

The Back Page Episode 200:
Behind the Back Page

JEREMY - NARRATING

It's an overcast day in Bath, Somerset, a city of beautiful Roman architecture where there's plenty to do - assuming you're not planning on staying for more than one day.

I've travelled down here from the clearly superior metropolis of Sheffield to meet some of its most famous residents. No, not Anthony Stewart Head, though that would undeniably make for a more interesting interview. Listener, I'm here to speak to Matthew Castle and Samuel Roberts, the two hosts of The Back Page: A Video Games Podcast, a moderately successful venture that has found an audience of societal outcasts who collect 6/10 PlayStation 2 games on Vinted.

I decided to make the journey down here after receiving an anonymous tip-off. In recent times, as the podcast approached its landmark 200th episode, word had reached me that the two hosts had a cataclysmic falling out - one that threatens to shift the foundations of the Video Games chart on Apple Podcasts, specifically in the UK, for several weeks. Good news for those chancers at TCGS, but bad news for the show's 35 loyal listeners. Could the Back Page really be over?

Over the years, having appeared on The Back Page as their token northerner and PC gaming punching bag, I've come to regard the pair - often referred to as the two giant men of Bath, mostly by themselves - as acquaintances. I wouldn't say 'friends', as such, because I'd consider that a gross violation of my personal boundaries. But some might say I'm the ideal mediator between the pair of them. I have a northern accent, for one, which makes it more unreasonable to contradict me.

But this rift, and the grim truth behind how it went down, has never been revealed to the general public - until today. With each host refusing to speak to the other under any circumstances, it's my mission to reunite these Two Giant Men of UK podcasting, and remind them of the many delightful horrors they've unleashed upon the unsuspecting public, whether it's Games Court, Samuel's dad playing the oboe or

Matthew's anecdotes about his childhood in Winchester that didn't really go anywhere.

So join me, games media's own Jeremy Peel, as I go...behind the Back Page.

Dramatic music.

Part One: Beginnings.

JEREMY - NARRATING

The Back Page's two hosts are former games journalists, forged in the fires of print media. Each started their careers in the latter half of the 2000s - and both rose through the ranks from humble staff writers to editors of commercially unsuccessful video game magazines in the UK.

The following testimonies from Matthew and Samuel were recorded separately, in the back room of an unnamed Bath sandwich shop. They've been carefully edited to provide a documented history of the podcast, and its eventual demise.

MATTHEW

They called me 'the Closer' because of all the magazines that shut down on my watch.

SAMUEL

Every magazine I've ever worked on has either been pulped or widely condemned on LinkedIn.

JEREMY - NARRATING

Matthew Castle cut his teeth on NGamer, the last independent Nintendo magazine standing in the mid to late 00s. Reviewing countless dreadful Wii games on a standard definition TV stained with yoghurt, he became synonymous with the unofficial Nintendo magazine scene. And by 'scene', I mean a single magazine.

MATTHEW

On NGamer I took on this goon persona, just praying to god that the readers didn't discover my dark secret that I hate Rare games (sorry again, Rare - unless the Rare social media manager is still listening, in which case, Jet Force Gemini 2 when?).

JEREMY - NARRATING

Matthew eventually became editor of its short-lived successor, Nintendo Gamer - until The Closer struck again. Down the line, he worked on Official Xbox Magazine, the official Xbox YouTube channel and Rock Paper Shotgun, before single-handedly driving each of them to economic ruin.

MATTHEW

Those were tough years on OXM. If I had a therapist - and I simply could not afford one on my Future salary - I'd relay the trauma of pretending to like Keiji Inafune's ReCore. You don't bounce back from a thing like that.

JEREMY - NARRATING

Samuel Roberts began his career on problematic independent PlayStation magazine Play, writing Niko Bellic fan fiction and pretending that Resistance 2 was good, all while eating 2.99 whole chickens from Lidl in Bournemouth.

SAMUEL

I'm not saying the economic crash of 2007 and 2008 was linked to me entering the world of print media, but it can't have helped. In a way, I was the ultimate toxic asset.

JEREMY - NARRATING

Samuel then pivoted to numerous doomed print publications before landing on PC Gamer. After working tirelessly to lower this long-respected publication's editorial standards, he was paid handsomely to update a best Netflix shows SEO article at TechRadar for two years before transitioning into games PR.

SAMUEL

On PC Gamer, I pioneered making the hardware section look prettier so that reading reviews of SSDs didn't make me want to die anymore.

JEREMY - NARRATING

I ask both giant men about their memories of meeting one another, but with their recent feud front-of-mind, neither could be civil.

MATTHEW

I thought, 'who's this tetchy shit with less editorial talent than me?'

SAMUEL

I said, 'who's this Gabe Newell-looking motherfucker?'

JEREMY - NARRATING

I ask them to try again, but this time without shitting their pants.

JEREMY, ASKING A QUESTION TO MATTHEW - MORE CONVERSATIONAL

Do you remember your first meeting with Samuel, Matthew?

MATTHEW

Vaguely, but my memory is like a sieve these days as Back Page listeners well know. Weirdly we both existed in the same games media sphere for years but didn't meet properly until ONM shut down and I moved back to Bath to run OXM. Every now and then, late in the office, we exchanged our tired thoughts about trying to make a living in the dying embers of print media. He was a bit of a young hotshot - maybe too big for his boots, which were cheap, because I know Samuel didn't make a lot of money down in Bournemouth. We used to bond over deadline week meatball marinaras at Subway. Hence, Two Giant Men were born - quite literally, based on our expanding waistlines.

JEREMY, ASKING A QUESTION TO SAMUEL - MORE CONVERSATIONAL

Do you remember when you and Matthew became friends?

SAMUEL

I remember exactly when it felt like we'd become friends. It was 2015 and we were both in the office on a Saturday; me working on the PC Gamer redesign, Matthew doing something for OXM - probably a retrospective on Fuzion Frenzy or a 10-page feature on Ryse or something. We went to a small pub in Bath called the Coeur De Lion. It was at this point that I started to learn Hotel Dusk on DS was the basis of his entire personality.

We grew even closer when he fell over and shattered his knee at Gamescom 2016. Great days.

MATTHEW

If I should die, think only this of me: that there's some corner of a foreign carpark that is forever a bit of my knee.

SAMUEL

It's safe to say we hit it off. We each had our personal baggage to deal with; for Matthew, it was the failure of the Wii U, for me the opening years of the PS3. That sort of shared trauma can bind two men together. Who knows, maybe one day there'd be a creative outlet for discussing that sort of thing?

Dramatic music in the background.

JEREMY

Coming up next in Behind the Back Page..

MATTHEW

He said 'fuck Northern Exposure!' so I shouted 'fuck Onimusha!' And that's when he tried to get me into a headlock.

SAMUEL

I still reckon the boys across the river drowned, and that the Castle family fortune made the inquest go away.

MATTHEW

Rumours about Alexa Chung's restraining order are just that: rumours.

Part Two: Further Beginnings

JEREMY - NARRATING

As each exited print media and explored new career paths to varying success, both couldn't quite shake their unyielding passion for the medium of print.

SAMUEL

Every time I look at a back issue of a magazine I worked on, I'm reminded of the piece of me that died forever to make it.

MATTHEW

It's true, I really missed working in print, especially when the Nintendo Switch took off. If I could've just launched an

unofficial Switch magazine then got it closed down within 10 months, it would've been the perfect sendoff for 'the Closer'.

JEREMY - NARRATING

Move over, Wii U. It's the Nintendo Switch! But with both men having passed the age that a career in print media becomes physically and psychologically impossible to maintain - 30 - they decided to explore other creative projects together. In February 2020, at the Garrick's Head pub in Bath, Samuel first pitched the podcast idea that would become The Back Page to Matthew and his wife, Katharine Castle.

SAMUEL

I was feeling sorry for myself after a very bumpy 2019 where I changed jobs three times, and I was determined to drag Matthew down with me. I took a sip from my pint of overpriced Session IPA and laid down the vision for what would become the podcast.

MATTHEW

I remember Samuel being a bit down in the dumps that evening, but my wider recollection is that he ruined a perfectly good pub dinner by banging on about a podcast where he could bore me to shit about Onimusha 2. I'll be honest, it didn't sound like my cup of tea. And I was running the RockPaperShotgun video channel - not into the ground, I will hastily add - so I was already getting games out of my system in my day job.

SAMUEL

What do I remember about that evening otherwise? I recall Matthew nodding furiously and saying 'mmm!' over and over again while shoving three chips into his mouth at a time. But that's the thing about Matthew: 'mmm' is his response to everything. And you never really know if you're getting a good 'mmm!' or a bad 'mmm.'

JEREMY - NARRATING

I decided to quiz Matthew on his use of 'mmm', as it comes up in the podcast rather a lot.

JEREMY, SPEAKING TO MATTHEW

What's your response to that, Matthew?

MATTHEW

Mmm.

SAMUEL

The larger idea was that we could make a podcast where we told war stories about working in games media, just after the golden age of print ended - and in doing so, violate numerous NDAs, betray personal confidences and shatter libel laws. It was also a chance to give a powerful voice to that perennially underrepresented group: overweight white men in their 30s who enjoy computer games.

MATTHEW

I wasn't yet convinced there was a podcast in it. Samuel sent a long follow-up email to myself and Katharine that I never responded to, which isn't that unusual for me. I should've responded with 'mmm!'

SAMUEL

I'll read the email out for you, Jeremy. We've never revealed this on the podcast. "Hey both,

I said I'd put this in an email, and now I finally have. Sorry it's long!

I basically want to make a podcast where we can tell a few war stories and demonstrate our expertise in a way that old magazine reader types will appreciate. My current thinking is we pick an era or subject, and frame it like a magazine feature. We'd talk a bit about the climate of games at the time, a bit about the behind-the-scenes stuff, but mostly about the games. I figure this approach would be interesting, because you bring an angle to it, rather than just talking about one game like a lot of retro podcasts do.

Truth be told, Katharine, I was just talking to Matthew about this originally, but I'd love to have your valuable perspective too if you're up for it. I would, after all, probably want to record in your house (er, you own a Blue Yeti, right?).

And, well, if we want to refine the format, we can do that as we go. I'll prepare some notes before each episode so you've got some reference materials. I'm also prepared to edit it (in the lightest possible sense) and pay to host it. It'd be cool

to have a couple of magazine-style back section ideas, too. They don't even have to be tied to the episode idea: they could just be runners that break up the conversation.

I think each episode should be an hour long. That way if we record for two hours, we've got two weeks' worth of stuff at a time, broken up into parts. I don't have a title, or anything, but can the creators of 'Barrel Watch' and 'Orange is the New Track' really do wrong in this area?"

Ah, memories. Matthew didn't give a flying fuck.

MATTHEW

It goes on a bit, doesn't it? You can see why I wasn't dying to jump in. I had other things to think about, anyway: it was the start of the year 2020, and I had an oddly good feeling about the months ahead.

JEREMY - NARRATING

You know what happened next. Furloughs. Toilet paper shortages. Sourdough starters. John Krasinski hosting a nice news show. Sitcom casts reuniting on Zoom. Gal Gadot's cover of 'Imagine'. Eat Out To Help Out. Tenet. The horror, the horror.

As the pandemic shut down the world in March 2020, the Deliveroo debris stacked up, and the two giant men grew ever larger. Now inflated by two additional waist sizes, Samuel was able to pressure Matthew into starting the podcast in November of that year.

SAMUEL

I had a stroke of great fortune: Matthew was laid off by Rock Paper Shotgun.

MATTHEW

Yay.

SAMUEL

So I had him cornered: he had to make the podcast.

MATTHEW

We agreed to record a couple of episodes, just see how it would go. But if no one listened, I was going to disown it and

tell GamesIndustry.biz that Samuel made me record it against my consent.

SAMUEL

I knew episode one had to be something super mainstream, and I'd spent most of my year on TechRadar updating boring articles about the price of the PS5, so covering the new consoles felt like the right idea. Even though I find industry commentary tedious as shit, I was willing to pretend I cared for one hour.

But to give it the print media flavour I'd always envisioned, I came up with the idea for episode two, 'Game Review Scores We Got Wrong', which helped explain what the podcast was to Matthew. It was a chance to audit lots of dubious writing about Wii and Xbox 360 games for cheap laughs to an audience of about five people. And yet when I said this bit aloud to Matthew as part of my pitch, he still raised an eyebrow.

MATTHEW

Fortunately for Samuel, by the end of 2020 I was finally as miserable as he was. I saw the shape of what he had in mind, and reluctantly went through with it, despite already serving as the comic relief on two existing podcasts.

JEREMY, NARRATING

But where did the name The Back Page actually come from? The answer will neither move nor surprise you: they dumped a load of nonsense suggestions into a spreadsheet.

SAMUEL

Matthew actually came up with the majority of the suggested names for the podcast. My one suggestion: The Thicc Old Games Magazine Men Podcast. In the comments part of our 'possible podcast names' Excel tab, Matthew sarcastically wrote 'You nailed it in one'.

MATTHEW

I haven't looked at these for four years at this point. 'The Back Section', 'Free Gifts', 'Back Compat Chat', 'Backwards Compatible', 'Update Required', 'Patch Notes Podcast'. Good god.

SAMUEL

Nestled among those was 'The Back Page'. It was a clear winner, summarising the legacy of jokey back pages of a magazine, and therefore the tone we were trying to go for. Also maybe there's a poignance to it being the last page of the magazine, and neither of us working in print any more? 'Update Required' is particularly embarrassing, though, I wouldn't be showing my face around Bath city centre after pitching that.

MATTHEW

The iconic Back Page logo of two blokes about to kiss over a microphone was the cherry on top.

JEREMY - NARRATING

The first episode of The Back Page, PS5 versus Xbox Series X, was a notorious flop. A lukewarm analysis of the two then-new consoles, neither seemed particularly engaged in discussing SSDs, framerates and other tedious nonsense that only lonely lads on Reddit are invested in.

Instead, the pair found their feet in revisiting petty nonsense from the 2000s: on-stage gaffes from E3 2006, Wii games that Matthew awarded 93% before they landed a 3 in Edge, or brown first-person shooters that the rest of us would rather forget.

SAMUEL

Despite my best intentions, I knew the first episode was poor, which is why we had the second one ready to go before we told anyone about the podcast's existence. We recorded both episodes at Matthew's house, technically violating lockdown laws, if I recall correctly. But no more so than the Conservative government was doing at that time.

MATTHEW

We're just lucky that Skrebs and Tamoor retweeted the announcement post for the podcast, otherwise no one would've given a shit.

JEREMY - NARRATING

The Back Page was off to a flying start, immediately finding an audience among those who remembered the good parts of print media in the '00s - and not the lack of diversity in writers and editors, the frequently pornographic classified ads at the

back of each issue, or the often problematic lads mag-style writing that froze women out of the industry by design.

Across a variety of themed episodes, both men set out their stalls: Matthew went to bat for dregs on Nintendo platforms that no one else agreed was good, while Samuel recalled his experience with the early days of the PlayStation 3 like a victim of Stockholm Syndrome. Off-hand remarks would become sweeping ideologies: Metal Gear Solid 4 is bound to the PS3 and should never come to other platforms; Metroid: Other M is quite good actually.

Such teachings formed the Church of the Back Page. Blokes in their 30s worshipped them.

SAMUEL

My content strategy was incredibly complex, and required a light touch. What I would do was listen to other podcasts I liked, then steal their ideas.

MATTHEW

Samuel took everything from The Big Picture, a film podcast I introduced him to. The only exception was Games Court. His one original idea happened to be the worst I'd ever heard, and seemed to be a labyrinthine justification for his obsession with hoarding bullshit and his failure to secure a mortgage. I went along with it to keep the peace, safe in the knowledge that I already owned a house.

JEREMY - NARRATING

But despite its gristle-level nutritional value, Games Court - in which Samuel would make questionable secondhand purchases of games then justify them in a fictional courtroom - was a hit format with the listeners. And Matthew found his popular alter ego Judge Castle was the centrepiece of the growing fictional universe that surrounded these episodes.

MATTHEW

I have no further comment on Games Court. There are relatives who won't look me in the eye after listening to those episodes.

SAMUEL

Games Court was me playing to Matthew's characterful strengths: he only does his very best work when he's at his lowest ebb. I just knew that making him talk about the time I bought Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood for £4.77 would break him - the best content came in pushing his resolve to the limit.

Matthew's always been a cult figure in the games industry; sort of a quasi-intellectual clown who's in on the joke. He has big, 'but doctor, I am Pagliacchi' energy. He's Jerry Lewis in *The King of Comedy*, a kind of dour funnyman who's got a luger tucked under his hotel pillow. He's a podcasting goldmine.

MATTHEW

Respectfully - and please make sure he only hears this when the documentary goes live - Samuel is a giant fucking baby. He gets tetchy about the smallest things imaginable, like if you make a joke about his categories in a draft episode, or query the wisdom of purchasing Lair on PS3 17 years after its release. I was railroaded into all sorts of podcasting travesties, and I never complained, just to stop him having a tantrum.

That's because I'm the most conflict-averse person you will ever meet - I'd crash my own car to avoid having a difficult conversation. Well, I'd actually get *Katharine* to crash the car, because she's technically my chauffeur as previously established on past episodes.

SAMUEL

It was a two-sided and mostly polite creative partnership, but if I wasn't happy with the way Matthew responded to my episode ideas, I wasn't above yelling that he was a cock in the middle of an episode recording.

JEREMY - NARRATING

Despite the inherent tension in the creative partnership, each was about to experience a level of credibility among their peers they'd never previously achieved.

JEREMY - NARRATING

Coming up in Behind The Back Page..

Dramatic music in the background.

MATTHEW

My concern was that Samuel wasn't taking the works of Keigo Higashino seriously.

SAMUEL

He just wouldn't let the Borgen tweet go, and when Geoff Keighley's legal team got in touch, I knew that was the beginning of the end for us.

MATTHEW

Blorko created a schism in the partnership, and I think it killed Samuel that he'd never have a tweet pop off like that.

Part Three: Heightening Tensions

JEREMY - NARRATING

As the podcast entered its second and third years, it found a steady audience of around 6,000 weekly victims - I mean, listeners. The ups and downs of the podcast - emphasis on the word 'downs' - became moments of legend.

SAMUEL

Whatever went down in any given episode, I was committed to keeping my cool. Especially during the draft episodes.

SAMUEL (clip from TIE Fighter section of the 90s PC draft - 45:25)

Oh fuck, oh fuck, oh that sucks, arghhhh!

MATTHEW

I would try to never get upset over something completely trivial, if I could avoid it.

MATTHEW (clip from Matthew referring to the singleplayer in Mario Kart as a 'campaign' in 2024 predictions - 34:24)

What the fuck do you call it then?

SAMUEL

Generally I think we hit a positive creative trajectory with the podcast. The listeners seemed happy, our peers guested on the occasional episode out of pity, and I dragged Matthew

along with whatever bullshit idea I came up with that week.
Once we achieved some level of popularity, it was time to
rinse the listenership for all they were worth.

JEREMY - NARRATING

When the Back Page Patreon launched in April 2022, the hosts
were shocked to learn that people actually wanted to give them
real money to support the podcast.

MATTHEW

The Patreon has allowed me to eat Pret sandwiches 7 days a
week, and for that I'll always be grateful.

SAMUEL

I spent the money on rare DS games, cheeseburgers from Magu in
Bath, and on funding an armed rebel militia in a nation I'm
not at liberty to name.

JEREMY - NARRATING

The podcast would eventually celebrate its 100th episode - an
inaccessible self-referential catastrophe, composed of clips
from fake episodes. It was an idea stolen almost completely
from an episode of the sitcom Community.

SAMUEL

The first cut of episode 100 was a disaster. I'll own up to
that.

MATTHEW

I let Samuel lead the way with the script for episode 100, and
that's why it was a debacle to make. But once I cut 90% of the
jokes out, it reached a level I would describe as adequately
satisfactory.

SAMUEL

The Hitman bit at the start was good, at least.

DIANA BURNWOOD

the sequence from the start of episode 100 plays

SAMUEL

That was the best thing I've ever written - it took me 4
months with a team of 8 writers to crack it. It's a real

testament to what a podcaster can achieve with 72 pounds and an actress working under duress.

JEREMY - NARRATING

Episode 100 drew acclaim from the podcast's deranged listenership. Buttered up with Patreon cash, the Two Giant Men reached a level of creative success they'd each longed for - even if the podcast was theoretically keeping Matthew and Samuel from achieving their actual dreams of writing three-star detective novels and dubious Batman comics respectively.

But the good vibes would soon curdle, and tensions began to emerge as the pair recorded some of their most memorable episodes.

SAMUEL

In general, the draft episodes - where an element of competition is baked into the concept - brought out the worst in us. TIE Fighter hurt me bad, Jeremy. But the content was undeniably great. The listeners were hooked. Unfortunately, things only escalated from there.

MATTHEW

I think we can pinpoint the Nintendo DS draft as the beginning of the end for The Back Page.

JEREMY, SPEAKING TO SAMUEL

Do you think the DS draft was a turning point for your partnership, Samuel?

SAMUEL

I think there's something in that. It was the most I'd ever hurt Matthew on-air, and I want the listeners to know that if I could take back what I did, I wouldn't, because it was deeply entertaining.

JEREMY - NARRATING

Samuel went weapons free on *Hotel Dusk: Room 215*, a 2007 Nintendo DS mystery game long considered one of the key texts of *The Back Page*, and, as he'd long known, a fundamental component of Matthew Castle's identity. Indeed, Matthew's frequent endorsement of the game on the podcast shook the United Kingdom's CEX economy to its core.

Content warning: the following clip features a man's heart being broken.

SAMUEL and MATTHEW (clip from the DS draft describing Hotel Dusk as languid and with a lot of bad hangs - DS draft, 1:29:55)
...stop saying languid!

MATTHEW

A lot of damage was done that day. Damage to me, damage to Kyle Hyde, damage to the Touch Generations brand, damage to the memory of Cing.

SAMUEL

I don't know what to say, Hotel Dusk was simply not very good. At least Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney - another series Matthew has used as the basis of his personality - has a level of quality that justifies its cult appeal. With Hotel Dusk, it was like someone was telling me Midsomer Murders is as good as The Wire. Brother: it isn't.

JEREMY - NARRATING

I share Samuel's reflections on what's now known as 'languidgate' with Matthew.

MATTHEW

Well that's why he's not on the fucking Castle family Switch Online membership anymore.

SAMUEL

I won't lie, now it's been taken away from me, I do miss having access to Jet Force Gemini.

MATTHEW

After Samuel's public execution of Hotel Dusk, I knew I had to get him back. And I knew the draft episodes were the place to do it; each one was a Greek tragedy. But it would take time - well over a year - before I worked out exactly how to do it. I had to nuke his home turf, just like he dropped a dog turd on mine.

JEREMY - NARRATING

What happened next would break the podcast apart, creating

ripples in the UK games podcasting scene for literally two hours.

SAMUEL

"You see, it's the slow knife, the knife that takes its time, the knife that waits years without forgetting, then slips quietly between the bones; *that's* the knife that cuts deepest." Talia al Ghul, The Dark Knight Rises.

JEREMY - NARRATING

Coming up on Behind the Back Page..

Dramatic music.

MATTHEW

After the 'Batman Begin' tweet, it no longer felt appropriate to make fun of Michael Caine.

SAMUEL

Matthew never got any of the NGamer editors on the podcast because they all think he's a dickhead.

MATTHEW

Castle Island was all fun and games until it sparked a genuine international incident with the Chagos Islands.

Part Four: The Incident

JEREMY - NARRATING

As The Back Page entered 2024, the podcast maintained its waning and predictable mix of series retrospectives, numerous unwanted mailbag episodes and questionable drafts where Matthew pretended GTA5 was a PC game (no, I'm not bitter for coming a distant third in that one - Orcs Must Die forever).

SAMUEL

In late 2023, we took a break from the podcast, as people know. And while we told the listeners at the time that a pause was needed because we were both exhausted, the truth is that the tension behind the scenes had gotten out of control.

MATTHEW

What started with Hotel Dusk in the DS draft had snowballed - the second a recording ended, we ceased contact with one

another. The Back Page became pure kayfabe, like the Attitude era of WWE in podcasting form, and our dynamic was just a facade. But it was too big to fail. The Patreon was keeping us both in artery-clogging cheeseburgers and sweaty fried chicken.

SAMUEL

I boarded a plane to Japan just to avoid bumping into Matthew in Bath. We could no longer look each other in the eye. It was the sad but inevitable endpoint of two geniuses colliding, like when Jarvis Cocker slapped his own arse at Michael Jackson's BRIT Awards performance. Matthew is Michael Jackson in that analogy, to be clear.

JEREMY - NARRATING

The truth behind what happened next has never been revealed - until now.

SAMUEL

It was late October 2024. We were recording the long-awaited PS2 redraft episode - we'd been on a bit of a roll that summer with draft episodes, and we got a bit drunk on the idea of bringing in a third guest to amp up the competitiveness of the draft. Looping back around to the PS2 for our 200th episode felt strangely appropriate.

MATTHEW

The third drafter on that PS2 redraft episode cannot be revealed as a result of a witness protection order from Bath crown court.

SAMUEL

But things had already been getting frosty in the weeks leading up to this. Matthew pretending GTA 5 and MGS5 were native PC games was a slight I just couldn't let go.

MATTHEW

I can now reveal that those draft choices were all a ruse, part of my long-term plan to strike back at Samuel for languidgate. Kyle Hyde would be avenged.

SAMUEL

Our guest that week drafted first - he took GTA Vice City, which is a bit basic bitch as a pick if you ask me. But

Matthew was second, and he had two picks to make. He took Silent Hill 2, which I thought was wise. But then he took Final Fantasy X, my favourite game of all time. We both knew that this was a shot across the bow.

MATTHEW

It's a draft, we're all trying to take things from each other. I've watched Katharine play Final Fantasy X. It was a totally valid pick. But I'll fess up: I've long known this game means a lot to Samuel. This was his home turf; his Kyle Hyde. But it wasn't enough to take the game from him - I had to demolish it brick-by-brick. Salt the earth, so that nothing would ever grow again.

Nothing less than causing the tantrum of the century was going to do, even if I knew it would doom The Back Page.

JEREMY - NARRATING

In Final Fantasy X, players take on the role of Tidus, a young man who's catapulted into the future by a big time-travelling whale that turns out to be his dad (spoiler alert for the preceding sentence). It's a Japanese RPG *groans*. This isn't my area whatsoever.

SAMUEL

It's probably best you just play the clip, Jeremy, it hurts to talk about it.

JEREMY - NARRATING

The following clip is from the only known recording of Episode 200: The PS2 Redraft. Content warning: criticism of Final Fantasy minigames.

We now switch to a fake clip from the unaired episode.

MATTHEW, IN EPISODE

So my next pick...for category 6, RPG, I'm going to take Final Fantasy X.

SAMUEL, IN EPISODE

You shit. For pick number two? You'd take this over San Andreas or...your beloved Red Faction?

MATTHEW, IN EPISODE

I'm taking this, Samuel, to demonstrate to you that the things you love don't belong to you. That they are fragile, and can be destroyed. Do you recall the time you called Hotel Dusk on DS languid?

SAMUEL, IN EPISODE
That was more than a year ago!

MATTHEW
Do you recall, Samuel?

SAMUEL
Yes, I recall.

MATTHEW
And how did you sleep at night, knowing you called that game languid?

SAMUEL
Like a fucking baby, mate. How did you sleep at night knowing you picked TIE Fighter to win the 90s PC gaming draft, when you'd never even played it?

MATTHEW
Where to start with this game's war crimes: the voice acting is terrible. The main character is an unbelievable twat. His best friend is another unbelievable twat - it's Bender from Futurama doing a Jamaican accent. That big blue guy? A third unbelievable twat. It takes fucking forever to get going. The battle music is mid. Yuna is a wet fucking blanket. Its religious metaphors are as subtle as a punch to the face. But its greatest sin, Samuel? And no, I'm not talking about the fucking whale who's his dad. Blitzball is the single worst minigame I've ever played in a game. Fuck it. And fuck you! Languid game.

There's a long pause.

MATTHEW
What's your first pick?

SAMUEL
Stop the recording. This podcast is fucking *done*.

End of episode clip

JEREMY, SPEAKING TO SAMUEL

Oh...is that it? I thought you fell out over something serious. You ended the podcast because he didn't enjoy a Final Fantasy game you like?

SAMUEL

Well, yeah. I mean, the 'fuck you!' wasn't great either.

JEREMY, SPEAKING TO SAMUEL

But there's thousands of pounds in Patreon funds on the line. You'll walk away from all that over...Blitzball?

SAMUEL

Did we learn nothing from the cycles of violence depicted as in *The Last of Us Part 2*, Jeremy? "Man hands on misery to Man." - Philip Larkin.

MATTHEW

I like that he quoted Philip Larkin and Talia al Ghul, when we all know he only really understands one of those things - the dumb cartoon one.

JEREMY, SPEAKING TO MATTHEW

Do you think you went too far that day, Matthew?

MATTHEW

Shouting 'and fuck you!' at Samuel *might* have been a step too far - as it reverberated around the overturned coffee table I use as a recording studio I did think it was a little out-of-character for me as the more reasonable host of the podcast. But the draft episodes are epic operas of violence and death - I was just giving the listeners what I thought they wanted. People love it!

JEREMY - NARRATING

But people did not love it. The podcast was put on hold, and as the hosts deliberated privately with their friends and family members about what to do next with *The Back Page* next, a source tipped me off that something unpleasant had occurred between the two giant men.

MATTHEW

I actually emailed Jeremy and tipped him off because I thought the whole thing was quite embarrassing. But I went under a pseudonym so he would never know it was me: Pesto underscore Basil underscore Mister at outlook dot com. He'll no doubt be shocked to learn the tipster's identity..

SAMUEL

I'd like to say we ceased all contact following the falling out, but the truth is that we started airing all our petty grievances towards each other. 200 episodes of repressed rage, boiling to the surface in a string of WhatsApp barbs. I told him Skyward Sword was an Edge 7.

MATTHEW

I told him his dad only plays The Saboteur because he's downloaded the DLC tits.

SAMUEL

I told him Big the Cat was based on him.

MATTHEW

I told him he was too intellectually deficient to understand the majesty of Tears of the Kingdom.

SAMUEL

I told him he only disliked Metaphor: ReFantazio because it didn't have any Japanese schoolgirls in it.

MATTHEW

Eventually, we just stopped exchanging messages altogether. And since then, which was four days ago, we've not spoken. Samuel deleted me on *Instagram*. I don't even post on there!

SAMUEL

I even went as far as deleting all the pictures of Matthew off of my phone. That was painful, actually - though I did hold on to the photo of him eating a big sausage at Gamescom in case I ever needed to blackmail him, or hike up the premiums on his health insurance.

JEREMY - NARRATING

Coming up next on Behind The Back Page: is there any hope of reconciliation between the Two Giant Men, or is it curtains

for the moderately popular UK gaming podcast? Plus, all of this to come...

Dramatic music.

SAMUEL

By the 5th time he said 'psychology of a goomba', I was ready to send Matthew to the morgue.

MATTHEW

Samuel took my jibes about Evangelion body pillows far too seriously.

SAMUEL

After the listeners criticised my laugh, I genuinely considered hiring large men to break their legs. But by that point I'd already made the down payment on my new gaming PC.

Part Five: Reunion?

JEREMY - NARRATING

When I was first roped into the Behind the Back Page documentary project, my intentions were to reunite two old friends who I knew had respect for each other at their core.

And yet as I've looked deeper into the fractures that have emerged between Matthew and Samuel across 200 episodes of The Back Page, I've merely observed a modern parable of fragile masculinity. They're two men who just can't bear to apologise to each other, and would rather hold a grudge than accept mild criticism of their respective Japanese computer games. The modest success of The Back Page has completely and utterly gone to their heads. The world around them continues to spin, the human race oblivious to their petty squabbles. And yet to them, this is a saga of great nations at war, of Olympian gods battling for supremacy.

JEREMY, SPEAKING TO SAMUEL

Is there anything Matthew could do or say that would heal the rift between you?

SAMUEL

I think if he apologised to me, to Blitzball, to Yoshinori Kitase. To the Besaid Aurochs - they're a Blitzball team. That would begin to fix things. I think in general we need to reset the dial on draft episodes so we can keep doing this. And maybe Matthew can apologise for picking TIE Fighter that time without having played it. And for picking GTA 5 and MGS5 in the PC gaming draft. They're just not really PC games, are they?

JEREMY - NARRATING, TO MATTHEW

Can Samuel say anything to you to put things right?

MATTHEW

Well, he's the one who's angry. I've made my peace with Hotel Dusk being languid. Many of the best things in life are languid! Waiting for lovely food at a restaurant, museum exhibitions, or French cinema. I've learned to love languid things.

JEREMY - NARRATING, TO MATTHEW

How do you respond to Samuel's comments about apologising for past draft episodes?

MATTHEW

Look, Samuel's issues with GTA and MGS not being PC games are between him and his psychologist. That's a hard line for me. But...I might be willing to apologise for the Final Fantasy X thing, even though Blitzball was total arse. And I might even throw in a sorry or two for TIE Fighter too. But he has to pay for what he's done to Hotel Dusk. We need reparations on both sides.

JEREMY - NARRATING

I plan to bring the hosts to a neutral location in Bath: JC's Kitchen, an infamous eaterie mentioned many times on The Back Page. Unfortunately, the weather forecasts light showers, and the tent where JC's Kitchen is usually based is nowhere to be seen. We go to a nearby coffee shop instead, where a latte somehow costs 8 quid. This is why I try to avoid the south.

SAMUEL

It's been a long time, Matthew.

MATTHEW

Mmm. Days!

JEREMY

Say it, Matthew.

MATTHEW

Samuel, I'm sorry for what I said about Blitzball. And I didn't mean what I said about Final Fantasy X - I mean yes the voice acting is bad, and it's rife with bad hangs. And I don't even think Blitzball is tolerable, but I can acknowledge when I've overstepped the mark. Maybe shouting 'fuck you!' was a step too far.

JEREMY

Samuel, I don't really give two shits about Japanese RPGs as established many times, but do you accept that?

SAMUEL

Yeah, I do, and I'm sorry for what I said about Hotel Dusk. I hope they add Kyle Hyde to Smash Bros one day - just for you.

Right around the same time they add Geno, who I know you've grown to respect since the Super Mario RPG remake.

MATTHEW

Well, don't push it, pal, but apology accepted. What do you say, shall we restart the Patreon? Ol' Castle's Deliveroo debts are getting a little spicy - they're, er, threatening to send guys round.

SAMUEL

Yeah, why not. I think it's about time the listeners bought me an import Wonderswan Colour anyway.

MATTHEW

Phew. Would've been a shame to break up a winning partnership on the 200th episode, eh? We should get to enjoy this victory.

SAMUEL

We did build something from nothing, and I am proud of the podcast. That's the thing about me, I am petty enough to walk away from something valuable I've created over the most minor bullshit imaginable - it's one of the many personal weaknesses

I confront on a daily basis. That, and being prickly and complicated, punishing myself for never working hard enough,

drinking two Monster Energy drinks a day, being psychologically warped by the pandemic, being addicted to sandwiches and fried chicken, nuking the listeners on Discord from orbit over slights so minor they can hardly be said to have existed at all. Well the list goes on, really.

MATTHEW

That's okay, buddy, we're known as the 'Two Giant Men', not the 'Two Perfect Men'. I'm not without my faults. Leaving basically all the podcast admin to you, not realising episode plans have been going into my junk mail for an entire month, forgetting to pay you the Patreon funds, staying up until 2am writing freelance then punishing myself for no longer being funny enough in my copy, being emotionally dependent on sweets. Well, again...the list goes on really.

But that's alright isn't it? We make something great. And people continue to give a shit, which is the greatest privilege of all. Let's keep descending, down into the darkest tunnels of Mementos deep beneath Bath.

SAMUEL

Yep, fine. Or as you would say, 'mmm'. Good 'mmm'.

JEREMY

Now kiss!

JEREMY - NARRATING

My work in Bath is done, and The Back Page: A Video Games Podcast is saved. I can return to the far greater city of Sheffield. But how long until the hosts fall out over something else that's totally trivial and pointless? I leave Somerset with the lingering feeling that these Two Giant Men are only ever one contentious Mario spin-off away from having a full-on meltdown.

But until then, at least, the podcasting 'magic' - the words of some strange men on the internet, not mine - can continue.

Epilogue: The Future

SAMUEL

Hello, and welcome to The Back Page: A Video Games Podcast.
I'm Samuel Roberts, and I'm joined, as ever, by Matthew
Castle.

MATTHEW
Hello!

SAMUEL
First of all, Matthew: how's the toe? Still discoloured?

MATTHEW
Fine. Getting there. The good news is, it's no longer yellow.

SAMUEL
Lovely stuff. Matthew, let me just say, it's great we were
able to put that unpleasantness behind us and get back to
doing our best work on this podcast.

MATTHEW
Hear, hear, Samuel, it's a pleasure to be able to do this
again.

SAMUEL
So in this week's episode we're ranking the 100 horniest
Hideo Kojima tweets. Matthew: how are you feeling about it?

MATTHEW
Well, let's just say it wasn't easy to get it down to 100.

JEREMY - THE END