

HAYWIRE MAGAZINE

ISSUE 4 • CHALLENGE



Games are the great enablers. They let us be heroes or villains, assassins, time travellers, scientists, spaceship captains, political leaders or even gods. Any fantasy can become approximately real in digital worlds, so why are some titles so coy when it comes to wish fulfillment? They burn us, crush us, impale us, throw us off cliffs, and we keep coming back for more.

What draws us to games that seem to offer not achievement, but failure? Mere masochism, or the ritual cleansing of self-flagellation by proxy? It seems unlikely to me that anybody should enjoy constant dejection. Perhaps what we find truly inspiring about challenging games is that there's always the ever-so-slight chance of success. The thousand deaths we die along the way only remind us how unlikely, how important and how precious our victories can be, as old adages about the sweetness of rewards in relation to the effort needed to obtain them would imply.

And tired as those might be, there is something endearing about tragic struggles. It's why we'll limp along in the harsh space of *FTL*, even when our ship is only held together with duct tape and sheer force of will. It's why we can't bring ourselves to give up on an entirely hopeless fight like *DayZ*, where death is sure to catch up to you sooner or later. In other cases, the challenge at hand might be our struggle to make sense of the cryptic or deeply personal tales brought to us by the many creative voices in games.

This issue is dedicated to that edifying combination of adversity and encouragement, in all its shapes and forms. How fitting, too, that our little magazine is going through interesting times as we deal with this particular topic. We have gotten ourselves both a new domain and a new look to go with it over at www.haywiremag.com, and we'll try to finally come through on promises of more regular content there.

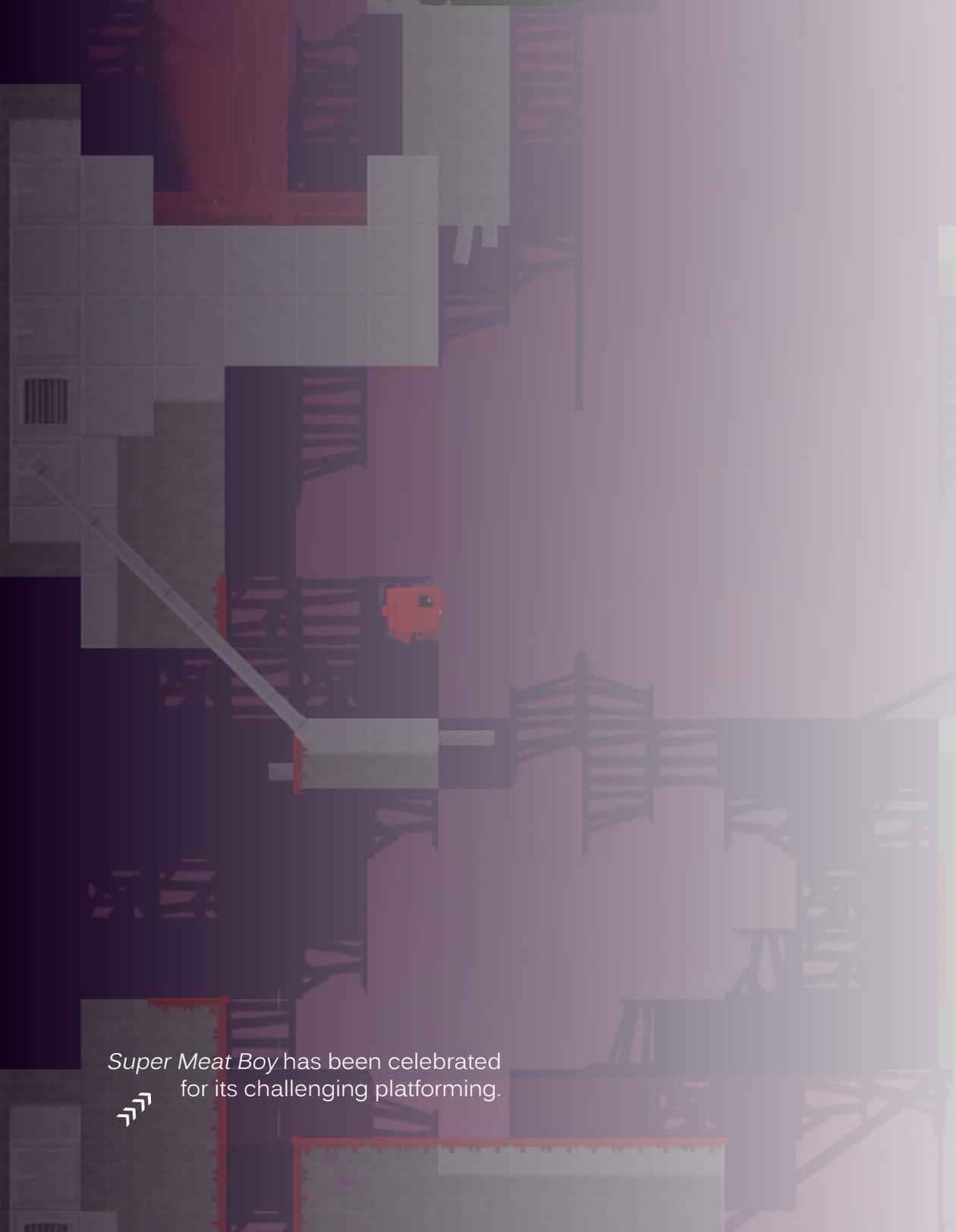
For feedback and suggestions, you can always reach me at haywiremagazine@gmail.com. I hope to hear from you soon.

Cheers,
Johannes Köller
Editor-in-Chief

HW



Looking for a challenge? Try landing
on the moon in
 *Kerbal Space Program.*



Super Meat Boy has been celebrated
for its challenging platforming.



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The Possibilities of an Island

Johannes Köller has gone missing in *Proteus*.



I am such a fool.

It's relaxing, they said. It's refreshing, they said. It's a walk in the park, they said. And I just had to take their word for it. Why? Why did I have to listen? Look at me! I haven't slept in days, I haven't eaten in days, I haven't even touched another game in days. All because of their meditative little nature simulation: Everywhere I look, I see only its vibrant colors and adorable critters, taunting me with that sublime arrangement I have yet to find within the constraints of its cruel, random nature.

Did you know some people don't even consider *Proteus* a game? I can only assume they are joking: This is by far the most challenging, painful, torturous game I have ever played. In their satirical articles, these comedians pretend to mock the game for lacking objectives and meaningful interaction. It's quite an elaborate ruse. Of course *Proteus* has an objective: aesthetic pleasure. What objective could possibly be more noble than pursuing beauty, and what interaction more meaningful than to gaze at it, absorb it, let it speak to you?

Only, do you know how hard it is to find beauty in this world? Oh, not

at first. It's all very beautiful at first, the little animals, the trees, the clouds, the colors. But by being wholly picturesque, *Proteus* spoils you. Soon islands that are merely pretty will no longer do and you go looking for one that is not just beautiful, but breathtaking. The one island with just the right combination of colors and sounds, the ideal arrangement of trees, clouds and animals dotted over impeccable topology. You start searching for the image your mind created as you read that sentence: the one, perfect island.

It's a frustrating meditation on inadequacy and ugliness that gives you a deceptively simple goal, but not the means to achieve it.

I'm beginning to think it doesn't exist. It must, somewhere within the myriad of potential landmasses hidden in *Proteus'* procedural algorithms, but what are the odds of finding it, really? Not that it matters. So

long as it's out there, or might be out there, I cannot rest and I cannot accept substitute pleasures. This one? Too flat. This one? Too rugged. This one? Too symmetrical.

None of them ever live up to the lofty standard I have set, and I have long since stopped spending more time on any one of them than is absolutely necessary to grade its looks. That's all the time I can afford these subpar artworks if I mean to continue this quest for

perfection. Maybe this is why *Minecraft* gives you tools? I used to think that it was simply a way to keep players busy, to play to their narcissism and possibly their obsessive compulsions by allowing them to colonize and structure the space surrounding them. Maybe it's a necessary coping mechanism though, a way of dealing with the endlessly disappointing possibilities of this Impressionist generator. Unable to improve the game's creations, you can only stare at their flaws, shudder and recoil. Without the means to craft perfection, all you can do is chase that

elusive dream.

Perhaps *Minecraft* is entirely the wrong comparison. This is no innocent little sandbox full of diversions and distractions. It's a frustrating meditation on inadequacy and ugliness that gives you a deceptively simple goal, but not the means to achieve it. It's *Slender*, only with roles reversed so you are endlessly chasing instead of fleeing. It's visual horror, aesthetic splatter, art gore, and it has trapped my anhedonic mind in an endless loop of terror.

Well, not entirely. Sometimes, sometimes I find a spot that's just close



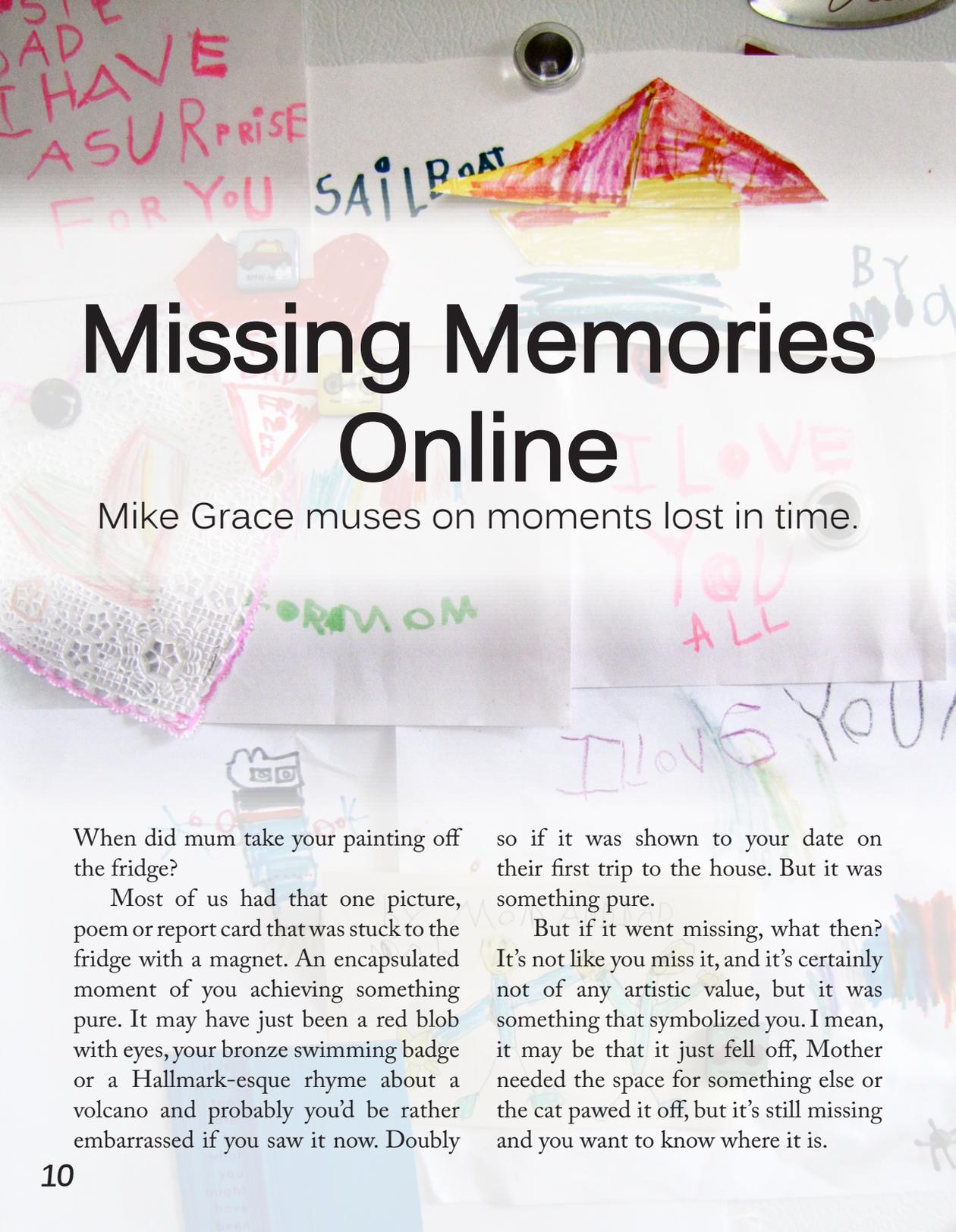
enough to the picture in my head to stop my shaking and frantic breathing for a while. I'd sit down and, just for a minute or two, wonder if maybe this is good enough. If maybe this will do, even though that slope is not quite right, the trees are too far off and there are no critters to be found. Those wonderful clouds are drifting away and the sun is going down, but I could go find this island's magical circle of time travel and see if the vista works better in a different season.

Or I could stop. If I accept that the not-quite-perfect will do, there's

all manner of flawed beauty in my life already. Novels, films and games are just piling up. I got articles to edit, conversations to lead and actual, real walks in parks to take. Fresh air to breathe. I could spend an afternoon just lying in the sun and not worry about anything. Let perfection find me instead.

Or I could try again. Maybe this time it'll be different. Maybe this time it'll be right.

HW



Missing Memories Online

Mike Grace muses on moments lost in time.

When did mum take your painting off the fridge?

Most of us had that one picture, poem or report card that was stuck to the fridge with a magnet. An encapsulated moment of you achieving something pure. It may have just been a red blob with eyes, your bronze swimming badge or a Hallmark-esque rhyme about a volcano and probably you'd be rather embarrassed if you saw it now. Doubly

so if it was shown to your date on their first trip to the house. But it was something pure.

But if it went missing, what then? It's not like you miss it, and it's certainly not of any artistic value, but it was something that symbolized you. I mean, it may be that it just fell off, Mother needed the space for something else or the cat pawed it off, but it's still missing and you want to know where it is.

And it's during this frantic searching of everything you own that you find out that the school has come round and gathered all of your pictures up. They've left the odd one, but the ones that you treasured the most are gone. And there's a dark plume of smoke coming up from the school. At the door, your friend asks you to put down the axe and think about it calmly for a second. "I mean, they own all the stuff, don't they? You never really owned any of that stuff – just hired the use of their equipment. They're perfectly within their rights to delete it."

While an aging record player plays *The Noveltones, Left Bank Two*, your childhood disappears into flames. Would we ever consider that "fair"?

People tend to overlook the fact that online games are fast becoming the transition point to adulthood. While children as young as seven are squeaking through their first *Call of Duty*, it's often not until they come into contact with an MMO/MOBA or MUD that the entire concept of Massive Multiplayer comes home.

In first person shooters, your interaction is usually limited to the guy

supporting you and the other guy trying to kill you. In MMOs you might find that suddenly there's an entire group of people with you. Two of them you quite fancy, one of them is just a clown, three of them are in this strange subgroup, and all of you have this huge world to explore. At first, the idea of actually talking to other people, of having no set goal to play toward, might be enough to make you think that MMOs are for all those other hardcore nerds. And then you have your first pure moment.

Sure, getting a really lucky kill in a *Call of Duty* is exciting, but taking down a God with friends? Even *Shadow of the Colossus* falls short.

I was brought into MMOs through *Everquest*. A friend of mine had been playing a text based game, where we ran round typing "kill animal", "search body" and "take all." She asked me if I'd

move on to this new game with her, and with my Windows 98 PC screaming at having to use 3D graphics, I booted up.

Suddenly, I'm looking out across the top of a forest. Slightly stunned, I pressed the up arrow and moved forward. The ground came up to meet me really fast.

My poor graphics card couldn't even cope with 3dfx properly, so I couldn't see any of the health bars or text, but with my microphone crackling,

The sprawling metropolis in *SimCity*, the *Minecraft* architecture or even the sentient, phallic *Spore* monster, they're all digital memories that we only rent.





I was resurrected, clambered down from Faydark and the two of us fought our way to Butcher Block. Days later, my card was replaced and I saw a whole new world. Weeks later I realized I could target myself with spells. Months later, I was chatting with a Swedish Troll in the market about how the customers never respect the effort we went to.

The pure moments differ between people, but they're often just those points where you're encapsulated in the world. When real life has been crappy to you and your online personality succeeds (or fails) astonishingly. Sure, getting a really lucky kill in a *Call of Duty* is exciting, but taking down a God with friends? Even *Shadow of the Colossus* falls short.

But times change, servers change and people change. We went our own separate ways, and my troll disappeared from the Norrathian Bazaar. Probably still trying to sell all those damn GoD salmon chunks. Is he a work of great acting skill? Nope. Something that's all mine? Nope. Something that touched another life? Probably not. But he was one of my pure moments on *Everquest*.

A dullard pushed out of his home by frogs that dreamt of hobnobbing with High Elves.

Unfortunately, my poor computer died to a nasty virus and all my "paintings" of Quartz died with it. My online memories of him had all but been destroyed. This point was brought home to me recently when I tried to dig out my old *Lord Of the Rings Online* characters. I still had some Turbine Points, so I tried to locate my Hobbit Cook. She'd clambered the Misty Mounts to search out a terrifying boar, and wanted to make a good sauce to go with those ribs.

So I looked up my old account. And there was nothing there. After a few hours of searching, I found that there had been some sort of server movement and all characters that weren't specifically moved were gone. Deleted. No more. She was an ex-hobbit.

December 2012 was the death of the Silver Weasel as well.

City of Heroes was always a great love of mine and I met some great people there, including one very special person. I spent a good 1400 hours in Paragon City, about as many hours as you spend

At first, the idea of actually talking to other people might be enough to make you think that MMOs are for all those other hardcore nerds. And then you have your first pure moment.

in a normal school year. Imagine what you can get up to in a school year. Think back on one of your years. Now imagine it gone.

Silver Weasel was my alter ego, my id, my sixth form year of mad abandon. A white-cloaked daredevil who considered caution to be a four letter word, along with taste, decency and forward thinking. I came back in 2012, 5 years or so after I'd left, and someone still recognized me from my antics. And now he'd finally been defeated. There was nothing I could do about it – I didn't own anything about him – and all I had left of his gallery of kookiness was a few screenshots.

Like the primary school paintings, there are a lot of memories that can come from these events. The time when five of us stormed the Oranbega Temples dressed in swimwear, the epic Rock Paper Scissors tournaments, the short-lived attempt at tanking Lusca; these will mean nothing to most people, but to me, they're moments I still smile at.

But there's no way I can relive them now. Even with *Manic Miner*, *Dragon's Lair* or *Asteroids*, I can replicate moments in time. I can be Fry in *Raiders of the Lost Arcade*, firing through the shields like a madman, with my two liter bottle of Fanta.

Now we've reached a generation of dedicated servers, cloud storage and the

dreaded Always Online. The sprawling metropolis in *SimCity*, the *Minecraft* architecture or even the sentient, phallic *Spore* monster, they're all digital memories that we only rent.

It's not just our data though: Will we ever see *Star Wars 1313*? How long before there's nothing left to play *Parappa the Rapper* on? *Doomdark's Revenge*? Can you still play *Powerstone 2*?

Perhaps the thing that scares most people away from MMOs is not the monthly fee any more – most are now free to play – but the idea that once you experience a moment that touches your soul, it could be locked behind a paywall, or deleted. I still have a picture of the Weasel but, like my sixth form year, I'm not getting the full memory back. I just wish I'd snuck out more memories before they removed my ability to make new ones.

What Weasel had cost me, a year of subscriptions, he had more than paid back for in thoughts, ideas, good times and fun. I'd like to think that somewhere, out of my control, he still exists. As the final moments tick away in Paragon City, Weasel grabs hold of his friends and says, in an excited voice, "I've got a plan that might just work."

You are being forcibly disconnected from the server. Servers are shutting down.

Holding Hands

Trivun Luzaic
remembers his old
tag-team partners.

The year is 2003, the game is *Final Fantasy X*. I stare at the collection of spheres in front of me, wondering where to place them. A few erratic guesses later I've shifted a block against the wrong wall and have to leave the room and come back to reset the puzzle. After a few more minutes of racking my brain, I finally consult the book lying next to me, and move on past. Cut to this week. I find myself stumped by *Silent Hill's* infamous piano puzzle, blindly mashing keys, waiting for some reaction or clue. Then I decide to strum my keyboard instead, and my laptop quickly provides the answer.

We've always found ways to circumvent the many stumbling blocks in games, but it's interesting to note the differences between the past and present when it comes to breaking down difficulty. A decade ago we were limited to whatever commercial solutions

developers (or others) were willing to write. Now we have something far more powerful: the internet, and a massive crowd of people more than happy to provide detailed, piece-by-piece explanations of any game's elements.

I could open Google right now and learn where every single audio log in *Bioshock* is located, without even leaving my seat. It was quite another thing to use an actual printed guide, and I should know. There have been many of them in my gaming library over the years, I even once bought a guide to *Final Fantasy XII* two weeks before I got the game itself, because of those taunting words: Limited Edition.

Some might say that reading up in preparation kills the joy of exploration, but then what of the things I would have never found on my own? The added character details and snippets of world-building that informed, but never

dominated my trip, as any good travel guide should. Some even manage to do it in style, *Alan Wake's* guide reads like an old Stephen King novel, describing events first and providing instructions only indirectly.

It's a level of subtlety that has been lost in the transition to amateur FAQs, video walkthroughs and Let's Plays. They might be much more readily accessible, entertaining even, but have no room for creative expansion of the source material without an official seal of approval to lend them credence. Good walkthrough writing can be an opportunity for multimodal storytelling that the slow death of game manuals has left barren.

Maybe that's why you can still find walkthroughs in game stores. Or maybe it's just nostalgia.

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Intermission...

The Seven Deadly Sins of Gaming: Perpetual Disparager

Two words that drive talons into your friends: “No” and “Actually”.

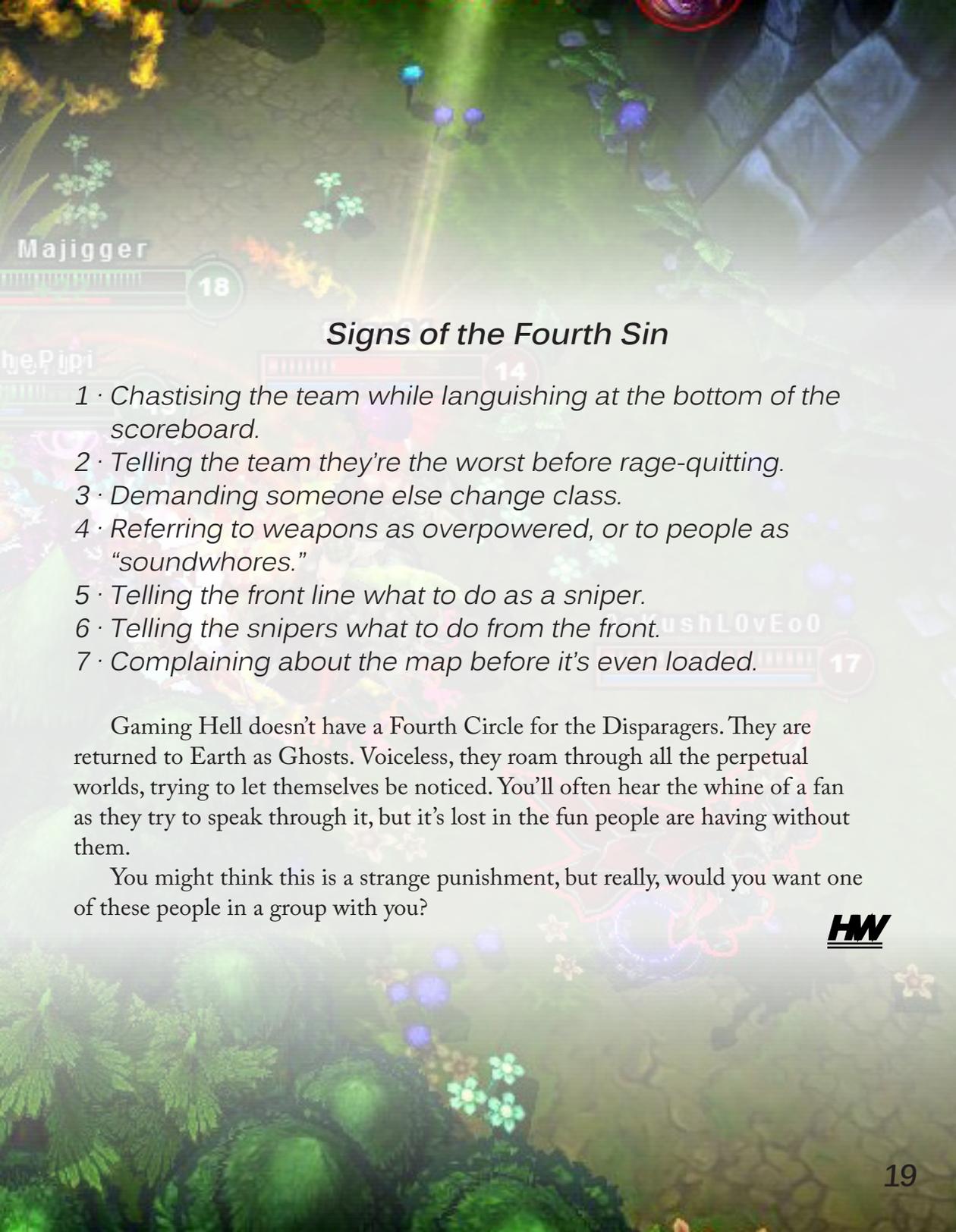
Your friends like you, really they do, but when you start to tell them what they’re doing is wrong, sometimes it’s not the right time. If it’s continual, then it will be the wrong time very soon.

Condemning someone’s opinion – or worse, correcting their opinion – is worse than a child’s whine. Not only does it mute out what your opinion is – however right it may be – but it makes people take less notice of you in the future.

When you then apply that to a subject that you don’t have equal experience of, you draw forth resentment and bitterness that you probably don’t deserve. Perhaps it would have been better had the cleric healed you at that moment, but telling them that, even though they probably already know, and telling everyone nearby that you knew the right time, marks you as the person that the cleric will “forget” to heal next time.

It doesn’t matter how correct you are, or that you needed that food more, or that you would have been better off using pets to attack with, what matters is the group stability at that moment. Because you’ll never know when they “forget” to add you next time.

There is no “I” in team, and “me” comes only after “Ta!”



Signs of the Fourth Sin

- 1 · Chastising the team while languishing at the bottom of the scoreboard.
- 2 · Telling the team they're the worst before rage-quitting.
- 3 · Demanding someone else change class.
- 4 · Referring to weapons as overpowered, or to people as "soundwhores."
- 5 · Telling the front line what to do as a sniper.
- 6 · Telling the snipers what to do from the front.
- 7 · Complaining about the map before it's even loaded.

Gaming Hell doesn't have a Fourth Circle for the Disparagers. They are returned to Earth as Ghosts. Voiceless, they roam through all the perpetual worlds, trying to let themselves be noticed. You'll often hear the whine of a fan as they try to speak through it, but it's lost in the fun people are having without them.

You might think this is a strange punishment, but really, would you want one of these people in a group with you?

HW

Off the Grid: Dear Escher

Zachary Britson
considers every angle of
Antichamber.



Bleak, white corridors sketched with
dark lines paint a labyrinth of stairways
to nowhere, uncrossable gaps
and recursive

pathways.

A maze not of dead ends,
but of mysteries, puzzles, and rooms
splashed with technicolor mind trickery.
Antichamber is like a first-person
expedition through a level designer's
sketchbook, one that arouses incredible
curiosity not just for its abstract world,
but for how it encourages an abstract
approach to that world.

You might pass an empty window frame standing in the center of a blank room, and looking through that purposeless construction, see new paths. Suddenly, you aren't in the same room anymore. The game's environment morphs without your acknowledgement, you've navigated by complete accident, solutions to similar obstacles calling for the same duplicity. Forget what you know about puzzle games. Try walking through a wall. Try walking on thin air. Consider normal problems an anomaly.

Plastered against the walls are collectible drawings to push you towards this thought process, behind each one a piece of written advice. Finding yourself going in circles, you may just come across one: "The choice doesn't matter if the outcome is the same." Such overt messages might come across as superficial, but somehow lend credence to an oddly motivational atmosphere.

Puzzles take the form of lessons instead of challenges, teasing your brain with harrowing problems that come with simple and liberating solutions. Stuck? With a press of a key you'll fade back to a quick travel map and choose a new chamber. Trial and error becomes seamless, and while white noise and sounds of nature echo through the sterile halls, *Antichamber* becomes a therapeutic and psychedelic experience,

if only for a very short while.

Its reliance on gimmicks - admittedly clever ones - means that it can only remain compelling for as long as it has enough to spare. When it exhausts its creativity, *Antichamber* decides it should stop with the magic and start abiding more closely to the definition of its genre. Puzzle guns are introduced, and with them some unstated, but rigid rule sets for block manipulation.

Mundane as it sounds, it's the idea of the game now having a defined structure that betrays the player's enjoyment. You could explore freely and at your own pace, limited only by your own mind, but now rooms may prove unsolvable if you haven't acquired a certain colorful tool. Unaware of what rules apply to what chambers and unaware of which gun you lack and where to find it, *Antichamber's* recreational tone is quickly lost, the fortune cookie wisdom on the walls ceases to inspire, and suddenly you find yourself in the midst of very malicious design. A torture chamber, if you will.

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An aerial, isometric view of a city with various skyscrapers and buildings. Several bright, glowing energy beams or fire trails streak across the scene from the top left towards the center, creating a sense of action and destruction. The lighting is a mix of cool blues and warm oranges from the beams.

Same Difference: *Sim City* & *Duke Nukem Forever*

The case of two remarkably similar games.

SimCity is what dollhouses grow into. A model village simulator that someone tried to make manlier by making it large-lier.

Duke Nukem Forever, on the other hand, is a game about a manly man who manlily shoots things in a manly way. With chicks everywhere. And I'm not talking about the ones you get fried in buckets.

Does that prove they are different games? No. What proves things is facts.

Think about how you play these games

SimCity: Brief action, wait for results, look for where to place zones, rush to place them, wait for money to reload.

Duke Nukem Forever: Brief action, wait for screams, look for where to place grenades, rush to place them, wait for ego to reload.

Both games were based on rather ropey, older games

SimCity was created by Will Wright (Alter ego of Won't Wrong) when he was writing *Raid on Bungeling Bay* (Not as good as *Raid over Moscow*). Supposedly he enjoyed making maps more than playing games, but he collects train numbers as well.

The Dukester, back in his MSDOS days, was heavily influenced by *Turrican* and *Megaman* – so much so that most of the graphics were taken from those two games.

Numbers? What are those?

SimCity is the 13th of the *SimCity* games, and it's not even the first *SimCity* game to be called *SimCity*. That's not including *Sim Helicopter* (and its dancing himbos), *Sim Ant* (lacking a Sim Magnifying Glass) and *Sim Bull*. Don't worry, that's journalist humor.

Duke Nukem Forever is the thirteenth Duke, (Ahem, 13!) and not the one from *Fast Show*. He may be the same Duke, but about 12 years older, which would put him around 30 odd now (old!). Not so cool when he's hanging around with teen chicks anymore, is it guys?

Princess Peach has nothing on these two

SimCity was originally called *Micropolis*, and the source code for *Micropolis* was released in 2008. Not *SimCity*, as you might expect. There have also been many *Sim* games that aren't *Sims*, *Sims* that are sims and even sims in *Sims* that are also sims, paid in simoleons. Xzibit nearly had a fit over this.

Duke Nukem himself was *Duke Nukum* for a while. The original Nukem was a bad guy in *Captain Planet*. By your potential lawsuits combined, Apogee renamed him. And then named him back, probably after the god-awful Belfast episode (Seriously, watch that [redacted] if you really want to laugh your [redacted] off).

The cancelled side-projects sound way better

Sim City = The Card Game, SimMars.

Duke Nukem = Duke4Ever, Duke Nukem: D-Day, Duke Nukem: Endangered Species.

Why innovate?

SimCity bases most of its gameplay scenarios around real cities. Bern, Boston, Detroit, Tokyo, San Francisco, etc. The latest version even strips out

most of its platform dependencies and relies on a browser based model.

Duke Nukem Forever, well... where hasn't it stolen from? If we ignore Stallone/Schwarzenegger's physique, Campbell and Piper's lines, or Dirty Harry's voice, then we still have his name, his haircut and Lundgren/Van Damme's look.

The spin-offs were way better

The Sims accounts for almost 80 full price games. No matter what you think of the weirdos that buy this stuff, that's a lot of money.

Duke? *Balls of Steel* (pinball), *Blood* (I don't want to set the world on fire way before *Fakeout 3* did it), *Death Rally* (recouped its 8 month development cost in 3 days – *Duke Nukem Forever* isn't even close).

The rumor mill keeps rolling on

What have we heard about *SimCity*? Well, the Mac Version comes out soon, probably with gameplay changes to deal with their one button mouse. Then we have bigger maps (allegedly), and hopefully offline versions of it. But I'll believe that when Polygon updates their review, and not a day sooner.

Duke Nukem Forever? What hasn't been said about it? The film still in production in 2009? Gearbox rebooting

him after *Alien: Colonial Marines* is flushed out of the airlock? The *Duke Nukem* toys that broke as soon as you got them out of the package? Who can say? Time to get middle-aged on this franchise.

Convinced yet? No? Fact blast for you then!

Nuclear Devastation of American cities, awful versions on the N64, exploding buildings, Godzilla monsters, police everywhere, rubbish driving physics, no highscores, difficult levels, who wants Sim?

Differences? One's an FPS, one's an RTS? Does the S in there not give it away? I've come here to compare games and chew gum, and my gum's gone. Oh, and I had some notes on DRM, but they don't seem that important.

CONCLUSION:

***SimCity* and *Duke Nukem Forever* are the same game!**

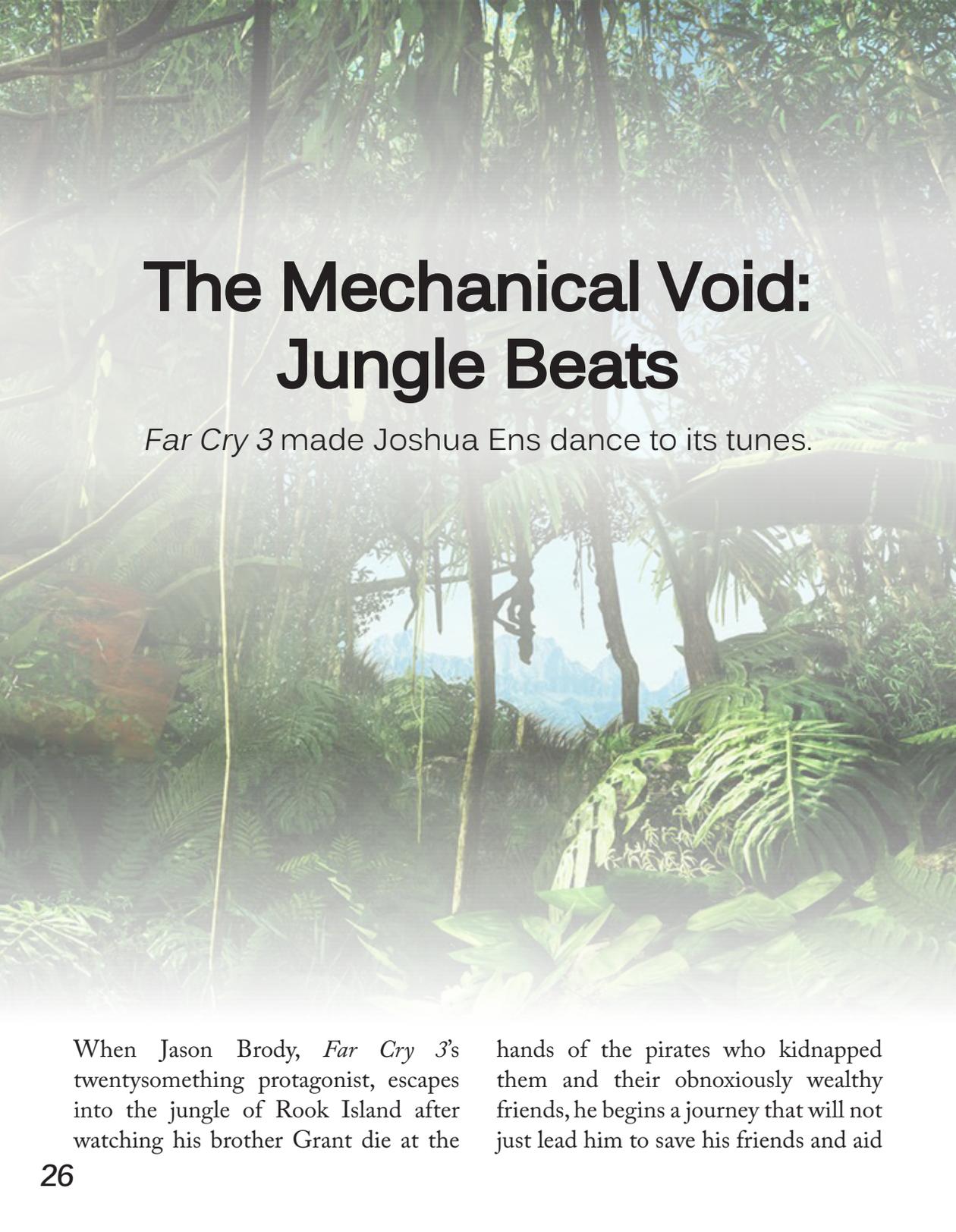
You may want to argue this, but you know in your heart that you're wrong, and I'm right. Any geek on the internet starts giving you trouble talking to you about two games?

You come back to me and I'll make sure they know the facts.

I'm outta here. Peace.

HW





The Mechanical Void: Jungle Beats

Far Cry 3 made Joshua Ens dance to its tunes.

When Jason Brody, *Far Cry 3*'s twentysomething protagonist, escapes into the jungle of Rook Island after watching his brother Grant die at the

hands of the pirates who kidnapped them and their obnoxiously wealthy friends, he begins a journey that will not just lead him to save his friends and aid

the native population, but also to lose sight of morality as he is forged anew in the fires of combat.

That process is somewhat disconnected from our experience as players: At the end of the day, my giddy laughter while rampaging through enemies might not reflect terribly well on me as a person, but it happened knowing of the skewed perspective of the 'harmless' fiction I was consuming. Jason's slow descent into sweet insanity isn't something we share, as players, but it is something the game manages to illustrate beautifully via the most destructive parts of his power trip.

There are three basic events in the game that perfectly capture Jason's new role as gleeful killer, the first being your escape from a burning building and consequent car chase after rescuing your girlfriend Liza. You both hop into a truck, she takes the wheel while you fend off your pursuers with a conveniently placed grenade launcher. Jason whoops and yells with excitement over slight bass beats, pushing Liza to go faster even in her state of shock. "Those motherfuckers never saw that coming," in his words.

You can see this side of him again when you rescue your friend Oliver from being sold into slavery in a similar vehicle section. Oliver steers the boat while you lay down cover fire with a machine gun, whooping and yelling

with glee at the exploding boats and trucks around you. Oliver has a harder time enjoying the chaos, voice cracking with panic as he tries to maneuver the crowded waters. Again, the scene shows Jason excited over something that should leave him as shocked as his friend.

In the final, clearest example of his lust for destruction, Jason is tasked with destroying a drug lord's crop of marijuana, which mostly means going nuts with the flamethrower you have been given in between dealing with the pirates guarding the fields, Skrillex & Damian "Jr. Gong" Marley's *Make It Bun Dem* blasting from your speakers. A mix of Marley's rasta lyrics and Skrillex's bass heavy dubstep, it's an intoxicating soundtrack for your fiery adventures. You and Jason Brody both laughing as you torch plants and men.

Each one of these instances is about combining chaos and music to create that rush of adrenaline, the powerful rush that lets you forget the inhumanity of your own actions and lose yourself in the experience. That lets you experience the same reckless abandon Jason Brody has elected as his new life. *Far Cry 3*'s achievements and shortcomings as satire or commentary are another matter, but it sure knows how to hammer home a point with some drumming beats.

HW

The Scripted Sequence: Eye, Robot

Ethan Woods shares his
storytelling pet peeve.

Everyone understands that gaming is fundamentally in existence because of its interactivity. You can take away the sound and the writing and I even once saw one remove graphics entirely. But if you take away the interactivity, then all you're left with are disparate parts which might make a nice looking picture with an accompanying, slightly erratic soundtrack, but that's about it. Seems to me this begs the question of why games would take control from players and ask them to watch idly.

I am talking, of course, about cutscenes, a practice that seems to undermine fundamentally the fundamentality of the medium they're employed in. In theory, there's little difference between games using these little films and films using written flashcards, or novels using pictures. Ignoring the most basic convention of a medium is fine, but you'd better have a good reason to do so. And, as it turns out, most developers don't. Cutscenes are

simply used as convenient storytelling shorthand.

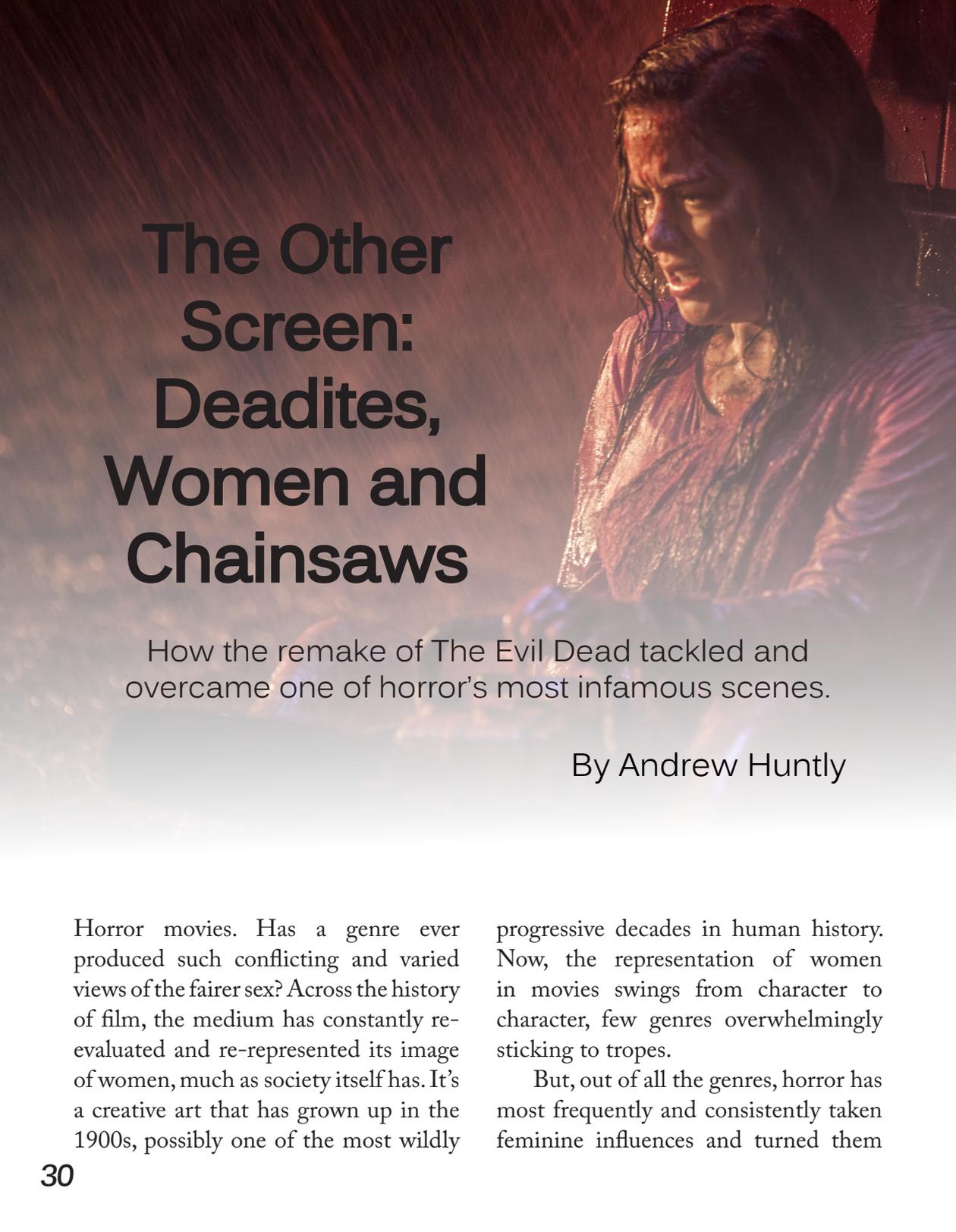
In a day and age where, more than ever, we're all hoping for video game storytelling to be taken more seriously, the reliance on cutscenes is undermining those efforts. How can anyone proclaim to evidence great video game storytelling if they relay their tale through what is effectively a film? That's cheating! We know how to do that. Stories have been told with actors following scripted actions and lines for thousands of years. You've not mastered video game storytelling, you're just repeating something that belongs to another medium.

If a game's plot can't be expressed without the use of regular cutscenes, then it is perhaps time to accept that it shouldn't be made. Or that the plot should be changed. There's no shame in a story not fitting a medium - I'm sure we've all heard of "unfilmable" books. Such a phrase shouldn't be considered

a slight against filmmaking, merely an acknowledgement that it has its weaknesses. Until developers, players and critics get that into their heads, then no amount of better writing and acting will allow video game storytelling to be what it should be.

Perhaps we must even admit that, amongst the storytelling media, gaming is the weakest, at least conventionally speaking. Instead of trying to emulate the sorts of plots seen in films, perhaps it's about time more effort was put into merely conveying experiences and emotions through the construction of mood and tone. Let the players sort out the intricacies themselves. These kinds of games already exist: *DayZ* and *EVE* are both fine and hugely different, examples of such an approach. As gaming stands right now though, it's a medium that's compromising its own potential out of the wish for a quick-fix to its problems. Maybe it's time to kick the habit.

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The Other Screen: Deadites, Women and Chainsaws

How the remake of *The Evil Dead* tackled and overcame one of horror's most infamous scenes.

By Andrew Huntly

Horror movies. Has a genre ever produced such conflicting and varied views of the fairer sex? Across the history of film, the medium has constantly re-evaluated and re-represented its image of women, much as society itself has. It's a creative art that has grown up in the 1900s, possibly one of the most wildly

progressive decades in human history. Now, the representation of women in movies swings from character to character, few genres overwhelmingly sticking to tropes.

But, out of all the genres, horror has most frequently and consistently taken feminine influences and turned them

into instantly recognizable tropes. From the parental fear of female puberty in *The Exorcist* and *Carrie* to the empathetic 'final girl,' the virginal princess of slasher flicks who is allowed to live because she doesn't have sex and doesn't take drugs, horror films have a surprisingly rich and deeply-rooted connection to women. A comprehensive study of these links would be far too broad and overwhelming for such a small article, so for now, I'd like to condense the discussion down into two movies of recent relevance: the original *The Evil Dead* and its recently released remake. This will be spoiler-tastic, so continue at your own peril.

The Evil Dead, made in 1981 by now blockbuster-maker Sam Raimi, is one of the most highly revered horror classics ever made. A rough, gory, messy film with an underpinning of slapstick comedy, the film was battered by censorship offices around the planet on its release, but has now secured its place in many a horror fan's heart with its plasticine gore, swooshing camera and oddly endearing wooden acting. It tells the story of five friends who go to spend a weekend at a cabin and consequently fall victim to a malevolent dark spirit after they free it from a flesh bound

The scene is staged to be disturbing and frightening, unlike the original.

to me known as the Necronomicon. I've always struggled to really 'like' *The Evil Dead*, despite my understanding and appreciation of its admiration, and it always comes back to one specific scene.

Early on in *The Evil Dead*, the character of Cheryl, sister of the series' poster boy Ash, is hunted in the woods by a demonic force, before being pinned down and sexually violated by crudely anthropomorphic trees. It's not the most excessively graphic scene of sexual assault in horror cinema, far from it, but it's portrayed in an uncomfortable, sexualized fashion. The human characteristics given to the trees and the focus on Cheryl's moaning tinge the assault with a cavalier immaturity that leaves a bitter taste in

the mouth. Raimi himself has spoken about his disdain for the scene, and excised it from the do-over *Evil Dead 2*.

In the new *Evil Dead* the scene has a very different edge. The remake's substitute for Cheryl, Mia, is held aloft in the branches, rather than lain on the ground with her legs splayed open in an inviting fashion. It's more Vitruvian Man than the overtly sexual original pose. The anthropomorphic trees are gone, replaced by more natural twisting, thorny branches. The actual violation



is considerably more brief, with actress Jane Levy playing distinct terror. The scene is staged to be disturbing and frightening, unlike the original where a young Raimi's playfulness got the better of him and produced an uncomfortable, nasty scene that finds little defense even from its creator.

However, the biggest difference between the two scenes is not simply their direction, it's how Cheryl and Mia are portrayed through the rest of their respective films. Cheryl's rape literally dehumanizes her, turning her into the first deadite and the catalyst for the horrors at the cabin. It's something she never recovers from, simply serving as slack character development for her brother Ash, who needs to overcome

his mild and slightly weak nature. She never receives any justice for the crimes visited upon her, nor does she overcome them. Her role in the movie after the rape is just as disturbing and ill-judged as the actual scene itself. In the end, Ash destroys the Necronomicon, and in turn destroys his sister and the rest of his friends, leaving Cheryl nothing more than a victim for the entire duration of the film.

In contrast, Mia still becomes the first deadite, but instead of being destroyed by her brother, is instead saved by him. David, the almost-surrogate Ash, refuses to kill his sister and instead chooses to use the mythology of the book against itself, managing to bring her back to her human self. Beyond

that, he chooses to sacrifice himself for her, destroying the cabin while still inside to stop the final deadite. Instead of becoming a tool to promote his ruthlessness, Mia's rape forces David to finally take responsibility for his past selfishness.

This further character development is not limited to David. After he resurrects Mia, the mutilations and scars formed upon her are gone, her face clear and human again. It's a nice metaphor, highlighting her transition back to reality and life after her assault. The final confrontation in the film takes place between Mia and the Abomination, the physical manifestation of her aggressor. In its blood-soaked climax Mia destroys the creature with a chainsaw through

the mouth, an unmistakably sexualized destruction. Rather than be a slave to her oppressor, as Cheryl was presented, Mia overcomes and eventually prevails. She is no longer a victim. She is a survivor.

There's something oddly poignant about the way *Evil Dead* has twisted this scene. Horror movies are infamous for the idea of the pure 'final girl', spared on account of her virtuous, virgin nature. In *Evil Dead*, the final girl is one who was fiercely violated but, with the help of her family, overcame it and won. It's a strong message, one that elevates the film from just another competent but unfulfilling remake, and it makes for an excellent twist on tiring mainstream horror tropes.

HW

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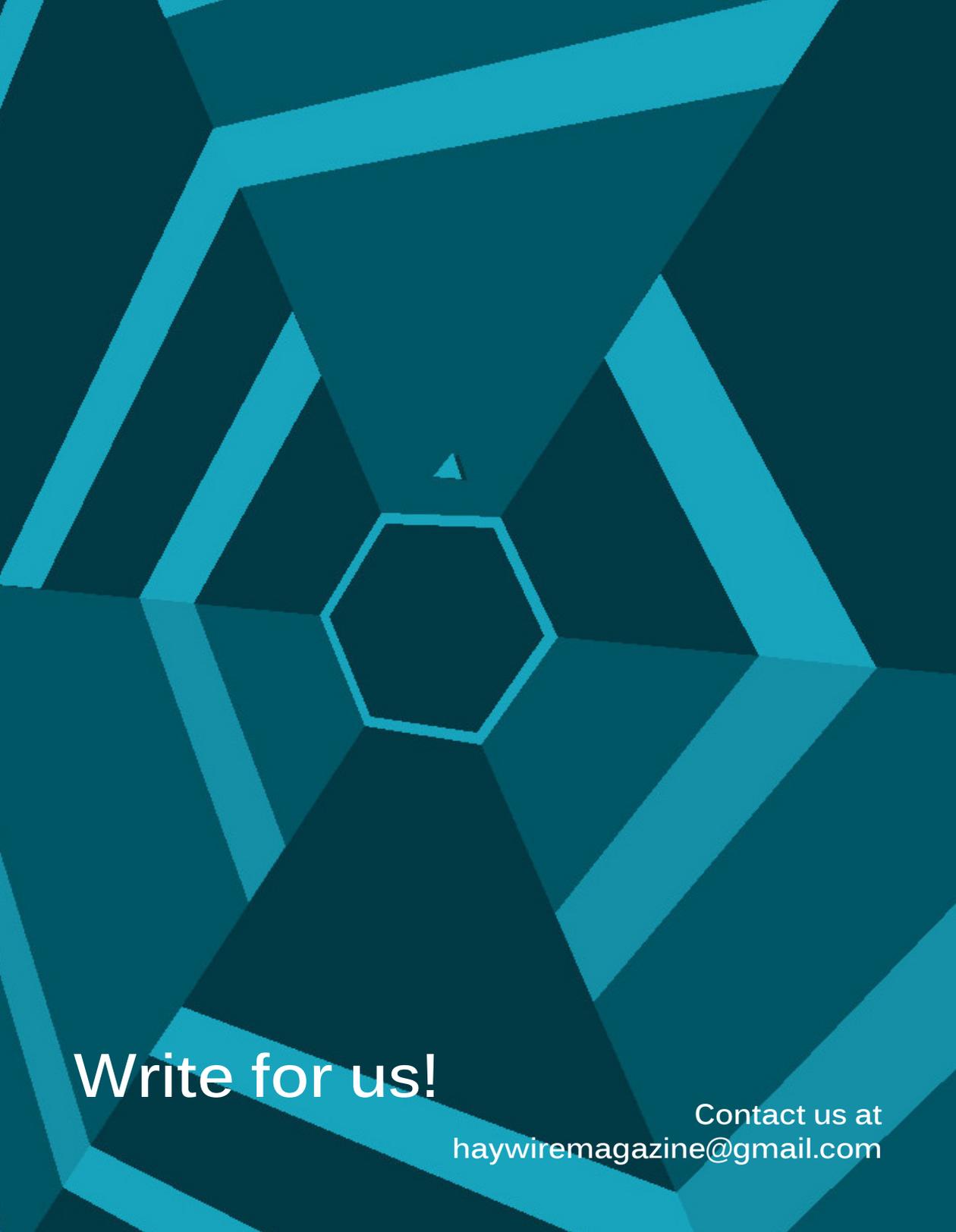
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