

Stardew Valley and Eric Barone

This week, I wanted to write about my favorite game developer, Eric Barone, who single handedly created the game Stardew Valley. Relating back to our in-class discussion about our own history of video games, Stardew is the main reason I still play video games and has gotten me very interested in both indie game development and the business of video games.

If you haven't played it, Stardew Valley is a simulation farming game with 16-bit pixelated graphics. Although the premise of the game is simple, you take over your grandfather's old farm in a small, isolated town, there are literally hundreds of hours of potential game play. If you have played the game however, you know how addicting the game becomes. Each in-game season becomes a little time warp where you can always justify playing "just one more day..." Similar to saying "just one more chip" we all know that isn't the case.

Other than immensely enjoying the game, Eric Barone's journey to creating the game is what fascinates me the most and has influenced me to pursue game development. Over the course of 4 years while working as an usher at a Seattle theatre, Eric developed the game by himself. Not only did he create the backend of the game, but he also made all the art, the music, the storyline, the characters, and every other little detail. He oftentimes worked 10+ hours a day, for 4 straight years, reaping no benefits or affirmation that the game was even good.

I believe the success of the game can partially be attributed to the fact that he developed it by himself. In the indie game market, intimacy is key. People who look for indie games prioritize uniqueness and want to feel as though the game was developed *for the*. With Stardew, that could not have been more apparent. The weeks following the game being launched on Steam, Barone spent nearly every waking moment responding to people on forums like Reddit, patching bugs, and fixing individual save files for people whose games became corrupted.

Since then, Stardew has become one of the most highly rated indie games of all time and it continually releases free updates to add more features and more playtime. The commitment to his users, and the engagement he has with the community has played a massive role in the success of the game and I hope to see more games from him soon.

As a computer science major with an interest in game development, I owe a lot of that to people like Eric Barone, and I know many people feel similarly. I look forward to learning more about the business of video games and maybe getting the chance to analyze indie games and how their model might differ from a massive company like Ubisoft or Activision.