

MNOG 2 Questions

The story of MNOG 2 ends where MNOG began: on the Ta-Wahi beach, leading back to the cliff with the telescope and the Mata Nui/Makuta stones. But the development of MNOG 2 is itself like an inverse of MNOG: where MNOG flourished, ballooned in scope, and gained more responsibility as an engine to deliver story, MNOG 2 seems to have diminished over its development, contracting in scope with each level, and gradually getting sidelined with the first BIONICLE movie's release.

I suspect there were behind-the-scenes developments preventing Templar from achieving the scale that was initially planned. Ga-Koro is released in two full chapters, with extensive dialogue trees, wandering NPCs, puzzles, worldbuilding notes, and unlockable sections. Onu-Koro lost much of this scale, but it did feature fetch quests and dialogue that changed after the Ga/Onu Kolhii match, as well as when Hahli solved puzzles. Dialogue in the Le- and Ko- levels were far more diminished and simplistic still, with much of Ko-Koro consisting largely of Matoran stationary, hidden in generic rooms, and Le-Koro featuring half the amount of Matoran in every other level. By Ta-Koro and Po-Koro, half the Matoran were recycling the same dialogue about being too busy to talk, and the minigames were the only dynamic aspects of each level.

There's a ton I'm sure could be discussed about this game, and its development and evolution (I imagine a MNOG 2 blog would be incredibly bountiful, perhaps far more than even the MNOG one has been). But in the meantime, here are some questions relating to some of the more obvious mysteries of the game. There's no particular order, and a number relate to conversations that have happened lately in a few BIONICLE communities.

- Whose idea was the expanded scope of the game? Did Lego commission a far richer game after the success of the first, or was Templar interested in seeing what it could pull off?

The idea came from us. We wanted to do a better game than MNOG, and take advantage of new technologies, and we had some really great plans. The original design was something I've always been proud of, and it was heavily indebted to Richard Garriott's *Ultima IV*, which was (and still is) an inspiration to me. It centered around growing Hahli's skill at Kolhii while solving mysteries, the solutions to which, along with the skills, would then be used in battles against the Rakhshi in the second half of the game. In the latter part, she rescues each village from Rakhshi and escapes with its people to the Kini-Nui. The design allowed the same systems to be reused in unique ways, allowing for very deep storytelling. But, inexplicably, LEGO cut the budget in half. They never told us why, but it may have had to do with moving operations from NY to the UK. It was very strange, after the success of MNOG 1. As a result, tragically, the programs were progressively reduced, which didn't come close to creating the experience we'd originally envisioned.

Matoran Names

1. **Ahkmou:** Very recently it was discovered in the code for MNOG 2 that the name for the shop belonging to Ahkmou (the Po-Matoran traitor trader who'd sold Comets in the first game) was programmed as "Akmuosshop." It's been pointed out that "Akmuo" is Lithuanian for stone, and

Po-Koro was one of the last levels to be developed (seemingly the last, given that the challenges and team in Po-Wahi are more advanced than those of Ta-Wahi), at a point when the plans for 2004 were presumably further along. Ahkmou, like three other Matoran in MNOG 2 would later reappear in 2004 as major characters, only unlike Ahkmou, the other three would see the spelling and pronunciations of their names slightly altered (Orkan to Orkham, Nuri to Nuhrii, and Tehuti to Tehutti).

- Was Ahkmou's name originally planned to be Akmuo?

Yes, Akmuo was the original name, and, yes, it was taken from the Lithuanian word for stone. Nice sleuthing! I found an email in which I was surprised to discover LEGO had changed Akmuo's name. We defined all 72 names for MNOG2. In MNOG1 scripts he is just referred to as "Koli Merchant."

2. Speaking of Metru Nui Matoran:

- What was the process for including them in the game?
- Were the names "Okran," "Nuri," and "Tehuti" early development names pulled from the planning stages of 2004? If not, how did those characters get their names and/or roles merged with those that would be the 2004 Matoran?
- Why weren't Ga-Matoran Vhisola and Ko-Matoran Ehrye (the other two Matoran in 2004 that weren't present in MNOG 2) present in the game? The Ga-Koro level may have been released too early to get development information about Vhisola, but by the time the Ko-Koro level was released (where Ehrye would have seemingly been), Tehuti had already been added with Onu-Koro and Okran was namedropped in Le-Koro.

We had no involvement in that beyond designing the villagers and naming them all for MNOG 2. We were kept unaware of any plans for them past 2003.

3. On a related note, several other original Matoran characters of MNOG 2 would later reappear in Metru Nui CD-ROMs created in-house by Advance. These characters would share the same names and general color schemes of their MNOG 2 counterparts.

- Did you share MNOG 2 notes and concept art with Advance regarding these Matoran characters? Or were the designs and names for those Matoran developed independent of both the game and the CDs?

We defined all 72 Matoran on the island in a chart in the Final Chronicle design document. It shows their name, colors (Mask, Body, and Feet), their roles (Architect, Farmer, Guard, Trapper, Villager, Kolhii Fan, Attendant), what they need and what they trade.

4. Due to the Maori lawsuit, 2003 was the year LEGO grew cautious about its use of names and words in BIONICLE and other product lines. Given that Naming Day had already occurred to phase out names like Jala, Huki, and Maku, it is surprising that so many new names could be introduced in MNOG 2 (and even later used in the Metru Nui CD-ROMs).
 - What was the process behind getting these names added? And how were these communicated with LEGO? (A version of this question was submitted by Gueriosj for 8/10/22.)

We submitted to LEGO a document proposing names for all the Matorans that hadn't appeared yet, since the design featured speaking with all 12 of the villagers in each town. The chart has the meaning of and inspiration for name, from all over the world. Starting in MNOG 2 you'll see names for Onu-Korans, for example, inspired by Scandinavian languages (Bardo), Bulgarian (Zemya), Greek (Kaj), Slavic (Damek), Celtic (Dosne), Egyptian (Azibo and Tehuti), Nigerian (Aiyetoro), and Japanese (Mamoru). All of them mean "earth" or are related to earth in some way.

5. In the Mata Nui Online Game II: The Final Chronicle, Mamoru is referred to as "Mamru" in the dialogue of Azibo and Whenua. However, his spawn code refers to him as "Mamoru," and consequently, so does his speech box. Additionally, his conversation file is titled MamoruConversation.swf. Most Matoran names introduced in the game originate from real-world languages, and while "mamru" does not have a known meaning, some sources claim 'Mamoru' can mean "Of the earth."
 - Was Mamru the typo? Or was Mamoru?

Mamoru was the original inspiration, but like many others was altered to not be too close to the actual name. That alteration I imagine came at a later time.

6. The final two levels of the game – Ta-Koro and Po-Koro – feature a handful of Matoran recycling dialogue about being too busy to talk.
 - What would these Matoran have discussed if there were more development time? Was there anything specific originally in store for them?

We designed a general structure for what happens in each town, and what the player learns. So the occupants would have revealed important information about that town's Tenets and Crystal, plus hints, such as their Kolhii team's strengths and weaknesses, and extra information, generally about the town or the Turaga. There would be part of a code, allowing entrance into a secret chamber where the Crystal (a biomechanical "memory") for each town is hidden. Players that figured out the code would get an extra boost for that town's skill, to aid against the Rahkshi. That is, it should have worked this way.

7. Nearly all of the six villages were represented by about twelve Matoran each, with only two exceptions. Ta-Koro features thirteen, although one of them, Takua, is an Av-Matoran destined to become a Toa of Light. Le-Koro, by contrast, has only six – half the amount of villagers present in the other villages, although the names of five [faceless Le-Matoran](#) (Boreas, Orkan, Shu, Taiki, and Vira) were briefly mentioned as members of the Gukko Force.

- Were Boreas, Orkan, Shu, Taiki, Vira, and an additional Le-Matoran originally slated for inclusion in the game?

They are all on the list of characters dwelling in Le-Koro.

- If so, why were they cut?

Purely due to time restrictions as a result of the budget cut.

- What roles would these Matoran have served in an expanded Le-Wahi level that included them?

Like in the other towns, they would likely have dropped clues about Le-Koro's Tenets: Faith and Fragementation, Unity, and Duty, and they'd teach Accuracy, along with some Le-Koran philosophy. I suppose music and flying, too.

- Many of the MNOG 2 characters correspond to the appearances of NPCs in the first game. Which MNOG Le-Matoran did these characters correspond to?
- Is there still concept art of these Le-Matoran, or descriptions of their appearances?

There may be! I'll have to do some more digging. Boreas was to have a light green Huna, light green body, and dark green feet; Orkan a teal Akaku, dark green body and teal feet; Shu a dark green Komau, a light green body and dark green feet; Taiki a dark green Mahiki, teal body, and dark green feet; and Vira a light green Pakari, dark green body and light green feet.

- What would the name of the twelfth Le-Matoran have been? (Assuming there was one)

Not sure which was missing, but there are 13 in total: Boreas, 2nd Commander; Kongu and Tamaru, attendants; Kumo, crafter; Sanso and Makani, musicians; Tuuli, Trader; Afa, Orkan, Shu, Taiki, and Vira, pilots. And Matau, the Turaga.

Cancelled Plans

The Le-Matoran lead us into the next major set of questions:

8. Following the Kolhii match, Hahli plays a key role in evacuating Ta-Koro, then again in the climax of *Mask of Light* – accompanying Takanuva on the trip to Mangaia, vowing to serve as his Chronicler, rallying the Matoran, and then serving in the rite to restore Takanuva to his original Toa form.
 - Could you describe how the final stage of MNOG 2 in its original plans would have dovetailed with the movie, and set up her appointment as the Chronicler in the final MNOG 2 cutscene?

The initial summary in the design document describes: "Players win the game by fulfilling Hahli's Destiny: to lead all the people of Mata Nui from the villages to the Temple of Kini Nui." The goal for

MNOG 2's second half is summarised in the original design as: "Goal (Programs 6-8): Gather all the Villagers and bring them to the Temple; Find the Turaga and learn where all the Villagers are; Rescue the Villagers; Confront one of six Rakshi and overcome them." Later, in describing the Tenets and Crystals, it says: "As the first half of the game is concerned with winning Kolhii, the second half is concerned with rescuing the Matoran and bringing them to the Kini-Nui. In order to do this, Hahli must overcome the six Rakshi." At the time, our connection to the ongoing stories and world was mostly terminated, and I think taken over by the comic book writer and the UK team. So that was the full extent of it: at the end of MNOG 2, Hahli's heroic efforts to save the villagers establish her in the role of Chronicler, but there is no more connection between our work and the media that followed later, beyond the initial seven-year story outline shared with us from the beginning.

9. The Toa Nuva never make an appearance in MNOG 2, making it one of the only pieces of 2001-2003 media where they never show up.
 - Was their exclusion planned from early development, or did we mean to have a role that was ultimately cut?

I believe the Toa Nova plan was to follow the exodus to Kini-Nui, so it had no part in MNOG 2. And we had no part in the development of that aspect of the story.

10. Speaking of the Toa: The Kolhii notes found throughout Ga-Koro make reference to Pohatu as being the patron Toa of Kolhii (something the movie alludes to). A patron Toa of Unity is mentioned in Nixie's riddle, and while the answer is never expressly stated, the letter in the coordinate is "G" suggesting Gali was the patron Toa of Unity.
 - What were the other Toa intended to be patrons of?

We didn't have opportunity to evolve that aspect much beyond what we had. Each village corresponded to a Principle, and in Ga-Koro's case it was Unity, so that makes sense. It also tracks with Hahli's destiny to unite the villages at Kini-Nui. It's possible that Kopaka and Tahu also were patrons of a single Principle, since their towns followed the single principles of Destiny and Duty, respectively. The other villages that followed a combination of two principles maybe were intended to feature other concepts that their Toa were patrons of.

11. *MNOG 2* especially seems to have had a number of plans with its orbs, temple and a highly abridged ending (which never even featured sound design).
 - What was the original mythos behind these temples and orbs?

In the original design, Hahli acquires a variety of Charms that give her bonuses, and are used to unlock the hidden Temples. Inside the Temples are the Crystals, which, if found, make battling the Rakshi much easier later in the game, but aren't required to defeat them. The temples also hid other artifacts with bonuses, such as the Staff of Unity, which can be used in Kolhii. To find and unlock the temple, the player uses their knowledge of a town's Tenets, learned through conversation and other means. To find

Le-Koro's Crystal of Faith, for example, the player would talk to the villagers and learn that the town's Principle is Faith, which opposes Fragmentation. Fragmentation is the destructive power used by Guuhrahk, a Rahkshi, and so the Crystal would protect from this. They would also learn that Faith derives from Unity and Duty, and use that knowledge to find and open the temple. Villagers would also teach about Accuracy, the skill borne from Faith.

- What other major plans for MNOG 2 had there been that were scrapped? Is there anything you wished you could have included in it that didn't end up in the final product? If you had more time, would Templar have made a better game than *MNOG 2* already is? (Versions of these question were submitted by Bionichead and Toatapio Nuva for 8/10/22.)

Absolutely. The design had a pretty elegant approach. After winning the tournament, disaster would strike, and Hahli was to race back to each village to rescue the inhabitants, and guide them to Kini-Nui. The second half of the game was to leverage the technology we developed in the first half, where instead of passing, striking and charging in kolhii, Hahli would engage in combat with the Rahkshi. Kolhii fields would be replaced with ravaged village squares and battlefields, in the fields, sea, mountains, jungles, deserts and underground. In each place, Hahli could choose a matoran to help her, ideally one whose skill best counters the strength of the Rahkshi she faced. Battles would be as challenging and engaging as the kolhii matches, which were already really fun, and the destructive powers of the Rahkshi would be great to see: Fragmentation, Disintegration, Poison, Anger, Fear, Hunger. All the items, artifacts, and knowledge Hahli had found or crafted would have a tactical use in the second half's disaster-struck environments.

At the beginning of development LEGO was very supportive, engaging focus groups to test the first program, and approving of our plans. But something turned midway through and the support evaporated. By the end, we weren't able to keep our lead programmer, 3D artist, sound designer, or any other key developers, and it fell to the lead animator to finish the project almost single-handedly, as a handful of silent animations.

8/10/22 Bonus Questions:

MNOG

1. **(Emily)** A standout aspect of *MNOG* is the careful way in which dialect, inflection, and tone are communicated through the characters' text-based speech. When approaching character writing, do you have any particular tricks or methods for coming into a clear voice for a given role?

That's a nice thing for any writer to hear, thank you. I try to look at real people, starting with my friends, family, and acquaintances. I think about what I like about them, and what I don't like, what makes them funny or happy, and what makes them sad, and any idiosyncrasies or quirks they have. It helps me avoid derivative stereotypical archetypes, a trap that's easy to fall into when working in high-adventure genres. Then it's an easy jump to translate it into the world of the game. It was also my great partner Gordon, our art director, a genius creative who would add color and flair for each character that I'd have otherwise missed.

2. **(Nanotronlu)** What went into creating the *MNOG* art style?

That's Gordon again, and he'd be best suited to answering it. What I can say is that he is immensely talented, and has traveled around the world from childhood, and is a sponge of cultures and styles from all over, with a hearty lexicon of influences from which he creates his work.

3. **(jointdogg666)** How closely did your team collaborate with Saffire in 2001? Can you remember what assets you got from them, and what they got from you? [Moderator note: this question was basically answered at the panel but in a way that made things more confusing lol]

We had no contact with Saffire at all. We knew the project was taking place, but only received a handful of 3D models, if that. I don't remember which ones, and I don't remember sending anything to them, either.

4. **(Beeslow)** In the first *MNOG*, a sprite was found depicting Protodermis (which was initially called Biodermis) as Bionicle pieces, with a Biodermis Smith that could construct creatures out of it. On the other hand, the second *MNOG* depicted the Protodermis deposits as a kind of gelatinous fluid. Was that a part of Bionicle lore that was changed in the time between the release of the first *MNOG* and its successor?

What I remember is that the idea was very vague in the beginning. What the toa and matoran were made from, what the island was made from, and how it all worked, was very blurry. If they are all kind of mechanical, how were they born, how did everything get there in the first place? The idea for it evolved from fully formed LEGO "pieces" into a sort of nanomachinery of tiny particles that could form anything

out of a metallic goo, which is much easier to work with when building out the story.

5. **(Gonel)** Between *Quest for the Toa* (previously: *Tales of the Tohunga*) and MNOG, it is established that each of the Turaga seems to have a title. A villager in the Po-Koro level of QftT asks, "Did you know that Turaga Onewa is known as The Referee?" In the Le-Koro level of MNOG, Matau introduces himself as "Matau, called the Singer by the people of Le-Koro," (a title Kongu also references). Vakama's may also have been stated, although it's unclear since he introduces himself as "Vakama. I am the Turaga of this village. I am the Legend-Keeper, the Takara-Leader, He of the Great Firestaff who farms the Mangai's burning core." Could you speak to the Turaga titles? What were the titles that weren't confirmed?

Our chief source was the Story Bible developed by Skryptonite and Advance, and I'm fairly certain the titles we used came from there. I don't remember specifically, but I suspect that if a Turaga had no title in MNOG, it's because there was none listed in the bible. It's also possible there wasn't occasion to use it, if it existed, but I'd have to go through the old documents to be sure.

6. **(Matt Vanlieshout)** Besides *MYST*, what other games and game mechanics worked as inspiration for *MNOG*?

Big question, too many to name here, I think. I grew up on Infocom's text adventures, such as Meretzky's *Planetfall*, the *Enchanter* trilogy, *Deadline*, *Witness*, *Wishbringer*, and others, which inspired a healthy respect for story-driven adventures. I also grew up loving *SimCity*, *Castles II*, *Caesar II*, and of course *Civilization*. These might not seem connected, but they demonstrated how complex systems can be abstracted not only to simulate society, but also to implement strings that let an author push and pull dramatic threads. Role-playing games — we were into *Dungeons & Dragons* as kids — showed that a Dungeon Master is as often creating the illusion of agency, to suit a narrative that will reward the player, as much as they are creating a structure and opportunities for it. So by extension, starting with Neurath's *Space Rogue* and later *System Shock* and *Deus Ex*, game design for me became the art of combining engineered, abstract systems with storytelling. Meanwhile, around the time of MNOG, there were so many good games that we were playing: *Diablo 2*, *Half-Life 2* and *Counter-Strike*, *Unreal Tournament*, *Battlefield 2*, *Stronghold: Crusader* and *Neverwinter Nights* were staples around the office. And, as mentioned above, Garriott's *Ultima IV* and *V* were foundational inspirations for *MNOG 2*.

7. **(Shadow Emperor + Planetperson)** Do you know where the "[seventh tribe](#)" concept of Makuta followers originated from and why it was dropped from MNOG? Did you have any ideas for the role they'd play in the game after the Po-Koro chapter?

The seventh tribe was supposed to be a whole village of Makuta-worshipping Matoran, who were intent on bringing the rest of the island to their side. It was purely for reasons of scope that it was abandoned, given how challenging the episodes were. Instead, it was reduced to a single agent, the corrupted Comet salesman in Po-Koro. We'd entertained the idea of following him back to the hidden village and the seventh tribe, but decided to keep him on his own for the meantime. I think it was considered that the

seventh tribe would be made up of lost members of the other villages. So I suppose technically, he was one of that tribe, but we never got to see his village.

8. **(Beeslow)** Originally, there was a reference in the MNOG dialogue to the "ancient carvers" of Po-Wahi and to the Ta-Koronan Jala being the son of "Lhii the Surfer". Do you remember if these were meant as hints toward the islanders being the descendants of prior generations of Matoran living on the island?

Sorry to say, these were colorful additions that were never explored. As often as we executed thorough, planned themes and storylines, we left a lot of crumbs, threads and open doors as building blocks to later capitalize on. Callbacks and references only work if the first parts are laid down, and you're not always sure where things will lead. It left us with quite a few unexplored loose ends.

9. **(Lukas Sprehn)** How much of *MNOG's* concepts that aren't really seen later in the story came from Bob Thompson and Alastair Swinnerton's original concept notes? Like the mention of "Papu and Rangi"?

I think the Toa Kaita, Akamai and Wairuha, were pretty short-lived. There was mention of a Haka-type dance, and other elements from Polynesian culture, that never moved forward.

10. **(Zebulan)** Do you happen to know anything lore-wise about Papu and Rangi, the beings mentioned by Nokama and Jala in the original version of *MNOG*?

I'm pretty sure the cultural and legal issues extinguished any development of that thread.

1. **(Gonel)** Moreover, it was recently discovered that on the [2001 Polish BIONICLE website](#) there was mention of a third entity: Io, the "Great Creator" who gave the six heroes the name "Toa" and placed them in the world to guard it and maintain the balance of the elements. What information did Templar get about these characters, and were there ever plans to incorporate them more?

I don't remember much about that beyond a brief mention in the original story bible. I suppose it connected to the idea that the island and its inhabitants were artificial, and therefore had to have been manufactured by some entity; it also connects to the idea of creative play, and creativity in general as a LEGO creed.

11. **(Beeslow)** With examples like the telescope, the star charts, and the sundial, astrology played a big role in the MNOG. Do you remember what the backstory to the importance of studying the movements of celestial bodies was, particularly in regard to the orbiting red comet "mothership"?

It was known that the island of Mata Nui had crash-landed from space, as did the Toa, and presumably all the inhabitants of the Bionicle world. Therefore, when looking for ways to predict coming events, it seemed a natural fit that the island and what happens on it were linked to the cosmos.

12. **(Lukas Sprehn)** How come the *MNOG* is so prophetic? For instance, there is that one hut owned by the astronomer/astrologer Nixie in Ga-Koro which has a map that looks as if it says you're on a planet and that there are two other celestial bodies around it... Additionally, the telescope in Ta-Wahi has a carving closely resembling the Great Spirit Robot... Spooky.

This was a luxury afforded by having seven years' worth of storyline fleshed out before undertaking these projects. Although we certainly left mysterious breadcrumbs for ourselves to follow, we also could make reference to things to come with confidence and precision, since we already knew what the future held (more or less clearly) for the island and its inhabitants. Even on the very first program in the first game, we had glimpses into what was to come, and we knew the answers to big mysteries that wouldn't be revealed for a very long time.

13. **(Ghabulous Ghoti (pronounced as "Fabulous Fish"))** I've heard about a few parts of *MNOG* that were altered or cut (such as the search for Onua in the Onu-Koro chapter, or a secret tribe of villagers worshiping the Makuta being introduced in the Po-Koro chapter [See seventh tribe question]). Are there any cut/altered storylines or locations that you'd be able to share with us from either *MNOG* or *MNOG II*?

As described above, most of *MNOG II* was cut or altered, so there's that. Beyond that, I'll need to do some digging. The serialized release format of *MNOG* kept us up against deadlines pretty consistently, so there were few opportunities to develop stories or ideas that weren't immediately put into production.

14. **(Ghabulous Ghoti (pronounced as "Fabulous Fish"))** Are any of the original or unfinished Flash files (such as the sandstorm blocking off access to Onu-Koro before its chapter was completed) still in your possession?

Alas, we lost a lot of data, so it's unlikely. But there might still be some gems around and I'll see if I can't get them out there.

15. **(Dave)** In *MNOG*, there is this Great Sundial which is underground with a secret staircase and golden mask. At the end of the game, it becomes the passage to Makuta's lair to witness the final battle between the Toa and Makuta. I have read a making of *MNOG* that explained that the cancelation of the *Legend of Mata Nui* game resulted in *MNOG* having to handle the final battle instead of *LOMN*. So this begs the question, before it became the secret passage to Makuta's lair, what was the purpose of this sundial in the story? Why a sundial underground? Why the secret staircase with a golden mask down there? Why were runes of the Makoki stone engraved

on it? Was it something that was explicitly mandated by LEGO? Did they explain the reasoning behind it?

It was a confluence of several factors. Mid-development, LEGO engaged a promotional campaign of some kind which featured gold masks, and we were asked to incorporate them somehow into the game. We were also always looking for ways to give small clues about the bigger story going on, without revealing too much. Around that time, we had settled on what protoderms was — and we wanted to give a clue that there was more inside the island than people knew. We were in the process of unraveling the mystery of Mata Nui, and so took advantage of the request to add some more clues. The sundial was a hint that the surface, as known to the player, was not always the surface, but that soil and rocks had, over time, covered over something much more ancient. Remember, at this time, very little of the story had been revealed. Then, eventually, when we were looking for a clever way to lead the player underground, we remembered the odd little sundial we'd added as a result of LEGO's marketing campaign, and it fit perfectly. So that was a happy coincidence.

16. **(Gonell)** Could you speak a little to the character of Onepu and some of the intention behind his MNOG introduction? Although he is generally presented as good-hearted (if narcissistic) in most media, there are plenty of people who get a strong reaction to the part of MNOG where he gets poor Taiju to do his work for him. It seems uncharacteristic of Templar to characterize any Matoran as actually being mean, especially considering he was one of the main Matoran characters for the year, so was something lost in translation along the way?

Nope, he could be a jerk, but he was also good. We tried to introduce a grayness to characters whenever possible, as the real world is not particularly black-and-white. So a patrician vanity, we felt, would be interesting for a knight-like archetype, to contrast with the underdog left-hand characters that made up Taku's party. It also laid the groundwork for a character arc with Onepu, although it was never undertaken.

17. **(Gonell)** Could you speak to why Macku (Nokama's right-hand Matoran) was a member of the Chronicler's Company instead of Kotu (a left-hand Matoran, like the rest of the Company)? Also, although she was not identified in-game by name, can we assume that the Matoran caring for the defeated Tarakava was Kotu given that Kotu was canonically responsible for tending to freed Rahi? (Despite the fact this Matoran — like many other Matoran — did not share the same mask her set or appearance in the animations).

I think in Macku's case, details that led up to her appearance justified her inclusion over Kotu in the player's party, her relationship with Huki being most significant. We also decided it helped diversify the group a bit by including a right-hand character, and not making it exclusively made up of misfits.

1. **(Gonell)** Relating to the above, Kotu was responsible for leading Ga-Matoran defense forces. In the original plans for the Kini-Nui battle (as per the Templar development notes blog) Matoran from Ga-Koro, Po-Koro, and Ko-Koro were supposed to be depicted

as well, although they were later cut from the scene. Could you explain why they were removed?

I'm pretty sure that was a scope issue. In the battle animations, we included references to the other villages because they had significantly visual warlike capabilities (the Ussal cavalry, the disk-throwers), whereas the Ko-Korans, for example, might rely on stealth over open confrontation, and that was more difficult to depict. If they fought at all, being a very peaceful group.

- 18. (Vahkiti)** After Le-Koro when the player gains access to the fast travel system with the flute song, the player is able to call down a Kewa bird to take you to any village on the island. However earlier in the game's original episodic life cycle, this bird was instead the Kahu bird seen in the Nui Rama minigame with a completely different animation and associated map screen. Why was this changed midway through the game's initial run?

I think we had to bring it in line with the LEGO sets available at the time. The Kewa, I think, was available to build, so we had to shift it over.

- 19. (Markle)** Did you anticipate *MNOG* becoming as popular as it is within the bionicle community? What's your reaction to the attention it's garnered?

Heck no. But I'm so glad it did. Now that I have children of my own, in a world filled with user-created content, I can see how important it is that creators act responsibly to introduce well-intentioned, sincere, meaningful works to society. We really did care, and it's everything to see that validated and know there was a positive impact, from something that could have just been another product advertisement.

General:

- 20. (Gonel)** Do you still have the story bibles and style guides that you originally worked with? We have some archived from the later years of BIONICLE, but the 2001 one in particular has been the subject of much inquiry and speculation.

I do.

- 21. (Gonel)** Should we anticipate a concluding entry for the MNOG blog? And is there a possibility for posts covering the animations or MNOG 2, (or, dare I ask, expansion on the Programs 3-5 of MNOG)?

Actually, I think I do have one last batch of artwork and writing to share, but haven't quite gotten around to it. I'll pick it up again!

22. **(u0718580)** On Templar Games's online pages, it has been mentioned that being so close to the events of 9/11 impacted the story direction of the final chapters of the game. Do you think that escapism from the real world terror attacks contributed to the game and BIONICLE's popularity in the following years, along with the massive rise of fantasy in the early 2000s (things like *Halo*, *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, etc.)? Do you feel fantasy and sci-fi is important to countering the real life darkness in the world?

This is a really poignant question: thank you for asking it. Especially now, given the deluge of content available, and how easy it is to stare into devices instead of engaging with the world. Personally, I attribute my own escapism to disruptive events in my early years, when I submerged myself in fantasy and games; I know of others who buried themselves in Tolkien or *Dungeon & Dragons* after a tragedy in their lives. Conversely, playing *Counter-Strike*, with its terrorists, became oddly unenjoyable after 9-11. Art helps us process grief, reflect the world around us and give us insights even into our own feelings. By revealing things through new perspectives, it is a salve, a teacher, a therapist, and, yes, a refuge. The danger is that it becomes a prison, blocking life instead of enriching it.

23. **(BobTheDoctor27)** How does it feel looking back on Templar's work and knowing they were able to achieve so much story and character without any spoken audio in the animations?

Ha, I never thought about that, it's an interesting point. It might be a feature of film school, where we revered the philosophy of "show, don't tell," and therefore held that moving pictures — pictures, mind — didn't need words at all to tell amazing stories, and a filmmaker should never resort to dialogue to tell a story if they could do it with pictures. But of course, in the modern world, storytelling mostly happens with actors talking, in cutscenes. As far as printing words instead of using voiceover, I grew up on text adventures, and my advertising background taught me to write succinctly, so I knew I could avoid giving players too much to read. Interestingly, the first LEGO game we built, *Stormrunner*, featured excellent professional voice actors, but we never thought to use the same method after that, particularly given the localization needs of a global company like LEGO.

24. **(jointdog666 + Dave)** Many of the creatures, vehicles, and islanders in the Mata Nui flash games are seemingly based on real Bionicle toys, but are not actual LEGO sets. These include the iconic Ga-Koro boat from the start of the game, the Ta-Koro bridge engine, the Ko-Koro cable engine, the telescope, et cetera. Some parts can be clearly identified as actual LEGO parts while some cannot. What was the inspiration for these? Did LEGO come to Templar's office with actual LEGO builds of those, or were they based on drawings? Do you still have any pictures of the original toys or 3D models used for the game, and would you be willing to share them?

That was Gordon and Hong, our art team, being both clever and economical. They used references to Bionicle parts and shapes whenever they had to draw something, and would reuse 3D libraries of parts from models we built whenever a 3D rendering was needed. Most of the time they were playing fast and loose, so it's unlikely their designs are actually buildable, but I know many wonderful models have been invented that were inspired by their artwork from the game. Given all this attention and interest,

I'll make a special effort to get anything online that hasn't already been shared!

25. **(Gatanui)** Were there ever plans for a *Metru Nui Online Game* and if so, is there any concept art you can share?

Alas, no, LEGO severed their relationship with us not long after a handful of animations were done in 2004.

26. **(Gonel)** What was the origin of the Vahki Animations? And were they ever meant to be part of a larger project, or just promotional material?

Purely promotional. As mentioned, disruptions were happening at LEGO and we had no insight as to why support for Templar's games were withdrawn over time.

27. **(Gonel)** Was Templar ever contacted to do future games or animations through or past the Metru Nui arc?

Like above, no. We did submit proposals for other LEGO products much later — *Space Police*, I think, around 2008 maybe? — due to new there being new producers looking to reconnect with us. But they didn't get off the ground.

28. **(Gonel)** To what extent were the Templar team also involved in creating the story for Bionicle.com's Wall of History news updates? Did the 2002/2003 animations have to follow the story prescribed by the developers of the Wall of History, or was Templar influencing or directing the Wall of History?

We weren't involved in those, but I think a lot of the content was taken from what we were developing for MNOG 2. As we started by developing a much deeper, expanded society and culture for Mata Nui, we formed a lot of threads that would be carried forward by the comic book folks and others.

29. **(Gonel)** Were there plans for the animations that changed or evolved over their development? Any cancelled plans with respect to them?

No, I'm pretty sure it was a comparatively tiny contract (versus the MNOG contracts) with a very definite scope.

30. **(Gonel)** Who was responsible for writing the stories for MNOG games and animations?

It was my responsibility to create the initial drafts, but of course I collaborated endlessly with art and tech to evolve the final iterations. In some cases we employed the "Marvel method," where Gordon

would take the lead on some aspects, creating artwork that would then have story built around it.

31. **(Gatanui)** When was the first time LEGO approached you for a) *MNOG*, b) the Bohrok/Bohrok-Kal animations, and c) *MNOG II*?

I remember around Christmastime of 1999, I think, we were told there were big things cooking at LEGO for the next year, which they wanted us to pitch on. We knew enough about the Bohrok plans to include a foreshadowing in the conclusion to *MNOG*, and past that, the relationship evolved year-to-year through 2002-3, when we were engaged for the Bohrok animations, and then *MNOG 2*.

32. **(Toatapio Nuva)** What kinds of constraints by LEGO did you have working on *MNOG 1 & 2*?

We were extremely independent and self-motivated. We worked with a very insightful producer who had a vision, and saw that we could achieve it; LEGO's main office was in Europe; and they were awfully busy. We were also a side-show, not a big priority — very few people understood the potential the internet had back then, and didn't understand how much more impact we were having than traditional media. Us included.

33. **(fjperzef)** Were there parts of the games that changed drastically from the original plans?

See above regarding *MNOG 2* - the answer is, most definitely. For *MNOG*, I remember the most significant one was having to draw back on plans for an Onu-Koro action minigame, where you have to dodge spider-like Rahi in the tunnels.

34. **(Gonel)** Every contributor brought something new or different into this fantasy world. What were some of your favorite inventions and ideas that you added?

That's a tough question! It's very hard to answer that. Which of your children do you like the best? For me, in *MNOG* my favorite inventions were the big things: the structure, the distinct cultures, the way we ended it — it's very hard to end games and stories in satisfying ways. I liked the callbacks of gathering the Company in the final part, and I liked how we built in a turn-based strategy game you could play endlessly while waiting for the next episode. Gordon's animations for it were amazing. But when it comes to small things, I do think I personally invented the Ussal-crab cavalry, and the Kewa-bird fast travel mechanic. But I could be wrong about that.

35. **(Oma)** Besides *BIONICLE* games and animations, what else did/does Templar Games work on?

We did a lot of games for LEGO: *Stormrunner*, *Robohunter 1* and *2* for Mindstorms; *Racers*, *Drome Duel*, and *Supersonic RC* for the Racers line; *Jack Stone*; and *Backlot* for the LEGO Studios line, and maybe some others. Around the time of *MNOG* we also made *Tummy Trouble*, *Cul-de-Sac Smash 1* and *2*, *IGPX*

Immortal Grand Prix, and *Nose Hairs of Fury* for Cartoon Network, and games for other networks, movie studios, and ad agencies. This continued up until covid in 2020, when contracts slowed and I had an opportunity to work with another developer. Templar is currently on ice (but not gone)!

36. **(Emily)** Could you name one or two of your biggest creative influences? (That had a bearing on your BIONICLE work or otherwise?)

I've been impacted by a lot of fiction writers over the years, but if I had to pick one, I'd say Ursula K. Le Guin, from an early age. In film, David Lynch and Ridley Scott are two of my favorites. In games, Sid Meier was always a big influence, and also Paul Neurath and Richard Garriott, as I mentioned.

37. **(Goniel)** How did Templar's work in BIONICLE influence subsequent projects that it worked on?

Because of its depth and array of minigames, we had the opportunity to rapidly test a lot of mechanics while making Bionicle. We developed a pretty robust system for conversation trees that was easy to edit and iterate with; a method of using 3D animation in a 2D environment; and other RPG elements such as inventory systems and an economy. It underscored how important it was to prototype, iterate, and play the game in development — and play it with as many people as possible — to get it right. Most of all, though, it gave us a blindingly clear idea of just how much time, effort, and resources are needed to develop a title and deliver it on time and inside a budget — and, in the case of MNOG 2, what happens to the game if those needs aren't met.

38. **(Goniel)** What new projects do you have in store that fans should look out for?

I'm currently engaged with a new developer on a multi-platform console title, which we're hoping to release next year or in 2025. I hope I'll be able to reveal more about it soon.

39. **(Goniel)** If you could invent your own BIONICLE Rahi, what would it look like, and what special abilities would it have?

The loss of biodiversity on the planet over the last centuries has had the eerie effect of making the world quieter: fewer bumbling bees, buzzing flies, birdcalls, and general cacophony I'd hear in wild places when I was little. I could imagine a Rahi that only attacks in silence, sort of like the Weeping Angels on *Dr. Who*, but for sound. As long as there's some noise, they don't come. Of course at first the Matoran would think they only come at night, or in the dark, but actually it's only when things are quiet. So, cold, wintry places would be dangerous, and they'd have come from the vacuum of space, where there's no sound, but in general, as long as you're making some kind of noise, they stay away. They move like lightning if it's silent. Maybe they're big round fleshy balls covered in ear-holes — one of the weirder parts of anatomy — with claws, and giant fanged mouths, but they make no noise. It would be creepy to always have to be making some sound, and it would be hard to sleep maybe, although even a quietly ticking clock would probably do the trick. It would underscore the idea that growth is not necessarily progress, and that advancements can have adverse effects we can't predict, such as attracting such creatures.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS:

1. In 2004 the Bionicle website was revamped and MNOG 2 was temporarily taken down. When the game went live again, two crucial files were missing: Nixie's library and the one containing all of Nokama's dialogue. To make the game playable again Nixie's library was painstakingly recreated, but for Nokama's dialogue, all we have is a fan-written patch file with some barebones dialogue to substitute. Is there a possibility the original file still exists? If not, do you have any idea what it would have said?

It does exist. She provides hints about who to speak to in town, about what, and how to get better at Kolhii. Interestingly, she shares a lot more if you lost the kolhii match than if you won. I'll attach it here if I can. Nixie's library is where you'd find the Nixie's Key, allowing you to visit Nixie whenever you want without using the conveyor.

2. In an early version of Legend of Mata Nui an Onu-Matoran named Nobua makes his first and only appearance. In MNOG a similar Matoran appears deep in the mines. Was Nobua a character you were familiar enough with to have included him here, or was this just coincidence?

Strange, but I find no reference to anyone called Nobua in MNOG2 or MNOG. The only Hau worn by an Onu-Koran in MNOG 2 is Zemya the trader's.

3. In the Quest for the Toa game, a Po-Matoran named Podu makes his own first and only appearance. Were you ever given any information about this Matoran?

No, I have no reference to a Podu in my old files.

4. Finally, also in QftT six there were six Matoran responsible for safeguarding the Vuata Maca trees. (In the Nintendo Power Advance magazine, these characters are called "Wizards," although this is the only instance of this name.) Did you know anything about the Wizards, and were they ever considered for inclusion in any of your work?

No again, that seems to have predated our efforts, and was not passed on.

5. Moreover, outside of Matoro giving Takua the Vuata Maca fruit in the first game, were Vuata Maca tree fruit, Madu fruit, Bula berries, or any other items from QftT considered for inclusion in your games and animations?

It sounds strange but very little of the themes and content from Quest for the Toa carried over to our work.

6. What were the Spirits of Valor and Wisdom that the Toa Kaita called upon? Did they have any connection to Papu and Rangi?

The Toa Kaita, Wairuha and Akamai, themselves represent Valor and Wisdom, respectively. So, no, except insofar as they were engineered by the creators to be the ones to awaken Mata Nui. At least according to the original story bible.

7. Outside of what would have appeared in The Legend of Mata Nui, what information were you given about the Makoki Stones and/or Noble Masks?

In the materials from 2002, the Makoki are described: "A stone fragment collected by each Toa. The assembled stone forms the key to Kini-Nui and opens the pathway to the Makuta's domain." However in the 2000 bible, it says there are two, and they're masks, more powerful than the Great Masks, and worn by the Toa Kaita. They are each made from eight Kanohi. Noble Masks have power but not as much as Great Masks, and can be worn by Toa and Turaga.

8. Alastair Swinnerton mentioned once that as far as he was concerned it was ambiguous whether the island was actually physical or digital -- the latter scenario explaining Makuta's role as a virus and his controls over the island. Was this ever anything you were informed about?

There is some detail in the original materials that describe the villagers as carrying Mata Nui's digital DNA, and behaving as cells and viruses in a human body, whereas the Toa are like penicillin — but robot versions of those things. So it seems both things are true. I always imagined they were effectively robots, with no organic components, but the metal behaved and grew (or was manufactured) in an organic way, on a cellular level. Kind of like they were silicon-based, instead of carbon. But that's just my personal take.

9. In MNOG 2 the default mask for Matoran is a Kaukau, but despite this Hahli appears to be the only character intended to have a Kaukau. The Ta-Matoran guard Nuri/Nuhrii appears in the game with a Kaukau, but the code sets his mask to "Kamau" which appears to be a misspelling of "Komau" (the misspelling causing him to revert to the default mask). If he is meant to have a Komau it would match one character in the animations. Was this likely to have been a spelling mistake? And if so, why was Hahli the only Matoran set to wear a Kaukau?

I can confirm that Hahli is the only one wearing a kaukau according to the *Final Chronicle* documentation, but I have no reason for this other than that it was the original Mask of Water.

10. A prominent symbol throughout Templar's work is the Mata Nui stone, which pops up as the Bohrok Nest Portal, Po-Koro souvenirs, Matoran home decorations, and Onu-Koro candle holders, to name only a few notable occurrences. The prominence of the Mata Nui stone symbol adds a lot of cultural flare to Matoran life, and I was wondering if you could speak to the idea of making that widespread (as opposed to the Makuta stone which only appears in the Amaja-Nui sandpit for the Legend of Mata Nui).

We had a lot of material to work with, but could only reveal it in small pieces over time. The island and its nature was significant to the complete arc of the story — perhaps the single most significant element — so we introduced it as often as we could, hopefully without revealing too much. Its constant appearance was to reinforce how important it was to explaining everything that was going on.

11. Speaking of the Bohrok Nest Portal -- Was it always intended as a portal deep into Mangaia/Kini-Nui from the start? If not, what was it intended to be?

I think I mentioned elsewhere, it was not! We were producing programs at a pretty furious rate, so when we caught on to something revealed in a previous episode, that we could leverage in the current story development, we grabbed it. Due to the pace of development I'd say plot threads were discovered and conveniently repurposed (if they worked) as often as they were planned. We got pretty lucky but Gordon's work also really accommodated a lot of "eureka!" moments when plotting the story. So this was an instance where the visual design provided narrative support as much as, if not more than, the written script. When we needed an exit for Takua from Makuta's lair, I remember feeling very happy and very lucky that we could pop out of the statue on the beach, and bring the whole story full circle, all because of because of Gordon's creativity in the original set-dressing for the first program. I'm pretty sure he purposely created these little details and would keep them in his back pocket for a rainy day.

12. This will be very specific, but in the Onu-Wahi level of MNOG 2 there is a Matoran who works under Mamoru who wears a Matatu. In the first game, there is a Matoran also wearing a Matatu and who also works under Mamoru who gives Takua the letter to Nixie the astrologer in the first game, although the color schemes are very different. (Perhaps it was changed for the second game to differentiate him from Piatra). Would you happen to know if these were the same character?

Azibo is the Onu-Koran that wears a Matatu, and is described as Mamoru's best prospector. I can't remember his role in MNOG 1, though, and I don't have mention of him earlier than *FC*.

13. Was Templar ever given descriptions or names for any of the Rahi that never became set models?

I honestly don't remember. We certainly received the ones that did, but I can't remember any conversations around in-development Rahi concepts.

14. Over the development of The Legend of Mata Nui game, Kapura was originally designed with a Pakari and yellow feet (matching MNOG) before getting switched to a Ruru and red feet (like in the '03 Bios render). Do you know anything about these changes? And did they have anything to do with the confusion between Hafu's and Taipu's masks (who had their Pakari and Ruru switched) or even Kotu having a Pakari?

I don't think we had any interaction with the makers of the Legend of Mata Nui. I do know that a) there were lots of funny emails back and forth about mask mixups with those characters, and b) in my documents, Kapura has a Pakari and is all red.

15. A document from Lego customer service indicates that there were twelve total polybags planned, only six of which became the McDonald's Matoran. A message one fan got from "Gordo" of Templar (maybe Gordon Klimes?) said that from the beginning there were going to be twelve "hero" Matoran sets, six of which became the Chronicler's Company. Were you ever told if the Chronicler's Company Matoran were intended to become sets?

Gosh, I don't know. I'm sure Gordo was Gordon, and he may have known more than I about it. We had little contact with the marketing department handling the McDonald's promotion, but it would make sense if they were targeting both the Turaga's left- and right-hand main Matoran characters, as these had the most detail in the original materials.