

= Asher Vollmer =

Asher Vollmer (born September 14 , 1989) is an American indie video game developer and creator of Puzzlejuice and Threes . He created the 2012 iOS game Puzzlejuice while a student at USC Interactive Media & Games Division . The game began his collaboration with Greg Wohlwend . The pair 's next release , the 2014 iOS puzzle game Threes , received what review aggregator Metacritic described as " universal acclaim " , including perfect scores from Eurogamer and TouchArcade , and the title of Apple Inc . ' s iPhone game of the year . The game was later ported to multiple platforms . Polygon included Vollmer in their " 50 admirable gaming people " of the year for his work on Threes . Among other projects , Vollmer subsequently worked on Close Castles , a real @-@ time strategy game later put on hiatus , and Royals , a simulation game for OS X and Windows .

= = Career = =

Vollmer is a graduate of the USC Interactive Media & Games Division program . As a student , he began work on Puzzlejuice , a puzzle video game . He reached out to artist Greg Wohlwend for aesthetic advice , which led to a collaboration between the two . Puzzlejuice is a combination of Tetris , tile @-@ matching , and Boggle : players rearrange falling tetromino blocks into rows of similar colors , which turn into letters that are cleared from the board by forming words . The iOS game was released on January 19 , 2012 , to what review aggregator Metacritic described as " generally favorable " reviews . Multiple reviewers mentioned the difficulty in mentally balancing the various components of the game .

Vollmer started as thatgamecompany 's " feel engineer " in August 2012 , but left in April 2013 to " go indie " and work on his own projects . On his blog , he said he thought the studio 's current project would be groundbreaking , though he was unhappy working there . Vollmer tried to write a short story in an attempt to take a break from games . Before long , he began to play with his computer keyboard . Vollmer challenged himself to make a game that only used the arrow keys , and prototyped what would become Threes in ten hours overnight . He proceeded to iterate on the idea with Wohlwend over the game 's 14 @-@ month development . In Threes , the player slides numbered tiles on a four @-@ by @-@ four grid to combine addends and multiples of three . Vollmer cited Drop7 as an inspiration for the game , having played it for two years beforehand .

Threes had no original inclination towards minimalism . In fact , Vollmer and Wohlwend felt that the game needed to appear more complex so as to interest players . They returned to the original idea and added character personalities to the tiles . The iOS game was released on February 6 , 2014 , to what Metacritic characterized as " universal acclaim " . Reviewers found the game " charming " and " addictive " , and compared it to Drop7 (2009) , Triple Town (2010) , and Sticklets (2013) . Eurogamer and TouchArcade awarded the game perfect scores , with the latter calling Threes " about as close as it gets to a perfect mobile game " . Other developers released similar games and clones within weeks of the game 's launch . Apple named Threes its best iPhone game of 2014 . The game was later ported to Android , Xbox One , and Windows Phone platforms . Polygon included Vollmer in their " 50 admirable gaming people of 2014 " for his work on Threes .

Vollmer thought he would work on a new game a month after releasing Threes , but was kept busy by obligations to fix and update the game , to port it to other platforms , and to promote game through press and events . He was convinced that he would never make a game " as clean and tight as Threes ever again " . Vollmer 's next game was Close Castles , a real @-@ time strategy game .

= = = After Threes = = =

Vollmer unveiled Close Castles in June 2014 . Players start in corners of a " grid map " and are represented by castles . Vollmer explained that the game 's name is from castles built too close to one another , starting a mutually assured destruction scenario . Players can build three structure types out from their castle : towers that fire at incoming enemies (defense) , houses that make " loyal subjects " (offense) , and markets that make money (economy) . The " A " button with a

direction constructs a path directing followers to the enemy . Followers capture enemy structures as denoted by a " defense bar " that fills as followers enter the structure and that destroys the structure when filled . Markets are the weakest structure , and two towers can defend against one house . Player turf grows as player structures approach the limits of their area . Players earn five units of money a second , which increases by five for every market . Polygon called the game 's simple visual design " horrifyingly deceptive " . Vollmer has said that games should last around three minutes apiece and that the local multiplayer 's lack of " hidden information " should make interactions with other players less of a " sadomasochistic " game of waiting for an opponent to concede . The game was demoed on an Xbox 360 but was planned for release on the PlayStation 4 . Vollmer put the project on hold while he worked out " fundamental flaws " in the gameplay .

While Vollmer traditionally worked on multiple games at once , Close Castles was his only project when it was in production . In March 2015 , he worked three days a week on a bigger project with a small team , and saved his other days for personal experimentation and Threes bugs . The next month , Vollmer released Royals , a pay what you want simulation game for OS X and Windows . The player controls a peasant who advances towards royal status by collecting resources and followers . Every player decision counts as a year of the peasant 's life . Polygon 's Megan Farokhmanesh described the game as difficult and charming , with a " quirky , subtle humor " . The game was designed to be " purposefully difficult and obtuse " and " nothing like Threes " . Eurogamer 's Jeffrey Matulef wrote that the gameplay was like a " comically minimalist roguelike " for its emphasis on resource management and short player lifespans .