

Just Adventure Interview

Just Adventure speaks with Terry Dowling

Interview conducted by Randy Sluganski

Unfortunately, a lot of our North American readers will probably not be familiar with Australian Terry Dowling, which is a shame as he is easily one of this generation's best horror, fantasy and science fiction authors. Yet – for some inexplicable reason – he is virtually unpublished in the U.S.

Besides being the acclaimed author of award-winning books such as *Rynosseros*, *Wormwood*, *The Man Who Lost Red* and *An Intimate Knowledge of the Night*, he is also a reviewer, a musician and songwriter - with eight years of appearances on ABC's *Mr. Squiggle & Friends*, Australia's longest running children's series - and a Communications lecturer at a large Sydney college.

The awards he has been honored with include the Bram Stoker (1987), the Ditmar (12 times) and the Aurealis (3 times).

Now, I hear a lot of you asking, "This is all fine and dandy, but what does it have to do with adventure games?"

Well, besides being a huge supporter and fan of Just Adventure, Terry Dowling is also the author of a few games that are critical favorites in the adventure community – *Sentinel: Descendants in Time*, *Mysterious Journey: Chameleon* and *Schizm*

And that information is what we will use as our starting point...

Why haven't there been more established authors in the game industry?

I think it mostly has to do with the mechanics of how a writer goes about hooking up with game developing studios. How do writers do that if they're not approached first? More importantly, how does a game developer approach a writer who has any sort of track record – *without* surrendering too much control over their project? Let's face it, if you're a game designer, chances are you've had to become an all-rounder just to survive, a multi-talented sort of person with definite ideas on things. This is your project, a huge commitment of time and resources. You quite rightly want to use your own story ideas or collaborations brainstormed with your own design team. You also want to own the intellectual property as much as you can. It's like with the earlier *Myst* games from Cyan. You get a lot of it laid out yourself then bring in whatever outside help you need to story-doctor it, give input. You keep it small if you can. But that sort of crossover is starting to happen: Marc Laidlaw working on *Half-Life 2*, John Saul getting involved in *The Blackstone Chronicles* project and so on.

At the moment it's far more likely that it will go the other way, that game writers will develop careers as traditional writers for themselves as natural spin-offs of their game work – Jane Jensen novelising *Sins of the Fathers*, for instance, then going on to non-game novels like *Dante's Equation*.

There's a perception problem at work here too. Sometimes writers can be a bit like some film actors – they can be prima donnas and not know when to let go. Both the original *Star Trek* and the original *The Outer Limits* series tried using established SF writers and they weren't always that easy to work with. It should have worked better than it did. Writing for games is like writing for film and television – you have to be prepared to let go to a greater or lesser extent. That isn't always easy for a writer to do.

How did you, an Australian, enter into a business relationship with Detalion, a game company from Poland?

The most wonderful coincidence really. I fell in love with the adventure game as a medium the moment I saw *Myst* on a friend's PC back in 1997. I was immediately hooked. This seemed a perfect vehicle for storytelling. But being a working writer I just couldn't afford to spend hours making my way through the average game, much as I wanted to. So I started keeping walkthroughs handy so I could have the game story experience, go on the journey without getting bogged down too much in aspects of gameplay that delayed or spoiled story too much. Dedicated puzzle solvers have an entirely different view on this, of course, but for me puzzles should *feel* like parts of the gameworld.

When I was stuck on a timed puzzle in *Reah*, Detalion's first interplanetary adventure for L.K.Avalon, I emailed the developers, introduced myself and asked if they could help. I really wanted to continue that journey, you see, and my machine at the time just wasn't powerful enough to let me complete that puzzle. Maciej Miasik very kindly replied and provided the puzzle solution. He had also checked out my home page and asked if I'd be interested in coming up with a title, story and script for this new game they were working on: the one we now know as *Schizm: Mysterious Journey* (or *Mysterious Journey: Schizm* in North America). It meant doing a full story outline and the 'shooting script' for at least twelve or so characters needed for the game. A lot of the visuals, level design and game code (including the dual protagonist idea) were already in place, but Maciej felt that their existing storyline wasn't suitable. I was delighted to assist. I love SF stories about First Contact and came up with the *Mary Celeste* idea. That not only allowed the planet to be uninhabited, but made a strong and intriguing story premise and promotion hook.

As well as the story and script, I started working out the alien geography and ecology for Argilus too. I produced an elaborate map of the planet, naming the continents and oceans and locating the different settings our characters visit, even showing the different science bases, balloon fields and floating cities, though we really only get to visit one of each. A lot of this additional backstory material was never seen in the final game itself, certainly not in the packaging for the version made available to North

America, England and Australia. But if you look at the *Schizm* soundtrack, you'll see that the themes are named after the various continents – Julianna, Carolina, Mariana, Aurora, etc – and other geographical features like the Kitris Balloon Field, the Singing Towers, and so on. Some European versions came with a beautiful lift-out antique-looking map of the planet showing many of these features, as well as including photographic profiles for the main characters. It was all so exciting to do for me as a writer – actually seeing things visualized like that.

This is where it's probably useful to remind gamers who may not be aware of it just what localization involves, how a game, like a successful book or movie, gets licensed as an international property. North America is a large and lucrative market, but it's still just one market in a huge global industry. A sufficiently popular game will probably be localised for those other markets. That doesn't just mean having the script dubbed in the appropriate local language, but also different packaging design, different cover art and inserts, marketing campaigns etc. In practical design terms, it also means avoiding the use of written journals for presenting backstory in the game itself, a la *Myst*, since not only would foreign language versions of those texts have to be done and substituted, but anticipated in the first place. *Schizm*, for instance, was developed in Rzeszow, Poland, written in Sydney, Australia, published by a Dutch company first in Polish and Dutch, then Italian, French, German, English and so on. *Chameleon* and our latest title, *Sentinel*, was developed in Poland, written in Australia (what we've been calling Detalion Down Under), voice recorded and published in Canada, then made available in French, Italian, Polish, Spanish, German, Czech, possibly Russian and other languages.

The various game versions themselves can differ too. The original Polish (and European) version of *Schizm* had an elaborate FMV (full motion video) opening with Sam Mainey and Hannah Grant being interviewed on a major television news program called World News and recalling their mission to Argilus. This featured extensive footage of the actors you catch a brief glimpse of at the end in the North American version and whose faces you see at the bottom of the screen throughout the game. Sam and Hannah were played by good actors (Hannah was especially fine) using their own accented English. During the interview, we cut away to flashback animations of the original science ships arriving; then see Sam and Hannah arriving aboard *Angel*, see their panic as engines and life support fail and they have to eject in separate escape pods. You even see those pods heading for different touchdown points on the planet. It was a much more substantial and 'human' opening, though some felt – and perhaps rightly – that it damaged the suspense, letting the gamer know that our heroes do get off Argilus successfully. For me, *how* they went about doing that and what they learnt doing it were far more important than the fact that it happens. It was a trade-off I was happy to go with. As a writer, you learn to trust your instincts.

We were ahead of our time using a DVD format too, and that was the version that earned us a fine review here at Just Adventure, plus the Seal of Excellence at Adrenaline Vault and won Detalion a prize at Utopiales 2001 in France. That same DVD original (released in the US with the voices re-dubbed but minus the FMV opening) had continuous animations throughout, not just during the transitions. It had *all* the mission logs active with FMV backstory from the various scientists who went missing,

showing their panic and concern. The whole thing was quite edgy. The population had vanished; now their own scientist colleagues were disappearing too. What was causing it? Who would be next? The beautiful settings suddenly became very sinister. You felt you were constantly being watched.

Unfortunately, a lot of gamers still couldn't run DVD games then, and for compression reasons the transfer to a CD ROM format meant that most of the mission log FMV sequences had to be cut. So at least 50% of the backstory, the continuous animations and a lot of creepy atmosphere just aren't there and a lot of the edginess is gone. No wonder many gamers were left wondering what was going on. The most important mission log of all, that of Angela Davis in Bosh's Tunnels, is blank in the CD version. It broke my heart to see it, especially when the mission logs that *were* active often featured the weaker actors. But the dual protagonist arrangement needed so much storage space. Needless to say, I've been through the CD ROM version only once. It's a bit too painful.

Anyway, that's how it all came about, purest chance. After the first collaboration, we continued with *Chameleon*, and now *Sentinel*. It's all been tremendously exciting and very satisfying.

A good friend of yours – Harlan Ellison – released his classic *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream* as an adventure game in 1995. Did you approach him for any advice on converting your works to the game medium?

It's funny, but we actually didn't get around to discussing it, though I did go to a signing with him in San Francisco when his game was released. This was just before I discovered *Myst* on my friend's PC and saw the medium's potential. But, curiously, we found ourselves in the same situation. Harlan's such a creative all-rounder that he approached it pretty much as doing the script for a film or television project, which is what a gamestory ends up resembling most closely. It's intuitive to approach it that way and that's how I went about it myself. These days, what with film and television being so lucrative, storytellers always try to keep their minds open to what media are available for presenting their stories. You write cinematically, hear the dialogue in your head, see events in terms of camera shots, pans etc, even hear the soundtrack. The tricky thing is trying to imagine the final outcome and how it will differ from what you've originally envisaged in your mind's eye.

So while the subject didn't come up between Harlan and me, I was quite familiar with his scripts and television treatments from editing *The Essential Ellison*, and I'm sure that helped. Curiously, I did have gaming conversations with another close American writer friend, Jack Vance. We talked about what a terrific adventure or RPG computer games his novels *The Dragon Masters* or *The Last Castle* would make.

Here's where I say that I'm really interested in what modern storytelling is doing and what it *can* do where computer adventures are concerned. I'm presently completing a doctorate in computer game narrative, and truly believe that computer games – and the adventure game in particular, despite what doomsayers are presently saying – are

becoming as viable a vehicle for storytelling as feature films, television mini-series and graphic novels. Not RPGs anywhere near as often, oddly enough, and certainly not shooters, because the gameplay doesn't become 'invisible' enough to the user, ultimately, for it to work as well. You keep noticing the physical act of operating the game as a game. Ironically it's actually game design that's lagging behind storytelling here – making puzzles feel like natural tasks in a complete story, crafting the level design so it isn't noticed as that.

You're widely known throughout Europe and Australia, yet relatively unknown in the United States – which I find amazing as some of your horror stories are as good as anything Stephen King has ever written – why have you yet to find a market in the U.S.?

Thanks for the kind words. I suspect it's because I haven't been a novelist to date. Only about eight per cent of writers earn their livings from their writing, and very few writers make a career for themselves writing only short stories, novellas and novelettes, which is what I do. Ray Bradbury and Harlan come to mind as managing it, a handful of others. I've been writing professionally for twenty-three years now and have had quite a number of appearances in the *Year's Best Fantasy and Horror* (I was the only author to have two stories in the 2001 volume; something I'm very proud of), but apart from having my first linked collection *Rynosseros* published by the SF Book Club back in 1993, I haven't had US editions of my work. Hopefully that will start to change this year with the release of a hardcover collection of my best horror stories from Cemetery Dance.

Of the three games you've written, which were original writings and which were based on published stories?

Sentinel is the only game based on a previously published story – “The Ichneumon and the Dormeuse” – which first appeared in *Interzone* magazine in the UK back in April 1996. The Adventure Company approached Detalion about producing a quick game title for the end of 2004 and I suggested to Maciej adapting an existing story that seemed to have an intriguing premise and a strong ending. *Schizm*, as I said, had no story, characters or dialogue in place when I came aboard in 1999, but in terms of artwork, interface and level design it was already substantially done. I just had to adapt a story to it, which was especially interesting and rewarding to do.

For *Mysterious Journey II: Chameleon* (released as *Schizm II: Chameleon* in Europe, England, Australia and other marketing territories), the Detalion team wanted to continue the 'schism' idea from the first game and have some new kind of crucial dislocation at work. In *Schizm* the dislocation was having the two protagonists separated from each other, ultimately in more ways than one. In *Chameleon* they wanted to have two tribes at odds with each other: one pro-technology, the other pro-environment, thus providing a basis for conflict and different and interesting cultural designs. That was the extent of their briefing. The rest was up to me. I already had the idea of a prisoner trapped on an old space station in a decaying orbit and went ahead and developed that, turning the idea on its head a bit by having the pro-technologists as

the good guys and the pro-environmentalists as more radical and nearsighted. Maciej and the rest of the team over in Poland discussed my story ideas, raised points, asked questions, made suggestions, helped me logic-test the story.

Can you describe the process involved to transfer one of your stories into a workable script for an adventure game?

Once the basic idea gets the green light, I start working up a few treatment pages for Maciej to show to his other team members and the publishers. It breaks the story down into a quick summary that can be used to pitch the game and explain what it is, how it proceeds etc to people coming to it cold. It not only explains what's going on to colleagues and publishers but hopefully gets the interest going with the marketing and publicity people as well.

Then it's a matter of thinking about how the storyline should be changed to allow for appropriate game rewards in the level design. Think of it as being like planning book chapters. You try to end a chapter on a key event, a suspenseful or significant moment. In game design terms, a 'chapter' (to call it that) for *Sentinel*, say, might end with the opening of a new domain within the tomb, or a key revelation by our guardian. The dialogue and the surprise ending is already there from the original story. Those are just embellished and modified to suit gaming outcomes.

Once the initial design meetings in Poland reach a certain point, Maciej then sends me the design plans and level schematics the team has come up with so I can see what game levels and visuals are going to be used and how I need to adjust my story for them. I then tailor specific comments to those settings. For instance, in *Sentinel* there are eight major settings including the tomb itself. We agreed that our Dormeuse should appear twice in each of those domains, either as animations, voice-overs or a mixture of both given the deadlines. This sounds a bit contrived and mechanical, I know, but you then judge when enough is enough, when it's too much, and adjust the material according to feel. After those initial design meetings (all by email, remember; we've never even spoken on the phone), my job became refining the dialogue elements. Tregett, for instance, was originally going to be a desert domain till quite late in the piece. When it became a marsh world, I had to adjust Tamara's text accordingly. Or Maciej would contact me and suggest having Beni make an additional comment here and there to make an area feel less lonely, things like that. For *Sentinel* I was able to do this sort of tweaking right up until the start of August 2004 (the dialogue was recorded on 15 August). You have to remember that we only had ten months to produce this game and on a very strict budget. I am frankly astonished at what Maciej and the team have been able to achieve in that time. I'm extremely proud of all our collaborations but, for me, given the production realities, what we achieved with *Sentinel* is amazing.

How significant is dialogue in a game – where you can actually hear the characters – as compared to reading dialogue in a story?

Dialogue is very important because it not only gives information in what's possibly the most natural and immediate way, but also defines character by what they say (and don't

say), how they say it, etc. Most writers will tell you that they run the dialogue in their heads anyway, actually hear the characters talking, so the differences aren't always that apparent for the author. What becomes the main difference between listening to dialogue and reading it on the page is the time factor. It reads much more quickly than can be spoken. Hey, I'm the guy who scripted a cutscene in *Chameleon* between Sen and Arko the Nomad that ran nine minutes and ten seconds. Nine minutes and ten seconds, for heaven's sake! What was I thinking! It's a small animation masterpiece and it taught me so much. Now I try not to have any character speak more than thirty words in any one piece of conversation. I'm very pleased with how the dialogue is presented in *Sentinel*.

What do you find more challenging: writing a story, writing an adventure game or transferring one of your stories into an adventure game?

Definitely writing an adventure game from scratch. You have to come up with a good enough basic concept, one that will appeal, have a good ending and carry the artistic and level design well. This is harder than it sounds because it also becomes a matter of logistics: what budget and deadlines are involved, of trying to anticipate what other limitations you might find yourself facing *before* they arise. In our case, the language difference has always been an important factor, for instance. Most of the design team don't have English as their first language, so you keep wondering if you've explained things clearly enough? Just as important, have I understood *them* correctly? What may look a good idea on the drawing board may not lead to a good outcome. There was one instance in *Chameleon* where I misread a design map and thought that the Ansala museum and its approaches were located *inside a mountain* when in fact they were outdoors and above water, a central feature connected not by tunnels but by a network of bridges. It made no difference whatsoever to the storytelling or game outcomes, but something like that reminds you how careful you need to be when you're not physically sitting in on those design sessions. I've learned that there are no silly questions. Everything must be logic-tested and verified.

Another tricky thing for me as a writer is preferring not to labour the point with explanations and endings. Good storytelling is full of 'givens' – things that the audience is just required to accept. Think of *The Lord of the Rings*, for instance, the movies and the original print narrative version. We were meant to take all those cultural and pseudo-historical details on trust. Think of Frank Herbert's *Dune*. You're just thrown into that exotic far future and then have to figure it out as you go along. I tend to work that way as well. But with the wide age and experience range of the modern computer game audience, you find that a lot of gamers aren't always comfortable with that. Things need to be spelled out. I always tend to overestimate what people can grasp in my stories, because I'd rather extend the compliment implicit in that than underestimate them. In *Schizm*, for instance, I figured, hey, we've had all this talk about the Wanderer and the Good Servant, spent all this time trying to get into Matia's Zone, then we discover this giant metal egg sitting there. When we find a way to open it, everyone *has* to wonder what the globe is that the fish balloon loads aboard the travelling ship, right? With any luck, they have to put two and two together and figure out why the fish-balloon ship from the balloon field is loading something onto a ship from one of the

floating cities. It didn't happen. A lot of people needed to be *told* that it was Matia sending that part of itself back to Earth. At one level that sort of elusiveness is my fault, my failing. At another, it's theirs.

What do you feel is something intrinsic from your stories that you have not been able to transfer to a game due to the limitations of the medium?

I'm sure all writers who have translated their ideas to other media have wish lists of one sort or another. Even understanding budget and deadline limitations, how many hours goes into, say, a mere ten seconds of on-screen animation, I guess it still has to be having programs that allow the density and richness of the worlds where people are actually living their lives. It's what I said just now about having 'givens' that make a gameworld feel real. Imagine having something like the Massive program used in the *Lord of the Rings* films to produce crowds of NPCs for the Transai and Ansala villages in *Chameleon*, for instance, even if off in the distance as with the Moiety Age in *Riven*. It's also easy to wish for additional budgetary freedom so you can prolong some of the transitions between locations in both *Schizm* and *Schizm II* if only to establish the sheer size of these worlds. I envisaged seeing the wastelands outside that single surviving valley in *Chameleon* filled with Companions coming alive at the end of the game, and seeing the environment field flickering overhead throughout. These are things that only additional time and money can bring. But, on the other hand, there are wonderful compensations – all the unexpected and wonderful touches the Detalion artists and designers came up with that made those worlds interesting.

Given that I'm known as a writer of dark fantasy and horror as well as science fiction, I guess the single greatest element from my own writing that hasn't been carried over into the games I've worked on so far is the disquiet and fear element, the sort of unease the French call *inquiétude*. Even my science fiction and fantasy tends to have an element of this for mood and dramatic effect. Detalion's games have avoided violence for sound marketing, sales and philosophical reasons, so terror and a real sense of danger are generally out of place. Without danger and fear and the game penalties that go with such things (usually 'dying' and a game re-start) you can't really maintain a sense of horror or disquiet too well. *The Blackstone Chronicles* and the *Silent Hill* games all involve 'death' and have a real sense of dread and anxiety; others, like *Amber* and *Dark Fall*, have the sense that it can happen.

We understand you are currently working on a new game. Can you provide some details?

There are no contracts as yet, so it's probably best to say I'm developing story ideas that would transfer to game design well. It's a very competitive scene at present, far more than even fifteen months ago, so it all depends on publishers accepting a project proposal. We did have an adaptation of my book *Wormwood* in the early planning stages, set in a far-future, very alien Earth after an interstellar invasion, but that would be a huge project and would require a considerable budget. We may get back to it one day. I'd also very much like to do an adaptation of my story "The Man Who Lost Red", but a lot will depend on how well *Sentinel* does and what publishers are interested in

follow-up projects. Going back to what I said earlier, I also accept that others on the Detalion team have story projects they'd like to see developed. I'd be pleased to assist wherever my services are needed.

Cyan Worlds licensed three novels to explore the background of the D'ni civilization which resulted in *Myst*. Are you planning any specific novels to explore the background of the Tastan Civilization from *Sentinel*?

Not at this point, though I did begin a novelisation of the first *Schizm* game, just the original opening, to see how it tracked as text narrative reading it on the page. It's actually more exciting to come up with new stories, new ideas, new projects. That's the main reward for me as a writer, surprising myself with marvelous things that didn't exist before. But if a publisher wanted to do game tie-in novels, I'd be pleased to do them.

What, in your opinion, can be done to make the adventure game a more marketable genre?

The short answer: integrating tasking within story and setting more carefully. There's a major difference of perception here. Some developers design computer games *as* games, with definite gaming objectives in mind. Others allow that these 'games' are (and will be) much more than that, and accept that the gaming aspect is just a means to an end in the much larger phenomenon of traditional storytelling. We're talking about the holistic immersive presentation of story that will one day be available given present technological trends. They know that any puzzle solving and action/combat activities should be natural and organic, fully integrated in the game design, and that this is the hardest thing to achieve. Making exploration and 'tasking' – to call it that – feel realistic, credible and appropriate, regardless of how amazing the setting might be, becomes just too difficult, especially when some gamers just want the puzzles to be puzzles. But that's where the tail starts wagging the dog way too often. Adventure games at their best aren't really about puzzle-solving, they're about life-living and self-extension in a world that's new, different and engaging. However absurd and amazing that new world might be, the tasks faced there should *feel* appropriate to that setting, despite its strangeness, or, as in *Obsidian*, be explained in an ultimately satisfactory way.

When puzzle-solving and action tasks feel unrealistic and tacked on – so much busywork to stretch the gameplay and pad out the level design – it's so easy to dismiss the whole thing as: 'Oh well, it's just a game! And it's just an *adventure game*! What do you expect!' But that's because we're still in a blinkered, short-view, 'silent movie' era of immersive entertainment. We forget that action carried out by a human, whether for entertainment or otherwise, whatever the media used and however abstract and unintended, becomes a form of storytelling and always has. Whether it's a soccer game, a car race or a game of chess, you have story occurring. It can't be avoided. In staging them as computer games, the same logic-testing we apply to novels, short stories, movies, television programs, comic books, graphic novels, musicals etc applies. When a game grinds to a stop so the gamer can complete a slider puzzle, navigate a maze,

construct a device for making a cup of tea or even track through all the options in a dialogue tree, there has to be a good contextual reason for it within the gameworld and the game design. Otherwise it's just padding, busywork and false interactivity. The gameplay also has to be as invisible as the game designer can make it. If I'm in a strange and unfamiliar location in the real world trying to find my way into a building or how to operate a piece of machinery, I don't think of it as a puzzle in conventional terms. If anything, it's a problem I'm facing, part of what I naturally have to do to get by in the life I'm leading. That's the difference between puzzle-solving and what I call tasking. Tasking tends to be invisible; you don't notice it.

Logic testing for a storyteller is important too. I consider Cyan's *Riven* to be an early high-point in holistic game design, a genuine classic, but still wonder why there was no spy-hole in that prison cell on the Jungle Island. Ingenious of the Moiety to put a secret door there, but you'd never dare open it without first be able to see who was near the cell. Too risky. Logic testing and brainstorming should have found and dealt with that early on. So, too, in *Rhem* there wasn't a kitchen or other living facilities for that poor selfish sod who runs off with our rail-car. Someone built all that wonderful architecture, so where did they go the bathroom? Where did they eat and sleep? Those omissions violated the logic of the gameworld in an instant. If you're just seeing it as a game then, okay, forget about it. Get a life, for heaven's sake! But if it's quality storytelling in a new vital form, and logical unto itself, then intelligent and gifted game designers need to get their act together and logic-test their game design, *especially* if they're in it for the puzzles, because that's going to be their blind spot! The first principles at work here aren't merely gaming per se, as some seem determined to have it, but immersion in a story experience that becomes life-experience when done well.

I've tried to walk the walk as well as talk the talk here, at least as much as I could using email and dealing with talented colleagues whose first language isn't English. It was important that the 'tasking' in *Sentinel* be grounded in such logic. The Dormeuse was deliberately giving Beni tasks so she could observe him, slow him down, make him use up his supplies, mess with his mind. She even comes out and says so. The ending shows why. There's a valid context, however tenuous some may feel it is, for what Beni – and so the gamer – has to do. Soap Bubble's *Morpheus* did very well here too. The puzzle elements there were mostly either security and operations tasks needed aboard that rather special ship or aspects of the dreamworlds of those poor trapped souls inside the neurographicon that need to be resolved. Clever and appropriate. If it's a cartoon reality like *The Neverhood* or a dreamworld like the first *Myst* game, full of absurd and surreal elements, then you can forget too much logic testing. You just go with what's given and take it on its own terms.

Here's where I add my bit and say adventure games aren't dead and probably will never die. They're too engaging, too effective, too useful. If they seem to have done so, it's only in comparative, commercial terms, not artistic ones. Artistically, they're as strong and as important as ever. Remember, Van Gogh sold only *The Red Vineyard* in his lifetime. It's going to be interesting to see what plays out ten or twenty years from now.

Do you think it would help sales of games like *Sentinel* if more consumers were aware of established authors, like yourself, involvement with the game?

You'd think so, if only for the usual 'brand name' reasons. But that can skew things a bit as well, give more credit than is often due. I've learned that there are always unsung heroes in game storytelling and game design. I'd love to ask Bob Bates, for instance, about the extent of his contribution to *The Blackstone Chronicles* or Jon Bock about his work on *Lighthouse*. What about Frank and Susan Wimmer with *Amber: Journeys Beyond*, and Glenn Dean on *Morpheus*. These were and are great story ideas, perfect for adventure gaming. The future looks rosy from here.

Read more:

<http://www.justadventure.com/reviews/Sentinel/Sentinel.shtm>

<http://www.justadventure.com/reviews/Schizm2MJ2/Schizm2.shtm>

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