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Trading Shovels for Controllers: A Brief Exploration of the Portrayal of Archaeology in Video Games

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Abstract

Archaeology has been a persistent theme for video games, from the long-running *Indiana Jones* and *Lara Croft* franchises to more recent uses of archaeology in games like *Destiny* and *World of Warcraft*. In these games, archaeology is often portrayed as a search for treasure among lost worlds that leads to looting and the destruction of cultural heritage. In this article, we review the current state of archaeological video games, including mainstream and educational games. While this is not an exhaustive discussion, it provides an introduction and overview to the current landscape. We propose that an understanding of current popular archaeological video games is important to archaeologists for three reasons: (1) it is a source of potentially dangerous misconceptions about the discipline that must be addressed; (2) it can be a source of inspiration for funding and a means to recruit new students to the discipline; and (3) games can be leveraged as teaching moments in classrooms and public discussions. It is important that archaeologists recognize the ways the discipline is being portrayed in such public contexts, in order to maximize the potential benefit for archaeology and to prevent further misconceptions about the subject.

keywords: [public archaeology](#), [video games](#), [outreach](#), [popular culture](#), [archaeogaming](#)

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