Comics to Games:
Great Adaptations

Jill Murray, Evan Narcisse, Kim Belair, Mike Rogers, Son M.

Adapting (someone else's) comic book IP for games
Knowledge is power

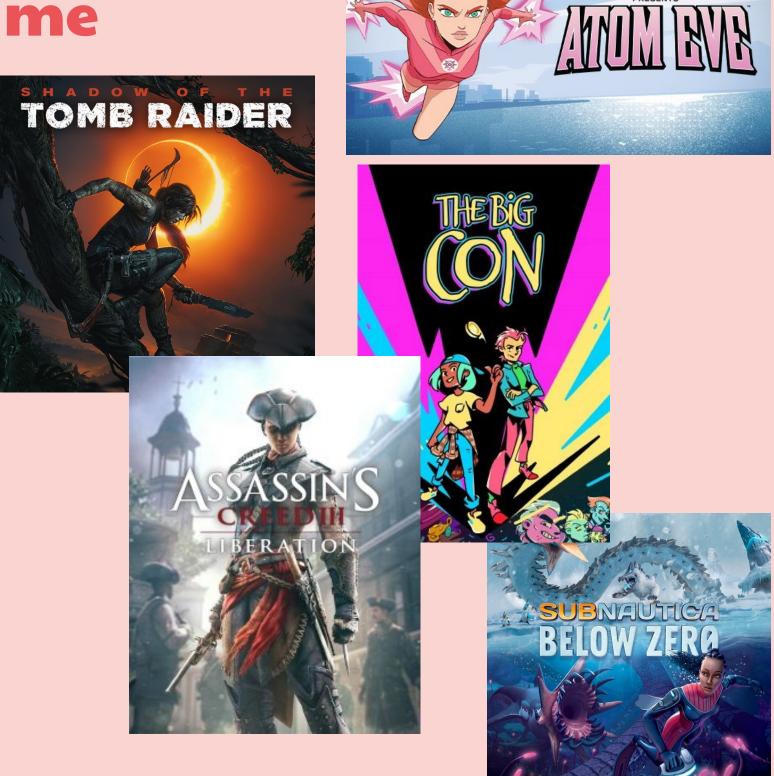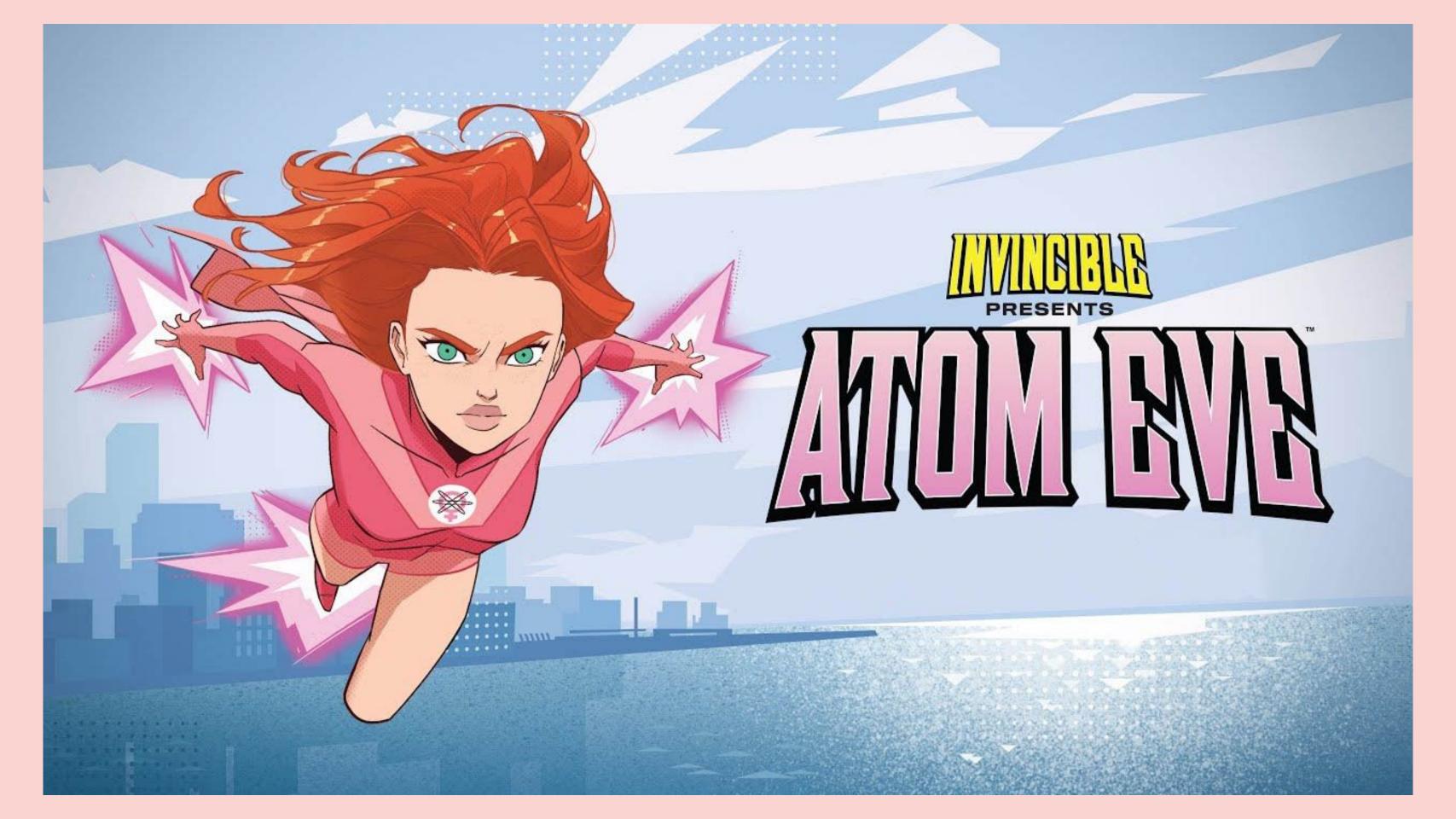Jill Murray - www.discoglo.be

About me

In games industry since 2010

Worked on wide range of AAA & indie games

like Shadow of the Tomb Raider, Subnautica: Below Zero, and Assassin's Creed Freedom Cry– lots of things, relating to various IPs, basically

A visual novel screen

A still of a story panel sequence

The combat stage

RPG screen

Adaptive Skills for Adaptations

01. **Analysis**

How do this franchise, its world, character, and internal logic work?

02. **Curiosity**

Who are the fans of this franchise, and what do they connect with about it?

03. **Creativity**

What systems can I use to communicate with players, how can I make my voice into the voice of the IP?

04. **Collaboration**

Who are the people I need to work with, who control approvals for this IP? What are their needs and expectations?
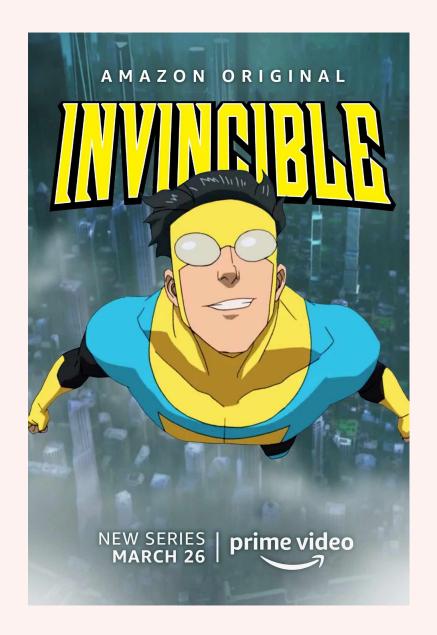
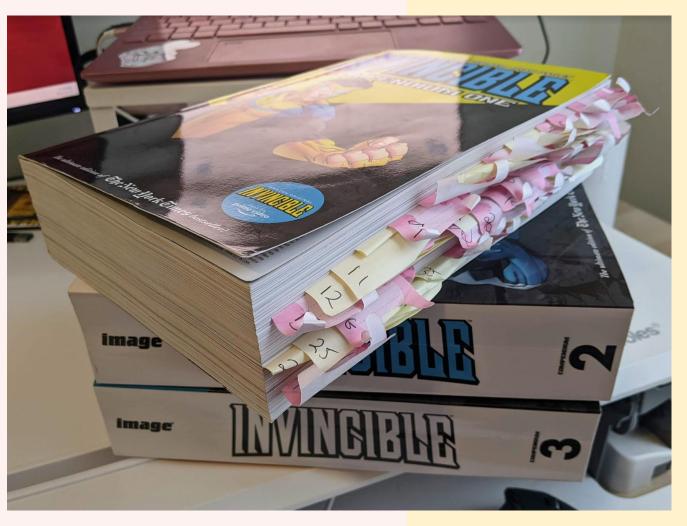**05.** **Synthesis - Pulling it all together**

Understanding the IP and its fans deeply, how can I give those fans the new thing they don't know they want yet, that the IP holder will also be excited about
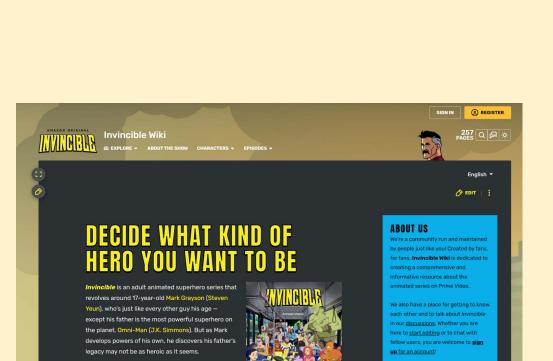
1- Know your basics

- Budget and scope of project
- Who will make it
- What is the chain of command
- Definition of roles
- Tools and tech resources
- Who approves things and how?

2- Learn the IP

Comic Issue	Show Ep	Summary	Eve	Mrs. Wilkins	Mr. Wilkins	Eve Childhood friend	Tutors and Babysitters	Brandyworth	Eve's birth mother	Mark	Debbie	Nolan	Art	Principal Winslow	Derek Sanders	Bully/Todd	William	Amber	Rick Sheridan	Robot	Rex Splode	Dupli K
X	103	Eve wistfully packs away her teen team mementos from her locker in the hideout, feeling the weight of what she's lost and what's been taken from her. Fireworks draw her attention outside. It's Rex, he says he doesn't know why he keeps screwing up. She says she knows, but that's not an apololgy. He asks for a second chance and says he'll do better. She says good luck with the new team.																				
9	103	Eve flies by Mark's window for a chat but sees him kissing Amber and flies off. In the show this happens after she she tells Rex good luck with the new team. She gives them a wry smile and says "good for you mark."	1							1	1							1				
10		Damien Darkblood goes to investigate the murder scene of the original Guardians team.																				
10		Samson goes to Stronghold Penitentiary to visit his butler, Sanford. Samson says that he will work on getting him released from prison.																				
10		Mark sees Nolan disembowel The Immortal. Nolan asks Mark if they can talk now.								1		1										
11, 12	8	Nolan then reveals to Mark the truth about his origin and the Viltrumites, and asks Mark to help him take over Earth. Mark refuses. They have a brutal fight all over the planet, that is shown all over the media.								1		1										
13		Eve and William see the fight on TV. The two of them bond over their worry and become better friends.	1														1					
13		Eve goes to the Guardians hideout to ask Robot for help locating Invincible. Rex tries to reach out to her but she brushes him off.	1																	1	1	1
13		2 weeks after the fight, mark comes out of his coma in the Pentagon. He gets formally hired by Cecil, who will also take care of all the family's expenses.								1												
13	8	Mark heals, gets a page, and goes to space to tell Alan what happened.								1												
14	102	Guardians, Mark and Eve fight the Flaxans. Flaxans are back, with bracelets that keep them from aging so fast. During the fight, Rex is still trying to jokingly get back into Eve's good graces, and she's still calling him a jerk. In the series Rex mentions that he never got to go to high school, and he says it shows.	1							1										1	1	1
14		Immortal isn't dead, and he's suspicious of Invincible. The recording from Omni-man's earpiece got leaked to the media so now Debbie knows he says he never loved her. Art starts drinking with Debbie, who is lost in grief.								1	1		1									
14		Derek fights a bunch of kids at school. Amber's happy to see Mark. She wants to come over tonight but he's not sure she should becuase of how things are at home. Mark thinks Eve and William hanging out together is weird. Professor winslow gives mark more time to make up his school work.	1							1					1		1	1				
14		Donald brings Bulletproof into the Guardians and brings The Immortal back as a consultant.																		1		1
15		Robot asks Monster Girl to stop hitting on her teammates.																		1		
15		Mark is still avoiding Amber. Amber wonders why he needs a beeper.								1								1				
15		After talking to Cecil at the Pentagon, Mark goes to an underwater fish planet to marry a fish queen, and manages not to.								1												
15		Debbie befriends a woman married to a superhero. In the show, this is replaced from the get go by Red Rocket's wife, which makes a lot of sense.										1										
15		William finds out Eve is Atom Eve and she takes him flying.	1														1					
15		The Immortal pays the Mauler Twins a visit to teach them a lesson																				
ICSS		not much happens, a fight, mark worries about his mom, winslow worries about Mark's grades																				
16		This issue begins in another dimension, where Invincible and Omni-Man are																				

3- Know your player

- If it's an established franchise, it already has fans.
- These fans already have expectations.
- The publisher also wants the game to bring new fans to the IP
- You need to satisfy the core expectations of the fans, but also make choices that will result in an independently satisfying game
- The resulting game probably has to be "classic" and "fresh" at the same time.

Target player definitions

Example from *Invincible Presents: Atom Eve*

01. People who had seen the TV series,
Played games sometimes but didn't necessarily identify as "gamers"
In it for the experience– ie: interested in character, story and a little action, up for a little challenge, but not looking for a punishing skill test

02. Fans of visual novels who might be aware of the show and willing to give it a try because we were doing something a little different but not too different with the genre

03. Die-hard *Invincible* fans, who love comics and were going to check out anything *Invincible* no matter what

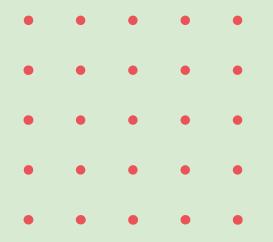Related: "Audience of one" microtalk, in Game Design for Inclusion Beyond Representation, in GDC vault

4- Your Own Point of View

5- IP Holder - Care and feeding

Trust and Boundaries

Feels professional but doesn't establish trust:

- Only wanting to "wow" the client or IP holder
- Reflexively saying yes to every request
- Hiding when things aren't going well

Scary but builds trust:

- Sharing WIP and asking for feedback
- Respectfully explaining why you disagree
- Admitting what's difficult and asking for help
- Setting and enforcing clear boundaries about what you can and can't do/deliver

6- Playtests & QA - Know how it lands

Playtest the game with different groups of people, but especially with people who correspond to your target market.

It seems obvious, but given time crunches and approvals delays, things can get so squeezed that it really feels like there isn't time.
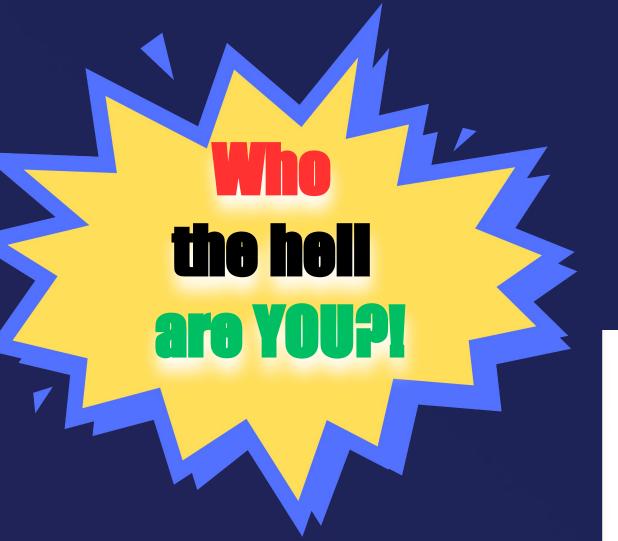
You just gotta find the time anyway.

Recap

Powerful knowledge for strong adaptations

1- Understand your studio/project setup
2- Learn the IP
3- Know your player
4- Get in touch with your own POV
5- Develop your IP holder relationship
7- Use iterative testing and feedback intel

@EvNarc
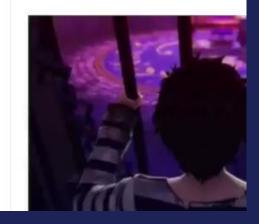
evan.narcisse
@
brasslionentertainment.com

A Game That Showed Me My Own Black History

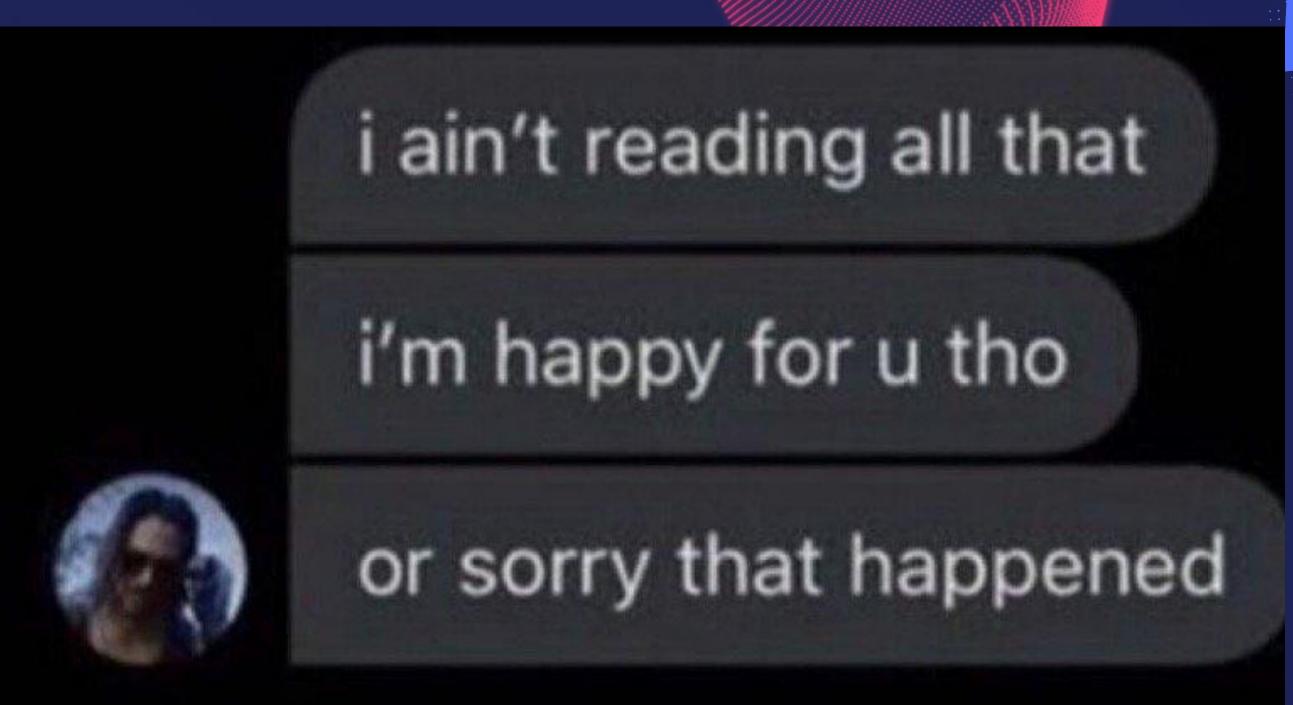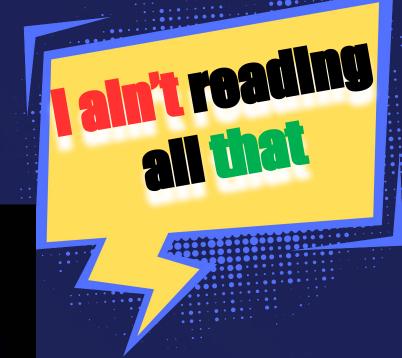Evan Narcisse
12/19/13 3:00PM

307 51

The newest chapter of the *Assassin's Creed* series gives me some of the things

PANEL <02>

WIDE SHOT. We see TECH-9 2.0 as a small figure in an alle[y]
between buildings, PEEKING AROUND A CORNER. The alley sit[s]
cluster of small businesses next to each other with A TRU[CK]
PARKED ON THE STREET. This should reference **Blood Syndica[te]**
page 1, panel 3. The businesses should be different.

> TECH-9 2.0
> (caption)
> One minute, we on the bridge scrapping
> with Rebar and Holocaust's crew. The
> next, I wake up on...

> TECH-9 2.0
> (caption)
> Wait. This is Blue Street but wild
> different! Copy shop where the chicken
> spot is supposed to be?!

> TECH-9 2.0
> (caption)
> Maybe Sara's flashbacks got screwed up?
> Threw me back too far?

PANEL <03>

A SYSTEMatic OPERATIVE in massive armor STANDS IN THE OPE[N]
BED and PROJECTS A SCANNING GRID on Tech-9's body from be[hind].
Tech-9 2.0 whips around, MATERIALIZES WEAPONS, and FIRES [at the]
SYSTEM OPERATIVE.

> SYSTEMATIC OPERATIVE
> (electric)
> Infrared scout to base: scans picked up
> a worker, moving to capture.

> TECH-9 2.0
> ^$#@%!!! You can capture deez--

> SFX
> PAK! PAK! PAK! PAK! PAK! PAK!

> OG ROCKET
> (tail, off-panel)
> Throwing up a protective bubble! All
> yours!

PANEL <04>

A RED, BLACK, AND GREEN BLUR STREAKS ACROSS THE PANEL, se[nding]
the SYSTEM operative flying backwards. A PURPLE ENERGY BU[BBLE]
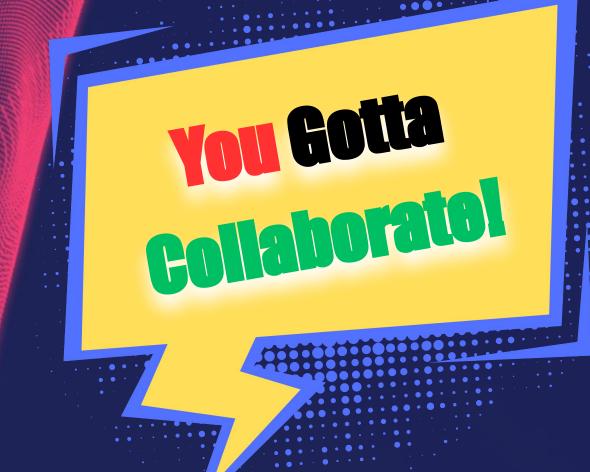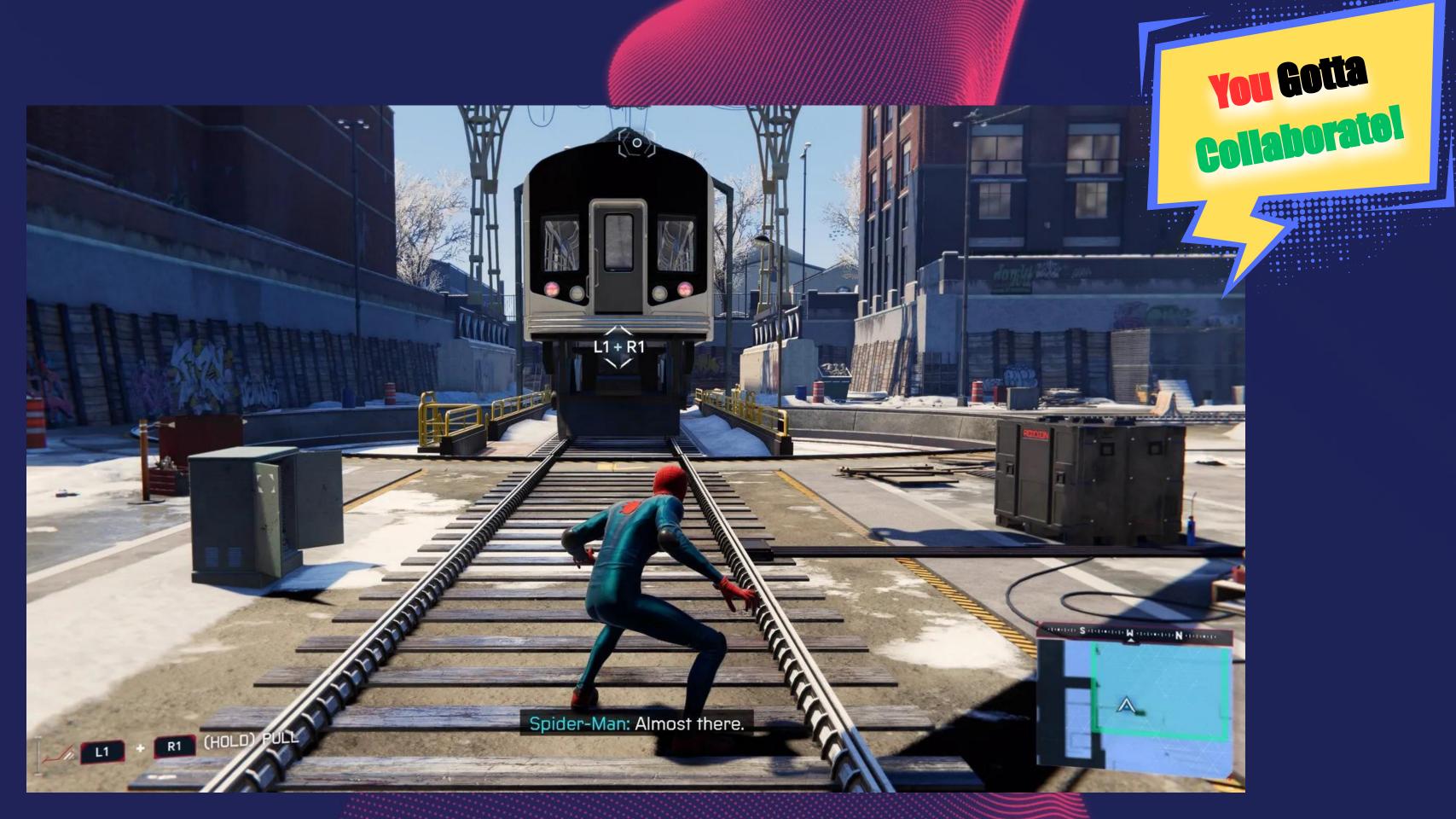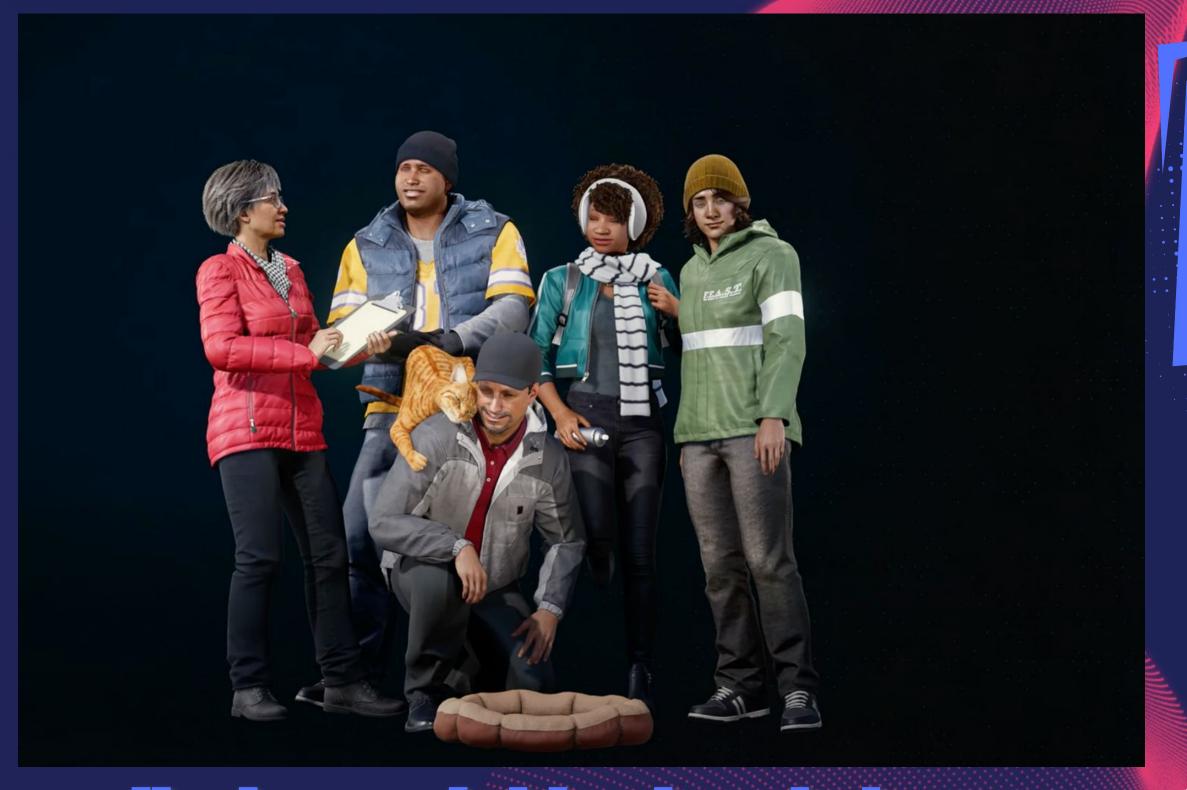SURROUNDS Tech-9 2.0.

Sidequest Pitches for Miles Morales

- Feature at Least One Marvel Character.

- Build Miles' Attachment to Harlem

- Take the Player OUTSIDE of Harlem

You Gotta Collaborate!

You Gotta Collaborate!

L1 + R1

Spider-Man: Almost there.

L1 + R1 (HOLD) PULL

You Gotta Collaborate!

Harlem neighborhood characters from Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales

LEVEL 8 | 1238 / 5000 XP

SKILL POINTS | 1

TIME CAPSULES

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DAZZLER / LILA CHENEY
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You Gotta Collaborate!

RESOURCES   9   2

CLOSE

One of the things for me was early on in the game, one of the points I made was his skin should be showing through his costume. This is the scene when the Roxxon security operatives have their guns on him. So I wanted to charge that scene, obviously, with some metaphorical energy.

I remember that scene.

The reason I made the case for that is, they see his skin peeking through his costume and immediately the whole city's going to know that this Spider-Man is different in a fundamental way than the other one. Once Harlem and other Black and brown communities in the city know that this new Spider-Man is one of theirs, they're going to react differently to him.

@EvNarc

evan.narcisse
@
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Sweet Baby INC
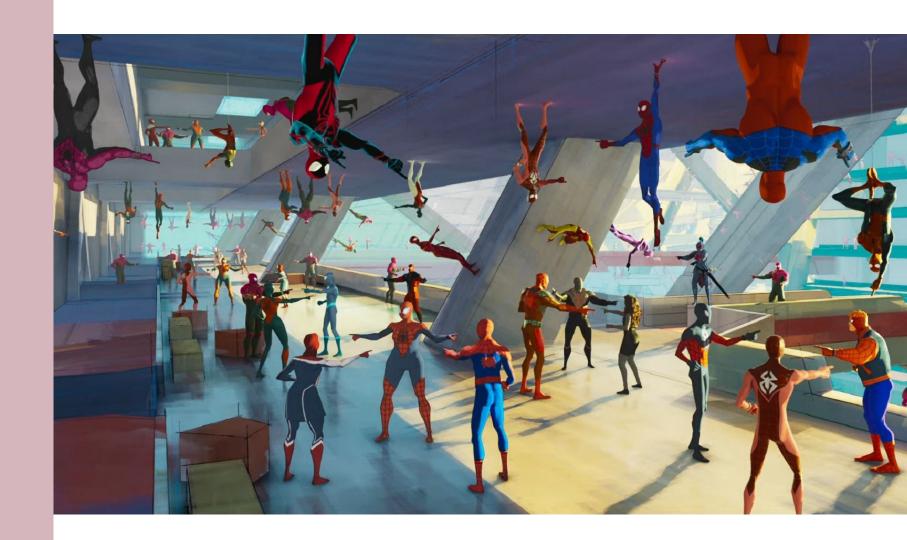
Kim Belair - CEO / Writer / Narrative Designer

Spider-Man 2
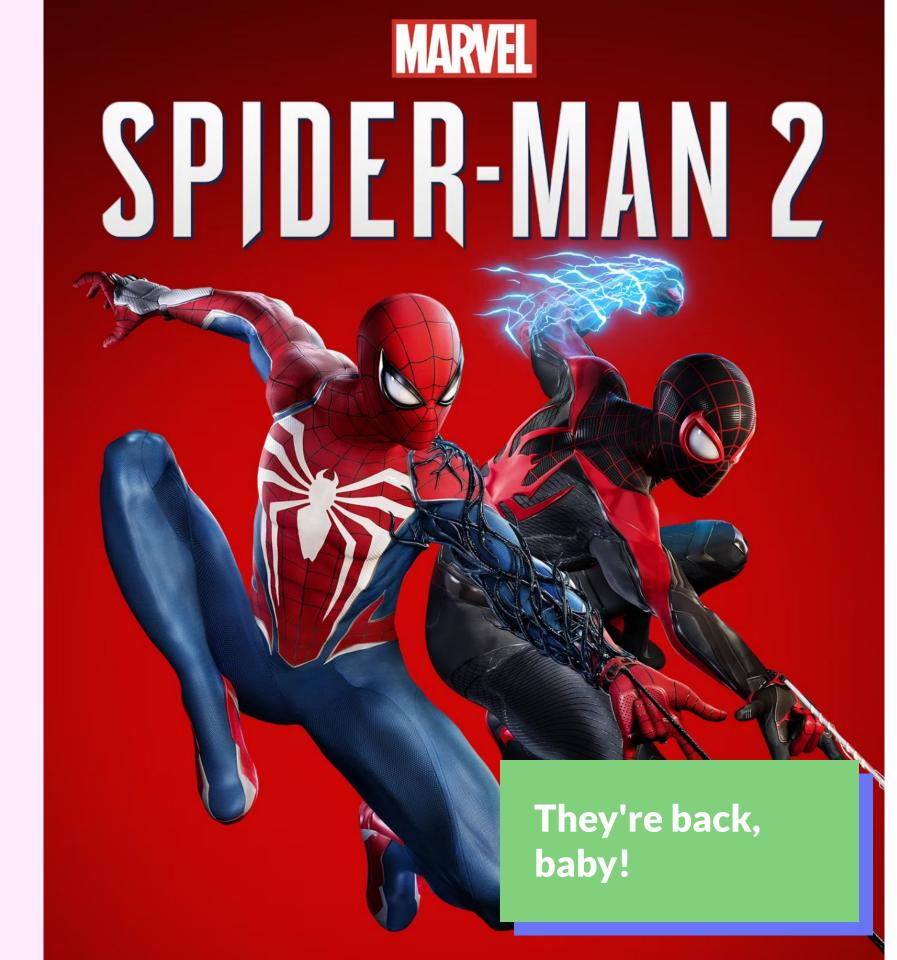*Canon + Creativity*

What is the CANON?

- Canon is **collective "truth"** but also a **cultural understanding.**

- In working with canon characters, the canon is the foundation of the work, but the aim is to be **additive**, to tell a new story.

- The canon gives us **foundations**, **expectations** and **assumptions**.

- The canon tells us **who Spider-Man is**, but also leaves space and structure for **who Spider-Man can be**.
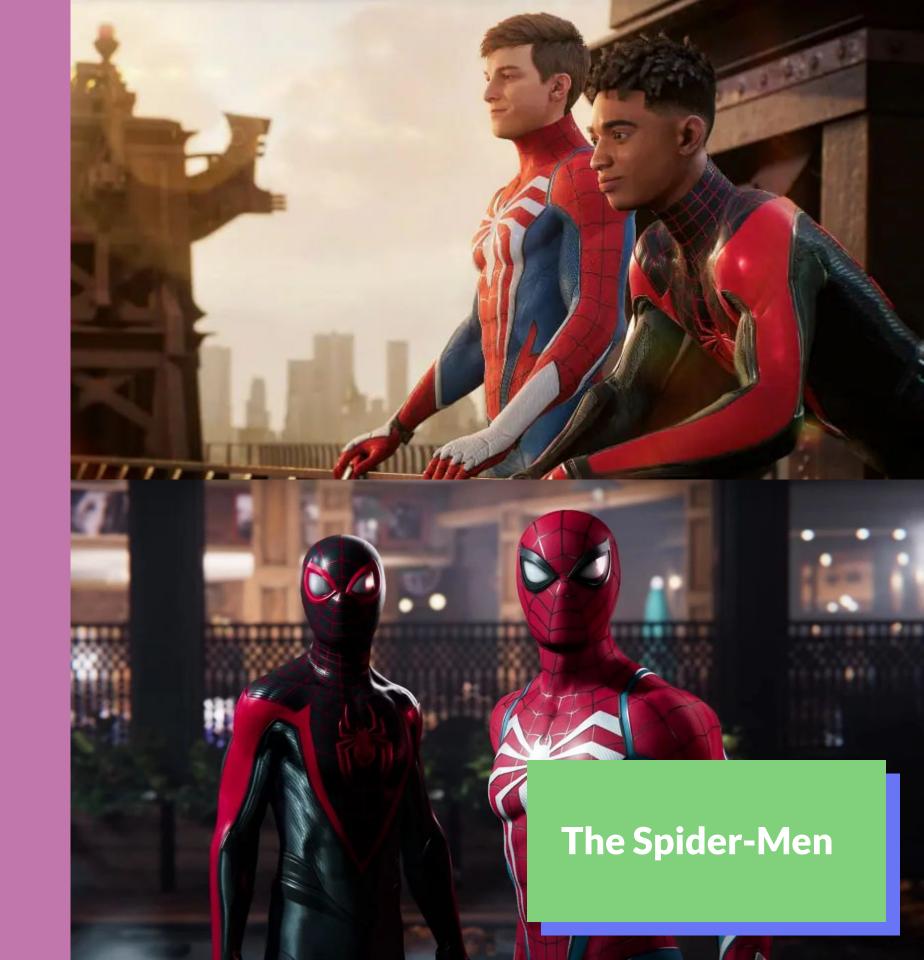
Which Spider-Man is Spider-Man?

The Canon of the Game(s)

- Insomniac's Spider-Man has its own canon, but draws from existing lore and cultural understanding. It is a new Peter and Miles, but it is also the same Peter and Miles.

- To do this requires **narrative design** thinking on top of **storytelling**. Narrative design is about aligning with the player's expectations and understanding.

- How do we **turn canon expectations into wins** while also **subverting expectations to achieve surprise** and excitement?

They're back, baby!

EXAMPLE: The Spider-Men

- **Spider-Man (2018)** is a successful translation of Peter Parker's Spider-Man into the gameplay space.

- **Miles Morales (2020)** brings Miles to the fore, and his canon abilities and personality undergo a similar translation.

- But when we bring the two together for **Spider-Man 2 (2023)**, how does the canon shape that story?
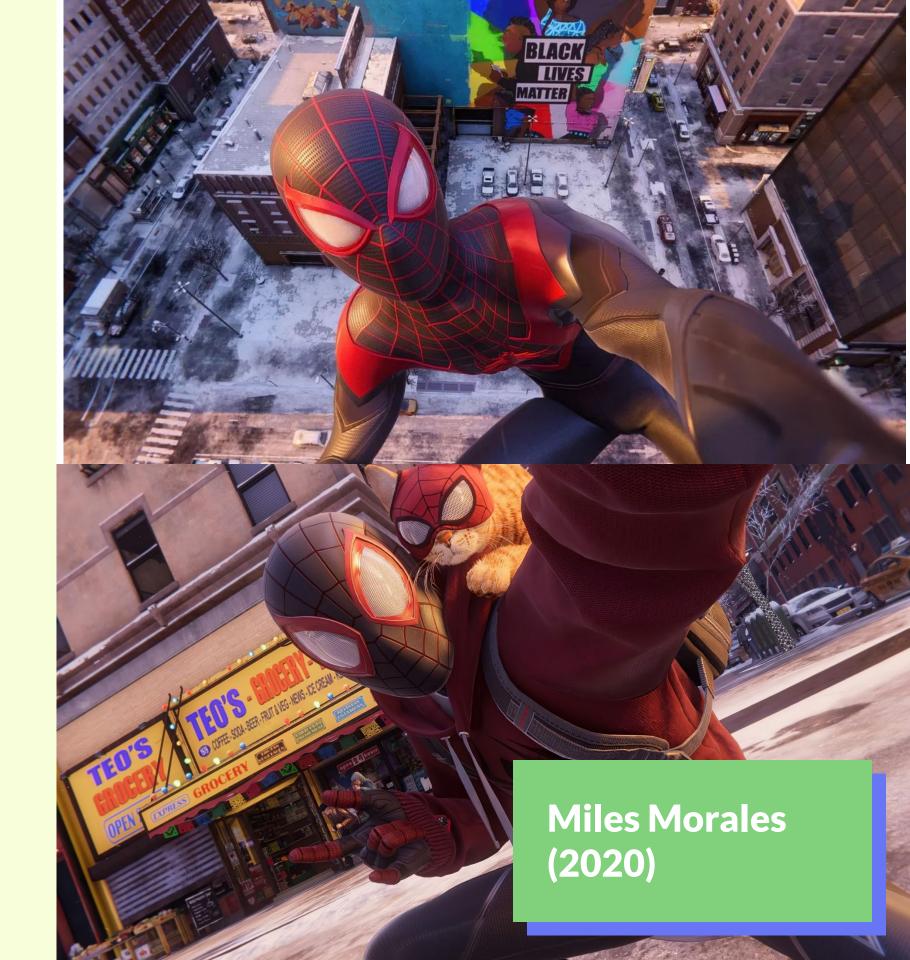
The Spider-Men

Miles Morales v. The Canon

- As a character, **Miles is about change**. He is about a new kind of Spider-Man. He is positioned as a character who deliberately **"breaks" the canon**.

- A Spider-Man's life is one of sacrifice and loss, the cost of heroism: **WITH GREAT POWER COMES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY.**

- "Rules" create expectations. And **if players expect it to go a certain way, how do we tell stories that surprise?**

Sometimes, the canon IS the story.

Miles Morales v. The Canon

- For me, it came down to looking at Peter Parker and Miles Morales not just as individual "Spider-Mans" but as "Spider-Men". A team.

- **A good team isn't two of the same guy.** A good team is complementary. And the story Insomniac is telling is about two people from different worlds facing the same problem. **How is Miles different from Peter and how do we apply that meaning to story?**

- **The answer was in the canon. The Harlem missions help illustrate that** Peter has close friends, Miles has community.

Miles Morales (2020)

With Great Power comes Great Responsibility

PETER PARKER is
Burdened
Self-isolating
Fearful but accepting of loss

Peter's power weighs heavy: his friends are at risk, and he must protect them. He is afraid to love and to lean.

With Great Responsibility comes Great Power

MILES MORALES is
Hopeful
Community-focused
Expectant but fearful of loss

Miles' power isn't just his own: his community is his strength, and he must protect it. He is empowered by his ability to love and to lean..

When Miles doubts himself, Peter believes.
When Peter loses hope, Miles holds on.
When Peter loses himself, Miles remembers.
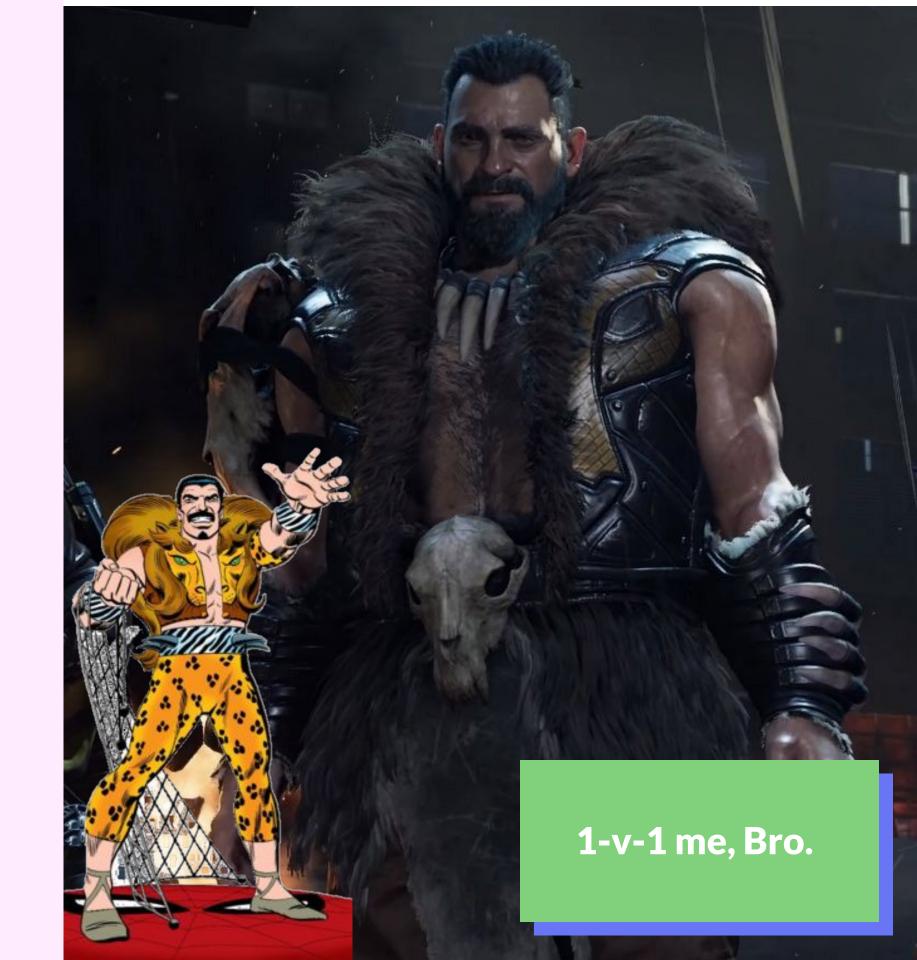When all seems lost, they are stronger together.

Their responsibility to each other gives them great power.
It works because we understand who they are.
And we understand who they are because of who they've been.

AND THAT'S CANON, BABY.

Quick! Kraven's here too.

- Kraven's **canon role is to cut through Spider-Man's story**. He *loves* to just show up and be a single-minded, one-man Spider-hunter. But video games mean he also needs to be a **faction**.

- This was achieved by keeping the shape of Kraven's canon role: he cuts into the story, he single-mindedly pursues, and we come to learn the (spoiler) reason he works with others. **We don't compromise his character, we understand his character's compromise.**

- We retain who he is and what he does so that despite going from one man to many, **he feels entirely like himself**.

1-v-1 me, Bro.

OKAY THAT'S IT.

- **The canon, for storytellers, is a source of resonance.** It gets to the heart of those who know it, and it is felt even by those who don't.

- As storytellers contributing to one small part of a larger IP or franchise, **the canon gives you the foundations you need to build on and the shape you're building in**, but **it's in building *off and from* the canon that we tell great stories**-- despite the audience knowing "how it always goes".

Which Spider-Man is Spider-Man?

Thank you!
(to you! To GDC! To my co-panelists! And the team @ Insomniac!)

Constructing Creative Publisher Partnerships

(or The Importance of Caring)

Ingesting an IP & Understanding Its Parameters

- Devour Everything Possible

- Devour Everything Possible
- Passion Makes a Difference, Existing or Acquired

- Devour Everything Possible
- Passion Makes a Difference, Existing or Acquired
- Work with IP Guides (Lore & Brand)

Story Collaboration

- Publishers should be partners, not obstacles.

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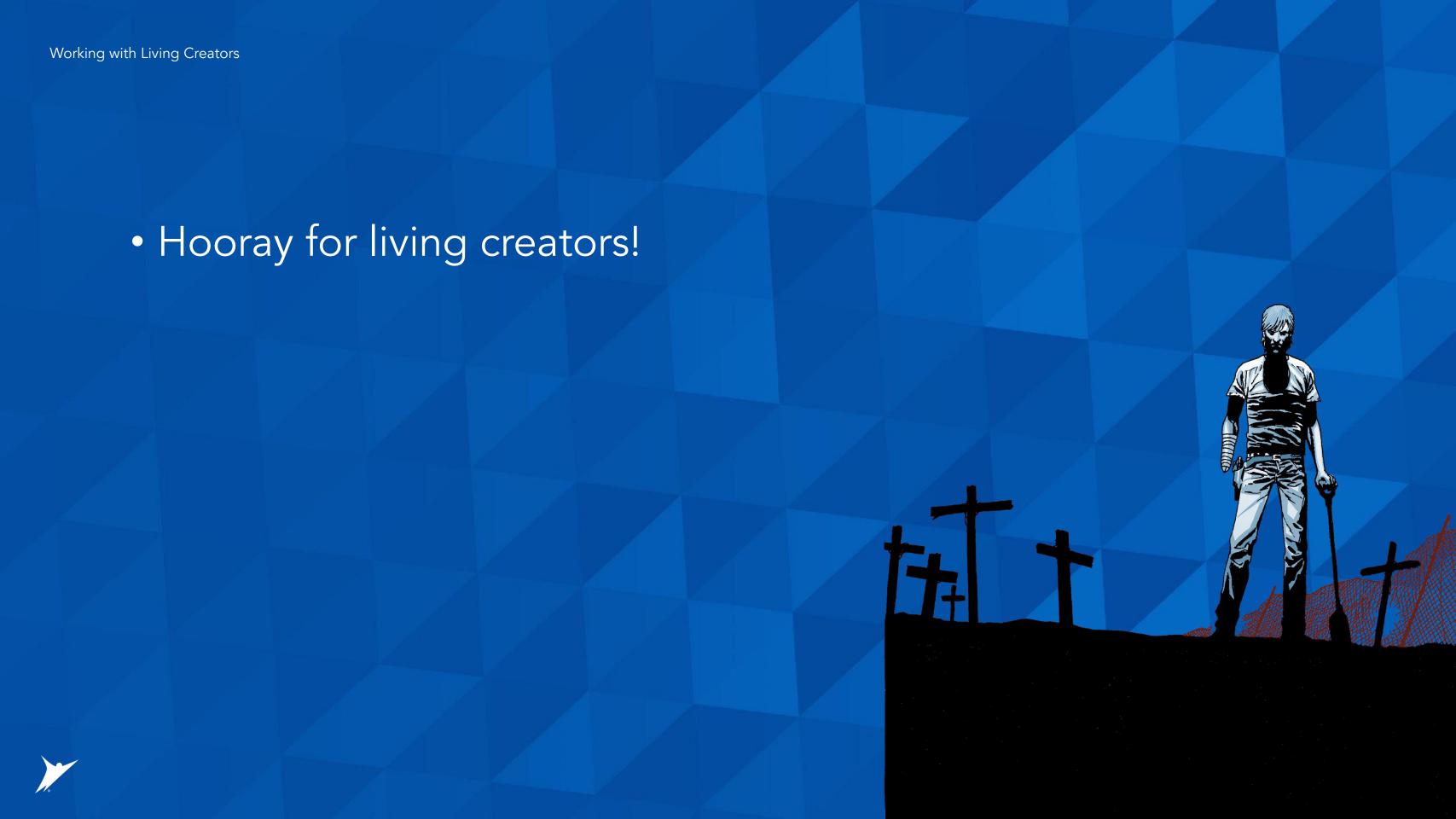- Publishers should understand how to tell a story. Remind them of that.

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- Let your passion for a property feed theirs, and vice versa.

- Publishers should be partners, not obstacles.
- Publishers should understand how to tell a story. Remind them of that.
- Let your passion for a property feed theirs, and vice versa.
- Discover together what rules can be broken.

Working with Living Creators

- Hooray for living creators!

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- Fresh properties mean evolving rules and worlds.

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- Balance what's important to different stakeholders.

- Hooray for living creators!
- Fresh properties mean evolving rules and worlds.
- Balance what's important to different stakeholders.
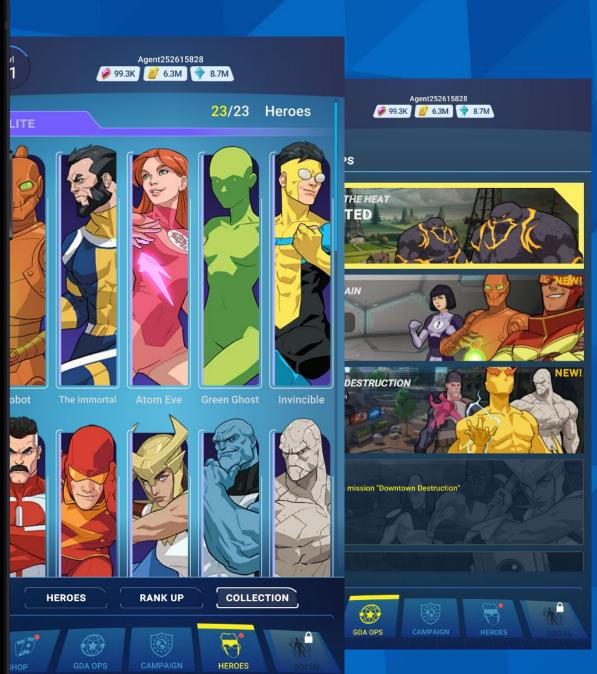- Embrace nuance.

Examples

• It's all about teamwork.

- It's all about teamwork.
- Foster creative relationships.
- Develop mutual respect.
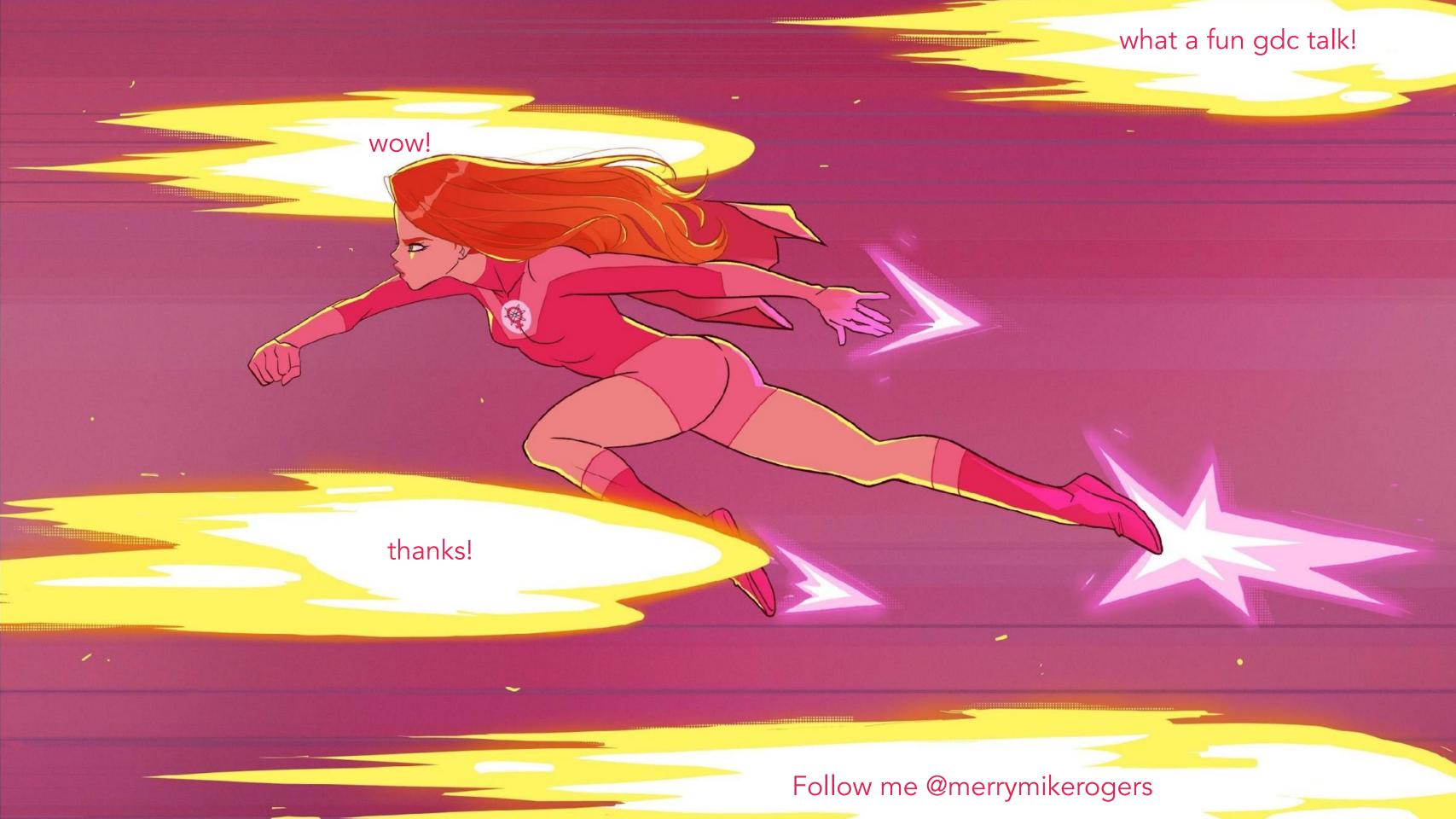
- It's all about teamwork.
- Foster creative relationships.
- Develop mutual respect.
- Expect and encourage publishers to meet your level of passion for the IP.

Indie Games and the growing multimedia space

Son M.

Co-founder of Perfect Garbage Studios

Narrative Designer

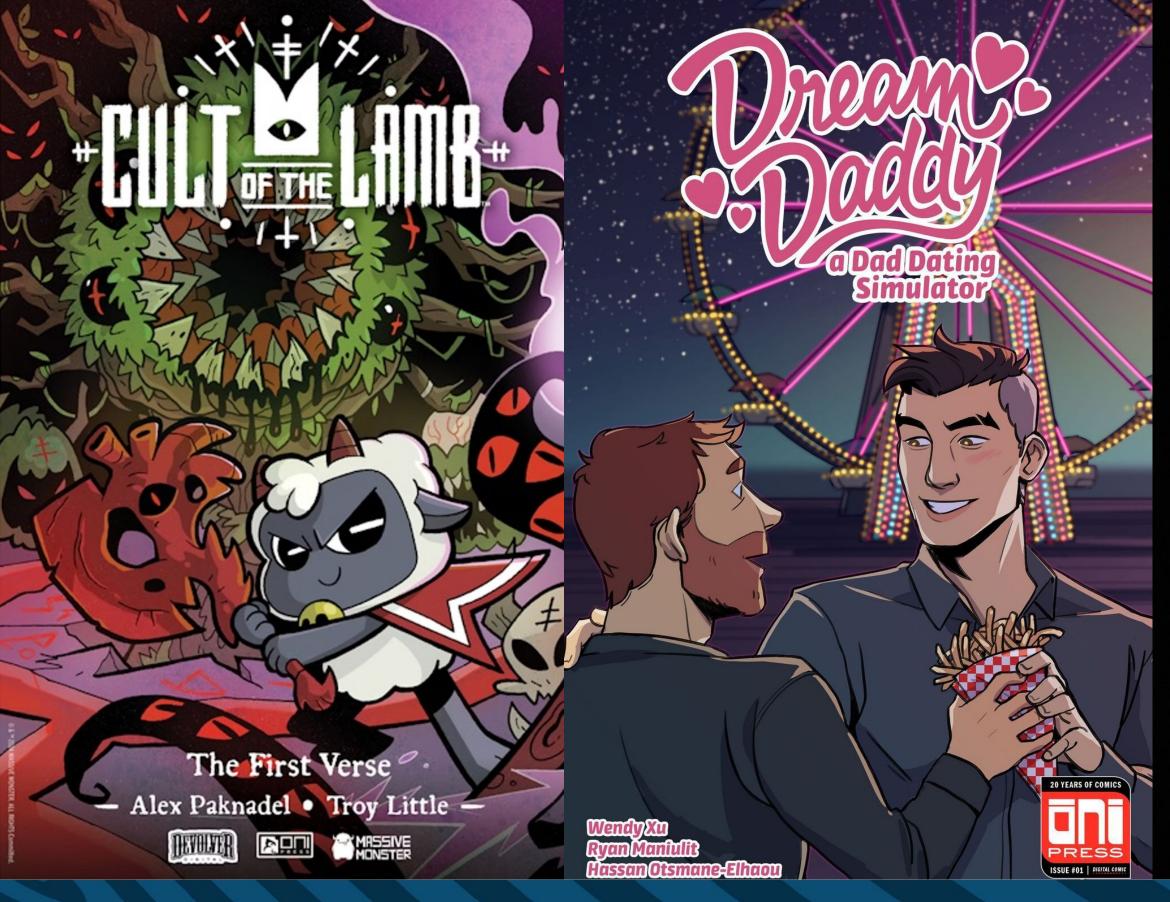Writer for a bunch of comics

Court jester and general horror

Bloodborne

KOT | KOWALSKI | SIMPSON

FREE COMIC BOOK DAY

HORIZON
ZERO DAWN

2
Visions of V
Art by Tomio Ogata
Story by CAPCOM
漫画 尾方富生
原作 カプコン

Devil May Cry 5

What about indie games?

How do you develop games with the concept of multimedia in mind?

Building a world that translates to other forms requires…

- An awareness of the appeal of other types of media (in this case, comics)

- An understanding of supplementary content

- An understanding of who the comic is for

Appeal of Comics
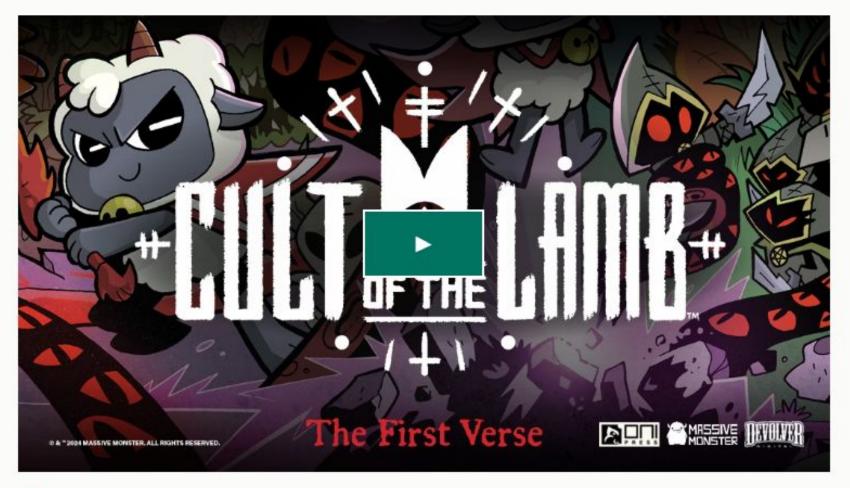
Developing indie games with comic potential means:

- Considering the importance and space needed for strong world building. What are the unique elements in your game that won't be explored too deeply in gameplay? Can that be supplementary material? Can that be a comic?

- What are your character arcs? Are there further things to flesh out? Beloved side characters to explore?

- As you're building your next project, could a comic help transition between the two games?

Why even make comics?

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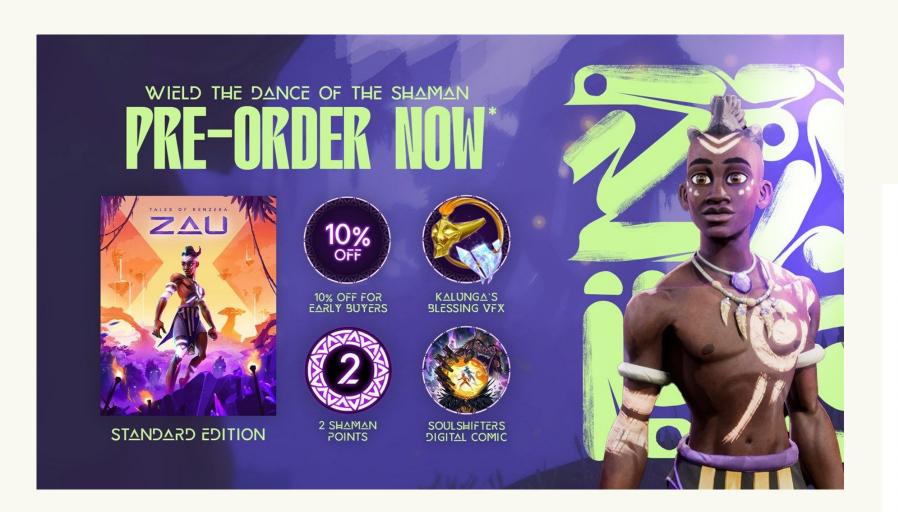
30
days to go

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Project We Love   Comic Books   Portland, OR

Venture to the Vile Comic Project

CA$ 10,269
pledged of CA$ 10,000 goal

Project We Love   Montreal, Canada   Comic Books

163
backers

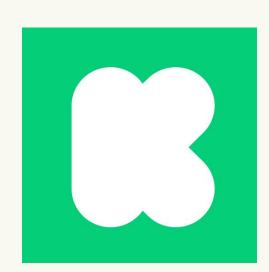Story   Story

Risks

Pitching comics

Publishers

Reach out!

@bogboogie

t33thing@gmail.com

GDC