2010 It Takes a Village

Two thousand ten saw transformative changes in the indie ecosystem. Beyond Sony, indie games were increasingly showing up on other consoles, including IndieCade 2008 Nominees. *And Yet It Moves* was published that year on the Nintendo Wii, and *The Misadventures of P.B. Winterbottom*, came out on Xbox. The Kinect was also introduced for the Xbox, an interface that indies would embrace, misuse, and push far beyond the imaginations of the platform's designers. Although nobody quite knew what its impact was going to be, the release of the iPad in April was another major game-changer, and IndieCade Nominees were already exploring its unique affordances. In 2010, the Indie Fund was founded by Kellee Santiago (formerly of thatgamecompany and OUYA), Jonathan Blow of Number None (creator of *Braid*), Nathan Vella (Capybara Games), Matthew Wegner (Flashbang Studios), Kyle Gabler and Ron Carmel (*World of Goo*), and Aaron Isaksen (AppAbove Games) to provide financial support for independent games.

The 2010 IndieCade Festival was a turning point in terms of scale and visibility. After being in start-up mode for the first two years, the Festival was now joined by a new community of people to help build IndieCade into what it would become. John Sharp and Richard Lemarchand made good on their offer to serve as the Conference Co-Chairs and had a major role in setting quality and content standards for future programming.

The Festival itself had grown significantly by this point. The submission pool had more than doubled again, and the Culver City footprint grew to include the Culver City Fire Station as an exhibition venue. New programming categories included Big Games and Night Games (which were proposed and organized by Colleen Macklin and inspired by Come Out & Play After Dark), with both focusing on large-scale physical and social games with an element of spectacle. Other new venues included the Culver City Foshay Lodge No. 467, City Hall, and Media Park in front of the Ivy Substation. The city-owned parking lot between the Culver Hotel and Trader Joe's began its multi-year transformation into IndieCade Village, and IndieCade oversaw a city-funded public art program in conjunction with the Festival.

This year also marked the addition and expansion of key sponsorships. The partnership with Sony, which began with its film studios sponsoring the 2009 awards, grew to include PlayStation Home—which became a Premiere Presenting Sponsor—along with Activision and Intel. New branding from Young & Rubicam was rolled out with banners and posters. Most importantly, there was a growing commitment from the community to assist in both the creative and practical aspects of running the Festival.

IndieCade's first round of branding, used in 2008 and 2009, came as the fortuitous result of Stephanie meeting British artist Jon Burgerman at IndieCade @ GameCity in 2007. The team loved his playful hand-drawn style, and over the two years that followed, Burgerman produced IndieCade's first banners, postcards, business cards, and other branding.

At the IndieCade Showcase @ E3 in 2009, the IndieCade team was approached by Alvin Lumanlan from Young & Rubicam, one of the world's largest advertising agencies. Alvin was attending E3 with the mission of engaging the agency in the game sector and stumbled on IndieCade's booth. He immediately became a fan and offered to orchestrate a pro-bono project to do IndieCade's branding. Young & Rubicam decided to run the project as a competition out of its San Francisco office, where Lumanlan was based at the time.

The first campaign to come out of the competition was called "Inspiration" and was used to make IndieCade's 2009 T-shirt, which became something of a collector's item for early IndieCaders. It featured a hand-drawn logo with an illustration of a woman's head swirling with game ideas in place of hair, all in a rainbow-colored palette.

Early in 2010, Stephanie and I visited the Young & Rubicam office in San Francisco to discuss the final branding design, which became the basis for all IndieCade branding going forward—featuring the now-iconic stacked orange letters. There were several other colors offered, but orange was selected because it was bold and gender-neutral. The concept for the branding was that this simple lettering could become the focal point for a variety of different themes. In 2010, the letters served as a jungle gym for an array of characters from games displayed the prior two years, including P.B. Winterbottom himself, the little robot from *Machinarium*, and a yellow *Train* playing piece. This design became the banner that hung over the Culver City Fire Station and is also used on the cover of this book. Young & Rubicam also created a playful "Voices" poster series that included photos of developers with imagery from their games.
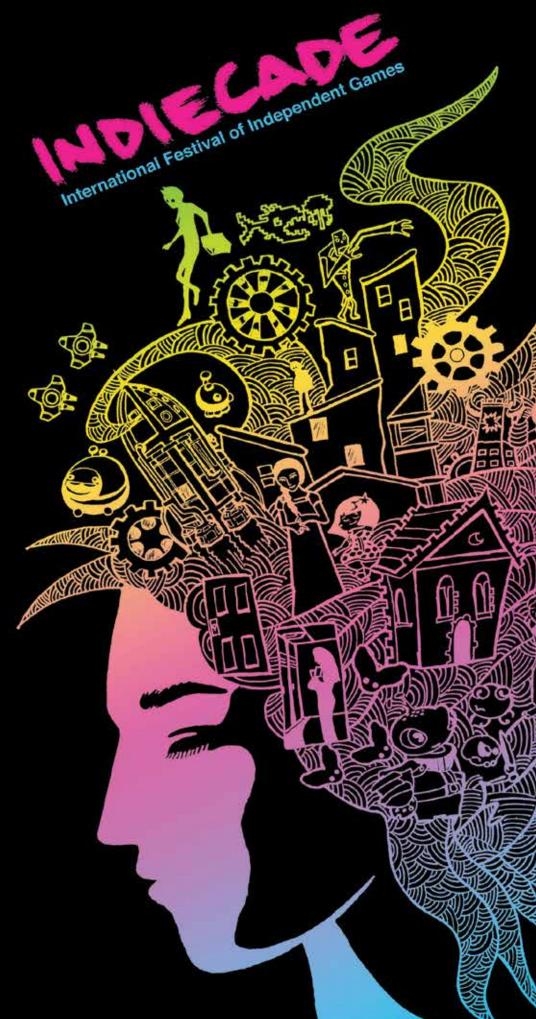
The giant Helvetica Neue letters have since become a trademark component of IndieCade's branding, with many variations over the years, including different color schemes for IndieCade East and IndieCade Europe, integration of other images and motifs, and so on.

Two thousand ten was also the start of an eight-year collaboration between IndieCade and Florida-based artist Will Wagenaar. It came about after the artist who had been asked to create the Festival's trophies dropped out last minute. In panic mode, I did an Etsy search for "robots," landing at reclaim2fame. I was immediately charmed by Will's playful robot characters, made from "upcycled" materials repurposed from flea market finds. They combined artistry and technology, were cute and friendly, and each had its own unique personality. I wrote him a frantic message and said I wanted to purchase everything in his store, all mounted on bases, plus commission him to make a few more. He happily obliged, resulting in what would become the signature trophies used for IndieCade's awards until 2017. In subsequent years, we provided a list so he could customize them for each award. His annual trophy-making tradition typically began with an email, followed by a treasure hunt to local flea markets near where he lived in Florida to find component parts: teapots, View-Masters, film reels, hammers, vacuum tubes, old cameras, and the odd vintage board-or-video-game part. Over time, his creations evolved as he added different bases and experimented with new techniques—such as interactive magnetic parts—making each year's crop of trophies a distinctive set. In fact, no two IndieCade trophies were ever alike: every trophy is as individual and unique as the creators and games it honors.

IndieCade+IGDA Game Slam at Art History of Games

In 2010, John Sharp—then a professor at the Savannah College of Art and Design's Atlanta campus—along with Georgia Tech professors Ian Bogost and Michael Nitsche, organized a symposium called The Art History of Games, which focused on the intersection of fine art and games and included a number of IndieCade Nominees and speakers (past and future). The event took place at Atlanta's High Museum of Art, with the organizers curating an exhibition that included Brenda Romero's *Train*, commissioned works by Tale of Tales and Jason Rohrer, and Eric Zimmerman and Nathalie Pozzi's *Sixteen Tons*, which became an IndieCade Nominee later that year (Pratt 2010).

For the after-party, IndieCade partnered with the local chapter of the International Game Developers Association, or IGDA (which was co-led by John Sharp and me at the time), to organize the IndieCade/IGDA Game Slam. Modeled after a poetry slam, it was a simple, flexible, easy-to-implement format that required minimal infrastructure. The result was an open-mic-style demo session where gamemakers had only three minutes to show their games. There were no restrictions on presenting; the first 15 people to sign up got slots. Time limits were strictly upheld and people were kicked off the stage when their time was up. One of the great things about this format was that it didn't matter how weird, bad, or wonderful games were—you only had to spend three minutes with each one.

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IndieCade Showcase @ E3 2010

The timing of the IndieCade submissions cycle was such that the Showcase @ E3 became a testbed for presenting new games and an experiment for showing a diverse array of new genres. Overhead was a banner featuring what would become IndieCade's signature logo and branding. The booth was decorated with posters produced by Young & Rubicam as part of the "Voices" campaign and included images of developers such as the team from Broken Rules leaping into the air, *Papermint's* Lev Ledit, *Cogs'* Lazy 8, *Eliss* creator Steph Thirion, and The Odd Gentlemen. The centerpiece of the booth was a lounge area for developers to hang out and play mobile games, which were increasing in number. Visitors chatted and clustered around computer games perched on draped tables.

Variety was the watchword of the event, and the Showcase exemplified IndieCade's penchant for breaking out of the video-game mold. One area where IndieCade set itself apart in this regard was with novel controllers. Taiyoung Ryu's *Maum* was an early experiment with the Mindset brain-computer interface, a thesis project that epitomized the role of academia in spurring innovation. Another was *B.U.T.T.O.N.: Brutally Unfair Tactics Totally Okay Now*, by Copenhagen Game Collective and Die Gute Fabrik, a kind of digital "Mother May I?" local multiplayer game in which players were instructed to do strange things with Xbox controllers (e.g., "The first one to touch their controller button loses"). The game resulted in a vigorous showdown between Sam Roberts and the actor-director LeVar Burton, who had signed on to host the IndieCade awards show in the fall.

IndieCade continued to present pervasive games at the Showcase @ E3. One example stands out for its novel use of the iPhone's accelerometer and mapping capability: *Gigaputt*. This game used its mapping function to create a golf course on the fly in any location and the accelerometer to turn the phone itself into a golf club. Created by Gigantic Mechanic (Come Out & Play co-founder Greg Trefry and Mattia Romeo), it was an early experiment that prefigured *Pokémon GO* by five years.

A notable trend in 2010 was the abstract spatial puzzle game. There were two standouts from the Showcase @ E3: one was Marc ten Bosch's *Miegakure*, a brilliant mind-bender in which l puzzles are solved by flipping between the third and fourth dimensions (it would go on to win the Amazing Award at the Festival). The second example illustrates IndieCade's important role as a venue for dialogue between play and practice. Australian developer Alexander Bruce of Demruth showed an early prototype of *Antichamber* (then titled *Hazard: The Journey of Life*), an abstract spatial that used space as a metaphor for life challenges. Although the game didn't make it into the Festival that year, its inclusion in the showcase turned out to be invaluable to the game's evolution. As Bruce noted in a 2011 interview, the IndieCade Showcase @ E3 "was my first time to really put it in front of people and test it, and once I did that, I thought, 'Oh my god, I am nowhere near finished with this'" (Dominguez 2011). The testing and jury feedback he received, as well as demos at other events, led to *Antichamber* becoming an IndieCade Nominee in 2011 and an Independent Games Festival award-winner in 2012, after which it received finishing funds to go on to a 2013 release. In 2013, Bruce flew from Australia to New York to attend the first IndieCade East because he wanted to support and mentor newer developers.

Two examples of adventure games that IndieCade exhibited at the Showcase that year went on to great acclaim and success. The first was the published version of Erin Robinson Swink's *Nanobots*, which had been in the 2009 Festival and was renamed *Puzzle Bots* and released by Wadjet Eye. (Erin was also featured on one of the IndieCade posters as part of Young & Rubicam's "Voices" campaign.) The second game was UCLA student Josh Nuernberger's *Gemini Rue*, an old-school adventure game inspired by the 1990s classic game *Blade Runner*, which went on to win both acclaim and three awards the following year.

IndieCade Festival 2010

In 2010, IndieCade needed to expand capacity in Culver City. This began with a partnership with NextSpace, a coworking space that provided an office, became a venue for jurying, and was expanded to a production office during the Festival. Strategically located at the corner of Culver Boulevard and Main Street, it overlooked The Gregg Fleishman Studio and the giant parking lot that would be transformed into IndieCade Village during the event. IndieCade's new branding, which had begun at the Showcase @ E3, was fully rolled out and integrated into the Game Walk, which guided attendees to the different Festival locations throughout downtown Culver City.

The Culver City Fire Station Headquarters were centrally located, spacious, and offered three giant roll-up doors that opened out to the street. This new location, home to most of the Nominee games, made for better visibility, expanded capacity, and provided a more fluid traffic flow, which became increasingly important for attendance growth. The Fire Station also had the cherished resource of plentiful electricity, which had been in scarce supply in conventional gallery spaces. The Fire Department was thrilled with the partnership and graciously offered to park its trucks behind the station for the duration of the Festival.

This larger, more flexible space allowed for works that were more demanding in terms of footprint, like Eric Zimmerman and Nathalie Pozzi's *Sixteen Tons*, an installation-based artgame that had been commissioned for the Art History of Games exhibition earlier that year and won IndieCade's 2010 Choice Award. In this human-sized board game, players had to pay one another—with real money—to make their moves for them by repositioning heavy pieces of steel piping. Preparing for the installation entailed matching Pantone color swatches to the Fire Station's floor to ensure color fidelity with the stickers that comprised the game board.

IndieCade's presence also expanded in the parking lot in front of the Culver Hotel, a dead space that had been slated for future development. Transformed into IndieCade Village, it became the heart of the Festival. Located at the junction of several major streets and adjacent to a multiplex theatre, it housed the registration area, some of Gregg Fleishman's signature structures, tents, and sponsor displays. Between IndieCade Village and the Culver Hotel was the first in a series of public art installations commissioned by the city and curated by IndieCade. The winning piece was an oversized board game painted on the sidewalk by John Derevlaney, a local resident, television producer, and IndieCade supporter; his *CulverLand* was a *Candy Land*-inspired family game with a special Los Angeles twist—moves were made based on the colors of cars at the nearby stoplight.

Pervasive games, Big Games (large-scale street games that included new field sports), and alternate reality games (ARGs)—all genres that integrate real-world elements, with or without technology—were deployed from multiple venues throughout the Game Walk. While often excluded from other festivals, IndieCade embraced their wild creativity and innovation, in spite of their sometimes-daunting jurying and exhibition requirements. One of the best examples was *The Games of Nonchalance* (aka *The Jejune Institute*), an ARG that attracted over 10,000 players in San Francisco between 2008 and 2011. Because of the site-specific nature of the game, the

designers were invited to create a mini-installation in IndieCade Village—a mysterious van surrounded by barriers with cryptic artifacts and monitors displaying videos about the bizarre cult around which the game revolved. In addition to winning the IndieCade 2010 Best Story/World Design Award, it later became the subject of an award-winning documentary film, *The Institute* (McCall 2013; Rothe 2013). The Grand Casino hosted *Socks, Inc.*, Jim Babb's Kickstarter success in which players made a physical sock puppet avatar and then went on missions to make media with their creations. Media Park hosted *The Unwritten Storybook*, an experimental ARG prototype by Walt Disney Imagineering, the company's theme park division, in which players competed to create the best fairytale.

The inaugural Big Games program was chaired by Colleen Macklin, a professor at Parsons School of Design - The New School and a member of Local No. 12 (along with Eric Zimmerman and IndieCade Conference Co-Chair John Sharp), and Jeff Watson, a PhD student at USC specializing in ARGs. Big Games and Night Games were deployed from one of Gregg Fleishman's structures in IndieCade Village. The hands-down hit of the inaugural Big Games program was *Humans vs. Zombies (HvZ)*, a large-scale pervasive game that had recently become the rage on college campuses. *HvZ* transformed the downtown area into a giant tag game, with "humans" wearing orange IndieCade/*HvZ* armbands either running away from or chasing after "zombies" in matching headbands. *HvZ* took the 2010 IndieCade Kids Choice Award; its creators would become IndieCade chairs and, in 2017, would receive the first Bernie De Koven Big Fun Award, devoted to gamemakers who had advanced physical play.

Night Games was a giant party featuring large scale physical games that created a spectacle. One of 2010's highlights was *Humanoid Asteroid*, created by a co-founder of the Big Game festival Come Out & Play, Nick Fortugno, along with Sam Strick and Dave Warth. In it, a player is pushed around in a cart while they shoot glow-in-the-dark pucks at "asteroids" that begin as clusters of four people wearing illuminated suits and linking arms; when hit, the asteroid divides into two people, then one, mimicking the original *Asteroids* mechanic of generating smaller, spin-off asteroids that could potentially hit the player. The Developers Choice Award went to another Night Game entry: *Renga* by wallFour, a local massively multiplayer cooperative game in which an audience of as many as 200 worked together to manipulate virtual space stations by directing laser pointers at a shared projection screen.

The Festival also encouraged spontaneous physical gameplay, with USC students Asher Volmer (who was on *The Misadventures of P.B. Winterbottom* team and went on to make the hit iPhone game *Threes!*) and Sam Farmer (who became an IndieCade Nominee) running *Ninja* games throughout the week. Asher had introduced the IndieCade community to *Ninja*, a physical game in which players mimic ninja moves in slow motion until someone makes contact to "cut off" other players' moves and eliminate them. Asher and Sam had the role of instigating and running spontaneous sessions of the game. This became another signature IndieCade activity that members of the community later began playing at the Game Developers Conference.

On the digital side of things, indies were increasingly experimenting with alternative controllers and alternative uses of standard controllers. The Fleishman Studio's display windows, centrally located across from IndieCade Village, proved the perfect venue for these highly physical games. *Recurse,* by Matt Parker, an artist and game designer who eventually went on to chair IndieCade East, was an early example of a gesture-based machine-vision game that predated the Kinect by several months. Parker later released it on iOS, taking advantage of the platform's onboard camera. The Fleishman Studio also housed Chris De Leon's *feelforit,* which made novel use of the iPad's accelerometer and had come out only a few months before. Nearby, the Copenhagen Game Collective ran *B.U.T.T.O.N.,* a perfect game to catch the attention of passersby through the picture window.

Although the Games for Change Festival celebrating activist and documentary games had launched in 2004, its purview was still not fully embraced by the broader indie scene. IndieCade's 2010 Festival saw a flowering of these genres, including Impact Award winner *The Cat and the Coup* by Peter Brinson and Kurosh ValaNejad, a game in which players experienced the 1953 Iranian coup from the point of view of the prime minister's cat.

At the intersection of activist and artgames was *Every day the same dream*, Paolo Pedercini/Molleindustria's game about white-collar labor and alienation. Created in less than a week for the 2009 Game Developers Conference's Experimental Gameplay Workshop, the game has been described as "a demonstration of why games are better suited to some artistic statements than any other medium " (Alexander 2014). Other artgames included *Faraway,* for which Steph Thirion won his second IndieCade award for Most Sublime Experience, and *A Slow Year,* a collection of four interactive poems by Ian Bogost, which ran on an Atari 2600 and won two awards that year.

By 2010, indie games were increasingly garnering mainstream attention, and there a few standouts from the Festival that year. *Retro/Grade* (later published on the PlayStation 3) could be played with either a standard controller or a *Guitar Hero* controller and took the IndieCade Audience Choice Award. Terry Cavanaugh's *VVVVVV*, which won the IndieCade award for Most Fun/Compelling Game, was known for being incredibly hard to play. *LIMBO*, by Danish studio Playdead, became a particular indie darling for its "film noir" and

"German Expressionist" aesthetic (Koo 2011). It was often cited as demonstrating indie games as an art form (Gillin 2010) and went on to numerous awards, including the 2010 IndieCade award for Best Sound and the 2011 Independent Games Festival award for Best Visual Art. It also made several top lists, including *Time Magazine*'s Top 10 Everything list (one of two indie games, along with *Super Meat Boy*) (2010) and *Wired*'s Top 20 Video Games (Kohler 2010).

The conference portion of IndieCade also went through major growth under the watch of Co-Chairs John Sharp and Richard Lemarchand. Spread out among multiple venues, the conference explored a diverse array of issues: curating game exhibitions, publishing on consoles, game narrative and artgames, Big Games, and ARGs. Highlights included Eric Zimmerman hosting an *Iron Game Designer* game-show-style competition. Frank Lantz from the NYU Game Center gave a talk about his company Area/Code, which was a pioneer in pervasive games; the studio hit it big with a casual game, *Drop 7,* that was sold to Zynga, the publisher of *Farmville*. Colleen Macklin interviewed *Doom* co-creator John Romero about his early days as an indie developer. Brenda Romero gave a stirring talk describing how she applied the principle "The Mechanic is the Message" to her series of games about human tragedy, which included *Train,* a 2009 IndieCade awardee.

As mentioned earlier, academia became an important component in putting on IndieCade, including through both volunteer labor and financial support. The GameU program was introduced to showcase different degree programs represented by IndieCade's constituents and conduct outreach with aspiring game designers. Initially, GameU included sample class activities from Georgia Tech, Guildhall School of Music & Drama, Savannah College of Art and Design, and the Art Institutes of California in order to give prospective students a taste of the teaching style at each school. In the years that followed, GameU evolved—under the watch of Jeremy Gibson Bond and Chris DeLeon—into a program that included not only educators and students but also amateur and hobby game developers looking for practical guidance and peer learning opportunities.

As the Premiere Presenting Sponsor for 2010, PlayStation Home had its own gallery to show games that had been launched for the platform's virtual world. This unlikely partnership was born of my consulting work for the

division (headed up by Jack Buser and Katherine de Leon), which had decided to open up its platform to indie developers (MCV Staff 2010). A few IndieCade games were ported to PlayStation Home, including *Cogs* and *Minor Battle* from 2009. This marked the beginning of a long-term relationship with PlayStation, which would become pivotal in Sony's play to dominate the indie console space.

The 2010 IndieCade awards were held once again in the atrium of Sony Pictures Plaza. The host was LeVar Burton—of *Roots, Star Trek: The Next Generation,* and *Reading Rainbow* fame—who brought a "cool factor" to IndieCade that resonated across three generations of attendees. Burton was also a media entrepreneur who represented the spirit and diversity that IndieCade sought to embody. Appropriately, attendees were given crayons and an IndieCade coloring book to enjoy during the ceremony. The awards show was written by *Los Angeles Times* journalist Ben Fritz.

IndieCade's awards categories have evolved over time in response to the changing landscape, always emphasizing innovation. In 2010, they included Vanguard (for a cutting-edge game), Virtuoso (a game made by one person), Wild Card (something unexpected), Gameplay Innovation, Sublime Experience (originally created for *The Night Journey* in 2008), Amazing, Aesthetics (the visual design award), Documentary, World and Story, Fun/Compelling, and the Jury Award. There were also three "Choice" Awards: Finalists Choice, Audience Choice, and Kids Choice.

In 2010, IndieCade also introduced the Trailblazer Award to honor a game designer whose work had broken new ground in terms of innovation. The first award was given to adventure-game darling Tim Schafer—who had worked for LucasArts and Lucasfilm Games on the original *The Secret of Monkey Island* and *Grim Fandango*—by his longtime collaborator and friend Ron Gilbert. Along with some other LucasArts refugees, Schafer had launched his own studio, Double Fine Productions, in 2000, going on to make such critically acclaimed favorites as *Psychonauts* and *Brütal Legend*, the latter of which starred actor Jack Black as the voice of its protagonist. Schafer would gain further indie kudos by launching *Double Fine Adventure* on Kickstarter, which became the first project on the platform to surpass $2 million.

Photo by Stephanie Barish

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