be systematically tested by at

least a hundred people with a hundred different computer configurations each playing the game a hundred times (well at least that would have been ideal :-). We had five people playing the game with five configurations.

Exhausting our testing capabilities...

With Consortium's release having happened just before the "early access explosion" gamers are currently seeing in the marketplace, we had our reservations about using Steam's Early Access system. Incorrectly believing Consortium was in fact "ready enough," we did not want to give the wrong impression and we were terrified of potentially pissing off our Kickstarter Backers who had been treated multiple times with our assurances that the game was almost done. Therefore, we chose to forego Early Access. In hindsight, this turned out to be utterly ridiculous thinking on our part because our backers only wanted the finished product and even a seriously delayed finished product was better than a broken one.

All in all we vastly underestimated the amount of time our particular type of game (i.e of a type that none of us had ever made before) needed to spend in deep testing with a much larger base of testers refining and polishing before being unleashed onto the gamer masses and professional critics alike.

Should have just used Early Access

Within a few hours after our official launch on January 8th, 2014, we had already reached the top three on Steam's "top sellers" listing and we were really catching fire. Sales were far higher than we anticipated and Steam was promoting us quite strongly on their front page. That's about when all hell broke loose as our email boxes and the Steam forums began to fill up with many angry, confused gamers wondering just what the hell was going on.

To them, the game was an embarrassingly broken mess.

In full panic mode now, Steve and I had an emergency meeting and with Early Access off the table (because we had already launched) we decided the only course of action was to come straight out and explain the situation honestly. That is when Steve drafted this Steam update and we posted a link to it right on the main store page's description.

Almost immediately our sales dropped like a stone, Steam pulled us from the main page, and we never recovered. While the response to the Steam update was overwhelmingly positive, our slight over-reaction (in hindsight) and extreme honesty may have given a bunch of folks the idea that we might not be able to fix the game, or that it was fundamentally broken. Neither were true. It had many bugs, yes, and some major, but they were all fixable. But our harsh messaging created a strong wave of "this

game is too buggy" PR to plague the game's ability to gain traction in the marketplace, the effects from which we are still fighting to this day.

Anyways, so we jumped right back into bug-fixing mode. We began harvesting every single bug report from the mass of new players sending us emails and posting to the Steam forum. I spent about 15-20 hour days hammering the game into shape as more and more reports continued to flood in and we tried to tackle all the big ones as fast as possible.

The irony of course being that we would never have realized just how broken the game was until releasing it onto thousands of people like we did. No amount of bug testing from five people could have ever amounted to that. I wanted to mention here too that it was absolutely heartwarming to see how many people jumped right in and were willing to help us out. I mean it was incredible – suddenly we had dozens of people sending us extremely helpful bug reports, and I'd say 99% of them did so with compliments and a general desire to help us fix the game. We won't ever forget that.

Honesty at all costs...

Something we have prided ourselves on since as far back as the A.R.G. was the act of being completely open and honest with players, no matter what the cost. That and continuing to communicate with our fans as to this day we are still active on the Steam forums and respond to every email sent our way. I believe this forthright approach has saved us on several occasions where a less transparent company would have fallen apart – people appreciate a little honesty and from our point of view there's no reason to hide what's really happening behind the scenes. The players, our fans, are the only reason our company exists.

Lesson learned the hard way…

In summary, we have learned the hard way the extreme importance of devoting more resources and budget on having a much larger testing team dedicated to ironing out all bugs and kinks before unleashing the game onto the public. While we did not have the resources for that while making CONSORTIUM, Early Access could have allowed us similar results, harnessing the abilities of those gamers willing to dive into the game to help us iron out the issues and find those nasty but hard-to-find bugs.

2. Scheduling and Cash Flow

We knew from the beginning that we wanted to create an experience that pushed the boundaries of blending interactivity and narrative in ways never before seen. How

do you go about creating a realistic schedule and budget for such an experimental project? As it turns out, it is practically an impossible task.

The initial hunt for production funds

In addition to launching and helping run our Alternate Reality Game, I personally spent much of 2010 hunting for investors. I pitched to local Vancouver angel investor groups as well as to publishers at both GDC 2010 and 2011. My pitch didn't center on why our game would be a smashing commercial success, or about how we were aiming to combine a bunch of elements from the most successful games to help guarantee making lots of money. My pitch was about making an innovative experience the likes of which had not been seen before; an experience with a moral backbone, where there would be consequences to player actions and one that took place in a bright and positive future. It was to be purely altruistic, and so I was looking for altruistic people to back us. In the financial world, especially in the west, altruism is very rare indeed. People practically want a guarantee that they will make a return, and videogames are a hit-driven, extremely risky business. No-one was interested in our obviously risky and experimental project.

Enter the Canada Media Fund

When we started production in May 2011, we had all the components blocked out. We knew all of the characters and environmental art that we thought we needed. We already had all of Zenlil built from my prototype, and the overall layout from that original prototype actually didn't change all that much. In order to ultimately secure cash from the Canada Media Fund (CMF) we had to have a very detailed production schedule, and we had to have it completed in time for the CMF submission in 2010. It turned out our project was a perfect fit for the CMF's brand new "Experimental Stream." Twelve months after applying for that, we got the first tranche of $500k and we were a go for full production. We were then responsible for the remaining ~$160K of our projected budget.

Large enough budget to invent the game being imagined?

It did not take long for us to realize that budget was going to be a problem throughout production, and cashflow became a consistent problem to overcome in order to prevent the project from stalling or losing vital people. We were making constant progress towards the game being completed, but various issues got in the way of being able to accurately schedule the work being done towards that progress.

Our Kickstarter estimates on when the game would be complete were pretty far off of reality, but at the time we stated those estimates we really thought they were realistic. There was absolutely no filter between what was really happening internally and what we communicated to our backers. They were treated to a court-side show of

what game development on an original and unique game is all about: overcoming extremely difficult challenges and solving mind-bending problems each and every day.

I can't stress this enough – when you're inventing something truly new, it is really impossible to schedule and budget accurately. All that can really be done is to have a massive amount of "buffer" in the budget to cover for all of the "black box" development tasks. That is, tasks that are experimental and will require an unknown amount of iteration. You continue to schedule aggressively to keep everyone focused on the goals and only use the buffer where absolutely necessary for the benefit of the final game.

Re-defining the term "tight budget"

We had no buffer whatsoever, so you can probably imagine the kind of difficulties we had to work around. Our CFO, Stewart Marshall was awesome, however, and with his help, contacts and guidance we were able to work our way around the difficulties with some rather inventive solutions. Technically, the game was made with the originally planned budget, but in reality everyone on the team worked far harder and for far longer than what the budget and schedule dictated.

3. Overly Ambitious Game Design

This one is a particularly difficult thing for me to admit, as the overall Game Design of Consortium was most definitely my department. The main problem here is that we worked hard to establish a very original series of combat, inventory, ammo, healing and repairing mechanics, but the game's story and scope simply did not adequately make use of all of these systems.

Original and re-usable mechanics are a lot of work to develop!

The root of this problem stems from the original desire to make Consortium into a fully episodic series, eventually with 8 or so episodes per season. The world's first "interactive television series" was the original goal back in 2007/8. To that end, we did indeed develop game mechanics that are usable for a large number of potential game experiences and locations.

So while this is a good thing for us moving forward, as we've got some solid mechanics to be fully harnessed in the sequels, it was a real hindrance for us in making Consortium. The combat systems could have been drastically simplified, allowing us to more greatly polish a much smaller amount of combat related content and mechanics.

The iDGi-1 Interactive Narrative tech was CRAZY experimental.

In addition, the actual scope and challenges involved in translating the 500 or so pages of Interactive Screenplay into functioning game script was not at all fully understood. The system that the screenplay was written with was experimental and invented by us. The engine we were working on was known and created by Valve for an entirely different game. The result of combining the two of them the way we did is a ridiculous amount of level script data that is basically incomprehensible to anyone but myself, and therefore could only be maintained by myself. This is why most of the bug fixing could only be done by me and me alone. You would never see this sort of thing on just about any other professional project.

The upside to this is that there *is* still a logical system behind how I implemented the screenplay, and it's one that will translate far better to the Unreal 4 engine (our engine of choice for The Tower). Now that we have a solid example of how our iDGi-1 Interactive Storytelling tech works, making the second game becomes all about working within this pre-established framework of the first game while turning everything up to *11*.

IN CONCLUSION

Clearly, more stuff Went Right than Wrong for the project overall, but the mistakes we did make were pretty big and almost killed us. The journey of making this game was fraught with peril and we had to fight off monsters and demons the entire way through it. In some ways, it almost felt as if we were defying the laws of nature when making it. A game about a positive future where you play someone in a peace-keeping organization specifically avoiding unnecessary violence? Madness.

Imagining a better future for us all

Someone recently said in a comment online that Consortium was "a totally unrealistic future predicted by Canadians, but a cool game regardless." But *is it* really unrealistic? We want to believe that such a positive future is within our grasp, and we went to great lengths to present near-future technology that could very well be realized soon toward this goal. Is it really so unrealistic to believe in a better future for our children and grandchildren?

Therein lies what Consortium represents to me: that very belief, embodied into the form of an interactive narrative experience. It's for this reason that I am truly glad we were able to even finish it at all. When I think about all the series of events that led to Consortium existing today, I truly have to marvel at the sheer unlikeliness of it all.

To The Tower!

To date, Consortium has not made back its development costs. As of this writing, the game has made very roughly half of its development budget in gross revenue from sales (before platforms take their cut, etc). There was a strong artistic goal in mind when making Consortium from the get-go and we stand by the final result, strange

quirks and rough edges included. But as a commercial venture, Consortium is still in an uncertain stage. Our dream is to be able to make Consortium games for years to come *and* still be able to support our families and live our lives at the same time.

With Consortium: The Tower, we aim to merge together all the components and ideas we invented with Consortium Game One with the traditional structure and content format of FPS action/adventure videogames. This is easily the coolest video-game I've ever dared imagine I could possibly work to produce, as it's a game I've dreamed of making AND playing my whole life.

As it stands, we know one thing for sure: CONSORTIUM does have fans, it keeps making fans, and all of them want more! Well, we are working hard to provide more!

CONSORTIUM

Release Date, v1.0: January 9th, 2014

Intended platform: Windows Vista/7/8

Project Budget: $677,356

Project Length: 7 years (4 years pre-production, 3 years production)

Team Size: 6 full-time developers, 5-10 part-time developers