



HAYWIRE MAGAZINE

ISSUE.0

I have a knack for writing. This is something that I've heard a lot, growing up, whenever I'd surprise my teachers by bending rules with unusual or extravagant pieces penned for no better reason than my dissatisfaction with boring, run-of-the-mill assignments. For the longest time exceeding academic expectations was the only use I saw for my talent, and I've left it to atrophy. Skill is a combination of two things, talent and dedication. It was only once I applied the writing craft to my passion, videogames, and found a community of like-minded individuals that I started taking this leisurely pursuit seriously, and the quality of my work grew by leaps and bounds.

Online communities like the Escapist forums, my personal incubation pod, can help amateur critics connect with their peers and test their skills in playful competition, but they're hardly professional environments. There are no rules, no deadlines, no editors. Professional publications on the other hand are highly selective, not just in terms of quality, but also in terms of content. Articles about old games or covering the same ground as previous pieces are generally off limits.

There's a vast disconnect between professional writing and the rampant amateurism of simply throwing your work on a forum or blog. This is where Haywire comes in. My goal with this project is to offer some middle ground by creating a faux-professional publication that will provide a more respectable voice for amateurs while helping them learn how to play the writing game. We will strive for a professional level of quality, but without strict content guidelines or entrance requirements. I will not ask you about your previous work, only whether you have a story to tell. And for us no story is too dated, too trivial or too small, so long as it's told well.

Even if every amateur writer had only a single good story in them, which I know for a fact to be wrong, we could fill this magazine with 50 pages worth of content every two months and keep it running until the end of time. We are many, and together we can achieve strange and wondrous things. It's only a matter of finding the right people. Some of them I already know: Andrew Walt, whose design work and assistance in editorial duties has proven invaluable. Ethan Woods, Joshua Ens, Andrew Huntly and Zachary Britson, who will help me hold this project together with their regular columns. I cannot overstate the importance of their contribution.

However, we are always looking for new contributors. Be so kind as to read this inaugural issue twice, once through the eyes of a gaming enthusiast and once through the eyes of a writer. If you enjoy our style, maybe you'd like to write for us. If not, maybe you can help us improve it. Comments, feedback, questions and pitches are very welcome. You can reach me at haywiremagazine@gmail.com and I hope to hear from you soon. Join us in this crazy adventure.

Here's to the future.

Cheers,
Johannes Köller
Editor-in-Chief

HW







Features

Thinking Indie	06
Back Off	12
Do You Feel Like a Hero Yet?	16
Rise and Shine	23

Columns

Off the Grid	25
The Mechanical Void	27
The Scripted Sequence	30
The Other Screen	35

Information

Masthead	39
Disclaimers	39



Thinking Indie

What's it like to create a game and market it too?

Francisco Dominguez took a trip to Brighton's Rezzed Con to find out.

Conclusions formed about indie games based on what you find at Rezzed, Brighton's inaugural PC and indie games show, are probably skewed. Lack of marketing clout demands more promotional legwork from independent developers at such events, and indies forced into becoming visible proponents of their game are often far more willing to discuss their creation and their history than their larger

counterparts would be prepared to do.

And these are creations, games yet to be packaged as a product by a marketing department. Design principles can be captured here before they are transmuted into opaque brand messages and rote feature lists. The reluctance big studios tend to display discussing their craft (hugely improved, but often still defensively reticent) vanishes. With no passing

technological advantage to defend, and no legal department monitoring their every word, indies can speak more freely. They have a strong interpersonal advantage at these shows, with fewer opinions dictating the game's shape, allowing the characters and histories of those who make it to have clearer influence. It may only be constructing a false portrait of the collaborative artist as a young egalitarian, but the honesty displayed makes it an appealing illusion at worst.

Not that honesty, integrity, and even an engaging presentation were exclusive to indies. Gearbox were enthusiastically represented, and just as enthusiastically received, as Randy Pitchford demoed *Borderlands 2*. Creative Assembly struck a great balance between the company history, its future, and design insight in their talk too. And even had time to show off early footage of *Rome 2*, the latest installment of their *Total War* series. Both of these developers proved that even within the strict constraints guarding information about their upcoming games, a riveting talk can be made.

But both Ubisoft owned developers attending made limp efforts. The language barrier provided an excuse, but Nadeo's inhibited attempt to show off *Trackmania's* suspiciously athiest spiritual successor *Shootmania*, along with their new network "Maniaplanet," were already struggling before the alarmingly clumsy translation efforts became apparent. "Easy to handle,

hard to masterize" and the clunky buzzword "Sportainment" horrified the audience when what appeared to be Powerpoint typos turned out to be a marketer's idea of acceptable English. Ubisoft Singapore then turned out to be a bad choice for the final developer session, their *Ghost Recon Online* demonstration both poorly attended and perfunctorily delivered. Perhaps the French developers misjudged the event; perhaps they were hamstrung by their publisher's restrictions. The contrast between them and the other developers remained glaring, regardless of the reason. At least Nadeo provided some entertaining slip-ups to remember.

Larger studios working on larger projects necessarily have to break their games down into specialised tasks for employees to produce. As a result, a marketer's impression of the game may well be among the best available for communication to an audience. But could their investment in the game itself be fairly questioned? The amount of work they put in doesn't necessarily go into the game itself. Valuable work in many areas, but maybe not likely to provide the insight the audiences here wanted.

Indies bypass this issue with enviable ease, even if the technical and promotional responsibilities that caused this could lead to a generation of prematurely grey haired developers. Older mediums like film are yet to discover the ideal collaborative system. Games, a medium with greater

technological demands, need greater numbers of subordinates simply to ensure basic functionality. The indie setup can rescue these subordinates from relentless microdevelopment. But could the risks of creative liberation make developers reconsider going indie?

While the studio may be proud enough of their independent status to trumpet it in their name, The Indie Stone certainly recognised the many pitfalls of their chosen method of game production, even if their session title "How Not To Make An Indie Game" suggests recognition of these pitfalls only comes after a hard landing. Maybe not the best way to introduce people to their alpha-funded zombie survivalthon, *Project Zomboid*.

During the session, the team described their discontent with previous jobs at major studios, working on isolated tasks. Their career aims didn't involve exclusively developing shaders or particle systems, so ditching triple A game production to indulge in their own ideas seemed the sensible move. The originality of that vision in yet another zombie survival game could be questioned. However, the fond openness with which they discussed their game and its many disasters makes it clear that they made the right decision on a personal level.

When you can tell a story about being evacuated from your home studio after the discovery of a bomb lab on your street with a smile, but can only discuss your previous job with wry diffidence, you've made the right decision in leaving it. Their enthusiasm made it clear that their haphazard self-reliance was something they cherished.

Designers with the creative freedom The Indie Stone craved may also look beyond major publishers, as Peter Molyneux has shown with his recent return to independent development with his new studio 22 Cans. One surprising reason he gave for his abrupt departure from Lionhead and Microsoft was the impact of his comedic Twitter doppelgänger, Molydeux. Not many people would envy

... And these are creations, games yet to be packaged as a product by a marketing department...

the mind that spawned game ideas featuring a bear who can only breathe in a hug, and then see their own failure to devise such scenarios as a personal limitation. That Molyneux claimed he did came across as endearing instead of bizarre, a testament either to his considerable public speaking abilities or his commitment to innovation in gaming. Although he seemed to have sold the audience on his decision, he never shared how he managed to sell the idea to his wife. I'm sure his kids loved it, mind.



It's a good thing most people aren't in a position to take career advice from their own parody. Otherwise, Molyneux's admission that he doesn't expect his new project to earn money could reduce the chances of anybody following his lead. Potential profits from his MMO cube chiseller, *Curiosity* (new name pending - thanks, NASA), are entirely speculative. But he went on to make the case that profit would be entirely incidental to this project's aims anyway, as he explained its two main purposes as an experiment and as a teambuilding exercise for the young studio.

While the plethora of psychological insights into player motivation attainable from distilling the final goal to an extravagant promise, and gameplay's reward to intermittent novel stimuli, are fascinating in themselves,

more directly financial concerns were also addressed. Molyneux believes our current understanding of the free-to-play model is limited. The more outrageously priced chisels available are included as speculative options, intended to gauge player interest, financial willingness, and perhaps even mental stability. The aim is to raid their minds, not their wallets. Ian Bogost's *Cow Clicker* may have already proven people will pay to, well, click on a cow (in satirical spirit), but it will be interesting to see how far people may go for a more earnest effort. 22 Cans has a deal arranged with *Edge* magazine to publish their findings, ensuring curiosity about *Curiosity* will be satisfied.

In what could seem a tacit depreciation of the entire exercise's worth, the teambuilding presents

the series of experiments as an opportunity to allow the new studio to gel. As Molyneux put it, you don't bring together a new team and immediately commence your life's great work. At their current speed, this plan may be unfeasible. The idea that these experiments are also a precursor to a larger project, while appearing typically overambitious, is still quite exciting. The insights and studio ethos built over what might just transpire to be a bout of self-indulgence could still create something radically different. After the usual series of ebullient interviews, anything less would be regarded as a disappointment. If anyone in the industry is a victim of their own charisma, it's Peter Molyneux, but having taken the opportunity to bring his experience and abilities to a new area of gaming, he might actually uncover something exciting. It's always hard to find a downside to anything involving this man until the game's release, so we must wait and see.

Few have Molyneux's flair for public speaking. It would certainly be unfair to expect similar of a studio called Introversion. Yet the small studio was one of the more personable developers around, despite the cold sterility of their previous games *Defcon* and *Darwinia*. During their session they delved into the development of the abandoned project *Subversion*, and how it was partially salvaged in their upcoming release, *Prison Architect*. The story of the gradual realization that the game's development had been

deeply misconceived, requiring years of work to be dropped, revealed a problematic aspect of how absorbed tiny indie teams can become in their projects. Introversion's single game designer, Chris Delay, spent three years working on the game before finally acknowledging the gameplay didn't work. Traditional studio developers may share that attachment to their work, but the variety of opinions constantly available from peers, along with the sternly maintained commercial remits issued from above, makes the same outcome unlikely for them.

The studio managed to survive the catastrophic loss of three year's work. Where was redemption found, along with inspiration for a new project? Alcatraz, of course. A research trip to the disused island prison to gather material for a *Subversion* level triggered the chain of thoughts that led to their new project, *Prison Architect*. Their new game provided an excuse to salvage some of the ideas and software tools developed for *Subversion*, redeeming some of the time and effort invested into it.

A commercial alpha release for *Prison Architect* is planned. While the reasoning behind this purchase model, their first attempt at exploiting the new array of distribution methods, went unexplained, it could be fair to speculate that the approach provides the financial support during development that their depleted funds can no longer provide after *Subversion*.

With no passing technological advantage to defend, and no legal department monitoring their every word, indies can speak more freely.

Introversion's indie status may have contributed to their mistakes. Fortunately, that status, along with the recent popularization of crowdfunding options, may have secured them a second chance rarely afforded to indies or traditional studios alike. And the game looks quite fun too.

Brighton's Rezzed convention supplied many informative insights into game development, but how that knowledge was conveyed struck me just as much as what was said. Community counts, even more so now that crowdfunding and alphafunding have turned customers from sales digits into investors. Nothing demonstrated that better than when DayZ's Dean Hall delivered the shortest introduction of the entire event to a

packed hall before moving straight to Q&A. History counts, even if it's one as ignoble as the many bankruptcies of Splash Damage's CEO. Such a background is far more revealing than developers who, for the purposes of their talk, spawn into existence to deliver a company message and avoid answering questions. Honesty counts, or at least the appearance of it. Games are products of creativity. I'll never forget Shigeru Miyamoto's story of his childhood garden adventures and their influence on the games he made. I've forgotten the features and game modes *Ghost Recon Online* tried to show off already.

And for god's sake, spellchecked Powerpoint slides count, Nadeo.

HW



Back off

**Would you kindly fund
my dreams? Tossy
Mahapatra reminds us
to keep our hopes for
Kickstarter reasonable.**

It's safe to say publishers have a bit of an image problem in our community, being generally seen as faceless corporations trying to rob us blind while not contributing to the quality of the games they are funding in the slightest. It may be an exaggerated view, but it's not entirely inaccurate, either. Happily perpetuating exhausted franchises and flogging peripherals, big publishers seem awfully reluctant to take risks. Indie developers have cleverly broken into this stagnant market by delivering the kind of games larger companies would never dare fund, but their ambitions are held back by a general lack of money. This is where Kickstarter comes in.

Kickstarter, one of many burgeoning platforms enabling crowd-funded development, allows game developers to raise capital for their projects through donations from potential future customers. In exchange for perks and benefits such as a DRM-free download of the eventual product or a free t-shirt, consumers provide project owners with the funds to make bigger, more ambitious games while retaining creative independence. With no supervisors or subcommittees to answer to, developers are free to craft just the game they want, for the people who want it. At least if they can them.



As a stepping stone for breaking into the videogame market, Kickstarter is strange in that it's already a market in and of itself. Putting the cart before the horse, project owners need to sell their game before they can create it. This may seem awkward at first, but as we live in an economy fuelled by credit it's a quite common and well-established method of production. Instead of selling their ideas to a publisher, developers on Kickstarter are selling their ideas straight to the consumer. The difference is that in dealing with publishers, you only need to find the approval of a few people to be greenlighted. Finding public support is a much more broad issue. Before they can even think of making a successful game, hopeful indies will need to successfully play the Kickstarter game by selling their concept to thousands of people.

Just finding that kind of audience can be difficult when there are hundreds of other projects vying for the attention of donors. In this fiercely competitive environment, the most successful projects seem to be those sporting big names, be they of designers or brands. To date, the three biggest piles of cash have been raked in by the as of yet untitled *Double Fine Adventure* game, *Wasteland 2*, and *Shadowrun Returns*, even though all three campaigns gave us very limited information about the games proper. The platform is ideal

for high-profile developers looking to rejuvenate old franchises or dive into niche genres. Not only do these developers have decades of industry experience, they can tap into an established fanbase to fund them.

Classic RPGs like *Wasteland* and adventure games like *Leisure Suit Larry* are ignored by publishers since they don't follow current trends, but there's a definite, albeit small market for them. By emphasizing their history and portfolio, experienced designers have an easy time winning over these audiences. They need no intricate design documents, people know what to expect when dealing with those established developers.

Small developers trying to fund their breakout title can't rely on fame to achieve their own modest goals, they need to convince the public of the merits of their idea. There's no one right way to do this, but generally the more content and gameplay you can present, the better. This poses another problem for bedroom developers, who need that cash before they can even start thinking about making the game. The Kickstarter environment favors developers looking to expand their budget for games being made either way, ventures such as *Project Giana*, *The Other Brothers* or *Shadowrun*

Online.

Even without having to fight existing games for a moment in the spotlight, it can be hard work convincing people to part with their money, since the platform doesn't guarantee you'll see anything in return. Kickstarter exercises very little regulation, providing project owners with near unlimited freedom, and the legal classification of consumers as donors means that they don't share the same rights as regular consumers. Under most jurisdictions, there's very little they can do to hold the creators of a project accountable as donations aren't covered by consumer law or advertising law. ZionEyez, for instance, a company promising HD video recording glasses, raised \$344,000 before vanishing. Donors began to believe they were scammed and formed ZionKick, a forum seeking legal compensation. Although ZionEyez reemerged as Zeyez a few weeks ago, declaring their intention to continue the project and raise more funds, ZionKick still considers it a scam. They have not had any legal success yet.

Of course, any real developer using Kickstarter to scam consumers is effectively committing career suicide, but as the high-profile hoax *Mythic: The Story of Gods and Men* has shown,

Kickstarter asks donors... to understand that every project comes with the inherent risk of failure.

there are still people who will pose as developers. Using stolen assets, copied reward tiers and a fantastical tale of industry veterans hailing from the likes of Blizzard or Activision and partners such as Disney and Pixar, the project managed to raise almost five thousand dollars before journalists and consumers caught on. The project has been pulled and since it failed to reach its goal no money was lost,

but it could happen again. Kickstarter leaves the burden on donors, asking them to be prudent with their wallets and to understand that every project comes with the inherent risk of failure. The only thing stopping these scams is our

own vigilance, so it shouldn't be very surprising that consumers are starting to be more cautious.

How does this affect indie developers though? *Mythic: The Story of Gods and Men* was a poorly planned scam, easily exposed over its stolen content and outrageous claims. If future frauds learn from the mistakes of this ill-fated cash grab and exercise a modicum of restraint, we might start seeing smaller scams, with humble goals and maybe even facades of genuine imagery. It's hard to tell how frequently we can expect those, if at all, or how easily public and journalistic scrutiny can uncover their malicious

plans. What's important to remember is that Kickstarter can potentially be abused.

At the time of writing there are over 280 projects in the Games section of Kickstarter, and although the figure includes a few dozen that have already been successfully funded, it gives a rough impression of the brutal arena developers are throwing themselves into. Kickstarter, for better or worse, is a pure, Darwinist marketplace. The divine consumer hand is free to pick any title that tickles its fancy, spelling life or death for the project. The ventures to succeed in this environment are not necessarily the best, but the most apt: Projects that understand how to win people over with endearing promises. They might end up delivering brilliant games, but their initial success is not based on the merits of the product they have yet to craft, but their ability to play the Kickstarter game. Good ideas might fail due to poor marketing, while those with the resources to provide polished pitch videos will find it easy to prosper.

This isn't to say that developers lacking established franchises, fanbases and funds can't succeed on Kickstarter, just that they will have a harder time doing so. Games like *FTL* or *Castle Story* have already shown that clever independents can break through on Kickstarter, but on such a selective platform ambition and even fresh ideas are no guarantee for success. In a way, it's reflective of the indie market at large: Some succeed, but many more fail. Kickstarter can help those small studios clear the final hurdle, but it's much better suited for veterans or established developers. As games like *Planetary Annihilation* show, the current trend seems to be experienced developers entering the indie market, not indies breaking out of it. With more fierce competition, this is beneficial for us as consumers, but it creates an increasingly difficult landscape to thrive in. Kickstarter then, is a highly selective, but potentially rewarding environment for new developers. Either you fail, or you get to make the game of your dreams.

HW



A soldier in a combat suit is rappelling down a thick black cable. To the left, a tattered American flag with many stars and stripes is visible. The background is a hazy, yellowish-brown landscape with some sparse vegetation and a distant structure.

Do you feel like a hero yet?

Andrew Huntly takes us
upriver into gaming's
heart of darkness with
Spec Ops: The Line.

Ever since *Gears of War* all the way back in 2006, the third person shooter genre has become a cliché onto itself, with almost every title embracing Epic's propensity for sticky cover and the eventual weariness of that very particular brown color palette. Playing the first hour of *Spec Ops: The Line* gives the impression the game is gunning to be the very epitaph of the genre, as though Yager Development saw the closing days of the console generation and wanted to create a

third person shooter that encapsulated the genre at its most worn out. We have the graphics powered by the Unreal 3 Engine, the tap of A that sends our avatar into his beloved chest high wall and our innocuous and dull protagonist, voiced by Nolan North. Our two squadmates, a smartass white guy and a gruff, by-the-books black guy, don't exactly stretch the realms of characterization either.

But given a few hours, *Spec Ops* begins to mature and blossom into an

entirely different beast. Those Unreal powered graphics begin to morph into something gloriously surreal and desolate, and Nolan North's voice cracks and tears, his banal tones turning into disparate roars. The combat stays the same, functionally uninteresting, but as the context and the story start growing *Spec Ops* becomes something quite extraordinary.

Inspired by Joseph Conrad's 1899 novel *Heart of Darkness*, *Spec Ops* puts you in the shoes of Delta Force operative Captain Walker, who is sent into a now desolate Dubai on a reconnaissance mission, along with his two comrades Adams and Lugo. Your goal is to locate and, if possible, extract Colonel Konrad after he and his 33rd Battalion are lost in the metropolis during an evacuation attempt. As Walker and his team head further into the city, they discover horrifying atrocities spawned from an insidious overuse of martial law. The situation, along with the squad's mental state, only deteriorates as they make their way to the tallest tower in Dubai to confront Konrad and make him answer for the atrocities he committed.

Videogames based on novels are more common than you may think, with games like *The Witcher* and *Metro 2033* being amongst the best

examples. Even so, these are very direct translations, adapting story elements and the universe into the videogame medium and allowing the thematic resonance to come from the source material. By contrast, *Spec Ops* uses *Heart of Darkness* as a parallel to its own story. Playing the game and watching Walker, Adams and Lugo march on forward, confronted by a darker shade of humanity at every turn and you slowly feel that ferocious burden twist them into broken men. What begins as an evacuation attempt

How can you
punish the villain for
his crimes if yours
are just as great?

quickly spirals into a tale of bloody, angry, screaming vengeance. It all culminates with the realization that as Walker, and by extension, you, have pushed their way through Dubai to

find Konrad, you've sunk to the same levels he has. How can you punish the villain for his crimes if yours are just as great?

It's a horrifying idea and one that gamers haven't really been confronted with before. In our shooters, we've become so accustomed to the idea of light versus dark that we can gun down just as many soldiers as the bad guys because we're batting for the right team. At the end of the game, the villain is punished, the enemy forces are destroyed and everything can go back to the way it was. When the antagonist kills hundreds of your

**You're no great savior.
Not even close.**





fellow troops, it's an atrocity. When you kill hundreds of his, it's justice. Spec Ops has the uncanny ability to completely subvert this mode of thinking. There's a certain turning point in Spec Ops that demonstrates this perfectly. I won't give details for fear of spoilers, but it involves an attack on an enemy encampment. Walker and his team come across a reliable way to dispatch the enemy infantry between them and the objective. It's a cruel way to progress, but the enemy has done far worse, right? The following sequence plays out like a very standard, modern military shooter set-piece: disconnected and distanced, but passably fun. But then the coarsely granular, monochrome filter drops and you're left to inspect your own atrocities. It's a moment of introspection that makes you realise you're no better than those you're fighting against. As things escalate to a point of violent insanity, it becomes more and more clear there can be no justification for what you or Walker are doing in Dubai.

While the mechanics will always draw comparisons to other shooters, Spec Ops has more of a connection with games like *Silent Hill* - in particular the second game in the series. In *Silent Hill 2*, there are no true antagonists. The creatures that populate the street and the horrors you encounter are all projections created by protagonist James Sunderland, built from his deep fears and regrets. They're the evil within himself made flesh to punish

him for his sins. With Walker, as his list of atrocities grows the more things fall apart and the more he's tortured within his very own head. As you see that damned tower get closer and closer, it starts to look less like a beacon leading you to your predictably heroic finale and more like a monument to your crimes. But still, you and Walker march on. Even as the bodies pile up, even as Adams and Lugo begin lose their faith in their leader and friend, the idea that there's sanctuary to be found in that tower, that all your crimes will be forgiven once you punish the wicked, propels Walker. It propelled us through other virtual battlefields. Why should this be different? But, secretly we know we won't be given that satisfaction. We don't deserve it.

At one point, Lugo screams at Walker "He's turned us into fucking killers!" The script is laced with talks of PTSD and other jargon, but it's that sole line that sums up the core conceit of the entire experience. Walker and the player blast and blow their way through Dubai, trying their very hardest to play the hero. They'll take down Konrad, evacuate the city and go home having done their country proud. In reality, they make things worse, turning Dubai into a maelstrom of madness and horror that rivals, if not eclipses, anything Konrad could accomplish. Spec Ops: *The Line* revels in letting you know that this time, you're no great savior. Not even close.

Write for us!



Contact us at
haywiremagazine@gmail.com





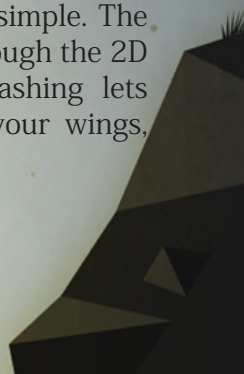
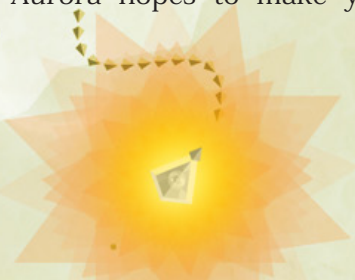
Rise and Shine

Three years after *And Yet It Moves*, *Broken Rules* is still toying with motion. Johannes Köller takes a look at their new game, *Chasing Aurora*.

On the back wall of *Broken Rules* humble abode, there's a poster defining *Chasing Aurora*'s aesthetic identity. Central on the white sheet, a Sierpinski triangle, playful geometry mirrored in the game's Origami visuals. "Playful Flight," reads one corner, backed by images of birds flapping their wings, caught in awkward landings or takeoffs. "Merciless Nature," says the next, picturing that Romantic concept of the sublime, nature at its most beautiful and terrifying: Forest graveyards, foggy peaks and precarious ravines. The last is titled "Coming of Age," a combination of the two themes. Birds perched on the edge, ready to leap. Their new project is similarly daring. *And Yet It Moves* threw you off that edge, locked in continuous freefall. *Chasing Aurora* hopes to make you soar.

"We wanted to create a game based on the dynamic of flight," says *Broken Rules*' Martin Pichlmayr. "Early versions had the player jump off a cliff before sailing through the air. In a way, it's a direct extension of *And Yet It Moves*." But the game is more than a simple follow-up. Having grown from three men to eight in the wake of their big break, the team now has the means to pursue more ambitious goals and a new in-house engine to put them into practice. Consequently, *Chasing Aurora* is already looking to be a much more crisp and polished title than its predecessor, with clean visuals and compact gameplay.

Its recipe for the age-old dream of aviation is surprisingly simple. The thumbstick moves you through the 2D skies. Rhythmic button-mashing lets you control the pace of your wings,



and thus your speed. Another button lets you dive, to descend quickly or break through strong currents, while a third is for grabbing and holding on to objects. It's a simple, minimalistic system, but far more precise, direct and gratifying than the gimmicky twists and turns of *And Yet It Moves*.

Simple, however, does not mean the same thing as easy, and your winged avatar is tasked with nothing less than bringing light back to the world, a feat achieved by collecting shards and returning them to their place. Those might be hard to find, or just hard to reach. Or in the hands, claws or paws of other animals you'll have to wrestle them from. With this emphasis on relatively peaceful exploration, *Chasing Aurora* feels reminiscent of the nature games of olden days, especially Sega's classic *Ecco the Dolphin*.

The game breathes a distinct, halcyon spirit, from its vibrant tunes of rural chords and bells to the paper-playbook visuals. While still sharp and colorful, this style goes above and beyond tired pixellation, creating a captivating alpine dreamland. In fact, *Chasing Aurora* has been partially funded by the city of Vienna in an effort to showcase the beauty of Austria's characteristic mountain range. Money well spent: Photography doesn't do the visuals justice, but with rolling clouds and streaming winds it looks

The game breathes a distinct, halcyon spirit, from its vibrant tunes of rural chords and bells to the paper-playbook visuals.

absolutely gorgeous in motion.

Much about *Chasing Aurora* is yet unclear. Its release is somewhat tied to the launch of Nintendo's Wii U, and the existence of their new eShop. Other platforms? To be announced. From its narrative to the particulars of the planned multiplayer, details remain to be seen, but *Broken Rules* has already cleared the biggest hurdle for its new title. Watching other people play, complaints do come up. About the lack of a map or other navigation aides. About the controls acting up. But those are voiced afterwards, never while playing, rapt in flying. Five minutes into my own session, I was navigating wind-swept caves, diving through clouds and jousting with other birds midair. Even at this early stage, *Broken Rules* has managed to make the act of motion fun.

Playful Flight. That's one down, two to go.

HW



Off the Grid: *Skullgirls*

Forgetting more than just their clothes.

By Zachary Brictson

Fighting game enthusiasts don't ask for much. They can pick up a new game, boot it up, and throw 90% of its features to the wayside. Most are, after all, useless to them. The rushed story, cheap end boss and completely random AI: these are mere formalities. Or the kind of mediocrities expected from ported arcade fighters.

Skullgirls originates on digital storefronts, but it wears this minimal packaging like a badge of honor, as an ode to the late 90s fighting game

scene. It's a tag based fighter with buildable meters for super attacks (*Marvel vs Capcom 2*), but then it also incorporates a ratio system that makes the idea of a tag team completely optional (*Capcom vs SNK*).

Ratios mean that a one vs. three match-up is both completely plausible and balanced. A full team contains individually weaker characters, but more tag options, while rolling solo amounts to hitting like a truck. With customizable tag attacks and this

kind of dynamic approach to team composition, *Skullgirls* has impressive depth, especially considering its small roster size.

Having only eight characters is a bit extreme, given you can put three to a team. And the bizarre art direction doesn't make finding favorites any easier, either. It's like Felix the Cat had a nightmare after watching some erotic Japanese animation, an odd mix of old fashioned western cartoon charm and shameless fanservice. Freak shows, gratuitous up-skirts or bouncing breasts, take your pick.

Still, these strange gals do feature some heavily contrasting toolsets and veterans will take note of the historical archetypes at work here. One character can pop her head off and control it separately, something like the doll control seen in *Guilty Gear* or *Blazblue*. Another keeps airborne and hovers around the stage looking for offensive opportunities, a style no doubt akin to Sentinel from *Marvel vs Capcom 2*. The game's got heart.

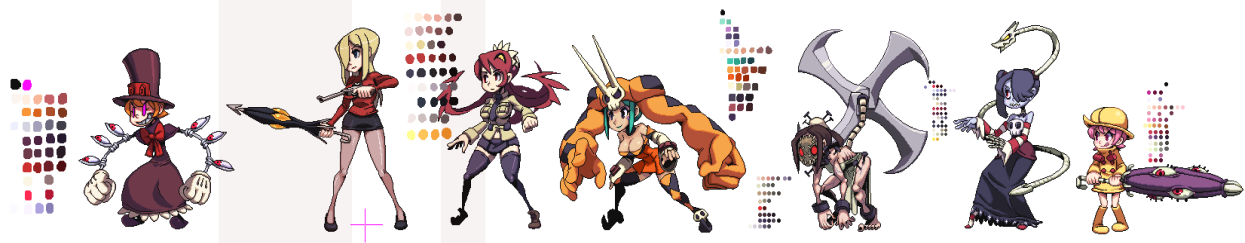
It also has some ideas of its own. A combo heavy fighter, *Skullgirls* attempts to encourage creativity over memorization by incorporating an

infinite prevention system. This allows players to break free of combos that begin to loop or repeat themselves, though it's currently in dire need of patching. As of writing, the computer doesn't differentiate between a light punch and a light kick, allowing players to fool the system and still perform egregious combos.

But they sure look good, with moves that smack, whack, snip and smash with a clean sense of hit confirmation. It's crisp. Even when a full blown three on three creates chaos all over the screen, the art never stutters or overlaps. This smoothness is enough to warrant some serious inspection at the competitive level, plus it's got a lagless net code. Take that, Capcom.

With fixes and additional expansion allegedly on the horizon, *Skullgirls* stands as a shrewd mash-up of historically beloved mechanics and could well be on its way to being one of the more legitimate competitive experiences in the genre. But it's currently missing things, like characters, and character move lists. Seriously, they aren't in there. You have to Google them.

HW



The Mechanical Void: Less Is More



**Why RPGs should do away
with needless busywork.**

By Joshua Ens

One of the most satisfying feelings in any RPG is that moment when a tough battle ends in your favor. All the hard work, the hours sunk into the game climax in a moment of triumph and the euphoric feeling will stay with you for ages. However, leading up to that final confrontation many traditional RPGs, especially of the Japanese distinction, expect you to prepare by farming experience for hours, a process gamers have come to hate. This is grind, the forced and asinine repetition of menial tasks required to progress through certain games.

While the feeling of victory is sweetened by the time you pour

into a game, when this dedication is simply forced through unnecessary busywork, you end up with a system void of enjoyment, simply geared to waste your time. Two genres are especially guilty of this crime, RPGs and their MMO cousins. However since MMOs deal in this kind of Skinner Box rewards in order to turn profits in subscriptions and ingame transactions, we can assume that for them grind is a conscious business decision. Instead, let's focus on singleplayer RPGs, where grind is used to needlessly pad game time.

One of the easiest ways to correct grind is to look at some of the solutions

implemented by western RPGs. While many accuse the western market of becoming more shallow and action-focused as it entered the 21st century, you could also argue that it has grown to balance the mix of exploration, narrative and gameplay. Skyrim is an excellent example of such a balance, though we should ignore the quality of its main narrative for the benefit of this argument. The game forces you to repeat the same actions thousands of times in order to level up, and yet the variety of quests and locations, along with its open structure, will keep you from feeling bored..

One lesson the JRPG market can take from *Skyrim* is the idea

of "dungeon narratives." Dungeon narratives are small, isolated stories adding context to your cave crawling, and they come with their own climaxes and rewards. Shaping each combat area into an adventure of its own can help alleviate the illusion that they are merely training grounds, even as they provide exercise for the player. The lore and material gain provided give the feeling that getting to explore the dungeon is its own reward.

More importantly, it's essential to make sure the amount of experience gained in fights scales properly throughout the game. Many games require hours of work for paltry rewards, especially in later stages.

The ability to tap a button and rush through battles in the Persona franchise is an astonishingly pragmatic feature for alleviating repetitive grind...

Persona 3 (2006) • • • •



This problem ranges from *Pokemon* and its lack of trainers to fight, to the more recent *Persona* games and the absurd amount of time required to level up towards the end of the game. By adjusting the experience amounts offered per fight, you can easily cut a few hours of solid boredom from the game. They will not be missed.

A third solution, though some might disagree, involves refining the turn-based battle system, commonly used by JPRGs. *Persona 3* and *Persona 4*'s battle systems are excellent examples of hybrid turn-based systems that do not sacrifice strategy, but quicken the pace of each battle, thus speeding up the necessary grind. *Persona 3*, for

instance, allows players to continually attack by exploiting enemy weaknesses. It's a simple system, but still calls for strategy and rapid decisions.

Grind is and has always been an important part of gaming, but like so many other parts it will need to adapt to its changing medium. While walls of narrative text, grinding for hours to defeat a boss and the like may have done it in the old 16-bit days, developers now have more tools in their belt to craft a better experience for the players. Less filler material and more quality content will make games more interesting for old fans and new audiences alike.

HW

... Unfortunately, many flagship JRPGs are either celebrated for their archaic mechanical design or stubbornly refuse to streamline their systems.

• • • *Final Fantasy VII* (1997)





The Scripted Sequence: A Slice of Life

How Assassin's
Creed has
forgotten that it's
cool to be cruel.

By Ethan Woods

Ubisoft Entertainment is to gamers as a guillotine is to a head and its body: divisive. On the one hand we're presented with a publisher tugging at the coattails of industry behemoths EA and Activision, viewing their successes as a justification for obnoxious DRM schemes with backdoors big enough for a hacker to drive a bus through; as well as often barely functional (and always delayed) PC ports and now, it seems, yearly releases. On the other hand, they employ some exceptionally talented people, who, in the past, have produced works of considerable quality. We're talking about games like *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*, *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* and *Far Cry 2*, the latter being so bafflingly brilliant that I dislike almost every second I play of it, and yet routinely return to its golden planes as a matter of endearment and fascination.

Of course, absent from that triumphant trio is *Assassin's Creed*. Now Ubisoft's most recognised and expansive franchise, which spans a main series of games, spin-off titles, mobile games, comics, short-films and probably condoms, too. The first game's most attractive feature was the promise of things to come, but *Assassin's Creed II* famously delivered on the rich premise of a historical sandbox set within a conspiracy theorist's wet-dream. Since then, however, the series has become something of a lumbering mass, bloated with inane, unwanted features and an increasingly meandering lore. The prospect of a new *Assassin's Creed* is no longer a particularly exciting one. Worse, something infinitely more delicate, more sincere has been lost in the flood of yearly releases.

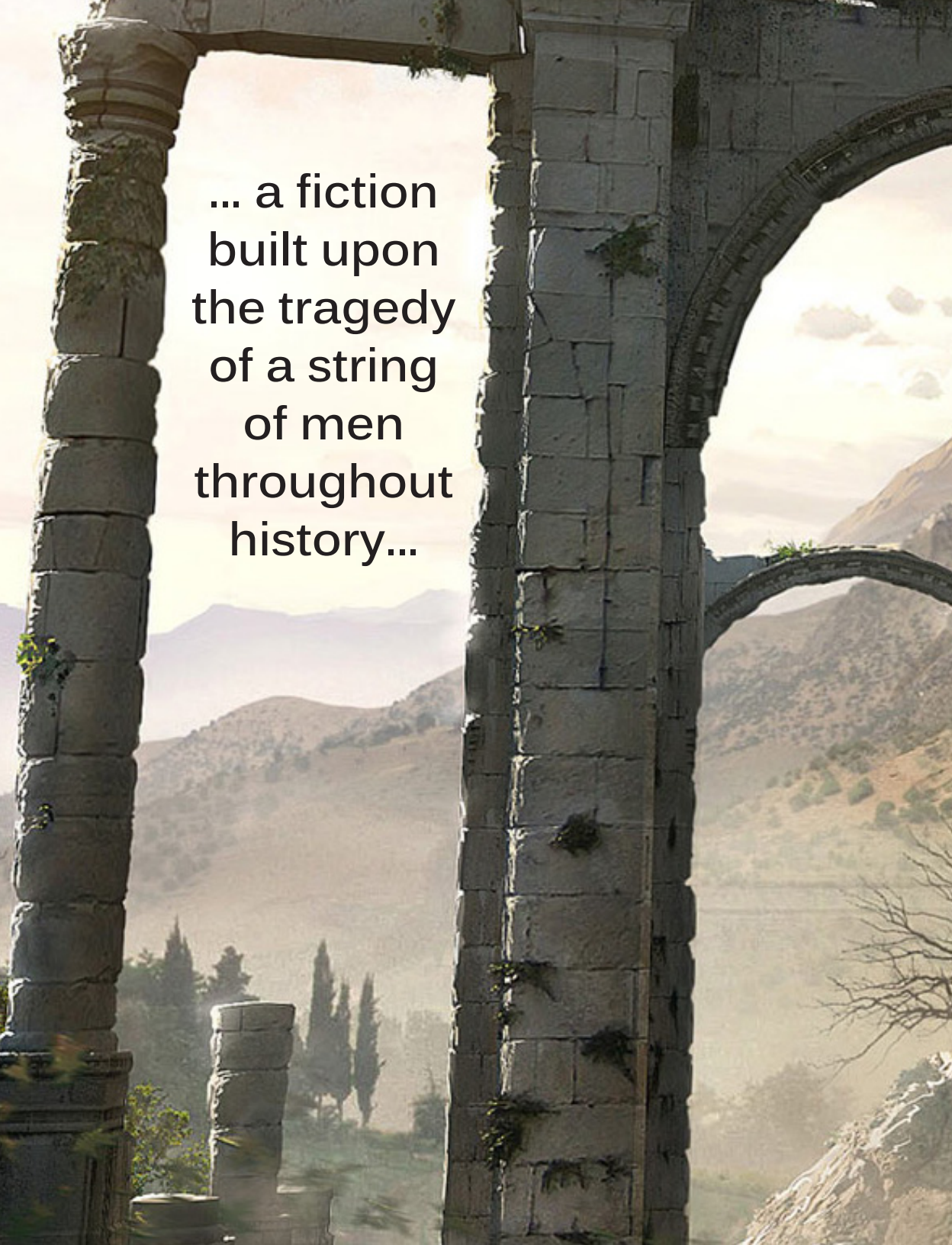
As a narrative device, the Animus was something of a stroke of genius; a pseudo-scientific virtual reality machine that was perfectly acceptable to a post-Matrix audience. While the franchise's overarching tale of a near-future chap and his talky-walky escapades has proven controversial, the mechanic by which we are transported to the Third Crusade,

the Italian Renaissance and soon the American Civil War, has never come under any particular amount of criticism. Instead, it has provided a means by which the series can move itself throughout history as it sees fit, as well as providing an ever-looming threat to the sanity of Desmond, the protagonist behind our protagonists, by way of the bleeding effect.

"But what's the loss then?" you might ask. "Well," I would reply with a fatherly frown, "it's that whilst the Animus allows *Assassin's Creed* to note that being part of a grand cosmic scheme probably isn't all it's cracked up to be, Ubisoft failed to capitalise on the inherent lack of sentimentality the Animus creates. Our chief concern, our only concern, is supposed to be the knowledge of Desmond's ancestors. The modern-day Assassins accept this, but as players we invest weeks into these characters, so it's inevitable that our divorce should be all the more gruelling." No doubt I would then sigh deeply, horn-rimmed glasses gently reflecting the sunlight, turtleneck framing my strong jaw.

Although the first *Assassin's Creed* ended Altair's story with a whimper so anti-climactic it was almost a bang

The *Assassin's Creed* series has become something of a lumbering mass, bloated with inane, unwanted features and an increasingly meandering lore.

The image shows a scene of ancient stone ruins. In the foreground, there are two large, weathered stone columns and several arches. The stone is grey and shows signs of age, with some small plants growing in the crevices. The background is a hazy, mountainous landscape under a soft, warm sky, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is contemplative and historical.

... a fiction
built upon
the tragedy
of a string
of men
throughout
history...



again, it laid the groundwork for how to conclude ancestral stories for the rest of the series. *Assassin's Creed II* took the idea and made it short, sharp, and brutal, setting the stage for a fiction built upon the tragedy of a string of men throughout history rubbing up against the confines of their own prescribed destiny. In *Assassin's Creed II*'s closing moments, Ezio begs of Minerva: "I don't understand... Please, wait! I have so many questions!"


In light of the titular creed, that nothing is true and everything permitted, which supposes that people are free to forge their own destinies, it's a devastating and ironic end to our vengeful hero, as his own destiny is thrust upon him and then stolen away in mere moments. Concern with satisfying his curiosity is dismissed by Minerva in order to relay a message to Desmond. As we're cruelly dragged through the matrices of the Animus and back to dear-old Des, our capacity as players to empathise with Ezio is vast, guilt-ridden even, as we leave him to seek those answers without our guidance. Our lasting image of him is a simple one: a man, in the middle years of his life, lost and confused.

Within this brief moment, we were permitted a glimpse at the twisted core of the *Assassin's Creed* series, one heavily juxtaposed against the often

jovial nature of Ezio's adventure. We are forced to realize that his legacy is no heroic deed or grand achievement, but procreation. Suddenly, a series about reliving long-dead memories through DNA and stabbing people in the face had come to reflect the innately human fears of insignificance and isolation. With this, *Assassin's Creed II* raised itself to a lofty perch well above the station of its predecessor. That a developer could be so dismissive of their own creation, a character written specifically as an antidote to the po-faced, unwaveringly distant Altair, was an enticing prospect. Alas, it was quickly dispelled.

Whilst replaying *Assassin's Creed II* still conveys a twinge of sympathy for our Renaissance Batman, the lingering cruelty of the Animus' curt drop-in/drop-out reality is lost. By continuing Ezio's story with both *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* and *Assassin's Creed: Revelations*, as well as a short-film, *Assassin's Creed: Embers*, Ubisoft have wasted the fascinating and inherently unsentimental nature of the mechanics of their own narrative, in favor of bleeding a series and character to death. As we face a new ancestor and the conclusion to Desmond's story, it remains to be seen if *Assassin's Creed III* can recapture the cruelty.

HW



The Other Screen: Assemble, Evolve, Rise

This summer, we hit the apex of
the genre movie blockbusters.

By Andrew Huntly

It's common for audiences to be given one "event" movie per year. One big, tell-all-your-friends, bring-down-the-auditorium experience that highlights what's so great about that large screen and that booming sound system. In 2012, we were given three. With *The Avengers*, *Prometheus* and *The Dark Knight Rises*, this summer has seemed like a gratifying, one-two punch of epic, intelligent genre blockbusters.

Sure, we had *The Amazing Spider Man* and *Men in Black 3* sliding their way in between the bigger release dates, hoping to make their capital before getting crushed by the weight of these titans, but they were the bread you chew on between the massive platter courses.

The first cinematic summer giant was brought to us by the possible monarch of geekdom, Joss Whedon.

The man behind *Buffy*, *Firefly* and *Dollhouse* was the helmsman for Marvel Studio's ridiculously ambitious plan to bring comic book continuity to the world of cinema. Having been lined up and fleshed out in their own titular outings, *The Avengers* scooped up Iron Man, Captain America, Thor, The Hulk and a scattering of lesser knowns and placed them in a big, bombastic superhero movie that really should not have worked, but did. Gathering up so many great characters and equally dividing up their screen time is a mountainous challenge, but Whedon managed to pull it all together with an astonishingly breezy script. His time in the land of the small screen was probably his greatest strength in the project, managing a cavalcade of witty lines and character moments that gave life and spark to every conversation so that no protagonist overpowered another.

The movie suffered a little in its transition from dialogue to action. It's all very well staged and shot, but they lost much of the intelligence and heart the quickfire writing provided the film. As a climax to the intricate, witty and occasionally revealing character moments, they couldn't help but feel like a letdown. The lack of a sincere and present danger from the ineptly

villainous horde in the final fight made the slew of punches and explosions lose a crucial amount of weight that pure spectacle couldn't overcome. *The Avengers* was still a strong film that held together far more tightly than it had any right to, but it was the most fluffy and lightweight out of our summer blockbuster trilogy - a popcorn munching prelude for the two films to follow.

In a multiplex taken over by wizards and superheroes, Ridley Scott's *Prometheus* was a complete anomaly. The levels of fervour the R-rated sci-fi flick managed to attain

before its release are almost unheard of, but it had come from incredibly good stock. Scott's revered reputation in science fiction, built upon *Alien* and *Blade Runner*,

Joss Whedon's time in the land of the small screen was probably his greatest strength in the project

was enough to make a prominent number of film and sci-fi fans perk up at the notion he's working within the recently arid genre once more. When it was revealed *Prometheus* would also be a quasi-prequel to *Alien*, the excitement agglomerated into an unstoppable ball of hype. With monstrous weight of expectations the film brought with it, it was shocking it lived up to its promises. And at the same time did not.

Prometheus was a visually

ambitious and frequently intelligent movie. Ridley Scott's direction was pitch-perfect; his trademark slow pacing suited the expertly built environments and drenched the whole film in a thick, weighty atmosphere. It's just so unfortunate that the film was burdened by a dry, clunky script, with aspiringly intellectual discussions stifled by unnatural dialogue. The visuals gave audiences a film of almost Lovecraftian horror, the writing gave them a sub-par 2001: A Space Odyssey. It was a clash that some couldn't overcome, but the fact that a film with this level of violent ambition reached out to a such a broad audience and pulled in so much money is a great achievement for genre cinema.

But the pinnacle of my movie-going summer was always going to be *The Dark Knight Rises*. The unfortunate reality behind the final chapter in Christopher Nolan's Batman trilogy is that it could never possibly live up to its predecessor. *The Dark Knight* was a watershed not only for superhero movies, but it ranks among the best films of the past decade. To follow that while also lacking Heath Ledger's iconic Joker is the sort of task that only an absolute madman would place on their shoulders. Nolan deserves a standing

ovation for following through with his insanity.

The Dark Knight Rises is an angry, brutal, brooding film. It soars and glides on levels of such operatic intensity that it makes most other blockbusters cower in shame, as the fiery darkness Nolan and co-writer David S. Goyer have built up over two fantastic films finally explodes in the most satisfying and grandiose way. It's a blockbuster that draws far more comparisons to Greek tragedies than the latest Michael Bay or Brett Ratner effort.

Much like its predecessor, *The Dark Knight Rises* has far more on its my mind than the to-the-point adrenaline highs of punching, banging action. The thread of the economic crisis runs through the film like cancer, as the desperate and the furious

**The reality is that
Christopher Nolan's
finale to the Batman
trilogy could never live
up to its predecessor.**

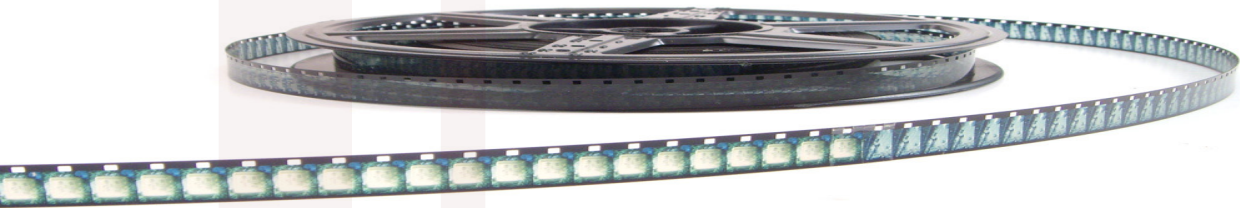
of Gotham are manipulated and weaponized against Batman. It draws on the idea of the 99 percent and the status of the elite in a clear and potent way, injecting the film with a social realism that even *The Dark Knight*, with its war-on-terror allegories, couldn't capture. The blossoming, frothing seed of economic destruction that was planted all the way back in *Batman Begins* seems like the perfect end point for Nolan's Batman trilogy and it's a dark, beautiful beast of a

film, built with the most carefully crafted pieces of closure imaginable. As Harvey Dent once said, "You either die the hero, or you live long enough to see yourself become the villain." Nolan and his excellent cast and crew are all certainly walking away from Gotham the hero.

For me, *The Dark Knight Rises* is the most powerful and long-lasting blockbuster movie to come out this year, but neither can the strengths of *The Avengers* and *Prometheus* be understated. Both are huge-budget genre films, made by people with respect and knowledge for their audience who understand that to take, you must give. It's refreshing to see

gigantic, high-profile movies that are as intelligent, well crafted and sharply defined as these. It's a year without the throbbing, scraping and clanking of a Hasbro product mutated into a film. A year without an endless stream of misjudged comedies, dreamed up to patch some overheads. Instead, it's a year of cinematic events that deliver and satisfy, despite everyone from studio executives to audiences screaming at them that they could never accomplish such things. It's unlikely we'll see another summer with so many poignant blockbusters for some time, so this year is certainly one to be cherished.

HW



Who we are...

Editor-in-Chief

➤ Johannes Köller is a columnist for in-ga.me, occasional amateur critic and student of literature and language at the University of Vienna.

Layout & Design

➤ Andrew Walt studies ancient drama at the University of Toronto when he's sober enough to be a functional member of society.

Contributors

➤ Zachary Britson is a hopeless gaming romantic studying computer sciences and Japanese at Northern Illinois University.

➤ Francisco Dominguez recently completed his degree in English Literature, which he uses to swat flies in Brighton between erratic fits of job-hunting and writing.

➤ Joshua Ens, hailing from Alberta, Canada, is a welder by trade and drunkard by choice.

➤ Andrew Huntly is a British musician and cineaste currently gearing up for entering Film Studies, and NaNoWriMo.

➤ Tosal Mahapatra is a law student at Dublin University with a taste for Samuel Beckett, good ale and fantasy football.

➤ Ethan Woods is a dashing handsome, thoroughly amateur writer and student of English and American Literature at the University of London.

What we do...

➤ Haywire Magazine is an amateur games journalism project developed by Johannes Köller and Andrew Walt. All written content has been contributed generously by and is entirely property of their author's byline. All visual content has been retrieved through Google image search and is property of their respective owners.

➤ This magazine is not for sale or print, and exists solely as an online PDF.

➤ Please address any comments, concerns, and feedback to haywiremagazine@gmail.com, and visit us online at www.haywiremagazine.wordpress.com.

