Open World Games: Crash Course Games #22

Crash Course: Games
https://youtube.com/watch?v=0f6K1bzXCcs
https://nerdfighteria.info/v/0f6K1bzXCcs

Hi I'm André Meadows and this is Crash Course Games.

Today we're going to talk about a genre of games that has really boomed in the past couple decades: open-world games. I'm talking about the ones in which you can spend hours discovering every dark alley of the city, exploring a magical fantasy world, completing aimless quests, or even just choosing what you want your character to wear.

We're going to learn how these games are time capsules, and that they reflect the capabilities of their hardware, and while they aren't necessarily story-driven, we'll learn why they encouraged us to redefine what narrative means and how they appeal to the social being and explore in all of us. Unless you don't know how to control it and you just keep running the walls constantly. [Crash Course Games intro plays] Open world games are video games that take place in large, explorable worlds. The player chooses to partake in tons of optional activities, rather one clear set path.

Some of those pursuits relate to an overarching goal or story, and others don't, and many can be completed in a nonlinear way. These games will have a required John we're going to be talking about RPGs, action/adventure, fantasy, and more. We also have sandbox games, whose definition continues to be debated in the gaming community. Some view sandbox games is actually falling under the category of open world games, and some see them as two interchangeable terms.

Author Carolyn Handler Miller explains her perceived difference between the sandbox game and an open world game in the book Digital Storytelling. She writes, "when distinctions are made between open world and sandbox games, sandbox games are regarded as a toy box that contains tools that players can use to modify the game world and gameplay. Instead of containing set story elements like an open-world game, players can construct a narrative while playing, creating an emergent story." This brings us to another important term in this genre.

An emergent story is when a narrative becomes clear to the player, but it wasn't written or planned that way. You can view it as a sort of improvisation that occurs between the player and the sandbox world they've been given. The people who created the game didn't plan a story, but the individual interprets one. This can also happen to multiplayer games.

Think the MMORPGs we discussed. People get together and make an emergency story. And as Miller notes, "despite all the recent attention, the concept of emergence is still quite ambiguous and undefined in games." So in this video, when I refer to a "sandbox game," I'm talking about one with a lack of story and no clear end goal.

You could have an open world game that's not sandbox, but all sandbox games take place in an open world. Now I've been talking primarily in video game terms so far, but this genre has origins outside of those. As you know from watching the series, gaming devices and consoles haven't always had the capability to handle games like Fallout 4. But people have always enjoyed the emergent gameplay.

It really started in this context with the interactive fiction boom of the 1980s. There was a text based computer game Zork created by MIT students which was popular throughout the decade. In the game, you type in commands for your character to uncover a story piece-by-piece. Another text-based interactive fiction game with the Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy game released in 1984 for computers and Atari.

And even before that, board games like cosmic encounter and RPGs like Dungeons and Dragons gave people the opportunity to create emergent narratives. These games all have one thing in common: they give people an amount of control over the stories and the gaming experience. In the 1990s, popular graphic adventure PC and video games came out, like Mist, another processor to open world games. Another forerunner was the Ultima series which ran from 1980 to 1999 and often gets credit for being the first RPG set in an open world while incorporating a vivid narrative.

Then some three open world games started popping up, like Super Mario 64, Body Harvest, and the Legend of Zelda Ocarina [OAK-ar-ee-na] Time. Or is it Ocarina [ACH-ar-ee-na] of Time... It's always been a big debate.

You probably know. Now super Mario 64 might not be what you think of when you think "open-world game," but as scholar Henry Jenkins notes, "I've always felt Mario 64 is the greatest sandbox game ever made because of his ingenious non-linear level design. Levels in Mario 64 do not rely on multiple paths, but instead allow for improvisation a play based on a simple elegant ruleset" Now it's a little confusing, but worth pointing out that his definition of sandbox game differs from Carolyn Miller's. As I said these terms are still being shaped. Anyway in response to Jenkins, his colleague Chris Kohler adds "[Mario 64] also has emergent gameplay in the sense that a player can come up with ways to get around its challenges that even the developers never thought of, but which are not bugs." In 1999, two open world games were released that allow players to drive wherever they want to go.

Driver and Crazy Taxi and the same here Shenmue was released for the Sega Dreamcast. Shenmue's open world is often compared to the one in Grand Theft Auto 3, but it came first. There was a lot of hype.

At the time, people believed it cost about 70 million dollars to develop, it was now thought to be closer to 47 million. Still a lot. The game was set in modern Japan was an open explorable world featuring a harbor, bars, shopping areas, and villages. There were details that were monumental for games of the time, like weather changes, communication with a bunch of characters, and the ability to closely observe and interact with objects.

The graphics were pretty spectacular too. Already you can see how gaming devices needed to significantly progress in order for these games to develop. Zork was originally written for the massive PDP-10 a computer that was typically used in universities. Not really something the average American could access.

And even the later installments or Zork that did run on home computers, were simple and based on text commands. The open-world style seen in Zelda Ocarina of Time and Shenmue required more complex gaming devices to achieve that truly immersive feel. And a great example of this was 2001's Grand Theft Auto 3, an important release for Sony. The game exemplified the special features of the PlayStation 2: better graphics and bigger storage.

There was a plot, but players were given tons of freedom. They could explore 3D world, which was an entire city with three districts. They also had the option of following the main plot or veering off into side missions and adventures.

While some earlier games gave players control of the order of the missions, this game combined that freedom with the alternative of just exploring. Rockstar, the company that released Grand Theft Auto 3 or GTA3, even gets credit for inventing the term "sandbox game." Now wait to jump forward to more modern games. I wanna talk about these in terms of impact on players.

We're going to look at them from two different perspectives: how they operate as social constructs, and has been used for exploration. Two good examples of open world games that involve social dynamics are Eve Online and World of Warcraft. In these games, players form their own communities that include economies.

They're great examples of emergent narratives, but we already talked about them, so if these MMORPGs are of interest to you, check out the episode on that. And there's a newer open-world game that incorporates socialization: Minecraft, which was released in 2011. Now, it's one of the best-selling PC games of all time.

Let's go to the Thought Bubble. Minecraft was created by Swedish video game designer Markus Persson AKA Notch. He cited other sandbox games as influences, including Dungeon Keeper, Infiniminer, and Dwarf Fortress.

And surprise surprise, he loved Lego growing up. In 2009, Persson posted an unfinished version of Minecraft, a gaming portal tig souce, while working as a programmer and an online photo-sharing service called jAlbum. Minecraft was officially released in 2011.

By 2012 it had sold 5.3 million copies, making it the sixth best-selling PC game ever. It currently sits at number one, with 24 million copies sold, and thanks to additional console and mobile versions, is also one of the best-selling games of all time, right up there with Wii sports and Tetris. Minecraft is the epitome of a sandbox game.

Players can choose to do basically whatever they want, though there are different modes. If you've never played it, the world is made up of Lego-like blocks, everything is constructible and deconstructible. You can play solo or multiplayer.

In the latter, you get to work with others to create a structure from scratch. Calling it a "game" doesn't fully describe the co-operative experience. You are literally building a world together with your friends.

That's more than just gameplay, that's a complete and unique social relationship. As journalist Clive Thompson puts it, "It doesn't really feel like a game, it's more like a destination, a technical tool, a cultural scene, or all three put together." In other words. games like Minecraft and MMORPGs are redefining what "play" means. But perhaps it's not as new as it seems.

As Thompson notes, the game echoes the early days of personal computers, in which young people collaborated and learned to code together. Maybe playing Minecraft is similar to those MIT students creating the first iteration of Zork. Thanks Thought Bubble.

Kurt Squire of the University of Wisconsin-Madison has studied open-world video games to determine how people learn by playing them. In research published in 2008, Squire makes an interesting observation about how young people play Grand Theft Auto San Andreas varies depending on the context. For example, when one 12-year old participant described gameplay the researchers, he said he spent much of his time designing and driving cars, but when his friends were in the room, he spent more time talking about the violence he could enact.

Squire writes, "Its gameplay itself was a performance, one that arose in context, shaped in part by the other participants in the gaming experience, such as those who might be huddled around the television watching. These experiences suggest that for players, there is no one game that is played. Different gameplay models and experiences are activated by play in different contexts." So the people around us could possibly affect how we play open-world games, whether that's cooperation in Minecraft, showing off to your friends GTA.

And while you might get similar results to Squire's research with all types of games, there's more freedom in open world games. The format allows people to really show their different facets. Moving on from games that emphasize socialization to ones that pique curiosity and require exploration, there's the Elder Scrolls series, an open world fantasy RPG created in the mid-nineties by Bethesda Game Studios.

Skyrim, the fifth installment of the series, will release the rave reviews in 2011. There is a plot line, but the game features an extremely open world, so you don't have to follow narrative if you don't want to, and there's plenty to explore. Then there's the Fallout series which has been released by multiple studios since the late 90s. Fallout 4 came out in 2015 from Bethesda.

It takes place in a post-apocalyptic version of Boston, and not only can you explore and do quests like Skyrim, you can create your own structures and houses, sort of like Minecraft, and of course your character is completely modifiable. Something that sets Skyrim and Fallout apart from many other console games are modifications or mods. In 2016, mods were released by Bethesda for Fallout 4 on Xbox, like the PC mods we discussed in this series, players can now on a console install user-created mods on to their games.

Weapons, quests, even cheats. You can imagine how mods would be especially appealing to players who choose games that center around exploration. These are people who prefer to create their own gaming experience, without having to strictly adhere to a storyline.

A more recent example of a sandbox game is No Man's Sky. Every player starts the game with a broken spaceship on a planet chosen at random. From there you can wander and hunt resources, traveling from planet to planet.

The game has no narrative, but there is a goal for interested players: reach the center of the universe where a mystery may be revealed. So the game is solely about exploration and discovery of the planets and its inhabitants. According to Jake Swearingen of New York Magazine, "within the first night of the game's release, players had already discovered over 10 million species of living things.

More than we know about on our own planet." There's no way to know where the open-world genre is headed. We're talking about something that's going to continue to experience huge innovation for years to come. And as future you is lining up for the latest versions of Grand Theft Auto and Fallout, or waiting for the amazon package to arrive, probably by drone, take some time to reflect on everything open world games have taught us about ourselves.

We can create our own narratives through emergent stories, we can learn about and develop our own interests and priorities, whether that be socializing in Minecraft, exploring to make it planet No Man's Sky, following a pre-existing storyline in Shemue, or just stealing a car in Grand Theft Auto 3. It's fun. Don't do in real life though.

Thanks for watching, I'll see you next week in this open-world.
Stan

Muller: Crash Course Games is filmed in the chad and Stacey Emigholz studio in Indianapolis Indiana. It's made with the help of all these nice people. If you'd like to keep crash course free for everyone forever, you can support the series on Patreon, a crowdfunding platform that allows you to support the content you love. Speaking of Patreon, we would like to thank all our patrons in general, and we'd like to specifically thank our High Chancellor of Knowledge Morgan Lizop and Vice Principal Michael Hunt. Thank you for your support.