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## How Shenmue helped me cope with childhood trauma

By Rosalie Newcombe 12 days ago

Opinion: The game that changed my life



(Image credit: SEGA - AM2)

Games have the ability to leave a lasting impression on your life – they can take you back to a specific moment in time that was a turning point for you. For me that game is Shenmue, and that moment in time was when my mother and I were suddenly homeless and had all of our belongings stuffed into stolen shopping trolleys.

About 20 years ago I was standing on a street corner alongside the shopping trolleys which were packed to the brim with bin bags of my belongings. Everything I had to my name, including my most prized possessions like my N64 or various Pokémon toys, were crammed amongst my clothes and school work.

I grew up with a single parent, but up until that point we had been living with her partner for many years. Almost every single early memory I have involves him being around in some shape or form, but suddenly he had decided to break up with my mum, and that meant we had to go, but the thing is, we didn't have anywhere to go.


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...rned that not only did her partner break up  
...nd made an attempt to take her own life.  
Being a kid you don't understand the full scope of what's going on, I just knew that one day I was sitting happily in my room playing  
Ocarina of Time, and the next I was pushing a stolen shopping trolley with that very same game shoved in a bin bag.

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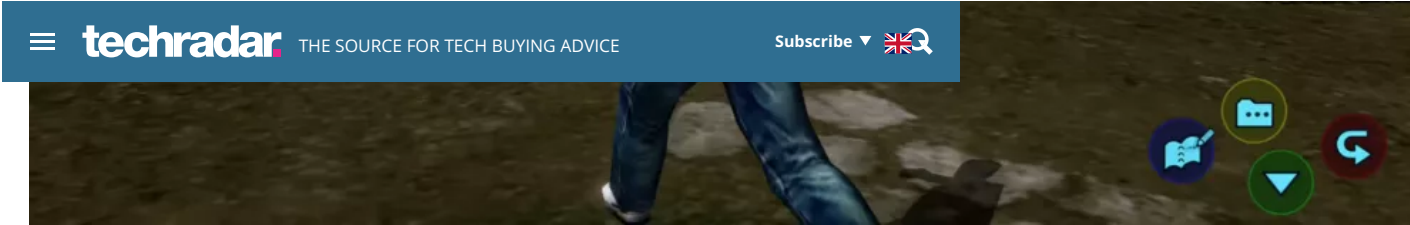
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A video player thumbnail showing a person in a dark jacket standing in front of a screen displaying 'OVERFLOW'. A large 'TOTALLY RATED' logo with a play button is overlaid. The HP logo and 'Powered by hp' are also visible. At the bottom, it says 'learn more at hp.com/thoughtfullaptop'.

PLAY SOUND





(Image credit: SEGA - AM2)

## A blue swirl

Though a friend of my mum’s let us stay with them in the end, the situation made me feel distressed and upset. More so did the many hours I spent later pushing trolley after trolley full of memories to the new place while getting strange looks from the Edinburgh locals.

This was the earliest traumatic experience in my life that I can remember; having everything suddenly change and seeing your mum distraught wasn’t easy. It was also around this time I began to feel depressed for the first time, culminating in low self-worth and the constant feeling that I was a burden.

I had taken with me an old CRT TV, and had it on the floor of the box room we were now staying in, so I could have some form of entertainment. Still to this day, I don’t know if my mum’s friend knew I needed a cheer up, or assumed I had played my N64 games to death but I remember coming home from school one day to find his SEGA Dreamcast hooked up to my TV, and sitting next to it was a pile of every game he owned for the system, one of them was Shenmue.

This was the first time I played, or even heard of, Shenmue, and this was the moment of my childhood where my trauma went from being all-encompassing, to manageable.

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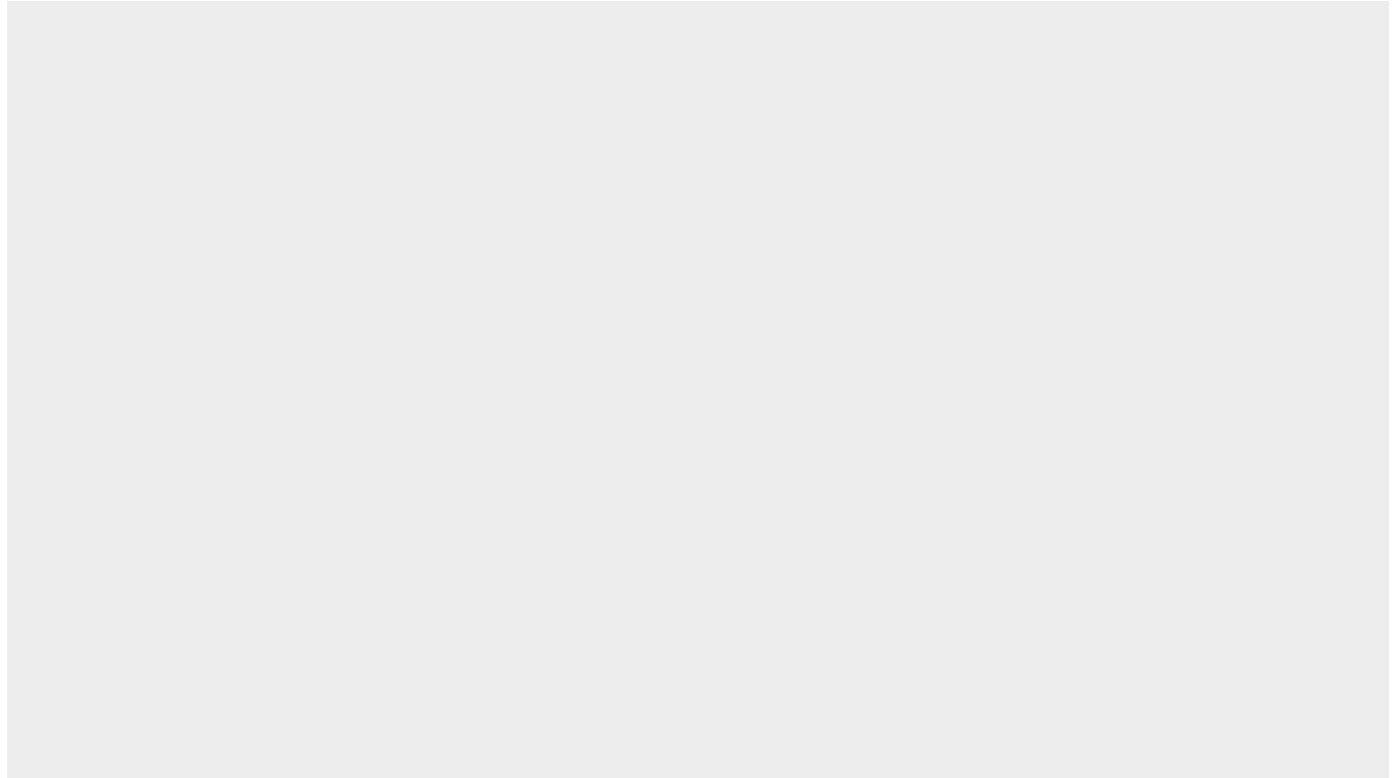
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(Image credit: SEGA - AM2)

Shenmue, originally released in 1999, is a game set in 80s Japan, where you play as Ryo Hazuki, a martial artist who has recently witnessed the death of his father. You set out to the streets of Dobuita (based on the real place in Yokosuka, Japan), asking both friends and strangers if they know anything, trying to avenge the loss of your father.

It was one of the earliest open-world games I can remember where it felt like there was so much to do; you can enter shops, talk to just about everybody, buy drinks from vending machines, collect Sonic toys from gachapon machines and even spend time in an arcade where you're able to play full versions of SEGA's Hang On and Space Harrier, it really felt like you were wandering around the streets of Japan in your own time.

While everything was going on in my real life, being able to be a part of Ryo's life and spend hours at the arcade, or just admire and take in the scenery, felt almost therapeutic. Though I'd never recommend playing games instead of seeking actual help for your problems, having Shenmue there when I needed it is something I'll never forget.



(Image credit: Rosalie Newcombe)

## From Dreamcast to PC

For some reason or another we had to move to another friend's house, but before we left, my mum's friend entrusted me with his Dreamcast and all the games to keep forever, and to this day that is the same Dreamcast I have sitting amongst my game collection, and that copy of Shenmue is still the most treasured item I own.

My mum and I eventually found our own housing, and although things weren't easy, they got better. To this day, we both look back at those times and can laugh about it – my mum now refers to Shenmue as the “black car” game as that's what she remembers over-hearing Ryo say constantly when we were living in that box room all those years ago.

With all three Shenmue games now available on PC, it's even easier to experience the world once more, compared to a time where I could only reach it by switching on the Dreamcast.

Although I can never forget that trauma from my childhood, I can choose to remember the happiness I felt discovering Shenmue right when I needed it.

- Welcome to [TechRadar's PC Gaming Week 2021](#), our celebration of the greatest gaming platform on Earth. Despite the global pandemic and ongoing GPU shortages, PC gaming has never been more vibrant and exciting, and throughout the week we'll be reflecting this with a selection of in-depth articles, interviews and essential buying guides.