



### *Editors Note*

"Hey, I'm putting together this indie fanzine, it's kind of a personal slant on working in games"

"Cool, what should I write about?"

"Whatever the fuck you like"

Thanks to all contributors and to everyone else I asked; when I didn't get a reply, I knew it was from you.

Issue 3 will be out in December. Wanna write something? Email me at [conduit4games@gmail.com](mailto:conduit4games@gmail.com).

Alex B

Awesome Cover Design by Jason Ancomb

## It's About Time

*By Vaida Plankyte*

At our coffee date yesterday, my friend asked me about anxiety— what's it like?

It's feeling like your arms are physically going to fall off because your muscle pain is getting worse now that you're working full-time again. It's having trouble sleeping at night because you ache too much, but also knowing that you can't allow yourself to get worried because worrying is the main culprit here. It's about making ingenious use of pillows. It's having to cancel plans last minute because you overexerted yourself the day (or was it days?) before and just feel like there is too much in your head, but you desperately hope that you'll be able to make it, so you wait until the last possible moment to cancel. Because cancelling feels so very similar to failing. It's also about hanging out with dear friends you only get to see a couple times a year at events and fearing the passage of time, being acutely aware that you just have a couple of days to make unforgettable memories, and getting quite annoyed at yourself for not having the energy to attend all of the things on your list —this is a really nice city why must you fly back tomorrow— wait isn't that talk you really wanted to go to starting right about now?

Mostly, it's about feeling like you've lost all of the creativity left in you because these weird fears mean you haven't worked on your project in two months and that must mean you just don't have it in you anymore and any attempt will be lukewarm and foreign. Fun time and self-care time have become work time and it's about fearing that you, you have become a machine.

It's the need to feel consistently productive (and be acknowledged as such) in order to feel like you are worth something. It's about hesitating for way too long when you see someone you chatted with on Twitter and never ending up going up to them to say hi and not really being able to explain to yourself why. It's about assuming people don't remember you and being genuinely surprised when they do and they also mention that they like your work. But you made that stuff a couple of months back, so you should probably start working on the next thing to make sure people don't forget. It's about all those things, not knowing how to deal with them, and having even less of an idea of the shape and form they will come back to visit you in.

On some days, though, you break the habit, and on those days something curious happens: you learn to make time for yourself.

One afternoon, you learn how to lay in bed while listening to that album you had been eyeing the release of, and you're lazily eating some candy and you're thinking about nothing and it feels kind of nice. The next day, you meet up with a friend and you realise you love what you're doing but you're also maybe a bit scared and that that's okay. You see the hours go by as you chatter away in a cute local coffee shop and that's okay.

Then, after some time (because it does take time), you realise your head is a little less heavy. You are excited for things again-- and the time it took you to get better was necessary, and there is no point comparing yourself to others because you just don't get anything out of it. You deserve as many mental health days as you need. You don't create for a while, and it gives you a greater sense of what direction you want to take your work: you realise it's about the long-run. You plan more coffee dates and at first it feels artificial, but you have always found it hard to approach people, and it's getting a bit easier now that you do it more regularly. It's about getting into a self-care routine because self-care is something you make into a daily habit and cherish, rather than pick up when things are bad. It's about unconditionally putting yourself first and refusing to feel guilty over it.

But mostly, it's about feeling like the negative thought loops that you've internalised throughout the years put you back to square one, and still having an overwhelming, underlying feeling that you will work it out and be just fine.

Sitting in between two of your best friends and only half-listening to their enthusiastic meme conversation, leaning back, you get some sun on your face. There was that weird game about falling arms you were excited to try out. The expo is open until late so you have time.

It's about time you felt like you had the time.



# Pranayama Breathing

*by Alison Elizabeth*

Breathing properly is highly underrated. Basically, it's a quick fix for almost anything from stress to pain relief so if you can learn to breathe like a Yogi you are onto a winner. Here is an exercise called Pranayama Breathing, or Alternate Nostril breathing which takes a bit of concentration but is well worth the effort and it won't take more than 5 minutes.

## **Why do it?**

Because it balances both the left and right side of the brain equally and strengthens your natural Life force energy.

So, this one you will need to sit down, either at your desk but if you want to get into proper Yogi mode sit crossed legged on the floor and keep your back straight.

1. Ok, so, position your right hand by placing your pointer and middle fingers together and resting them on your forehead in between your eyes, leaving your thumb, ring finger, and pinky sticking up.
2. Bring your thumb to the right side of your nose and your ring finger to the left side.
3. Close your eyes or take a soft gaze downward. Inhale and exhale once to prepare.
4. Close off your right nostril with your thumb.
5. Inhale through your left nostril.
6. Close off your left nostril with your ring finger.
7. Open and exhale through your right nostril.
8. Inhale through your right nostril.
9. Close off your right nostril with your thumb.
10. Open and exhale through your left nostril.
11. Inhale through your left nostril.
12. At first, you might only make it through a few rounds of this breath. Try to work up to doing at least 10 rounds. You can also take a break and then resume the exercise.
13. If you ever begin to feel light headed it means your poor brain is not used to getting so much oxygen in one hit. Just release both nostrils and breath normally. You can have another go in a few minutes.

Ok, you should be feeling a bit more like the superhero you were always destined to be but here is one last Hack to really get you totally focussed and ready to go.

## ANULOM VILOM PRANAYAMA (ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING)



# Eye Rejuvenator

*by Alison Elizabeth*

This one is super quick and it re-energises those tired, strained eyes.

Palms together and start rubbing as quick as you can. You will begin to build up a nice bit of friction and heat.

When your hands are feeling hot and tingly place a palm on to each eye and with a slight pressure leave them over your eyes and breathe deeply in for 5 second, out for 8 seconds three times.

That's it. Congratulations, you are now a Mindfulness Guru!



# A Stand Up Education

*by Kelly Vero*

When I told my careers officer that I wanted to work in “computer games” he laughed at me and suggested that stand-up comedy might be more my thing. The boys in my class (and some girls) enjoyed the brave new world of technology in our classroom; from the Acorn to the dot matrix it was a boon to anyone who wanted to be an astronaut, an engineer or a nuclear physicist. I mean, it

was the era where we’d shit out a week’s worth of breakfast, lunch and dinner worrying about mushroom clouds and long-range missiles. But even then, games education was something of a myth, a pie-in-the-sky theory or a luck of the draw where in our bedrooms we’d rejected social norms in favour of coding “Hello World”; who knows what evil we could create without the guiding hand of an Information Technology teacher?

So I wasn’t massively surprised when in 2004 I embarked on developing, leading and teaching courses, curricula and certificates in Games education. After all, I’d lived it. I’d worked in the games industry and I had loads of contacts. The industry was in a holding pattern post-Halo 2 awaiting the Gears of War/Call of Duty 4 onslaught and Grand Theft Auto was a badge of honour. I took a career break, and boy what a break that was.

We had small classes, because it was often a module of another course. It gave me plenty of room to work with individuals, some who were here for the money or for a job as a games tester for Rockstar (these just were like rocking horse shit – and still are!) but it was tough to find the resources and get the backing I needed to show these young minds just how exciting this industry could be.

“Improvise,” my superiors told me. So, I took them at their word. After all, the commonality was that these guys and girls (but mostly guys) saw us tutors as developers of some of their favourite games and thought, I can do that. Well. They could. But...

I was wading through treacle at a time when this type of education was a novelty. The truth is that Games isn’t Computer Science, nor is it Design, it’s not Art or Media: it’s all of those things and a lot more besides. I was bound by early IP legislation, no free engines and a bunch of parents who thought what their son or daughter was doing was a laugh, or waste of time. I was one of four tutors on the course and the only one with actual games experience, so, when I said “you can’t teach that, it’s not relevant,” I was told to suck it up if I wanted to keep my job. But I didn’t give up! I improvised.

I tried to teach students about themselves first and I maintain that this is the most important thing anyone in the games industry can learn. Who are you? What do you have to give the industry that we don’t already have? How do you cope with crunching? How to do you manage failure? So I taught them how to stand up in front of people by watching stand-up comedy (Rivers, Evans, Marx, Hicks, and Leary) and then getting them to do two-minutes of pure joke-telling. Their secret personalities shone through. It was magical.

Some students had a burning desire, like me, to get out of their shitty little town and do something great. Other students had special needs: they found solace in spending 6 hours a day in front of a monitor. Regardless of why they came to learn or which labels they had been given, we worked with

their most hidden talents to engage them in board games, cultural pursuits and healthy debate. I told them everything I knew; how to work with others, how to pitch your ideas, how to know the business, how to create and how to understand other cultures and other gameplay methodologies. On top of that they learned how to code, how to create sound, how to write stories and how to put a game together for release through scrum management, marketing, PR, art and solid design.

And by

design I mean, why door handles work or why teapots leak, as well as UX. My students could test, they could analyse and they had the skills to shake the hands of anyone who walked into their classroom to see what they had made. They were gracious, and they treated their team like family.

The numbers grew, the resources started to appear and tutors, who actually had experience of the programs we were using, joined the team; yet still, there was no one working on that course who had credible shipped games experience except for yours truly. "It's fine," I was told: "it doesn't matter in FE, it matters more in HE."

I didn't agree, so I plotted my escape back to the comfort of the industry. I was ashamed that education was obsessed with higher education, when it wasn't so long ago that I was getting my hands dirty learning through making and breaking things. We'd forgotten why we were doing it: replacing the Atari video game burial discussions with academic papers on perfecting Leisure Suit Larry. No one ever said that games was brain surgery, and no one ever really saved a life with a copy of Crash Bandicoot did they? Some of the greatest game designers and developers of our time came to visit my poxy little course in the middle of nowhere and they left these alert and excited young minds with the same advice, "find the fun."

Recently, I went back to the place where I'd moved mountains and put young people into actual games jobs (they did you know, they actually went off to work in games) and I was staggered. Nothing had changed. It had just stayed the same, but BIGGER. There wasn't anyone I could talk to with any shipped games experience working there and some 300 games students covered one-third of all of the students in that college.

In the time that I've been away, there is so much to celebrate about games education. From innovation labs to BAFTA awards. But there was still something missing that I felt in every industry gig I did after teaching. And I could trace it back to what I'd done in the early/late 00s. I cannot tell you how happy I am to see games courses which specialise rather than generalise. But I was gobsmacked by how many specialist courses are completely unnecessary in our industry. So I challenged the new world order. "Did you research job numbers in this area of the industry?" I asked. "It doesn't matter really does it?" They replied. "Are you aware of the issues involved in hardware software issues for the end-user?" I asked. The conversation moved on. Next year, I am told, students will be able to do VR courses throughout the UK. Let's hope that Samsung, HTC et al shift enough units.

My final questions, I thought, were the most important and so indicative of this current crowded climate.

1. "Do you teach them about business models? Do they know about the issues facing our industry regardless of platforms and software? Do they know about funding? Investments?" I urged. "Well," one said, "kind of. One of us covers it a bit. It's not massively important though is it?"

2. "How are their stand-up comedy skills?" I laughed and the reply came without a single thought. "Yeah," he told me, "we don't do that anymore."

I'm pretty sure, with interest piqued you're all shouting at the pages where I've pulled the education system apart (lovingly); but I think you can agree that all any of us want to know is that you care about being the best you can be every day, whether a tutor, a student or a peer. That you care about your team, that you understand the changes affecting our industry and that you want to be the change. Find your education how best you want to learn, and if you're an educator, please spend some time with us, learn from us and question our processes, then share the love and go back and do it all again.

By the way, I got a degree in the end. I'm 44.

# 23 copies

*by Byron Atkinson-Jones*

Game developers around the world dream of one thing, to get to the number one position on whatever store page they release on. The math should be simple, your game is at the number one position which means you sold bucket loads and you can now retire and buy that small Hawaiian island you always wanted to. For me that store page would be Steam and to my amazement I actually made it too, I had got to the number one slot! However, I'm typing this article still in my tiny office on the border of Croydon so clearly something went wrong.

It happened last year. I made an off-shoot to my bigger game and released it on Steam. It was a room scale VR game making full use of the HTC Vive. There was Oculus Rift support too but at the time I didn't have the touch controllers so the support wasn't as rich experience as the Vive. I wasn't really expecting much, but on the day I released it I got a shock – it went to the number one slot on the Steam popular new releases chart.

This had never happened to me before so I didn't know how to react. I was about to book tickets to Hawaii right there and then but my wife, quite sensibly, told me to put on the brakes and to wait for the sales figures. It was the longest 24 hours of my life.

The next day, the sales figures came in. I loaded up the Steam report page on my browser, which for some reason took an age and then I had to click on through to the game I'd just released. Guess how many copies it took to get to the number one slot of the popular new releases chart for VR games on Steam.... The title of this piece is a BIG hint. That's right, 23.

Let that sink in for a while.

My game is at the number one slot and all it took to get there was 23 sold. I couldn't believe it. That should not be possible. It was an incredibly low number. The last time I released a game the first day's sales amounted to around about 1500 copies and that got nowhere near the top of the chart and here I was looking at 23 which did get to the top of the chart. What the hell was going on? What's even scarier is that there was something like 200 other VR games behind mine, how many were they selling?

This was my slap in the face to let me know that the hype of VR was just that, hype. I wasn't expecting high numbers but I certainly wasn't expecting to get to such a high slot in the charts with such low sales numbers. All dreams of sipping drinks with little umbrellas in them on a sunny beach faded away into the distance and to replace it was a VR HMD giving me the finger.

I'd like to think that my story is an isolated case. While I suspect that other indie developers sold more than 23 copies on launch (at least I hope they did!) I don't think they were sustainable numbers. This presents a real problem as I know of a few indie developers who jumped wholly onto the VR train, believing the hype that this was the next big thing. I hope not but I suspect we will see a culling of development studios next year who pivoted this way.

You could argue that it was a poor business decision to go down the VR route and you'd be right but at the same time, the VR hype was massive and hard to ignore. Also, once you've tried VR it's very hard to just forget it, the tech is amazing. It's just a pity that the audience just isn't there yet.



# How Dark Souls 2 taught me self-discipline

*by Noor Alkhadra - Founder of WeGeek*

Self-discipline is defined as being able to control one's feelings to overcome one's weakness. A powerful ability to have to say the least! It's the ability to overcome yourself to be better.

Sun Tzu, the world renowned Chinese military strategist and philosopher, and writer of his famous strategy book "The Art of War" (a book that has been the bible for military tactics for decades and is still being taught today by the US military) mentions that in order to be a good leader, you need to practice the art of self-discipline.

A leader should not need external motivation to insure performance and self-control.

Here are the three steps to self-discipline according to Sun Tzu:

1. Self determination
2. Decision
3. Taking action

After reading his book, I was fascinated by the art of self-discipline, particularly because I admired the idea of being able to become a better, more skilled version of myself. That being said, I found that honing one's self-discipline abilities is not necessarily limited to the practice of leadership.

I found myself trying to implement this art when I was practicing Kendo, when I was learning a new song on the violin, and especially when I was playing Dark Souls 2.

In Kendo, constantly correcting your posture and being aware of your body and how it's moving is very challenging. I often found that when I would try to improve myself in one area (for example not biting my lip while swinging the sword) I would lose track of another part of my body.

Moreover, this concept is exceptionally relevant to video games (even though many people underestimate the value and learnings from this medium), particularly Dark Souls 2.

Now, Dark Souls 2 (if you haven't played it DO!) is a game known to be one of the most frustrating and challenging games out there. It's a game that does not allow you to pause, doesn't allow you to save until you reach another checkpoint (bonfire), and worst of all, if you die you lose all the souls you have been collecting for ages. It's an understatement to say that many players have thrown controllers in frustration for not being able to beat the boss after twenty attempts. The game is hard as fuck, and that's why I love it.

The secret in beating a boss in Dark Souls 2 involves many things such as choosing the right armour, the right weapon etc... But the most important aspect, which is related to this article, is the ability to have self-discipline.

As humans, we naturally get frustrated when things don't work out the way we planned. We get impatient and some of us just simply give up. However, I found that with self-determination, making a decision, and taking action, anyone can do anything, yes ANYTHING!

Using Dark Souls 2 as an example, I would go into a boss fight the first time with full focus, thinking I'm going to beat him/her, then inevitably I'd die. I get super frustrated, and I take the learnings from the first attempt into the second and third attempt. Then I reach a point where I know what I should be doing, and then I do very well on my fourth attempt and get the boss to a really low level of health, then guess what? I die. I die. I die. I die. I die.

OMG the frustration! Why does this happen? It's because I got so excited that I was doing so well in the end of the battle, that I lost focus (and patience) and ended up failing again. And again. And again.

Eventually I would get to a stage that I would be so frustrated that the boss would beat me instantly and so I'd lose immediately. With a deep breath, I take a break, and go do something else.

Finally, I step into the boss fight with full focus, self-discipline and awareness to not be disillusioned by my imaginary victory. I fight the boss to the end. And this time I WIN.

I found that you are constantly self-disciplining yourself until you reach a state of full control and focus. Once you are there, you can achieve wonders. Even beating those bosses in Dark Souls 2.

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## A Shit Poem by Anon

If I live by the moment  
I'll forget who I am  
If I give myself a deadline  
I'll fuck up the plan  
I swim in nostalgia  
I walk on hot coals  
Its constant reassurance  
While trying to meet goals  
As I push the big 30  
I'll make up a list  
Decide I don't need them  
Then go and get pissed  
Who feeds my soul?  
Who couldn't care less?  
Who cherishes the future?  
Whose priorities are a mess?  
As the penny drops  
I ponder my aim  
It will hit something  
Just give it a name.

# Ugandan Adventure - 2017

*by Steven Huckle*

## **What's this all about?**

I'm just back from a week in Kampala, Uganda, setting up a new branch of The Games Hub. I wasn't sure quite what perspective to put on this as there's so much to cover, so I opted for this "my experience" point of view. This blog/article jumps around a bit in many ways and some of it is quite hard to put down into words and give it justice, hopefully though this is interesting and informative as well as understandable.

I'm a big believer in removing barriers that stop people even being able to try something, let alone working through something that may become their future.

There's really no games or app development in central Africa itself and although there are a handful in South Africa, it's far from a prominent industry. We as an industry should offer everyone every opportunity to give stuff a go and help guide them through, regardless of where their future lies.

## **Where did it all begin?**

Many months ago I was approached by a wonderful man by called Don Brewen who for the last 25 years has been visiting central Africa through his previous work with the church. This was initially an introduction through his niece Susan who works at the University of Essex. Don wanted to talk about developing an app or apps to help people based in Uganda to teach themselves and learn. This would be as a way of helping them continue on from what, if any, limited education they were able to get. My first thought wasn't how or what app to make but, why don't I help them to make their own app. They are far better informed to know what they need to learn and how best to do it, plus it would also give them the opportunity to build themselves a future. And in the back of my mind was the thought that it could work the same as The Games Hub and help them potentially setup their own companies.

After an initial couple of discussions and a meeting, my idea was to emulate my Games Hub programme in a more open way, as an experiment (for want of a better word) to see if I could help set some on a possible career making games or apps. It was also vitally important that, like its counterpart, it was free!

So, after many weeks of planning and discussions, with a few ups and downs along the way, on the 2nd of July I boarded a plane for Entebbe airport and on to Kampala. Where, for the following week I would spend the days mentoring and education 20 people from both Uganda and DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo) about all I could to do with games and app development. Of those 20 it was excellent to see 7 of them were girls.

Those travelling from DRC had to make quite an arduous journey (and a longer way around) to avoid some areas of violence. Yet they all managed to arrive on time.

The plan was to spend each day from around 9am till 6pm (with tea breaks and some lunch) fitting in as much as we could learning and making stuff. I was keen to find out what they wanted to do.

The over-arching and very clear desire from everyone was that they wanted to learn so they could share their learning with others, to pass on their knowledge and experience so that everyone could have the same opportunities.

## The experience.

On the day we arrived, at Namirembe guest house, where Don and I would stay for the week, I met all of those who would be taking part in the programme and jumped straight into spending the afternoon talking about the industry, roles and possibilities. It also gave a chance for those first very quiet and shy introductions.

Most of them hadn't met each other before, so it was inevitably quiet and I did far far too much talking and waffling on. But it did give a great starting point to the week, I bored them with my career so far (99% of which no-one had ever heard of) and gave a good overview to the many different roles, platforms and range of software there is. I also covered as further a range as possible; business, stores, designing, art, code, audio, engines, software and much more.

This time also gave a chance to get some of the software I'd brought with me installed. Before going I tried to prepare for as wide a range of hardware and skills as possible, although I knew what some of the computers were going to be like (which was a broad range of almost 10 year old laptops to current day i7s). To ensure that everybody would be able to learn as much as possible I opted to use Construct 2 (C2) by Scirra.

I also used the opportunity to take short videos of a few of them to find out what they wanted to gain from taking part and why. It took quite a bit of coaxing to start with, but after the first few I ended up having to stop as everyone wanted a go! I know this would have "worked" much better if done at the end of the week, when everyone was more relaxed, but it was important to get this before they started.

Frustratingly there was no internet due to problems out of our control, initially not a worry as I had the first few days planned out already and all the software and documentation needed.

This meant that it (C2) would likely work on all the laptops as well as it being reasonably straightforward to pick up. I've also used it for tutorials in the UK with many different ages and skill sets. I was hoping it would make life easier and be more accessible to cover the wide range of abilities.

One thing that became more and more apparent over the week was, in particular with those from DRC, that the inexperienced were more limited than I first imagined. This wasn't only in terms of their technical understanding and use of computers, but also how much English they understood. This was also even more apparent when it came to most of the terminology used, as there are lots of words that were simply unknown and just as hard to describe or give context to.

I also now know (well I think I already did), that I talk far too fast and rush too much, that it makes it a struggle (and likely off putting) for those who find things like this difficult enough already.

Of course, as the week went on, everyone got to know each other that little bit better and every day things got much more relaxed. People spoke up more, took on more, and we all started to make some friends.

The first tutorial was to take everyone through the beginner's guide to Construct 2, which works well as it shows many of the key things needed when developing a game or app (take an idea, make some assets, import them into the engine, give those assets information, give the game instructions on what you want it to do and run). It also serves well as a way to introduce how the software works and how the user interacts with it. It also helps that C2 is event driven so when making simple games/apps the logic is more straightforward to understand.

I'd allowed a couple of days for us to get through this, knowing the difference in knowledge and experience (and despite my rushing) we could take our time. It turned out that by the end of day one we'd done about 80%!

So, time for a bit of a rethink on how we could get the most out of the rest week as it was quite clear that for most the desire to learn really helps overcome lacking experience. Extending the initial tutorial is fairly straightforward as there's much that can be added to the tutorial game (lives, high score, levels, etc...)

By the end of the second day everyone had done the whole tutorial and the extras. This was hugely impressive, especially by those with extremely limited experience with computers, let alone the language barrier.

During all the sessions I tried to show where many of the systems and mechanics being implemented could be used for different projects. This helped spark bigger thinking about the projects they would like to make for themselves.

Over the course of the week we started working on ideas that the participants had come up with, the general theme was around how to teach others, from things like picture to word association to going on a journey and taking people with you. Hopefully some of these will be projects they continue to develop.

Everyone (most) became much more relaxed and conversations, ideas and ambitions were much more free flowing. Those that had picked up C2 quicker than others started to help out those who were working against the language and technical knowledge.

There was a growing confidence in their abilities and the process of going from idea to asset-in engine to behaviours to events written to tested and this was improving every day. As everyone was doing so well I decided to let them all jump into something more complex and take them through making Pacman. Now, although released in 1980, none of them had heard of it and it transpired from the conversation around my surprise of that, that only a couple of them had heard of things like X-Box and Playstation! That also made it more obvious as to why some of the things I was talking about weren't being clearly understood.

However the timing of this worked out rather well, as towards the end of the week we managed to get some very limited 4g internet through one of the guys (Tonny's) mobile dongle. It wasn't fast by any means but it did give me a great chance to show them the bigger world of games, from Epics Unreal Engine E4 live car rendering technology, to games and apps developed in Unity and other many game engines. 2D games, animations, film work, education apps and even footage of Pacman being played was incredibly exciting (and eye opening) for them all. It's been a long time since I've seen a group of people getting nervously excited about Pacman being caught by a ghost!

On the last couple of days a few expressed an interest in wanting to give other engines a try, Unity being the best option. Although we didn't get a chance to do any tutorials with it, I did get to provide them all with an offline install and the documentation, which I'd brought with me (along with a ton of as much free offline software as I could).

This does bring up a few interesting things. The rushing ahead of modern countries for "always online" is sadly making places like Uganda and even more so the rest of central Africa fall further and further behind. There's a reliance on mobile tech rather than landlines, but the speeds outside of larger towns and cities (even on the outskirts) and costs means online can be a luxury. The average standard of hardware is lower, again with access and costs making this even more limited to many.

By the end of the week the huge leap in knowledge and skills they had all achieved was honestly remarkable, made even more impressive by the ones who had started the week with their limited hardware, experience and language. But they did much more than I expected, so much so (especially with no internet) that at times it was a struggle to know what to do next.

### **Wrapping up.**

To sum everything up, the whole experience was completely amazing, so many things seem the same yet others vastly different. The lives that some of those I met have really highlighted the struggles most of us couldn't attempt to comprehend. Their deep desire to learn and know more and how precious they hold what education they can get through all the adversity is incredible. But these and more are the next generation and I believe will change the world for the better. The more we can do to help, support and guide them the better for all.

I'm beyond proud of all of them in every way, they're all truly amazing people!

### **The future?**

So, next steps. They are all planning on continuing to learn even more, with plans already in place to develop a range of apps and games. They also want to share what they've learnt and will learn with others. I'm giving them dedicated office space to work from. Then to take these to even more people who are stuck behind stupid barriers blocking them from any opportunity to give stuff like this a go.

# Playing with Anxiety

*by Alberto Rico*

So I've been dealing with anxiety for a few years now, and I've come to get used to it. I can get through most days just doing the little dances that keep it's effects away and not even think about it. I'd know where to look if I had to find it, though.

I'm an indie game developer with my own studio (an entrepreneur, some people say). This means I work too much to try and earn just enough to get by. Anxiety usually makes this harder. Some days it's just like someone looking over your shoulder, some days it's like someone tying you to your bed.

I had always taken my anxiety as a drag, a dead limb I can't get removed. A part of me I'd rather not have and will try to hide. But then I found out about personal games, and an article by Jane Friedhoff inspired me to try and make a game to point at, show, express and fight my anxiety.

That's when I made *How Not To Sink*. It's a personal game, it's about (my) anxiety, but it doesn't tell you a story about me. It takes what's on your mind and turns it to you into (a representation of) an anxiety attack. I didn't want to make a biographical thing, so I tried to make a design that would express how anxiety feels to me, and put the player in my shoes.

It took like a couple of weeks to make a first version of it, but it took more than a month (without any extra work on the game) before I showed it to anyone. I then started showing it to friends and people I was somewhat comfortable with. I was really scared of showing it, really.

People hugged me after playing it. They thanked me. Asked me for a build to play at home or to show other people. A year later I finished the game (it was really hard to get in a mood where the game felt relevant and I felt like working, a very fine line in a venn diagram). I did not feel like it was ready to go public (I was starting to doubt it could ever be) but I showed it again to colleagues and some press people.

Someone shed a tear. Someone else asked for a copy to show their anxiety-sufferer brother. A couple of people pressed me to release the game. They convinced me, and then it still took me a couple of weeks to get the courage I needed to get past the anxiety I was getting (ironic, I know).

So when I look back into this, I'm just very glad I have made a positive impact on the people who played the game. And I get to keep the game, and the stories people have shared with me, as a token to hold when anxiety gets bad. A sign that there's a way to take my anxiety and turn it into something good.



## Help Yourself

I recently spoke with Lorna Evans, Clinical Psychotherapist, she provided some helpful points. If you want to take action and do something about your (or a family member's) mental health, options are:

- 1** Go to your GP. If you don't have a good GP or a regular one, ask for a "pro mental health GP". It's a great place to start
- 2** You can ask for counselling via your GP / NHS. Find out the waiting times - it could be around 3 months wait. Know you have other options.
- 3** If you want counselling now, look on the BACP website and find a local therapist. If you had a bad back you would pay for an Osteopath or Physio. Get the help you need now.

BACP - "It's good to talk" - just type in your postcode and pick a person you like the look of. It is important people go and see a qualified therapist.

You will pay about £50 per session, and been seen in days. Via a GP, you maybe waiting for 12 - 18 weeks and can only access 6 sessions, so consider going private for therapy.

- 4** If you are in crisis, know you can call the Samaritan 24 hours a day on Tel, 116 123

## Regina meets: Poppy Byron, SYBO Games

### 1. What do you do?

I work as PR and Community Manager for SYBO, the co-creator and IP rights holders of Subway Surfers. It's an endless runner that was released in 2012, but is still the most downloaded mobile game in 2017 so far. We also made Blades of Brim - also an endless runner, but with combat, and have a few other top secret things cooking in the background.

### 2. What made you choose Community Management as a career?

I studied interactive media at university way back in the 90s, and hobby-wise, had always had a huge interest in video games. I was part of the generation of kids who spent endless hours in my room playing games on my ZX Spectrum, then Commodore Amiga and Sega consoles, so finding a career that utilised these skills was always going to be a huge dream. When I first graduated from university, community management didn't really exist. These were the days when telephone banking was still a novelty. I found creating content quite a lonely and isolating experience - I've always loved interacting with people and I was never as great at art or programming as some of my course-mates who really had that WOW factor, so I took a role in finance until a magical opportunity at a games company arose.

As a career, the dynamic nature of Community Management has always held attraction for me - it seems that there is a new 'place to be' every few months. The journey from forums, to Facebook and Twitter, to Instagram and Snapchat means that I'm constantly having to review what works and learn more things so I can never sit still. I love it.

### 3. How did you end up with this role?

SYBO were looking for a community manager to replace someone who was leaving, and a friend recommended me to them. I'd heard of Subway Surfers - it was always the super-cool game that everyone was playing on public transport when they weren't playing the sugary match-three games we all know and love. I hopped on a Viking ship to Denmark to go and visit them (well, a plane) and had a chat with the team there for a couple of days. I fell in love with SYBO, and Denmark, and the way that the team worked. Within 2 months, I'd donned my woolly hat, 2 coats and 4 pairs of gloves, and was enjoying a Copenhagen winter with my new colleagues.

a. What communities have you managed in the past and what were your responsibilities?

I've worked in the video games industry for over a decade, first starting off in the community management team at Jagex who created the huge MMORPG 'RuneScape'. When I started there in 2006, community management was primarily focused on online forums. There was no social media and Reddit didn't attract the huge numbers it has today. YouTube had only just appeared on the landscape. If you wanted to communicate with your players - forums were the only real place to do it. RuneScape's forum was one of the busiest games forums in the world at the time - a place for game discussion, trading and off-topic chat. Much of the forum moderation took place by volunteers. One of my roles there was to train and mentor the 100 plus forum moderators who covered the forums 24/7. I formed some really strong bonds with many of these, and am friends with them still to this day.

My next role was at Bossa Studios - first of all taking care of the Merlin: The Game community (a Facebook game based on the popular TV series - some highly engaged superfans there), and then creating new communities from the ground up for new games - Surgeon Simulator and I am Bread, which started off small, but became massive. YouTube was responsible for the popularity of those games, and creating enduring relationships with some hard-hitting influencers was a key part of the role there.

### 4. What's your typical day?

A typical day at SYBO can include a number of the following things:

- Brainstorming new content ideas with the team
- Training new team members
- Social media weekly/monthly content planning
- Organising office visits for superfans
- Developing relationships with key mobile game influencers on YouTube and Instagram
- Filming behind the scenes footage on Snapchat Spectacles
- Exploring new areas within social media that we can reach our fans

### 5. Why do people join your community -- what are some of the biggest drivers?

Subway Surfers has a huge number of die-hard fans who really love the game and have been following each update since its inception in 2012. The game's long running time, worldwide appeal, the fact that it's easy to pick up and can be played on virtually any smartphone are all reasons for the game's success. The fact that they feel real kinship with the characters and want to find out more about them is a huge driver. Subway Surfers has a real 'cool' factor that young people can identify with and aspire to, and they really love talking about new hoverboards new outfits...and bragging about high scores. Who doesn't love doing that, right?

SYBO are currently working on creating an animated TV series based on Subway Surfers, which will allow players to find out more about their favourite characters and take a peek at what their life is like behind the scenes of the game. To support this, a whole new fan/community area is being planned. Exciting times for my team!



## **6. What did you set out to achieve when managing this community or these communities, and did you succeed?**

When I started at SYBO, much of the community management was based solely around Facebook and Twitter posts. This was working well for the team so far, but I wanted to push for more. Since then, to name just a few, we've created a range of merchandise available only as a reward for fans and mail this out to highly engaged fans every week, have developed relationships with YouTube influencers and are co-creating video content with them, have reviewed the social media content that we put out on our channels and ensure we're delivering more of what our fans want to see, and we've also opened up the doors of our studio so that players can see a little of what goes on behind the scenes of their favourite game through the windows of Instagram and Snapchat. This is just a small snippet of what we have planned for our fans. Much more is to follow.

## **7. What metrics do you track, and why?**

How do you communicate these metrics to management?

Like many companies, we use a social media management tool to track all of the usual metrics - engagement, reach, reactions, page growth. We use this data to gauge which content we need to create more of, and which we can drop. This is communicated to management by means of monthly reports, in meetings where we can all look at the month as whole, focus on individual posts that stand out, and adjust our posting and asset strategy as necessary.

How do you deal with difficult people, arguments in your community, or legal/security risks?

I've always had a little motto while working with online communities - 'it's nice to be important, but more important to be nice', and I've carried that through every job I've had in the games industry. When people are being difficult, it's usually because they feel their voice isn't being heard - sometimes, just taking the time out to reassure players means that, although raising their concerns might not give them the outcome they're hoping for, they are still valued as an community member. I've seen the most vitriolic players turn into staunch advocates of the game simply because their concerns were met with patience and respect, rather than patronising messages and forum bans.

We have a number of processes in place to ensure that anything problematic, such as legal and security issues that arise, are dealt with in the proper manner.

## **8. How would you announce a new title feature, initiative or respond to problematic users of the website?**

Subway Surfers is regularly updated -the game visits a new location every month, and sometimes players can be disappointed if a location they wish for isn't the one that appears. We know that we're not always going to be able to please everybody every time we update the game, but just employ the age-old, tried and trusted method of listening and replying to any concerns ensures that players don't stay angry for long. If there is a valid issue, for example, a huge bug (this happens from time to time - video games, right?), we're strong believers in the 'holding our hands up and giving a genuine apology' method. We try to contact any players who are really upset in direct messages, talk to them, and offer them the olive branch of free stuff. ;)

## **9. How do you know when a community is working and thriving?**

You get a really warm, positive feeling when working on a game where the players are genuinely happy. I've worked in communities before that had really toxic elements, especially when unpopular game updates were released. No amount of coffee in the world could make those days better! I think a really simple answer to this is - if players like your game and the spaces you offer to talk about it, they keep coming back. They communicate with you on Twitter. They send you fan art and postcards from where they live. You receive letters and photographs of them playing the game. And everyone feels good.

## 10 . How do you know when a community is working and thriving?

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*Poppy Byron has worked in the video games industry for over a decade. After long-term positions at Jagex (Runescape) and Bossa Studios (Surgeon Simulator, I am Bread), she recently left her homeland of Great Britain to explore the Viking lands of Denmark, and is now working as PR and Community Manager for SYBO, the co-creator of Subway Surfers, the huge mobile hit. When she's not obsessing about post apocalyptic landscapes and old school rave, you can find her curled up asleep with her cat, OJ.*



# 12 Songs to make you feel good, darling

*by Kitty Powers*

Hello Kittens,

Kitty Powers here, aka Richard Franke, director of Magic Notion and creator of YouTube Let's Play sensation, 'Kitty Powers' Matchmaker'.

The lovely Alex B asked me to put together a playlist for you, of songs that never fail to cheer me up. I've been prone to bouts of anxiety and depression all my life, and like most gays, feelings of loneliness. Music is one of the tools I use most to pull me out of a funk.

My taste is rather camp, fun and melodramatic, with occasional dips into dark glamour and movie/ videogame soundtracks. I also love a bit of Detroit techno too. And disco. And synthpop. Female vocals are my preference but not exclusively.

Yes, I'm a gay stereotype. Sue me.

So I've put together a cross section of my eclectic taste, starting with the lighter stuff...

## **1. Came Here For Love - Sigala**

A quite new track. No that into Sigala as a rule but this track makes me light up.

## **2. RuPaul - Kitty Girl**

RuPaul inspired me to become a drag queen way back before RuPaul's Drag Race with her track 'Supermodel'. But you've all heard that one so here's one that recently made me smile :-)

## **3. The Saturdays - Not Giving Up**

Cheesy for sure, but empowering. I do love a girl group with a banging pop song.

## **4. Girls Aloud - On the Metro**

Hard to choose but I think this is my fave GA track. About falling in love with someone you just met and getting all upset when they piss off without giving you their number. Sounds like Grindr.

## **5. I've Got Just What You Need - Cheryl Lynn**

One of my favourite Disco tracks. Kitty loves it.

## **6. Lana Del Rey - National Anthem**

Lana is about as dark as I get. She's sumptuous and glamorous and melodramatic. Great for rolling around on the shag pile feeling one's oats.

## **7. The Cardigans - Paralyzed**

When the Cardigans did a stylistic turnaround I was cynical until I heard it. The whole of Gran Turismo is amazing. Great for when you're feeling fucked over.

## **8. Warm Leatherette - The Normal**

This is the original version. I love the Grace Jones version too, but this is more uncompromisingly stark.

## **9. AUX 88 - Aux Mind 2005**

I used to dance to Aux 88 in a techno nightclub in Liverpool called Voodoo, in the mid 90s. I love the groove.

## **10. Wonder Woman Main Theme - Hans Zimmer, Junkie XL, Tina Guo**

I love how Wonder Woman is now cooler than Batman and Superman. That includes her new theme tune. I've loved WW since the TV show when I was a kid.

## **11. Hero of Time - Eric Bucholz**

A lifelong fan of Zelda, this is probably the best orchestral interpretation of the soundtrack to Ocarina of Time. Wistful and luxurious. Check out the whole album if you're a fan.

## **12. Sampo - Joe Hisaishi**

To leave you on a high note, the theme from 'My Neighbour Totoro', makes you want to swing your arms and march with a big grin on your face. All of Joe Hisaishi's stuff is marvellous.

# Creativity Can Fuck Off

*by Will Freeman*

It's true that opening yourself up and taking a shot at being creative can take courage. It's certainly a fact that creativity contributes a great deal to society, from prose and architecture to engineering and video games. And what it does for those that create can be wonderful, whether pushing forward their careers or emboldening one's self worth.

But it can still fuck right off, right? Ok – maybe that's not quite accurate. But the pressure to be creative can absolutely take itself the fuck far, far from here. Because not of all of us find our calling in being creative. Not every one of us wants to be creative. And some of us are a little bit creative here and there, but it isn't a force that defines us or leads our thinking. And all of that's fine. Because we don't have to be wildly creative.

Except it can feel like the whole world is telling us we should all be more creative. And sometimes, when you're not creatively inclined, the barrage of messaging that presents creativity as one status rung below philanthropy – something to improve ourselves with, a way to define or worth by – can feel down right elitist.

There's nothing wrong with seeing creative endeavour as a higher state of being for yourself, but some of us just aren't that creative – or our reluctance to embrace or discover our own creativity is about something deeper than a casual fear or passing lack of confidence. The sentiment 'you can be creative if you try' is, of course, supposed to be encouraging and positive, but when anxieties about your own creativity run deep, or your passion in life is something not recognised as straight up creative, the seemingly daily messages that we must strive to pursue creativity can feel demeaning and demoralising, whatever their intent. That, and they come across as rather snooty and pretentious. What's more, banging on as if creativity is some higher state of understanding, superior way of being or ultimate form of human experience really projects a narrow perspective of the diversity of what it is to be part of society. And you probably have never enthused with unbridled excitement in an attempt to sway the creatively meek, but plenty do, and it really feels pronounced when it serves to make you question the value of your contribution to humanity's collective existence. There are different legacies we can all leave, aren't there?



And, yes, the obvious should be addressed. Writing this article is a creative act, and without encouragement that spinning up editorial copy is a valuable pursuit, this very opportunity to berate creativity might not exist. Creativity affords the luxury to bite the hand that feeds in this case. But, again, there's nothing wrong with creativity or creative output. It's the status of creativity that pisses some of us off, and the carpet-bombed message that creativity is a superior use of the hours we have. When you don't feel too creative, or honestly don't care to be, such attitudes can make you feel like a failure. And yet none of this makes sense as a piece of writing: except that it's quite ordinary to hold contrary feelings and logics.

But what is all this counter-creative venom about when we're bringing this 'zine together to celebrate video games? However it's addressed, the beauty, wonder, excitement and experiences video games deliver make all this cynicism seem nothing but hostile and jealousy-motivated. And yet an army of non-creative roles help turn game ideas into things people play. Creative people, it shouldn't be forgotten, need those who fill roles like publishing, marketing, distribution, testing, localisation, business development, accounting, HR and more. And, yes, all those roles can be highly creative, but the point stands.

Still, the headline of this article shouldn't really be 'creativity can fuck off'. That's just an attention seeking way of saying 'it's OK not to feel creative'. Plenty of us don't, including some of us with explicitly creative careers. And that's OK. Creativity can reach far beyond brilliant, but those of us that aren't too creative aren't any less valuable, and there's plenty of other ways to share games with the world.

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## Mugshots!



Noor Alkhadrart  
@nouralkhadra



Regina Walton  
@ReginaWalton



Lorna Evens

Kelly Vero  
@electricgeisha



Will Freeman  
@spadgy\_OTA



Byron Atkinson-Jones  
@xiotex



Daley Johnson  
@Daley\_Kong



Alison Elizabeth  
@earthartalchemistry



Steven Huckle  
@sharkcustard



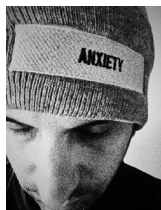
Väida Plankyte  
@underskinnyhrt



Richard Franke  
@MsKittyPowers

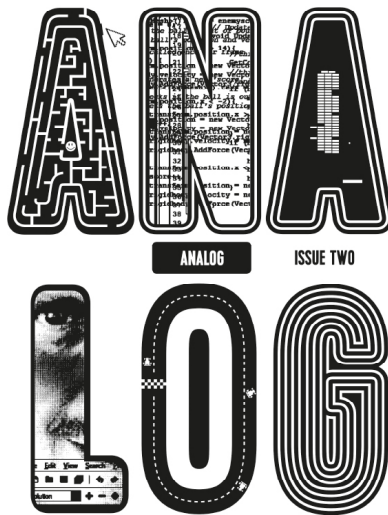


Alberto Rico  
@RicoAlbe



Alex Boucher  
@thatwouldbealex

## Issue #2



submissions: [conduit4games@gmail.com](mailto:conduit4games@gmail.com)



# HOW TO APPROACH THE GAMES INDUSTRY



## LEVEL 1 PREPARATION

### RESEARCH

Read job vacancies for the type of job you would ideally have. What skills do you need? Study the experience requirement gaps between junior and senior roles.

### PORTFOLIO

Create an online portfolio. You have to start somewhere. Work on it regularly, showcase your progress. Find a suitable platform for your line of work.


### RESUME

Most places will ask for a resume/CV. Keep it concise, informative, and try to make it nice to look at.

### COVER LETTERS

Write a baseline cover letter, but make sure to personalise it for each job you apply to. Explain why you want the job and what you can offer to the company.

## REFINE



Over the course of your job search, make sure to refine and revise all of the above! More research can always be done, and your portfolio, resume and cover letters can always be improved.

## LEVEL 2 APPROACH

### RESEARCH

Look for ways to apply for jobs outside of standard job-hunting websites. You also need to research where you can find Networking events for game developers.

### APPLY FOR JOBS

Look around for the various ways you can apply for and find industry jobs. Utilise social media. Find games industry recruiters, they are awesome!


### NETWORK

Keep an eye out for game developer meet-ups. They're a great way to get solid advice and make new contacts. Attend conventions and talk to game developers

### BE OMNIPRESENT

Social media is your friend. Set up and maintain accounts on LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram. Conduct yourself professionally and talk about your job hunt.

## REFINE



Refining your approach is \*super\* important. If you don't seem to be getting anywhere, you need to head on back to level 1 and refine some more. Then return to level 2 and look into the way you are doing things and think about how you can be more effective. Maybe you are doing too much of one thing and not enough of the other. Switch it up, experiment, and eventually, your effort will pay off!

## ★ BONUS LEVEL ★

### STAY POSITIVE

It's important to try and retain a positive mindset when chasing your dreams. It might be a really long journey, but when you feel like giving up, don't.

### TAKE ONE STEP AT A TIME

Instead of treating it as one monumental task, break things down into mini-goals. Chip away at your ambitions one step at a time. Remember, everyone has to start somewhere.

### REWARD YOURSELF

Don't forget to be nice to yourself. You will work hard, and it is okay to take breaks now and then. Don't forget to balance things out and spend time relaxing and doing cool stuff.