OBFUSCATE THIS!
WHY CODE OBSCURING COULD HURT NOT HELP

LET'S HIT THE PUB
INNS AND BOOZERS IN RPGS

UNLEASH THE KRAKEN
HOW TO ANIMATE LIGHTNING

Hello, and welcome to Issue 30 of HBGames the eZine! We are a community of amateur and indie video game developers from around the world, and our mag is used to spotlight the best of the site, while offering tutorials, tips and info on game creation. While we specialise in RPG Maker, any games are allowed on our site, and the best feature in this eZine. In this mag we will be looking at pubs and how they became the centre of the RPG, we will take a look at using Pixabay as a source of stock imagery (this page is an example of that), and we will explore some of the new games on our site.

IN THE MAG...

UNLEASH THE KRAKEN

The Kraken is my favourite scene I've created for my game, but it is really simple to achieve this effect. My first step was to accrue assets. The ship above is from Pixabay, which is a website with a repository of free stock images.

I wanted to give the effect of lightning striking. The best way to achieve this is to flash up the light quickly, and then fade it away slowly.

I used Macromedia Fireworks which is old commercial graphics software which may or may not be readily available. No comment.

Instead of adding light, I removed it. I did this by just wiping over with a very dark brush.
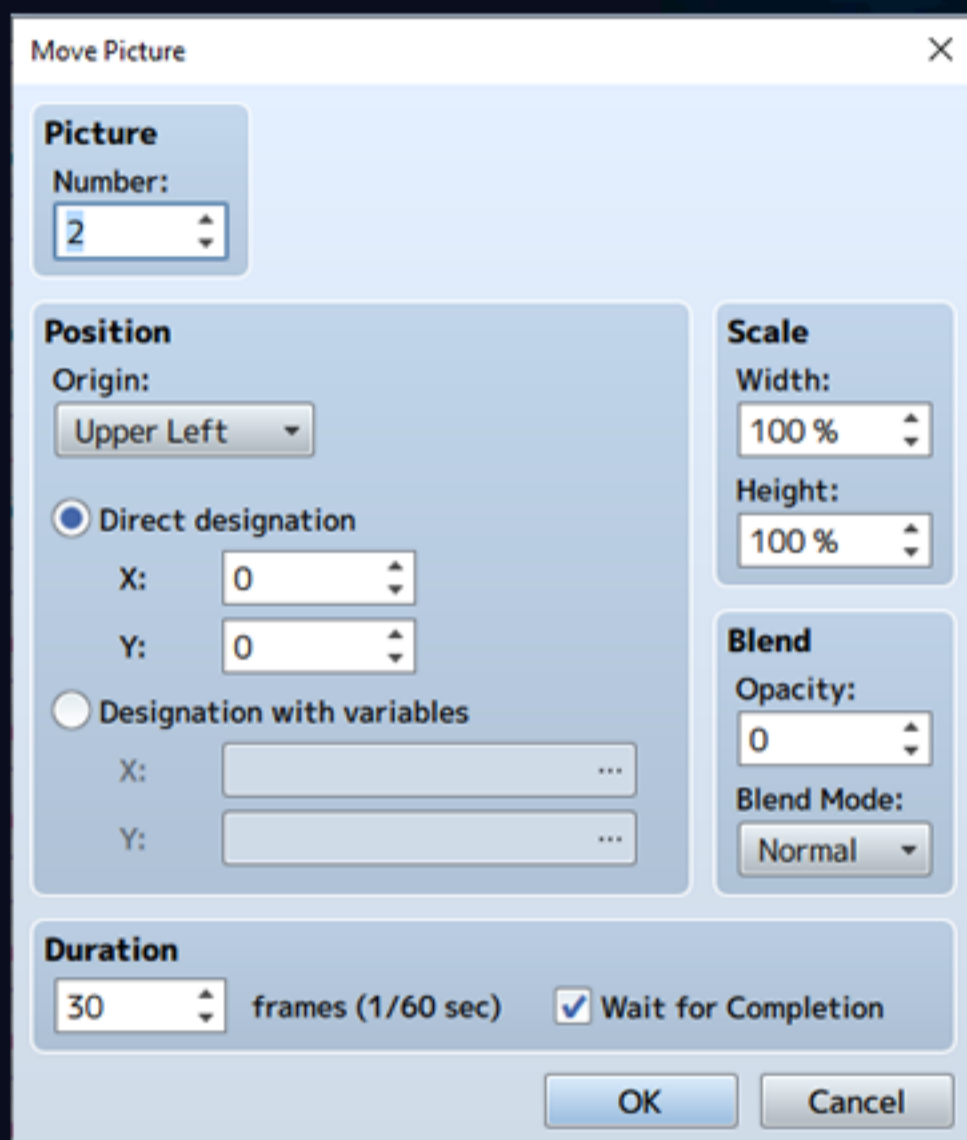
This is pretty damned dark but it's sufficient for the effect as the lighter image will be most dominant, we are just fading to this dark screen.

We begin in darkness and then use Show Picture to show our lightning pic on top.

```
◆Show Picture : #1, kraken1, Upper Left (0,0), (100%,100%), 255, Normal
◆Wait : 60 frames
◆Play SE : 061-Thunderclap01 (90, 100, 0)
◆Show Picture : #2, kraken2, Upper Left (0,0), (100%,100%), 255, Normal
◆Move Picture : #2, Upper Left (0,0), (100%,100%), 0, Normal, 30 frames (Wait)
◆Wait : 60 frames
◆Play SE : 061-Thunderclap01 (90, 92, 0)
◆Show Picture : #2, kraken2, Upper Left (0,0), (100%,100%), 255, Normal
◆Move Picture : #2, Upper Left (0,0), (100%,100%), 0, Normal, 30 frames (Wait)
```

Immediately after we use Move Picture. Move picture is used for moving images in cutscenes for various animations but, crucially, this movement includes a variety of different things including Opacity. By moving a picture from Opacity 255 to Opacity 0, we effectively fade it out.

Move Picture   ✕

Picture
Number:
2

Position   **Scale**
Origin: Width:
Upper Left   ▼   100 %

◉ Direct designation   Height:
X: 0   100 %
Y: 0
                                      Blend
○ Designation with variables   Opacity:
X: [...]   0
Y: [...]   Blend Mode:
                                      Normal   ▼

Duration
30   frames (1/60 sec)   ☑ Wait for Completion

          OK   Cancel

Keep the origin and position to the same as the previous image. Duration is important; in the end I decided 30 was fine, which is roughly half a second.

In order to make the kraken itself I used the magic wand tool to highlight just the ship, which was relatively simple as it is mostly just a silhouette.

I had to create two images for each frame of animation - one in darkness and one in light. This was so that my "flashes" were actually animated frames for the giant squid behind, creating a flailing limbs effect.

In the end this is a very short cutscene, but it is emotive and compelling, creating an effective lightscape from the stock lightning image.

These methods can be used for all manner of cutscenes, and by changing the direct designation, we can make pictures slide, and can even scale on the fly for moving objects.

Check out Remilia's videos for more complex examples of cutscene creation.

Rotten Apple

Apple have deprecated OpenGL support and 32-bit software, meaning RPG Maker MV now has compatibility issues with the latest updates to Apple's Mac OS. In the end the RPG Maker team have had to give in and are not able to make the software work at all. It would be incredibly time consuming and at the same time would break many plugins for RPG Maker MV. It's certainly true that breaking these plugins would cause more strife than pulling Mac OS support and there are many, many reasons not to deploy to Apple software in the first place...

We aren't about to go into a multi-page rant about why not to use Apple but a quick google of "Why does Apple suck?" or "Reasons not to use Apple" should suffice. Simple things such as their unwillingness to conform to web standards, including use of modern elements such as webms which make the Internet go around post-Flash, as well as their constant attack on any adult content, should be enough for any developer to steer well clear.

The good news is that RPG Maker MZ has been built around these restrictions and so you still have full Mac OS support, for now... But for how long? (And why would anybody reasonable want to, we wonder?)

Apple aren't the only ones, of course, and it seems the advent of streaming services and download managers has created the ability to censor video games far greater than Mary Whitehouse could ever have wished for. Storefronts such as Sony and Nintendo are now notoriously difficult to get "adult" content on to - as far as banning one game from using the word "jerk". Adult games *are* allowed here.
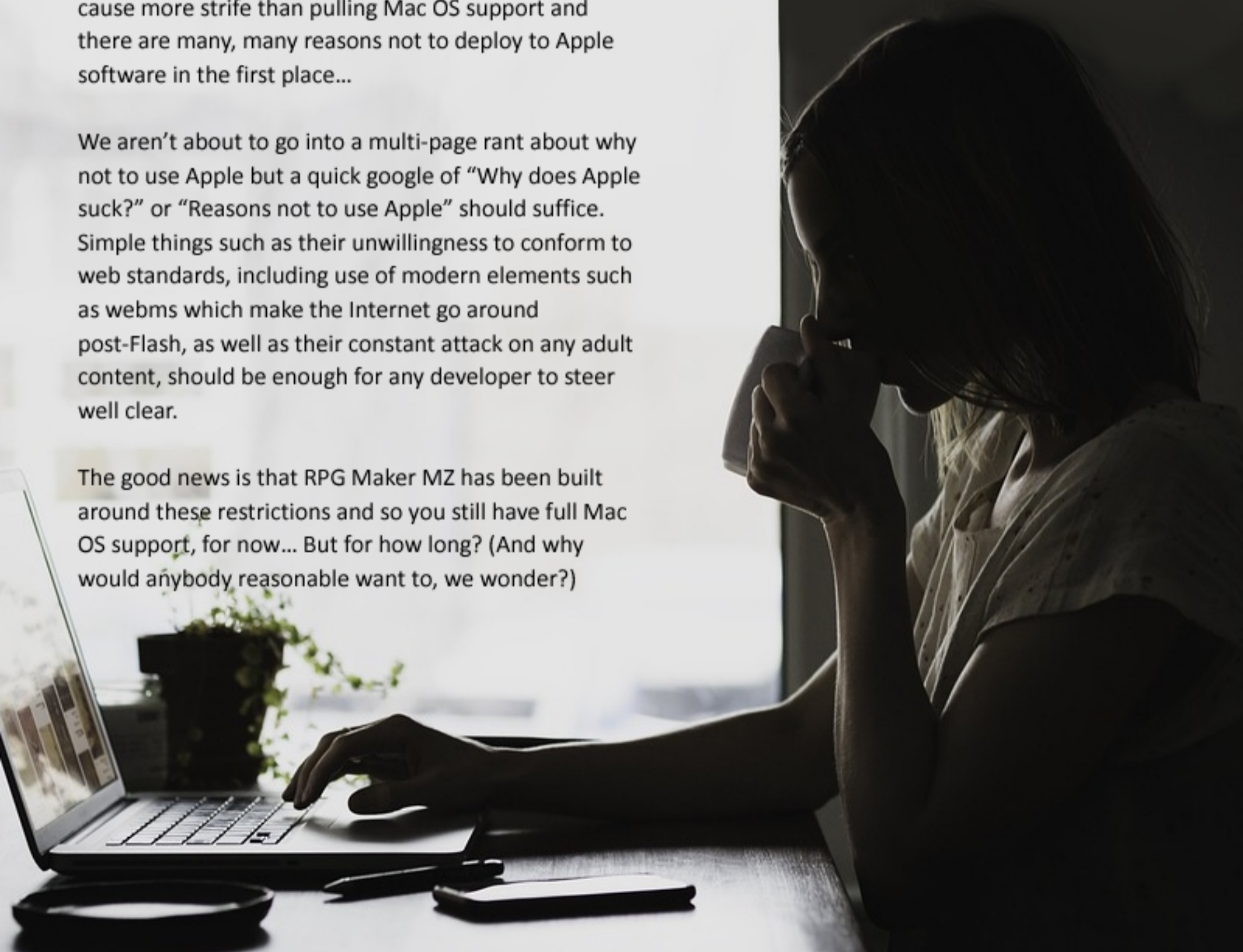
Let's hit the pub

The pub has been the centre of the RPG for generations.

We find out why, and then hit the web to look at some interesting mapping examples for inspiration in our games.

The pub has been the centrepiece of communities in England for centuries. In the town of Willenhall, for example, there are no less than twenty pubs in the heart of the town itself, with even more in the suburbs - this is after the great exodus of recent times which has seen tens of thousands of pubs close around the country. These range from traditional drinking establishments for the working classes (boozers) to coaching inns for the visiting gentry, or a combination of the two. The former would be found on street corners wherever people live, while the latter would strictly be found on major roads and turnpikes and may include toll houses.

In games they have traditionally kept this role as the centre of a town and the hub of activity. In Adventure Quest, the pub serves as the main weapon and armour shop and is the first thing the player sees. In Final Fantasy XII it is used as a location to serve mini-quests in the form of Bounty, where the player is given specific enemies to hunt down and kill. Indeed in most Final Fantasy games inns serve as the point of rest after a long journey, providing healing stays for a modest fee.

Pubs have also served a more interesting role over the years and the Bingley Arms, Leeds, said to be the oldest pub in the world, served as a resting house for monks on their travels between the abbeys at Leeds and York, later becoming a safe haven, with holes dug into the pub's chimneys. During Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries, they were used to hide Catholic priests. This would be the case later when King Charles fled across England, with many such priest holes being used to hide the King himself.

This gives us interesting ways to implement them in our games. They are a meeting place, a stop on a journey for rest, and a place to hide out from the law of the land. And, since many priest holes led to elaborate underground tunnels, it gives us a new location for dungeons and side quests.

Let's not forget AVALANCHE's headquarters in Tifa's *Seventh Heaven* bar in *Final Fantasy VII*
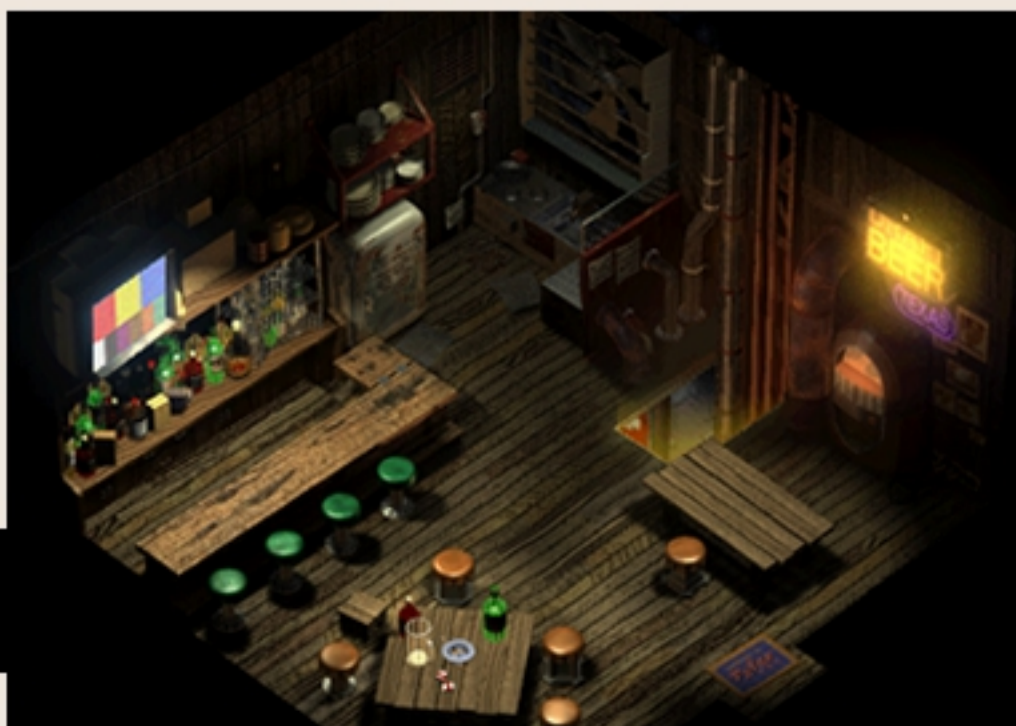
Above: courtyard of a former coaching inn in Shrewsbury, from Ellie's inspiratonal photos

Ellie's Wytches & Wyverns tavern is the central hub for quests and adventures

The Last Chronomancer by *Guld* on Twitter featuring separate booths and fancy carpets

Musical Corner

Without a doubt my favourite video game musical track is *Only a Plank Between One and Perdition*, by Nobou Uematsu. This track doesn't come in until quite far into Final Fantasy VIII and because of the happiness of the video game's soundtrack up to this point, and the lack of instruments such as electric guitars, a combination of the running beat trope (used to great effect in Final Fantasy VII when escaping Weapon in Midgar) and the evocative guitar riff means the track easily stands out and makes the hairs on your legs stand up in anticipation and anxiety for what is coming.

Throughout VIII Nobou uses hints and homages to *Emmerson Lake and Palmer* and *Yes*, and you can clearly spot these when listening to the albums *Brain Salad Surgery* or *Close to the Edge*. The boss music early on in the game is almost a facsimile for BSS in fact.

While *Only a Plank* is more of a modern style piece of music, because of the soundtrack's lack of an electric guitar, a similar riff would have a great impact as an addition to the RPG Maker XP RTP (which we'll cover later). The apparent mismatch stuns the setting and creates a great overall sense of anticipation.

The leap from here straight into Winhill furthers the juxtaposition, with its quaint setting matched by an equally peaceful soundtrack.

REMASTERED SOUNDTRACK

Being a huge fan of the RPG Maker XP original soundtrack I ran out to purchase the remastered version from Steam both for use in my game and to just listen to out of wistful nostalgia. The original soundtrack is amazing, being a collection of little clips and homages to video game soundtracks of the past (spot, for example, the Sephiroth march).

The remaster was not only disappointing but pretty damned insulting. Steam refunded it pretty quickly, which was fair, but it shouldn't have been necessary.

It is clear on a very quick listen that all that has been done to the original midi files is to run them through a converter, however it is also clear that the author hasn't even had one play through to test them, indeed there has been no quality control whatsoever. Take for example the track Church01 which is a great ecclesial tune. It has one of the backing tracks erroneously loud

such that what you get is an ear piercing wall of sound that in no way matches the original song and actually hurts your ears rendering the track completely unlistenable to.

This is not limited to one track however but is a theme throughout the resource pack. Making the quieter backing tracks take precedent over the main melody has created a lag/echo effect on many of the tracks. The worrying thing is that this is immediately noticeable on the very first play through - it is within the first few notes on some tracks!

I have achieved better results running the original midis through a free online convertor so it is not clear where the error has taken place.

The thing is, this is not a free DLC, and not even a cheap one. I paid £15.99 ($19.99 on Degica store) for the privilege of having my ears ripped off by a squirrel with a vendetta. This makes me now incredibly wary

of using any of the music DLCs. It's not much to ask for the tracks to be played just once by the content creator to ensure that nothing has gone wrong in the conversion.

Apologies if this review sounds too scaving and angry. It took a while to work out how to even refund the pack because it is something I have never considered doing before. If something is bad it just is bad, that is the nature of assets. But this DLC isn't just objectively bad but is actually unplayable and I am sure you would agree.

I have recommended Steam remove it from the store, but I would say that the RPG Maker OST is one of the finest OSTs ever made, for any game. It is an amazing mix of pop culture references with hints of prog, along with little snippets to mimic video game soundtracks creating a great sense of nostalgia and a theme of homage rather than pastiche. The RPG Maker team would not go far wrong doing a proper job on this, and a proper remaster would go for much more than the $19.99 they are charging for this awful mess of a conversion.

As it is, unfortunately this resource pack is completely unusable and unsuitable for both the Steam and Degica stores. I am sure others would agree.

As the RPG Maker XP RTP is in midi format it is readily openable in software such as Fruitloops. Once in you can use the software to edit music tracks, the simplest being to simply swap out which music is being played. This can be a great way to create unique music for your project that still fits in to the other tracks available. One example is swapping the pianos in the later tracks for glockenspiels, which creates some great ice dungeon music.
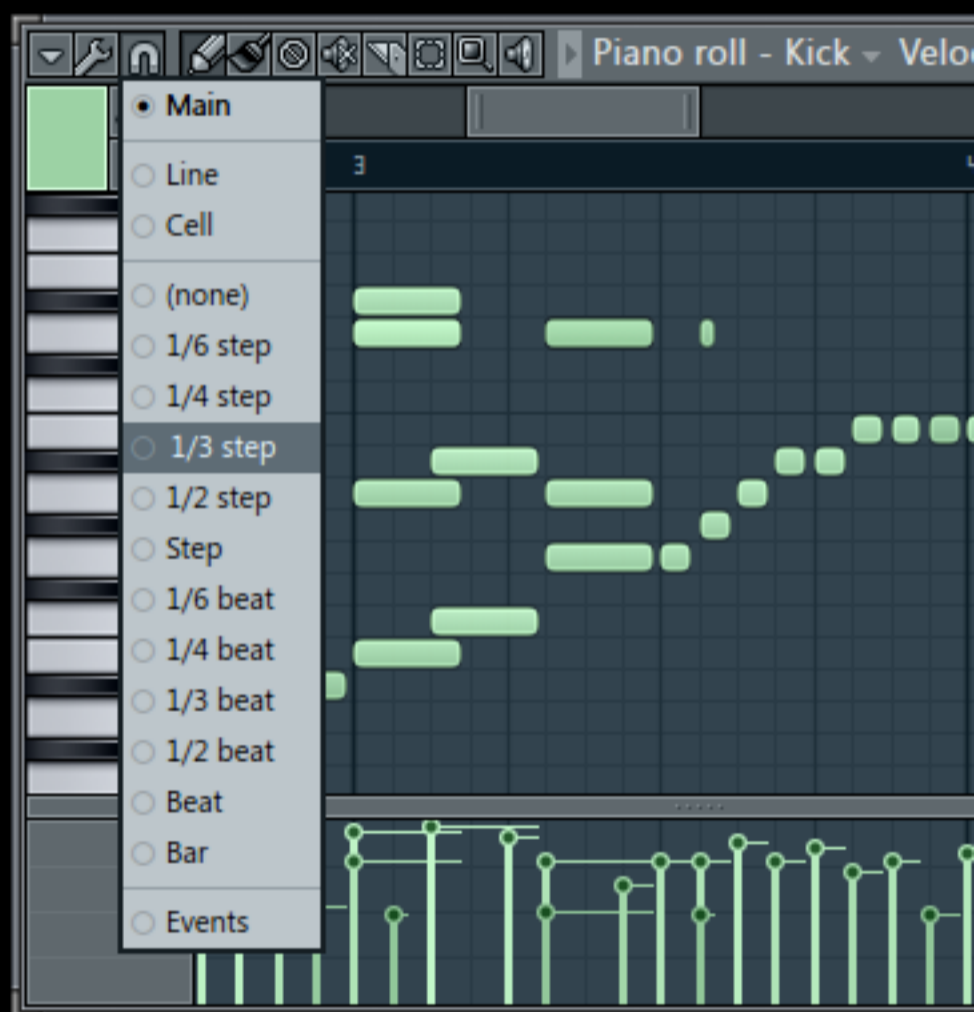
TAKING STOCK

Some people are gifted with the ability to create amazing art. Others have the background, time and patience to spend days pouring effort into fantastic logos and other works. Sometimes that just isn't feasible, and without spending money on a team behind you, becoming a sole indie dev where every aspect of your game is made by yourself becomes too much of a toil.

The background of this page is just a composite of a few different Pixabay stock images.

Pixabay is a free version of stock imagery sites such as Shutterstock or Alamy. On it, amateur and budding photographers and artists upload works which are free to use, often only needing appropriate credit. On the site can be found a mix of pixel, vector, illustrated and photographed art, as well as various different edits, mostly usable as concept art. Some of it is of dubious quality, as is to be expected, but there are real gems every now and then which are suitable for use in our games.

Many works are also suitable for applying effects and filters to create new works off the back of, especially photographs of buildings or scenery.

All works on the site are released under the Pixabay License, which makes them safe to use without asking permission or giving credit to the artist - even for commercial purposes. They can be copied, distributed, and otherwise used.

Limit Breaks

By far one of the most requested features of new RPG Maker editions is simply that the creators cease to impose artificial limits on users. Many things are limited arbitrarily, such as the total number of maps allowed, the size of maps, the number of layers, the amount of items other database tabs, and the number of tabs that we can use within events, which seriously limits how we can use event systems in our games.
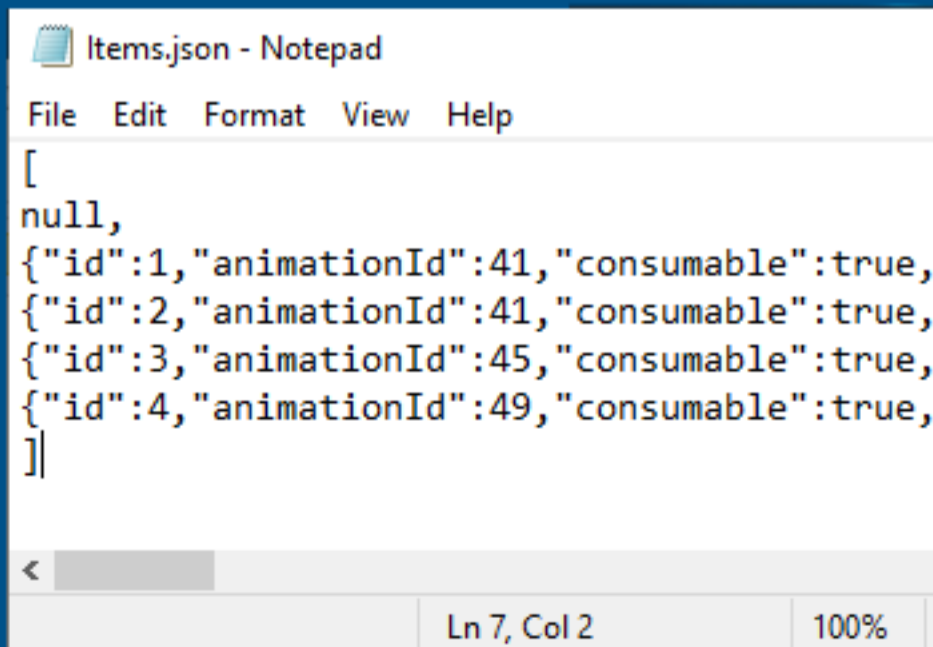
As of yet nothing has come of this, although we continue to push for it for a more powerful editor. The simplest way would be, accepting that the limits are there for performance reasons, to merely warn the user that breaking the artificially imposed limits may lead to problems with the client experience. On top, of course, a tick box to say not to mention that again.

Until this happens, is there anything we can do to break the limits given to us by the RPG Maker software? In some aspects no, but in others it is quite doable.

The simplest way is to open up the individual JSON files in the text editor of your choice and just copy and paste the last line, editing the ID number to increment it, creating an additonal entry. This can be done a practically indefinite number of times, expanding the amount of spells, items or enemies in the game for example.

To add a new map one must edit MapInfo and then copy and paste a map data file, renaming it to the incremented ID number.

Some limits are for performance reasons but others, such as limiting items to 2,000, are strictly arbitrary.

Items.json - Notepad

File   Edit   Format   View   Help

```
[
null,
{"id":1,"animationId":41,"consumable":true,
{"id":2,"animationId":41,"consumable":true,
{"id":3,"animationId":45,"consumable":true,
{"id":4,"animationId":49,"consumable":true,
]
```

Ln 7, Col 2   100%

Wolf's Gang

Some of our members are highly prolific with the sheer amount of games and resources they churn out. Now Caz has joined them. bringing her unique mix of mostly contest games. as well as pixel fantasy RPG icon sets for you to enjoy.

Our favourite is definitely Wolf's Gang which features amazing sprite work. It's also quickly become one of the highest rated games on HBGames.

Wolfgang the wolfman lived peacefully on the 5th floor of the Dark Lord's tower. until his tragic birthday when the heroes invaded. killed the Dark Lord and destroyed the tower. Now Wolfgang has nothing left – but with the help of the "superstar" skeleton Scarlet from the 89th floor. he decides to rebuild the tower. recruit an army of monsters. and take revenge on the heroes of Goodhero City!

Our members' verdict

★★★★★

CATFE

HEROGOOD vs VILLAINBAD

YES SIR!

I'LL FLY US STRAIGHT AND SURE!

Not a Chance of a Ghost!

Ocean's Dream

STAY AWAKE

Press Ⓐ

PIXEL FANTASY RPG ICONS

Tirawmisu

KNIGHT SHIFT

Discover the secrets of the afterlife!

In Knight Shift, you play as a recently departed human soul reborn into a mysterious, high-fantasy kingdom, and discover that the true nature of the soul is not what you had previously thought.

In an attempt to differentiate Knight Shift from other RPG games, every piece of the world that looks interesting is interactive. Be sure to interact with anything - who knows what you may find by rifling through bookshelves or looking into crates?

Knight Shift features hours of story content, amid self-proclaimedly terrible pun-based gameplay. With a bunch of original art and music, sidequest upon sidequest, and a megadrive inspired soundtrack by Unthusiasm, this is traditional JRPG nonsense at its finest.

The whole thing began as a writing exercise and has rapidly grown into something the author loved working on.

Travel to strange and exotic lands, meet life-long friends, fight vicious creatures and defend the Honeycomb Kingdom! It doesn't always have to suck when you are working the Knight Shift...

Demo now available in the Completed Games forum!

The world's first printmaking RPG...

COPPER ODYSSEY

It is Finals week, and 4 thieves have gone into the Print Studio and are taking all of the supplies. The Monitor of a print studio must get their friends, find the thieves, and take back the print supplies so students can keep working....You are the Monitor! Respect the craft.

In this game, you will be playing as Monitor, and you will have the option to get your friends, Bad Girl, Mr. Woodcut, and Miss Gun to help you out.

There are many small and silly routes to get what you want and do what you need. As long as you are strong and respect the craft, you will be winning the game. Welcome to the game.

Many of the enemies and skills are based on Printmaking Terms, since you are the monitor of a Fine Arts Printmaking studio.

Please be on the lookout for small little comics (this game is based on small comic I used to do) that show more of the characters.

DRM Won't Save Your Game

This is purely an opinion piece, and others are welcome to disagree.

Digital Rights Management, anti-cheat systems and code obfuscation seem like the perfect three tools to protect your game from stealing, cheating and code copying. In reality they do little to stop those three and instead create a hurdle for well-meaning users and turn potential customers and gamers away.

There are two metaphors that come to mind - speed cameras and tax evasion. Under speed cameras, only the well-meaning people who drive a little over the speed limit are caught. Yes they broke the law and were driving a little too fast, but the real villains, shooting through too fast for the camera to catch them, swapping their plates, or not being licensed to begin with, get away with it. Similarly under tax evasion the IRS are simply incapable of auditing millionaires, so the only people who get caught are again the well meaning people who make mistakes, or small time folk.

It's the same with DRM. Those who want to steal your game will do so whether it is behind a barrier or not. People have been ripping graphics from Gameboy and Playstation games for years and those are so protected that it's often a case of print screen and editing. If there is a will there's a way.

Code obfuscation is no protection for your code being stolen, especially as anyone really into that will know how to get around obfuscated code in the first place, or just be copying like for like. What you are stopping is modifications. That might be a well-meaning user wanting to improve upon or tweak your system, it might be another developer seeking compatibility with their plugin, or it might be somebody legitimately trying to fix a bug in your system - you are not God, you are human, and mistakes happen.

The same goes for anti-cheat systems. If a player wants to cheat they will. Jenova Project has existed for almost as long as Final Fantasy VII has been available on PC, for example, and there are so many ways to cheat in an RPG Maker game. By stopping people doing this, you won't stop the diehard

cheaters, but you will stop anybody trying to fix bugs, or get through a frustrating section in your game. Do not assume your game is perfectly balanced, you are a one-person indie dev!

There are so many ways that these things can detriment the user experience that it is rarely worth implementing them. The big question you are asking is, where do you stand legally, if somebody is trying to steal your game and you don't protect it?

Use minimal protection. Encrypt your game using the RPG maker system (or whatever engine you are using). Ask the player not to redistribute the game, politely, without calling them a criminal in doing so. Be nice, and civil, and nudge them along the right lines. If you've done that then legally you have protected your game. Anybody who does then go above these hurdles has already done sufficiently enough that you are as protected as if you used a combination of the big three mentioned above. You don't need to obfuscate your code or use DRM because you already own copyright by default as a creator of the work.

The reason I say to be civil and not imply criminality is that writing a lengthy terms of use could actually be meaningless. In order to play a game it must be decrypted and so your player has to break into the game in order to play it, in RPG Maker's case, via Game.exe. Because of this it is actually impossible to make an unbreakable offline game. Whatever method your executable invokes to play the game is the backdoor in for any cheekiness. Because of this, it is not worth invoking expensive proprietary encryption tools, especially as those are likely to have their own premade decryption system equivalent by now anyway, meaning employing them is like placing a flag that says "this way in".

If somebody steals your game, go after them! There is a notorious game studio going around at the moment who is not only stealing games, but is then threatening court action to people who have the audacity to post Let's Plays without permission (as these might tell the content owners their game was stolen...)

DRM, code obfuscation and anti-cheat systems are unnecessary, do not solve the three issues at hand, and only seek to punish the well-meaning or lowball users. Like speed cameras and the IRS they do nothing to solve the actual problem.

Ultimately it is up to you, but don't fall into the trap of rendering your game inaccessible in search of the unbreakable game: all games must be hackable otherwise the player wouldn't be able to decrypt the game to play it in the first place.

ALL HALLOWS EVE

As the holiday season approaches we would like to run a Hallowe'en issue of *HBGames the eZine,* with a suitable horror theme. All things well, we will feature spooky resources, the very best horror games our site has to offer, and tips, tutorials and guides on making your own spooky spectacular!

We are anticipating a Spoopy level of 5 so please check now if there is a skellington already inside of you.

In the meantime, if you have any horror games or resources to add to the site, please feel free to do so! As usual if you want you can just send us a link to your game and we will set you up a Game Page with all the mod cons.

Scare you later!

AND ANOTHER THING...

HBGames are now on Twitter! No, this time we are actually properly on Twitter. The old account seems to have been set up by somebody who didn't know how Twitter worked (probably Ellie) and was little-used.

The new account is being used to spotlight indie dev from around the Twittersphere, injected with works from our own site, promos for the eZine, and other interesting titbits we think you may enjoy.

We've had more interaction the past week than we have in a decade of the old account. Its also having a positive impact on the eZine, with readership averaging over 60 for the new issues now.

TO REMASTER... OR NOT?

For a long time we have wanted to remaster the old issues of the eZine. Going back to Lene's 2005 editions, some font and colour choices make things difficult to read, and there is a lack of graphical content in a lot of text articles that would brighten the mag up. Focus is of course going to be on new issues and it's not something we're going to throw our entire development period on.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ellie is the editor and author of the eZine, and currently the sole admin of HBGames. Hailing from the little known city of Wolverhampton, England, she has always had an interest in video game creation and came across RPG Maker 2000 while on the BattleOn forums in early 2004. Since then she has been a member of what became HBGames, and after picking up Netplay that year, has been at the forefront of RPG Maker MMORPG development.

Ellie's manic depressive personality often has an impact on her game development projects such that she has a cycle of on and off periods, characterised by an intense and highly productive development phase followed by a gloomy dark phase for a while. Her current project is Wytches & Wyverns, which can be found in the Games in Development section of the site. She's currentl;y in the Dark phase.

Ellie has two dogs. You can't have them. She also has a habit of speaking about herself in the third person especially in bios.

For a decade Ellie went by the name Amy Pond, which is probably why you have never heard of her.

WRITE FOR US

If you have ideas of your own for an eZine article, let us know! Even if it is just a loose idea for Ellie to roll with at her pace. We really appreciate any and all feedback, comments and critique and will take it all onboard.

All issues of *HBGames.org the eZine* are available on the website in our new HBGames Xen powered eZine manager (yeah, it's just the games manager with a different banner...). This makes them easier to discuss, rate, comment and share.

We've created *many* issues over the years, some of dubious quality, but others with some quite thought provoking and useful game making articles within their pages. What's your favourite?