

DIARY OF A ZINE EDITOR

BY AXEL OF BRAINSTORM

zine
BEHIND THE SCENE

JANUARY 13, 2009

This diary is kind of scary because it keeps reminding me of how much of a slacker I am when it comes to ZINE 14, but now we are determined to move ahead, with an anticipated release date of March 28, 2009, that is. Not sure whether I'm going to regret having typed this. Well, at least I didn't type here that the original release date was May 2008. Oops, guess I did.

I think it's safe to say that I've been lazy, but most of all I've enjoyed being a father. My spare time was a little more limited than I thought it would be, and I start to wonder if Smash will ever make demos again, with twins keeping him and his wife busy. But then again, Smash wouldn't be Smash if he couldn't make it possible somehow. Navis should be his mentor in that regard.

So, ZINE 14's batch of articles is taking shape and it becomes apparent which articles will actually make it into the issue and which ones aren't. Of course there will always be some last minute hassle, but we're getting used to that.

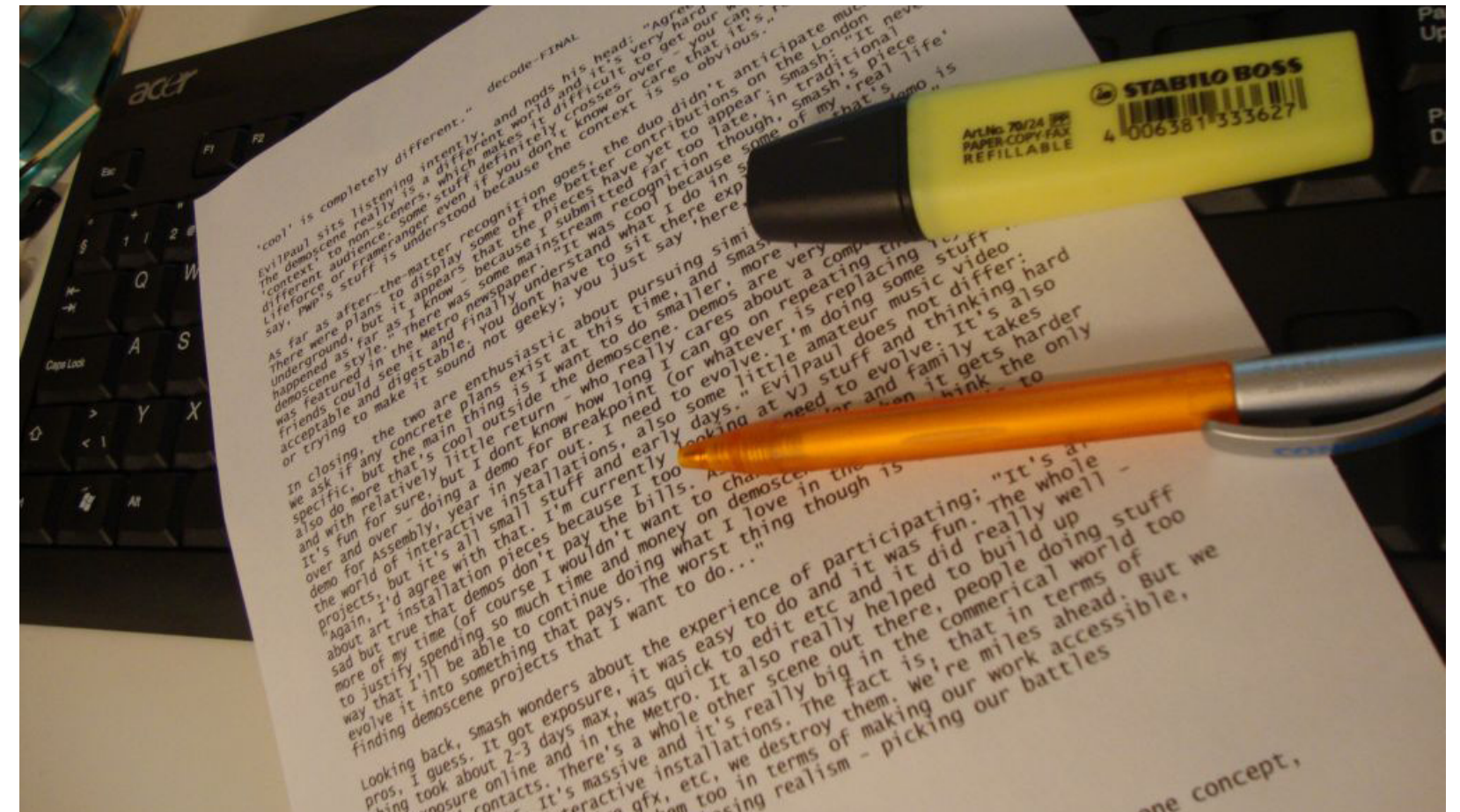
I'm also relieved that Unlock and his gang at Pain magazine are no better than us, by having missed their promise to release the anniversary issue of Pain in 2008. I'm regularly in touch with Unlock and it was a fun the last time we chatted because we were both nowhere near having anything complete.

We've also started "ZINE - The Radio Show" which is really a lot of fun to make with Okkie and Vincenzo. It's refreshing how quickly something can get done and released, contrary to a complete issue of a magazine. Maybe that's the charming aspect of it. The podcasts can be found on Biffellas.org, in case you're interested. In the first bunch of episodes we also had some guests, such as Academy-Award winning visual effects supervisor Kevin Mack (Fight Club, Speed Racer, The Fifth Element), Puryx of TBC and Gloom of Excess.

So yeah now it's time to get ZINE 14 done, and I'll do my best to stick to our schedule.

JANUARY 22, 2009

Last evening I - once again - apologized to Zoom of Conspiracy for being so late with ZINE 14. I remember how I pushed both Zoom and Xerxes to get the ZINE 14 Headlines production done as soon as possible (must have been in Spring 08) because I wanted to release ZINE 14 in Spring 08 originally. So



A typical scene in the life of a ZINE editor

now the ZINE 14 Headlines production is finished since August 08 and is waiting for its release. I owe Zoom and Xerxes a lot of beers at Breakpoint 09. Barrels of beer.

So now I've got a bit more than a month to get the content done before we go through all the finetuning (which tended to take longer than we thought in our previous two issues. This will be rough. Antony is wrapping up the design at the end of January. I've just updated the list of articles and noticed that I still have shitloads to do. Most of all, I have a lot of asskicking to do. Business as usual.

I'm currently putting together the questions for an interview with Keops of Orb. Not only have we postponed it from past issues, but I also realize I find it hard to ask him good questions. The reason is, I really want to get a very in-depth interview with him, but equally I find it very hard to "grasp" his personality. He's like a phantom that no one has seen yet. Can't really describe it. I just know I want to do this right. Hence I've been breeding over questions for hours and hours, not in a single session but in several. I finally think I'm heading in the right direction. I see interviews a bit like a puzzle game. The goal is to get an as complete and in-depth picture as possible, but it's hard to put the pieces of the puzzle into the right position. Each question of an interview can lead you to get a more complete impression of the person. Since each puzzle has different pieces, it's always a new challenge no matter who you interview. That is, if you want to know as much about a person as I do. Still, each interview only scratches on the surface of the person's character. It's something that

will always amaze me.

JUNE 1, 2010

Major fast forward. 2009 passed without getting anything done, and that's mostly because we had a huge blow to deal with: Smash quit the ZINE project, due to lack of time and his desire to focus on demos again. That's because it still took quite a lot of programming involvement for each issue of ZINE. So back after Breakpoint 2009, we had a huge gap to fill, and everyone I asked wasn't very keen on programming a magazine. Can't blame them, as it involves a lot of unattractive code I would imagine. However, at the time I met a certain guy named Fishguy876. He helped rebuild the Nectarine demoscene radio and formed his own station at the time. Some folks within Brainstorm said I should ask him, and in the end he agreed. I have to admit that I was really hesitant, because he had pretty much no track record in the scene and I didn't want ZINE to fold completely. Some people said we should turn ZINE into an online-only mag, but neither Menace nor I thought that this is a very attractive thing to do. I want it to be a production, with music and a proper presentation, in the good old demoscene way. Anyway, in long talks with Fishguy it turned out that he had some really good ideas, some of which scared the hell out of me, because I thought they would make the project so much larger. So we decided to take this step by step. The goal was to rebuild ZINE 13 codewise with the help of some of Smash's source code (but without the mighty Fairlight demotool to

DO something with the code), so it looked a bit like an unsurmountable pile of code, and a tricky challenge to begin with. Progress was slow. Fishguy had problems with reading what Smash had done and I felt a bit discouraged at the time. Menace and I forced ourselves to continue with the articles despite not knowing if there would ever be a proper ZINE again. So that had quite an impact on the motivation. However, there was a point - I can't remember exactly when - that Fishguy made a huge leap forward. That's when he decided to actually fly to Evoke along with his wife, with the goal to release ZINE 14 at Evoke 2010. That's when I thought "oh crap, this is going to happen". My head started to spin as I had wanted to make a press release aimed at the wider public for ZINE 12 and 13, but always was a bit scared to do so, as it would expose us and the content to the gaming industry and other communities. I felt that Evoke 2010 would be a great opportunity to finally do it. At the same time, we plan to have a ZINE 14 release party at Evoke, with a free BBQ to celebrate the release. Let's hope I won't regret having typed this as in the opening of this article.

What's also certain is that absolutely no one expects us to ever release ZINE 14. In conversations with other people it became quite apparent that people don't trust in ZINE anymore. Nevertheless, I'm surprised that demo creators still support us by willingly answering our questions. So, many thanks to all of you out there for still believing in us.

After having made significant progress on the code side, there was still the layout to deal with. We worked with Antony back in 2008 to create a design for ZINE 14, but it meant that we had to make a lot of changes on the technical side as well. With Smash gone and us starting from scratch, we didn't want to change much design-wise as we did not want to place more obstacles in our way. So prm came up with some layout changes to build on the simplicity that was liked by most of you in ZINE 13. I remember when working on ZINE 13, the moment of seeing the first layout drafts by prm (and Critikill) was an absolutely "damn, this will rule" moment. So it was great to see prm's first drafts for ZINE 14 again. Coupled with the features Fishguy has planned for ZINE 14, 15 and beyond, I can't wait to see how this will turn out, and what your feedbacks will be.

As far as content goes, we naturally had the problem of several articles becoming outdated over the course of our two-year delay. Party reports from 2008 anyone? So the goal was to see before Breakpoint 2010 which articles are still timely, and which ones we need to drop and replace. The goal was to have around 30 articles in total and that we add some brand new content to ZINE 14 after Breakpoint and potentially Assembly 2010. Navis' article about his Assembly demo is such an example. Also an interview with lft and the Making of Phon from the Gathering.

Currently we have most content in our email inboxes, but still need to edit a lot of them to turn them into polished articles. That's usually the hardest part. We have two months to go until we need to have a release candidate of ZINE, so we're in a positive mood right now. Let's see if that's subject to change.

JULY 22, 2010

The panic mode has finally kicked in. With around a month to go until the release at Evoke, there's still a lot to do. Fishguy is pretty much coding it continuously, and Epec and I are currently in the finalization phase of all articles, including proofreading and making sure that each article has picture material, so prm has everything he needs to make the layout of each article. prm has also been in touch regarding the menu design for issue 14. I also sent Willbe and Scott reminders regarding their songs as they are still missing. So far we got Mikael Fyrek's, C-Jeff's and Hansee's tracks. Prowler is busy working on the title picture for the issue, finalizing his oil-painting that will be brought to the PC afterwards. This is the time that I love the most when working on a new issue - the moment when the pieces fall into place. Each part of the mosaic starts to give shape to the whole production. Article-wise we're making good progress, with a batch of last-minute articles scheduled for the issue, such as Navis' article about ASD's new demo named "Happiness is around the bend". It was thrilling to read his article ahead of Assembly, and the screenshots made me long for Assembly to finally take

place. Menace has also received the article by Cons about ArtCity which he's now going to edit. Menace and I also lined up some further articles for ZINE 15, and we had some ideas we want to explore with ArtCity. We also made a schedule that will hopefully allow us to release ZINE 14 online at the same time as the executable. At least that's the goal. In three days, Fishguy wants to put together a beta of ZINE 14 that we can send to all Brainstormers for testing, trying to make it crash. We also need to get in touch with Critikill again as the new ZINE-logo he created poses some problems in the main menu, because well, it looks crap when placed vertically.

I'd also like to state that without the help of Menace and Epec, this issue wouldn't be happening because they have strengths where I have weaknesses. Epec worked in scheduling and therefore is perfect for keeping an overview of which article has which status, etc. Menace is a great co-editor, constantly kicking my butt when I don't deliver when I said I would. He's also very cooperative and constructive, and we share a similar motivation. Plus he replies almost instantly to emails, which is something that I love. So, a big thanks to the two of you. You rock!

AUGUST 11, 2010

After some major escalations within our team due to miscommunications (someone expecting something from someone

else while the other one thought he would be given something to work with, etc) we all were pretty much on the edge. With only two weeks to go we have to channel our efforts now, start to skip stuff that won't be ready in time for this issue, and so on. The menu design is finally coming along and Fish is working between 16-22 hours daily on Zine which is fairly nuts. We hopefully will have nailed down the menus by midnight tonight and then prm will have to lay out the remaining articles, around 20 or so. On August 18, a beta is supposed to go out to all Brainstormers for crash-testing. In the next days we also have to announce our plans for a free BBQ due to a ZINE 14 Release Party that we plan to hold at Evoke this year. I'm still a bit hesitant to announce it

just yet, but I have to make a decision soon. The Brainstormers have donated around 400 Euros so we can buy around 300 sausages and rolls to be given out for free at Evoke during the Zine 14 Release Party BBQ. Should be great fun and I hope to be meeting loads of people there. It will be such a great feeling to have the pressure of this production off our chest.

The only song that is still missing from our selection is Scott's. He became a father last week, so a big congratulations to him! While he sent me an unfinished track back on July 1, he now wrote a completely different track, but it's also unfinished. I am replying to him that I like the previous track better, but I wonder which one he'll finish now, if at all. I find the situation amus-

ing. Bugging someone for a song even though the person has much better things to take care of right now... I guess we're stretching the dedication to the demoscene.

I have four more articles to take care of: Decode:Recode, Demoeffects in Games, this diary, and the editorial together with Menace. My deadline is that all are written, edited, and proofread by Saturday evening at midnight. It's Wednesday now, and I'm starting to think that I won't make it. I'll try my best though.

The online edition is coming along nicely. Menace is doing a great job in that area.

AUGUST 19, 2010

The last days have been hectic. Fish, prm, Menace, and Epec are working around the clock on getting stuff done, and the beta of ZINE 14 has been sent out to all Brainstormers for testing. We've encountered a major issue, and that is the scaling. So right now we don't know if and how we should release the mag, because it's obvious that it's not perfect yet. At the same time Fish had to rebuild everything from scratch, and we can still improve aspects in future editions. So maybe we should just close our eyes and release it in order to be able to advance. Prowler just sent the final version of the title picture, shortly before his plane is leaving for his vacation. He says he's stressed out, but that's what happens when you ask us what the last

possible date for submitting is. Also, it's not very helpful for our own nerves either. Scott is supposed to deliver his track by midnight tomorrow, so let's see what happens.

I guess I should wrap up this diary too. The next few days will be spent with laying out articles (prm), fixing bugs and finalizing code (Fish), proofreading the last articles (Epec), finalizing the online version (Menace) and getting started with the next issue.

With this, I'm wrapping up my last article for this issue. See you in ZINE 15!



Axel in front of an early version of Prowlers ZINE 14 title picture