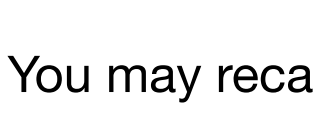


Tech

'Computer Chess' Co-Star Wiley Wiggins on His Favorite Hardware, Software, and Games

By DJ Pangburn August 10, 2013, 3:30pm

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Wiley Wiggins in Computer Chess

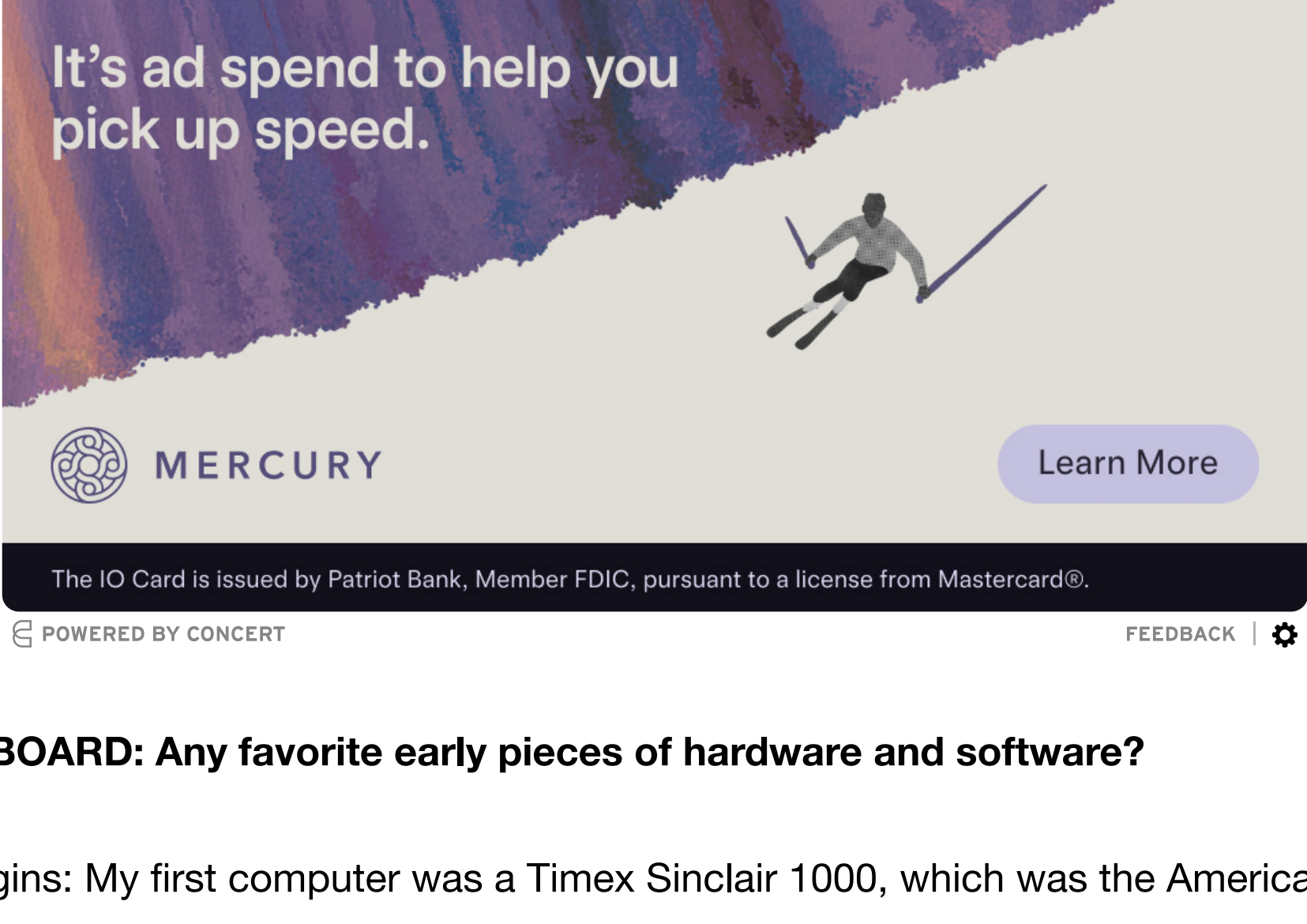
You may recall Wiley Wiggins from Richard Linklater's films *Dazed and Confused* and *Waking Life*, and a few other films here and there, including Andrew Bujalski's new film *Computer Chess*. What may not be known about Wiggins is that he's had a long interest in technology and gaming. He's also a blogger and co-founder of the Austin-based gaming collective **Juegos Rancheros**, along with Brandon Boyer, Adam Saltzman, and Jo Lammert. He's the perfect choice for the uber-serious computer chess gamer in Bujalski's satirical black comedy.



In *Computer Chess*, Wiggins plays the deliciously arrogant and bespectacled programmer Martin Beuscher. The character, like his fellow computer chess competitors, serves as a retroactive window into the personalities that have come to dominate the tech landscape of the last two decades. Though I've only exchanged a minor flood of emails with Wiggins for this interview, I can say that he is exactly the opposite of Beuscher. Like many in the late Generation X to Y demographic, Wiggins is eager to share his interests, as well as all of the cool stuff he's encountered recently.

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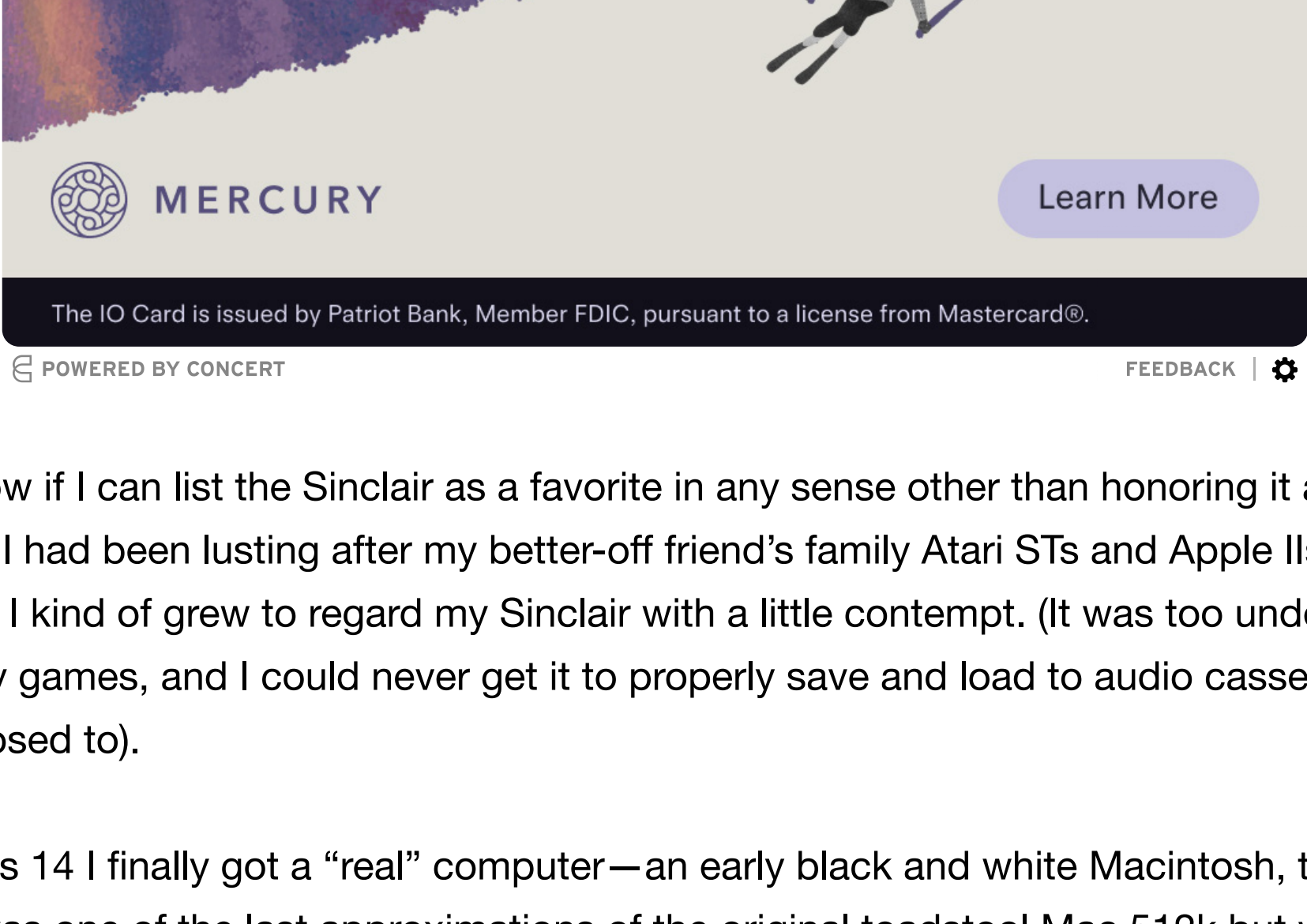
Wiley and I talked about his favorite retro hardware, software, and games; the current gear that he's into; and the iPad game he has been developing with his *Computer Chess* co-star James Curry and Scott Lee. [Shit's about to get geek'd.](#)



MOTHERBOARD: Any favorite early pieces of hardware and software?

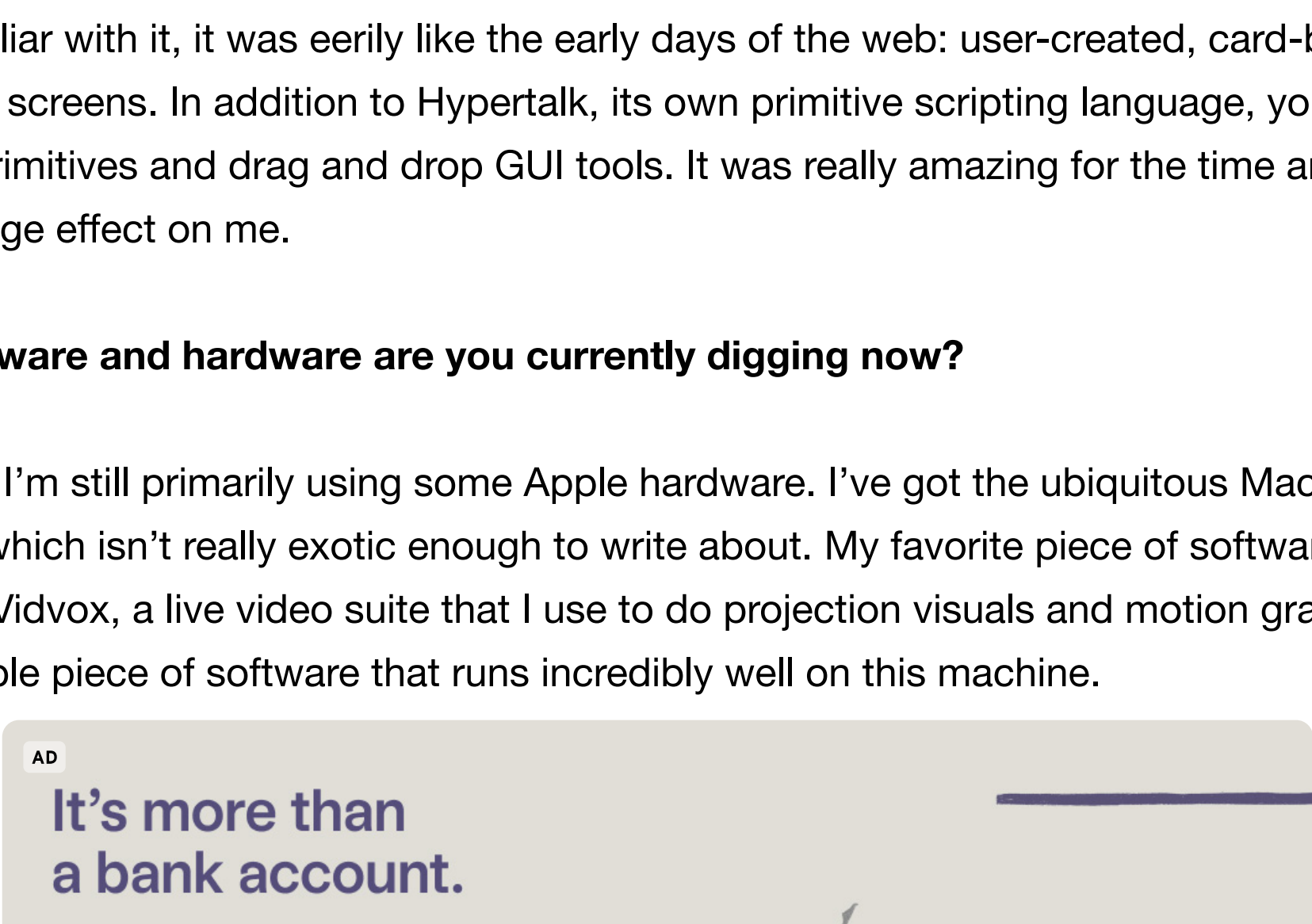
Wiley Wiggins: My first computer was a Timex Sinclair 1000, which was the American version of the ZX Spectrum—the computer that taught a generation of kids in the United Kingdom how to program. The Spectrum that my Sinclair aped was the Z8, which was for all intents and purposes a pocket calculator that had its own version of BASIC.

My mom had found it in the trash (still in its box with a manual and AC adapter) and brought it home for me to disassemble. It plugged into a TV and had those awful membrane keys, kind of like a Speak & Spell. On attempting to plug it in and start it up, I found that it powered on, but you couldn't type anything. After opening it up I found that the ribbon cable from the keyboard had a big crack in it. A snip with a pair of scissors and the cable reseal. Voilà. I could now spend the next week laboriously typing in the BASIC monopoly game that was in the back of the manual.



I don't know if I can list the Sinclair as a favorite in any sense other than honoring it as my first computer. I had been lusting after my better-off friend's family Atari STs and Apple IIs for years, and I kind of grew to regard my Sinclair with a little contempt. (It was too underpowered to play any games, and I could never get it to properly save and load to audio cassette like it was supposed to).

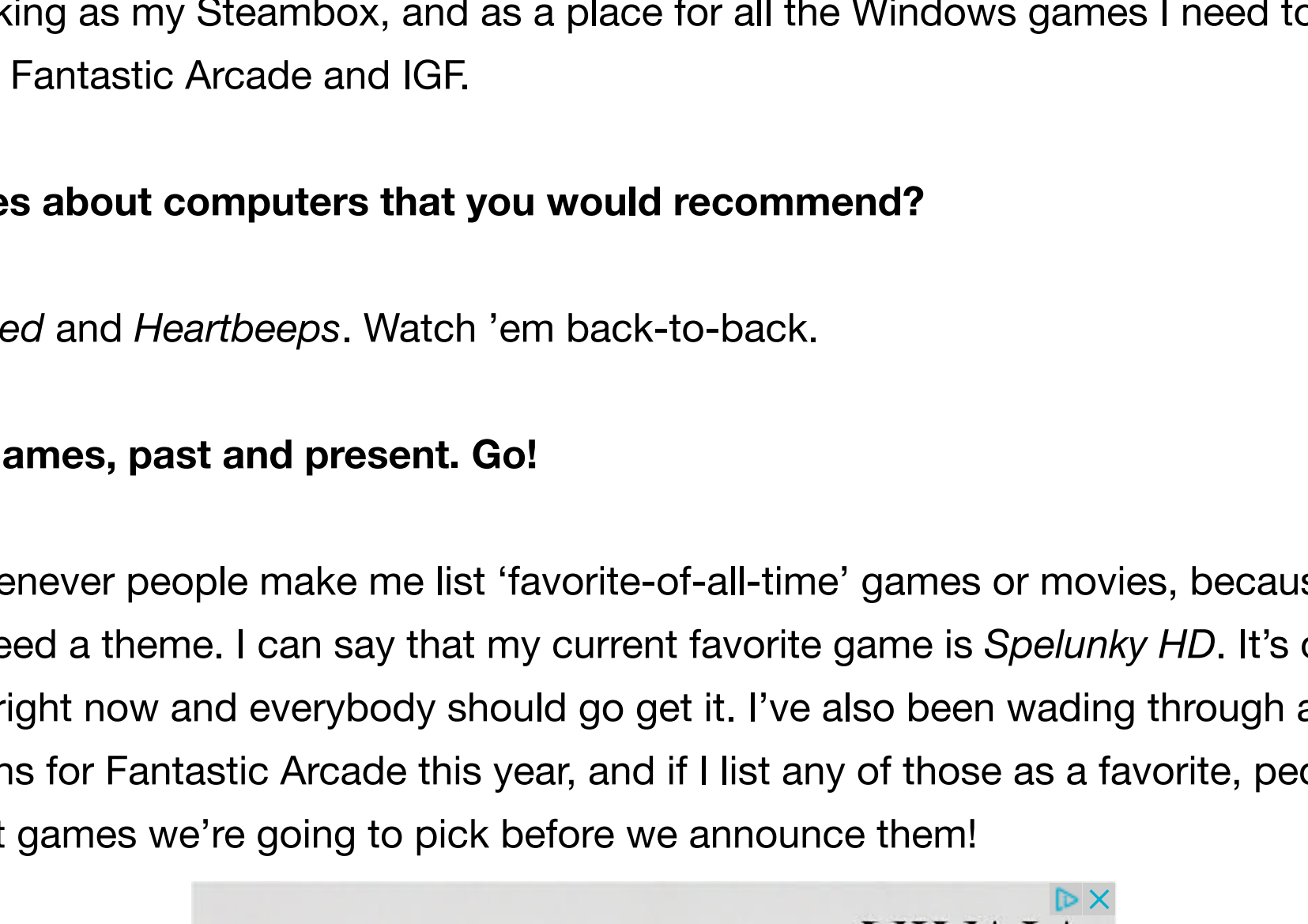
When I was 14 I finally got a "real" computer—an early black and white Macintosh, the Classic II, which was one of the last approximations of the original toadstool Mac 512k but with a hard drive. Most of my friends hung out on any one of a handful of local BBSs. And where other kids desperately dreamed of a car, I had been desperately dreaming of a computer with a modem. This of course all led to a misspent youth attempting to get outside lines on business PBX's to start party calls, and selling redboxes at school.



The early Macs also featured Hypercard, Bill Atkinson's hypermedia toolkit. If your readers aren't familiar with it, it was eerily like the early days of the web: user-created, card-based interlinked screens. In addition to Hypertalk, its own primitive scripting language, you also had drawing primitives and drag and drop GUI tools. It was really amazing for the time and I think it had a huge effect on me.

What software and hardware are you currently digging now?

Right now I'm still primarily using some Apple hardware. I've got the ubiquitous MacBook Pro for work, which isn't really exotic enough to write about. My favorite piece of software is VDMX by Vidvox, a live video suite that I use to do projection visuals and motion graphics. It's an incredible piece of software that runs incredibly well on this machine.



My favorite text editor for coding is Sublime text. My primary media player is an original Apple TV with its wifi card removed and replaced with a Broadcom crystalHD decoder, running Crystalbuntu (a specific Linux distro for this setup) and Xbox Media Center. It's a little wonky at times but it's served me pretty well. I've got a little microPC made by a company called Zotac working as my Steambox, and as a place for all the Windows games I need to play and archive for Fantastic Arcade and IGF.

Any movies about computers that you would recommend?

Demon Seed and *Heartbeeps*. Watch 'em back-to-back.

Favorite games, past and present. Go!

I panic whenever people make me list 'favorite-of-all-time' games or movies, because I typically need a theme. I can say that my current favorite game is *Spelunky HD*. It's on Steam and GOG right now and everybody should go get it. I've also been wading through all the submissions for Fantastic Arcade this year, and if I list any of those as a favorite, people will know what games we're going to pick before we announce them!



Growing up, I played a lot of text adventures and early adventure clickers. I was the kid who got an Atari 2600 when everybody else got an NES, and an NES when the SuperNES came out. Looking back I should count myself incredibly lucky that I got to play anything at all; but, a lot of my early game memories are mythologizing the games that other kids were getting to play. One of my friends had this insane French game called *Captain Blood* running on an Atari ST and it seemed like the most frightening and mysterious thing I could imagine. It had a theme song by Jean Michele Jarre and it used some of the first speech synthesis ever on a home computer to make these terrifying alien noises when you interacted with it.

A screenshot of Wiley Wiggins, James Curry, and Scott Lee's game forthcoming iOS game Thunderbeam, via Wiley Wiggins

Let's talk about your monthly game expositions with Juegos Rancheros.



Juegos Rancheros is a group operated by Brandon Boyer of Venus Patrol, Adam "Atomic" Saltzman of Cannabalt fame, and Jo Lammert from White Whale Games. We bring indie games and their developers to Austin and show them off with access to booze close by. This month we showed an early build of Christopher Hedborg's abstract space game *Eleven* inside an inflatable planetarium.

Any great games you've come across through Juegos Rancheros apart from Eleven?



I'm often surprised by the betas that local developers bring in to show off. I really liked Zak Ayles' *Punks Not Dead*, a game he showed us a couple of months ago.

Let's talk about your game Thunderbeam. How is it coming along?

They say that when you make your first game that you should start small, which was exactly what we didn't do. James Curry, Scott Lee and I started making *Thunderbeam* almost two years ago. It's an adventure clicker set in a 70's vision of the future that would be familiar to anybody who grew up watching trashy british Sci-Fi at the time.

Artwork from Thunderbeam, via Wiley Wiggins

Sometime in the distant past there was an economic cataclysm that effectively ended the progress of science and culture. The last products of a secret eugenics program brought about the advent of psychic humans who retrieved scientific advances from the future, creating a new golden age and setting themselves up as the high epopts of a new age theocracy. Our story takes place in a utopia full of a mixture of anachronistic technology married to ridiculous future advances, and you control a group of teens who are the latest in a long line of carefully cultivated psychics.

The whole thing is ostensibly presented like it's a children's show, but includes some kind of dark game mechanics—like randomly generated characters and permadeath, so you end up littering the universe with the bodies of dead cadets that you've recruited. The game plays like a fairly straight genre adventure, but we toy with themes of moral hypocrisy and try to poke holes in our own nostalgia, for games and for the fantasy fiction we're referencing.

The game has an amazing original soundtrack by the Octopus Project and sound programming by Paul Slocum, who is an artist and programmer known for his excellent band Treewave and his cool iOS sampler app *Sir Sampleton*. I think we'll be able to show off a playable demo this year, but release is still a long way off. I'm trying to exercise restraint now and keep feature creep from delaying the game any more. But, I do want it to live up to its full potential.

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