GDC 13

You Don’t Need a Degree to Make Video Games!

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EXPO DATES: MARCH 27-29

What I plan to rant about today…

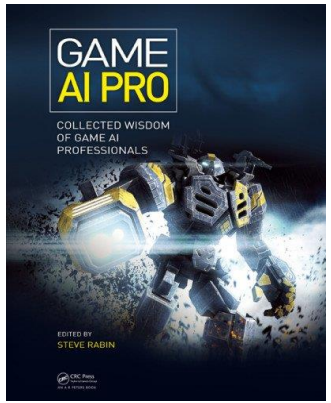
- Degree or not degree?
  - That is the question!
  - And what type of education do I really need?
- What is important in reality?
  - Want to work for a big studio?
  - Want to go indie and maybe do your own thing?
- What tools are there to teach yourself?
- How can I find like-minded people?
  - And how can we afford to do it!

Dr Christopher Erhardt

- 19 years industry experience:
  - 22 credited game titles
- 15 years in academia:
  - DigiPen Institute of Technology
  - Indian School of Gaming
  - Academy of Interactive Entertainment
- Indie game development was a big passion

Why me?

- Worked for BlueTongue Entertainment
  - 6 credited commercial game titles
- The Academy of Interactive Entertainment, Sydney Campus, past 4 years
- "Introduction to GPGPU for AI"
  with Tomasz Bednarz



So?! Why me still?

A lecturer telling you that
you don’t need a degree?

Irony!!

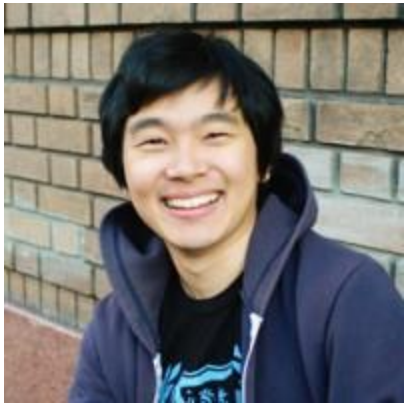
No Degree!

(crap my secret is out!)

"The most important thing to know about video game development and schooling is that no one, whether it's an indie studio or big company, cares about degrees. How could it, when some of its most prominent members are drop-outs or never-beens? John Carmack, Cliff Bleszinski, Jonathan Blow, and Team Meat are all prominent members of this club."

Derek Yu

"Making it in Indie Games: Starter Guide"
gamasutra.com



We are among you…

"They don't know how to properly make a game, and everything they do make is crap!"

Anonymous Internet Douchebag

These were crap?!

"If a guy applied for a job and showed me a well polished game of PacMan that he made in his spare time then who the f#k cares if he has a degree or not; he knows the details needed to make a game".*

Martin Slater

Wargaming
Former Studio Director, 2K Australia.

(also has no degree!)

shock horror

So let's clarify something…

"A degree is a piece of paper that says you can do something in theory - game developers want to know that you have enough passion to do real work, regardless of whether you're being graded on it."

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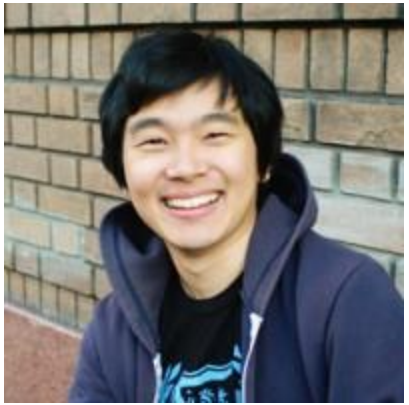
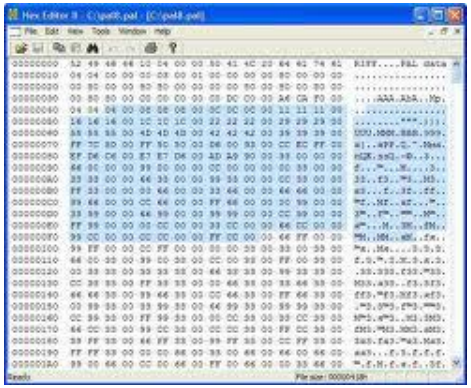


Well how the hell did I do it?

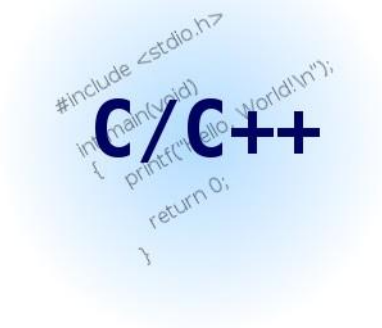
- First PC was a 486
  - 2nd game I got was Diablo

- Then I got the internet…
  - Teenage me was in information heaven, for better or for worse…

Holy s*#^ MODS!!!!



- You could modify games?!?!
  - *"Gimme that HEX editor!"*
- Created dozens of Diablo 1 mods
  - At one point had the #1 diablo mods site in the world
  - Notepad full of hex numbers and details scribbled everywhere
- Next moved onto Half-Life 1 mods
  - *"Time to learn some 'real' programming!"*



The terrible school grades…

- Couldn't get into University
  - Couldn't have afforded it anyway!
- Signed up for a Game Programming course
  - Pros: time, like-minded people
  - Cons: just used a pre-existing engine, unproven

*"This isn't to dissuade you from going to college, per se (I studied computer science in college, and while it was far from a perfect experience, I also gained a lot from both the curriculum and the friends I made there). The point is **make something** - games, mods, art, and music. If school helps you with that, great. If it doesn't, then you need to rethink how you're spending your most valuable resources: time and money (both of which can be exorbitant costs for schooling)."*

Derek Yu

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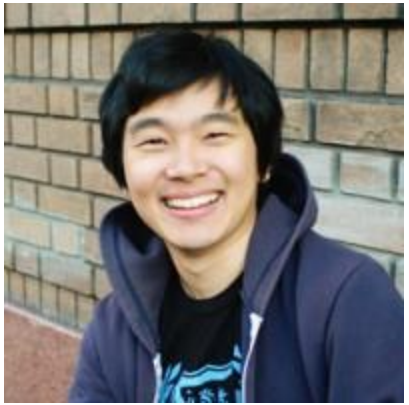
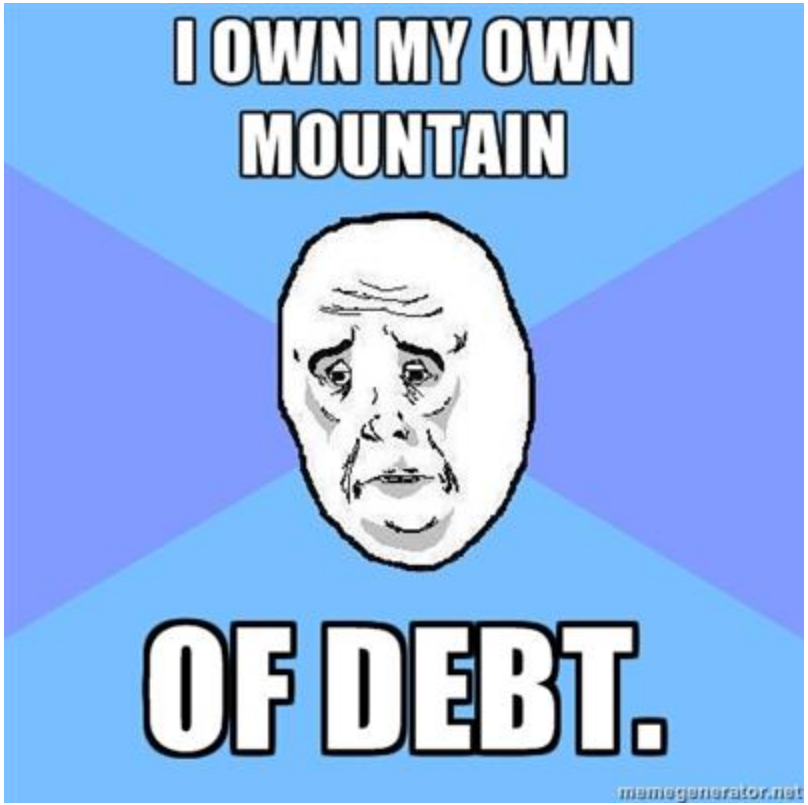
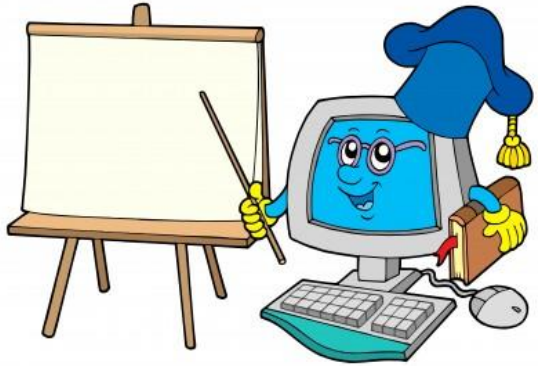



I OWN MY OWN MOUNTAIN
OF DEBT.
memegenerator.net

So you still want to study…

- Practical course-work
- Focused pathways
  - Going indie? Multi-disciplined streams can be useful
  - Though try to avoid “design-only” streams
- Find a school with proven track record
  - Ideally the teachers are ex-devs, not perpetual academics
  - Where you keep your work, not the school!

How can I gain the skills without doing a degree?



- The internet is your friend!
  - No really!
- There are plenty of online resources
  - Teaching programming, art and even game design

But the best way to gain skills…

MAKE STUFF!!

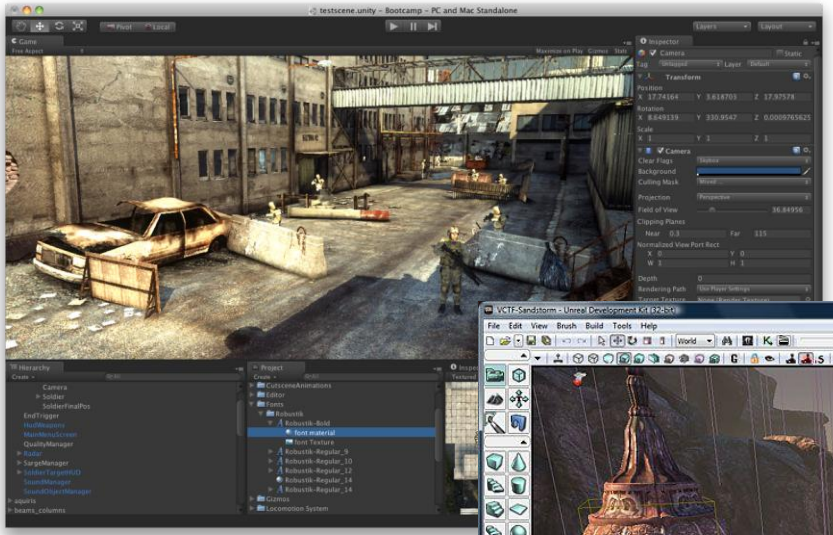
(duh)

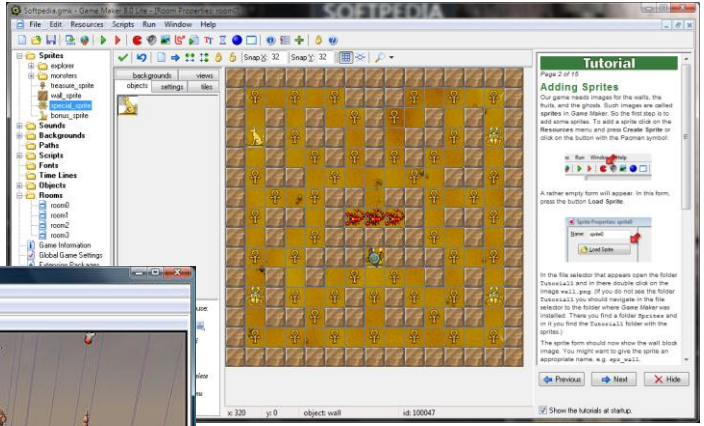
LOTS OF STUFF!!

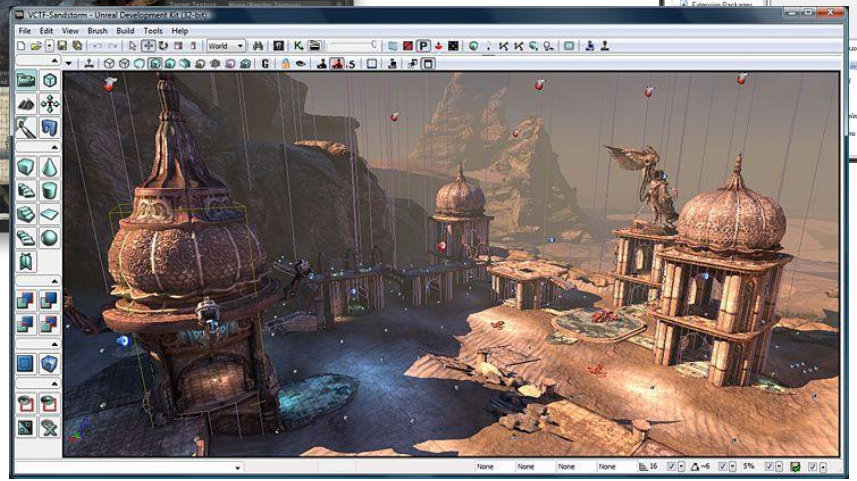
What can you use to make stuff?

- Programmer?
  - Xcode is free
  - Visual Studio has free editions
  - Mono is also there
  - Web/JavaScript
- Artist?
  - Blender
  - Sculptris
  - Gimp

What can you use to make stuff?







So you’re going indie…

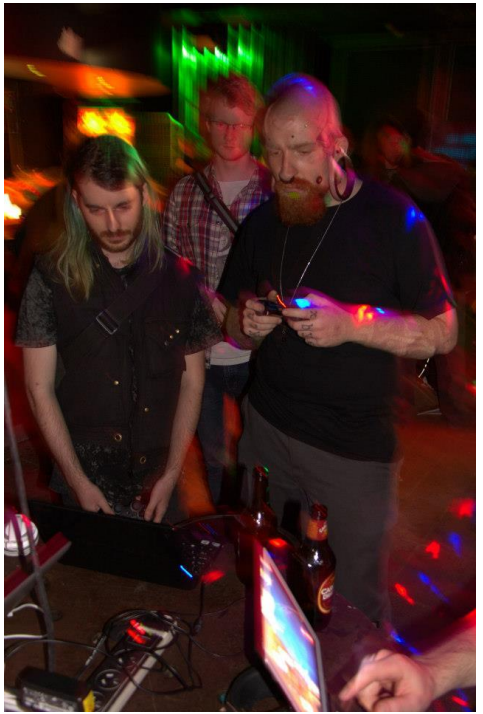
- Where could you learn to do things for yourself?
  - By asking other indies!
  - Reading ALL THE BLOGS!
  - Way too many books!
  - Maybe a short business course
- A key thing here is be realistic!
  - You first game is likely to fail
  - So make lots of games! Lots of failures!
  - Show them to people, get them to play them and give you feedback, but don’t try to sell them!

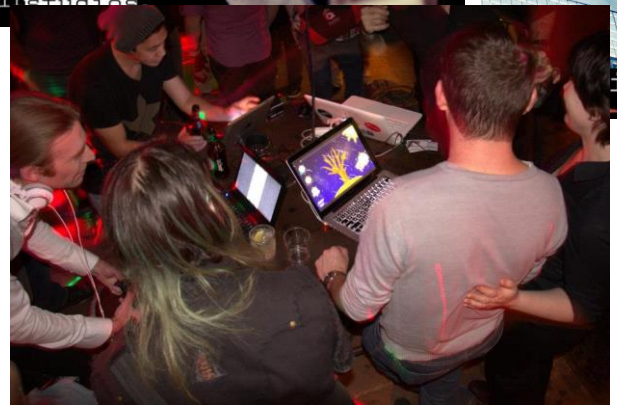
Find like-minded people

- It’s very hard to create something in isolation
  - But that doesn’t mean you need a whole team!
- There are many communities out there with others also learning to make games
  - Join them! Learn from them! Share ideas! Test each others games!

Gamedev.net Gamasutra.com IDGA

Look for local dev communities





Living the indie dream; show me the money!

- When your hobby becomes your livelihood it needs to earn you a living
  - You should never enter indie dev thinking you'll be the next game-dev rock star
- Plenty of the big players were not overnight successes
  - But some got lucky
- Finding ways to earn money for you and your team can be tricky

Living the indie dream; show me the money!

- Contract work is not the devil
  - Two of Australia's biggest mobile teams started with contract work for 10-ish years
  - Use it to fund your own projects
- Be careful diving too quickly into crowd-funding
- Local government grants can be amazing!

Most importantly…

- Get known!
  - Blog
  - Dev diaries
  - Enter contests with playable prototypes
- When it comes to asking people to give you money, wether you're asking them to fund your project or buy the game, it's all about **trust**
  - That you can get the job done
  - That it will be fun and live up to their expectations

Conclusion to my rant

- A degree can be useful, but isn’t important
- Making stuff is what is important!
  - Just keep making stuff!
- There are plenty of free tools and training resources online
- There are communities full of like-minded people
  - You could be working with them RIGHT NOW!
- Be cautious with your primary resources; time and money

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