“The Only Constant is Change”: Preparing the Ground for tCGJ’s Seventh Year

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This week alone, the journal has received a record-breaking seven papers (mainly because the final deadline for our first Springer-hosted special edition has ended). Emails are ricocheting as I scramble for my spreadsheets, update the journal’s records and send out calls for reviewers. Both we (the editors-in-chief) and our Springer/Apress colleagues—as well as our appointed guest editor for the special edition on game accessibility—are sailing uncharted waters just now.

Despite the noisy in-tray, I stole a 12-hour break from my desk yesterday (Tuesday 23rd January) when my co-Editor-in-chief and I spent several hours driving from the far west Scottish Central Belt out to Dundee and back—to attend a meeting and prepare the ground for a second special edition, which we aim to have published before the end of 2018. It is too early to specify exactly what the theme will be, although our aim is for this second special edition to focus on games audio and music technology.

Our visit to Abertay University (its other geographical attachment ‘Dundee’ has been quietly removed from the name in recent years) was strategically necessary. However, it also served as a poignant trip down Memory Lane. Fifteen years ago, both John and I individually were scurrying along the PacMan-like corridors of the Kydd Building almost every day. Back then, he and many of his colleagues were at the forefront of developing and delivering computer games education courses—the first in the UK. (I could not have been more different: I was reading for an Abertay Dundee MSc in Environmental Management. I have lost track of the number of times I have had to change job and reinvent my portfolio since then.) It felt strange sitting in the university’s main lobby yesterday afternoon watching the large TV screen on which ran a loop featuring students and lecturers speaking excitedly about their games development exploits.

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But it's not all good news. Fifteen years ago, Dundee's Technology Park near Invergowrie was the city's great hope for the future, especially for its accelerating games industry. It is now a warning from history. Driving down Riverside Avenue for the first time in nearly a decade, we stared in disbelief at the dilapidated empty business units with their shattered windows. Dundee still has a games industry, but these empty industrial units lie derelict. The industry, just like Dundee's waterfront, has evolved and changed beyond recognition. Inevitably, I began thinking on how we have tried and tested many an approach with this journal, and why we can never afford to let it stand still.

During our meeting, our host, Dr Kenny McAlpine, said something in passing which provided the catalyst for this editorial: you need at least a 3-year plan in place on how you are going to respond to Change, and to deliver or improve your product. Three years ago, this journal was being taken over by Springer—an absolutely essential upgrade to what was a fledgling, obscure website hosting a handful of PDFs, with no analytics and a minimal Google ranking. The way the journal was in 2012 was no longer adequate by 2015. The way the journal was 3 years ago would not be good enough today. Many editorial board members have come and gone (as have their jobs, departments and even companies in some cases). Some of our communication and marketing methods which worked 3 years ago have been abandoned.

Last year, John and I decided to steer this journal (and our management of it) in new directions. We attended two conferences and interfaced with delegates who were presenting ground-breaking research. We proposed the need for a special edition. We also tried bringing back 'student editions' featuring games students' essays and papers based on their dissertations. These efforts have yielded mixed results. A few weeks ago, I was doing what any businessperson should be doing—'casing the joint'—by examining and comparing other computer games journals with this one. It would be improper for me to name names: suffice to say, I have discovered that one major games title was terminated in 2015, and many of the others release only about ten or fewer papers per year.

As most of you will know, when you're driving on a horizontal plane and you take your foot off the accelerator, the vehicle begins to slow down. We the editorial board need to ensure that this journal remains relevant, and can reach new and wider audiences, but not at the expense of excellent writing quality and academic standards. (Sadly, most papers received in 2017 were rejected.) Our plans for 2018 include:

- Publishing the special edition on cutting-edge research and perspectives in relation to game accessibility (possibly in April or May).
- Promoting and preparing the next special edition concerning game audio and music technology, including novel applications and community projects (we expect this to be published by December 2018).
- Establishing a collaboration with organisers of one major games research conference, in which a group of the best researchers are invited to publish work in this journal in early 2019.
- Trying again to encourage submissions from students and their supervisors based on computer games-related dissertations (there were two quite good

submissions in 2017). Especially here in Britain, much of the cutting-edge research into games development and quality is carried out by students, particularly final-year undergraduate and MSc students, and their supervisors. We also need to formalise guidelines and the review process for these prospective authors, not least because we do not replicate entire dissertations in this journal. We are determined to see that *The Computer Games Journal* continues to shed light on this underreported source of information on new developments and concepts in computer games design and development.