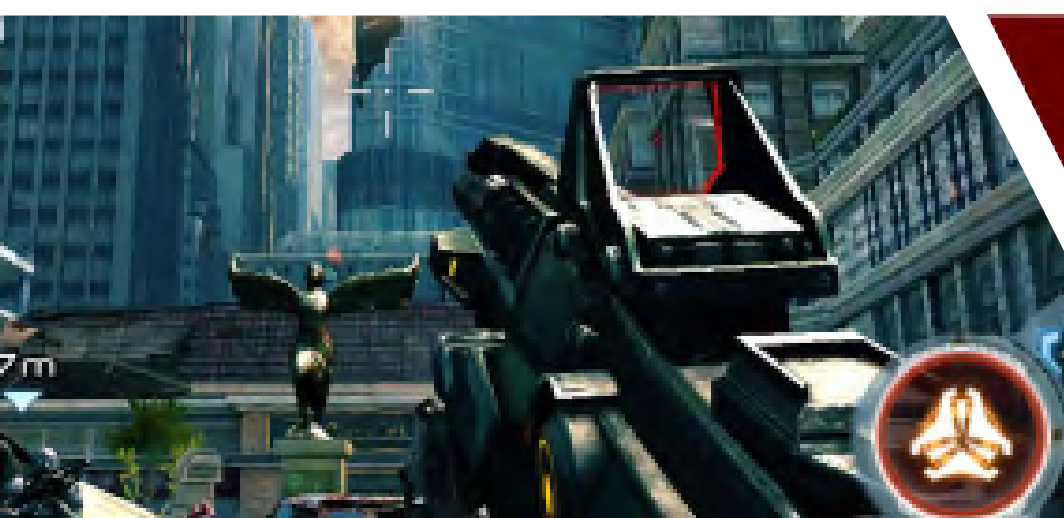


Hardcore Droid's

MOST HARDCORE

**GROUND
BREAKING
1ST ISSUE**

FALL vol.1 no.1

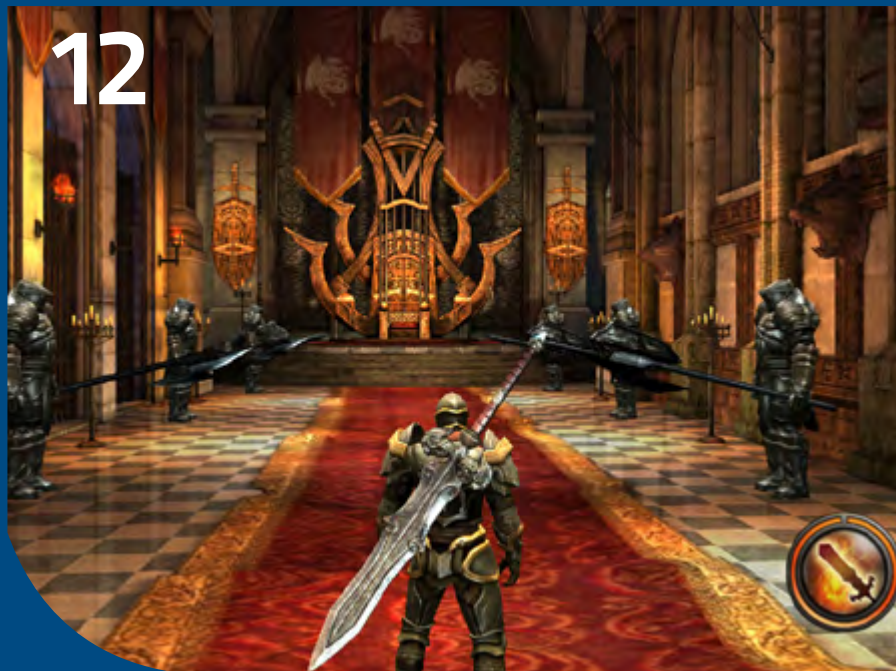


*Epic Lists of
Android's Best:*

**RPG
ACTION
STRATEGY &
INDIE GAMES**
and more...



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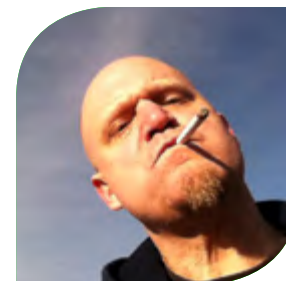
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from the editor

What is this Hardcore?



People ask me all the time: "Ajax, what is this hardcore about which you speak so fondly." And no matter what, I always tell them the same thing:

"Rock and roll, video games and berserk politicians."

And because I'm socially challenged, I usually leave it at that, but I'll give you a hint: The common thread that defines hardcore lives within the relationship between these disparate things.

Commitment. Hardcore means deep commitment. The kind of commitment where half-measures are scoffed at. And while personally I could never get with a politician who's so lacking in balance that he's referred to as hardcore, the entertainment value of hardcore, even when you throw over-zealous congressmen into the mix, is not to be underestimated. Which brings us, hopefully,

back to hardcore gamers and hardcore games. By hardcore games we mean the kind of games that hardcore gamers love the most: Games with speculative fiction or martial themes; games that are storied and nuanced role playing games; over-the-top action games and deep textured strategy games. As journalists and hardcore gamers, our staff are particularly adept at picking out the best hardcore Android games. But we've gone a few steps further here. We've taken the games from all of Hardcore Droid's best of and most hardcore lists, and then dug deeper into everything we've written on the subject since we first went live one year ago and hand-picked the very best Android games, the cream of the cream, the core of the most hardcore to put together the compilation of lists you're holding in your hands right now. This first Issue is meant to serve as the definitive hardcore gamer's guide to gaming on the Android OS, an endeavor and publication that can only be described as Most Hardcore.

Ajax Moroni
Senior Editor

The Players



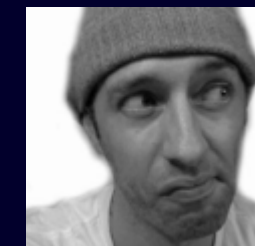
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The Most Hardcore Android Strategy Games Ever Made

by Ajax & John Markley

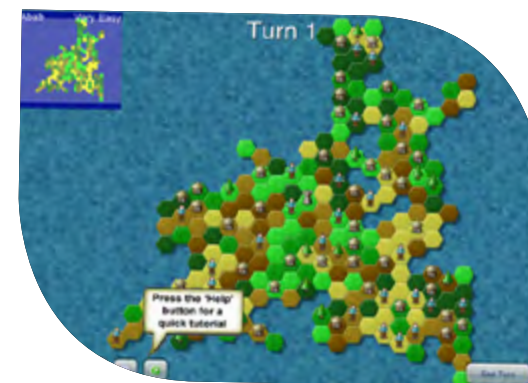
The world of Android gaming has expanded greatly in the past few years, and the strategy genre has not been left out. From turn-based military strategy games, to classic real-time strategy gameplay in the tradition of *Command and Conquer* and *Starcraft*, to city-building games focused on creating instead of destroying, to the tower defense games that seem to comprise about two thirds of all mobile games published in the past five years, there's something for everybody. Here's an overview of the best and most noteworthy strategy games available on Android devices.



Great Little War Game/Great Big War Game

Great Little War Game is a turn-based strategy game with a humorous tone. There's nothing groundbreaking here—you build units selected from a variety of types, deploy them, exploit the terrain and the different abilities of each unit to fight through a series of battles – but it's the execution that counts. The missions are well-designed and offer great variety in their objectives, and the visuals have an endearingly goofy style to them.

Much of the same isn't really a criticism when it comes to this series, as last year's *Great Big War Game* proved, offering up enough new solid content to keep the *Great War Game* fan tapping away for days on end. Pocket Gamer's, Harry Slater, lauded Rubicon Development's sequel stating, "*Great Big War Game* builds on the foundations of its predecessor elegantly, solidifying what was already there and tweaking where necessary, there's enough here to make sure that the war efforts go on indefinitely."



Sean O' Connor's Slay

The title of this article promised "hardcore strategy," and where the strategy genre is concerned it's hard to get much more hardcore than a hex-map turn-based strategy game originally written in assembly language on an Atari ST. *Slay* has gone through many versions and upgrades since its distant origins, but its essence has always remained the same: Simple but extremely fun and addictive struggles between you and five opponents for control of a hex-based island. Expand your territory and your forces, manage resources to keep your growing host supplied, position troops and fortifications add vital strategic points to hold back the encroachments of the enemy, and cackle with glee when a well-planned invasion slices an enemy's territory in two, cutting off supply lines and dooming mighty armies to sudden oblivion.

It's enormously enjoyable, and its simple production values make it eminently playable without a state-of-the-art phone. Hardcore Droid's John Markley called it "a fun, simple, addictive game that's easy to pick up and well worth playing for strategy fans," and if you can't trust him you can't trust anybody.



UniWar

UniWar is another turn-based strategy game: Different types of units with various strengths and weaknesses, hex map, capture bases, you know the drill. Once again, though, it's all about execution, and in that regard *UniWar* has been very well received. In particular for its online multiplayer mode, which includes an option to have multiple games running simultaneously and can will you an e-mail when it's your turn. Levi Buchanan, of IGN, raved, "If you draw even the smallest amount of gaming pleasure out of the genre, there is no reason not to download *UniWar*."



Sentinel 3: Homeworld

Another entry in the ubiquitous tower defense genre, *Sentinel 3* adds some new wrinkles to the formula such as placing barriers along the path that the onrushing horde of enemies travels that they have to stop and break down before advancing, adding another strategic consideration when deciding where to deploy your weapons. You have an on-screen character, a soldier in powered armor who fires on the enemy, hinders them with special abilities, repairs damaged barriers, and slugs it out with the enemy hand-to-hand when they get close enough. You can also call in orbital fire support from the eponymous spaceship Sentinel when you find yourself overwhelmed. You also earn money and experience that lets you strengthen your powered armor, expand your arsenal of towers and unlock new abilities for your armor and the Sentinel. It's quite nice graphically – it's not gritty-looking, but doesn't go to the opposite extreme of being outright cartoonish. The action is fast-paced and fun, and the additional tactical considerations of where to deploy and when to call down firepower from orbit make it even more interesting and more like what's happening on your screen is an actual battle and not just a puzzle game with gun turrets.



Anomaly: Warzone Earth / Anomaly: Korea

Originally released for PC, *Anomaly: Warzone Earth HD* is a twist on the tower defense genre that places the player in the role of attacker. In the near future, a strange object comes crashing to earth from outer space, striking downtown Baghdad and enclosing it under a vast dome-shaped force field. It's up to you to lead a platoon of British combat vehicles inside to discover the truth behind this phenomenon, fighting your way past arrays of alien weapons emplacements.

In each stage you must use the resources provided, or salvaged along the way, to build and upgrade a force selected from a variety of combat vehicles that gradually become unlocked as you complete missions, plan your route through the streets of the ruined city, and accompany your forces as they blast their way through. Your ace in the hole is the ability to deploy a limited number of special abilities like vehicle repairs, smokescreens, and airstrikes. Huge fans of the original, we were thrilled when the sequel hit The Play Store early this year. Adding a bunch of maps and new gameplay elements, the second iteration, *Anomaly: Korea*, continues the story in... well, take a wild guess.



Kingdom Rush

Kingdom Rush doesn't contain a single element that can't be found elsewhere: not the nuanced tower types and upgrades, nor its fantasy theme, nor the way in which the towers jibe with the different monster. However, everything it does, it does with verve, pincache and great aplomb. From the tight mobile-phone friendly controls to the perfectly balanced dynamic between baddie and tower to the engagingly cartoony graphic style, *Kingdom Rush* is a prime example of mobile strategy done right. Hardcore Droid's James Christy loved it so much he gave it 4 stars, writing: "It was damn hard to pry myself from the game long enough to complete this review."



Starfront: Collision HD

Some games are subtle in how they draw on their inspirations. Others are less subtle. Still others are rather explicit about it. And then there's *Starfront: Collision HD*. To say that *Starfront: Collision HD* resembles Starcraft is like saying that the consequences of Earth suddenly falling out of its orbit and plunging directly into the sun would be "bothersome."

But derivative doesn't necessarily equal bad, and while *Starfront* is a bit short on originality it makes up for it in execution, offering what Paul Devlin, of Pocket Gamer, calls "a generous, well-paced and satisfying strategy experience." There are 20 single-player missions, a customizable skirmish mode, and online multiplayer for up to four simultaneous players. The game has also been praised for its effective control scheme, something that is often a sore point for mobile gamers in genres that require precise input – a group that definitely includes real-time strategy games. One of my first contacts with the genre was trying to play the original *Command and Conquer* with a game pad on the original PlayStation, so I know about these things all too well.



Strategy & Tactics: World War II

Historically-based strategy has been enormously important in the history of the strategy genre as a whole but is still an underserved niche in mobile gaming, a field where fantasy, sci-fi, and humorous settings dominate. (I hate to break break the hearts of any *Ninja Village* fans who thought that battling talking frogs was part of Kairossoft's grittily authentic simulation of 16th-century feudal Japanese warfare, but...)

Strategy & Tactics: World War II is a welcome entry in the subgenre, letting you play out 18 different historical campaigns in single player mode, or choose from a number of customized scenarios to play in single player skirmish mode against the AI or up to three other human players. It has a lot of atmosphere and immersion thanks to its graphical style, which adds a lot to the experience. The music is astonishingly good. It is in fact the best I have ever heard in a mobile game, bar none.



Oregon Trail: Director's Cut

My elementary school's rather grandiosely named "computer lab" had little to recommend it. You could quite literally go there twice a week for six years and remain blissfully unaware of the existence of exotic computing devices like mice or hard drives or monitors that displayed colors other than green.

Yet there was one bright spot amidst it all: *Oregon Trail*, a game where you had to successfully cross the Western 19th-century United States in a covered wagon, carefully planning the equipment and provisions you'd take on your journey before facing down a host of randomly generated threats like starvation, disease, and rivers that randomly drowned half your family if you tried to ford them yourself to save five bucks on the cost of hiring the ferry. It was fun, it was addictive, and educational enough for the school to have it.

Director's Cut is a spiritual successor, adding new gameplay elements and decisions to the classic formula. Also, it has zombies, from whom you're fleeing across a desolate post-apocalyptic wasteland in search of safe haven from the undead hordes. It's won quite a few fans with its combination of dark atmosphere, humor, and classic gameplay, with Eurogamer's Rich Stanton raving that, "*Oregon Trail* is a great idea, and its execution moves it far beyond a grisly tribute act."



Myth Defense: Light Forces

For the hardcore gamer who isn't sufficiently challenged by other tower defense games, there's *Myth Defense*. It's a deeply challenging game, where the enemy is utterly relentless and each of the game's 18 campaign stages has at least 70 waves of pitiless foes to hold back. In addition to the campaign mode and another 4 stages for one-off games in Battle Mode, there's also the option of playing in randomly generated stages, with a different layout and terrain each time. Mike Rose, of Gamezebo, says it "offers one of the better TD experiences on the Android with some wonderfully deep gameplay."



Ninja Village

Who among us hasn't looked at the cute cartoons, silly humor, and infectious cheerful atmosphere of Kairosoft's library of games about running fantastical towns and businesses and thought, "Why hasn't this formula been applied to the blood-soaked history of Feudal Japan?" The answer, of course, is "everybody." However, it also turns out to be a pretty good idea. *Ninja Village* combines familiar Kairosoft mechanics - designing your village of ninjas, making it pleasant and productive, and recruiting and developing new characters - with a surprisingly detailed battle system as you send your ninja out to challenge rival warlords fighting to rule Feudal Era Japan.



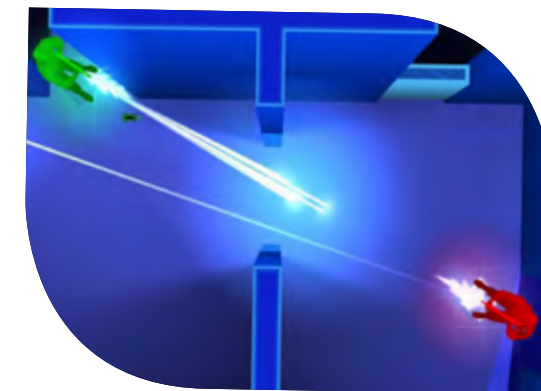
Worms 2: Armageddon

The seminal artillery-based strategy game finally reached Android in 2013 giving Droid strategists good reason to count their blessings. *Armageddon* is part of the long-running *Worms* series of games, still going strong since it began in 1995. (You know a series has staying power when it started out on the Amiga and remains a popular franchise today.) Rival teams of worms - fighting for reasons explained in the no-doubt rich backstory of the *Worms* universe - take turns lobbing projectiles at each other. There are numerous different weapons and other helpful items, many available in limited supplies, and it's up to you to make the best use of these resources and make your shots count.



Total War Battles: SHOGUN

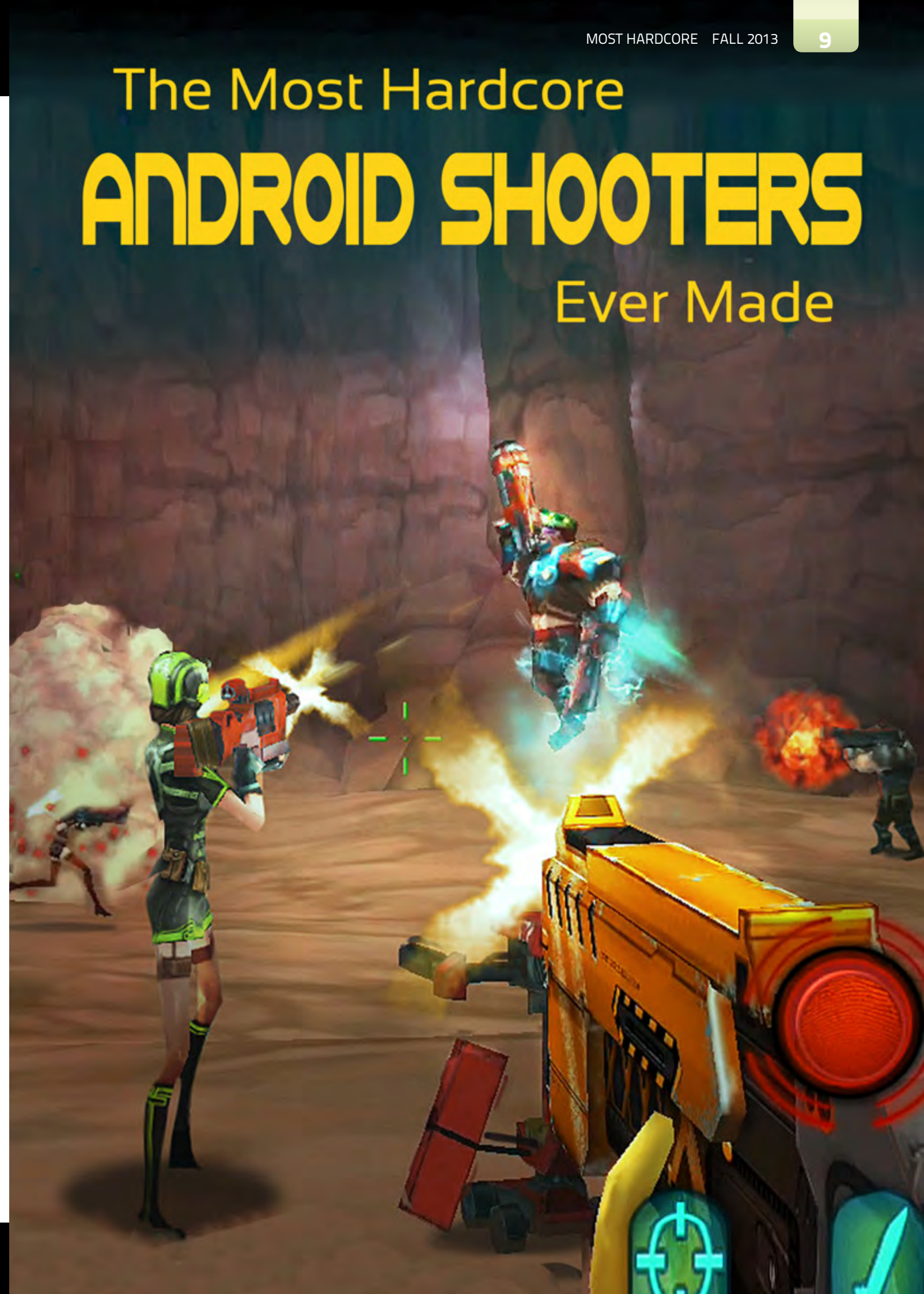
The long-running military strategy franchise finally makes its mobile debut with this unique and much smaller spinoff. It doesn't actually have all that much in common with its desktop-based forebears. What it does however is provide a unique take on small-scale real time strategy that has an almost puzzle-like quality. Hardcore Droid's own Travis Fahs called *Total War Battles: Shogun* "a smart game that will tax the mind of even experienced players," so if you're away from your computer when you're jonesing for some Sengoku Era Japanese military strategy this could be just the thing.



Frozen Synapse

Firaxis' announcement that *XCOM* would be released in its entirety on the iPad was bad news for Android gamers, as The House That Meier Built has never showed us any love. To counter this tragedy we have *Frozen Synapse*, a brilliant turn-based tactical strategy game ported to Android from the PC with all of its detailed brilliance intact. Featuring an engaging minimalist aesthetic, and a unique take on tactical strategy, *Synapse* offers up not only a unique play experience, it also sports a vast campaign, providing players with hours upon hours of nail-bitingly good tactical combat.

The Most Hardcore ANDROID SHOOTERS Ever Made



The Most Hardcore Android Shooters Ever Made

by Ajax & John Markley

The 3-D shooter has been one of the less-represented genres in mobile gaming thus far, due to their technical demands and the challenge of adapting their gameplay to touchscreen controls. Luckily, however, that is starting to change, and the past few years have seen a slew of third and first-person shooters for Android devices. The following list constitutes the most successful forays into the genre thus far.



Shadowgun

In *Shadowgun* you take on the role of mercenary John Slade as he battle hordes of enemy soldiers, monstrous creatures, and some impressively large bosses in third-person shooter action in the vein of games like *Gears of War*. It has intense action and some remarkable graphics and production values for a game made specifically for mobile devices. Yes, it's another entry in the "angry bald man killing everything in his path" subgenre, but by all accounts it's a very good one, with Chris Burns of *SlashGear* calling it "massive, so awesome, so significant that it cannot be ignored."



Into The Dead

Into the Dead is a sweet little FPS, sporting tight controls, beautiful, moody graphics and visceral action. Hardcore Droid's Saul Berenbaum gave the title Four stars, citing its wickedly exiting gameplay and authentic horror movie atmosphere. While its ads can screw up gameplay from time to time,

Into the Dead is otherwise a prime example of Freemium done right. It does sporadically try to sell you IAPs, but the mounds of cool weapons you can earn through play (as it should always be), means that this freemium title is hardcore gamer ready. What's more, the lack of a paywall means that you can play until you are covered in Zombie gibs and your heart is content without paying extra.



Max Payne Mobile

2012 was a busy year for the *Max Payne* franchise. After an absence of over eight years, Max finally made his debut on current-generation home consoles in *Max Payne 3*, proving that he is still the toughest ex-cop in gaming and the most depressing man in human history.

It also saw his first appearance in mobile format with this new release of the original *Max Payne*, ported from the PC version. The original became a classic on the strength of its intense shoot-outs, slow-motion "bullet time" mode - something so common in modern shooters that it's easy to forget how novel it was at the time - and gritty noir-inspired story, all recreated here.

While the port to mobile takes a little getting used to, the game plays nicely on a tablet, bullet time's still a blast, and at three dollars it's more than worth the price of admission.



Dead Trigger

Dead Trigger is another shooter from from *Shadowgun* developer Madfinger Games, this time in first-person rather than third. Like a lot of mobile shooters, the premise isn't exactly original - you're fighting to stay alive while gunning down hordes of zombies. It's gameplay that matters in the end, though, and on that front *Dead Trigger* succeeds. Hardcore Droid named the title best Game of 2012, with our own Travis Fahs calling it "a quintessentially hardcore shooter, with blistering, almost *Serious Sam*-like action."



N.O.V.A. Series

N.O.V.A.: Near Orbit Vanguard Alliance is a series of sci-fi first-person shooter in the vein of games like *Halo*, and one of the most successful series of console-style games on Android. The first game in the franchise was praised by Levi Buchanan of IGN on its release as "the best first-person shooter on the Android right now."

The series, which consists of three games so far, is noteworthy for its impressive visuals, effective use of touchscreen controls, exciting battles created by the cunning enemy AI, and solid and varied single-player campaigns, to say nothing of the franchise's solid and intense multiplayer component.



Mass Effect: Infiltrator

Mass Effect: Infiltrator is a spinoff of the popular action/RPG series *Mass Effect*. It focuses on the "action" side, with nine linear stages for the player to blast through, though it retains some RPG aspects by awarding you credits based on your performance that you can use to unlock stat improvements or new abilities.

The game boasts some fine graphics, controls well, and provides a new look at the setting of the popular series. Events in the mobile game can also affect in-game events in *Mass Effect 3*, with certain accomplishments in *Infiltrator* that can improve your Galactic Readiness score in the main game.

It's much more action-focused than the main *Mass Effect* series, with much less attention given to characterization, choice, or other RPG elements. If you're a *Mass Effect* fan primarily for the latter and go into this expecting a similar experience to the console/PC game you're probably going to be disappointed.

Nevertheless, it received four out of five stars here at Hardcore Droid, where it was praised by Travis Fahs as "one of the best 3D action games you'll find" for Android.



Bounty Hunter: Black Dawn

Have you ever wondered what it would be like if someone took *Borderlands*, made it simpler and goofier and only for mobile? Well, wonder no more, because Freyr Games *Bounty Hunter: Black Dawn* is exactly that. *Borderlands* fans who can get past the concept of an RPG with a lack of exploration via tiny maps that must be rehashed, will find a lot to love in *Bounty Hunter: Black Dawn*. Like its predecessor, *BHBD* is a post apocalyptic FPS/RPG hybrid with comic book-style cell-shaded graphics. What's more, it is a joy to play with taut controls, fun battles and more skill and weapon upgrades than you could shake a stick at.



Dead Space

Despite what the name suggests, this isn't simply a port of the original. Instead, it's a full-fledged new entry in the *Dead Space* universe, with a story set between the events of the original game and *Dead Space 2*. It's been widely praised for its impressive graphics, for a control scheme much more intuitive and functional than most attempts to translate console-style controls onto a touchscreen, and for its overall success at translating the dark atmosphere and gory action of *Dead Space* to mobile devices.



Epoch

First off, it's a robots only affair. Second, it's a TPS/RPG hybrid with a small 'r' in its RPG. Thirdly, it's a cover shooter with rather limited movement. If you're OK with all of that, you'll find in *Epoch* a beautiful 3D game set in a wicked looking post apocalyptic world as well as a visceral shooter/RPG, the RPG aspect coming to players via upgradeable skills, gadgets, armor and weapons, with poison ammo, bombs and lightning guns to spare. If robots spin your gears (get it? Spin your gears) *Epoch*, at ninety nine cents to enter, is a must.



Modern Combat (series)

OK, admittedly, the name is slightly derivative of a certain other franchise about warfare in the modern world, and sort of reminds me of the generic store brand "Crispy Rice" cereal my mom used to buy when I was a kid. Despite the less than inspiring moniker, however the *Modern Combat* series is actually quite well-done in its own right, delivering a solid modern military first-person shooter experience that has won widespread acclaim, with Trevor Dobrygoski of *Android Rundown*, calling *Modern Combat 3: Fallen Nation* "about as good as it gets for war action games on Android devices."

The Most Hardcore Android Action Games of All Time

By Travis Fahs, John Markley & Sam Riedel



Action games have become a thriving genre on Android devices, thanks to a combination of original titles and the efforts of many developers to give their games of past decades a new life. And yet there's still a lot of crap out there. How, you ask yourself, am I going to find the time to sift through the garbage to find the kind of games that I, a hardcore gamer, enjoy. As in all things we have got you covered.



Vector

If you're like us, you love the French obstacle-course athleticism of parkour, but you can't stop playing with your phone long enough to learn the fundamentals of wheel jumps. Thankfully this year Nekki brought us *Vector*, a vaguely dystopian side-scroller where you leap, somersault, and otherwise propel your silhouette away from thugs of the running dog establishment. The graphics are incredible, with detailed & realistic animations that manage to bring even matte black characters to life on your Android tablet or smartphone. There are some technical hiccups lengthly load times, so your mileage may vary depending on your device, but *Vector* is nevertheless a heart-pounding thrill ride from beginning to end.



Sonic CD

Sonic has had a few outings on Android now, but it's his oft-forgotten *Sega CD* adventure that stands out as the best. As always, the simple controls and deep physics are the best the genre has seen, but the increased emphasis on exploration sets it apart from *Sonic*'s other iterations. Previous ports of classic *Sonic* games to newer platforms have often been of dubious quality, but *Sonic CD* makes the transition to Android with aplomb. The resolution has been expanded so that it can be played in 16:9 aspect ratio, and the ability to play as *Sonic*'s loyal sidekick Tails has been added. As an extra bonus, this mobile version lets you switch between the American and Japanese versions of the original game's music.



Ultimate Stick Fight

With rudimentary designs and a bare-bones set of mechanics, you'd be forgiven for thinking *Ultimate Stick Fight* is nothing new under the sun, because you'd be absolutely right. But there's nothing wrong with that when "nothing new under the sun" means responsive controls, hours of unique content, and a huge variety of options for character customization. The animation is fluid and the stages are surprisingly detailed—and best of all, it does all this on Android 2.2. It might not have much going for it when it comes to originality, but it's an awfully impressive action game nonetheless.

The Ultimate Guide to Action Games on the Android OS



By way of some of the best works of Hardcore Droid's finest writers, parsed through with all due diligence by senior editor, Ajax Moroni, Hardcore Droid brings you... drum roll please... this hardcore gamer's guide to the very best action games available on the Android platform. Enjoy.



God of Blades

Brawlers sometimes get a bad rap as mindless button-mashing distractions with no skill requirements or replay value. Haters beware - *God of Blades* is coming for your preconceived notions, wielding a sword made of light that summons soul-sucking demons. The combat system is detailed and precise. Older devices may experience some minor lag problems, but that's because the 3D graphics are just plain off the hook. With a haunting soundtrack and well-executed unlockables to boot, *God of Blades* is on track to be the best mobile hack-and-slash game of the year.



Megatroid

From its armored sci-fi heroine and 2D side-scrolling shooting/platforming gameplay to a title that's only slightly subtler than just calling the game *Shmetroid*, *Megatroid* is not exactly coy about what it's influenced by. It's a retro shooter/platformer inspired by *Metroid* and other classic side-scrolling games of the 8-bit and 16-bit eras. However, it has a lot to offer. The action is intense, it's quite nice to look at, and it has procedurally generated levels that make the game different every time you play. It also has the very appealing trait of being free - you can buy premium in-game items and bonuses with actual money but the playing through main game costs nothing.



R-Type

Like some unspeakably evil race of far-future biomechanical monstrosities banished to another dimension beyond space-time as we know it, we're now reaching far, far back into the distant past. (That probably made no sense to you whatsoever, but rest assured that if you were familiar with the back story of the *R-Type* series you would find it mildly clever.) DotEmu's exemplary port of the 1987 classic has earned gushing praise for both its graphics and superb controls - and you'll need the latter, because *R-Type* is a legendarily challenging game and this version doesn't pull any punches. If you're looking for a truly "hardcore" mobile game, this is it.



Grand Theft Auto III

The game that kicked off the open-world craze on consoles makes the jump from PlayStation 2 to mobile gaming. In another remarkable testament to how far technology has come since 2001, *GTA III* makes the transition completely intact - all the dialogue and cut scenes of the original, all of the radio station audio, and, most importantly, all of the expansive open world of the original. *Grand Theft Auto III* is almost ideally suited to be a game played on the go, since the missions are generally simple, bite-sized affairs, and the real heart and soul of the title - careening about the city wreaking senseless havoc until the police bring you down - can go on for as long as you like.



Grand Theft Auto III: Vice City

For yet more antisocial action, there's the follow-up to *GTA III*, *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City 10th Anniversary Edition*. *Vice City* improves on the controls of its predecessor, adding more customization options. It also adds an auto-save system more suited to the mobile experience and a few conveniences from later games, such as the ability to simply retry a failed mission without needing to travel from your respawn point every time. This time the setting shifts to the 80s, letting you rampage through We're-Not-Officially-Calling-It-Miami during the era of cocaine, Scarface, and hideous giant hair.



The Dark Knight Rises

Happily, the new trend of video games based on movies that aren't shoddily slapped-together cash-ins has made its way to Android. In *The Dark Knight Rises* you play as Batman in an open-world third person action/adventure game that Simon Dage of Android Central calls "a perfect companion to the film." The Android version of the game has gotten some criticism for its unbalanced graphics, with Batman looking conspicuously better and more detailed than other characters, but has still been praised for maintaining the dark, somber atmosphere of Batman's classic adventures.



Raiden Legacy

The *Raiden* games are a series of vertically scrolling shoot'em ups that made their arcade debut back in 1990. The series has long been considered among the classics of the genre, offering intense action with wave after wave of relentless enemies and the ability to unleash some truly stupendous firepower if you stay alive long enough to accumulate enough power-ups. *Raiden Legacy* collects four of these games, bringing you the original *Raiden*, *Raiden Fighters*, *Raiden Fighters 2*, and *Raiden Fighters Jet* in one package and fans of classic shooters who doesn't mind a challenge a lot of value on one package.



AirAttack HD

AirAttack HD is a World War II-inspired vertically scrolling shoot 'em up. The intense action recalls classic shooters like *1942* or *Sky Shark*, with waves of enemy aircraft swarming across the screen and bosses filling the air with gunfire, and it's beautiful to look at too. It also offers four different options for controls, which is certainly a good thing in a genre where fast, precise reactions can make all the difference. *AirAttack HD* has won widespread praise since its release, with Artem Russakovskii of Android Police raving, "every single little thing about this game is top notch."



Jet Set Radio

Jet Set Radio is one of the true classics of SEGA's oft-overlooked final years. Drawing inspiration from 1990s Tokyo punk culture, *JSR* casts you as a "rude boy" on rollerblades, performing sick tricks as you spray paint each level with your tag. Of course the police show up, and though you're no Nico Bellic, the later levels will still see your character pursued by helicopters, attack dogs, gas grenades, and more. The result is a vivid, unique sandbox game that draws as much from *GTA* as it does from *Tony Hawk*. *Jet Set Radio's* graphics and soundtrack have aged well, and although the controls are an awkward attempt to recreate the Dreamcast controller on Android's touchscreens, this is still a majorly rad sandbox game.



Super Monkey Ball 2

We've seen a number of impressive adaptations to mobile, but it's a rare sight indeed when a console series actually gets better in transition. And yet that's exactly the case with *Super Monkey Ball 2*. The accelerometer controls feel like the way this game was always meant to be played, and while they take a bit more finesse than the control pad, they're intuitive and very accurate. The difficulty has been dialed down from the series early GameCube days, but collecting all the crowns and unlocking bonus stages proves to be plenty of challenge for the more experienced. There are few games more addictive, and we hope SEGA continues this series on the Android in the years to come.



Asphalt 7: Heat

The *Asphalt* series, which has become one of the venerable mainstays of mobile gaming since its debut with *Asphalt Urban GT* in 2004. Despite its origins in an era where "mobile gaming" mostly meant playing *Tetris* on a graphing calculator - or, if you were really scrapping the bottom of the barrel, getting an N-Gage - the *Asphalt* franchise has kept up with the times. *Asphalt 7* is, provided you can play it at full graphical settings, among the more visually impressive games yet released for a mobile device, with Hardcore Droid's Travis Fahs praising it for "some genuinely incredible visuals."



Need for Speed: Most Wanted

With all the narrowly averted car crashes I've seen caused by idiots fiddling with their smartphones, it's only fitting that there should be an Android game dedicated to wildly unsafe and irresponsible driving. *Need for Speed: Most Wanted* is that game. Set in an open world that leaves you free to choose your own route to the finish line, *Most Wanted* puts you behind the wheel of twenty different automobiles as you compete in races around the city while evading the police. Its impressive graphics and strong controls led to it being acclaimed Racing Game of the Year at our very own Hardcore Droid, where it was praised for its "detailed, cutting edge graphics, tight, smart controls" and "heart-thumping action."



Wild Blood

Beat 'em ups are among the hardest games to get right on a touch screen. It's a genre so deeply rooted in console controller paradigms that even PC games have trouble making it work with the highly articulate PC/Mouse combo. Gameloft's fantasy-themed *Wild Blood* doesn't entirely overcome all of these challenges, but it manages to succeed as a game despite them. Boasting great graphics, a varied move set, and a huge cast of big, impressive bosses, *Wild Blood* is hands down one of the most exciting and best looking beat 'em ups available on Android.

The Most Hardcore Android Indie Games Ever Made

The Finest Android Indies

by Joe Matar & Travis Fahs

"Indie" is a pretty nebulous term in that it doesn't give you a clue as to what type of gameplay you're in for. Indie titles can be puzzle, action, adventure, or even something that doesn't fit snugly into an established genre. This is the true joy of indie as, free from the constraints of publishers worrying over the mass-marketability of their product, the small development teams that create these games are able to explore, transform, manipulate, and hybridize the gaming medium in whatever ways most interest them. While many indie games suffer from the same problems as their AAA peers, getting mired down in retreaded subject material and clichéd mechanics, the most interesting titles recognize their freedom and show no fear in taking advantage of it. The qualifier of "indie" should indicate that the player is bound to engage in a unique and inventive experience, and if you follow our lead here and download any of these gems that is exactly what you are in for.



Superbrothers: Sword & Sorcery EP

Superbrothers is one of the most anti-commercial games ever to make a million dollars. At once silly and artsy, it's a mash-up of nostalgia and just plain odd. The pixelated visuals might seem low-tech, but there's nothing retro about them, and the touch-based interaction, while evocative of the adventure games of old, is more of an ambient game of discovery. If the indie games movement ever needed a poster child, this could be it.



Gene Effect

From the moment you boot up *Gene Effect*, you can see that it's a labor of love. Without borrowing too heavily from any one game, *Gene Effect* is a gushing love-letter to the European computer

games of the early '90s. It's a slow, methodical action game in which players have to survive with hardly any offensive capabilities. In a world where little ships are more often than not armed to the teeth, *Gene Effect* runs completely against the grain.



Minecraft Pocket Edition

Begun as a one-man project, the quirky voxel-based sandbox game has managed to rival the sales of the industry's biggest AAA, all without a single dollar of advertising. Although the *Minecraft Mobile* isn't yet up to snuff with its PC counterpart, it's still one of the platform's most important titles.



The Traveler

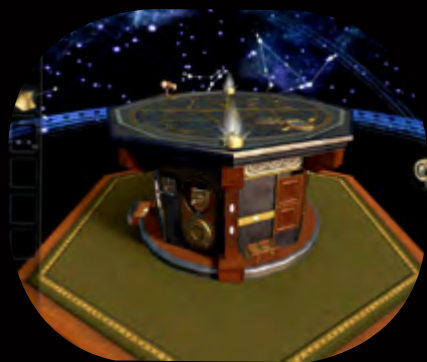
We've become increasingly wary of the interactive fiction glutting the Android

market, have grown gradually more dubious that it's even a relevant genre any longer. However, *The Traveler* avoids many of the issues that plague interactive fiction, largely by just having a straight-up good storyline. Basically just pages of text with radio buttons at the bottom of each, the presentation is about as bare bones as it gets. But it's the story that's the star here. Taking place in a post-apocalyptic future, it follows a protagonist obeying the commands of a mysterious voice coming from an electronic box. And it's awesome.



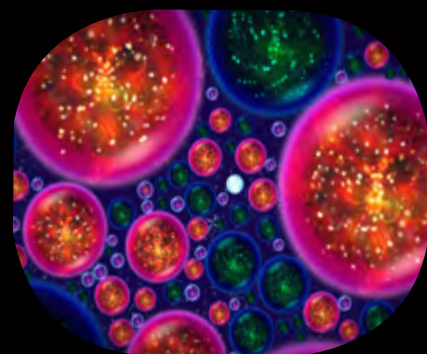
Machinarium

Witty dialog and deep narratives have been the key selling points of the adventure genre's greatest exemplars. It's a strange thing, then, that the best adventure game of the past decade tells its tale without uttering a single word. With stunning, distinctive art, suitable for framing, it manages to tell its tale visually in the grand tradition of animated films like *The Triplets of Belleville*, *Wall-E*, or *Idiots and Angels*. The result is something that feels universal, unbounded by the constraints of language; a playable cartoon that will make you laugh and charm the pants off of your grandmother or your kid brother.



The Room

The Room is another game that was out last year, but not available to Android gamers until 2013. It's an intensely focused first-person adventure puzzler in which the player must solve a series of consecutive puzzles in an effort to open an extremely complicated box. *The Room* is a gorgeous looking and incredibly detailed game, made all the more impressive by the fact that you're pretty much staring at a box the whole time. It's got cool, creepy music and even a bit of a storyline told through journal pages that you uncover in stages.



Osmos

Osmos is like *Katamari Damacy* on a cellular level. It has only one rule: Large things absorb smaller things and get bigger. Drive forward by the simple premise, it somehow manages to be one of the most addicting pure arcade games in recent memory. There's something deeply satisfying on an almost primal level about dodging huge globs, only to return later, loom over once huge globs and swallow them whole. Like an abstract revenge story that never ends, *Osmos* is the kind of game you can sink hours into, five minutes at a time.



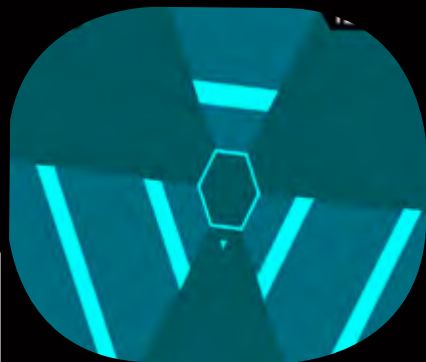
World of Goo

World of Goo is one of the pivotal games in the modern indie movement. It evolved from an entry in the Experimental Gameplay Game Jam, and it plays like nothing else before it. Essentially an architectural puzzle, it asks players to bridge obstacle courses by constructing elaborate tinker toy-like structures. Despite straying far from any existing genre conventions, it managed to be a breakthrough hit, lending much needed credibility to the indie game movement, and it's a must-play for anyone looking for a good puzzler.



Finding Teddy

Though arguably not as fiercely bizarre or quite as engrossing as 2012's stellar *Superbrothers: Sword & Sworcery EP*, *Finding Teddy* is a point-and-click adventure that more than holds its own. Feeling not unlike a combination of all that has defined indie up until this point (pixel graphics à la *Superbrothers* and *Fez*; grisly deaths like in *Limbo*; minimalist music as in... tons of indie games), *Finding Teddy* still accomplishes a beautiful and unique experience. It even has puzzles based around characters talking by way of musical notes, which, for old people like me, triggers comforting flashbacks of *Loom*.



Super Hexagon

Designed almost entirely by one guy, Terry Cavanagh's *Super Hexagon* is about as independent as it gets. The streamlined gameplay consists of moving either left or right as player's navigate a tiny triangle through ever encroaching geometric shapes. It's simple, fast-paced, brilliant, and addictive. This isn't just one of the best indie games of the year for the Android; it's simply one of the best action games ever, period. Seriously, I'm still playing this sucker to this very day.



Rebuild

Rebuild combines the resource management of a city builder with the kind of interactive narrative found in choose your own adventure titles. And while the linear progression at the heart of choose your own adventures have made for a mountain of lukewarm video games, the narrative element in *Rebuild* is a more organic and open-ended affair. Take this dynamic narrative and combine it with a civilization-lite resource management mechanic, then gently stir in the fact that the game was primarily developed by auteur Sarah Northway and you have an engaging little zombie strategy game that embodies the best of what indie games have to offer.

The Most Hardcore Android RPGs Ever Made





The Best Android RPGs Ever Made

by Ajax, Tavis Fahs and Joe Matar

Scan any RPG-related forum and you'll come away with a clear impression that RPG players are among the most hardcore fans in the world, which makes sense because role-playing games are driven by story, and story by character, and if we're going to be loyal to anything it's most likely going to be to another person or the closest analogue at hand. And this is where RPGs, more so than any other genre, take us.

Unfortunately, Android's RPG market is glutted with crap. Which brings us to the purpose of *Most Hardcore*, because we have granted you a boon here, Oh, RPG fan. In your honor, we've braved the crap app sea dutifully handing over our credit cards so that our devices might be used like old-school arcade games, except this time we pumped our machines full of singles and fives for an assortment of virtual refuse that more often than not boiled down to the ability to continue playing. In my mind's eye the Insert Coin message still appears when I die in certain Droid games, only it reads Insert five bucks! But I digress... The real point here is that we did all of this so that you don't have to suffer, and so that we might bring you this list—this epic list of gems we're calling: *The Most Hardcore Android RPGs Ever Made*.



Avernum: Escape from the Pit

Originally released on the PC and Mac, *Avernum* is a party-based open world role playing series developed by Spiderweb Software. Jeff Vogel based the mobile iteration of *Avernum: Escape from the Pit* on old school RPGs like *Baldur's Gate* and *Ultima 7*. A somewhat modernized version of one of Spiderweb's earlier game worlds, *Escape from the Pit* offers the kind of rich, nuanced gameplay reminiscent of tabletop RPGs. *Avernum: Escape from the Pit* is a bit more expensive than your typical casual Android title, but the game's length and smart, deep gameplay makes it a worthwhile investment

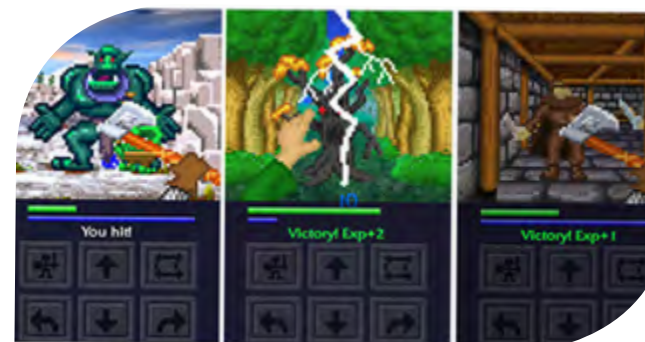
that easily beats the entertainment value you'll get from a movie or album at the same price point.



Aralon: Sword & Shadow

While it admittedly suffers from an occasional bug or three and the second half feels at times unfinished, *Aralon* is the real deal. It boasts a functional story, an open 3D world filled with engaging baddies and bits and pieces of story, and it's backed up by a rich, original role-playing system. Character creation and development come replete with a host of options: three distinct races, seven classes and a

decent skill and leveling system. It also boasts day and night cycles, nuanced character customization and a decent selection of weapons and armor. In the final analysis, there's a definite pleasure to be had in traipsing around a huge open virtual world on the tiny screen. We reviewed it promptly when it finally made its way to the Play Store last February and Hardcore Droid contributor, Travis Fahs gave the game a winning 4 out of 5, writing: "You really won't find a more robust modern RPG experience on your Droid."



QuestLord

In *QuestLord*, you choose to play as a human, elf, or dwarf and set out to save the realm from destruction. The 8-bit graphics and accessible user interface make for a solid retro RPG experience on the Android. The graphics aren't hi-tech, but they're not meant to be. This game is a nod to retro with compelling gameplay, secret passages and monster-battling action. Gamers pining for the classic days of RPG gaming on the PC can add another star to *QuestLord*. Even if you're of the new school, you'll be hard pressed to find a more solid mobile RPG.



The Bard's Tale

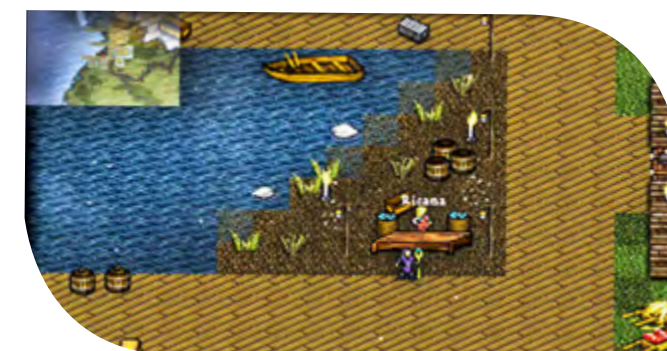
For Droid enthusiasts hardcore about their Western RPGs, it really comes down to a small handful of choices and *The Bard's Tale* is one of the best of that lot. The game features rich character customization via a balanced role playing system, a protagonist who physically changes as he dons new arms and a cool, somewhat unique magic system, wherein the bard conjures one to a few fantasy-themed familiars to assist him as he quests and battles. Though it was a port, we loved it

so much that we named it Best RPG of 2012, in our Hardcore Holiday Issue, I wrote: "It's overall design, a hybrid of open-world and action RPG with aspects of narrative driven adventure games sprinkled into the mix, makes for the best kind of role-playing game."



Kemco Games

This is the only instance where we'll cite a company rather than a game or series. In Kemco's case it makes perfect sense. Founded in 1980, the company has literally been around forever; and from then until the early oughts they were primarily developers and publishers of console games. In 2011 they moved into the mobile gaming space with their critically acclaimed and commercially successful *Symphony of Eternity*, an excellent JRPG that stood as one of our picks for 2012's Most Hardcore RPG list. Since the time of *Symphony's* release, Kemco has released title after quality title of JRPG. From the *Symphony* series to the *Alphadia* series to individual gems like *Grinsia*, Kemco has built a reputation for producing quality, mobile-friendly, old-school JRPGs. With the release this this year of *Symphony of the Origin* and RPG *Alphadia 2*, Kemco has solidified said reputation as the go-to publisher for fans of the old school, Japanese role-playing.



9th Dawn

When home computer games first started gaining popularity in the early 1980's, Richard Garriott's *Ultima* series created many RPG standards still used today, including detailed plot lines, inventory/loot systems, and party-based combat. *9th Dawn* pays homage to the original *Ultima* series, closely

resembling the retro graphics and gameplay of the iconic role playing legend. Creating an open-world experience on mobile platforms is a difficult task, but *9th Dawn* accomplishes it well. Fans of the original *Ultima* games will love the many modernized elements offered by this rich and compelling Android RPG, including multiplayer and dynamic combat. Regardless of your level of familiarity with classic computer RPGs, this title is a worthy addition to any mobile gamer's library.



Oubliette

Oubliette is a challenging and immersive Roguelike that actually predates *Rogue*. Initially developed by a trio of college students, including John Gaby, the man responsible for the present mobile port. The original iteration was built on a main frame computer in 1977 making *Oubliette* the 3rd or 4th computer role-playing game ever. Video game historians should check out Hardcore Droid's interview with Gaby in which he discusses *Oubliette* past and present.

Though the cumbersome menu system has been ironed out a bit, the learning curve remains steep. Craig Stern on IndieRPGS.com concurs, stating that the game will likely "pose too much of a challenge for casual gamers who tend to give up quickly. That said, players who enjoy a real challenge, don't give up easily, and relish a chance to test some real strategies will be generously rewarded."



Final Fantasy III

Final Fantasy III—the final in the series originally of the NES era—is its own interesting entity as the visuals haven't just been giving a coat of polish. Instead, the game's been

catapulted into the 3D realm. This was the other game in the series that didn't make it out of Japan until 2006 and took six more years to find its way to Android.

It's still hugely old-school (this was the entry originally notable for the introduction of the Job System), and the remake beefs up the story and gussies the presentation up nicely.



Final Fantasy IV

Of course this one had to make it on here. Aside from VII, *Final Fantasy IV* is in effect "the other Final Fantasy" that always gets mentioned by players. It's another all-out 3D remake, but this one would have been worth it even without the graphical overhaul.

Its slightly darker storyline is a welcome change, following the dark knight Cecil's reformation and featuring characters getting bumped off semi-regularly. It's also less daunting for players used to the modern entries in the series as this is the game where the Active Time Battle system was introduced.



Final Fantasy Dimensions

Final Fantasy Dimensions is a completely new entry in the series, dressed up in an old-school presentation. It borrows a lot from *Final Fantasy V* and its more complex version of the Job System. The most unique aspect of *Dimensions* (originally released episodically) is that it puts the player in control of two different parties. You switch back and forth between them thereby getting to witness story events from two different perspectives. It's an interesting twist on the established Final Fantasy formula that, along with the return of the jobs system, makes *Dimensions* one of the more intriguing FF titles.



Chaos Rings II

Another original Square Enix mobile title, *Chaos Rings II* also looks sincerely quite gorgeous. It's got a cool, dark storyline about the lead character having to murder his brother. Furthermore, though the world is (unsurprisingly) on course for destruction, the whys and hows behind this are revealed uniquely in the style of a murder mystery. Once again, pricey, but this is a console-quality JRPG that actually deserves the label "epic."



Ravensword: Shadowlands

Featuring some of the best 3D graphics on the Droid period, *Ravensword: Shadowlands* has all the trappings of an open world RPG in a condensed mobile package. Think of it as *Skyrim* Light. From Crescent Moon Games, the makers of *Aralon: Sword & Shadow*, the title is everything *Aralon* is, but more. *Ravensword* is hands down the finest and most expansive open-world RPG available on Android.



Avadon: The Black Fortress

Another party-based open world RPG from Jeff Vogel, *The Black Fortress* is the first game of Spider Web's new *Avadon*

trilogy. The turn-based combat and vast world translates so well you'll think you're playing on your computer. If you loved *Baldur's Gate* or *Neverwinter Nights*, then Avadon's party-based, tactical gameplay will be right up your alley.



Dungeon Ho!

When your friends are trying to set you up with someone, the first thing many of us want to know about is what the person looks like. If they're ugly, you'll usually hear about their personality first. Let's just say that *Dungeon Ho!* has a great personality. Underneath *Ho!*'s barebones production values, however, lies a rich, textured rogue-like. While the difficulty level may turn away some casual gamers, hardcore rogue-like fans will love the title's complexity, challenge and amusing writing. *Dungeon Ho!* features a nice sized cadre of skills, weapons and spells to manage during exploration and battle. What it lacks in looks and accessibility, it more than makes up for with beautiful atmospheric music and demanding, expansive gameplay.



Tales of Illyria

If you're an 80s baby, chances are you played *The Oregon Trail* in school. The gameplay in *Tales of Illyria*, a party-based Android RPG from developer Little Killerz, is the lovechild of *Oregon Trail* and *Heroes of Might and Magic*. Much of it plays like a randomized interactive fiction with cool, strategic combat. Like *Knights of the Old Republic*, you have the option during quests to choose between good and evil, and just like the original KotOR, your choices don't impact the main storyline. *Illyria* is an ambitious RPG that raises the bar for expansive mobile gaming worlds across all genres and platforms.