



## In a Far Away Land

by Chris Motola

Rwanda is a small, densely-populated agricultural nation in the heart of Africa. Many Westerners know of Rwanda primarily in the context of the 1994 genocide, when tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups led to the extermination of over 500,000 Tutsis.

When STG alumnus Mike Liese decided to spend a year in Rwanda doing IT work, he discovered a nation that was neither hiding from its past nor dwelling on it.

**Q:** How did you end up in Rwanda?

**A:** Mike Liese: I found out about it through my cousin who works for Liquidnet, the corporate sponsor of the village. She forwarded me the email and I applied.

**Q:** What was the job like?

**A:** They were looking for a combination of things. Somebody with IT skills, someone who could troubleshoot a network in the middle of rural Rwanda. But at the same time they needed someone who

would be comfortable living in that environment for a year. So while my tech skills were important, it was the fact that I've worked with kids for many years. I kind of fit the bill in that regard.

**Q:** Did you know what you getting into? Were you prepared?

**A:** Nothing can really prepare you for something like that until you do it. I just tried to go with an open mind, with

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JEREMIAH LAHNUM  
STGAA PRESIDENT

## Pooling Our Talents

Welcome to the second issue of the Storytellers Guild Alumni Association's newsletter. This issue we're focusing on the careers of our alumni and the job skills we've learned from our hobby.

The alumni of the storytellers guild work in a wide range of industries and we have a lot of ideas and experiences to share about those careers. We can act as a point of contact in industries ranging from Information Technology to Education to Journalism. It is our hope that we can come together to act as a source of information and social networking to aid us in finding careers and maintaining strong working relationships.

I believe that an organization such as the STGAA can aid in helping people to exchange ideas and concepts between fields so that

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# Rwanda: exposing orphans to high tech

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the idea that I can help change things slowly, but also keep in mind that I probably wouldn't be around to reap what I sowed.

Q: What village were you placed in?

A: Here's the thing, it wasn't exactly a village, not like the ones you'd find throughout Rwanda. The NGO, the non-profit, is called the Aghozo Shalom Youth Village. It basically looked like a summer camp built by Westerners and Rwandans, almost brand new. So I wasn't living in a true African village. There was a fence, security guards, wireless Internet--the Internet sucked, but there was a wireless footprint that covered about half a square mile.

Basically, it was land bought from Rwandan farmers and they built this place to be a school in the village. It's a village in the sense that there are families who live there. Orphans are put together in families, 16 kids and a



The Aghozo Shalom Youth Village Cafeteria seats over 500

family "mother." They have a counselor, or "brother," who is involved in their lives and volunteers--of which I was one.

Q: How did the Rwandans react to you?

A: Everybody in the village was part of this organization, so the people we interacted with on a daily basis were the kids and volunteers.

We did get out to the real

village at least a couple times a week. They were nice, especially once you started picking up the language and realized you were going to be there more than a couple weeks.

Q: Is there typically a lot of turn-over with volunteers?

A: Well, we come off all kind of similar to them. We're from a far off magical land where everything's technological and everybody's rich. You

walk down the street and there are groups of kids following you and asking for money. The adults, not so much.

Q: Did you get charged special foreigner prices?

A: Yes, the *muzungu* prices. It depends on where you go. The market we regularly went to, some of the poorer folks, actually, were really fair. I'd go

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# Lahnum: Gaming taught me to think creatively

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we may all benefit from each other's knowledge.

I think it's also worth exploring how gaming might help us develop skills that are useful in different careers. I learned how to manage my time effectively when GMing a game. I learned organization and record keeping skills as well. Mostly, I think gaming has taught me to think creatively and find imaginative solutions to problems that present themselves in my career.

Much of gaming is about working together as a group to overcome obstacles. Often times the solution to these

problems is not easy to come by. These experiences translate directly into the real world workplace. In either scenario success is earned by teamwork and innovative thinking. These roles are something we can safely explore at the gaming table.

We can find new roles for ourselves and interact within a group in ways that we may never have even thought about doing elsewhere. I think there are important chances to learn skills here. Gaming let's us take the helm of a situation and work toward a common goal. We learn to evaluate other's strengths and weaknesses in this way. Obviously we aren't going to send a Wizard to do

a Fighter's job. You wouldn't ask someone with a background in IT to review some financial reports for you.

I might not be able to point to a specific instance of gaming that has helped me develop as a manager. However, I believe that gaming has made me a better leader and that has sharpened my problem solving skills. I'm a better manager and a better person for having gamed most of my adult life.

The point of all of this is that I say, keep gaming. It's not a bold declaration for anyone in our hobby. However, I think we don't often reflect on what it teaches us. Gaming is about more than just having fun. Gaming is a social activity that

encourages the development of many different skills such as leadership and teamwork. These are skills that any employer would value. It might not be possible to put that you lead a party of adventurers on a quest to slay a mighty dracolich on your resume, however, you can still take the skills you learned from that adventure into your chosen career.

Please stop by the forums at [www.stgaa.org](http://www.stgaa.org) and tell us how gaming has helped your career. Let us know how you're doing. Are you looking for a new career? Can you offer help to someone in your field or who's looking to break into your field? We're eager to hear from you.

# Learning the Rules

There is a delicacy that my sister and I were raised on, and so far, we are the only ones I know of that enjoy this dish among our now extended families. Kraft™ Macaroni & Cheese with a can of tuna fish mixed in. The tuna fish was my mother's way of adding protein to our meals with what funds she had available.

I can tell you tales of the lower class and those impoverished that lived in the small town I grew up in. My mother can tell you tales of being homeless. My grandparents, when they were still around, would tell tales of the Great Depression. I come from old blood, and I can tell you despite what you see or hear around you today, the current generation has far more advantages than my ancestors. However, they are at a disadvantage to me, my sibling, and those of my generation.

I can ultimately inform you that my sister, nor I, would not be where we are today without the generous scholarships for education that were available to us. In the decade following my graduation from university, I have seen a decline in the availability of those funds, and ultimately a decline in opportunities for the next generation that currently seeks to better themselves.

I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to everyone that made this year's scholarship possible. It is my hope that this will become a long-standing tradition of the alumni association and that we will be able to grant larger scholarships



DAVID BLAIR

## MY BIASED OPINION

as well as multiple scholarships in the years to come.

It is also my hope to extend our abilities to provide opportunities for the creative individuals of the StoryTellers' Guild through knowledge transfers, funding of ideas, and social networking with those that have travelled forth before them. These goals can be achieved only through the support of the alumni community, and I ask that each of you reading this find a way to get involved and offer your time and expertise to help make this an organization of opportunities.

On a lighter note, I was asked (we all were asked) by Chris Motola to give this newsletter a job-oriented focus. He wanted to know "how gaming had prepared me for the real world". I will extend that to "how STG has prepared me for the real world."

My time in STG could be well divided into three things:

- Sampling everything I could get my hands on
- Social interaction
- And finally, giving back to the organization

Let's ignore that last one ex-

cept to say that STG is a great group of friends, why wouldn't you want to give back to it?

As for the social interaction, being in a supportive group of friends that let you practice speech and roleplaying, as well as collaboration and compromise was invaluable to the work I currently perform and, I'd assume, any job that involves co-worker interaction. Sometimes you need to calm a situation down, other times you need to inspire or motivate someone.

Most individuals didn't notice, but while I was with STG I never stayed with a game very long. Sometimes I only finished character creation before moving on to the next thing. A semester of LARP here, a Mini-Con of HKAT there... Where I grew up, there was D&D 2nd Edition, and nothing else. No other rules to compare it to. At STG, there were limitless rulesets and mechanics trying to organize and define each system into being the best at what it did, whether that was a cage-match storytelling experience, or an epic adventure told in episodic segments. Card games, board games, video games, animation, these all presented new ideas and ways of doing things, some extremely similar to each other but with definite advantages and disadvantages to compare and contrast.

I'll talk about my careers at some other time, but currently everything I do boils down to understanding what the customer wants, understanding best practices for any given

situation, and knowing when to break those practices based on the customer needs. With a life of only one system, one ruleset, I would give them a boilerplate solution which may or may not suit their business, their vertical, and their company's dynamics. With the understanding of several mechanics, rulesets, and ideas, I can adjust our offerings to fit the customer's demands. STG has helped me in this ability to look at problems with different perspectives.

That might sound extremely abstract, but that is how my company works. We are a technology company sometimes referred to as a Solutions Architect. We are resellers of over 20 different technologies ranging from voice over IP to wireless, and we maintain certifications and expert engineers for each product we sell. That said, we don't sell boxes; we sell solutions. For each of our customers that range from small companies to enterprise corporations, we need to understand their business and how to best achieve their goals with today's ever changing advances in technology. STG has helped make this a lot easier for me with both the logic training and social training I received as a member.

## Dicavi fabula. Dices fabula.

(I have told my story. Now you shall tell yours.)

*David Blair is the current vice president of the STGAA.*

## NOW HEAR THIS! STGAA NEWSLETTER TITLE HELD HOSTAGE BY 80s MOVIE REFERENCE

- We're Still Looking for a name for the STGAA newsletter.
- Have a suggestion? Email the editor at [cmotola@gmail.com](mailto:cmotola@gmail.com)



# STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

On Adam Nelson

By Pete Sterpe

Finding a gaming community was a deciding factor for Adam Nelson when deciding what college to attend. Now two years later, Adam is the newly elected STG President.

Adam's done a lot as a member of the Story Tellers' Guild. Having gotten into board games in community college, STG's Strategy Night was a natural fit for him. This was a gateway to other forms of gaming, like RPGs and LARPs. However, this became a gateway to the other aspects of the organization. He started becoming very involved, and eventually Adam became head of the E-Gaming and Anime committees.

It has been as head of E-gaming where Adam really began to show why he is a Communications major. He has reached out to other student organizations to cross-promote E-Gaming events. He has helped other organizations put events together, and recently

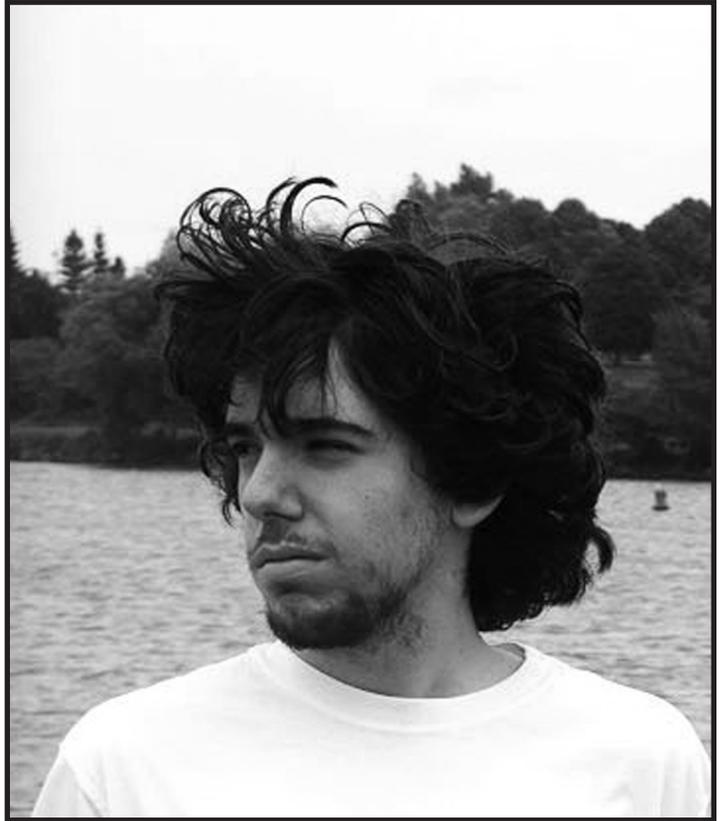
co-promoted an E-Gaming tournament with local video game store Infinite Lives.

"I almost went to another school, but STG was a deciding factor," Adam says as he explains to me why he cares so much about the club and being its President.

The community that STG provides is important to Adam. Being President also provides him with the opportunity to expand on the work he started as a committee head.

As President, Adam wants to work to continue to expand into the community at large. The idea of bringing in outside groups, like the Infinite Lives video game store, is appealing to him.

As President, Adam will have the opportunity to expand on these and other ideas, and give back to the community that initially drew him to SUNY Oswego.



Adam Nelson

## FAQ

### What is the STGAA?

*We're an organization for SUNY Oswego alumni who were in STG while in college.*

### What is the purpose of the STGAA?

*Our aim is to support the STG while providing the same sort of camaraderie and friendship for alumni that the STG gives to students. We offer services to both students and alumni such as career advice and contacts in various career fields. We'll also be offering a yearly scholarship*

*for STG members who are SUNY Oswego students in good academic standing.*

### How do I join the STGAA?

*If you are an alumni of SUNY Oswego and a former member of STG you are automatically a member of the STGAA. However, if you pay dues to the organization you get access to special privileges granted only to paying members.*

### Whoa! Dues? I don't have much money.

*Don't worry, dues are*

*only collected yearly and they come in a wide range. Our most affordable and basic level is a \$10 contribution. This would allow you to vote on any organization business requiring a vote. You can choose to give as much money as you like or can afford.*

### Where does my money go?

*We use that money to fund the scholarship, and support the organization and STG. We are a nonprofit entity and board members do not receive any financial compensation. Your money*

*is invested directly back into this organization and the STG.*

### So what privileges do I get for paying more money?

*Tier 1: Basic Member: \$10. The member has voting rights for the year paid.*

*Tier 2: Bronze Member: \$50. All Basic Member rights and a print copy of the newsletter.*

*Tier 3: Silver Member: \$100. All Bronze Member rights and Arcon fees paid*

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# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

On Bret Gillan

By Chris Motola

Some gamers, after years of rolling dice in other people's games, decide to sit down and create their own. STG alumnus, Bret Gillan, is one of those gamers.

*The Final Girl*, published under Bret's Gas Mask Games label is a horror-themed splatterfest that simulates the brutal attrition of classic franchises like *Friday the 13th*.

"It's supposed to be like you and your friends are sitting down watching a horror movie or coming up with one of your own," explains Bret. "What I enjoy about these movies are the sympathetic characters who are facing a murderous evil that is picking them off one-by-one until there's only one left to face it."

With that in mind, Bret set out to design a system that would make the survivor's identity a mystery to the players while giving each player a say in the matter. Players bid their resources, in the form of



Bret Gillan

playing cards, to try to keep beloved characters alive while nudging others toward their grim fate.

"It's designed to be a short-form role-playing game, with self-contained sessions of

one-and-a-half to two hours," says Bret.

While the card-based mechanics of the game came together early on, the publishing process came with a number of obstacles and bottlenecks.

"It was my first time designing a game, so there were a lot of hurdles that I had to fumble my way through," says Bret. "It probably should have taken a third of that time."

Scheduling deadlines for the art, editing, page layouts and enlisting playtesters drew the process out to the several year mark.

Now that he's over the learning curve, Bret expects his future releases to have a much shorter development cycle. He hopes to have his second project, *Cold Soldier*, printed up in time for Arcon.

"Generally I start with a gap, if there's a hole in my game play experience, something that I want but isn't offered by existing games," says Bret of his creativity process. "I'll set about thinking about the rule system, which is kind of like solving a puzzle. It tends to come in 'aha!' moments."

Bret is an IT support specialist living in Astoria, Queens in New York City.

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by STGAA.

*Tier 4. Gold Member: \$250. All Silver Member rights and a special gift decided by the Board of Directors.*

*Tier 5. Platinum Member: \$500. All Gold Member rights and recognition on a plaque displayed at STGAA office.*

*If you want to exceed the \$500 mark we'd need to discuss an appropriate benefit for that.*

**Who's in charge of the**

**STGAA?**

*We're a democratic body using parliamentary rules to conduct organization business. We do have a board of directors who are currently setting the basic agenda for the organization and acting on the organization's behalf.*

*President - Jeremy*

*Lahnum*

*Vice President - David Blair*

*Treasurer - Scott Charette*

*Secretary - Aimee Blair*

*Student Representative*

*- Pete Sterpe Jr.*

*We also have various committees chaired by other alumni who are working on specific projects for the organization.*

**What rules govern the STGAA?**

*We have a set of bylaws that can be found online at [stgaa.org](http://stgaa.org), where you can access all sorts of great information and discussions about what we're doing.*

**Once I join how can I help out?**

*Paying your dues helps us a lot, but we also value*

*new ideas and extra hands to get things done.*

*Feel free to contact a member of the committees and see what help they might need.*

*Also members of the board might post requests for help with specific projects as things occur. Keep an eye on our forums and feel free to speak up, too.*

*If you have any further questions not addressed here feel free to e-mail one of the board members or post in our forums and ask.*

*We look forward to you being a part of our organization in the near future.*

# Gaming the System

Most of us can remember a time when an authority figure interrupted a beloved activity and threw down a challenge or rebuke that sounded something like this:

“How is that going to help you get a job?”

If you were anything like me as kid, you didn't have much of an answer. Gaming was fun. Wasn't that enough? Why did we have to justify our hobbies?

Neither we nor our parents could have known what a hot commodity games would be today. We're not just levelling up on the screen and at the table anymore.

“Gamification” is all around us. We earn “experience” when we exercise (Fitocracy), when we shop (credit card reward points). We earn badges by checking into real world loca-



CHRIS MOTOLA

## ON GRAPH PAPER

tions in the hopes of becoming “mayor.” (Foursquare)

What happened here?

On a very basic level, games present us with systems in which we can learn, investigate, experiment and validate. If we can effectively learn and exploit the system, we are rewarded with intangibles. For many gamers, games represent the meritocracy that society has long promised but never really delivered. People

are hungry for a balanced risk/time/reward experience. As gamers, you have at least a latent understanding of how powerful these drives and desires are.

Maybe you just play for “escapism?” What, then, are you escaping from? Maybe you just like telling stories? What about storytelling do you find compelling and rewarding?

Calling life a game would be trite. It's too big, too complex and has no discernible win condition. The character balancing is just awful. It is, however, made up of countless natural and constructed systems that we can learn, investigate, experiment with and validate. People who do that for a living are called “scientists,” “doctors,” “lawyers,” “journalists,” “investment bankers,”

“programmers,” “analysts,” and you get my drift.

But you, you crazy bastard, you're doing this for “fun!” For whatever reason, this appeals to you. You're mastering the game system, analyzing the playing styles and behaviors of your gaming group (even the annoying guy who smells like cheese curds and always makes it to the treasure first) and making it all work for you.

Maybe the dragons and the princesses make it more appealing, but the fundamental difference between selecting the best spells for the day and figuring out which stocks to trade or sell is the system you've chosen to study. Get out there and master some systems.

*Chris Motola is the STGAA Bulletin editor.*

# Liese: Coming home was difficult

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to my regular tomato people, my onion people, the guy I'd get goat kabobs from every week. They were 50 cents a piece. Avocados, I could get five for less than 50 cents. We made a lot of guacamole.

Q: What was the state of their IT?

A: There was a teacher in the school who taught computer programming. He had experience with IT, but was much better trained on the programming side. He was also hired to be the teacher, not the IT guy, so he didn't have that much time to spare. The teachers get bussed back and forth from Kigale (the capitol city)

I actually ended up doing some teaching during my first

term for eight hours a week. I was teaching IT to the class that just arrived and barely knew English. That was extremely difficult.

Q: Is the genocide talked about?

A: The entire month of April is genocide memorial month. They're very aware of the genocide and they are very cognizant of the fact that they don't want it to happen again. They're also cognizant of how they're perceived because of the genocide. The genocide ended with the Rwandan Patriotic Front coming in and basically kicking out the regime behind the genocide. They're the folks that have been in power since.

The state line is that there is no more Hutu, no more Tutsi, there's only Rwanda. They

want people to talk about what happened, but you can't talk about if you are a Hutu or Tutsi now and how you feel about it.

Reconciliation is a major party line in part because they just don't have the infrastructure to lock up everyone who participated in it. So they instituted this idea of *gacaca*, where, if you participated in the genocide, you confess your crimes to your village and they punish you, usually with a form of community service.

A big reason for the genocide is that Rwandan culture had long stressed obedience to authority, so they did what they were told. They're doing an about-face now and trying to stress critical thinking in their education now.

Q: Were there things you weren't supposed to talk

about?

A: There're two things they said we shouldn't talk about: politics and asking Rwandans whether they are Hutu or Tutsi. You'll probably get yelled out if you say (President Paul) Kagame is a dictator. Besides, he's really popular, whether by force or not, I don't know.

Q: How hard was it to come back? Were you overstimulated?

A: It was harder. You have certain expectations. When I went to Rwanda, I was prepared for things to be different. I just assumed I'd be able to jump back into American life and that ended up being pretty jarring. When you're in a different culture, people treat your idiosyncracies with a grain of salt. You don't get that here.