



# All Systems No:

*Learning from the Doomed  
Launch of Brigador*

**Hugh Monahan**

Co-Founder/Designer, Stellar Jockeys



HughSJ

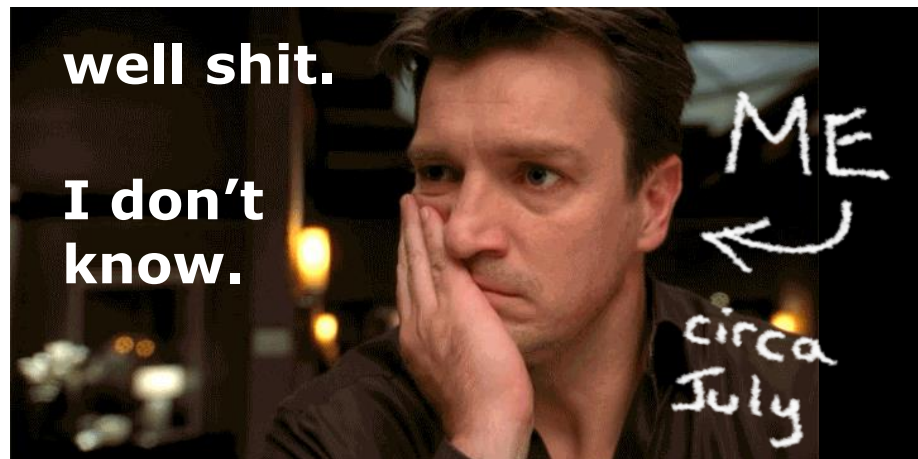


# What did I mean by **Doomed**?

-> **v1.0 launch was already a failure *before it happened*** <-  
*we just didn't know it yet*

But was it **doomed** as in  
*nothing I could do about it...?*

...or **doomed** as in  
*all my fault...?*





For this to mean anything, we need: **Context!**

- 4 devs, 2011-2016, mostly full time
- 1st commercial game for  $\frac{3}{4}$ ths of the team
- 100% self-funded, completely unknown
- Scratch-built engine was a non-negotiable





For this to mean anything, we need: **Goals!**

1) Make a unique game with a high skill ceiling



2) Make enough money to do it again



3) Keep the team together after ship



4) Build reputation as high-quality developer





For this to mean anything, we need: **End Results!**

- Review scores between 4/10 and 9.5/10\*
- Overwhelmingly Positive Steam user reviews\*\*
- 9 months out from release, ~15k units sold
- Shipped a game, 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> hour OST, book, and audiobook

\*final metacritic score of 7/10

\*\*98% if reviews no longer relevant are removed







# What *is* Brigador?

- NOT a twin-stick shooter
- NOT Tiberian Sun or an RTS
- NOT a roguelike or rogue-lite
- *Kinda* like Desert Strike\*, Crusader: No Remorse\*\*

\*released 1992

\*\*released 1995

# BRIGADOR



The background of the slide is a screenshot from the game Brigador. It shows a yellow and black mecha, which is a tank-like vehicle with a large gun, positioned on a dark road with white lane markings. The mecha is facing forward, and its right arm is extended. At the bottom of the image, the word "BRIGADOR" is written in a large, stylized font with a red-to-blue gradient and a white outline. The overall scene is set in a dark, industrial environment.

# What *is* Brigador?

- “A colorful and chaotic isometric 2D mech shooter set in a world steeped in ‘80s futurism.”  
(PC Gamer review)
- a “Tank Western” (Something Awful forum poster)
- a “Kool-Aid Man simulator” (Me, best I could do)

BRIGADOR





<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPnjH8a-W1U>





# Steam Dev Fights Price Complaints With Excellent Breakdown Of Why Game Costs \$20



Patricia Hernandez

2/23/16 3:08pm · Filed to: BRIGADOR

## What Happens After An Indie Game Fails On Steam



Nathan Grayson

7/21/16 4:15pm · Filed to: INTERVIEW



83.9K



157



12



= 34% TOTAL SALES

### Should Video Games Cost MORE? - The Know



The Know



1,076,511

116,555 views



Add to



Share



More



3,934



371



What's Brigador? I've never even heard of it.





## TOTAL BRIGADOR PURCHASES



2015-2016





# The Litany of Doom

aka the stuff we didn't understand or do correctly

## 1) Priming

You must teach the consumer how to react to and interact with your game.

*Before they play it.*









# BRIGADOR

## REVEAL TRAILER

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RHtRDVpNV1M>



# GDC

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE®

| FEB 27-MAR 3, 2017

| EXPO: MAR 1-3, 2017

#GDC17



*dupe me*





# GDC

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#GDC17





# A L I E N I S O L A T I O N



02 Qbert  
130/130

. Generator

. ---

. ---



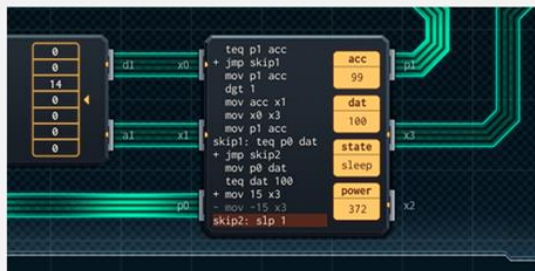
```
CONSOLE
> status
Status of derelict ship:
-Type: Space station C
-Infestation types detected: ??
-Hull integrity: Medium
-Age: 186 (stable)
> scan
Unrecognized command: scan
use 'help' for list of known commands
> c8
> █
```





# ZACHTRONICS

## COMMERCIAL GAMES



SHENZHEN I/O



TIS-100



Infinifactory



Ironclad Tactics





# The Litany of Doom

aka the stuff we didn't understand or do correctly

1) Priming

**2) Death of the designer**

All that matters is whether  
players buy and enjoy your game.

This determines sales.

Sales determine longevity.



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UBM





# The Litany of Doom

aka the stuff we didn't understand or do correctly

- 1) Priming
- 2) Death of the designer
- 3) **First 60' foundation**

The majority of your players,  
*aka the ones who fund your company,*  
will **never** make it past the early  
stages of gameplay.





## Galak-Z player statistics:

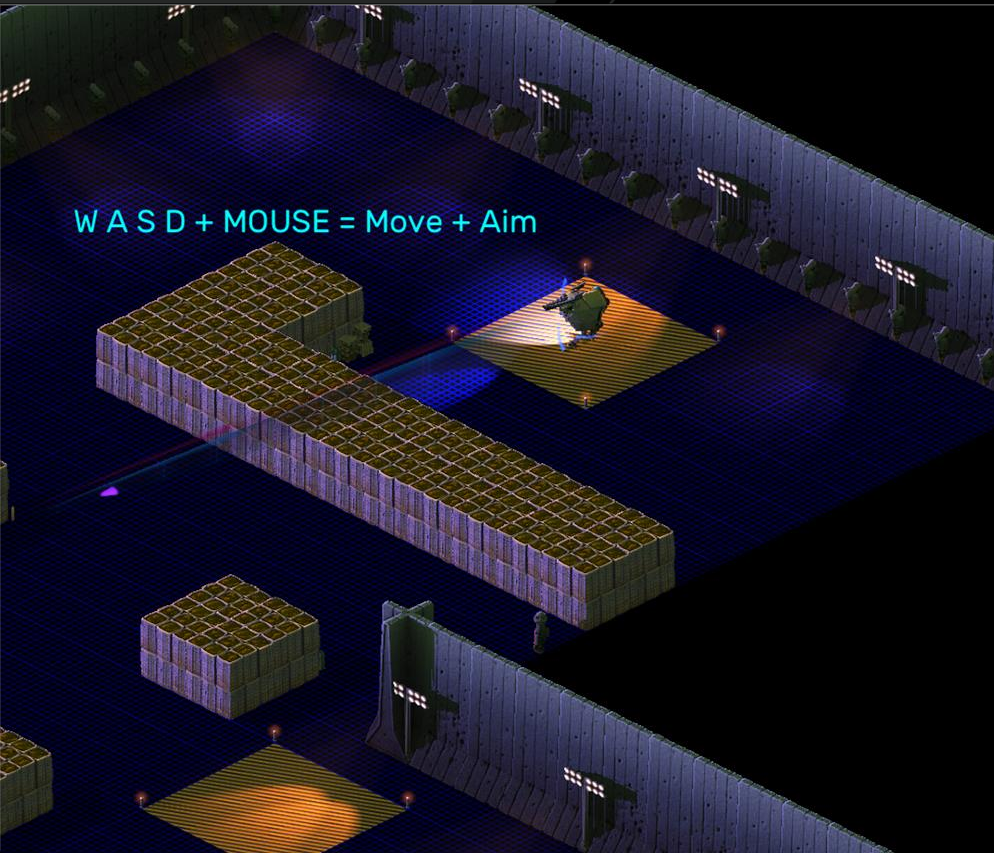
- **17%** players dropped out before completing the first level
- **92%** players dropped out before completing the 1st 'dungeon' area (~2 hours)

(numbers are somewhat inflated due to PS+ giveaway)





W A S D + MOUSE = Move + Aim







# The Litany of Doom

aka the stuff we didn't understand or do correctly

- 1) Priming
- 2) Death of the designer
- 3) First 60' foundation
- 4) Impedance**

The more *unusual, complicated,* or *difficult* a game is, the stronger the incentive is required to get both players and reviewers to 'buy in'.



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# DARK SOULS





5845



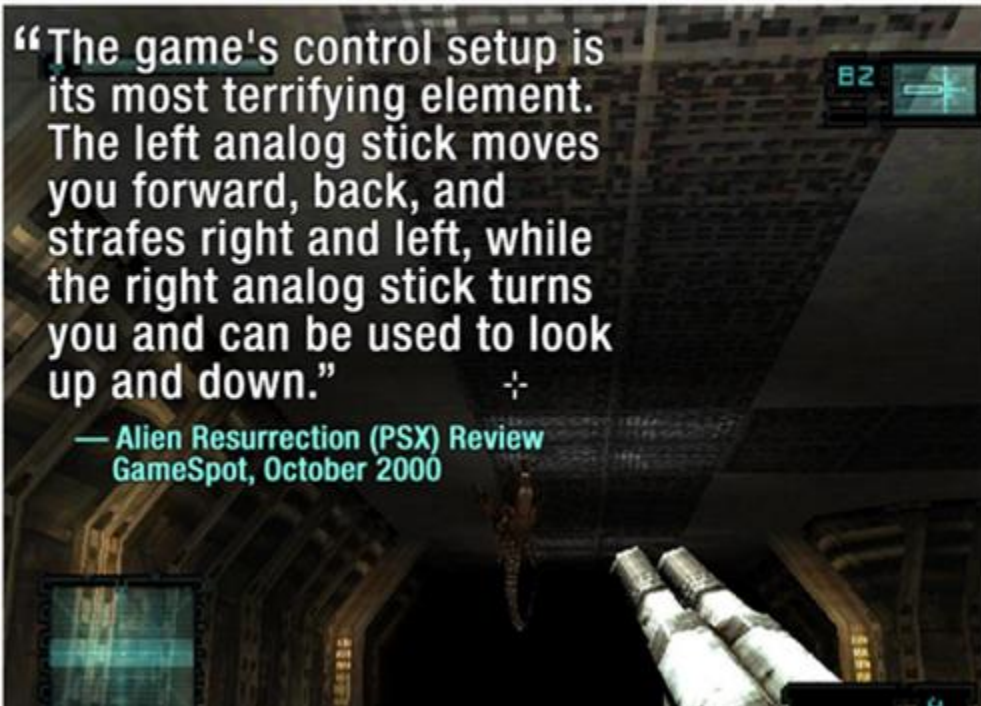
# Games Developers should never, ever be afraid to innovate.. (i.redd.it)

submitted 2 months ago by [NokkonWud](#)

1916 comments share save hide give gold report

“The game's control setup is its most terrifying element. The left analog stick moves you forward, back, and strafes right and left, while the right analog stick turns you and can be used to look up and down.”

— [Alien Resurrection \(PSX\) Review](#)  
GameSpot, October 2000







# The Litany of Doom

aka the stuff we didn't understand or do correctly

- 1) Priming
- 2) Death of the designer
- 3) First 60' foundation
- 4) Impedance
- 5) Press is transactional**  
*aka* what do you bring to the table  
—> visibility is paramount





# The Slaughtering Grounds









# The Litany of Doom

aka the stuff we didn't understand or do correctly

- 1) Priming
- 2) Death of the designer
- 3) First 60' foundation
- 4) Impedance
- 5) Press is transactional
- 6) The Reserve Tank**

The week after shipping is  
just as demanding if not more than  
the week before





happy cake day, 5 years of gamedev will kill you

by [HughSJ](#) Jun 14

[Next Post >](#)



This is me, at the start and finish of making my first game. As things look right now, it's also going to be my only game.





## FREELANCE

PILOT

VEHICLE

PRIMARY

SECONDARY

SPECIAL

OPERATION

Norman Osberger



Merlo Reis

\$1'000'000

Efigénia Tseng

\$1'500'000

Arturo Nemi

\$2'000'000

Phil Bromlin

\$2'750'000

Castor Pinho

\$3'250'000

Telma Mullan

\$4'000'000

Katar Joutsen

\$4'750'000

Modesto Pires



Marvin Beck

\$6'250'000

Scottie Graf

\$7'000'000

Lovell Archer

\$8'000'000

Constance Ferro

\$9'000'000

Doc Volhard

\$10'000'000

Odetta Dunsmuir

\$11'000'000

Luis Leng

\$12'000'000

\$11'221'432



Modesto Pires

Start Difficulty | 0

Max Difficulty | 9

Increase per Level | 1.00

Victory Bonus | \$100'000

Min Payout Multiplier | 1.0

Max Payout Multiplier | 3.4

Cross the wrong officer and find out just how quickly your military career prospects can go from Mog Recon Battalion to Legs Hangar Nightwatchman.

BACK

RANDOMIZE

DEPLOY







★★★★★ **Stunning**

By [D Griffin](#) on September 28, 2016

Format: Kindle Edition | **Verified Purchase**

As a former tanker, I expected something at the level of the first Halo anthology, but this... This was utterly amazing and unexpected. I hope we get a few more books set in this universe sooner rather than later.

★★★★★ **It's probably by far best for those already invested in the franchise**

By [Amazon Customer](#) on October 26, 2016

Format: Kindle Edition

Listened to the audiobook on long drives, and for one time in my life I wished they were longer. Finishing it left a Touro-sized hole in my heart.

It's probably by far best for those already invested in the franchise, but even on its own the book stands.

The pacing, setting, character development and story are all very well done; involving and entertaining and never losing steam. The level it detail is evocative without slowing things down.

I hope the author revisits the setting one day.

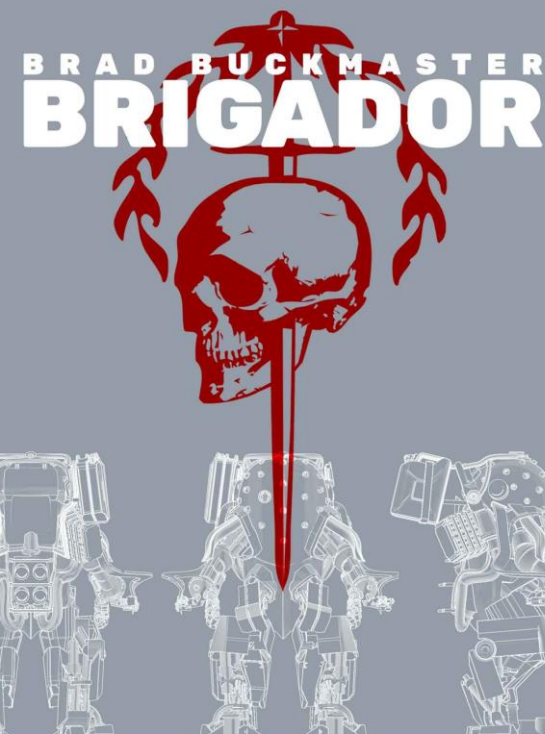
★★★★★ **Five Stars**

By [DMac](#) on July 12, 2016

Format: Kindle Edition | **Verified Purchase**

This is a great read, highly recommended. The story begins with action and ends with action, no breaks. The characters are well done, the battles are well done, everything is just easy to imagine and see as you read because the author puts in a lot of details.

I've never read a Mech book before, I strictly read history, but this book was a lot of fun. I bought it because I bought the game and wanted to learn the lore behind the game. I can't wait if/until a second book comes out.





BRIGADOR | BRAD BUCKMASTER  
READ BY RYAN COOPER



メイクやパニティーセット  
BRIGADOR — VOLUME I

SCORE  
BY  
MAKEUP  
AND  
VANITY  
SET







## Recommended

226.1 hrs on record



POSTED: FEBRUARY 28

There's a reason I've logged 200+ hours in this game in under 2 months. It's fun as hell and offers incredible amounts of replay value and gameplay depth. There is an absolutely enormous amount of content, and everything is packed with detail.

The basic idea of the game is to pick a vehicle, a primary and secondary weapon, and then a special defensive weapon/feature, and go to town. You're getting paid based on how much destruction you dish out by a cold, calculating megacorp, the SNC, that has only one goal: conquest of Solo Nobre, a massive walled city where the game takes place. You must secure the city district-by-district via whatever means necessary, even if that means completely leveling the entire map (which is totally doable, and even encouraged!).

You are a Brigador -- basically a mercenary -- offered a contract by the SNC to use your firepower to help bring about the city's fall so that the corporation can swoop in and secure it. The backstory is really interesting, and it is pretty clear you are NOT playing the typical Good Guy™ role here, but it's not black-and-white either. You have to really read between the lines and come up with your own decision on whether you're playing as an opportunistic sociopath, a freedom-fighting liberator, or something in between. The level of detail put into both the story and the game is incredible.

### ► Gameplay

It's rare these days to find something that feels like it was totally designed around a "wouldn't it be fun if..." philosophy. Gameplay is what Brigador is all about, and where it truly shines. While I feel like I've mastered the mechanics, there is still a lot of exploring to do with loadouts. I really like the Randomize button for just that reason, and I often discover variants I wouldn't have picked out on my own. They can be pretty fun, too!

The feel of each vehicle is unique for the most part, with some overlap in designs between factions, but otherwise they all have a charm of their own and can serve different purposes. Though with the flexibility of the weapon hardpoints and similar weapon types per mount size, it's rare you can't make a vehicle do whatever you really want. Some just excel at certain things more than others.

The navigation / aiming system is simple and effective, easy to learn yet challenging to master. Sometimes it's tough to land shots on hovering vehicles (aggravs) that get right up in your face, but that's one of the agrav's chief advantages: being a tough target to hit. So I think it works in the game's favor. Besides, your weapons are so over-the-top in terms of destructive power it's pretty rare you can't make short work of any single enemy that gets into your personal space. If you can't shoot it, blast the unholy hell out of it with the AK pulse, stomp it, smash it, or run it the hell over. Awesome.

Destruction is plentiful and encouraged as much as possible, which is the best. It sucks to have an environment that is leveled so beautifully and then be penalized for collateral damage. Instead, the opposite happens, and you actually get a payout bonus from your shadowy benefactors based on how much devastation you dish out. Dystopian as all hell, and got a good laugh out of me. Similarly, when I was seeing mention of "purchase the terms and conditions for more information" lines, I got a kick out of that too. But then I noticed that you can literally buy access to the terms and conditions of your contract and just about died. It's perfect. And even better, the contract reads believably, too. It's obviously worded in a way that benefits the megacorp over you, but not so much that you wouldn't take the job anyway. After all, for a Brigador, what's a reward without a little risk, right? Superb writing across the board. Though an aside from gameplay, it's a core part of what makes Brigador go from a fun game to a truly fantastic overall experience for me.

Managing difficulty level via the pilot system is clever. When freelancing (i.e. not playing in the structured campaign mode), you pick your loadout, but also your pilot. The pilot determines the difficulty level, and in turn, the payout bonuses (higher difficulty = make better money). It took me a little bit to figure out what was going on, but by the time I'd finished the campaign, it made perfect sense. I only wish you could specify a default pilot, or select a roster for randomizing so that you -- for example -- always stick to the max-diff pilot if you want balls-out challenge every single time. And while it isn't a big deal, lower-tier pilots aren't worthwhile once you have mastered the game. It also doesn't feel like there's a huge amount of difference between pilots, unlike the vehicles and weapons, save for the extremes. I enjoyed unlocking pilots more for the lore than for their function. But for a new player, the difficulty curve is generously gentle. You have a lot of time to get used to things before going all-in, if you ever choose to do so.

### ► Visuals

Love them. The amount of detail crammed into each map is astounding considering how BIG they are and how MANY there are. It must have taken ages to finish a single one, let alone all... what, 20+ of them? And while lots of assets are reused frequently, they are done in clever ways so you hardly even notice it. Even though the levels look very similar via the art style, none look like they're the same. Leaving the place littered with persistent debris is a fun, satisfying way to finish a mission.

The UI is superb as well. I appreciated even the little unnecessary details, like seeing a white dash in the scroll bar if you went past your selection on the page. And I am glad the UI is quick, snappy, and responsive. I hate it when UIs get all fancy but slow down functionality. Not here!

### ► Sound

Excellent. Soundtrack is fantastic, SFX are great. All the gun sounds feel about right. Vehicle movement sounds are good, though the large mech footfalls seem a bit weak. Sounds like they're stepping on crunchy grass rather than dropping tons of force onto the ground.

The music is wonderful, but it doesn't play forever! It seems to fade out completely once you complete all objectives. Sometimes I like to fly around and just destroy stuff (because it's so satisfying to level everything), and it isn't as fun when there's only silence. Fortunately, you can buy the soundtrack which includes everything ingame and some extras, and just play that in the background with Winamp or what have you. Problem solved!

### ► Modding

The game is moddable via the developer console! While it's not always easy, it's fantastic that you can change so many aspects of the gameplay if you want. Everything from the weapons enemy units pack to damage values to numbers of enemies on the field to sound effects.

I'd just about exhausted all the difficulty the game has to offer out-of-the-box when I discovered the dev console, and now it's like a whole new game for me with near-limitless replay value.

Modding is not always easy, and it involves permanent edits to the assets-pack game file if you don't want to lose your changes when you quit. If you screw something up, you can end up crashing the game constantly and be unable to fix it without verifying game files in Steam to redownload the .pack and start from scratch (though your profile will be unaffected). So it's a good idea to make regular backups if you get into modding. But the devs are still working on the game, too, and are also trying to make modding even easier for us, which is fantastic. They also want to release a level editor, which would be HUGE.

Overall? Absolutely get it if you are interested. Chances are, you'll find a way to enjoy the game, and if it gets too easy for you (which seems to be rare for most players), you can crank it up to absurd degrees with the dev console. The soundtrack and audiobook are also worth a grab, so I say get the full package. Solid game, and best 20 bucks I've spent in years.

Was this review helpful?



Yes



No



Funny

There's a reason I've logged 200+ hours in this game in under 2 months. It's fun as hell and offers incredible amounts of replay value and gameplay depth. There is an absolutely enormous amount of content, and everything is packed with detail.





**Thanks!**  
 **HughSJ**

