LA ABADÍA DEL CRIMEN

Anatomy of a Cult Video Game in Spain
JAUME ESTEVE

INTRODUCTION

The release of the ZX Spectrum 16K and 48K in late 1983 jumpstarted the Spanish video gaming industry. Suddenly, a group of self-taught teenagers and some programmers, all in their twenties, teamed up to form a coherent scene dominated by four studios (Dinamic, Topo Soft, Made in Spain, Opera Soft), and a publisher, ERBE. Several events explain the popularity of video games in those years —the arrival of a variety of home computer systems like the Amstrad CPC, the MSX or the Commodore 64; the freedom to publish almost anything without a publisher; or the birth of some of the first magazines. *Micro Hobby* was the most influential magazine, a publication that "managed to sell 100,000 copies weekly" according to Paco Pastor, ERBE's CEO (P. Pastor, personal communication, February 23rd, 2011; my translation). The matter of piracy must should not be overlooked. As video games were sold on cassette tapes, it was easy to copy them, a factor that helped to expand the popularity of the 8-bit systems mentioned above.

In section 1, we will have a look at both the game and its creators, as well as the conditions that surrounded them during the creative process including the commercial release and the critical reception. Section 2 takes a look at the game mechanics, where

the game made a leap in quality in comparison to other Spanish titles released during those years. Section 3 focuses on one of the most iconic aspects of *La Abadía del Crimen*, its code and how it let the user believe that the NPC characters were smart enough to take their own decisions. On section 4, we will take a look at the art style and how it was a step beyond from the classic isometric perspective games that were famous back then. Section 5 takes us back to Spain, where we will examone the causes that turned the game into a cult phenomenon. In the conclusion, we establish that due to three key reasons (the game mechanics and AI, the art style and its cult status), *La Abadía del Crimen* has become a cult video game made in Spain in the 1980s.

La Abadía del Crimen: the video game adaptation of The Name of the Rose

La Abadía del Crimen (Opera Soft, 1987) is a single player isometric adventure set during the XIV century in an abbey where a series of mysterious crimes are happening in obscure circumstances. Fray Guillermo and Adso de Melk[1], the main characters, have to solve the case in seven days. It was released for the Amstrad CPC 6128 and 464/664, Spectrum 128K, MSX and PC.

During the week that the game takes place, the player has to follow a strict schedule inside the abbey. The day is split in seven time frames (night, prime, terce, sext, none, vespers and compline, based on the canonical hours) and Guillermo must attend two services (one at prime, the second at vespers) and having lunch at sext with their fellow monks, who have their own everyday routines and seem to be making their own decisions. Guillermo and Adso are supposed to stay in their room at night; failing to do so may end the game if the abbot catches them wandering through the abbey. But it is only at nighttime when

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1. We refer to the main characters by their Spanish names due to the game never being released overseas.

the main characters have the time to look for clues and gather certain objects that can be stored in a small inventory, similar to the one used in point-and-click adventure games, which will help them to discover who the murderer is. The user is always in control of Guillermo, though Adso's help is essential to obtain certain objects that allow the player to get to the final stages of the game. The player can control Adso using the down arrow ke, while the other three direction arrows control Guillermo.

One of the traits that define the game is its high difficulty. The controls were clumsy due to the isometric perspective combined with a static camera setup. The absence of clues during a game session and a very small life bar, called *obsequium* (Latin for obedience) which diminished with every little misbehavior in the abbey were, and still are, some of the main complaints the players had about the gamplay.

Paco Menéndez and Juan Delcán: two childhood friends behind *La Abadía del Crimen*

Paco Menéndez had founded Made in Spain by the mid-1980s; it was one of Spain's first development studios and responsible for the games *Fred* (1983) and *Sir Fred* (1985).

When *Fred* was released, Menéndez and his partners – a group of friends from the same neighborhood – were still teenagers. When Sir Fred hit the market, even though they were still at university, part of the group had already decided that they wanted to make a living out of video games. Thus Ziggurat was born, a publishing company which would publish and distribute third-party games as well as those designed by Made in Spain.

Juan Delcán belonged to that group, although he did not code *Fred* or *Sir Fred*—his sole contribution was *Fred*'s loading screen. An architecture student at the time[2], Delcán had some knowledge

2. 1. Ironic as it may seem, Delcán never graduated from college. However, this particular

regarding graphic design and joined Menéndez when he decided to leave Made in Spain to develop his own game. The team formed by these two life-long friends had an enormous challenge ahead—creating the video game adaptation of *The Name of the Rose*, Umberto Eco's novel (Eco, 1982), which had already been adapted for the screen (Annaud, 1986).

The decision to adapt *The Name of the Rose* had come after he read the book. Before starting development, as Delcán recalls, Menéndez was sure his third game would be his last. A few weeks after starting the project, Menéndez told the press that nobody in Spain had ever created a game like the one he was working on (El País, 1987).

Delcán, who had no programming experience at all, only had one task: to create a graphic environment for the abbey and the characters where the monks would seem to behave autonomously even though they always repeated the same patterns from one game session to another.

The duo worked from Menéndez's bedroom for a year, with a couple of Amstrad CPCs borrowed from his father's computing school, Mister Chip; both coded while also attending college. The game was originally coded for Amstrad CPC 6128, and it was released for ZX Spectrum 128K and MSX as well. When it came to the PC port, Menéndez needed help since he was not as familiar with that platform, as he was working with the 8-bit microcomputers. He turned to Opera Soft, a studio he was familiar with thanks to the small video games industry that existed in Spain in the 80s.

Menéndez and Delcán never managed to get Umberto Eco's permission to market the game as The Name of the Rose (*Micro Hobby*, 1988), so instead they made small changes to avoid any

project drew more public attention than any of the projects his fellow students were involved in.

legal trouble with the writer. Upon its release, the game was received with critical acclaim. Menéndez and Delcán's proposal enticed the main outlets in Spain and it looked like the game would be a best-seller during Christmas '87 and the first months of 1988.

The two main magazine publishing outlets in Spain were delighted with the game. Micro Hobby's average score, based on six parameters (originality, art style, movement, sound, difficulty and addiction), was nine out of ten and it outlined how different the game felt compared to the rest of Spanish game productions. The review stated that it was something new and original and totally different from everything they had seen so far (Micro Hobby, 1988).

Micro Manía, a magazine focused on PC gaming, awarded it the same score as Micro Hobby: 9/10. The review appeared a some time later, in August 1988, due to the PC port being released in April of that year. This review stated that few games had been able to earn praise from each and every one of their journalists (Micro Manía, 1988). It is important to say that one of the aspects the review considered was the originality of the game. Both outlets, the two most respected of their time, awarded unusually high scores.

Though the sales numbers were good – around 50,000 copies according to Opera Soft's last CEO, José Antonio Morales (Morales, personal communication, April 21st, 2017) – they did not live up to expectations. As with most Spanish video games during the 80s, the exact sales figures are unknown. *Micro Hobby's* sales chart is helpful in gaining some understanding of how the game was received, though it only measured the Spectrum market sales in Spain.

La Abadía del Crimen was in and out of the charts since its publishing date, but it never made it to the top 8. According to

the sales charts released by the magazine every two weeks, the sales ranks between March 29th 1988 (issue 166) and November 30th 1988 (issue 181) were as follows: 9 (issue 166), 13 (issue 167), 20 (issue 169), 8 (issue 173), 13 (issue 174), 12 (issue 175), 12 (issue 176), 14 (issue 177), 16 (issue 178), 16 (issue 179), 20 (issue 180), 17 (issue 181).

The reason for this gap between the way it was received by the critics and its modest sales figures is not too hard to surmise. *La Abadía del Crimen* is known for its notorious difficulty, something it has in common with a lot of Spanish games at the time, particularly *Game Over* (Dinamic, 1987). The game, however, is not difficult because the player had to complete "pixel perfect" jumps or because there is a massive amount of enemies or bullets to dodge. The complexity of the game is subtler—not only is there no indication – diegetic or extra-diegetic – whatsoever of the steps the player had to take to solve the crimes that had been and were being committed in the abbey, it is possible to reach the seventh day of the game without finding out who the murderer is. When that happenes, Guillermo and Adso simply leave the abbey and the mystery behind the murders remains unsolved.

The game includes additional surprises along the way. Several key items are essential to reach the end and solve the crimes, such as the gloves that will keep Guillermo from getting poisoned when reading the cursed book, something which the player does not necessarily know because the game does not offer any clue about their importance to solve the murder mystery. Among those items are Guillermo's spectacles. Even though the player has to get them during one of the nights, nothing in the game suggests that it is a required item to complete the investigation. They can be anywhere in the abbey and the user has to figure that out by him/herself.

There was one last irony related to the game's difficulty. As if it were not difficult enough, the guide published by *Micro Manía*

contains one crucial mistake: the printed map of the labyrinth, the last stage of the game, is misleading, and therefore the players have to find their own way around it.

Despite its relatively low sales, *La Abadía del Crimen* received two awards on *Micro Hobby*'s games awards at 1987: Best Art Style and Best Script (Micro Hobby, 1988). Additionally, Paco Menéndez obtained the Best Programmer Award, an honor nobody else has ever been awarded with.

La Abadía del Crimen's discreet commercial performance did not play a part in both Menéndez and Delcán retiring from video games. The first had already made his decision before starting to develop the gameñ; his premature death in 1999 prevented any chance of him developing again. Delcán eventually abandoned college to start a career in publicity and arts—he has since worked with successful bands such as U2. These two promising game dev careers being cut short helped create a cult around two developers who only created one game and then retired.

THE GAME MECHANICS: A RARE EXAMPLE IN THE SPANISH INDUSTRY

La Abadía del Crimen took slightly over a year to be completed; it was released between November 1987 and April 1988 depending on the platform.

During the 1980s, the Spanish industry developed hundreds of video games. A quick glance at Dinamic's, Opera's, Made in Spain's or Topo's titles reveals that the most popular genres in their catalogues were platformers, sports and beat'em ups. Games such as *Army Moves* (Dinamic, 1986); *Livingstone, Supongo* (Opera, 1986); *Game Over* (Dinamic, 1987); *Fernando Martín Basket Master* (Dinamic, 1987); *Emilio Butragueño ¡Fútbol!* (Topo Soft, 1988) or *After the War* (Dinamic, 1989) prove how prolific the Spanish gaming industry was at the time. The sales numbers explain why the studios pursued those genres. *Emilio Butragueño*,

the most successful Spanish video game of the 1980s, sold more than 100,000 units according to the local press (Micro Hobby, 1989).

La Abadía del Crimen aimed at something very different—it was an adventure game using isometric perspective, similar to Ultimate's classic games; it did not depend on twitch reflexes and did not intend to make to player rush from one end of the screen to the other. Take *Knight Lore* (Ultimate Play the Game, 1984) or Jon Ritman's *Batman* (Ocean, 1986), for example, where almost every room is a puzzle in itself and has enough enemies and obstacles to end the player's life rather quickly. In *La Abadía del Crimen*, it was common to roam the abbey without seeing any other monk unless they crossed the player's path because they were performing their everyday duties in the building.

The slow pace of the game is one of the traits that made a difference when compared to other Spanish productions during those years. It puts *La Abadía del Crimen* at a similar level in terms of game mechanics to other European classics of the 1980s, such as *The Great Escape* (Ocean, 1986), *Skool Daze* (Microsphere, 1984), *Back to Skool* (Microsphere, 1985) or Ultimate's Filmation games, which used an isometric perspective such as *Knight Lore*, *Alien 8* (Ultimate Play the Game, 1985) or *Gunfright* (Ultimate Play the Game, 1985). As Retro Gamer puts it, the game succeeded thanks to two factors—its artistic style and its gameplay. "For all its gob-smacking beauty, the real pleasure of *La Abadía del Crimen* can be found within its perfectly crafted and tightly honed gameplay" (Retro Gamer, 2010).

In the game, the main character, Fray Guillermo de Occam (William of Baskerville's alter ego, the name change due to the inability to secure a license from Umberto Eco), and his assistant, Adso de Melk, have to solve a series of mysterious crimes in an abbey within a week, which the player can accomplish in a little less than two hours of gameplay. In order to do so, the player

must walk up and down the abbey searching for clues and talking to the monks. At the same time, the player must adhere to the abbey's routines: he must attend religious services twice a day (at dawn and dusk) and have lunch with the rest of the monks. Failing to do so will terminate the game, just as if the player is caught out of the cell by the abbot during the night. Since the player must adhere to strict routines during the day, nights are the only time Fray Guillermo and Adso have to investigate and explore the abbey. The game will end if the player's *obsequium* bar drops to zero. Every time the player disobeys the abbot or is late for a service the bar will decrease.

Few games in the 80s proposed a daily routine as a game mechanic. One of the better-known examples is *The Great Escape*, from Denton Designs, in which the player is a prisoner of war at a nazi camp and has to follow a strict routine every day consisting of waking up, attending roll calls, having his meals and exercising. However, the fact that all the POWs and all the camp guards look exactly the same visually made the game feel artificial in terms of character. One game that succeeded in differentiating its characters was *Skool Daze* and its sequel *Back to Skool*. Through clever art style, the user can distinguish the bully from the bookworm or the teachers, even though there are also many pupils with no particular task other than making the player believe that the action takes place in a school full of students.

The very point where *La Abadía del Crimen* succeeded was in mixing both concepts from *The Great Escape* and *Skool Daze*. The strict timetable the characters must follow during the days they spend in the abbey is one of the weaknesses of *La Abadía del Crimen*. The sequence consists of attending a first service, having lunch, and attending a second service, which leaves barely any time to the investigation. This formula had nothing to do with the fundamentals of an open world—why did they put the player in such a universe, consisting of 93 rooms, if the character has to constantly rush from one room to another? Games such as *Ant*

Attack (Quicksilva, 1983) or *Elite* (Acornsoft, 1984), both designed before *La Abadía del Crimen*, understood the concept of open-world gaming much better.

The game used daily routines and a roster of recognizable characters to help create the illusion of being in an abbey inhabited by monks. This is important to emphasize, since Spanish video games often copied overseas hits. Some infamous cases include Dinamic's *Satan* (Dinamic, 1989), inspired in *Black Tiger* (U. S. Gold, 1987), or Topo's *Desperado* (Topo Soft, 1987)*,* an almost exact copy of *Gun.Smoke* (Capcom, 1985).

Like Batman and Robin or Mario and Luigi, Fray Guillermo had his own sidekick, Adso. The young character's function isn't merely to make the game closer to the book and the film. Adso also takes part in the action, hence he is much more than just Guillermo's pupil, who follows him everywhere. At certain moments, the user has to take control of him in order to get certain objects Guillermo is not able to reach and which are necessary to complete the game. Having two player characters is, again, a rarity in Spanish video gaming back then. As the expert in Spanish video games José Manuel Fernández says: "Only one game did something similar, *Spirits* (Topo Soft, 1987), and it did so by using a split screen" (Esteve, 2012).

Spanish studios did not demonstrate much interest in developing games in isometric perspective. They knew what sort of games their audience favored and were not keen on taking any risks, especially as the competition grew tougher from 1987 onwards. There are some examples of Spanish isometric video games that show how *La Abadía del Crimen* stands out, however. *El Cid* (Dro Soft, 1987), released in the United Kingdom by Mastertronic, is an adventure with some beat 'em up mechanics. *Evaristo el Punky* (System 4, 1988) follows the same pattern as *El Cid*. Neither of those games achieved critical acclaim, and even less commercial success. *El Cid* got a 7,3 out of 10 (Micro Hobby, 1988) whereas

Evaristo el Punky's review was even tougher as it got a 6,5 (Micro Hobby, 1989). If *La Abadía del Crimen* never managed to get past the Top 8 in the sales charts despite being blessed by the press, it is easy to understand why the big Spanish studios were not interested in isometric perspective games, even though *La Abadía*'s visual approach is, paradoxically, one of the features that still stand out today.

THE CODE: FAKE AI TO MAKE THE ABBEY COME TO LIFE

Another feature that makes *La Abadía del Crimen* and its characters stand out was the pseudo artificial intelligence of its inhabitants. The monks were not programmed to make any intelligent decisions. However, Paco Menéndez wrote a script, a set of rules, that made them wander through the abbey as if they were going about their everyday routines.

That believable behavior was implemented in the game's code and had instructions for almost every situation that the player would confront. As Manuel Pazos wrote in *Obsequium* (Morales et al., 2014), a book about Menéndez and Delcán's creation, "[the code] had instructions as to which camera had to follow each monk, where the objects were on the map, the contents of the monks' dialogue, where the monks had to go at any given moment or which doors were locked at what time of the day" (my translation). That script was responsible for making the player wonder what was happening on the screen; the use of brief cutscenes increased this sense. Where is brother Berengario going? What is brother Malaquías doing? Considering that the game had to fit in less than 128Kb, what the script accomplished was due to Menéndez's genius. For example, "reading the position of a character would have taken 3 bytes in machine code whereas the script managed to only use 1 byte" (my translation).

The movements of the two main characters are another source of controversy. Given that the camera point of view changes every

time the player enters a room, the player must identify again how to move a character left or right, since its relative orientation changes in the new point of view, as would later be in games such as *Resident Evil* (Capcom, 1996). The first scene of the game, in which the abbot welcomes Guillermo and Adso, explains what is going on and leads them to their room, is an ordeal to complete. Having just found out how to move the protagonist, the player had to manage to follow the abbot closely; otherwise he would already lose *obsequium* bar at the very beginning of the game, which is a common occurrence during gameplay.

Making the abbey look like a real place was among the greatest accomplishments of Paco Menéndez. A previous Spanish game, *Dustin* (Dinamic, 1986), had already introduced non-playable characters to interact with, though not as rich as the ones in *La Abadía del Crimen*. Aside from their main task, i.e. letting the player interact with certain objects needed to complete the game, the characters were completely static.

THE VISUALS: ONE STEP BEYOND ULTIMATE'S FILMATION

The other half of the equation was equally important for *La Abadía del Crimen* to attain its cult status. Despite not having designed a game before, Menéndez was instrumental in Juan Delcán's unleashing of his creative talent.

When the pair started working on the game sometime during the second half of 1986, both knew perfectly well their respective duties. Menéndez was in charge of the code whereas Delcán was responsible for the art style and visual assets, i.e. he was in charge of designing both the characters and the scenario.

For Delcán, the task was a unique opportunity for an architecture student. He wanted the abbey to be as realistic as possible—using his knowledge of Gothic and Romanesque architecture, he turned to Italian, French, Catalan and German

abbeys for inspiration. The result has a Latin-cross layout, with the apse and the monks' cells facing east, as it was common in the Middle Ages, so they would wake up at dawn.

The game used isometric perspective to create a sense of depth. The room's walls were divided into spaces where the two walls that met at the bottom corner were cut out in order for the player to see what was happening, as described by Jan Van Looy (2003). This perspective, similar to a 3D space even though true 3D rendering was not still possible, had been made popular thanks to games such as *Ant Attack*, or particularly those from Ultimate, for example *Knight Lore*. This Spanish attempt, however, went one step beyond: the rooms were not independent but part of a whole. And even though each camera was linked to a specific room, the game allowed the player to see what was happening outside of it.

> "*Knight Lore*'s screens were independent from each other. When the player exited them, the characters that inhabited them ceased to exist, they were only alive inside that frame. The character behavior in *La Abadía del Crimen* was more complex. Compared to the foes in *Knight Lore* that only moved upwards or downwards or from side to side, the monks in the abbey were able to look for routes and choose the right paths". — (Pazos, creator of *La Abadía del Crimen Extensum*. Personal communication, April 18th, 2017; my translation)

One of the reasons why the game's graphics are better than other games developed at that time is the level of detail that Delcán put into the abbey. The game not only improves on classic filmation games (*Knight Lore* and *Alien 8*) made by Ultimate or those developed by Jon Ritman, such as *Batman* or *Head Over Heels*. The architecture of the buildings in Ultimate's titles is basically a series of black walls and some bricks here and there to help create the illusion of a building. In this respect, not even the buildings in *The Great Escape* are very convincing. Despite the fact that the rooms are furnished, nothing is hanging from the

walls, and thus it is difficult for the player to perceive the rooms as such.

In order to make the abbey a believable space – with a library, a scriptorium, a kitchen, cells or a church – Delcán used a camera setup that allows to show each parts from different angles.

This set of cameras was one of Delcan's trademarks; it would also become one of the most controversial aspects of the game, one that still gives rise to heated discussions amongst its followers. As was the case in the first *Resident Evil* games, best known for their cinematic style, *La Abadía del Crimen* used a set of static cameras. Unlike *Knight Lore* or *Batman*, however, the position of the camera was different in every screen. Delcán has repeatedly explained that his intention was to create a cinematic atmosphere (Esteve, 2012). That is why, for instance, Guillermo crosses one room facing the camera and we see him from behind once the screen switches to the next room. This use of perspective allows the player not only to see the abbey from different points, it also shows that the abbey is not a series of independent rooms, each one containing the characters with whom the player has to interact but a building where everything is interconnected. As in the case once again of *Knight Lore*, it should be noted that, because of the way the game was designed, these characters did not move from one room to another but stayed in the one they originally appeared. Finally, the changing point of view allows the players to see the walls from different perspectives, giving the abbey a more realistic look.

According to Enrique Giner, architect and author of one of the first remakes of the game, the control scheme and the change of perspective were fundamental aspects of the game and they needed each other: "Alternating the cameras allowed creating a non-restricted architecture. Without those cameras, and with a conventional control scheme, *La Abadía del Crimen*'s graphics, as

we know them, would have never existed" (Morales et al., 2014; my translation).

More than ten years passed from the release of the game until the cult about the game started to grow. The first news of a PC remake, made by Antonio Giner, broke at the end of the 20th century (Giner, 1999). It wasn't the only project that tried to remake the game to make it available for current computers. Manuel Pazos worked on another version for MSX2 as well as one made in Javascript. It is also important to talk about Manuel Abadía and Sebastián Blanes, authors of VIGASOCO, VIdeo GAmes SOurce Code (Abadía and Blanes, 2005), a project that reconstructed the game with C/C and that served as a blueprint to port the game to PS2, PS3, Dreamcast, Mac or Linux.

These three remakes were upgrades for the computers at the time. The game contents remained intact as well as its visual elements. These versions saw the light during the early 2000s but they were not the only games that paid tribute to *La Abadía del Crimen*. *The Abbey* (Alcachofa Soft, 2008), a point-and-click adventure from Alcachofa Soft, was released in 2008; other similar projects such as *Medievo* (García, 2011), *El Enigma de la Abadía* (García, 2006) or *Los Secretos del Claustro* (Narratech, 2017) remained unfinished during the following years. The difference between these titles and the remakes was either the scope, a different visual approach or an entirely different set of mechanics, as was the case with *The Abbey*.

Medievo was a failed project led by Enrique García, which had a team of 20 people working on the game during 1999-2003. The game was never released, and it tried to reimagine *La Abadía del Crimen* with an entirely new visual look and a script that followed more closely the events depicted in the book. *El Enigma*

de la Abadía, a title made with Unreal Engine by Diego Cadenas, tried to go further and deliver a game with an improved graphics. The project was cancelled in 2010 due to the lack of funding. *El Enigma* did not want to be a simple remake—Cadenas planned more than 20 hours of gameplay and puzzles that could be solved in a variety of ways. *Los Secretos del Claustro* is an unfinished project developed by students at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, where the player controls the villain of *La Abadía del Crimen* instead of Fray Guillermo.

The point in all of these remakes and tributes is that no other Spanish game made in the 1980s has gathered a similar amount of projects. There have been remakes of *Sir Fred* (Celemín, 2005) by Daniel Celemín, *Abu Simbel Profanation* (FX Interactive, 2012), which appeared on iOS, or *La Pulga* (Suárez, 2011), made by Paco Suárez, its original creator, for PC. But no game has managed to spur the same amount of varied and ambitious projects.

Perhaps the most important and interesting remake was *La Abadía del Crimen Extensum* (Celemín and Pazos, 2016). Developed by Manuel Pazos and Daniel Celemín, both important names in the Spanish classic gaming scene, the game is an extended version of *La Abadía del Crimen* with upgraded visuals to match the characters with the ones from the film version from Jean-Jacques Annaud, a bigger abbey and an extended story to make the events of the game closer to *The Name of the Rose*. Released for free on Steam in July of 2016, the game managed to get more than 100,000 downloads. According to Pazos, about 50% of those came from outside of Spain (Personal communication, April 18th, 2017).

Remakes are not the only way to measure *La Abadía del Crimen*'s success amongst its Spanish competitors in the 1980s. RetroMadrid, the most important event dedicated to classic video games in Spain, paid a tribute to the game and its creators in its 2013 edition, which received more than 6.000 visitors

(Retro Madrid, 2014). The game was also the subject of a panel at Celsius Festival, a yearly event held in Avilés dedicated to literature – especially fantasy, horror and science fiction – but with a focus on video games and history.

The last point that highlights the importance of the game is rather unusual–on May 8th 2017, a Spanish video game was recognized by local authorities for the first time. The Fábrica Nacional de Moneda y Timbre – the organization in charge of printing official mail stamps – agreed to honor *La Abadía del Crimen* on its 30th anniversary.

Even though the game was never sold outside Spain, it gained critical acceptance over the years. Retro Gamer's praise should be credited as a major factor in the game gaining public approval as one of the great games designed in Europe during the 1980s. The English magazine featured *La Abadía del Crimen* twice: first, in its "Import Only" section, that showcased games never released in the English market and, second, in its "Perfect Ten Games" chart for ZX Spectrum 128 where it stated that "*La Abadía del Crimen* is an 8-bit masterpiece […] that is well worth playing through, even if you don't understand a word of Spanish" (Retro Gamer, 2010).

Being on the same list as games such as *Renegade* (Technos Japan, 1986), *Where Time Stood Still* (Ocean, 1988) or *Tai Pan* (Ocean, 1988) gives the measure of how much critics were aware that the game was important to the Spanish market despite never being sold overseas.

CONCLUSION

There are several factors that demonstrate how important *La Abadía del Crimen* was at the time of publication. The game gained a cult following years after its release, due to the technical aspects that the press outlined in its reviews, its art style, way above what other Spanish studios managed to do and more

detailed than those made by UK studios at the time, the tricks Paco Menéndez used in its code to make the abbey look like a building inhabited by real monks, and the countless remakes, tributes and homages the game has received over the years. The fact that Menéndez died at a young age and that Delcán never worked in the video games industry again are crucial to building an aura of mystique around the game.

The game's mechanics were original in comparison to its contemporaries, including the monks' AI, something never seen in a Spanish game, while its visual style matched the looks of Ultimate's games or other isometric perspective titles, whereas the remakes and tributes it has been subject to over the years have helped to generate its cult status. These three aspects constitute the recipe for the cult of a game that managed to perform as well as some of the great European games of the 1980s. It was able to create an environment as vivid as in *The Great Escape* using a set of independent, recognizable and *intelligent* characters, and it all happened on an isometric scale never seen before on previous games. And it is still has a devoted following, almost 30 years after its commercial release.

Despite its average commercial performance at the time of release, the game has been remade on a variety of platforms and it even has a revamped version available for free on Steam. It was also honored at Retro Madrid, Spain's most important retro event; and Spanish authorities decided to print a postal stamp to celebrate the 30th anniversary of its release. Menéndez and Delcán's creation has achieved what it did not in the late 1980s—to be recognized as a landmark game for the Spanish video game industry.

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1. Ironic as it may seem, Delcán never graduated from college. However, this particular project drew more public attention than any of the projects his fellow students were involved in.