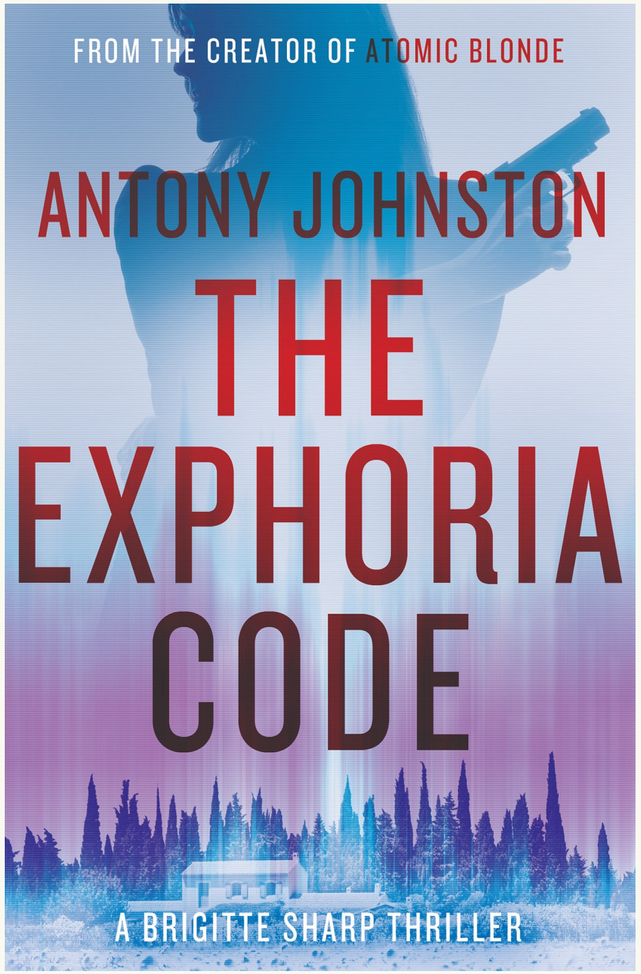
GDC
March 21-25, 2022
San Francisco, CA
How to Run (and Survive) a Writers' Room
Antony Johnston
@AntonyJohnston
#GDC22

Who am I?

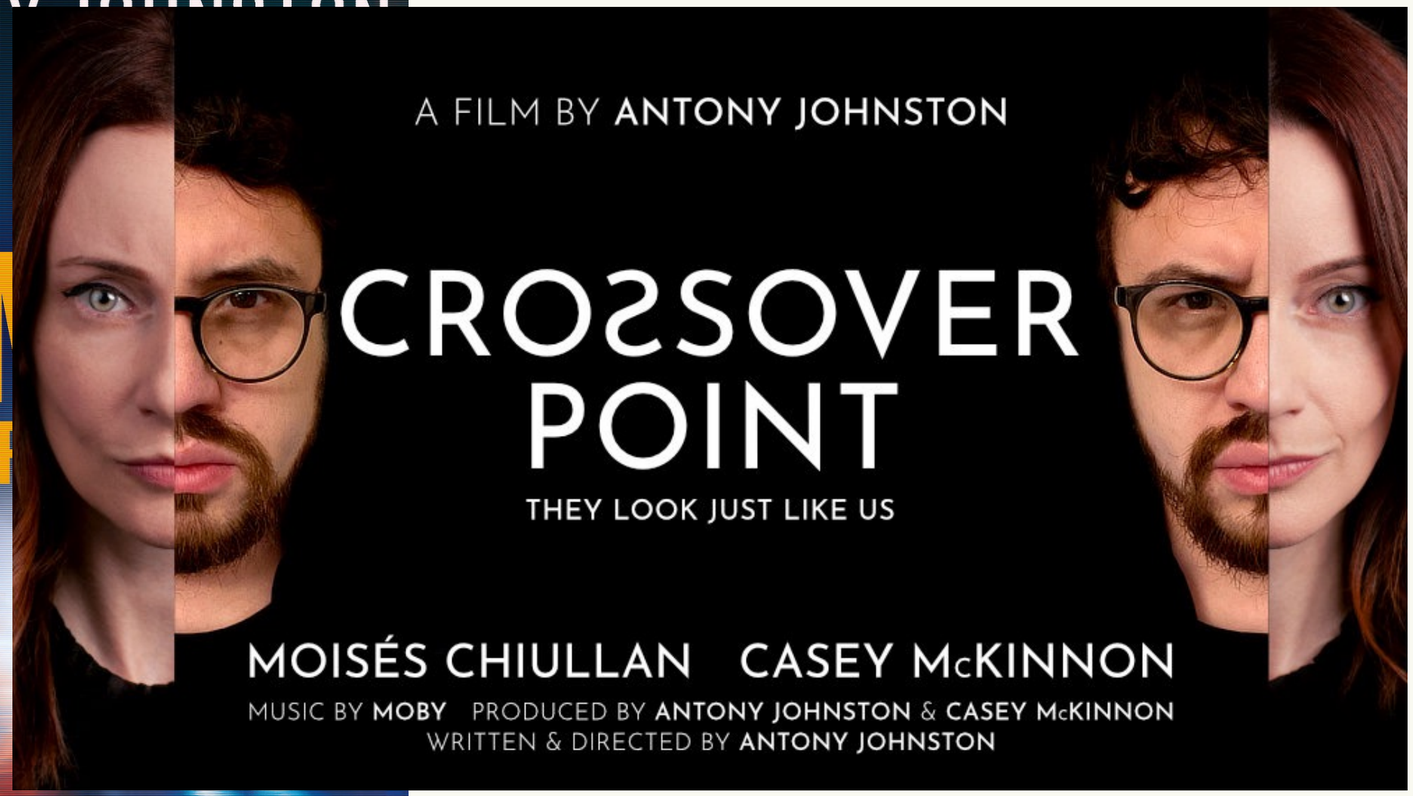
Who am I?

CHARLIZE T
JAME
ATOMIC
BLON
XBOX 360
DE
SPA
MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
Game Experience May
Change During Online Play
Wii
ZOMB
RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
PS4
MIDDLE - EA
SHADOW OF M
MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
PS5
VILLAGE
RESIDENT EVIL
MATURE 17+
M
ESRB
CAPCOM

Who am I?


FROM THE CREATOR OF ATOMIC BLONDE
ANTONY JOHNSTON
THE EXPHORIA CODE
A BRIGITTE SHARP THRILLER

A BRIGITTE SHARP THRILLER
'FORGET ABOUT LISBETH SALANDER. HERE COMES BRIGITTE SHARP'
JOHANA GUSTAWSSON


A FILM BY ANTONY JOHNSTON
CROSSOVER POINT
THEY LOOK JUST LIKE US
MOISÉS CHIULLAN CASEY McKINNON
MUSIC BY MOBY PRODUCED BY ANTONY JOHNSTON & CASEY McKINNON
WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY ANTONY JOHNSTON

Who am I?

THE ORGANISED WRITER
HOW TO STAY ON TOP OF ALL YOUR PROJECTS AND NEVER MISS A DEADLINE
ANTONY JOHNSTON
BLOOMSBURY
Writing AND Breathing
WHY, HOW, AND WHAT WE WRITE
WITH Antony Johnston
UNJUSTLY MALIGNED
THRASH IT OUT
The Metal Arguments
ABOUT LISBETH SALANDER. HERE COMES BRIGITTE SHARP'
JOHANA GUSTAWSSON

...Don't be a dick.

What is a Writers' Room?

Aims of the Room

- Assemble a staff of good writers
- Create a space for ideas to flourish
- Encourage collaborative brainstorming
- Produce consistent, unified material
- Meet the producers' needs

1. Assemble a staff of good writers

Hiring the Room

Diversity = Better Work

- Diversity of Experience (how long in games?)
- Diversity of Resumé (what types of games?)
- Diversity of Approach (how do you work?)
- Diversity of Personality (can we get along?)

2. Create a Space for Ideas to Flourish

Running the Room

- **Establish ground rules**

  - Nobody stands on ceremony
  - Don’t wait for good ideas
  - My virtual door is always open
  - Don’t be a dick

Running the Room

- Establish ground rules
- Be the visionary… or a proxy
- Short daily check-ins
- Know your goals
- Be the loremaster
- Online collaborative inbox
- Direct and communicate clearly

You're not a mind-reader, and neither are your staff

3. Encourage Collaborative Brainstorming

Breaking Story in the Room

- Assign a note-taker
- Stay on target
- Stand back
- Encourage the quiet ones
- Quit while you're ahead

4. Produce Consistent, Unified Material

Produce Consistent Material

- Play to strengths… *and* throw curveballs
- To rewrite, or not to rewrite?
  - Be the guardian
  - Show your edits
  - Don’t be a credit hog

5. Meet the Producers' Needs

Meet the Producers' Needs

- Your producers and you
- Represent the writers' room
- Represent the producers

“Defend your ideas vigorously... but recognize when someone else has a better idea.”

Q: Is it Worth the Money?

It's cheap.

Is it worth the money?

AAA:

- 4 veterans x 1 month = 80 working days @ $50-60k
- 4 veterans x 6 months = 450 days @ $300k
- 4 range of xp x 6 months = 450 days @ $200-250k

Indie/AA:

- 3 varying exp x 4 2-day weeks = 24 days @ $30k

What's in it for us?

Look to the Future

And if you don't believe me...

Javier Grillo-Marxuach

(Lost, Dark Crystal, Middleman, lots more)

Twitter: @OKBJGM
Podcast: 'Children of Tendu'
Treatise: The Eleven Laws of Showrunning

Thank You

@AntonyJohnston