



# REKAMENAG

ISSUE 4 SUMMER 21

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Anyone that likes Video Brinquedo, look away now

I always stated that ReKameMag would be made only when I was having fun making it. The reason it's been so long (8, 9 months?) since the last one is simple—I had made about half the magazine when my laptop decided its hard drive wasn't good enough. It collapsed, taking some of my un-backed-up work, and all RM4 progress thus far, with it.

Remarkably, after two weeks of owning a new laptop, the exact same thing happened again! I threw the bricked laptop and £150 at PC World and got an upgrade, which after two months is actually still functioning. And ReKameMag 4, now with new rewritten articles, is saved safely in Dropbox so if anything does raise hell again, it just takes a replacement laptop and a Dropbox sync to get it back. (I've also upgraded my Dropbox to 50GB so everything important can sit there. If you can afford it, I can't recommend it enough—Dropbox is excellent.)

An absolute ton has happened since Issue 3. YoYo Games has gone from, like, four in-office employees to nearer 15. An ever-increasing pile of mobile games are being released, including my own game Maddening. To date, I've done at least one thing to every single release, incase you're wondering, including coding a couple entirely (though Maddening is the only one I had any real creative control over).

Speaking of the new employees, two actually live with me—Jack Oatley and Darrell “Dadio” Flood! If you've never experienced it, yes, suddenly living with someone you only previously knew over the internet is bloody bizarre. Even meeting them is; meeting the likes of Mark Overmars, Jesse “2Dcube” Venbrux and GMC moderator Uriel “ugriffin” Griffin made for some bizarre but wonderful experiences.

GameMaker has seen some major changes too. 8.1 is now the latest version, and is improving on a weekly basis thanks to the work of Mike Dailly and Russell Kay. It's also undergone a slight name change, from “Game Maker” to “GameMaker”, something I've reflected on by also removing the gap from “Rekame Mag”. I'm not fussed if it's still spelt with the space, it's just a nice reference given the origin of this magazine's name.

GameMaker Studio and GameMaker HTML5 are within spitting distance as well, which will open up all sorts of possibilities to the public. I know I'm not the only person that's

planning on making a website (my own portfolio) in GMHTML5. The HTML5 engine is previewable on the YoYo Games website, another thing which is completely different now to when ReKameMag 3 was out!

There's only one major downside to working with GameMaker eight hours a day, five days a week—it leaves me very burnt out with the program. I used to release 1-2 short games a month personally. That's slowed right down now. I've only managed five or so in over a year, and haven't released something since Innoquous 4 over three months ago (since which I've barely opened the program for personal use).

To fill the time, I've been abusing my newest laptop's extra power by finally being able to do full playthroughs of games. This includes a full recording of every single mission, including cutscenes, of the excellent GTAIV: The Lost and Damned. I'm also partway through recording GTAIV: The Ballad of Gay Tony. Along with those two, I've started a couple of extra video series, including “Casual Games”, “Fun Indies”, and “Shit Games”, a series I've literally spent nearly £50 so far on crap shovelware so far to get good content for!

A lot of this is not yet online due to bad internet back home during my visit for the summer holiday, and no internet at all for the next week or so here, but a lot of videos are. If it's of any interest whatsoever, you can find them all via my playlists on my YouTube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/NALGames>.

For this issue, I believe I may have set two records. One, the first GameMaker magazine to offer a physical prize—see the “Name That Knock-Off” bookend. Two, the first GameMaker magazine with a face to face interview. Admittedly, I do live in the same flat as Darrell “dadio” Flood, so I'm at a big advantage. But nevertheless, it's an achievement!

Anyway, enough of this blog entry cum magazine issue introduction. I have my doubts it gets read very often given it's not actually part of the main content. It's time to run into actual-content mode.

See you in ReKameMag 5, if I get up off my backside and make it happen!

-Allison James

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# THE FLAWS OF RATINGS

## Why those little numbers and stars are about as useful as this article

Pretty much every game portal has a user rating system. Five stars, out of ten, 1-100 percentage. Whatever the system, everyone seems to have one. It means anyone browsing the site for something to play can jump straight into a list of the highest-rated games.

But the thing is, any system like this has flaws up the jacksie. Rating systems mean any games that get no ratings, or very few, are doomed to be buried for life. They could be fantastic games that 99% of the community love. It just takes that 1% with a different opinion to seal the game's fate.

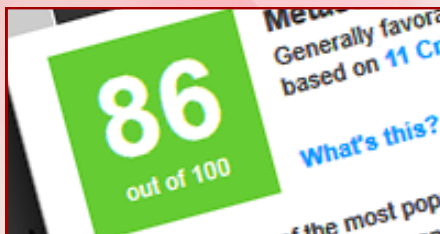
Rating systems also generally mean there's a defined "best" and "worst". Going with the five star system which is especially affected by this (though it's arguable that 1 star could mean 0-20% in percentages), it's assumed 1 star is the absolute worst, and 5 star is essentially perfection. I have previously, in a blog entry, suggested an uncapped rating system, which has no set-in-stone upper bound. The "best" rating is simply what the current best-rated game has achieved, but any other game that's better can up that bar.

Differing opinions, however, pose the biggest flaw in rating systems. As mentioned earlier, some people will love a game others will hate. With a lot of people, disliking a game won't result in them not rating and simply saying "Other people clearly love this game, but it's not for me. I won't rate it". They're going to slap the lowest rating possible on it.

People will also rate games unfairly for things nothing to do with the game (eg Portal 2's Metacritic user score was affected heavily by people that hated Valve, though the game itself is brilliant - in my opinion!). As well as loving or hating the developer of a game, they might have problems with playing it due to a flaw with their computer. They might have chosen a crappy antivirus that counts all downloaded .exe files as viruses, and assume the game is harmful to their system. They might have a slow internet connection or a low download limit and dislike the physical size of the game. There's a ton of factors that can give people the wrong impression.

Professional critics can bring to the table a more fair opinion. But again, they're subject to bias. With films (for example), critics will always choose top-notch cinematography and a well-toned script to "turn your brain off" action. A lot of people, however, just want a

flick where they can sit comfortably, popcorn in hand, completely ignore the storyline and watch someone unrealistically and arbitrarily manage to kill hundreds of grunts without taking a single bullet themselves. Metacritic reinforces this stuff.



Everybody I know (that's seen the series) loves the Austin Powers trilogy. They have average Metacritic scores. The Social Network, on the other hand, has a 95. Sure it's interesting to see, but present most of the general public with two hours of an action-free documentary on how some college student nicked a website idea, and they'll probably fall asleep. If you want to see how different critics and the public are in opinion, just have a look at the professionally highest and lowest rated films and games on Metacritic - nigh on every single badly rated film has its share of glowing user reviews, and vice versa.

To the defence of ratings, they do generally represent the overall quality of a game. Most people will probably end up liking something that has a glowing overall rating. However, they cannot really pinpoint-rank anything that is subject to even the tiniest of personal opinion - everyone will have a different list.

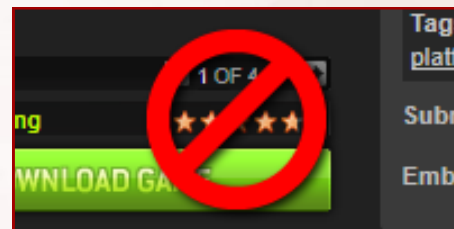
I don't get why they're so primitive still. There are literally tens of ways to improve their accuracy and usefulness. For example, giving something two ratings - one intended for fans of the media's genre and one for everyone else. A 90% first person shooter probably won't seem 90% if you're indifferent to FPSes. With a website you can get very clever with this - get users to create accounts and ask them to rate how much each of the media's usual genres appeal to them. Then provide them dynamic ratings on how much they'd enjoy each thing. If user rating was enabled, their ratings on films could then "update" their preferences and alter ratings for everything else.

I've already mentioned the Relative Rating Scale too. This especially to me makes sense with console game reviews. I'll take

PlayStation Magazine UK (PSM, though currently PSM3 due to the PlayStation 3) as my example. It's been running since the original PlayStation was current, providing a percentage to games on all three systems. Now, games continue to get better and better. I'm not saying "new games are by default better than old ones". I'm saying that technological enhancements in every field increase; as this happens, the quality of games increases.

Now, games like Metal Gear Solid on PS1 were amazing for their time, and PSM would have given it a 95+ score to reflect on that. However, Metal Gear Solid 4 came out a decade later. It's prettier, its engine is stronger, it's bigger. But it only has around 5% of leeway to increase in comparison to the original (discounting the actual original Metal Gears). Though it can be argued MGS4 is only being reviewed in relation to other PlayStation 3 systems, it's not just system-to-system. Official PlayStation 2 Magazine gave Metal Gear Solid 2 a perfect score in Issue 17 (it ran for 100 issues). Sure, it was a good game, but better games came in the next four years and of course could not get a better score than MGS2. If they'd given MGS2 a 100 in a rating scale with no caps, games like Metal Gear Solid 3 could maybe have received a 110.

I've mentioned commercial gaming and Metacritic a lot, though this does of course relate to GameMaker games and other independent releases too. These are even more biased due to the average age of the free gamer and the lack of mainstream attention on things - it's easy to bury a game or land it on the front of a website with a few account-equipped friends and a few dodgy



ratings.

But to twist off at the end, if you are a game developer, don't strive for, or rely on, ratings. They're biased, frequently wrong, easily abused and vague. When you can get constructive criticism, feedback and even praise from a well-placed, mature comment, why rely on numbers to tell you if games are



# BUDGETLESS BESIDE BILLIONS

Where independent games lie in a world of \$70 carbon copy FPSes (Article request: JAK HAK)

The gaming scene, like any other form of media, is incredibly broad. On one hand, you have an army of people playing games like Grand Theft Auto and Call of Duty, game which took decades of total man-hours to create, along with huge, huge sums of money. Yet, in the same category, you have people sitting on sites like YoYo Games playing platformers created entirely by single people in a matter of hours or days, with no budget other than the \$40 software they're using to make it.



In many ways, the two ends of the spectrum are separate. A good 99% of people sucked into franchises will take one look at anything 2D, laugh at it, and continue camping in the corner of their map occasionally shouting obscenities into a flimsy little grey headset. Conversely, many that develop independent games will see games like Call of Duty as hideously overpriced, overbudgeted, mainstream crap. (Given my entirely unbiased views of both sides, guess where I stand.)

But every day that passes seems to see the two inch together. This must be like the fourth article I've banged on about it now, but Minecraft, originally developed in one person, has shot into PC gamers' hearts, regularly topping best game awards. Millions have bought it, and it continues to sell like hot cakes.



Flash games are also frequently enjoyed by both - mainstreamers will often boot up some kind of puzzle flash game for a quick blast

during a lunch break. Independently developed games leak into the minds of console gamers through the marketplaces their respective consoles offer as well - PlayStation Network houses popular indie titles such as f10w and Riff: Everyday Shooter; Xbox Live Marketplace takes it a step further by housing a completely separate category for them. They enjoy success there too - most professional downloadable games cost 800-1200 Microsoft points (£8-10, \$10-15) where nigh on all independent titles are just 80.



You can see the line being crossed anywhere games are distributed. Downloadable content provider Steam now has a category for independent games, and you'll very frequently see Terraria and other games in the program's Featured section. Infact, the only place you'll not see the two areas of gaming merging is naturally in physical retail stores. The occasional game will be sold boxed - World of Goo springs to mind - but for the most part, boxed releases go against everything to do with independent development.

Why are independent games so popular with so many people now? Most likely it's simply that the quality of indie games gets better and better, and the prices for the games stay anywhere between free and low. Many are probably burnt out with spending £45 on a first person shooter that's a slight tweak on the first person shooter they spent £45 on last year, that will give them around seven hours of enjoyment. Stick them in Minecraft and they might take seventy to build the dream fortress they've always wanted alone.

The thing is, the merging of independent and mega-budgeted games is almost certain to continue. Digital distribution of games grows in popularity while physical retailers decline. Perhaps ironically, independent physical retailers are dying out at an alarming rate.

But for publishers, digital distribution is fantastic. The boxart designing, materials,

compilation and shipping to shops is an expensive process, and it's difficult to gauge exactly how many copies of the game they'll need to create. With it all online, they just have to stick it on a server and watch people throw them \$60 to clone it. Essentially, commercial games are beginning to enjoy the benefits independent games have always had.

It also means, of course, that larger game development companies can make smaller experimental games, either to test the market on an idea before going full-on with it, or just because it's a good idea that would not suit a full retail release (and that a boxed release would not justify). This blurs the line even more - if you gave someone with no experience of the back end of game creation a copy of Riff: Everyday Shooter and Geometry Wars: Combat Evolved, I guarantee they'd put them in an identical category. Riff was made by one person, Geometry Wars by Bizarre Creations (Project Gotham Racing, 007: Blood Stone).



Because of all this, the line is rapidly blurring between the two. How long will we still be able to split games into the categories of "independent" and "published"? We kind of already can't - thanks to the wonders of modern technology, you get all sorts of middle ground. Flash developers can get paid to be sponsored/published on websites like Kongregate and Armor Games. Many independent teams consist of large numbers of people, often with professional experience in their sectors. As aforementioned, some of the biggest names out there are making very small games like Geometry Wars, which feels very indie yet isn't.

So where do independent games lie in a world of huge-budgeted blockbuster games? Right next to them. In a few years' time, perhaps even in exactly the same place. It'll be interesting to see if "indie" and "mainstream" even exist as labels in the future. We could just end up having "games".



# MONEY FOR SOMETHING

## Tips for independent commercial game development and publishing

For many people, the games they create will always be purely for fun. Freeware releases, slapped onto the nearest free game portals for all to download without payment. Either due to lack of quality/content (be it deliberate or due to inexperience), no need for money, a desire to keep as many plays coming in as possible, or even unawareness of commercialisation (for many using GameMaker is little more than a once-a-month bit of fun), for some, freeware games will be all they ever make.

For others, their intent will eventually be to sell what they make. I'm not referring to them moving into an established company and following orders, I'm referring to selling self-made, self-published games at a low (\$1-15) cost. It may be a need for a source of income, be it secondary to another job or even primary (though this certainly should not be something somebody expects to achieve quickly; many independent game developers take years to become well known and experienced enough). Nevertheless, if you are considering travelling down the commercialisation route (now or in the future), there is a lot you have to consider.

The hardest by far, as much as it may seem easy, is simply knowing if you are good enough. This is far more than simply being good at coding - excellence in programming does not result in excellent games. You need to have ideas for games that will appeal to the public. Your games needs to have attractive graphics - while again, great graphics don't make a game great, if people aren't interested they won't even touch the gameplay.

Unfortunately, things can get in the way. Egotism, optimism and pessimism will always bias your own idea of how good what you make is. If you have already released freeware games, take the best few and sift through all the feedback and comments it has garnered. While it isn't a perfect indicator, comparing the feedback on games will give you an idea of what you are strong at and what you aren't at.

If you do have weak areas, consider building on them before attempting to sell games. Either that, or if your weak spots are in areas like art or sound, post a Team Request on the GameMaker Community or a similar request elsewhere. You do not need an expensive professional, a good amateur artist/musician works fine for this scale. Many of these will

agree to simply take a percentage of the money earned from the game, something that will not harm how much you end up with as having the better resources should drive sales anyway.

The area people ignore the most, but which is very important to making something commercial, is self-motivation. You need to be able to have a good enough idea and stick with it for the entire duration of its creation. It won't all be fun; hours of testing will be required to fix issues (a buggy game will only prompt buyers to demand refunds) and for every minute of happiness there's around three of tedium. Changing the idea of the game halfway through can rarely work, but mainly results in a final game that doesn't quite know what it wants from itself (a lot of released commercial "vapourware" suffers from this - Duke Nukem Forever feels like it's stuck in the 1990s and Too Human doesn't know what it wants).



Ultimately, you should come up with a game idea that you know you will enjoy following through with as much as possible. It's an unwritten rule that the more you enjoy creating something, the more people will enjoy playing for it.

If you feel you are strong enough, either alone or as part of a team, to create a sellable game, the next area to think about is spreading the word. If you're popular in the independent gaming scene (regular features of your freeware content on sites like [indiegames.com](http://indiegames.com), [tigsources.com](http://tigsources.com), [bytejacker.com](http://bytejacker.com), or even better, sites like [kotaku.com](http://kotaku.com) or [rockpapershotgun.com](http://rockpapershotgun.com)), you're in there. Make the game, find a reasonable selling point (I'll touch on this in a bit), then contact them with your game and they'll more than likely slap it on their respective homepages. If not, perhaps consider a few more high-quality free games to garner this kind of attention.

You may also be able to contact websites like that and similar ones with a request to advertise them freely - or if you have a bit of money and feel you could recoup the cost with game sales, actually buy advertising on particular websites or through services like GoogleAds (I cannot vouch for the success rate of this method but by the sheer amount of websites that use GoogleAds, it must be doing something right).

While you *can* put links in your forum signatures and create topics on GameMaker and independent gaming forums, it's generally been observed that it's not a big seller - perhaps due to the fact that most people see a commercial game sitting in the same space as a plentiful supply of free alternatives and would rather not drop the money. By all means do these two things as an extra source of buys, but do not rely solely on them if you're looking for a successful seller.

One other thing that's worth doing is observing the current market - what sort of games are selling like hotcakes, and can you capitalise off some of their ideas? (That is, use certain trends, not rip them off.) For example, there's currently a big market for games that give you a sandbox in which to create whatever you like, mainly thanks to the popularity of Minecraft. Games like Terraria are selling very well despite being heavily inspired by the 3D creation/survival game. Social gaming is also at an all-time high and is extremely popular at the moment, as are free-to-play MMORPGs. Both rely predominantly on in-game purchases for their profits, yet it works. People are enticed by the lack of an initial price tag, get suckered in and attached to their accounts, then decide to go with microtransactions which, for a few pounds/dollars, enhance their experience.

Once you feel ready and have the content, then go for it. Stick a price tag on it - try to make it reasonable or even lower than the game is felt to be worth - get it out, and publicise the crap out of it. While there are plenty of factors important to a game's success, you still have a lot of freedoms as an independent developer. If it doesn't see success, lower the price or even make it free. If it's not profitable but it is a good game, then if nothing else it'll pave the way for an improved second attempt.



# DARRELL FLOOD

AKA dadio: Artist, comedy game creator, active GMC member, fellow YoYo Games employee/flatmate

**Thank-you for accepting the interview, Darrell! Please introduce yourself.**

Hello, my name is Darrell, aka "dadio", and I'm a chocoholic. I'm from a long line of potato farmers originally from Ireland but I've spent over half of the last ten years in Japan (mostly Tokyo), checking out HAWT Japanese chicks and attending Tokyo Game Show religiously. I'm a retro games junkie and am big into animé and good films (not the crap that you tend to watch, lol).

**Pleasantville was fantastic! Anyway, what do you do as part of YoYo Games?**

Look busy while sleeping with my eyes open. Nah, actually I originally applied for a "GM Programmer" position, but my "official title" is "Artist". That doesn't really fit what I do tho, "Creative Guy" might be a better description. To date I haven't done so much art and have been mostly focused on game mechanic concepting and level layouting for They Need To Be Fed. More recently I've done concept and in-game art for the GraveMaker demo that's being shown at GDC Europe. I also spend a lot of time and effort each day ignoring what Jack [Oatley] has to say and making as much of a mess as possible on my desktop, lol.

**How did you get into software development?**

Well I studied 3D Animation at college and freelanced online for small start-ups for 10 years-ish, originally doing web stuff but settling into games pretty fast. Freelancing allowed me to hop around like a cabbage anywhere anytime I wanted, but chasing after late payments and no guaranteed regular income became tiring. During my freelancing I've worked on titles for PC, Mac, Xbox, Wii, iPhone & weird things like Pachinko & Video Bingo machines. I've fiddled with Flash, Unreal Engine, Unity and Dark Basic but GameMaker towers above those in terms of ease of use/speed to prototype in my opinion. I have a pile of half finished WIPs but haven't ever really "released" anything that I'd call my own.

**So how, when and why did you first get into GameMaker?**

I can't remember exactly when I got into GameMaker but I remember I was still on dial-up, so it wasn't yesterday, lol (10 years ago?). I was around on the old [GMC] boards, so I'm a GM "old timer". Think I've used it since at

least version 4. I guess the reason I started using it at all was because I had a massive addiction to games and just wanted to be able to create my own \*shrugs\*. If I wasn't such a lazy bum I'd have finished some of my own games and conquered the world by now...

**What games have you published currently, and which is your favourite?**

Published? For YoYo just recently, They Need To Be Fed. My own titles? Um, "Video Game Addict" on YoYo Games, I guess. Quite pathetic. I plan to address my serious lack of "own game output" at some point in the near future, I figure now's a fantastic time to do that because I have two crazy-code-ninjas, that'd be you and Jack, to work alongside to produce games that will bring the populace of the planet to their knees in awe and worship.

**Any particular reason for choosing Video Game Addict as your favourite own game/IP?**

Favourite? \*Looks up\* oh yeah right, I guess my favourite game is Video Game Addict um cos it's my only one, lol. Actually I do quite like how that turned out especially cos it was a GMC Jam game that was genuinely done entirely in the Jam timeframe. And it's deranged.

**You seem to specialise in artwork. How long have you been an artist?**

As long as I can remember. I've always loved art and always drawn/painted/made models. I used to self publish comics years ago doing everything by hand before I got into computers, but I love the flexibility/speed at which things can be changed/adjusted while doing things digitally. I hafta say tho that I do miss doing "proper" art (ie: finished stuff on paper/clay models) I really want to brush up my traditional skills sometime, I spend way too much time in front of a computer these days.

**What tools do you use for art?**

Paper, pencil, pen, Canon camera, PhotoShop, 3DStudioMax, whatever I need to. I do a lot of concept stuff on scraps of paper. Very unorganised, lol. Despite a lot of my stuff looking very "Flash-like" I don't like using Flash at all. Most of my finished work (even 2D stuff) is done in Max.

**How do you find doing art melds together with game creation?**

Well, art really sets the mood and style of a game, it gives it life. It's likely the first thing someone checking out the game will notice, so it's important. I think when making a game it's best to work with someone else or in a small team where each person has a particular strength, cos I find when trying to do my own projects that I get so tangled up wasting time on the code side that I lose interest. I kinda need someone else to deal with that side of things. Also, it's a lot better to have someone else to bounce ideas off.

**Are there any art tips you could give an average GameMaker user?**

Stick with it. GameMaker is going from strength to strength, lots of cool stuff coming. If you're a coder, work with an artist, if you're an artist, work with a coder. It's best to focus on your strengths rather than be a one man band.

**Anything else you'd like to say?**

\*Munches Wispa\* um I really like Wispa bars. Also, it's interesting living here in Dundee in this flat with you and Jack. Apart from when you try to jump out the window. Big change of pace from Tokyo, but it's pretty nice here. Working for YoYo is very cool. I've been a massive fan of GameMaker and YoYo Games for years so I'm very happy to be doing what I'm doing now.

**Thanks again for accepting this interview!**

Cheers, happy to do it. Stay tuned for the legendary "Ninjas Vs Smiley Cog", "Spud Zombies" & "Tentacled Brains From Mars Vs Sexy Schoolgirls". Now where's the stripper you promised?





# AIR HOCKEY UNLIMITED

Let's travel round the world, just you and me puck-knock game

There are plenty of types of game full of game modes, content and all-out fun. Platformers, action games, shooters, RPGs, hundreds of games in each are brilliant. Air hockey games are not that sort of game. At best they're a near-perfect simulation that just serve to make you want to play the real thing; at worst, they're a crap simulation in the same category. They're hindered even more from being great games on PC, with mice being too imprecise for the sheer speed and necessary reaction times for playing the game, and the general lack of multiple mice meaning you're usually against brain-dead AI.

Air Hockey Unlimited has other ideas. It does have some of the limitations other air hockey games have. It also has the bog-standard one-on-one mode, complete with AI difficulty tweaker and score-to-win modifier. This isn't where it shines, though. The game also features a Challenge Mode.

Challenge Mode is a set of 20 challenges split into four categories, Rival, Target, Hectic and Pick-Ups. While all very "air hockey", the challenges are all interesting, unique and fun.

"Rival" challenges are normal games with a twist. One sees you facing off against an illusionist. Every time he strikes the puck, it splits into three pucks - the genuine one, and two slightly lighter mirages. While they're not too difficult to tell apart, trying to determine within a quarter of a second which of the three pucks headed straight for your goal is the genuine one quickly turns tense. Another Rival challenge sees you against a skilled opponent that is 5-1 up, however his cockiness is resulting in his skill faltering, and it's up to you to make the perfect comeback.

"Target" challenges see you trying to, well, hit targets. These feature boards of bizarre shapes, time limits and targets you have to hit with precise, ricocheting shots. Although it's a premise that's been done before in other games, I've yet to see it in an air hockey environment. Other "Target" levels are about

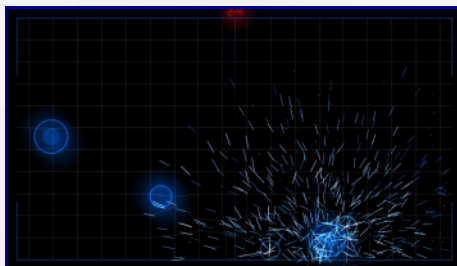
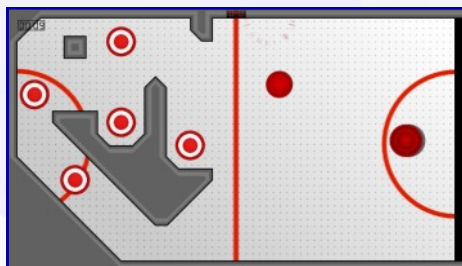
hitting all the targets in order - and not being able to use your bat after your initial hit. It's a little trial-and-error, as you attempt to find the perfect angle and timing (many of these levels feature moving walls that will either get right in your way, or allow you to bounce perfectly into things).

"Hectic" features score based minigames in things like "rallying" the puck, and having to keep an increasing number of gravity-affected pucks from entering your goal. And "Pick-Ups" adds powerful pickups to the standard-style gameplay, such as one that accelerates the puck straight towards the opponent's goal, usually resulting in points to you.

Thankfully (it'd be a shame to see the most original attempt at an air hockey game around to waste its potential), the game is built well. AI is well made, the engine itself is solid enough (rarely you'll get the puck stuck in things or to stop altogether), and perhaps most importantly it genuinely feels the same as a real-life air hockey table. You can even lift the bat off the table by holding down left click.

The game does have weaknesses though. The music doesn't fit the game in the slightest and, as far as I could find, there's no option to turn it off save for muting your computer's global volume (which isn't great since the game's SFX are, in contrast, quite nice). The graphics of the game are functional at best. And the menu system could do with a lot of improvement - it feels sluggish, the Challenge screen takes a little time to learn how to navigate, and the layout of things is also questionable.

But these are smaller faults in a game which is pretty darn fun to play, especially given its subject matter. It still just makes me want to play proper air hockey more than anything, but it's revived my interest in a genre full of games that are all carbon copies of one another. Good stuff, the Challenge mode is definitely worth a look.



## THE DETAILS

Developer: vertex67  
Release Date: 6th January 2011  
Genre: Arcade  
Suitability: All  
Reviewed By: Allison James

<http://goo.gl/ujpzI>

## THE FINAL SAY

### NECESSITIES

Gameplay: 22/30  
Graphics: 05/10  
Replayability: 07/10  
Originality: 07/10

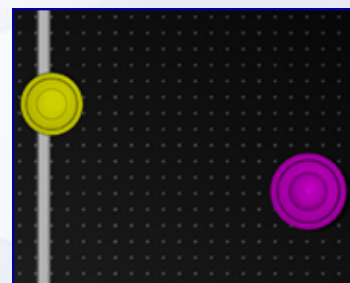
### OPTIONALS (4)

Aural: 03/10  
Challenge: XX/10  
Download Size: XX/10  
Execution: 09/10  
Longevity: 07/10  
Memorability: XX/10  
Message Success: XX/10  
Potential Reached: 09/10  
Retro: XX/10  
Sequel Improvement: XX/10

COMES TO A TOTAL OF

# 69

A refreshing take on a tired genre, it's a shame it didn't get just a bit more love





# IN A DUNGEON

Perhaps the only videogame dungeon ever not teeming with hostile creatures

While games with original concepts can be new, entertaining experiences, you don't always have to break the mould to be fun. In *In A Dungeon*, by Alexis Andújar, is just that - a clichéd concept done very well.

*In A Dungeon* is an oblique projection "maze adventure", in which you're presented with a number of interlocking rooms. Each contains a coin, collect the coins from every room to complete the game. Some paths are blocked off until you collect the correct coin. Rooms contain moving platforms, walls, and holes in the floor as obstacles for making your collection challenging. Slightly rarer to this kind of game, you can also jump, giving the whole game a quasi-3D look.

Because of how simple the game looks, the precision jumping puzzles the game holds are just that - precise. The game feels tactile; mistakes that feel like its own fault (rather than the player's) are rare. Its level design in general is also very well done, taking the few different objects it has and turning them into a set of freeform levels with a pleasing amount of variety.

Due to the fact levels are connected in a grid-like design, with the game allowing you to go pretty much any path on your collection quest, the difficulty curve is high on non-existent, though levels seem to get harder the further from the initial room you are (which makes sense). Having said that, none of the levels in the game are particularly difficult or easy - on the best of days you'll run into a room, nab the coin with minimal fuss and run straight out. On the worst, you may die 10 times (deaths just reset the room).

To prevent situations where you're looking for the room with the last coin, the central hub has a pleasant little plaque on the floor which shows the room layouts in a simple form, each containing the coin you've collected from that room if you've done so (or an empty

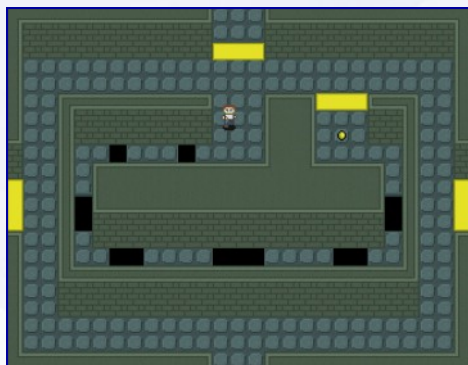
slot if you haven't). While handy, you have to find the hub to use it - with no minimap or access to anything like that in any other room, if you've been through multiple rooms, that's harder than it sounds!

The game is simplistic in looks (understandable given it was an entry into a competition with a "Minimal" theme), but is clean and crisp, with a well-created pixelated look. The menus aren't as nice, though, and yellow walls in-game, with their single solid colour and lack of oblique depth other walls have, are a little out of place. They don't detract from the general experience, though they may have enhanced it aesthetically had it been improved.

There's no music in-game, perhaps a good decision. I couldn't think of any style of music that would make the game any better without diminishing its atmosphere. Ambience, however, would have been nice. The game does offer some very SFXR-ish sound effects that are scarce, but just about work (though the jump sound is a bit too shrill).

At the end of the game you just run onto the area where all the coins are shown, you get a small cutscene I won't spoil, and the game finishes.

*In A Dungeon* is a short experience, but a very pleasant one nevertheless. Around 10-15 minutes of raw fun gameplay that will most likely make you wish it was a full-length game - even if it was just more of the same stuff. There's a lot of ways the game could go, but for now, it's a bit of free entertainment that's easily recommended.



## THE DETAILS

Developer: Alexis Andújar  
Release Date: 8th November 2009  
Genre: Adventure  
Suitability: All  
Reviewed By: Allison James

<http://goo.gl/gPfMA>

## THE FINAL SAY

### NECESSITIES

Gameplay: 26/30  
Graphics: 09/10  
Replayability: 08/10  
Originality: 03/10

### OPTIONALS (4)

Aural: XX/10  
Challenge: 07/10  
Download Size: XX/10  
Execution: 09/10  
Longevity: XX/10  
Memorability: 09/10  
Message Success: XX/10  
Potential Reached: XX/10  
Retro: 09/10  
Sequel Improvement: XX/10

COMES TO A TOTAL OF

# 80

Leaving you wanting more, *In A Dungeon* is a well-made, fun, simplistic adventure game



# HIGHWAY RACER

## Can style prevail over substance?

There's a genuine disappointment experienced every time you play something that has clearly been given a heck of a lot of love, but in the gameplay department fails to deliver any real level of fun. Unfortunately, Highway Racer is one such instance.

The game features some very nice graphics, which for a GameMaker game could even be considered fairly realistic. It is wrapped up very nicely with a smooth and easy-to-use UI, a simple star system for grading your performance on levels, and in general an air of professionalism.

But the game itself is as stale as old bread. It's identical to the (old?) GameMaker example game "Street Racer". For the benefit of those unfamiliar, your car moves forwards along a completely straight road (with no turnoffs, scarily). You can move left and right to avoid traffic in both directions.

That's pretty much the entire game. The only other gameplay element is the ability to temporarily slow down time. While this creates a pleasing slowdown/speedup effect on the background music, to slow down a game that's already pretty slow-paced isn't much fun either.

The game features six levels. However, all of these levels are the same, identical road. The only changes between levels are the density of traffic and the model of car you drive. Level 1 sees you driving a SMART car; later levels give you faster vehicles to drive.

Your car also has a damage counter. Colliding with a car takes off around 10% (you seem to start at 50%, even though I couldn't find anything that improves that figure, and there was no option to start at 100%). Butting into the wall at either side of the road generally removes 1%. Hit 0% and your car flies in the air and you get a lovely big Game Over. Colliding with other cars makes them do the same motion, which is amusing in the same way as crashing in games like the Burnout series.



I'd have loved to have seen a mode in which you must deliberately crash into other cars, given it's the funnest aspect of the entire game. Infact, I'd love to have seen a lot of other modes. There's a lot of ways the game could have gone—crash modes, arcade-based point collection (through attacking enemies/other cars, or pickups)... heck, pickups in any mode. It's these offshoot thoughts that go to highlight the wasted potential of Highway Racer, a game that doesn't even contain racing!

One of the upsides of the game is the audio. While there are no sound effects as far as I could hear, the built-in music track is very jolly and actually made me want to keep playing for a few extra minutes. Another audio upside is the ability to load any MP3 or OGG you want into the game, though unfortunately this has no effect on the game other than what pleases your ears as you play the game.

In all, it's definitely a game with a long way to go. Were it an alpha of a game to come, I'd be scouting its progress like a hawk. Such a simple premise can be taken in any of numerous directions and be turned into a piece of brilliance.

But as it stands, Highway Racer is a great-looking, good-feeling game that simply lacks the fun factor. It's too simple, it's too monotone. By all means give it a play and see what you think, but by the end of your session, your head will probably just be full of ideas for what the game could have done, but didn't manage.



## THE DETAILS

Developer: Bodhi Donselaar  
Release Date: 2nd June 2011  
Genre: Driving  
Suitability: All  
Reviewed By: Allison James

<http://goo.gl/wZ4pr>

## THE FINAL SAY

### NECESSITIES

Gameplay: 07/30  
Graphics: 08/10  
Replayability: 04/10  
Originality: 04/10

### OPTIONALS (4)

Aural: 08/10  
Challenge: 07/10  
Download Size: XX/10  
Execution: 07/10  
Longevity: 04/10  
Memorability: XX/10  
Message Success: XX/10  
Potential Reached: XX/10  
Retro: XX/10  
Sequel Improvement: XX/10

COMES TO A TOTAL OF

# 49

Made very well but lacking any real fun, Highway Racer feels like wasted potential





# THE LITTLE CARS IN THE BIG RACE

Oh shovelware, you so funny

I've always figured that a magazine should not exclusively review decent and better games. It gives ratings no relativity, completely killing any reason to have anything under 50% / 5/10 / 3 stars / whatever. At the same time, when it comes to GameMaker games, it always seems cruel to take a game made perhaps by a pre-teenager and completely maul it.

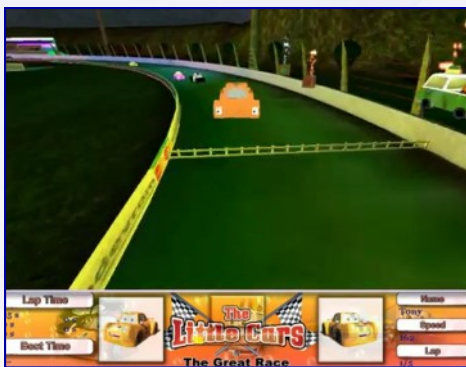
The Little Cars in The Big Race poses no such problem. Made by a small-time but nevertheless professional game company, based off a set of short films that rips every single one of its ideas from Disney Pixar's "Cars", and with more faults than Tim Henman's entire tennis career, it's the perfect game to fill in the "bad" void.

Oh, did I say "bad"? I meant "dire".

So, The Little Cars is a Brazillian knock-off of Cars—the eyes as windshields and mouths as radiators, the racing themes, everything. It's made by a production company, Video Brinquedo, that creates low-budget ripoffs of a plethora of popular animated films—the CGI version of "The Asylum".

Following in the low-budget category, The Little Cars in The Big Race is a very-low-budget shovelware racing game. Made in GameMaker, a rarity itself among commercial games, it is a simple racing game. With jumping. Broken, broken jumping.

You start the game with a quick FMV title intro straight out of Windows Movie Maker, then a basic menu with some GameMaker-default graphical effects (I will point out where GameMaker "trademarks" are seen in game because, in general, they're very unprofessional for a boxed, commercial game). You can choose one of six characters from the film the game is based off, then after a nonsense loader the game begins after a film clip of a race commencing.



The track, like NASCAR and of course Cars, the Pixar film The Little Cars borrows so heavily from, is a large oval. However, unlike either of the films, NASCAR, or anything else ever, there are hurdles on the track. If you hit Alt at the right position and speed you jump over them, otherwise they spring you back, killing your acceleration. Make this mistake once and the AI cars (which just follow a preset path, and hit every jump without fail) cannot be caught up.

The biggest problem with jumping is that the game contains no help file. Alt is hardly the most obvious jump key in the world, either. So the first time you play, you're pretty much boned. You go straight to restart the level...

...then you hit the second biggest problem. Whether you give up, or actually decide to hack three tedious laps of the oval, hurdle-laden circuit, you get thrown out of the game. It literally closes itself, meaning to retry you have to go through the long, randomised-length loader and all the other crap again.

The game also adds powerups, which do very little. Speedup and slowdown crates do exactly that (though nothing like a smooth nitrous boost—the game immediately tweaks the car's speed, creating a nasty jerking effect). A third powerup with similar graphics to the first two has absolutely no affect on anything. Then a fourth, which bears no resemblance to the first three, instead just looking like a little pink cube, stops you dead.

I could mention the randomised, nonsensical commentary (audio clips from the film played in no order), the bizarre country music, the grindingly bad SFX, the horrendous controls, the diabolical graphics, or the fact they added an installer to this trash to salt its gaping wounds, but it's a waste of breath. The Little Cars in The Big Race is, above all, a bad game. I can only hope the next boxed GM game fares better. It can't be worse.



## THE DETAILS

Developer: Video Brinquedo  
Release Date: 2009  
Genre: Racing  
Suitability: All  
Reviewed By: Allison James

No Digital Distribution

## THE FINAL SAY

### NECESSITIES

Gameplay: 01/30  
Graphics: 01/10  
Replayability: 00/10  
Originality: 01/10

### OPTIONALS (4)

Aural: XX/10  
Challenge: 00/10  
Download Size: XX/10  
Execution: 00/10  
Longevity: 00/10  
Memorability: 01/10  
Message Success: XX/10  
Potential Reached: XX/10  
Retro: XX/10  
Sequel Improvement: XX/10

COMES TO A TOTAL OF

# 4

Making bad games seem good, its only redeeming feature is the comedy factor





# NAME THAT KNOCK-OFF

Win a prize! A physical goddamned prize! ...oh wait, it's balls. But still!

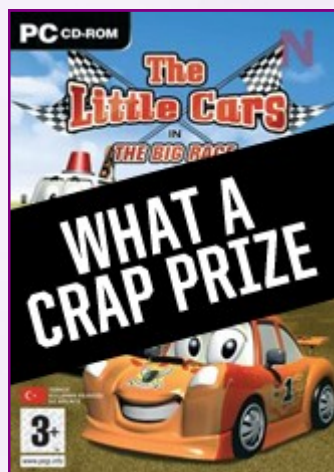
This issue contains a review of a game called *The Little Cars in The Big Race*. If you've not read it, you won't know that I essentially tore it to pieces. It totally deserves it. But guess what? Today, I managed to get hold of some more wrapped copies of the game—three copies for £1. Not bad for an amusing novelty.

Long story short, anyone that completes this puzzle between the day this magazine issue is released and a month directly after will be put into a draw. The person that comes out of this draw will receive a wrapped copy of hilariously pathetic *The Little Cars in The Big Race* as a prize!

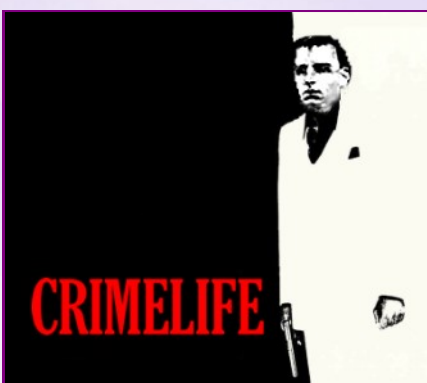
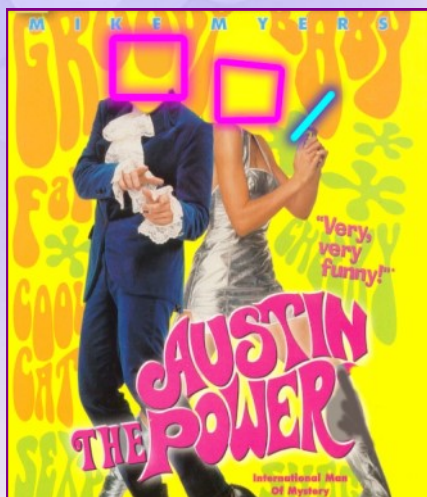
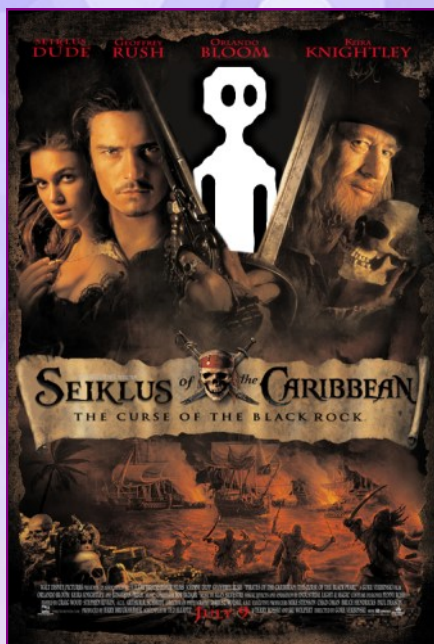
Simply PM your answers to me (NAL) on GMC or YoYo Games, or email them to [nal@nalgames.com](mailto:nal@nalgames.com). Make the subject for whatever "Rekame Competition 4 Answer" and the body text the answer, along with your name and address (since the prize is a physical item). No restrictions to where you live; if it's got an address, I'll post the game to it. Your entry will not be counted if you cannot provide an address, for security or whatever other reason (but let it be noted, I'm not going to give any spammy bastards the address, and if you like, I can delete the address as soon as it's noted and added to the shuffler).

So what do you have to do for this puzzle? It's simple! Presumably with the help of the wonderful internets, all you have to do is name each of the screenshotted Video Brinquedo films, ALONG with the names of the films they've knocked off. So that's two film names for each screenshot—the knock-off's name, and the original film's name. 12 film names in total.

Good luck to all entrants!







RekameMag, Issue 4 of 1

Content written by Allison James bar:

- Interview answers—Darrell Flood

Graphics compiled by Allison James bar:

- Backgrounds sourced (royalty-free) by <http://www.dezignus.com>
- Fonts from the "United" family (United Sans, United Serif)
- (Edited) cover screenshot: See cover

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Software used in the creation of this magazine: Adobe Fireworks CS5, GameMaker 8.1, Microsoft Office Publisher 2010, Microsoft Office Word 2010, Microsoft Paint, novaPDF

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The last last word: "Overbyte"  
*I totally invented the Overbyte mascot*