

ANALOG

GAME DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE ISSUE EIGHT



Editor's Note

Well, as a decade ends it's always time to take stock, be a tad nostalgic and dwell on previous highs and lows. 2020 marks my 10th year in the games industry, starting off with Develop mag back in 2010. From there I moved on to form Analog and became a biz dev gun for hire for companies ranging from TIGA and PocketGamer to Games Week Berlin, and coming full circle to MCV/Develop. In that time, we've bought a house, had 2 kids and done plenty of travelling. As for Analog fanzine, I'm chuffed at the positive feedback we get from each issue, and relish the chance to showcase unique art and budding bloggers.

Special thanks as always to Steven Huckle for helping to make this happen and to Cyrus Crashtest, our frequent cover artist and passionate contributor to the 'zine. We've only managed 2 issues this year, but we did organise a kick ass party too! This is our yearly Mental Health special, I hope it provides insight and is useful to anyone struggling or willing to learn more about mental health awareness within the games industry.

Read on,

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How videogames can help with mental health

by Adam Burt

For a few years now, I've been relatively public about my depression. It's something I've tweeted about, something I've written about, and even made a podcast about. In the few years I've been doing it, it's been heartening to see more and more people talking openly about this aspect of their lives. Slowly but surely, the public discourse around mental health is changing.

However, it is clearly still a problem. One in four people in the world will be affected by mental or neurological disorders at some point in their lives. Over 800,000 people die by suicide annually, representing 1 person every 40 seconds, and suicide is the leading cause of death in people aged 15-24 in many European countries.

Looking back on World Suicide Prevention Day, it's a chance to reflect and read well-written articles about various aspects of mental health, and how we can protect ourselves and our friends from the worst of it. So, I thought I'd add my own article to the pile, with an Etch Play twist.

Some depressed people, myself included, spend a lot of time looking at screens. Usually we think of this as a negative – the perils of social media, the addictions that our phones allow us to feed, and all the other bad stuff on the internet. And a lot of that is true! I don't want to discount it. But, it's not all bad. Today I wanted to take a look at how one thing we look at on our screens, videogames, can be really helpful to people with mental health issues.

Now, before we go further: I have to caveat that this is not professional advice, and if you're suffering from a mental health condition, you should talk to your GP, or an accredited therapist. I'll also put some helpful numbers and links down at the bottom of the article which you can use if you need to talk to someone.

So, with that out of the way, let's get into it. Some of the ways in which games can help us with our mental well-being are obvious, when you think about it. They make sense, in a pop psychology kind of way. And other ways are slightly more difficult to understand but are backed by research. Let's start with one of those.

Action and distraction

In a study called "Fighting Depression", one of several forays into the impact of videogames, researchers found that action games specifically helped curb rumination, and that this could contribute to a reduction in symptoms of depression. Rumination is when you dwell on things, and in depressed people periods of rumination can be really harmful. This study actually surprised me, because I expected fast-paced games to potentially be frustrating or even cause anxiousness, but it seems that for the majority of people these kinds of games can have a positive impact.

It ties in nicely to one recurring theme about the value of videogames: Sometimes we all just need to be distracted, even if it's being distracted by something which could be stressful. The types of games come in many forms, but consider something as all-encompassing as Bethesda's Skyrim, which is a fantasy world large enough to get lost in. Having that experience available to you at the push of a button can be really valuable to some people, who need to take some time to get away from the day to day.

"Sometimes we all just need to be distracted."

Control

Another way that videogames make us feel empowered is to give us a sense of control. This can be thrilling, but has an added benefit for people struggling with a mental health condition: Sometimes, our lives aren't going the way we want. Try as we might, not everything in the real world is under our control, and this can be a discomfoting thought. Then, in the world of videogames, you have something like Minecraft.

"Not everything in the real world is under our control..."

The game isn't something that you necessarily have complete control over, but the entire game is built around the idea of creating the world that you want. Placing blocks where you want them to be, arranging them to your liking, and carving out something. Depending on what mode you're playing, there's challenge here too, but feeling like you can shape the entire world with your bare-hands is the exact fantasy that Minecraft trades on, and sometimes a bit of control is what we feel like we need.

Motivation

Videogames also, typically, present us with challenges. These range from infuriatingly difficult, to relaxing, peaceful goals. And yep, you guessed it: These help too.

When you're in therapy, one of the things you'll likely be encouraged to do is try to set sensible, achievable goals. Even things like making your bed, which can feel hugely difficult to someone who is suffering. Accomplishing the little things has two effects:

Some things actually get done, an overall net gain for your life, or at least your to do list
You start to feel empowered by your success, and able to take on bigger challenges
That exact logic applies to videogames too. Studies have shown that what's known as a "gameful" mindset helps us to feel motivated and resilient in the face of those little everyday challenges, like getting out of bed, meeting friends in public, and staying active.

"... Those little everyday challenges..."

There are loads of games that fit this mold, from little puzzlers on your phone to charming indie exploration games like A Short Hike.

Reducing Stress

The kind of games that set these easy challenges are doubly beneficial because they also offer us a break. We all sometimes need to take time off, and life can be hectic. Anything which can offer you a half an hour of solace in an otherwise stressful day is something to hold onto. Games like Animal Crossing and Stardew Valley have optional challenges, and the fact that they are completely optional helps the game remain stress-free. When the world outside gets a little too crazy (and let's face it, that seems to be happening a lot!) tending to a virtual farm where nothing else matters might be exactly what you need.

"Life can be hectic."



Companionship

Of course, games can also be multiplayer. And for people who may struggle to maintain friendships, or meet people in the real world, these games can offer incredibly useful assistance. Whether it's trying to beat your friends at Super Smash Bros on the sofa, teaming up with your pals in Overwatch online, or just exploring a world together, keeping in touch with your friends can make a huge difference to your well-being. Just don't take it too seriously when you lose!

"Keeping in touch with friends can make a huge difference to your well-being..."

Identity

One aspect of mental health that we've made real progress on in recent years is reducing the stigma, and letting people know that they are not alone – highlighting just how common these issues really are. Whether it's your mates or your favourite celebrity, having people talk openly and honestly about their experiences can help to address one of the worst aspects of having a condition: Feeling like nobody else could possibly understand.

It's another area where games, particularly independent games, are able to offer real comfort. There's a rising tide of titles coming out which are directly about mental health, albeit usually in a metaphorical context. Games like Elude and Celeste are made by people who understand depression, mainly from personal experience, and the game mechanics and storylines revolve around these very concepts. To players, the message is clear: You are not alone.

"To players, the message is clear: You are not alone."

This market is growing, too. Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice, put together and published by Ninja Theory, has all the sensibilities of a triple-A, big-budget title, and still found room for this nuance. They worked with mental health experts and real sufferers to build an accurate portrayal of psychosis in the game, alongside the hack-and-slash action, and sold over a million copies. Some of the biggest publishers in the world are now listening. Electronic Arts, a publisher who traditionally focuses on sports and action games, and regularly turns over billions of dollars a year, launched Sea of Solitude this July through their EA Originals program. The game allows players explore themes of loneliness, sadness and fear by navigating a sunken city inhabited by metaphorical monsters.



Designed to help

Some developers and designers have even begun taking this to the next level: games explicitly designed to help you manage a mental health condition. Owen Harris and his team have put together Deep, a meditative virtual reality experience which is scientifically designed to help people with anxiety. Other companies, like Orpheus Self Care, are start-ups entirely founded on the premise of creating experiences which help players practice mindfulness, a useful tool in combating a range of mental health ailments.

Etch Play's own Dan Thomas has recently become an Ambassador for Autistica, who are exploring ways that the games industry can be more supportive of people with autism. Mental health issues such as OCD are more common in autistic people. As neurodivergent representation grows within the studios and workplaces, our games have more chances to become more representative of the different mindsets we all have, and the different challenges we may face.

The challenges we face

At the start of Journey, thatgamecompany's beautiful and critically adored adventure game, your character awakens stranded in a desert. In the distance, there is a mountain to climb. Between there, and here, are a number of obstacles. You can make it on your own, but companions will appear along the way to help guide you.

"In the distance, there is a mountain..."

That is the story of a videogame. Several videogames in this article alone have the same basic premise. But it can also be the story of our lives. It can even be the story of our entire society, pushing forward towards our goal: The top of the mountain where everyone can take a break, de-stress, feel seen and heard, accomplish their goals, and generally, feel more content about their life.

That mountain is getting closer. Let's keep walking.

Please be wary about self-medicating – if you think you may be affected by a mental health condition, seek professional advice.

Discuss your feelings with a GP (UK)

<https://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/GP/LocationSearch/4>

Find an accredited therapist (UK)

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/counselling/>

Organisations who can offer support in the UK include Samaritans (available on 116 123) or Mind (available on 0300 123 3393). Readers in the US are encouraged to visit mentalhealth.gov.

Mental Health at Work: 10 Quick Tips

by Nicola Freeman

Alex Boucher reached out to me to find out if I might be able to offer some wisdom on surviving in the workplace or the freelancer life when you suffer with or have experienced mental health difficulties.

To qualify to write this article, let's just say, I have several diagnoses in addition to some trauma from my teen years. I have spent my life recovering and seeking solutions. I now understand I will never be perfect, but I have found some ways to function quite comfortably in the workplace and as a risk-taking entrepreneur.

I could have spent a week writing an essay, a book or even a great tomb and sat agonising over what to cut and what to keep. I realised it would be better to share the tips, tricks and wisdom that has helped me in my journey.

I currently run a small online start-up focusing on games business education for solo devs and small to mid-sized studios called The Business of Indie Games (<https://www.businessofindiegames.com>). It's a brand new business area for me and I have managed to find the cash, complete the pilot launch and work towards seeking funding. Uncertainty is difficult; for anyone, and can be devastating for people with mental health issues.

It's a real honour to be able to share some of my experiences. I don't feel qualified to shout my achievements from the rooftops about much, apart from my mental and emotional recovery. Those are my achievements.

Here are 10 quick-fire points that have never failed me:

1. No matter what, put your mental health first. It's never going to work if you don't. What does that mean? Say no to situations that are going to affect your emotional and mental wellbeing beyond what you're capable of handling. No amount of money is worth your mental health deteriorating.
2. Set up your life to avoid being hungry, angry, lonely or tired. It sounds so simple, right? But on some days it can feel like a battle. You need to find ways to take care of yourself. You might not be able to achieve all of these daily, but if you start working towards these ideals as a lifestyle, your daily experience is going to feel a lot more enjoyable,
3. Above all else, prioritise you. Look after your mind and body. Do whatever it is that works for you, you may know what that is. If you don't, please find out now! These self-care things may be meditating, standing on your head, hugging a tree, walking in the park, seeing a therapist weekly, socialising, origami, painting or assembling toy planes... Find small ways to incorporate things into your daily life that look after your mind and body.

4. Pay yourself first. You're not a charity. You need to be able to support your basic needs - housing, food, healthcare and have a bit on top so you're not just working to survive.

5. Get help with your business decisions. Business people do this in many ways through mentoring, coaching, business support groups etc. Check out the list below for some of these. The only additional note I would add is that some people don't understand mental health issues. And you'll need someone who can help you think clearly with the priority of putting your emotional, physical and mental wellbeing first.

a. Business Debtors Anonymous (Part of BDA - free business support group based on sound emotional principles) - <http://debtorsanonymous.org.uk/business-debtors>

b. Workaholics Anonymous - <http://www.workaholics-anonymous.org/>

c. Underearners Anonymous - <https://www.underearnersanonymous.org/>

d. Local or Regional Business Support Services

6. Underpromise. Get into reality. Do not embark upon impossible work projects and let people down. Disappointing others can bring up shame and that's a feeling we can all live without. Work with the limitations of being human and accepting who you are. Living in reality rather than fantasy is infinitely more satisfying.

7. Find a way to laugh. Have fun with friends. Do things that make you smile.

8. Deal with overwhelm. Work out the next single action you can take to tackle your overwhelm. Make a list of what's bothering you the most and take the next step you can to resolve it. For instance, you might be running out of cash, so chase up an investor. Do what you can. You can't control others but you can take the next step for you. Cultivate the practice of focusing on one thing at a time and completing tasks. No matter what's going on, if you can tick problems off the list, overwhelm will reduce.

9. Don't make medical decisions without a psychiatrist or doctor. Surrender and leave that kind of decision for people who can look at your life objectively, with their medical knowledge and experience. If you don't have the right medical support, find a support team that can help you.

10. Radiators and Drainers. Some people make you feel warm and fuzzy. Some suck out your energy. Take steps to reduce contact with people who suck the life out of you or people who trigger the worst in you. You don't have it to give and you are not a charity. Be brutal and cut them out. Sometimes you will not be able to do this, for example, difficult personalities at work. However, you can start to put limits in place and take steps to protect yourself. The key message here, once again, is to put yourself first.

By Nicola Freeman, Organizer and Co-founder at The Business of Indie Games
(<https://www.businessofindiegames.com>)

Nicola has been a business researcher for the last 10 years, covering topics from heavy lift engineering in Brazil to fintech and bitcoin. She loves talking to people about what's going on at work and finding ways of bringing people together and sharing great information

@NixCFree

5 Ways to Reduce Unhealthy Stress

by Andy Barker

I worked in the games industry for many years. I suppose I'm what you'd call an industry veteran. I absolutely loved it. I'm now a coach, a trainer and an author. I help people to be the best they can. To manage stress better, increase resilience and get out of their own way. I'm also a Mental Health First Aid instructor. In my line of work, I meet many people and it's always fascinating.

Mental health is a big news story. Or more accurately, mental ill health. We live in a stressful, fast paced world where an increasing sense of unyielding pressure can tip us from just coping to frazzled in a pounding heartbeat. Constant and chronic stress leads to anxiety and that can be the start of a spiral into poor mental health.

A degree of stress is good for us. In fact, we need stress to motivate and propel us. Without it, we'd struggle to perform. We'd be bored. Disengaged. We'd go from burn out to rust out. Stress should be about excitement. Buzz. But too much stress can lead to burden, so let's find our middle ground and retain the buzz!

Ok, so that's great. But how to achieve this balance? Here are five simple things we can do in our working lives that make a positive difference, helping us to find a better balance to protect our mental health.

Take regular breaks

It's so easy to keep going and forget to take some time out when you're working hard and engrossed. Set the alarm on your phone to plot some breaks evenly throughout the day. Then, get up and walk around. Step outside. Disengage from what you were doing for a short while. Have a chat with someone. Studies have shown that we're actually more productive when we take regular breaks. You actually get more done in less time.

Make a list

Unhealthy stress is often the result of our perception that we have too much to do in too little time. We feel overburdened. Remember, buzz or burden? Make a to do list but set realistic goals. If your list is too long and you don't get through all of it, you'll add to the sense of burden. So, make sure the list is realistic and manageable. When you get through it, the buzz is great.

Prioritise

Set priorities on your to do list. Plan your day as best you can. Be clear on what absolutely has to happen by when. What's less urgent then goes further down the list. It's obvious really but so few of work like that.

Don't multitask

Avoid multitasking. It really doesn't work. It can lead us into frenetic and muddled thinking whilst increasing that sense of burden. Set yourself a task and see it through. Then move on to the next one. That's the theory. It can of course be tough turning theory into practice.

Be kinder to yourself

These are just a few tips and thoughts about finding some sense of balance in an imperfect world. Not to trivialise mental ill health and anxiety, but if we can be kinder to ourselves, take a little more care of ourselves then small changes start to help the bigger challenges. In fact, there's plenty we can do to be kinder and more self compassionate. These small steps can lead quickly to big changes, new working habits and very positive results that promote better mental health. Give them a try. It can be a life changing.

Andy Barker
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www.mindfitness.training

Unlock You by Andy Barker and Beth Wood is published by Pearson
https://www.amazon.co.uk/Unlock-You-confident-happy-minutes/dp/1292251123/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=Unlock+You&qid=1571997591&sr=8-1

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Trending in Video Games Industry

#MentalHealth

Trending with: #LetsTalkAboutIt

by Dominic Shaw

Mental health can be a very controversial topic depending on whom you talk to - some consider it is an excuse for others to not work as hard as they could, others demand 100's of policies already be in place for it to cater to THEIR OWN needs regardless anyone else they work with needs, while everyone else between these extremes are mostly unsure how to progress on the matter. Yet there is no doubt mental health is a new frontier for the video games industry, and one of the top subjects in 2019.

Though I may not have known it when I was younger, mental health and the complications that surround it have always been apart of my life. Being diagnosed at an early age with Asperger's syndrome my family have always been mindful about what that might entail for them and me, as alongside being a neurological condition those with a form of autism often develop further co-occurring mental health conditions like anxiety and depression; many of which were very present in me as a child, while I was growing up and still are with me today.

Such mindfulness led my family especially my mum to seek out and ensure I got the support as an individual I needed to develop and not lose out on as many opportunities as possible, although what might have helped my mum to have such drive is at the time of my diagnosis doctors expressed clearly to her that it would be a miracle if I could lift a pen without help by the time I reached high school; something I don't think many parents would sit back and submit to hearing as fact.

Such mindfulness led my family especially my mum to seek out and ensure I got the support as an individual I needed to develop and not lose out on as many opportunities as possible, although what might have helped my mum to have such drive is at the time of my diagnosis doctors expressed clearly to her that it would be a miracle if I could lift a pen without help by the time I reached high school; something I don't think many parents would sit back and submit to hearing as fact.

Looking back now my childhood between the mid-90s and 2009 is either a sign of how far autism research has come and how important it still is, or the support I received was pioneering! Nevertheless my childhood wasn't always intense and isolating, yet I feel my upbringing could be seen as unorthodox which might be why my approach towards mental health might be very different compared to others because while other kids played outside I got the support I needed to understand myself mentally and behaviourally, thus allowing me to better function independently as best as a kid could before their teenage years that correspondingly afforded me a maturity and sense of reflection beyond my years.

In relation to my overall point, such time and effort into care towards mental health and conditions in general I've described are not always available within the work environment, but also shouldn't be expected to in one set fashion since my small summary of my background isn't the same case for everyone on the autism spectrum because my triggers and traits won't be the exact same as to another autistic person's, and is even more likely to be different to anyone who is neurotypical.

Mental health matters are quite often individualised. How we deal with things and find comfort isn't always going to be the same to those we work with, and we shouldn't let it hold up the monument of work. But that doesn't mean we throw consideration to the curve, but instead re-scale, realign pace and ensure everyone has somewhat a sense of relief most of the time. We are not a public service industry or one that is technically needed, however we are an industry that can bring a smile to someone's day, translate pixels on a screen into immersive entertainment and allow tech, creativity and business to collide into a virtual fireworks show; so why shouldn't we be able to feel good while doing all that?

Through my personal experience from what I hear around the industry it is often the loudest of extreme opinions that are heard and halt progression of mental health matters being discussed openly – so let me try to address these as best I can.

Personally I don't see why there has to be such a struggle from corporate viewpoints to implement campaigns that encourage positive mental health which are supported practically through initiatives and schemes, since a happier workforce is a better workforce no?

Positive mental health does not always mean guaranteed happiness, more often than not it is more about you or a colleague's acknowledgement of their mental state and tolerance to their current situation; environment and people included. Which isn't a bad thing, as sometimes said colleague might get sensory overloaded by their workspace and need flexible working to allow them to bring their best work to the job, not just to the table that day, or a traumatic event the night before work might have overwhelmed you, resulting in needing to use one of your half-days to realign your work/life balance.

Though the rise of social enterprises and start-ups are shifting opinions not just in the video games industry but across all sectors, there is still a strong fundamental, conservative approach to trust in the workplace where if someone is not being as productive as they are expected to be, that means a loss of profits to the dismay of those on top of the hierarchy. Unfortunately within this industry there is an addition factor that reduce leniency and can often be seen very hypocritical where many senior and high management professionals add unneeded pressure onto those who work for and/or with them by claiming "it is an honour to work within this industry, you should give out more, do crunch and such or we just find someone else who will be less confident and doesn't prioritise their mental health" - having been on the end of such conversations in my career so far I can tell you it is not nice and still affects my mental health to this day.

I have been fortunate enough though to have a small yet supportive network that has allowed me to essentially quit and leave such environments without the risk of going broke or worse. However for some it is not that easy and those that can't just quit to leave such work environments have to take what almost could be considered blackmail or verbal abuse daily to avoid losing money; which is why it is easier said than done and very understandable why people submit to bad work practices if the job they are doing is what gives them the money for rent, food and not become homeless. But that doesn't mean nothing should change and the people within such situations should lump it and accept it, this is why open discussion is important and why more needs to be done towards mental health matters within industry..

On the other end of extremes, it is hard to understand why some people try to overcomplicate and almost over sensitize mental health matters to the point that it creates awkward tensions to talk about or becomes very self-servicing to few individuals within the workplace that it pushes people away from considering suitable options or getting the support they need. There can be people who believe it is there right to the best mental health practices and thus take advantage of systems in place within companies that eventually reduce the quality and disregard fellow co-workers; a sense of ego that isn't always justified.

This does not mean I am against people feeling like they need extra support and trying to lessen their own personal struggles, but more the infrastructure of any mental health support currently in the games industry needs to safeguard and actively be worked on so the support is not abused, static and mental health in the workplace is treated correctly. Almost like the meta of a fighting game where it takes re-balancing, patches and modifying daily to accommodate players because new and more things constantly change the dynamics, just like new and more staff do within a company and how one way is not always the way due to everyone being different and needing balance not doesn't cater to just a select few.

I hope by sharing some of my own journey and tackling a few of the “elephants in the room”, it can help breakdown the stigmas around mental health to allow people to engage on the topic as respectfully as possible with no restrictions because talking about mental health does not lesser someone nor does it retract from businesses, I feel discussing mental health and acting on said discussions by developing initiatives and such can only strengthen the games industry to become a happier, healthier and more inclusive space to work in.

Though I've talked about much of the negatives, there is no question there are video game companies and professionals within the UK and around the world who are adapting while putting into practice systems to create positive impact, catering to people's mental health and overall wellbeing.

As my thinking is if games can positively impact players' mental health, then why shouldn't we as an industry ensure positive mental health is an on-going standard for every individual and company's work culture, and not just the latest buzzword or trend to be passed by!

@DominicShaw94



Five minutes with John Szymanski. Indie dev. Madman.

For a while now you have been working on the game Maximum Action with the New Bloods (as has your brother, David I believe). How did that come about?

I started working on Maximum Action from a connection with my brother David. New Blood had secretly taken on this new project and were finding that they wanted an extra set of hands to get the code-base under wraps. At the time, I was working as a janitor and doing my own development after hours part-time. David, who happens to be the creative director at New Blood, suggested that I talk to the CEO of New Blood about pitching in on Maximum Action as a coder. One thing led to another, and now six months later I'm a full-time employee at New Blood.

Yet you've also recently self published the bizarre choice adventure Kyle Is Famous on both Steam and itch.io - has that been an issue or have you had support from the NBs on that too?

No, New Blood has been nothing but supportive of the project from the get go, which I'm very thankful for! Sometimes you need to do something on your own to keep motivation for those "slow burn" projects that happen over a period of years, and I think Dave and David realize that. In fact, Dave Oshry even gave me pointers on some good tips for creating my store page and marketing things.

Wasn't it also Dave Oshry who pushed you towards going "full time dev" this year?

For a period of time I was working with New Blood part-time. After a while, though, wanting to move out of non-development jobs in my life, I approached Dave with the idea of going full time. Development of Kyle Is Famous happened "after hours" from my New Blood work, so it has been more a pet project for me than something I diverted attention to do, if that makes sense.

Your development streams on Twitch are rather anarchic at times. Do you find that atmosphere of benefit in your work / creative thinking, or are you normally very much the "locked door, phone off" type?

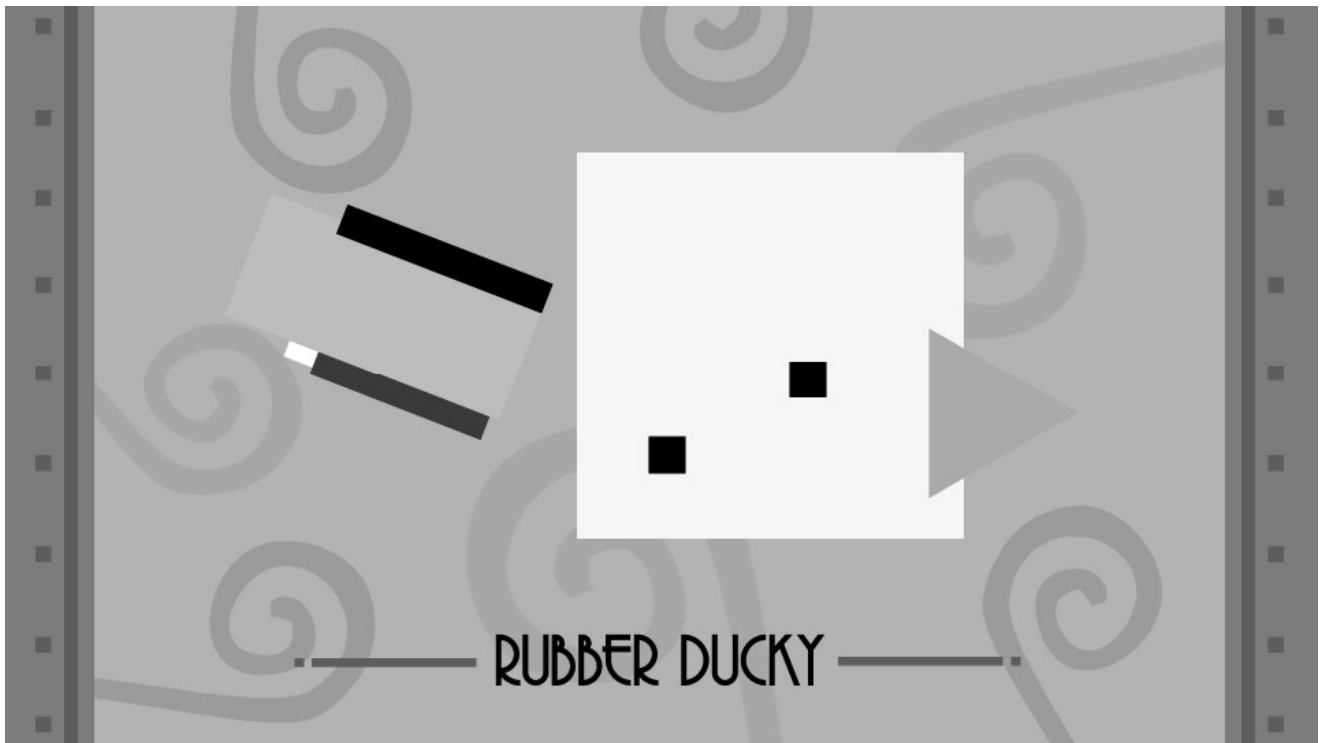
That is a great question. It depends entirely on what's being worked on. System development, for instance, is the thing I'm most passionate about when it comes strictly to the coding aspect. And so that ends up being something that I am very comfortable streaming, since it's familiar and enjoyable. Bug fixing falls into the same category. But heavy artistic decisions of developing the design of how the game should run. That's something I want to do off on my own and only reveal the work once I feel happy with how it's turned out.

I suppose the rule is that things that include my personality are things I like to fully-bake before revealing, and therefore aren't things I tend to stream.

I believe I'd call myself a "friendly introvert." I like interacting with people, but my mainstay is definitely the "closed door, phone off" sort of development.

Kyle
is
Famous





The thing about those streams is that they're fun - and for somebody like myself for whom a lot of the coding stuff does not make so much sense, they can also be a learning tool.

With your brothers fair success with DUSK have you found any (even if comical) sibling rivalry in game dev between you - does it compel you to do more, do better for instance?

We joke around here and there (once, David found a spelling error I had made in Kyle and set me a message saying "game brok, unplayable"). Really both of us are just glad to be able to do what we love and I couldn't be happier for David that his development has taken off and his games are so popular.

So at no point did you look at his output and go "Wait, I can do that!"?

Naw, David's always been a better developer straight up. We have such different things that we excel in, too, so it's more complimentary than anything else.

Yet both of you are genuinely multitalented devs who have done everything from coding and assets to music and script. You even made some games together when you were kids.

Yeah! It more boils down to what place our style lends itself to. I can't help but make things that are a tad ludicrous. Something serious and meaningful like, say, the Music Machine is just something I'm not really capable of doing.

We have actually worked on three projects together, including the Chicken RPG.

Your style is generally considered rather “quirky” from the narration and game-play of “Rubber Ducky and the Rainbow Gun” to the frankly weird choices you can make in “Kyle is famous”. Is that something that appeals to you and you maybe seek in a project (such as the fun kicking function in Maximum Action and its newly reloadable katana), or is it a natural effect of you being present?

Hahahahahaha, that is a very tough question to answer. I think there’s definitely an element of the “natural side effect” sort of thing. It’s pretty well-known among people I’ve worked with a lot that 90% of my ideas will be suggested because I find them funny and not because they’re a good ideas. In the past week, I’ve lobbied for a massive room full of spinning chickens, an AK-47 that spews other AK-47s as ammunition (and, of course, you get more ammo by sucking enemy weapons through the front of your gun), and a man that gets infested with the spirit of Christmas and ends up spewing presents out of his mouth. When I have control over my own project, then, I think I tend to vomit all of that pent-up zaniness into a singular game so I can go back to making things that don’t revolve around eating your fridge or giant flying lizards or whatever else came to me at 2:35 in the morning. I will say the full extent of that zaniness has yet to be unleashed. I have some ideas floating around that have been there for a while that I’d like to explore someday when I have a bit of a budget and a few employees.

Is there anything else you want to add?

Just a very heartfelt thanks to everyone that’s be so loving and supportive of my development over the years, and especially huge amount of people that have been running with me the past few months. I really feel inspired to continue.

Kyle is Famous is a free choice based adventure with a multitude of endings. It is currently available on Steam and itch.io for Windows, Mac, Linux and Android. Follow the developer on Twitter: @Ducky_Szymanski

MAXIMUM *Action*

by Cyrus

What we sometimes forget about accessibility.

Accessibility in gaming has become more of an important developmental facet over recent years - from games more commonly having a colour-blind mode, to Microsoft's XBox adaptive controller.

Sadly, as availability and quality of the tools and engines to make your own games has increased, I cannot help but think accessibility itself has more broadly declined.

It used to be that on PC you would expect control rebinds - not only catering for the 10% or so of the population that are left handed, but those in other countries that use differing keyboard layouts, and of course anybody with a physical impairment. Now many devs use only basic WASD or in rare cases, some strange custom setup only they can fathom.

People are sometimes told "Well it works with a gamepad!". Great. That's just fugging fantastic for the poor sod who is missing three fingers on one hand. Don't get me wrong, I've several friends who benefitted from the likes of the X360 controller and increased compatibility due to their own disabilities, but controller support alone is not enough to make a difference to people that's not an option for.

Full graphics tweaks and a general level of testing an optimisation became the norm as well. These days many devs (especially those using Unity) don't seem to bother with anything other than "low / medium / high / ultra" - which often have no effect at all as many effects that can slow your gaming experience, or even prevent it entirely on a lower end system.

Right now there's a percentage of people reading this and thinking "Get a REAL computer!" and entirely missing the point. For many people that's not an option and they're using what they have available. Of course expecting a massively graphics heavy game to run at full pelt on a low end system is daft but finding out your onboard chip is equal to or better than the minimum required gives an expectation that with some tweaking, some proper options... it MIGHT run. With modding, maybe it will even run well.

Accessibility has different layers and different facets - from hearing and sight impairments to physical ones. One factor that can affect any individual though, is financial. While equipment such as the Raspberry Pi has allowed a low bar for basic access to computing, the gap between development and common specs appears to be widening as more devs seek to make the next Witcher 3 level benchmark.

It would be daft to expect much to run on a Pi, i merely mention them because of their low price. The likes of Intel HDs, however, are built into just about every laptop and are common enough on peoples gaming rigs as backup cards, that a high percentage of people have them. I've no doubt (especially in countries where there's no social level of healthcare), that there are many individuals and families dealing with various disabilities (and therefore basic accessibility issues), that may only have a laptop with such a card.

If more people allow more graphical and customisation options, that's a greater accessibility, test market and potential sales market. The more potential customers you have, the greater potential you have for sales - and this doesn't even require you to change platform. This is what I want you to think about as developers and as people - especially if you care about the other factors of accessibility.

Networking is Not Working.

by Alex Boucher

2 weeks into my new job as a sales exec at The Independent, I bought a pocket guide to telesales. I've been buying business books ever since, here are some of my favourites:

To Sell Is Human by Daniel Pink

Parents sell their kids on going to bed. Spouses sell their partners on mowing the lawn. We sell our bosses on giving us more money and more time off. And in astonishing numbers we go online to sell ourselves on Facebook, Twitter and Match.com profiles. We're all in sales now, and this book shows that it isn't what it used to be. We've now moved on from "caveat vendor" to "caveat emptor". This book also sums up in one perfect line the ideal relationship between client and sales manager.

Networking Is Not Working by Derek Coburn

This book plays devil's advocate to the notion that good connections are made when networking at events. It highlights the common risk that people are simply hoarding business cards and pitching people whilst networking at events. Coburn suggests that building a smaller guild of trusted and influential connections will help find new business and in turn reward everyone in your group too. I'm not totally convinced, but an interesting read

Made To Stick by Chip & Dan Heath

If I say the word "priceless" what brand comes to mind? Or the word "search"? If you just thought of Mastercard and Google then this book may be of interest. This book talks about the pitfalls and successes of marketing, what techniques newspapers have used to survive (so far) and why high-concept pitches work (e.g, Die-Hard on a bus).

Other recommended books:

The Little Red Book of Selling by Jeffrey Gitomer
Flow by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
Out of Office by Chris Ward
Feel The Fear And Do It Anyway by Susan Jeffers



Steven H - Co-Editor note

How the F**K is it xmas and nearly 2020 already?

Putting together this issue has been a pleasure, not just because of the quality of writing and the topics in the articles, but also for the openness and sharing. This is something Analog excels in across the board, whether it be mental health, games design, project management, interviews or anything else, our contributors are second to none!

And to follow Alex in thanking people, without him none of this would be possible and it is an honour to be able to help put it all together.

Due to both our workloads we had hoped to get the print version of this out in time for the holidays, as it seems more applicable this time of year for some people to know that when life gets a bit shitty, at any time of the year, that you're not alone at all. There's a world of understanding friends, strangers and professionals strangers out there who can all help, so don't ever feel you're by yourself.

Look after yourself and have a wonderful Christmas and new year, we'll see you in 2020 in the next edition!

So, if you would like to write for us or have any ideas, thoughts or comments send Alex an email on info@analogzine.co.uk or tweet either of us (@thatwouldbealex @sharkcustard).

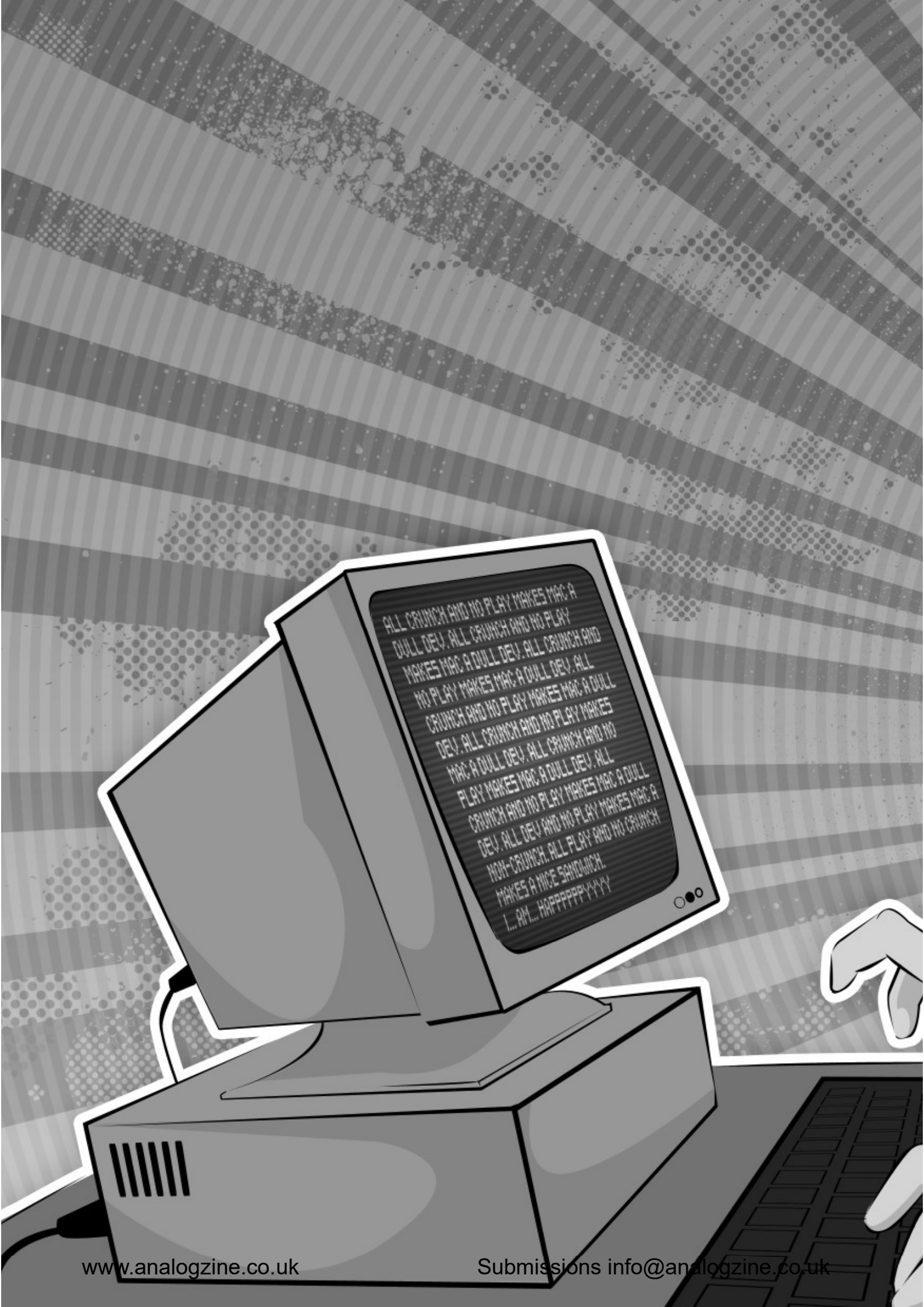
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@SharkCustard



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