

# DEADWOOD

—  
**SNUFKIN:  
MELODY OF  
MOOMINVALLEY**

They love the laughter and they love the living... and you'll love this game

—  
**IT'S STILL  
THINKING...**

A brief history of independent games on the Sega Dreamcast





# #4

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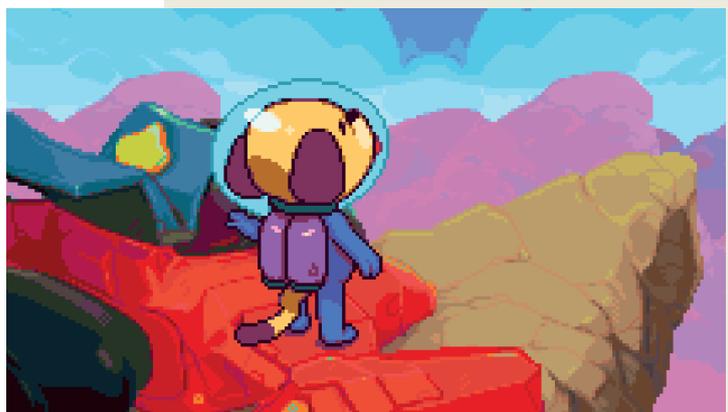
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## RETRO WORLD

# Quin- tes sen- tially Nordic

How  
**SNUFKIN**  
MELODY OF MOOMINVALLEY  
was born

Written by Andrew Dickinson

© Snufkin: Melody of Moominvalley.  
Developed by Hyper Games. © Moomin Characters™





# VIRTUAL

## INDIE

### Your handy guide to the latest VR indies

Strap on your headset, fumble around for your controllers, and get ready for some stonking VR experiences to play right now! Virtual and mixed reality has really come into its own recently, so it felt only right to highlight immersive gaming. Just try not to punch your TV, okay?

### Liminal Phase

#### Anananas Studio

We all remember the '90s, right? Cream-coloured desktop computers, gigantic CRT monitors, dial-up internet, floppy discs, *The X-Files*, *Gladiators*, *Eurotrash*, Pogs... Those were the days! Right? Right?!

In *Liminal Phase*, developer Anananas Studio take us to a parallel '90s world to weird us out and scare our pants off. The vibrant colours and low-poly graphics really whack you in the face with the feeling of that decade, and with homages to things like *DOOM*, *Half-Life*, and *Pac-Man* you really get an odd sense of déjà vu as you interact with this truly messed up world. Insert that floppy at your own risk!



### GAZZLERS

A (quite literally at times) cartoon on-rail shooter that tasks you with taking out hordes of enemies. Good fun!



### Towers and Powers

Tower defence strategy at your fingertips. Being able to interact with the battlefield feels so darn God-like!



# EARLY ACCESS

## WHERE THE GAMES AREN'T FINISHED, BUT ARE STILL A LOT OF FUN

Early access is an interesting concept. Allowing people to play your game while it's still in active development, giving you vital feedback and data. It's also not for everyone though, with many wanting to wait for version 1.0 before they jump in.

We wanted to highlight some awesome titles in early access here, all currently available on Steam. If any of these grab your attention, and you want to be a part of that early access process, consider supporting that dev if you can!



### Beyond Sunset

When John Romero says that a first person shooter "looks really nice", you know there's something potentially special in store. *Beyond Sunset* serves up a unique visual style coupled with great gunplay in this cyberpunk RPG experience.



### Little Learning Machines

An incredibly cute game based around training AI to succeed at certain tasks. Explore new islands full of challenges to overcome, assisted by your little AI robot buddies. A really fun way to harness the power of neural networks.



### Swarm Grinder

A procedurally generated roguelike shooter featuring enemies that burst out of cells and swarm you. It sounds kinda gross, but it's incredibly fun. Hone your build to better take out your enemies on the next run.



### Lose Ctrl

An unpredictable experience that tests your skill and resolve by completely changing the control scheme while you play. Likened to *The Stanley Parable* by some for its philosophical story, the game boasts both single player and multiplayer modes.



### Age of Reforging: The Freelands

This mix of CRPG with survival and strategy elements shows some promise. How you play is up to you, and you even have access to a party AI editor to tailor your team to better suit you.



### Phantom Galaxies

Aiming to evoke sci-fi epics such as *Mass Effect* and *Starfield*, but with a mecha twist reminiscent of *Daemon X Machina* (and maybe a little *Anthem* and even *Elite Dangerous* thrown in for good measure), this has all the makings of a good time.

# INDIEVELOPMENT

## BASHTRONAUT

RELEASED  
2024

# IT'S HAMMER TIME

## GET YOUR BUG-BUSTING ON WITH BASHTRONAUT

I fully expected some classic *Smash TV* chaos action from this game after watching its trailer, but *Bashtronaut* instead turned out to be a surprise that forced me to bring some much more strategic thinking into the equation...

You are truly outnumbered and outgunned in this challenging hack-and-bash adventure. Your enemies have guns, missiles, lasers, and more! You have... a hammer! So you need to keep moving and perform well-timed parry attacks to get up close and personal to deliver the damage. There is a lot to keep your eye on and it is easy to get overwhelmed in the green pixel chaos and start bashing wildly, but this is no button masher! With a stamina bar, you can't go in swinging on this mission.

*Bashtronaut* forces you to choose your shots wisely to conserve energy. I died lots trying to clear the arenas which made unlocking the fancy powerups all the more rewarding. Strategists and players who like a challenge might enjoy this one - I look forward to playing this more on its full release. [U](#)

**Maria Kinnun**



### FAST FORWARD

This isn't the only game from this dev...

#### Nyana

An action adventure aiming for a 2025 release.

### INFO

**Developer**

OrionGames

**Publisher**

OrionGames

**On**

PC

**Demo**

Yes



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# SO MUCH TO DEVOUR

## HORROR STORIES: HARVEST HUNT STACKS THE DECK

This caught my eye at EGX 2023. Gorgeous, stylised visuals and a gameplay loop that encourages you to try again and again. You could easily refer to *Harvest Hunt* as a single-player *Dead by Daylight*, but that would do the title a disservice. While you have a terrible monstrosity hunting you throughout the non-linear levels in the form of the Devourer, who you must avoid and outrun whilst performing tasks, there's also a roguelite element at play in the form of game-altering cards you can win and assign between runs. You are tasked with finding ambrosia to keep your cursed village of Luna Nova safe between harvests, as well as trying to banish the Devourer. When you die, you return at the next harvest as another villager, ready to try again. [EU](#)

Andrew Dickinson

### INFO

**Developer**  
Villainous Games

**Publisher**  
Villainous Games

**On**  
PC

**Released**  
TBC

**Demo**  
Yes



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**Director of Villainous Games, Mark Drew, talks anthology horror and lore.**

***Horror Stories: Harvest Hunt* is the second game in your anthology horror series. What possessed you (get it?) to create an anthology?**

We love horror, and when we started the studio we started working on a number of ideas. As we were developing a prototype and starting to talk to publishers for one game, the team had time on their hands so we developed a smaller-scoped game, *PLEASE COMPLY*. We love finding ways to connect our games which gave us the idea of making these all part of an anthology. And thus the *Horror Stories Anthology* was born.

**There's plenty of lore within the game. How important is world building for you?**

World building in horror is super important! We usually start with the gameplay itself so that is the main focus for us. What better way to have a feeling or theme come across to the player than through the mechanics? Eventually, that's backed up by lore and more conventional storytelling elements but we're making games first and foremost.

The background and fiction of the game also grow as we work on the game, from small additions to ideas we add even late in development!

We are also developing a style at the studio that leans heavily towards diegetic design. This brings a lot of challenges but is paid off by adding to the immersion of the player in our experiences. That immersion needs to have a great lore to make the world interesting and important to the player.

**What advice would you give to new developers?**

Oh so many! But one of the most important ones, and the main mistake we see, is to cut the scope of the game, and then cut again. Don't worry! It will expand anyway. But if you keep the scope small and put some core pillars that you can refer to as you progress during development, you can keep anchored in the heat of development. Keeping the scope small means you can make your initial game pretty quickly from start to finish and then keep doing more and more passes, improving the gameplay and looks and introducing what the game needs. Also, don't forget that it's not all about the development of the game itself. The game has to be released and seen by the world! Marketing early to grow interest is just as important as the development of the game.



## DaemonClaw: Origins of Nnar

**Developer** BITBEAMCANNON **Publisher** NEOFID STUDIOS/PIXELHEART **On** MEGA DRIVE, NEO GEO **Released** Q3 2024

A sudden coordinated attack by the varied mystical 'zverkin' armies has thrown the once peaceful world of Nnar into chaos.

You've been chosen as humanity's best hope for survival and given a powerful magical artifact, called DaemonClaw, to aid you in your quest

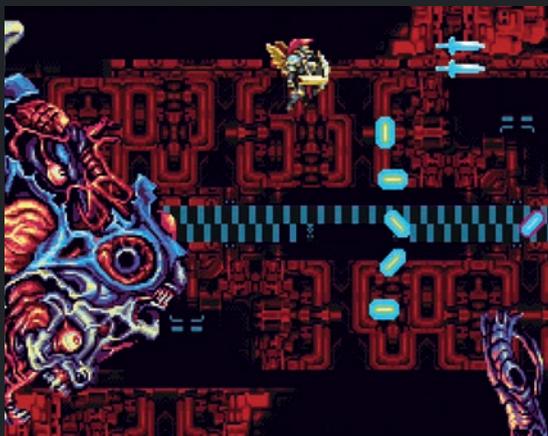
*DaemonClaw* has been in production for a good few years and I was privileged to play a beta of the game back in 2022. It was shaping up to be something special even then. Fast forward to now, and publishers Neofid Studios and PixelHeart have jumped on board to help BitBeamCannon take the game to even greater heights!

The game itself is described as a fantasy side-scrolling affair, with a mixture of physical and magic attacks on offer. You can build up the magic in a power bar (think *Golden Axe*) and even use it as a defensive shield instead.

It's been a long time coming, but we have very high hopes.



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## ZPF

**Developer** ZPF TEAM **Publisher** MEGA CAT STUDIOS **On** MEGA DRIVE **Released** TBC **Social** @ZPF\_MegaDrive

*ZPF* is your typical horizontal shmup, with an ever-increasing number of enemies filling the screen as you fight through. Mid-level and end-of-level bosses further compound the mayhem.

There are three characters to choose from, each with a unique weapon style. For example, the most unique of the three is a flying knight, who shoots multiple swords. You also have a finite number of bombs to blitz the entire screen, should the amount of enemies become too overpowering. The amount of lives and bombs can be changed in the difficulty settings beforehand, handily.

Coins can be collected throughout each level and these allow you to purchase upgrades from a shop before the start of each level. A hall of fame high score chart awaits the best players after each session, which is wonderfully vintage stuff.

We were provided with a playable demo which included all three of the playable characters, and three of the levels. The levels are detailed and varied. My favourite, *Magical Journey* is set in a lush, green environment above the trees.

The action was fast-paced at all times, and I didn't notice any slowdown despite the number of enemies on the screen, with my reflex skills being tested to the limit and the waves of enemies varied.

*ZPF* is looking very promising, and you can be sure of a full review.



WATCH IT



## Dracula: Dark Reign

**Developer** SPACEBOT INTERACTIVE **Publisher** INCUBE8 GAMES  
**On** GAME BOY COLOR **Released** Q2 2024 **Social** @spacebot\_dev

*Dracula: Dark Reign* is the very first *Dracula* game to be officially endorsed by the Stokerverse, so hopes are incredibly high that this will be the best and most realistic *Dracula* game to date.

The game itself is a *Castlevania*-style game that takes us back to the original novel, recreating Jonathan Harker's thrilling escape from Castle Dracula.

By far the most exciting part of all this is the game will expand on the original novel by using the notes of Bram Stoker himself to expand the story. A never-before-seen prologue will be present in the game, which will centre around how Jonathan Harker's escape from the castle came to be.

We are also promised multiple routes through the game and oodles of items to pick up along the way, meaning this escape from the castle will be anything but linear.

I've played a demo version of the game and it's looking very promising indeed, with movement feeling very fluid and the controls very responsive. Incube8 were keen to stress there is still much work to be done, but overall it is looking very encouraging already.

Incube8 Games tell us that the game should be ready around spring time, although it could be earlier depending on how the final testing and tweaks to the game go. 📺



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## The Meating

**Developer** MEGA CAT STUDIOS **Publisher** MEGA CAT STUDIOS **On** NES **Released** Q1 2024

Featuring over 40 levels, *The Meating* is a puzzle platformer that sees you play as Konstantinos, a ghost Minotaur who was catfished by a butcher on an online dating site, and subsequently killed! He has now been resurrected to solve the mystery of his own death.

As a ghost, our job is to take Konstantinos back through those harrowing moments before, and after, his death, coming face to face with the very people that took your life. Expect to solve puzzles in places like a slaughterhouse and the dreaded meat freezer itself.

The combat side of things sees you battling an array of enemies, such as skeletons and raw chickens (yes, seriously), and Konstantinos has the usual physical minotaur moves such as jumping and headbutting. But remember he is also dead! That means that supernatural powers are at our disposal as well. Want to possess an enemy and then pass through a wall? Yep, you can do that!

The supernatural abilities need to be refilled with spirit energy, which you can find scattered throughout the game, and various types of meat can be consumed to fill your health bar. Turns out dead minotaurs also need to refill their health bars from time to time!

*The Meating* is due to land any time now, following a successful Kickstarter campaign (where you could bag a very swish looking physical edition), so expect a full review — all being well — in issue 5. 📺



WATCH IT



Bex Trista

# UNPACKING THE WORLD OF UNPACKING



Bex Trista is an avid indie gamer who's been working in the games industry for almost a decade. She has hosted panels at a variety of gaming and comic conventions across the UK, and interviewed a number of indie developers on YouTube. Find her online as @TristaBytes.



With twenty-four awards, including multiple Game of the Year, Accessibility, Narrative, and Sound Design accolades (among others), *Unpacking* is a small game that has left a big impression on gamers since it launched in 2021. But what made a cosy game based around such a seemingly simple premise so impactful?

When I first saw *Unpacking* I fell in love with its gorgeous isometric pixel art, soft colour palette and relaxing, tidying-focused gameplay. Little did I know that within the sorting and arranging of items was hidden an incredibly touching narrative told entirely through contextual storytelling.

As the game progressed, following the life of our protagonist via her belongings from childhood through to adulthood, I found myself highly invested in her life. When she left home for the first time, I wanted to know that she was okay. When she shared a home with a fun flatmate, I was happy for her. When she had a partner who stifled her passions, I felt her pain. I was invested all the way through to an ending that I am not ashamed to say almost brought me to tears. That's something that has rarely happened to me because of a game, let alone one with no speech and where the characters are never seen, except in a few tiny pixelated photos on a pin board or fridge.

*Unpacking* was a masterfully made game which managed to convey an entire person's life, loves, and dreams through its cute artwork and locations, all set to a beautiful soundtrack. The detail on show was incredible, and it was clear that every asset in the game was made with immense care. Each item, no matter how mundane or

insignificant it seemed, had meaning as an integral part of the story being shared. Every book, game, and DVD she owned was a tiny pixel version of a real-life item, and trying to work out what they were became effectively a fun mini-game for me all on its own. The stuffed toys our protagonist is given as a child accompany her throughout her life, gently ageing as their colours fade and repairs are made, before taking a starring role in her life as a grown up.

The way the game depicts the highs and lows of sharing your home with someone else, and how that shared space impacts your own growth as a person, was also immensely relatable. From putting up posters together and sharing passions, to trying to find space for things which don't fit with your housemate or partner's needs. The game's clever utilisation of a mixture of free-form sorting, along with a mechanic that required some items that had to be put into a specific room, or even a singular spot that needed to be found as part of the narrative, gave the game a sense of freedom and replay value whilst also ensuring the story was uncovered naturally.

There were also a range of interactive items. One allowed you to click to play music, another loaded up one of her favourite computer games, while other small animated touches really brought the locations to life. The game felt so relaxing, in no small part due to being able to take it at my own pace. *Unpacking* takes seemingly mundane activities with everyday household items and turns them into a magical experience you will never forget.

If you haven't yet played *Unpacking* I would highly recommend you experience the story for yourself. The game is available on PC through Steam, Humble and GOG, and is also available for Switch, PlayStation, Xbox as well as more recently launching on the Apple & Google Play stores too.





**Quang runs micro indie game studio Asobitech, making retro games with an East meets West design philosophy. He is passionate about building community and sharing knowledge.**



My introduction to game development was with a micro computer; the Sinclair ZX Spectrum +2. This gave me access to the programming language BASIC, and via the included manual, books from the library, and magazine type-in listings, I learned that if I inputted the correct characters I could magically make things happen on the screen. Over time I was

able to create some very *basic* games of my own. I graduated to an Atari ST using *STOS - The Games Creator*, which allowed me to create more complex and polished games. I then advanced to a 386 PC, first learning Pascal, followed by C, so I could make games for DOS. I was hooked on making video games.

My breakthrough into the video games industry came with the release of GBDK, the Game Boy Development Kit, which allowed budding developers to create games for the Nintendo Game Boy. Along with a flash ROM cartridge, you could have your creation running on actual Game Boy hardware in your hands. It was 1999, the Game Boy Color had been released the year before, and I was obsessed with it. I entered an online competition with my own port of the ZX Spectrum game *Jetpac* titled *JetPak DX*. My work came in 2nd place. This then got spotted by a small UK games studio that was looking for a Game Boy coder. They had snagged the contract to port the RC racing game *Re-Volt* over to the GBC, and after I put together a test program of a car driving around a track, I got the job.

The year 2000 for me was an intense year of coding, as I learnt on the job without any real help. First with *Re-Volt*, which unfortunately got cancelled a month from finish and instead got reworked into *ATV Racing*, before I was then tasked to create various game prototypes. Eventually I was asked to do GBC versions of *Equestriad 2001* and *Mary King's Riding Star*. We somehow managed to also land the contract to port *Lego Stunt Rally* to GBC, with a deadline of only three months. Sadly, two months down the line I was overworked, stressed, and not aware of the state of my mental health. I burned out and left the industry.

Fast forward to 2007, I rediscovered the creative itch to make video

games again, but so much had changed while I had been away. I had to relearn a lot, and due to my previous experience I decided I didn't want to work for anyone else again. This is when I started Asobitech. This filled my spare time, as I used my day job in IT Support to fund everything. I thought the best way to get up to speed was to make as many small games as possible, allowing me to try new things and iterate. I entered every Game Jam I could find, even attempting the challenge of making a game a week. As my skills become more and more honed, I even started to win - the most significant being Castle Game Jam 2016 with *MaoMao Castle: A Magical Cat-Dragon Fantasy Adventure*. All the while I was also growing my professional network and learning all I could by attending as many industry events as I could find.

That is basically how I became an indie video game developer. My biggest piece of advice to you is this - keep creating. If you're a coder, then code. If you're an artist, then make art. If you're a writer, then write. There are a plethora of tools out there that enable you to bring your ideas to life. Also, make sure you have a way to fund yourself, whether it is through a day job, savings, grants, or outside investment. Continue to grow your knowledge and your network. Look after your mental health. But most importantly, keep making things! Aim for your next thing to be better than the last. Through iteration and resilience, you will do great things.

**SO YOU WANT TO  
BE AN INDIE VIDEO**

**GAME**

**DEVE**

**LOPER**

Quang DX



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