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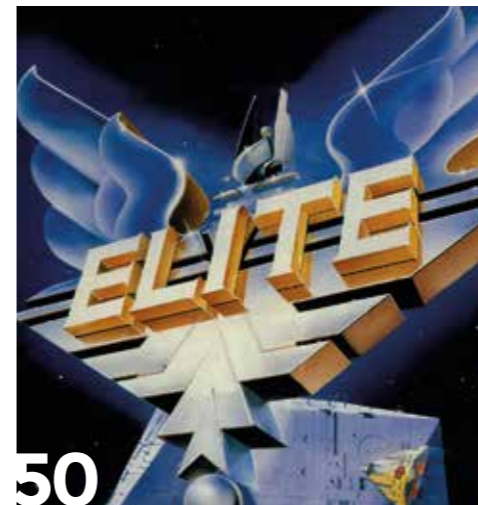


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## WELCOME

Games can be many things – an escape, a challenge, an all-consuming pastime – but they can also function beautifully as digital comfort food, something familiar we can turn to when we're tired or need a bit of reassurance. As our deputy editor Ian Dransfield writes on page 65, *Stardew Valley* is one of those games: an experience so soothing and gentle that you can almost feel the day's stresses ebb as you water and harvest your crops. Not that games have to be gentle to be soothing; years ago, I found comfort in *Renegade*, an old ZX Spectrum game I got so good at, I could complete it on multiple loops without breaking a sweat. Later, I started memorising the positions of enemies in *GoldenEye*, and analysing maps in *Halo 3*. The process of mastering a fast-moving game provides a sense of control that's frequently lacking in the chaos of the real world. Sure, games are about skill, judgement, precision, and problem-solving under pressure. But there'll always be a place in our hearts for games that swaddle us like warm security blankets; whether they're old or new, they're always there as a refuge after a hard day's work.

Ryan Lambie  
Editor

