

An abstract background featuring a dark, textured surface with several bright, diagonal light rays emanating from the right side, creating a sense of depth and movement.

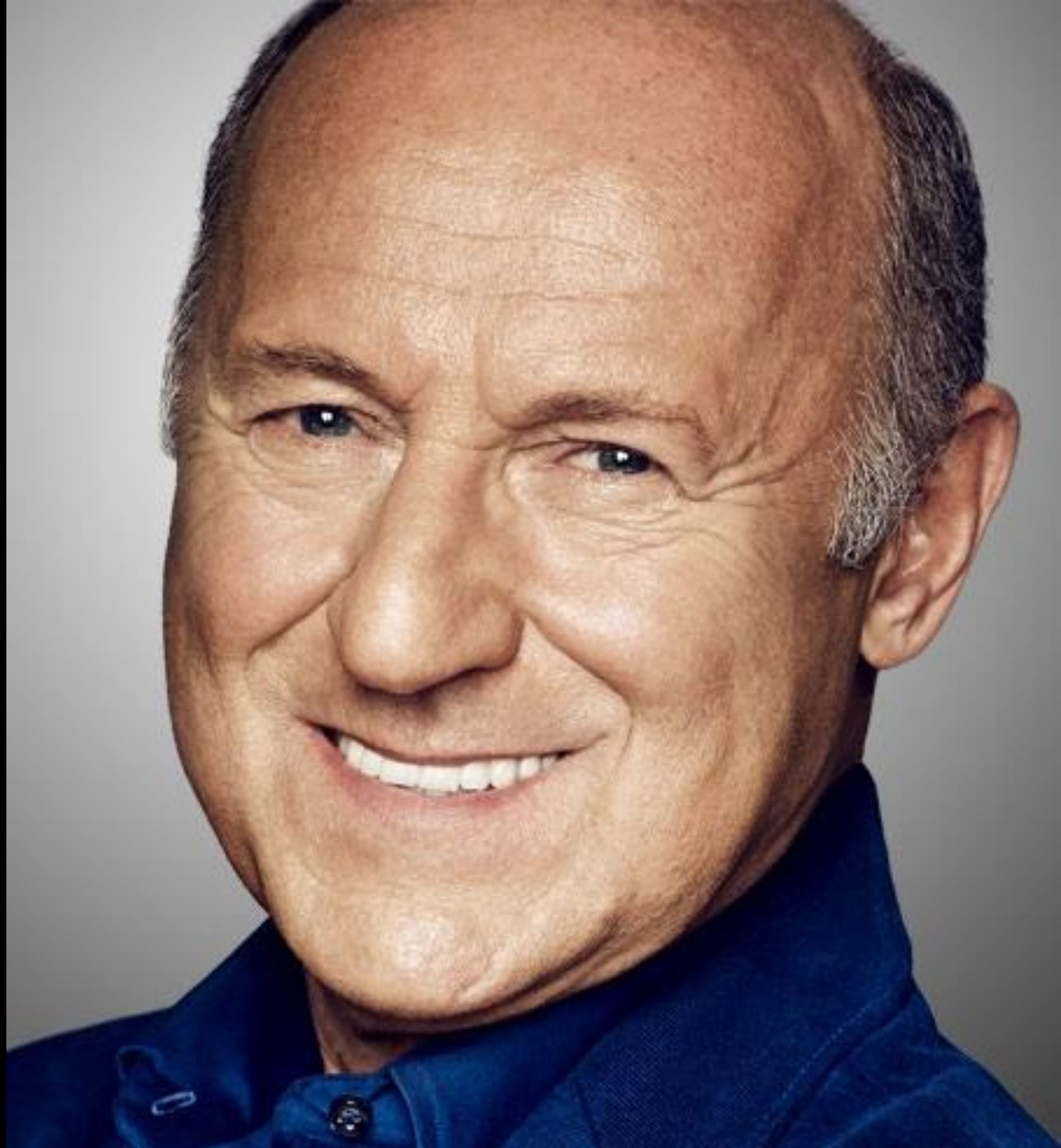
„You must gather your party
before venturing forth”

Why were computer games
from the late 1990s
so important in Poland?

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5th Offtopicarium

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Introduction

What I am doing

Why I am doing this

How I began

What it's all about

- The late 1990s in Poland saw such titles as *Fallout*, *Starcraft*, *Baldur's Gate*, *HoM&M III*...
- Why did these games rise to cult status?
- An attempt at a sociological answer
(boring keywords: sociology of culture, cultural sociology, game studies)

| Polish premiere | cRPG | Turn-based strategies | Real time strategies |
|-----------------|---|--|---|
| 1996 | | Civilization II*, Lords of the Realm II*, Master of Orion II | Command & Conquer, The Settlers II, Warcraft |
| 1997 | [Diablo], Final Fantasy VII*, The Elder Scrolls II* | Lords of Magic*, Warlords III* | Age of Empires, Dungeon Keeper, Total Annihilation* |
| 1998 | Fallout | | Knights and Merchants: The Shattered Kingdom, Starcraft, The Settlers |
| 1999 | Baldur's Gate, Fallout 2, [System Shock 2] | Heroes of Might & Magic II, Heroes of Might & Magic III, Jagged Alliance 2 | Age of Empires II, Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun, Dungeon Keeper 2, Might & Magic VII, The Settlers III |
| 2000 | Baldur's Gate II, [Deus Ex], [Diablo II], Icewind Dale, Planescape: Torment | Age of Wonders | Homeworld, Majesty, The Settlers IV |
| 2001 | Arcanum | Civilization III | Might & Magic VI, Might & Magic VIII, Original War |
| 2002 | Gothic, Gothic II, Icewind Dale II, Neverwinter Nights, The Elder Scrolls III | | Age of Mythology, Might & Magic IX |
| 2003 | Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic | Warlords IV | Homeworld 2 |

Why, dude?

(Apart from money and glory.)

- I played many of those games (of course) and I'm sentimental towards them
- A lot of the people I know are interested in this
- I like sociological research and I'm trying to bring more sociology into game studies

Short talks can have long histories

- My academic paper about this is in review
- Work inspired by:
 - Earlier Offtopicaria (indirectly)
 - In-depth discussions in focus groups
 - <https://www.facebook.com/staszek.krawczyk/posts/10150951052327325>
 - <https://www.facebook.com/staszek.krawczyk/posts/10151775967867325>

The plan

- Who were the players?
- How do I know that old games kept being important?
- What factors made the cult status of old games possible?

Who were the players?

Gender

Age

Social standing



Gender of players

- **Mostly males**
(as in “gaming culture” in general)
 - Fewer household chores
 - More uninterrupted free time
 - More time spent on longer games
- **Caveats**
 - Some women played, too, but they’re invisible
 - Apart from “men’s games”,
there were also “women’s games”

Filiciak, M., Nowotny, A., Halawa, M. (2008). „Czasami nawet im zazdrościć”. O przyjemnościach zabawy z Simsami. *Kultura Popularna*, 7(2), s. 5–20.

Tuła, Magdalena (2013). Dlaczego mężczyźni grają w “FIFA”, a kobiety w “The Sims”? Przemoc symboliczna w grach komputerowych. *Homo Ludens*, 5(1), s. 279–288.

Age

Born in the 1970s and 1980s

1. Played as high school or university students
2. Talking about games and playing together: related to identity formation

Born in the early 1990s

1. Fast Internet → alternative for hot seat and LAN gaming
→ fewer direct contacts while playing
2. But: festivals (Poznań Game Arena) and cafès

Born in the late 1990s

1. No real marketing and distribution for older games
2. The visual gap & the interface gap

Social standing

- What made it more likely for people to play *Baldur's Gate* and such in the late 1990s?
 - Parents who could afford a good computer
 - Enough money to buy the game
 - Contacts and readiness to get a pirate copy
 - Friends with relevant interests
 - Etc.
- Not everybody met these conditions

How do I know
these games
kept being
important?

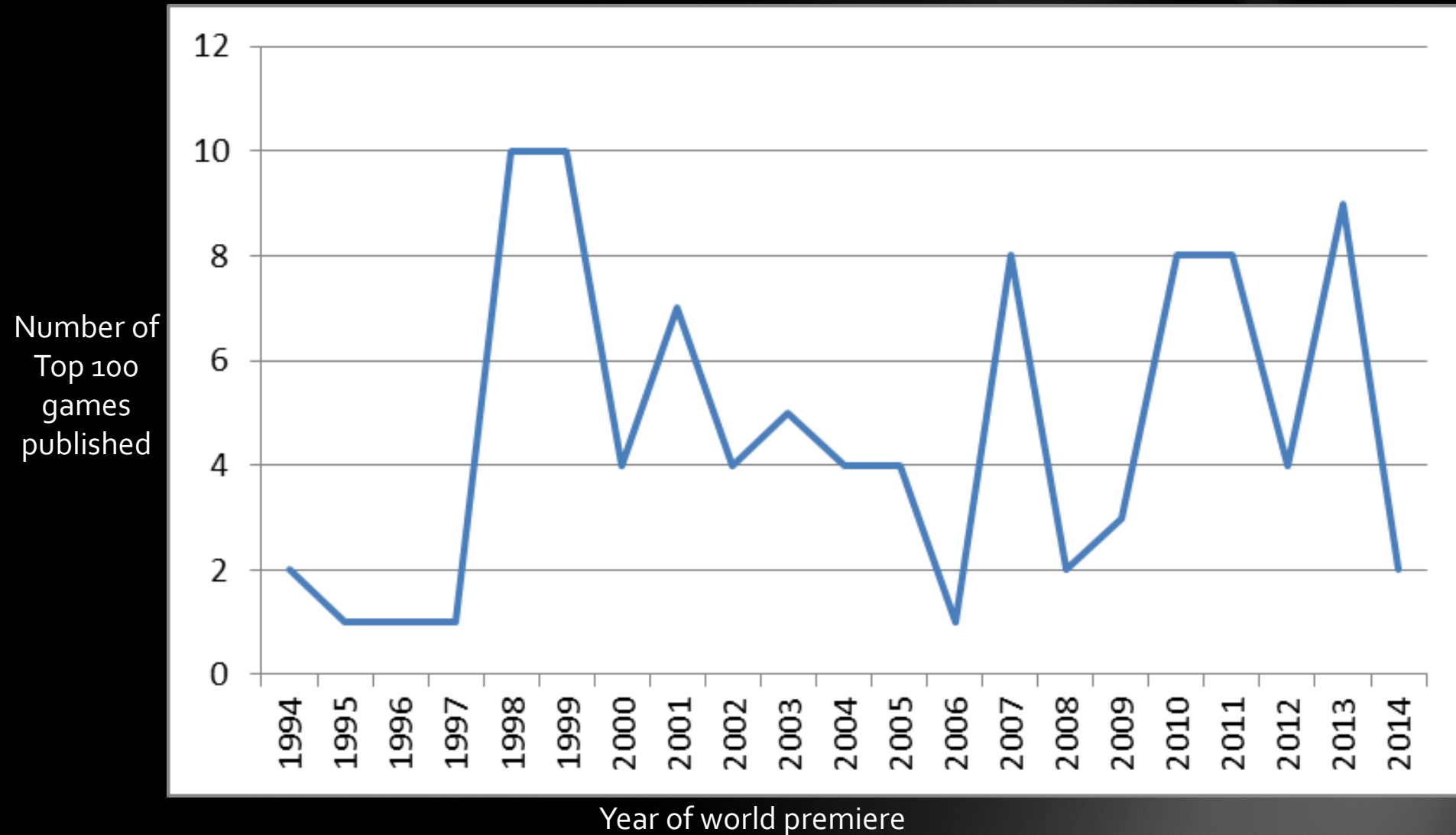


limited charge items. They will make a huge difference.

Zuckerberg for the rescue

- The things my Facebook friends said:
 - „I still talk about these games, and I'm happy to come back to some of them from time to time“
 - „I still play *Starcraft* with my friends via LAN“
 - „For me ... Baldurs Gate I and II are still the best RPGs, all those Mass Effects, Skyrimms ... from the XXI century easily lose to the old Baldurs“

Filmweb rating (since 2011)



The data for the graph come from the Top 100 rating of a popular portal Filmweb.
Of the games published in 1998-1999, 55% are cRPG or strategies (for the 1996-2003 period: 59%).

What factors made the cult status of old games possible?

Technological developments

Place in genre history

Growth of Polish game publishing

Gaming periodicals



●You see: Temple.
●You see nothing out of
the ordinary.
●You see nothing out of
the ordinary.
●You see: Temple.



INV



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Skilldex

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Technological developments

- **Mid-1990s:** companies start using CD-ROMs to make bigger games (e.g., Bioware's *Baldur's Gate*)
- **Late 1990s:** better visuals
- **Recently:** crowdfunding services (some interest in Poland)

**Some possible reasons why “the cult window” closed
(at least for cRPGs and strategy games)**

- **2001:** Telekomunikacja Polska introduces the Neostrada service, which gradually replaces modems and weakens the position of *hot seat* (→ fewer HoM&M III gaming parties)
- **Early 2000s:** ambiguous position of early “3D” games

Place in genre history

- The 1990s established a new canon
- cRPGs
 - 1995: Strategic Simulations stops publishing the Gold Box titles (based on the AD&D RPG game)
 - Bioware sets the new standard with *Baldur's Gate*
- Real-time strategies
 - 1992: Westwood Studios publishes *Dune 2*
 - 1994: Blizzard publishes *Warcraft*
 - 1995: Westwood St. publishes *Command & Conquer*
- Perhaps those first innovative titles have closed the door for any subsequent innovations in the relevant genres

(Some) Polish game publishers

| Company | Year of founding | First game published in... |
|---------------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| Mirage Media | 1988 | ? |
| Laboratorium Komputerowe Avalon | 1989 | ? |
| MarkSoft | 1990 | 1995 |
| IPS Computer Group Sp. z o.o. | 1991 | ? |
| APN Promise | 1991 | 1997 |
| Wydawnictwo Bauer | 1991 | 1998 |
| Techland | 1991 | 1995 |
| CD Projekt | 1994 | 1994 |
| Play-publishing | 1994 | 2001 |
| TopWare Poland | 1995 | 1996 |
| Licomp Empik Multimedia | 1997 | 1997 |
| Lemon Interactive | ? | 1998 |
| Play-It | 1999 | 1999 |
| Axel Springer Polska | ? | 2000 |
| Dobra Gra | ? | 2001 |
| Lukas Toys | ? | 2001 |
| City Interactive | 2002 | 2002 |

Gaming periodicals

- Some circulations exceeded 100,000 copies
- Medium of communication among players
- Game instructions & maps (especially until the late 1990s), solutions, jokes, reviews, floppy discs /CDs

| Periodical | Published in... |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Top Secret | 1992–1996 and 2002–2003 |
| Świat Gier Komputerowych | 1992–2003 |
| Gambler | 1993–1999 |
| Secret Service | 1993–2001 (+ recent crowdfunding) |
| CD-Action | 1995–today |
| Reset | 1997–2001 |



Final word

Everything is related

- The aforementioned factors help explain why some old titles became classics for a certain culturally significant group of Polish players
- While I treated most factors in isolation, there are a lot of interrelations here, for instance:
 - CD-ROMs → long games → male preference
 - Growth of publishers → first Polish translations → increased accessibility & alluring novelty

References

- On “women’s games”

Filiciak, M., Nowotny, A., Halawa, M. (2008). „Czasami nawet im zazdroszczę”. O przyjemnościach zabawy z Simsami. *Kultura Popularna*, 7(2), s. 5–20.

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- Methodological stuff

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Images

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- http://www.gameandplayer.net/images/inset/inset1_09_0922_fallout2.jpg
- <http://zdjecia.pl.sftcdn.net/pl/scrn/42000/42566/age-of-empires-ii-16.jpg>

Thanks for your attention!

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