

Appendix I

Interview with Chris Klimas

This interview took place between the authors of this book (AS and SM) and Chris Klimas (CK) via Skype on April 6, 2017. Our work was in the early stages, and the exchange helped us understand much about the origins and circumstances of Twine. It also confirmed our commitment to multiple agendas—historical, personal, critical, and creative—because as Chris makes clear, the Twine phenomenon has all those dimensions. The conversation was notably free ranging. We have used a light editorial hand in order to preserve the flow of ideas.

AS: Circa 2009, people may have tended to think of hypertext as more of an appliance than an area for active software development. What made you interested in the concept?

CK: Of hypertext . . . ? [bemused] wow.

AS: . . . of building something in hypertext . . .

SM: If that's in fact what you were thinking—I don't know—did you think of [Twine] as something else?

CK: I don't know, actually. I think so. I think that [hypertext] was a fair characterization. . . . I think at that point, I had done a lot of experimentation with parser IF, and I had done a couple of games myself, but I felt sort of frustrated with the medium . . . how *object-y* it is . . . very world-model-based . . . and that felt like an obstacle, I guess. That was when I started messing around with stuff that was, more . . . hypertext-y. You just have tons of exposure to the idea of hypertext. For me, it was more the web. I hadn't played or experienced the stuff from the early nineties or whenever you want to date that particular period.

I ran across this technology called TiddlyWiki, and it was this really clever thing [that created] a self-modifying web page. You download it to your computer, you can edit it, it's like a wiki, but there's no server component to it at all, and so it's like a very simple . . . DIY hypertext. And so I started editing and playing out stuff in there and experimenting with that medium.

It just got very disorienting, actually, to try to edit [a TiddlyWiki story] from inside . . . where I'd click links, and follow them, and it's like—*where am I?* I'd get lost in my own stuff, and that was the genesis: *I want to build a tool that will help me do this better.*

SM: What was your process [of development and invention] like? When did you first think you were building Twine?

CK: There were a couple of abortive attempts. Before [there was Twine] it started as Twee . . . and they all started with "TW" because they came from TiddlyWiki . . . and this was just a plain old text format and compiler, the sort of programming environment you expect out of traditional programming.

That worked OK, and I wrote some stuff with that . . . and then I thought . . . I should make something web-based because I wanted more people to get into it . . . because there were so few things at that point on the web that were . . . literary hypertext, I guess.

I was always trying to convert people to the cause [of branching stories]. I thought, I should try to win over [some of my] friends who are writers . . . to have them try this out. And of course, if you give

them a compiler, they're like, *What is this?*—so I tried building a web-based thing, but it was just a web front end to the compiler . . . which I called . . . TweeBox . . .

I had all these attempts to try to build something [along these lines], and I always had this idea, actually while I was in the UB IDIA program [University of Baltimore, Interactive Design and Information Architecture], where I was on track to do a master's, and I was thinking this would be an interesting thesis project . . . and then I got really impatient because I was doing it part-time, taking one class at a time, so I was at least two years away from even starting on [the thesis]. I remember just deciding, I'm going to do this and try it out, and that's where the genesis of [Twine] began.

I had always hesitated to build an actual GUI behind it . . . and then I was like, there's never actually going to come a moment where somebody tells me, *You should go ahead and do that*—so I just did it. And that's how it started.

SM: [Ironically] Why wait for permission?

AS: Since you did mention Twee . . . It's always been interesting to me that you've included Twee in the releases, that it's stayed a part of Twine. Do you see people still using it? Is there a following for Twee or a motivation for you in keeping Twee part of the platform?

CK: I wouldn't say that I actively develop [Twee]. . . . For a long time, I did, and then I lapsed working on it. I came back to Twine. . . . Twine 2.0 was very much for me like, let's think about what succeeded here, what didn't, and rethink assumptions. . . . That was when I actually stopped working on Twee. It seemed like kind of a done deal. [Twee] does what it needs to do.

[There's] sort of this pendulum swing between programming and writing. . . . I am building larger projects now and I need to merge stuff together, so I wrote a bunch of JavaScript, it's an NPM module called `twine-utils` that includes a tiny little compiler. . . . There have been quite a few Twine competitors that have sprung up in its wake. . . . I

don't remember all of the names. . . . The guy who does TextAdventures .co.uk has one—Squiffy, I think it was called?—it seemed like for a while, every day there was someone who said, I have a better way to do Twine . . . and they all had [a] programming language, like, *Here's a text file* . . . [something like] Raconteur, which is based on Undum.

To me, the hard problem has always been the interface. It has never been, like, I need something really sophisticated in terms of functionality. It's actually the ease of use, from my point of view, so it's a useful substrate.

Beyond that . . . the people who are into programming, who come at it from a programming angle, it's more comfortable to them, like I definitely hear about people in the community who are like, *Oh man, I just want to be able to use my text editor*, and that's great, go for it, you know? . . . [Twee] was a useful stepping-stone. . . . To be honest, I still use it from time to time, for programming utility kinds of things, but I don't see it as a big deal.

SM: This is a shift-focus question . . . Have you always thought of Twine as a free platform, or have you thought at any point of monetizing, commercializing?

CK: One of the core tenets of my thoughts on [Twine] is that it should be free, and I think, to be honest, that is a large reason why it succeeded in the first place . . . because obviously Storyspace existed, and as I learned later on, there's this product called AXMA Story Maker . . . but it's not the price tag so much as the open-source thing.

I do cling to hippyish beliefs about open-source, and I read Slashdot back in the day, which is I think where I got indoctrinated. . . . I still sort of pine for that period . . . the early 2000s, where the web was . . . much less a social-media, TV-like experience . . . and I think that is important, one of the foundational things. . . . Obviously it would be nice to be paid for my work, but it has never made economic sense to me. The people who are using [Twine] are, by and large, not the kind of people who are going to pay fifty dollars or more for what we [for some reason still] call a boxed product.

AS: Given the commitment to open-source, have you had any notable successes, challenges with that, taking that model, maintaining the Twine code base, especially as you handed it off?

CK: I did a talk at a conference called NoShowConf, which talks about me burning out on the project and some of the history too. . . . When I gave the talk, which was maybe 2014 . . . it was definitely a moment to reflect. . . . So yeah, I totally burned out on [Twine], to be honest. . . . It was ironically just as [Twine] was taking off that I burned out . . . and it's hard because you get a lot of support requests and bug reports.

The Twine user base often is not particularly technically savvy, which is cool most of the time, but it also means that people will write in bug reports like *It just doesn't start*. Which is very frustrating because, you know, you feel bad because there's no information to actually fix [whatever the problem is] . . . and people often have an expectation that . . . it's a program like Office and Word, so if it doesn't work right, it's a travesty . . . and some people get angry about it. I guess that's just human nature, but to be on the other side of it gets frustrating, and I've had to learn and am still learning how to manage my time with the project . . . and also my emotional well-being.

I used to have . . . a [Twitter] TweetDeck column . . . for people talking about Twine games . . . or I'd have this very convoluted search term to see what people are saying on Twitter about Twine . . . and it was . . . kind of a terrible idea, actually. . . . This was just when Gamergate happened, so I had to close it down because the flow was just too much.

I still have a Twitter account, which I mainly oversee, though I just brought on someone else to help with it . . . and people will just tweet at me, "Your software sucks" [laughs] and it's like, thanks! And that's tough, and I guess that's also . . . living a little bit in the public eye, in the internet sense of the word. People are going to have opinions about what you do, no matter what. That is the major challenge, trying to keep Twine afloat while maintaining a full-time job elsewhere.

The truth is, the number of people who work on [Twine] in general is very small. There are people who do . . . drive-by pull requests, which is good. . . . Like yesterday, somebody came in with a request. . . . He

wanted to add a thing for adding force touch, like when you push very hard on a trackpad, to do stuff with that. . . . But the problem with any open-source project is there's a judgment call. . . . You are adding a functionality to this thing that I have no way of testing myself . . . so if it breaks, I am going to be the guy who fixes it, probably . . . and is that a decision I'm willing to make? . . . I'll bet that's pretty typical for an open-source project.

SM: Are there particular contributors to the code base who are memorable or rank as among the most important?

CK: Yeah, definitely. Leon Arnott is a guy who lives in Australia. . . . I don't know much about him otherwise, which is also really interesting. . . . Leon developed a lot of macros, things you can add to your story to make it do stuff, back in the Twine 1.X days. He had done a lot with it, and when I was looking at version 2, I thought, this is going to be too much for me, to do both the editor and the runtime at once, and [Arnott] seemed to have thought hard about what people were doing or wanted to do with Twine stories, so I asked him to work on Harlowe, which is the default [story] format [in Twine 2]. . . . Leon's interesting to chat with. He works at a different speed and thinks about things very differently than I do, which makes for interesting conversations.

The other guy is Thomas Michael Edwards. . . . He is the maintainer for SugarCube, which is the legacy [format], so if you're used to using Twine 1 . . . SugarCube takes what I did in 2010 or so and builds on it quite a lot. It's a very mature kind of format.

Those are the two [people] I could go to just off the top of my head in terms of programming, though obviously the community goes much wider than that.

AS: Shifting into the community itself, what are some of the things you see in terms of Twine extensions like community-generated code that's not necessarily part of the format choices that you've found most interesting? Anything that's surprised you?

CK: A lot of it is . . . one-off things. People do really surprising things with Twine, in the sense of . . . content, obviously, but there've been instances where I've seen like, wait, oh, kind of taking it and twisting it. . . . It reminds me a little of [the way] Andrew Plotkin did an implementation of Tetris in the Z-machine. . . . That level of stuff that serves no practical purpose, and it's not necessarily even like a big artistic statement in terms I understand, but it's more like technically playing with what you can do.

There's this guy . . . the only thing I know him by is his Twitter handle . . . such is internet life. . . . His Twitter handle [is] *lectronice*. . . . He did this really amazing thing where it looked very much like a Japanese RPG, with little dialogue boxes and such. . . . People are always trying to build RPG games out of [Twine] . . . which is always to me . . . a giant quagmire because there are a million ways you could potentially do that . . . lots of little modules or extensions or plug-ins or whatever.

People came up with this idea for cycling text, which may well have antecedents way before Twine that I'm not aware of . . . but the idea that I'm clicking and the text changes . . . you're not moving, the text just changes to a different adjective, or something like that. That was always interesting to me, and something I hadn't seen before.

AS: I think that's the extension I use most.

CK: Yeah, it's fun to do. At least for me, there's the fear that . . . you know, with [disjunctive] hypertext, you're like, if I click here, will I be able to get back to where I was? Am I about to jump off a cliff? Whereas if I click on a link and [the current text] just changes, and that's it, that's kind of pleasant, in fact.

SM: My students have impressed me a lot with timed effects [using the *(live:)* macro in Harlowe] . . . that thing where you say, *If I wait another five seconds, maybe it'll do something . . . or maybe he set it up to wait FIVE HOURS!*—and then you have to crawl the code [to figure it out]. What do you think about timed effects?

CK: One of my favorite Twine things is *Queers in Love at the End of the World* [by Anna Anthropy], which has the ten-second thing, but it's tricky because in the IF community, people were very against the idea of having text appear slowly, even, or making [the reader] wait at all. . . . I remember this big debate back in the nineties on USENET. . . . David Cornelson was writing this suspense story, and he wanted it to play out [so that] the text would appear like you're reading it on a really old modem, and everybody in the community was like, *That's a stupid idea! I'm going to hate it!*—or whatever. And we've come so far, I feel that people have let go of that and . . . let text appear one character at a time but also play with time in an interesting sort of way. It's cool. I don't know. A game that requires you to wait five hours would be . . . challenging . . . but interesting at the same time.

SM: I have a question I've been dying to ask since you sort of answered it earlier. I'll ask it again, nonetheless. You know Darius Kazemi, right?

CK: I've met him a couple of times.

SM: I was talking Twine with him about a year ago, and I wondered, Should I say, "Twine games," or should I say, "Twine fictions?" And [Kazemi] said, "Well, these days the kids just say "Twines." [General amusement.] So let me ask you, where would you go with that?"

CK: Well, it's interesting. To sort of sidebar a little . . . I'm a member of the board of the Interactive Fiction Technology Foundation, [a] non-profit that's about community infrastructure . . . and one of the things we're exploring is possibly trademarking Twine . . . so then it gets real muddled if we start saying, like, *Oh yeah, it's a Twine*.

To be honest, it's a struggle every time [I ask myself], Is this a Twine game? Is this a Twine story? And both times, people might not like your description, so my internal stylebook is, I just write *Twine works*. . . . "This is a work of Twine." . . . That was the one middle ground I could find. I don't really so much care. At the same time, I like the idea of people saying, *Oh, I made a Twine*—even inasmuch as that is a problem,

legally speaking, potentially. [It's nice that *Twine*] is a term, and people know what you're talking about.

AS: You talked a bit about trying to convert your literary friends and people writing in a more linear way when you were talking about the audience for this platform, and Stuart has just touched on the age-old “games versus stories” debate. So given all of that happening in the various spaces of *serious writing*, which sometimes tends not to engage . . . when serious writing goes digital, it means they made a PDF . . . over to games. Where do you see Twine fitting in this larger culture?

CK: I see it as this thing that confounds people. I really like that aspect of it. I initially thought of [Twine] as this thing that was for . . . serious writing, I guess, though *serious writing* is obviously a loaded term. It wasn't that I thought [Twine work] was somehow better than a game; it was more that I couldn't see how you build a game out of it, originally. And then everybody came along and proved me wrong, basically. And that was the other piece of it. I had zero awareness of the indie game scene at the time.

[The importance of indie gaming] was the thing that Anna Anthropy really recognized, I think. I honestly credit her . . . fifty-fifty for Twine's success. Because she saw something and was in a digital community I had no relationship to.

Personally, I think you can build stories with Twine; you can build games with Twine. I think that's fine. I think there are things that I wouldn't call games that I've experienced with Twine. . . . The problem is that a lot of people see [the claim that] *this is not a game* as an insult [laughs]. And I see how people do that. . . . At the same time, I wish we could return to a world where it's not a value judgment—where people just say, *Eh, this is a game, according to my own personal rubric, and that's not*, and that's the end of it. Unfortunately, now it's just so fraught. I like the fact that there are things people build in Twine that are . . . aspects of both, and people can argue about it.

I suppose that's my own hell-raiser tendencies: let us disrupt these somewhat stuffy debates.

SM: I agree with that. I wanted to ask further about the Interactive Fiction Technology Foundation.

CK: It turns out the acronym [IFTF] is the same as the one for the Institute for the Future . . . which I'm pretty sure is unintentional. [Much amusement.]

SM: Show up at their conference!

CK: The president and the ringleader is Jason McIntosh, who is part of the parser IF community, mostly. He's run the IFComp for the last couple of years now. He reached out to me when he was getting it set up. It's been in existence since July of last year [2016]. Its real purpose is . . . there are all these projects run by people in the community, there's the IFDB, there's the IF Archive, there's the IFComp. . . . All these things are done because people are interested in them, and it's great to have that level of enthusiasm, but the danger is if people burn out, like I did, or just want to move on, then all this stuff could just completely fall apart.

Right now, [IFTF] is trying to help out with projects that need people to look at them. [For instance] right now, the parser IF interpreter situation on Mac OS is terrible. All the ones that used to work don't work anymore on [Mac OS 10.12] Sierra. And it's a real problem. . . . I don't know that I can play . . . the only thing that works right now is a thing called Lectrote. . . . One of the things we're working on right now is to have people fix up this interpreter called Gargoyle, which had been working really well for a long time. So [IFTF] is about adoption of projects, and eventually, hopefully, to fund-raise to help grow stuff . . .

SM: So this gets to the metaquestion I want to ask: What kind of community has Twine become, what kind of community does it belong to, and it sounds like you're saying it's part of the general interactive fiction community?

CK: I believe so. You may get different answers from different people, but as someone who is more steeped in that community, I think of it that way.

SM: Could you tell me how you think of the IF community? How does it fit into the culture generally?

CK: It's an interesting question because [the IF community] has changed so much over time. When I first got internet access . . . when I first went to college, which would be have been in 1998 or so . . . I trawled around in USENET and found the news groups . . . and so, through the nineties . . . I don't exactly know when they died out. . . . It was this very, very tiny community, relatively speaking, of people who were really, really dedicated to it. . . . Looking back on it now, there was always that thread in Infocom's advertising of *Text-based games are inherently superior to graphical games because your mind is the best graphics engine ever* . . . or whatever. Which I kind of believe, though not necessarily to the exclusion of graphical games.

There's this online term, *Amiga persecution complex* . . . you feel you have this superior thing but the world doesn't recognize [it]. [The IF community] had that vibe to it, for a time, but at the same time, people were doing really interesting stuff. . . . The other thing I hear people say is that everything interesting going on in the gaming world at large happened in the IF community ten years before. Which is a bit of an overstatement, but I believe a lot of that is actually true.

I never really intended it to be this way, but Twine became this existential threat [to parser-based games], at least among the old guard. . . . People [said], *We have this very strict definition, and we clung to it because it was part of our community identity: you have to type in words and you get back text in return, and you can't even show graphics—[or], God forbid—sound!* I clued into this way late, but there were people in the wider world [saying], *Twine games aren't games*, and people in the IF community saying, *Twine games aren't IF*.

Carl Muckenhoupt, who was the guy behind Baf's Guide to the IF Archive, one major review site, wrote this article that explained it really well, though I thought his view was incorrect. . . . [Muckenhoupt said], it's like, you're really into jazz, and you keep going to this one jazz club that is preserving your particular definition of jazz, and all these young upstart kids show up and start ruining it with their new jazz.

I'll bet this is a pattern that repeats in every subculture . . . where people come around and challenge things, and the old guard hate it . . . and it's funny to me because I came from that [traditional] part of the community, and I never intended [Twine] to be this massive, subversive, destructive tool, but I also like to think that at this point, people have chilled out a bit and realized we can coexist in peace.

There's the IFComp and then there's the Xyzzy Awards, and people look at how many parser games versus how many choice-based games are in both, and because the community's a little bit nerdy, there's graphs, and stuff like that, and trend lines, and people freak out and post detailed analyses. . . . It's a little overblown, obviously, but people have started to relax. . . . An equilibrium is starting to be achieved. . . . I forget what the numbers were last year, but it was about equal [between parser and Twine entries].

This is a little bit grandiose to say, [but] I think that without Twine, the [IF] community would have continued to be a small thing. There are definitely people who pick up parser games now, even so. I was at PAX East in 2011 and they had an IF meet-up, and there was a girl who must have been about seventeen who showed up at the meet-up, and I was walking back with her to the main area, and I asked how she found out about IF. I said, "You are the youngest person I've ever met who's into it." And she said, "Oh yeah, I found [interactive fiction] on the [Apple] iOS Store and just started playing the games." So there's some longevity to [IF].

And it's not just Twine, actually. Choice of Games had a similar issue, and their communities were much bigger, and there was an eruption of controversy over . . . I forget which Xyzzy Award. . . . One of their games was nominated for it, and a bunch of their fanbase came over to the forums and voted for it, and everybody panicked because normally a thing you'd see 200 votes for was getting 1,500, and so everybody was [thinking], *You must be cheating*. But then people mellowed out about it and realized it was not this big existential threat.

AS: Since you've talked about Twine as an existential threat in the context of IF . . . you and I talked about this during Gamergate—what

do you think about the ways Twine has disrupted mainstream gaming culture?—the way the legacy of *Depression Quest* hangs over us . . .

CK: That is sort of the go-to example. [That game approaches its subject] both in terms of form and content. Overall, I think there's bias toward procedural-ness—this has to be hard to program in order for it to be good, artistically. There's obviously parallels in other mediums, even from super-photo-realism to stuff that's more impressionistic, where people say [on one end], *Oh, I can do this*—people say that about everything.

I think it was either TotalBiscuit or someone even worse who said . . . Twine games are great because you can make them without knowing how to make games . . . [to which I say] YES, I AM ON BOARD WITH THAT! I think he was actually meaner. I think he said you can [make Twine games] without any skills—which I am in favor of—or talent, which I disagree with [laughs] and so there is that aspect, where it has to have 3-D graphics to be a game, or something like that.

There are a lot of historical reasons for that, and a lot of them happened by accident, where you look at how journalists cover games, to see how that came out. . . . The way I talk about it, when I give talks, is that the content of *Depression Quest* is really interesting, too, because there are very few games that talk about mental illness in a very non-gimmicky kind of way . . . but that obviously got lost completely in the whole controversy.

I think long term what Twine might really be remembered for is for broadening the scope of what a game can be about . . . and allowing more personal narratives. . . . It's hard to build graphical games unless you're a very skilled artist. . . . It's hard to build a one-off; there's more effort involved in something that will take twenty minutes to play or read through. That's why the confessional Twine genre is such a thing: there's a more immediate payoff to it. Say I want to build a Unity game based on the way I feel today. . . . You're going to be done next month, where you're going to be done with it in Twine, hopefully, that same day.

SM: I still feel that way about [HTML] and JavaScript things, where I'll say, *I really want to do this thing* . . . and it's going to take three weeks, but I won't feel this way in three weeks.

CK: Yeah.

SM: You've just touched on where you think Twine will be in the near future, or the even further future. Could you expand on that? If you could think twenty years out, what do you think happens to Twine?

CK: I'm a pessimist by nature. . . . I think Twine will no longer . . . I think it will always have a place, but at the same time, I think it won't have as prominent a place as it has right now. I see some game companies are taking Twine writing samples, which is pretty cool, and that argues for more longevity among the world at large. But at the same time, I'm mindful that . . . Twine becoming popular was . . . sort of an accident.

Nothing I tried [made the difference] . . . other than building it in the first place, which was [laughs] NO BIG DEAL REALLY! As far as making it popular, I feel like I was very not-responsible for that. . . . It was really Anna [Anthropy], among others, who managed to make that happen, and it seems equally likely that if [Twine] remains popular . . . it will be for reasons I have no idea about.

I'm trying to keep myself a little rooted on the ground and to realize nothing is forever, especially in the software world. It would be nice [for Twine] to persist as a standard-ish format. . . . I still want to be working on it. . . . I think it was Judy Malloy who was writing about . . . her own hypertext engine that she'd been working on since the eighties . . . and that's amazing because that amount of time . . . it would be really interesting to see what that looks like. . . . There are very few software projects out there on which people spend more than a decade, really.

I don't see myself ever losing interest in [Twine], exactly. . . . It will always be a thing for me, but I'm not sure it will always be as big of a deal as it is right now, and that's OK . . . and that's the thing that I'm trying to prepare myself for, I guess. I keep wondering, What is the next Twine going to be? and if I knew, I guess I would build it.

The one thing I think it's not so great at, and people have tried to improve on is . . . I was talking to people at the Mozilla Foundation because I was looking for a home for Twine, and [the man from Mozilla asked], *Well, what's the mobile story for Twine?* And I [thought] I don't really have one because I hate typing on a phone, and I feel like that's the one aspect that someone could really improve on. The other thing would be making it better at collaboration. . . . I know Stuart and I have talked about that in the past. . . . That's something I want to try to do.

SM: This is going to stop being [an] interview and start being an ordinary conversation, but have you ever thought about people being able to just talk to the phone and compose orally?

CK: Mmm . . .

SM: As you were talking, I was thinking about [the IF programming language] Inform 7 and [its] natural-language interface. I kind of hated the idea until I started working with it, and now I want everything to be in English, or whatever [Inform 7's idiom] is. . . . If you think about being able to create powerful structure with almost gestural simplicity . . . that might be really cool.

CK: Yeah, I agree. I think that . . . it needs to embrace text, but also embrace the fact that it's on a phone and on a relatively small screen . . . and swiping or any kind of gesture is much more natural on a phone or any kind of touch screen than it is on a track pad or moving stuff around with the mouse—that kind of thing.

AS: What do you think about the future of interactive fiction? We pick up the odd seventeen-year-old who finds it on the iOS store, and that's good, but what do you think more broadly about the future of the interactive fiction community?

CK: [The Inkle game] *80 Days* is my really short answer. It'll be things that people don't even think of as IF, or like [the mobile game] *Lifeline*

[from Big Fish Games]. Stuff like that. I have a lot of respect for Andrew Plotkin, who's also on the board of the IFTF, and he's trying really hard to make the parser thing work on a phone and elsewhere, but I ultimately think it's going to be something else that keeps the principles of the medium and not necessarily the trappings.

If you ask people what kind of game *80 Days* is, I don't think anybody will say it's interactive fiction. Part of it is that *interactive fiction* feels sort of esoteric. . . . The community held on to the definition of IF with a really tight grip . . . and this orthodoxy emerged . . . and to me, it's better to, like, let it go a little bit.

I was talking to Brian Moriarty [of Infocom], and he seemed a little bit perplexed by the worship of parser [games] by people he ran into still . . . because he [was thinking], *How do we adapt this?* He told me about . . . a voice-driven [storytelling technology] . . . which is interesting because I certainly listen to a lot of podcasts now, when I drive, and so I could see, like, talking back to it, potentially . . . [and] in general, speech seems to be the next big thing as far as technology goes.

You can draw on a ton of IF things. . . . Emily Short and Aaron Reed are now working at a company called Spirit AI. . . . I don't know their elevator pitch, exactly, but it seems like they are taking a lot of the principles behind IF and applying them to . . . designing a traditional AAA kind of game, where it's like, *Our company will help make your AI better* . . . or make your conversation trees better, and stuff like that. To me, it's like this hidden substrate to [IF], where you're using it, or playing it, but not necessarily thinking of it as such.

AS: I think Aaron Reed is also working on that.

CK: Yeah. There's also an NYU professor . . . Mitu Khandaker-Kokoris. . . . I don't know much about their technology, but . . . Emily is a really smart person, so I figure there must be something there. And Aaron is too, but I'm less acquainted with him. . . . I really like the Inform 7 book he wrote.

SM: Yeah, I love it. [I've taught with it so much that] my copy is now completely shot. [General laughter.]

CK: I like *Sand Dancer*, the game he has in the book. . . . So anyway, there's a lot of talent there [at Spirit AI], so I'm interested to see what happens, and obviously Inkle, they're kind of a big deal, too, but their new game that they just announced, [*Heaven's Vault*], is moving more toward a graphic novel feel than a text-based one. . . . I'm interested to see what they do with it.

AS: That definitely will be interesting. And you have companies like Netflix supposedly doing a choose-your-own-adventure concept.

CK: We'll see. Sam Barlow is the guy I try to pay attention to on that stuff because I really liked *Her Story*, which was really innovative . . . and I forget the company that he's with, but I feel that he will come up with something really interesting. . . . I'm not so much convinced about Netflix.

AS: If they have any sense, they'll hire [Barlow].

CK: Hopefully! Brian Moriarty has this amazing talk about the history of interactive cinema, and having learned from that, [I realize that] this is a really old concept and nobody has really changed much about it since the very beginning, and it's always been kind of a novelty; it's never gotten any traction, it feels like. And so it seems, the Netflix thing sounds exactly like this . . . but we'll see.

AS: A lot of folks from interactive fiction are going off and working for companies and founding start-ups right now. Are you thinking of doing anything with this background of everything you've done?

CK: I would love to. I've talked with folks, but I've never found the right fit. I've been really hesitant to get into the game industry per se. Back when Zynga—East, I think it was?—had a Baltimore-based branch, I talked to folks from there, [but I thought], *This is Zynga*, and I'm not sure my values are compatible with yours.

SM: And they lasted about eighteen months too.

CK: I guess I dodged a bullet there. I would have switched careers and immediately gotten laid off. Which I guess would have been an instructive experience in the game industry, right there. It's very tough right now because all the companies are like five people.

And I have my own two-person company. It's called Unmapped Path, and the first client work that we've done is for Andrew Schneider, who's written this incredibly long (by my standards, at least) about 150,000 words . . . this interactive story about Robin Hood. We're building that for him. It's supposed to be coming out June-ish . . . and we're working on our own projects as well.

The idea is to leverage Twine to build games for mobile. And that goes back to the problem of Twine not having a good story on mobile. If I play Twine games on my iPad, it's a little bit janky, to be honest. . . . I keep meaning to come around and improve on it. If I tap on a link, it's like for some reason the whole thing highlights. . . . So we are leveraging the content creation aspect of Twine to build games that feel like text adventures but hopefully have a little bit more mass appeal.

This is the boring part where I say that we don't have anything to announce yet, but there's something we're working on that we hope to have an announcement about soon as far as games go. Because I see the role of Twine as like a Photoshop or a Unity. The interesting part to me is not so much the tools but the content. I would like tools as much as possible to be open-source, but I don't feel the same way about games or content per se. I'm more comfortable buying a book than a software program, but I guess that's just my deal.

[Around this point, Chris asks about the book we are writing, which is our chance to say we don't have anything to announce yet . . . and brings up the subject of books about Twine.]

CK: I was at Games for Change a few years ago, and Merritt Kopas [now known as merritt k] was speaking with Austin Walker and Naomi Clark from NYU, and I came up to them after the talk, and Merritt actually gave me a copy of her book, *Videogames for Humans*, and it was like, wow, when you have a book written about something you made, and

it's just sort of astonishing. So when there's a book out of all this, it will occupy a place of honor on my bookshelf.

SM: Well, we hope so. [General amusement.]

CK: See, I'm not even saying *if*, I'm saying *when*.

AS and SM: Thanks.