

= Super Columbine Massacre RPG ! =

Super Columbine Massacre RPG ! , abbreviated SCMRPG ! , is a role @-@ playing video game created by Danny Ledonne and released in April 2005 . The game recreates the 1999 Columbine High School shootings near Littleton , Colorado . Players assume the roles of gunmen Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold and act out the massacre , with flashbacks relating parts of Harris and Klebold 's past experiences . The game begins on the day of the shootings and follows Harris and Klebold after their suicides to fictional adventures in perdition .

Ledonne had spent many years conceptualizing games , but never created one due to his lack of game design and programming knowledge . He was inspired to create a video game about Columbine by his own experience being bullied and the effect the shooting had on his life . The game represents a critique of how traditional media sensationalized the shooting (in particular the role of video games) , as well as parodying video games themselves . Super Columbine Massacre was created with ASCII 's game development program RPG Maker 2000 and took approximately six months to complete . Ledonne initially published the game anonymously , releasing an artist 's statement about the work after his identity was revealed . Super Columbine Massacre was released for free online and attracted little attention until 2006 , when widespread media coverage fueled hundreds of thousands of downloads .

Reaction to Super Columbine Massacre was enormously negative ; the title was criticized as trivializing the actions of two murderers and the lives of the innocent . The game 's cartoon presentation and the side @-@ plot into hell were considered by critics as obscuring the game 's message , but it received minor note as a game that transcended the stereotypical associations of the medium as entertainment for children . Super Columbine Massacre 's themes and content led to it being included in discussions as to whether video games cause violence ; the title was later listed as one of the possible motivating factors of the shooter after the 2006 Dawson College shootings . The game has been described as an art game , and Ledonne has become a spokesperson for video games as an emerging art form , producing a documentary in 2008 called Playing Columbine about his game and its impact .

= = Gameplay = =

Super Columbine Massacre RPG ! is a role @-@ playing video game . Players control the actions of teenagers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold ; the pair entered Colorado 's Columbine High School on April 20 , 1999 and killed 13 people before turning their guns on themselves in a library . Much of the game takes place in a third @-@ person view , with players controlling Harris and Klebold from an overhead perspective . The graphics and characters are deliberately reminiscent of a 16 @-@ bit @-@ era video game ; while the content is violent , the violence is not graphically rendered .

When players engage in battle , the screen changes to a first @-@ person view of the enemy ; enemies are named by stereotypes or occupations , such as " Preppy girl " , " Janitor " , " Math teacher " and " Jock Type " . Combat has two options : " auto play " , where the game chooses the weapon to use , or " manual play " , in which the player decides to use a hand @-@ to @-@ hand weapon , explosive , gun , or defensive maneuver against foes . Once a battle starts , it is impossible to avoid or escape ; the player must kill the enemy or die . Text narrates battle events and actions such as finding a bag or gaining a weapon .

As the game proceeds , flashbacks occur showing events in Harris and Klebold 's lives which may have caused them to commit murder ; real life events are compressed into the game 's timeframe for narrative purposes . Much of the plot is constructed around the events precisely as they are believed to have occurred ; lines of the gunmen 's dialogue are often lifted verbatim from their writings or from their own home videos of each other . In contrast to the 16 @-@ bit graphics are digitized photographs from the shooting or full voice samples from news reports ; photos of the school are used as backdrops during battle scenes .

= = Plot = =

The game begins as Eric Harris ' mother wakes him on April 20 , 1999 . Harris phones Dylan Klebold , and the pair meet in Harris ' basement to plot a series of bombings that will precede their planned shooting . The two reminisce about the bullying they experienced at Columbine High and express rage at those they perceive to be their tormentors . Harris and Klebold make a video , apologizing to their parents and asking them not to blame themselves for what will follow . The two boys collect their guns and bombs , pack a duffel bag with weapons , and leave home .

In the next scene Harris and Klebold are standing outside their high school . The player guides them to the cafeteria to plant their timed propane bombs without being detected by security cameras or hall monitors . After the explosives are set , the two stop for a moment on a hill outside the school , discussing their alienation and hostility . After the bombs fail to explode as planned , Harris and Klebold decide to enter the school and murder as many people as they can ; the final number killed is up to the player . After roaming around the school shooting innocents , Harris and Klebold commit suicide . A montage of clips showing Harris and Klebold 's corpses , students comforting each other , and childhood photos of the gunmen plays .

The game 's second half finds Klebold alone in Hell . After combating demons and monsters from the video game Doom , Klebold reunites with Harris , and they profess their enthusiasm for the opportunity to live out their favorite video game . The pair find themselves at the " Isle of Lost Souls " , where they meet fictional characters such as Pikachu , Bart Simpson , Mega Man , Mario and real personalities including J. Robert Oppenheimer , JonBenét Ramsey , Malcolm X , Ronald Reagan , Freddie Mercury , Roger Taylor , Brian May , John Deacon , and John Lennon . Next , they deliver a copy of Ecce Homo to Friedrich Nietzsche before fighting the South Park design of Satan . Upon their victory , Satan congratulates them for their deeds .

The game returns to Columbine High School , where a press conference addresses the murders . Some of the dialogue appears precisely as it was spoken after the actual event , while other lines caricature the political forces at work in the aftermath of the murders . The conference references gun control advocacy , religious fundamentalism , and the media 's implication of Marilyn Manson and video games as culpable in the shooting .

= = Development = =

Super Columbine Massacre was created by Danny Ledonne of Alamosa , Colorado , then a student and independent filmmaker . As a high school student , the Columbine shootings resonated with Ledonne , who said that he himself had once been " a loner " , " a misfit " and " a bullied kid " in high school like the shooters . " I was an easy target to be picked on , and that started in kindergarten , " he said . " It was the kind of bullying that most kids who were bullied experienced [...] When you get pushed every day , and when you are ostracized not once , not twice , but years in and out , your perception of reality is distorted [...] These things really do warp your understanding and your perception of humanity in some almost irrevocable way , " he said .

In 1999 , director Stanley Kubrick 's death and the Columbine High School massacre occurred within months of each other ; Ledonne credited the two events with changing his life . After seeing A Clockwork Orange , Ledonne discovered that film could comment on culture ; after the Columbine shootings , he realized he was headed down the same path as the shooters . " It was a bit scary , once I learned more about these boys , because it was like I was looking in the mirror and I didn 't want the same fate for myself , " Ledonne said . He began taking martial arts , studying film , and saw a therapist . By the time he graduated from Alamosa High School , Ledonne had a 4 @. @ 0 grade point average and was voted " most likely to succeed " by his peers . He studied film at Emerson College and moved back to Colorado to form his own production company , Emberwild Productions , which mostly edits wedding videos .

In November 2004 , Ledonne discovered a program called RPG Maker , which allows a developer to add images , text , story and objectives to design a game ; RPG Maker creates the necessary programming automatically . Ledonne had always conceptualized video games throughout his childhood but never produced one due to his lack of technical knowledge ; with RPG Maker he was

able to fulfill his ambition . Ledonne decided to make a game that would explore why the Columbine shootings occurred , as well as refuting pervasive myths about the shooters and the alleged role video games played in the massacre .

The researching , planning , design and programming of the game took about six months and between 200 and 300 hours of work . All the footage and pictures in the game were taken from the internet . Final Fantasy VI influenced the sprite @-@ based design . Many of the songs in the game are MIDI versions of 1990s grunge and alternative bands such as Radiohead , Nirvana and Smashing Pumpkins . Ledonne paid meticulous attention to detail , including giving players access to the exact inventory the gunmen used on their rampage . He watched videos , read newspaper articles and pored over 11 @,@ 000 pages of documents released by the county government regarding the massacre and the killers .

Ledonne added elements to the game to criticize subjects varying from public reaction to the disaster , to stereotypical role @-@ playing game conventions . Every victory in battle displays the message " another victory for the Trenchcoat Mafia " , in reference to the gang that Harris and Klebold were mistakenly affiliated with by the media . Ledonne added the hell segment and populated it with characters from the video game Doom , explaining that " [having the shooters] battle these monsters in an eternal recreation of their favorite videogame was a statement in and of itself . " Super Columbine Massacre is the only video game Ledonne has created , and he has no future plans to create another .

= = = Release = = =

The game was made available for download on April 20 , 2005 , the sixth anniversary of the Columbine massacre . Ledonne sought to remain anonymous at the game 's debut to avoid any possible controversy , which he would later regret as it created the impression he had something to hide . Under the alias " Columbin " , Ledonne regularly engaged gamers and critics alike on a message board he established to discuss the game 's depiction of the shooting and the broader implications of the shooting . Ledonne 's identity was revealed by Roger Kovacs , a friend of one of the Columbine victims , Rachel Scott . Kovacs found out Ledonne 's name by donating to the site via Paypal ; after his name and address were posted online , Ledonne stepped forward and was greeted with requests for interviews . " That 's when I decided that I had to grow a backbone and stand up for my creation , " Ledonne said .

The game is distributed as freeware , with donations in the amount of \$ 1 requested to defray bandwidth costs . Initially , the game attracted little attention , and was downloaded 10 @,@ 000 times in its first year . In April 2006 Patrick Dugan of web site Gamasutra wrote about the game after meeting its host at Game Developers Conference . Impressed , Dugan sent an email to Georgia Institute of Technology professor Ian Bogost , who blogged about the game . Brian Crecente of gaming news site Kotaku and the Rocky Mountain News subsequently interviewed Bogost , and the Associated Press and mainstream media picked up the story . The increased visibility resulted in increased coverage , controversy , and downloads ; in the first half of May 2006 the game was downloaded more than 30 @,@ 000 times . Ledonne announced in September 2006 that the game was no longer available for download directly through its website (instead providing download links) , as the title 's popularity cost too much to sustain ; in a single day in September , he reported 8 @,@ 000 downloads . By March 2007 , the game had been downloaded more than 400 @,@ 000 times .

= = Reaction = =

Reception of Super Columbine Massacre has been extremely negative amongst the mainstream media and those personally affected by the shootings . Upon revealing Columbine 's identity as Ledonne , Kovacs said " One of the girls who died [in the shootings] was a friend of mine , Rachel . We were in the same church group . Anyone playing this game can kill Rachel over and over again . " The father of one victim remarked to the press that the game " disgusts me . You trivialize the

actions of two murderers and the lives of the innocent . " One victim of the shooting played the game and voiced reserved support , remarking that " It probably sounds a bit odd for someone like me to say , but I appreciate the fact at least to some degree that something like this was made . " While he took issue with what he saw as glamorization of the shooters , he also believed it would help open a dialogue about the shooting .

Super Columbine Massacre was largely condemned by the press . Betty Nguyen of CNN labeled the game as an example of a subculture that worships terrorists . Newspapers called the game " exploitive " and a " monstrosity " . PC World declared the game # 2 on its list of " The 10 Worst Games of All Time . " Even critics who were supportive of Ledonne 's intent found the game hard to play ; Ben Kuchera of Ars Technica said that he left the game " shaken " , but that as an easily misunderstood game " the people who are most likely to gain anything from it will never play it . " Crecente felt that the message of the game was obscured by the cartoon graphics of the medium . Reviewers for web site Gameology felt that while the hell segment was a well @-@ executed parody , it did not further the game 's message among those who were quick to judge the game . Ledonne has refused to alter the game as it represents his thoughts on the subject at a particular point in time , but has encouraged others to rework the game themselves .

The most positive reviews of Super Columbine Massacre came from critics who accepted Ledonne 's intended message . Wired magazine writer Clive Thompson appreciated the game 's attention to narrative detail , writing that " the upshot [of the game] is that Ledonne has done a surprisingly good job of painting the emotional landscape of [the gunmen] ? whipsawing from self @-@ pity to pompous grandiosity and blinding rage , then back again . " Thompson called the game subtle , including jabs at the participants and gaming culture by using the language of games as a way to think about the killings . Paul Syvret 's advice to those who found the game controversial and in bad taste was to " lighten up " . Bogost summed up his review of the game by writing " this game is not fun , it is challenging , and difficult to play ? not technically difficult , but conceptually difficult . We need more of that . " David Kociemba , a professor at Emerson College , agreed with Bogost and commented that " the controversy should be that there aren 't more games like Super Columbine Massacre RPG ! that are as demanding and as artistically innovative . " Dugan responded to common criticisms of the game , including that the game was made in bad taste , by writing a rebuttal on his blog :

I think everyone who disses the Columbine RPG is gutless . Most haven 't played the game , or have played it with such preconceptions that they 're blinded to the genius [sic] , the honesty , the beauty of its social commentary . Super Columbine Massacre RPG is riddled with design flaws and has mediocre graphics by 1995 , the maker of the game admits this , but it regardless is a work of art . It puts you in the mindset of the killers and provides a very clear suggestion of why they did what they did ; they were enacting an ideological demonstration through a terrorist act , and the game shines light on this as an indictment of the American dream and way of life painfully close to the main nerve .

After the Dawson College shooting in September 2006 , when gunman Kimveer Gill killed Anastasia De Sousa and injured 19 students , the Toronto Sun wrote that Kimveer had self @-@ reported playing Columbine Massacre on a web site . The story was picked up by media and reported widely . Upon hearing media reports of a link to the game one of the shooting victims at Dawson College contacted Ledonne and told him that " I just suffered multiple gunshot wounds and I think you should take this game down . " Ledonne expressed his reaction to the shooting and renewed media attention towards his game in an interview a week later :

If one is interested in making something for the public to view ? be it a painting , a book , an album , a film , or a video game , should the POSSIBLE harm that may come out of this work be grounds for its suppression from society ? This is , in a sense , pre @-@ crime . If you believe in what you 're doing and you want to express yourself , the expression should be primary and any interpretations that come after must always remain of secondary importance to the creation of the work itself . On another level , the entire correlation between the Dawson College shooting and my game is unfounded . [...] What else did Kimveer like ? Black clothes ? Goth music ? Pizza ? [...] If anything , the Dawson College shooting is proof positive that games like [Super Columbine Massacre]

should be made ; until video games are no longer among the " usual suspects " for homicidal rampages , the public needs to more carefully consider why interactive electronic media is somehow the manufacturer of Manchurian Candidates .

Developer Ryan Lambourn created a flash game called V @-@ Tech Rampage in 2007 , which allows players to control the actions of gunman Seung @-@ Hui Cho in the Virginia Tech massacre . Lambourn professed empathy for Cho , and said that he was a target of bullying in high school . " No one listens to you unless you 've got something sensational to do . And that 's why I feel sympathy for Cho Seung @-@ Hui . He had to go that far , " Lambourn stated . On the V @-@ Tech Rampage site , Lambourn posted a statement that he would take the game off of Newgrounds if donations reached \$ 1000 ; at \$ 2000 in donations he would take the game down from the main site and for another \$ 1000 he would apologize for creating it . Ledonne posted a comment on Lambourn 's website after V @-@ Tech Rampage drew comparisons to Super Columbine Massacre , calling Lambourn 's statement tantamount to a " hostage note " , and asking bloggers to consider " not whether a game about the Virginia Tech shooting SHOULD be made but how we might go about making a game that accomplishes more than V @-@ Tech Rampage does with the subject matter . " Ledonne stated that he emailed Lambourn sympathetically , but that the creator responded to his emails with profanity ; he reiterated that the two games had different motivations and were not easily comparable in content .

= = = Slamgate and legacy = = =

In October 2006 , Sam Roberts , the Guerilla Gamemaker Competition director of the Slamdance festival , emailed Ledonne encouraging him to submit the game to the contest . Ledonne looked at the selection of the game as one of the competition 's finalists in December as evidence that " all forms of art can be valid tools for societal exploration (even painful topics like school shootings) " . The event 's organizer , Peter Baxter , announced the removal of the game from the festival 's " Guerrilla Gamemaker Competition " after its selection as a finalist . Several reasons for the change of mind were given , including threatened sponsor withdrawal , possible lawsuits , and " moral grounds " ; Baxter denied that sponsor pressure caused the drop , instead affirming that " the shootings are still a very touchy subject , and rightly so . We have to be sensitive to [victims and their families '] feelings . " An additional consideration reported was that unnamed parties might sue for copyright violations in the game itself . The announcement marked the first time the festival had pulled jury @-@ selected content from the contest ; the incident was dubbed " Slamgate " by the gaming press .

Following the announcement , USC Interactive Media Division withdrew its sponsorship of the festival . Seven of the fourteen finalist games were removed from the contest by their developers in protest : Braid , fIOW , Once Upon A Time , Toblo , Everyday Shooter , Book and Volume and Castle Crashers (Toblo was later reinstated by the DigiPen Institute of Technology , who owns the rights to the game) . Developer Jonathan Blow of Braid stated : " [Super Columbine Massacre] lacks compassion , and I find the Artist 's Statement disingenuous . But despite this , the game does have redeeming value . It does provoke important thoughts , and it does push the boundaries of what games are about . It is composed with more of an eye toward art than most games . Clearly , it belongs at the festival . " Blow and the other developers sent an open letter to the festival , encouraging the reinstatement of the game as keeping with the festival 's " trailblazing " efforts . Despite protests , Baxter refused to change his mind , citing consideration for the shooting 's victims and their families . Ledonne told the other finalists that he planned to go to the festival anyway and distribute copies of the game . Acknowledging that the withdrawal of six finalists compromised the competition , Roberts let the attendees vote on whether any prizes would be awarded ; they decided not to .

Brian Flemming , director of The God Who Wasn 't There , saw Ledonne 's demo of Super Columbine Massacre outside the festival , and convinced two fellow Slamdance film jurors to award the game a " Special Jury Prize " for Best Documentary , an unofficial award not endorsed by Slamdance itself . The jurors intended to present the special prize alongside the award for best

documentary . Shortly before the ceremony , Baxter informed Flemming that he couldn 't present the award due to " music clearance issues " , and refused to allow it despite Flemming 's protests . According to Ledonne , Flemming tried to hold his ground , but eventually gave in to Baxter 's request .

Ledonne produced a documentary film based on his experiences after the release of Super Columbine Massacre . Titled *Playing Columbine* , the documentary uses the controversy surrounding the game to investigate the large issues facing video games as a medium for artistic expression . The film premiered at AFI Fest in Los Angeles , California on November 7 , 2008 . Thirteen minutes of preview footage were released online , and a limited edition DVD is posted for sale on the web .

As a result of the controversy of his game , Ledonne became an unwitting spokesman for the games industry , facing the medium 's opponents in debates and forums . The furor resulting from Slamgate was called out by Ledonne and others in the media as a sign that video games had not yet outgrown the traditional stereotype of children 's games . Keith Stuart of *The Guardian* wrote that despite being confused and tawdry , *Super Columbine Massacre* " symbolizes a growing understanding that videogames have more to say than ' shoot the enemies and pick up health . ' " Authors Andreas Jahn @-@ Sudmann and Ralf Stockmann consider controversial video games such as *Super Columbine Massacre* and the *Grand Theft Auto* " Hot coffee mod " evidence of sociopolitical tensions present between gamers and older generations . The game and others like it continue to be at the center of the video games as art debate , and Gamasutra credited *Super Columbine Massacre* and *Slamgate* as having two highly positive and far @-@ reaching effects ; first , forcing print game journalism to focus on the issue ; and second , the " evangelization of the notion that games can be as meaningful and important as other media , even if the example is offensive to the sensibilities of most Americans [...] To win is to lose , but to play is to experience an enrichment that cannot be scored . "