

GAMING



Fantastic Arcade offers an eclectic mix of indie games and culture

By [Dave Tach](https://web.archive.org/web/20120831021645/http://www.theverge.com/users/davetach) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20120831021645/http://www.theverge.com/users/davetach>) on August 27, 2012 04:02 pm [Email](#)
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Since its inception in 2005 Austin's genre film festival, [Fantastic Fest](https://web.archive.org/web/20120831021645/http://fantasticfest.com/) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20120831021645/http://fantasticfest.com/>), has curated an eclectic mix of science fiction, horror, fantasy, and genre-defying films. When it added a video game adjunct a few years ago, its curators fostered the same diversity.

Fantastic Arcade will coincide with Fantastic Fest from September 20th through 23rd, and its curators see the show as a way to build an event that highlights independent games and their developers just as Fantastic Fest does for films.

"We're trying to be ambassadors to people outside of the games industry," Wiley Wiggins, Fantastic Arcade's creative director, told Polygon.

"I think a lot of game events are very monolithically developers and people who are already entrenched game fans. Because we're a subset of a genre film festival ... we're trying to be ambassadors for non-mainstream games to film people, and also at the same time, we're trying to be ambassadors for Austin to the game community."

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This year, Wiggins, Brandon Boyer, and Adam Saltsman, co-founders of [Juegos Rancheros](https://web.archive.org/web/20120831021645/http://juegosrancheros.com/) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20120831021645/http://juegosrancheros.com/>), an Austin-based independent gaming collective, also serve as the festival's curators. They discovered that the momentum that Fantastic Arcade has steadily gained during in its first few years enabled the show to include more games and afforded independent games developers greater exposure.

The trio called for submissions through the Fantastic Arcade website, and holed up in a house to play those games and determine what would be shown at the festival. Their

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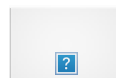
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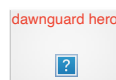
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(<https://web.archive.org/web/20120831021645/http://fantasticfest.com/games>) represents a broad range of genres, and resonates with the tonality of Fantastic Fest.

"We look for games that have a unusual game mechanics a lot of the time, [and] maybe games that revive lesser-used mechanics that people remember or have some kind of connection to," he said. "But thematically, it's pretty all over the board.

"The weirder the better, usually — but that's certainly not a rule. We look at fun mechanics that catch people's eyes before anything else."

Wiley and the other organizers want to distinguish Fantastic Arcade through its culture as well. Although they invite as many developers as possible, they don't force them to be tethered to their games.

"It's been really important to us to try and get as many developers to the event as we can, and not tie them to their games like it was a trade show," he said.

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Even the location is an attempt to foster a spirit of openness. Unlike traditional trade shows, which are typically held in convention centers, Fantastic Arcade is held in the [Highball Lounge](https://web.archive.org/web/20120831021645/http://www.thehighball.com/) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20120831021645/http://www.thehighball.com/>), which includes a bowling alley, themed karaoke rooms, and a bar. The setting incentivizes everyone to mingle, and exposes not just the games but the people behind those games to a wide section of the public.

The show also features developer panels designed to expose the developers and their games to the attendees. Wiley highlights the annual developer commentary panel, in which developers play and discuss their games to an audience, akin to a director's commentary for a film.

Fantastic Arcade is also about putting games in attendees' hands, and while the featured games will be playable, Fantastic Arcade builds custom arcade cabinets for several that the curators choose. On the weekend before Fantastic Arcade, they'll be sponsoring "Gamemaking Frenzy," a collaborative game jam where independent developers create games based on a still-secret theme. The best games will also be featured at Fantastic Arcade.

FANTASTIC ARCADE



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Although Fantastic Arcade features awards, they're more of a celebration of independent developers and unique games than a competition. Prizes like Lego trophies and novelty-sized beers convey the lighthearted nature of a festival that's primarily concerned with celebrating games and their creators and exposing them to the wider world, Wiley said. At Fantastic Arcade, it's about broadening horizons.

"We try really, really hard to expose unusual and interesting games to people who maybe have only ever seen the monolithic army shooter man games, that mainstream front that is the face of the industry now."

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