



Nate Shivers: It's been a long wait friendly listener, but we're back. We have new pinball machines to talk about with George Gomez and Mike Vinikour, not one, not two, not three but four *James Bond 007* pinball machines. Let's go.

[music]

Joining me today on the *Stern Insider Pinball Podcast*, the executive vice president, chief creative officer, and lead game designer of Stern Pinball the games we're talking about today, Mr. George Gomez. Welcome, sir.

George Gomez: Hey, Nate. Good to be back.

Nate: Great. Great to hear you. Great to see you. Also, joining us on the show, Mike Vinikour returning. It's been a while it's been since *Stranger Things* we were just talking about.

Mike Vinikour: Yes, it's been almost two years, but I'm glad to be back here with you, Nate.

Nate: Reminder for everybody, Mike's an associate game designer and he's the rules designer here on the *James Bond 007* pinball machines, which we are here to talk about. George Gomez, why are you designing pinball machines still? I thought you were getting out of that business.

George: It seems like sometimes, it's destiny, I think. [chuckles]

Nate: We talked way back on *Deadpool*, which fell into your lap, so to speak. I said, "You want to design another game?" You're like, "Oh, yes, I want to. I don't know if I have time to, but I want to."

George: Yes, it's really hard to do my job and design pinball machines. As you know, I've had my head in Insider. And Insider, in and of itself, is a big project that takes a lot of my time. Between running the studio and Insider, it's luckily-- this situation has always-- you just don't plan life, right? Mr. Richie decided to leave the company. He was the original designer on James Bond. He left us a white wood, and it was far from finished, and the game, it wasn't anywhere really. I said, "I didn't wanna take it over and finish his game."

That's always really hard for me. I don't know what to do with somebody else's stuff. Basically, I'm gonna throw this out, I'm going to start over. And that's what I did. It's been a ride, that's for sure. James Bond is a big license and with it comes a lot of complexity in terms of managing the brand. You're talking about 60 years of content, 60 years of film. It's been a challenge.

Nate: It's got to be a dream theme though as a designer. When we look at, like you said, 60 years, every generation that's up and alive and kicking today has some sort of James Bond touchstone in their life. Mine was probably a little later than yours and younger people in us, it's all probably the more recent films, but to get to work on



James Bond and get to work on the Sean Connery era James Bond seemed like it'd be pretty exciting.

George: Yes. I think you hit the nail on the head. When I was 10 years old, 1965, I had a very cool aunt. She was in her 20s and she had gone to see *Goldfinger*. One day she called me up and said, "I'm going to take you and one of your buddies, you got to see this film I saw." I'm sure my mother had more to say had she known. My aunt said, and she took me and a buddy dropped us off at one of those big theaters in Chicago with the big giant marquees. In those days, the entire theater front was decorated in the theme of the film, and the film was *Goldfinger*.

She gave me popcorn and pop money for us. Bought our tickets and sent us in. [chuckles] That was also back in the days at the end of the movie if you stayed in the theater, you got to see it again. We stayed and I called her from a payphone, remember those, and said, "Hey, can we stay and watch it again?" She said, "Sure." We watched *Goldfinger* back-to-back. Honestly, think about this, the Connery films, in which I focus-- all the cornerstones are focused on the first six Sean Connery films.

That set of films, they essentially defined the entire genre, not of just James Bond, not of the 60 future years of James Bond, but the entire spy thing that was happening in 1965. All those spinoffs, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *Mission Impossible*, all that stuff was fallout. Even the spoofs, *Our Man Flint*, all of that, every one of those fictions was the-- "Oh, we're in the Cold War, spies are sexy. Look at this James Bond thing, this is--" Everything from *Get Smart* that spoofed it, all of that stuff was essentially driven by those films.

Nate: There's so much there that is just woven into movies today. The spoofing obviously of it that occurred through the *Austin Powers* years.

George: Oh, absolutely. [crosstalk]

Nate: Just little comments you make, you know where that comes from. There's so much that started with these Connery films.

George: Yes. This is interesting. We've never really done this before. The pro is themed around *Dr. No* and the premium is themed around *You Only Live Twice*. The limited edition is themed around *Thunderball*. My two favorite films, by the way, are *Goldfinger* and *Thunderball*. I picked those three thematically because we were limited to working from art content that existed in the license. We had a lot of limitations in terms of what we could actually illustrate so we did do some illustration. There's a famous illustrator that did a lot of the film posters from the time.

His name is Frank McCarthy. Frank McCarthy did some spectacular work on *Thunderball*, spectacular work on *You Only Live Twice*. Based on that imagery, I figured, "Well, I could take elements." There are elements for all six films throughout the games. All the games including the film footage from all six films, speech calls, et cetera, music from all six films. All six films are in all three games. Even though the



pro is *Dr. No*, the premium is *You Only Live Twice*, the gameplay is consistent across them. The playfield, by the way, features elements from each film.

One of the big playfield toys is the Bird One rocket base in *You Only Live Twice*, in the volcano. You can hit the rocket. I came up with this floating rocket that you can whack with the ball and it moves, does explosion effects, et cetera. It lends itself to a great, big MultiBall, ninjas repelling down into the volcano, all hell breaking loose, got to stop Bird One from launching. Auger sirens going off, [onomatopoeia] all the drama of the scene. Of course, there's a DB5 and the ball launches out of the roof. The ejector seat ejects the pinball, if you will.

Nate: Yes, everyone gets an Aston Martin with their game. That's very cool.

George: Right. Everybody gets an Aston Martin, a three-dimensional custom molded for the game, custom designed for the game, not a toy off the shelf. Also, custom molded for the game, two guys simulating the Sean Connery and another diver locked in *Mortal Combat* underneath the playfield on the left side. You only see them when we turn the lights on. Very similar to what I did with the *Creature from the Black Lagoon* and *Monster Bash*.

Nate: That's what I was thinking when I saw it. It's like the creature-- That's cool.

George: Yes, absolutely. I did a weird thing there where I have an eject that actually fires the ball up playfield. Up playfield on the premium and limited edition, I have a dragon tank from *Dr. No* with lights inside, et cetera. One of the coolest features in the game is I have a custom molded for the game, James Bond in the jet pack. He flies around, he's got a magnet. He can pick up the ball, drop it at different strategic areas. Mike and Lonnie came up with this really cool thing where he picks up--

One of the very first uses because at some point, you'll be able to fly him around, but at times, the game flies him around and creates little play things. Mike and Lonnie came up with this thing where he picks up the ball, and they park it in the center of the game, and you have to make a shot. Then we feed you another ball and you have to-- Of course, we start- it's like a hurry up. Once you knock the ball or once you make that shot, the ball gets scrapped from the jet pack and you start a two-ball MultiBall, which you can augment two or three, right Mike?

Mike: Right. Right. We have some really cool eye candy with that device too and that multi-ball in regards to how the super jackpot will work, too.

George: There's areas of the playfield. Different areas of playfield are themed to different elements of the films. All six films represent Bond's assignments. Also represented from each assignment are the major villains. So all the major villains and then of course all of the major henchmen and all of the bond women from the appropriate films. The Bond women rule is an interesting one because it's one of those powerful things in the game because it's a plus one X multiplier leading up to a seven X 007 multiplier. Mike, you want to talk about that a little bit?



Mike: Yes, so this game when you interact with the different playfield features you qualify the various Bond women associated with those movies. Then when you shoot the shot that they're on, you light them solid and they go into your playfield multiplier bank. Each one is worth a plus one X. If you get all six, then it's a 7X playfield multiplier and we call that 007 scoring. How the playfield multiplier works in this game which is different from any title we've done previously is you activate it with the action button on your lockdown bar.

You press that when you want to activate your playfield multiplier so you have to choose when is the most opportune time to do it. And how far do you want to risk building up the multiplier before you use it because you lose them on the drain and you have to requalify them at the start of every ball. And while you're in the playfield multiplier you can't bring in the other Bond women multipliers you haven't gotten yet. You locked yourself into whatever you choose when you hit that button. There's a lot of strategy.

Nate: Before I start a mode or a multiball, I want to use my multiplier. Mike, do I have this pinball thing figured out?

Mike: Yes, pretty much, Nate but then what's the most lucrative time to invoke that playfield multiplier and how far do you want to push it by building up more of the multipliers before you activate it while you're risking losing the balls or something like that.

Nate: Before the super jackpot, Mike am I right?

Mike: [laughs] May or may not be the best time and the more playfield-- the more that you build up before you do it, the longer it will last. It's really in your best interest to try to max it out to get the 007 scoring before you activate it because you'll also get the longest time period of use.

George: There's actually a ton of strategy related to that. I know we're not down the road enough to say okay, this is the definitive, this is the best way to do this.

Nate: The Meta is not set.

George: The Meta application. There's a couple of other interesting things about this playfield. As I started doing this and I try really hard to very selectively, all designers inherently there's things you do. When you've done 20 Pinball machines like I have, you end up with signatures. Signature things you do, signature events et cetera and it's really hard to not get yourself in a rut of where this one is just like something else you did. When I sat down to lay this out, I had a lot of guys that I had hinted at.

I hinted, "You guys are going to see a game from me before the year's out." A bunch of these guys reached out and said, "Man, I can't wait for another two-flipper game like *Deadpool* and surprise, surprise. This is my first three-flipper design since my original design at my original pinball design I ever did which was *Corvette*. Three-flipper game. This is a three-flipper game for me which is a little bit out of the



ordinary. It is very similar to *Corvette* in the flipper layout in that upper flipper hits a ramp and an orbit at the top.

And that ramp is interesting because Gary Stern's always telling me that when we do features that are unique to an upper flipper, a novice never sees them because novices struggle with upper [crosstalk]

Nate: The timing and it's a difficult shot.

George: Very hard. I did a ramp that I call it a combination ramp because you can hit it from the front and from the upper flipper. And by the way, this is not the easiest shooting playfield that I've ever designed. There are a couple of key shots on the tips of the flipper. It's like the left side of the game is what we would call the easy set and the bird one MultiBall. Bird one is interesting. The rocket base, there's three drop targets guarding the rocket. When you take those down, they light locks, and on the premium and the limited edition a diverter opens.

You can then load balls into a physical ball lock behind the rocket. The balls get shot up through the rocket gantry and they drain down this cool little spiral ramp to the lock. Then the lock feeds that upper flipper on the way out, if you can do it. It's a tough shot. The easy part to a novice is knocking down those targets and locking the balls and starting the MultiBall. The hard part is there are seven standup targets surrounding the rocket and each one of those spell Spectre. It's a Specter spell out, if you will.

The Spectre spell out is also represented on the back panel. Every time you hit those targets you collect a letter and they essentially act as a multiplier on your jackpot values once you start that mode. The reality is that there's a couple of targets that are behind the rocket. The only way that you can shoot them is by rattling around by making a shot and it's doable. It's just not an easy "I'm just going to hit the target."

Nate: Each target is tied to one of the letters on the back box. You can't just hit a random target.

George: That's correct. One of the targets, the beginning S target, is literally facing away from you. [laughs] It can be done and you can enter the shot on either side of the rocket if you take the drop targets down. It rattles around and there sometimes it does a really cool thing where it's just right. It whips around the rocket and back out onto the playfield.

Nate: Nice. I don't want to say this looks like a game that could have been made back at a company where you might have made *Corvette*

[laughter]

but it has that feel where there's a lot of toys on this game. There's a lot going on here.



George: There are a lot of toys in the game. The Premium and the Limited Editions for sure are loaded. You know what the Pro has-- it's got the rocket base. It's got the DB5. It's got the drop targets. It's got all of the playfield interactive features with the exception of the jet pack. What it's missing is some of the decorative features. It doesn't have the underwater dudes. It doesn't have the physical three-dimensional molded dragon tank but in terms of how it plays, it's the same identical board, identical shots.

The kinetics are the same because the targets are all the same. It's got drop targets. The one thing-- that center shot that either diverts into the gantry or whips around, the biggest single difference in the Pro is that that shot just flows around to the orbit and the MultiBall is started live as opposed to stopping it.

Nate: With the physical ball lock there.

George: There's one other thing we haven't talked about and I just thought of, it's on both playfields is the up post that stops the ball in the in lane leading to the right flipper which allows us to stage and present modes.

Nate: Similar to say *Jurassic Park* on the left side.

George: Correct.

Nate: Mike, when you see a playfield or a game coming at you that has more toys to it maybe this one seemingly does, does that open up rule set ideas to you or is that caused problems-- What's your thoughts on that?

Mike: Oh, it absolutely does. When I saw the design for the first time I really got excited about what can I help design with these physical items in regards to rules. How can I incorporate them into the rule sets to make something really compelling and fun and also have that wow factor. Just a visual eye candy of like, "Oh, that's cool. I want to do that," if you're watching somebody else set that stuff up. It absolutely inspires rule ideas.

George: For advanced guys it's combo king heaven.

Nate: There's a lot of inlane-- there's a lot of inserts here. Excuse me, did you design the game with the inserts or were you adding them as the rules were coming to mind?

George: The inserts were absolutely driven by the notion of villains.

Nate: The story stuff.

George: Villains henchmen and Bond women. Then of course, if you're compelled to six villains, six henchmen, six Bond women, then you're also compelled to represent six films.



Nate: And six weapons.

George: [laughs] Right. Gadgets and weapons which we haven't touched on yet play a role. The area the DB5 is in represents Q branch where Bond goes to get his gadgets. We've got a lot of the interesting film sequences where Bond is acting like a 10-year-old and Q is telling him not to fiddle with the knobs. We have all that stuff in the game. You go to Q branch to collect your gadgets. We distinguish between gadgets and weapons. The Spectre guys get weapons and so you have the Spectre that a representative thing from each of the films.

Dr. No, we decided that since we already had the dragon tank on the playfield, the weapon of choice was going to be the tarantula.

[laughter] There's a really cool-- Chuck and his crew have taken advantage of that tarantula scene in *Dr. No* and done some cool stuff with it. In *Thunderball*, there's the sharks and as this, of course, Oddjob's hat plays a role, lots of cool stuff relative to gadgets and weapons.

Nate: It's a packed-looking game for sure. Sorry, Mike go ahead.

Mike: Speaking of the topic of the lot of inserts, I'm a big proponent of having a lot of inserts that give me the information I need on the playfield because that's where my eyes are the entire time that I'm playing. Seldom do I get to look up unless the ball's being held for presentation because I don't want to lose the ball so I'm always watching the playfield. The more information I have at my disposal right there under the glass, the better.

George: One thing we did is we color-coded the inserts and all the films so you'll see that all the *Dr. No* stuff is yellow, all the from *From Russia with Love* stuff is red, think the *Thunderball* stuff is orange, the *Goldfinger* stuff is like an amber gold, it lights up that way. We color coded all that stuff. We talk about McCarthy's artwork and mostly things like the cabinets and backglasses and stuff are all McCarthy right, with Kevin adjusting. Kevin's work on this can't be unmentioned because one of the things that he had to do is some of the original art on this exists in the state of the art of technology from 1965.

Meaning that somebody scanned a poster and that's what you get.

Nate: There's a lot of clean up involved in those.

George: Oh, my God, and paint overs and clean up all the characters on the playfield were painted by Kevin. A, we needed a consistent look, some of those images existed as black and white photos, some of those images existed as bad images, so Kevin had to take and make everything look like it belonged in the same world. Then of course, none of the gadgets existed as paintings so he created all those paintings, same thing with the weapons. It was a question of it was a fine line to walk because we had a lot of limitations on what we could create from scratch, what we could not.



It was a fine line to walk. I'll tell you it's all due respect and credit to Frank McCarthy who was an incredible illustrator, did amazing work. Man, Kevin had to take that stuff, tie it all together, clean it up, fit it, composite it, extend where it needed to be to get to where we are and that *Thunderball* package is my favorite, and of course, LEs unless-- I won't get any discount on an LE, and on this one I might just have to do it.

Nate: I really, really like the artistic choice with the different models to theme them as the movie title. I imagine there had to have been some sort of conversation and maybe argument involved, you're not putting a 007 logo or the James Bond name on the front of the game. I mean the front below the cash box has a 007 but to do the back glass is just the move [crosstalk] big discussion.

George: The words "James Bond" appear in one place on the game and I think it's on the left side plastic on the bottom arch it says "James Bond". [laughs]

Nate: Some of the movie posters I think it's in there.

George: Right, and of course the movie posters.

Mike: Maybe the rule code I can't even remember if we put it on the rule code now [crosstalk].

George: I don't know.

Mike: We might have just put 007.

George: Yes, 007 is used a lot, but it's appropriate. I think that as much work as it's been, it's been a ton of work, the amount of iteration to get to something that was acceptable and acceptable to both sides, to both partners, us and the brand partner, the amount of iteration has been incredible. It's probably the most I've seen in any of the products I've been associated with.

Nate: They're very protective of all their [crosstalk].

George: They are and they have a right to be, it's like I'll tell you that the impact of those films when I was a little kid, whether or not I don't know what the numbers say, but I'll tell you that being a 10-year-old and discovering *James Bond* was the equivalent to being a 10-year-old-- Had I been a 10-year-old in 1977 which I wasn't and *Star Wars* came out, it had that level of impact in 1965 in my life. When I went to school the next day, guys had the little Corgi DB5, I had for Christmas. I asked for and got the James Bond attaché case which I wish I still had because it's probably worth a fortune.

[laughs]

I'm going to hint at something so if you're an Insider Connected guy, you're connected, there's a bunch of secret missions that you'll discover—I'm not gonna tell



you what they are. You'll discover, spill over into Insider and make Insider interact with the game in new ways. That'll be a lot of fun for people to mess with.

Nate: I think we need to also dive into the fact that beyond these three cornerstone games you guys are releasing a fourth game at the same time, it's very interesting, it's very exciting.

George: Oh, yes and this one will floor all your listeners. Mr. Keith Elwin has designed a fourth model of *James Bond* and it's what we call the 60th-Anniversary Edition. His game covers all of the actors that have played the role and all of the films so I believe it's 25 films. His game spans the 25 films and his game is very different. I think it's limited to 500 units and it's a single-level playfield, like old school. It's got reels in the back box. Yes, you heard me right, it's got reels in the back box. Programmed by Mark Penacho who goes back to the Williams Electronics days.

One incredibly talented high technology guy that very impactful in everything he's touched at Stern since he's been with us. He raised his hand said, "I really want to do this." Elwin did an amazing-- It's not what I did with *Beatles* where I took *Sea Witch* which and updated it and cleaned up the shots and all that stuff. It's not like that it's a from-scratch Keith Elwin single-level playfield that is built around all standard pinball things. It's got spinners. One of the coolest thing it's got, is it's got a three-dimensional molded odd job hat in a spinner very similar to what we've done on a variety of games with a post.

Nate: Like a tesseract. That's what I choose to think of.

George: Exactly, like a tesseract. One of the things is it does have a display it's got the small display from the home editions and that display is actually flat on the playfield or facing the player on the playfield. Everything else is there are no ramps it's just all shots, but man, has he done a job with the shots! You're talking about a guy that he spent so many years having to play that old-school stuff in the tournaments.

Nate: Oh, the classic PAPA tournaments, the classic divisions.

George: Yes, so he understands the kinetics of those games really well and so he said, "Yes, I'd love to do it."

Nate: Oh, interesting.

George: Yes. They did some fun stuff-- so imagine that the (score) reels are situated where you would expect, where the LCD sits in the backbox and on either side of the speakers. In that panel, with the real mech, there's a bunch of old school, the ghosted images for game over and all that stuff, they're all back there. Very, very cool. I think that game comes with a topper and it's a single-level playfield but it's a very premium game and it's going to be a very special game.



He's got a shot I've never seen before, *ever*, and I don't know where he came up with this. It works really well. It's got drop targets, it's got an inline set, it's got a traditional set, a for bank. I think it's got, what is it? Three spinners, Mike?

Mike: Four spinners.

George: Four spinners. It's got four spinners, it's got the spinning Oddjob hat thing, it's got-

Mike: A couple of saucers.

George: -a couple of saucers. It's got a trapped newton ball.

Mike: It's a lot of fun to shoot it.

George: Yes, it's got the kitchen sink for up for a single-level playfield I should say.

Nate: From a business side of things do you see this as something like okay, we had this opportunity Keith wanted to do it, it's great, it's special. We just forced the hand of all our mega collectors to maybe buy two games? Is this something that could happen again, is this something you see as maybe Keith doing?

George: Maybe, we'd love to see how we do with it, right? Every once in a while, the beauty of where we are business-wise is that we can try strange stuff. We're not hand to mouth like our beginnings and so we can try different things. This also, by the way, the two distinct game thing also lends itself to we're going to do something interesting Insider Connected stuff where progress or things you do in one with a cornerstone open things up in Keith's game and things you do in Keith's game open stuff up in my game.

Even though they're going to be hard to find because when you're talking about 500 games for his game, they're going to be hard to find, they're going to be in somebody's house but it's okay. We thought it would be fun. Certainly, for the people that own his game, they'll have access to some of mine. If somebody buys both that'd be amazing but I don't know if that's an expectation. I don't know if that's my expectation.

Nate: I wouldn't think it's an expectation, but I think we have rabid pinball collectors out there who are going to-- especially with a theme like James Bond, I think it'd be exciting for the collectors out there.

George: Yes. The art on his game is all 25 films are represented with their film posters on the sides of the game, on the playfield every actor that's played Bond, Connery, Pierce Brosnan, George Lazenby, of course, Daniel Craig, Roger Moore, they're all represented on the playfield. Then there's elements-- he's got villains from each of the Bonds and he's got game features from each of the Bonds. His gadgets and his weapons and stuff work differently than mine but he's basically picked a representative device from each.



Like where I use the films he used the Bonds. He said, "I need a Roger thing, I need a Daniel thing, I need a Sean thing. I need a George thing."

Nate: Does this double the work for your team on some level?

George: It's two teams. I'd say the art team, oh man, those poor guys, they have really-- Kevin was the project artist on both products so he's done two distinct *James Bond* playfields. In addition to that, Greg Freres, Steve Martin, Justin Frait have been incredible in the things that have been asked of them in terms of just how much support, the levels of support, printing challenges because of some of this old content. It's just been crazy. Of course, you can't build a *James Bond* game without the 007 theme.

Even though I played the game with nothing but the 007 theme for a long time, I could hear that thing in my sleep.

Nate: I'm sure.

George: We have music from a bunch of the different films. I wish I could have highlighted a game as *Goldfinger* and I still hope, I wish no promises but if the product is very successful maybe down the road there's some *Goldfinger* implementation of some sort. I think it's one of the strongest films and so--

Mike: I would agree with that too. It's probably my favorite of the six.

George: *Goldfinger* and *Thunderball* to me were my favorites. There were certainly elements in *You Only Live Twice* and *Dr. No*, I liked the law as you have to put *Dr. No* in context to say the first film. Nobody knows who this guy is, nobody understands this and they themselves the filmmakers were figuring it out. Some of the things that they hinted at or began exploring in *Dr. No* got extended into the franchise. They are still in the pantheon of Bond but they began there. In every situation, there's the evil villain's lair, which *Austin Powers* really went to town on and there's the world held hostage.

The guy, of course, the villain, those original villains for the most part in *Dr. No*, *Goldfinger*, Largo, and one of the Blofelds, are basically, those are villains you care about. Those are villains that-- okay, I give a damn about. It's like you got to make a villain that means something, otherwise-- if you don't care about your villain, you don't have anything. Meaning that if he's not impactful, scary, weird or something, you don't have anything.

Nate: Do you guys find it difficult on any level to capture this Sean Connery James Bond of the 1960s and '70s here in 2022 as the world is maybe slightly different in their tastes and acceptance of certain themes?

George: Absolutely. That was one of the most controversial things we had to deal with. That is the sensibilities of our time are different than the sensibilities of 1963. I think that and yet you have to be true to the brand, you have to be true to the



character that Ian Fleming created and that the filmmakers extended. You have to be true to the character but you have to be respectful of the time we live in. Yes, it was a challenge, it was a tightrope. I'll tell you this, I think when we're all said and done, I will be proud of the game. I'll also tell you that was a tremendous amount of work.

Nate: I believe that bit.

Mike: I will second that, I will second George's statement verbatim, I totally agree.

Nate: That's great. I'm really looking forward to this game, I just think it has a great vibe, it has a great look, it looks packed. I love seeing games when I first images and there's just so much going on to digest. You're going to keep coming back to it and I look forward to seeing where you guys are taking it. Any last thoughts on the James Bond games before we wrap up this episode?

George: *Licensed to thrill. 007 Licensed to Thrill.*

Nate: There you go. Hey, George though, do you want to design another game?

George: [laughs] Not right now, Nate.

Nate: No?

George: I want to take the winter off is what I want to do.

Nate: All righty.

Mike: I'll say that I want to work on another game with George so I hope that answer becomes yes when he gets some time away after this one is done.

Nate: Love it.

George: In November I hope to not be doing anything. [laughs] Still, I want to go hang out in a ski chalet for three months.

Nate: Absolutely. Winter's coming as they say on another game.

George: Yes, winter is definitely coming.

Mike: George, with the hours you've had to put in on this one I'd say you've more than earned that ski vacation, that's for sure.

George: Man, thanks, Mike. Honestly, the whole team, the thing we didn't touch on which we should make sure we know and that is that the team had a pivot. The team pivoted beautifully. The team had a pivot. When you get a new designer and all the work, whatever work had been done, whatever planning you were doing to do whatever. Here comes the new guy and he cans everything, which is what I did. The team had a pivot and I can't say enough of Lonnie, Mike, John Rotharmel who was the lead mechanical engineer. At the end there, Tom Kopera jumped in on a bunch



of stuff. Of course, Kevin and Greg, Steven Martin, Justin Frait, all those guys, Jerry Thompson, Ken Hale, and then of course Chuck Ernst and all of his animators, all those guys. They created environments, they created animations. The animations that Chuck and his team created were so good that the licensor said to me, "Which movie did this come from?" [laughs]

Nate: That's great.

George: I was like, "Oh no, we made that." [laughs] Right?

Nate: That's high praise.

George: He's, "I don't remember this in the film. [laughs] Right?" Right. You don't remember it in the film because it's not in the film.

Mike: I will say also this is the fifth game that Lonnie and I are tag teaming together.

George: Right.

Nate: Designing rules. I love working on games with him because we have such a great collaborative relationship. I think his strength and my strength complement each other greatly. We've learned a lot from each other in the past five and a half-plus years that we've been working together on games.

George: Yes. A couple of the games these guys worked on are considered classics today. Things like *Guardians of the Galaxy* and *Stranger Things* are really sought-after games and a lot of that is that Lonnie and Mike alchemy.

Nate: Yes. It's absolutely true. I think it's one of the strengths of the company as the company's grown. You've assembled this really amazing talented group and they work together well. Then when they work in different settings, different sets of groups, there's this cool symbiotic thing it's you're pulling and teaching and learning. I think Keith has mentioned that in one of the shows we did when he switched some of the guys he worked with, it was refreshing. Like, oh, there's these new things that pop up and you play off of each other. I think that's a major strength of the company at this point.

Mike: I would say that from day one when George came to me with the idea of coming to work at the Stern which is where I wanted to work at for more than a decade. He told me, "Here's what I want to hire you for," but he absolutely made it pretty clear that there was plenty of room for growth and to find a path there. He's been so encouraging, not just with me, but with everybody in the department. I think that's kind of the magic. He gave me a lot of room to find my path and then I figured out how to work very well with the various leads, which made my role-- My role has evolved probably more than anybody's in the last five years at Stern. They constantly throw new hats at me, but it's a testament to what George encourages like, "Find your way and I'll encourage you if you do well." If you don't do well, he'll steer you in a direction where he thinks you'll do well. I wouldn't have been able to do that if he



hadn't had that kind of faith and trust like, "Go find your way and help us make more these games be as best as they can be."

George: I think you gotta-- When this is all said and done and people ask me all the time like, "What are you most proud of?" Recently, it's you have to look at sort of the arc of a career and I'm definitely proud of the games, but I'm really proud of the studio. I'm really proud of the culture of the studio, and I think that I'm blessed that talented people want to come and work here and people-- I think my job is to foster this talent, right? It's to let these guys be who they are.

And I've told what Mike said, I've said to many people. If you want to get into a position that you're not, I'm going to do what I can to give you those shots and I'll be very clear with you. If you're successful, I'll empower you and if you're not, I'm going to try to help you find what I think is the best fit." That's the reality of managing a team, right? Everybody likes to focus on the game designer, but the reality is that these games are not made by one guy.

Nate: No.

George: They're not in any way, shape, or form. My strength is in all the people that collaborated with me and that's the word, right? It's not me, me, me. It's that collaboration. Why wouldn't you let talented people to be who they are and express their talent? Right?

Nate: Absolutely. It certainly comes out in the final product and it's an inspired-looking game. I think you're right. Can't be said enough, how many people it takes to get one of these amazing games out to the world looking forward for this one.

George: Thanks, man.

Nate: Thank you so much, guys. I appreciate it, guys. We'll talk to you again in the near future, hopefully.

George: See you soon.

Mike: Thank you, Nate.

George: Bye.

[music]

Nate: That's George Gomez, that's Mike Vinikour. I'm Nate Shivers. Really appreciate you listening to the show. Excited to see some new pinball machines rolling off the line. Can't wait to play them. Until next time, hope everyone is taking care of themselves playing lots of pinball. See ya.

[00:46:24] [END OF AUDIO]