

Up Close and Personal with Ben Spees

Some folks enjoy meeting the people behind the scenes of Ambrosia, some are curious about what goes into a new program, and some are just plain nosy. So each issue of The Ambrosia Times we interview a member of the Ambrosia family.

Ambrosia Times - Hello, and welcome to Ambrosia Software. Your name please?

That would be Ben Spees, and I am in fact sitting in a swivel chair at this very moment. Truth is stranger than fiction.

Ambrosia Times - Ah yes, you are the madcap programmer of Harry the Handsome Executive. How are you today?

Spees - Just my usual wacky, zany self.

Ambrosia Times - Tell us a little about your background. When did you get into programming?

Spees - I wrote my first game in 1986, in Basic, for the infamous IBM PCjr. It was called "Space Probe" and was as groundbreaking as it could possibly be with a 4-color CGA video card (choose either white/cyan/magenta/black, or yellow/red/green/black...) I then wrote some horrendous programs for the Apple II before discovering the Mac.

Ambrosia Times - What other projects have you worked on?

Spees - I've done a few minor shareware projects -- a space action series called "Soldiers of the Sun" and an arcade-type game called "P'tong", but no shareware even close to the scale of Harry. Last fall I released a commercial adventure game called "Derrat Sorcerum" which sank without a trace, despite a 4/5 joysticks review from Inside Mac Games. It may still be available -- check local bargain bins. (Sense any bitterness here?)

Ambrosia Times - What brings you to Ambrosia Software?

Spees - Harry somehow found his way to the Ambrosia offices, and I just happened to follow him and end up here. I have no idea how it happened... Okay, okay, I planned it.

Ambrosia Times - What sort of things do you hope to achieve here at Ambrosia?

Spees - Well, first and foremost I want to get Harry released! The development has been going really well and we're just about to start beta testing, so I'm looking forward to getting some opinions from players out there in the real world (and I'm not talking about M-TV).

'Times - What can Ambrosia offer you?

Spees - Gee, lots of things. Too many to list here. Everyone seems to have a very good understanding of game design, which makes their advice quite useful. Ambrosia has also been very helpful with artwork and other things I need for the game. Apart from that, well, I thought I'd be getting in on the secret Ambrosia scene, but no such luck. People always ask me about Andrew, but the truth is that I've never even talked to him on the phone. Go figure.

'Times - What can you offer Ambrosia?

Spees - Well, a pretty good game, hopefully. To quote my resume: "I wish to be assertive, eager, and attentive. As an achiever, I will strive towards achieving as many achievements as possible." Excuse me for a minute, I need to go gargle now.

'Times - Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

Spees - I'm trying to decide between the papacy and a career in exotic dancing.

'Times - Do you ever watch movies with gladiators?

Spees - The meaning of that question is somewhat ambiguous. I don't know any gladiators personally, but I'm sure they're pretty fun folks to view a film with. Or if you meant it the other way, well, I recently saw "Hercules" -- does that count? Wait, that's Greek, not Roman. So I guess not. I must be missing out big time.

'Times - What inspired the creation of Harry the Handsome Executive?

Spees - A friend of mine had a "wouldn't it be cool if..." idea about a game where you're a guy in a swivel chair, and I just happened to remember it around the same time that I was looking for a new project to work on. We had actually been joking about the idea for a couple of years. Then I fleshed it out and made it real. Harry was also partially inspired by a little throwaway game I wrote about five years ago called "Staple Gunner."

'Times - Do you now, or have you ever worked in a oppressive corporate environment?

Spees - You mean other than Ambrosia? Only briefly, and I hope to keep it that way.

'Times - Could you explain to our readers a little about "The Swivel."

Spees - Ah, the Force of the Swivel Chair. As the mantra goes: "It surrounds us. It moves through us. To deny it is to deny yourself." If you have been having bad luck, it is undeniably because you are denying the undeniable force of the swivel chair. Send me a cash offering and I will make sure that the Force fully notes your contribution. Your luck will almost certainly begin improving immediately. If it does not, send additional offerings until you begin to see the effect. If you fail to send an offering, you will be plagued by "what if?" questions 20 years down the

road.

'Times - Any last comments?

Spees - I would like to vehemently deny the rumors that the character of Harry will be voiced by Pauly Shore.

'Times - Ok, thanks for coming by, we will let you know as soon as we make a decision.