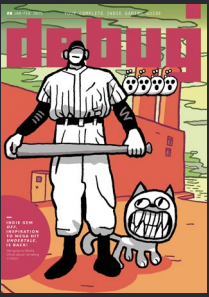




—
**INDIE GEM
OFF,
INSPIRATION
TO MEGA HIT
UNDERTALE,
IS BACK!**

We spoke to Mortis
Ghost about remaking
a classic.



#8

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Special Thanks To

Antonio Santos for running another amazing BIG Conference. The lovely team at Diva, and all of the incredible devs, publishers, and PR people out there. Keep doing what you do!

The Fine Print

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ISSN 2976-7180



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Edd is back again, and this time he's musing on the physical side of game UI. By the way, did you know he's writing a book?!

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These super cute ghosts are from the Fangamer remastered box art. Physical versions, including a special edition filled with goodies, are now available at fangamer.com.





If, like me, you had never heard of *OFF* until recently (or if this is indeed your first time hearing about it), here's a brief summary of what the game is. "*OFF* is a surreal Japanese-inspired RPG, where the player controls a taciturn baseball batter who must explore and purify a monochromatic world haunted by ghosts." It isn't a game that can be easily summarised, as even its own creator found the above description difficult to write. And while we may now have an idea of what the game itself is, its importance and impact are altogether more complex to describe.

So let's start at the very beginning. Mortis Ghost (also known as Martin Georis, though I think we can all agree this is far less cool), a Belgian comic artist, officially released *OFF* back in 2008, though it had been available to some since 2007. I wondered what prompted Mortis to branch out from comics into games. "Comics and video games have been my two passions since forever. I studied to make comics, and considered this field for my future because it seemed easier to me to make stories through this medium, but also to enter it professionally.

But in truth, neither practice surpasses the other in the affection I have for them. Both are — for me — interesting, and very different ways of staging stories. While I was doing my art studies, I started to make *OFF* in my free time, as a hobby. Finally the project grew bigger than expected, and it became the game it is now."

BATTER UP!



Sovietborgs

Developer RETRO SUMUS **Publisher** RETRO SUMUS
On MEGA DRIVE, DREAMCAST, NEO GEO **Released** TBA **Socials** @RETROSUMUS

I was granted access to a playable level of strategy/shooting game *Sovietborgs* to sink my teeth into, and while the game is still very early in development, the signs look encouraging.

The game starts with the robot commander (and two allies) being dropped onto the playing field from a helicopter.

I control the commander, with the other two automatically following me around. All three are armed with guns and when you press to shoot as the commander, the other two follow suit. The team are also equipped with a finite amount of bombs, for when things become overwhelming on screen.

Zombies shouting "brains", zombified chickens and a few other grotesque mutants were thrown at me during the playthrough. All enemies emerge from a portal hotspot and you need to destroy these, or else the enemies just keep on coming.

You are free to move and shoot in any direction you please, but when you are in a shooting stance, you can only move in the direction you aim.

Where *Sovietborgs* becomes interesting is the health bar and your teammates. The health bar is split into three segments and once a

segment is empty, one of your teammates dies. While there are three of you, the enemies and portals are easy pickings. When you are the sole survivor, it becomes much trickier.

Every single mutant has to be eliminated to complete the level, and once that is achieved, a radio can be activated to send a beacon to the helicopter for extraction.

I enjoyed my short playthrough and felt very positive about the progress, even at this early stage. The sound effects are pretty clear, even down to the clear audio of the zombies screaming. The sprites look good and function well.

The handling was a bit off at times, but I am confident that this will be rectified as work on the game progresses.

There is a lot to like about *Sovietborgs*. It's a title that could absolutely be an indie classic. [▶](#)



MORE INFO



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-FINANCIAL TIMES



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9.5/10

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9/10

-GAMINGBIBLE

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-GOD IS A GEEK

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-CUBED3

9/10

-NINTENDO WORLD REPORT

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-NINTENDO LIFE

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-GGRECON

9/10

-XBOX TAVERN



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INDIE DEVELOPMENT

HYPER LIGHT BREAKER

RELEASED
EARLY
ACCESS

TRIP THE

LIGHT FANTAST

TAKE **HYPER LIGHT BREAKER** FOR A SPIN AND DISCOVER A NEW DIMENSION

How do you go about tackling your third game? Your debut game became a poster child for successful crowd funding, and became a critical darling. Your follow-up eschewed pixel art for 3D and garnered a cult following. So what next?

In the case of Los Angeles-based studio Heart Machine, you create co-operative roguelike *Hyper Light Breaker*. It's a direction you might not expect when looking at their first two games, *Hyper Light Drifter* and *Solar Ash*. While they're all set in the same universe, the first two games are solo affairs, though admittedly otherwise quite different.

While the much lauded *Drifter* was an action-RPG, *Solar Ash* would be described as an action-adventure platformer. *Hyper Light Breaker* seeks to take many of the best elements of those games, then, transplanting them into a run-based action title with upgradeable

weapons and skills. Plus co-op.

Set many years prior to *Drifter*, *Breaker* sees you play as one of its eponymous heroes, a Breaker. At launch there are only three to choose from, but they all come with their own pros and cons. The developers have confirmed that more Breakers will be added as early access continues, along with new weapons, skills, and locations.

Upon loading the game you are deposited in the Cursed Outpost, your hub area, which feels like *Cyberpunk* got *The Last Of Us*'d — neons clash with

INFO

Developer
Heart Machine

Publisher
Arc Games

On
PC

nature, and it's pretty gorgeous. From here you can speak to various vendors, party up, and of course jump into the Overgrowth.

Your mission is to defeat various Crowns (bosses) throughout each procedurally generated map that you're transported to, each of which features three distinct biomes to explore. You must explore, fight enemies, and collect Prisms to unlock Crowns.

Getting around is a lot of fun, with each character having access to a hoverboard and paraglider, and the combat itself is satisfying. If you're used to the roguelike grind of finding new items, upgrading, and leveling up, then you'll largely know what to expect here, and hopefully find something to like.

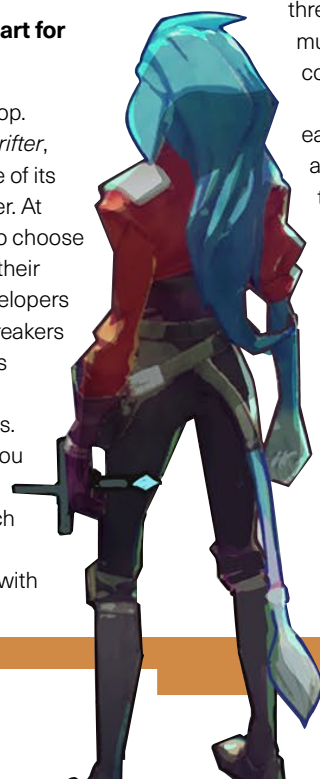
Things are still early, with plenty of tweaks and new content to come. We'll be sure to review it once it hits

1.0! 📌

**Andrew
Dickinson**



MORE INFO





ATIC



SEASONAL GAMES

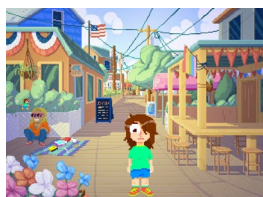
TEN OF THE BEST

No, wait! Come back! It's more than just farming sims. In fact, you have **STUART GIPP'S** word — only one farming sim will appear in this feature. That's the Debug Difference.

'Tis the season to be indie, fa la la la etc. Actually, it's always the season to be indie, but some games take the concept a little further, basing their setting, themes and/or gameplay around the passage of — or a particular point in — time. It's a handy way to establish a particular vibe or to inform certain gameplay mechanics, and this list accounts for a mere ten titles which do just those things. As ever, indie gaming is the world's deepest and most enriching well, and there are many more out there that let you soak up a vivid sense of time.

PERFECT TIDES

2022
Three Bees



octopus pie's Meredith Gran brings us a brilliant and beautiful point-and-click adventure set across all four seasons; a paean to teenagedom that offers outstanding characterisation, excellent animation and laugh-out-loud hilarious writing, while also tugging at your heartstrings with its heavier themes. Sequel, *Perfect Tides: Station to Station* is on the way.

STARDEW VALLEY

2016
Concerned Ape



Well, one can hardly discuss seasonal games without mentioning Concerned Ape's magnum opus, can one? You already know what it's about, you already know what you do in it, you already know it's a masterpiece. No matter what time of year you choose to play, *Stardew Valley* will always deliver.

COSTUME QUEST

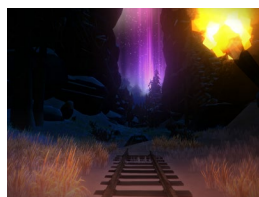
2010
Double Fine



Perhaps it's stretching the definition of 'indie', but it would be folly not to include this Halloween adventure in this feature, such are its *mysterious and ooky* vibes. Gather as much candy as you can in this turn-based RPG adventure. Trick or treat? In this instance, treat. Sequel also available.

THE LONG DARK

2017
Hinterland Studio



Nothing says 'It's winter!' like freezing to death in the Canadian wilderness, eh. With both Story and Sandbox modes, this survival sim has a painful end for every player, including a *very final* one if you switch on the Permadeath mode. No thanks! Real life already has one of those.

CTHULHU SAVES CHRISTMAS

2019
Zeboyd



In his house at R'lyeh, dead Cthulhu waits dreaming... of a white Christmas! This short-and-sweet follow-up to *Cthulhu Saves the World* sees the ol' pulpy tentacled head honcho himself tasked with a JRPG quest to save Santa. As enjoyably streamlined as Zeboyd's other works, this is a Christmas cracker. Fhtagn!



DON'T STARVE

2013
Klei Entertainment



It's not that hard, you just need to not starve. Alright, it *is* that hard — even harder, in fact — especially when winter rolls around, as your precious crops stop growing and the nights draw in ever longer. You'll need to make sure you spend those balmy summers stockpiling resources and defences.

FIREWATCH

2016
Campo Santo



Become a fire lookout in the vast forests of Wyoming's Shoshone National Park. Drink in the atmosphere of a passing summer while piecing together a compelling and occasionally — eek! — slightly scary mystery. Yes, it's a walking simulator, but walking is good for you. Especially if it's away from a fire.

A SHORT HIKE

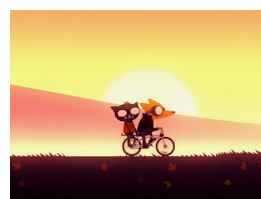
2019
Adam Robinson-Yu



This summery quest to get a half-decent phone signal (ugh, kids these days) has you clambering all over Hawk Peak Provincial Park. Many areas are initially inaccessible, requiring you to find golden feathers in order to increase your stamina. Oh, and it's one of the best games ever made.

NIGHT IN THE WOODS

2020
Infinite Fall



This evocative game sees you take control of Mae, college dropout and kitty cat, as she returns to her home town of Possum Springs one autumn and gets caught up in a fraught mystery involving missing persons. Also you get to play in a band! But not The Fall, sadly.

HIGURASHI WHEN THEY CRY HOU

2002
07th Expansion



Nothing warms the heart like the Watanagashi Festival, a celebration of the summer solstice that sees nails driven into a sacrifice and their guts thrown in a river. Technically, that would *cool* the heart. Nonetheless, this classic visual novel is a seasonal game and there's nothing anyone can do about it.

REVIEWS

MYTHWRECKED: AMBROSIA ISLAND

INFO

Developer
Polygon Treehouse

Publisher
Whitethorn Games

Price
£20.99

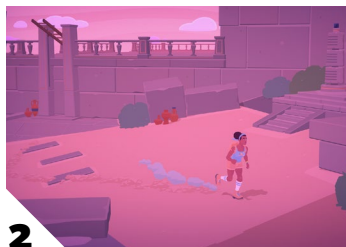
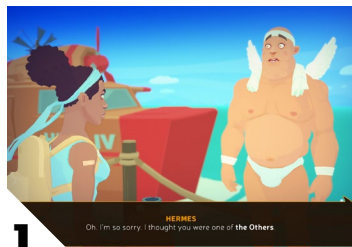
Released
December 5

On
PC (tested), Xbox Series, Xbox One, Switch



LOST AND FOUND

On your quest to rekindle the memories of the gods, you'll come across many lost items that will need reuniting with their original owner. Hermes, for example, has lost his sandals and satchel. The gods will also give you tasks to complete, Hephestus would like the power-giving windmills that have broken down all over the island to be repaired so he can use his workshop again. Through these tasks and discoveries, your friendship level with each god will grow, unlocking progress deeper into the island.



LOST GODS IN MYTHWRECKED: AMBROSIA ISLAND MIGHT JUST HELP YOU FIND YOURSELF

When a freak storm strands overworked Alex on a lush island full of ancient architecture, she quickly realises strange things are afoot. When a talking statue called the Oracle asks for help, Alex selflessly makes it her mission to solve the riddles and discover the secrets of this mystical place.

The island is inhabited too, and it quickly transpires that its residents are all Greek gods [1], except they've got amnesia and none of them are talking to each other. Basing herself in the lighthouse, Alex sets out to help each god remember who they are.

The island itself is beautifully designed right down to its gentle day-to-night cycle [2], with a logic and progression that works effortlessly. The atmosphere is so calming that it's hard not to just spend time

chilling in the various beauty spots. Indeed, the game encourages this through a series of relaxation spots where you can relax and listen to the music cassettes [3] discovered across the map.

Progress is tracked on the in-game Ambrosidex, so you always know what to do next, and the island opens up a section at a time to avoid overwhelming the player. There are even handy shortcuts that open up along the way to make backtracking less of a chore.

Mythwrecked offers a serene, rewarding adventure that balances exploration, puzzle-solving and intrigue. Alex's real discovery is the journey she takes to find herself. [▶](#)



Dan Morris



MORE INFO

LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

The Witness
Different vibe, but there's puzzle heavy, island-based gameplay aplenty.



THE BACK CATALOGUE

Polygon Treehouse made *Röki*. This BAFTA-nominated title offered a narrative, puzzle driven adventure through a snow-covered landscape.



INFO

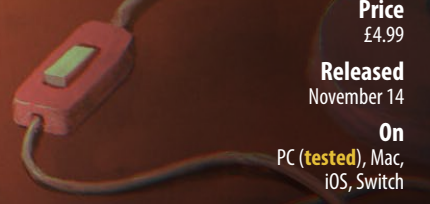
Developer
Other Tales Interactive

Publisher
Other Tales Interactive

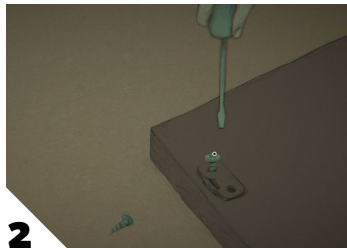
Price
£4.99

Released
November 14

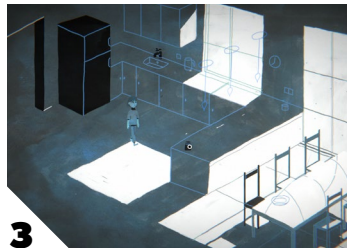
On
PC (tested), Mac,
iOS, Switch



1



2



3



EXPLORING CHILDHOOD IMAGINATION IN **MINIATURES** LEAVES ROOM FOR REFLECTION

Miniatures is an imaginative collection of short stories that begins on a curious note. Stumbling upon a box filled with unusual trinkets, each tells a unique hand-drawn tale that leans into surrealism. There's no established order to follow and, at a glance, the items aren't interconnected. After all, what could a toy lizard, moth, screwdriver, and seashell have in common? Childhood imagination, it turns out.

None of these stories feature the same characters, and while this bite-sized game often starts on a happier note, that's never the full picture. Detailing specifics would spoil the best part, yet each story unites through a sense of loneliness. Between **the child waiting for her parents [1]** or **furniture building gone wrong [2]**, these brief tales convey sadness well.

It's a surprisingly thought-provoking experience for a 45-minute game. Different art styles give each story a distinct yet visually pleasing aesthetic that helps it stand out, offering enough visual clues that you can **pick up on this rather easily [3]**. That's accompanied by simplistic but straightforward puzzles to advance.

These short stories are impactful, but the split focus ultimately harms *Miniatures* since they're finished as soon as you get invested. That feeling isn't helped by an abrupt overall ending. Still, if you're after a narrative experience with emotional impact, *Miniatures* doesn't take long to complete, and it'll stick with you when the journey's over. **E**



Henry Stockdale



MORE INFO

ANOTHER TALE

This isn't the first time *Other Tales Interactive* has caused a splash, and 2019's *Tick Tock: A Tale for Two* remains worth visiting today. Using only your voice for communication, you and a friend must work together to solve puzzles across an increasingly bizarre world that takes inspiration from Scandinavian fairy tales. This offers an unsettling atmospheric adventure that's very different from *Miniatures* but worth looking into, and I'd love to see more titles like this from them in the near future.

LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

Pentiment
Another story-rich adventure worth exploring.



THE BACK CATALOGUE

Tick Tock: A Tale for Two, the debut game from Other Tales Interactive, was released back in 2019 and is well worth experiencing.



REVIEWS • REVIEWS • REVIEWS • REVIEWS • REVIEWS • REVIEWS
**MUST
PLAY**

TAKE A FANTASTICAL **JOURNEY** INTO ONE OF INDIE GAMING'S MOST EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCES

Almost 13 years ago at the time of writing this review, I was eagerly waiting for *Journey* to download from the PSN store on my PlayStation 3. I'd been following the game since its announcement in 2010, and was excited to finally try it for myself.

Nothing could have prepared me for what I was to experience. Austin Wintory's stellar score fades up as we stare out across a vast, shimmering desert. The sun peaks out from behind a dune, revealing statues or markers embedded in the sand. A shooting star races across the sky, and the camera rushes across the desert to show where it ends up. And then a figure rises into view. Dressed all in red, with two glowing eyes peering out from a cloak, we're introduced to the character we'll inhabit throughout our short but memorable time in the world of *Journey*.

There are no words, no voices to be heard in this place. At first it's just the desert and you; it feels vast and lonely. You move through it, through the stone markers at odd angles, ribbons tied to them rippling in the breeze. Climbing up dunes feels

**LIKE THIS?
TRY THESE...**

**The Unfinished
Swan**

Another high-concept PS3 indie title worth your while.



INFO

Developer
Thatgamecompany

Publisher
Sony, Annapurna
Interactive

Price
£11.99

Released
March 13, 2012

On
PC, PS3/4 (PS4),
iOS



JOURNEY'S
FRIEND

One of the very special things about *Journey* is the multiplayer element. The game pairs you with a random person each time, and you will never know who they are, but nevertheless you are able to experience the journey with them. One of my most memorable playthroughs (I've had many) was so memorable because of the person I was paired with. They led me round the areas we traversed together, showing me things I hadn't seen before, even things the developer hadn't intended players to see. They showed me how to reach these areas without a word, but even so I could feel their sense of pride.

MORE INFO



1



2



3

suitably tough, but the first time you come down the other side of one you get the feeling of how graceful the controls here are. You glide down, an exhilarating feeling. Then you realise you can jump, and even glide in the air, although the length of time you're able to glide is restricted by the length of your patterned and glowing scarf. As you reach structures — ruined buildings and bridges, largely taken back by the encroaching sand — you find **bird-like pieces of fabric [1]** that can be used to charge your scarf, and collectables to upgrade the length of your scarf too.

You progress ever onward, towards **a mountain that appears split in two at the summit [2]**, a bright light emanating from it, piercing into the sky. Through murals you discover as you go, you find that many others who look just like you have taken this very same journey. It seems pre-ordained. You're being

pulled towards it.

Your journey takes you through many locales, each simple and yet stunningly beautiful to behold. After a time you spot another figure, just like you, making its way towards the mountain. You can approach each other, and even communicate, albeit very basically with a single emote. **The other figure is another real person [3]**, on the very same journey as you. You can choose to ignore each other, or you can work together, lifting each other higher to reach objectives quicker, skating across the sand dunes together, or just exploring side by side.

I implore you to play this one. Experiencing it yourself will leave you stunned. [▶](#)



Andrew Dickinson

GRIS

If you're looking for beauty and emotion, look no further.

ABZÛ

Possibly the closest game to *Journey* in look and feel. Incredible.



WHAT THEY DID NEXT...

Journey was Thatgamecompany's last contracted title with Sony. They went on to self-publish *Sky: Children of the Light*, which is now in early access.



Wesley LeBlanc

TAKE A CHANCE



Wesley has written professionally for over seven years at local newspapers, websites like IGN, and more. He recently worked as an editor at Game Informer for three years before the publication's untimely shutdown. Though he now works in PR, helping developers find success with their games, he still loves journalism and is excited to be writing for **Debug**.

It's hard to ignore the triple-A space. Publishers spend millions to get games in front of you. While the triple-I indie space doesn't quite market as much, there are still lots of dollars being spent to ensure you see the latest games from publishers like Devolver. But away from those two spaces, there's a steep dropoff when it comes to a game's capability to get in front of you. This space is where the indie breakout hits of the year can typically be found — the *Mouthwashings*, *Balatro*, and *Thank*

Goodness You're Heres of the world. I wrote in the last issue of **Debug** about how indies like this are the ones that anchor the years where first-party publishers are quieter, and I love discovering these types of games throughout each year.

However, there's another space of indie games even harder to discover. It's here where I found one of my favourite games of the year, *With My Past*, from developer Imagine Wings Studio. When I reviewed it earlier last year for Game Informer (RIP), I gave it a 9 out of 10. It captured me in a way few games had in 2024. Falling into the camp of games like *Celeste* — platformers with an emphasis on narrative and storytelling through gameplay — *With My Past* tells a story that everyone can relate to. It's about a girl who awakens in the middle of the night, metaphorically suffocating under the stress, weight, and anxiety of her past. But unlike *Celeste*, which is more direct in its storytelling approach, *With My Past* is more vague, making it easier for you to superimpose your own past onto this girl.

You must platform through various levels while relying on your 'past', which is a shadow of the girl that does whatever you did two seconds after you did it. The ensuing result is a perfectly paced platformer that continually ups the puzzle ante with each new level. Throughout the experience, on-screen words tell a story of self-hate, loneliness, embarrassment, and more. I found myself reflecting on various instances of those feelings I've had throughout my life. Watching how this unnamed protagonist in *With My Past* worked through her version of those feelings helped me better understand why I was feeling what I felt, reflecting on those

aforementioned moments. All of this is to say you should check out *With My Past*. Because not many people have.

At the time of me writing this, it has only 217 user reviews (which is quite low) and virtually no other published reviews in the press outside of my own (which ironically, is no longer viewable with ease as Game Informer's website no longer exists). That's criminally low for what I consider one of my favourite games of the year, but there's nobody to blame. Hundreds of games are released each year and there are a hundred more factors that go into a game's ability to break through.

I only played this game because the developer sent me a code, said the game was about five hours long, and I had some free time between games. I beat *With My Past* the next day, so happy with my decision to check it out on a whim. Doing so was a reminder to me that I should play more than the games that have broken through — just because a game hasn't done so doesn't mean it's not worth my time.

I understand why we, as a community of gamers, tend to check out the games that break through. There are verified reviews and thoughts about the game to read about to help determine if it's worth spending your hard-earned money on. Nobody likes spending money on a game they end up disliking, so of course we protect our dollar with research before letting it go. If you can, though, I urge you to let those dollars go just a little more loosely every now and then. Don't worry about whether a game has reviews or not, or if it's in a genre you like, or has a voice cast you recognise, or comes from a developer you trust. If any part of the game's package speaks to you, consider giving it a try. You might end up with a new favourite.

Like me, you might end up with an indie that left you aching, reflecting on moments of your past that haunt you. I still think about *With My Past* today, more than six months after its release. It will be in my top 10 games of 2024; all because I took a chance.



Rahul advises on all manner of commercial and legal matters within the video games industry, working with clients ranging from independent development studios, brand licensors and industry service providers. Rahul's practice focuses on commercial contracts, intellectual property and games development funding advice. Rahul is also a passionate indie games fan and occasionally streams his latest gaming obsession on Twitch.



've received a contract and it's only three pages long. Is that a bad sign? Surely it can't cover everything it needs to in just three pages?

This is a great question, and the short answer is that it all depends on the context. There is certainly an idea that contracts are always long, unapproachable documents filled with dense legal jargon. However, this is not always the case. Good contracts are clear in setting out what the 'deal' actually is and they do so

concisely, but great contracts are also proportionate.

The first thing to consider is, what is this contract actually for? Is it an NDA (which are often not more than two or three pages long)? Is it a contractor agreement for some freelance work you're going to do? Is it a simple IP licence or assignment? Or is it a full-blown publishing and development deal? This is important to have clear in your mind, so that when you review the contract you can check that it achieves what it's supposed to. Let's assume you are looking at a publishing agreement. You'll want to check that it contains provisions around the development process, the publishing obligations, how the game will be financed, who owns the rights in the game, in what circumstances can the agreement be terminated, etc. If those aspects are not addressed, then it's likely missing some key provisions.

The next thing to think about is the overall parameters of the deal. If the deal will last multiple years, then the contract may need to cover certain scenarios in a bit more depth, compared to one that is going to finish in a month. If the value of the contract isn't very high, then it might not be worth having a super long contract that will be unnecessarily expensive to draft and negotiate. Another point to consider is how

complicated the deal is. If there are a lot of moving parts, with lots of parties involved or multiple stages of the deal, then it's unlikely a super short contract will be able to cover everything adequately.

All that said, there will be legal provisions that should be covered in every instance, depending on what the deal is. So, it's always worth getting a legally trained eye to look over a contract. In many cases they can let you know fairly quickly whether a contract is fit for purpose or whether there are glaring omissions that need to be addressed.

Can I write a contract myself or do I NEED a lawyer to write one for me?

The quick answer is yes, you can write a contract yourself. Whilst there are generally accepted, industry-standard ways of writing contracts that lawyers would be familiar with, technically there is nothing stopping you from writing a contract yourself.

That said, for a contract to be valid there are certain requirements under English Law. I won't go into details about these requirements, but if you prefer to go and do your own research the four components for the formation of a valid contract are (i) offer, (ii) acceptance, (iii) consideration, and (iv) intention to create a legal relationship. If you were to handwrite some terms onto a piece of paper and two parties signed it then, as long as the four components are present, the contract will likely be found to be valid (there are of course many exceptions to this, for example if one of the parties was a minor).

That said, there are many nuances when drafting a contract, and there are certain areas/elements that a contract should cover, depending on the type of deal. My recommendation? If you insist on writing the contract yourself, at least ask somebody legally trained to look over it and give you some feedback. Whilst you may save yourself some money at an early stage, there is a risk that the contract is not fit for purpose, which could cause issues later down the line.

CASE FILES

#7 & #8

Rahul Gandhi

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