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CSCI 1500-01

16/11/14

From art to artificial income: The decline of the Video Game industry

With the start of Alan Turing’s computerized chess game to Blizzards global hit World of Warcraft, video games have always been instruments of creativity and fun. However the days of developers working to bring their dream to your home entertainment system are coming to an end. Much like the music industry the internet has torn video game creation asunder like a double edge sword.

The internet was a wonderful invention tying society together and spreading ideas across the globe. I remember watching my older brother sit at the computer watching lines of text scroll up on a black screen while he drew a map. As I looked at the text closer I began to see an entire world at work. Voices talking to each other, descriptive imagery of the land around his character, and a list of commands for him to tell the world what actions he would take. It was like book had sprung to life and started breathing in the room with us. I never learned the name of that peculiar text based RPG but I will always remember that as the moment I realized virtual reality is still a creation of reality and video games are as much art as the Mona Lisa.

It was so great to see people around the world gather to create new worlds for the imagination to explore online, but the cost is starting to become too high. In part I strictly mean the financial cost. Modern day games when released cost $40-$60 which is quite a chunk of change to the thirteen year old without a job. Then 3 months later when they are just about to beat the game the company releases a DLC (downloadable content), not a full blown expansion mind you, for another $10-$20. Instead of adding new features, hours of playtime, and expanding on content, most of these DLC’s add one new quest line to be beat in an hour or two at the most. So why do these companies get away with charging through the rough for less content? Simple supply and demand. With the internet providing games for immediate download upon release you no longer have to go wait outside a store to make sure you get a copy before the limited numbers sell out. Now we have software that takes your credit card number and can automatically generate as many copies of a game as you want. This was part of the brilliance of Steam when it originated but now it has gotten out of hand.

In recent years Steam has tried to give small time indie developers a chance to get their games on the market. Users would vote on game ideas and once greenlit the idea would go into alpha. Steam furthered this idea by allowing developers to put alpha games up for sale before they were finished to help fund the projects. This was great for a while, we saw flurries of artful stories and creative game dynamics pop up everywhere. But now the system has been exploited. Early access games get sold with a promise that the game will be finished. Only not every game gets finished. Spacebase-DF9, created by Double Fine, was one of my personal favorite early access games. Only halfway through development Double Fine pulled funding for the project and called the game good to go. I had originally paid 25 dollars for the game and upon release they had lowered the price to 15. I was outraged, not just at the unfair theft of my money but also at the fact another piece of art was tossed out due to the internet. Why should these companies finish games when they can turn a better profit like Double Fine did?

It is for these reasons I’m sad to say the video game industry is no longer one of art and creativity, but that of profit turning corporations exploiting the dreams of others.