

Gaming on Ubuntu

# PLAYGROUND



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Gaming on Ubuntu is a reality. In this article we introduce 10 games that you can install without breaking a sweat. **BY TIM SCHÜRMANN**

## Installation

All of the games I will be looking at here are easily installed via *Applications | Add/Remove*. When you get there, set *Show to All available applications*, then browse the *Games* section. If you can't find what you're looking for, the *Search* box might help.

In contrast to Windows, Ubuntu is not generally regarded as an El Dorado for computer gamers. But this widespread opinion is actually unjustified, as the Synaptic package manager goes to show with its choice of more than 1,000 packages in the *Games* section. Many games promise hours of fun when your daily chores are done, and it's totally free of charge. On the following pages, I will present a short selection of very popular Linux games. But beware, some of them are addictive.

## 1 Freeciv

The Freeciv strategy game is a classic Linux game. Just like its role model, Civilization, the player guides a civilization from ancient to modern times en route to prosperity. This endeavor is not just a question of exploring new territory, negotiating with other tribes, and conducting research, but also of surviving the odd war or two. The game is related to Civilization II, but in many cases, you can customize it to suit your needs.

*Freeciv:* <http://www.freeciv.org>

*Alternative:* [FreeCol](#)

## 2 Lincity and LinCity-NG

If you have always fancied a term in office as the mayor of a city, Lincity is just what the doctor ordered. Another Linux original, the game is modeled on the popular SimCity. As an urban planner, you are given the task of creating a prosperous city from a piece of vacant ground. For this to happen, you have to assign land for construction, build roads, and collect taxes. Each decision you make has an effect on urban life: Houses in the suburbs will attract wealthier citizens, whereas ghettos will develop in the vicinity of heavy industry, requiring expensive policing. An addition to the fairly frumpy-looking Lincity is a modern version called LinCity-NG.

*Lincity variants:* <http://lincity.sf.net> and <http://lincity-ng.berlios.de>

*Alternative:* [OpenCity](#)

## 3 Beneath a Steel Sky

If you like solving puzzles and are into science fiction, you will not want to miss Beneath a Steel Sky. This old-school adventure lets you direct the protagonist, Robert Foster, through Union City, a city built on iron and steel. Supported by a little robot, Joey, you battle the merciless, totalitarian state and in the process discover a dark spot in your own past. Beneath a Steel Sky started life in 1993 as a commercial game for MS-DOS, which explains the slightly pixelated, but atmospheric, graphics. On Ubuntu, it requires the ScummVM utility, which has given many other classic adventures a new lease on life on Linux.

*ScummVM:* <http://www.scummvm.org/downloads.php>

*Alternative:* [Flight of the Amazon Queen](#)

## 4 FlightGear

The makers of FlightGear were looking to create a realistic and extensible flight simulator. The graphics can't compete with the commercial counterparts, but the flight characteristics and environmental conditions are all the more realistic to make up for this. The sheer number of options and settings are likely to put off occasional flyers, though. FlightGear does not just simulate every single on-board instrument, but every single lever on board your choice of plane. Before you even dream of taking off, plan a couple of hours practice. A giant, world-wide community continually turns up with new maps and new flying material.

*FlightGear:* <http://www.flightgear.org>

*Alternative:* [ACM Aerial Combat Simulator](#)



1 Freeciv



2 Lincity



3 BASS 5



4 FlightGear



## 5 Battle for Wesnoth 2

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Battle for Wesnoth is another turn-based strategy game modeled closely on the erstwhile favorites Master of Monster and Fantasy General. In a fantasy world divided into hexagonal cells, players move their characters, each with their strengths and weaknesses, and gain experience in the course of battle in a fashion similar to role-playing games. Type of attack and weapon, positioning, time of day, and terrain are all important to game play. A good introduction helps you take the first steps, and thanks to the purposely simple rules, newcomers can come to grips with the game in next to no time. The graphics never cease to amaze with excellently rendered manga-style images. Playing against human competitors is particularly enjoyable, and the map editor included with the game lets you define your own campaigns, which you can swap with other fans on the Internet.

*Battle for Wesnoth:* <http://www.wesnoth.org>  
*Alternatives:* *Advanced Strategic Command, Glest*



## 6 TORCS

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Motor sports fans can hit the virtual throttle in The Open Racing Car Simulator, or TORCS for short. At the wheel of a modern race car, such as a McLaren F1 or a Mercedes CLK DTM, you can race over intelligently laid-out courses. Among the more than 20 tracks to choose from are high-speed courses on smooth tarmac, dusty rally courses, and street racing. TORCS simulates the response of more than 50 different vehicles based on a number of parameters, such as suspension, aerodynamics, and driver error. Attacks by opponents are reflected by a simple damage model. Because the game does not support multiple players, you will have to make do with racing the computer.

*TORCS:* <http://torcs.sourceforge.net>  
*Alternatives:* *SuperTuxKart, Trigger*



## 7 FooBillard

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FooBillard is another sporting challenge. This pool/billiards/snooker simulator offers attractive 3D graphics, realistic physics, and a simple computerized opponent. As an alternative, you can play human competitors over a network. A selection of games is available, including 8 ball, 9 ball, carambole, pool, and snooker. And if you happen to own a pair of 3D glasses, you can switch to anaglyph mode and experience a fascinatingly real 3D view of the table. Table textures, ball highlights, and shadows add to the realism of the game.

*FooBillard project:* <http://foobillard.sunsite.dk>  
*Alternative:* *BillardGL*

## 8 SuperTux

If you are looking for an existing jump and run side-scrolling game for the kids, SuperTux is perfect. Instead of an overweight plumber, as in Nintendo's Super Mario series, you help a small penguin negotiate pitfalls and cuddly monsters. The latter typically can be knocked out by jumping on their heads. Bonus articles give the hero super powers. The game currently has more than 100 levels, to which you can add your own creations, thanks to the level editor.

*SuperTux:* <http://supertux.lethargik.org>  
*Alternative:* *Secret Maryo Chronicles*

## 9 Vega Strike

Vega Strike takes you into the realm of outer space. This mix of action game and simulation sees the player set off as the owner of a small spaceship, very much in need of a refit. Of course, a refit is going to cost you money, and to earn it, you will need to trade with foreign planets, fight with or against factions, or indulge in a spot of piracy. Just as in its role models *Elite* and *Freelancer*, Vega Strike gives you an open environment. The universe, comprising more than 5,000 solar systems, is populated by 39 factions, all of which are tied up in alliances – if you are unlucky, you end up in the middle of a war. A kind of “warp” engine, called a SPEC drive, allows you to travel quickly throughout the solar system. Jump points allow you to travel between star systems – if you have a jump drive, that is. The game generates most of the planets randomly, and it's a completely new game on each restart. Many weeks of gaming pleasure are guaranteed en route to fame and power.

*Vega Strike:* <http://vegastrike.sourceforge.net>  
*Alternative:* *Oolite*

## 10 Nexuiz

Ubuntu has no end of classy but free multi-user shooters. Nexuiz, a three-dimensional deathmatch game, is just one of them. The idea of the game is to take out the enemy in a team or on your own, to capture flags, or to secure waypoints. Multiple game modes are available. Just like the *Unreal* series, Nexuiz is designed for fast shoot-outs on the network; single-player mode, with more than 20 levels, is just for learning the ropes. The emphasis is on speed and intense action. Numerous, intelligently designed and attractively illuminated levels promise variety and strategically challenging duels.

*Nexuiz:* <http://www.alienstrap.org/nexuiz>  
*Alternatives:* *OpenArena*, *Sauerbraten*, *Alien Arena*, *Tremulous*, *Warsow*



8 SuperTux



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10 Nexuiz