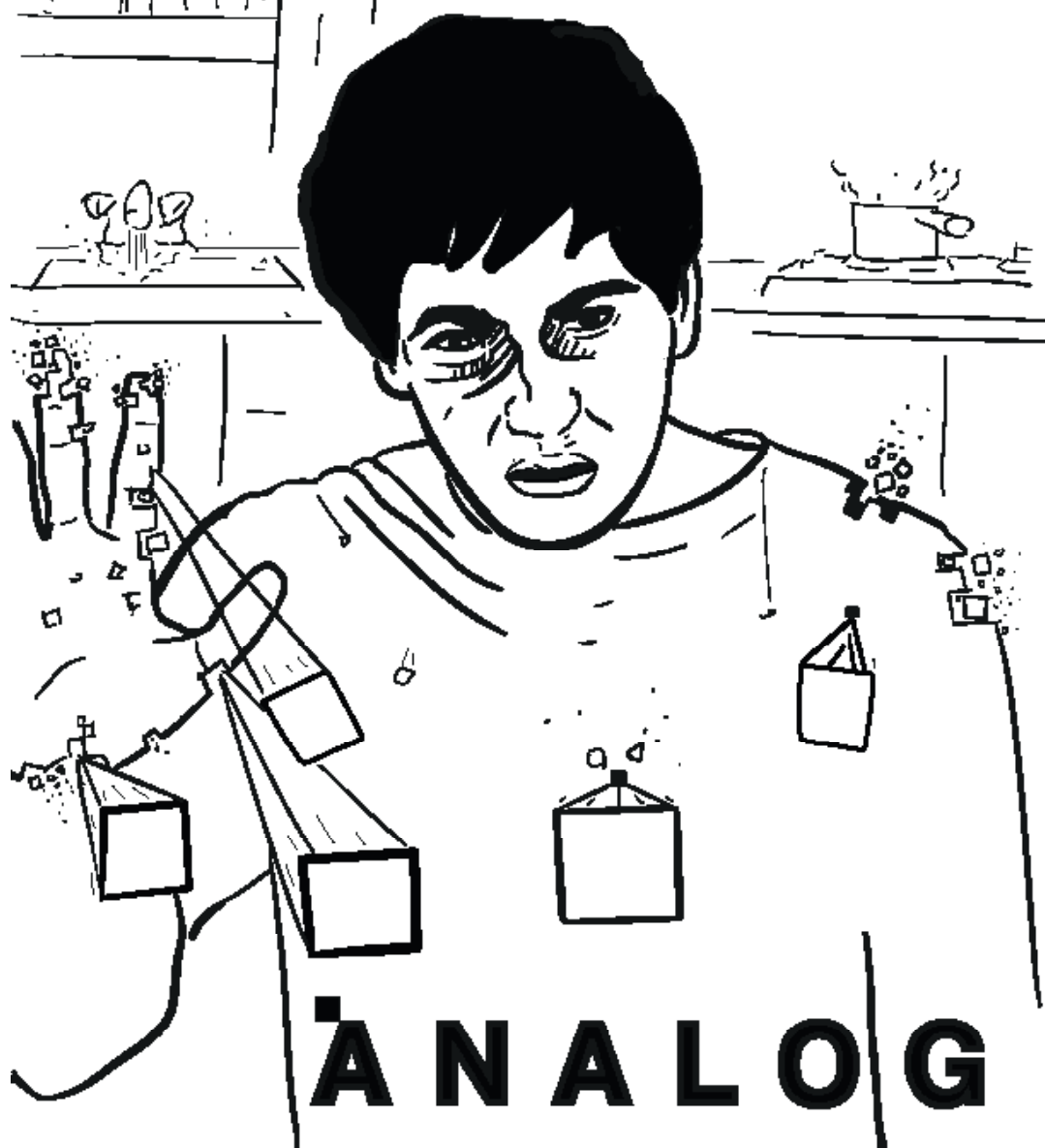


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ANALOG

Editors Note

In the 80's, if I wasn't playing the drums I was doing one of 2 things: reading magazines or playing video games.

And now, many decades later I've sort of combined the two.

However, this isn't an ordinary mag. It's more like those scrappy fanzines you might still see in hipster cafes, or something akin to MaximumRockNRoll.

The articles in here are as diverse as they are insightful (I hope).

I really have no idea what I'm doing, all I've done is ask some great people to write something cool.

So read on, read in, read up and down and round. This fanzine hurtles through the air, it burrows underground.

Thanks again to all who contributed, the founding members of Analog.

And special thanks to Steven Huckle for finding the time to put the articles together.

Alex Boucher

July, 2017

The Beauty of Trash Talking

By Noor Alkhadra - Founder of WeGeek

Trash Talk is defined as:

"Ruthlessly ripping someone for their gaming skills. Designed to wash away abusive language that should not be confused with, or taken as personal attacks, but merely in the interest of friendly hate."

It's what I grew up on.



Looking back at my childhood in Saudi Arabia the best memories I had consisted of gaming with my cousins and family members. I longed for the moments with everyone participating and the house echoing with endless laughter, and of course, Trash Talk.

As a grown 25 year old adult I still long for those moments. Was it because games back in the day were so good and irreplaceable? I doubt that (although nothing will ever beat Final Fantasy Tactics...Nothing!). There must have been a deeper meaning to the infinite smiles and giggles that came about as a result from Trash Talk.

When I moved to the US to pursue my passion in game design I would host game nights at my house all the time. We would play games like Tekken and Mortal Kombat with us Trash Talking all night. When I worked tireless hours on my 3D models in the game design lab, my ultimate break and energy booster, was to ask everyone to participate in a Tekken tournament, and most importantly, I made sure to light the fire of Trash Talk.

I liked Trash Talk so much that I actually had to question myself and ask why the hell does this rude and mocking form of conversation make me so happy?

In a world where we are expected to always show fake politeness to one another; I believe Trash Talk cracks that illusion; it breaks societal norms. Nonetheless, Trash Talk isn't for everyone, it requires the participants to understand that this mockery isn't a personal attack in order for it to be an enjoyable experience. Nevertheless, it's clear why Trash Talk is perfect in the setting of playing games. I found that this 'friendly hate' breakage in our social norms results in a stronger and more authentic bond between people.

I came to the conclusion that it wasn't actually the Trash Talk that brought happiness upon my soul, it was the atmosphere that arose as a result of this Trash Talking. I realised that what I was really longing for, was a community.

I was and still am, determined to spread this unique social phenomenon with others: this was the stimulus for starting WeGeek.

WeGeek is a community where everyone can be themselves and bond through the medium of playing games. Why does being in a community where everyone can be themselves matter? Because it makes you happy, simple.

Happiness is a concept people, scientists, and philosophers have been trying to grasp and achieve for decades. I think it's important to reflect on the moments that really do make you happy instead of defining it with the social standards of sex, money and power.

In the words of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his book Flow:

“Happiness is not something that happens. It is not the result of good fortune or random chance. It is not something that money can buy or power command. It does not depend on outside events but, rather, on how we interpret them. Happiness, in fact, is a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated, and defended privately by each person.”

The way I cultivate my happiness is through Trash Talking. I encourage everyone else to give it a try.

Xbox & Friends


by Natalie Sabin

I've always been a gamer since I was given a SNES as a child which will give you a pretty good clue of how old I am. For years my gaming was a solitary affair - playing Tomb Raider, Super Mario Bros, and The Sims on various platforms. My only experience of playing online was as an 11 year old playing No One Lives Forever, an obscure FPS released in 2000 featuring a British spy protagonist called Cate Archer. My sister and I gained an online stalker for years after meeting a boy online, not the best start to the online multiplayer experience. I didn't rediscover online gaming until 14 years later when I was offered a job at a digital creative agency in Leamington Spa.

A few of my new colleagues played daily Call of Duty death matches on their lunch hour on the company Xbox 360s and I was up for joining in. It had been a long time since I had played on a console and I was all over the place, but slowly one kill per match became two, which became three. Once I was averaging around 15 per match, (not impressive by anyone's standards but good enough for me) I bought myself an Xbox One and started playing COD in my spare time. At first I didn't use my mic and muted everyone else, concentrating slowly on getting my K/D ratio above 1. If I played poorly I would get incredibly annoyed and would have to pull myself away for the sake of my sanity.

My colleagues that I played with at the agency didn't play much in the evening and I found myself craving some social interaction with team mates while I played. I started turning on my microphone and talking while I was playing in the hope that I would find some people to interact with. As suspected I was met with one of three reactions: silent indifference, abuse or friendly chatter. The abuse I got was based on my terrible performance, tinged with an air of sexism. Messages read "shut the fuck up", "go play hello kitty", and the imaginative "shut up or you dead". My response was usually to call them out on mic and invite them to mute me at their leisure. These messages I had guessed were from boys/men judging by their profile, so I set off in search of women to play with.





I had a few hiccups when trying to interact with what appeared to be female gamer tags. I'd send a GG message here and there and didn't get much response. Although once when I did get a response I explained to someone over messenger that I was trying to find other women to play with and that I was in my 20s. The reply I got was "that's kinda weird, I'm 15". Immediate panic ensued as I desperately tried to unfriend them, managing to send them 3 party requests in a row before I managed to remove them - hilarious after the event but mortifying at the time. Whatever happened to Call of Duty being an over 18s game? This incredibly awkward and embarrassing encounter put me off my search for a while.

After a while I finally plucked up the courage to give it another go. I got thrown into a hardcore match and I noticed Miss Mario, Miss Sonic, and x Bumblebii x, gamer tags - surely girls right? Off I go chatting away trying to get a conversation going. The pivotal moment came when I got friendly fire shot by x Bumblebii x, I shouted "Bumblebii!!" A few seconds passed and I heard the crackle of a microphone being adorned followed by a "sorry!" We started having a tentative natter while we were playing and we hung out over the next hour or so in the same party. She was playing with her two friends Miss Mario and Miss Sonic in the same room as they were having a gaming date at Miss Sonic and Miss Mario's house. x Bumblebii x explained to me that usually they would be in separate houses and would be in a private party, and they wouldn't have heard my pointless prattle. I've been told since that Miss Sonic had pushed x Bumblebii x to join a party with me and report back to see if I was nice.

I passed the nice test and 6 months later I have gained 3 really close friends (my own age) that I talk to most days. We play around three times a week and chat about anything and everything going on in our lives. I've also been up to see them in Derbyshire and they've been down to Leamington Spa for a jaunt at Warwick castle. We're each other's agony aunts, cheerleaders and friends. When we have nothing to chat or complain about the multiplayer is accompanied by a series of annoying shrieks and terrible accents. Whilst this is endlessly entertaining for us, it's not as amusing to my long suffering boyfriend trying to play Dota 2 with his mates.

One particular night that had us in hysterics came in the form of an abusive voice message from a disgruntled German chap. "O.M.G shame on your clan - only camping all the time, that's terrible bro. Shame on you, little PUSSYS". This came through to Miss Mario's messages and played it out loud to us all (she always seems to get the angry anti-campers even though 3 out of 4 of us are guilty of regularly camping). Any abusive messages that come through usually has us up in arms, but this one set us off laughing. I've never felt compelled to send an abusive message to anyone even if they are playing in a way that I don't agree with, but I'm glad this guy did. It's still something that we laugh about and quote regularly.

Over time it's become less about the game play itself, it's the experience of playing as a group that is the most rewarding. I'd never had a group of friends before I met the girls, (I have several incredibly amazing close friends even they don't know each other) so it's nice to have that friendship group who share my gaming interest. Playing online has brought me these lovely ladies who I wouldn't have otherwise met. Gaming is often described as antisocial but it's been the complete opposite for me since I met the gamer girls.

I've never been one for putting myself out there and speaking to other players online.

I'm not really a shy person so I can only put my hesitance down to past experiences.

Many times I've received abusive messages from who I can only assume are male gamers. A prime example being "get back in the kitchen". These messages seem to increase in hostility if I'm playing particularly well - they don't seem to like that!

One of the worst messages I received was from somebody (gamertag suggested male) who didn't seem to like that my gamertag mentioned Sonic. Now I've been a fan of Sonic the Hedgehog since my childhood. The games and the TV show (which I now own on DVD!). I fully completed the Sonic Allstar Racing game on the Xbox and really enjoyed it. I tried numerous other Sonic games but I'm not particularly a fan of the more updated versions. Now going back to the message I received - for some reason this guy took issue with the fact that I didn't have many achievements within the Sonic the Hedgehog franchise on Xbox. This suggests that he literally went through my profile and previously played games just to be able to call me out on it. Normally I would ignore a message like this as I'm not one for responding to silly insults but what this guy said genuinely worried me;

It's worth pointing out that I did literally nothing to provoke this guy. He simply saw my gamertag and set off on his own personal vendetta against a complete stranger. The reason this message bothered me so much was the the thought of the very possible situation that he could have sent it to a vulnerable person and it could have had dire effects

Many people suffering with depression, anxiety and other mental illnesses turn to gaming as a comfort, a distraction or even just a way to meet people. If somebody in a very fragile state of mind had received a message like this there is a chance that it could have had horrible consequences. I aired my feelings to the sender of the message and proceeded to receive similar abuse. Eventually I gave up and blocked and reported them. I think it can be very dangerous to be so blaze' about the kind of things you say to others online. It is supposed to be entertainment and if for some reason you are incredibly angry and not entertained - you should switch off and chill out before hurling abuse at strangers.

All of this being said, the gaming community as a whole I believe to be friendly, accepting and kind - with the exception of a few. I've received many messages from male and female gamers alike simply saying hi, praising me when I do well in a match and even complimenting me on my gamertag or emblem on Black Ops 3. These kind people are the real gamers and are what make the gaming community so great.

My friends and I have spent many an hour playing online in a private chat but by chance we happened to be playing in the same house when we met SabreNat. Had we been playing in our normal manner we wouldn't have heard her. I'm so glad that we did because I feel like I've gained a brilliant friend in her, we all have - and our gaming sessions are now full of constant giggles, silliness and sometimes more serious discussions. Meeting somebody so genuine and lovely has made me feel more confident about interacting with fellow gamers again.

There are lots of good people out there and the friendship that the four of us girls have is proof that gaming and socialising can go together.

So remember this; game happy, be nice to people and always have your spare batteries close by!

I Miss Sonic I



I grew up with a SNES and have distinct memories of being gifted an original Gameboy and a PS1, I wasted away far too many hours on both systems and it began my love for gaming. I bought an Xbox 360 at 18 but I only played single player, favouring the likes of Assassin's Creed, the Lego series and RPG's in general. It was only when I met I Miss Sonic I that I became interested in multiplayer games and FPS; I taught myself to play COD in a private combat training lobby, vowing to not go online until I could run and shoot at the same time.

For a while I was apprehensive of playing online with other people, afraid of being judged for not being very good but as I became better at the game my confidence grew. Over the years I've had a lot of messages, at least one per gaming session, and not many are nice. The usual are "get back into the kitchen", "campers suck" and "bitch/whore/slut" but every now and again I get incredibly offensive ones; one in particular said he hoped I could never have children and that I got cancer and died painfully.

Out of our "gaming girls group" I'm the one who receives the most messages/abuse and the likely reason is because of my style of play, my high K/D ratio and the fact that my gamertag is obviously female. It's a sad fact that gamer girls have come to expect abusive or sexual messages, 99% of which are from males.

Our friendship with SabreNat started purely by chance and since it has evolved into daily Whatsapp conversations, gaming sessions a few times a week and visiting each other's houses. We pick each other up after a bad day, we listen to rants about daily life and we make terrible jokes that make us laugh until it hurts. Our usual meeting place is in a COD lobby but it's become more than just gaming for us; it's a social experience.

I Miss Mario I



Natalie is a blogger, producer, gamer, and bird watcher. She likes all things vintage and collects tins. Her favourite game of all time is Super Mario Galaxy 2.

Old School, New Cool

by Kelly Vero

It's 1984. Hulk Hogan defeats The Iron Sheik and wins his first WWF championship at Madison Square Garden. Michael Jackson's hair catches fire during the filming of a Pepsi commercial. Bobby Ewing is accidentally shot as he tries to shoot J.R. in Dallas. Madonna performs Like A Virgin at the first MTV video awards. Mad Cow Disease wreaks havoc in the UK. The first Mac with an actual GUI goes on sale and I'm in my first year at secondary school.

I went to rich kid Daniel Simpson's house, he had a Commodore 64. His latest game took something like an hour to load, so he used to load it in the morning before school, leave it running all day so that we could go to his place and play at lunchtime and then after school. He was that rich, electricity meant nothing to him: global warming? Forget about it. I grabbed an Um Bongo from his mum's fridge and watched him play Mission Impossible for what felt like days. Yeah, I had homework, but so what? This was Twitch in analogue. It was 1984. There was a cold war going on. We could die in intercontinental thermonuclear war. We didn't give a Castlemaine XXXX.

I was already a past master at games. I'd gotten my ZX Spectrum a couple of years before, and in between saying what I was typing: load dit dits, I was building a death ray using string\$, variables and tildes god damn it. And when I wasn't doing that, I was watching my friends do ace moves on Ghostbusters, Jet-Pac and Manic Miner. We swapped tapes, we shared tips, and we lived the life of gods. Our decisions affecting the outcome of everything we did as we read the credits under torchlight hoping that one day we'd be making a game. The world belonged to us. We wore the heavy crown of nerd at a time when, let's be honest everyone was doing this on the sly. We were in our own world, games belonged to us.

And when the NES came, we took our jumpers and went home.

I don't know what happened to Daniel Simpson. Let's assume he became a mysterious benefactor and MMA superstar billionaire. As for me, well, I went into games. I never forgot that decade of decadence, that citadel of our own making that no mere human could enter without secret passcodes like ROM or RAM or CYAN or MAGENTA. And when the getting was good in the games industry, in the mid-90s and early 00s, it was magical. It didn't matter where you came from, or which papers you'd written; you were welcomed into a world of awesome by having 90% passion and 10% ability. I mean, you've played ET, right?

I remember watching King of Kong when I was lecturing a few years ago and I saw the looks on the faces of the young people who were the great hopes of the digital world. They couldn't understand the rivalry, they couldn't quite understand the vehemence that Billy Mitchell used to secure his position as King of Kong and the outsiders who, like me, had been twiddling away in their rooms forever were now the new gods of analogue. It made me wonder whether we were still carrying a torch for a world that we'd left behind. From the early to mid-2000s phrases started to emerge "games as art", what the hell did that mean?

The Stampers never intended to place their games in the Louvre, did they? John Romero was making things that people wanted to play. Will Wright was making worlds that we wanted to live in and Tim Schafer was making us laugh in a medium that we had not considered beyond Saturday Night Live on Channel 4. Other nuances to the games began to emerge, from polish to production values. Production values? What? We were glad to release product rather than demanding awards for it.

Even though I still work in the industry, it was during that period that games became so very mainstream. Games were no longer a secret world, they were completely accessible and people were buying consoles, over personal computers. They were using cartridges instead of tapes and Matthew Broderick was quickly replaced by Jeff Fahey, Jonny Lee Miller and Christophe Lambert. Leaving your machine on for hours to load one game was no longer necessary, it took probably the length of Everybody In the Place (Fairground Remix).

We went to ground. We became cyber. We worshipped Downward Spiral-era NIN and held onto the beautiful keyboard and monitor which had given us such joy. We refused the challenge of joining in and though we secretly loved the Mortal Kombat soundtrack, we hated any depictions of our kind as some sort of laughing stock. All your games are belong to us! And then we grew up, we went to work, we got older, we went crazy, we partied, we got a life partner and then another and we watched Spaced and remembered the old days. We lamented the fall of the game as tasting like some day old kebab or a lukewarm big mac. We always loved the first Rainbow Six, Medal of Honour, and Call of Duty was a place you'd go to let off steam. We welcomed the advent of televised events like E3, but completely lost our minds by how commercial it had become. We saw DOTA and LoL as something massive that even we couldn't imagine. And when Twitch got bought out by Amazon, we nodded in agreement. We'd been in Danny Simpson's bedroom. We knew.

Sitting in that room watching my mate play Mission Impossible in 1984, I couldn't have ever predicted the level of product that the games industry would churn out. Those kids who, in their bedrooms, had fooled around with string\$. Inspired by the dreams of Manic Miners, Starfoxes and a Princess called Peach; had put away childish things and spouted words like business models and MAU as a psalm to the new gods. Our horizons had narrowed from Sid Meier's universe of time to locations like the App Store or Google Play; and Steam was now the cartridge system to end them all. Digital, mobile, VR: these dreams rule the world, and though they stole our best ideas somehow they gave us our analog back. Castlevania, Horace and the Spiders, Golden Axe and Dungeon Keeper. Find them. Enjoy them.

They didn't bring back Um Bongo though, but that's ok, I'm holding out for a 3D juice printer.

By Kelly Vero: Writer, social hand grenade, gamer, polymath, general gobshite. Loved by robots and vampires everywhere. Lives on the Island of Malta after winning Bullseye

Sci-Fi books that need to be games

by John Wyatt

Ever been reading a book and thought what a great game it would make? Here science fiction reviewer John Wyatt reveals the ten novels that made him want to drop his paperback and pitch it to the nearest developer

1. Barricade by Jon Wallace (2014)

Artificial man Kentisbec's journey through the ruins of Britain made me want to fight the giant mutant rats myself. Most fun of all would be seeing his disease-riddled friend Fatty rendered as a game character, bloated with weeping sores all over him. You could have a driving section where Kentisbec has to dodge the post-apocalyptic remnants of humanity trying to stop him, and end with a boss fight against the TV-obsessed warlord who tries to put Kentisbec to death.

2. Defenders by Will McIntosh (2014)

We all love a good alien-invasion tale in the style of HG Wells's classic *The War Of The Worlds* (I checked; that one's been done) but McIntosh thought of a great twist: What if the invading aliens can read our minds?

This tactical advantage has them dodging bullets so a desperate humanity creates the Defenders: super-soldiers whose brains work in a different way, preventing the aliens from reading their thoughts. The only trouble is, they have to be creative and autonomous thinkers to be any use.

So the Defenders – giant tripods with robot legs – decide that, once they've seen off the aliens, they might as well get rid of humanity too and have the planet to themselves.

If this were a game, the player could play as one of the mind-reading aliens. The mind-reading facility could be rendered as a ghost-flash of what an enemy (human) combatant is about to do, giving the player a second to react and make a counter-move.

Then the next level would be fighting the Defenders themselves, whose minds can't be read, requiring more skill.

3. The Laundry Files series by Charles Stross (2006)

A great chance to pit yourself against all manner of eldritch monsters. The first novel, *The Atrocity Archives*, presents run-of-the-mill IT guy Bob Howard accidentally discovering fundamental maths equations that open portals to other dimensions. This attracts the attention of super-secret magic beast-fighting government agency The Laundry, who have to offer him a job as a secret agent or risk him meddling with the fabric of reality without their supervision.

You could make players crack a maths or logic puzzle every time Bob needs a new spell or power, and the series is full of any number of tentacle horrors with various powers for Bob to battle.

4. Arcanum by Simon Morden (2014)

In most games you gain powers and abilities as you move along. But what if, like the magic-dependent people in this clever fantasy novel, the magic starts to disappear? Morden's Lord of the Rings-style world has everything from fighting battles to flushing the loo dependent on magic. When the spells stop working, it's a race against time to discover all the knowledge that we take for granted.

So a player could start a quest with a full complement of spells, as would his opponents, only to have them gradually stop working as he goes along. The challenge would be to think your way round the problems instead of firing off firebombs etc. Want to fight a giant? Your spell to knock one out has just fizzled, so you'd better start hacking away at those ankles.

5. The Devil's Detective by Simon Kurt Unsworth (2015)

A murder mystery set in Hell sounds a pretty tricky premise for a novel but Unsworth makes it work. His hero Thomas Fool, sent to Hell for reasons he can't remember, has been put in charge of policing a version of Hell populated by various capricious and cruel demons and damned humans.

But there is still such a thing as murder, and Fool's wretched job is to investigate a series of them. To do that he interviews and sometimes fights a motley assortment of demons, devils and fiends, piecing together clues as he goes.

The boss fight would be with the peculiar Man Of Plants, an entity formed of any available vegetation, which would keep a player on their toes as random tree branches, daffodils and daisies attack.

6. Down Station by Simon Morden (2016)

OK, I really like Simon Morden. It's another fantasy-with-a-twist novel, with the set-up that a group of strangers flee an apocalypse on the London Underground through a door that leads, CS Lewis-style, into a magical world.

They notice that they start to acquire magical powers but what's so clever is that the powers they gain are dependent on their personalities. So a brave young lad becomes good at fighting, an ambitious but restless girl can turn into a giant eagle. And a troubled war veteran turns into a writhing mass of tentacles and teeth.

You could make players' moral choices affect what powers are granted them, giving brave players the power to turn into a lion, say, and sneaky ones the power to become a sea snake, as the novel's villain does.

7. Nod by Adrian Barnes (2012)

Nod is a zombie novel with the difference that no plague or supernatural event transforms people into zombies. It's just that they can't sleep. Our hero is one of just a handful worldwide who can get any shuteye, with everyone else succumbing to psychosis. It's an almost-plausible scenario and one that would make the enemies you have to fight get more zombie-like and less human as time goes on. You could make it a key point that the player has to choose the right time to shoot apparent enemies, avoiding it if possible, because technically they're still human. But in the novel people without sleep become less and less human and eventually they go mad and start trying to kill you, which is the point where the player can start blasting away.

8. **Revenger by Alastair Reynolds (2016)**

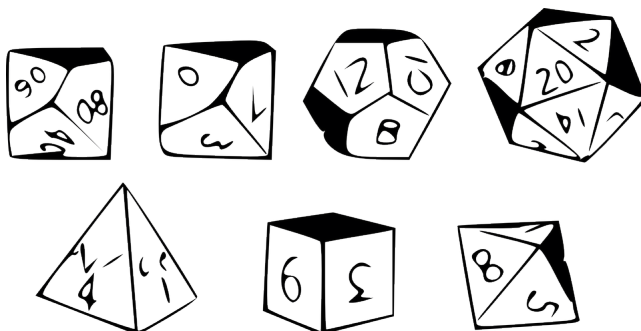
One of science fiction's modern greats produced this original gem that finds a way to make Star Trek-style planet hopping plausible. It's set in an unimaginably far future, where some great but long-forgotten civilisation has left planetoids strewn around our solar system, loaded with riches for those with the wit and bravery to plunder them. So an ongoing quest in which treasures and exciting alien tech can be found becomes possible. And of course the force fields protecting the planets only open up once in a while, making plundering a perilous dash in case they close again. The most exciting loot would be the invisible "ghost armour" that may have a mind of its own...

9. **Sand by Hugh Howey (2014)**

Imagine the terrifying, suffocating feeling of swimming through sand. That feeling is hypnotically evoked in this post-apocalyptic novel where people are living in deserts under which today's cities lie miles deep. A bit of technological hand-waving describes sand-diving suits that electrostatically disturb the sand in order to allow the wearer to swim through it. But get your electrostatic fields wrong and you can end up stuck yards or even miles deep in the yellow stuff, doomed to an unpleasant death. The big business in this world is diving down all the way to the buried skyscrapers, with air pockets still preserved, to find the treasures of the ancients (us). So expect to find iPhones and, uh, fidget spinners?

10. **The Lazarus War series by Jamie Sawyer (2015)**

The only novel on this list that isn't actually all that good would nonetheless make a cracking game. With future soldiers piloting Avatar-style remote bodies, the regeneration aspect of games is built in to the narrative. Mankind is locked in an ongoing war with some aliens that might as well be zombies, and our hero Conrad Harries spends the entire novel shooting the shit out of them, with only occasional breaks to have an emotional crisis about his lost girlfriend or something. The avatar bodies he and his team use are heavily upgraded from human basic, with super reflexes, muscles and damage limitation, and there's always a spare one if Harris gets mashed. But when he and his squad go to investigate a research facility that's stopped transmitting, shit gets real. The boss fight is in your own body, with no upgrades. And no rebirth.



Discoverability for Games

by Benjamin Woolf

Several years back Sam Koch (Co-founder of ANDi) and I were on the brink of developing a games development studio, concentrating mobile games. We'd spent the last few months identifying the types of games we wanted to create, researching the market and how we would get them noticed.

With our research building up, we quickly became aware that discovery has been an ever increasing issue in mobile gaming. The Top 10 games in app stores, account for 25% of all revenues, and the industry being somewhat of a pure monopoly amongst the app stores, well, it is conceived as one. Mobile games are played by over 1 Billion people worldwide. With over 2 Million games available, just over 400 are added each day. Game installs account for over 50% of global app installations, with an average churn rates of over 85%.

Is that a pool you want to swim in? The market is worth over \$40 billion after all

Considering there are so many social channels, gaming influencers and players it's a wonder how discovery could genuinely be a problem. We firmly believe that the problem with game discovery is that there is too much information. An ever increasing, saturated sea of information available. On top of this we have grown submissive to the barrage of adverts and marketing tactics - ever impressed by a solid viral campaign, recognised brand, 1 click responses, short videos and funny memes.

The largest challenge for independent game developers is marketing. With non-existent budgets, and no firm knowledge of Marketing & PR, they can really struggle to be heard above the noise. For those that have the budget and the experience, they embrace meticulous marketing campaigns, monitor consumer behaviour and metrics, deploy notifications, newsletters and focus on ASO. We consume around 5,000 ads a day. Of those, less than 10% will work and still with us. It's a full time job being an ad reviewer in 2017.

For the larger well known corporate game studios the sell of their product is easy with enough cash, and once engaging several million users they are able to cross promote. For the rest of us on the battlefield it's a deathmatch.

The rise of recommendation systems - ANDi Games

Once learning what we did from online sources and vast amounts of meetings with CEOs, founders and senior staff we tested an app with 500 people that tracks user's interaction with google play, the session times users had, games they downloaded and when they uninstalled them. The results were marvelous - with users taking 15 minutes to an hour to find games, to then see 72% of those people delete their games after one or two plays.

With our hands held high, we are not the first discovery platform to exist but I believe we are the first to take this seriously and one of the very few consumer facing products available in the mobile gaming sector.

When we look at other discovery platforms they tend to either use manual input information (questionnaires) or a variety of very basic data such as the genre, reviews and rating systems. But with the rapid improvements in Machine learning, Artificial Intelligence, Natural Language Processing, Big Data and other buzz word related technologies, there is a great deal more we can do in terms of utilising information and producing what are pro-active systems. Taking information and responding more effectively over time.

Our application, ANDi, identifies the games installed, uninstalled and session times, mixed with a swiping feature allowing users to aid the process of deciding what few products they love from millions available - from here we identify the location age and gender for social purposes and what defines a game? The genre, does it have ads, in-app purchases, use wifi, and is it suitable for mobile VR.

All of which creates a profile for each individual user which identifies their personal gaming characteristics.

Since January 2017, our users have downloaded x2 times the games they usually would, finding them in less than a minute, which they tend to keep for longer, 25% longer!

Now this isn't the ultimate solution, but a prototype

Bare in mind not all games are the same - especially in this space with the quick tappers, long term strategy games or boredom busters. Some games really are for 2 weeks of playing, and others several months or more, and we let users know this - it's about their needs remember.

However, the solution is automated, so we don't decide for people what they choose or do. Instead, they decide and we simply help manage this process to ease their journey, severely reducing the amount of ads they see or notifications they need. We refer to this as a proactive system, unlike chatbots, that are a good example of reactive products.

As mentioned earlier, this is only the beginning. The ability to create user profiles with data will improve as we learn how the games are played (tapping, clicking, pressing) what are the graphic qualities, music, avatars, crypto currencies and reward schemes used. For the user, what content do they watch, read and enjoy, or how they react to the gameplay, what they like on social media, or if the other apps they use reflect the amount of time people can play and so on. The list is quite vast.

In the near future, combining this will allow us to create 'artificial personalities' in our handheld devices that can act, not as an extension of communication, but a serious assistance to enhance our lives with somewhat a cognitive feeling.



Decimation

By Charlie Boucher

YOU HAVE AN INVITATION TO PLAY DECIMATION.

That's nice. (It probably isn't).

I bet they don't even know the real meaning of the word decimation.

My finger hovers over the banner.

Who sent me this anyway? Odds are it's from a friend's kids. Kids who have been left to play unsupervised with a parent's phone, rack up a £400 IAP bill, and pepper everyone in the address book with invitations to play a game that is chilling in its inanity.

I feel the same way about these invitations as I do about chain letters and "Like if you agree".

"Like this to show respect"

"Like this to show you care"

Like this to get sucked into the machinations of below-par marketers who are desperate for anything they create to go viral.

Like this to be a sheep. Like this to show you unthinkingly agree with someone you don't know on a subject neither of you may be informed about.

Like this to gather numbers, give it weight, make it look important, to give unwarranted credibility to something crass.

In my experience we hardly ever like the truly important things we need to know.



YOU HAVE AN INVITATION TO PLAY DECIMATION.

Oh yeah. That.

Decimation, I discovered recently, is a thing they used to do in Roman times. Legionnaires guilty of not following orders would find their Legion decimated as punishment. One in ten members would be killed, and that would show those naughty naughty soldiers who was boss.

This does not seem to be the best way to foster loyalty. In fact it looks like a great way to destroy your assets and give your enemies the upper hand. But what do I know.

YOU HAVE AN INVITATION TO PLAY DECIMATION.

There is nothing on this invitation to indicate who is inviting me to play. No names, no links, just a black bar with scratchy white typeface.

Against my better judgment I tap it.

My phone goes black. I wait a full twenty seconds before groaning at my own stupidity. I might as well have pressed a button that said "Click here to kill your phone, you loser".

I drop the dead thing in a drawer and try to work up the energy to do something about it, but I don't even have the motivation to stay annoyed with myself for long. I am a medicated zombie, and this is probably why I pressed the button in the first place. That fleeting rant at the Like Plague of Social Media used up all the emotional energy I have available today, and now I am a careless robot; one that performs repetitive functions and is too slow and numb to even remember its first law programming.

I forget about the phone. In its own small way Decimation may have saved me from the distracting neediness of my mobile device. Constantly chirruping away, flagging apps I don't want to open with ever growing numbers in burning red spots. Maybe I'll be happier without it.

I spend an entire afternoon, evening and night without the phone. I only notice its absence in moments of boredom; so roughly every four minutes. I am going to need to get the thing fixed, I realise, even if it's only to give myself a distraction in those regular sweeping absences of living.

I get to work in the morning and take the phone from the drawer. The lock screen shines at me.

Huh. Not killed after all.

I unlock it and sweep through the screens, trying to find the icon for Decimation. I haven't yet decided whether to remove it or open it. These sorts of decisions are ones I generally leave to my fingers. As soon as my head gets involved things become tense with unfolding possible scenarios. No-one needs the level of anticipated doom that my brain can bring to the table. But there is no icon. I don't know what Decimation has done (other than achieve a level of mild irritation other apps can only dream of), but it has done it invisibly.

I wonder if this has been a joke. A temporary shutdown designed to make me really think about how frequently I press a button without properly understanding what it might do.

Point well made.

If I cared at all about the consequences of my actions it might actually have some impact. But I don't.

I slide the phone onto my desk, switch my PC on, and prepare myself for another long day of staring at numbers. These charts are starting to be meaningless. All of the numbers I once collected with enthusiasm, eager to interrogate them for their secrets, are just a series of incomprehensible digits. I am waiting for my manager to notice that my reports are a series of copied and pasted paragraphs. They don't say anything useful, and they almost never relate to the graphs that accompany them.

The phone beeps.

ANSWER ME

flashes onto the screen. And then it begins to ring.
I don't like talking to people any more. So I let it ring.
It stops. And then almost instantaneously it starts again.

DECIMATION IS CALLING.

My heart sinks. Not only has this game burrowed itself into my phone, it apparently requires me to participate. In real life. I don't do interactions, so I ignore it. Later on I might see if I can stir myself from my desk and get one of the IT guys to burrow into the depths of the operating system and uninstall it. The volume gets louder. I hear the irritable query of "whose phone is that?" float across the open plan expanse towards my desk. I can feel my neck prickle, my face become uncomfortably hot. I slide the phone into my drawer and slam it shut. It continues to sing in a muffled voice, and then finally falls silent.

I slowly pull the drawer open.

YOU HAVE FAILED IN YOUR LOYALTY TO THE EMPEROR.

I feel my mouth quirk into a small smile, and welcome the growing realisation that this is a sucky little app' with huge pretensions. The install was a jabbing poke that briefly dented my bubble. Now it's going to disappear into up-itself obscurity.

Emperor. Feeble.

PREPARE FOR DECIMATION.

Whatever. I close my drawer. The vaguely threatening overtones of Decimation have been replaced with the app equivalent of a kitten pretending to be a lion.

Roar away, Decimation. Meet my massive slavering dog, Recycle Bin.

And then there's a pop, the sharp smell of burning, and a scream from the other end of the office. Four more pops burst out, followed by four human voices making a variety of yelps, shrieks and loud swears. The fire alarm shouts itself to life, and we all stand up and stare at each other in that baffled way people do when a thing you've tediously rehearsed is unexpectedly injected with real urgency. There's a solid "Phut" sound from above, and then the sprinklers burst into action, chugging out glots of brown gunge. Everyone gets splattered with this shit-like substance before there are more weird noises, and then the messy liquid stops and it's only slightly stale smelling water raining down on us.

Caroline, a jobsworth in high-vis, starts flapping around the office, shoos people towards the fire escape and squawking ridiculous rules about leaving our bags behind. I have nothing of value in my bag, but Caroline's sharp bob and insistent voice automatically make we want to do the opposite of whatever she says. I sling it over my shoulder, push my mobile into my pocket, and head for the stairs along with everyone else. Ahead of me I see Julie, the only person on my floor to ever have persisted in cheery conversation with me. One hand is swabbed in what used to be a paisley scarf, but is now a dripping red swathe on the end of her arm. I try to avoid the cherry splotches and splatters as we all trek downwards in muted panic. Geoffrey, a tiny grey man in huge glasses who does something incomprehensible with Excel, slips in a tiny pool of Julie's blood mixed with sprinkler goo, and lands with his coccyx on the edge of a stair. His agonised cry echoes down the stairwell, and for a moment the echoes of grumbles, murmurs and footsteps is drowned out. Then someone finally reaches the bottom and pushes the emergency door open. We see a flash of daylight at the bottom, and can dimly make out the sounds of sirens.

In my pocket, the phone vibrates.

I take a look.

ANSWER ME.

My thumb hesitates to accept the call, whilst behind me someone else slips in the messy detritus of sprinklers, tears and blood.

The phone tumbles out of my hand and falls down the two remaining stairwells, bouncing to a stop in the empty space at the bottom, ringing as it falls. My hard-core rubber case appears to do its job; there are no plastic shards shredding across the floor. By the time I reach it, stooping to scoop it up, the screen reads:

PREPARE FOR DECIMATION.

And there is a single crack running from the bottom left to the top right corner.

The fire escape door slams shut. The lights flicker and die. All that is left is the glowing green "EXIT" sign and the shuffling yelps and cries of people trying to negotiate slippery stairs in the dark.

There is an enormous soul driving roar. It rocks the building. The stairs sway, and the bannisters on the second floor give away. The stragglers fall in a cloud of dust and metal bars. I can barely see a thing, but those still on the stairs manage to pull themselves together as the shaking stops, and a row of lit phone screens start to wave. Weak light roams across the pile in the stairwell. I can see Geoffrey's face, tight with pain behind broken glasses. A luminous flash tells me that Caroline is under there somewhere too. The number of twisted limbs I can see indicate at least three more of my colleagues have taken this particular tumble. Behind me those who were near the bottom of the stairs start to pound and bang on the emergency exit doors.

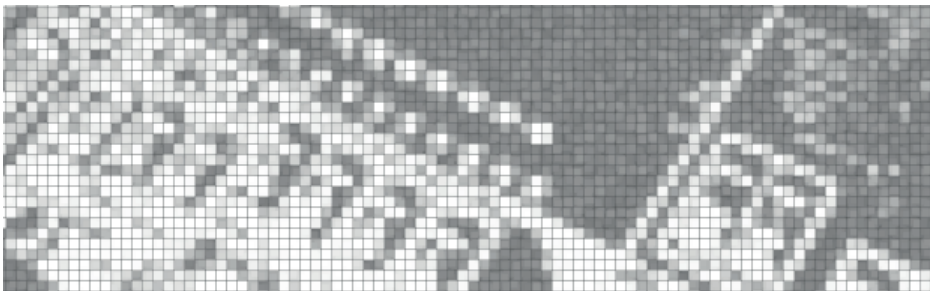
"Wait!" I shout, surprising myself. "Stop - listen!"

They slowly stop. We all listen. Beyond the panting and muffled sobs that we are making, outside we can hear... Nothing.

No sirens. No reassuring shouts.

There is a sound like a building sighing, and something falls, the colossal weight of it sending shudders through the floor and walls. What daylight we could glimpse underneath the doors vanishes.

Far above us there is a low and familiar "Phut".



The stairwell's sprinkler system clicks into action. We are all showered with more smelly gunk, and then tinny smelling water. In no time at all I can feel water spreading across the floor and seeping into my shoes. My shirt starts to stick to me. My hair flattens against my head. Those of us on the ground edge back towards the stairs, and everyone shuffles back up. By the light of our phones we see the water reach the first step, and as one we take another step back up. Someone in the jumble of limbs groans and coughs, and two people splash back down to pull ineffectually at the lumps of concrete and iron railings.

Slowly but surely everyone gives up on trying to call the outside world. Signal fades as we retreat up the stairs. The water level persistently creeps upwards, and Geoffrey, Caroline, and whoever else is down there, are abandoned with wails of regret and horror.

We are a set of huge eyes, staring wide-eyed into darkness. All of our individual sounds of pain, terror and shock have combined into a white sound that is almost calming in its volume and monotony.

And then my phone jangles discordantly into life.

DECIMATION IS CALLING.

I take a deep breath. I can feel the bewildered eyes of my bedraggled colleagues on me. I answer the phone.

Charlie Boucher is a writer. You can buy her first novel on Amazon.co.uk, and her short stories are hidden in fabulous and secret places on the internet. You can follow her on Twitter @charlieboucher, and like her on Facebook at www.facebook.com/bouchercharlie. You lucky things.

Image design by Lucie Baker-Wyse



How to get Grounded

by Alison Elizabeth

Ok so here are three great tips for keeping mind and body alert when you have an intense day ahead. You can also do any of these exercises at the end of the day too to re-energise after a hard day in front of the screen.

Number One - Grounding

Firstly it's a good idea to Ground Yourself. What does this mean?

Well as the name implies, it grounds you in reality so that your mind isn't stuck in the past or future. Grounding is about bringing your awareness in to your body and feeling the earth beneath your feet. We are talking about bringing your consciousness in to the here and now, not yesterdays events, not worrying about what has or may happen but just being present 'in the moment'.

So, why do it?

Grounding is simple and an incredibly easy strategy to reduce anxiety and get focused. You can do it anytime, anywhere but is especially beneficial at the start of a busy day and equally as good after a huge day of mental stress.

How to do it.

You can do this Grounding exercise either standing or sitting down, whichever is most comfortable but make sure your back is straight and both feet are squarely planted on the floor.

Now close your eyes and inhale deeply for the count of five.

Hold your breath for a count of five.

Exhale for a count of 8. As you exhale imagine tree roots coming out from the soles of your feet and spreading deep down in to the ground.

As you inhale again imagine the energy from the Earth as a pure bright light coming back up through the roots of your feet and into your body.

Hold your breath for a count of 5 and see that energy swirling through your body, reaching every part.

Exhale down through the roots again for 8

Do this three times in total.

When you have finished your third and final out breath open your eyes and just take a moment to see and feel everything around you. Get your breathing back to normal.

And that's grounding. You are ready to go!

Cool Story Bro'

by Will Freeman

Is gaming's obsession with telling tales limiting the medium's broader potential?

'Games are wasted on telling stories'.

That would be a ridiculous claim, wouldn't it? Games' capacity to tell stories proves the medium as credible. They surely now bump shoulders with film, books and television as one of the great mediums for telling tales. Story-driven games let the player join the rest of the cast, and offer endless ways to escape. They spin yarns of realism and surrealism with equal aplomb, and their interactivity makes the delivery quite unique.

The thing is, in spite of all those arguments, it sometimes feels that the video game form's increasing subservience to traditional narrative approaches might be limiting their true potential.

It could be argued games are too keen to please entertainment's old gods of printed literature, cinema and even theatre. Award shows slap games eagerly on the back with categories that celebrate storytelling, giving us all a reminder that to be like film and books is good. To seek mainstream recognition like film and books is good. Film and books are good, and games must please them.

Of course, games today offer such a vast, diverse array of experiences, there are myriad examples that contradict any notion that they have become too fixated with aping the way stories have been told for decades.

But the fact remains that, out in the mainstream of console gaming – and PC to a lesser extent – it is games with big stories that are pushed to the front for the poster child photo shoot. A protracted obsession with comparison to conventional media – and lingering questions about artfulness – have established unwritten conventions for what makes games good. And it is a well-told story that is the true hallmark of gaming integrity. That is the law, and it must not be contested.

Really, though, why would anyone give a fuck if games are art? It shouldn't matter. Any comparison too – or placement within – a framework where other media are defined will serve to engender games made in the image of their parallel forms. That will happen to a greater or lesser extent, but it will happen. Games that dare to be experimental with the conventions of story are labelled as 'interactive poetry'. High praise indeed, but a compliment that continues to whisper in the medium's ear: 'you must be more like us'.

Forget about the sweet light of digital distractions for a moment, and consider a season of games of football played out there in reality. There's no need to drape a narrative over the mechanics of that game. The mechanics – and how players interact them with – is the story. It's a ninety-minute tale of changes in pace and sudden twists. Fate flip-flops and crescendos in the drama see underlings become champions. Every match watched tells a different story, and the diversity is remarkable, even though the rule set is unchanged. There are the tabloids, of course. They make money from embellishing gaudy narratives about private lives and partners. But that work barely brings credibility and innovation to the arena of football.

And then there's Entertainment wrestling. That's looked down upon by many in more traditional sports exactly because its mechanics of combat are diluted so heavily through their being draped with an excess of story.

Back over in video games, there's a comparable enthusiasm for obscuring pure mechanics, and many rewards for those that do.

And you've probably already thought of numerous examples of releases both mass market and obscure that demonstrate interactions where story takes a back seat role, or fails to materialise entirely. There is Puyo Puyo Tetris and Threes and Wipeout. Elsewhere Super Hexagon and Ry-ndkapsel and Olli Olli are rightly celebrated. Some of those could be argued to carry stories, but it would be hard to argue these are anything but gameplay-lead games.

And I agree that these prove a point. There are thousands of games that do brilliant things with little or no story. I happen to warm to a fairly common narrative from that realm. It goes 'three lives; save the universe'. That's it. The set-up is over, and I'm on my own. I'm talking about arcade games, and specifically 2D shooters – or 'shmups', if you must. And just like the players in that real game of football, stood at an arcade cab I get to play my own story, rather than follow somebody else's. The arcade stick feels almost immediately connected to the code. There are few frills and distractions. Just player, screen, controllers and code. And the stories they tell together are mesmerising in a singly play-through, and might last weeks or months as time is given to mastering a single release. It can be a story of personal defeat, repeated failure, achievement, dedication and heart pounding action: a travelogue of a journey to beat a system.

Gameplay-led games are well respected, of course. But that doesn't change the fact that storytelling gets disproportionate attention as a barometer for the credibility of the medium. That, in turn, gives more games reason to focus on story, and much less talent, cash and time going towards titles that do what only games can do, rather than those that aid the desperate desire to prove games as somehow more worthy or deserving.

This isn't an argument. If it were it would be full of holes. It's just a feeling. A sense that while games and stories so often make wonderful bedfellows, an obsession with the credibility of a tale well told is limiting games' potential to be distinct.

There are, of course, story-led masterpieces like 80 Days and Device 6, and there should be more of that kind of innovative narrative design. In fact, there should be more of straight down the middle triple-A adventure games. Quantity means nothing here. It might just be interesting to see fewer constrictions on how games are told to their players.

Diversity of content – if not industry – might be the greatest progression in games over the past few decades. If that trend continues games, their players and makers will all be better for it.

Ultimately, video games are nothing more than experiences where you can interact with light, sound and movement. That's a great starting point for telling a story. But it's equally the perfect platform for doing anything but. Both approaches are equally credible, but only one gets the attention it deserves, and that might be leading us astray.

Of course, even Pong had a story, and it's worth digesting. Famously, from beginning to end, it reads 'avoid missing ball for high score', and was engraved on the iconic Pong arcade cabinet.

More games should tell stories like that, because only they can.

Will Freeman is a freelance video games journalist for publications like The Guardian, Edge, The Observer and Eurogamer. He also covers board games and Lego, and he just co-wrote a book about the Raspberry Pi. Freeman spends too much time with a yo-yo for a man in his mid-30s, and prefers arcades and shmups to most things.

Long Live Dreams

by Des Gayle

I wanted to use this opportunity to look back over the past 3 years of *Altered Gene*, reflect on its journey from start up to “still alive” and share some problems that I had and what I might have done differently.

Get an unofficial advisory board

The first thing that I regret not doing at the start was assembling a crew of people that could say “Hey Des, that idea is a bit shit” or “don’t go down that road, we’ve been there and it didn’t turn out well”. If I could turn the clock back, I would have a mentor that has 10 years or more experience (and is still relevant), another mentor with a business roughly 3 years ahead and a handful of peers in the same situation as me in the present.

I say this because there will come a time (or as in my case, multiple times) when the darkness comes. You’ll just happen upon a YouTube video of a game that is too similar to your game for comfort but also, better. It is disheartening, rage inducing and could potentially put your project in a destructive spiral of self-pity. I was very lucky to get away with this as I have a very supportive wife who, shall we say, “realigned my focus”. :) I feel that if I had set up this support network earlier on I would’ve recovered a lot quicker.

Funding

So, there IS money to be had out there in the world but it’s not trivial to get, even if your prototype is good. We have the likes of Unity and Unreal to thank for bringing affordable game development to the masses but it’s creating a problem. More and more people are making good games.

I’m from the school of “everything has a price” so even though there are some pots of free money floating around, it’s not really free. On 2 different occasions, I spent just over 3 weeks collating all the materials for funding applications that I didn’t get. On my team of two and a half, that meant my feedback to the coder was delayed and I took too long to setup simple backend stuff. I wasn’t fully engaged in the production of *Hyperstellar: SV* for FIFTEEN days. In old money that’s a couple of grand. Or you know, free.

Now, forgive my small bias here given the team I’ve just left, but I think now is the age of the “Double A” or “Triple I” publisher. My next attempt at funding is likely to be to pitch to a publisher. There are still some bad deals out there but there are also some very good ones. Don’t automatically cross publishers off your list just because they’re suits.

Face your demons

Coming from “pro-land” to “indie-land” was horrible for me. Having worked on some really good brands and franchises, I put myself under a massive weight of expectation and it was crippling. I was so petrified of making something substandard that I would unjustifiably shelve a project a few months before launch. I can’t remember what my trigger point was but in the end I just knew I had to ship something. If I could get one stranger to download the game, that would be validation enough to keep going, learn and make adjustments.

Equipment / Health

In Des' Hierarchy of Needs, after a stable internet connection my next need is health. INVEST in a good chair that looks after your back and posture. You're gonna have your ass in it for 10+ hours a day so your bog standard kitchen chair just isn't going to cut it. Also, don't forget to leave the house or apartment at least once a day. Some time on the balcony or in the garden or park can work wonders for productivity and make sure your legs don't fall off.

Crunch

In a creative industry where we are occasionally pushing the limits of technology, crunch is inevitable and unavoidable. However, what IS avoidable is excessive crunch. Obviously what is classed as excessive is relative to the length of the project but if you are in this mode of crunch then either the team estimated horrendously, the producer(s) messed up or management are involved in some shape or form. :)

I'd like to point out that I am not saying that zero overtime should be done. I am a believer in the "zone" or "flow state". Different people enter into this hollowed place at different times. Back when I used to have a job as a producer, my main objective was to complete the project on time, reasonably within budget and without killing anyone. This meant making sure that I kicked people out of the studio at a sociable hour. However, as I approached certain team members I could feel a heat haze or aura of productivity that I knew that if I interrupted, the project would lose something good so I would just send them an email to let them know that they were the last one in and slide out the door.

Fast forward to me writing various bits of code for myself, I got to feel for myself what an amazing place the "zone" is. I can't get there every night but when I do, I'm off into the early hours of the morning and write some good (by my standards) stuff. It's so powerful that I wish I could call on it at will. :)

Stay in the game

I guess where I was going with all this is that sure starting a game is easy but finishing and shipping a good quality game takes a huge effort and lots of teamwork. There are going to be multiple times when all you want to do is tap out.

I meet a variety of students on my travels and my advice to them is that unless you truly believe that you have something amazing and the foundations of a team ready to go, get a job first. Learn what to do and what not to do from the pros who have already been through the ringer. If you like your personal project enough, turn it into a "5-9" business. Work on it in your spare time and when you have a demo ready start pimping it around and see what happens.

Once you've done that and are STILL dearming about setting up your own games company, aim for the stars and land 20 feet away from where you started because life showed up just before launch and said "NOPE". Go all in, chase your rivals and swing for the fences. Put in maximum effort because even if you don't realise all your dreams, the journey is still going to be worth it.

Community Management Tips and Tricks

by Regina Walton

Interview w/ Susan Silver, Director of Community, TSR Games

What is Community Management:

Community managers build, grow, and manage communities both online and offline. In the case of games, community is essential because it provides a place where players can interact with each other and with game creators. In this world where digital games are everywhere there are still pen and paper tabletop games out there with vibrant communities. To that end, I thought it would be interesting to talk to a community manager that works with these sorts of games, and I found one: Susan Silver, Director of Community, TSR Games.

About Susan Silver:

Susan is the Director of Community for Gygax Magazine and TSR Games. She is interested in the intersection of cognitive psychology, computer science, and statistics. She is making positive change in people's lives with thoughtful communication.

About TSR Games and Gygax Magazine:

TSR is in the business of producing pen and paper games. On their Facebook page, they describe themselves as "Analog gaming in a digital world". The TSR name has gone through many changes including being the initial publisher of Dungeons & Dragons. The current TSR is a different company, but they still work with some of the original TSR team. In its current form, TSR publishes a range of gaming books, magazines, and posters catering to those who prefer to play tabletop games.

Gygax Magazine is a quarterly magazine about adventure gaming. Founded by in late 2012 by Luke Gygax, Ernest Gary Gygax Jr., Jayson Elliot, and Tim Kask. The first issue was published in 2013.

Community Management at TSR Games and Gygax Magazine:

This community primarily lives on their Facebook page. Susan is responsible for builds community between the brand and their customers. She does this with user generated campaigns.

One example of this is their “show us your dice” campaign where players to share pictures of the dice they use to play, and she then shared those pics on their page. Those posts got a lot of engagement.

One goal to keep the community healthy is to give the community things to do to stay engaged. This means making sure that people are connecting to others in the community.

In addition to the TSR Facebook page, she develops content on blog, which includes creating and managing blog posts written by others; crafts new product announcements and improvements; makes sure that TSR’s community triage is responding to user questions and problems; and collects user feedback to share with the TSR team. Her primary goal with the community is to connect people and entertain.

Initially she worked solo, but she now has help. Susan handles most of the high-level strategy around community because she now has a moderator for the TSR Facebook page. One concern is collecting positive stories about gaming. For example, they recently shared a story about someone who is teaching kids how to be game masters (GMs).

Data and metrics:

One big concern is how to do things better and get more efficient. Collecting and going over data to learn what’s working and what’s not with the TSR community. This is a practice that all community managers need to do. When we talked about data she explained that she tracks the community with raw data using spreadsheets. She uses raw data because a lot of the platforms give you numbers, but the numbers you get are vanity metrics and those really don’t help you make smart decisions. There are some exceptions, but she prefers using raw data.

She measures shares and likes on posts. This helps her find high performing outliers, which she then tries to replicate. She also tracks the number of new likes on the TSR Facebook page. She uses a scatterplot and finds the best fit line to predict when the page will hit a certain number of likes. On the TSR blog she tracks data around publishing times, views, and shares. The goal is to find correlations. For example, is there a connection between how much time readers spend on the blog based on the length of a post and the average time readers spend on the page. What she’s found is with their readers post length doesn’t matter, and that their readers are spending 20 minutes or more on the site when they visit. She also tracks new posts once a week for three months tracking the organic, search, and social reach of new posts.

Because she has support from management, she focuses on giving them the big picture and her recommendations. She doesn't have to worry about trying to get buy-in from upper management, which she knows is a luxury. She has done freelance work where working with community is an uphill battle. Like all community managers, it's an uphill battle and, eventually, she parted ways with them.

Problem users:

The TSR community team has a unique approach to dealing with problem community members. Her approach is to instead of chastising someone they try to reframe the discussion or interaction in a positive way. Susan says that approach works really well with their community. Thus far, they've never had to ban anyone. The bottom line is it's gaming and they're in it to have fun and to learn about cool things. The bottom line for her and her team is learning how to frame issues vs. attacks and bans. You can learn more about how Susan handles problem users by reading her post on the CMX hub titled, "A Proactive Approach to Handling a Community Crisis": <http://sumo.ly/C38P>

New product launches:

With new products and launches, they prep their community by building up anticipation. They're not always free to reveal everything. She says it's fun to tease, "I know something you don't know!"

She says having a communications plan around a launch is key. This involves messaging, timing, advertising considerations including boosting posts, blog posts. They avoid press releases and communicate this news through their blog. The bottom line is having a messaging plan down to the minute, if necessary, and knowing what links and images you're going to use to promote.

And knowing what will methods will get you the most reach for your money.

Markers of a healthy community:

People are tagging, sharing, and pulling their friends into the conversations
Threads or posts that have a lot of comments

When Facebook changed the algorithm to make Facebook pages harder to see, she noticed that community members would go out of their way to come to the page and catch up on updates.

Thanks so much Susan for a great interview and sharing your knowledge and passion for community and gaming.

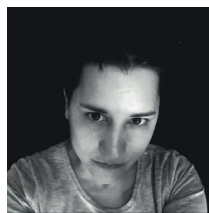
Mugshots!



John Wyatt



Ben Woolf



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ANALOG