

 **INDIE
GAMES** presents

250 Indie Games You Must Play

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Mike Rose



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Introduction

Welcome to *250 Indie Games You Must Play*—your guide to the ever-expanding and always exciting world of indie gaming. Whether you’re in the know about the indie game scene or you’ve never played an indie game in your life, this book will help further your understanding of why indie games are so important to so many people in the entertainment industry.

Whether your usual gaming exploits involve a round of *Wii Sports* tennis with your family, or “fragging” terrorists in *Call of Duty: Black Ops*, the games highlighted in this book may well feel like a breath of fresh air, with concepts and ideas that will change your perspective of what video games can be.

Aside from being great fun, indie games can also be experimental, emotional, nostalgic, and occasionally just plain bizarre. Some will make you sit back in awe, while others will have you thinking “Why have I never played a game like this before?”

The games in this book represent a side of gaming that you should dabble in, and every single one is an essential experience. Better still, you can play the majority of these games for free, and even the commercial releases are incredibly cheap.

Just be warned—once you start playing indie games, you may not be able to look at your big-budget blockbusters the same way ever again.

Mike Rose
IndieGames.com Editor

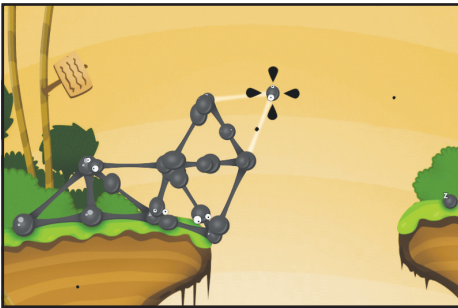
What Are “Indie” Games?

The exact definition of an indie game is sketchy at best, and both indie developers and gamers argue periodically over what they believe the word “indie” signifies.

While independent games are those that have been created without the backing of a publisher, the term “indie” has evolved further and now generally refers to an independent game that has been developed with a certain “indie spirit” by a small team or an individual.

Without the pressure from a publishing deal, indie developers are able to create the exact experience they desire, leading to a massively varied selection of games. Ranging from experimental platformers that you’d never see from a big-budget developer, to the oft-discussed “art games,” indie games provide unique and sometimes unusual diversions.





Indie developers come from all sorts of backgrounds and every corner of the globe. Some are enthusiastic hobbyists who relax after a hard day at work with a spot of game development, while others create indie games for a living. Numerous online indie gaming communities provide these developers with a place to talk shop, share their latest projects, and take part in competitions and game jams.



What Does It Mean to Be an Indie Developer?

Being indie has a variety of benefits and advantages to different developers. Here, a number of well-known developers explain what being indie means to them.

“Being indie for me means I’m not a faceless cog in a giant production line that operates for the profit of somebody else. I get to work on what I want, when I want, how I want.”

—Bennett Foddy (*Evacuation, Qwop*)

“Making games and publishing them as a young indie designer meant that thousands of people knew my name and my work before I even began applying to universities to earn a degree.”

—Greg “Banov” Lobanov (*Assassin Blue, Dubloon*)

“If you believe in a concept, you don’t have to pitch to publishers or shareholders; you just plonk your arse in a chair and start building it. A ‘real’ definition of indie might describe work practice or organizational structure, but the spirit of indie is making stuff because you want to.”

—Jarrad “Farbs” Woods (*Rom Check Fail, Playpen*)

“I think it’s telling that, instead of referring to just one particular financial model for game development, the term ‘indie’ is more used to denote things that are weird, inventive, or personal—games that probably wouldn’t be developed by bigger or more commercial groups.”

—Stephen “The Catamites” Murphy (*Space Funeral, Paul Moose In Space World*)

“Indie games allow me to channel all my ideas and creativity, but still make enough money to get by and do some of the travelling and self-educating that I would have otherwise put off.”

—Chevy Ray Johnston (*Beacon, Skullpogo*)

“You can change the direction or scope of a project at any point or drop it altogether. There’s a community of other indies out there ready to help you with any aspect of the project.”

—Mark Essen (*Punishment, Flywrench*)

“Indie game development really does cut the corporate puppet strings and lets you roam the wild west of game development. It also means rolling out of bed and hitting your head on your desk, but man, doesn’t it feel good!”

—John Cooney (*Achievement Unlocked, Maverick*)

“I’ve worked on a publisher-funded project before, and the publisher had the final say on whether the game saw the light of day. That was not a good feeling.”

—Jason Rohrer (*Passage, Sleep is Death*)

“People squabble over definitions like ‘indie’ and ‘independent;’ they’re the new fanboys. There’s now even indie sub-classes, because indie has become too mainstream. Some of these games are so indie, they don’t even exist.”

—Dan Marshall (*Privates, Time Gentlemen, Please!*)

“The best thing about being independent is being able to do something I love.”

—Charlie Knight (*Irukandji, Space Phallus*)

Why Have Indie Games Become so Popular in Recent Years?

The end of the first decade of the twenty-first century saw a boom both in the number of developers getting into indie game development and the amount of attention the scene was receiving. We asked some notable developers what they thought was the cause of all this interest.

“The quality of games being produced has really shot up. Small teams are making the sort of clever, exciting things you just couldn’t get from big publishers, coupled with various factors like ease of accessibility and more coverage.”

—Dan Marshall (*Privates, Time Gentlemen, Please!*)

“The larger companies started to focus on big budget games, but the demand for smaller titles didn’t decrease. A hole was left in the market for indie developers.”

—Nicklas “Nifflas” Nygren (*Knytt Stories, Within A Deep Forest*)

“Indie games bring fresh ideas back to a video game scene that has become entirely focused on sales.”

—Locomalito (*L’abbaye Des Morts, Hydorah*)

“The web created an amazing DIY publishing mentality, where anyone with a keyboard can be a columnist or an author, anyone with a mobile phone can be a film director, and anyone with a free hour or two can make and publish a video game.”

—Jarrad “Farbs” Woods (*Rom Check Fail, Playpen*)

“The number of tools and available platforms has grown; additionally, the tools have gotten better and easier to use, allowing more people to make

games. I think there's a growing demand among players for simple but good games focusing on gameplay."

—Jesse Venbrux (*Karoshi, They Need To Be Fed*)

"Kids who grew up with video games have now hit the 25–30 year mark, and have the opportunity to make those dream games they always talked about on the school yard a reality."

—Edmund Mcmillen (*Super Meat Boy, Time Fcuk*)

"Indie games embody the same restless drive for strangeness and excitement and constant mutation that also creates the best pop music, the best pulp fiction, the best b-movies and the best comic books."

—Stephen "The Catamites" Murphy (*Space Funeral, Paul Moose In Space World*)

"It is maybe because indie games are so personal to the author. Playing a game made by one or two people is much more intimate and human than playing a game made by a hundred people."

—Matt Thorson (*Give Up Robot, An Untitled Story*)

"Indie games feel weird, have some taste from back in the days when everybody was indie, and are made by small-time guys somewhere. All the ingredients to be trendy!"

—Daniel Benmergui (*Today I Die, I Wish I Were The Moon*)

"Like punk, indie and electronic music are tearing down the walls that separate producers and consumers. They are contributing to the de-geekification of the gaming phenomenon, reaching people and groups who wouldn't otherwise play games."

—Molleindustria (*Every Day the Same Dream, Run Jesus Run*)

"We are out there in the Wild West leading the charge. Who doesn't love a cowboy?"

—Greg Wohlwend (*Solipskier*)

Indie Gaming Resources

If you're looking to get more acquainted with the thriving indie gaming scene, look no further than the following places. These news sites and festivals play a huge part in helping bring unique, delightful, and entertaining games to the masses.

WEBSITES



IndieGames. Started by veteran indie gamer Tim W., IndieGames.com is now the most popular indie gaming news site; it covers all the latest news, reviews, and releases and is updated daily. The IndieGames podcast features a prominent indie developer each week.

TIGSource. The largest online community for indie developers, TIGSource holds themed competitions that are always very popular, and the forums are the perfect place for anyone interested in creating their own games.



Bytejacker. Bytejacker is an online review show that focuses mainly on indie games, with plenty of humour thrown in for good measure. A daily news blog also accompanies the videos.

Indie Game Festivals

The Independent Games Festival. The IGF was established in 1998 by UBM TechWeb, who also owns IndieGames.com, and is held annually at the Game Developers Conference in San Francisco. The festival highlights the best indie releases of the past year, along with the most promising projects still in development. Many IGF award winners go on to have great commercial success.



INDIE
~games arcade~

IndieCade. Celebrating indie developers from around the world, the IndieCade festival has been promoting the most diverse, artistic, and culturally significant indie games since 2005. The organisers aim to provide a gaming equivalent to the Sundance film festival, rewarding tremendous passion and innovation.

Indie Games Arcade. The Indie Games Arcade is an annual UK-based event that is part of the Eurogamer Expo. Organised by The Mudlark Production Company, the arcade highlights all the best upcoming and recently released indie games, with a particular focus on the British indie gaming scene. Mudlark also runs the indie videogame development conference World of Love.

**INDIE
CADE**
International Festival of Independent Games

What You'll Need to Play

So you've decided to take a dive into the world of indie games—but what will you need to play? Fortunately, there is very little effort needed on your part, although it's worth taking note of the following:

- The majority of the games featured in this book do not require a computer with more than average specifications, although there are some exceptions. For the commercial games in particular, it's worth checking out system requirements from the game's official site before purchasing.
- Every game in this book is available to download for PC, so almost everyone will have a computer at home that is capable of running these games. Certain games are also available on other platforms, such as the Xbox 360 or Nintendo Wii, and this will be stated where appropriate.
- Many of the games, especially those that are browser-based, require that you install a plug-in to your computer. Two such plug-ins include the Adobe Flash Player and the Unity Web Player. Some of the download games will also need the Microsoft XNA library installed on your machine. Any game that has these requirements will automatically ask you to install the appropriate plug-in as necessary.
- Some games are compatible with a gamepad or controller, and using this method of control can greatly increase the enjoyment you get from a gaming experience. It's recommended, but not necessary, that you purchase an Xbox 360 controller for use with your computer.
- Keep an open mind when you begin playing these games—many will be unlike any gaming experience you've had before, and some attempt to portray ideas and emotions that you may never have seen in gaming before.

Feeling prepared? Okay, let's do this—here come 250 of the most worthwhile indie gaming experiences. Note that there are thousands of enjoyable indie games out there for you to discover, and this selection is meant more as a starting point for anyone looking to explore the scene, rather than an exhaustive list of the very best indie games available.

There are three sections to pick your way through—download games, browser-based games, and commercial games. You can choose a game at random to download, or start from the beginning and work your way through the lot. There is no special order to follow, so feel free to try the games out in whatever order best suits you!



Acknowledgments

A huge thank you to all the developers whose work is featured in the book—and of course, that thank you is extended to every indie developer who helps to make the indie gaming scene as fantastic as it is.

Many thanks to my fiancée Jo and my parents for the much-needed support, and to the proofreading god that is Simon Archer.

My gratitude must also go out to Simon Carless who has been hugely supportive every step of the way, and of course to fellow IndieGames.com editor Tim W.—without him, there would be no perfect place for following the indie gaming scene.

Special thanks to Anthony Carboni who allowed me to borrow his indiegam.es url, and who is also one seriously cool dude.



Part 1

Download Games

The games in this section need to be downloaded to your computer for you to play them, and they may need installing as well. Every featured game will work on a Windows PC, but you'll need to check a game's official site for requirements if you're playing on a Mac or using the Linux operating system.

Some games may not have an official site, and will instead be available to download from a forum or a file-sharing site. This is usually the case for games that have been developed for competitions or game jams.

Star Guard

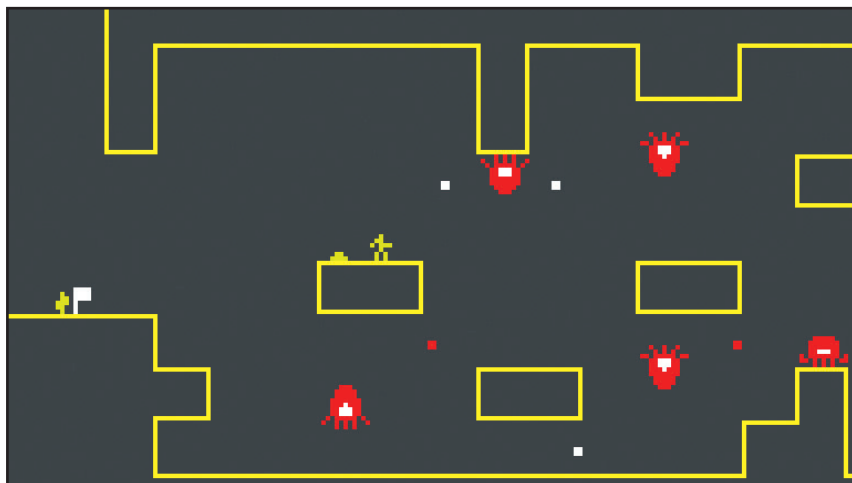
Loren “Sparky” Schmidt

Inspired by a series of stories about Mars written by Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Star Guard* follows a mysterious green spaceman as he attempts to defeat an evil wizard. Armed with just a laser gun, our hero must battle through the wizard’s minions on Venus, overcoming levels full of nasty aliens and obstacles.

The game has a very minimalist feel with simple visuals and sound effects, yet play is incredibly engaging thanks to tight controls and hectic action. Every now and again our hero stumbles upon allies who are fighting for the same cause, and you can choose to keep them safe or rush past and leave them to their fates. The dialogue is kept to a minimum, with the occasional short story printed on the backdrop.

Star Guard was nominated for the Excellence in Design award at the 2010 Independent Games Festival.

<http://indiegam.es/playstarguard>



RunMan: Race Around the World

Tom Sennett and Matt Thorson

In the words of developer Tom Sennett, *RunMan: Race Around the World* is “a game about doing your best and running really, really fast.” Our hero RunMan shows up for a race, only to find that the other contestants have dropped out because they fear his speed. Rather than accept the trophy, RunMan decides to challenge himself to a race around the world.

RunMan has two main actions—run, and run really fast. As he pounds along platforms knocking bad guys out of the way and popping balloons, he automatically springs off any wall he runs into, allowing for a very smooth gaming experience that many players have compared to the early *Sonic the Hedgehog* games. This game has a lot of style too, from RunMan shouting “Rock on!” as he runs to the 1920s blues, country, and jazz music soundtrack.

The game was drawn entirely in Microsoft Paint over the course of four years, and features over 30 levels to rush through.

<http://indiegam.es/playrunman>



Enviro-Bear 2000: Operation Hibernation

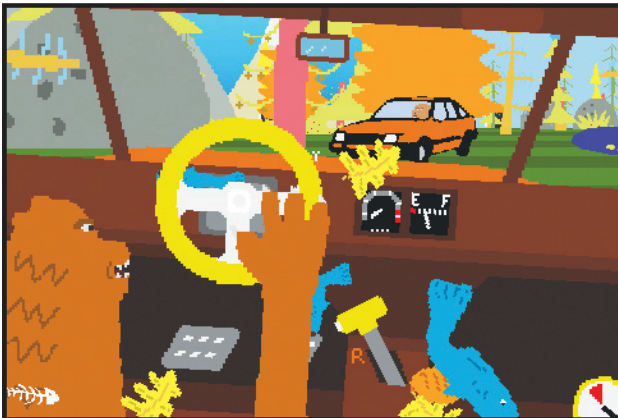
Justin Smith

“Who is driving the car? A bear is driving the car! How can that be?!”

Enviro-Bear 2000: Operation Hibernation was originally developed for (and won) the Cockpit competition on the popular indie gaming site TIGSource, and was later ported to the iPhone and the Android. You play a bear driving a car who wants to fatten himself up before hibernating for the winter. The bear can only use one paw at a time, which makes driving around an absolutely hilarious nightmare. The game is purposely awkward to control, and a variety of obstacles from vicious badgers to showers of pine cones will constantly hinder your progress. There are also other bears driving their cars and looking for fish to eat.

This game was nominated for the Nuovo Award at the 2010 Independent Games Festival and is widely regarded as a must-play indie game, especially when played for a laugh with a group of friends.

<http://indiegam.es/playenvirobear>



The Black Heart

Andrés Borghi

A bloodstained world exists alongside the human world, although we choose not to see it. The king and creator of this dark void has been brutally murdered, and his powerful heart—the Black Heart—has been stolen by a demon known only as Final.

Six twisted characters all want to take the heart as their own, and each is determined to battle through the bloody wasteland, taking out one opponent at a time, until the heart is won. Each character's story line is told through gorgeously grim cutscenes, which include an assortment of special, super, killer, and fatal attacks with complex button pressing that will please fighting-game veterans. There are also reams of extra game modes, including practice, team fights, and hotseat multiplayer.

The Black Heart runs on the MUGEN engine, a tool that allows developers to build masterful fighting games. Andrés Borghi spent over seven years developing the game, creating the character stripes, animations, and backdrops from scratch.

<http://indiegam.es/playblackheart>



Atomic Blast

Qrleon

Atomic Blast is a tricky platformer with a plethora of dangers to keep your eye on. The protagonist may have a gun, but that won't help much if he can't dodge the enemy soldiers and death lasers that will cut him up with a single shot.

On each of the 12 levels, the hero can hang from ceilings, climb through shattered windows, and unlock doors—but the enemy guards are a very real problem since they can fire at any angle and can easily pick you off whether you're above or below them. You, however, can only shoot horizontally and so are at quite a disadvantage. Once you manage to beat the tough missions there's an even trickier final boss battle to contend with.

Atomic Blast started life as a tribute of sorts to Chris Roper's *Destructivator*, and after several months of chopping and changing, eventually found its way on to the Glorious Trainwrecks site.

<http://indiegam.es/playatomicblast>



Magic Planet Snack

Kyle “Lazercatz” Tolbert

In *Magic Planet Snack*, you play as a wizard who has accidentally turned himself into a space worm. You now need to fly through space, chomping on planets and devouring other wizards for points.

There are plenty of bad guys and flashing blocks to dodge, and staying aggressive yet cautious is the best way to grab the big scores. As you eat the orbs dotted throughout each planet your HYPER meter fills up. Once the meter is full, the planet turns into cakes, pastries, and ice cream for a few seconds, during which time you’ll want to grab as many as you can for a serious addition to your score.

Magic Planet Snack was originally going to be a racing game, but Tolbert says that he eventually opted for a more score-based approach so that players would “make stupid decisions.”

<http://indiegam.es/playMPS>

