Twitter Thread by Michelle D'israeli

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At Christmas, many of us are getting new computer games.

With the season, we also turn to nostalgia & looking back on the past. It's often hard to shake the feeling that games of our youth were simply better than games coming out now. Let's explore why that might be (1/22)

"Well, that's clearly because games in the 80s and 90s didn't have any politics and forced inclusivity"

Nope, that's complete bollocks, and nothing to do with why you remember those games so much more fondly

(maybe I should have started the thread with this, lol) (2/22)

For the purpose of this exercise, I'm going to arbitrarily draw the line between modern and old games at roughly the early 2000s.

For many, the 'golden age' of gaming is the era from the SNES/Genesis to the early years of the PS2, Gamecube, and Dreamcast. (3/22)

There wasn't just one thing that made games from that period feel so great. In my opinion, it came down to 7 interlinking key constraints. As development teams & players looked to overcome them, they had to either mitigate or innovate.

Let's look at each of them in turn (4/22)

First up we have:

'Just enough' hardware performance

Games were finally able to look *amazing*, as long as developers knew the limits of the platform they were working on. You couldn't push for realism, so instead you had to commit to an artstyle. Reply with your favs! (5/22)



Secondly, storage for game data was limited, but also (for the time) really quite large. On consoles there was no install to hard drive, and on PC you had to assume limited space. Multi-disk games were rare, and had to do clever trickery with save files (6/22)

The fact that the storage was comparatively large opened up opportunities for embracing artistic vision, and for creating larger worlds.
But the restrictions meant there was a hard limit you had to work within. You couldn't make huge but boring worlds (7/22)

Third up, and very much related to the above, is the impact that the limited levels of internet access had on how games were developed. You couldn't assume a zero day patch would be possible, and you would have no where to store it on consoles anyway (8/22)

This time early in the life of the internet was also before online stores & accounts were commonly in use, so you couldn't cram microtransactions into your game. DLC wasn't a thing (9/22)

Closely related, global supply and marketing processes were even more slow and lumbering beats than they are now. So you had to 'go gold' so much earlier before launch in order to hit the deadline for pressing the CDs (10/22)

(This is, like everything on this list, still true today to some extent, but manufacturing and shipping was slower and less flexible in the 90s) (11/22)

The next constraint was partially driven by the above, but also by where the market was at the time:

Development cycles were shorter.

With fewer games being published and less huge blockbuster studios, publishers couldn't fund seven year long projects. (12/22)

As storage and hardware were limited, they also didn't see the need to fund long projects.

Developers would hence have to focus on a smaller set of core features and assets, and being unable to do zero-day patches, would have to polish them more before launch (13/22)

...but all the above constraints that I talk about how they effected the development process?

The REAL effect they all had was actually on you, and your assumptions and approach to gaming at the time!

(Dang, no, maybe I should have opened with this ■)(14/22)

(As I've already mentioned, developers still consider all the above to still be an issue, and the best developers are doing incredible work to manage them <3) (15/22)

As a gamer, you knew that you had to live with the game you purchased, so you learnt to overlook minor bugs, or even embrace them into your play (16/22)

There wasn't an expectation for huge open world games, but rather that what you got would be polished and have a good graphical art style. (17/22)

The above hints at the first constraint that most affected you, the consumer of games: A limited library of games and not much buying power.

Odds are, if you remember fondly gaming in the 90s and early 2000s, you were a teenager without a large budget. (18/22)

This perhaps is the biggest reason of all as to why we remember games back then as being so very good - we played them /a lot/, because /that was all we had/. We learnt every secret, every beat of the story, every pixel of art. (19/22)

This leads me onto my final constraint on gaming in the 90s and early 2000s - social media was limited.

We didn't have instant access to the every thought of an overly hyped producer. We couldn't whip ourselves up into a frenzy in quite the same way (20/22)

There's many good counterpoints to all I have written, but really that's not the point. The key takeaway is really that you're looking fondly upon games that were:
- Shorter
- Less obsessed with fancy graphics
- Less hyped
- Played over, and over, and over again (21/22)

Basically, to sum it up, you're looking back fondly on games from the 90s and 2000s because of the same reasons those kids you look down on are obsessed with Minecraft

(...OH DANG, no wait, this would have been a much better opening tweet! ah well ■) (22/22)