

The Snood dude: A professor's flirtation with fame

By Jordan Alexander
STAFF WRITER

Beginning as the product of Associate Professor of Geology Dave Dobson's grad-school hobby, the computer game Snood is now considered one of the most addicting and recognizable computer games in history.

Dobson, who originally wrote the program as a gift for his wife, now has the claim to fame for creating the "puzzle game" that many Internet gamers and Guilford students are self-professed addicts of.

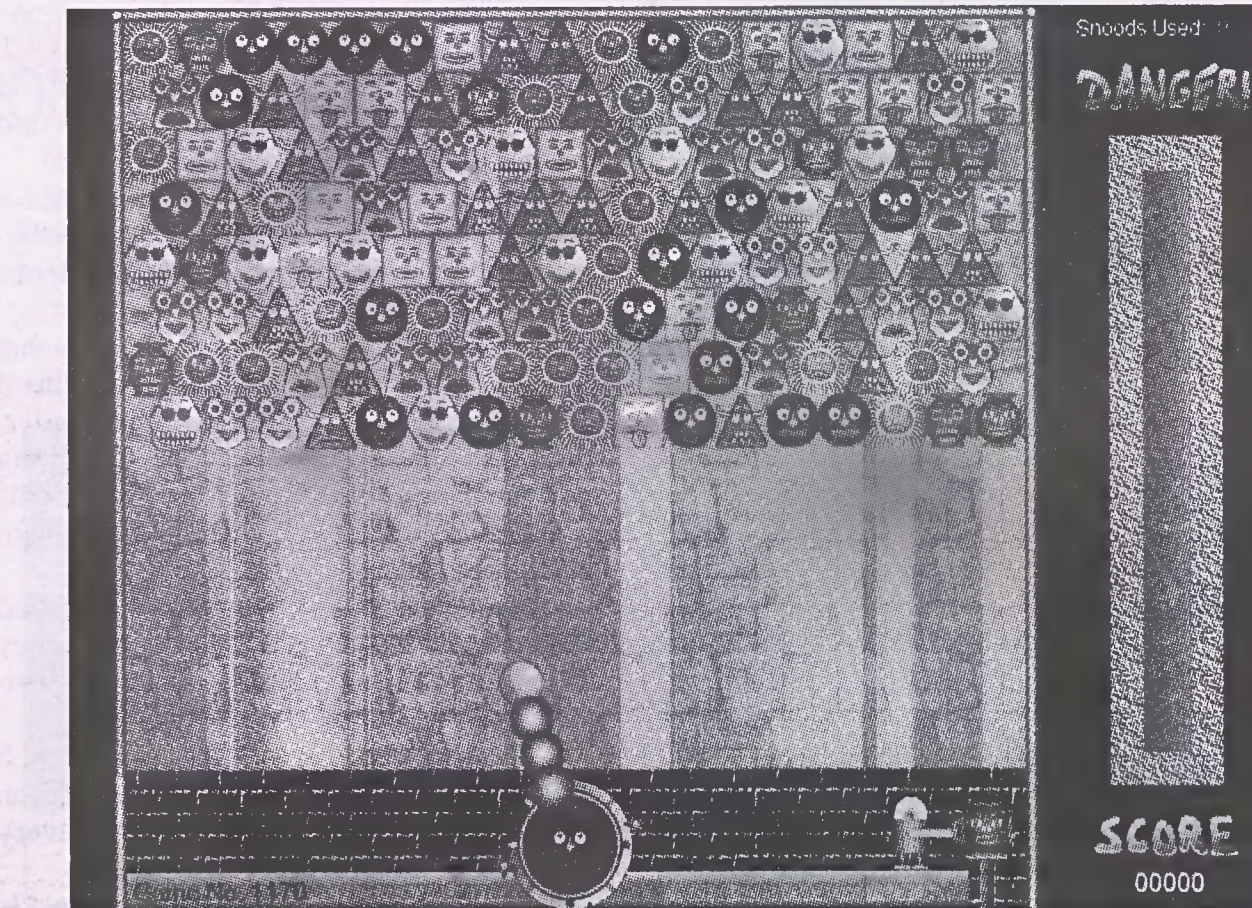
Usually leaning to more extreme gaming styles like first-person shooters or sports games, Dobson considered one reason for the unforeseen success of his less visually capturing Snood.

"There's something really neat about games that are simple to learn and have no time pressure (like Snood, some kinds of solitaire, bowling, pool, etc.) in that they open up games to a broader segment of players. I get a lot of mail saying 'Snood is great! I play with my grandkids and beat them every time.' Pretty cool," explained Dobson on the blog-site costik.com.

One recovering Snood player tried to explain just why Snood is so spellbinding.

"You don't have to be a genius to play Snood - it's simple - but the thing is the game is different every time," said senior Dan Etter. "Plus there is no time limit so it's easy to drop it and go do something, then come back and pick up where you left off."

The premise of the game is simple. Snoods in groups of two or more can be "freed" by shooting them with the same color snood. The user shoots the snood that he has (which is given one at a time, Tetris-style with one visibly waiting) into a cluster and they all fall. When all Snoods are clear you move on to the next level, although with every bad



Snood, a computer game created by Associate Professor of Geology Dave Dobson in 1996. Taking him only four months to finish, it has been an international hit for over a decade.

shot a Danger meter fills up and once it's full the game is lost.

The pre-game instructions explain, "Snood is a puzzle game which emphasizes thought rather than reflexes."

Etter admitted his reactions weren't always the best while playing, but his thoughts were usually superior to most.

"I think the reason I was so good was because I would thread the needle on the bank shots. I just zone out and see the angle," said Etter.

Taking Dobson only four months to finish, Snood was the most popular game he has created thus far. Though this seems like a short time to assemble an entire game, Dobson says it was a materialization of "many years

of messing around with computer gaming."

Dobson recalls being a game fan from an early age, but his real interest was sparked at the age of 14 when his dad brought home a PC.

Dobson's father, also a teacher, owned one of the very first PCs or personal computers, which at the time cost around \$10,000.

"My father had an academic deal worked out with them; he was writing a book about the new computers so we got to have one in our house," said Dobson.

Snood was the actually the third game released by Dobson, the first was an advanced minesweeper type game, and the second was called Centaurian. The latter was based on a popular arcade game at the time (which

Dobson still has in his basement) called Bosconian.

Dobson released his second creation Centaurian on a forum-based site called "Usenet," pulling in around 3,000 dollars, which he used for tuition.

With Snood however, came unforeseen success for Dobson. His brainchild had turned into a nation-wide craze, with college kids playing often enough to practically earn majors in Snood.

One troubled young person even posted a question on Yahoo! Answers which said, "Help! I am addicted to Snood! I can't stop playing! Does anyone know if there is a Snood's Anonymous?" To which they then they added, "I'm going to go play one more and I'll check back with you."

As the Snood players multiplied so did Dobson's paperwork.

"At that time people weren't as keen to use their credit cards online," said Dobson. "I was receiving payments and registrations mostly by mail and I started to get about 33 envelopes a day."

Dobson decided to hire a business partner to handle the registration workload so that he could focus his time on finishing school.

Since Snood, Dobson and his partner have generated several new games including: Snoodoku, Snood Zoo, and Chowder. They are also in the process of creating an iPhone application for Snood and a new game called Snood Poppers.

As anyone would be, Dobson is pleased with Snood's cult status.

"It's pretty cool when you hear a game you created getting mentioned in movies and on television shows like the Sopranos," said Dobson.

Though Dobson will continue to create games in his leisure time, he reassures his students with a smile, "Teaching is most of what I do now."

"Valkyrie" a new masterpiece of suspense

By Robert Kenneth Dator
STAFF WRITER

It is the eve of the Allied invasion. The war is over for Germany. All that remains is the weeping, annihilation and immeasurable suffering - not only for Germany, but for an already ravaged Europe.

Watch closely and listen carefully. "Valkyrie" reveals all through devices of infinite subtlety. As when, in fleeting images, we see Hitler (David Bamber) at lunch with his field staff. There are no vintage wines on the table only tumblers of water. On their plates, mashed potato, carrots and sauerkraut. Mere frames suggest: if this is all that can be had for the Fuehrer, what are civilians eating?

"Valkyrie" employs artful master shots and silky camera blocking that more captivate and amaze when second and third position pull backs admit telling, previously hidden details. But the money is in the bold use of tight, close, framing. Director Bryan Singer and

cinematographer Newton Thomas Sigel achieve a claustrophobic intimacy and a relentless dynamic tension of angst that renders "Valkyrie" not a thriller, but a masterpiece of suspense.

The sumptuous, painterly lighting by Tomoko Shin is utterly natural and eerily warm. The stylish, documentarian cutting by editor John Ottman amplifies Singer's beautifully executed subjective camera technique. "Valkyrie" is all about the eyes: glittering, fox-like and wary in the young men; preoccupied, soul-sick and exhausted in the older men, and men made old too young; a rare film in which we can hear the actors thinking. This fearless gamble puts a human face on those who have been, up to now, one-dimensional monsters.

It is further suffering and death that Col. Claus von Stauffenberg, played with fierce concentration by Tom Cruise, seeks to forestall. As for the co-conspirators, the understated and contained performances of a determined, stellar

cast - famous faces all, immediately familiar if their names elude you - the pressing question they impose is not why they act, only why they waited so long.

The producers of "Valkyrie" would wish us to see these men as patriots. This may be too tall an order for one uncomfortable truth that cannot be evaded: these same men who sought to remove Hitler from power did not stand in the way of his accession to power.

A thinking viewer is ever wary of any film "based on a true story". However, as written, this mature and sophisticated script, by Christopher McQuarrie and Nathan Alexander, offers the finely wrought, haunted expressions of men and women desperate to survive.

Though I fear some will shout, "Nazi apologia", I wager "Valkyrie" will chisel gallows empathy from the flintiest heart. To its enduring credit, this is a serious, thought-provoking film as unexpectedly moving as it is sincere.



Tom Cruise plays Col. Claus von Stauffenberg, a German officer conspiring to kill Hitler during WWII. Faced with this impossible task, it is staying alive that becomes his greatest challenge.

A Must See: "Judgment At Nuremberg" (MGM/UA. 1961, 190 min.) which not only explores the law on trial through those of the Reich's Judges, concluded late in 1948, but leaves no stone unturned

in examining the people and practices of Nazi Germany. This black-and-white landmark film will leave the viewer troubled by writer Abby Mann's genius, painstakingly rendered in shades of gray.