

Midnight Stranger:
the 2016 reboot of a legendary digital interactive drama,
and the inception of a new media genre

February 3, 2016
For Immediate Release

On February 3, 2016 Other Body Enterprises (OBE) launched a 35 day Kickstarter campaign to fund the redevelopment and free re-release of the groundbreaking mid-1990s interactive drama *Midnight Stranger*, announced Ottawa based co-producers James Botte and Jeff Green.

OBE's production slate includes, as part of this campaign, the world's first crowd-sourced interactive drama – called *S.O.A.R.C.E.* (for release in early 2017). Among the Kickstarter incentives, major contributors will be contacted to co-create and perform a character, recorded through remote direction. There is also a special offer for students of digital media and human computer interaction courses, who will be allowed to enter an entire class as a single character in the production.

“This form of POV drama is very immersive, very intimate, so it will be exciting to explore that approach with material gathered from almost random sources,” said Green, who created the original, critically lauded, version of *Midnight Stranger*. “Executives told us we were twenty years ahead of our time. Sure enough, the combination of broadly available multimedia devices and a diverse, media-savvy public make this the perfect time to reintroduce this singular artform.”

James Botte will steer the technical side of rebuilding of the program, with a plan to release as *open source software* everything needed to allow anyone to create their own productions or even join in the development of the code itself. In parallel, a new web portal will be set up where new titles can be published and shared, planning will start on new OBE productions after *S.O.A.R.C.E.*, and the research and development will start on expanding interface options, beginning with voice recognition. “We could find no word for this approach to interactive media, so we’ve dubbed it an Other Body Experience, or *obe*, pronounced ‘oh-bee’,” he says. “We’re really trying to found a genre”.

“When originally released, titles like *Midnight Stranger* could only be created by studios with considerable resources and technical skills, and only experienced by people with expensive multimedia computers. Today? They will be able to run on just about any smartphone, and the necessary recording hardware and editing software is already available to so many, that once we release the authorware tools for *obes* it will be more of a creative process than a technical one to make more. Not only will someone be able to play *Midnight Stranger* or one of its successors, the means of *obe* production will be in the hands of millions of people. That is one of the big motivations for us to be doing this now”.

Jeff Green agrees. “The twenty years that have passed since this first experiment have shown dramatic difference in not just the technology, but also the minds of the consumers of digital entertainment, and their numbers. We fully anticipate that lots of people will find this form engaging not only as an entertainment option, but also as a tool for their own self-expression. We want people to tell their own stories, in their own style, in this uniquely immersive medium.”

The free web launch of *Midnight Stranger* is planned for November 2016.

TO CONTACT US

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The Kickstarter URL: <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/673299016/midnight-stranger>

Our web site URL: <http://www.obeing.net/>

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Jeff Green is an award-winning multimedia producer who began his career in radio as a founding member of Carleton University's CKCU-FM and influential AOR radio station CHEZ-FM. His radio drama series *Soundings* was broadcast on three continents and won a silver medal at the New York International Radio Festival. His offbeat children's television series *Cowboy Who?* ran for four years on the Mid Canada Television Network and won a Canpro Canadian Cable Award. In collaboration with the (long gone) Ottawa-based computer graphics company *Animatics*, he created the interactive dramas associated with this project.

James Botte spent 25 years in the high technology industry specializing in high-performance digital electronics, network distributed and mission critical software systems, and international project management. During that time, he also co-founded *CAN-CON: The Conference on Canadian Content in Speculative Arts and Literature*, the associated magazine *NorthWords* (now defunct), and an associated academic conference (now the *Academic Conference on Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy*). Deciding it was finally time to go to university, he is currently a full time undergraduate student almost done simultaneous honours degrees in feminist studies and theoretical physics (with a math minor), and works as a part time research assistant for the LHC ATLAS experiment.

THE PROJECT

Midnight Stranger: the rebuild of a long-lost classic CD-ROM interactive drama for free online distribution.

OBE is seeking \$13,000 through this Kickstarter to reconstruct *Midnight Stranger* using JavaScript and HTML5 technologies (which, over the past two years, has rolled out to just about every desktop and mobile device with the power to run the title), and then post it for free for online engagement or download to any device.

Along with the release of *Midnight Stranger*, as part of the Kickstarter, Jeff Green plans to create the world's first crowd-sourced interactive drama (called *S.O.A.R.C.E.*), using the tools developed to rebuild *Midnight Stranger*. Those who donate \$250 to the fundraising campaign will be invited to co-create a character for the new production, and recording will be done through remote direction according to available technology. The finished production will also be posted for free online use or download on our website *obeing.net*.

In addition, OBE will *open source* the active web framework, the data formats, and the authorware tools developed so it will be easy for others to create their own productions, and plan to set up a web

portal where new titles can be published and shared. Green and Botte see the release of *Midnight Stranger* as the initial seed production in what they intend to become a universal platform for longer-form immersive story/character-driven digital interactive productions.

Most of the remaining Kickstarter incentives are drawn from Jeff Green's body of published works (radio theater, and series television) although he still says, "the most exciting incentive to me is the chance to participate in the production of *S.O.A.R.C.E.*".

Stretch goals will also see the rebuild and posting of *[MODE]* and *Stranger Still*, the follow-up productions of *Midnight Stranger*.

BACKSTORY

In 1995, the groundbreaking CD-ROM *Midnight Stranger* was released, a first-person perspective video-based immersive digital drama utilizing the innovative *Mood Bar* conversation simulator.

Midnight Stranger sold 20,000 copies. Other titles in the form such as *[MODE]* (1996) were produced but went undistributed, executives of the day shrugging that the approach was 20 years ahead of its time. Twenty years later these titles are incompatible with modern systems, and may only be experienced by those with advanced technical skills or legacy hardware.

In 2012, noted online games enthusiast "SuperGreatFriend" started a *Let's Play* (LP) of *[MODE]*, documenting an extended play-through of the production with his commentary.

This epic LP stretched over two years and attracted thousands from all over the world, who were drawn into the surprising depth of this unique storytelling medium. It was this event that convinced author Jeff Green that the time might indeed be right to reintroduce these productions to the world.

At the same time James Botte was learning the ways of HTML5 (along with the latest JavaScript and CSS3 techniques that went with it), and independently decided the technologies needed to modernize these titles and produce more had finally arrived. Having discussed the possibility for years with Green, it was just a matter of deciding the best approach to take, and this Kickstarter is the result.

As for the future, both have also deemed that the timing will soon be right to update the form with an eye towards exploiting fast-developing virtual reality technologies, beginning with voice recognition.

WHAT CRITICS SAID

Midnight Stranger named by *NewMedia* magazine as one of the 10 best CD-ROMs of 1995.

The Toronto Star (Feb. 16, '95, Gerry Blackwell): "... a pioneering effort... brilliant innovations... interactive entertainment as you've not seen it before. It opens up new vistas."

Computer Gaming World (Oct. '94, Eden Maxwell): "Directing the characters, including yourself, in this free form cinema verité experiment is exciting and habit forming..."

Winner *Macromedia* "People's Choice Award".

Electronic Entertainment's Murphy Award for "Best Story In An Interactive Title".