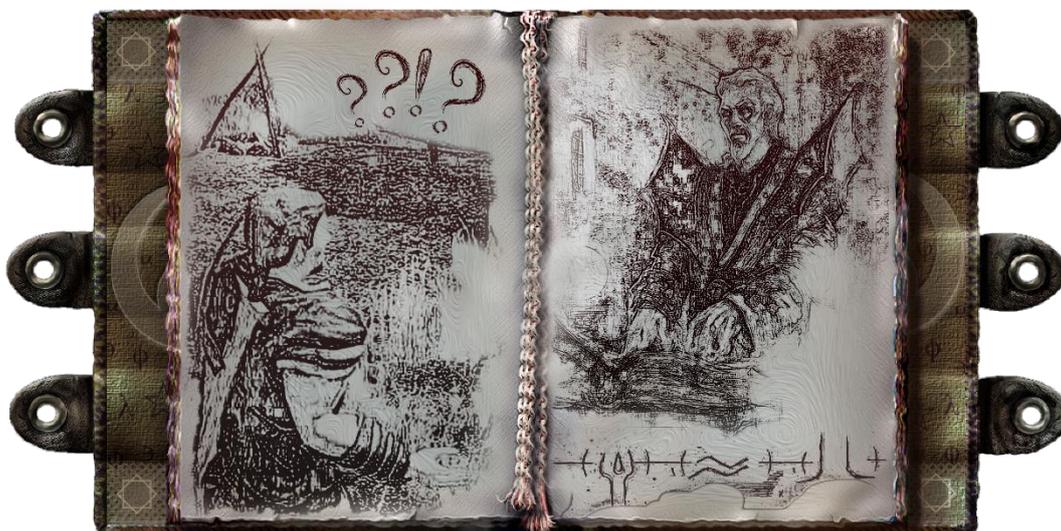


2023 Summer Special: Q&A with the Community Story Team by Piranha Bytes Italia



With the release of the 13th Community Story Project (CSP) Advent Calendar last December, we thought it was time to take a look at the progress of a very ambitious project, which these tenacious fans are developing to bring a new shine to the third chapter of the Gothic saga.

The previous interview was published some time ago, thus Piranha Bytes Italia decided to write down a new list of questions to provide more information to those gamers who are eagerly awaiting the mod release.

Commonly overlooked issues, trivia, points of view and desiderata were the starting point for our questions, which were sent directly to the people involved in each area of the development team.

In order to better analyze what could be asked, it was of utter importance for us to involve the Italian Gothic community that follows Piranha Bytes Italia through its various communication channels.

Thanks to their excellent feedback and a good deal of editing, it was possible to collect suggestions and summarize them in a series of arguments, to which we added some other elements thanks to our now many years of experience and the huge amount of information that we have archived over the years.

It was clear that everybody was interested in learning more about: the primary inspiration that gave birth to the project, their working method and the hierarchy established to manage such an articulated project; the critical issues that they faced and the rewarding aspects of such a work; the details of managing the programming mechanics and limitations, that gave the possibility of altering the context so profoundly, while improving the immersiveness of the player; details on

the possible expansion and modification of the original plot; finally, there were also some questions that were actually nostalgic requests from people who are eager to relive the emotions linked to the legendary Gothic saga.

A horizontal management style has emerged, which has basically ensured the continuous development of the product, as it has not suffered from delays due to the pandemic situation, from which we are now slowly emerging. We cannot say the same about many other highly hierarchical, albeit more structured, productions.

Proud of their huge project, they want to release a unique and highly coherent product – because of this, they rarely accept external influences, although they still seem open to good ideas and experimentation.

Cryptic about a few aspects, they still seem to keep some details of the big picture hidden to themselves. Perhaps, they do not want to appear inconsistent on aspects which are still in development, or to they want to limit uncertainty due to speculation and misunderstanding. It seems that there will be many new features that will surprise us during our playthroughs, whether thanks to the immersiveness of the setting, polished down to the smallest details, or to new content that will leave us stunned on more than one occasion.

In conclusion, of course there is still a lot of work to be done, but from what we have seen so far, we certainly will not be disappointed.

Piranha Bytes Italia wishes you a pleasant reading!

1. Gothic fandom is one of the most active RPG communities, especially in the modding world. Lately our team worked very closely with the “Chronicles of Myrtana” team, as we localized their mod into Italian. What do you think about this matter? Are there any projects which has particularly inspired you?

Of course, we are pleased that Gothic games, even after so many years during which the saga has been practically dormant, can still boast a vibrant community and so many active modders. Many of us follow other mods in development, since we are enthusiastic Gothic players too, obviously. But, generally speaking, these other projects do not affect our work. It happens rarely that, by agreement and with the permission of the developers, we integrate a feature in the CSP, because maybe it fits well with the rest of the project. These are only a few exceptions, though. We focus on making a plausible, seamless game world with a unique story. This is not something that you can achieve by simply combining different mods of various kinds.

2. Regarding the organization of your development team, we imagine that each member works in a relatively independent way. However, how do you manage the project overall? Is there a hierarchic structure, or do you proceed in a more democratic manner? Do you hold regular meetings to share updates internally? How has internal communication changed along the years?

The structure of the team is quite horizontal. This means that everyone works at their own pace and at the tasks that interest them the most. If internal discussions arise during development,

everyone has a say, and the decision is usually taken by trying to involve as many people as possible.

3. Let's stay focused on this project management matter – you surely have a list of objectives to achieve in order to consider the CSP 'complete'. How do you assess your progression towards these objectives? When you will be close to the final release, who is in charge of 'pushing the button' and publish it?

There is an Excel spreadsheet, which shows in detail the overall status and progress of each part of the project. When this spreadsheet will say that all aspects are 100% complete, that will mean that the project is ready for publishing.

4. Along these years, you have probably seen several CST members leaving for personal reasons and such. How have you replaced them? The new team members were chosen only because of their skills, or maybe a few were enrolled just because they are Gothic enthusiasts?

With such a long development time, it is inevitable that there have been changes in the development team. Many of our storywriters, developers, and testers, however, have been part of the team for several years, some even since the beginning of the project. The tasks obviously adapt to each person's situation. There are periods when one works more and periods when one is less active. Clearly, every now and then someone leaves the team, but on the other hand there is always someone new that join us. This usually happens in two ways: the first is when volunteers apply spontaneously, writing us because they are eager to take part in the project. The second way involves sharing small test projects on our website, to find volunteers. In both cases, those who join the project must show that they already have a good degree of experience. Given the very large workload, we cannot include modding newbies in the team.

5. Covid surely changed our life and work habits. What was its impact on the CSP? What was the biggest change that you had to adopt in order to cope with the pandemic? Did you have to spend less time on the project, or maybe you had even more time, due to lockdowns and company shutdowns?

In fact, our working habits have not changed substantially. From the very beginning, the CSP has always been an online project which is developed in free time. These two aspects did not change during the pandemic. This does not mean that there were not also important changes in the lives of our team members, on the contrary. In any case, the time committed to the CSP and the activities carried out by each of us have adapted according to the new conditions.



6. The CSP has been in development for many years now. Unlike other mod teams, you are going on steadily, as we can see from your WIP news and from your Advent Calendars, which you still publish yearly. Who or what helps you the most in keeping the team together and focused on the project?

Each team member draws his motivation from different reasons. As an example, here is a statement from Robespier: "I love the Gothic saga games. I love the project, which I initially followed as a fan. Later on, I was welcomed into the team, which represented a sort of dream for me. My motivation is related to the possibility of giving my own contribution. It has always been very strong and it is still there, despite the fact that other matters have occupied my spare time from time to time.

7. Your development team is actually rather small. Have you asked for –and/or received - any help from important Piranha Bytes members, or from mod developers who are now community-wide famous? We are thinking about something similar to what is happening right now between Kai Rosenkranz and the Gothic Remake project.

A few years ago, Robespier got in touch with Sascha Henrichs and described our project to him. The first teaser of Gothic Remake had just been released. During their conversation, they discussed various topics related to the development of the project, but in general this never had any concrete effect on the development. All in all, the CST never felt the need to obtain support from Piranha Bytes or receive their help in the form of supervision or counseling. The CSP is a project that was born in the community and it should remain so.

8. Which are your main sources of inspiration for new features? Who decides, and how, what should be added or changed in the project, for instance a mission, a game mechanic, an object, a character and so on?

The most significant sources of inspiration are, of course, the original Gothic games themselves. Gothic 1 and Gothic 2 and its expansion are, for us, timeless masterpieces. The main idea of the CSP is to bring Gothic 3 up to the level of the first episodes, thereby providing the trilogy with the ending it deserves.

As for who takes the lead, however, that depends very much on what we are considering. Is it a new story-related mission? Then it will probably be an initiative of the storywriters. Is it a technical

optimization? Then it will normally be the developers who have thought about it. Is it about a texture or a new object? Then it is up to the graphic designers. At the same time, though, we are a very open team. Anyone can come up with new ideas or develop them. A developer can contribute to the story, just as a graphic designer can suggest technical improvements. We integrate various points of view and try to match the initiatives of all participants, so that the final result is consistent.

9. Gamers' wishes often collide with programming mechanics, which make it impossible to add a particular feature. Is there anything that you wanted to be there, but that you found out to be impossible to have because of technical issues? What kind of limitations have you experienced while modding the original game?

The biggest limitation is definitely the game engine itself. That, in itself, cannot be modified. This prevents us, for example, from introducing substantial changes to the combat system. In this case, we must limit ourselves to minor modifications to the combat balancing, which clearly limits our possibilities considerably.

10. We imagine that there is a group dedicated to test and approve what has been developed so far. How does this process work? Which are the assessment parameters for new contents?

The testing procedure basically works like this: all bugs that are found, whether in the original game or in the mod, are reported in our forum. One of the developers takes charge of the problem, corrects it, and then moves the thread to the untested changes section. During the next testing session, one or more testers check whether the problem has been fixed. If so, the thread is moved to the archive. Whenever we introduce new changes or new content, a new testing phase takes place. This process is repeated constantly.



11. At present, it seems that Gothic 3 runs on GNU/Linux systems, even though the optimization is not great – patch 1.75 fixed several problems, but the framerate is still unstable and the peripherals are not responsive enough. Is the CSP going to optimize this aspect and/or make the game more compatible with these systems?

Regarding this matter, we have not brought any contribution. We work only on the Windows version.

12. In a previous interview, you declared that after the mod release anybody will be able to modify single aspects or parts of the CSP, if deemed necessary. Are you going to release a sort of small 'mod kit' or 'unofficial editor' to help fans to unleash their imagination?

Most of the tools that we use for the project were developed by MadFaTaL and George while working on the CSP and have long been available for everyone on World of Players forum.

13. Regarding the game soundtrack, you stated that you were planning to play single tracks differently during the game, and that you also wanted to add new ones. Have you hired one or more external artists for this task, or someone from the team is working on it?

The soundtrack was probably one of the least criticized elements of the game. We changed the tracks related to some areas and also added a few new ones to the game.

14. Talking about audio effects in Gothic 3, when entering a house, a cave or a dungeon, the sounds coming from outside (voices, cries, and other noises) are equally loud despite changing the setting. Usually, an external sound should gradually soften or change in these situations. This can be clearly seen also in your latest video – 'The Catacombs of Trelis' – where the sound effects from outside are still perceived by the Hero and are not affected, even though he is inside a dungeon and going underground. It could seem a minor element, something that can be ignored, but it has a great impact on the level of immersiveness that the CSP is aiming to. Is it technically possible to do something about it, or maybe is it even already in your plans?

Noises are actually dampened when going inside caves or dungeons. This does not happen in the Trelis dungeon video because the footage was recorded using the free-flying camera. In this case, as the camera moves, the hero remains motionless in the inner courtyard of the Trelis fortress, and the sound level remains tied to his position. In the dungeon, the environment is also much darker than outside, so it is necessary to use a torch. Again, when using the free-flying camera, the basic brightness of the graphics engine depends on the hero's position, so it is not altered as it would normally be in the game.

15. In the past you talked about an automatic German dubbing ('Text-to-speech'), but the results were uninspiring and 'robotic'. You have also shown individual attempts at direct dubbing for a few new characters, with an uneven result. In light of past experiences and new AI and sampling technologies, how has this matter changed in your development process?

We know that many players expect improvements in this area. Even now, the results that we have achieved are much better than the level visible in our first videos. The older videos do not reflect the current state of the project in this matter.



16. Are there going to be any secret details in the game code? Something like apples giving you strength, or mushrooms giving you mana. Other examples could be a stamina increase due to running for a certain distance, or an improvement in the Hero's ancient knowledge after stargazing for a certain amount of time...

We introduced this 'learning by doing' feature regarding stealth skills. However, I do not think we are going to introduce anything similar for the examples mentioned above, regarding movement and other things.

17. As already seen in the first two games of Gothic saga, is the CSP adding hidden money bags and/or treasures, which are not actually related to main or side quests?

Yes, we are trying to hide treasures and similar small surprises all around the game world.

18. Interactions with game objects was an important immersive element in the first two Gothic games. Are you planning to add new usable objects, in particular something interesting for players and that may provide beneficial (or harmful) effects? Here is a non-exhaustive list of examples: interactable branches that you can use to climb up and get extra experience points for exploring the area, boulders which you can roll towards a group of enemies who would be otherwise too powerful to fight, sudden landslides that make you fall into caves or cliffs, and so on.

Our Gothic 3 Hero will have many new possibilities to interact with objects. For example:

- Heating raw iron ingots at the forge;
- Melting iron ores into raw iron ingots at the forge;
- Writing a scroll at the writing desk;
- Interacting with specific quest-related items.

NPCs also gained several new interaction possibilities, such as splitting wood and carrying barrels and lumber.

19. Provided that Gothic 3 inherited an excellent day/night routine from previous games, will it be possible to start a quest or meet characters and creatures only at night? Will there be any events happening only at certain times during the day, or will we meet diurnal or nocturnal animals sleeping when they are not active? It would be interesting to delve deeper into the concept of 'darkness', as it is often seen as a moment where brightness is lower and characters should 'rest', but it could also lead to interesting mechanics.

Yes, the day/night routine will also affect conversation options with characters. For example, there is a ghost that you will only be able to meet at night.

20. Is there going to be a weather system in the CSP? If so, would the Hero be affected by adverse weather conditions if not properly prepared? For instance, he may need light clothing/armor in the desert and heavy clothing/armor in Nordmar.

In this regard, there will be no changes from the 'vanilla' version. The original Gothic 3 already included changing weather conditions, which influence the speed of stamina recovery. In the freezing cold of Nordmar nights and in the suffocating mugginess of Varant days, stamina will be regenerated much more slowly. The 'Cold Endurance' and 'Heat Endurance' skills will be very helpful.



21. In a similar way to Beliar's Claw, will it be possible to upgrade or modify weapons and/or armors in their effects and/or models?

During some quests, it will be possible to repair some destroyed weapons and armor. Otherwise, the usual options provided in Gothic 3 will remain, namely forging new weapons or sharpening, blessing and poisoning the weapons you already have. If you use some pieces of armor together there may be some advantages, as was already the case in Gothic 2 when you combined an armor with the appropriate belt.

22. The job system in Gothic 3 seems to have a trivial role in the game, as it is only used to 'grind' and get new equipment. The CSP is going to improve these aspects, maybe adding one or more side quests that may be solved only by using jobs?

Indeed.

23. NPCs will react more properly while our character wanders around? In particular, are they going to react in a more noticeable way when the Hero gets inside their houses? Are they going to wake up the Hero when he is sleeping inside someone else's bed, instead of staying awake all night and be at the bedside when he wakes up in the morning? Previous Gothic games were more realistic as regards this matter.

Yes, NPCs will react more properly to our Hero's actions.

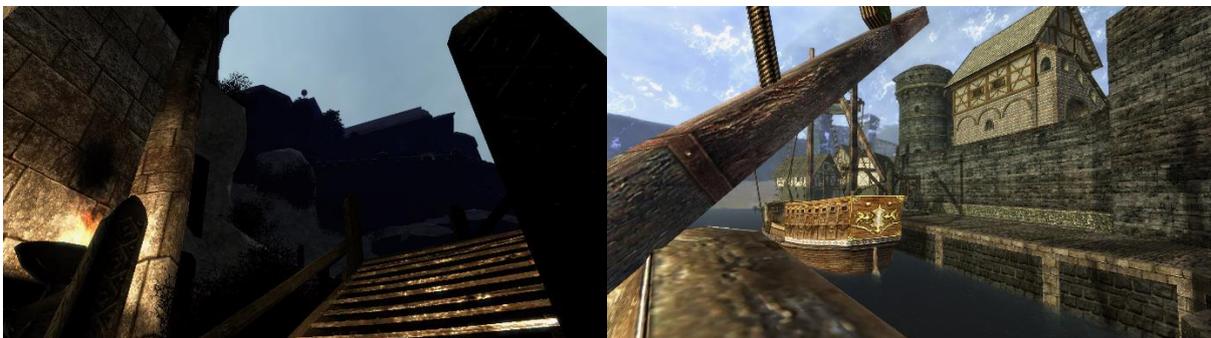
24. The CSP added a huge list of new items. May we expect an increase in number and variety of trophies which can be obtained from hunted creatures? Maybe you could reintroduce some 'evergreens' like Bloodfly wings, which mysteriously disappeared in Gothic 3.

We cannot reveal anything about the single trophies that will be there yet. In any case, I can assure you that you will find some items on the bodies of defeated beasts that you have never seen so far.

25. We know that complex implementations (e.g., changes to AI and polygonal models, and aspects that need to be developed from scratch) must be limited, but we want to try to ask this anyway: is there any hope that we may see new and old animals placed with greater care than what was done in the vanilla version? We would love to see Mammoths in Nordmar snowy lands, and we also miss Field Raiders with their charming songs.

No, there will be no completely new animals, such as mammoths. It will be possible to have some variations of the animals already present, though. A couple of these have already been announced through our Advent calendars.

Completely new opponents, on the other hand, will include the Will-o'-the-wisp, which you should be already familiar with, thanks again to one of the past Calendars (*Editor's note: here is the link to the Calendar door, in case you missed it: <https://q3csp.de/en/2017/12/24/door-24-3/>*).



26. Talking about game fauna, in Gothic 1 and 2 each animal had different moving and attacking speeds. If it was rather easy to run away from Young Scavengers, it was way harder to do so with Boars and Dragon Snappers, not to mention Shadowbeasts that could reach you in the blink of an eye. Conversely, in Gothic 3 all beasts seem to move at the

same speed, so it is extremely easy to run away also at the beginning of the game, you do not even need to sprint. Is the CSP going to fix this aspect?

We do not have any plans about it at the moment, even though we took a look at the speed settings for the beasts. Generally speaking, 2 speeds are used: 450 and 550 (this is the case, for example, for wolves and sabretooth tigers). Currently we are not changing this, but we tested it a bit anyway.

27. When you hit a beast with a melee weapon, especially with a charged attack, you feel like you hit some jelly – its body deforms and stretches, until it falls on the ground in the most absurd positions, and it often keeps shaking too. May we hope to see something more realistic?

We cannot modify the original physics engine, so there will be no improvements regarding this aspect.

28. Gothic 3 fighting system is largely different from what we saw in the first two games. It is surely more intuitive, but it lacks that 'raw charm' that managed to convey to the player the feeling that he was really hitting the target with his/her blows. The alternative balancing fixes this partially, but it does not alter the system substantially. At present, it seems that we have a limited set of movements, all adapted to a single combat style. This is more visible with two-hand melee combat, which lacks some polishing. Do you plan to rework basic combat mechanics and/or make different combat styles more visually distinguishable?

The combat system will be optimized mainly through better balancing. You will notice the difference distinctly. Again, since we have no way to change the main aspects of the game engine, it is not possible for us to alter basic combat mechanics.

29. Regarding the localization of the CSP, have you already thought about using dedicated platforms such as Crowdin or any other system to manage the localization work, or are you going to share the files with the communities directly? We know that this kind of portals are rather costly, but maybe you could think about using Patreon or asking for the community's support in some other way?

The project is being developed in German. We will begin to focus on localization only when dialogues and text changes can be considered more or less finished. This is to avoid having to do translation of large amounts of text that will then not appear in the final version of the CSP or may require further editing. There are a few team members who are proficient in English and Russian. For languages such as Italian and Polish, we rely on our local partners. We do not have yet a definite plan for this aspect of development, though.

30. Regarding the communities' contribution in the translation part, when you are releasing the CSP, are you going to release only the German version, or have you already planned an English version which can be used by other communities for translation purposes?

As already mentioned, for the time being the team is not yet working on translations into other languages. As the project gets close to its final stage, it is reasonable to assume that we will give the various partners access to the CSP in advance, so that they will have the opportunity and time to try it out and work on translations. In order to translate in a meaningful way, it is necessary to have access to the game.



31. You mentioned that the CSP will cancel both Innos' and Beliar's endings, in continuity with 'Forsaken Gods'. Has there been any changes since then on this matter? Could you please tell us a bit more about how the CSP is going to alter those meager original endings?

This idea dates back to the early stages of our project development and has since been abandoned. We consider both Forsaken Gods and Arcania as non-canon.

32. It is well known that Gothic 3 was released too early. This led to several bugs, but also to relevant plot holes and unresolved or hastily dismissed situations. Do you plan to follow the original plot as much as possible anyway, or are you maybe going to add something to it, in order to make it more faithful to what has happened before in 'Gothic 2 – Night of the Raven', or even to Piranha Bytes' drafts and ideas which were disclosed later on?

Yes, improving the story of the original game is precisely one of the founding goals of the CSP.

33. The game has really scarce references to the Unknown Lands, even though it is a huge part of the game map and Xardas seems very interested in them. Are we going to discover more about these lands?

If the question refers to the possibility of exploring the Unknown Lands, again the answer is a definite no. However, there may be new references to these Lands in tales, dialogues and books.

34. In each game of the saga, the presence of Beliar, Adanos and Innos is very strong, and the same can be said about people's faith in them. Nevertheless, we rarely see concrete

examples of 'divine interventions' during the plot, especially in Gothic 3. Since you are going to explore more deeply Xardas' scheming and you put that 'trinity' symbol in the CSP logo, should we expect more interaction with the Gods thanks to your mod?

Belief in the Gods will be portrayed more credibly than in the 'vanilla' version of Gothic 3. However, do not expect face-to-face encounters with Innos. Also in this respect, the CSP will become a Gothic 3 that rests on the characterizing elements of the saga.

35. When playing as the Hero, you often perceive that you are not actually part of any specific group, territory or city. Maybe the CSP could add a way to be acknowledged as an important citizen of a certain town, which could also lead to a reward or something similar? An example of this would be what happened in the previous games, where you were rewarded with the access to Khorinis Upper City or to the Old Camp castle.

Regarding this matter, we have nothing new to report, in addition to what you have already seen in the Calendars.



36. Our Hero was a petty thief in the mainland, before being sent to the Valley of Mines. It seems unlikely that, going back to Myrtana, we can't find any traces of our past, or new characters recognizing us and remembering our criminal past. In addition, our Hero's first thought after landing should have been to go back to places or people he knows and trusts. Is the CSP going to add references, quests, or anything else in relation to this matter?

Only in the form of jokes or taunts from other characters. A key point that has always characterized the Hero is his anonymity. We will stick to the several occasions when the Hero is interrupted precisely in an attempt to say his own name, and we will not go into more detail about his past. Piranha Bytes' original idea will be maintained in the CSP.

37. The mechanics and the quests leading up to rebels' uprisings to free cities was so clunky, unintuitive, and relatively unencouraged that we often ended up freeing the cities by ourselves, one against a thousand, making rebels' plot and activities completely useless. The whole thing was always particularly unrealistic. Have you thought about how to improve this aspect, making the liberation of the continent the real protagonist of the main plot, a great feat to be engraved in the history of the people of Myrtana?

From this point of view, there will be great changes. Rebels and nomads will participate much more in the revolutions and truly engage in the struggle against the invader, instead of simply waiting for a miracle.

38. Still on the subject of liberating cities or other quests related to specific areas (e.g., freeing Gotha from its curse), are cities or villages going to change after these events, to make the world more 'alive and evolving'? This could be done, for instance, by rebuilding houses, adding men at work, maybe setting a rebel camp on fire, and so on.

The game world will be, as far as technical limitations allow, very believable. The purpose of the CSP is to give the impression of wandering around in a living world, with its own internal logic, which is not just a backdrop for the Hero's exploits. So, it will also be possible to enjoy everyday life situations, which have no deeper purpose than to bring the setting to life.

39. There is no point in denying it – the CSP Advent Calendar has rightfully entered the Christmas traditions of each and every Gothic fan. Year after year, we look forward to receiving any news regarding the release date, while also asking; 'Is this going to be the last Calendar?'. So, do you think that you could keep publishing it even after the mod release, maybe using parallel stories, audio contents, artworks, wallpapers or 'making of' materials?

This is not something that we are concerned about at the moment, as we still have quite a bit of work to do before we are in this situation. So, at the moment you can continue to enjoy our annual Advent calendar without concerns. We will worry about what to do next when the time comes.



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