

The best games ... that I have ever played

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We continue this week with a continuation of "The best games ...that I have ever played." Look for another installment in next week's Clarion.

"Torchlight"

Game budgets and studio sizes have gotten out of control. It now takes literally millions of dollars and hundreds of people to make a Triple-A title with the vast majority being paint-by-numbers military shooters and high fantasy rpg's with embarrassingly clichéd art direction.

Here's where a little gem like this blew me away. For one, it was developed by under thirty people and twelve million dollars. That in of itself is absurd, but the fact that the art style pops and the game play keeps you hooked for hours after you know you should have stopped playing makes it one of my personal favorites.

The game basically is all about three things: kill'n monsters, get'n loot, an' get'n better loot. There is much more under the hood than this, but what I've mentioned above is what the folks at Runic Games really nailed and among their accomplishments is the vast range of appeal it has.

Do you want to obsess over your weapons and armor; memorizing and calculating all the little perks and quirks within to best confront the next passageway? There's more than enough for those kinds of folks, like difficulty levels and massive walls of statistics.

What if you just want to toss back a few beers, wail on some zombie dwarves, and find pretty candy colored loot? The developers are already way ahead of you by making all the cool stuff you find as visually satisfying as they are powerful.

If you've never touched a role playing game before in your life, honestly good for you, then this is a fantastic place to get started. But if your expectations for the genre have been grinded down to nub by now, its immediately likable breath of fresh air.

"Torchlight" is available for \$15 on STEAM and Runic Game's web site

"Metal Gear Solid 3"

I bought this game several years ago with absolutely no idea what to expect, except the drenching torrent of praise and awards the gaming press kept throwing at it. Now expectations like that are a bad thing to have for any new experience, but you know what? It achieved and exceeded everything I wanted

from a video game literally two thirds of the way through. . . I was blown away.

You are a paratrooper infiltration specialist working for a branch of the US. Government. It's the late sixties and Johnson has assumed the presidency.

A radical wing of the Russian communist party has absconded with several warheads and a prized physicist, and Khrushchev himself is backing the American effort to bring all the precious cargo back.

It gets so much more complicated from there. In fact, it collapses under its own weight just a few hours in. But the game is so long, yet so dynamic and refreshing, that you really never have a chance to pick your head up and criticize it.

It's a stealth game that, in a way, lets you do whatever the hell you want. You want to walk around a sandy cliff face in a cardboard box? Well then you go ahead. You want to whip out an ak-47 and lay waste to all that stand in your way? Then have at it. You want to make it through the entire twenty hour campaign with a tiny tranquilizer pistol? The developers aren't there to judge.

What they are there to do is give you the most entertaining sandbox for your inner cigar-chomping ninja-spy to play with. The aforementioned guns blazing approach, while initially entertaining, becomes obsolete once that game teaches you just how phenomenally stupid that approach is.

It doesn't force you to play a certain way, it shows you by smacking you down and letting you learn from your mistakes. For a game that's seems to be all about killing, it's not, stealthy pacifism is not only the smartest strategy, it's almost always the most fun.

Snake Eater is available for the PS2 in almost every PS2 bargain bin in the country.

"Devil May Cry 3"

I'm letting y'all know ahead of time, that when trying to finish this game on easy mode . . . it's ok to cry. I'm just not making an obvious pun. This game is so hard, so maddeningly difficult; yet so beguiling and visceral. That you will cry salty, painful tears at your incalculable failures while never backing down from its challenge

to try again

You play as some white haired thirty something named Dante who owns a devil hunting agency that gets jumped by said devils on his way out of the shower. Dude barley gets a chance to grab his coat.

But story is actually pretty damn good considering I'm leaving out a fair amount of nuance. But that's the dead last time the word "nuance" deserves to be anywhere near this review.

You run around a post-apocalyptic city killing billions upon zillions of demons and collecting various weapons and cash. The cash you use to upgrade your stuff, the weapons you use to keep from being mauled to death by the seven deadly sins, the various types of demons correspond with one of each.

It's incredible length, multiple difficulty levels, oodles of upgrades and secrets as well as it's rock solid combat fundamentals make it a blast today even six years after it's release

DMC3 is available right next to Snake Eater . . . not really, but in the same general area

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