

PLAYDATE



BROKEN SWORD REFORGED

We speak with Charles Cecil about Revolution Software's modern remaster

WHAT'S YELLOW AND CRANKY?

Exploring creativity with the game devs designing for the 1-bit Playdate



#5

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CONTENTS



06 Return of the GOAT



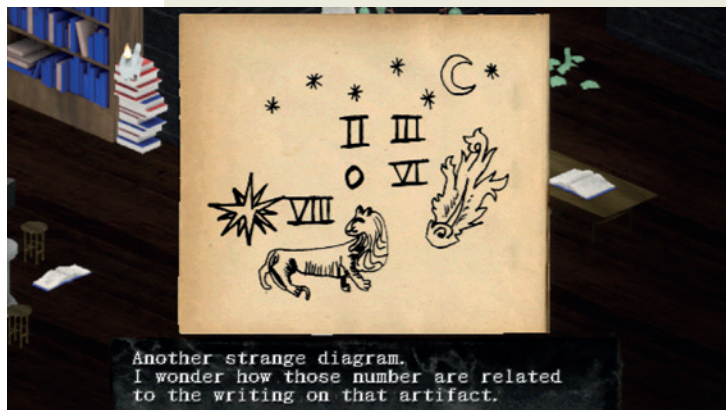
22 Indies Rock!



26 Eiyuden Chronicle



56 Pacific Drive



80 Fragmented Almanac

FEATURES

42

WHAT'S YELLOW AND CRANKY?

Deputy Editor Dan Morris explores the uniquely creative world of Playdate game development.

06

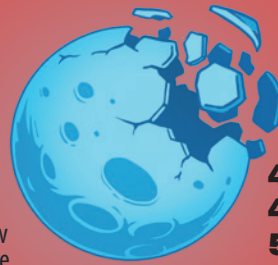
RETURN OF THE GOAT

Broken Sword: Shadow of the Templars is back, and better than ever!

52

ID

In this new feature, we take a gander at Newfangled Games' workspace!



- 46** Ten of the Best
- 48** Why I Love...
- 50** Magnify
- 86** Game Dev Diaries
- 90** Columns
- 98** Discourse

THE HUB

14

DEBUG DEBRIEF

See what the team have been up to since you last saw them. Events in Norwich and Guildford kept them pretty busy!

16

RISING STARS

Checking out the work of students from across the county — this time we look at Buckinghamshire New University.

22

INDIES ROCK!

Our inaugural Debug U and Indie Game Awards took place on February 2nd. Catch up on the events, and award winners!

- 13** Elevator Pitch
- 18** Past Present Future
- 18** Free Play
- 19** Let's Get Physical
- 20** Virtual Indie
- 21** Early Access

INDIEVELOPMENT

28

ANTONBLAST

This crazy, retro-styled action platformer is due out later this year, so we took an in-depth look at what kind of madness you can expect upon release!

26

EIYUDEN CHRONICLE

As the spiritual successor to the classic *Saikoden* games, what can you expect from *Eiyuden Chronicle: Hundred Heroes*?

- 25** Hazard Pay
- 30** Sleepytime Village
- 31** Phoenix Springs
- 32** Windrush Tales
- 34** Selfloss
- 34** The Alters
- 35** City 20
- 36** Star Trucker

- 37** Manor Lords
- 38** Dreamsettler
- 40** DON'T SCREAM
- 41** Garage Sale
- 41** Beyond The Board

REVIEWS

56

PACIFIC DRIVE

This car is my car. There are many like it, but this one is mine. My car is my best friend. It is my life. I must master it as I master my life. Without me, my car is useless. Without my car, I am useless...

- 57** Ultros
- 58** Snufkin: Melody of Moominvalley
- 59** CorpoNation
- 60** Death of a Wish
- 60** Bulwark: Falconeer Chronicles
- 61** Balatro
- 62** Penny's Big Breakaway

- 63** Arzette: The Jewel of Faramore
- 63** Go Mecha Ball
- 64** Inkulinati
- 65** The Outlast Trials
- 68** Berserk Boy
- 68** Promenade
- 69** Chronique des Silencieux

- 70** Lil' Guardsman
- 71** New Star GP
- 71** Super Space Club
- 72** Planetiles
- 72** Bullion: The Curse of the Cut-Throat Cattle
- 73** Also Released

RETRO WORLD

84

RETRO INTERVIEW

Retro Editor Marc Jowett chats with James Deighan from retro publisher Mega Cat Studios about breathing new life into old systems.

80

FRAGMENTED ALMANAC

If issue #4 taught us anything, it's that the Dreamcast is an indie haven. Here's a shining example.

- 77** Flea!2
- 78** Vengeance Hunters
- 78** Flap Happy
- 79** Excelsior
- 79** Lufthoheit
- 81** Dead Tomb
- 81** The Train 2

- 82** Jane Austen's 8-Bit Adventure
- 82** Lost Treasure of Lima
- 83** The Storied Sword

Return of the



ANDREW DICKINSON in conversation with CHARLES CECIL

Our cosy and professional interview set up with Charles

It's not everyday that you get to sit opposite one of the all time greats in gaming. Some of my colleagues have been lucky enough to interview Japanese auteurs such as Hideo Kojima and Yu Suzuki, but their careers in video gaming began several years after the person I find myself looking at on this chilly March day.

"I actually wrote my first game in 1981. So in those days, obviously, we didn't have home computers. I had a Sinclair ZX81, and that for me was an advanced computer. I'm lucky enough to have lived through the most extraordinary change. Certainly, working now, it feels like we're much, much more efficient than we were in 1996. And hugely more efficient than back in 1981."

Charles Cecil, co-founder of Revolution Software, whose offices in the heart of the Shambles within the city of York I find myself in, looks at once relaxed and also animated as he discusses the advancements in technology since he wrote his first game over forty years ago.

"The huge difference is that when we worked with collaborators back in 1996 [for *Broken Sword*], obviously anything would be sent through the post, so it's a very, very slow process. We can send things by fax, but that wasn't the best way because the results were generally fairly poor. The huge advantage [today], of course, is through the internet — Zooming, and through Slack. And through all these





processes is the direct relationship that we can have with people working remotely, which just wasn't possible before. Because one of the things at Revolution is that we have a proud history of working with really talented people, whether it be for *Beneath a Steel Sky* with Dave Gibbons, or, in the case of in 1996, a whole slew of animators and layout artists — and these were people that weren't necessarily even in the UK. So that involves endless phone conversations, and these drawings being sent backwards and forwards by post. It's just so fantastic to be able to do it so much more remotely now. To share screens would have been unthinkable [back then]."

Technological leaps since the '80s and '90s have had a profound effect not just on the quality of work being outputted, but also how people collaborate. What was 'unthinkable' back then is commonplace now, and in fact it's hard to imagine trying to work on a project with someone half the world away using only the postal service and a telephone. But this is exactly what it was like to create *Broken Sword: The Shadow of the Templars*. While discussing the original game, I wanted to know what went into making George and Nico such enduring characters.

"Interestingly, it was Nico that came first. When I was quite young, maybe 10 or 11, my mother took me to Paris. Back in those days, Britain was really poor. It was grim. It was grey. It was what punk came out of, before Margaret Thatcher magicked money out of the North Sea. Then deregulation happened, and suddenly, we all felt rich. But before then, it was really quite poor. So when we went to places like Paris, they were so much richer than us; there was this self confidence that we didn't have in Britain. I love that memory of how extraordinary and how different France was back then. And so the first character that I came up with was Nico, because she embodied a self confident, intelligent, ambitious young woman. She embodies everything that I loved about Paris and France in those days."

"In any story, what you benefit from enormously is to have a foil, a second character against which the first character can reveal exposition. We wanted to convey the story

Left to right: David Cecil (Senior Game Designer), Noirin Carmody (COO), Mark Jagger (Art Director), Sam Hayes (Producer), Charles Cecil (CEO) and Harry Flanagan (Production Assistant)

VIRTUAL

INDIE

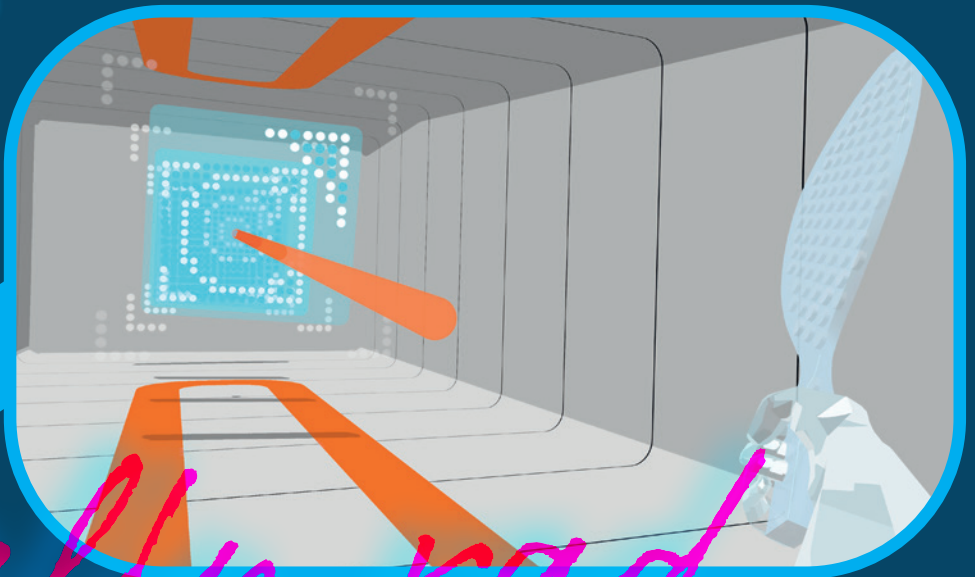
Your handy guide to the latest VR indies

Strap on your headset, fumble around for your controllers, and get ready for some stonking VR experiences to play right now! Virtual and mixed reality has really come into its own recently, so it felt only right to highlight immersive gaming. Just try not to punch your TV, okay?

C-Smash VRS RapidEyeMovers

It's no secret that we're big fans of this game here at Debug (it came very close to winning a couple of trophies at our Indie Game Awards, in fact). Jörg Tittel of RapidEyeMovers and the amazing team at Wolf & Wood Interactive created a bone fide VR hit by using a little-known Sega IP from the days of the Dreamcast.

Now freed from the shackles of PSVR2 due to being recently released on Meta Quest devices (it will also be available to non-VR players on PS5 via their New Dimension update coming soon), *C-Smash* is just as much fun and effortlessly cool as it has ever been. In fact, you might even say that it's even more fun than before, now you're not constrained by that pesky wire!



Totally rad



Arcade Paradise VR

If you love *Arcade Paradise* already (and why wouldn't you? It's incredible), experiencing it in VR is perhaps even better! New games to add to your arcade are the icing on the virtual cake!



The Pirate Queen

Who had Lucy Liu being the star of a virtual reality game on their 2024 bingo card?! *The Pirate Queen: A Forgotten Legend* sees you transported to 19th century China for a swashbuckling adventure!

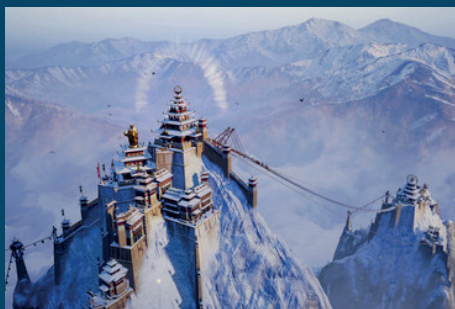


EARLY ACCESS

WHERE THE GAMES AREN'T FINISHED, BUT ARE STILL A LOT OF FUN

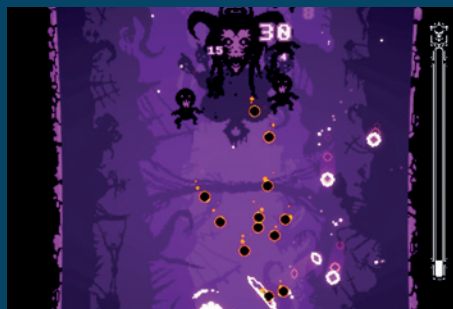
Early access is an interesting concept; allowing people to play your game while it's still in active development, giving you vital feedback and data. It's also not for everyone though, with many wanting to wait for version 1.0 before they jump in.

We wanted to highlight some awesome titles in early access here, all currently available on Steam. If any of these grab your attention, and you want to be a part of the early access process, consider supporting that dev if you can!



Laysara: Summit Kingdom

It's a city builder, Jim, but not as we know it. Well, not quite anyway (and don't ask me where that *Star Trek* reference came from, I have no idea myself). *Laysara* tasks you with building a prosperous city on a mountain, but beware of avalanches!



Against Great Darkness

If you've ever dreamed of being a Pagan deity attempting to escape the grasp of Hell itself, *Against Great Darkness* is going to be your cup of tea. A brick-breaking, bullet-hell rogue-lite that looks like one hell of a good time.



Infection Free Zone

Now *this* is pretty unique. Utilising OpenStreetMap, the team at Jutsu Games allow you to pick literally anywhere in the world to fend off zombie hordes. Fortify your own home — or maybe the Tower of London — and survive the apocalypse.



Furnish Master

Craving a new cosy game? Alex Blintsov has you covered with their furnishing extravaganza! Decorate a space to your liking with huge creative freedom, and then buy new property and furniture to do it again. And again. Total zen bliss.



Throne of Bone

Dying for a new deck builder to play? Why not give this one a shot. You play as a necromancer fending off all those who dare get in their way as they fight to reclaim their throne. Windmill Slam could have a [insert basketball pun here] on their hands!



Southfield

It's farming, Jim, but not as we know it. Please, someone stop me, I'm begging you! Set up a crazy farm full of unpredictable crops, use machines to maximise your potential, and build build! And then build some more.



RELEASED
2024

STOP!

HAMMER TIME

IN ANTONBLAST YOU'LL BE LEVELLING THE LEVELS

Familiar and fresh at the same time, *Antonblast* takes clear cues from Nintendo's *Wario Land* series both in its aesthetics and its rambunctious central character. It may be one of the most aptly-titled indies in recent memory. You are Anton, and it is a blast.

Quite literally, as Anton barges his way through large, complex stages that see him (or similarly maniacal comrade Annie) bursting through terrain and terror alike as they quest to retrieve Anton's spirits (yes, that kind) from the clutches of the ever-popular master of lies, Satan himself. Upon locating said beverages, the destruction goes into overdrive as 'Happy Hour' mode is activated, applying a time limit to your frantic return to the level's entrance, before the entire area goes up in a sea of fire. Very *Wario Land 4*, but what's wrong with paying homage to a gameplay style that hasn't been represented since 2001?

Anton and Annie's trademark Clutch attack is a speedy dash forward that

has them violently shoulder-barging obstacles out of their way, a move that can be chained into itself with timed button presses to make you feel

" Spirits and gambling? Anton, are you okay, mate? "

like an unstoppable wrecking ball. There's also a satisfying Hammer Spin that sees Anton slamming his weapon of choice into the ground after a jump, making him bounce higher to grab those out of reach collectables, such as piles and piles of

INFO

Developer
Summitsphere

Publisher
Summitsphere

On
PC, Switch

Demo
PC

shiny poker chips. Spirits and gambling? Anton, are you okay, mate?

Great player control would be nothing without level design chops, and *Antonblast* certainly has that, with hidden nooks and crannies all over the place that'll offer a stiff challenge even to skilled players. Segmented level design makes navigation breezy, lending *Antonblast* a joyous fluidity that makes it stand out from the indie platformer crowd. Gorgeous cartoon graphics and the fantastic soundtrack don't hurt, either. This is going to be a big one. **□**

Stuart Gipp



WATCH IT



Q&A ANTONBLAST

A secret-packed, high-intensity platformer with eye-popping visuals, *Antonblast* is one of the most promising and thoroughly fresh indie platform games to come along in quite some time. We had a quick chat with the game's director, Tony Grayson of Summitsphere, about what makes this marvellous mash-up of cartoon carnage tick.

What are *Antonblast*'s inspirations?

Wario Land is obvious, but a lot of the design philosophy is actually born from *Crash Bandicoot*. *Wario Land* is a slower, exploration-focused game, while *Crash* is centred on having a rhythm to its actions. Consequently, *Antonblast* is much harder than any *Wario* game. Oops!

What kind of experience are you hoping for players to have?

It has a very present challenge as a result of the expectation that you will not clear each level on your first try. This is one of its biggest strengths - you WILL get through the stage, no matter how hard it's kicking your ass. We heavily checkpoint through difficult areas, allowing us to give the players small victories leading up to the big one of clearing a stage. I hope people laugh at it, too. I think it's a pretty funny game.

Has feedback received during development led to changes in *Antonblast*?

Shuhei Yoshida at PlayStation was one of the first people to see *Antonblast*. He was really enthusiastic about it, so we sent him a build. The next day, I got a long email from him detailing all the things he didn't like!

I was floored, but Shu demonstrated his interest in *Antonblast* being the best that it could be. He's one of our biggest supporters, still. Thank Shu for the Hammer Vault working the way it does now; it used to be a timing challenge which was terrible. I should never be precious about anything I've designed; If the player doesn't jive with it, that's my failing, not theirs.

How have you approached the game's visuals?

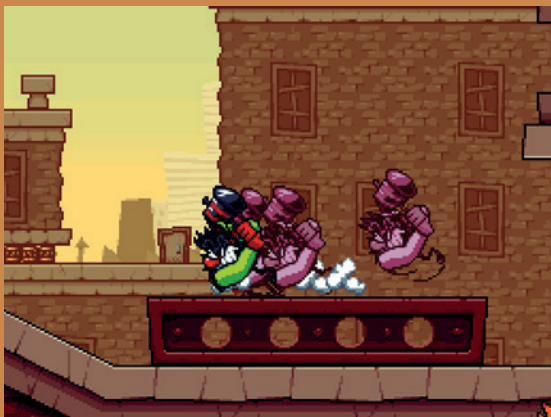
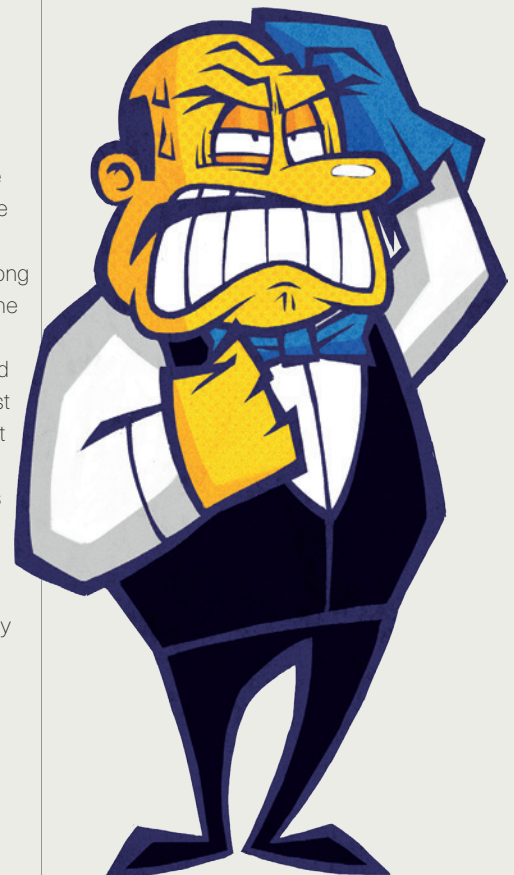
We started by trying to marry the aesthetic of *Wario Land 4* with the animation of *Earthworm Jim*, but

ultimately this amounted to a surface level mishmash without discovering what the underlying art style was.

There's a lot of inspiration from cartoons — *Johnny Bravo* and *Ed, Edd n Eddy* are of particular interest - but the graffiti scene here in Miami started bleeding in. I became obsessed with clarity above all. The striking high contrast colours of our new art style meshed well with our chaotic gameplay and solved the issues we had earlier.

Is there anything secret about *Antonblast* we can reveal?

All I can say is that nothing pairs better with a good Spirit than a slice of Lime. God, I hope people remember me saying that in a few months.



THE BACK CATALOGUE

The people who made this also made...

Antonball Deluxe

Antonball Deluxe is a snappy sideways take on *Breakout*, adding platforming elements to the brick-busting action.

Vengeance Hunters

Developer NALUA STUDIO **Publisher** NALUA STUDIO
On NEO GEO **Released** MAY 2024

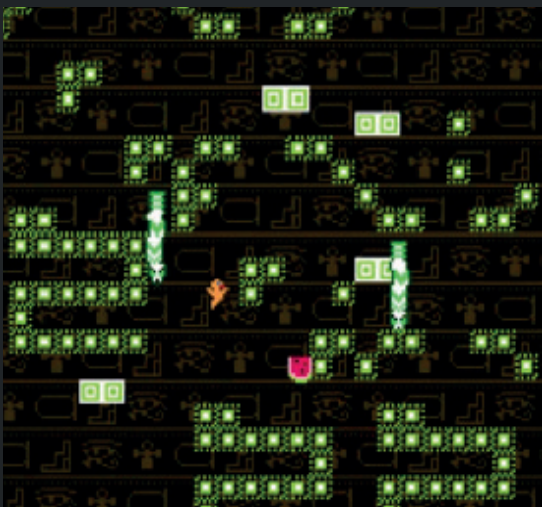
Vengeance Hunters is a classic arcade-style brawler, designed to take you back to the '90s. I spent many an hour playing the *Streets Of Rage* series to death with my mates and with couch co-op available here, it sounds right up my street!

Choose from three brawlers who have different strengths and weaknesses; Candy possesses some handy blades for close-up punishment, Golem, a robot whose strength and brute force are bound to rough up anyone who gets in the way, and Loony, who appears to have a detachable fist for long-range attacks. The combat will feature string-based combos and moves that can be chained together to give different results based on the situation.

There are five main zones, and these are all filled with sub-levels and mini-games. End-of-level bosses will provide a test, with multiple phases to tackle. There will also be several collectables to look out for. Watch out for plenty of nods to the '80s and '90s too! 📺



WATCH IT



Flap Happy

Developer REFRESH GAMES **Publisher** MEGA CAT STUDIOS
On NES **Released** TBC **Social** @RefreshGamesDev

Once upon a time, a chicken living its best life suddenly loses consciousness and awakens in a dungeon filled with horrors. The plot may be a little far-fetched but the gameplay is familiar.

Flap Happy describes itself as an 8-bit avian rogue-like platformer, in which you flap to dodge hazards, collect fruit, and land on platforms. Sounds like flocking good fun to us!

If playing as a chicken who flaps to avoid hazards sounds familiar to you then you will have already guessed that *Flap Happy* is another take on the classic *Flappy Bird*, only with much more under the hood.

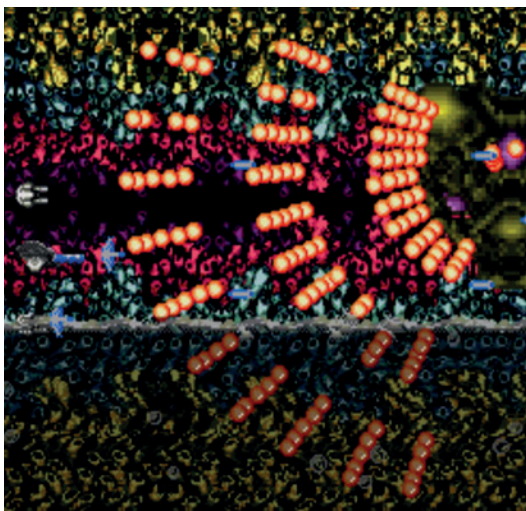
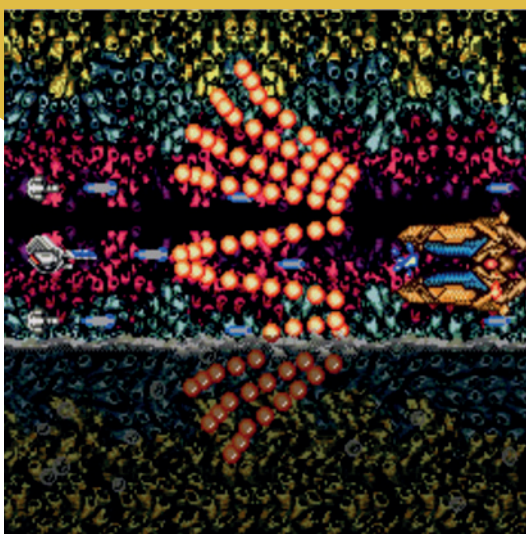
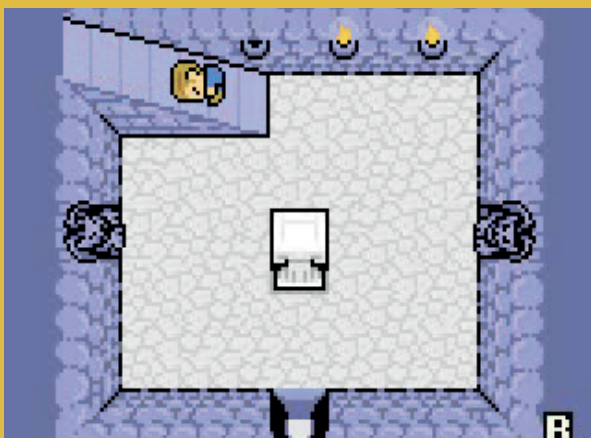
Each level has five platforms that require you to attempt to land on with skill and precision, in order to earn bonus points. Random enemies litter each level, including snakes and sharks. Yep, flying sharks. Fruit can also be collected to further enhance your score.

We are told the final version will feature over 900 levels to flap through, and a high score table will be present for bragging rights over your mates.

Developer Ryan Carson has been working on and fine-tuning *Flap Happy* for several years now, and the game has been picked up by Mega Cat Studios for the NES. The game smashed through its Kickstarter goal and we will have the review here in *Debug* when the final version drops. 📺



WATCH IT



Excelsior

Developer POLYDUCKS, LK CAMPBELL **Publisher** ZENADU
On GAME BOY COLOR **Released** TBC **Social** @POLYDUCKS

Excelsior is a puzzle RPG which takes place in a post-war society where towers of war are repurposed for the tourism trade. The towers contain puzzles which must be solved to climb higher, and puzzle solvers set out into the world for fame and fortune.

Debug was given access to a work-in-progress version and can report that it is shaping up to be a challenging but fun puzzle sim.

During my playthrough, I solved several puzzles within the initial tower. Picking up an item I shouldn't have resulted in some stairs becoming a slide, and a sweeping brush enabled me to clear away some dust bunnies. Strange puzzles? Absolutely. Fun puzzles? Absolutely! Hints were given freely by a thoroughly generous chap outside the first tower, which was welcome.

Outside the towers, there were plenty of folk to interact with. Some held valuable information while others were happy just to chat. Graphically, these areas look very beautiful indeed for a Game Boy Color title.

The Polyducks team are sending *Excelsior* to Kickstarter soon to raise the funds to complete the game. Polyducks developer Ben Jones tells us, "Our goal is to launch *Excelsior* through crowdfunding to fund the rest of development, with the beta having taken a year to build and illustrate."

As always, Debug will bring you the definitive review when the game is complete. [D](#)



WATCH IT

Lufthoheit

Developer SHANNON BIRT (PROGRAMMING), CARSTEN GLASER (GRAPHICS), CYAN & CROUZET LAURENT (AUDIO/SFX)

Publisher TBC **On** MEGA DRIVE **Released** 2025 **Social** @BIRT_SHANNON

Lufthoheit (which loosely means *King of the Sky* in German) is a shmup that is still very early in its development. Thankfully, Debug have played a very early demo.

The team are aiming to push the Mega Drive hardware to its very limits and we are told the engine being used will produce things seldom seen on the Mega Drive before. Developer Shannon Birt gives us more of the lowdown on the technical side.

"The demo includes sprite scaling effects, sprite rotation effects, sprite multiplexing effects (up to 220-plus sprites, [which are] limited to 80 normally), a debris system for destruction, water splash effects on all bullets, line scrolling effect for water, four-layer parallax, shadow and highlight effects for the water transparency, and mid-screen palette re-use for over 100 colours on the system (it's limited to 61 normally)."

The demo we played was only a few minutes long but it is already clear that *Lufthoheit* could be something very special indeed. There were plenty of enemies on screen with no noticeable slowdown, some nice water effects and a rock ditty playing in the background. The accuracy of the bullets are unknown at this point as we were invincible, and a lot of the enemies were too, but it gave us a really good feel for the game and as development progresses, we will keep you up to date right here in Debug.

Lufthoheit is currently penned in for release next year, giving the team plenty of time to further improve the game. With *Earthion* and *ZPF* also heading to the Mega Drive, the shmup competition is shaping up very nicely indeed, and *Lufthoheit* is showing early signs it is up to the task. [D](#)



WATCH IT



Bex Trista

CALM AND OCCASIONALLY CAT FILLED PUZZLE BASED FUN WITH



A LITTLE TO THE LEFT

Bex Trista, aka TristaBytes, is a UK-based presenter and interviewer as well as an occasional Twitch streamer and content creator. She has been gaming since retro was modern and enjoys a range of indie games, especially those with cats.

S

ometimes a game comes along at the absolute perfect time to make life better. And that's what happened to me when, while under a lot of stress, Max Inferno's *A Little to the Left* (or to be more precise their *Cupboards and Drawers* DLC) appeared like a beacon of calm on my radar.

This game felt like it had been designed to calm my brain with its slow, soothing puzzles, while bringing a smile to my face with its relatable and gentle cat-based humour.

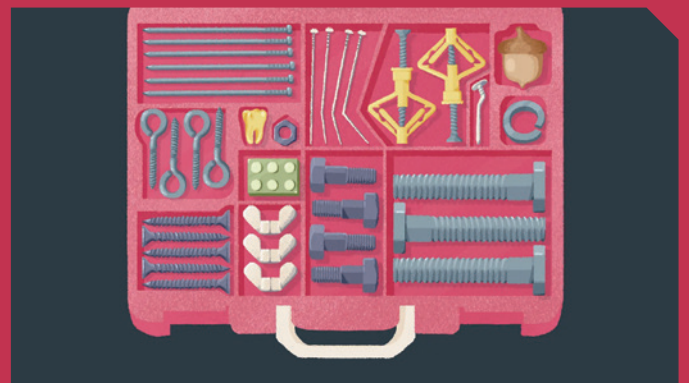
The game comprises a varied set of sorting and arranging puzzles using simple mouse-only controls to move and place items. The soft pastel colours and gentle hand-crafted art style, accompanied by a beautifully low-fi calming soundtrack, make this game an ideal way to switch off after a long day. You can play one or two levels - including their daily puzzle - or play through the whole game and it's over 70 conundrums, for a solid bit of self-care. The puzzles range from arranging dried leaves into a symmetrical pattern, through sorting boxes into an arrow system (which rewards you with a cat!), to tidying a multi-stage jewellery box. The game isn't about pursuing an ever increasing difficulty to feel accomplished, but rather enjoying the experience and journey along the way. To add to the replay value and

ensure no puzzles feel too frustrating, some have multiple potential solutions, giving you another layer of depth to discover.

There is no story to the game, but you definitely feel a connection to the mischievous cat that pops up and occasionally tries to thwart your efforts. If you've ever had a pet cat, the experience is all too familiar and adds a lot of charm to what would otherwise be a game without any character interaction. The whole experience has a very calm, dreamlike quality to it and a lot more personality than you would assume, with the ending verging slightly on the psychedelic, albeit in a soft pastel colour scheme.

I found this game for the *Cupboards and Drawers* DLC, but stayed for the whole game. I occasionally still drop in for their daily puzzle, or to replay my favourite levels, moving things into pleasing arrangements as a way to wind down. I can also imagine the tasks being great for those with anxiety to use while on long calls or meetings, since there is no time limit or pressure involved.

I can absolutely see why fans of cosy indie games gave this a 9/10 on Steam. It ticks all the right boxes and makes the most out of an incredibly simple concept with its charm and style. If you'd like to try out the game for yourself it's currently available on Steam, Xbox, Switch, PlayStation and Itch.io, as well as both Android and iOS, for whimsical tidying-based calm on the go.



Developer Polytron Corporation

FEZ

You never forget the first time you play *Fez*; the first time your little character, Gomez, steps out of his 2D plane into a colourful, intriguing and exquisitely crafted 3D world. Released in 2012 to widespread acclaim, *Fez* was a major part of *Indie Game: The Movie* and arguably helped bring the burgeoning scene to a much wider audience. *Fez* never received the sequel it deserved, but that just makes playing it that little bit more special. If you've never experienced it, do. Enjoy it. Because you'll only play it for the first time once.



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