

Ten years ago, at the launch of the PS3 and the Xbox 360, I told you to ignore the manufacturers' hype. These machines were not ushering in a new golden age; they were putting the last nail in the coffin of game innovation. The long term trend of ever-higher budgets and ever-larger teams would continue, and fewer and fewer original titles would be published, until the last ounce of creativity was squeezed out of the industry, profits would decline, and the whole structure would eventually totter and fall under the obvious inconsistencies of the system. And I decried the greed, and lack of taste, on the part of publishers, that led us to this sorry pass.

I was kind of right. We're now witnessing the last death throes of the AAA system, the viper that sucked game innovation dry. And my sincere regrets to every developer who has suffered in that transition, inevitable though it is.

I called for a revolution; and to my astonishment, we've witnessed one, over the last ten years. Online distribution and developers ready to defy the

system produced the indie revolution, a Cambrian explosion of creativity not seen since the early days of computer gaming. New platforms – social and mobile games – have opened up entirely new channels, and enabled entirely new game styles. The last 10 years have been the most exciting and most promising time to be a game developer in history, and I include the birth of the industry, and the rise of tabletop hobby games, both exciting times, in that judgment.

But all good things come to an end. And so it is today. The walls are closing in once more. The coming years are going to be harsh. There will be a winnowing of developers unseen since the Atari crash. There will be less and less innovation. Ten years from now, we're going to need another revolution. And as usual, greed and lack of taste will be to blame.

Let's look at the markets that have sustained this revolution: indie, social, and mobile games. All three face dire challenges.

The indie revolution has been sustained by one

thing: Steam. Oh, yes, XBLA was important once, but Microsoft screwed that pooch; they no longer care about indie games, and don't care that their authorization and update policies make developing for XBLA utterly unattractive to indie developers. What's happened with PC games is that we swapped a world in which you had many possible distributors – admittedly distributing into a declining retail market – into a world in which ONE company has a virtual monopoly. And that company is moving from a curated market, in which you were virtually guaranteed success if you passed their curatorial bar, into a total free-for-all, like the mess that is the Apple appstore, in which it will be well nigh impossible to reach an audience unless you are at least as good at public relations and marketing as you are at game development – something true of very, very few indie developers.

Capital likes to invest in companies that are at the pinch-points of a market, because they can squeeze out the lion's share of the revenues that market produces. Valve is at the pinch-point of the PC games market. Valve, admittedly, actually cares

about games, which puts them one up on every other channel; but you can guess where the revenues are ultimately going to go. And it's not to you.

The Apple app store? Do I even need to recap what a horror -that- is? Tens of thousands of apps, and only two ways to find them: the best-sellers list, and featured games. This is WORSE than conventional retail, where you have at least a few hundred SKUs; nothing below the top 10, 20 at most, on these lists is going to benefit. And "featured" means that unless you know whose cock to suck at Apple, you can forget it. You're not going to be on that list. Discovery is bloody fucking impossible.

And it TOTALLY DOESN'T HAVE to be this way. Amazon solved this problem decades ago; people are not identical, and best-sellers are a terrible window into your inventory. Why is there no "recommended for you?" Why is there no "people who bought this also bought?" Apple is NOT working to help expose their inventory to people

who might like it, because they do not give a flying fuck. The app store is just a marketing gimmick to support hardware sales to them, and they could care less that it does not work for developers. Apple has historically been actively *hostile* to games, those geeky, boy toys that don't mesh with their technocool, hi-brow mystique. They're greedy, and they don't care.

Google is no better; nor does it seem to bother Google that per-user game revenues on Android lag iOS drastically. And they certainly aren't doing anything to fix that.

And Facebook? Good Christ almighty. Not content with seizing 30% of developers' revenues off the top, they have nerfed the viral channels that once made it possible to quickly build a massive audience, so that now the only route to user acquisition is advertising – on Facebook, in competition with every other developer on Facebook, so that an ever-increasing share of revenues go to Facebook. And social game developers either die on the vine, or turn to other

channels.

Game markets are killed by greed and lack of taste. The casual game market should serve as a warning to us all. Ten years ago, it was the only sign of hope on the horizon, an alternative channel where developers could innovate and thrive; but the casual game portals took an every-increasing share of revenues, cut prices ever lower to compete with each other, and turned a thriving market into a cesspool in which only a Croatian living on starvation wages could hope to compete. Their short-sightedness and greed killed the goose that laid the golden egg.

The same thing can, and will happen again, unless our distribution partners start to realize that success can only be sustained over the long term if there is a viable business ecosystem in which all parties can thrive. Apple doesn't care about games. Google doesn't care about games. Facebook doesn't care about games. Valve may care about games – but my bet is that they care about money more.

Contrary to libertarian theory, a business does not

exist to maximize profits. A business exists to *do something*. Profit is the condition of survival, but it is not the goal.

How many of you go to work each day, thinking "I want to maximize share-holder value?"

And how many of you go to work thinking, "I want to make the best damn game I can?"

We're faced now with a scary landscape:

Essentially monopolistic distribution channels that have total power over what gets distributed, and what gets attention, with the power to demand whatever portion of the consumer dollar they want.

You can sit passive in the face of this, or you can do something about it.

Actually, I have no idea what you can do about it.

But it might be creating an indie cooperative movement, to join together for better leverage against the other members of the value chain. It might be trying to create our own path to the

consumer. It might be marching on the Googleplex, or Apple's ridiculous flying saucer, and demanding change. I don't have any pat answers, but we need to start thinking about these issues, instead of allowing ourselves to be passive victims in the face of inimical market forces, shaped by those who do not give a flying fuck about games.

Games are good. Games are powerful. The best games are worthy of love, and of passion. We must somehow shape a world in which games that are worthy of love and passion can find their audience. We've had this, for a brief few years; we must not let it go.