

INDIE GAME MAG

Issue 5: July/August 2009

We Talk to Edmund McMillen, the man behind

SUPER MEAT BOY

Aether, Spewer, Coil, Gish, and about 10 other Indie Games



**Also Inside this issue:
Over 20 Indie Games!**

- Ragdoll Cannon
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- Zatikon
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Indie Game Magazine

Issue 5 - July/Aug 2009

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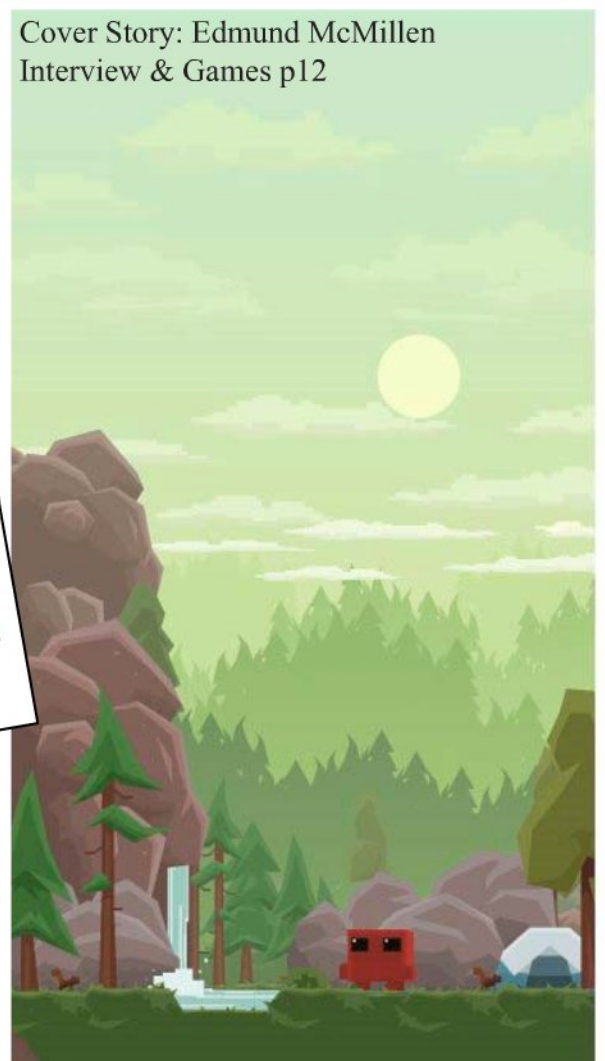


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EDITORIAL

This month IGM is introducing a new feature: "On Trial" is a bi-monthly look at the latest Indie Game Demos. Our panel plays ten demos and rates each game on a scale of 1-10. The scoring system is pretty objective and based on the following criteria:

Scoring System

- 1 point if the game installs and runs painlessly
 - 1 point if it doesn't crash or glitch in some way
 - 1 point if it's slickly presented
 - 1 point if it's original
 - 1 point if the graphics are good
 - 1 point if the sounds and music are good
 - 1 point if the overall style is good
 - 1 point if the game is fun to play
 - 1 point if the game is addictive and leaves us wanting to play more of it.
 - 1 point if we recommend purchasing the game and would buy it ourselves.
- = 10 Total Points

Check out this feature on Pages 10-11 and let us know what you think. Clicking on any of the screenshots (if you're reading this on a computer) should send you to the game's website.

Unfortunately, there were a few games whose demos weren't working or were pulled during this process. If a reviewer couldn't play the game at all, a Not Applicable (NA) score is displayed.

One pilot.

Two fleets.

Epic space battles.



THE ADVENTURES OF
RICK ROCKET





Bitpop from the garage: An interview with Composer John Marwin by Taylor Hall

Fugazi are living legends in the punk scene. Coming out D.C. they're known for their relentless allegiance to their fans. For years, their shows cost \$5. They moved their own equipment, recorded their own albums and had their own label. The closest thing indie gaming may have is John Marwin.

Marwin is an indie game composer who has no plans to leave the scene to which he has helped build and is perfectly content working as a server technician in Helsingborg, Sweden.

As a rule, Marwin almost never charges for his work. He uses the independent tracking program Renoise, has never accepted any offers to perform live, and customizes his music based on the request of the developer. His site is the visual accompaniment to the music he produces: a lo-fi themed Times New Roman type on a dark blue background.

Marwin was toiling away as a tracker on the internet, as he had since 1996, when a man named Cactus (clean asia, akuchizoku and other games) asked him if he could use his songs to do a game he was developing.

"(He) contacted me and requested permission to use my songs in his productions. Surprised, I checked out his demos that he had and I was incredibly happy to learn that his games would fit extremely well with my music. And, seeing as I don't really aim to get rich and famous off my productions, I feel that if the indie gaming community can benefit from my music, why not chip in with a song here and there?"

And he charged Cactus a whopping nothing for his services. To Marwin it's not just a sign of respect for the developer honoring him with a request, but also an adage that he lives by.

"Well, my dad told me that I should NEVER try and support myself on an artistic craft, as he's had a very tough life thanks to his attempts of doing the same (he's a gold and silver smith). And I can totally see the sensibility in that approach, I do sometimes charge for my services, but that entails getting special soundtracks written, and general control in determining moods and format of the songs."

Marwin's songs are the closest thing to lo-fi you can come in a scene already dominated by the sounds of outdated equipment. His use of the Renoise tracking program lets him make modern soundscapes that sound like they were recorded in a basement, because at times they were. The process of writing the song can go from four hours to two months. "If (my mind) says hey, you really, and I mean REALLY, need to make an agent theme, I create that with whatever tools I find at the moment. More than often, that means bleeps and 8-bit stuff. His crowning jewel being the piece, "My Castle In The Clouds". "I've written my dream piece many times, but as my dreams change, the pieces have to be written again and again."

As gaming gets more distilled into the mainstream, nerd/indie culture will be a natural extension of that. Some influence is evident in forward-thinking artists like Crystal Castles, who have very little to do with the culture, but whose bubble-gum chip tracks owe much to their game composer cousins. And in 2005, Beck, one of music's Chameleons, had an EP of remixes by unsigned chiptune artists. Is a revival inevitable? Will he join in the festivities?

"As gaming becomes more of a mainstream thing, we'll see some more incorporation of old styled bleeps and bops, but ultimately I think the artists will keep to their genres in fear of not selling enough copies. However, I have noticed a curious emergence, and that's the advent of game music cover bands, take a gander at ocremix for instance, that community is awesome to say the least!" he said.

Marwin is a man who is content with where he is and where he is going. His almost ethical allegiance to the cause is infectious and reminds his fans that indie culture isn't a necessary evil for success, but the beginning of a trend. That the indie game scene will grow in to something that older gaming houses will respect for the innovation they provide and, maybe, just maybe: advice.

"Essentially," Marwin said, "There will be lots of insane gaming."

ENERGY: 25 CURRENT UNITS: 48 UNITS DESTROYED: 341



INDIE NEWS FEED

New development preview version of Space Exploration: Serpens Sector Released. SE:SS is a role-playing game based on classics like Starflight and Star Control



Braid is released on Mac. Braid is the highly acclaimed time-platformer by Jonathan Blow.



Zeno Clash Releases on Direct2Drive and Steam. Zeno Clash is a First Person action/fighting game set in a weird fantasy punk setting. Zeno Clash was an IGF finalist for best visual arts.

Ace Team announces that Zeno Clash 2 is already in the pipeline. The game will continue the original's story and you will once again play as Ghat. Gameplay looks to be expanded. RPG elements and larger open world environments are said to be in the works.

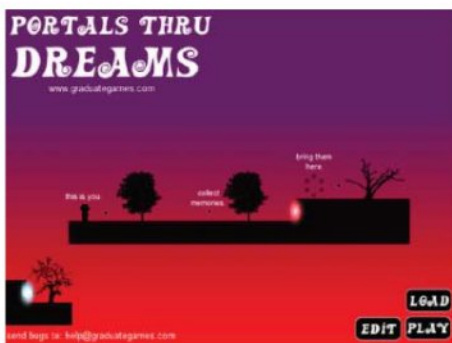


Eternal Eden 2 is announced. The original Eternal Eden used RPG Maker and stood out because of its interesting take on the Eden Myth from the Bible. Blossomsoft

has described the upcoming Eternal Eden 2 as follows: Eternal Eden 2 will focus on Japhee, a female protagonist who possess a mysterious clairvoyance gift. Thanks to her special ability, the player will be allowed to influence parts of the game by reading the future through special artifacts.



BOH is released. BOH is a game of exploration and action. You move in claustrophobic and dangerous battlefields searching for the Evil Masters. This no easy task not only because of the traps-packed corridors and mind-blowing puzzles, but also because of the countless enemies that the Evil Masters throw at you more and more until you discover them - at that point, you will be attacked directly by the Evil Masters themselves, the toughest of all. Although your quests are made slightly less hard by the bonuses and power-ups scattered all around the battlefield, carrying out the missions demands lots of concentration and quick reflexes.



Free game prototype, Portals thru Dreams, is released. Portals is an atmospheric 2d platformer inspired by Valve's portal. Moving through a sunset-hued dream world, collect memories and bring them to the exit. Aim and create portals to help move yourself through each stage.



Squid Yes, Not so Octopus: Squid Harder Beta is Released. Squids with guns! Pink Robots! Devils from the 4th dimension! Shopping Trolleys and Lasers. When 4 worlds collide, only SYNISO (he's a squid, not an octopus!) can save the day. Psychedelic arena shooter action with visual and aural overload. Just the way sir likes it. The follow up to Squid Yes! Not So Octopus!, now with more lasers, more effects and more eye melting anarchy than ever before



The IGF Award Winning Blueberry Garden is released on Steam.



BV2 is a top down shooter where you control a "Babo," a red or blue orb that rolls around the screen with one of six weapons attached to it. The intuitive keyboard + mouse interface helps you get into the thick of the action as quick as possible. You are immediately dropped into the action and start tossing grenades and molotov cocktails at anything that moves while firing to stay alive.

If you **play, collect, or deal** with video games, then you **MUST** check out *Video Game Trader*!

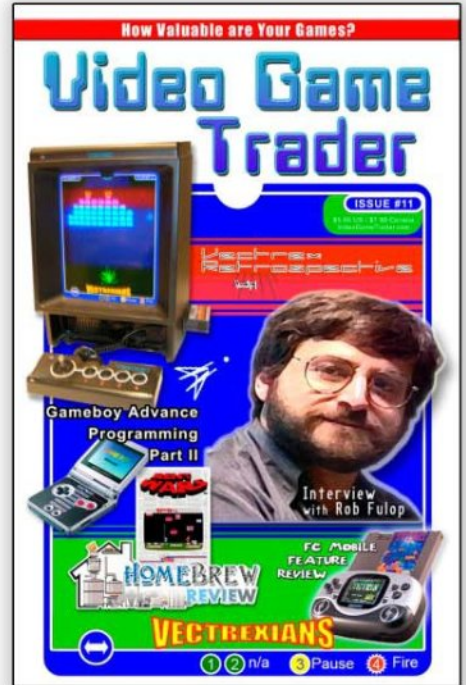
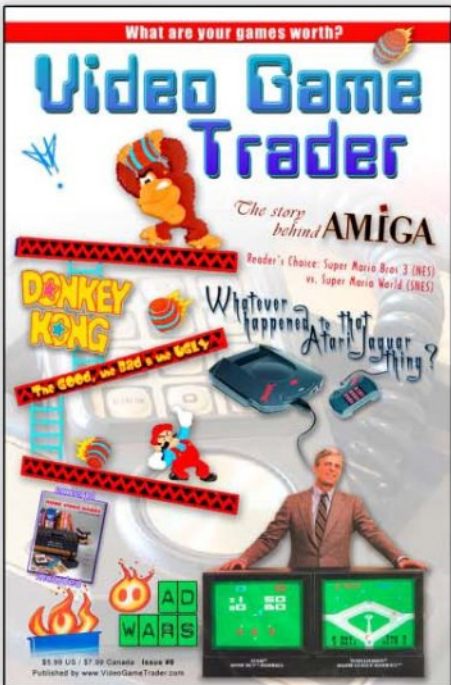
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About our Reviews

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.



THIS ISSUE'S REVIEWERS

Caspian Prince

Cas is an indie game developer behind the critically acclaimed retro remakes over at Puppy Games (www.puppygames.net). He's also the fellow who came up with the new "On Trial" feature.

Rose Bryant

Rose had a tough time giving up her addiction to Uno Rush on Xbox Live Arcade to write her review. She really likes Uno Rush.

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

Steve Gargolinski

Steve Gargolinski has been making games ever since he was a small child and is currently at Blue Fang Games, working on the coolest virtual animal entertainment around. He keeps a blog of his thoughts about video games at www.alivejournal.com. Steve's other interests include baseball, Magic: The Gathering, abstract strategy, and walking in the woods.

Taylor Hall

A Hawaiian whose career aspirations are to be a game journalist, focusing on indie and retro titles. My dream job would be penning a blog for indie games or being an editor for a retro gamer magazine.

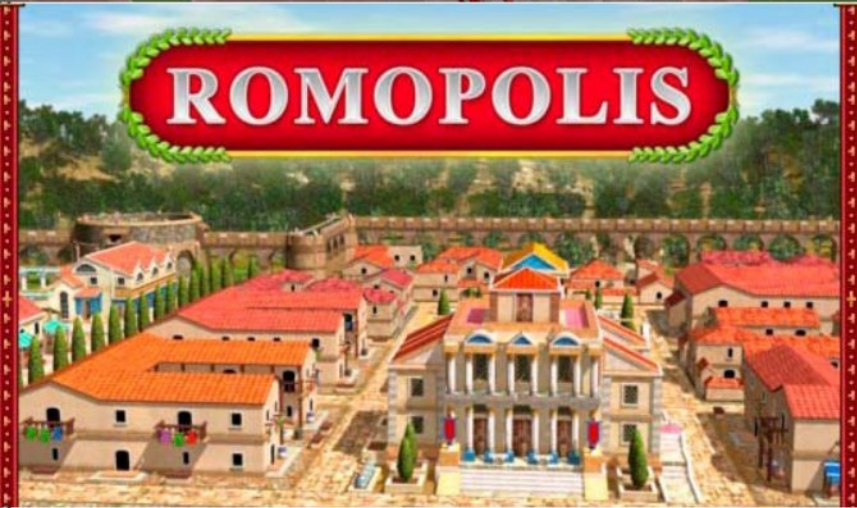
Playing right now: Spelunky & Assassin blue

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

Mike is looking forward to playing Zeno Clash, Blueberry Garden, and Gratuitous Space Battles... he's hoping he'll have the time to enjoy them.



ON TRIAL

Caspian



Bumps is a cute little action puzzle game in the manner of Eets and World of Goo. It combines stylish graphics and appropriate sounds in a perfectly presented package. The basic game involves simply initially positioning creatures on the screen via drag and drop and then clicking "Go!", letting gravity and the rest of physics do the rest. The puzzles start off incredibly easy, and ramp up very linearly, introducing new features regularly and making for a good solid bit of entertainment without too much serious brain taxing. I suspect Bumps is aimed at younger players which will make it a tough sell, but it's worth taking a look at just to have a bit of light fun. Overall, a must see.

Steve

The premise of Bumps is simple: drag your bumps (cute colored balls with eyes) around the level and then click go. From here the physics system takes over and your bumps roll, bounce, and traverse the platforms of the level in a realistic manner. If you set up the scene correctly, your bumps will collect the level's keys, which unlock cages of your captured friends. Bumps is intuitive, fast-paced, full of personality, challenging, and rewarding. These qualities combine into one of the most enjoyable puzzle games I've played in quite some time.

Mike

Bumps is a casual physics puzzle game. Bumps are colorful balls that bounce around and collect keys. The game is similar to Eets in that you setup a level and then click play to see the results. The gameplay is a little simplistic for my tastes, but the presentation, graphics, sound and music are all done very nicely and professionally. It's definitely a demo worth trying, but it left me a little short of wanting to buy the game. The demo leaves you with an excellent first impression even if the full game features look sparse. This will surely be a hit with younger players.

Zak

I really enjoyed this game. Utopian Games' Bumps is stylish, clean and fun to play. I would actually buy this physics game. The goal is to save all these cute little orbs from space aliens by setting up your catalyst bump and "bumping" other orbs to collect keys and accomplish goals. No issues with downloading or running the game. The graphics and style were great and well within the vein of newer indie styles. The puzzles were enough to keep my interest and I would like to play more. I give it a 10.



Simply refused to work on my bang-up-to-date Vista 64 system.

The Book of Wanderer: The Story of Dragons plays very much like a combination of Bejeweled and Puzzle Quest. Instead of swapping two tiles at a time, you drag entire rows or columns in order to match up like-colored groups vertically, horizontally, or in L-shapes. Depending on the specific tiles you match, a number of different effects can influence the board - everything from locking rows to linking columns together. The Book of Wanderer benefits from decent production values, including trophtics, a story, and minigames that unlock bonus wallpapers.

Story of Dragons is a Match-3 game where you shift the columns and rows in order to match up dragon eggs. The game's setting is interesting and all the magic spells that you can use and that are used against you keep things pretty interesting as you play. At the end of each chapter, you'll have to assemble a parchment picture and play a bonus round of Collapse style matching. Story of Dragons is a good Match-3 game without the uber colorful graphics and some nice new mechanics that are added every few levels. The presentation and graphics fit well within the theme and it definitely offers more depth than the average match-3 clone.

The Book of Wanderer is a match three game from Dream Farm Games. The game has some interesting and neat "special eggs/spells" that help you progress through the storyline and separate the game somewhat from other match3 types. I enjoyed playing the game, but wouldn't necessarily buy it. The graphics, style and sound effects are all good.

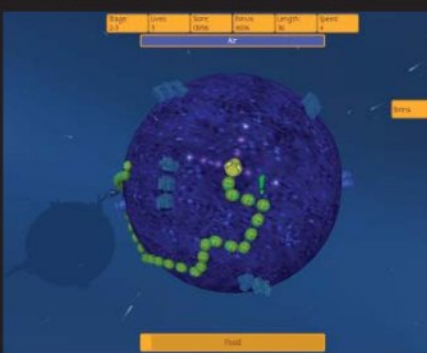


Cool electro pop music mixes with decidedly 16-bit era graphics and gameplay in this racing team management / top down formula one racing game. It has a strangely clunky user interface that in the end made me end-task to close the thing down. I couldn't really figure out what was going on with the team management thing. Casinos? Eh? What's that got to do with racing? I suppose you'd probably understand it better if you were a Max Power reading Formula 1 addict type. As for myself, I didn't really get it. The car was abominably hard to control at first too. That is, until I bashed it good and proper a few times, and then it slowed down to a manageable sort of speed. I think you'd have to be a proper fan of fan-down 2D racing games and Formula 1 nerdery to like this one.

New Star GP is a top down racing game that reminds me of the old Micro-Machines game for NES combined with some of the depth of Gran Turismo. Practice racing the track during the week and then dominate on race-day in order to build up cash. You're responsible for managing the attributes of your ride, finances, fuel levels, and weather to maximize your winnings. There's a fun casino minigame, track editor, and many cars to buy; the biggest thing missing is multiplayer.

New Star Grand Prix is not for everybody. The game is a top-down Formula 1 racing game with some substantial RPG & strategy elements. The game reminded me a little of the Kudos series in that you can pick from an assortment of activities for each day. You can choose to practice the racetrack, go out with friends, gamble at the casino, etc. That aspect of the game adds a lot of depth, but the problem is that the core racing gameplay is not that thrilling. The game may be worth a lap around the track for fans of the genre or Formula 1 gearheads.

New Star GP from New Star Games downloaded easy enough, but the game seemed to crash every time I went to play it. I can't find faults with the graphics, but wish I was able to get past the title screen and into the game.



"Game classic goes spherical" - I'm not sure what these guys were thinking, taking one of the duller games ever made and making it three dimensionally dull. I think this developer is possibly a tiny bit out of touch with the general gaming public, a hint more of this being found in the installer which waffles on about some Visual C++ redistribution files. Er, what? I quite liked the music in this game... but not much else. I'd rather watch the kettle boil than actually play Snake. It's even worse in 3D. From the incredibly small screenshots in the gallery I can see some new things are in there in the later levels - just a shame I can't face playing it for another second. I'll give them a point for managing to move the Snake genre on into a new dimension of originality but it still adds up to a rather torturous experience.

Snakeworlds is a version of the classic Snake game that takes place in 3D on a globe full of obstacles. The gameplay is very simple: don't crash into anything, don't eat your own tail, and eat as much food as possible. Unfortunately Snake-worlds suffers from a lack of polish. The camera jerks around quite a bit with each move you make, which leads to an unsettling feel. The graphics are very bland and the music is decent. Control is tricky and takes some time to get used to, but thankfully there are tutorial levels for this purpose.

The Installer has some ridiculous C++ 2005 Redistributable install attached to it...which I cancelled and the demo still loaded up fine. Snake was never a very thrilling game and putting it on spheres doesn't especially help it. The game is dull and slow and I found myself always holding down the up key for a speed boost. The menus and presentation caught my attention and got my hopes up, but when the game actually loaded - these hopes were dashed. Soon after, I was looking forward to when the demo was over.

Snakeworlds looks like a good twist on a classic. I wish I had been able to download and run the game. Graphics look good and global player ranking on the website is a plus.



Zatikon is a very complicated, deep, and intriguing strategy game with vaguely chesslike semantics - a cross between the ancient game itself and some kind of modern turnbased tabletop wargame. I think the last game I played like this was Chaos on the Spectrum, in an emulator. You can play versus AI players or real people found online (all the lobby stuff is taken care of quite nicely). Hidden beneath a slightly clunky and decidedly ugly interface there is a gem of a strategy wargame. As you play you gain new units for your army, and you've got an online ranking system as well to measure your mettle against online opponents. I have become completely addicted to it. Even the clunky graphics and sound and slightly awkward presentation have grown on me. Here's hoping Chronic Logic make enough money from Zatikon to give it the polish it deserves.

Zatikon is a multiplayer tactical strategy game that plays out like a very complicated version of chess. The combination of army customization, unit variety, and special abilities makes for a game with some deep strategy. On the downside, graphics are primitive and sounds are sparse - Zatikon suffers from a significant lack of polish, but I'd play it anyway.

Zatikon is like a really complex game of chess and simply must be downloaded if you are a fan of strategy games. The game's primary weak points are the lackluster animations, graphics, and sound...but the gameplay makes up for all of these deficiencies. The game is a well balanced and complicated strategy game and you can challenge players and enjoy the bulk of the game for free! Expansion packs can be purchased that add even more depth, new units, and strategies to the overall package. Are you getting why this is a strategy gamer's wet dream? It would be great if Zatikon got a little more flash and an overall facelift, but ultimately it's made for a niche audience that favors depth in gameplay over presentation.

Zatikon, available from Chronic Logic, is sort of a unique take on chess. Basically you equip your army forces and march across a chess-like board to the enemy castle. Each unit has certain skills and restrictions which you have to use to your advantage. There's room for some good strategy play. I didn't have any issues with downloading and running the game. The originality comes from the various unique units that become available during game play. The graphics and the overall style aren't the greatest, but they aren't bad. Ultimately, I got bored with the repetitiveness of the game.

Caspian

A curious and original puzzle game that won awards. It's got a very Harry Potter feel to it, from the sound effects and presentation and curious nature of the puzzle, which is based upon sliding rooms around to get to an exit for your curiously attired avatar. The puzzles start off easy but it didn't take too long for my aging brain to get stuck on one. My eyes started to hurt after a little while as the graphics are rather blurry, a little like those hidden object games which are the fad of the moment. I got a little annoyed by the linear feel of the user interface, which demanded that each animation be properly completed before the next. A fairly straightforward puzzle game with a nice twist and imaginative setting and presentation. However, I'm not really a puzzle game fan, and this particular game didn't convert me.

This game made me download some weird installer thing before I could play it, a sort of Steam-like game manager. A little odd, but it didn't cause me any problems. Unfortunately Astro Creeps did, and refused to work at all.

We have a curious mix of genres that creates something new - a cross between an interactive novel, a roleplaying game, and Kudos. I've never experienced anything quite like it but there's a first time for everything! The language at times is a little quirky, but that's most likely because Celso's native tongue is Italian. I can't complain though as his English is about a million times better than my Italian. The interface and general feel of it looks like it could probably be done more slickly than it is; I found that it seemed to hinder my immersion in the story somehow. It is also rather complex, right from the beginning - there's precious little handholding or introduction to the game's many facets.

Faerie Solitaire is a classic solitaire game, wrapped up in a curious little story about some faeries trapped in the woods and such. As you play, more of the story is revealed, along with (early on) a few twists to the gameplay such as frozen cards which must be melted first with a fire card, or thorns that can only be cleared by uprooting a rose. Faerie Solitaire's general aim and objective beyond the simple playing of solitaire and the story is to collect money which enables you to unlock special enhancements to the game in Faerie Land, with such useful tweaks as the ability to undo a move, or see how many cards are left in the deck. ---Cas continued---

Instantly lost a point for being a zip file instead of a proper installer. It really needed that point too. This miserable arena shooter combines awful graphics with boring sound and gameplay so bereft of excitement I was almost annoyed at wasting 5 minutes of my day on it.

It scores a single solitary point just for not crashing.

Steve

Rooms is one of the most unique and interesting games that I've played in quite some time. Imagine a click-and-move adventure that takes place in a level that can be manipulated as a slider puzzle, and that's the basic idea of Rooms. Can't reach the exit of the level you're on? Slide a few rooms of the mansion around in order to open up a passageway. This unique mechanic combines with a strange setting and creative art style to produce an odd but beautiful game. This uniqueness comes at a bit of a price, and unfortunately the game is not quite as accessible as it could be. Expect to spend some time stumbling around menus and wondering exactly what you're supposed to do next.

I could not get this game to run. There's some weird hUB app that I had to download in order to play it, and this crashed repeatedly.

If you're interested in trying out a Japanese-style life sim chronicling the day-to-day life of female humans, elves, and demons - then Spirited Heart may be the game for you. You'll choose a profession, increase skills and stats, develop relationships, and learn about the upbringing and background of your character. Spirited Heart combines painted backgrounds with Anime characters for a unique look.

--Cas continued-->

Subsoap keep releasing patches with new features. At the time of writing, there used to be a Hidden Object quest game that popped up occasionally, but it has been temporarily removed and will reappear in another patch.

It is a horribly, horribly addictive game. I can't really explain why. I didn't think I even liked card games and now I literally cannot stop playing it.

Synchronicity is a hacker-themed Galaga-style arcade shoot-em-up where you're responsible for blasting abstract geometric shapes in order to progress through the game. As you play through the game you'll earn points to spend on upgrades, which will hopefully allow you to survive longer on your next go through the game. This loop is very repetitive and the lack of a save feature ensures that you'll be playing the same sections many times over, which I found extremely frustrating.

Mike

Rooms loses 1 point solely for its low resolution, general blurriness and weird motion-capped Harry Potter wannabe. The game offers a unique mix of mystery/adventure and puzzle solving even if the overall motif is a little weird. The music is spot-on Harry Potter and I'm not sure if the main character is supposed to be a girl or a boy. It's a unique game on all fronts: presentation, characters, story, and gameplay. The demo is pretty lengthy and this is probably a no-brainer purchase for any puzzle fan. The game has a unique twist and original gameplay - a rare find for casual fans.

Astro Creeps has an insanely problematic Steam-like delivery system from the developer which gave a lot of the reviewers a hard time. It was incredibly annoying, but at least I got the game to work. It's a shame too, because Astro Creeps does an excellent job of creating an action packed homage to Asteroids. The graphics are ok, but the sound and gameplay are top notch. I would even forgive the graphics since the power-ups are absolutely incredible and make the game a ton of fun. Too bad the demo only gives you a 5 minute trial.

Spirited Heart is a romantic choose your own adventure and stat-tracking romp. The presentation and graphics are excellent, but the gameplay is dull. You pick a girl, track/influence her stats and then make decisions for her. It's an RPG without the flashy battles. The demo is a decent length and definitely gives you a good opportunity to get wrapped up in the story and setup your character. The gameplay was too slow paced for me, but the presentation definitely stood out and was excellent.

Unfortunately, Subsoap felt the need to remove their demo of Faerie Solitaire... they say "coming soon", but a member of the panel who didn't procrastinate was able to enjoy the demo before its removal. From watching the video, Faerie Solitaire looks like a clone of Fairway Solitaire which was probably one of my favorite casual games last year. Shame there's no demo for you to enjoy currently.

Synchronicity is an amateurish shooter whose highlight was the somewhat interesting load screen. As soon as the game started, I had an intense urge to hit ALT+F4. It's more of a hobbyist's game than an indie game. It could have been made in a few days and I've seen prototypes with more complexity and better graphics...but it didn't crash so that's a plus.

Zak

Rooms by Handmade Games, is a unique game. I've never played a sliding puzzle game like this. The game challenges you to slide the tile pieces around to get your person to the exit. It takes some strategy accomplish the puzzle and receive a high score. Some of the later levels required quite a few steps before being able to exit. The graphics weren't the best and they reminded me of old time PC games, but altogether the game was slickly presented.

Astro-Creeps is sort of like asteroids and asteroids as they fight through the levels. The game was a lot of fun and I enjoyed blasting space rocks and all. Not sure I'd buy the game, but enjoyed the clean graphics and sounds. The game play ran smooth and brought back memories of days in the arcade.

Spirited Heart, available from Winter Wolves, wasn't my cup of tea. The game revolves around creating an alter ego (happens to be female), seeking a career and eventually a relationship. I give it a point on originality. On the fundamentals, the game downloaded and ran without problems. The overall style and graphics were fantastic. I didn't particularly enjoy playing Spirited Heart, and I wouldn't buy the game personally, but it's a well crafted and solid on the fundamentals.

Unfortunately, Faerie Solitaire distributed from Subsoap is no longer available from free trials. From what I can tell, the game has good music, nice style and graphics. It looks like some other cool features, like ice walls, have been incorporated to spice up this classic game. I would have liked to give it a go.

Synchronicity is a well put together arcade game. The premise puts you in the "hacker" seat as you blast away polygons. The enemies come at you fast, so you'll have to upgrade your player or last only a few seconds. I would play this game more, but I might be just shy of buying it. There was nothing about the graphics and style I didn't like. Download wasn't a problem and I didn't have issues with running the game from the website. Also there's the added bonus of getting your name on the ranking list. Well done.

ON TRIAL



EDMUND MCMILLEN:

Independent Artist, Innovative Game Designer,
and Self Proclaimed Gay Nerd

by Mike



Edmund McMillen has been in the indie scene for over 10 years. He's been involved with over 17 different indie games as an illustrator or game designer (or both). He is one of the members of Cryptic Sea, the developers behind Gish, Blast Miner, and the upcoming No Quarter and Gish 2. Super Meatboy is also in the works for WiiWare. Most of his work can be found on Newgrounds with games such as Spewer, Meatboy, Aether, Tri-achnid, Coil, Clubby the Seal, and more. You can learn more about Edmund by visiting his website (www.edmundm.com), following his 'blog for gay nerds,' or ordering his compilation CD, 'A Cry for Help' which features Edmund's game work, animation, comics, and artwork.



Interview

Indie Game Mag: I know you said in our emails that Aether was your best work, but I would have to go with Spewer as my favorite

Edmund: Spewer is my best "game" game. Spewer's design is very formulaic. I did it to prove I can design a good "game". It's 100% formula though. I tried my best to make the story personal and play with experimental mechanics and storytelling but the gameplay is straight forward.

IGM: I'm not sure I would say it's 100% formula...the liquid physics are a pretty innovative feature

Edmund: Yeah, but the design is a formula. It's one I've been mulling over for years.

IGM: what formula is that? The platformer?

Edmund: No, It's the way the game flows...it's the way I introduce things. In a way that show you how to use them without telling you. Then give you examples of how they can be used and let you use them. I introduce something simple, let the player use it and so on. I string the player along.

IGM: Basically, your formula is how you expand on all the "power ups"

Edmund: In a way that works, yeah. There's also the tiles. I introduce a new tile every 2-3 levels (and other hazards like the acid and also switches and alternate tiles). First, I show the player how it's used, then they use it, and then there's a level that uses it in a new way. There's also the game mechanics, like the different ways to jump, but yeah it works well and that's why the kids like it.

IGM: Well the formula worked on me

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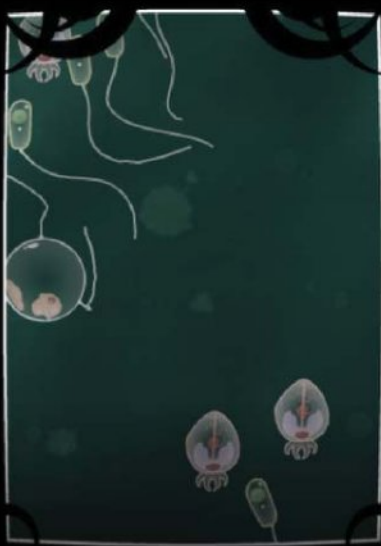
Spewer

The description for spewer explains it best:

You're born into this world a guinea pig before god. Unsure of his motives you progress through life solving his puzzles searching for meaning in the rudimentary problems of everyday life. To make sense of life we must evolve past our previous forms, purge from our bodies the rules set in place by our previous selves in order to see the future with new eyes....In other words Spewer is a game about puking.

What this description fails to mention is that the game mechanics are unique, fresh and that the game plays superbly.





COIL



Coil is quite possibly the weirdest game I have ever played and was in the running for the IGF's 2009 Innovation Award. The graphics are incredible and the presentation sublime. The atmospheric music and 'silent film' style text all work to create an entirely new experience. There's no instructions as the game is described as an experimental art game. Each Level is different with different mechanics and for a flash game, the story is pretty engaging. I'm not sure if Coil is a video game, but it certainly is a work of art.

COVER STORY

...interview...

IGM: I liked the basic mechanics of Aether, but after visiting a few planets, I wasn't really sure what I was supposed to do. The whimsical visuals and set pieces did make it memorable though.

Edmund: That game uses a different formula. It's based on experience gameplay where you are told nothing but the game pushes you just a little to explore. I personally think games like these give you more. They make you feel smarter when you do things and pull you deeper in. But you run the risk of people not getting it.

IGM: So what was I supposed to do on the planets?

Edmund: I'll let you play with it and find out. It's a core part of the experience because your actions have significance.

IGM: Okay fair enough

Edmund: the one thing I did wrong with Aether was I didn't explain you could go 360 around things by pressing a w d s in a circle. A few people don't read that in the instructions. The game has a circular theme.



IGM: Did Gish and Meat Boy have formulas?
Edmund: Yes Meat Boy and Gish had formulas. Meat Boy's was the same as Spewer just not as fine tuned.
IGM: I would have to agree
Edmund: Gish was different because it had physics based gameplay. It wasn't about introducing new mechanics but instead new physics situations
IGM: In Gish, you pretty much start with a lot of his (or its) abilities
Edmund: Yeah, with his I would just sit around and draw out different situations, cool physics situations. Alex would add something new and I'd draw up like 5 things that could use it. When making the levels, I'd basically go through and make sure that I added at least 3 of these new things each level to keep things exciting. I never reused any physics mechanic in Gish, so it stayed fresh to the end. But again, Gish was my first game so I was still learning a ton.
IGM: Gish isn't a bad first game out of the gate
Edmund: Yeah



...continues on page 14

...continued from page 13...

IGM: What would you recommend fledgling freelancers use to draw in? Do you draw right in Flash?

Edmund: I draw in Flash 100%. I have a feel for how Flash does things. Flash complements my style a lot.

IGM: Flash definitely has its own feel. I think it takes some time to adjust too. There's definitely a hump where you just hate where everything is laid out.

Edmund: I've been drawing in it since 2000. I never found another program that I liked as much...

IGM: It certainly is "the online game app"

Edmund: Yeah, it's an amazing animation tool

IGM: You've mentioned that you designed many of the games above...do you do any flash coding?

Edmund: Nah, I always work with different programmers

IGM: Do you find a programmer to code your vision then? Or do they recruit you?

Edmund: It depends on the game. With Meat Boy, Jon had an engine, but he didn't know what to do with it. He asked if I thought I could make a game with it and I said sure and we did Meat Boy. With Aether I had an idea for a game I wanted done and asked Tyler and we did it as it was written. With Gish it was more like I had a basic idea of what I wanted to do and Alex and I worked together and the design formed. It's always different, but I tend to only work on games I'm also designing with the exception of Braid where I was just hired to do the character design and animation.

IGM: I wasn't aware that you were involved with Braid

Edmund: Yeah, I don't advertise it really.

IGM: Someone else did the "watercolor backgrounds" right?

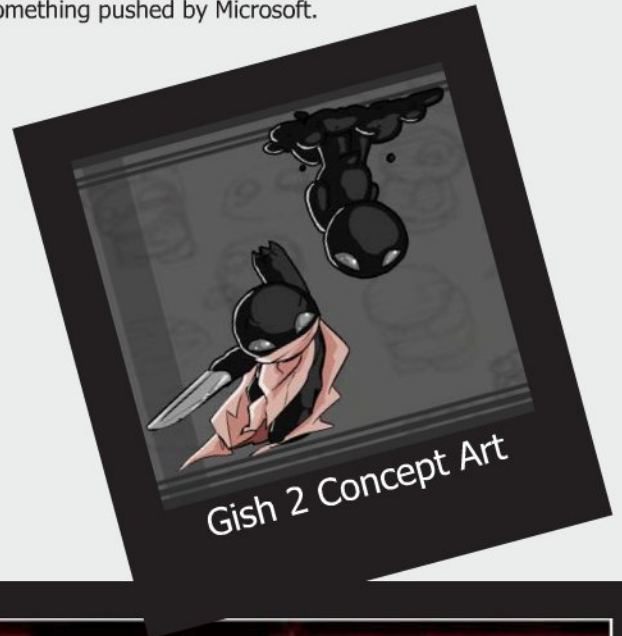
Edmund: David did the backgrounds and then colored over my art with the same style so it doesn't really look like my style anymore.

IGM: What did you think of Braid?

Edmund: I loved braid that's why I wanted to work on it. I applied for the job as the character artist after judging Braid in the IGF in 2006.

IGM: Jonathan Blow is certainly an interesting guy. I liked his response to his game being \$15... I think it's very important that Indies push for higher prices so they can be successful.

Edmund: Yeah money is good, but that price tag was something pushed by Microsoft.



The Original Gish



IGM: Are you 'full time' indie? Does being a freelancer and indie game designer pay the bills? or do you have a regular 9-5?

Edmund: For the past 10 months, I've been 100% purely funded by my own work, but before that I'd do freelance illustration and game design for other companies I don't talk about

IGM: Congratulations, I know a lot of Indies dream about funding their own work.

Edmund: Yeah

IGM: What would be the once piece of advice you could give to an indie developer?

Edmund: It's been a long ride, don't give up. And get used to being fucking poor for a long time. If you stick with it you grow as an artist over time.

IGM: I don't like that second part, but I think being persis-

tent is certainly necessary for all Indies.

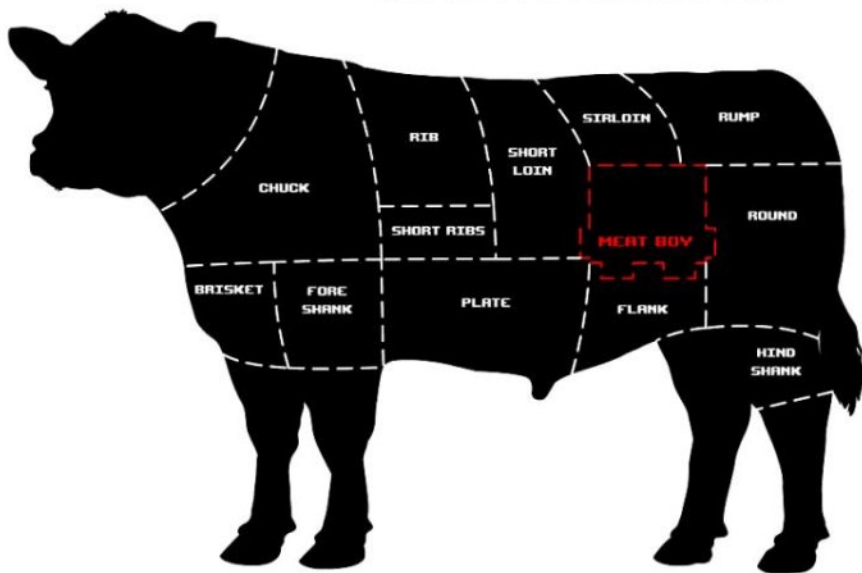
Edmund: Most of my advancement when it comes to design and art is all gaining perspective through experience. If you want to get good at making games...make a shit load of games then you will know what you've done wrong and how to fix that.

IGM: Now that is a great quote.

Edmund: I mean Coil was a correction of Triachnid. I wanted to make a game more personal and move people, but then Aether is a correction of Coil. Spewer is one of Meat Boy...it's a stepping stone process.

IGM: I certainly see some of the connections there, especially between Meat Boy and Spewer.

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Edmund: I just keep going back and grabbing the things that worked and trying them out with new things. It's just basic Evolution...so was this the interview?

IGM: Yeah, I think there's certainly some great stuff.

Edmund: because I feel like I haven't said anything entertaining

IGM: Well, here's your chance to add something.

Edmund: I actually thought you were just asking me questions. Well I mean...shit...I didn't get the usual "Why are you weird" question that's a nice break from things.

IGM: Well, weird is relative.

Edmund: This is true. Maybe you're a super weirdo

IGM: I did find the draw Edmund naked contest, so I can see why people would say (you're weird). Who's weirder though? You for coming up with that contest or the contestants for doing it?

Edmund: yeah that's why I thought it was funny.

Originally people thought it was a prank and I was just going to make it one... but I felt guilty because the art was so good.

IGM: I think it's great that Indies don't have to worry about PR. Can you imagine the soccer moms you would've pissed off with that contest if you were Activision or something?

Edmund: Indie PR can be super fun though. I wish more people would take advantage of being able to say anything in their ads. Did you see my Super Meat Boy ad?

IGM: I don't think so.

Edmund: hehe, look up Super Meat Boy Hitler. It's quite awesome. Best PR ever.

After the interview, I found the SuperMeatboy Ad (see above). It's a great example of indie advertising since it was controversial and was covered by a lot of gaming sites. SuperMeatboy is an expanded and upgraded version of the flash game, Meatboy. It's a vertical platformer of sorts and is coming out to WiiWare in the 4th Quarter of 2009.



Wonderland Adventures

Developer: Midnight Synergy - **Players:** 1
Website: www.midnightsynergy.com

Wonderland Adventures: Mysteries of Fire Island from Midnight Synergy is the sequel to 2007's Wonderland Adventures. The game opens in Wonderland, a town of happy-skippy smiley faces with feet. It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood when flaming meteors fall from the sky!

Gameplay: Fire Island's flimsy storyline, a collection of vanilla find-the-artifact missions, is disappointingly linear. The dialogue is little more than clicking ok after each piece of information. Sometimes personality-challenged NPCs block your path to enforce this dialogue.

This clumsy plot is used to drive your character along between intriguing puzzles. In each level, your Stinker must solve puzzles to make his way to the goal item. You'll help your Stinker cross water, avoid falling, use magical mechanisms or otherwise safely make his journey. You might need to create a path of mechanical transporters, herd adorable dragon-turtles into water to make a bridge, or time your travels around firetraps. Each level requires a different kind of creative problem solving, but all involve sweet graphics and clever solutions. With these fantastically engaging logic puzzles, I didn't much care that my goal was trying to reach a star key, a gold star, a rainbow key, or whatever random object had been introduced for the sole purpose of being that level's goal.

Because the game auto-saves at the beginning of each adventure, screw-ups aren't as punishing as they could be. One-solution problems can become frustrating, but if you are fond of the wolf, chicken and grain sack type of logic puzzles, you'll enjoy these. There is enough variation to make the addictive puzzle-solving worth clicking through the plot.

As you solve puzzles and explore new areas, there are optional gems and coins to pick up for extra points. I'm not really a high score-driven player, personally, so I didn't spend much time collecting the gems when it wasn't necessary to solve a level. For in-game shopping, collect gold coins and spend them on equipment.

When playing, I had one odd issue. Every time I went from one area to the next, my Stinker always seemed to be facing the wrong way. Maybe it's just me, and I just always wanted to head the wrong way?

Graphics: The bright Crayola-colored world was cheery, with stylized cartoon-ish terrain and magical effects. Exploring new areas was always fun, sweet and colorful without crossing the line into cutesy. The game includes scritters, dragon-turtles, fire-breathing flowers, and other wild Wonderland life, but the Stinkers themselves are a bit flavorless. You play as a smiley face with feet and a tam-o'-shanter. It would have been nice to be able to zoom out and see a bit more of the area.

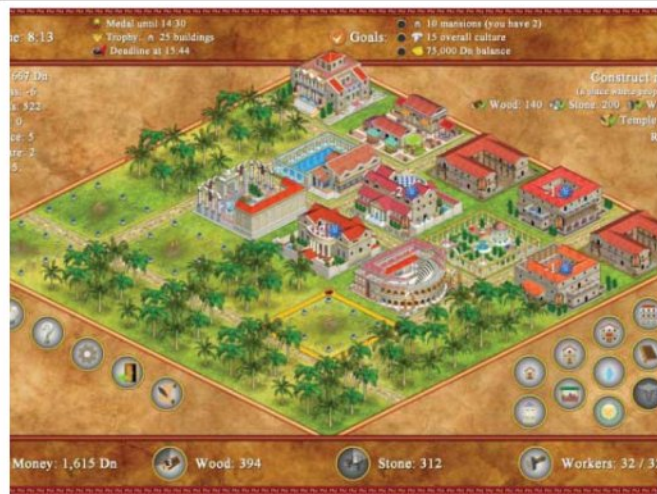
Sound/Music: The background music is just as cheery as the rest of the game, a perfect accompaniment to a sweet game. I had to turn it off after a while, because it became repetitive as I tried and re-tried the puzzles.

Lasting Appeal: There are so many puzzles, and each one stands alone, so Fire Island will stay playable for a long time. This is a long-lasting game for short, coffee-break puzzle solving, or an addictive puzzler for long bursts. I can't imagine wanting to replay any completed levels later, though. The frustration of getting stuck on a level I'd already beaten would be too much for me.

Review by Meg

Gameplay: 8
 Graphics: 7
 Sounds/Music: 6
 Lasting appeal: 4

Verdict: 63%



Romopolis

Developer: Lonely Troops - **Players:** 1
Website: www.lonelytroops.com

Romopolis is a strategy game set in "Roman" times with the overall objective of making money by constructing towns for Caesar. In every level you have 3 objectives that must be fulfilled to complete the level. These objectives are usually pretty straight forward and don't require an extensive amount of thought or strategy. Perhaps the most challenging portion is keeping all of your residence happy. Yes, happiness of your tenants is actually a concern and objective. If only all of us had such luck with our existing landlords!

Gameplay: Romopolis's game play is straight forward and intuitive. The tutorial was very clear and helped you easily master the game. Simple mouse clicks easily guide you through the game. Features like pause, and detailed pop up instructions help keep you focused. The only real issue with the gameplay is it borders on boring. If you like these "build-a-town" strategy games, you'll be able to find Romopolis entertaining for a good 20 minutes. To be fair, I did give the game a good solid hour of play before turning it off.

Graphics: They were simple and clean and are one of the games strongest points. Because of the layout and design it was very easy to understand the game and follow along with your objectives.

Sound/Music: The background music while you were playing was not distracting and fit in with the theme of the game. The basic sounds assisted the graphics to help the player understand what was going on and what needed to be accomplished. The only annoying part was the sound of the horn's "Badom-Badom" as you were given your next mission or words of congratulations from Caesar.

Lasting Appeal: Like I said before, if you're really into this kind of game, you might play it all the way through, but it's not something you'll be dying to come back to or replay over and over again.

Review by Rose

Gameplay: 7
 Graphics: 7
 Sounds/Music: 6
 Lasting appeal: 2

Verdict: 65%



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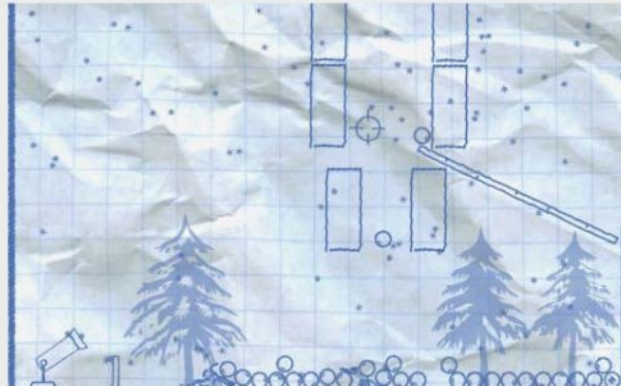
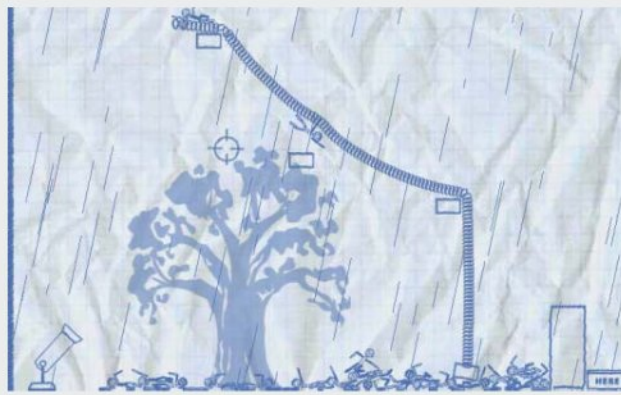
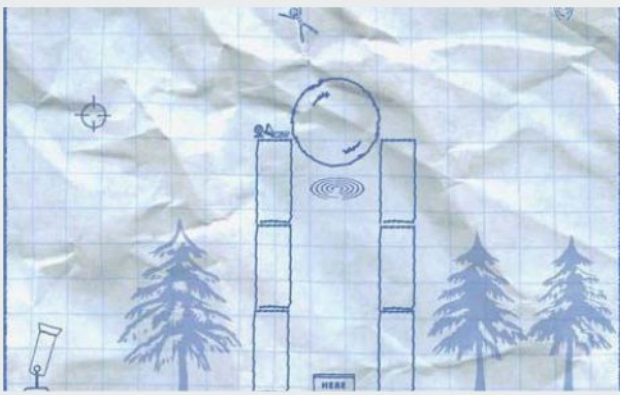
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Ragdoll Cannon

Developer: JV-Crow - **Players:** 1 - **Website:** www.ragdollcannon.net

The premise of Ragdoll Cannon is simple, addictive, and accessible: you fire little ragdoll people all over physics-rich levels trying to get one of your stick people to touch a specially marked target. This puzzle game is not quite as easy as it sounds. Levels are filled with ramps, blocks, balls, swinging chains, teleporters, and plenty of other tricks that get in your way. These pieces of the environment, including the target object that you're shooting for, are all simulated with a 2D physics system. You will need to understand and exploit this physics system in order to guide your cannon fodder friends to their goal.

Just like in real life, sometimes the physics in this game work for you, and sometimes they don't. It's pretty sweet when you use a rolling ball to catapult the target object into an area of the level where you have a clear shot, but catapult that same object a little too far and the target will fall into a bottomless pit. Too bad! You'll have to start the level over. Figuring out the key to each level remains fun throughout the entire game. I felt a true sense of accomplishment after pretty much every level of Ragdoll Cannon, which is very key for a puzzle game.

It's amazing how many interesting levels can be constructed from just a few simple parts, and Ragdoll Cannon explores each and every one. Some levels are based on carefully breaking down complicated structures in a way that leaves the target exposed. Others are twitch based, and

perfect timing is required to sneak your ragdoll buddy past moving obstacles and into the level's target.

There are 170 levels in this game, and the first time I sat down to play, I had completed fifty levels before I even realized it! So it's a good thing there were still so many left to try. Once you've completed a level you're able to replay it whenever you want, either just for fun or to improve on the number of cannon shots that you used to complete the level.

The graphics in Ragdoll Cannon are very unique, reminding me of something that I would have sketched out while bored in math class as a child. Everything in the game is stylized as doodles on graph paper, and this really works well and fits the energy of the game. Levels include simple ambient background action and environmental effects, all the way from tropical levels with birds flying by to arctic levels covered by falling snowflakes - all done in this ballpoint pen-on-graph paper style. Personally I really enjoyed the simplicity of the graphics, but anything this stylized will be a 'love it or hate it' situation for most people.

Speaking of love/hate relationships, I think that's a fantastic way to describe my feelings on the tiny ragdoll people that you fire out of your cannon. There are times where I'm literally cheering the little guys on, begging them to just reach a little bit farther in order to grab a hold of the level's target. At other times, my evil side

comes out and I spend some time blasting the little guys all over the level, watching them bounce off of walls and into bottomless pits. I know we're supposed to be on the same team, but all's fair right?

The music is decent, but there's a fairly limited selection. While playing, I found myself humming along, so I suppose that's a good sign. But if you're going to play this game for any length of time then you'll definitely notice the repetition. Also, there are really only two sound effects in this game: the boom of the cannon, and the ding of completing a level - so those sounds get a bit old.

Other than the repetitive music, the only downside for Ragdoll Cannon is in the polish. There are no options available to play in fullscreen, or even to adjust game's running resolution. What makes this worse is that the default game window is fairly tiny. There also seems to be a bug that causes the game's performance to drop sharply after a decent amount of play; restarting seems to help this issue.

There's a 20 level demo of Ragdoll Cannon available for free. To get the other 150 levels you need to shell out \$20. If you like the demo, then you'll love the full version. If you're looking for a fast-paced, pick up and play, physics-based puzzle game - then I would highly recommend that you check out Ragdoll Cannon.

Ragdoll Cannon
Review by Steve



Gameplay: 8
Graphics: 8
Sound: 6
Appeal: 9

Final: 85%
Grade: B





City Rain

Developer: Mother Gaia - **Players:** 1 - **Website:** www.cityrainbs.com

City Rain
Review by Mike



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

Final: 77%
Grade: C+



City Rain, by Mother Gaia Studio, is a puzzle / simulation game where you are mayor of a city that, like all others, grows in an unpredictable way. As the mayor, you are challenged to make fast environmentally conscious decisions while still providing for all your citizens. This environmentally conscious game was an IGF Student Showcase Finalist and City Rain is part SimCity and part Tetris, but never quite came together in the way I would have liked.

Gameplay:

City Rain's concept of building a sustainable city is excellent, but it has some missteps in its execution. The main problem is that City Rain never reaches the frantic and rewarding puzzle aspects of Tetris or strategically develops a sustainable town a la SimCity. The dichotomy of the two gameplay types sounds good in concept, but doesn't quite work in practice. The keyboard controls and isometric grid make it difficult to make quick reflexive moves, and the pace of the falling pieces prevents you from really delving into the statistics of each type of building. For me, much of the game revolved around me floating around a certain zone of the map, continually dropping pieces to unlock the next phase of the mission as I watched the main town satisfaction bars in the bottom left. The game would be much better suited as a strategy/SimCity game based around green sustainability. It works as it is and is unique, but at least give the option of controlling the pieces with the mouse. This addition would greatly improve the Tetris side of the gameplay, since I believe the strategy elements are there.

Graphics:

City Rain's graphics are slick, clean and immediately play homage to SimCity. If you have played SimCity, the graphics will make the game feel instantly familiar...just be ready to put down your mouse and use the keyboard. Each building tile is easily distinguishable and there's a great variety. It's also nice that you can stack similar pieces on top of one another to upgrade and/or build larger buildings. The game's presentation and menus do a great job of embodying the theme of game. If some more animation and effects were thrown in, the graphics could really stand out. Even as it stands now, City Rain is an excellent looking game.

Sound/Music:

The music is great for the first hour, but then you realize that you're pretty much stuck with the same track. The sound effects are minimal, but suit the strategy/puzzle theme well. The voice-overs are done pretty well and do a good job of alerting you to your city's problem....but they can crop up way too frequently and can become annoying.

Lasting Appeal:

City Rain will certainly hold your interest for a decent amount of time. The campaign is the strongest mode and does an excellent job of mixing up the goals and introducing new elements into the game. The other two modes focus on typical survival & high score puzzle type modes and are good additions, but focus more on the inferior 'Tetris' aspect of the game. City Rain is incredibly unique and a great starting point. I think with some slight tweaks, more control options,

2nd Opinion by Zak

Mother Gaia's City Rain is a timely simulation game in the vein of Tetris and SimCity, I agree. Your job, as the mayor, is to stay in office by creating a sustainable city. This isn't as easy as it seems with buildings and garbage "raining" down from the sky. The biggest challenge for me was the game control, which is all keyboard. Accidentally pushing the wrong buttons occasionally cost me some job approval ratings – maybe it is realistic. If the mouse or keyboard changes could be incorporated, it would have helped a lot. That said; the progression of the game was a winner for me. As the city grows, you are presented with goals from your oh-so-helpful Secretary Catherine. Great voice work! She helps you keep focused around pleasing your population and creating a sustainable city. Biodiesel power plants, NGOs and water treatment plants all help you with the overall goal of sustainability.

City Rain has three modes to play: Campaign, Quick Play and Block Mania. In the Quick Play and Block Mania modes, the object is to rotate the blocks of buildings to fit the space before time runs out; this is Tetris. For lasting appeal, I would suggest the Campaign mode where the goals create dynamic. I wanted to see what new buildings I could obtain; however, I found myself leaving the game and returning later - in other words I didn't feel compelled to play. The graphics are solid, clean and I loved the building upgrade feature. Not quite sure I liked the level select screen, but I was pleased with the graphics overall. The music could use some variety, but was appropriate for a simulation game. The concept is great, but something just kept me from going totally green on this one.



and a larger focus on the sim elements that City Rain could be a must-buy.

Average: 73.75%
Tilt: + 3.25%

City Rain is a good game, but it could be a great game. The sustainability angle is refreshing and enjoyable. The game certainly delivers in the graphics/interface department and is certainly deserving of its awards and nominations for its theme/concept alone. Perhaps, I was a little hard on the game, but ultimately there was just something that kept me from playing level after level. Regardless, Mother Gaia has put out a very impressive first title. I'm hoping that they can build and expand on their concept and make a truly captivating and addicting game in the future.

Verdict: 77%

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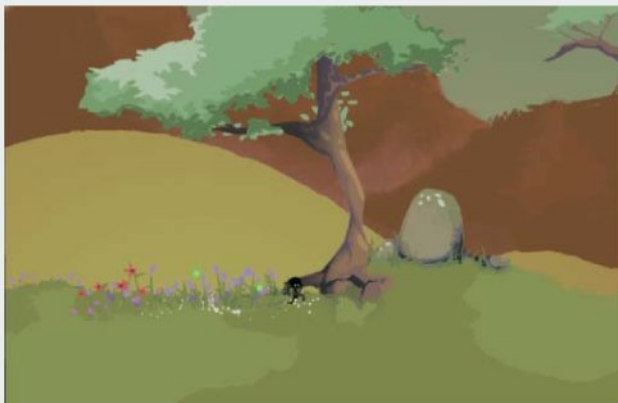
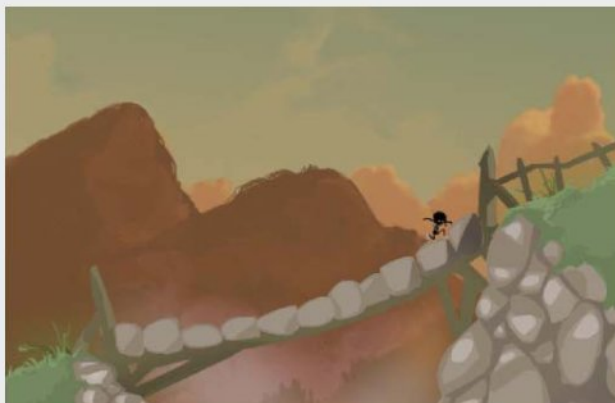
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Nevermore 3

Developer: Adam Westerman - **Players:** 1 - **Website:** www.2dplay.com

The Nevermore series is gaming's version of subverted children's programming: Everything is friendly and vivid, but with inspired characters and mystery that never get pushed aside by needless dialogue or the game's own limitations. Nevermore 3 manages to be the best entry in the series by far, by eliminating annoying features like death from previous entries while fine-tuning the atmosphere of the world. Although there are minor problems with its platforming, this is a true gem of a flash platformer and one that every indie game fan should take.

Ivor the Engine was a British children's show that ran for nearly 20 years in syndication on the BBC. The show was distinctly British: Everyone was polite, plots were never too serious, and the humor subverted (Ivor worked for the Merioneth and Llantisilly Rail Traction Company Limited). The shows are cult-classics for the fact that, like Seinfeld, nothing ever really happens; and to this reviewer - that's Nevermore 3.

There is a plot about saving your village, but it's treated rather lightly until the finale (which is brilliant) makes you re-analyze the adventure as well as surprises you with a beautiful redemption morale. I won't spoil it; after all, morale's are rarely a part of the gaming culture, so it was a joy to discover that Nevermore not only has one, but that it and the ending are so surprisingly clever that they cast a nice memory over the entire experience while also offering a wink to older Nevermore veterans.

The graphics are the best yet, with graceful rolling plains and underground memorials all rendered in bright vivid colors. The darker tones of your main character and the aardvark-like people that hang around makes the games feel like a mix of MYST and the Moomins. When your main character jumps through a tree, the sound of him coming in and out is on cue, but the leaves that fall out are not. When you see it in motion, it's comical, and it made me think

about the physical comedy inherent in Pixar films. Sure it was subtle and not hilarious by any means, but these moments are what make a great game.

Sound-effects are just the tip of the iceberg, well... the bulk of the iceberg. Most of the game is filled with the background sounds of Nevermore, the wind blowing, plinking pianos and the sounds of the wild, represented in Banjo Kazooie nonsense. But rather than flood our ears, the game takes the reserved method of giving us one synth note to represent dialogue, a very welcome change. The music is present in the very beginning scene, which really wonderfully sets up the adventure before disappearing for a majority of the game. Approaching the game's conclusion, the music changes frequency, pitch and intensity to represent that you are getting closer to your destiny. The score is done by "The Very Odd House," who has done commission for Radio Disney and EMI, and it adds a lot of meat to the atmosphere's stew. It's a classy score too, like Jon Brion doing music for an Oddworld title.

I don't know much about Sophie Houlden's "Platform Game Engine", but if NM3 is any sign, then this engine is woefully underused. Controls are flawless and the game has no problem busting out very vivid hand-drawn graphics. Some people on the Internet (www.indiegames.com) have likened it to a fetch quest, but that's quite misleading. The game only makes you backtrack when you make a mistake, and the couple times you do, it never gives you too much area to cover. In fact, messing up usually leads to a different hat. The hat's don't do anything except change the look on the character (green hat, old skull, a very sportingly purple beanie), but it's nice that the developer found a way to go, "oh, you missed the jump, that's OK have a present."

One major problem was that, while it's always obvious where to go, there's no way to tell exactly what is solid ground

and what isn't. It happens throughout the game, and I imagine it to be a purposeful flaw, but one that every gamer will have a different tolerance for. For me, it wasn't even an issue. And although the game is a strict platformer, -just jump (space bar) and left and right- there's a few times that I was worried the game was going to trick me, that I had to click something with the mouse or press up on a door. But it was my own ignorance of the games simplicity, and thankfully so. There's nothing worse than having an unforeseen instruction that later becomes necessary to play the game (here's looking at you, Milon's Secret Castle). And although it's explained, I really did not enjoy having to move my hand to click on word bubbles. Never in the rest of the game do you use the mouse, so having to move my hand off the keys to click the dialogue bubble seemed stupid. I can try and trick myself into thinking the developer wanted you to read the whole word tree so having you grab your mouse would force you, but that's reaching a bit.

NW3 is a great game and maybe its biggest strength is its length: It's about a half hour long. I can honestly say that if it wasn't for its length, I would never have played it, and I would really have missed out. I clear my cookies frequently and I know a lot of other PC users that do too, destroying my ability to get through a substantially lengthy flash game is hindered. And I don't know many players who would realistically would come back to finish a game, but I would come back to NW3. We put so much on length these days that we forget we are padding our games with sub-quests and repeating objectives. People play games for a healthy marriage of gameplay and expectation, whether that expectation is a rank, points or a story. But stopping your quest to save the world to race Chocobos or farm takes the player out of the experience. NW3 knows what it does best and sticks with it. Because of that, it's a joy to experience.

Nevermore 3
Review by Taylor



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

Final: 85%
Grade: B



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Happier Than You



Pahelika: Secret Legends



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