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Local Kids ~~Play~~ Make Games BY JAMES RENOVITCH, MAY 18, 2012, 5:09PM

I once tried to make a video-game. To put the entire experiment on a bumper sticker, it didn't work out. Coding is hard. And the fact that middle-schoolers were showing off their games, only made me feel worse, even if the overall mood of the awards ceremony at East Austin College Prep was jovial. Keep reading for more on the awards and links to some of the games.

I'll admit that applause levels at yesterday's third annual Globey Awards were a bit high for me. Every finalist, every winner, every guest speaker, and a few organizers got several rounds of cheers. But, it's hard to deny youngsters who worked on a game for an entire shoolyear their due, especially with parents sitting right next to you.

The event was other wise peppy and polite with short videos for the finalists games consisting of short interviews. When asked what was the hardest thing about making a game the universal answer was, of course, coding. It came as quite a surprise that the kids weren't using game-making software to aid the process like many beginners, but in fact coding their creations from scratch. Suddenly my clapping was a bit more enthusiastic.

Getting significant attention at the ceremony was Michael Alvarez who won a 2012 Scholastic Art & Writing Award for game design and will be going to Carnegie Hall to receive his prize. He also took home the Gamer's Choice Award for his game *Forest Rats*.

But a game made by a team of youngsters calling themselves the Golden Apples took home the Best Game trophy for *Flood Escape*. There wasn't a trophy, but rather a laptop computer, a copy of *Dance Dance Revolution 2*, and other impressive loot.

The games are all online and are playable on any modern browser. They tend to be standard platformers or mazes with very unforgiving gameplay. The games are meant to be educational and tackle social problems that affect the students' community and the world as a whole. Popular topics included gangs, drugs, bullying, immigration, and environmental issues.

A few highlights include *The Endangered Wolf*, *E-Man*, *Aging of Buildings*, *Race to the White House*, and *Mission Impossible: Chicken Protocol*. My mind is also still boggling about *The Undead Nightmare: Cleaning the Teeth*.

There are also games that perhaps unwittingly get a message across. Take for example the graphical haiku of *Divine Intervention* or the anti-war statement of *A Man's Honor. A Man's Misery*. The appropriately abrasive intro to *Find Your Way* would make me think twice about unprotected sex.

I have no idea what *Swift Teen Adventure* is trying to tell me, but the haunted discotheque imagery and invitation to "Party Again" when I died lured me in again and again. But my favorite just might be *Young, Wild, & Free* which puts gang members, illicit drugs, peer pressure, and, what appears to be love, in your way to the finish line of life.

Sometimes the consequences of not succeeding in the game can be pretty intense. Take the O.G.'s *SOS: Save Our School* which, upon failure, says, "You are a disgrace to the human race. You will always be a loser I always knew when you were born. I hate you. You are a dead person." as a green-headed ant paces on your coffin. If that isn't an impetus to play again and win, I don't know what is.

You really should check out all the games at the *EAPrep Globaloria website*.

As the Lozerzzzzzz put it in the description for their game *Mathnightmare*, "Our game may not be fun, but it will work when we get finished with it so don't doubt us now." We're not. Congrats to all the kids, who did something that I still have yet to do. I'll be over here sulking if you need me.

The original article can be found here: http://www.austinchronicle.com/blogs/screens/2012-05-18/local-kids-play-make-games/