

If there is one consistent, overriding complaint that unites PC, Console, handheld and tabletop gamers, it's one simple idea- man, remember the good old days when games didn't all suck? True or not, it's a pretty common sentiment, and we've got no shortage of games that claim to be follow ups or spiritual successors to a variety of landmark titles from days gone by.

These kinds of games, which for ease I'm going to call successors, present a really interesting design challenge. That's because they occupy this weird middle ground where they aren't direct or usually even official continuations of an idea, but their entire design is consciously inspired by a single game. You end up caught between the varied and fickle tastes of the general gaming public, and why people liked the original to begin with.

If you make a successor and don't change enough, you'll end up like Yooka Laylee, which, for all its highpoints, is pretty much just banjo kazooie but with none of the old school charm that makes us forgive its wonky controls, irritating side characters and nonexistent sense of pacing. Yooka Laylee isn't a bad game- I mean- it's not a good game either but its held back even more by this sense that... it's an imitator, that it has very few unique ideas of its own- and that we really could just be playing the original.

Similarly, if you change too much, you'll risk alienating longtime fans, and isolating new players from the original, robbing them of that precious context. Deus Ex is a really telling example of this. The original game was this intricate, explicitly political and very complex game that took multiple playthroughs to truly master. The newer deus ex games on the other hand, though still enjoyable, never really live up to the legacy of the original, trading cutting commentary for third person shooter action. Fans of J.C. Denton thought the new games were simplistic and safe, but people who were introduced to deus ex through adam jensen couldn't get into the uncompromising and clunky original.

The difficulty with successors, is that they're simultaneously their own thing, and are inexorably shackled to their inspiration.

So the question I want to ask you, is how do we balance these two elements in order to make a successor that occupies past, present and future all at the same time?

Well, if you ask me, it's all about grafting, you know like how you cut a bit off of a plant and then grow it into a whole new one- trust me it'll make sense. I think to make a great successor you've got to find what part of the original game you like, and make that the focus, rather than just copying the original wholesale or ignoring it completely. For example, you'd be stupid to make a successor to mario without adapting his bouncy, expressive jumps, and you're probably not going to be able to follow up on what makes starcraft good without some good old fashioned asymmetrical balance. The question you've got to ask is whether that special bit you want to replicate is part of the mechanical nuts and bolts of your inspiration, or if it's something that's harder to pin down, and is more about the way you feel when playing rather than any particular system.

Sonic mania is a great example of a successor that takes already-great mechanics, but uses them in a different, better way. Sonic has all his old tricks from the genesis era: spindashing, bouncing and running really fast, but they're used in all new levels that are much better put together. See, the old sonic games had a bit of an identity crisis, the blue blur seems like a character built for speedy edge of your seat platforming action, but too often sega bogs you down with slow-paced obstacle courses that have a lot of waiting around, and even more... of this. Yeah, early sonic was not great- but mania ditches all that to give those old mechanics the space they need to shine, in fast-paced, intricately interwoven platforming challenges that balance visual spectacle with speedrunning potential.

On the other side of the coin, we've got games that try to capture the feeling and the psychological experience of older games, whilst modernising the mechanics- XCOM would be a great example of this -look I've not mentioned it in ages, gimme a pass here- . The original DOS games and the rebooted firaxis series play completely differently, but despite this, they both tap into that brilliant feeling of knife's edge strategy, where hours of work is constantly on the line, and the aliens are more often than not always one step ahead.

Both of these methodologies are a different approach at the same thing, selectively nurturing just one element or feeling from the original game to become the heart of the successor. Part of the game is recognisable, and the rest is entirely new.

It's not just whole new games that can be successors either, mods and custom game modes can fill the same role. Vox populi turns civilisation 5 from a casual 4x into a deeply strategic and in depth game and custom levels in golf with your friends can turn the game from a multiplayer torture simulator into an actual, functioning golf game, who would have thought?

I think the best way of demonstrating this phenomena in action, is to look at a game that's 25 years old, but is still clearly visible as part of its successors in the present day, I'm talking of course, about DOOM. Doom is a fantastic way of showing not just how a variety of successors can be created from the same source, but also to demonstrate how in remaking and responding to games we can help people to appreciate what made the classics great in the first place.

There's a reason why the gaming communities love for DOOM has endured for so long, it engages with the brutally satisfying and cathartic human urge for violence. Whether it's mowing down dozens of zombie soldiers or unloading a volley of shotgun blasts into the face of a big scary demon, doom revels in its viscerality. But despite the flair, it's still manages to wring a lot of strategic depth out of the relatively simplistic weapon and enemy designs by varying effective ranges, projectile speeds and the shape of each arena. The end result is an adrenaline-pounding experience that demands 100% of your attention as you duck and weave between fireballs, advancing on your prey through mounds of their fallen comrades.

Needless to say, Doom is great, and pretty much holds up today- but we're not looking at doom, we're looking at some of the games it inspired, for example, DUSK.

From looking at it, DUSK appears to be very similar to DOOM, it's got the same sort of fast paced horde combat, it has this very cute fake DOS aesthetic and it copies most of the weapons - they even sort of sound the same. However, despite replicating the form of Doom, Dusk is actually a substantially different game.

For one, Dusk leans way further into the horror aesthetic than DOOM, which never really goes beyond campy gore. Dusk loves psyching you out with levels in total darkness, bad guys that jump out of hidden areas, and enemies like the utterly terrifying wendigos which are invisible and leave a trail of blood or these chaotic, thrashing demon dog car monstrosities- I don't even know where to start with that.

In addition, the game also cheats in a few upgrades to the formula that simply weren't possible in 1993. Advanced scripting lets enemies teleport in around you and can change entire levels around. Cool but graphically on theme lighting makes certain enemies harder to spot, and really ramps up the tension in levels like the Infernal machine. There's also the crucial addition of a proper Y axis, meaning that enemies don't just attack you from the front, sides and behind- they can also get you from above and below- requiring much more tactical awareness as you fight across rooms with multiple levels and enemies capable of flight, unlike the kinda head level hovering the cacodemons did.

This focus on fear and surprise means that dusk often plays much more defensively than its predecessor, with less hitstun and more angles to be attacked from, a lot of your time in dusk is spent strafing around enemies or ducking behind corners, particularly in the later levels. Despite playing like doom, Dusk feels very different, and vice versa with another game that's a successor to id software's opus. Doom. No not doom, doom. Yes, doom. No doom. Honestly what's so hard to get about this, it's doom not doom. okay?

The 2016 reboot of the doom franchise henceforth called doom 2016 obviously takes inspiration from the original game, but the two actually share relatively little common ground mechanically. Doom 2016's gunplay is much more complex, with guns having upgrade paths and alternate fire modes- that's not including a whole new melee system called glory kills.

The glory kill system underpins pretty much the entirety of Doom 2016's gameplay loop, even though it's totally absent from the original game. In 2016, guns hold relatively little ammo, and your health depletes very quickly on even normal difficulty. The only reliable way to regain health and ammo mid combat is to stun an enemy and glory kill them, releasing a shower of goodies and rendering you invulnerable in the process. Doom wants you running from glory kill to glory kill as your health and ammo totals bounce back and forth constantly, forever riding that thin line between survival and defeat. Where DUSK prefers you fight at mid range whilst strafing around, DOOM 2016 shines in moment to moment close quarters combat just like its predecessor, despite playing very differently

Doom 2016 distills the legacy of the series down into white knuckle smash and burn adrenaline, each fight passing in a blood-filled blur as you bounce from enemy to enemy, tearing your way through them. It feels like the kind of game the original doom really wanted

to be, and taps into that same brutal simplicity- just with an extra 25 years of design knowledge at tech behind it.

And that's what rebooting games is all about. The familiar and comfortable working in unison with the new and exciting. It's a different way to experience something we love, without just endlessly repeating the same thing over and over again. Doom struck a cultural chord, it's no wonder people still want to play it, but also understandable why people don't want to muck about with emulators to get it working on modern systems, or want something with a bit more of a story, or slightly deeper gunplay.

In a video I made about dawn of war in april of last year, I talked about something called a core experience, the one indivisible part of a game that makes it special- and that's really what we're trying to find here. We're working out whether our favourite part of, say, doom is the aesthetic, the mechanics, the feeling we get when playing it, or even just a single gimmick, and then making something new to pay homage to and to better facilitate exactly that.

Whilst it might appear that the things I've been talking about really only have relevance to developers, figuring out the why we love particular games can not only help us appreciate them, but also to find successors which might do the things we love even better.

Wargroove is a great example of this idea. Whilst it looks and plays almost identically to Advance wars, it's made several key changes to the formula to cater to a very different style of play. Advance wars is a game all about long term strategy, games are won by inching forward artillery positions, keeping your supply lines up, and capturing key strategic locations in order to get the advantage in the long run, it's a game where both wins and losses happen very slowly.

However, wargroove ditches passive commander abilities to make them actual units with localised, immediate effects that can change the course of a skirmish. Commander abilities work alongside criticals, a means through which units can gain extra power, usually when attacking. This is stuff like if your cavalry has charged a certain distance or the enemy is surrounded by doggos, it swings control of the game overwhelmingly in favour of the aggressor, with battles transforming into back and forth bloodbaths where every unit counts, particularly your powerful commander, who's quite prone to dying out of nowhere, losing you the game.

Using the mechanical underpinning of Advance wars, Wargroove changes the focus to small, impactful skirmishes you'd normally only find in the early game, and makes them the entire experience, focusing on the micro tactics where advance wars emphasises macro strategy.

Another example would be the kickstarter game One Step from Eden, which takes the slow paced, light tactics of megaman battle network and gives it a roguelike makeover. It massively upsthe difficulty, turns the speed up to 100 and in doing so gives now grown up fans of MMBN an appropriate challenge that can be enjoyed in much smaller bursts. The

actual gameplay experience is surprisingly similar, it's just that the mechanics have been switched up to be less about standing still and shooting lemons, and more about... this.

Full disclosure the person who made this watches my videos so I can't guarantee they're good at making games.

Games are continually evolving, and whilst it's fine to return to an old favourite every once in awhile or to follow a fun trend, we can never lose sight of why we enjoy the games we make and play in the first place. Playing more games and learning to appreciate the artform not only provides a bunch of new experiences, but allows us to better understand why we love our favourites- and chances are, someone else will have felt the same way.

Dusk caters to horror fans who want hard as nails tactical gunfights and DOOM 2016 offers an injection of brutal catharsis and the simple gory fun of the original. Both things provided by doom, but with their full potential realised in its successors.

Which successor to doom do I prefer? Well, it's obviously the mod that turns the entire game into the set of hit 90's sitcom Seinfeld. This is for the bee movie, Jerry.

Hello! And thanks for watching a video that does, TO BE CLEAR, not endorse the murder of aging comedians, okay? Just want to cover myself there.

Apologies for the late vid, but between taking a bit of a break and the 100k celebrations, this is the earliest I could get things done.

If you'd like to finance the creation of future videos that will probably happen more regularly, then why don't you support me on Patreon, much like these fantastic people you can see on the side of the screen as well aaaasss:

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Thank you all for the recent swell in support- it means a lot. Before I go I've been asked by an anonymous patron to tell you all that chess is bad and go is better. To that person, I say, give me my five dollars- and to the rest of you I say, seeya!