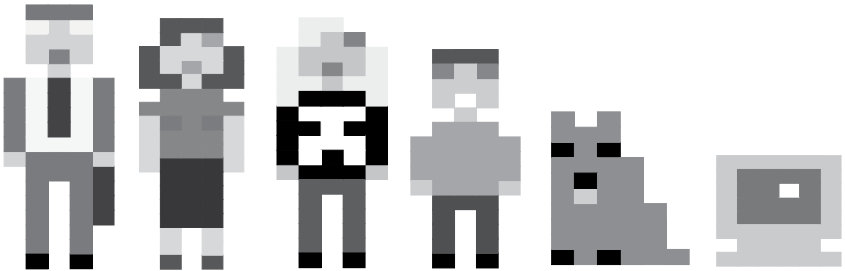


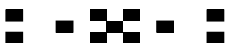
Game Quest

by Leopold McGinnis



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Epilogue; restart? restore? quit?

Madre Quest

By Fred Goodwin

(uncut final draft article for Game Mania Magazine, May/July 1998.)

I never liked video games. They were too frivolous to take seriously. Somewhat ironically, though, my father worked at what was commonly recognized as the greatest computer game company of all time. Much to my own consternation and the envy of my friends, this made me eligible for the company's annual Internship program. To throw that consternation back in my friend's faces I swore that I would never ever apply. This amused me to no end and made them wriggle and steam in their seats with jealous frustration. I wanted to do something with my life. I wanted to be a writer, change the world and win a Pulitzer...not a Golden Joystick.

Then grade 12 rapidly arrived and I suddenly had to face the fact that I had not saved up *any* money for university, or for the around-the-world trip I had been dreaming of since grade 10. This, coupled with the prospect of another summer at Burger Hut **and** strong encouragement from my mother, forced me to do the unthinkable: ask my father for an internship application. Through some miracle my half-assed application made it through the piles and I was chosen. At the time it was a double-edged sword for me: my pride and values versus money to spend on my dreams. But, in retrospect, filling out that application was one of the best things I ever did. That company was Madre Entertainment, one of the most innovative companies in computer gaming history.

Little did I realize that by the end of my short internship my opinion on computer games and the men and women that make them would have rotated 180 degrees. I would also probably never work for a company as interesting, enjoyable and innovative as Madre ever again. Indeed, I have yet to. But, more importantly, at the time of my internship, nobody in the entire company had any inkling that I would be the last intern they would ever hire and, little more than a year after my departure, Madre as they knew it would be bought out, the office closed, all the employees

fired and the production of 3-D adventure games, Madre's creation and signature product, discontinued forever.

Madre's contributions to the computer gaming industry have been so significant and copious that the industry can easily be organized into two periods: Madre and post-Madre. Madre's litany of accomplishments include: creating the world's first graphical adventure game, employing the world's most prolific, awarded and successful female computer game author, countless gaming awards (including 7 Games of the Year!), breaking numerous sales records (often their own), pioneering realistic sound quality in computers, having the largest female fan base of any gaming company, having the largest number of female employees of any gaming company, and for creating, at the time, the world's largest commercial computer network, SupraNet.

Of course, not everything can be measured in records and many of Madre's accomplishments are ethereal. Madre was best loved for taking risks, striving for originality and for doing things for the love of games, sometimes at the expense of profit. Madre was the envy of all competing companies not only because of its success, but because of its renowned relationship with its employees. Madre was the people's game company and web sites dedicated to Madre games, music and characters continue to proliferate across the Internet despite the fact the company hasn't released an adventure game in three years and has publicly stated it has no intentions of doing so in the future.

The current Madre is a shell of its former self. Another entity entirely rests under the name. Madre no longer creates games, but publishes, distributes or contracts the work of smaller firms. The heart and soul of Madre left on Black Monday and whether you are a fan of the original Team Madre or not, you cannot deny that the industry is not the same without them. Madre's current financial and legal troubles only serve to remind us of the company's former days, when it flew high and proud.

I won't be maudlin and say that the industry is worse off for the loss of Madre. I don't think that is true. However, things are definitely different and Madre's fall was the first and biggest sign that the gaming landscape had been seriously altered. Perhaps the reason Redwood Studios' collapse is seen as so significant is because no one from Team Madre – the biggest names in the industry at that time – has done anything since. It is as if they have dropped off the face of the gaming planet.

I know I'm not the only one who wonders what happened to these individuals and so decided to go on a quest of my own to hunt down my former colleagues, to find out what these heroes of Sci-Fi Quest,

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Fantasy Quest, Swarthy Victor and HomoSapien Quest are doing now and uncover their insights into the gaming industry three years after Black Monday.

Art Loel, *Creator and Designer of the Swarthy Victor series.*

Bill Shafer, *Former Madre art-lead & Swarthy Victor co-designer.*

I have just finished watching *Swarthy Victor: the movie* released on VHS last year. Art excitedly asks me what I think as we sit on the couch, staring at the static ridden TV. I dig into the nuts on the table to avoid answering. I'm not sure if Art is proud of this movie or not and am hesitant to say what I really think. Art laughs. "Pretty mediocre, huh?" he prods. I agree. But I think he is being kind to his own movie. *Inspid* is a better description.

"Art's son said it best," Bill chimes in. "*It sucks donkey balls!*"

Art laughs. "I think that would have made a better quote for the newspaper ads than what they used...what was it again?"

Bill, as usual, helps him out. "The laugh-a-minute movie marathon of the year!"

"That's right," Art chuckles to himself, "Where do they come up with this stuff? I couldn't write something that bad if I locked myself in my closet and ate nothing but cheese-puffs for two months. I think of all the phrases to use to plug a movie 'The laugh-a-minute movie marathon of the year!' is the phrase most likely to make me NOT want to see that movie."

Bill and Art laugh together, almost revelling in how much the movie, based on their hit game series, stinks. I am transported back five years to our brain-storming sessions in their office. Although I was the communal gopher around the office, obliged to get coffee or take notes for anyone whenever they wanted it, I worked primarily for Bill and Art. They claimed me from the beginning, forcing me to be the overworked zookeeper in their tent of wild and untamed ideas. Somehow we are in this position again. Bill, visiting from San Francisco, and Art go off as usual while I struggle to copy everything down – my tape recorder having run out of batteries on the drive up.

"I'm actually quite pleased that it stinks so bad, actually," Art says. "It's rather fitting: Victor finally gets some attention, gets a big budget Hollywood movie made out his life and it's a total stinker. It's perfect. It's what would happen to Victor. Art imitates life...in art."

I try to steer Bill and Art's conversational circus in a cohesive direction:

Q: *I know you've been asked this question a million times by fans, but will there ever be a Swarthy Victor 5?*

Art: Who knows. It certainly isn't going to happen anytime soon. After the movie sunk...which was really their own fault, they abandoned what little plans they had for a game sequel. Madre owns the Quest game rights so we can't legally make another one without their permission. I know several people have tried to secure the rights, but Madre refuses to sell and, frustratingly, refuses to do anything with the rights themselves.

Bill: I think that should be illegal. If you have the rights but aren't going to use them...

Art: I would be interested in doing another Swarthy Victor game if the opportunity came up...but I wouldn't hold your breath. I really don't see it coming, particularly with the recent financial troubles.

Q: *The adventure game has all but disappeared in the last four years. Are rumors of the genre's death greatly exaggerated, or do you see a comeback?*

Art: That's hard to say. It's kind of dogma to say that the market drives the economy...that demand will create supply. But I don't see that happening. I know there are thousands of players who want nothing more than another adventure game. I still get emails daily asking if another Swarthy Victor will come out. There are fan sites all over the web devoted to Madre and adventure games. There's a market, but Madre and others argue that the adventure gaming public just isn't willing to cough up the dough because once in a blue moon some company releases a crappy adventure game and then they lose money.

Bill: Gamers lost faith in the adventure game because the market was flooded with a lot of bad games. Most of the few released today are really sub-par. Nobody wants to spend 50 bucks on a dull adventure game. One advantage an action game has over an adventure game is that even a bad action game can be enjoyable...while a bad adventure is a terrible chore.

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Art: Morbid Macarena. That came out after the market bottomed out and was probably one of the best adventures ever created. It did well but didn't blow the socks off of any sales records or anything. It proved that a well-made adventure game in a cynical market could sell, but it's gonna take more than one under-marketed game to win back that faith. But the companies aren't interested. The problem with the adventure game is that it's not going to make *scathes* of money. The vast majority of gaming houses today are shareholder or venture capitalist run – money is predominantly the driving force of the game production. The actual creators of the game, I'm sure, want to make the coolest game ever. Every game designer's dream is that they'll get a big cool plaque that says 'Creator of the Coolest Game Ever in the History of the Universe.' Funders don't care about that though. They want a plaque that says 'Maker of the Most Money Ever in the History of the Universe – Communism Sucks!' They want the shortest route to the biggest bucks. Adventure games are like a Japanese garden. They take skill and time and are usually immeasurably satisfying. Action games are like pet rocks. They sell like crazy but any fool can make them and most fools will buy them.

Bill: I don't think it's dead. The desire and hope is out there and continues to grow. I think there's a comeback in the works. Even if the games are fan made and distributed as freeware, it will return. Fans would probably produce better games, too, with the pressure of investment out of the equation. I mean, even in the good days at Madre we always had to kill good ideas because of money or timeline issues.

Art: Yeah. I think action games are suffering the same fate as adventure games. There's too many of them and they need to be increasingly sophisticated to sell. All the companies know this, but they'll keep pumping them out until they panic and sink their own ship by all jumping overboard at the same time. They're like lemmings.

Q: *How do you feel about the notorious Black Monday...and what do you miss most about working for Madre?*

Art: I still get angry sometimes. Not so much because of what happened with Melfina...but because we were the ones that, ultimately, put ourselves in that position. We were so naïve. I mean, when they changed our name to Redwood that should have been a big flashing sign of impending doom. Melfina's plan all along was to kill the adventure

game. They wanted in on the action game market. The trick for them was getting rid of all of us. They should have just renamed us Deadwood—

Bill: (laughs) Deadwood. Good one.

Art: Thanks... Anyway, we were naïvely rallying our fans to write protest letters but Melfina didn't care. We were stupid to think the fact that people liked our games mattered. Melfina changed our name so people wouldn't notice when Redwood was axed. *Everyone at Redwood got fired? Who were they?* So, sometimes I get angry at ourselves for being so...out of touch with what was really going on.

Q: *And what do you miss most?*

Art: I miss...I think the hardest and strangest thing about Madre was not that it ended...but the realization that the work we did there was the best we ever did and would ever do. It's hard to move on when you know that you'll never top what you did before. I don't think any of us realized it at the time...but we were doing incredibly important things, shaping an industry. I still find it hard to believe we were paid as much as we were, and celebrated and respected for so much work that wasn't work...for having fun. And knowing that is an incredibly rare thing to achieve and we will never replicate that again in our lifetimes makes me a little sad sometimes. It's really bitter-sweet. On the other hand, I've already done incredibly important things, so I can focus on relaxing, hobbies, retirement.

Bill: I miss working with Art.

Q: *You know how they do these 'where are they now?' exposés for old pop stars? How would you describe yourself to fans now wondering 'where are they now?'*

Art: (laughs) Well, I maintain my website for fun. It's nice to get letters from people who enjoyed my games...and my books. Oh yeah, I've written a couple of children's books in the last two years which were well received. Critics describe me as 'offbeat & brilliant' which is a nice change from the usual 'bald and fat man who writes dirty computer games for a living.' (laughs) I wrote a couple of joke books too. Most people who come to my website via my kids' books are surprised to learn

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that I wrote Swarthy Victor...but most of them accept it. The humor is the same. And the ones that get uptight about it, well... Who cares? If they get uptight, then they're not really the ones I want reading my books. Other than that I relax and do what I want. Art Loel: teacher, musician, author, professional dirty game maker. I've lived a full life.

Bill: Right now I'm working as an artist and designer for Zenihil studios, a small gaming studio in San Francisco. We just released our first game last year. It was actually published by Madre.

Kendra Roberts,

Co-founder of Madre, Designer of Fantasy Quest, Gorr.

Kendra doesn't seem like the type of woman to wear sunglasses, but out on the patio of Mama Mia's Restaurante Italiano the sun is scorching. I feel overdressed. We are in Berney, the town nearest the Robert's residence and the forest where Madre once reigned. Kendra digs into her Caesar salad and I am disappointed that I can't see her eyes. It makes it harder to do an interview. But, then again, talking to her here, I get the feeling that I will never fully understand Kendra Roberts. Working at Madre I only spoke with her on a few occasions. Even I, the computer game hater, was in awe of Kendra Roberts. She was a god in the computer game world...and a woman – with seemingly boundless creative energy. She kept changing, evolving, like you could never catch her. Peering through her sunglasses is the closest, perhaps, anyone will ever get to understanding the complex being that is Kendra Roberts. I'm lucky to have even a shot at getting a few glimpses.

We chit and chat and I'm surprised at how easy she is to talk to...and wonder why I never spoke to her much during my internship. The lemon slices in our tall glasses of water bounce light off the ice cubes, painting yellow rays across our forearms, plates and the tablecloth. Kendra wipes her mouth and I segue into our interview.

Q: *Madre had a reputation, shocking at the time, for having a large number of female customers in an era where most women wouldn't even touch a computer. Statistics show that female gamers are increasing in number. What's your take on the myth of the girl gamer?*

Kendra: Well, like you say, I think girls were afraid to touch computers because it was seen as a male domain – like peeing standing

up or something. I think some shied away from it because they felt using a computer, or pretending to know about it, would make them seem less feminine. I also think a lot of guys in the industry can be pretty macho about their machines. *Girls can't use machines!* So encouragement certainly wasn't there. I think a lot of women didn't play computer games, not so much because of the games, but because of the computers...because of the genderification – is that a word? – of the computers themselves. That's changed a bit over the years. It's seen as something that everybody uses now...

Q: *So you don't think the fact that men are designing all the games makes a difference?*

Kendra: No, no. I'm not saying that. I don't know, maybe ten years ago I would have argued that it was a self-fulfilling cycle: *Women don't play games because they don't have 'womany' stuff in them. They don't have 'womany' stuff in them because they are mostly designed by men. The games are all designed by men because most women don't know or care about computers or games.* I'm not so sure I'd argue that now, though. I mean, it still plays a large part. Traditionally, women aren't too into guns and explosions...but I think that is more of a *girls aren't supposed to like that stuff* attitude rather than that women, biologically, don't care about that stuff. But, more importantly, scantily clad females or the whole 'save the helpless female and win the game' plotline syndrome – which I admit even I used in *Fantasy Quest 1* – doesn't offer up as much excitement for a woman as it might for a man. They're just less likely to associate with male characters, even if the goals are the same.

But things have changed a lot. It's pretty common today to have a female main character...it's almost sacrilege not to have at least one major female character to choose from. Sure those females are always slim and sexy and busty...but it's more interesting than playing a muscle-bound man. And, really, the slim, sexy tough woman, I think, can be as much an attraction to women as to men. It's fantasy. Nobody wants to play a homely wimp. The male characters are never fat and ugly. They, too, are muscular ideals – often violent ideals – but ideals, none the less.

I guess if I had a concern about females and gaming today it would be the almost total lack of female designers. There are, generally, more women involved in the industry than when we started, but, I think they're usually involved as artists and producers. Game design is still largely a male domain. When women designers *are* allowed into the fray,

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it's usually to make games based on dolls or hair or something. So, I don't know. I think more women are playing and liberating themselves from constraining stereotypes like *women can't play games*...but, at the same time, there are so few women making games...just normal, good games. That's a disappointment. To me, games shouldn't be about gender. They're about fun.

Q: *As, arguably, the creator of the 3D adventure game, how do you feel about its present status? Is the adventure game dead? How do you feel about action games dominating the market?*

Kendra: I don't know what to say about action games. I mean, people seem to like them. They are fun, I guess. They work on a totally different level from an adventure game, though. They push the wow factor and work on adrenaline. They get you excited, pull you in faster, play on your body's instincts and split second decisions. An adventure game is more cerebral, slower and less passive than an action game. Like a book the excitement comes from a plot and character development and you, as a player, have to invest some time in getting into the adventure, associating with the characters. You keep playing because you want to follow the story and learn how it ends...and you have an active part in doing that. I think a good adventure game can be much more satisfying than an action game overall. It's easier to get stuck in an adventure game, I think, but then you feel more satisfied when you do solve it. You feel clever. But it takes more patience and intellect to enjoy than an action game. That sounds really elitist, I know, and I don't mean it to be. I'm not saying people who like action games are dumb. Those games work on the opposite plane of human intelligence. A lot of people like both types of game. But I think it's easier to play an action game. Just like it's easier to watch TV than to read.

So is the adventure game dead? I don't know. I don't think so...but it's not returning to its heyday. I think it will remain a minor game genre. One or two will come out a year. It will develop a certain steady demographic, but it won't own the market.

Q: *We used to hear from Kendra Roberts all the time. Now that Redwood Studios is gone, so are all your voices. What is Kendra Roberts up to today? Will we be seeing any more games from the famed Adventure Game writer?*

Kendra: *(laughs)* I'm not doing much. I'm really enjoying the low key lifestyle these days. You know, everybody wants to accomplish something with their life, to feel like they did something important. I feel like I achieved that with Madre. The compulsion that says 'I've gotta do something important before I die!' is gone. It's a weight off your shoulders and after nearly 20 years of Madre, well, I think I'm still recuperating. The video game industry has changed a lot since I started. I'm not sure I'd want to get back into that. It would be more work than ever for less recognition...and I don't know what I have to prove. For now I'm working on other things...and keeping a relaxed approach.

Q: *What else are you working on?*

Kendra: Well, I don't want to give you any false-starts. I'm working on writing a book. It's something I always wanted to do...but making games kind of satisfied that creative desire. But now I have time. My friend Kathy Willis, the novelist who helped co-design Gorr and the never released Fantasy Quest 6, is helping me with it. So that's a lot of fun. I don't know if it will ever be finished...I don't want to start receiving letters asking 'when is your book coming out?' Let me say this: I plan on finishing it and publishing it. But who knows when. *(laughs)*

I've never done a novel, but dammit, if Art Loel can write a book for children, then I can write a book for adults! *(laughs)*. Don't ask me how he pulled that one off. Don't ask me how Art pulls anything off.

Q: *What do you miss most about Madre?*

Kendra: Nothing really. I mean, Madre was great. I can't even remember all the good times I had there. But it was over. I think we really accomplished something spectacular. We made an impact on the industry, on people, even the world, maybe. It ended rather abruptly and shockingly, but I don't think we would have ended it on our own. Good books can't go on forever. Sequels are rarely as good as the originals... especially when you get past four. Like our games, I think we did something new and important. It was great and it finished...with a bang. It was a nice little story, but someone else has to write a new book now.

I don't miss Madre. I don't think Madre is gone either. I still see a lot of people I worked with. They are friends. And I've moved on to the next part of my life. Madre wasn't the beginning and it wasn't the end. It was the middle. I'm excited to see what happens next.

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Henry Washington,
Madre Composer & Sound Engineer.

Henry's personality, like his role at Madre, hides in the background. You may not recognize his name, but if you ever played a Madre game, you can probably sing one of his songs, and probably have in the shower.

We are sitting around the table in his San Francisco office where he works as a consultant composing primarily for video game companies, but works on everything from bathroom tissue commercials to museum exhibit muzak. Henry left Madre soon after Black Monday.

Henry confesses that it is good to see a face from Madre again, even if it is only an intern. He genuinely misses Madre, you can tell.

Q: How did you feel about Black Monday? Why did Madre disappear so fast?

Henry: I guess, mostly, I feel sorry that Madre couldn't go on. There are very few really decent things in life. Madre was one of those for me and a lot of people. Black Monday felt like watching a movie where the good guys lost, you know?

I feel most sorry for Will, though. He didn't lose his job but he beat himself up a lot. I think, not only did he lose his company and vision, he felt like he'd let everyone down. He always treated this thing – Madre – like a family affair. When Madre went down a lot of people were unemployed in an area with limited job options. I was sad to see it go, but for Will it was the hardest.

I think Madre was dead before Black Monday, though. Our games were getting pretty uninspired, as I've heard from fans since. We were becoming really corporate on our own. To stay alive we had to keep growing; we had to invest in stocks. I think if anything led to the downfall of Madre, it was the stocks.

Q: How so?

Henry: Lots of ways, I guess. The day we sold out to shareholders was the day we sold our jobs. I wasn't there at the time, but when Madre did that, the employees ceased to be their own boss. They were reporting to somebody else...people whose only interest in Madre was to get money. Suddenly the point of Madre wasn't to make games, or to contribute to society, or provide jobs, or to make a difference, whether they realized it

or not. I remember one of the guys in accounting talking with Will by the water cooler when I was first hired and they were still losing money on SupraNet. This guy asked him, ‘But why sustain it? What about making money?’ And Will answered ‘Making money is what the treasury does.’ I never actually liked SupraNet. I was sure it was going to sink us in the end, but I think that was the first time I really felt that I’d joined a company trying to do something beyond the obvious. People hear that ethic now and think we’re crazy – but we had a lot of success with it.

Q: So you think that if Madre had never sold those initial shares, it would still be here today?

Henry: Well, I don’t see how you can not get into stocks these days. It wasn’t like Madre ever really had a choice. It started growing so fast, it needed investment just to keep up with itself. Financially, all your competitors have stock money and if you don’t, you’re toast.

Once you have shareholders suddenly you’re trapped in this endless pole-vault to beat the previous year’s profits. Every year the bar is raised. It’s not enough that some company makes a decent product and solid revenue every year because, on the stock screen, that looks like you’re stagnant. Shareholders don’t make money unless stock value goes up. You have to make more money each year. This has to go on forever.

That’s how you end up with places like Che’s Coffee Revolution engorging the planet and why it’s so difficult to get eco-friendly cars made, or affordable drugs, or find effective solutions to world poverty. It’s like a horse with blinders in a never-ending race towards that dollar hanging at the end of the stick. But, like I said, you can’t avoid stocks anymore. Even companies that didn’t traditionally need stocks, like coffee houses, get trampled by stock bearing franchises like Che’s.

Anyway, all that Madre stuff was quite a while ago. I have a new job now and three kids to feed, so I really don’t think about it a lot.

Q: *What do you think about the state of games these days?*

Henry: I was never much of a gamer. The games look better. All the programmers are always telling me they are better, faster, but I never play them. I’m not good at them. My son tries to get me to play but it feels like playing piano without the sound coming out. The music quality is greatly improved. I can think more like a musician now, rather than a programmer. I can compose traditionally, hire a band and put a live

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recording into the game. You have so many more options.

Tim Wilko & Geoff Rogers,
Award winning designers of the Sci-Fi Quest series.

“I’m still recovering from the ulcer,” Geoff tells me as he froths milk from a machine that has ‘property of Madre Games Entertainment’ branded on the side. “It was crazy, like we’d all turned into coffee fiends that last year...coffee and games and coffee and games – that’s all we thought about. I don’t know how that happened. When I left I looted this cappuccino machine...but before I’d used it even once my doctor diagnosed me with an ulcer. Now friends come over just to use the machine and rub it in.” He hands Tim and me our mugs. We sip and Geoff enjoys the flavor vicariously.

“Thought that one out well, didn’t you?” Tim snickers.

Geoff tells him to shut up and this seems as appropriate a time as any in the world of Tim and Geoff to begin the interview.

Q: *So, what do you guys think about the fact that, of all the Madre fans on the net, the vast majority of them are Sci-Fi Quest fans? Will their cries for another Sci-Fi Quest work? Do you guys still interact with your fans?*

Geoff: It’s cool. We’re the best.

Tim: Yeah. It’s nice to feel like you did something that people liked.

Geoff: Although, now it’s a little strange because, well, we haven’t created anything in three years...but the mail still comes.

Tim: We get asked for interviews a lot. That’s fun.

Geoff: The fan mail is from older people now, people who remember us. It’s nice...but not as exciting as when we were putting out new games.

Tim: Yeah, there are no more real young kids writing. Sci-Fi Quest is like another world to the current generation of young-uns. It’s old people stuff. I miss the young mail. But browsing through one of the more popular Sci-Fi Quest web sites I actually recognized the site founder’s

name because he'd written us a letter when he was, like, 11. That was kind of funny. I kept all our fanmail. Still read it sometimes.

Geoff: Even though it says designed by Tim Wilko and Geoff Rogers on all the game boxes, that's inaccurate. It's more like Geoff did 75% of the work while Tim spent 25% of the design time reading fan mail over and over.

Tim: Shut up! I did not.

Geoff: As if!

Tim: Whatever! I was left carrying the bag because you spent all your time at the cappuccino machine! Didn't take a doctor to know you were giving yourself an ulcer.

Geoff: Let's stay on topic, ok Tim?

Tim: I was on topic! You were the one that—

Q: *If the opportunity came up, would you do another Sci-Fi Quest?*

Geoff: Maybe. I don't know. It's hard work. And we've got our own projects going now. I think we'd both want to take it in different directions.

Tim: Yeah. Anyway, I really don't think the opportunity is going to come up since Madre is hoarding the rights to those games.

Q: *What do you think about the games Madre is putting out now?*

Geoff: Meltdown was cool. It was original. And it took a step I'm surprised nobody took long ago of weaving actual plot into an action game... But then, Madre didn't make that game. They just published it. There's nobody creative at Madre anymore...except for a few people who make ads and design game boxes.

Tim: Yeah, Meltdown was the only thing in the last three years of any note. Everything else has just seemed...painfully average. It's funny how quick a name and logo can be associated with blandness. It's odd

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because they were so focused on being ‘hip’ and ‘cool.’ They bought us for our brand real-estate – our name and logo - and then frittered it away churning out pablum. In computer gaming the proof is in the pudding. Companies earn cool by making cool games. Yes, Melfina puts out a fair number of decent, even cool games, but everyone knows they’re just a distributor. People want cool games, not cool distributors.

Anyway, we made the Madre name by focusing on game quality. We never cared much about brand recognition. In the end, Melfina bought our name and tossed the quality. It’s ironic.

Q: *With the recent embezzlement scandal threatening to kill off the Madre name for good, do you guys feel vindicated that your way of running a game business was smarter than theirs?*

Tim: Not in the least. It’s only the next obvious step in a series of inevitable chain reactions.

Geoff: Oh no. Now you’re going to hear his *theory*. I hope you have lots of batteries in that thing. (*my tape recorder*)

Tim: I don’t understand why people are surprised when good, original companies eventually get bought out by visionless corporatocracies. Because, if you look at the rules of modern day business, that’s the inevitable conclusion. If anything is surprising it’s that Madre managed to remain independent and innovative for nearly two decades in this sort of environment.

Q: *What do you mean?*

Tim: Ok, it’s like... I like to call it Business Darwinism: The most vicious and amoral thrive. The guy who wants more money, more power, is more willing to sink to new lows for promotion is much more likely to apply and achieve promotion over the guy who’s just satisfied doing a good job, doing the right thing, is satisfied with the money he’s making and the time off from work he has to focus on his hobbies and family, right? It’s like a pyramid where you keep knocking out the most ethical and down-to-earth on the way to the top. So, at the top you end up with slimeball #1. Who’s going to win a job for CEO? The qualified guy with morals, or the qualified guy who’s willing to cheat and lie to win the interview? I’m not saying this happens in all companies, but, for the most

part, the system drives the power-and-money-hungry into the captain's chair. These guys, like Tom Newman, are basically cogs in the machine, both driven by and driving the machine.

Not only are these guys promoted, but they are *rewarded* for their greed too. Save a million dollars by unethically dumping the company's waste in a field? Get a promotion! Give everyone a raise because the company is making money hand over fist? You get fired.

But this doesn't just apply to employees, it applies to companies within the business world as a whole. The bloodlust businesses buy-out or crush the little ethical guys who aren't prepared to play this sleazy game. How's a little company that never really cared about dominating the world going to stand up to one that does and has a million troops to do it? In fact, the only reason Madre got as far as it did doing things so much differently was because we found unconquered land: The computer gaming industry. But as soon as we settled it, the conquistadors smelled money and stormed in, uprooting crops and replanting nothing. In this system the reward for people like Will and Kendra is to have the land they settled bought out and turned into everything they hated. If you are not prepared to play the game the Melfina way, you get conquered. What happened to Madre was inevitable. It happens every day.

So, no, it doesn't surprise me that Madre now has to deal with corruption in its own ranks. In a company that sees the rules as 'what you can get away with', 'steal or be stolen from', business becomes a race to the bottom. Well, they're hitting bottom.

Geoff: Well, I'm not as radical as radical Tim... I'm not so jaded as to say there is no point in starting a company like Madre. We had a great 16 years and we showed a lot of people that you could do things your own way and be wildly successful. Those are important things. But the bigger you get, the more you have to decide what the point of your company is. You have to say 'Well, we could stay in business and compromise our values...or we could move on to something else. Start something new and different.' Madre, ultimately, made the second choice. And I'm proud of that. Madre was true to itself right to the end.

But that doesn't mean there was no point. Sure, it's frustrating, because every time you create something nice the 'power-leeches', as Tim likes to call them, storm in, steal your ideas, take credit, and abuse your inventions to further their world domination. It's disappointing and, in a way, Tim is right: we live in a system that promotes jerks. The true innovators of the world, the ones really making meaningful changes, get

I can't get a job because...

I have no experience...

...I have no experience because
I work at Electronics Pit...



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trampled on while companies like Melfina reap the rewards.

But in the end I don't think that matters because the reward isn't in winning. The reward is in creating, building new and better things, doing a job you know is useful and valued. Melfina will never have that. They don't know how to create that and they can't just grab it away. It's too ethereal.

In a way I'm glad we were destroyed by Melfina because our Madre, the Madre that represented the things we all believed in, when put between its values and its money, settled for its values. I think everyone at Madre won the struggle with Melfina. We all walked away from Black Monday feeling like we still had our principles and our integrity. The takeover also allowed us to move on, to try new and different things. What did Melfina and Newman walk away with? Just more money.

Q: *If there ever was to be a Sci-Fi Quest 5, what would it be about?*

Geoff: That's for us to know and you to find out.

Tim: It would be about space groupies.

Q: *What work are you doing these days?*

Tim: Well, I figured that since I was always slacking off at work playing games, a good job for me would be to be a game reviewer. But somehow, having to play games as part of your job takes all the fun out of it, so I'm seeking other ways to slack off.

Geoff: I'm doing graphic design and visual identity work for a lot of Internet start-ups. It's unbelievable the amount of cash investors are pouring into this stuff. I'm doing well.

Tom Newman,

Much vilified ex-CEO of the current Madre.

It's as if nothing has changed for Tom Newman. Despite being 'retired' from Madre earlier this year with a healthy compensation package, he still works in the same building, four floors down, at another high-tech company – Kelmor Media – where he occupies the CEO position as well. Kelmor Media produces some of the most powerful and expensive

arts software for film special effects.

As we sit down around an oval glass table in the expanse of his new office, I swear I can almost hear Madre HQ working three floors above. Newman offers me a coffee from his cappuccino maker. When it arrives in my hand I notice it is made with unnatural perfection, as if the foam wouldn't move if I tipped the cup. The coffee he makes is as impeccable as his suit. Newman sits down and though he gives off an air of settling in for a relaxed, chatty interview, I know he has only scheduled 20 minutes for this meeting. I can't imagine a life divvied up into 20 minute intervals. I decide to get right to the point.

Q: *You are often vilified as the man who destroyed Madre. How would you respond to this charge?*

Tom: (*laughs*) I don't know if I'd normally bother responding to something like that. The people who say that I destroyed Madre are living in some sort of ideological dream world. Despite large profits Madre had refused to expand beyond the garage-based business model it began with... It might not have shown from the outside, but Madre was already in trouble by the time I got to it. Will Roberts knew that. That's why he created an HQ. It's why he hired somebody who knew big-business to run it. Madre needed change to survive, to stay competitive.

People may say I destroyed Madre...but if I hadn't made the necessary changes, breaking away from the stale adventure game format and outsourcing product, Madre wouldn't be where it is today. Stockholders would have bailed out a long time ago. I thought Will Roberts was crazy to try and fend off the whole Melfina acquisition because it couldn't have come at a more perfect time. A year later, after the fall of the adventure game, Madre wouldn't have been *worth* taking over. Maybe they could have eeked out an existence, but that's the thing, you've got to flow with the current, change directions at the drop of a hat. At the end of the day, it's the swimmers who make the quick decisions and take the risks that survive the flood. With Melfina we were guaranteed a future. If people want to blame me for good business practices, for saving Madre, then so be it.

Q: *So you don't think that Will Roberts, who practically started the industry, understood the market? He couldn't have survived the 'flood.'*

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Tom: I mean no disrespect to Will Roberts. He was a visionary. And he did a good job, with no business training, creating a profitable little company. But Will didn't want to bring Madre into the future. He wanted it to keep it tucked away in the woods...but that's not how it works. You've got to get bigger. I'm not saying that he was a poor businessman. Anyone who could pull Madre together out of a garage is not a poor businessman. But he wasn't a BIG businessman. Will is a talented guy but he refused to take Madre where it had to go. The industry became a raging river...not just the little backwoods trickle he loved. It was sink or swim and Will still wanted to do the backstroke. The shareholders could see the throne had grown too big for the King so they elected one that could rule the greater kingdom.

And really, after twenty years, I think Will and his staff were beginning to lose direction. They weren't doing anything new. They were stuck making sequels to games that were popular fifteen years earlier.

Q: *Madre was known for being highly innovative and taking risks. Just before its closure, Redwood Studios was working on some unique games. You don't think that they could have adapted to a new market while remaining true to their core beliefs?*

Tom: Well...No. I don't think so. They'd already missed the boat. The adventure game was dead. A lack of consumer interest killed it. Madre wanted to continue full steam ahead, but the writing was on the wall.

Q: *A lot of criticism was leveled at Madre on Black Monday, not only for the decision to fire the entire Redwood staff, but for the way they went about it, with no forewarning. What's Madre's side of the story?*

Tom: Well, I don't work for Madre anymore, but you don't make money by holding onto dead weight. We couldn't pay the people at Redwood Studios to make games that weren't selling. The money was in the 3D action genre. We tried to reason with the staff at Redwood. We made some attempts, out of loyalty, to fix their circumstances, but they fought us tooth and nail on everything. When we cancelled Sci-Fi Quest for unsatisfactory financial prospects and decided we wanted to take the company in a new direction, away from adventure games, they organized a massive fan-revolt. It was ridiculous. You don't have

fans dictate your business decisions. It was undercutting business and management and Redwood Studios put themselves in a place where we *couldn't* give them forewarning because they would have organized an all-out war. The closure was the company's decision and the right thing to do, but Redwood wasn't about to accept that. The suddenness and secretiveness of the firings was the fault of Redwood, really.

Q: *For the record, the final Sci-Fi Quest instalment turned one of the largest profits for a game by Madre in almost a decade.*

Tom: Yes, but that was largely due to Tim and Geoff's efforts to rile up the fans over the game's possible cancellation. So, in a way, firing them was a good idea. It increased sales.

Q: *What do you say to the fans who argue that Madre was still making money on adventure games when they chose to fire all the staff at Redwood.*

Tom: That depends on how you look at it. Sure, we were still making money, and might have for a few more years if adventure games continued to do well. But market analysis said they wouldn't. Anyway, they weren't making *enough* money. If the shareholders see you piddling around in the garden while letting the acre go fallow, they're going to hire a new farmer. Madre was like a little hut in the forest, producing wool. Sure they could feed themselves and get by just fine. I'm sure it was warm and cozy. But as the cities come in with real changes, there's better use for that land. Redwood was just standing in the way of progress, so we re-zoned them. That's just common sense. That's just good business.

Q: *Last year Madre fell into a rather deep embezzlement scandal which, many speculate, was the reason you were let go. Some Madre fans claim this as proof of your incompetence. What do you have to say to them and how does this scandal bear on the future of Madre?*

Tom: (*laughs*) Well, again, I don't really care what people say about me. None of those people run a business. Decisions need to be made. Things can't always remain the same. It's all about image. As CEO my duty is to the shareholders. Though I was not involved or implicated in the scandal in any way, shareholders are like scared little children and sometimes you have to rearrange the world to make them feel safe

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again. These efforts can be nonsensical, but they work. A departure from Madre seemed like the most symbolically effective thing I could do for the Madre shares. But, basically, embezzlement is something that can happen in any company. There isn't much you can do about it except keep good watch. Financially, the embezzlers didn't get away with much, and a lot of what was stolen has since returned.

Under my term, Madre made record profits, expanded its market coverage by 25% and developed a strong and stable income base. I amicably agreed to leave Madre for the good of the shares and I was compensated.

Anyway, to answer about the future of Madre: the so-called scandal is a drop in the bucket. An unfortunate PR event. It caused us to cut back some projects, sell off some dead properties and tighten our belts a bit. But I think all those predictions of the company going completely under are exaggerated. The bad eggs have been tossed out and Melfina has injected Madre with new cash. Madre will be around for a long time.

Q: *How do you feel about the game industry today, having left it?*

Tom: Well, the industry is still going strong and shows no signs of slowing down in the immediate future. It's a good place to invest money.

On my way out of the building I pass by a board with the Madre logo on it. In one corner is an advertisement for the Madre internship program, the same program that I worked in five years ago.

How would you like to wake up everyday with a smile on your face knowing that you're coming to work for one of the world's top game companies? The 1 year, unpaid, Madre Internship program grants you the invaluable opportunity to turbo-charge your career in the gaming industry with valuable and exciting experience in actual game development! And, who knows? If you work hard enough, maybe we'll hire you to stay on afterwards...

I think to myself, if the internship had been unpaid when I was in grade 12, I would never have applied for it...and never have saved up enough for my trip around the world, changed my mind about computer games, or be doing this interview.

Will Roberts,

Founder, ex-president and ex-CEO of Madre Entertainment

I'm talking to Will in the backyard of his house, tucked deep inside the Redwood forest, just a few miles from the old Madre building. We drink beer at the picnic table where the infamous annual Madre bar-b-ques were held. It was in the garage (now demolished) of this house that Madre had its meagre beginnings. Will lives here with his wife, renowned computer game creator Kendra Roberts, his son and two dogs.

This isn't the first interview I've had with Will Roberts. When I first found out that my internship interview would be with their president and CEO I felt sick to my stomach. *For real? With the CEO?!* Will turned out to be very friendly; the interview was relaxed and impromptu. I was impressed by the fact that, as president and CEO of this organization, he still took the time to personally interview even the lowly interns. Will was always a friendly, confident individual with an uncommon ability to make you feel at ease and give you direction at the same time. Five years later I can see that, at least in these respects, he hasn't changed.

Q: *Why did you stay in Redwood?*

Will: I always thought I would stay in Redwood. I set up Madre around my life in Redwood, not the other way around.

Q: *How do you feel about life after Madre?*

Will: Well, it was tough at first. I was still on the Madre payroll as a consultant afterwards, but I wasn't doing much and I think they only kept me on to stem off outrage over the firings. That irritated me so I quit. Anyway, after spending all those years creating something like Madre – geeze, I was barely 24 when we first put that computer in the garage – and it becomes so big and successful and it's the only thing that you do for nearly twenty years...you can't imagine yourself doing anything else. That job is the only job you want to do. It's like losing a child, I guess – you expect they're going to outlive you...and you put so much time and energy into raising them...and you really get to love them. Well, if they go...it's...you don't really feel like having another child, you know? Madre is what I did...and it was great. But I don't want to start something else. Madre was its own unique thing.

But I feel good about it now. Not about the way it ended, but all good

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things finish and when I look back at those...17 years it seems amazing that we did what we did. Sometimes it seems like it was just a dream. We put out some of the best games in the industry. We did things differently and weren't afraid to do things our own way. We were pioneers. During that time I managed to feed my family. I raised two kids. In a way, it's like running Madre was just a sub-quest in the greater picture of my life: raising a family. My youngest will be graduating high school this year and wants to go into architecture and it's been really rewarding to watch my daughter come into her own. I still wish she'd go to college, but, you know, she worked at EGO Games for a while and then moved to Seattle with a friend that she met over SupraNet. She was a bike courier for about a year and a half, which is pretty dangerous, I guess, but she seemed to really enjoy living there with her friend. She was mostly just saving up money to go on some big world trip, which she and her friend are still on, nearly six months after their departure. I got a postcard from Thailand the other day. So, I'm really proud of her.

You know, and that, really, was the quest all along, I think. The stuff we did at Madre helped my daughter make friends. And I think some of the games we made had a good influence on her...and other people I'm sure. We did some incredible things at Madre. Sure, I'm sorry it's over, but I'm more glad we had twenty years of incredible success and happiness that also allowed us to live fulfilling lives. I feel good about Madre and everything that's come out of it.

Q: Are you working on anything now?

Will: I have my own little projects I'm concentrating on. Less stressful...smaller. You grow to appreciate that stuff. That's another lesson I learned from Madre...big isn't necessarily good. (*laughs*) I've got a few things going, but I'm gonna keep them secret. They're not big, just little business hobbies for me. Beyond that, I have to admit I don't have too many ideas. Sometimes I itch to start something again. But I'm still recovering from Madre in a lot of ways. If someone gave me a list of all the things we did at Madre and then said, 'Ok. You have 17 years to do all this' I'd say it's impossible. I wouldn't even attempt it.

Q: For so many years Madre seemed invincible, then, in just over a year, it collapsed. Why do you think it happened so quickly? If you could have done anything different, what would you have done?

Will: It's easy to have doubts. Should I have done this? Should I have gone to that meeting? Should I have sold SupraNet? Should we have sold shares? You can kick yourself forever over stuff like that...and I did a lot after Black Monday. I examined every little detail and decision I'd made, creating alternate realities stemming off of major choices... But eventually, after all that moping, brain wracking and soul-searching, I figured that I did the best I knew how and, actually, given the chance to do it again, wouldn't do much different. I used to really wonder, should I have tried to appease Melfina more? But if I did that I would have just become a puppet for Melfina. Even then they wouldn't have kept me as CEO. They needed somebody they owned in that position. As for why Madre fell so quickly, things happen quickly in big business. Big money buys fast results. Besides, Madre did everything quickly.

Q: *How do you feel about Madre the company now?*

Will: Nothing really. I used to get angry that they were using the name I had built for their backwards, impersonal goals...but it's hard to care anymore. Sometimes I feel disappointed. You just can't help but feel disappointed about a good thing that's gone away. Mostly, I still feel bad about all the people that got fired and the difficult position that put them in, but everyone I know of seems to have done well beyond Madre. Anyway, Madre isn't the same company: logo's different, staff's different, location's different, games are different. It's not there anymore.

Q: *What are your thoughts on the embezzlement scandal?*

Will: Mostly, I'm really angry about that. I still had a lot of shares in Madre. A lot of people did. Art Loel, before his books took off, had his entire retirement banked on Madre stocks. Now the scandals have sunk the stock value to practically zero and sucked away all that money. All that time we spent fighting over shares during the takeover, and now they're pretty much worthless. They might come back up, but it'll take years and, in the meantime, we all have a lot less money. I know a lot of employees were frustrated by that scandal because it affected them personally. It was like a last kick in the pants from Madre...just when you thought we were done with them. And I'm frustrated because I know that would have never happened under my watch. Satisfied employees don't embezzle money. It's when they feel they're getting screwed over that they take revenge... Or, at least, I know I would have been in tune

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enough with the staff to know something fishy was going on... Really, I'm not surprised at all about it. The way Madre runs things that stuff's bound to happen. I still had quite a few shares invested in Madre at the time. I guess I still had loyalty to or a belief, for some reason, in my company. Dumb. But I can't say I always make good decisions. I just try to do my best.

I think the scandal was kind of a boon for Madre, though. Now the pressure is off. Their company wasn't seeing any significant growth. Shareholders were going to jump ship. Now the bar has been lowered again, so the endless pole-vault can continue.

Q: *If you could send a message right now to all the fans of Madre games, what would you say?*

Will: That's a good question.

Will drinks from his beer and takes a long pause, staring out into the trees that line his backyard. Just as I think he isn't going to answer my question he speaks up.

Will: I want to encourage our fans to follow the lead set in our games. Everything you need to learn, I think you can learn from our adventure games. Be creative. Don't be afraid to think...and especially think differently. Don't give up. You can beat the game. Don't be afraid to put things down for a while and come back to them. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Playing with a friend can be a lot more fun, and easier, than playing alone. Don't be afraid to challenge yourself and try different things. The end will be worth it.

And, I'd also like to encourage our fans to follow the lead we set in making our games. Be true to yourself and to your friends. Don't do things just because everyone else is doing them. And I'm not just talking about smoking or drugs or something asinine like that, but I mean everything. Think and understand why you're doing things. I think that was sort of the unofficial motto at Madre. Maybe we lost sight of it a little at the end, but in a way, we've all found it again. You know, sometimes it's the hardest thing to do, following your own path, and sometimes it might seem to lead you down the wrong path or fail you totally. But stick it out because, in the end, you'll realize that it *does* work out better, you'll realize that it was the best route for you and you'll have friends and family that care for you at the end. You'll still find the world a wondrous

place when you wake up in the morning, even if it isn't Monday. That's more important than anything, I think.

Will hangs on this last bit for a moment, almost as if he is going to say more, but decides against it. He smiles. Our interview is over.

Q: Thanks for taking the time to talk with me. I'm sure many Madre fans will take your advice to heart.

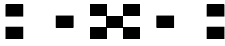
Will: Thank you, Fred. It was my pleasure.

On the drive out of Redwood I talk into my tape recorder, searching for an ending to this article. It isn't going well and I pull into Berney for a coffee. There's a busy little quickie coffee hut on the highway to service a world increasingly filled with people on the go. It isn't until I pull into the lot that I realize the place is called Naughté Latte. There's a generous line-up inside and as I wait for my coffee I tell the barista that this place was the bees knees at Madre before the store suffered its own takeover. I'm glad to see it came back. The barista tells me that, actually, it was the founder of Madre that started this place up again, opened it up sometime last year. It's obviously doing very well.

Watching the new Naughté Latte shrink in my rearview mirror I find my ending: there isn't one. The heyday of Madre may be gone and the future seems bleak for our favorite genres: Sci-Fi Quest, Fantasy Quest, HomoSapien Quest, Swarthy Victor. But even in death Madre remains strong. The personalities behind those games are alive today... Although they no longer make games, the aftershocks of their work at Madre continue to impress upon the world, as do the personal quests they embark on today.

Madre has been responsible for too much of the computer game industry to ever truly disappear. With the legion of Madre fans swarming the Internet and moving into the gaming industry themselves, the principles, values and precedents set by Madre live on in the community, no doubt shaping the games of tomorrow. Madre is not gone and Madre is not forgotten.





Congratulations on completing Game Quest!

We hope you had as much fun reading it as we
had making it – Madre Programming Staff

Total estimated reading time: 9 hours
Pages: 496

Restore?
Restart?
Quit?



Special Thanks

A lot of people have aided me in this book's four year journey from concept to final product.

I want to give a huge thanks to Christine Hopkins, David McGinnis (Papa), Janice Dickin (Mama), and Jennifer McCarthy for constructive criticism and encouragement on previous drafts. The strength of this final version owes much to their generosity and efforts, as do I.

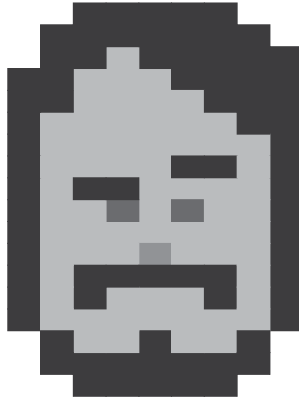
An interstellar thanks is owed to Andrew Loach for encouragement, promotional help, and updating the serialized Game Quest website on time (mostly) while I was galavanting through Asia. He also deserves a sincere thanking for putting his brilliant nit-pickery skills to good use spell/fact/continuity checking the manuscript.

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About the Author



Leopold McGinnis is an independent Canadian author currently living in Edmonton, Alberta. He is a founding member of The Guild of Outsider Writers (www.outsiderwriters.org) and the founding editor of www.redfez.net, an online database of under-recognized literature, poetry and comics by under-published authors. In the past 6 years he has lived in Calgary, Vancouver, Manila, Victoria, Tokyo, Ottawa and Toronto for no sane or profound reason.

Game Quest is his first full-length novel.

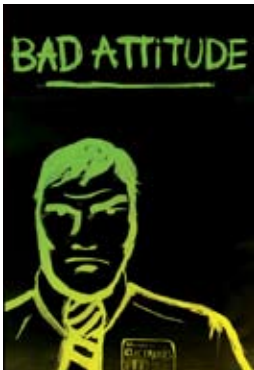
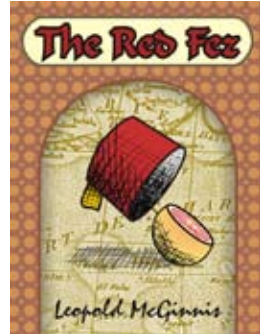


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Other books by Leopold McGinnis



In 1936 Algiers, a valuable artifact is ‘stolen’ from a French archeological site and seemingly nobody knows where it has gone. Pierre Rensard, Chief of Police, is suddenly charged with recouping the item in a realm of moral ambiguity where everyone feels entitled to the ill-gotten gains. When Savid, proprietor of *the* underground gambling hotspot, and Sylvia Longshot, gun trader and supposed husband murderer, (alongside her new hunchedback lover, Afiz) enter the picture, law, order and morality all go by the wayside in this humourous casablanca-esque crime caper. And all this is before the city is swamped in thousands of crates of grapefruit. And where is Habibi during all this mess anyway?



Jesse Durnell has shunned the rat race for a series of go-nowhere jobs in the high-pressure world of wage-slavery. Wandering from McJob to McJob he has his sites set on a higher metaphysical plane: the nuclear oasis. In his current occupation as a Widget peddler for Electronics-Pit, Jesse makes it his mission to sell the most useless crap to those who most deserve it. But it won't be easy. There's know-it-all Tom Davis, who'll stop at nothing to expose Jesse's game. Then there's the morning store cheer, which could test the limits of even the most hardened nihilistic optimist. But

Jesse will persevere through the bad motivational posters, the dingy lunch room, the 15 minute breaks...for the only true reward for a life of servitude is front row seats to the kicking game and Jesse knows that the day of reckoning is close at hand. (Coming Fall 2007)

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