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I remember back when I’d get a SNES game and there’d be these games in the shop, and some of them were just garbage. You needed to be careful with your pick. In the NES era, even a lot of them were. From the N64 throughout Xbox 360/PS3 I remember times where I had finished more or less all the greatest games I wanted to play and was sometimes waiting for the next truly great game to come out. Nowadays there are just so much great games coming out it’s impossible to keep up. At the same times, the amount of money into developing games is huge and worthy games are deemed “flops” after release, with sales figures which are actually pretty big. Is the market just too crowded?

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When I started to write this article, I was feeling some positive game stress because I need to juggle around finishing Red Dead Redemption 2, Death Stranding and the Star Wars Fallen Order before Final Fantasy VII Remake & Cyberpunk 2077. Preferably even one of my more esteemed backlog games as well. Like Nier or the Witcher 3. I knew I would get lost and sucked in for 100+ hours after starting the Witcher so I have postponed it. But then I just realized that Dragon Ball Z Kakarot is coming out as well in about a week. Oh, the agony!

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Seriously though, it does feel bad to have an ever increasing backlog with real good games on there, and never being able to finish most of them before the next great game comes along. The industry has reached a point of maturity and professionalism which is impressive. The quality standard is just so high. I am nearing completion of Red Dead Redemption 2 and just for background sake I searched some gameplay videos of Red Dead revolver, and it is such a huge different in terms of what the medium can accomplish. And it’s not just the technology and the graphics, but also just having reached a higher level of mastering the artform of game creation, and of capital and effort pumped into it. It is glorious and Red Dead Redemption truly reached a new level of gaming greatness.

2

Yet it can also a bad thing at the same time and there might be trouble. Of course in part it’s personal, as for example I make myself finish every game I play while normally I guess it would be okay to abandon one if something else comes along that grasps your interest more. I guess you could also look at it something like “well you just have a certain amount of time o play anyway, so you just play what you feel like playing the most in that time and if you have more choice than that’s just nice”. In a way there’s nothing wrong with a lot of great games being there. Retirement is going to be awesome! But a lot of great expensively produced games also need a lot of consumer money spent buying them.

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The biggest of my concern is one of whether the market can sustain this level of quality and investment over time. What I mean is the following. Of course it is only good that there are so many great games being produced, and it is an extreme luxury position that there are too many good games out there to buy (let alone play) them all. But what worries me is that there’s also games that don’t sell so well, while they in every way would normally deserve to do so. I am a 30-something with a decent job etc. who loves videogames, so if I can’t contribute my share to infusing the videogame market with happy costumer cash, who can? Common sense would say that people with jobs (let alone wives & kids) don’t have that much time to play games, while people without jobs don’t have so much money. Is there a gap? This might be exactly why so many producers are desperate to tap into new markets, and making desperate efforts to appeal more to the less traditional gaming audience like “girl gamers” or LGBT community. I am somewhat skeptical of the long-term value of this strategy.

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What might need to happen instead( as unpopular as it might sound to some) is a shift to slightly more expensive and shorter games. Hear me out as it might be a good idea. This would of course be very different back in the years where as a child I’d get 3 games a year: one for my birthday, one in the holidays and my allowance could buy me about one a year as well. But honestly, the limit on my videogame spending is not money itself but the amount of time I have to play and finish games. I’d easily spend 3-4 times as much on games if I knew I could finish at least 3 out of 4 that I’d buy. And I know that most people around their 30’s who play games feel the same.

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I think God of War is a good example in that it makes a qualitatively amazing and enjoyable game, but unless you are an extreme completionist you’ll finish it in around 30 hours. But me and many others gladly paid it’s price for the experience it offered. As long as the content is really good and the experience of the game is awesome it’s not a good thing per se that it’s long. Besides, for a lot of people who have been playing games for decades there’s some side-quest and collectibles fatigue kicking in. The sooner you can move on, the more games you can play and the more money will be flooding into the business. And this needs to happen, at least this way it is for qualitatively high content and not through loot boxes or paid cosmetics. Another thing I’d like to see experimentation with is a facilitated way to “tip” games, like for example being able to quickly donate some money extra through PSN. (which of course would need to fly right past the publishers to the devs themselves).

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Very simplistically speaking, there’s a trend of ever increasing budget and effort into developing games with an overall increase in production value and quality as well on the one side, and a slower increasing pool of consumer money that’s spent. Most growth is in mobile games but my guess is that it’s a LOT of small transactions spread out over a LOT of games so it’s harder for a single company to make serious profits on a high-end product from that. Should we be worried for an incoming crash in the videogame industry? And if so, what needs to be done to make sure the development keeps going strong?

Should we spend more on games by choice, just how for example people choose to spend more on biological food to support their idea of sustainable food? Maybe. For example, imagine paying slightly more (as in standard price geos up), for more fleshed out yet at the same time on average shorter games. It’s in essence happening anyway, almost every game has some form of DLC (cosmetic or not) now so you’d basically be canceling that out. It’s rather pay say, max. 5-10% more on a game that is complete than the paid DLC every 3 months & pass model becoming the norm. And in all honesty, considering how much the quality of both in- & output of the industry has grown (and also how much basically everything in life is getting more expensive all the tie anyway) it might even be all right to do so.