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Designer Interview

Interview with Javy Gwaltney, Associate Editor for *Game Informer*

Javy Gwaltney boasts an impressive resume for being just a few years out of college and in the economic strains of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, from tenure at Winthrop University's Writing Center, a brief time as a community college teacher, to then a daring transition into writing freelance, for magazines like *Playboy* and *Paste*. Indeed, at first glance, he seems to be the exception to the rule that college graduates are all moving back home to live with parents and picking up shifts at retail stores. For those close to graduating and looking to enter the gaming industry, especially as a writer, Javy (pronounced *jay-vee*) stands as a beacon of hope, utilizing hard work, creativity, and enduring determination to get to where he is today: Associate Editor for *Game Informer* magazine, one of the most popular gaming magazines in the United States, with over 6.7 million copies sold nationwide each month. As someone looking to personally fill the kind of shoes he wears, I was lucky enough to meet Javy through a friend of a friend, and he let me pick his brain regarding his writing history, his gaming preferences, and advice he has for hopefuls like me looking to be as lucky as him in the competitive gaming industry.

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**Q: What first interested you in writing about/for video games? Was it you playing video games yourself or a class or coming across video game-related articles?**

**A:** So I got into writing about video games because I wrote about movies and I wrote fiction and a buddy of mine was starting a site and he needed a games editor. He liked me writing for other subjects and knew I played games and that was that.

**Q: As a writer in the video game industry, what do you most prefer to write about? Coverage of video games or conventions? Interviews with game developers? Reviews of gameplay?**

**A:** I like writing features that touch on semi-taboo subjects in the industry, like religion or disability. All of it is pretty great but I think the power to bring about meaningful change or to at least change someone's perceptions of something is in those types of features: investigative journalism and essays, basically.

**Q: As a player of games (which I imagine comes with the territory), what do you most prefer to play? What genres, what consoles, what series? Do you have experience with tabletop games or do you prefer electronic games?**

**A:** I think I like pretty much everything except sports simulation games. First-person shooters, tactical games, narrative-focused games, and role-playing games are my jam. And no, I haven't played any tabletop stuff yet but I hope to soon! It seems fascinating and, of course, we wouldn't have video games without tabletop considering that Dungeons and Dragons forms the backbone for most early text adventures and RPGs.

**Q: When you are planning a piece to write, what's the routine you normally go through? How do you prepare, whether it's an interview or a game review? Do you immerse yourself wholly in the process or are you more relaxed? Describe your creative process.**

**A:** Honestly, it just depends on what the piece is. If it's something [like this essay I wrote for Paste about games and disability](#), I usually spend a day writing up a stream of consciousness sort of draft and then revisit it a couple of times before I send the final version into an editor. That usually takes 2-3 days. For smaller stuff like reviews and previews, those usually don't take too long outside of actually playing the games themselves. Maybe a handful of hours for them each.

**Q: As an Associate Editor with *Game Informer*, you must have taken some great, influential steps to get where you are today. Any advice on how to get a job like yours? Any names to drop or stories of a great experience? What would you recommend to a college graduate, looking to write in the video game industry?**

**A:** Yeah! So, like anybody else who does decently in games writing, I basically worked hard and was fortunate enough to have several people give me chances when they noticed how much effort I was putting into my writing. Editors like Garrett Martin at *Paste* and Mike at *Playboy* are fantastic teachers and not only did they give me a chance to write for them but they also helped shape who I am as a writer. Incredible teachers.

As far as what I recommend to folks who want to do this? Couple of tips:

1.) Don't write for free (unless it's for your own blog). People will try and lure you in with promises of exposure but exposure doesn't pay bills.

2.) Pitch. Pitch all the time. Pitch everyone. Don't give a damn if you get rejected a lot, just keep on pitching. I know countless writers who are more talented than I could ever be but they get so disheartened because an editor rejects their pitches a couple of times. Fight for it if you want it and never stop until they say yes. Getting that first pitch accepted is the hardest thing but once you get past that, it gets easier.

3.) Have a job that lets you support yourself while you write about games or whatever on the side. Freelancing full time is super stressful and the only reason I did it was because I lived in a town where there was no other job opportunities.

**Q: Finally, what's the best part about your work? Do you get to test run the latest and greatest games? Do you get to meet the most prominent figures in the video game world? What's the most rewarding aspect for you?**

**A:** Hey, yeah, to both those things. I've only been at *GI* for a few months but have already met people whose games I've adored for years. It's weird and strange and pretty great. I think the best part of my work is looking forward to being surprised by whatever is around the bend. What great, fantastic games that push envelope—whether it's thematically or technologically—are coming. I love playing a role in discovering them.

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Outside of my interview with Javy, he offers some great tips and insight via his personal blog, [Antagonize the Horn](#). In fact, his latest post complements our exchange well, going through a comprehensive and poignant description of what it is like to dive into freelance writing, complete with how to overcome rejections and pester even the most intimidating names for a consultation. Overall, I feel a little bit of hero worship on my end; as an English Major, with an emphasis in Creative Writing, my dream for the past several years has been to write for or about video games, contributing to story development, plot creation and analysis, and empowering the genre of narrative-centric games, immersing the player beyond graphic pixilation and battle mechanics. I am thoroughly impressed with all Javy has accomplished with his creative writing talent, his investigative smarts and determination, and his willingness to share what he has learned with someone as eager as myself to follow his footsteps. I look forward to getting to

know Javy further, to continue discussing his experiences, and hopefully count him as a friend and connection as I too venture as a writer into the gaming industry.