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Local visitor at the India Gaming Show South 2018, Bengaluru / India. Photo by Xenia Zeiler, 20 January 2018.

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Special Issue

Video Game Development in Asia: Voices from the Field

edited by

Gregory P. Grieve, Kerstin Radde-Antweiler, Xenia Zeiler
and Christopher Helland

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Interview With Avinash Kumar, Creative Director & Co-Founder, Quicksand Design Studio

Xenia Zeiler

Abstract

Interview with Avinash Kumar, Creative Director & Co-Founder, Quicksand Design Studio, India.

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Q1: Who is Quicksand Design Studio and what is *Antariksha Sanchar*? When was it founded/created, and by whom? Why did you choose this name (and does it have a specific meaning)? Why or for what purpose?

Founded in 2004, Quicksand Design Studio is an interdisciplinary consultancy, which facilitates the creation of meaningful experiences through design research and innovation. Quicksand Games Lab is positioned as an exploratory research group within Quicksand that collaborates with external teams, partners and patrons to create playful experiences in media and technology. We are currently working towards publishing our first indie video game called *Antariksha Sanchar: Transmissions in Space*.



Figure 1. Speculative science fiction experience in Antariksha Sanchar.

The game, which might just be India’s first major cultural video game, is a point and click adventure. Its narrative manifests as a speculative science fiction experience, inspired by the dream theorems of the prodigious mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan, and the Indian classical dance of Jayalakshmi Eshwar. *Antariksha Sanchar* follows a simple yet remarkable family living in the early 1900s in a temple town inspired by the city of Madurai, as they construct a new philosophy blending ancient culture, spirituality, natural creation and science.

The story and name of the game evolved from a classical dance ballet conceived and choreographed by Bharatanatyam exponent and my mother, Jayalakshmi Eshwar. The

dance ballet explores the evolution of flight and aircrafts in Indian mythology, posing philosophical and practical questions on man's abilities to explore the universe, which were some of the original themes of the video game project. The mobile-phone based Indian narrative video game, which is heavily inspired by Tamil culture, will be available in English and Tamil and targeted at a diverse-age segment in India and abroad.

Q2: What are the objectives, aims or concepts you want to share with the world? What is unique in *Antariksha Sanchar*, and in what way is it innovative?

Antariksha Sanchar, which literally translates to Transmissions in Space, is a project borne from a need to create interactive cultural learning tools for the youth and parents. It is a transmedia project that is composed of a video game (mobile), a

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Figure 2. Concept cards set in the game.

Antariksha Sanchar is a speculative science fiction adventure inspired by the vibrant cultures of South India; created to celebrate the independent exploration of our Universe. It aims to share the magical culture and history of South India with the world. The rich heritage it has to offer, from its temples to its ancient texts, merge with the mystical life of Ramanujan.



Figure 3. Walking a Tamil temple corridor.

Philosophical conversations, a unique Indian fantasy steampunk aesthetic, and a transmedia ecosystem render the game as an engaging, educative and surprising peek into Indian culture as interpreted by an emerging generation of Indian media artists. The narrative of the game weaves together strands of Tamil culture, Indian mythology, Carnatic and electronic music as well as science and ancient philosophy.

With *Antariksha Sanchar*, we want to present, through the immersive experience of the video game, a culture, which has a deep and wondrous interface of myth and technology. What makes the game so different is that it is locally rooted and will be appealing to players across geographies. With audiences looking for creative and enjoyable game experiences, *Antariksha Sanchar* with its compelling content and a socio-cultural context will engage users/ gamers. Through the game, we are focused on fulfilling an early agenda of the studio to facilitate better play experiences through design.

Q3: To date, what have been the most important achievements of your company? How did they come about? Do tell us about your most important game(s) please!

GamesLab is an opportunity for us to actively investigate the mysteries of play and its impact on people. There is something pure in any engagement involving play; as a creator, it pushes you to understand yourself and others in a more primal, deeper manner and as a player, it pulls you back to the native state of your childhood. These are critical and valuable experiences to propagate within these two groups, and GamesLab is an opportunity to do so for the Quicksand studio.

Antariksha Sanchar is our debut game; and it has been built with the detail required to create an immersive and culturally rooted experience for gamers. The success of the game would be a massive disruption to the Indian gaming ecosystem, where most resources are dedicated to creating mobile games and global 'me-too' concepts. Based on the praise that the project has received in India and abroad through social media, press coverage and festival nominations, *Antariksha Sanchar* is set to become a landmark for Indian gaming. The fact that it became the fastest Indian game to be "GreenLit" on Steam is great encouragement.

Indian culture is a dynamic, free flowing, encompassing expression of the Universe and its unsolvable magic. Our project connects these ancient expressions to imminent digital culture, taking on the challenge of representing it in a secular, accessible and entertaining format.

Q4: In what way do you decide on new endeavors, e.g., do you follow an established process regarding how you formulate your projects?

With Quicksand GamesLab, we have an opportunity to expand our engagement and contribution to the progression of experimental research approaches. At the GamesLab, we lay a lot of emphasis on detail and research. In the initial days, we scouted temples and South Indian architectural structures as well as Karaikudi and Chettinad homes to create sketches, which were then reinterpreted into the game. What we now see is a unique, immersive and culturally rich depiction of the protagonists' life in a south Indian temple town in 1920s. We also studied the gopuram, a monumental gatehouse tower at the entrance of Hindu temples, but disconnected the religious aspect of the same when it was incorporated into the game.

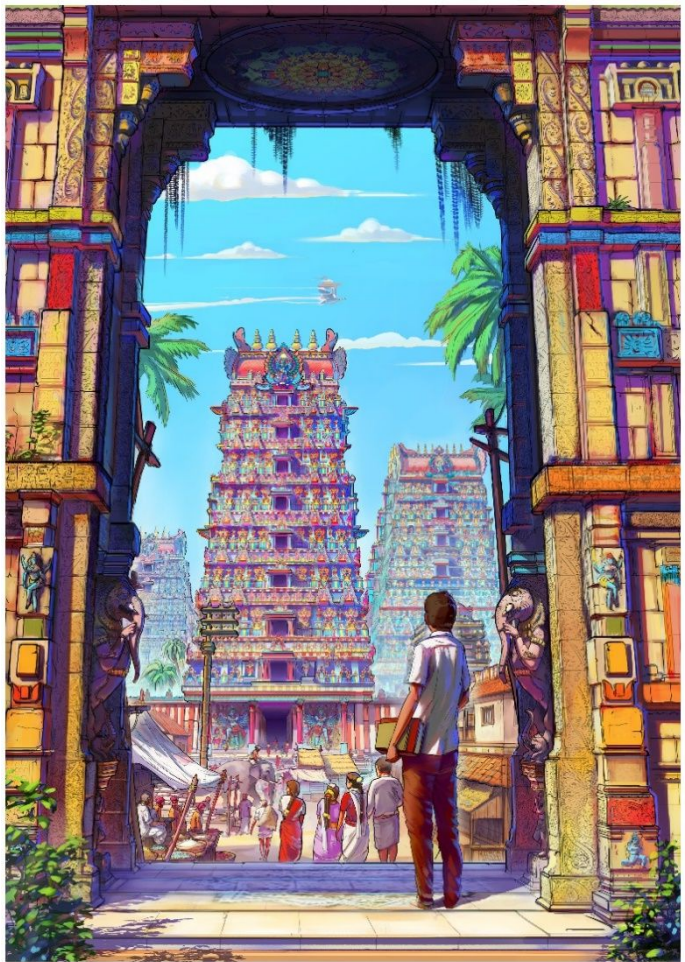


Figure 4. Tamil temple towers.

Q5: If it is possible for you to share this information: what is your next project about, and when and where can we look out for it?

I hope to start work on a video game that uses qualitative research to simulate future scenarios of informal healthcare in India. Given the fact that there are many in this country who either cannot afford or do not choose more conventional forms of treatment, the video game is envisioned to bring about awareness and raise questions around the future role of local and traditional forms of medical treatment.

Website: <http://www.antariksha.in/>

Instagram: www.instagram.com/antariksha.sanchar

Video Trailer: <https://youtu.be/cd6W61Y2-Pc>