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MMC informational interview

The career path that I am looking to enter is video game development. The company that I have been wanting to work at since I decided on this career path is NetherRealm Studios. NetherRealm Studios are the creators of award winning fighting games such as *Mortal Kombat* and *Injustice*. These are two of my favorite games and it was my dream to be one of the people behind them. As soon as I heard about the informational interview, I knew that I wanted to interview someone from there. Luckily, through LinkedIn, Alumnifire, and some help, I got a phone interview with a NetherRealm employee. The person that I got to interview is Daniel Carey, who is an animator. He is new at NetherRealm, only working there for three months. The fact that he has experience in other companies as well as recent experience in job searching in the profession.

The first thing we talked about is his current job. Since he just joined, the only thing Daniel has worked on is downloadable content for *Mortal Kombat 11*. The main project that he has worked on is *The Terminator* downloadable character on *Mortal Kombat*. The specific type of animation that he works on is something called idle animation. Idle animation is how the character moves when the player is not moving them or moving them slightly. For example, if a character wearing a cape is jumping, then the cape should not stay still. It will instead follow him

up and down. I asked him how to tell a good animation from a bad one. His response was that if you do not notice it, then its perfect, because it should be seamless. If you notice it, it is likely because it is not natural. The next question that I asked is how he chooses or is assigned his next animation to work on. Daniel answered by telling me that he does not get to choose and that it is assigned based on what is the current priority for the company. For example, if a character is going to soon be announced or released, then all of the employees work on different aspects of that character.

The next subject we talked about is some of Daniel's preferred methods for animation. At NetherRealm studios, they use motion capture for most, if not all animation. Motion capture is when a person dressed in a suit that is made to track every movement, does an action, and the action is recorded in a program to be added to the animation. The other main method for animation is free form animation. Free form animation is when you start from scratch and program every movement of a character through code. This is completed through programs such as *Blender* or *Maya*. Free form animation, specifically in *Maya* is Daniel's preferred way to program animation. We then discussed some of the other companies and projects that Daniel has worked on. His favorite animation he has ever worked with was part of his interview for a company called *343*, who created the video game series *Halo*. As part of a test in the interview, Daniel had to animate using characters from the *Halo* series. Daniel chose to animate an alien character known as a Jackal jumping from a spaceship. This particular animation can be seen on his demo reel. Although he did not end up getting that job, he still enjoyed working with characters from one of his favorite games and believes that the animation is the best that he has done so far.

Finally, we talked about the industry itself. A normal day at work at the three companies Daniel has worked at consists of going to work, checking his email for any important changes or work that is needed, then working on those. If there are no emails, then he works on whatever he was the day before. The video game industry is currently notorious for being one of the worst industries to work in. There is a very high burnout rate. This is because in many companies, they hire people to make one specific game. After this game, the company often lets go of the employees that were hired for this game. The biggest issue is that it is known as the worst profession when it comes to overtime. Right before a game comes out, many employees are forced to work overtime and weekends that are badly paid. This is an issue with the entire industry because customers are expecting new, innovative, and bigger games every time a game comes out. The problem with this is that the same customers expect these games to come out quickly. This means the employees of these companies are forced to work longer and harder. This causes a strain between outside family and friends, as the employees are forced to work longer for terrible pay. It is an awful cycle. Daniel once had to work twelve hours every day for three months straight. Some of his coworkers had to do the same but for seven days a week. Most employees of this industry do not last in it longer than five years. Another issue with the industry, mainly in animation, is employers have a hard time trusting animators. Many people use animation in video games as a step to becoming an animator for a movie company. Employers for the video game industry want people who want to work in video games, not to use it as a step to a different industry. Therefore, many employers have a hard time trusting that

animators are at the company for the right reasons. There have been many times that companies ruin an employee's life and career without caring. *Blizzard*, a company known for making games such as *Starcraft* and *World of Warcraft* recently let go of thousands of employees without a warning. The most infamous example is *Telltale Games*. They are famous for games such as *The Walking Dead* and *Game of Thrones*. They shut down the entire company without warning. This left all of their employees with no severance, no job, and no insurance. Thousands of employees and their families were affected by this. An issue that I have with the profession, that not many do, is that in bigger companies, you are picked to work on only a piece of a single part of the game. This is an issue to me because I genuinely enjoy every part of making a video game. If I work for a smaller company where I can work on more parts of a game, I am not guaranteed a specific salary and it all depends on how the game does. Working in a small group or by myself, is that there would be no pay until the game is finished being developed. If the video game fails, then all of the time and work I put into it, will be for nothing. This made me rethink my future career plans.

I learned much about the industry and myself through this interview. I learned that the company I dreamed of working for since I began following this path, is no longer where I see myself later in life. I am thinking of abandoning my dream of working in the video game industry, and instead maybe work in animation. It is more secure, better paying, and offers employees the chance to grow inside of the company. Then maybe I can work on my own video games in my spare time. Allowing me to do what I love, but in a safe and secure environment that allows me to have an amazing and long career, while still giving me a chance to do what I

love. I am very thankful for the insight that this interview gave me, and to Daniel for giving me information on every aspect of the profession.