BTW

Baka-Trio Webzine

Making Compromises

Special Feature
Requiem for Araiah

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The Beauty of Compromises

Compromise: to arrive at a settlement by making concessions. In the context of the English Visual Novel community, this means to make sacrifices, great or small, in order to create a visual novel. While there have been several milestones in the EVN community primarily stationed in the Lemma Soft Forums, at its core the community is still the same as ever. Certainly, we are no longer struggling to reach that "100 OELVN games released" mark, and several prominent developers and groups have gained a significant fanbase, even outside the community, in both commercial and hobbyist undertakings. However, the so-called "spirit" of game-making in LSF still remains largely unchanged even to this day. While the term "compromise" seems to carry a negative connotation, it need not be looked upon as something undesirable in the EVN creation scene. The scenarios that follow may or may not seem familiar to you, but any developer who has spent enough time in LSF should be able to relate to at least one of them.

There are many types of developers in LSF. Some of us are skilled writers, others are artists, programmers or musicians, and there are a few jack-of-all trades who dabble in all the necessary fields required to create a basic visual novel. Recently, there has been a logical trend towards forming teams consisting of people with different specialties in order to create more "polished" VNs. Still, there has not been a single OELVN game ever released that did not make compromises in one way or another – at least from a consumer's standpoint.

Let us look at the scene through the eyes of a timid writer-developer - a pure, text-only author who has confidence in his literary skills but does not possess the other requisite skills required to create a visual novel. The next logical step is to recruit an artist and a musician in the Work-In-Progress part of LSF and hope someone answers his request. But how long does he have to wait? It could take several days, weeks, months and perhaps eternities. Many WIP posts simply get buried in obscurity within the forums. There are no convenient, alphabetically-sorted means to keep track of all projects. This puts the writer-developer in quite a predicament. He wants to create a visual novel, but the development of his work depends on someone answering his plea for help in his WIP post. So in order to create his first visual novel, he makes a compromise; he takes bits and pieces of free resources from the links provided in the Ren'Py Wiki and writes his story around these free materials.

But not all developers work alone. Some of the most prominent games in the community came into being from chance collaboration between fellow LSF forumites. For example, a writer decides to publicly post his work for feedback in LSF. Another writer sees his work and finds it beautiful. He is impressed enough that he gets another friend, an artist, to read it. The artist friend is equally impressed by the story, so they decide to approach the original author and ask him if they could turn it into a VN. The author is intrigued by the idea and gives his consent – he even offers his help with the development. But partnerships like this can be unstable. Disagreements could easily arise at any stage of the production process and jeopardize the entire project. Even something as simple as the release date could be the subject of dispute. Thus, in order to meet a preset deadline, certain cuts had to be made in the art and in the story as well as in the game's overall presentation.

Then, there are some developers who simply prefer to work alone. Take the case of a tech-savvy writer who also dabbles in art as well as in music composition. He is aware that his VN could be better if he were to enlist help from real specialists in each field. But he simply does not want to work with anyone. He wants to create his visual novel using the best of his own abilities. He is well-aware of his own limits. He knows how much of the artwork he can do alone, how many pieces of music he can compose without getting tired, how long he can wrestle with Ren'Py traceback errors before his patience gives out. So he proceeds to make his game alone, but there are various setbacks that await a lone developer, as many of you already know. For example, motivation is always a factor. It is much harder for a single developer to recover from a burnout when he knows that only he alone can make his game a reality. Nevertheless, by scrimping out on the artwork, by using stock music, by making various other compromises he is finally able to release his VN to the world.

All of us VN developers make compromises. We may or may not consciously acknowledge this, but it is a fact that the creators of each unique VN in the community had to come to a settlement regarding some aspect of their work before it could be released to the public. Conduct yourself with dignity, EVN creators. These compromises are not something that should warrant hanging our heads low in shame. Just like the timid writer who overcame his lack of skills with resourcefulness, just like the group of diverse specialists who conspired through chance collaboration, just like the lone developer who overcame various obstacles in pursuit of his vision; we have something to be proud of. Our very own visual novels are proof of our compromises. They are concrete substantiations of the hurdles that we surpassed and the fulfillment that we found in our VN creation endeavors. Now, isn't that good enough for anyone?

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## REGULARS

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Giving In

Or: How I Made A Visual Novel Without "Art",
and How Art Later Made a Visual Novel For Me

By Kazuki Mishima

I had a problem. I had a story I wanted to share, and I wanted to share it in the form of a visual novel. I had the story written out as a short stage piece, and adapting the dialogue and narration would be a simple matter. I could see the story in terms of vivid images – sketchy, hand-drawn pictures in my mind. But I lacked the ability reproduce these images on paper or on-screen. And I was far too anxious to put the whole thing together before I convinced myself it was a stupid idea, so waiting for some insanely helpful artist to come along was out of the question. I found the solution to my problem in a radical compromise: I would try to tell the story without "art."

Once I had resolved to continue my efforts in this way, everything began to come together rapidly. I had already planned on filling in the space between sketches with symbolic backgrounds – a Christian cross to be displayed during a discussion about religion, a circle to be displayed during a discussion about geometry – and I decided to make symbols of this sort the main visual method of my project. I made the simple stuff using various tools in the GIMP and fulfilled the need for more complex images (galaxies of various shapes, a candle flame, and the interior of a 1920s Japanese passenger rail car) using public domain images from Wikimedia, altering these to suit my taste and desaturating them to create a sense of visual consistency. I even threw in a picture of my own hand, taken using my laptop's built-in webcam.

Probably the greatest compromise I made
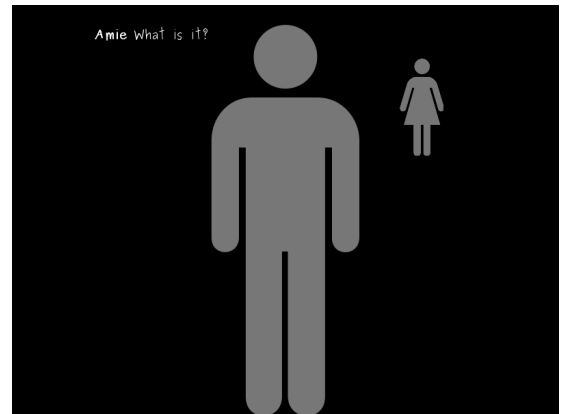
was in my choice of character art. The usual community resources would not do; they just didn't portray my characters accurately. I therefore decided to extend my symbolic approach even further. Because my story explored an issue of gender, I decided to represent my characters with the symbols used throughout my country and in many places to mark public restrooms as being reserved for men or women.

The music, at least, was not a compromise. Well, not entirely. I was able to use a couple of my favorite pieces – one composed by J.S. Bach and the other by Ludwig van Beethoven. What I really would have liked to use was Damien Rice's lovely song "Amie," which had provided the name for one of the characters and thus the name of the story - "Remembering Amie."

After "Remembering Amie," I wanted to make something much more traditional. I had the germs of a story in mind – something about a rare disease called "fatal familial insomnia" and also some murky ideas about Edgar Allen Poe – but the whole idea was still

very loose. I caught a lucky break when I stumbled on a load of art LSF member BCS had made for an abandoned visual novel project and subsequently donated to the community. The art included a sundial, lots of locations portrayed in both daylight and nighttime, and a whole bunch of ominous black birds. These images served as a catalyst in the fermentation of my story.

It was at this point I once again had to make a big compromise if my project was to move forward at all. If I was to have art of this quality and in the same visual style for every scene of my story, every scene of my story would have to conform to the set of images with which I was presented. I wrote the story and wrote the Ren'Py code simultaneously over the course of one or two sleepless nights, taking it one image at a time, picking out locations and other images, displaying them in the order that most made sense to me. I let those images dictate the story to me, and the words I wrote merely filled in the gaps and explained the connection between these visions. At some point I decided my story would be over when I had used every location image I had in my arsenal. Thus BCS more or less wrote the plot for "Nevermore," my next visual novel.

This time I turned to Kevin MacLeod for music. Mr. MacLeod is a professional, and his music worked very well for me, but using his work always feels like a compromise, simply because everyone else in the community does so.

On the whole, really, I've found that my visual novel projects thus far have been made through a series of this sort of compromise – settling for intense symbolism rather than expressive pencil work, for a story dictated by somebody else's artistic ideas rather than purely my own, or for Kevin MacLeod's premade music rather than a driving techno soundtrack custom-made for me. I have come to see artistic compromise as necessary and natural. Art for me always involves unrealistic

expectations, and reining in those expectations is a necessary part of sharing my ideas.

Every evening for as long as I cound remember the ravens had come to roost upon the utility cables outside our house.

Kazuki Mishima goes by the forum handle, "lunasspecto" in the Lemmasoft Forums. Check out his Visual Novels there and in the Ren'Ai Archives.

TEAMWORK AND COMPROMISE:

ON GETTING YOUR GAME RELEASED
AND GETTING IT OUT THERE

BY JINZOUTAMASHII

> "**THE MORE PEOPLE YOU'RE IN-
> VOLVED WITH, THE MORE COM-
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The hardest thing in the world is to complete something: it is easy to start with an idea, but you may find it is much more difficult to find the motivation to finish your work, especially if you have a lot of ideas and lots of creativity.

Sometimes, your team is made up of only one person. Or five people. Or fifty.

The more people you're involved with, the more complicated the project becomes— suddenly, instead one person's vision, it's shared with the entire team. The project becomes the work of several people. That's why a director or team coordinator is so important: he or she helps keep everyone on track and on the same page. Most of the time, it is the author of the story but not necessarily.

So how do you start finding a team and others like you? Where you begin? And how will you ever finish this one?

- **Starting Small (or Knowing When to Dream Big)**

"So, where do I begin," you ask yourself. "I know I'd like to make a game, but I don't really know how."

Well, everything starts out with the seed of an idea. Did you watch a good movie or read a good book lately? Play a good game? What did you like about it?... What didn't you like about it? Knowing your tastes will help you form your style and product. Once you have done that, the flowers will begin to sprout from the bud you have planted.

What is style, then?

Style is what results after the long-term application of taste, the sum of all your abilities put together. You learn your own aesthetics. Just like handwriting, it will always have a distinctive look—whether it's coding practices, art, writing, or voice-acting.

It was Robert Henri (an American painter who specialized in realism and an art teacher during the early 1900's) who said: "A work of art is the trace of a magnificent struggle."

Nothing you see, not even the smallest game, is not without the trial and error involved in creating it—and that is always worth something. So, be brave to try. The only true shame would be not trying at all.

When I started my first Ren'Py project, I got done coding all the text and dialogue into SciTe… and I realized that my writing skills had moved beyond that point. I was no longer happy with that game and I moved on.

But now I wish that I had finished it and released it, because it would have been another stepping stone for me across the wide river called Fear. Fear to try something new. Fear to do.

Now I know better. In fact, I may even go back and release that ditched project sometime next year. I won't just give up on it. I might give in, but I won't abandon it.

- **Finding Others (or Knowing When to Ask for Help)**

Sometimes, it's just too hard to go at it alone. You're stuck bad. You either don't have the talent or the skills to continue on, or you have a bad case of writer's block. At this point, it's time to suck it up and admit that you
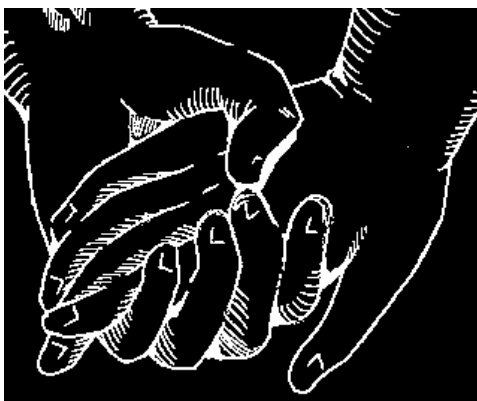
need help.

You have to swallow your pride, and see if there's someone else out there in that big wide world who might assist you.

What if you can't draw, write, compose, animate, or program but you still want to make a visual novel? What then? No one person can do everything.

Post in every forum you can find, every outlet you can possibly use. Talk to the people you know and people that you don't. Tell everyone about your ideas and hope that people comes along, find your project, and realize that they would love to be involved.

Some doujin circles spring up out of like-minded peo-

ple that collaborate on almost every aspect of the game. Other times, it's necessary to assign specific roles to the team.

When one person becomes burnt out or gives up, it's the others that will encourage that person. Sometimes, the team may be better off to let someone go if it is causing problems and in-fighting. Drama has been the death of many otherwise promising projects, and it's always a shame to see them go.

The year was 1998, and Koutou, Tokyo was already packed, milling mostly with fans and cosplayers. The heart of winter had just begun to beat harder, and the air was crisp at Winter Comiketto. The three of us had not slept the night before, staying over at a friend's dorm and getting the final builds released. I still had heavy bags under my eyes, but I will never forget the immense feeling of accomplishment that thundered through me.

We sat at the booth, exhausted but incredibly happy. We had seen people come and go, through the forums and recruiting on the campus, but we had made it through it. We had done it…

It was done. My first release.

It wasn't my vision alone. It was as much theirs as mine. I had just made the settings. But I gave the circle the places and spaces the characters would inhabit; I had inspired the world-building of the author. I helped with translation and debugging. I got paid peanuts because we only sold twenty copies of our amateur dating sim, but it helped me understand at that point what I would always crave—

The feeling of belonging and of working on a team to create something that, at the time, was honestly the product of all our combined abilities.

- **Killing your Darlings (or Knowing When to Cut Corners)**

Every writer knows that, sometimes, not every piece is important. That's why beta-testing is so crucial to the release of a visual novel—especially a commercial one.

Sometimes, we have to know when to kill our "darlings"—those scenes we love but which add nothing to the overall projects. Those scenes that actually weaken the storytelling with too much detail. Those CGs that are superfluous. That code that needs to be pruned down and commented and debugged.

It's not possible to write a perfect story, draw a perfect picture, or a code it the whole thing right the first time. Doing it off the cuff, editting, re-editing, and cutting are all parts of getting it done and getting it done well.

For artists and composers, it's about knowing when to let it go and accept your limitations when there's a deadline. So you want it to be perfect but it's due in three days? Time to just lay down the ink and paint fast and sloppy and to hell with the rest.

And, sometimes, there's just not enough time to re-play the game through all the possible scenarios. Bugs

and errors happen, and it's a part of programming that you can't avoid. Don't just give up on it—take it to the forums! We have a great community here at Lemma Soft, and there's always someone that can nudge you in the right direction.

- **Finding Motivation (or Knowing When to Take a Break)**

When I start writing any story, the characters do not leap fully-formed from my mind. Instead, I write in bits and pieces, all out of order, and find that their personalities emerge from the parts that I don't write but think about.

When I am stuck on a drawing, I look for pictures that inspire me. When I am stuck on a story, I read a good book or go watch a movie. Inevitably, something will strike me and I'm off again to listen to more of my Muse's constant song.

Inspiration finds me in the quiet moments and places and spaces, on the in-between... the half-light of morning, the shower, crawling awake from a dream, or just daydreaming while going for a walk. Whenever I get stuck, I just let my feet lead me down wherever I go. And, most of the time, I don't even think about the story. I think about something my husband said or some unrelated thing, and then that eureka moment happens: "That's it! That's perfect!"

Sometimes, we have to know when to take a deep breath and let the story find us. Sometimes, it means not writing everything that you wanted in order to meet your schedule.

What do you do when you're burned out?

· Try one of your other hobbies, such as writing or perhaps gaming or reading. Just like I suggested above, sometimes a break is what you need in order to renew yourself.
· Try taking a nap. Maybe you'll think of something before you go to sleep or when you wake up.
· If you're an artist, try drawing a bunch of random shapes on a piece of paper (like triangles or circles) and see if you can see anything in it. If you're a writer, try writing out-of-order. Write from another character's perspective. Write as if it's already happened, as if it's going to happen in the future. Try writing in a stream-of-consciousness exercise.
· Exercise can be great stress relief.
· Don't do anything related to your project for several days and see if anything comes to you.
· Try watching a movie or going outdoors for a while.
· Sometimes, burn out comes because you're learning several new skills at once and you're frustrated when you can't master them. Try asking for some help.
· Look at other people's art, stories, code, or projects. Maybe you'll get inspired.

So what do you do when you're so upset or so tired that even the love of your project leaves you?

The most important points are knowing your limits, not being afraid to ask others for help or seek them out, taking out the weak and unimportant parts, and, finally, keeping up your drive and motivation.

Get It Out There and Get It Done!

Good luck, my fellow gamemakers! I want to see the rise of the OELVN within my lifetime!

The Jerk's Word for "Balance"

By Mikey

Well, I had a sort-of-friend on the internet. It was quite some time ago on a forum that doesn't exist any more. We got into an argument or two, but I always felt it was good-natured. After the forums died, we lost contact. There was a forum project to make a sort of simple animated film, which he would write and I would create a world for, and it included some of the other forum members as well. But that one died with the community, and I think it was more hypothetical than realistic anyway.

Time passed since then, and I found out that while I headed in the direction of visual novels as my hobby, his main activity was now writing reviews for a manga site. However, recently he's found visual novels as well and did a few reviews on the best-known ones. Once, he mentioned my game in a forum post when he discussed compromises, and that's how I found him. Because, admittedly, I'm one of those people who google their own games.

Anyway, at least some good came out of it this time, so I wrote him an e-mail asking how he was and all. Of course, I wanted to share with him what I had done over the past years, and so he agreed and started playing more of my games, giving me honest feedback on all of them.

He went through them quite quickly, and all his mails to me where he discussed them had a review-like structure. They also felt genuine and unbiased, because they felt distanced - I liked that because I know this person isn't interested in my game-making community, and I can trust him to be objective.

I suggested to him a rough playing order so that he wouldn't miss something, and as he played more and more, it struck me that, even for games I felt would be his style, they still always had a negative side to them pointed out in his review. I guess I know this is kind of what reviews are about, but after a while this distance stopped feeling good. I wished he would - just once - NOT write about how the art could use some more polish, or NOT pretty much directly say that if I just worked a bit harder or taken more time the game would be better.

But then even when he played a game on which I spent more time, I got the same amount of criticism. When I raised my bar, he raised his, so there was really no way of pleasing him. What started to irritate me, however, was that in his elaborations, everything in my games was made to look like a compromise. It was his reviewing style, yes, and I guess he was good at it from all his manga and visual novel reviews - but it still felt very mechanical. I know I liked his reviews for that at first, but that quickly wore off as it became more and more obvious that he wouldn't really like any of the games he had left to play. They would always have some sort of "negative side" being mentioned. In his case, he used that word "compromise" a lot.

So when I had black and white visuals, it was a compromise because I couldn't make them in color. When I had color, it was a compromise because I made them out of photographs, rather than drawing them by hand. The same applied to character art. They weren't that detailed, and when they were (in a different game), then they were only in one pose. So it was a compromise again, because obviously, the effort to make extra poses could have been taken.

I got into a discussion with him, about this whole compromise thing. What is compromise, I asked. Because when I was making my games, the conscious thought of compromises rarely came

> But there is a fine line between a helpful critical analysis that points out a balancing issue (a bad compromise) and someone simply being a bitter person who gets off by stepping on other people's self-worth by using semantics and extreme philosophic examples.

up. It may have been that I considered an idea, such as having multiple poses for sprites in Ori Ochi Onoe, but I intuitively dismissed it very quickly, because for that game and what I had in mind for it, one pose was enough.

"No, no," he argued, "This is precisely the point. You say you have *something in mind* for your game, but that's the compromise right there. Wouldn't your game be better if the backgrounds were hand-drawn or more detailed?" Well, yes, I could do that, I told him. But that would put a lot of work on the artist, and I wouldn't be able to move on to a different project, and we would spend, perhaps, 18 months on the game instead of six. Still, he then basically got me to admit that it was indeed a compromise - given the time, resources and circumstances, I had to use just one pose, and I had to use filtered photographs.

After I got myself together, I started thinking about this whole approach. Compromise. Well, I know I have to make compromises, but the thing was, they never made me feel as bad as when this friend pointed them out to me. He had a way of setting up a perspective about these things that I didn't have - so even though on my level I hardly saw something as a compromise or I just saw it in a positive way (like being able to finish the game and moving on), he was able to zoom out and see the bigger picture, and the compromise was instantly visible.

It made me think about what it is that makes him see these things. I used to think it was be-

cause he was distanced, but then I started thinking it was ambition. He always pointed this out to me - "the ambition defines whether something is a compromise or not." For example, Kaori (a simple game I made) is a compromise - in 2004 I had a certain level of skill, I knew certain people and based on that, Kaori was the result. But even though I did my best with Kaori at that time, it didn't mean that I didn't make compromises - it didn't mean I couldn't have done better.

In essence, he said he felt this from my game. He sensed that even though I felt fine and content with what I had created, deep inside there was an ambition for more - that subconsciously, I wanted Kaori to be in color, hand-drawn, and in an engine where it's possible to actually save the game. And it was really logical.

There was, however, one basic stipulation to his theory, that I came to identify. And that was that in some way or form, if given the choice, I would always want to achieve a sort of ultimate state. He assumed that, if given the choice, everyone would want to be the best or attain a state of perfection in everything. If you asked a woman for an honest answer, whether she wanted to look more attractive, you'd get a yes. If you asked a musician whether he wanted to be number-one in all the world's music charts, he'd say yes. And if you asked me, whether I wanted to make the best visual novel of all time (as opposed to just making insignificant freeware), the honest answer would be yes. This ultimate goal of perfection is, in his theory, a sincere wish that we all have - if not consciously, then surely at least subconsciously.

The thing is, it all sounds reasonable because it's logical in its ultimate expression. It has an almost existential quality to it, like saying men really just want to have sex with as many women as possible. And it certainly works for the philosophical arguments I got engaged in, when I brought all this up with my friend once again. The occasion was his review of another one of my games - as usual, ending it with the negative points, suggestions for what could be done better, and where "the team made concessions."

He re-stated his points about perspective and that ambitions define compromise, but the truth is, even though it was logical at that point, it was only irritating to me. I started to wonder why he even agreed to review my games, why he took so much time to argue when there was clearly no

way to please him. All I wanted was for him to like one of my games so that he would let go of logic and the reviewer style, to simply say that I had done a good job and that he thoroughly enjoyed the game. And I realized at that point, when going through his reviews again, it wasn't that much what he wrote about my games that gave me this feeling, it was HOW he wrote it. I saw he was never going to like my games, and that initial comment that brought me to his forum was very much in the same direction.

When you're engaged in a discussion where you name an example of perfection, which is the shape of a ball, and you get a response that this is merely a compromise between a featureless surface and a cube, you know that this isn't about the game anymore. I suppose if you want, you can see everything as a compromise. If Michaelangelo lived, this person would surely find a way to even criticize his Sistine Chapel - for "having more potential," perhaps.

It's annoying, and it's what happens when people use philosophies as tools for their agenda. A compromise - which in itself is a balancing act and as such is really not inherently positive or negative and will even feel different for different persons - is often used to put down other people or actions. It's a strong tool, too, because when presented properly (assuming that people should always aim to be the best), it gives the person the illusion that they are settling for less. A classic example for visual novels are filtered photographic backgrounds.

There seems to be one reason only to use these - because you can't draw your own. Everyone kind of knows this, much like everyone knows you have your Volkswagen hatchback because you don't have the money to buy a BMW limousine. Because if you had a lot of money, would you drive a Volkswagen hatchback?

But there is a fine line between a helpful critical analysis that points out a balancing issue (a bad compromise) and someone simply being a bitter person who gets off by stepping on other people's self-worth by using semantics and extreme philosophic examples.

And how do you find out? Well, simply put - the people who generally see your Volkswagen as your optimal car are your friends (which means

you should also listen to their reservations regarding your choice or about whether a Toyota or Ford may be better for you), and those who primarily point out to you that your Volkswagen just means you don't have the money for a BMW are doing it because they get a kick out of you losing your self-esteem.

And as for all these arguments and theories from my so-called friend about me being subconsciously unhappy with the fact that all my games are a compromise, and that for now and the forseeable future of my game-making I will be a failure deep inside because buried in me is an honest desire to be the best that can't be fulfilled because I just don't have the talent or persistence... it's just a bunch of carefully-worded theories you made up to provoke a reaction from me, to put me in a position from which I'll have to fruitlessly fight your nihilist concepts, so you can enjoy my reactions and make me feel bad.

So screw you, Mark. Feel free to continue evaluating my design decisions as compromises rather than balancing or being reasonable. Feel free to think it's eating me alive that I can't have graphics as detailed as Clannad and that I have to settle for mediocrity. The truth is, relevant definitions are those made by people who care about you. My friends may realize an obvious compromise, but they make an effort to understand why it was made, and only if it still doesn't make sense to them, do they ask me to justify it. They may even think I've made a bad choice, a compromise in the wrong place, but the difference between them and you is that they get no satisfaction by trying to make me feel like a loser.

Because I like my compromises. They are a record of what I am like as a person, how I cooperate with others and how my values are arranged. In my games, the compromises I made are also memories - reminding me of how we went through tough times, and how we tried to turn drawbacks into positively defining features. And while I understand the desire of people to balance their individuality with their social relations, making "no compromises at all" is impossible unless you're a sociopath. Which Mark isn't. Because like a lot of similarly-motivated people, he is just a simple jerk.

Requiem for Araiah

A story of Araiah's last hours
by DrakeNavarone

Songs of Araiah had been a terribly long project by my standards. I should've given up on it, given my personal track record. Actually, I did, nearly 18 months before its release, after putting in nearly 6 months into it already. But anyway, the epic tale of the project's long development isn't the point of this story. It's just a framing device. So for me, this story had lived for a whole two years already, which might help explain why I was so eager to be rid of it. My teammates, Enerccio and Yvanc, and I had made some vague promises earlier in the year 2008 to release Araiah before we had to buy new calendars. The recent announcement of the '08 Lemmys reminded us of it all the more, and we went about the task of finishing this magnum opus of ours within a month. It really didn't seem possible to me, who had all sorts of plans for it: extra features, complete UI customization, side stories, CG gallery and music room, etc., etc.

We whittled away at the task anyway. The last week of December approached, and we didn't feel very accomplished at the time, with a huge To-Do List still left to cover. The music - having been pushed off till the very end, appropriately for a game with the word 'Song' in the title... - was now a tasked assigned to me, and I dove into it with an attention I rarely afford to anything that isn't entertaining me for hours on end. I had pretty much put in my entire Friday into my music collection task. Somewhere around five that evening, however, when I shared no evidence of actually having done it (even though I really had, for once...), Enerccio asks me what I've been up to all day. I tell him "music," and he has his doubts, justified from prior experience. Of course, this leads into the beginning of one of our little spats, where words are said and interpreted through a filter of slight maliciousness. So no surprise when he says something that I read as "Screw quality, let's just release for the Lemmys already."

Not all compromises come from good intentions. Some are necessary evils. Some are from the sheer limits of human ability. And some, as was the case

here initially, just come from spite. Now, I'd be a liar if I said winning the Lemmys wasn't a motivation in our wanting to complete Araiah in December. We all agreed it was one of our reasons for pushing so hard in these last hours. But still, screw quality? Not the way I would have wanted to go about it, but... instead of blowing up on him, I agree. "Screw quality!" became my mantra for the moment. Enerccio immediately begins backpedaling, asking me if I really mean what I'm saying. I assure him, all the while with a somewhat twisted smile across my face I know he can't see. But I really did mean it. To show him, I promise to release it before the weekend is over.
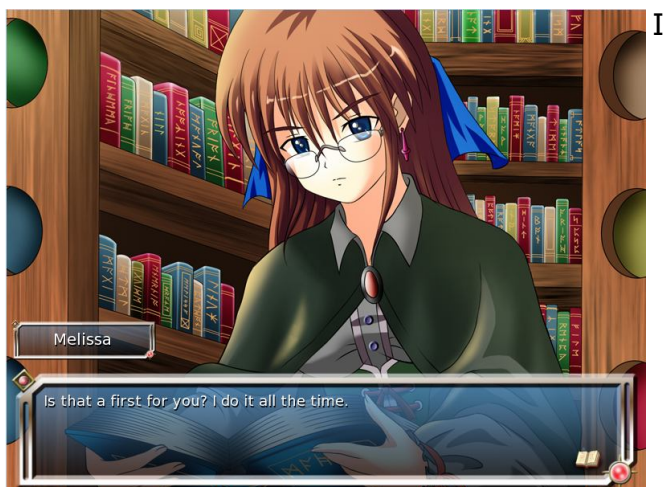
I spent all of Saturday and Sunday gutting our hopes and dreams for this piece. Every little minute detail had to go. What was important was priority one. Just a customized text box was apparently enough to sate my need to customize the UI, even if I knew it wouldn't be for others. Various side stories that were supposed to be unlocked after the game was completed were thrown out immediately. I completely dashed hopes on making a music room and sufficed with just the gallery as an extra. The music gathering and OP final rendering were done in a hurry and thrown into the game folder and script. By mid-afternoon on Sunday, everything was set excepting two last details. Enerccio also wanted to do a pre-rendered MPEG video for the credits, and we all agreed it would be a nice touch to do a "release party" skit that would unlock after reading the game. When it came time to start writing the release skit up, though, Yvanc was already offline. Ah, the difficulties of coordination with at least a six-hour time zone difference between all of your members...

Enerccio and I still gave the skit a valiant effort, now getting along just peachy with our newfound resolve to complete the completable and trash the expendable. I'll spare you any of the embarrassing quotes and just say it didn't go well. Needless to say, it was cut. At this point, it was already 8 pm or so on Sunday, so the last seconds of the clock were ticking away from us. Again, pretty needless to say, the credit video was cut, and just good old text and fades were thrown together. At last, at long last, the final version of Araiah. Ultimately, after a little more detail debating, bug fixing, and uploading which took forever, Songs of Araiah was finally released at 11:30pm on Sunday, as promised, only three or four days before the year was over.

Was it worth it? All the compromise, arguing and spite, the cutting of nearly every sparkly detail? Looking back a whole year later, absolutely. I wouldn't change a thing, honestly. It might not have been a decision made with the best of intentions, but I stick by the decision all the same. As I write this very article, Enerccio and I are reminiscing back to this period of our lives, the birth of our biggest venture yet. And not a word of it is tinged with regret. It's all good times and good memories. He doesn't regret a bit of it either. And why should he? Compromise made this game as much as our ambition did, and we're proud of the whole game, flaws and all. I can only hope everyone else feels the same when it comes to their own epics.

An interview with

Sakura River

Presented by BTW Baka-Trio Webzine

What sort of story did you set out to tell originally? How close is Fading Hearts to your original vision?

When I first started out I had envisioned three heroines in a standard VN story structure. It was completely different than Fading Hearts. When I started to get serious about making something commercial there had to be a change of plans. After doing some research I realized that the traditional VN market wouldn't be big enough. So I decided to make it more gamer-friendly and solve the problem of choice normally found in video games.

How did you determine the pricing of the commercial release?

The price was determined from the pre-order sales I made at an anime-convention. The initial price was just doing a straight currency conversion from CDN to USD. I didn't factor in the recent rise of the CDN dollar at first. After I realized the problem, I re-priced Fading Hearts.

Why did you choose to use otaku terms in Fading Hearts?

The otaku terms used in Fading Hearts is used to subtlety convince the player at first that conventional anime stereotypes will be used. Genre savvy players will likely find themselves burned pretty badly when they guess wrong.

What makes a "romantic interactive story?"

Technically speaking, it is a story that allows reader/player input to alter the events and also has a romantic theme.

Tell us a bit about Sakura River Interactive.

Sakura River Interactive develops games that have a story that the player can really make a difference in. I've heard that Japanese VN creators have stopped trying to make stories into a game and just focus on story. Western video game developers have been pouring large amounts of money into trying to make a storyline more interactive.

Fading Hearts is proof that we can develop an interactive story that the players can influence in a more meaningful, complex way.

How many VNs have you guys played prior to creating your own?

Many of the people who have worked on Fading Hearts come from a gaming background. Many have played a few visual novels before.

What are you planning to do next and are you planning to keep your releases all-ages?

We do plan on keeping our releases "all-ages" as that would allow for more access to distribution channels. We are planning to approach distributors with Fading Hearts. We are also planning to pitch to game publishers our next project.

Original concept by
Red "KiRa_YaMaTo" Mendoza
Written by
Benedict "Moonlight Bomber" Villariaza

Episode 6: Deal Or No Deal? Kris' True Colors Exposed!

PROLOGUE: After the sinister plans were hatched, the PBB House defenders decided to go separate ways. Matt and Hyacinth went home, Pritong Kandule went along with Hero to the Uinversity of the Philippines where he studies Fine Arts, and the rest went back to ELJCC. The ABS-CBN anime characters continued their jobs; while the Ren'ai Rangers were busy filing job applications.

PROLOGUE 2: At about the same time when the defense ended, the duel between Korina and Mel also ended. They were both tired and weary, but they swore to duel again sometime.

Time has passed since the attack on the Big Brother House. And the "anti-Heroes" are still enacting their "rule".

The HELLO HENRY SCANDAL, Part 2
Legend: A-Emily Abrera, G-Felipe Gozon

Conversation on 30 15:05 June 2006

A: Hello, Henry? It's been a long time since I've called you.
G: Oh, good. It's because I have a plan.
A: Ah, regarding Hero, right?
G: Yes, ma'am. Because I've heard that he's banned from the other side, I'm arranging a plan to force him to transfer here.
A: OK, OK.
G: Convince Kris to place Rene Mariano in "Deal Or No Deal".
A: No problem with me.
G: All right. Bye.

Mid-July 2006. July 14, 2006 to be exact.

The episode of "Deal or No Deal" featuring fortuneteller Rene Mariano is being aired.

By some coincidence, the PBB House defenders (minus Hero, Sandara, Joseph, and Pritong Kandule) meet again on the set. And how?

Matthew Luke, Hyacinth, Kim, and Gerald were invited to the audience seats. The ABS-CBN anime characters were stationed as guards. And the Ren'ai Rangers were drafted as part of the 26K who will open the briefcases.

The show begins, and Mr. Mariano chooses first his winning briefcase (#13 to be exact), and then proceeds to pick six briefcases for opening.

Rene Mariano: I choose #10.
Kris: Mizuki, open the briefcase.

Mizuki opens briefcase #10, and it reveals Php100,000.

Rene Mariano: How in the?
Kris: It's because you predicted that Hero will be obsolete. He may have cast a curse on you.
Mizuki: (What? Kris is disrespecting Hero?)
Kira: (Hmm... I know that Kris has been acting weird recently...)

The house defenders wonder what will happen next; meanwhile, they just concentrate on which briefcase will be opened next.

Rene Mariano: OK, I'll then choose #18.
Kris: Asa, open the briefcase.

Asa opens briefcase #18, and it reveals Php200,000.

Rene Mariano: Again?
Kris: Looks like the curse of that pest Hero will be long-lasting.
Asa: (Kris... why'd she lambast Hero again?)
Athrun: (One more strike and Kris'll be going for the kill with her slandering.)
Kris: Never mind. Next time you might get lucky. Which briefcase now?
Rene Mariano: #4.
Kris: Ayu, open the briefcase.

Ayu opens briefcase #4, and it reveals Php300,000.

Rene Mariano: Arrgh! Looks like my prediction powers are fading!
Kris: That Hero, ah... he's soooo bad!
Ayu: (Uguu... why is Kris like that...)
Zenki: (Does Kris have the seed of Karuma?)
Kris: Let me tell you. If you'll criticize Hero, your luck will return to you.
Rene Mariano: Yes, Kris. (clears throat) You're a liar, Hero! You're really not a hero! (clears throat again) OK, I'll now choose #15.
Kris: Misuzu, open the briefcase.

Misuzu opens briefcase #15, and it reveals Php300.

Rene Mariano: Ahaha! Thanks! Because I humiliated Hero, Lady Luck's with me now! I'll do this everytime to get the 2 million!
Misuzu: (Gao... poor Hero...)
Katie: (Mirmo, in your opinion, will we report this to Ma'am K?)
Mirmo: (You know, Kris and Korina are friends. Probably this might create a ruckus.)

The group gets jittery with every briefcase opened thereafter and its accompanying lambasting of Hero. With that, the banker's offers to Mr. Mariano pile up.

In the end, they can hold it no more.

Kim: (Enough! It's too much! Oust Kris! Now!)
Gerald: (I'm with you, Kim.)
Arcueid: (That Kris...)
Saber: (She has no respect for the innocent...)
Naruto: (I'll really do a Kagebunshin on Kris!)
Yumi & Sachiko: (It's not nice for a girl to insult...)
Hattori: (Kris needs to be rushed to the Mental Hospital.)
Kazuma: (Or let her eat moldy bread!)
Matthew Luke: (Hyacinth, looks like our fellows who defended the Big Brother House are here on this set. It's time once again to unite.)
Hyacinth: (Great!)

And the next move: they all charge towards Kris.

Matthew Luke: Why you, Ms. Kris Aquino! It is revealed that this scene is planted, scripted, and intentionally fabricated in order for Hero's detractors, especially you, to wait for the right time for him to be insulted and desecrated again!
Hyacinth: But as a matter of fact, you've been exposed and now you won't declare victory.
Kris: Aha, aha, aha! Exactly! I really planned all of this to force Hero to move to Channel Seven. And then, everything will be a-OK.
Saber: But mere destructive criticism's not OK for the viewers!
Kim: You'll be caught by Laguardia!
Kris: I just can't be ousted by Laguardia because I take good care of her! Now what? Are you speechless?
Kira: ... (shows angry face)
Athrun: ...you'll pay!
Kris: (pause) Well, you don't know that I won't deal with insects like you. So in order to defeat you, the defenders of that Hero, I'm doing this. Jobert Sucaldito, I summon you!

While Jobert is being summoned, Mr. Mariano dashes away from the DOND set.

Mizuki: Mr. Mariano, come back!

But then...

Jobert Sucaldito: You imbeciles who are allies of Hero Angeles! I know that his pesky brother Henry is your ally too!
Arcueid: Not! You're like Congressman Alan Peter Cayetano [A/N: He's now a senator as of this issue] in terms of barking too much!
Kris: Come on, Jobert! Finish them off! I don't want to see their disgusting faces again!

Jobert does a pose, and then chants the following.

Jobert Sucaldito: JOBERT SUCALDITO ROBEAST, ENGAGE! (transforms into a monster)

Naruto: Now! Charge!

A BOSS BATTLE COMMENCES!

Allies: Anyone from Matthew Luke, Hyacinth, Zenki, Naruto, Katie, Sachiko, Yumi, Mizuki, Asa, Ayu, Misuzu, Arcueid, Saber, Kim, Gerald, Kira, Athrun (maximum party size of 6)
Enemy: Jobert Sucaldito (HP: 2,659)

Starting line-up: Matthew Luke, Hyacinth, Saber, Katie, Kira, Athrun

Matthew Luke chooses to do a cooperative attack with Hyacinth named "Osananajimi". That attack deals 10 hits and 653 damage to Jobert Sucaldito.
Saber chooses to attack Jobert Sucaldito. She deals 165 damage to Jobert Sucaldito.
Katie chooses to attack Jobert Sucaldito. She deals 128 damage to Jobert Sucaldito.
Kira chooses to do a cooperative attack with Athrun named "Natural & Coordinator". That attack deals 14 hits and 293 damage to Jobert Sucaldito.
Jobert Sucaldito chooses to attack Saber. He deals 57 damage to Saber.
Matthew Luke chooses to use a Gatorade on Saber. Saber's HP is restored to full.
Hyacinth chooses to use attack Jobert Sucaldito. She deals 123 damage to Jobert Sucaldito.
Saber chooses to attack Jobert Sucaldito. She deals 164 damage to Jobert Sucaldito.
Katie chooses to cast Withered Strength on Jobert Sucaldito. Jobert Sucaldito's STR decreased by 10.
Kira chooses to attack Jobert Sucaldito. He deals 159 damage to Marvujoli.
Athrun chooses to attack Jobert Sucaldito. He deals 139 damage to Marvujoli.
Jobert Sucaldito chooses to cast Poisonous Swearing on Hyacinth. Hyacinth is Poisoned.
Matthew Luke chooses to use a Herbolario's Antidote on Hyacinth. Hyacinth is no longer Poisoned.
Hyacinth chooses to attack Jobert Sucaldito. She deals 166 damage to Jobert Sucaldito.
Saber chooses to cast Switch Style on herself. Her style is changed from Rush Style to Strong Style.
Katie chooses to attack Jobert Sucaldito. She deals 69 damage to Jobert Sucaldito.
Kira chooses to attack Jobert Sucaldito. He deals 139 damage to Marvujoli.
Athrun chooses to attack Jobert Sucaldito. He deals 159 damage to Marvujoli.
Jobert Sucaldito chooses to attack Saber. But Saber deflects the attack!
Matthew Luke chooses to do a cooperative attack with Hyacinth named "Osananajimi". That attack deals 10 hits and 542 damage to Jobert Sucaldito.

Jobert Sucaldito: You've defeated me... but I'll never turn my back on Kris! (explodes)

BATTLE WON!

Jobert Sucaldito: Aghh... where am I? Huh? I'm on... "Deal Or No Deal". Kris?
Kris: Jobert? How in the? (gasps) Oh my gosh, Karuma's seed is useless!
Zenki: Another one of Karuma's seeds? He he. One bite and talk's over! (eats the seed of Karuma) Mmm... delicious!
Kris: You worthless... But next time we meet, you are all finished, even Hero! For now, the transfer will occur! (faces the audience, who are puzzled by the turn of events) Next time, who will languish in bad luck just like Hero Angeles? We will know this Monday in Kapamilya: Deal Or No Deal!

And then Kris leaves via teleportation. After the audience leaves, the people who have participated in the recent battle are a bit perplexed at first, but eventually...

Matthew Luke: Hero's transfer really can't be prevented.
Kira: But we still have a counterforce to this.
Asa: What?
Kira: The stoppage of that transfer lies in Sandara and Joseph's hands.
Athrun: We'll meet up at ELJCC tomorrow to discuss this plan of ours.
Hyacinth: Sure! No problem!

Meanwhile... at an undisclosed place somewhere in Metro Manila...

Henry: My beloved brother has been defiled again! ABS-CBN has really done it this time. They should be destroyed. DESTROYED! But for now... I need to convince Hero to resign...

At the Angeles residence...

Hero: What kind of baloney has this harlot Kris done to me?! Even if she asks for an apology, I surely won't accept it!

After some minutes of thought...

Hero: I've decided. I'll transfer to Seven. Sorry, my former comrades; but it must be done.

The HELLO HENRY SCANDAL, Part 3
Legend: A-Emily Abrera, G-Felipe Gozon

Conversation on 14 23:05 July 2006

A: Hello, Henry? Good work!
G: Ma'am?
A: Good work in forcing Hero to transfer.
G: Ah, thank you ma'am. How about the reward?
A: Because Marvin's missing, you'll get it from Elder Joey [de Leon, a long-time Kapuso and one of the hosts of GMA's noontime show, Eat Bulaga!] instead. But the sharing's still the same.
G: Ah, OK, but any more work for me?
A: Yes, the......... (line cut)

Stars Introduced So Far
None
Super Network Wars Continues in BTW #9

KIKIRIN WANTS YOU
TO SEND US FEEDBACK

Do you agree/disagree with any of the articles featured here? Do you want your game featured in next month's issue? Would you like to submit an article of relevant interest to the English Visual Novel Community? E-mail us at baka_triad@yahoo.com for your submissions/comments

Kikirin Character Art by Yvanc