

15 Great iPhone Games

April 2 2009, Crispy Gamer

It happened when no one was looking. The DS was busily extending Nintendo's decades-long dominance of the handheld market, and Sony was trying to make third-party partners stop ignoring the PSP like the kid with dental headgear at a middle school mixer. Apple's boast about the iPod Touch and its elder cousin, the iPhone - best handheld gaming device on the market today - seemed foolhardy at first. Now, thousands of games later, the App Store's brimming with tons of swipe-worthy videogame purchases. We've gathered our most dedicated screen-smudgers to call out their favorites on Apple's portables.

"Enigmo"

Developer: Pangea Software

Publisher: Pangea Software

Price: \$0.99

One of the very first puzzle games for the [iPhone](#) is still one of the best. Use your fingertip to manipulate the flow of various liquids by moving around various items on the level (such as cups, drums and sponges) and toying with their angles, so that the water, oil or lava reaches its designed target. Along with an understanding of physics, speed helps, too, as bonus points are awarded for fast completion. More than 50 of these Rube Goldberg-style contraptions are included in the dirt-cheap 99-cent sticker price, and gamers can download additional player-created levels for free. Marc Saltzman, Crispy Gamer

"Edge"

Developer: Mobigame

Publisher: Mobigame

Price: \$4.99

To go all reductive, mix "Marble Madness" and "Metal Gear Solid: VR Missions" and you've got "Edge." Spare, geometric landscapes are dotted with floating gold cubes, which you've got to collect by flipping a larger cube end-over-end across each level. Controls are simple and intuitive -- to move, just glide your finger anywhere on-screen in the appropriate direction -- but the [game](#) isn't overly simplistic. Soon you'll be balancing your cube on ledges and trying to make precisely timed movements to catch a sliding platform to your next destination. The fact that those precision moves are possible, combined with the stark and beautiful presentation, makes "Edge" a must-play. Russ Fischer, Crispy Gamer

"Trace"

Developer: Kevin Calderone

Publisher: Kevin Calderone

Price: Free

A platformer where you draw the platforms, "Trace" is a poor man's "Crayon Physics." Each level is incomplete and asks the player to scrawl some squiggly lines that the little man can use to get from point A to point B. This is a shabby-looking game, with slapdash level design and wildly inconsistent difficulty, but its dead-simple fun makes Trace the ultimate late-night subway-ride companion. If you're sober enough to get

yourself on the train, you're sober enough to play Trace. John Teti,
Crispy Gamer

"Fieldrunners"

Developer: Subatomic Studios

Publisher: Subatomic Studios

Price: \$4.99

Nominated for awards in three categories for the Independent Games Festival Mobile competition, "Fieldrunners" belongs on every iPhone. Other tower defense-style games might be flashier or deeper, but none is as easy to pick up and play as this one. Gameplay currently spans three maps -- one added in a recent update -- and features multiple tower types and enemies to destroy. Strategic placement of the different towers keeps you glued to the screen while you attempt to stop the "runners" from getting to the other side. Well designed defenses give rewarding results as the gorgeous 2-D sprites journey along your paths of doom. It's quick and easy entertainment with perfect touch-screen controls. David J. Long, Crispy Gamer

"Rolando"

Developer: Hand Circus

Publisher: ngmoco

Price: \$4.99

Let's get this out of the way now: Yes, Rolando bears a striking resemblance to Sony's "LocoRoco" franchise on the PSP. Just like in the

two "LocoRoco" games, players must shepherd the cute titular creatures through a cut-out landscape. But, the implementation in "Rolando" makes all the difference. The simple controls feel immediately intuitive. You can swipe and select multiple "Rolandos" and roll them along by tilting the iPhone left or right. An upwards flick makes them jump and you'll be able to use springs, levers and other interactive parts of the environment to get them around evil shadow creatures and spiky hazards. Those differences make "Rolando" feel a bit cleverer than the "LocoRoco" games. "Rolando's" music -- jazzy synth-funk, downtempo lounge and catchy bossa nova - comes from licensed tracks by DJ and super-producer Mr. Scruff, and make a perfect complement for the game's quirky vibe and visuals. Evan Narcisse, Crispy Gamer

"Galcon"

Developer: Phil Hassey

Publisher: Imitation Pickles

Price: \$4.99

"Galcon" turns on a wonderfully simple concept that becomes delightfully chaotic when put into action. Your objective is to capture all the planets in a star system. Trouble is, someone else has the same objective. Tap planet A (which you own), then tap planet Z (which you don't), and half of planet A's ships will go and colonize planet Z. Whoever sends the most ships wins, and once you capture a planet, it will start to produce more ships for you (the bigger the planet, the faster the production). You can think of it as a real-time version of the classic board game Risk without dice-rolls. This means that when you lose, you only have yourself to blame. Fast, immediately understandable and utterly absorbing, "Galcon" makes excellent use of touch-screen controls, and became the go-to timewaster on my [iPod Touch](#) almost

instantly. Scott Alexander, Crispy Gamer

"Line Rider iRide"

Developer: inXile Entertainment

Publisher: inXile Entertainment

Price: \$2.99

Based on the cult Flash game that has players draw crazy courses for a sled-rider to tackle - which has spawned thousands of YouTube videos and console game versions - "Line Rider" has slid to the iPhone and proves to be a perfect match for the platform. Instead of using a mouse or gamepad, you can use a fingertip to draw lines and watch the hapless rider, Bosh, attempt to make it to the end without falling off. Use special lines, select drawing tools, and play around with gravity options and night mode - before sharing saved tracks with other players via 3G or Wi-Fi. Marc Saltzman, Crispy Gamer

"iDracula"

Developer: Chillingo

Publisher: Chillingo

Price: \$0.99 (on sale)

"Diablo" on the iPhone? Oh, hello, we'll take it. Granted, that's not quite what "iDracula" achieves, but the game is damn close. Taking on the role of a sorta-medieval demon hunter with access to a bunch of weapons that go "boom," you use two on-screen control pads to direct movement and fire. Monsters incessantly attack, forcing you to dash around the

screen, firing in all directions. Splash some "Smash TV" and "Gauntlet" into your Diablo, and you're close. The graphics are superb, the weapons distinct and the controls responsive. The main gripe: I'd like the music to be less "White Zombie" knockoff and more "Symphony of the Night," but otherwise it's hard not to fall at least slightly in love with this arcade affair. Russ Fischer, Crispy Gamer

"Crayon Physics Deluxe"

Developer: Hudson Soft

Publisher: Hudson Soft

Price: \$4.99

The charms of the PC-sized physics game are all intact for this port. The crude aesthetic still works perfectly for a physics-based puzzler in which you can draw just about anything to move a red ball into contact with a shiny yellow star. All that prevents this version of the awesome PC title from being more of a touch-screen champ is the imprecise controls; it's just slightly difficult to draw precise objects on the iPhone/iPod Touch screen if you've got lumpy fingertips. I had to do a lot of panning and zooming (using the standard iPhone pinch controls) to draw the series of pivot points and small objects that made for my favorite puzzle solutions, but that's a small concession to have such smart physics gameplay in my pocket. Russ Fischer, Crispy Gamer

"LightBike"

Developer: Pankaku

Publisher: Pankaku

Price: \$2.99

If not for the omnipresent fear of copyright lawyers, "LightBike" would be called "The Tron Game." An iPhone translation of the most famous scene from Disney's inside-the-mainframe cult hit, this title captures that twitchy game of high-tech chicken remarkably well. The two-player mode features a clever control scheme: Players grab either end of the phone, tug of war-style, and tap their respective halves to steer their bikes. It's head-to-head action, literally. John Teti, Crispy Gamer

"Cube Runner"

Publisher: Andy Qua

Developer: Andy Qua

Price: Free

It's one of the oldest games available, but with more people getting iPhones every day, "Cube Runner" still deserves a mention. It's as simple as games get: Avoid obstacles; earn points for distance covered. The cool part is the controls. Using the iPhone's accelerometers, you steer your plane through a maze of blocks by tilting left and right. Control is precise, and zipping through 3-D cubes is more satisfying than you'd expect. You only get three levels of challenge with the base game, but can create your own levels on a PC or Mac and then download them to your iPhone to play. Of course, many other folks have levels to try out - so it's a free app that keeps on giving, and it's hard to beat that price. David J. Long, Crispy Gamer

"Fantastic Contraption"

Developer: InXile Entertainment

Publisher: InXile Entertainment

Price: \$4.99

We've played portable games with our thumbs for decades. Yet when mouse-friendly PC titles jump to the iPhone, they often refuse to work with the oafish first finger. Few games are worth the trouble of pinpointing taps with one of your lesser digits, but "Fantastic Contraption" is one of them. In this faithful port of the venerable Flash game, you build ornate inventions from wheels and liquid axles to carry a payload across simple obstacle courses. The mesmerizing, bouncy physics make spectacular failures as much fun to watch as successful gizmos, and with the addictive ability to peek at other players' Rube Goldberg-ian solutions, you're liable to play until your pinkie gives out. John Teti, Crispy Gamer

"Crystal Defenders"

Developer: Square Enix

Publisher: Square Enix

Price: \$7.99 (Free Lite version available)

Tower defense games will soon be swarming the iPhone, and with great entries like Fieldrunners in competition, why not? Take the "Final Fantasy Tactics" series as a jumping-off point for a tile-based version, add power-ups that can buff up your attacks and 300 levels across three tiers of play, and "Crystal Defenders" is on the attack. The drawback: Square's first iPhone game has very plainly been ported from a previous iPod edition. So the screen is crammed with a replica iPod wheel, and few touch-screen commands have been implemented. The action is great, the price-to-content ratio is good and the sprites look great. If

Square had put more effort into the port, this would be a killer. Instead it's a great tower defense option for the otaku in you. Russ Fischer, Crispy Gamer

"SlotZ Racer"

Publisher: Freeverse, Inc.

Developer: Strange Flavour, Ltd.

Price: \$1.99

I've wanted a slot car racing videogame for pretty much all my life, and it's finally arrived - on my phone! SlotZM has a ridiculous amount of content for a game on just about any platform, let alone the iPhone. There are a lengthy set of Championship races, multiple types of cars with varied handling, night races, and an insanely detailed track editor. The game just got better too, with an update adding scenery to liven up your layouts. Crossovers, squeeze tracks and up to four vertical levels allow for some super circuits. And if that's not enough, you can even grab three friends for four-player racing on one phone. Racing takes some practice, but control is simple, with binary on/off acceleration. SlotZ is worth far more than its tiny price. David J. Long, Crispy Gamer

"Puzzle Quest: Chapters 1 and 2"

Developer: TransGaming

Publisher: TransGaming

Price: \$7.99

An upfront disclaimer: If you have a Nintendo DS and have yet to play

"Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords," just grab a copy for the portable. Think of "Bejeweled" with a thick and surprisingly pleasing layer of story and RPG features added, and you'll be close to the mark. Puzzle Quest is a staggeringly addictive game that uses familiar jewel-swapping mechanics to power a highly variable RPG experience. This port is a little more sluggish and harder to use than the DS version, thanks to slightly too-small jewels, but it's still a fantastic game. Players complained when the app first hit, as TransGaming initially released only Chapter 1 in a buggier format for 10 bucks. Now \$8 nabs you a slightly improved version with Chapter 2 appended. That's much closer to the mark. Russ Fischer, Crispy Gamer

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