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101 GAMES

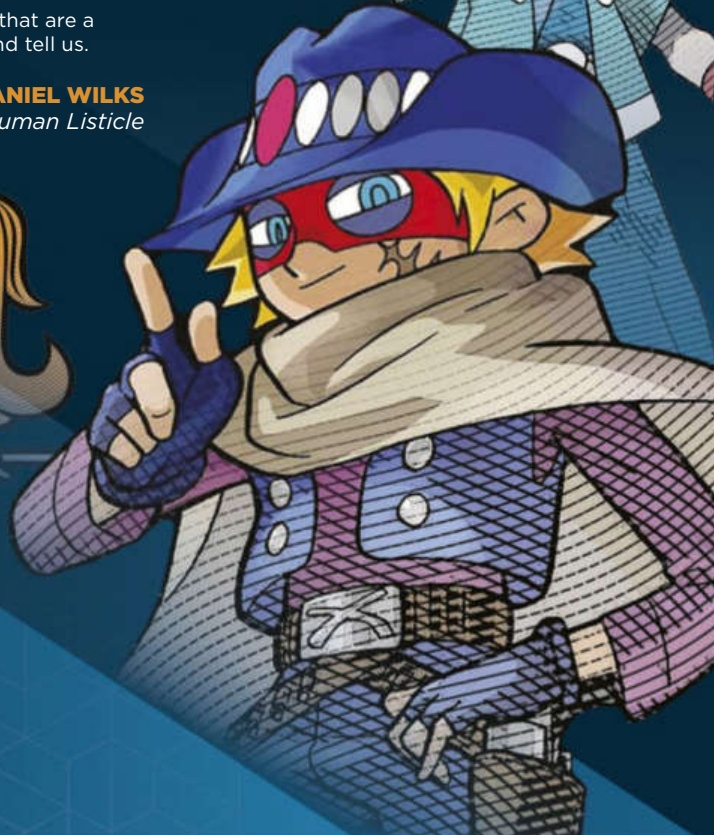
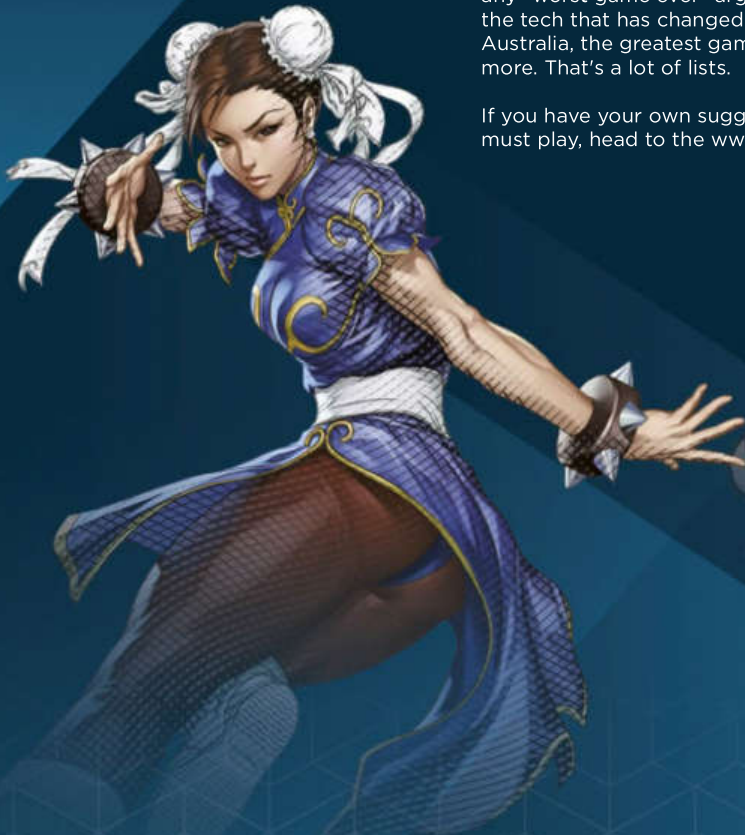
You Must Play

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» There are some games that have left an indelible mark on both the games industry as a whole and gamers in particular, and there are others that are so well respected that they are all but permanent fixtures on "The Best Games of All Time" lists. This isn't that type of magazine. Rather than looking at games that are simply superlative, we've instead focussed on those games that we think all gamers should go out of their way to play - not just because they're good, but because of what they represent or the way in which they typified their genre or style. There's also one so bad you're guaranteed to win any "worst game ever" argument. We also take a look at the tech that has changed gaming, games education in Australia, the greatest games never made and much, much more. That's a lot of lists.

If you have your own suggestions of games that are a must play, head to the www.hyper.com.au and tell us.

DANIEL WILKS
Human Listicle





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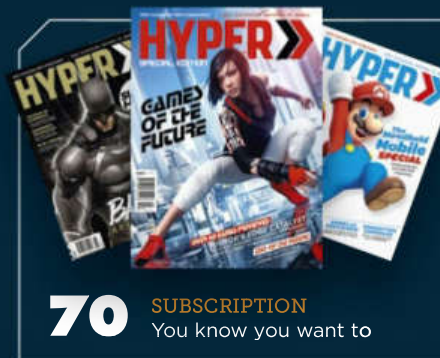
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101 GAMES You Must Play

» Top 100 lists are pretty great when it comes to fomenting conversation but trying to put a bunch of games in numerical order is a hard task. How do you decide that *Half-Life 2* is a better game than *Civilization*? Both are supremely good, hugely influential and near perfect examples of their genre. So which one is better?

Rather than running a Top 100 list, we've instead opted to list 101 games that we think should be played by anyone who considers themselves a gamer. Not all of the games are amazing – hell, some of them aren't even good – but they are all important in some way. Some of the games are fine examples of early genre tropes while others were hugely influential or genre defining. Whatever the case, we consider them all essential.

Pokémon Gold/Silver

The core mechanics of the Pokémon series haven't changed much over the years. Sure, we now have 3D landscapes and an ability to parade our pocket monsters around like spoilt Honey Boo Boos, but Gold & Silver had just the right balance of everything. These are titles of firsts: with the introduction of the night and day cycle, trainers now have to plan ahead to catch special pokémon that only appear at certain times; dual elemental types allow for more diverse combat options; and the friendship/happiness mechanic strengthens player relationships with their little battling buds. The starter Pokémon are solid, and the 251 available

pokémon is not only a manageable number, but one of the best lineups the series has seen. On top of the new Johto region, these games also re-introduce the nostalgic Kanto region, with the late Satoru Iwata single-handedly compressing the beloved map from Blue & Red into the tiny little cartridge. You might have a hard time finding an original copy, but as HeartGold and SoulSilver have been released on 3DS we'd heartily recommend diving in to CATCH 'EM ALL!



DEVELOPER:
GAME FREAK
PUBLISHER: THE
POKÉMON COMPANY
TYPE: RPG
PLATFORM: GAME BOY, GAME
BOY COLOUR, 3DS
YEAR: 1999

NieR

Finding its origins amongst the fifth-ending of the first Drakengard, NieR was destined to be an odd title. Its mix of genres, gameplay and styles don't always gel, but provide an experience quite unlike any other. This can be seen firstly through the game's protagonist, an ageing mercenary that doesn't subscribe to the immaculate appearance of other RPG characters. His daughter is ill, and he's determined to find a cure for the strange virus that threatens to take her life. In actual fact, he's really quite bland, but those that accompany him on

his quest, such as the pompous talking book known as Grimoire Weiss, provide more than enough character and entertainment to fill the stoic main's void. Third person hack n slash combat, top-down shoot 'em ups and even 2D platforming segments all make an appearance - yet NieR continually grounds itself in an explorative three dimensional RPG, all held together by an engrossing story and epic adventure. It's a scattered title that really shouldn't work - yet somehow it does - providing a journey worthy of the upcoming sequel.



DEVELOPER:
CAVIA
PUBLISHER:
SQUARE ENIX
TYPE: ACTION RPG
PLATFORM: PS3, X360
YEAR: 2010



DEVELOPER:
MOJANG
PUBLISHER: MOJANG,
MICROSOFT STUDIOS, SONY
COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
TYPE: SANDBOX
PLATFORM: EVERYTHING
THAT'S NOT NINTENDO
YEAR: 2011

Minecraft

If you haven't encountered Minecraft yet you're living wrong. The procedurally generated open world sandbox is a playground of possibilities, and one that is so malleable it's able to shift with every turn gaming seems to take. Currently appearing on a ridiculous number of platforms, the build-it-how-you-see-it title draws upon our basic instinct to create. Middle Earth, Azeroth, and even a fully mapped out Death Star are but some of the amazing user-created content this title has spawned, not to mention a working 16-bit computer. But creation is only one aspect of the title, with other players focusing on exploring, adventure, combat or taking part in fan made multiplayer minigames. What the future of Minecraft holds is uncertain, but from the AR demo we saw at E3 this year - which projected a 3D Minecraft map onto a table via Microsoft's HoloLens - it looks like this title will continue to break the mould for some time yet.

Deadly Premonition

JAMES COTTEE investigates a murder in a town that's like Twin Peaks times a thousand...



DEVELOPER: ACCESS GAMES
PUBLISHER: RISING STAR GAMES
TYPE: HORROR/COMEDY RPG
PLATFORM: PC, XBOX 360, PLAYSTATION 3
YEAR: 2010

Even if you've never played *Deadly Premonition*, there's a good chance you've seen this game in motion – its cut scenes are so unnerving and peculiar that several of them have gone viral. Like the iconic sequence where the protagonist sits at one end of a comically long dining table while trying to talk to a hearing-impaired elderly woman, as a wistful, whistling folk tune grows ever louder, overpowering the dialogue. The scene ends as he confides with an imaginary friend, divines the future from the shape of the cream in his coffee, and flashes an unnerving, maniacal grin.

It's not immediately clear if he is a hero, a villain, or simply out of his mind.

Deadly Premonition was directed by Hidetaka Suehiro, better known as 'SWERY', the off-kilter creator of *D4: Dark Dreams Don't Die*. While the story and themes have clearly been cribbed from *Twin Peaks*, and the interface owes a great debt to old-school *Resident Evil*, *Deadly Premonition* is more than the sum of its influences.

Rather than being ushered from one strictly linear story or action sequence to the next, the player is presented with emergent objectives in an open world, a picture postcard country town in the Pacific Northwest. The in-game clock dictates how residents mill about and live their lives, when businesses open and close, and what side-quests are available. As time passes the protagonist needs to eat, sleep, shave, change his clothes, and refuel his car.

There is still a great deal of that trademark Japanese gaming wonkiness: the awkwardness of the over-the-shoulder perspective, the finicky nature of the tank controls (especially aggravating on staircases), the derpy vehicle handling, the spindly text font, and a hundred other quirks. And as for the animation of the good citizens of Greenvale, well, maybe a better name for their town would be 'Uncanny Valley.'

But *Deadly Premonition* transcends all these quibbles, for its simulation aspects create a great deal of immersion. It's also a comedy masterpiece. Every slice of the story is moreish, from the fruity puzzles, to the deadpan delivery of the oddest lines, to the cocksure attitude of the player character, FBI Special Agent York. York speaks frequently with his imaginary friend Zach, an in-game explanation for the player's control over events.

Game content is divided between conventional real-world exploration and nightmare zombie sequences where sick red spectral tentacles intrude from some dark dimension. In these dank scenes York is obliged to shoot or flee from shimmering zombie ghosts with mouths cut from ear to ear and spines bent over backwards so they can walk on all fours. These ghoulies are a novel take on the concept of undead body horror, and York's dream sequences are creepier still.

By trying his own take on a David Lynch franchise, SWERY has pushed beyond the conventions of what is merely 'crazy' and has in effect divided by zero. Yet not all gamers have found his iconoclastic approach endearing. This could possibly be put down ambiguous marketing, where customers expecting a cross between *Silent Hill* and *GTA* found themselves playing a cross between *Wild at Heart* and *Animal Crossing*.

We get a clue to the game director's attitude to interactivity when we're first introduced to York, as he discusses his conviction that Tom & Jerry cartoons are a metaphor for a consensually abusive relationship. This could well be a metaphor for the relationship between consumers and highly idiosyncratic Japanese game designers. We profess disdain for fetch quests, cheap monsters, and even cheaper quick-time events. Yet we cop it sweet. **H**

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BioShock

Question: What do you get when you combine Ayn Rand with Walt Disney? Answer: Andrew Ryan – wealthy industrialist, self-styled ubermensch, and one of the most memorable villains in videogame history. Revolted by the altruistic decadence of American society, Ryan fled to the bottom of the ocean and built his underwater utopia: Rapture – an objectivist paradise where the artist would not fear the censor, and the scientist would not be bound by petty morality. Where the great would not be constrained by the small.

But like all utopias, it didn't take long for Rapture to collapse under its own weight. Within a matter of months, Ryan's undersea wonderland was transformed into a drowning hell, undone by the contradictions inherent in its existence. In *BioShock*, we are granted the privilege of witnessing Rapture's death throes, of watching the great Andrew Ryan's sanity disintegrate along with his dreams. As you might expect, it makes for quite a show, one that's definitely worth your time... even if the final act is almost as big a disaster as Rapture itself.



DEVELOPER:
2K BOSTON &
2K AUSTRALIA
PUBLISHER: 2K GAMES
TYPE: FPS/RPG
PLATFORM: PC, PS3,
XBOX 360
YEAR: 2007



DEVELOPER: KCEJ
PUBLISHER: KONAMI
TYPE: ACTION-PLATFORMER
PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION,
SATURN, XBLA, PSN
YEAR: 1997

Castlevania: Symphony of the Night

Symphony of the Night was a radical departure for *Castlevania*: a thorough and inspired reinvention that would define the trajectory of the entire series for years to come. You see, before *SoTN*, *Castlevania* was a fairly standard side-scrolling action-platformer: levels were self-contained and character progression non-existent. Realising this venerable formula had passed its expiry date, directors Toru Hagihara and Koji Igarashi looked to the Nintendo classics *Zelda* and *Super Metroid* for inspiration, introducing rudimentary RPG mechanics and replacing individual levels with a

single vast, nonlinear overworld. Thus the "Metroidvania" was born, and – with the exception of a few less-than-memorable oddities – the series hasn't looked back since.

Just as importantly, *SoTN* is the first game in the *Castlevania* series to really double-down on the whole over-the-top, frilly cravats and stained-glass-window aesthetic that has since become a hallmark of the series. The soundtrack is also incredible, and who could forget that expertly acted dialogue? "What is a man? A miserable little pile of secrets! But enough talk... have at you!" Ahh, good times.



DEVELOPER:
SQUARESOFT
PUBLISHER: SQUARESOFT
TYPE: RPG
PLATFORM: SNES,
PLAYSTATION, DS, IOS ETC.
YEAR: 1995

Chrono Trigger

Developed by a "dream-team" of gaming industry superstars – including the creators of *Final Fantasy*, *Dragon Quest*, and *Dragon Ball Z* – *Chrono Trigger* is a work of staggering genius: a game so far ahead of the curve in all respects that it's (ironically enough) essentially timeless. With an endearing cast of memorable heroes and villains, a complex but remarkably tight narrative, genuinely beautiful visuals, and one of the best game soundtracks ever written, it's an artistic tour de force that – in our opinion – remains unequalled in all of Square's voluminous back

catalogue. But more importantly than that, *Chrono Trigger* is also mechanically flawless, featuring an accessible and engrossing turn-based combat system, robust character development, and boss fights that remain as challenging today as they were 20 years ago.

The fact that *Chrono Trigger* has only received one (weird but by no means bad) sequel and has since languished in obscurity is a mystery to us. This is arguably the best game Square has ever made, and the best they can manage for its 20th anniversary is to release a remixed OST? It just doesn't make any sense.



Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe

The year is 2105. After being forced underground for decades, Speedball – the world’s most brutal sport – has resurfaced in order to reclaim its former glory. Fiercer than ever before, the sequel follows new team Brutal Deluxe as they work their way up a cutthroat ladder. Teams have expanded from five to nine players, all vying to control a solid steel ball – bouncing it off walls, pinball like obstacles, and players skulls – in an attempt to score goals or rack up the most points. Between matches, players can be bought or sold, upgraded or benched, with

individual stats heavily affecting each player’s in-game AI. Match soundscapes are completely diegetic in form: comprised entirely from the roar of the crowd or screams of tackled players – placing a sense of anticipation on every clink of the metal ball as it moves around the court. But most importantly, Speedball 2 is all too aware that it’s a game, not a simulation, creating an over the top experience that is still one of the best multiplayer titles out there – even if it was made over 20 years ago.

Streets of Rage 2

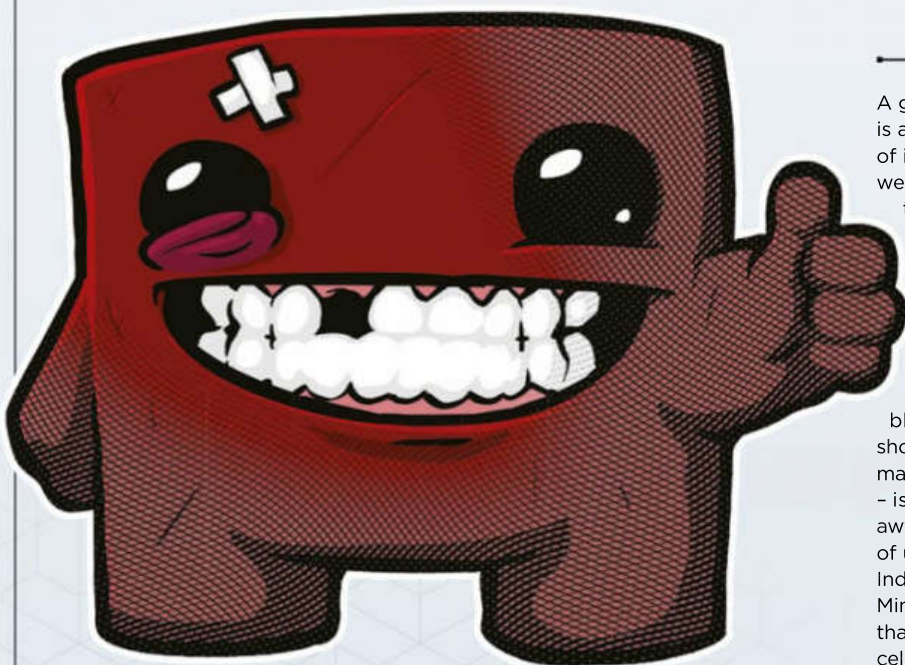
More 80s than the 80s, Streets of Rage 2 blends cutoffs with neon nightlife as a cast of hip teens take to the streets to clear out the trash. The city is overrun with criminals – AGAIN – and original fighter Adam has been kidnapped. Old hats Blaze and Axel return as playable characters, joined this time around by newcomers Eddie “Skate” Hunter and a big grappling lad named Max Thunder. The quintessential beat ‘em up, Streets of Rage 2 stands out in the series as it discards the previous game’s handicap system, working to differentiate characters via unique move and skill-sets. Tweaks like Skate’s ability to dash if the right D-pad is double tapped enrich character choice, moving the series away from a cast of skin swapped fighters. Weapons are numerous and varying, with knives being thrown, baseball bats swung and katanas slicing – as any good katana should. Yet whether playing alone or with friends, it’s hard to find a title that beats the simple joy of punching, kicking and flipping through armies of bikers, ninjas and even robots in these dark, but always raging, city streets.



Super Meat Boy

A game that’s made for speed running, Super Meat Boy is a love letter to platformers everywhere. All elements of its clever design are in some way a homage to the well-worn genre: from cut-scenes that mimic the greats, to gameplay mechanics that draw from a lifetime of jump puzzling. Levels take the form of fast-paced challenges that require players to successfully navigate through a series of spinning, chopping and crushing objects. Quick resets and level transitions make death fleeting, keeping things as fluid and well-paced as the immaculate movement mechanics themselves. For a game with this much blood, the characters are far cuter than they should be. The evil Dr Fetus – an ill-mannered foetus in a well-groomed jar – is but one example of “so wrong but awww”. What’s more, among the cast of unlockable meats hide cross-platform indie favourites such as Braid’s Tim or Minecraft’s Steve, adding diversity to a title that is not only a solid platforming experience, but a celebration of games everywhere.

DEVELOPER: TEAM MEAT
PUBLISHER: TEAM MEAT
TYPE: PLATFORMER
PLATFORM: PC, MAC, PS4, PSV
YEAR: 2010





FTL: Faster Than Light

ALEX MANN has taken his protein pills and put his helmet on

DEVELOPER: SUBSET GAMES
TYPE: TOP DOWN STRATEGY
PLATFORM: PC, MAC, LINUX, IOS
YEAR: 2012

Space games can be intimidating. Thanks to their impossibly infinite settings, they often require more time and energy than other titles. Take Mass Effect, with its complex narrative and branching dialogue trees – not to mention the strangely addictive mining mini-games – or EVE Online, otherwise known as ‘that black hole waiting to destroy the very concept of free time’.

Then come acronyms, also intimidating. Generally used to condense a complex phrase, they also happen to be a great way to make the unwise feel like they’re not part of something – kind of like they’re standing on the outside of a secret club where people no longer use full sentences – AYSOS?

So when FTL gets affectionately recommended, and abbreviated, by those who are down with some heavy space shit, it can be truly alienating (...geddit? Space). But for those who actually breach this perceived barrier and bravely sit down with the game, it’s anything but.

Built upon the strong foundation of the iconic Oregon Trail, FTL puts rockets on your wagon and shoots you into space. Encounters are text-driven, while still remaining incredibly active thanks to real-time combat that involves managing crews, shields, weapons and all sorts of other space gadgets to gain an advantage.

While yes this does sound like complicated space stuff, the beauty of FTL is that it starts simple. You begin with one ship, one race (boring old humans) and one mission – from here? It’s all about learning by doing. As you jump from beacon to beacon, you are greeted with a randomly generated scenario: whether it be a merchant ship looking to trade, a pirate vessel wanting to plunder, or a planet full of mindless space horses. Jumping from star system to star system, you begin to meet other races, encounter rock storms, space nebulas, or ion storms, and glean a little insight into how this universe is made up.

It’s here that FTL really pulls you in, because while each playthrough is completely self-contained, the deep system means you’ll have a wildly different experience each time through. New ships are unlocked with different abilities and crews, all of which are completely customisable. Different races offer different quest options, while their active traits – like the Zoltan’s ability to power part of the ship using their radioactive bodies, or the Rock’s skill when it comes to smothering fires – work to alter the way encounters are approached. You learn only by doing... and yes, by dying; the difficulty system of ‘Easy’, ‘Normal’ and ‘Hard’ really means ‘Hard’, ‘Hella Hard’ and ‘HAHAHA GOOD LUCK’.

Personally, when I first took to the skies I focused all my power on shields and weapons, as shooting things and not getting shot by things seemed like a surefire way of surviving this crazy ‘verse. I mean, who would waste time upgrading doors and sensors when you can have a ship armed to the teeth with lasers, missiles and blast cannons? This went well for the first few spans, but then when my ship caught on fire and my doors weren’t strong enough to keep it contained, or an intruder teleported in and rampaged through like a knife through butter, I began to see the error of putting all my space eggs in the one interplanetary basket.

The truly rewarding part of FTL is that knowledge is power, and a captain who can prepare themselves for the worst – and still roll with the punches – will be the most successful. The fact that said knowledge comes at the hard won price of many wrecked ships in many previous games only adds to the victory.

Oh, and if you skipped over the title, FTL means Faster Than Light. Welcome to the club, now get flying. 🚀

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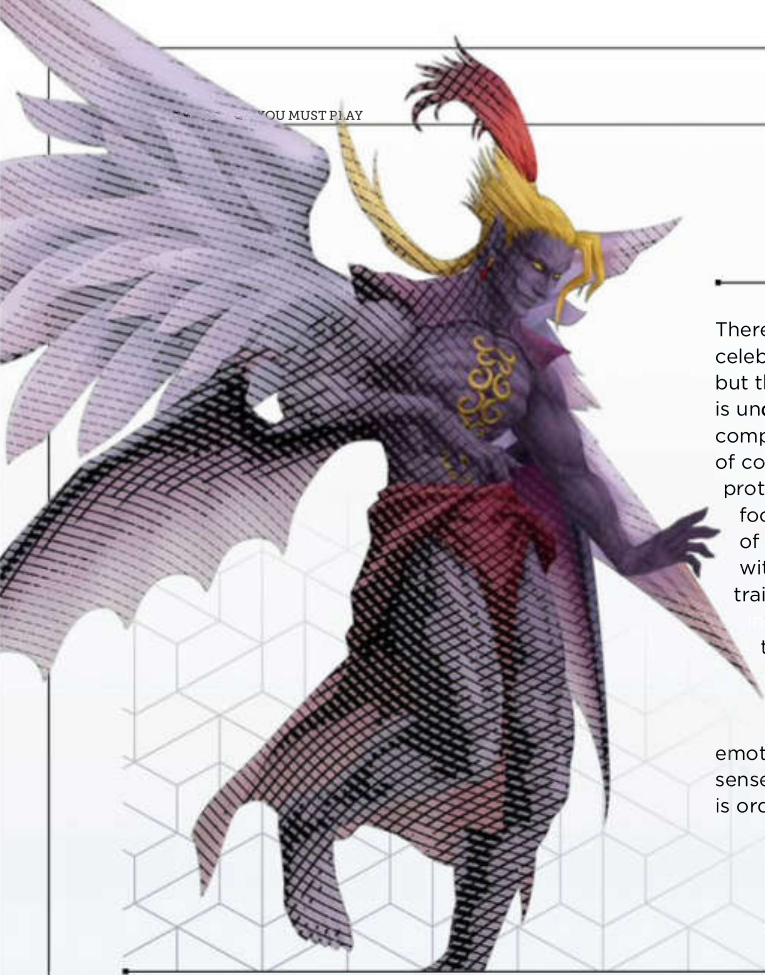


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Final Fantasy VI

There are many things worth celebrating in Final Fantasy VI, but the game's greatest strength is undoubtedly its wealth of compelling characters. Instead of concentrating on a single protagonist, the narrative shifts focus between an ensemble cast of diverse personalities, each with their own unique histories, traits, and abilities. Enhanced by intelligent and lively dialogue, the relationships that develop between these characters as they journey together imbues the narrative with emotional depth and a poignant sense of humanity, the kind of which is ordinarily reserved for film and

literature. You CARE about these people: you empathise with them and want to see what happens to them.

Mechanically, FFVI's about as traditional as they come - random encounters, turn-based battles, the whole deal - and to be honest these elements have not aged particularly well. However, given the gorgeous and expressive visuals, memorable score, and aforementioned cast of loveable characters, it's not difficult to look past the game's shortcomings and appreciate it for what it is: an enduring masterpiece.

DEVELOPER: SQUARESOFT
PUBLISHER: SQUARESOFT
TYPE: RPG
PLATFORM: SNES, PLAYSTATION, GBA, IOS, ETC.
YEAR: 1994

Doom

Aw c'mon... we don't need to tell you about Doom, do we? It's DOOM, for god's sake. The game that pretty much invented first-person shooters. Yes, fine: stuff like Maze War and Ultima Underworld and Wolfenstein all came out before it, but it was Doom that propelled the FPS into mainstream consciousness, cementing it as the premier genre on PC for more than a decade. Doom was imps and pinkies and Barons of Hell and ARGH HOLY SHIT IT'S A CYBERDEMON RUN RUN RUN. It was the shotty and the chaingun and the glorious, screen-clearing BFG turning a horde of screeching demons into harmless piles of viscera and goo. Doom was the shit - IS the shit, as fist-pumpingly gratifying today as it was 23 years ago.

But you don't need us to tell you this. You already know. But maybe you were looking for an excuse to fire it up again, maybe try out some of the new mods that are still being made for it? Well, here you go: have at it.



Fallout: New Vegas

Fallout: New Vegas is a wonderful compromise, combining the accessibility and addictiveness of Fallout 3 with the hardcore sensibilities and depth of Fallouts 1 & 2. AZZZs trite as it sounds, the truth is that this is a game with something for everyone. If you want an easy-to-play run-and-gun adventure, all you gotta do is skip the dialogue and turn the difficulty down. But if you want a challenging role-playing game with a deep and rewarding narrative, then do just the opposite. The point is that you've got a choice. Few games offer that kind of flexibility.

What really makes a F:NV a superior game to F3, though, is the quality of its dialogue and characterisation. Unlike their counterparts in the Capital Wasteland, the NPCs you encounter in the Mojave Desert are not just thinly veiled quest-kiosks. They are characters in the proper sense of the word, possessed of idiosyncratic views, motives, and mannerisms. They are charismatic and complex and - in some cases - darkly hilarious. Who could forget Fisto the sexbot? "Numbness will subside in several minutes," he says - but trust us: he lies.

DEVELOPER: OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT
PUBLISHER: BETHESDA SOFTWORKS
TYPE: RPG
PLATFORM: PC, XBOX 360, PS3
YEAR: 2010



DEVELOPER: ID SOFTWARE
PUBLISHER: GT INTERACTIVE
TYPE: FPS
PLATFORM: EVERYTHING
YEAR: 1992

LandStalker: The Treasures of King Nole

At first LandStalker looks a lot like its RPG brethren – a fantasy character fighting fantasy monsters in a top down fantasy world. Yet take a closer look and you'll find something a little more surprising. Gameplay is incredibly active, with the ability to jump drastically changing navigation. Flat levels suddenly become vertical playgrounds as platforming elements allow players to climb and descend like no other fantasy title of its time. Combat is in real time, with sword swings being triggered at the push of a button, and random encounters are thrown to the

dust – for LandStalker's enemies stand brazenly out in the open.

And boy does it look good. Environments are expertly rendered, with an attention to detail given to every little facet, complimented by fully animated sprites, with a range of movement going far beyond the simple left foot, right foot, and action frames. Not only is LandStalker a joy to play, but its focus on active gameplay and rich design went on to influence beloved titles like Terranigma (another must play for any RPG fan) and for that we are eternally grateful.



DEVELOPER:
CLIMAX
ENTERTAINMENT
PUBLISHER: SEGA
TYPE: ACTION RPG
PLATFORM: SEGA
MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1992

*: Heh heh heh...
there are still more riddles
to solve over there...



DEVELOPER:
TAKUMI
CORPORATION
PUBLISHER: CAPCOM
TYPE: SHOOTER
PLATFORM: ARCADE,
DREAMCAST
YEAR: 2000

Mars Matrix

One of the rare arcade shooters to be displayed on a horizontal monitor, Mars Matrix mixes 3D elements with shoot 'em up mayhem. Earth's decaying, but the humans who have settled on Mars have been providing support for decades. Yet recently this relationship has become strained, and the occupants of Mars have decided to rebel, fortifying themselves for war. Players take control of Earth's newest Mosquito class fighter, with two builds offering different stats that govern weaponry, power, mobility and speed. Instead of relying on power-ups and enemy drops, this title's varying attacks are player controlled, with button combinations allowing for a switch between continuous streams, charge shots, and piercing cannons at will, not to mention the ability to round up enemy bullets in a protective shield and then fling them straight back at foes. The active nature of Mars Matrix's combat offers a shooter that no longer relies on the luck of the draw, adding a tactical element to the familiar dodge and gun mechanics.

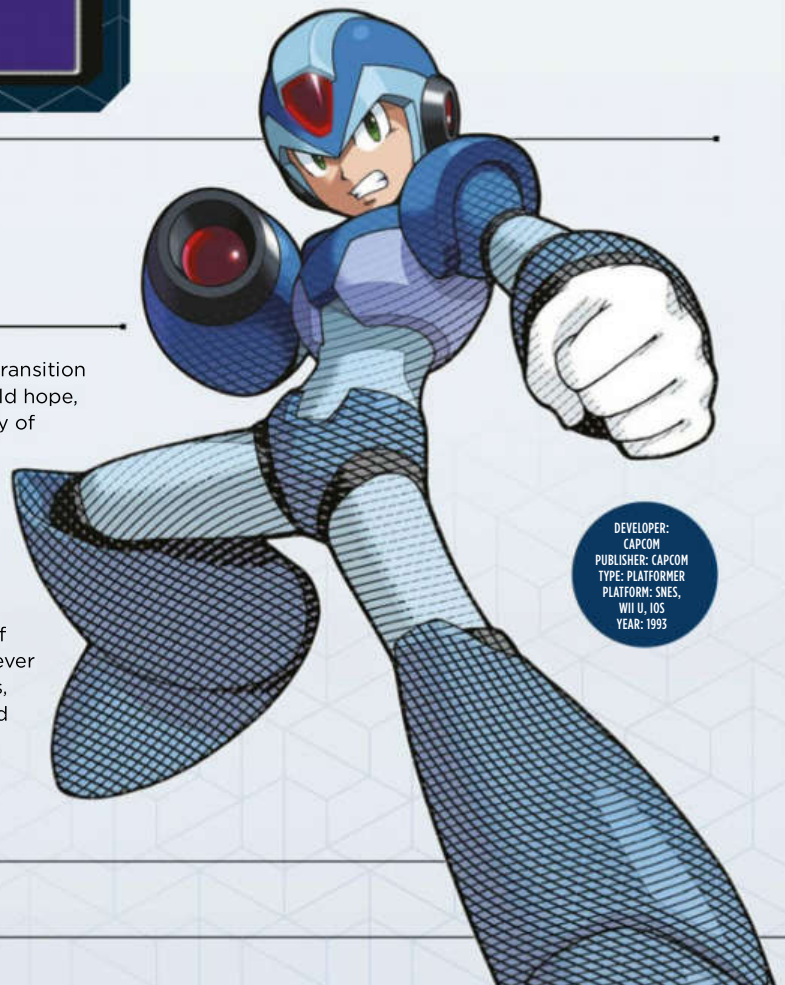
Mega Man X

From its conception the Mega Man series has been a brilliant study in game design. Its ability to teach game mechanics through play without the use of annoying tutorials is legendary, but none do it quite so well as Mega Man X. This game marks a huge change for the series: the art-style – one that largely remained the same from day one – has been given an overhaul; screens now scroll comfortably from left to right, abandoning the forced camera shift of previous titles, and new movement such as wall and ground slides completely alter gameplay.

With all these changes you'd think even veterans would need to take

time adjusting, but the transition is as smooth as you could hope, teaching players the way of things in the first level alone without dropping a beat, continuing to offer the same high quality experience for the remainder of the game.

But most important of all, X marks Zero's first ever appearance in the series, the blonde haired, sword wielding robot that is hands down Mega Man's coolest character to date.



DEVELOPER:
CAPCOM
PUBLISHER: CAPCOM
TYPE: PLATFORMER
PLATFORM: SNES,
WII U, IOS
YEAR: 1993


IL2: Cliffs of Dover with Team Fusion mod

BENNETT RING is an enemy ace

IL2: Cliffs of Dover promised to be the ultimate combat flight simulator of all time. It would recreate the most famous air war, the Battle of Britain, to a degree of fidelity never seen before... or for that matter, since. It would include every major aircraft of the period, with a whopping 25 different aircraft in total, covering everything from the graceful Spitfire to the howling Ju-87 diver bomber. Every aircraft would include a fully switchable cockpit, which in laymen's speak means every button and switch actually works identically to the real aircraft. Want to take off in that Hurricane? You'd better open the radiator, crank the fuel lever, switch on the magnetos and give it 10% throttle before hitting the starter button. Then you'd have to wait a minute to let the engine warm up before giving it any gas, otherwise your engine would fail within minutes. It had the most detailed graphics engine ever seen, and the cherry on the top was 128 player online battles. With industry legend Oleg Maddox heading up the development team, simulator fans could hardly believe what was being promised. And they shouldn't have, because the game that came out was an unplayable wreck, more Spruce Goose than SR-71 Blackbird.

With more bugs than a mothballed Russian airfield, the game was plagued by massive issues that had the community up in arms. Half of the systems in the aircraft didn't work properly, with engines failing at weird times, the AI tending to eat dirt at the earliest possible opportunity, and more crashes than a drunken test pilot. The development team promised to fix these myriad problems via patches, but a year of work later and the game was still in a very poor state. Oleg ended up leaving the team – some would say in disgrace – and it wasn't long after that Maddox games shut up shop.

Despite its many issues, stubborn simmers refused to give up, and one of the most active communities around the game was the Air Tactical Assault Group. These were serious simmers, with an active server hosting missions that replicated the BoB battles. Some of their users happened to be software developers, and they soon began talking about fixing Cliffs of Dover. Thus was born Team Fusion, a passionate yet small group of modders who would spend the next few years fixing nearly every issue within the game. At the time of print the Team Fusion mod was at version 4.312, and I've been flying it at least once per week for the last six months. When combined with Reshade, another app which adds antialiasing to the game, this is unquestionably the finest looking flight simulator of all time. The world is so detailed that online flyers have to use landmarks to navigate. Meanwhile all of the aircraft systems now work perfectly, matching the historical data, and online battles of 70 or more pilots are common during peak hours on the weekend. It is, in a word, superb.

Team Fusion has spent much of the past year developing tools to create new content, and the plan is to release new theatres of combat along with new aircraft in late 2016. That is indeed a long time to wait, but in the meantime the team has delivered the finest combat flight simulator I've ever played. With hundreds of missions freely available from the community, along with paid expansions by Desastersoft.de, this game truly shows how so few protected so much for so many. If you'd like to give it a shot, the following thread explains the slightly convoluted patching process, as well as eases you into flying these magnificent machines: <http://theairtacticalassaultgroup.com/forum/showthread.php?t=5058&p=52711>. 

DEVELOPER:
TC COMPANY,
TEAM FUSION
PUBLISHER: TC COMPANY
TYPE: COMBAT FLIGHT SIM
PLATFORM: PC
YEAR: 2011



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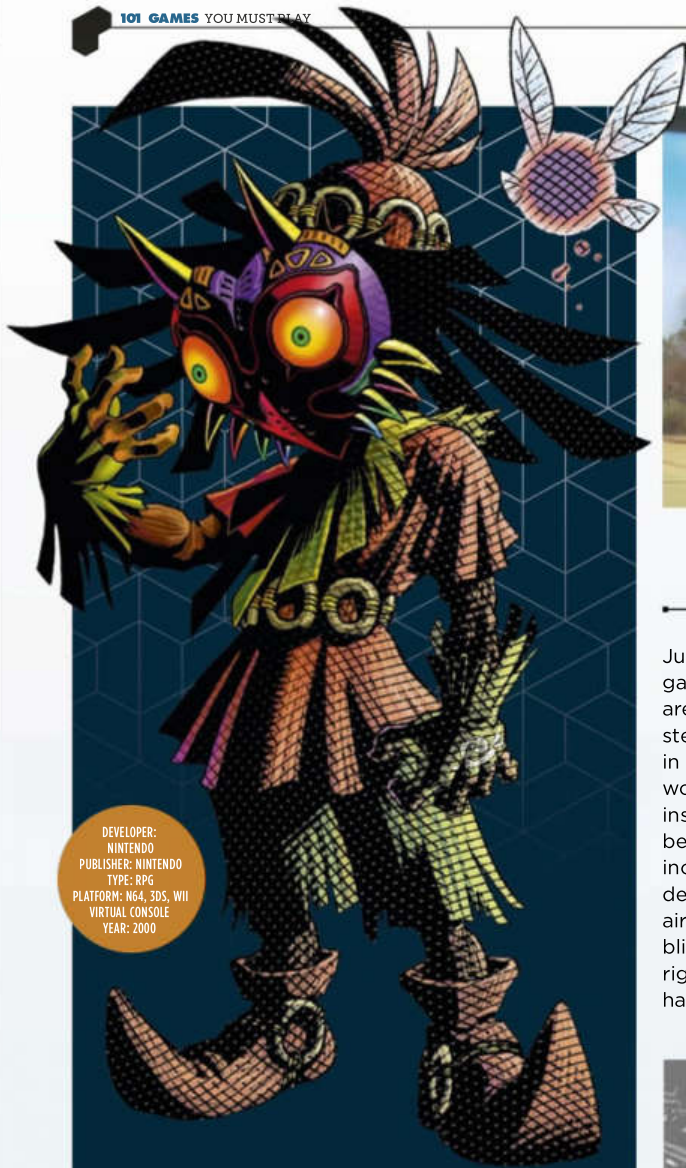
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DEVELOPER:
NINTENDO
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
TYPE: RPG
PLATFORM: NG4, 3DS, Wii
VIRTUAL CONSOLE
YEAR: 2000

Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask

Built in a year with assets originally constructed for Ocarina of Time, Majora's Mask is – like many great works of art – very much a product of its limitations. As the developers explain in an interview with (sadly deceased) Nintendo president Satoru Iwata, the game's Groundhog Day-esque premise, in which the player is tasked with repeating the same three days over and over again, was simply a clever way of minimising production time. So too with the masks, which went from being an afterthought in Ocarina to a centerpiece feature in Majora's, transforming Link's identity and abilities in radical new ways.

Majora's Mask is a gloomy, eerily beautiful game. Even though it's made almost entirely of parts recycled from Ocarina, it's distinguished from its predecessor – and the rest of the Zelda series – by an oppressive atmosphere of omnipresent dread. There's something scary about this game, with its insanely glowering moon (which is even more terrifying in the 3DS remake) and the crushing fatalism it represents. People who pine for a "dark and mature" take on Zelda need look no further than this.



DEVELOPER:
AVALANCHE STUDIOS
PUBLISHER: EIDOS
INTERACTIVE
TYPE: OPEN-WORLD ACTION
PLATFORM: PC, PS3,
XBOX 360
YEAR: 2010

Just Cause 2

Just Cause 2 is an open-world action game about blowing things up. You are Rico Rodriguez: a suave Latino stereotype whose sole purpose in life is to parachute into third-world dictatorships and foment insurrection by exploding anything belonging to the regime. This includes but is not limited to: fuel depots, weapons facilities, factories, airports, skyscrapers, rocketships, blimps, statues, and offshore oil rigs. To help achieve this end, Rico has access to a dizzying array of

weapons and vehicles, including machine guns, rocket launchers, helicopters, fighter jets, tanks, and – most dangerous of all – the double-ended grappling hook.

Using Rico's grappling hook to cause creative mayhem is unbelievably gratifying. At first you start simple, attaching bad guys to moving vehicles or explosive barrels, but after a while you get bored and start experimenting – and that, ladies and gentlemen, is when the fun really starts.



DEVELOPER:
Q ENTERTAINMENT
PUBLISHER: BANDAI
TYPE: RHYTHM-PUZZLE
PLATFORM: PSP, PS2,
PC, XBLA ETC.
YEAR: 2004

Lumines

Lumines is bliss. Playing it – particularly with headphones on – is an experience comparable to contemplating a Zen koan. It sends you into a meditative trance, purging your mind of any concern that isn't directly related to the arrangement of falling multicoloured blocks.

In crass, earthly terms, it's a puzzle game a bit like Tetris: multicoloured blocks fall from the sky and your job is to arrange them into single-coloured squares. Unlike Tetris, though, Lumines features a soundtrack of top-shelf electronica

that rhythmically regulates the action on-screen. A line – called the "timeline" – sweeps across the screen in tempo with the music, clearing away completed blocks. If there aren't any blocks to clear, the timeline and music loop, reinforcing your success and failure and heightening the sensation of both.

It's a hypnotic, engrossing experience: the kind of thing you can lose hours to without even realising. And if that isn't the definition of a great game, then what is?

Halo 3

From the first few seconds Halo 3 hits the ground running – quite literally – as the opening sequence sees series hero Master Chief fall out of the sky like a meteor, dust himself off and head into the fray guns blazing. Promising to “finish the fight”, this title wraps up the Covenant War by placing Chief beside Arbiter in campaign co-op. Swarms of enemies are no longer filtered through narrow hallways, but rather placed on sprawling open battlefields, testing player skills like never before. But by far the most groundbreaking aspect

of Halo 3 lies with its multiplayer, offering an incredibly generous amount of content in order to enrich the experience for all online players. Forge, an editor that allows for level creation and customisation, is only one of the many options this hefty package introduced, as new treats such as varying modes, scaled maps and camera control all worked to create a vibrant community of online gamers that single-handedly put Xbox Live on the map.



DEVELOPER:
BUNGIE
PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT
GAME STUDIOS
TYPE: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER
PLATFORM: XBOX 360,
XBOX ONE
YEAR: 2007



DEVELOPER:
ROCKSTAR NORTH
PUBLISHER:
ROCKSTAR GAMES
TYPE: SANDBOX ADVENTURE
PLATFORM: PS2, PC,
XBOX, OS X
YEAR: 2002

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City

Sam Houser – Rockstar president and Vice City writer – wanted to prove games could be as visually engaging as film, and with Vice City’s uber ‘80s kitsch, he seems to have succeeded.

The Miami inspired environment blends neon menus and sun-blessed beaches with cold alleyways and smokey lounges, providing the perfect playground for its characters to recklessly lose control. With a storyline that pays tribute to films like Scarface and Goodfellas, Vice City is an exaggerated take on the corrupt, drug-filled world of crime and betrayal in America. An

all-star soundtrack sets the mood with bands like Tears for Fears, Kate Bush, and Mötley Crüe blaring from the radio, while memorable characters only add to main man Tommy Vercetti’s boisterous charm. But no matter how many cars he crashed, or how many one liners dropped, Vercetti could never match the cold-hard-cool of Lance Vance: cocaine dealer, club owner and one of our favourite Rockstar characters to date. Like a well crafted mise-en-scène, all these elements help push VC beyond mere power fantasy, creating an experience worthy of the silver screen.



DEVELOPER:
PIRANHA BYTES
PUBLISHER: JOWOOD
ENTERTAINMENT, ATARI
TYPE: ACTION RPG
PLATFORM: PC
YEAR: 2002

Gothic II

When it comes to open world fantasy adventures, the Gothic series is criminally overlooked. It achieves so much, especially considering when it was released. Characters are free to grow however they like, with the ability to wield a vast array of weaponry alongside many forms of magic. Different world factions, such as dragon hunters, mages, and templars, make the world feel vibrant and alive while the choices you make have tangible rewards/consequences. Yet what makes this series so clever is that skill-point allocation isn’t purely about buffing – it is physically noticeable. Sword fighting, for instance, is a real-time mix of chaining the right moves together to block, parry or dodge, alongside four different directional attacks. Players may start off swinging their weapon awkwardly with stiff limbs but as they train their skills (yes, you actually have to find people skilled enough to teach you things – crazy right?) eventually find themselves spinning, pirouetting and slicing their enemies to shreds. The fact that development is far more organic than most titles, even by today’s standards, makes progressing through this fantasy world a truly rewarding experience.

Papers, Please

Papers, Please is a grim, unpleasant game. It isn't fun – it isn't something you play to relax after a hard day at work. It is work. You are a checkpoint inspector working for the fictional but all-too-real totalitarian regime of Arstotzka. Your job is to inspect the paperwork of travellers attempting to cross the border and ensure everything's up to snuff and on the up and up. Again, if this sounds like soul-crushing bureaucratic gruntwork, it's because it is soul-crushing bureaucratic gruntwork.

Papers, Please is a poignant demonstration of what Hannah Arendt famously calls the "banality of evil". It makes you a solitary cog in a vast unfeeling machine and challenges you to retain your humanity. Do you let the sick woman in to get life-saving medical treatment even though her passport is out of date? Do you risk losing a portion of your pay – which you need to feed your family – so that a husband and wife can reunite?

A lot of games do moral gameplay, but Papers, Please is one of the very that does it well. It isn't fun – it's edifying. Which is exactly what good art ought to be.



DEVELOPER: LUCAS POPE
PUBLISHER: LUCAS POPE
TYPE: DYSTOPIAN DOCUMENT THRILLER
PLATFORM: PC, IOS
YEAR: 2013



DEVELOPER: BLACK ISLE STUDIOS
PUBLISHER: INTERPLAY
TYPE: RPG
PLATFORM: PC
YEAR: 1999

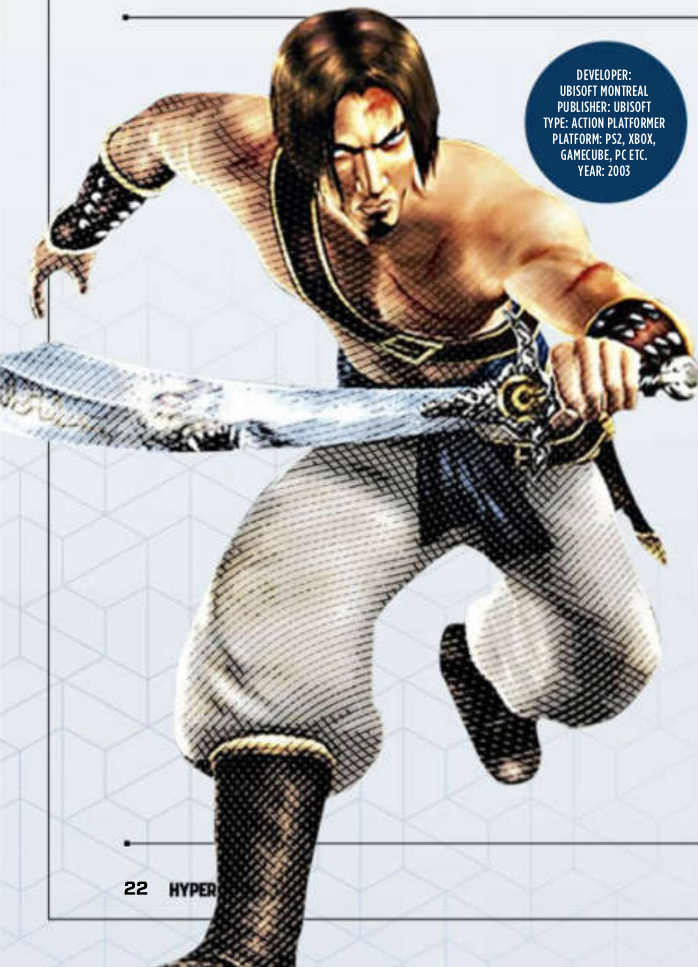
Planescape: Torment

Placing players in the role of an amnesiac immortal, Planescape: Torment is an earnest, philosophical game. Dauntingly verbose, it grapples with topics typically confined to musty tomes authored by dead Europeans with unpronounceable surnames. What is identity? What is responsibility? Are we merely the sum of our memories? Placed in the blood and dust-caked sandals of the Nameless One, players are forced to confront these questions head-on.

It's heavy stuff, but thanks to the

masterful prose of lead writer Chris Avellone, Torment never buckles under its own weight – it never feels pretentious, or wordy for the sake of it. The characters you encounter in this fractured reality are sympathetic and memorable: you'll enjoy spending time with them as much as you'll enjoy unravelling the philosophical conundrums they embody.

Word to the wise, though: if you're going to play Torment, make sure to install the HD mod first. It's more or less unplayable without it.



DEVELOPER: UBI SOFT MONTREAL
PUBLISHER: UBI SOFT
TYPE: ACTION PLATFORMER
PLATFORM: PS2, XBOX, GAMECUBE, PC ETC.
YEAR: 2003

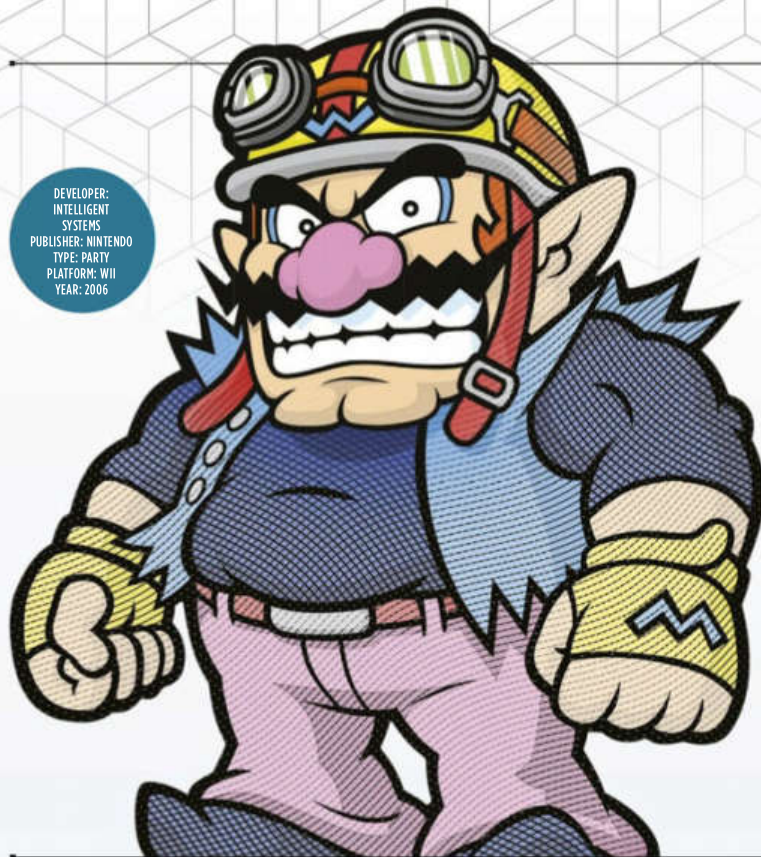
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time

Now this is how you do a reboot. Designed by Jordan Mechner, the original Prince of Persia was released in 1989 and is regarded as a bit of a masterpiece, combining gorgeous rctoscoped visuals with hard-as-balls precision platforming to create something wholly unique and memorable. Then came the sequels – Shadow of the Flame in 93 and Prince of Persia 3D in 99. Both were shithouse. For a while there it looked like the franchise was finished, but then in 2003, The Sands of Time was released and... well, it blew our freakin minds.

The truly incredible thing

about SoT is that it captures all the acrobatic finesse of the original PoP but – thanks to its clever time-reversal mechanic – avoids replicating that game's discouraging difficulty. Because messing up isn't an instant death sentence, you're encouraged to take risks, to leap with abandon from platform to platform, sliding down drapes and swinging from poles like a fearless little monkey man. You are, in other words, free to revel in the Prince's abilities: to go with the flow. It's glorious.

And then they ruined it with a "dark and edgy" sequel. Sigh.



DEVELOPER:
INTELLIGENT
SYSTEMS
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
TYPE: PARTY
PLATFORM: WII
YEAR: 2006

WarioWare: Smooth Moves

There are zany, crazy, ridiculous games and then there is WarioWare – Nintendo's take on a Japanese variety show. Despite his ties to Mario, Wario's self-made mini-games leave the Mushroom Kingdom behind in exchange for the real world... well, quasi-real world. Characters like Jimmy T jive with a legion of disco kitties as players manipulate the Wiimote – known here as the "Form Baton" – in various positions to complete bite-sized tasks. High-fiving dogs, balancing brooms or shoving false teeth into an old lady's mouth are just a few examples of the bizarre missions players must perform, made hectic by quick transitions under a gruelling timer. It's a title best experienced with friends, passing the Wiimote among a group and laughing as each person struggles to keep up with the whacky tasks. This may sound eerily similar to an unrealistic Nintendo infomercial – and yet it's anything but forced, as the pure craziness of Smooth Moves constantly catches players off guard. Such grace, they'll cry! Such style! Such hors d'oeuvres... that's WarioWare for you.

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2

Whether you're a fan of skate culture or not, it's hard to deny the charm of Tony Hawk's second outing. The game's arcade-y nature puts players in control of a large cast of rockstar skaters, complete with the power to sail through the air with gravity defying bunny hops or chain together ridiculous combos without losing balance. The in-your-face attitude of the game's soundtrack creates a space where four wheeled anarchy feels as natural as breathing, with punk heroes like Bad Religion, Papa Roach, and Rage Against

the Machine leading the charge. Expansive levels transform everyday urban environments into pro-skating playgrounds, where both collectables and secret locations work to give players tangible goals beyond landing a ridiculous trick. But the fact that the solid campaign mode is backed up by a two-player freeform experience is the real genius, rendering Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 a game for all occasions – simultaneously cementing it as one of the the PlayStation era's defining titles.



DEVELOPER:
NEVERSOFTECH
PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION
TYPE: SKATING
PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 2000



DEVELOPER:
SEGA AM2
PUBLISHER: SEGA
TYPE: FIGHTER
PLATFORM: ARCADE,
PC, PSN, XBLA
YEAR: 1994

Virtua Fighter 2

The large array of sequels in this list are proof that gaming doesn't suffer from 'sequelitis' quite as much as some like to believe, and Virtua Fighter is the perfect example of a second game done right. As one of the first games to enter the 3D world, Virtua Fighter already had a unique push – but its focus on a rock, paper, scissors style of gameplay is what really set it apart from other titles.

With more control, a smoother frame rate and a much needed graphic overhaul, Virtua Fighter 2 takes what made its predecessor so good, and simply does it better. Staying true to its nature, there are still no magical fireballs, rib-crushing harpoons or fantastical creatures, just a solid focus on kicks, punches and blocks. This requires players to read their opponents, answering attacks with the appropriate counter-attack, instead of chaining together a ridiculous amount of ups, downs, half circles and punches. At first the roster may seem a little small – but don't let this fool you – as each character is completely unique in the way they fight and takes serious time to master.



Burnout 3: Takedown

JAMES O'CONNOR presents the
Hottest Take of 2004.

It was inevitable, really, that you'd crash at that intersection. While many driving games are loving odes to cars, Burnout has always felt more like a cautionary tale – it's insane that we trust millions of people worldwide to pilot fast-moving metal death traps – with Burnout 3 being the absolute zenith of the series' car crash porn. The brakes exist only to be tapped so that one may slide around a corner at speed. When a game rewards you for driving as fast as possible on the wrong side of the road, crashing is a constant possibility. So when you were racing towards that intersection, with traffic entering it from multiple directions and your opponents right on your tail, you knew you were probably going to crash. And that was fine... better than fine, in fact.

It's the 'Aftertouch' mechanic that has made me think about Burnout 3 at least once every week or two since its 2004 release. I'm not thinking about these crashes in an erotic way, as J. G. Ballard and David Cronenberg suggest one might, but I do have a distinct memory of the UK games mag 'Games TM' declaring that the game was 'better than multiple orgasms', and there certainly are moments of extreme, cathartic pleasure to be had. Aftertouch allows you to keep steering your vehicle after a crash has reduced it to a written-off wreck. Usually the camera flips around so you can see any opponents behind you, time slows to a crawl, and you do your best to careen your twisted metal into your opponents. Crashing will typically rip a chunk off of your boost bar, but if you can land a takedown in Aftertouch, you'll spawn again with your boost replenished. The little triumphant sound effect the game plays whenever you pull one off is the glacé cherry on top of a cake that was already pretty well iced.

The satisfaction of taking a disaster and turning it into a victory is unparalleled by anything else I've ever experienced in a driving game, but even without it Burnout 3 would probably still be my favourite racer ever made. It's a tremendous piece of game design, a high-octane racer in which instances of good or bad luck are always contingent on the risks you chose to take. Going back to the game now, it's not as good-looking as one recalls, and the steering in the first set of cars you unlock is pretty sluggish, but the thrills are still immediate. Success in Burnout 3 requires the most dangerous driving possible, whether that means narrowly missing on-coming cars while driving on the wrong side of the road, or sliding around a busy corner, slipping between two cars and shoving an opponent into a wall.

The risk/reward factor of every action needs to be considered, and more often than not the risks are too tempting to turn down.

And then there's Crash Mode, a Burnout fixture that the third game perfected. Burnout 3 featured 100 crash levels, and they remain the most viscerally satisfying affairs imaginable. You hurl your car into traffic in the hopes of causing the biggest pile-ups possible, with the option of exploding your wreck popping up once enough cars are damaged. It's the most satisfying, violent puzzle game out there.

Future Burnout titles couldn't reach the same heights as Takedown. 2005's Burnout Revenge was tremendous, but traffic checking (which basically made rear-enders advantageous) made the races feel too safe, and Burnout Paradise's open world forsook the previous' games track variety and became irritating to navigate after a while. Burnout 3 remains the high point of not just the series, but the genre... just remember to mute the irritating DJ Atomika. ❌

DEVELOPER: CRITERION GAMES
PUBLISHER: EA
TYPE: ARCADE RACER
PLATFORM: XBOX, PLAYSTATION 2
YEAR: 2004



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Street Fighter III: Third Strike



DEVELOPER:
CAPCOM
PUBLISHER: CAPCOM
TYPE: FIGHTING
PLATFORM: ARCADE,
DREAMCAST, PS2/3,
XBOX/360
YEAR: 1999

Street Fighter III: Third Strike is something of an oddity in the Streeties series. A commercial flop at the time of its release, over the years it gradually attracted a hardcore following and became a popular fixture at tournaments like EVO and Super Battle Opera. Now it's widely regarded as the pinnacle of the series – even better than SFIV and Super Turbo – and it's hard to see why.

Third Strike is an extraordinarily elegant game, perfectly tuned and almost perfectly balanced. What really sets it apart is the completeness

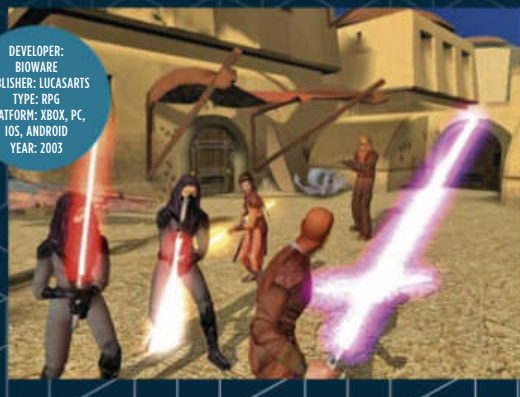
of its roster: playing competitively, each character occupies their own niche in the game's tactical ecology, necessitating a unique approach, a unique overall strategy for controlling the fight. This is true even of superficially similar characters: try playing Akuma like Ryu, for example.

On top of that, SFIII was – and remains – a stunningly beautiful game, featuring gorgeous hand-drawn sprites animated at a fluid 60 frames per second. The only downside is the final boss character, Gill. God we hate Gill. He is the WORST.

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic

In hindsight, it's hard not to regard Knights of the Old Republic as a kind of prototype for Mass Effect. Both are space-opera RPGs that follow implausibly charismatic protagonists and their mixed-species entourage as they traipse from planet to planet in a bid to stop galaxy-ending evil. Both feature real-time combat that can be paused at whim, dichotomous morality systems, and a hub ship where all your companions stand around waiting for you to solve their personal problems. Both were directed by Casey Hudson and star Jennifer Hale and Raphael Sbarge.

But of course the big difference between the two is KOTOR is freakin STAR WARS. It's lightsabers and wookies and blasters that go pew pew pew. It's Jedi and Sith and the Mos Eisley cantina music that gets stuck in your head for days. With The Force Awakens just around the corner, the urge to revisit this – the best Star Wars game ever made – is just too strong to ignore. And now that it's available for pretty much every platform in the galaxy, including smartphones, you'd have to be a real poo-doo head not to give it one more go for old time's sake.



DEVELOPER:
BIOWARE
PUBLISHER: LUCASARTS
TYPE: RPG
PLATFORM: XBOX, PC,
IOS, ANDROID
YEAR: 2003



DEVELOPER:
NINTENDO
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
TYPE: FIGHTING
PLATFORM: SNES, WII/WII U
VIRTUAL CONSOLE
YEAR: 1994

Super Punch Out!!

Before Street Fighter cornered the market in fighting games starring vaguely racist stereotypes, there was Punch Out!! – Nintendo's annoyingly punctuated NES/arcade title that played a bit like a rhythm game sans music. Viewed from directly behind your transparent (or tiny in the NES's case) boxer man, each bout was essentially a boss fight where you'd observe your opponents, predict their patterns, and then beat them senseless. It was good cartoony fun.

In 1994, Nintendo followed up with Super Punch Out!! for the Super

Nintendo. Again empowered with exclamation marks, it was more of the same, but better looking and with way more opponents. In addition to returning fighters from the arcade/NES originals, SPO featured a Chinese dude who would beat you with a stick, an effeminate French man with a curly moustache, and an fatass clown who'd clap you into unconsciousness.

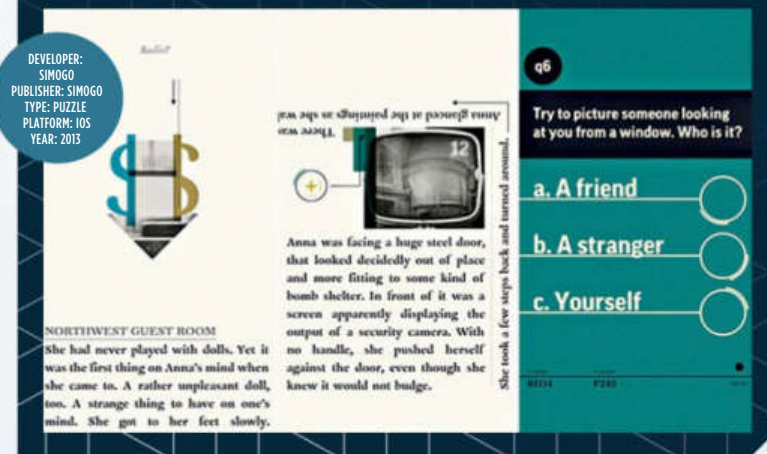
The best thing about SPO, though, is that it isn't as murderously difficult as its predecessors. We actually managed to finish this one – without cheats, even!

DEViCE6

Text-based adventures are nothing new, but DEViCE6 is so text-heavy it walks the narrow line between game and book. Yet this title is so beautifully laid out and original that it's hard to feel anything but engrossed. Each chapter requires the user to follow protagonist Anna as she explores a strange island. Lines of text tiptoe across the screens as if laid out in an E.E Cummings poem, splitting into different paths that bend and wind, often requiring the user to physically shift their device in order to follow

the journey. Multi-layered pictures scroll in different directions, while scientific diagrams dip in and out of colour and interactivity.

At first glance things might seem strange and pointless, but as chapters unfold it becomes apparent that each section has a purpose, being necessary to solve puzzles and proceed. Like a puzzle room entirely on your tablet or phone, DEViCE6's clever mix of intrigue, storytelling, sound and presentation gel together to make an experience ideal for a mobile gaming world.



Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem

Survival horror games often see players walking down dark hallways, dreading what they might find around the next corner. Eternal Darkness is no exception, yet what actually lurks in the darkness is quite out of the ordinary by any game's standards. While the generation-spanning story still offers up plenty of traditional ghouls, ghosts, and villains, these only act as a catalyst for the real scares, seen as characters slowly begin to lose their minds. Strange things start to happen – and not only to the characters – but to the players themselves: televisions will suddenly mute during important dialogue, controllers will disconnect just as a zombie horde strikes, or, most horrible of all, game data will seemingly delete itself when attempting to save. There's no doubting that games can be scary, but by breaking the fourth wall and trolling the gamer when they least expected it, Eternal Darkness found a truly unique way to get hearts racing.



EarthBound

EarthBound – otherwise known as Mother 2 – has had a troublesome history here in the west. For Japan, the Mother series is as popular as any large RPG, but when EarthBound hit the Americas, sales were pretty damn dismal. What's more, its predecessor – released here as EarthBound Beginnings – took 26 years to breach our shores, something Mother 3 is still yet to achieve.

It's surprising, really, as the title comes as a refreshing change to the fantasy-based hordes that dominate the genre. Its real world setting grounds the title – with a cast of everyday kids dressed in ordinary clothes – only to surprise players with hilarious encounters that parody traditional RPG tropes. Goblins and knights are replaced by the likes of 'Extra Cranky Ladies' or 'New Age Retro Hippies', while relatable struggles with 'Abstract Art' or a 'Scalding Coffee Cup' bring the laughs home. While days may be spent buying burgers or chatting to Dad on the phone, behind every suburban fence lurks a strange new adventure straight out of the Twilight Zone. It may have taken a little nudge from Super Smash Bros, but EarthBound has finally received the attention it so genuinely deserves.

Alien Soldier

HEIDI KEMPS still looks for buried Treasure



DEVELOPER:
TREASURE
PUBLISHER: SEGA
TYPE: BOSS RUSH
PLATFORM: MEGADRIVE,
WII VIRTUAL CONSOLE
YEAR: 1995

It's tempting to simply describe Alien Soldier as "a boss rush game," but that would be doing it a grave disservice. Alien Soldier isn't just a boss rush game – it is the defining boss rush game to which all others are inevitably compared. It's a test of adaptability, skill, and endurance, and it may be the greatest game in developer Treasure's entire body of work.

Alien Soldier is the sort of game that lets you know what you're in for from the moment you press the start button. The first thing you'll see is a screen where you can pick an arsenal of weaponry from six different shot types. You can also set the HUD to an absurd variety of different display types – even obscuring info, if you're that hardcore – and then you get to practice the controls to your heart's content, learning about invincible teleport dashes, shot switching, and free versus fixed shooting. It's a bit unusual for a game of this era to have a "tutorial" for the controls, but it's absolutely crucial, because hero Epsilon-2 is going to be besieged by foes from the moment he steps into Stage 1, and by God, you'd better know how to get past them because you're going to need all the health you can get just to beat the first worm boss.

What little there is for "levels" in Alien Soldier simply serves as connective tissue for the heart of the game: the incredible boss fights. What makes Alien Soldier so special is that all of its bosses are memorable, be it from their design or an interesting gameplay gimmick or just how furiously resilient they are. There's a boss that's a giant samurai armadillo. There's another that's a cybernetic wolf riding a mechanical horse. Still another is a one-eyed blob that is fought in a darkened hall that only lights up with your gunfire. One boss appears to be a giant insect, but when you kill it, it falls into a sticky web, and you reveal what the actual stage boss is: a massive spider and its children that feed on the insect's corpse, which serves as the platform for the fight. There's even the return of Seven Force, the multi-stage boss from Treasure's beloved Gunstar Heroes.

There are multiple ways to approach every boss encounter, and numerous strategies you can devise to defeat them. Do you whittle away at them with an easy-to-use weapon, or try to do more damage with some of the more difficult to handle weapons?

Or maybe you'll go for the really heavy damage: using Reflect Force on certain attacks creates recovery items, and when your health is maxed, your Zero Teleport transforms into an amazingly damaging, invincible strike... that leaves your health depleted afterwards. There are many ways to tackle Alien Soldier's challenges, and it's this combination of strategy and skill that keeps you coming back to play again and again.

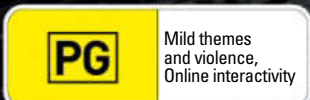
It's easy to see why Alien Soldier was overlooked when it was first released, as it came very late in the life of the Mega Drive, and was never widely available in any of the territories it released in (Japan and a few PAL regions). It's a game that has benefitted immensely from the rise of console emulation and retro re-releases: rather than simply being spoken about in hushed, reverential tones by the hardest of hardcore import gamers, it's now become a widely-revered action classic – all because more people have the ability to actually play it. Alien Soldier is a true must-play: a superbly designed game that has only grown better with time, and an eternal classic for any player looking for a fast, skillful, relentless action experience. **A**

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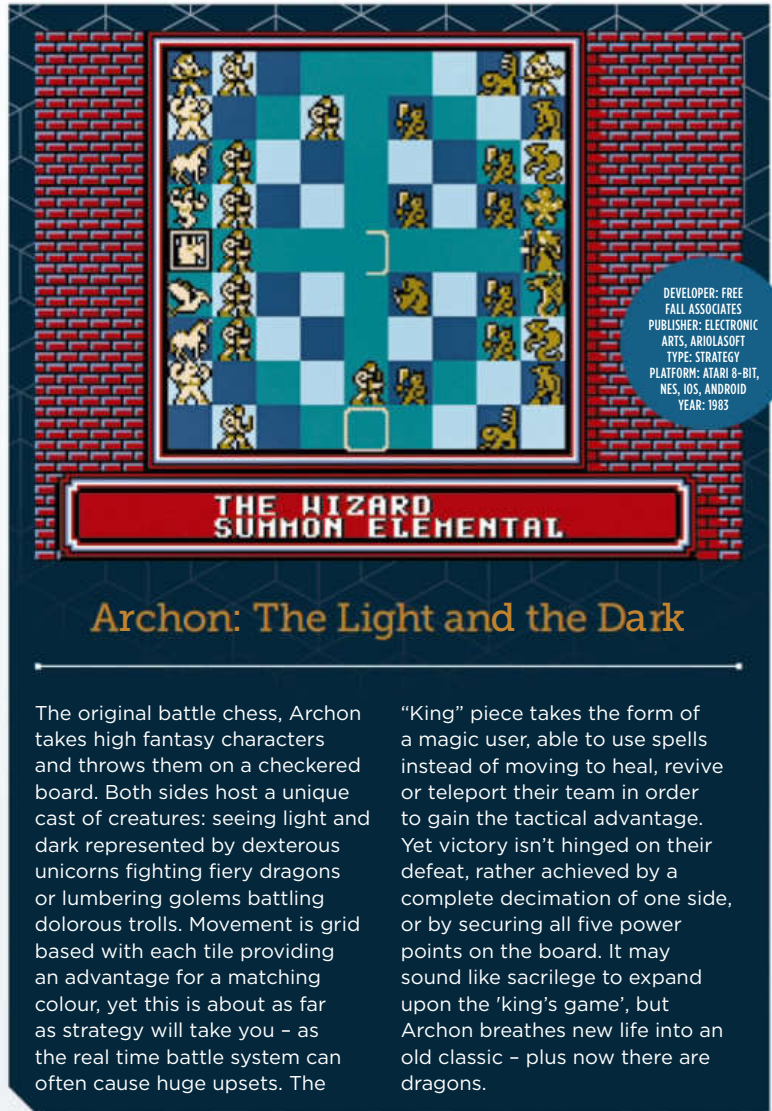
Wizball

Ah, the 80s: when a few pasty garage-dwelling weirdoes could make a game about a magic laser-shooting cabbage and have it published by a major software distributor. Wizball is a strange game: the kind of game that is very obviously the product of severe technical limitations and a great deal of hallucinogenic substances. You are the eponymous Wiz: a wizard whose planet has been invaded and turned monochrome by a race of evil aliens. Apparently lacking other options, Wiz turns himself into the aforementioned laser-shooting magic cabbage and collects paint from the aliens he destroys, which he then uses to restore his planet to its natural, multichromatic glory.

But don't let its weirdness fool you: Wizball is a precisely designed and punishingly difficult game – a physics-based shooter that forces you account for things like acceleration and gravity, and features a robust upgrade system. It's one of the few C64 games we'd love to see remade for modern hardware – like the 3DS, maybe, or the Vita. With its momentum-based gameplay, it's all but crying out for touchscreen controls.



DEVELOPER: SENSIBLE SOFTWARE
PUBLISHER: OCEAN SOFTWARE
TYPE: SHOOT-EM-UP
PLATFORM: AMSTRAD, C64, SPECTRUM, AMIGA ETC.
YEAR: 1987



DEVELOPER: FREE FALL ASSOCIATES
PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS, ARIOLASOFT
TYPE: STRATEGY
PLATFORM: ATARI 8-BIT, NES, IOS, ANDROID
YEAR: 1983

Archon: The Light and the Dark

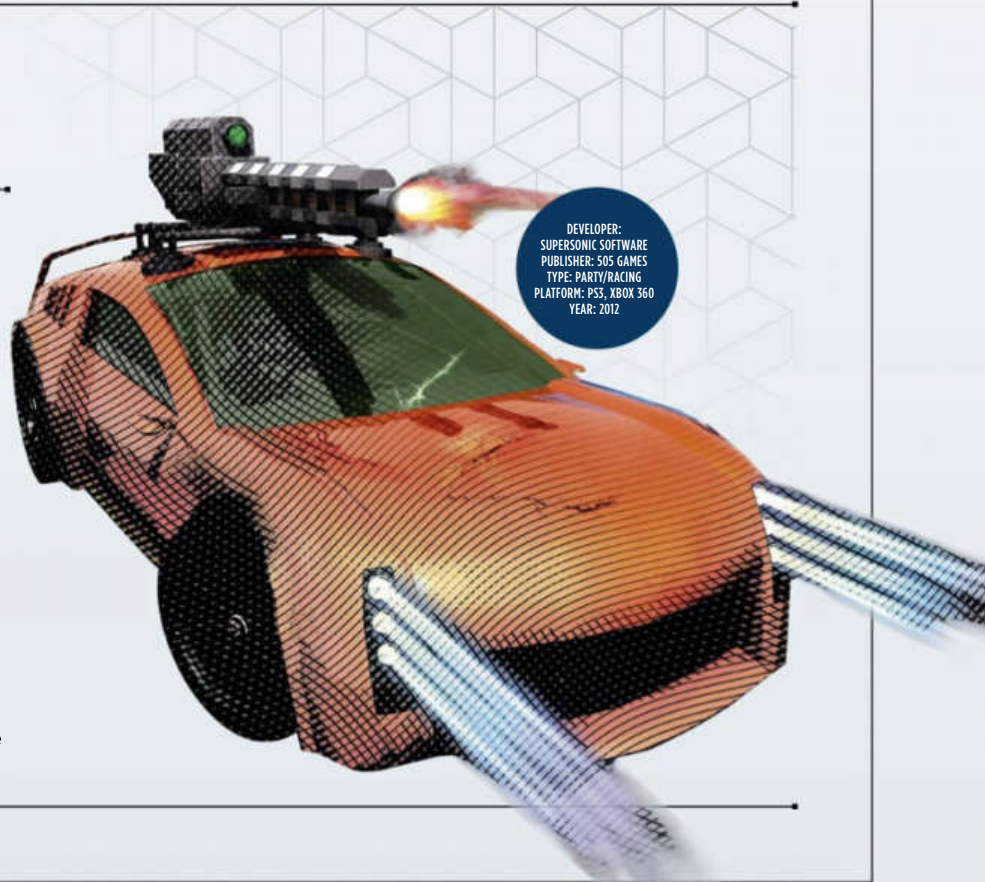
The original battle chess, Archon takes high fantasy characters and throws them on a checkered board. Both sides host a unique cast of creatures: seeing light and dark represented by dexterous unicorns fighting fiery dragons or lumbering golems battling dolorous trolls. Movement is grid based with each tile providing an advantage for a matching colour, yet this is about as far as strategy will take you – as the real time battle system can often cause huge upsets. The

“King” piece takes the form of a magic user, able to use spells instead of moving to heal, revive or teleport their team in order to gain the tactical advantage. Yet victory isn't hinged on their defeat, rather achieved by a complete decimation of one side, or by securing all five power points on the board. It may sound like sacrilege to expand upon the 'king's game', but Archon breathes new life into an old classic – plus now there are dragons.

Wrecked: Revenge Revisited

Wrecked is a top-down combat racer where the goal is to eliminate your opponents by either outracing them or destroying them. Have you played any of the old Micro Machines games? Well it's like those, but purely competitive. Simplicity is its chief virtue: five minutes is all it takes to grasp the basics, and then it's just you and your mates hooning all over the place, blowing the shit out of each other with machine guns and homing rockets, trash-talking like your lives depend on it. In other words, Wrecked is the perfect party game – the kind of game that creates bitter rivalries and lasting memories, the kind of game you'll keep thinking about long after you've stopped playing it.

In this sense, it's identical to its spiritual predecessor, the criminally underappreciated Mashed. The only significant difference between the two is that Wrecked introduces shunting – a versatile and deliciously satisfying means of debilitating opponents and gaining the upper hand. Believe us when we tell you that shunting is the source of all that is good and right in the universe. All hail the mighty shunt.



DEVELOPER: SUPERSONIC SOFTWARE
PUBLISHER: 505 GAMES
TYPE: PARTY/RACING
PLATFORM: PS3, XBOX 360
YEAR: 2012

Rez

An abstract rail-shooter set in a Tronish computer generated universe, Rez combines electronica with mutating gridwork visuals to create an arresting audio-visual experience unlike anything else. It overwhelms the senses, intermingling sound, sight, and touch to create a kind of synthetic synaesthesia – the hallmark of designer Tetsuya Mizuguchi.

When it comes down to it, you don't really play Rez so much as you experience it. Yes, there are goals, and enemies, and levels and so on, but they're very much secondary

to the simple pleasure of BEING in this captivating digital landscape, of floating along its glowing vertices, of letting the sound and visuals wash over and consume you. Indeed, the truly great thing about Rez is that it's one of those very rare games that you can enjoy even if you're absolutely terrible at it.

Broad accessibility is a trait common to Mizuguchi's games and is manifest even in his latest work, Child of Eden – a spiritual successor the Rez that doesn't quite capture the magic of its forbear, but is still very much worth experiencing.



DEVELOPER:
UNITED GAME
ARTISTS
PUBLISHER: SEGA
TYPE: RHYTHM SHOOTER
PLATFORM: DREAMCAST,
PS2, XBOX 360
YEAR: 2001

Shadow of the Colossus

How is it that people doubt that videogames are art when games like Shadow of the Colossus exist? That anyone could think games are incapable of the same emotional depth as cinema and literature when something as hauntingly, tragically beautiful as this exists is baffling.

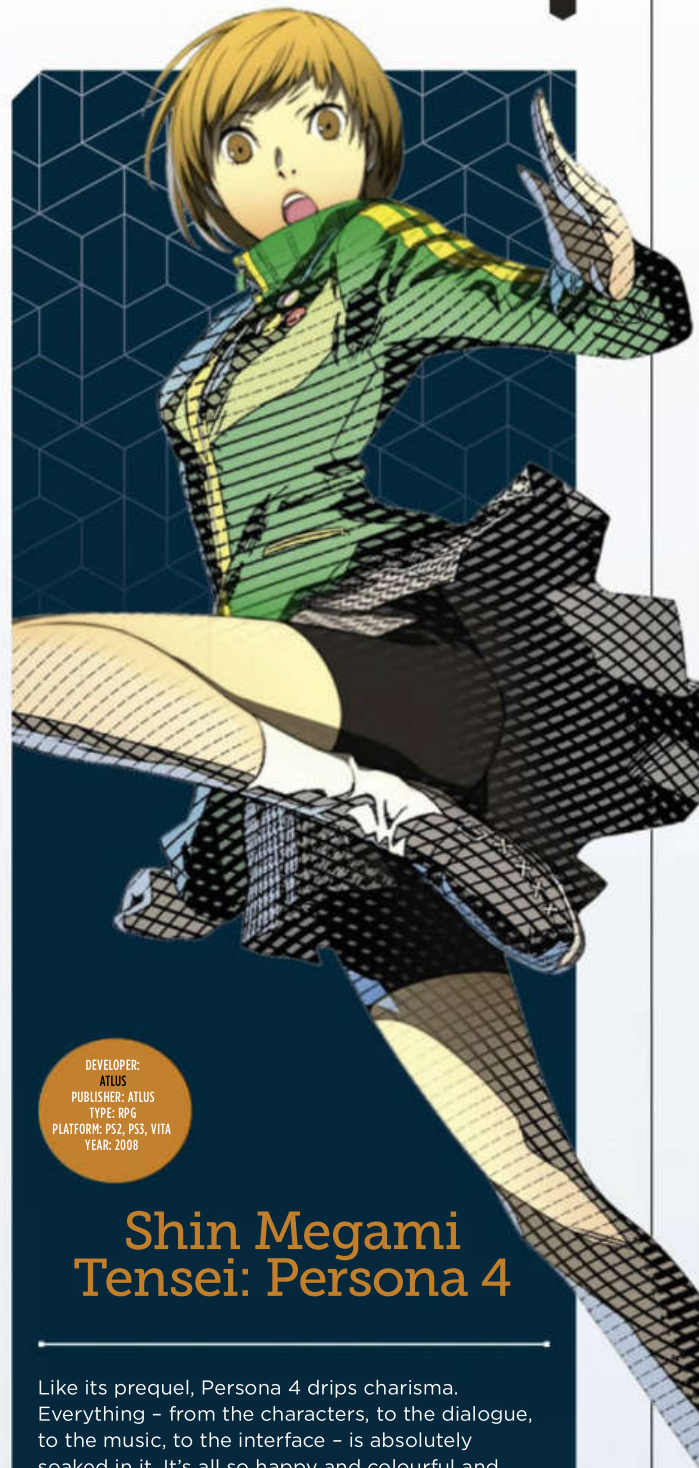
The setup is: you are a young man named Wander. Mono, whom you are sworn to protect, lies comatose on a slab in a mystic cathedral. To awaken her you must travel the desolate Forbidden Land and slay the sixteen colossi: towering

stonework beasts as fearsome as they are majestic. The colossi are massive things – even the smallest is larger than a minivan – but they all have a weak-point. The trick is finding it.

Fighting and killing a colossus is an exhilarating and gratifying experience – a boss fight like no other. But then when the final blow is struck and they moan and die, and the blackness emerges from their carcass and enters your soul, you can't help but wonder: was it worth it? Is she worth it?



DEVELOPER:
TEAM ICO
PUBLISHER: SONY
TYPE: ACTION-ADVENTURE
PLATFORM: PS2, PS3
YEAR: 2005



DEVELOPER:
ATLUS
PUBLISHER: ATLUS
TYPE: RPG
PLATFORM: PS2, PS3, VITA
YEAR: 2008

Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 4

Like its prequel, Persona 4 drips charisma. Everything – from the characters, to the dialogue, to the music, to the interface – is absolutely soaked in it. It's all so happy and colourful and unpretentious. In this sense, it is the anti-Final Fantasy: the perfect antidote to the excruciating angst and self-seriousness which is now sadly typical of Square Enix's flagship franchise. Persona 4 grabs you by the wrist and says to you in a voice high and cheerful, "Hey there! Wanna go on a fun adventure with a bunch of happy-go-lucky teens? Of course you do! Let's go!"

But charisma isn't the only thing Persona 4 has going for it. Beneath its sunny exterior beats the heart of a hardcore dungeon crawler/dating-sim/Pokemon-style creature breeding game. It's an odd mishmash, but devastatingly effective, with each component of the game designed to support and reinforce the others. As a consequence, this is a game you could get lost in for a hundred hours or more, and when you emerge you'll wanna do it all again.

Civilization V

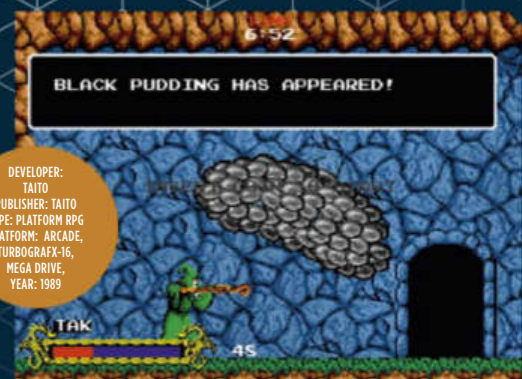
DEVELOPER:
FIRAXIS GAMES
PUBLISHER: 2K
GAMES, ASPYR
TYPE: TURN-BASED STRATEGY
PLATFORM: PC, LINUX, MAC
YEAR: 2010



The Civilization series has been breaking new ground since its inception in 1991. So much so that over the years lead designers from each iteration have branched off to create iconic titles such as Age of Empires, Rise of Nations, and Spore. Yet instead of becoming lost in the 4X crowd, Civilization V has cemented itself as one of the most polished strategy games ever created. Spanning from the dawn of time to the distant future, players take control of a historic leader as they set out to control a

procedurally generated world. Leaders need to make a wealth of choices: ranging from passive decisions, like what technologies to research, to the more active – whether to use diplomacy or force. It's a lot of pressure to put on one individual, yet the addition of the advisor system cleverly stops things from becoming too overwhelming, with players able to consult a group of experts without having to deal with annoying tutorials. Strategy is the key to success, and the game's wealth of options make the experience far more than a mere war of numbers.

Counter-Strike



DEVELOPER:
TAITO
PUBLISHER: TAITO
TYPE: PLATFORM RPG
PLATFORM: ARCADE,
TURBOGRAFX-16,
MEGA DRIVE,
YEAR: 1989

Cadash

The late 80s/early 90s saw a huge amount of co-operative beat 'em ups dropped on the arcade scene. These games did one thing well: beating on bad guys was fun, yet Cadash offered a multiplayer experience with a little more depth. Combining four player madness (over two system linked cabinets) with an epic fantasy world, players are thrust into the shoes of a fighter, mage, priest or ninja tasked with rescuing the King's daughter from the evil Balrog. Character choices aren't mere skins, but affect how you play, coming equipped with customisable gear, armour, and skills that improve as you level up. Each has their distinct advantages: the ninja, for instance, is faster than the others, with the ability to throw kunai at a deadly rate, while the priest is much slower with her holy flail attacks but can use defensive magic to absorb far more damage. Cadash's high fantasy setting and detailed environments lay the groundwork for many sword and sorcery games to follow, yet it somehow manages to remain one of the best.

Beginning as a humble mod of the ever popular Half-Life, Counter-Strike quickly became known as the quintessential FPS multiplayer experience; a mouthful, for sure, but the game's simplicity is what allows it to be so successful. Two teams – terrorists and counter-terrorists – face off, each with their own arsenal of weaponry and the ability to expand these as rounds progress. Success is governed by eliminating the opposing team or controlling a map: whether it be through planting or disarming a bomb, rescuing or securing hostages, or meeting any

other prerequisite that might be set. While these modes offered a distinctive goal, it was important that they remained simple, as things always came down to who could outshoot, outsmart and outlive opponents. True to its origins, Counter-Strike grew organically through modding, with new maps, skins and bots to keep players striving for the scratchy over-the-comms confirmation that their team wins.

DEVELOPER:
VALVE CORPORATION
PUBLISHER:
SIERRA STUDIOS
TYPE: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER
PLATFORM: PC, XBOX,
MAC, LINUX
YEAR: 1999





DEVELOPER:
ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS
PUBLISHER: EIDOS
INTERACTIVE
TYPE: FPS
PLATFORM: PS2, XBOX
YEAR: 2006

Urban Chaos: Riot Response

Urban Chaos: Riot Response is a riotous (literally) first-person shooter set in a kind of near future suburban Armageddon. A gang of Warriors-esque terrorists called The Burners has overrun an unnamed American metropolis. As Nick Mason, head of the newly-formed anti-terrorist group T-Zero, your goal is to take the terrorists down by whatever means necessary.

What sets Urban Chaos apart from other, similarly scenarioed first person shooters is its gleeful disdain for realism and emphasis on micro-objectives: fun little

tasks like "Get 10 headshots in a row" that infuse minute-to-minute gameplay with a sense of purpose beyond simply getting to the end of the level. Completing micro-objectives unlocks better equipment and weapons with which to tackle harder micro-objectives, creating a potent feedback loop that keeps you replaying levels long after the narrative draws to a close.

Oh, and did we mention that you can tase a badguy in the balls until he bursts into flame? Yeah, well, you can do that, and it's AWESOME.

Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines

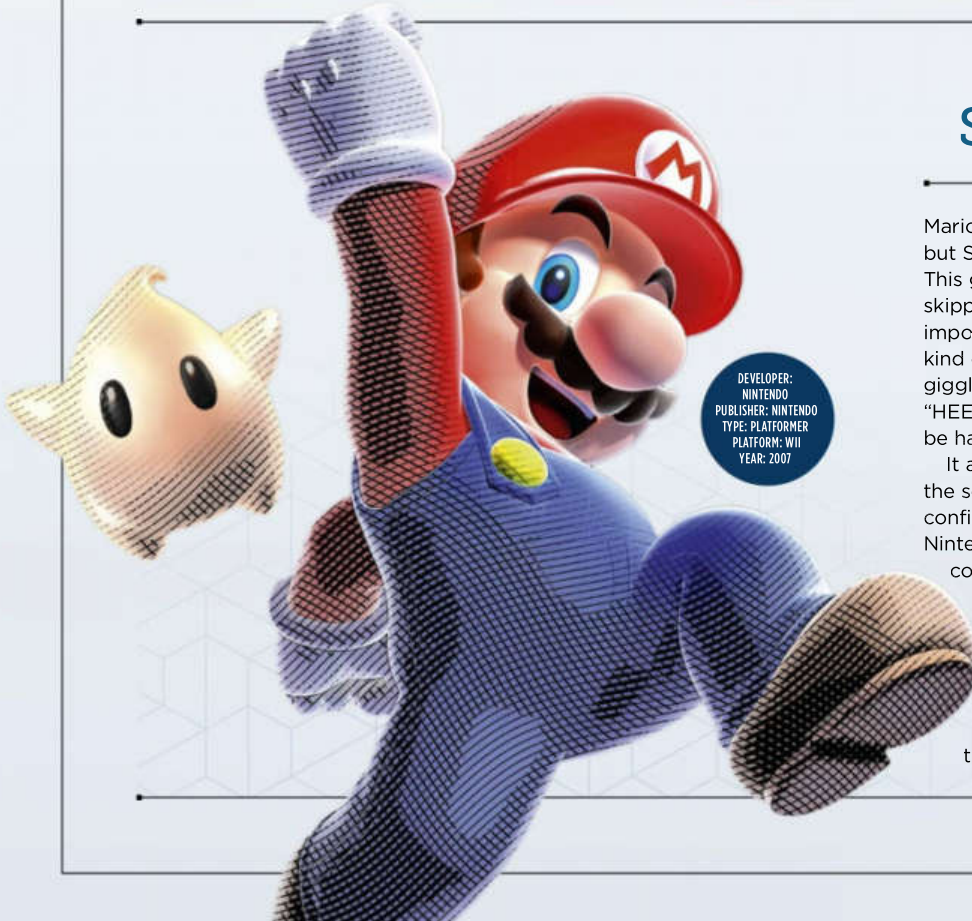
Depending on how you look at it, Bloodlines is either one of the best games ever made or a colossal turd. The writing is brilliant, that much is incontestable. Troika's twisting narrative goes to the heart of what makes the World of Darkness appealing: manipulation, deceit, treachery – politics. Not politics in the grand sense: it's more like office politics, petty and parochial. There are no big ideas here, no heroic contest of ideologies. There is simply greed and naked ambition.

Which is great. The problem is that, sans patches, Bloodlines is an unfinished mess. For the first 20 hours or so, it's not a huge deal, but after that... things take a turn for the worse. Creative quests and thoughtful level design give way to tedious combat slogs through endless corridors of respawning goons. There are boss fights. Stupid, awful, frustrating boss fights. Bugs become more frequent and more serious. Some are game-breaking. In fact, there is one bug that is both game-breaking AND nearly unavoidable.

So: if you're gonna play, make sure to get the unofficial patches first. You'll be glad you did.



DEVELOPER:
TROIKA GAMES
PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION
TYPE: RPG
PLATFORM: PC
YEAR: 2004



DEVELOPER:
NINTENDO
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
TYPE: PLATFORMER
PLATFORM: WII
YEAR: 2007

Super Mario Galaxy

Mario games are (almost) always a lot of big dumb fun, but Super Mario Galaxy is something else altogether. This game is a joy to play: it sparkles with infectious glee, skipping and flipping with such vivacity that it's almost impossible not to get caught up in it. If you have any kind of a soul at all, it is almost guaranteed to make you giggle, big and loud and dumb, like an idiot schoolgirl: "HEE HEE HEE!" It's a happy game and it wants you to be happy too.

It also represents what is arguably a highpoint for the series in terms of level design. Liberated from the confines of gravity and a strictly contiguous world, Nintendo's designers let their imaginations run wild, concocting beautiful sprawling playgrounds that – incredibly – keep getting better as the game goes on. And then, once you finish the game and shoot Bowser into the sun, you can go back and do them all again, hunting for bonus stars and elusive purple coins.

The Wii didn't have an abundance of must-have titles, but this is one of them.

A large white circle containing the title 'Aerobiz' in a bold, white, sans-serif font. Above the circle, a red Concorde is shown in flight, angled towards the right. The background of the entire page is a dark blue with a subtle hexagonal grid pattern.

Aerobiz

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DEVELOPER:
KOEI
PUBLISHER: KOEI
TYPE: BUSINESS SIM
PLATFORM: SNES,
MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1992

» A couple of years back Japanese games company Kairossoft released a series of breakthrough strategy games for iOS. Titles like Games Dev Story, Pocket League Story, and Grand Prix Story managed to take complex strategy tropes and distil them into cutesy, pixel based titles with dangerously addictive gameplay.

These \$6 titles were basically digital crack, and anyone who spent several feverish days trying to build a software empire, take their pixel men to the F.A. Cup thing, or win the World GP will know just how compelling a series of sales charts, profit and loss statements, and simple icon driven controls can be.

Aerobiz was doing all the above way back in the early 90s. An airline management simulator released for the Mega Drive and Super Nintendo, it certainly stood out amongst all the shooters and platform games that sat on videogame shelves back in those days. And if you were brave enough to purchase a game that featured a guy in a suit on its cover you'd soon find the hours and days slipping away as you began to obsess over aircraft capacity, trans-pacific routes, and whether Egypt was the sort of place you wanted to open a branch.

That may sound abstract and confusing, but the game's core mechanics were actually super simple. You start by picking one of two scenarios, either 1963 to 1995 or 1983 to 2015, and select which international city you want to start in. The game follows a rough approximation of real history, so starting out in Beijing in the early 60s is going to handicap you from the get-go, whereas London or New York make for a considerably easier job. Regardless, you'll be competing against three AI controlled rival airlines and 'win' by being the first to link the world and sustain profits for 12 months. Huzzah!

You start your airline CEO career by sending out lackeys to negotiate flight slots in cities, purchasing aircraft, opening routes, setting fares, and kicking off some marketing campaigns. Each turn represents a three-month period, and once you've finished faffing about you can skip ahead to see how your decisions have played out via profits, sales, and passengers.

All the above is accessed via a series of icons, and it takes about 5 minutes to figure out the basics. But as the years roll on and the competition and money start to ramp up you're presented with an ever-expanding range of choices about money, routes, outside investments, and historical events to consider.

I know that doesn't sound particularly exciting when you read it out aloud, but like the best strategy games, Aerobiz manages to creep up on you, turning a series of numbers and charts into an unhealthy obsession. Two decades and several hardware generations later its addictive qualities are as strong as ever.

I dusted off my Mega Drive and plugged the cartridge in for a quick session before writing this and ended up playing for several hours, taking my start-up operation from Hong Kong 1963 through to the early 70s before noticing it was well after midnight. And then I was back the following night to try and win a price war on the London to Paris route.

That sort of behaviour isn't normal. But it says a bunch about how far ahead of its time Aerobiz was. Now if you excuse me I've just taken delivery of new Concorde and have some rivals to crush... **🔴**



PHANTOM-S

GAMEPAD EMULATOR

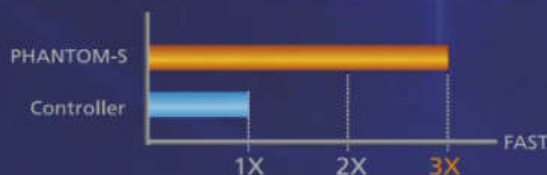
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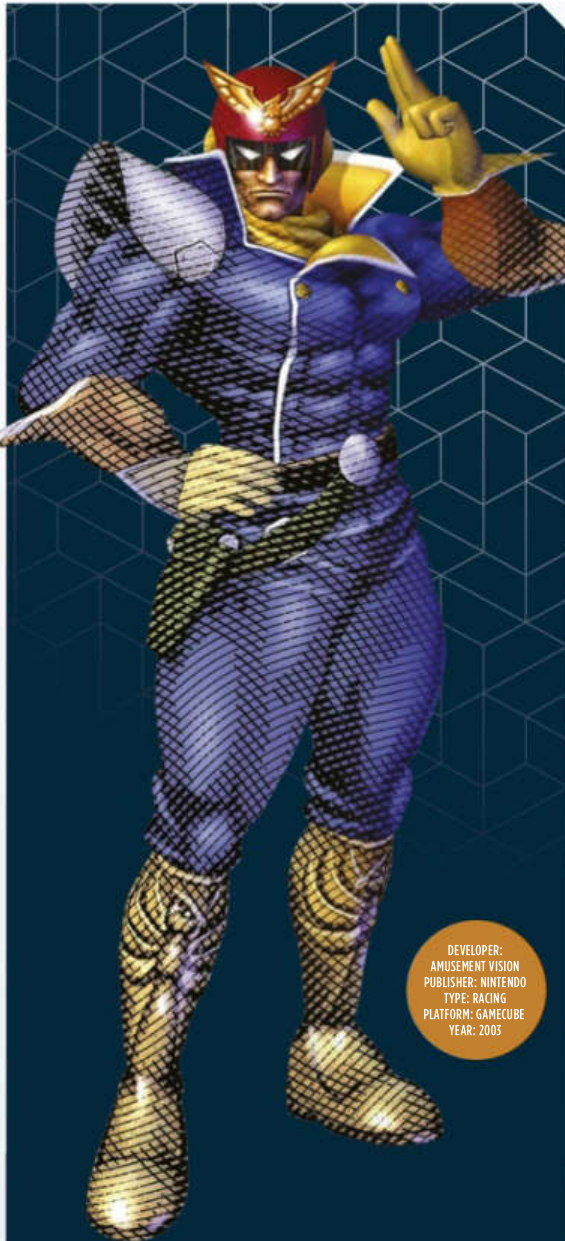
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DEVELOPER: AMUSEMENT VISION
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
TYPE: RACING
PLATFORM: GAMECUBE
YEAR: 2003

F-Zero GX

While the GameCube may not have flourished Down Under, a few titles made it worth its salt. F-Zero GX spearheaded these, a title that's so fast it's almost maddening. While its N64 predecessor was responsible for the leap from flat tracks to three dimensional tubes, GX perfects the insanity by placing its tracks on solid ground and increasing the sense of speed as the environment whips by all at an incredible 60 frames per second.

The game boasts over 40 drivers, each more crazy than the last, complete with fully animated cut-scenes alongside a fleshed out story mode. But it's not for the faint of heart, as even Baby Mode is hard as hell. The speed and pace are mostly responsible for this, but there's also no sympathy for those who fall off a track. Antigravity may be a part of Mario Kart's latest iteration, but the F-Zero racers have been doing it for years, and man is it still fun.



DEVELOPER: CCP GAMES
PUBLISHER: CCP GAMES
TYPE: MMORPG
PLATFORM: PC, MAC, LINUX
YEAR: 2003

EVE Online

When it comes to being transported to another world, it's hard to find one as dense and engrossing as EVE Online. The amount of hours this game requires for any form of success is insane, but it's all due to the complicated nature of the community driven sandbox. Players have a generous amount of control by any game's standards: huge political alliances are formed, user generated banks rise to manage the complicated economy and epic fleets are built over years and years of hard work. Yet with this

control comes a surprising lack of boundaries. Where in other games you'd get banned for certain shady behaviour, EVE rewards the clever rogue. Key bankers have embezzled billions thanks to well planned scams, espionage heists years in the making have managed to bring down long standing alliances and political differences can lead to devastating battles. EVE does, after all, hold the record for the largest-ever PvP battle of all time. A lot of the game is data crunching, but when all hell breaks loose, it's damn near spectacular.



DEVELOPER: SCE
SANTA MONICA STUDIO
PUBLISHER: SONY
COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
TYPE: THIRD-PERSON
ACTION ADVENTURE
PLATFORM: PS3, PS4
YEAR: 2010

God of War 3

The fifth game in the series but the seventh and final in its chronology, God of War III pushes the franchise's trademark action to its apex. Kratos marches on Olympus with Titans in tow, ripping, tearing and maiming all your favourite Grecian myths with a guttural roar. His new arsenal of weapons cleverly expand combat beyond the Chains of Exile, with smooth changes allowing for seamless combos. The violence is unashamedly brutal, with quick-time finishers that can never be unseen (Poseidon's and Herc's brutal ends

come to mind) yet with everything so beautifully rendered it's hard to look away. Even though the story meddles and muddles traditional mythology, Kratos himself is a testament to SCE's knowledge of the subject matter. He's no hero by today's standards, but he is 100 percent raw hubris. Greek heroes were incredibly vain, and often very flawed, and the fact that Kratos fits the bill perfectly not only manages to justify the game's excessive violence, but makes him an extremely refreshing character in today's world.

Power Stone 2

DEVELOPER:
CAPCOM, KLEIN
COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
PUBLISHER: EIDOS
INTERACTIVE, CAPCOM
TYPE: FIGHTING
PLATFORM: ARCADE,
DREAMCAST, PSP
YEAR: 2000



A brawler that wears its arcade origins with pride, Power Stone 2 pits four players against each other in three dimensional environments. Characters have an assortment of moves to draw from, but it's often more fun to utilise one of the many weapons littered around the landscape - or even use the landscape itself - to effectively mess up your foes.

It's a survival of the fittest, with the simple goal to keep your health bar above zero, but by far the most exciting part comes from the ever changing level design. One particular stage sees contestants battling it out on a crumbling airship. The playable area grows smaller and smaller, eventually collapsing to send players falling through the sky - still throwing fists - until landing in a temple oasis to continue the fight.

This went on to influence the scrolling stages seen in later Super Smash Bros. iterations, but to this day none have got it quite so right as Power Stone 2.

Phantasy Star IV

DEVELOPER:
NANAON-SHA
PUBLISHER: SONY
COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
TYPE: RHYTHM
PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION,
PSP
YEAR: 1996



PaRappa the Rapper

The father of all rhythm games, PaRappa the Rapper is simultaneously original, whacky and fun. Forget microphones, this isn't about a bunch of tone-deaf gamers dishing out terrible rhymes, but rather utilising the PS1 controller to support main dawg PaRappa on his mission to become "the man with the master plan".

Under the tutelage of characters like Chop Chop Master Onion, players must match button combinations with beats in call and response situations. Tunes jump between straight rap, hip-

hop, and reggae as they take the influential young pup through everyday life lessons like getting his driver's licence, learning kung fu and even falling asleep at the wheel. Not only does this quasi coming of age narrative gives the game a direction and pace that modern rhythm games often lack, but the songs themselves are catchy as hell and sure to be stuck in your head for days. But no matter what the situation, or how tricky the rhyme, every one of PaRappa's problems has a solution - you just GOTTA BELIEVE!

From the epic music, to the tightly woven turn-based combat, the last instalment in the original Phantasy Star series is certainly our favourite. The world has suffered a great collapse, and planet Motvia has become a barren desert. Dune-esque sand worms hide amongst the yellow seas while Biomonsters are actively attacking the remaining population. But young hunter Chaz Ashley and his companions are on the case, fending off hordes of monsters to find out who's truly responsible for the sorry state of things. Enemies come as varied as you would hope from a sci-fi setting, with bug-like monstrosities standing aside dark magicians and hostile robots. Narrative cut-scenes are told through a series of manga-style panel illustrations, making it easy to stay on top of (and care about) the large rotating cast of characters. It may come as an indirect sequel to the beloved Phantasy Star II, but IV is the sci-fi adventure you've been looking for.



DEVELOPER:
SEGA
PUBLISHER: SEGA
TYPE: RPG
PLATFORM: MEGA
DRIVE, PC, WII
YEAR: 1993

Killer7

As far as auteur directors are concerned, Goichi Suda aka Suda51 is one of gaming's finest. His distinctive style blends whacky with hyper-cool, often seeing quirky characters in the middle of over-the-top violent scenarios. Killer7 follows not one, but seven of these characters as they shoot, stab and explode their way through an intricate noir conspiracy that blurs the between good and evil, black and white, or "what the hell is going on?" and "yeah, ok I get it".

The characters in question are all assassins from the Smith Syndicate, dressed to the nines in stylish attire that they're not afraid to get dirty. Each has unique characteristics and weapons such as the silent (and shirtless) knifeman, the cautious sniper, or the rabid gunslinger. The game moves on rails, which might seem strange at first, but after following the clever camera angles that draw attention to the game's slick art style, it's not hard to see why Suda51 is considered a genius... albeit a whacky, slightly disturbed genius.



DEVELOPER:
GRASSHOPPER
MANUFACTURE
PUBLISHER: CAPCOM
TYPE: ACTION-ADVENTURE/
RAIL SHOOTER
PLATFORM: GAMECUBE,
PLAYSTATION 2
YEAR: 2005

Ikaruga

Ikaruga won't blow you away with originality, but it's a rare example of meticulous design that you won't find in many other titles. It all comes down to pure simplicity: the screen is limited to a vertical tube, with excess screen room being blacked out on the left and right; controls are tight and responsive; and gameplay revolves around a simple black and white mechanic. Enemies make up one of the two colours, with the player's ship being able to switch between each. Having the same colour means devastating damage done to foes, whilst also allowing players to absorb incoming attacks in order to charge their special meter. The downside? They are now highly vulnerable to the opposite colour. As speed builds, this simple concept engenders hectic gameplay, especially when bosses made up of both colours begin to break through. But Ikaruga is always fair, and never impossible. If you ever wished Galaga packed a bit more of a punch, this is the game for you.



DEVELOPER:
NAMCO
PUBLISHER: NAMCO
TYPE: THIRD-PERSON
PUZZLER
PLATFORM: PS2, PSN
YEAR: 2004

Katamari Damacy



DEVELOPER:
TREASURE, G.REV
PUBLISHER: TREASURE,
SEGA, ESP SOFTWARE, ATARI
TYPE: SHOOTER
PLATFORM: ARCADE, DREAMCAST,
GAMECUBE, XBLA
YEAR: 2001

Explaining Katamari Damacy to someone who has never played it is kind of strange. You are the Prince of All Cosmos, a tiny tube-headed green kid who dances with pandas and lives in a castle in space. In order to help your father - the King of All Cosmos - recover from a drunken bender, you must push a ball around on Earth in order to collect stuff and make stars that will fill the sky. You know, pretty standard. Gameplay focuses around a snowball mechanic, you roll

of everyday objects to make it grow in size, and as it does you're able to attach bigger and bigger objects - but don't be fooled by how mundane it sounds, because it's surprisingly fun. The dual thumb-stick controls work alongside the game's physics to create a solid feeling of momentum, while a soundtrack that is hard to define by any genre creates a truly loveable title sure to awaken your cosmic-being. Speaking of, how did the King of All Cosmos get his job anyway? He's such a jerk.

Command & Conquer: Red Alert

It's been almost 20 years since Red Alert came out and in that time there hasn't been a single game with a more memorable opening cinematic. We can see it now: Einstein... Hitler... "sooner or later time will tell"... then the tromp of boots, that badass bassline... and Hell March: glorious Hell March, the soundtrack for ending an empire one base at a time. The great thing about Red Alert is that it was so ridiculous and at the same time so utterly earnest and unironic. The sequels were all good fun, but they were too self-aware, too focused on their own overt zaniness: Red

Alert wasn't trying to be wacky... it just was.

It was also a total blast to play. Unlike the Blizzard-style "rock-paper-scissors" balancing typical of modern real-time strategy games, Red Alert's factions - Soviets and Allies - were internally counterweighted such that their strengths were designed to compensate for their own weaknesses rather than exploit the enemy's shortcomings. We didn't know this at the time, of course: we just built lots of tanks, put on Hell March, and hoped for the best. No wonder we sucked online.



DEVELOPER: WESTWOOD STUDIOS
PUBLISHER: VIRGIN INTERACTIVE
TYPE: RTS
PLATFORM: PC, PLAYSTATION, PSN
YEAR: 1996



DEVELOPER: EA
PUBLISHER: EA
TYPE: SHOOT-EM-UP
PLATFORM: MEGA DRIVE, SNES, AMIGA, PSP ETC.
YEAR: 1992

Desert Strike

Designed by a mechanical engineering PhD with no prior experience making videogames, Desert Strike is a 2D isometric shoot-em-up based loosely on the Gulf War. In it, you play as an attack helicopter on a solo mission to bring down a Saddam Hussein-esque Middle Eastern dictator. Unusually for the time, stages were sandboxish and designed to be approached in a nonlinear fashion. The game would simply give you some objectives (take out the X, rescue the Y) and leave it up to you to decide how and in what order to achieve them. Because fuel and ammo were both strictly limited, planning was essential: going gung-ho was a recipe for disaster, especially in the later missions.

As a result, Desert Strike is not what you'd call an easy game, or a fair one. Nevertheless, it sold like a zillion copies and spawned four sequels: Jungle Strike, Urban Strike, Soviet Strike, and Nuclear Strike. None of them were as good as the original.

Dark Souls

The armoured bull bellows and charges, its enormous horns aimed squarely at your fragile little body. One hit from this rampaging monster was enough to almost kill you. Another will certainly finish the job. You're out of Estus, you've got no firebombs, and 2000 souls to lose. You're frazzled and frustrated. And then something magical happens. With a precisely timed roll, you dodge the beast's assault and leap at it from behind, driving your spear into its spine. As you watch its life literally fade away before your eyes, you clench your fists and yell: "Eat it, you bastard! I GOT YOU."

Moments like these - these jump-

from-the-couch, fist-pumping moments of bloodthirsty elation - represent Dark Souls at its best. At its worst, it is bleak and vicious drudgery.

What you have to realise is that Dark Souls doesn't give a shit about you. This isn't a world that has been custom made for your convenience. It is survival-of-the-fittest gaming: Darwinian in the most ruthless sense. Those who adapt, thrive; those who don't, perish. Think you've got what it takes?

DEVELOPER: FROM SOFTWARE
PUBLISHER: NAMCO BANDAI
TYPE: RPG
PLATFORM: PS3, XBOX 360, PC
YEAR: 2011



Defcon

BEN MANSILL believes in mutually ensured destruction

You know you have to play Defcon the moment you see the first screenshots. Who can resist the sparse ghostly lines and colours that are so strongly reminiscent of War Games? In the surprisingly scant genre of strategic nuclear war games, Defcon hits it pitch perfect. It is not difficult to pretend you are looking at the Big Board at NORAD as you drive Defcon – it is more an end of the world control panel than it is a gaming facsimile. Everything is technical and ultra minimalist, which goes a long way to create a feeling that inside each pale city dot are a million dying souls, but your job is to view the world as a simplified set of units and targets and play for a mathematical win.

There is no evil dictator pleasure that comes from wiping out a city in Defcon. Yet, it chills me every time. As one who grew up in Reagan's 1980's nuclear hair-pin trigger era, who ranks Fail Safe as a favourite book and movie, the premise is entirely plausible. Playing today, there's a new feeling that Defcon represents a moment of madness in history that has passed, and thusly, Defcon stands, increasingly, as a historical memento. I hope I'm right.

Much like Harpoon, to which it is almost identical, except the arena is the whole world rather than limited theatres of engagement, it plays both as a strategic and tactical game. The initial setup starts with choosing your country, then deploying land-based silos, airbases and radars, then naval units. Some countries are definitely easier than others, with the US being easiest of all thanks to having a relatively small area to defend and having a 'back to the wall' (its west coast) that usually doesn't need to be defended. Or, so the theory goes. Fail to kill just one enemy missile-carrying sub and it'll work its way undetected to where it will pop up in the most annoyingly out of your range place, at the worst possible time, and turn the game on its head.

It's headaches like this that make Defcon a game that, once it has started, locks you in with mesmerising concentration. Should I place missile silos to protect cities, or areas with military facilities? Should I hide my navy and try and decimate theirs with air power first, or gun it straight to where I *think* the bad guys are and get that aspect of battle solved (for better or worse) before the nukes start flying?

The cleverest gameplay element that makes Defcon more than just a hit the red button game is that missile silos serve double duty as a defensive anti-missile/anti-air station, or can convert to launch your nukes. Thing is, it takes several minutes to reconfigure each silo, and once the process is started it can't be reversed until complete. Timing is critical, second guessing the enemy as much as you bluff him. Get it wrong, and there is nothing you can do as you watch the incoming enemy nukes arc their way across the globe.

Defcon can be played as a fairly detailed RTS, via micromanaging individual units. But there comes a point where there is too much going on, and the need to make bigger-picture decisions in a moment means trusting the AI. You can pause the game if you like, but shouldn't. Let it start, then ride the rollercoaster of painful tense lulls with ever increasing action, culminating in a terrible crescendo of everything happening at once and the knowledge that winning is still, ultimately, losing. ❧

DEVELOPER:
INTROVERSION
SOFTWARE
PUBLISHER: INTROVERSION
SOFTWARE
TYPE: APOCALYPSE SIM
PLATFORM: PC
YEAR: 2006

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By Thermaltake

Metal Slug

Paul Valery once described war as “a massacre of people who don’t know each other for the benefit of people who know each other but don’t massacre each other.” Some years later, two American commando-bros dive into the enemy ranks, ripping through hordes of rebels with an insanely huge arsenal in tow. Heavy streams of gunfire cause chaotic explosions as planes, buildings and soldiers are all blown to smithereens. Yet despite its war torn surroundings, Metal Slug’s pulpy art-style manages to twist everything into a bizarre parody. Bearded POWs upgrade your armoury with goodies hidden in their oversized underpants, lazy guards argue over wanton pigs, and giant shirtless baddies bellow with laughter as they fire heavy machine guns. But our American heroes aren’t phased, they continue to obliterate their surroundings, wrecking homes and leaving residents screaming alongside their pets, who they grip with the fear of someone who’s lost everything. If you look hard enough, there’s probably some thinly veiled political commentary hidden among all the jovial madness, but we’ll leave that to you, we’ve just upgraded to bouncing tanks.



DEVELOPER:
MAZCA CORPORATION
PUBLISHER: MAZCA
CORPORATION, SNK
TYPE: RUN AND GUN
PLATFORM: ARCADE, NEO
GEO, IOS, PSN
YEAR: 1996



DEVELOPER:
CRYSTAL DYNAMICS,
NIXXES SOFTWARE BV
PUBLISHER: EIDOS
INTERACTIVE
PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION,
PC, DREAMCAST
YEAR: 1999

Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver

Third person action games were in a weird transitional phase in the late 90s. They had incredible vision, yet lacked the hardware to support it. That’s why revisiting a title like Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver can be a bit of a drag. But a game should be judged by the sum of its parts, and Soul Reaver’s strength comes from its rich lore, engrossing storytelling and strong characters. Kain, the protagonist of the first title, has risen to a kingly state amongst vampires, yet when Raziel, his loyal servant, surpasses him on the evolutionary front, he casts him out

into the pits of hell. What follows is an ambitious adventure that pushes the Playstation to its limits, supported by excellent voice acting and a legendary soundtrack that still kicks arse. The game’s combat also offers a flavour other titles of its generation lacked. Different enemies have different weaknesses: some perish if exposed to daylight, while others need to be set ablaze with a flaming brand, and then there’s those that need a good ol’ staking. Mix-ups like these are what keep Soul Reaver feeling fresh, even despite its years.



DEVELOPER:
ALTERATION
PUBLISHER:
ALTERATION
TYPE: DRAMA
PLATFORM: PC
YEAR: 2002

Masq

Masq is a strange little project that is often overlooked due to its simple presentation. Released as an episodic free to play flash game, Masq combines pulpy comic art with choose-your-own-adventure storytelling. The game puts you in the slick clothes of an up and coming fashion designer, just days before a show that could make or break your career. The prospect might seem pretty bland at first, but the everyday scenario quickly escalates into a tale full of deception, intrigue, sex and action. Playing the game will take

you an hour at most, but the options vary so much that you can replay the story through multiple times without seeing the same scenes twice. You may end up beaten and alone in jail, happy and successful on a beach or confused and pants-less in the street. Progress is entirely based on what you choose, and is surprisingly progressive for its time, grounding itself with heightened but realistic twists and turns that will keep you on the edge of your seat the whole way through. Pretty impressive for a flash game, don't you think?

Bayonetta

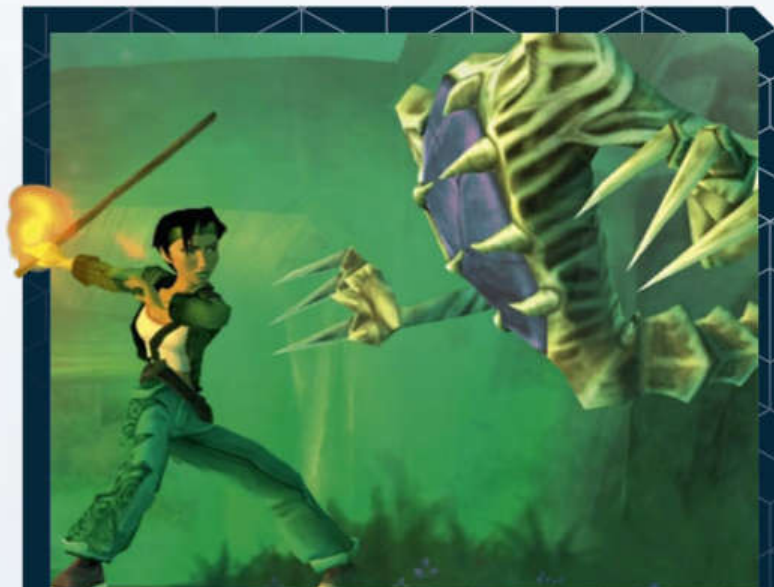
Bayonetta is gratuitous. It is ridiculous and obscene and nonsensical in the extreme. Its titular protagonist is a bootylicious witch with weaponised hair and guns strapped to her stilettos. She is an assassin hired by devils to kill angels and her preferred method of dispatching her targets is to transform her hair into an enormous gnashing serpent and consume them whole like cocktail wienies. Because her clothes are also made of hair, executing this attack leaves Bayonetta almost completely naked. See what we're saying? Gratuitous. Obscene. Nonsensical. And totally, totally awesome.

But craziness isn't the only thing

Bayonetta has going for it. The brainchild of Hideki "Devil May Cry" Kamiya, it's one of the tightest and most technically accomplished beat-em-ups ever made. Genre devotees will find much to appreciate in its finely tuned combo system, robust upgrade mechanics, and demanding bonus challenges. Think you're a badass at beat-em-ups? Try an all Platinum run on Nonstop Infinite Climax Mode. If it doesn't make you weep at least once then you're probably not doing it right.



DEVELOPER: PLATINUM PUBLISHER: SEGA/NINTENDO
TYPE: BEAT-EM-UP
PLATFORM: PS3, XBOX 360, WII U
YEAR: 2009



Beyond Good & Evil

It's no easy task, describing a game as unique and ambitious as Beyond Good & Evil. BG&E is... an adventure game, a platform game, a third-person brawler, a racing game, a photography sim, and a stealth game. It's a ham-fisted political critique, a touching coming-of-age tale, and a heart-warming affirmation of the power of friendship. It features a pig in a singlet, a Rastafarian rhinoceros, and a giant space whale. Protagonist Jade is sympathetic, charismatic, and a total badass. The soundtrack is wonderful. The voice-acting

DEVELOPER: UBISOFT
PUBLISHER: UBISOFT
TYPE: ACTION-ADVENTURE
PLATFORM: PS2, PC, GAMECUBE, XBLA ETC.
YEAR: 2003

is superb. The graphics are... pretty okay. Basically, BG&E is a fantastic piece of work - one of the best games ever made. And it sold terribly. Why? Lots of reasons, the most important being that Ubisoft made a hash of marketing it. Seeking to atone for this heinous error of judgement, the French publisher announced a sequel in 2009, but aside from a teaser and leaked vertical slice video, no new information on the game has surfaced since. Ubi assures us that it's still in development, but since creator Michel Ancel doesn't even work there anymore... well, let's just say we're not holding our breath.

999: Nine Hours, Nine Persons, Nine Doors

First in what is now referred to as the "Zero Escape" series, 999 is a strange and unrelentingly bleak visual novel reminiscent of horror thrillers like Saw and Cube. The premise is simple: you and eight others have been kidnapped by a masked psychopath and trapped in a derelict ship that is rigged to sink in nine hours. On the ship are nine locked doors, each with its own series of puzzles. Your goal is to solve the puzzles, get the keys, open the doors, and escape before the ship is consigned to a watery grave. Complicating matters somewhat is the fact that you and your newfound companions have each swallowed a bomb. Break the rules of the game and boom goes the dynamite... and your guts along with it.

Set apart from other visual novels by its confident (albeit uneven) prose and brain-twisting metanarrative, 999 defies expectations at every turn, masterfully cultivating suspicion and doubt to create an atmosphere of paranoia that'll have you second-guessing everyone and everything - even yourself.



DEVELOPER: CHUNSOFT
PUBLISHER: SPIKE
TYPE: VISUAL NOVEL
PLATFORM: DS, IOS,
YEAR: 2009



DEVELOPER:
INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
TYPE: RPG
PLATFORM: GAMECUBE
YEAR: 2004

Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door

Gamer or not, everyone's crossed paths with Nintendo's rockstar plumber at some point, but whether they've tackled his RPG adventures is a different story. Building on its previous iteration, Thousand-Year Door sees Mario traipsing through a paper thin world in order to rescue the princess from someone other than Bowser.

Joined by a host of unlikely companions, such as a ponytailed Goomba who can tattle on enemies, a timid Koopa who loves breakdancing, and a sultry Cloud Spirit full of hot air, Mario leaves his reckless head bopping ways behind, opting for an active turn-based system instead. Fights play out onstage, with crowd participation creating an ebb and flow to the farcical combat. Audience members throw helpful items or stones at Mario based on his performance, all while props come crashing down or smoke machines obscure hit rates. Alongside excellent writing that is brimming with humour, quirks like this make Paper Mario a truly unique experience for the series, with Intelligent Systems rocking the sometimes repetitive Nintendo boat.

Operation Wolf

A classic shooter with heavy Rambo tones, Operation Wolf's original arcade cabinet was known for its accuracy. Interestingly enough, the mounted uzi attached wasn't a light gun, but rather mapped via the spatial positioning of the barrel, with an in-built motor allowing for some hectic recoil. Since those days, the game has become one of the most ported games of all-time, with only a few of these (the NES, Spectrum and Sega Mega Drive versions) supplying light gun capabilities.

But gun or no gun, the side-scrolling shooting gallery is still hard to top, with troops, tanks and helicopters providing an endless assault of targets to mow down. Each level has a mission: get the ammunition, save the hostages, or take a rest... after killing more bad guys. Just make sure you don't hit the leggy blondes in the red bikinis - it makes little sense why they're running around in a third-world village or dense and dangerous jungle - but civilians are civilians and you have a job to do soldier.

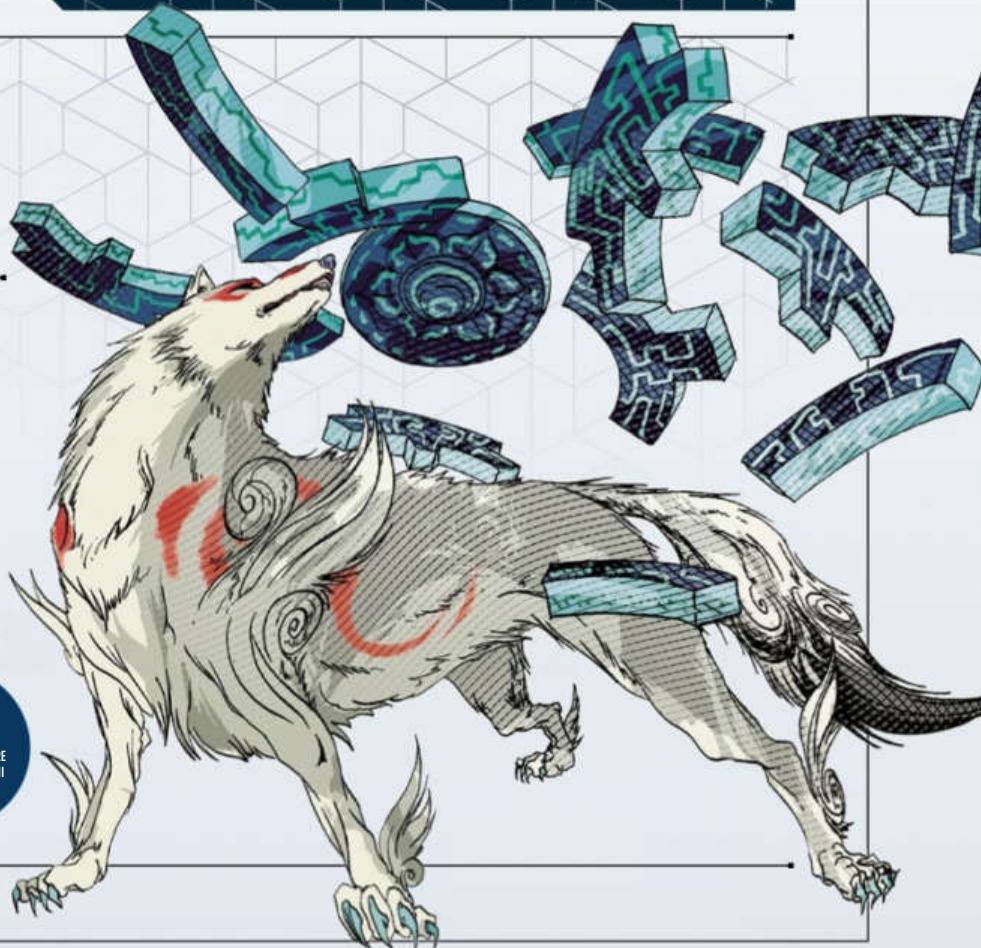


DEVELOPER:
TAITO
PUBLISHER: TAITO
TYPE: SHOOTING GALLERY
PLATFORM: ARCADE,
NES, MASTER SYSTEM,
COMMODORE 64
YEAR: 1987

Okami

Drawing inspiration from the Legend of Zelda series, Okami manages to take a well-worn formula and thoroughly improve upon it. Demons are on the loose, so Okami "Ammy" Amaterasu - Goddess of the Sun - descends from the heavens in the guise of a stoic white wolf. Every screen from the game is a tapestry in itself, as the rich art-style draws upon both Japanese watercolour and woodcarving techniques, emboldened when paired aside its classical Japanese soundtrack. Yet the game's combat is where it really impresses, with Ammy's attacks being dictated by the Celestial Brush, a sacred item that allows players to draw glyphs onscreen to control attacks, summon elements and alter their surroundings. This mechanic was so progressive it almost seemed to be before its time, as the initial PS2 layout required the brush to be controlled by the left analogue stick, when it's far more suited to the Wiimote or Playstation Move controllers used in later ports.

DEVELOPER:
CLOVER STUDIO
PUBLISHER: CAPCOM
TYPE: ACTION ADVENTURE
PLATFORM: PS2, PS3, WII
YEAR: 2006



Sonic the Hedgehog 3

Sonic the Hedgehog 3 is in no way the most groundbreaking of Sonic games, in fact a lot of it comes off as a rehash of the first two titles, just tweaked and tightened. But if you haven't given the time of day to the world's fastest hedgehog, this is definitely the title for you. The game pairs Sonic beside long time pal Tails, with players switching between the two in single player mode, or teaming up in co-op. Levels are wide and expansive, making full use of the speed and pace that Sonic is famous for, only broken up by

Chaos Emerald mini games that pull Sonic out of his 2D realm and onto a 3D plane. Loop de loops soar both vertically and horizontally - creating some extremely cool visual moments - and Sonic's wider array of navigational abilities help to maintain a strong forward momentum. To top things off, the game's expansion, Sonic & Knuckles, allows players to experience things from series bad-boy Knuckles the Echidna's perspective, rendering S3 the definitive retro Sonic experience.



DEVELOPER:
SONIC TEAM
PUBLISHER: SEGA
TYPE: PLATFORMER
PLATFORM: MEGA DRIVE,
PC, WII, XBLA
YEAR: 1994

Ridge Racer

Before its legacy was buried under a series of E3 memes, Ridge Racer was responsible for some huge changes to the racing genre. It was the first game to introduce the simulation element to arcade racers, with players being offered a manual or automatic experience. Cars felt fast and were able to switch between first and third person views, while a cheesy commentator would announce laps and time management. It was the first title to introduce drifting as a mechanic in order

to maintain speed, it was also the first mass market video game to use texture-mapped 3D graphics - which meant for the time it looked crazy good. Namco even sold it as "the most realistic driving game ever." Nowadays, it's no secret this statement didn't stick, what with the game's four modes being extended versions of the same track, but what has remained is how damn fun it still is to burn around the streets of Ridge City. So forget Daytona USA, we're all about Ridge Racer... Riidge Racerrr!



DEVELOPER:
NAMCO
PUBLISHER: NAMCO
TYPE: RACING
PLATFORM: ARCADE,
PLAYSTATION, PSP
YEAR: 1993



DEVELOPER:
DYNAMIX, GAME ARTS
PUBLISHER:
SIERRA ON-LINE
TYPE: ACTION ADVENTURE
PLATFORM: PC, MAC,
SEGA CD
YEAR: 1990

Rise of the Dragon

Do androids dream of electric sheep? Does William "Blade" Hunter dream of Rick Deckard? The year is 2053, LA is a gritty cyberpunk hell full of low-lives, two bit thugs and hermits that preach doom on the streets. The mayor's rebellious daughter has OD'd on a new drug - MZT - and Blade, ex-cop turned private dick, is on the case. This point and click adventure puts players under the timer, with decision and indecision sending them towards a vast number of possible outcomes, most of which are extremely unpleasant for the gritty detective. Hunter must work through a number of mysteries, including the riddle of his struggling relationship with girlfriend Karyn, all leading up to the mysterious rise of the so called "Dragon". It's hard to say which version you should play, as the Sega CD's additional voice acting creates some heady noir tones, but it also has a reduced colour palate, lending everything a green tinge. What's more, scenes like a sultry french kiss and the hint of intercourse had to be removed, being considered too "explicit" for sensitive console gamers. Ooh la la!

Divinity: Original Sin

DAVID HOLLINGWORTH throws
barrels at baddies



» Divinity: Original Sin made a huge impact with gamers. So much so that the sequel is about to blow through its Kickstarter with weeks to spare, and every perk well and truly unlocked. So, what's at the heart of this success?

Well, to be concise, it's because Divinity really doesn't give a damn about what you want to play – it's going to make you play it its way, and it's going to be hard. It's not going to hold your hand. It's going to offer some impressive spell/environment interactions that can blow up in your face as often as you make them blow up in your enemies'.

In short, it's hard. Uncompromising. But that's the game's brilliance. Anything you do manage to accomplish feels like completing an entire game, and there's a tonne more of that in Divinity.

The game tries to teach you its unique beats and requirements in its first major quest line. After a couple of fights to show you how the game works, you barely draw your sword for what feels like days. In fact, if you're playing in short bursts, it will be days. Instead, you're investigating a murder, and a line of other quests. You pick up some friends, argue amongst yourselves, and every time you think, well, this is little odd, and leave town... the guards warn you you're going to get pwned.

And you do. Big time.

So, back to doing what brought you to this place to begin with; which will lead you out of town, but even then, Divinity is not for the Diablo click it 'til it's dead

crowd. The turn-based combat might make you feel in control, but every opponent is well equipped to cut you down to size. They flank you, outnumber you, and will often make far better use of Divinity's terrain than you can hope to, in the early phases of the game at least. Before every fight, you'll want to make sure you know the ground, that you're properly equipped, and that you know what you're getting into. Otherwise, you'll be looking at a whole lot of party wipes; this is a game that will train you to reflexively hit the F5 key and save.

In fact, while you might think you're done with the game's brief tutorial, the entire first few hours is actually teaching you how to play the game and get the most out of it. It's teaching you to be thorough, and to think about what people are saying to you. It's teaching you to explore, and think outside the box. In one memorable instance, it also teaches you not to do things just because you're an adventurer and you think you can get away with just about anything – by blowing you up if you dig up a certain filled in hole in the ground.

Once you're done with that, you get to leave the city, and even then the game makes you work for every screen's worth of ground you cover. Divinity wants to challenge you, and by challenging you it will make you feel like you've earned every single victory.

It's also a game that will happily let you trespass in a house, piss off an important NPC to the point that he attacks you, and then let you kill him. What you do after that? The game doesn't care, because you got yourself into this mess, and you should be smart enough to get out of it.

I do love this game. 🍷

DEVELOPER:
LARIAN STUDIOS
PUBLISHER:
LARIAN STUDIOS
TYPE: RPG
PLATFORM: PC, XBONE, PS4
YEAR: 2014

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M

Violence, online
interactivity

Previous versions of StarCraft II® NOT required to play.

BATTLE.NET™ ACCOUNT REQUIRED. INTERNET CONNECTION REQUIRED. ADDITIONAL ONLINE FEES APPLY.

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BILZARD
ENTERTAINMENT

Pilotwings

Not quite simulator, not quite action, this strange SNES launch title floats somewhere between the lofty realms of definition. To attain a pilot's license players must perform simple tasks like landing or taking off a plane; both of which can prove surprisingly challenging – but never frustrating. Controls are minimal, with the directional pad controlling angles while a single button performs an action, like breaking or opening a parachute. The zen nature of the game make it almost a meditative experience – even when tasked with jumping bodily out of a plane with the goal to parachute safely onto a target. Those moments of 16-bit free fall, angling your body ever so slightly or somersaulting through the air like a slinky, provide rare moments of gaming tranquillity. But don't get too caught in the moment, as an excessive tilt could send you rocketing to the ground. This game really knows how to mess with your Chi.

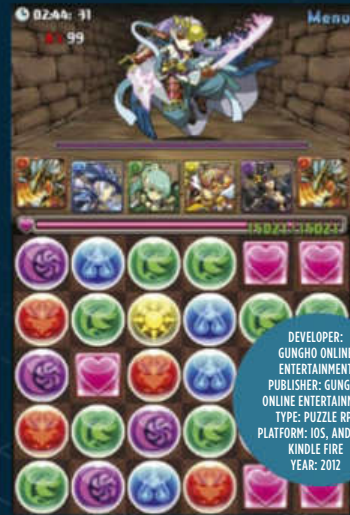


DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
TYPE: UNDEFINED
PLATFORM: SNES, WII, WII U
YEAR: 1990

Puzzle & Dragons

An RPG with a twist, Puzzle & Dragons sends players through fantasy dungeons alongside a team of six monsters. Fighting is turn-based, but offers something a little more suitable for touch screens than your classic text-based combat. Players are dealt a series of orbs, each made up of one of five elements: Fire, Wood, Water, Light and Dark, with a sixth thrown in that restores health. The aim is to align three or more matching orbs in a single turn, as doing so will trigger monsters with the corresponding colour to attack. Monster teams can be hand picked from over 2,000 available options made up of fantasy beasts, pop-culture characters and even some religious and mythological deities. It's a simple concept, but one that's addicting as hell, and perfect when on the move. Unfortunately the original game

isn't available in Australia at the time of writing, but if it ever makes its way to our shores (or you venture abroad) we highly recommend the cheap-as-free download.



DEVELOPER: GUNGHO ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT
PUBLISHER: GUNGHO ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT
TYPE: PUZZLE RPG
PLATFORM: IOS, ANDROID, KINDLE FIRE
YEAR: 2012

Red Dead Redemption

After more than enough time spent in the corrupt city streets of Grand Theft Auto, Rockstar's western sandbox feels almost like a refreshing mountain holiday. Gone are the stifling high rise buildings, drug fuelled thugs, and constant chatter of automatic weaponry, replaced instead by the calm and quiet of the open range. Yet the frontier world of Red Dead is far from peaceful: everyday is a fight to survive as occupants struggle to make ends meet; posses take their fair share and then some, while wild coyotes, bears and even the dreaded chupacabra stalk the landscape in search of fresh pickings. Amid

all this rides John Marston, a lone wanderer torn between the life of a bandit and that of a reformed, family man. While this virtual frontier is lush with choices and spontaneous events, Marston is the real reason we stay. Like all good legends, his tale is ever changing depending on who's doing the telling, but it's one so immaculately spun that it will continue to be told by gamers around LCD campfires for a long time to come.



DEVELOPER: ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO
PUBLISHER: ROCK STAR GAMES
TYPE: SANDBOX ADVENTURE
PLATFORM: PS3, XBOX 360
YEAR: 2010

Metroid Prime



DEVELOPER:
RETRO STUDIOS
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
TYPE: METROIDVANIA
PLATFORM: GAMECUBE,
WII, WII U
YEAR: 2002

When Metroid Prime was revealed for the first time in 2000, Metroid fans – including many of us here at Hyper – were aghast. It had been six years since Super Metroid, and after all that time, this was what Nintendo had to offer? A first-person shooter? What were they thinking?

But as it turned out, Metroid Prime was not an FPS at all. It simply took the exploration/collect-em-all formula perfected in Super Metroid and translated it into stunning first-person 3D. Even today, Prime stands as an intensely atmospheric experience: entering the Chozo Artefact Temple for the first time as rain snake their way down your visor and a cosmic hymn wafts through the air is as spine-shiveringly sublime today as it was 13 years ago.

Against all the odds, Metroid Prime was not only a good Metroid game – it was the BEST Metroid game. Better than Zero Mission, better than Fusion... better than Super Metroid. It's a goddamn masterpiece, is what it is.

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

The first thing you need to know about MGS3 is that it's the best Metal Gear Solid bar none. It takes place in the thick of the Ukrainian wilderness – a unique backdrop that provides ample opportunity for Hideo Kojima to expand upon the stealth gameplay that is the hallmark of the franchise. The addition of mechanics such as the ability to hunt for food and equip camouflage make the world of MGS3 feel robust and dynamic. It's like the environment isn't just something you use to hide from guards – it's a living entity that you need to cooperate

with in order to succeed.

Also, the jungle is just a really cool place to set a stealth game. There's something innately awesome about swinging down from a tree-branch onto an oblivious patrolling guard and quickly slitting his throat before he has the chance to cry out. It makes you feel like you're in an action film from the 1980s. The key difference is that, unlike most 80s action films, the story in MGS3 is well-written and moving. That ending... god, just thinking about it makes us choke up a little.



DEVELOPER:
KONAMI
PUBLISHER: KONAMI
TYPE: TACTICAL
ESPIONAGE ACTION
PLATFORM: PS2/3, XBOX
360, 3DS, VITA
YEAR: 2004



DEVELOPER: KLEI
ENTERTAINMENT
PUBLISHER:
MICROSOFT STUDIOS
TYPE: STEALTH
PLATFORM: PC, XBOX 360
YEAR: 2012

Mark of the Ninja

The weird thing about videogame ninjas is that they're seldom very ninjaish. Ninja Gaiden's Ryu, Ninja Blade's Ken, Shinobi's Joe Musashi... they all look like ninjas, sure, but they don't really act like ninjas. Instead of being stealthy killers that strike from the shadows, they're more like bloodthirsty berzerkers, chopping down anyone and anything unfortunate enough to get in their way.

Mark of the Ninja's unnamed protagonist is the exception that proves the rule. He's a master of stealth, darting silently from shadow to shadow, using misdirection and fear to keep hapless guards in a state of confusion until the perfect opportunity to strike presents itself. Uninterested in brawls, he is the king of the silent kill, swooping down from light fixtures and telephone poles before quietly impaling his foes with his razor sharp katana. He is versatile, lithe, and resourceful, possessing a suite of tools and abilities to contend with every eventuality.

He is the ultimate ninja: the nameless assassin. And he's not even 3D.

Deus Ex

DAN STAINES now has full access to your systems

DEVELOPER: ION STORM
PUBLISHER: EIDOS
TYPE: IMMERSIVE REALITY SIMULATOR
PLATFORM: PC, PS2, PSN
YEAR: 2000

I can remember the exact moment Deus Ex clicked for me. It was fifteen years ago and I'd just scored a gig as a part-time editorial assistant for Hyper's sister magazine, PC Powerplay. On my first day in the office, my editor and good friend David Wildgoose asked what I'd been playing and I told him "nothing" since I'd just bought a new PC and hadn't gotten around to buying any games for it yet.

"Get Deus Ex," he told me. "Get it on your way home. Leave work early if you have to."

At first I didn't like it. Like many first-time players, I struggled to come to grips with the game's wonky gunplay and was overwhelmed by the multitude of skills and weapons at my disposal. I approached it like a first-person shooter, investing in the pistol skill and blasting my way across Liberty Island with my trusty 10mm. As anyone familiar with Deus Ex will tell you, this not an optimal survival strategy – especially for a first timer – and it wasn't long before I was cursing Wildgoose for recommending what seemed to be a sloppy and unforgivably frustrating FPS.

But I persisted. And, after much reloading and profanity, I made it to my first objective: the Statue of Liberty. My target – terrorist leader Leo Gold – had barricaded himself inside and so I needed to find a way in. Across an open courtyard I could see an entrance to the statue's foyer... but it was closed, and locked, and guarded by a patrolling duo of terrorists and a small but menacing security bot. What to do?

My first instinct was to go with what I knew and simply shoot my way through. Crouched in the shadows,

I popped the guards with my 10mm and tried to circle-strafe the robot, Unreal Tournament-style. Bad idea. The guards went down easily enough, but robots – it turned out – are bulletproof, while I most certainly was not. It wasn't until my fourth or fifth death that I finally realised the Rambo approach wasn't going to work. I needed a new plan.

I looked in my inventory and saw that I had an EMP grenade. I knew from the tutorial level that EMPs were good for taking out electronic devices, so I figured: I'll shoot the guards like normal and disable the bot with the EMP. But I soon discovered that trying to throw a grenade without investing any points in the demolitions skill is a bit like tossing a paper plane in a hurricane: sure, I could throw the thing – but hitting the robot? No chance. Back to the drawing board.

Then I saw it: the explosive crate. I wondered: what if I lured the robot, and the guards, to the crate and shot it with my pistol? I couldn't throw grenades for shit, but I could shoot a gun just fine... instead of banging my head against a wall, why not play to my strengths? It took a couple of goes, and one Benny Hill-esque chase around the courtyard, but eventually it all fell into place and... boom. Problem solved. I had done it, and honestly? I was ecstatic. It was a simple solution but it was MINE.

And that's when it clicked. That's when I realised what I had been doing wrong. See, I'd been looking for "the" solution – the one path I assumed the devs had wanted me to take – never realising that there wasn't any. The problem was mine to solve: it was up to me to figure what to do with the tools at my disposal. This is the essence of Deus Ex: this is why Wildgoose had told me to buy it, and why I've played it more than a half-a-dozen times since. It's why Deus Ex is the greatest game ever made. **U**



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Splatoon

A non-violent multiplayer shooter, Splatoon splashes colour all over the genre's ever monotonous greys and browns. Two teams face off in an isolated arena. Armed with three types of weapons – a main, a sub and a special – both sides aim to flood levels with their respective colours before time runs out, kind of like a dog that pisses on everything. Enemy players can be forced back to respawn points by being soaked in ink, causing them to explode in a burst of goo. Yet this is only a temporary solution, as these aren't regular kids, they're Inklings, with the ability to dive into the floor and swim a

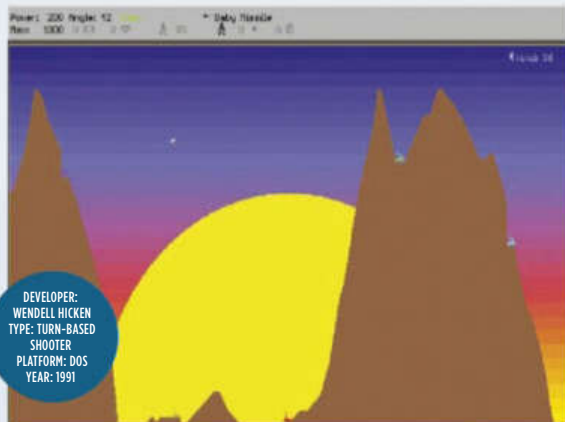
through their own paint tracks. Apart from regaining ground, this method of movement also recharges ink supplies allowing players to continue the expansion of their turf. Its cutesy design and lack of violence may seem a little childish at first, but it quickly becomes clear that Nintendo have made something extremely original, clever and – most important of all – fun, with addictive, competitive play that makes you want to play for no time.



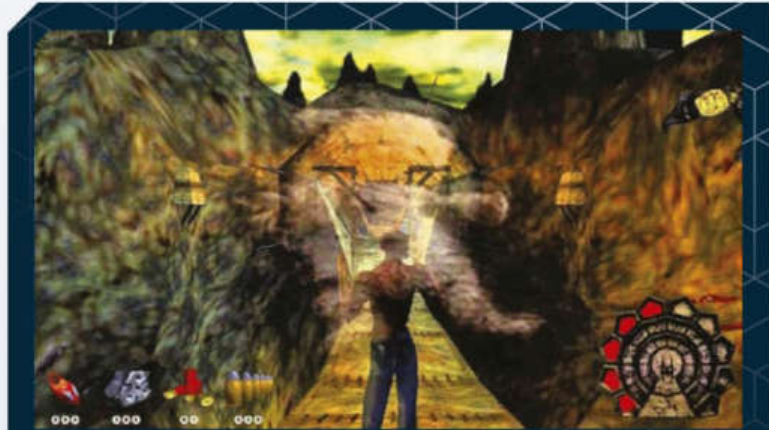
DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD
GROUP NO. 2
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
TYPE: THIRD-PERSON SHOOTER
PLATFORM: WII U
YEAR: 2015

Scorched Earth

A shareware artillery title, Scorched Earth plays kind of like a tennis game with pixelated tanks. The first tank serves, adjusting the angle and power of its shot to account for the shape of the landscape and strength of the wind. If they miss, the opposing tank returns a volley, going back and forth until someone finally hits their target. The victor is rewarded with a cash bonus, which can be spent on upgrades to weapons and armour. Items like the heavy roller won't detonate on impact, but rather roll down a slope until it reaches the bottom – ideal for tanks situated in a ravine; napalm spreads fiery death across the ground, catching foes that are just out of reach; and deflector shields, well, they deflect. But a crafty player can still win with standard weaponry, as an enemy can be destroyed by a sudden lightning storm or meteor shower, or even fall to their death if the ground is shot out beneath them – exiting the round in an epic DOS explosion.



DEVELOPER: WENDELL HICKEN
TYPE: TURN-BASED SHOOTER
PLATFORM: DOS
YEAR: 1991



Shadow Man

As far as Nintendo 64 games go, not many can boast the dark, sinister atmosphere of Shadow Man. The game begins with Jack the Ripper stabbing himself through the heart for crying out loud – in full view of players at that – all while a mysterious figure plans the doom of mankind.

Based on the comic book series of the same name, the game doesn't shy away from adult content or harsh language, yet handles both in a way that feels completely natural. This is mostly due to the excellent writing and delivery of characters like

Mark LeRoi, aka the immortal voodoo warrior Shadow Man; Jaunty, a terrifying skeleton/snake hybrid with a surprisingly jovial attitude; and the sassy Shaman Mama Nettie. Combat sees Mike dual-wielding all kinds of weapons and items alongside a wide range of unlockable Shadow powers. Pair this with a sprawling non-linear world and some tight platforming, and it's not hard to see why you should stop reading and start playing.

DEVELOPER: ACCLAIM
STUDIOS TESSIDE
PUBLISHER: ACCLAIM ENTERTAINMENT
TYPE: THIRD-PERSON ACTION
PLATFORM: N64, PLAYSTATION, PC, MAC
YEAR: 1999

Hotline Miami

Hotline Miami is a top-down Nicolas Winding Refn action-scene simulator. You are a professional murderer. Somebody calls you on the phone, gives you an address – an apartment, a mansion, a nightclub – and you go and murder everyone there, as quickly and stylishly as you possibly can. Style is massively important to this game – obviously. The whole saturated-neon VHS vibe has been lifted wholesale from Drive but somehow manages to avoid feeling derivative or clichéd. It's gorgeous in its ugliness – brash and grotesque, not unlike Miami

in the 1980s. Scarface's Miami.

Hotline Miami's sense of style extends to its mechanics as well, which have been crafted to facilitate exquisitely satisfying killstreaks. Finesse is mandatory and screw-ups are not permitted. Finishing a stage means killing everyone without getting killed yourself, and since a single bullet is usually enough to kill, you can't miss a beat. Think John Wick. Think Liam Neeson in Taken. That's you.

Oh, and also: the soundtrack? Orgasmically great. Even if you don't wanna play the game, check it out.



DEVELOPER: DENNATON GAMES
PUBLISHER: DEVOLVER DIGITAL
TYPE: SHOOT-EM-UP
PLATFORM: PC, PS3/4, VITA
YEAR: 2012



DEVELOPER: SMILEBIT
PUBLISHER: SEGA
TYPE: ACTION-PLATFORM-SPORTS THINGY
PLATFORM: DREAMCAST, PC, XBLA, PSN ETC.
YEAR: 2000

Jet Set Radio

Few games have stood the test of time better than Jet Set Radio. With its vibrant cel-shaded visuals, impossibly funky soundtrack, and uniquely subversive premise, it feels as fresh and relevant today as it did when it was released 15 years ago. This is Sega at the top of its game: confident in its voice and unafraid to take risks and pursue the new – even at the expense of mass-market appeal.

And though it saddens us to say so, it's easy to see why JSR never found the mainstream success it so clearly deserved. It's an odd game and just a little bit too counter-cultural for conservative tastes. Look at who you're playing: a rollerblading skatepunk on a mission to turn Tokyo into a giant canvas for your gang's graffiti. Add to that the fact the game was available exclusively on a platform few people owned and you've got a surefire recipe for obscurity.

Thankfully, the HD re-release is now cheaply and widely available, meaning everyone who missed it first time around can now give it a go. Don't get it on Vita, though: the controls are woeful.

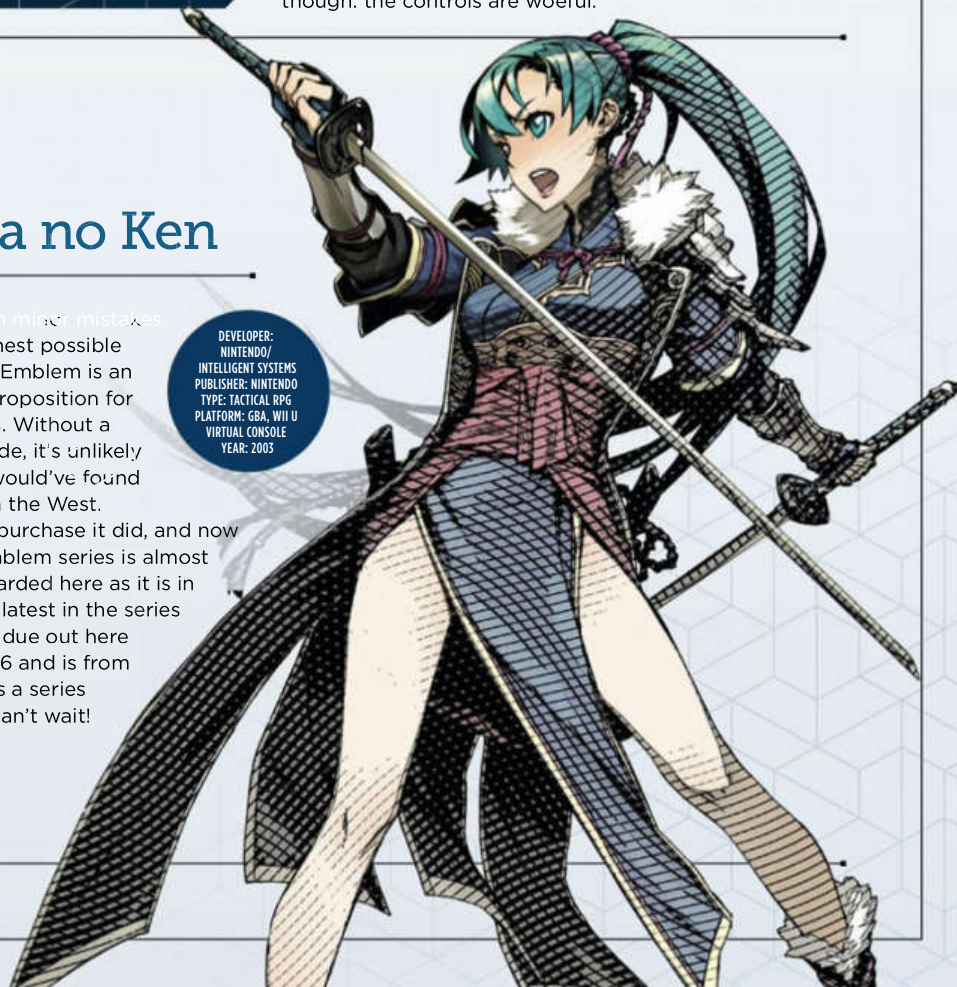
Fire Emblem: Rekka no Ken

The seventh game in the Fire Emblem series and the first to receive a Western release, Fire Emblem: Rekka no Ken (i.e. Fire Emblem: The Sword of Flame – or simply Fire Emblem outside of Japan) is widely regarded as one of the best tactical RPGs ever made, and for good reason. Retaining the accessible but tactically rich rock-paper-scissors design of its predecessors, Rekka no Ken introduces a number of innovations that have since gone on to become series staples, including terrain types, multiple mission objectives, and a tutorial mode to ease beginners into the game. The last of these is especially noteworthy: with its tendency to

punish even minor mistakes in the harshest possible terms, Fire Emblem is an imposing proposition for newcomers. Without a tutorial mode, it's unlikely the game would've found purchase in the West.

But find purchase it did, and now the Fire Emblem series is almost as well-regarded here as it is in Japan. The latest in the series – Fates – is due out here in early 2016 and is from all accounts a series highlight. Can't wait!

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO/
INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
TYPE: TACTICAL RPG
PLATFORM: GBA, WII U
VIRTUAL CONSOLE
YEAR: 2003





DEVELOPER:
ACCESS SOFTWARE
PUBLISHER: ACCESS
SOFTWARE
TYPE: ADVENTURE
PLATFORM: PC
YEAR: 1996

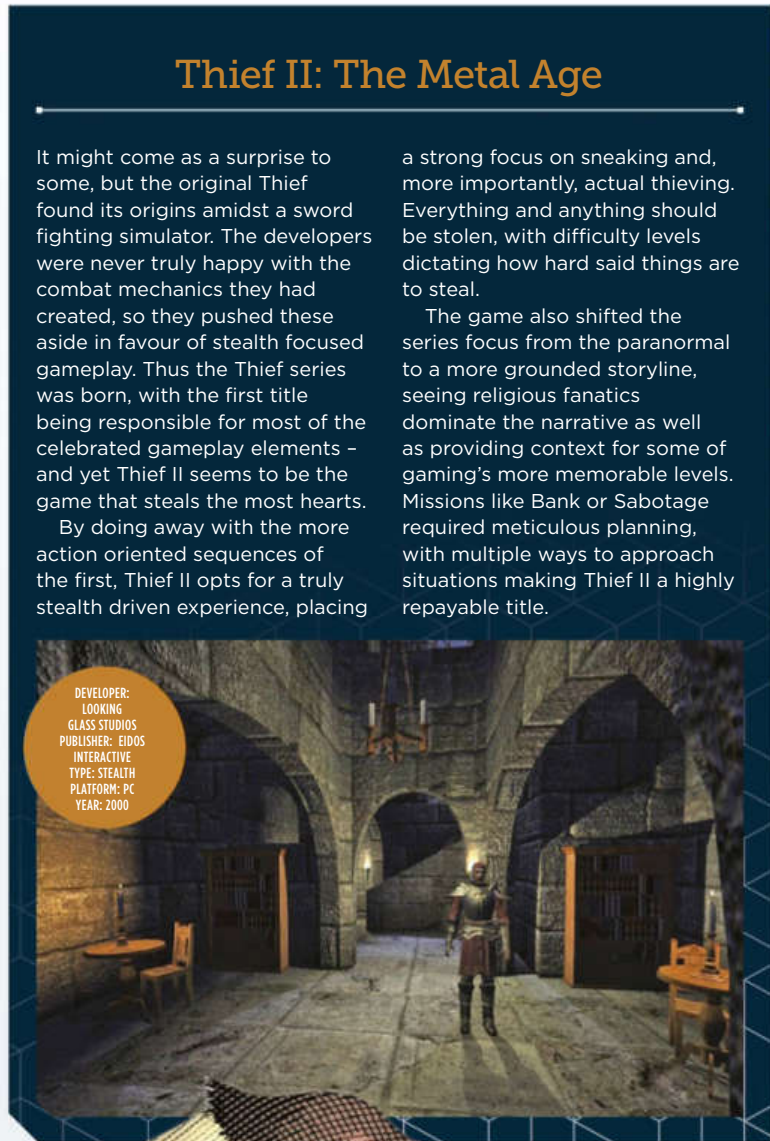
Tex Murphy: The Pandora Directive

If you've been slugging away at any of BioWare's titles of late, you may be interested to know that Tex Murphy is where these kinds of dialogue trees initially took root. Realised in glorious full motion video, The Pandora Directive follows the hard-boiled detective as he struggles to make ends meet. But our boy has bigger fish to fry, as the Black Arrow Killer is on the loose, the love of his life is becoming distant, and a strange, paranormal threat lurks in the shadows. Players navigate 3D spaces in first person, interrogating suspects or searching for clues that trigger cut-scenes and noir-esque asides that are sometimes gritty and others hilarious. Branching dialogue options allow players to make Tex a stand-up bloke, an OK guy, or downright rotten, with choices leading to one of six possible endings.

Cheesy, old school but never boring, The Pandora Directive's mix of action, comedy and intrigue lead to a non-stop thrill-fest that is far from dated. To quote the main man himself, "Danger's like Jello, there's always room for more."

Super Smash Bros Melee

Nintendo is responsible for some of gaming's most recognisable faces, so a title that brought these superstars together was inevitable. Yet the fact that Super Smash Bros managed to be more than mere fan service – rather providing a fresh, accessible brawler – surprised gamers the world over. It wasn't long before Smash 64 became an a-list party game; but when Melee rocked around, things changed. While the game remained as accessible as ever, controls became honed, mechanics tightened – making room for more serious players to take root. Advanced techniques like the ability to wavedash or DI (directional influence) divided casual and competitive gamers, creating a nuanced battle of timing and skill over the button bashing smash-fest it once was. But the game is far from pro exclusive, as the inclusion of event matches, arenas and a wider range of both characters and stages all work to appease even the humblest of fighters. The thing is, Melee still holds up beautifully – just ask one of the record setting 205,000 viewers who tuned into this year's epic Evo Melee final.



DEVELOPER:
LOOKING
GLASS STUDIOS
PUBLISHER: EIDOS
INTERACTIVE
TYPE: STEALTH
PLATFORM: PC
YEAR: 2000

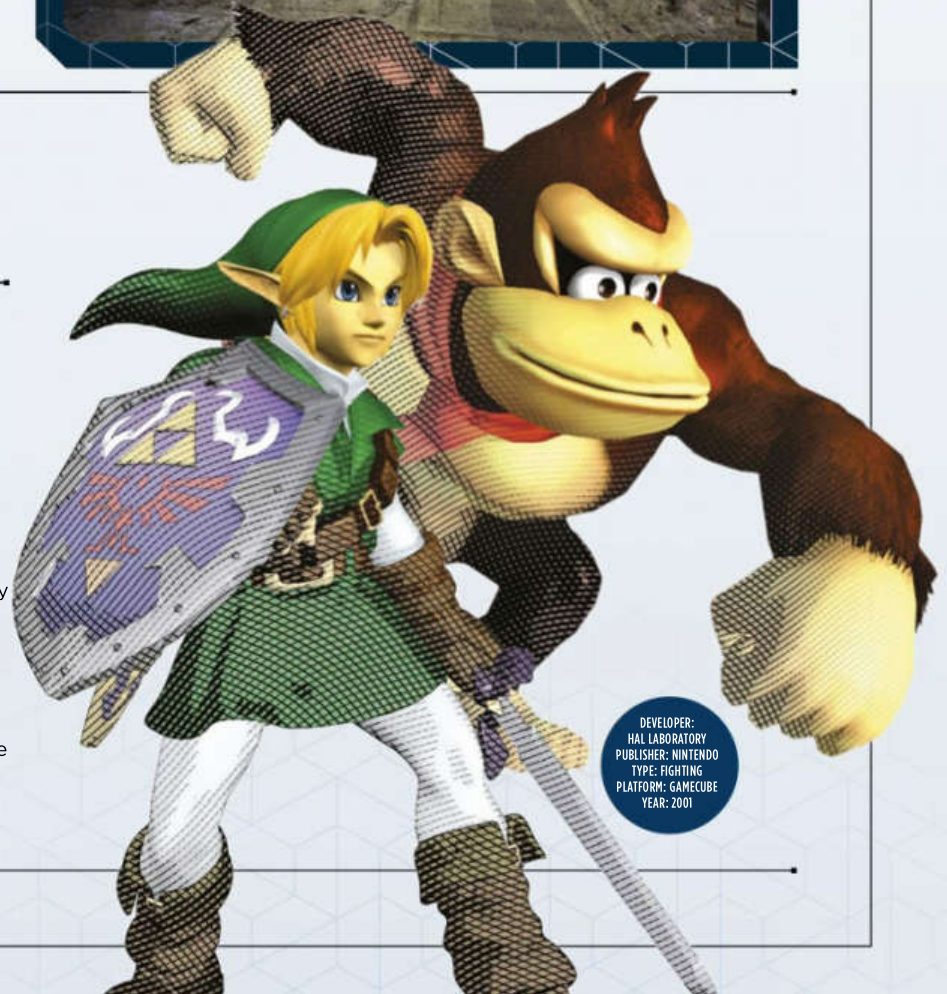
Thief II: The Metal Age

It might come as a surprise to some, but the original Thief found its origins amidst a sword fighting simulator. The developers were never truly happy with the combat mechanics they had created, so they pushed these aside in favour of stealth focused gameplay. Thus the Thief series was born, with the first title being responsible for most of the celebrated gameplay elements – and yet Thief II seems to be the game that steals the most hearts.

By doing away with the more action oriented sequences of the first, Thief II opts for a truly stealth driven experience, placing

a strong focus on sneaking and, more importantly, actual thieving. Everything and anything should be stolen, with difficulty levels dictating how hard said things are to steal.

The game also shifted the series focus from the paranormal to a more grounded storyline, seeing religious fanatics dominate the narrative as well as providing context for some of gaming's more memorable levels. Missions like Bank or Sabotage required meticulous planning, with multiple ways to approach situations making Thief II a highly repayable title.



DEVELOPER:
HAL LABORATORY
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
TYPE: FIGHTING
PLATFORM: GAMECUBE
YEAR: 2001

Advance Wars

Advance Wars is the gateway drug of the turn-based strategy world. Its in-game tutorial system and cartoony art style make it instantly accessible, but when backed up by deep strategic mechanics that allow for multiple playthroughs you've got a game that will last aeons. Its large roster of characters, terrains and units cause levels to constantly shift and change, with fights taking place in the air, on land and at sea. These can be altered by what commanding

officer you pick, which enemy you fight and what units you decide to deploy. Before its re-visit with this depth had rarely been seen on western handhelds – as up until then Nintendo believed turn-based strategy wouldn't find purchase outside of Japan – when in actual fact the game was so well received that it Marco Polo'd Japanese strategy favourites like Fire Emblem to the international market. Thanks Advance Wars!



DEVELOPER:
INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
TYPE: TURN-BASED TACTICS
PLATFORM: GAME BOY
ADVANCE, WII U
YEAR: 2001



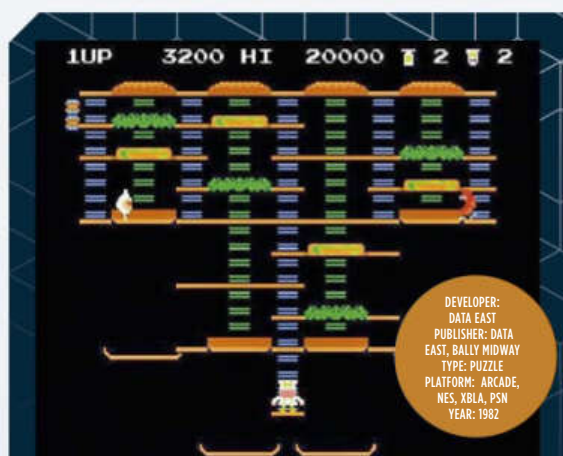
Assetto Corsa

Simulating reality is a huge ask. We're still a long way from perfection as – let's face it – making someone in their living room feel like they're on the track is fairly ambitious. Assetto Corsa understands this. It may not be as pretty as other games, nor have as many vehicles, but it stands out among its competitors because it focuses on the points that really matter. First of all, it's made for a racing wheel: the force feedback is hectic (and haptic), with hairpin turns causing you to literally

DEVELOPER: KUNOS
SIMULAZIONI
PUBLISHER: 505 GAMES
TYPE: RACING SIMULATOR
PLATFORM: PC, XBI, PS4
YEAR: 2014

fight against the wheel for control, unlike the underwhelming rumble of most titles. Pit stops, which are as crucial to racing strategy as the layout of a track, are left completely in the user's hands, and the options once pit-stopped are as accurate as they are plentiful.

This is all barebones stuff, but you'd be surprised how many titles get the simple things wrong. Another thing AC seems to understand is that pleasing everyone is as unrealistic as not feeling the road beneath you, green-lighting user generated mods to fill any gap players still may have in their mechanical hearts.



DEVELOPER:
DATA EAST
PUBLISHER: DATA
EAST, BALLY MIDWAY
TYPE: PUZZLE
PLATFORM: ARCADE,
NES, XBLA, PSN
YEAR: 1982

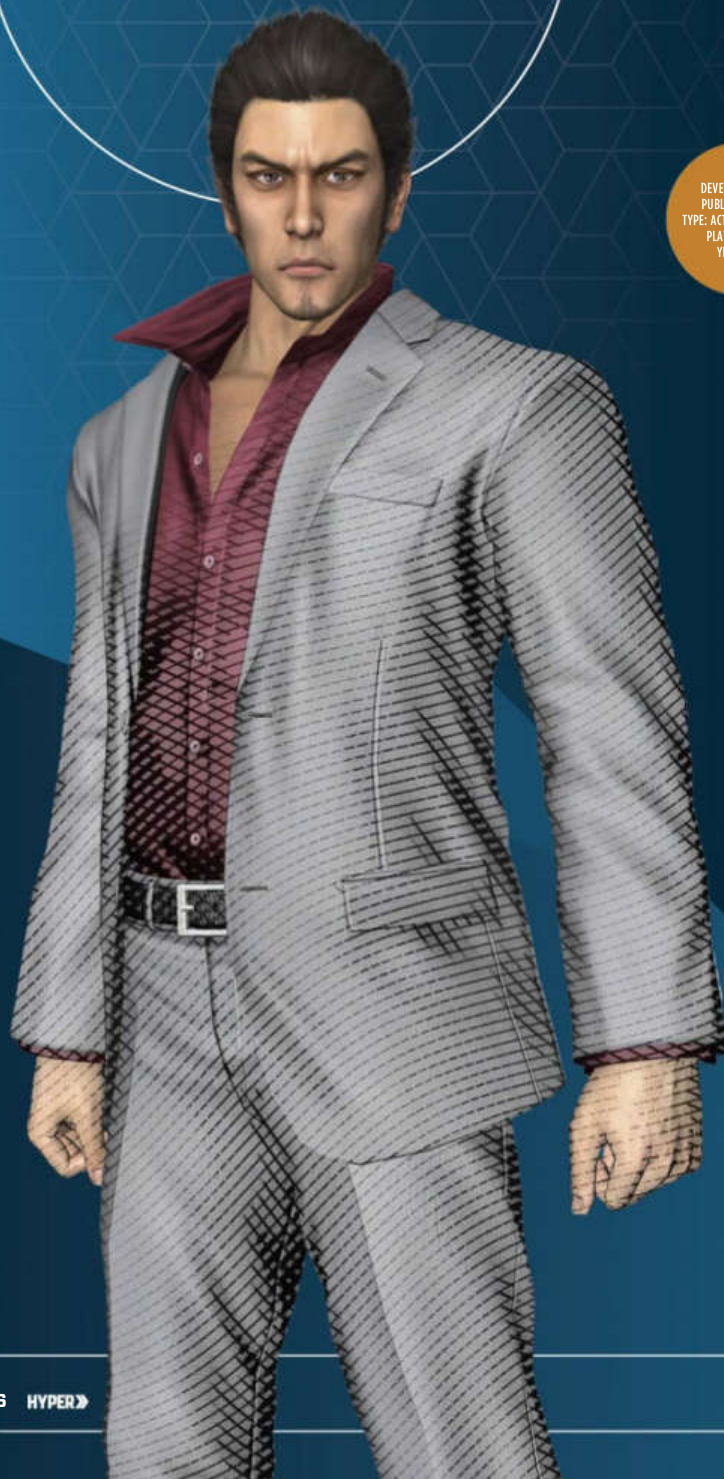
BurgerTime

Games don't always make sense. Take BurgerTime for instance: frantic chef, Peter Pepper, runs around kicking ingredients off platforms in order to make four delicious (and might we add, giant) burgers. Surly sausages and enraged eggs chase him about, eager to ruin the menu, only to be thwarted by a few precious handfuls of Peter's perilous pepper or crushed beneath a giant burger filling. There are literally hundreds of other scenarios this gameplay could have slotted into, but for some reason we're glad it ended up in this crazy world.

The goal is to complete the menu without falling prey to your culinary pursuers, but while enemies can be defeated, the trick lies with picking the right path, anticipating enemy movement and adjusting on the fly. In truth, the game owes a lot to arcade giants Donkey Kong and Pac Man, yet the frantic gameplay, chirpy music and hilarious jiggling movements of the antagonistic foods make BurgerTime a meal in itself.

Yakuza 4

DANIEL WILKS lies like floor dragon



DEVELOPER: SEGA
PUBLISHER: SEGA
TYPE: ACTION ADVENTURE
PLATFORM: PS3
YEAR: 2011

There is something wonderfully different about the whole Yakuza franchise, and Yakuza 4 in particular. While each of the games contains very familiar ingredients – the quest system, the beat 'em up action, mini-games and the like there is also a definite sense of other at play, of a culture unlike our own with some social mores and habits that aren't like our own. It's a delightful thing, having a game act as snapshot into another culture, simultaneously showing our differences as well as the universality of certain themes. It's a game about brotherhood and loyalty, honour and sacrifice, friendship and betrayal. These are all universals, seen in stories throughout the world, but the game world in which these themes are played out is deliciously other.

The first character introduced of the four protagonists of Yakuza 4 is Shun Akiyama, the owner of a loan company and a hostess club. While the concept of a privately owned, semi-legal loan company is a little odd, the activities surrounding the hostess club are much more alien. To make the club successful you need to dress and train girls, playing to their strengths and personalities to make them ideal companions and flirts. One of the first things you face in the gritty world of Yakuza 4 is a tough guy who is just as happy to kick the shit out of someone as he is to lend them money essentially playing pretty princess dress-up with girls who professionally drink with men in bars. It's about as far from the tough guy persona as you could be but it's an intrinsic part of his character.

The other three characters, Taiga Saejima, a hulking death row prisoner sentenced to die for a series of killings 25 years earlier, Masayoshi Tanimura, a young cop trying to solve the mystery of his father's murder and its connection to the Taiga Saejima case, and Kazuma Kiryu, the hero of the Yakuza series and, by Yakuza 4, retired legendary yakuza turned orphan wrangler (or whatever you call a person who opens an unlicensed orphanage before turning his back on it, heading back to Kamurocho and punching a lot of people to death), are all equal part tough guy and incongruous quirk.

Yakuza 4 is the apotheosis of the series (at least until the release of Yakuza 5), elevating the melodrama and machismo to the Nth degree, culminating in the most simultaneously macho and homoerotic way possible – a shirtless brawl on top of a skyscraper. For years Hyper has joked with the initialism WTHIWJJP (What The Hell Is Wrong With Japanese People) when referencing the strangeness of Japanese games, the heightened, odd realities in which some games take place or the casual mixing of sex and violence that often seems to go hand in hand. The initialism could be used with Yakuza 4 – it's strange and definitely psychosexual, but it's also one of the best, if not the best example of a Japanese game remaining strictly culturally Japanese but having that universal appeal that can transcend cultural boundaries. Playing dress-up with hostesses may be odd, but in the world of Yakuza 4, it's a natural extension of time and place.

If none of the melodrama, sexual tension or soap-operatics appeal, you can always find solace in the fact that it's hard to walk down a street without coming upon a group of thugs menacing someone who is just asking for a good beating. Even if the story doesn't grab you and the characters are too far afield to appreciate, you'd be hard pressed not to crack a smile when you bean a baseball cap and parka clad tough with a bicycle and follow the attack up by KOing his mate with a boot to the face and a polite curb stomp. **4**

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Zone of the Enders

What could be more fun than battling space robots? Battling space robots with swords, that's what. Set in the 22nd century, Zone of the Enders follows Leo Stenbuck, a young colonist of Jupiter who stumbles across the super awesome mech-suit, *ahem* "Orbital Frame", Jehuty. Leo quickly masters the ins and out of the frame, and uses his newfound power to defend Jupiter's population from the evil military force BAHRAM. While the game

is produced by the legendary Hideo Kojima, the story is sadly a far cry from Metal Gear standards, but rest assured cut-scenes are of the same high quality, spectacle-based ilk. When controlling Jehuty, players fly through areas firing an assortment of missiles, locking onto foes with a Zelda-inspired targeting system. But the real heavy-hitting comes when players boost in close to slice enemies to pieces, providing a variety of combat options to choose from. Fast and active, the game really comes into its own during boss encounters, especially the intense challenge provided by those approaching the title's epic finale.

DEVELOPER:
KCFJ
PUBLISHER: KONAMI
COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
TYPE: THIRD PERSON
SHOOTER/HACK AND SLASH
PLATFORM: PS2, PS3, X360
YEAR: 2001

Wonder Boy in Monster World

So many games these days are going for the grit factor. Look how Joel Marcus Fenix is, how grizzled Joel from the Last of Us is or how ... er ... dark the Dark Knight is. Sometimes all this doom and gloom can get a bit much, and you need a game to remind you life doesn't have to be so damn bleak.

This is where Wonder Boy in Monster World comes in, a side scrolling adventure game that is unashamedly fantastical. The once peaceful land of Monster World has ironically been invaded by an army of, um, monsters - but everyone still seems to be in good spirits, as blue haired hero Shion has taken up

arms. Levels are awash with colour, complete with smiling tree stumps and happy mountains, seeing players leap across clouds, swim through oceans and duck n swipe their way through armies of monsters (because this is by far the most effective mode of attack). Shops peddle weapons, armour, boots and potions while companions can be found in dragons, wizards and fairies.

If you're searching for the video game equivalent of antidepressants, this is it. ☺

DEVELOPER:
WEISTONE
PUBLISHER: SEGA
TYPE: PLATFORMER
PLATFORM: MEGA DRIVE,
VIRTUAL CONSOLE,
PSN, XBLA
YEAR: 1991



DEVELOPER:
SEGA AM-3
PUBLISHER: SEGA
TYPE: SPORTS
PLATFORM: ARCADE,
DREAMCAST
YEAR: 1999

Virtua Tennis

You may be asking yourself "How did a tennis simulator, not to mention an old tennis simulator, make the list?" Surely, there must be other, more original games deserving of this esteemed reward? Well, dear reader, with a question like that, it's evident you have never experienced the joy of playing Virtua Tennis. It's not about having a knowledge of the sport, knowing which forms work, or who the hell Mark Philippoussis is - it's about bringing PONG into a 3D landscape. While there have been some significant improvements to the visuals, the gameplay largely remains the same. One side launches, or "serves", the ball to the other side, who in turn returns that "serve" with a hit - continuing until someone shamefully, pitifully, humiliatingly misses and loses the point. But they aren't ostracised, stoned, or sent to the racks like in the arcade days, they simply get on with the game until someone loses for good - THEN they are ostracised, stoned, and sent to the racks. Just kidding, unlike PONG Virtua Tennis is a family friendly title... still, one can never be sure what might happen outside of the game itself.



Ride to Hell: Retribution

JAMES COTTEE was hoping the title of this game wouldn't be so literal...

DEVELOPER:
EUTECHNYX
PUBLISHER: DEEP SILVER
TYPE: ACTION/ADVENTURE
PLATFORM: PC, PS3,
XBOX 360
YEAR: 2013

There are many outstanding contenders for the title of Worst Videogame of the Last Generation, but *Ride to Hell: Retribution* fails in so many ways and on so many levels that it transcends mere mediocrity. It is an instant anti-classic, and has rightly earned a place in the Videogame Hall of Shame alongside *Superman 64* and *E.T.* for the Atari 2600.

The most striking aspect of *Ride to Hell's* mediocrity is its lack of polish, refinement, presentation, and optimisation. Menus are sluggish and poorly-designed, and cut scenes begin and end abruptly and artlessly. The dialogue reads like placeholder text. The drab colours, grubby textures, and obnoxious lighting make everything hard to see, and the tawdry animations make characters impossible to relate to. Everyone has a surreal, exaggerated physique. Our hero is a grottier, more simian sibling of Jack Black's avatar from *Brutal Legend*, the prostitutes look like rejects from the Barbie doll factory, and the myriad goons you will murder are all lanky, lumpy, and stumpy.

When talking their jaws flap like they're broken Muppets, and the quality control team failed to notice that nobody actually stands on any surface; everyone appears to be floating a good inch above the ground. Your motorbike has the opposite problem: sometimes it will clip through the tarmac and hurtle downwards to oblivion.

Your mission: to avenge your murdered brother by slaying large numbers of goons. You achieve this by belting them with a pipe wrench during sluggish and disorientating motorcycle chase sequences, and by ventilating them in some of the poorest cover-shooting encounters ever included in a full-price videogame.

Guns become completely impractical at close quarters, hence the need for repetitive melee attacks. A mini-boss might take a good 50 or so stomps to the chest to kill, and by the time you reach that point your senses are deadened to the accompanying squelching, blood spurts, and camera shudder. Sometimes goons will pile into a room and forget to attack you, allowing you to line up perfect head shots while they just mill about.

Pearl-clutching wowers complain a lot about 'meaningless violence,' but here this spectre is given flesh. This violence really is meaningless. In *Ride to Hell: Retribution*, everything is meaningless.

The true scope of this game's tawdriness is revealed when you start unlocking the sex scenes. Defend a lady's honour by inflicting grievous bodily harm upon a randy oaf, and she'll reward you with a rushed, confusingly-directed, and fully-clothed session of rumpy-pumpy. Pummel the ex of a lady mechanic, and she'll service you while still wearing her boiler suit. Talk about wearing protection. These animated 'rewards' have around the same level of articulation as the sex scene in *Team America: World Police* and are far, far less erotic.

How can a game get absolutely everything so utterly wrong? The developers at Eutechnyx originally envisioned *Ride to Hell* as an open-world, GTA-like game of 60s biker vengeance, but over the course of five or so years of production difficulties the game was cancelled, then un-cancelled, then finally rushed to market as a load of slapped-together, mostly-linear tripe.

In a perverse way, *Ride to Hell: Retribution* succeeds in creating an emotional connection with the player. Things that once seemed important like sex, violence, money, drugs, and vehicle customisation lose all value. The only thing that matters it plugging away at each poorly-designed challenge, dying and restarting until you beat it - until it's finally over.

If you want to truly appreciate the very best gaming has to offer, then you have to sample the worst - and as gaming experiences go, *Ride to Hell: Retribution* is unforgettable. ❌

DEVS SAY WHAT GAMES You Must Play

» Rather than just reading us banging on about the games you must play, we thought we'd get some other authorities to chip in. We cast the net far and wide and invited developers from all over to tell us what games they think everyone must play. Here are some of their responses.

TJ Wagner (Executive Producer, Chicago-Baltimore, Wargaming)
PORTAL 1 AND 2

It's a great example of making a whole new genre by combining others. It's a shooter without bullets that is mainly solving puzzles. The storytelling, music and characters are all top notch. It changed the way I think about games forever. Portal 2 introduced a cooperative gameplay mode that was fantastic and had a lot of smart design decisions included like emotes to help communicate with your partner.

Andrew Karpiuk (Development Director, Mobile Development, Wargaming)

ANGRY BIRDS

Rovio managed to create a cultural phenomenon of our time. 17 games are united by the same franchise, support of 13 platforms and about 2B downloads since 2009. By the way, the amount of downloads is comparable to the population of the Earth in 1930.

Michael Zhivets (Team Lead Gameplay Vision, World of Tanks, Wargaming)

HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC 3

It helps to train the brain to become more agile and improves strategic thinking. Unlike the majority of games released these days, Heroes of Might & Magic 3 is a thinking game, not just a means to while away a few hours.

Sergey Vorobyev (Deputy Development Director, World of Warships, Wargaming)

GRAND THEFT AUTO V

Grand Theft Auto III defined sandbox gaming, and really introduced it to the whole world. You could do whatever you wanted - given that it was mostly violent, haha. However, as the series progressed, we saw the game getting more layered and a more engaging experience. The latest incarnation, GTA V, has a huge, open world brimming with possibilities, an awesome physics engine, sweet graphics, thrilling story - it's the complete package.

Victor Avila (Vanir Project)

For me, an absolute must play is

SUPER MARIO BROS 3.

This is a must play because it took 100% advantage of the console's potential and if you play it today it is still every bit as entertaining as the day it was released.

Andrew Goncharuk (BSK Games)

EVE ONLINE





It's not some old game that people usually will pick (because of impact on gamedev and nostalgia). EVE is my pick for must play because, if you want to see the future of gaming, here it is. It is ahead of its time, it will become mainstream only 10-20 years after but this one will be called the real first one. EVE is a parallel universe, one big breathing world where people actions affect anyone in this world, in the same way as in reality.

Mario Mihokovic (LGM Games)

Since we are game developers, I hope you won't mind, but I'd like to suggest our game as one of the games players should really try out. There are a number of spectacular games out there, but this one we are personally attached to.

Our latest game is **STARPOINT GEMINI 2**, sequel to our first title released back in 2010. This game has been released in Fall 2014, after one year in Early Access, and was very successful. A great part of this success was the fact we shaped the game much to players wishes and ideas, and that path proved to be the correct one. Communication with our fan base during Early Access was exceptional, and made us realise that players (at least our community of more "mature" veteran gamers) actually do have a great idea of what kind of experience they expect from a space game, and also don't hesitate to offer dozens of usable suggestions on how to achieve certain gameplay goals.

Our initial idea was to create

a living universe, much like older legendary space games, and allow players to travel and discover unrestricted in any way. At the same time, we didn't want to go too far and create an overcomplicated hyperrealistic space simulation. A huge, inspiring and dangerous, but at the same time easy to grasp universe was our main intention. And we really think our open world space game, crosslinked with over 50 factions, made it possible for most players.

In the words of one journalist from months ago, "Starpoint Gemini 2" can simply be put in a single sentence: "It is a mix of Elite, X series and legendary Freelancer... best way to put it is that this is Eve offline..."

Any player that craves real time massive space battles, discovering dozens of planets and different factions, improving himself along with his crew and ship, but also doesn't have the time to study entire encyclopedia before playing should really try Starpoint Gemini 2...

Carlos Blas Garcia (Anima Project Studio)

THE LAST OF US

Because it is a story-telling masterpiece which mixes story and gameplay in an incredible way.



Olaf Morelewski (Game Designer, LabLike)

THIS WAR OF MINE (11 BIT STUDIOS)

Because it touches the problem of war from a completely different point of view than any other game. Survive the war as a civilian, not a soldier.

Yoshiaki Hirabayashi (Producer of Resident Evil titles, Capcom)

VAGRANT STORY (PS1, RELEASED IN 2000)

The game system is a perfect balance of action and strategy, the mixture of pixel art and 3D polygons is an artistic triumph, the gameplay is deep and rewarding, and the darkly fantastical worldview of the story completely sucks the player in. Despite its age I think players today can still enjoy this masterpiece - a true 'must play'.

Nick Tannahill (Marketing Manager, Firefly Studios)



JET SET RADIO FUTURE

JSRF is not only a one-of-a-kind platformer skating game hybrid, it is also one of the greatest videogame sequels of all time. Future takes the tagging from the original and properly integrates it with the platforming, it goes wild with character artwork and expands levels while somehow retaining their tight design. It is a masterwork of Japanese game development.

Jess Lebow (Lead Narrative Designer, CI Games)

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION V

If you are a fan of turn based strategy, this is the quintessential title. Why: multiple ways to win, procedurally generated resources, massive re-playability through new civilizations and maps, and online multiplayer. I have played this game regularly since it came out, and I still find myself in situations I've never encountered before. And playing co-op with a friend online -working together to take on a super high level AI - is an emotional roller coaster. It's just streamlined, efficient, thought-provoking fun.

Chris Wilson (Lead Designer and Producer, Grinding Gear Games)

DIABLO 2

Diablo 2 built on the firm foundations of Diablo 1 to pioneer many RPG tropes that are

omnipresent in modern RPGs (skill trees, rare items with random mods, set items, etc). It was also one of the last 2D RPGs (before the switch to 3D around the year 2000), and has some of the best graphics of a purely 2D game. It's a must-play game because its character and item progression are incredibly addictive and rewarding. Playing with friends on the Battle.net online service is one of the best possible action RPG experiences.

Sebastian Gioseffi (Programmer and Designer, Coffee Powered Machine)

BRAID, BY JONATHAN BLOW

It is a masterclass in game design. It takes the time-rewinding mechanic, which is really interesting in itself, and explores it to its deepest and fullest, doing so without any unnecessary repetition or grinding whatsoever. That alone would make it a must play game, but Braid also takes a step further, attempting not to tell a story or generate a set of emotions, but to convey the sense (as opposed to the meaning or reference) of the subjects it explores, entwining traditional narrative and game mechanics into something unique, that could

not exist in any other medium than a videogame. All of this makes Braid nothing short of a masterpiece.

James Ohlen (Senior Creative Director, BioWare)

Okay, so I'm kind of biased, in that I love role-playing games and I love role-playing games with stories. I've been with BioWare for 20 years. I was lead designer on Baldur's Gate and games like Knights of the Old Republic, and games like that, so I love story-based games. And this year, **KNIGHTS OF THE FALLEN EMPIRE** is the story-based Star Wars RPG.

Kyle Duncan (Producer, PopCap)

I'm playing **BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT** right now. What I love about it is the psychological changes and what they do in that. So the way they treat the Joker [SPOILER] and the way you find him in





places, and sometimes he's in the architecture, sometimes he's in the billboards... the way they create that psychological tension in the storytelling. I love games that immerse you in their worlds and what's going on. I think they did an amazing job. For us, it's all about humour and we try and create in our worlds that humour, that accessibility and depth, but I thought Arkham Knight did a fantastic job of that.

Marcus Nilsson (General Manager, Ghost Games)

I always find it so hard because I play all these different games and they all are different. I'll do this. The game that people absolutely must play, they need to dig up their old PS2 and find one on fucking Craig's List, or whatever, and find a copy of **ICO**. Because Ico does an excellent job of communicating emotions through very subtle ways, but it's an astonishing achievement in emotional storytelling without words.

Martin Sahlin (Developer and Creative Director for Unravel, Coldwood Interactive)

Wow, that's so big. There are so many, I must go for... honestly, I think, yeah, **JOURNEY** is definitely a must-buy. There are many other must-buys, but that one. I think a cool thing about videogames is when you make the core mechanic, like, the main thing you do, moving from A to B, when you make that really awesome. They're doing lots of other stuff that's really cool. But the thing that they've done best of all is the fact that just the simple action of moving from A to B is super satisfying to do. They've got it just right, the thing where you slide down the hill and there's just enough momentum to just fly over there. It's very satisfying to play and, on top of that, there's lots of other stuff that's brilliant about it, too. But that's what makes it a must-play for me.

Patrick Bach (General Manager, DICE)

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT.

It's Star Wars and it's a DICE shooter.

That's it. I can go into detail on what that means, but I think most people hopefully know what Star Wars is, and I think the whole collaboration with Lucas, the whole attention to detail, the focus on the core values of what the whole Star Wars IP stands for, married with the



attention to detail that DICE has, not only artistically, but also from a gameplay perspective, and then our knowledge of building shooters, in general, married with working with Lucas... because they care a lot about what this game is. It's not only about, do the bolts fit in the right way on the AT-AT, it's way more than that. It's about the "feel" of the Star Wars universe, and Battlefront captures that.

Rachel Franklin (Vice President and General Manager, The Sims Studios)

I'm going to say **THE SIMS.**

The Sims 4, of course. I think because the relationship that you can have by controlling your little person and their life is a game experience that you will not find in any other franchise.

Sara Jansson (Senior Producer on Mirror's Edge Catalyst, DICE)

Absolute must-play. I will then choose... there are so many great games, I will choose **BRAID**. It's one of my favourite puzzle, clever-type smaller games that I think is something different from a lot of games.

Sebastian Enrique (Developer of FIFA 16, EA Sports)

INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS.

It's brilliantly designed. It's a lot of fun. It's one of the games that inspired me to become a game developer. **W**



THE 15 GREATEST

Games Never Made

» Many games fall by the wayside and quite rightly so. For every great game there are a bunch of stinkers that were cancelled some time during production, but there are some cancelled games that truly stand out as those that died before their time. **DANIEL WILKS** takes a look at 15 of the games we wished had made it all the way.

inSANE

When inSANE was announced at the Spike Video Game Awards in 2010 it sounded too good to be true – Guillermo del Toro was set to direct a survival horror game being developed by Volition, the developers behind Freespace, Summoner, Red Faction and Saints Row. The 30 second teaser trailer that went with the announcement simultaneously revealed nothing and everything you needed to know to get interested in the title in a montage on insectile looking parts, tentacles and other grabbing

DEVELOPER:
SNOWBALL INTERACTIVE
PUBLISHER: OCTAGON
ENTERTAINMENT
TYPE: ACTION RPG
PLATFORM: PC, DREAMCAST

tendrils with the occasional shot of a screaming mouth and ending with a quick glimpse of a needle and a terrified eye. It looked creepy as hell and given Del Toro's expertise when it comes to creature design it would doubtlessly have been something at least unnerving if not downright terrifying.

Then THQ imploded and the rights to the game, intended to be the first part of a trilogy, went to Guillermo del Toro. Since then, nary a word about the project has been heard, despite the occasional rumour that something would be announced "soon".

Legacy of Kain: Dead Sun

First intended as a title for PS3, 360 And PC and later considered as a possible launch title for PS4, Legacy of Kain: Dark Sun was not, despite the title, a direct sequel to the previous Legacy of Kain games. The story was set in the far future of Nosgoth and was most likely intended as a reboot of the franchise. It would have involved a new clan of vampires known as "the Saradin", one of whom would be the main character. Details leaked online state the game would see Gein the vampire destroying a human village but essentially being possessed by the soul of Asher, one of the slain humans, leaving the main character with a human soul and questioning why he was driven to destroy the village in the first place. Of course this could all be false – the narrative designer of the game, James Smythe has implied that the leaked story summary is entirely wrong but has not provided any alternate narrative threads. The game would have featured both a single and multiplayer focus. The multiplayer was salvaged and released as the Square Enix F2P action game, Nosgoth.

DEVELOPER:
VOLITION
PUBLISHER: THQ
TYPE: SURVIVAL HORROR
PLATFORM: 360,
PS3, PC

Stormbringer: Elric of Melniboné

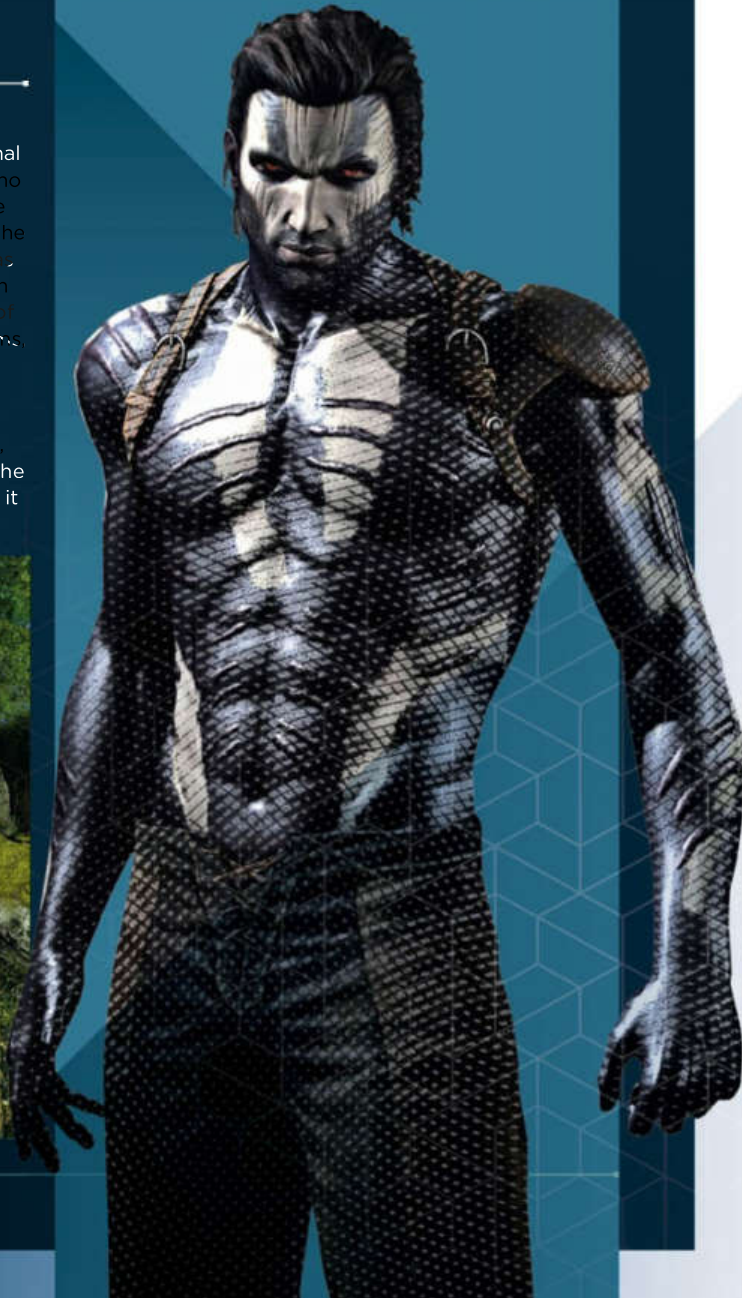
Michael Moorcock, the unbelievably prolific creator of the Eternal Champion saga, a connected series of novels and stories (around 114 at the moment, one of which is a Doctor Who novel) detailing the experiences of a character destined to be reborn into every conflict across the multiverse, hasn't had an easy time when it comes to getting his novels translated into game form. Every one of the games based on his writings has been cancelled before release. Stormbringer: Elric of Melniboné is but the most recent Eternal Champion game to have

been cancelled.

Based on his most famous Eternal Champion character Elric, the albino prince of Melniboné, wielder of the soul sucking sword that provides the title of the game, Stormbringer was a single player action RPG in which players would have taken control of Elric, exploring the Young Kingdoms, fighting the forces of both Law and Chaos and commanding armies. While the ambitious ARPG sounds interesting to say the least, Moorcock himself wasn't a fan of the direction the story was taking and it was canned. Alas.



DEVELOPER:
CLIMAX STUDIOS
PUBLISHER:
SQUARE ENIX
TYPE: ACTION
PLATFORM: PS3, PS4,
360, PC





DEVELOPER:
ROCKSTAR SAN
DIEGO/ANGEL STUDIOS
PUBLISHER: ROCKSTAR
TYPE: ESPIONAGE SANDBOX
PLATFORM: XBOX, PS2

Agent

Development of Agent started, and most probably ended, in 2003. The game was never officially announced, so as a result there isn't a great deal of information available about the project outside of a general outline of the game gleaned from leaks, unofficial sources and data-mining. The game was said to be similar in approach and scope to the GTA series, with players taking the role of secret agents rather than criminals. A second project, this time by Rockstar North, also titled Agent, may still be in development if the 2013 renewal of the Agent brand copyright by Take-Two Interactive is anything to go by. Originally slated to be a PS3 exclusive, and now positioned as a potential PS4 exclusive, Rockstar North's Agent is again an open world stealth action game. Set during the Cold War, the announcement press release stated that the game would take players into "the world of counter-intelligence, espionage, and political assassinations". Open world Cold War, GTA style stealth action? Fingers crossed that Agent is just missing, not dead.

Hellraiser

It's hard to think of a movie less suitable for being developed into a NES game, but Color Dreams, purveyors of unlicensed NES titles (they bypassed the 10NES lockout chip so as to avoid the licensing fee and the chance of their games being outright rejected) apparently paid somewhere between \$35K and \$50K for the rights to set a game in Clive Barker's psychosexual universe of torture demons, infidelity and incest.

The game was to be a shooter set in the Lemarchand Configuration and built on an improved version of the Wolfenstein 3D engine. That was the first problem with the game. The NES wasn't powerful enough to run the new engine, so Dan Lawton, one of the founders of Color Dreams, contracted an engineer to create a new kind of cartridge that contained a Z80 processor, programmable array logic chips and an extra 4mb RAM, making it capable of running the game. Of course, the price of the cartridge and the fact that retailers were shying away from unlicensed games meant that Hellraiser turned

into a \$2 million boondoggle that all but bankrupted the company. Color Dreams later reinvented itself into Wisdom Tree, developer and publisher of Christian games such as Bible Adventures and Super 3D Noah's Ark.

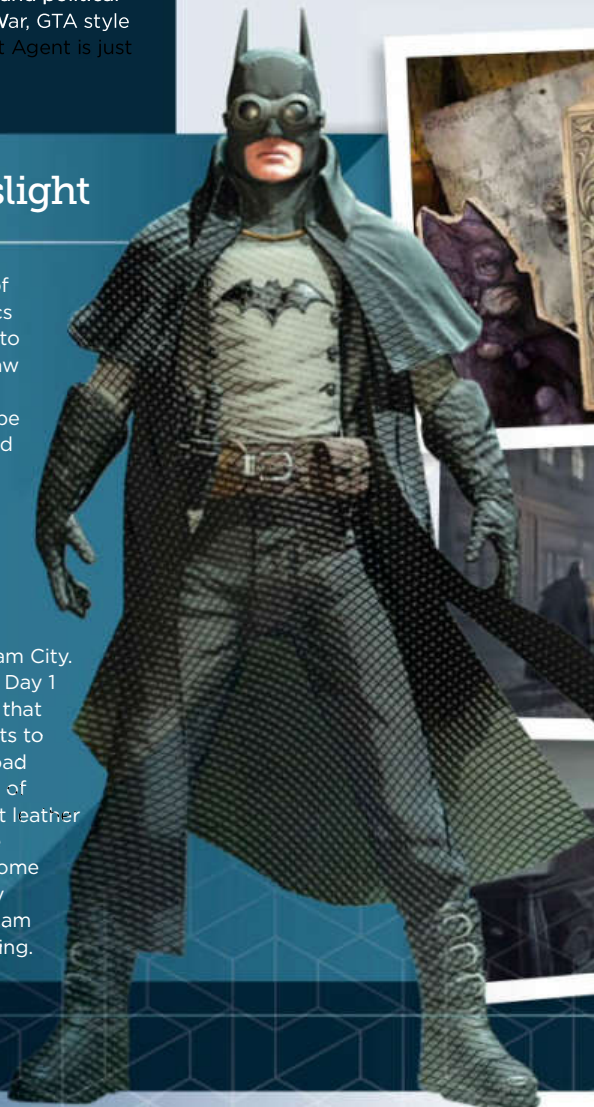


DEVELOPER:
COLOR DREAMS
PUBLISHER:
COLOR DREAMS
TYPE: HORROR SHOOTER
PLATFORM: NES

Gotham by Gaslight

Gotham by Gaslight was the first of DCs "Elseworld" one shots - comics that transpose popular characters to another time or place. The story saw a young Bruce Wayne returning to Gotham after taking a trip to Europe to see Dr. Freud in an attempt to rid himself of nightmares brought on by the murder of his parents. On returning to Gotham, Wayne takes up the mantle of the Bat to fight the growing crime on the streets of his city and eventually becomes embroiled in the hunt for Jack the Ripper who has relocated to Gotham City.

Little is known about the plot of Day 1 Studios' Gotham by Gaslight as all that has been seen of the game amounts to screenshots of the title screen, a load screen and a 2 minute demo video of Batman running around in his giant leather cape, but if it stuck to the Jack the Ripper story, or even transposed some well-known DC villains to the misty streets of Gotham circa 1889, Gotham by Gaslight could have been amazing.



DEVELOPER:
DAY 1 STUDIOS
PUBLISHER: N/A
TYPE: ACTION
PLATFORM: 360, PS3



Prey 2

Prey, although short, was a pretty amazing experience, combining portals, astral projection, alien abduction and first person shooting into a somewhat incoherent but thoroughly enjoyable whole. Prey 2 looked set to take the concept even further, with the main character, U.S. Marshal Killian Samuels, being abducted by the alien enemies of the first game and then deposited, years later, suffering from amnesia, on the Alien world of Exodus. Using his man-hunting skills learned as a U.S. Marshal, Samuels becomes

DEVELOPER:
HUMAN
HEAD STUDIOS
PUBLISHER: BETHESDA
TYPE: FPS
PLATFORM: 360,
PS3, PC

a bounty hunter on Exodus, taking bounties to earn cash and give him opportunities to try and discover just what the hell happened to him in the years missing from his memory. Released gameplay footage showed an open world in which the player can tackle bounties in any order they choose, interesting movement, fast paced FPS battles and the freedom to be a dick to aliens. This last part was highlighted a lot, with the person playing for the demo pushing innocent bystanders off ledges, taking hostages and otherwise not being cool. God it looked fun.



DEVELOPER:
FREEDOM
FACTORY STUDIOS
PUBLISHER: N/A
TYPE: BEAT 'EM UP
PLATFORM: 360,
PS3, PC

High School Heroes

There is not a lot of information remaining about High School Heroes aside from a little bit of gameplay detail and some screenshots, but what there is certainly gives us an intriguing glimpse of what looks like a pretty promising game. Set in a fantastical high school a-la Sky High or Kill la Kill, players would take the role of one of three super-powered students in a semi open-world environment. The final game would have seen the students beating their way through six missions and facing off against themed school gangs (one made up of creepy clowns), evil faculty and janitorial staff. Technically the game isn't quite dead yet – although Freedom Factory created a playable prototype of the game they failed to find a publisher, so it was put on permanent hiatus.



DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
PUBLISHER: CAPCOM
TYPE: RAIL SHOOTER
PLATFORM: GAMECUBE

Dead Phoenix

Originally announced as one of the Capcom Five launch titles along with P.N. 03, Viewtiful Joe, Resident Evil 4 and Killer7, Dead Phoenix was an ambitious rail shooter that saw players take the role of a winged warrior fighting gigantic enemies whilst being aided and in turn aiding a ground based army. The scant trailer footage made the game look comparable in terms of style to Panzer Dragoon, making it quite hotly anticipated. Unfortunately, despite hype and a handful of screenshots being released, nothing else was seen from the game. It

failed to show at E3 2003, and despite Capcom's insistence that the game was still in development, was cancelled soon after. Such was the anticipation for the game that it became the centre of much speculation and rumour for over a year after cancellation, with IGN positing that the game may have been retooled as a Kid Icarus title and other speculating that it may have been retooled for handheld or a subsequent platform. Given the Dead Phoenix trademark lapsed in 2004 it seems unlikely that Capcom will ever revisit the title.





DEVELOPER:
TARSIER STUDIOS
PUBLISHER: N/A
TYPE: ADVENTURE
PLATFORM: 360, PS3



City of Metronome

It's all too rare to see a genuinely innovative new idea in a game. Most IPs are built on the foundation of games that came before – innovating on mechanics and concepts that have proven successful in the past. City of Metronome went in a pretty different direction to everything else announced between 2005 and 2011. Set in the ramshackle city of Metronome (strange that), players take the role of a young man fighting against an evil corporation that controls the city with a dream machine maintained by kidnapped children. The weapon the young

man would have used to fight the corporation was sound – recording, manipulating, mixing, and even creating sound forms the crux of all action, with the player using them to manipulate objects and characters, scaring guards, soothing frightened slaves, shattering glass, bypassing voice activated locks and the like. Despite firm overtures from Sony to make Metronome a PS3 exclusive, Tarsier failed to find a publisher for the project and instead went to work on Little Big Planet for Vita and Tearaway Unfolded, amongst others.

Chrono Trigger: Crimson Echoes

Here's a cancelled game you can actually play to completion – just don't tell Square Enix you're doing it. Between 2004 and 2009 an international team of Chrono Trigger super-fans devised, wrote and coded a ROM hack to run on the original Chrono Trigger engine. Based five years after the events of Chrono Trigger the game sees the original characters coming together once again to fight an enemy trying to change the past. The plot was designed to tie up some dangling plot points from Chrono Trigger as well as set up some plot points for Chrono Cross, allowing it to serve as a bridge between both official games. In 2009, weeks before the ROM hack was set to be officially released and when the game was already 98% complete, Square Enix sent a cease and desist letter. The timing can only be viewed as a dick move – the amount of press coverage Crimson Echoes had garnered throughout the years of development would have definitely put the game on the Square Enix radar months, if not years before the official letter. That said, the dick move does mean that a nearly complete version of the ROM escaped onto the Internet so can be played by anyone interested.



DEVELOPER:
KAJAR LABORATORIES
PUBLISHER: KAJAR LABORATORIES
TYPE: RPG
PLATFORM: SNES

Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings

Many moons ago we had this game on the cover – issue 155 to be exact – and to say that we were excited would be an understatement. The first footage we saw of the game, with Indy fighting hoodlums on the roof of a trolley car (or tram as we properly call them) had us veritably frothing with anticipation, and the subsequent tech demos showing how the new Euphoria engine would allow for realistic animations and environmental animations made us even more excited. Unfortunately that was all that was ever really seen of the game

– just a short canned visualisation and some rough barely shaded wireframe proofs of concept. The game eventually came out in a much different form, sans Euphoria, on Wii, DS, PSP and PS2. The Wii version in particular was horrible with terrible motion controls, an insufferable checkpoint system and fragmented gameplay. We're left to ponder what could have been if the 360 and PS3 versions of the game hadn't been cancelled. Would that we could have played it rather than watched Kingdom of the Crystal Skull.



Aliens: Crucible

One of the greatest “What ifs” in the history of gaming, Sega and Obsidian announced the RPG *Aliens: Crucible* on December 13, 2006. Just under three years later, in February 2009, Sega announced the project had been indefinitely suspended before officially cancelling the game in June of the same year. Some tantalising hints as to what the finished game may have contained are all that remain. The developers were apparently trying to make the environment and the situation scary as opposed to the aliens themselves, rationalising that people would

have seen the movies and played previous games so would be used to the aliens. They also didn't want to resort to constant jump scares for tension. The game would have also contained a kind of permadeath – any companion character face-hugged would be effectively dead, with the character having the option to instantly put them out of their misery, put them in suspension, or use them until they burst.



DEVELOPER:
BLACK ISLE STUDIOS
PUBLISHER: INTERPLAY
ENTERTAINMENT
TYPE: RPG
PLATFORM: PC



Van Buren

The *Fallout 3* that almost was, *Van Buren* was cancelled in 2003 when Interplay laid off their entire PC development team. Although we may never know the complete story of *Van Buren*, there was enough information released or leaked to let us know just what we missed out on. Players would begin the game as a prisoner, with guilt or innocence decided during character creation. After escaping the prison, the player would then make their way around the wasteland, influencing the tide of the ongoing war between the Brotherhood of Steel

and the New Californian Republic. The game was set to culminate with a truly difficult choice – a rogue NCR scientist would seize control of an orbital nuclear weapons platform in an attempt to wipe the world clean with a second nuclear holocaust, leaving only his select few to repopulate the world. The player would never be able to stop all of the missiles and would ultimately have to choose who lives and who gets turned into crispy critters. A (buggy) tech demo of the game is available online if you want to feel sad.



DEVELOPER:
OBSIDIAN
ENTERTAINMENT
PUBLISHER: SEGA
TYPE: RPG
PLATFORM: 360,
PS3, PC



DEVELOPER:
KOJIMA
PRODUCTIONS
PUBLISHER: KONAMI
TYPE: SURVIVAL HORROR
PLATFORM: PS4

Silent Hills

We finish on a game that seems to have been cancelled out of nothing but spitefulness, *Silent Hills*, a game that would unite two immensely creative minds, Hideo Kojima and Guillermo del Toro, in the effort to scare the piss out of you. First teased by the innovative P.T. (Playable Teaser), *Silent Hills* would have starred Norman Reedus of *Walking Dead* fame. Although it was little more than a walking simulator, with players only able to move and zoom, P.T. was voted by many outlets and gamers as one of the scariest games in recent memory. Between August 12 and September 1, P.T. was downloaded over 1 million times. How could something with this much hype and talent get cancelled so soon after it was announced? We may never know the full story, but it seems to be a parting blow from Konami against Kojima who was, apparently due to internal conflict, planning on leaving the company after the completion of *MGSV*. Konami aren't interested in rebooting the project, nor is Kojima, and after having two videogame projects fall flat, del Toro doesn't want to even think about games at all. ❌

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MA/260

5 'Engrish' moments in videogames

Zero Wing (Mega Drive) - "All Your Base Are belong to US"
Pro Wrestling (NES) - "A winner is you."
Metal Gear (NES) - "I feel asleep"
Samurai Showdown (arcade) - "Victoly!"



AeroWings 2 (arcade) - "I never thought I'd be frying over a jungle"

2 Memorable boss battles

Psycho Mantis: Metal Gear Solid (PS1) - The one where you have to unplug the controller to stop Psycho Mantis 'reading' your thoughts and plug it into the second port. The battle doesn't just break the fourth wall, it nukes it from orbit.
Bob The Killer Goldfish: Earthworm Jim 2 (Mega Drive) - A Dave Perry in-joke, pressing any button will cause Bob's fish bowl to smash and that's that.



1 Really interesting peripheral

Rez Trance Vibrator - Users were encouraged to sit on the vibrating device while playing Rez because 'reasons'...



1 Game obsessed with Whiskey

Yakuza (PS2) - Suntory quietly threw some money at this, which is why there's a whole mini game devoted to sitting around in a bar and listening to the bar tender drone on about Japanese Whiskey.

101 Games Lists

A list about lists because people love lists. Also, lists.

MIKOLAI



1 Greatest mayor in videogame history

Mike Haggar - Final Fight
 When the 'Mad Gear' gang kidnaps Mike Haggar's daughter in Final Fight he eschews traditional law enforcement channels and takes to the streets to dispense his own brand of summary justice. That 'can do' attitude (and the fact he's a former wrestler who looks like he belongs in a 'Tom of Finland' annual), is apparently totes normal in Metro City.



5 Games that were really product ads

Pepsi Man (PS1) - A corporate fever dream in which Pepsi Man runs around Pepsi world collecting Pepsi so he can Pepsi while he Pepsis.
King Games (Multi) - Sold at Burger King, with Burger King product placement contained within, quite possibly connected to Burger King
Cool Spot (SNES / Mega Drive) - The anthropomorphic red circle

is/was a 7-Up mascot in the US. The branding was removed for the Oz and European releases.
Mick & Mac Global Gladiators (Mega Drive) - The McDonalds logo is right there on the cover in case you were confused.
Chester Cheetah: Too Cool to Fool (SNES / Mega Drive) - A cheap shill for Cheetos chips

3 Videogame inspired cereals

Nintendo Cereal System
Pac Man Cereal
Sonic The Cereal



3 Iconic videogame journalists

Julian 'Jaz' Rignal - An industry veteran who's been around since the days of Zzap64!, but best known for launching Mean Machines magazine in 1990 and helping to popularise the new wave of Japanese consoles on the horizon

Gary Cutlack - Founder of UK Resistance, which was equal parts hilarious and incredibly misogynistic (back when that was 'fine' in the industry).

Ste Curran - Wrote the Red Eye column for Edge magazine and helped popularise what would later become known as 'new games journalism'.

5 Hip Hop inspired videogames

Wu-Tang: Shaolin Style - Because people still cared about Wu-Tang Clan in 2000

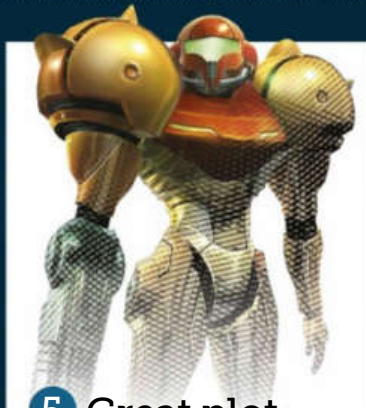
50 Cent: Bulletproof - Because people still cared about 50 Cent in 2005

GTA: San Andreas - An extended homage to early 90s West Coast hip hop

Parappa the Rapper - You Gotta Believe!

Def Jam Vendetta - For those who fantasised about DMX

wrestling Method Man in a strictly heteronormative fashion.



1 Game where the main character commits suicide

Super Fire Pro Wrestling Special (1994, SNES) - The lead character takes his own life at the end of the game after falling down a nihilistic black hole and realising it's all meaningless. You can thank Suda51 for that ending.

5 Great plot twists

Bioshock - Would you kindly
COD: Modern Warfare - That nuke though
Silent Hill 2 - How's the wife?
Braid - Creep much?
Metroid - Pee in the cup, plz



5 Most expensive videogames of all time (including marketing)

Final Fantasy 7 - \$145 million
Star Wars the old Republic - \$150 million
COD: Modern Warfare 2 - \$200 million
GTA V - \$250 million
Destiny - \$500 million



1 Worst follow-up to a successful console

PC FX - NEC followed up their 10 million plus selling PC Engine with a weird mutant machine that only seemed to play Full Motion Video titles, was several years late to market, and sold less than 100,000 units.

3 Controversial game reviews

Driv3r (Xbox World) - Magazine gets exclusive front cover and a mention in the game manual, awards the (broken) game a 9/10 and wonders why readers want to burn their offices down.
Outrun 2 (Sunday Times) - Random bro awarded this 1/5, UK Resistance responded with, "Find him (the reviewer) and kill him."



Depression Quest (Kotaku) - Helped spark the Gamergate clusterfuck after a bunch of basement dwellers decided a positive review was a direct attack on their limp penises.

3 Drama filled developments

La Noire - Developed by Team Bondi here in Australia, La Noire went through two different publishers, seven years of development and over one hundred employees resigning. Former staff described it as sweatshop nightmare helmed by an angry maniac.

Duke Nukem Forever - 15 years in development, several game engines, and numerous lawsuits later this finally staggered to the party and collapsed at the front door.

Daikatana - A cautionary tale of ego, Texas Penthouses doubling as studios, and flushing money down the toilet, all soundtracked by the gentle rustle of John Romero's hair.

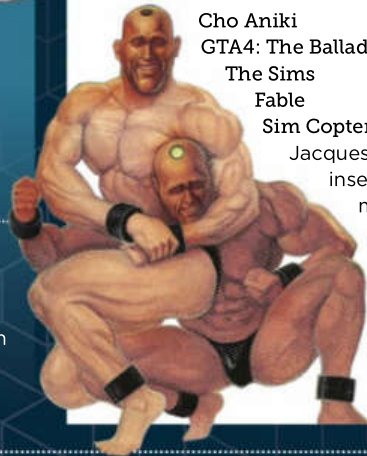


2 Mobile Games that made ridiculous cash

Puzzle and Dragons - \$1.4 billion (via in-app purchases) in 2014

Candy Crush - \$1.33 billion (via in-app purchases) in 2014

5 games in support of marriage equality



Cho Aniki

GTA4: The Ballad of Gay Tony

The Sims

Fable

Sim Copter - programmer Jacques Servin secretly inserted shirtless males who make out into the game, and was subsequently fired.

3 Best limited edition Dreamcasts

Hello Kitty - Self explanatory

Chu Chu Rockets - Sega of Germany commissioned artist T.Rachu to create nine custom Chu-Chu Rocket Dreamcasts to be given away as prizes

Seaman - Because speaking to virtual fish and teaching them about life was briefly 'a thing' in Japan.

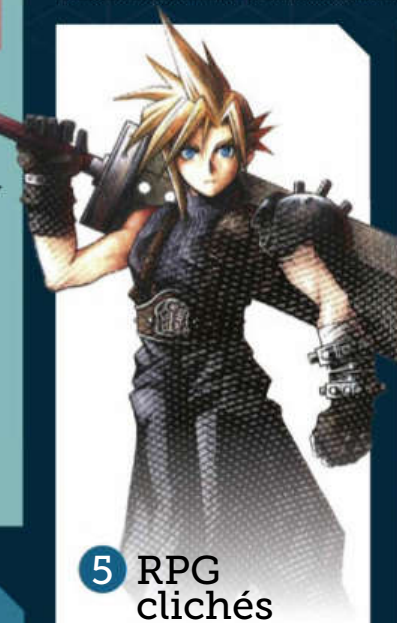


3 Reasons FMV games never caught on

Night Trap - Switch between cameras in a sorority house full of half naked women in a bid to stop them being kidnapped by freak vampires in Lycra. Apparently this is what people did before Internet porn.

Make My Video - Splice together your own music videos for INXS, Marky Mark and Kris Kross. Minutes of fun.

Voyeur - Nudity and sex. It was like watching SBS, but you had to buy a Mega CD to experience the unsatisfying climax.



5 RPG clichés

Amnesia

Orphan protagonist

Breaking into houses and robbing people blind is fine

Bratty entitled rich girl defying parents to seek adventure

A good nights sleep will cure everything up to and including death

3 Mega Man covers that really make you stop and think

Mega Man
Mega Man 2
Mega Man 3



7 dumb decision in videogame history

Nintendo Virtual Boy (1995) - Hey kids, who wants to go blind?

Sega 32X (1995) - Unwanted lovechild spawned from an abusive relationship between Sega Japan and its North American counterpart.

Commodore 64 Console (1990) - Play shitty old Commodore 64 games, on cartridge! But for more money...

Pac-Man for Atari 2600 (1982) - Atari produced 12 million cartridges for a console with a user basis of about 8 million. Were confused when they failed to sell them all.

John Romero will make you his bitch (1997) - Stupid marketing campaign is stupid

The Sega Saturn launch (1995) - Brought forward several months with a surprise launch at E3 in Las Vegas. They should have held back and developed some actual software instead.

Atari passes on the NES (1983) - Atari was offered North American distribution rights to the Nintendo Entertainment System in 1983. Due to 'reasons' this never happened, and it all went downhill for Atari from there.



1 Worst launch ever

Gizmondo (2005) – more of a criminal enterprise than an actual game console, the whole shambolic story reads like a film script. The handheld sold approximately 25,000 units and lost \$400 million in a single year before exiting stage left.



1 Really meta game

Segagaga (Dreamcast) – You assume the role of Sega CEO and are tasked with saving the Dreamcast from failure.



5 Sexiest videogame executives (in no particular order)

Tom Kalinske – Sega USA
Howard Lincoln – Nintendo USA
Dave Perry – Shiny Entertainment
Kazuo Hirai – Sony Japan
Phil Spencer – Microsoft USA



5 Overhyped games

Rise of the Robots (Amiga 500) – This was supposed to be a 'SF2 killer' back in the day, lulz.

The Cube (mobile) – The secret prize at the centre was 'disappointment'.

Dikatana (PC) – Something, something, John Romero, whatever, whatever.

Demon Soul 2 (Multi) – If you all love it so much how about you marry it.

Destiny (Multi) – \$500 million to develop, most of it on marketing spend.



5 Failed mascots

Rocky Rodent
Mohawk
Gex
Boogerman
Bubsy



2 Baddest dudes to ever save the president

Blade (Bad Dude 1)
Striker (Bad Dude 2)



THE PRESIDENT HAS BEEN
KIDNAPPED BY NINJAS.
ARE YOU A BAD ENOUGH DUDE
TO RESCUE THE PRESIDENT?



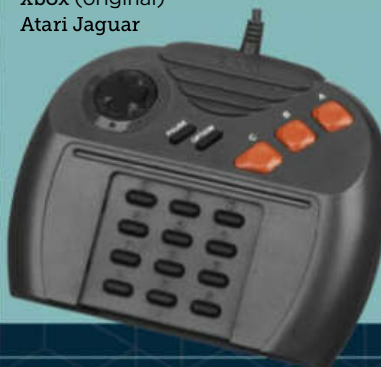
3 Greatest Controllers

Sega Saturn (Japanese version)
Super Nintendo Pad
DualShock (Playstation)



2 Worst controllers

Xbox (original)
Atari Jaguar



5 Best videogame magazines

Hyper (1993 to present) – You're reading it. It's been around since 1993, it's one of the world's longest continuously running videogame magazines.

Super Play (1992 – 1996) – British Super Nintendo magazine with a fondness for import games, JRPGs, and anime inspired art. Basically a fan letter to all things Super Nintendo.

Edge (1993 to present) – The first magazine to really take videogames and the associated industry seriously.

Mean Machines (1990-1992) – Introduced and championed the emerging Japanese consoles making their way west. Inspired a generation of kids to start writing about games.

EGM (1989 – 2009) – The go-to source of videogame news throughout much of the early and mid 90s, and of course there's that whole Sheng Long April Fools thing.





TECH THAT CHANGED

the Way We Play

» Gaming is intrinsically linked to technology, which is part of what makes it so exciting; tech continues to evolve at breakneck speed, bringing with it newer, more compelling ways to enter virtual worlds. It seems like every other year there's a new leap forwards in gaming, be it motion-control, 3D, photorealistic graphics or Virtual Reality. We've taken a look back at the history of videogames to highlight the fundamental technology shifts that changed the way we play. **BENNETT RING**



Atari 2600 - the birth of console gaming

Let's make it clear, the Atari 2600 was not the first gaming console to enter the living room. So why is it on the list, when that honour actually goes to the Magnavox Odyssey? There's one reason in particular, which helped sales of this wood-grained console explode: it was the first console to popularise the use of cartridges. While there were dozens of consoles vying for gamers' attention in the few years prior, it was the Atari 2600's use of a microprocessor that allowed it to accept game code via removable cartridges, unlike other fixed hardware consoles which were usually hard-wired to only play a single game.

At its launch in 1977 it was originally sold as the Atari VCS, or Video Computer System, and it would take another five years before this groundbreaking platform received the name old-school gamers know and love. It came bundled with twin joystick controllers, which would inevitably break after a few hours of waggling, a gaming mechanic that has thankfully long since died (although many would suggest that bashing the X button is its modern-day incarnation). Two more paddle controllers were also included, with rotating dials, while a single game cartridge introduced the concept of bundling that remains popular to this day.

First year sales added up to just 250,000 units, as the market was saturated with machines that could only play a single game, growing to 550,000 a year later. Yet just a year later sales doubled, as the public came to the realisation that this console could play more than just a single game, hitting the magic 1 million sales in 1979. Over the next few years the console experienced several major software hits, with the

likes of Space Invaders, Pac Man and Pitfall helping to drive sales until the great gaming crash of 1983.

Over the course of the console's six year lifespan, the hardware within the Atari 2600 changed very little. The main CPU was a MOS Technology 6507, which ran at the blazing speed of 1.19MHz. It came with just 8kB of memory, yet only half of this was available to software developers because Atari had used 24-pin connectors on the game cartridges due to their lower price. An additional 128 bytes of RAM was included. Another chip handled the display and sound, and was called the Television Interface Adaptor, alongside a third chip to handle memory management and I/O duties. When run on an NTSC television, the 2600 could pump out 128 different colours, but this was trimmed back to 104 on PAL sets.

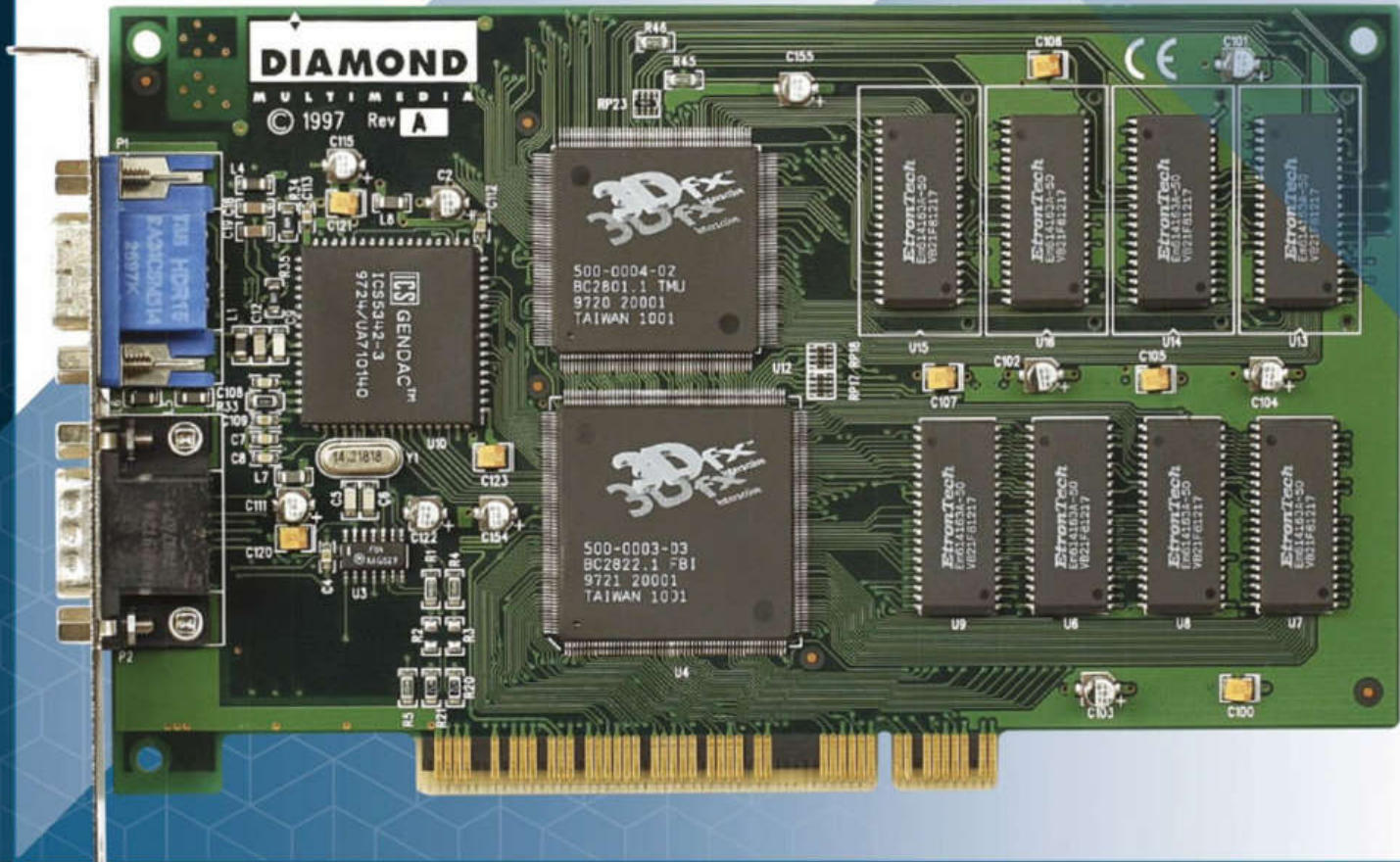
Unfortunately the stellar sales of the Atari 2600 came to an abrupt halt in 1983, and many credit the release of the game E.T. on the system as one of the main reasons. It was a hugely expensive game to make thanks to licensing fees, and a huge number of cartridges were made to try to recoup these costs. When the game flopped thanks to the terrible gameplay within, dragging down 2600 sales in the process, it contributed to the collapse of Atari, which was divided and sold in 1984. Thankfully it's possible to still enjoy a trip down Atari lane on several freely available PC emulators, with the likes of Stella and z26 perfectly recreating the low-fi feel of the original.



Magnavox Odyssey

While it took four years to arrive in Australia as the Philips Odyssey 2001 in 1976, the original Magnavox Odyssey was first launched in the US back in 1972, officially making it the world's first commercial gaming console. The price tag of US\$99 was relatively affordable, even back then, and it was able to accept several different game cards to play different games. Powered by either six batteries or an optional power pack, this machine didn't even deliver sound at its launch due to the lack of any audio hardware. It also couldn't do colour graphics; instead players were given translucent plastic overlays to stick to their TV, which were only available in two sizes. Keeping score whilst gaming required the player to use the included notepad and pencil! It also came with dice and poker chips, for use with other games.

In 1975 Magnavox then launched a range of Odyssey consoles that could only play the games that were hardwired into the console, making it considerably cheaper to manufacture. The final model was 1977's Odyssey 4000, which shipped with seven games and allowed for up to four players. It also enabled colour displays, but this wasn't enough to fend off the competition from the Atari 2600, which was able to deliver a huge range of gaming experiences thanks to its wide library of software. With the market flooded by cut-price Odyssey consoles, the 4000 was the last console made by Magnavox, which itself had been purchased by Philips just a couple of years earlier.



3D Hardware Accelerators – goodbye 2D, hello glorious 3D

No matter where you sit on the gameplay versus graphics debate, nobody can understate the huge impact that the move to 3D graphics engines had on our beloved pastime. Shifting from a fixed camera viewpoint to a freely moving view within a fully 3D environment increased immersion exponentially, which explains why the vast majority of today's games use three dimensional graphics engines. While 3D graphics were made possible before hardware acceleration, their incredibly demanding nature meant that they were extremely rudimentary to start off with, with examples such as Battlezone using primitive vector graphics to depict a crude 3D world. However, the release of the 3dfx Voodoo Graphics card in 1996 kickstarted the transition to a 3D dominated gaming world.

3dfx was founded by former employees of Silicon Graphics, a company known in the 90s for its incredibly powerful – not to mention expensive – 3D workstations used to make movie CGI. In 1996 the company released its first product, the 3dfx Voodoo, a 3D Acceleration

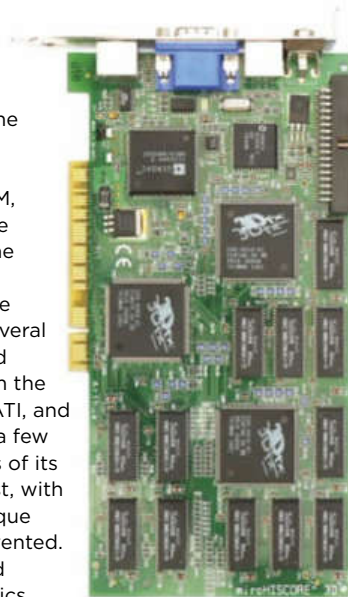
chip that wasn't sold to consumers, instead being used by arcade games and OEMs. Products based on the chip included the Diamond Multimedia Monster 3D, Colormaster Voodoo Mania, Canopus Pure3D and several more.

It was a revelation, wiping the floor with competitor's 3D products when it came to performance. The original Voodoo chip had 4MB of EDO RAM, which operated at the same frequency as the GPU, at 50MHz. Over the next few years the company released several more cards, but faced stiff competition from the likes of NVIDIA and ATI, and closed its doors just a few years later. Remnants of its technologies still exist, with SLI being one technique that the company invented.

While consoles had delved into 3D graphics before this time, they'd relied upon their CPU to handle the heavy load of 3D processing. Sega's

Saturn console even had dual CPUs so that one could handle the core gameplay logic, while the second could handle 3D duties, but it still wasn't a dedicated 3D processor. The Sega 32X and Super-FX chip for the SNES were some of the first examples of console hardware devoted to 3D, but it was the PlayStation and Nintendo 64 that fully embraced the switch to 3D worlds. Nintendo's hardware was the first to use a 64-bit processor, but it also had rudimentary 3D acceleration thanks to technology provided by Silicon Graphics for use in the system's processor.

Fast forward to today and 3D acceleration is mandatory for any gaming platform. In fact, many would argue that the 3D accelerator is the most important component within a gaming system, and many would claim that the PS4's 50% faster GPU is the reason it's outselling the Xbox One so dramatically. With the evolution of CPUs continuing to slow, developers are finding more ways to offload work to the system's GPUs, which are maintaining healthy performance improvements. With the introduction of VR in the near future, which will double the performance demands on GPUs, we can expect 3D performance to become even more important.



The Control Pad

Until the launch of the third generation of consoles, which includes the Nintendo Entertainment System and Sega Master System, the way we played games varied depending on the game or platform we were playing it on. There was no such thing as a standardised control pad; instead we were forced to use whatever weird peripheral developers thought most appropriate for each game, requiring console owners to buy several different input devices depending on the types of games they enjoyed. The simple joystick that shipped with the Atari 2600 was one of the most ubiquitous, featuring a single 4-direction stick with a single fire button. Another popular peripheral at this time was the tennis-paddle, used with the enormously popular game Pong. This had a rotating analogue dial that would control the position of the player's bat on screen, thus limiting its use to very specific games.

Nintendo's NES joypad introduced the concept of a D-pad instead of a joystick, and was designed to be held in the palm of two hands, not one. The meant the player could control direction with their left thumb, while operating the action buttons with their right thumb, and this design served as

the template for today's control pads. The 1996 Nintendo 64 joypad introduced the idea of an analogue controller for the right thumb, while 2000's PlayStation 2 contr pad finally introduced a D-Pad alongside twin analogue thumb sticks. It was also the first to introduce haptic feedback in the form of twin vibration motors. Today's control pads have pretty much s design, introducing and touch sensors



Backwards compatibility

It may not be quite as fashionable as it once was, but backwards compatibility wasn't always a given when it came to gaming. First debuting in the impossible-to-find

Atari 7800, until then console owners were out of luck, with the likes of Sega never even considering this to be an issue. It took the boffins at Nintendo to

popularise the concept of playing games from the last generation on the replacement generation's hardware. The list of its platforms that support backwards compatibility is exhaustive, including but not limited to the Game Boy Advance, Game Boy Colour, 3DS, DS, DS Lite, Wii and Wii U; it's no wonder that many gamers often refer to the brand as one of the few that actually cares about its players. On the other hand, nearly every PC game from the last twenty years is still playable on today's hardware, provided you've got the patience and enthusiasm to ferret out the fixes and emulators necessary to do so. Sony initially supported backwards compatibility, but dropped it from the launch of the PS4, instead offering a streaming service that remotely plays PS3 games on PS3 hardware and streams the video and audio back to the player's

PS4. This service has yet to launch in Australia. Microsoft waited two years after the launch of the Xbox One to announce backwards compatibility for its device, and it's currently limited to just 100 titles. Hopefully this proves to be a major profit-spinner for the company, ensuring back-compat support in the next generation.

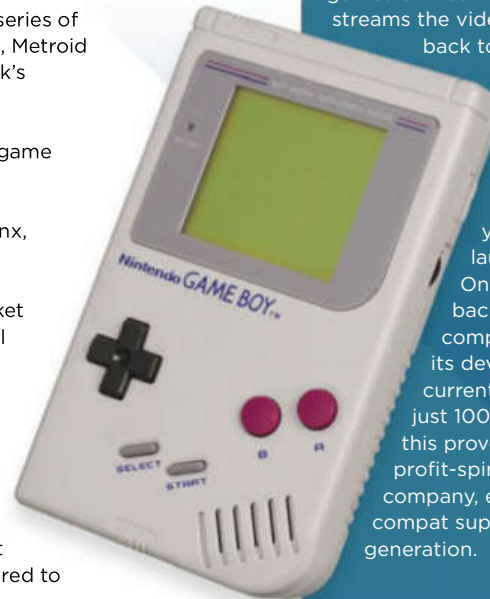
Mobile Gaming – Game Boy

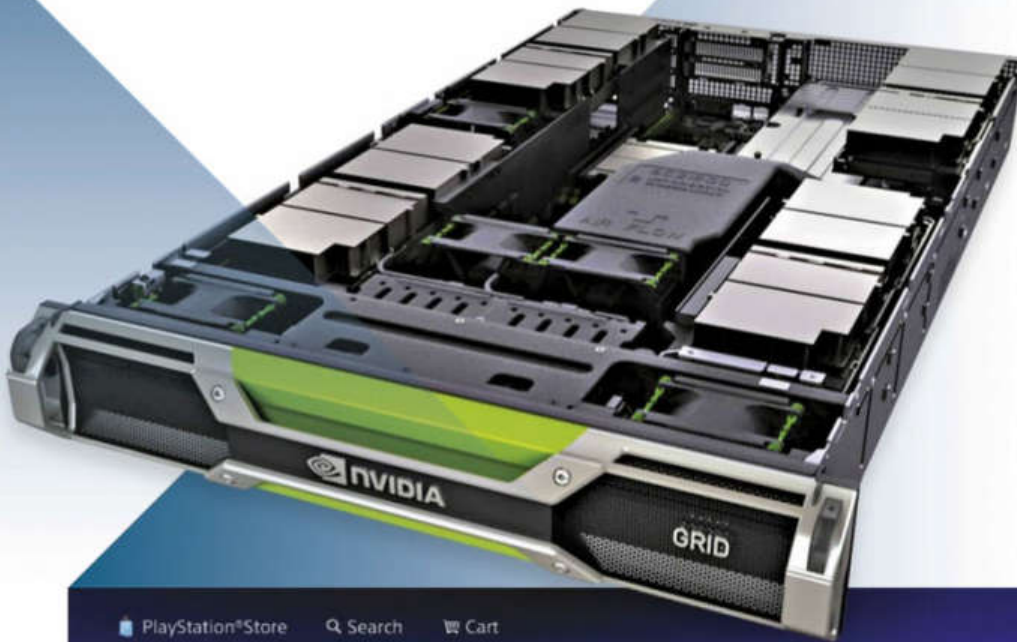
One of the biggest gaming genres today is mobile gaming, with revenues forecast to grow by 50% year on year, generating an expected US\$30 billion this year alone. That's more than console game sales for the year, by around ten percent. While today's mobile games are powered by our increasingly capable smartphones, we can credit the invention of mobile gaming to the folk at Nintendo, who were obviously thinking well ahead when it released the Game Boy in 1989.

Designed by the same folk who had created Nintendo's massively successful Game & Watch series, this handheld featured a tiny 160 x 144 pixel monochrome screen, powered by a 4.19MHz Sharp LR35902 processor along with 8kB of S-RAM. Powered by four triple-A batteries, it

would become home to a series of massive hits, such as Tetris, Metroid II and Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening.

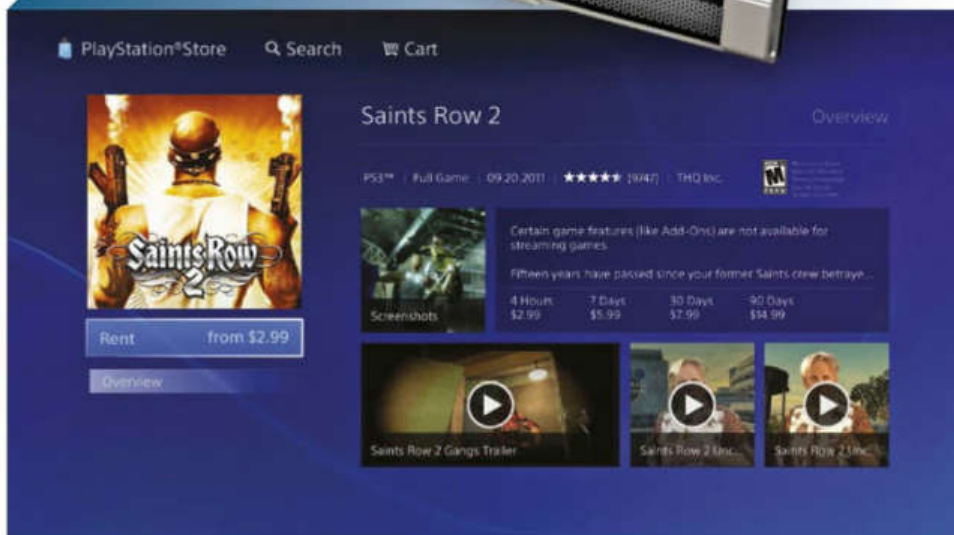
Interestingly, there have dozens of other handheld game platforms, but most have c untimely deaths. In chrono order we have the Atari Lynx, TurboExpress, Bitcorp Gar Sega Game Gear, Watara Supervision, Neo Geo Pocket Colour, N-Gage and several more handhelds that now wander the lonely halls of obsolescence. Only Sony's PSP platform has ever come close to the success of the Game Boy, though even Nintendo's success doesn't stand up well when compared to smartphone gaming.





Game Streaming

Sadly Australia's large geographical size combined with our small population means we've yet to experience the next on our list of technological advances - game streaming. This refers to the removal of the gaming hardware from the player's environment, instead hosted on a remote server farm. The player's inputs are fed to the server over the Internet, and the resulting video and audio stream is then fed back to the player's environment. The benefit is that the player doesn't need to buy any expensive hardware or even games, opening up the possibility of subscription services that give access to a large library of titles. However, this technology is still in its infancy even in countries where it's established, with the likes of NVIDIA's Grid and Sony's Playstation Now still suffering from the overall slow speeds of today's internet. This results in low-quality compressed video and high latency. However, as high-speed broadband becomes the norm, our Internet connections should have the necessary bandwidth to deliver high quality audio and video with lossless compression, all at a latency that the player can't detect. We've already seen this type of streaming computing revolutionise productivity applications, so it's a sure bet that we can expect the same to happen with games, though it might take a lot longer than many expect.

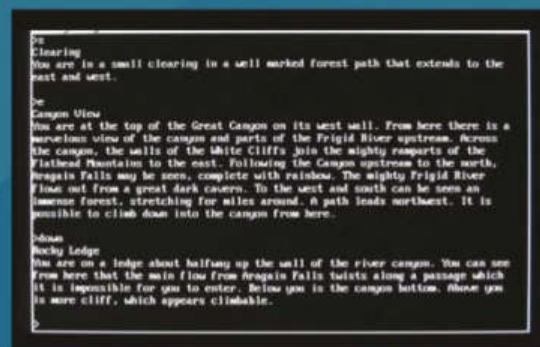
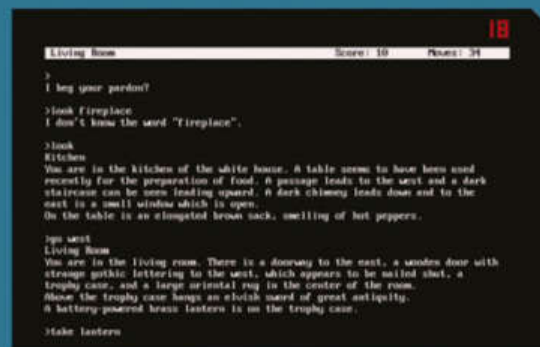


MUD gaming and then MMOs

Long before gamers were firing up their 28.8k modems to shoot their friends in the face on map19 in Doom 2 online, serious networking nerds were getting their multiplayer fixes via Multi-User Dungeons, or MUDs for short. These were the precursor to the phenomenon of MMOs, and allowed multiple players to connect online to explore vast dungeons.

The things is, most of these dungeons existed only in the minds of the player. There was no graphics engine for most MUDs, instead using text descriptions to build the world and lore around the player. This is because the first MUDs were created on mainframe PCs housed in the laboratories of universities and corporations, with the very first arriving on the DEC PDP-10 computer, called Colossal

Cave Adventure. Just two years later came a MUD that would chew up far too much bandwidth on the ARPANET (an early predecessor to today's Internet) and be reborn a decade later as the hugely successful adventure series, Zork. Despite the limitations of the technology of the time, these early MUDs established many of the genre rules that still exist in today's MMOs, including Role Playing servers, PvP servers, and Hack and Slash-styled MUDs. The first commercial MUDs that could run on PCs arrived in the mid 90s, and in 1997 took out the top two spots on AOL's most played games list. However, the 1999 release of Everquest was the deathknell for MUDs, which fell from popularity to become the niche genre that still exists today.



The CD-Rom – PlayStation and PC gaming goes big

Many gamers would remember the PlayStation as the first gaming platform to include CD-ROM support, but they'd be wrong. It was in fact the NEC TurboGrafx-16 that first released games on CD-ROM, in the form of a CD-ROM peripheral. This was a massive shift for game creators, as until then they'd been limited to cartridges and their puny amount of storage. The Atari 2600's cartridges contained a mere 4kb of memory, increasing to 117.75Mbit on the Super Nintendo Entertainment System. Despite this, the largest games released for the SNES were only 48Mbit in size, while the smallest were a mere 2Mbit.

One benefit that cartridges did have was the ability to include custom hardware within the cartridge, increasing the capability of the console. In the case of the SNES, these were known as Enhancement Chips, specialised coprocessors included on a cartridge that would deliver improved performance relevant to the game they sat next to. For example, the popular Super-FX chip was a CPU designed to deliver enhanced 3D performance, which made it a mainstay with early SNES 3D titles, such as Star Fox and Doom (which used the Super-FX 2).

However, despite this advantage, the memory limitation of cartridges proved to be an obstacle when games started using large audio and video recordings.

While it wasn't the first game to ship on CD-ROM, *Myst* is widely credited with proving the importance of optical drives. The large 650MB capacity of these discs allowed its creators to deliver stunningly detailed environments: a total of 2500 high resolution images made up the gameworld, each pre-rendered in 3D. Another 66 minutes of Quicktime animations helped use more of the disc space.

It wasn't long before other game developers realised that CD-ROM discs could store several hours worth of videos, which led to the unfortunate explosion of Full Motion Video games, or FMV for short. While there were a few genuine hits in this genre, including *The 7th Guest* and the *Tex Murphys* series, there were dozens of FMV dogs, with special mention going to the unplayable *Night Trap*. This game

was also one of the first to attract attention from the mainstream media regarding gaming violence, which probably accounted for its relatively decent sales despite its atrocious gameplay.

The first console to ship with a built-in CD-ROM drive was again created by NEC, in the form of its PC-FX. However, its inability to handle 3D graphics meant that it received very little attention in the Western gaming world. It was the release of the Panasonic 3DO that popularised the use of CD-ROM drives in consoles, though this platform's high price and limited game range meant it didn't receive widespread adoption. It was only when Sony released the PlayStation in 1994 that CD-ROMs became the preferred format for games; it took Nintendo a whopping seven years to ditch its cartridge designs and use optical

disks, adopting the Nintendo Optical Disk format when the GameCube arrived in 2001.

Compared to today's 50GB game installs, the CD-ROMs of the past seem positively tiny. Yet the move to optical media was a huge leap forward for game developers, giving them the room to move that pricey fixed hardware cartridges did not.



Online gaming – no longer a solitary experience

Considering that nearly every triple A release now has a large multiplayer component, it's hard to believe that just a decade ago online gaming was still a rather niche way to play. We can credit Microsoft with bringing online multiplayer to the masses in 2002 with its Xbox Live service, despite consoles first introducing multiplayer peripherals a decade earlier, but the real credit has to go to the PC. The widespread adoption of dial-up modems meant that the PC was opening the door to online gaming long before the consoles, with a large variety of ways to play.

Doom was the first game to popularise the use of the TCP/IP network protocol to facilitate online gameplay, yet it only supported a limited number of modems and required technical know-how to setup. It was only with the introduction of Doom 2 on the PC in 1994 that online gaming really boomed, which then saw the introduction of game server browsers. "Let's get it on with the

killing" is etched into the minds of millions of gamers who used the popular Gamespy server browser software, which easily allowed gamers to find nearby servers populated by players. In the age of dial-up, distance was king, as playing on a distant server would introduce game-wrecking lag.

The open-nature of Doom 2 introduced another major innovation to gaming in the form of mods, many of which would go on to become even more popular than the base game. Action Quake was the first to introduce "realistic" weaponry and team-based gameplay, which would go on to inspire the still-massive Counter-Strike.

Alongside shooters, Real Time Strategy games proved to be massively popular multiplayer offerings on the PC. Starcraft was one of the biggest, launching in 1998, and going on to spawn the massive e-Sports industry that exists today.

Due to the high-latency of dial-up

modems, LAN gaming also became very popular around this time. At the height of its popularity over 1000 gamers would attend the biggest Australian LANs, most lugging their home PC into giant halls to wage 24 hour wars against friends and foes. The introduction of high-speed broadband had a massive impact on LAN gaming, as the low ping offered by local area networks was now rivalled by cable and ADSL connections.

2004's introduction of World of Warcraft saw online gaming reaching the masses, eventually growing to a subscription base of over 10 million. It became such a cultural phenomenon that South Park devoted an entire episode to it.

While the consoles had dallied with online gaming via a range of peripherals in the 90s, it was Microsoft's revolutionary Xbox Live service that finally made online console gaming mainstream. Its combination of VOIP, easy configuration and quick matchmaking removed many of the hassles that had plagued other online services, and it took Sony another ten years to catch up, with the revamped version of PSN that launched with the PS4.





Social Network Gaming

It's hard to pinpoint exactly when and where the social gaming phenomenon commenced, but there is no denying how massive it has become. Whether that's for the good of gaming or not is for others to decide, but with the size of the market in the billions, it's a trend that we can't leave off this list. Considering that Facebook only launched in 2007, the growth of this gaming genre has been staggering. There are now thousands of different games that can be played via social networks, and they're making enough money to advertise on Free to Air television even more frequently than core games. Part of their success can be attributed to the wider net that these games cast - to play the latest Call of Duty requires either a console or PC, but to play Clash of Clans you simply need a PC or phone and a Facebook account. Facebook now has nearly 1.5 billion active monthly users, and they're just one click away from installing any of these games.

Social gaming has become so huge that there are now social networks launching devoted solely to these casual gaming experiences. Game is the latest in a series of networks that hosts dozens of free games, placing the emphasis on gaming rather than sharing photos or status updates.

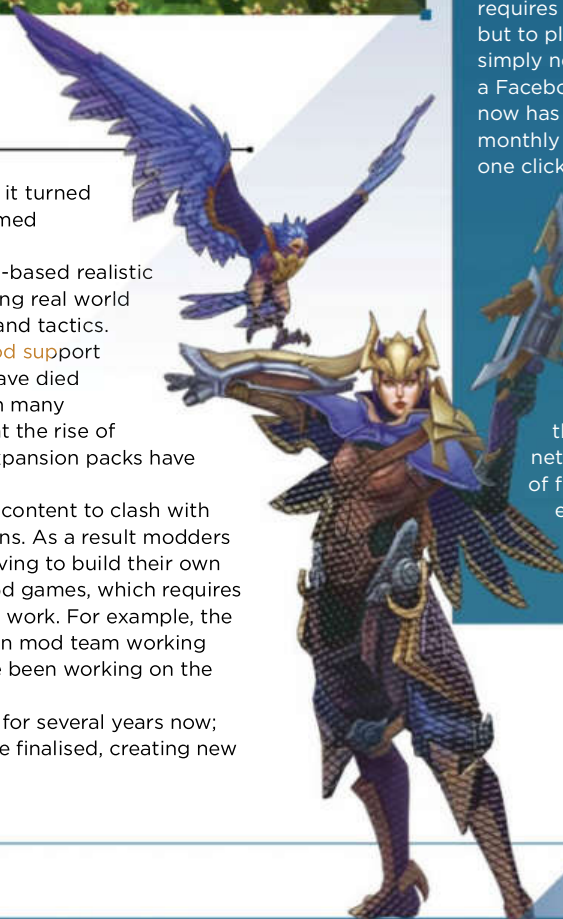


Game mods

The ability to allow users to modify core game engine code was a phenomenon in the late 90s and early 2000s that saw the birth of some of the biggest games in existence today. Counter-Strike, League of Legends, and DOTA all originated as game mods to existing engines, thanks to the developers handing over the tools for their engine to an inquisitive public. Modding first began even earlier than these though, with MUDs often encouraging their player base to add to the codebase by creating new areas and puzzles. In the 80s mods tended to focus on cheats, modifying the game code to allow players to pass tricky sections, but it was the creation of Counter-Strike that saw the rise of Total Conversion mods. As the name suggests, these totally alter the base game into something entirely different. In the

case of CS, it turned a sci-fi themed deathmatch into a team-based realistic shooter using real world weaponry and tactics.

Sadly mod support seems to have died of late, with many arguing that the rise of DLC and expansion packs have made dev competing content to clash with their add-ons. As a result modders are now having to build their own tools to mod games, which requires much more work. For example, the Team Fusion mod team working on IL2 have been working on the creation of base game for several years now; once they're finalised, creating new content will be the time. it



Motion Controls

Deemed by most serious gamers to be a flop even before it was launched, Nintendo's Wii console went on to smash sales records, eventually selling over 100 million units. The reason for its success was simple - it was the first, and possibly only, console to deliver working motion controls. More importantly, it did it in such a way that it opened gaming up to an audience that didn't need to know how to use a control pad or keyboard. They could simply point the remote at the TV screen, select the game they wanted to play, and then go through the motions of the real world action they were replicating. While the accuracy of the motion tracking in the Wii wasn't actually that great, it did a fantastic job of faking it,

though hardcore users soon figured out ways to trick the controllers. The success of the Wii saw Microsoft trying to take it to the next step with the Kinect, removing the controllers entirely. As the dearth of quality Kinect games shows, this strategy proved to be a failure, yet Microsoft still pursued it with the launch of the Xbox One. Sony went for a far more traditional approach, copying Nintendo's technology with its Move controller, while also adopting basic motion tracking in its control pads. Meanwhile PC users have been using basic head tracking hardware for around a decade in the form of the TrackIR, but this is limited to niche use by simulation fans who need a quick way to move their in-game avatar's head.



The commodification of game creation tools

Thanks to the likes of Unity and Unreal Engine, game developers no longer need to shell out tens of thousands of dollars for a license to work on the latest game engine. It's now possible to build a game with nothing more than the right know-how and the motivation to get it done, as all of the necessary software is freely available. Rather than charge up-front costs for these products, the engine creators instead go for a revenue sharing approach. For example, if you build a game using the Unreal Engine 4, Epic games is entitled to 5% of the gross revenue after the first \$3,000 per product, per calendar quarter. On the other hand, Unity Personal Edition is open to anybody who doesn't make more than \$100k per annum using the software - after that and the creator then has to buy the commercial edition of Unity. As a result of the dropping in tool prices, combined with the ease of distribution afforded by online stores such as Steam, independent gaming has experienced a massive resurgence in recent years.



Virtual Reality – the next step

We're taking a punt on this one, as we believe that the next biggest leap in gaming technology is literally right around the corner in the form of Virtual Reality. Many might doubt this prediction given the untimely demise of VR in the early 90s, but we're guessing many of these naysayers haven't tried the latest Head Mounted Display (MHD) prototypes. We have, and we're sold on the technology, to the point where we believe it will be as big as the leap from 2D to 3D graphics, if not more important.

Older gamers will remember the popularisation of VR in the early 90s, led mainly by films of the time such as *The Lawnmower Man*. Until then, the military had been the main consumer of VR technology, paying upwards of \$50,000 per headset, plus several million more for the large workstations needed to deliver the graphics. It was only in 1991 that a company named *Virtuality* introduced it to gaming arcades. Costing around US\$70,000 per gameplay pod, Australians were asked to pay

upwards of \$15 per session, which may last for just a few minutes. Games such as *Dactyl Nightmare* routinely caused nausea in players, as the *Virtuality* pods hadn't solved the problems that today's VR prototypes have overcome, namely latency, high refresh rates, and player positioning.

In 1995 Nintendo released the highly anticipated *Virtual Boy*, but it too suffered from the same issues as the *Virtuality* system, albeit at a much more affordable price point. The concept of VR died as quickly as it arose, and it would take almost two more decades for technology to reach the point where VR is finally feasible.

Today's consumer VR platforms differ from the 90s versions in several key ways. Firstly, they're far more affordable, and will be able to run off a relatively

well-specced PC, suggesting a total cost of ownership below \$3,000. Secondly, they've largely solved the issues of nausea by lowering latency from player input to photon update to below 20ms, while also maintaining a minimum refresh rate of 75Hz. Finally, approaches such as HTC's *Vive*, which allow players to walk about virtual spaces, get around the issue of fooling the inner ear into feeling what the player is seeing.

As a result, we think VR is finally primed for the big time. After trying several recent demos with the very latest in prototypes,

and experiencing the sense of "being there" that only VR can deliver, we're positive that this is going to be a revolutionary technology. And not just for gaming – it has massive potential across the fields of education, tourism, rehabilitation and communication. No wonder Facebook made a US\$2 billion

bet on the tech when it purchased Oculus, with the likes of Sony and Microsoft also beavering away on their own versions. ☞





DEATH AND DYSENTERY:

A short history of games in education

Commercial software is being used in classrooms around the country to help students learn, create, and connect. But what does Grand Theft Auto have to teach? Knowledge lover **MIKOLAI** dons his mortarboard, straightens his headmaster's gown, and goes in search of learning.

Dying was part of the curriculum at my school. Once a month the teachers would march us up to the computer labs to play Pieces of Eight, a text based adventure game with a kink for gruesome deaths.

Our efforts to find the treasure and escape the digital island would be cut short by shark attacks, pirates, loss of blood from leeches, drowning, a different kind of drowning, and clapped out 286 PCs crashing. This was viewed as character building, educational, and cutting edge.

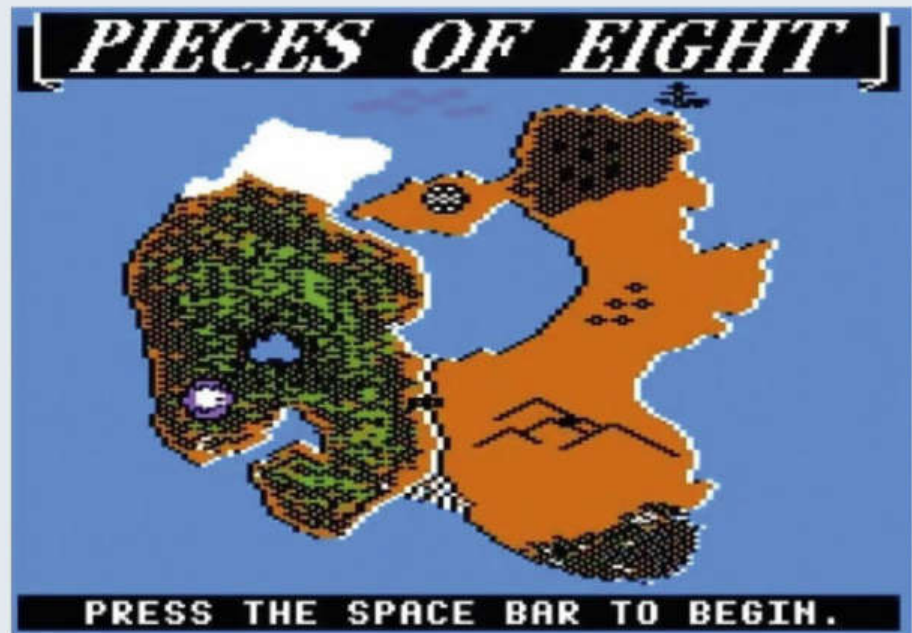
Commissioned by the Queensland Education Department and developed by schoolteacher Paul Holland, Pieces of Eight was distributed to schools throughout the country as a way to promote “a broad range of problem-solving techniques and logical-thinking skills,” via “dynamic, collaborative interaction and co-operation.”

A couple of decades later the groundwork it laid still holds true, but the software being used in classrooms is more likely to come from EB Games than the state education department.

ALL ROADS LEAD TO OREGAN

>> Using games for educational purposes isn't exactly a new concept. Chess was used to teach military tactics back in the Middle Ages, and various European writers and philosophers debated the merits of games and childhood development throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. But it wasn't until the late 20th century that technology and the education system began to catch up with all the theories that had been swirling around.

'Gaming as a Technique of Analysis' was an influential paper released in 1954 which argued that games had the potential to reshape education. As it explained, "A virtue of gaming that is sometimes overlooked by those seeking grander goals is its unparalleled advantages in training and educational programs. A game can



easily be made fascinating enough to put over the duller facts."

These fledgling ideas about games and education came to a head in 1971, when a U.S. teacher named Don Rawitsch used his school's mainframe computer to program a text based adventure to compliment his history class. The Oregon Trail focused on a settler making his way across the U.S. in the 19th century and proved hugely popular with students. The title

would go on to sell 65 million copies over ten iterations, forty years, and multiple platforms; numbers that place it in the same league as the Halo series.

The success of The Oregon Trail helped legitimize the idea of computer game assisted education and inspired a new kind of software. Titles like Math Blaster,



Not pictured: waiting 20 mins for the game to load. Ahhh tape drives.

Play it Again

(3 classics you play right now)

LEMONADE STAND



>> www.coolmath-games.com/0-lemonade-stand

PIECES OF EIGHT



>> www.playitagainproject.org/games/pieces-of-eight/

THE OREGON TRAIL



>> www.archive.org/details/msdos_Oregon_Trail_The_1990



Remember the 90s cartoon based on Carmen? No? Lucky you!



Mavis Beacon Touch Typing and the Carmen Sandiego series all made their debuts in the early 80s under the 'edutainment' banner, attempting to reframe maths, typing, and geography in a way that was more accessible to kids.

While these early titles were created with defined learning outcomes, there were teachers willing to look further afield, and explore the use of commercial games in a classroom environment. One of these outliers was Paul Holland, who would go on to develop the aforementioned Pieces of Eight.

"I started using Apple IIs and was soon involving my classes in

using commercially produced software and writing courseware to go with it," says Paul. "I became part of a trial group of teachers exploring the classroom use of computers and what they could offer. I especially liked getting the students involved in group work, problem solving, and storytelling."

CHOCOLATE-COATED BROCCOLI

>> According to John Burns, Director of Creativity & Innovation at International Schools Services, the evolution of educational games follows three main epochs. "The first is the traditional 'edutainment' approach, more commonly referred to as chocolate coated broccoli. These games typically take a learning experience that students dislike and attempt to make it more interesting through a gaming experience."

"Next we have the 'gamification' of learning movement. This school of thought focuses on creating a community of learners through the use of rewards such as badges, achievements, experience points, trophies and more."

"Finally, and the most promising, is games based learning. Here students leverage contemporary

videogames such as Minecraft, Portal, and even Grand Theft Auto to create, collaborate, and showcase their learning in new ways."

It's this last example that has had the most obvious impact on education and student engagement in recent years. Rather than trying to shoehorn an awkward

combination of education and gameplay, it pursues a more organic style of learning based around titles that students already play.

It's an approach supported by Daniel Donahoo, Director at Project Synthesis, a Melbourne based education consultancy group. He believes that open-ended commercial titles offer children "things that educational software built around (old) industrial models of learning couldn't. It offers

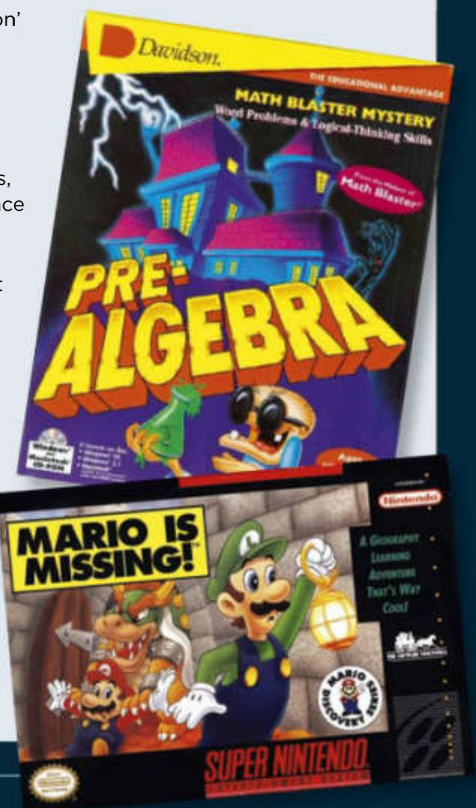
them agency; the ability to control and shape their own experiences and learning. It offers them a sandbox in which they can play."

John Burns agrees, and says that the potential for commercial software to teach is almost endless. "GTA allows senior students to capture and edit their own narratives in a genre referred to as Machinima, for instance. Here they have a wealth of tools for professional storytelling that they would have previously been inaccessible to them. Sandboxes like Portal allow learners to explore and experiment with realistic representations of physics..."

A PHD IN GAMEBOY... >> The last fifty years have seen the traditional 'recall and repeat' classroom environment replaced with more

Paul Holland on Pieces of Eight

In 1985 I was asked to join and then manage a group developing software for Queensland schools. One of our first tasks was to design some titles. Mine was Pieces of Eight. I'd always loved pirate stories and in particular Kidnapped and Treasure Island, so I combined that type of story with the Infocom style of game. I drew a small map, converted it into a room map with hidden objects, created the game logic and a story narrative and designed the interactions. My group was based in the Department of Education's media production branch so it was easy for us to hire in freelancers to help with programming on each of the versions. It was released on Apple II, BBC micro, Commodore 64 and IBMPC.



dynamic methodology. These days it's all about a student's ability to find and evaluate information before applying it contextually.

Games obviously lend themselves to this style of learning, and respected international publications like the NMC Report have stated that commercial software has the potential to increase student's "ability to problem solve, collaborate with others, and ultimately learn educational content and skills."

It's a mantra that's found support in many schools, especially in more progressive enclaves like North Fitzroy, Melbourne, where Sim City has been used to teach everything from social studies to English.

According to one of the teachers involved, "Students were required to blog, read gaming manuals, and present orally about their progress in the game. This is a powerful way of integrating the English requirements into our curriculum, because students use their literacy skills in a meaningful context... Even with the generally harder to engage students, I saw so much evidence of them totally immersed in the unit. They were learning so much without even knowing it!"

While these trials have helped promote the use of commercial software in schools, the integration of games and education in classrooms is still decided on a largely ad-hoc basis. According to Jess, a primary school teacher from Brisbane, "The programs I use in my classroom are pretty straight down the line educational, there are some games in them to encourage the kids to stay engaged but I haven't used anything like Minecraft... With the games that my kids use, they're more of a mid program reward rather than the point of the activity."

And as Daniel Donahoo warms, good teachers are still the most crucial aspect of any educational policy. "There is the assumption that games teach. Games don't teach. Just like textbooks don't teach. Games are content, they are spaces where students are exposed to things and it is the teacher who brings them to life."

"When teachers are using Angry Birds to teach physics, or when a teacher takes SimCity and uses it to build a unit around civics and government, or when a teacher uses Minecraft to engage with

sustainability curriculum, that's when games hum."

THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT... >> A generation of students raised on Mario Brothers, Sonic, and Duke Nukem are currently making their way through the education departments ranks, assuming directorial positions and starting to have real input on policy. And unlike their predecessors, they understand that commercial games and education aren't mutually exclusive.

Granted, there are numerous issues to overcome, including curriculum requirements, lack of teacher training, the need to assess student work, limited class time, and computer access. But the notion that commercial games offer real opportunities to learn, create, and connect is no longer the subject of scorn and derision.

As Marianne Malmstrom, a Cognitive Architect from New Jersey recently stated, "Games are the way people are connecting. People think of social networks as being Facebook. But games are the social network for little kids. And I don't see how education can ignore that for much longer." "

The DS Effect

While schools have increasingly turned to commercial software to help facilitate learning, the Nintendo DS stands out amongst videogame system due to its flood of educational and 'self help' software. The success of early releases like Brain Training created a short-lived craze for these titles, the ghost of which lives on via eBay and your local Cash Converters.



Minecraft is a self-contained learning environment.



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Games Education In Australia



Looking to get into game development? There are more places to go, and more options available to you, than ever before. We chatted with some of the schools out there to get a better sense of the current state of games education in Australia, and talked with some alumni who have gone on to make cool things.

by James O'Connor



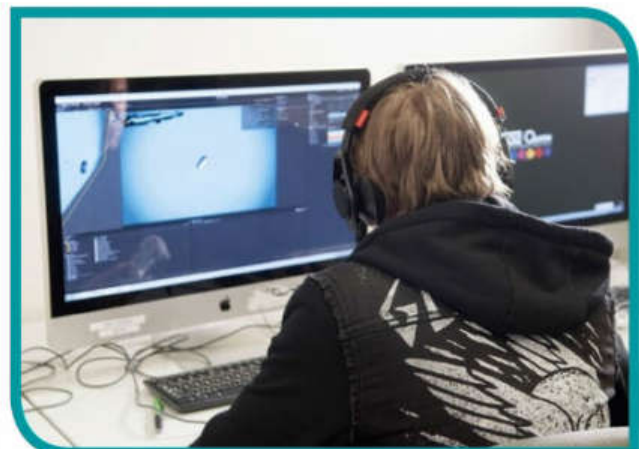
We asked ADAM RUCH, department coordinator for Games and Animation at SAE Sydney, to talk about what the school offers students.

Do students typically come to SAE with a specific idea of what they want to do in the industry? Do you think their attitudes towards and ideas about game development change over time?

Some do, but not everyone. There are a few roles in games that people seem to recognise before enrolling, like 'game designer' or 'level designer', but I also find that new students don't necessarily know what it means to actually occupy those roles. So they definitely learn that there are a lot of different ways to contribute to a game, and find that there are different aspects that they gravitate towards.

How important is collaboration between students on projects at SAE? Are you aware of any independent teams that have formed between SAE graduates?

This is extremely important. We focus on project work, making games and prototypes, and students are almost always working



in a 'simulated studio' environment. We believe that not only are the technical skills required to use any particular piece of software important, but that being able to collaborate is vital. It's very unlikely that anyone will have a career without collaboration, so we want to give our students the opportunity to practice that while they study. There are a few teams who have gone on to work together outside of college including the guys from Pygmy Tyrant - Trent Naylor, Willis Smith, Dhani Wong and David Coonan. These guys were college mates who founded their successful indie studio after collaborating on their major student project at the SAE Sydney campus.

You offer campuses all around Australia - will students get the same basic experience at any of them? Are guest lecturers ever live-streamed across campuses or anything?

Each of our campuses works to the same curriculum, but this is really a framework, not a laundry list of tasks to complete. Even within a campus, the studio projects are usually themed around a set of ideas that are one way to approach the learning outcomes for the unit. These change over time: different lecturers bring different ideas to a unit, different student groups interpret the project briefs in unique ways, and that's part of the design of these units. We want our students to have a more personal experience, something in their portfolio that speaks to their identity as a creator, rather than every student graduating with the same assignments in their showreel.

That being said, all of our lecturers come to this institute with years of experience and industry accolades - and they know what it takes to succeed. Our academic rigor challenges students to be original and push the medium forward.

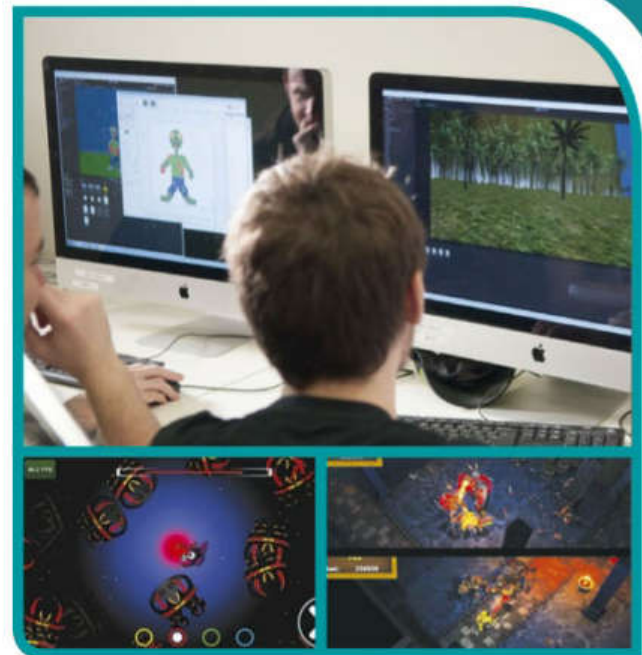
What sort of challenges do you need to prepare students for aside from teaching them how to design games? Does SAE focus on the realities of the industry as well?

One of those challenges is the group work - we know that working in teams is unpredictable, and handling that is not easy for all students. That is a reality of the industry - of the whole world, really - so it's an important one to address. Our internship program, which is built into the course, prepares students to present themselves in a professional way. We also help students build an online presence and a portfolio, both by building the content, and by actually working on the showreels and portfolio sites themselves.

Personally, I am very up-front about the realities of finding work in large companies, about the state of the Australian industry, about the opportunities (and challenges) of running an indie studio, among other things. But I am fundamentally an optimistic person, so I use that kind of honesty as the foundation for effecting real change over time.

The Australian games development scene was rocked somewhat by the 'bust' of a decade ago, when a significant amount of foreign investment dried up. We've been working hard to address the impacts of this on our local creative media sector and specialists, mainly by ensuring our students graduate with a more rounded skillset. We want to ensure they qualify with the aptitude and attitude to work both in large development studios across different specialist areas, as well as in smaller indie teams on projects that retain intellectual property for Australia.

If we can gradually build a more stable foundation of developers working on original game ideas, the Australian gaming industry



» ALL OF OUR LECTURERS COME TO THIS INSTITUTE WITH YEARS OF EXPERIENCE AND INDUSTRY ACCOLADES

should become more stable and we should see long-term sustainable growth.

What does SAE offer that makes their game development course unique from other schools?

For starters, we have a wide range of disciplines here, so students can work together in teams including animators, audio producers, web developers etc. We also build up a theoretical or first-principles knowledge about games throughout the unit, to give students an understanding of what games are that transcends whatever technical skills they will pick up. We want to answer the question "what is a game?" or "how does this game work?" regardless of whether it's built in Unity or UnrealEngine or GameMaker.

We are one of the oldest and most experienced providers of tertiary games development education

in Australia, having the experience of Qantm College which was founded in 1996. This enables SAE to provide students with both a solid academic foundation and professional industry knowledge so they're ready to hit the ground running.

Can you point towards any success stories from recent graduates?

We're really proud of the achievements of our graduates. Our success stories include Melbourne games graduate Jair Wallace who is doing great work with Australian games studio Twitch, designing and executing user interface systems as well as core multiplayer battle systems for games such as Orcs vs Knights: Heroes of War.

Brisbane graduate Adam Single has joined the ranks of successful gaming programmers and is co-organiser of the Game Technology Brisbane meet-up. Adam returned to study at 27, having left his former life as a café manager to pursue a passion for technology.

Halfbrick is another success story. The company is at the forefront of the Australian games development industry and was founded by SAE graduate Shainiel Deo in 2001.

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ALEX CARLYLE, Head of Design at AIE Sydney, is an industry veteran. He was the project lead on both The Getaway and LA Noire.

What prompted you to move from full-time game development to education?

I didn't study game development to get into the industry and throughout my career I have done a lot of recruiting and training of junior designers, so I have always had an interest in the burgeoning education sector. During the last few years I have got to know some of the people who work at AIE and I've also had the pleasure of working with some of the graduates who had impressed me. More recently the landscape of game development has changed across Australia. My career and experience has always been centered on large-scale AAA development, which is no longer present here, leaving me considering where

I could best utilise my skills should I choose to remain in Australia. AIE felt like a good fit and I have been fortunate enough to be able to bring that experience and shape the curriculum across the organisation.

Aside from design logistics, what do you think are the most important things for games development students to learn?

A professional working attitude and the skills to see a project through from concept to completion. Even for industry professionals those are still the toughest challenges ahead of them. Knowing when to push hard, knowing when to let go of an idea that isn't working, working effectively in a team, planning and scoping appropriately and staying the distance to see the fruits



of your labours come to life are all the elements of what makes a person an invaluable team member when making a game.

What advice would you give to a potential student who wanted to enrol in AIE but ultimately wasn't sure what they wanted to do within the industry?

They should do their research and make sure they understand what the different disciplines do in the game industry, but ultimately I would encourage any student to identify and follow their passions. If you know what you love to do and you get the opportunity to do that you are on the right path. For those students that don't

know what their passions are yet, try to see what you enjoy and what you don't. The great thing about the world of game development is that you can absolutely give it a go without having to study it. Education institutions like AIE will help you take your skills to the next level and can provide structure and industry expertise, but you can try your hand at the basics in the comfort of your own home to see what you like to do.

From your perspective, what's the most rewarding part of getting to teach game design?

Amidst the opposing opinions of what game is better than the next, the differing walks of life of students, and the varying levels of skills and interests within the discipline, is a united passion for creativity and the dream to go out into the world and make truly ground-breaking experiences for players. It is refreshing to be surrounded on a daily basis by that raw desire to put those ideas into practice. Having the opportunity to help shape them and provide a pathway for success in the industry is both humbling and rewarding.



DAN TOOSE, coordinator of the AIE Incubator program (and former editor of *Hyper*), spoke with us about what the AIE Incubator can offer aspiring game makers.

Can you outline the Incubator Program for us? What is it exactly, and how can students become a part of it?

The Incubator Program is something AIE came up with as a means to help our Advanced Diploma graduates who wanted to go indie. This was something that seemed really necessary once the games industry shifted from being almost entirely about medium to large studios working with major publishers into this new age of independent development.

We take anyone who has proper development chops, whether they're an AIE graduate or not, but I screen them pretty carefully

to ensure they know what they're getting themselves into. Typically, that means either having a team that has worked together, or coming in here as an individual with a well-considered plan for a solo venture.

Does the program target the business of independent development as well as the logistics of building a game?

Absolutely. Arguably the most common thing that folks trying their hand at indie development fail at is the business side of things, because they're typically motivated by their passion for games, and don't think about how to run a business around that until it's too late. We still need to help with production advice too - There's a massive difference between making a small student project game and trying to

create a game suitable for commercial release.

Who is the Incubator for? What sort of student is likely to benefit from it?

Primarily, the Incubator is for people who want to actually start and grow their own business. It can also benefit folks who simply want to be a part of a commercial game project, which is super valuable on your CV when you go to apply to a major games studio. However, most of the key benefits we offer, like access to scholarships and grant funds, best serve those who are trying to get something sustainable going and need a boost at the start.

Can you outline any success stories from the Incubator program?

At this point, our biggest success stories are in a series

of projects that are 'about to hatch' after quite a bit of incubation. We've had nine projects successfully pitch for a share of \$300,000 in grant money we've made available to our Post-Incubator teams over the past two years, and that's helped some of them to keep focused on their projects long enough to do things like get on to Steam Greenlight, and be approved for development on the major consoles. Some of the Greenlit game include *Bearzerkers*, *Evergreen*, *Dragon's Wake*, with *Collateral* and *Orbitor* both in Early Access now. One of our teams has a deal in place with a publisher that we're not able to discuss, but that's obviously a major win.

What sort of feedback do you get from students after completing the program?

It's generally all been very positive, which is a big deal to me. There are many times when I've seen someone wrap up at the Incubator and not really get as far as they thought they would have when they first arrived, but have still come and talked to me about how they've had an invaluable experience that they needed to have. I think the fact we've got most of our graduates wanting to stay on here as Post Incubator teams speaks volumes about how they see the place.



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» WE MAKE SURE WE GIVE STUDENTS ENOUGH CREATIVE FREEDOM BUT ALSO OFFER CONSTANT GUIDANCE WITH LESSONS



We talked to Nick Fredin, director and co-founder of CG Spectrum, about their online school, established in 2011.

What is the main focus of CG Spectrum? What might draw potential students to this school over others?

At CG Spectrum our main focus is providing an optimised education that will truly lead to relevant employment after graduation. We aim to teach students the latest skills by providing a cutting edge curriculum created and taught by industry leading mentors. We have created our programs by finding out what skills studios are looking for in artists and what makes someone employable. We then hire the best artists from around the world to implement the studios' advice and to create our own unique curriculum. Our courses are designed to take someone who has the passion and dedication to an

employable level faster than any other school. We are able to do this through small class sizes of ten students or less, in-depth correlated lessons and full time, highly experienced mentors that are there for our students every step of the way.

How do you cater to students who arrive not entirely sure what sort of artist they want to be?

We understand not everyone knows exactly what they want to do when they start school. It can take some time to find out what really makes you excited and this is something we nurture by introducing all aspects of the 3D pipeline over the course of a year. We are very excited to be announcing our Advanced Diplomas that will give students the chance to really focus on a specific craft

in their second year and give grads the proper skill set to succeed in the industry.

What's the split between focusing on digital art for films and digital art for games? Are there separate courses, or does a lot of the knowledge taught apply to both?

While taking the diploma of Screen and Media students learn the 3D design pipeline in a hybrid form. We teach the foundational skills that every artist needs, whether in film or games, to be successful by building a game and the assets within it. Doing this allows students to gain a fundamental knowledge that they can then build upon in the second year of our Advanced Diplomas.



You offer an online diploma, how does this differ from the experiences students might have on-campus? Can you still encourage collaboration in this set-up?

The technical hurdles that you encounter providing online education encourage you to come up with creative and innovative solutions that end up enhancing the students' experience. This isn't online education where you sit there and watch a video and that's it. We meet with our students live, look at their homework and give meaningful critiques. We record all of our classes so students can review them at any time, and we have designed our curriculum in a thoughtful way that encourages collaboration. A common situation that students find themselves in is biting off more than they can chew and becoming frustrated when they can't complete projects. In a collaborative situation this becomes a nightmare and students often abandon projects. We make sure we give students enough creative freedom but also offer constant guidance with lessons that build on each other and merge naturally into collaborative projects. It's the only way you can offer optimised education of this calibre online.

Where Does It Get You?

To get a better understanding of what you can actually do with a games-focused degree, we reached out to several former students who have, since finishing their degrees in Australia, been involved in the making of games that have received commercial release.



MATT TROBBIANI
Studied: Computer Science, Adelaide University (2011)
Worked on: Hacknet

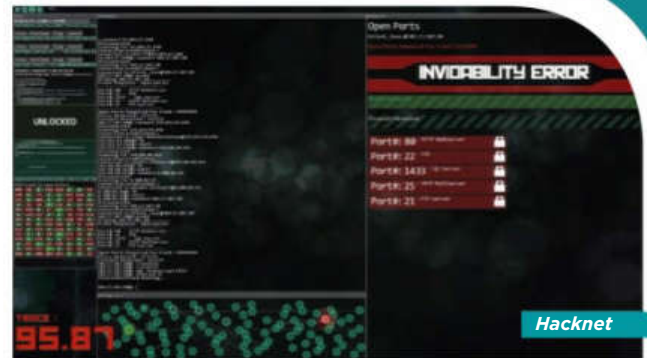
▲ In August, Matt Trobbiani completed work on the long-gestating Hacknet. It's a game about hacking into computer systems to lift data, sort of like a modern Uplink. It's clever and funny and fantastic, and is clearly the result of a lot of hard work. "Making games is really hard", Trobbiani admits. "If you're making something new or innovative, there might not be good answers out there for 'how do I do this?'"

"A computer science degree helps a lot", says Trobbiani. "Coding for games is still just coding, on most levels, and having those strong technical skills behind me let me start making things of substance earlier, and guided my development as a 'games coder' in a really good way."

"Having a really strong understanding on the language you're using, and how to think about problems from a coding and systems point of view gives you a lot more options."

As with a games-focused degree, being around people helped. "I learned a lot more at uni when I was writing my own projects outside of the course work, but being around those people, and in that environment, really kept my motivation up to keep improving and gave me good people to talk to about projects."

While he was there, Adelaide University was also host to the Game Development Club, which Trobbiani says was a great way to network. "Talking to people there about the indie scene, development, code - everything, was amazing. Two people in the club - Chris Johnson (Expand) and Izzy Gramp (Intergalactic Space Princess) are basically totally responsible for me starting to take game development seriously. I'd always been



Hacknet



VEGA Conflict

interested in making games, and had played around and made a few experiments before then, but hadn't really be considering it as a career, or something that investing a lot of time into would ever see anything good come of it."



ANNA TITO
Studied: Game Design, RMIT (2011)
Worked on: VEGA Conflict, Ice Age Village

▲ Tito's career has taken her to a few developers around Australia before ultimately leading her to EA Capital Games Austin, where she now works as an engineer. "I definitely think (my degree) was instrumental in the beginning", she says. "I chose a slightly different path at the time focusing on a double major in design

and programming, with a sub focus on mobile application programming. This unusual background and knowledge base made me much more useful in an industry that was newly transitioning to mobile and web." While Tito says that her work experience is now more important than her degree on a resume, she also believes that she wouldn't be able to work overseas without it. "While at this point the degree is looked at less by the companies I go to work with, it is still vital to have for the immigration, visa and other administrative processes. It is definitely safe to say that without it I would not be working at EA right now."

RESPONSE RATE

To find people for this feature, I put callouts on three Facebook game dev groups and asked a few industry figures for help me find graduates who had made use of their degrees. Within a few hours, 32 people sent me messages via Facebook, offering to help, and several more e-mailed me. Others contacted me on Twitter, equalling around 50 all-up. I didn't have to look hard to find people, which is a great sign for the industry.



Stormrise



Forget Me, Not



TRENT ATWOOD

Studied: Advanced Diploma in Game Art, AIE Sydney (2000)
Worked on: Cinematics for AAA games

▲ Trent Atwood is the Lead Unreal Technical Artist at Waterproof Studios. "I believe my education contributes to me landing jobs on AAA world class titles", he says. "However, I believe that most employers also look for experience and learning beyond the classroom especially when hiring for high profile projects. My advice for students is to add to their formal training with other software packages." He feels the things he learned fifteen years ago remain useful, even when the work he is doing is different

from what he learned. "My education was very arts focused while my current line of work is more technical focused. Regardless of how technical my job gets, there is usually an element of creativity where my arts background comes into play".



SALLY KELLAWAY

Studied: Bachelor of Music Technology (Honours, 2010), Griffin University, Masters in Design Science, Sydney University (2014)
Worked on: Stormrise, London 2012, sound design for Firelight Technologies.

▲ Sally Kellaway has had a tremendously varied career, working on several AAA titles and smaller indies

over the last few years. Her accomplishments are too many to list here. "I used my education as a lever to begin working in games before I graduated the first time. I started out working on tiny game projects providing sound effects for other students. After I graduated, I took a job in QA to learn more about development holistically". She believes that her research work is one of the reasons for her success. "I think most importantly of all, each passionate push I have received from each of my supervisors and course instructors to keep going down this rabbit hole is something I have valued from my education at many points in many ways."

SHANE RYPERS

Studied: Bachelor of Interactive Entertainment, QANTM Brisbane (2014)
Worked on: BioGloom, Snack Attack.

▲ Since finishing his degree, Shane Rypers has worked mostly on Android and iOS games for clients. "When I set my mind to work in this industry, I wasn't sure that a university course was the way to go", he says. "The seemingly normal progression was to go work in the QA trenches until you were good enough to call some shots." The course he ended up doing, however, was extremely enlightening.



"The course really helped me to put things into perspective and bring me back down to earth with my preconceptions about the industry. Everyone knows about the 'ideas guy' stereotype of amateur developer, who acts like some kind of gameplay brains trust. I was very much this person, and had no real tangible skills in game development". Rypers now feels far more equipped to work in the industry. "It taught me the tools, the methods, and the importance of iteration and continual self-improvement. It also taught me a bunch of inter-disciplinary stuff like modelling and programming that helped me work better."



ELIZABETH THRELFO

Studied: QANTM Sydney, Bachelor of Interactive Entertainment (2010)
Worked on: Forget Me, Not

▲ Elizabeth Threlfo has worked on several of her own projects since graduating. "Probably the most significant game project I've worked on has been 'Forget Me. Not' which explores dementia using the metaphor of data corruption", she says. The game was nominated for a Freeplay award this year.

HOW DOES IT LOOK ON A RESUME?

We asked Paul Baker, 2002 AIE graduate and current head of Three Phase Interactive, whether indie companies look at degrees on a resume. "CVs are used to work out if someone could possibly fit the role, and education is an important part of that", he says. "Degrees are preferred over shorter courses. We don't really have a preference of one institution over another."



» IF YOU SPEND YEARS AT UNI CREATING THINGS THAT CAN MAKE UP YOUR PORTFOLIO, THOSE ARE SUPER VALUABLE BY THE TIME YOU WANT TO GET A JOB

She jumped right into her course out of high school, and acknowledges that she has learned a lot since finishing. "The actual content of my studies haven't been much more than an intro to the world. After my studies I realised I had quite a gap in knowledge, even as I worked in the industry as a designer. Since starting out as an indie I've spent much of my time improving my skill set across programming and design especially". Studying also helped her to make friends within the industry.



ASPEN FORSTER
Studied: RMIT, Bachelor of Design (2015)
Worked on: The Sims Freeplay

▲ Aspen Forster is currently working at Firemonkeys, EA's big Melbourne mobile studio, which is a job she got through her studies. "My course was

basically like a 3-year long interview", she says. "All of the hard work I put into my assignments not for grades, but for the satisfaction of pushing myself creatively ended up showing my tutors that I was fairly capable, which in turn lead to me getting an internship at ACMI before applying for a position at Firemonkeys." She was particularly fortunate, as one of the interviewers had acted as a mentor at RMIT and had seen her course work prior to the interview. She believes that it isn't so much her degree as the hard work her



USING YOUR SKILLS OUTSIDE OF GAMES

Aaron Milan, a second year student in Game Design at AIE Sydney, is also the director of wearable tech start-up company Forcite Helmet Systems. They've developed a smart ski helmet that records video, pairs with your phone so you can talk to friends, and tracks you via GPS. "I didn't have experience with design, and the whole time throughout the AIE course everything I learned I was able to apply immediately", he says. "From creating presentations, to project management, design feedback, understanding player engagement... I was able to transfer this knowledge into product design with the team". Milan is a great example of how game design studies can be applied outside of games.

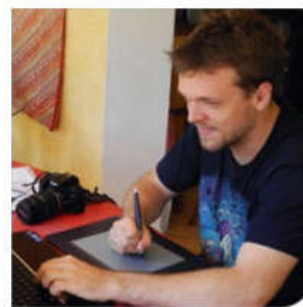


The Sims Freeplay



Anna's Quest

degree motivated out of her that has landed her this job. "If you spend those years at uni creating things that can make up your portfolio (instead of just passing), those things are super valuable by the time you want to get a job. No one cares about the grades you got or the list of subjects you completed or the uni you went to, all they care about is what you can SHOW them you can do."

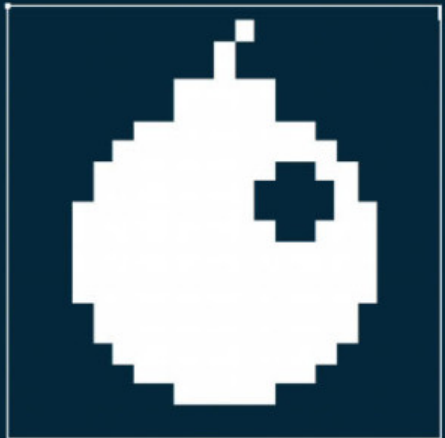
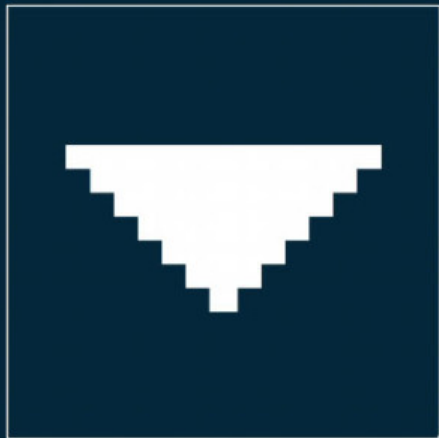
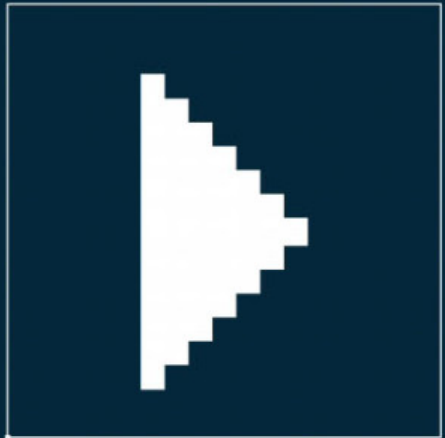
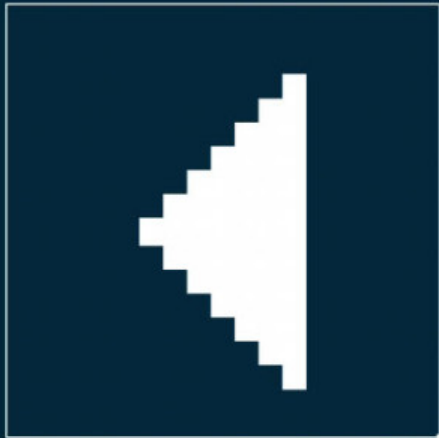
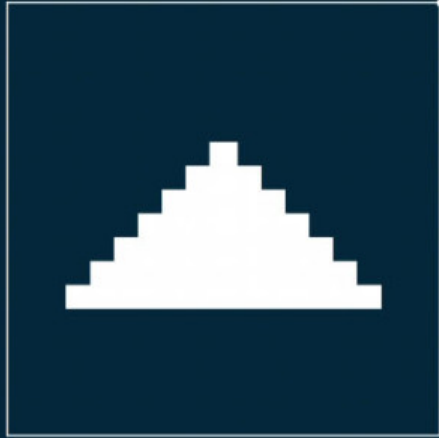
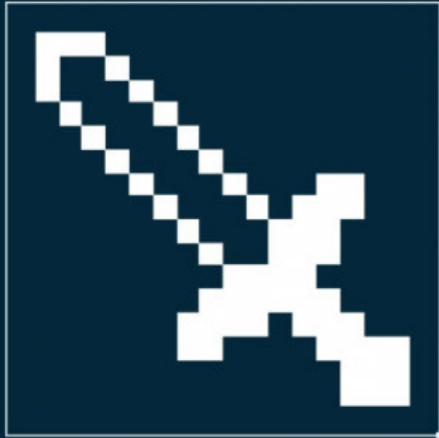


DANE KRAMS
Studied: Master of Creative Industries, Queensland University of Technology (2012)
Worked on: Anna's Quest

▲ Dane Krams released Anna's Quest this year, a point-and-click adventure

that was published by Daedalic Entertainment. He designed, directed and wrote the game, and was the lead artist and animator. He believes his degree helped him to develop the game. "There were basic practical electives that helped in obvious ways, like animation, web design, project development. But there were also compulsory theory subjects on things like entrepreneurship (which a lot of students rolled their eyes at) that I was personally surprised by. These went a long way to making me think in a business-minded way, which has to be considered to at least some degree when making games." His degree taught him not only how to build his game, but also how to market it to Daedalic.





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