



THE VIDEO GAME GENERATIONS NEWSLETTER

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Loading Screen

This week, I'm taking a close look at a variety of video game development studios.

Correction: this week, I'm taking a close look at video game development studio *names*.

Correction again: It's not really a *close look* to be honest. It's more of a far away look. Rather than spoil the whole feature right at the start, I'll just say that this might be one of the silliest and most unnecessary articles I've written for the VGGN yet.

Enjoy!

News in the Recent Events this week comes from recent Kojima and PlayStation presentations. I've also included 17 of my prior social media mini-reviews, which are all games developed by studios that I mention in the main feature.



Taking a very close look at a video game development studio name.

Recent Events

Kojima Productions – Beyond the Strand

I didn't watch the whole two-and-a-half-hour video, but I skimmed a bit and caught a few highlights elsewhere.

A teaser trailer for *OD: Knock* was shown and can be seen separately [here](#). I guess "Knock" is the subtitle for the game portion of whatever this is. It's a collaboration with Xbox Game Studios, which may mean it'll be an Xbox exclusive. It looks creepy and weird, but this looks like an extended cut-scene (typical of Kojima games), not gameplay, so it's hard to know what to expect from just this.



There's a *Death Stranding* animation project called *Mosquito* in the works.

They showed a poster for *Physint* (I'm still not sure what that game's about) which is in early production. They talked about the *Death Stranding* movie from A24. They're making Kojima-branded sake for some reason.

The first source link included below is the full presentation. The second is a good summary of the highlights, with stand-alone video clips.

Source:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6CaAu3T7l0>

Source:

<https://www.dbltap.com/news/every-announcement-video-kojima-beyond-the-strand-stream>

PlayStation State of Play – September 2025

The next four news items come from Sony's presentation on Wednesday, September 24th.

Source:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QcEoGC51ZY>

Saros Release Date

Many gamers were probably happy to learn that Housemarque's next big game, *Saros*, now has a release date (March 20th, 2026). It looks great, but *Returnal* also looked great and I came away from that game feeling like I just wasted \$75. My mini-review is up later.

Deus Ex Remastered

It's easy to complain that it doesn't do enough to modernize the visuals (the way a full remake might), but ever since playing it on PlayStation 2 (not a bad port, IMO) way back in 2010 (eight years after it released for that console), it set an impossible standard for any other immersive sim to follow. It's one of my favorite games of all time. I hope gamers give it a chance and love it as much as I did, when it releases next year on February 5th.



Nioh 3 Release Date

I enjoyed the *Souls*-like gameplay in the first two *Nioh* games, with a particular fondness for *Nioh 2* and its co-op summoning feature. The third game launches February 6th, 2026.

Marvel's Wolverine – First Look and Info

Everybody correctly predicted that we'd see Insomniac's upcoming *Wolverine* game, and they were right. It's set to release in Fall 2026.

What's In a Name?

When I said at the end of last week's issue that I wanted to write about game studio names and logos, I hadn't decided exactly what that meant yet. Studios that made my favorite games? Studios with a funny or cool name? The studios making the biggest and best games today? Studios that are no longer in business? Studios with the most original logo or the most *unusual* name?

What's The Angle?

As I started putting together way too huge a list (and [this page](#) at Wikipedia was helpful), I started to notice something. There are great studios with simple to-the-point names (Sony Santa Monica, Hello Games), studios with interesting names (Spike Chunsoft, The Coalition), and studios with names that can be confusing out of context (FromSoftware, Rare, Retro Studios). Some studios, though, have names that are especially evocative.

From the Oxford dictionary:

e·voc·a·tive

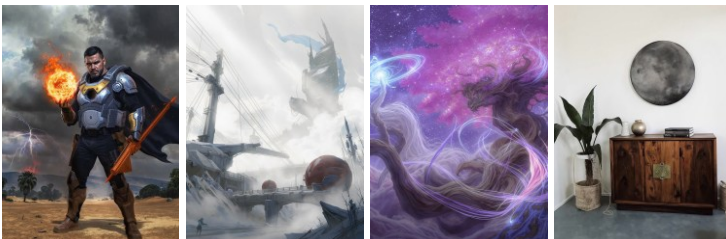
/əˈvəkədiv/

adjective: **evocative**

bringing strong images, memories, or feelings to mind.

"powerfully evocative lyrics"

Some studio names tell a story or paint a picture in just one or two or three words.



Sorry for yet more AI slop, but I had to know what it would do with nothing but a studio name for a prompt. Left to right: Gunfire Games, Obsidian Entertainment, Certain Affinity, and Moon Studios.

How's This Going to Work?

As usual, I've put together some ground rules and general guidelines. It's basically an explainer for this whole feature.

1. **This is my** list of the top 50 most evocative game development studio names. I selected them from an initial list of nearly 100, based on having an interesting or unique name that makes me think of *something*.
2. **I'm counting** down from #50 to #1. I didn't obsess too much over the exact placement, though. It's very subjective, of course. Those in the top 10, though, are ones that I really feel belong there.
3. **For each** studio, I'm also including a link to their website (if there is one), what games of theirs I've played (if any) and sometimes what other games they're known for, and their studio logo.
4. **I'm not always** showing their *latest* logo. Sometimes an older one is more iconic.
5. **I'm going** for studios I recognize. That means I've probably missed some smaller studios or indies that would otherwise deserve a mention. For example, I came across one called Nude Maker. They made *Steel Battalion*, apparently, and would probably be #1 on the list if I had known who they were.
6. **For each studio**, I'm writing just a sentence or two about what makes the name evocative; specifically, what it makes me think of, a silly story as if taking the name literally, or just a bit about why they made the list.
7. **Unless I already** know what each studio name means or why they chose it, I'm not looking it up. It's more fun to guess, speculate, or make it up. Ya'll are welcome to research and let me know.



#50: Guerrilla Games

<https://www.guerrilla-games.com/>

I played:

Killzone: Shadow Fall

Horizon: Forbidden West

Horizon: Zero Dawn

As it's spelled (like freedom fighters or a small militia), it's less interesting than how it sounds (like games made by big hulking gorillas).



#49: TellTale Games

<https://telltale.com/>

I played:

The Walking Dead: Season 1

Back to the Future: The Game

Tales from the Borderlands

Batman: Season 1 and Season 2

It's evocative of exactly what, presumably, it means. They will be telling tales.



#48: Double Fine Productions

<https://www.doublefine.com/>

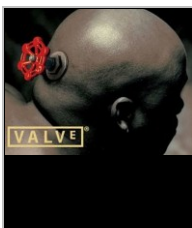
I played:

Stacking, Brütal Legend, Broken Age

Day of the Tentacle Remastered

Psychonauts and Psychonauts 2

Admittedly, it's the weird two-headed kid in the logo that stands out more than the name, but my mind also jumps to a double meaning: having to pay some sort of fine twice (or twice the normal amount), and that their games are more than fine, they're *double* fine.



#47: Valve Corporation

<https://www.valvesoftware.com/en/>

I played:

Portal 1 and 2, Left for Dead 1 and 2

Half-Life 1 and 2 and 2-ep1 and 2-ep2

Once you've seen the guy with a literal valve in the back of his head, you will never be able to unsee it. A prior version features a guy with the same red valve where his eye is supposed to be. Lately, their logo is just the text.



#46: Compile Heart

<https://www.compileheart.com/>

I played:

None (I think), but they're known for several series like *Hyperdimension Neptunia*, *Record of Agarest War*, and *Death end re;Quest*

As a programmer, I'm compiling code all day long. I've never compiled a heart, but maybe that's what you do to make a living robot.



#45: Crystal Dynamics

<https://www.crystaldynamics.com/>

I played:

Project Snowblind, the newer *Tomb Raider* trilogy, an older *Tomb Raider* trilogy (*Anniversary*, *Legend*, *Underworld*), *Marvel's Avengers*
They're also known for *Gex*

I think of some machine powered by clear crystals. I definitely don't think of their old too-cool-for-school mascot, Gex, but their logo these days is just their studio name.



#44: Bloober Team

<https://www.blooberteam.com/>

I played:

Observer, *The Medium*, *Silent Hill 2* (the remake). They're also known for *Layers of Fear* and the recent *Cronos*

There must be a really good story behind this one, but it makes me think of bloopers and blubber; certainly not their horror games. There's something disconcerting about that logo, though, as if there's an eye in the center of it just watching me. Creepy. Or maybe it's just a spiraling lowercase letter "b".



#43: Night School Studio

<https://nightschoolstudio.com/>

I played:

OXENFREE and *Afterparty*

I wasn't even a fan of school during the day.



#42: Digital Eclipse

<https://www.digitaleclipse.com/>

I played:

None, but they release definitive collections of retro games and related materials like the *Mega Man Legacy Collection*, the *Disney Afternoon Collection*, and *Atari 50*

In a world... in a digital world... nobody is safe from... the digital eclipse.



#41: Techland

https://techland.net/?lang=en_US

I played:

Call of Juarez: Gunslinger, *Dead Island*, *Dead Island: Riptide*, *Dying Light* and *Dying Light 2*

We've got the lowest prices around on all the latest doodads and gadgets! Get on down to Techland! Buy one thingamajig, get one free! Not in the mood for tech? Try our open world zombie games. They're great!



#40: High Voltage Software

<https://www.high-voltage.com/>

I played:

The Conduit (on Wii)
Also known for some licensed games, and now as a *Fortnite* support studio

This one requires no speculation, leaving little room for creative interpretation, but it's evocative nonetheless.



#39: inXile Entertainment

<https://www.inxile-entertainment.com/>

I played:

Wasteland 3, some of *Wasteland 2*
The Bard's Tale IV: Barrows Deep
I'm excited for *Clockwork Revolution*

Unintentionally, I confirmed my theory when looking at their Wikipedia page. I always knew it was probably because Brian Fargo had been gone a while and then made his crowdfunded comeback with *Wasteland 2*.



#38: Cyan Worlds

<https://cyan.com/>

I played:

Myst (the remake), *Riven*
Myst III: Exile, *Myst IV: Revelation*

They're generally known just as "Cyan", but I like the "Worlds" bit from their DBA ("doing business as") branding. It evokes mystery and possibilities and epic adventures, pretty much in line with the kinds of games they make.



#37: Supergiant Games

<https://www.supergiantgames.com/>

I played:

Bastion and *Hades*
They're also known for *Transistor*, *Pyre*, and *Hades II*, which is out now

I chose them over the similarly named Supermassive Games (makers of *Until Dawn*, the *Dark Pictures Anthology*, and the upcoming *Little Nightmares III*) because just imagine a super-giant. It's already a force to be reckoned with because it's huge, but it has superpowers too? Galactus Games, maybe?



#36: Sledgehammer Games

<https://www.sledgehammergames.com/>

I played:

Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare

Here's another that leaves little to the imagination. It springs to mind a game studio that is neither subtle nor nuanced.



#35: Tango Gameworks

<https://tangogameworks.com/>

I played:

The Evil Within and *The Evil Within 2*
Ghostwire Tokyo and *Hi-Fi Rush*

This one makes me think of Gomez and Morticia Addams (*The Addams Family*) dancing the tango. Their logo since being kicked to the curb by Microsoft and getting picked up by KRAFTON is now *totally* different.



#34: Gearbox Entertainment

<https://www.gearboxsoftware.com/>

I played:

Duke Nukem Forever, *Borderlands* (most of the series, and I'm playing through *Borderlands 4* currently)

My mind jumps to that weird little box Pinhead uses in the Hellraiser movies; either that or just a random box filled with loose gears.



#33: Team Meat

<http://www.supermeatboy.com/>

I played:

A tiny bit of *Super Meat Boy*, I guess

"Meatwad make the money, see.
Meatwad get the honies, G.
Drivin' in my car, livin' like a star.
Ice on my fingers and my toes and I'm a Taurus"



#32: Insomniac Games

<https://insomniac.games/>

I played:

Sunset Overdrive
All their *Spider-Man* games
Ratchet & Clank: Rift Apart
Ratchet & Clank (the 2016 one)

Just one guy, perpetually tired but unable to sleep, pouring his heart and soul into making games day and night. But seriously, those who work at the studio are referred to as Insomniacs.



#31: Playdead

<https://playdead.com/>

I played:

Limbo and *Inside*

Roll over, Fido. That's a good boy. Gooooood boy. Shake hands. Now play dead. Good boy, Fido!



#31: Tequila Works

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tequila_Works

I played:

Deadlight

Alcohol-fueled game development? Sadly, they were forced to close up shop last year.



#29: Nightdive Studios

<https://nightdivestudios.com/>

I played:

System Shock (remake)
Shadow Man Remastered
They're known for awesome remakes and remasters of cult classic games

How far underwater does light reach? I'm guessing it gets dark down there whether it's day or night, but there's just something a little spooky about diving at night, I would think.



#28: Oddworld Inhabitants

<https://www.oddworld.com/>

I played:

Most of the main *Oddworld* games:
Abe's Oddysee, *Abe's Exoddus*,
Munch's Oddysee, *Stranger's Wrath*,
and *Oddworld: Soulstorm*

To be honest, it's impossible for me to think of anything other than the characters inhabiting the game, which is probably the point; a studio made up of Mudokons, Glukkons, and a random Steef.



#27: Don't Nod Entertainment

<https://dont-nod.com/en/>

I played:

Remember Me, *Vampyr*, *Banishers: Ghosts of New Eden*, *Life is Strange* (seasons one and two); also looking forward to upcoming game *Aphelion*

Are you nodding? Stop it. Stop it right now. Don't you dare. Get a grip on yourself. DON'T NOD!



#26: Sucker Punch Productions

<https://www.suckerpunch.com/>

I played:

Infamous (everything except *Festival of Blood*), *Ghost of Tsushima*, *Sly Cooper* and the *Thievius Raccoonus*

Not considering the 2011 movie of the same name (which I never watched, despite sharing a last name with director Zack Snyder), the studio name always just makes me think of a literal cowardly [sucker punch](#).



#25: Starbreeze Studios

<https://www.starbreeze.com/>

I played:

The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay and *Assault on Dark Athena*, *The Darkness*, *Syndicate*, and *Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons*

So, I mentioned my lapsed love of sci-fi novels last week, right? There's a concept of a solar sail, which uses photons from a sun to propel a spacecraft; a "star breeze" if you will. From what I've read, NASA and others have actually made them work for real.



#24: Vanillaware

<https://vanillaware.co.jp/>

I played:

13 Sentinels: Aegis Rim

They're known for their unique, vivid art style in games like *Odin Sphere*, *Dragon's Crown*, *GrimGrimoire*, and *Unicorn Overlord*

I choose to think of "vanilla" in terms of the flavor. Those vanilla Tootsie Roll midgees are so, so good. It can't be the other meaning (plain, with no special features) because their games are great.



#23: Rockstar Games

<https://www.rockstargames.com/>

I played:

Bully, all the *Red Deads* including *Red Dead Revolver*, all the *Grand Theft Autos* since III (never finished *San Andreas*), *Max Payne 3*, *The Warriors*

In a self-fulfilling prophecy, the developers of the GTA series are now considered gaming rockstars.



#22: White Owls Inc.

<https://www.whiteowls.co.jp/>

I played:

The Missing, *Deadly Premonition 2*, *The Good Life*, and looking forward to *Hotel Barcelona*; it's coming soon

Not black, not brown, not speckled; pure white.



#21: Rebellion

<https://rebellion.com/>

I played:

Rogue Trooper Redux, *Atomfall*

They're the rebel alliance, fighting against the empire. On a side note, I was positive they made *The Warriors*, an awesome game based on the movie. I played the PSP version. According to every source on the internet, including [this post](#) on Twitter from Rebellion in 2020, they in fact *did not* make *The Warriors*. Why did I think that? Why did they need to deny it? Is it the logo font?



#20: Running With Scissors

<https://runningwithscissors.com/>

I played:

Nothing, but they're responsible for the *Postal* game series

You really shouldn't do that. It's very dangerous. On yet another side note, *Running With Scissors* was also the name of a jazz band started by an acquaintance of mine in college.



#19: Human Head Studios

<https://humanhead.com/>

I played:

Prey (the original one)

They're also "known" for the *Rune* series, *Defiance*, and *Brink*

Buzz What is "something a serial killer would keep in his freezer" Alex. Human Head shut down, got resurrected by Bethesda as Roundhouse Studios in 2019, and was then shut down by Microsoft in 2024. We never got *Prey 2*.



#18: Mistwalker Corporation

<https://www.mistwalkercorp.com/>

I played:

Lost Odyssey

They're also known for *Blue Dragon* and *The Last Story* (a Wii exclusive)

Mistwalker evokes a fantasy setting; maybe a dense forest shrouded in an eerie mist, where a lone hero steps slowly and confidently forward in his quest to find and defeat the evil wizard.



#17: The Behemoth

<https://www.thebehemoth.com/>

I played:

Castle Crashers

My mind goes to those super mutants in *Fallout 3*, or those extinct elephant things – the woolly mammoth – or a combination of both. I don't know. Just something really huge that you don't want to mess with. I guess their egg-shaped chicken mascot is the canonical behemoth?

mercurysteam

#16: Mercury Steam

<https://www.mercurysteam.com/>

I played:

Metroid: Dread, *Metroid: Samus Returns*, *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow* and *Lords of Shadow 2*

Despite being a sci-fi fan, I don't immediately think of the planet Mercury. Rather, I envision some sort of toxic gas made from mercury, the liquid metal stuff in old thermometers.



#15: Media Molecule

<https://www.mediamolecule.com/>

I played:

LittleBigPlanet and *LittleBigPlanet 2*

It's a very tiny TV station broadcasting from inside Ant-Man's quantum world, but it's all fake news.



#14: Silicon Knights

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silicon_Knights

I played:

Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem
Also known for *Too Human*, *Legacy of Kain: Blood Omen*, *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes*, and *X-Men Destiny*

The first time I heard the term “silicon” was on an episode of *Star Trek (The Original Series)* when I was a kid. No, I'm not quite old enough to have seen it when it originally aired. This was a rerun some fifteen years or more later, in the 1980s. Anyway, there was a silicon-based life form called the Horta, in the episode *The Devil in the Dark*. So, I imagine that, somehow, but as a medieval knight. Anyway, this studio shut down in 2014.



#13: The Chinese Room

<https://www.thechineseroom.co.uk/>

I played:

Everybody's Gone to the Rapture
Still Wakes the Deep

Thank you for joining us today as we present our new Earth exhibition. As you know, Earth was a funny little planet that collapsed under the sheer stupidity of its inhabitants, called “humans”, some four thousand years ago. Now, direct your attention here to the American room. And over there, we have the Russian room. You'll also notice the Japanese room, and the Chinese room, and over there...

It actually refers to a thought experiment about AI and being able to tell the difference between true understanding and simply being equipped with an enormous symbol-matching system.



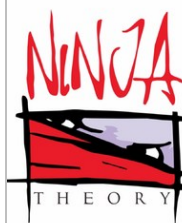
#12: Blizzard Entertainment

<https://www.blizzard.com/en-us/>

I played:

Just *Diablo IV*, but they're also known for *Warcraft*, *World of Warcraft*, *The Lost Vikings*, *Overwatch*, *StarCraft*

A very cold place to work.



#11: Ninja Theory

<https://ninjatheory.com/>

I played:

Heavenly Sword, *Enslaved: Odyssey to the West*, *Dmc: Devil May Cry*, *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*, and *Senua's Saga: Hellblade II*

Welcome to Ninja Theory 101, class. No, we won't be practicing stealth or throwing any shuriken. We'll just be thinking about it.



#10: Yacht Club Games

<https://www.yachtclubgames.com/>

I played:

Shovel Knight, but I'm looking forward to *Mina the Hollower* late next month

Jeeves, my good man, would you please notify Thurston, Prescott, Langston, and Sterling that we're ready to set sail? Right-o, then, good chap.



#9: Piranha Bytes

<https://www.piranha-bytes.com/>

I played:

ELEX and *ELEX II*

They're also known for the *Gothic* series and the *Risen* series

Another studio that was sadly shut down, and another with a name that evokes exactly what it sounds like (being bitten by piranhas, like a hapless victim in a *James Bond* movie). It's spelled "bytes" though. Get it? It's software.



#8: Iron Galaxy Studios

<https://www.irongalaxystudios.com/>

I played:

None, but they did help with *Crash Bandicoot: N-Sane Trilogy* apparently, and I played through all of that

In the far-flung reaches of space is a heavily mechanized and industrialized galaxy.



#7: Grasshopper Manufacture

<https://www.grasshopper.co.jp/en/>

I played:

So many; *The Silver Case* (never did finish it though), *Killer7*, *Contact* (DS), *No More Heroes* trilogy, *Shadows of the Damned*, *Lollipop Chainsaw*, *Let it Die* (at least some), *Killer is Dead*

Insects that have been trained to build things. It also reminds me (more recently, anyway) of a dumb joke from *Kinda Funny Games Daily* where somebody kept saying "meta-cricket" instead of Metacritic, so they put up a Twitter [account](#) with a grasshopper as the icon. It's been dormant for more than a year, though.



#6: Chucklefish Games

<https://chucklefish.org/>

I played:

None, but they're known for *Wargroove* and also as a publisher

Self-explanatory: a happy little fish that thinks everything is funny. Their icon nails it exactly.



#5: Naughty Dog

<https://www.naughtydog.com/>

I played:

Uncharted (all of them), *The Last of Us* (both of them), *Jak and Daxter* (the original trilogy), *Crash Bandicoot* (the originals in the *N-Sane Trilogy*, although those ports weren't them)

In the sequel to earlier developer Playdead, Fido will just *not* behave. He's barking at all hours, chasing cars, chewing up homework, and dragging his butt along the carpet.



#4: People Can Fly

<https://peoplecanfly.com/>

I played:

Bulletstorm, *Gears of War: Judgment*

Up, up, and away!



#3: Flying Wild Hog

<https://flyingwildhog.com/>

I played:

Shadow Warrior, *Shadow Warrior 2*, *Evil West*, and bits of some others

You've heard of feral hogs (30-50 of them), but the true danger is the fabled flying wild hog.



#2: Toys For Bob

<https://toysforbob.com/>

I played:

None, but they have a [huge catalog](#)

None for you. All for Bob. He likes toys.



#1: Spiders

<https://www.spiders-games.com/>

I played:

Faery: Legends of Avalon, *Mars: War Logs*, *Bound by Flame*, *GreedFall*, *SteelRising*, *The Technomancer*

In the number one spot is Spiders. It doesn't get more evocative than this, although I can't say it's in a *good* way. Their games have been fantastic, though, and they just keep getting better.

The Best of the Rest

Here are many more studio names from the original list I put together that didn't make the top 50, presented to you in rapid-fire format.

HAL Laboratory

The AI from *2001: A Space Odyssey* is a scientist.

Monolith Software Inc.

HAL Laboratory might know something about this.

Red Thread Games

It's that one sticking out of your Christmas sweater.

Quantic Dream

I had to look up the word *quantic*. Not what I thought.

Lionhead Studios

I know this one. It was named after a pet hamster.

Infinity Ward

A wing of the hospital where they treat time travelers.

Respawn Entertainment

A clever name after Infinity Ward's founders got fired.

Remedy Entertainment

Just be sure you're not buying snake oil.

Bungie, Inc.

Extreme cliff diving tethered to an elastic rope.

Housemarque

Sadly, it doesn't rhyme with [Biz Markie](#), but it should. "You... you got what I neeeeed. But you say he's just a friend. And you say he's just a friend. Oh baby youuu..."

Obsidian Entertainment

They just bang rocks together; cool rocks, though.

FromSoftware

Q: Hello, Miyazaki-san. How do make your money?

A: FromSoftware.

Neversoft

Sometimes rough, sometimes hard, but...

Game Freak Inc.

Alex Winter in that one bizarre circus [movie](#).

Rogue Factor

Only our paladin, ranger, and cleric are ready to go.

Harebrained Schemes

No, I didn't make this one up. They make *Shadowrun*.

DrinkBox Studios

Staffed by your local little league soccer team.

Traveller's Tales

Because *The Canterbury Tales* was already taken.

Striking Distance Studios

By the time you see them, you're already too close.

Rare

I own a few rare games. No, sorry, I mean Rare games.

Airtight Games

Useful if your studio doubles as a submarine.

Gunfire Games

This seems like a dangerous place to work.

Playground Games

Red Rover: the most dangerous and problematic children's playground game since dodgeball.

Riot Games

I prefer the definition that means "wildly amusing".

Bioware

A weapon of mass biological destruction.

Spike Chunsoft

An enemy from *Super Mario Bros.* teams up with Chun-Li from *Street Fighter* to make their own games.

Boss Key Productions

At face value, a key that unlocks your boss's door.

WayForward Technologies

If you're lost, follow us. We know the way forward.

Certain Affinity

I've got nothing but a doubtful aversion to this one.

Hazelight Studios

A bright beacon through the obscurity of life.

MachineGames

It's that one show where little remote-controlled robots fight each other with axes and saws.

Clover Studio

The four-leaf variety is probably implied.

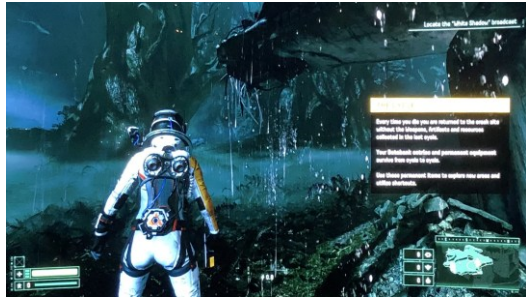
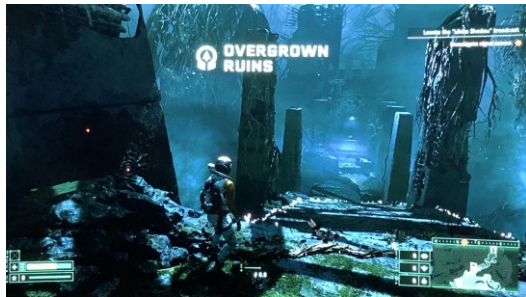
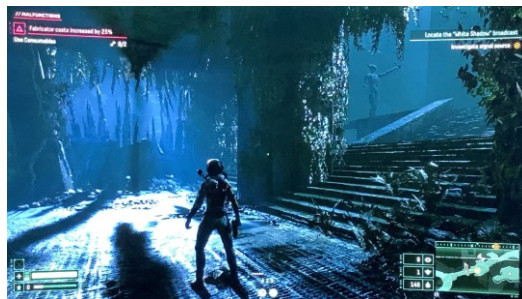
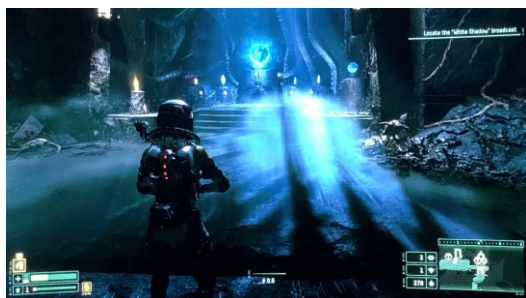
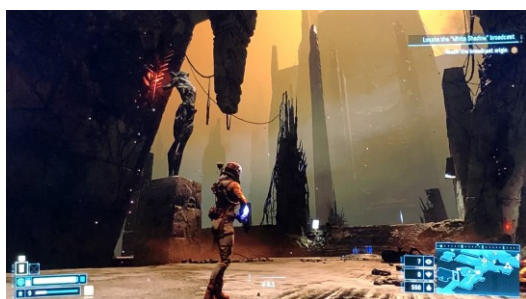
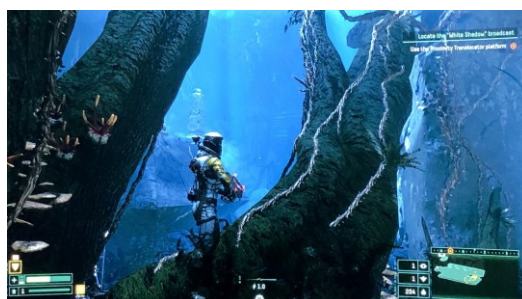
Infocom, Inc.

Broadcasting facts and statistics, 24 hours a day.

Supermassive Games

Absolutely, positively, without any doubt, way too large to fit into your console's cartridge slot. Sorry.

Mini-Review: Returnal



I don't usually review games I haven't finished, but here we are. The clock says I've played over 26 hours, which is more than some reviewers say it takes to beat.

I've made it to the boss of the third "biome" several times. Turns out, there are six. It even cheated me out of the trophy for beating the second boss. I did get the suit upgrade, and those help you skip ahead to later areas faster on future runs, but then you miss upgrades along the way.

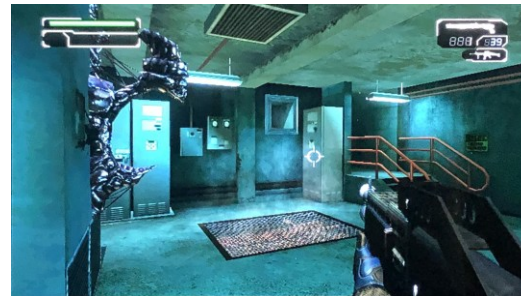
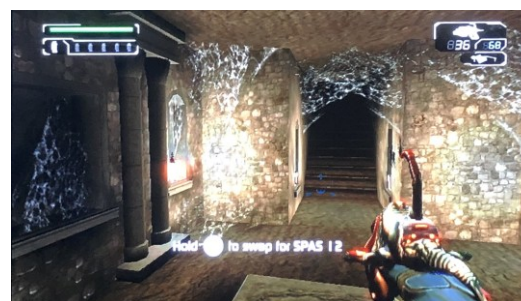
The game is addictive, with excellent gameplay, great sound and haptics, and a sci-fi mystery that's right up my alley, but the roguelike structure is the problem for me. No one part has been *too hard*, but it often takes several failed, unrewarding runs to gain any permanent advantage.

It wastes your time, and I'm getting too old for that. I may never finish this one.

Played on console: PS5.

Originally posted: 05/05/2021.

Mini-Review: The Conduit



It's a pointer-and-nunchuck controlled first person shooter that plays surprisingly well. Popular opinion is that it's mediocre as FPS games go, but if I had played this when it was new, I'd probably have loved it.

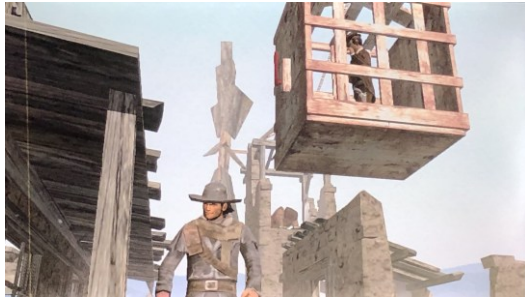
Graphically, it sits between a PS2 game and an Xbox 360 game. Frame rate is smooth, action is great, and there are some interesting ideas (secret rooms, hidden collectibles, scanning mode, etc.). Atmosphere-wise, it's like *Halo* mixed with *Perfect Dark*. The story is Illuminati-type stuff, ending on a bit of a cliffhanger (continued in the sequel I guess).

The multiplayer mode is online-only but the Wii online service is no more, so that's gone. It has lots of control adjustment settings, so you can fine tune how it plays.

I had a fun time blasting aliens in the Pentagon, White House, etc.

*Wii game played on WiiU.
Originally posted: 08/18/2021.*

Mini-Review: Red Dead Revolver



It's hard for games of the PS2 generation to hold up so many years later, but (1) this is from Rockstar, and (2) it's a precursor to *Red Dead Redemption* (although with no story ties that jumped out at me).

You can see pieces of inspiration that led to *Redemption* - diverse characters, some downright wacky mission scenarios - but there's no open world and what little between-mission freedom you have is very basic.

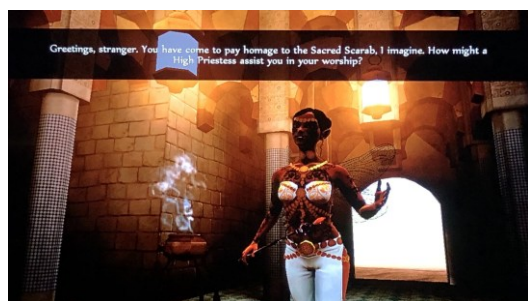
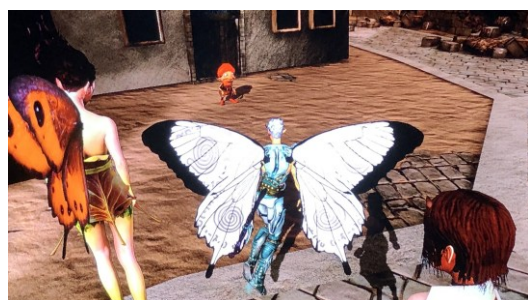
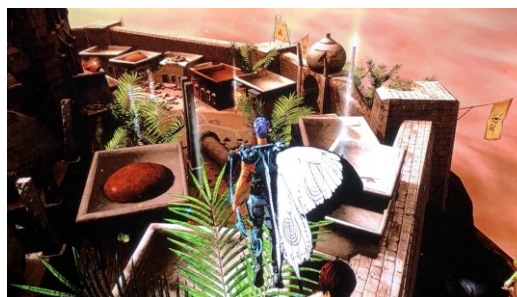
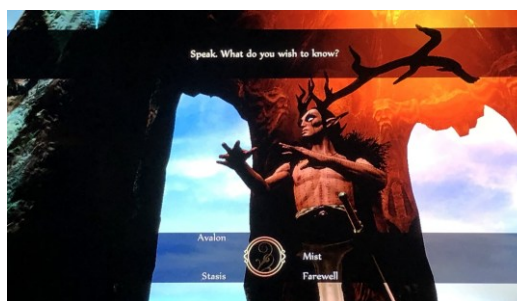
It controls well, and there's generous targeting, but later missions do get pretty tough. I found ways to cheese some of the combat encounters, but later duals were a pain.

There's also a split-screen deathmatch mode for up to 4 players, with stages and characters unlockable in the campaign.

So... does it hold up? I'd say better than expected, but a bit dated.

PS2 Classic played on PS5.
Originally posted: 06/24/2021.

Mini-Review: Faery – Legends of Avalon



I love Spiders; the game developer, I mean. *Faery* is one of their earliest, before their games started taking on the form of *The Witcher*, *Dragon Age*, *Mass Effect*, etc.

There's a lot wrong with *Faery* (bad light/dark contrast in the visuals, no spoken dialogue (just text), companions you never really get to know much, etc.) but I still found it highly enjoyable.

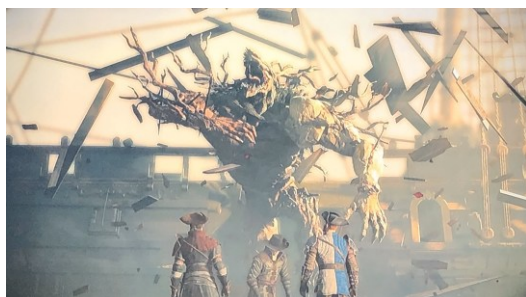
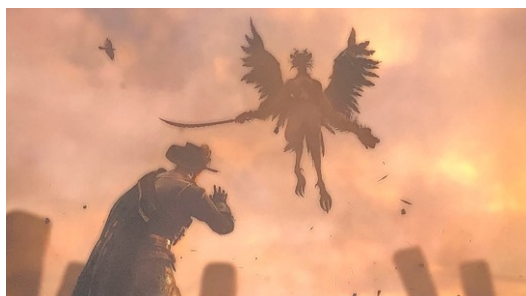
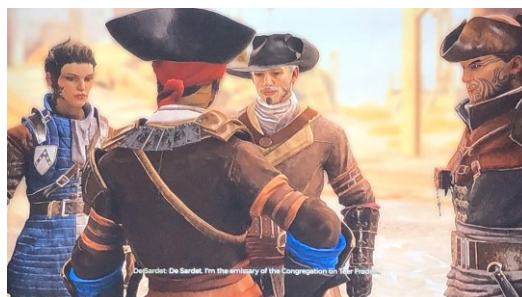
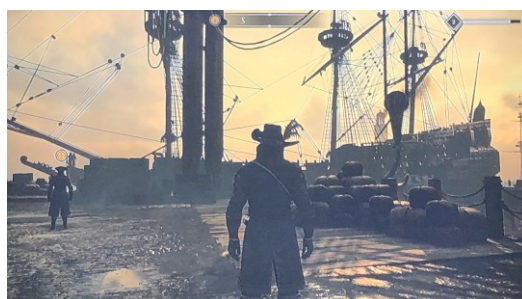
The four worlds you visit are super small, and since you always fly, they seem even smaller.

Combat is turn-based. On normal, it's quite easy (nobody on my team ever died). It's short, at 7 to 10 hours (depending on how many side quests you do).

I think for most people it wouldn't be worth playing, but through my rose-tinted Spiders-fan glasses (and the cheap sale price at the time), I liked it.

Xbox 360 digital game played via back-compat on Xbox Series X. Originally posted: 01/23/20222.

Mini-Review: GreedFall



An action RPG in the style of *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (and *The Witcher 3*, although companions make it more *BioWare*-ish).

All the usual things: skill trees, quests, branching decisions, exploration, loot, flexible play style (traps, magic, melee, guns, etc.). It's a big leap forward in what Spiders (the developer) has accomplished so far.

The few glitches I saw were mostly cosmetic, and on par with other games of this style and scope.

Interesting setting and story. Great choice to sink a few dozen hours into, for fans of this kind of RPG. There was something unique, magical about earlier Spiders games - the quirks, the jank, the feeling that a little-known studio created something so ambitious. *GreedFall* feels like a breakthrough. Although it loses that underdog feel, it becomes something with wider market appeal.

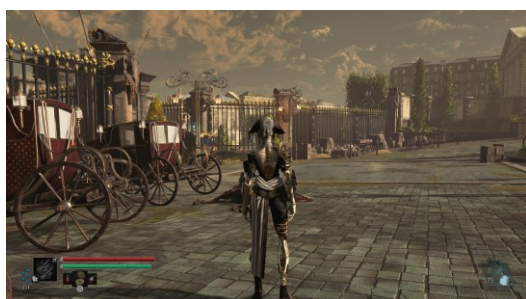
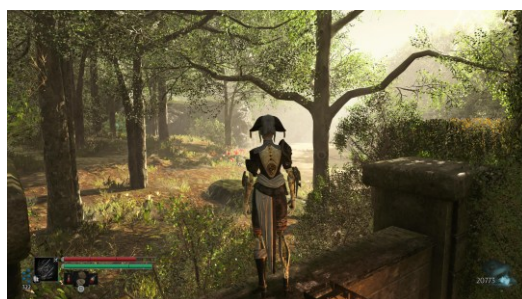
I was impressed with almost every aspect of the game: combat variety, voice acting, incredible vistas and locales, general technical polish.

While *The Technomancer* and *Bound by Flame* caught me more by surprise, *GreedFall* is a step up that shouldn't be missed by BioWare/CDPR fans.

Oh, one other thing to note. The game does feature a character creator. You can play as your own De Sardet, male or female, with a range of customization options. It doesn't go so far as to let you completely shape the face of your character, but it's good enough to do the job.

Played on PS4 – 10/07/2019.

Mini-Review: SteelRising



Developer Spiders' business model seems to be taking a popular game, cloning the core mechanics/concept, and putting their own story, setting, or twist to it.

Earlier efforts took inspiration from Bioware and CDPR. *SteelRising* is *BloodBorne*, more or less.

The twist is that you play as a clockwork robot during the French Revolution. Enemies are all mechanical. Otherwise, it's the *Souls* formula through and through; a bit less nightmarish than *BloodBorne* though.

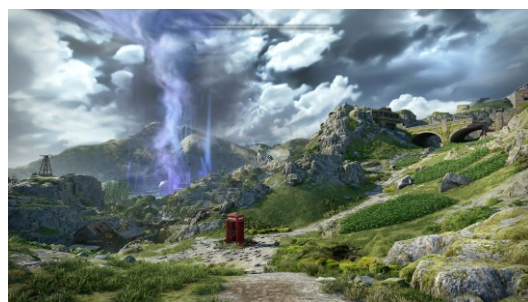
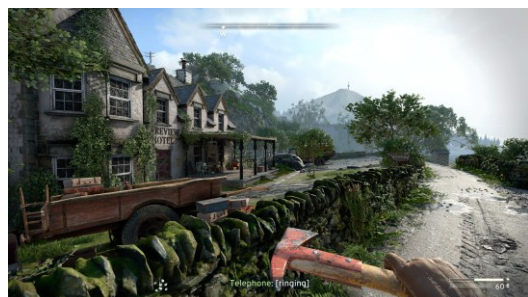
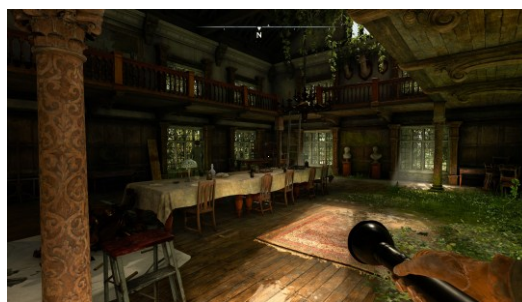
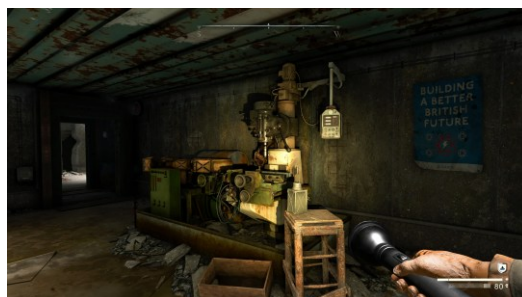
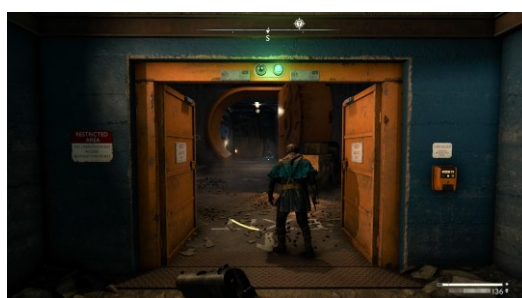
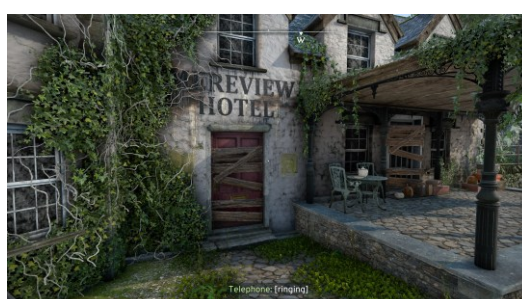
While their earlier games had a sort of endearing jankiness to them, *GreedFall* before it and now *SteelRising* really showcase their talent.

To be fair, I loved the earlier ones too.

This was quite a bit easier than the typical *Souls*-like; more story, too, and several tracked side quests. A departure from their open world RPGs, but fun!

Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: 09/11/2022.

Mini-Review: AtomFall



Rebellion's latest has surface-level similarities to modern *Fallout*, but it's very much its own thing.

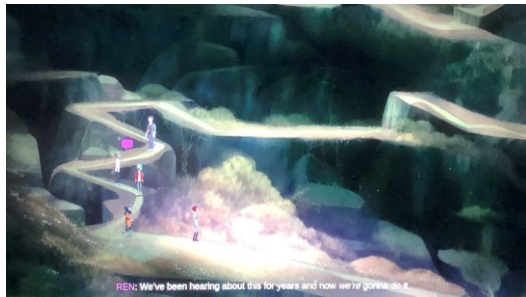
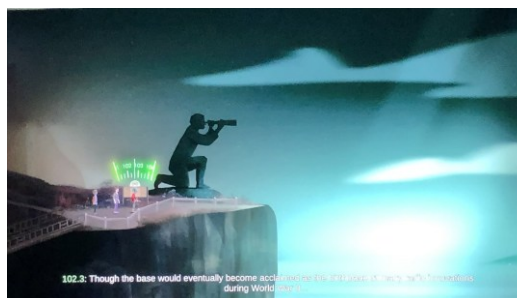
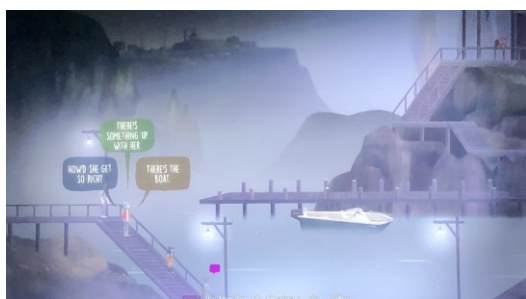
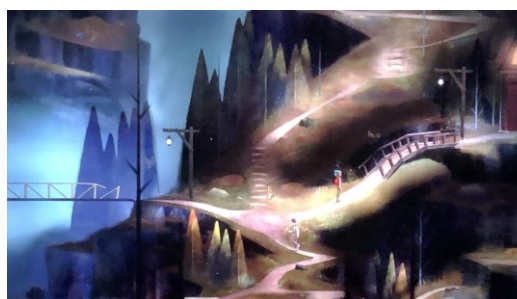
For one, it's far shorter. Even if you take your time to pursue multiple possible endings and explore the five main areas and various bunkers (dungeons), you're in for, at most, 30 hours by my guess. A speed run (for one of the trophies) grants you a five-hour limit, but an optimal, well-planned run on easy that skips exploration and role-playing takes less than an hour.

Speaking of that, it's also not an RPG. You can unlock passive skills, but they require training manuals and stimulants (both being items you find in the world). There's crafting, which requires components and the diagrams to unlock them.

It took a while to click, but I enjoyed it all the more for what it is, which isn't *Fallout*.

*Played on console: PS5 Pro.
Originally posted: 04/20/2025.*

Mini-Review: Oxenfree



Sort of an adventure game, but sort of a narrative experience. I managed to play it with almost no prior knowledge of what it's about (a good thing for a game like this).

It seemed like it was going to be just some slice-of-life drama about teenage angst with an insufferable, unlikable cast of misfits, but no. Where a game like *Firewatch* fell flat for me because pretty much nothing happens, *Oxenfree* delivers the kind of mystery and story that I can really get into.

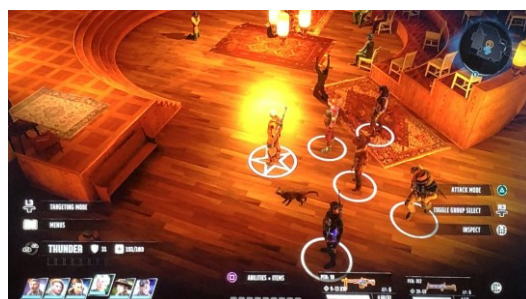
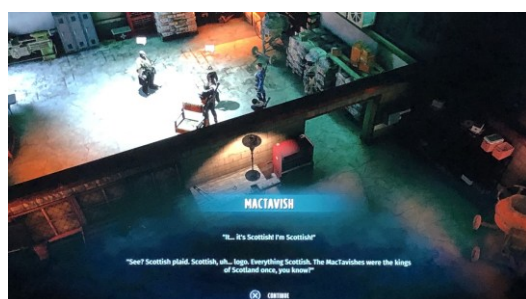
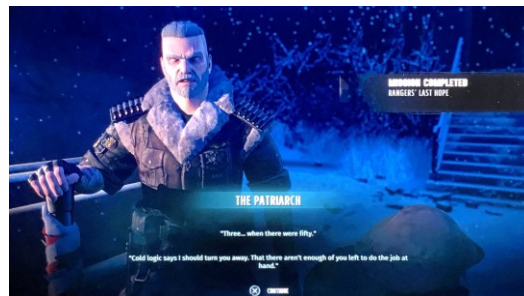
It has a similar vibe to *Kentucky Route Zero* (although shorter, and not quite the masterpiece I consider *KRZ* to be). Still, it's a fantastic game with a great story.

Apparently, there are things that contribute to different ending variations, plus some notes/collectibles I missed.

Glad I finally got around to this one. I loved it.

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

Mini-Review: Wasteland 3



The idea of an isometric turn-based strategy RPG has always appealed to me, yet somehow I haven't really gotten into the ones I've tried (*Divinity: Original Sin 2* and *Wasteland 2* come to mind – I didn't finish them). *Rabbids on Switch* was one of the few exceptions, and maybe *XCOM* (although that's more just a strategy game) – until now.

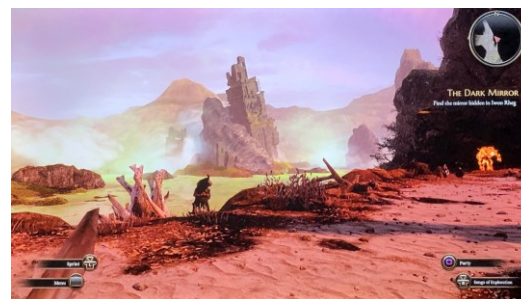
Wasteland 3 is really good, with interesting quests, weird characters, lots of loot and RPG systems that are complex but not overwhelming.

It also features some really cool music, including odd but fitting covers of familiar songs and even old TV show themes (*Green Acres*, *Welcome Back, Kotter*).

The game's undoing, though, is a range of annoying glitches (I can live with) and frequent hard crashes (way bigger of an issue). I still enjoyed it, but oof. Needs fixed.

Played on console: PS4 Pro.
Originally posted: 10/09/2020.

Mini-Review: The Bard's Tale IV



Full title: The Bard's Tale IV: Barrow's Deep

Most of my talking points are technical issues (jittery frame rate, muddy textures, a few hard crashes) and difficulty (was challenging but fair only on Easy mode, for me). Yet... I ended up loving this game!

This RPG's mythical races (elves, dwarves, etc.) have a unique look, and the fantasy world uses bold colors and contrast.

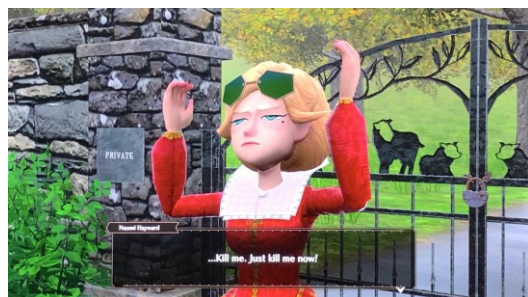
Explore in 1st person, but battle in turn-based tactical encounters that seem an odd fit at first. When it clicks, the combat is fun and the skill options are great.

Many areas feature puzzles and riddles of several varieties, often forming a sort of puzzle-gauntlet to solve (ex: *Talos Principle*, *The Witness*). I liked this aspect a lot - bird/fairy puzzles in particular.

It's a strange RPG with lots of haunting Gaelic bard songs, and I loved it.

Played on console: PS4 Pro.
Originally posted: 07/14/2020.

Mini-Review: The Good Life



Although it's "free" on GamePass, I played on PS5 due to my Kickstarter reward (disclaimer: I'm listed as a backer in the credits, but that didn't factor into my thoughts on the game).

SWERY's latest is a departure from the spy and horror stuff we've seen in the past, but keeps the small town with eccentric citizens aspect of *Deadly Premonition*.

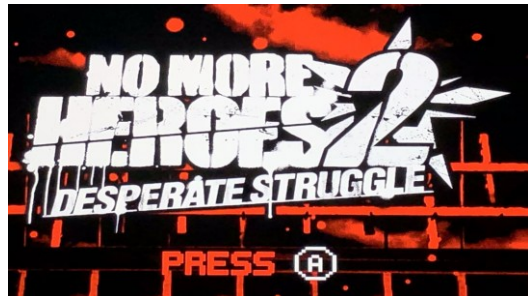
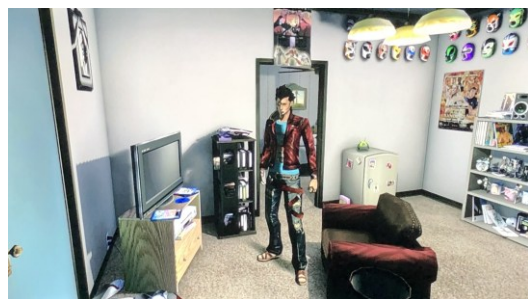
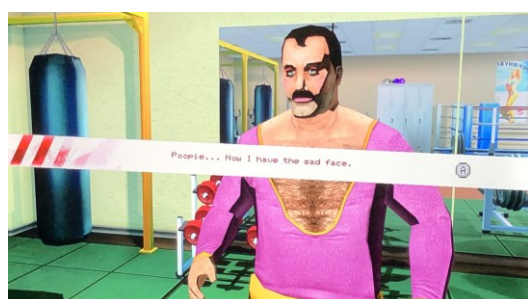
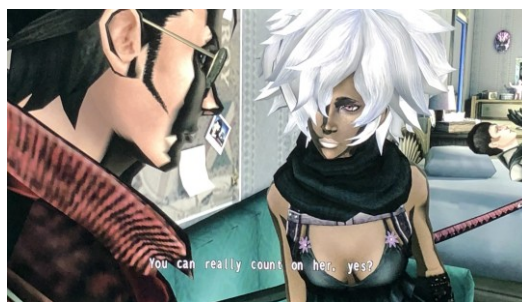
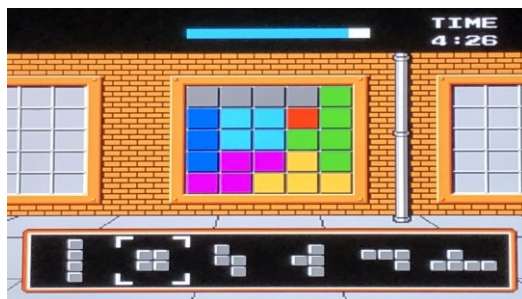
You may already know the game's premise (I won't spoil it if you don't). There are tons of systems at work here: survival stats like hunger, sleep and sickness, photography, a faux Instagram, sheep-riding (leave it to SWERY to skip horses), crafting of a sort, side quests, more.

The critical path isn't long, but the side content is exponential. Apparently, trophy hunters are in for over 120 hours of mostly dull grinding.

Familiar jank. Fun story.

PS4 game played on PS5.
Originally posted: 12/20/2021.

Mini-Review: No More Heroes 2



Full title: No More Heroes 2: Desperate Struggle

Suda51 games are a good choice if you're in the mood for goofy action games. Unlike the first game, which appeared on PS3 after its Wii debut (and is now on Switch), *NMH2* never made the jump to another console until now. It also drops the open world (or city) exploration, opting instead to just present destinations as a menu.

The core game is still a series of combat encounters leading to a boss, but several mini-games (most styled like 8-bit NES) also provide in-game rewards.

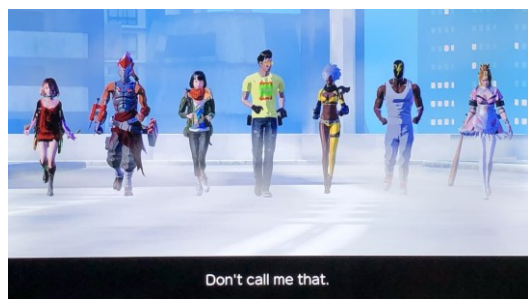
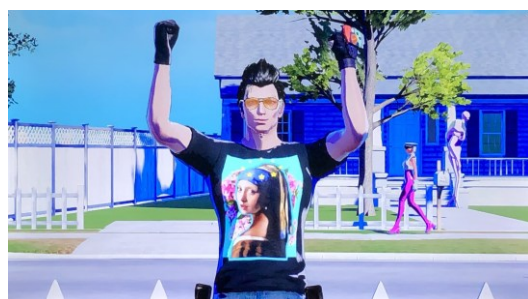
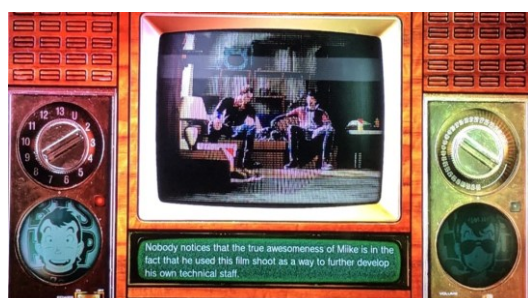
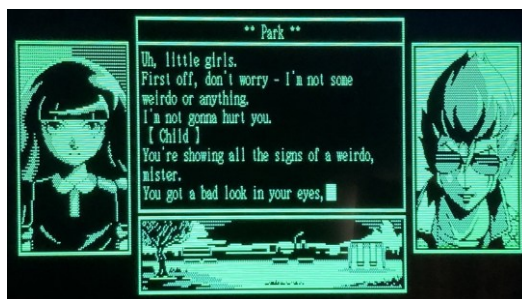
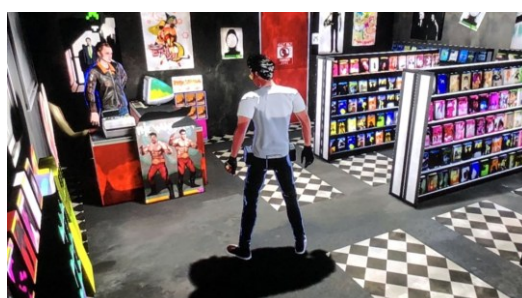
The cell-shaded style is cool, but the environments are plain and empty; this was originally a Wii game, after all. The story is wacky, the characters are bizarre, and the action is fun.

Main character Travis is kind of a dirty creep.

The game runs great on Switch. Overlook its age, and it's a fun game.

*Played on console: Switch.
Originally posted: 06/18/2021.*

Mini-Review: No More Heroes III



So maybe it's not reviewing the best, but I had a blast. It's easily my favorite in the series.

The combat mechanics felt great; something I really vibed with, in a way I haven't seen in many other action games over the past few years. I'm a fan of a good time-slowng invincibility window after a perfect dodge.

The city exploration missing in the second game is back, but there's not much in the way of "levels" you fight through. It's mostly exploration, collectibles, one-off combat arenas, and boss fights. Also, plenty of story moments and cut scenes of various presentation styles, mini-games, and that sense of "what am I even seeing???" that you only get from Suda51.

I miss the linear adventure style of my Suda51 favorites like *Lollipop Chainsaw* and *Killer is Dead*, but this is good!

Played on console: Switch.
Originally posted: 09/12/2021.

Mini-Rev: BulletStorm – Full Clip Edition



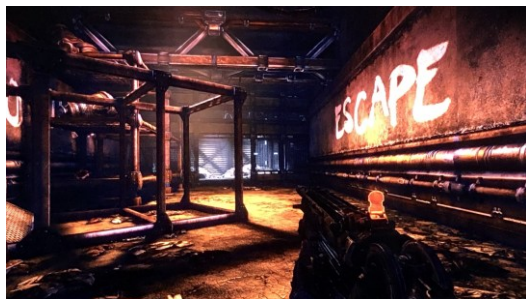
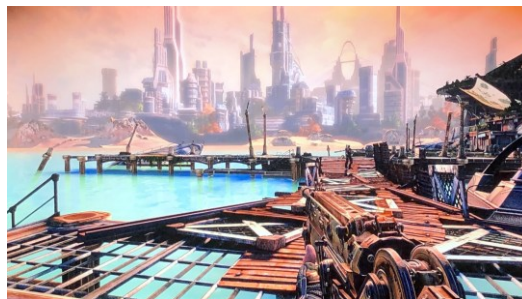
Last-gen first person shooter remastered for this gen. I freaking LOVED it. Easily among the best FPS campaigns I've ever played.



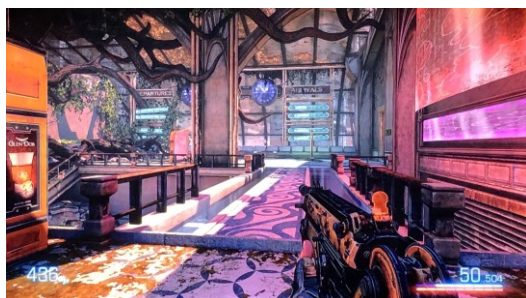
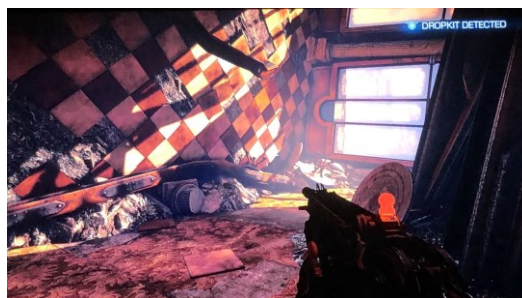
This gave me what I didn't get from playing *Doom Eternal* and *Halo 5* earlier this year – just near-perfect gameplay, incredibly rewarding and not too hard (even on Hard mode); an adventure through a beautiful world of connected levels to fight and advance through; over-the-top set piece moments; a fun story. I absolutely loved it.



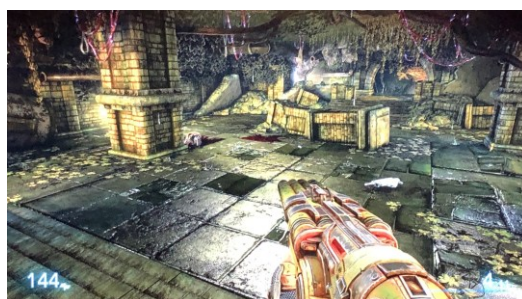
My only complaint is no jumping and you sprint by holding X (can't map to L3), but that's minor.



Enemies go slo-mo when leashed (grappled) and score-based "skill kills" even have a story reason.

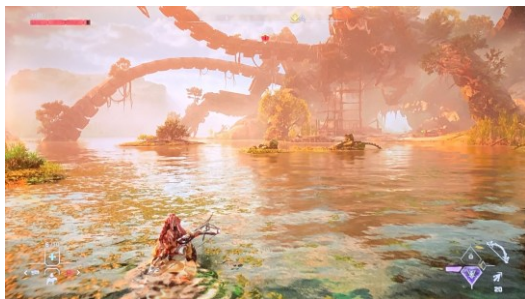
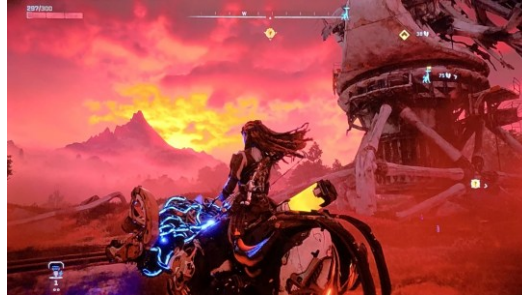
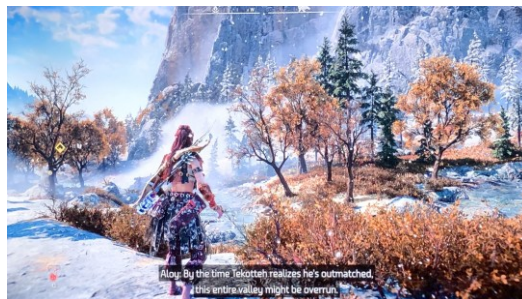
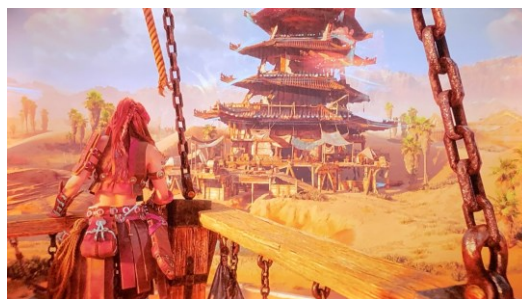


It's full of crude humor and lots of creative swearing. Top 5 FPS, IMO. It's not *Half-Life 2*, but it's better than most.



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

Mini-Review: Horizon II – Forbidden West



What a game.

It's excellent in almost every way. It frustrates me to know that some gamers abandoned it for *Elden Ring* (which I'll start next) as if *HFW* is in some way diminished by *ER*'s very existence in the same way the first *Horizon* gets compared to *Zelda BOTW* (which, IMO, was pretty meh; good, but wouldn't be in my personal top 100 by any means).

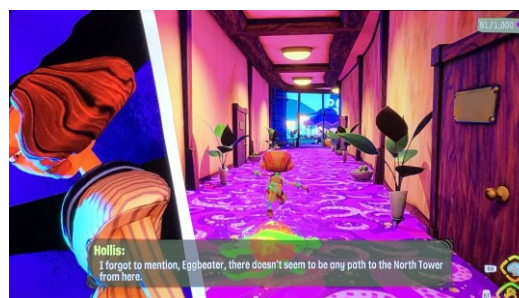
Anyway, Aloy's second third-person action-adventure is a sequel that improves on everything from the first game; and it looks stunning even in performance mode.

I played on Hard mode (aside from a couple arena/hunting challenges for trophies). It has an even harder mode, and two or three easier ones.

It's a big open world with quests, collectibles, great characters, weapon variety, robot-animal enemies, crafting... I absolutely loved it.

Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: 03/07/2022.

Mini-Review: Psychonauts 2



This long-awaited sequel exceeds expectations. I loved the original, but only played through it once, many years ago, on the OG Xbox. I admit, though, *Psychonauts 2* didn't really grab me until several hours in.

I don't know why. It's a great game that uses its concept and psi abilities in dozens of cool ways (and it was great from the start), yet I just wasn't hooked for quite a while.

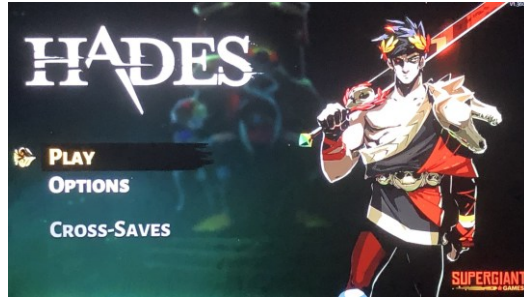
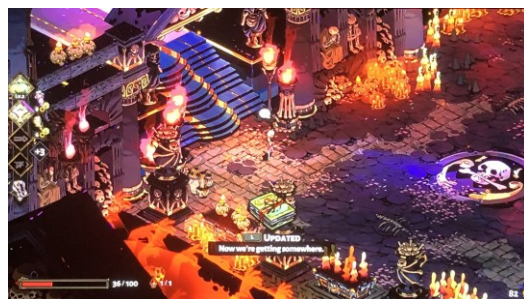
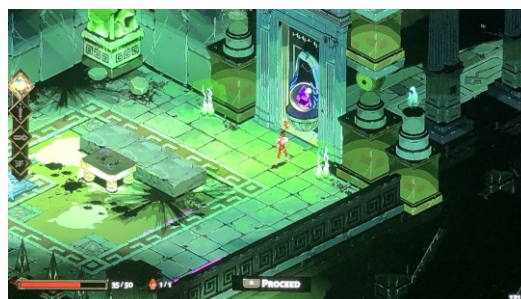
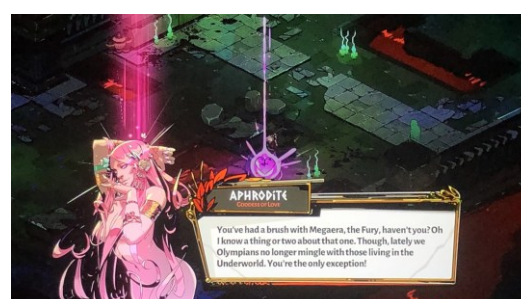
Some of that may be due to the combat controls, which felt fine but didn't click until later, with some upgrades.

By the end, I was much more enamored. Great art design, fun platforming levels, touching moments in a great well-written story, top notch voice acting, the varied well-done soundtrack, the collectibles, everything.

It's some of Double Fine's best work, and a definite must-play game.

Played on Xbox Series X with GamePass. Posted: 09/10/2021.

Mini-Review: Hades



I don't play many rogue-likes. I tend to find them frustrating. I hate starting all the way over and losing my progress. The only one I ever stuck with long enough to finish was *Dead Cells* – and now *Hades*; although “finish” may be kind of misleading.

I guess people call this rogue “lite” since there's a good chunk of progress you don't lose. Sure, you “start over” but the story doesn't. Plus, you're gaining permanent upgrades and various bonuses that make you stronger.

Each “run” rewards you in ways that make the game easier. It's like grinding in an RPG.

The combat is fast and smooth. It's very addictive too; just one more run... just one more room... just a bit more loot. I was totally hooked.

After one “escape” though, the story continues. I've read that the real ending comes after the 10th escape.

*Played on console: Switch.
Originally posted: 10/13/2020.*

The Final Stage

N-E-Ware and Prowler Productions

I've written some about my past life as an indie game developer (in [issue #13](#) about my TRS-80 CoCo games and in [issue #10](#) about my BBS and browser-based *Lunatic* and *StarLock* multiplayer games).

My earliest games were marketed under the name *Biware Enterprises*. My BBS games were marketed as *N-E-Ware* and later rebranded *Prowler Productions*. My uninspired logos leave a lot to be desired, and we didn't have a logo at all for *Biware Enterprises*.

Biware Enterprises
<https://www.cocoquest.com/>
I created:
 Lots and lots of TRS-80 CoCo games

Co-created with my friend Frayne. The name was meant to indicate there were two of us.

N-E-Ware
<https://www.prowler-pro.com/n-e-ware/>
I created:
Lunatic the BBS game, *Cupid-Slayer*, *Lexter 1* and *2*, *Shift Zone*, *FourTris*, and several others, all of little note

It's pronounced like "anywhere". I don't even remember how I came up with it, but I think it probably predates other businesses using a similar name (I launched mine in late 1995).

Prowler Productions
<https://www.prowler-pro.com/>
I created:
Lunatic for WorldGroup/MajorBBS
Lunatic Online: Global Insanity Crisis
StarLock (which wasn't ever finished)

I haven't updated this site in eleven years, but maybe I'll post something about the VGGN before this issue is out. Our studio was named after the Plymouth Prowler (a car), but I've been told it evokes a more sinister image of somebody lurking around where they shouldn't be; not at all what we were going for.

The Road (or Logo) Not Taken

On the topic of logos, here are just a few of the many that I rejected while putting together the first issue of this newsletter, back in May.



I wasn't a fan of the ones with people, and most of the others seemed too wild, as if they were for some sort of extreme sport or a heavy metal album cover; and that isn't even all of them. The only other two I seriously considered are the first one and the last one, from the second row.



Although I hadn't originally planned on using a variation of the logo in every issue until my younger daughter suggested it, the one I ultimately went with has been great for that. To the left is the original basic version.

Next Week

It'll be October when the next issue is out (spooky month), and I might just burn through every possible horror game topic over the next four weeks, to make a month of it. We'll see. I'm also thinking about a new (possibly recurring) feature called "Collection Inspection", which would give me an excuse to photograph and write about games in my collection, as opposed to doing absolutely nothing with them.

End Credits

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

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