

HBGAMES.org

The Ezine!

HBGAMES.org's Official E-zine!

Issue #7 Retrospective



The Missing Issue

2006-2008 Retrospective

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Quick Jump

Throughout this issue you'll see quick jump codes. These are just a simple way to link to posts and threads around the forums without wasting space in the magazine. To use them, simply go to the homepage and enter a quick jump code in the quick jump box below the left hand menu and press the enter key. Simple!

Just look out for this symbol:

QJ 123456



CELESTIAS FERRUM

シレスチヤス・フェルム

QJ 276651



The Missing Issue

There were no eZines between November 2006 and November 2009. It's always bugged me, as well as the fact there's technically no issue 4. I've taken advantage of this and created a new issue to stick between 7 and 8, as a new issue 7. It's a collection of various reviews from on the forums, screenshots, links to interesting topics, contest results, and other information, as a retrospective looking back at those years. I've intentionally left out inter-staff drama and other such shenanigans, and focused purely on game making - and boy were some amazing games made in this time. I hope you enjoy it, and I hope this makes up for the lack of an eZine for three years. My thanks to everybody whose content I've nicked (er, aggregated) - without you eZines, TWODOs, and hell, the forums in general, would be for nothing.

~ Amy



Child's Play

In December 2006, owing to a surplus in sponsors, the site chose to donate money to the Child's Play charity. Members chipped in, tripling the fund pot, and we gave collectively over \$150 to the charity.

Child's Play is a charity supported by the Humble Indie Bundle which aims to improve the lives of children stuck in hospitals through the power of video games.

A huge thank you to everyone who donated, and to those who continue to do so after the drive.

RPG MAKER® VX

2007 saw the release of RPG Maker VX, which we didn't really like. (Actually we hated it and were very vocal about this).

We probably lost out on a lot of the hype at the time - websites were made for it that overtook .ORG - people always like a new thing even if it's worse than the original.

VX games are and have always been welcome at .ORG, even if we didn't get many over the years.

QUINTESSENCE

THE BLIGHTED VENOM

In 2009, Quintessence won the .ORGy Award for Best Game. This review, written by Untraversil, explains why.

In my last review of Cast Aside, I mentioned that animated title screens are all the rage these days. Apparently QTBV is the game that started this fad. After a brief intro and seeing a bunch of crows fly past me, I see the list of game options. The options are Destiny Anew, Memories Past, and Fate Foregone. What's wrong with New Game, Continue, and Shutdown? I know using those words kind of adds to the feeling of the game, but for a few moments it left me feeling a little confused. I selected Destiny Anew, assuming it meant playing a new game. Thankfully, I was right. The next effect I saw was actually pretty cool. Going off of the animated title screen (which is actually an rtp made mountain), I see a kid walk up the mountain and say a bit of text. It was a seamless animation and I didn't even know I had selected something. The screen went black, a bit more text appeared and:

"Rated T for Teen by rmxp.org". Classic. Whoever remembers the RRRB and how awesome they were for pointlessly giving ESRB like ratings to all these rmxp games knows just how cheesy that is. After a three second long fade in / fade out, It begins a main title sequence.

Now I'm going to be honest here; if you've never played QTBV before and have never seen this intro, you are missing out. Reives has successfully combined RTP, facemaker and other graphics into this absurdly beautiful choreographed intro, where all the characters make their appearances and so forth. Now I have seen better cutscenes done without so many visuals in an rmxp game, but this intro is so unique and different that it definitely makes itself stand out. Not even a minute in and this intro is just a feast for the eyes. All the graphics, frames of animation and pictures are just truly astounding, and are definitely the selling point of this series. My only immediate grope would be the white tiger that I see. Its movement frames are very awkward looking, and it seems as if the tiger is limping when it's

moving. Maybe this is intended, as I'm not fully aware of Quintessence's backstory. As the intro finishes, random flashes of a cave appear to traumatic music, and it becomes obvious that something nerve racking is happening. Then, the screen follows a winding cave path until it reaches our heroes, who seem to be having a discussion on the lack of a missing character. She promptly arrives, only to have absolutely nothing happen.



Let me just quickly digress onto another matter before I continue from here. Let me just mention something about the music; it fits really well into the environment. Its not often you get to hear music this intimidating, but it's certainly something else. So far the background music has been working almost in sync with the background sound, and the effects it has been producing are something else.



So now that I have been permitted play, I see that the first thing I have to do is solve a puzzle. A great start to a game, especially since it doesn't involve using many integral or foreign key strokes. What's more, there are semi-transparent arrows that point to what I need to look at, whose effects are immediate and effective. The intro puzzle is definitely very user friendly until you look at the stuck gate, whereupon the true puzzle awaits. Using seamless animation, the puzzle appears where it shows four crescents with colored orbs in their centers. At the bottom are directions on how to move the crescents and how to change what crescent you have selected. It's smooth, colorful and convenient. Not all puzzles need to be like this for your game; it's true, but Mr. Reives has simply outdone himself with this puzzle. I don't think I've ever seen something so intricately made for such a simple challenge. At this point, I fell head-over-heels in love with this game. The lack of backstory is definitely stifling, but so far, the only thing that's keeping me down is the facemaker graphics, which, although they fit in quite well, are too overused and cheesy for me appreciate.

I finish the puzzle in under a minute, and continue with the story. I was expecting the next challenge to be a small battle or another intricately done puzzle, but I guess that by now I should have figured Quinie was going to keep surpassing my expectations. The challenge was a puzzle, but by the likes of which simply made me gawk in awe. The difficulty curve just went from the level of playing hangman blindfolded with the word four letters long to being asked to solve a Sudoku

puzzle before continuing.

It was definitely a big jump, but by the likes of which are very doable. The idea was to use a bunch of floating rocks to hop to one side of the room to another. A simple concept, but also that there were two switches that had to be turned on and off in order to cross larger gaps. This was done using the other shape shifting character, Naira (I hope I spelled that right) to transform into a raven and go from one switch to another and turn each one every time the situation called. Like the previous puzzle, the directions were also given once the controls were too become complicated, and it left the player to fend for themselves. It was complicated, but it wasn't the hardest puzzle I've ever been faced with (Professor Layton, anyone?) It gave me the directions when they became crucial to the challenges completion, and didn't interfere until the completion of the puzzle had been achieved. The controls are a little awkward, but are otherwise generally understandable and it really won't take you long to get used to them.

Now the intro and the first puzzle proved to be a healthy five minutes long, but by the time I was finished with this challenge, I had reached my fifteen minute mark. So here I am, wanting to give less praise and more criticism for Quintessence, but I just can't think of any. Honest! It so far seems to be an impossible task, the likes of which are leaving me feeling ashamed for leaving you without a good game-bashing (or at least are leaving me feeling ashamed for actually liking this game so damn much). So, without further ado, here are ten additional lines of what is wrong with Quintessence.

- What the fuck is up with the name?
- Facemaker graphics are a no-no.
- Why is everybody so obsessed with animated titlescreens? Jesus Christ.
- New Game. Continue. End Game. Was that too hard? Where the hell is the menu?
- RTP graphics are way overused in the intro.
- Really, what the fuck is up with the white tiger spritesheet?
- So many bugs.
- Definitely not for beginners.
- Quintessence rhymes with Cuntessence.

Otherwise, this is one of the better games Ive played in a long while, and definitely something to stave me off until Master of the Wind Arc VI comes out.



In late 2008 through to early 2009 we ran one of our biggest contests: a pixel art war. Members joined two groups which were pitted against one another in a battle of the arts.

THE PURPLE PERIHELION PARTY



The Panda

QJ 592817



QJ 594362

Ocean's Dream



QJ 594097

The Inquisitor

LEGION



Ynlraey

QJ 594342



Green Raven

QJ 594680



Berserker

QJ 591920





Lunar Eclipse

QJ 600897

Boon

QJ 591968



Redman

QJ 592924



Perihelion

QJ 591948



Zerlab

QJ 591960



Joy

QJ 592169



Amy

QJ 591983



Lomastul

QJ 592141



Fucbillgates

QJ 592274



rmxp_beginner

QJ 591924



Clangers

QJ 592717

QJ 592817

Bluescope



Emtch



QJ 593660



Twirly

QJ 601603



PURPLE PERIHELION PARTY WINS!

Yes, the PPP, or the Purple Perihelion Party, had reigned victorious, when the War of the Pixel finally drew to a close. Though the mighty leader, The Fuhrer herself, perished in the Skirmish of Spritehedge Shire, her trusted and most talented officers had taken up the cause, and showed their valor. It was bittersweet: though many had tirelessly laid their lives on the line for the good of their country, only a few would come out of the battle triumphant.

Most Impressive Quality

Inquisitor, Perihelion, Green Raven

Most Content

Ocean's Dream, Inquisitor, Green Raven

Greatest Diversity

Ynlraey, Ocean's Dream, Boon

Most Original

Inquisitor, Green Raven, Fucbillgates

Best Pieces

Inquisitor, Fucbillgates, Iomastul

Best Palettes

Inquisitor, Ocean's Dream, Perihelion

MASTER - OF THE - WIND

Master of the Wind is a game that needs no introduction, and quite possibly no reviews either; we all know it's great. Over the years it's accumulated a considerable fanbase one would think impossible for an RPG Maker game. Now that arc V has been released, the entire .org community awaits impatiently the release of the final arc. But after five episodes, can the series continue to provide the same classic entertainment it always has, or is its age showing?

As the fifth episode of the saga opens, our favourite group of comic heroes head for the Nuntak jungle, in chase of the McGuffin they found and lost countless times before: the evidence they need to expose Equipment King as



trouble makers and finally shut them down. Very early in the arc, it becomes obvious that gameplay has taken a backseat in favour of heavier (we're talking McDonald heavy) storytelling. In fact, you probably spend more time in a flashback exploring Stoic's life than in the present. Conveniently enough, most of the flashbacks also concern ongoing events in the present.

Thankfully, by arc V the player has enough emotional investment in the characters and interest in the storyline and Solest's past to keep the entire experience fun and interesting, and it certainly helps that the cutscenes are dynamic and masterfully designed, complete with an impeccable and beautiful musical score. All of the game's flashbacks deliver an intriguing exposure of the world's past, complete with recurring political or religious critique, but a special mention must be given to the sheer beauty of the "rain of fire scene", accompanied by the song of Within Temptation's *Somewhere*. By itself, that single scene makes the entire arc worthwhile.

As we approach the series' climax, most ongoing loose ends are being tied up, most notably the Necromancers Rana and Solik finally getting what's coming to them, Equipment King being busted and Sparrow's identity finally being revealed. I won't spoil it for you, but it leads to another powerful and emotional moment, and disturbs any notion anyone might have had about how the series would end for the main characters.

If the storyline is as great as it ever was, gameplay and visual elements suffer a much harsher fate, not that there is a lot of gameplay in the arc to talk of, anyway. In fact, there are only three (and a half) moments where you actually are in control of the character for an extended period of time, and even so, that extended period of time doesn't make it past the hour. Not counting the 30 seconds you have to use to get from the desert town of Artagal to the jungle of Nuntak, the first true gameplay area will be Nuntak itself. After exploring a small town of Undermoss, you'll step into the jungle maze, which consist of walls of trees and perfectly perpendicular paths, with a rabid tiger coming out of every other bush. I know, I was let down too. Thankfully, that bit is over soon enough.



Next over, we get to explore Volrath's (not the author, the game character) castle. In order to open the castle's secret passage, despite being obvious, the player will be required to travel through Stoic's memory and explore both past and present castle, talking to everyone and, in true adventure game fashion, acquire items that will allow you to open the path. Piecing together Stoic's past and figuring out the next step to take will take a sharp mind, but a little challenge never hurt anyone. That part WILL get frustrating until you figure out there is a chapel you need to enter hidden on the east side of castle.

The final area of gameplay is a beach by the mountain side, as our heroes struggle to catch up to the Necromancers and the ancient evil they are attempting to raise (don't worry, it's not as cliché as it sounds).

This beach features one of Master of the Wind's many minigames. This time, the wind mage Shroud will have to jump from rock to rock, carefully watching as his power meter fills up to hit the action key at the right time to avoid landing in the water. The strength of the wind, indicated by the orientation of the rain, also plays a key element in this minigame. It's rather fun for the first 5 times, but after a while it becomes slightly annoying, and the constant monster encounters, which, by the by, are rather tougher than usual this time around, make for a particularly tedious area.



Visually, the arc also seems to be inferior to its predecessor. Perhaps due to the limitation of the tileset, the jungle of Nuntak is the epitome of average, with the beach not far behind. Lack of natural variety and randomness, as well as more inspired visual effects such as animals, for instance, make for map design that is not bad, and that definitely won't make your eyes commit suicide, but that is not as great as it could've been.

As a whole, I would characterise this arc as the calm before the storm. You get a lot of that bothersome storyline out of the way to pave the road for the grandiose finale. As one of the greatest RPG Maker series nears its end, one can't help but to wonder what the future brings.

Final rating: 8.5/10

You can read more of The Doctor's reviews here:

 487141

This Week on .ORG

One of the main reasons the eZine stopped between 2006 and the end of 2009 was the introduction of *this week on .org*, a short amalgamation of links. The new eZine is largely aiming to replicate TWODO, serving as a collection of articles with some interesting links and a roundup of the month's news. TWODO was a successful initiative, but annoying to compile every week. We lasted quite a while though! The TWODO archive can be found here: **QJ 592141** (use the navigation bar to get back to the archive board).

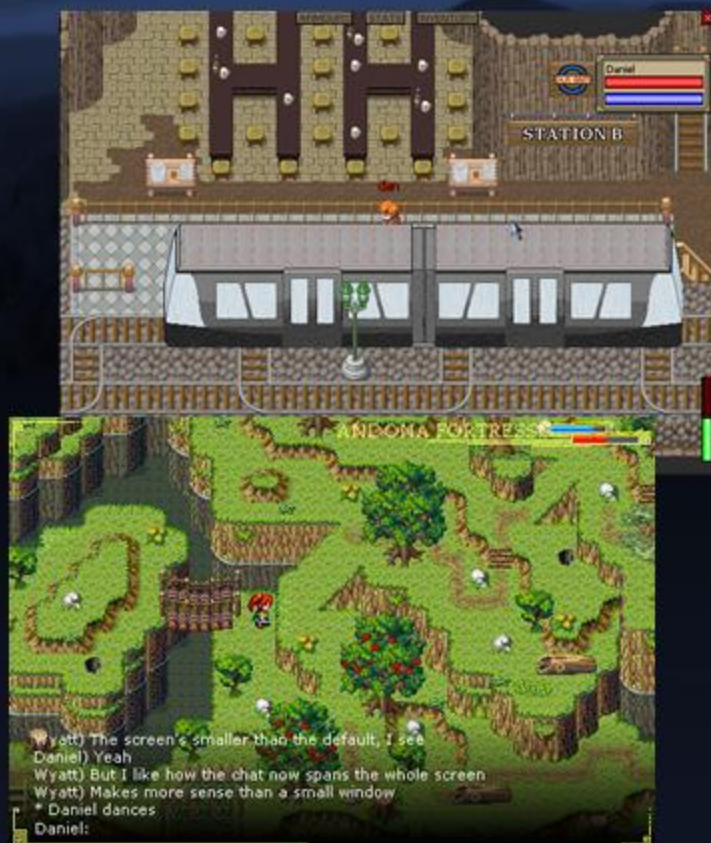
VENGEANCE

2006 to 2010 for me was taken up by creating and running Vengeance, an online game made in RPG Maker XP. It started as a small, compact project designed to get something out there... and grew into the opposite. A behemoth with supposedly 10 hours of gameplay, it was so windy and complicated that eventually, when Necrile said "release it", I did. We had fun. I took it down and put back up a new version with none of the original content, just a basic map, and we enjoyed it for weeks. I think it goes to show that having content out there and playable is more important than having a detailed game, to begin with, especially for online projects.

Vengeance grew to be one of the most followed games on .ORG, which displeased the moderators at the time due to it's spammy thread. Eventually it spawned an active forum to store everything in.

Vengeance eventually became Afar and was remade outside of RPG Maker entirely. It's still going, but development is pretty much dead at this point.

QJ 740014



VACANT SKY

VOL 1. CONTENTION

You don't see many RPG Maker XP games that show a lot of effort. Most of them are the uninspired story of some brash, good-hearted teenager fighting an evil overlord "because it's the right thing to do." Vacant Sky is quick to throw that trend off, and that's a very good thing.

Numerous developmental setbacks delayed the game for about a year, and as a result a lot of visual and audio revisions have cropped up over the months. Despite the complications, Vacant Sky is an ambitious project that shows a lot of promise.

Story: 9

The story begins with a brief cutscene narrated by the game's main protagonist, Auria Edith, whose journey begins when she's killed.

Before you're introduced to her, though, you get the chance to play as three of the primary antagonists, who belong to the elusive terrorist organization known as the Virad. The Virad are "abducted" and shortly thereafter begin to wreak havoc in a high-security prison. That sequence ends, and the pace shifts to a town not unlike the American Midwest, in which Auria Edith's main concern is doing afternoon shopping and finishing her Chemistry paper. Auria learns that there are rumors of Virad activity in her town, and it's because of her suspected involvement in the Virad that she's killed and her quest begins.

The story isn't strikingly original, but it's a significant change of from the trite plots that sadly consume the majority of RMXPs. While you're playing, it's entertaining and clever, and when you bother to talk to people in towns, you're sometimes rewarded with little bits about the characters from Auria's point of view.

Plot advancement comes largely from the fairly standard dialogue between characters, though you can occasionally ask them direct questions about themselves. Auria will also sometimes stop to narrate and offer some insight into her current situation or past experiences that tie in with it.



Gameplay: 7

Vacant Sky's gameplay is a bit of a mixed bag. It has all the components, but they haven't quite come together just so yet. As RPGs go, it's a fairly traditional setup, with a few interesting tweaks thrown in.



There are no random battles in Vacant Sky; apart from pre-scripted battles that are mandatory (though you don't always need to win). It might sound as if this makes battles very scarce, but there are several battles against both bosses and regular enemies throughout the two or three hours of gameplay. These battles also give a significantly higher amount of experience than most other methods of finding

In and out of battle, you can change each character's method of reacting to attacks: dodge, guard, and counter. Each setting has its own set of advantages, depending on the stat build you choose for Auria early on. That aspect of battle adds an extra layer of complexity. Is it better to take less damage indefinitely or to take a gamble on dodging an attack and sometimes taking none?

As you level up, you're allowed to divide up points amongst your stats as you like, giving you full customization of your character. Early on, you'll also gain access to a unique area in which you can purchase increases to your stats or new techniques and passive abilities for battle.

Outside of battles, there's a lot of exploring to do, despite Act I's very linear format. It's never forced upon you, but there are usually items and money in it for you if you look around enough. These sidequests aren't necessary, although skipping them will keep you from getting all the story and all the items you could otherwise use.

A lot of the sidequests are dependent upon skills, special stats like Strength, Charisma and Awareness. At any given point, you might need to perform a skill check to see if you're able to do something like move an object or convince someone to tell you something. These are never necessary, but when successful, you'll get a small reward. Not all these sidequests depend on skills, though, and some are independent of all skills. Still, it seems like most of the sidequests are in the very first town rather than increasing in volume as you progress, which seems a little strange.

Another complaint is that the menu system, particularly in Equipment, Techniques and the Journal, seems a bit clumsy. The Journal section looks very cluttered at times, and it could do with some form of categorization. Equipment and Techniques are odd in that, instead of letting you change multiple characters' techniques and items around, they always send you back to the main menu once you've changed one character's reaction mode or equipment. This results in a lot of needless back-and-forth that can become tiresome.



Graphics: 7

Apart from some occasional blips like being able to talk through counters and fences, and not being able to walk into certain open areas, the graphics are great, although there is one particularly glaring bug in which Auria's sprite is invisible in battles until she's attacked. You also run into the occasional clipping when walking under trees and there are some brief hitches you'll occasionally see as you're walking around the areas.

The characters all have custom artwork and battle sprites, which really adds a lot of life to them, and the sprites look especially nice. The few powerful attacks you do see also have their own custom animations, and despite some of them looking a little overdone, they're nice-looking and non-intrusive.

There are also a lot of really nice effects like sunset and fog that make it more convincing when someone says "It's almost nightfall" or something to that effect. You're not just standing there in broad daylight, wondering what the characters are talking about, and this is a surprisingly powerful thing.

A lot of effort was put into making Vacant Sky look unique, and the effort paid off. The game might not be the prettiest out there, but it has more than just superficial beauty going for it, and its distinct style is sure to make it easily discernible from the crowd.

Sound: 10

Vacant Sky's sound is basically flawless. The voice acting is essentially the only example out there that isn't frustratingly bad or indistinct, and it's used infrequently enough that the sections in which it does appear are quite welcome and serve to nicely break up the otherwise tense, dark story.

Beyond the voice acting, Vacant Sky has an outstanding soundtrack, with two full vocal tracks featured. The style of the soundtrack has a wide range, with styles similar to those of the Silent Hill and Tales series. Similarities aside, Vacant Sky's soundtrack is distinct and beautiful, loaded with memorable tracks.

Overall: 8.5/10

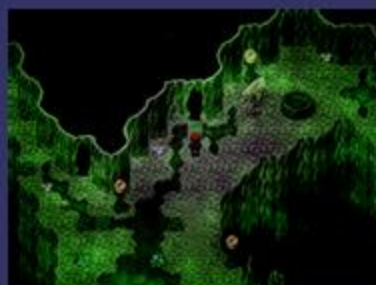
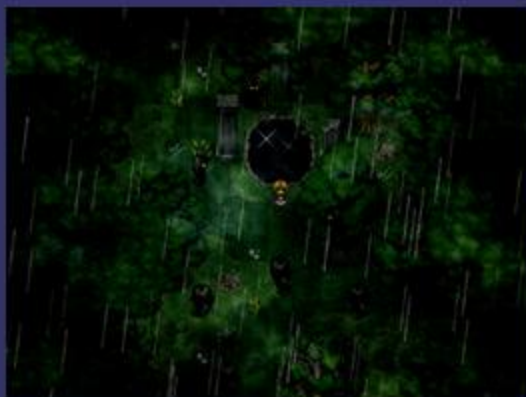
Vacant Sky is more than the sum of its parts (except its amazing sound, obviously). Overlooking the linearity of the first act and the graphical bugs, you'll find a great first attempt that shows a lot of potential. It's only a few hours long, but it's a worthwhile investment of your time that bucks a few long-standing RPG cliches and offers you a lot of options with building your character. Give Vacant Sky a chance, and you almost definitely won't be disappointed.

QJ 254645

Fall of Terra, ImmuneEntity QJ 510737

BloodSphere, Alex898 QJ 652684

Hellion, by Kentona QJ 701683



Enex 2, by Erichermit

QJ 227138



Sailor:
There aren't as many goods in storage this month... The pirate attacks are starting to cost us profits.

Legionwood, by Dark Gaia

QJ 677892

Manager: Calupe Joe Money: 1445 Time: Jun 23 (Fri) 18:24

NEXT	GIFTS	FURNI	SAVE	QUIT
Yumi Lv: 9	Airi Lv: 7	Kazune Lv: 4		
Health 20/55	Health 60/70	Health 60/60		
Popularity 455	Popularity 295	Popularity 154		
Vocal 82	Vocal 78	Vocal 34		
Dance 60	Dance 58	Dance 42		
Charm 99	Charm 33	Charm 18		
Trust 97	Trust 75	Trust 20		
Confidence 96	Confidence 82	Confidence 33		

Chisato is on vacation.

Idolcraft, by Flower Thief

QJ 427682

Rayne

A recipe sheet. These are more rare than you might think around here.

Cast Aside, by Anaryu

QJ 531475

Intense
Increases the level of attacks and lowers casting time.

Rumble	11	20
Flare	13	45
Inferno	95	25
Gust	12	60
Geysir	7	75
Prayer	9	40
Shield	15	20
Barrier	13	20

Small Fire Weave; causes [Burn].



Over the years some beautiful games have been overlooked - none moreso, I think, than Bandits of Arabia, by Simacir. A demo was released, but despite it's prettiness it never got the big following of other games.



Bandits of Arabia, by Simacir

QJ 372441

Lene, who played editor for the original six issues of the eZine, sadly left the site in 2007. Over the years various people such as Sixty and Sophist tried to revive the eZine. The content they created eventually formed the first few issues in 2009 to 2010. These issues are available to download at HBGames.org.

I hope you enjoyed this issue of the eZine, and I hope it didnt come across the wrong way! The past is great, but the future ever more exciting, and we can't wait to see what great new games are coming to the site. There's no shortage of new games to be discovered and played, and they come in in a steady flow; feel free to post your own or just discover those others have made over the years, that have created HBGames.

This issue was released in March 2014 and sits between issues 17 and 18 chronologically, though between 7 and 8 practically.

CREDITS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

A huge thank you to anybody whose game or art featured in this issue of the eZine. Without you we'd be nothing!

- **Quintessence Review:** Untraversil
- **Master of the Wind Review:** The Doctor
- **Vacant Sky Review:** Lusus Naturae



If you want to write for the eZine feel free to submit anything you like. We can't guarantee everything will feature, and it may be subject to editing, but everything is looked at and very much appreciated. It can be a great way to get your name out there!