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DEADBOLT REVIEW
BY HOPOO GAMES

When Blue Oyster Cult wrote "(Don't Fear) The Reaper," they probably weren't thinking about the undead. As *Deadbolt* clearly shows, zombies and vampires should fear the reaper.

Deadbolt is a pleasant twist on the paranormal genre, putting you as a Reaper, a hitman who opts for guns instead of a scythe – unless you want to buy one. As a Reaper, you go door-to-door and dish out a serving size of death (approved by the FDA, of course) to the undead gangs and thugs that run the streets.

Whether you're busting zombie street gangs or dismantling a vampire drug ring, there is no correct way to complete each task. As long as you complete the job, you can go stealthy or on a slaughter spree. As you progress, you collect souls which can be used to buy new weapons to use in your loadout.

You are given a number of avenues of ingress when it comes to completing your task: Taking advantage of the environment by flipping light switches, knocking on doors to split enemies apart and traveling through vents and pipes to swiftly move around a building interior.

Deadbolt offers a challenging experience when it comes to its gameplay. It's all fun and games when you're re-atomizing while an enemy is taking a dump, but that fun can come to a swift end with a single shot to your person ... corpse ... skeleton? You get the point. One shot and you're dead, unless you get lucky.

One slip up and you're back to the beginning. Though you may be a little ashamed of yourself, you will be all the wiser. While you may be the exact opposite of a bullet sponge, you can use the furniture to your advantage; overturning coffee tables and taking cover behind sofas to delay your death. As it was made clear within my first hour of playing, *Deadbolt* is relentless, freeing, brutal and a quintessential "trial and error" game.

I'm a sucker for appealing pixel art, so for me, the art style of *Deadbolt* was an awesome visual experience. Watching the blood splatter on the wall behind the enemies you maim is satisfying and hilarious when paired with the naturally innocent appearance of pixel graphics.

When you're not out killing the already dead, you can relax at your home, watching the fire roar with an extremely satisfying fireplace.

While going around and doing death's work, you're accompanied with a wildly appropriate soundtrack. Gang hideouts have loud, bass heavy music while nightclubs play dance music, with everything being appropriately muffled when you enter a different room. This is the first soundtrack for a game that I have heavily considered buying. It's diverse, fun and fitting for such a unique title. For the curious, you can preview the soundtrack on Bandcamp.

If you were to somehow do a perfect run of *Deadbolt*, it would probably take you around one to two hours to complete. However, the game comes with a map builder, and while it may only be available on the Windows version, it adds a near-limitless amount of replay value to the game. Playing on user-created maps and creating your own adventure adds so much more depth to *Deadbolt*. You can also always go back to old levels to experiment with different approaches and improve your score.

For an asking price of $9.99, *Deadbolt* has a lot to offer gamers from all genre preferences. It's a pleasant 2D sidescroller that effectively employs your favorite style of gameplay. Completing a mission in *Deadbolt* isn't about what method you choose, but how you do it. Play smart, not hard, and *Deadbolt* will reward you for it.

8.2 GREAT

In brief...

👍 Engaging Gameplay

👍 Awesome soundtrack

👍 Workshop features, map customization

👎 Can get frustrating and tedious

Reviewed by: Travis Lefevre

THE ART OF THE PIXELS
STUDENTS WEIGH IN ON THE PROCESS OF MAKING GAMES

For a vast majority of consumers, the visual aspect of video games is what they first see, creating a "judge a book by its cover" mentality. This instant judgment creates a task for game developers: make a good first impression.

Animation, visual art, narrative and music composition are just a few of the aspects that go into the long process of making a video game.

At SUNY Fredonia, the Video Game Development Club (VGD) has wrapped up its first official academic year working on *The Vengeance of Nekolai,* an in-progress video game currently in early testing.

The Vengeance of Nekolai is a platformer where you assume the role of Nekolai, a Russian cat with a thirst for revenge after its mentor gets slain by an army of dogs. The game takes massive inspiration from the popular game *Syobon Action,* also known as *Cat Mario,* full of in-game traps and ploys made to frustrate the player and create a sense of trial and error.

Mimiteh David is a VGD club member and works with its art team. She is the principal designer behind the main character, Nekolai.

"I think art, especially, encompasses the entirety of a game. The art and the story should go really close together. Whenever I'm drawing something, I always think about the character the narrative team made. What's their personality and how should they look and what kind of general direction are we going?" David said.
The Vengeance of Nekolai has a bit of a quirk to it, as the art is cute and charming but leads into a massive revenge scheme and ensuing chaos. According to David, this is a selling point.

"[Nekolai] has that juxtaposition with the cuteness and the [angst] ... that was one thing we wanted to mix together ... You wouldn't normally see a cute cat be a Russian spy and do all these things. It was like a hook into the game," she said.
Another art team member, Jordyn Lee, aided in the creation of VGD's debut project. Although she is a journalism major at Fredonia, she has had a variety of experience with visual art that dates back to high school.

"Back in high school, I did a lot of different mediums with art. Visual arts and graphic design and things like that my freshman year of high school. I branched into photography, fashion design and I've basically worked my way up in different mediums of art," she said.
Lee has assisted with the creation of the background art and has also begun dabbling in 3D art for another project, a 3D dodgeball game currently titled *LeRouche,* which is being worked on concurrently with *Nekolai.*

"I helped with writing scripts, dialogue, story setting, things like that. When I went to art, I started helping the art team with backgrounds and slowly branched into making 3D models," she said. "Writing and art have intertwined throughout my entire life."
According to Lee, one of the most important things for making art as a team is a strong essence of synergy.

"You want to make a cohesive, aesthetic theme for a game. It's important for the artists to build the work on a similar art style while still keeping their own styles," said Lee. "It's hard for people to match up art styles with a game ... It's a challenge to match each other's art styles enough to make a cohesive style."
VGD allows members to work on more than one aspect of a video game. With *The Vengeance of Nekolai,* Lee has also worked with building the narrative behind the game.

"I focus a lot of my time on developing characters versus world building. World building is honestly terrifying to me. I believe if you have really strong characters, then a somewhat vague world build setting isn't as crucial as the characters you're getting to know," Lee said
Michael Lepsch leads the narrative team throughout the early stages of *Nekolai.*

"Character development is definitely something that needs to be fleshed out more," Lepsch said. "The character development isn't as linear. It's a little more random. It's a little bit weird."
According to Lepsch, the story plays a huge role in his overall love of video games.

"Some of my favorite video games have amazing stories. It's not just random button mashing and epic shooters, but character development has

to do with saving the world and [other] epic fantasy stories," he said.

"A game's narrative can be expressed in multiple ways. Even if a video game doesn't appear to need narrative, it still exists and is not only limited to in-game dialog and lines that actors read off a script. Narrative also takes the form of more simplistic aspects, like tutorials."
For the future of *Nekolai,* Lepsch has most of the bare bones of the story laid out, citing that what they currently have is a solid foundation.

"Basically, I liked absolutely everything we came up with. Part of my issue was that I didn't keep people on track because I loved what we were coming up with too much. I believe that was true for every team for *Nekolai.* I think next time around, we know what we want to do ... it's just a matter of fleshing it out, expanding it and making it real," he said.
Although Lepsch has a strong affinity for writing and creating stories, he holds an associates degree in animation. With this, he is also responsible for the animation of Nekolai and other characters in the game world.

Lepsch uses a technique called "skeletal animation." This technique consists of a character model with two parts: the skin and the skeleton.

The skin, or mesh, is the part that everybody sees. The character itself covers the skeleton and acts as the visually aesthetic part of the character model.

The skeleton, however, is the most integral portion of the animation and acts as a chassis to the skin. Also known as a rig, it is loaded with interconnected parts that are set up in such a way that they can be moved. This way, movement can be more individualized throughout the entire character, like a literal skeleton. Unsurprisingly,

every aspect mentioned above would come off as somewhat dull without any noise to accompany it.

Robert Moore is the leader for the audio team and has worked on a majority of the music and sound effects behind *Nekolai.* On average, one song loop that lasts 40 to 60 seconds would take approximately six hours to make in an audio suite.

Moore has defined himself a "melody over chord structure" type of individual and believes the music being made should adequately fit the world you are in.

"When you're making music for a game, you want it to reflect the theme of whatever you're playing. That was my main focus. I wanted to create a song that reflected the environment you were in," Moore said. "I try to come up with a melody that fits the environment first and then [I] figure out what that melody is telling me in more detail."
Club president Kermit Mitchell III started VGD back in the fall 2017 semester to create a club with a sense of cohesion and synergy.

As the club founder and entrepreneur at his core, Mitchell stands by a mission: to make video games better.

"Money doesn't drive me, it never really did, but it's a tool necessary to get what you need to get. Will I be making a living with video games? Yes. Is that the intent? No. The intent is not to make money. Even if I make no money and the games get released, I still completed my job," he said.
As the summer rolls around, VGD will be taking a hiatus from its projects but are ready to kick it into high gear once the fall comes around.

DRIVEN AND DETERMINED, OUTLAST MAKES IT'S MARK

'For a game that deals a lot with mental illness, it has been able to make me feel less alienated as a mentally ill audience'

One of the biggest struggles when it comes to independent creators, both in gaming and in other forms of art, is getting exposure and achieving their big break. Sometimes, however, they break through and prevail, with their work making its way into the mainstream.

Red Barrels, a Montreal-based studio, got its big break with its debut title, *Outlast.*

Before moving on to found Red Barrels with David Chateauneuf and Hugo Dallaire, Philippe Morin worked at Ubisoft Montreal. After working on big titles like *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* and *Assassin's Creed*, Morin went on to work on *Uncharted: Drake's Deception* with Naughty Dog.

Morin then returned to Ubisoft Montreal, where he spent a bit of time before venturing out and creating Red Barrels.

The trio founded Red Barrels in 2011 and officially released *Outlast* on Microsoft Windows in 2013. Since then, it has been re-released for PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Mac OS X, Linux and the Nintendo Switch.

"It's a cliché, but it was a lot of extreme hard work and a bit of luck. *Outlast* came out when players were hungry for horror games and, at that time, big studios were not making them anymore," Morin said.

Outlast is a survival horror game where you take on the role of Miles Upshur, an investigative journalist. Upshur is lured to Mount Massive Asylum via an anonymous email claiming that the institution is conducting cruel treatments on its patients. Once inside, it is revealed that Mount Massive has been overrun by the patients. From there, the journey only gets crazier.

The architecture for Mount Massive was inspired by the Richardson Olmsted Complex in Buffalo, N.Y.

"We simply liked the vibe of the architecture. It felt appropriate," Morin said.

Once a hospital for people with mental illness, the real-life complex has been renovated into a hotel. The Hotel Henry Urban Resort Conference Center opened for business in April of 2018.

Although Mount Massive was inspired by a former asylum in Buffalo, the game itself takes place in Colorado.

"We needed the player to feel isolated and far away from any cities. Also, the scenery felt similar to the Overlook Hotel in *The Shining*," he said.

Generally speaking, people tend to go for originality with their projects in order to differentiate themselves from the competition. For Morin and the rest of the gang, they took an interesting spin to achieve their goal of originality.

"We didn't think about it. We just focused on making a game we would want to play ourselves. I think it's dangerous to pay too much attention to what others are doing because you must focus on what comes naturally," Morin said.

Though they decided not to put too much thought into what others were up to, they still took cues from films, books and other video games. *Shutter Island, Quarantine, Amnesia: The Dark Descent* and *Call of Cthulhu* are just a few of the inspirations behind *Outlast.*

Due to *Outlast* being made as the debut project for Red Barrels, the pressure was on for Morin and the rest of the development team. One of the big roadblocks, as would be expected by any debut company, was finances.

Due to the limitations, time quite literally equaled money. Red Barrels raced against the clock to get *Outlast* out before it ran out of funds. The team was so strapped for cash, it couldn't afford to not use any of it's characters.

Despite the financial struggle, there was a newfound essence of freedom when it came to developing a game entirely on their own. When it came to the development process, according to Morin, "the people on the floor are the people in charge."

Based on numbers provided by Red Barrels, *Outlast* has sold approximately 15 million units. Although the three co-founders have released games under different companies, this was the first title to be released by Red Barrels as a collective. The result of their efforts led to a game that soared into the mainstream, earning accolades like "Best PC Game" from GamingBolt and "Scariest Game" from Press Play TV in 2013.

> ## "I THINK IT'S DANGEROUS TO PAY TOO MUCH ATTENTION TO WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING BECAUSE YOU MUST FOCUS ON WHAT COMES NATURALLY,"
> ## PHILIPPE MORIN SAID.

"It was freaking awesome and it exceeded our hopes. The game was really well received, and we were lucky in terms of timing because *Outlast* was almost a launch title for the PS4 and Xbox One," said Morin.

After the initial release of *Outlast*, Red Barrels released a prequel in the form of downloadable content (DLC). *Outlast: Whistleblower* was issued in 2014.

The fanbase for the *Outlast* series is vast, seeing fandom from the United States to Paris and to South Asia. With so many fans scattered about, the internet has provided a means of connection between them on discussion boards and channels on Discord, the free voice and text chat software. For many of these fans, *Outlast* was a breath of fresh air for the horror genre of gaming.

"I was never sure if it had been Red Barrel's intention to make some of the statements they have made with some their games, but it's part of why I have such a love for the series," said Marco, from Oregon.

For fans like Marco, who is diagnosed with bipolar, PTSD and experiences symptoms of psychosis, Outlast has had a deep impact on him for having a more inclusive feel to its gameplay and characters.

"For a game that is dealing a lot with mental illness,

it has been able to make me feel less alienated as a mentally ill audience. It hardly shames those with illness and more so shames those who abuse the vulnerable, and show how horrifying mistreatment can be," he said. "It's an extremely layered concept, however, and I'm not sure if even Red Barrels understands how they could [create] a very well struck balance."

With other fans, like Diogo from Portugal, *Outlast* got them into the horror genre when other games just wouldn't cut it.

"*Outlast* was one of, if not the main reason horror is my favorite genre in gaming. Before *Outlast* I played games like *Slenderman* and that kinda stuff but horror wasn't really a genre I liked that much; then *Outlast* happened. I got the game for my then brand new PS4 and played through it and absolutely loved it," he said.

In October 2014, *Outlast 2* was officially announced

to be in development. Due to the success of Outlast and it's DLC, the bar was raised significantly to make *Outlast 2* an even more memorable title.

"Making a sequel is hard because suddenly you must deal with people's expectations and they're not the same for everyone," Morin said.

Unlike *Outlast, Outlast 2* didn't have the same struggle when it came to money to develop the game.

"Financially, it allowed us to take our time and try a lot of different things. One thing was for sure, we didn't want *Outlast 2* to be a glorified DLC. We wanted to take risks and try new stuff," he continued.

Red Barrels successfully took a huge risk when it came to *Outlast 2* by flipping the script entirely: new characters, location, enemies and horrors await.

The only real similarity between the two games is that you are once again an investigative journalist. This time, you assume the poise of Blake Langermann, who must find his wife after a helicopter crash in Arizona. This time you are up against two cults: one believes his wife is pregnant with the Antichrist and the other wishes to bring about the end of days.

As with their predecessor, *Outlast 2* has also sold upward of 15 million units. The reach of their game has exceeded their expectations.

"Red Barrels tends to create unique characters with complex backgrounds and I'm a pretty big fan of that. I really appreciate their works and everything they've put in the *Outlast* games," said Lesley, a fan from Paris, France.

For Zarin, a fan from South Asia, the world of *Outlast* has intrigued him so much that he has engaged in deep research into the universe and all of the nitty-gritty details.

"Initially, I did not play the game. I decided to watch other gamers play it. Then I was finally interested enough to play the game myself," Zarin said. "I knew all about the game, its structure, themes and ending before even playing it. It was thrilling that the horror could function by itself but there was a lot of meaning behind it too."

Currently, Red Barrels is in the early stages of an unidentified project. According to Morin, they're "trying something new, but not too far from our previous games."

Philippe Morin, senior game designer and co-founder at Red Barrels

SHOTGUN FARMERS
PLANT THE SEEDS OF VICTORY

Life on the ranch isn't an easy task, which is why you have to gear up to protect yourself from other farmers. In *Shotgun Farmers,* you bring the fight to the farmhouse.

Released on Steam Early Access on June 1, 2017, online multiplayer shooter *Shotgun Farmers* puts you in the boots of a farmer with an arsenal of crop-based weapons.

This is the second game made by developer Wase Qazi. *Shotgun Farmers* currently has a "Very Positive" rating on Steam, with 87 percent of 309 reviews giving positive feedback. His previous work includes *Skyhook*.

A unique gameplay mechanic employed in *Shotgun Farmers* is that, technically, there is no reloading your weapons. Instead, you have to grow and harvest weapons that spawn from bullets that hit the ground.

"Yeah, it was kind of a complete accident," said Qazi. "The original premise had nothing to do with plants. It was just farmers, with shotguns . . . one team was rabbits and the other team was farmers. The rabbits were trying to steal the farmer's carrots and [the farmers] are trying to shoot them with the shotgun and blow them out of the ground. I went to a friend of mine with this game idea I had called 'Shotgun Farmers,' and before I even said the idea he was like 'Aw really, I thought you were talking about farmers that grew shotguns.' and I was like 'Oh, crap.'"

Qazi became interested in video games in junior high, making games on RPG Maker. His interest increased further after completing a playthrough of *Kingdom Hearts II* and seeing the end credits, he aspired to see his name in the end credits of his own game.

In college, Qazi realized that programming was an important part of making games when his intro class made their own game.

While Qazi spent a good chunk of time working solo on *Shotgun Farmers,* he always had company with his fans on Twitch. His streaming dates back to when he hosted his own game jams, known as "Qazi Jams."

"After *Skyhook* we came up with an idea called 'Qazi Jams.' We jammed together and made a bunch of games. I would make my own game and the viewers would make their own game and at the end, I would play everybody's games," he said.

Though popular among his viewers, *Shotgun Farmers* has had a bit of a difficult time keeping a solid player base.

"In the beginning, there were a lot of players and then slowly the player base kind of died off . . . Once I introduced bots, that helped a lot to keep players in, and then I introduced daily challenges which helped," Qazi said.

To retain players, Qazi has considered ideas like a horde mode and single player content to keep players engaged.

Qazi's community helps him shape his game by providing feedback and taking suggestions. He credits a majority of the weapon puns to his fans, but claims the idea of the "Carrocket Launcher" as his own. One of the best contributions, according to Qazi, is a mode called Chicken Run. The objective of Chicken Run is to claim the chicken and keep it away from the enemy team. It is compared to the "Oddball" mode of the *Halo* games. So much so that the chicken itself is named "oddball" in the game's code.

Currently, there is a competition for the next weapon to be implemented in Shotgun Farmers: the M6Bean rifle, or the Chillithrower flamethrower.

Qazi is frequently on Twitch working to improve *Shotgun Farmers.* You can find his channel on Twitch under his handle, @QaziTV.

A LOOK INSIDE THE FARM-ORY

IN SHOTGUN FARMERS, YOU BRING THE FIGHT TO THE BARNYARD WITH AN ARMORY OF PUN-DERFUL FIREARMS. HERE ARE THE WEAPONS THAT ARE CURRENTLY AVAILABLE TO YOU. GET OUT THERE AND JOIN THE CLUCKIN' FIGHT!

SNIPERAGUS RIFLE
TAKE AIM AND SCOPE OUT THE ENEMY WITH THIS LONG RANGE RIFLE! QUICKSCOPE, NOSCOPE, THE CHOICE IS YOURS!

PEASTOL
WHO SAYS YOU CAN'T PLAY WITH YOUR FOOD? USE THIS PEA-SHOOTER TO FORCEFEED VEGGIES IN SIX SHOTS OR LESS!

CARROCKET LAUNCHER
BLAST YOUR ENEMIES WITH THE POWER OF CARROTS! FUN FACT: YOU CAN USE IT TO ROCKET JUMP!

SHOVEL
THE PERFECT WEAPON TO WHACK YOUR FOE AROUND WITH, ALSO GOOD FOR PLANTING SEEDS AND GRAVEDIGGING!

SHOTGUN
GIVE THE ENEMY A FACE FULL OF SHUCKSHOT WITH THIS CORN-CONSTRUCTED SHOTGUN!

WASE QAZI RUNS MEGASTORM GAMES, AN INDEPENDENT GAMES STUDIO, AND IS THE SOLO DEVELOPER BEHIND SHOTGUN FARMERS.

Beholder

BY WARM LAMP GAMES

Being a landlord can be a tough job. To make matters worse, the government is forcing you to snoop on your tenants. Welcome to *Beholder*, where nothing is private.

You are put into the role of Carl Stein, a landlord who has been hired by the State to replace the old landlord. You are ordered to monitor the lives of your tenants by means of security cameras and good old-fashioned snooping.

In *Beholder*, you are moved into your new home and you are tasked with catching criminals by any means necessary. You can help the State or you can turn your back and help the resistance movement in secret.

You are given a number of options and your choices matter, but the story gets lost often. Certain choices and decisions seem to appear out of nowhere without any previous context. Suddenly, I want to flee the country with my family, even though my daughter died and my wife and son have been arrested for reading books? Good luck getting them out of prison.

While there are confusing aspects to the story, the backdrop is immensely powerful in telling the story of *Beholder*. Fleeing citizens, explosions and propaganda vehicles convey the dystopian message better than any story could. Ridiculous government directives are constantly coming through, ordering you to report people who own apples or blue ties, for example.

Throughout my time as the landlord of Krushvitze 6, I always felt the government looming over me. There are little events and reminders that will give you a feeling to tread lightly; you're being watched just as I watch my tenants. *Beholder* plays with your mindset to the point where you'll be either too paranoid to disobey orders or realize that the moral high road is the way to go. For example, if the government orders you to evict a tenant, will you tell them the truth and risk being detained? Or do you plant incriminating evidence in their room and look good to the government overlords?

You are provided with a number of tools to aid the State in its goal to catch criminals. You must place cameras in tenants' apartments, snoop through keyholes and break in when they're not home. The gameplay is tense; you never know if you'll get caught or when the tenant will be back. Fortunately, a good deal of the stress is taken off once you get security cameras placed in their rooms.

The gameplay has a tendency to feel repetitive. While this happens often, the repetitive nature of *Beholder* is saved due to the fact that most of the actions you make are going to leave you tense and finicky until you've completed your task.

The art style and graphics of *Beholder* drive the dystopian message home. What stuck out the most to me are the character models. Characters are portrayed as shadows, indicating that everyone in this nation has been stripped of their individuality in public and private life. The totalitarian government seemingly has complete control over its people and it is made clear via the character's appearance.

While it is a fun and engaging title, *Beholder* doesn't offer much in replay value. There are multiple endings and scenarios, but for the most part, they have a "seen one, seen them all" vibe. There are a few different endings you can get without actually completing the game, but the ones at the end are just variations of one overall ending.

Beholder is an engaging title with the intensity dialed up to 11. It's not something you'll binge for days on end, but it is a game that you can come back to every now and again.

Beholder is available on Steam for $9.99.

IN BRIEF...

👍 High intensity   👎 Repetitive

👍 Choice matters   👎 Low replay value

8.0 GREAT
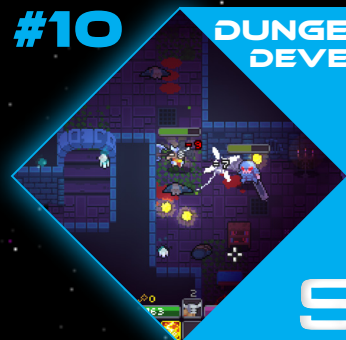
REVIEWED BY: TRAVIS LEFEVRE

INDIE RANGER'S SHINING STARS OF 2017

AT INDIE RANGER, WE REVIEW A TON OF GAMES; SOME ARE GOOD AND OTHERS ... NOT. SO MUCH. HERE ARE THE TEN GAMES THAT BROKE THROUGH AND SHOT THROUGH THE STARS!

LISTED BELOW ARE RANKS TEN THROUGH TWO. FOR THE GAME THAT TOOK OUR #1 SPOT, TURN TO THE NEXT PAGE...

#6 SAVING PRINCESS
DEVELOPER: JACOB PAVONE
SCORE: 8.4

#10 DUNGEON SOULS
DEVELOPER: LAMINA STUDIOS
SCORE: 8.1

ORWELL: KEEPING AN EYE ON YOU #5
DEVELOPER: OSMOTIC STUDIOS
SCORE: 8.5

SPACEBOUND #9
DEVELOPER: GRAVITY WHALE GAMES
SCORE: 8.2

#4 CONARIUM
DEVELOPER: ZOETROPE INTERACTIVE
SCORE: 8.6

#8 OGRE
DEVELOPER: AUROCH DIGITAL
SCORE: 8.3

NEOFEUD #3
DEVELOPER: SILVER SPOOK GAMES
SCORE: 8.7

MILITIA #7
DEVELOPER: BRAINGOODGAMES
SCORE: 8.4
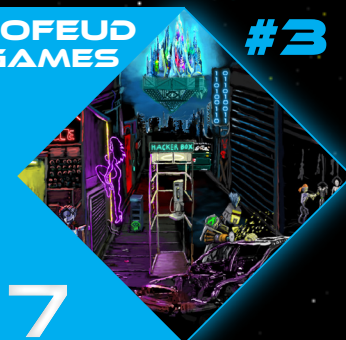
#2 DISTRUST
DEVELOPER: CHEERDEALERS
SCORE: 8.8

RUNNING WITH RIFLES

In my first campaign mission of *Running With Rifles*, I remember pushing back enemy forces in Rattlesnake Crescent. This was the first time I died in the line of duty, but not the last.

"OMG Grenade," I exclaimed, as I got blown up by a grenade.

At first glance, it's easy to get fooled by this game. It looks like a cute and simple top-down shooter; the reality, however, is that nothing about this game is as cut and dry as it seems.

Running with Rifles is an absolute slaughter-fest, and I wouldn't have wanted it any other way.

In the vanilla game, you are a soldier for either the Greenbelts (American), Graycollars (German), or the Deadpool approved Brownpants (Russian). In *Running With Rifles*, you are just as expendable as the AI, so don't expect to last long going in guns blazing Rambo style. Unless you have a vest on, you can only take a couple of hits before you're dead. Run, hide and take cover often, but don't try to play hero on this battlefield.

You can either play in campaign mode, which spans multiple game modes on a variety of maps, or you can do a quick match and create your own scenarios. Want to take a tiny squadron and go head-to-head with an army? You can do it in a quick match!

If you want to test yourself as a Rambo-esque character, you can try Man vs. World mode. But it won't last long, trust me.

A perfect example of the aforementioned "nothing is as cut and dry as it seems" is the shooting mechanism. While this is a top-down shooter, the environment isn't 2-dimensional. You can't just hit an enemy by aiming your crosshairs over them. Weapon spread and obstacles, both natural and man-made, will almost always get in the way of the enemy you have your sights on.

If you're on the bottom of a hill and you want to shoot the guy on top, follow the advice of Obi-Wan Kenobi: don't try it. Finding the high ground is a much more effective option than trying to shoot through a dirt hill.

Unlike many shooters, the AI in *Running With Rifles* aren't worthless cannon fodder. They aren't top-notch AI by any means, but they are smart enough to heal fallen allies and give cover fire while only sometimes getting caught behind an obstacle.

This also can work against you, as enemies have enough knowledge to know how to take the tactical advantage. They have all the same abilities as you, even the ability to call in airstrikes or request reinforcements.

The above situations make combat extremely engaging, as you never know what your enemy will do to take the upper hand.

Although it can feel a little repetitive now and again, those moments are few and far between. The maps are varied enough to save you from repetition and most battles feel like a new experience.

You are given free rein to play as you please and do what makes you most comfortable. You can play around with the assortment of SMGs, LMGs, rifles and snipers to be found. Personally, I've found comfort in taking up the role of a support class soldier who provides suppressive fire with a LMG. I can be pretty clumsy in my keystrokes, leading to my death on many occasions. Using a weapon that forces you to go prone just makes the job a little easier for me.

I haven't had too much experience with the online part of *Running With Rifles* due to my spotty connection. From what I have played, however, the multiplayer is a fun mechanism that relies heavily on teamwork.

Every time I've come online to play, there have always been at least 30 online matches available to play. This had let me know that their multiplayer component is alive and well. Above all else, my favorite aspect of *Running with Rifles* is the mods that are available. From what I've seen, there are 52 mods in total on the Steam Workshop. While that isn't much compared to some games, the quality of some of these mods is top-notch.

Of all the mods, my favorite has to be *Running in the Fallout*. I have a bit of a bias toward this mod because I'm a huge *Fallout* fan, but the mod allows you put yourself in the boots of one of the many factions in the *Fallout* universe.

You have access to power armor and weapons unique to *Fallout*, like laser and plasma rifles. Unfortunately, this mod doesn't offer new maps, so your recreation of the Battle of Hoover Dam might have to wait.

Based on looks, this mod could almost be a spiritual successor to the original *Fallout* games made by Interplay Studios.

If you're looking for something a little wackier, I'd recommend the *Running with Nerf Guns* mod. Instead of spitting lead, you'll be spitting highly inaccurate foam. Take up arms with the N-Strike, Mega, Z-Strike and more as you battle with all the frustration Nerf has to offer! Even the dialog in this mod makes it extremely relatable to anyone who's ever been in a Nerf battle.

Mods add more to an already huge game. It's simple, yes, but the amount of variety and the ever-shifting tide of war makes this a game with high replay value. If you ever get sick of the base game, mods add more hours of fun and chaos. If neither mod that I've recommended interests you, there are more to choose from in the Steam Workshop, including a zombie apocalypse and a World War I mod.

Running with Rifles is a game that you can get lost in. It's intense and addictive and I've already lost track of time playing it on more than one occasion.

8.9 GREAT

👍 Addictive

👍 Smooth Gameplay

👍 Active developers and community

👎 Minor framerate issues

Unturned

Less is more

Sometimes, the simplest of games can become a phenomenon. For Nelson Sexton, the founder of Smartly Dressed Games, this rang true with his video game, *Unturned*.

Unturned is a free-to-play video game with an open world to explore and survive in. From the moment you see the title page, in all of it's Arial fonted, low-detailed glory, you know that what you're about to play has about as much depth as a puddle. However, this didn't stop *Unturned* from garnering a large following and positive reception.

The original concept for *Unturned* started as a game he created on a platform called *ROBLOX*. Sexton began playing *ROBLOX* in 2008 and during that time, he made two successful titles: *Deadzone* and *Battlefield*.

He began making the sequel to *Deadzone* on *ROBLOX*. However, due to the limitations of its creation engine at the time, Sexton moved on and began creating *Deadzone 2* on the Unity engine, calling it Unturned.

"The structure of Unity is a lot different from *ROBLOX*," Sexton said. "For *Deadzone 2*, I wanted to have more realistic vehicle physics … Just the jump from *ROBLOX* to Unity was already a huge step up in that regard."

At the time of *Unturned's* initial release on Steam, Sexton was around 16. Four years later, at age 20, *Unturned* has become his full-time job. In that time, *Unturned* has gone through three versions, all of which were made with Unity. The fourth and upcoming version will be made with Unreal Engine, which offers better quality graphics and more user friendly programming.

Although it is a free title, methods of funding include a $5 upgrade which gives users special cosmetic perks and server access as well as a feature called "Steam economy," where players can earn in-game items to trade with other Steam players.

For a majority of *Unturned's* existence, Sexton has been a lone developer.

"I had my recorder and I walked around outside [to make] footstep sounds. The zombie sounds are me, with a cold, making noises," he said.

According to Sexton, the revenue from the original three versions of *Unturned* will drastically improve production quality for its fourth version, leaving open the possibility of higher quality sounds than the sniffles.

Sexton keeps his fanbase engaged through weekly progress updates and allowing players to create their own content for *Unturned* via Steam Workshop.

With the implementation of Steam workshop, creators help to drive the game forward with new weapons, items and maps. Known as curated maps, community members have chipped in to keep the game fresh with new locations inspired by real-life places such as Greece and Hawaii.

Within the world of video games, the open-world survival genre has been a popular one in recent years. *Unturned* has to compete with titles like *H1Z1*, *DayZ* and *7 Days to Die*. Sexton remains optimistic, citing that, unlike the other titles, not only is *Unturned* free-to-play, but it is one of the few that offers flying vehicles.

"People had been talking about that for so long. It was one of those 'none of these survival games actually have flying vehicles' and 'it's probably never going to happen for the game' and then, surprise! Here's planes and helicopters," he said.

In contrast to the games mentioned above, *Unturned* is unique in that it offers missions, quests and NPCs (non-player characters) that can be interacted with beyond combat.

With tens of thousands of people playing *Unturned* on a regular basis, it's hard to see this game losing its relevance any time soon. Constantly updated and tweaked, *Unturned* is expected to keep it's popularity for some time, especially with the eventual release of a new and improved version.

ERUPTION
BY LAVA FLOW GAMES, LLC

It's not every day that you get to control a natural disaster. However, *Eruption* gives you that opportunity, no matter how short-lived the excitement may be.

You play as a volcano and wreak havoc on the villagers who dare to dwell on your island. As you play, you progress through different eras, each containing a checklist of "goals" to complete. In order to progress to the next era, you must complete your goal with the set number of powers.

Depending on the era, you will be given any variation of the four powers: Magma rock, eruption, fissure or lightning. Each power has different advantages to use in certain situations. While this is fun at first, the lack of variety makes the gameplay run stale quickly.

The first time you use each ability is fun and it's exciting to watch the havoc that ensues, but the joy isn't the same after that. You know what to expect from the powers and, given that there's only four of them, you can only switch up the play style so much.

The only power that feels like it has a semblance of tactic to it is the eruption ability. The flow of lava goes down the side of the volcano and follows the bumps and cracks along the way, making you think tactically before you drop the lava on the villagers.

The "campaign," for lack of a better word consists of 18 eras, all on the same island. Nothing about the landscape changes except the placement of the destructible items such as trees, temples and villages Even after all the years that pass between each era, the island remains almost the same throughout all of it. This, coupled with the aforementioned abilities, leads to repetitive gameplay that, while fun at first, gets boring quickly.

Eruption offers an alternative "free mode," putting your volcano on a giant island with unlimited abilities. This was satisfying for a bit until the island inevitable became covered in lava.

The lava that destroys a majority of the environment is vibrant, colorful and feels like an outlier to the rest of the game's art style. The destruction the lava leaves behind is visible from the birds-eye view in the form of smoke and steam. Everything else – the landscape, villages, villagers and magma rock craters – are low quality and don't have any aesthetic appeal to them. Graphics don't make or break a game to me, however, the graphics in *Eruption* doesn't seem to compensate for the dry gameplay.

Eruption virtually has one song that plays during the game. While it fits the island theme, it doesn't add or take anything away from the experience. It's not catchy and it feels like it's just there for the sake of being there.

It appears that, since the release of the game, the developer has gone dark on this project. Neither their Twitter or Facebook have made status updates since August and their Steam News page is completely empty. For the asking price, Eruption provides a decent amount of content, but the replay value is extremely low due to the overall repetitiveness and stale gameplay. I don't see myself coming back to this game anytime soon.

Eruption is available on Steam for $4.99.

4.2
Below Average

👍 Initial Fun Factor

👎 Repetitive
👎 Limited Variety
👎 Mediocre Art Style

DIALOGUE TREE
GAMER'S OPINIONS ON GAMING

Do you consider video games to be a form of art?

Me personally, no. Because of how I define games. Games have existed for a millenia before the "video" part ... I think that the software package that is in the game can include art, like the visuals, the audio, the storytelling. Those are forms of art. But the game part of the "video game" is not a form of art. That would be akin to saying a game like *Pong* is art.

KERMIT MITCHELL III, INDIE DEVELOPER AND ENTREPRENEUR

Absolutely. The narrative, art style, graphic design and, depending on how they're set up, you can have a world of emotion in a video game. It still has an impact just like any other form of art or design or anything. Also, you have music in video games and some of the soundtracks from video games are orchestral in nature. I think video games are loaded with art.

MICHAEL LEPSCH, ASSOCIATES DEGREE IN ANIMATION

Games are experienced differently from novels, paintings, films, et cetera. I don't think *Flappy Bird* exists to be art any more than a microwave does. They are a "third thing."

JAMES TILLMAN, INDIE DEVELOPER

Coming to the SEGA Mega Drive

June 2018

BIG EVIL CORP.

OUT WITH THE NEW... IN WITH THE OLD?
GLIMPSING INTO THE WORLD OF HOMEBREW GAMES

Before we had the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One, video games were enjoyed on the Sega Mega Drive and the Commodore 64. Today, in 2018, developers are still trying to bring life to these artifacts of gaming history.

Matt Phillips is a game developer based in the United Kingdom and is working on *Tanglewood*, a new game for the Sega Mega Drive, a console that was officially discontinued by SEGA in 1997.

Tanglewood is a platformer that follows a young fox named Nymn as it traverses through the forest at night when the danger begins to lurk. Nymn can get powers by returning Fuzzles to their nests.

Phillips has a history of video games that goes back to his childhood when the aforementioned consoles were in their prime.

"I got a Mega Drive when I was about 9 years old, and I had a Commodore 64 at around the same time. I was learning to program on the Commodore and learning to game on the Mega Drive and the two loves combined very early on in my childhood," Phillips said in an interview with The BRIDGE, a GINX Esports TV program. "I wanted to do it my entire life, to make a game for my favorite console. I guess it was the kid that never grew up, really."

Phillips has an extensive résumé of video game development, specifically having experience with helping to create a sizable chunk of the *LEGO* video game franchise.

When people go about making homebrew games, they might find a way to "cheat the system," so to speak, to make the process easier. Phillips, however, is using original equipment from the 1990s to create *Tanglewood*, including processors and coding language.

He cites the use of reverse engineering, guesswork and trial and error to get to where he is now.

After five years of learning, eventually quitting his job to work on *Tanglewood* full-time and a wildly successful Kickstarter campaign, Phillips is finally where he is today, with a release set for June 2018.

"It's only had a year of full-time development on it ... Most of [the five years] was learning to code for the machine rather than writing the game itself. The game itself has come together rather quickly," he said.

According to Phillips, the difficulty will be similar to that of your typical '90s game, specifically referring to the stampede level in *The Lion King*.

Photo courtesy of Wikimedia. Edited with Pixelator

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Travis LeFevre is a junior journalism major from the State University of New York at Fredonia. He has had a passion for gaming ever since he played *Pokémon Red Version* and *Donkey Kong 64*. Some of his all-time favorite titles include *Halo Reach*, *Spec Ops: The Line* and *Fallout: New Vegas*. In his free time, Travis enjoys making a hot mess of himself and making situations awkward. Finger guns and puns are his specialties.

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SCAN THIS TO SEE THE VIDEO VERSION OF TOP 10 LIST

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

The print publication, Indie Ranger, is a physical adaptation of the website of the same name. The overarching goal of Indie Ranger is to provide the reader with games that they might not have heard of before. As indicated in the name, we primarily cover independently developed games, or indie games. The video game market has a stiff competition with big name developers casting a huge shadow over the indie scene. We aim to shine a light on that shadow, You can view our whole website by using this URL or by scanning the QR code.