



THE VIDEO GAME GENERATIONS NEWSLETTER

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Issue #12 – July 26, 2025

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Loading Screen

The feature topic this week is one of many I've been mulling over for the newsletter. I'm writing about my favorite first-person puzzle games, particularly ones that involve physics or manipulating the state of the environment. I use the term "*Portal*-like" throughout this article and the many mini-reviews I've included, probably to the point where readers will tire of it.



Correction: I'm not just writing about my favorites. I'm writing about every game in this genre that I've ever played (unless I've somehow forgotten any or miscategorized them as *not Portal*-like).

First though, some recent events (which somehow includes one of my rants) and a new (possibly non-recurring) "behind the scenes" section. Let's go!

Recent Events

Layoffs Never End

Working in game development seems like a bloodbath these days. Per their post on social media, Supermassive Games is joining the list of developers who have made sizable cuts to their workforce over the past couple of years.

The announcement says they anticipate up to 36 employees being let go, which seems to be around 10% of their staff.

Supermassive is the studio behind *Until Dawn*, *The Quarry*, all the *Dark Pictures Anthology* games, and the upcoming games *Little Nightmares III* and *Directive 8020*.

Source:

<https://x.com/SuperMGames/status/1947650822768132211>

Clive Barker's Hellraiser – Revival

There's a trailer for a new single-player horror action game set in the *Hellraiser* movie universe. I've never been a huge fan of the movies (horror isn't typically my go-to when it comes to movies), but this looks... interesting, and with modern *Doom* levels of gore.

It's getting three different expensive collector's editions, although I didn't see any news about a standard physical release. Since the game comes with those special editions, it stands to reason that it will be up to pre-order from retailers soon.

Tracy would have loved this. Unlike me, she was a big fan of the *Hellraiser* movies.

Sources:

<https://boss-team-games-store.myshopify.com/collections/all>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R88QdIlIg-E> (NSFW)

<https://x.com/Wario64/status/1947632557819858974>



Clive Barker's Hellraiser:
Revival - Cenobite Collector's
Edition with Game
\$199.99 USD



Clive Barker's Hellraiser:
Revival - Genesis Collector's
Edition with Game
\$129.99 USD



Clive Barker's Hellraiser:
Revival - Leviathan Collector's
Edition with Game
\$249.99 USD

The Outer Worlds 2 Gets a Price Reduction

With luck, Microsoft's decision to release the upcoming Obsidian-developed RPG sequel *The Outer Worlds 2* at \$70 instead of the previously announced \$80 is a good sign of things to come. I find myself leaning more on GamePass for their first-party games, though.

I bought several GamePass Ultimate codes a couple years ago when they were on sale (and before the tiers got more expensive and more complicated), so I tend to redeem one when there are several games to play all at once. I haven't made the most of my most recent redemption, though, being only halfway through *South of Midnight* due to other distractions, with my month set to expire in a few days, but I digress.

As of writing this, the pre-order for PS5 is still priced at \$80 at every online retailer I've checked, but presumably that will change.

Their post about it on Twitter is getting the usual hit-and-run jokers posting "drop it another \$20" and "still not worth it" and "not for this woke BS", but this feels like a good thing to me. Whether it was because Microsoft truly "listened" or simply reacted to a dismal pre-order response (which is a form of "listening" I suppose) is anybody's guess.

I just don't think the market (and certainly not me personally) is ready for an \$80 standard on new games. A few games may be able to get away with that, but I can see too much pushback against it for most games.

I think *The Outer Worlds 2* could be great, but I'm skeptical that people passing on it because it was \$80 will give it a go now at \$70. I never cheered for the \$70 price hike either, but some of these clowns act as if they've already played it. In reality, their minds were already made up and the price is arbitrary.

Source:

<https://x.com/OuterWorlds/status/1948020672502137257>

Behind the Scenes

Do any of you keep a log or list of the games you play? I started doing that back in 2006. Games I can remember playing in the decades prior are just grouped and listed by console before the detailed list starts.



Each game gets an entry stating what platform I played on, a note if I played it as a digital download, the date I started, the date I finished, a note about the difficulty setting I chose (unless I played on Normal), a note about getting all trophies or achievements (unless I didn't), a note about which endings I reached (unless different endings aren't important to the game), and who I played the game with (in the case of co-op games).

This should be in a spreadsheet with columns or fields for all those things. Instead, it's just a plain text file. It comes in handy often, when I've put together my top 10 games list for a calendar year, when I needed to remember how long ago I played a certain game, or as is the case with this week's feature topic, just being able to refer back to all the games I've played to remember the ones that qualify.



Here are the most recent few entries. You'll notice that I'm still playing *South of Midnight* as I write this, which ordinarily wouldn't have taken me so long, but I distracted myself with a couple other games, and I've spent a lot of time writing for this newsletter instead.

Like a Dragon - Pirate Yakuza in Hawaii (PS5)

Started: 02/22/2025

Finished: 03/05/2025 - All trophies

Split Fiction (PS5)

Started: 03/06/2025 - With Heath

Finished: 03/08/2025 - All trophies

Folklore (PS3)

Started: 03/06/2025

Finished: 03/23/2025

Assassin's Creed - Shadows (PS5)

Started: 03/23/2025

Finished: 04/12/2025 - All trophies

Blue Prince (PS5 / Digital)

Started: 04/12/2025

Finished: 04/13/2025

Atomfall (PS5)

Started: 04/13/2025

Finished: 04/20/2025 - All trophies

Eternal Threads (PS5 / Digital)

Started: 04/21/2025

Finished: 04/23/2025 - All trophies

Fear of BIOSEC (PS5 / Digital)

Started: 04/23/2025

Finished: 04/23/2025 - Short - Platinum is glitched

Cat's Request (PS5 / Digital)

Started: 04/23/2025

Finished: 04/24/2025 - All trophies

Clair Obscur - Expedition 33 (PS5)

Started: 04/24/2025

Finished: 05/03/2025 - Main story

Finished: 05/05/2025 - All trophies

The Hundred Line - Last Defense Academy (Switch)

Started: 05/05/2025

Finished: 06/08/2025 - 66 of 100 endings (includes true ending 55)

MindsEye (PS5)

Started: 06/10/2025

Finished: 06/15/2025 - All trophies

Alone in the Dark (PS5 / Digital / 2024)

Started: 06/15/2025

Finished: 06/26/2025 - as Edward Carnby

Death Stranding 2 - On the Beach (PS5)

Started: 06/26/2025

Finished: 07/09/2025

South of Midnight (Xbox Series X / Digital / GamePass)

Started: 07/10/2025

Finished:

Night Trap - 25th Anniversary Edition (PS5 / Digital)

Started: 07/12/2025

Finished: 07/12/2025 - Didn't finish. Just played some.

Viewfinder (PS5 / Digital)

Started: 07/18/2025

Finished: 07/19/2025 - All trophies

Portals, Puzzles, and Perspectives

With my **trusty** game play log at the ready, I've identified 25 games that (seemingly) take inspiration from *Portal* or are themselves *Portal* (or *Portal 2*). This is one of my favorite genres. I've taken to calling them "*Portal*-like" because "first-person puzzle games with some central puzzle mechanic often involving physics or manipulating the world that focus on themes of exploration and escape" is too difficult to remember and write in a sentence.

Some of these games stretch the definition and might be considered *Portal*-adjacent rather than *Portal*-like. For instance, *The Witness* feels in some ways *Myst*-like more than *Portal*-like, especially in its world design and its central mechanic of solving line-based puzzles rather than physics. *XING* (which I suspect is relatively unknown) also straddles the line, but like *The Witness*, I think it fits.

I'm also including games like *Re:Touring*, which has a central mechanic more like *The Witness* where you're solving logic puzzles, but it does capture the vibe of progressing through a series of puzzle/test rooms, and it feels very *Portal*-inspired. It also has some elements that involve platforming and physics, so I feel like it counts.

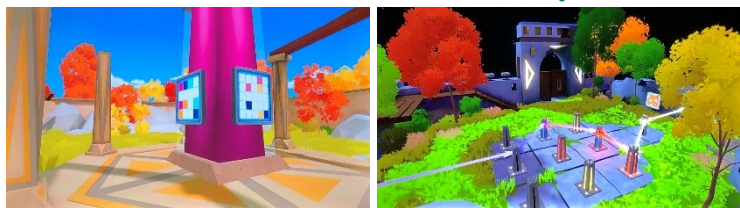
I very nearly included *Tempus: Level Escape*, which is a good game and maybe *Portal*-like, but there isn't really a central mechanic, and it could just as easily go into the *Myst*-like category. *The Unfinished Swan* is another example that didn't make the list, because it feels less *Portal*-like in its world construction and puzzle design. These were tough calls.

What I may do, though, is feature *Myst*-like games in a future issue. There are a few I still have on my backlog to play first, but I think that would make for a fun topic too.

1. **I am going** to try ranking these, which I have typically avoided when listing games in prior issues. This doesn't mean assigning a score, because I'd probably give high scores to most of them anyway.
2. **I will include** the Metacritic score for each game, though, if there is one.
3. **The games** will be listed in reverse order, from my least favorite to my most favorite. Just bear in mind that I enjoyed and recommend nearly all of them, so appearing low on the list doesn't mean much.
4. **I'll include** a link to a full no-commentary playthrough for each game on YouTube. Surprisingly, they each have at least one.
5. **There's nothing** scientific or methodical about my rankings. I just looked at my list, thought briefly on whether I enjoyed one game more than another and would recommend one game more than another, and sorted them accordingly.
6. **I wrote** mini-reviews upon playing many of these, which I'll include later in the issue. That means I probably don't need to write much more about each game mentioned. The older games aren't reviewed, but I think a sentence or two for each should suffice.
7. **Those** mini-reviews appear after this main feature and are in chronological order by the date I played them, mainly because I often mention and reference other games in the genre, so having them in order made sense.
8. **Games I haven't** played myself aren't included. For instance, *Esper* seems interesting, but it's VR only. *Antichamber* looks cool, but it isn't on consoles.
9. **Only first-person** puzzle games are included; no walking sims with limited or no puzzles, adventure games, or puzzle games from a third-person or top-down perspective.

Top 25: Part 1

#25: The Pillar – Puzzle Escape



It's like a colorful, scaled-down *The Witness*, with logic/tile puzzles being the main focus.

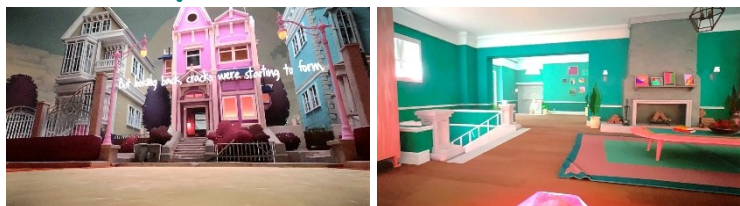
Metacritic: 72

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/the-pillar/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wzp4Wd7jnSY>

#24: Maquette



To this day, I don't know why I didn't enjoy Maquette as much as I thought I would.

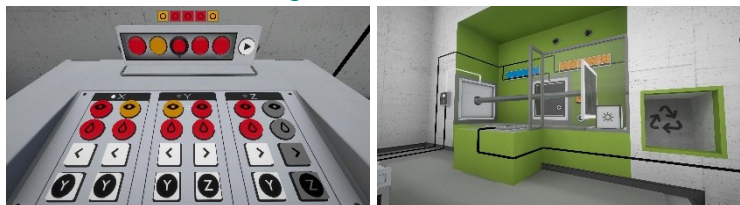
Metacritic: 70

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/maquette/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6N3NHBULDng>

#23: Re:Touring



It's a game that lacks a Metacritic score, but the one review listed has it at an 80. Its core puzzle mechanic is a bit like *boolean* and *if/then/else* logic in computer programming.

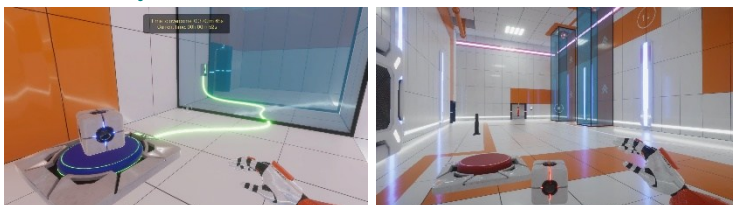
Metacritic: N/A

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/retouring/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqD9T4xWC3k>

#22: System of Souls



No Metacritic score, but it has a 70 from the two reviewers listed. This one borrows a lot from the vibe and even the look of *Portal*.

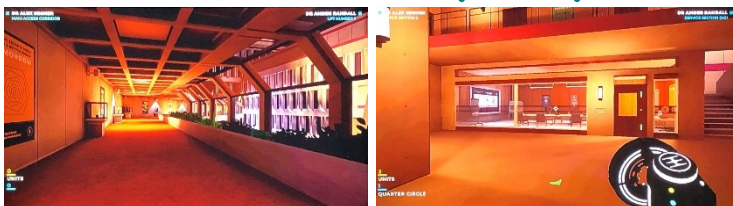
Metacritic: N/A

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/system-of-souls/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DbC5MSLRNys>

#21: The Bradwell Conspiracy



My opinion on this sits somewhere between the Metacritic user score of 80 and the official critic score of 55. My main complaint is only that it ran poorly on Nintendo Switch.

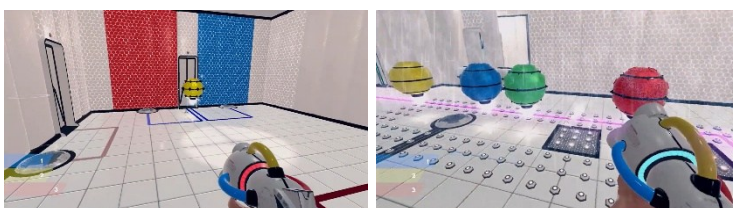
Metacritic: 55

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/the-bradwell-conspiracy/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aBQOkkTgRug>

#20: ChromaGun



Another game that takes heavy inspiration from the look and vibe of the original *Portal*. Change wall colors to attract puzzle orbs to provide or cut power to various devices.

Metacritic: 69

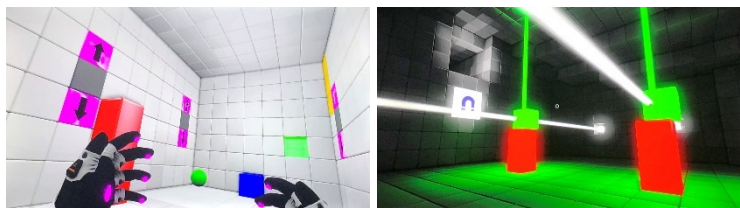
<https://www.metacritic.com/game/chromagun/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z9b8cKff0ig>

Top 25: Part 2

#19: Q.U.B.E. – Director’s Cut



Q.U.B.E. was one of the earliest *Portal*-likes, and a good game for the time. It speaks to the quality of higher entries that this is only #19.

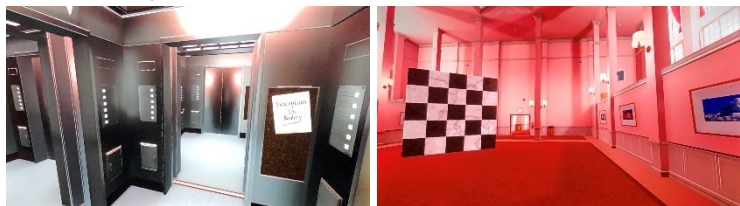
Metacritic: 76

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/qube-directors-cut/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yshcd3DcwY4>

#18: Superliminal



Perspective is reality; so says *Superliminal*. It's great, but hard to explain in one sentence.

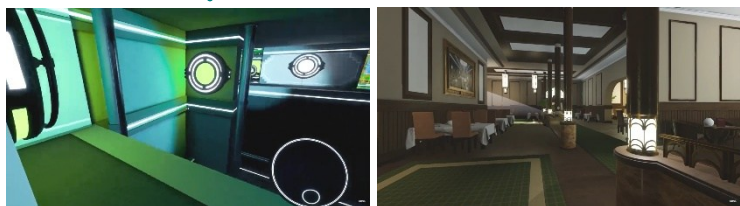
Metacritic: 74

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/superliminal/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZeEWTvdmXoE>

#17: The Spectrum Retreat



Critics liked this a lot more (at a score of 67, so “like” may be subjective) than users did (at a dismal score of 34). I thought it was good.

Metacritic: 67

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/the-spectrum-retreat/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ClRhTEKAOlg>

#16: The Sojourn



Puzzles, platforming, and a central mechanic that involves shifting between dark and light worlds. Light on story, but heavy on gameplay.

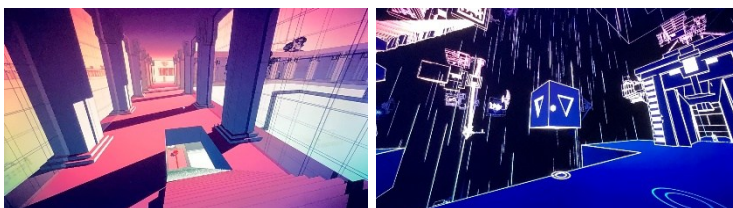
Metacritic: 71

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/the-sojourn/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jTJH3PhstJM>

#15: Manifold Garden



A highly-rated mind-bending adventure that looks nothing like *Portal* but nonetheless fits the bill as *Portal*-adjacent. It's really good, and it probably deserves a higher spot on my list.

Metacritic: 85

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/manifold-garden/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GWoRHZ-Ri7c>

#14: XING – The Land Beyond



I'm surprised that this well-crafted, visually appealing entry in the first-person puzzle genre doesn't have a Metacritic score, but the average user review is a 79. I enjoyed it a lot.

Metacritic: N/A

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/xing-the-land-beyond/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51KgKcMlylM>

Top 25: Part 3

#13: Pneuma – Breath of Life



Memorable for British voice actor Jay Britton's nearly endless stream-of-consciousness self-reflection, narrated through the entire game.

Metacritic: 63

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/pneuma-breath-of-life/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LL3PN4WDgw>

#12: Faraday Protocol



An interesting bronze and gold retro-future aesthetic and energy-based puzzle mechanic.

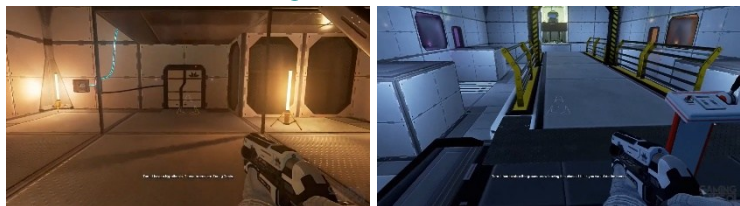
Metacritic: 70

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/faraday-protocol/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=boqtj5LV88E>

#11: The Turing Test



Featuring an energy gun, magnets, batteries, drones, and an interesting story. It's among the earliest of the *Portal*-likes that I played.

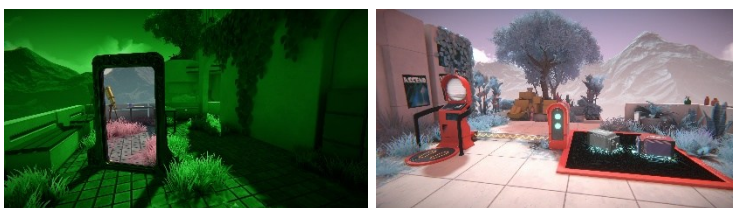
Metacritic: 74

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/the-turing-test/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-mfQoF-0vJI>

#10: Viewfinder



I *should* have recency bias, since I played through this mere days ago. I really enjoyed it, and the core mechanic of changing the world by placing photographs is incredibly inventive.

Metacritic: 84

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/viewfinder/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltVA80VPNM5>

#9: Quantum Conundrum



Created by Kim Swift (who created *Portal*) and voiced by John de Lancie (he was "Q" on *Star Trek: TNG*), puzzles involve shifting to different dimensions that alter the physics of the world.

Metacritic: 77

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/quantum-conundrum/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OjKDBixx9D4>

#8: The Talos Principle – Deluxe Ed.



My only justification in placing this masterful, excellent example of the genre down at #8 on the list is that it has an even better sequel.

Metacritic: 88

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/the-talos-principle-deluxe-edition/>

Full Playthrough:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhqyPUZ_tMA

Top 25: Part 4

#7: QUBE 2



Better than the original Q.U.B.E. in every way. The 76 on Metacritic feels way too low to me.

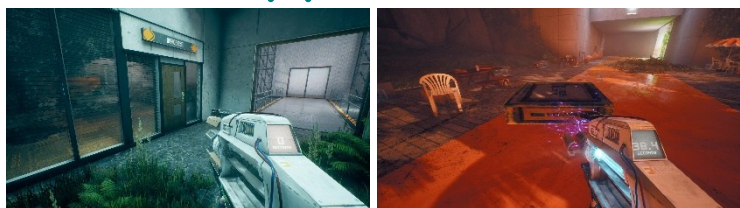
Metacritic: 76

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/qube-2/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hd9PfeLIU64>

#6: The Entropy Centre



A more recent *Portal*-like that introduces a unique time-rewinding puzzle mechanic. The story is good, and the puzzles are great.

Metacritic: 80

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/the-entropy-centre/>

Full Playthrough:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMxY_CtjnsM

#5: Portal – Still Alive



The original *Portal* had to be in the top 5. It set the standard and remains a top-tier entry in the genre. I played it in the *Orange Box*.

Metacritic: 90

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/portal-still-alive/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wA82CD9YFG0>

#4: Relicta



With a core puzzle mechanic involving gravity and magnetism, it's a lengthy game that gets more and more challenging as it goes.

Metacritic: 74

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/relicta/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJxSCxrNVr0>

#3: The Witness



A phenomenal and lengthy game that takes its central line-puzzle mechanic in many great and inventive directions. It's a masterpiece. My son just finished it too, and he loved it.

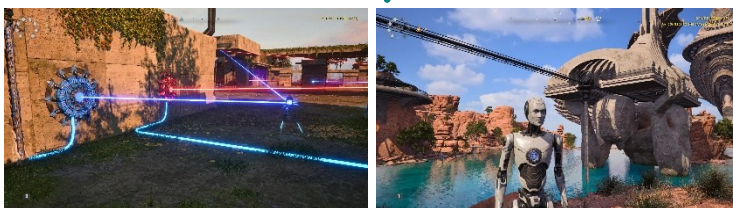
Metacritic: 87

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/the-witness/>

Full Playthrough:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWj_IVHEXpw

#2: The Talos Principle II



Outstanding in every way, it's another lengthy masterpiece that expands on the first game's story and introduces a great cast of robotic characters. Great story. Excellent puzzles.

Metacritic: 88

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/the-talos-principle-2/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJqR-SPTmFQ>

Top 25: Part 5

#1: Portal 2



There was never any doubt that *Portal 2* would be at the top of my list. What's surprising, though, is that *you can't play it on PS4 or PS5!* It's as if Valve decided they just didn't need any more money.

As consoles go, it's Xbox to the rescue, since it's available digitally and it's backwards-compatible on Xbox One and Series X and S.

The *Companion Collection* (*Portal 1* and *2*) is available on Nintendo Switch, with a Metacritic score of 95 (the same as the original release of *Portal 2*), so that may be a great version to consider as well.

Of course, it's also available on Steam (Valve's digital store) for PC, Mac and Linux.

Metacritic: 95

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/portal-2/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aySPmEBzLS4>

What's so great about *Portal 2*, you may ask?

The voice acting. Stephen Merchant as the robotic core Wheatley, Ellen McLain as evil mastermind computer GLaDOS, and J. K. Simmons as the disembodied voice of Aperture Science founder Cave Johnson.

The humor. Its funny moments are truly funny, from Wheatley's eccentric personality, to GLaDOS in her "alternate" form, to Cave Johnson describing failed Aperture Science experiments. The comedy translates into some gameplay moments as well, making for an experience that never gets boring.

The story. I won't go into it, but it carries the whole experience, and again, it's never boring.

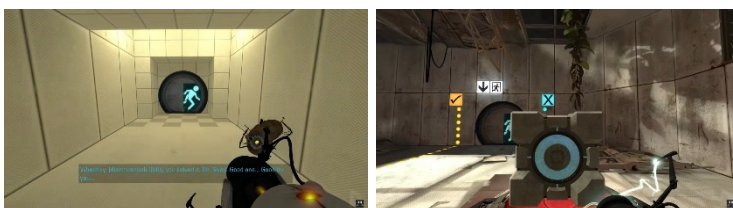
The sense of place. The atmosphere of just *being in* this enormous testing facility is cool.

The puzzles. While "portals" are still at the core of it, the addition of gels that make you run fast, bounce, or create portal-able surfaces, hard-light bridges that have clever uses beyond just being walkways, and gravity "excursion" funnels all combine for some inventive and clever puzzle combinations.

The innovation. Many of the puzzle elements (even including pressure plates on the floor, doors that require power, bounce springs, and big cubes), which are standard in other first-person puzzle games now, all started here.

The co-op. It has a separate two-player mode that's so good, I played through it three times.

Portal 2 is absolutely the best in its own genre.



That's a wrap for my top 25 rankings. Next up are my mini-reviews for most of them. Notably absent are reviews for *Quantum Conundrum*, *Portal 2*, and *Portal*, because I played those before I started reviewing games and doing deep dives about each of them on the [Video Game Generations Podcast](#) in 2014, and way before I started posting my short game reviews to social media. I've said plenty about *Portal 2* here, though, so the absence of a mini-review for it shouldn't matter much.

My reviews of *The Talos Principle*, *Pneuma: Breath of Life*, *The Witness*, and *The Turing Test* can be heard in their entirety on old episodes of the podcast, but I've included brief excerpts for each one. *ChromaGun* and *The Spectrum Retreat* were just one-post top-level thoughts from back when I was still calling them "capsule" reviews. All six of those games are up next, collected together in a set. All the mini-reviews are in chronologic order by the date I played each game.

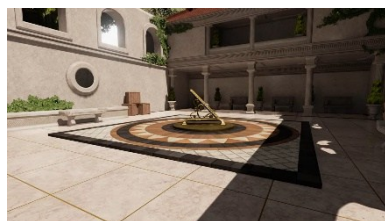
Six Little Capsule Reviews

The Talos Principle *Played on console: PS4. Originally discussed on the VGG Podcast (episodes 67 & 68).*



“Basically, it’s a bunch of environmental puzzles. If you think something like *Portal*, or *Portal 2*, or *Quantum Conundrum*, how those sort of had physics and environment-based puzzles. Well, that’s kind of what this is.” – 41:34 mark on the VGGP [episode 67](#).

Pneuma – Breath of Life *Played on: Xbox One. Originally reviewed on the VGG Podcast (episode 78).*



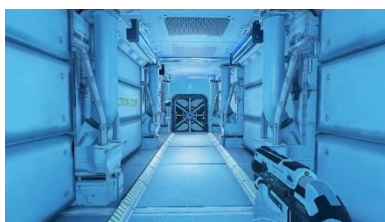
“...a little bit philosophical in nature... I really got into it... It’s really short... maybe three hours... If you like puzzles... where you have to think... I would recommend this game.” – Review starts at the 37:29 mark on the VGG Podcast [episode 78](#).

The Witness *Played on console: PS4. Originally discussed on the VGG Podcast (episodes 82, 83, & 85).*



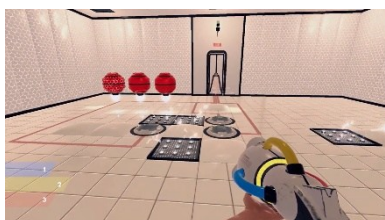
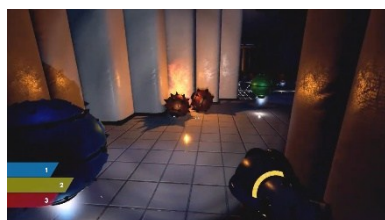
“*The Witness* got its hooks in me... It was made by Jonathan Blow, who made *Braid*... You’re on this big, colorful island... It’s a very big game... The closest comparison would be... *Portal*.” – Excerpts from the VGG Podcast [episode 82](#) starting at the 32:50 mark.

The Turing Test *Played on console: PS4. Originally reviewed on the VGG Podcast (episode 138).*



“I guess you’d call it an environmental puzzle game... where you go through areas or rooms, where there are these physics-based puzzles that you have to solve in order to reach the exit to the next area.” – Review starts around 36:27 on VGGP [episode 138](#).

ChromaGun *Played on console: Switch. Originally posted to social media on: 03/28/2018.*



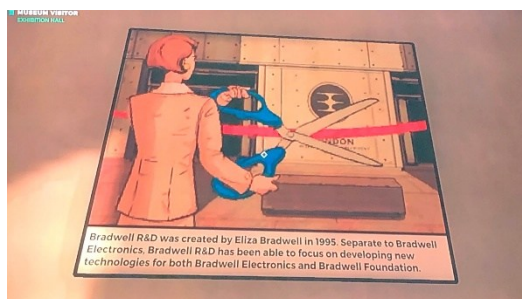
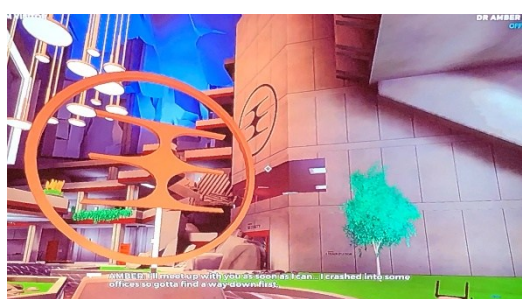
“More *Portal*-inspired than any other *Portal*-inspired game I’ve played, with a Cave Johnson-esque disembodied voice rather than GladOS. Color/droid puzzle mechanic[s] used in fun ways. Enjoyable, challenging but fair. I liked it a lot. Recommended.”

The Spectrum Retreat *Played on console: Switch. Originally posted to social media on: 09/23/2018.*



“First person puzzle game (ala *Portal*, *ChromaGun*, etc). Not quite as good as some others in the genre, but still fun and challenging. The main mechanic is swapping colors to pass through matching doors, but [it] adds new twists [later]. I enjoyed it.”

Mini-Review: The Bradwell Conspiracy



First-person exploration puzzle game (ala *Portal*, *Talos Principle*, *Turing Test*, *Quantum Conundrum* etc). Not as clever and not nearly as polished as the best in the genre, but it's not bad.

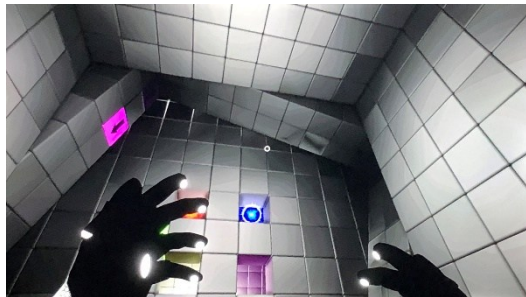
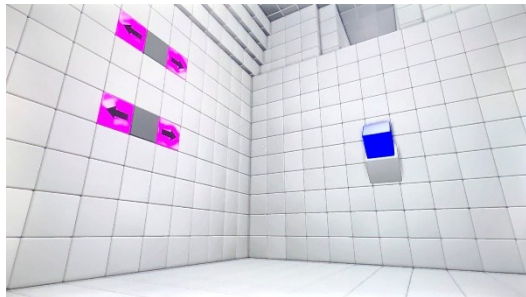
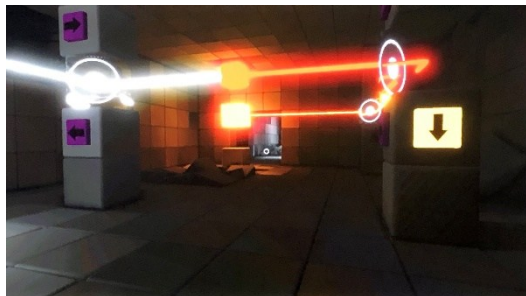
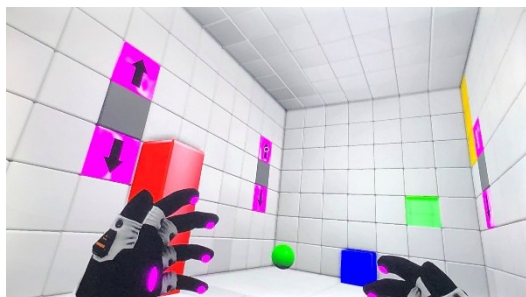
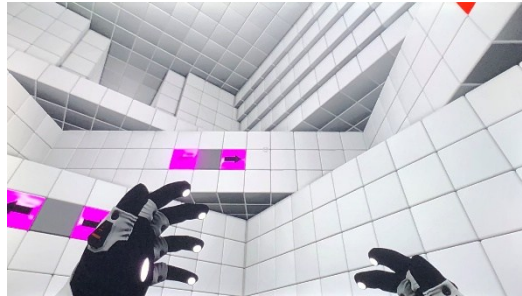
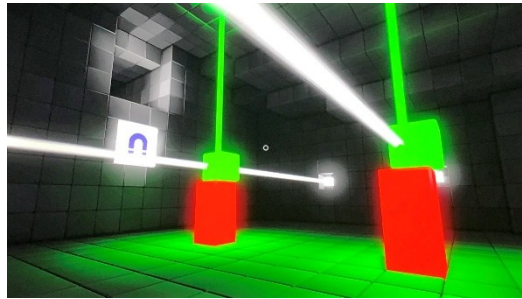
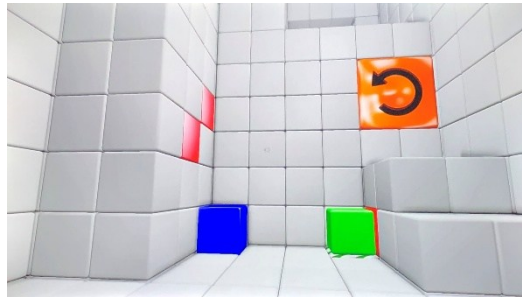
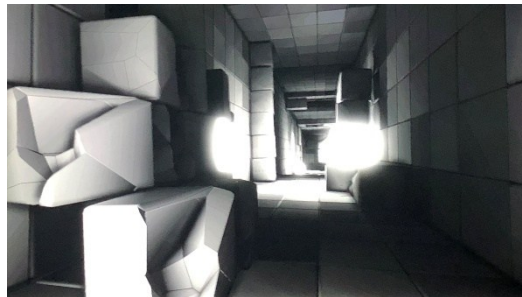
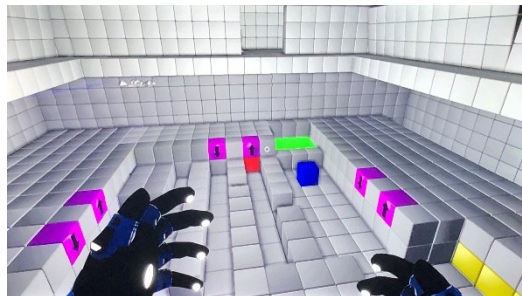
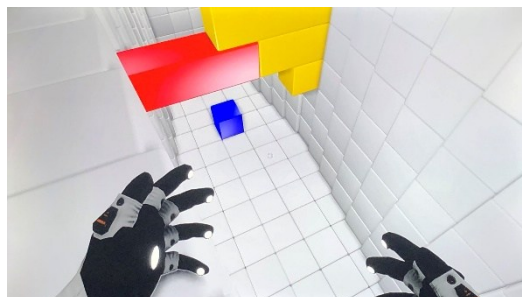
Has some technical issues on Switch, though, which is surprising given that it's not a graphically advanced game. Often looks like a PS2 game, but the frame rate is "ok" at best and dips to single digits in some areas at worst (exiting helped).

Also had some audio glitches, photo events not triggering, repeating dialogue, crashes. Despite that, I enjoyed the 4 to 5 hours played. Maybe I was let down a little by high expectations? I liked it, but it would be a lot better if it ran smoother.

The central puzzle mechanics are interesting and varied, making it worth checking out if you're a fan of similar puzzle games.

Played on console: Switch.
Originally posted: 11/08/2019.

Mini-Review: Q.U.B.E. – Director's Cut



A solid game in one of my favorite genres (pioneered by *Portal*, for example), the first-person physics puzzle game. It's 3 to 5 hours long, and even has kind of a *Portal* vibe to it.

There's a mystery to the story and to who you can believe about what's going on. It wraps up nicely, although it leaves parts of the plot in "this doesn't quite add up" territory, but maybe the sequel sheds more light on that?

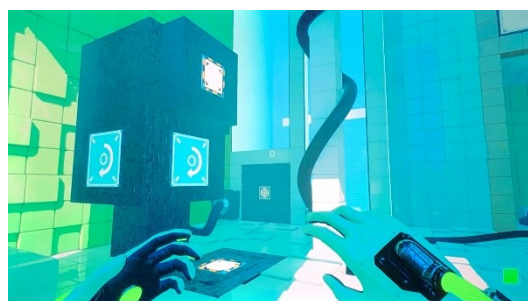
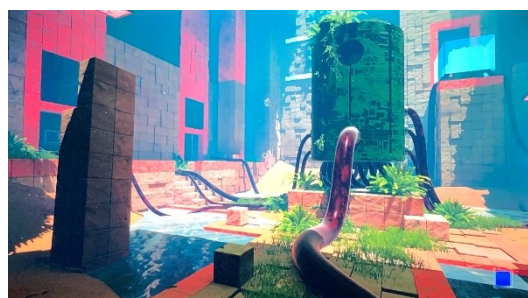
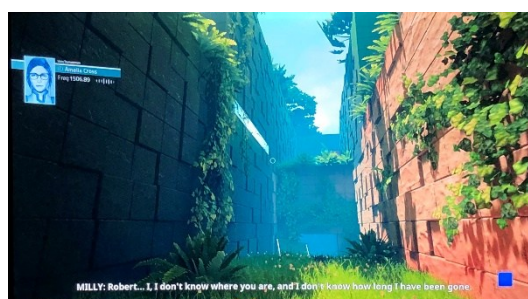
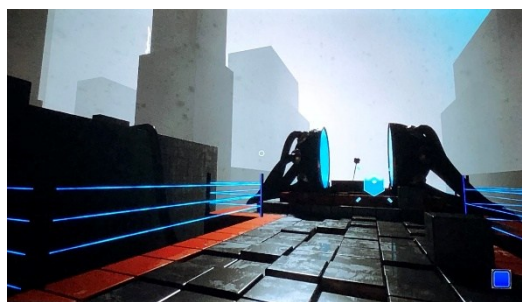
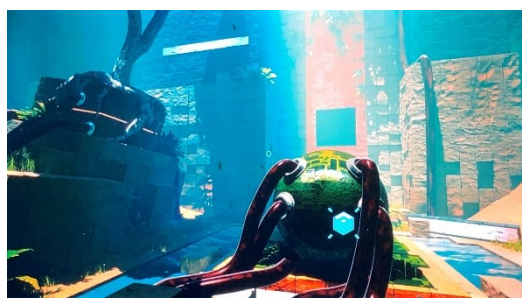
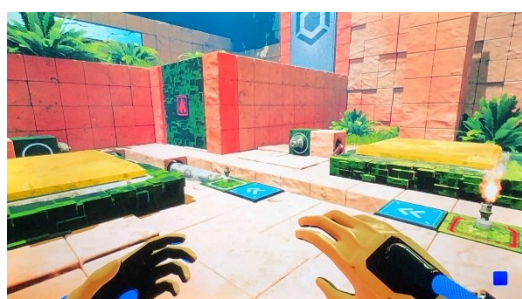
QUBE 2 is supposed to be really good, so we'll see.

The gameplay and puzzle variety is good. New puzzle elements are added in each chapter, providing some brain-bending combinations that can be tough yet never too overwhelming or complex.

With a story and sense of progress that kept me going, I'd recommend it for sure. For fans of *Portal*, *Talos*, *Turing*, *Pneuma*, *Quantum*, etc.

Played on console: PS4.
Originally posted: 10/03/2020.

Mini-Review: QUBE 2



The first game was good (see yesterday's review), but the sequel improves on every aspect (gameplay, controls, puzzle structure, graphics, atmosphere, even the story to a lesser extent), elevating it to (IMO) must-play status for fans of *Portal*-likes.

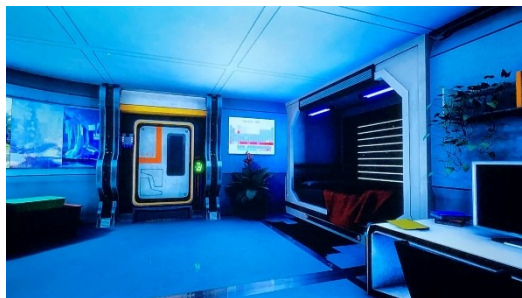
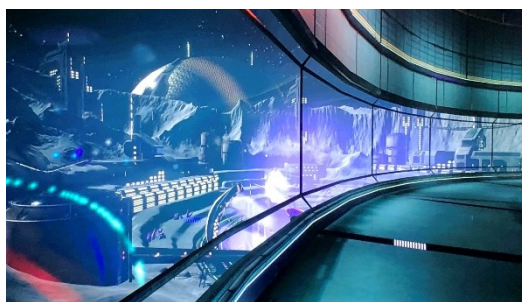
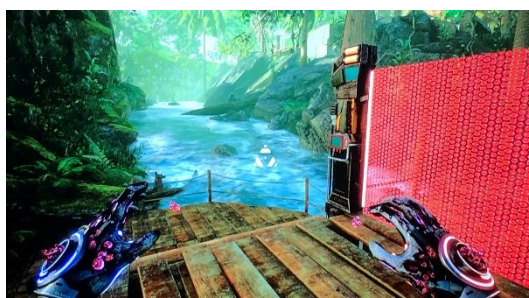
Most of the first game's puzzle mechanics make a return, plus a few new things, but it's more refined and focused on physics and traversal (where the first game had a lot of just puzzles for puzzle's sake, if that makes sense).

Here, you enter an area and get a sense of all the pieces, what they do, how they might work together.

It's fun to experiment as you figure it out; a lot like *Portal* in that regard too. It's well-crafted, fun, more varied in its visual design, and a bit longer than the first game. I thoroughly enjoyed it. Highly recommended.

Played on console: Switch.
Originally posted: 10/04/2020.

Mini-Review: Relicta



Not long after I finished *QUBE 2*, I came across another recently released first-person physics puzzle *Portal*-like called *Relicta* on the PS4 digital store (also on Steam and Xbox One).

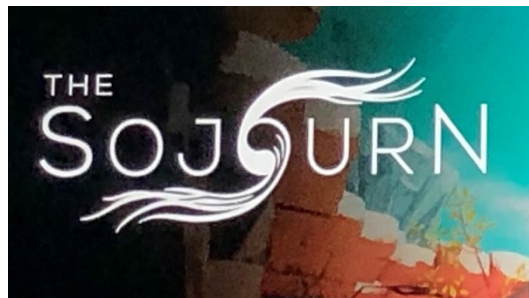
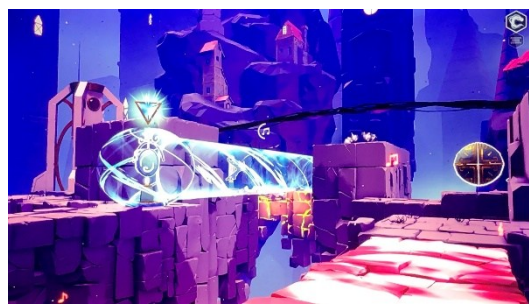
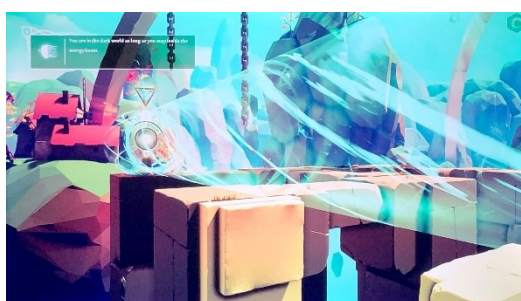
The main mechanics in this one involve gravity and magnetism. The puzzles grow progressively harder and more complicated, with later puzzles covering a wider area with multiple sections to solve.

As the complexity grows, they do begin to border on overwhelming, but it makes solving them all the more rewarding. It's a much longer game than some others in the genre, in part because of this ramped-up challenge.

There's an interesting story to go along with it; good voice acting too. The core puzzle mechanics are more fun than some of the later additions, but all in all a fun brain-bender of a game. I enjoyed it.

Played on console: PS4.
Originally posted: 10/18/2020.

Mini-Review: The Sojourn



It impresses me that developers of first-person puzzle games (ex: *Portal*, *QUBE*, *Relicta*, *Turing*, *Talos*, etc.) still find a set of unique mechanics to build their game around.

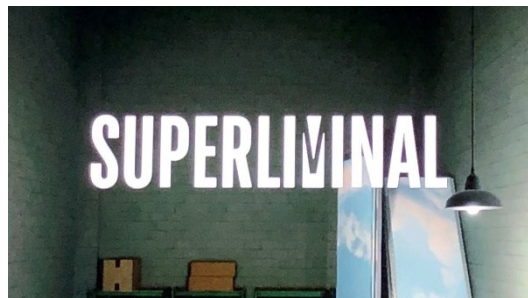
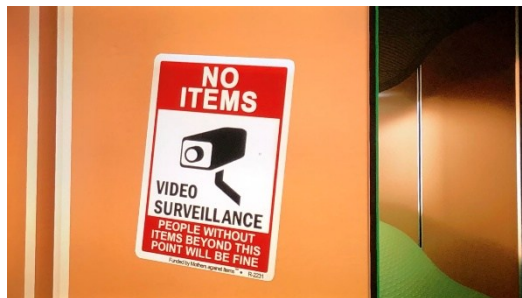
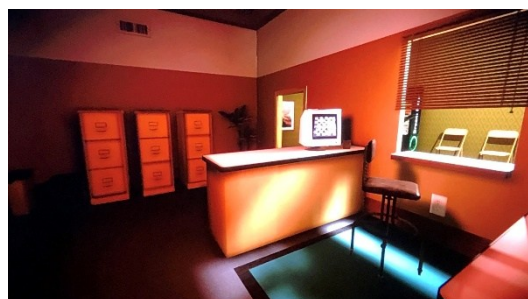
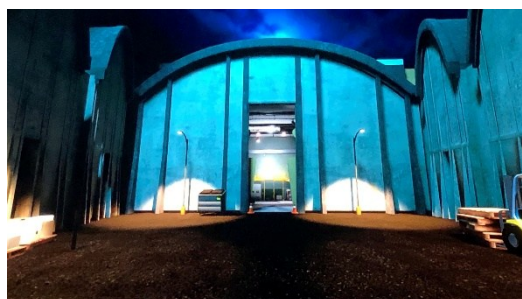
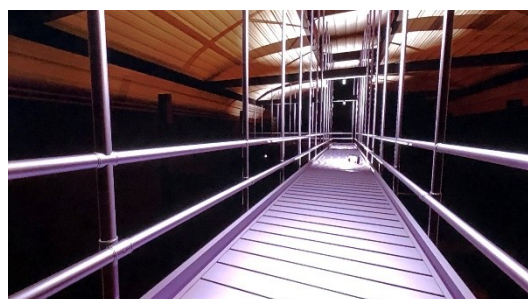
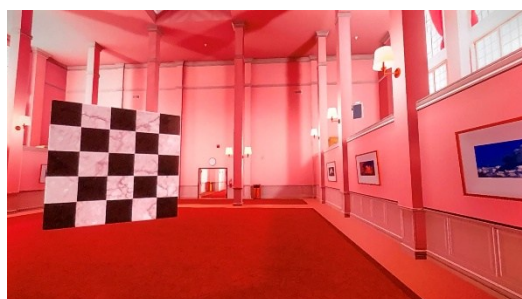
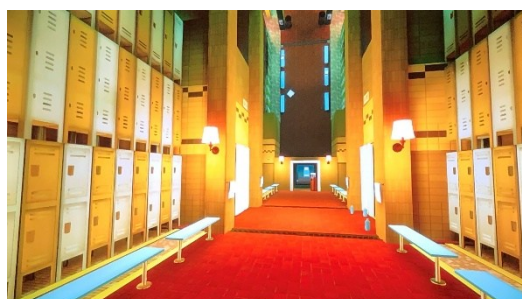
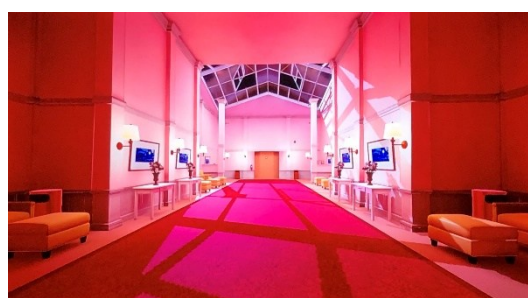
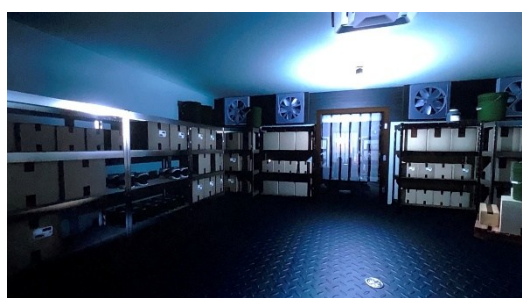
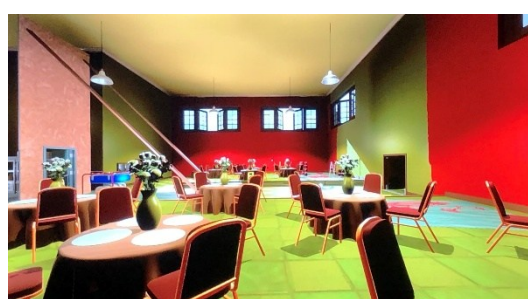
The Sojourn has players swapping between a light and dark world that's triggered in a few different ways. Objects in the world are only "awake" (can be interacted with) in the dark world. This results in puzzles that become tough later on, but satisfying.

What this game lacks that the best in the genre have, though, is an engaging story. There *is* a story, but you're supposed to figure it out from a series of no-context statue scenes. I had no idea what it meant. The philosophical scrolls you collect also seemed less profound than intended.

As a pure puzzle game, it's good. As something more than that, it falls short.

PS4 game played on PS5.
Originally posted: 01/06/2021.

Mini-Review: Superliminal



It's in the genre I've been calling *Portal*-likes; an atmospheric first-person puzzle adventure.

This one's hard to talk about without spoiling the central puzzle premise, but I will say it's another unique and cool system that results in some great gameplay.

It's not too difficult, although I was stumped a while in two places. Both times, I insisted on solving it without a guide, and felt rewarded as a result. I was just trying to make things overly complicated from what the actual solutions were.

It gets a bit abstract near the end, which was less interesting to me than the rest of it, but still a great game. It took me 4 or 5 hours, but some of that was when I got stumped on those puzzles.

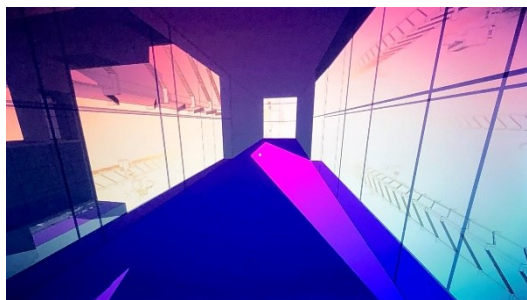
I'd recommend *Superliminal* if you're like me and enjoy first person *Portal*-likes.

PS4 game played on PS5.
Originally posted: 02/27/2021.

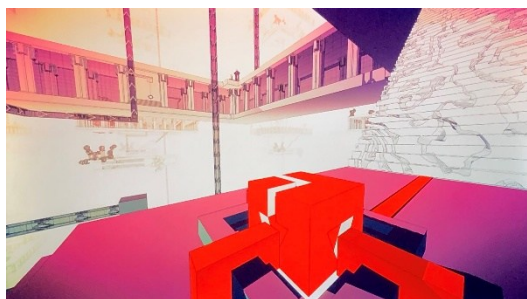
Mini-Review: Manifold Garden



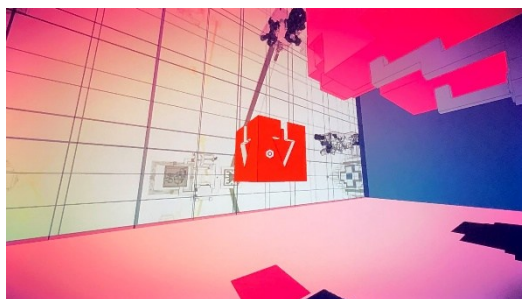
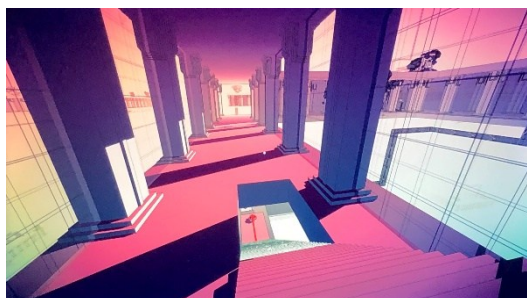
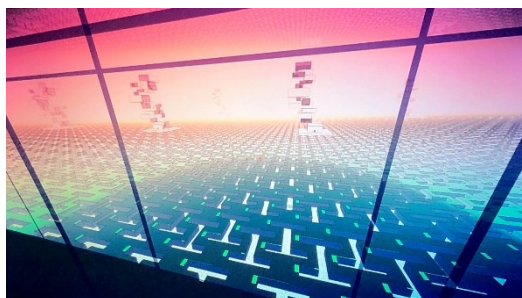
At first glance, it's easy to be confused about what kind of game this is. Screenshots tend to look like abstract art, but no.



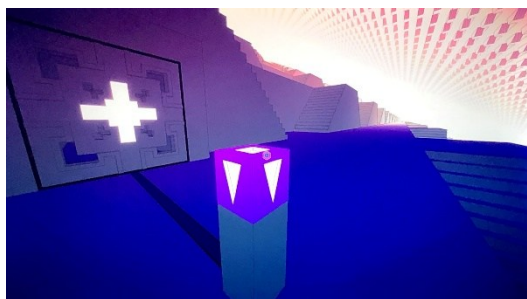
It's a trippy first-person physics puzzle game (yeah, a *Portal*-like) that couples simple non-textured architecture with complex, infinitely repeating non-Euclidean geometry. Ex: you can fall down a hallway that keeps repeating but aim for a sideways door that serves as a portal to a different zone.



You can shift the entire world so up is now down, or walls become floors. It took me about 10 hours to finish. There's very little guidance so it's easy to get lost or confused about what you're supposed to do next. That said, things usually aren't as complex as they seem.

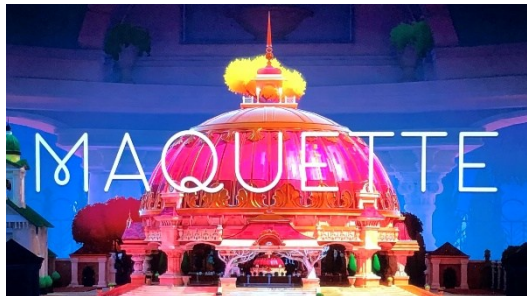
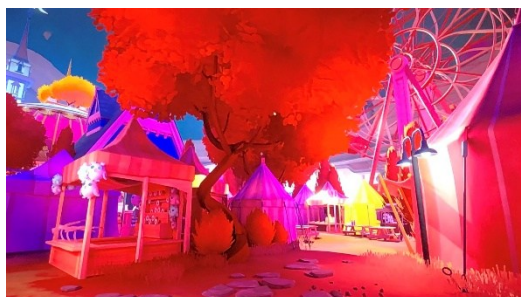
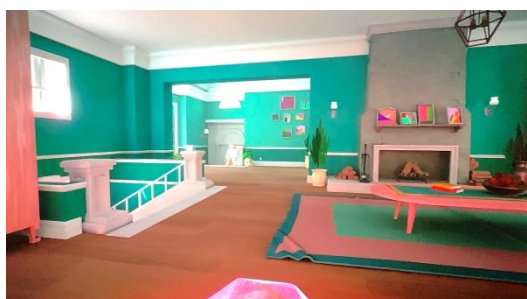
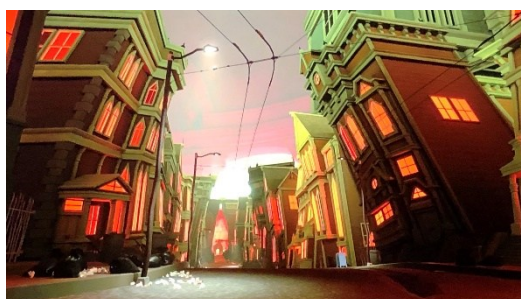
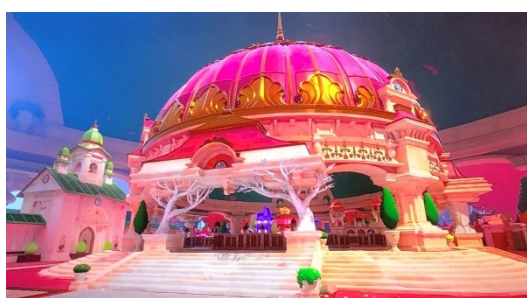


There's no story, but it still feels like you're on an adventure. I liked it a lot.



PS4 game played on PS5.
Originally posted: 03/01/2021.

Mini-Review: Maquette



Games like this are usually my jam; these first-person puzzle adventure games. Somehow this one failed to connect with me. I didn't hate it, but I found myself disinterested most of the way through, despite a puzzle setup that reminded me a bit of another size-and-perspective shifting adventure I played recently, *Superliminal*.

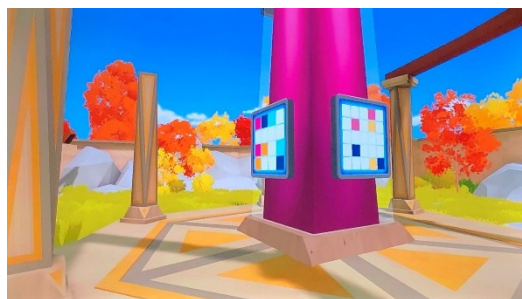
There are interesting concepts at work here, yet I found various ways to break it, possibly making it unwinnable without reloading.

It tells a story that tries to intersect with what you're doing in the game, but this too kind of fell flat for me.

~~It's free this month to PS+ users on PS5 (tip: grab it on the PlayStation web store even if you don't have PS5 yet).~~ I could see Maquette having its fans, but there are other games in this genre I'd recommend before it.

*Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: 03/17/2021.*

Mini-Review: The Pillar – Puzzle Escape



The Witness is one of my all-time favorites, so when I came across a game that seems to draw its inspiration from it, I had to check it out.

It's way shorter (3 to 5 hours), with a similar look and first-person gameplay centered around puzzle boards you must solve to progress. It's not nearly as innovative or varied as *The Witness*, but it does introduce other types of puzzles and more environment-based challenges later on.

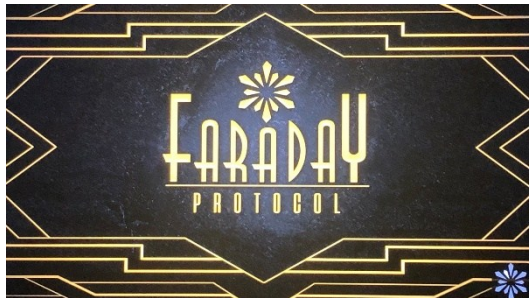
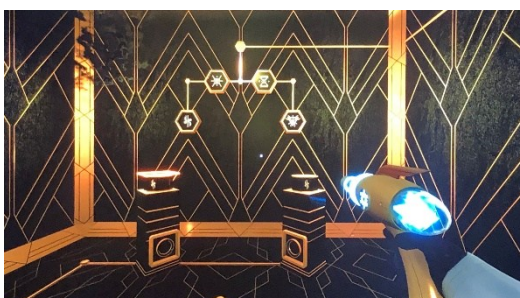
Most puzzles are really easy, even late-game. The ones where you have to redraw a pattern briefly shown to you from memory were a pain, though. I mostly just cheated by recording them on my phone.

Oddly enough, you can earn the platinum trophy halfway through. I liked it.

It's like a lower-budget scaled down *The Witness*, but that's ok. It's best if you can find it on sale.

PS4 game played on PS5.
Originally posted: 04/02/2021.

Mini-Review: Faraday Protocol



Fans of first-person puzzle *Portal*-likes rejoice, because here's a fairly recent good one you can get on any of the current platforms (including Switch and PC). It's from what appears to be a core team of maybe three or four devs, featuring unique bronze and gold architecture and a central puzzle mechanic involving red and blue energy.

Despite this being a bit less inventive than some others in the genre, it makes for some fun brain-teasing with satisfying-to-solve solutions.

The game feels just long enough, at five to eight hours (always subjective when it comes to puzzles).

As with most in the genre, part of the fun is in the story and the mystery of what's actually going on.

Music (mostly lacking) is a weak point, but otherwise an easy recommendation for fans of *Portal*, *QUBE*, *The Talos Principle*, etc.

PS4 game played on PS5.
Originally posted: 04/11/2022.

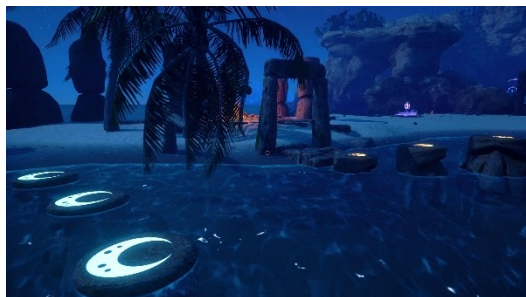
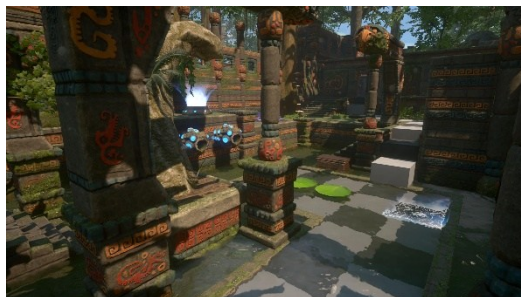
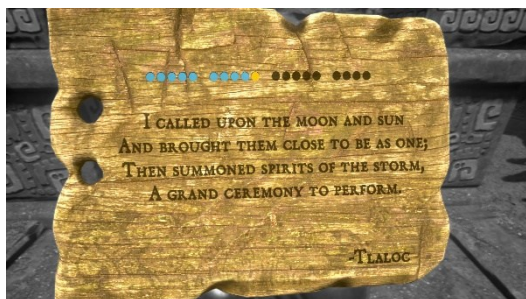
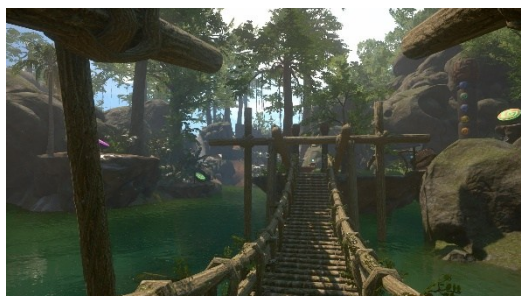
Mini-Review: XING – The Land Beyond



Is it pronounced "Zing" or "Crossing?" I'm guessing the latter, since the story involves the afterlife and learning about the lives and deaths of several others.

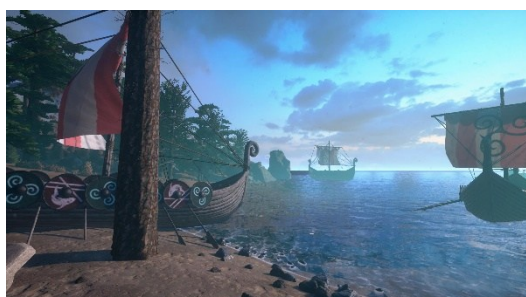


There are a few walking-sim bits, but it's mostly a first-person puzzle adventure game. There's no one central puzzle mechanic like the portals in *Portal*, but rather several different ones that involve changing day to night or clear weather to rain, lighting fires, flipping switches, pushing blocks and solving a myriad of other puzzles, all of which open new paths, raise or turn platforms and change the environment in interesting ways as you progress through each area.



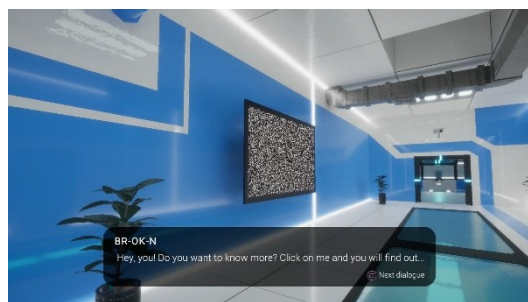
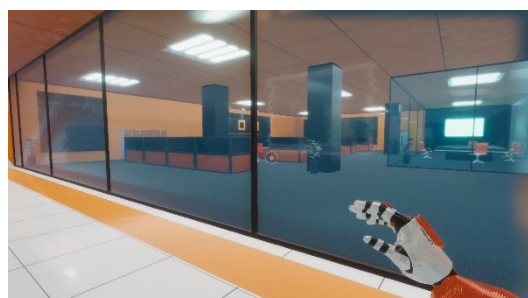
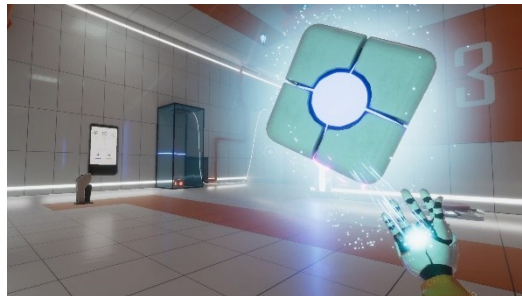
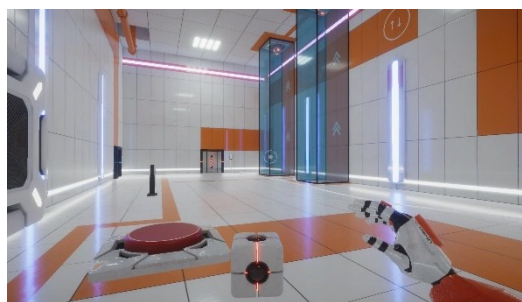
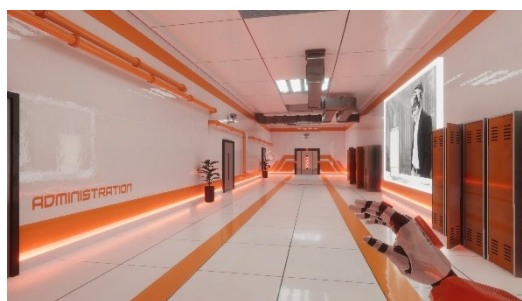
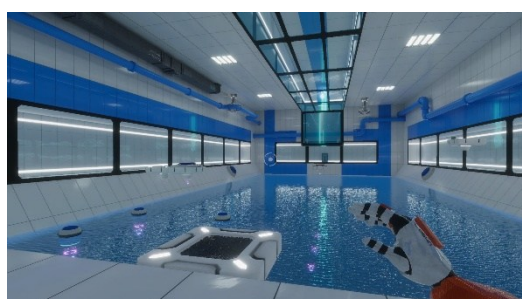
It gets increasingly complicated as different puzzle elements combine.

Recommended if you like *The Witness*, *Portal*, *The Turing Test* and so on.



PS4 game played on PS5.
Originally posted: 07/14/2022.

Mini-Review: System of Souls



By now, I think I've played at least two dozen first-person physics puzzle games. It's a genre I really enjoy. It's tough to match the best of the best (*Portal 2*, *The Talos Principle*, *QUBE 2*, *Relicta*, others) but each one has been worth the time for me.

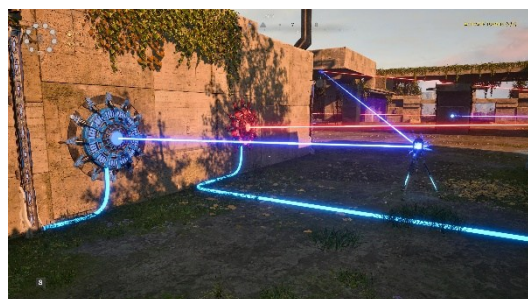
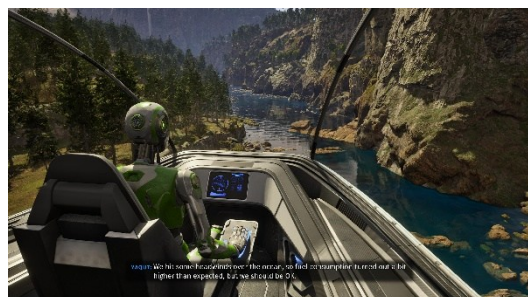
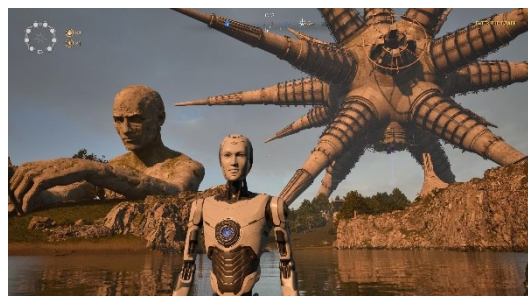
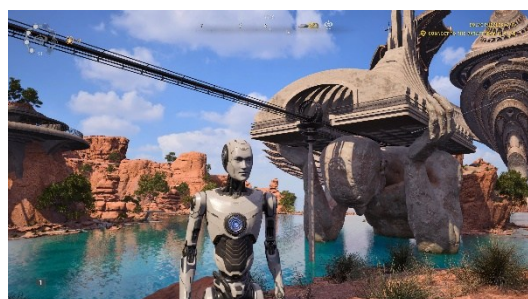
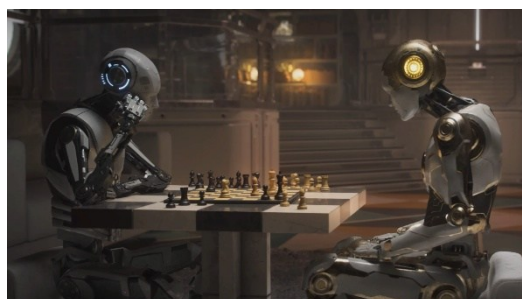
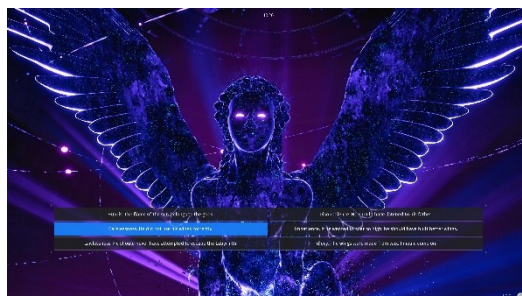
System of Souls does very little to amaze or innovate if you're familiar with similar games, but it's fun and fairly short and won't leave you stumped for long. Level select and a built-in replay timer will appeal to speed-runners.

The platinum trophy is fun and easy to obtain. The platforming bits can be frustrating (just a little), text can be skipped but not paused, and I didn't fully follow the story. Maybe that's the awkward English translation, or maybe it's purposely vague.

These are minor gripes, though. It's a fun and very enjoyable game.

Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: 08/06/2023.

Mini-Review: The Talos Principle II



The first game was released around nine years ago at a time when *Portal*-like games weren't so common. The sequel expands on the first- (or third-) person narrative puzzle experience with a more up-front story, interesting characters and a variety of new puzzle components.

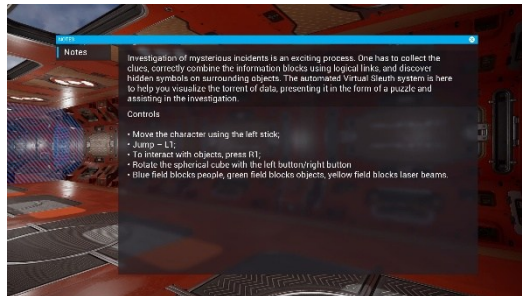
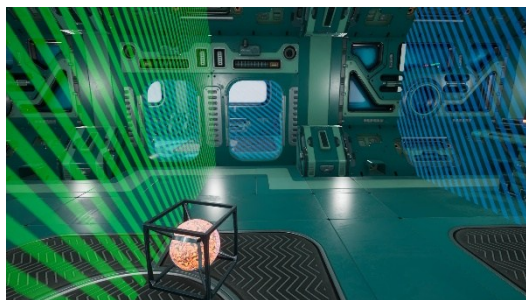
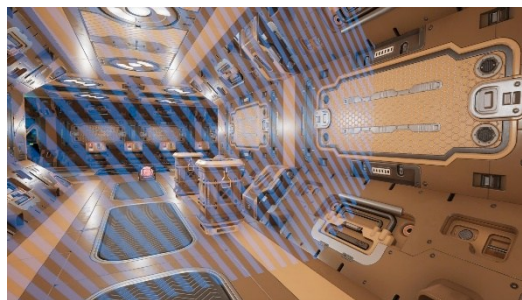
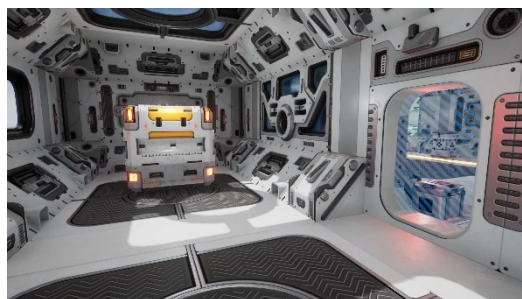
Some aspects reminded me of *Myst* (the remake at least) and *The Witness* with multiple big areas to explore as you go around solving puzzles, but *Portal* is of course the easiest comparison.

The most difficult puzzles are tucked away in an extra late-game quest that can be skipped. A certain limited collectible lets you skip puzzles entirely, but you can solve it later to get them back. Each area has more puzzles than are needed to progress.

It's a great game. This may be my second favorite in the genre, after *Portal 2*.

Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: 01/09/2024.

Mini-Review: Dofamine



A first-person physics puzzle game; a *Portal*-like. I didn't hate it, but I wouldn't recommend it.

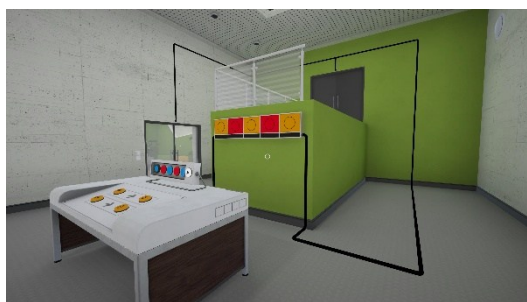
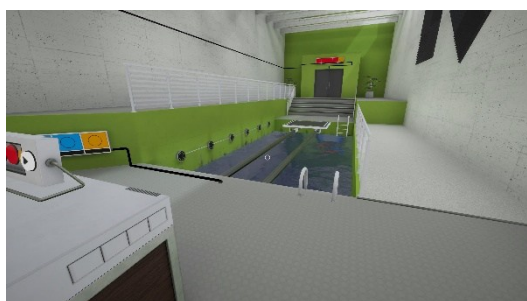
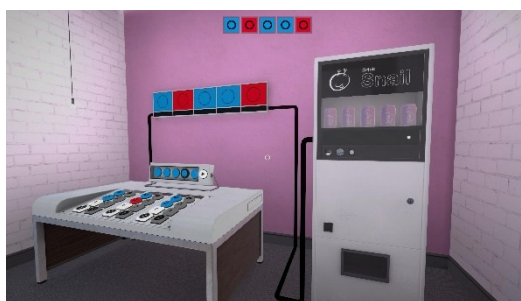
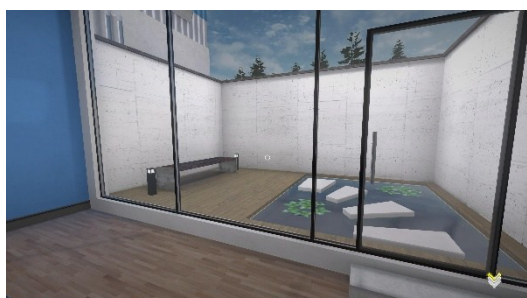
Carrying and placing boxes is clunky since they tend to get stuck or refuse to position the way you want. Lining up low-to-the-ground lasers is tricky because (of course) you can't look down and ahead at the same time. You can turn them after placing them, but it's not ideal.

Pressure plates have no lead-away wire or indication of what gate or device they control. There's no reticle or dot to help you aim your actions. The text is badly translated. Busy walls and floors sometimes camouflage boxes you need to pick up.

All that said, there are some interesting puzzle ideas, and the structure of progressing through the contiguous corridors of a lab is pretty cool. Also, it's a short, easy platinum.

Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: 01/25/2024.

Mini-Review: Re:Touring



I hadn't planned to play this now, but my son really liked it and insisted I take a break and give it a go.

It's a first-person puzzle game (which I tend to call *Portal*-likes), but the more of these I play (aside from the best of the best like *The Talos Principle 1 & 2*, *QUBE 2*, of course *Portal 1 & 2*, maybe a couple others), the more I think their developers are trying hard to come up with inventive puzzle mechanics but just aren't able to capture the two most important aspects of this genre.

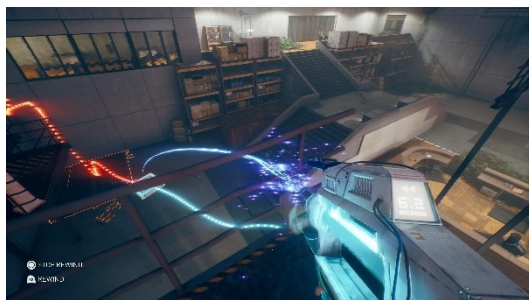
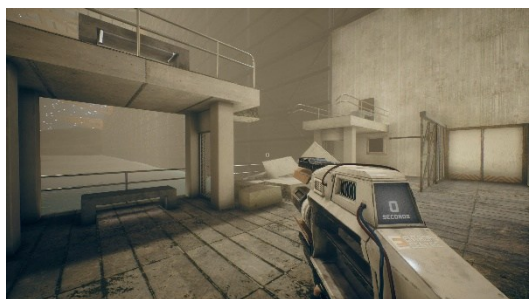
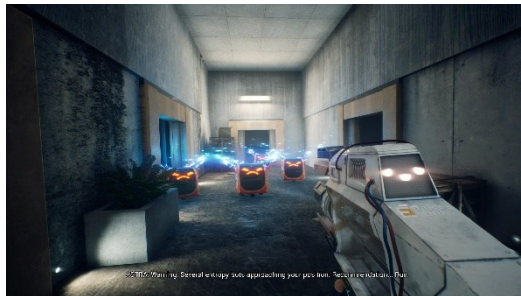
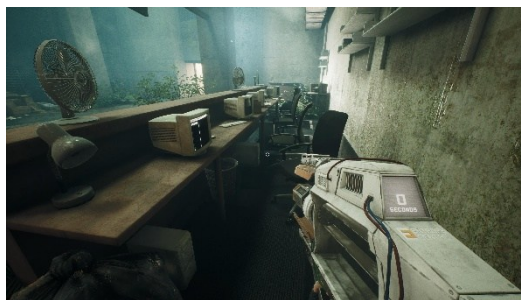
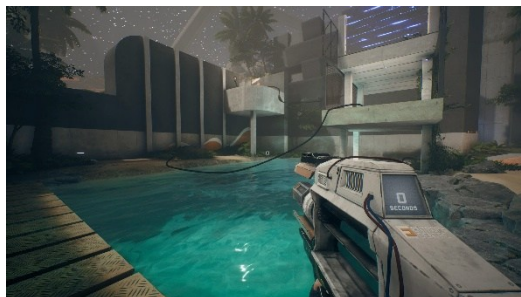
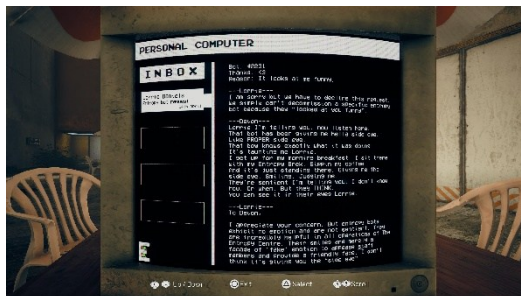
One, there should be some kind of mystery, story, and resolution (narrative payoff) by the end.

Two, they should be fun, and invite exploration, experimentation and clever problem-solving.

The main mechanic in *Re:Touring* is just logic puzzles; clever in a way, but a bit tedious. It also lacks a story.

*PS4 game played on PS5.
Originally posted: 07/03/2024.*

Mini-Review: The Entropy Centre



I lamented in a recent review of another first-person puzzle game that what I missed – and what draws me to the genre – is when these games have a story and are actually fun to play and explore.

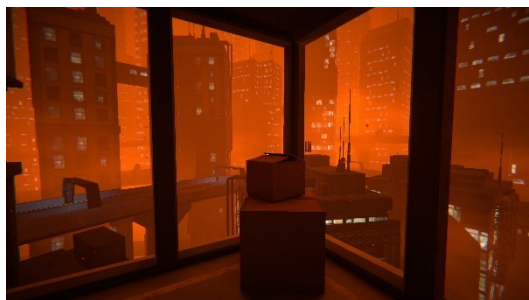
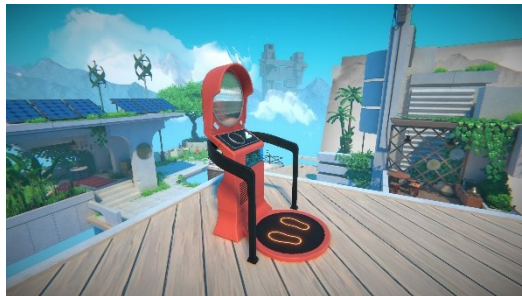
The Entropy Centre hits the mark, with a great central puzzle mechanic that I haven't seen in any other *Portal*-likes. Yes, you get the by-now familiar elements like light bridges, laser beams, buttons, blocks, and bounce pads, but that's mixed in with a time rewind mechanic that lets you move objects around and then rewind them to play back your efforts in reverse; core to both the gameplay and story.

The story campaign is sizable, and it comes with creation tools (PC only) and lets you play other people's levels (on console too). Was this really made (mostly) by just one guy? It's great.

Played on console: PS5.

Originally posted: 09/14/2024.

Mini-Review: Viewfinder



I've been meaning to play this game since it came out exactly two years ago, because the *Portal*-like genre (or first-person physics puzzle games with an emphasis on exploration and escape) is one of my favorites.

My dashboard stats say I finished in around 7 hours, but it felt shorter. I guess it's like they say: time flies when you're having fun.

Like most games in the genre, there's a central puzzle mechanic with secondary mechanics layered in as the game progresses. Much like *Superliminal* and *Manifold Garden*, the important part here is how 2D and 3D perspectives work together. Placing a photo in the world manifests it as real. Build walkways, make walls vanish, and enter new areas by manipulating the world this way.

I won't spoil the other cool mind-bending gameplay twists. Recommended!

*Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: 07/12/2025.*

The Final Stage

If you've made it here to the end and read (or at least noticed) all the mini-reviews, you may have seen one for *Dofamine*, which wasn't mentioned on the ranked list of 25 at all.

There's a good reason for that. It was originally the lowest-ranked game on my list, but when I was close to wrapping up the feature, I went back through my game-play log to make sure I hadn't overlooked anything. It seemed odd to have such a big gap in time between *Faraday Protocol* and *System of Souls*, and sure enough, I had omitted a qualifying game I really enjoyed: *XING - The Land Beyond*.

Rather than turn it into a list of 26, which would have meant moving too much around in a feature that was already completed, I decided to just bump *Dofamine* off entirely and make other minor edits. This also meant I could keep it to a nice round list of 25 games.

So, consider this a sort of honorable mention, or a post-feature bonus game, or something.

#26: Dofamine



There isn't anything particularly noteworthy about this, the game at the lowest position on my list. It's short and features a core mechanic involving lasers and pressure plates. As an obscure indie game, it doesn't even have a score on Metacritic.

Metacritic: **N/A**

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/dofamine/>

Full Playthrough:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJH8ut-Zfvg>

I started playing a game on PlayStation called *Eclipse – Edge of Light*. As soon as I realized it was a first-person puzzle game (it might also be available in VR), I stopped. I don't know for sure that it's *Portal*-like, but I had already finished my rankings and didn't want to risk finding another one that might obligate me to change up what I've already written. It looked interesting, and whether it turns out to be in this genre or not, I may play through it later.

I also came across *Quern* and *Obduction* (the latter being from Cyan, who made *Myst*). If I do a feature on *Myst*-likes later, I'd like to check those out to see if they fit the genre.

Sometime soon, I want to write about my own TRS-80 CoCo 2 and CoCo 3 games, maybe as I'm reviewing them all now, 35+ years later.

Like with my articles about the VGG podcast, my game collecting, my text adventures, and the BBS games I wrote (*Lunatix* and so forth), it might be of little interest to anybody else, but it's something I'd just like to write up and have available for posterity and preservation, if nothing else.

Something like that will take time, though, so it may not be the focus of the next issue. We'll see.

End Credits

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Most of the screenshots used in the *Portals*, *Puzzles*, and *Perspectives* feature are from my own mini-reviews. For the few games without a full mini-review included in this issue, the screenshots shown come from the YouTube playthrough video, which is linked for each game as it's mentioned.

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