

iPod Touch offers video-game fun

February 25 2009, By Dennis McCauley



iPod Touch 8GB or 16GB

My video-game addiction took on a new, smaller footprint after the holidays. Resigning myself to the fact that my four-year-old iPod was never going to die of its own accord, I proactively put the clunky, white model with the ugly monochrome screen out to pasture and treated myself to a 32-gigabyte iPod Touch (\$399). Just doing my bit to jump-start the economy, you know.

My old, circa 2004 iPod played only audio files, so naturally I'm digging the music, video and Wi-Fi capabilities of the iPod Touch. But I'm especially impressed with the system's ability to play video games. I'll confess this is partly a generational consideration; iPods and iPhones are

so mainstream these days that I don't feel self-conscious using my iPod Touch in public. On the other hand, I'd be a bit uncomfortable pulling out a Nintendo DS or Sony PSP on a train or at a fast-food joint.

Although the games available for the iPod Touch and the iPhone aren't nearly as sophisticated as those on the DS or PSP, neither are they as expensive. Titles for the Nintendo and Sony handhelds typically run in the \$20-\$40 range. So far, the most that I've paid for an iPod game was \$7.99 for "SimCity" from Electronic Arts.

In addition to SimCity, I've toyed with a number of iPod/ iPhone game apps in recent days, including Apple versions of World War II shooter "Brothers in Arms," PlayStation 3 hit "Time Crisis" and Sega classic "Super Monkey Ball."

While the major game publishers are beginning to tap into the iPod/iPhone market, many indie developers are offering games as well, which makes for an eclectic mix of choices on Apple's App Store. And that's part of the beauty of gaming on the iPod/iPhone platform. At this point, it's still something of a wide-open platform where freeware and indie games are found alongside pricier offerings from the major publishers.

As Det Ansinn, chief gaming officer of Doylestown, Pa.-based iPhone development studio 1337pwn.com told me recently, "The iPhone platform is in its infancy and has enabled something of a renaissance in independent game development. It's exciting to see some very creative applications on the AppStore."

Among the more polished commercial offerings, "SimCity" was a fun play, although the small screen of the iPod Touch made the game more challenging than its PC cousin. Arcade shooter "Time Crisis Strike" (\$5.99), from Bandai Namco, was a total - pardon the pun - blast. Even

on the small iPod screen, the game captured the fast-paced fun and excitement of the "Time Crisis" series. "Brothers in Arms: Hour of Heroes" (\$5.99), from GameLoft, is a terrific small-screen version of the popular World War II combat game, complete with cut scenes. I'll confess to being somewhat disappointed with "Touchmaster Volume One" (\$3.99), from Midway. Its five mini-games suffer from a distinct lack of personality and are poorly documented as well.

Although from a lesser-known developer, one of my favorite games on the App Store is "Fieldrunners," a superbly designed tower-defense affair from Subatomic Studios.

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Citation: iPod Touch offers video-game fun (2009, February 25) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-02-ipod-video-game-fun.html>

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