# = History of Western role @-@ playing video games =

Western role @-@ playing video games are role @-@ playing video games developed in the Western world , including North America and , in more recent years , Europe . They originated on mainframe university computer systems in the 1970s , were later popularized by titles such as Ultima and Wizardry in the early- to mid @-@ 1980s , and continue to be produced for modern home computer and video game console systems . The genre 's " Golden Age " occurred in the mid- to late @-@ 1980s , and its popularity suffered a downturn in the mid @-@ 1990s as developers struggled to keep up with hardware changes and increasing development costs . A later series of isometric role @-@ playing games , published by Interplay Productions and Blizzard Entertainment , was developed over a longer time period and set new standards of production quality .

Computer role @-@ playing games ( CRPGs ) are once again popular . Recent titles , such as BioWare 's Mass Effect series and Bethesda Softworks ' The Elder Scrolls series , have been produced for console systems and have received multi @-@ platform releases , although independently developed games are frequently created as personal computer ( PC ) exclusives . Developers of role @-@ playing games have continuously experimented with various graphical perspectives and styles of play , such as real @-@ time and turn @-@ based time @-@ keeping systems , axonometric and first @-@ person graphical projections , and single @-@ character or multi @-@ character parties . Subgenres include action role @-@ playing games , roguelikes and tactical role @-@ playing games .

## = = Early American computer RPGs ( late 1970s ? mid @-@ 1980s ) = =

### = = = Mainframe computers ( late 1970s ? early 1980s ) = = =

The earliest role @-@ playing video games were created in the mid @-@ to @-@ late 1970s , as offshoots of early university mainframe text @-@ based RPGs that were played on PDP @-@ 10 , PLATO and Unix @-@ based systems . These included Dungeon , written in 1975 or 1976 , pedit5 , created in 1975 , and dnd , also from 1975 . These early games were inspired by pen @-@ and @-@ paper role @-@ playing games , particularly Dungeons & Dragons , which was published in 1974 , and J. R. R. Tolkien 's The Lord of the Rings trilogy . Some of the first graphical computer RPGs ( CRPGs ) after pedit5 and dnd included orthanc ( 1978 ) , which was named after Saruman 's tower in Lord of the Rings , avathar ( 1979 ) , later renamed avatar , oubliette ( 1977 ) , named after the French word for " dungeon " , moria ( 1975 ) , dungeons of degorath , baradur , emprise , bnd , sorcery , and dndworld . All of these were developed and became popular on the PLATO system during the late 1970s , in large part due to PLATO 's speed , fast graphics , and large number of players with access to its nationwide network of terminals . PLATO was a mainframe system that supported multiple users and allowed them to play simultaneously , a feature not commonly available to owners of home personal computer systems at the time . These were followed by games on other platforms , such as Temple of Apshai , written in 1979 for the TRS @-@ 80 and followed by two add @-@ ons ; Akalabeth : World of Doom ( 1980 ) , which gave rise to the well @-@ known Ultima series ; Wizardry ( 1981 ) , and Sword of Fargoal ( 1982 ) . Games of this era were also influenced by text adventures such as Colossal Cave Adventure ( 1976 ) and Zork ( 1976 ) ; early MUDs , tabletop wargames such as Chainmail ( 1971 ) , and sports games such as Strat @-@ O @-@ Matic .

The popular dungeon crawler Rogue was developed in 1980 , for Unix @-@ based systems , by two students at Berkeley . It used ASCII graphics , and featured a deep system of gameplay and a multitude of randomly generated items and locations . Rogue was later distributed as free software with the BSD operating system , and was followed by an entire genre of " roguelikes " that were inspired by and emulated the original game 's mechanics , and by later titles such as Diablo . Later examples of roguelikes include Angband ( 1990 ) , Ancient Domains of Mystery ( 1993 ) and Linley 's Dungeon Crawl ( 1997 ) .

The keyboard was frequently the only input supported by these games , and their graphics were simple and often monochromatic . Some titles , like Rogue , represented objects through text characters , such as ' @ ' for the main character and ' Z ' for zombies . No single game featured all of the characteristics expected in a modern CRPG , such as exploration of subterranean dungeons , use of weapons and items , " leveling up " and quest completion , but it is possible to see the evolution of these features during this era and that which followed .

= = = Ultima and Wizardry ( early ? mid @-@ 1980s ) = = =

The early Ultima and Wizardry were definitive games which began to build the genre . Although simplified for use with the console gamepad , many innovations of the early Ultimas ? in particular Ultima III : Exodus ( 1983 ) by developer Richard Garriott ? became standard among later RPGs in both the personal computer and console markets . These ideas included the use of tiled graphics and party @-@ based combat , a mix of fantasy and science @-@ fiction elements , and time travel . The game 's written narrative was an innovative feature that allowed it to convey a larger story than was found in the minimal plots common at the time . Most games , including Garriott 's own Akalabeth , focused primarily on basic gameplay mechanics like combat , and paid little attention to story and narrative .

Garriott introduced a system of chivalry and code of conduct in Ultima IV : Quest of the Avatar ( 1985 ) that persisted throughout later Ultimas . The player 's Avatar tackles such problems as fundamentalism , racism and xenophobia , and based on his or her actions is tested periodically in ways that are sometimes obvious and sometimes unseen . This code of conduct was in part a response to the efforts among some Christian groups to mitigate the rising popularity of Dungeons & Dragons . Continuing until Ultima IX : Ascension ( 1999 ) , it covered a range of virtues that included compassion , justice , humility and honor . This system of morals and ethics was unique at the time , as other video games allowed players to be lauded as " heroes " by the game worlds ' denizens , no matter what the player 's actions had been . In Ultima IV , on the other hand , players were forced to consider the moral consequences of their actions . According to Garriott , Ultima was now " more than a mere fantasy escape . It provided a world with a framework of deeper meaning [ , ] a level of detail [ , and ] diversity of interaction [ , ] that is rarely attempted . " " I thought people might completely reject this game because some folks play just to kill , kill , kill . To succeed in this game , you had to radically change the way you 'd ever played a game before . "

Ultima III is considered by many to have been the first modern CRPG . It was originally published for the Apple II , but was ported to many other platforms and influenced the development of later titles , including such console RPGs as Excalibur ( 1983 ) and Dragon Quest ( 1986 ) . The series went on to span over a dozen titles , including the spin @-@ off series Worlds of Ultima ( 1990 ? 1991 ) and Ultima Underworld ( 1992 ? 1993 ) , and the multiplayer online series , Ultima Online ( 1997 ) . Ultima Underworld : The Stygian Abyss ( 1992 ) offered players a full 360 degree view of the game world . Ultima VII : The Black Gate ( 1992 ) was the first real @-@ time title in the series , and was fully playable with the computer mouse . Garriott later left Origin Systems and Electronic Arts to form Destination Games , under publisher NCsoft . He was involved with a number of NCsoft 's MMORPGs , including Lineage ( 1998 ) and Tabula Rasa ( 2007 ) , before his 2009 departure .

The Wizardry series was created for the Apple II at roughly the same time , in 1981 . Wizardry featured a 3D , first @-@ person view , an intuitive interface , party @-@ based combat , and pre @-@ constructed levels that encouraged players to draw their own maps . It allowed players to import characters from previous games , albeit with reduced experience levels , and introduced a moral alignment feature that limited the areas players could visit . The series was extremely difficult when compared to other RPGs of the time , possibly because they were modeled after pen @-@ and @-@ paper role @-@ playing games of similar difficulty . Wizardry IV ( 1986 ) in particular is considered one of the most difficult CRPGs ever created . It is unique in that the player controls the villain of the first game in an attempt to escape his prison dungeon and gain freedom in the above world . Unlike Ultima , which evolved with each installment , the Wizardry series retained and refined the same style and core mechanics over time , and improved only its graphics and level design as

the years progressed . The series ' most famous titles did not appear until years later , and installments were published as recently as 2001 . Wizardry VII ( 1992 ) has been said to possess one of the best character class systems of any CRPG .

By June 1982 , Temple of Apshai had sold 30 @,@ 000 copies , Wizardry 24 @,@ 000 copies , and Ultima 20 @,@ 000 . Ultima and Wizardry dominated the industry in the early 1980s ; a historian later wrote that " there seemed to be very little oxygen for anyone else ; their serious competition during this period was largely limited to one another . Otherwise there were only ... workmanlike derivatives " like Questron and Phantasie " that all but advertised themselves as ' games to play while you wait for the next Ultima or Wizardry ' " . Garriott even discussed collaborating with Wizardry 's Andrew C. Greenberg on " the ultimate fantasy role @-@ playing game " . The first Wizardry outsold ( more than 200 @,@ 000 copies sold in its first three years ) the first Ultima and received better reviews , but over time Ultima became more popular by improving its technology and making games more friendly , while Wizardry required new players to play the first game before its first two sequels , and the very difficult Wizardry IV sold poorly .

Telengard , a BASIC port of the earlier PDP @-@ 10 game DND , and Dungeons of Daggorath , both released in 1982 , introduced real @-@ time gameplay . Earlier dungeon crawl games had used turn @-@ based movement , in which the enemies only moved when the adventuring party did . Tunnels of Doom , produced the same year , introduced separate screens for exploration and combat . Dragon Quest is most commonly claimed as the first role @-@ playing video game produced for a console , though journalist Joe Fielder cites the earlier Dragonstomper .

= = Golden Age ( late 1980s ? early 1990s ) = =

The Might and Magic series , highly popular in the 1980s and onward , began with the 1986 release of Might and Magic Book One : The Secret of the Inner Sanctum for the Apple II . It encompasses a total of ten games , the most recent of which was released in 2014 , as well as the popular turn @-@ based strategy series Heroes of Might and Magic . The series featured a mix of complex statistics , large numbers of weapons and spells , and enormous worlds in which to play . It was among the longest @-@ lived CRPG series , alongside Ultima and Wizardry , It is also notable for making race and gender an important aspect of gameplay .

Strategic Simulations , Inc . ' s series of " Gold Box " CRPGs , which began in 1988 with Pool of Radiance for the Apple II and Commodore 64 , was the first widely successful official video game adaptation of TSR 's Advanced Dungeons & Dragons license and rules . These games featured a first @-@ person display for movement and exploration , combined with an overhead tactical display for combat that tried to model D & D 's turn @-@ based mechanics . Better known for producing computer wargames , SSI created one of the defining series of the period . The games spawned a series of novels , and titles continued to be published until the game engine was retired in 1993 , although users who had purchased Forgotten Realms : Unlimited Adventures were able to create their own adventures and play them using the Gold Box engine . The later titles were developed by Stormfront Studios , who also produced Neverwinter Nights , a multi @-@ player implementation of the Gold Box engine which ran on America Online from 1991 to 1997 . As in the Wizardry series , characters could be imported from one game into another .

SSI had already published many RPGs based on original properties . Its " hardcore " RPG Wizard 's Crown ( 1985 ) presaged the Gold Box games ' design , with eight @-@ character parties , a skill @-@ based experience system , highly detailed combat mechanics , dozens of commands , injuries and bleeding , and strengths and weaknesses versus individual weapon classes . The game did not , however , offer much in terms of role @-@ playing or narrative beyond buying , selling and killing . Wizard 's Crown was followed by The Eternal Dagger in 1987 , a similar game that removed some of its predecessor 's more complicated elements .

Interplay Productions developed a string of hits in the form of The Bard 's Tale ( 1985 ) and its sequels under publisher Electronic Arts , originally for the Apple II and Commodore 64 . The series became the first outside Wizardry to challenge Ultima 's sales . It combined colorful graphics with a clean interface and simple rules , and was one of the first CRPG series to reach a mainstream

audience . It spawned a series of novels by authors such as Mercedes Lackey , something that arguably did not occur again until the release of Diablo in 1997 . The series allowed players to explore cities in detail , at a time when many games relegated them to simple menu screens with " buy " / " sell " options . A construction set released in 1991 allowed players to create their own games , and Interplay re @-@ used the engine in its 1988 post @-@ apocalyptic CRPG Wasteland .

 FTL Games ' Dungeon Master ( 1987 ) for the Atari ST introduced several user @-@ interface innovations , such as direct manipulation of objects and the environment using the mouse . Unusually for the era , it features the real @-@ time , first @-@ person viewpoint now common in first @-@ person shooters and more recent games such as The Elder Scrolls IV : Oblivion . The game 's complex magic system used runes that could be combined in specific sequences to create magical spells . These sequences were not detailed in the game manual , instead players were required to discover them through trial and error . Sequels followed in 1989 and 1993 . The game 's first @-@ person , real @-@ time mechanics were copied in SSI 's " Black Box " series , from Eye of the Beholder ( 1990 ) onward . Dungeon Master sold 40 @,@ 000 copies in its first year of release , and became the best @-@ selling Atari ST title .

 Times of Lore , released by Origin Systems in 1988 , introduced the action @-@ adventure and action role @-@ playing game formula of console titles such as The Legend of Zelda to the American computer RPG market . Times of Lore directly inspired several later titles by Origin Systems , including the 1990 games Bad Blood , an action RPG based on the same engine , and Ultima VI : The False Prophet , which used the same interface .

 Quest for Glory ( 1992 ) was produced by Sierra Entertainment , known for point @-@ and @-@ click adventure games , and combined CRPG and adventure @-@ game mechanics into a unique , genre @-@ bending mix . The series featured involved stories , complex puzzles , and arcade @-@ like combat . The last of its five titles was released in 1998 . It was originally conceived as a tetralogy built around the themes of the four cardinal directions , the four classical elements , the four seasons and the four mythologies . The designers felt that the series ' storyline made Shadows of Darkness too difficult , and so inserted a fifth game , Wages of War , into the canon and renumbered the series .

 Legends of Valour ( 1992 ) provided an early example of open @-@ world , non @-@ linear gameplay in an RPG . It was cited as an influence on The Elder Scrolls series .

 Sierra 's Betrayal at Krondor ( 1993 ) was based upon author Raymond E. Feist 's Midkemia setting . It featured turn @-@ based , semi @-@ tactical combat , a skill @-@ based experience system , and a magic system similar to that of Dungeon Master , but suffered due to outdated , polygonal graphics . Feist was heavily consulted during development , and later created his own novelization based upon the game . The sequel Betrayal in Antara ( 1997 ) re @-@ used the first game 's engine but ? as Sierra had lost its license for Krondor ? was set in a different universe . Return to Krondor ( 1998 ) used a new game engine , but returned to Feist 's setting .

 Westwood Studios 's Lands of Lore series ( 1993 ) featured a story @-@ based approach to RPG design . It served as a stylistic " mirror " to Japanese RPGs of the time , with brightly colored , cheerful graphics , a simple combat system borrowed from Dungeon Master , and a semi @-@ linear story . These elements contrasted with Western RPGs ' stereotype as dark , gritty and rules @-@ centric games .

 = = Decline ( mid @-@ 1990s ) = =

 Western RPGs faced a sharp decline circa 1995 , as developers lost their ability to keep up with hardware advances . RPGs had been at or near the forefront of gaming technology , but the improved computer graphics and increased storage space facilitated by CD @-@ ROM technology created expectations that developers struggled to meet . This caused lengthy delays between releases , and closures among less popular franchises . A few years later , one magazine wrote that " [ d ] uring the now @-@ infamous mid @-@ nineties CRPG lull , the toughest dungeons were the bottomless pits of failed designs , and the fiercest beasts the deadly @-@ dull CRPG releases . "

Increases in development budgets and team sizes meant that sequels took three or more years to be released , instead of the almost @-@ yearly releases seen in SSI 's Gold Box series . The growth of development teams increased the likelihood that software bugs would appear , as code produced by programmers working in different teams was merged into a whole . A lack of technical standards among hardware manufacturers forced developers to support each manufacturer 's implementation , or risk losing players .

Competition arose from other genres . Players turned away from RPGs , flight simulators and adventure games in favor of action @-@ oriented titles , such as first @-@ person shooters and real @-@ time strategy games . Later RPGs would draw influences from action genres , but would face new challenges in the form of massively multiplayer online role @-@ playing games ( MMORPGs ) , a late @-@ 1990s trend that may have siphoned players away from single @-@ player RPGs . They also faced competition from Japanese console RPGs , which were becoming increasingly dominant around that time , for reasons such as more accessible , faster @-@ paced action @-@ adventure @-@ oriented gameplay , and a stronger emphasis on storytelling and character interactions .

Western RPGs changed following this period . Non @-@ player characters were given more dialogue , as in Baldur 's Gate , party sizes became smaller , as in Fallout , and combat became faster , as in Diablo . Games became more accessible . Their feel became more cinematic rather than novelistic , and they focused on a single player @-@ made character who progressed through the game as the player 's sole avatar . Video games became darker and more thematically consistent . Designers abandoned or reconciled some of the eccentric elements and pastiche of the 8 @-@ bit and 16 @-@ bit titles . Diablo , for instance , displayed a consistent Gothic style throughout the series , and the Elder Scrolls series downplayed its cat- and lizard @-@ people in favor of the more recognizable Dark Elves and Nords .

= = North American computer RPGs ( late 1990s ) = =


= = = Diablo and action RPGs = = =


The dark fantasy @-@ themed RPG Diablo was released by Blizzard Entertainment on December 31 , 1996 , in the midst of a stagnant PC RPG market . Diablo is set in the fictional kingdom of Khanduras , in the world of Sanctuary , and has the player take control of a lone hero who battles to rid the world of Diablo , the Lord of Terror . Its development was influenced by Moria and Angband , and Diablo resembles a roguelike due to its focus on dungeon crawling , and its procedurally generated levels . Major differences include the commercial quality of the game 's graphics , its simplified character development , and its fast , real @-@ time action . A factor in Diablo 's success was its support for online , collaborative play over a local area network or through its Battle.net online service . This greatly extended its replay value , though cheating was a problem . While not the first RPG to feature real @-@ time combat , Diablo 's effect on the market was significant , a reflection of the changes that took place in other genres following the release of the action titles , Doom and Dune II . It had many imitators , and its formula of simple , fast combat and replayability were used by what were later referred to as " Diablo clones " , and more broadly " action RPGs " .

Action RPGs typically give each player real @-@ time control of a single character . Combat and action are emphasized , while plot and character interaction are kept to a minimum , a formula referred to as " the Fight , Loot , and Level cycle " . The inclusion of any content beyond leveling up and killing enemies becomes a challenge in these " hack and slash " games , because the sheer number of items , locations and monsters makes it difficult to design an encounter that is unique and works regardless of how a character has been customized . On the other hand , a game that omits technical depth can seem overly streamlined . The result in either case is a repetitive experience that does not feel tailored to the player .

RPGs can suffer in the area of exploration . Traditional RPGs encourage exploration of every detail of the game world , and provide for a more organic experience in which NPCs are distributed

according to the internal logic of the game world or plot . Action games reward players for quick movement from location to location , and tend to ensure that no obstacles occur along the way . Games such as Mass Effect streamline the player 's movements across the game world by indicating which NPCs can be interacted with , and by making it easier for players to find locations and shopkeepers who can exchange items for money or goods . Some of the best characteristics of RPGs can be lost when these road blocks are eliminated in the name of streamlining the player 's experience .

One action RPG that avoided these limitations is Deus Ex ( 2000 ) , which offered multiple solutions to problems through intricately layered dialogue choices , a deep skill tree , and hand @-@ crafted environments . Players were challenged to act in character through dialog choices appropriate to his or her chosen role , and by intelligent use of the surrounding environment . This produced a unique experience that was tailored to each player .

Diablo was followed by the Diablo : Hellfire expansion pack in 1997 , and a sequel , Diablo II , in 2000 . Diablo II received its own expansion , Diablo II : Lord of Destruction , in 2001 . Diablo , Diablo II , Diablo II : Lord of Destruction and the Diablo II strategy guide are sold together as the Diablo Battle Chest , and are still sold over a decade later . A third game , Diablo III , was announced on June 28 , 2008 , and released on May 15 , 2012 . Examples of " Diablo clones " include Fate ( 2005 ) , Sacred ( 2004 ) , Torchlight ( 2009 ) , Din 's Curse ( 2011 ) and Hellgate : London ( 2007 ) . Like Diablo and Rogue before them , Torchlight , Din 's Curse , Hellgate : London and Fate use procedural generation to create new game levels dynamically .

= = = Interplay , BioWare , and Black Isle = = =

Interplay , now known as Interplay Entertainment and a publisher in its own right , produced several late 1990s RPG titles through two new developers , Black Isle Studios and BioWare . Black Isle released the groundbreaking Fallout ( 1997 ) which , reminiscent of Interplay 's earlier Wasteland , was set in an alternate history future America following a nuclear holocaust . One of the few successful late @-@ 1990 video game RPGs not set in a swords @-@ and @-@ sorcery environment , Fallout was notable for its open @-@ ended and largely non @-@ linear gameplay and quest system , tongue @-@ in @-@ cheek humor , and pervasive sense of style and imagery . Players were afforded numerous moral choices to shape the game world based on how NPCs reacted to the player , much like the original Ultimas . Fallout was nearly as influential on post @-@ crash RPGs as Ultima was on Golden Age RPGs , and is considered by some to be the first " modern " CRPG . Black Isle produced a sequel , Fallout 2 , in 1998 . Third @-@ party developer Micro Forté produced Fallout Tactics : Brotherhood of Steel , a tactical RPG based on the franchise , which was published in 2001 under Interplay 's strategy division 14 Degrees East .

BioWare 's Baldur 's Gate series was no less important , the most significant D & D series to be released since the Gold Box era . The games created the most accurate and in @-@ depth D & D simulation yet , and featured support for up to six @-@ players in cooperative mode . Baldur 's Gate ( 1998 ) provided an epic story with NPC followers and written dialogue that continued through both titles and two expansion packs . Black Isle produced a more combat @-@ oriented series , Icewind Dale , soon thereafter .

The critically acclaimed D & D title , Planescape : Torment , was developed by Black Isle and published by Interplay in 1999 , and became known for its moody , artistic air and extensive writing . Interplay 's Fallout , Planescape : Torment and particularly , Baldur 's Gate are considered by critics to be some of the finest RPGs ever made .

Black Isle 's games during this time period often shared engines to cut down on development time and costs , and most feature an overhead axonometrically projected third @-@ person interface . Their titles , apart from the two Fallout games , used various versions of the Infinity Engine that had been developed by BioWare for Baldur 's Gate . Interplay 's collapse resulted in the shutdown of Black Isle and the cancellation of the third games in both the Fallout and Baldur 's Gate series , as well as of an original title , Torn . Instead , they published a trio of console @-@ only action RPGs based on the two franchises : Baldur 's Gate : Dark Alliance ( 2001 ) , Baldur 's Gate : Dark Alliance

II ( 2004 ) , and Fallout : Brotherhood of Steel ( 2004 ) . One of the last CRPGs released before Interplay seemingly went defunct was the poorly received Lionheart : Legacy of the Crusader ( 2003 ) by developer Reflexive Entertainment , notable for using the SPECIAL system introduced in Fallout .

Interplay announced in 2008 that money from its sale of the Fallout intellectual property to Bethesda Softworks and the sale of its controlling interests to a Luxembourg @-@ based firm would be used to relaunch its game development studio . The plan was to develop Wii Virtual Console and sequel versions of some of its classic console series , including Baldur 's Gate : Dark Alliance and Earthworm Jim . A massively multiplayer online game based on the Fallout franchise has been in development , a project for which Interplay retained the creation rights , though Bethesda has filed several injunctions against Interplay in an attempt to prevent this . Development of the game is on hold , pending the outcome of the dispute .

= = Resurgence ( 2000s ? present ) = =

The new century saw an increasing number of multi @-@ platform releases . The move to 3D game engines , along with constant improvements in graphic quality , led to progressively detailed and realistic game worlds .
BioWare produced Neverwinter Nights ( 2002 ) for Atari , the first CRPG to fuse the third @-@ edition Dungeons & Dragons rules with a 3D display in which the user could vary the viewing angle and distance . New game content could be generated using the Aurora toolset supplied as part of the game release , and players could share their modules and play cooperatively with friends online . Based in part on experiences while playing Ultima Online , one of the goals during development was to reproduce the feel of a live pen @-@ and @-@ paper RPG experience , complete with a human Dungeon Master . Neverwinter Nights ( NWN ) was very successful commercially , and spawned three official expansion packs and a sequel developed by Obsidian Entertainment . BioWare later produced the acclaimed Star Wars : Knights of the Old Republic , which married the d20 system with the Star Wars franchise ; as well as the original titles Jade Empire ( 2005 ) , Mass Effect ( 2007 ) , Dragon Age : Origins ( 2009 ) , Mass Effect 2 ( 2010 ) , Dragon Age II ( 2011 ) , Mass Effect 3 ( 2012 ) , and Dragon Age Inquisition ( 2014 ) all which were released for multiple platforms . With the Mass Effect and the Dragon Age titles , Bioware also utilized a save import system where decisions in the earlier games impact the story in the later games .
During the production of Fallout 2 , some of Black Isle 's key members left the studio to form Troika Games , citing disagreements the development team structure . The new studio 's first title was Arcanum : Of Steamworks and Magick Obscura ( 2001 ) , an original , nonlinear steampunk @-@ themed RPG with fantasy elements . Several Arcanum designers worked on Fallout , and the two titles share an aesthetic and sense of irony and humor . Arcanum was followed by The Temple of Elemental Evil ( 2003 ) , based on the Dungeons & Dragons 3 @.@ 5 Edition rules and set in the Greyhawk universe ; and Vampire : The Masquerade ? Bloodlines ( 2004 ) , based on White Wolf 's Vampire : The Masquerade . All three games received positive reviews ? as well as a cult following in the case of Arcanum ? but were criticized for shipping with numerous bugs . Troika 's reputation became " Great Ideas . Never Enough Testing " , and by 2005 the studio was in financial trouble , no longer able to secure funding for additional titles . Most of the developers left for other studios .
When Black Isle closed down , several employees formed Obsidian Entertainment , who released Star Wars : Knights of the Old Republic II ? The Sith Lords ( 2005 ) , a sequel to BioWare 's successful Star Wars : Knights of the Old Republic . Obsidian later created a sequel to another BioWare game : Neverwinter Nights 2 was released on Halloween of 2006 , and featured the 3 @.@ 5 Edition D & D ruleset . It was followed by two expansions and an " adventure pack " , in 2007 and 2008 . Obsidian Entertainment began development of a role @-@ playing game based on the Alien film franchise in 2006 , but it was canceled , along with an original title under the working name of Seven Dwarves . Obsidian 's most recent RPGs are Alpha Protocol ( 2010 ) , a modern @-@ day spy thriller released for multiple platforms , and Fallout : New Vegas ( 2010 ) , the latest installment in the Fallout franchise . The company released Dungeon Siege III on June 17 , 2011 .

The Gothic series , by German developer Piranha Bytes , began with the first title in 2001 . Lauded for its complex interaction with other in @-@ game characters and attractive graphics , it was criticized for its difficult control scheme and high system requirements . The third game in particular was notable for a " ton of quests " , rewarding exploration , and approachable combat , but also for its high system requirements , unfinished feel and " atrocious " voice acting . Piranha Bytes split from publisher JoWood Productions in 2007 , and due to a contract between the two companies , JoWooD retained some rights to the Gothic name and to current and future games released under that trademark . Piranha Bytes have since developed Risen , with publisher Deep Silver . A fourth , " casual " installment of the Gothic series , this time by developer Spellbound Entertainment , was released by JoWood in 2010 . The rights to the Gothic series may revert to Piranha Bytes following the release of Risen II .

= = = Bethesda = = =

Bethesda Softworks has developed RPGs since 1994 , in its The Elder Scrolls series . Daggerfall ( 1996 ) is notable as a 3D first @-@ person RPG with an expansive world . The series drew attention to sandbox gameplay , which gives the player wide choices of free @-@ roaming activities unrelated to the game 's main storyline . The Elder Scrolls series was seen as an alternative to the " highly linear , story @-@ based games " that dominated the computer RPG genre at the time , and the series ' freedom of play inspired comparisons to Grand Theft Auto III . According to Todd Howard , " I think [ Daggerfall is ] one of those games that people can ' project ' themselves on . It does so many things and allows [ for ] so many play styles that people can easily imagine what type of person they 'd like to be in game . "

The series ' popularity exploded with the release of The Elder Scrolls III : Morrowind ( 2002 ) , for the Xbox and PC . Morrowind became a successful and award @-@ winning RPG due to its open @-@ ended play , richly detailed game world , and flexibility in character creation and advancement . Two expansions were released : Tribunal in 2002 and Bloodmoon in 2003 . The Elder Scrolls IV : Oblivion ( 2006 ) , released for the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 as well as the PC , was a much @-@ enhanced sequel that featured scripted NPC behaviors , significantly improved graphics , and the company 's first foray into micro transactions , a recent trend among Western RPG makers . Two expansion packs , Shivering Isles and Knights of the Nine , were developed , as were several smaller downloadable packages that each cost between $ 1 ? 3 . Oblivion 's immediate successor , The Elder Scrolls V : Skyrim , was released to critical acclaim on 11 November 2011 and remains one of the most successful , favourably reviewed RPGs ( or video games in general ) to date .

Interplay 's decision to scrap plans for Fallout 3 and Bethesda 's subsequent acquisition of the Fallout brand created mixed feelings among that series ' fan community . Bethesda released Fallout 3 in North America on October 28 , 2008 , to critical acclaim and much fanfare , and the game was followed by five " content packs " . The sequel Fallout : New Vegas , created by Obsidian Entertainment , used the same engine as Fallout 3 and was released to generally favorable reviews in 2010 .

= = = Video game consoles and multi @-@ platform titles = = =

Multi @-@ platform releases were common in the early days of RPGs , but there was a period during the 1990s when this was not generally the case . The sixth generation of home gaming consoles led many game developers to resume the practice , and some opted to develop primarily or exclusively for consoles . The combination of the Xbox and DirectX technologies proved especially popular due to the two systems ' architectural similarities , as well as their common set of programming tools . Multimedia and art assets , which account for a greater proportion of the development budget than in the past , are easily transferable between multiple platforms .

This affected several major PC RPG releases , mostly due to console exclusivity publishing deals with Microsoft . BioWare 's Star Wars : Knights of the Old Republic was developed primarily for the Xbox , and ported to the PC several months later . Their original IP , Jade Empire ( 2005 ) was also

an Xbox exclusive , and did not receive a Windows version until Jade Empire ? Special Edition ( which included bonus content ) was released on Feb 26 , 2007 . Obsidian 's KOTOR sequel was released in December 2004 for the Xbox and followed by a PC version in February 2005 , and Fable ( 2004 ) by Lionhead Studios received a PC port along with its reissue as a Platinum Hit in 2005 .

Sequels to many of the above titles were also developed for next @-@ gen systems , including Lionhead 's Fable II ( 2008 ) and Fable III ( 2010 ) . The Fallout and Baldur 's Gate series of PC RPGs spawned console @-@ friendly , Diablo @-@ style action titles for the PS2 and Xbox as their respective PC series ended . Bethesda 's Oblivion was released simultaneously for console and PC , but was considered a major launch title for the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 .

The change of focus from the PC platform to console systems has been criticized , due to the concessions required to adapt games to the altered interfaces and control systems , as well as a need to appeal to a wider demographic . Developer Josh Sawyer lamented the decline of high @-@ profile computer @-@ exclusive RPGs , and claimed that the collapse of Troika Games meant that there were " no pure CRPG developers left " , outside of small companies like Spiderweb Software . Other criticisms include the increasing emphasis on video quality and voiceovers , and their effect on development budgets and the amount and quality of dialogue offered . BioWare was considered the " savior " of the Western RPG following the drought in the mid @-@ 1990s , but its prominent Mass Effect series now sheds the novel @-@ like writing style , and other conventions of Western RPGs , in favor of the cinematic style and streamlined action of Japanese console RPGs and other video game genres . These changes raise debate as to whether games such as Mass Effect and its sequels are truly RPGs . On the other hand , BioWare 's success has been attributed to successfully " marrying western mechanics with Japanese @-@ style character interactions " .

There have been more subtle shifts away from the core influences of Dungeons & Dragons that existed in the 1980s and 1990s . Games were originally closely tied to the system 's basic mechanics such as dice rolls and turn @-@ based tactical combat , but are now moving in the direction of real @-@ time modes , simplified mechanics and skill @-@ based interfaces . Dungeons & Dragons itself is diverging from its roots , as the 4th Edition D & D rules have been compared to role @-@ playing video games like World of Warcraft and Fire Emblem . Even as some non @-@ role @-@ playing games adopt RPG elements , developers and publishers are concerned that the term " role @-@ playing game " might alienate non @-@ RPG gamers .

Development for multiple platforms is profitable , but difficult . Optimizations needed for one platform architecture do not necessarily translate to others . Individual platforms such as the Sega Genesis and PlayStation 3 are seen as difficult to develop for compared to their competitors , and developers are not yet fully accustomed to new technologies such as multi @-@ core processors and hyper @-@ threading . Multi @-@ platform releases are increasingly common , but not all differences between editions on multiple platforms can be fully explained by hardware alone , and there remain franchise stalwarts that exist solely on one system . Developers for new platforms such as handheld and mobile systems do not have to operate under the pressure of $ 20 million budgets and the scrutiny of publishers ' marketing experts .

= = = Independent games and European game studios = = =

The technical sophistication required to make modern video games and the high expectations of players make it difficult for independent developers to impress audiences viscerally , to the degree that large game makers with extensive budgets and development teams are able to , but innovation and quality need not necessarily be stymied . Europe , and Germany in particular , remains more receptive to PC @-@ exclusives and , in general , to older , more " hardcore " design decisions . Like the movie industry , the indie video game scene plays a crucial role in formulating new ideas and concepts that mainstream publishers and marketing departments , stuck in their old ways , might otherwise deem unworkable or too radical . There are many examples that movies that never gained approval with the corporate decision makers were financially successful or became iconic on the film industry . Indie video game developers can provide more development time and effort whereas larger corporate enterprises are constrained by the expenses and expectations of voice

@-@ overs and advanced graphics . Independent developers can be successful in focusing on niche markets .

The new millennium saw a number of independently published RPGs for the PC , as well as a number of CRPGs developed in Europe and points farther east , which led some to call Eastern Europe a hotbed of RPG development in recent years . Examples of independently produced RPGs include Spiderweb Software 's Geneforge ( 2001 ? 2009 ) and Avernum ( 2000 ? 2010 ) series , Pyrrhic Tales : Prelude to Darkness ( 2002 ) by Zero Sum Software , Eschalon : Book I ( 2007 ) and Book II ( 2010 ) by Basilisk Games , Depths of Peril ( 2007 ) and Din 's Curse ( 2010 ) by Soldak Entertainment , and Knights of the Chalice ( 2009 ) . Examples of Eastern and Central European RPGs include Belgian developer Larian Studios ' Divinity series , starting with Divine Divinity ( 2002 ) ; Russian developer Nival Interactive 's series of tactical RPGs , starting with Silent Storm ( 2003 ) ; German developer Ascaron Entertainment 's Sacred series of action RPGs , starting with Sacred ( 2004 ) ; Polish developer CD Projekt RED 's The Witcher ( 2007 ) , The Witcher 2 : Assassins of Kings ( 2011 ) , The Witcher 3 : Wild Hunt ( 2015 ) , and another Polish developer Reality Pump 's Two Worlds ( 2007 ) and Two Worlds 2 ( 2010 ) . Hybrid RPGs include Russian developer Elemental Games ' multi @-@ genre Space Rangers ( 2002 ) and Space Rangers 2 : Dominators ( 2004 ) , Ukrainian developer GSC Game World 's hybrid RPG / first @-@ person shooter S.T.A.L.K.E.R. : Shadow of Chernobyl ( 2007 ) , and Turkish developer TaleWorlds ' hybrid RPG / medieval combat simulator , Mount & Blade ( 2008 ) .

The Finnish independent development studio Almost Human released Legend of Grimrock , a Dungeon Master @-@ inspired game , in 2012 . A reboot of the long @-@ abandoned tile @-@ based dungeon @-@ crawler subgenre , it was a commercial success that reached the top of Steam 's " Top Sellers list " in April 2012 . Examples exist in which developers leave larger studios to form their own , independent development houses . For instance , in 2009 , a pair of developers left Obsidian to form DoubleBear Productions , and began development of a post @-@ apocalyptic zombie RPG , Dead State , using Iron Tower Studios ' The Age of Decadence game engine . Three employees left BioWare in 2012 to form Stoic Studio and develop the tactical RPG The Banner Saga ( TBA ) . Dead State and The Banner Saga are both supported in part by the public , through the crowd funding website Kickstarter , a recent trend in independent gaming .