

HBGAMES.org

The Ezine!

HBGAMES.org's Official E-zine!

Issue #23 May 2015

Castle Oblivion 3



Greetings adventurer, and welcome to this, the twenty third issue of HBGames.org the eZine.

This is an online magazine dedicated to the HBGames.org community, a website centred around the creation of video games, specialising in RPG Maker but branching out into so much else.

It's been a while since the last issue (nine months). In that time your editor got a full time job, not that that's much of an excuse. Apologies and thanks for staying a fan. At least it wasn't three years like last time, or the time before that...

Which reminds me, I'd quite like to do a filler issue for 2010 to 2013, as we went a while without an eZine. I did the same for 2006 to 2009 (issue 7 retrospective). I know nostalgia is boring and petty, but there's quite a lot to celebrate.

We've got quite a lot in store for this rather late issue, and without further adieu, let's get on with it.

~ Amy



For once there's no flashy contest to launch this issue. There will, however, be a Game of the Year celebration as always. There's been plenty to highlight!

There's still chance to be eligible, get your games out there before ~Juneish.

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QUICKFIND CODES

As in previous issues, if you want to read more about an article, you can type its **QF** code into the box on the homepage, on the left, beneath the menu, under a sign marked "beware of the leopard" - and you'll be whisked away in the blink of an eye to the very spot ye be seeking. Just look for the gold **QF**.

Contrary to fantasy RPG visions of the depths of evil, dark, gloomy landscapes, and barren wastelands as far as the eye can see, volcanoes are actually incredibly green, with the ash providing some of the most fertile soil in the world, as this photograph from **Go Visit Costa Rica** shows.

Why not turn the world on its head, and have a volcano as the setting for the cliched happy, promiscuous bunny girl colony, or the secret elf haven.



Afar

FIVE YEAR BIRTHDAY

QF 916598

I'm one for starting new, exciting projects and then dropping them when something more interesting comes along. It's an unhappy trait but it makes me a little over-proud that I finally managed to finish a game. That's a lie, as the game itself is an ever-updated MMORPG, but it's complete in that you can go out and play it without stumbling across the end of the game.



Above: a conversation during a quest, screenshot taken in 2011, shortly after the release of the game.



Above: how the exact same conversation looks in 2015, following various incremental updates and graphical improvements. The screen size is larger and there is much more going on. Conversations appear as individual messages that can be interacted with, rather than a flow of messages in a line somewhat like Facebook.

It's five years this year since Afar (then titled Vengeance Online RPG) was released, almost by mistake. It was the web browser client for an RPG Maker game. The client became a little special due to various additions to make up for how long the RPG Maker side was taking to develop. Eventually the RPG Maker game was just dropped in favour of the browser client, which became a fully fledged game in its own right. Over the years its been through many incremental updates which is what makes it so interesting to develop.

Afar is a browser based MMORPG. A graphical game now, it is set in the world of Afar, a world which has been crafted and honed through a game series to reach this point. Chronicles of Afar, Lost Fantasy, Vengeance and others have all contributed over the years, and while only a few were released (and not to a very high standard at all), they all helped this world grow in their own way. The trouble is it's all stuck in my head, and getting the story out there through quests is difficult with the current game - which is why incremental updates, small steps improving the game with each new quest, are important. What I really want to work into the game are puzzles but it hasn't reached that point yet (in five years!), but I think this development cycle, while possibly annoying, is fun, for the developer at least.

Because of the simplicity of updating the system for a majority of its development it has been able to achieve weeks on end of daily updates. This is, due to personal issues, broken up by months of stagnation. You can probably tell that the game has massive up and down periods.

By being an online game however it largely manages itself. We achieved three years of continuous uptime and, having been down for a day, then achieved a further two years uptime. That's not bad going, and it means even though development might not be continuous, the game is always there to play.

Recent updates have included the introduction of IRC chat and a wiki guide,

although there is a long way to go on each. Before that we introduced music, vastly improving the experience for the player. It now feels like a game, which is weird to say, but in its original form it was a web forum with bits added on. The game is in its most basic form a discussion board which has been reimagined. I got the idea from a successful Pokemon game, although took it further, and now the game is unrecognisable as a forum. I did this mainly for the security that using prebuilt systems provides. It is a lot more secure to use extensively tested systems than to make up your own, and then editing slightly to hone them to your own situation, adding your own security along the way.



What does the future of Afar bring?

Who knows? (that's what makes it so exciting!) The main priority currently has been graphical improvements which has taken the game away from its "graphical text-based" approach. Battles are due to be extended with much more strategy.

More quests are in the pipeline, although I want to create some puzzle systems and other interactivity before then, to stop quests merely being text with some errand running.

Improvements such as enemies having faces, while seemingly simple, are a lot of work, but provide a much better game visually. Making maps more interesting wouldn't hurt, either, perhaps introducing more interactivity such as fishing using a game, which was actually created a while back but never finished. (Like I said, my thing is starting new flashy projects and then moving on to other things.)

Let's hope Afar lives another five years and that it's a much better game at the end of it. It's certainly been a joy to create all these years!



QF 916598

Brain Zap

Good news, everybody! Juan is back working on Brain Zap.

Brain Zap is a puzzle game in development. You can track its progress on the Games in Development board. Designed for mobiles, the game consists of a series of puzzles from five categories (logic, reason, math, visual, memory) which are used to train your brain. There is a practice mode and a test mode.

Primarily of interest is the graphics which are unique, beautiful, and in development: you can help Juan out in the artwork boards. Juan is also looking for a musician, and offering money as reward.

Brain Zap

Welcome to
Brain Zap!
My name is
Dr Albright.



QF 870848

5

ROOKIE MISTAKES: ADDING LIGHT

Lighting is the easiest way for a novice to graphically alter a pixel art scene.

Enhanced shadows, bright streetlights with gradients added in photoshop, and obscuring fog all seek to enhance the view of repetitive tiles and poor workmanship.

That's one view, anyway.

Lighting is an additional layer to the graphics of a game. The mistake people make, however, is adding, rather than subtracting, light. In order to add white light to an image the image first needs to be *dark*.



Example: Khas Awesome Lighting Effects, from RPGMakerVXAce.net

Here we can see lights being added by overlaying white onto existing lights. Instead, the best way to go about this is to overlay a dark image, slightly transparent, and then *subtract* this darkness using an eraser. This can be done in programs such as Photoshop, GIMP or Fireworks.



Above is an example of this method, by **Bear** of RPG Maker Web. As you can see, no light has actually been added to the scene at all. Instead, darkness has been thrown in, and then taken away where the light falls from the window.

Treat light as the product of a lack of darkness, rather than a syrup which is poured over the scene. This may be counterintuitive, logically, however it works best, when most scenes have 100% light.

Castle Oblivion 3

QF 927175

The long awaited third game in its series, Castle Oblivion 3 has just been released. Following the original Castle Oblivion in 2007, and Castle Oblivion 2 in the following year, both are big games in the RPG Maker VX community.

Castle Oblivion 3 is a fan sequel, following many cancelled fan sequels, due to the game's huge following and the ease of delving into RPG Maker to do so. Not only has this third title been released, but a remake of the original Castle Oblivion, too, itself a 15 to 20 hour game.

The game takes place in two worlds: the mystic island of *Stormbidge* and the floors of *The Castle*. Inside you'll find a world of challenging puzzles, battles, creepy and mysterious atmosphere and plenty of secret areas offering huge replayability.



You better like treasure hunting to enjoy the most of it. The game is a thinking game, with multiple endings to boot.



The main thing which makes Castle Oblivion 3 shine is its battles. This is one of those projects where spamming buttons and keeping to attack is a surefire way to make your sharp drop to oblivion quicker, you won't mash your way through this one. Attempting to escape them leaves you normally scratching your head as most battles are forced.

In short the game is about testing your imagination and problem solving to work your way through the floors of the castle, much like the original series.

The game can be found in full in the complete games section.

QF 927175

GAME OF THE YEAR

2 0 1 4 - 1 5

It's that time of the year again, and voting will shortly commence for Game of the Year 2014. All complete games released in the past year are eligible, and any games released between now and the end of May.

If you want your game to be eligible, make sure it is in the Complete Games forum by the end of May, and meets the rules of said forum. Any and all games are eligible.

Winning the top spot gets you a prime placement on the HBGames.org homepage as well as featuring in the eZine.





A rather bizarre monkey informs me that Crazy Chimp Collective are celebrating their second anniversary. Responsible for some great, if a little weird, games, there's surely much more to come in the coming years too.

CCC games are always full of animation. Take the opening scenes of *Menagerie* for example, that are a movie in themselves. A quirky art style has gained the games a cult following on the net.

Bizarre Monkey is one of HBGames.org's most prolific and creative members, with a series of games flooding the board with their originality and epicality.

You'll find CCC games across the complete and games in development boards.

Menagerie

QF 891891

intelligence

QF 891493

PERSEVERANCE

QF 922635

ADHERENCE

QF 927455

EXIL

QF 916977

WEB PRESENCE

Creating a website for your game is a great way to invoke a sense of professionalism and personal identity. However, there are simpler ways of going about it. The most condensed, and easiest to get going, is a **Tumblr Blog**.

tumblr.

Simply create your blog and then edit the theme to include header, links to static pages, and personal graphics.

It can be tempting to create profiles on every social media platform on the net. In reality however, most people use either **Facebook** or **Twitter**, as the sheer amount of people makes other forms much less worthwhile. Anybody on other platforms will likely be on one of the big two - perhaps also on **Google+** if they're trying to stick it to the man by going with a different man.

If you need help in your web design, layouts, or understanding HTML and other web syntax, we're here to help. Check out our programming and web board, located in the **Artwork and Creativity** section.



Melanii

QF 927344

The Sketch Thread and **Pixel Art WIP / Small Things Thread** are thread dumps in the Art and Creativity board where anybody can post quick pieces and small bits for comment and critique. It's a community in itself, with avid participants, and anyone is welcome to contribute.

As always the best talent tends to be featured in the eZine as a way of showing off and encouraging artists.



Jason

QF 922698

10

Managing databases in Excel

The number one rule of game making is to use the right tool for the job, and that is no less true of database management. It's one of the most frustrating parts of developing an online game: the standard tool for managing mysql databases, PHPMYAdmin, is not particularly user friendly. There are reasons for this.

Live vs Offline Editing

A database is something which is constantly sent and retrieved from. In its live form there will be requests every few nanoseconds from all over the world, and these must all work together to form a coherent database. That means somebody in Australia editing a value shouldn't affect somebody in Nigeria requesting that same value too much.

Because of this, PHPMYAdmin does everything in individual requests. Even when you spend a day compiling a list of 300 edits to a table, each one is done one at a time, populating the database live. This is good, if you need your data to be live. However, some tables do not need to be protected in this way.

Anything fluid, such as tables of users or items users own, needs to be dealt with online, otherwise you run risk of overwriting user data, which is always annoying to the player. However, there are tables which only the admin ever edits: tables of enemies that can be

fought, or tables of items themselves. These can usually safely be edited offline and then thrown back at the database in one big lump.

What to use for editing

There are many programs for editing databases. However, considering the form of mysql tables, I have found Microsoft Excel (or Open Office equivalents) to be excellent for the job (pun unintended). The great thing is that PHPMYAdmin is actually set up for this.

Field	Type	Function	Null	Value
id	int(1)		1	
price	int(1)		25	
name	text			Trous
description	text			Looks vaguely edible.
buy	tinyint(1)		1	
sell	tinyint(1)		1	
type	text			

Above: editing live in PHPMYAdmin is fraught with complications, the worst being that an error in one line will lose all your data being input.

Step One: Back up your database

No, really, back up your database.

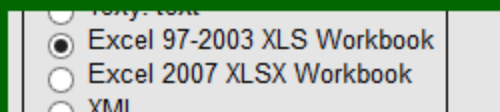
Step Two: Check your backup

I cannot stress this enough, and any loss of data from using this tutorial is hereby not the fault of the author, HBGames, or the Internet in general.

Step Three: Open PHPMyAdmin

Step Four: Open your table

Click "export" at the top. You will be given a list of options. Choose "Excel Workbook", and your version of excel.



Step Five: click "go"

This will download your file onto your computer for editing.

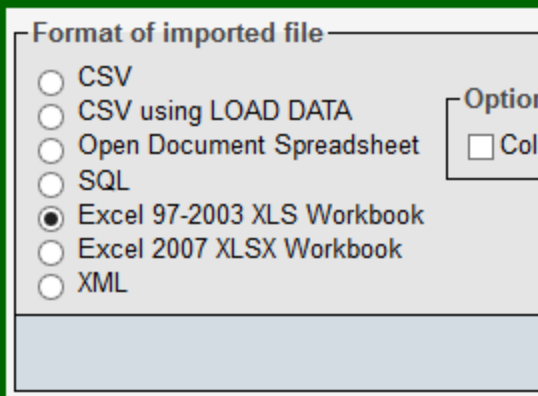
	A	B	C	D	E	F
408	423	57	13	main/117.png	Vampire	Well, yeah, maybe even centur
409	424	57	14	PLAYER	PLAYER	I'm going to leave now...
410	425	58	1	main/118.png	Dark Stranger	I sense you're after an adventu
411	426	58	2	PLAYER	PLAYER	Who are you?
412	427	58	3	main/118.png	Dark Stranger	I am a dark stranger, of course.
413	428	58	4	PLAYER	PLAYER	I see. Well, what is this adventu
414	429	58	5	main/118.png	Dark Stranger	Being a dark stranger, of course
415	430	58	6	PLAYER	PLAYER	Quite. Well, just for this once, v
416	431	58	7	main/118.png	Dark Stranger	That would spoil the fun, my fr
417	432	58	8	PLAYER	PLAYER	Alright. But this better be wort
418	433	58	9	NONE	NONE	<center><a href="http://afar.w
419	434	59	1	main/119.png	Sailor	I'm not... *hic* oh, Who're you?
420	435	59	2	PLAYER	PLAYER	Are you OK?
421	436	59	3	main/119.png	Sailor	Do you... erm. Ah! Do you want
422	437	59	4	PLAYER	PLAYER	...OK!
423	438	59	5	main/119.png	Sailor	I'm gonna... hump. I'm gonna re
424	439	59	6	PLAYER	PLAYER	You want me to go and find som
425	440	59	7	main/119.png	Sailor	No. Yes! Write thish down in y
426	441	59	8	PLAYER	PLAYER	I guess I should come back whe
427	442	59	20	NONE	NONE	<center><a href="http://afar.w
428	443	59	9	main/119.png	Sailor	Why god evening there advent
429	444	59	10	PLAYER	PLAYER	I completed *hic* the quest... G
430	445	59	11	main/119.png	Sailor	A quest? How thrilling! What qu

Step Six: edit and save.

You can edit freely as everything here is now offline.

Step Seven: open your table

Now, this is why we backed everything up, because you are going to press that dreaded button. Making sure you are in the right table (no, really, check now) click "empty table". **All data from your table is now gone and unrecoverable.**



If all goes well your import should be successful and your table repopulated. If it isn't, consider what the fault could be: an interrupted insert, php file limit, loss of connection, incorrect file, etc.

If all does not go well simply restore your earlier backup.

This method vastly increased productivity in my game. It is much more user friendly and efficient.

Think you can do better?

That's nice - do it then! We're a community written magazine. If you don't like our shoddy journalism, write your own and send it in, it will probably feature (though we retain the right to edit and reformat to fit). We're always happy to take submissions, even if they're just ideas for articles. If you'd like to read it, others will too. We can't guarantee when and where your article will feature.



From an edition point of view, we're more likely to achieve a regular pattern with more releases. We work better when we have a backlog of work to catch up on, and ideas can be a little museless.

Just PM your ideas or articles to Amy.



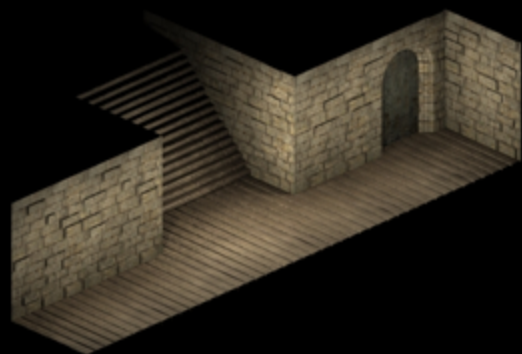
Forum Suggestions

We are always open to site and forum ideas or suggestions, however silly you think they might sound to others. (Some of our best work comes from daft ideas!)

Just visit the **site discussion** board beneath Announcements and post away. You can even use the quick feedback box to type quick bits, or tick a little box to make your post only viewable to forum staff. (Please note you will not be able to edit said posts once posted!)

Issues with Posts

If you have a problem with a post or another user it is usually best to use the **report** function rather than going via the site discussion board. This way it keeps everything out of public discussion - so gets less heated and keeps things calm and coordinated. We don't promise to act on every report, and will use our discretion, but we will never have a problem with you reporting things, however big or small.



RESOURCES

arev's spooky mansion backgrounds are great little resources for a small isometric project, with various prerendered rooms to play around with. They may well be from several years ago, but since he's back, and they're high quality, they're worthy of a mention. You'll find them at rmdump.blogspot.com.

MASTER TILESET

Amy's master tileset for RMXB is an attempt to replace Erk's original from 2005. It combines all of the RPG Maker XP tilesets in one usable image, fixing hundreds of missing or broken tiles from Erk's original.

QF 921894



RTP Spiderman for RMXB
by **Climperoonie**

QF 922976



Snow-free palm trees for
VX Ace by **Dr. Funk**

QF 915729

MUSIC

Erik Matyas has posted a load of free music resources that can be used in commercial or non-commercial games.

QF BLANK

Mystic Ninja is working on a new template. The Pesel will be released when a good amount of characters are made (as a template alone is a bit useless).



QF 927481

HBGames.org is eleven years old somewhere around now. It's hard to believe it's been so long. In all that time, for me at least it has become my home, and I'm sure many others feel the same way.

In the past year we have seen the death of RRR and RPGMakerVX.net, our worthy rivals and companions on our adventure through the Internet. We may have had our differences, but an Internet forum is more than just a website. It is a community. One thing we can guarantee: HBGames.org will never die. We may dwindle, we may even all disappear to join a West End musical and become millionaires and open a bar in the Cayman Islands all while dressed as pantomime horses, but die? Never.

We are HBGames, always at your service.

SUBMISSIONS

If you don't feel like writing a full article, why not visit our Cloud Generation board? There you can post just quick sentences or ideas, and the community will embellish them and turn them into features.

If you do want to submit a full article you can do that too, in any way you can imagine (PMing Amy is the best way as we can't guarantee your submission will survive anal passage).

THANKS FOR READING IF YOU INDEED DID

I DIDN'T FEATURE

Fear not. Chances are we are just keeping you for the next issue (or the one after that), especially if you're something exceptionally special. Or, we don't know about you, in which case we're more than happy to write about you if you want to request it. We can't guarantee you'll definitely feature, but it can't hurt contacting us, can it?

We'd like to thank everyone who contributed to this issue.

That includes everyone who posted content to the forums which we stole for this issue. We couldn't be here without you.

