

# SPECIAL INTERVIEW 1

# YUJI HORII

The creator himself talks about everything *Dragon Quest*, from its inception to its ongoing future!!

✝ **Based on current trends, there's a very high chance that *Dragon Quest V* will land on the Super Famicom.**

## PROGRESS ON THE NEXT GAME

— Everyone wants to know more about *Dragon Quest IV*. In fact, will there be a *DQ IV*?

Well... I can't really talk about that.

— So, Horii-san, what about your next work? Is it *Dragon Quest IV*, or something unrelated?

One of my next works is about 70-80% complete, so it will be revealed in Jump, in an issue around the beginning of next year.

— So you're making other games?

Yes, actually! I'm making a board game for the Famicom. It's pretty much finished already, so I think it will be revealed as early as this year. I can't talk too much about it now, but it's a pretty interesting game. So yes, I'm

producing other games, but they're taking quite a while, so there's not much I can say.

## MORE ON *DRAGON QUEST V*

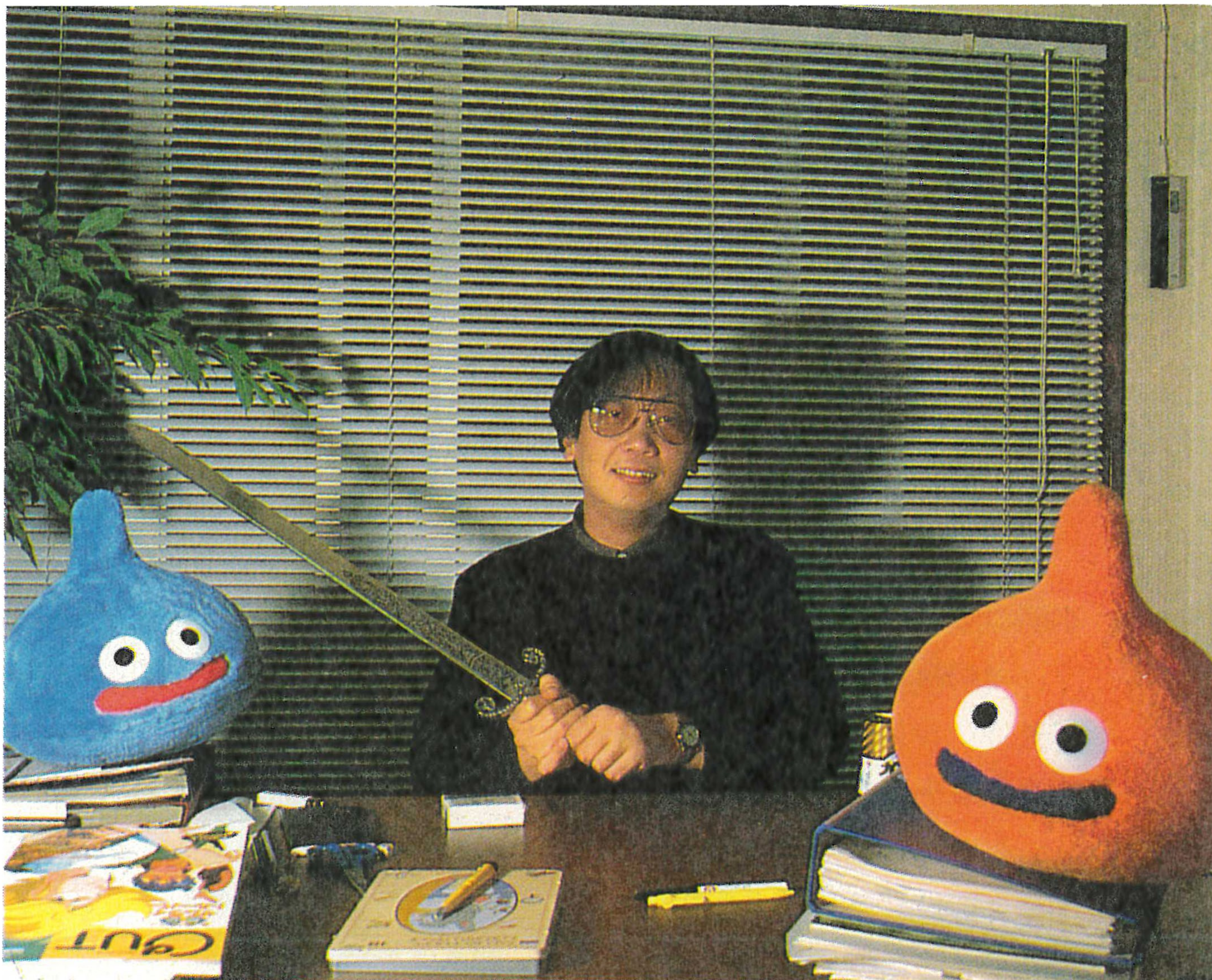
— What's going on with *Dragon Quest V* for the Super Famicom?

With how things are going now, it might just happen. The Famicom is pretty much at its limit, and there's a lot that I can't do now, but really want to.

— As a fan, I'd love to see *Dragon Quest* continue.

I love *Dragon Quest* too. I've worked hard to develop it, so I'd like to continue it however possible. It's just that the workload keeps going up, so it's getting harder and harder to make one game a year.

— You're always trying to make the games more interesting, so the workload is increasing?



Not only that, but because of the ROM, we have to wait six months or more after the game is done. *(laughs)* So, let's say, even if the game is finished by the end of the year, it won't come out until, say, July or August.

— **So if that happens, even if the game is finished, there's no guarantee it'll come out.**

Thing is, if I say this, I'll be told to get on with it and release the game already. *(laughs)* I'm only making an analogy.

## **AN IDEAL GAME**

— **What's your ideal game?**

That's really hard to say, what an ideal game should be... It changes from time to time, to be honest. But I can say that it'd be

a game that anyone can enjoy.

— **I once heard someone say that it'd be good to make an RPG without experience points or levels.**

Our ideals change, so always we end up wanting something even better. I think we'll see RPGs with no experience points soon enough. There are kids who don't like leveling up, and repeating something over and over can be a real drag... but there are other kids who *like* raising their levels. Everyone's different, after all.

Another thing is, if you pay attention to the storyline, it's fast-paced and fun, but once it's completed, you can't play it again. I think it's important, to be able to play after the story is over.



## **Dragon Quest was a big gamble: either it would be either a big hit or ignored**

### **THE SECRET ORIGIN OF DRAGON QUEST**

— Did you have a full series' worth of story in mind while making *Dragon Quest I*?

No, I didn't — not while I was making that game.

— Only at the time?

Yes, although I was already thinking about the systems for *Dragon Quest II*.

— So the story came together when you were making *Dragon Quest III*?

No. I had a plan for *DQ III* while working on *II* — so the whole story was completed when I was making *DQ II*.

— What was the reason for making *Dragon Quest* in the first place?

First of all, the Famicom was a big hit. And at that time, the only Famicom games available were [ports of] arcade games. And I played a lot of games on the computer, so I wanted the general public to know about them.

— Computer games?

Yes. But I didn't feel like jumping in and making an RPG (role-playing game) right away, so I made *The Portopia Serial Murder Case*, a game that you could play with text on-screen. Then, after people got used to reading on-screen text and

making decisions off of it, I put out an RPG.

— So Portopia was a stepping stone to the making of *Dragon Quest*.

Pretty much.

— At that time, did you expect *Dragon Quest* to become such a hit?

I thought it was a gamble. I thought it'd either be ignored or a big hit.

— But it all worked out well in the end, right?

True. But in the prototype stages, it felt a little more like a computer game. For example, computer games at that time threw you right into the field. And if you died, you had to start from your last save spot, or from the beginning. That was my initial idea for *Dragon Quest* as well, but I discarded that as I worked on the game.

#### Translator's note

*The Portopia Serial Murder Case* is a 1983 adventure game for home computers designed by Yuji Horii. In contrast to the text-based input of contemporary adventure games, *Portopia* used a command menu; this system was refined for *Dragon Quest*. *Portopia* was extremely influential on popular video game designers such as Hideo Kojima (Aonuma (*The Legend of Zelda*)).



— **That would've made beginners give up.**

That's why you just get a penalty instead. If you die, you don't lose your experience points or items; just half of your money. I thought that even if the player died without understanding why, leveling up would help them understand better, so I made the crazy decision to let the player's level increase with just 7 experience points.

— **And that kind of thinking led to success.**

## **SOMETHING TO LOOK BACK AND LAUGH ABOUT**

Also, I made the player start in the field, but no one understood that at all. The people in front of the screen didn't go into towns and just went straight to battle. They could see the town, but didn't think they could get in.

— **Nowadays, everyone gets that very well. At the time, most people didn't know what RPGs were.**

That's right. I used to play a lot in computers, so I knew I could get into the town; but children who didn't know would think it was just scenery to look at.

— **Now that's something to look back and laugh about.**

Since that didn't work out, I had the player start in the castle, made the objectives clear, and made it so that you couldn't leave the room until you'd learned the controls. Then, once players knew they could get into the town next door because



they stood on top of the castle upon leaving, I made it so they could learn everything in order.

## **THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF DRAGON QUEST**

— **How did *Dragon Quest's* basic systems come about?**

I like RPGs myself, and I got really into *Wizardry* and *Ultima*. That's when I realized that dungeon-oriented games are harder, and field-oriented games are more breezy fun. But *Wizardry* had a really cool direction, and that game's idea was, you just have to go down and down the dungeons. So I thought I'd express that direction in a field-oriented game, and that's how *Dragon Quest* came about. *DQ* is supposed to be a field-oriented game, but with a clear objective and a layered structure.

### **Translator's note**

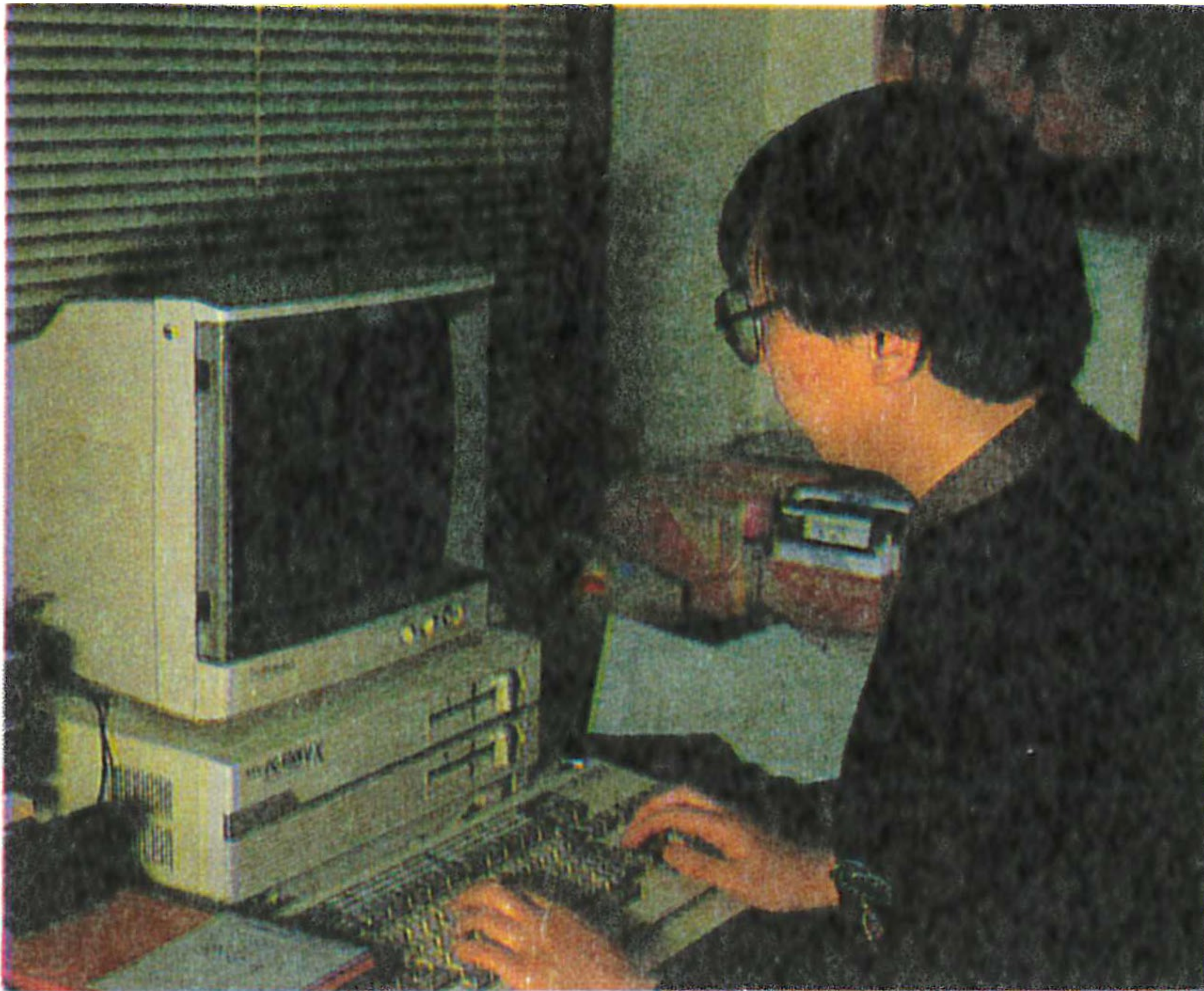
*Wizardry: Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord* is a 1981 dungeon-crawling RPG for home computers. Aside from its smash success in English-speaking territories, it gained a cult following in Japan, where it influenced game designers like Yuji Horii and Hironobu Sakaguchi (

A full 3D remake of the game was released in 2023 for Steam and eighth-generation consoles.

## OTHER *DRAGON QUEST* STORIES

— The world of *Dragon Quest* is now well-established. Do you plan on making other games in that world?

I'd like to do something like that, someday, if I have the time. I had an idea that was scrapped from *DQ III*: there was a town that was just a mystery adventure. It was pretty interesting. I wonder if I could make a game with that kind of story...



...like a game with a protagonist that isn't a legendary hero, but someone with more of a background part. Maybe a game starring a merchant, where all you do is make money.

— That scrapped event; was it plot-important?

No, but it was sort of related. You weren't required to solve the mystery, but you'd get a good reward if you did... that reward was actually the Night Light.

## THE FUN AND THE CHORES

— What does *Dragon Quest* mean to you, Horii-san?

It's a lot of work, but seeing it finished feels good. It's like raising a child, really.

— So is the process of making a game really hard?

To be honest, half of it is fun and the other half's a chore.

— What's the fun part?

It's fun to think about new things and come up with ideas... but the physical labor of turning them into a game is a chore. You can have an interesting idea, but if you think too hard about it, you'll run into a lot of bugs and issues. In the end, it's not easy to think of a way to avoid them. The process would be much more fun if you came up with ideas, and they were made then and there. (laughs)

— If it were that easy to make a game, with just ideas, everyone would become a game designer.

The hard part is actually implementing your ideas on-screen.

✝ **No matter how powerful the Super Famicom is, if it doesn't take off, it'll be worthless**

## **IS THE FAMICOM AT ITS LIMIT?!**

— **So, after all this time making games, do you feel that the Famicom has reached its limit?**

The biggest limit I feel right now is that — first of all — there can be only 256 characters and four palettes (basic colors) on-screen. So, in terms of graphics, it's pretty tough. There's a lot of special places I want to make, but I can't — and I want to put many different people in towns, but I can't increase the number of people in them. But the capacity has increased, so I try to think of ways to do it, but it's not easy. That's why there aren't many in-game cutscenes.

Also, there's not enough RAM. I really want to do more, but there wouldn't be any work to save the game. Maybe if the Adventure Logs were combined into one...

— **That wouldn't be good at all.**

Having three Adventure Log slots allows for different ways to play. If we only had one Adventure Log slot, we could have more complex events, but that's not happening. We could add more RAM, but that'd bring higher costs.



— **So you have high hopes for the Super Famicom.**

Well, the specs for the Super Famicom aren't clear yet, so it's too early to call. In fact, at this point we don't know if it suits our needs.

— **Do you have high hopes that it will?**

I do have high hopes. But there's still one question: will it catch on? If people don't switch to the Super Famicom, no matter how many games you make for it, not everyone will be able to play them. And that'd be a shame. Buying a Super Famicom just for a new Dragon Quest game would be a huge expense (for the average player). But if everyone naturally switches to the Super Famicom, it'll be easier for us to make games.

# SPECIAL INTERVIEW 2

# KOICHI SUGIYAMA

One of the creators talks about *Dragon Quest* from a musical perspective and the future of the series!

✝ "I hope people focus on not just the negative aspects, but the positive ones too!"

## ENJOYMENT COMES FIRST AND FOREMOST

— Was *Dragon Quest* your first game soundtrack?

It was my first time making music for the Famicom.

— Did you have any difficulties making *DQ*'s music?

Not at all. To be honest, I had fun.

— You're a big "game freak"; what did you think when you played *Dragon Quest* first-hand?

It was really fun, I thought it was a great game. I got so addicted to it that I couldn't stop playing.

— So, out of *DQ I* to *III*, which one do you like the most...?

*III*, of course. *I*, *II*, *III*... it just keeps getting better. It's rare for a work to only get better the more you make of it.

— What do you do to improve, musically speaking?

I find it very important to consider if I'll enjoy a piece when it's played its intended scene.

— After all, if you enjoy it, other people will enjoy it too.

That's right. I'm a "game freak" too, so there's nothing better than music that I can enjoy while playing.

— It seems like the *Dragon Quest* staff thinks the same way.

Yes, I think that's an important tenet of *Dragon Quest*.



— **And your love of games is a big part of that.**

So I believe. In the end, music and games all have theory as their foundation — but in the end, they're all about sensitivity, not logic-based creation. I think everyone values that (sensitivity) the most.

## **FAVORITE SONG**

— **Which *Dragon Quest* song is your favorite?**

I try my best with each song, so I don't have a favorite in particular. And if I don't like a song that I've made, I scrap it before it's released. But some songs are particularly memorable: for example, the main map theme of Alefgard, which appears in all three. Even I feel nostalgic when I hear that song.

## **THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF *DRAGON QUEST***

— **By the way, you've also held concerts, right? How did fans react to them?**

The reactions to the concerts were incredible. Listening to live concerts in Japan isn't a frequent habit, but I think it's an important one to develop.



— **It's not often you see children at a concert!**

Yes, and if this gets them into the habit of going to concerts, they could only stand to gain from it. They'll have more chances to experience fun music.

— **On that note: it seems like *Dragon Quest's* music is being taught in school classes too.**

Yes, it's being used a lot in music classes.

— **Has game music ever been used in educational settings before?**

I think this is the first time. It's been called a social phenomenon, but I feel like the game is gaining some real social significance.





**"I want the *Tora-san* series to continue for 20 or 30 games on the Famicom!"**

## WHAT'S NEXT?

— As a composer, will you continue making game music in the future?

Of course, I want to keep at it.

— What kind of game music do you want to make in the future?

I've made a lot of different types of music, so instead of focusing on a specific type, I'd like to write the best music for each game.

— As a "game freak", what kind of games do you want?

I'd think about that more often if I was a game planner, but I just keep looking for fun games that strike my fancy.

## LOOK FORWARD TO THE NEXT GAME!

— What does *Dragon Quest* mean to you, personally, Sugiyama-san?

Work is work, so I should think of it as a way to earn a living — but now it's more like my biggest pleasure than a mere job. I've been waiting anxiously for the next one to come out.

— Do you think *Dragon Quest* will keep going?



Yes, I think it will continue for quite some time; maybe, about one per year. I think that masterpieces of entertainment should be made into series.

— For example, do you think *Tora-san* would work on the Famicom?

Yes! That's exactly what I said to producer [Yukinobu] Chida. He asked me how much longer it could go on, and I said that, from a producer's point of view, long-running programs have a special feel to them. Some examples would be film series like *Tora-san* and *James Bond*. We've talked about getting inspiration from what we find good about those series.

— We hope they can keep going too!

Do you? So do I. Let's give it all the hope we can! (laughs)

### Translator's note

*Tora-san* (男はツライよ *Otoko wa Tsurai Yo*, "It's Tough Being a Man") is a Japanese comedy franchise about the hijinks of traveling salesman "Tora-san" Torajirō Kuruma.

The franchise spanned a TV series (1968-1969) and forty-nine movies (1969-1995), all starring Kiyoshi Atsumi as Tora-san. A 50th movie celebrating the series's 50th anniversary (*Tora-san, Wish You Were Here*) was released in 2019, featuring the series' legacy cast recalling Tora-san's presence in their lives; Atsumi appears in archive footage.