

**Transcript for Steamchat Snack #2:  
“Interview with Harry Robins, voice of Dr. Kleiner”**

**Recorded:** 14th February 2011

**Website:** <https://www.thesteamchat.com/snack/2>

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**Sam:** I am delighted to be talking to Hal Robins, the very memorable voice actor for Dr. Kleiner in *Half-Life 2*. It is a pleasure to be talking to you Hal and thank you very much for agreeing to this interview and taking your time with us today.

**Harry Robins:** You're most welcome.

**Sam:** It has been several years since most *Half-Life* fans have heard your voice so on behalf of the community we thank you for your time and it's definitely going to be refreshing. So I want to talk first about the original *Half-Life* if that's okay.

**Robins:** Alright.

**Sam:** Was this the first game you had done a voiceover for?

**Robins:** Well I believe it was. I recorded for some other games but they never used the recording that I made, although I was paid for those. But yes this was the first one that was actually fully produced.

**Sam:** How did Valve approach. Was there some sort of auditioning process or did they approach you directly?

**Robins:** Well I was approached directly, for years had been friends with Marc Laidlaw who wrote the novel *The 37th Mandala* and other similar books and he was aware of my work with the [Church of the SubGenius](#) and our radio show and other broadcasts and also my work as a performer in the area; so he, the writer of the structure for *Half-Life*, thought that I would be ideal for the voice-parts in the first game.

**Sam:** And did you ever anticipate the success of *Half-Life*?

**Robins:** Well it has a lot more substance behind it than many games do, and then of course the fact that one does not see an avatar but inhabits the person of the Gordon Freeman character had a lot to do with it.

**Sam:** How would you imagine Gordon's voice being, even if he's a mute character?

**Robins:** Well each person must hear Gordon responding in his own voice and as Gordon you can talk back to the individuals who address you. In the first game I was not one character but I gave my voice to a number of the scientist characters.

**Sam:** With the scientist characters you voiced in the original *Half-Life*, did you aim to keep the voices consistent when it came to recording lines for *Half-Life 2*? Or did you have an idea for how Kleiner should have sounded like?

**Robins:** I was directed in my first recording session. The very first one was at the Microsoft campus up in Seattle but since then I recorded from a link down here, but at all times I had the guidance of the creators to make sure that I was giving them within certain parameters what they wanted.

**Sam:** Did you ever record in the same room as, say, the voice actor for Alyx Vance?

**Robins:** No I never had that experience, all the recorded material was combined at a later time, although I've spoken to her on the phone when I went on G4TV to talk about the game; there was a link from New York where she was appearing in a stage production at that time.

**Sam:** You did say in that interview that you'd never met her in person. Has that changed?

**Robins:** I still have not I'm afraid.

**Sam:** That's a shame! Comparing your roles in *Half-Life* to *Half-Life 2* is it more memorable to be working on a single character than multiple ones, especially considering how Kleiner is a beacon of light in such a dystopian and oppressive future.

**Robins:** Well I think that it is better to inhabit a single character and one can work on different personality aspects. I hope that some of that is discernible in the way that I handled the character.

**Sam:** Quite so, Kleiner is a very unique character. How would you yourself describe Dr. Kleiner as a character?

**Robins:** Dr. Kleiner is of course a brilliant but the amusing and interesting thing about him is the blind spots that he has where he's of necessity - not looking at the ultimate picture of the possible consequences of the scientific lines he has pursued, and this is characteristic of all mad scientist characters in fiction and I think in life.

**Sam:** So have you ever played the games themselves?

**Robins:** I have, I'm not a particularly good player and I'm not able to persist for long before getting clobbered by the monsters.

**Sam:** So you don't know of Lamarr's fate?

**Robins:** Well that if I did I wouldn't be allowed to say it, but Lamarr was accidentally shot into space, not intentionally.

**Sam:** Do you miss Lamarr?

**Robins:** Well I'm such Kleiner misses Lamarr, but Kleiner has much to occupy him! All the scientist characters in the original game also are unconcerned or so it seems with possible repercussions of what might happen, although they sound a cautionary note - this is actually a matter of humour. I did the voicemail recordings for the Valve Corporation so that my voice would be on their voicemail and direct people to various offices of people.

**Sam:** We did call that once and it was fantastic to hear Kleiner on the voicemail. So you do a lot of work outside of voice acting for games, in particular your show called [Ask Dr. Hal](#). Would you mind explaining what it is and how any of your adoring fans would go about supporting it.

**Robins:** Oh, well *Ask Dr. Hal* is a nightclub show which runs periodically here where I live in San Francisco and basis of the show is that the audience asks me questions which I answer that provides the entertainment so I have to make the answers good. But I have good luck in having extremely capable and talented people working with me on the show. [Chicken John](#) hosted the show, we have a science specialist Dr. Peter Goldie who is a former liaison with NASA who took photographs of the Challenger challenger as it

happened and these photographs are now going to be in the Smithsonian Institution I understand just from talking to him last night. He had my name and Chicken John's name shot into space aboard the Dawn Explorer some years ago. Then I have a wonderful assistant KROB who produces the sound and video stream to accompany the show. Then we have a computer person who brings up elements from the internet to illustrate what is being said. We other things happening too in the show so if you're in San Francisco and we are running please come and see us. At the moment we are on Friday nights, although the show is dark at the moment we expect to resume in mid-March. I do a radio show based on it on a pirate radio station here in San Francisco, [RadioValencia.fm](http://RadioValencia.fm) which [has a podcast](#) that can easily be located by putting those keywords in.

**Sam:** Well fantastic thank you. Something which really intrigued me was the Church of SubGenius which you mentioned previously. Would you mind explaining what that is because I found that quite fascinating?

**Robins:** Well the [Church of the SubGenius](#) is an ongoing thing, we have many books out - I don't know whether you are familiar with them. The first book of the SubGenius has been through 21 or 22 printings and is still in print. My presence in that not really major, although I'm in it, but in our second book, our new testament, which is called [Revelation X: The 'Bob'Apocryphon](#), my own illustrations and writing are prominently featured. I also contributed as an author to the book [Three-Fisted Tales of "Bob"](#) and I was told my story called [The Smoker from the Shadows](#) was nominated for an EDGAR

away from the Mystery Writers of America. And there was also a comic book, [\*Bob's Favorite Comics\*](#) - extremely rare item since it was under-printed and then most of the copies were destroyed when an illegal fireworks factory exploded nearby.

**Sam:** I'm sorry to hear that! You also wrote a book called the [\*Dinosaur Alphabet\*](#), which you illustrated.

**Robins:** Yes, that's a book that I wrote entirely and illustrated. That came out in 2006, it was my second book, and it's still in print I hope some people will investigate it.

**Sam:** You do quite a lot of creative work; the voice acting, writing, illustrating, radio shows and so on. What advice would you give to someone who wants to aspire to you and go into voice acting.

**Robins:** Well I've been lucky in that a niche has been found for my voice and I've done the scientist voice also in *Half-Life: Opposing Force*, I did some of the soldier voices which may not be generally known. But I have what people are looking for, what the clients are looking for, is not a specialty voice but the hardest of all voices to do which is the normal-Joe voice, the voice which is or seems to be the voice of the everyday person. This of course is an abstraction and impossible to realize with any accuracy but the voice actor must convince the listener [that they are] hearing the voice of the everyday slob and whoever can do that can write his ticket in the voice acting business. Of course

most of us deal with specialty voices, accents, all young science fiction, everything but what is most profitable which is to be Joe Lunchpail in the voice acting business.

**Sam:** With specialty voices, do you build some sort of connection with the characters you voice, for example do you feel close to Dr. Kleiner?

**Robins:** Well in order to do it properly you have to think what Kleiner might think and what pressures and personal things he might be under. He really is for one of those guys a selfless person working for the good of humanity more than for his own career or his own aggrandizement. This makes him, in spite of his intellectual sophistication, a kind of innocent which is unusual and endearing thing about him.

**Sam:** It definitely is a great contrast to the world that Laidlaw wrote. To have that sort of vague comic character is a very nice feeling in such a dark environment. I can speak on behalf of all the fans that Kleiner is such a fantastic character, especially the way you've done his voice.

**Robins:** Well thank you very much, of course much credit does have to go Marc's writing. I was able to improvise a very little bit but most of what you hear, 99.99% percent I would think, is in the scripts that I'm given.

**Sam:** To my understanding when you actually record the lines Laidlaw himself is in the room there, guiding you?

**Robins:** Well he's connected, he's linked certainly although he may not physically be present.

**Sam:** Well, thank you very much for taking the time out with us. I really do appreciate it.

**Robins:** Well I do hope this is helpful and thank you for mentioning my book, I hope people will look for that and my other book if I may mention it [\*The Meaning of Lost and Mismatched Socks\*](#) which published by North Atlantic Books. Also, our other radio show [\*The Puzzling Evidence Show\*](#) which is a SubGenius radio show, has a podcast. It's on KPSA 94.1FM on Friday mornings very early but [the] podcast archives can be found on the internet. People who are interested in SubGenius should look at the SubGenius main website at [subgenius.com](http://subgenius.com).

**Sam:** Thank you, we'll have all those links on our website for everyone to check out. Once again thank you very much, it's been an absolute honour and pleasure to talk to you. As you once said in *Half-Life*, good luck in your future endeavors.

**Robins:** Thank you, and the same.