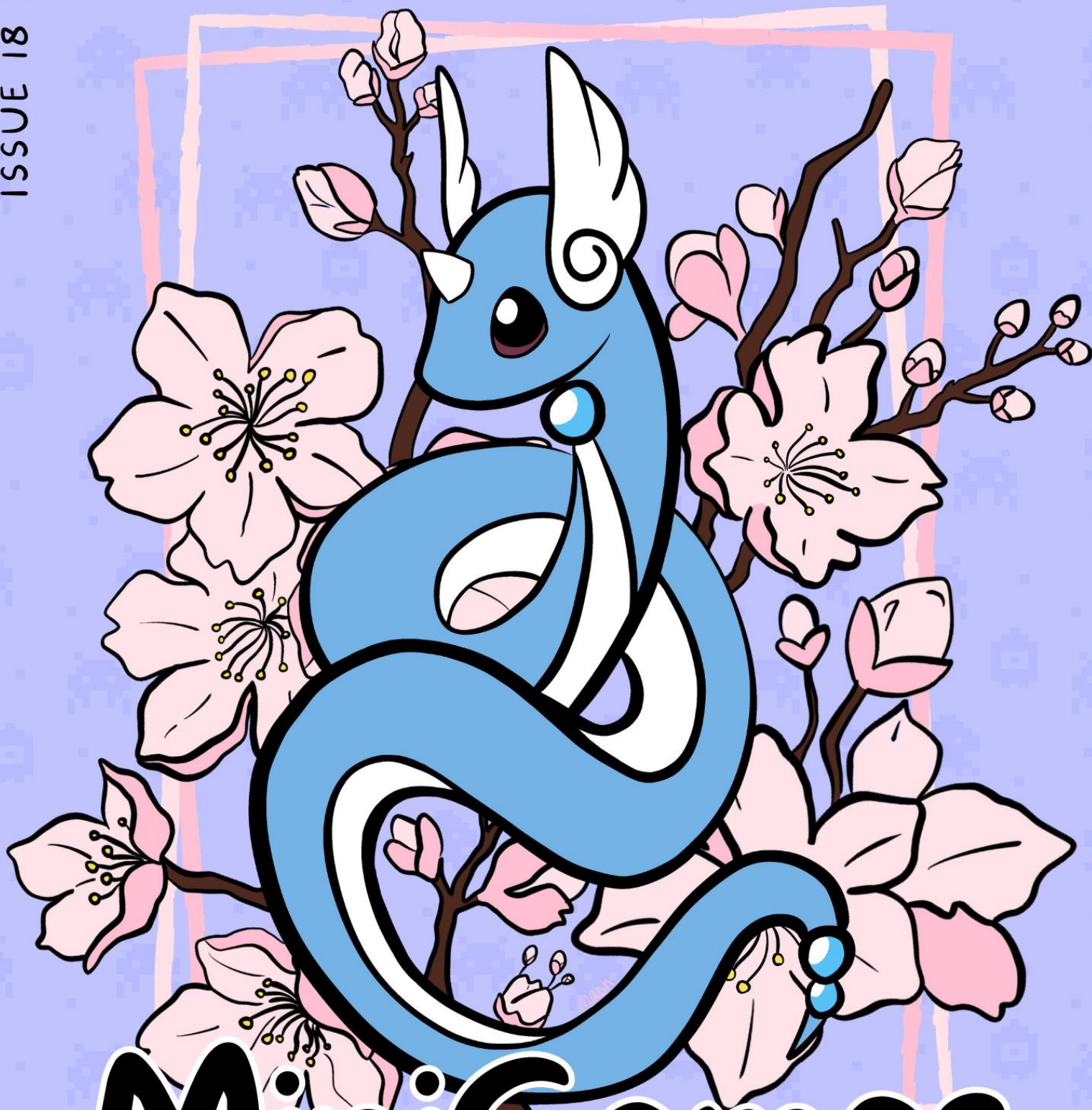


ISSUE 18 | APRIL

THE MINISON PROJECT
PRESENTS

the minison zine



MiniGames

COVER ART BY
MELISSA ASHLEY HERNANDEZ



the minison zine

The Minison Project

issue 18 contributors:

<i>Spring is in the Dragonair</i> , Melissa Ashley Hernandez	Cover, 28
<i>When We Didn't Get to Choose Our Bodies</i> , Haley Bossé	5
<i>implicit doubt</i> , Irina Novikova	6, 12, 20, 24
<i>Turtle and Goomba</i> , Ly Faulk	7
<i>Zelda II Bossfight; Manipulator; The Boy of My Vegas Dreams</i> , Katherine Quevedo	8, 23, 26
<i>Link</i> , Nathaly Herrera	9
<i>Polybius</i> , Mathew Gostelow	10
<i>Run</i> , Teri Anderson	12
Interview with Alyse Knorr, Melissa Ashley Hernandez	13
<i>fight scene with my past self as a nightwraith</i> , nat raum	19
<i>Extra Lives</i> , Anna Jackson	21
<i>Wishful Thinking in Willow Creek</i> , Anna Boughtwood	22
<i>playing god in the sims</i> , Val Drew	25
<i>Not Mine</i> , Laura Bibby	27

When We Didn't Get to Choose Our Bodies

Haley Bossé

I'd never kissed a
girl before I met

Anne, my white and
pixelated body a

blaze among rose
-like flowers, her

hand four dots in
mine, our new lips

disappearing in
to one another so

briefly I forgot
I was kneeling in

the closet, a girl
-body, a boy in love.



Turtle and Goomba

Ly Faulk

my sister did not
have patience, or
solid ground, and
ripped that game
controller from
my chubby hand, in
tears because it
was too hard to do,
make Mario run at
turtle and goomba,
did not even get a
chance to hear it,
our princess was
in another castle

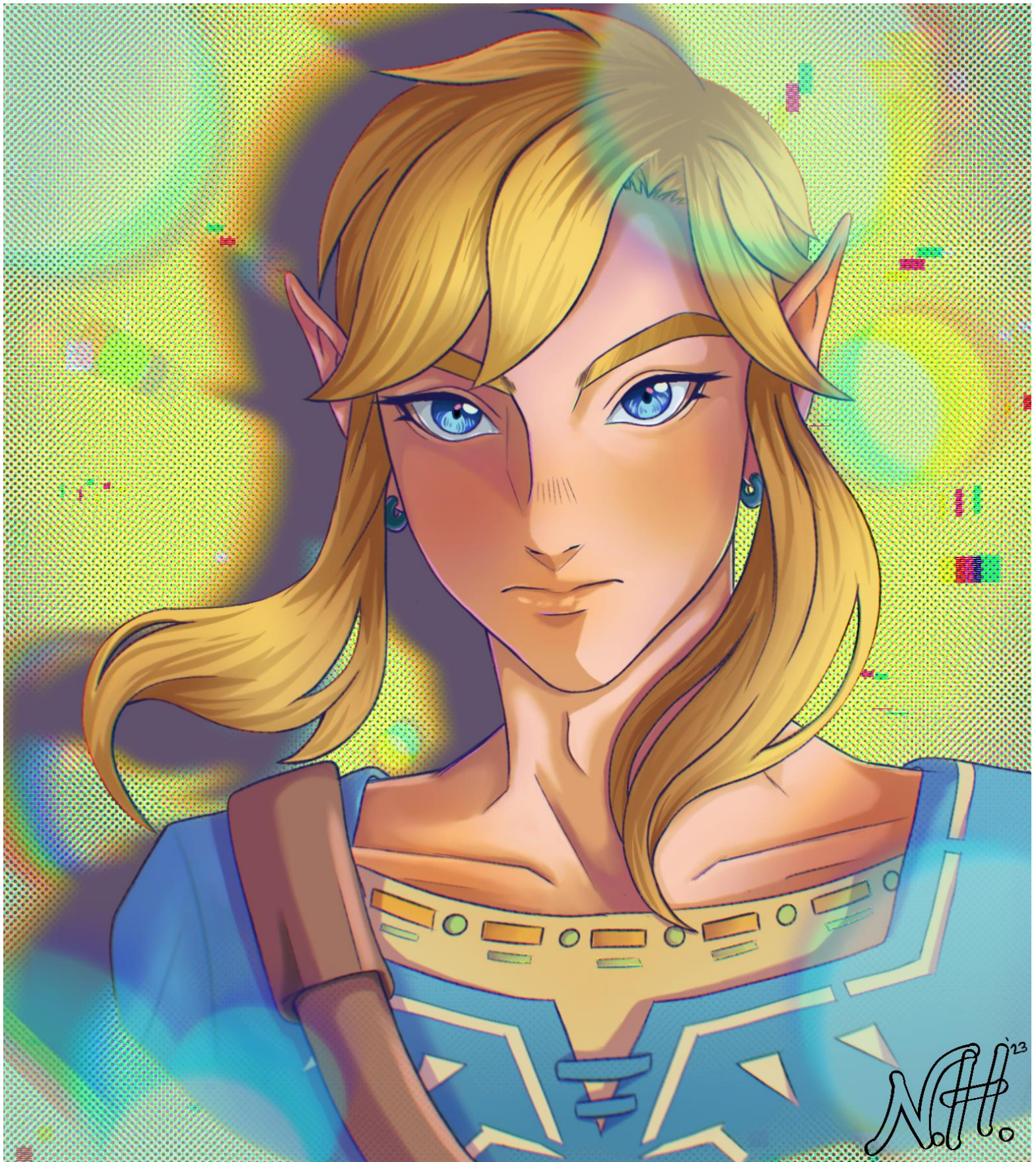
Zelda II Bossfight

Katherine Quevedo

I throb the first time Horsehead swings his mace,
but later, by the time I reach the third
of Hyrule's bosses, I have learned to gird
myself with magic, blunt the sting. I brace
myself for new attacks, the grueling chase
through further temples melding in a blurred
array. The horrors of the Thunderbird,
splayed pinions and a snarling, wraithlike face.

Then, finally, my shadow. Is it me,
or does a faceoff with myself (although
an evil version) indicate that I,
the hero, am my own worst enemy?
I recollect the battles blow by blow.
I wonder: Did they really have to die?

Link, Nathaly Herrera



Polybius

Mathew Gostelow

In the cacophonous dark of a seaside town arcade, that's where he found it – his white whale, holy grail – the machine he'd hunted through years of whispered rumours on message boards, forums, and auction listings.

All the friends he'd ghosted, family occasions ducked, social events avoided, and bridges burned, all of it would be worthwhile if he finally got to play Polybius.

Hidden at the back, next to other classic cabinets – Paperboy, Outrun, R-Type, Gauntlet – there stood Polybius, powered up, bleeping an urgent siren song.

After all these years, it almost felt too easy, but this was it – the game that had spawned a thousand conspiracy theories and urban myths since the 1980s – he would be the first to play and report back.

Vector graphics spun on screen – green line wireframes against stark black – spacecraft looping and blasting in frenetic laser dogfights, inviting him to join.

A shivering thrill ran through him as he gripped the two-handed flight controls, handles smooth, triggers ready beneath his forefingers and thumbs.

Fifty pence clunked down the slot, eight-bit sound effects blipped and chirped the machine's readiness, and the game began.

The first enemy waves were standard shoot-'em-up patterns, easily dispatched with laser fire – but the stakes escalated quickly, faster ships, smarter weapons, until the screen became a frantic bullet-hell.

A flicker in the graphics as he desperately swerved his craft, the screen blinked to black and back, wireframes frozen momentarily, burning high-tech sigils into his retina, afterimages cutting across his vision.

It blinked again and again, strobing light and bursts of harsh white noise, then strange images rendered green on black, flashing fast; a confusion of shapes, impossible geometries, lines upon lines, more and more, faster and faster until everything stopped.

As the screen crashed to black, the arcade around him fell silent, empty, no longer bustling with screaming kids and booming music, blinking games and clunking change machines.

Startled by the sudden shift, he left the vacant space to find the world faded, colourless, streets echoing empty – a seafront without traffic, people, gulls, or waves – the only sounds; his own footsteps, his own panicked breath.

Back in our world, amid the lights and shouts and blaring games, nobody noticed that a pale young man had vanished.

Weeks later, his final, victorious post on the arcade forum would be dismissed as a prank by those who knew the myths: *I found it you guys, Polybius, playing now, will update later.*

Run

Teri Anderson

He is going to catch me and I have no lives left, quick run.



Interview with Alyse Knorr

by Melissa Ashley Hernandez

[Alyse Knorr](#) is an associate professor of English at Regis University, co-editor of Switchback Books, and co-producer of the Sweetbitter podcast. Her most recent book of poems, *Mega-City Redux*, won the 2016 Green Mountains Review Poetry Prize, selected by Olena Kalytiak Davis. She is also the author of the poetry collections *Copper Mother* (2016) and *Annotated Glass* (2013); the non-fiction books *GoldenEye* (2022) and *Super Mario Bros. 3* (2016); and four poetry chapbooks. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The New Republic*, *Poetry Magazine*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, and *The Georgia Review*, among others. She received her MFA from George Mason University.



Video games are incredible. Not only are they great tools to stimulate and improve creativity, focus, and critical thinking, but they are also great outlets for entertainment and art. The Minison Project is a collective focused on literary arts, but writing is so intrinsic to all kinds of art, not just books. There are video games that have some of the best storytelling I have ever experienced! With dynamic characters, dialogue, and world-building, video games can be (and often are) playable stories.

Alyse Knorr is no stranger to video games or the literary world. She has written two documentary-style books about video games published by [Boss Fight Books](#), a perfect marriage of two of her passions. Her roles as poet, prose writer, and editor have allowed her to work with both big and small names in the literary industry, and she also has the added experience of teaching in academia.

Because of Alyse's experience wearing different hats within the industry *and* her love of video games, I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to interview her for the "MiniGames" issue of [the minison zine](#). I asked her a variety of questions involving different aspects of her roles and got some seriously cool responses!

Alyse Knorr on Video Games and Writing

TMP: How would you describe your relationship to writing?

AK: Writing is my life! I'm a writer (poetry, fiction, and nonfiction) and I'm married to a writer. I teach writing of all kinds to undergraduate students at Regis University. I'm an editor of [Switchback Books](#), a feminist poetry press, and a co-producer of a podcast called [Sweetbitter](#), where I write every episode. For as long as I can remember, reading and writing have been a tremendous source of joy and comfort and inspiration in my life. It's my passion, my profession, and my source of meaning in the world.

TMP: How did you get into writing? What does your writer journey look like?

AK: I'm one of those people who has always loved storytelling—when I was a little kid, I wrote these little books with my dad, and then throughout my childhood I always had my nose in a book, either reading or writing stories about other worlds. I spent high school math classes typing poems into my TI-83 graphing calculator, and after school I'd write little songs on my pawn-shop acoustic guitar. In college, I double-majored in English and journalism, and then I went on immediately into a poetry MFA at George Mason University. Ever since then, I've been living the wonderful life of writing and teaching writing!

TMP: How would you describe your relationship with video games?

AK: Playing video games with my father is one of my very earliest memories. I grew up playing Mario and Donkey Kong platformers, Doom, The Sims, Mathblasters, Oregon Trail—video games were a form of education, bonding with family and friends, entertainment on boring rainy (and sunny!) days, and a way for me to make meaning about my own gender, sexuality, and personal struggles. Games have always been a source of not only fun but also potential and possibility. In a game, you can go to another world and be a hero. You can feel more powerful than it's possible to feel in real life. And that can be life-saving.

TMP: I know you've written two brilliant deep-dive, documentary-style books about two video games, but other than writing specifically about video games, how deeply does your history with video games affect your writing?

AK: This is a fascinating question! I learned to play video games before I learned to read, and my entire life I have experienced stories through both books and video games, so I'm sure that a video game aesthetic or mentality or structure has certainly seeped into the way I write or tell stories. I think that in my poetry, maybe I'm influenced by a video game's inherent sense of potentiality. Games are full of rewards to win, levels to beat, secrets to

find, and (effectively) an unlimited number of chances to do all this. I hope that my poems are imbued with a similar rich sense of potential and exciting possibility, where each turn of the line reveals a new world and a new exciting direction. Now that I'm writing fiction, I'm finding that I'm more interested in setting than anything else. I like drawing maps of where my characters are traveling and what they're seeing along the way. And in platformers and open-world games like the ones I love playing, one of the most exciting features is exploring new worlds—Henry Jenkins calls this “topophilia.” Perhaps that's one influence I'm taking from games to my fiction!

TMP: Walk me through your writing process.

AK: It really depends on the genre! The way I write poetry is very different from the way I write prose, and the way I write each book differs depending on the book's content and limitations. For instance, for my book on Super Mario Bros. 3, I wasn't able to get many interviews with the game's developers, since Nintendo is very private. So the research for that project involved more time reading games criticism and doing a long playthrough of the game, whereas all of the GoldenEye team members were generous enough to speak with me for that book project, so most of the early research for that book involved talking with them, then crafting an outline based on what they'd shared with me.

In general, I like to research and plan as much as I can, then use that material to generate an enormous “shitty first draft” (in Anne Lamott's words), then go through and cut, cut, cut and re-focus. I tend to write way more than what I'll need in the final version—sometimes as much as three or four times more than the final draft. It's the completionist in me!

TMP: How do you find being an editor impacts your writing? And on the other end, how does being a writer affect how you view video game narrative and dialogue writing?

AK: Believe it or not, all these areas feel pretty distinct to me! I think I'm able to compartmentalize and really put on my “editor” hat when I'm editing, my “writer” hat when I'm writing, and my “gamer” hat when I'm gaming! The one area where I see a lot of overlap is when I'm watching TV or movies. I don't claim to be a screenwriter myself, but sometimes I get very frustrated by awful writing in cinema! If I had to say one thing I've really learned about writing poetry from my volunteer position as a poetry editor at Switchback books, it would be that it's absolutely critical that the first ten pages of your poetry manuscript be very strong when you start submitting it to contests. These first ten pages are the most important part of the book.

TMP: Not only have you been published by bigger names, such as POETRY Magazine, but you have also been published in smaller journals and do editing for a handful of smaller/“indie”

publications. In your experience, what are the benefits of involving yourself with smaller presses / journals / magazines? What are the pros/cons? What do you find the most rewarding and working with lesser-known companies in the capacity that you do?

AK: My bookshelves contain a huge variety of publisher titles—many from the big names like Norton or Penguin Random House, and many from smaller indie publishers run (like my press, Switchback Books) entirely by passionate volunteers. Just like we go to indie music for some of the most exciting new material, I think we can look to indie presses for really cutting-edge and beautiful work published by passionate people dedicated to editorial work not for money but simply because they believe in stewarding good literature into the world. The biggest risk of an indie publisher is that it will disappear, as many amazing small presses and journals routinely do. Without sustainable funding and staffing, indie outlets can disappear—along with the books they have published—which can put their authors in a really tough spot, especially considering how many authors are also academics whose only chance at promotion or success on the job market is the existence of published books. That risk aside, I think that the indie scene in literature, and poetry especially, is incredibly rewarding and inspiring. I have met some of my closest friends through indie publishing, and I love having a closer relationship with the editors at smaller outlets. I think it's very important to support this work, most

of which is keeping literature alive, keeping it new, keeping it fresh.

TMP: Do you prefer long-form or short-form writing?

AK: I love both! My home genre is poetry, which is about as short-form as you can get. But I really enjoyed working on the two video game books, and I'm working on a novel right now (more below!) and having a ton of fun with that.

TMP: What is a question you wish I had asked you, and what is your answer to that question?

AK: Hmmmm. Well, if you're looking for other great video game book recommendations, I would say any Boss Fight title is awesome, though my favorites are [NBA Jam](#) and [Baldur's Gate II](#). I also can't recommend enough David Kushner's [Masters of Doom](#). An incredible read no matter how much you already know about Doom. And of course, there's the novel [Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow](#) by Gabrielle Zevin, which is a gorgeous book about friendship, love, creativity, and video games.

TMP: What are you working on next?

AK: I'm writing a post-apocalyptic novel! Here's the logline: After almost all of humanity disappears overnight, an emotionally scarred Coast Guard veteran must journey across what remains of the southern United States to find her twin sister, all without sabotaging her relationship with the woman she loves.

VIDEO GAME LIGHTNING ROUND

Question: What video game character do you think is underrated?

AK: Probably Funky from the Donkey Kong Country series. Dude always seemed high as a kite but was running a thriving business (“Funky’s Flights”) and still seemed to always have time for his surfing hobby. Plus, he figured out how to make a barrel fly!

Q: A game you think needs more love?

AK: I’ve really become addicted to this weird little Minecraft clone called 7 Days to Die. It’s Minecraft but with a less cartoonish look and 24/7 zombies. The zombies are slow-moving and super easy to kill, so the game’s biggest challenge is more around survival—you get hungry, thirsty, sick, and too cold or too hot (the game has several different biomes). It’s really a base-building and survival game about tedious tasks like collecting snow, boiling it into water, making soup, making bullets, collecting sand and crafting concrete to build walls. etc. I love that kind of slow, boring game. I can’t find anyone else who’s playing it, but I love it. I’ve built an epic base and farm on top of an abandoned gas station and dug a huge moat full of spiky traps around it, and I feel pretty badass about that. Totally the opposite of how I’d fare in any real zombie apocalypse.

Q: In your opinion, which console is the best console?

AK: I’ll always have a soft spot for the Super NES. It was the best birthday present I ever got (at age 7) and my first console of my own. Right from the get-go, Super Mario World rocked my...well, my world! There are so many absolutely amazing games for the “Snezz,” as the British pronounce it. And for me it perfectly captures that feeling of childhood innocence.

Q: Thoughts on VR?

AK: I haven’t done a ton of VR, but every time I play it, A) I love it and B) I get really nauseous. So, mixed bag!

Q: What is your preferred game genre?

AK: I love a single-player open-world RPG (Skyrim, the Fallout series, 7 Days to Die, Breath of the Wild) and any platformer! I’m so excited for Bethesda’s Starfield...if it ever actually comes out.

Q: Favorite video game of all time?

AK: Super Mario Bros. 3! I wrote this book about it. :) It’s not only a masterpiece, but also a cultural touchstone and a super fascinating artifact from Nintendo when it was at the peak of its powers.

Q: A video game you thought you’d like and then didn’t at all?

AK: I recently downloaded Ark: Survival Evolved because it’s my favorite genre of

game AND it has dinosaurs. But it didn't capture my fascination the way I thought it might. I think the level of challenge is kind of weird? Some things feel way too easy and other things feel way too hard.

Q: Best soundtrack goes to?

AK: Donkey Kong Country 2! I still regularly listen to "[Bramble Blast](#)" while I work. Shoutout to the geniuses at Rare!

Q: Who/what got you into video games?

AK: My dad! I talk about this a lot in my book about Super Mario Bros. 3. He taught me how to play that game (and Doom!)

before I even knew how to read. We bonded a lot over gaming, and he really passed down his love for video games to me—a love that I'm now passing down to my own four-year-old daughter!

Q: Your weirdest video game flex?

AK: I don't know if this is weird, but I'm pretty sure I know every secret area in Super Mario Bros. 3, and I can beat the game in about 15 minutes. Maybe my biggest flex is the weird amount that I know about SMB3 and GoldenEye – all from writing my books about them!



fight scene with my past self as a nightwraith
nat raum

After The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

my fists collide
with remnants of
sinew which once
lined weak ribs,

tattered cotton
shedding off her
pale limbs in the
brackish breeze

she lingers here
no longer echoes
about the night;
a wraith expires

as her last wails
awaken the light



Extra Lives

Anna Jackson

My life is an 8 bit
Video game and I'm
The protagonist
Destined to fail.
I fight and I flee
I falter and fall
My lives deplete
And then I'm right
Back at the start
With empty hands
With nothing but
Broken promises
And one less life.

Wishful Thinking in Willow Creek
Anna Boughtwood

How soon is too soon to introduce him to our simselves and our children?

Manipulator

Katherine Quevedo

Undo the past. Rewind all your mistakes.
You stand apart from time's relentless flow.
When playing *Braid*, a button's all it takes
to mess with temporality. So go
ahead and wreck the world around you. Show
remorse, but only acting in reverse.
You hold a leash on time. Man up, and throw
all caution to the wind. Things could be worse.
You could've been the princess, with her curse
to be imperiled and without your gift
of time manipulation. Sure, rehearse
apologies for every timely rift.

The princess flees a monster. Sad, but true.
Now, here's a sadder thing: The monster's you.



playing god in the sims
Val Drew

erasing ladders
during swimtime

igniting flames
in your kitchens

the grim reaper's
always knocking

generated lives
lost each minute

my laptop heated
in the bloodshed

i don't wonder why
my cruelty burns

when i am corrupt
after it crashes

The Boy of My Vegas Dreams
Katherine Quevedo

The boy who set my third-grade heart aflame
first introduced me to a game he owned
called *Vegas Dream*. In this Nintendo game,
you picked your gambling choice—I mostly honed
my blackjack skills, though now and then I'd try
the slots, roulette, or keno. Best of all,
throughout (like every several turns), some guy
or gal would interrupt you with a call,
request, or business deal. So hard to read
if you could trust their pixelated glance.
Was it a scam? Would you come out ahead?
You had, perhaps, a fifty-fifty chance.

At times they offered marriage. (My friend's face
—inscrutable. My *boy friend*, with a space.)

Not Mine

Laura Bibby

Lament of a Broodmother, Dragon Age: Origins

The violence and
fury are not mine
i am captive here
in this unending
void of darkness

forced to mother
i never wanted to
have babies, now i
birth thousands
a demon army that
damns us to death

remember, my love
mother monstress
they are not mine.



