

# Quick Fixes and Verbal Triage:

Script Doctoring For Games



# (Mandatory Self-Serving Plug)



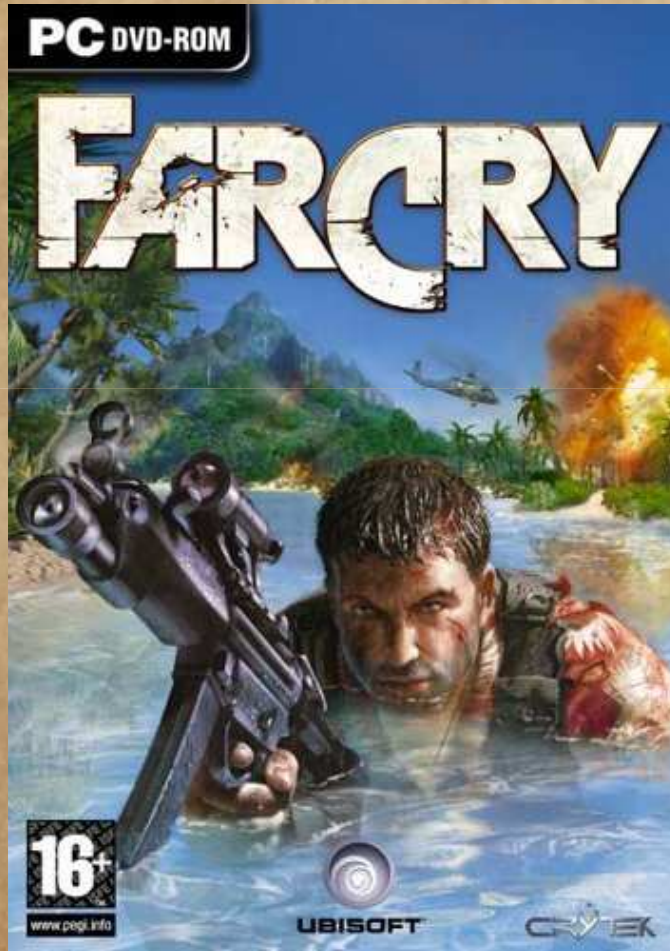
# What Is Script Doctoring?

- Script doctoring *for games* is:
  - Writing work done on an in-progress project to address existing issues
  - Fixing problems or adding last-minute content
  - Can include:
    - Rewrites
    - Additional material
    - Polish passes
    - ...and anything else that's needed
  - Not always a “ZOMG!”

# Personal History

- Started in tabletop RPGs
  - Planned book carefully
  - Estimated wordcount
  - Estimated art needs
  - Sent it to layout
  - Discovered it was 17 pages short and needed to go to the printer Monday at 6:30 AM

# Example: Far Cry



- Purely a script polish
  - Went through dialog & nothing but dialog
  - Rewrites & edits
  - Minimal impact on story & character design

# Example:

## Splinter Cell: Conviction



*Oh, look! It's Sam again!*

- Brought in initially for story assessment
- Ended up contributing to re-imagining of entire narrative & doing the bulk of the writing
- Not the usual experience

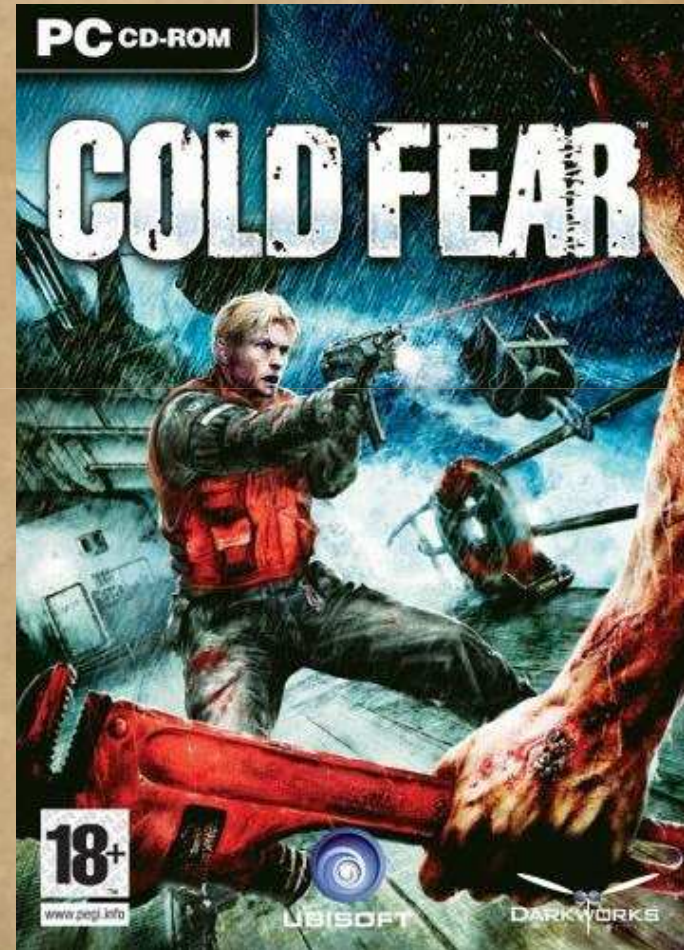
# Techniques

- You can only do what you can do
  - Don't chase unicorns
  - Establish parameters
  - Define the Expectations
- What Can/Can't/Must you do?
  - What's high priority?
  - Don't waste time on non-essentials
  - Don't fight unwinnable battles



# Example: Cold Fear

- Brought in 4 weeks before recording
- Character models & levels already done
- Needed: Dialog & story framework
- Anything else = wasted effort

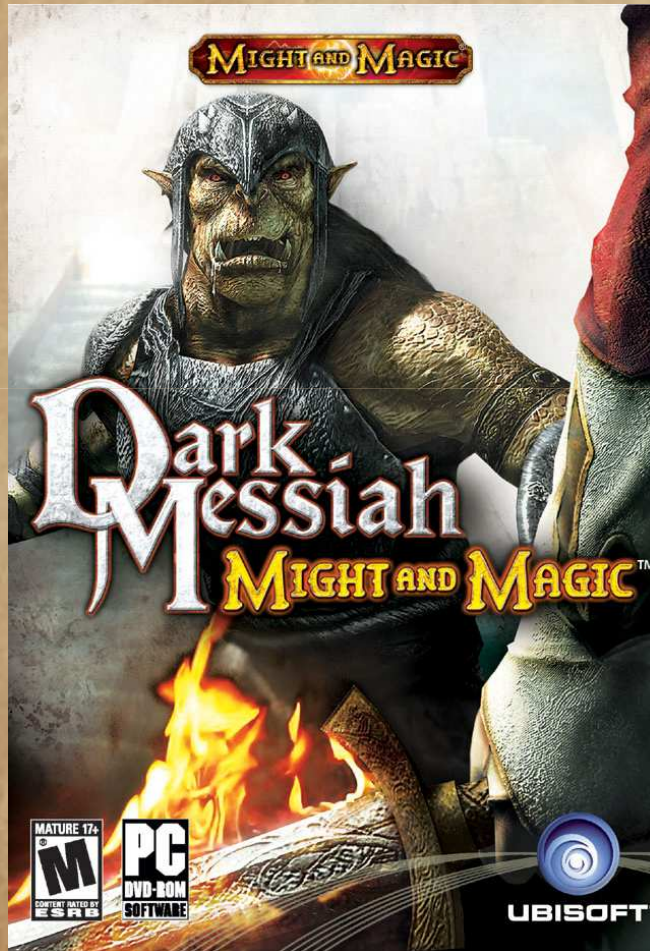


# Identify Reporting Structure

- Step One: Establish one
  - Whom do you report to?
  - Who can give you feedback (and make it stick)?
  - Who assigns and signs off on tasks
  - Who can you safely ignore?
- Don't let anyone mess with the structure
  - The more people involved, the slower the loop
  - The slower the loop, the harder script doctoring gets

# Example:

## Dark Messiah of Might & Magic



- No clear reporting structure
- Meant no clear line of communication
- Meant stuff got ignored/people got worked around/general messiness

# Integration With the Team

- Remember: They were there first
  - Be aware of history & relationships
  - Don't trash existing work
  - Don't cast yourself as the Lone Ranger
  - Build on anything good that's already there
- Remember: You are there to support the team
  - The team is not there to support you

# Example:

## Splinter Cell: Double Agent

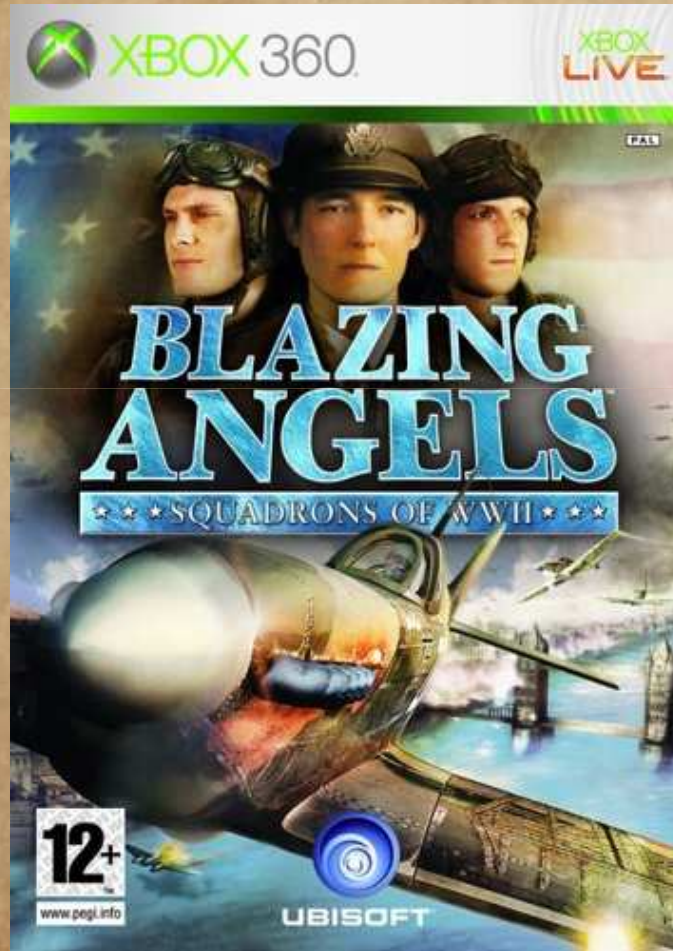
- Writer in place on team when I showed up
- Established working relationship
- Established working dynamic
- Got a lot of stuff done fast
- Got great reviews for writing



# Pace

- Break the work down
  - Small manageable deliverables, not one big one
  - Smaller discreet deliverables = faster feedback
  - Steady pace means better goal-setting
- Don't go crazy
  - You've already impressed them enough to get the job
  - Burn yourself out and there's no one behind you
  - Nobody's paying you for just the first day
- Always be prepared to go back in

# Example: Blazing Angels



- Variations for each SKU meant going back in repeatedly
- No closure until it was on the shelf
- Effort of going back into the headspace

# Writing Technique

- Prepare to cut
  - Develop an eye for what's essential
  - Better to make one big cut than lots of small ones
    - Faster
    - Easier to paper over one hole than a hundred
    - Less chance of missing something
- Nothing you do is deathless prose
  - And nothing the other guy did is, either

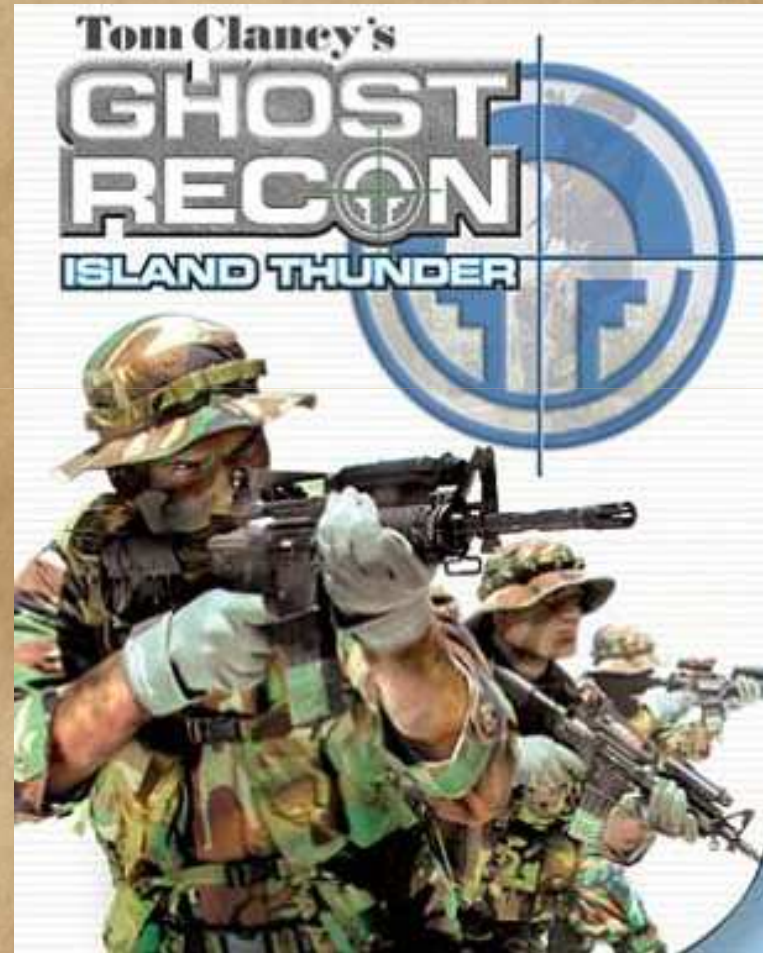
**Just don't be a jerk about it**



# Example:

## Ghost Recon: Island Thunder

- Initially designed for 10 mission narrative
- Short timeframe meant cutting 2 missions – and stitching the rest back together
- Nobody noticed...until now



Most boonie hats on one box cover, ever.

# Short Is Good

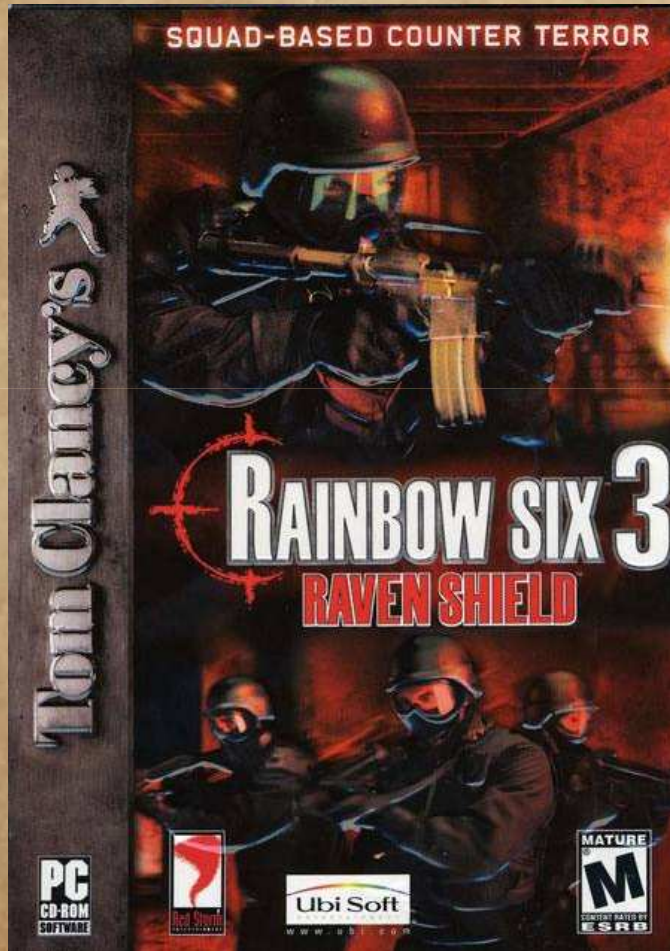
- Short = Less
- Less = Faster
  - Faster completion
  - Faster turnaround
  - Faster edits
  - Done faster
  - Paid faster (hopefully)

# Surprises

- They always happen
  - Deal
  - Get back to work
- You should always prepare for them
  - Leave “disaster” time in the schedule
  - Look for potential calamities and head them off
- You can't anticipate everything...
  - ...but you can anticipate that there will be *something* – and hedge your bets

# Example:

## Rainbow Six: Raven Shield



- **First surprise:** 9/11
  - Required complete story overhaul
- **Second surprise:** Drastic last minute cuts
- **Third surprise:** Change from PC to console storyline

# Perfection Is Impossible

- If it were perfect, they wouldn't need you
- Do the most good where you can
  - More effective than polishing tiny gems
- Recognize that your work may go unappreciated
- Just do good work

# Thank you for your time & attention

- Any questions?

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