

## **Pirates on the Web**

The Witcher 2 is a popular game made in 2011 by CD Projekt RED. It has sold over 8 million copies. However, CD Projekt CEO Marcin Iwiński believes that 4.5 million copies were downloaded illegally; according to him, that's an optimistic estimate. Through a process called "torrenting," people are able to download exact copies of a videogame without actually paying for it.

Companies are not happy with this method of obtaining their products. One of the most direct results of pirating games is the loss of revenue from potential customers. This profit loss has multiple effects. Large game development companies, also known as AAA companies, may not be able to afford high pay for their teams, which can include anywhere from 100-2,000 people. For smaller companies, the revenue loss can be detrimental to the longevity of their brand. If companies cannot sustain themselves and have to shut down, the creative diversity in the field decreases, stifling possible innovation. Piracy also raises the issue of the relationship between consumers and developers. Developers can put years of their creativity, imagination, and lives into creating videogames, and when consumers obtain the product illegally, the developers receive no compensation for their efforts.

However, consumers are sometimes unable to buy the game due to economic constraints. The cost of the average AAA game is now \$60-\$70. Not everyone can afford spending that much money on a single videogame, especially considering currency conversion for people from different countries or the challenges for people with low incomes. AAA games aside, independently developed videogames, or indie games, have an average price of between \$10-\$20, which is much more manageable. The quality of indie games compared to AAA games is often debated, but both can fluctuate heavily. Certain countries are locked out from buying games from legal vendors, so they download games illegally in order to experience the work. Piracy can also be a means of protest against bad workplace conditions, lack of consumer rights, and other issues.

Anti-piracy measures have been taken by indie and AAA companies alike. Some games are only playable through connecting to private, company-owned servers. Only legally licensed games are able to connect to these servers, so pirated games are effectively unplayable. This can be challenging, however, for those with unstable internet connections or limited Wi-Fi plans. In addition, companies are able to shut down their servers whenever they want, so games with this feature can have limited playtimes. The go-to website for buying games, Steam, does not allow refunds after a game has been played for two hours. If these online-only games shut down, then customers arguably lose their money, as opposed to a game that can be played offline.

## Discussion Questions

1. Is there a point at which the lack of income/resources makes piracy ethically justifiable?
2. Does the popularity/size of a game affect whether it is morally justifiable to pirate it? Why or why not?
3. Are companies ethically obligated to prioritize anti-piracy measures or consumer accessibility when making a game? Why?
4. Should videogames be viewed as products, art, or both? How does that affect the ethical obligation to buy the game legally?

## Bibliography

Grayson, Nathan. "Interview: CD Projekt's CEO on Witcher 2 Piracy, Why DRM's Still Not Worth It." *Pcgamer*, PC Gamer, 29 Nov. 2011, <https://www.pcgamer.com/interview-cd-projekts-ceo-on-witcher-2-piracy-why-drms-still-not-worth-it/2/>.

Harmon, Keith. "ThornCrest." *ThornCrest*, 15 Jan. 2025, [thorncrest.com/blog/video-game-piracy](http://thorncrest.com/blog/video-game-piracy).

"What Are AAA Games: Everything You Need to Know | Konvoy." *Konvoy.vc*, 2025, [www.konvoy.vc/blogs/what-are-aaa-games](http://www.konvoy.vc/blogs/what-are-aaa-games).

Written by Kleo Rrodastani and Sayan Bhattacharya, age 18  
Allen D. Nease High School, Ponte Vedra, Florida