

# UNWINNABLE MONTHLY

*Volume 7, Issue 10 - October 2020*



**UMURANGI GENERATION • DUNGEON CRAWLERS  
• DEATH IN VIDEOGAMES**

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*Monthly*

*132*



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## CONTRIBUTORS





This issue is packed, so let's just get right into it. This thing is 84 pages long, you don't need me rattling on.

Our main feature by Adam Goodall looks at art and political resistance in *Umurangi Generation*. Our second feature has Orrin Grey looking at his history with dungeon crawling board games. Nicholas Straub delivers our third feature, on how death is not the end in videogames. Our sponsored feature looks at the near disastrous development of *Robot Champions*.

In the columns, Noah Springer's got five hip hop albums for you to check out. Harry Rabinowitz has three witchy comics. Oluwatayo Adewole has thoughts on an Indonesian metal band and a documentary about the perpetrators of Indonesia's political massacres in 1965. Diego Nicolás Argüello tells us some ghost stories. Declan Taggart presents a review of *Pendragon* in pick-your-path form.

Melissa King pens a letter to *Final Fantasy XIV*'s Krile. Ben Sailer sees the inclusion of Colin Kaepernick in *Madden NFL 2020* as too little, too late. Matt Marrone gets a new Apple Watch. Yussef Cole gets in the groove of Steve McQueen's *Lovers Rock*. Autumn Wright ponders the post-apocalypse. Justin Reeve takes in the architecture in *Ashen*. Rob Rich admires the character flaws introduced in *The Legend of Korra*.

Topping it all off, we chat with Skullfungus, indie dungeon mapmaker extraordinaire.

Have yourselves a happy Halloween!

Stu Horvath  
Kearny, New Jersey  
October 14, 2020



**G**oddamn, fall is a great season for hip hop! Last year, I was overwhelmed by all the quality drops over the full season, and this year, September 25 seemed to mark the beginning of the season with an amazing selection of releases I just can't do justice. Keep in mind though, I'm not sure I can ever do justice to the glut of good hip hop released these days. Regardless, I'll do my best, but I am going to stick to albums that only came out on the 25th of September. I might have to revisit this legendary Friday later in the year, but this is a start.

## **Joji – *Nectar***

I struggled to write this column for October because for the last two weeks, I've basically had [Nectar](#) on repeat. Nearly everyday since it dropped, I've woken up with at least three tracks running through my head (mainly "Daylight," "Pretty Boy," and "Your Man"). This is my kind of pop music, full of deep bass, crisp drums, heavy synths and ethereal vocals. The lyrical content is a little banal in the grand scheme of things, but Joji keeps it interesting enough to keep the luscious instrumentals together. This whole thing drips with melancholic charisma that oozes out of the vocal work and instrumentals that I never would have thought could come from the guy formerly known as TVFilthyFrank, but here we are.



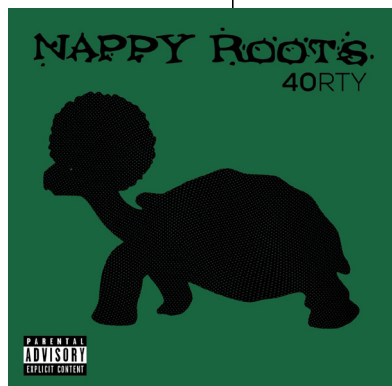
### Spillage Village – *Spilligion*

Remember March? It feels like a different time, but that's when JID rented out a house in Atlanta to record his third album. Instead of having some folks stop by for features, when quarantine dropped on all of us, he invited EarthGang, Hollywood JB, Mereba, 6lack, Benji and Jurdan Bryant to settle in and make a new Spillage Village album: *Spilligion*. As always, the Spill Vill team bounce back and forth off each other with precision and the hazy, neo-soul beats provide a gorgeous palette for their technical lyricism. Together, the crew has produced an album that feels fueled by contemporary anxieties. From the systemic racism exposed by the BLM protests to losing unemployment pay, *Spilligion* describes the specific vibes of 2020, letting you experience it from their cloudy, haze-infused couch. This isn't exactly a timeless album (although there are few timeless songs, including “Mecca” and “End of Daze”), but it was timely as hell, and might help you through this interminable isolation of quarantine. Now I'm left waiting on that JID album though.



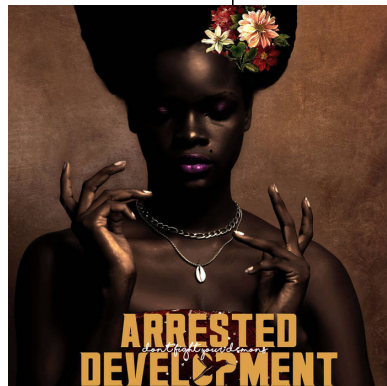
### Nappy Roots – *40RTY*

I've been saying that Nappy Roots are one of the [most underrated](#) hip hop groups for a while, mainly because they produce their unique sound with astounding consistency. They've never replicated the success of “Good Day,” “Po' Folks” and “Aww Naww” in the '00s, but they've released a stream of albums that are fire, and *40RTY* is just another feather in their cap. As always, this album has a steady stream of thoughtful, complex lyrics and tight beats, but also feels a little more minimalist than some of their previous work. Regardless, if you haven't listened to them since they broke into the mainstream, come back and check out their new material. But even if you don't, if you live in Kentucky (\*wink\* \*wink\* Amanda), you should put a note in your calendar for next September 16th so you can remember to celebrate “Nappy Roots Day.”



### Arrested Development – *Don't Fight Your Demons*

I'll come clean on this one, *Don't Fight Your Demons* is the first Arrested Development album I've listened to in full. But, if the rest of their lengthy discography holds up to the quality of this most recent project, I've some listening ahead of me. This is a lyrical assault on the contemporary failures of America, attacking capitalism and poverty, the police state, the COVID response, among other problems that we see on the daily. The boom bap beats and soul samples provide a traditional backdrop for refined lyricism that is fun but potent. I think I'm about to dip back to 1991 to check out their debut, *3 Years, 5 Months, and 2 Days in the Life Of...*



### Action Bronson – *Only For Dolphins*

Frankly, I'm amazed that I haven't written up an Action Bronson album in this column yet. Unless I'm forgetting, Action is the artist I've seen most in concert (what can I say, he frequented Colorado a lot when I was there). I even got pulled backstage by his producer Party Supplies in Denver one night for some pre-show shenanigans, which might be the coolest thing I've ever done.

Anyway, I've got some love in my heart for Bronson, and on *Only For Dolphins*, he brings his usual charismatic self, delivering lyrical twists and turns over jazzy, funky beats. This is a solid release from Young Baklava, featuring everything you'd expect from the Flushing, Queens native, including some high quality dolphin sounds. I'm also happy to see Action trying to trying his hand at the painterly arts. I'm really tempted to buy the vinyl to get the poster that comes with it. 🐬





## Coven Edition

Fall is here, and you know what that means.

“Pumpkin spice!”

“Sweaters!”

“Gourds?”

Well, yes, those things are here too, but I was going to talk about witches and magic, actually.

In honor of our resident witches, this month’s column features lots and lots of witchy comics. ‘Tis the season.

### *Witch Hat Atelier, Volume 1*

*Witch Hat Atelier*, an [award winning manga](#) that came to the US last year, is about a girl thrust into a world of magic and secrecy. On the personal level, it’s about an overly curious, excitable, talkative girl who stumbles into a world she does not belong to. On a more thematic level, it’s about the responsibility and reality of power.

*Witch Hat Atelier* stars Coco, our aforementioned excitable pre-teen who works as a tailor with her mother in their humble village. While she is excellent with cloth, Coco’s real obsession is magic. The glowing cobblestones streets of the city, the ever-pure spring in the neighboring forest, the flying carriages ridden by nobles, Coco lives for such sights. But in a world where magic is everywhere, it is only understood by witches.

#### HARRY RECOMMENDS:

*Witch Hat Atelier*

*Volume 1.* By Kamome Shirahama. Translated by Stephen Kohler

GENRE: Fantasy,

Adventure, Magic

Rating: 12 and up (fear, peril)

INFO: Published by Kodansha Comics.

208pp.

AVAILABLE AT:

[BookShop](#), [IndieBound](#),  
[Your Local Comics Store](#)

Read the first chapter free at [Kodansha Comics](#).



Witches are the keepers of magic in the world. You are either born a witch or you are not. Most people are not. How witches cast their spells is a deeply guarded secret.

Or at least, that's what the witches have told everyone.

The set up and reversal of this initial world building is what makes *Witch Hat Atelier* immediately gripping. Within the first two chapters, we discover the truth: that magic can be cast by *anyone* because magic is cast by simply drawing special symbols. A total novice can cast the world's most powerful spells, even by *tracing*.

According to the witches, once upon a time, everyone was casting magic. Because of magic's power and ubiquity, the world was locked in endless war. A select few witches took extreme measures to create a new status quo, one where magic knowledge and power are obsessively guarded. Only then did the world find peace.

How much of *that* is true remains to be seen...

After Coco learns these secrets, her magical experimentation goes horribly awry, and she is quickly taken in by a teacher named Qifrey. At his atelier, Coco dives into the world of witches, and finds out how much of an outsider she truly is.

Coco serves as a great surrogate for the audience: enough of her own person with her own motives, but also a child outsider, meaning we get to learn most things alongside her. Her reactions are comedic and heartfelt, keeping this tale of magic, witches and secrets personal. Qifrey, on the other hand, serves as our key to the larger world. His scenes reveal his own outsider status within the institutions of the witching world, and the impact of Coco's presence upon their society.

While the story is fun and fascinating, author Kamome Shirahama's amazing artwork puts *Witch Hat Atelier* above and beyond its contemporaries. A cover artist for DC and Marvel comics, as well as a burgeoning author, *Witch Hat Atelier* is her first manga to be translated into English, and by far her longest running. Shirahama's character designs are incredibly appealing, her depiction of clothes and fabric beautiful and her encyclopedic entries regarding creatures



and items are worthy of picture books. Through Shirahama's art, *Witch Hat Atelier* feels like an old fairy tale. Influences from older illustrators, like John Tenniel (Alice in Wonderland), and older media, like book plate etchings, are abundant.

*Witch Hat Atelier* feels honest and exciting. Its world is full of mystery, both enchanting and horrifying. The themes of power, secrecy, and trust are strong. If the next four volumes are anything like this one, I think we have the makings of a truly magical series.

### ***Black Magick Volume 1: Awakening I***

Detective Rowan Black has a problem: she got a call from work while in the middle of an evening ritual with her coven. Everyone is a bit pissed at her, but more importantly, the work business she needs to attend to is a gun-toting man with hostages threatening to shoot until the cops bring him detective Rowan Black.

After a tense encounter, it becomes clear that *someone* is on to Rowan's detective-witch dual identity. Someone who seems to want her dead.

*Black Magick* is a slow burn, sharing many concepts with shows like *Dexter* and *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*, but focusing much harder on the central mystery of who knows Rowan's identity. We spend much of the first volume seeing pieces fall into place: allies, romances, clues, motives, and secret organizations. The key question is: who would know Rowan is a witch, and who would want her dead?

Greg Rucka (*The Old Guard*, *Lazarus*, *Batman*) is a veteran comics writer, and it shows in *Black Magick*. Mysteries are not easy to write, but Rucka balances detective work and character relationships excellently. The story feels mature, with characters never devolving into clearly-for-the-audience dialogue. Adding to that feeling is the fact that everyone seems to have secrets, and no one is eager to spill their hearts out to each other. This is a mystery with, and for, adults.

Nicola Scott (*Birds of Prey*, *Wonder Woman*) compounds this with a black and white, painterly style focused on realism. While stiffer than what I usually go for, the detail on anatomy and body proportions really solidifies the gritty detective feel the series is going for. And when magic finally does come into play, Scott depicts it with splashes of vibrant color that make it feel properly otherworldly.

#### HARRY RECOMMENDS:

*Black Magick Volume 1: Awakening I*. Written by Greg Rucka. Illustrated by Nicola Scott

GENRE: Mystery, Suspense, Supernatural  
Rating: Mature (nudity, violence, blood, gore, language)

INFO: Published by Image Comics. 128pp.

AVAILABLE AT:  
[BookShop](#), [IndieBound](#),  
[Your Local Comics Store](#)

Read the first issue free at [Image Comics](#).



For mysteries in particular, it is hard to judge based off of a first volume. But Rucka and Scott have created a strong start to what is hopefully an excellent dark magical mystery.

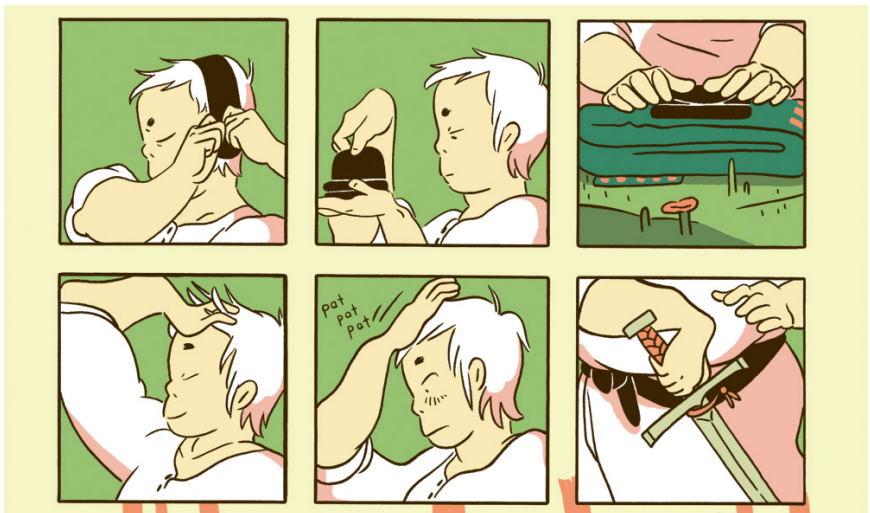
**Witchlight**

*Witchlight* is the story of an unlikely duo: a witch named Lelek who is not whole and her hostage turned traveling companion/knight Sanja. The story is a focused, simple tale of love, trust, family and what it means to change for the better.

But it's author Jessi Zabarsky's art that makes this book shine. Her characters feel straight out of an animated show, with clean and minimal line work that makes for readable, expressive characters. Similarly, Zabarsky uses tiny sequential frames to show small moments I am not used to seeing in comics; the bend of a sword as it flies into a tree trunk, someone's face changing as they start to cry, the hesitation in someone's fingers before finally reaching out to hold someone's hand. These micro panels add detail to Sanja and Lelek characters that might have been missing otherwise. Zabarsky's sequencing is something more illustration-heavy artists should take note of.

Also, Lelek, the witch, casts magic from her fingertips. Literally. She brews magic potions, dips her fingertips in them, and when the potion dries, she has *magical fingertips*. It's pretty cool. 🪄

HARRY RECOMMENDS:  
*Witchlight*. By Jessi Zabarsky. Color by Geov Chouteau.  
GENRE: Fantasy, Romance, Young Adult  
Rating: 12 and up (violence)  
INFO: Published by Random House Graphic. 208pp.  
Available at: [BookShop](#), [IndieBound](#), [Your Local Comics Store](#).





**W**elcome to this month's edition of World Tour! So get your bowl of nasi goreng ready and let's dive in!

## **Voice of Baceprot**

To kick us off we've got Voice of Baceprot, a metal trio from Indonesia. They've only got a few songs out, but each of them is incredible. There's an energy to their music which is impossible not to vibe with and feel that spirit of rebellion. Though often not the focus, the vocals on each track are entrancing and powerful. They also mix rap and metal in a way that actually works really well - which is more than can be said for most attempts to synthesise the two.

What makes this trio unique, apart from their talent, is that they started as a group of schoolgirls in one of the more conservative parts of Indonesia (West Java) who found the heavy metal records collected by their music teacher (who is now their manager) and got into metal from there.

It would be extremely easy to force them into the gaze of Western liberal feminism, which crafted the bans on Islamic veils in French law. I could create a narrative about Muslim schoolgirls breaking free of an "oppressive faith" and moving into modernity (as defined by the Christian West). In fact, a lot of the pieces written about them do exactly that - almost treating them like a curiosity rather than a group of artists. It's true that there are complicated gender politics within Islam (especially around the veil), and constant ongoing conversation within various communities. However, a trio of sixteen-year-old girls forming a metal band and performing on their country's biggest talk show

is groundbreaking anywhere – especially in metal, where the mainstream is so dominated by men.

VoB are all about pushing past these expectations and making music on their own terms. In an interview with the Guardian, Kurnia, their vocalist and guitarist said “I think what we want to say to the young women of Indonesia is, don't be afraid of being different. Don't be afraid to shout your independence.” That's what they're constantly doing in every song, shouting their independence. Pushing free from both the conservatism of their home province and the expectations of the 'liberal' Western gaze they're starting their School Revolution and there's nothing any of us can do about it.



### **The Act of Killing**

From 1965-66, the military and various militias killed anywhere between 500,000 and three million people suspected to be Communists in the space of a year. Killings were often arbitrary, or based on someone being of Chinese heritage, and ripped through families and communities. The US had intimate knowledge of these killings but didn't even make a public statement about them.

This documentary covers a group of the perpetrators nearly 50 years later, asking them to recreate the atrocities they committed for a film of their own.

The first thing that hits you about the documentary is the nonchalance with which the men discuss these grizzly killings. They're not Nazis hiding in Argentina, people know exactly who they are and what they did. Josh Oppenheimer (the documentarian) hardly has to do any prodding at all. Instead, they gush endlessly about what they did. They give locations, methods, their state of mind, their thought process as they did this. All of this feels less confessional and more like old men recounting war stories. There's that same wistful tone, those same rose-tinted glasses we all see in our elders as they recount times gone by.

There is a boisterous joy and camaraderie to a lot of these men and the quasi-fascistic paramilitary group Pancasila Youth which grew out of the original death squads. For most of the documentary, it's not solemnity or horror behind the eyes – it's unadulterated joy. That's the terrifying thing. Part of the way through, Ibrahim Sinik, a newspaper publisher, is asked about his role in the killings. What gets him fired up isn't the accusation that he was involved in apocryphal interrogations for nonsense information which justified many of these murders – he even brags about it. What insulted him was the insinuation that he got his hands dirty. He ended up shouting "Why would I do such grunt work? Why would I kill people? Just one wink from me and they're dead."



With villainous monologues like this and the many other disgusting things admitted in the documentary, it would be easy to characterize these men as monsters. Soulless beings wearing human shells that were destined to be that way -- bearing no resemblance to us at all. But the most effective part of the documentary, especially the longer director's cut, is reiterating that these men are people. Gangsters and rapists and murderers and exploiters and class traitors and chauvinists but still fundamentally human. You see these men joke, carry their children, drink and sing. You watch one of them brush his teeth in the morning. You watch another retch and struggle to spit out phlegm.

Crucially, the longer you watch, the more you see how pathetic these men are. Their brazenness and celebration of their action is ultimately a facade, covering for the fact that they are for the most part deeply traumatised by the heinous acts they committed. The main person we follow, Anwar Congo (who was said to have killed 1,000 people in the massacre) can't sleep at night, he's too haunted by the memories of what he did, yet by day he's paraded around as a war hero -- even appearing on national TV. You can always see



the desperation to cling onto the narrative that they were righteous. Even a flimsy fantasy is easier to cope with than accepting guilt for the atrocities. This appears most distinctly in two moments:

The first is when mid-way through filming, one of the men working on the film bares his soul and talks about how his Chinese stepfather was taken by the paramilitary troops. He then starts describing finding the body with his grandfather and burying it in a shallow grave. Whilst telling this he's giving a terrifying forced laugh – as if framing his trauma as comedic is the only way he can cope and be allowed to tell it. However, as soon as he's done, the ex-paramilitary men say that the story can't be included. They give various excuses, saying it will make the film too long, or too sad. But the reality is that it would challenge their narrative as the men who did what needed to be done, even if their methods were extreme. Any complication topples their house of cards.



The second is when our central figure, Congo, mass killer and hero of the Pancasila Youth, acts as the victim in one of the killings he's done a thousand times -- and he breaks. He panics and refuses to do another take, it's like it finally dawned on him that the people he did this to were real, and they felt fear and pain. He even tries to say that he gets it now, that he feels what they felt -- though Oppenheimer immediately and correctly pushes back on this, telling him that their fear was unimaginably worse because he knew that ultimately he would live.

In displaying their wretched humanity, Oppenheimer refuses to Other them. They're not foreign barbarians who haven't been civilized yet. In fact,

they are directly influenced by the US. Congo was inspired by Hollywood for some of his methods of killing, saying “When I was young I always watched American films and imitated them.” Now this isn’t to say that the American Western genre is responsible for this mass killing, but it does serve as a useful pointer for the way that the American (and broader Western) imperialism was and is the biggest exporter of violence globally – especially in killings like this which are born out of the Cold War. This violence is much bigger than Indonesia.

In the world we inhabit we eat, sleep and breathe violence. Capitalism and the plethora of hierarchies it intertwines with require that human relations are consumptive and competitive. Within capitalism, all we can do is create flimsy narratives to justify and ignore that violence and offload it onto the global South. One of the men involved in the killings actually wears a shirt that says “Apathetic” on it. Much like the men in *The Act of Killing*, we tell obvious lies to each other and to ourselves so that we can continue to live our lives without being burdened by the guilt of the violence we are all complicit in (to varying degrees) – particularly in the global North.

That’s why *Gone With the Wind* is/was revered and why we’re inundated with period pieces that refuse to meaningfully interrogate the class/colonial violence that this splendor is built upon. To acknowledge that our soil is fed by the bones of the exploited and the enslaved is burdensome, but it is absolutely necessary. Otherwise, we let those violence happen again and again and again. That violence which creates prisons where there should be community centres because it’s more profitable to use Black and Brown people for slave-like labour. That violence which uses venture capital to turn desperate people into the henchmen of landlords to make people houseless during a pandemic, instead of helping to improve their conditions. That violence which consumes endlessly as the world burns.

The time for the facade is over. 🇺🇸





## Ghost Stories

I have been thinking what I wanted to write in October for a couple weeks now. Truth is, I had planned the first two pieces of Traces a long while ago, and now I'm free to pick up any of the ones on my (ever growing) list. By now you should know about my early steps in freelance journalism and my awful work habits, so I wanted to try something different.

October marks the terrifying Halloween season, so I thought this one would be appropriate. You will read a lot about myself yet again, but this story is different. In fact, you could consider it an anthology of sorts – one on my relationship with horror games, and on ghost stories. I'll let you decide if they're fictional or not.

Happy Halloween.

### I

My parents got divorced when I was 12. It took a couple more years for my father to finally have his own place, first staying at a friend's house and then settling down with his new partner. Once that happened, my routine involved weekly visits where my brother and I would spend the weekend with them. The apartment wasn't that big, but during those two days a week, I had a room of my own – packed with a modest TV, my PS2 and a 2-lite slider window.

It was rather simple all around. We would hang out for lunch on Saturday, chill during the afternoon watching whatever was on TV, prepare dinner and head to bed. My brother was young at the time, so he slept in their bedroom. This meant free reign to play *Guitar Hero*, watch a movie or, eventually, sext with my ex. It was yet another regular night when I saw them for the first time.



I remember being in bed with my phone. Summer was just around the corner, so I was there half naked with the windows open, my screen being the only source of light within the calm room. But I started feeling cold all of the sudden. It was a rarity, sure, but it tends to get chilly during the night in spring, so I didn't pay too much attention. Until it started getting under my skin, feeling as if I had a fever all of the sudden.

All it took was for me to look away from my phone to see the figure of a woman pass by at inhuman speed. I couldn't distinguish much. In my memory, she always had black hair and white clothes, but the image wasn't clear. The cold had overcome my entire body, and I quickly turned to my right, facing the wall.

I grabbed my phone again and called my ex. She laughed when I told her I had just seen a ghost for the first time, reassuring me that it wasn't going to do anything to me. It did not calm me, and it took me a while to fall asleep that night. Covered from heads to toe with a blanket, sweating as if I had a fever. The room returned to its regular temperature afterwards.



## II

*Outlast* was one of the first horror games I ever finished on my own. My father and I used to spend entire evenings trying to understand *Silent Hill's* puzzles when I was young, and we always held fond memories of *Resident Evil Survivor*. The genre always intrigued me, but I get scared easily. Seeing the end credits took me several months, as my sessions didn't last longer than 20 to 60 minutes at a time.

There was also the fact that I always searched for the perfect ambience. Over time, I got used to booting the game up only during rainy nights.

## III

My mother has always been more sympathetic with the supernatural. I really don't know why, nor did I ever asked. I explained the situation and, perhaps it was my pale face as I described the night, but she was convinced. As usual, she

told my father about it without me knowing. During the following weekend, he said that it was probably all in my head. I let it rest and, for a while, I was able to sleep calmly. Even if I never felt comfortable in that room again.

Summer finally arrived. Again, half naked, windows opened, chatting with my ex. I start feeling cold, and with that I begin to worry. A few minutes pass by as I try not to think about it too much, but I'm interrupted by the oppressive embrace of the room as the windows get slammed and I hear a barefoot sprint right beside me, running towards the door. My breathing grew heavy, my heart was about to burst out of my chest. I turn to my right and cover myself with a blanket, facing the wall again. I grab my phone and call my ex, barely being able to hold the device steady. I remind her that it's a 2-lite slider window.

She sounded more worried that time around.



#### IV

I was excited to finally dive into *Resident Evil 7*. It had been a while since the last time the series dived into horror. Everything seemed quite different compared to *Resident Evil Survivor*, despite the fact that they're the only ones who share a first person perspective. I wasn't in a decaying city, but rather a lush and lonely forest, searching for a house. My father wasn't playing alongside me, either.

Something made me go for a full stop when I opened the first door, the insides of the room greeting me with nothing but darkness.

I paused the game and messaged a friend on Steam.

"Hey, I know this might sound random but I'm playing *Resident Evil 7* and I'm... terrified. If you're free, do you mind if I stream it to you?"

#### V

I'm watching a TV show. My ex's friends are in a mall, but I only see snippets interrupted by camera cuts. There's music, but I don't quite recognize it. The

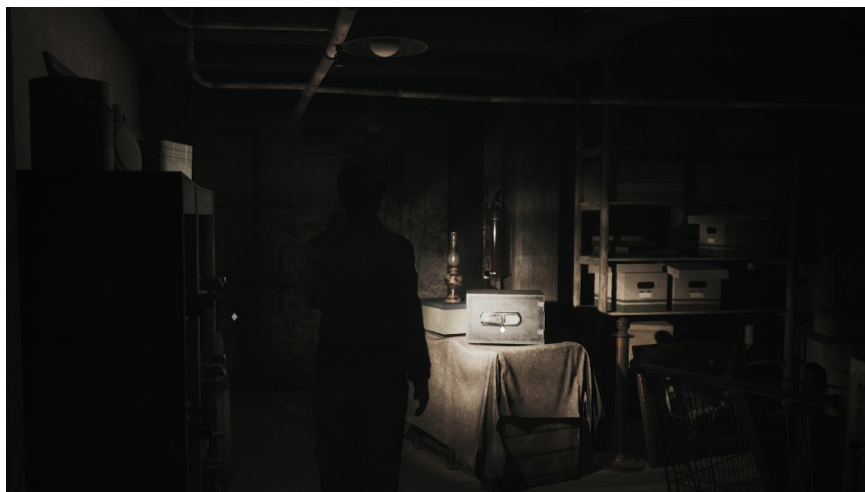
three of them smile at me at times. I see them running and jumping around. They wear colorful wigs and joke around. I have no recollection of this. I don't remember seeing them this happier before.

I wake up in my bed. A pale face is looking at me when I open my eyes, smiling ear to ear.

## VI

The first day of the event was exhausting. We weren't just there as press – they had given us our own booth (rather, an improvised table near the food trucks) so we spent the whole day with the sun in our faces. I return home later in the night and immediately jump into the bed. I just wanted to rest for a while.

I'm facing the opposite side of the living room, as I try to zone out from the noises of my family, occasionally going to the kitchen or laughing from the bedroom while watching TV. Naps are almost non-existent unless I wear my headphones, but I try my best.



As I'm resting my eyes, a finger goes down the back of my head, scratching me. I turned around annoyed, ready to yell at my younger brother to let me rest for a little longer.

Nobody was there.

## VII

I have been in the same position for over half an hour. The metal plates where my hands and feet are resting aren't cold anymore, and I can barely sense their pulsing movement now. I hear a profuse breathing as the woman in the room walks around me in circles. At times talking. At times completely

silent. I can't see anything either way. She asked me to keep my eyes closed until she said otherwise.

My chest had been feeling thinner for a while now, barely letting me breathe anymore. I couldn't sleep much at night, terrified of the things that could manifest in my dreams. Or worse, outside of them. My mom knew someone who could help. She told me what reiki was on our way to her place. I didn't pay much attention. I barely paid attention to anything by then, except for my shortness of breath.

"What you had is called triangulation. It's a very serious job that requires three people. Whoever did this to you... did not like you at all. At one point I didn't think I was going to be able to do it on my own."

We got lunch afterwards. My chest felt lighter. My mom looked at me surprised. "Your face has color again."

## VIII

Being on my own at my current place is a rarity. Ever since my father moved and I stopped visiting him, I no longer have the luxury of a room all for myself. But I get by, despite always being surrounded by family.

During a Saturday afternoon, just before jumping into the shower to get ready for the evening, I decide to take off my headphones and play music using the speakers instead. But I'm suddenly interrupted by a noise coming from the room. It sounds like bare feet moving.



I sense them getting closer, exiting the room and turning around the corner. Everything goes quiet. I slowly look to my left. A dark figure leans.

Cold, shivers, the sudden oppressiveness. I close my eyes and tell myself that this isn't real. I repeat it for what it feels like an eternity.

## IX

I started playing *Song of Horror* mainly because I want a recent example to add to my column, and it has been sitting on my backlog for months now. The main character is sent to a house to look for someone, but he ends up trapped inside a basement. You then pick up from a roster of people -- his ex wife, his boss and two workers of the house to investigate the scene and find more about his whereabouts. The game has an AI-based enemy called The Presence, which reacts differently depending on your actions.



As I begin looking for items to complete puzzles in a very old school fashion, I begin to see it in action. Lights flicker, someone knocks on the door, the figure of a kid runs past a corridor.

The next thing I see is my character escaping from danger, this time tangible. At first this is done with a quick time event holding a door. Then, I had to hide her inside a wardrobe. But the enemy was inside as well, manifesting itself as a dozen hands and faces. I am told to manage my character's breath in between heartbeats. After a few seconds, the darkness is gone.

I don't feel like streaming it to a friend this time around.

## X

I'm sitting in bed trying to finish writing yet another preview. It is my last night in this hotel, even though E3 still has two more days of show ahead. My mouth is dry -- I ran out of water hours ago and it's impossible to get more at 4 am. I decide to get some sleep so I can get up as early as possible, pack my things and head to my last few appointments before picking my suitcase and rushing to the airport. I'm eager to return home, thousands of miles away. Work is all I could think of during the past few days.

I hear noises in the room. Footsteps again, barefoot. I didn't think they could follow me all the way here.

This time I didn't want to look. I was too busy to do so either way.

## XI

An hour or so after telling my editor the draft for my column was going to be a bit late, I sat on my desk and started writing. It is almost midnight, so my family is getting ready to sleep. Time passes, and I begin sensing the darkness of the living room. I get shivers recalling my stories, some of which I had tried hard to forget. My youngest brother shows up all of the sudden to say goodnight, and I literally gasp when his face emerges right beside me. He laughs and mocks me. "What did you think I was, a ghost?"

A half an hour or so later, I use my phone as a lantern to go to the bathroom. I decide to check Instagram to distract myself, but this person used a filter that made her eyes huge and distorted on one of her stories. A chill runs down my spine. I close the tab and return to the PC.

I'm halfway there, but I'm starting to feel uneasy, so I relocate to my bed to finish the draft on my phone. I hear my uncle leaving his headphones on the table before heading to the bathroom. The same noise repeats itself seconds after.

The wind outside throws the clothes rack in the balcony against the floor, which makes me jump for a brief second. I see my mom coming from the bedroom to pick it back up. I take this as a chance to breathe. It is easier to stay away from them when I'm not the only one around.

It's almost 2 a.m. and it's getting rather cold, despite the fact that we're not even half into Spring. But I'm used to nights like these. All I have to do is turn around facing the wall, and tell myself this isn't real.

## XII

"Diego, I asked my mom about the other night."

"Huh?"

"Remember when you told me a couple weeks ago that you saw my mom bringing clean clothes to my room while we were sleeping?"

"Yeah. She looked kinda sad."

"It wasn't her." 🍷





## Write Your Own Pendragon Review

*Warning: contains small spoilers for Pendragon.*

1.

You step off the ferry onto the banks of the river Avelion, your boots splashing into the mud of Britain for the first time since the Round Table was split apart. Behind you, the river gurgles. It is not the babbling of a brook in springtime. More the bubbling up of saliva in the throat of a hanging man.

- a) The gurgle is the perfect way to foreshadow the travails that lie ahead of me. Go to 2.
- b) This is altogether too melodramatic. Go to 3.

2.

The warnings of the river are well taken. You heft your spear in your hand and step away from its banks. As you walk, you feel the weight of tradition on you, the weight of over a thousand years of stories, of King Arthur and of others, mutating with every telling.

Like that of your weapon, tradition is a burden that you will relish bearing on your journey northwards, towards Arthur, his traitorous son Mordred and the battle that will decide the future of this broken land.

Go to 4.



3.

Though the descriptions of fallen Britain are not always so extravagant – indeed, the text that appears around you, chronicling your travels, is usually little more than scene setting – you step warily away from the river. Better to walk carefully than to blunder into an especially hammy bit of prose and choke before you can reach Arthur.

You have wronged Arthur, and yet he needs you now more than ever before, as he prepares to battle his son Mordred somewhere in the North.

Go to 4.

4.

Passing by a farm – a series of run-down sheds that barely deserve the title – you reflect on the devastation done to Britain. How could this have happened? And yet your own tumble from your high seat has been no less striking.

a) I was a queen! Go to 5.

b) I was Arthur's most loyal companion and the greatest of his knights! Go to 6.

c) Who was I again? Go to 7.

5.

You are Queen Guinevere! Others have recited your own story to you many times, but you have never felt so much agency over it as you do today.

Go to 8.

6.

You are Sir Lancelot! Your tragedies are predictable but they could still pierce a rock-hard heart. Nonetheless, your biography might have been more fun if you'd been hiding away as a nun all these years.

Go to 8.

7.

You are a mysterious stranger! Even you do not know who you are yet, though your identity will be unlocked as you make this journey again and again, meeting new friends and foes.

Many of the mechanics of how you fight will be familiar by then, though there's a chance you will have some unusual trick to share and an even greater possibility that the story of your personal connection with Arthur will be fresh and engaging.

Go to 8.

8.

The sun is setting. Night creeps from over the mountain, invading the fields and forests. You stumble onwards in the dying light and find yourself in a place that you swear was not here the last time you walked this countryside. Britain has changed.

- a) It is a thick wood, almost impassable. Go to 9.
- b) It is a barrow, home now only to vermin and ghosts. Go to 9.
- c) It is another farm with no livestock in its fields. Go to 9.

9.

You plod through the unfamiliar space, moving from square to square – for that is how the land of Britain is laid out these days. People travel along chessboard-like areas a tile at time, having to wait for others to take their turns before they can move again.

You wonder if this foul place might be safe enough to rest for the night.

In the darkness, you hear a crash. Something has broken through the undergrowth. You move forwards another step. The thing changes its stance in the darkness, readying itself to fight. You move forwards again. Again it changes stance, to one better suited for movement. You move forwards another step.

It's a wolf! And another joins it out of the darkness!

- a) I will surely destroy these beasts! Go to 10.
- b) I choose to run away! Go to 11.
- c) Haven't I beaten enough wolves and rats and snakes already?  
No matter a few more will not make much difference. Go to 12.

10.

A brave choice. Any enemy might be your death, be they another wild animal, a bandit or one of Mordred's many roaming knights.

- a) I will move around in circles, waiting for an opening,  
before I dance forward and kill the creature. Go to 13.
- b) I will move around too much and be forced to  
flee when my morale falls too low. Go to 11.
- c) I will make a silly mistake and die here. Go to 14.

11.

You flee blindly through the darkness. Still it is better to run away alive than fight to a pointless death, no matter what ignominy it brings on your name.

Go to 15

12.

This fight proceeds much like many others you have fought. All the same, you still find yourself deriving pleasure from the strategy of it.

This time you use your special attack to take the wolves out, stabbing them when they're at an angle to you. It is a rare skill you possess in this early medieval world, jabbing someone with your spear even though they are not directly facing you. It will be several hundred years before most people learn to use a full 360-degree range of motion and even longer before people themselves stop being two-dimensional forms and become as three-dimensional as the landscape they walk on.

Go to 15.

13.

Around and around you go. You step forwards. The first wolf steps forwards. You step back. It steps sideways. You step diagonally. It steps diagonally. You hold position. It changes stance and would charge at you if you didn't step away. It steps back. You step forwards. It steps forwards too.

"Wroooow," the wolf cries out. Quite frankly you had been getting tired of all the moving around by the time the terrible creature blundered too close and you could kill it.

The second one proves easier to dispatch without its colleague. A jump across some bushes, a stroke and it is gone too.

Go to 15.

14.

You dash forwards, confident. You have felt the thrill of your spear driving into the meaty flanks of a wolf many times before. Today, you see no reason why it should be any different.

Yet today is like no other. Today, you briefly forget how the mechanics of battle and claiming territory work and allow yourself to be backed into a corner. You have no prospect of escape. One of the wolves jumps forward and its fearful maw is the last thing you ever see.

Your journey is over. Arthur must fight Mordred alone. He will probably die, and it's basically your fault, even if the text that pops up in the world around you never lets him forget the role his own pride played in his doom.

Go to 1 and begin another adventure.



15.

You leave the wolves' home behind and advance on the North.

You had choices before, but now there is only one path you can take to reach Arthur. It runs through the marshes of Rhos Listenaise.

The smell of the earth beneath your boots is musty but cutting through it are the acrid taints of smoke and of recently spilled blood.

This morass has seen battle. Mordred's forces wait not far from here.

You are almost on the other side of the marshes when, in the dawn's dim light, you spot someone coming in your direction.

a) Not one person – two! Go to 16.

b) It is a figure from my past. Go to 17.

c) I see a fleeing soldier. Go to 18.

16.

As you get closer, you can see that the two are in a heated argument. Both have their knives out, weapons raised. One jumps into the square of the other, ending both the argument and their associate's life.

Knife still out and out of breath, the survivor approaches you.

"My friend wanted to steal from you, but I couldn't do it," they say. "I recognize you from the stories of my childhood of the glory days of Camelot. I remember what you meant for this country."

a) I convince the bandit to come north with me. Go to 19.

b) I tell the bandit to return to their home and beg forgiveness for their crimes. Go to 20.

17.

You recognize Lady Rhiannon, former knight of the Round Table. Her fall from her place of honor was not quite so dramatic or great as yours. She wields a mighty sword, its edge gleaming even in the low light of the dawn.

She greets you with just a nod.

"On your way to fight Mordred?" you ask.

"On my way to fight someone," she replies.

a) I convince her to come north with me. Go to 19.

b) I tell her to travel on. In the end, does Arthur merit saving more than any other person? Go to 20.



18.

The soldier is close to tears, though he wears the mark of Camelot on his breast.

“It is too much.” He begins to sob, the sight of a face from the glorious past too much for him to bear. You remember that face now. Sir John is his name. “They are too many, even for Arthur. I could not stand to witness it.”

- a) I convince the once-brave knight that there is still a chance to save Arthur if he comes with me. Go to 19.
- b) I tell him to travel on and be safe. He may be right. If so, his family needs him alive, not dying on a doomed errand. Go to 20.

19.

A wanderer on the road has become a new companion. You can travel on together and reach the battlefield today, or you can rest and better prepare for the test ahead.

- a) We must get there before it is too late! Go to 21.
- b) We'll recuperate here and share a story around the fire. Go to 22.

20.

You watch as your potential lieutenant disappears over the horizon to the south. You hope they find a peace they have not had for some time – though there will be no peace for anyone if Arthur's son, the Black Dragon, is not stopped.

Go to 21.

21.

The sounds of fighting are close enough you can hear them, metal clashing against metal, the screams of the dying and the roaring of those who do not want to join them.

Though the lids on your eyes are heavy, you press on towards the tumult. It's time to meet Mordred and bring about a reckoning. You hope it is his and not your own or Arthur's.

Onwards! Go to 25.

22.

Your comrade stretches out on the ground, making themselves as comfortable as they can on the rocks. It's the only space dry enough to set yourself down and make a fire.

They begin to tell a story from their childhood.



It's a well-told narrative, one which lights up the gloomy marshlands with vivid characters. It keeps you guessing at its moral. It has tragedy. It develops your understanding of one of the lesser characters in your own tale.

a) I savor the extra texture the yarn brings to the world I inhabit. Go to 23.

b) The story is too much of a tangent from my own. In future, I'll avoid participating in such gatherings around a fire. Go to 23.

23.

Your own responses to the story make no material difference to its plot, though they imply a great deal about you as a character and as a player.

a) I enjoy it for what it is, another instrument for self-definition in an existence that is given meaning as much by how we live as where we end up. Go to 24.

b) And that's why it feels a little meaningless, like many of my other choices in this life. Go to 24.

24.

You drift off with the final words of the story, lost to sleep beneath the night's sky. When you wake, it is early but not so early that it should still be this dark. The morning is overcast and smoky, the sun too weak and fearful to penetrate the fog above you.

You gather yourself and your possessions. Already you can smell the stench of fear on the wind, the tell-tale scent of soldiers about to die or already dead. You can't be far.

It's time to meet Mordred and bring about a reckoning. You hope it is his and not your own or Arthur's.

Onwards! Go to 25.

25.

You halt at the edge of the battle and assess the field. Arthur is somewhere in its middle, fighting alone against Mordred's men.

Your story ends here. Your story often ends on this spot or near to it, and, although *Pendragon* is supposed to change with every telling, many of its chapters will be familiar, in shape at least, if you have heard the tale before. Whether the changes are enough for you will depend on you as much as the story itself.

You take another step forwards, onto the board of this final battleground, to conclude this story and to offer your spear again to the man who was once your king. 🏰



Dear Krile,

While you might not get as much attention as your fellow Scions of the Seventh Dawn, you'll always be my favorite member. The plot may often set you aside in favor of other Scions, but you make the most of your screentime. Throughout our time saving the world of Eorzea, you've taught me these lessons:

*Be kind, but take no shit.* Even though you're years younger than me, I always say that I wish I could "grow up" to be you. You have an infinite well of kindness to give, and you always hold your head up high.

*Don't underestimate someone just because they look cute.* You have cat ears on your cloak and stand about a yalm tall, but you wield your smarts and your cunning as well as any other Sharlayan.

*Wear what makes you happy without abandon.* Have patients to save and souls to read? Might as well look cute while you're doing it, notions of "professionalism" be damned.

*Call out people who have the capacity to help but choose not to.* Yes, that includes my character, who refused to heal people in cutscenes until you urged her to act. I thought of you fondly when she healed someone without prompting in *Shadowbringers*.

*Never give up on your friends.* Whether it involves sleepless nights or thinking outside the box, you'd do anything to support the people you care about. Just remember to take care of yourself, okay? (Have you tried talking to Isabelle?)

With another adventure under our belts, let's look to the future with kindness and determination.

- Melissa 🐱



# The Football Future That Wasn't

Electronic Arts announced last month it was [adding former professional quarterback Colin Kaepernick to Madden NFL 21](#) as a free agent, allowing players to assign him to any team of their choosing. The addition comes four years after he was blackballed out of the league, and despite his [insistence that he would like to continue his career](#), there had been no way to play as Kaepernick in the game since 2016. The move reverberated across [sports, games, business](#) and [political news](#) media alike, showing Kaepernick's continued cultural relevance (while providing a convenient post-launch PR boost for the [\\$37.89 billion](#) corporation's [critically stale videogame football franchise](#)).

In a sense, this decision can be viewed as a [victory for Kaepernick and the Black Lives Matter movement](#); pushing a massive company to support anti-racism in any way when they previously appeared indifferent is significant. However, while EA worked directly with Kaepernick directly to bring his likeness back to their game on his terms (even adding a [Black Power touchdown celebration](#)), it's hard to ignore the fact that they could have done this at any time in the past four years but didn't move forward until his [odds of playing again effectively dropped to zero](#). So, why now, and should we make of this?

Let's start our search for answers by reviewing the company's [announcement tweet](#): "Knowing that our EA Sports experiences are platforms for players to create, we want to make Madden NFL a place that reflects Colin's position

and talent, rates him as a starting QB and empowers our fans to express their hopes for the future of football.”

On the surface, this may sound like a sincere acknowledgment of Kaepernick’s talent and the desire of millions of customers to see him take the field once again. There is no doubt many of us would like to see him return to his former glory, and for a generation of kids denied that opportunity, having him in the game would be a welcome sight.

It doesn’t take much to start unraveling what’s wrong with this statement though. For starters, Kaepernick was once a [brilliant player in real life](#) and his career never should have been derailed for forcing America to confront police brutality. He should have been on an actual NFL roster every year for the past four years and EA’s public support for his talent and activism would have mattered more when teams could have realistically considered signing him. Now, it would be almost unprecedented for any player to return to form after four years away, making it tough for any team to rationalize signing him.



NFL owners know that NFL talent has a shelf life and this is what railroading him out of the league was meant to achieve; they didn’t have to beat his argument, they just had to outlast him until teams could pass on signing a player who could no longer help them win. As a result, Kaepernick’s starter-quality statistics stretch reasonable belief. [His 81 out of 100 rating is better than 17 out of 32 other starting quarterbacks](#) in the game, which is almost certainly inaccurate and a depressing reminder of his squandered skill. Consequently, EA’s suggestion that they’ve realistically portrayed his abilities right now comes off more like a passive admission of guilt than a sincere show of support. Instead of using their considerable influence to back Kaepernick in 2016 (or 2017 . . . or 2018 . . . or, hell, even 2019), it took a confluence of social pressure and a marketable fantasy for them to see an opportunity they could safely capitalize on. Better late than never is better late than never, but they

did nothing for years only to sell us a \$60 dream when the risk was low, and this looks more like a business decision than actual ally-dom.

Want to see your hero toss the ol' pigskin around? Now you can! Only on Madden NFL 21. In stores now. [Please don't check our review scores.](#)

Perhaps this shouldn't be surprising though. Companies exist to make money and not every corporation can pretend they're trying to save the world; in fact, sometimes appearing disingenuous can do more harm than good. Organizations that employ tens of thousands of people also must be careful with how they make public statements of support for social issues because summarizing the thoughts and feelings of that many people in one paragraph is fraught with issues. It is deceptively difficult territory to tread, and it can partially explain why brands don't do more when it seems like they should.



With that said, you don't get credit for risks you don't take, and large companies also often lose their cautious attitudes about showing their hand on socio-political issues when they've run the numbers and [determined it'll be a PR victory](#). Back in 2016, the (mostly white) media and (mostly white) public treated Colin Kaepernick's protest like an issue with two valid sides between social justice and respecting the military, despite the fact a [Green Beret suggested he kneel because it was more respectful than sitting on the bench](#). The idea that he was protesting the armed forces was a misunderstanding rooted in lack of awareness at best and a willful and hateful deflection at worst.

By the time the following season rolled around, the conversation started to shift, and [Kaepernick was a runner-up for TIME's Person of the Year](#). The year after that, [Nike made him a spokesperson](#) and [they've been rolling in cash since](#). As more white Americans began to see Kaepernick's protest as just, using his likeness became safer, and more teams and players searched for ways to make statements of their own.



EA had to have seen this happen in real time, and yet did nothing helpful. In fact, they did the exact opposite, and came under fire for [removing references to Kaepernick from the lyrics of a Big Sean song](#) included on the soundtrack for Madden '19 (the series has long leaned on hip-hop artists for its music, making EA's tone-deaf approach to social issues even more ironic). While they claimed this was due to confusion around copyright issues, it turned out they [removed his name from a song on the '18 game too](#). Seemingly, the only difference that time was no one noticed right away.

It's likely there are many employees at EA who have been advocating for Kaepernick over the years, and if so, they deserve credit. And for what it's worth, I'll still buy the game eventually, [even if only for lack of better options](#). Looking at EA holistically as a corporate entity however, it's tough to see all the way past their questionable track record on inclusion (this is the same company that once claimed they [couldn't animate female soccer players](#)) and view this through anything other than a semi-skeptical eye.

Before we lose sight of who really helped make this happen, then, we must give more credit to Kaepernick himself for his continued sacrifice, to his allies like former [San Francisco 49ers and Carolina Panthers defensive back Eric Reid](#) and to the Black Lives Matter movement for driving the change in the broader culture that has forced corporations like EA and the [NFL to respond](#). Kaepernick's reappearance in Madden is, if nothing else, a sign that momentum is moving in the right direction. It's a shame EA couldn't follow his lead sooner, but in the end, real heroism crushes cowardice. 🙏



## It's Complicated

After five years, my original Series 0 Apple Watch broke. I could decry the state of disposal technology – how nothing is built to last these days, how they rip you off by making their own products obsolete as quickly as possible – but the truth is, my relatively ancient watch was working just fine until I left it charging in direct sunlight and melted the goddamn screen right off of it.

So now, after a few months of patiently waiting – not using my stationary bike, of course, because it doesn't “count” anymore – I have purchased and received in the mail a shiny new Apple Watch Series 6.

I've only had it a couple of days, so I don't have a ton to say about it yet. In short, I got the exact same color, material and band as my old one so it's basically like being reunited with an old friend.

The big difference so far? The screen is slightly bigger, and there are new watch faces that take advantage not only of the added real estate, but also the vastly faster processor – which, compared to my old Series 0, actually makes it possible to, you know, run the blasted apps on it.

Naturally, I went right to work creating a watch face with as many complications as I could squeeze in. After a few hits and misses, I put together a configuration – described by my son Jacob as “WAAAAYYYY better” than my old watch – that at a glance tells me: the current temperature with the day's highs and lows, the percent chance of rain, the date, my progress toward closing my three activity rings, my current battery charge, a button that instantly opens my podcast app, another that brings up my text messages and, oh yes, the actual time, in my preferred a digital 24-hour-clock readout, all beautifully arranged within a classic but stunning white analog watch face.

I also made a backup face, solely for working out, which features my three activity rings, my current “move”, “exercise” and “stand” totals in large colorful digits, my heart rate, a quick link to start a workout, that same quick link to my podcast player and, yes, the time.

These watch faces are great. But they're not the reason technology is awesome. Technology is awesome because after a few hours of finely tuning these new watch faces, this is the watch face I am using:





**L**overs Rock, one of the films in Steve McQueen's brilliant new "Small Axe" anthology about the UK's West Indian community from the 1960s through the 1980s, is full of a palpable and irresistible energy. Like *Kid and Play* once did in the 1990s, the film follows the comings and goings of a raucous house party, beginning in late afternoon as the DJ's set up their ceiling-high sound system and ending with the harsh rays of the new day's sun. Like *Kid and Play's House Party*, it is boastfully, recklessly black. It is a celebration of the peaks, valleys and crescendos of black love and passion, perceptibly hemmed in by unfriendly and violent whiteness.

It is also, unquestionably, an immigrant film. A film out to capture the unique experience of not being *from* where you're currently *at*, of desperately searching for any markers of home; in people, in music, in food, in eyes, in lips, in smells. Its title refers not just to that style of music that shakes the wooden beams of the dance floor and gives paramours cause to grasp at and pull each other so close that not one inch of air is left between them, but to the site of it all: the house itself, and its party. This site is a small island in a turbulent sea; safe harbor in treacherous waters. Beyond the ramparts of the old Victorian walk-up providing rickety shelter for the revelers, the enemy taunts and rudely stares, pale white and sallow faces under gelled hair, on the lookout for stragglers from the pack, for lost souls who've wandered a bit too far away from the protective spell of the music.

We watched *Lovers Rock* at a drive-in. It was my first time going to one, being from a city where few drive, and inexpensive, undeveloped real estate is a rarity. Thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic, however, watching movies in the

relatively safe bubble (or island, as it were) of a car has become the only way to mimic the theatrical experience. The anthem-sounding horns of Dennis Brown's "Things in Life" and the snapping pace of Carl Douglass' "Kung Fu Fighting" rumbled out of our car's speakers, shaking the suspension and rattling the air vents. Inside the car, it warmed us, chilled as we had been by the nervous attendants trying to adhere to vague social distancing regulations as they collected our tickets. We bounced in time with the dancers, feeling the heat and the joy bleed through into our own anxious reality.

Afterwards, I kept coming back to the memory of spending time with my mother's young nieces in Tunisia. Whenever I'd visit, and we would go out, they'd dress up; coating their faces in makeup and dashing their necks with perfume. It didn't matter if we were headed to a nightclub or a sandwich shop, they'd always arrive at our front door decked out in their absolute finest. If we drove or took a cab somewhere, my cousins would turn the radio dial until it landed, inevitably, on a love song, often by some famous North African crooner. Greats like the Egyptian chanteuse, Oum Kalthoum, or the Tunisian tenor, Lotfi Bouchnak. These were voices I had only heard through my mother's stereo, sourced from her cherished collection of tape cassettes. My cousins would always sing along, matching every word, perfectly in tune with the music.

I remember feeling slightly jealous of the easy joy they could find in these moments. Their casual fluency in this musical language was one I could not share in, unversed as I was in the spoken language to begin with. Growing up in America, I rarely found similar camaraderie through Western music. My tastes were confused and uncertain. I was always late to the moment, frantically trying to keep up, unsure of whether I liked the music or if it was just a tool I could use to fit in.



During a scene in *Lovers Rock* in which Janet Kay's "Silly Games" is placed on the turntable, the crowded dance floor vibrates in instant recognition. Groups of friends and paired-off couples dash in from off-screen rooms and hallways. They put out their cigarettes in the backyard, put down their plates of curry goat, and beat it rapidly onto the dance floor. Once the song properly gets underway, they sing and scream along to the lyrics, voiced as many, sounding as one. "No time to play your silly games. Silly ga-ames!" At the crescendo, the DJ cuts off the sound and lets the crowd set the beat and sing the words. No one is off, no one forgets a line, this anthem is ichor in their veins, inscribed upon their very bones.

In this way, music is a touchstone, a unifier, a reminder of who you are and who your people is. Outside of the boundaries of the party, it's all wrong, all turned upside down. The music fades and no one is sure of how to act; how loud to be, what they can own, where they can stand, who they can be seen with. But huddled together in that tiny room, shouting along to the chorus until their throats go sore, these men and women experience no doubts, "no fear" as Nina Simone once described the sensation of love. It's a powerful and moving display, a testament to the power of culture, of finding family and home in an alien place.

When I listen to my cousins sing to each other in Arabic, I can hear hints of this. But it's like listening to someone speak to you through water, or through the static that lives between radio bands. I was born to an expat, an exile, so my own touchstones are second-handed from hers. My sense of community is patchwork, not anchored to anything but spread thin through the endless adaptation required for traveling between disparate social circles. The trade is a life far more privileged and comfortable than the one my Tunisian cousins have. In that way, my jealousy is unfair, misguided. I want something I do not really want. I want the one thing that they have, because it reminds me of what I am missing.

In the final post-party, early dawn moments of *Lovers Rock*, two newly-minted lovers, Martha and Franklin ride on a shared bike through the sleeping neighborhoods that lie between the island of the house party and the spaces where they spend the rest of their lives. In the garage where Franklin works, they embrace before being rudely interrupted by Franklin's white manager, who attempts to intimidate Franklin, drawing power from the whiteness lurking within his diminutive frame. Driven from their safe bastions, they reluctantly part ways, and Martha sneaks back into her parent's house. The film closes on her hastily snuck back into bed, playing the part of innocent church girl we gleefully recognize as false, and breaking into a broad cheek-



spanning grin. Though the party's music can no longer be heard, its echoes and its power reverberates through this moment, no white man can get her down, slings and arrows bounce harmlessly off the barriers the night has erected.

Perhaps it's that shield that I miss, that protection grown from shared survival. Here, I survive mostly alone, to music that isn't really my own, among others who are generally just as unmoored. The joy inherent to *Lovers Rock*, the joy of my cousins' joyful chorus, is getting to pretend for a time that I too could wrap myself in music and feel invincible, feel the solidity of being moored to stone sunk down through miles of sea to the ancient bedrock below. 🍷







## There are Many Ways to Apocalypse

For [Mark Fisher](#), the end of the world was a slow and absurd collapse of meaning making. Maybe history didn't end, but reality did. Austerity, neoliberalism and capitalism are ending now much like they do in the dystopia he describes in *Children of Men*: "There is no punctual moment of disaster; the world doesn't end with a bang, it winks out, unravels, gradually falls apart." Post-capitalism was once posited through ends: apocalypses, dystopias, wastes. Building up a new world after blowing apart its literal structures. But no more. Since colonizing the world, capitalism has come to occupy "the horizons of the thinkable." So if it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, how can we ask for [a better ending](#)?

While the end of all things in the Anthropocene is slow and suffocating, defined more by stillness than entropy, our fiction neatly confines the apocalypse to moments and chapters. If it's a symptom of neoliberalism that we fail to think in or of systems, then these movies similarly convince us that so long as we can go to the theaters to see hellscape dystopias, we're okay. Whereas the post apocalypse was once the site of radical alternatives to status quo, "the disasters they depicted acting as narrative pretext for the emergence of different ways of living," these stories are now subsumed by the hegemonic systems of today.

The post-apocalypse has always been delimited by our collective imaginations. Heather Smith describes the ethnocentricity of the preeminent 20th century dystopia, the nuclear wasteland, as a relocation of an entire culture's guilt: "America, it seemed, worked through the issue of having bombed Japan by generating an endless number of stories where America was the bombed, not the bomber." Consider Pat Frank's seminal nuclear apocalypse, *Alas, Babylon*. The author locates the globe's mutually assured destruction within the individual, a young pilot that strikes a third world country's infrastructure. Though, he's as much to blame as Florence, a gossiping unmarried woman that Frank insists you remember is fat. Frank's cautionary tale fails to indict anyone in particular, instead filtering out undesirables judged by the authors own religious morality. In this brave new world, disabled people are too reliant on the excesses of post-War America, all too frail and elderly to survive more than a week. While he criticizes the emerging consumer culture of the 50s, Frank does so with the Catholic-tinged noblesse oblige of his painfully obvious self-insert. The gruff, alcoholic veteran is able to grow into himself and lead the fictitious central Florida community – by virtue of the resources on the property his family took from Indigenous people and with the aid of the family of Black servants that never stopped living off the land.

Frank's novel is not an imagination of the world after capitalism, but a romanticization of the preindustrial. Since salvation from alienation in a post-apocalyptic America is consistently tied up in some form of Christian morality, it makes sense that an author operating within capitalist realism could only point back, unaware of how the system has eroded the icons of their faith. This, what Smith calls "post-apocalyptic dream America," is the original American fiction, envisioned by the Puritans that settled what they considered the promised land of their own post-apocalypse. And it persists today in the rhetoric of American exceptionalism. The state is politically re-centered in the global as sci-fi re-centers us in the solar.



Alternatives to capitalism have been relocated further into the future, a sub-genre we could call the post-post apocalypse. The post-post apocalypse is, understandably, a recurring setting in the works of Japanese creators, though American's have a particular fondness for the films of Hayao Miyazaki, whose work, to borrow again from Smith, “displays no affection for civilization.” This lineage is, I believe, a part of the nostalgia inspired by America's preeminent post-post apocalypse – *Adventure Time*.

From the bug-filled forests of the Toxic Jungle to the quiet paddies of Hateno Village to the bustling streets of the Candy Kingdom, new ways of life are consistently explored in the genre. [Grace Lee](#) describes *Adventure Time*'s post-post apocalypse as “a future where life as we know it has ended. But, of course, that isn't to say that life has ended.” Remnants of Ooo's past are scattered about, indicating civilization – and capitalism – once occupied the same land. In “Dark Purple,” a soda company's kidnapped, mutant labor force is described as “weird, ancient ways” while in “Ocarina” Jake gives a lesson on colonialism in the distant past before trading the functionally obsolete deed to the tree house for an ocarina without any holes in it.

As much as it is about the extraordinary ways in which people live their normal lives, *Adventure Time* is comprised of endings. Cycles still end in death and decay, apocalypses still beset the world (and Mars) and break-ups still hurt. The ultimate expression of *Adventure Time*'s thematic use of endings comes from the show's very own ending, which philosophizes about . . . endings. “[Time Adventure](#)” is both a lullaby that keeps the cosmic forces of discord at bay and a poetic rumination on the lives that continue past the inevitable end of our spoken words (at least until capitalists demand epilogue comics.)

The post-post apocalypse is, to me, thematically autumnal. Beyond this cycle we find ourselves in the ending of another. Post-post apocalyptic worlds are always presented in some ending of sorts: Ooo faces apocalyptic threats until the story itself ends, the Toxic Jungle inches closer to the Valley of Wind, the “aimless spirits of monsters slain in the name of the light return to flesh.” Beyond the myopic dystopias and repeated apocalypses of our time, the post-post apocalypse promises us it *will happen, happening happened.* 🍂





## Some Things Last Some of the Time

Walk around the game world in *Ashen* for long enough and you'll pick up on something strange: the place is filled with ruins. These are meant to be the products of a civilization which has long since fallen from glory. In any case, the decaying remains of what are supposed to have once been settlements can be seen in each and every corner of the game world. The first one of these which you'll come across is called Vagrant's Rest. This becomes your home early in the game.

When you first set foot in Vagrant's Rest, you'll find that a bunch of bandits and brigands have turned the place into their hideout. Vagrant's Rest is really just a random collection of sheds and shacks at this point in time, but it slowly transforms into a stately settlement as you progress in the game. The piles of rocks and rubble disappear after you drive out the bandits and brigands. The collapsed columns are put back on their socles. People start filling the streets. You come across Vagrant's Rest in a sorry state, but the place looks pretty prosperous late in the game. The settlement transforms from a ghost town into a boom town right before your eyes.

When it comes to architecture, things don't tend to last for a very long time. Buildings have a habit of disappearing. People frequently demolish them on purpose, but they're sometimes allowed to fall apart on their own. While it doesn't happen very often, buildings can last for hundreds or even thousands of years, though. In its depiction of settlements, *Ashen* raises the question of



why some structures are preserved and others aren't. Vagrant's Rest provides quite a bit of insight into this question, but settlements like Einarden Reach are worthy of some consideration, too. The answer mostly has to do with how settlements are reoccupied after being abandoned.

You might remember that I once wrote a piece called "Some Things Last Forever." You might also remember that I once wrote a piece called "Nothing Lasts Forever." This led me to the conclusion that I simply had to call this particular piece "Some Things Last Some of the Time." In any case, let's take a look at what *Ashen* can tell us about how buildings are preserved.

As an archaeologist, I've noticed that settlements are often abandoned. This happens for a variety of different reasons, but in cases where settlements aren't reoccupied, the buildings in them decay to the point of collapse. The only parts of these buildings which remain after a while are their foundations. These are buried over time as dirt and dust accumulate on top of them. When settlements are reoccupied, people tend to preserve some of the buildings, though. Structures are often taken apart to have their materials recycled and reused, but people sometimes also renovate them. You can see both of these processes at work in *Ashen*. Vagrant's Rest and Einarden Reach provide the best examples of this. You can see some of the same things in Rome, so let's compare these parts of the game world to this part of the real world.



Vagrant's Rest becomes a burgeoning settlement after you drive the brigands and bandits from their hideout. Buildings can be seen popping up all over the place. You won't see anyone demolishing the decaying structures, though. These are definitely dismantled, but the most useful parts of them are in fact recycled and reused. This can be seen when it comes to the stone slabs. These can be found in quite a few of the quoins and corbels of the buildings

that you'll come across under construction. Walk around Vagrant's Rest at just about any point in the game and you'll see these old materials being worked into new structures.

The population of Rome started to contract after the second century. Structures were slowly abandoned. Since almost all of them were made from wood, most of the buildings in Rome were destroyed by fire, but the stone monuments were just reduced to ruins. When the population started to expand in the tenth century, some of these were preserved as churches, but the majority of them were taken apart for their materials. Pompey's Theater provides a good example of this. While the marble was ground up in the process of producing lime, the travertine can be found on a mansion called the Palazzo della Cancelleria today. The concrete furnishes a foundation to the nearby Palazzo Orsini Pio Righetti.



Explore the game world beyond Vagrant's Rest and you'll soon come across Einarden Reach. This particular settlement shows that structures aren't always taken apart to have their materials recycled and reused. The collapsed castle between Listener's Ridge and Prophet's Rise for example is clearly being renovated. Scaffolding can be found all over the place. The point is apparently to keep the structure from collapsing, but some of this looks like it serves more than one purpose. Platforms furnish porches to the houses that used to be nothing more than hallways in the collapsed castle. You'll even find a couple of shops in between all of the stairs and ladders.

Pompey's Theater was taken apart to have its materials recycled and reused, but the Colosseum was spared from this fate. The marble from the Colosseum was removed after an earthquake in the fourteenth century, but the concrete parts of the building are still standing today. The back rooms were used as

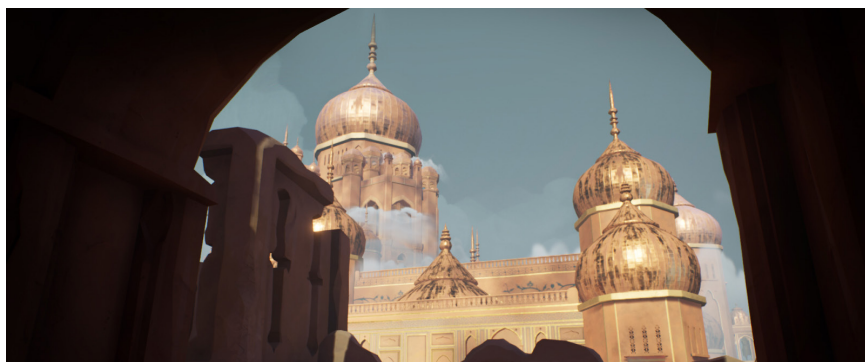


workshops and factories for several centuries. The structure was even converted to a castle at one point in time. Spend a while in Rome these days and you'll see the Colosseum being used as a venue for a variety of different events.

Why are some buildings taken apart and recycled while others are simply renovated? The answer has to do with their state of preservation when a settlement is reoccupied after having been abandoned.

While the Colosseum was in pretty good condition, Pompey's Theater was apparently falling to pieces in the tenth century. Since the structure was about to collapse, Pompey's Theater was taken apart to have its materials recycled and reused. The same could be said about Vagrant's Rest. The place was in a sorry state when the brigands and bandits made it their hideout, so recycling and reusing the materials makes a lot of sense when you stop to think about it. The collapsed castle between Listener's Ridge and Prophet's Rise in Einarden Reach is another story, though. Similar to the Colosseum, this particular structure was apparently found in good enough condition to be worth renovating.

I stand by what I wrote in the pieces called "Some Things Last Forever" and "Nothing Lasts Forever," but *Ashen* definitely provides a reminder that preservation is a complicated matter when it comes to architecture. The main takeaway is that buildings are only preserved because settlements are sometimes reoccupied. There are definitely exceptions to the rule, but when settlements aren't reoccupied after being abandoned, the buildings in them are slowly reduced to ruins. When enough time has passed, the only parts of them which remain are their foundations. These are buried by dirt and dust after a while. I think that *Ashen* does a good job at depicting these processes of preservation. In any case, I would encourage you to closely consider settlements in the game world like Vagrant's Rest and Einarden Reach because they resemble settlements in the real world like Rome. You can actually learn a lot about preservation just by looking at these two places. 🏰





## On The Legend of Korra and Imperfection

It wasn't that long ago (but also like six thousand years ago because \*gestures around wildly\*) that I wrote about the importance of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* [making people with super-human abilities relatable by focusing on the mundane moments of their lives](#). Now I want to talk about how the series follow-up, *The Legend of Korra*, did one better. Because here's the thing: for as much as fans of the show might love Aang, Katara, Sokka, Toph, Zuko, etc, they weren't particularly flawed. And *Korra's* way of bringing some particularly significant character flaws to light through the eyes of their children makes them feel even more like human beings. Exceptional, talented, imperfect human beings (spoilers ahead, obviously).

Original series main protagonist Aang, the titular "last airbender," was a plucky young kid who had to grow up real fast and accept his role as the world's biggest celebrity/savior in the middle of a century-long war. He clearly cared about the world and the people around him, but only a couple of episodes into *Korra's* second season it's revealed that he was kind of a crappy dad. Not that he was abusive or anything like that – he clearly loved all of his children – but he favored his youngest son, Tenzin, because he was also an airbender.

Granted, yes, Aang was trying to deal with the literal extinction of his people so obviously he would be excited about the possibility of slowly bringing the air nation back. But he did so at the expense of spending time with his other children, which fostered some amount of resentment, naturally. In

his (understandable) enthusiasm he ended up neglecting his family, which honestly sort of makes sense given Aang's tendency to focus first and foremost on his people and his culture throughout the original series.

Then there's Toph. Hooboy.

Don't get me wrong, Toph is great and probably my favorite character from the original show, but wow. Again, her behavior does make a sort of sense when you consider her background: she was the only child in a very wealthy family, but her parents were extremely controlling and tended to treat her more like a precious possession than their own child. She had to run away from home to join Aang & Co. even after proving that she was an incredibly powerful earthbender. Arguably, the most powerful earthbender. So when she grew up and had children of her own, she overcompensated by not giving them any boundaries or guidance at all.

Again, this does make sense as a way she would approach parenting, but it was also terrible because it resulted in one of her daughters acting like a hooligan for most of her formative years and the other trying way too hard to please her all the time. On top of this, Toph never really seems to grow as a person, resulting in her becoming a hermit because she just got tired of dealing with people rather than making any sort of attempt to understand why her actions (or inactions, really) might have hurt her family.

All of this is to say that I'm glad *The Legend of Korra* brings these major problems to light. It's not necessarily pleasant to discover that a favorite fictional character wasn't a terrific dad, or was a shit mom, but it makes them feel even more real and relatable – in that we all have some significant imperfections, because we're human, I mean. And the show manages this in ways that actually do make sense for those characters. I can't say it's made me respect or like either of them more than I did previously, but it does make them even more interesting. Possibly even more compelling. 🍷



## How'd you get into making maps for RPGs?

I've been drawing knights, warriors, dragons and various monsters since I was a kid. I even drew the occasional side-scrolling videogame level on a piece of paper as a child, and would later ask my friends and parents to "play" through them by tracing their progress through the map with their finger. I've only been drawing RPG maps for the last couple of years. I think I started off by trying to follow [Dyson Logos'](#) excellent tutorials on how to draw cool, classic maps back in 2015. From then on my style has changed, and I now prefer to draw isometric maps with exaggerated features over top-down maps. The thing that's always attracted me to RPG's has always been, and still is, the chapters about the monsters. I care less about specific rules systems and settings than I do about really crazy monster illustrations. I think that's why monsters are pretty heavily featured in my art and my maps.

## Your maps turn up everywhere (I know, I look everywhere!). How did you become the unofficial indie RPG map maker?

I started getting into drawing maps for games back in the g+ days, when I would reach out to people who were working on interesting projects and pretty much just ask them if I could draw something for them. The first time I really felt like I had "made it" was when Jason Sholtis said yes to letting me draw one of the player handout maps for [Operation Unfathomable](#). It was amazing to see my art featured next to his, and when he later asked me to draw a few monsters for him, I could hardly say no.

I launched my Instagram account a couple of years ago, and when that slowly started to gain traction (is that the right term?) I noticed that people would occasionally reach out and ask me if I'd like to do commission work for them. I've managed to finagle my way into a few modules, and it's always amazing to get to hold a physical copy of a module you worked on in your hands and go "AW LOOK! I DID THAT!" That never gets old!

### **What's your process like?**

I don't know if I have a consistent process to be honest. It all depends on what I feel like doing at any given moment. Sometimes when I'm bored I'll just start sketching out an entrance to a dungeon and just get to "follow along" with where my mind takes me. Other times I have an idea for a cool room or a specific feature, and then draw the map around that. Most of the time I try to put a hard limit on myself by cutting the paper in half or a quarter the original size, and just try to fit as much cool stuff in there as I can. That approach is a lot of fun actually, hard limits are good, and I think some of my best work are the really small dungeons.

### **What is it about dungeons that captures your imagination?**

There's just something about the mythical underground that attracts me. Monstrous and wondrous things, treasure, magic artifacts, deadly traps and strange plants are abundant down there. It's almost like I get to go and explore down there myself when I'm drawing my maps. It's also a good excuse to get to draw all the fun and dumb stuff I liked as a child, all collected in one place. Skeletons, monsters, traps, mushrooms, stalactites. All of that good stuff!

### **Do you look anywhere in particular for inspiration?**

I'd like to say yes, but I honestly don't really know. Sometimes I get an idea for something really cool when I'm out on a walk, sometimes I see something interesting in a movie or a picture of something that I'd like to draw online, and then I kind of just draw a dungeon as an excuse to get to draw that specific thing. Sometimes when I'm out of ideas, blank paper in front of me, I mindlessly browse the internet for strange insects or plants. Those always seem to get my mind going.

When it comes to other artists, my biggest inspirations are Dyson Logos, Jason Sholtis and Stefan Poag. They all have their own, very characteristic, fun style and I'd lie if I said that they haven't inspired me on my map making journey.

### **What do you hope folks take away from your work?**

A feeling of childish glee and inspiration that they bring to the table the next time they sit down to play some RPGs.

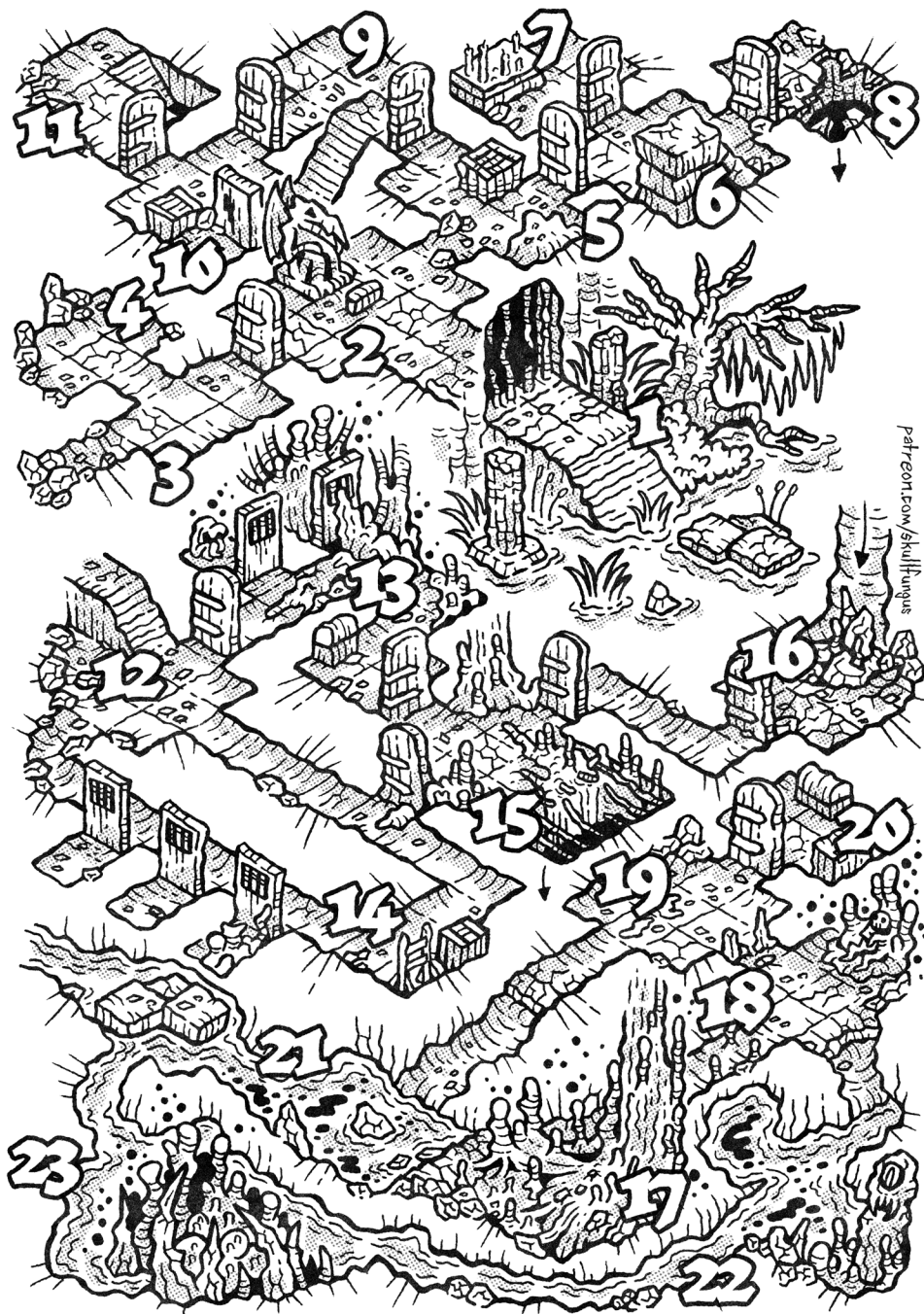
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*To see more of Skullfungus' work, follow him on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#). Join his [Patreon](#) to witness the ongoing development of an original mega-dungeon, mailed to you monthly! 📬*



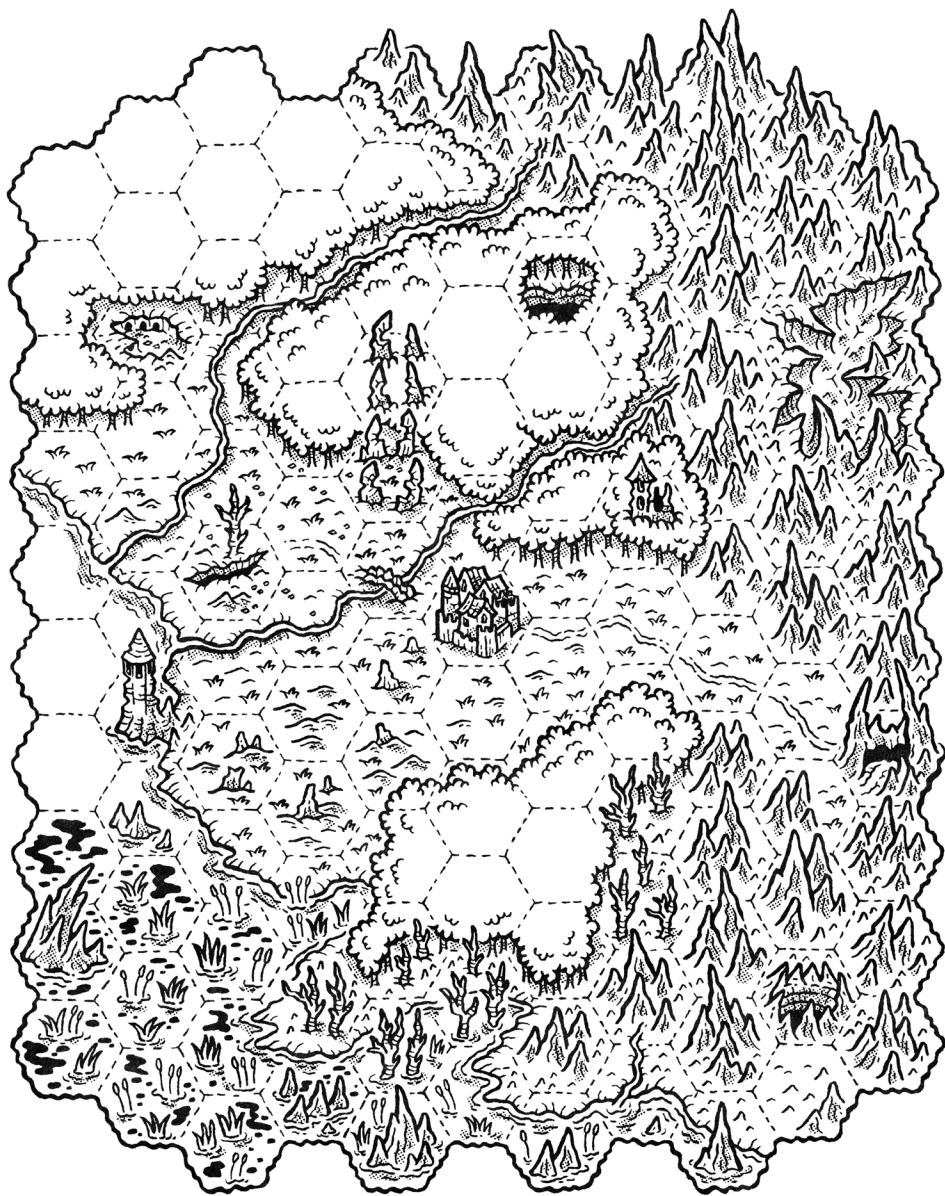


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patreon.com/shulhugus







# Floral Prison



## DESCRIPTIONS

1. Rusty Portcullis
2. Pollen Covered Halls
3. Ancient Murals
4. Chamber of Worship
5. Whispering Sarcophagus
6. Hidden Shrine

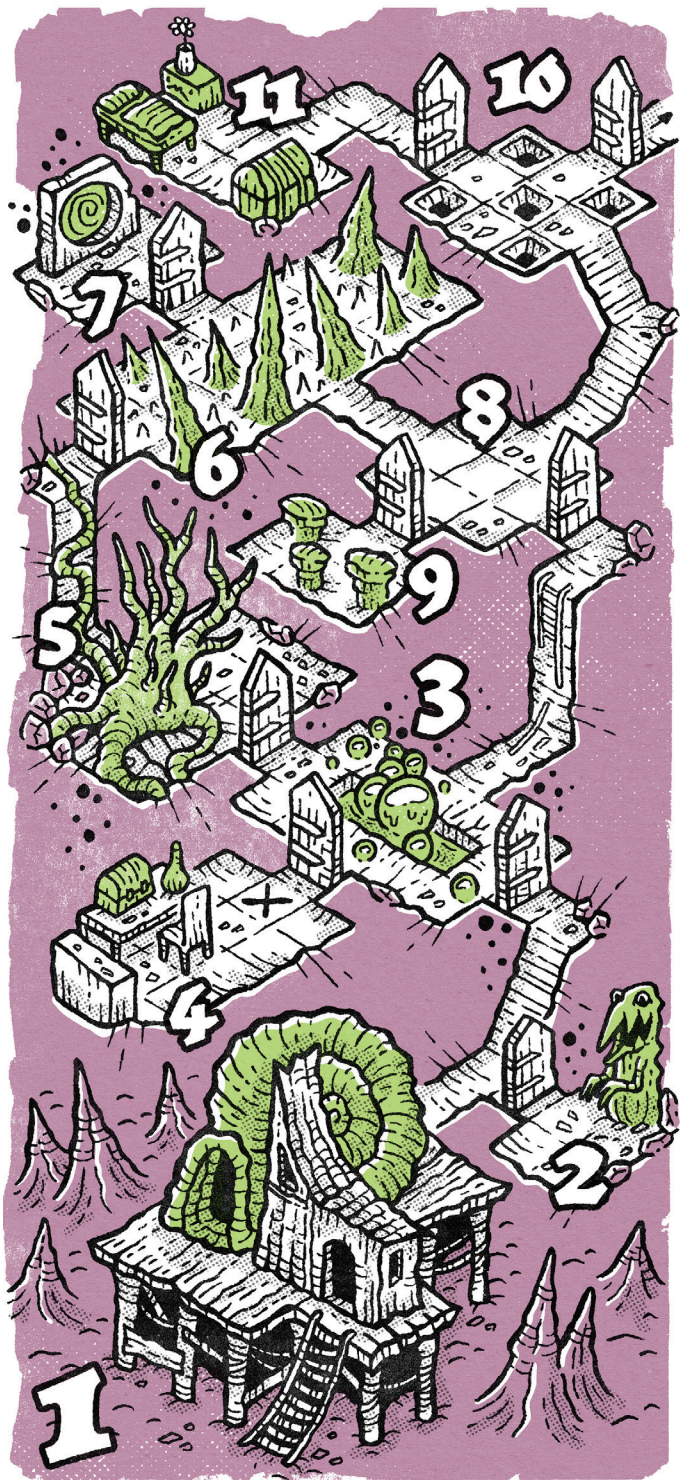
7. Palpitating Pod
8. Roots of the God Tree
9. Hypnotizing Giant Flower
10. Pool of Acid Sap
11. Overgrown Burial Grounds
12. Stairs to the Observatory

## ENCOUNTERS

1. Bloom Cultists
2. Pollen Cloud
3. Ravenous Pod-Spawn
4. Thorny Vines
5. Seed Spitters
6. The Rose Dragon









By Adam Goodall

# A FRIEND AT THE END OF THE WORLD





The Strand is an urban valley, sky-high commercial blocks lit up with red and white neon. Signs for a million identical VR dungeons buzz above the footpath, illuminating names like Gamers Palace, The Gamers Loot Horde and Moody's VR Café ('For Gamers. By Gamers.'). The streets are walled off, cars and trucks trapped by barriers carrying multi-storey warnings and instructions: UN | EMERGENCY LOCKDOWN | REMAIN CALM AND FOLLOW OFFICER INSTRUCTIONS. And the walls are all covered in movie posters. The world is ending and everyone's leaving the city, but in this shitty future, you can still pay ten bucks to catch a poorly-lit DCP of *Tokyo Ghost Police* at Event Cinemas. Just make sure you make your scheduled evacuation.

This is how designer Naphtali Faulkner imagines the Tauranga of the future in *Umurangi Generation*. Faulkner is Ngāi Te Rangi; Tauranga is his rohe, the land of his iwi. In this year of 2XXX, a titular red

sky hangs over that land, the product of climate change and corporate pollution and probably also the kaiju attacks that are hitting the city hard. The country's leaders have abdicated responsibility for the kaiju crisis, choosing instead to hand the city over to UN peacekeepers, who in turn have chosen to lock residents in a tedious, never-ending holding pattern. And the movies keep coming.

Some of the posters are arch jokes, like the one advertising *The Last Liberal*, a movie about a doomsday cult with the sarcastic tagline, "Clowns to the left of me, jokers to the right." Others are for defeatist docos and dramas like Saxon Englishman's *The Day The Earth Died*; "Eye-opening," says The Times, a brutally naïve pull-quote that calls to mind [Faulkner's comments in Vista Magazine](#) about colonial ignorance of kaitiakitanga and other Indigenous concepts of trusteeship and guardianship over the land – "the game's main crisis event probably

could have been avoided if people could have cared in the short-term.” And there are homegrown titles like *Lets Play: God: The Failed Attempt At Resurrecting the Huia*, a dramatic exposé that quietly references recent political arguments about genetic engineering on New Zealand soil.

Most of what’s advertised, though, is very trashy and very American. *Space Soldiers*. *Cyber Assassimators*. *600 Hours: The Secret Warriors*. *Cyber Driver*, starring James Morgue. Or my personal favourite, *Assassin Sniper Shooter Killer* – “HE’S PISSED, RETIRED AND AMERICAN,” hitting a screen near you later this year.

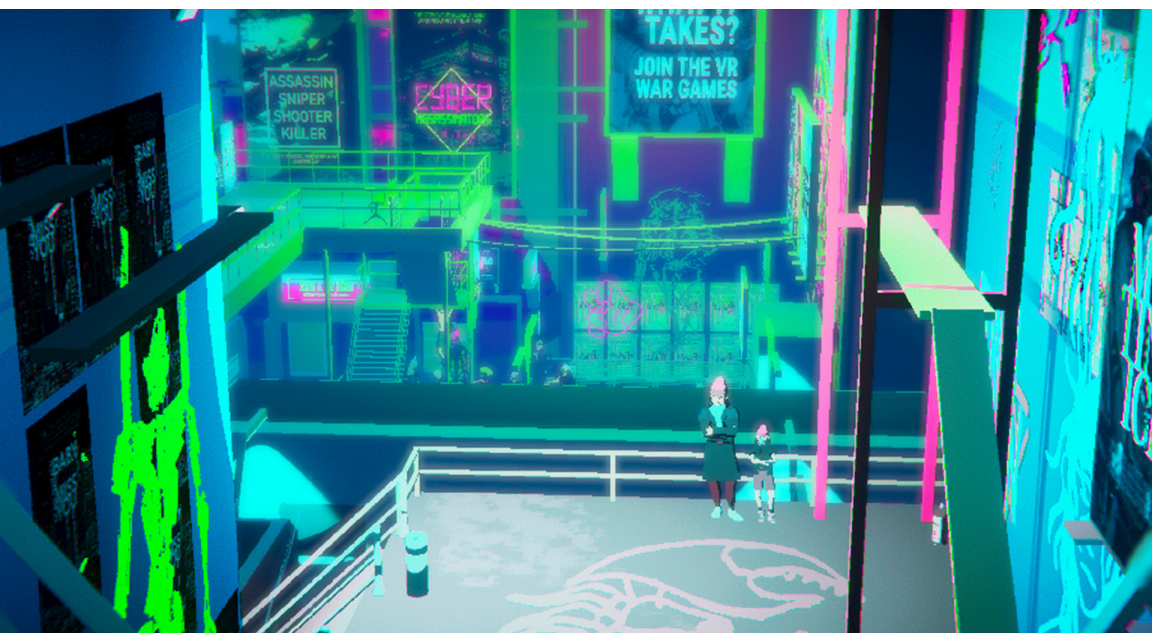
You can trace the lineage of so many of these films back XXX years to today, to the kind of fascist, jingoist film making that contemporary Hollywood likes to pretend it doesn’t make. You know the type: the troops-respecting action-dramas that always star Mark Wahlberg

or John Krasinski; the CGI-heavy blockbusters that seek, and get, sign-off from the Pentagon. Militarist power fantasies, all of which ring false in a city occupied by international military forces. But that’s the point, isn’t it – they’re counter-programming, attempts to condition the mind so that the people living on the sharp edge of late capitalism believe revolution to be impossible or even undesirable.

Between the bloody military potboilers and all the rest, *Umurangi Generation* gives us a commercial sphere that is entirely cynical and designed to import a hegemonic, eco-fascist worldview. *The world’s defo going to die, but that’s fine; the guys with the guns will see us through fine.*

But the residents of Tauranga aren’t really buying it; their walls are also covered in other forms of art, art that’s exciting and transgressive and more honest about





who actually lives here. There's a tunnel under The Strand that's color-sick with graffiti, vivid glow-in-the-dark portraits of rangatira and whales and giant spray-painted words: KABA, TEPUNA. Bright chairs hang from the roof above punks with light-up hover-shoes, green LEDs spinning. There's a skateboarding kaiju, bright-red, and a man shrugging, shiny grey, saying, "*It's just weather / It's just earthquakes / It's just kaiju / It's just the end of the world.*" Your friends are hanging out above, dancing in the middle of the walled-off street, a boom box blasting DJ Tariq's *Bitchtape*.

The people are on the streets and underground, all without the commercial permission of a hoarding or a free-standing frame. Their art and expression exists in opposition to the corporatized "public" spaces of future-Tauranga. *Umu-rangi Generation* has been praised a lot

for its environmental storytelling; unlike the hoary "Kill the Rats" style of street art commonly found in big budget titles, Faulkner has invested each piece of art with personality and purpose outside of whatever narrative insight it provides. It exists for itself, as if *people* made it. That's why the graffiti and gatherings and music and fashion in Umu-rangi Generation are more striking, more persuasive statements of resistance than you'll find in those open-world action-adventures: they have a history to them and a community behind them. They are as much a response to centuries of Pākehā colonization as they are to the current occupation.

And you're taking photos, sharp bright colors bursting against the deep blues and rust reds of the buildings and barricades. But what space do you and your camera occupy in this city? You're far



from an observer, an outside eye; rather, Faulkner positions the player as a site of tension in this world falling apart. You're a permalence delivery person selling photos on the side. Unlike your mates, you're tangled up in the market: you've got to deliver that package in ten minutes. You've got to sell those photos, and be okay with the dog shit pay.

But you're also encouraged to perform little acts of resistance as you hit your KPIs. You can, if you choose, run out the clock and get to know this town better; you can take photos of your friends instead of the subjects you're assigned; you can experiment with new and critical ways of framing the environment. That photo of the word 'COPS' you've been asked to take? Really absorb what's around it. Take a photo that reflects what you *see*, not just what you've been asked to capture.

In an [early, essential review](#) for *The Spinoff*, Dan Taipua writes, "Every single artistic vision of a Māori future or a future for Māori is an act of resistance against extinction."

"While we live and breathe, there's a persistent and potent narrative that Māori are already extinct, that te reo is a 'dead language', that there are no 'full-blooded Māoris left anyway', that our contributions are moot, and our experiences without value . . . In real life, in everyday life, there are forces around us always that conspire to destroy history itself, making every gesture towards a future, towards continuity of existence, a meaningful one."

Faulkner's vision is a world where we understand that resistance through the lens of a camera; a world where the photographs that we take, and the people and places that we record with those





photographs, work to reject the racist, deadening influence of capitalism and colonialism. Faulkner draws on a theory and practice of Māori photography that Natalie Robertson (Ngāti Porou, Clann Dhònnchaidh) describes in *Can I Take A Photo of the Marae?*, her chapter in the 2012 book *UNFIXED: Photography and Postcolonial Perspectives in Contemporary Art*; he takes a tool brought to New Zealand for the purposes of objectifying Māori and advancing a colonial project and turns it into a tool for resistance and self-determination, a tool for capturing and communicating the mana of its subjects at a particular point in time. It's an approach mirrored in the angular, activist work of protest photographer John Miller (Ngāpuhi, Pākehā). His photos of the 1975 Māori Land March and the 1981 Springbok Tour protests, both critical flashpoints in New Zealand society, set groups and individuals, often Māori, against backdrops of asphalt and construction. In so doing, as Cassandra Barnett describes in *Documents Alive*, Miller calls the audience to regard his subjects' mauri, or life force, as they assert their power and challenge the spaces and institutions that would have them rendered invisible.

Faulkner builds that practice into his mechanics. You're encouraged, through

the discovery of new filters and new forms of traversal, to reject the tyranny of the clock, the understanding of time as an economic concept, little units ticking down to a deadline. Faulkner asks you, not explicitly, to take your time in each world-box instead, recording each community and its lifeworld. Use your tools to find new ways to communicate with the manaia in Katikati, the graffiti in The Strand, Mauao on the horizon.

We often talk of the camera as a weapon, but the revolutionary Ngāpuhi filmmaker Barry Barclay spoke of it in different terms: "Over the years, the camera becomes like a friend, something you learn to take with pride into places of great power and the humblest of villages. Yet which one of us is not anxious walking with a friend into a new world?" The movies advertised all over Tauranga – they're weapons, using the camera to destroy your community and absorb you into an order where the oppressions you bear are a fact of life. But the camera you carry in *Umurangi Generation* is a friend, or at least it tries to be. It's compromised, exploited by the market, but it's also a way for you to perform, in some small way, the game's anti-capitalist, anti-colonial politics. It is a way for you to resist, and document, and understand what has happened to this land and its people. 🇳🇿



# DUNGEONS & DOLLHOUSES

By Orrin Grey







The first board game I ever fell in love with was *Clue*. Back then, my options were constrained by a couple of factors. We were poor – and my parents unimaginative – and the plethora of story-driven (and often prohibitively expensive) board games that we currently enjoy had not yet been unleashed upon the world.

In those days, *Clue*, with its cozy mystery characters and top-down dollhouse game board, was as close to a “dungeon crawl” as any board game I had ever found – and while I had not yet ever seen an “old dark house” movie, it prefigured my love of those, too.

A few years later, a friend of mine got a copy of *HeroQuest*. I don’t remember if this was immediately *before* or shortly *after* I discovered the various worlds of Warhammer through issues of *White Dwarf* magazine that I found on newsstand shelves (when those were still a thing) at a local Waldenbooks (when *those* were still a thing).

As it was for many people of my age and general proclivities, *HeroQuest* was something of a revelation. I had not yet played a proper game of Dungeons & Dragons, but I had probably read the

Dragonlance Chronicles by then, and I had played videogames that had introduced me, in broad strokes, to the idea of the “dungeon crawl.”

Growing up, I loved the idea of dollhouses, but no one had to tell me that, as a boy, playing with them was not acceptable. Back then, I hadn’t yet figured out that I was bisexual, let alone pansexual, let alone probably some strain of gender-queer. I’m not going to claim that *society* didn’t yet have those concepts, but I hadn’t been exposed to them. I came up in small towns in the Midwest; gender norms were pretty rigid.

Dungeon crawl board games may not have been as socially acceptable as playing football – something I *never* had the slightest interest in – but for someone who was seen as a boy, they were certainly more acceptable than playing with dollhouses, never mind that they were essentially the same thing.

And spooky dollhouses with *monsters*? Turns out that is basically my whole, entire jam.

With *HeroQuest*, I was hooked, even without having really played it. I fell in love with the miniatures, with the vari-

able dungeon board, with the tiny little dollhouse furniture that came with it. I wanted a copy of *HeroQuest* so badly – but see above re: being poor.

As I said, around this same time I discovered Warhammer, another hobby I couldn't afford. The miniatures and their boxes were outside my reach, but I could buy issues of *White Dwarf* – and later a subscription – and I could occasionally save up enough to buy one of the army books. I could pore over the pictures of the tiny figures in their battlefield dioramas, spin from each fragment whole universes, as you only can when you're a kid obsessed.

By the time I had accumulated enough resources of my own to invest in a dungeon crawl boardgame, *HeroQuest* was no longer as readily available, so I ended up getting *Dragon Quest*, one of the many attempts to translate actual Dungeons & Dragons to board game form, complete with a handful of Ral Partha miniatures and a lot of disappointing cardboard standees representing monsters.

(I say disappointing, but I kept those stupid cardboard monsters for years.)

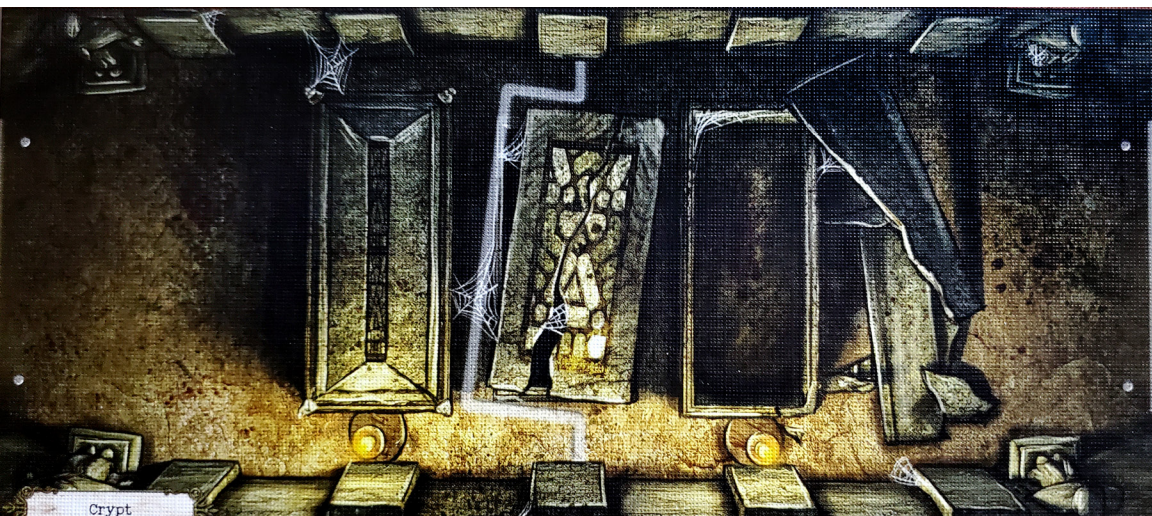
Like *HeroQuest* before it, *Dragon Quest* used a single generic game board to create all of its various dungeons. Which meant you were limited to “dungeons” that could be generated by adding doors and things to a fairly static castle layout. It wasn't until I picked up *Warhammer Quest* that I was introduced to modular dungeon tiles and my ultimate fate was sealed.

The branding of *Warhammer Quest* is still alive today – you can see it in tiny letters above the names of products like Games Workshop's current *Blackstone Fortress* – but back then it was a fairly simple affair that brought the Warhammer fantasy setting to board game form without the need for a gamemaster. Randomly drawn cards determined everything from monster encounters to what room you found on the other side of the game's plastic doorways.

I had tried playing Dungeons & Dragons by the time *Warhammer Quest* came along. The difficulty with playing D&D though, was that it required not only a group of friends, but a group of friends who *wanted to play D&D*.







My brothers were all so much older than I was – the youngest a senior in high school when I was in kindergarten – that I was, in essence, an only child. I won't lean into the whole bullied geek archetype and suggest that I didn't have friends, but I seldom had *enough* friends who wanted to play Dungeons & Dragons – or enough friends who wanted to play it when I did, or the *way* I did. Dungeon crawl games gave me an outlet that I could play by myself.

I was already writing by then, and games like *Warhammer Quest* gave me a place to make up stories – and act them out – in a way that felt more tactile than just scribbling them on paper. That was part of it, absolutely, but here's the other: I was drawn to the little tableaus, the miniature figures, the two-dimensional rooms. Dollhouses that I could play with, tailored to my specific aesthetics and filled to bursting with monsters and mysteries.

In the years since, there have been lots of other dungeon crawl board games

though, until recently, I haven't owned many of them. Then, just before the COVID-19 pandemic gripped the country, I got into Dungeons & Dragons for the first time since college.

These days, playing tabletop RPGs is a lot more feasible than it was when I was a kid, even if my friends now are all busy introverts, many of whom have kids of their own, and it can be tricky to get a gaming group together. D&D 5e, with its focus on miniatures and dungeon tiles, scratched a lot of that dungeon crawl itch for me, but then the pandemic hit.

I wrote for *The Pitch* – Kansas City's local alternative newspaper – about how lots of people are getting into Dungeons & Dragons for the first time during the pandemic, thanks to online platforms like Roll20. But for me, it isn't the same. It misses that tactile element, for one thing, which I apparently need.

So, I've been filling the void with dungeon crawl board games that I can play by myself, or with my spouse. It started

with *Descent*, a game I had always wanted to try, and expanded to *Massive Darkness*, *Super Dungeon Explore*, one of the newer iterations of D&D as a board game, and even a dip into *Shadows of Brimstone*. Have I actually *played* most of them? No, not at all. But there's a validation there, for that kid who wanted to play with monster-filled, subterranean dollhouses, and a way to tell tactile stories, if only to myself.

While I was writing that article, the makers of Dungeons & Dragons were [re-\*leasing\* a statement](#) in which they committed to resolving some of the game's long-standing problematic elements, such as the existence of "evil races." They've since announced the release of the book that's going to handle some of that, *Tasha's Cauldron of Everything*, due out mid-November, which is likely to spark a lot of much-needed discussion on a topic that could easily have dominated much more than just this single essay.

When I was talking with people about that aspect of Dungeons & Dragons for the article, though, several mentioned the desire of players to be able to kill goblins (or whatever) indiscriminately, without having to worry about the morality of their actions.

If that's true in D&D, it probably goes double in a dungeon crawl board game, where storytelling tends to take a back seat to hack-and-slash, and where the line between "friend" and "foe" is even more clearly delineated. Certainly, there's an element of (often toxic) violence and even colonialism baked into just about any dungeon crawl game – something that can be a bit hard to square, at times, with my dollhouse analogy earlier.

However, on the same subject of D&D's walking back of "evil races" and the like, Twitter user Quinn Murphy [made a post](#) asserting that the linchpin of "action fantasy" is the fantasy that violence can solve problems.

When it comes to the allure of dungeon crawl games, I might break it down even further and say: The fantasy is that problems have simple solutions.

In a world that is often complex and contradictory, there's an appeal to challenges that you know how to face. Especially in the middle of a pandemic, when what might kill you is invisible, intangible and potentially spread by your friends, coworkers and loved ones.

These days, we are all taking journeys in the dark... 🕯







# **DEATH IS NOT THE END**

By Nicholas Straub

Even the best of times are haunted by a persistent whisper: this too will end. Regardless of our actions, regardless of society's ability to get out of whatever rut it finds itself in, death is inevitable. Unknowable by nature, Death seems insurmountable, immune to all reason. However, it is within this very mystery that freedom from it is found. For the only thing more perplexing than what comes after death is what came before. That is to say all life defies understanding.

In *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, David Hume, an Enlightenment philosopher wrote on the inherent limitations of the human mind and how just by thinking we do something beyond rationale comprehension.

“But do we pretend to be acquainted with the nature of the human soul and the nature of an idea, or the aptitude of the one to produce the other? This is a real creation; a production of something out of nothing; which implies a power so great, that it may seem at first sight, beyond the reach of any being, less than infinite. At least it must be owned, that such a power is not only felt, nor known, nor even conceivable by the mind. We only feel the event, namely, the existence of an idea, consequent to a command of the will: but the manner, in which this operation is performed; the power, by which it is produced; is entirely beyond our comprehension.”

Right now, reading this passage, you're experiencing this remarkable creation. Sure, one can say that what is occurring is just a number of complex physical processes that come together to form this experience, but that is an objectification, separate from your immediate experience. Immediately, you're experiencing the creation of both thought and the present moment. Simply put, by just thinking, by existing, you exude a remarkable power: a power that proves existence will never end. It's a notion so simple it seems ridiculous. But it's not, as four of the prior decade's most beloved videogames find hope in extinction by embracing this truth.

The inhabitants of the *Dark Souls* universe seek a hero to rekindle the first flame, for without it, they believe, all life will cease. But they are wrong. Behind the complex and fascinating lore, *Dark Souls* tells a simple, allegorical story about the end of existence and the fear of an eternal night. One of the primary endings for *Dark Souls 3* involves snuffing out the fire rather than rekindling it and it shows the futility behind the action. The firekeeper, the player's primary companion, begs the player to end everything once she regains her eyes and becomes aware of reality's bleakness. If the player does so, reality recedes, the light fades and all seems to end . . . but it does not, as the firekeeper, with a new understanding, calls out to the player: “One day tiny flames will dance across the darkness like embers linked by lords past.”



The fire is not the sole source of creation for it created neither itself nor the first people. When the birth of fire is depicted in the first *Dark Souls*, the narrator says, “From the dark they came and found the souls of lords within the flame.” The people that subjugate themselves to the lords, were, just like the fire, born from the dark. In other words, the very power that manifests fire exists within them.

Like *Dark Souls*, *Outer Wilds* deals with encroaching night as all the stars in the universe are going supernova. The protagonist is a nascent explorer who has the misfortune/blessing of being caught in a time-loop whereby every time their sun goes supernova instead of dying they awaken 22 minutes prior. Thanks to this Groundhog Day effect the protagonist can seek a solution to the oncoming destruction, but it is impossible. The sun must die. However, not all is hopeless, since, the protagonist discovers that death is not damnation; rather, it’s a transition.

Using the power of indefinite time, the protagonist can seek out the Eye of the Universe, a mysterious entity/planet

sought, but never found, by a more advanced civilization. Ancient, and possibly eternal, the Eye predates anything known in the universe and is a source of immense creation. When the protagonist finally finds the eye, they are dropped into nothingness only for the void around them to be populated by what they love. Then, mirroring this personal creation, the protagonist and the Eye usher in a new universe together as a second Big Bang ensues. Whether or not the Eye continues in the new universe is unknown but its essence, and the essence of the protagonist and all other life, endures as the final shot of the game is of a new species delighting in exploration, billions of years later.

*Death Stranding* takes place following an apocalyptic event that wiped out almost all life on Earth, but instead of despondency the game evokes wonder as every part of its world is an ode to life’s resilience. Decimated but steadfast, humanity rebuilds underground and seeks to reconnect while the natural world refuses to fade, sprinkling landscapes with newly born greenery. Desolation, no matter how horrific, gives way new life.

“Life came from nothing” asserts Amelie, one of *Death Stranding*’s central characters, as she calls the “big bang that gave birth to time and space” a “big fluke.” Defying all logic and sense, existence shouldn’t be but it is and it refuses to go away. Extinction events bring life to the brink of annihilation but ultimately fail. “From the ashes of the dead, rise the living – stronger and wiser,” Amelie proclaims. “Inheritors of the legacy of existence itself. They defy the universe and refuse to surrender.” Because of this, Amelie see the probable extinction of humanity as “an opportunity” for renewal. While the individual will die, and humanity may die, the inexplicable power of existence that unites all will continue, emboldened by the sacrifice. The evolution that comes from trauma propels life forward and us with it.

Like the other games discussed, *Nier: Automata* concerns death with an entire

race being wiped out. *Nier: Automata* tells the story of a proxy war between humans and aliens with each side using artificial combatants to fight on their behalf, androids fight for the humans and machines fight for the aliens. Eventually, it is revealed that all humans and aliens are dead and that the war has been continually propagated by an AI using the suffering of both androids and machines to drive its own evolution. The existence of all the characters in *Nier*, both android and machine, is one of absurdity. They live and die with seemingly no purpose and their entire conscious experience was manipulated. Yet, despite the horror, there is hope.

*Nier*, too, finds wonder in life’s inexplicable existence but unlike the others it puts a special emphasis on consciousness. Tapping into the popular philosophical notion of panpsychism, the game depicts consciousness as something fundamen-



tal to existence: interwoven into the very fabric of reality. Numerous elements of the game express this notion but the most elegant is found in a side mission called "Machine Examination." The android protagonists, 2B and 9S, discover a wrecked Goliath (a vicious machine of war) whose body is ruined but whose mind is intact. They activate the machine to gain information and then leave it alone, allowing the once purely violent entity to contemplate his own existence. Over time, Engels goes from loathing the androids and even life itself – his only memories are of carnage after all – to finding awe in the world around him. "Am I my own existence," he wonders. "Or do we all encompass one sole existence?" He delights in nature and feels a connection when recognized by it: a bird lands on his shoulder and he savors the experience, deciding, for the first time, to make something protected data, a treasured memory. Eventually, Engels asks 2B and 9S to disassemble him for resources. No longer seeing the androids as enemies, but brethren in life, Engels wishes to atone for his past war crimes and help them survive.

The truth that inspires Engels transformation leads to salvation for the game's characters. The androids, and all individualized machines, die at the end of the game but, thanks to the presence of the player, fate is upended. Acknowledging the interconnectedness of all reality, *NieR: Automata* offers a means for players to alter the game's story. The game asks the player if 2B, 9S, A2, and all

the others actually matter. If the player answers affirmatively, the game presents players with a new challenge in the form of a shoot-em-up arcade game where the credits are the enemy. Defeating the fatalistic credits is near impossible but it can be made easy by another acknowledgment of universal connection: reaching out to other players. Using bots provided by the saved data of other players, it is possible to save *NieR's* lovable characters by overriding the programming of the Pods (auxiliary bots that are supposed to have no emotion or will) and enabling them to express their love for the androids by rebuilding them and restoring their minds. They are just characters of a videogame, simple data, but like us, in some manner, they exist so we care for them and assert their worth.

Death is inescapable as is the sorrow that comes with saying goodbye, but that doesn't mean we have to despair. Something always comes from nothing, and we are inextricably tied to that inexplicable power. That is to say the most fundamental part of us, the essence of who we are, is everlasting. 🕒





# FIGHT! FOR YOUR LIFE!

By Stu Horvath





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**M**aking games is crazy! If you work in the games industry you already have the skills to work in any number of non-gaming professions that will be more stable, pay better and never make you work 12 hours a day, six days a week. It's one thing to work in this industry and another to think you can start your own business and grow it into something successful.

"All the evidence in the world suggests you're more likely to fail than succeed and it will cost you everything to experience that. You have to have a couple of screws loose to still press forward in spite of the adversity."

That's Andrew Bennison, managing director of Manchester's [Prospect Games](#).

We seldom have a clear view on how difficult it is to make videogames. Partly this is our own fault – most folks will always suspect that making games isn't "work" the same way that digging ditches is. Partly this is a perception encouraged by the games industry at large, through the use of non-disclosure agreements and robust PR operations. Whatever the reason, we are poorer for it – for me to get anything out of imagining having to walk a mile in your shoes, I need to have an idea of what the shoes, and the mile, are like. Even though I know, intellectually, that game development is hard work filled with pitfalls (because all work is), if I never hear stories about those challenges, it is always going to seem on some level as if videogames just magically appear out of thin air, fully formed and unstained by blood, sweat or tears.

*Robot Champions*, though, has soaked in all three, according to Bennison. "It's been through a roller coaster development," he said in his initial message to me. "Absolute low was needing to put my life savings into the biz to keep the lights on."

Prospect started out as a development team in university that moved into modding and eventually incorporated as a studio. With

two games shipped – *Terrawurm* and *Unbox: Newbie's Adventure* – the team kept kicking around ideas and prototypes for a new project. The one that stuck was *Untitled Robot Combat*. “Before you ask,” says Bennison, “this was back in 2016, so way before the goose!”

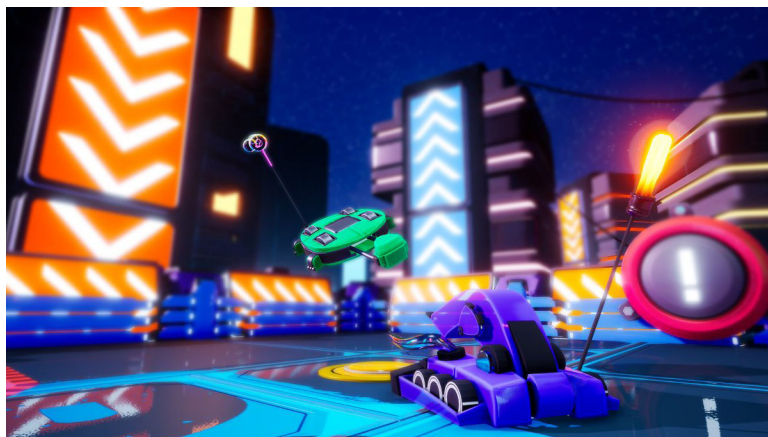
*Robot Champions* is essentially what if *Smash Bros.* but *Robot Wars* (or, *BattleBots*, as the robot fighting TV show is known in the US). When they pitched the game to publishers, they found that the indie space had changed while they were working on *Unbox*. A good prototype wasn't enough. Having trouble finding traction, Bennison and company started reaching out to developers.



“Our offer was simple,” says Bennison. “We have this great game and need help finishing it. Instead of lending us money, let’s team up and finish it together! If there are any skills gaps that either company can’t fill, we’ll co-fund those. Finally, when the game releases (and makes millions) we’ll split that between us.”

Prospect soon found a talented partner studio and got to work. Then, six months later, it all fell apart. Bennison is understandably circumspect about the details of the split, but insists it had nothing to do with the *Robot Champions* or the relationship between the studios. “When something bad happens in the industry, from a botched launch to a company falling apart,” says Bennison, “It’s usually attributed to malicious acts and bad actors. In reality, it is often a series of uncontrollable events culminating in an unwinnable situation. This is what happened with our partnership; some very unexpected things happened that no one involved could foresee or control. We all did our best to survive and reduce the damage inflicted as much as possible.”

And there was plenty of damage. When the split happened, *Robot Champions* was about halfway through development. Most of the staff were gone, those who remained were demoralized and there was no money left to hire more. *Robot Champions* itself was in an unfinished state with very little documentation, making what existed of the game essentially unusable. On top of that, two other Prospect projects that were reliant on the stability the partnership wound up scuttled. “We were left with this absolute mess,” he says. “It was an intensely painful experience for us to have this wonderful thing torn apart without warning.”



All this happened right before Christmas and while Bennison was sure Prospect could regroup and make *Robot Champions* a reality, he was rapidly running out of energy as the studio's driving force. Work on rebuilding the game persisted through 2019. Bennison drew up plans for a Kickstarter, to save both the game and the company, but was burning out. “Everything we'd done before this point paled in comparison to the brutal slog of 2019,” he says. “When you burn out, an exhaustion sets in that can't be fixed with a good night sleep. It damages you exponentially, until you feel like a shambling husk. Ironically, that comes with a loss of sensation, which allows you to keep going.”

Right before the launch of the Kickstarter, Bennison wound up in the hospital after a health scare. “Your body and mind are incredible, they can be pushed to extreme limits over a lengthy time period with seemingly no repercussions,” he says. “But eventually, the damage



catches up with you and when it does, you need to stop, rest and recuperate. Unfortunately Prospect needed the entire team to keep going well beyond their natural limits.”

He came out of the hospital with an all clear, but was under doctor’s orders to avoid stress – something that is next to impossible when running a Kickstarter. “When the doctor told me to stop, I understood how severe my health situation was getting. That didn’t change the fact that Prospect was only going to last a couple more months; it didn’t have time to wait for me to get better. Stopping was the sensible thing to do. Continuing forward was the right thing to do.”



Except, a month later, Prospect canceled the Kickstarter campaign. “We tried to run a Kickstarter with no budget, as if we were still living in 2012,” says Bennison. “You can’t just launch a campaign and expect it to go well, you have to treat it like a product and spend enormous amounts on marketing and outreach to cut through the noise. We did as much as we could without any money and were on track to raising about £30,000, but it wasn’t enough. It was our first Kickstarter and it was done in desperation so in retrospect the writing was on the wall before we started.”

This should have been the end of Prospect and a good number of people were telling Bennison to let it go, but what he calls “Plan Z,” the very last shot at turning things around came through. Bennison is vague as to what Plan Z consists of, but it had provided the funding to properly finish *Robot Champions*, restructure the business and hire new talent. “We’ve essentially come back from the dead,” he says.



It boggles my mind, honestly, even as someone who runs an independent publication and has made some questionable decisions along the way to keep it afloat. It's the hospital bit that really throws me. To carry on after that seems reckless. Bennison disagrees. "I view life like climbing a mountain," counters Bennison. "If you stop moving forward you'll die from the cold, if you veer off path you'll die from the fall. Death is always within reach and a rewarding life is always far away. My desire for life prevents me stopping, my instinct keeps me on the right path and my experience tells me when to drop dead weight. The only way I'm going to better myself is heading up the mountain because I have no other choice. I find this mindset immensely freeing."

Which isn't to say Bennison learned nothing from his experience with *Robot Champions*.

"It really put me in my place. My boundless energy helped us achieve so much, but it also enabled me to run from my problems. When you're exhausted and out of options life becomes bleak and binary. There's death, life and no more running. I felt myself standing on a precipice, staring into darkness. When I looked back I could see all the mistakes and problems that led me there piled up like a mountain.

"I used to think that you stop situations from controlling you, by controlling the situation. Making this game has taught me that you're missing the point if you think it's about control in the first place.

"Does that even make sense?! Figuring out life is an on-going process!"

To be continued...

\* \* \*

*You can follow the progress of Robot Champions' development and play the pre-alpha on [Patreon](#). You can also follow [Prospect Games](#) and [Andrew Bennison](#) on Twitter. 🐦*



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## Illustrations

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