

Can games writers make money?

MAKING a living writing about computer games, and scriptwriting for computer games, was the focus of "The NUJ Presents: Game Over?" organised by the NUJ New Media Industrial Council (NMIC) in London in April. This event revealed the struggle for survival of writers in the games industry has many challenges familiar to all freelancers.

London Freelance Branch's own Emma Boyes, instigator of the event, described how "most national newspapers don't pay games journalists, even though they have paid staff". Games writers "should start to value" themselves: Emma urged them to "challenge people, say that not being paid is unacceptable." Rather than admonishing aspiring games writers against taking on work for free, says freelance games writer Dan Griliopoulos, "it's the employers, they are the people we should be remonstrating with."

Will Porter freelances for *PC Zone* and says long cover features that used to command £300 now earn you £100-120. To write such reviews, "you definitely have to complete the game," which works out at around 75p an hour – the minimum wage in Albania, as it happens.

Freelance *Guardian* games writer Steve Boxer said: "these days I get

paid word for word what I got paid by the papers in the nineties." But print is "not entirely dead," he says: he's part of a team behind *Games 24/7* – last autumn saw its first loose insert in *Shortlist*, the "most successful mag in the country".

Dan said you will need "something unique these days," because game reviewers are "up against people with writing ability, people with skill in front of a camera" (increasingly doing their own YouTube "pressy" – presentation, as "kids don't read nowadays").

All panellists emphasised importance of face-to-face human contact in the actual physical universe, and in getting your face known by reliably turning up to all the industry events. (Game Over? began with beer and pizza, and ended with an NMIC tab at the pub afterwards for networking purposes.) Will observes that the people with whom the panellists were socialising a decade ago are "the commissioning editors of today."

The future? While the young seem to have time to sit around playing endless video games, Dan notes that games writers' "time shrinks when you get older". As Will put it, "Why the fuck should a 15-year-old care what a 50-year-old thinks about

their games?" Games writers should also have a long-term exit strategy.

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• There's a longer version online at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1305game.html with a link to our write-up of the Game Over session on writing the narrative element of games, somewhat akin to scriptwriting for film and TV, but with challenges all of its own.



Rhianna Pratchett escaped Discworld to work on the recent Tomb Raider prequel, and told the masses at about making a living in games.

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Policing update

THE CONDUCT of police dealing with journalists covering events has shown improvement in recent years, and the NUJ's Freelance Organiser John Toner has written to South Wales police to congratulate them on their helpful interaction with photographers covering a National Photofromo in March.

The last few months have, however, also seen a couple of alarming cases. In one, police stopped and

searched a vanload of nine journalists travelling to cover a far-right march in Brighton, under the Terrorism Act: see <http://sussexstopandsearch.notlong.com> – and in another Greater Manchester Police got a "production order" forcing NUJ freelance videographer Jason Parkinson to hand over a clip from his video footage of a Unite Against Fascism counter-demonstration in Bolton: see [http://productionorder](http://productionorder.notlong.com)

der.notlong.com. And as a result of recommendations in the Leveson report, the announcement of a consultation on weakening the defence of "journalistic material" in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) is imminent. Current law requires police to obtain a court order before seizing "journalistic material."

Watch our "right to report" roundup at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/r2r.html

Training courses in the near FEuture

Free one-day training workshops are available from the Federation of Entertainment Unions (FEU, of which the NUJ is a part). These include "Realistic Optimism" (goal-setting) on 21 June in London and "Get Noticed" (the latest conventions in CV writing) on 28 June in Bristol. See www.feutraining.org for details – and go there to register your interest in forthcoming training courses (with nominal fees) on building your own website, marketing yourself, money matters and networking via the interwebs. The next NUJ "Getting Started as a Freelance" course is on 1 November and "Pitch and Deal" on 15 November: see www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1306tra.html

Friends with benefits?

A RECENT "invitation" by *Scotsman* editor Ian Stewart to organisations in "industry, academia, law, charities, the arts, sports, science, medicine" called on them to become "friends of the *Scotsman*": see <http://FOTS.notlong.com>. These Friends would pay for "a basic subscription package... less than £300 a year" and write and submit articles to dedicated pages of the newspaper. Stewart expressed a hope that each Friend would contribute at least 750 words six times a year on themes such as "Environment, Finance, Education, Food and Drink."

The invitation, though mentioning

articles being "submitted", was vague on criteria for acceptance.

One freelance had a bold suggestion for the paper: "if some of these writers regularly contribute interesting stories which people buy the paper to read, then the 'journal' could pay those writers a fee out of the profits to encourage them to write more, or even take them on full-time to write stories every day."

By analogy of people who write diaries being diarists, perhaps we could call them "journalists"?

Meanwhile, the *Yorkshire Post*, also from Johnstone Press, has Yorkshire Vision (tinyurl.com/yorkshirevi)

with copy submitted by sponsors. While the design is good, there would seem to be no time to sub the raw copy submitted by the PRs. Vision contributors get sent copies of the publication with their articles in it, to show off to clients.

The editors of the *Freelance* extend an invitation to contribute input to the Advertising Standards Authority (www.asa.org.uk) and to seek the ASA's views on whether such developments would comply with their strict guidelines on the labelling of "advertorials" in newspapers and magazines.

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