

#10 MAY-JUN 2025

YOUR COMPLETE INDIE GAMING GUIDE



FROM UNDERTALE TO DELTARUNE - WE TALK EXCLUSIVELY
TO THEIR CREATOR, TOBY FOX

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Two Digits Deep.

Still here. Still curious. Ten issues in, and *Debug* remains committed to the same mission we started with; championing the most exciting, unusual, and important games coming out of the indie scene. That means spotlighting the developers breaking new ground, celebrating projects with something to say, and making space for the ideas pushing this medium forward.

From the start, *Debug* has been a meeting place for players, developers, and industry professionals alike. A shared space for insight, reflection, and inspiration. As someone who's been with the magazine since its earliest days, it's been an honour to step into the editor's role and help shape what *Debug* becomes next, while continuing to learn from the brilliant community around it.

Working closely with our Games Editor (and my brother) Nick, I've spent the past few months delving into thousands of indie games from all corners of the world. Some are ready for the spotlight. Others are still early prototypes. But all of them speak to the extraordinary range of creativity and experimentation driving this space!

Debug #10 is packed with interviews, features, and hands-on reporting that reflect that ambition. Whether you're here to stay ahead of the curve, gather ideas for your own projects, or simply curious about how great games get made, we're glad to have you with us. Thanks for being part of the journey. Let's see where it goes next!

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#10

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DELTARUNE

Special Thanks To

Robby Bisschop for making our Toby Fox feature possible. Everyone who's supported us so far... thank you. Two years in, and we're only just getting started. Here's to many more issues of Debug, made with love in Norwich!

The Fine Print

Debug magazine does not endorse products or services in the magazine, and accepts no responsibility for any supplied content. All content correct at time of going to press. Errors and omissions excepted. All editorial decisions are final.

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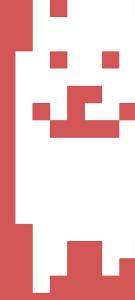
BOTH SIDES NOW

Caspar Field reminds us that everything you sign up for, everything you subscribe to, may one day need to be stopped.

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QUANG DX

Everybody's favourite modern retro dev Quang DX waxes lyrical about the benefits of embracing random chaos. For what is life if not entirely unpredictable?

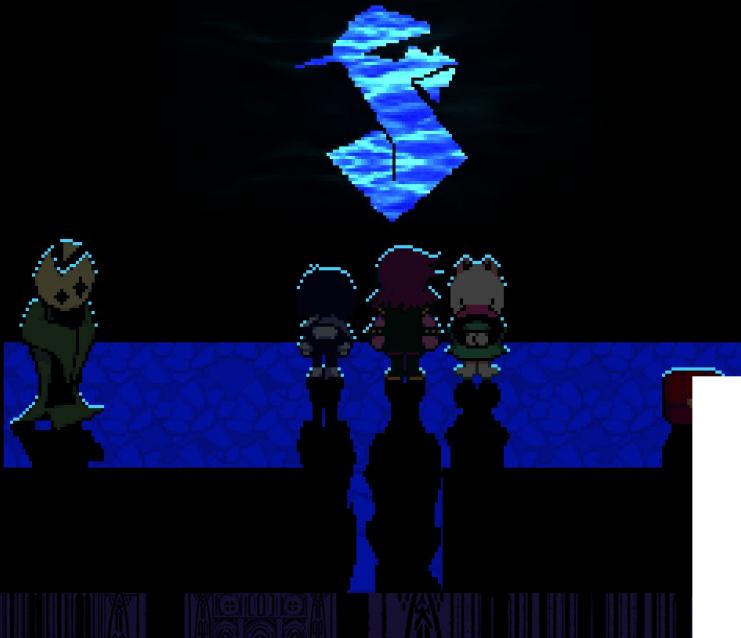
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FANT ASTIC MR. FOX

For many gamers, the release of *Chapters 1-4* of *DELTARUNE* is one of their highlights of 2025. The genius behind both *DELTARUNE* and *UNDERTALE* is Toby Fox, and in a rare interview we asked him about his creative process, and how an unknown developer managed to create one of the most popular RPGs in recent history.

JOCKINGTON GROWS THE BEARD.



Protagonists Kris, Susie and Ralsei pick up their instruments for a Rock Band-style mini-game in *DELTARUNE: Chapters 3-4*.



It's fair to say that *UNDERTALE* took the gaming world by surprise on its 2015 release. On the face of it, it appeared to be just another Japanese-inspired RPG with a tinny soundtrack and 8-Bit-style graphics. But then people actually started to play it. And the people that played it loved it. And they told other people, which then inspired the larger press outlets to review it, and before you knew it, *UNDERTALE* had become pretty much the only thing that gamers were talking about – and, more importantly, playing.

The success of the PC version of *UNDERTALE* enabled conversions to the PlayStation 4 and Vita in 2017, the Switch in 2018 and the Xbox One in 2021.

As the popularity of the game grew and spread, live orchestral *UNDERTALE* concerts began to pop up. There's a rare 10th anniversary one being held at London's Eventim Apollo on June the 22nd. If you're interested, then tickets start from around £56 and are available from www.eventim.co.uk. Oh, and in 2022, a track from

UNDERTALE, Megalovania, was used as the soundtrack for a circus performance for the Pope. But, incredibly, that's not the only connection the Pope has with the game. In 2016 a physical copy was given to His Holiness by a YouTube influencer during a staged meeting. Whether or not he actually played it remains a mystery that we will sadly never know the answer to.

And then there's the merch. Lots and lots of merch. Currently you can choose from over 100 pieces of official *UNDERTALE* merch (plus hundreds of unofficial ones) – including Flowey badges and Annoying Dog mugs. If you're only going to get one piece of merch related to the game though, we recommend getting hold of the soundtrack, as it really is superb.

Amazingly, *UNDERTALE* was Toby Fox's first fully completed game, and it was created using the game creation software, GameMaker Studio. We asked Fox what the pros and cons of using a package such as this were... "The pros are that we are very familiar with the engine, and it's rather fast to create and prototype things. We also get a lot of

Once upon a time, a LEGEND was whispered among shadows.



* oh man, thanks for checking that. that's wrong.



developer support. I think it's a great engine to make a 2D game with.

"Cons? Well, historically we have been forced to update the engine in order to maintain compatibility with consoles. When you do a significant update, the entire game will need to be retested in case the update has caused any part of the game to behave differently or even throw errors. Until we are able to continue using a single version forever, every couple of years we are going to big trouble town in the big trouble train – and we have to build the track ourselves.

"It's like an eight-person marble race from YouTube but all the marbles are individual, different-coloured Gromits from the train scene in *The Wrong Trousers*, placing down tracks as fast as possible. He has to survive. And when one of him wins, it plays MIDI music and shows a really weird nickname for him."

Ridin' Solo

The reason that Toby Fox's name is commonly used when discussing either *UNDERTALE* or *DELTARUNE*, is that so much of the game is designed by him. Concept art and sprite work for both games is handled by American illustrator Temmie Chang, but coding and music and all the bits in between for *UNDERTALE* and *DELTARUNE: Chapter 1* was all Fox's work.

"I really wanted to prove myself," said Fox, "so I was happy to try and tackle everything alone. But even if I wanted to collaborate with someone, I don't think it would've been possible.

"I didn't have any money, didn't have any contacts, and that version of GameMaker didn't really allow two people to work on the same project at once. If there was another person, we would have just gone back and forth breaking each other's project file over and over. I know it sounds really romantic but I'm shy."

Given *UNDERTALE*'s popularity, a second game was inevitable, but Fox has never been one for following convention, so rather than create something that would be sold as a standalone game, he announced in October 2018 that the first chapter of his new episodic game, *DELTARUNE*, would be released the following day on October the 31st. And for free.

Although not a direct sequel to *UNDERTALE*, *DELTARUNE* does share similar gameplay and some of the characters – although the setting is new and the battle system has been remodelled. And those of you who are fans of word puzzles may also spot that *DELTARUNE* is in fact an anagram of *UNDERTALE*...

Fans were delighted, as were reviewers. Fundamentally, *DELTARUNE* was more of the same, but considering the popularity of *UNDERTALE*, that wasn't a concern for the majority of reviewers and gamers.

But with the first chapter downloaded and completed, fans of the game were eager to find

out when they could continue the game's story. Unfortunately, they would have a bit of a wait for the second chapter though, as although its development began in the middle of 2020, it wouldn't be actually released until September of the following year. Fox wanted to explore alternative options for the game's development, but after some research he concluded that GameMaker Studio 2 (the updated sequel) was still the best choice – a belief that a lot of 2D indie developers share.

Chapter and Verse

Skipping forward a bit, work started on chapters three, four and five in 2022, with the idea to release them as a paid game once they'd all been completed. That plan changed slightly the following year though, and so now we have the release of *DELTARUNE: Chapters 1-4*, a compilation of the first two chapters, plus two brand-new ones. This was released on June the 4th for PC, PS4/5 and Switch, and also on the launch day for Switch 2 (June the 5th).

According to the chapter select screen in *DELTARUNE: Chapter 2*, there will be a total of seven chapters to *DELTARUNE*'s story – and, most importantly, just one ending as *UNDERTALE* had a total of three main ones plus a large number of variations for each of them. Work has already begun on *Chapter 5*, and Fox has assured fans that remaining chapters of the game will be released free of charge.

One other difference between *UNDERTALE* and *DELTARUNE* is the size of the development

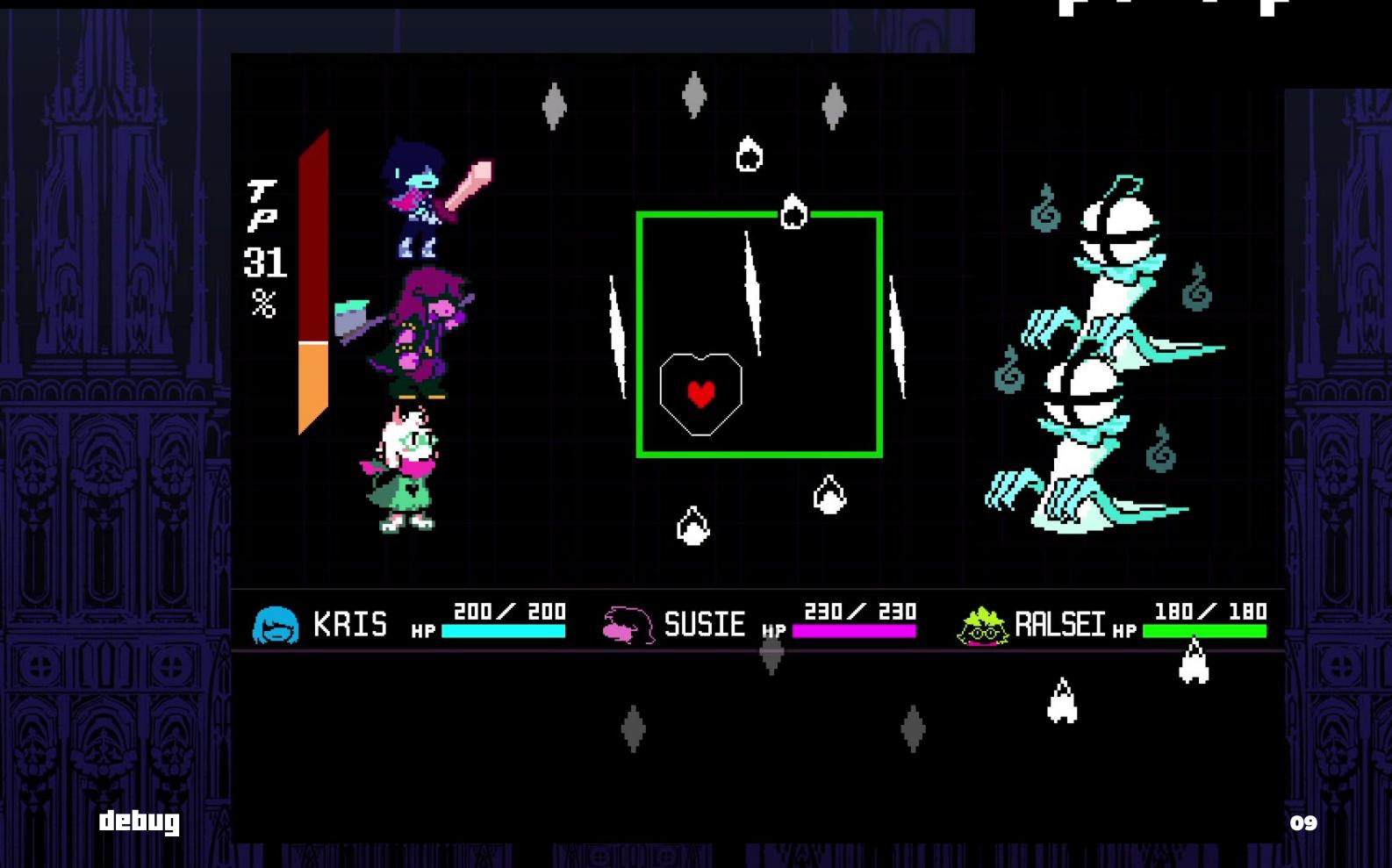
THE MAN TO THANK FOR ALL THIS...

Toby Fox doesn't tend to do many interviews, and, quite rightly, he prefers to keep a low profile and crack on with what he's really good at: making videogames.

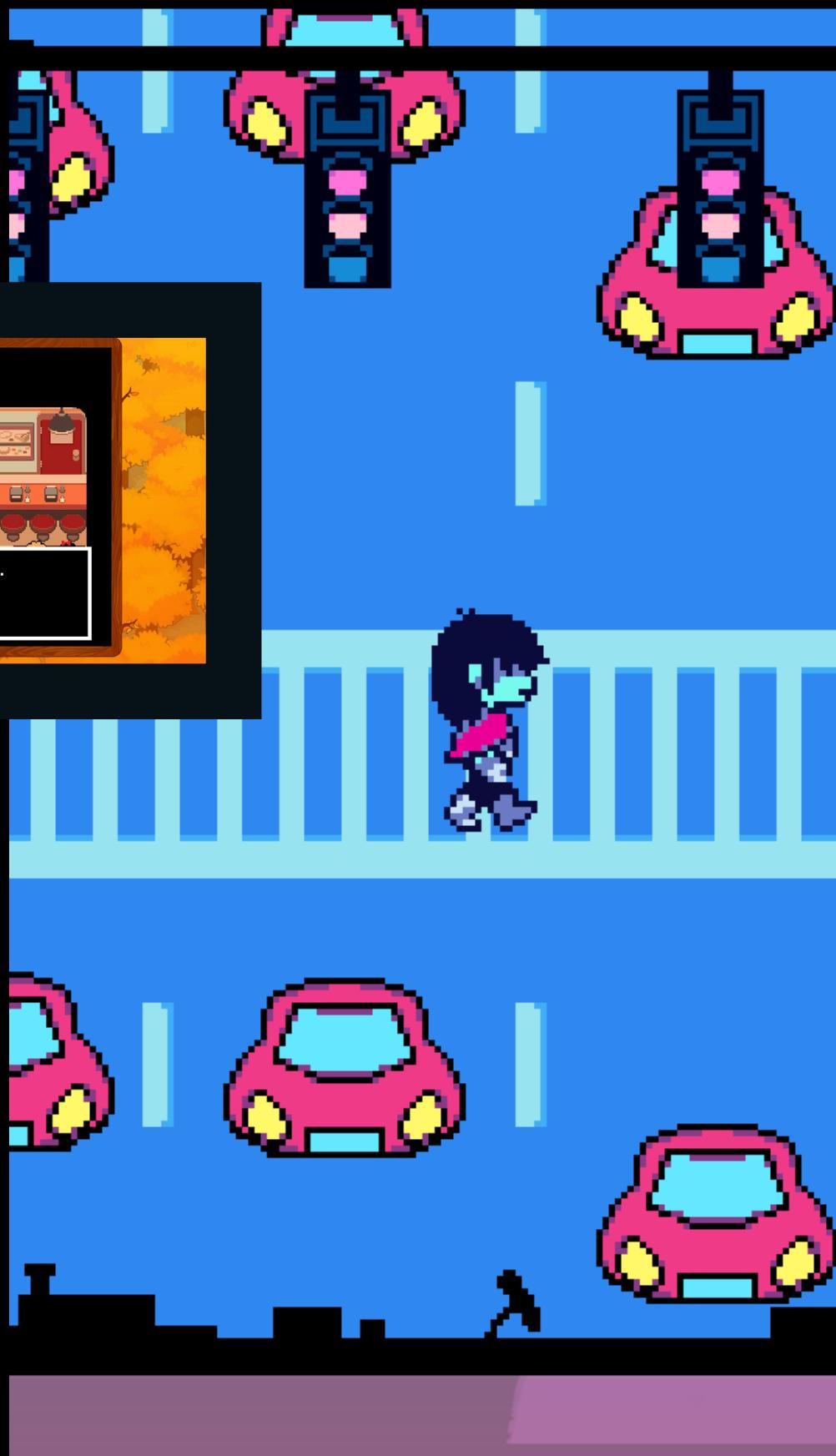
So we dug around a bit to see what we could find out...

He's a lifelong fan of Japanese RPGs, and has always been obsessed with their soundtracks – his classic song *Megalovania* is apparently inspired by Yoko Shimomura's track *Megalomania*, which is from the Japanese RPG, *Live A Live*.

Also, based on the replies to the questions we sent him, we suspect he may well be a fan of the classic film, *Groundhog Day*...



For those who don't recognise them (meaning you haven't played *DELTARUNE*) this is Kris, the main 'hero' of the game.



team. Although *Chapter 1* was developed solely by Fox (again, with Chang helping out on the sprite/illustration side), the team was expanded from *Chapter 2* onwards. In order to speed up production of the game, three team members worked on it day-to-day, with a few more helping out as needed.

Fox had a longstanding issue with pain in his hand and wrist, which unfortunately worsened during the development of *Chapter 2* – to the point where even using the keyboard was too uncomfortable for him, and coding had to be done through voice-to-text software. We asked Fox about this time and whether he preferred to work solo or in a team.

"Programming things alone is goated and blessed with the sauce. Everything you make will always be your vision, and sometimes it really helps to develop and iterate your ideas by trying them out yourself. Even if you can explain a concept to somebody else, there is no substitution for the brain blast you might undergo at the last minute when you do it yourself."

"However, nowadays, I have a pretty strict physical limit as to how much I can type, and I am limited to using speech to text for most of my written communication. So, I don't actually program anything any more. Occasionally I do go on call with somebody and tell them exactly what to do however."

"But I'm not saying I think working completely alone is the best option. I would

probably never do it again. Unless your scope is very restrictive, creating a game alone is just too much of a combination of too much impossible and too much annoying. The consequence of that is that not everything is always going to be perfectly aligned with how I would do it, but still, as long as the overall experience is enjoyable, it's fine."

When it comes to *UNDERTALE* and *DELTARUNE*, gamers fall into several camps: the ones that'll never play it because RPGs aren't 'their thing', the ones that quite like RPGs but won't try them because it looks too retro, and the gamers that are prepared to give it go. Having played both, I do feel sorry for those in the first two camps

In *UNDERTALE* (and later *DELTARUNE*) [Fox] created games where characters and storyline were the primary focus. He wanted the player to be constantly surprised and delighted by the unfolding tale.

as they are missing out. *UNDERTALE* is one of those games that takes over your life while you're playing it. Games that stick with me are the ones that drag me in and allow me to become invested in the characters and the story remarkably quickly. My belief is that, ultimately, role-playing games share a lot of DNA with the original text-based adventures. Both should have a dramatic and engaging storyline, and like the best books and films, you should be engrossed from start to finish. I suspect, based on his work output over the past 10 years, that's a belief that Fox shares to some degree.

The Secret of its Success

So the question surely is: what is the secret to the success of the games? Why are they both hailed as classics of the genre, when the ones that inspired them – like the *Mother* series – are not quite so revered in this writer's opinion. Fox believed that most RPGs were boring to play, more style than content, so in *UNDERTALE* (and later *DELTARUNE*) he created games where characters and storyline where the primary goal. He wanted the player to be constantly surprised and delighted by the unfolding tale. And funny. Fox's games had to be funny, too – he cites *Mr. Bean* as a strong influence on the game's comedic attitude. Hard to imagine that initially, but consider that in both the *Mr. Bean* TV show and *UNDERTALE*, the lead character is a fish out of water; a unique entity dropped into a world that they don't fit into. There's potential for comedy of a slightly darker nature, which both the TV and game explore.

All that would mean nothing if Fox wasn't able to construct a game framework inhabited by interesting characters woven into a storyline that grabbed hold of you tightly and kept you gripped until the

end credits. Thankfully for us gamers, that's exactly what he was able to do. It's impossible to say much more without spoiling it for those of you yet to experience the games, but suffice to say that both *UNDERTALE* and *DELTARUNE* are quite unlike any other RPG you've played before – in a good way.

One of the games' USPs is the way they deal with combat. Bearing in mind that your species is a new one to the monsters living in the Underworld, many don't immediately become aggressive when they first make contact with you. In fact, you do have the option to not attack any of them, and the game can be completed without killing anything. That's not to say that you won't, but it's refreshing to have the option.

As we mentioned before, the soundtrack to both games is definitely one to check out. Aside from the live orchestral shows, particular songs have been covered by a number of artists and styles – jazz, anyone? No? Sure?

The whole soundtrack was written by Fox. He prefers to write the tracks before programming that particular scene in the game, because it helps him decide how it should go. We wanted to find out more about Fox's musical background, so naturally the only sensible thing to do was ask him...

"I took piano lessons in Second Grade and I played the trumpet in Middle and High School. In Middle School I began playing the piano again, this time trying to play every single videogame song I knew by ear. This taught me a lot about song structure and chords. I'm pretty much entirely self-taught.

"When I was in High School, I joined the music team for a webcomic called *Homestuck*. Creating music for this comic was my first significant foray into working with a DAW [Digital Audio Workstation]. I learned basically everything from that time. I don't know if I ever learned anything else."

Fox's compositions have become hugely popular in the gaming community, and not just the indie one. He's contributed songs to the soundtracks for *Super Smash Bros. Ultimate* and also *Pokémon* games.

Wonderfully Weird

If you ask Fox about the success of the games, as we did, his simple answer was: "There's a lot more weird people out there than I thought..." This leads us to believe that Fox is probably the most surprised out of any of us at the popularity of both games. He's created exactly the sort of game he wanted to play, and luckily for him, it would appear that a significant number of gamers want to play them too. We can't wait to see what he does next, as it's bound to be fantastic. ■

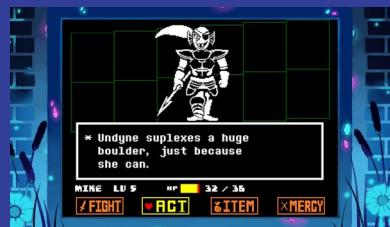
YOUR NEXT OBSESSION

In a nutshell, here's a breakdown of all of Toby's games so far...

UNDERTALE (2015-2021)

PC, Mac, PS4/Vita, Switch, Xbox

The game that started it all, and Toby Fox's first completed game. Fantastic story and characters, plus a unique combat system.



DELTARUNE: Chapter 1 (2018-2025)

PC, Mac, PS4/5, Switch 1/2

The first part of the seven-chapter epic adventure. Improvements over *UNDERTALE*, and shares some characters/locations, but not a straight sequel.



DELTARUNE: Chapter 2 (2021-2025)

PC, Mac, PS4/5, Switch 1/2

Fox believes that *Chapter 2* could well be the largest chapter in the whole series, mainly due to the number of cut-scenes and characters.



DELTARUNE: Chapters 1-4 (2025)

PC, Mac, PS4/5, Switch 1/2

The latest release, and a whopping four chapters (two original ones and two brand-new ones). Chapters 5, 6 and 7 will be released for free over the coming years.





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DEBUG NEWS

This part's all about us, obviously

► MCV/DEVELOP AWARDS

Debug nominated for second year

As far as the UK games industry accolades go, it doesn't get much better than being recognised by the MCV/Develop awards. We never thought we'd be so lucky, given our very indie approach, but if there's one thing we've learned over the last couple years it's that Debug is appreciated by the folks we're doing it all for.

It's truly an honour to be noticed by the industry we love so much, and whilst the competition in our category is incredibly

strong, to even be nominated has been a very positive experience for us.

How can I vote?

The fine folks at MCV/Develop are voting internally this time around, so unfortunately you can't. Perhaps this gives smaller nominees a fairer chance? Debug #11 will certainly have the details.

Speaking of voting, our very own Indie Game Awards will once again be accepting submissions in a few short months. Keep your eyes firmly on debugawards.com



COFFEE

When we're stuck indoors for too long then we get decidedly cranky, so thankfully there are regular gaming events we can attend. From packed showcases, to industry conferences and sweaty game jams. We'll go, take pictures and report back.

This time: New Game Plus, GDLX, Nordic Game



What: New Game Plus

Where: London, UK

When: 3rd to 4th April 2025

What is it? Part of this year's London Games Festival, New Game Plus took over the iconic London Museums building and turned it into a celebration of creativity, culture, and play. With hands-on demos, talks, and some brilliantly weird and wonderful showcases, it showed just how naturally games sit alongside other forms of art and expression. From experimental indie gems to clever design-led experiences, it was a reminder that games can do a lot more than entertain. A real highlight of the festival, and one we're definitely hoping to see back in 2026.



What: GDLX

Where: Farnham, UK

When: 12th April 2025

What is it? GDLX is a small, friendly industry-focused expo held at UCA Farnham. It brings together developers, students, and games industry folks for a relaxed day of showcasing, chatting, and sharing ideas. The vibe is low-key but packed with talent, with plenty of fresh games to play and some brilliant talks covering everything from design and narrative to the challenges of getting a game out into the world. It's a great chance to connect, and discover something new. We also got a kick out of the local kebab seller who spotted the event and rolled up to feed dozens of hungry developers. Judging by the queue, we reckon he did well for himself.

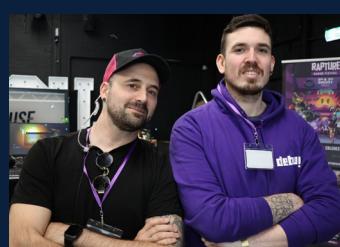


Photo credits: New Game Plus - Quang DX, Nick Crocker // GDLX, Nordic Game - Daniel Crocker



It was blisteringly hot outside, but inside the venue was cool. The people even cooler.



James of Spelkollektivet



Succulent Japanese Meal



No Shortage of Food



Sponsored Beer?



DEW

DEVELOPER MVRX GAMES
PUBLISHER MVRX GAMES

Spotted at Nordic Game in Malmö, *Dew* instantly stood out with its stunning art direction and immersive atmosphere. Set in a rain-soaked, surreal landscape, this 2.5D platformer challenges players to move with precision and momentum as they navigate its stunning world. From the first moments, it's clear that *Dew* is doing something special; offering puzzle-solving, fluid gameplay, and dreamlike visuals. It's an intensely stylish game that rewards you with moments of flow-state brilliance. Keep your eye on this one.



MORE INFO



Past. Present. Future.

Where we ask someone who really knows their indie shiz their favourite games from the past, present and (yep, you guessed it) the future.



Joe & Fergus

This issue we're joined by Joe Bain and Fergus Coyne, Directors of the Glasgow Independent Games Group CIC (GIGG). Through GIGG, they're building an open, inclusive community for game developers across Scotland, championing creativity and collaboration at every level. Joe also runs Hairy Heart Games, home to some of the weirdest and most wonderful indies around, while Fergus heads up Hubworld Scotland, a growing force for game dev support in Dundee and beyond.

Together, their passion for the scene gave rise to the Glasgow Independent Games Festival (GIGF), a vibrant celebration of games, talks, art and community. Last year's event sold out and supported over 200 developers, sponsors and attendees. This year? They're aiming even bigger. Twice the size, double the vibes. Mark your calendar for August 9th – they're really excited, and you should be too.

Past

Joe: Probably my favourite game from the heady days of XBLA was *Applejack*. It was sort of a cross between *Super Mario 2* and *Bangai-O*, where you throw washing machines at pandas and they explode into fountains of coins.

Fergus: *Return of the Obra Dinn*. Oh my god what a game! I'd wipe my memories just to play it again from the start. It scratches the itch of a narrative detective game so well, the art style is fantastic and the soundtrack slaps.

Present

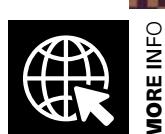
J: I love all the weird little things you can find on itch. The other day I played *Gob* which is this claymation point-and-click with superb grubbiness.

F: *Buckshot Roulette*. This is the definitive indie game in my brain for short, simple, atmosphere and fun. I admire the weirdness it doesn't address, just to focus on the gameplay. Why a club? Why so many teeth? Afraid? It makes you ask, 'Why am I not making a game like this?'

Future

J: I am super hyped for *Crescent County* – witches racing broomsticks with a sort of cozy *Jet Set Radio* dating-sim vibe. What's not to like?

F: Tough to choose one, but I'm going to go with *Tenenbris Somnia*, which is a retro 2D horror adventure game with full live-action cutscenes. I'm not a big horror guy but man, the mash-up of styles has got me hooked until launch. They put so much into their cinematography, matching that with the in-game visuals. It's so cool! I will be playing (with my hands over my eyes so I don't get scared).



MORE INFO



SYNTHS AND SIRENS

Lost In Cult Records and Fallen Tree Games have teamed up to deliver *The Precinct Original Soundtrack*, a synthwave-infused homage to 1980s cinema and television. This release is available in two nostalgic formats: a limited edition vinyl and a cassette, each designed to transport listeners back to the era of neon lights and noir narratives.

Art director Lewis Boadle describes *The Precinct* as a "love letter to the cop movies and TV shows of the 1980s," emphasizing the importance of music in creating the game's atmosphere. He notes that the soundtrack's synths "pulsed like a heartbeat," and the inclusion of saxophones and snare drums evoke the gritty, stylish essence of the era.

Pre-orders are live now at: lostincult.co.uk/precinct

POCKET PARASITES

Lowtek Games have boldly gone where few devs dare, releasing a brand new Nokia N-Gage game in 2025. Yes, really. *Parasite Pack* is now available on Nokia's misunderstood handheld, thanks to the relentless passion of indie dev Alastair Low, who apparently looked at the N-Gage's lack of physical indie representation and decided to *make it so*.

Parasite Pack bundles together three wonderfully weird 8-bit games: *Flea!* and *Flea! 2* are both frantic platformers where you play as a blood-hungry flea dodging death across pixelated canine guts, while *Tapeworm* is a clever spin on grid-based puzzlers... So charge up that taco-shaped phone, slide in the MMC, and engage.



SPIRIT SEEKS SHELF

The original *Spirit of the North* was a bit of a sleeper hit; the serene, wordless adventure that cast you as a lone fox exploring a mystical, Nordic-inspired landscape. Now, that quiet magic returns in *Spirit of the North 2*, and it's got a few new tricks under its fur.

This time around, you're not entirely alone. Joining you on your journey is a wise raven companion, helping you solve environmental puzzles and uncover the secrets of a world long forgotten. The goal? Track down the lost legendary guardians and restore balance to the land. No pressure, right?

If you're into games that blend exploration, atmosphere, and a little mystery, this might be your next quiet obsession.

With the Switch 2 having just launched, we've teamed up with PowerA to give away OG Switch goodies in the form of the Controller Charging Base

(controllers not included) and the Enhanced Wireless Controller with Lumectra! To enter, send an email to hello@teamdebug.com by 7th July 2025 titled 'Let's Get Physical'

- PowerA. One lucky winner will be drawn randomly and contacted in mid-July. If the winner doesn't reply within 7 days, we'll draw again. Good luck!

WANT TO WIN THIS?



THE SPELL BRIGADE

STEAM EARLY ACCESS
OUT NOW



INDIE- VELOPMENT

TOMORROW'S GAMES TODAY

CLAWS FOR CONCERN



**WRECK CITIES AND
SAVE KITTIES IN
CAT-A-STROPHIC**

We've all seen those videos of cats casually swatting mugs off tables, but scale that up to city-destroying proportions and then it's less 'aww' and more 'uh-oh'. It's fair to assume that if our furry overlords were kaiju-sized, they'd gleefully turn downtown into a scratching post. Thankfully, they remain cuddle-sized and mostly uninterested in urban annihilation... for now.

In *Cat-A-Strophic*, that "what if" becomes reality as you control a giant monster kitty on a mission to rescue her kittens by levelling a city and its military forces. Set in a fully destructible sandbox world, you'll swipe, stomp, telekinetically fling cars and use your scythe tail (you know, usual cat things) to cause destruction on a monster scale.

Surprisingly cosy for an extinction-level event, the game blends rogue-lite progression with physics-driven mayhem. It's chaotic, funny, and unapologetically adorable. So grab the demo, sharpen your claws, and brace yourself for a cat-astrophically fun time. □

INFO
Developer
Purr Point Productions
Publisher
Purr Point Productions
On
PC
Demo
Yes (on Itch.io)

**RELEASE
AUGUST
2025**



MORE INFO



RELEASED
TBA

DOUBLE THE VISION TRIPLE THE FUN

A NOVEL EXPERIENCE THAT'LL LEAVE YOU SCREENBOUND

When it comes to unique concepts, *Screenbound* might just be the most creatively bonkers platformer we've seen in years. Seamlessly stitching together the golden age of handheld gaming with the slickness of modern 3D worlds, it plays like something so inventive that it feels borderline illegal.

Screenbound doesn't ask if you want 2D or 3D gameplay, it gives you both at once and says, 'Good luck!'. You'll control a character navigating a vibrant 3D environment while simultaneously managing a second, pixelated version of yourself on the 'Qboy', a charmingly retro handheld device suspiciously similar to a Game Boy. Every jump, interaction and misstep must be carefully considered in both dimensions. If your brain starts to overheat, don't worry, it means you're doing it right.

This dual-reality gameplay is more than just a gimmick, as it taps into something nostalgic and oddly emotional. It evokes childhood memories

of playing *Pokémon Yellow* on a bumpy car ride, squinting at the screen while

“Combat is reserved for the 2D space, but rewards play out in 3D.”

wondering if that cow you just passed was real or just a Snorlax in disguise. The way *Screenbound* blurs the lines between the game world and 'reality' feels oddly familiar, and very clever.

As you progress, you'll encounter environmental mechanics like updrafts,

INFO

Developer
Crescent Moon Games // Those Dang Games

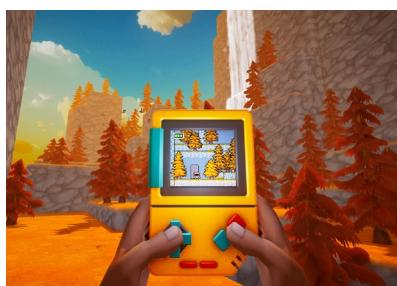
Publisher
Digital Pajamas // Crescent Moon Games

On
PC

and enemy encounters that affect both worlds. Combat is reserved for the 2D space, but rewards play out in 3D, encouraging you to stay mentally present in both realms. The game also features a level editor where 2D creations are automatically transformed into 3D levels, an impressive feat we still aren't quite sure how is possible.

The teased plot also seems tantalisingly interesting, as we delve deeper into the dark history of this device and the secrets surrounding it

Screenbound is shaping up to be a platformer that not only challenges your reflexes, but your nostalgia and multitasking abilities, too. Keep an eye on this one, in fact, probably both. □



Q&A JOSH PRESSEISEN

Read the preview? Good. Now you've probably got some questions, right? We did, so we did the only sensible thing and spoke to Josh Presseisen from Crescent Moon Games to get the answers.

Screenbound blends 2D and 3D gameplay in real time. What inspired this dimensional duality, and how did you approach balancing both perspectives without overwhelming the player?

As strange as it sounds, the inspiration came from a single image that I saw on my timeline. It was a person playing a handheld device. It was just a close-up of the hands holding the device, with a background. When I saw that, I immediately thought, wouldn't that be interesting if the game on the screen and the background were linked? And then I tried some simple prototypes and the concept worked really well.

The Quantum Boy device is a central mechanic. Was it always part of the concept, or did it evolve from another idea during development?

Yes it was always part of the concept; the main aspect of it. The lore around the device itself started to evolve once the main idea started to gain traction.

Can you walk us through a puzzle or moment in the game that best exemplifies the kind of '5D thinking' players will need to succeed?

Certainly! The balloon mechanic is what we use to describe best how the two worlds interact with each other. You can jump to grab a balloon in 2D, but when you do, you are also moving in 3D, and you can aim in any direction.

This may seem confusing at first, but once you try it, it gives you a very strange and cool sensation. It's the perfect example of the two worlds working together.

You're integrating a level editor that transforms 2D creations into 3D worlds. How do you ensure that user-generated content still delivers a cohesive and enjoyable experience?

We are not promising yet that we will give the level editor away to the public although that would be amazing. Right now it's really just for us to design the

levels that will be in the final game.

We may end up building out a more robust version for public use, but we'll see after the game is finished. To answer your question, we don't know if its possible yet, but we hope so!

Screenbound has a nostalgic vibe with the Qboy, but also modern gameplay mechanics. How did you strike that balance between retro charm and innovation?

The retro charm comes from the 8-Bit-style game played on the screen, and the modern mechanics are the interaction between the two worlds. Balance is the ultimate goal for the game, and making sure we can create mind-bending and interesting moments throughout the game as the player progresses. We focus on the 2D first, because we believe if it's not fun in 2D, it won't be fun in 3D either.

Narratively, the game hints at a deeper story involving the protagonist's mother. How does emotional storytelling factor into a gameplay experience this mechanically complex?

While there will be a narrative behind the game that will influence the game's mechanics, it won't be such a heavy narrative focus that would take the player away from the simple fun aspects of the game that keep the player engaged with the 2D and 3D worlds together.

The narrative will sort of be the thread that holds the game together from a structural sense. The lore bits will hint at the origins of the mechanics of the game itself. □



THE BACK CATALOGUE

While looking like the first game by Those Dang Games, Crescent Moon Games has a few previous releases under their belt, such as **Morphite** – a low-poly atmospheric FPS set in a universe of unexplored planets.





RELEASED
TBA

DRAWN TO ADVENTURE

BOOPER, GET HOME! IS A JOURNEY OF PURE IMAGINATION

Booper, Get Home! turns childhood doodles into a platforming playground where puzzles, socks, and heart collide. A joint project between a father and his autistic son, we were immediately drawn to the game when we first discovered it, and felt it was a natural fit for the pages of *Debug*.

Sometimes, it's the smallest steps that lead to the biggest adventures. *Booper, Get Home!* is a lovingly crafted platformer that drops you into the sketchbook world of Booper, a non-verbal child trying to find their way home. And socks, lots of socks.

Built from the actual artwork of the developer's autistic son, the game's hand-drawn aesthetic is both charming and refreshingly original. Think crayon dragons, googly-eyed clouds, and giant robot cats that look like they were summoned from a colouring book, because they were. But don't be fooled by the childlike visuals, as Booper's world is packed with clever puzzles,

quirky characters, and some truly heartwarming encounters.

“The game’s hand-drawn aesthetic is both charming and original.”

Guide Booper through a 2.5D world full of imaginative, but approachable obstacles and interactive environments, picking up items and solving challenges that help piece together the way home. It's a light-hearted experience that stays fun for all

INFO

Developer
Fletcher Studios

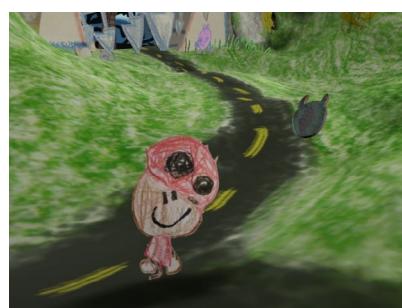
Publisher
Fletcher Studios

On
PC

ages while gently encouraging empathy and exploration.

While still in development, it seems to be shaping up nicely with a generous dose of creativity, accessibility, and wholesome vibes. And with VR support also planned, you will soon be able to truly step inside the imaginative landscape. Even better? A portion of the game's proceeds will go toward autism awareness initiatives, an extra reason to get behind this joyful project.

Whether you're here for the puzzles, the playful visuals, or just to help Booper find their way back, one thing's for sure: this journey is full of heart and a whole lot of character(s). 



Q&A THOMAS KILDREN

In this Q&A, we speak with Thomas Kildren, creator of *Booper, Get Home!*, who aims to raise autism awareness through a heartfelt, imaginative game inspired by his son.

What inspired you to centre the game around a young, non-verbal protagonist? How did your personal experiences shape that decision?

My son is limited-verbal, and seeing him struggle to express needs and wants as a child had me wondering as a parent, 'what happens if he gets lost?' – the underlying fears I've had as a caregiver when I've lost track of him in public (only to find him nearby, playing and discovering new things) was probably a big motivator. I also must give credit to my wife, who helped come up with the hook and big plot twist at the end of the game.

The game's art is based on your son's drawings. How did you translate his imaginative visuals into a playable game world?

When I started learning game development, it was right around the time my son started drawing. As a proud father (who has a background in the arts) I was taking a ton of photos of everything he was creating. Since most of the early development tutorials are 'make this cube move' or 'learn how to greybox a level', I found it boring and started putting his art on them as textures. My boys were also my playtesters, and when they were laughing hysterically at walking the player off the edge of the world and into the void, I thought it was cute and should pursue it further.

What challenges did you face in balancing accessibility with creative puzzle and platforming mechanics, especially for neurodiverse players?

My puzzles are designed to encourage exploration and tenacity. Keeping at it will eventually reveal a solution. The only real challenge I've found was physicality. When I started developing *Booper*, it was initially a VR game. After a few rough play test sessions, it was apparent that small hands can't handle VR controllers, so I switched to traditional Xbox/PlayStation-styled controllers, which kids can instantly grasp.



How do you hope *Booper, Get Home!* will influence conversations around autism and representation in the video games world?

In showing *Booper* at gaming expos, I've met many kids – either on the spectrum themselves, or have a sibling or friend on the spectrum – and finding that someone like them helped make a video game has inspired them to try their own creative pursuits. It's my hope that if the game takes off, part of the proceeds will go to organisations that help promote awareness and acceptance.

Can you share a moment in development that was especially meaningful or surprising for you and your son?

A story I love sharing is how my son is also a playtester, and plenty of times he'll stop the game and rush over to his sketchpad and start drawing. And, without a word, bring it to me indicating that I need to add this to the game. And the number of times I've had to explain, 'um, that's Mario – he's a copyrighted character, we can't use him!'

You're developing a mobile game featuring Booper – can you share more about what players can expect and how it ties into the original game?

Go Booper Go! is an infinite runner that has the player chasing letters to spell words, all while speeding through a world populated with characters and creations from the bigger game. The game will feature two modes: Find the Word given to the player, or Build a Word by collecting letters and spelling correctly. We are hoping to launch it this fall. ☺

MORE OF THE SAME

Chicory: A Colorful Tale – A painting adventure game where you wield a magic brush to bring colour back to a black-and-white world. It's heartfelt, whimsical and deals with themes of self-doubt and creativity in a gentle, thoughtful way.





INDIEVELOPMENT

DUNEBOUND TACTICS



**RELEASE
TBA**

ctives
enemies to win.

FUEL SURVIVAL WITH FLESH AND FIRE IN DUNEBOUND TACTICS

Dunebound Tactics throws you headfirst into a scorching, unforgiving wasteland where every choice matters and someone will end up paying for it. It's a brutal turn-based tactical RPG that asks not just how far you'll go, but who

you'll burn getting there.

If you like your tactics games with a side of moral torment, *Dunebound Tactics* should be on your radar. Set in a barren, procedurally generated desert wasteland, it's a turn-based roguelite where survival isn't just tough, it's soul-crushing.

You lead a scrappy caravan across endless dunes in a sand-powered ship, scraping by thanks to a rare energy called Elios. Harvest it from enemies, track it down on quests, or when things get really bad, even extract it from your own crew. Yep, you can literally sacrifice your allies to keep the engine running – talk about team building. It might sound grim, but sometimes you've got no other choice.

Combat is sharp, tense, and deeply strategic. Each battle unfolds on destructible terrain, letting you manipulate the battlefield itself to gain

the upper hand, raise sand structures to provide cover or find yourself digging your own grave. Just hope no bullies come along to knock your sand castle down, because positioning, timing, and smart use of abilities are key, especially when your party is running low on health, hope, and humanity.

But the hardest decisions happen outside of battle, where gut-wrenching choices await. Who do you heal? Who do you recruit? Who gets turned into bio-

THE BACK CATALOGUE

Terahard has a few other projects in the works, such as *BADA Space Station*, *Era* and *Monster Mop Up*, but if you're looking for something to get stuck into now, we suggest *Claws of Furry*.

INFO

Developer
Terahard

Publisher
Terahard

On
PC
Demo
Yes

fuel? With limited space on your caravan and permadeath always looming, *Dunebound Tactics* forces you into choices most games shy away from.

There's a strong roguelite loop here, too. Each run is different; shaped by random events, terrain, and recruitable characters. Even when your caravan crumbles into the dust, their legacy can influence your next attempt, re-scavenge materials or recruit survivors from your previous caravan run.

Dunebound Tactics won't remind you you're a good person. It'll remind you of how far you'll go for survival, and how quickly you'll throw your friends under the bus... for fuel. 

MORE INFO



"You! I CHALLENGE YOU, MORTAL; TO AN EXORCISM. COME TO 205 KUHANA ST. AND DRIVE ME OUT, IF YOU CAN.
MUHAHAHAHA"

DISASTORY

"Solid evil laugh."

RELEASED
TBA



A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE CHOICES

A SURREAL STORY UNFOLDS IN DISASTORY'S CHAOTIC STREETS

If Douglas Adams made a D&D campaign after three espressos and a head injury, you'd end up with something like *Disastory*, a choice-driven, illustrated roleplaying adventure from Godsppear Games. It's weird, it's wordy, and it's a wonderful trainwreck of delight.

At its heart, *Disastory* plays like a choose-your-own-adventure book that was left too close to an open paint tin. You pick from six oddball characters (with varying levels of murderous intent), wander through gorgeously hand-drawn locations, and make choices that range from the seemingly sensible to the absolutely unhinged – the promotion itself pretty much uses the phrase 'make dumb choices' as its tagline. And probably for good reason, because sometimes the obvious option is the worst one. Clicking the big shiny 'help the man' button might just cause him to explode. Figuratively, of course. Probably.

Combat is just as ridiculous – or perhaps frantic is the better word – and in this game, words are important.

Rather than turn-based tactical combat, it often boils down to recognising the right prompt and then selecting it before your timer runs down. There are combat items to utilise and some prompts are harder than others, but for the most part, when you need to dodge, you click the word that says dodge. Other times however, fights are more like improv scenes with consequences. You don't always win by fighting smart; sometimes you win by

MORE OF THE SAME

Road to Golflantis – a browser-based, quirky golf adventure where players navigate bizarre landscapes, using creative mechanics to solve puzzles and score holes in absurd locations.

INFO

Developer
Godsppear Games
Publisher
Godsppear Games
On
PC, Mac
Demo
Yes

saying something dumb at the right moment. It's kinda genius.

The humour is relentless and proudly silly. Expect dark jokes, one-liners that have no right being as funny as they are, and a world full of characters with more quirks than a reality TV show reunion.

There are over 100 scenarios in the demo alone, and the branching storylines mean repeat plays feel fresh – or at least differently chaotic. It's definitely an RPG for people who like their fantasy with a side of 'what just happened?'.



MORE INFO



INDIEVELOPMENT

THE KNIGHTLING



KNIGHT MOVES

PLAYING 'SPOT THE INFLUENCE' WITH ACTION-ADVENTURER, THE KNIGHTLING

The *Knightling* sees you play as a young knight-in-training, exploring the magical realm of Clesseia to uncover the fate of your missing mentor, with shield-centric combat being a core mechanic along with tight platforming.

When you step into its beautifully crafted world, it's clear this isn't just another fantasy romp. While wearing its inspirations proudly, it also confidently carves out its own identity.

The world feels alive, and every corner seems handcrafted with great care, with creative environments full of rooftops, waterways, and slopes designed for shield surfing, making exploration a joy.

For fans of stylised fantasy and thoughtful design, *The Knightling* could be a must-play adventure. □

INFO

Developer
Twirlbound

Publisher
Saber
Interactive

On
PC, PS5,
Switch, Xbox
Series

Released
28 August

Demo
Yes



MORE INFO



RELEASE
TBA

HOME IS WHERE YOU PARK IT

CUSTOMISE YOUR CAMPER IN SQUARE GLADE'S OUTBOUND

In *Outbound*, the open road is your playground, your van is your home and the vibe is pure cozy escapism. And cozy (or cosy for us British types) is most definitely the name of the game, as there's not a huge amount of space inside those vans. We know, as the guy writing this has owned two of them. And no, he didn't build a greenhouse on their roofs...

What if your tiny home had wheels, a greenhouse on the roof, and a mushroom farm in the back? That's the whimsical promise of *Outbound*, the upcoming openworld crafting adventure from Square Glade Games. The game hands you the keys to a run-down camper van and lets you build it into a self-sufficient sanctuary on wheels.

With modular building, sustainable energy systems and a gorgeously illustrated world to explore, *Outbound* is a breath of fresh, off-grid air. Whether you're rigging up wind turbines, cooking garden-fresh meals or assembling a rooftop bee farm, every action feels like a step closer to the ultimate nomadic dream.

Beneath *Outbound*'s cozy charm is a game with real depth. Farming, crafting, and automation all weave together in a

way that's super satisfying – like ticking off a to-do list without the stress. You'll befriend a loyal pet, roam through ever-changing weather, and discover everything from foggy forests to golden deserts, all at your own chilled pace. It's the kind of game that gently pulls you in and lets you stay as long as you like.

Oh, and your van... it's kinda a big deal. It's more than a vehicle, as it's your evolving, personalised base that grows with you: sideways, upwards, even

THE BACK CATALOGUE

Square Glade Games also made *Above Snakes*, an openworld survival game set in Corpse Creek, a unique, Wild West world infested with lost souls, where you build, craft and explore to survive.

INFO

Developer
Square Glade Games

Publisher
Square Glade Games

On
PC, PS5, Xbox Series, Switch

Demo
No



outwards if you fancy a garden deck. And thanks to four-player co-op, you don't have to road trip alone.

Square Glade's Kickstarter darling is on track for a 2026 release, and if what we've seen so far holds up, *Outbound* could be your next big little adventure.



MORE INFO



RELEASED
TBA

REBOOTING HUMANITY, ONE WAVE AT A TIME

EXPLORING THE DEPTHS OF HOPE IN THE LAST CARETAKER

In a world drowned by oceans, one machine holds the fate of humanity in its metallic hands. Embark on a mission to rebuild, craft, and discover what lies beneath the waves in *The Last Caretaker*, a game full of heart and adventure.

The Last Caretaker introduces you to a breathtakingly beautiful universe. You need to preserve what remains of humanity in this watery apocalypse centuries after the Earth has drowned beneath the waters. The worst part is that you're not even human. You are a machine created for the sole purpose of retrieving the 'seeds', turning on the Lazarus complex, and sending humanity's last chance into space.

At the heart of *The Last Caretaker* is a journey that'll stick with you. As you explore this vast, drowned world, you'll find the haunting remains of humanity's past, massive, rusted megastructures that once touched the sky, crumbling power grids, and relics of a time when human civilisation still thrived.

By this point, you can probably tell this isn't your typical scavenger quest. Fixing malfunctioning systems and gathering parts aren't the only aspects of *The Last Caretaker*. It's about plain, unadulterated living. Yes, you are a machine, but your programming instructs you to take care of, nurture and safeguard what remains. You are entrusted with something much more significant than simply surviving. You will manage the delicate development

THE BACK CATALOGUE

Channel37, the talented team behind *The Last Caretaker*, bring years of industry experience to this fresh and ambitious project, but this will be their first actual release.

INFO

Developer
Channel37

Publisher
Channel37

On
PC (consoles
to come)

of human embryos in the Lazarus Complex while maintaining the delicate balance of resources required to sustain them. Every choice you make, whether it's about power, nourishment or memory restoration, is a decision that could affect how humanity develops.

With its breathtaking world-building, deeply personal storytelling and unique crafting systems, *The Last Caretaker* is more than a game. It's a journey into what it means to be human, especially when you're not. 

MORE INFO





NUBBS! ARENA



PLAY NOW! 



fors^{VC}



RELEASED
TBA

KNIGHT OF THE CARDBOARD TABLE

HIDALGO REIMAGINES DON QUIXOTE IN CARDBOARD CHARM

Drawing inspiration from Cervantes' classic novel *Don Quixote*, following the adventures of an ageing knight who has lost touch with reality, with many of his adventures happening only in his mind, the game reimagines the tale as a children's book through a handcrafted world made of cardboard and recycled materials.

You play as a puppet representation of the two main characters of the book, Don Quixote and his money-loving squire Sancho and their respective steeds, which you can control solo, switching between the two, or co-op with a friend as you progress through the chapters of the book.

The game features a dual narrative, within the pages of the tale, and in the real world, where a single mother reads the story to her two kids while juggling life's more grounded challenges. It's a touching framing device that adds unexpected emotional depth to this otherwise whimsical world of paint tubes, pencil pots, and perspective-based puzzles.

With *Paper Mario* and *The Plucky Squire* cited as main inspirations, you can expect some truly imaginative design. The world itself is wonderfully crafted, created to resemble a large diorama piece, with colourful cardboard backdrops, recycled props, and classical Spanish guitar gently strumming in the background to set the tone.

The puzzles are cleverly staged, often playing with parallax and

THE BACK CATALOGUE

Hitori Kakurenbo Online – While still in early access, ITG has another game with a different tone, inspired by the viral Hitori Kakurenbo ritual, play as a murderous doll or team of unknowing potential victims.

INFO

Developer
Infinite Thread Games
Publisher
Infinite Thread Games
On
PC
Demo
Yes

perception, seeing you manipulate clouds, using perspective to grab keys from a far distance or even framing multiple objects in view to create an imaginative monster. Rather fittingly, these feats are only possible through Don Quixote, which not only highlights him as the main character but also hints that these impossible feats may be just that, impossible scenarios created out of delusion.

So far, *Hidalgo* looks to be a slow, thoughtful adventure, light on stress and also very rich in charm.



MORE INFO



INDIEVELOPMENT

HANK: DROWNING ON DRY LAND

RELEASE
TBA

HANK TO THE FUTURE

TIME TO PUNCH IN! HANK'S WORKING OVERTIME

Inspired by 90s/2000s superhero shows – especially *Batman Beyond* – you play as Hank, a rough and gruff anti-hero battling crooks, booze, and inner demons in a grimy, Gotham-esque city, using time-bending powers to save the day... as many times as you need to.

Hank's main ability is a particularly mind-bending one, where the player will be able to manipulate time to achieve his goals, allowing the player to test different routes, pre-determine outcomes and survive otherwise certain death.

There are also magic doorways that will rewind your countdown, giving you roughly one minute of additional time, which we are led to believe may be a hard cap for our anti-hero's powers.

These doorways are single use and leave behind an additional version of Hank still doing whatever you made him do, which will now have to be considered within your strategy, because running into an earlier version of yourself will cause a paradox, resulting in your failure! So basically you have to plan your movements carefully, while tracking the current timeline of events – via a

countdown visual.

You must use cover to dodge yourself, other enemies and be in the correct location at the correct time to set traps and complete your goal, all within the determined time limit.

It all sounds rather difficult but in practice it makes perfect sense, and you will find yourself picking up the concept rather quickly.

The art style is very reminiscent of gritty graphic novels and comicbooks, with high saturation, strong contrast and heavy

THE BACK CATALOGUE

Before making the anti-hero *Hank*, My Next Games had a more light-hearted title, with **Tales for the Arcade: Fartmania**, a cute platformer that sees you playing a little piggy who ate too many beans at the market.

INFO

Developer
My Next Games

Publisher
My Next Games

On
PC

Demo
Yes

shadows, fitting the dark neon future vibe well. The comicbook aesthetic extends to the text, with cut-out text boxes, even though all text is voice-acted.

Dialogue also happens in real time and can be rewound or fast-forwarded, so you'll never miss a monologuing villain divulging their entire plan – you quite literally do have the time for it.

While short, the demo does an excellent job of showcasing the mechanics and tone. It ends with a wild, surreal rollercoaster set to heavy alt-rock, which is quite a spectacle to enjoy.

We think *Hank* will be a game you'll keep coming back to – again, and again, and again... 



MORE INFO



RELEASE
AUGUST
2025

STAR CROSSED AND PUZZLE BOUND

TRIALS AND TIME-TURNING TERRAIN AWAITS YOU IN ASCEND

In *Ascend*, puzzles aren't just challenges, they're cosmic trials that unlock the secrets of a forgotten world. Talk of Zodiacs and celestial symbolism may seem like it belongs to the realm of joss stick-waving yoghurt weavers, but *Ascend* is oh so much more interesting than that.

What if the stars held the answers – not just to your future, but to ancient technology, lost knowledge, and the harmony of the world itself? That's the premise of *Ascend*, a striking adventure-puzzle game from indie studio Miami Avalon. You play as Aurora, a quiet seeker scaling a sacred mountain, where remnants of a lost civilisation lie shrouded in twilight and starlight.

At its core, *Ascend* is about trials inspired by the Zodiac and designed to test your intuition and observation. You'll rotate celestial discs to match star charts, align constellations to unlock gates, and weigh ethereal symbols to restore balance. Each puzzle is both a rite of passage and a piece of a grander mystery, making your actions

feel meaningful, as if you're decoding a forgotten language written in the sky.

The main mechanic however, is the game's time-turning system. By shifting between day, twilight and dusk, you can transform the landscape, revealing previously hidden details such as illuminated glyphs. This makes shifting not just aesthetic, as it changes how you interact with different environments. Some puzzles need to be solved across multiple times of day to progress.

MORE OF THE SAME

The Pathless – An atmospheric open-world puzzle adventure where you solve environmental challenges and navigate ruins guided by myth and celestial themes.

INFO

Developer
Miami Avalon

Publisher
Miami Avalon

On PC
Demo
Yes

From the architecture of the ruins to the trial chambers themselves, each is themed around celestial archetypes. *Ascend* leans fully into its mystical identity, highlighting an area that hasn't seen much coverage within the gaming scene, with the overall narrative unfolding as you complete trials, revealing how balance was lost and how Aurora's pilgrimage may restore it.

Ascend is shaping up to be a thoughtful, atmospheric experience – one where puzzles, story and setting align like the stars themselves. 

MORE INFO



MAKING WAVES

IS DEMON TIDES FABRAZ'S NEXT BIG SPLASH, OR ARE THEY ALL WASHED UP?

Demon Tides, a vibrant spiritual successor to *Demon Turf*, casts players into a sprawling ocean world where Beebz and her crew set sail to explore the secrets of Ragnar's Rock.

A 3D platformer at heart, this open-world adventure blends high octane platforming with strong character identity and raw attitude.

With Akira Toriyama cited as a large source of inspiration for Fabraz, it's no surprise the art direction is a standout feature, with a bold cel-shaded anime-inspired aesthetic and character designs that both seem delightfully nostalgic and original.

Each island is brimming with personality, from sun-soaked beaches to eerie ruins, all dripping with colourful charm. 

INFO

Developer
Fabraz

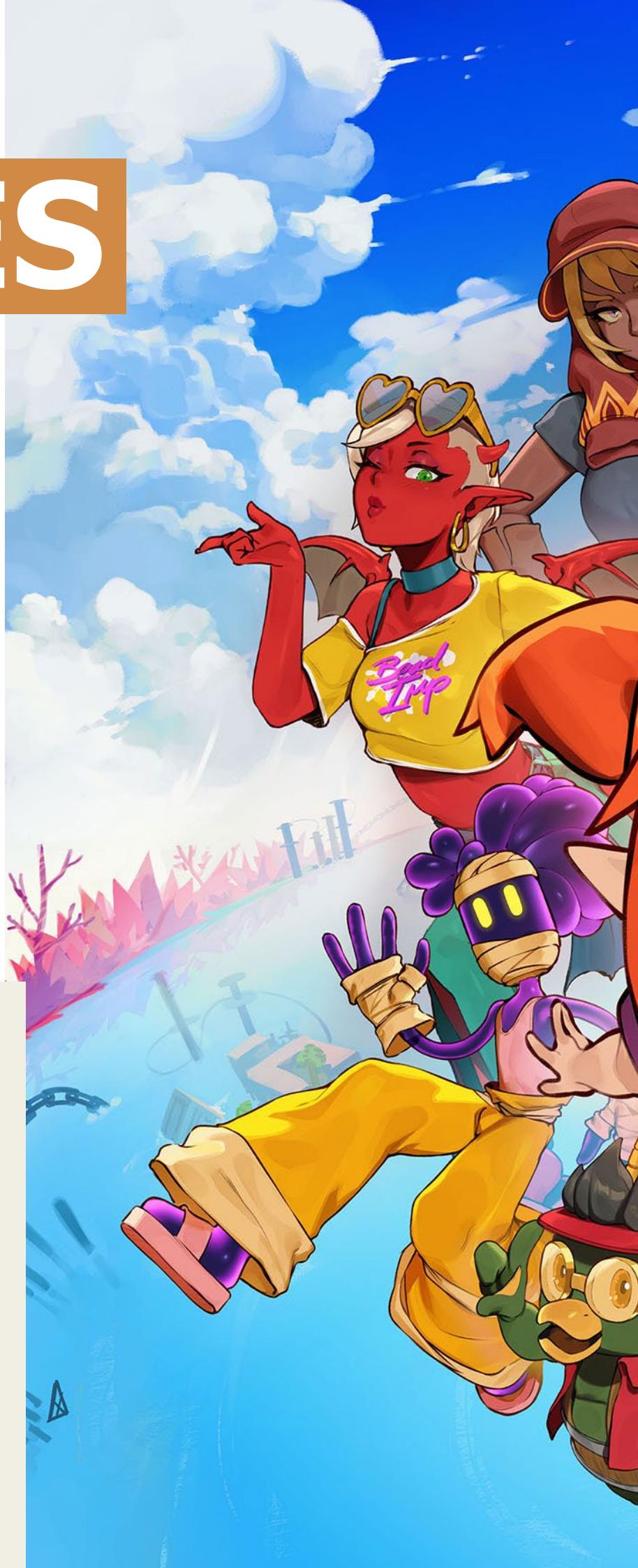
Publisher
Fabraz

On
PC

Released
2025

Demo
Yes

[MORE INFO](#)



INDIEVELOPMENT
DEMON TIDES



INDIE DEVELOPMENT

SUPERBALL



RELEASE
TBA

KICK IT INTO HYPERDRIVE

SUPERBALL SCORES BIG WITH SCI-FI ACTION AND POWER PLAYS

Set in a neon-lit future, *Superball* reimagines football as a high-octane, hero-powered competitive sport. Developed by Pathea Games, this 3v3 multiplayer game combines physics-driven gameplay with unique character abilities, offering a fresh take on a familiar game.

Superball feels like a pitch-side collision between *Rocket League*, *Overwatch*, and a high-octane sports anime. It's loud, it's fast, and it doesn't care about subtlety. In 3v3, neon-drenched arenas, players control an outrageous cast of sci-fi heroes from robot goalies with giant hammers, telekinetic midfielders, and gravity-defying strikers that wouldn't look out of place in a *League of Legends* splash screen.

The inspirations are far from hidden, but the game wears them well. Rather than feeling derivative, *Superball* remixes these influences with flair.

As you would expect, each character has a bespoke moveset and an ultimate ability that charges over time, except with a unique football flavouring, expect black hole passes, aerial snatch moves, devastatingly illegal tackles, and

teleport plays that make you blink twice. Properly utilising abilities is key, with many designed to turn the tide of play in seconds. But what makes *Superball* work is how these powers are fine-tuned around momentum and effective positioning.

Beneath all that chaos is a smart, tight core loop. It borrows the physics-first philosophy of *Rocket League* and builds on it with a more combo-driven pace. Quick passes, sharp movement,

MORE OF THE SAME

Lethal League Blaze is a chaotic, stylised ball-battling fighter with unique characters and flashy abilities. Like *Superball*, it combines sports mechanics with intense, high-energy combat.

INFO

Developer

Pathea Games

Publisher

Pathea Games

On

PC

Demo

Yes

and a feeling that every goal is a team effort (or a last-second solo clutch), but when everything's on cooldown and the timer's bleeding out, chaos reigns, and it's glorious.

Modes like Dodgeball and Hoops remix the flow, while a single-player campaign lets you draft and level your squad of misfits. Observer Mode is built for sharing the madness, letting you clip and replay that one ridiculous moment you'll never pull off again.

Superball knows what it is... all-style, all-speed, and all about the flex. Its visual flair makes it a joy to observe. Built for chaos. Built for hype. Built for bragging rights. 

MORE INFO



RELEASED
TBA

OF MICE AND METROVANIAS

PIPSQUEAK! IS SMALL IN SIZE BUT BIG IN PROMISE

Pipsqueak! is a charming Metroidvania that puts you in the tiny paws of Tofu the mouse – which presumably means he's squishy and tasteless. With tight controls, gorgeous pixel art and a world full of secrets, this bite-sized demo hints at big things ahead.

The demo for *Pipsqueak!* introduces classic enemy archetypes in a fitting theme, with the typical grounded enemies taking the form of hedgehogs and the iconic airborne bat trope, keeping enemies familiar, but also feeling deliberately chosen. Their scale and nature reinforce the sense that Tofu, the tiny mouse you play as, isn't some battle-hardened hero, but a fresh-faced adventurer barely taller than his foes.

As you explore you'll earn collectible earrings that enhance your combat powers and grant new abilities, helping Tofu traverse his world and open up fresh routes through the environment.

There are currently five biomes planned, each with its own environmental quirks and secrets. The

demo also introduces a pins system that allows for multiple placements on your map for objective tracking, suggesting deeper, layered worlds where backtracking will play a significant role within the game. Movement feels very fluid and responsive, with an agile control scheme that makes platforming satisfying.

The first boss appears in the demo, offering a light challenge but a memorable design and distinct attack

THE BACK CATALOGUE

Prior to making *Pipsqueak!*, Pond Games created **RITE**, another game with a strong emphasis on precision platforming and momentum, despite differing tone and visual styles.

INFO

Developer
Pond Games

Publisher
Pond Games

On
PC
Demo
Yes

phases. It's not punishing, but a good taste of what's to come.

Plans for a dye shop and 'Professor Tinker's Trials' hint at customisation and challenge-based content. We also suspect we'll see a cute cast of NPCs, but that is yet to be confirmed. Either way, we expect to be charmed as much as challenged.

While brief, we feel the demo gives a satisfying look at *Pipsqueak!*'s potential, highlighting tight controls, gorgeous pixel art, and an endearing tone that never forgets how small its hero truly is. □



MORE INFO



HYPE MACHINE

They're not out yet. Not for a while actually. But we're already obsessed. These early-look indies are strange, stylish, and full of promise. They might be months away from release, but we think the wait will be worth it.

HUNGRY HORRORS

PC, Mac

This deckbuilder that utilises food ingredients as your main tool for vanquishing eerie enemies that are based on English and Irish folklore. Cook their favourite dishes to satiate their hunger and send them back to whatever hole they crawled from. We bet you never thought a scotch egg could end up saving you from giant mythological creatures. Each encounter feels like a strange supper club from the underworld, and the menu just might be your best weapon.



MORE INFO



FOOLISH MORTALS

PC, Mac, Switch

A supernatural point-and-click adventure where you unravel the mystery of a disappearing wedding reception and a missing treasure.



PIRATE OUTLAWS 2

PC

Build decks, recruit crewmates, fuse your cards for unique combos and battle fearsome enemies such as shamanistic baboons.



TINY BOOKSHOP

PC, Mac

Run an endearing little mobile bookshop by the sea in this cozy narrative management game.



LITTLE CHEESEWORKS

PC

To me, to you! Channel the Chuckle Brothers as you move cheese blocks through obstacles.



BAPTISTE

PC, PS5

If you thought the dummy from Goosebumps was scary, maybe give this one a miss.



REALITY DRIFT PC

Get ready for a roguelike racer with extreme tracks – from roads engulfed in flames more gruelling than sitting on the M1 during the height of summer with the windows rolled up, to towering rows of kitties. It's extreme, silly and surprisingly deep with decisions to be considered relating to your ideal routes, a deckbuilding element and situational upgrades. Think *Mario Kart* by way of *Slay the Spire*. Unpredictable, and just the right amount of unhinged.



MORE INFO

TANUKI: PON'S SUMMER PC, Xbox One/Series, Switch

Do sweet tricks on your BMX bike as you deliver parcels as a raccoon-shaped postal worker named Pon. Travel across four vibrant Japanese towns, undertake tasks such as playing baseball, making sushi and fishing to fund your renovations and restore the Tanuki festival shrine back to full glory in time for the big day. Whether you're nailing a backflip off a rooftop or perfecting your nigiri technique, there's always something new to discover in Pon's world.



MORE INFO



SLOWLY SLIDING DUCKS

PC

Play as a rubber ducky with up to 16 players in party-style mini-games. Customise your duck with silly hats and splash your way to victory.



NET.ATTACK()

PC, PS4/5, Xbox Series, Switch

Create unique abilities by utilising programming know-how to hack your way through enemies in this cyber-themed bullet hell.



HAUNTED PAWS

PC

A co-op adventure where two puppies must rescue their human from a haunted house.



COMBO DEVILS

PC

A stylish platform-fighter with strong character design. Features a great co-op roguelite mode.



THAT SAUSAGE MUSEUM GAME

PC

Navigate an art-deco museum as a slippery little sausage. It's better than it sounds.



Can't stop the SWAP!

Ruffy and the Riverside is an action adventure that lets you copy & paste the World! With the magic SWAP you can turn ice into lava, waterfalls into climbing vines and much more!



"Bursting with Nintendo Inventiveness" - *NintendoLife*

"One of this year's best platformers" - *PC Gamer*

"Could be the next big thing!" - *VICE*



Coming June 26th for



FREE PLAY

Hundreds of indie games are released every week, and some are completely free. Each issue, we pick out the ones that caught our eye to bring you the most interesting games for nowt.



1 OLD TIMER TRANSPORT

Old Timer Transport is pure chaotic gold on wheels, specifically, mobility scooters with NOZ. From the moment I picked up my first grumpy granny and yeeted her (with love, of course) into the hospital doors, I knew this game was something special. The physics are hilariously unpredictable, one second you're racing, the next you're flying through the air thanks to a rogue baguette truck.

Multiplayer is a riot; so invite your friends and get ready for some insanity. If you've ever dreamed of becoming a geriatric Uber driver in a lawless cartoon world, *Old Timer Transport* delivers.



MORE INFO



2 GUN DEVIL

Imagine *Doom* had a lovechild with a Saturday morning cartoon. You play as a gun-toting demon on a mission to rescue your hell wife from a pompous villain called the "Caramelized Dumbass."

Yes, really. The levels are fast, the music slaps, and the pixel art is gloriously chaotic. One minute you're blasting through ghostly pimps, the next you're dodging explosive diarrhea from a giant dog. It's short, sweet, hilariously over-the-top, and somehow it's free!



MORE INFO

3 CRY OF FEAR

3

Cry of Fear stands in stark contrast to the two previously covered games, trading lighthearted fun for a deeply disturbing and serious tone.

This psychological horror experience by Team Psykskallar immerses players in a nightmarish descent through a broken reality, shaped by trauma and mental illness. Originally releasing in 2013, the gritty visuals and oppressive atmosphere are remarkably effective, especially considering its origins as a *Half-Life* mod.

Combat is tense, resource management is crucial, and the story, centered on protagonist Simon's deteriorating mind, is both tragic and unsettling.



MORE INFO



BY EWAN FISHER AND DANIEL TURNER

GOING THE

When College Fun Games, a young development company, were planning a game based around *Les Misérables*, they decided to head to the city of love for inspiration...



Artistic inspiration can come from anywhere – a particular brick, tile, or just a bike leaning against a wall.

W

here is your game set? A fantasy medieval world? A metropolis on Mars? A LSD-fuelled Lovecraftian fever dream? How do you bring the player to that space, and make it feel like a real lived-in place?

If you are shooting a movie or TV show, you can film on location, build a set to match your dreams (budget permitting) or do it all on green screen or virtual space like The Volume used in *The Mandalorian*. But building real spaces that cast and crew can inhabit and interact with brings things to a different level – which, I'd argue, is one reason that *Andor* feels like such an immersive world.

For some reason, we are making a point-and-click adventure game that's a parody of *Les Misérables*, using real 2D character

animation and backgrounds. 'We' is College Fun Games. Last year we released our first game on Steam, *The Protagonish*, and we're going much (much) bigger for our second one...

So to make sure our world felt real, we spent four days with the whole team in Paris, visiting and mapping real locations, plundering museums (photographically) and taking more pictures than you can shake an SD card at.

This was an amazing opportunity, but in this digital age, you don't have to leave the comfort of your gaming chair to see the world. The critical indie darling *Untitled Goose Game* was set in an '80s English village, but developed by an Australian-based studio, House House. Instead of flying out to the UK, they used Google Maps to find inspiration for the level design, outlined in an excellent 2021 GDC talk 'Google Maps, Not Greyboxes' on YouTube by level designer Jake Strasser.

But real locations don't necessarily make for great gameplay. It's important to note that locations were used for asset inspiration, rather than trying to replicate the exact layout of one specific location. House House were looking for locations that had the key areas they already wanted in the game, like gardens, churches, shops. It was gameplay leading to the location, rather than vice versa. So the village in *Untitled Goose Game* is a hybrid of several villages, with a fictional layout that gives gameplay logic priority over exactly mapping a locale.

This was a key philosophy of our approach in Paris, too. We have a bunch of different puzzles based in Notre Dame, and we spent a long time taking pictures of different parts of the cathedral, knowing that we were not going to create game locations that were accurate to the layout of the cathedral. We wanted to use real lighting and pillars that exist, but move





VERSION 1

(A)



(B)



College Fun Games spent four days in Paris and they photographed pretty much everything they saw.



The whole of Paris was levelled in the 1850s, removing the slums and narrow streets.

them to bring players' attention to key puzzle items. Various real entrances and exits will be moved together that the player isn't needlessly going through dozens of empty screens to get to the next door they need.

If in *Untitled Goose Game* you had to waddle for five minutes to get from the shops to the church, just because they were that far apart in a

real location, you'd rage-quit pretty fast. There's value in giving space to explore, but once you've worked out how to solve a puzzle, you want the player to be able to quickly enact it.

But game locations also need to match player expectations. When most people are playing a game set in Paris during the French Revolution, they already have a mental image of what this should look like, based on films, books and famous art.

For us, this is tricky because pretty much the whole of Paris was levelled in the 1850s, removing the slums and narrow streets and rebuilding it in the style we see today – pretty stone flats, wide streets and shutters. That's why most TV and film adaptations of *Les Misérables* are filmed in small Belgian towns that preserved older style streets. This both connects to, and reinforces viewer expectations of what Paris in the early 1800s *should* look like.

Due to this renovation, the feeling of exploring Paris with the team inherently felt like a game, too – where any street corner could have remnants of an era long past that we are trying to recapture. We walked each street with curiosity, watching locals for character inspiration, eagerly pointing a camera at any odd building or particularly fascinating set of flats, because “the style of wood here is exactly what would have been accurate to the time!” It turned the trip into a jigsaw puzzle, stapling photographs from each corner together to create our own map that might picture the modern day feeling of Paris, but would balance the specific time-frame we are trying to offer.

While we used StreetView for planning the trip, exploring Paris gave a feeling that is truly impossible to capture in a Google Maps flyover – a sense of appreciation for the space.

The wide streets of Paris are such an inherently foreign concept that they need to be seen to be believed.

Visualising the contrast between the wide, open spaces around the river Seine to the fiddly little alleyways that weaved around it is not something that comes easily from an image. The UK is such a densely packed little island, but the wide streets of Paris are such an inherently foreign concept that it needs to be seen to be believed.

As a game designer, it's fascinating to look at the design of a city like Paris and how that maps to my own personal processes of design. Throughout the trip, but especially in Notre Dame and Versailles, every single doorknob and piece of furniture feels lavishly bespoke.

In any form of large-scale product design, there is the idea of a 'hero asset', an asset with more time and detail placed into it, in order to sell the concept to the audience. In games, you usually want your player character to look more detailed and interesting than a random chair or lamp-post, because the audience will be staring at the character most of the time! But in Paris it felt like every doorknob and curtain hook was a hero asset, and the sheer overwhelming detail and presence of these buildings is part of why it is so appealing to set a game here. You'd think it would be the Eiffel Tower, but nah, it's those doorknobs – it turns every scene into a playground for the artists.

Okay, okay, I know. Millions of people have taken pictures in Paris and Notre Dame, and we probably could have found pictures online to do this (even if most people don't take pictures of floor tiles or doorknobs), but there was one thing we couldn't find many pictures of: Marie Antionette's 'Hamlet' in Versailles – a fake rural village she had built so she could cosplay as being a peasant farm worker.

For being a publicly accessible part of one of the popular tourist attractions in the world, the Hamlet felt incredibly remote and was almost completely empty, which made it very unreal. It is an utterly fascinating place to explore – such an incredibly whimsical yet fake location that feels like it was ripped straight out of a theme park... or a video game.

Each wall felt so purposefully constructed, but with paint imitating wooden beams. Each staircase spiralled to give satisfyingly photogenic angles, while elaborate bridges and windmills led to empty, hollow rooms.

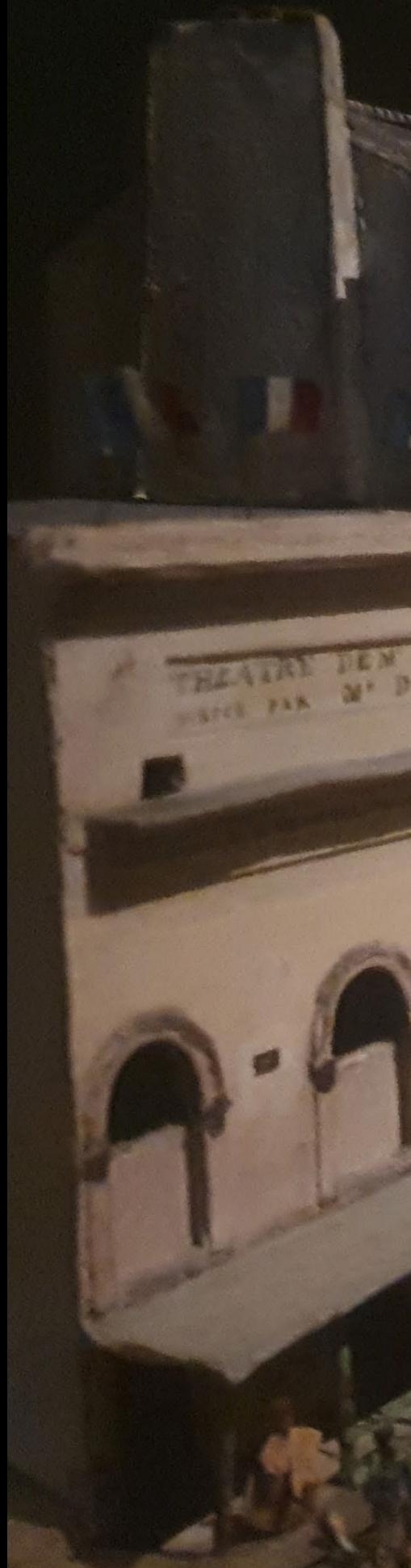
Truly one of the most surreal locations I've ever been to, just the contrast of such purposeful design for such purposeless recreation – while the actual poor people of Paris were starving, being imprisoned for stealing a loaf of bread. It's a really eye-opening experience to see first-hand why a revolution occurred in retrospect – another feeling that just doesn't translate from an image.

Irregardless of the setting, going on an elaborate field trip or not, there's a special kind of magic of having a shared team experience that really drives ideas. One of our main goals with the game is capturing the feeling that there could be an inside joke hidden in any nook and cranny, the intrigue that made us fall in love with point-and-click adventure games like *Monkey Island* in the first place.

Translating that type of charisma into a boardroom writing setting was never going to work for our team, but throughout the trip we kept thinking of surreal ideas, or seeing inspiration for character design in completely unrelated statues. With a small team, a trip to get ice cream can result in a Rube Goldberg-esque chain of events leading to a something as major as a new gameplay mechanic, or something as minor as a funny line of dialogue. But these connected events make games such a fascinating art form to work in. They are living, breathing entities and you never see the full picture until you get the black ink (or Steam page) and decide that it is finished.

Finally, regardless of where and when your game is set, your own local area can be a great inspiration for game assets. Go out into the street with your phone, and take pictures of cool signs, buildings, paving slabs, weird plants or graffiti, and use it as asset inspiration for your game.

To immerse the player in your world, it needs to be unique and draw inspiration from something different. Sometimes that thing might be in your own mind, millions of light-years away, or it might be a real amazing place on Earth, or a really interesting crack in concrete wall down your street. Wherever it is, draw from something real, and build it out to something amazing that teleports your players to somewhere fake, but that feels real. ■



An excellent diorama in Paris, showing how the city would've looked when Victor Hugo was alive.





LOWTEK'S LO-FI LAB

Inside the workspace of Alastair Low

Game development can take many forms. For Alastair Low of Lowtek Games, that form includes retro cartridges, odd controllers and multiple Nokia N-Gage units. While some studios chase cutting-edge rigs and ultra-wide displays, Lowtek's space is all about the charm of the past colliding with the DIY spirit of today.

Alastair's workspace is right in the middle of his living room. "It's pretty personal," he tells us. "I have a solid Cintiq and a small desk full of wires and components for hardware tinkering. Behind me are lots of old gaming consoles and toys from *Zelda*, *Power Rangers* and *Treasure Planet*."

Look a little closer and you'll spot some real oddities. "I have a few weird and expensive things around me," Alastair says. "I have all the *Zelda: Majora's Mask* figures, and a copy of *Zelda's Adventure* on CD-i. On the wall behind me there's a one-of-one Sharpie artwork drawn by Kareem Ettouney, formerly art director at Media Molecule. And there's the fake Nintendo prototype I made for an April Fool's prank!"

Alongside the monitor sits his well-used Cintiq, which is a key part of the digital side of Lowtek's workflow. "It's where sprites come to life, mockups get sketched, and ideas start to take shape before jumping into code," he explains.

This is where games like *Fleal* and *Tapeworm Disco Puzzle* come to life. Not just designed, but tested, tuned, and lovingly boxed up. "Yes, most of the *Parasite Pack* level squishing was made at this desk," Alastair says. "There were some edits made by Valdir in Brazil for *Tapeworm* and Michael in Germany for the loader we use on N-Gage. And I used a local print shop in Dundee for the paper parts."

Music is a big part of the working environment, even if it's not to everyone's taste. "I usually have a YouTube auto-created playlist in the background," he says. "It plays mostly the same songs every day, and anyone working with me goes mad that I often don't realise a song has gone onto a 10-hour version."

Podcasts are out, unless Alastair's doing something repetitive. "I find it hard to work when a podcast is on, unless I'm doing something that's second nature, like 3D modelling."

The environment does influence the work, but not always in helpful ways. "When I'm deep in a physical project my room often gets very messy and I have to climb over stuff. That does get me down a bit, but I need access to most of the stuff until the task is done," he admits. "I'll do a big tidy up after and feel better about the space again." As for standing desks? "Torture," he says. "I would always feel like I'm about to go somewhere."

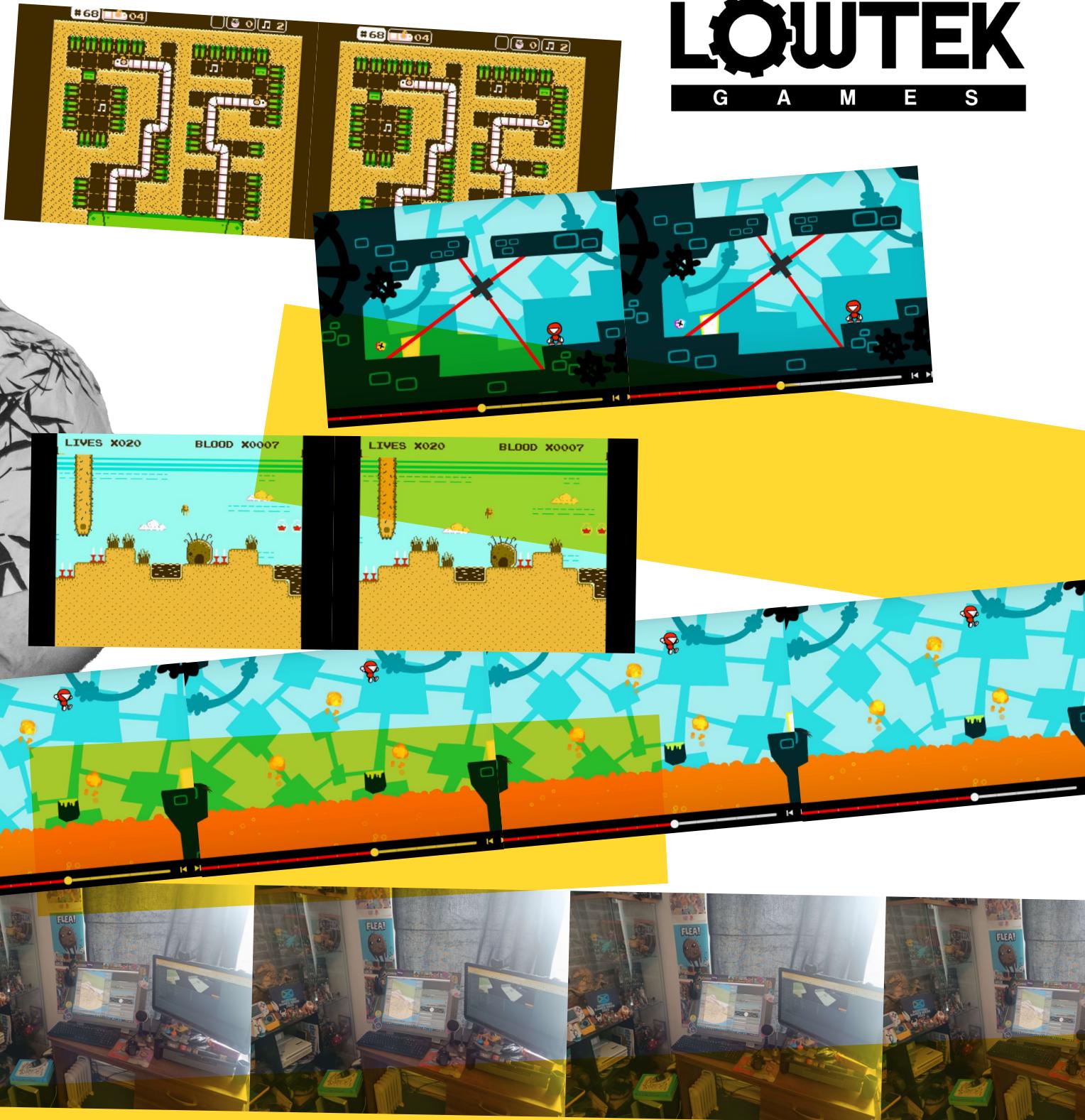


There's loads in this image to love – including some amazing figures and some great consoles, too. Oh, and a copy of *Debug*, natch.



Pride of place on Alastair's wall is this one-off sketch by Media Molecule's Kareem Ettouney.





DESK DETECTIVE

OR, SNOOPING AROUND DEV WORK STATIONS

This is the desk of Alastair Low, a space that feels like a love letter to DIY creativity.

It's the sort of setup where anything can happen – and, to be fair, probably will. An N64 controller could be wired to an FPGA one minute, then used to control a digital saxophone the next. Somewhere in the mess:

stickers, physical game boxes, modelmaking glue, and a mountain of MMCs.

Compact, chaotic, and completely committed to the cause. It's the kind of environment you either thrive in... or have a breakdown trying to find a USB stick. Exactly where a Lowtek game should be born.

CHASING STATIC



WHY I LOVE... CHASING STATIC

WORDS BY ALEX HUNT

What can I say about *Chasing Static*? Well, it's a first-person psychological horror game by Headware Games from Bristol. This isn't your average horror game that tries to use jump scares, though. This is something rather different. Through the storytelling and build up to the finale, you don't always know where to go or which direction to take.

I stumbled across *Chasing Static* on the PS4 through one of Sony's monthly sales – in fact, this one was focussing on indie games. The title image alone got me excited but I'd never heard of *Chasing Static* before, so I checked out a quick trailer on YouTube and that enough... I had to own it and I had to play it. And soon.

The game focuses on Chris Selwood, and it opens on him visiting Wales where he's attending his father's funeral. His father leaves him a journal which talks about his father's research and investigation into ways to contact the dead. And with that very smart slice of backstory, you're then into the game.

Each destination you visit will have elements to interact with, from notes, cameras (which save your progress when you take a photo) and radios. You'll speak to someone called Helen through these radios, who will give you very useful tips as to what is happening in the game.

Each area will be littered with signal arrays, these arrays were set up to keep the horror at bay. But all of them are down, so you need to find your way to each one and turn them back on. To help with this you're given a frequency monitoring device which, as you get closer to areas of high interest and intensity, will light up. You'll then see the residual echoes playing out in front of you – this could be to move the story arc forward, or maybe a tip as to where to head next.

All areas require use of keys, hammers, chain cutters and more to progress, and these are found by watching the echoes play out. You'll likely find yourself backtracking a fair bit, but with the use of telephones scattered around the areas, you'll be able to fast travel between sites.

Along your journey you'll find three cassettes, these are used to turn the arrays back on. Which really is the main task to progress through to the end of the game.

Now for me, sound design and visuals are what set this game apart from most psychological horrors that I've played in the last few years. With its PSone-style graphics, through to excellent narration from the characters, you really do get immersed very quickly. It is a relatively short gaming experience, but an experience I think shouldn't be missed, especially for those who enjoy horror titles.



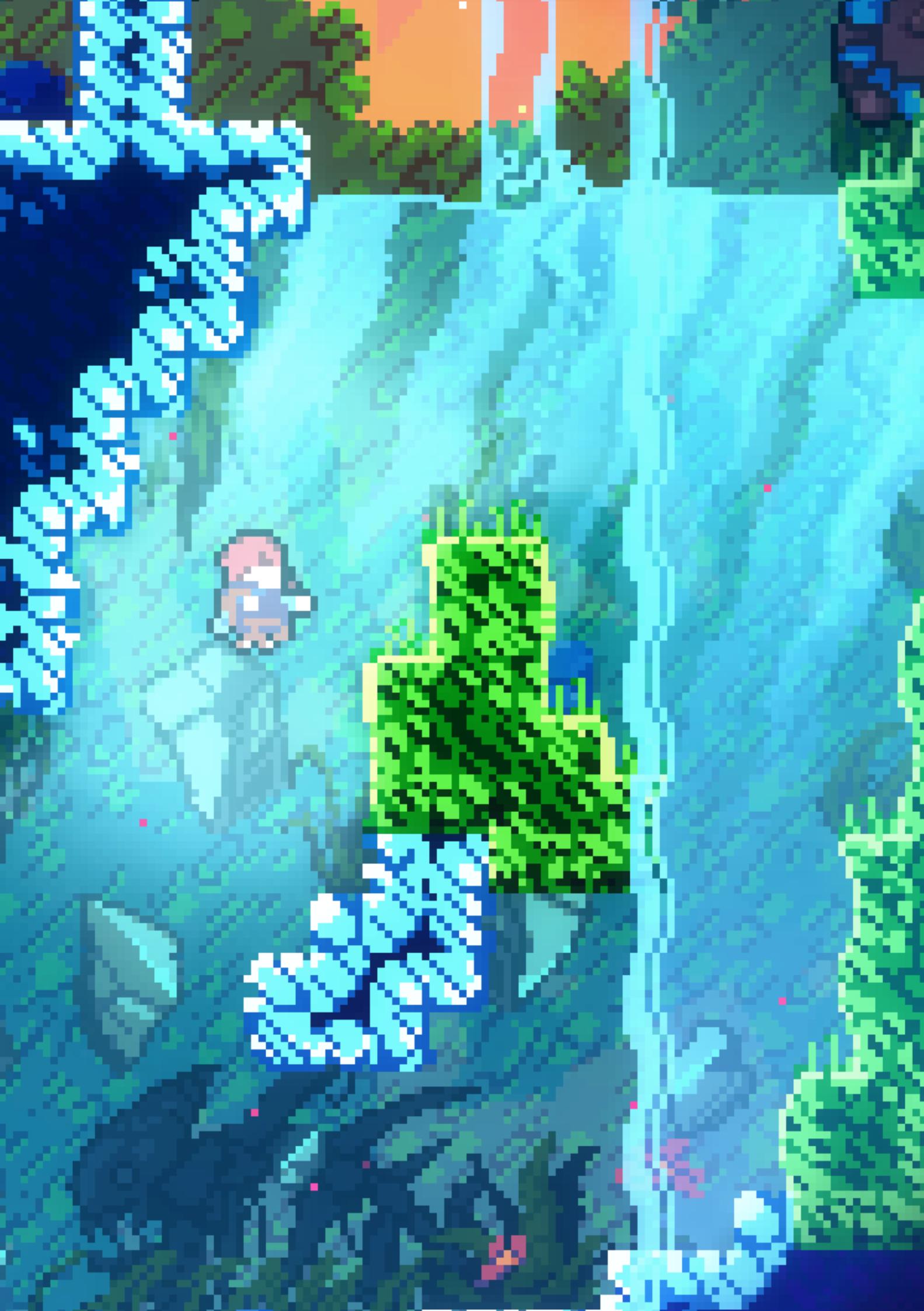
WHY I LOVE...

Developer Maddy Makes Games

CELESTE

Celeste is a tough-as-nails platformer about climbing a mountain, both literally and emotionally. You play as Madeline, a young woman facing self-doubt, anxiety, and some seriously tricky jumps. The gameplay is super precise, with tight controls and clever level design that constantly challenges you without ever feeling unfair. But what really makes *Celeste* special is its heart. Beneath the spikes and respawns is a moving story about mental health, perseverance, and self-acceptance. Add in a beautiful soundtrack and pixel-perfect art style, and you've got a modern indie classic that sticks with you long after the credits roll.

icumi.





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PLAY CARDS TO HAUNT THEM
CONSUME THEIR ESSENCE

BUILD YOUR MANSION
IMPROVE YOUR DECK
PROTECT YOUR HEART



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Deck of Haunts

BECOME A HAUNTED HOUSE

DANGEN
ENTERTAINMENT

MANTIS

VAF



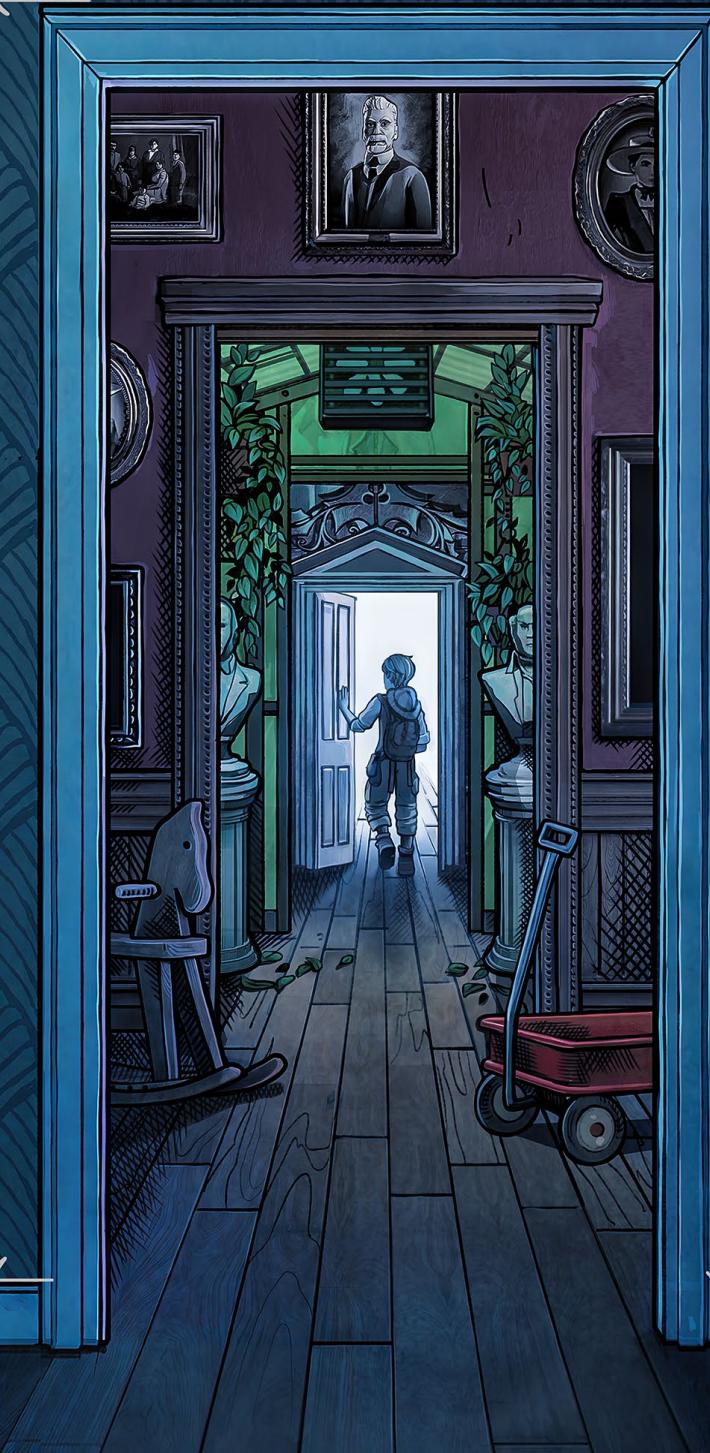
Flanders
State of the Art



BLUE PRINCE

Dogubomb

Long-term readers of Debug will know we've had our eyes on this one for ages. *Blue Prince* delivers on all its eerie promise. A looping, room-shifting puzzle box filled with mystery and style. Clever, compelling, and quietly unsettling. Everything we love.



- 56** **Blue Prince**
- 58** **Spirit of the North 2**
- 59** **Cataclismo**
- 60** **Dunk Dunk**
- 60** **The Precinct**
- 61** **Deck of Haunts**
- 62** **to a T**
- 63** **Once Upon a Puppet**
- 65** **Big Helmet Heroes**

- 66** **Revenge of the Savage Planet**
- 68** **Polterguys: Possession Party**
- 69** **Hordes of Hunger**
- 70** **Level Devil**
- 70** **Finding Frankie**
- 71** **Odinfall**
- 72** **Also Released**

FEATURED REVIEWER

NICK CROCKER

Nick has been with Debug since day zero and he's always had a lot to say about the games we cover. Now it's official. He joins the editorial team to deliver honest takes, sharp instincts, and a real love for great games.



IT GRACED THE COVER OF ISSUE 6 BUT DOES **BLUE PRINCE** LIVE UP TO ITS SIGNIFICANT HYPE?

One of the best things about this job is when you come across a game that dares to be different; one that rips up the rule book and delights in surprising you at every turn. Happily, *Blue Prince* is one such game.

Blue Prince is also the perfect definition of the slow burner, as it's a game that takes a while to grab hold – well, that was certainly the case for this reviewer. After a brief story outline (we'll come to that in a bit) you're dropped straight into the game. There's an end-goal laid out before you but only the briefest of explanations on how you're going to get there. But like all the best games, the joy is in the journey, not necessarily the finale.

So to that story. Your uncle has popped off, leaving you his vast estate. So far so good, but here's the rub: although there are 45 rooms open to explore in the house, there's a hidden one, and you only get the jackpot if you can find it.

You begin the game with 50 steps, and one room – the Entrance Hall. Head to one of the doors leading off and you're given **three possible rooms to choose from [1]**. Pick one, enter it and you use a step. Some rooms have multiple exits, some are dead ends or hallways. Many have objects to collect, bonus items or penalties, as well as puzzles and secrets.

On your first run through, you'll probably just add rooms randomly in an attempt to finish it on the first go. But you can't. Obviously. Your steps end and so does that day. Day 2 starts and you're back at the house for another attempt. You can skip back and view the layouts from your previous days, but don't expect the rooms to be in the same place. It's like

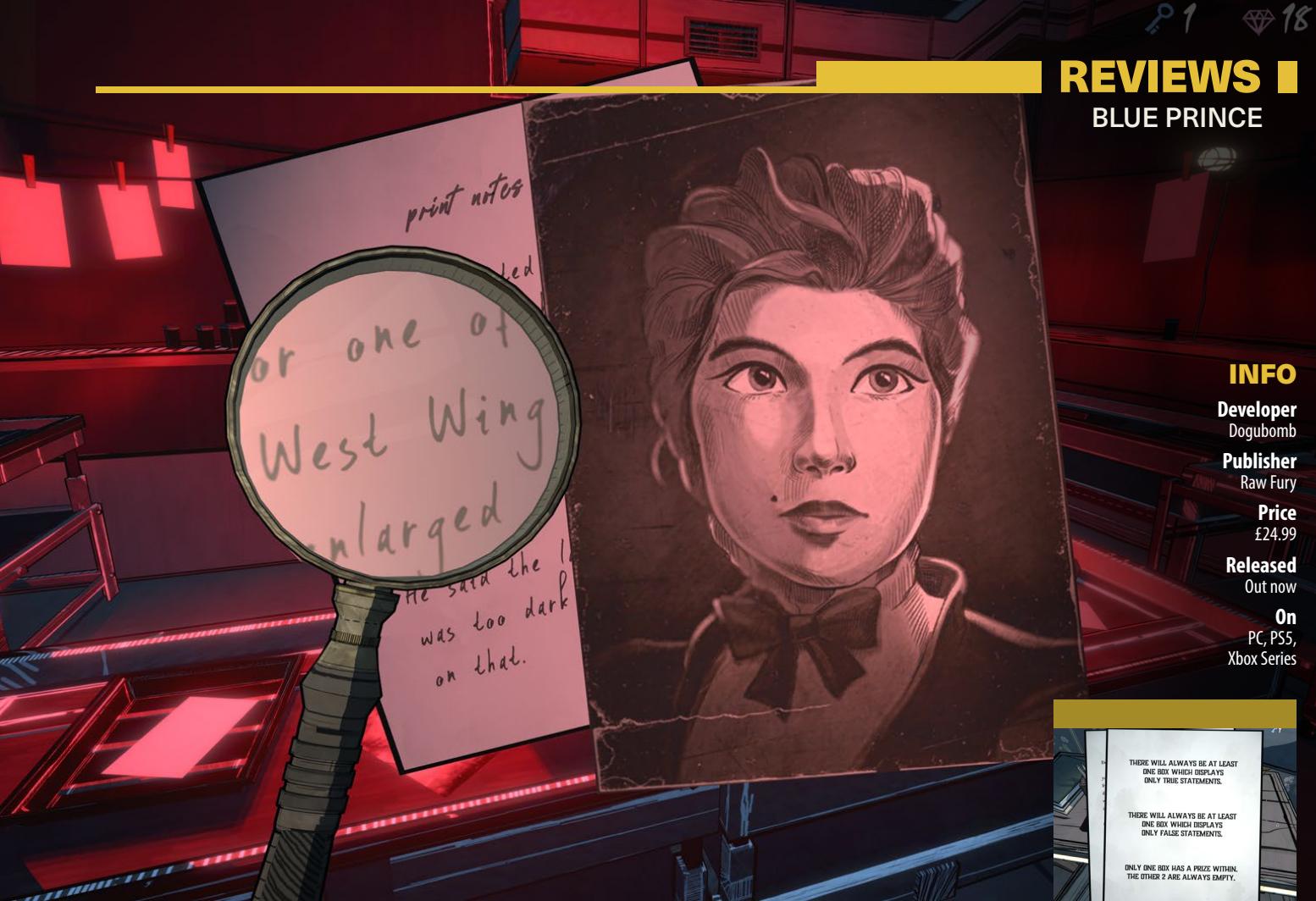
**LIKE THIS?
TRY THESE...**

Myst

Check out the (fairly) recent remaster of this classic game.

REVIEWS

BLUE PRINCE



1



2



3

Groundhog Day, if *Groundhog Day* was created by a sadistic master puzzler.

It's also possible you might not get what all the fuss is about (read the reviews online – it's already near the top of many people's GOTY lists). But trust me, the more you play it, the more it takes hold, and the more you realise just how deep this rabbit hole goes.

Everything in *Blue Prince* has a purpose and is exactly where it's supposed to be. Here's an example: you enter a storeroom and there are a key, coin and gem placed there waiting for you to collect them. A further examination of the room reveals a small child's drawing of a blue bird in a swimsuit...

And it's not always about objects you can interact with [2]. Each room has to be examined closely. The aim of the game isn't a race to find the 46th room – it's much more than that. **If you spot two similar drawings**

in a room then that's no coincidence [3]. There's a link between them, and one of the game's most devious puzzles will only be revealed to you if you can work it out.

The best puzzle games are the ones that assume you're intelligent but don't scare you off in the first hour of play. *Blue Prince* grows as you do, and it's the first game for some time that I had to make notes on as I played through. It is challenging, and there are moments when you'll be stuck like you-know-what to a blanket, without a clue what to do next, but the point is that you will want to work it out. The game is that good, and you almost certainly will keep playing until you've finally opened the door to that 46th room.

James Oakwood



MORE INFO

Outer Wilds

Not an easy game, but one that really should be experienced.

Return of the Obra Dinn

Like puzzlers? Then definitely try this one.



THE BACK CATALOGUE

Blue Prince may well be Hollywood-based Dogubomb's first game, but it's a very confident start for the team.

INFO

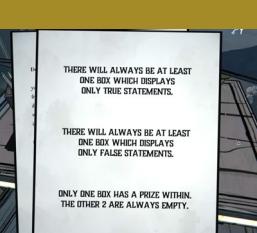
Developer
Dogubomb

Publisher
Raw Fury

Price
£24.99

Released
Out now

On
PC, PS5,
Xbox Series



RIDDLE ME THIS

Here's an example of one of the puzzles in *Blue Prince*...

In an early room you'll come across three boxes on plinths. On a nearby desk is a note saying that at least one box has a true statement, at least one has a false statement, and only one has a prize within.

Head back to the boxes, and two of them have a note that says 'This statement appears on another box'. The third one says 'The blue box is empty'.

As two boxes do indeed have that statement, the third one must be false, so the blue box does indeed contain the prize.

REVIEWS

SPIRIT OF THE NORTH 2

INFO

Developer
Infuse Studio

Publisher
Silver Lining
Interactive

Price
£24.99

Released
Out now

On
PC, PS4/5,
Xbox Series



ONE FOX AGAINST THE WORLD

The plot of *Spirit of the North 2* is one of ruin and redemption. A fox explores a vast and desolated wilderness where humans once dwelt. After accidentally unleashing an ancient evil, it must cleanse corruption from the land. With the help of a raven companion, the fox must thwart the terrible dark shaman, restore the guardians of nature, and bring balance back to the natural world.

That seems like an awful lot of responsibility for our omnivorous mammal.

SPIRIT OF THE NORTH 2 IS A JAUNT THROUGH NATURE MARRED BY PARTLY CLOUDY SKIES

There's a lot to love in *Spirit of the North 2*, a mesmerising openworld exploration game in which players take on the role of a (slightly) customisable fox.

The game's stunning biomes are **immersive and atmospheric** [1], and exploring them is a treat. Puzzles are generally clever, but usually easy enough to solve, and it's impossible not to fall in love with the game's cute and charming animal characters. **The lore is rich** [2], and the storytelling – delivered through text at discovery points across the world – is subtle and rewarding for curious-minded players.

But *Spirit of the North 2* is not a perfect game. It suffers some technical shortcomings that detract from the overall experience. Occasionally unpolished areas and environments, weird clipping artefacts, and slightly

unsophisticated animations betray a game that's otherwise beautiful in its presentation.

In addition, the game can feel a bit sparse and lonely. The environments are expansive, which is good for exploration, but moments of discovery are just a bit too few and far between.

On the whole, *Spirit of the North 2* is a lovely game that's perfect for players who seek experiences beyond the usual openworld fare of heavy combat and endless quests. It tells its story with subtlety and just the right amount of mystery. **Fans of the original will find a lot to love** [3], as will players who love exploration and light puzzles. □



James Tocchio



MORE INFO

LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

ABZU

ABZU is another meditative experience with superb environmental storytelling.



THE BACK CATALOGUE

Infuse Studio previously created assets through Unreal Marketplace, before releasing 2019's *Spirit of the North*.



INFO

Developer
Digital SunPublisher
Hooded HorsePrice
£24.99Released
Out nowOn
PC

1



2



3



DEFEND HUMANITY'S LAST SANCTUARY AGAINST BLOODTHIRSTY NIGHTMARES IN **CATACLISMO**

Cataclismo is an ambitious game. It takes the basic building blocks of a handful of seemingly disparate genres (city-building, real-time strategy and tower defense games) and crafts what ultimately becomes a refreshing and unique experience.

In *Cataclismo*, the player is tasked with protecting their small slice of humanity from invading horrors – bloodthirsty monsters that attack every night. During the day, the player's job is to train their troops and to position them in such a way that they might best fight back the horde. In addition, the player must build and fortify their defenses by constructing walls, towers, ramparts, and more.

The granularity of these building mechanics represents the game's greatest strength, but it may

also be its only real weakness. While *Cataclismo* will feel engaging for players who love the idea of piecing together their ultimate fortress, brick by brick, that same task could feel tedious to others. While a community blueprint system allows for the latter type of player to mooch off the designs of the former, there's no getting around the game's extensive city-building requirement.

That said, I loved Lego as a kid, and *Cataclismo*'s block-building is amazing. The game's engaging campaign and story, and the generally high production value of its voice acting, visuals, soundtrack, and art design make the total package something special.

James Tocchio



MORE INFO

FEAR AND SURVIVAL

The story of *Cataclismo* is a very familiar one of fear and survival – like living in Cornwall in the winter when all the tourists have gone home.

The game is set in a post-apocalyptic world in which a magical cataclysm has occurred, unleashing a poisonous mist that threatens to suffocate the entire world, turning all who breathe it into monsters. Humanity has organised one last expedition to save itself. Lady Iris, the protagonist, must brave the mist, find the source of the terror, and destroy it at all costs. Can she do it? Well, that's really up to you...

LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

Anno 117

If you like the fortress-building elements of *Cataclismo* then keep an eye out for this one, too.



THE BACK CATALOGUE

The Spanish dev studio Digital Sun previously released the original action-RPG *Moonlighter*, and *The Mageseeker*.

DUNK DUNK. WHO'S THERE? CHAOS. CHAOS WHO? CHAOS RIGHT IN YOUR FACE

At its core, *Dunk Dunk* is basketball, but instead of a net, you're launching balls into a dimensional rift as a galactic roster of delightfully unhinged characters, from fishmen and robots to sentient squirt bottles.

It also features a host of iconic indie guest characters, making *Dunk Dunk* feel like a heartfelt homage to the indie scene, with cameos from *Lil' Guardsman*, *Demon Turf*, *Berserk Boy* and more.

Gameplay is straightforward and largely what you'd expect: jump, throw and dunk. But perhaps less conventional to see in the NBA, you can also wall jump and block other players by literally turning into a wall. There's no dribbling either, so you'll avoid opponents and obstacles by dashing and platforming around them.

Take on the Galaxy Tour, dive into Mutator Mode with shifting rules, or tackle Challenge Modes, but as expected, the real fun begins in local or online multiplayer.

Solo play isn't as engaging, with few unlockables and most content available early. Still, at just £5.99, it's well worth a shot. □



Theo Lancaster



MORE INFO



INFO

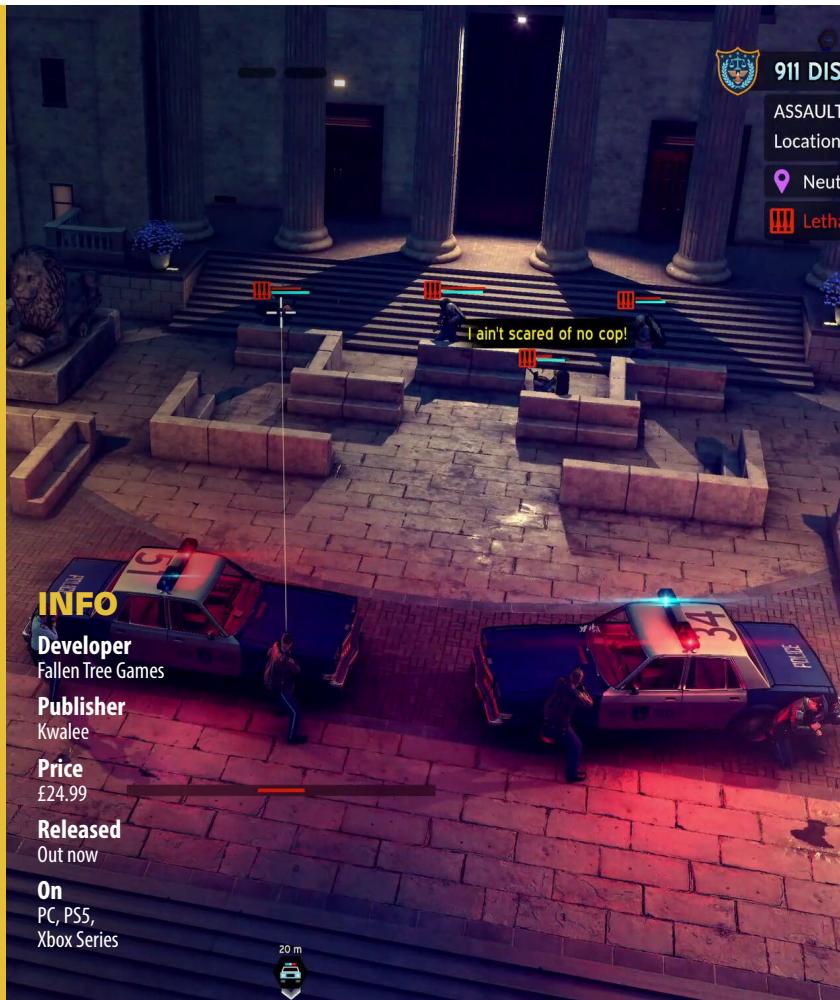
Developer
Badgerhammer

Publisher
Playtonic Friends

Price
£5.99

Released
Out now

On
PC, Mac, Switch



INFO

Developer
Fallen Tree Games

Publisher
Kwalee

Price
£24.99

Released
Out now

On
PC, PS5,
Xbox Series

POUND THAT AVERNO CITY BEAT IN NEW TOP-DOWN COP CAPER, THE PRECINCT

The follow-up release to 2019's *American Fugitive*, *The Precinct* focuses on the right side of the law this time, putting you in the rookie cop shoes of Nick Cordell Jr.

Set during the '80s, *The Precinct* tips its hat to cop shows and movies of yesteryear, with a strong arcade-style vibe and a visual style and gameplay mechanic that is clearly influenced by the likes of *Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars*.

A top-down title running at a solid 30fps, *The Precinct* is an incredibly fun jaunt through the rain-slicked streets of Averno City. With a tasty, 80s-tastic soundtrack, an effective skill tree, and satisfying heft in the vehicle mechanics, *The Precinct* shines in the moment-to-moment gameplay of making arrests and getting involved in chasing suspects down. That said, slightly finicky combat mechanics are a shame, with the in-vehicle sections mostly outshining the on-foot areas. What are you waiting for? Get out there and clean up the city! □



Britt Roberts



MORE INFO



IS IT A CASE OF SCOOBY DOO OR SCOOBY DON'T FOR SPOOKY DECKBUILDER, DECK OF HAUNTS?

In *Deck of Haunts*, you don't just haunt the house, you are the house. A malevolent entity with a love for confusing floor plans, psychological warfare and, apparently, interior design. It's part card game, part horror sandbox, and part *The Sims* – if your Sims had names like 'Terror' and 'Despair' and their hobbies included bleeding from the eyes [1].

Fear and Sanity are your core gameplay mechanics. Each night phase, you unleash cards to manipulate, terrify, or straight-up kill the poor fools that are silly enough to wander into your domain. Cards range from the straightforward, Damage to reduce health, or Drain to chip away at Sanity, to Nighthlong (persistent effects), and Tension, which cranks up the potency of Sanity-draining effects.

By day, you play architect: construct new rooms, reshape your floor plan, and turn your mansion into a deadly labyrinth [2]. Special rooms add flair – like the Sacrificial Chamber, where you can trade cards for extra action points – or storage rooms to stash cards for later.

Gameplay unfolds over 28 days and nights; survive the full cycle and you win. Though honestly, 30 nights would've made for a tidier horror movie reference.

Overall, the play time is rather short, and it could use more life in its victims – it would be nice to see more natural NPC interactions [3]. Right now, everyone's a bit too emotionally detached for people being driven to madness. □

Nick Crocker



CLUELESS ESSENCE DISPENSERS

Humans aren't just clueless essence dispensers, they come with traits that can seriously mess with your plans. Some are brave, others ignore distractions, and a few are packing heat.

Generate enough missing persons reports and even the police will eventually show up. Prioritising threats is essential – isolate the bold, mislead the clever, and take down the dangerous before they find your Heart or bolt for the exit.

This isn't just casual haunting, it's tactical terror management.

LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

Inscription

A dark, narrative-driven deckbuilder where cards bleed and scream. Nice.



THE BACK CATALOGUE

Mantis' previous title, *Journey for Elysium*, is a VR narrative adventure where players navigate the Underworld solving mythological puzzles.

REVIEWS

TO A T

INFO

Developer

Uvula

Publisher

Annapurna Interactive

Price

£15.49

Released

Out now

On

PC, PS5,

Xbox Series

Demo

PC



POT(TY) OF T

This is an overly silly experience full of absurdity, meta self-aware moments and presenting to camera, eccentric characters, such as a friendly giraffe who *really* likes making sandwiches, DJ Pigeon, a frog detective and a man made out of brightly coloured building blocks. Paired with charming town exploration, collecting hair cuts (for some reason) and discovering secrets make every corner a joyful surprise, and every conversation a little weirder in the best way (especially during episode five).

WELCOME, DEAR READERS, TO THE WONDERFULLY ECCENTRIC WORLD OF TO A T

In *To a T*, you play as Teen: a fun little dude person just trying to live their best life... while stuck in a permanent T-pose. With arms outstretched like a dramatic plane about to take off, everyday tasks can be hard.

Alongside your loyal dog 'Dog' [1], you'll explore a quaint coastal town, make some delightfully odd friends, unravel the mystery of a crashing wind turbine, and eventually learn to soar. Literally.

It's essentially a slice-of-life mini-game adventure mashed up with cartoons, complete with catchy intros, outros, and daily chores reimagined as epic quests. Tasks include brushing your teeth [2], washing your face, and launching yourself into the stratosphere like one of those chaotic ripcord toys from your childhood. Symbolic? Probably. Hilarious? Definitely.

Controlling each limb and even your head tilt independently, turning the simplest of actions into a graceful (or not) flailing ballet. And with Dog by your side, every moment feels more triumphant [3].

Despite the camera at times being somewhat difficult to follow, *to a T* offers a fun and surprisingly heartfelt story about embracing who you are, overcoming bullies, and learning to love your gloriously weird self. Also, spontaneous musical numbers. Obviously, because who doesn't love a spontaneous music number?

The message is simple: never forget you're the perfect shape.

Nick Crocker



MORE INFO

LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

Donut County

Control a growing hole in the ground, swallowing up everything in sight.



THE BACK CATALOGUE

Crankin's Time Travel Adventure – a popular Playdate title where you advance and rewind time using the handheld's crank to avoid obstacles and make your date.



INFO

Developer

Flatter Than Earth

Publisher

Polymorph Games

Price

£21.99

Released

Out now

On

PC, PlayStation,
Xbox Series, Switch

Demo

Yes



1



2



3



FIND LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS IN *ONCE UPON A PUPPET*, BUT WHO EXACTLY IS PULLING THE STRINGS?

Well here's something with a slice of originality about it. *Once Upon a Puppet* is a 2.5D puzzle-platformer where you start off as a hand (a stagehand called Nieve to be exact), but end up magically tied to a puppet by the name of Drev [1]. Set in the world of the theatre, they're two understage lost souls looking for a way to return to the theatre above.

Both are actually discarded items, as the King of the land has been discarding more and more lately. The story behind the game is a little sad, as it's all about the loss of items and also the desire for something that is seemingly impossible, but it's probably nicer for you to uncover that for yourself.

As you explore, you can talk to characters that live in this world, solve puzzles, and find yarn that will

upgrade your abilities [2]. Soon, you'll be jumping, gliding, changing your outfit and even finding more tools to help you solve puzzles. There are plenty of side quests to keep you busy too, if you'd like to help those living inside this world. Solving puzzles feels rewarding, helping your little puppet (and bonding with them) is captivating, and the world holds a lot of secrets [3].

There are also evil, shadow-filled monsters that only you and your puppet friend can see. *Once Upon a Puppet* feels like a well-developed game with plenty of gameplay to keep you busy, in a unique world. □



Jupiter Hadley



MORE INFO

SOMEDAY I'M GONNA BE A REAL BOY

You may consider the gaming genre of puppetry to be a rather minor one, but there are a surprisingly large number of them out there. Obviously we've mentioned *A Juggler's Tale* elsewhere on this page, but fans out there should also check out the rather amusing *Limbs* on Steam, while PlayStation owners might want to consider *Puppeteer*. Finally, a brief shout out must go to *No Strings Attached*, a puzzle platformer where you take control of a newly sentient puppet.

LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

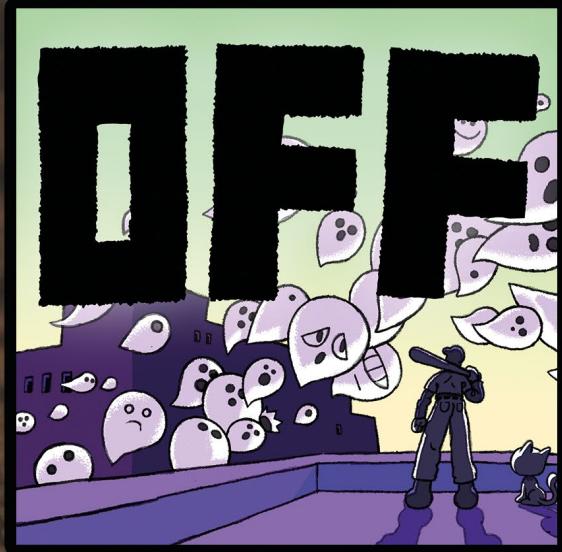
A Juggler's Tale
A Juggler's Tale has you pulling a stringed puppet through a beautiful fairytale world.



THE BACK CATALOGUE

Once Upon a Puppet is the first title from Flatter Than Earth, moving from graduates to professionals with consummate style.

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ON THE MAP OF PRESS & CREATORS!



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GAME MARKETING
WE PUT THE ARRR IN PR



piratepr.com



INFO

Developer

Exalted Studio

Publisher

Dear Villagers

Price

£21.99

Released

Out now

On

PC, PS5,

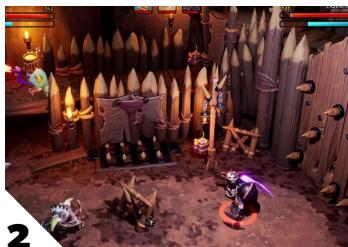
Xbox Series, Switch

Demo

Yes



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2



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THERE'S AN AMUSINGLY PUERILE JOKE IN THE TITLE **BIG HELMET HEROES**, BUT BEST NOT, EH?

When it comes to beat-'em-ups, the pool has become far deeper in recent years, with titles like *Final Vendetta* and *Fight'N Rage* offering old-school fisticuffs and contemporary mechanical depth. It's a tough genre to stand out in, but *Big Helmet Heroes* manages a broadly appealing offering which then comes to life in multiplayer [1].

There are 24 heroes to unlock by sniffing out secret areas or solving optional puzzles around each stage, though the bulk of the gameplay is the expected button-bashing that comes with the territory.

Being a fully 3D game rather than a sprite-based scroller, positioning is rather simple, which translates to repetition in the early game, particularly for a lone player. Bring a friend into the game though, and things

perk up a bit. The hordes of enemies [2] are easier to corral and fall much faster, while an extra set of eyes help a great deal when it comes to finding all of the hidden characters.

While it doesn't have the most auspicious start, *Big Helmet Heroes* does improve quickly, with the visuals and set pieces becoming more artful and interesting [3], and the game progresses across its four hours or so. It's as though it's growing in confidence alongside you, pushing through an all-too-simple opening into a more diverse and interesting co-op experience. Not a classic, but there's plenty of fun to be had here. [1]

★★★★★

Stuart Gipp



MORE INFO

A WORLD IN MOTION

Big Helmet Heroes is a classic example of a game's static shots really not doing it justice. The framerate in *BSH* is just about perfect, and the varied graphics in each area are detailed, always interesting, and everything is always silky smooth – regardless of how much is onscreen. Trust us, to really understand the gameplay, you've got to see this baby in motion.

Our advice is to head online and check out a gameplay trailer for it. Or, even better, PC users can head to the Steam store where there's a comprehensive demo of the game waiting for you.

LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

Castle Crashers

A very similar comical take on medieval fairytale combat. Play it if you haven't.



THE BACK CATALOGUE

This is the first game from developer Exalted Studios, with its staff mostly (but not exclusively) experienced with mobile games.



REVENGE OF THE SAVAGE PLANET LIKES TO CLOWN, BUT IS THIS SEQUEL PAGLIACCI OR KRUSTY?

Games and comedy are strange bedfellows, the latter being so dependent on timing and structure that the free movement and interaction offered by player input can often strip a joke of its impact. Furthermore, attempts to remedy this by issuing gags during cutscenes or mandatory dialogue can have the adverse effect of frustrating the player by stripping control from them and utilising what they will perceive as downtime in order to showcase their 'tight five'. Put simply, trying to make a funny game is a bit of a minefield, and it's one that *Revenge of the Savage Planet* power-walks into, arms flailing as it tries to raise a laugh by any means necessary.

Scarcely a moment seems to go by without some sort of humour being crowbarred in, whether it's in the chirpy dialogue from the floating navigational computer Eko, the snarky text descriptions that pop up when you scan something, or the outlandish and overtly silly animations of the astronaut you take control of. This game is wacky, and that's not something everybody can tolerate. It's worth putting up with however, because behind the constant tickling of your ribs lies a solidly designed

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Spiritfarer

This is a beautiful split-screen game of cheery resource management.



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MAKING THE JUMP

So if you're still thinking that the perspective jump from first to third-person is an odd one, here's a quote from *Revenge of the Savage Planet's* Game Design Director, Steven Masters, taken from a *Radio Times Gaming* interview...

"Just doing that has given us so many more opportunities for physical humour, whether it's how the character runs and moves to the way you land after taking fall damage. Humour is at the heart of what we do, and seeing the character allows us to bring so much more of that to the forefront."

Metroidvania-style adventure, **with gorgeous visuals** [1] and a smart drip-feed of new mechanics and areas that'll keep you – and, optionally, a co-op partner – playing until the credits roll... and beyond.

Revenge of the Savage Planet offers a literally shocking change of perspective from its predecessor (*Journey to the Savage Planet*), and the move from first-person to third-person is a wise one considering how **much of the game's appeal is down to its character** [2]. Nobody could say that *Revenge* hasn't had love poured into it from all angles, as it buffets you with personality from start to finish, painting a gloriously garish picture over inspiration from games like *Metroid Prime* or the *Ratchet & Clank* series. Exploration, scanning and combat come together to form a satisfying soup as you explore the **very different biomes** [3]. You'll be dashing, dodging and capturing

creatures, gathering resources and crafting upgrades in a tight little loop, though there's nothing here you won't have seen before – and the game knows it, cracking wise at its own contrivances in a way that, while funny, might make you wonder if self-deprecation is an effective salve for derivative gameplay.

Originality isn't everything when you copy other games well, and *Revenge* certainly does that. It's pretty, it's playable and its focus on both online and local split-screen co-op is a breath of fresh air. I found the humour to be quite obnoxious and ended up lowering the game's voice volume to zero, but that's obviously subjective. Add an extra 0.5 to the score if you think it's funny.

Stuart Gipp



MORE INFO

Pseudoregalia

While this one boasts a darker tone, but a similar focus on exploration.

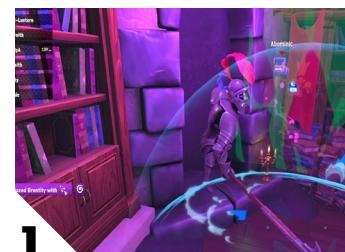
Supraland

Supraland is a more puzzle-focused, but just as cheerful, adventure.



THE BACK CATALOGUE

Direct predecessor *Journey to the Savage Planet* remains a thoroughly playable slice of Metroidvania silliness, albeit in first-person this time.



IT'S A QUESTION OF POWER

As mentioned in the main review, each level is littered with collectables. Some give you a valuable speed boost to escape the monster's clutches, while others give you a power-up to use against your opponents – and that's the fun bit.

Power-ups range from the simple (bombs and freezing blocks) to the more elaborate (alien abduction and whirlpools). All are a lot of fun though, and the smarter players will quickly learn the best times to deploy them in-game.

LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

THERE ARE GHOSTLY GOINGS ON IN THE LATEST PARTY GAME, **POLTERGUYS: POSSESSION PARTY**

Like the best parties, *Polterguys: Possession Party* is loud, chaotic and only ever a moment away from a potentially lethal situation. Unlike most of the parties I've been to though, this is one that I don't wake up panicking where my money's gone and why there's now a farmyard animal living in my house.

But enough of that and on with the review. So, unsurprisingly, this is a party game, so you and up to seven other players (either human, drones or a mixture of the two) battle it out on a series of haunted house-themed levels [1].

You play as a 'polterguy', a ghostly character that can possess everyday objects to protect its spectral form. And you need that protection, as you and the other spooks are being relentlessly chased by a

monster [2]. Each item you possess has a special move related to it, plus there are bonuses to collect for either weapons, protection or speed. The object is simply to be the last spook standing (or hovering) while the others are captured by the monster.

There's no denying that *Polterguys* is fun to play, especially if you can rope in some mates, but unlike something like *Mario Kart*, where you have a bit more space and time to plan your attack, **everything here is slightly frantic and crowded** [3], as the levels are fairly small. This means that you're not always sure what's going on around you.

Overall? Fun but flawed. 1



James Oakwood



Boomerang Fu

We recommend either *Party Animal* or *Boomerang Fu*.



THE BACK CATALOGUE

Madorium has a long and varied history, as they were formed nearly 10 years ago. Recently they worked on the *Hello Neighbor* sequel.



INFO

Developer
HyperstrangePublisher
KwaleePrice
£12.79Released
Out nowOn
PCDemo
Yes

1



2



3



STARVING FOR SOME ACTION? **Hordes of Hunger** SERVES CHAOS BY THE PLATEFUL

Hordes of Hunger throws players into a grim, gothic fantasy where you take on the role of Mirah [1], a warrior cursed to die and rise again, a power granted by her father in a last-ditch effort to free the land from a blight.

From the very first moments, the game sets a chilling tone with its eerie music and evocative atmosphere, plunging you into a cursed world crawling with an astonishing variety of enemy encounters [2].

Unlike many action roguelikes that lean into passive abilities or automated area-of-effect chaos, *Hordes of Hunger* demands a more hands-on approach. You're encouraged to parry, dodge and execute jump slams and heavy attacks to survive waves of nasties. The action feels immediate and physical, giving you a visceral connection to every swing and strike.

The game's story is actually present and unfolding, a seemingly rare feat in the genre, with the narrative genuinely pushing you to progress [3].

Hordes of Hunger leans into random ability drops, but sometimes the effects of RNG can feel a bit too dramatic. Get the right abilities at the right time and you can become an unstoppable god. One near-invincible combo utilising life leech abilities, perks that scale off high HP and some early luck with increased physical damage modifiers can quickly see you mincing an entire army without dipping below max HP, creating moments that, while unbalanced, are undeniably fun. □



Nick Crocker



MORE INFO

LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

Curse of the Dead Gods

A roguelike dungeon crawler with parry/dodge-heavy combat.



THE BACK CATALOGUE

Hyperstrange has released a diverse range of games, such as *Blood West*, a first-person shooter set in the Wild West.

FANCY A NEW GAME, OR IS IT A CASE OF BETTER THE LEVEL DEVIL YOU KNOW?



nyone who visited the Newgrounds website in the mid 2000s and 2010s has probably encountered infamous flash games such as *The Impossible Quiz*, or the later released

The Unfair Platformer.

If so then you're probably fairly familiar with the premise of *Level Devil*, a platformer designed to cause you anguish and suffering, with obstacles, such as invisible pit falls and sentient traps, which will lead you to suspect the developer hates you. I mean, *really* hates you.

Having said that, *Level Devil* always comes across as humorous and encourages you to beat the developer at their own – heavily stacked against you – game.

On an unrelated note, we also strongly recommend that you check Unept's Steam page, because it's hilarious, rather brilliant and sets the entire tone of what's to come.

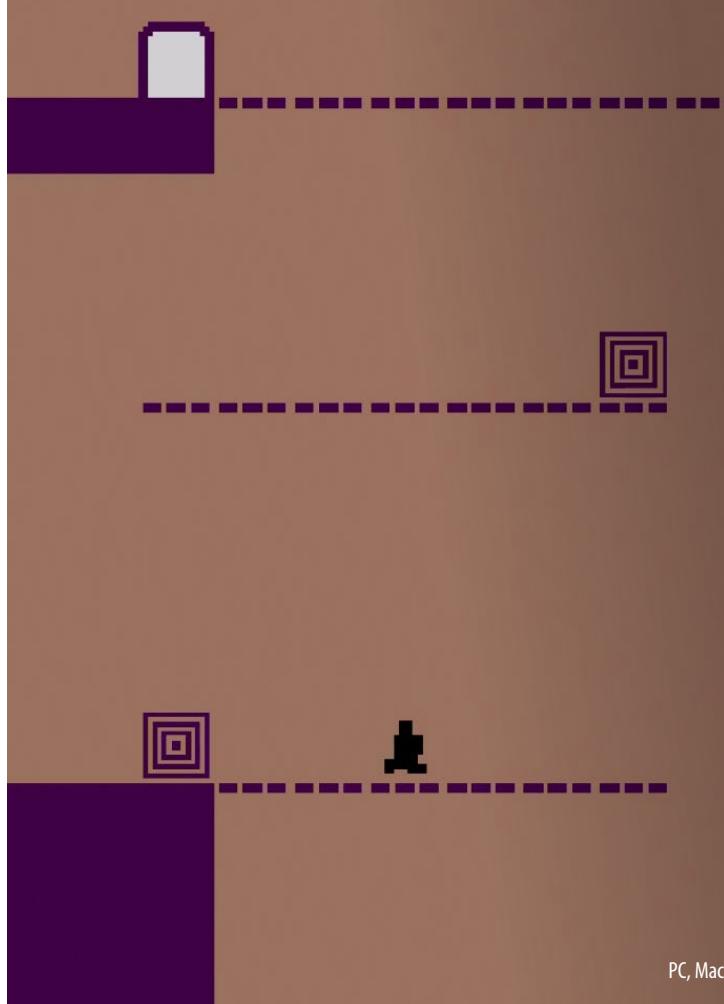
Overall, with over 200 levels, and even a two-player mode where you can troll your friends by controlling traps, we can ensure you that your suffering will be legendary.



Nick Crocker



MORE INFO



INFO

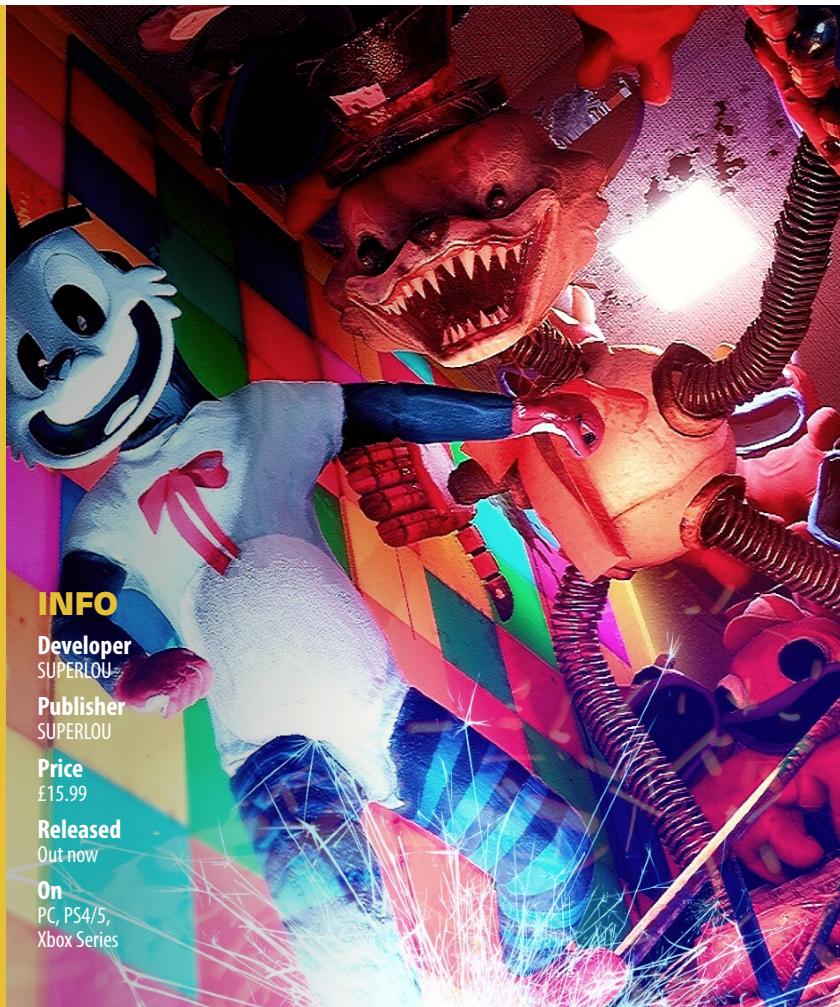
Developer
Unept

Publisher
Unept

Price
£5.89

Released
Out now

On
PC, Mac, iOS, Android



INFO

Developer
SUPERLOU

Publisher
SUPERLOU

Price
£15.99

Released
Out now

On
PC, PS4/5,
Xbox Series

CAN YOU SURVIVE THE HORROR-FILLED FUN HOUSE IN **FINDING FRANKIE?**

Horror games that have a cute element to them seem to be on the rise. *Finding Frankie* is one such horror game, but instead of just being creepy, there are a lot of stealth and parkour elements to keep you moving forward within this massive soft play.

Though the soft play is abandoned, there are areas you need to interact with that can open doors and move you to the next area. A lot of the game relies on very quick movement and decision making, but at the same time, if you plan too far ahead it seems to think you've gone out of bounds and you'll die anyway. *Finding Frankie* is a challenging game that will test your patience, especially as you watch a number of cut scenes where Frankie kills you.

I found myself dying a lot. There is a knack for where to look and when to move. The cut scenes feel almost like they were laughing at me but I do enjoy the variety of cartoon-like characters, with their own sinister backstories as well.



Jupiter Hadley



MORE INFO



INFO

Developer

Ember Paw Games

Publisher

Fireshine Games

Price

£10.99

Released

Out now

On

PC

Demo

Yes



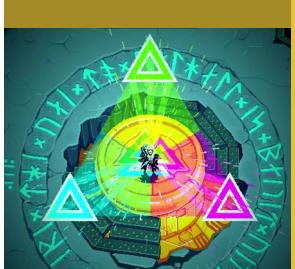
1



2



3



IS ODINFALL A GOD-TIER ROGUELIKE, OR JUST ANOTHER TWIN-STICK SHOOTER?

Odinfall reimagines Norse mythology in a chaotic, post-Ragnarok, cybernetically enhanced sci-fi future, blending a roguelike structure with oodles of twin-stick shooting mayhem.

The cast of playable characters is delightfully weird, from a 'Cyberserker' with a rocket-powered arm, to a rampaging **Viking Moose** [1]. Each has its own abilities and skill tree, creating varied runs that reward experimentation. Customisable weapons are a major draw, offering outrageous combinations like acid-launching machine guns and triple-barrelled crossbows.

Combat is tight and energetic, with destructible environments adding a layer of tactical freedom. **Boss battles are visually impressive and challenging, requiring adaptability and fast reflexes** [2].

A vibrant, chunky art style matches the game's wild tone and over-the-top action.

Though the game is still in Early Access, it already offers a complete campaign and robust replayability. Community feedback is shaping ongoing updates, with new content planned. However, a minor drawback is that some levels can feel overly cramped, making it difficult to dodge the **barrage of enemy projectiles** [3].

Despite this, *Odinfall* delivers a unique twist on mythology with satisfying depth and a strong sense of personality. It's a bold, irreverent ride through Norse legend like you've never seen before. □

★★★★★

Theo Lancaster



MORE INFO

MIX AND MATCH

When the mighty Norse Gods are, in reality, delusional AI, a lot of creative doors open up. Being that *Odinfall*'s Ragnarok event was an atomic one, this then leads to design from both post-apocalypse influences and Norse mythology. The cables shackling Loki echo the roots of the world tree Yggdrasil. The heroes use a techno-Bifrost to send clones of themselves on adventures, and the game's first boss, Fenrir, has gone nuclear from eating too many leftover warheads. It's all very '*Horizon Zero Dawn*', but it looks great and adds to the game's atmosphere.

LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

Nuclear Throne

A roguelike twin-stick shooter where you blast enemies in procedurally generated wastelands.



THE BACK CATALOGUE

Ember Paw Games is based in Sweden, with a few projects on itch.io such as *Die Recompile ZERO*, a fine bullet-hell shooter set in space.

ALSO RELEASED

Actual space may well be infinite, but in magazine terms it's quite the opposite. Bearing that in mind, here are the freshest dishes from the indie buffet that we weren't able to squeeze in for review but are still worth a closer inspection.

ROGUE: GENESIA

PC

If you're looking to become an immensely powerful overlord of destruction, look no further than *Rogue: Genesia*, an action roguelite with so many enemies on screen at one time your computer may just crap the bed. While great fun to slaughter thoughtlessly, it also offers decent levels of experimentation and goal-orientated gameplay.

It would be nice to see less congestion on screen though, especially once your abilities border on the truly insane.



MORE INFO



LITTLE SIM WORLD

PC

A charming and highly customisable life sim set in the vibrant city of Little London, with its detailed characters and engaging daily activities.



WAR RATS

PC

Build your base, upgrade your gear and muster your rat army to battle the filthy TechnoRats in gory, strategic gameplay.



KOIRA

PC, Mac

A heartwarming adventure through an enchanted forest to save your newfound friend.



GOLF GAMBIT

PC

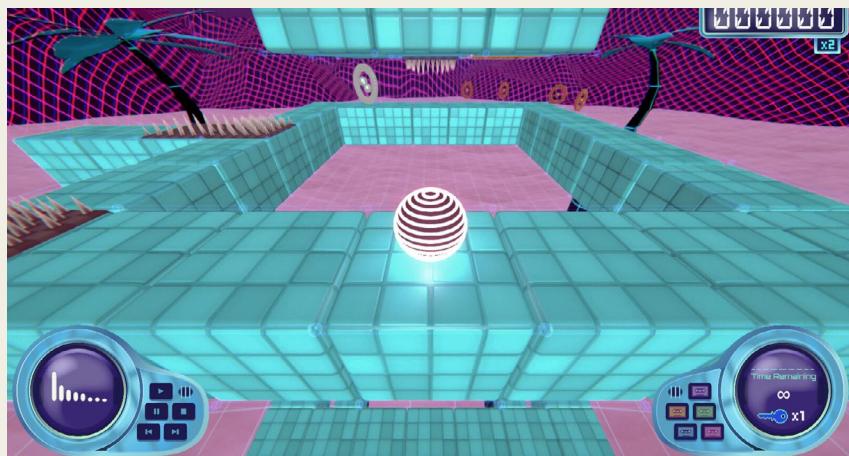
Play with up to seven friends in this booby trap-infested mini golf mayhem.



KĀDOMON: HYPER AUTO BATTLEERS

PC

Collect, battle and evolve over 200 unique monsters in this charming autobattler.



AXYZ
PC, Mac

Voted as one of the most anticipated games of 2025 in the Debug Indie Game Awards, *AXYZ* takes a simple premise and executes it excellently. *AXYZ* offers an engaging and immersive experience, with soothing breakbeat and synthwave soundtracks, dreamlike atmosphere and clever gravity defying puzzles focusing on spatial awareness and three-dimensional consideration. The vibes are definitely strong with this one.



MORE INFO

GLOVER

PC, PS4/5, Xbox Series, Switch

Originally released in 1998 for the PC and N64, *Glover* is back, this time remastered for the Nintendo Switch and a range of other modern consoles, so get ready to get your hand dirty once more. With new updated graphics that still stay true to the original style but also give the whole thing a dusting of colour, relive this classic adventure as a magical glove running around and manipulating bouncy balls to explore and battle enemies.



MORE INFO



BAHAMUT AND THE WAQWAQ TREE

PC

Dive into Ma'een, an Arabian mythology-inspired underwater realm corrupted by dark forces.



THE ELECTRIFYING INCIDENT

PC, Mac

Explore a facility on the brink of meltdown and solve puzzles using your extendable mechanical grabber arm.



QUETZAL'S CALL

PC

Navigate fast-paced, tightly designed levels without ever touching the ground.



NAIAD

PC, PS4/5, Xbox Series, Switch

A peaceful, visually stunning journey where you guide a water spirit through nature.



WHITE KNUCKLE

PC

A first-person speed climbing horror game with roguelite and resource management systems.

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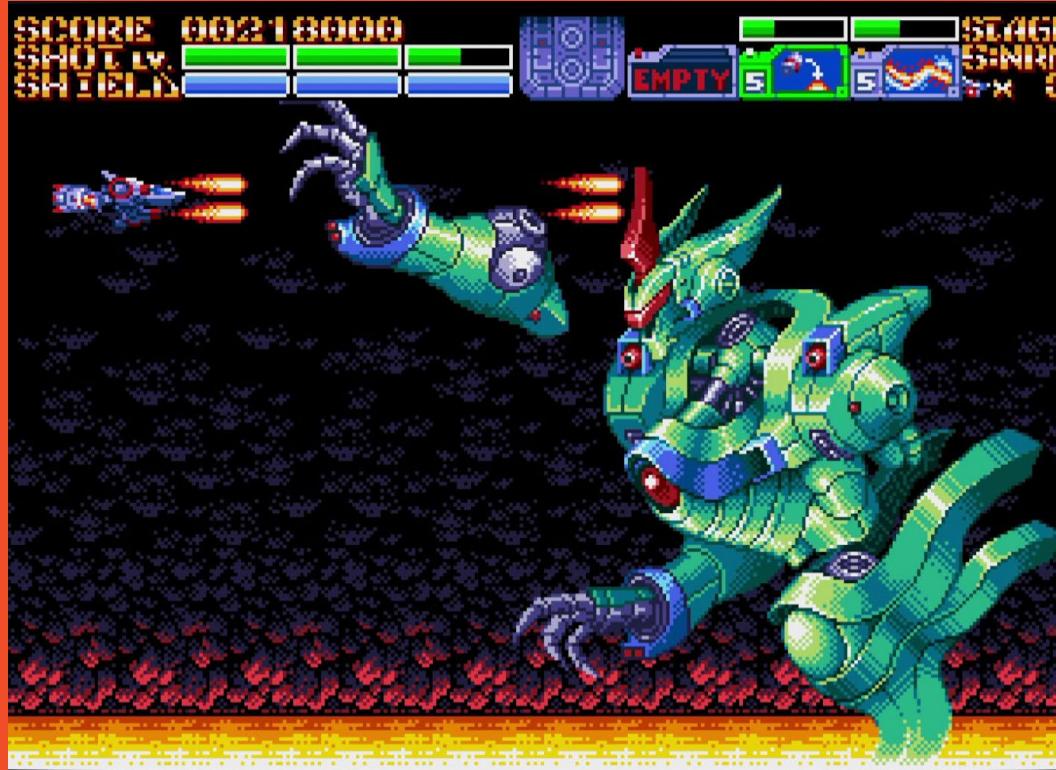
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RETRO WORLD

Marc Jowett brings us a whole load of new stuff to play on old stuff



Earthion

Developer ANCIENT CORP, BITWAVE GAMES **Publisher** LIMITED RUN GAMES
Retro MEGA DRIVE **Modern** PC, PLAYSTATION 4/5, XBOX SERIES X, NINTENDO SWITCH **Released** 2025

With Earth's resources depleted and its environment in ruin, most of humanity has fled to Mars. But when hostile invaders launch an attack on Earth, mankind has no choice but to fight back. As environmental researcher Azusa Takanashi, you'll pilot the state-of-the-art space fighter YK-IIA and mount the most important counterattack in human history.

Legendary composer Yuzo Koshiro (*Streets of Rage* and *Shenmue*, to name just two) has been teasing us for what seems like an eternity with his new shmup, *Earthion*. The official website has now been launched (officially), and it reveals the splendid news that the game will also be ported to PC and consoles.

Earthion has been created using 16-bit hardware, and a look at the trailer and the accompanying screenshots shows a 2D shooter that is shaping up to be absolutely gorgeous – one that is even comparable to some of the greats of the genre, like the *Thunder Force* saga.



The pixel art looks beautiful, with the action running smoothly at all times, despite the number of enemies on screen. With Yuzo Koshiro composing the game's soundtrack, it sounds incredible, too.

There are eight stages in total, with the objective to destroy all enemies in sight and pinch their resources to upgrade your own ship.

We have also learned that there will be various sub-weapons to play around with, enabling different strategies and tactics to emerge victorious.

Two modes of play are currently planned – the main story mode and a challenge mode. Exactly what that means for the player is something we'll be able to share with you when we finally get hold of a review copy of the game.

To make *Earthion* accessible to as many players as possible, Ancient Corp has included Japanese, Brazilian Portuguese and English languages, with a further 10 languages available via subtitles on the modern platforms.

Judging by what we have seen so far, and the sheer amount of talent on board for the project, *Earthion* could be on track to become one of the greatest Mega Drive shmpus of all time. Words on this very page don't do the game justice. Head on over to www.earthiongame.com and prepare to be blown away by the video footage.

Full review to come in *Debug* as soon as the game releases.



MORE INFO



The Secret of the Four Winds

Developer KAI MAGAZINE SOFTWARE **Publisher** KAI MAGAZINE
Retro MEGA DRIVE **Modern** TBC **Released** OUT NOW

The Secret of the Four Winds is an action RPG that involves combat and exploration as you try to understand why the local area has become feral.

Enemies are dispatched via gunfire or magic spells. Combat involves getting into a stance, so evasion tactics are key. Each enemy has their strengths and weaknesses. Zombies, for example, are lethal in the dark but weak in the light. A bit like students.

Levelling up happens on the fly, and you need to remember to do this via the equipment screen as things get tricky very quickly.

Vending machines restore health, and phone boxes are used to save the game manually. Enemies respawn, so grinding is required if you are not good enough.

The Secret of the Four Winds is a remarkable achievement on the Mega Drive, with its only niggles being that it is single player and can get samey in parts. It boasts Mega-CD quality audio thanks to a special chip in the cart, and runs incredibly smoothly despite the increasing enemies on screen.



The Cursed Legacy

Developer GGS STUDIO CREATION **Publisher** BROKE STUDIO
Retro MEGA DRIVE **Modern** STEAM (COMING SOON) **Released** OUT NOW

The Cursed Legacy is an action/exploration game that sees Leif, a mercenary, attempt to survive a complete human wipeout by any means necessary.

For fans who simply want run and gun or exploration, you can choose these modes separately, but the story mode brings the whole experience together.

The run-and-gun levels are hectic. Leif can shoot in all directions, and you can either do this on the fly or get into a stance to make the shooting more accurate.

The exploration levels allow you to roam freely around a map while inside a robot. Here, you can upgrade its abilities to unlock further areas and levels.

The Cursed Legacy isn't afraid to throw curveballs at you with its clever level design. Uncoupling carriages and electricity, forcing us to crouch, are just two examples.

Boss battles follow a similar structure, with multiple phases. These enemies are where the game excels, with the Artificial God boss being a particular favourite of mine.

The Cursed Legacy is a thoroughly enjoyable experience from start to finish. The fusion of run and gun and exploration makes it a little disjointed in places, but the option to choose either as a standalone mode makes up for it.





Farming Simulator 16-Bit

Developer GIANTS SOFTWARE **Publisher** STRICTLY LIMITED GAMES
Retro MEGA DRIVE **Modern** DIGITAL DOWNLOAD **Released** OUT NOW

The 16-bit version of *Farming Simulator* has been given a limited cartridge release, alongside the digital download.

The aim of *Farming Simulator* is simple: grow crops and then sell them for profit. You do this by switching between several vehicles using the C button. As your empire grows, you are able to buy better vehicles, which streamline the whole operation. Eventually, you can purchase additional pieces of land.

Money has to be spent on seeds and also on keeping the petrol topped up, so staying profitable is important. The developers have included an option to change the difficulty mid-game, which changes sale prices and harvest amounts. This means that, for the most part, players can play the game in a relaxing manner.

Graphically, *Farming Simulator 16-bit* is hit and miss. The landscape looks nice, but the wheels on the tractors don't move – it's these little things that make the game seem a little rushed.

Giants Software have included the cruise control option for the Mega Drive, which circumvents the trickier joypad controls.

Farming Simulator 16-Bit is a cool little sim game that suits the Mega Drive. It is therapeutic for those who like this kind of game, but others may find it monotonous.



Discrete Orange

Developer TARDIGRADE **Publisher** INCUBE8 GAMES
Retro GAME BOY ADVANCE **Modern** DIGITAL DOWNLOAD **Released** JULY 2025

If you boot up *Discrete Orange* without any context, you would be forgiven for thinking it's a broken, laggy mess.

It's actually an original idea. Movement is non-continuous, turning it into a turn-based puzzle platform game involving a cute orange on a mission to grab chocolate bars. I wonder if his name is Terry?

Getting from A to B isn't simple when you can't plonk yourself onto the adjacent land. Our orange friend will need to jump, and you use both obstacles and enemies as friends to get onto that piece of land you glitched past earlier. Enemies and obstacles only move when you do, leading to some clever and tricky puzzles – there are some trailers on YouTube that probably explain it better than I could.

Graphically, *Discrete Orange* is sublime, and the audio is beautiful. The concept of the game, however, felt a bit broken to me. At times, I was simply mashing buttons and hoping for the best. The B button shows you where you can move to next, but it didn't always feel accurate. Thankfully, you can skip levels, so you'll never be completely stuck.

Discrete Orange is a unique idea, and you feel a real sense of triumph when you work out the solution to a level. However, its frustrating element means it's a game that won't be suited to everyone.





Hero GP

Developer SHANE MCCAFFERTY **Publisher** THALAMUS DIGITAL
Retro GAME BOY COLOR **Modern** ITCH.IO **Released** OUT NOW

Hero GP is a short love letter to *Super Hang On*, and for a Game Boy Color game, it is super fast!

Racing against the clock, there are nine stages to conquer, with the next stage unlocked upon completing an objective on the current one, such as finishing third.

Hero GP gives you a real sense of speed, so much so, you don't need to brake – there isn't even an option to brake! It's just you, the bike and negotiating corners while avoiding fellow riders.

You can still crash if you hit another bike or some scenery. You lose a bit of time, but the game doesn't punish you severely, thankfully.

Upon completing all nine courses, the game is complete. There are no unlockables and no extras, so no replay value. But here is the surprise. You can buy this game for a single dollar, which is around 75p.

Once you consider the ridiculously cheap price, *Hero GP* becomes a real work of love and dedication that pushes the Game Boy Color to its limit.

If you like racing games or were simply a massive fan of *Super Hang On*, this is an essential purchase that is an absolute steal price-wise.



MORE INFO

Prisonela MD

Developer THE RETRO ROOM/RATALAIKA GAMES **Publisher** TWO BLACK CATS
Retro MD **Modern** STEAM, ITCH.IO **Released** OUT NOW

Prisonela MD is a platform game that has created using MD Engine, a Mega Drive game development engine that requires little technical experience.

There are 80 levels, each one short and spanning a single screen. You enter each level through a door, and the objective is to get to the exit at the opposite side of the screen while avoiding obstacles.

To negotiate enemies and traps, you can jump or double jump – there are no weapons and shields.

You get just one life, and if you die, the game will record how many consecutive levels you have completed, and then it's back to the beginning.

The twist is that the levels are mapped in a random order each time, which can affect your level streak. You could start with level 1 or level 71.

Coins are scattered around levels and can be used to unlock a few different skins for your character. Unfortunately, there are no unlockable boosts for your character, meaning the tough levels become a chore when they start to repeat.

Prisonela MD is a welcome port to the Mega Drive. It plays well, but the fact that there are no rewards to keep you playing is a disappointment.





Q&A: KAI MAGAZINE SOFTWARE

For starters, can you give us a brief history of Kai Magazine Software?

We started back in the '90s making games for the MSX2 computer. We developed and published three titles but we stopped due to piracy.

We came back during the 2010s with re-editions of our three previous games. It went well so we decided to develop a new game for the MSX2: *Life on Mars*.

It sold well, so we made a bunch more games for the MSX2 over the following years.

We struggled with piracy and PCBs [which stands for Printed Circuit Board], so we decided to try developing for Intellivision. It went very well, and we developed a bunch of games for that system as well. Then, we struggled with PCBs for the games, so we tried to develop for the Sega Genesis/Mega Drive. We ported *Metal Dragon* to the system, and it went really well, so we are now planning on releasing a

brand-new game every year.

Tell us some more about the work you do with the indie community.

I have collaborated voluntarily on other developers' projects when I had some free time, and I helped other people to reach the finish line and publish their game.

What plans does the Kai Magazine Software team have in store for the indie scene in the future?

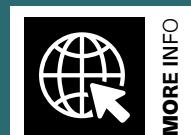
We are working on our fifth game for the Sega Genesis/MD at the moment. It's a two-player arcade game set in the Wild West, and it uses the same sound chip we developed and used for *The Secret of the Four Winds*, so the music has CD quality as well.

In the far future, we might try and develop something for the SNES and or Neo Geo, but no idea when exactly.



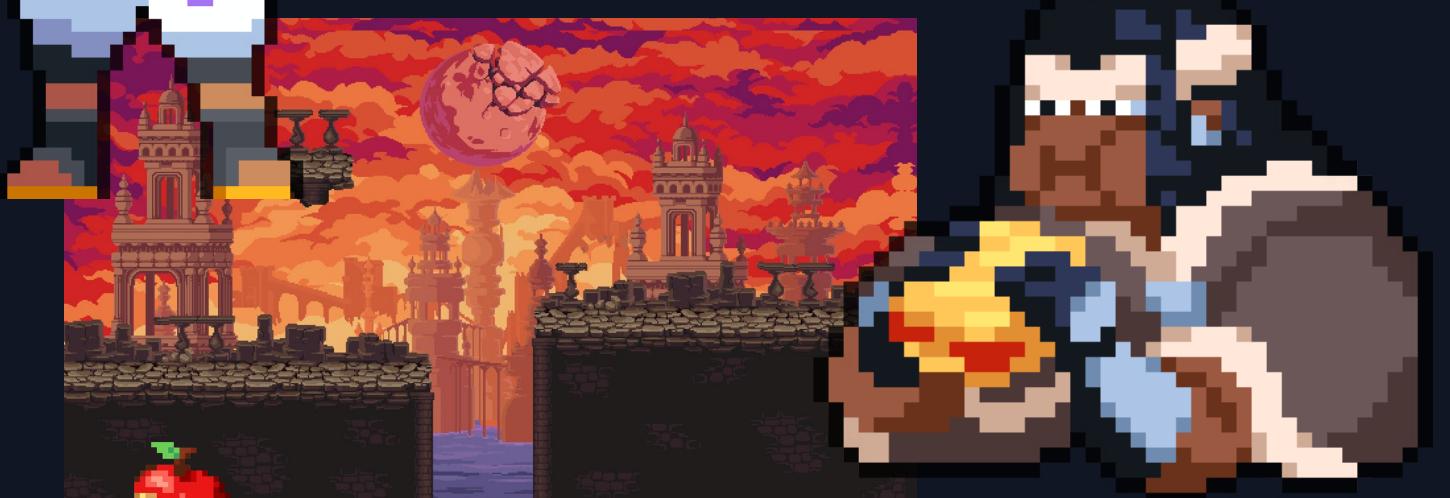
Kai Magazine Software have released some top-notch Mega Drive games over the last few years, many of which have been reviewed in *Debug* magazine. The latest game, *The Secret of the Four Winds*, has scored a perfect 5 within this very issue. The mantra is simple: for each new release to be better than the previous one.

Founder Oscar Kenneth Albero sat down with Marc Jowett to discuss the history of a company that has been around since the 1990s, their vision of releasing a brand-new game every year, and to share some exciting details regarding future game releases.





A new background for the opening level, now with a richer palette and more atmospheric tone to set the stage for Nanuka's adventure.



Watch our monthly Devlogs on YouTube!



Collectables come in all shapes and flavours.

debug

Game Dev Diary

A QUICK INTRODUCTION

Welcome back to the Development Diary for *Nanuka: Secret of the Shattering Moon*. Almost two years into the development of our next indie title, we are continuing to share the ups, downs and learning curves of this project with you. If you have been reading us in the past few issues of *Debug*, you will be familiar with *Nanuka*. If this is your first time, here is a short catch up.

A BRIEF RECAP

Nanuka: Secret of the Shattering Moon is our action-platformer, entirely hand-drawn and hand-animated in pixel art. The game blends the fast-paced platforming we loved in classics like *Sonic the Hedgehog* with satisfying combat inspired by beat-'em-ups like *Streets of Rage*.

You will play as Nanuka, a spirited and slightly clumsy young karateka, as she fights her way through strange lands, befriends powerful allies and faces quirky enemies in an adventure to uncover the truth behind a mysterious disaster threatening her world. Since the release of our previous game *Full Void*, our team of six has been fully immersed in bringing this new title to life. We are aiming to release *Nanuka* in the last quarter of 2025.

A NEW ROADMAP

As you can imagine, *Nanuka* is a much larger project than *Full Void*. Longer, more complex, and with a lot more features. Our biggest project so far. For this reason, we realised that being efficient and well-organised will be crucial if we want to stay on track.

After preparing our first public demo for the Debug Indie Game Awards in Nottingham, we started rethinking our development structure. That experience made us realise that a vertical slice approach could be more effective than a linear one. So, we adjusted our roadmap accordingly. Each version we build from now on will be a step closer to the final game, gradually layering in features, assets and polish.

We are currently working towards what we call Alpha 1, a reduced version of the game that includes all the core mechanics, menus, bosses, and systems, but with placeholder visuals and just the key parts of each level (around 10 to 20 screens per level). The goal with Alpha 1 is to ensure all elements work together and the overall structure of the game feels solid.

Once Alpha 1 is in place, we will move to Alpha 2, where we will start improving progression, refining how enemies behave, and cleaning up gameplay flow. Still using placeholders, but at this point we should be able to turn off the grid and play with temporary screens and basic visual layouts.

MORE STEPS TOWARDS THE FINISH LINE

After that comes Alpha 3, a version that includes the full story, all gameplay systems, menus, collectibles, cutscenes, bosses and the ending. All still with placeholder visuals, but with everything else in place.

Alpha 4 will be next, and is essentially the same version of Alpha 3 but with music and sound effects implemented. From that point on, placeholders will be updated and swapped for the final artwork.

In a nutshell, the final Alpha build will be a fully playable and polished version of the game, shorter in length, but shippable in terms of quality. Each level will feature around 10 to 20 screens rather than the full scope we eventually plan, but everything else will be final: UI, visuals, sounds, bosses, gameplay, so no placeholders and no bugs.

Once we move on to the Beta versions, it will be a matter of adding content to the game until we reach full length. Here we will focus on implementing secret levels and bosses, and those fun little touches that are the essence of *Nanuka* and the spirit of the game.

Finally, we aim to reach Release Candidate 1 by August/September. This will be the full, polished version of the game with no placeholders left.

APPROACHING PARTNERS

As part of our preparation for presenting *Nanuka* to a wider audience, we also spent time approaching a small number of carefully selected publishers. Although we have always self-published our games, we thought it was worth exploring whether a collaboration could help bring *Nanuka* to even more players. Especially as we were approached by some publishers at the Big Indie Pitch and Debug Indie Game Awards, so we appreciated there was an interest towards our game. Having the demo ready was key for this, and so was reworking our Steam page and putting together a proper presentation deck.

Creating that deck was a challenge in itself. It was not just about showing off *Nanuka*'s strengths, but clearly explaining what the game is, who it is for, how far along development is, and what kind of support we were looking for. With no prior experience in pitching to publishers, we turned to friends in the industry for feedback, and their advice was invaluable in shaping something that felt honest and well-structured.

As mentioned, we only reached out to a handful of publishers we truly respect and admire. For each one, we customised the deck, referencing their catalogue and explained why we felt a partnership could be a good fit. It was a lot of work, but it helped us clarify our own vision in the process. We kept it short and focused: a few slides about the concept, gameplay, target audience, timeline, team, and plenty of artwork to show how much we care about every detail.

In the end, we received a few offers, of which one in particular stood out. But after much thought, we decided to stay on our usual path and self-publish *Nanuka*. We have built a solid internal structure for QA, porting and marketing over the years, and self-publishing gives us the flexibility we want for what we are planning next.

And as always, we will keep sharing our progress with you in the next instalments of our Dev Diary series.

Don't miss *Debug* #11 for more inside information
from The OutOfTheBit Team

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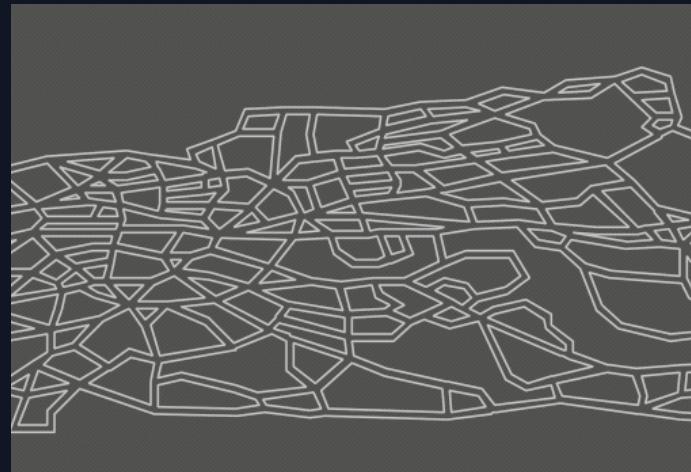
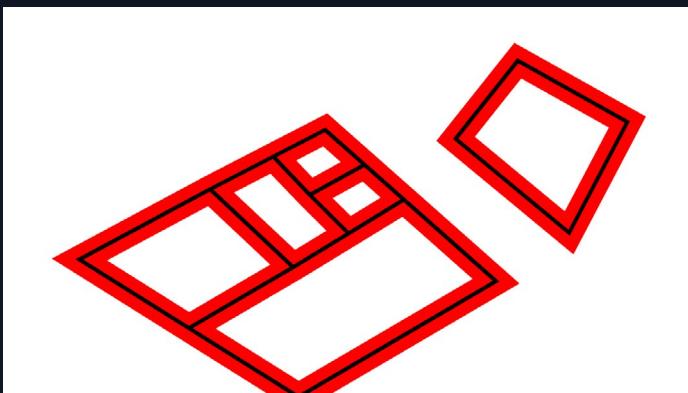
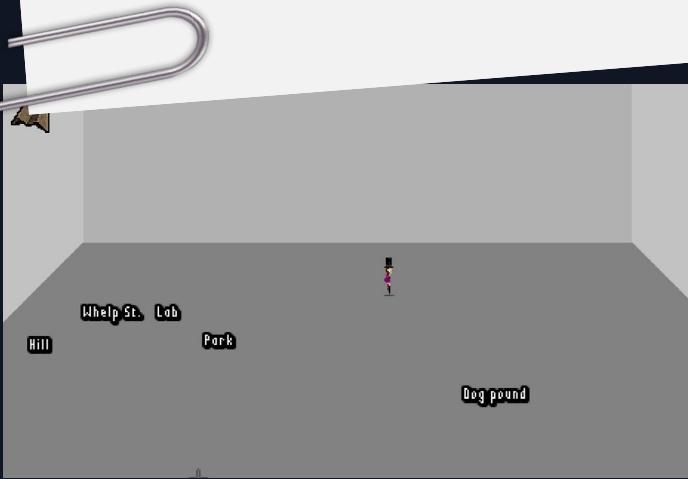
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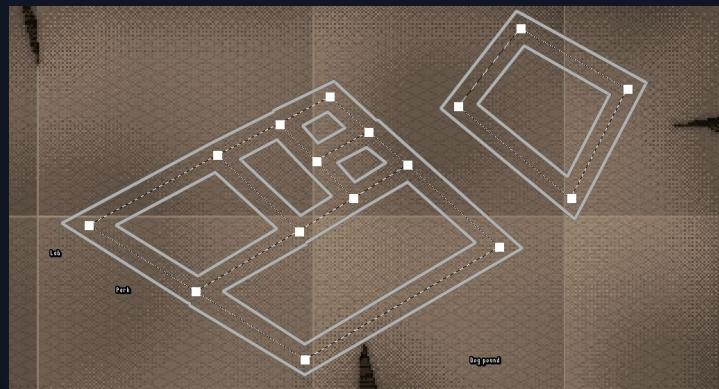
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The game's map is based on an actual section of Victorian London.



Planning out the locations and routes for the game.

Game Dev Diary

DEV DIARY 6 – MAPS

I like to develop my games in a more-or-less chronological order, where I follow the narrative as I go along. This allows me to play through the game in longer and longer runs, each time learning more and progressing the story a little further. For me, this not only helps me to develop the story without being too constrained by a pre-existing framework or future events set in stone, but also helps me appreciate the subtleties of what a potential player may ‘know’ about the game’s world, characters and plot versus what they may ‘suspect’, based on hints and breadcrumbs I’ve added up to that point.

I have now reached the point in the development where the game’s world is about to open up and permit access to more locations beyond the 15 or so scenes which have become available up to this point. The number of accessible scenes will essentially double at this point, and I am using a map to help shape players’ mental geography and provide them with a quick, easy way to travel long distances.

Up until now, the map has essentially been a neglected grey placeholder, and was beginning to make the gameplay feel disjointed when playtesting. This seemed like a good time to spruce it up and really think about the precise position of the different locations relative to each other. I was optimistically expecting this to take maybe two to three days, but it ended up taking a disproportionately long time to plan, draw and implement as I kept changing my mind on the style and layout. When, over a week later, I eventually reached a look that I was happy with, it was time to start implementing it.

Like with my previous game, *Lucy Dreaming*, the map has similar functionality to ones you’d find in the *Monkey Island* games (a top-down-ish view with a miniature sprite literally walking between the available locations), but where *Lucy Dreaming* had a comparatively simple map with just a handful of locations and a single road linking them all together, *Heir of the Dog* is set in Victorian London, a complex city with a myriad of tiny interconnecting streets and lanes. I wanted to represent this maze-like feeling, not as individual locations (that would take forever), but so the player could feel like they were free to take short cuts and wander around the map if they wished. With an actual map of Victorian London as my starting point, I chose an area and removed some of the numerous smaller passageways, as these would be too small to see when zoomed out to the level I required. I then roughly traced the larger roads and connecting streets until I had a map which provided enough space for the individual locations, and retained that labyrinthine feel of London.

Now was the time to implement it in the game engine, and I realised just how much work it was going to be to draw this complex way-system. Visionaire Studio (my engine of choice) allows developers to draw multiple polygons to define the boundaries where characters can move, and add ‘way-points’ which encourage characters to take certain paths within those boundaries and help them to navigate around tighter corners where the pathfinding algorithm can occasionally get stuck. The more intricate the paths, the longer it was going to take me to draw both of these individual elements within the engine, point by point. It would also require a lot of additional work to amend the map’s layout in the future if I needed to.

As a long-time web developer, I love to build my own web-based tools whenever I come across an arduous or repetitive task. I realised that if I was able to plot the interconnecting way-points within vector illustration software, I could then adjust the thickness of these paths to generate the boundary polygons at the same time. If I needed to subsequently change the street plan at a later date, it would be easier to tweak these lines in the vector software than to adjust them within the game engine itself. I also love a distraction, so I set to work creating a JavaScript tool to convert the vector files into an XML-style format I could paste directly into Visionaire and, after a bit of swearing, I got it working. Result! Unfortunately it soon became apparent that I had been over-keen with the amount of intersecting streets I had created, and it immediately crashed the game whenever it tried to calculate the optimal route the character should take across the map.

So, after all that, I had reached a ceiling I hadn’t realised existed, and needed to manage my own expectations of how complex the map’s way-system could be. During this process I had been posting about it in the Visionaire Discord, and some of the other developers there had watched my progress through their fingers, knowing that this was the inevitable outcome. They could have spoken up, but hadn’t wanted to piss on my over-enthusiastic chips and I probably would have carried on regardless anyway. I have now been forced to compromise on my original intentions for the map, simplifying the amount of intersecting paths to prevent crashes, but retaining the same complex look of the map by representing the now unavailable paths visually, to give the impression of interconnecting London streets without requiring the processing power to calculate the shortest route through them.

It's good to be ambitious, but try not to be disappointed if your initial plans don't come to fruition.



Alex Kanaris-Sotiriou

NO ART WITHOUT ARTISTS



Alex is the Creative Director and Lead Dev at Polygon Treehouse (*Röki/Mythwrecked*), a double BAFTA-nominated micro indie studio who make art-led narrative games that pack an emotional punch.

T

he amount of Generative AI being used is evidently on the increase. Unless you're a severely offline individual, you'll have noticed a rise in certain trends that leverage the technology – like creating an image of yourself as an action figure, accessories and all, or generating images that utilise the signature art style of the famous Japanese animation house, Studio Ghibli – over

recent months.

I'd hope that many individuals using Generative AI to manufacture these 'fun' images are simply unaware of why many see the controversial technology as problematic, for which there are two main reasons...

The first is the environmental impact. Generative AI technology needs energy to work, and not a small amount. Researchers have approximated that at its current level of global usage, AI will use as much energy as Switzerland this year. In a world already hurtling towards a climate crisis, this feels spectacularly dumb.

Secondly, there are very strong ethical concerns about Generative AI. These technologies are often trained on existing works by very human artists who have not given their permission or been compensated for their work being utilised. Essentially, their life's work has been stolen and used to generate profit for others, reducing their employment prospects in the process.

It's worth noting that there are some rare uses of Generative AI that don't have these ethical concerns. As I understand it, the recent *Broken Sword* remaster by Revolution Software used Generative AI as part of its process in upscaling the classic game for HD resolutions. The difference here is that they trained their generative AI model on their own original artwork and sprites. However, this is the only instance of developers using their own work to train AI that I'm currently aware of.

It's important to note that the 'artwork' generated by these technologies is not limited to 2D images. That is just the tip of the iceberg. Generative AI can be used to create pretty much anything: video, voice acting, music, writing, 3D meshes and more. This casts a wide shadow over all strands of our creative arts, including the video game industry.

The question this technology poses is: 'if I can generate it, why should I pay for it?'. Video game studios (and their indie siblings) are under more pressure than ever to make budgets go further in an increasingly competitive market, so from a shortsighted financial standpoint, you can understand the temptation Generative AI poses from a purely business perspective.

Understandably, there is a lot of concern across the wide-ranging creative industries about being replaced by Generative AI. If artists, composers, writers and animators can no longer make a living plying their trade, then those industries will be decimated, and we'd all be poorer for it. Without the authentic human expression we find in art, we will be left with hollow echoes of what we once had. Do we want our games made by human artists and creatives, or by committee in a boardroom?

Maybe the tide is on the turn, though. Recent articles have shown that large, market-leading video game companies have become concerned at the very real risks using Generative AI poses, both legally and reputationally.

When I think of the video games that have really connected with me on an emotional level, games like *Sable*, *Journey*, *Gris* and *Inside*, then I find it impossible to perceive that same impact could come from a game made by machines.

I want future generations to be able to experience the same magic from video games we have, and that stardust undoubtedly comes from the humans who create them.





Rahul advises on all manner of commercial and legal matters within the video games industry, working with clients ranging from independent development studios, brand licensors and industry service providers. Rahul's practice focuses on commercial contracts, intellectual property and games development funding advice. Rahul is also a passionate indie games fan and occasionally streams his latest gaming obsession on Twitch.

I want to hire somebody to do some project-based development work for me and I was told to make sure to send them a contractor agreement, not an employment contract, otherwise I might have to make all sorts of extra payments. Is this true?

In a nutshell, yes – depending on the work status of a person you've engaged, there may be additional payments you are required to make. This really relates to the worker status of an individual and more specifically, whether they are classified as an employee or a contractor.

If you engage somebody as an employee, there are certain statutory requirements that could require you to make extra payments. For example, an employee is entitled to certain benefits such as contributions to a pension, sick pay and holidays, and there may be additional costs for the employer, such as contributions to national insurance. A contractor is not entitled to these. In the video games industry, contractor agreements are very common to see, particularly for project-based work as they are often simpler, more flexible and faster to set up compared to an employment contract.

It's important to note that the question of an individual's work status is not based on what the contract says, but what happens in practice. You could have a signed document that is titled 'contractor agreement' but if the reality of the situation reflects that of an employer/employee relationship then it may be deemed as such. For example, if there is a dispute around a worker's status, a court or tribunal would look at several different factors to determine their status. They would consider things like (i) the renumeration structure, (ii) exclusivity (i.e. can the worker take on other jobs), (iii) control over when and where the work is carried out, and (iv) being able to appoint a substitute. If they determine that a worker is actually an employee in reality, the employer may be liable for payments like holiday back-pay and pension/national insurance contributions.

What is a 'right of first offer', and is that different to a 'last match right'?

A right of first offer (or ROFO) is a type of pre-emption right. In practice, if a party has a ROFO, it usually means that they have priority or exclusive first access to something. In the video games industry, these are often found in publishing agreements in relation to future or additional rights around a game. Let's say you are a developer, and you've entered into an agreement with a publisher for one game. The publisher may want a ROFO in respect of publishing future games based on *that* game. In practice, this would mean that if you want to make another game in the series, you have to approach this same publisher first and ask them whether they would like to publish it. The publisher, if interested, would have the opportunity to make you a publishing offer. There would be a set period of time where you would negotiate and see if a deal can be reached, during which time you may not be permitted to talk about the future game or have any negotiations with other publishers. If a deal can't be reached within the set time frame, then you'd be free to speak to other publishers.

A last match right (or LMR) is different in that it gives a party a chance to match an offer from elsewhere. Continuing with the above example, let's say you have released a new game with a publisher and that publisher has an LMR for publishing prequels, sequels and spin-offs. After a few months, the game is doing really well, and a different publisher approaches you and asks if you would be interested in publishing a sequel with them and sends you a publishing offer. Since the original publisher of the first game has an LMR, you would have to give the original publisher the opportunity to match the terms that have been offered. If the original publisher agrees to match the offer, then you (usually) must proceed with the original publisher. As you may have gathered, this is a much stronger right than a ROFO because an LMR, effectively lets somebody have the final say.

As a top tip, you should always read these clauses carefully and make sure you understand how they work and what you are giving the ROFO or LMR in relation to. In particular, watch out for contracts that have a clause heading that states 'right of first offer', but is in fact actually drafted as a last match right (or vice versa). It is sometimes easy to read the clause heading and glaze over what the actual wording says, which can catch people out – especially as the wording might look similar at a glance.

Rahul Gandhi

CASE FILES

#11 & #12



Robby Bisschop – Pirate PR

HOW TO GET MARKETING SUPPORT FOR YOUR GAME FROM NINTENDO, PLAYSTATION AND XBOX



Robby Bisschop is a Belgian PR and communications expert at Pirate PR, a company he founded to help indie game studios with their marketing needs. It's a shame when great games get overlooked, so he's always happy to lend a hand (or a hook!) where possible to help them navigate the unruly waters of the internet.

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o you're releasing a multi-platform game. After wrangling with Steam's medieval-looking backend, you're ready to tackle consoles. That's when you start wondering how to get Xbox, Nintendo or PlayStation to actually help promote your game. The good news is they sometimes do. The bad news is they don't make it easy to figure out how.

This article focuses on how to get marketing support from the big three. We're talking about having your trailer hosted on their YouTube channels, getting some love on their socials or landing a spot on the console dashboard or store. It's not guaranteed and it's not fast, but it can be worth the effort for the right game and the right timing.

You'll need to be set up as a developer or publisher first, but that's a different topic entirely. Once you're in their ecosystem, it's usually on you or your publisher to submit marketing materials. Most platforms don't advertise how to ask for support, and the process varies wildly depending on where you're launching.

Before you even think about asking for coverage, your trailer has to meet their standards. Each platform has specific requirements and failing to follow them can mean instant rejection. For a solid breakdown of trailer specs, look up Derek Lieu's site: gamertrailerspecs.com.

Make your trailer platform-specific. That means using the right intro and outro clips, staying within their branding rules, and designing thumbnail art that doesn't clash with where each platform overlays logos or text. Never show competing platform logos, and avoid quoting reviews from platform-specific sites. PlayStation isn't likely to promote a trailer that includes a quote from *NintendoLife*, and Nintendo won't love one referencing *PC Gamer*.

Xbox is relatively approachable, especially through the ID@Xbox program. Start by reaching out to their indie marketing team. If timing lines up, they can support your launch through pre-release social posts, YouTube Shorts and Reels. On release day, your game will likely be included automatically in the Xbox Wire roundup and featured on the New Releases section of the dashboard. No request is needed for that part. If your trailer hasn't been shown on other platforms in the past 48 hours, it might also qualify to be hosted on their YouTube channel.

Extras like dev interviews or stream features are possible if you ask far enough in advance.

If you want your trailer featured on PlayStation's YouTube or socials, you need to submit it at least 72 business hours before any embargo. For a shot at a PlayStation Blog post, plan to send materials 20 business days ahead. Their support focuses on major beats such as announcements, release dates, gameplay premieres, and content drops. To improve your odds, your game should prioritise a PS5 launch over other platforms, highlight visually striking content and interesting mechanics, use DualSense features if possible, and should be localised for key regions. Note: PS4 support is tapering off, so focus your efforts on current-gen development.

Nintendo is the most complex of the three. Trailer approval requires going through the Nintendo Developer Portal separately for each region. You'll need to submit individually for North America, Europe and Japan. Once approved, you must then email each region's marketing contact five to 10 business days ahead of your campaign. The process often includes multiple rounds of feedback and even minor issues can cause days of delay. Nintendo is extremely particular about thumbnail layouts and CTA language. If you ignore their trailer guidelines, even slightly, your submission could be rejected outright. But if you do manage to get everything approved, the payoff is strong. And your game may get featured on @IndieWorldNA and other official Nintendo regional channels.

Across all three platforms, one rule holds true: you'll need to give yourself plenty of time. Most missed opportunities come down to people submitting too late, failing to follow basic requirements, or assuming they'll be contacted automatically. You almost always have to ask.

Console marketing support can be a powerful tool, but it takes persistence, preparation and some familiarity with how each platform operates. It's never guaranteed, but if you want your trailer seen by more of the right players, it's worth doing properly.

Scan the QR code for a better breakdown, links to forms and emails to contact



piratepr.com



James Lightfoot is a lifelong creative and retro gaming obsessive. From music and acting to art and design, his career now focuses on game development and writing. He co-runs Lightfoot Bros Games with his brother David, creators of *Cars: The Remix* and *The Mystery of Woolley Mountain*, with *Sleepytime Village* and *Catcher & Rye* on the way.

I finally got myself an Xbox Series X last week – mainly so I can play my port of *Woolley Mountain* when it's complete, and mainly to play *Indiana Jones and the Great Circle* on Game Pass. Wait, what? *Blue Prince*, *Mythwrecked*, *Oblivion* and the new *Doom* are available on Game Pass, too? Downloaded. And *Robocop* in the sale? (purchase) Amazing!

And phew, what a month for point-and-click games: *Rosewater*, *Old Skies*, and, wow, *Near Mage* coming in two weeks. That's a lot of games. And it kind of leaves me with a gentle, lingering panic that these games have not been played, started, or completed.

So what's the answer? Crack on and spend all my spare time playing my wealth of games? Well, I can't, my friend. I'm also making a bloody game!

My time needs to be spent doing that, as a lot of time needs to be spent on exactly that. There's so much to do: writing, dialogue, puzzles, art, animation, playtesting, cutscenes, logic, promotion, socials, expos, and everything in between.

If I fully comprehend the extent of what needs to be done to get my game completed, I start sweating and need to lie down. So what on earth am I thinking, trying to *play* any games?

But I really like playing games – after all, it's this very hobby that lead me to the path of being a game designer in the first place. And I like being inspired by games – new games, old games, good

games, crap games. What to learn, adopt, or avoid? New UI ideas and layouts, new art styles, new particle systems. Writing. Dialogue. Mechanics. Enemies. Heroes... There's so much good stuff to digest, and the best way to digest the good stuff is to play them!

But no, I need to be making my game!

It's such a dichotomy, and it's so unfair!

If you love football and want to be a pro, surely you watch all the games and practise every day? If you're in the filmmaking world, surely you're watching the new blockbuster or indie hit? And so on. Why does it feel like that's not feasible in the gaming industry?

I think it's because it's pretty much little old me making this game. And maybe it's because when I start playing a game, I can lose chunks of time. And rack up a ton of guilt – yes! I completed the Vatican section in Indy, but oops, I could have finally sorted that bug, set out that scene, or written that puzzle in that time.

There shall be no joy, no pleasure in making my game. In fact, the only joy and pleasure shall be in the incremental steps forward – ticking off lists in Trello. Which, actually, is less joy and more relief.

In fact, as my library of games increases and my Trello list grows, I wonder: which weight is heavier? Or are they equal? On one shoulder sits the weight of the unstarted, unfinished games, and upon the other, the weight of tasks that I must complete to slowly step forward toward releasing my game. But let's be truthful here. I do love making games, and I do love playing games. And, ultimately, life's great quest/achievement is doing both.

THE DICHOTOMY OF PLAYING GAMES WHILE TRYING TO

MAKE GAMES



James Lightfoot



Quang DX

THE JOY OF RANDOM CHAOS



Quang runs micro indie game studio Asobitech, making retro games with an East meets West design philosophy. He is passionate about building community and sharing knowledge.



Early video games had simple rules and mechanics that made it possible to predict what would happen in them. This allowed you, with enough time and experience, the ability to master the game. Human brains are really good at seeking out patterns, but a downside of this is that repetition can eventually become boring and uneventful. *Dragon's Lair*, developed by Advanced Microcomputer Systems in 1983, is credited as the originator of the QTE (Quick Time Event).

While it looks stunningly beautiful with its hand-drawn animated scenes, the gameplay is not much more than memorising inputs that you perform at the correct timings. A little randomisation was added with the scenes playing in different orders, and sometimes mirrored. But this did little to keep a person engaged in the game after they had played through it all a few times.

By adding randomness to our games, we can keep things interesting for the player, requiring them to react to outcomes that they did not see happening. Increasing the quantity and diversity of scenarios in the games we create. But it is a truly fine balance. Too much randomness feels chaotic and at times unfair, whereas not enough randomness can quickly become predictable and boring. This is especially important in games where players of different skill levels will compete. Take chess, for example; a game where outcomes are determined entirely by skill rather than chance. The person with the higher skill level is always expected to win. Then you have *Mario Kart*, whose 'random' weapon system can throw players a curve ball and give the worse racer the opportunity to actually win the race. Which objectively makes the game more fun for all.

American psychologist Burrhus Frederic Skinner came up with the Operant Conditioning Chamber, aka the Skinner Box. Where he found rats and pigeons will stay engaged repeating a task for a reward much longer if an element of randomness is introduced – like when pressing a button a random number of times to release food. We

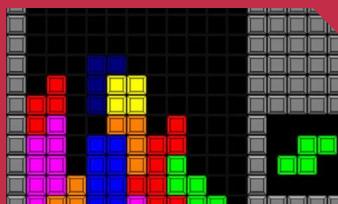
see this used dangerously in gambling and the like, to keep people addicted, and always hoping for that big random payout.

Our brains are actually really bad at perceiving true randomness. For example, have you ever had your music playlist set to random with thousands of songs to choose from. But sometimes you will get songs from the same artist played back to back, and you're left wondering if you actually turned the random function on. Or with flipping a coin where you have a 50/50 chance of it being heads or tails. True randomness means you could theoretically get 10 heads in a row. But our brains would suspect foul play if this was to happen.

Early *Tetris* games used a pseudo random number generator, which at times could give you a long sequence of pieces that had all the variations of Tetromino, apart from the coveted I piece. This phenomenon is known as a drought, which has always felt extremely unfair. So modern *Tetris* games use a technique called the 7 Bag system, where all 7 Tetromino variations are each placed in a blind bag once, and are drawn randomly until all have been removed. Then all 7 are placed back in the bag to be drawn randomly again. This means you are never more than 13 shapes away from the next I piece. Making it feel fairer and allows players to prepare for this eventuality.

The game *Peggle* has the randomness of a ball, bouncing off pegs at different angles, racking up points with each bounce. But to minimise the player feeling bad at the start of the game, there is code in place to massage the angle of travel so the ball is more likely to hit a peg, rather than fall between into the gaps. All so the player feels good about playing, and does not give up early on.

Randomness in games is important, but it must be used correctly. Lots of play testing will help.





With a career spanning journalism, publishing and development, Caspar Field has been producing games since the turn of the century and playing games since the days of *Pong*. He's been indie, he's been AAA, and he's here to share ideas and learnings from both sides of the coin.

It's over. We thought we had it in the bag: a long-term development deal for an original game on a platform that we had unusually particular expertise in. But the delay to the deal that I wrote of in *Debug #8* turned into a stop at the end of March; an incredibly disappointing end to a promising business relationship that started with a 'yes' in early September last year.

I have long said that for a video game to succeed, everything must be right; all the stars must align. The right team, with the right idea, with the right experience to make it, at the right time for the market, with the right support from the publisher, and the right level of interest from influencers, media, and not least, the players. Some of these things can be 'less right' than others but take one out of the picture and things often don't work out as hoped.

What is particularly painful for my business partner and me is that we thought the stars had aligned for us. The game, our experience, the publisher, the team, the platform, the timing... It all seemed 'right'. But in this case, the wheels of the big machine unexpectedly rotated out of sync, moving the dials and needles, leaving us in the wrong position.

Our business model was heavily geared around co-development and outsourcing, to give us maximum flexibility, and to enable us to work with interesting

specialists, to build diversity of thinking into our games. With the deal off the table, that's meant having to give our intended partners the bad news but also that we haven't had a team to let go.

I always urge any studio, large or small, to think about how they grow, and whether their work requires staff to be full-time rather than contract, outsourced, or co-development. That sounds a little hard-nosed-business-person, perhaps, but in my experience, it is much preferable to deliberately plan for flexibility and be up-front with everyone about it than having to tell a full-time team member that you're making their role redundant. When you hire someone on a permanent contract, you're setting an expectation of trust and stability in your business, and that should never be taken lightly.

What's next for me personally? Well, I'll still be here writing for *Debug* (for as long as I'm welcome!), and I'm talking to people about various opportunities. As you'll doubtless appreciate, things are still tough out there in the video game industry, but hopefully soon I will find a new home where I can engage my experience and skills.

Meanwhile, as my partner and I learned when we closed our last studio, there's the unavoidable and depressing job of stopping all the services and accounts that we opened when we thought the deal was going ahead. Beware! Everything you sign up for, everything you subscribe to, may one day need to be stopped – keep an eye on that. But there are worse problems in life. And life, as we know, goes on!

WHEN THE STARS DON'T ALIGN

Caspar Field



**Something Wicked
This Way Comes...**

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* The dog absorbed the
back cover.

