

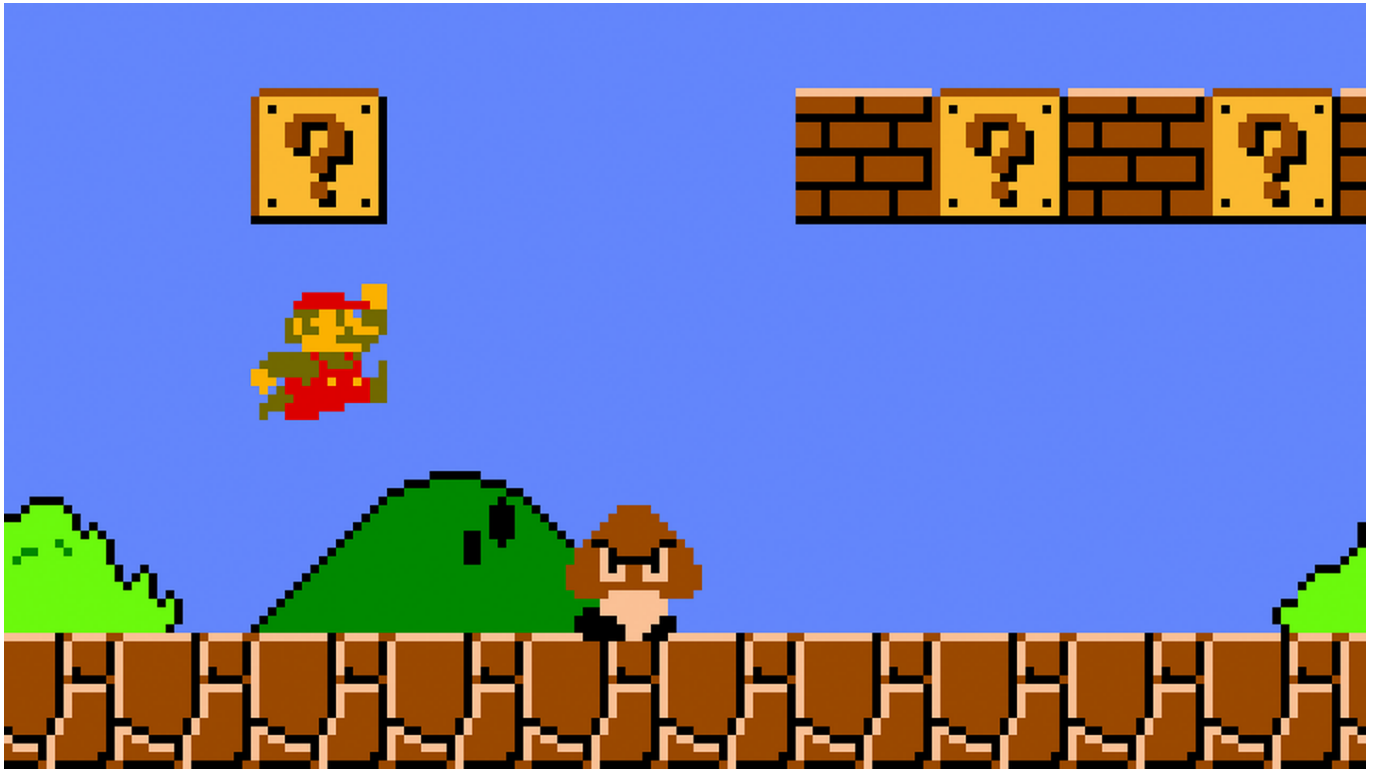
Pac-Man (1980)

The main character performs two functions in a game:

- Gives the player an avatar to identify with in the game world
- Indicates the functionality of the character

Pac-Man is simple but the color makes the character stand out in the game world and easy to identify on a screen.

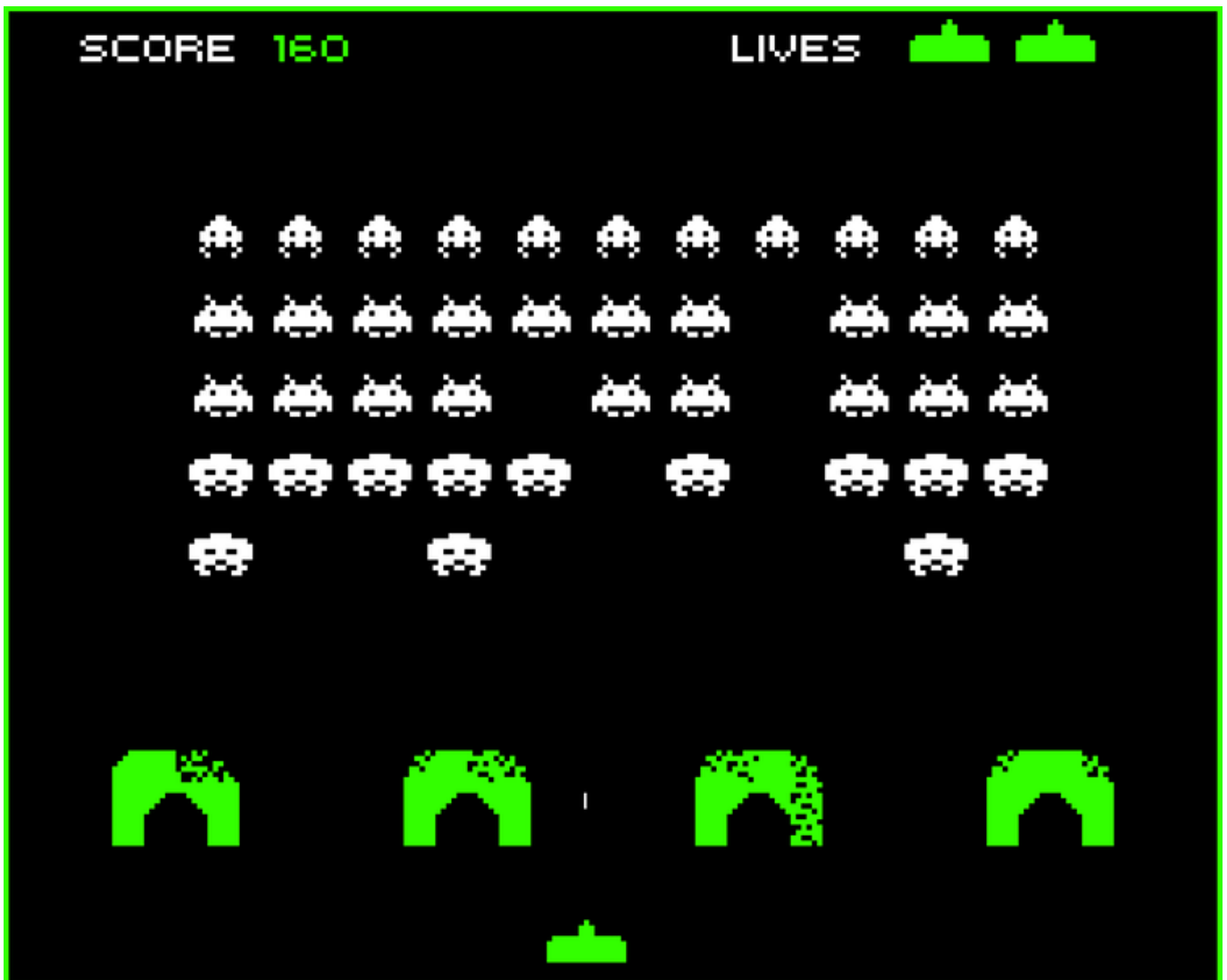
Pac-Man has a large mouth making it clear that his primary objective is to eat the dots.



Super Mario Bros. (1985)

Mario has several unique, distinguishing features that make him a unique character, including his hat, overalls and mustache.

These visual traits don't relate directly to the functionality of the character. Instead, the randomness of the character choices tell us something about the game world, which is that its a sort of fun but ridiculous combination of elements.



Space Invaders (1978)

Early video games had were limited by the graphics power of their systems. The number of colors and physical space were both limited by the capacity of the graphics processing power and hardware.

This inspired creative means to make game characters stand out from their settings and other components of the game.



Canabalt (2009)

Today there are virtually no limitations on the graphic quality of games, including the number of colors used, resolution of screens and size of images.

Many games still use pixel art and other “retro” aesthetics as an homage or reference to video game history.



Limbo (2011)

Games with complex or detailed graphics can still use simplified designs for the main character.

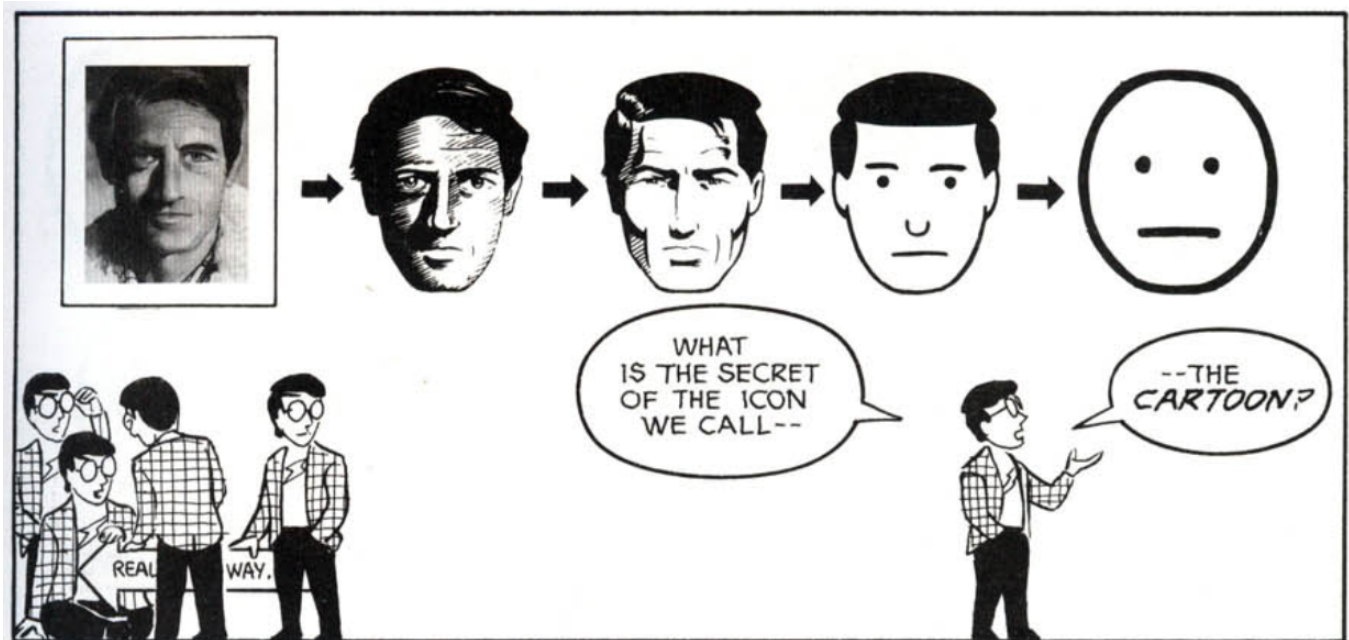
In ***Limbo***, the character is a simple silhouette of a boy with two white eyes to show the face.



The Binding of Isaac (2011)

Video games also borrow styles from sources like cartoons, comics, anime, film and other visual references.

Isaac is a very simple character with one specific mechanic, his tears. This game mechanic reminds us of the origin story of the game and gives is a unique way to identify the character.



Understanding Comics by Scott McCloud (1993)

Characters that are rendered with more detail tend to be interpreted more realistically.

Simpler characters are easier to identify with for the player.

The aesthetic choices that go into game and character design give the player clues about what to expect in the game.

This also applies to NPCs (non-player-characters) and other visual components in the game. Their design should cue expectations for the player to their functionality.

The comic book artist Tomatatoro redesigned the characters from Overwatch in 2D and wrote about the process.

This is a good example of setting some basic rules for character design, which helps create consistency across your designs.

Design is an iterative process. Iterative means repetition with variation, or trying the same design again and tweaking details until you reach the best version.

The best designers will explore every possibility for a character they can imagine before finalizing a design.