

DEADWOOD



I HATE THIS PLACE

JANUSZ TARCZYKOWSKI ON ADAPTING THE
IMAGE COMIC FOR A BRAND NEW CROWD



#13

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I Hate This Place

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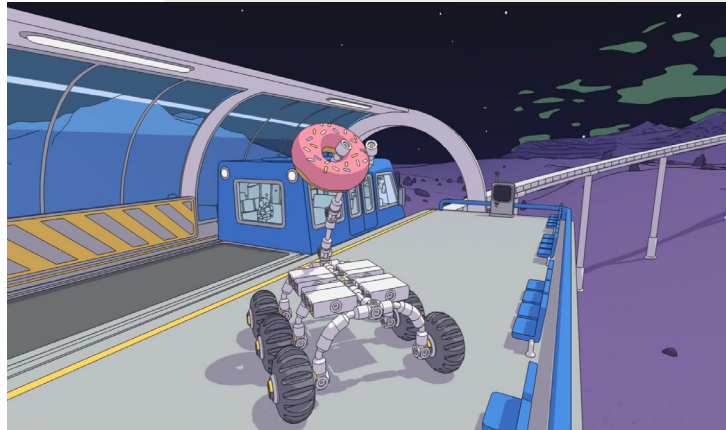
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HATE

This is Elena, the protagonist of this particular gaming adventure. She's packing weapons and the best snarl since Clint Eastwood, so is probably the perfect person for the job.



THIS PLACE

Vince Pavey checks in with Rock Square Thunder's CEO, Janusz Tarczykowski, to ask him all about turning Image Comics' *I Hate This Place* into a spooky video game.

road trip

When we're stuck indoors for too long then we get decidedly cranky, so thankfully there are regular gaming events we can attend. From packed showcases, to industry conferences and sweaty game jams. We'll go, take pictures and report back.

This time: PLAY Expo, AdventureX, GGDF

What: PLAY Expo

Where: Blackpool, UK

When: 4th to 5th October 2025

What is it? This is very much a retro-focused show, but the small indie corner is what we are really here for. A cosy patch carved out for smaller teams, a place where retro meets now. **Debug** friends Lowtek Games were there with *Flea! 2*, and just across the aisle a first look at *Necro Nancy* drew a curious crowd. Other highlights included Charles Cecil and Tony Warriner sharing stories from the early days of Revolution Software, echoing memories we explored in **Debug #5**. The atmosphere was shaped less by nostalgia than by an active interest in how older formats continue to be worth your time.

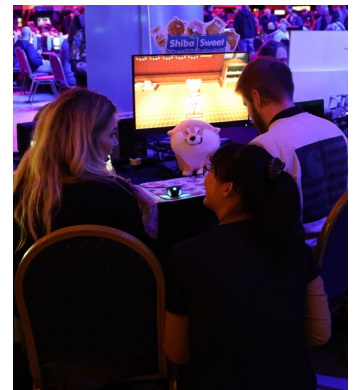


Photo credits: PLAY Expo - Daniel Crocker // GGDF - Dann Sullivan // AdventureX - Nick Crocker



What: Good Game Dev Fest

Where: London, UK

When: 29th November 2025

What is it? This one-day UK games industry gathering held at Goldsmiths, University of London, blends talks with a curated showcase of independent games and interactive installations. As sponsors, we spent the day meeting readers and chatting with a broad range of indie teams from emerging studios to solo creators. With food and drink available throughout and even live chamber arrangements of video game music on the programme, the event offered both insight and community engagement at every turn. It also happened to fall on Editor Daniel's birthday. GGDF is definitely a treat!



Games Editor Nick and *The Dark Room's* John Robertson bring the teeth (and the metal) to proceedings



What: AdventureX

Where: London, UK

When: 22nd to 23rd November 2025

What is it? A narrative focused convention held in the heart of London, and true to its reputation, it was overflowing with story driven ambition. Hosted at the British Library, this annual showcase brings together writers, narrative designers, and developers who care deeply about characters, choice, and consequence. It offers a calmer setting where projects can breathe and conversations go further.

From interactive fiction and point and click revivals to branching visual novels and experimental text adventures, the range on display was consistently engaging. We played demos that surprised us with economical storytelling, and encountered teams treating narrative as a playground rather than a constraint. Crucially, it was easy to speak directly with creators, who frequently discussed pipelines, localisation challenges, and how they test player agency in practice.

In a busy calendar, this is an event which stands out. AdventureX continues to prove that story first development has a loyal, growing audience.



Debug's Rowan Cameron



Alasdair Beckett-King



Woodfired Pizza



Organiser Tom Handwidge



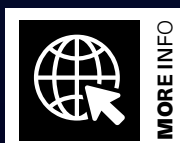
SPOTTED IN THE WILD

GHOST HAUNTING

DEVELOPER THREE HEADED MONKEY STUDIOS

PUBLISHER DAEDALIC ENTERTAINMENT

We spotted *Ghost Haunting* tucked between demos at the show, a traditional point and click adventure rendered in confident pixel art. It follows Gigi, an eight year old who discovers her grumpy grandfather is secretly a ghost hunter, then decides she can rescue her grandmother from the afterlife with help from a pumpkin demon called Baron Butternut. Surprisingly the tone leans witty rather than wacky, and the world is packed with oddball characters.





BOUND FOR GREATNESS?

BALD SPACE CHICKENS? WELCOME TO VOIDLING BOUND

What we have here is a fresh sci-fi twist on the monster-collecting genre, blending elements of *Spore* with classic creature-taming, and well-crafted shooter combat. Created by former *Skylanders* developers, their signature imagination for weird little guys shines through.

You play as the mysterious helmeted 'Wrangler', by name and title, a member of a scientific space expedition with a gaseous visor who relies on alien wildlife, called Voidlings, to restore ecosystems and push back the Lesion, a plague-like sentient infection spreading void tumours across the galaxy and causing entire species to disappear. Because the ecosystems are fragile, you don't intervene directly. Instead, you collect, breed and study Voidlings. Through neural-linking, you become Voidling bound, taking direct control of them on missions that mix melee combat, ranged abilities and elemental powers. Each species has

strengths you can enhance through research and elemental mutagens.

“ Voidling Bound offers a creative take on the monster-collecting genre. ”

Missions range from wave-based encounters to more runs, often ending in flashy boss battles. The first biome – a lush, green, cliff-filled landscape – introduces the Kwipeck, a weird bald chicken-like creature with fleshy sacks, that becomes your first

INFO

Developer
Hatchery Games

Publisher
Hatchery Games

On
PC (Consoles announced)

Demo
Yes

Released
Q1 2026

companion. Finding Voidling eggs feels like cracking open a big-gooey alien gachapon capsule, with rarer eggs offering extra trait points across stats like strength, agility and essence. Even early on, variety is clear – the Kwipeck excel at rapid ranged attacks and agile repositioning, while the Gilicks, sturdy lizard-like creatures, play more like big bulldozing bulldogs, using heavy leaps, powerful melee strikes and molten mouth blasts to decimate enemies. Missions also feature elemental typings, making team selection an important consideration and encouraging experimentation with multiple typings.

Getting your first Voidling feels genuinely exciting. As you progress, you can evolve companions and branch into multiple evolution paths, or enhance skill trees via cerebrum upgrades.

With varied builds, distinctive aesthetic evolutions, and a roster of strange, expressive creatures to discover, *Voidling Bound* offers a creative, ambitious take on the monster-collecting genre. **▣**

Q&A FREDERICK GAGNON

We catch up with Frederick Gagnon, executive producer on *Voidling Bound*, to discuss the game's development journey. Frederick talks through the ideas shaping the game's creatures, worlds and systems.



How did *Skylanders* shape your approach to designing Voidlings and the game's world?

Working on *Skylanders* taught us how important it is for characters to be fun to control and tied closely to gameplay. With *Voidling Bound*, we took those lessons in a very different direction. We moved from fantasy into sci-fi and leaned into speculative evolution and biological experimentation.

Every Voidling has its own playstyle, and every evolution asks the player to make choices that can change how that creature fights. Some feel familiar at first, like your DPS, tanks or assassins, but many quickly go into territory you haven't seen before.

The structure of the game has some similarities to *Skylanders*, with combat-driven exploration, light puzzles and a hub where you return to upgrade your characters, but the way you collect creatures is entirely different.

What considerations go into balancing 'cute' and 'threatening' traits in Voidlings, particularly for combat encounters?

Each Voidling has its own personality. We wanted them to feel approachable without ever feeling harmless.

Some Voidlings are deceptively cute until they unleash devastating abilities, while others look intimidating but reveal surprising depth once you start mastering their playstyle. This balance helps players form attachments and experiment with different ways to fight.

With breeding, mutagens, and evolutions, how deep can players go when creating the ultimate min-maxed Voidling?

We want players to push the game to its limits. End-game Voidlings are nothing like what they started as, and that transformation is part of the fantasy.

Through evolution, breeding and gene splicing, players can discover synergies that change stats and abilities. Once you start combining genes, it's

easy to lose hours experimenting with new builds, hunting for dual natures and getting every last advantage.

There's also the visual side. Mixing genes across species creates massive visual variety, so your strongest Voidling also looks unique. By the end, you're not just building a powerful creature, you're crafting your perfect specimen.

In what ways do biomes shape gameplay, and have worlds ever inspired new Voidlings or abilities?

World and creature design go hand-in-hand in *Voidling Bound*. Biomes don't just change how the game looks, they change how it plays.

Each planet defines the flow of its levels and which abilities shine there. Jungle biomes favour smooth traversal with ramps and flowing paths, while frozen and volcanic worlds introduce harsher terrain that demands more precise movement and positioning. These differences change how combat and exploration feel from planet to planet.

Are there philosophical or ecological ideas behind the Lesion and its impact on ecosystems?

We really wanted to explore the idea of nature in constant adaptation. We asked ourselves how life might respond to an existential threat, and what happens when evolution alone can't keep up.

The Lesion is a shapeless parasite that adapts so quickly it pushes ecosystems to their breaking point. Humans and technology step in not to dominate nature, but to help unlock the evolutionary potential of the Voidlings.

As a Space Wrangler, you experience this first-hand. You experiment, refine, and discard what doesn't work while creating creatures capable of surviving the Abyss. As you reclaim worlds from the Lesion, you also restore them.

At its core, the game carries a message of hope. Survival isn't about destruction, it's about working with nature. Only by cooperating with it can we endure. □

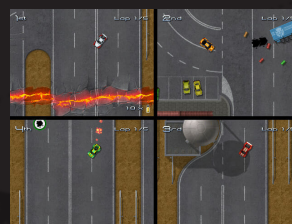
BACK CATALOGUE

Skylanders – Hatchery Games makes its debut with a game from former *Skylanders* talent, blending years of experience in inventive, playful monster design into a fresh sci-fi setting.

Who says Smoking is bad for you?



AVAILABLE NOW FOR STEAM AND DREAMCAST



RUSH RUSH RALLY RELOADED

rushrush.co.uk

Senile
TEAM

WAVE

Marc Jowett brings us a whole load of **new stuff** to play on **old stuff**



Aethos

Developer RBG ENTERTAINMENT **Publisher** RBG ENTERTAINMENT
Retro NES **Modern** ITCH.IO **Released** TBC

Aethos is a true 8-bit sci-fi metroidvania where players take control of Kyra, an advanced autonomous AI explorer sent to investigate the distant world of Aethos, humanity's last hope for survival. After a catastrophic energy surge cripples her orbiting vessel, Elysium, Kyra must descend to the planet below and uncover the truth behind its ancient secrets.

The game will feature a vast alien world to explore, as well as a deep upgrade system. There will also be eight unique boss battles, but RBG's Jon Alloggio is keen to point out that the bosses don't simply repeat, and each one will have an evolving strategy to overcome.

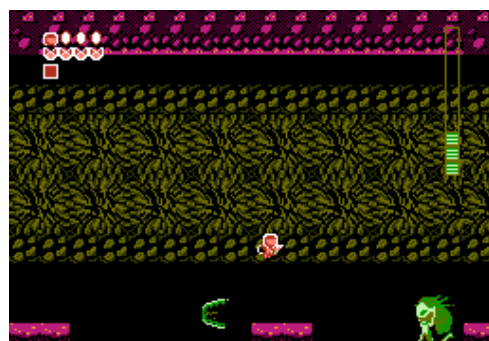
"Some bosses can poison you, and some can desync the player, which causes limited mobility for a brief time. Some can collapse the floor, some can spawn minions. In a way, it's a very *Mega Man*-like boss system."

The battle system for Kyra revolves around a basic move set of jumping and shooting, and

an energy skill set for special moves. By finding a material called Pulse Ore, Kyra can convert this to energy to harness special moves, such as teleporting and flying, and unleashing mega shots. Run out of energy, and it's back to the basic moveset, which doesn't pack that much of a punch against normal enemies, let alone the boss battles, so strategy will definitely be needed here.

Aethos will also immerse us with a superb and very atmospheric soundtrack. Apparently it's also won some award or other, so it's obviously going to be amazing, right?

The current plan is for *Aethos* to make its way to Kickstarter in February. There is currently a demo available to play at <https://retrobrogaming.itch.io/aethos>. The demo shows off a chunk of what is to come from the game, and if the rest of the game is as good, *Aethos* could be a NES frontrunner in 2026.



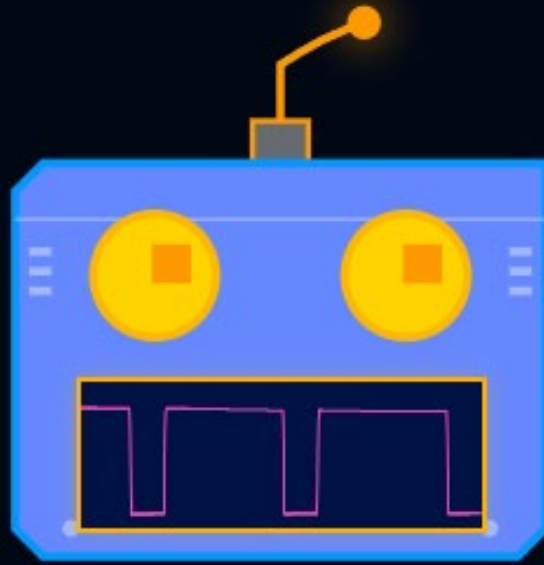
TALK TO TRN5-FORM's creator, Irskep, got the idea for the programme when they were listening to a *Star Wars* audiobook.

GAME

PROCJAM

JAMS

BY JUPITER HADLEY



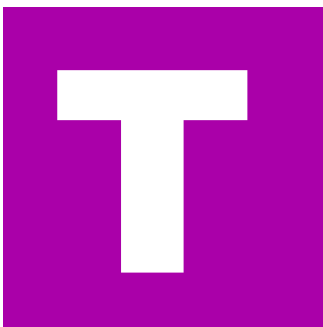
49%

MAKE WITH THE BEEP BOOPS

REPLAY

DOWNLOAD

TALK TO TRN5-FORMR



The ProcJam Procedural Generation Jam is a little different from your average game jam. Instead of being completely focused on games, developers are challenged to 'make something that makes something'. This can be a tool, a little name generator, a dungeon creator or a game.

debug

There are plenty of games submitted each year, and the jam itself has a community of people who have all been creating procedurally generated stuff for quite some time now.

The very first ProcJam happened back in 2014. It's been going each year since – at one point having a series of talks, tools and even a zine that was released alongside the jam itself.

This jam brought together a bunch of knowledge on procedural generation. The actual time period is more relaxed for this jam, allowing people to start before the official start and even end after the official finish. This year, the entries were more tool heavy than games heavy, with a bunch of toys and interactive things thrown in. The theme was

very fitting for this time of year, being *Cold Places*, and in this feature I'm going to run through a few of my favourite entries...

LAST VOYAGE OF THE TARTARUS

Last Voyage of the Tartarus is a narrative-driven adventure game where you control a little ship floating on the ocean. You are the captain of said ship and need to guide the Tartarus to the farthest Northern reaches of the polar Ocean. The map itself is procedurally generated, so there's a lot to see within it. Every few moves you also get a new captain's log. Some of these logs have to do with the areas that you can see on the map, while others will update you on your crew, the food that you have left, and how you are generally feeling as a

"THE VERY FIRST PROCJAM HAPPENED BACK IN 2014."



A LOT OF ASSEMBLY REQUIRED IN MARS FIRST LOGISTICS

Anyone who grew up with classic 90s LEGO Technic sets, back when everything was long beams full of holes, will instantly recognise the vibe here. This feels exactly like the Technic-branded video game you always imagined, wrapped in a dusty red sci-fi setting.

From the moment the title music kicks in, sounding like an upbeat episode of *How It's Made*, you know what you're signing up for: machines, efficiency, and the quiet expectation you have the IQ of an engineering college professor.

You start with a tiny dune buggy built from simple, chunky base-cube components that look suspiciously like the 'math cubes' you had in primary school; instantly nostalgic, fun, and a clear sign that building is the core mechanic.

The world is mostly barren, which is where you come in, running logistics (glorified fetch quests) to expand a scientific foothold by setting up signal towers and moving vital supplies: crates, food rations, **massive doughnuts [1]**, giant trophies, and apparently... a giant beach ball. Perfectly normal, mission-critical cargo. This is not a simple 'put it in the van and drive' situation, though... logistics, it turns out, is a synonym for headaches and suffering.

Very quickly, your simple buggy proves unfit for purpose. Enter Blueprint Mode: a beautifully clean editor that **looks exactly like a LEGO instruction manual [2]**. Unlock parts steadily: blocks, wheels, springs, hydraulics, grabbers, and suddenly you're less a driver and more a hyperfixated Martian engineer who's found a new obsession.

Blueprints give you a starting point, but your base plans aren't going to be perfect for every

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Besiege

A physics-based building game where you design siege machines to complete objectives.

INFO

Developer
Shape Shop

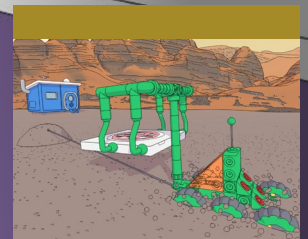
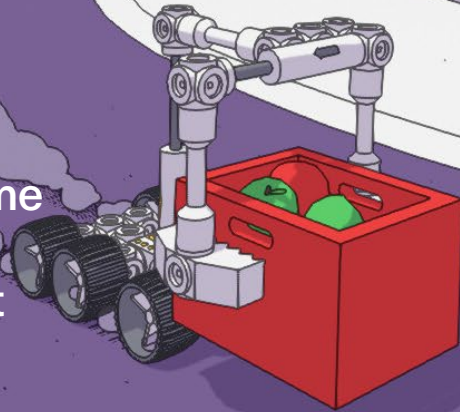
Publisher
Shape Shop,
Outersloth

Price
£15.99

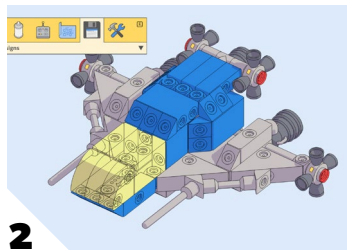
Released
Out now

On
PC

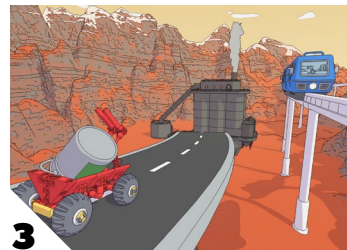
“ I won't lie, this game is frustrating, but frustration doesn't cancel out fun! ”



1



2



3

situation. Rover flips? Reinforce the roll cage. Grabber too narrow? Build an extension. Cargo too high? Congratulations, you've invented a terrible new tool whose only job is to poke things until they fall over. Over time, this leads to increasingly convoluted contraptions like THE TALLBOY, THE ROTATOR, and THE PINCHER, all held together by thinly veiled hope. Fortunately, most objects don't mind being dragged face-first through Martian dirt, as my solutions were rarely 'handle with care', bordering on an EVRI postal service simulator.

There's more to consider than just the cargo: balance, resources, and functionality all matter. Terrain can be especially tricky; this is Mars after all, not the local beach, and yet that damn beach ball keeps reminding you otherwise.

I won't lie, this game is frustrating, but frustration

doesn't cancel out fun! Embrace the acid-inducing anxiety as that massive beach ball you've been pushing around for ages teeters on the edge of a cliff for the third time, daring you to scoop it up once again.

And yet, the vibes remain immaculate. Respawn is painless, the building tools are clean and expressive, and watching your rig rebuild itself with clackity, plastic-sounding perfection is deeply satisfying. Big-brain engineers and creative chaos gremlins will both feel at home. Later on, things scale up: bigger rigs, miners, propulsion engines, roads, **and even trams** [3], turning scrappy problem solving into an impressive logistics network if you're clever enough (spoiler: I'm not). □



Nick Crocker

SANDBOX PLANET

Beyond deliveries, *Mars First Logistics* really shines when players set their own challenges, whether that's surgical-precision builds aimed at maximum efficiency, or more freeform, creative experiments. Give those same tools to the wider community, though, and chaos quickly follows: flying squids, Star Wars Podracers, Wild West-style mechanical spiders, even a fully functional Rick-rolling music box.

That creative sandbox is what excites me most, and where I see myself spending hours. Whether you're a big-IQ engineer or a chaotic tinkerer, imagination is always rewarded here.

Trailmakers

Build vehicles and machines from modular parts, then pilot them across land, sea, and sky.

Kerbal Space Program

A beloved engineering sandbox focused on building spacecraft.



THE BACK CATALOGUE

Shape Shop founder Ian MacLarty has worked on titles like *Dissembler*, a minimalist puzzler where you flip and rotate tiles to solve clever, calming patterns.



*Cats, pandas, monkeys...
together at last.*



*Want to see Astro
Burn in action?
Scan the QR code.*

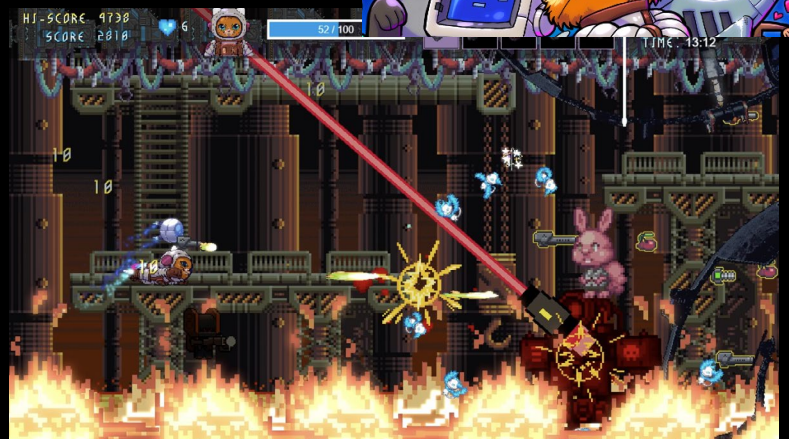


ASTRO BURN

Smoother than a softly lit jazz club.



So far so ruddy good.



*You had us at
'cats with jetpacs'.*

Game Dev Diary

QUICK INTRODUCTION

I'm HaZ Dulull, an indie developer currently making my first game, which is a wild pivot after years of directing cinematics for games like *Dune: Awakening*, building *Fortnite* experiences, and directing feature films on Netflix as well as TV shows for Disney+. So why take on the challenge of creating a game from scratch in just 12 months? Have I lost the plot? Or is this a very intentional, deeply personal mission?

THE MISSION

When I decided to make my first game as an indie developer, I wanted to reconnect with my happy gaming memories from the '90s, and bring that feeling back. I didn't want to spend three or four years in development. I wanted to go from concept to release in 12 months. That meant one thing: locking down the scope, and that decision shaped everything that followed.

SHMUP!

Oh, one more important thing... I was learning how to code at the same time as making this game. After weighing up whether to use Unreal Engine or Unity, I went with a simpler engine: GDevelop. It allowed me to focus on gameplay rather than getting lost in heavy technical stuff.

The first thing I built was simple: moving a sprite in all directions with a controller and firing a projectile. From there, things started to click quickly. As I figured out how to create systems for enemies, a scoring system, parallax scrolling backgrounds and foregrounds, and (of course) a leaderboard complete with the obligatory three-letter player initials.

EARLY PLAYTESTING

As a self-financed indie, I knew early playtesting was essential. I took early builds to game conferences and set up online playtests via Firstlook.gg, connecting Steam and Discord to gather feedback quickly.

One theme kept surfacing: players connected with the space cat pilot and wanted more of her. Some influencers even said they clicked *because* of the cat, but were surprised to find a very traditional shmup underneath.

So was I building for a niche shmup audience, or could the game evolve into something broader without losing its soul?

CATS AND CUTE-EM-UPS

Whenever I hit a creative block, I head to my retro shelf, fire up the CRT, and boot the SNES. Two Konami cartridges always call to me: *Pop'n TwinBee* and *Parodius*. Classic shmup mechanics wrapped in unapologetic, cute

chaos. I love them. And it makes me wonder if they were ahead of their time, and maybe the genre I should be building in wasn't just shmups, but cute-'em-ups, something that fits perfectly with today's meme culture.

The problem? I was already halfway through a 12-month schedule, had done Steam Next Fest, and kicked off PR. I genuinely didn't know if I was onto something, or completely losing the plot.

So I tested it. I posted a single screenshot: a panda riding a mech boss, with a brighter, more colourful space backdrop. The reaction was instant – people loved how ridiculous it looked. Then I swapped the player ship for Astro the cat in a jetpack. The response was even stronger.

Gamers who'd been lukewarm on the early trailer and demo suddenly said things like: "Okay, this looks nuts. I'd play this."

That's when it clicked that this is what the game was always meant to be. The audience had spoken and now it was on me to deliver. I fully leaned into the playful, unhinged side of game design and embraced the chaos, transforming *Astro Burn* into a full-on cute-'em-up.

The brilliant artist Q Yoneda refreshed the visuals with a strong '90s Konami vibe. At the same time, Venice Bleach amped up the soundtrack, blending '90s drum & bass, funky textures and a few well-placed meows

OLD-SCHOOL TO SOLVE TECHNICAL PROBLEMS

When I heard that Steam's refund policy is based on two hours of gameplay within 14 days for automatic refunds, that completely freaked me out. My knee-jerk reaction was to extend the levels for longer gameplay time.

Big mistake.

The longer stages hurt the pacing and, more critically, caused frame-rate issues. Bullet hell means thousands of collidable objects, and even after every optimisation trick – such as culling off-screen bullets and explosions, and compressing PNGs – I still found the game slowing down badly past the halfway point. Then I played an earlier build and it ran perfectly from start to finish, so the pattern was obvious: short levels, lots of them. In GDevelop, each new level load clears the memory anyway. Problem solved.

COMING NEXT

In the next chapter of the dev diary, I'll dive further behind the scenes, including plans for a physical release, and why thinking beyond the Steam ecosystem (such as a web-based version of *Astro Burn*) is key to growing the audience without relying solely on wishlists.

HaZ

debug

WE'VE GOT YOU COVERED

BACK ISSUES

Think you missed an issue? Yeah, not on our watch. We've got everything from the scrappy debut that smelt of fresh ink and chaos to the latest 116-page beast. No bidding wars, no dusty racks, no collector's guilt. Just pure, uncut **Debug**. Order your missing fix, complete the set, and pretend you've been here since day one



#03 Headbangers



#04 Snuffkin



#05 Broken Sword



#06 Blue Prince



#07 Mewgenics



#08 OFF



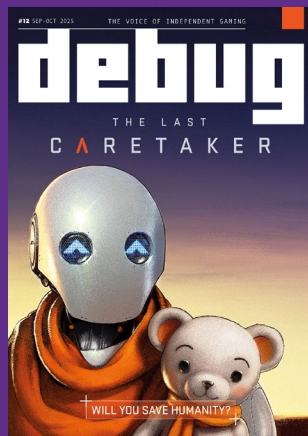
#09 to a T



#10 DELTARUNE



#11 Quantum Witch



#12 The Last Caretaker

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