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One Life Left: the fun (and folly) of videogames

Dan Hobart

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Over the past three decades videogames have blossomed into a gargantuan global industry that has surpassed both movies and music in total revenue. This is a historical account of the medium's evolution, but also a personal one, tinged with anecdotes and nostalgic reminiscences that reveal just how deeply affecting games can be, capable of imprinting themselves upon the minds of all ages, conveying us to unfathomable worlds, immersing us within a reverie of transcendent imagery and sounds. They can also plunge us into a morass of torrential fury and monomaniacal obsession.

One Life Left is an intimate journey through 25 years of video games, from the 16-bit platformers of the early 90s to the astonishing open worlds of the seventh generation. From the blistering gait of Sonic to the breathless expanse of Skyrim, key titles are analysed, extolled, admonished and deconstructed to ascertain where, exactly, their fun lies, and why it is people all over the world continue to ravenously devour videogames.

What are the four motivators that draw us to games and keep us playing? Are they ultimately good for us or harmful? Do they connect us or drive us apart? How do they fail us and cause us to fail? How do they succeed in eliciting our success? How should the medium improve, and how should our usage of it evolve? These questions and more are included in a rare conversation that looks at both sides of the coin, where both the beauty and ugliness of videogames are addressed.

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