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Undertale

This week, continuing on the trend of video games developed by a single person, we are going to look at “Undertale” a 2D-roleplaying game developed solely by Toby Fox in 2015. If you haven’t played the game, the gameplay is centered around you, a child who has fallen into the Underground who is looking to make it back to the surface. Through your travels you meet monsters, some friendly, some who you must fight in a “bullet curtain” or “bullet-hell” style. The game contains small puzzles for the user to complete, mazes, and many battles to partake in. If you’re a fan of the role-playing game Dungeon and Dragons and want to get into a new video game, this might be the one for you. As you move through the Underground you encounter many scenarios where you get to decide what happens and what direction you go in. One interesting aspect of the game is that the player never speaks, and most of the game’s narration is in second person. This allows for the player to identify with the character more and act as if it is themselves in the Underworld, not a pre-set/predetermined character.

Toby Fox developed this game in 32 months after it was funded on Kickstarter. Although the original goal was \$5,000, the Kickstarter raised over \$50,000. Toby started development with the battle system, inspired by the Mario and Luigi series, and created the game using GameMaker: Studio. Like many of the developers we have looked at over the weeks, Toby made every part of the game (with artist Temmie Chang providing character sprites and concept art). Toby worked as the programmer, storywriter, and composer. He was inspired by many games during the creation of Undertale, a few of which being Brandish, Shin Megami Tensei, and Moon: Remix RPG Adventure.

When questioned about the simplistic art style of the game Toby said he found that "there's a psychological thread that says audiences become more attached to characters drawn simply rather than in detail." Because of this Toby and Temmie kept the art style as simple, even to the point of the battle simulation being in black and white.

Toby also introduces humor into the game, an example being Toriel, the tutorial character. Toriel is a wildly overly protective and overbearing mother-like character who quite literally holds your hand through part of the game. This was inspired by the partner character Fi in Skyward Sword who would give the main character answers to the puzzles. Toby said in an interview – “I figured that if someone was THAT concerned about you then they wouldn’t tell you the answers, they would just do the puzzles and fight all the monsters FOR you. This is why she literally holds your hand through a segment of the game.”

If you’re looking for a game with interesting battle mechanics, a deep, grim, and engaging storyline, and a diverse set of player interactions, I would highly recommend you go check out Undertale. You can expect about 6 hours of gameplay for a basic playthrough, but somewhere closer to 20 hours if you want to complete all the available side quests and puzzles.