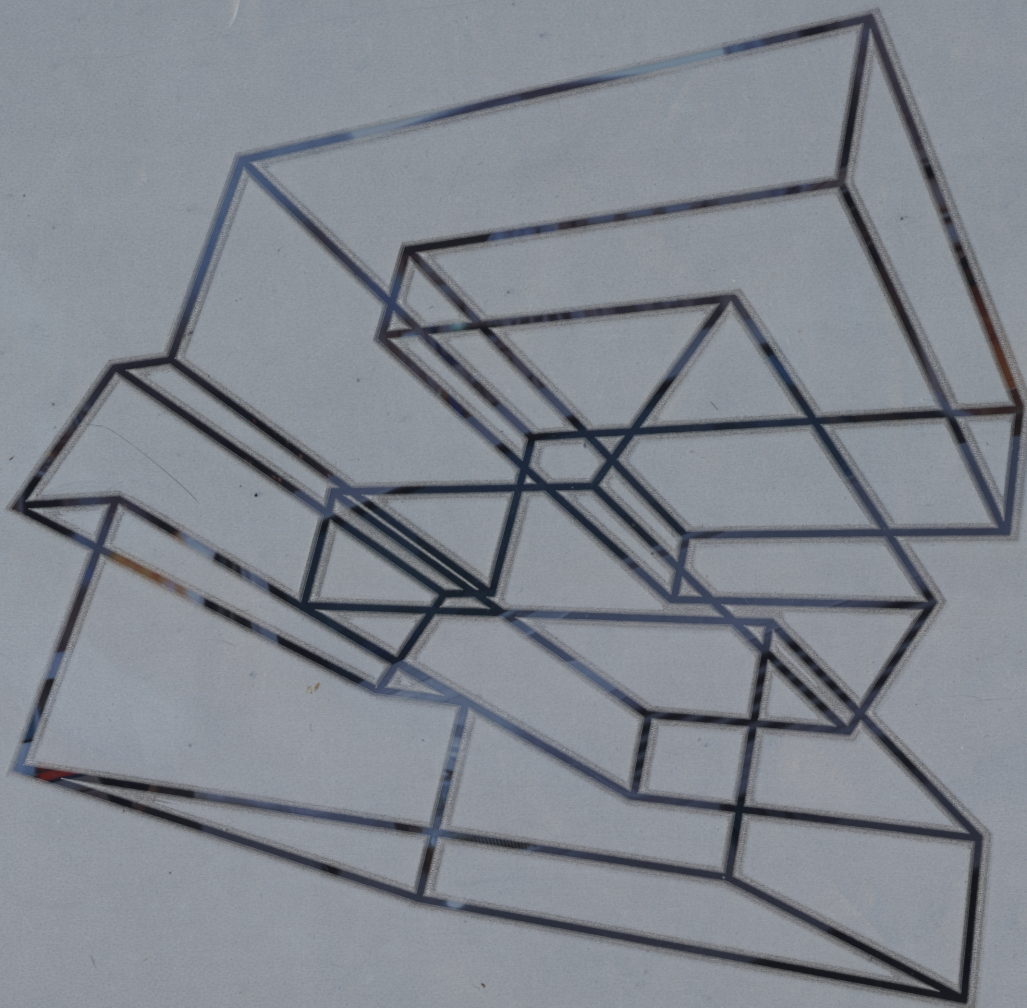


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FAQ

Ste Pickford

Managing director, ZedTwo Game Design Studio

Having trodden the path from 8bit hobbyist artist to big cheese of one of the north west's most respected codeshops, **Ste Pickford** is heading up ZedTwo's next-generation development drive.

What was the first videogame you played?

I have really vivid memories of playing both *Space Invaders* and *Sprint* in the late '70s. I remember at first thinking it was a really strange concept, to put money in a machine to play a game in which there was no chance of winning any money back (all arcade machines I'd seen up until then were one-armed bandits and the like), to pay just for the pleasure of playing.

What was the first computer you owned?

It was a long time before I owned a computer. My brother John had a ZX-81, then a Spectrum, then Amstrad 464s and 6128s, Tatungs, etc. I think my first may have been an Atari ST.

What was the first thing you ever created on a computer?

My brother wrote little art programs on both the

“Publishers only want copies of last year's hits. How many more karting games do we need? How many more FIFAs?”

ZX-81 and Spectrum, and, using these, both of us had 'computer-generated' pictures printed in *2000AD*, so that was the first published work.

What was your first job in the industry?

My first industry job was a freelance graphics job, while I was still at school (aged 14 or 15). I did the graphics for Amstrad *Ghosts 'n' Goblins* for the fantastic sum of £50. I was really excited, until I found out I only had four colours per level, rather than 16, so the results were pretty poor. I was proud of the loading screen, though, which also went on the C64 version. The first original game I worked on would have been either *Zub* or *Feud*. Both games were designed by John, but I designed the look of them.

What's your favourite game ever?

Mario 3 on the NES. It's hard to explain exactly why, but we played the Japanese version, which we got as soon as it came out, so we had no instructions, and no tips or hints on the signs. We had to work everything out for ourselves, which led to a wonderful feeling of discovery. We didn't know that Mario could fly until we'd been playing the game for about two months, so it was an incredible surprise to find that there was

a whole section in the clouds above the first level.

I think far too much is given away in games now. The instructions within the games spell everything out so clearly that there is no sense of discovery, and secrets and walkthroughs are often published (even officially) before the game is even released, which is a real shame.

What was the last game you played?

The last game I finished was Game Boy *Wario 3*, which was great. The gameplay was split into lovely short chunks, so I could play a level on the bus to work in the morning, and always finish it before I arrived. I'm playing *Perfect Dark* at the moment, which I'm enjoying more than I expected, considering that I hated *GoldenEye*.

What's your favourite movie, book and album of all time?

Movie: probably 'Goodfellas' – a movie-making master class. Book: 'Gravity's Rainbow' by Thomas Pynchon – mind-blowing. As far as albums go, I think I've probably listened to the first Stone Roses album more than any other record ever.

Which game would you most like to have worked on?

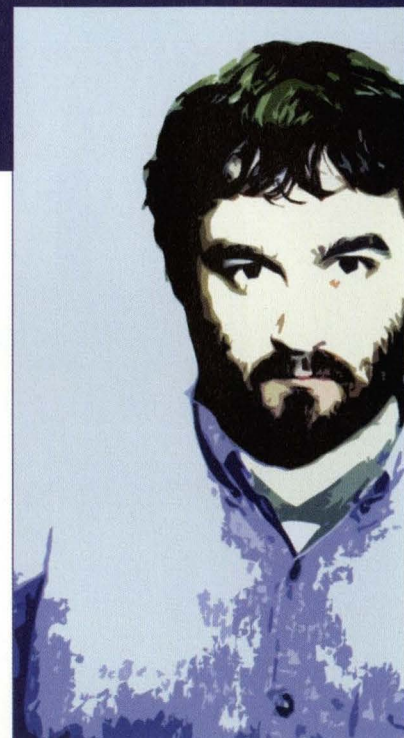
I can't say any of my favourites (*Mario 3*, *Yoshi's Island*, *Zeldas*, etc) 'cos I might have messed them up. I'm quite happy with what we're doing right now at Zed Two, really.

Of all the games you've been involved with in the past, what's your favourite?

Right now, *Wetrix*, because it's the game where we've had the least publisher interference, and had to make the fewest compromises, so it's a finished product that most closely resembles our original ideas.

Is there anything in particular that annoys you about the industry?

The fact that it's next to impossible to do original games, and that publishers only want copies of last year's hits. How many more karting games do we need? How many more FPSs which describe a slightly different shape of gun as an 'innovative new feature'? How many more FIFAs? I'm disappointed that after some exciting early years, there has been little or no development of gameplay ideas of late. All the focus has been on minor tweaks and



modifications to existing game concepts, masquerading as originality.

What is the most expensive item that you have ever bought with a bonus?

Bonus? Actually, I did get a few grand bonus when *Ken Griffey* on the SNES started selling, and I used that for the deposit on my house.

Which new platform are you most looking forward to?

GameBoy Advance, mostly. We're not really bothered about platforms, to be honest. We like games, and tend to get excited about game ideas, rather than the hardware they are implemented on. We'd come up with great game ideas for digital watches if somebody would pay us. It's exciting to have better graphics and sound available with which to realise your ideas, but for a small company like us, without unlimited resources, the newer platforms mean more money spent on development. More money spent on development means a greater urgency to make that money back, which means less risks. This of course means more 'safe' clones of last years hits, and less 'risky' original games. More karting games, in fact.

What's your take on mobile-phone gaming?

My gut feeling is that it is nothing more than a fad right now, a buzzword used to separate investors from their money. Sure, I'd play a game on a phone in my hand (I play my Game Boy), but I wouldn't pay for it. Maybe when the screens are better. Then again, I'm quite prepared to be completely wrong.