

A Simple People

SPOKESMAN OF THE NERDS:

I appear before you, oh mighty Oracle, to beg for guidance for my people. My people are the Nerds, the Gamers, oh Oracle—and we are lost.

We are a simple people. Our clothing needs are simple: anything black. Our nutritional needs are simple: caffeine, salt, fat, and sugar in any combination will do nicely. But nothing about us is nearly so simple as our aesthetics.

It has to do with our roots. We are not like the Television People. They came from the Radio Men, who came from the Book People, who called Shakespeare their father. Shakespeare is complicated, and he does “to be or not to be,” which makes us think about decisions. He is not the guy for us. Nor are we like unto the Big Screeners, whose ancestors were the Photo Makers, who came from the Painters, whose way was watched over by the Van Goghs and the Warhols and the guy who draws *Doonesbury*. We despise the Big Screeners and Television People and their soft jobs, in which they can just point a camera at something and it shows up on a screen and people laugh and cry and pay money.

Many years ago, in the Before Time, our ancestors, the Life Givers, created the first games, and our people were born and we thrived. The first games were good and, being a simple people with little tiny computers, we were happy to have what we had.

What we had was white text against a black background, describing a few rooms in a dungeon. In these dungeons, we could find and pick up swords and things and kill dragons and things, and the more things we picked up, the more powerful we became. We liked becoming powerful, because it enabled us to kill dragons.

Then the computers got a little bigger, and a game that described more rooms and had more things for us to pick up, like shields and potions and stuff, made us more powerful, and therefore it was a better game.

Then a game came out that had two rectangles and a flying square, and that was even better. Then there were little eight-pixel-high blocky guys who looked like they were running, and those games were better still. The bigger and faster the little blocky guys got, the better we liked the games.

And so the little men got bigger, and they ran faster through bigger dungeons, picking up more and more kinds of stuff, and the dragons they fought had pixels and pixels and more pixels.

And as the games got better, the people who made the better games made more money than the people who made worse games. Soon, they even made more money than artists, than photographers—more than pretty much anybody in their high school classes. That was good.

Then they made more money than their teachers. That was even better.

Then they made more money than the Television People and the Big Screeners, because they made the best games. And by then they—and in fact all of the Simple People—all knew exactly, precisely, without a doubt what a good game was. We still do.

A good game is a fast game. A good game is a game with lots of rooms in its dungeon. A good game is a game in which the little guy and the dragon have countless pixels. And if you can pick up lots of things, countless things, innumerable things—even the flies and the silverware—then that is the best game of all.

Faster is better. Bigger is better. More is better. More realism and better physics is better. That is our wisdom to this day.

But, oy, Oracle, have we got troubles now.

Because now our computers are big. Really, really big. And we can make things really, really, *really* big, fast, and plentiful.

And there was this one guy last year, Prometheus, who decided that he would make the best game of all. He started to make a game that had all the rooms in the world in it and all the guys in the world in it, and that

would run as fast as the world runs. And do you know what he discovered, Oracle?

There are a *lot* of *things* in the world.

I mean, Prometheus, he didn't make more money than other game makers. Even after he had built a machine that could simply point at something and bring it into the game, he still *spent* money on modeling all those rooms and guys and flies and footprints and *all that silverware!!!*

And the game wasn't very fun. The flies were bothersome, and nobody knew what to do with all that silverware.¹

So my people, the Nerds, the Simple People, had a meeting of the Elders, and at that meeting, this problem was discussed for a long time. And it was concluded, painfully, that perhaps more, faster, and bigger are *not*, after all, better. Because you can't make everything, and if you do, it's not fun or profitable. And the Elders realized that they would have to decide *which* things to make, *how fast* to make those things, and *how big*.

Oh Oracle, that brings me to why I have come here. I represent a people who are humbled. A people who thought they knew the answers, and who found out that they were wrong.

The guys making smaller, less, and slower games sometimes make better games, and it confuses the heck out of us.

We are a people who need to learn something. We need to learn that, if big, more, and fast aren't best, what *is*?

¹Long after the death of Prometheus, the question of what to do with all that silverware was discussed amongst the intelligent and bored members of lower society. It was eventually correctly hypothesized by members of a secret society, PSI (Persistent Silverware Inc.), that the only way to defeat the gigantic dragon in the final level of the game was to use all the knives, spoons, and forks to build an intricate exoskeleton with which your hero could become as powerful as Sigourney Weaver in the final battle scene of *Aliens*.

The game was revised and shipped in this form, hailed as gaming's greatest achievement, but still nobody liked it—except one player, an eight-year-old beta tester named Jimmy, who could not be convinced to leave the computer. Researchers discovered finally that little Jimmy had found among the myriad of virtual objects in the game a perfectly accurate working model of a first-generation Gameboy handheld, and he had been spending his hours battling virtual Charizard against virtual Pikachu.

Go figure.

We need to learn *what* to point our camera at to make people laugh and cry. We need to learn *how* to make people think about decisions. We need to be, or not to be. We need to learn to *decide*.

How do we *do* it, oh Oracle? We beseech thee.

ORACLE:

William Shatner is not in the office right **now**.

Please leave a brief message at the **sound** of the

communicator beep.

beep