

Jan 16 2025

🥁🥁 Jonathan “the indie game industry is awful” Blow:



<https://youtu.be/XhfZ1QE1-2s?si=LumAYLykFQVB2MLm>



#024
How To Make Indie Games In 2025 w/ Jonathan Blow — Full Time Gam...
Thomas Brush - 161K views · 1 month ago

0. Big list of games

1. The game (game #1, game #2)
2. The game type
 - a. Strategy/simulation
 - i. “RTS”
 - ii. “Colony” / “Colony Sim”
 - iii. “City Building”
3. Why
 - a. Social commentary
 - b. Simulation
 - c. Simulation > social commentary
 - i. *These games do well on Twitch!
4. Market
 - a. Yuuuuuuuge
 - i. {Video games}
 - ii. {PC/Mac/Linux videogames}
 1. - PC
 2. - Mac
 3. - Linux
5. 4.1 Major studios
 - a. Paradox Interactive
 - b. [Studio that makes] Animal Crossing, @ Nintendo
 - c. Wube Software
 - d. Jonathan Braid, the studio-onto-himself
 - e. Matthias Linda, the Chained Echoes guy
6. Games we’re not like
 - a. Disco Elysium
 - b. “Gacha” games (WuWa, Genshin, etc.)
 - c. AAA-games (any, but – e.g., Breath of the Wild; compare)
 - i. We’re a Single-A studio
 - ii. \$100 million dollars is too much

Big list of games:

~~ *Games that teach you something about the world* ~~

Historical simulator games (sometimes called “4X”):

- The *Civilization* series (IV, V, and VI)
- **Any Paradox Studio game**
 - Crusader Kings 3
 - Europa Universalis IV
 - Hearts of Iron IV
- The *Total War* franchise
- Anno 1800

Futuristic simulator games:

- (Paradox) Stellaris
- Offworld Trading Company

City/Colony-builder games:

- Rimworld
- Against the Storm
- Timberborn
- Cities:Skylines
- Dwarf Fortress, *is the classic*

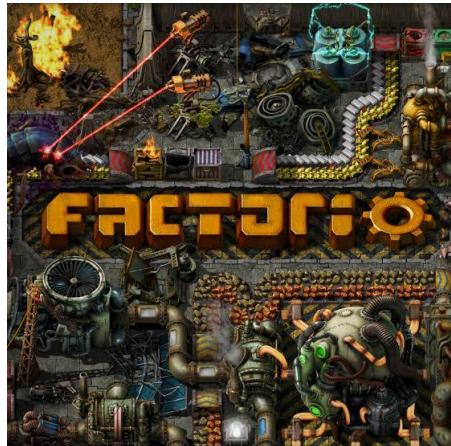
Builder-style games:

- Factorio
- Satisfactory
- Dyson Sphere Program

Outdoor-style games:

- Rust
- Outworld
- Arc
- Kenshi
- No Man's Sky

1. The game



plus



That's it..

(game 2: <https://bsky.app/profile/personofpersonhood.bsky.social/post/3lfsi5iaqu227>)

2. The game type

The central thing we care about with videogames is that they are a *way to see*. Video Games can teach you something about the world.

When I was in middle school, in the year **1999**, I played a game called **Age of Empires 2**.

It let me **reenact famous scenes** across human history, controlling an army, a town center, a number of defenseless villagers, and progressing throughout stages in technology the way prehistoric man did.



2. The game type (con't)

I like games that teach you something about the world.

Simulation games

- **Factorio**, by the Czech studio **Wube Software**, is the #1 game studio in the world.



- Actually, read the whole thread.
- https://x.com/search?q=from%3Apatick11%20factorio&src=typed_query&f=top

Factorio total revenue last 10 years



As of January 2023, Factorio, developed by Wube Software, has generated approximately \$105 million in total revenue. FACTORIO FORUMS This estimate is based on the sale of around 2.5 million copies over nine years, each priced at \$30, resulting in \$75 million before deductions. REDDIT After accounting for platform fees, taxes, and other expenses, the net revenue is estimated to be around \$56 million. These figures are approximations, as Wube Software has not publicly disclosed detailed financial data.

Sources



- Minecraft/**notch** is probably a close second. We're jealous of him.

Social simulation games

- **Animal Crossing** total revenue: \$3.6 billion
- **Stardew Valley** total revenue: \$615 million
- **Minecraft** total revenue: \$220 million last year
 - (\$3 billion total - yuck)

2. The game type (con't)

Social simulation is superior to social commentary in every measure.

People play games that they watch on Twitch.

Streamers play games that get a lot of viewers

(Streamers stream games that are fun to stream}

Social commentary games are fun to stream

(Social commentary games are, usually, not that fun)

Strategy games are fun to play

(People like playing strategy games)

Simulation is the cousin of strategy

A game that teaches you something about the world

History is fun,

but the present is more fun

(and the future — very fun)

Fantasy is also fun.

Example prima:

- Roblox
- Runescape
- Minecraft
- Fortnite
- CS/1.6/Source/Go

All of these games:

- Are about the real world
- Huge, massively online “marketplace” experiences

We want smaller games than that.

- **Single player -> broadcast audience** (Twitch, Kick, YTG) -> a market.

Attractive women are engaging

- Avoid it
-

What we're shooting for here is an **indie game development shop**,
that **makes single-player** games, broadcasting to their **livestreaming** audience,
that **teach** viewers and players *something real about the world*,
from the comfort of a hikkikomori shell basement in a decaying and de-industrialized world.

2. Game type (cont'd)

Prime inspiration: **Wube Software**.

- *Founded* in 2013
- *Released* Factorio (flagship title) in 2015
- *Took off* in 2015, upon release

Small, 10-12 people, development-led team.

Secondary inspiration: **Lo-Fi games**

- Started in **2006 (!!!)**, alpha in 2011, released in **2018**
- They make a game called *Kenshi*

Tertiary inspiration: **Jon Blow**

4th: Stardew Valley

- Single developer: “ConcernedApe” (name:)
- Started in 2012, released in 2016

5th: Chained Echoes (JRPG - *Best JRPG of all time*)

- Solo developer: Mattias Linda
- Started in 2016, kickstarter in 2019, released in 2022

6th: Notch?

- I don't really like Notch. For personal reasons. But he did the thing.
 - “Minecraft” or whatever

—

{ *A game that teaches you something about the world* }

- Mission statement

There's tons of examples of this, spanning genres:

- **Shooter/FPS** type games teach you about guns, vantage points, tactics, team coordination, and often (cf., Modern Warfare 2) about contemporary, or more typically historical (older CoD franchises, Wolfenstein) historical experiences.
- **Historical RTS/Strategy** games obviously teach you about their historical context.
- **Action/Racing** games teach you about cars, and racing.
- **Action/Sports** games teach you about sports, players, teams, and design.

The list goes on.

- **Engineering/automation** games are where our sweet spot is, though.
- Which is Factorio, Satisfactory, Rust, and so on
 - {list like 30 games here}

- **Social/simulation** games are of particular interest to us, as well.
 - Animal Crossing, Stardew Valley, Pikmin, etc.
 - **Dwarf Fortress** is a really key example.

4. Actual research / industry analysis:

The robot literally does it all: <https://chatgpt.com/share/679a5829-b344-800e-88fc-44d90fcfe19b>

What are the top 10 highest grossing video games of all time that were developed by a solo developer, a small team, or a ramen-subsistence / poor / bootstrapped / kickstarter'd dev studio



Here are the **top 10 highest-grossing video games** developed by **solo developers, small teams, or bootstrapped studios** (including crowdfunded projects). These are ranked primarily by total revenue, factoring in copies sold, microtransactions, and long-term success.

1. Minecraft (2009)

- **Developer:** Markus "Notch" Persson (Mojang, initially solo)
- **Revenue:** \$3+ billion (as of 2023)
- **Copies Sold:** 300+ million
- **Development:** Started as a solo project; later expanded. Sold to Microsoft for \$2.5B in 2014.

2. PUBG: Battlegrounds (2017)

- **Developer:** Brendan "PlayerUnknown" Greene (PUBG Corporation / Bluehole)
- **Revenue:** \$13+ billion (as of 2023)
- **Copies Sold:** Over 75 million (PC/console) + mobile version is one of the highest-grossing mobile games ever
- **Development:** Greene worked on mods (Battle Royale for Arma) before making PUBG. Initially a small, scrappy team before success.

3. Terraria (2011)

- **Developer:** Re-Logic (Andrew Spinks + small team)
- **Revenue:** \$700+ million
- **Copies Sold:** 44+ million
- **Development:** Created on a shoestring budget by a tiny team; has remained successful over a decade.

4. Stardew Valley (2016)

- **Developer:** Eric "ConcernedApe" Barone (Solo)
- **Revenue:** \$500+ million
- **Copies Sold:** 30+ million
- **Development:** Solo-developed over 4+ years while living frugally; now one of the most successful indie games ever.



4. Actual research / industry analysis:

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5. Undertale (2015)

- **Developer:** Toby Fox (Solo)
- **Revenue:** \$100+ million
- **Copies Sold:** ~5+ million (excluding digital sales data)
- **Development:** Created mostly by Fox, with some help on art/music; started as a crowdfunded Kickstarter project.

6. Hollow Knight (2017)

- **Developer:** Team Cherry (3-person Australian team)
- **Revenue:** \$100+ million
- **Copies Sold:** 5+ million
- **Development:** Kickstarted for ~\$57,000, built by a tiny team, and became a global success.

7. Rust (2013)

- **Developer:** Facepunch Studios (Garry Newman & small team)
- **Revenue:** \$1+ billion
- **Copies Sold:** 12+ million
- **Development:** Created as an experimental survival game by the guy behind Garry's Mod; took off massively.

8. Valheim (2021)

- **Developer:** Iron Gate Studio (5-person Swedish team)
- **Revenue:** \$500+ million
- **Copies Sold:** 12+ million
- **Development:** Small team, self-funded, and blew up into a phenomenon on Steam Early Access.

4. Actual research / industry analysis:

The robot literally does it all: <https://chatgpt.com/share/679a5829-b344-800e-88fc-44d90fcfe19b>

9. The Binding of Isaac (2011)

- **Developer:** Edmund McMillen (with Florian Himsl)
- **Revenue:** \$50+ million
- **Copies Sold:** Several million across multiple versions
- **Development:** A low-budget project inspired by Zelda; went on to spawn multiple expansions and remakes.

10. Five Nights at Freddy's (2014)

- **Developer:** Scott Cawthon (Solo)
 - **Revenue:** \$100+ million (across games + merch)
 - **Copies Sold:** Multiple millions (exact numbers unclear)
 - **Development:** Made by one guy with almost no budget; exploded into a massive franchise.
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Honorable Mentions:

- **Kenshi** (2018) – Developed over 12 years by one guy (Chris Hunt). Sold 2+ million copies.
 - **Slay the Spire** (2019) – MegaCrit (2-person dev team); 1.5+ million copies sold.
 - **Factorio** (2016) – Self-funded by Czech developers; sold 3.5+ million copies at full price (\$30).
 - **RimWorld** (2018) – Solo developer (Tynan Sylvester); over 2 million copies sold.
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Takeaways:

1. **Minecraft, PUBG, and Terraria** are the most financially successful in this category.
2. **Solo devs (Stardew Valley, Undertale, FNAF, Kenshi, RimWorld, Factorio)** have made millions.
3. **Kickstarter games (Hollow Knight, Undertale, Kenshi)** have done extremely well.
4. **Survival, crafting, and roguelike/lite games** dominate indie success stories.

Would you put anything else on this list?