

# five out of ten

thought beyond play



preview

# reach

I normally write this introductory blurb weeks in advance: a few pleasantries and apocryphal comments about the future, laced with hints at the issue to come. This time, I'm writing this less than a day before this magazine is released - who doesn't love digital publishing?

Truthfully, this issue came to fruition quite late in the day: we're lucky to have not just one talented artist in Christos Reid, who created our front cover and the 'Space' cover images; but also Trevor White, who drew some beautiful illustrations for 'Failed Men in Failed Satires'.

This issue's theme is 'Space', although our contributors have chosen to explore the spaces within and around games instead of the 'outer' kind. What does it mean to be free to explore a game's spaces? How do the spaces in which we play games affect our play? How can games subvert a domestic space? We examine all of these and more.

There's just enough space here to mention that we're working on something very special, due for release in June. It's not an issue of *Five out of Ten*, but we think our readers will love it. All I will say is that it'll be an adventure for all of us, myself included. Enjoy the magazine!



## Alan Williamson

Editor-in-Chief of *Five out of Ten*, occasional contributor to the *New Statesman*, *Eurogamer* and *Critical Distance*. He never wants to illustrate another *Final Fantasy* character for as long as he lives.

five  
out of  
ten

### #8: Space

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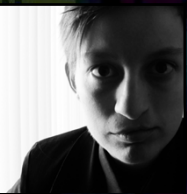
## Patrick Lindsey

Co-writer of *Depression Quest*, game critic and developer living in Boston. He writes his bios in the third-person because that's what everyone else does.



## Tauriq Moosa

Writes on ethics related to modern technology for *The Daily Beast*, the *Guardian*, *New Statesman* and elsewhere. He is more likely to love a videogame than people. He currently resides in South Africa.



## Zoya Street

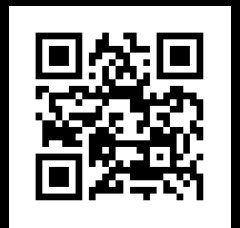
Historian and journalist from Britain, living in the Bay Area. He runs the games history e-zine *Memory Insufficient* and wrote *Dreamcast Worlds*, a book based on his master's thesis.



## Meg Townsend-Ruttan

Errant writer and teacher from Ontario, dabbling in many things including videogames, literature, and film. She likes to take things apart but refuses to put them back together.

Cover image: Christos Reid, @failnaut    Inner image: *Super Metroid*, Nintendo  
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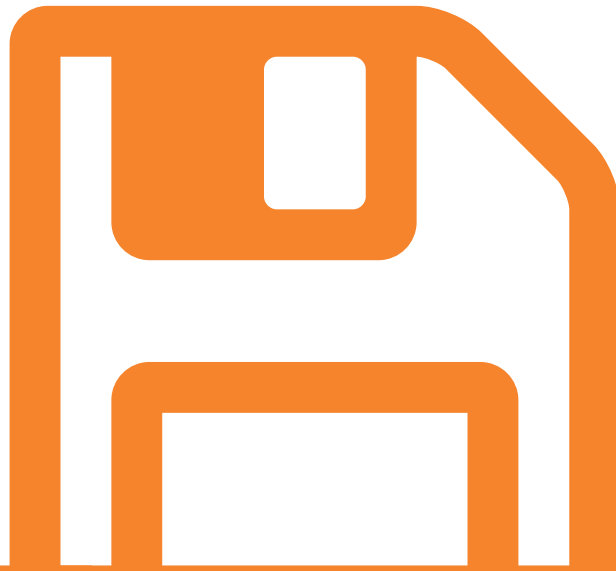


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# Editor's Note: Space and Memory



“My mum’s house is a place where memories go to gather dust,” I wrote in Issue 5’s *The Banality of Addiction*. Every few months I return to Northern Ireland to visit family and friends, but neither the home town nor the contents of mum’s shelves change much. I was looking for some old documents as research for a book I’m writing, and came across a cornucopia of technological clutter: old flight sticks that connect to ports which no longer exist, the docking cradle for a Palm Pilot, a box of floppy disks. A lot of Norton Antivirus and AOL discs were cathartically snapped in half that day, I can assure you.



The relentless march of technology is always impressive when viewed from a distance, but when it comes to memory, the advances are particularly staggering. The InDesign source file for just one issue of *Five out of Ten* would fill forty floppy disks. My first computer had an eight gigabyte hard drive: you could fit the working files for eight issues of the mag onto that, but you wouldn't have any space left for the operating system. Where we used to store our information on volatile, expensive disks, it's now de rigueur to store it on someone else's disks in the cloud. I now use a hard drive platter as a coaster. Memory is a commodity: the entire *Five out of Ten* archive is stored on a tape backup in a bunker outside of Oxford, so we can rest assured that in the event of a nuclear apocalypse, digital archaeologists will still know what I thought of *Ecco the Dolphin*. Thank heavens for that.

While cloud backups and cheap storage are great news for consumers and IT professionals, there's a knock-on cost to our humanity. The internet doesn't forget: every website is scraped and archived, 'deleted' Facebook accounts will remain inert on servers forever. I was fortunate enough

to do most of my growing up offline - aside from some ill-considered LiveJournal posts that have now been mercifully purged - but what of those we pretentiously call 'digital natives', whose entire lives have been recorded on social media? The internet's elephantine memory is great for the things we want to preserve, but it's a nightmare for when we actually want to forget. Tomorrow's politicians will either need to be today's luddites, lead a pseudo-monastic existence, or the general public will need to considerably lower their moral standards.

Forgetting is a natural and important thing. The act of forgetting is crucial to forming new memories in the brain. Imagine if you eidetically recalled each new day as well as the last: the word 'memorable' would lose all meaning. Yet Instagram gives an equal weight to every image, whether it's your wedding day or a picture of a mediocre cup of coffee. The things that stick in our mind are truly special. The way we store our memories online is a digital analogue of tall poppy syndrome, where we homogenise our greatest adventures with an over-exposed, sweaty nightclub selfie.



As a medium intertwined with technology, the memories we create in videogames - and the spaces in which we share them - are also changing. In an act that seems almost sacrilegious, the PlayStation 4 has replaced the Start button with a Share button, allowing instant video publishing to YouTube. Of course, videogames have always been a fine spectator sport, whether it was crowds forming in the arcades or around a television with your friends. But now, the barriers between our private and public gaming lives are steadily eroding. We can watch strangers stream on Twitch, and they can make a living off the advertising revenue. The age of the anonymous online handle is at an end, replaced with the age of pseudonymous celebrity. I recently visited the EGX Rezzed show in Birmingham, and the biggest crowd of the day wasn't for any game; it was for a Yogscast signing session.

In Tauriq Moosa's essay on discomfort in gaming, which you'll conveniently find in this issue of *Five out of Ten*, he discusses the notion of games as 'escapism'. It is that withdrawal into a game's spaces, that complete sensory engagement, which

creates some of our most powerful gaming memories. You may not remember where you were when Aerith died in *Final Fantasy VII*, but you won't forget Sephiroth's blade. You won't remember the date when you encountered *BioShock's* "would you kindly" moment, but you'll never forget Andrew Ryan's words. I worry that, now we are encouraged to share everything immediately and live-tweet our faintest neural impulses, we will diminish the ability to consolidate those memories: to dwell on them, to make them neurologically unforgettable as well as digitally preserved. Part of *Five out of Ten's* role is of course a form of archival, where we write about some of our most powerful gaming memories because we deem them worthy of preservation. But first we must form them, and they must inform us as well.

Memories are not screenshots of our lives, moments frozen in time: they're subjective, heuristic, changeable.

Some spaces are sacred. Our memories are the foremost of them.



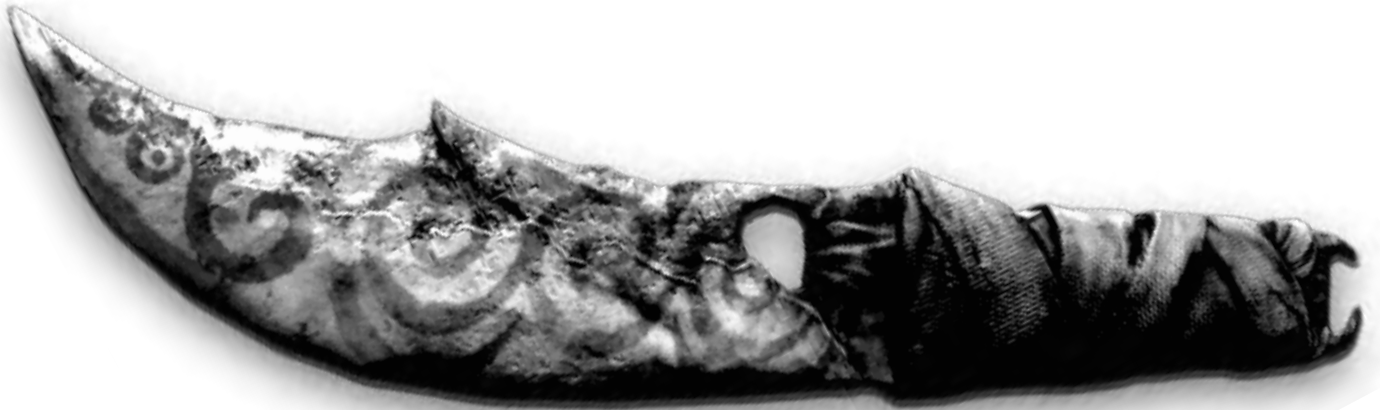




# Failed men in failed satires

Zoya Street

Illustrations: Trevor White



“...she kills you while having sex with you? And she says, “you win,” as you’re dying. The only thing more outrageous I could think of is if she castrated him.”

— *Far Cry 3* Lead Writer Jeffrey Yohalem, in an interview with *Rock Paper Shotgun*

Videogames keep trying to do satire, and they fail consistently. In *The Castle Doctrine*, a satire about hyper-security and hypocrisy in suburban America, you play a heroic man trying to protect his family by attacking other people. The game has been roundly criticised for reflecting sexist and racist tropes without sufficiently deconstructing them. The first hour of gameplay in *Bioshock Infinite* suggests a commentary about the role of games in the militarisation and racism of American culture, but as the story unfolds, people of colour are demonised for their methods of resisting the same colonialism that the game seemed to critique.

*Far Cry 3* is a particularly useful example of videogames’ failure to adapt satire for interactive storytelling. A first person shooter with multiple references to *Apocalypse Now*, lead writer Jeffrey Yohalem said in interviews that *Far Cry 3* was a satire, because it deliberately exaggerated racist

tropes in order to expose them while emasculating its white male characters and undermining the assumption that they are the drivers of narrative. Critics found that the satire fell flat, resulting in a game that uncritically mirrored racism in games — or worse, exploited racist tropes for its own ends.

Holly Green at *Gameranx* responded, “*Far Cry 3* is about extremes, not subtleties. Saving your friends from slavers, having sex with the hot “exotic” chick, shooting a tiger in the face with an AK47: it’s the same stereotypical male wish fulfilment we see played out in so many other FPS titles. Why would the player interpret this as a challenge to the status quo?” Mata Haggis concurred on *Gamasutra*, describing it as a “recapitulation of an American hero stereotype” with no subversion involved — in particular, pointing out that the game presents the drugging and rape of the protagonist Jason Brody as a conquest fantasy, rather than as a traumatic experience.



KEEP THE SCANDAL

FOR THE END



# KEEP THE SCANDAL FOR THE END: COMMANDOS, 14 YEARS LATER

Grant Howitt



## A LONG STORY MADE MERCIFULLY SHORT

I'll cut to the chase. I received a demo disk when I was thirteen, and on that disk (amongst other games) was a single mission from **Commandos: Beyond the Call of Duty**. I fell for that game. I played it for days, weeks. I could never finish it, because **Commandos** is hard as nails.

I never purchased the full game. I spent years convinced that **Commandos** was a great game, but that I could never really hope to play it - because if I couldn't get past that mission, what chance did I have of getting anywhere with the real thing? And so it, and I, drifted apart.





## A PRIMER

**Commandos: Beyond the Call of Duty** is a standalone expansion pack for **Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines**, both published by Eidos and developed by Pyro Studios, a Spanish development house who would go on to develop three more **Commandos** titles and a couple of RTS games in a more traditional vein (**Praetorians** and **Imperial Glory**) before shifting to mobile games and fading into obscurity in late 2012.

**Commandos** is a real-time tactics game, a challenge for the mind and not necessarily the reactions - it's a game of building convoluted plans and then rapidly rearranging those plans when they prove to be almost entirely useless. The player takes control of a small unit - generally numbering around four men, each with unique skills - and is tasked with infiltrating a series of German bases during WWII. It is astonishingly difficult: unforgiving, unintuitive, and requiring you to utilise techniques that border on the absurd to avoid detection.

It's kind of like chess, although to truly simulate the experience using chess your opponent would need to move during your turn and a big man in a greatcoat would kick the board off the table if you came within three moves of checkmate.





Me

You

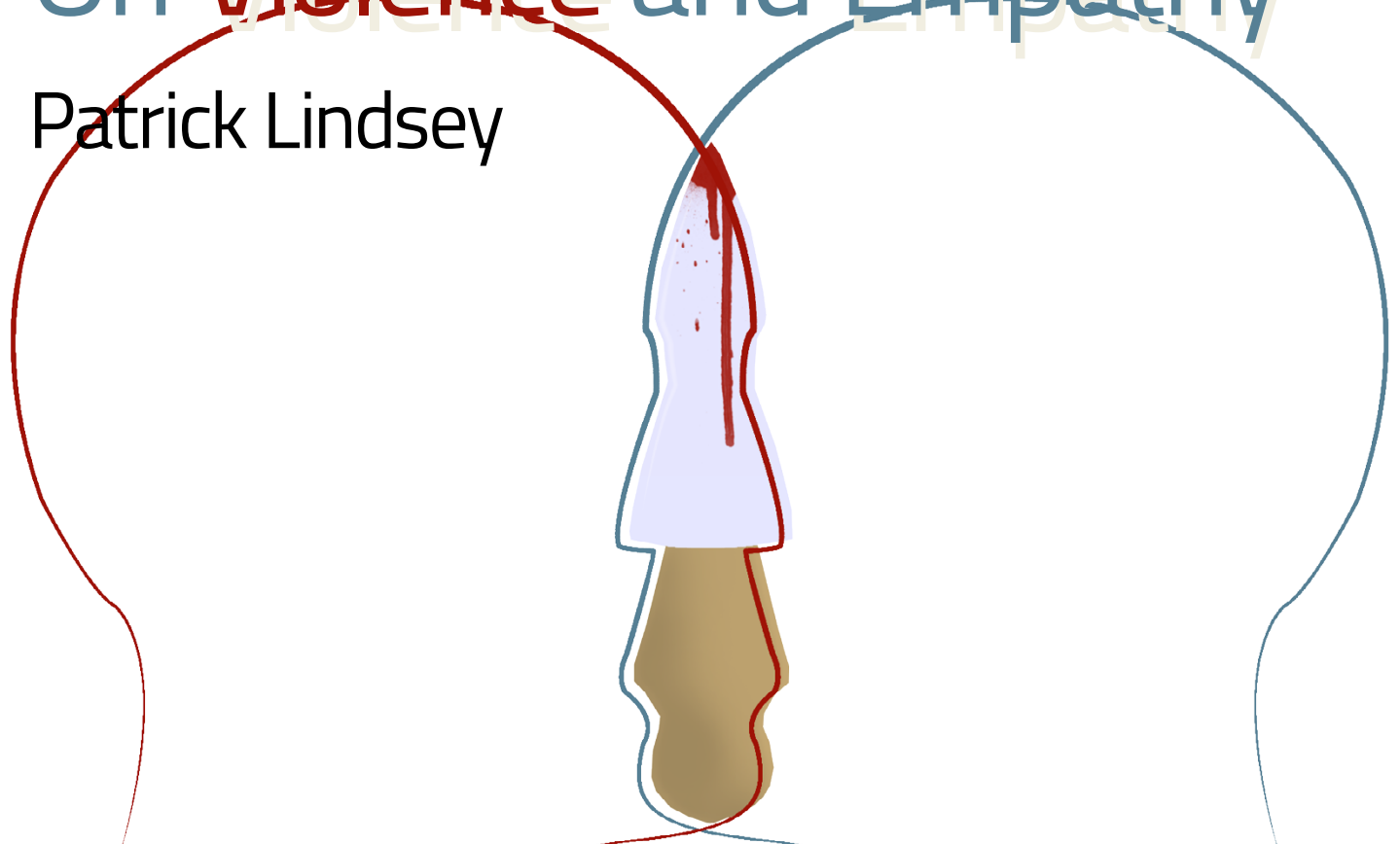
I have killed.

Slaughtered. So many deaths I've lost count. Killed for self-defence, for sport, for patriotism, for anger, for boredom, for caprice. We are all digital butchers in a world of pixelated abattoirs. Our game worlds are little more than hunting grounds stocked with chattel for us to stalk and kill without a second thought, before we go on to finish the dishes or pick the kids up from soccer practice.



# Once More, With Feeling: On Violence and Empathy

Patrick Lindsey



**N**ot only have I killed; I've revelled in it. I've fist-pumped after reducing an opponent's digital head to red mush, stomped and beaten dead bodies into constituent members because it amused me, gawked at the chunks of human face that a well-placed headshot removed from my target, and mowed down innocent bystanders simply to marvel at the way physics pulled and tugged at the lifeless body as it flew through the air.

It has never been particularly difficult, but with each passing death the act of taking a life becomes increasingly trivial. Videogames are designed around aiding and abetting our quest for slaughter in subtle but carefully calculated ways. Game enemies are ubiquitous and name-

less, systematically dehumanized at every turn, from their never-ending numbers to the fact that they're often masked or wearing a helmet, their faces and identities hidden and made irrelevant.

So why, with untold thousands of digital murders under my belt, am I just now starting to flinch at the same acts of violence I used to celebrate? Why now, when I push X to drive a knife into a human throat, does a gape-mouthed look of horror replace my previous guttural grunt of primal masculinity? Has my murder odometer simply ticked over, my capacity for death completely exhausted? Am I just getting older? Have I lost my nerve?



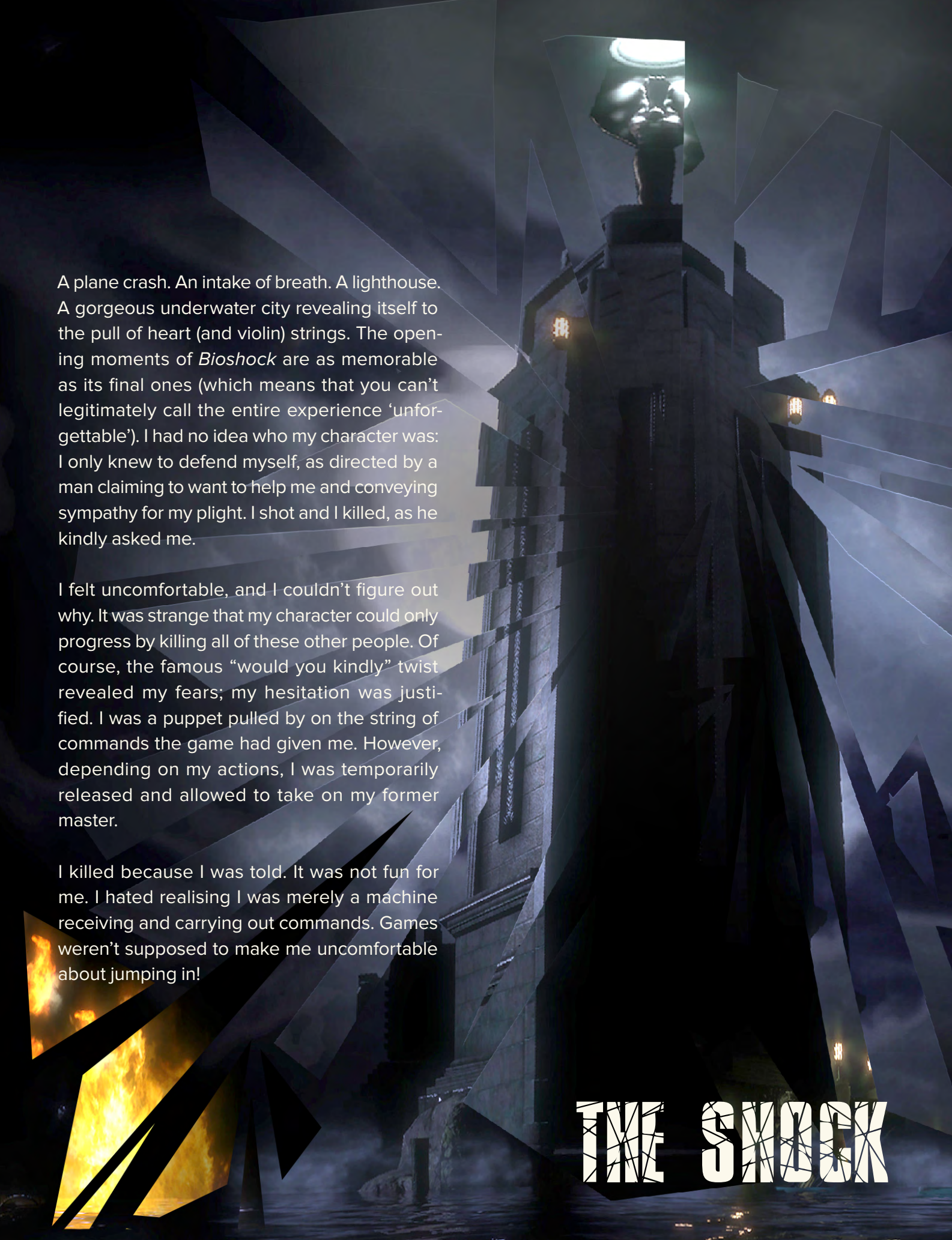
## Tauriq Moosa

**F**reedom is a lie we tell ourselves to manage the illusion. Whether by physical or societal law, we can't do what we like, when we like. Videogames have usually been greeted with a view that they're for "escapism" – which is, of course, what people say about books and film, too. But, like these other forms of art, no one thinks that's their sole purpose. Creativity is a doorway to reflection, an entrance into a moral safe zone where ideas about what we know and think can twirl around concepts we otherwise would never encounter or entertain. Morality is built into how we operate as a species: our sense of duty, our sense of right, drives all our actions, and presumably almost no one wants to deliberately hurt others unnecessarily.

Videogames have always played with this, writing scripts and narratives where even the box art assures the player of their heroic status. As you play, every swing of your sword, every pull of the trigger, reaffirms that you're on the side of Good, combating Evil, clearing the way to righteousness with crunches and bullets.

This lulls us into a state of moral absolutism. There is no need to question our position on the moral landscape. For a while, some games have worked in ways to upset this, but perhaps it's only recently that the idea of steeping you in moral ignorance has been more blatant, and so essential.





A plane crash. An intake of breath. A lighthouse. A gorgeous underwater city revealing itself to the pull of heart (and violin) strings. The opening moments of *Bioshock* are as memorable as its final ones (which means that you can't legitimately call the entire experience 'unforgettable'). I had no idea who my character was: I only knew to defend myself, as directed by a man claiming to want to help me and conveying sympathy for my plight. I shot and I killed, as he kindly asked me.

I felt uncomfortable, and I couldn't figure out why. It was strange that my character could only progress by killing all of these other people. Of course, the famous "would you kindly" twist revealed my fears; my hesitation was justified. I was a puppet pulled by on the string of commands the game had given me. However, depending on my actions, I was temporarily released and allowed to take on my former master.

I killed because I was told. It was not fun for me. I hated realising I was merely a machine receiving and carrying out commands. Games weren't supposed to make me uncomfortable about jumping in!

**THE SHOCK**





Cloud

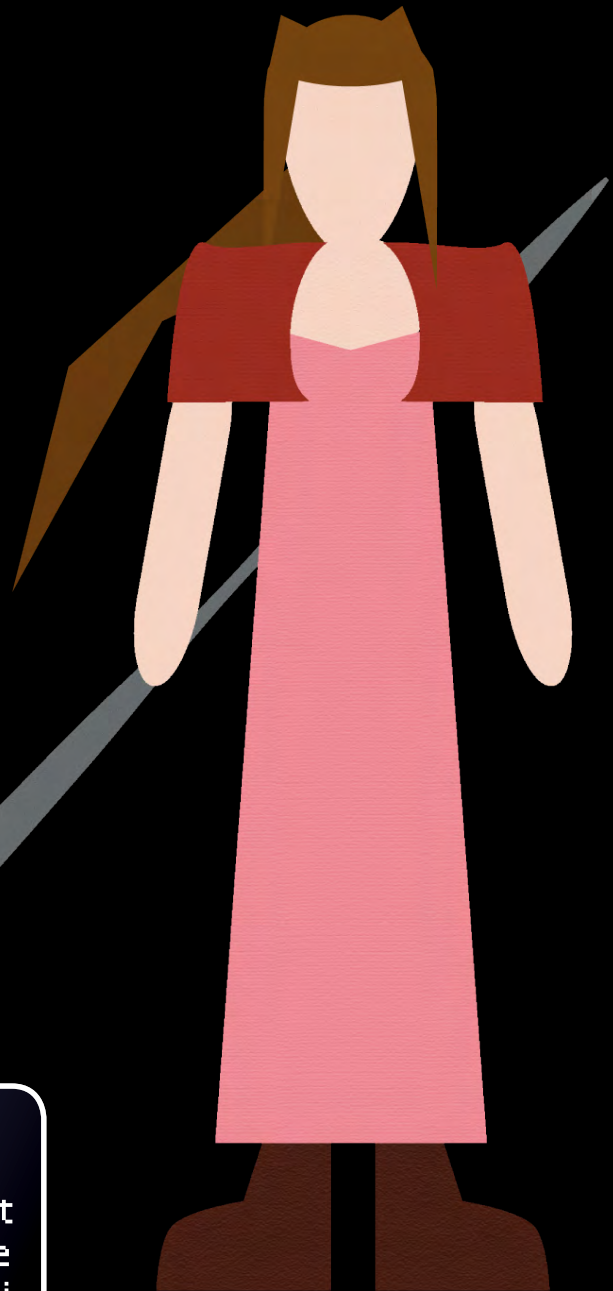
"She was so close, we couldn't see her."

# A Mere Body

Aerith, Silence, and Death in *Final Fantasy VII*

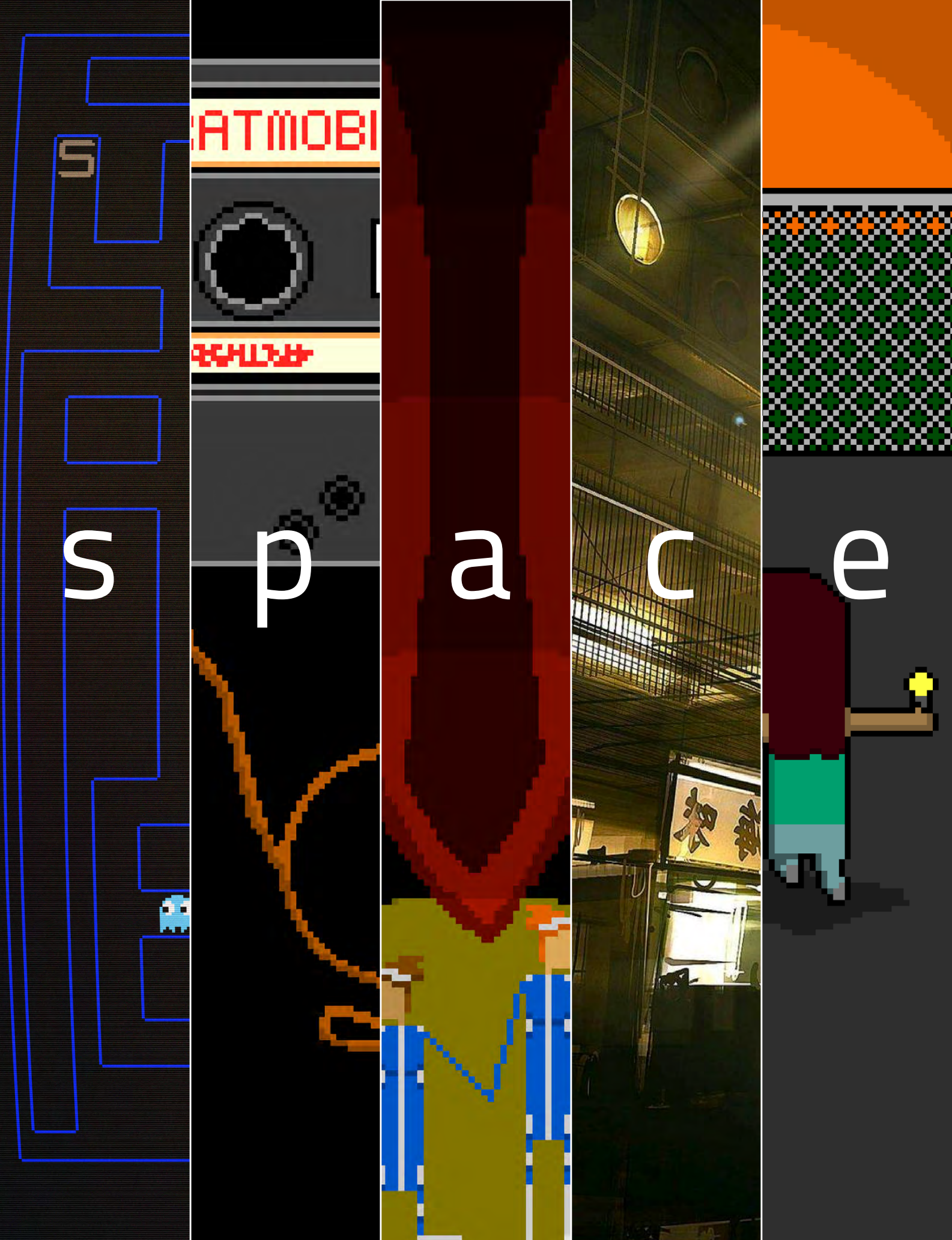
Meg Townsend-Ruttan

Sixteen years on from its release, *Final Fantasy VII* fandom has persisted with healthy enthusiasm. For those in need of an introduction to this critically-acclaimed game, the story occurs on Gaia, a fantasy earth being slowly destroyed by an evil empire in the guise of the Shinra Corporation. Cloud Strife, the game's amnesic protagonist, was once a member of Shinra's army but has since joined up with a band of environmental activists who seek to stop Shinra from destroying the city of Midgar. After sabotaging a Shinra facility, Cloud meets Aerith, a flower girl living in one of Midgar's few pastoral areas, and she conscripts him into serving as her bodyguard.



## Aerith Gainsborough

'The flower girl' is the last of the ancient Cetra race. The Shinra Corporation are pursuing her to exploit her magical abilities. She meets Cloud after he sabotages an energy reactor in Midgar.



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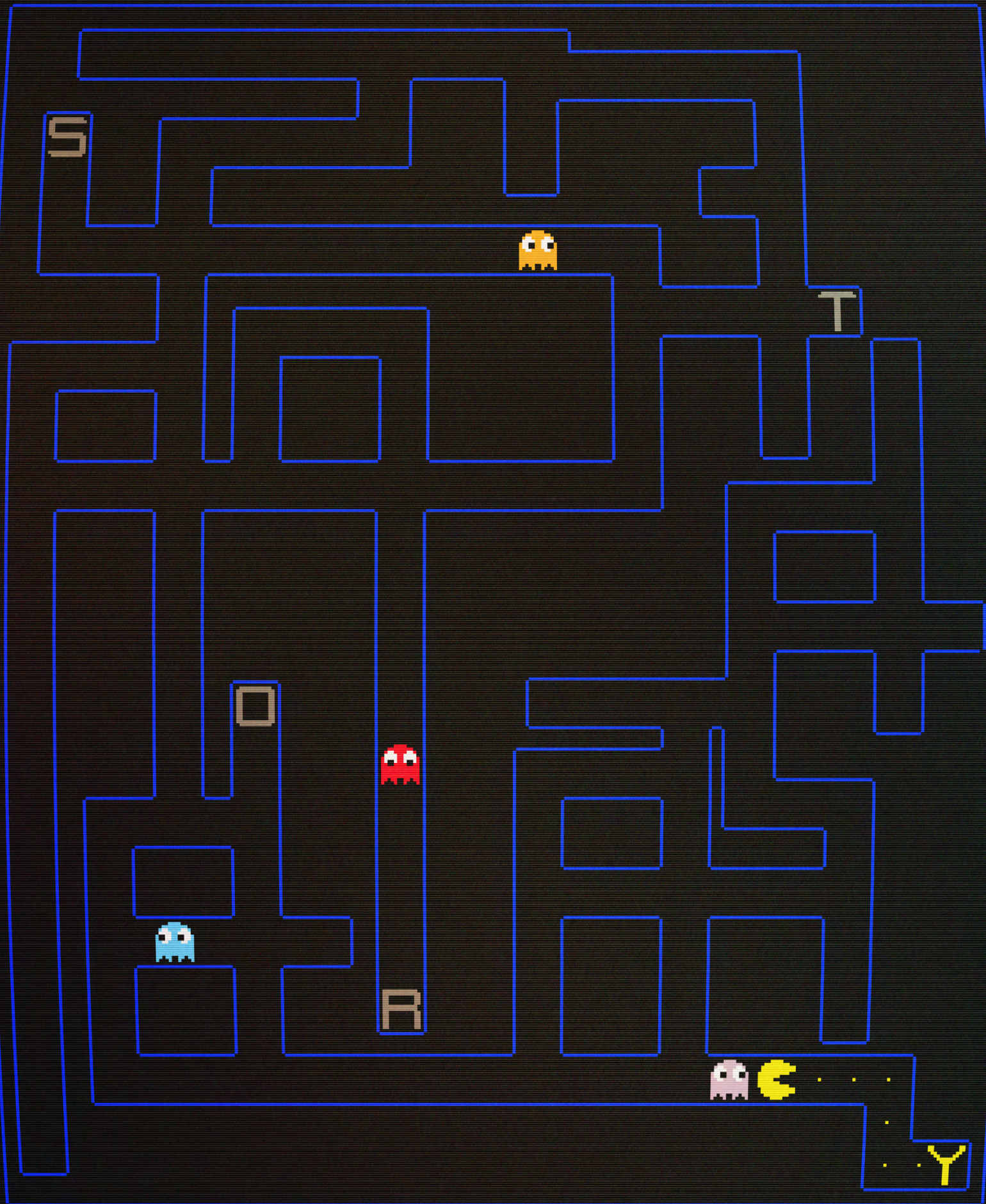
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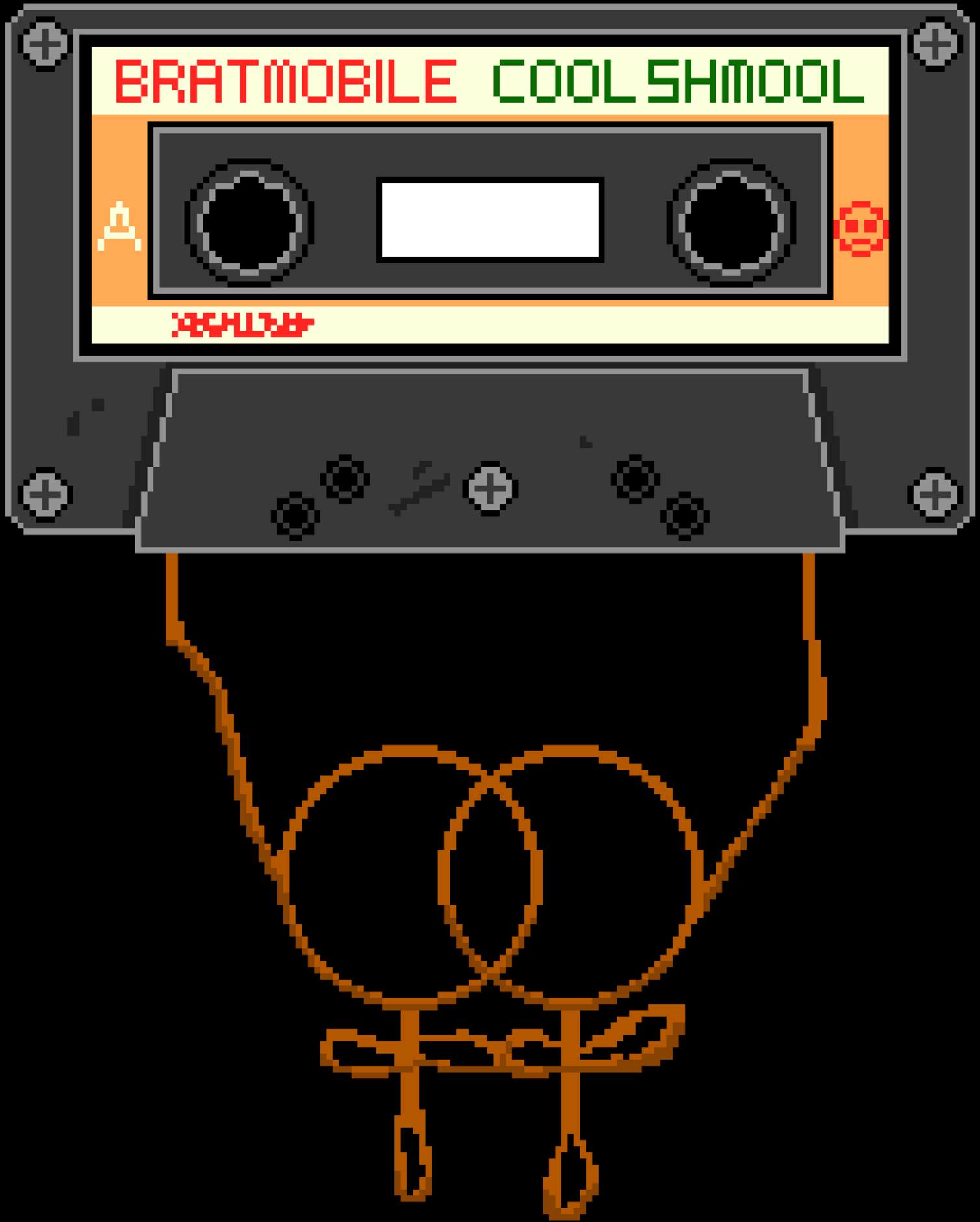
# The Cost of Freedom

Tauriq Moosa

Journeying through an endless landscape is a prized feature of the modern videogame: worlds roll into the horizon, tempting you with exploration and never-ending play. The incredibly large world of *Skyrim*, the darkly comic urban cesspool of *Grand Theft Auto V*, the endless night of *Arkham City*: open-world games imply a blank page, a director-less story that lets your every decision carve out its own end.

But this choice of seemingly endless space often comes with compromise. Without a guiding hand, the player has endless freedom - but crucially, lacks direction toward events or plots that can be managed and therefore executed in a creative way.

As a consequence, rather than being constricting, the spaces of linear games seem increasingly to confer their own advantages - benefits that outweigh the loss of illusive 'freedom'.



BRATMOBILE COOLSHMOOL

BRATMOBILE





# Home Made Strange: Heteronormativity in *Gone Home*

Meg Townsend-Ruttan

In a market saturated with games appealing mainly to the average male, *Gone Home* eschews heterosexuality and the masculine heroic narrative entirely. It is a queering of the haunted house genre and the domestic melodrama. The term ‘queering’ is used here in two different ways. First, *Gone Home* is wrought up with the dawning of lesbian sexuality in a teenage girl and essentially a coming-out story. But queering is also the ‘making strange’ of general assumptions about human lives and human sexuality and, in this case, domestic and familial spaces as they serve as genre. Popular thought and pop culture relegate genre to categories of media, but consider the house in *Gone Home* as a generic space itself, one that the player comes to with a set of assumptions. *Gone Home*’s time period, the make-up of the family, and the items in the house all reveal a family that is contextually appropriate, exactly what one would expect of the supposedly ideal family. Suburban, middle-class, and, most importantly, heterosexual and heteronormative.

While assumptions of heteronormativity are subjective and based often on whether or not the reader of a text is heterosexual or not, *Gone Home*’s family structure mirrors the cultural space where one assumes that every person is straight until the (sometimes shocking) realization that perhaps they are *not*. We see this every day when a person comes out to the media and it makes the news: to be queer is to be other. We are always presuming heterosexuality.

When I say “heterosexual” in this context I mean that, because of heteronormativity - the general assumption that every individual is heterosexual until stated otherwise - the player automatically assumes that the *Gone Home*’s narrative is grounded in heterosexuality. We assume that the hero of the game, and thus her focus, is the fate of a standard family consisting of a heterosexual pairing and their offspring. Secondly, the horror overtones of the setting - an empty house, the metatext surrounding the history of the family and the previous occupant of the domestic space, for







# A Shared Core

## *Sanctum 2* as relationship maintenance

Zoya Street

We're on the verge of a core breach. The cloudy heart of the sphere pulses blood red as hulking beasts beat their fists on its fragile glass shell. I plant round after round into their exoskeletons, and I see my partner dart in from the side to help. The last beast falls, and in unison we let go of our mice, lean back and exhale. We survive again.

*Sanctum 2* is not a complex game. Its premise is simple: tower defence meets first person shooter. My partner and I play the game cooperatively, building snake-like labyrinths around ourselves and summoning giant turrets from the heavens to protect us from wave after wave of alien invasions. As a wave approaches, we switch from builders to soldiers, striking down the strange creatures that come from dark corners of the map, before they get to our precious, nebulous 'core'. The invasions are inevitable. All we can do is stand firm and defend.

We are working together to create a safe space. The name 'Sanctum' brings religious connotations, intoning the inner space of some temple or cathedral. Playing *Sanctum* has reminded me that games are ritualistic in lots of ways, not least because they exist in some separate space, protected from the complexities of the outside world. They translate difficult problems into simple spatial challenges and, by overcoming them, we go through a process that would have been much more difficult without the game as a mediator.

This separate space set aside for transformative rituals is known as 'liminality' in anthropology. 'Liminal' is also sometimes used to describe any kind of in-betweenness, but the term originated in studies of rites of passage: ceremonial practices that help us to manage the transition from one state to another.





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Zone

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# The Immersion Fallacy

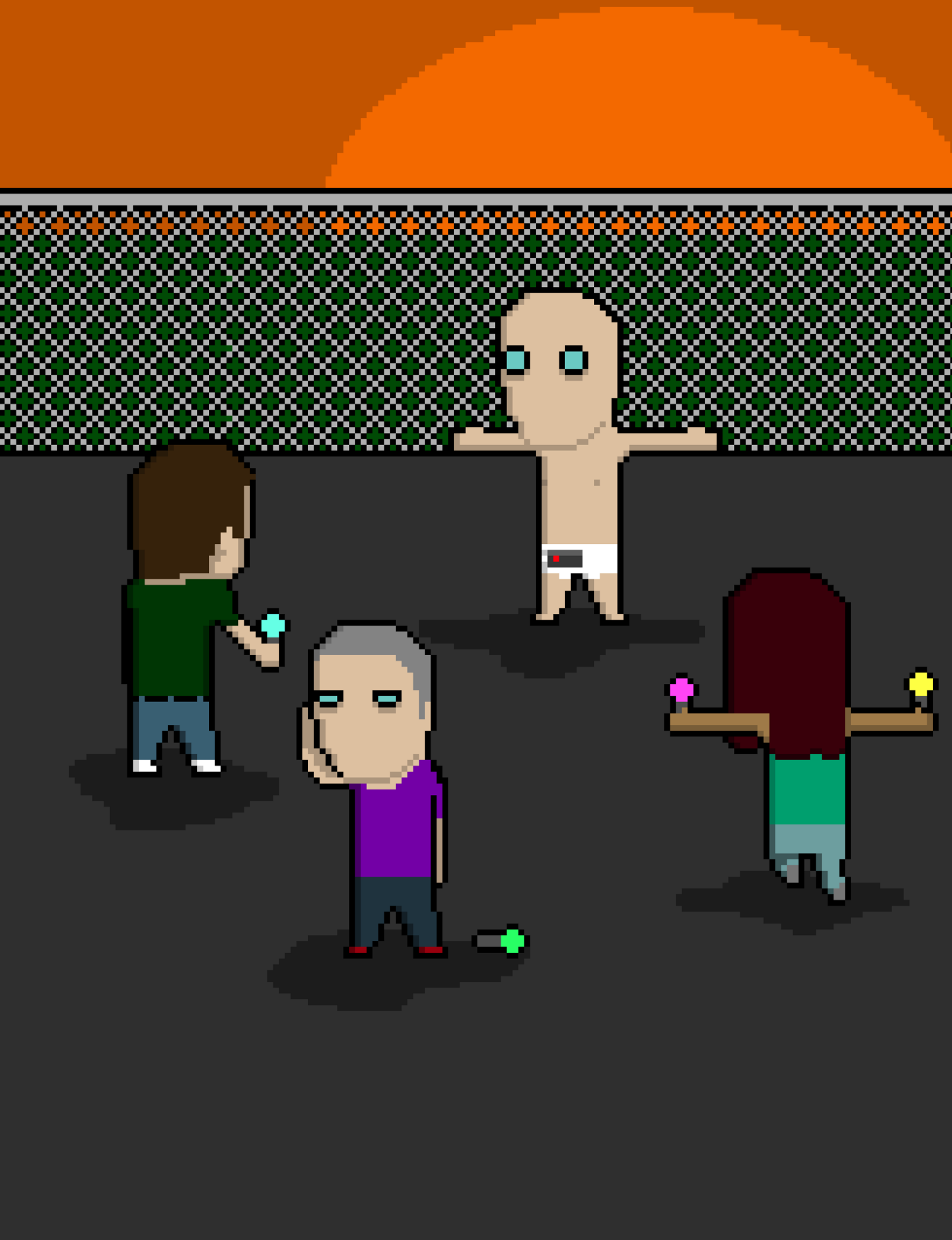
Patrick Lindsey

Early in *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, I'm walking the streets of near-future Detroit. Although the familiar trappings of a Mid-21st Century cyberpunk dystopia have supplanted the familiar trappings of a late-20th Century blue-collar American city, all the familiar urban touchstones are there. Residents trawl apartment blocks and basketball courts, the homeless camp out on street corners, youths breakdance in subway stations. The game will later take me to China, Montreal, and Singapore, all given the *Blade Runner* treatment, but all nonetheless unmistakably real. Or at least, places that I'm supposed to believe are real.

As I wander around this un-Detroit, cracks begin to show. The cars that line the streets never move. Pedestrians mill on the sidewalks, motionless on their respective street corners, idly chatting with whomever crosses their conversation radius. The city is populated, but not alive.

Indoors, I navigate nonsensical labyrinths of air ducts and back hallways, the architecture and layout avoiding any sense of practicality. I trace my way through a ventilation system that serves only to connect an out-of-the-way bathroom to the office I need to infiltrate. It could serve no real purpose, yet here it is. Everything is just too convenient, too planned out.

Yet my suspension of disbelief isn't based on the notion of 'realism'; after all, I had been spending my time hacking electronic locks with my brain and stabbing people through walls with blades built into my elbows. I was already on board for fiction: the dissonance I experienced was caused by a lack of believability and consistency.







## The Wild Rumpus, London: *Swordfight*

I am wearing a bondage harness, the kind you stick a rubber dick through, but instead of a rubber dick there is an Atari joystick hanging from my crotch. Whooping drunk game developers, and the sort of people who hang out with whooping drunk game developers, surround me.

*Swordfight* is a game that requires social momentum to play. You couldn't turn up at a friend's house on a Sunday afternoon and suggest a couple of rounds. You use your joystick to poke the red button on the base of your opponent's unit before they push yours, and you do this by thrusting at them. You weaponise your hips: you are in charge of, for all intents and purposes, a fully armed and operational battlecock.

It's fun of course, but because the button is on the lower half of the unit, my height causes me some problems; short people get up under my guard and powerfuck their way to an easy victory. But it is not in the least bit sexy, even if you play it with people you fancy. It is uncomfortably intimate; but something about the crowd, the beer and the rabid desire to win lets you bypass that, and arousal is nowhere near the top of the list of things you are getting out of this.

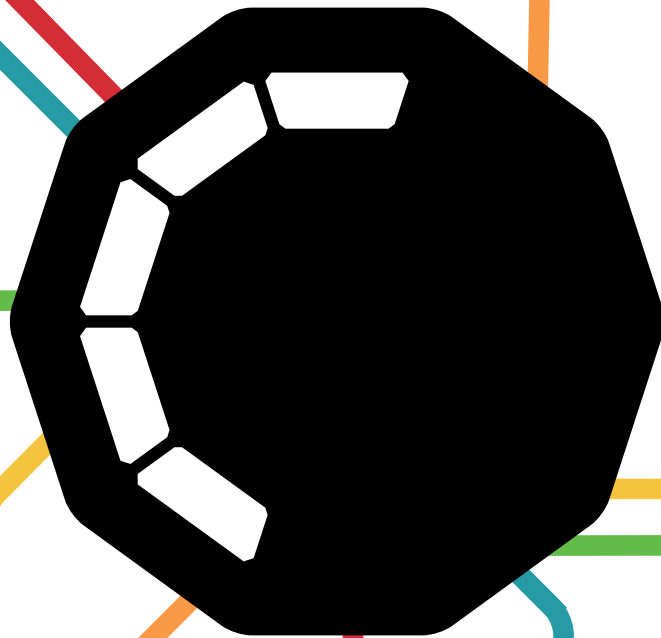
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