

INDIE GAME MAG

Issue 3, Mar/Apr 2009

CRAYON PHYSICS DELUXE

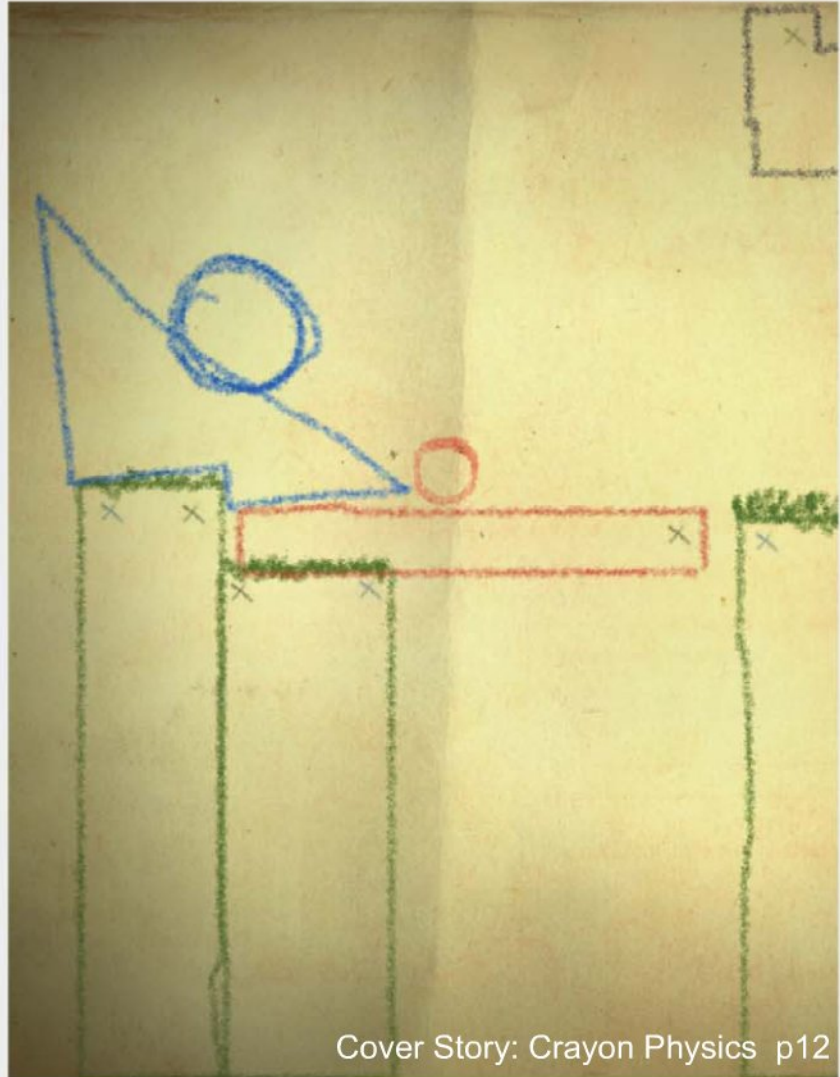
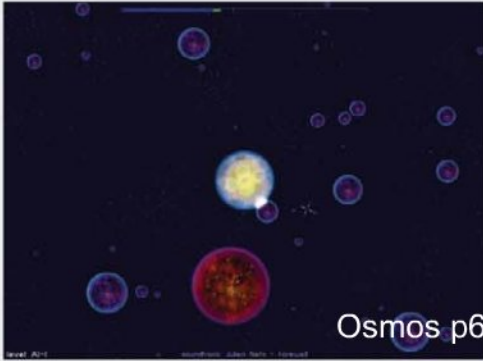
Reviewed Inside:

- Crayon Physics Deluxe
- Chains
- New Star Soccer 4
- A Kingdom for Keflings
- Qwak
- The Mastermind
- Droid Assault

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Indie Game Magazine Issue 3 -Mar/Apr 2009

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EDITORIAL

Do Portals help or hurt Indie Developers?

by Mike Gnade, Editor-in-Chief

Portals are a very hot topic among indie developers. Sites like Big Fish Games, Reflexive, and Real Arcade all get tons of website visitors, feature hundreds of games, and rake in earnings. If a developer can get their game on a big portal, they are almost guaranteed to sell a substantial number of games. Where's the bad in this? Well, the developer typically only receives 30-40% of their game's revenue from a portal and portals have recently engaged in price wars cutting their prices to \$9.95 and below. If that wasn't enough, Portals typically only accept match-3, hidden object, and other such casual games. A lot of indies feel that this focus on certain game styles is too stringent and promotes game cloning.

If a developer's game gets rejected by portals, doesn't fit in their genres, or if they just want to do it all themselves, a developer can release their game on their own website and collect over 80% of all their sales. The problem with this is that most developers don't have a substantial amount of traffic to sell more than a handful of copies on their own site. Yeah it's great to get 90% of your sales, but when you only sell \$100 worth of merchandise that sort of sucks compared to 40% of \$1000s. How can a truly indie game, one that is entirely new and unique be successful? Steam and Greenhouse cater to a different gaming crowd, but I have heard Valve/Steam can be pretty nonresponsive to indie developers and Greenhouse is dedicated to featuring only 12 or so games a year.

The bottom line is that Indie Developers need distribution sources to be successful. Even games with IGF awards and significant press get distributed through other channels (look at World of Goo, it appeared on 2dboy's website, but also got published for stores, on WiiWare and carried by Greenhouse online). It would be great if the portals opened up their doors to a more diverse catalog or if a new portal came along that accepted "out of the box" genres. I think that casual portals help indie developers who make casual games. The big portals can offer casual developers a great distribution channel. If an indie game falls outside of that casual audience, the developer needs to look at Xbox Live, PSN, and other platforms to be successful because the casual portals will not be helping you.

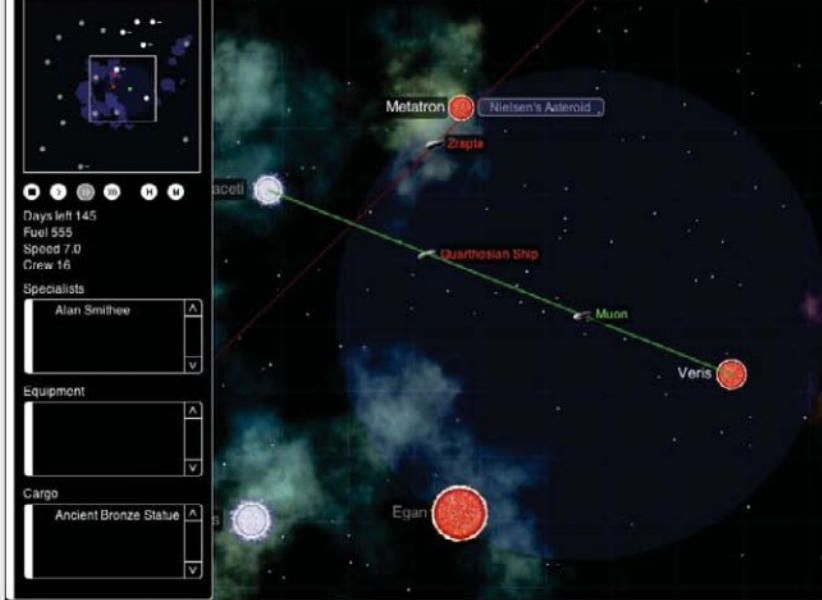


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Space Exploration: Serpen's Sector

Preview by:
Mike

Windows
Metal Beetle

PREVIEWS

Serpen's Sector is a space sci-fi RPG by Metal Beetle. The game focuses on exploring the long abandoned Serpen's Sector of space. Encounters and discoveries are randomized and each game is different and relatively short (you are given 200 days to explore as much as you can). The gameplay is very rudimentary and involves simply clicking your choices and navigating the map. The story and your space discoveries are all presented via text and static pictures. The graphics are all static and there is no real animation or action to keep you attention. The basic mechanics of this game are too simplistic and repetitive to warrant anyone getting involved in the story of this game. Luckily, Metal Beetle is planning on releasing the main game for free which is a wise choice. For those who really loved old text-based adventure games, keep a watch out for Serpen's Sector. Other gamers will probably want to stay away.

Osmos
Preview by:
Mike

Windows
Hemisphere Games

Video Trailer



Osmos, by Hemisphere Games, is nominated for 3 2009 IGF awards including the Seumas McNally Grand Prize. The game is an interesting fusion of asteroids and fIOW. You control a little amoeba ball called a 'mote' that can thrust itself by firing some of its own mass in the opposite direction. Your objective is to absorb other motes...this is only possible if your mote is bigger than the other (a la fIOW). The controls and thrust of the world are very similar to asteroids...once you start going one way, you won't stop till you slow yourself down. The game offers a nice serene ambient soundtrack and dream-like graphics. All in all it's a well executed game that I think lacks the variety to take the grand prize. Still, the game is only in alpha and certainly one to watch.

SPACE WAR COMMANDER™



Space War Commander is a "Real Time Real Strategy" game where you attempt to conquer the galaxy and eradicate the destroyers of mankind. The game was just released at the beginning of 2009. "Real Time Real Strategy" is Dreamspike's way of emphasizing the strategy elements of the game; honestly it doesn't make much sense since the game can be paused at any time and played more like a turn-based strategy game.

Space War Commander has retro/16-bit graphics and sound. It definitely looks like it belongs on the Sega Genesis... this is a good thing for nostalgics, but bad for most gamers of 2009. The vacant music and minimalist sound works for this space title, but the graphics and pixel art could be better. It doesn't help that there is little to no animation in the game. Ships appear as icons in the galaxy and float from planet to planet. Battles consist of red dots flying between ships. The gameplay is definitely only for the strategy enthusiast. I found the menus overly cumbersome, but there's certainly a lot of stats, ships, planets, etc. to track.

Space War Commander is certainly not for everyone. It's a heavily stat-tracking and strategy focused game. The controls are simple enough to learn, but the menu system and overall presentation could use a lot of work. I think Space War Commander could be a success with the strategy crowd if a Graphic Designer were to update the visuals and improve the user interface. As it stands, it's just not refined enough to compete in the commercial space.



Space War
Commander
Preview by:
Mike

Windows PC

Dreamspike Studios
www.dreamspike.com

Name: Alex Kutsenok
Studio: Dreamspike

Game Titles: The Quest, Space War Commander

Fav Indie Game: FastCrawl

Fav Retro Game: Battle Arena Toshinden

Best Current Gen Game: Star Chamber

Best Game Console Ever: Playstation 1

What is the best game of all time and why?

Everquest is the best game of all time so far. It was atmospheric and also very difficult to succeed in, so success really meant something. I've played that game for about 4 months, which is the most time I've ever spent on a single game.

What is the goal of your indie game studio?

We want to make original games that force the player to think like never before. Our games are hard but oh-so-rewarding when you succeed in them. We feel like games should be about player creativity and thought, and not about reflexes or doing anything repetitive.

Why did you start developing indie games?

I've been making games all my life. Card games, board games, role-playing games, and so on. Computer games are better because I know someone will actually play them! My first game was The Quest, a graphical role-playing game. I started receiving fan mail when I was 17 years-old, and I knew there was no turning

back after that.

What is the biggest mistake you have made as a game developer?

Not listening to testers as much as I should. Often, there is such a temptation to just stick with the way things are because so much time was spent on designing and implementing a particular feature. However, if the testers say it's broken or bad...they are right.

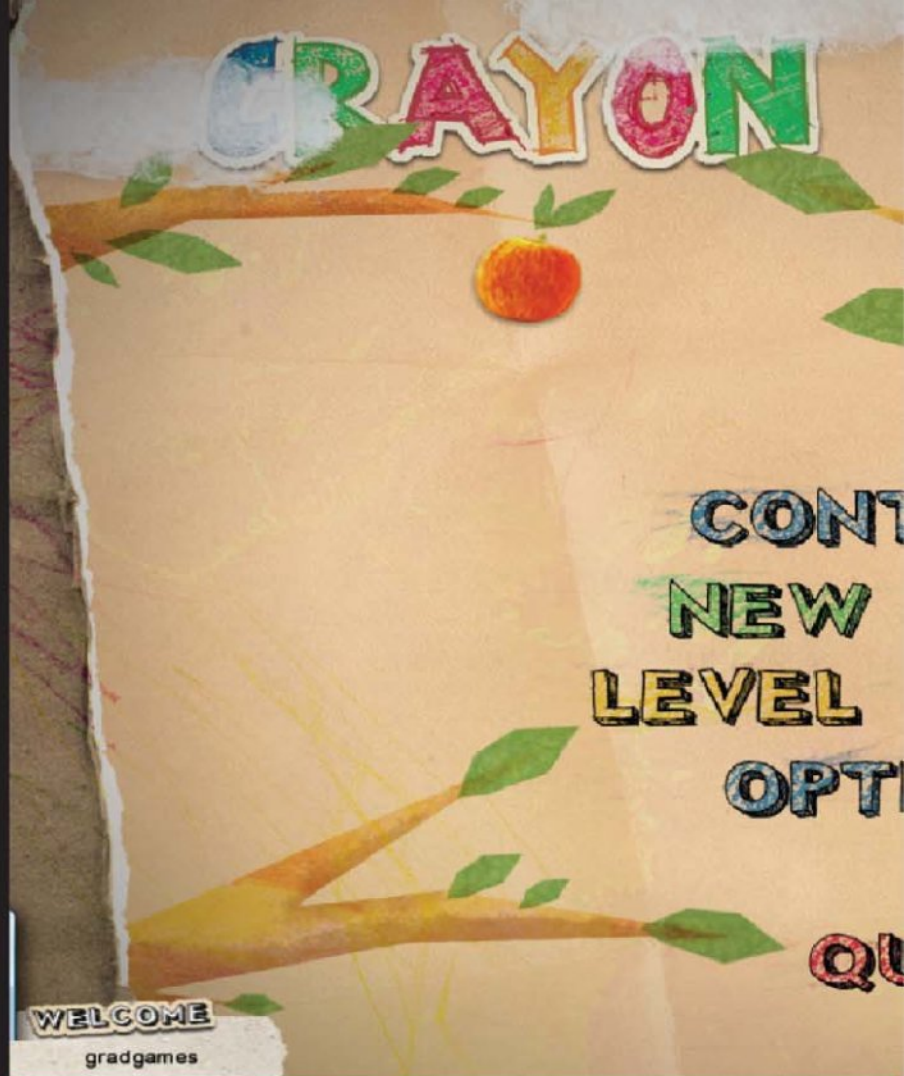
What has been your biggest success?

Finishing Space War Commander. This has been the biggest project I've ever been involved in; it took a lot of patience and work to put everything together. Also, I am very proud of the gameplay, which is quite original, simple to get into, and most importantly...fun!

DEVELOPER PROFILE

REVIEWS

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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.

PHYSICS DELUXE

CONTINUE
GAME
EDITOR
IONS

UIT



THIS ISSUE'S REVIEWERS

Benjamin Hayhoe

I'm a full time writing and media student specialising in video game studies near Liverpool, England. I split my time up between playing old video games, playing new video games and curing diseases...Well... Not so much the last one.

Meg Stivison

Meg Stivison has been a computer gamer since discovering text-based PC games as a little girl. She is a freelance writer and English teacher, currently based in Raleigh. She blogs at SimpsonsParadox.com

Stephen Webb

An aspiring film maker who has been gaming since he sat on his dad's lap at the age of 2 to play Wolfenstein 3D. He now plays mostly indie games and classic arcade games. When he not playing classics such as Splatter House and Escape Kids, he spends most of his time working, shooting videos, writing scripts and playing Chess.

Zak Gebelein

I've always been a sucker for RTS, but open to any game that peaks my interest. Give me a game with classy graphics and a keen sense of story and I'm hooked. Some of my past times include killing zombies, conquering the world (if not the universe!) and dwelling on games of yesteryear – call me traditional.

Mike Gnade

I'm a long time gamer currently exploring post-apoc-alyptia in Fallout 3. My turn-ons include balanced on-line multiplayer, Master Chief, and unique art styles. My turn-offs include bejeweled clones, snood, and EA sports monopoly on the NFL license.

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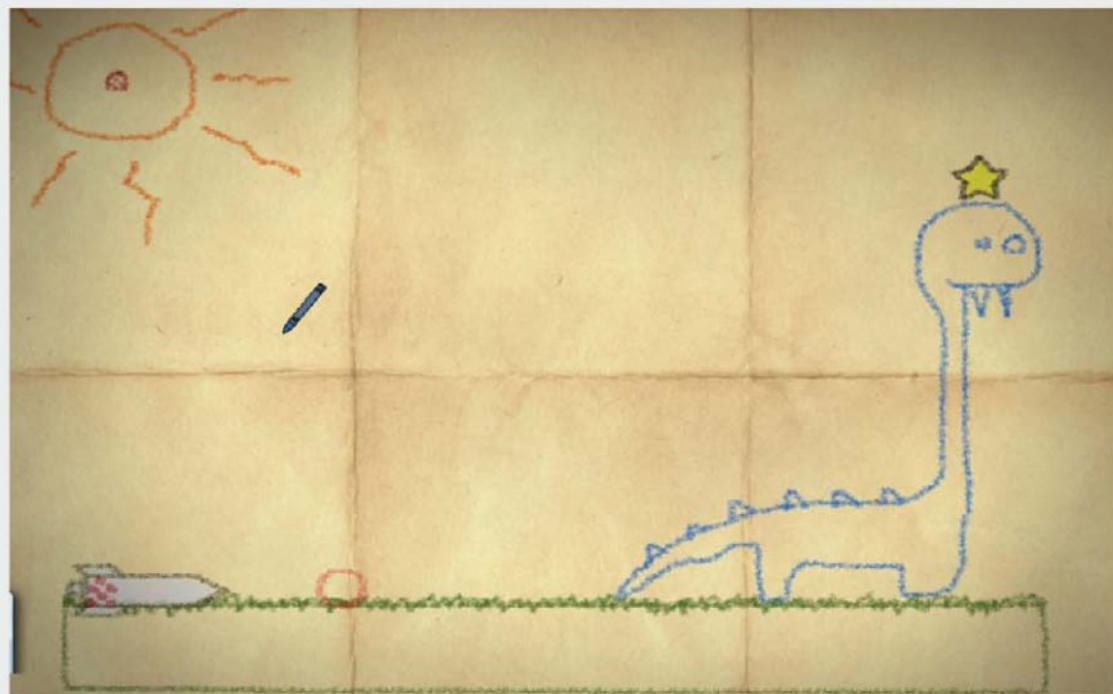
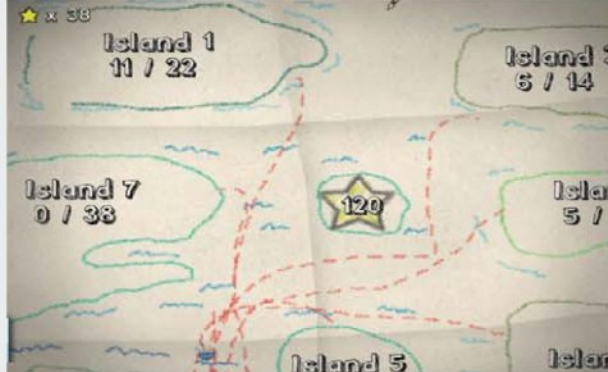
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Crayon Physics
Review by Mike

Gameplay: 10
Graphics: 8
Sound: 9
Appeal: 10

Final: 92%
Grade: A-



Windows & iPhone

Crayon Physics Deluxe

Developer: Kloonigames - **Players:** 1 - **Website:** www.crayonphysics.com

Crayon Physics Deluxe is about as high a profile indie game that you can get, after all it won the grand prize at the Independence Games Festival last year. The game is a 2D physics puzzle / sandbox game, where your drawings are transformed into real physics objects that interact within the game. The game is based on the experimental game, Crayon Physics, which was completed in less than 7 days by Kloonigames way back in June of 2007. It's definitely interesting to see where the game started (check out Kloonigames for the old free version) and how far it has come.

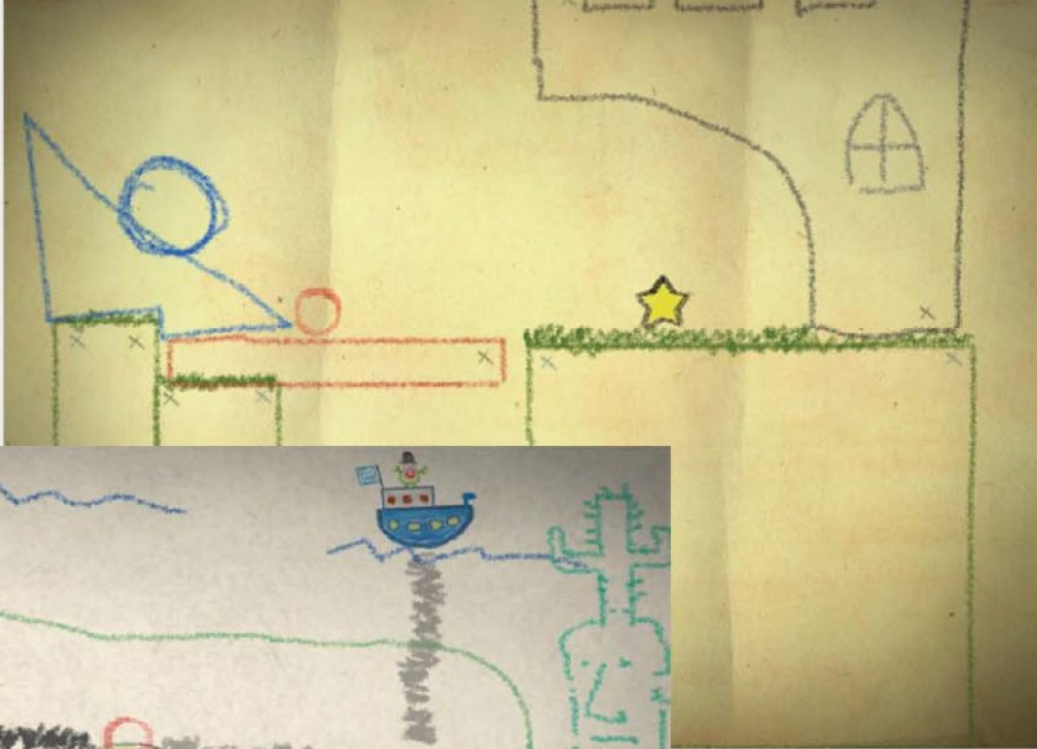
Gameplay:

The gameplay for Crayon Physics has been solid since the original free version, but the deluxe version adds a whole lot of functionality and gives the player even more freedom of the imagination. The basic objective in the game is to get the red ball to the gold star. You achieve this by building any solution that you want. The game gives the player the immense

freedom to create nearly anything within the game's engine. You can create a swinging mallet, a rolling car, or a complex series of ropes and pulleys; the imagination is truly the only boundary. That being said, there are usually pretty simple and straight forward solutions to the game's levels and the same tactics can be used to solve a large number of them...but that's really only a problem if you WANT to be boring.

As you collect stars, you will unlock new islands and more puzzles. You are free to tackle an island's puzzles in an order you like which is nice and limits the frustration of getting stuck on one particular level. The game comes with a great level editor where you can create your own levels and share them online. There's already a bunch of additional levels to download on the game's website.

You can't help but wish for a tablet notebook or one of those new HP touch screen PCs when



this game. While the mouse controls work great, the game's drawing mechanics are perfectly suited for the tablet & touch screen PCs of the world and would give the player an even more immersive drawing experience.

Graphics:
The crayon graphics, paper textures and backgrounds all contribute to the allusion of your drawings coming to life and work well. I am especially fond of the way the crayon lines animate and fluctuate. I think this subtle animation helps create a surreal atmosphere that fits well. Another great thing about the game is how a level is loaded and drawn right in front of you. While I appreciate the crayon lines, loading animation, and the general artistic direction of the game, the fact remains that the game is relatively simplistic graphically. I think I would have forgiven the basic colors and shapes of the game's levels if it weren't for the appalling simplistic level and island select screens. I really wish that the islands weren't just green outlines labeled 'Island.' I

think actually drawing an island with varying topography and various green shades and giving it the crayon filter would have been fantastic. While I can appreciate the ability to draw whatever I want on the level select screen...I would like to have something aesthetically pleasing at the start. This is being nitpicky, but it was a large sore on my experience with the game and left a bad taste in my mouth...especially since the title screen is gorgeous while maintaining the look and experience of the game.

Sound/Music:
The music is incredible. It's surreal, laidback and fits the mood of the game perfectly. It helps immerse the player in their crayon world and enjoy their journey there. There are practically no sound effects in this game... and that's okay because the music is so amazing. I can't help but wonder if sound FX would've given the game an even more immersive feeling. I think some general impact and interaction sounds would have brought my drawings to life even

more.
Lasting Appeal:
The game is incredibly easy to pick up and play and a joy to play and experience. The game itself may be lacking in challenge and puzzle variety, but the player is granted the freedom to make the game as challenging and complex as they can imagine. The game was updated several times during our review process with new features, additional stars, and other challenges which was nice to see. The game's website playground has a plethora of downloadable levels for anyone looking for something new outside the hundreds of levels that come with the game.

Crayon Physics Deluxe is an atmospheric romp in creativity that must be experienced. It has its flaws, but when you boil it down, the game overcomes its shortcomings because it gives the player the freedom to pretty much do whatever they can imagine. Imagination is an inspiring thing for a game to give.

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Chains

Developer: 2D Engine - **Players:** 1 - **Website:** www.2dengine.com

Chains
Review by Meg

Gameplay: 9
Graphics: 8
Sound: 3
Appeal: 8

Final: 89%
Grade: B+



The goal of Chains is to connect 3 or more bubbles of a matching color, a pretty typical puzzle game goal. Matching colors to pop bubbles is hardly new, but what separates Chains from Puzzle Bobble, Snood, Bejeweled or even bilging on Puzzle Pirates, is the special bubble physics of Chains. Falling bubbles interact with each other, bouncing or pushing each other into different places, so they're not just falling into obvious spots. It's simultaneously relaxing to watch and more challenging to play.

Gameplay: The best games have simple rules and complex challenges. Chains has some of the simplest rules in puzzle games, just match three or more balls. You could explain the rules to a new player in a minute, but that doesn't mean the game is easy or childish. There are endless ways to change and refine your strategy.

Each level of Chains presents a different challenge, like making the longest chain possible, racing the clock to get a certain number of bubbles cleared, and so forth. In Exact Change, bubbles of different sizes have weighted

values, and players need to create a chain worth exactly the specified amount. In The Stream, bubbles are falling down a river and must be cleared quickly enough to keep the river from backing up. In Coathanger, bubbles fall onto a precariously balanced coathanger, spilling off the heavier side. Using that simple mechanic of clicking three or more bubbles to clear them, players have to adapt their strategy to each new challenge.

Graphics: On Gravity, bubbles are attracted to a midscreen center of gravity, unless they collide with another bubble. This level is almost hypnotic. Overall, the bubble physics were amazing.

Each level consists of a dynamic pattern of bubbles in front of a static background graphic. I don't know what is going on with the vaguely floral designs in the background, though. They do add psychedelic decor to the magenta, yellow and lime bubbles, but the game doesn't really have a cohesive look or feel.

Sound/Music: Um... no. I shut the sound off pretty early on because

the theme music was annoying and repetitive. Or was that because I played the game too long? Some puzzles were perfect for playing on the phone, so you'll probably want the music off anyway so your clients think they've got your undivided attention.

Lasting Appeal: With so many puzzle games, it's hard for one to stand out. I think the variety of difficulty levels and different challenges makes it easy to find either a relaxing game for a quick break or a frustratingly difficult puzzle. You'll be playing this at least until the next puzzle game comes along

Check it out for a fun puzzle game... but don't bother with the sound.



Download the Demo: Windows, Linux, MAC OS

Droid Assault

Developer: Puppy Games - **Players:** 1 - **Website:** www.puppygames.net

Droid Assault by Puppy Games is an arcade/action title where your task is simple: Destroy or Reprogram all the bad droids of OmniCorp (some uber large and evil organization no doubt). Droid Assault's retro gameplay is a mix of Robotron and Paradroid, but is ultimately better than both; You start with 1 Droid and aim and fire at other droids to destroy them or you can use transfer points to take over the droid and add it to your army of allied robots. Droid Assault may at first seem like a straight forward retro-inspired arcade game, but as you quickly realize that it has a lot of depth and strategy.

The controls are straightforward, but are definitely more complex than most casual pc titles. The keyboard moves and cycles through your droids, while the mouse is used to aim, fire, and assimilate other droids. The most appealing part of this game is by far the strategy that goes into selecting which droids to reprogram and which droids to simply blast to bits. There are over 40 different droids and they all have different weapons, speed, armor etc. The 17 Power-Ups also add some strategy and exhilaration. My personal fav moment was when my tripod droid with shotgun spread rapid

fire was getting pummeled only to run through some explosives to a repair power-up thus allowing it to exact its revenge on its pursuers! Of course nothing is more disheartening than having your favorite droid blasted to bits. The challenge is a little too high in Droid Assault. I really wished that between levels I could use points to soup up or repair my droids since they all come across as a little too expendable.

The graphics expertly capture the retro style of the game while avoiding the pixilation that plagued those older titles. The bad news is the game's droids and environments are simple and lack animation. When you first boot up Droid Assault, you'll definitely appreciate the retro inspired art style and clean presentation, but after awhile the lack of diversity makes things a bit stale. Regardless, Droid Assault is impressive in motion and has some fantastic particle effects and explosions ... and isn't that what matters most when you're blasting robots.

Droid Assault once again captures and emulates retro arcade games with its music, but of course offers a much cleaner aural experience. All the tunes seem vaguely familiar and are reminiscent of the repeti-

tive beeps of old Arcade games, but are far superior in sound quality and composition. The sound effects fit the style of the game perfectly.

There are over 50 levels in Droid Assault and the game is very VERY hard to put down in your first play through...but then your favorite robot dies...then all your other robots die...and eventually your game is over and you have to start from only a select few starting levels. While this challenge is great for retro gamers, it is a little harsh for games nowadays. Why not allow players to retry from the last save point or beginning of the current level? Despite the difficulty, Droid Assault is very addictive and engrossing. There's just something about amassing a droid army that is very appealing.

Droid Assault is only \$20 (the price of 2 movies) and it offers a whole lot more than 4 hours of entertainment. It's a little challenging, but the variety of robots and ability to "jack" new ones keeps the game from getting stale. The Graphic Style, High Scores, Music and Challenge all work together to capture the spirit of older coin-op arcade shooters. If you're into retro games this one is a must buy.

Droid Assault
Review by Mike

Gameplay: 8.5
Graphics: 8
Sound: 8.5
Appeal: 7

Final: 82%
Grade: B-





Windows & MAC

New Star Soccer 4

Developer: New Star Games - **Players:** 1 - **Website:** www.newstargames.com

New Star Soccer 4
Review by Benjamin

Gameplay: 6
Graphics: 4
Sound: 6
Appeal: 9

Final: 65%
Grade: D



I'm going to start from the beginning. There's a lot to say about this game. As well as being a soccer game clearly inspired by the many before it. It also encompasses RPG elements that which you might find on championship manager or an alternate version of it. You begin the game with some basic character designing: hair color, eye color, height and weight. The last two of these actually affect your character's ability as a player through the use of fitness attributes such as strength, acceleration and pace. After this you have a number of points which you can apply to a selection of skills and reinforce your player's talents. Interestingly, you're asked a few personality questions as well. I was impressed with the number of teams available to you. Not only is every country is playable, but every single major club within that country. Though, the team names are changed, for copyright purposes. Being from Cambridge, England, I chose to

play as "Cambridge United". Each team has its own kit, but I'm sure if you were to cross reference the kits, you would find many of them to be the same. The kit design is rather basic...

In fact, everything about this game is basic. Graphically, the menus are pretty enough: plain interfaces labeled with colorful bars indicating your levels of fitness, how much energy you have, etc. There's even a pretty globe spinning in the background that somewhat resembles Google Earth. However, the simplicity of the design isn't as appreciated within a match. The characters' blocky appearance makes every player look the same and the pitch is without any real attention to detail. The crowds in the stands are stationary and the only really nice touches are the boards around the edges of the pitch advertising various websites and games obviously affiliated with New Star Games. The game is a vast improvement

over the 2D stylings of New Star's soccer games before hand so it's nice to see that they're progressing.

The gameplay feels clunky and lifeless, chasing the ball around only to have it kicked off to the other side of the field where you will once again have to run after it. You rely mostly on your team members passing the ball to you through a "HEY, PASS ME THE BALL!" command which is sort of cute and similar to the recent FIFA game if my sources are accurate. I failed to get hold of the ball more than a few times without using this feature though. The audio effects don't do much to inspire you to carry on playing. Some very basic whistle sounds are used to indicate a fowl or a half/full time. The crowds can be heard constantly, but only a continuous dull roar, although if you listen carefully, you can hear the occasional soccer chant being called out by the fans. All in all, the audio



A 2nd Opinion by Mike

New Star Soccer 4 is a highly praised Sports/Sim Game that should not be faulted for its RPG focus over sports action. NSS4 is about controlling 1 rising football star to glory. While the 3D graphics are blocky, it's unfair to expect an indie developer to recreate real life players and offer the graphical prowess of large studio titles. This game is a very in-depth simulation game that resembles an RPG more than a sports soccer title. Ultimately, there's nothing more rewarding than having your country call on you to compete in the World Cup. This game is certainly not for everyone, but it is a unique experience. The game offers incredible depth and if the description has you are a soccer/football fan, you'll probably have a hard time putting this game down.

Grade: B+



seems a half hearted attempt at creating an atmosphere. On the other hand, this is dreamy compared to the music that's forced upon you in the menu screens when you're managing your player; a ridiculous, fast paced, Brazilian beat slammed on repeat for your ears to bleed to. It's a shame because these menu screens, although a sidetrack to the game, are actually where I found myself spending most of my time playing. The RPG elements really come into play. You manage your free time and energy as a player outside of work. You can choose to spend time with friends and family or your fans and team. Ignoring any one of them will have negative effects on you (such as being stuck on the bench if your team starts to dislike you). You can even get yourself a girlfriend if you're at all interested in doing so. You have a player profile with statistics that you can improve as you go through the game. Train your fitness attributes by doing laps, working the exercise bike, etc, but first you will have to have enough money to purchase the equipment (Who knows what's wrong with the gym). You can also boost your performance with energy

drinks, performance enhancers and, oddly enough, alcohol, though these all have side effects including a friendly trip to rehabilitation. A nice touch I think.

You have a finances page in which you can follow what you're spending your money on and truly live the life of a football star. You can purchase property and vehicles. Transport choices ranges from roller skates – though I've never seen a soccer player on roller skates in my life – to your own private jet at a substantially higher fee. You can keep track of what you're being paid for and your sponsorship deals, though obviously you don't start with anything except a basic wage. There are also some mini games available. These are split between training like dribbling around cones and shooting practice, to gambling games such as blackjack, roulette and the slot machines to make (or lose) money. Finally, you can bet money on horse races and if you make enough, purchase your own horses and stables to race your own.

I can see the game being – if you can deal with its faults – very satisfying as

your character progress' up the ranks and becomes successful. Since you're able to purchase bigger and better things and everybody loves you. I also have a sneaky suspicion that this game is intended to be played with a joystick. It just doesn't feel right with a keyboard and mouse though this isn't indicated anywhere prior to the download. On the plus side, if you do like the game, there's an awful lot to do. As far as I can tell there's no limit to the amount of matches you can complete and money you can make as well as a number of competitions. There's a huge list of achievements for you to try and collect, some of which seem very difficult (to me at least).

To sum up, this game is lacking. It's worth playing. If you are a serious soccer enthusiast and fancy supporting an underdog instead of a big gun then perhaps worth purchasing, but I, as a player not in love with the genre found it difficult to grasp, be absorbed by and enjoy. It's saving grace being that there are other things to do besides playing soccer.



Windows

The Mastermind

Developer: Total Gameplay - **Players:** 1 - **Website:** www.totalgameplay.com

The Mastermind
Review by Steve

Gameplay: 8.5
Graphics: 8
Sound: 7.5
Appeal: 8.5

Final: 81%
Grade: B-



Total Gameplay's "The Mastermind" puts you in control of a growing organized-crime syndicate in an unnamed city. Your job is to expand the syndicate throughout the city, growing your illegal (and legal) business to gain wealth and power over the other Masterminds. At first glance, it looks like every other crime-based strategy game, but once you get your hands on it, you won't be able to stop playing.

Gameplay:

Like many other strategy games, "The Mastermind" is turn-based. During these turns, it's your job to send your gangsters out to perpetrate crimes, begin trading with smugglers, and talk citizens into joining the syndicate; there are many other actions you can perform as well. Throughout the game you are rated by wealth points. Your wealth is pretty much another form of health. If your wealth goes down to zero, you get arrested and the game is over. You can gain wealth points by donating to charities or by buying out businesses that won't have a negative effect on your bottom line. For example, owning gun shops and

coffee shops will give you greater wealth, while night clubs and museums will not.

There is so much you can do in "The Mastermind"—but that is also a problem. The further you get into the game, the more actions you must perform at the beginning of each turn, and it all starts to get confusing and a bit repetitive. All the actions your gangsters must perform have to be put in at the start of every day—which is the start of every turn. There isn't a way to have them do one single task over a long period of time. Also, if you own businesses, you have to go to every building to collect your money. Doing all this takes up a lot of time and could possibly leave the player bored and irritated.

Graphics:

The graphics have their ups and downs. The city has a great look to it: shadows look pretty realistic, and the still models look OK. The only problem with the city is that there are not a whole lot of people or vehicles on the screen at any given time. In addition, some of the drawn art is lacking a bit. For example, sometimes you can't

even tell which gender the character is without having to look at his or her name.

Sound:

Audio quality lacked slightly. The music is catchy, and the ambience was pretty good. The only problem was that the quality of the sound itself was weak. Everything sounded really compressed. I did like that the urban ambient sound was consistent and continuous. Cars screech; pay phones ring; people chat; dogs bark. It really helps create the feeling of a living, bustling city.

Lasting Appeal:

After playing this game for some time now, I would definitely suggest fans of strategy games get "The Mastermind." But make sure you have enough time to play, because you will be spending a lot of time performing actions over and over again.



REVIEWS

Download the Demo: Windows

Qwak

Developer: Jamie Woodhouse - **Players:** 1 - **Website:** www.qwak.co.uk

Qwak developed by Jamie Woodhouse (distributed by Archive Games) is platform game for the PC. The goal of the game is to collect keys on a level to open exits to the next crazy level. Additionally, you have to avoid enemies (which look sort of like fish and spiders) complete tasks and gain points by collecting fruit and gems. The goal sounds simple, but be aware of the time limit and avoid getting hit by bad guys. Try to collect as much as possible and move on to the next level.

Gameplay:

Duck runs, duck jumps, duck collects keys and shoots eggs. Qwak is purely a platform game. The goal of the game is for players to jump from platform to platform to collect the keys and other bonus items. Shooting eggs will kill the enemies with a few hits, the same is not true for you (you have three lives and one hit ends your life). The saving graces are the bonuses: potions, flowers, gems and mushrooms – all increase points or give you armor and getting armor is a must! The levels aren't terribly complex, but each has a lot going on at once. Between the falling fruit and spike balls, enemies and

tasks (pull levers, kill bad guys, etc.), the player has the added challenge of staying calm. A cool head and keeping your eye on the prize will keep your duck quacking. But be quick about completing your goals, the levels have a time limit before raining spike balls. Qwak also features a two-player mode which great for adding more chaos and fun to the formula. Luckily the game controls are configurable.

Graphics:

Qwak's graphics are well designed and colorful. This isn't to say that I was blown away by the graphics, but the game has a classic indie feel. Seeing those bad guys move back and forth, brings me back to the good old koopa days. The graphics are clean and the transitions are smooth. The cascade of fruit can make the game all the more challenging, as the screen lights up with the different colors. The perfect balance is met between the visually demanding today and the 8 to 16 bit game of yesterday.

Sound/Music:

The music and sounds are quirky, but appropriate to the theme. Did I hear a duck quack in there somewhere? I loved each bonus item had a unique sound to go along with it (crunches for fruit), unlike blanket pings used for anything in other games. I didn't find the music annoying, though it did remind me of elevator music at times. The music kept the game play all in good fun, even when I was kicking myself for being overly greedy.

Lasting Appeal:

Qwak was at times frustrating, especially when I went for those gems and it started raining spike death balls. Even with the challenges I found myself becoming addicted to upping my score and I kept going back for more. Also, be sure to check out the website (www.qwak.co.uk) to view the high scores, they even break it down by the month, week and day. The simple controls, smooth graphics and quality of gameplay make it an overall great distraction from daily humdrum. If you have £13 (yes I said pounds) around, give it a go!

Qwak
Review by Zak

Gameplay: 9
Graphics: 8.5
Sound: 8
Appeal: 8.5

Final: 85%
Grade: B





Xbox Live Arcade

A Kingdom for Keflings

Developer: NinjaBee - **Players:** 4 - **Website:** www.ninjabee.com

I am not sure if NinjaBee's latest XBLA title Kingdom for Keflings is much of a game, but it certainly is a relaxing and entertaining diversion. In Kingdom for Keflings, you control a giant (there are 3 to choose from or you can use your avatar) who is helping the Keflings build their town and prosper. There are no ways to lose...Keflings don't die, there's no danger or enemies, and there's even abundant resources so you can never get stuck by harvesting all the resources on a map. The goal is to just keep building your Keflings Kingdom. Your giant can collect resources himself, or train Keflings to do all the work for him. However, your giant is the only one who can build components and use blueprints to construct new buildings.

Gameplay:
Kingdom's utter lack of challenge is fine and dandy and makes this title perfect for the casual crowd, but the repetitive nature of the gameplay (your giant simply moves from point A to B building/placing new parts) makes this game hard to sit down and enjoy for hours on end. It is great for short play sessions though. The

depth of the technology tree is actually quite satisfying and interesting and ultimately culminates with building the Keflings a Castle (the end of the game I suppose). The gameplay actually reminds me most of SimCity... there's always something to build and improve on in your Keflings' Kingdom and the game can be quite endless in nature. I just wish the Keflings' Kingdom had some of random disasters that befall a simulated city.

Graphics:
The game features vibrant and colorful 3D graphics. The graphics are simplistic but work for the title. It's nice being able to use your avatar as your giant and the season changing weather effects are very nice. My only gripes with the graphics are that the components of buildings all look very very similar and that the game world itself lacks variety.

Sound/Music:
The game's music is definitely a highlight. It completely captures the mood of the game and is very catchy. You will definitely find yourself humming some of the game's catchy tunes or booting up the game for an hour or so to

enjoy the music and work on your latest building project. There are very few sound effects, but then again there are very few different things to do in Kingdom.

Lasting Appeal:
Kingdom for Keflings is a fantastic casual gaming experience. It is simple to pick up and play and is great for short play sessions. While the technology tree and new blueprints certainly give you incentive to keep playing, the game becomes very tedious if you've been moving building pieces back and forth for hours. Despite the tedium and lack of challenge, Kingdom is strangely addictive and charming. I certainly found myself lengthening my play sessions to finish that next building or get that next blueprint.

Average: 80%
Tilt: +3.00%

The charm and relaxing nature of Kingdom makes it a perfect medi-eval romp for casual and hardcore gamers alike. Casual gamers will just stick with it a lot longer.

Kingdom for Keflings
Review by Mike

Gameplay: 8
Graphics: 8.5
Sound: 9
Appeal: 6.5

**Final: 83%
Grade: B**

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