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Gaming, all grown up



Professor Ridgway is a game designer and filmmaker. Photo by Mary Knox Merrill.

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Saving the princess in "Super Mario Bros." and gobbling monsters in "Pac Man" introduced **Ben Ridgway** to a virtual universe, but also to a real universe that fuses the power of the imagination with the beauty of technology and the ingenuity of art.

Small wonder that he's made a career as a game designer and filmmaker.

"I've always been around games," said Ridgway, an assistant professor of animation whose research focuses on computer graphics, as well as film and game production. "I love both playing

and analyzing games and I'm really lucky to have the opportunity to make them and have fun doing it."

Ridgway, who holds a Master of Fine Arts in experimental animation from the California Institute of the Arts, teaches 3D computer graphics. He is currently guiding his students through production for a short film that they're creating for eventual submission to film festivals and competitions.

He calls film and game creation a "team sport," and encourages his students to work in groups. "They're able to get a taste of what it's like in the professional world," he said. "You can accomplish so much more with a group working towards a common vision than by trying to do it all by yourself."

His own most recent project, a 3D experimental animation called "Ad Infinitum," uses the mathematical phenomena of fractals to explore time, space and the concept of infinity. The short, which was influenced by the work of Dutch graphic artist M. C. Escher, has been selected to appear at film festivals in Ireland, Montreal and San Francisco.

Over the years, Ridgway has created concept art and designed environments for action/adventure and road racing games for Nintendo, Microsoft and Sony, such as "Road Rash 64," "MX Featuring Ricky Carmichael" and "Alter Echo." He's received several awards for his filmmaking, including the MTV award for Excellence in Animation in 1995 for "Olive Shower," a short, 2D exploration of an alien landscape.

For Ridgway, gaming has become a near-ubiquitous part of our daily lives, whether we're looking to have fun or solve complex societal problems.

"Three-dimensional computer graphics and game design are great fields to explore because they touch on so many things that surround us these days," he said. "Aside from pure entertainment, 3D graphics and games are used for educational, scientific, medical, communication and military applications. And that's just the tip of the iceberg."

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