

Future Imaginary Dialogues: Solomon Enos

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Artist

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Interviewed by Jason Edward Lewis

[pause]

0:00:12 Jason: Good morning, Solomon. It's really a pleasure to be here. I'm amazed that I'm here, and really excited to have this conversation with you. What I'd like is for you to introduce yourself, however you want to sort of situate yourself.

0:00:24 Solomon Enos: Sure. So aloha, Jason. My name is Solomon Enos. I am an artist, illustrator, and a game designer. And that's today. Tomorrow I might be a few other things. The day after that, I might be a few less things. [laughter] But very best way to put it is I'm a shape-shifter, you know? In the most useful sense. [laughter]

0:00:46 Jason: Well I'd like to... Maybe I'll start by following up on that shape-shifting sort of idea. So when you came and spoke to the Skins workshop a couple of days ago actually, which was really fantastic for us and for them, it's one thing that you kept coming back to, this idea of shape-shifting. And actually, one of the interesting things was this kind of idea of long-term shape shifting, right? As humans, as indigenous people, we're involved in this long-term process of shape shifting. Can you talk further on that?

0:01:16 SE: Sure, absolutely. Well, so I've been recently developing a game, as an example, about ending war forever. Period. Evolve beyond it. We're done with it. And I think those are fun things I love to do in the concepts and art and work that I create. Because it's a perennial reminder of how extremely improbable we are, from whatever metric we use. Whether it's traditional or if it's based purely on scientific information. We are really, really unlikely. So I want us to start thinking about how we engage with time in the sense of how many stupid mistakes had to be made to get us to be what we are now. And the whole goal is to stop making stupid mistakes. [laughter] So, we crawled out of the oceans, right? So, it was the idealist that said, "Oh, there's nothing beyond these waves, you fools." And of course... Sorry, it was the cynics who said that, excuse me. It was the cynics that said, "There was nothing beyond these waves." Right? And so it was the idealists that crawled out of those waves. And the whole idea of when we engage in this, of revolutionary ideas. The first idealists are the ones that get gobbled up immediately as the... [laughter] They're like, "Wow, we got legs!" And they get eaten on the shore.

0:02:46 SE: But once we've fattened up enough of those... As enough people have made the foray into new technologies, into new ways of thinking, you fatten those shore birds up. They just say, "Oh, whatever, let the fish come out. [laughter] We lost our tails. We were..." Loving each other is not asking much more. Yeah. And so I'm just really looking at this sense of applying my ancestors' shamanistic algorithmic vision and to decipher the profound wonder and mystery of our realities, to help to translate that. And I think... Which is the reason why I think when I jokingly, when I tell kids, I say, "Hey kids, when you guys go to school, if you wanna be a good artist, show up for every single class except art class."

[laughter]

0:03:42 SE: So, all of those things are telling me like, it's the story, it's not how to draw, it's what you draw. And I think it's our story that got us to where we are and the fact that somebody is sitting and listening to this voice right now means they, themselves, are in this same story. [laughter] And that something about this singularity of a single continuous story makes me, as a native person to Hawaii, want to see real time, the statistical health of all native people everywhere, and then to make that nativeness relative to all humans on Earth, and say, "What is the status of native people? What wisdom do they have to help us to get unstuck right now?" [laughter] "And how can we continue to remind everybody who has teeth, and who has eyeballs, who has noses, every human on Earth, that we don't go too far back before they too were native people to a place." So when we talk about... When I talk about native, or indigenous, or aboriginal, those are degrees of gray, when we talk about how the family tree flows in both directions. [laughter] Right? So somebody's aunts and uncles are really my aunts and uncles.

0:05:20 SE: But I'm seeing a way to map all of this visually through analog and digital means that sings the final story for humanity in such a way that it gives everybody immediate access to empathy for everybody's stories, real time. And I'm thinking about maybe, perhaps, with this idea of the digital applications... So, where we are as an evolutionary being, that there is a collective consciousness that we're on the cusp of.

0:06:00 SE: And I think an amazing community in any one of our communities, whether it was here at Hawaii 500 years ago, or somewhere in a different part of the world, 700 or 1,000 years ago, where there were native people living in harmony with the location, there was a kind of a collective consciousness. There was a way of like, "We better check in with every single hut in this village because all it takes is for one sore tooth. So let's check in with everybody. How is everybody doing?" It makes me think where we are as a species, is that this profound ability to be self-aware. It reminds us that temples and telescopes are both sacred. They're measuring different things though. Just like a thermometer would measure something different from a tape measure. Right? They're both important. [laughter] Both useful tools. But what a telescope was doing is like a laboratory or anything else, it's measuring the degree, the nature of matter.

0:07:16 SE: Ultimately, what a temple of many myriad forms around the world, and sacred sites and holy sites, what they really represent is measuring, understanding, the nature of consciousness, which gets back to something that I think... Summing up all that momentum that got us to where we are as a species, really quite fascinating to think that our technology has surpassed our morality in its contemporary sense. But native cultures, the only way they could have survived was if their morality and their technology was in sync.

0:08:01 Jason: Well, that reminds me of you in one of that interviews I was watching earlier. You say, "Traditional cultures have the most important information for the future." And I think this is related to what you are talking to right now, right?

0:08:11 SE: Yeah.

0:08:11 Jason: So can you just expand? Keep going but expand on that.

0:08:13 SE: Sure, sure. So native cultures have the source code for the futures. Native cultures are like those old drawers that nobody bothers looking. And yet everybody's running around, going crazy, "Where's my keys? Where's my keys?" Well, maybe try ask the people who have lived there for 10,000 years, maybe they have the key to unlock and to get us unstuck. And so it's in best practice thinking about how best to manage your water, how best to manage waste, how best to manage jealousy, how best to manage envy, how best to manage pests, 'cause... [laughter] I include...

0:08:51 Jason: Human and non-human... [chuckle]

0:08:52 SE: Human and non-human weather, internal weather and external weather. People said, "Oh my goodness, my Kamapua'a hours, the male, over creative energy is in me. I better go and stay away from women today." [laughter] As an example, right? And that a man or a woman could feel that. Women could say, "Oh, I actually just really wanna be that other woman. And that's not polite. So I'll go fishing today. I'll go do something else." Because people had a way to personify the problems inside of them. And if you can personify a problem, you can tell it to either... If you personify a feeling, you can tell it to either sing louder or to shut up. But if there's no way to grapple with these feelings people have inside of them because they have no faces, they have no names anymore, that's why mental health is one of the crippling, crippling, crippling, underlying health issue around the world, especially in developed countries. I mean, they say if you can solve one thing, you go after mental health. Right? The whole reason why are people getting diabetes, why are they drinking too much soda, why, why, why, why? You go back to the source. And it's like, "I think people are just really, really, unhappy, deeply disconnected from a sense of joy." When we go back...

0:10:11 SE: And so another gift is just this idea that our native ancestors were born, lived, and died in world of pure bliss. At least defined by them. Just knowing that makes me feel better. [laughter] Even though I had many ancestors who then suffered later. There was much more about our story that's full of joy. So channelling that narrative... And then even this idea that maybe our ancestors had access to kinds of joy that we today wouldn't have any access to, without somehow hacking the system. [laughter]

0:10:54 Jason: Because of the sort of network there and...

0:10:56 SE: Yeah, because if you had... Imagine if, talking about collective consciousness, everybody in the community kind of thinks and feels super synergized. When somebody's happy, and it's a sense of happiness is in this... Permeates

all the posts and the stones and every single piece of your village is permeated with happiness, and that's just a new happiness like we've never known for... I think nobody's been... Nobody's really been happy for about 1,000 years. [laughter] You know? Back about a 1,000 years ago, somebody was super duper happy and since then, it's just that we've been less and less happy. I mean, collectively, as a species. That, I wanna get back. I think there's a lot of real fun and joyful ideas that can help to unstuck.

0:11:53 SE: It's something that just... And on one metaphor. [laughter] 'Cause I've got... I've mixed about 30 of them already. But it's this idea of, you could build an amazing rocket ship that can last for 10,000 years to go all the way to Alpha Centauri, but if you fill it full of people who hate each other, then what's the point? Yeah, so it's being the fact that the most... So the most profoundly hopeful thing is that all the problems can be boiled down to something that can be fixed immediately, which is to actually have everybody on Earth stop hurting each other. [chuckle] It's... And immediately. It's actually one of the most immediate change as a species. If you can say, "Okay, everybody lose their tails. Everybody evolve. Just love each other." Just that... We're 500 impossible things to make what we are, so 501 is everybody just loving each other, forever. No slipping back. [chuckle] No sticking tails back on again. [chuckle]

0:13:00 Jason: Right. As well as your tail might have served you...

0:13:02 SE: Right, right. We're good. We don't need our tails anymore. We don't need to kill each other anymore. That's where I think there's an indirect application of ancestral wisdom that can help us through mine... Even if it's just reminding us of the power of a story to re-script our narratives. Yeah.

0:13:25 Jason: Another comment you were talking about, you were talking about when you guys were growing up out over on the west side, right? And is it the Makaha Cultural Center?

0:13:36 SE: Ka'ala.

0:13:38 Jason: Ka'ala.

0:13:38 SE: Ka'ala, yes.

0:13:39 Jason: Yeah, Cultural Center. You were talking about sort of the experience of watching people being rebooted, right?

0:13:45 SE: Oh, and that was also in Makaha, also. There were two locations, that's right. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Makaha. You were right. You were right. Yes, yes.

0:13:51 Jason: And it made me think that that's sort of like a... I mean, think you were making this point in the interview anyways, right? That that's sort of either a macro version or a micro version, I'm not sure which way it goes, of the way that you're talking right now, right? This idea of, if we just lose our tails, if we just do some kind of fundamental reboot through reengaging with culture in the land, then there's all sorts of interesting directions we could go.

0:14:13 SE: Absolutely, absolutely.

0:14:15 Jason: I wondered if you wanna talk a little bit more about that experience?

0:14:18 SE: Sure. It's a perfect story. Another application of this idea of ancestral wisdom being the key to help to unlock a lot of the kinds of problems that we face within our communities and things is something that I witnessed growing up out in Makaha. And it was working with a farmer who was from Italy, originally. Actually he was a Catholic priest who left the church and he came to Makaha and he opened up about three acres of land. And it became a place, like a resource for the community to reboot. And I really mean it in the sense of shut that computer down, unplug it for 10 seconds, or 10 minutes, or 10 years. [chuckle] Plug it in and reboot, reload all the operating systems. Basically he worked with moms who had their children taken away because of substance abuse. And dads who had been locked up, who had offenses related to sexual violence and things like that. He had parents come and try and reset their story by being on the land. And this farm is located right in the middle of their neighborhood. So in a way, that whole idea of proximity, proximity, proximity, that when they go back to their own homes, they can still see the farm. Even if it's just one... There's something about having that farm there on so many different levels, set up a perimeter, a location, of just good energy. And it's been there for 40 years, about as old as I am.

0:15:52 SE: Now, as folks went to the farm after months of going in, planting bananas, and being angry, and watching that when they come back next week they see a new shoot, one single new little green leaf as a reaction to their energy, taking whatever their energy was and saying, "Whatever it is, take all that junk, as long as you plant me. 'Cause if you plant me I'll say thank you every day. A new leaf, a new leaf." Coming back months later, month after month after month, watering, taking care. And actually, to add to the story, real briefly, there is a gentlemen by Dr. Jonathan Deenick, who's a state soil scientist for here in Hawaii. He led the group. He spent time in the Peace Corps and he would begin every workday, which is about a 45 minutes of work. The first 15 and sometimes 20, sometimes half of an hour [chuckle] of the day was sitting under a mango tree with all of these adults and telling stories about Africa. Telling stories. And just fun, tragic, hopeful, joyful, laughing and then, "Let's go do the work. Let's continue that here."

0:17:17 SE: The fact that each workday began with story, and it's kinda almost like then they got to go and do the story immediately, and they got to then eat the story later. That program is still doing really strong and it has been an opportunity to unplug, cool off, reboot, whole operating systems within individuals. And then once an individual can reboot, it allows a household to reboot. And if a household can reboot, than a community can reboot. [chuckle] Reboot, reboot, reboot. You know? And I think that's that beautiful crossover of bio into analog digital crossover. And it's a constant reminder of how our ancestors were able to master being human first.

0:18:08 Jason: Right. Right. Can you go... Let's go back just to the analog/digital thing. So, I'm very interested to hear how you... Yeah, sort of your engagement with digital technology. That's a big chunk of what we do and for us, part of what we're interested in, is we're fairly convinced that no matter how things turn out, if we still keep going, there will be a substantial technological component to it.

0:18:35 SE: Fabulous, fabulous.

0:18:37 Jason: And so, the question is, how can we make sure that indigenous people have their hands on the tool set that's making those things? And so, I'm interested in talking to various, particularly indigenous artists and sort of how their engagement with the digital, right, and whether it's a thing or not a thing, or how it's a thing?

0:18:52 SE: Sure, sure, sure. So, a couple of different fronts. One of them is that an opportunity to continue to translate our work into new forms. From ice to water, to gas to water, to ice to gas to water, from spoken word to text, to animation, claymation, digital graphic novel somewhere in Mele, and then back down to spoken word again. Every possible way of telling our story is I think a way of... The more different forms that a tree has to propagate itself, it will. Some trees propagate... Many trees will propagate both through seed and through shoot. Bananas are a perfect example of that. Bananas are both seeds and shoots. So, in other words, the more successful the culture, the more it can articulate to the world why it's relevant and why when people come to that specific land that that culture is a guardian of, why people need to walk a certain way, talk a certain way, and dance a certain way. And when we don't have those instructions, or when people got rid of those instructions a long time ago, or had their instructions taken away from them a long time ago, then people begin to engage with land and resource in a way that is abusive, whether knowing or unknowingly.

0:20:31 SE: So, definitely the idea of myself as an artist, as a digital artist, is to help draw a picture to get everybody on the same page. And that I think there's a lot to be said about... And really, as far as the gamer go, and the other part, playing games, the reason why I'm interested in creating digital games is that I simply cannot have a table big enough to fit everybody at it.

[laughter]

0:21:02 Jason: Right, right.

0:21:04 SE: And more importantly, I really see that there is a time after secrets. And there's a time after secrets, there's time after politics. There's a time where we do build a global collective consciousness, and I take that and the very technology that is currently... How shall we say, adolescent in its age, will continue to develop. The Internet currently is only a circulatory system, within this very early organism of a collective consciousness. One day there will be a nervous system and then if we're lucky, everybody will have enough to eat, which means, it'll have a digestive system, yet information and food will be equally accessible. I don't necessarily mean downloading hotdog, but the systems that get us information. All these different kinds of systems are missing. So there is a collective consciousness that allows everybody to take responsibility for everything. And we're on the cusp of that, and that I really see technology and that games are the individual building blocks, I think to help to conceptualize such your realities happening. I mean, in the

sense that it's the most palatable way for people to start eating. It's delicious data. And it's... What is that data?

[laughter]

0:22:35 SE: Delicious things are often not good for you. So, I think in all of those senses, I'm really seeing there is a way that the digital world can actually be the problem solv... The way for us to build a sense of... When we talk about Dalai Lama says universal responsibility, it just sits with me so much, I keep thinking about that ideas that if anybody is... If we're at a party and if we're working, everybody is working before the party, and then we have a party together, if we're preparing for the party. Nobody's slacking. It doesn't feel good to sit down when other people are working. It doesn't feel good to sit down when this world is burning, and parts of it are suffering and there's a lot of tragedy. So, feeling good about it or helping people to feel good about that while doing something about it...

[laughter]

0:23:37 SE: Grail, holy, that one.

[laughter]

0:23:41 Jason: And do you find... 'Cause it seems like you spend a fair amount of time talking to groups of school kids, youth and stuff like that. And I'm wondering if you see... If you're talking to enough that you feel like you can see how they sit in all this and how they sorta see video games as a way of doing that sort of thing or it's purely entertainment or...

0:24:03 SE: Yeah. The kids aren't the problem. [laughter] It's the ones who grew up before Dungeons & Dragons or somehow we're told it was a bad thing to do. It was the ones, and they're becoming less and less important in the decision making process. More and more people are realizing that if you created a school where kids ran to school, and they never wanna be late, they never wanna miss a day, yeah? That's how we've evolved to be what we are now. School used to be fun for millions of years. [laughter] I'm gonna say that. [laughter] School used to be fun, if not, we would have died off as a species. School being boring is a process of us turning collectively into a robot, controlled by a handful of people. School being fun is what allowed us to be a diversified species that have thrived for millenia upon millenia upon millenia, so it's a matter of survival that we get some D&D in classrooms right now. [laughter]

0:25:16 Jason: Thinking in terms of millenia, I wanted to ask you about sort of, POLYFANTASTICA. And I think particularly I'm wondering if spending time in that 40,000 year time frame, did it change you?

[laughter]

0:25:35 Jason: How did it do that? What is it like to sort of try to grasp in some way, constructive way? Like you didn't just talk about it, you made stuff, right?

0:25:42 SE: Sure, sure, sure. So, when I decided to sit down to make a 40,000 year story, I realized that I needed to create these individual nodes or benchmarks and so I said... As a kid I'd go to into the library and I loved to look at book covers, absolutely loved book covers for Science Fiction books and I would say, well, a good book cover should be everything. Everything there, all the ingredients to make this cake should be on the cover. Even if it's just red, you know, there should be something about this that really... So I said what if I made 400 book covers, each book cover was a snapshot of what was the most important thing that happened that 100 years. So there are 400 centennial images. See, it doesn't sound that bad [laughter] if you think about it. 400 is not as bad as 40,000. 40,000, oh my God where did that... But before I did any of that, I created 40 millennial figures. A figure that represented what human beings would look like every 100 years. So, I'm merging a lot of different things. The first impetus that began all of this was a simple question, what would happen if we were never interrupted?

0:27:02 SE: If folks get nothing else from anything else I say, that's the question I want people to leave with: What would happen if they were never interrupted and they continued to practice their traditions? Where would we be today and what can you do to get there? [laughter] From, how can you cut a channel between that other reality and the one we're currently in to draw strength, to draw power, to draw information? In other words, that other reality is possible. So, I said to myself, if we were never interrupted, what would happen? And I then set myself on that quest to then, based on that idea, of a world where most populations had died off through some kind of pan epidemic, leaving island cultures to reboot. Hear that word again, to reboot. Very simple. It would make a lot of sense. But I didn't want to run

through some of the quagmire of creating the story within our own reality. Like a splint, a [0:28:05] ____ running parallel, as a parallel reality. If you have a broken bone, you run it parallel to your own culture. It allows you to realign your culture in such a way that eventually, you're not gonna need Sci-Fi.

0:28:18 SE: I mean, in a sense. [laughter] But anyway, I created 40 millennial figures, each character, what would human beings be based in this oceanic-centric, future? Every 1,000 years what would be the most important avatars for every 1,000 years? Even easier, 40,000 years boiled down to 40. That's easy. [laughter] So I sat down, I did all 40 of them and they go from, we end up looking as bizarre... There's no such thing as aliens, first and foremost. That was really important to me. Only very, very, very, very distant relatives. [laughter]

0:29:03 Jason: So there must be people coming from somewhere else, they're related to us still?

0:29:06 SE: Right, right, right. So, most importantly, the idea of human beings... Four of our Akua or our gods for the pantheon, so we have Lono... Kū, Lono, Kanaloa, Kane. And I based 10,000 year epochs around each of those gods. And then I look at the attributes of those gods to then unfold the story. See, so even if... Now it's just four, easy. 40,000 is easy. Reduce, reduce, reduce, reduce. But every step allowed me to have a different setting, so even as I tell the story, it's like an aperture. I can zoom in, I can look at things at all four, I can zoom out, and I can see as individual years, which is what I did. So then I went and did a graphic novel based on year one of 40,000 and then I said to the world, "Finish the rest, guys. [laughter] Here's two, four, six, eight, finish the pattern. I'm on to something else." [laughter] And where it is right now, so I'm actually re-editing the centennial images so that they are crisp black and white images, which will then I'm hoping to send to artists around the world to illustrate as a project. Maybe it might be a giant picture book with nothing but a title, an image 100 years later, 100 years later, 100 years later, 100 years later, a 100 years later, a 100 years later, a 100 years later, a 100 years later...

0:30:31 SE: There's something about just doing that, even as I was developing it, I was like, something's happening in my brain which is really strange. I'm asking myself, "And then what? And then what happens? And then what happens after that piece? Do they keep it? If not then was it even worth it?" The good guys become the bad guys and the bad guys become the good guys and the good guys become the bad guys, and the bad guys become the good guys. Oh my god. So in other words, I was able to soar through time, and get a sense and to taste time, just by creating this project. There are ideas that are offshoots, that like this project creating it, there's so many of these ideas that need to get generated that I've taken and applied to reality. So for example, the idea of, in POLYFANTASTICA, people have a collective consciousness.

0:31:17 SE: So I thought, well how could we create this idea of collective will, morality... And so this was where I was relating earlier this sense of creating some kind of application that will allow people to master money, and to channel money surgically around the world, to only post a post-corruption reality, a post-secret reality. Yeah. And that's what, in one of these worlds I've been creating, people did. And then a 100 years later, what was going on? Was it up-keeping 100 years later? Was it great and then flopped? 'Cause then it means nothing. 10,000 years later and we're talking. You see? Then we're like, "Okay, I think that tail is really gonna fall off finally." You know? [laughter] So it made me think about human evolu... I want everybody to do their own POLYFANTASTICA, really. That's really what I want everybody to do. And I want them to help me do, work on mine, and I want them to do their own. I want them to think about how can they retell their culture, not only are we gonna survive, we're surviving, and 40,000 years in the future, we are unlocking the mysteries of the multiverse.

0:32:22 Jason: Right on.

0:32:23 SE: Why not?

0:32:23 Jason: Good. Absolutely. Why not?

[laughter]

0:32:27 Jason: So somewhat related to that is one of the of things you talk about is, which I find... It's not just you, you know. After a couple of people you're due, talk about this idea of kind of a culture of abundance, which is, I have to say, quite different from most of the other communities that I'm familiar with.

0:32:46 SE: Interesting, yeah.

0:32:48 Jason: There's often a discussion about how to move out of this kind of narrative of decline, like I said, to one of survival, and then from survival to resurgence. But this kind of vocabulary and sort of way of thinking that's about abundance, I find so far, in my limited experience, to be kind of unique to this place.

0:33:09 SE: Oh, interesting.

0:33:09 Jason: And I'm wondering if you could talk about that and talk about how that relates to moving forward.

0:33:14 SE: Sure. So one of the most important things about living in Hawaii is that it really is important to get a sense of how artificial our security is. Hawaii is kind of like how Saudi Arabia was, maybe, not into the oil obviously [laughter] But we are paid off mostly, to not really riot and make a fuss about anything. And most people in Hawaii are. We have a beautiful wife and everybody wants to date. And that's basically it, right? And as long as everybody can keep dating her, everybody's okay. Right? So [laughter] it's basically summing it up, right? And as soon as that relationship sours, right? As soon as we actually have to grow our own food, we import 80% of what we eat. Yeah. So this is actually a large TV set. [laughter] That's why this seems like it's... You should see the food, they have the caterers at this TV set, 'cause you can pretty much get cheap food anywhere and you're okay. The systems are okay, but it's not sustainable. And it's dependent on a broken system. So all the suffering has been displaced. It reminds me of a really great Ursula Guin story, forget the name of it, but it's about this beautiful utopia, fabulous world, everybody's happy, except that there's this child that they bring out, and they whip them and they beat the hell out of this child and they put him away, or they kill him or something and they just...

0:34:46 SE: There's just this one child that takes all of the suffering, and it's okay for us to do that because everybody else is happy. And it's like, "Ha!" I can't unsee, I can't unfeel my sense of responsibility, globally. One day, I realized... I felt the curve of the Earth and I said, "Hmm. [chuckle] It's not this. It really is this. And that my joy has to be this, the responsibility has to be this. Not this." [laughter] So that abundance... There's a sense of a lot, there is, and I think it's unveiling that, and be preparing people to be optimized humans, to really question what is the true cost of our current security, both whether it's security from not having enough food to security from whatever. Which is, just as an interesting little side note, this whole idea of people are more likely to get diabetes than they are to get invaded by paratroopers. So the fact that we continue to support a military and yet we cannot have health paid for, healthcare... [laughter] So basically, the war that's happening within and the war that's happening without, all these things are basically being held at bay because we're living in an artificial version of Hawaii that is not sustained.

0:36:08 Jason: And how do you move past?

0:36:10 SE: Well, we create a game... [laughter] No, no, really! Actually, in all seriousness, we start telling the stories in all the different ways about how Hawaii did it. About how Hawaii was on the cusp. I've been telling this to folks lately who are going through some personal things. I tell them, "Hey guys, you know what you should do?" Say, all of a sudden go, "And all of a sudden, when so and so was having a hard day, he said to himself, 'I'm gonna turn this around,' and he did something that..." And I said, "Do it by yourself in a room, evoke the narrator." "He turned his beep around and he really sunk his feet into what he needed to do, and he cleaned that house today. And then after that, he did this, this, this, and this." And then, if you need to play a little musical soundtrack for yourself, because there's a way for us to re-script that narrative. And I think... So I'm going off on quite a bit of a tangent there, but... [laughter] But it's this idea is that as if people... And there are allies everywhere. There is opportunities now for less and less ignorance in all kinds of wonderful ways. [laughter]

0:37:21 SE: There's ways to map power if people really thought about how much money leaves the state, how much money comes into the state, all of these different things. But in such a way that's as visually interesting and as engaging as the latest thing that they're already playing on their phones. What? It's this, it's the shape of the key, it's this shape right over here. And it's actually not too difficult to... It's just this... [chuckle] But it's... Ultimately, though... And I guess that's the thought... Well, I'll finish one idea. [laughter] So we make reality as quite, Alan Moore. We start telling stories about after Hawaii's independence, make games that talk about how there will be difficulties, there will be challenges. There will be all these other things, but look at all the wonderful opportunities there will be. How that can actually even set precedent for... Maybe this is where I'm leaping into this whole idea of, "Add miracle here." [laughter] "Insert miracle, and then continue the equation," of a time after politics, a time. And I think... But it all comes back to this something here... I think what's really important is people realizing that it is a movie here in Hawaii, just to return to that... I'll stick with my metaphor. [laughter]

0:38:44 Jason: Yeah, yeah, that's a good one.

0:38:46 SE: People are realizing, they're seeing the facades, they're realizing that Hawaii is not sustainable. And more, and more, and more people are realizing they don't wanna be connected with America and want nothing to do with it. And I think... So we just wanna continue to nudge [chuckle] lovingly. And with that, I say the most important thing... Sum it up with a phrase is, "ku'e me ke aloha", which is to resist with love. Simple. And telling stories is loving people preemptively. [laughter] So they don't make stupid mistakes that have a... Not like them.

[laughter]

0:39:23 SE: So anyway.

0:39:23 Jason: Yeah, yeah. Well, we went to... There was a storytelling event at Papahana Kuaola.

0:39:31 SE: Yes, yes, yes.

0:39:32 Jason: Yeah. Last night.

0:39:34 SE: Wonderful.

0:39:34 Jason: That we went to Noe Goodyear [0:39:38] ____ and it was really interesting to watch, both for sort of similarities, sort of what goes on in the mainland, and sort of the differences. But that was one of the big similarities we found, is that idea of going into this battle but armed with love or aloha, or however they said it. Because ultimately, it's not gonna do any good to win, if it's simply by vanquishing the other side.

0:40:08 SE: Yeah, absolutely.

0:40:08 Jason: First of all, it's kind of impossible.

0:40:09 SE: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, absolutely. And even this idea that... Mel Brooks said, as how you laugh at Hitler, you make songs about him. "Spring time for Hitler, and Germany..." You make a farce out of the power that is up against you. One of the most important things is you can carry this torch of purpose outside of your body. [chuckle] Don't stick it inside, it hurts your guts. That's not where you carry it...

0:40:51 Jason: You carry it where other people can see it?

0:40:52 SE: Where people can see it, and they can help you to illuminate. So that's what expression is. "I feel really strongly about something but I'm not gonna stick it in my stomach. I'm not gonna let it kill me." So there is important times, there are times to yell and shout and to fight. And I think if we can avoid that by collectively... There's awe, awe. It's just like... There's five forms of communication from aggression, to indirect aggression, to passive aggression, all these different ways of... So we need all different forms. The one that is kindest on your kidneys and your heart is the one that you're laughing all the way through, especially when you're laughing at your opponent and before you know it, they're laughing too. Everybody's got to win in order for us all to win. I know that seems like a... [laughter] And it's... Right? Everybody. Right, right. Nobody... In fact, in order for such a reality to achieve... Nobody can lose, nobody's feelings can even get hurt in future conflicts, in the sense. [laughter]

0:42:00 Jason: Well, [0:42:01] ____ I've had my conversations with non-indigenous people, or maybe... I don't know how to say it, maybe just status quo people, that's one of the things that always strikes me is there's an assumption, of course, that by us winning, that they're gonna lose. It's the only framework that they have to think about the world. And that's what makes it difficult. It's not so much... Like they can recognize some of the injustice, they recognize these are wrong, but they're like... But actually, doing anything about it means I have to lose, and figuring out ways to express that.

0:42:29 SE: Yeah. That's where I think a game of Othello, just to back it up a little bit, is perfect. Actually, the chip flips over, it's the same people that are also winning.

0:42:40 Jason: [laughter] I haven't played a fiddle in years. Yeah.

0:42:41 SE: A basic game, and it's kinda like actually we're reaching out to the great grandmother and the guy behind

the shield and the mask and the pepper spray. We're reaching... We're asking his great grandmother to step forward. And take her son... Grandson by the ear [laughter] and say... It's to sing to the ancient in everybody, you know what I mean, and there's a way to do that, there really is, there is a way. There's a way to resonate with something so old and it can be in a song, it can be in a story, it can be in a video game, and it's... I can't quite put a word to it but I think there's a way to do that. Because that's where the bridging capital happens. Sun Tzu would say, "The best way to win is to make your opponent think that they're winning too." [laughter] And then all of a sudden and as that... A single... I just... To me, it's this really huge elephant in the room of Asimov says, "Violence is the last refuge for the incompetent."

0:43:48 SE: Most video games emulate incompetence. [laughter] which kind of dummy would you wanna use? This dummy, that dummy, that dummy, or this dummy, which dummy do you want to role play 'cause they're all dumb? Yeah, they all are people sticking tails back onto their butts, and running around which actually people still do, so I shouldn't probably talk about that too much. [laughter] Anyway. [laughter]

0:44:13 Jason: Okay. So we're at 45 minutes.

0:44:15 SE: Yes.

0:44:16 Jason: Prem? I wanted to see if there was...

0:44:19 Prem: Well, I have two specific questions, I think this has come up and I'm interested in the concept of time and how people perceive it. And how that affects how we interact, how we...

0:44:31 SE: Sure.

0:44:32 Prem: Make decisions...

0:44:33 SE: Sure.

0:44:34 Prem: How we... And I'm curious of your own personal...

0:44:36 SE: Sure, sure.

0:44:37 Prem: Approach and philosophy and also the Hawaiian connection to it.

0:44:41 SE: Sure, sure. And then I'll just direct the question direct... Okay. Got it. Time is something I am... I was just listening to NPR today which is how I spend all my time, NPR, BBC Radio, basically talking about... Basically the nature of time being more valuable than money. And I think it's out, the word's out, it's now official, [laughter] all debate on that can end, time is more important than money. But it really is this sense of, I'm already gone. I'm a concept, and I'm so... Death is time travel. And I'm looking forward to the next adventure, no matter what that is. And to me, it's just basically fundamentally one of the gifts of exploring the nature of consciousness is just giving these wonderful gifts back to my own understanding of reality, which is thinking of this life, being alive is weird, being dead is way more normal. [laughter]

0:45:58 SE: But not in a gothy sense, just that there's something so profound to the nature of time. And that... So as an artist, I have absolutely zero time or the minimal amount of time for watching other people's movies, unless it's another native artist, which even then I have to pry myself away from the studio. But I have found out a way to make myself happy all the time, and if everybody could find a room and access that room, and they could push that button, they would do it all the time. And I do that and that's it's actually at my desk, or it's with my children, physically. But I found a way to be deeply content and I optimize all of my time to do that. I've taken the time that I maybe would've spent watching other people's movies and binging on other people's stories, and long ago, I should say, the last online game I played was Diablo 2, that should date me.

[laughter]

0:47:02 SE: And after playing it for... I guess this was like 2000, I don't know when this was, for... 17 years, years ago.

[laughter]

0:47:11 SE: Anyway it was one of those like eject... Never again because if I play that, I won't create. I'll be... As opposed to...

0:47:21 Prem: Consumer instead of producer. Yeah.

0:47:21 SE: Right, that's producing. So optimizing my time to pour everything I can into the creation of stories and narratives and encouraging students, everybody, spend half your time playing video games, half your time designing your own. Or writing poetry or doing something. Half consume, half create, yeah. Breathe in half, breathe out, exhale. More or less. [laughter] But we need that equilibrium of storytelling and engagement and creation, and I think that's something with that... And that is a really ginormous concept within a Hawaiian concept... And that content, that narrative on which is within the Hawaiian geneological story within our cosmology.

0:48:19 SE: We are in the 16th wā, we are in the 16th age and so in the Kumulipo, yeah in our Kumulipo, and so in the Kumulipo, it says at the end of the 16 Age, return to the first. Let's go back to the slime, go back to the darkness and boy, darkness is important, right? Disney says, "vanquish darkness forever." The moth is actually really trying to put the candle out, it's saying, "No, it's nighttime, go to sleep." [laughter] So if you ask the trees, you ask the birds what it thinks about darkness, more of it. So return to a time of darkness, yeah? It's not a popular theme but it's exactly what we need to do. But not of heart or mind, but a darkness of just "mmmm" parties. Less parties. [laughter]

0:49:19 SE: The machine is running way too hot, so just... So we are in the 16th wā, there should not be a 17th wā. Yeah, we need to return to the first age, we need a time of darkness, we need a lullaby for humanity, we need to scale back our economies. When I think about growth, every single time I hear growth, I think growth, growth, [chuckle] growth, I think abscess. From a business sense, like "as much growth as possible," said the cancer.

[laughter]

0:49:54 SE: "It's all about me," said the cancer cell.

[laughter]

0:50:01 SE: Yeah, so kind of a long, long way, a long way on that one.

0:50:03 Jason: Yeah, we still have one more.

0:50:04 SE: Sure.

0:50:06 Prem: Because we've been talking about game play as a process, and I just wanted to hear more about what the process of play and engaging with the system means to you?

0:50:19 SE: Yeah, sure.

0:50:20 Prem: Break it down into its fine realms.

0:50:23 SE: Absolutely. Pa'ani in Hawaiian is our game traditions. I wanted to begin with this idea first that we have this traditions that go way back and during the rainy seasons, you had have people huddle in a space and you had all kinds of games. A lot of them were very naughty but...

[laughter]

0:50:48 SE: Which just reminds me, I wanna remind everybody, they were already born with PlayStations.

[laughter]

0:50:57 SE: And some people were told, "Don't touch that Playstation... Don't touch, don't you touch that controller. No, no." Many people were like, "We know we have PlayStations and we know how to use it." So anyway, we'll move on beyond that euphemism. But the idea of thinking about the... When I work with students and I say, games, rules, reality, laws; dumb rules change them, dumb laws change them, [chuckle] but take responsibility and think critically. Games allow you to make all the mistakes you possibly can and want to before then applying good information to

reality, which is why Carl Sagan said "Everything is an experiment. Every time we put our foot on the Earth, it's a micro experiment, getting us a little further or a little away from wherever we're trying to go." And we don't know if Earth is gonna sink if we're gonna suddenly fly into the sky, like the Douglas Adams in... [laughter] but it really is play games and returning to the very nature of... We already know we have some great best practice, if we want to hold people's attention, we sure can.

0:52:36 SE: What are they looking at though? What is occupying people's mind time? We can bring nutrition in the sense of giving people a sense of purpose, helping to defeat depression once and for all. And actually, there's some really great things that are happening with augmented reality and virtual reality that are helping to do those sorts of things. I think we came really close to the edge of something really dumb, but I think we're really turning it around [chuckle] with games.

0:53:08 SE: And enough people are getting it who are... Enough people who understand that it's okay that children are laughing all day long in class. That's fabulous, as long as they're laughing and being engaged by a story that is relevant to the curriculum. [laughter] To whatever standards there will be artists can make it delicious. Musicians can make it delicious, programmers can make it delicious. We can do so much work to even... I even see a reality where we personalize curriculum for every student based on their genealogy. Games where kids walk in and first thing they get is their own personal book about where they're from, or hard copy or digital, whatever, or a story... A story that tells them where they're from based upon best information. It reminds them that we're all the tip of this amazing spear that we just have to remember that we are a singularity made up just of all these people behind us and that spirit hurtling through time and space. What you're gonna poke? [laughter] What you're going after? Are you just gonna go right into the mud? Are you gonna hit that juicy bison or that juicy boar right over there and bring something really good home with your lifetime? Every lifetime is a toss.

0:54:39 Jason: Maybe just a quick side-note question, which is also interesting about being here is that, I think in, again, sort of the mainland United States and Canada as well, it feels like a lot of people are actually running away from their genealogies. There's this weird double move of wanting to be completely independent of it, but also kind of a fascination with it at the same time. I often wonder, how do we bridge that gap or how do you... Then also, if you think about the American rhetoric of freedom, individual liberty, is sort of based on that idea, is that you can break your genealogy at any time and go off in any direction you want.

0:55:17 SE: Right, absolutely. You can only do that so many times in Tron until you hit a wall.

[laughter]

0:55:30 SE: And people have painted themselves in corners. So the whole, the it's the fist that punched the face that created the fist that punched the face that created the fist that punched the face that created the fist... So, we say, "Why were you like this? Why did you do this?" In the story yesterday, "Why did you assault that person?" Somebody hit his great, great, great grandfather so hard, he felt it actually, to continue that joke... When we start talking about genealogical suffering, but in a way though that can somehow aggregate this, then I think that's the kind of healing we need to talk about. For example, games that help to engage people about the story of the split between Sunni and Shiite within the Islamic culture, and done in such a way that is as respectful as possible, with the need that such a story needs to happen. And even symbolically, I see something manifesting where people even see both factions, actually say, "This wasn't a big deal, guys." This wasn't worth this disagreement that Muhammad... I think it was between the brother and the son.

0:56:51 Jason: The son, yeah.

0:56:52 SE: It wasn't as big a deal. That's why when you're building a house, little bit split 2000 years later, is this. A small split in a community in the south of America and problems that happened a long time ago become this. And almost... [laughter] So, where all of this is going, 'cause very often people who are affluent, generally white demographic folks... People they should really get angry at are their own grandparents. [laughter] But we want them to say... Let's help you to manage that anger you have for your own ancestors in a way that you don't take it out on us and you also understand why we cannot blame you, but our anger has to go somewhere, right? And so naturally, it comes out from all kinds of orifices, except for the one it's supposed to come out of. And I think there is no greater story in human history than the one that made us what we are right now.

0:58:14 SE: The danger of making up too many artificial narratives that get people to go into a movie theater just to get

the nectar of like, "Oh, problem? Problem solved. I can go back into my air conditioned box, in the air conditioned car, the air conditioned apartment, into an air conditioned morgue." And always thinking that they're solving problems, when the problems are being presented and solved for them pre-gurgitated, pre-chewed, not encouraging people to engage in reality. So, this is the movie. This is the video game. Level this up. Write a better script for this one 'cause this one currently sucks. But I can smell a better version. It's delicious and there's so much of it and it's a much better version of this story.

0:59:15 Jason: Right, excellent. I keep on forgetting to do this with people, but I like to close with a question which we can take sometime for you to think about it or if you have something off the top on your head. And the question is, what is the question that you, especially you who's interviewed a lot, that you always wish people would ask but they don't?

0:59:43 SE: I always give so much extra information that I always feel like... [laughter] It's almost like I'm wondering if there's a question I shouldn't have answered or something. You know what I mean? I've given more information. Well...

1:00:01 Jason: People often make lots of assumptions.

1:00:03 SE: Sure. Sure.

1:00:03 Jason: In their questions.

1:00:04 SE: Sure, sure, sure, sure, sure. You know, it's right. I think maybe what I'll do is, I would say... Oh, it's so close. If there's something there... If there's something there... No, that's about it. [chuckle] Well, I'm probably gonna say, I'll probably just tack on something if I might. And I think that might be is that, I don't entirely... For projects like POLYFANTASTICA and some of the projects that I'm working on, I'm totally okay if they never take off. They may not even be for this generation. And if it is, fabulous. I'm absolutely okay letting the tree grow and knowing I may not ever harvest those plums. I don't even know what kind of a tree that is. [laughter] I don't even know what fruit's gonna come out of it, but I want to keep going. I wanna keep...

1:01:09 Jason: Excellent. Thank you very much.