

= Ico =

Ico (?? , Iko , / ?i?ko? /) is a puzzle @-@ platformer and action @-@ adventure video game developed by Team Ico and published by Sony Computer Entertainment , released for the PlayStation 2 video game console in 2001 and 2002 in various regions . It was designed and directed by Fumito Ueda , who wanted to create a minimalist game around a " boy meets girl " concept . Originally planned for the PlayStation , Ico took approximately four years to develop . The team employed a " subtracting design " approach to reduce elements of gameplay that interfered with the game 's setting and story in order to create a high level of immersion .

The protagonist is a young boy named Ico who was born with horns , which his village considers a bad omen . Warriors lock him away in an abandoned fortress . During his explorations of the fortress , Ico encounters Yorda , the daughter of the castle 's Queen . The Queen plans to use Yorda 's body to extend her own lifespan . Learning this , Ico seeks to escape the castle with Yorda , keeping her safe from the shadow @-@ like creatures that attempt to draw her back . Throughout the game , the player controls Ico as he explores the castle , solves puzzles and assists Yorda across obstacles .

Ico introduced several design and technical elements , including a story told with minimal dialogue , bloom lighting , and key frame animation , that have influenced subsequent games . Although not a commercial success , it was critically acclaimed for its art and story elements and received several awards , including " Game of the Year " nominations and three Game Developers Choice Awards . Ico is listed on several overall top game lists , and is often considered a work of art . It was re @-@ released in Europe in 2006 , in conjunction with the release of Shadow of the Colossus , the spiritual successor to Ico .

= = Gameplay = =

Ico is primarily a three @-@ dimensional platform game . The player controls Ico from a third @-@ person perspective as he explores the castle and attempts to escape it with Yorda . The camera is fixed in each room or area but swivels to follow Ico or Yorda as they move ; the player can also pan the view a small degree in other directions to observe more of the surroundings . The game includes many elements of platform games ; for example , the player must have Ico jump , climb , push and pull objects , and perform other tasks such as solving puzzles in order to progress within the castle . These actions are complicated by the fact that only Ico can carry out these actions ; Yorda can only jump short distances and cannot climb over tall barriers . The player must use Ico so that he helps Yorda cross obstacles , such as by lifting her to a higher ledge , or by arranging the environment to allow Yorda to cross a larger gap herself . The player can tell Yorda to follow Ico , or to wait at a spot . The player can also have Ico take Yorda 's hand and pull her along at a faster pace across the environment . Players are unable to progress in the game until they move Yorda to certain doors that only she can open .

Escaping the castle is made difficult by shadow creatures sent by the Queen . These creatures attempt to drag Yorda into black vortexes if Ico leaves her for any length of time , or if she is in certain areas of the castle . Ico can dispel these shadows using a stick or sword and pull Yorda free if she is drawn into a vortex . While the shadow creatures cannot harm Ico , the game is over if Yorda becomes fully engulfed in a vortex ; the player restarts from a save point . The player will also restart from a save point if Ico falls from a large height . Save points in the game are represented by stone benches that Ico and Yorda rest on as the player saves the game . In European and Japanese releases of the game , upon completion of the game , the player has the opportunity to restart the game in a local co @-@ operative two @-@ player mode , where the second player plays as Yorda , still under the same limitations as the computer @-@ controlled version of the character .

= = Plot = =

Ico (?? , pronounced " Ee @-@ ko ") , a horned boy , is taken by a group of warriors to an

abandoned castle and locked inside a stone coffin to be sacrificed . A tremor topples the coffin and Ico escapes . As he searches the castle , he comes across Yorda (??? , Yoruda) , a captive girl who speaks a different language . Ico helps Yorda escape and defends her from shadow @-@ like creatures . The pair makes their way through the castle and arrive at the bridge leading to land . As they cross , the Queen , ruler of the castle , appears and tells Yorda that as her daughter she cannot leave the castle . The Queen destroys part of the bridge ; although Yorda tries to save him , Ico falls off the bridge and loses consciousness .

Ico awakens below the castle and makes his way back to the upper levels , finding a magic sword that dispels the shadow creatures . After discovering that Yorda has been turned to stone by the Queen , he confronts the Queen in her throne room , who reveals that she plans to restart her life anew by taking possession of Yorda 's body . Ico slays the Queen with the magic sword , but with her death the castle begins to collapse around him ; he is hit by falling debris , breaking his horns , and he falls unconscious . The Queen 's spell on Yorda is broken , and a shadowy Yorda carries Ico safely out of the castle to a boat , sending him to drift to the shore alone . Ico awakens to find the distant castle in ruins , and Yorda , in her human form , washed up nearby . She stirs .

= = Development = =

Lead designer Fumito Ueda came up with the concept for Ico in 1997 , envisioning a " boy meets girl " story where the two main characters would hold hands during their adventure , forming a bond between them without communication . Ueda 's main inspiration for Ico was Eric Chahi 's game Another World (Outer World in Japan) , which used cinematic cutscenes and lacked any head @-@ up display elements as to play like a movie . It also featured an emotional connection between two characters , despite the use of minimal dialog . Ueda also cited Lemmings , Flashback and the original Prince of Persia games as influences , specifically regarding animation and gameplay style . With the help of an assistant , Ueda created an animation in Lightwave to get a feel for the final game and to better convey his vision . In the three @-@ minute demonstration reel , Yorda had the horns instead of Ico , and flying robotic creatures were seen firing weapons to destroy the castle . Ueda stated that having this movie that represented his vision helped to keep the team on track for the long development process , and he reused this technique for the development of Shadow of the Colossus , the team 's next effort .

Ueda began working with producer Kenji Kaido in 1998 to develop the idea and bring the game to the PlayStation . Ico 's design aesthetics were guided by three key notions : to make a game that would be different from others in the genre , feature an aesthetic style that would be consistently artistic , and play out in an imaginary yet realistic setting . This was achieved through the use of " subtracting design " ; they removed elements from the game which interfered with the game 's reality . This included removing any form of interface elements , keeping the gameplay focused only on the escape from the castle , and reducing the number of types of enemies in the game to a single foe . An interim design of the game shows Ico and Yorda facing horned warriors similar to those that take Ico to the castle . The game originally focused on Ico 's attempt to return Yorda to her room in the castle after she was kidnapped by these warriors . Ueda believed this version had too much detail for the graphics engine they had developed , and as part of the " subtracting design " , replaced the warriors with the shadow creatures . Ueda also brought in a number of people outside the video game industry to help with development . These consisted of two programmers , four artists , and one designer in addition to Ueda and Kaido , forming the base of what is now known as Team Ico . On reflection , Ueda noted that the subtracting design may have taken too much out of the game , and did not go to as great an extreme with Shadow of the Colossus .

After two years of development , the team ran into limitations on the PlayStation hardware and faced a critical choice : either terminate the project altogether , alter their vision to fit the constraints of the hardware , or continue to explore more options . The team decided to remain true to Ueda 's vision , and began to use the Emotion Engine of the PlayStation 2 , taking advantage of the improved abilities of the platform . Character animation was accomplished through key frame animation instead of the more common motion capture technique . Ico is recognized as one of the

first games to incorporate bloom lighting into video games , a feature that is common in later seventh generation console video games . The game took about four years to create . Ueda purposely left the ending vague , not stating whether Yorda was alive , whether she would travel with Ico , or if it was simply the protagonist 's dream .

The cover used for releases in Japan and PAL regions was drawn by Ueda himself , and was inspired by the surrealist artist Giorgio de Chirico and his work , *The Nostalgia of the Infinite* . Ueda believed that " the surrealistic world of de Chirico matched the allegoric world of Ico " . The North American version lacks this cover as well as additional features that become available after the player completes the game once . The development team was unable to provide Ueda 's cover or the additional features such as the two @-@ player mode in time for Sony 's planned North American release date , but included them for the later releases in Japan and PAL regions . On reflection , Yasuhide Kobayashi , vice @-@ president of Sony 's Japan Studio , believed the North American box art and lack of an identifiable English title led to the game 's poor sales in the United States , and stated plans to correct that for the release of *The Last Guardian* . For its original release , a limited edition of the game was available in PAL regions that included a cardboard wrapping displaying artwork from the game and four art cards inside the box . The game was re @-@ released as a standard edition in 2006 across all PAL regions except France after the 2005 release of *Shadow of the Colossus* , Ico 's spiritual sequel , to allow players to " fill the gap in their collection " .

Ico uses minimal dialog in a fictional language to provide the story throughout the game . Voice actors included Kazuhiro Shindō as Ico , Rieko Takahashi as Yorda , and Misa Watanabe as the Queen . Ico and the Queen 's words are presented in either English or Japanese subtitles depending on the release region , but Yorda 's speech is presented in a symbolic language . Ueda opted not to provide the translation for Yorda 's words as it would have overcome the language barrier between Ico and Yorda , and detracted from the " holding hands " concept of the game . In the non @-@ North American releases , playing through the game again after completing the game replaces the symbolic text with appropriate language subtitles .

= = Other media = =

= = = Novelization = = =

A novelization of the game titled *Ico : Kiri no Shiro* (*ICO @-@ ???-* , Iko : Kiri no Shiro , lit . " Ico : Castle of Mist ") was released in Japan in 2004 . Author Miyuki Miyabe wrote the novel because of her appreciation of the game . A Korean translation of the novel , entitled *?? - ??? ?* (*I @-@ ko : An @-@ gae @-@ eui Seong*) came out the following year , by Hwangmae Publishers , while an English translation was published by Viz Media on August 16 of 2011 .

= = = Cross title content = = =

Costumes (including Ico and Yorda) , stickers , and sound effects from Ico are part of an add @-@ on pack for the game *LittleBigPlanet* , alongside similar materials from *Shadow of the Colossus* , after being teased by the game 's developers Media Molecule about two weeks prior .

= = = Film = = =

A film adaption of Ico may come about based on the success of the adaptation of *Shadow of the Colossus* being created by Misher Films in conjunction with Sony and Fumito Ueda .

= = = Soundtrack = = =

Ico 's audio featured a limited amount of music and sound effects . The soundtrack , *Ico : Kiri no*

Naka no Senritsu (ICO ? ?????? ? , Iko Kiri no Naka no Senritsu , lit . " Ico : Melody in the mist ") , was composed by Michiru Oshima and sound unit " pentagon " (Koichi Yamazaki & Mitsukuni Murayama) and released in Japan by Sony Music Entertainment on February 20 , 2002 . The album was distributed by Sony Music Entertainment Visual Works . The last song of the CD , " ICO -You Were There- " , includes vocals sung by former Libera member Steven Geraghty .

= = Reception = =

Ico received strong reviews , becoming a cult hit among gamers . The game has an aggregated review score of 90 out of 100 at Metacritic . In Japan , Famitsu magazine scored the PlayStation 2 version of the game a 30 out of 40 . The game is considered by some to be one of the greatest games of all time ; Edge ranked Ico as the 13th top game in a 2007 listing , while IGN ranked the game at number 18 in 2005 , and at number 57 in 2007 . Ico has been used as an example of a game that is a work of art . Ueda commented that he purposely tried to distance Ico from conventional video games due to the negative image that video games were receiving at that time , in order to draw more people to the title .

Some reviewers have likened Ico to older , simpler adventure games such as Prince of Persia or Tomb Raider , that seek to evoke an emotional experience from the player ; IGN 's David Smith commented that while simple , as an experience the game was " near indescribable . " The game 's graphics and sound contributed strongly to the positive reactions from critics ; Smith continues that " The visuals , sound , and original puzzle design come together to make something that is almost , if not quite , completely unlike anything else on the market , and feels wonderful because of it . " Many reviewers were impressed with the expansiveness and the details given to the environments , the animation used for the main characters despite their low polygon count , as well as the use of lighting effects . Ico 's ambiance , created by the simple music and the small attention to detail in the voice work of the main characters , were also called out as strong points for the game . Charles Herold of The New York Times summed up his review stating that " Ico is not a perfect game , but it is a game of perfect moments . " Herold later commented that Ico breaks the mold of games that usually involve companions . In most games these companions are invulnerable and players will generally not concern with the non @-@ playable characters ' fate , but Ico creates the sense of " trust and childish fragility " around Yorda , and that these leads to the character being " the game 's entire focus " .

The game is noted for its simple combat system that would " disappoint those craving sheer mechanical depth " , as stated by GameSpot 's Miguel Lopez . The game 's puzzle design has been praised for creating a rewarding experience for players who work through challenges on their own ; Kristen Reed of Eurogamer , for example , said that " you quietly , logically , willingly proceed , and the illusion is perfect : the game never tells you what to do , even though the game is always telling you what to do " . Ico is also considered a short game , taking between seven and ten hours for a single play through , which Game Revolution calls " painfully short " with " no replay outside of self @-@ imposed challenges " . G4TV 's Matthew Keil , however , felt that " the game is so strong , many will finish ' Ico ' in one or two sittings " . The lack of features in the North American release , which would become unlocked on subsequent playthroughs after completing the game , was said to reduce the replay value of the title . Electronic Gaming Monthly notes that " Yorda would probably be the worst companion -she 's scatterbrained and helpless ; if not for the fact that the player develops a bond with her , making the game 's ending all the more heartrending . "

Despite the positive praise , the original title did not sell well . By 2009 , only 700 @,@ 000 copies were sold worldwide , with 270 @,@ 000 in the United States. and the bulk in PAL regions , Ueda considered his design by subtraction approach may have hurt the marketing of the game , as at the time of the game 's release , promotion of video games were primarily done through screenshots , and as Ico lacked any heads @-@ up display , it appeared uninteresting to potential buyers .

= = = Awards = = =

Ico received several gaming acclamations from the video gaming press , and was considered to be one of the Games of the Year by many publications , despite competing with releases such as Halo , Metal Gear Solid 2 : Sons of Liberty , and Grand Theft Auto III . The game received three Game Developers Choice Awards in 2002 , including " Excellence in Level Design " , " Excellence in Visual Arts " , and " Game Innovation Spotlight " . The game won two Interactive Achievement Awards from the Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences in 2002 for " Art Direction " and " Character or Story Development " , and was nominated for awards of " Game of the Year " , " Game Design " , " Level Design " and " Sound Design " .

= = Legacy = =

Ico is stated by Chris Kohler of Wired to have influenced numerous other video games , borrowing from its simple and visual design ideals . Several game designers , such as Eiji Aonuma , Hideo Kojima , and Jordan Mechner , have cited Ico as having influenced the visual appearance of their games , including The Legend of Zelda : Twilight Princess , Metal Gear Solid 3 : Snake Eater , and Prince of Persia : The Sands of Time , respectively . Marc Laidlaw , scriptwriter for the Half @-@ Life series , commented that , among several other more memorable moments in the game , the point where Yorda attempts to save Ico from falling off the damaged bridge was " a significant event not only for that game , but for the art of game design " . The Naughty Dog team used Ico as part of the inspiration for developing Uncharted 3 . Vander Caballero credits Ico for inspiring the gameplay of Papo & Yo . Phil Fish used the design by subtraction approach in developing the title Fez . The developers of both Brothers : A Tale of Two Sons and Rime have Ico as a core influence on their design . Hidetaka Miyazaki , creator and director of the Souls series and Bloodborne , cited Ico as a key influence to him becoming involved in developing video games , stating that Ico " awoke me to the possibilities of the medium " .

Film director Guillermo del Toro cited both Ico and Shadow of the Colossus as " masterpieces " and part of his directorial influence . Jonny Greenwood of Radiohead considers , of his top ten video games , " Ico might be the best one " .

= = = Other Team Ico games = = =

Shadow of the Colossus (?????? , Wanda to Kyozy , Wander and the Colossus) , released for the PlayStation 2 in October 2005 in Japan and North America , was developed by the same team that developed Ico . The game features similar graphics , gameplay , and storytelling elements as Ico . The game was referred by its working title " Nico " (" Ni " being Japanese for the number 2 ") until the final title was revealed . Ueda , when asked about the connection between the two games , stated that Shadow of the Colossus is a prequel to Ico , specifically citing the ending of Shadow where a child is born with two horns .

Team Ico 's third game , The Last Guardian was originally announced as a PlayStation 3 title at the Electronic Entertainment Expo 2009 ; the game centers on the connection between a young boy and a large griffon @-@ like creature that he befriends , requiring the player to get the creature to cooperate as to help complete the game 's puzzles . The game fell into several complications from both hardware limitations and the departure of Ueda and other Team Ico members from Sony around 2012 , though Ueda and other members continued to work on the game via consulting contracts . The game was subsequently switched to the PlayStation 4 in 2012 , and was formally reintroduced in 2015 , with plans for release in 2016 . Ueda has stated that " the essence of the game is rather close to Ico " .

= = = HD remaster = = =

Ico , along with Shadow of the Colossus , received a high @-@ definition remaster for the PlayStation 3 that was released worldwide in September 2011 . In addition to improved graphics , the games were updated to include support for stereoscopic 3D and PlayStation Trophies . The Ico

port was also based on the European version , and includes features such as Yorda 's translation and the two @-@ player mode . In North America and Europe / PAL regions , the two games were released as a single retail collection , while in Japan , they were released as separate titles . Both games have since been released separately as downloadable titles on the PlayStation Network store . Patch 1 @.@ 01 for the digital high @-@ definition Ico version added the Remote Play feature , allowing the game to be played on the PlayStation Vita .