



THE VIDEO GAME GENERATIONS NEWSLETTER

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Issue #6 — June 14, 2025

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Loading Screen

Ordinarily, the focus of each issue has been an opinion piece or an exploration of some topic I find interesting. This week was a whirlwind of summer game conferences from Xbox, PlayStation and others. The news, announcements, and trailers shown have given me plenty to write about.

That's not to say it's *all* about those showcases. I have a lengthy rant afterwards (I'm uncertain if it qualifies as "unhinged") and then a few more mini-reviews harvested from my years of posting them to social media. They all have something in common, and I doubt you'll have trouble figuring out what.



Guess I'm Not Psychic After All



What can I say? I took some big swings that didn't pan out when I made my predictions for SGF and surrounding showcases two weeks ago in Issue #4. This was my final prediction:

“Everything else I’ve predicted, except the very first one, will come to pass just as I’ve foreseen it. Mikestradamus has spoken, and so it shall be.”

To make it interesting, I spread 100 points across my various predictions, based on how unlikely I estimated each one to be. Let's take the ones I got right, in reverse order.

We saw IO Interactive's 007 game (officially titled *First Light* which was already claimed years ago by Sucker Punch's *inFAMOUS: Second Son* stand-alone expansion) at Sony's State of Play as well as SGF itself. The release window is a vague “2026” but that counts. This prediction nets me **2 points**.



At the Xbox showcase, we saw *Keeper*, the new game from Double Fine, worth **1 point**.

Several games had sequels announced. At least one of these *must* count as a game that wasn't a commercial (and maybe not a critical) success, right? Google's AI Overview tells me that both *Planet of Lana* (never played) and *High on Life* (played and loved) were critical and commercial successes. It thinks *The Outer Worlds* wasn't a critical or commercial success, but I call shenanigans. Either way, the sequel was announced a long time ago so it wouldn't count anyway.

Atomic Heart was a commercial success in reaching 10 million players, although I bet much of that is from Xbox GamePass, which is how I played before later buying a copy for PS5. It wasn't a critical success, sadly, although it should have been. It's amazing.



Mortal Shell was a fun (and not overly long) Souls-like that flew under many a radar. Does it qualify? Maybe. I enjoyed it, but I wouldn't have expected a sequel to be announced.

Code Vein (which I somehow keep getting confused with *Scarlet Nexus* when I try to remember one or the other) is another game I enjoyed that sits at a respectable but not outstanding 70 on Metacritic. It seems to have sold well enough; at least well enough to justify getting a sequel.

All this to say I'm claiming **1 point** for this prediction, because I make the rules. 🤪

Not Psychic - Continued

I predicted that a celebrity would be brought out to appear on stage and present a game they're starring in. My confident selection is Mads Mikkelsen at SGF, reprising his role as Le Chiffre in the new limited-time contract for *Hitman: World of Assassination*.

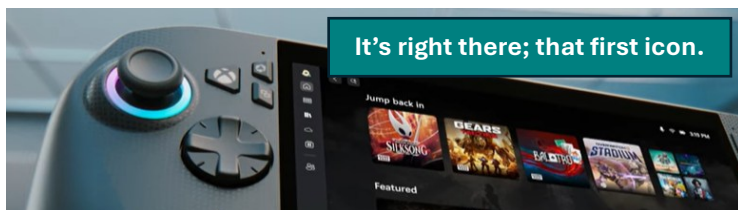
My second choice would be Carolyn Lawrence, voice of Sandy Cheeks in *SpongeBob SquarePants*, although I couldn't have told you any of that until seeing her at SGF so it probably doesn't count. We also saw Tony Hawk at the Xbox showcase, but this was an all-digital event, so it doesn't fit the "on stage" portion of my prediction. At any rate, I'm claiming my **1 point** for Mads Mikkelsen.

This next one might be reaching but stick with me. I predicted, and I quote:

"Hollow Knight - Silk Song gets re-revealed in a new trailer..."

This mostly comes down to how you define "re-revealed". The important thing here is that I never said the trailer would be *for* this game (even if that's what I had in mind). I just said it would be *in a new trailer*, right? It was shown (an icon was, anyway) and even mentioned by name during the *ROG Xbox Ally X* reveal during the Xbox showcase, with a promise that the game launches *this year* with or before the new handheld console. I miss the full points because we didn't get a specific release date, but the *release window* being this holiday season is enough for **2 points**.

Also ignore the fact that this was more ad than trailer, and we're all set.



This next one became almost a foregone conclusion days before the reveal at the Xbox showcase on Sunday. I wouldn't have even thought to predict it without those hints, so in a way, this may be the least deserved of all my points. I'm talking about *P4R*, or *Persona 4 Revival*, the remake of a fan favorite entry in the long-running *Persona* series from Atlus.

I never played the PS2 original, but I loved the game on Vita when it released as *Persona 4 Golden*. It was a bright spot in a very tough time I went through at work. Although *Persona 5* later supplanted it as my own favorite in the series, it's great that P3 and now P4 have made a return for more players to enjoy. While this prediction feels a little like cheating, I'm going to award myself the **1 point** I gave it.

This brings me to my final prediction:

"I earn 1 point if my total score without this point is less than 10."

By my count, I got 8 points from my other predictions. This point brings me one more. My final score is... drumroll... a very sad but not entirely surprising **9 points** out of 100.

Here's a quick recap of every prediction I missed.

We did *not* see sequel announcements for *Brütal Legend*, the *Ultima* series, *Mega Man*, *Sunset Overdrive*, *Half-Life*, or *Shadow Man*.

Also MIA were Hideo Kojima's other projects, a *Fallout 3* remaster, more on *Intergalactic*, the *Star Wars* game from Quantic Dream, Jack Black, a *Dishonored* collection, the next Bluepoint game, the next *Bioshock*, a *Twilight Princess* remaster, any video game TV or movie adaptation, the long-awaited release date for *Metroid Prime 4* (which I mistakenly called "Metroid Prime 2" in my prediction), DS games on the Nintendo Switch, and *Beyond Good & Evil 2*.

There was no first-person physics puzzle game a la *Portal* or *QUBE*, and no indie game where you play as a sentient tuxedo, wedding dress, or bikini.

The Future Looks Bright

Despite my failure as a prognosticator, these summer showcases offered plenty to be hyped for in the form of unexpected reveals and new looks at previously announced games. You know what that means? If you guessed “Mike’s Top 10 SGF Announcements” then you would be wrong. No, no, I can’t pick just ten. This is a Top 20 list. Let’s-a-gooooo!



Rather than list them in reverse order leading up to my #1 pick, I’m just going to list them in order by my anticipation or hype level. What this means is, if I could only have one of these games, it would be the pick at #1. If I could only have two of them, I’d pick the first two, and so on and so forth. Ranking them this way was far from easy. I deliberated, changed my mind multiple times, and obsessed over this to the point that I probably should have just opted for an unordered list of favorites.

These choices are all games that were either announced for the first time during the three main showcases (SGF, Xbox, and PlayStation) or were previously announced but have felt nebulous to me until these new reveals.

This means some of my most anticipated upcoming games *aren’t* included despite their presence at one of these showcases, simply because my hype remains unchanged or they’re releasing soon anyway. This includes games like *Mafia: The Old Country*, *The Outer Worlds 2*, *Silent Hill f*, and *Death Stranding 2*.



Showcase Favorites Top 3

#1: Atomic Heart 2 (SGF)

<https://youtu.be/fquBSxalY1Y>

If you’re already tired of me talking about my 2023 Game of the Year, the original *Atomic Heart*, I have bad news for you. Youngsters might accuse me of “glazing” the game, but I mean every word. I wasn’t expecting a sequel; let alone one announced this soon. Nothing short of *Half-Life 3* or *Fallout 5* would have kept this from claiming the top spot on my list.

#2: Clockwork Revolution (Xbox event)

<https://youtu.be/l421zRNnivo>

Brian Fargo was a veteran game designer well before founding InXile. While I bounced off *Wasteland 2* partway through, I loved the follow-up, *Wasteland 3*, and felt that *The Bard’s Tale IV* was an underappreciated masterpiece. This new game, while already previously revealed, blew me away with just how much of a “me” game it looks to be.



#3: Resident Evil - Requiem / RE9 (SGF)

<https://youtu.be/POz1-EmLsTY>

As I watched SGF with my son (this was the only one he sat in for), I tried to guess what game was being shown as the trailer went on. Who makes games that look like this? Maybe Remedy? This probably isn’t *Control 2*. Maybe Capcom? Is this the next *Resident Evil*? Love or hate that “coming soon” fake-out earlier in the showcase, it worked for me. I can’t wait!

Showcase Favorites 4-9

#4: First Light - 007 (PlayStation event)

<https://youtu.be/J4qY9DYE184>

As it probably was with many gamers, I wasn't a James Bond 007 fan until Nintendo and Rare introduced us all to Goldeneye on the N64. I still wouldn't claim to be a super-fan, having never watched any of the older movies, but I've kept up with them since. Combine that with the talent of IO Interactive and the style of their Hitman series, and I'm all in for this.

#5: Mudang - Two Hearts (Xbox event)

https://youtu.be/L6-5vM_tSVw

It's tough to know what to make of this, with a trailer that gave me vibes of *Splinter Cell* (which I've sadly never played), *Metal Gear Solid*, and *Call of Duty*, and a Seoul-based developer I've never heard of. Something about it, though, just has me hyped enough to rank this #5 of my list of showcase favorites.

#6: Call of Duty - Black Ops 7 (Xbox event)

<https://youtu.be/dZdRDyYGoQg>

This is another game that had me wondering if it was another new game from Remedy or maybe something else from Quantic Dream (obviously not *Star Wars Eclipse*). Of all the games it *could* have been, I wouldn't have guessed *Black Ops 7*. I don't regularly play any *Call of Duty* (and I'm only interested in the single player when I do), but I *loved* last year's *Black Ops 6*, and this tone piece trailer really grabbed me. I only remember Milo Ventimiglia from *Heroes* (the TV show), but I look forward to seeing what they have his digital likeness doing in this year's game.



#7: Pragmata (PlayStation event)

<https://youtu.be/PdDVyBtYrUI>

Was I living under a rock? Did I cross over from a dimension where this upcoming Capcom game had never been announced? Did I simply forget about it somehow? It's on my radar now, thank goodness. It looks like we'll be accompanied by a young girl (robot?) whom we must protect, a la *Resident Evil 4*, *Ico*, or even *The Last of Us*. This looks good.



#8: Resonance - A Plague Tale Legacy (PS)

<https://youtu.be/lfssswW0qf4>

This doesn't remind me in the slightest of the two *A Plague Tale* games I played, but since I loved those games, I can't help but be hyped for *Resonance*, which is apparently a prequel centered around a different character. While mostly a mood piece with little to latch onto, the series alone is enough to get me hyped.

#9: Aphelion (Xbox event)

https://youtu.be/RZs_lthEb2s

Don't Nod's debut game, *Remember Me*, is among my favorites on the Xbox 360. I need to replay it some day and see if the sentiment still holds. They're better known for *Life is Strange* and its numbered sequel, but I was happy to see them switch things up again with *Vampyr* and last year's excellent *Banishers: Ghosts of New Eden*. This new game looks like just the kind of sci-fi adventure I enjoy, and it reminds me a little of *Deliver Us Mars*.

Showcase Favorites 10-15

#10: Cronos - The New Dawn (Xbox event)

<https://youtu.be/Pl0wmn0Ua4I>

Bloober Team's *Observer* was a good game (but not the Switch version, which looked as though the screen was hidden behind a layer of Vaseline), and I really enjoyed *The Medium*. They're known for those and other horror games, but it wasn't until last year's remake of *Silent Hill 2* that they broke through the usual middling reception and caught the attention of a larger market. The easy comparison here is *Dead Space*, and that makes me happy.

#11: Nioh 3 (PlayStation event)

<https://youtu.be/KXGm-JaxY54>

Originally known for the *Dead or Alive* and *Ninja Gaiden* (Xbox) games, Team Ninja took a Souls-like turn with *Nioh* (really good), *Nioh 2* (even better) and *Wo Long - Fallen Dynasty*. I enjoyed last year's diversion into open world territory, *Rise of the Ronin*, although for many gamers it seems to have come and gone with very little fanfare. To see they're returning to *Nioh* with a third entry warms my heart.

#12: High on Life 2 (Xbox event)

<https://youtu.be/UubdWlkj8Wc>

Rick & Morty survived after Justin Roiland's exit over allegations of misconduct, but it's tough for me to imagine what *High on Life 2* will be without his gross-out humor and his character portrayals that always seem like tentative improv. I'm sure Squanch Games has it all covered. I just hope this sequel can live up to the benchmark set by the first game.



#13: Beast of Reincarnation (Xbox event)

<https://youtu.be/L-qZiMPsNz0>

Wait, Game Freak? Where do I know that name? That's what went through my mind during this reveal at the Xbox showcase, but I probably wouldn't have needed to look it up if I was more of a *Pokémon* fan (I played the original *Pearl* on the Nintendo DS, and that's about all). I guess they're *not* exclusively a Nintendo developer. This looks nothing like a cute monster-catching cartoony RPG, but it *does* look pretty darned interesting.

#14: The Blood of Dawnwalker (PS event)

<https://youtu.be/DhCuMS4JiKQ>

Here's a brand-new RPG from a brand-new Warsaw-based studio, Rebel Wolves. Poland seems to be a hotbed for game development the past few years, as home to developers like CD Projekt Red (*Cyberpunk 2077*, *The Witcher*), Bloober Team (*The Medium*, *Silent Hill 2 Remake*), and Artifex Mundi (if you like stylized hidden object games). You can't tell much about the gameplay, but the vampire-focused story shown in cinematics is cool.

#15: Romeo is a Dead Man (PS event)

<https://youtu.be/nW1cE6sj6h8>

The art style in the cinematics is sure something, but the fidelity in the gameplay looks to be a big step up from prior Suda51 favorites like *Killer is Dead*, *Killer7*, *No More Heroes* (series), and *Lollipop Chainsaw*. I only needed to know this was from Grasshopper Manufacture to be fully on board with it.



Showcase Favorites 16-20

#16: *There Are No Ghosts at the Grand* (XB)

<https://youtu.be/u68h-Af1HiA>

It looks nothing like *Blue Prince*, yet that was the first thing that came to mind as the trailer went on. The second thing was that maybe it's a physics-y puzzle game, which would have given me two more points for my predictions. It's billed as a "spooky, cozy musical mystery" that has you going "room-to-room solving restoration puzzles" and that sounds great.



#17: *Stranger Than Heaven* (SGF)

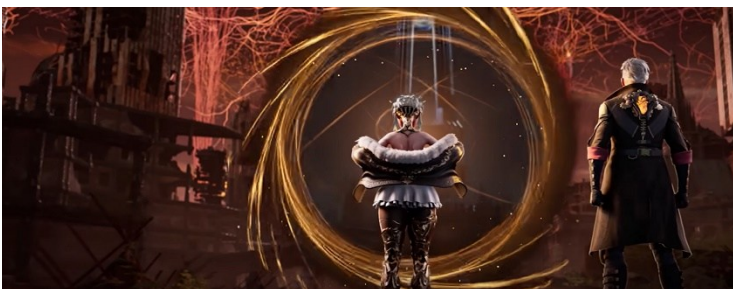
<https://youtu.be/5L3XVVzsmHE>

Apparently, this was originally announced as *Project Century* at the 2024 Game Awards, but I don't remember that at all. It's from Ryu Ga Gotoku, the studio behind *Yakuza* (now called *Like a Dragon*), *Judgment*, and others. I see a lot of asset reuse in those games, which somehow never feels cheap, but this has a style and presentation that either hides it well or introduces plenty of new stuff for its more historical setting. I'm looking forward to this.

#18: *Code Vein II* (SGF)

<https://youtu.be/mdD6dEhhges>

I enjoyed the first game's anime-styled take on the Souls-like genre. If we're getting more of that, then I look forward to playing this.



#19: *Bloodstained: The Scarlet Engagement*

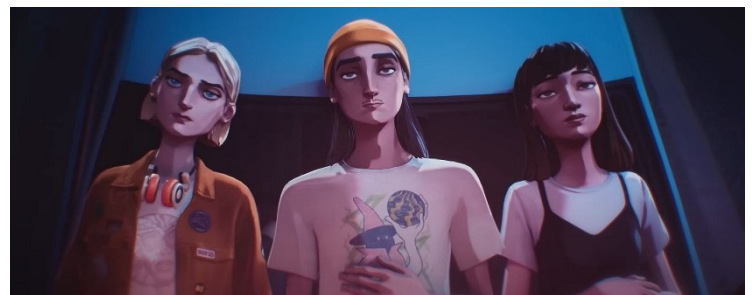
(PlayStation event) <https://youtu.be/-de45inSnWg>

Not every Kickstarter-funded spiritual successor can be considered a success (the *Mega Man* creator's *Mighty Number 9*, which I backed but barely played after launch, was an underwhelming one by most accounts), but *Bloodstained: Ritual of the Night* (which I backed, played and enjoyed) was really good. Its two retro-themed spin-offs, *Curse of the Moon 1 and 2*, are also supposed to be great. The visuals in this new entry seem greatly improved over that first game, and I'm of a mind that we can never have too many, especially when it involves Koji Igarashi, the guy who put the "vania" in "Metroidvania".

#20: *Mixtape* (SGF)

<https://youtu.be/F6TQF6eJa3Y>

When Annapurna Interactive publishes something, it's usually artsy, experimental, and worthwhile, with only the rare miss (at least in my opinion) like *Twelve Minutes*. Even though these characters don't remind me of me or my friends in the 80's, and I was already out of college by the mid-90's when this game is seemingly set, I'm here for the soundtrack, the story that's bound to be something special, and the general vibe of this game.



Each of these showcases gave me plenty to be excited about. I feel sad for those in the online audience who didn't see much of interest to them (a totally valid perspective if that's how you feel) because I was far from disappointed. In fact, read on for a few of my honorable mentions to wrap up this section.

Honorable Mentions

Narrowing down my favorite announcements and trailers was no easy task. I didn't even watch several of the other shows, like Day of the Devs, Future Games Summer Showcase, and the Wholesome Direct. These are a few more noteworthy games I have my eye on, and a bit on why they didn't end up in my Top 20.

The Expanse - Osiris Reborn

<https://youtu.be/mdD6dEhhges>

This was shown at the Future Games show, and I'm sad I missed it. I never read the books, but The Expanse ranks among the best sci-fi ever produced for television. I still need to play TellTale's take on this universe, but this upcoming action RPG looks a bit like Mass Effect. If the developers can even come close to the high bar set by the show, this has the makings of must-play for me. If I had watched and included games from this show in my Top 20 considerations, it would be near the top.



No Straight Roads 2

<https://youtu.be/lb4JAGF8Rz8>

Among other showcases I didn't catch, the Southeast Asian Games Showcase featured this announcement for *No Straight Roads 2*. I liked the first game and its musical focus on story and combat well enough, but it didn't wow me. Still, I'm interested in this sequel.

Wu-Tang - Rise of the Deceiver

https://youtu.be/xxavq_HXTmQ

After 25 years, the Wu-Tang Clan returns to video games with what looks to be a stylish action RPG with no release date as of yet.

Keeper

<https://youtu.be/AWAwVgTsFfk>

The only reason this newly announced Double Fine game didn't bump something else off my Top 20 is that I somehow forgot about it when I was putting the list together, and I'm too lazy to reorganize that section after finishing it. It looks weird and wild.



Mina the Hollower

<https://youtu.be/3KT4R9pu1Ew>

This game gets mentioned once in a while on podcasts I listen to, but I'd forgotten it was the next game from *Shovel Knight* developer Yacht Club Games. Now that I've seen this trailer, my NES-fueled nostalgia is in full effect.

Ill

https://youtu.be/apTtr_BSrOm

This first-person action horror game looks incredible. It's releasing through a publishing agreement with Mundfish, the makers of that game I just won't shut up about, *Atomic Heart*.

Sea of Remnants

<https://youtu.be/osyjYYhyLqo>

Puppet pirates? That could be fun. A title that, when combined with the seafaring theme, might make people think of *Sea of Thieves*? That could work for or against it. Releasing as a free-to-play game? Hmm...

End of Abyss

<https://youtu.be/eot8qV7CuTA>

Isometric shooter gameplay with *Little Nightmare* vibes could be interesting. I could see me playing it.

Out of Words

<https://youtu.be/HSzA43ZQJ3Q>

My son is my couch co-op partner, and this looks like something we'd both really enjoy.

Infinitesimals

<https://youtu.be/oZ3MpzLSSwl>

The name might be too clever for its own good, but this trailer shows a game I could really enjoy. It looks to be an action-adventure starring a little bug dude.

The Future Looks Bleak

Lately, I've started to recognize a growing number of contradictions in my own opinions about the video game industry, and about the ever-growing toxicity in certain discussions around it. Some of this will be a continuation (or an outright rehash) of my issue #2 opinion piece (or rant), [Room Enough for Everything](#).

The Rising Cost of Games

Not long after the Xbox event last Sunday, news came out that *The Outer Worlds 2* would be an \$80 game. Sure, Microsoft had already dropped that bomb a month earlier in saying their new first-party games would get a price hike later in the year, but the reality of it still shocked me. I'm sure it's going to be a fun and worthwhile experience, but is it *really* a good idea to do this?

Have the bean-counters in finance really decided that they'll make up for selling fewer copies by charging more for the ones they do sell? Would the smarter move not be to price it at, say, \$40 and sell more than double the number of copies? Do they not actually expect it to sell well regardless, since it'll be on GamePass anyway? Will any of that money go to the developers in the form of bonuses, or simply to the fat-cat shareholders?

When most people talk about game prices, they never factor in sales tax. Maybe you're lucky and you're getting your games tax-free, but if you're like me, 7.5% sales tax adds \$6 to the price tag, so I'm \$86 out of pocket, not \$80. That's within spitting distance of \$100, and it hasn't even been a full five years since publishers decided \$60 wasn't enough.

Does it end at \$80? At what point does the market for launch-day games just evaporate?

My inner conflict is varied and abundant. As I've gotten older and settled into my career, and even with rising prices on just about everything else, I won't go broke paying \$86 for a new game. Mentally, though, I have to check myself. Is this *worth it*? Shouldn't I just wait for a sale? But what happens if the physical run sells out before it gets cheaper? What happens if it flops because nobody bought it, and a talented studio gets gutted, never releasing new patches or follow-ups?

One of my pet peeves is the argument that game prices haven't kept up with inflation. Yeah? So what? Many people's wages haven't either, and money has a buying power that's immediately diluted when a price goes up, even if when "adjusted for inflation" it's on par with the previous price a decade or two ago.

At the same time, AAA development *has* gotten more expensive. It takes a bigger staff more time to make these games, when gamers are increasingly unsatisfied with anything other than flawless masterpieces.

More developers and higher salaries, over a longer period, means middling sales or a budget price tag won't be enough to keep the studio afloat for their next game. Yes, the end goal is still to enrich that company's investors, but it's not *entirely* that, when games do cost more money to make.



Rising Cost - Continued

It isn't just *The Outer Worlds 2*. Nintendo made the first move in pricing *Mario Kart World* at \$80. If the market accepts it, this is the new norm. AAA games, whether a given game is worth it or not (depending on your definition), are getting a price hike.

Being "worth it" has an easy counterpoint. Is it worth \$13 or more per movie ticket to see a show in a theater, when that's rarely more than a couple hours of entertainment and you have nothing to show for it afterwards but the memory of what you saw? For dollars per hour and given that you can keep a game for as long as the disc or cartridge lasts (or for as long as there's no server or licensing issues with your digital purchase), a new AAA game seems like a bargain by comparison. For a day out at a movie with just me and my three kids, with movie-priced snacks, it's not even close.



Granted, I'm somewhat of a hermit these days, but I wasn't always. Then again, movies weren't always \$13 or more per ticket (and they're much pricier in other cities). Still, it's another point where I'm conflicted.

This all leaves me with the feeling that I *shouldn't* be so against the rising cost of video games, yet I *am*. Even if I personify the "old man yelling at cloud" Simpsons meme, that's just how it is. If there's no pushback at all, and especially if the market just responds with enthusiastic acceptance like I've seen in some instances, why *wouldn't* publishers keep testing us like the proverbial frog in boiling water? It only stands to get worse.

We Demand Perfection

Another paradoxical topic for me recently has been the idea purported by some gamers that anything less than a masterpiece is garbage. In my rant from issue #2, I said this:

"What I don't get, though, is what satisfaction comes from poo-pooing any game that isn't a 90+ scoring Game of the Year contender."

And this:

"It's one thing to review a game and point out its strengths and weaknesses. It's another thing entirely to crack jokes at the mere mention of a game you never played..."

The cycle doesn't end. Just when the flippant negativity about one game dies down, there's always a new target for their hate and ire. This week, that game is *MindsEye*, from new studio Build a Rocket Boy, which was founded by ex-Rockstar North president Leslie Benzies.

Criticism about *MindsEye* ranges from calm and factual at one end, to jokes, trash talk and conspiracy theories about money laundering schemes at the other. The worst of it is the never-ending drive-by potshots aimed at any mention of the game, even if the mention is by one of the developers just happy it launched.



Perfection - Continued

My internal conflict here comes from recognizing that yes, *MindsEye* is far from perfect. At just three or four hours into it so far, I've seen plenty of asset pop-in, some questionable car physics, story beats that sometimes leave me wondering if I missed a key point earlier, and what seems to be an open world GTA-style game but isn't, since it lacks a city map, an in-car radio, quest-givers, and on-foot city exploration. My best guess is that they *meant* for it to be all that, but simply ran out of time, money, or both. As such, it doesn't seem unfinished to me; just finished in a different way. It certainly needs a few more months of polish, but I'm not finding it to be an unplayable mess on PS5 Pro like some people suggest.

Granted, my opinion could take a nosedive by the time it ends, but I *like* this game so far. The story is interesting, and it has the kind of janky charm I appreciate from games that punch above their weight like this. At the same time, if you remove the negative hyperbole and the mockery, the game's detractors aren't entirely wrong. Even if my enjoyment lasts until the end, it would be a tough game to recommend to anybody without my high tolerance for jank.



Image snipped from Alan's post from the prior page.

In prior years, much-maligned and mocked games like *Cyberpunk 2077* and *No Man's Sky* got a second chance and came through the other side with updates that redeemed them. Are we still in a gaming climate where that kind of turn-around is possible today? I'm highly skeptical.

Now, when a game underperforms, layoffs follow soon after. If a game flops outright, the developer shuts down entirely. What sickens me are the idiots out there who cheer for that.

MindsEye is an extreme example of this, because it's in a spotlight of its own making. If a game is coming out that looks like and is positioned to be a tide-me-over before the next *Grand Theft Auto*, and it's headed up by a guy who was the game director and dev lead on multiple *Grand Theft Auto* games, then you don't expect *this much* jank. As evidenced by the backlash, you don't really expect *any*.

It puts creatives in a tough spot. Is Build a Rocket Boy at fault for aiming too high, where something less ambitious might have been the better call? Have gamers simply become an insufferable, entitled mob that enjoys ganging up on whatever misfire suits their fancy? Have the few true masterpieces released over the past few years fostered an environment where there is no room for a game that launches with flaws?

Again, *MindsEye* is an extreme example, but it isn't uncommon to see similar storms of rabid negativity around games with far fewer (if any) problems, like *Dragon Age: The Veilguard*. Some gamers seem to have lost the ability to distinguish between a highly imperfect game that's still fun and worthwhile (as *MindsEye* seems to be, from my limited time with it so far) and \$0.99 eShop shovelware that's far more deserving of derision.

In summary, don't buy a game that isn't worth it to you, but don't be a clown about it.

Is The Industry Hosed?

Probably not the entire industry, but it's full of contradictions and not in a great place now.

Games cost more to make and investors want top dollar on investments, so let's raise the price of each copy sold. But wait; raising the price may drive more people away from those day-one purchases. Oh well; can't be helped.

It's risky to take chances on something new and inventive, so let's play it safe with sequels and known money-makers. But wait; gamers are getting bored of the same old thing.

There's money in live service games, and that constant revenue stream is a golden goose in the eyes of investors. But wait; the tide has turned, and gamers are just waiting with glee to see these games fail, almost willing it into existence before the game even launches.

Maybe we can make a game with fewer developers on a lower budget, straddling that AA line between indie and AAA. But wait; if we can't achieve Rockstar or Naughty Dog or Santa Monica Studio levels of quality, expect the game to be savaged on social media.

We might appeal to a market subset by being inclusive and respectful of different cultures, races, and gender identities. But wait; that market doesn't have the numbers to make our game a success, and the outlandish backlash brought on by so-called "influencers" is as much demoralizing to the team as it is damaging to our game's reputation.

At least podcasters and *some* influencers see the market turmoil, lamenting the constant layoffs and studio closures. But wait; those same people mock and guffaw at the same games the grifters do, as if they don't *really* care as much about the developers and the hard work put into those flawed games as it might have seemed at first.



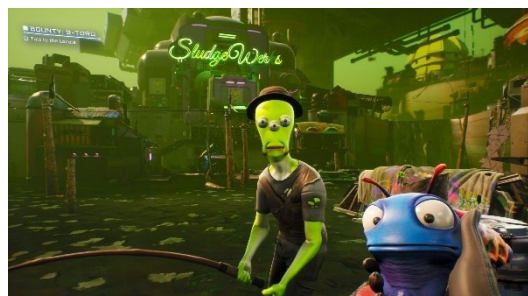
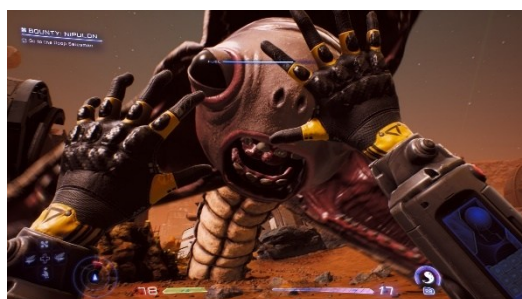
The biggest contradiction of all may be that games just keep on coming. This first half of June has been dedicated to announcements and new reveals about dozens upon dozens of upcoming titles that look amazing. With so many layoffs and studio closures, how can this be? Are things not really as dire as they seem? Sure, some may be cancelled. Some may launch, only to become the internet's next punching bag. Some may simply be forgotten about immediately, without even meriting the firestorm of hate their peers get. Some may do okay. Others may do well. Others still may win awards or even become somebody's favorite game of all time.

All the bad news points to *something* seismic happening in the industry. Mass layoffs and studio closures were occasional things a few years ago. Now it's weekly, if not daily.

It may be that AAA development has reached a point of unsustainability, and these recent new game announcements are the final optimistic gasp of an industry that can no longer breathe. It may be that the market shifts away from all but a few top-tier AAA releases and embraces lower budgets and quicker dev cycles.

It may just be a temporary hiccup that will work itself out once the anti-woke grifters and other miscellaneous clowns get bored and find something else to obsess over, no longer intent on making it their life's calling to destroy a game's reputation before it can even find an audience. This, though, is probably the least likely scenario of all.

Mini-Review: High on Life



I think you can enjoy *High on Life* even if you're not a big fan of Justin Roiland's particular humor (and the way he delivers it with stuttering uncertainty a la *Rick and Morty*) but you need to at least be able to tolerate it.

There's a lot of gross-out humor with seemingly no subject being off the table, but there's also plenty of truly funny, laugh-out-loud moments in *High on Life*. Gameplay and visually, it's a bit like *Borderlands* crossed with *Journey to the Savage Planet*. There's an organic feel to the first-person shooting and traversal, where everything plops and splatters and is a little floaty.

I enjoyed it, especially after new abilities help you boost and jump and get around in ways not available to you at first.

One achievement is glitched, but otherwise it's a great game.

Played on Xbox Series X with GamePass. Review originally posted on: 12/28/2022.

Mini-Review: A Plague Tale – Innocence



Probably flying under most people's radar, this 3rd-person action-adventure mixes stealth mechanics with environmental puzzle-solving and a great (if increasingly supernatural) story to create one of 2019's most memorable games.



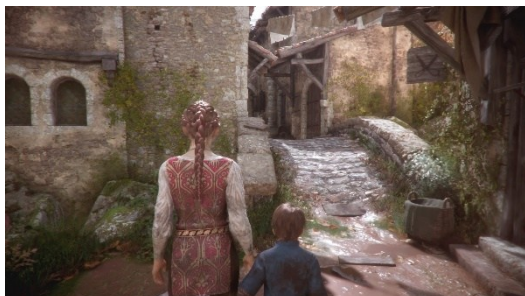
Light and shadows play a part and the game looks incredible on PS4 Pro with HDR and a 4k TV.



Graphically, it's no slouch on regular PS4 either. Enemies are the right amount of dumb to make stealth fun.



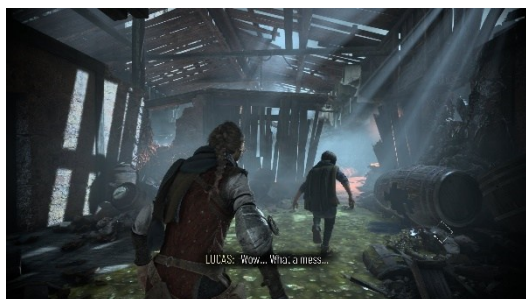
It's a journey through 14th-century France that packs suspense, surprise, and more than one emotional moment. Depending on your tolerance for rats, it might be a nightmare, but I highly recommend it.



Learning to fight back is super satisfying, and the final boss encounter... wow.



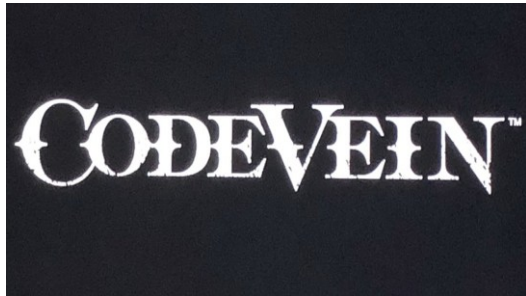
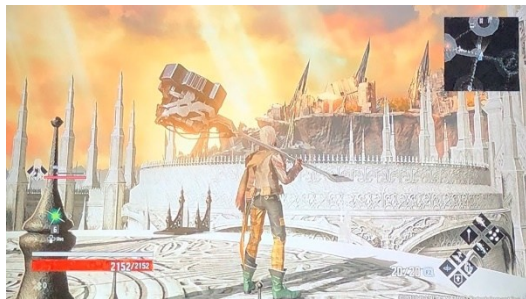
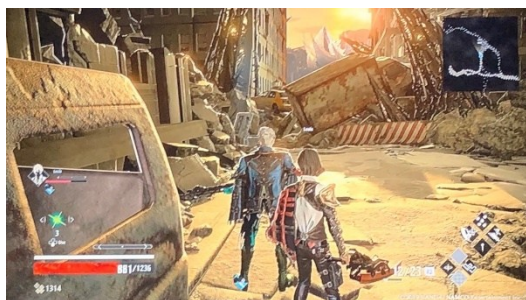
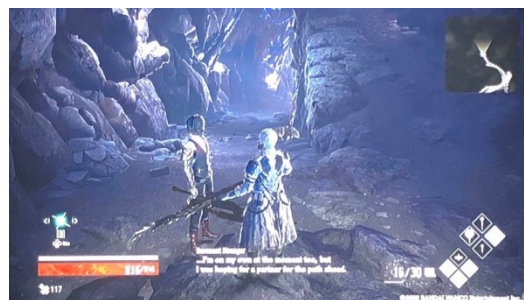
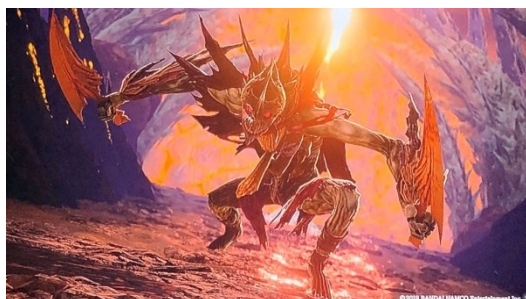
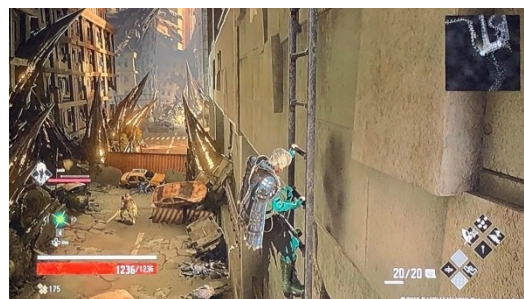
*Played on console: PS4 Pro.
Originally posted: 12/06/2019.*



I highly recommend it, if you can deal with swarms of rats.

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Mini-Review: Code Vein



It's fascinating how *Demons/Dark Souls* have inspired a "Souls-like" sub-genre of third-person action RPGs. *Code Vein* follows the formula almost entirely, but with a more forgiving weapon and character upgrade system that helps you avoid a bad build.

I've seen it noted that the game is easier than the FromSoft games that inspired it (*Bloodborne*, *Dark Souls*, or even others of this style), and I agree. It's challenging, but only one or two bosses took more than a couple attempts to beat. Your AI partner helps a lot in combat.

It also differs in its storytelling; specifically, that it actually has one.

I really enjoyed *Code Vein*: the combat, the dangerous world, the anime-inspired post-apocalyptic setting, the cosmetic and gameplay character upgrades, the Souls-like systems, an AI partner - all of it.

Played on console: PS4.

Originally posted: 10/18/2019.

Mini-Review: Call of Duty – Black Ops 6



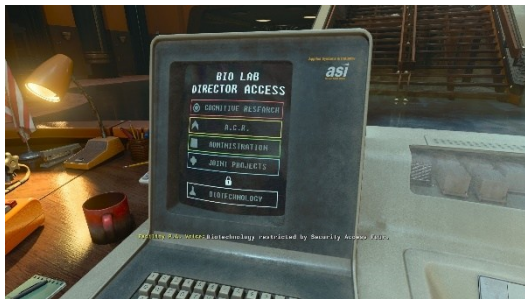
I only ever played the original Modern Warfare (COD4) and Advanced Warfare. As a result, I not only lack a lot of context about the story and characters in BO6, but I'm out of touch with how the series has evolved. This might be why it feels like such a leap forward to me.



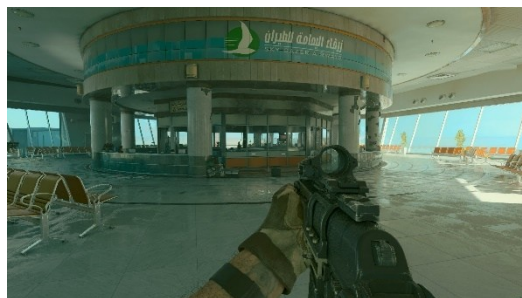
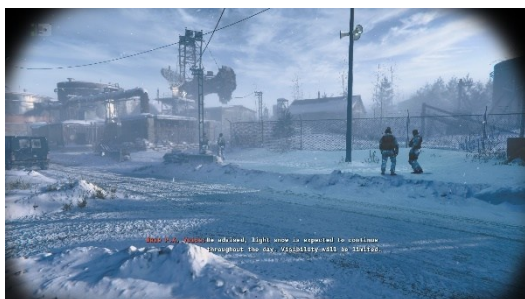
I wouldn't have predicted, a year ago, that a Call of Duty would be among my favorites of 2024, yet it is.



You get big battles, lots of guns and military dudes, sure, but there is so much more here. Some sections feel like Hitman, with multiple objectives and approaches.

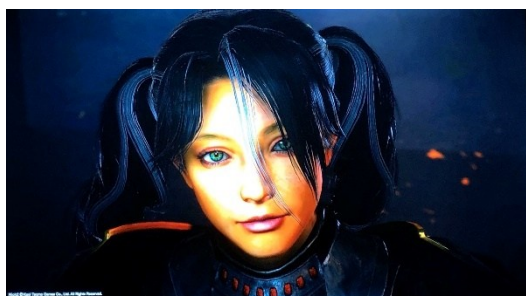
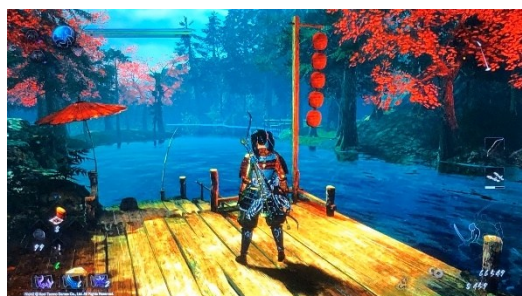
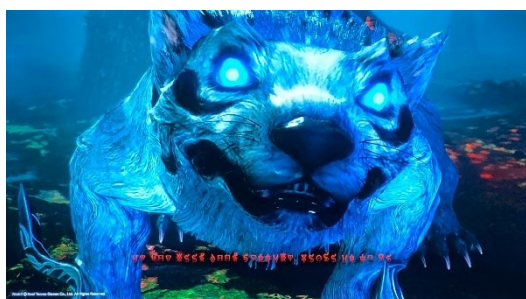


It has stealth, trippy parts, horror, a heist, twists in an interesting story, puzzles, an upgrade economy, one-off gameplay systems, and great characters. I'm still in a buzz over just how great this campaign is.



Played on Xbox Series X with GamePass. Posted 01/14/2025.

Mini-Review: Nioh 2



It's *Dark Souls* with a mission-based structure from *Ninja Gaiden* developer Team Ninja. So much combat variety and upgrade options means it's brutal early on but gets easier as you power up and level up.

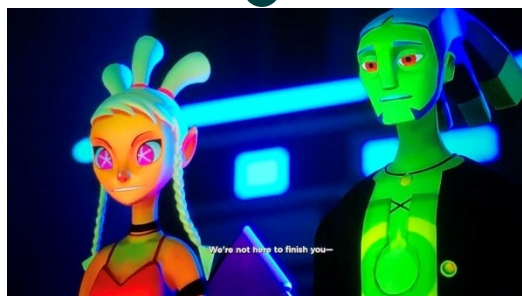
A very robust character creator lets you make anybody. The online mode lets you summon players as AI from blue "graves" or even summon up to 2 real players to join. This helps a lot, and I'm still joining others to help against some of my favorite levels and bosses. No chat; just emotes and action.

Combat is fast, fun, and dangerous. I usually make "me" in games but went a different direction in *Nioh 2*. She's a monster-slaying legend. Anyway, I liked the first game ok, but hadn't even been hyped for the sequel. I'm so glad I played! The story is interesting too.

If this is in your wheelhouse, don't miss out. It's great!

Played on console: PS4 Pro.
Originally posted: 04/08/2020.

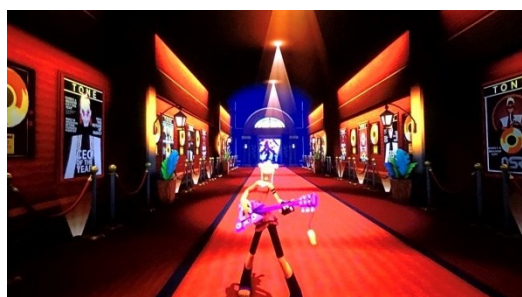
Mini-Review: No Straight Roads



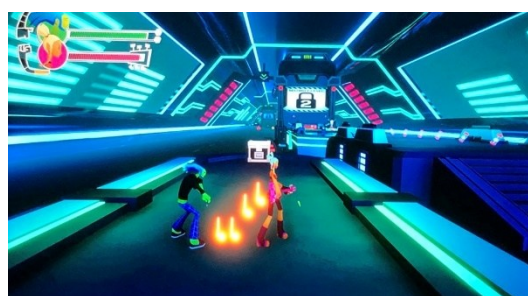
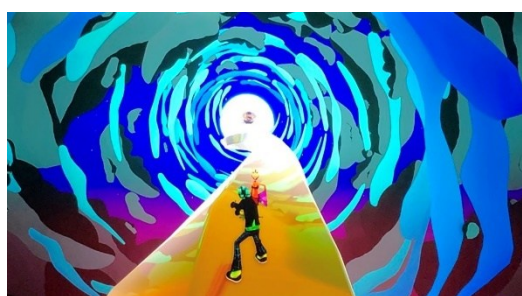
Often when I play a game I'm interested in but not super hyped for, I end up loving it; something about the expectations, I guess.



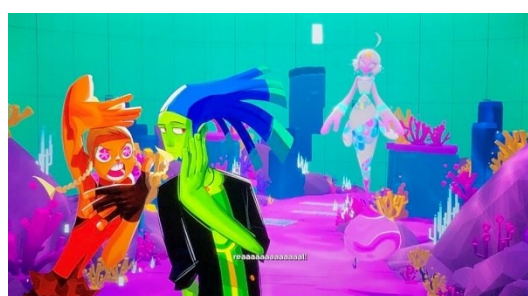
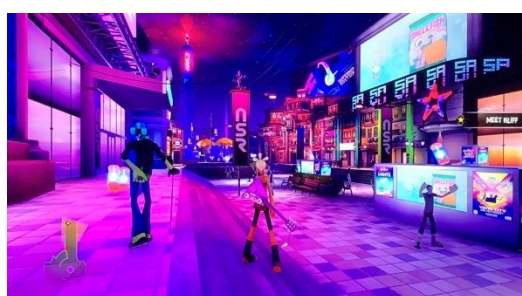
In the case of *No Straight Roads*... it's fine. It's definitely fun. It's a 3rd-person action game that can be played in same-screen co-op or solo with character switching.



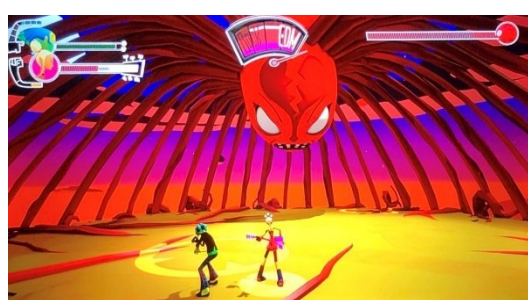
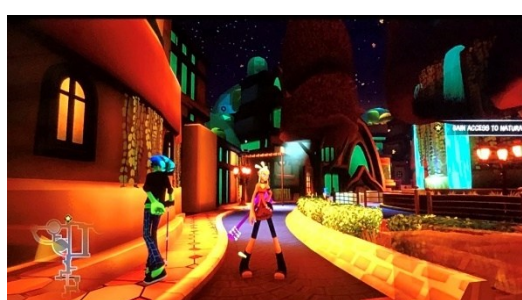
It's about two rockers in a city ruled by electronic dance music (EDM). It's cartoony and surprisingly wholesome (E10+ on ESRB) with a good, if simple story to tell.



It's also pretty forgiving difficulty-wise since infinite continues upon losing (for a lower rating) keep you moving ahead. There are harder modes, but I never felt like I mastered the combat on normal. Granted, I haven't been great at an action game like this since the *DmC* reboot last gen.



Anyway, it's fine. And fun.



Played on console: PS4.
Originally posted: 09/03/2020.

Final Stage

Believe it or not, I'm not *trying* to make every issue longer than the last one. This week, I had plenty to write about the summer game showcases, then got carried away with my thoughts on *MindsEye*, the criticism it's getting, and my worries for the future of AAA. Then I couldn't decide which mini-reviews to include (knowing that I wanted them to be games with recently announced sequels), so I went with more than the usual two or three.



I'm gathering mini-interviews (sort of like I did for the [Other Podcasts](#) section of issue #4) for a feature I'm planning for a future issue about Interactive Fiction. If it all comes together, that should be the focus of the next issue, but if it doesn't, I'll swap it out for any of the many other topics I've been mulling over.

Interactive Fiction (also known as "text adventures") is all about stories; sometimes puzzles too, especially the older classic stuff. Unlike video games, the barrier to entry for writing interactive fiction is much lower, with newer tools that make it possible without any real programming required.

I'm a fan of the more traditional stuff. I've written a few text-based games that range from clunky and unplayable in my early attempts in the late 1980's into the 1990's, to award-winning by the time other things finally took me away from it in the late 2000's.

It's a far-reaching topic, though. Don't expect an exhaustive deep dive into every aspect. My goals are to (1) share my own experiences, as I did in the issues about game collecting and podcasting, (2) touch on a few aspects that may be interesting to readers who aren't already familiar, and (3) try not to bore you.

End Credits

Some of the information about games announced at various summer showcases was found at:

Xbox Wire: <https://news.xbox.com/en-us/2025/06/08/xbox-games-showcase-2025-recap-everything-announced/>

PlayStation Blog: <https://blog.playstation.com/2025/06/04/state-of-play-june-2025-all-announcements-trailers/>

Polygon: <https://www.polygon.com/gaming/604574/summer-games-fest-2025-news-announcements-trailers>

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