Exhibition **Game Over**

The „game over“ screen is a harsh punishment for the player that forces him to restart the entire game. It is a death-penalty.

Over time games have gradually grown and relaxed this penalty.

Arcades used the convention of limited lives. Three lives were standard, allowing the player to die twice and still continue the pursuit. Only later you were able to insert more coins and continue your play-session without starting from zero.

The early home consoles took up the concept of three lives, but soon came up with variations. Some Nintendo games let the player continue from a certain point even after losing all lives. One game lets you restart at an earlier check point with a full set of lives. Another game allowed limitless number of continues. And some offered a password to restart in the same spot.

Many console games continue along these lines and provide the player with means to overcome death limitless times. In newer *Super Mario* games you always find enough „extra-life“ mushrooms to keep your play-session going. An experienced player will never see the "game over" screen. More narrative games work with „checkpoints“ for the player's progress and allow to save the game and restart from the last save point when the avatar dies. Thus the player has a limitless number of tries and doesn’t need to worry about „game over“. The concepts of being able to pause and not needing to repeat earlier gameplay and story sequences allow a much better fictional coherence.

Then there is the concept of stalling death or prolonging life. Many shooter games use a „health score“ or „hit point“ system to keep their protagonists alive longer. This may come with a system of collecting items to be healed or an automatic heal after escaping the source of damage. Once the character is close to death, the player may get visual feedback like blurred vision, changing colors or tilted camera angles. An interesting way of implementing this concept is turning back time to undo a fatal mistake as is the case in **Prince of Persia, The Sands of Time** and with a rewind mechanism in *Braid*.

Generally, narrative big-production games tend to render the old concept of deaths and several lives obsolete. You can play through more than half of *Heavy Rain* before you get in danger to experience a character death. A skilled gamer will try to progress in his *Final Fantasy* or *Zelda Breath of the Wild* Session without being killed at all. On the other hand, there are some games like *Limbo* and *Inside* that let the protagonist die many gruesome deaths.They are mysterious from the start and work the trial and error method so well, that they carry it to the next level. Here the (many) deaths help the player to discover more aspects of gameplay and spatial and narrative context.

Adventure games omit death of the protagonist entirely in order to guarantee narrative coherence. In **Grim Fandango**, our main character is already dead and lives in an afterlife, but there is no death scene, no player death. The protagonist never is in danger to die, however, he needs to solve the puzzle to progress his session, if he doesn't, he remains in the same section which could be worse than dying.

Branching narratives in games have been around for a while. In newer games they try to support the coherence of a game story with offering the player a different path after a failure or a wrong decision. It is supposed to soften the emotional effect of a fail. This way failure does not necessarily mean that the story is halted and the flow of the game is broken. Instead you discover a different lead.

However, some genres and games work with the concept of „permadeath“ (permanent death of a character and removal from the game). Table Top Games, roguelike RPGs like *Dwarf Fortress* and MMORPGs. On the other hand, in a *Fire Emblem* game, „permadeath“ looms over all your playable characters, but not over the main character. After failing and dying, you are able to restart with your main character from the last save point.

There is a big difference between the death of your PC (Player Character) and the death of an NPC (Non-Player Character). An enemy NPC's death is insignificant because it works to your advantage or doesn't give you a disadvantage. If a friendly NPC dies, you may feel some emotional attachment towards this figure and some confusion about the event. This becomes a lot more emotional if the NPC is a supporting character (escort mission). Therefore the loss of a supporting character like your horse in *Colossus* or a love interest in some games is often staged as a drama with a special cutscene that should spark your emotional involvement. This is an indirect punishment by the game, but it does not break the narrative coherence since you can go on with your pursuit.

Death in Games

Our exhibition shows games with different functions and ways of dying. It is a rather special selection. Several games deal with current political events: **Freedom Bridge** features an avatar that tries to make her way through the Korean border. You cannot win. The only possible outcome is death of the avatar. **September 12th** is a news-game that lets you play snipers in a middle-east setting. You can bomb the terrorists, but each time you kill civilians as well. The villagers get upset and turn into terrorists themselves. Here too, the player realizes soon that there is no way of winning the game. He experiences how violence begets more violence. Not doing anything at all doesn't help here either. Nuclear threat is a rather current topic too and the topic of **First Strike**, a strategy simulation game. If you ever wanted to end the world, here is the chance! You have enough nuclear weapons to blow up anyone. And this is exactly what happens, once you pushed a button. It is a question of war and peace and the only way of winning the game is not to play!

The game **The Graveyard** offers a short tale of death and claims to be close to reality. An old woman visits a cemetery, she walks very slowly down the path, sits on a bench and dies. The death of the avatar is a winning or rather closing state of the game. Life as a game is over. Completely different to this is **Life Goes On: Done to Death**. In this comically morbid platform game the player kills heroic knights only to use their dead bodies to stack them, freeze them or use them strategically to solve puzzles. Death of the NPCs here is the only means to progress and to live on.

Violent death animations are the forte of the game **Battle Chess**. Each type of chess piece has a unique animation for killing other pieces. This increases the player's feeling of defeat – a bit like **Mortal Kombat** tried to do. **Doom** was the first game rated M for Mature (18+). The player fights monster after monster and has no choice but killing all creatures she encounters. In some parts the killing becomes a massacre with blood and limbs all over. Not with gore but with dignity and professionality the player has to approach death in **A Mortician's Tale**. You are Charlie and have to run a funeral parlour. While playing you learn a lot about the funeral industry and burial rites. The game is informative and humorous at the same time.

In **Dark Souls 3** story and gameplay are closely linked to death. The game is merciless causing lots of deaths for the player. However, there is a curse on the character and he gets respawned each time at the bonfire. Many deaths loom for **Meat Boy** as well. But he is only a red cube-shaped figure speeding through the platform world like mad. Here it is fun to fail and die. Quick restarts and short levels support the fun gameplay and a replay feature shows all deaths of Meat Boy at the end of the game. In **Crash Bandicoot** it is not so much fun dying, but the game shows a rather humorous side of dealing with failure in a game. The two cartoon-like characters Crash and Coco die in a slapstick manner. Big open eyes, spinning and falling backwards, exploding into parts with teeth and ears and tail raining down, zapped by electricity with fur standing up and much more. The game celebrates many ways of dying, the first in the sequel knows 12 deaths, the second 30 and the third Crash Bandicoot game knows staggering 50 comical ways of dying.

Finally we have **Chasm Spasm**, a short art game that is more a comment on gaming than a game itself. It starts like any arcade game, a hero on his adventurous way to fortune in the rain forest. But it is not that. Try to get your avatar jumping over the chasm and he fails and breaks his knee. This sort of realism usually is avoided in games. Here it leads to the avatar lying injured on the ground. He is not able to move away and can only wriggle his body. The player tries to move him with all available buttons, but realizes soon that there is no use. Ironically, those desperate wriggling moves are scored and the player gets a ranking.

CREDITS:

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Video NPC NIGHTMARE:
__Max Moswitzer and René Bauer.

__November 2017

Many thanks to our **Sponsors:**

USA, 1988

Battle Chess (12+)

Developer: Interplay Productions
System: Amiga, 3DO, Acorn Archimedes, Amiga CD32, Amiga CDTV, Apple IIGS, Apple IIe, Atari ST, C64, MS-DOS, FM Towns, NES, Mac OS, NEC PC-9801, X68000, Windows
Genre: Chess

«Battle Chess» is a computer chess game that follows the traditional chess rules. It can be played in single player or multiplayer mode.

Game over: Like any traditional chess game the movement possibilities of each chess piece are bound to a representation of a social class. Only the death of a king results in the end of the game, but every type of chess piece can defeat or as in «Battle Chess» kill any opposing piece.

What distinguishes the game from other computer chess games are its violent death animations. Each type of chess piece has a unique animation for destroying any other type. These animations stage the defeat and thus the death of a chess piece either as a shattering experience or a solemn event for the players.

Link: Mortal Kombat

USA, 1989

8+

KLAX

Developer: Atari
System: Arcade, Ports for all home computers and consoles
Genre: Action Puzzler

In KLAX you have to operate a conveyor belt. In three lanes different colored bricks are rolling towards you. You can collect them on a moving stack and distribute again to your container. If you put 3 in a row, they disappear. The game asks you to fulfill different tasks like aligning bricks in diagonal and horizontal series.

Game Over: As a norm puzzle games use simple sound effects for their audio display. KLAX is very different: It uses an imaginary audience that is clapping at the end of a level or a woman's voice that says "Yes" or "Huhh", if you do something extraordinary. And in the same way: if you loose a brick or the game a digitalized audience shouts: "Ohhh".

There are two ways for a Game Over: When you let three bricks fall through or when the container is filled to the top with bricks.

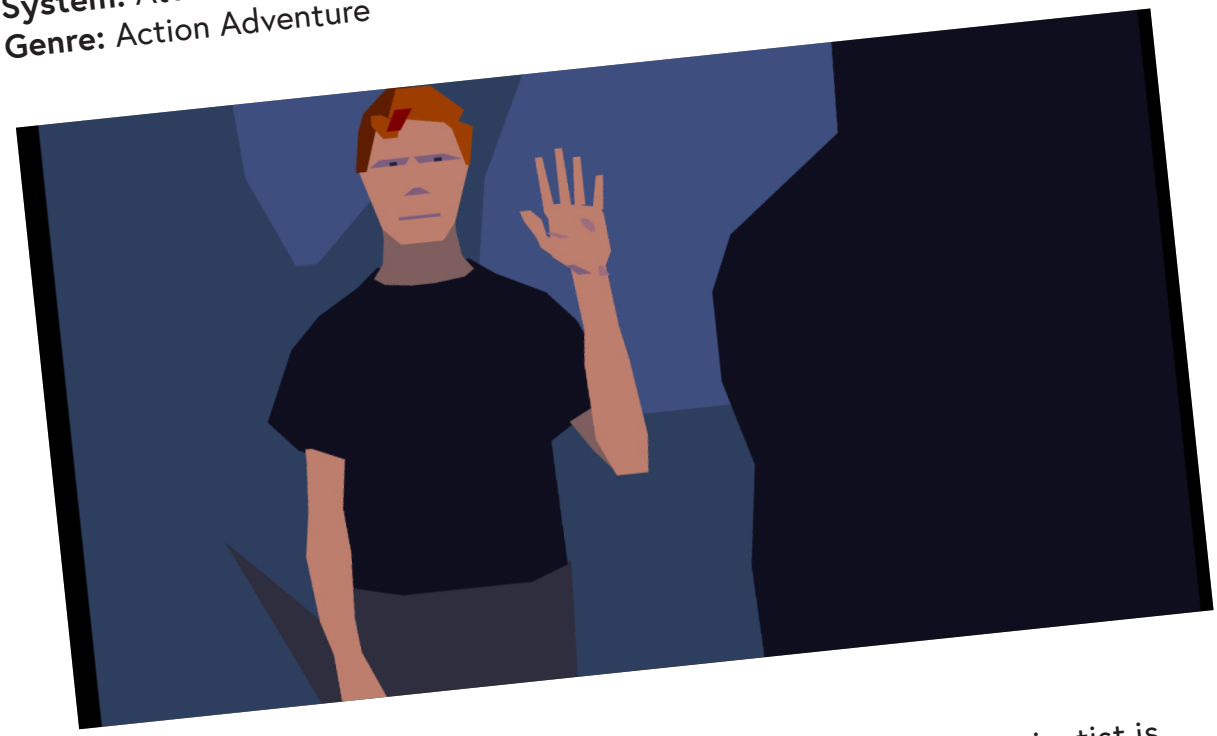
Link: Tetris

FRANCE 1991

16+

Another World

Developer: Delphine Software
System: Atari ST, Amiga, various console ports, iOS, Android
Genre: Action Adventure



An experiment at CERN in Geneva goes wrong and Lester the scientist is teleported to a dangerous alien world. He is now forced to survive and needs to find his way back to his lab.

Game Over: Another World is one of the first cinematic games at all. There is no score, no health, no GUI. The graphic is a mix between vectors and painted pictures. The game works with ingame cutscenes to tell the story. Death is often a cinematic close up, simple but very well staged. With a radical style Another World showed very well how to seamlessly merge games and movies.

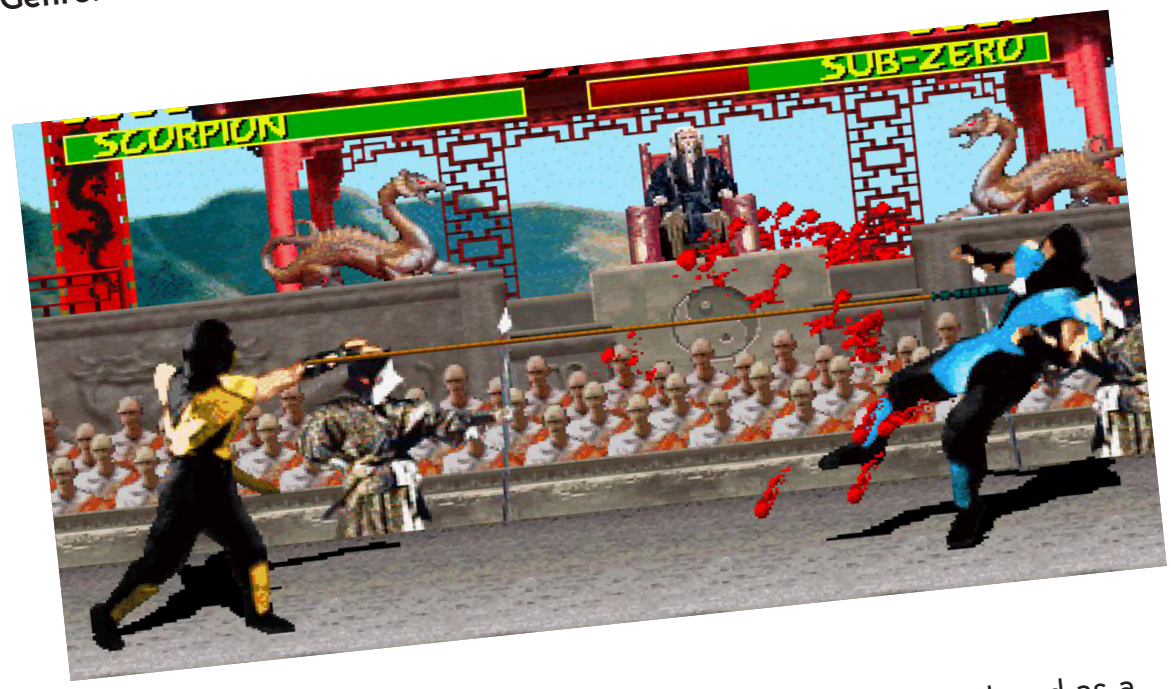
Link: Flashback, God of War, Heavy Rain etc.

USA, 1992

PEGI 18+

Mortal Kombat

Developer: Midway Games
System: Arcade, SNES, Mega Drive, Sega CD, Amiga, DOS, Game Gear, Game Boy, Master
Genre: Beat-Em-Up, Fighting Game



„Mortal Kombat" is a 2D arcade fighting game which can be played as a single or two player game. The story focuses on the journey of the monk Liu Kang to save Earth from the evil sorcerer Shang Tsung, ending with their confrontation in the tournament known as Mortal Kombat. „Mortal Kombat" offers many fighting characters with various skills such as speed or strength and special weapons.

Game Over: Usually arcade games such as StreetFighter made use of drawn characters. In opposition to that, „Mortal Kombat" employs digital animations of people (with blue screen technology). To contrast these realistic graphics, the fighting games excessively displayed unrealistic blood splatters. On top of that, the game became (in)famous for its „fatality" or finishing moves: Instead of just winning over the opponent, the game character could downright destroy him – requiring for the player a sequence of button inputs to perform.

The „fatalities", in part, led to the creation of the ESRB (Entertainment Software Rating Board), e.g. the US video game rating system.

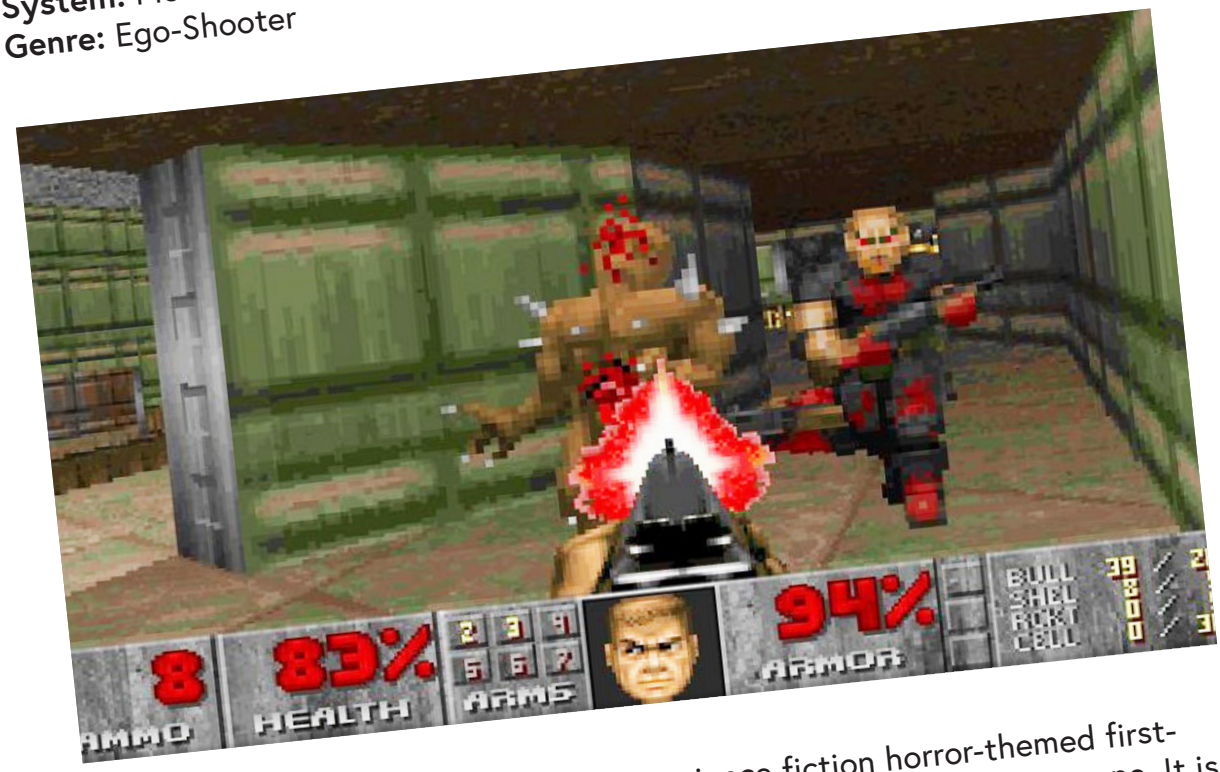
Link: Battle Chess, Street Fighter, Chiller, NARC

USA 1993

FSK ab 18

Doom

Developer: id-Software
System: MS-DOS, Sega 32X, Atari Jaguar, SNES, Playstation 1 etc.
Genre: Ego-Shooter



According to its developers, Doom is a science fiction horror-themed first-person shooter. The game was very influential for the video game scene. It is one of the first 3D-games and set the agenda for Ego-Shooters, networked multiplayer gaming and 3D-games in general.

Game Over: The player assumes the role of an unnamed space marine who fights his way through hordes of invading demons from hell. Like its predecessor Wolfenstein, it features graphic violence and stsanic imagery that sparked controversy. The player, dubbed as „Doomguy" by players, is the last man standing in a spaceship or on Phobos and has to fight the onsalught of the monsters all alone. In some parts the killing becomes a massacre with blood and limbs all over. Doom was one of the first games rated M for Mature (18+). In any way, there is no choice for „Doomguy", it is either him or the monsters that die. Larger weapons can be picked up on the way: a chainsaw, a rocket launcher or the incredible BFG 9000 - and of course they create even more havoc and gore.

Link: Wolfenstein, Doom II, Doom 3, etc.

USA, 2001

PEGI 3+

Crash Bandicoot

Developer: Naugthy Dog
System: PlayStation 2
Genre: Jump'n'Run

Crash Bandicoot is a franchise of platform video games. The protagonist of the series is an anthropomorphic bandicoot named Crash. His purpose is to defeat his evil creator Cortex and to foil his plans for world domination. During the gameplay, the player mostly guides Crash through many colorful worlds, picking up apples and crashing boxes on the way; and facing Cortex in the boss levels.

Game Over: The game is kind to the player: Offering not the usual 3, but 5 lives per game sequence, the levels are not very difficult to master. Furthermore, the death of the little orange bandicoot is not actually a punishment, but rather an aesthetic pleasure and comic relief: The NPC can die in more ways than you can imagine, and the animations always look cute. Crash Bandicoot explodes next to a nitro box, with only a few ashes and two eye balls as remains. It gets smacked by a penguin and drops drunkenly to the floor, or falls in the ice water and comes up to the surface frozen in an ice cube.

Collecting apples help regain lives, and special boxes contain a magic mentor that shields from 1 damage. This makes it even harder to actually experience a Game Over, even though the character constantly dies.

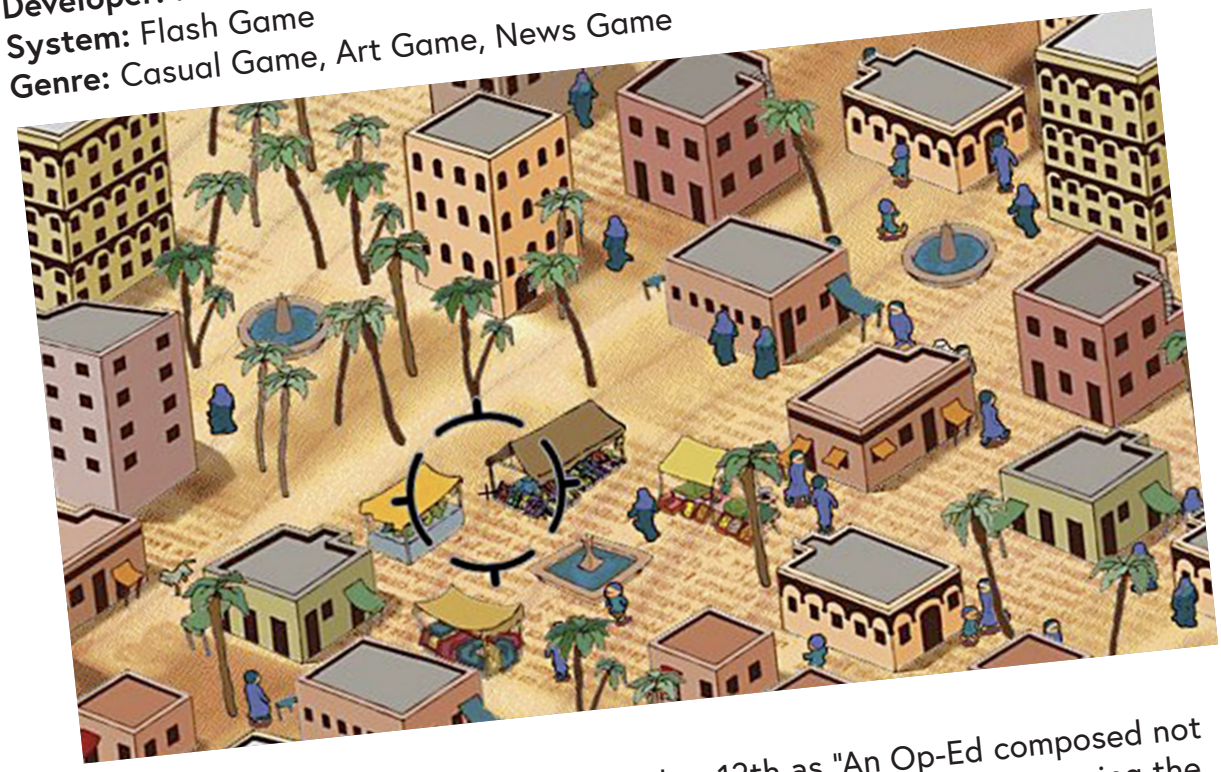
Never mind the long loading times! Enjoy the hallucinogenic colors and eat a candy, or do some sit ups for exercise!

Uruguay, 2003

FSK ab 18

September 12th
A Toy World

Developer: Powerful Robot Games
System: Flash Game
Genre: Casual Game, Art Game, News Game



The New York Times described September 12th as "An Op-Ed composed not of words but of actions". This newsgame became a viral hit by exposing the futility of the US-led War on Terror. Created by a team of Uruguayan game developers lead by a former CNN journalist, this was the first game of the series that coined the term newsgame.

Game Over: The project's main idea was to use the language of videogames to describe current events while conveying a timeless maxim: violence begets more violence.

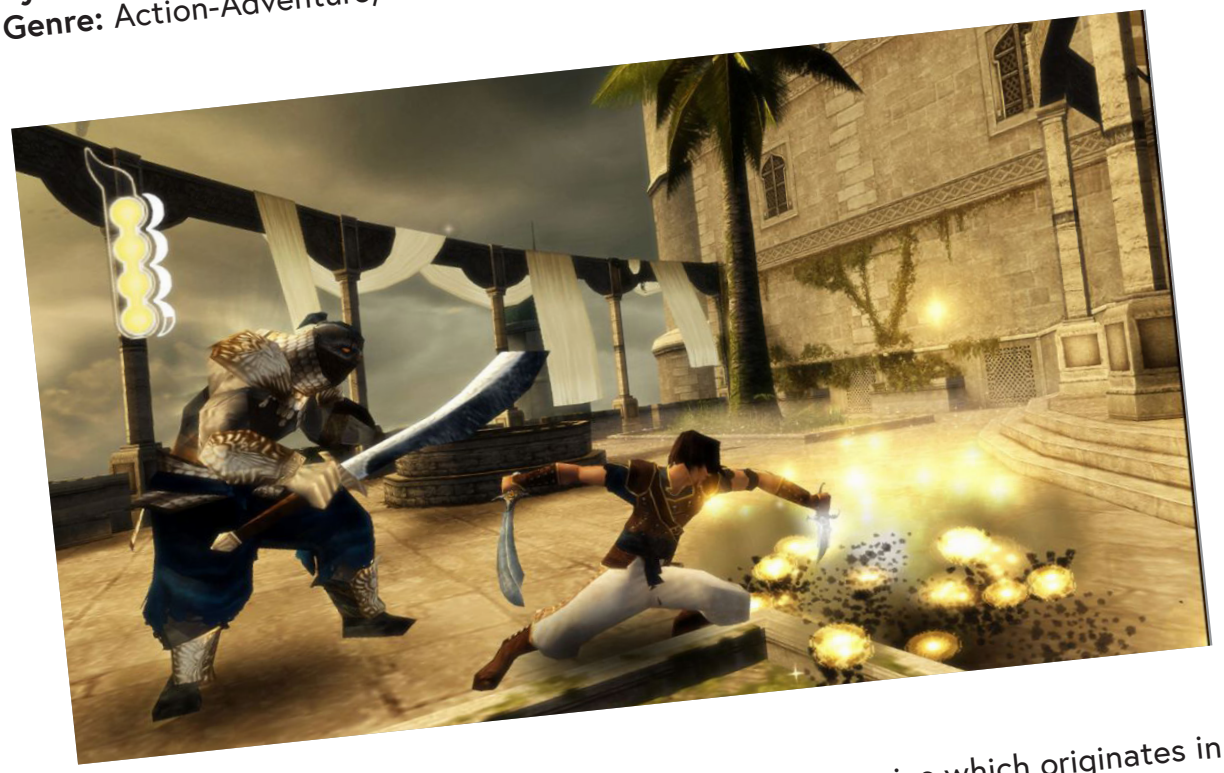
The player controls what seems to be a sniper rifle target but, when clicked, launches missiles. The bombs not only kill the terrorists but also generate so-called "collateral damage". When civilians mourn the innocent dead they soon turn into terrorists. After a couple of minutes, this Middle-Eastern village is destroyed and crawling with terrorists. The player soon realizes that there is no way to win the game: Neither through shooting nor through doing nothing at all.

CANADA, 2003

PEGI 12+

Prince of Persia

Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
System: Playstation 2
Genre: Action-Adventure, Puzzle Platformer



„The Sands of Time" is part of the „Prince of Persia" series which originates in 1989. The player helps an unnamed prince to conquer the Maharaja's palace. Having obtained the Dagger of Time, the prince gets tricked into releasing the Sands of Time from an hourglass, which transforms the city's population into savage monsters. His task then is to return the Sands to the hourglass, fighting along with the Maharaja's daughter Farah.

One of the key features of this game is the amazing parkour-style movements of the main character: the prince jumps over huge clefts, runs sideways on walls, is a great climber, jumper etc., just like Super Mario.

Game Over: The Prince of Persia never dies, since he can use the Dagger to rewind time and to re-do challenges if he fails. Furthermore, the whole adventure gets rewound when his companion Farah dies, and the player understands that the game has been narrated from a future version of the prince. „Time is an ocean in a storm!", the prince once said, and the poetics of this concept is cleverly reflected in the game mechanics as well as in the storytelling.

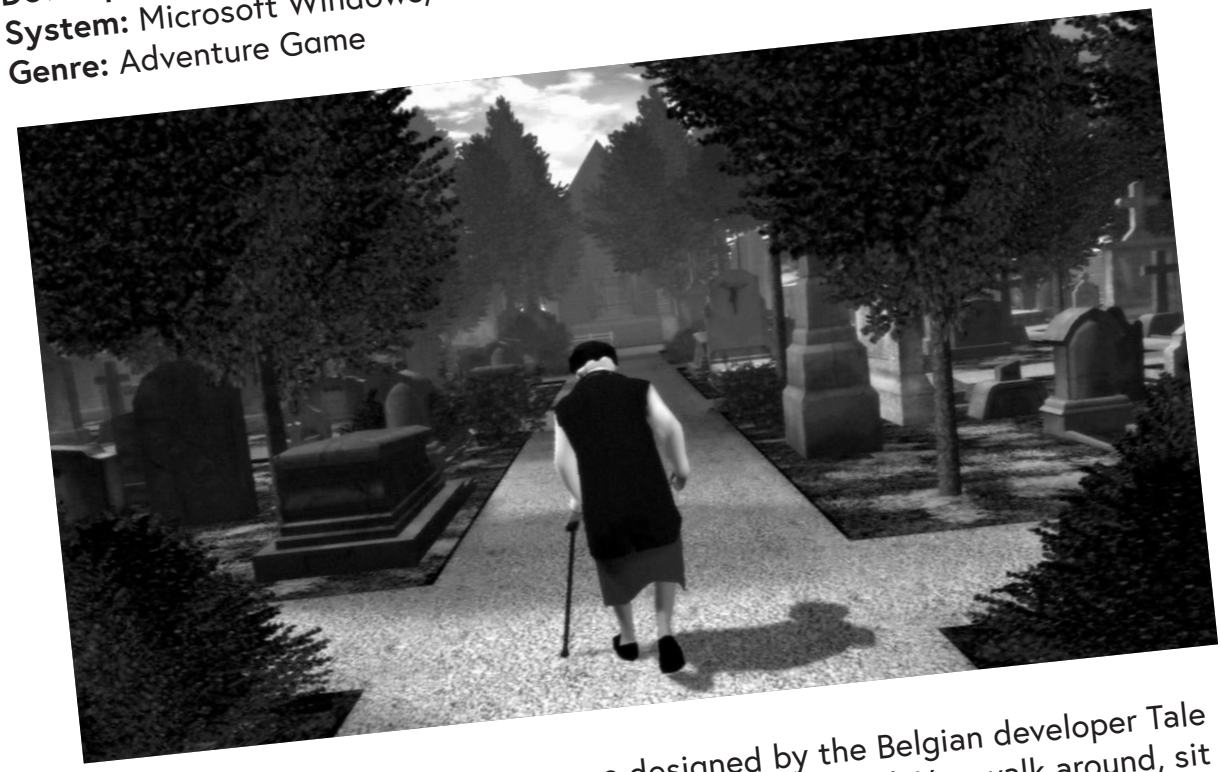
Link: Braid

Belgium, 2008

FSK ab 6

The Graveyard

Developer: Tale of Tales
System: Microsoft Windows, Mac OS X, iOS, Android
Genre: Adventure Game



The Graveyard is a ten-minute game designed by the Belgian developer Tale of Tales. You play an old woman who visits a graveyard. You walk around, sit on a bench and listen to a song. It's more like an explorable painting than an actual game. An experiment with realtime poetry, with storytelling without words.

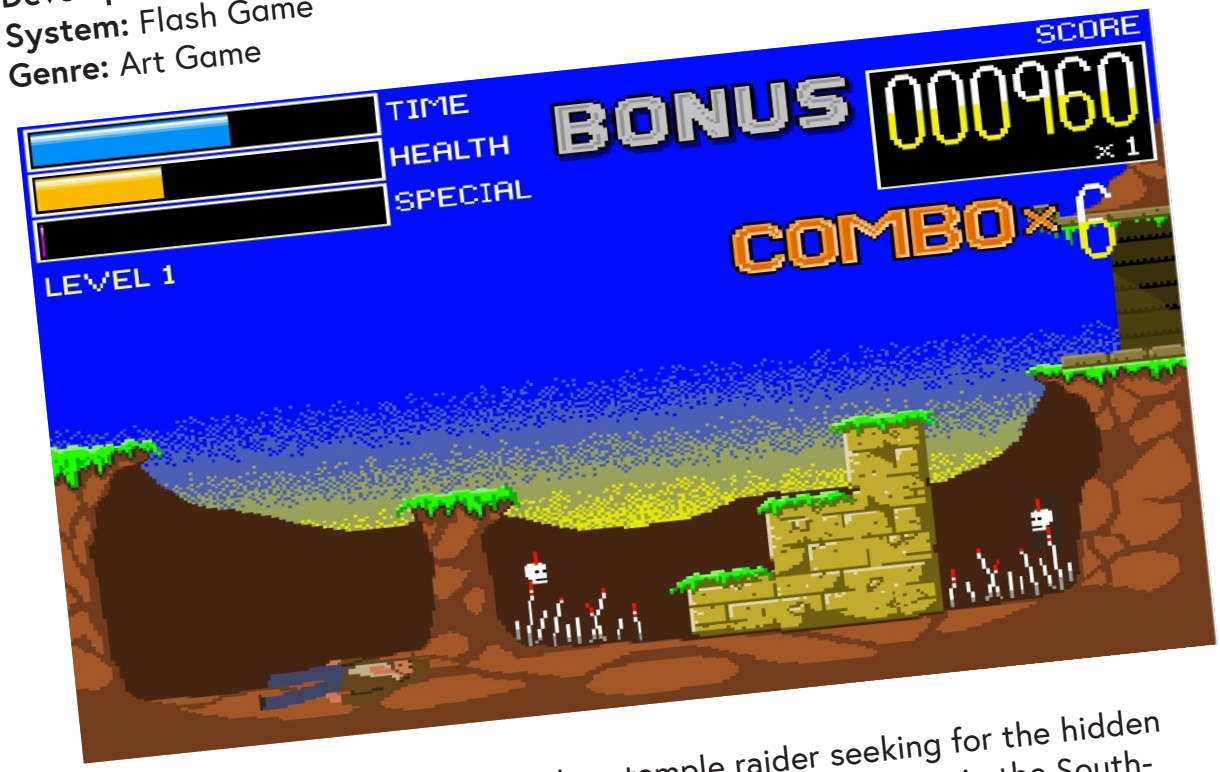
Game Over: The game offers a short tale of death: An old woman pondering death, and then (maybe) dying herself. Usually in Videogames the death of the avatar represents "Game Over" and therefore losing the game. In "The Graveyard" the death of the frail old woman feels like the proper ending: She'd been traveling long enough, lost everyone dear to her, and had nothing left but to visit the graveyard and count all the headstones of those she had lost.

Great Britain, 2010

PEGI: 7+

Chasm Spasm

Developer: Rathergood (David Shute, Ed Snow, Joel Veitch)
System: Flash Game
Genre: Art Game



In Chasm Spasm you play a fearless temple raider seeking for the hidden Inca treasure stolen by the post-war evil Nazi army hidden in the South-American rain forest. The pitch might sound kind of familiar but - believe us - you won't get the good old school platfomer game you expected.

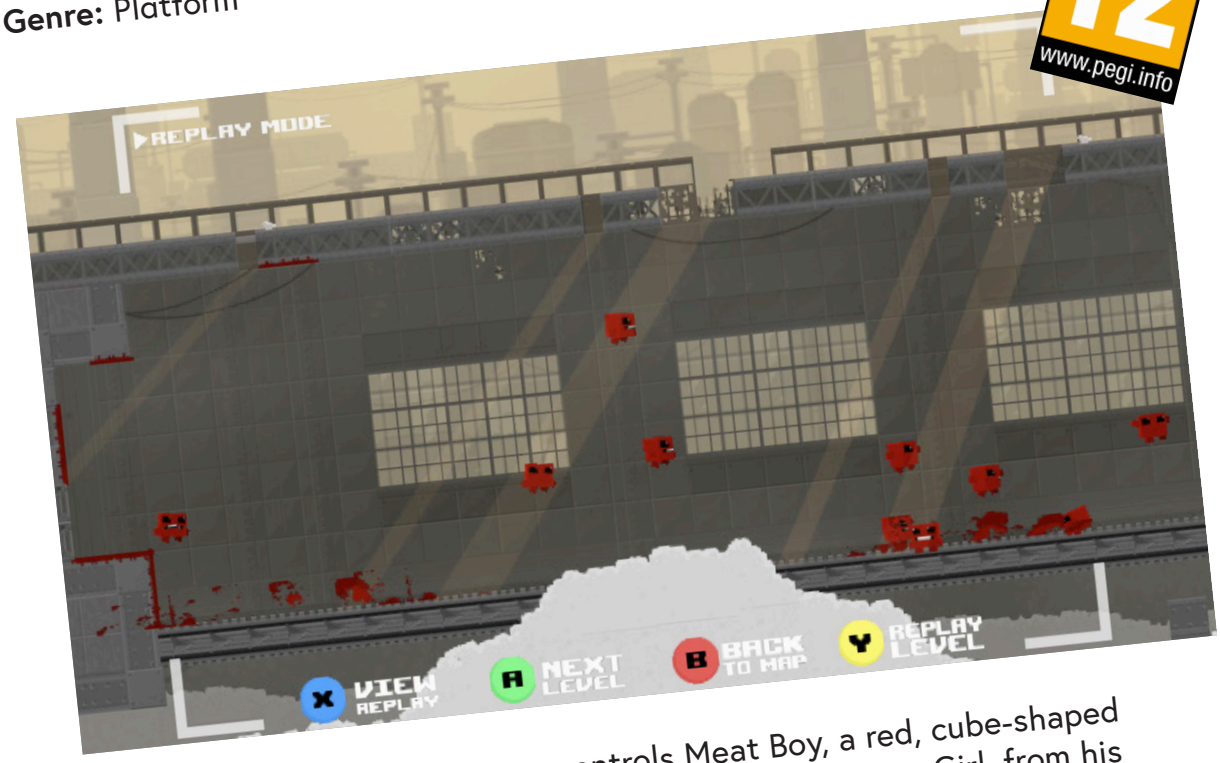
Game Over: On the contrary, your character will break his knee miserably after his first jump and lay on the floor all the way to the deadly "game-over". As a player, your aim is trying different key combinations (actually the ones from the tutorial at the beginning) in order to move your clumsy, not so lucky character, as much as his broken knee allows. The result of your actions will then be scored and ranked.

Chasm Spasm is probably one of the only where you can play an agonizing character unable to move because of his fractures. And it is definitely the only game where you'll find yourself ranting like : "S**t I missed my Ocelot Bonus at the end of the Squid Storm!!!"

USA (2010)

Super Meat Boy

Developer: Team Meat
System: Xbox 360, Microsoft Windows, OS X, Linux, PlayStation 4, PlayStation Vita, Android, iOS, Wii U, Nintendo Switch
Genre: Platform



In «Super Meat Boy» the player controls Meat Boy, a red, cube-shaped character, with the goal to rescue his girlfriend, Bandage Girl, from his nemesis Dr. Fetus. The gameplay is characterized by fine control and split-second timing as the player runs and jumps through over 300 hazardous levels while avoiding obstacles.

Death: The game is designed to be „retro", imitating the aesthetics of traditional platform games, but with a modern sensibility regarding difficulty. Therefore, it's rewarding and challenging, rather than frustrating. To achieve this the game uses infinite lives, quick restarts of levels, obvious goals and short levels. If the player reaches the end of a level, a replay shows all deaths of Meat Boy. This replay feature transforms death into a form of reward!

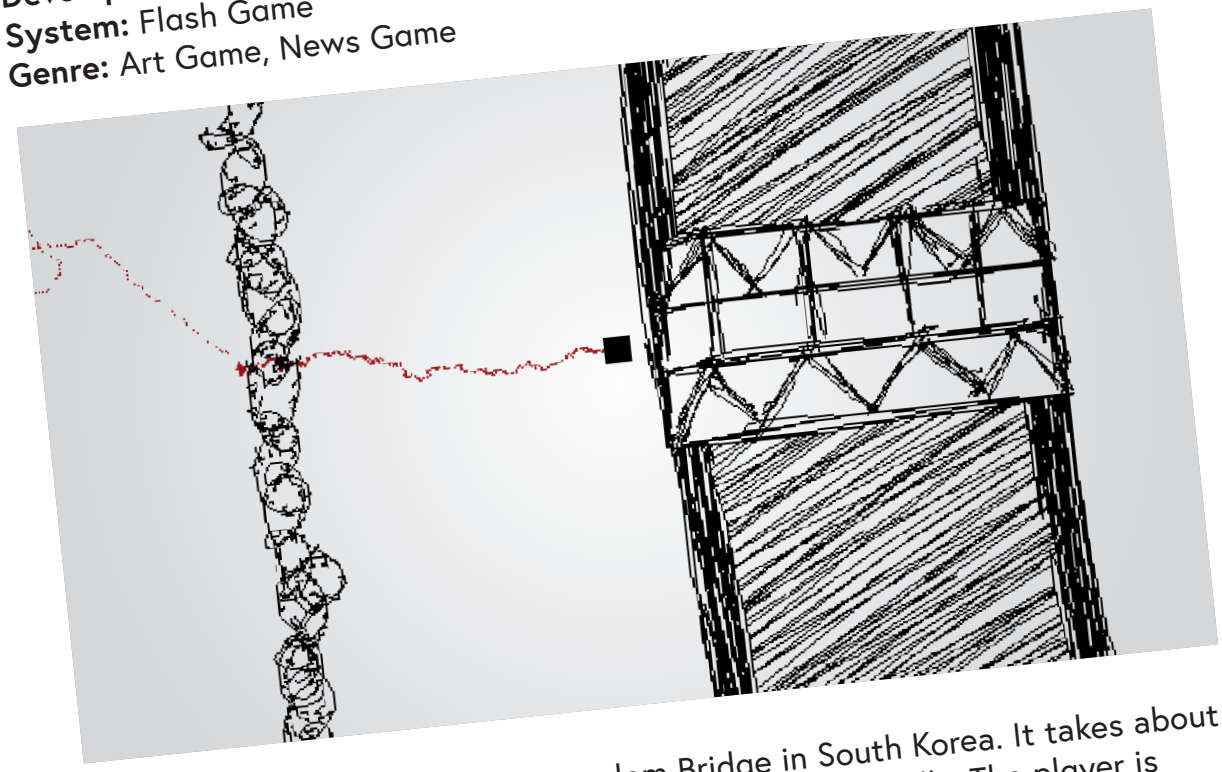
Link: The Binding of Isaac, Spelunky

South Korea, 2010

FSK ab 18

Freedom Bridge

Developer: Jordan Magnuson (necessarygames.com)
System: Flash Game
Genre: Art Game, News Game



A very short experience about Freedom Bridge in South Korea. It takes about two minutes to play through, and requires no gaming skills. The player is alone to face three fences. A small adventure, full of silence and emptiness, where the player is trying to reach the freedom bridge.

Game Over: The only possible outcome of "Freedom Bridge" ist the death of the avatar. There is no way winnig this game. Freedom Bridge communicates a sense of oppression and frustration associated with being unable to cross the Freedom Bridge in Imjingak, South Korea. This makes it a powerful commentary on the complicated situation between North and South Korea.

Link: Papers Please, All's Well That Ends Well

Canada, 2014

Life Goes On (12+)

Developer: Infinite Monkeys
System: PS4, Windows, Mac, Linux
Genre: Puzzle-Platformer

«Life Goes On: Done to Death» is a comically-morbid platform game where you guide heroic knights to their demise and use their dead bodies to solve puzzles. Impale knights on spikes to create a safe path. Catch a knight on a saw blade to strategically land the body on a button. Freeze your knights into blocks of ice to reach higher ground. Make your way through this treacherous and trap-ridden world to find the Cup of Life. On your quest, you will summon knight after knight and brutally sacrifice them to solve each challenging puzzle. In Life Goes On, death is not a setback—it is the only means to progress.

USA, 2015 (Remastered Version)

Grim Fandango (12+)

Developer: Double Fine Productions
System: Windows, Mac OS X, Linux, PlayStation 4, PlayStation Vita
Genre: Adventure

Grim Fandango is a Point and Click Adventure, separated in four acts with elements of the Film Noir genre and the mexican holiday Dia de los Muertos.

Game Over: The player leads Manny Calavera, a dead travel agent selling tours to other dead in the Eight Underworld, because everyone wants to leave for eternal peace in the „Ninth Underworld". Manny has the same job like Charon has in greek mythology: being paid for bringing the dead to peace. The Player has to help Manny solve puzzles and reach his main goal: quit his job and travel to the „Ninth Underworld", because being dead in the Eight Underworld is as exhausting as being alive. Like many others, he can't travel there quickly: His soul is spoiled from his rather bad life before death. While getting clients who always seem to have bad souls and therefore can't be sold a quick and expensive journey to the Ninth Underworld which would bring Manny commissions, he starts suspecting that the whole travel organization must be corrupt...

The game suggests that dying in general must not mean that it is over but can be a big hassle. A special aspect of game over is the „sprouting", dead bodies can actually die a second death when injected with living, growing seeds.

Link: Guacamelee

Japan (2016)

Dark Souls 3 (PEGI16)

Developer: From Software
System: Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, Xbox One
Genre: Action Role-Playing

«Dark Souls III» is the third installment of the «Dark Souls» franchise and an action role-playing game. The player controls a character from a third-person perspective through the dark fantasy world of Lothric and has to prevent an oncoming Age of Darkness by defeating the Lords of Cinder.

Game Over: Dark Souls' story and gameplay is closely linked to death. The gameplay demands strategic decisions and is merciless when making mistakes, causing a lot of deaths. However, the curse of the undead rests on Lothric, which respawns the player at a bonfire each time he dies. This will also leave blood stains of the player on the ground, making it possible for other players to review the cause of death. To overcome death and break the curse, the player has to reignite the Firelink Altar and start a new Age of Light.

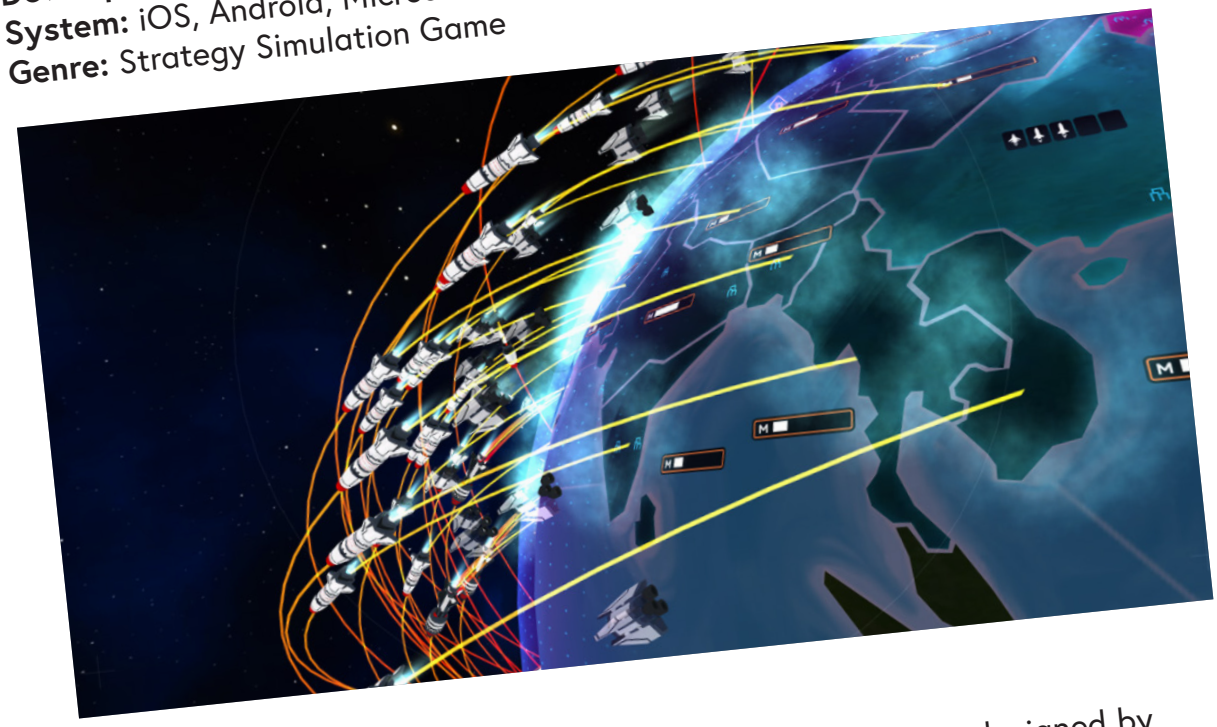
Link: Bloodbourne, The Surge, Nioh

Switzerland, 2017

FSK ab 12

First Strike

Developer: Blindflug
System: iOS, Android, Microsoft Windows, Mac OS X
Genre: Strategy Simulation Game



First Strike is a strategy simulation game about nuclear war designed by the Swiss studio Blindflug. You choose a nation or territory and build up an arsenal of offensive and defensive weapons. Then you use them to assert your superiority over the rest of the world.

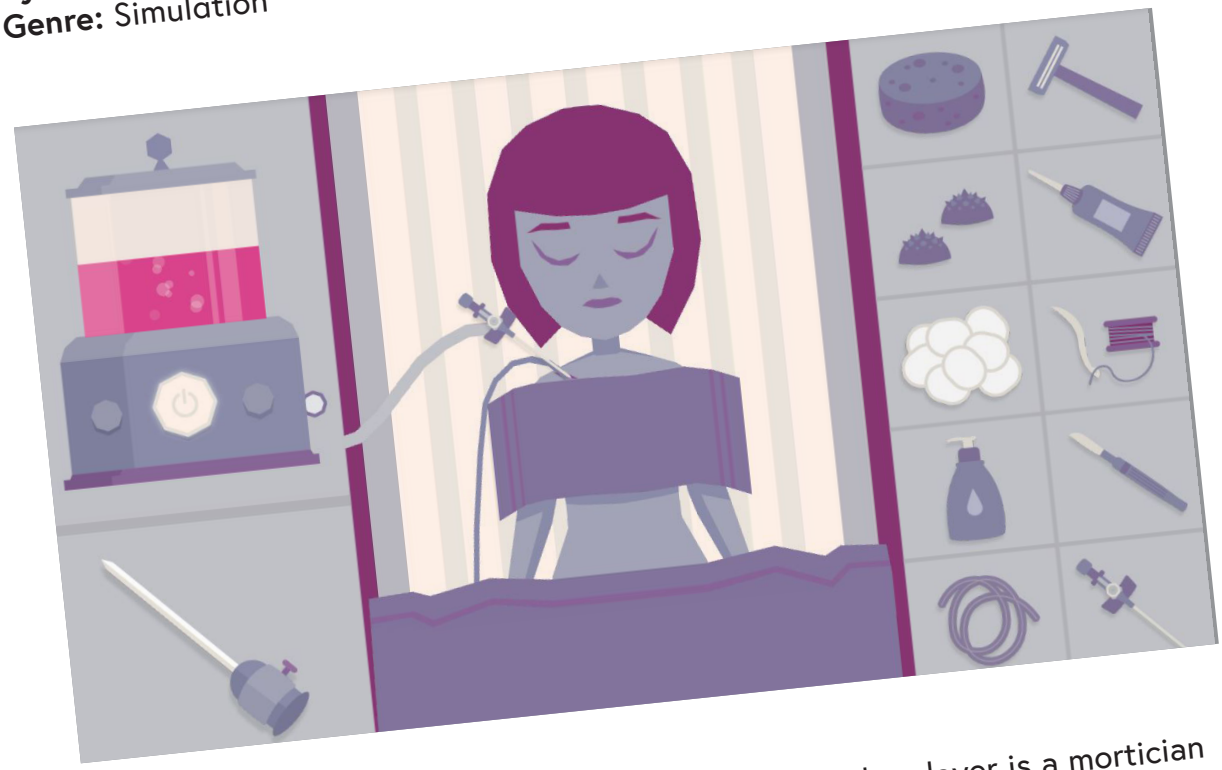
Game Over: If you ever wanted to end the world, here is your chance! You get enough nuclear weapons to blow up anyone you don't like. But the other nations will react and give you hell as well. Your own territory soon may look like the worst radioactive wasteland imaginable. Nuclear threat is a rather current political topic. That makes First Strike the more interesting. The gameplay is rather weill established. But at some point you have to face the inevitability of destruction and loss of billions of people. After playing it a few times, you may realize that the only way of winning this game is not to play at all! Once you pushed the first button, there is only destruction to follow.

Link: DEFCON

CANADA (2017)

A Mortician's Tale (16+)

Developer: Laundry Bear Games
System: Microsoft Windows, OS X
Genre: Simulation



A Mortician's Tale is a narrative-driven video game. The player is a mortician called Charlie who has to run a funeral home. The game shows an accepting attitude towards death. While playing you learn insights about the western funeral industry and burial rites.

Death: The simulation game approaches death with a positive and accepting attittude. It deals with the reality of bereavement and dead bodies. The game tries to be accurate but also sensitive. Mortician Charlie does not only have to deal with dead bodies, he also has to talk to and comfort relatives and friends. In this game death can be informative and humorous at the same time. The player has to face the dead bodies with professionality and at the same time he gets to know the story of the deceased through conversations with his or her relatives and friends. This way the player finds stories for reflection but also a routine in doing Charlie's job as a matter of course.