

## Taking Chances

There exist some names that deserve not to be spoken. Names that, upon being recalled in even the quietest of utterances, instill a dreaded and base fear within the soul. Names of people, names of places...

Of corporations.

And once, I was foolish enough to invoke the presence of such a name. A name that meant twice as much for my father, than it did for me.

My own inquiries began innocently enough, planted from the seed of a singular question that had been waiting in my mind for an answer. Yet when I came to his office in search of ideas for my class essay, I found more answers than I expected. "Hey buddy boy!" He'd said cheerily from behind his wall of computer monitors, using one of many "dad-isms" from the hive-mind of phrases most fathers seemed to hold in common. His left hand sat atop a black mouse pad, placed over a foam protrusion that served as a wrist-rest, and he scooted his chair out to glance over with a smile at the ready. "Whatcha doin'?"

My dad, you see, currently leads the Research and Development department of a video game company, Kabam; the creators of a mobile game of some good fame, Marvel Contest of Champions. In the body of the company, he serves as the mind; a central unit necessary in gathering knowledge, exploring that which is and isn't possible, to rally the hands and feet of development into action. This was something clear to me, easy to understand. Yet there was much that lingered in the past, much that was rarely spoken of.

On an ordinary day, I might've asked my usual round of *how's work going? Any new projects? Are you actually gonna tell your buddies to make an Avatar the Last Airbender phone game, since that would be really cool?* On that day, however, I had no interest in tarrying. My

question came quick, fast; almost without introspection, even if I knew the weight that it held.

“Dad? What was it like working at... EA?”

And it was then, there, upon mumbling the name of that most cursed company. A name that, in a better world, might've gone unsaid.

In the world of video game companies, there exists an unholy triumvirate of companies that, if ever aligned in some great and terrible matrimony, could rend the world's gamers bereft of their humility and their cash. These companies are Ubisoft, Activision, and, perhaps the greatest and most terrible of them all, EA: creators of the Sims, of every sports game known to man, and many other video games. Long ago, my father worked at that company.

The air changed at once, from moist spring air to a terrible chill; or it seemed to, though it might've just been the fact that my mom closed a nearby window and set the house's temperature to sixty-six degrees as usual.

Dad's chair creaked, from the effort of an additional scoot forward to fully meet my gaze. “Boy! We do not speak of them. Not here.”

“I'm just doing something for school where we have to, like, write about someone we know, Dad. I can exaggerate what happened, if that's any comfort.”

“Legends say that every time someone says the name of Electronic Arts Incorporated, a programmer has to work overtime. *Unpaid.*”

“I mean...” I shifted on my feet. “Maybe. But if you tell me about what it was like to work at – that company, then I could get a cool grade in Creative Nonfiction if I write it decently enough.”

He turned his gaze to the window. The smile on his face had become a distant memory. “2005. When you were naught but a wee bairn.”

“A 'wee bairn?’”

“Yup. Only two. We called it the 'Crunch Time' era.”

He did speak of his time in those days, though not in its entirety; in fact, there was just enough left unsaid, for my imagination to do a good amount of work. And work it did...

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I imagined it rather dramatically, inflating up aspects in my mind, and went all the way back to EA's California in 2005. Incandescent filaments, coursing like veins through the ceiling and lighting the office in a stark, unnatural shade of white. Cubicles stretching out, nearly as far as the eye can see, like honeycombs in a hive buzzing with computer screens instead of bees. And in one of those cubicles was my dad; working through the late hours of the night, and intently focused on the computer screen, right hand positioned beside a cup of black coffee.

Then a silhouette came over the screen, darkening the room, as a voice spoke my dad's name. "Zay."

My dad muttered an obligatory response: "Hey!" Not rudely; moreso the type of response that came from attention being focused elsewhere. My dad is a nice guy, and it isn't likely that he'd dismiss someone's words so quickly; but in 2005, under the yoke of EA, every one of its employees surely felt a more stressful culture, with too much to focus on, and too little time to do it all properly.

"It's coming, Zay. The revolution. And don't talk back," the man hissed, casting a wild-eyed gaze about the cubicle. His clothes and his very face held no form in my mind, save the typical garb of an early 2000s programmer. "They might be listening."

He continued on in a low voice. "For too long, these invisible overlords have ruled over us. Cutting our breaks, making us work far longer than we ever should've had any right to work."

"Uh-huh."

“I got kids, you know? There isn’t any time to be sleeping in the office; no time to be here for *a hundred hours a week*. But they make us do it anyways. Because they’re cruel, sick bastards pulling the strings up there, and the public doesn’t even know a damned thing about what we have to... well, I don’t know about you, but I’m not taking it anymore.”

He stepped forward, face still shrouded and away from the light of my dad’s computer. “We’re making a move against the company. I’ve got plenty of people who’ll speak out. If we all come forward, talk about what they’ve been doing here?”

He let out a dark chuckle. “They’ll be *done*. Pushed so hard into a corner, they won’t have any choice other than giving us what we deserve. And you can join us, if you want. I can tell you right now, this is going to go our way this time.”

“Right.” My dad only gave a nod. Hearing, yet not entirely listening, to the words of his coworker.

“Right,” the programmer repeated. “You don’t want to do it, do you? Take the last step?”

He moved out of the cubicle. “That’s fine. I get it... you think they’ll do something if we blow the whistle. That’s totally alright. I just figured I’d let you know. Just in case, right?”

And the man left, but not before hesitating in the doorframe. “The time will come when you’re going to wish you’d picked a side. The big man vs. the little man, David vs. Goliath, whatever you want to call it. We really are making a move against the company, Zay. It’s like I said earlier, I’ve got plenty of people, up in arms, ready to go. And we’re going to file a class action lawsuit, something you could miss out on if we really pull this through. But if you don’t want to join the rest of us now...”

He shrugged. “Well, I guess that’s your choice.”

And that was how I imagined it had all played out; an opportunity, perhaps heard, but missed all the same.

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“Jaiden?” The 2022, current-time version of my dad said, calling me forth from memories crafted by imagination. I blinked myself out of a mildly zoned out state. “Huh?”

“Did you catch everything?”

“Yeah. I did.” I’d been leaning against the wall, but straightened my back and stood up fully. I’d been following along with everything he’d said, filling in some of the blanks with imaginary encounters that may or may not have happened, but upon hearing something that he’d ended his explanation with, I was taken aback.

“Fourteen *million* dollars?” I stammered. “They sued EA in a class action lawsuit for fourteen million dollars and *won*?”

It would’ve been an understatement to say that he didn’t seem very upset about the whole thing. His tone held the same cadence that one might expect from someone explaining what they’d eaten on a Saturday morning. “Yup.”

“And you didn’t even know that was happening at the time? How did you miss that?”

“I didn’t know about any of it until later. And by then, I’d missed my chance to get any part of the distribution.”

“Well that blows.” I crossed my arms. “And EA basically stole your name in response. ‘Zaitrarrío Trimble,’ and ‘Zaitrarrío Nanale.’ They’re in one of those Sims games, right?”

He seemed more perturbed at that comment than any of the other ones. “They are. And they didn’t credit me or *anything*.”

“Well...” I tried to think of something else to add. “Was there anything you learned, maybe?”

He thought about it for a moment. “If you put people under pressure and don’t release the steam,” he started, “you’re gonna have trouble. But when you bring a group of creatives together and give them space to create, with a vision to focus them... you can do some really cool shit.” He grinned. “And that’s why I just might sue Kabam.”

“Really?” By that point, I wasn’t even surprised. Seemingly every video game company has problems with overworking and generally treating their employees unfairly, so hearing that the current one was having problems of their own was more disappointing than shocking.

“What’d they do?”

“There’s someone else leaving Kabam, someone who’s making a case for gender bias. Also, there’s only three black people in the entire company. That makes for a lack of support, and shifting expectations held against the performance of my team. So Kabam had better lawyer up soon.”

I didn’t know the full details of what it was like to sue a massive, billion-dollar corporation. If anything, it seemed daunting to me, if not downright impossible. But I had the sense that this time, my dad was going to take the chance, and come out on top. And hopefully, they wouldn’t steal his name either.

I grinned back. “You get ‘em, Dad.”