



THE VIDEO GAME GENERATIONS NEWSLETTER

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Issue #28 – November 15, 2025

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Loading Screen

If SEVEN is your lucky number, then this week you're... uh... in luck. My main feature is 7 pages covering a trilogy of top 7 lists, all about games where you play as a criminal doing criminal things.



I tend to keep *Recent Events* to a single page. Two bits of news late in the week made me reconsider, but I needed something for *The Final Stage*, so you'll find a bit more news there.

Collection Inspection covers a few crime-focused games from my PS2 and original Xbox library. This week's mini-reviews are a few of the games that made it onto my top 7 lists.

On a sadder note, I don't think anybody is actually reading this newsletter, yet I'll keep on doing it.

Recent Events

PlayStation State of Play Japan 11/11/2025

I didn't catch it when it aired, but I got the highlights (and trailers) from the PlayStation Blog. Much of it doesn't appeal to my gaming preferences – I'm not usually a fan of rogue-likes, fighting games, or racing games – but a few other things do look interesting.

Trailers for two new games in the *BrokenLore* horror anthology series were shown. I've never even heard of this series, but one involves climbing some kind of tower (called *Ascend*) and the other is apparently about the dark side of social media (although I didn't get that from the trailer – called *Unfollow*).

Damon & Baby looks interesting, but there are several other critically acclaimed games with this isometric art style I haven't played yet, like *Tunic* (although I did play a little of that).

I've never played a *Dragon Quest* game, but I keep planning to... someday. A new trailer for the upcoming *DQ7 Reimagined* was shown. I have the original *Dragon Quest VII* on PS1, (where it was called *Dragon Warrior VII*) plus the remake that already appeared on the 3DS.

A remake of *Fatal Frame II* was announced.

I wanted to see more of *Motion Rec*, but that PlayStation Blog post doesn't show a trailer. I found trailers on YouTube, though. It looks like this game is already out on Steam, so the news here must just be that it's coming to PlayStation.



I played the first *AI: The Somnium Files* and enjoyed it. I never got around to the follow-up, called *Nirvana Initiative*. The third game, *No Sleep for Kaname Date*, is due out in February.



Similarly, I played and enjoyed *Octopath Traveler* but I didn't get around to the highly-regarded *Octopath Traveler II*. The next in the series, *Octopath Traveler 0*, comes out soon.

Lastly, *Wandering Sword* is a pixel art RPG that looks interesting with a distinctive HD-2D art style. I had to look up a trailer on YouTube.

Source:

<https://blog.playstation.com/2025/11/11/state-of-play-japan-november-2025-all-announcements/>

Steam Machine + Controller + Steam Frame

My son heard about this before I did, which is unusual. I must have been too busy working to pay attention to social media or podcasts or wherever this news was making the rounds.

I make no secret of my disdain for “all digital” platforms, at least where gaming is a factor. If Steam is putting out a “console” though, and if it's not priced in an absurd way, I might be tempted, for two reasons.

One, I don't want an all-digital console in general, but I've amassed a big library of Steam games from sales, Humble Bundle, and so forth over the years. I'd finally be able to play some (most? all?) of that library.

Two, *Half-Life 3* is once again making the rumor rounds. It would be a must-play for me.

Source:

<https://store.steampowered.com/sale/hardware>

7 Gangs, 7 Criminals, 7 Wildcards

It could be argued that most (or at least many) games ask players to do things that are a bit outside the law, as the game's protagonist.

Maybe it's something as simple as vandalism or destruction of property, where Link is busting jars to find (and steal) hidden rupees in *The Legend of Zelda* series.

Any game where you can be a vampire seems like you might be operating outside the law.

In TellTale's *The Walking Dead* (the first season), Lee has been arrested for murder.

How about Wario? He seems kind of shady.

In some crime-focused games, you play as the "good guy" (to varying degrees), whether you're an undercover cop in *Sleeping Dogs*, an LAPD detective in *L.A. Noire*, a defense attorney in the *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* series or a police officer in quite a few games.

For the purpose of this topic, I want to focus on games or series where you clearly play as a criminal, where committing crimes is more or less the point of the game. That isn't to say you're always the *bad guy*.

I guess it's a matter of perspective.

Maybe you're doing it for the greater good, or maybe you're opposing a corrupt and oppressive society, or maybe you follow a code... or maybe you're just playing as an unhinged sociopath lacking any moral fiber in an over-the-top criminal power fantasy.

Organized Crime

The top 7 games or series that I've played featuring a gang or criminal organization.

First up are seven games where you're part of some larger criminal organization or gang.

#7: *Watch Dogs* (series)

The organization aspect of *Watch Dogs* became more prominent over the course of the three-game (so far) series. In the first game, Aiden Pearce mostly acted alone, although DedSec was "a thing" in the world.



Marcus Holloway in *Watch Dogs 2* became part of a small team affiliated with DedSec. This seems to be the popular pick for *best in the series*, and it is really good.

The structure of *Watch Dogs: Legion* is why this series is on my list, although at the lowest rank. The game is unique in making every NPC a potential DedSec (London branch) recruit. If this was real life, I'd expect at least *some* of them to flat-out refuse being a part of DedSec, but in-game, all it takes is a little convincing.

Unlike some of my other picks, DedSec is characterized as having more noble goals than just chaos and profit. They're accused of a bombing, with a goal to clear their name. In general, they're vigilantes trying to expose corruption, using technology and hacking as a means to that end.

As a programmer, it's sometimes hard for me to get on board with the way hackers are propped up as misunderstood good guys in movies, TV, and games. I can suspend my disbelief enough, I guess, but the reality is far less glamorous and exciting from the other side, having to protect *against* those groups.

#6: *The Warriors*

This is one of my favorite games for the PSP (PlayStation Portable). It's on other platforms too (original Xbox and PlayStation 2) but it was the handheld version I played back in 2008.



The game is a prequel to the cult classic movie, in which a street gang called *The Warriors* gets framed for the murder of another gang leader and must fight their way through various other eccentric gangs to get back home.

Much of the game fills in the gang's backstory, leading up to the events of the movie. Rockstar Games DNA runs through it, even though it's quite a bit different from the vibe and gameplay of their more well-known game franchises.

After so many years, I don't really remember the specifics, but I do remember liking this game a lot, with its brawling, chaos, and rival gang fights.

#5: *Mafia (series)*

The first game in the series got a remake and the second got a remaster, but the only games I played were *Mafia III* (in which I encountered quite a few comical glitches), and this year's *Mafia: The Old Country* (which was great).



Each game features a different protagonist, but there are connections to other characters between games (from what I understand).

#4: *Red Dead Redemption (series)*

Technically, *Red Dead Revolver* is part of the same series, but it's structured so much differently from the open world *Redemption* games that it seems more like an entry in an anthology rather than a true predecessor to Rockstar's more well-known open world old west outlaw series. My mini-review of the game on PlayStation 2 is in VGGN [issue #21](#).



I'm probably in the minority, but I prefer *RDR1* to *RDR2* in most ways. Don't get me wrong – the prequel (*RDR2*) is a masterpiece, but it went so far in the direction of simulation that it just didn't grab me the way the first game did. I wouldn't say it disappointed me, but I also wouldn't say it's one of my favorites. In *RDR2*, though, you *are* part of an outlaw gang.

#3: Saints Row (series)

Despite the distribution of hits and misses across the series, I loved them all. Yes, that even includes the reboot from 2022.

I played them out of order. Chronologically, it goes like this: *Saints Row*, *Saints Row 2*, *Saints Row the Third*, *Saints Row IV*, *Gat out of Hell*, *Saints Row Reboot*.

I played *Saints Row the Third*, *Saints Row IV*, *Saints Row Reboot*, *Saints Row*, *Saints Row 2*, and finally *Gat out of Hell*.



Saints Row the Third

The series was very much *GTA*-inspired, with the first game pre-dating the release of *GTA4* during the PS3/Xbox 360 generation.

#2: Yakuza / Like a Dragon (series)

For a series where the very premise is about large organized crime syndicates in Japan, the main characters and their circle of friends are far removed from the crooked activities that you'd usually associate with games where you play as a criminal. They help people, hang out to play games, and go on some very wacky side quests. Incidentally, the series is great.



Yakuza Kiwami

#1: Grand Theft Auto (series)

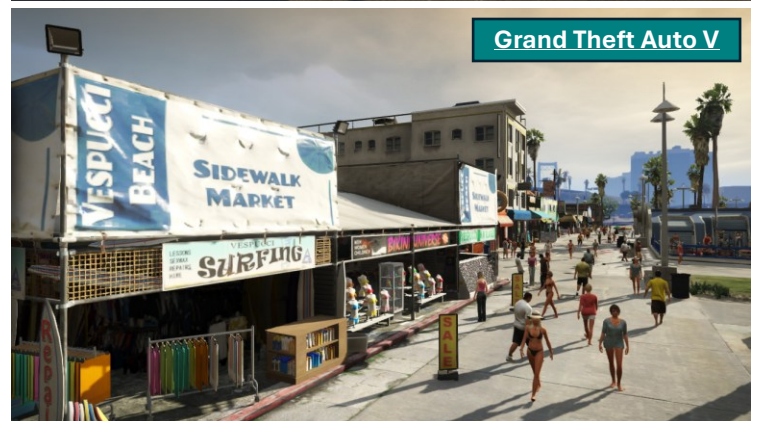
Of course, the top spot goes to the *GTA* series. Rockstar Games has three spots on my list, including my #1 pick for games where you play as part of a criminal organization or gang.



Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas



Grand Theft Auto IV



Grand Theft Auto V

Grand Theft Auto started as a top-down game on PC and PlayStation in 1997 but changed in a way that revolutionized open world games and crime fiction in games with *GTA III*. Since then, it's become one of the biggest and best-selling franchises in gaming, with the next in the series (*GTA VI*) recently getting another delay into November of next year. It's likely to break records when it does finally launch.

Outlaws and Criminals

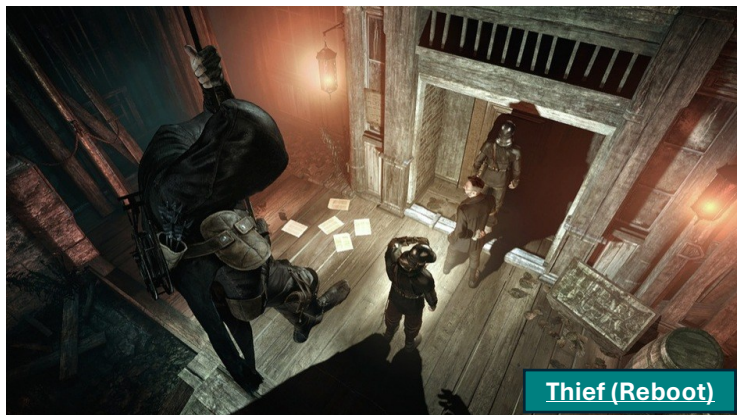
The top 7 games or series that I've played featuring a (mostly) solo criminal protagonist.

Okay, technically speaking, some of these picks are definitely protagonists that are part of a gang or organization, which might make a person question why they weren't included in the first list. The real reason is that they just didn't fit the vibe of the first list, and because then the lists wouldn't be evenly distributed.

#7: *Thief* (series)

Counting games in my Steam library, I own all the games in the *Thief* series. The *Thief* reboot from 2014 is the only game in the series I ever played. I think I was expecting something with more supernatural or fantasy elements, or something with more immersive sim aspects like *Dishonored*.

I came away lukewarm on the game, but I'd still be interested in trying out the original trilogy one of these days.



It's surprising to me how little I remember about that game (the *Thief* reboot). Maybe I just wasn't in the mood for its particular style of stealth at the time. I usually enjoy a good stealth experience.

#6: *Sly Cooper* (series)

Sucker Punch has moved on to bigger and arguably better things, leaving their *Thievius Raccoonus* master thief mascot behind. In this series, I only played the first game, way back in late 2006. I've always wanted to return and finish the trilogy, plus the *Thieves in Time* follow-up from Sanzaru (which I did play a little bit of on the Vita or PlayStation TV before getting sidetracked by other games).



I have a feeling these games would still hold up pretty well today. That original trilogy was even remastered for PlayStation 3, although that was quite a while ago at this point too.

Sure, Sly has a gang that includes Bently (a turtle) and Murray (a hippo), but I'm choosing not to consider them the kind of group that would have fit well in the earlier category.

#5: *A Way Out*

Before *Split Fiction*, before *It Takes Two*, there was a much grittier two-player split-screen action drama from Hazelight Studios about two criminals breaking out of prison to recover a stolen diamond and maybe get a bit of revenge in the process.

Well, there's more to the motives at play, but I won't spoil anything here. I played through this twice; the second time earlier this year with my son, who enjoyed it quite a bit too.



#4: *The Chronicles of Riddick* (series)

Maybe two games don't make a *series*, but I can always hold out hope that Vin Diesel will find enough motivation someday to make it happen. The first game in particular, *Escape from Butcher Bay*, was a fantastic first-person stealth/action game with immersive sim elements that I really enjoyed when I played it on the original Xbox way back in 2007.



I just noticed I listed two games featuring a thief, followed by two games featuring prison breaks. That wasn't intentional, but I like it.

#3: *Star Wars: Outlaws*

Some gamers had problems with this game at launch or were dissuaded by negativity about the stealth or by the ridiculous grifting chuds who've never seen a woman in real life trying to criticize the game for – paraphrasing here – *purposely making main character Key Vess ugly because Ubisoft is filled with woke DEI*.

For me, of course, all of that was nonsense. Maybe there was some truth to the frustrating stealth fail states pre-patched that played a part in those early impressions, but I loved the game when I played it last year. It might be my favorite of any *Star Wars* game, surpassing even the *Star Wars Jedi* series from Respawn.



My biggest problem with Ubisoft is only that they've forgotten how to put a complete game build on disc.

#2: *Assassin's Creed* (series)

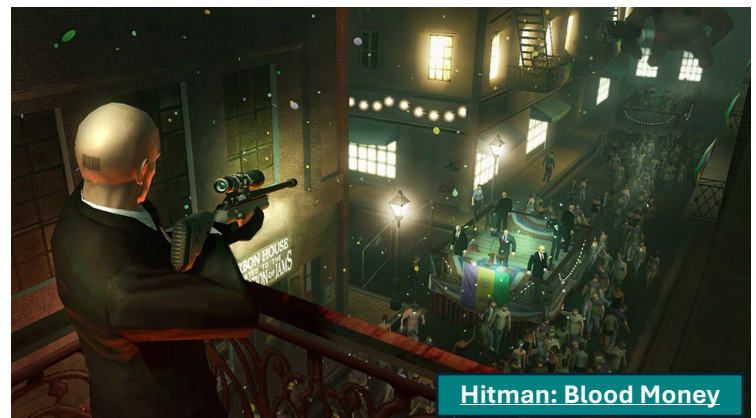
This long-running Ubisoft stealth action-adventure series is probably the most miscategorized one on this list, now that I think about it. The Assassin Brotherhood might not be “organized crime” or “a gang” but the story does center around a group of people with shared ideals fighting against an evil, powerful, shadowy organization throughout history by, well, killing them all.



#1: *Hitman* (series)

Two games in a row about thieves, then two prison breaks, then two from Ubisoft, and now two in a row where you play as an assassin. I must subconsciously like sticking to patterns.

In the top spot for solo criminals is another where *technically* the main character (iconically bald with a barcode tattoo on the back of his head, Agent 47) works for a global agency-for-hire specializing in contract killing.



This stealth series from IO Interactive had been around for a long time before they blew up with the *World of Assassination* trilogy. It's the only *Hitman* I've played, and it's excellent. The mission variety lends itself to multiple playthroughs.

Criminal Wildcards

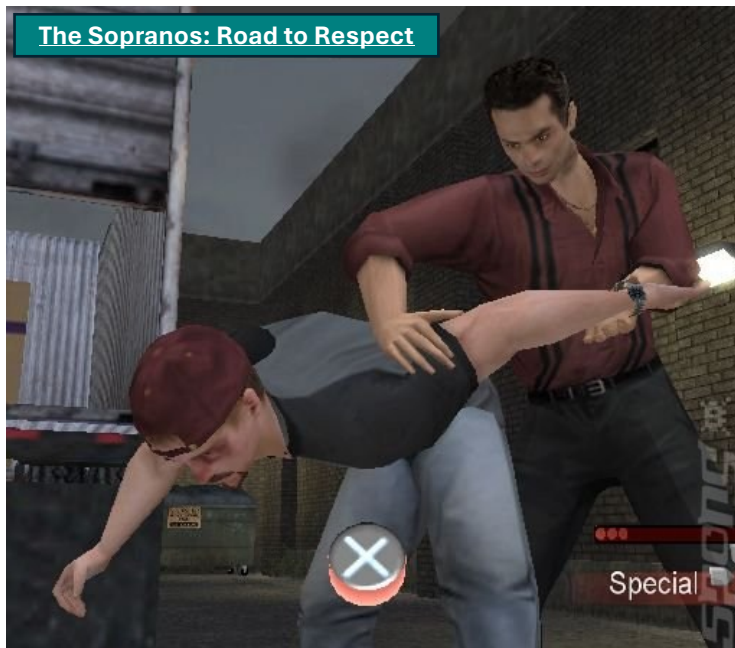
The top 7 games or series that I *haven't* played, where you play as a criminal.

In contrast to the first two lists, these are games I *haven't* played (or, at least, I haven't played *much*) but which stand out to me as good examples of games where being a criminal is the primary focus. I can think of several others, but I limited the list to seven.

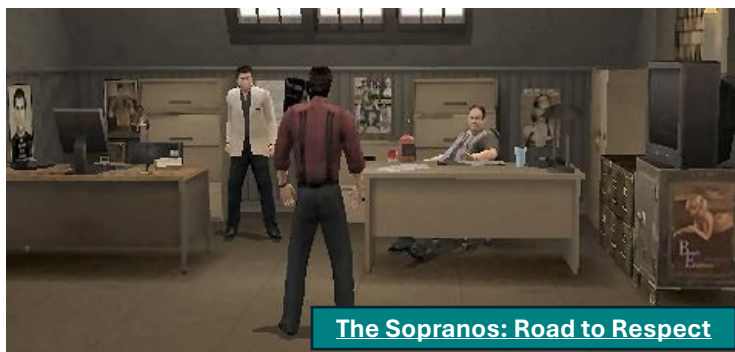
Since I haven't played them, I can't really rank them (unless I based it on my gut feelings), so they're simply in order by Metacritic score.

#7: *The Sopranos: Road to Respect*

With an abysmal Metacritic score of 42, I guess this game based on the phenomenal HBO series must have been a let-down.



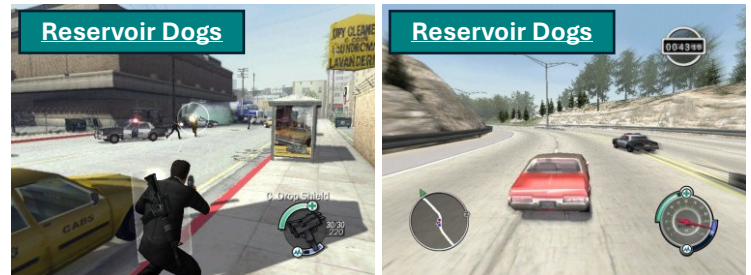
I kind of want to play it, though. Some of the most fun I have is with so-called “bad” games.



#6: *Reservoir Dogs*

The Metacritic score on this one is 50. I guess that makes it a bad game too, at least where popular opinion is concerned.

I never watched the Quinton Tarantino movie it's based on, but it seems like something I'd like. I think I've been spoiled on the twist or the ending already, although now that I think about it, I forget which colorful character the reveal involves. It couldn't be as epic as the twist in *The Usual Suspects*, though.



Lionsgate put out a different game in 2017 based on that movie (or set in the same world; it's hard to tell) called *Reservoir Dogs: Bloody Days*. It looks like an isometric twin stick shooter, based on [this trailer](#). Its Metacritic is even worse, at a 45. It was delisted from every digital storefront years ago, so anybody with the urge to rush out and buy it is out of luck.

#5: *Crime Boss: Rockay City*

Mixed and negative reactions to this game never deterred me from being interested in it. Being a bit confused by the tutorial prologue (which I didn't even finish) and annoyed by the clear team-based live service presentation of its main menu system kind of has. MC is a 52.



#4: Kane & Lynch (series)

Here's another "series" where there were only two games. *Dead Men* has a 65 on Metacritic, and *Dog Days* has a 63.



Both games were developed by IO Interactive (the makers of *Hitman*), which I didn't realize until just now when I started looking up more information about them. To confirm, I popped into my collection room (or library) and looked at the boxes for the Xbox 360 versions.



#3: Scarface: The World is Yours

I don't think I've seen the movie this one is based on either, although I know it's a cult classic. The game has a respectable 75 on Metacritic for PS2 and a 76 on original Xbox.



Apparently, the game rewrites the movie's ending in a way that puts Tony Montana in a *GTA*-like open world action game where he must build up his criminal empire once again.

#2: The Godfather: The Game

Somehow, I never really "got" *The Godfather*. Maybe I watched the movies (but only once) at a time when they had already been out for so long that the hype and reverence was just too much. In fact, I barely remember the story.



This game looks interesting, though. It came out in 2006, after all three *GTA* games from that same era. It seems to be heavily influenced by the kind of open world structure that *GTA* pioneered.

#1: Payday (series)

I've heard this series described as *Left 4 Dead* but with bank heists, which I never really understood. I get the waves of enemies, but do these games not just take place in and around a single bank, rather than through a series of locations like *Left 4 Dead*? *Payday 2* has a score of 79 on Metacritic.

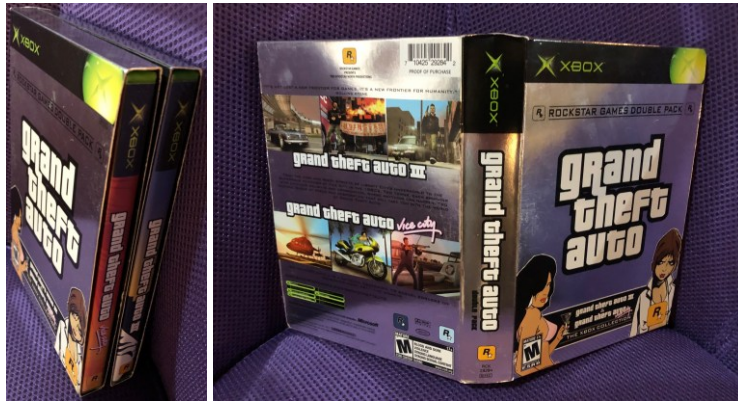
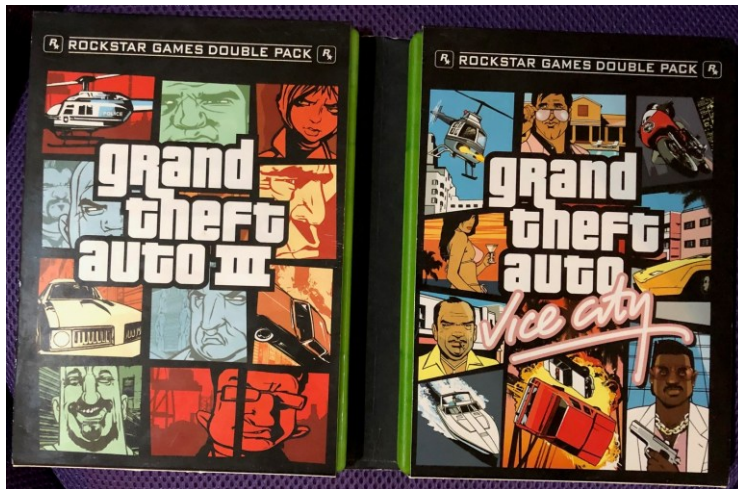
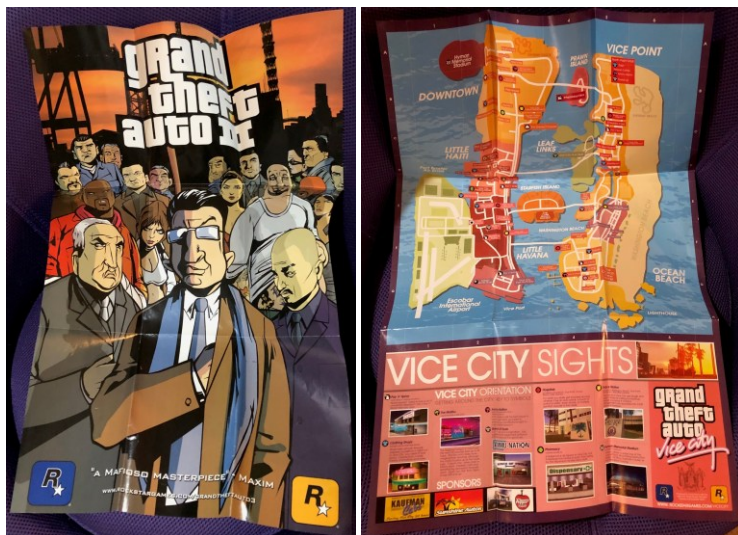


Collection Inspection - Crime Does Pay

Rockstar Games Double Pack

Platform: Original Xbox / **Edition:** GTA Double Pack

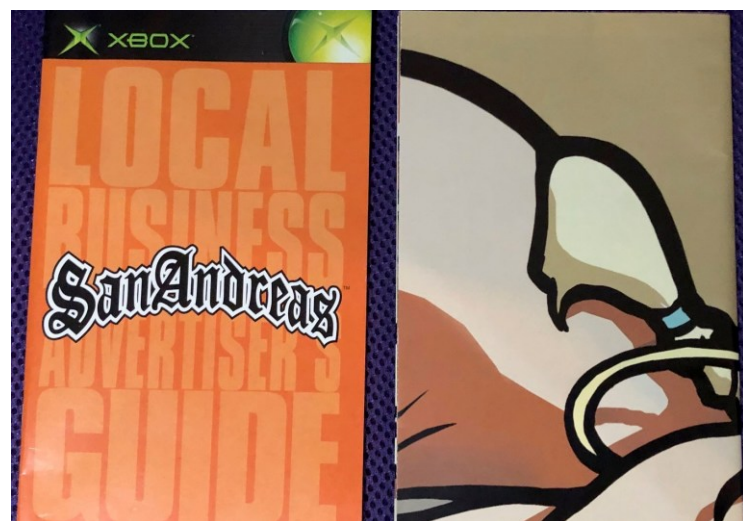
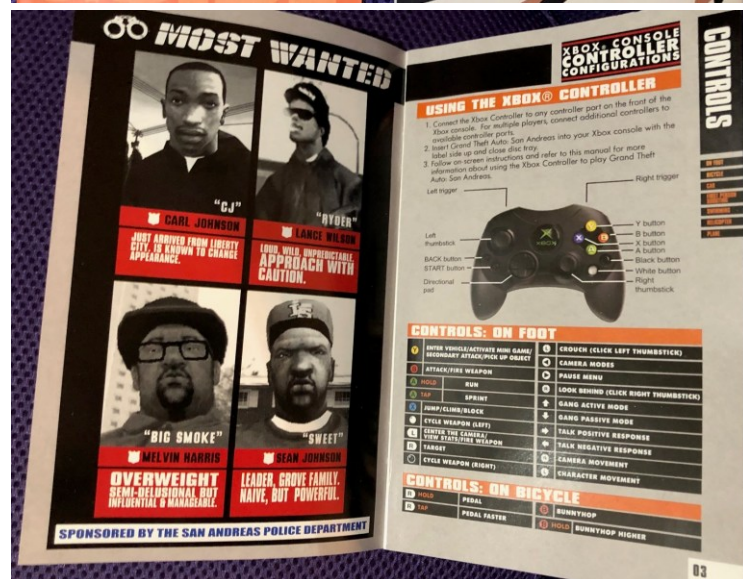
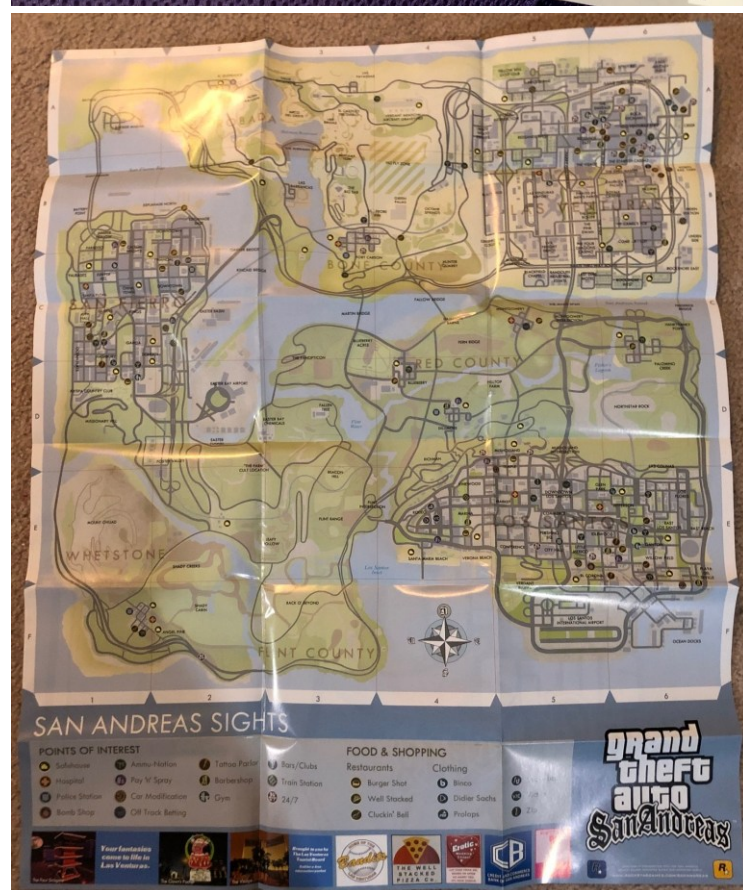
Comments: There's a little wear on the outer box, but the contents are mostly excellent. I had forgotten these games even came out on the original Xbox, because it seems like a PlayStation franchise to me. Surprisingly, this box set doesn't seem to be worth very much. They must have made a billion copies. I didn't photograph the registration card or the flip side of one of the two posters, but it's all there.



Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

Platform: Original Xbox / **Edition:** Standard

Comments: This one is in near-perfect condition.



Grand Theft Auto: PS2 Trilogy

Platform: PlayStation 2 / **Edition:** Standard

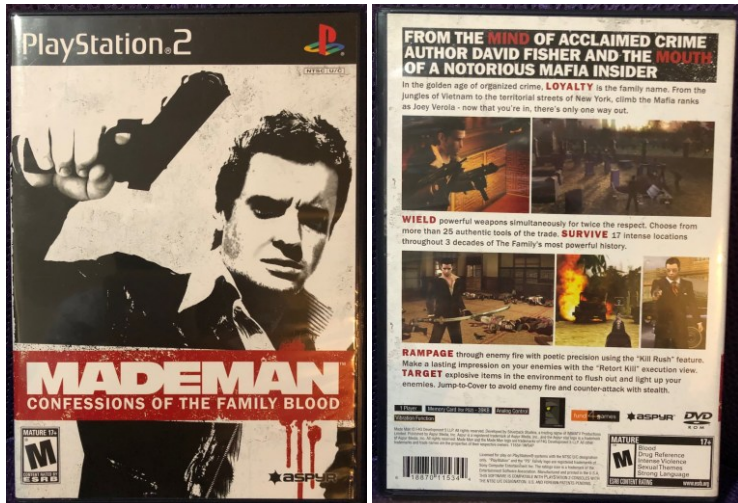
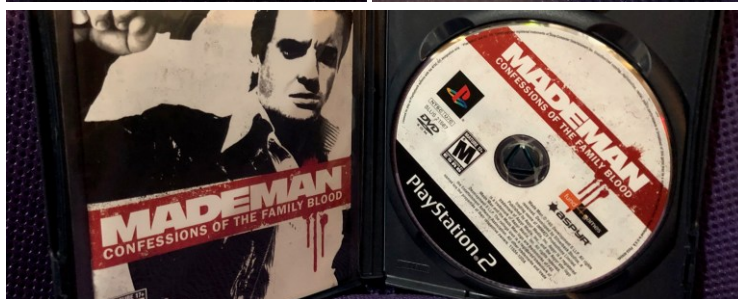
Comments: My PS2 copies are in excellent condition as well. I decided not to unpack them from those protective bags since the contents are mostly the same as the Xbox versions, but with some variations in the artwork and possibly with the posters.



MadeMan: Confession of the Family Blood

Platform: PlayStation 2 / **Edition:** Standard

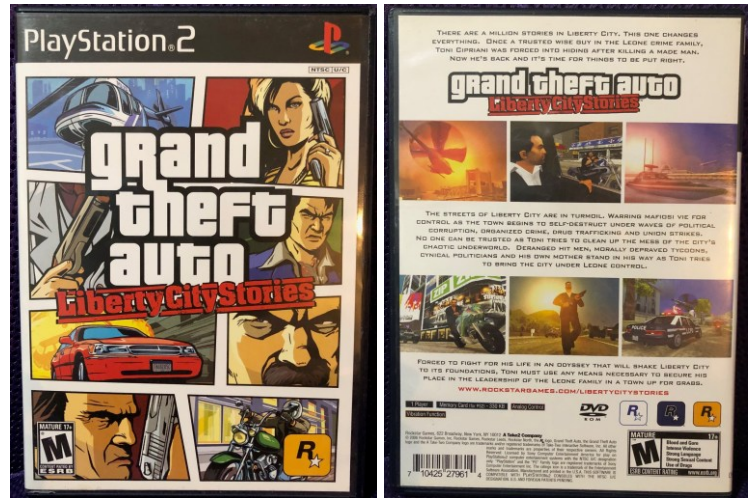
Comments: I know nothing about this game and forgot it was even in my collection until now.



Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories

Platform: PlayStation 2 / **Edition:** Standard

Comments: This was the first GTA I ever played, although it was the original PSP version (which I also have in my collection) before it was ported to PS2.



Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories

Platform: PlayStation 2 / **Edition:** Standard

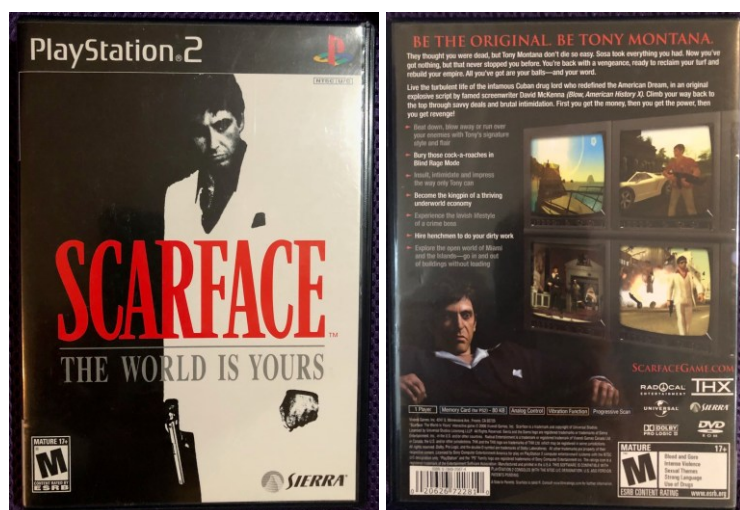
Comments: I forgot that my copy was factory sealed, probably because when I played this (although I never did finish it), it was the PSP version. This feature is already heavy on GTA games so I'll skip to a few other non-GTAs, but my collection also includes the original GTA games on PS1 (including the *London* one), three on PSP (including *Chinatown Wars*, which I also have on Nintendo DS), multiple copies of GTA5 (including the big-box collector's edition for Xbox 360), GTA4 for Xbox 360 with the expansions, and a few more.



Scarface: The World is Yours

Platform: PlayStation 2 / **Edition:** Standard

Comments: Never played this. Never saw the movie.



The Sopranos: Road to Respect

Platform: PlayStation 2 / **Edition:** Standard

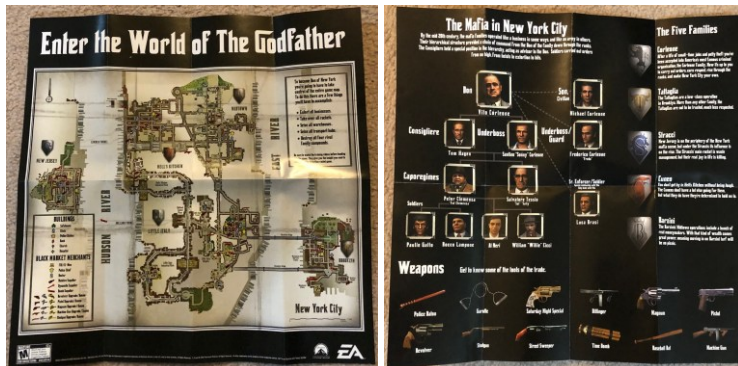
Comments: Maybe I've said this before, but I miss the days when games came with a manual, a bonus disc, an art book or character guide, a poster, and so forth. Collecting today's games just isn't the same. They cost more, yet you get none of this stuff.



The Godfather: The Game

Platform: Original Xbox / **Edition:** Standard

Comments: I also have this game on PS2, Xbox 360, and Wii (where it's called the *Blackhand Edition*). On Xbox 360, I also have The Godfather II. I never got around to playing any of them. It seems like a GTA-inspired game with an open world where you can run around on foot, steal and drive vehicles, and take over New York City. It sounds fun, anyway.



1. Chicago Enforcer

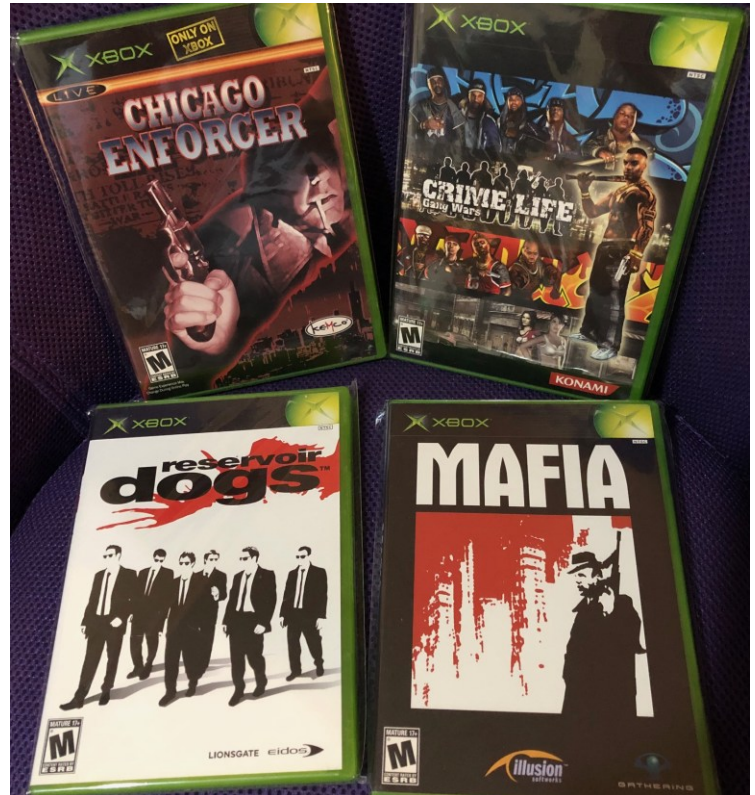
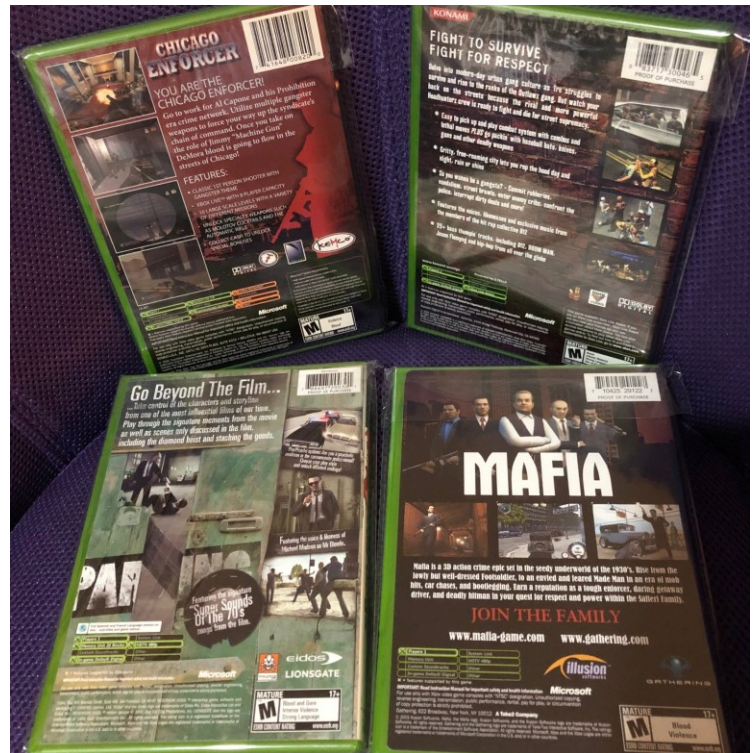
2. Crime Life: Gang Wars

3. Reservoir Dogs

4. Mafia

Platform: Original Xbox / **Edition:** Standard

Comments: At this point, I'm getting a little lazy. I had picked four more from my original Xbox collection, but I'm just going to include the case fronts and backs without even taking them out of their protective bags. I know - it's not much of an "inspection" I suppose.



Mini-Review: Grand Theft Auto IV



FPS Boost helps *GTA4* a lot, until the final mission, when it apparently introduces a bug that prevents you from pressing "A" fast enough, thereby making it impossible to finish.

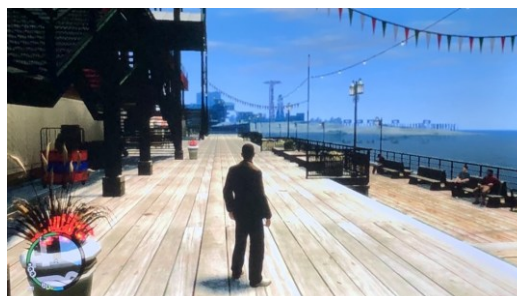
Luckily, I finished by moving my save over to an actual Xbox 360 for that. Everything else was fine.



I enjoyed it a lot, although Niko wasn't the most charismatic of protagonists.

GTA in general is a crime drama in a satirical wrapper. Themes like political extremism and misogyny are dialed up to 11, and it feels like that's the point; make it so obvious that even those who ignore such things in daily life can't help but recognize it here. It's most evident across several in-game radio stations.

Speaking of; music selection felt pretty weak in this entry. Anyway, it's *GTA*. You know what you're getting.



Xbox 360 game played on Xbox Series X. Posted: 08/09/2021.

Mini-Rev: GTA IV - The Lost and Damned



The first of two stand-alone *GTA4* expansions, available in the *Complete Edition* or as part of *Episodes from Liberty City*. It follows Johnny of The Lost (a biker gang), who appears a couple times as a side character in the main game.

His story crosses paths with Niko Bellic's just as it did in the main game, although now his motivations and activities are the focus.

It's considerably shorter than *GTA4* proper. There seem to be far fewer side activities as well, but it offers races and gang battles, plus online co-op that I didn't try out.

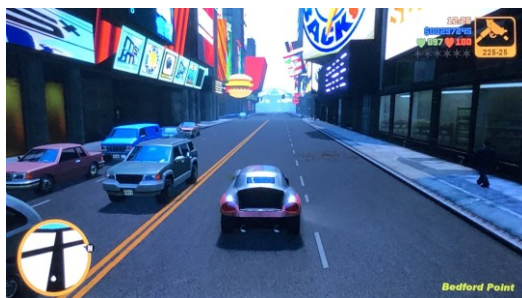
In-game radio stations get a refresh and include new channels like a Vice City one, which plays Neneh Cherry, Roxette, etc.

It's a good re-use of the *GTA4* framework and a fun smaller *GTA* in general.

It's also FPS boosted on Xbox Series X.

Xbox 360 game played on Xbox Series X. Posted: 08/11/2021.

Mini-Review: GTA III – Definitive Edition



It's not a must-play, but it's cool to see the genesis of modern open world games. This version looks and plays better; no crashes, only minor bugs (mostly just the baked-in jank). Either it's fixed or the gamer outcry was overblown.

They use the gameplay systems (driving, shooting, picking up stuff) and open world randomness (traffic, gangs, pedestrians, police) to create missions that vary each time in ways that work to your advantage or entirely against it, depending on luck.

The NPC-driven cars tend to be chaotic, but to be fair, if you don't want to get run over, stay off the street. And the sidewalk. And the grass.

Anyway, despite a story that seemed disjointed by today's standards, I enjoyed my time.

It wasn't broken at all for me; just outdated.

*PS4 game played on PS5.
Originally posted: 01/02/2022.*

Mini-Rev: GTA Vice City – Definitive Edition



I don't know how much of the wonky physics and general jank dates back to the original release and how much is new to the remaster, but kinda like with *GTA3*, it wasn't really an issue for me.

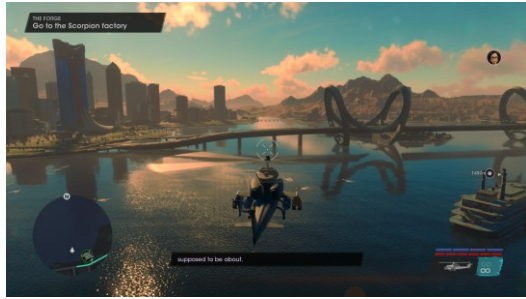
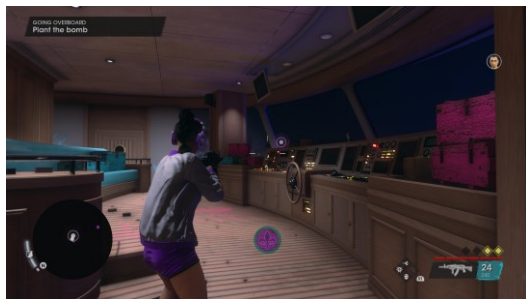
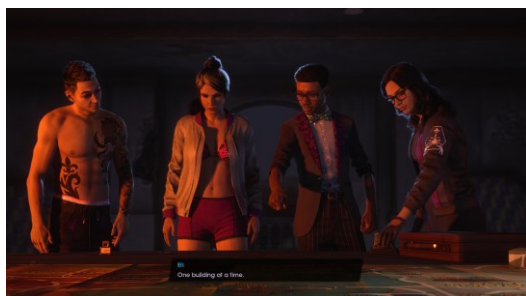
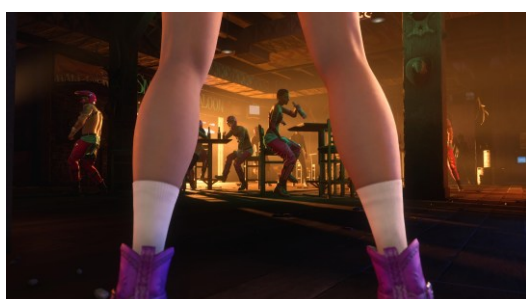
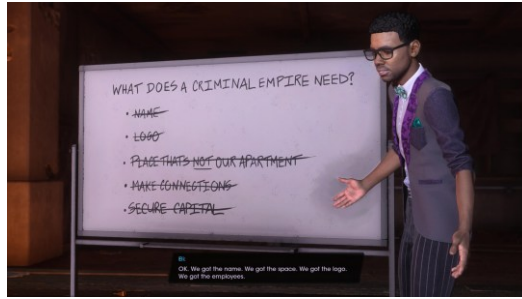
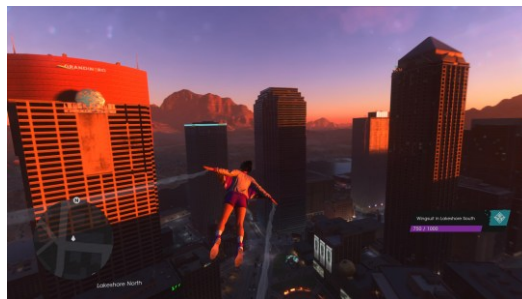
I definitely liked *Vice City* more; from the radio selection, to the more interesting side missions, to a more cohesive story, to the addition of motorcycles and helicopters, *Vice City* improves on everything they started in *GTA3*.

My only notable complaint is that you have to do some non-intuitive stuff and earn a bunch of extra money to buy properties later on to unlock the final missions. I thought it was busted until I looked at a guide. Luckily those property missions are pretty good.

It's not "modern" *GTA* but here's where Rockstar really started to nail the formula.

*PS4 game played on PS5.
Originally posted: 01/09/2022.*

Mini-Review: Saints Row (2022 Reboot)



The critics are completely wrong because this is a Game of the Year contender, is what I wish I could say.

Joking aside, I had a blast with the SR reboot, although I wish they'd given it its own title/identity to start a new franchise.

Some funny bugs, open-world jank and sometimes-goofy physics weren't enough to spoil the fun for me.

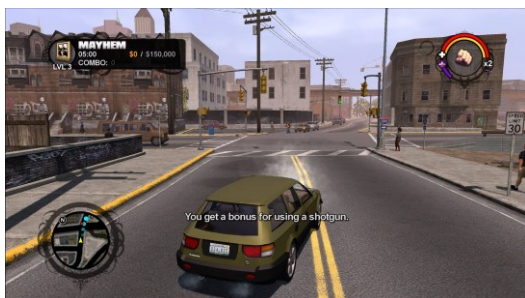
There's a big city and surrounding desert to explore, plenty of open world activities, linear/objective story missions, shooting, driving, and mass destruction. It's just what I was expecting.

The character creator lets you customize your boss in enough detail that people have created John Wick, Walter White, The Rock, Mistique, Shaggy, Riddick... even Ronald McDonald. Instead of creating a version of me, I took a different direction.

I really enjoyed it.

*Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: 09/07/2022.*

Mini-Review: Saints Row (The Original)



My first SR was *The Third*; I loved it. *SR IV* went even more over the top with aliens and virtual reality, but I loved it too. I even enjoyed the recent reboot, and Volition's less-regarded *Agents of Mayhem*.

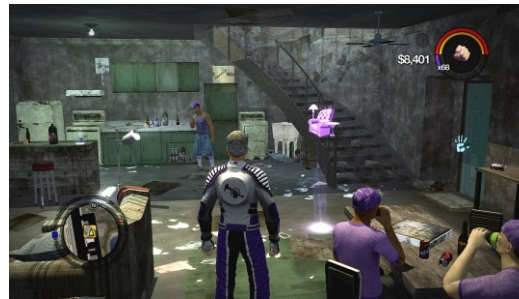
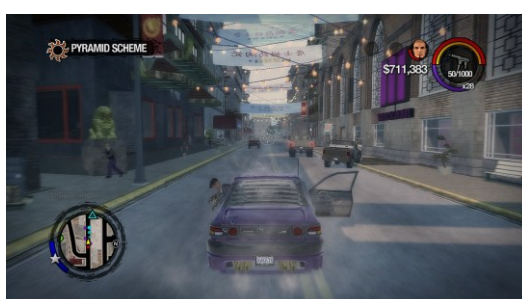
I never got around to the original (until now) or its sequel, but I found that it holds up pretty well in some ways, less so in other ways.

SR was an answer to *Grand Theft Auto*'s initial absence from that generation of consoles, and it does a great job of aping *GTA*'s whole schtick while forming a unique identity of its own. The story and scenarios seem less satire and more wacky criminal power fantasy, and there's a tactless nature to the background comedy, but for gameplay, mission variety and pure fun, it's tough to beat.

Soon, I need to make time for *Saints Row 2*.

Xbox 360 game played on Xbox Series X. Posted: 10/10/2024.

Mini-Review: Saints Row 2



Of the three male voices available (since "the boss" is now fully voiced, whereas the same main character as "the playa" in the first game wasn't), I went with the one that sounds like the Geico gecko.

I also spent my first few hours just traveling Stilwater and doing side stuff like the ever-popular Insurance Fraud, where you throw yourself into traffic to rack up points.

Most of these events are super fun (shout out to the flaming 4-wheeler Trail Blazing event, and the Septic Avenger) and earn you the reputation required to do the main missions. I ended up with all the points I needed for the entire game just by messing around at the start.

As to the review, it's just dumb fun in a GTA-inspired city, where anything goes (even a real-life pr0n star somehow in your crew).

Xbox 360 game played on Xbox Series X. Posted: 01/25/2025.

Mini-Review: Saints Row – Gat out of Hell



This stand-alone follow-up to *Saints Row IV* has The Boss getting abducted by Satan, with Johnny Gat and Kenzie following into Hades for a rescue in either solo or co-op.



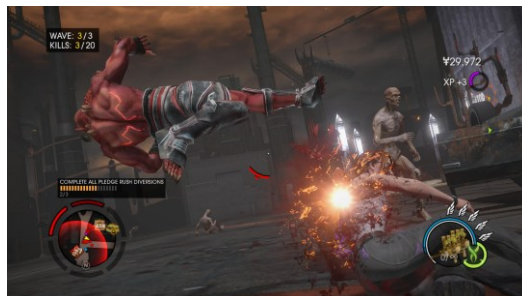
This marks the end of the series until the reboot in 2022 (a one-off, since it underperformed and Volition was shut down).



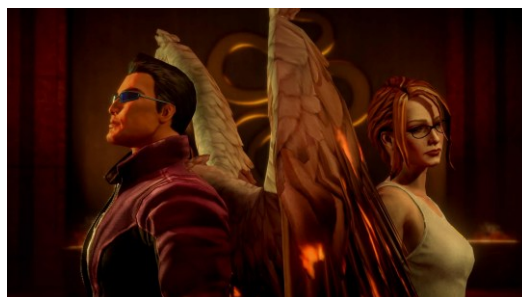
By this point it had gone from a competent *GTA* clone to a wacky super-powered sandbox in the vein of *Destroy All Humans* or *Crackdown*.



In *Gat out of Hell*, you're running at high speed, flying everywhere and using those superpowers to mow down demons and do even zanier *Saints Row* hijinks. This fast-paced traversal makes Hades feel more like a lava-filled snow globe than a city, but it's all about non-stop action.

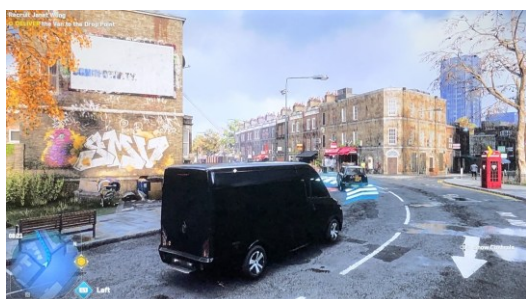
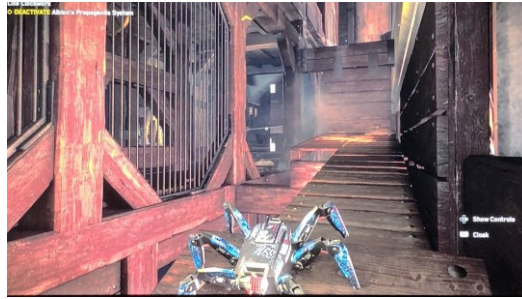
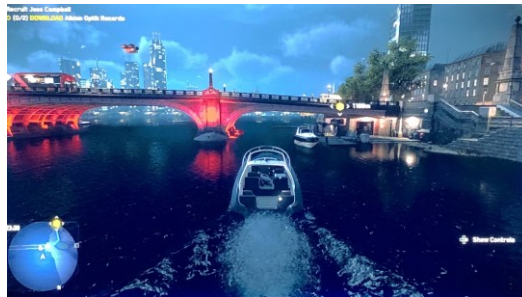
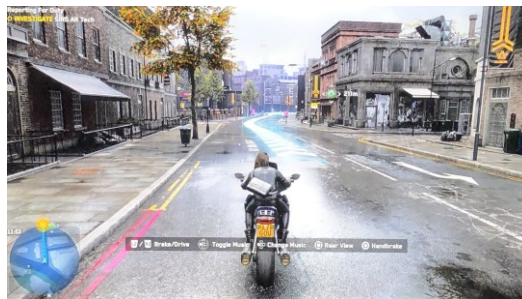
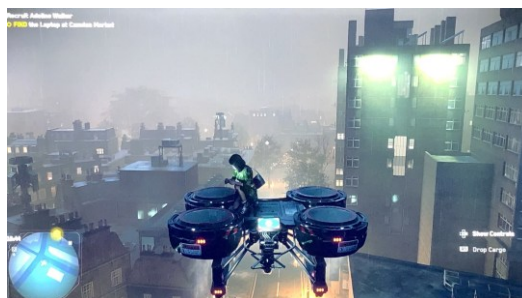


It feels as much a short precursor to *Agents of Mayhem* as it does a successor to *Saints Row*.



PS4 game played on PS5.
Originally posted: 01/27/2025.

Mini-Review: Watch Dogs – Legion



The third in Ubisoft's hacker/tech open world third-person action-adventure series is set in London, with gameplay and systems that seem more focused and streamlined now.

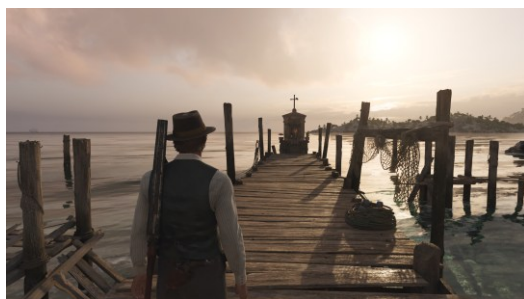
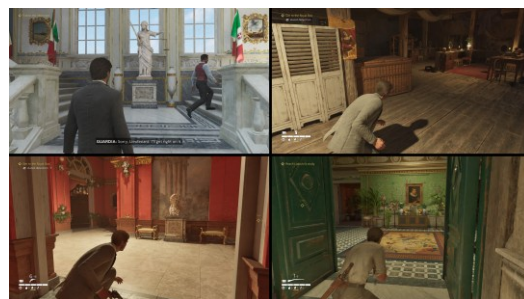
Some of the personality of the second game is lost due to the “play as anybody” structure, but there's still a lot of character to the seemingly randomly generated crew you assemble by recruiting civilians. That's the game's biggest appeal, and it's a really fun twist to the formula. The amount of duplicate dialogue required to pull it off is staggering.

My team is bound to be very different than anybody else's, although career archetypes and skills do narrow it down to certain must-have operatives.

I really enjoyed it. Some of the PSN trophies seem kinda glitchy, but I'm trying for the platinum anyway.

*Played on console: PS4 Pro.
Originally posted: 11/15/2020.*

Mini-Review: Mafia – The Old Country



Everything about this game is just right. It looks great, runs well, isn't chock-full of open-world bloat (aside from optional collectibles), has a perfect 12-16 hour play time, tells an interesting story, and has a great cast.

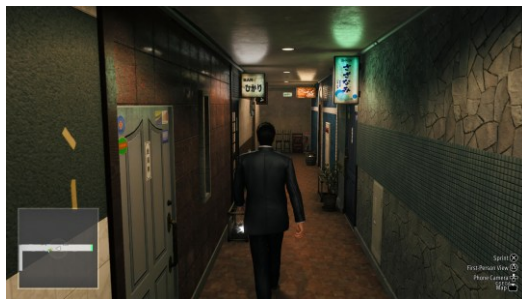
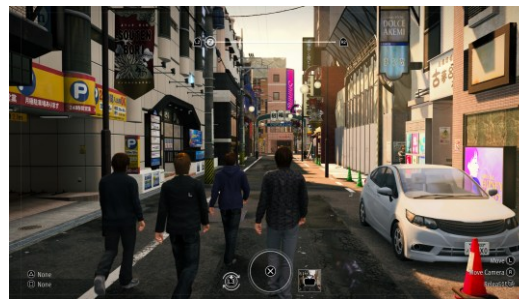
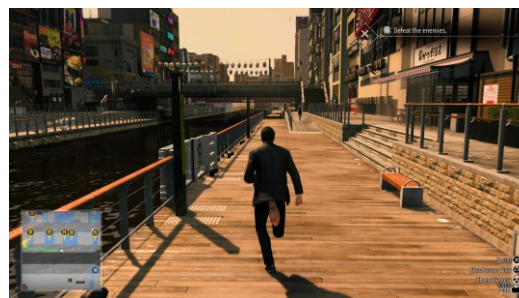
It's not structured as an open-world game, though. A series of main missions ask you to travel from place to place. It doesn't have side quests, towers to climb, or a map to unfog. There's a separate mode that lets you explore early 1900s Sicily (mostly to find the collectibles), but the main game plays out in a linear way.

You play as Enzo, on the run from a sulfur mine he was indentured to his whole life, taken in by the Torrisi family, and brought into the "family business".

It's a AAA game without the AAA price tag, and it's an easy game for me to recommend.

*Played on console: PS5 Pro.
Originally posted: 08/18/2025.*

Mini-Rev: The Man Who Erased His Name



Full Title: *Like a Dragon Gaiden: The Man Who Erased His Name*

Okay, I'm now one of those people who just won't shut up about the *Yakuza* / *Like a Dragon* games.

This latest entry bridges a gap between *Yakuza 6* and the hotly anticipated (at least by me) *Like a Dragon: Infinite Wealth* which releases next month.

As a latecomer to the series who hasn't yet played *Yakuza 2* through *6*, I worried this might be a bad place to jump in. Playing *Y6* in particular might have helped, but I had a good enough base from what I have played (*Yakuza 0*, *1*, *7* and both *Judgments*).

This is shorter story-wise, but it still packs a lot of content, side activities and mini-games. It's one of the most focused and streamlined in the series I've played so far, without giving up anything.

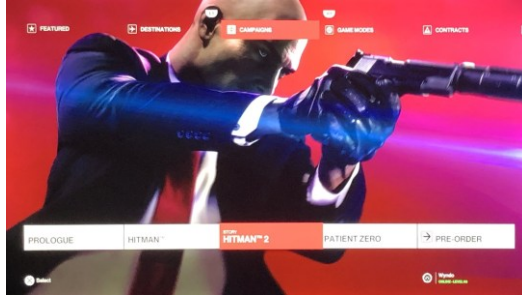
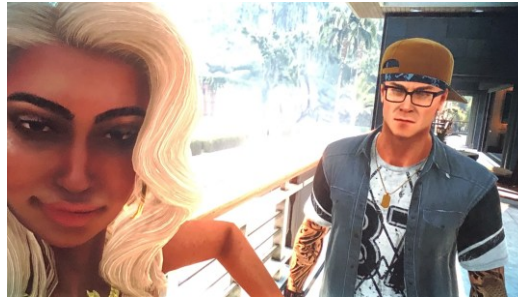
The English voice update was a welcome addition.

Fun combat, cool spy gadgets and a good story.

Played on console: PS5.

Originally posted: 12/29/2023.

Mini-Review: Hitman 2



Full Retconned Title: *World of Assassination: Hitman 2*

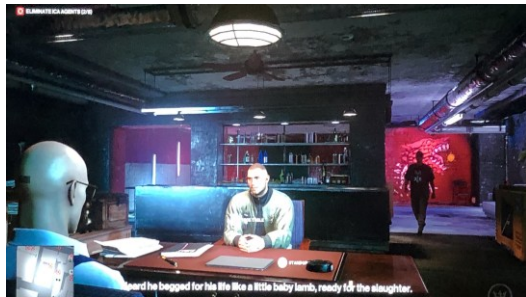
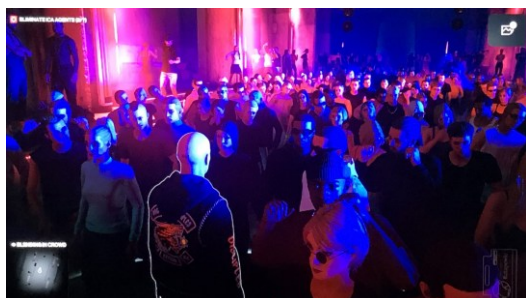
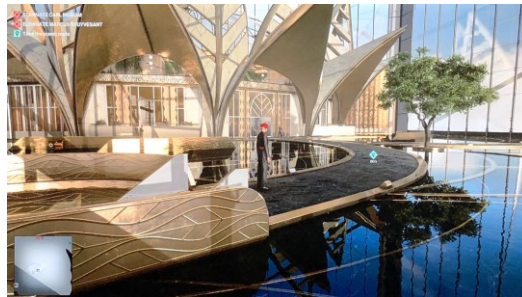
I thought *Hitman Season 1* was great, yet when I first tried playing *Hitman 2* a year or two ago, I just wasn't feeling it. Now, though, with *Hitman 3* just days away, it was the right time to try again.

These games are built to be sort of a series of self-contained small open-world sandboxes, where Agent 47 can assassinate his assigned targets in dozens (maybe hundreds) of ways. Be stealthy, or go in shooting for a quick solution, or take on disguises to create the perfect opportunity, or follow the “mission stories” for objective-based guidance toward specific methods of execution.

The brilliance is that you can play one through-line to the end, or you can play each mission many times. You can even save-scum without losing rewards/unlocks and all of it is really fun.

*PS4 game played on PS5.
Originally posted: 01/16/2021.*

Mini-Review: Hitman III



Full Title: *World of Assassination: Hitman III*

It's a fantastic finale to the *World of Assassination* trilogy. Every level this time is a winner; not just in their clockwork design where every character and set piece is part of a grand multi-faceted puzzle, but in their themes and unique twists to the formula.

As in the prior games, you can play in a variety of ways. You can learn each level, replay it, use your saves, and mine each level for every bit of content and all opportunities.

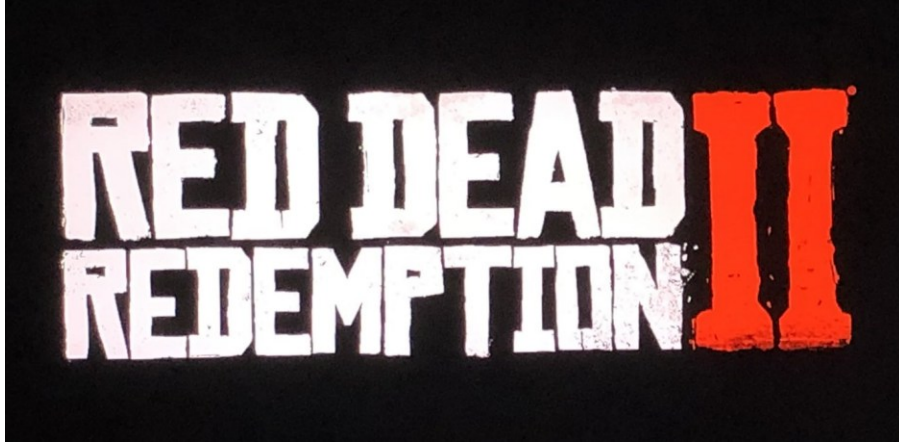
Or you can ignore all that, take out the targets, continue to the next of the six missions and not look back at all.

Trophy and achievement hunters will need to dig into the intricacies of each level, but a bit of caution: some trophies randomly glitch and won't unlock with no good work-around. I hope they fix that retroactively. Still, highly recommended.

Played on console: PS5.

Originally posted: 02/05/2021.

Capsule Review: Red Dead Redemption II



A masterpiece of a game that didn't grab me until maybe the last third, and even then, I'm on the fence. Am I just jaded? Slow travel, confusing controls, but a story that goes places with great main and side characters. It's definitely an epic.

Played on console: PS4.

Originally posted: 12/17/2018.

The Funny Glitches in Mafia III



I played this game in 2016, before I started posting mini-reviews, but I did post about these funny glitches then.

Later patches might have ironed out these rough edges, but I found them pretty comical when they happened.



The first image shows the main character (incidentally, the same actor who appears in this year's much-maligned *MindsEye*) with some kind of weird polygon rendering issue that turns his body into a weird stretchy cone thing.



The second image shows a bathroom mirror that seemed to render a still image of whatever was reflected if you weren't looking at it. Either that, or it only updated every few seconds, like a window into the past. Either way, it was kind of weird.



The third and fourth images show a strange NPC duplication glitch. Two versions of the same character are nearly on top of each other. I don't remember if one of them didn't move, or if they both did. It was super weird.

I think about those glitches from time to time, especially when people pick apart other games for far less egregious bugs. Even with those glitches, I really enjoyed *Mafia III*.

Played on console: PS4.

Screenshots originally posted: 11/08/2016.

The Final Stage

Fallout Season 2 Trailer

One month from now, we'll be basking in the glory of *Fallout: Season 2* on Amazon Prime Video. At least, it looks that way from this new [trailer](#) they released a few days ago.

Fallout 3 is my favorite game of all time, but some of the most memorable bits that come to mind when thinking back on the game are actually from *Fallout: New Vegas*. The show is going there in the second season, and I'm about as ready as a person can be.



2025 Game Awards Nominees Incoming

On Monday, the nominees for the 2025 Game Awards (aka *the Keighleys*) will be announced.

If I wasn't already scrambling to wrap up this issue, I might spend some time making predictions. My son has been trying to guess the nominees for Game of the Year for weeks.

Things seemed pretty predictable just a couple months ago, with a lot of love out there for *Kingdom Come Deliverance 2* (which I haven't yet played), *Split Fiction*, *Blue Prince*, *Clair Obscur: Expedition 33*, and *Death Stranding 2* (all of which I have).

My personal pick so far would be *Clair Obscur* by a country mile, although *Death Stranding 2* is my second choice. I also really liked a lot of other games this year that definitely won't be nominated, like *Hell Is Us*, *Lost Soul Aside*, and *Mafia: The Old Country* (although they might get picked for other categories). A few new fan favorites came out more recently.

Those are games like *Donkey Kong Bananza*, *Hades II*, *Arc Raiders*, *Ghost of Yotei*, *Silent Hill f*, *Dispatch* (which might be too late to be eligible) and *Hollow Knight: Silk Song*.

Next Week

Aside from the *Loading Screen* opener, this tends to be the last section of the newsletter I write each week. My frontrunner topics for future issues include games featuring time travel, games about post-apocalyptic worlds, games featuring hilarious comedic moments (which I mentioned as a possibility last time), games by solo developers (also mentioned last time), games featuring evil corporations, and the most annoying enemies in games.

So, here I am at the spot where I usually tease the next topic, and I haven't decided what the next topic will be, among those or any others.

I really want to write about solo developers, but that might be a better topic for the week after next, when I'm taking vacation time off work. I would be able to do more research.

So, let's say, tentatively, next week's feature will be about comedy in video games.

End Credits

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

The title font *Closet Dwellers* and the section header font *Shake Your Plums* are licensed from <https://chequered.ink/>.

Images sourced from elsewhere on the internet are sometimes credited and/or linked in captions that appear on or below them. This is true of all the screenshots used in this week's trilogy of top-7 lists, with most of them from <https://www.neoseeker.com>, which I just found out has really good screenshot collections, rivaling or surpassing my usual go-to, <https://mobygames.com>.

Images of the physical games in the "Collection Inspection" feature are photos I took of games in my own collection and weren't sourced from the internet.

Screenshots used in my video game mini-reviews and some screenshots used in other articles or features that weren't already attributed to a different source were captured by me in-game and are used here in what I believe is "fair use".

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