

Ultimate Collector: A Timeline

Rumours and Mentions

MARCH 15, 2011 - FIRST MENTION

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2011/03/lord-british-will-return/>

Gamasutra reports that Richard Garriott dropped one hell of a bomb at South by South West (SXSW), an annual film, music, and interactive arts festival held in Austin, Texas.

Garriott's company Portalarium is competing in this year's SXSW Accelerator competition, one of the show's most prestigious events and biggest launching pads.

Previous entrants include Foursquare and Foodspotting. The company unveiled a pair of new titles at the event — including one featuring the return of Ultima's Lord British.

Lord British's New Britannia (working title) will be a social networking game built around Garriott's famous alter ego, which he wholly owns — as opposed to the Ultima universe, which Electronic Arts has the rights to.

The title is set to come out after the second quarter release of Ultimate Collector, the company's first original game, which will take the form of a social network game paired with a television show hosted by Garriott, the pilot for which has already been shot.

Further details were light for both titles, since Garriott's presentation was primarily an appeal to investors for the \$3.8 million in financing the company is seeking. However, Garriott did note "the virtual world game is not just an ultra-light MMO shopped on social media. I think that would be a failure."

Previously, the Ultima creator has been somewhat vague about whether [Portalarium](#) would feature a Lord British-themed fantasy title in its lineup of games. Not any more, I guess!

New Britannia...actually kinda catchy, though I'm sure it won't be the release title.

DECEMBER 8, 2011 - FORMAL ANNOUNCEMENT

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2011/12/richard-garriotts-next-game-ultimate-collector-garage-sale/>

In Ultimate Collector: Garage Sale, the quest to find and assemble a wide variety of fabulous collections is easy and fun. Create your avatar and your house and begin the quest for the items you want. With plenty of content to appeal to both males and females, these items might be antique radios, purple stuffed toys, home décor, books, artwork, historical weapons or just a set of tools. Items can be collected as you visit your friends' or other players' garage sales, estate sales, markets, pawn shops, storage units, auctions or even from national retailers who will have their own stores in the game.

There are literally thousands of collectible items in the game," said Executive Producer Dallas Snell. "You may find an item that you really want, but you may need it authenticated by an expert to find out its true value. Some items might need repair to increase their worth. They are all real world items and we've scoured the Internet looking at auction and collectors' sites to determine authenticity. In fact we've provided links in the game so players can go back to these websites to learn more about the items they've collected and, in some cases, even buy them for real if they still exist and are available for sale."

Colour me a tad skeptical on this one, Dragons and Dragonettes. The Portalarium concept itself fascinates me, and I think it's the path forward for social gaming and cross-platform gaming. Garriott still commands much of my respect, and I still think he has a genuine creative spark in him.

But this? I think I can see what he's trying to do, and I really should have been mulling this over back with the game was first hinted at. But even though I think I can see what his aim is (and I'll get to that shortly), I'm skeptical.

What I think Garriott is trying to do here is, in essence, fundraise. That's the best word I can think to use. Obviously, *Ultimate Collector* is a game that's going to have a very particular audience; it's target is the casual Facebook user.

Particular though that audience may be, however, it is also a very large audience. And the potential certainly exists that it could be a very *lucrative* audience for Portalarium, if the game is launched and executed correctly, and if it takes off. That Zynga may well be worth more than all of EA is testament to the fact that social gaming can, under the right conditions, bring massive returns to developers.

And we all know why Garriott would need to fundraise. Large, open RPGs — especially MMORPGs (or, at least, online RPGs) — don't come cheap. I've little doubt that most of *Ultimate Collector*'s profits will go toward the development of *New Britannia* (or whatever it ends up being called).

That said, with the game finally announced, and with its basic design and play mechanics finally given some explanation... I'm just not sure. To be fair, the game is about more than just scrounging for loot; you can hold your own garage sales, and there is a bit of a worldbuilding aspect that flows from that. The game seems intent on really amping up the social interactions between players, which is (if nothing else) a good foundation to have if your end goal is the creation of an online RPG as well.

But is that all enough to make it stand out...or, rather, to make it stand out enough to show the success of the Portalarium idea?

DECEMBER 9, 2011 - MORE DETAILS (THE BIG IDEA)

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2011/12/richard-garriott-ultimate-collector-is-the-backbone-of-my-next-game/>

Richard Garriott just can't seem to stop giving interviews these days! This time, [he sat down with Eurogamer to discuss Portalarium's upcoming game](#), *Ultimate Collector*, and where the garage sale-focused casual game fits into his wider plan:

"Ultimate Collector really is the backbone of the next game," Richard Garriott told Eurogamer.

"None of the art is the same, of course, and there are absolutely no roles in Ultimate Collector, like there will be in the next game, but the tool-suite is continuing to evolve."

Rather than develop and test all of the necessary Ultimate RPG features at once, Garriott had Portalarium make simple casino games to establish (and help fund) "fundamental" back-end tools like friends lists, buying and selling, real-money transactions and Facebook integration.

Ultimate Collector expands Portalarium's capabilities to avatars, houses, secure trading, object collection "and all these other kind of things that are more role-playing-like". But still no combat, no magic, "not the diversity of roles to play".

You'll recall, Dragons and Dragonettes, that in reporting on *Ultimate Collector* yesterday, I mused that it was probably a fundraising effort as much as anything else. I wasn't wrong in that guess, and I kind of mused that the game might also be a means for Portalarium to grow out some of the other technologies that it would need to create a massive RPG with a strong

social component. BanditLOAF, from the [Wing Commander CIC](#), actually [got a chance to see an early build of the game](#) earlier this year, and he said that it's actually rather cool:

It's basically Animal Crossing on Facebook, which alone should make everyone involved very rich (I think; there seems to be an x-factor in casual gaming that no one has exactly cracked yet, having to do with how you get exposure for your game regardless of how good/appealing it is.) What I saw had some surprisingly deeper RPG elements, too. There was a kind of 'crafting' system that involved repairing and appraising the items you collect. If anything, it seemed like it was too complex for the audience.

Sergorn is correct about this being the start of the "portal" in Portalarium, too. Richard Garriott explained that you could for instance have a card table in your house that you click to jump to the Portalarium poker game... and when the "ultimate RPG" appears, you'll travel to it through a moongate in your back yard (uh, the unlicensed equivalent of a moongate, I mean.)

Not just a game, but an app launcher and game catalogue frontend, then. Intriguing!

JANUARY 4, 2012

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2012/01/portalariums-ultimate-rpg-has-a-logo/>

Portalarium, the social gaming company co-founded by Richard Garriott, recently [revamped their website](#), giving it a slightly cleaner look. They also added a couple of new sections to the site, one for the recently-announced [Ultimate Collector](#), and one for Richard Garriott's [Ultimate RPG](#).

At present, there isn't much to actually see on the Ultimate RPG's page, apart from a brief description of the idea and link to [Richard Garriott's lengthy missive about it](#). There is, however, a snazzy new logo, which is evidently associated with the game.

There are two elements in play on the shield: a [Templar](#) Cross, and our old friend the Silver Serpent. I'm not sure if the Templar symbol is significant in any way, although it is certainly true that a sizeable body of myth and legend has been built up around that once-proud knightly order.

That said, I am assuming that the Silver Serpent is significant in some way, and is a very obvious bone thrown in the direction of long-time *Ultima* fans. And that, Dragons and Dragonettes, is rather exciting, no?

Side note: To be fair, Bernard de Clairvaux's description of a Templar could easily apply as a description of the Knights and Paladins of Britannia, or the Order of the Silver Serpent:

A Templar Knight is truly a fearless knight, and secure on every side, for his soul is protected by the armour of faith, just as his body is protected by the armour of steel. He is thus doubly armed, and need fear neither demons nor men.

Just replace "faith", above, with a reference to the Virtues!

Game in Development

APRIL 13, 2012 - BETA TEST SIGNUPS OPENED

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2012/04/anyone-want-to-sign-up-for-the-ultimate-collector-beta-2/>

Richard Garriott and [Portalarium's](#) next game, [Ultimate Collector](#), [has entered public beta testing](#).

Here's [a bit of detail](#) about the game:

Ultimate Collector: Garage Sale takes collecting to a whole new level of fun. Start first with a basic home and yard and then begin your journey to collecting and shopping nirvana. Search newspapers for that unique item that will complete your collection. Hold a garage sale at your house to bring in some cash. Add patio furniture, a bird bath and bouncy castle in your yard to add to its curb appeal. Visit other garage sales to complete your collections.

Search for practically anything: teddy bears, tool kits, Barbie dolls, historic sets of armor, weapons, electronics and much, much more. Share you collections with your friends and show them off inside your home.

But Ultimate Collector is about more than just collecting. It's about decorating and growing your home and impressing your friends. Place your treasured collections in special display cases inside your home. Purchase larger pieces of property to increase the size of your house. Search other garage sales to find that perfect decoration. You'll be the talk of the neighborhood.

Ultimate Collector is truly a first of its kind experience in social network gaming.

If you're interested in seeing the next big thing that Lord British himself is working on, [sign up on Facebook!](#)

APRIL 28, 2012 - WEEKEND OPEN BETA TEST

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2012/04/check-out-the-ultimate-collector-garage-sale-beta-this-weekend/>

The next game from Richard Garriott and [Portalarium](#), the browser-based *Ultimate Collector: Garage Sale*, is in open beta [this weekend only!](#)

I realize that the game — which is largely focused on virtually buying and selling items at garage sales run by NPCs and players — may not be everyone's cup of tea, but it's still something that *Ultima* fans (and Richard Garriott fans in general) should pay attention to, because it will pave the way for the much-discussed [Ultimate RPG](#) that Lord British has talked about at length.

If you're on Facebook, you can try the game [here](#). I'd already signed up to test *Ultimate Collector*, so I was taken right in to the game. For those of you who haven't similarly registered for it, there may or may not be a registration screen to fill out; I really can't say.

MAY 8, 2012 - ULTIMA CONNECTIONS

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2012/05/maybe-they-should-call-it-ultima-collector-2/>

John "Razimus Dragon" Hughston [boasts a pretty impressive collection of items](#) in the ongoing beta trial of [Portalarium's](#) upcoming game, *Ultimate Collector: Garage Sale*. And many of those items are...shall we say?...very familiar-looking!



As Razimus explains it: “I highly recommend this game, it gives you the sense of having gone on a shopping spree, without spending a penny, and it is educational with a link to a site about each item.” And he adds: “Supporting this game, *Ultimate Collector*, is the same as supporting the next great RPG of the future, who wouldn’t want to support that game? you can do so by supporting the game that is here and now, the game that precedes the *Ultimate RPG*.”

That really is the long and short of it, *Dragons and Dragonettes*; the success of *Ultimate Collector* directly impacts the future of the *Ultimate RPG* that Richard Garriott has talked about over the last so many months. If nothing else, consider [giving the game a try](#) just to see what it has to say about the *Ultima* series and other Origin Systems-related treasures!

MAY 25, 2012 - SUPPORT PORTAL OPENED

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2012/05/by-the-way-if-youve-had-issues-playing-ultimate-collector-2/>

Hi all,

First off, thanks for all the positive feedback we’ve been receiving over the last few weeks/months regarding the game! We value all your responses (good and bad).

On another note, if you are encountering problems with the game, please go to our support site at: <http://support.portalarium.com/>. We have an FAQ there as well as other Knowledge Base articles that will help with both gameplay and technical issues.

If these articles don’t address your needs, please contact us using the links on the right side of the page.

So, if you’ve been experimenting in the latest game from Richard Garriott and his new company, and if you happen to have encountered issues whilst doing so...hit up the Portalarium support portal.

JUNE 5, 2012 - CLOSED BETA UNDERWAY

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2012/06/ultimate-collector-garage-sale-is-in-open-beta-2/>

Our friends at [the Wing Commander CIC](#) are reporting that the next game from Richard Garriott and [Portalarium](#), *Ultimate Collector: Garage Sale*, is now [in open beta on Facebook](#). LOAF's description of the game is particularly keen, so I'll excerpt it here rather than try say the same thing:

At first glance the game, with its bright colors and Sims-inspired interface, seems to be another casual Zynga-style "ville" game. The type of game that will get everyone involved very rich but perhaps not interest old school gamers. Appearances can be deceiving, though, and in this case they belie a game that is actually built around the sort of complex mechanics that Garriott's Ultima series were known for. Players looking for a simple 'collect stuff' game are rapidly lead into an experience that is not unlike the crafting mechanics found in serious MMORPGs.

The game's controls and mechanics do take a bit of getting used to, but there is indeed more "there" there than first seems apparent. And as a bonus, Lord British has filled the game with all sorts of in-jokes and references to Origin Systems; a virtual Britannia Manor can be obtained in the game, as can pretty much every *Ultima* game.

Even *Akalabeth* can be found in rare cases, in its much-sought-after (and often forged, in real life) '5.25" diskette in a plastic bag' form!

Update: I was wrong. David Swofford at Portalarium contacted me to let me know that *Ultimate Collector* is still in closed beta, and that a mistake in reportage had been made. Or, as LOAF explains in the comments:

...this was a mistake on my part. UC is still in closed beta. I was just looking for an excuse to show off the Wing Commander screenshots and used the wrong term... which I guess made it sound like some change had happened!

So, just to be clear: the game is still in closed beta, though you can still sign up for said beta at its Facebook page.

JUNE 12, 2012

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2012/06/gather-your-party-interviews-richard-garriott-2/>

Richard Garriott [sat down for an interview with the folks at Gather Your Party](#) last week, and talked with them at length about his plans for the *Ultimate RPG*...and how everything that Portalarium has done has factored in to those plans:

Let me give you the kind of Portalarium story. An MMO scale virtual world is a big game. It's many years in development and it's many, many millions of dollars in development. If you're starting a new company like we've done, you have two choices: start by saying, "Okay the first thing we're going to ship is the new big iteration of an MMO, the reinvention of MMOs", in which case you raise tens of millions of dollars and you wait many years and hopefully you come up with something that works. Or you do what we did, which the first thing we did was understand how to leverage the "friends graph".

This is something that a few people — myself included — have discussed before: Portalarium is using its various released and upcoming games, from the poker titles through *Ultimate Collector: Garage Sale*, as stepping stones on the way toward their masterwork, the *Ultimate RPG*. They're not unlike Pixar's short films, which exist both to entertain and to showcase new technologies that Pixar are working on...technologies that will be built into later Pixar movies.

We thought we could easily create a game that could at least support itself and support our ongoing development. It would let us build client, server, billing, synchronous play, asynchronous play around a table with a fairly minimal game design and at least prove out or technologies and we did that. It's working just fine. That was called Port Poker and Port Blackjack. Then we said, "OK, now we need avatars and housing and secure trade." So with that, we created this game Ultimate Collector. What's interesting about Ultimate Collector, for us it's a stepping stone. It's an MMO-lite in my mind. Very lite, with more what I will call classical leveraging of casual game mechanics than you will probably see in the RPG, but compared to most casual games, to most social games, it is far deeper. It is far richer as a lot more story is involved in it. I think that we happened to have built a game that,

which is not terribly surprising since we are the people that built Ultima, that we built a much more Ultima-like casual game than most, if you follow my meaning. I mean, it's in a cartoon style. It's in a contemporary setting, so by no means is it an Ultima. There's no combat or magic or anything of that nature in it. If you really sit back and take more of a distant perspective of it, you can see how, with the tools we've built here, we can now obviously come up with a different set of art. We can come up with things like character classes and combat and magic, as well as an outdoor map that connects it all together. You get back pretty close to Ultima if you look at it with that filter.

He goes on to get in some light digs at EA over the ownership of the *Ultima* name. More interesting is his story, later on in the article, concerning The Syndicate, a particularly hard-core *Ultima Online* guild that he has been...working with:

We've personally invited a bunch of players from The Syndicate and they were at least willing to give me a pass on, "He can't be that idiotic to be going down this path". The Syndicate really started as an Ultima Online guild and they were wanting to believe. What The Syndicate players have been doing, even if they were individually concerned or skeptical, once they came in and started playing Ultimate Collector, they went, "Aha! I get it."

I will keep saying this ad infinitum, I suspect, but even though I hate repeating myself I will say it again: if you approach what Garriott is doing with his intent to create the *Ultimate RPG* and shrug it off as just some Facebook game that you would by definition have no interest in ever playing, *you are quite likely doing yourself an extreme disservice.*

Yes, thus far, Portalarium has been playing around with low-key social games, including *Ultimate Collector* which, superficially at least, bears some resemblance to the *Whateverville* games that Zynga cranks out periodically. But appearances can deceive, and there's more to *Ultimate Collector* — and, indeed, to Portalarium — than looks alone let on.

But, contra Zynga (for whom the games themselves, and the revenue they bring in, are the sole end), Portalarium's end goal is not just to churn out a *Whateverville* clone; it's to test a system, or a series of systems. And yes, at each milestone, they wrap it up in a game that makes heavy use of the system(s), which in turn can be released and hopefully serve as a revenue vector. But the end of all of that is that thing which, thus far, has only barely been teased to us: the *Ultimate RPG*. Which, though it may leverage many of the systems that Portalarium's lighter games prototyped, may bear no significant resemblance to anything we've seen from the fledgling social gaming company to date.

And the fact that it runs through Facebook, or (more generally) in a browser window? Quite likely irrelevant.

JUNE 27, 2012 - ZYNGA PARTNERSHIP ANNOUNCED

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2012/06/portalarium-is-now-a-zynga-partner/>

I have no idea what Richard Garriott is doing partnering with Zynga, but there it is.

At its ongoing Zynga Unleashed event in San Francisco, the social media game giant revealed three new partners: Majesco, 50 Cubes, and Portalarium.

Majesco's current crop of top properties include the Zumba Fitness franchise and Cooking Mama. 50 Cubes currently features three titles on its website, including the "Facebook top fashion game for 2011" Mall World. Portalarium, which was founded by Ultima series creator and RPG legend Richard Garriott in 2009, recently launched a casual game based on garage sales, and is working on a project the company says will return Garriott to his RPG roots.

At its conference, Zynga also highlighted three partners it announced during GDC 2012: Konami, Playdemic, and Rebellion.

Now, to be fair, given the example of Konami, it would seem that Zynga partnership is not the same as turning over the keys to the kingdom, so to speak. Indeed, it would seem that the main point of these partnership agreements is to a) allow

third-party companies to leverage Zynga's publication and distribution platform, and b) allow Zynga to share in the profits from successful, partner-produced games. At least in theory, it sounds like a "win-win" scenario, and in some cases it may in fact be.

Still, this is Zynga we are talking about. They are arguably worse, in this day and age, than Electronic Arts was during the reign of Trip Hawkins. Indeed, I'd almost go so far to say that were Richard Garriott working on *Ultima 5* or *Ultima 6* today, "zynga" would be a curse-word in the games, and you'd be hunting for the treasure map of the dread pirate Pincus. I can't help but thinking that Garriott and Portalarium are exposing themselves to the very real risk that Zynga will crib their ideas and hammer out...I don't know...*Collection World: Rummage Sale* in a year's time.

Ultimately, though, we can only speculate as to what this all means, and about what Garriott's intentions and aims are here. Still, I know for a fact that I'm not the only one here who is thinking that Lord British has just made a deal with the devil, so to speak.

JULY 10, 2012 - MORE FUNDING

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2012/07/portalarium-closes-series-a-financing-round-with-a-cool-7-million/>

I received a press release from David Swofford, publicist for Richard Garriott and Portalarium, this morning:

Portalarium Closes \$7 Million Series A Round

m8 Capital Leads Round for Austin-Based Mobile and Social Game Company led by Legendary Designer Richard Garriott de Cayeux

AUSTIN, Texas, July 10, 2012 — [Portalarium™](#), an Austin-based publisher and developer of premium quality games for mobile platforms and social networks announces the closing of its Series A financing. The \$7 million round is led by [m8 Capital](#), a London-based venture capital firm focusing on mobile technology investments. [FF Angel](#) of San Francisco, [BHV Venture Capital](#) of New York, and Portalarium co-founder [Zynga](#), the world's largest mobile/social gaming platform, that Portalarium will be joining the new Zynga Platform Partners publishing program with products to be announced later.

About Portalarium

Portalarium is revolutionizing role-playing games for mobile and social media platforms. Formed in September of 2009 in Austin, Texas, Portalarium is developing and publishing premium online games and virtual worlds for mobile platforms and popular social networks. Portalarium games maximize the fun and social play experience between friends, making it is easy to find each other and play together regardless of where you are or what you are playing. For more information about Portalarium, go to www.portalarium.com.

About m8 Capital

m8 Capital is a London-based VC fund that invests exclusively in mobile technology. m8 Capital looks to support entrepreneurs and companies that are positioning themselves at the forefront of all things mobile. Other investments in m8 Capital's portfolio include mobile ticketing company [Masabi](#), next generation mobile publishing company [Aylus Networks™](#), the leading enabler of [video communication](#) services over mobile networks.

In other words, it would seem that Portalarium is now in a good financial position to finish *Ultimate Collector* (which is currently still in closed beta) and lay the foundations for the *Ultimate RPG*.

Interestingly, the *New Britannia* working title, which we haven't seen or heard used in a while, makes an appearance here; it's interesting to see that's still a valid label for the project, and certainly reaffirms that the *Ultimate RPG* is indeed likely to feature Lord British and be a game that inherits much from the *Ultima* tradition.

The nature of the partnership with Zynga also gets clarified, somewhat: they will be using Zynga as a publishing platform.

Note: For those unfamiliar with investment terminology, [Series A financing](#) is the “first round of financing undergone for a new business venture after seed capital. Generally, this is the first time that company ownership is offered to external investors. Series A financing, may be provided in the form of preferred stock, and may offer anti-dilution provisions in the event that further financing through preferred or common stock occurs in the future...Series A financing tends to occur when the company is generating some revenue from its business model, but rarely will the business be generating net profits at this point. Most series A investors will be venture capital funds or angel investors that are willing to accept the high levels of risk found in these early-stage company investments.”

JULY 13, 2012

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2012/07/richard-garriott-discusses-the-ultimate-rpg-with-mmorpg-com/>

Richard Garriott, hot off of welcoming his daughter into the world and helping Portalarium secure a whole pile of additional funding, sat down with MMORPG.com [for an interview about his planned *Ultimate RPG*](#) (which, we recently learned, is still being referred to as *New Britannia*).

*...while we did not get into the full scoop of *Ultimate RPG* (I was hoping too), but what we did learn is Richard's clear philosophy for the game. He wants to make sure hardcore players know they are not abandoned. It is one of the guiding principles of the design for the game. It is being made with the hardcore players at the very heart and soul of the title. Also, it is very important for the team to meet their goals on the game and create that *RPG* experience which made Richard's *Ultimas* so memorable.*

*Richard said that you will find your way into the game through a portal, hence Portalarium, similar to the idea in *Ultima 4*. The game will have personal ethics, social events, and be founded on a very strong story system. You will have plenty of challenges as a player in this game. He really wants to create a new body of fiction. He really wants the great story of the game to transcend the setting. With the story at its core for the *RPG* it will have a new setting and a new fictional wrapper for players to delve deeply into.*

*The best part of the interview was that Richard said the game has sandbox interaction at its core. He said it is styled after *Ultima Online* and *Ultima 7* in that regard. That news should really get everyone excited! Even though the game is set for social and mobile networks Richard was very clear that it is not *MMO Light*. He said that too many of the free to play games right now don't have the story or substance behind them for the long term investment by players.*

It's an interesting time in gaming, *Dragons and Dragonettes*...and a good time for *Ultima* fans. Or, at least, those that can look past the fact that the game is played in a browser window or a mobile app.

SEPTEMBER 6, 2012 - ZYNGA BECOMES THE PUBLISHER

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2012/09/ultimate-collector-to-be-published-by-zynga-also-release-window/>

The [big news that Portalarium was teasing the Internet about all day](#) has finally been revealed: *Ultimate Collector: Garage Sale* will be published by social gaming giant Zynga, as part of Portalarium's publishing agreement therewith.

*Today, the man known as "Lord British" is announcing that Zynga is publishing his *Ultimate Collector* game on Facebook and Zynga.com.*

Zynga is the world's largest social game firm, with more than 300 million users. It recently reported weak earnings amid a shift in game-playing patterns on the social network. It has also begun a third-party publishing operation in which it publishes games for third-party developers on platforms where Zynga's vast audience will see them.

Garriott, who gets his Lord British moniker from his historic Ultima role-playing game series, said in an interview with GamesBeat today that his startup is focused on "mid-core" titles that are more engaging and are much more like real games than traditional casual fare. He believes a shift toward these kinds of games is taking place on Facebook and that Zynga can capitalize on the trend through third parties.

"We've got almost 30 years in the business, and we feel like we're at the beginning of a new era in gaming — social games — which can reach 10 times more people than massively multiplayer online games can, which in turn could reach 10 times more people than single-player games could," Garriott said. "Zynga is at the head of this market."

Garriott believes the future lies in free-to-play games, where you can play for free and pay real money for virtual goods. The games should also be browser-based and easy to access, with no complex installation. And they should accommodate both synchronous multiplayer play as well as asynchronous (one turn at a time) play. Garriott believed he had to start a new company to come up with this kind of game. And after testing the waters with a poker game, Portalarium's first major effort is Ultimate Collector, which Zynga should publish in six to eight weeks.

Emphasis mine. We can, apparently, expect to see Ultimate Collector released not later than November 1st.

I'm honestly not sure what to say...Zynga is indeed a publishing giant, but they're also widely regarded as a highly negative force in the gaming industry; they may even be the most hated company in gaming today. But Zynga does have a massive audience and a powerful, widespread publishing platform, something that Garriott and Portalarium are no doubt hoping to capitalize on with *Ultimate Collector*. And if they are able to, that could mean very good things — and a vastly expanded budget — for the *Ultimate RPG*.

For now, I suppose we can all breathe a sigh of relief that the big news today was a publishing agreement, rather than a merger. I do honestly hope for the best for Portalarium, and for *Ultimate Collector*, the latter as a means to a triumphal return by Lord British to the world of RPGs, and the former because I think they have the vision and talent to do something new and innovative in that space. The proximity to Zynga makes me nervous...though I suppose that by publishing through a partnership therewith, Portalarium may avoid the fate of having Zynga churn out a cheap clone of *Ultimate Collector*. Which would, one has to grant, be a good thing.

SEPTEMBER 7, 2012 - ZYNGA PRESS RELEASE

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2012/09/portalarium-zynga-partnership-for-ultimate-collector-press-release/>

David Swofford, the communications director for Portalarium, forwarded this to me today, in the wake of yesterday's announcement that Zynga would be publishing Richard Garriott and Portalarium's next game, *Ultimate Collector: Garage Sale*:

Portalarium Announces Zynga Partnership for Ultimate Collector

Unique social media game focused on the growing trend of collectible shopping is set to launch on Zynga.com this fall

AUSTIN, Texas, September 7, 2012 — Portalarium™, an Austin-based publisher and developer of premium quality games for social networks and mobile platforms, today announced the company is partnering with Zynga (NASDAQ:ZNGA), the world's leading provider of social game services, to bring Ultimate Collector® to the 306-million monthly active players on the Zynga network.

The Zynga Platform is a social gaming platform designed to give players the most social and fun gaming experience wherever they play, while helping third-party developers of all sizes launch, promote, scale and grow their games and business.

“We couldn’t be more pleased to be rolling out Ultimate Collector on Zynga.com,” said Portalarium CEO, Fred Schmidt. “With its millions of players worldwide, Zynga provides the best vehicle for us to put our game in front of the biggest audience. Plus, Zynga understands social gaming better than anyone else in the world.”

Ultimate Collector, available now on Facebook in Limited Beta, is Portalarium’s first original social network game and is developed under the guidance of hall-of-fame designer [Richard Garriott](#). It introduces a new category within the social media space — shopping and collecting.

“Ultimate Collector is really three games in one,” says Garriott, Portalarium’s co-founder and creative director. “It’s a collecting game where players go on a major hunt for collectibles ranging from toys, gadgets, historical weapons, novelties and famous art and display those collections in their homes. It’s a shopping game where players can visit shops and stores in our game, some of them from national retailers, to purchase items and add to their collections. And it’s a world building game that allows players to outfit a home, show off their collections to their friends, sell virtual items to other collectors and make in-game money to upgrade their house and grow it even larger.

“It’s a hybrid — a unique style of social gaming that appeals to all ages, both males and females. With extensive questing and role-playing elements, it is testing very popular with those newer to social gaming but looking for a deeper play experience, as well as those who consider themselves veteran gamers but have been waiting on the sidelines for a more immersive play experience. Ultimate Collector really appeals to that rapidly growing mid-core gaming audience.”

Ultimate Collector is fueled by the collectible craze that is growing by leaps and bounds in this country. Much of that obsession has been created by cable television programs such as American Pickers, Pawn Stars and Storage Wars. By the broadest definition, collecting is an unregulated multi-billion dollar industry in the real world. Ultimate Collector spans the gamut of that entire activity and is a way for treasure and bargain searching people to transfer that enthusiasm — that passion for the ultimate hunt — into the social network space.

In Ultimate Collector, the quest to find and assemble a wide variety of fabulous collections is easy and fun. Create your avatar and your house and begin the quest for the items you want. With plenty of content to appeal to everyone, among the thousands of items to be discovered are antique radios, Barbie® dolls, home décor, books from famous authors, artwork, historical weapons or just a set of tools. Items can be collected as you visit your friends’ or other players’ garage sales, estate sales, markets, pawn shops, storage units, auctions or even from national retailers who have their own stores in the game.

Macy’s, one of the nation’s premier retailers, and Simon and Schuster, a world publishing leader, are two national brands with stores in the game. Other retailers include music lifestyle store, Wild About Music; online antique retailer, Go Antiques; and animation art retailer, Wonderful World of Animation. More brand partners will be announced soon.

Ultimate Collector is available now on Facebook at http://apps.facebook.com/Ultimate_Collector, and will be available on Zynga.com in the near future.

[UltimateCollecting.com](#) is Ultimate Collector’s new website. Featuring social media channels, videos, community forums and other information about the game, the site also is a destination that will appeal to anyone interested in the broad topic of collecting in general. It highlights the fascinating people who collect and the unique stories behind their collections. If you like collecting, this is a great place to engage with your community.

About Portalarium

Portalarium is revolutionizing role-playing games for social media. Formed in September of 2009 in Austin, Texas, Portalarium is developing and publishing premium online games and virtual worlds for popular social networks and mobile platforms. The company's first original IP game, Ultimate Collector, launched in 2012. Portalarium games maximize the fun and social play experience between friends, making it easy to find each other and play together regardless of where you are or what you are playing. For more information about Portalarium, go to www.portalarium.com.

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So, there you have it: the official statement from Garriott et. al. on the publishing agreement with Zynga.

SEPTEMBER 13, 2012

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2012/09/gamezebo-reviews-ultimate-collector/>

Gamezebo has [published a review](#) of *Ultimate Collector: Garage Sale*, the upcoming game from Richard Garriott and Portalarium. Their take: interesting concept that offers lots to do, if you don't mind some waiting around and middle-of-the-pack graphics.

Richard "Lord British" Garriott is The Man. His games have defined and re-defined RPGs and MMORPGs. He's been to space. There is a widely-distributed picture of him sitting, stone-faced, with a crown on his head. Plus, he adores collecting weird stuff. Ultimate Collector: Garage Sale is Garriott's Facebook-based love letter to swap meets, gar(b)age sales, and humankind's love for pawing through other people's trash like starving raccoons. It's a unique experience that collectors will love, and it's proof that despite Garriott's accolades, he's just a slob like one of us. And that's awesome.

..

The premise behind Ultimate Collector isn't unlike what's already been done in Pawn Stars: The Game, but Ultimate Collector is admittedly a much deeper experience. You don't sit back and wait for the bargains to come in. You need to read the papers, get out there, and see what's what.

Granted, Ultimate Collector looks pretty ugly, and it comes with the usual social game trappings like a limited energy supply and long waits between offers. Still, if you love hunting for yard sales and running your hands over a sun-warmed G1 Transformer that's been discolored by another person's cigarette smoke, there's no question that you'll get a kick out of Ultimate Collector.

You know...we (that is: me, the Dragoness, and the Dragonlets) moved to one of Edmonton's bedroom communities earlier this summer, and it's very much a "garage sale community" during the summer. The city paper publishes a weekly list of garage sales — hours and addresses — basically every week, and the Dragoness reports that a goodly number of people seem to do the "garage sale circuit". You have to get to such events early, lest you find that all the good and interesting things have already sold.

If *Ultimate Collector* has captured that sentiment even in part, I can see it doing very well. Heck, I can even see the Dragoness playing it, if so. Especially if it ever becomes available on her iPhone.

SEPTEMBER 27, 2012

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2012/09/richard-garriott-zynga-is-either-the-enemy-or-an-ally/>

Games.com [has an interesting interview](#) with Richard Garriott, in which the *Ultima* creator explains the rationale for Portalarium's publishing arrangement with Zynga through the Zynga Partners programme.

"We were at a trade show a few months ago— four or five months ago—and that's when we saw the announcement for Zynga Partners," Garriott recalls. "Then we sat down right there and said, 'OK, well [Zynga is] either the enemy or an ally. So, which will they be in this upcoming era?' We just thought that the advantages of not having to go raise many more millions of dollars into our tiny company, and getting a chance to look under their hood to learn some of the best practices they've learned."

...If Portalarium has such a great game on its hands, then why turn to Zynga to (hopefully) make it a success? The answer is simple: It's easier and less costly for a developer to side with the likes of Zynga than to spend millions upon millions of dollars trying to compete in terms of player numbers. That said, don't go thinking Garriott has gone and drank the Kool-Aid, so to speak.

"Not just Zynga's, but lots of social games use monetization strategies that, as a hardcore gamer, I find offensive, frankly," Garriott admits. "I really don't like games that constantly pester me to pay. I find it radically interferes with my suspension of disbelief. So, I'm devoted in the Ultimate RPG game to finding novel monetization strategies that don't offend me like some of these do. Yet, it's still really important to learn those lessons, and there's no better place to learn them than by having Zynga as a partner."

Plus, it saves Portalarium the hassle of having to deal with Zynga doing what Zynga always does — that is: publishing *Epic Collectibles: Thrift Store* six months after the release of *Ultimate Collector*.

The *Ultimate RPG* also gets a bit of a mention in the review:

...the next game that we're working on, the role-playing game [with] 'Lord British's Ultimate RPG' as the working title: That is a game that will be targeted at gamers," Garriott says. "But [it is] trying to show them that there is this kind of viral distribution asynchronous gameplay supporting a Lord British-style deep game that can be played in relatively short episodic sessions in a way that doesn't run off the lighter players, but fulfills a deeper play experience."

No, it's nothing we haven't already heard, but I do like how Garriott always finds a way to put the focus back on *New Britannia* or whatever it will end up being called, even if only for a short while, in every interview. It's obviously something he very much wants to make happen.

OCTOBER 17, 2012

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2012/10/ultimate-collector-the-backbone-of-the-ultimate-rpg/>

Richard Garriott [sat down for a short interview with Eurogamer](#) about the upcoming game from Portalarium, *Ultimate Collector: Garage Sale*. During the course of it, Garriott explained that *Ultimate Collector* serves a greater purpose than being just a revenue-generating Facebook game:

"Ultimate Collector really is the backbone of the next game," Richard Garriott told Eurogamer.

"None of the art is the same, of course, and there are absolutely no roles in Ultimate Collector, like there will be in the next game, but the tool-suite is continuing to evolve."

Rather than develop and test all of the necessary Ultimate RPG features at once, Garriott had Portalarium make simple casino games to establish (and help fund) "fundamental" back-end tools like friends lists, buying and selling, real-money transactions and Facebook integration.

Ultimate Collector expands Portalarium's capabilities to avatars, houses, secure trading, object collection "and all these other kind of things that are more role-playing-like". But still no combat, no magic, "not the diversity of roles to play".

We've heard this before, of course; it has been known for a while that *Ultimate Collector* is being used as a testbed for certain systems that will be incorporated into the *Ultimate RPG* in different ways (e.g. player inventory, in-game economy). And, of course, it will hopefully also serve as a convenient means of bringing in money for Portalarium, allowing them to make the *Ultimate RPG* bigger and better.

We can hope, anyway!

Downturn and Closure

DECEMBER 18, 2012 - LAYOFFS

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2012/12/portalarium-hit-with-layoffs/>

Word from both [GameBanshee](#) and [Polygon](#) (both of whom, it seems, are citing a [GameIndustry report](#)) is that Richard Garriott's Portalarium — the Austin-based development house that produced *Ultimate Collector: Garage Sale*, and which is currently working on *New Britannia*/the *Ultimate RPG* — has laid off a number of its staff:

News of the redundancies broke on Twitter on Friday, when senior programmer Paul Evans said, "Today [Portalarium] had to lay off people and I was one of them."

Evans, who was a programmer at Lionhead before making the move to Portalarium in July 2011, also noted that the redundancies were a "surprise" to the employees involved, and that Portalarium's management, "could've been better prepared with more notice."

That's unfortunate to hear, although I find myself rather more disturbed by this additional bit of clarification issued by Portalarium proper:

"We are reducing staff to the appropriate levels to support and grow our recently launched products, as well as continue development of Richard Garriott's Ultimate RPG," a representative from the Austin-based studio told GamesIndustry International.

Once burned, twice shy, as they say. A similar explanation was offered when a large round of layoffs hit BioWare Austin, and it later turned out to be the case that the game was...well, if not *actually* in trouble then at least seen as being in such. That series of events ultimately ended with the game transitioning to a hybrid subscription/free-to-play model, of course... and I find myself led to suspect that "reducing staff to appropriate levels to support" X, Y, and Z titles is the new "nothing to see here" in the world of corporate male bovine excrement. Surprise layoffs aren't typically a good sign (see: 38 Studios) either.

Is Portalarium in trouble? You wouldn't necessarily think so, given that they recently secured a good \$7 million in venture capital, and also entered into a partnership with Zynga. Zynga hasn't been doing very well financially of late; could it be that they've scaled back their support for Portalarium's development efforts?

According to GameBanshee, at least, development of the *Ultimate RPG* hasn't been affected by this, which is something. Still, if the company is falling on fiscal difficulties, does the possibility exist that we'll see Garriott turn to crowdfunding to raise any additional needed capital? Is an *Ultimate RPG* Kickstarter on — or just over — the horizon?

FEBRUARY 7, 2013 - NEW GAME IN DEVELOPMENT

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2013/02/richard-garriott-hard-at-work-on-his-next-game/>

If you have Richard Garriott in a circle on Google+, [you may have noticed this message from him](#) yesterday:

Working hard on our next FRPG! Getting back to me roots! More info to follow!

Presumably he's talking about the *Ultimate RPG*, the upcoming game from *Portalarium* that he has been touting as the game in which he will return, in his own way, to the *Ultima* tradition with a new game starring Lord British. And presumably "FRPG" stands for "fantasy RPG" rather than "Facebook RPG", although Facebook is a likely release vector for the game even so.

We will, of course, have to wait patiently for more details. Or impatiently, as the case may be.

FEBRUARY 28, 2013 - TEASING THE NEW GAME

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2013/02/ultimate-rpg-teaser-message/>

The *Ultimate RPG* Facebook page was recently updated with the following [little teaser](#):

Exciting stuff coming soon! Stay tuned...

Perhaps news of the "spiritual successor to *Ultima*" is on its way? It's not much to go on, and no timeline is given, but it would appear that Richard Garriott and Portalarium are preparing to reveal something big — hopefully big! — about the game that will ostensibly feature the return of Lord British!

MARCH 1, 2013 - COUNTDOWN TO A KICKSTARTER

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2013/03/lord-british-presents-a-countdown/>

This is, officially, the most exciting news of the week:

Richard Garriott ✓ @RichardGarriott

What waits beyond for Lord British? <http://www.lordbritishpresents.com/> #LordBritishPresents

12:49 PM - Mar 1, 2013

The same thing [was posted to the *Ultimate RPG* Facebook page](#), so it's fair to say that this is definitely related to the *Ultima* spiritual successor that Richard Garriott has been talking about for a while now. Too, we now know [what the fuss yesterday](#) was all about.

Also: he's using the Avatar font. How great is that? Obviously, he wants *Ultima* fans to pay particular attention, and so we shall...in about a week, when the countdown timer on the [Lord British Presents](#) website runs out.

I'm just going to put my guess out there right now: there'll be a Kickstarter campaign, next Friday. You read it here first (unless you read it on the UDIC Facebook group already, and/or are Sergorn Dragon, whom I made the same guess to in a chat window about ten minutes before publishing this).

There's a signup form on the website, which I guess subscribes you to some sort of news list. Hit that up if you like...and if not, check back in a bit under a week. Something big is coming!

Oh, and: In case you missed it, [Richard Garriott also posted a question](#) to his Google+ profile:

Inquiring minds want to know... What were your favorite in box add ins to Origin Games? Cloth maps, coins, stones, radiation detectors, tool kits? Something else?

If you're on Google+, stop on by and give him your answer!

The First Age of Update: Is former Origin artist Denis Loubet supplying concept art for the *Ultimate RPG*?

The Ultima Codex@UltimaCodex

· Mar 1, 2013

Lord British Presents...a Countdown! <http://wp.me/p2g5j8-1rt>

Drawmycharacter@Drawmychar

@UltimaCodex Countdown to concept art! #LordBritishPresents #ultima

7:30 PM - Mar 1, 2013

The mind...it boggles. It is boggled.

MARCH 2, 2013 - PC GAME RUMOURS

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2013/03/is-richard-garriotts-new-game-a-pc-title-will-it-be-revealed-at-sxsw/>

In the various interviews he has given about the *Ultimate RPG* over the past couple of years, and in the various interviews he has given about *Portalarium* in general, Richard Garriott has often fallen back on his “three eras of gaming” concept, and identified himself as being primarily interested in the “third era” thereof: social and mobile gaming. Indeed, *Portalarium* has — thus far — produced only social games, including *Ultimate Collector: Garage Sale* and various casino titles. They even *partnered with Zynga* to boost *Ultimate Collector's* distribution.

So one could be forgiven for assuming that the *Ultimate RPG*, whatever form it takes and whatever it ends up being called, would likewise be a “third era” game, targeting the social and mobile platforms primarily. *However*, thanks in part to some prodding from Sergorn Dragon on Twitter, Richard Garriott today let slip some information that casts doubt on that assumption.

Here's where it all began:

Richard Garriott ✓@RichardGarriott

For the record... I am have always been and remain a PC game developer! It remains central to my thinking. As a player, I also play mobile!

3:30 PM - Mar 2, 2013

This frank declaration prompted several replies, but it was Sergorn who managed to garner a reply from Garriott:

Sergorn Dragon@UltimaReturn

· Mar 2, 2013

Replying to @micha

@micha @RichardGarriott *I second that. Not that I mind mobile... but I really want a new Lord British true PC game! (With a cloth map)*

Richard Garriott ✓@RichardGarriott

@UltimaReturn @micha *Clearly long overdue by now! :)*

4:02 PM - Mar 2, 2013

Here's where it really got interesting, though:

Nayan Sthankiya @nayansthandkiya

· Mar 2, 2013

Replying to @RichardGarriott

@RichardGarriott By PC game developer you mean Mac/PC right? ;)

Richard Garriott ✓ @RichardGarriott

@nayansthandkiya Correct. Even Linux. Any full power machine with a monitor you sit close to and generally a keyboard and mouse!

4:05 PM - Mar 2, 2013

Sergorn again:

Sergorn Dragon @UltimaReturn

· Mar 2, 2013

Replying to @RichardGarriott

@RichardGarriott @micha Indeed! I mean it's mean it's been 14 years since U1X, way too long (Tabula Rasa wasn't my cup of tea I'm afraid)

Richard Garriott ✓ @RichardGarriott

@UltimaReturn @micha Back to our roots then!!!

4:09 PM - Mar 2, 2013

And again:

Sergorn Dragon @UltimaReturn

· Mar 2, 2013

Replying to @RichardGarriott

@RichardGarriott @micha Just make a game that would have been worthy of the Ultima name and I think a lot of people will be very very happy!

Richard Garriott ✓ @RichardGarriott

@UltimaReturn @micha If anyone can... I should be up to the task!

4:16 PM - Mar 2, 2013

It's the calling out of Linux — playing off the Mac/PC reference — that catches my attention the most. Could that be a subtle hint concerning [the game engine](#) that the *Ultimate RPG* will make use of? Will the *Ultimate RPG* eschew the social and mobile frontier and be revealed as a decidedly “first era” game: a standalone, single-player RPG, albeit one that might support some sort of optional multiplayer component?

And furthermore, [will the game be revealed at SXSW next Friday](#), in the special announcement Richard Garriott will be making in conjunction with a Descendants of Erdrick performance?

MARCH 8, 2013 - SHROUD OF THE AVATAR REVEALED

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2013/03/lord-british-presents-shroud-of-the-avatar-forsaken-virtues/>

Well, now we know what the [Lord British Presents](#) website was counting down to. Richard Garriott and [Portalarium](#) have announced this morning that Lord British will be returning to his RPG gaming roots with *Shroud of the Avatar*, a new series of PC games being developed with the [Unity engine](#) that has been so popular with Kickstarted RPG projects of late.

A [Kickstarter campaign](#) for the first episode in the *Shroud of the Avatar* series, entitled *Forsaken Virtues*, has gone live...and yes, a cloth map is part of the reward scheme for the campaign. There's also [a dedicated Shroud of the Avatar website!](#) Here's the info sheet that the Ultima Codex was provided by David Swofford, Portalarium's PR man:

Legendary and award winning game designer Richard Garriott returns to his fantasy RPG roots with Shroud of the Avatar: Forsaken Virtues. Shroud of the Avatar is the first installment of Garriott's new vision of role playing games and represents the reinvention of the classic, fantasy RPG, which he pioneered in the early 1980s with the classic Ultima series of games.

Using state-of-the-art tools and technology, the game will focus on what made his seminal Ultima series great. Players will be introduced to the game, but then discover their own story. There is an overarching story woven into the player experience, and players may choose to follow the life of the adventurer or, if they prefer, focus on exploration and discovery. Players may even choose the life of a homesteader, either safely within the settled lands or on the dangerous but potentially lucrative frontier. The world is full of opportunities and challenges!

From familiar psychological profiling used to create your character to organically derived game response to player behavior, fundamental virtues and consequence of actions play a huge role in Shroud of the Avatar. Players will be free to choose their path, but must then live with the consequences of their actions.

Shroud of the Avatar: Forsaken Virtues

From - Portalarium

Release date - TBD

Platform - Digital download to PC

Play Mode - Solo with multiplayer options

Distribution - Digital (service/partner TBA)

Website - <http://www.shroudoftheavatar.com>

Features:

- Legendary game designer and creator of the Ultima series of games, Richard Garriott makes his triumphant return to fantasy RPG games
- Fully interactive virtual world
- Richard Garriott hallmarks: character system without classes, virtue system and player actions that have consequences
- Player housing
- Crafting system that avoids busy work; craft as a hobby or as a career
- Meaningful PvP that also minimizes griefing
- Scene-based encounters – replayable scenes that may be played solo or shared with others
- A Kickstarter campaign to raise funding directly from the people who want to play the game and give input on its features and design

First it was Chris Roberts, and now Richard Garriott has returned to his PC gaming roots, with a multi-episode game that will finally feed that hunger that *Ultima* fans have been feeling for the last decade or two. Exciting times!

APRIL 16, 2013 - SHUTDOWN

Link: <http://ultimacodex.com/2013/04/ultimate-collector-garage-sale-is-shutting-down/>

Portalarium have posted a short update to the *Ultimate Collector: Garage Sale* Facebook page, announcing that the game will be closing down at the end of April, and will not be accepting payments after today.

To Our Valued Players,

It is with great sadness that we are announcing the end of Ultimate Collector. While it has always been our hope that Ultimate Collector would continue on, it is not possible any longer.

As of Tuesday April 16 2013 we are no longer accepting payments.

We will shut off the game servers on Tuesday April 30 2013.

We want to thank everyone that has been a part of our game and community for coming on this journey with us.

Presumably, this is — at least in part — a move that will support and bolster development on *Shroud of the Avatar*. Still, it's sad to see such a rich ode to nostalgia, even one implemented as a Zynga-esque Facebook game, close down. There were some good *Ultima* memories to be found within it.

Did you get to play the game, what do you think about it?

I did play *Ultimate Collector* for a while, yes; I got in on the beta and kept that access until the game was shuttered.

It struck me as very niche, I suppose; it had a lot of interesting mechanics, and had that colour pop that one expects from Facebook and mobile games. It wasn't the most performant game; moving about the screen and interacting with things felt rather sluggish at times.

But looking at everything Richard Garriott said about *Ultimate Collector* — how it would form the basis for the *Ultimate RPG*, how the systems being devised for it would aid development on the *Ultimate RPG*... — it became almost a fun sport for me to play *Ultimate Collector* and muse upon how different systems and mechanics present in the game might be used in a fantasy RPG instead. I enjoyed seeing things that made me think about inventory systems, or merchants, or player-to-player trade.

Still, I'm not surprised that it didn't last. It was, as noted, very niche; I happen to enjoy trolling the neighbourhood garage sales, looking for deals and hidden gems amidst the junk and worn-out eclectica, but that isn't something that is to everybody's taste. I'm not sure that the overall concept — essentially, that of playing as not-Richard Garriott, building up your personal home collection of weird and wonderful junk — was enough to draw a large-enough audience in.

Do we know why they shut it down?

Not really, no. But I have a suspicion.

As noted previously, I think the *Ultimate Collector* was a bit too niche for its own good, and I expect that it struggled to bring in enough money for Zynga to consider it worthwhile. In fact, I expect that it didn't bring in enough money. And while I've no evidence to support the conjecture that Zynga pressured Portalarium to shutter the game, I could see them withdrawing funding for it; I would not put such a move past them at all.

It's also worth noting that Portalarium's priorities shifted — rather profoundly, and rather suddenly — to the *Ultimate RPG* (which was later revealed to us as *Shroud of the Avatar*) . Moreover, it's worth noting that the platform on which the *Ultimate RPG* was to be released changed rather unexpectedly just before *Ultimate Collector* was shut down; Richard Garriott spent two years (roughly) touting it as a social game which would heavily leverage the friends graph, and then all of a sudden was there on Twitter confirming that it would be a cross-platform desktop title.

And it just so happens that this was also a time when web-based games were losing significant ground to mobile games.

Taking all this together, my suspicion is that a “perfect storm” of circumstances forced Portalarium's hand. The under-performance of *Ultimate Collector*, coupled with the diminishment of Facebook as a powerhouse platform for gaming, had left Portalarium in a bad state by early 2013; some estimates I've heard suggest that at the time of the *Shroud of the Avatar* Kickstarter, the company had enough cash on hand to keep the doors open another three months or so...at most. So, the *Ultimate RPG* was re-thought, and re-designed as a desktop game...and then hastily pushed to Kickstarter. Meanwhile, *Ultimate Collector* was basically abandoned, and was closed as soon as it became apparent that *Shroud* would be successfully funded.