



The IndieGameMagazine

Indie game reviews, previews, news & downloads

Issue 13: November/December 2010

SHANK



Interview with



Inside this Issue:



Ancients of Ooga



Alpha Squad



Spider HD



Zombie Pizza

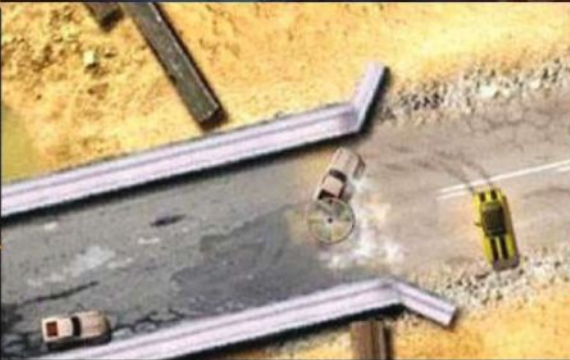
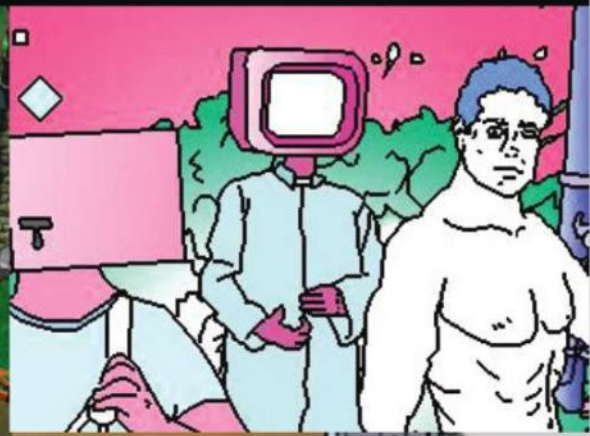


Aquaria

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+ Table of Contents

Front End

Staff/Credits	pg 2
Table of Contents	pg 3
Get Well Gamers Thank You	pg 5
Dragon Divide Interview	pg 6
Contributor's Bios	pg 7

Feature

The Indie Road Map	pg 8-13
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Cover Story

Shank Review	pg 14
Klei Entertainment Interview	pg 16

Reviews

Zombie Pizza	pg 19
Ancients of Ooga	pg 20
Spider HD for iPad	pg 21

Cover Story: Shank is brimming with style and violence.



About our Reviews

We rate all of our games based on their graphics, gameplay, sound, and lasting appeal. Each category is given a score on a scale of 1-10 (10 being perfect and 1 being horrendous). The average of these scores is tallied to give each game a percentage score and grade (A thru F). Games are more than the sum of their parts, so we do adjust our average scores based on our final assessment of the game, its appeal, creativity, uniqueness, and overall value.

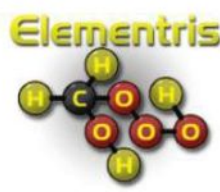
A: 90-100%
B: 80-89%
C: 70-79%

D: 60-69%
F: 0-59%



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IGM recently ran a promotion to raise money for the Get Well Gamers Foundation. We are happy to announce that we raised over \$600! The Get-Well Gamers Foundation is a California-based 501(c) (3)-certified public charity dedicated to bringing electronic entertainment to children's hospitals for the benefit of entertainment and pain management since 2001. Its network includes more 100 hospitals and treatment facilities across the United States and Canada. For more information, please visit www.getwellgamers.org.

Thank you to all of our supporters and sponsors. It's great to see that the Indie Scene was able to raise money for this great cause.

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Steve Flores of Dragon Divide talks to us about Alpha Squad



When I stumbled across Alpha Squad from Dragon Divide, it caught my eye because of its buxom beauties, but I was shocked to find that the game looks gorgeous and has very high production values for an XBLIG. The game is an over the top dual stick shooter that features several characters and takes place in a desolate future. You take control of a member of Alpha Squad by yourself or with a friend and attempt to take on the future's evil dictatorship: The Alliance. Alpha Squad will cost only \$3 and should be released in the next few months. Steve Flores was kind enough to answer some of our questions.

When did you start developing games? What got you into programming and designing?

Like most indie developers, I have been a designer all my life, ever since being able to pick up a pencil and write. I had always dreamed about making my own games and I knew that was the only thing I wanted to do.

Programming was something I dabbled with back and forth for several years but I never really got into it, because school and other responsibilities got in the way. I have never been a great student, the way the entire structure is set up clashes with my learning style. As a result I did poorly in programming classes I tried in college and needed to major in a different, but related, field.

My real-world experience came along later after college, when my first jobs required some small knowledge of C# that I learned myself. Over the next few years my knowledge increased and after saving my money for several years, I wanted to fund a game project while I still could.

You will notice that most of these well known indie developers are fairly young, as in under 30. Because when it comes time to settle down and have a family, you are not going to have a large amount of money or time just sitting aside for something like this.

So I pursued this with a big risk, but felt compelled to, as this was my "last shot".

What is your favorite retro game? What game do you remember from your childhood that inspired you to make games?

The first time that I can remember playing games was on an Atari 2600 that was at my Grandma's house. While the 2600 port of Pac-Man sucked, I was too young to care at that point. I was fascinated by all of those classics such as Space Invaders, and Donkey Kong.

Looking back however, I cannot think of a game title before the late Nintendo (NES) era that is worthy of being called a favorite of mine... Is Super Mario Bros 3 retro enough? I think at that point design mechanics matured enough to give a game some real lasting power. Only moving from A to B and racking up points is boring to me. What's your favorite game of all time? Why is it your favorite?

Mortal Kombat 2. It seems silly right? If you look at it today, the fighting system was not as good as some of the competitors of the time and overall the game would not be on a list of games you would take with you on a deserted island.

However, that game became much more

than the sum of its programming. The artistic style, music and story all gave an element of mystery and exploration from a rather unlikely genre. This was a fighting game but gamers were exploring to uncover all of its mysteries as if it was some kind of adventure RPG.

I was pretty obsessed with the game at the time. I remember buying all of the magazines, reading all of the rumors about the game from the very early days of the internet, doodling the characters on notepads and working in some of the announcer voices into my general speech.

There are a lot of lessons to be learned from that game, but unfortunately if you were not a part of that era it is difficult to impart the feeling that was there.

What is your favorite indie game right now? Why?

That is really difficult to say. I actually think the majority of indie games are not noteworthy. But since I'm older and have played a lot of games, it is most likely because I am hard to please. Even some AAA games do not really wow me.

What does it mean to be an indie developer?

Ideally an indie developer means that you

have more control of your ideas and explore aspects of design that are not touched upon by other studios. Basically you fill your own void, fulfilling whatever you feel is lacking in games... on a budget.

What actually occurs is a little more similar to what you get as a large studio, minus all of the money and legal backing. Sometimes what we deal with is even more difficult than a large development house. Let me give you a few examples:

While it is true that you are designing your own game, you still need to go through a peer review or some kind of sign off process like a professional title would in terms of content and profile. An acquaintance of mine passed a peer review on Xbox Live Indie Games, but when submitting the same game for the iPhone store, he was rejected for a fairly tame project. If your intent is for people to actually play your games, then you will still need to answer to someone or some group which COULD end up with you changing your original intentions or risk being cut out from a segment of the market.

Sometimes things can be pretty cut throat in reaching out to possible customers. Since you start out as an unknown, you'll be on the same level as hundreds of development teams, buried in mediocrity until that one title gets you noticed. Because this was my first game title, I was extremely happy when I got noticed by a mainstream site. Then I saw that another indie developer was using my success to market his own project on my article. It was an obvious viral marketing scheme because within short succession several users were praising they would check out the site. You will get a lot of stuff like that.

An ideal situation is to be an indie developer picked up by a major publisher to have a project funded or promoted by a large entity, like Hothead Games with DeathSpank. But wait, I guess that would not make you indie anymore would it?

Alternatively you could do so well independently that you have enough pull where you can actually force publishing channels into sponsoring

your game.

How many people comprise Dragon Divide? How did the studio get formed?

I am getting older and I have wanted to be a part of the game industry for a long time. Unfortunately I was not having much luck in pursuit of my ideal roles as a producer or designer and decided that my time was running out in changing careers and where I would have some disposable cash to use to create a relatively large project in order to either continue on as my own studio or to break into the industry.

Originally the idea was started by me. At first it was going to be myself and my best friend programming and designing with a bunch of others doing art, sound and music assets... but with a recent marriage, full time job and general life responsibilities, my friend had to drop off the studio project.

Dragon Divide is comprised of myself and several contractors around the world. Perhaps in the future I will be able to bring true full-time employees on board.

When did you start work on Alpha Squad? Where did you get the idea/inspiration for the game?

Work started on Alpha Squad in September 2009. The idea was to take a proven concept and technology and make it better than anything that has been seen yet on the Xbox Live Indie Games Channel. I was playing Smash TV with a friend and decided we could do better.

The game actually turned out a bit bigger than what I had originally envisioned, but because the market environment changed over the course of a year and I was able to put more money into the *budget over time*, I was able to put more features into it.

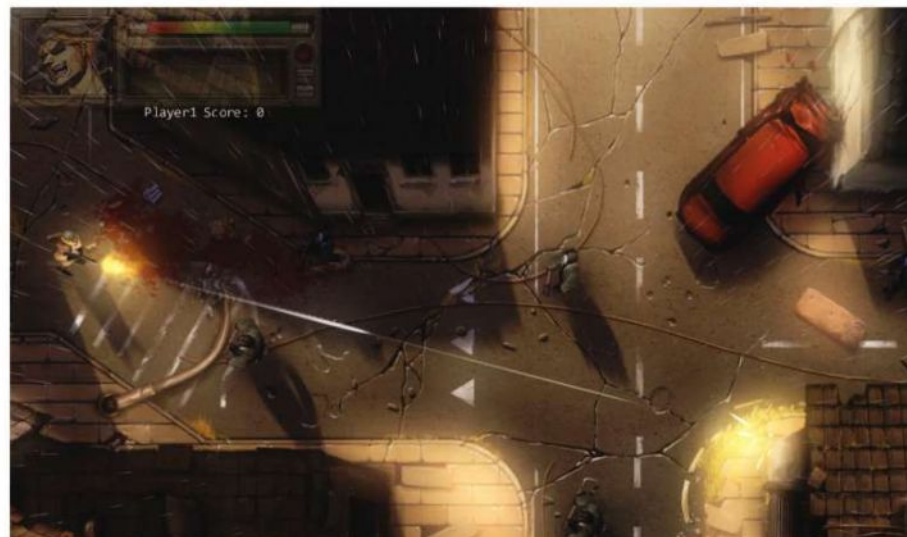
...continued on pg 22

Nicholas Lara

Nick is the Entertainment Editor at Royal Palm Beach High School and wants to be an Entertainment journalist for a big name company like IGN or Rolling Stone.

Mike Gnade

Mike is currently enjoying Super Meat Boy on XBLA and Explosionade on XBLIG. There's just something about old school 2D gaming.



The Indie Road Map

This issue we're going on a road trip across the Internet to discover all the great indie gaming content that you've been missing. We don't have time to cover every title out there alphabetically, but there are some essential stops along the way. Below you will find a roadmap and travel guide for your indie journey.

Part 1 - Essential Indie Freebies



Cave Story is the quintessential indie Metroidvania game. It was designed and programmed over five years by Daisuke "Pixel" Amaya in his free time and released in 2004 for the PC. It's got sweet pixel graphics, a memorable story, and classic gameplay. If you owned an NES, you have to try this game. There's a paid version that came out in March for WiiWare, too.



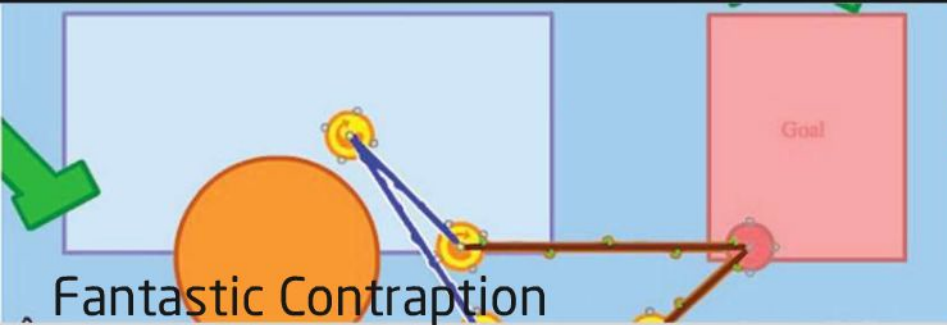
Edmund McMillen
www.edmundm.com

Edmund McMillen has made a ton of indie games and most of them are free Flash titles. You can play Aether, Meat Boy, Coil, Spewer, and more for free. He also made Gish, an indie physics game where you control a ball of tar. Currently, Edmund is working on Super Meat Boy for consoles. Edmund is a slightly cracked and definitely un-PC indie personality. His blog and games are all worth checking out.



Semi Secret Software
www.semisecretsoftware.com

Heard of Canabalt? If you haven't go check it out right now. Canabalt was made in less than seven days and took the Internet (and the App store) by storm with its addictive one-button controls. What most people don't know is that Adam Saltsman (aka, Adam Atomic) and the rest of the Semi Secret crew have other great products (and free prototypes) out there and are very active in the indie community.



Fantastic Contraption

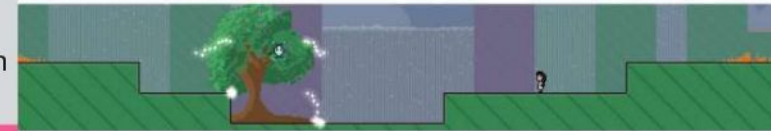
www.fantasticcontraption.com

This title is a lesson for every indie out there on how to make money. Fantastic Contraption is a simple physics game (similar to The Incredible Machine) with mediocre graphics, but it made Colin Northway a lot of dough. What really made it a success was its in-game upsell feature and easy sharing features. This led to Contraption going viral.



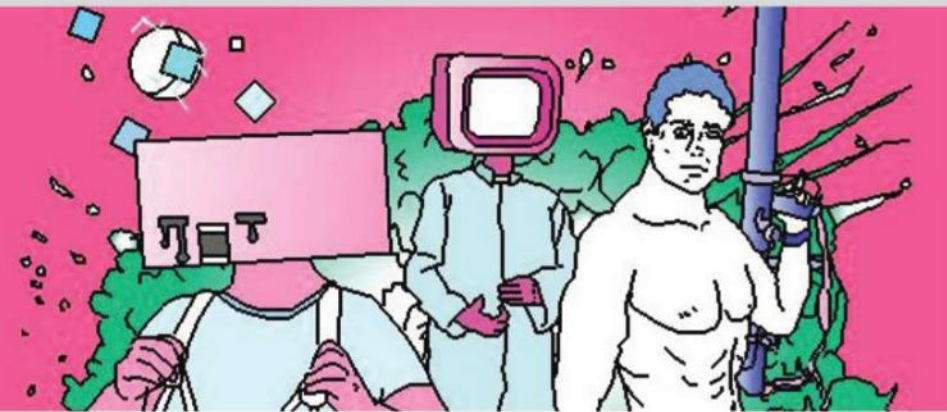
www.experimentalgameplay.com

Free games galore! This site has been the birthplace of tons of fantastic indie games from World of Goo to Canabalt to Shoot 1UP. The site focuses on free experimental prototypes made in less than seven days. Each month features tons of new games based on that month's theme. The next big indie game could be a prototype featured on EGP.



Knytt Stories www.nifflas.ni2.se

Knytt Stories is probably the best free game on the Internet. At its core, Knytt is a 2D pixel platformer that is based on exploration and discovery. The main game is a joy to play, but what makes it incredible are all the ways you can make your very own Knytt Story. The game is open source and comes with a bunch of tools to make your own levels or your own game based on the Knytt engine.



CactuSquid www.cactusquid.com

Cactusquid is a Swedish developer who just churns out freeware. He describes them as experiments dressed up as games, but there's a ton of content to be consumed on his site. His projects have resulted in some pretty interesting titles including the IGF Nuovo finalist Tuning. Download his free arcade compilations, which include all his great game experiments.



Steambirds www.steambirds.net

Steambirds is an excellent example of a premium Flash experience. It's a simplistic but addictive real-time strategy game that revolves around dogfighting.



Captain Forever

www.captainforever.com

Farbs' Captain Forever looks like it's just another Asteroids clone, but it offers customization. You can add parts to your ship at any time and even use scraps from defeated foes to create your own unique craft. It's a collection of games, but the first one is free and definitely worth your time.

+ Feature

This next group of games you have to pay for, but they're all well worth the price. These indie gems offer experiences unlike any that you have played before — that uniqueness has earned them awards and also helped keep them fresh over the years.

Part 2 - The Best Indies You Can Buy

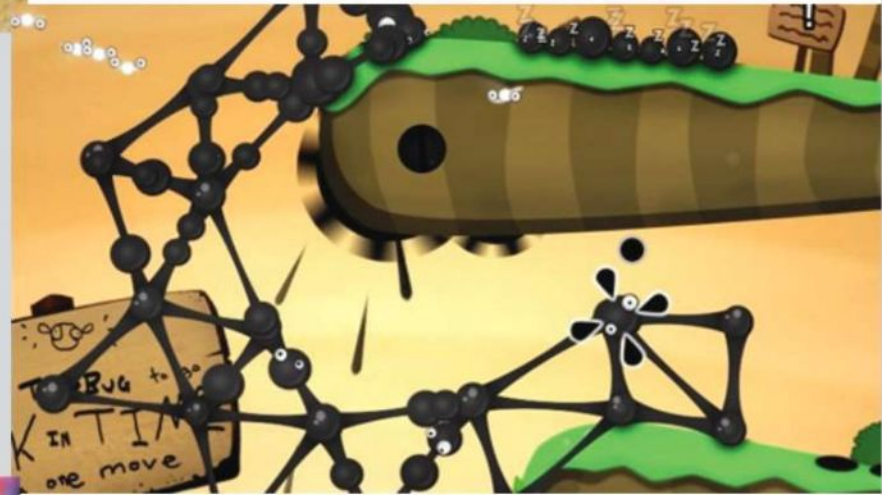


Gish www.cryticsea.com
Windows PC

Gish is a normal platformer...except that you play as a ball of tar that can change shapes and affect the physics of the world. Yeah, it came out in 2004, but it

World of Goo www.2dboy.com
WiiWare - PC - Mac - Linux

2DBoy's award-winning game started as a humble 7-day prototype, but soon towered over the competition as the immensely well-crafted World of Goo, now available on PC, Wii, and iPhone. This game's unique mechanics and spectacular design deliver a new experience with every level.



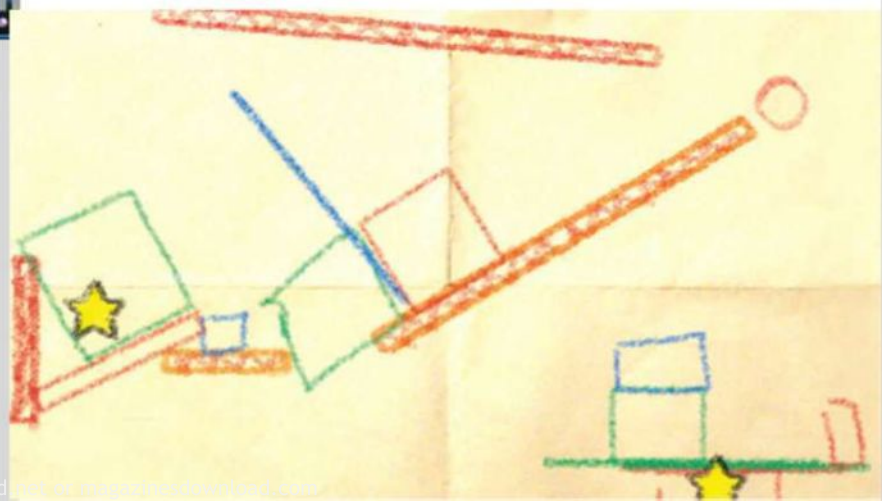
Starscape www.moonpod.com
Windows PC

Like the 1980s arcade hit Asteroids? Starscape takes that game's basic control scheme and adds RPG elements, mining, and base-building mechanics. It's an epic indie adventure game that will have you addicted for months.



Crayon Physics Deluxe
www.crayonphysics.com
Windows PC - iPhone

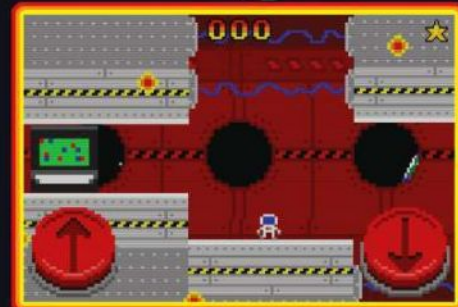
Crayon Physics started humbly enough as a free game prototype and soon evolved into the IGF Grand Prize-winning Deluxe version. Crayon Physics allows you to draw and create physics objects right on the page. The freedom that this sandbox physics gameplay affords simply must be experienced.



GRAVONAUT

CAN YOU HANDLE
THE LUNAR
CHALLENGE?

Available on the iPhone
App Store



GRAVITY CONTROLLING SPACE
ADVENTURE



FIFTEEN BRUTALLY CHALLENGING
LEVELS

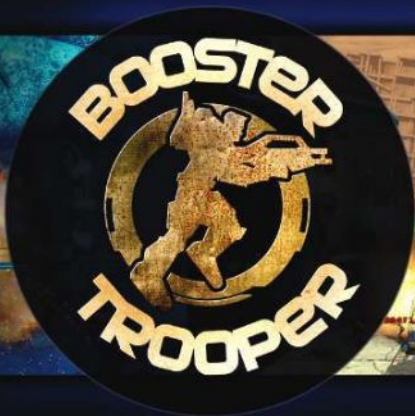


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PixelJunk

www.pixeljunk.jp

Playstation Network

The PixelJunk series and its developer, Q Games, may not be indie in the traditional, living-on-ramen sense, but their games certainly embody the indie spirit. Eden and Shooter both exemplify the fantastic experimental and simplistic gameplay mechanics that make indie games great.

Aquaria

www.bit-blot.com

Windows PC - Mac

Aquaria is a beautiful game with an epic story — it's similar to Echo the Dolphin but adds some intuitive controls and innovative 'singing' mechanics. It's better to experience Naija's enthralling tale rather than have it explained to you, so I'm going to quit right now. Check it out!



Mexican Motor Mafia

www.scienceoftomorrow.com

Windows PC

Remember the good old top-down PC versions of Grand Theft Auto? Mexican Motor Mafia takes the GTA formula, simplifies it to focus on car combat, and sets the game in Mexico. It's an oldie but goodie.

Armadillo Run

www.armadillorun.com

Windows PC

Imagine a virtual K'nex set on your computer with an odd looking yellow ball mimicking an armadillo, and you've got an idea of what Armadillo Run is all about. Sort of. It's a physics bridge-building game that's half simulation, half game, and totally worth a look.





www.shankgame.com - XBLA - PSN - PC

Shank takes the classic beatemup formula and amps it up with violence and visual style

Shank is a 2D side-scrolling beatemup for PSN, XBLA and PC. It has fantastic art and is chock full of violent animations. This isn't Double Dragon, Shank is a scorned ex-criminal who wants the boss's head on a platter... preferably ripped off with a chainsaw.

Shank's main story is pretty compelling and slowly evolves as you progress through the game. The story is one of the game's strong suits and is reminiscent of "Kill Bill" (only Shank's a dude). The gist is that Shank chose his girlfriend over the gang of sociopaths he worked with. That doesn't sit well with Cesar and the gang, so these psychopaths decide to rape Shank's girlfriend, kill her, kill Shank, and burn his house down. The problem is that Shank lives, and comes back years later for revenge. It's not the most original story, but the cut scenes are slick, the violence is raw, and the Mexican drug cartel setting and style shine.

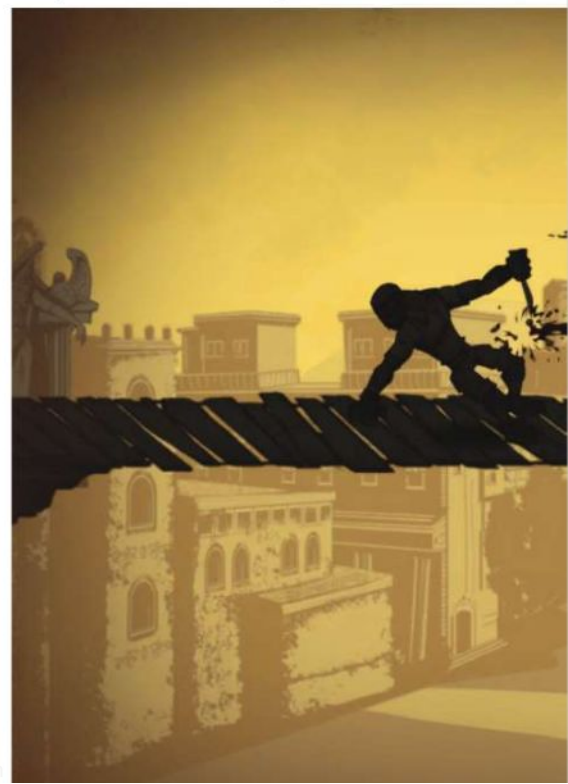
The gameplay in Shank is inspired by classic 2D brawlers such as Final Fight, Streets of Rage, and Double

Dragon. Shank throws in over the top violence and guns for good measure. The great thing about Shank is that it is instantly fun and benefits from some excellent art direction and animations. You start with a good variety of moves and weapons and the Boss Fights showcase some excellent custom animations. Some of the Boss Fights can be a little cheap, but once you figure out their patterns and weakness, you shouldn't have too much trouble beating them down. One of the biggest frustrations in Shank is that when you die, it doesn't really feel like your fault. Most deaths come at the hands of some bad luck and cheap enemies rather than a poorly timed jump or miscalculated combo.

My only gripe with the core brawler gameplay is that it doesn't really evolve as you play through the game. Sure you acquire some new weapons and moves, but none of the upgrades feel that different or really seem to help progress through the campaign. Shank would have benefited immensely from some slight RPG elements and upgrade options between levels. Earning points

that could upgrade Shank's weapons, health and combos would have reduced frustrations and added some replay ability. I can only imagine how badass and fun a fully powered up Shank could have been.

The presentation of Shank is fantastic. Shank's visual style grabs your attention and leaves a great lasting impression. The large hand drawn



characters and backgrounds seem to be inspired by top-notch comics/anime mixed with gritty Tex-Mex visuals found in movies like *Desperado*. The vibrant sun scorched locales lack some variety but they fit the game's story and atmosphere so well that it's not a big deal. *Shank* is drop dead gorgeous. It's the best looking 2D game that I've seen on Playstation 3 or Xbox 360.

Shank has a single player campaign and a co-op campaign. I loved that the Co-Op campaign wasn't just a 2 player version of the main game. Instead, Co-Op and Single Player are completely different stories with different levels. The co-op missions definitely add to the value, but ultimately co-op feels tacked on and showcases some of the game's blemishes to be major faults. *Shank's* story will drive you to keep playing through the campaign (and Co-Op if you can find a friend to suffer through it with you), but some of the later levels and enemies become cheap and tiresome.

Shank's over the top violence and compelling story are immensely entertaining. The game's production values are top-notch and complemented by some excellent voice acting and cut scenes, but the game falls just shy of beatemup bliss. Some cheap enemies and the lack of an upgrade system make *Shank* a fun ride, but not one that you'll be coming back to again and again. Nonetheless, *Shank's* story and graphics make it well worth the price of admission for action fanatics. As long as you're not opposed to some bloody violence, rev up the chainsaw and get ready for some gruesome revenge.

- Mike Gnade



REVIEW

Gameplay:	8
Graphics:	10
Sound/Music:	10
Lasting Appeal:	6

Score: 85%

Grade B

Klei Entertainment Interview

Jamie Cheng, CEO of Klei Entertainment and creator of Shank answers questions about their most recent games, what inspired him to be an indie developer, and what games influenced him growing up.



When did you start developing games? What got you into programming and designing?

I started developing games while in university, doing little fun demos in my spare time. The first version of Eets was developed while I was working at Relic.

What is your favorite retro game? What game do you remember from your childhood that inspired you to make games?

I honestly have too many games in my childhood to really just pick one. Growing up in Hong Kong, I was playing classic Nintendo games, weird Japanese games, classic JRPG's, Sierra and LucasArts adventure games, and basically everything in between. All of those had a huge influence on me today. Some examples of each include: Super Metroid, Dragonball Z: Super Saiya Densetsu, Secret of Mana, Quest for Glory, and The Dig.

What's your favorite game of all time? Why is it your favorite?

I don't really have a favourite, but I'll pick one that really comes to mind: Zelda:

The Minish Cap for the GBA. Obviously, I have huge fondness for the original Zelda and Link to the Past, but I honestly think they perfected the pacing in the GBA version. It never got too difficult, the puzzles were clever, and you always got a new toy to play with at exactly the right time. And there was no senseless travel time that they've decided to put in every Zelda game ever since.

What is your favorite indie game right now? Why?

Right now... probably Super Meat Boy or maybe Monaco... or Hoard. All of these chose one specific game mechanic and just do it fantastically well -- I had a ton of fun playing all three at PAX this year. SMB is very reminiscent of N+ and scratches that super tough platformer itch for me.

What does it mean to be an indie developer?

What being indie to me is being able to make your own choices and making games that you believe in.

What would you say to people who

think Shank isn't an indie game because of the partnership with EA?

I try to provide them with some context. We risked everything we built over the last 5 years to create Shank, and spent 80% of development with no other funding. In the end, we held out until we found a distributor who would sign a deal where we had absolute creative control. If that doesn't fit into your definition of indie, that's actually fine. I'd just say it's a more narrow definition than I would choose.

How many people comprise Klei Entertainment? How did the studio get formed?

We currently have 14 staff, and the studio was formed in my rented basement back in 2005. In the early days, Alex and Marcus would show up at my place every morning to create Eets -- I had incredibly supportive friends and room-mates who let me use their furniture and completely take over the living room with second-hand computers. Over time, we scraped enough money to rent a shoebox office and continued to slowly grow from there.

When did you start work on Shank? Where did you get the ideal inspiration for the game?

Shank began life in January 2009, with the idea that the classic 2D brawler still had so much to offer. We wanted to put some real life in it, with influences from movies like Desperado and graphic novels like Sin City, and create a brawler that players haven't seen or experienced before.

What did you learn from Eets that was helpful in developing your next title? How much impact did the success of Eets have on Shank?

Gee, the time between Eets and Shank was like 4 years. Obviously, we gained a lot of experience, but it's hard to point to very specific things. I guess the one thing Eets taught me is not to give up -- we just kept going even when things looked incredibly bleak, and we just kept coming up with ideas and options until we figured out a way to make it work.

Tell us about Shank. What is your favorite moment or feature?

Probably the classic "I shoved a grenade in your mouth and shot the grenade and it blew up your head" moment.



Why did you choose to release the game for Playstation 3 and Xbox 360?

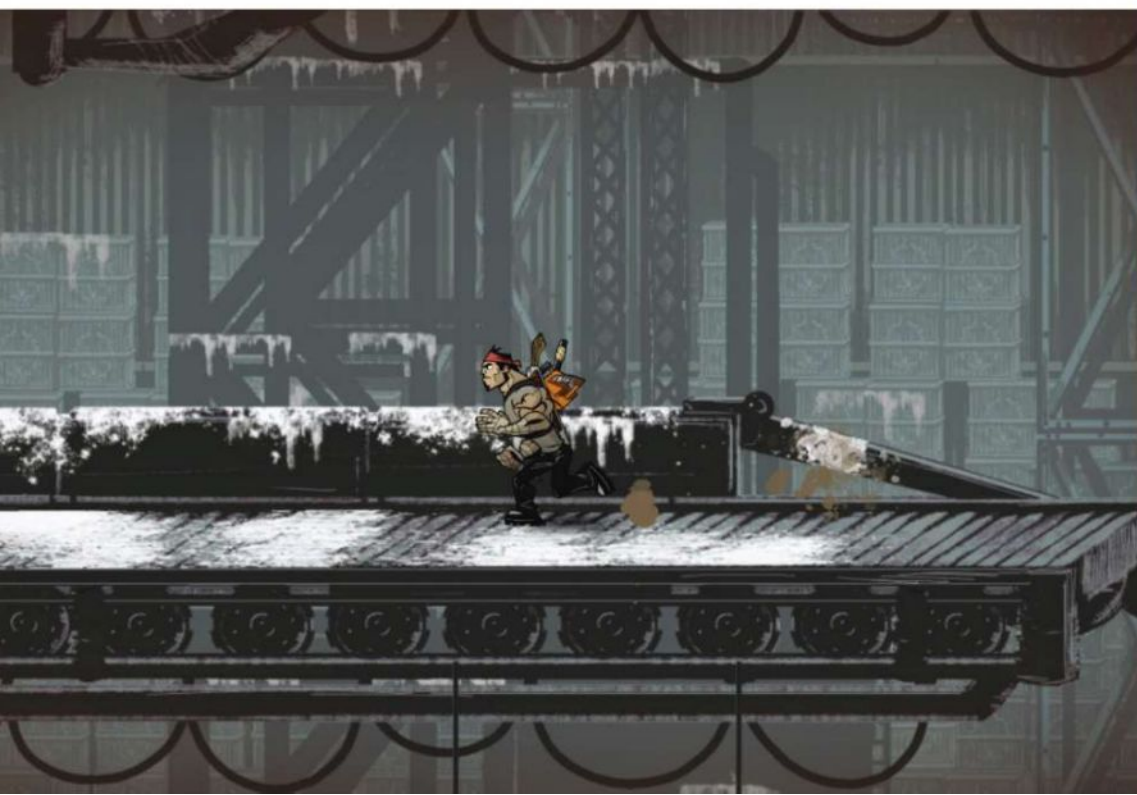
Shank's a natural fit for the console -- one of the reasons we were so happy to go back into high-end PC and consoles is that we could go all out, technically. The controller is the obvious choice for the genre, and we could do some amazing 2D artwork.

If you had more time/money what would you change about Shank?

Oh that's easy -- I'd have loved to do more fine-tuning of the difficulty across the board, spent more time with the pacing to teach people the finer points about Shank's combat, and adding online co-op is something that's heavily requested but something we couldn't do with our limited budget.

What one piece of advice would you give to aspiring developers?

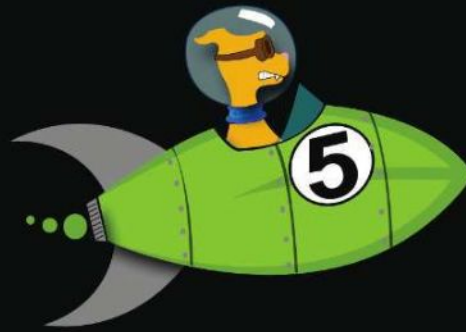
I want to say "Don't listen to advice" but that's just a good soundbite. There's lots of people out there who will say what you want to do is impossible and in fact they've got a point. Given certain constraints and assumptions, it is impossible, but if you're able to challenge those assumptions, then you can do some crazy, amazing things.



+ Reviews Rocket 5 Studios



Giant Moto



Small Space / XL



iSpooF Walken



Holeshot
Drag Racing



Gaga Eyes



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Zombie Pizza -

www.appyzombiepizza.com - iPhone - iPad

Getting someone to pay for an iPhone game is harder than getting someone to buy you a meal at a restaurant, though a meal is five times the price. It's sad but true, especially because Appy Entertainment just put out a new puzzler, *Zombie Pizza*, which is definitely worth every cent.

The story behind *Zombie Pizza* is simple, as is customary in most hand-held, if not all, puzzlers. There is a zombie uprising. The zombies are attacking all night and hiding all day. You and your Italian boss run a small pizzeria that you use to serve these zombies pizzas that are topped with bones, eyes and other various body parts. The trick here: If you don't feed the zombies quick enough, they will over run your pizzeria and proceed to eat your brains. The game spans over five weeks, which are level sets. Each week has seven days, which are levels.

The game boasts a simple combo system. You have four sections to fill on each pizza (You start with making one pizza at a time but eventually build up to making three pizzas at once) by dragging toppings on to them. In order to serve a successful combo you have to fill the sections with only two different toppings (Two each), fill each section with the same topping or place a different topping in each section. Each combo has a different score multiplier associated with it.

I found the combo system very efficient. Patience and timing play a huge factor into getting a combo. When you get to the point where you're serving three pizzas at once,

it helps to wait until just the right times to toss one of the pizzas out to the zombie onslaught.

Combos are very essential to getting achievements and getting gold medals. They are also essential to getting a high score in one of the two game modes, Survival. In Survival mode you just serve pizza after disgusting pizza until the zombie horde breaks through your front door. It got pretty hectic and there's almost no room for error.

One issue I had with the game, especially while I was playing Survival mode, was that the drag-and-drop had some issues. I'd clearly place a topping on one pizza and it would teleport to another pizza. I would also go to pick up a topping and it would simply not pick-up. There was even an instance where I dropped a topping and it simply floated on screen and was never placed on the pizza and couldn't be moved.

Another issue I had was the frame rate. Whenever you toss out a pizza, you run the risk of possibly lagging your game for a good 2 seconds. This can be extremely detrimental when you are already ten to fifteen minutes into Survival mode.

Overall, *Zombie Pizza* was very good. It's totally worth 99 cents. Sure the frame rate might slow down and the drag-and-drop may be slightly flawed, but the positives of the game outweigh the negatives by a landslide. It's not a game you can play for too long without getting bored (90 minutes tops), but when you do play it you'll find it hard to put down. *Zombie Pizza* is the perfect example of how an iPhone game should be made: casual, fun, addicting and humorous.

-Nicholas Lara





Ancients of Ooga - www.ninjaBee.com - Xbox Live

Ancients of Ooga by NinjaBee is the spiritual successor to Cloning Clyde. Like Clyde, Ancients is a platformer where you can switch between characters at will to solve puzzles. Ancients is a good game that improves on Clyde's concept but has some missteps along the way that keep it from being spectacular.

Let's get the bad out of the way, Ancient's setting and graphics are not as appealing as Clyde's. You control the Ooganis on their quest to become free from the Boolis. The crazy Ooganis were dumb enough to get addicted to slugs and imprisoned by the lumbering Boolis. The story is straight forward enough, but the witty and humorous script make the game a lot more enjoyable. The Ooganis themselves are a little too ADHD for me; I much prefer Clyde's stupidity to the wackiness of the Ooganis.

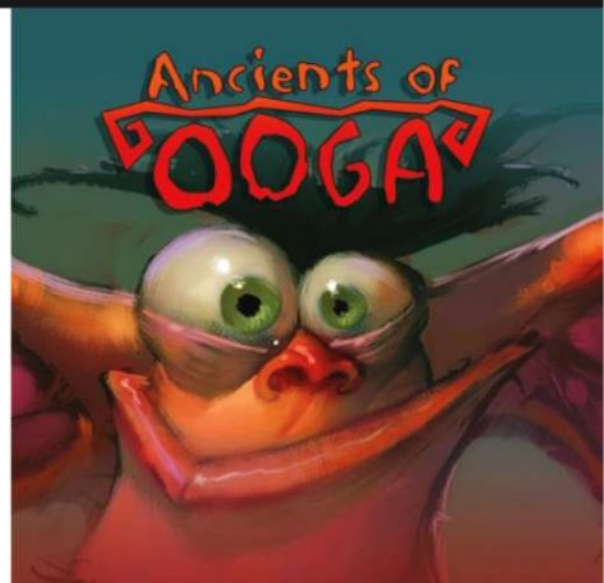
In my opinion, Ancients biggest mistake is its art direction. Clyde's Claymation graphics are much more charming than the polygons found in Ancients. While Ancients certainly offers a wider variety of environments and superior animation, I found the polygonal graphics lacking compared to other XBLA titles.

Let's move onto the good. Ancient's presentation is top notch. The story sequences are great and the game's writing and voice acting will make you smile and chuckle. The gameplay

is a vast improvement compared to Clyde. The basic mechanics of the game are the same, but there are more diverse level objectives in Ancients. Each tribe of Ooganis has their own special abilities which can be upgraded by shamans. These powers help the diversity of puzzles and keep the game fresh as you move from tribe to tribe. Another small game design improvement is the 'inventory' system. Ooganis have strong stomachs and you're able to carry an infinite number of objects (and even other Ooganis) in your belly. When you need an item, just puke them up with the press of a button. The premise is childish and gross, but it actually makes all the fetching in Ancients a lot less tedious.

Ancients of Ooga is a good quality game at a fair price. The story is well put together and worth playing through and while the game seems geared more towards kids with some of its over-the-top wackiness and easy puzzles, it's still a solid puzzle platformer. Ancients is not my favorite NinjaBee game, but it is a solid entry into their already solid portfolio.

- Mike Gnade



REVIEW

Gameplay:	7
Graphics:	8
Sound/Music:	8
Lasting Appeal:	7.5

Score: 81%
Grade B-



Spider: The Secret of Bryce Manor HD - www.tigerstylegames.com - iPad

Spider by Tiger Style walked away with the top Mobile Game prize at the IGF this past March 2010 and for good reason. Spider offers an innovative play mechanic with gorgeous visuals. Spider HD for the iPad is the same great game but the hand drawn visuals are even more impressive on the iPad's larger screen and the HD version has some great additional multiplayer features.

The goal of Spider is simple. Levels are made up of different rooms of Bryce

Manor and in each room you must trap and eat enough insects to open the portal to the next room. Trapping insects and controlling the spider is where the game really shines. Holding your finger on the right side of the screen will move the Spider to the right, doing the inverse will move the Spider to the left. Flicking your finger will make the Spider jump in that direction. You can tap the spider to anchor a web - then jump to a wall and you'll draw a thin line of webbing. By creating enclosed geometric shapes with your ropes will create webs

that can trap insects to eat. The controls may sound complicated, but they work great on the iPad. My only complaint about them is that the walking mechanic is a little weird.

The hand drawn graphics in Spider are among the best I've seen on the iPad. The art style is simply superb. In fact, Spider's only graphical inadequacies come from the somewhat simplistic animations of the insects. The sounds in Spider are adequate, but the music is a little too groovy and melodic. While the music isn't bad, it was certainly a missed opportunity to create a more mysterious and atmospheric Bryce Manor.

The campaign features a good number of rooms to explore and secrets to find though the game can be beaten in a few hours. It is a mobile game though and when you add in 3 arcade modes, a multiplayer mode, and achievements, the game more than warrants its asking price. The lasting appeal is better than a lot of the shorter arcade games that you can find on iPad or the iPhone. You can't go wrong by picking up Spider.

- Mike Gnade



REVIEW

Gameplay:	9
Graphics:	9
Sound/Music:	7
Lasting Appeal:	9

Score: 88%

Grade B+



...continued from pg 7

I obviously have far more ambitious ideas, but for a first title you want to go with something proven with some measurement of success with your deadlines.

Tell us about Alpha Squad. What is your favorite moment or feature?

Alpha Squad is a dual-stick shooter that combines elements from adventure games: such as story items, an overworld map, character driven dialogue, and multiple endings, to create a experience that has not really been done before.

My favorite feature and the feature I think most gamers are looking forward to, is the multiplayer. Not only can anyone locally or online drop directly into what is normally a single player story mode at any time, there is an arcade-like "Arena" mode, where up to four players can work together or compete to get the highest score while surviving waves of enemies on random levels.

The highest scores on your console are then compared with the scores on the consoles of your peers, creating what I call a "distributed high score system", since the Indie Channel on Xbox 360 does not allow you access to true global high scores.

The larger the audience for the game is, the more replay value can be extracted from it.

Why did you choose to release the game for Xbox Live Indie Games?

I do not really play PC games anymore unless it is with a genre that you absolutely cannot replicate the same experience with, such as Civilization 5 or Star Craft 2. The micro management with the mouse interface I feel cannot be portrayed accurately or efficiently enough on a console.

There is still a possibility to release the game on other platforms if the gamers demand it. But you cannot compete with the XNA framework and the Indie Game Channel for ease of development and distribution... Now if only Microsoft would promote it properly.

If you had more time/money what would you change about Alpha Squad?

I would have hired more experienced artists or kept some of my current artists into a longer contract for more work. Since I was unsure about my budget, I was only able to afford a small amount of work from my background artist for example. When I managed to get more money, the contractor had already moved onto other projects so I needed to backfill my additions with a different contractor and attempt to keep the same style.

I would also put a lot more money into advertising.

Overall I think I planned things out really well with limited resources.

What has been your biggest failure?

My biggest failure has been keeping up my infrastructure to account for the extra hands working on the project. Originally this was going to be a two man project with a bunch of artists, but since it became larger I did not have the funding to build infrastructure and fund the work and assets for the game.

What has been your biggest success?

The biggest success has been sticking with the original plan and working through all of the setbacks and road blocks I've come across when developing this title, to finally see the light at the end of the tunnel. It's also a pretty huge success to have kept the game stylistically in place with so many

people working on different portions of the project from around the world.

Working through the communication barrier to have the defined product vision still in place for over a year in development and working a full time job to pay for it, is pretty difficult.

What piece of advice would you give to aspiring developers?

Designers - Don't waste your money on getting a game design degree. Most of these degrees are from predatory schools with no return on investment. Instead you should learn a bit of programming, namely C#, because it will allow you to more quickly prototype your ideas and see them in motion.

You can also do what I did and save up meager earnings from a day job to pay for the help needed to see your vision come forward and use that as a portfolio piece. Because no one really cares about your ideas as-is.

Programmers - The only thing holding you back will be the art assets. Otherwise a single proficient indie programmer has a lot of power, you could create entire games by yourself and best of all you will not need to wait for anyone else to get their portion of the project completed. But for the love of god, please hire an artist (unless you are one of the few lucky artist/programmer hybrids).

That being said, software development is more than the design and development skills you bring to the table. There is management, business, politics and marketing as well.

- Steve Flores interviewed by Mike Gnade

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