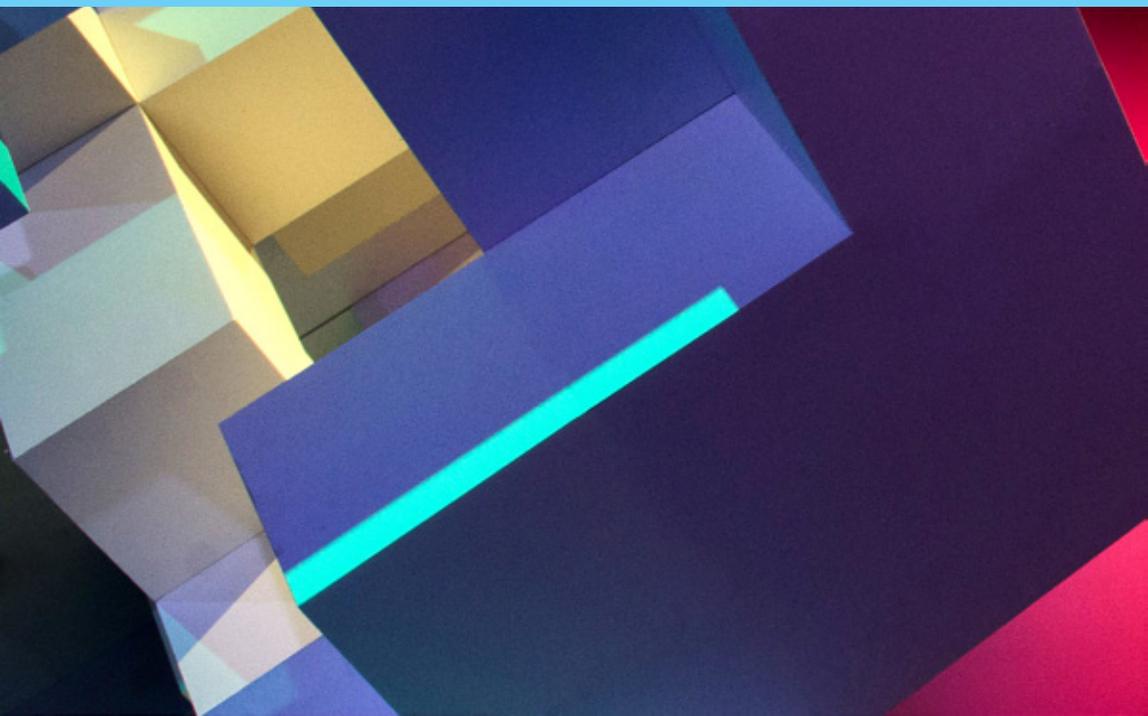




# UNWINNABLE WEEKLY

ISSUE TWENTY-FOUR



Hey, did you just call me a voxel?



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# UNWINNABLE WEEKLY

**ISSUE TWENTY-FOUR**

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Hazel Monforton

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Aurelius Ventro



## **CONTENTS**

**From the Desk of the EIC**

**The Lesson of the Golden Keys**  
by Erika Barcott

**Burning the Library**  
by Hazel Monforton

**It Belongs in a Museum!**  
by Steve Haske

**Dear Space Marine**  
by Aurelius Ventro

**Biographies and Illustrations**



# From the Desk of the Editor in Chief

Hi there,

In my Dungeons & Dragons group, I'm the cartographer. We play the first edition of the game and have been working our way through some of the classic modules. Those modules have their own equally classic maps, which our Dungeon Master, John, has blown up to poster size at Kinko's. They hang there, on the wall, in full view of the entire party.

What I'm saying is that we don't *need* a cartographer. I do it anyway, though. Usually, my versions of the maps are rougher, warped and strange compared to the ones on the wall. No one but me ever uses them.

I don't know why I do this.

Sometimes, I do this for videogames. Sometimes scribbled notes suffice.

Other people do this too. I can't tell you how delighting it is to find an old character sheet tucked in a second hand book, or annotations scrawled in the margins of a game manual.

I don't know why other people do this, but I am glad they do.

I recently had a discussion about this on Twitter with the artist Kent Sheely and the writer Kaitlin Tremblay (game makers, both), who share my delight at these paper artifacts and wonder at their mysteries. Together, along with academic researcher Skot Deeming, we've decided to try to learn why people create these things. We think the best way to do this is to collect and archive not just the maps and notes themselves, but the stories behind them as well.

To do that, we need your help, Dear Reader. If you have these kinds of maps and notes and game-related doodles, and you're willing to share them with us, we'd love to see them and hear their stories. Get in touch with the project via email at [ephemera@unwinnable.com](mailto:ephemera@unwinnable.com).

This idea is less than a week old, so we aren't yet entirely sure what shape the project will take in its final form. A book? A public facing archive? We'll keep you posted, but here and on the Unwinnable website.

\* \* \*

In this week's cover story, Steve Haske talks to Jacob McMurray, the man behind the ambitious new exhibit at Seattle's EMP Museum: Indie Game Revolution. Erika Barcott learns a valuable lesson about hoarding consumable items in videogames (or does she?) and Hazel Monforton takes the *Assassin's Creed* series' view on history to take. Finally, Aurelius Ventro, our favorite space marine, one again tunes in from 38,000 years in the future to give us his advice.

Last week, we had a problem with the emails we send out to our Kickstarter subscribers. If you haven't yet received Issue Twenty-Three, [you can get it here](#) (we're using the honor system - if you aren't entitled to Issue Twenty-Three, we can't stop you from downloading it, but we're pretty sure the guilt from doing so will stop you from getting a good night's sleep).

We aren't publishing next week in observation of Thanksgiving, but we'll still be around, rattling our beggar's cup as we start our year end subscription drive. Get at me via email at [stuhorvath@unwinnable.com](mailto:stuhorvath@unwinnable.com). In the meantime, I wish you and yours a happy and safe holiday, if you're American, and a happy and safe regular work week, if you're not.

Stu Horvath,  
Jersey City, New Jersey  
November 20, 2014

# The Lesson of the Golden Keys

By Erika Barcott





One of the best ways to get a better gun in *Borderlands 2* is to use a Golden Key. Each Golden Key will unlock a special loot chest in Sanctuary to reveal a shiny new gun, leveled to your character. The higher your character's level, the better the gun.

Every time I thought about using a Golden Key to get a new gun, I ran through the same set of thoughts:

- I have pretty good guns right now.
- I will need the best guns for the final battle at the end of the game.
- If I use a Golden Key now, I'll get a leveled gun that won't be useful to my character by the time I reach the end of the game.
- I should save these until later, when I really need them.

I accumulated quite a lot of Golden Keys while playing *Borderlands 2*. And guess what? I finished the game and never used a single one of them. I have 37 Golden Keys stored up in my account. Not to mention about \$121,000 – more money than I could have easily spent.

In hindsight, the lesson is that I should have used the Golden Keys. I should have used them as I received them. That, after all, is what they are for. Consumables are meant to be consumed.

*Skyrim's* combat system has a hilarious feature: you can pause in the middle of a battle to dink around in your inventory and use items.



The obvious choice for this task is health potions. “Just one sec, Mister Bandit; I need to take some medicine.” However, you can also regain health by eating any food you might be carrying. Food only replenishes a small amount of health per item, but that's okay, because many players end up toting around several shopping carts' worth of cabbages, roasted goat leg, and slabs of horker meat.

“When did I pick 87 cabbages?” I wonder, as I munch my way through a stack of 87 cabbages. I chase them down with two mammoth snouts and 23 loaves of bread.

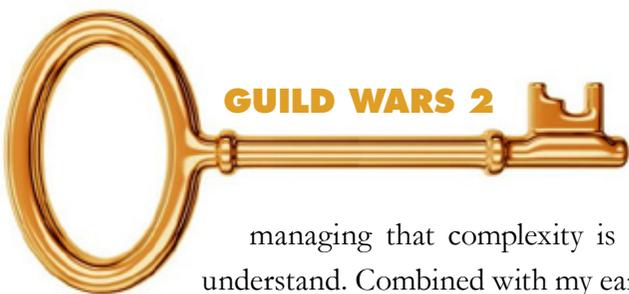
My health replenished, I return to battle.

I never actually end up using any proper health potions. I have gobs of them. I imagine cardboard boxes full of clinking bottles, waiting for the moment when I have finally eaten all the food in my inventory and I resort to a precious health potion.

I am hoarding health potions because I am hoarding food. Neither behavior makes sense, but I don't know how to stop.

Eventually I discovered the Healing spell, which regenerates health for free. Now when things get hairy, I just back away from the fight (I let my housecarl Valdimar handle things while I'm busy) and surround myself with magic blue light. Once I found this spell, I stopped needing to hoard either health potions or food. But I keep hoarding them anyway.

My *Skyrim* inventory situation has spun completely out of control, but I don't know how to fix it. Stop picking cabbages every time I pass a cabbage field? I don't know how to do that.



## GUILD WARS 2

**G**uild Wars 2 is fabulously complicated and the approach I have taken to

managing that complexity is to just ignore anything I don't understand. Combined with my early misunderstanding of how the inventory and banking system works, this meant that in the first 50 hours or so of gameplay, I sold a lot of stuff that I now wish I had kept.

For example, weapons. Each of the eight character classes can only use a sub-set of the game's 19 available weapons. Thus, there are good odds that most dead monsters will drop a weapon that is invalid for your character.

For a long time, I just sold any weapons my character couldn't use. Makes sense, right? What else would you do with them? As it turns out, a lot.

The Mystic Forge was another one of those things I ignored because I didn't understand it. It works like a meta-crafting station, and functions as a gold

sink for the in-game economy. Throw four items into the Mystic Forge and they will be magically transformed into a spiffier item.

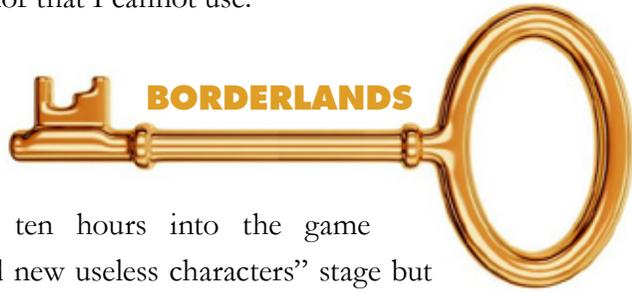
I wish I could get back all those weapons I sold. Not just because there is a 20 percent chance that the weapon you get from the Mystic Forge transformation will be of a higher rank than the stuff you threw into it, but out of curiosity. There is a random element to what the Mystic Forge gives you back. It can be a weapon, a piece of armor, or a rare crafting material. How fun is that?

Needless to say, learning about the Mystic Forge has thrown my hoarding anxiety into overdrive. What other uses might there have been for all the seemingly useless junk I have sold? What else don't I know? Maybe I should keep it, just to be on the safe side.

My in-game bank is now chock full of things I plan to throw into the Mystic Forge. But I don't want to just throw them in willy-nilly. There are recipes you can look up on the internet, particular combinations of items which are known to yield specific results. These recipe lists are long and boring, though. Maybe I will do that tomorrow.

The problem is, it is never "tomorrow." It is always "today." And today, my bank is full of weapons and armor that I cannot use.

**A**t the time I was working on this essay, I was also playing through the first *Borderlands* with a friend. About ten hours into the game – enough to be past the “brand new useless characters” stage but not quite to the “got cool gear” stage – we found a pair of vending machines that were selling some extremely tempting class mods.



He was reluctant to spend the money. “Spend it, that’s what it’s for,” I said, thinking of this essay. “Consume your consumables! What are you saving the money for, anyway? It’s for this stuff, right? So let’s buy them.”

He was convinced by this line of reasoning. So was I, although before I could afford my class mod, I had to do the *Borderlands* equivalent of checking the couch cushions for spare change.

After running around scavenging cash and weapons to sell, as well as selling my existing class mod, I was able to scrape together the cash I needed. The

class mod cost about \$34,000 and offered +4 team health regeneration, in addition to several other skill bonuses.

I left the station with a spring in my step, a fancy new class mod, and about twelve dollars in my pocket.

A little while later, after completing our mission, we returned to the vending machines.

“Uh, you should take a look at this,” my friend said.

With a sinking feeling, I checked the vending machine. It was now selling class mods that were slightly less powerful than the ones we had bought – the ones I convinced us to buy – which also cost significantly less money.

This new class mod offered only +3 team health regeneration and no extra skill boosts, but considering we originally had no team health regeneration, it would still have been a big improvement. However, it cost about \$10,000 less.

If I had waited – if I had followed my instinct not to spend all that money – I could have had something almost as good as what I had bought, plus several thousand dollars left over.

“Easy come, easy go,” I said, unconvincingly.

The lesson continues. 🍷



# Burning the Library

**By Hazel Monforton**



Hypatia of Alexandria was a teacher.

She lived in the 4th century, teaching philosophy and astronomy at the Platonist school in Alexandria, then part of Roman Egypt. She's featured in Raphael's *The School of Athens*, a fresco painted to decorate the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican. Robed in white, she stares enigmatically from behind a group of scholars discussing Classical texts; of the figures reading, talking, learning, she is the only one who turns her eyes on the viewer. The fresco represents Philosophy, alongside others depicting Theology and Literature, the trifecta of worldly and spiritual wisdom represented by the harmony between Classical and Christian teaching.

It's not without irony, then, that Hypatia stares accusingly from the fresco at the Catholic Church leaders who would be admiring it, including the Pope himself. Having watched them already sack and destroy the library where she taught, losing centuries of philosophical and scientific thought to fire and blasphemy, Hypatia was dragged to the street and flayed alive by a mob of Christian men for her paganism, her political and academic influence and her defiance in the face of the increasing hold the Christian church had on late Roman life.

What does this have to do with the Assassins and the Templars?

I don't know. Ubisoft hasn't told this story. It still exists, of course, as do the stories of the Third Crusade, the power struggles of Renaissance Italy, the American and French Revolutions; all extant despite how the *Assassin's Creed* franchise has reinterpreted them for its own storytelling.

They've done so cleverly and with a tangible respect for their sources, but Ubisoft has done a disservice to itself, and to history, by focusing mainly on the West and recasting each period as a struggle between what seems like American liberalism and a kind of anti-papist old-world imperialism.

It's no accident, that each *Assassin's Creed* has focused on a story of personal revenge, a bigger driving force than the nebulous and too-personal concept of "freedom" coopted in the service of an ideology of individual liberty. Individualism is a strange creed for a self-described "Brotherhood," particularly when the rallying cry of the antagonists in the franchise's latest incarnation is Liberté, égalité, fraternité.

The complexity of history eludes the franchise, but in a way that's too familiar in its conclusions. In high school, I learned about the French Revolution only insofar as to how it was directly influenced by the ideas and figures of the American Revolution. Similarly, it's a cheap shot to cast the papacy as evil and power-hungry in opposition to the mercantile Italian city-states.

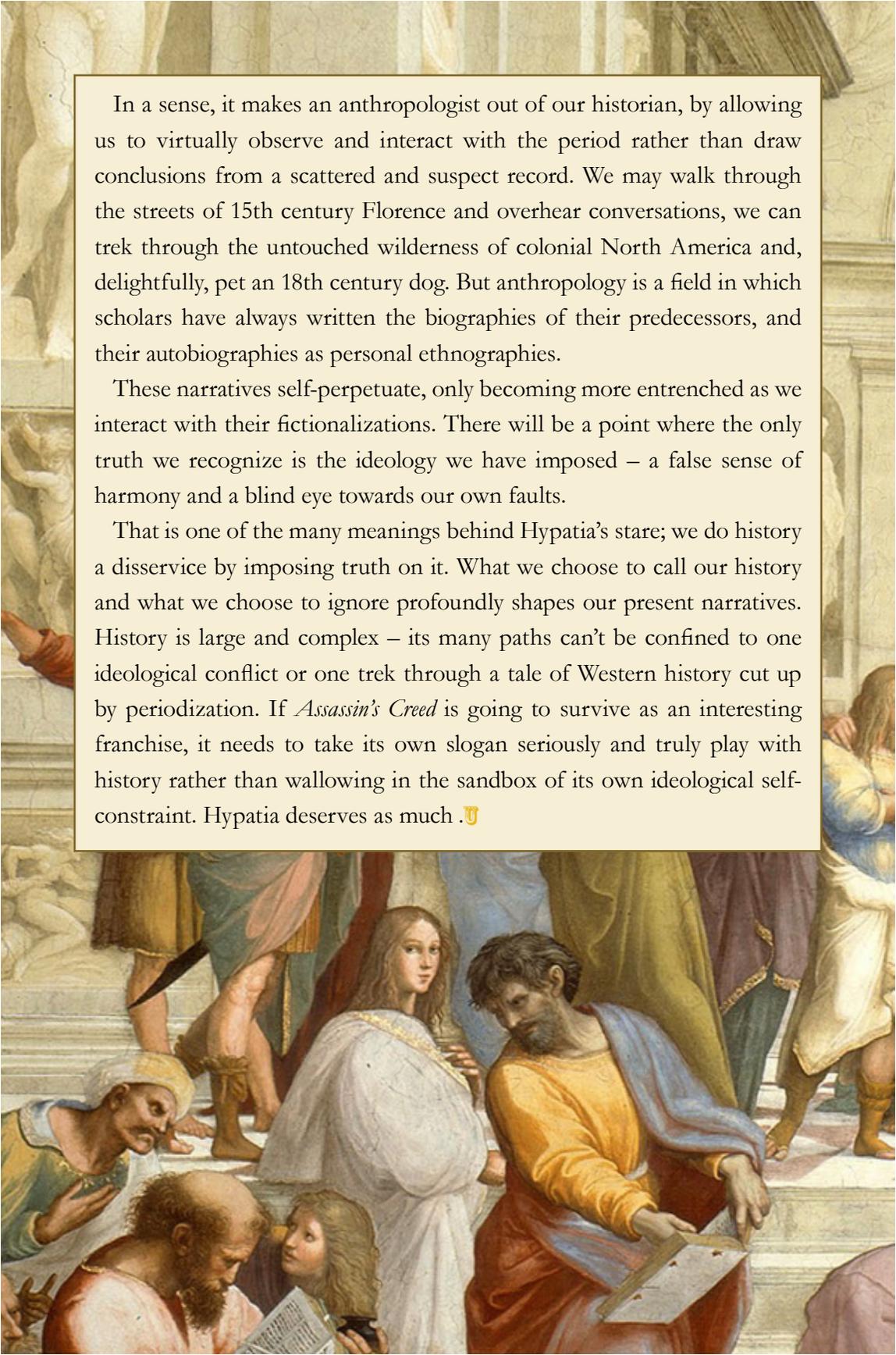
I was taught that the early modern break with Rome was an easy march towards national progress. We were not taught about the nuns forced into prostitution when their cloisters were turned over to the wealthy elite, or the destruction of art in the name of anti-idolatry, or the slow removal of feast days (say what you will about Catholics, but they know how to throw a party).

The tragedy of my high school history experience was an education clearly geared towards the promotion of the most US-centric ideologies which bolstered our right-wing, populist, anti-Catholic narratives. Ubisoft has, from the start, promoted the same.

History demands questions, but rarely gives fully-formed answers. The biggest challenge faced by a historian is the impossibility of immersion; despite all effort, our understanding of history is colored by the preconceptions and ideologies that influence our modern life – and the smaller, everyday details and common opinions of the day escape archives because of their commonness.

The zeitgeist is a myth that we attempt to pin down like a lepidopterist trying to fix a label to a butterfly so that it might fit into his ordered taxonomy of knowledge: useful, to a point, but it obscures the delicious uncertainty and complexity of history and the long conversations historians have had over their sources.

In *Assassin's Creed*, the Animus is our only guide. We could not access history without it. It translates speech, gives us a touchstone in contextual referents and generally forbids us from taking particular creative licenses with our past – we can't, for instance, start killing everyone in Damascus – but it presents uncritically its own creative licenses, couching it in terms of truth and accuracy that are unwarranted and unearned.



In a sense, it makes an anthropologist out of our historian, by allowing us to virtually observe and interact with the period rather than draw conclusions from a scattered and suspect record. We may walk through the streets of 15th century Florence and overhear conversations, we can trek through the untouched wilderness of colonial North America and, delightfully, pet an 18th century dog. But anthropology is a field in which scholars have always written the biographies of their predecessors, and their autobiographies as personal ethnographies.

These narratives self-perpetuate, only becoming more entrenched as we interact with their fictionalizations. There will be a point where the only truth we recognize is the ideology we have imposed – a false sense of harmony and a blind eye towards our own faults.

That is one of the many meanings behind Hypatia's stare; we do history a disservice by imposing truth on it. What we choose to call our history and what we choose to ignore profoundly shapes our present narratives. History is large and complex – its many paths can't be confined to one ideological conflict or one trek through a tale of Western history cut up by periodization. If *Assassin's Creed* is going to survive as an interesting franchise, it needs to take its own slogan seriously and truly play with history rather than wallowing in the sandbox of its own ideological self-constraint. Hypatia deserves as much. 📖



It Belongs in a Museum!

**By Steve Haske**

When you think about videogames that belong in museums, what usually springs to mind are probably crusty relics that hearken back to the primordial ooze of the medium's evolution: bulky curiosities like the PDP-1's 1962 *Spacewar!*, rickety post-war pinball tables, *Pong*. Of course there's nothing wrong with enjoying gaming's quaint beginnings, but in 2014 the impact of its cultural milieu extends well beyond a misty-eyed nostalgia for all things that bleep and bloop.

Here's where Seattle's EMP Museum comes in: with Indie Game Revolution – an on-going two-year exploration of the varied and imaginative independent gaming scene that debuted last week – the public is finally getting a comprehensive look at the development process, artistry and creativity empowering the medium's future through a rotating menu of thought-provoking, evocative and weird experiences.

For anyone that follows the industry, these titles will be familiar – *Papers, Please*, *Quadrilateral Cowboy* and *The Swapper* are featured alongside outliers like *Crystal Warrior Ke\$ha* and Katamari creator Keita Takahashi's *Tenya Wanya Teens*. That doesn't make it any less cool to see them in a museum. (Full disclosure: I've done some support writing on *République*, one of the games currently featured.)

EMP's senior curator Jacob McMurray agreed to chat with Unwinnable about the importance of diversity in the indie scene, how he approached the design of the exhibit itself and the inspiration behind the beautiful 3D voxel sculptures that grace this issue's cover.

**Unwinnable: You've spent a lot of time as curator designing exhibits around music and movies. What made you want to look at videogames?**

**Jacob McMurray:** Before [Indie Game Revolution], we had the small Art of Videogames exhibit borrowed from the Smithsonian. To me, its sole power was that it engaged that nostalgia. That got us thinking about that exhibit, and how all the associated programming was really popular. We'd been focusing on music, on film, on nerdy popular culture, why not bring in gaming, which is just the same exact stuff – engaging those same passions – and bring it into the core of what we do in a meaningful way? At that point, around July

2013, I started percolating on what the exhibit could be about, knowing that it couldn't be about all videogames just because that would be meaningless.

I've always played games, my first game was *Wizardry*, in 1982, when my dad bought it for me when I was 10 for Apple II E – but I hadn't really played a ton of stuff indie-wise, I think I'd played *Minecraft* and a couple other things. I'd watched that *Indie Game: The Movie* documentary and, while it's kind of problematic, that idea of this palpable excitement about creativity and engaging people directly with that creative process was appealing. So I started thinking along the lines of what if we focused on indie games specifically and I think at that point I didn't have a good sense as to how nebulous that term meant.



### **Unwinnable: How did you grow that initial idea?**

**J.M.:** One of the first things I did that October was I went down to Indiecade in LA and went to a bunch of panels and saw the festival part of it – I think that cemented it, that everybody was having such a good time, people were so psyched about stuff, but it was also a little bit nerve-racking because it wasn't like doing something that happened in the past, where that story is set. This is happening right now. If we're gonna do this, it can't just be up for three months, here's greatest hits of indie games or whatever and then it's done. We

have the opportunity to get in on this right now and be an active, constructive commentator on what's happening, but it has to be something that's facing the scene as it's happening.

That's when I started thinking, OK, let's build an infrastructure right now, the idea that we're going to focus on 20 playable games, but those games are being switched out every couple months. That was the basic structure, and I pitched that to our higher-ups thinking that it wouldn't be accepted because all of the media attention gets played towards the big games. I think that was right around when *Grand Theft Auto V* was released and made a billion dollars in three days, thinking they'd be like, "Well, why not this?"

I felt in the beginning I had this idea that the narrative was gonna be about trying to show a breadth of different gaming experiences, but the human stories became equally important as the games and the surrounding envelope of interpretation. We didn't want this to be viewed as an arcade in any way, and there isn't a curator that's telling you what is important. This story is tons of people's story and I am serving merely to reflect that. That reflection has to ring true to those people, because they're going to be the biggest the critics and be loud about it if it isn't true.

I think it ultimately it made a lot of sense to focus on indie games just because that's what [EMP is] about, empowering individuals towards creativity.

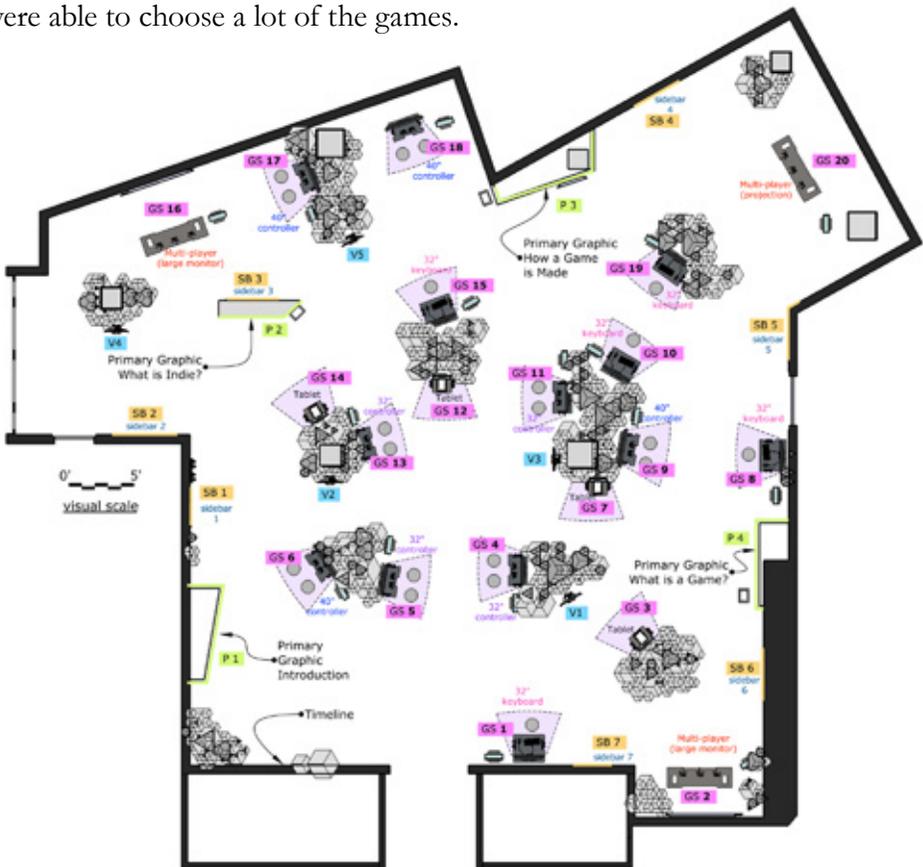
We wanted something that felt very now but still felt kind of referential to videogames for those people that wouldn't have any reference to that. That's why I had thrown together a look and feel document for our design team. Voxels, low polygons, things like that. Then [design firm] Curious Beast came up with this general idea which I thought we would never be able to do, honestly, but it ended up working. It looks fucking awesome.

## **Unwinnable: How did you feel, having to quickly familiarize with indie game culture?**

**J.M.:** I think for me that's a very comfortable realm because I feel like it's that way with every exhibit that I do. Beyond living in Seattle and listening to *Nevermind*, I didn't know much about Nirvana before I did that [exhibit], or Hendrix or horror films. I feel like I have a passing familiarity but not nearly

the level I need to be at, and I think that's the challenge of being the curator. I have to bone up quick enough to know what I'm talking about so that people that do know what they're talking about don't think I'm an idiot and are going to trust me to treat the content well enough. At the same time, this is where I firmly believe, at least for the content we do, it's good that I hadn't gone to school for game development. Experts are great, but at the same time you can focus on minutiae that nobody gives a shit about.

With our audience – like 600,000 people a year – there's going to be a small segment that really knows this topic, but there's gonna be quite a few people that have no idea about this realm, so this all needs to communicate to them as well. It's hard to do that when you're so immersed in this world that you can't be that ambassador. My process is coming up with what the skeleton of a narrative structure is and then diving into the content and making sure that what I'm learning is actually shaping and reflected in that content. From last summer, I started reading lots of blogs, that was how it started, and how we were able to choose a lot of the games.



**Unwinnable: How did you go about addressing the wide diversity in the indie game scene?**

**J.M.:** From the beginning, I wanted this to be a tool for advocacy, you know, we're gonna focus on the idea that the games we're showing have a breadth of content, from weird avant-garde stuff to seeming more gamey-gamey mainstream-y stuff.

Also, it's a diversity of creators. You have a good spread of genders and ethnicities and orientations. Even on the player-character side that you've got that, it's not all muscle-y white dudes that are the protagonists. We wanted to be up front with that. I love the idea that anybody could come into this exhibit and see a story that might reflect their life experience. We're talking about contemporary videogames [as a whole], where the spread of creators is not as diverse as we'd like it to be. I mean, they're out there, but it's still predominantly white dudes that are making stuff.

I think that's most of curating, trying to find that balance of stuff. We have 20 playable games but with those 45 creator interviews, they're talking about another 20-30 different games. The composers are representing another X number of games. The timeline for indie history has another 50 games. Overall we're covering a huge amount of territory, even if the playable games taken by themselves may not cover as much.

**Unwinnable: Did you have to play a lot of games for research?**

**J.M.:** Yeah, I think my Steam account went from like eight games to 170-something. Every Humble Bundle, I was like, "Oh my god, gotta get all these!" Yeah, definitely playing lots of games. I think we're now past that point where I can tell my wife that I have to go do some research. It changed my experience of how I ingest game content. Games that I never thought would be impactful to me became really impactful.

**Unwinnable: Have any of the game selections influenced how the exhibit was designed?**

**J.M.:** When we put *Papers, Please* up on the floor as a test case many months ago, just to see how visitors would react to the different stations, we got a lot of complaints about it. I think it was all from people who didn't really play it, and didn't really see this emotional side of it – they thought it was very negative towards immigrants. If we were making interactives, we could make it so that everybody is guided gently through the experience and everybody has a good time, but we can't control these. We can put a shell around them so people can't break into them and fuck with stuff but, how does the interpretation work and what game information do we give?

We did some prototypes to figure out how that was going to work. We ended up deciding on digital picture frames, because the colored light [of the exhibit] radically changes any of the printed material. That's why [we used] white light [on them] because it negates any of the colored light. So there's all this curatorial information there about each game and the developers, where they're from, how many people are on the team, briefly, because people don't read. And also I love the idea of invoking quotes so that you get an idea of why [the developers] were making the game.

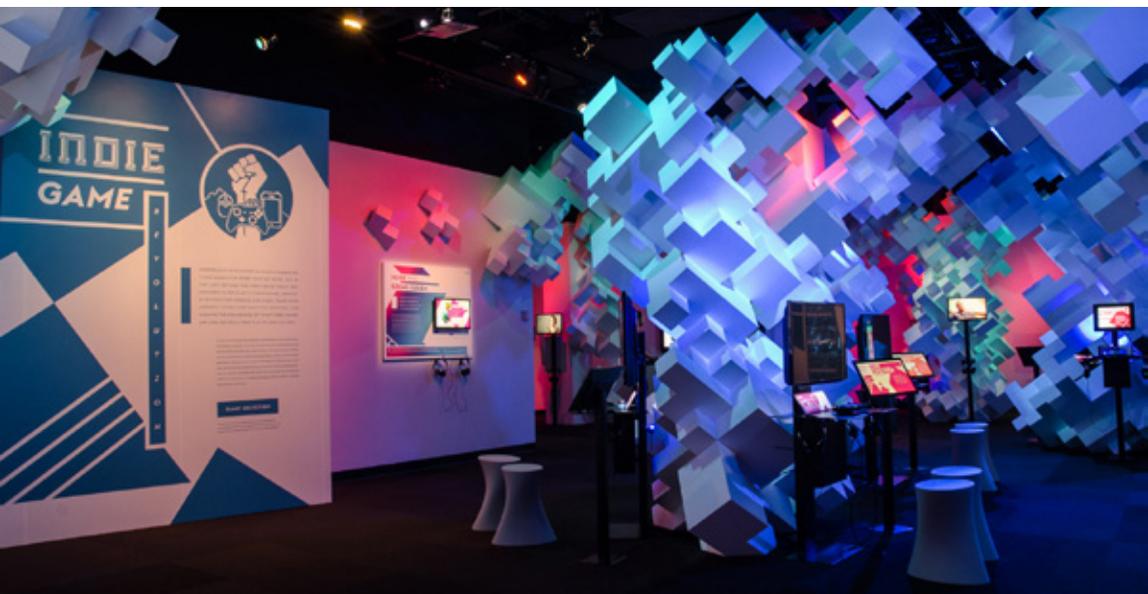
I try to do that through all exhibits – having this hierarchy through all the interpretation but also having overlapping methods of delivering that content. To me, an exhibit is just a system and it's very structured. When I'm trying to figure out what a narrative is for an exhibit, the narrative is tied to the physical space and what structures we can have and what tech we can have – I would never just write up a storyline – the space is so integral to that. And I don't know, I feel like everything just kind of hooks together in this weird, nice way that hopefully nobody notices, but that kind of feels seamless.

### **Unwinnable: What did you originally envision the exhibit as?**

**J.M.:** Well, something kind of like this. I feel like having all of these personalities in here – if it was just games, it could feel kind of cold and inhuman – but having the different aspects, like watching Brendan Chung making *Quadrilateral Cowboy* in a video – where you can see that creative process – that ended up coming to the forefront a lot more than I originally thought.

**Unwinnable:** If there's one thing we've learned it's that indie devs are fascinating to talk to.

**J.M.:** That, in a way, was one of the hardest [thing to parse], because there's so much great stuff. One of the reasons I did longform interviews is that they end up being permanent oral history archives so people 10 years from now could look back at this set of content and see how alien the indie scene was at that time. It ends up being a valuable cultural reference as well. That's the most exciting part – people's personal stories are always interesting. That's a way a lot of people can connect to the content, even if they don't think that they like games.



**Unwinnable:** The voxels really speak artistically to an indie aesthetic. What was their concept?

**J.M.:** I love the idea that we can create a structure that feels like it's an art installation. Often in museum exhibits, the main content is determined to be the most important thing and everything else is just set dressing. With this, I wanted to have something that felt exciting. The idea that it could feel like it was a living creature that was in the gallery – the lights would slowly change

over time, so it feels like it has a pulse, like a crystalline voxel being had wafted into the space and settled down, and that the lighting and the music is really keyed into that. That it all felt like it had a purpose, like all these game stations could nestle into it. It worked out nice, though it was the biggest pain in the butt to create these.

**Unwinnable: What went into making them?**

**J.M.:** It's all sheet plastic, maybe a quarter-inch. We got them in sheets and had to cut them all into squares, we had to miter the edges, glue them all together – I think we had 20,000 faces that we had to glue together to make just under 4,000 voxels. And it's all in a SketchUp drawing, so it's not like they were being installed randomly. We were rotating this SketchUp drawing, scratching our heads, being like, "How the fuck does this work?" It was a giant challenge, but people have been responding to them well.

**Unwinnable: What about the rest of the exhibit material?**

**J.M.:** Everybody was saying different things about what they thought indie meant, or didn't mean, or they were angry about it or didn't care. Whatever it was. A lot of the [exhibit material] came out of focusing on how everybody's making games for so many different reasons and they have very different opinions about stuff, and trying to show that diversity.

It seemed everybody was agreeing that what was important to them was creative freedom and control. Having things like how games are made is a great de-mystifier for people. It's something that any one of us could do but at the same time is incredibly complex and to make a good game requires quite a lot of effort. People are going to come in here and have a very narrow definition of what games are and what games can be – I think our definition of games is expanding quite a bit.

**Unwinnable: How can you plan for the fact that the indie scene has changed so much and will continue to change so much over the course of the next two years?**

**J.M.:** We tried to think about as many possibilities beforehand so that we can create a structure that can support whatever happens. If something fundamentally happens that changes things, we can deal with that by replacing [exhibit material], dealing with different topics if we want to. It's all set up to be flexible. And when it comes to the games, we have a good representation of what's happening and the diversity that's out there. An individual game is much less important than the whole gestalt.



**Unwinnable:** How has working on this changed your perspective on games? When you sit down now to play something, do you think about it differently? Do you look at them differently?

**J.M.:** Yeah, I absolutely do. It's hard for me to even remember a year ago and what my state of mind was. Definitely my conception of what is available and what the possibilities are for games is much broader than it ever was. I think I really was aware of what gets marketed broadly. And now realizing that there are all these experiences – ranging from tiny two-day game jam experiences to crazy in-depth things that no one could ever conceive of – that all of that fits within this realm I think is really cool. If I can convey the passion that I've had while creating this stuff to the people visiting then all is good.

## **Unwinnable: Do you still play triple-A games?**

**J.M.:** Yeah, I do. I think watching a lot of Anita Sarkeesian's videos and doing a lot of interviews with the different people that we did, where you see a lot of the politics that's happening in [the medium] that I don't think was very apparent – at least until recently with all the GamerGate bullshit – to people on a mainstream level. That's definitely changed the way I think about games.

Also, it feels like this is just another form of culture and all forms of culture are suffused with every other aspect of our lives. None of it is ultimately surprising.

One example: I didn't know about the Bechdel test before watching one of those Feminist Frequency videos. I remember at the time my wife and I were watching a lot of shitty TV and we were watching *Friday Night Lights* and I decided I was going to apply the Bechdel test to it, and not a single episode actually passes the Bechdel test at all. Just having those structural frameworks in which you can think about things was really interesting.

**Unwinnable: Yeah, and one interesting offshoot of GamerGate – if anything good can come out of it – is that people are realizing that games don't exist in a cultural vacuum.**

**J.M.:** Yeah. If anything, the good that comes out of this is that people might be a little more aware that there are other things going on here. Just the idea that there's more than enough room for anybody's voice in this realm. Even with the diversity thing – that's an inherently negative part of the gaming industry as a whole right now. The way that I tried to put everything in the gallery is never trying to whitewash anything – we say specifically in the [exhibit material], things are not anywhere near where they need to be – but trying to frame everything in a light of this being the possibility for things. This is the potential for games. This is what games can be – and hoping to not depress people. I want people to go away thinking wow, this is fucking exciting! I can be part of this. And the idea that we could be a catalyst for some minute amount of change in people's minds I think is awesome. 🍷

# Dear Space Marine

By Aurelius Vento



*Editor's note: Each month, Unwinnable's resident advice columnist dispenses wisdom from the ages in response to your email and Twitter questions. He just happens to do so from 38,000 years in the future. With the help of the ancient computer CHAD and the mecha-tentacled Magos Valence Mak, Tech-Marine Aurelius Vestro of the Imperial Fists delivers the enlightenment of the Emperor to your unworthy human eyes - as only a Space Marine can.*

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\*\*\*TEMPORAL COMMUNICATION PROTOCOL INITIALIZED\*\*\*

\*\*\*TRANSMISSION BEGINS\*\*\*

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Dear Space Marine,

Aren't you just, like, a copy of the guy from *Halo*?  
But with bigger shoulder pads?

- Anonymous (via [Gmail](#))

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Dear Yet Another Anonymous Mortal Clearly Terrified  
of Righteous Retribution for its Idiotic Query,







So no, Anonymous Idiot, I am not "a copy of the guy from Halo." I am a Space Marine. I am war. I am vengeance. I am dea**\*\*\*BUTTHURT\*\*\***th.

In faithful obedience to the Chapter  
and the Imperium of Man,  
I remain

Aurelius Ventro  
Tech-Marine,  
4th Company "Fists of Dorn,"  
Imperial Fists Chapter

**\*\*\*TRANSMISSION ENDS\*\*\***



**Erika Barcott** is a freelance writer living in the Pacific Northwest. She enjoys recording Let's Play videos and knitting, and is determined to earn the Best of the Best banner in *Mass Effect 3* multiplayer before *Mass Effect 4* is released. You can find her on Twitter [@noquartersreq](#).

**Hazel Monforton** is a PhD researcher in 20th century British literature at the University of Durham and has strong opinions about videogames. She's given conference talks on a variety of topics, from women in the Icelandic sagas to the gaze in *Outlast*. Follow her Twitter at [@hazelmonforton](#).

**Steve Haske** is Unwinnable's senior editor. A seasoned journalist, he also contributes to Wired, Salon, Complex and other places you've probably heard of. He often nerds out over aesthetics, likes to make weird art and is accompanied everywhere by his spirit guide, Iain Glen. Follow him on Twitter [@afraidtomerge](#).

**Aurelius Ventro** is a Tech-Marine from the 4th Company of the Imperial Fists Space Marine Chapter who won't be born for another 38,000 years, but that doesn't mean he can't dispense wisdom from the 41st millennium. Solicit responses to your pitiful mortal queries at [DearSpaceMarine@gmail.com](mailto:DearSpaceMarine@gmail.com) or at [@DearSpaceMarine](#). The only human he follows on Twitter is [@johnpetergrant](#).

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## Illustrations:

**Cover:** Brady Harvey/EMP Museum

**Letter:** Stu Horvath

**The Lesson of the Golden Keys:** Stu Horvath

**Burning the Library:** Flame photo by Stu Horvath; *The School of Athens* by Raphael Sanzio da Urbino, 1509

**It Belongs in a Museum!** Brady Harvey/EMP Museum

**Dear Space Marine:** Amber Harris

**CLICK A PLANETARY BODY TO GO TO  
A DESTINATION**

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UNWINNABLE  
FOR MORE  
GREAT  
STORIES**

**Pitch!**

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reading!**

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