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A People's History Of The FPS, Part 1: The WAD

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By Robert Yang on September 19th, 2012 at 8:00 pm.

"A People's History" is a three part essay series by Robert Yang. He told us that he wanted to write an alternate view of the traditionally accepted history of the FPS genre as entirely dominated and driven by the mainstream, commercial industry, and to "argue for a long-standing but suppressed tradition of non-industry involvement in the first-person genre". This is part one.

In 1994, the New York Times filed a review of a first-person game under its "Arts" section, proclaiming it to be "a game that weaves together image, sound and narrative into a new form of experience." It sold millions of copies and inspired dozens of imitators. It seemed poised to define an era.

That game was Myst and it failed to define an era. Instead, a game called Doom came out three months after Myst — and then it shot Myst in the face.
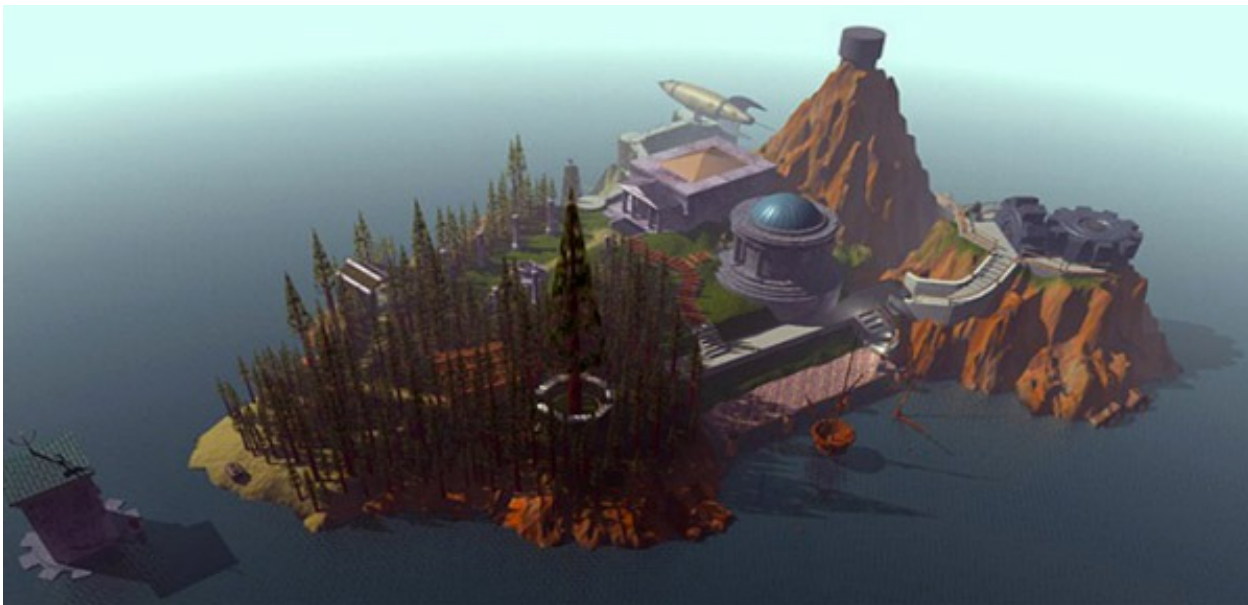
Myst died a slow, painful death. The sequel, Riven, sold well but caused the New York Times to seemingly backtrack, downgrading its Riven review to "Technology" instead of "Arts." Years passed with increasingly worse sequels and declining sales. Finally, the series' funeral in 2005, called Myst V (did you even know there was a Myst V?) was sparsely attended; the longtime developer, Cyan Worlds, laid off all but two employees and ceased all projects before making a last-minute deal to remain operational with the generally defunct game service GameTap. These days, they're porting the Myst series to iOS and seem somewhat healthy, but nowhere near the peak of their influence.

Still, some of today's boldest indie first-person games inherit many of Myst's sensibilities, and [some directly borrow the general premise](). It seems, given the growing number of experimental non-violent first-person shooters in development today, that Myst would be an integral part of first-person history… but it's suspiciously omitted from popular history.

Instead, we call Myst a "graphic adventure" and stuff it into the bottom of a locker in a closet in an attic. To give it a place in first-person history would be to highlight the lack of diversity and subtlety endemic to commercial practice in the genre today, and first-person history must remain the story of how a nascent manshooter empire became the hypermasculinized captain of the football team. That's the story the industry tells itself as it faces its mid-life crisis and buys itself a Ferrari, and even its critics believe this narrative.

In organizing the [7 Day FPS]() slow jam, indie darling Jan Willem Nijman [tweeted](), "… Fpses are a horribly oversaturated genre, indies can easily do amazing new stuff…"

This attitude is prevalent among players and designers, both in / out and for / against the AAA game industry. The popular narrative is that the first-person genre has long been an industry-funded enterprise of carnage, a linearly-structured, corridor-filled wasteland bereft of innovation. And now, only recently, are the "pretentious" cultural elite and avant-garde beginning to defile / liberate this lovely camera perspective from the muddied obsidian-clawed clutches of the AAA game industry.

But even criticizing the FPS in this way is playing directly into the industry's hand: it accepts the premise that the industry has always owned and nurtured the first-person genre… when that simply isn't true.

Yes, Doom was a wild success, built by industry veterans who are now industry emperors.

Yes, we used the term "Doom clone" as a short-hand for first-person manshooters until game journalists and players invented the term "first-person shooter," months after Doom's release.

Yes, Doom succeeded for many reasons: its compelling open floorplan levels, appealing graphic violence, multiplayer deathmatch capabilities, and online distribution / shareware model. In many respects, it was simply better than anything else available on the market.

But.

Doom also had a well-engineered engine architecture. Its levels and game assets were stored in modular .WAD files ("Where's All the Data?") that could be swapped in and out. That is, Myst mods were impossible or impractical — but Doom mods (or WADs) flourished, powered by a strong player community that reverse-engineered file formats and code pointers to make substantial game modifications possible.

In this way, Doom empowered people outside of the industry. Myst did not.

There were countless Doom mods, many illegally co-opting Hollywood's intellectual properties as in the Ghostbusters WAD or Batman WAD, betraying a sort of punk attitude toward modding, now somewhat defanged and depoliticized in today's age of the regulated Steam Workshop. Back then, modding was new, more like a wild frontier without a single monolithic community or a handsome PC-only games blog to offer coverage — it was somewhat fragmented, with at least a dozen editors developed for Doom, each with their own userbase. One of the more notorious mods was distributed in select boxes of breakfast cereal, called Chex Quest, reskinning Doom's demonic imagery and graphic violence with gentle political satire, cartoon aliens, and heroically crispy rice wafers that were part of a balanced breakfast. (From this perspective, even the advertising world's relationship with the FPS was somewhat subversive.)

To many Doom players though, one notable early mod stood out above the rest, and perhaps marks the beginning of a people's history in the first-person genre:

The "Aliens TC" was a total conversion mod by Justin Fisher, released in 1994. Fisher used an early community-made modding tool, DeHackEd, to hack the Doom executable to add acid blood, flashing proximity sensors, hatching alien eggs, and other fiction-building flourishes. His custom campaign roughly mirrors the

structure of the film Aliens, with a masterfully paced first level called "Landing Pads" that contains no monsters whatsoever and exists only to setup tension and tell a story — you just move through the level, with no "challenges" whatsoever, then push the exit button.

That is: this skillfully hacked piece of game design, the first level of the first mod of the first explosively successful, bonified first-person shooter… was a highly experimental, non-industry-affiliated, functional equivalent of Dear Esther, designed back in 1994.

Yet in spite of this profound legacy in modding, or of Myst's influence in present day FPS design, we still hold both types of design as less legitimate and less deserving of representation in the history of the genre than the 2005 film adaptation of Doom — which the genre's Wikipedia page currently mentions *twice*. Again, this bias is pervasive, even among the industry's critics: ex-industry now-indie developer Steve Gaynor (designer on Minerva's Den) remarked that "there's sort of this zeitgeist of people saying the first-person perspective is really interesting. What happens if you take out shooting?"

In "A People's History," I wish to argue that this interest in experimenting with the first-person perspective is not a zeitgeist nor a recent trend. It's more that we've been systematically denying the "first-person" genre label to such games, which is based on pleading semantics rather than any meaningful distinction.

There has been a steady current of non-manshooting / avant-garde-manshooting thought in first person game design, starting with Fisher's Aliens TC in 1994 — basically, ever since the term "first person shooter" got coined. Which is not to imply Steve Gaynor is a fool (he's street-smart and handsome) nor that he's necessarily wrong (he's just a little wrong) nor that the AAA game industry has always deliberately suppressed independent design and thought (it just happened to do it, accidentally).

However, we must be aware of the institutions that shape our perspective on game design — including the simple awareness that such institutions exist, that alternate histories exist, and that some institutions stand to profit from supporting a certain version of history — because that is how we can begin to take greater control as people.

Next time, Part 2: how the FPS modding scene was tamed and domesticated.

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113 Comments »

MORE FROM THE WEB

1.

19/09/2012 at 20:06 *MythArcana* says:

And I swore the industry would follow suit with the .wad format as it was very efficient on the end-user, but they did something else instead. I miss the day when id Software ruled the world with their great ideas and technology and I wish we would return to common sense soon.

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20/09/2012 at 09:29 *RegisteredUser* says:

To be fair several games have later used formats like .pak(id software also evolved into that with paks and pk3s and whatnot, but others picked up the idea as well iirc) which were (often, but not always) essentially pkzipped files anyone could extract/recompress to mod stuff in/out, while another logic that got sort of common was the "'outside'directory structure mimicking the packed structure means the outside files are used as overrides" which helped modding by leaps and bounds on several occasions(stuff like Kings Bounty, Silent Storm, quite a few others).

2.

CaspianRoach says:

And I thought Wolfenstein came before Doom… Come to think of it, there were FPSs on consoles some years before Doom and Myst. Oh well, I guess that's not the point.

○

alsoran says:

I'm not sure modding was generally possible with wolfenstien. Loved the Aliens TC, the inclusion of audio from the film really added to the tension. Doom was something else, I had it networked so the kids could play against each other from their bedroom, glory days.

■

Jehar says:

Mods were certainly doable, though mostly limited to asset replacement. Famously, Barney the dinosaur made his appearance in Wolf3D. However, this was literally hacked in and unexpected by ID. In Doom, they made efforts to facilitate that sort of thing, and so the mod community got properly launched.

■

jorygriffis says:

Ahh, that Barney mod for Wolf3D scared me so much more than Doom ever did when I was a kid. Good times.

■

susanna1415 says:

There's a disturbing lack of Richard Cobbett here, who will give a very-very good explaination on why Myst is not a good game:3

http://www.gamersgate.co.uk/DD-JSROST/jet-set-radio-soundtrack

■

20/09/2012 at 13:02 *jackelope* says:

You're a clever spammer, susanna1415.

20/09/2012 at 16:44 *Mad Hamish* says:

So sophisticated was the bot it even noted the Cobbettlessness of the thread.

19/09/2012 at 20:58 *GallonOfAlan* says:

I played multiplayer Maze War on the Mac network in college, which is an FPS, and that dates from 1974. So yeah, there were FPS games around before Doom and Wolf. What there wasn't was a hugely popular one.

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19/09/2012 at 21:09 *diamondmx* says:

Yeah, I also find myself wondering why they're always called "Doom-clones" and much reference to Doom as the first FPS, when at the very least, Wolfenstein 3D was first, was first person, and involved a lot of shooting.

Was it just because it wasn't as popular, or because the name is shorter and easier to pronounce?

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19/09/2012 at 21:55 *circadianwolf* says:

The technical reason is that Doom was true 3D and Wolf3D wasn't. There's no height in Wolf3D, just projection–the game is played entirely on the X/Y axes, and could be played from the top down if you wanted. (Of course, that's not to say true 3D games didn't exist before Doom–they did. But Wolf3D wasn't one of them.) (And as to why that means Doom is considered the birth of FPS, dunno.)

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19/09/2012 at 23:13 *thecat17* says:

Doom wasn't true 3D though. The term that gets thrown around is that it's 2.5D. Quake was id's first true 3D FPS.

Log in to Reply

20/09/2012 at 01:04 *Baf* says:

The one thing about this entire page that gives me the most hope is that no one has yet replied to that comment. Back in Usenet days, argument about how many dimensions Doom has and what exactly "2.5D" means were as unavoidable, and just as pointless, as copyright threads and the Monty Hall problem.

20/09/2012 at 09:28 *RvLeshrac* says:

2.5D means that the environment (or the majority of the environment) is 2D while the geometry is 3D.

The enemies, items, and objects in Doom were all 2D sprites. They had "backs" and "sides" in the same way enemies in SMW had "backs" and "sides," but no one would argue that SMW was "3D."

Also, there were a fairly large number of FPSes prior to Doom's launch. The modding had nothing to do with Doom's initial popularity.

20/09/2012 at 14:32 *Eclipse* says:

Doom is 3d. it's just raycasted instead of being polygon based. And while Quake was probably the first one featuring 3d animated humans, the first to feature fully polygonal 3d maps AND enemies was Descent, that came out before Quake

20/09/2012 at 15:16 *Charles de Goal* says:

Even Quake is not true 3D, because in true 3D straight lines do not appear (exactly) as straight lines. Move very close to your monitor and look at its borders to see what I mean.

20/09/2012 at 19:14 *Joshua Northey* says:

Understanding the Monty Hall problem is a very important part of understanding decision theory, math and logic. Not sure why you would think arguing about it is pointless.

That is like saying arguing about what is the correct math is pointless. It is clearly not as using the wrong math is very detrimental.

20/09/2012 at 14:42 *YourMessageHere* says:

Probably the same reason lorry-mounted cranes are known as Hiabs, vacuum cleaners get called Hoovers, certain types of bench-mounted saws are known as Stihl saws, and (lamentably) MP3 players get called iPods: success. These are the products that put the underlying concept into the minds of the general user base, and by doing that they manage to link themselves to that concept irrevocably, and thus a brand name or product name defines an entire category of stuff, even beyond that manufacturer.

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20/09/2012 at 00:07 *Metonymy* says:

Because it was, is, and remains an entire order of magnitude better than any other game of it's type.

All the problems with modern shooters can be described as: the way in which their overall design intent differs from Doom. All the excellent modern shooters can be described as: the way in which their overall design intent resembles Doom.

I could say a lot more, but I doubt I'll convince anyone.

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20/09/2012 at 10:05 *Bungle* says:

You aren't convincing me!

[Log in to Reply](#)

20/09/2012 at 00:57 *milman* says:

It's just the impact it had through it's distribution that gave birth to the "Doom -clone" remark. It wasn't a new concept but it infected gamers and spread like wildfire. Wolfenstein laid the groundwork for global doomination .

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20/09/2012 at 07:28 *c-Row* says:

Popularity. It's the same reason Minecraft clones are called that and not Infiniminer clones.

Log in to Reply

20/09/2012 at 06:44 *Prime* says:

If you think that forgetting Wolfenstein is unfair, what about something like the old Freescape games on the 8 and 16 bit home computers? Driller, Total Eclipse, Castle Master…Driller was made in 1987, several years before Wolfenstein was even an itch in id's coding lobe. All of those games gave the player a fully explorable 3d world, from a first-person perspective, and allowed you to shoot things. Also: Cybercon 3, Corporation (although I'll admit that was more of a 2.5 afair like Wolfy). Doom was the first big, popular *mainstream* success, and a huge technological achievement that gave players a fresh, fast-paced, innovative experience. That's why it gets its esteemed place in history. But no, none of id's creations were first to present 1st person 3D worlds.

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20/09/2012 at 07:54 *brulleks* says:

Driller was a fantastic game, and a massive step forward for the first-person perspective – but only because it used polygons. There were even earlier first-person games that used vector graphics, such as the Mercenary series.

Log in to Reply

20/09/2012 at 12:42 *Bobby Oxygen* says:

Everyone seems to be under the false assumption that Wolfenstein 3D was the id guys first foray into the first person perspective. Back when they were still working for Softdisk they developed The Catacomb Abyss which was in many ways a more advanced title than Wolf, albeit not nearly as polished.

http://www.mobygames.com/game/dos/catacomb-abyss

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20/09/2012 at 13:45 *Chentzilla* says:

And there even was a 3D editor for Freescape, which enabled end users to create their own 3D games.

Log in to Reply

20/09/2012 at 14:11 *GunnerMcCaffrey* says:

And before Wolf3D was [Catacomb](), also by iD, and also better.

Log in to Reply

20/09/2012 at 14:29 *Eclipse* says:

"Come to think of it, there were FPSs on consoles some years before Doom and Myst."
Wolfeinstein is obviously older than Doom, and Catacomb 3D is even older and nope there were no
fps AT ALL on consoles before doom\wolf 3d. If you're talking about first person games in fake 3d
like dungeon master then that's something very old, but it's not an fps

Log in to Reply

3.

19/09/2012 at 20:10 *molluskgonebad* says:

Fantastic start; I like this take.

Log in to Reply

19/09/2012 at 20:17 *Danopian* says:

I agree, this is incredibly intriguing.

Log in to Reply

19/09/2012 at 21:31 *Smashbox* says:

I feel like part 2 and 3 should be included here. It seems a bit odd to me to cut it off right as the
introduction wraps up.

Log in to Reply

20/09/2012 at 01:10 *Quarex* says:

Absolutely. Critical analytical perspectives subverting dominant narratives are pretty much always
welcome, especially where they are completely unexpected, as when I look to see what is new on
Rock, Paper, Shotgun. This is great. I hope there are many more articles like this.

Log in to Reply

20/09/2012 at 11:34 *Ross Angus* says:

Yay for Bobby Yang! More words, please!

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4.

19/09/2012 at 20:13 *Sheng-ji* says:

Did myst have any shooting in it? I certainly didn't get far enough to experience it if it did.

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○

19/09/2012 at 22:10 *RobinOttens* says:

Yeah. I'm confused by all the bouncing around between the FPS genre and the 'first person genre' (is that a genre now?). What is this article about exactly? Is there sarcasm involved? Myst is fantastic, but not the first first-person adventure game by Cyan, Doom is great but not the first FPS. I should probably read the entire thing to fix my confusion.

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19/09/2012 at 22:57 *Zeewolf* says:

Yeah, it's kinda nonsensical to bring up Myst in a series about a different genre. First person games is not a genre in itself, it's just a description of a viewpoint used. Myst, which used pre-rendered movies and still pics, is very, very far removed from the first person shooter.

Myst was not the first "first person adventure game". Just like Doom was not the first "first person shooter". They're both games, highlights maybe, from genres that had a long-lasting history before they showed up, and continue to exist as completely separate genres today.

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19/09/2012 at 23:47 *Muzman* says:

Fellas, fellas! The article isn't about first person shooters. It's about first person level design and the concept itself; a different take on the history of a perspective, looking elsewhere besides the shifting of tastes and the collating of raw popularity (note the marriage between the largely considered obsolete Myst and the minimalist first person indies of today).

Yes there were other first person games before (Wolf3d, Ultima Underworld). Doom and Myst were famous and popular in a way completely unprecedented in video games. Especially home computer ones. They were household names. The pop history of games would suggest Doom ushered in a new era. Maybe that's not all there is to it.

20/09/2012 at 00:51 *soldant* says:

The article is titled "A People's History of the FPS Part 1 – The WAD." It then launches into a discussion on Myst (which isn't an FPS and nobody would call it an FPS), ignores Wolf3D, then suddenly remembers it's about WADs and talks about that in a fairly shallow way, and then goes back to talking about Myst and Dear Esther and the indie devs. Really, for an article about first person shooters (remember the FPS part?) and WADs, there was a significant amount of discussion about Myst. And it's a very tenuous link at best, claiming that Myst and Doom share some similarities because Myst had a pre-rendered, fixed-movement first person perspective, and Doom is the prototypical 90s FPS. A more appropriate title should have been used. But given that linking Myst and Doom is a bit silly, I can't think of one.

20/09/2012 at 02:04 *thecat17* says:

I'm also confused as to why Myst was talked about in the article after reading both the headline and the introduction. Perhaps the former wasn't even written by Mr. Yang?

At any rate, it was an enjoyable read for me and this is only part 1. I'm very intrigued to see how Robert ties Myst into the FPS genre's history in the next two essays.

20/09/2012 at 08:27 *N* says:

This thing needs a re-title badly. Anyway pretty much what soldant said, the whole article is kind of fuckin incoherent honestly, and there is no real in-depth look into the wad scene at all. Really, it's like someone wrote this just by collecting "word of mouth" tidbits, without doing any genuine research into the subject. The Myst-Doom link seems quite forced also.

20/09/2012 at 09:40 *RegisteredUser* says:

I think the main problem is that I don't really feel the article has a real thrust or surprising new point to it.

I lived and played in the time when there were more doom mod floppy disks out than games it felt like, and I would never call the scene around id soft and Apogee and 3D Realms in any way a proper industry yet BEFORE they went on

to the next iterations of their games.

What I mean is: I am not sure what the guy is even saying. There has always been a very involved, community based scene on the PC and around the PC, and of course it also concerned itself with games. Forever(heck even I runtime aborted BASIC games on the C64 and then mucked about in the source, though that was more cheating than modding).

Even when, which I suspect part 2 will be about, developers became dicks(partly thanks to their publishers snare contracts) and locked down file formats, added more and more DRM on top of the old and didn't give a hoot about making anyone's life easier when it came to modding or hacking their precious IP (as it was no longer a game, but a property to be protected from our evil, dirty, grubby hands), there STILL was a scene of clever enough people if the title was just big enough that tore the thing apart and built things for it. The scenes, communities and various involvements never really died down, at worst they shifted to where they felt it was worth the time or simply took longer to become visible again.

If the guy thinks that because someone put the DOOM movie into the wiki twice this is all naught or forgotten or misjudged, he's just wrong.

"Consensus" as I have experienced it is that the DOOM movie was crap(or beloved by people into B movies and camp, which is another thing entirely) and that DOOM modding/mods is a conversation starter with anyone in the know. I also don't feel like there is a cover-up or revisionist attempt of the modding scene or the history of gaming, either.
So I really don't agree with that allegation of the article AT ALL.

-

I quite frankly sooner enjoy reading about the dilemma of having the wrong perspective of your gamer and community, because that kinda seems one of the many underlying things the guy is shooting off about.
But he's going in too many directions at once and not strongly enough for me to really get much out of what he's saying.

20/09/2012 at 10:02 *Muzman* says:

Is that really how you guys read stuff? Constantly bouncing back and forth assessing whether it justifies its title in the most literal fashion possible?
Aye Yie Yie
It's called 'A people's history of the FPS', which is a little arch perhaps, but he's talking about modding in first person. You have to talk about Doom there. But you talk about Myst because, one it was huge and looms large over the popular history of gaming, two because it's largely considered the last hurrah of an obsolete style of game (an adventure, but also heavily reliant on atmosphere and solitude), and three because as mentioned, there's quite a few indie games and mods that have gone minimalist FP not least of all Dear Esther. It's not the least bit interested in this strict genre bracketing people are doing. It does also say Part 1.

So folks could at least wait until the thesis is done with before saying it hasn't made a worthwhile or novel case.

20/09/2012 at 21:21 *Joshua Northey* says:

I really wanted to like this article, but I cannot for the life of me figure out what it is about or what it is trying to say. That is a think a weakness.

20/09/2012 at 15:04 *Urthman* says:

Don't know why you people can't read. The point of Myst is to say:

Most people think games rejected the path Myst seemed to offer and opted instead for all-shooting all-the-time FPS like Doom. This is false. Doom mods like Aliens TC were using FPS engines to feature non-violent gameplay all the way back in 1994, and this kind of experimental non-shooting FPS has continued to be part of the FPS scene.

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20/09/2012 at 00:21 *Wizardry* says:

Yes, this seems to be about the whole concept of first-person perspective in games, focusing on Myst because it was so popular around the time of Doom I guess.

Here's an interesting piece of information. Computer role-playing games featured first-person views all the way back in 1977 on the PLATO with games like Avatar, Oubliette and Moria. Wizardry, another first person RPG, was seemingly influenced by Oubliette. In fact, as far as I'm aware, some of these early games were the first to use WASD-like keyboard buttons for movement, using WAXD instead. This influence can be seen in much later games like Ultima Underworld, and likely influenced the widespread adoption of this control scheme among PC games.

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20/09/2012 at 12:13 *RobinOttens* says:

Oh wow, thanks for the history lesson! That was some stuff I didn't know yet.

Also… Now that I think about it. There *was* some first person shooting in Uru. Well, you were shooting a harpoon-thing from a first-person periscope thing. It qualifies! (the article isn't really just about fps', I know)

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5.

19/09/2012 at 20:15 *Tom De Roeck* says:

Still like Myst more than doom, though. All the different sequels.

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6.

19/09/2012 at 20:18 *malgox* says:

Brilliant Article. Wish their were more alternative history articles about games out there. Too often do we accept industry cliches about game development.

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○

20/09/2012 at 09:30 *RvLeshrac* says:

As demonstrated by this article, "alternative history" is nearly always utterly incorrect garbage spewed onto a page.

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■

20/09/2012 at 13:08 *N* says:

respect knuckles

[Log in to Reply](#)

7.

19/09/2012 at 20:19 *alsoran* says:

I always thought Myst would be better with shooters. just saying.

[Log in to Reply](#)

8.

19/09/2012 at 20:19 *Brun* says:

We need one of these on the history of MMOs.

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○

19/09/2012 at 21:04 *Sparkasaurusmex* says:

More of these articles on anything, really. Good stuff, can't wait for part 2.

Log in to Reply

19/09/2012 at 21:15 *Trevoresque* says:

Amen.

Log in to Reply

19/09/2012 at 23:53 *Wizardry* says:

Yes. And I should write the one about RPGs.

Log in to Reply

20/09/2012 at 00:06 *Hoaxfish* says:

Wizardry looked upon the RPG genre, and declared "That's not an RPG".

Log in to Reply

20/09/2012 at 01:15 *ffordesoon* says:

The following excerpt from "The Five RPGs Ever Made", by Wizardry, was reprinted with permission:

Computer role-playing games ceased to exist in 1987, replaced by games with "characters" and "stories" and "excitement" and things of interest to other people. Where are the stats? The STAAAAAAAAAAAAATS!

-THE END-

Log in to Reply

20/09/2012 at 12:25 *JackShandy* says:

You know we all love you really, wizardry.

Log in to Reply

9.

19/09/2012 at 20:35 *tomeoftom* says:

Robert Yang: one of the most tasteful and reasoned designers in games. Always glad to see collaboration between RPS and he.

Log in to Reply

19/09/2012 at 21:04 *ResonanceCascade* says:

Google tells me he did a lot of earlier work on Black Mesa. Interesting, that.

Log in to Reply

20/09/2012 at 11:36 *tomeoftom* says:

Yeah he's like Mr. FPS Level Designer

Log in to Reply

10.

19/09/2012 at 20:37 *Porpentine* says:

YES YES YES! Particularly love the splice of Myst with the Witness.

Log in to Reply

11.

19/09/2012 at 20:56 *fiddlesticks* says:

What impresses me most about the Doom modding community is that it's still alive and constantly producing quality work. Some of the wads which were released in recent years are better than most commercial FPS titles.

Log in to Reply

19/09/2012 at 21:15 *Chubzdoomer* says:

You're exactly right! I'm one of the folks still tinkering with Doom and it's amazing what you can do with it today, especially with modern source ports like GZDoom and Skulltag. There's a scripting language called ACS that really opens the floodgates for new ideas and even brand new game modes and ways of experiencing Doom.

In case you or anyone else is interested, here are my most unique and popular creations that I think show what you can accomplish with a nice mixture of scripting and map design:

If Doom was done today
A modern take on Doom parodying the incredibly linear, scripted single-player shooters of today

like Call of Duty and even Battlefield.

[Demon Defense (v1.3)](#)
A World at War Nazi Zombie-inspired game mode in which you must survive against waves of incoming Doom enemies. Each kill you get earns you money which can be spent on brand new weapons, ammunition, opening doors, and even activating random weapon or powerup boxes.

[RTS Doom (v1.1)](#)
A very unique real-time strategy take on Doom. Rather than roaming around maps, blowing away demons, in this project you're an invisible "commander" entity and your job is to construct buildings and train units from some of them to try and get at least one of them to the back of the enemy's base. This video features commentary and a one-on-one match I played versus a buddy of mine.

[Doom RPG](#)
Although this project was never completed, I published this video as a demonstration of what you can accomplish with the ACS scripting language in regards to role-playing games. This build featured a fairly large open world to explore, quests to take, and even a leveling system in which experience came from killing monsters and turning in quests.

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12.

19/09/2012 at 21:02 *espoo2* says:

Been lurking for 5+ years here. Created an account to say that I really appreciate this article, and I can't wait to read the rest. Well done, Sir.

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13.

19/09/2012 at 21:02 *Oozo* says:

Not much to add, other than: Thanks for a nice start, and I'm looking forward to more.
As some people already said, the popular narratives of the medium's history are so ossified that shaking things up a little (like Tristan Donovan did in "Replay" with the inclusion of the British trippin' scene or, on a totally different level, Claus Pias) is always very welcome.

Burn the history books! Let's write history! Oh Captain my Captain! etc.

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14.

19/09/2012 at 21:15 *Trevoresque* says:

I still haven't enjoyed a first-person shooter as much as I enjoyed Team Fortress for the original Quake. But I really loved fiddling with all the mods in those days. I remember one called "Slide" where you'd ride a hoverboard through blocky brown maps like they were ski hills. Good times.

p.s. Didn't lots of modders from the Doom/Quake era get snatched up by companies like Valve and Epic?

19/09/2012 at 21:35 *Jenks* says:

TF was my second favorite, my #1 of all time being another Quake mod, 3wave CTF. The grappling hook hijinks in that game were amazing, one of the most chaotic games I've ever played.

19/09/2012 at 22:27 *Trevoresque* says:

Oh my god oh my god. Joy flashbacks. I remember the chain sound that grappling hook made. Thank you for reminding me, because I'd merged CTF and TF in my mind. Threewave was my gateway drug.

20/09/2012 at 09:48 *RegisteredUser* says:

Counter-Strike was essentially a Half-Life mod that Valve had nothing to do with until the 4th beta, e.g.

A lot of people from the demo scene went into game development as well.

15.

19/09/2012 at 21:25 *twig_reads* says:

Interesting, I never knew that Monolith's Alien versus Predator 2 Marine campaign starting mission could be inspired by a mod. But my due to my age my gaming life started just abit after mid-90s so I never was a avid Doom player and my first fps was Quake 2.
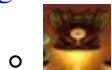
16.

19/09/2012 at 21:51 *Klarden* says:

There's a disturbing lack of Richard Cobbett here, who will give a very-very good explaination on why Myst is not a good game:3

19/09/2012 at 22:59 *Skabooga* says:

Reading some of the bits about Myst in this article, I got the subconscious feeling that some of the Hivemind nodes might have a thing or two to say in contention. I believe I really must have been thinking about Cobbett's reaction.
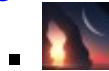
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19/09/2012 at 23:03 *Lambchops* says:

If I remember likely John shares Cobbett's outlook on Myst.

Rightly so too, it's shite.

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20/09/2012 at 09:39 *Prime* says:

Arrgg! You are all WRONG. Even Cobbett and Walker and Gillen and ANYONE who says Myst is bad bad filthy bad like a diseased rat bad. No! Wrong!

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17.

19/09/2012 at 21:58 *Yosharian* says:

I remember making my own DOOM levels. I also made my own Total Annihilation maps, custom built to allow me to build fortresses in which to fend off hordes of CPU enemies.

You don't get shit like that anymore. Fucking industry is eating itself alive.

Also, yeah isn't Myst a bad game? I remember attempting to play it and finding it terribly boring and unintuitive.
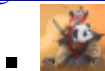
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19/09/2012 at 23:35 *sinister agent* says:

I can't say, but in general, bad games can still be very influential. There are lots of games that did something first, but not very well, or did something very well but relied too heavily on it (first example that comes to mind is Achron, although it remains to be seen how influential that will be).

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20/09/2012 at 10:30 *Yosharian* says:

True, I guess. I just don't remember any of my friends talking about Myst at all. Perhaps it was more of a thing on the programmer/developer side of the field.

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18.

19/09/2012 at 22:08 *Grey_Ghost* says:

Aliens TC is the only mod I still remember (quite fondly at that) from my time with Doom. That guy did a fantastic job.

Log in to Reply

19.

19/09/2012 at 22:09 *0rpheus* says:

Wonderful, will be following with interest.

Also 'bonified' != 'bona-fide' ;)

Log in to Reply

20.

19/09/2012 at 23:24 *welverin* says:

I didn't even make it halfway through this before I stopped reading out of annoyance, first-person isn't a genre, it's a camera perspective!

The S in FPS is critical.

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21.

20/09/2012 at 00:26 *jezcentral* says:

Oh, PCZone, and your glorious freebie diskette, with the infamous xxx.wad, how I remember thee.

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22.

20/09/2012 at 01:30 *pilouuuu* says:

I constantly wonder why games must force violence upon gameplay. When I play a game like Skyrim I wish it were a real RPG i.e.: a game where you can play a role. Why does it have to be a violent role?

Why can't we have a first person RPG that looks like Skyrim, but includes the best of Ultima? A game where you get rewards for not looting, for finding diplomatic solutions to problems, for talking to solve quests. A game where violence is an option, not an imperative.

Was the industry always a fan of violence? I remember most games I played as a kid included violence like Elevator Action, Space Invaders, but was it a limitation of technology at the time or it's something inherent to games themselves?

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23.

20/09/2012 at 03:18 *GreatGreyBeast* says:

That was just an absolutely stunningly confused pile of nonsequiters. What the flying spaghetti monster does Myst have to do with FPS history? Is he seriously arguing that anything viewed from a first-person perspective is part of the same genre? What does violence have to do with "non-industry involvement"? What does non-industry involvement have to do with indies vs. mainstream, seeing as indies are still, you know, in the industry?

Rambling, pointless nonsense, all of it. Pick a thesis!

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   o

   20/09/2012 at 04:39 *Hardlylikely* says:

   You are rushing to judgement. I suspect you will find the answers and developed themes you are seeking in the concluding, rather than the introductory article.

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      ▪

      20/09/2012 at 05:13 *GreatGreyBeast* says:

      Assuming that is true, then what was the purpose of this article's existence?

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         ▪

         20/09/2012 at 05:32 *Hardlylikely* says:

         Well I'd say, to introduce the ideas he wants to elaborate, and stoke discussion and interest in Part 2. The point seems to be to buck the normal lazy analysis of gaming history by way of introducing often forgotten aspects and connections. To be more specific, as the cliche goes, history is written by the victors, this is simply a different interpretation on those same events.

         It got you going, whether or not you agree with him, isn't that a better result than the usual boring list of firsts, similarities and influences? Also he has enough experience that I think he deserves a fair hearing. The results remain to be seen.

         Edited for elaboration.

20/09/2012 at 05:47 *GreatGreyBeast* says:

Well I'll admit to some of that. The RPS commenters can be counted on to provide thoughful perspectives, no matter the trigger. That happens sometimes. My friends and I got much more fascinating conversation out of The Dark Knight Rises and Prometheus than either movie really deserved. Providing a topic is not the same thing as providing an intelligent contribution to the discussion.

20/09/2012 at 06:12 *Hardlylikely* says:

I find a good 'what if' scenario fascinating. What if Myst had supported modding? Could this other thread of FP game design have flourished alongside clicking on faces until you get a death animation? These modern non-combat first person games, would they have found some clear air much earlier in time than they have done? Would we have more interesting shooters as a result? Might someone have made a fun Myst?

It definitely had the zeitgeist for a while there. Everyone with a passing interest in computer games must have heard of it. Personally I hated Myst and Riven no matter how much I tried to see what others saw. Pointlessly obtuse puzzles designed around a POV contrived to make working things out way more annoying than it needed be. But apart from any gaming merits it was also *the* showcase if you had a CD-ROM drive and a nice monitor. That wasn't all though, people did like it for a reason, even if I didn't. So why did that strand die away for a while?

20/09/2012 at 10:04 *RegisteredUser* says:

I'm kinda with you, as elaborated at http://www.rockpapershotgun.com/2012/09/19/a-peoples-history-of-the-fps-part-1-the-wad/#comment-1091630

24.

20/09/2012 at 04:30 *DoctorMikeReddy* says:

Myst was the first game to embrace photorealistic graphics. Terrible refresh rate (FPS = frames per second?) However, it was "first person" and I think the author is right to contrast it with 3D real-time rendered games. It's an evolutionary backwater, like FMV (full motion video) games, and an important complement to Doom-clones. Can't wait for the rest

20/09/2012 at 05:36 *GreatGreyBeast* says:

I don't think so. The difference between slideshow style first person and real-time first person is not just rendering technology. The two promote completely different level design, visual design, and world interaction. They are fundamentally different design paradigms, even before the whole divide between the adventure and shooter genres. Comparing them here makes no sense, and has nothing to do with the supposed thesis in any case.

20/09/2012 at 10:08 *RegisteredUser* says:

I agree. The games like Myst were (especially at the time) considered to be picture-to-picture travels and not "freeworld" at all.
They aimed for something else, they were something else, they did something else(and they appealed to someone else, too: A friend of mine played more of those than of DOOM. The sick f*ck! And even he wouldn't have called them first person, but also more akin to adventures, which, too, present you with something to fiddle with in a more static fashion).

25.

20/09/2012 at 05:07 *MadTinkerer* says:

"To give it a place in first-person history would be to highlight the lack of diversity and subtlety endemic to commercial practice in the genre today, and first-person history must remain the story of how a nascent manshooter empire became the hypermasculinized captain of the football team. That's the story the industry tells itself as it faces its mid-life crisis and buys itself a Ferrari, and even its critics believe this narrative."

Dear Entire Games Industry,

Twenty years ago, I played Ultima Underworld II (I played UW1 later, but not then), and I was convinced this is where the industry would go. It turns out I wasn't completely wrong: Dishonoured and Bioshock Infinite are coming out within a year and last year Skyrim was released. And that should have been the norm: immersive perspective combined with highly interactive worlds, open-ended challenges and narratives driven by gameplay. But you stupid, stupid jackasses insist on wasting millions of dollars on boring generic manshoots where you can't even push crates.

This is why Valve is better than all of you* put together: because when it came to deciding between ironsights and a "use" key, they made the right choice.

Note how different Black Mesa is from HL1 just from adding the ability to pick up and use (some) objects. All the NPCs have extra lines when you throw objects at them. Turret mini-puzzles are completely different. The ability to pick up and move explosive items and temporary cover completely changes the dynamics of combat. Several areas need to be fixed because I found holes in the levels from

stacking objects and climbing where you couldn't go in HL1. Zombies can hurl mugs at you(!) Also, there is shooting, but (even more so than before) it's there to punctuate interacting with the environment and not the other way around.

Actually, let's rewind for a bit. Play whichever the latest Call of Duty is called, and then play Counter-Strike GO. Even when Valve makes a generic military manshoot, it's ridiculously worlds apart from the rest. Molotov cocktails as a way to manage space and create temporary barriers, as one example. Yes, CS:GO still lacks vehicles (something I do wish they'd add, but there might be a mod for it), but otherwise it's just plain better than Face of Dutiful Medals: Mewtwo Ops.

Do any generic manshoots currently have free maps made by the community? No? They're all commercial DLC? Then Counter-strike wins.

Black Mesa wins. Dishonoured wins. Bioshock wins. Skyrim wins. Fallout 3 wins. Amnesia wins.

Borderlands and Rage come close, but not quite. DX: Human Revolution comes even closer but is brought down by tragic design flaws. Even Serious Sam 3 and EYE: Divine Cybermancy come closer than all of EA and Activision's efforts.

That's not to say non-Valve esport shooters are all bad. Natural Selection, Nexuiz, Section 8 and so on are just a few multiplayer shooters I've enjoyed recently. But they're also *not generic*. They don't have pretentions of being "serious" or "cinematic". They don't misappropriate quotes to attempt to sound "meaningful". Most of them started off as mods or are at least mod friendly.

Argh, this post is way too long. I'll be writing my own People's History if I keep going.

*Speaking specifically to the boring manshoots makers here, not the others, obviously.

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20/09/2012 at 06:02 *JackShandy* says:

I've only heard about Underworld by reputation, but is Bioshock really similar to it? It's a million-dollar manshoot where you can't even push crates.

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20/09/2012 at 08:33 *Jamesworkshop* says:

You do get telekinesis, but no crates.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWC7wImVPXw&feature=related

more than makes up for it

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26.

20/09/2012 at 05:15 *Nougat* says:

Holy crap. I played Chex Quest when I was about 10 years old. I did not remember, even after I saw the name, until I saw that screenshot with the goo covered Chex face. Thanks for dredging up some weird memories, RPS!

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27.

20/09/2012 at 06:06 *DoomMunky* says:

Holy cow, what a great essay. I love the use of language, the much-too-long-but-still-enjoyable sentences, and you make a cogent, interesting point. And the underlying argument, of eye-opening, narrative-questioning AWARENESS is thrilling. Very, very well done.

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20/09/2012 at 10:09 *RegisteredUser* says:

You're that guy that reviewed Kane&Lynch originally, aren'tcha! ;)

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28.

20/09/2012 at 07:36 *c-Row* says:

In my own personal history book, Myst is known as the one game that popularized CDROM drives back in the mid 90s. That, and Rebel Assault of course.

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29.

20/09/2012 at 08:38 *GallonOfAlan* says:

Both Wolf and Doom took a shortcut by having sector-based maps with height information, meaning they could not render a room above a room.

There were loads of things before that could though – why does nobody remember the Freescape games on the 8-bits and 16-bits? Castle Master? Driller?

All full polygonal 3D. There was even a Freescape game construction kit.

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20/09/2012 at 10:11 *RegisteredUser* says:

Actually although its debateable how FPS this is, the first thing I thought of when thinking ancient

first person like view on ancient hardware was ELITE.

But then I never had Driller or that other thing.

30.

Text_Fish says:

Disappointing article, full of crossed purposes and missused terms and references. FPS's need shooting, otherwise they're just FP's.

31.

Didden says:

I played Aliens TC back in the day. It was truly awesome. "Check those corners – check those corners!" pulled from the aliens film, played at the appropriate moment.

32.

Nallen says:

I'm going to be that guy.

The article describes Myst's aesthetic as "a hint of what may eventually be possible as the technology improves: a game that weaves together image, sound and narrative into a new form of experience."

It doesn't say Myst is that game.

33.

Yglorba says:

Myst did inspire a lot of clones for a long time. I think part of the reason it failed to have lasting impact, though, was that making good Myst-like games was *hard*. You had to be clever. More importantly, it got even harder as technology improved and gamers started to expect FPS-style full 3D movement.

Because a lot of what made Myst fun was exploration, and making a fun environment to explore means making a lot more resources. With a FPS, you can reuse things more often and with less worry about perfectly unique artistic design in every area, since people aren't as likely to examine them closely; with an exploration-puzzler game, you have to make each part unique.

(I think that Portal sort of found a solution in that it essentially used the voicework and writing to hold the player's interest and keep the game feeling fresh, rather than the environments — not that it didn't have interesting environments in many places, but obviously the test chambers would have gotten stale fast

without GlaDOS. The original Portal also wisely kept the game short, while the second one carefully divided it up to keep anything from getting stale. You can see how important this was by looking at Quantum Conundrum, which didn't have as much variety to environments, didn't cut the game short, and didn't have as good writing– and bam, it gets hard to stomach after a while.)

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34.

20/09/2012 at 14:58 *Gary W* says:

DOOM eclipsed Myst because it had soul.

It's analogous to how Metal Gear Solid 2 manages to be better than all the games in the Western Indiesphere: plenty of clever postmodern fourth-wall-breaking without coming across as a pretentious academic exercise.

Suck it down, hipsters.

Log in to Reply

35.

20/09/2012 at 17:45 *Twist* says:

Hmm… no mention of System Shock, which was also released in 1994. And no mention of the Ultima Underworld games, either…

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36.

20/09/2012 at 17:54 *blaxmith* says:

In this introduction, at least, the author seems to make the same mistake he accuses everyone of making which is to equate first-person perspective (FPP) with first-person shooter (FPS). The former is a way of viewing and experiencing the game world, the latter is a genre that by definition involves some shooty bits. Ergo, Myst is excluded from "FPS history" because a) it wasn't the first game to use FPP, b) by many accounts it wasn't very good, and c) **it isn't a FPS**.

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37.

20/09/2012 at 19:29 *Dervish* says:

I'm glad people are taking this article to task for being meandering and insubstantial. It's not about needless negative nitpicking, either–it's about being anti-fluff. Throwing together some thoughts about old stuff that makes people feel nostalgic is not gonna cut it, especially not with so many sweeping generalizations that demand at least an explanation if not justification.

I get that this is supposed to be a more personal "alternative" take as opposed to some stiff, dry chronology, but it comes off to me as a guy chatting about his off-the-cuff feelings instead of solid

research and reasoning. "Don't take it so seriously, Mr. Grimface," I'm sure many commenters are thinking, but hey, do you want good articles about video games or not?

38.

21/09/2012 at 15:40 *Mumrik* says:

"the traditionally accepted history of the FPS genre as entirely dominated and driven by the mainstream, commercial industry"

I guess I've never really heard that traditionally accepted history.
Sure, FPS money is in the mainstream, that's sort of why it's the mainstream. I can't however think of another genre which has evolved through modding to the degree that FPSs have (unless we're counting genres that were created through it – such as MOBAs). Counter-Strike alone did more to influence the mainstream FPS than any CoD game. I've never heard anybody say otherwise.

39.

25/09/2012 at 12:19 *Uninteresting Curse File Implement* says:

B..but Myst didn't have free look, did it? How can it be compared to 3D action games in any way?

And id aren't industry emperors… right now they are more like industry's weird uncles. Or were you talking about John Romero and American McGee?

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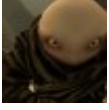
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