



THE VIDEO GAME GENERATIONS

NEWSLETTER

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Loading Screen

If you tuned out for last week's issue that was all about my early days as an indie game developer making TRS-80 CoCo games (with plenty about my thoughts on all those games now, decades later), then welcome back. This week's feature should be a bit more appealing, perhaps in a *weird* way.

My autobiographical topics may come to an end soon anyway, as I run out of things I haven't already written about. I do still have my days of writing modules for *Dink Smallwood* (including an *Arkanoid*-inspired full conversion), and a few DOS and Windows 3.1 games (including my *Tetris* clones), but I may hold off for a while on any of that.



If you make it to the end this week, I close it out with some updated thoughts about generative AI on the final page.

Recent Events

Darksiders 4 from THQ Nordic and Gunfire



We've seen each of the four horsemen in prior games, including the *Diablo*-like spin-off *Darksiders Genesis* (I played it in co-op), but now it seems they're all together to finally kick off Armageddon. I loved the mainline games (especially the first two), and I couldn't be happier that a new one is finally in the works.

Source:

<https://www.polygon.com/darksiders-4-announcement-trailer/>

Nintendo Indie World Showcase 08/2025

Mina the Hollower from Yacht Club Games continues to look fantastic. It's set to be released on Halloween this year.

Quite a few of the other games shown in the showcase appeal to me (*Neverway*, *Herdling*, and *Glaciered* in particular). Next to *Mina the Hollower*, the game that gets me most excited is *Well Dweller*. It looks to be a Metroidvania that might be right at home in this issue's list of weird games. It looks like my kind of game.

Source:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTv0HmKoUqw>



Mafia: The Old Country

The first two *Mafia* games have been on my backlog for ages, even being replaced by the first game's remake and the second game's remaster. I enjoyed *Mafia III* quite a bit when I played it in 2016, despite its [hilarious bugs](#) that caused people to be duplicated, mirrors to still-frame the main character like something out of the *Twilight Zone*, and a glitch that caused the polygons of the main character's body to form a huge spike.

<https://x.com/VGGenerations/status/796091300273672192>

Presumably this new game (being a prequel) doesn't rely on any knowledge of the two I haven't played, so I'm planning to get started on it right after I finish [Between Horizons](#).

What's going on with Best Buy though? I was supposed to get *Lost Records: Bloom and Rage* and *Mafia: TOC* this week (I pre-ordered them both several months ago), but both are reportedly delayed. I just walked next door to buy *Mafia TOC* at GameStop (which I rarely do) and I can wait on *Lost Records*, but this has been happening with Best Buy more and more over the past several months.

Choo-Choo Charles

Way back in [issue #2](#), I included a list of the upcoming releases I had on my radar. This weird high concept spider-train horror game *Choo-Choo Charles* was one of them. It was released on June 24th for PS5 (it was already out on PC and maybe digitally on consoles). After finishing it this week (it's not overly long), I can say it's everything I hoped it would be. My mini-review is on social media (at this link on [BlueSky](#) for instance) and will likely appear in some future issue of VGGN.

Layoff-a-palooza

Industry layoffs continue, this time at small indie studio [Bithell Games](#) and gaming news outlet [IGN](#). This [tracking site](#) is a little behind.

Weird Pixels, or What Did I Just Play?

When I first thought about writing an article about all the weird games I've played, it seemed like a good idea. After all, most games are pretty normal, right? I had three or four in mind at the time, and I figured I could come up with a few more to make my list.

As I started putting it together, I realized my mistake. Far too many games, by their very nature, are *not* normal. My list ballooned into thirty-five games quickly, and those are just the ones I've played. If I wanted to include weird games I *haven't* played (*Pony Island*, *Seaman*, *Hatoful Boyfriend*, *Goat Simulator*, *Katamari Damacy*, *The Binding of Isaac*, *Mister Mosquito*) then it would be even longer.

Although I *could* try putting together some kind of definitive list of weird games that would include those too (with a little research involved), I like the idea of sticking to what I know. So, this won't be a definitive, all-inclusive list. It's just going to be an excuse for me to write briefly about a few of the weird games I've personally played.

With that settled, my next hurdle has been to trim the list down. Thirty-five games are too many, knowing that I also want to rank them on a scale from 1 to 10 (with 1 being the least weird, and 10 being extremely weird). A list of twenty games seems perfect. Two games per ranking level works out nicely.

All that remains is to put them in order and assign a Weird-o-Meter rating.



The Weird-o-Meter is a very scientific scale that examines and ranks the weirdness level of a game, based entirely on my gut feelings.

Weird-Able Mentions

Also known as Honorable Mentions, these are the fifteen games I had to cut from my list, in no particular order.

Timothy vs. The Aliens

1940's gangster noir alien invasion shooter.

Nier and Nier: Automata

A weird but cool vibe, and mask-headed Emil.

Twelve Minutes

Weird mostly for that uncomfortable ending.

The Unfinished Swan

It's trippy. The first level must be painted in.

Bulb Boy

Weird art style with a boy that is a light bulb.

Violett

Surreal world design and abstract puzzles.

North

A short and surreal narrative adventure.

Danganronpa (Series)

Weird mostly for a few wacky music tracks.

Zanki Zero

Bonkers story and unique grid gameplay.

Elevator... to the MOON!

More absurd than weird, I suppose.

No More Heroes (Series)

It's almost a cheat. Suda51 games *are* weird.

Fantasy Zone

A unique Sega classic side-scrolling shooter.

Manifold Garden

The weirdest of the first-person puzzle games.

Time Lord (NES)

I like this, but it's on the low end of weird.

Let It Die

Suda51-adjacent. It features "Uncle Death".



10 Percent - Barely Weird

Uncle Fester's Quest (NES)



The game was released in 1989, and when I played it (a bunch) in college in the early 90s, I had no idea how close I had come to finishing the journey. It wasn't until 2014, with the use of save states on the Retron 5, that I was finally able to reach and defeat the final boss and save *The Addams Family* (and, probably, the rest of the world) from an [alien invasion](#).

Netflix has a new season of the spin-off show *Wednesday* (which I haven't watched yet), so this IP still remains of interest to people, but when *Uncle Fester's Quest* released, it was pretty dormant. The movie (starring Raul Julia and Anjelica Huston) was still a couple years away. It's amazing this game was even made.

Who doesn't want to battle aliens as Fester?

Christopher Brookmyre's Bedlam



What I remember most about this game is that the last level slowed to a crawl when I played it way back in 2016 on a base model PS4. I was getting two or three frames per second (if not two or three seconds per frame). It was fine up until then; else I might not have made it that far to begin with.

On PS5 now, it seems fine. I loaded up my old save, selected a few chapters, and it now runs at 60FPS. It's much easier to recommend.

Without spoiling the story (I hope), it's a game about a woman who ends up inside a series of video games (think *Tron*). It's based on a book by the same author. The varied game worlds take inspiration from *Call of Duty*, *Pac-Man*, *Halo*, the original *Doom* or *Quake*, and more.



20 Percent - A Bit Weirder

We Happy Few

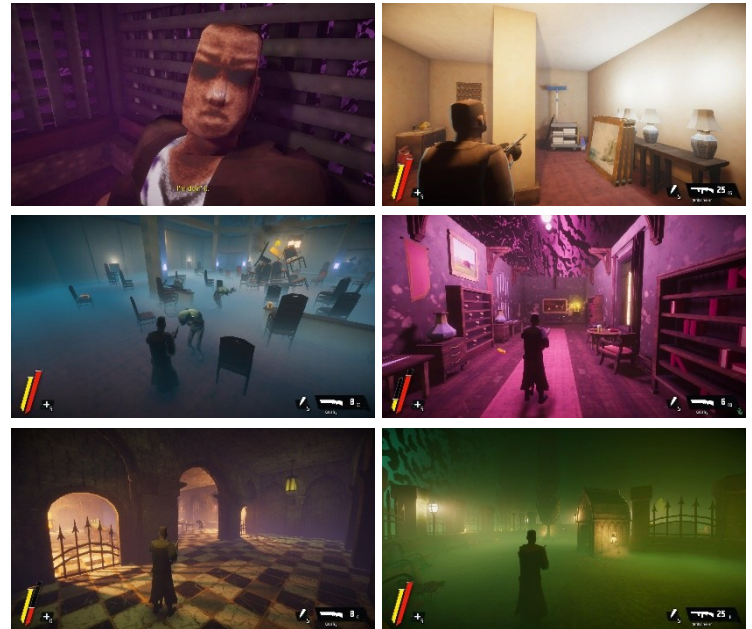


I only played through the first of three major chapters (Arthur's act) in *We Happy Few*, way back in 2018. This was before I started posting mini-reviews to social media.

Several years later, as I was catching up on classic episodes of *Doctor Who*, I came across an episode arc called "The Happiness Patrol" that very much seemed to be part of the inspiration for *We Happy Few*, both in its subject matter and its painted-on masked characters. I posted a little about that connection to Twitter [here](#).

The story's premise is weird in that everybody is expected (forced) to take a "joy" pill, which alters their perception of the dystopian world. I'd best describe the game as a little off-kilter.

El Paso Elsewhere



I wrote briefly about this game and its weird mix of music on [page 10 of issue #5](#), in my feature about video game music. I've also included my social media mini-review later in this issue. What else can I say about it?

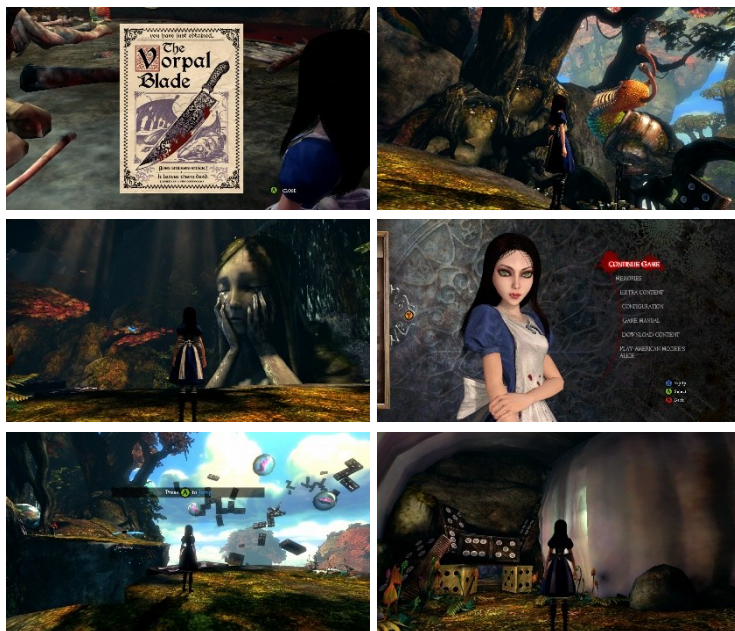
The whole game feels surreal, as if it's not clear whether these things are really happening or if it's all a drug-induced fantasy taking place in the protagonist's head. That's my own take-away, though. As best I can tell, it's simply a twisted reality shaped in part by his tortured memories, fears, and regrets.

The levels are short with gameplay relying on a time-slowing mechanic a la *Max Payne*. It's the topsy-turvy story about the relationship between a victim and abuser that stands out.



30 Percent - Weirdly Offbeat

Alice: Madness Returns



This game deserves an official remaster. I played it in 2011 on Xbox 360 and immediately became a fan. It's a game by American McGee, and a follow up to the original *Alice*.

It's a twisted unofficial pseudo-sequel to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, with mature and disturbing themes sparked by Alice's traumatic past. The visuals and the art design are at times stunning, with a combat system featuring special weapons that really resonated with me at the time.

Thanks to backwards compatibility on Xbox, I was able to grab a few new screenshots. It's also available digitally on Xbox for \$20, or with GamePass Ultimate (or rather, EA Play). It's a well-done action game that still holds up.

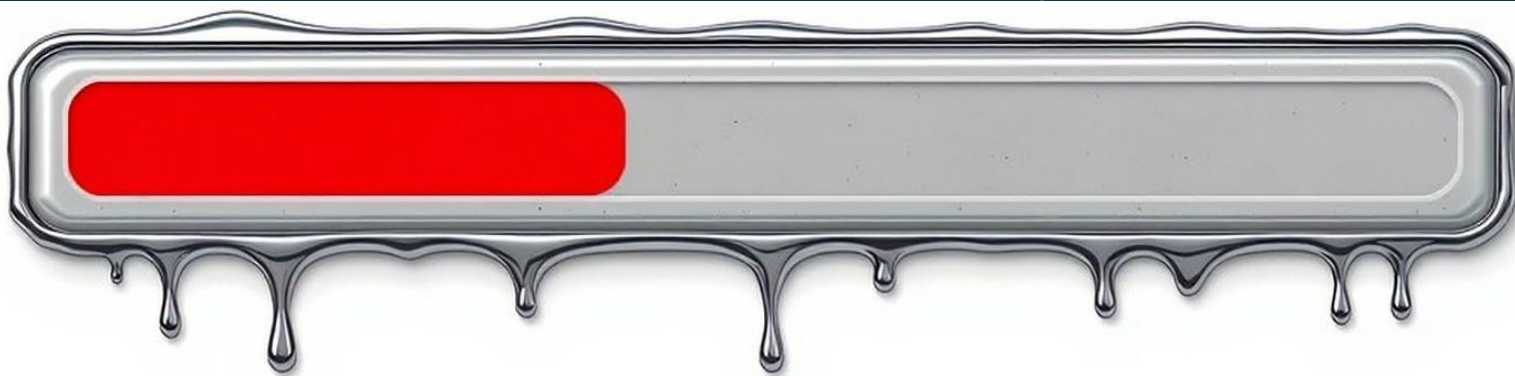
Inside



Playdead's follow-up to their excellent *Limbo* took the weird side-scrolling puzzle adventure to new heights, with amazing detail in its animations and world design.

It's weird throughout, from the mystery of why this boy is making his lonely journey through dangerous territory, to the underwater mermaid-like creature that can only be warded off with light, to the environments and puzzles on the way to his final destination.

It's the final stretch of the game, though, where *Inside* cements its place on this list of weird games. I wouldn't dare spoil what happens (and if you haven't played and don't already know, don't let anybody else spoil it for you either), but it's well worth playing.



40 Percent - Getting Even Weirder

Undertale



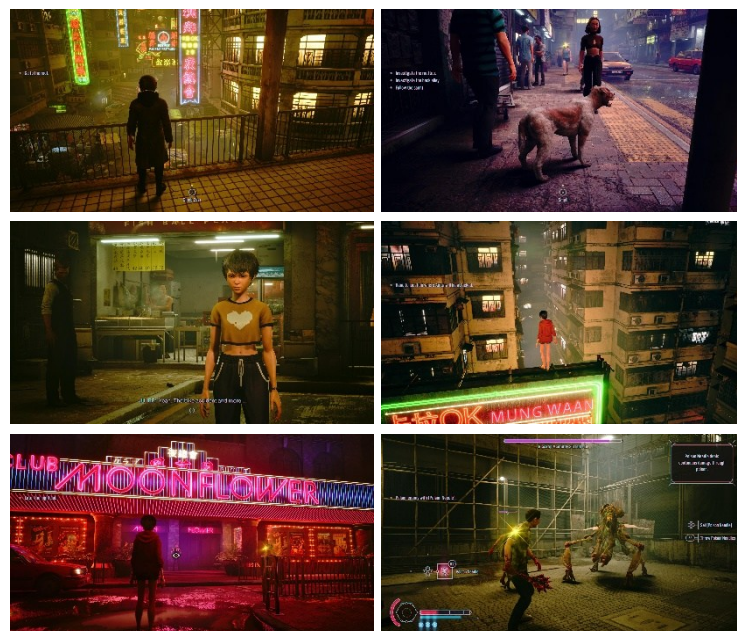
Undertale is weird in ways that probably make it worthy of a higher Weird-o-Meter rating. At the same time, it's incredibly popular.

For me, it was a victim of too much hype, and too many podcasters being unable to keep their mouths shut about twists and spoilers. By the time I played it in 2022, it didn't land for me the way it did for others, in part because I already knew too much about what to expect.

Perhaps I'm at fault for not getting around to it sooner; or perhaps I played it during a time when I wasn't best prepared to soak in its weirdness and really appreciate its unique twists to the retro RPG genre.

Even though it didn't resonate with me, I recognize it for the excellent game it is.

Slitterhead



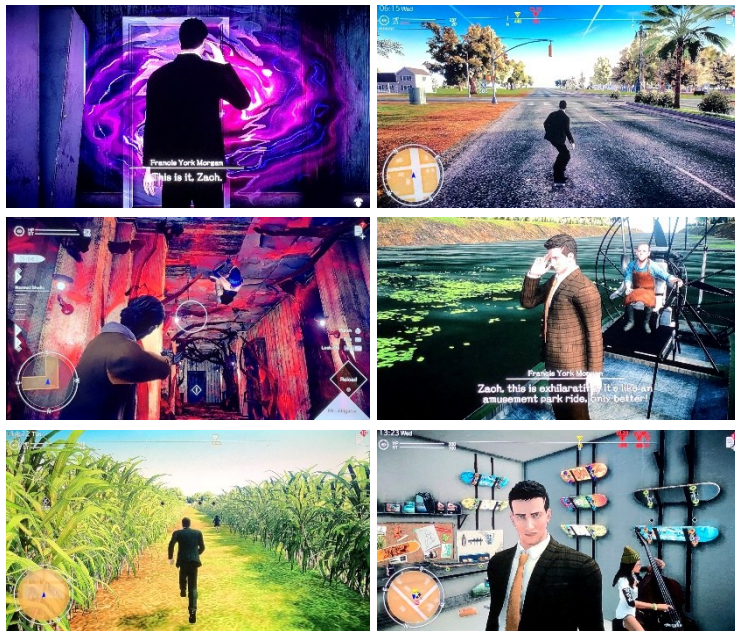
In some ways, it might have made sense to swap *Slitterhead* for any of the games with a lower Weird-o-Meter rating; *We Happy Few*, for example. On the surface, it's not all that weird. It's an action game with stylized characters in a mostly realistic-looking fictional Hong Kong (called Kowlong).

It's at times unsettling with its big bug-like enemies and its body-possessing gameplay (you play as a bodiless entity suffering from memory loss), but gamers might see all this and chalk it up to generic offbeat horror.

The game stuck with me, though. It has a vibe that's disconcerting (if not full-on weird), with between-mission conversation scenes that are just a little bit off. It's a unique experience.

50 Percent - Embracing Weirdness

Deadly Premonition (Duology)



The screenshots are from the second game.

Like it is with Suda51, you can pretty much point to any Swery65 game and it's going to be weird. Aside from his 2003 PS2 game *Spy Fiction* (which was more of a stealth action game in the vein of *Metal Gear Solid*), he's responsible for *The Good Life* (people turn into cats and dogs at night in a weird small town), *D4: Dark Dreams Don't Die* (it only got two episodes, but it was sufficiently weird), and *J.J. Macfield and the Island of Memories* (see my brief write-up on this game in [issue 8](#)).

It's like *Twin Peaks*, *The Twilight Zone*, *Silent Hill*, and an open world town all in one. I'm a bigger fan of the first game, but I've included my mini-review of *DP2* later in this issue.

High on Life



My mini-review of *High on Life* was already included on [page 13 of issue #6](#), so I won't be including it again in this issue. It was included then because a sequel has been announced with a release set for later this year.

Everything about the game is weird on some level. The premise is that aliens turn humans into some kind of psychoactive drug. Get it? They get "high" on "life". You wield living guns (a bit like the "live ammunition" in *Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath*) except these guns talk and rarely stop talking, with voices provided by Justin Roiland (before he ungracefully exited from Squanch Games, so that gun sounds a lot like Morty) among others.

It even has entire in-game movies to watch.

60 Percent - Weirdness Ramp-up

I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream



My mini-review of this cult classic point-and-click adventure can be found in VGGN [issue #7 on page 21](#), when I wrote about interactive fiction (text adventures, story-based games).

The story follows five tortured captives as they're toyed with by a malevolent AI called AM (voiced by Harlan Ellison himself, who wrote the sci-fi short story on which the game is based). It's weird and disturbing and it goes places mainstream games today don't; not that I would call this mainstream, even back then. It leaves a lasting impression.

Those of you interested in checking it out may be happy to know it's also available now on consoles, in its remastered form from the port powerhouse Nightdive Studios.

Oddworld (Series)



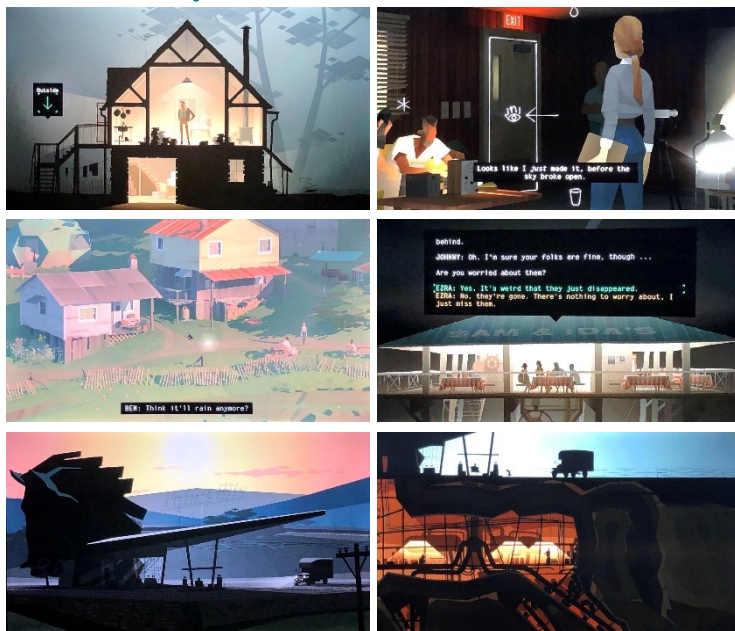
These images are from *Oddworld: Soulstorm*, for which my mini-review is included later.

It would be false advertising to call a game *Oddworld* if it wasn't, you know, *odd*. I've played *most* of the games in the series, aside from *New 'n' Tasty* (the remake of the first game) and the two *Oddworld Adventures* on GameBoy and GBC (simplified versions of the first two games, by a different developer).

The studio, Oddworld Inhabitants (headed up by Lorne Lanning, who also voices the main character Abe) seems to have a mantra of "the weirder, the better." If they do, it comes across in the world and character designs, the story about oppressed Mudokons turned into food, and even the gameplay systems.

70 Percent – Uery Uery Weird

Kentucky Route Zero



I'm not sure where it would rank on a list of my favorite games of all time, but KRZ is high up there on such a list. I loved it when I all but gave up sleeping one long weekend in 2020 for a marathon play-through, and I've only grown to love it even more in the years that have followed (although I only played it once).

It was originally released episodically on PC (now on consoles), with multi-year gaps between episodes. Each one takes the game, the art style, and its story in new directions. I found it incredibly surreal and engaging in a way that I just couldn't put down.

There's a haunting song called "[Too Late to Love You](#)" in Act III, theremin music in Act IV, and more. My mini-review is later in this issue.

Albedo: Eyes From Outer Space



There are various forms of *weird*. In the case of this first-person puzzle/adventure game, that form is probably "incredibly bizarre".

The game takes place in a linear fashion across a series of self-contained locations. These places/rooms somehow look both dark and shadowy *and* heavily color saturated. It isn't just the look of the game, though, where things get weird. Playing as a security guard at a secret scientific research base, you'll encounter eyeball aliens and mechanical enemies as you progress and solve puzzles.

Although the story and gameplay details have faded for me now (I played this way back in 2016), I remember enjoying it and thinking it was a well-crafted, fun adventure game.



80 Percent – Weird and Bizarre

Rememoried



Rather than write about *Rememoried* and include my social media mini-review later too (played on PS4 and posted on 10/27/2020), I'll just use that mini-review here. It's fitting.

?????

Really, though. ?????

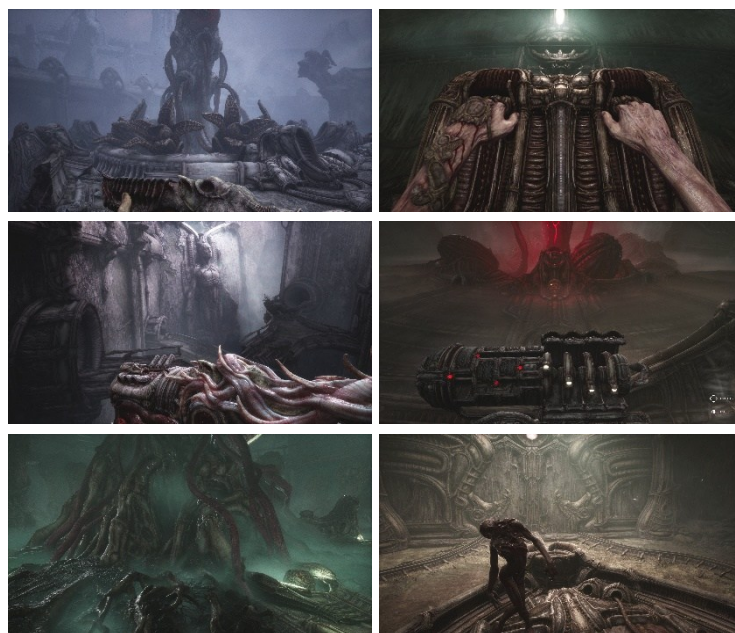
I guess it's a... well... an experiment?

It's a first-person walking sim through a series of surreal, abstract open areas, more or less. There's a bit of platforming. You "solve" each area by figuring out where to go or what to do/see. From time to time, a somewhat soothing female voice with a weird echo tells you cryptic things like "space is a dogma; a dogma is logic" and "you want to know space, without getting to know depths." A different voice (male - presumably "you") sometimes says hint-type stuff.

Each scene has different music (whimsical, mysterious, opera, classical, etc). I played a second time (knowing what to do, it's only about 30 minutes) trying to understand it. I still didn't. It's weird and interesting, at least.

Maybe it's a fever dream?

Scorn



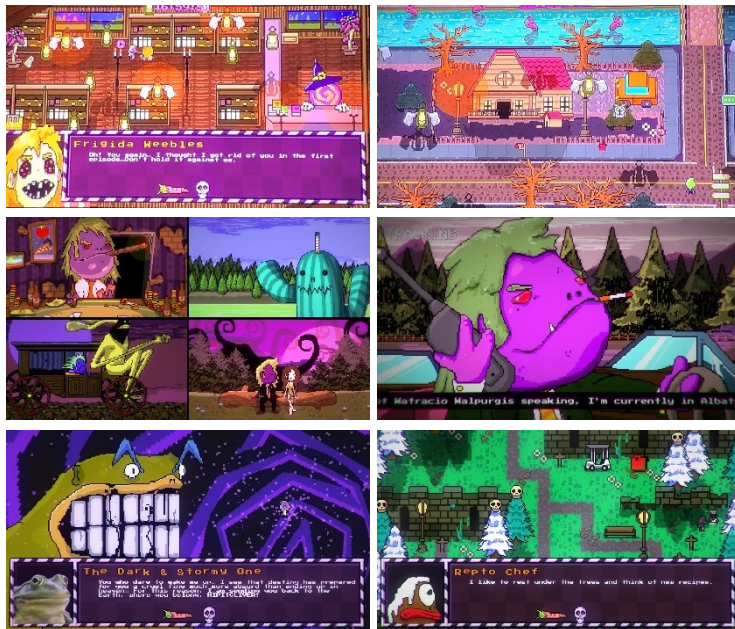
Gamers – me included – had the wrong idea about *Scorn* prior to its release into GamePass for Xbox in 2022. It's on PC too, and now on PlayStation 5.

It *looked* like a trippy *Doom*-style first-person shooter, but to borrow from my mini-review (coming up later in this issue), it has as much in common with *Myst* as anything.

Its visuals channel the style of H.R. Giger, David Cronenberg, and if Google is to be believed, someone I'm unfamiliar with named Zdzisław Beksiński; that's to say, it's a blending of creepy biological and mechanical elements – think the Borg from *Star Trek* or the art style in the *Alien* films, to borrow again from my mini-review. It's a truly weird game.

90 Percent - Cosmic-level Weirdness

Baobabs Mausoleum (Trilogy)



From experience, I know that solo developers tend to get weird ideas and just run with them. This may be the case with “Jacob Jazz” and his Madrid-based studio Celery Emblem.

It may have gone something like this:

JJ: “How about the main character is a humanoid eggplant who drinks, smokes, and likes the ladies, named Watracio Walpurgis?”

JJ: “Not good enough. What else?”

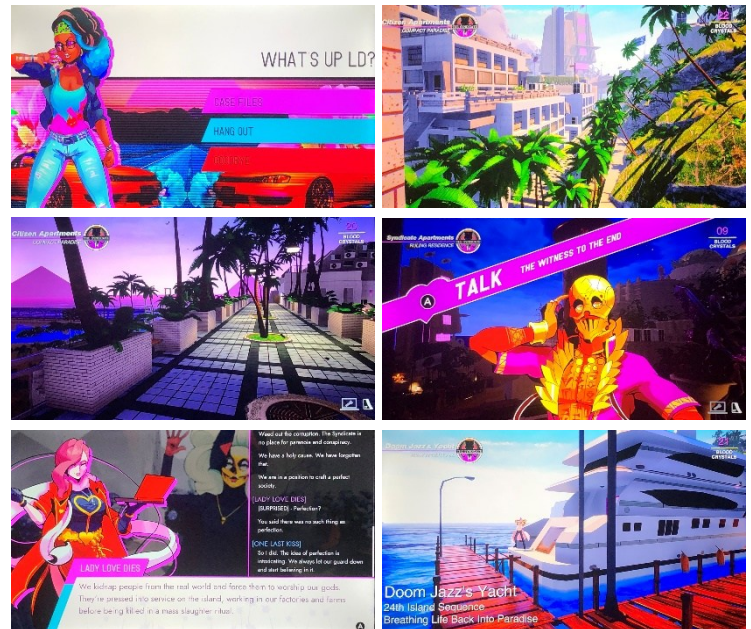
JJ: “He works for the FBI and gets trapped in a small town populated by bizarre people?”

JJ: “Keep going...”

JJ: “He’s also a vampire!”

JJ: “That works. Make it and ship it. Let’s go!”

Paradise Killer



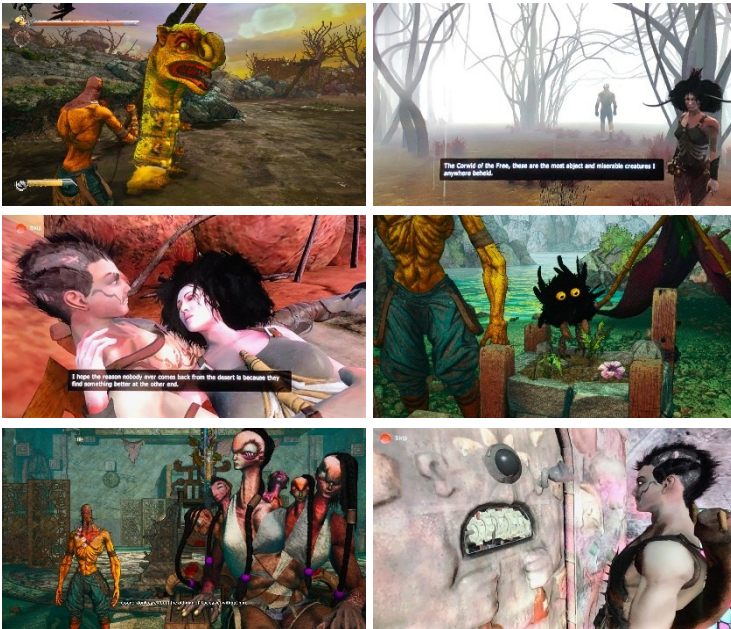
Paradise Killer is equal parts weird *and* cool. Players explore a small city in a quest to collect clues and solve a murder, but that makes it sound far more mundane than it is.

The city is populated by immortals, often pursuing their own agendas, and each with a possible motivation to commit murder and possibly break the cycle of destroying and recreating the world every few hundred years.

Characters are shown like cardboard cut-outs and have weird names like Doctor Doom Jazz, Crimson Acid, Witness to the End, Carmelina Silence, and Henry Division. You play the role of Lady Love Dies, who was previously exiled for thousands of years and so is the only person ruled out as a suspect.

100 Percent - Totally Bonkers Weird

Zeno Clash (Series)

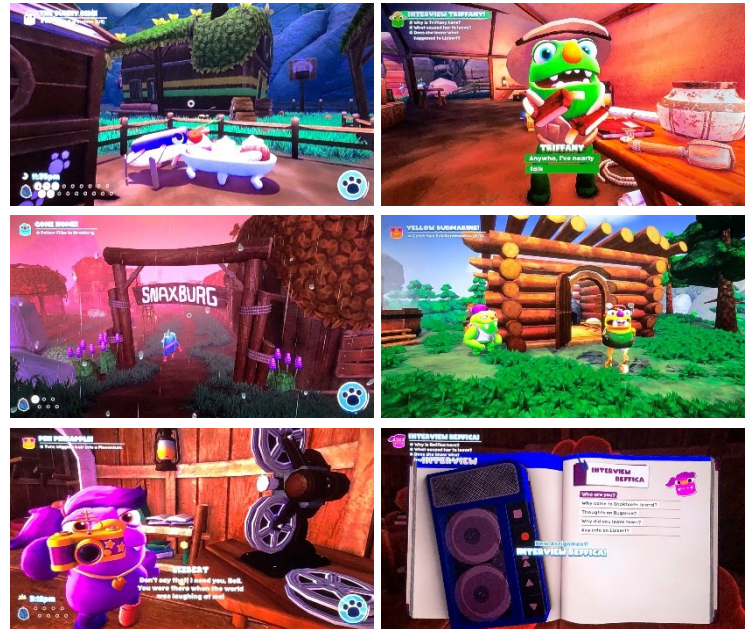


ACE Team has quite a catalog of games to their credit, including *The Eternal Cylinder* (it's on my backlog), *SolSeraph* (inspired by the SNES classic *ActRaiser*), the *Rock of Ages* games, and the *Zeno Clash* series.

Technically, *Clash: Artifacts of Chaos* is more of a spin-off set in the same world. It's the first game in the series I played, before following up with the original *Zeno Clash* (although I haven't yet gotten around to *Zeno Clash 2*). It also features a unique and colorful art style, with textures that look pencil sketched.

As with *Oddworld*, the world and the bizarre character designs give these games plenty of personality. My mini-reviews for both games are included later in this issue.

Bugsnax

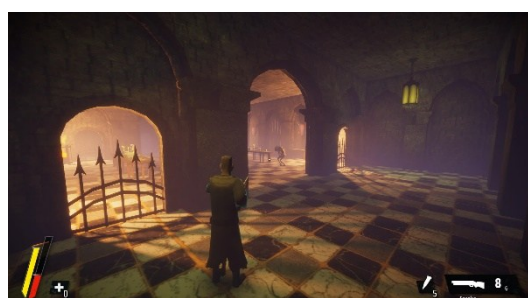
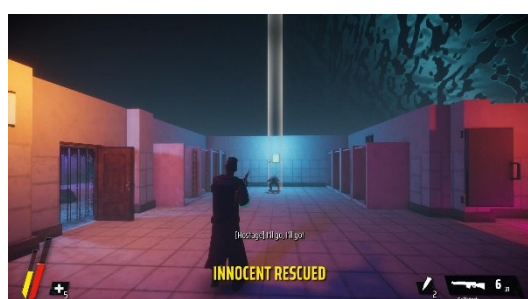
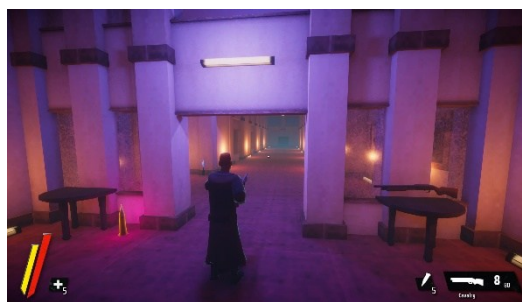
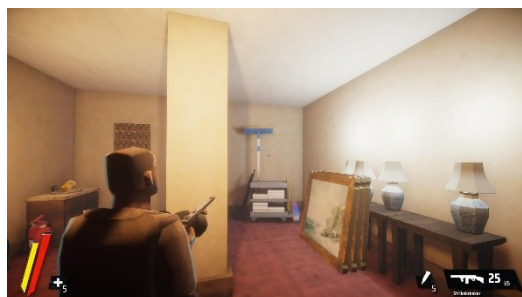
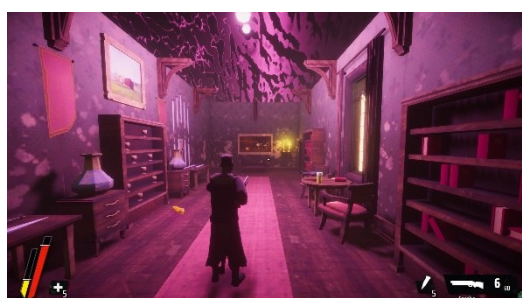


The weirdest game on my list, possibly even edging out *Zeno Clash*, is the PS5 launch game *Bugsnax* (also available on other platforms). I'd even say it's *deceptively* weird, because it has the trappings of an ordinary cartoonish action-adventure game, with a creature-catching system and some physics-based puzzle-solving.

The creatures, however, are made out of eggs, pizza, burgers, French fries, various fruits, cheese, and a variety of other foods. They're apparently delicious, but with the side-effect of morphing one's body parts into that food.

The weirdness doesn't end with the game's premise. The story itself is a twisted trip with plenty of interesting NPCs to meet.

Mini-Review: El Paso Elsewhere



My early impressions at an hour or two in were mixed.

I loved the Max Payne vibe and the intentional low-poly, low-texture PS1/PS2 throwback art style where the protagonist's face is just a blurry texture on a simple shape, but I was less enamored by the short-ish and same-ish levels that didn't feel at all like the adventure I expected.

Knowing the praise it got as a PC exclusive, I wanted to stick with it; and now I get it.

Ostensibly the story of an addict trying to save the world from the lord of vampires (incidentally, also his ex), the narrative goes places and has subtext that I'd be remiss to spoil in a review.

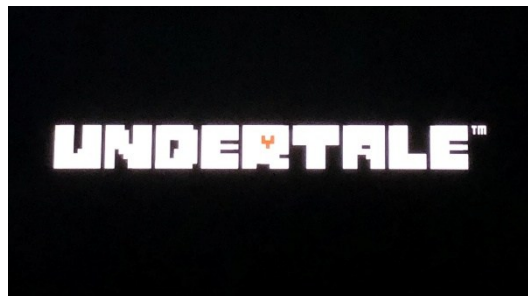
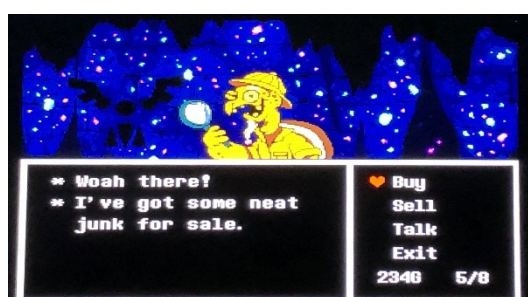
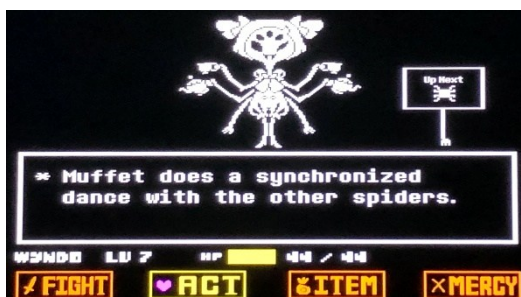
Suffice it to say it's thoughtful and impactful. On top of super-smooth third-person melee and shooting action are a swath of difficulty options.

This game is great.

Played on console: PS5.

Originally posted: 10/06/2024.

Mini-Review: Undertale



At the risk of angering this game's many fans... I... didn't... love it. I mean it's fine. I get that it subverts your expectations of this style of RPG. I get that it makes you think about your actions.

Heath and D (the daughter formerly known as Addie) both really enjoyed it and encouraged me to play.

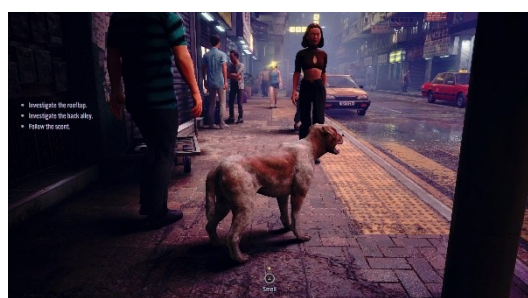
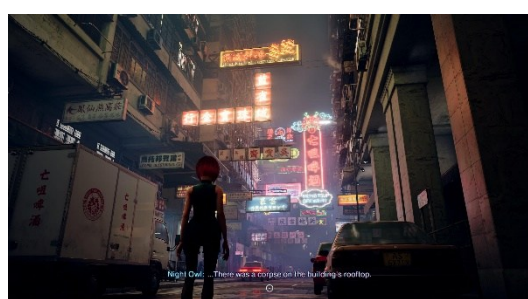
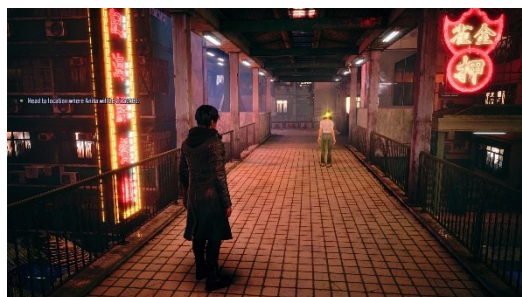
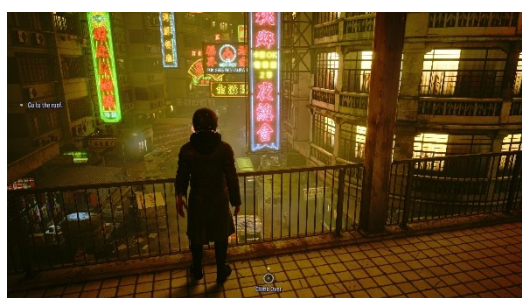
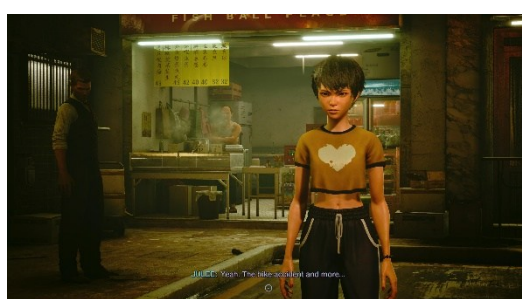
Heath even did the multiple playthroughs thing and sings the *Undertale* praises even weeks later. It just never fully clicked for me.

I'm not sure why. It's funny. It's witty. It's well-designed. The combat involves dodging these zany, creative attack patterns. The characters are cool. There are some fun puzzle areas. The music is good. And yeah, it turns the RPG genre on its head by letting you talk/spare your way out of battles (which I did often).

Maybe it was just too hyped? Maybe it just wasn't for me.

PS4 game played on PS5.
Originally posted: 02/13/2022.

Mini-Review: Slitterhead



I feel like this game made a big splash when it was first announced, was promptly forgotten about, and was ultimately released without most people even realizing it.

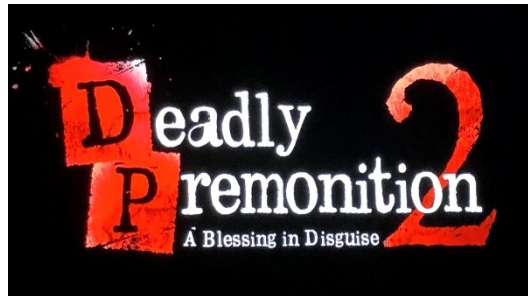
Slitterhead, a title that alone may cause some players to shy away from it, is a weird, original action game that exemplifies the phrase "it's not for everybody". A lot about it seems outdated and its lower budget shows, like NPC's that mill around like robots doing identical animations, and limited voice acting.

Look past that, and you're rewarded with a wild storyline about insect-like body snatchers and time travel, a unique (if awkward) combat system and body swapping mechanic, and a very memorable experience full of eclectic playable characters. I liked it, but it's a rare instance where it's tough for me to recommend it.

Played on console: PS5.

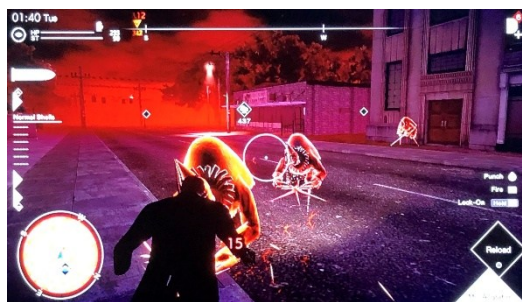
Originally posted: 12/14/2024.

Mini-Review: Deadly Premonition 2



Part sequel, part prequel to Swery's 2010 game, *DP2* is Switch exclusive.

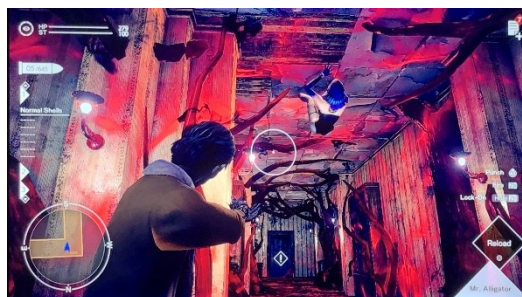
It's fairly janky, but I expected that. It's all kinds of weird and disturbing, mixing horror with offbeat comedy. It's a game where almost every moment is designed to make you wonder how it even exists.



The characters are comically odd. The story tackles heavy subjects in goofy ways. There's no real incentive to do side missions, since they're mostly busy work with no added story elements that I could see. Parts of the story and gameplay don't even make sense.

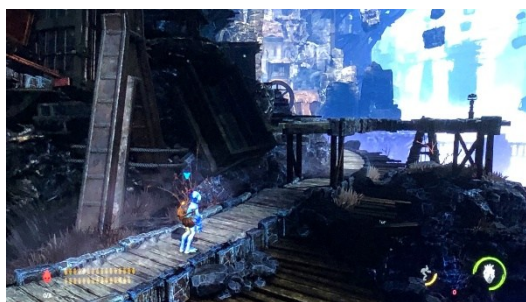
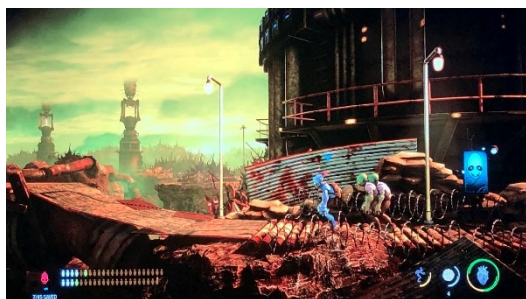
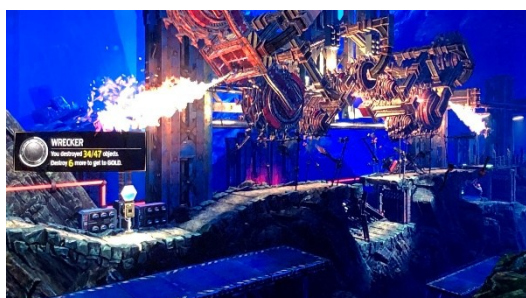
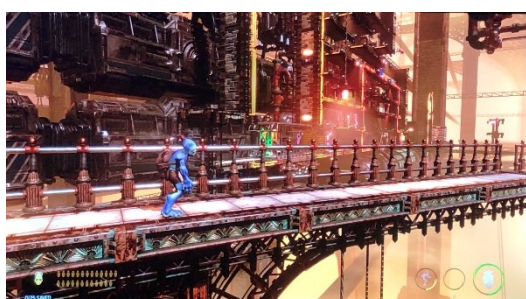
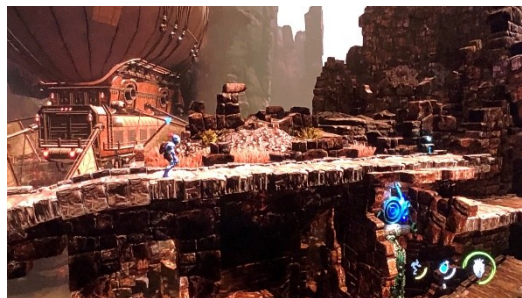
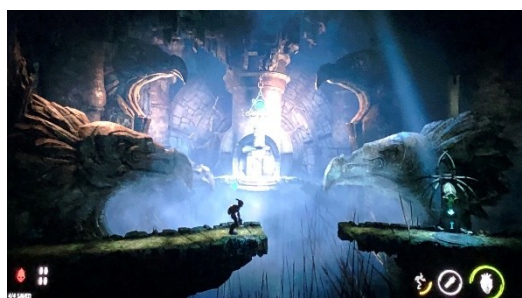
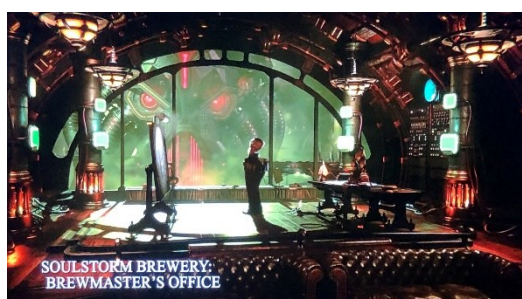
If it sounds like I'm hating on it, though, I'm not. It's exactly the reason fans of the first game should check it out.

This one may not become a cult classic, but it fills a niche - a return to Swery's bizarre creativity.



Played on console: Switch.
Originally posted: 08/28/2020.

Mini-Review: Oddworld - Soulstorm



I've always liked the Oddworld games. There's a style and charm that runs through the series even as they cover different gaming genres. The second game (Abe's Exoddus on PS1) is a particular favorite.

Soulstorm is a reimagining of that game, but in a way that makes it seem entirely different and new. Oddly (heh) enough, though, I had to be in the right mood for the 2.5D puzzle/adventure gameplay it offers, despite really liking each session in the moment.

A lock-up at the end of the game made me think my save was corrupted, but it turns out it ends there unless you rescue enough fellow Mudokons to unlock two more chapters and the good ending.

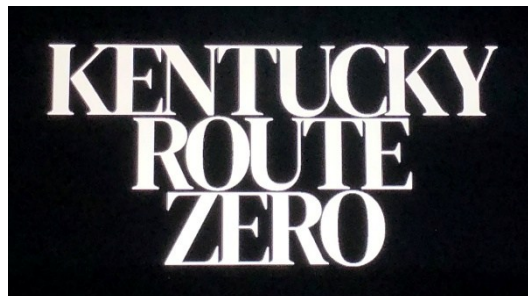
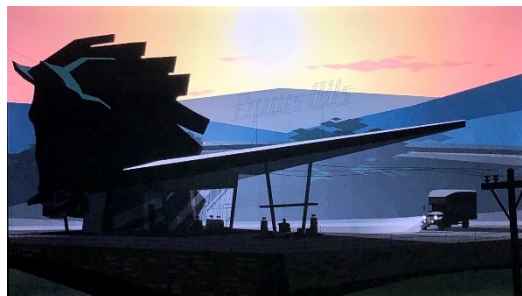
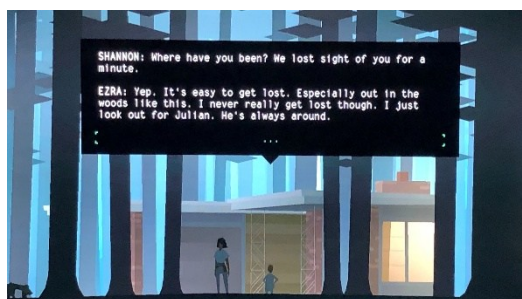
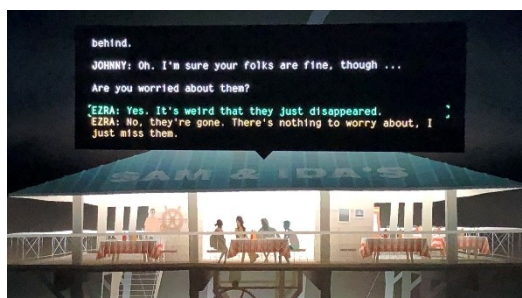
With chapter replay as an option, I might go for it. Finding and keeping them alive can be tough, but I'd like to see what happens then.

*Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: 05/25/2021.*

Addendum:

I ended up not going back. It's a really good game, but I was just never in the mood to try saving more Mudokons.

Mini-Review: Kentucky Route Zero



Here's a fascinating work of interactive fiction I've had an eye on for years, but only finally tried it out on Switch. I was drawn in almost from the start, and I marathoned my way through it this weekend. I couldn't stop.

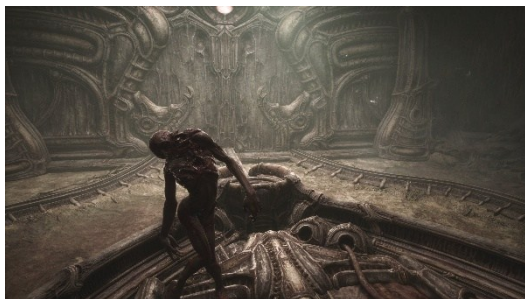
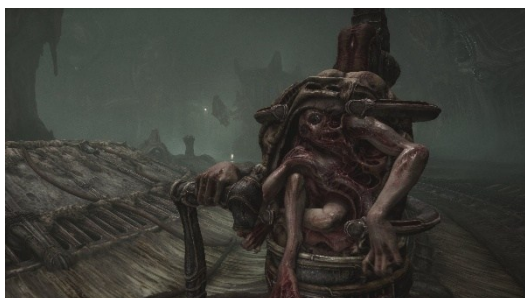
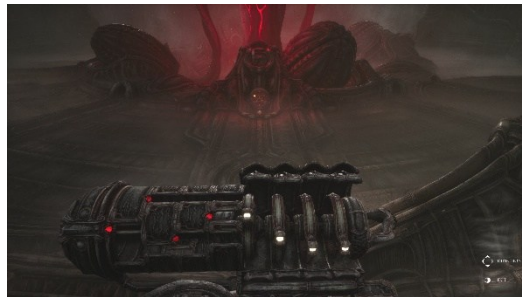
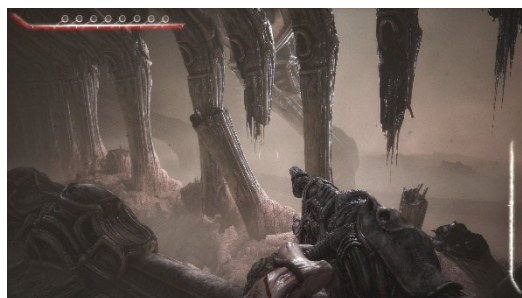
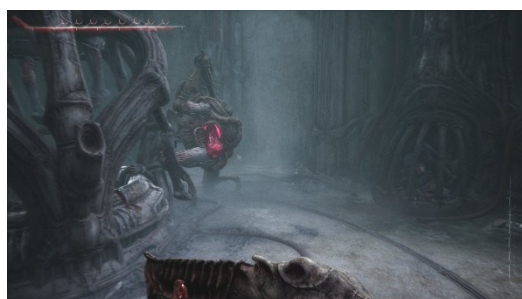
It's surreal and enthralling. I'd call it experimental, but this kind of storytelling in interactive fiction (IF) has matured over many years in the hobbyist scene; except for the presentation, audio and graphics, maybe.

It's less an adventure game and more a puzzle-less visual novel. I was less enamored by the time it ended, partly because my expectations for how the story might go were largely unfulfilled, but it's the kind of game I bet has thousands of fan theories and discussions to now pore over.

It's unique, surreal, and a must-play for IF enthusiasts.

*Played on console: Switch.
Originally posted: 08/02/2020.*

Mini-Review: Scorn



Somehow, I thought this was going to be a first-person shooter; something akin to *Doom*, but no.

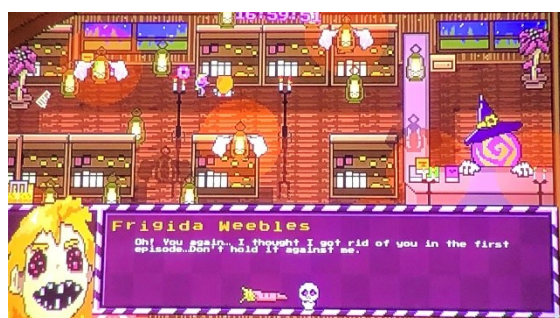
After a while, there is some combat (and even a late-game boss battle), but *Scorn* has as much in common with *Myst* as anything. This is a first-person adventure with puzzles, locked doors and plenty to figure out if you want to progress through the macabre, biomechanical, HR Giger-inspired world (think *Alien*, or maybe even the Borg in *Star Trek*).

There's no tutorial, no map, no objective markers. The creators trust you to work out how to play on your own. I only figured out how to heal by looking at the controller mapping, and it took even longer to figure out how to load the gun (tip: do it while aiming).

Your enjoyment may depend on how often you feel lost or stuck. Me? I loved it.

Played on Xbox Series X with GamePass. Posted: 10/15/2022.

Mini-Review: Baobabs Mausoleum 1 & 2



Episode 1

A wacky pixel-art top-down short story adventure with mostly simple puzzles. Each chapter changes things up with new mechanics or objectives. It has some grammar/typo issues and a couple of obscure puzzles later. It ended abruptly, but it was a fun time.

Played on console: Switch.

Originally posted: 04/12/2019.

Episode 2

It's a top-down pixel art adventure that falls apart quickly.

The first game was weird but well-crafted. This sequel is just bizarre and obtuse.

Act 1 is fine, but Act 2 lacks focus, having you explore a large area where busy scenes make it too difficult to even know what you can/should interact with. Walking under the avocado monster sequence-broke it, jumping me ahead to Act 12!

And, as it turns out, an item I need can only be found during real-world daytime, but I play at night. Didn't finish it. Big disappointment.

Played on console: Switch.

Originally posted: 09/10/2019.

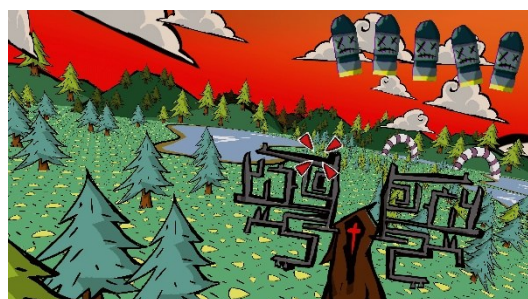
Addendum 1

To follow up, I did start over. I may not have needed to though, since I'd done everything but get the fishing rod, and the last act stands alone. I still think the first game was more focused and easier to navigate each act, but I'm happy to have finished it.

Addendum 2

I should also note that there is a way to change the in-game time from night to daytime. I had just overlooked that somehow initially.

Mini-Review: Baobabs Mausoleum Part 3



After almost six years, I finally got around to playing the final chapter in the Baobabs trilogy of bizarre bite-sized adventure games (available now in a "Grindhouse Edition" set on all platforms).

The game stars "Watracio Walpurgis", an anthropomorphic eggplant FBI agent stranded in a town where he must discover the identity of "resident 64" while becoming embroiled in a series of wacky, ridiculous situations.

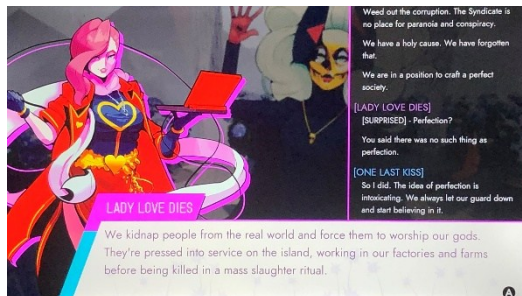
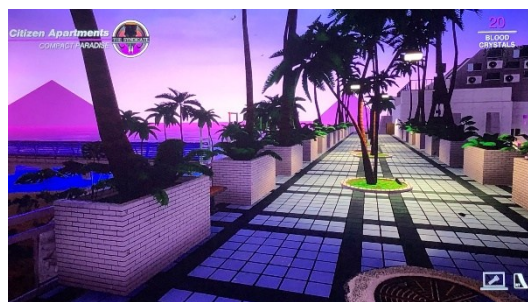
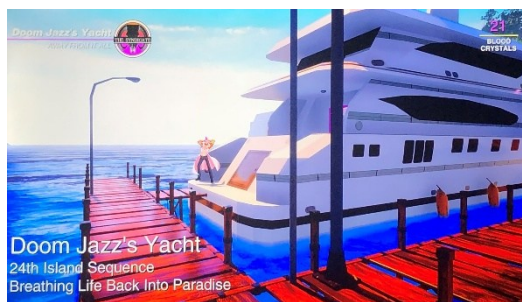
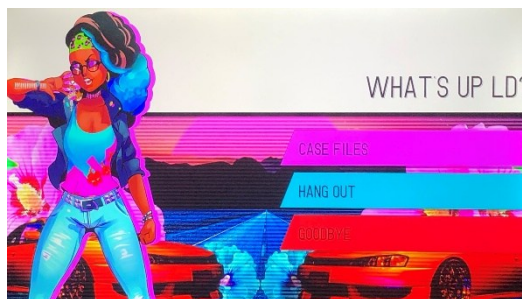
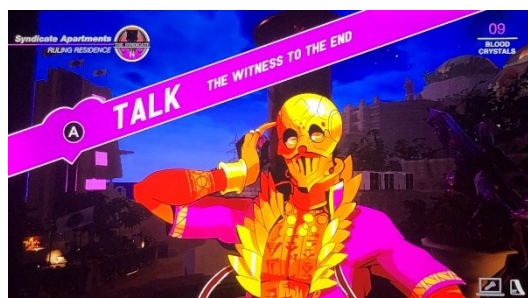
The third game starts with a weird FMV sequence, and later chapters introduce a 3D golf cart driving section where you run over sheep and an on-rails 3D shooter.

Most of it is top-down pixel art with a variety of puzzles to solve (often requiring you to figure out *what* to do next) to progress the story.

It's a fever dream full of quirky NPCs.

Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: 08/03/2025.

Mini-Review: Paradise Killer



The setup for this game is insane. It's an island paradise inside a pocket dimension, inhabited by immortal zealots that worship weird pagan gods and abduct real-world citizens to force them to also worship said gods to harvest the resulting psychic energy in order to destroy the island and create a better one every few hundred years.

You play as Lady Love Dies, on a mission to solve the murder of high-ranking zealots before the current cycle can end.

Take the clue-collecting mystery of *Outer Wilds*, put it in an adventure with the style, vibe and soft jazz/pop of *Danganronpa*, make it a first-person open-world with collectibles and you kind of have an idea of what this is.

It's a trip that takes a while to start making sense, but I ended up really enjoying it. It's weird and unique.

Played on Xbox Series X with GamePass. Posted: 05/14/2022.

Mini-Review: Clash - Artifacts of Chaos



Clash is a third-person action game with an RPG progression system and a stylized open-ish world that seems a bit *Souls*-inspired.



It's set in or tied to the Zeno Clash universe, which are a couple of first-person melee action games that I have on Xbox 360 but never got around to playing. Maybe now I will, since I liked this new one quite a bit.



It uses a visually impressive texture effect where everything looks kind of pencil sketched. Maybe it's a form of cel-shading? The music tied to each of the game world's regions is cool and sometimes weird, and I loved it.

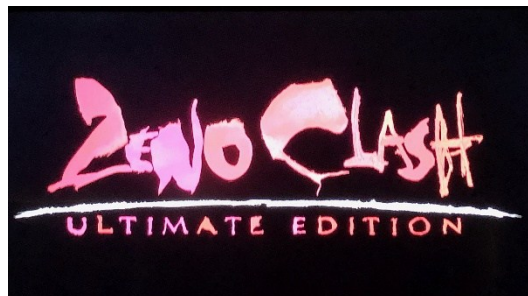
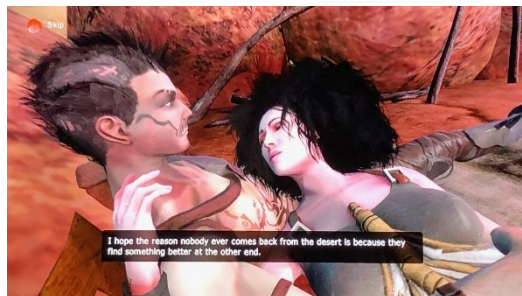
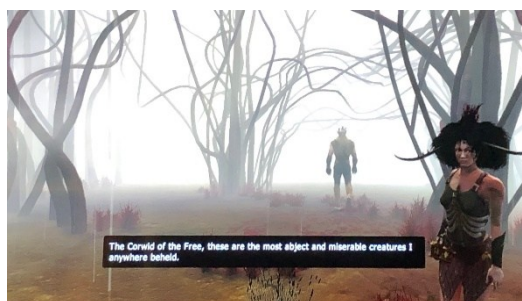


The world is a maze with an abundance of shortcuts to open; confusing at first but rewarding to explore. It's tied together by a father/son type story that's a bit *GOW*- or *TLOU*-ish. *Clash* is a strange but very cool experience.



Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: 04/16/2023.

Mini-Review: Zeno Clash



ACE Team has come a long way from this (their debut Source engine game) and the recently-released *Artifacts of Chaos* that returns to the same world (see yesterday's review).

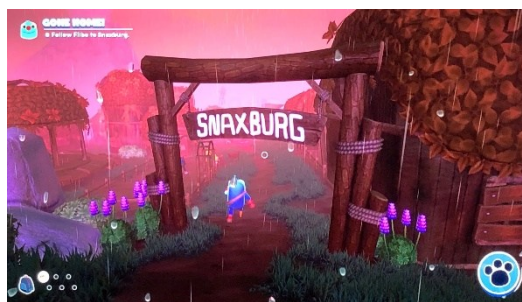
I didn't try multiplayer or the tower mode, but the campaign is a short story (five or six hours, if that) comprised of several short first-person brawling and shooting levels. And boy oh boy is it bizarre. It's weird and alien.

It's awkward to control (at least at first). I never mastered the combat, but I got good enough at getting out of the way of attacks to make it through without much trouble.

The story is... well, it's something. The characters are too. The weird thing is, I didn't love it but I kind of dig it somehow. If it's not a cult classic, it should be. Now I have to play the sequel.

Xbox 360 game played on Series X. Originally posted: 04/17/2023.

Mini-Review: BugSnax



The first free PS5 PlayStation Plus game is from Young Horses (makers of *Octodad*). It's also on PS4. It's an equally bizarre premise for a game, yet there's a good deal of substance to it; from the cool first person adventuring and puzzle solving to a story that's chock full of interesting characters and unexpected depth.

Gameplay involves a variety of bugsnak-catching devices, physics-based puzzle-solving, quests, NPC interaction, and exploring the different zones of the island.

I expected to enjoy it, and I ended up liking it even more than I expected - a rare thing for a game with a lot of hype. It's also a great Platinum trophy to get with a few fun surprises and a focus on 100% completion.

It's really something unique. Easily (and highly) recommended. My son (12) also recommends it.

Played on console: PS5.

Originally posted: 12/26/2020.

The Final Stage

When I posted about the last issue of VGGN to the TRS-80 CoCo Discord, I got my first complaint about the AI artwork I've (mostly sparingly) been "creating" for the newsletter. While the reception was positive in general, at least one person had a pretty visceral reaction to coming across artwork generated by AI:

"It's [sic] always feels like stepping into a dog poop when I suddenly come across it. Honestly a 2 minute doodle in mspaint, but made by an actual human is 1000x times better."

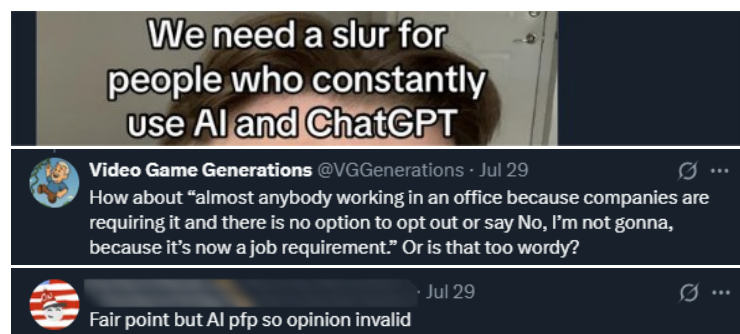
It's a sentiment I understand, and largely even agree with. My opposition to (or obstinance for) AI is kind of being forcibly removed from me, though, by way of working for a company that not only fully embraces it, but requires it to be used more and more in all aspects of our day-to-day, with directives to implement it in our processes as much as possible. There's a silent subtext to it all that anybody unwilling or unable to adopt AI may not be working in the best interests of the company; or may not be working for the company long-term at all.

When I do include AI art, I sometimes point out its shortcomings and failures myself. The captions I add often tell that story, like in the rendering of a six-fingered juggler on this issue's first page. Way back in [issue #2 on page 9](#), I went into a little more detail about my own inner conflict regarding AI-generated artwork, and my reasons for ultimately deciding to keep using it for now.

The AI genie is out of the proverbial bottle. It's everywhere, and companies see it as a seismic shift in the landscape of technology. It isn't going away. My inner conflict remains, but I wonder if in a decade, anybody will even bat a disapproving eye at generative AI.

This is the biggest reason why I haven't tried to promote the VGGN more than I do. It's a weird feeling to be proud of what I've managed to put together and of the articles/features I've written so far, yet also trepidatious about having more eyes on it because of the pervasive (and even deserved) negativity surrounding AI-generated artwork.

This is another example, from Twitter:



In the case of this newsletter, it's available for the low low price of \$0; not a justification, I suppose, but maybe to put it in perspective.

This is where I tease next week's feature or theme, but last week's gargantuan issue about my CoCo games took its toll on me (but well worth it to have that feature completed).

My twins start their senior year of high school in a few days, and D goes back to college for her junior year later this month. Maybe I'll write about schools/students in video games.

End Credits

The VGGN controller logo with multiple "X" buttons and some other artwork was made using <https://openart.ai>.

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