



THE VIDEO GAME GENERATIONS NEWSLETTER

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Issue #33 – December 20, 2025

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Loading Screen

My Christmas issue was originally going to be about games with a Christmas theme or level. What I realized, though, is that either (a) I don't remember many specifics even when I played a game set at Christmas (*Spider-Man: Miles Morales*, *Batman: Arkham Origins*, others), or (b) I simply haven't played the biggest examples at all (*Elf Bowling*, *Christmas NiGHTS into Dreams*).

That got me to thinking about gaming during the Christmas holiday season in general. I decided, instead, to do a community response issue.

Very few social media experiences are as humbling as facing the reality that you have zero reach. I was fortunate to get a few replies, so at least it will work.



My mini-reviews this week have nothing to do with the holidays; just a few fun games I reviewed years ago. I do include a few Christmas-themed games in *Collection Inspection*, though. In *The Final Stage*, to wrap up this issue, you'll find links to several lists I found online that are all about games with Christmas themes or levels.

Recent Events

Sony and Tencent Reach an Agreement

Several weeks ago, I wrote about Sony's clash with Tencent over the latter's upcoming game, *Light of Motiram*, which apparently started life as a potential *Horizon* game before Sony told them "no, we're not interested."

A private settlement was reached and Sony's lawsuit is being dropped, but the specifics seem to be confidential. Did Tencent concede and decide to cancel the game? The Steam and Epic Games Store pages have been delisted, so it's possible. Is the game set to undergo more significant changes to distance itself from the *Horizon* series instead?

A less likely third scenario is that maybe Sony decided to license out the *Horizon* IP after all, but even calling that unlikely is giving it too much credit. I'm sure it isn't that.



Image from [VideoGamesChronicle.com](https://www.videogameschronicle.com) showing Horizon on the left and Motiram on the right.

Source:

<https://www.videogameschronicle.com/news/tencent-horizon-clone-pulled-from-stores-as-sony-settles-lawsuit/>

Big Numbers for The Game Awards

According to VGC, The Game Awards organizers announced that there were 171 million global livestreams of the broadcast. In unrelated news, I keep seeing hit-and-run comments on social media from people who don't like The Game Awards and think the whole event is stupid.

Source:

<https://www.videogameschronicle.com/news/the-game-awards-claims-record-breaking-viewership-for-11th-year/>

Larian Under Fire for Generative AI Use

This is honestly a non-story because *of course* companies are using AI. In the case of Larian, the studio's CEO (Sven Vincke) had mentioned in an interview with Bloomberg that they've been able to use it in early conceptual and prototyping phases, stressing that it won't replace their talented artists or be used at all in the final game.

Source:

<https://www.videogameschronicle.com/news/holy-f-guys-were-not-replacing-artists-larian-boss-responds-to-ai-backlash/>

If you'll indulge a brief tangent, we recently had the all-hands year-end meeting at the company where I work. Adoption of AI has been a big push this year, and I found out that upper management is mandating it. It's not just "use it if it fits" – it's "use it or be fired." My boss has shielded our division from some of it, as we still need to evaluate the impact to our workflow and figure out how/where it makes sense (and in what form).

I've been able to demonstrate compliance to an extent by using ChatGPT to aid in coding – usually stuff I don't mind offloading because I'd rather get a tricky function working in a few minutes rather than noodling through it over the course of a couple trial-and-error hours.

My small corner of the division (R&D for a few of the company's many products) was a team of 7 just a few years ago. We're down to 3, and there's no indication we'll be hiring up, since it's expected that we'll match prior levels of productivity using AI. It's a scary world, to be honest, and I'm just sad I'm still at least 13 years away from normal retirement age.

The reality is, companies don't give two flips about the general public's opinion of AI, or the backlash from creatives across many disciplines who feel threatened or exploited by it. You may not see it, because much of it is used internally and isn't public-facing, but it's happening everywhere, and quickly. My work doesn't deal with art/writing (just programming), but even so, it's poised to replace me eventually too.

No amount of outrage, complaining, and mockery is going to make it go away. Crack your jokes, turn up your nose at it and lead the resistance, but the war is already over and the genie is already out of the bottle.

Christmas and Video Games

Earlier in the week, I posted a short, simple question on social media:

“What video game do you associate with Christmas, and why? Maybe a winter/Christmas level or theme, or a game you got as a Christmas gift, or one you replay this time of year, etc. Will include some responses in the next issue of VGGN if I get enough replies by Friday Dec. 19th.”

X/Twitter: [crickets](#).

BlueSky: [crickets](#).

Threads: [to the rescue!](#)

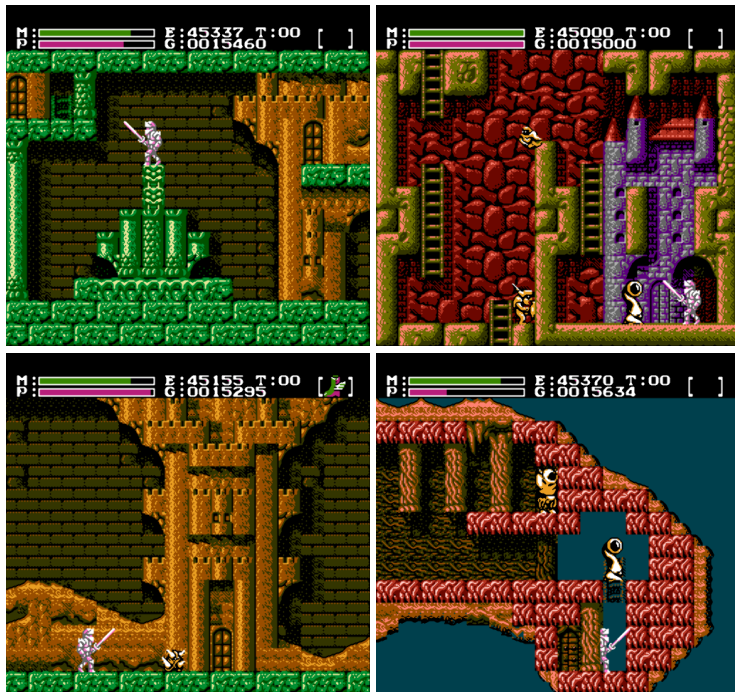
These are those replies. I appreciate every person who responded. Thank you! I replied to some of them, but I want to focus just on what they had to say. To see the full thread with the various replies, you can go to it here on Threads:

https://www.threads.com/@vggenerations/post/DSS_e0FkntW

Only one reply included a link, so the images I've included here are just screenshots I found online to go along with each of the replies.

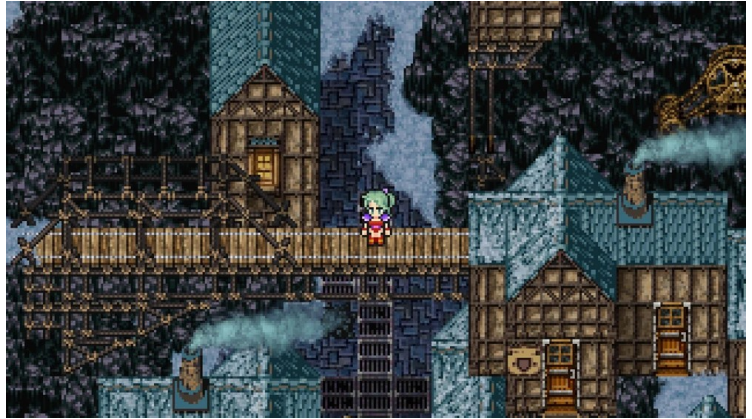
For my own answer, I'd go with *Faxanadu* for the NES. I remember getting it for Christmas one year in high school, and playing through it entirely over the weekend. It was a great experience, and it became one of my favorite games on Nintendo's first console.

I really want to play this game again.



@ [elleb3nnett](#)

“FF VI ! I tend to revisit in the winter time , mainly with the levels like Narshe , it gives me such Christmas feel :)”



@ [ichaelis_](#)

“Actual Christmas levels/settings:

- *Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales*
- *Pumpkin Jack*
- *Overcooked!*

Games I played near the holidays:

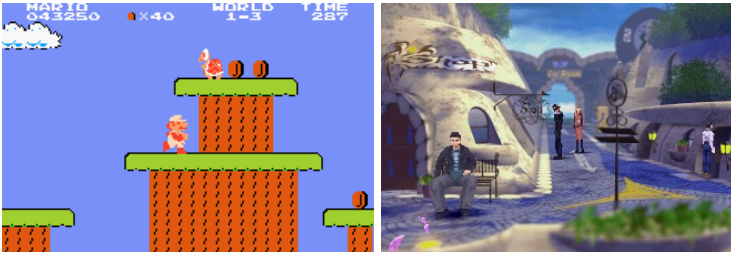
- *Assassin's Creed*
- *Bioshock*
- *Dragon Age: Inquisition*
- *Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones*



⑥ koalakid.deu

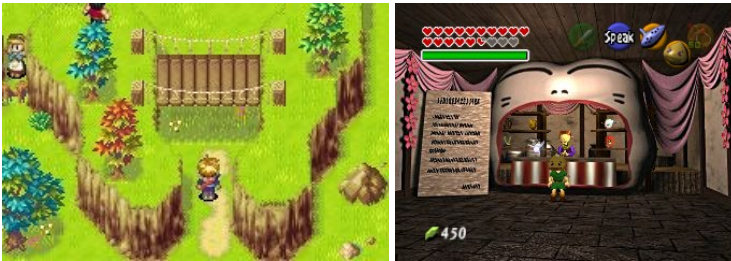
“Got the following games as xmas gifts:

- Super Mario Bros
- Ecco The Dolphin
- Final Fantasy 8
- Kingdom Hearts”



⑥ nolanperry

“Golden Sun and Ocarina of Time! I usually get cravings to play both games this time of year because of the nostalgia related to Christmas. Same with Skyrim. That game just feels cozy this time of year.”



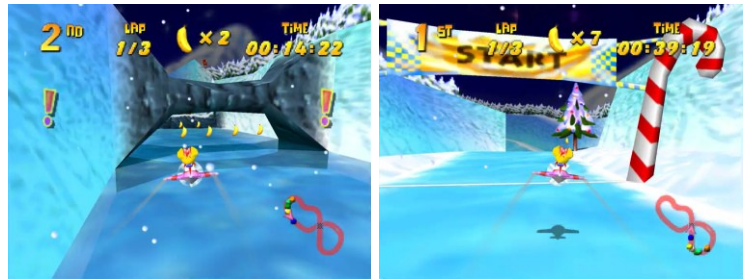
⑥ moodflowsanctuary

“Lemmings Xmas edition”



⑥ _arcimago_

“this is a track i'll end up playing every single time as christmas approaches. For me, best kart racer ever. Super fun and a lot of things to do. Ahead of his time, the power ups system is awesome too, i love it.” (*Diddy Kong Racing*, N64)



⑥ creepyceruid

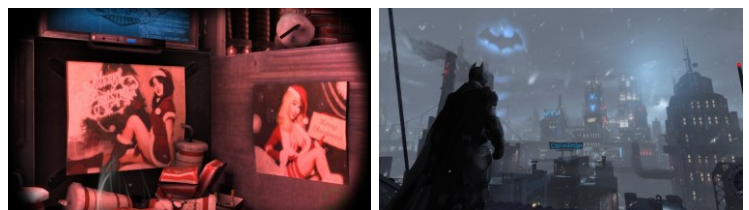
“Silent Hill 1 (eerie cold/snow) and I played it around Christmas the first time.”

⑥ drakouyx

“WOW at release (November 23) was pretty cozy 1 month later, with everyone being fun and social. It made a lonely Christmas less lonely in 2004.”

⑥ keubli86

“Batman: Arkham Origins, the whole game is set on Christmas Eve.”



Collection Inspection – Christmas Games

Here's a set of Christmas-themed games I found in my collection by searching for the words *Christmas* and *Santa*. I stumbled on the *Rudolph* DS game in the process. I'm surprised there weren't more. There probably are, if I really wanted to dig into it and include games where only a level or stage is themed for Christmas, but I didn't do that.

Santa Claus is Comin' to Town!

Platform: Nintendo DS / **Edition:** Standard

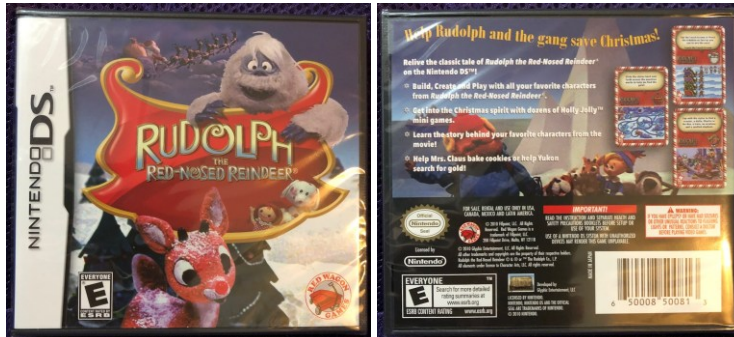
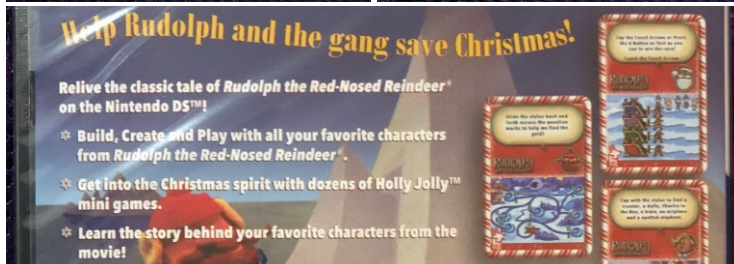
Comments: This one is still factory sealed, so I didn't open it up to include manual and cartridge photos. I probably could have. It's worth very little, either way.



Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer

Platform: Nintendo DS / **Edition:** Standard

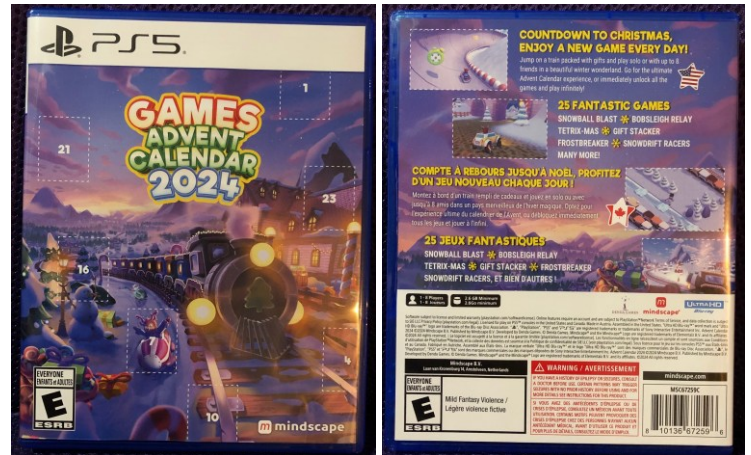
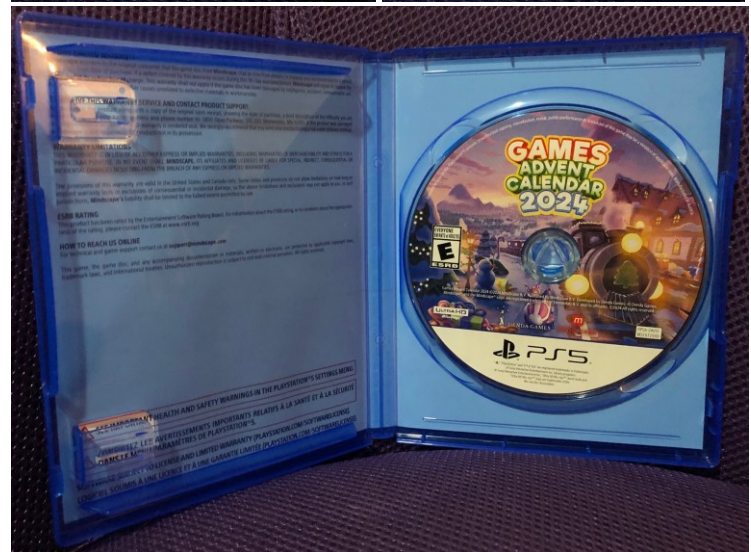
Comments: This one is also still factory sealed and also not worth very much; not that I'm only collecting stuff that's worth a lot. I might have originally bought these DS games for my kids to play when they were much younger, and they simply never got opened.



Games Advent Calendar 2024

Platform: PS5 / **Edition:** Standard

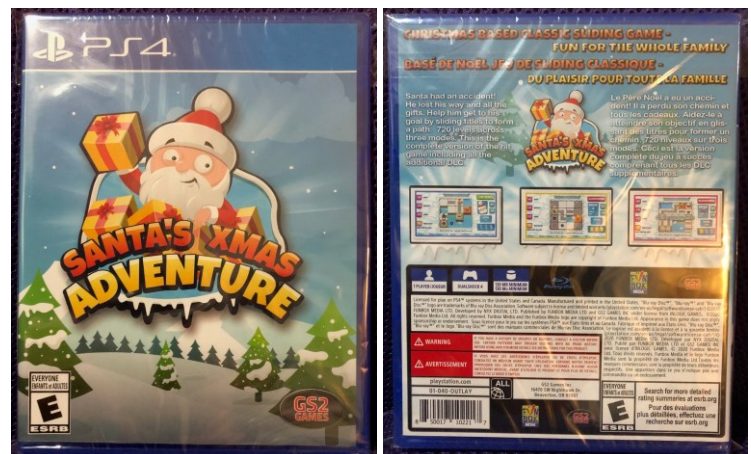
Comments: This game was cheap on Amazon earlier this year, and I hadn't added anything to my collection in a while (I think), so I picked it up. I'm silly that way.



Santa's Xmas Adventure

Platform: PlayStation 4 / **Edition:** Standard

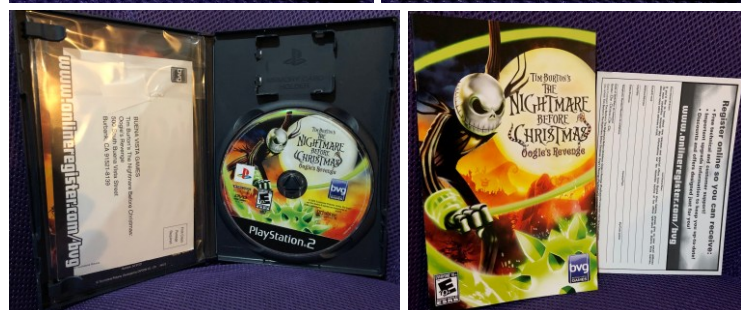
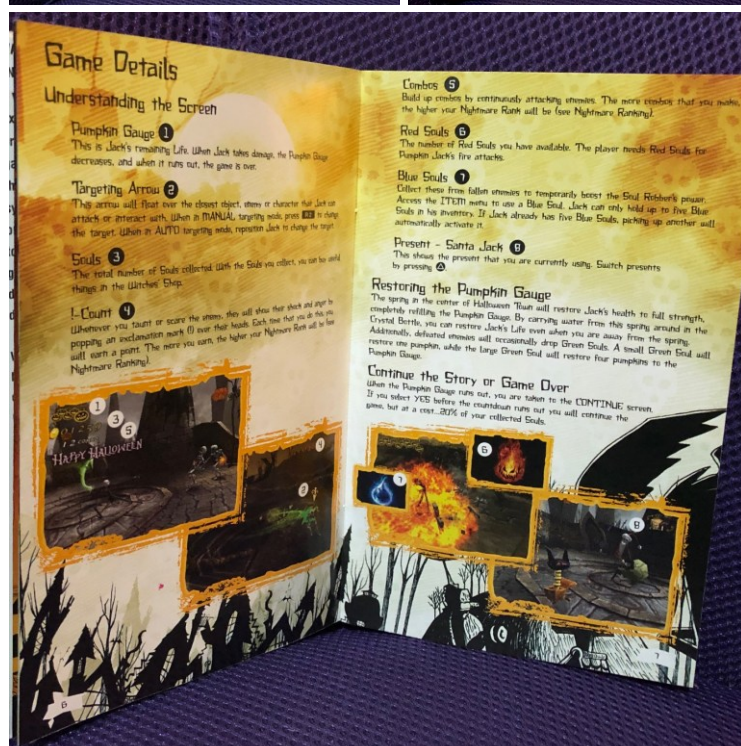
Comments: This one looks harmless enough. I don't know if it's any good. I never ended up opening it.



Time Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas – Oogie's Revenge

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

Comments: You know, I'm not sure I ever watched the movie this game is based on. I remember the world showing up in *Kingdom Hearts* a time or two, but it didn't mean much to me aside from the cool Tim Burton aesthetic. It sits at a 65 on Metacritic, although user scores are a bit better, at 7.5. Why is the critic score a 100-point scale and users 10-point?



The Grinch – Christmas Adventures

Platform: PlayStation 5 / **Edition:** Standard

Comments: Another one I've never opened. I never was a fan of the whole Grinch thing, to be honest.



Mini-Review: Astro's Playroom



The PlayStation 5 comes with this pack-in game pre-installed. Easily mistaken as just a tech demo, it turns out AP is a really fun 3D platformer with several levels and lots of trophies.

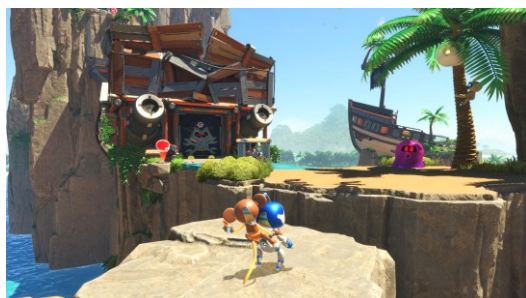
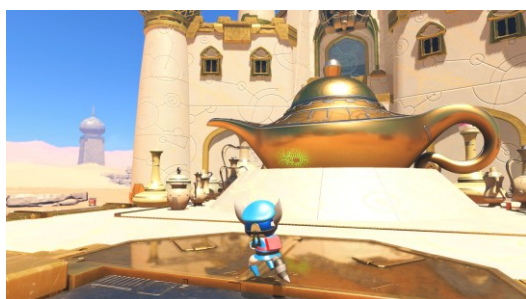
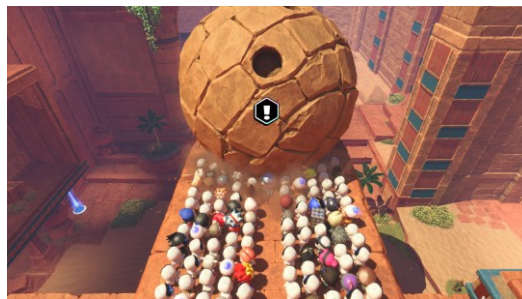
It serves several purposes. It does showcase the cool features of the new DualSense controller in ways that make me hope other games follow suit, but it also serves as a celebration of prior generations of PlayStation hardware (in the form of collectibles) and games (via myriad Easter eggs throughout each level).

Some of the motion-control sections are less appealing, but on the whole it's just a joy to play.

From all the nods to other games, to a whole area where the GPU sings to you, it's built to make players happy; especially if you have a history with PlayStation gaming, but even if not.

*Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: 11/24/2020.*

Mini-Review: Astro Bot



The older I get, the less I'm drawn to 3D mascot platformers. I don't know if that's because my reflexes aren't as great as they were decades ago or if I'm just more drawn to games with stories and characters, but this game embodies everything great about the genre.

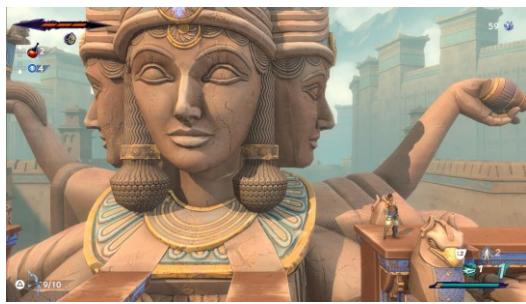
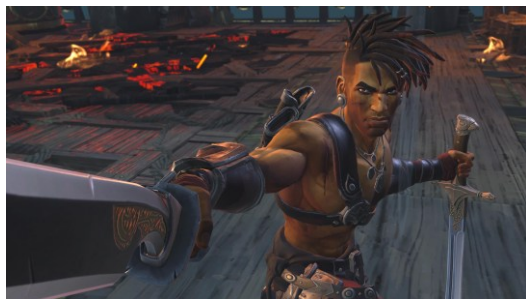
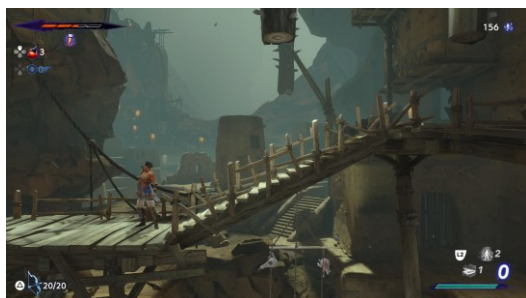
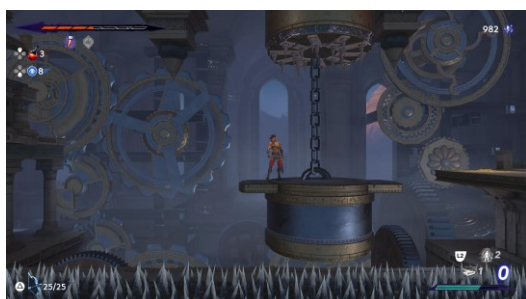
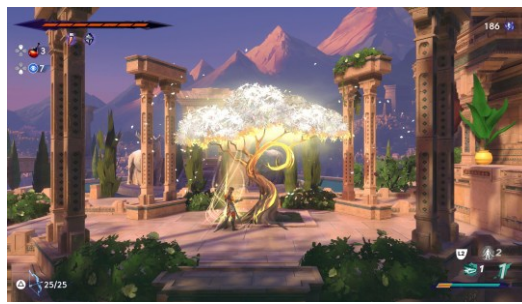
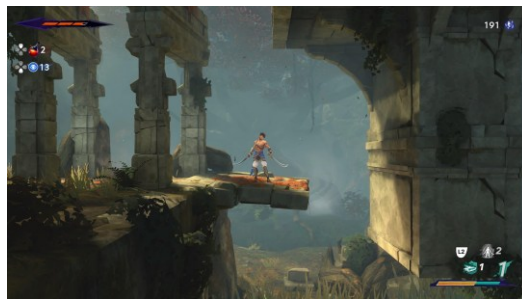
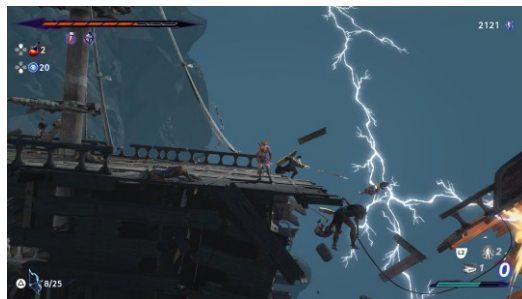
It expertly balances the difficulty between required levels and optional challenges, the DualShock gimmickry that enhances the experience without detracting from it, and the fan-servicey celebration of PlayStation history without being just a low-effort play or nostalgia.

It might not be *my* personal favorite 2024 game, but it's #1 if based purely on how fun it is.

As 3D platformers go, it's among my favorites of the past decade, among the likes of *Mario Odyssey*, *Yooka-Laylee*, and *Psychonauts 2*. This is joy, in video game form.

*Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: 11/29/2024.*

Mini-Review: PoP – The Lost Crown



Full Title:

Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown

When it comes to modern Metroidvanias, the gold standard is set by games like *Ori and the Blind Forest*, *Metroid Dread*, *Hollow Knight*, and *Bloodstained: Ritual of the Night*. Add to this list the latest *Prince of Persia*, which has a sprawling world, great gameplay that combines the best of platforming and combat, lots of combat and traversal upgrades, and (sadly) a few glitches that hopefully get ironed out in future updates.

The ability to tag the map and even include screenshots (limited uses) is great, but I found most of my markers disappearing after returning later (multiple times) which made collectible-hunting later more difficult than it should have been.

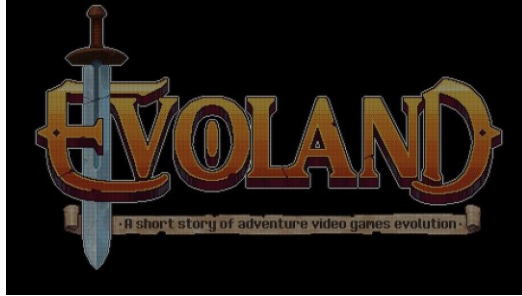
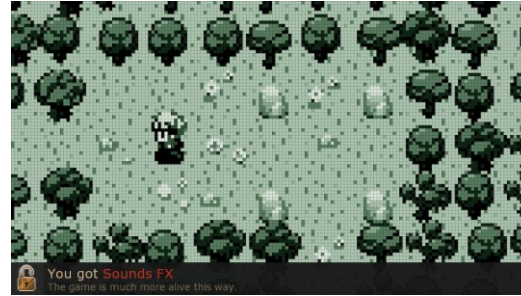
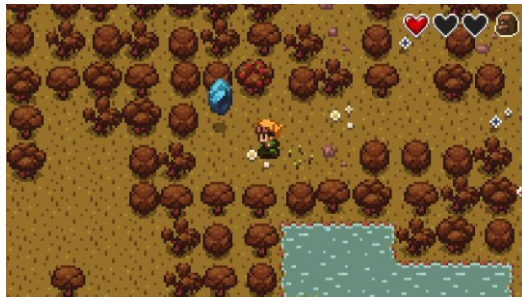
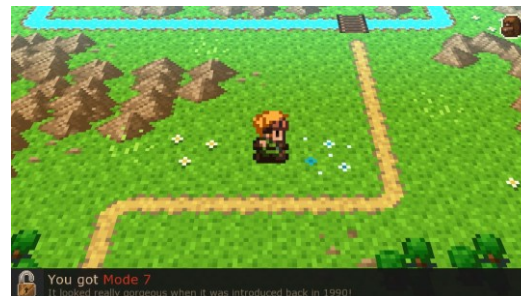
Still, that doesn't ruin a fantastic experience that only gets better as Sargon gains more powers.

It's great.

Played on console: PS5.

Originally posted: 01/23/2024.

Mini-Review: Evoland



For weeks, my son has been insisting I make time to play the *Evoland Legendary Edition*. He says the sequel is a lot longer and way better, but the first in this two-game set is pretty good on its own. It's a short 3 or 4 hour RPG that doesn't just take inspiration from years of classic RPG history, but uses that nostalgia for its gameplay hook.

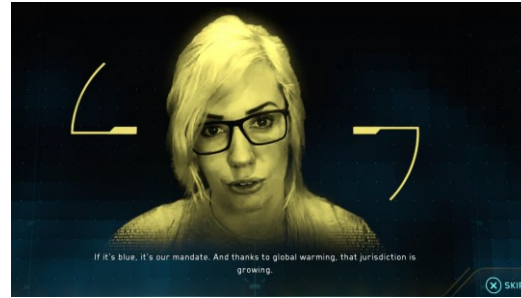
It's a bit like a gimmick game I played years ago on Xbox 360 called *DLC Quest*, but *Evoland* does much more with the premise of evolving gameplay and graphic styles.

There's a lot packed into the short play time. I can see why my son enjoyed it so much, but it's all the better if you have a history with the specific games it references (*Zelda*, *Final Fantasy*, others).

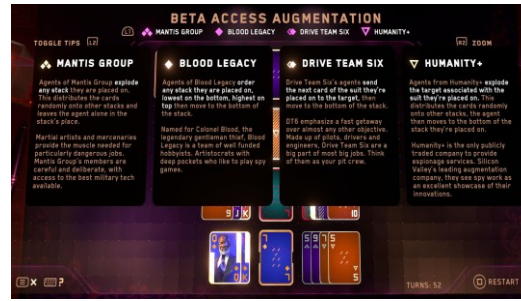
I enjoyed this one. I'll get around to playing *Evoland 2* sooner or later, I'm sure.

Played on console: Switch.
Originally posted: 10/03/2022.

Mini-Review: The Solitaire Conspiracy



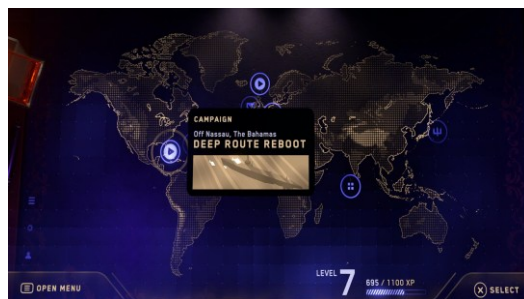
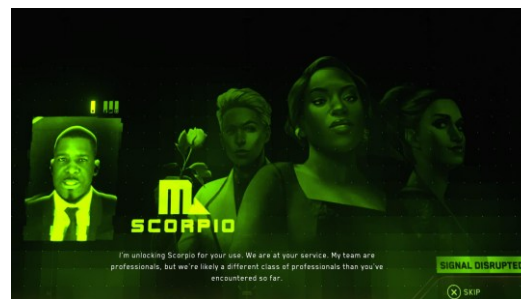
This game's currently on sale for \$2 (or \$1 if you have PS Plus). I enjoyed the two "Circular" series games from the same developer, so this was an easy buy at that price.



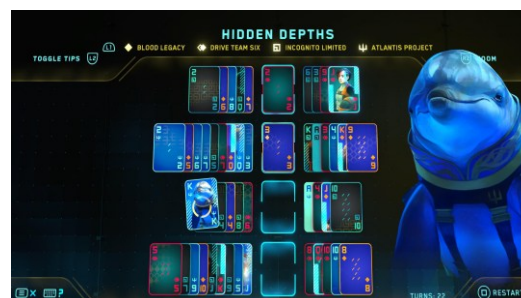
At its core, it's a version of the solitaire card game that I've never seen (maybe invented for this game, but I'm not sure).



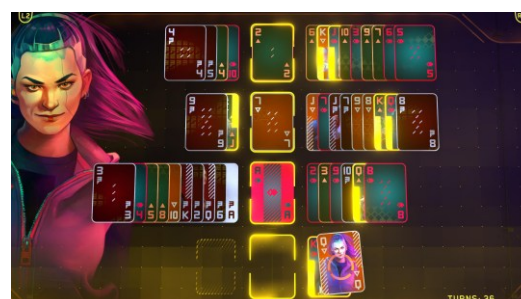
There's a timed challenge mode and a limited-turns option for each campaign mission using a preset deal, but those are optional. The rules are such that normal hands are more relaxed and are impossible to lose.



It's within the framing story of a spy network, where each team is represented by a suit of cards. Face cards have special abilities based on the team they represent.



It features some FMV acting (Alanah Pearce, Greg Miller, others).



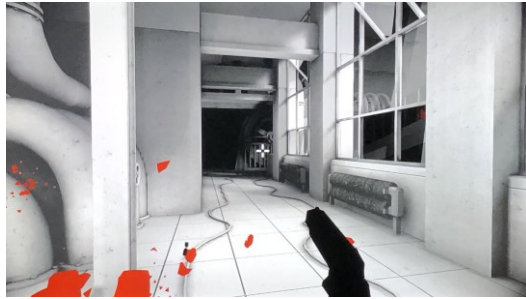
It was a pretty fun, cheap weekend diversion.

PS4 game played on PS5.
Originally posted: 06/12/2022.

Mini-Review: SuperHOT



This game had a lot of positive buzz around it when it first released a few years ago, and I can see why. It's not just a first-person shooter for people with poor reflexes; it's sort of a puzzle game with a cool 80's-era BBS/chat framing story and menu interface.



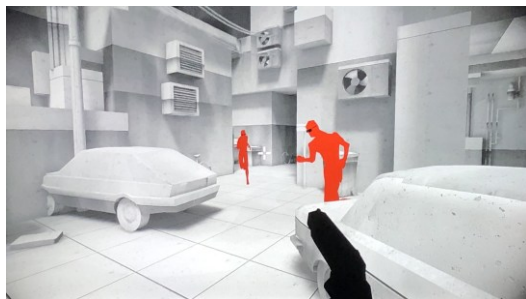
When standing still, everything pauses; enemies, bullets, everything. That's the puzzle aspect of it.



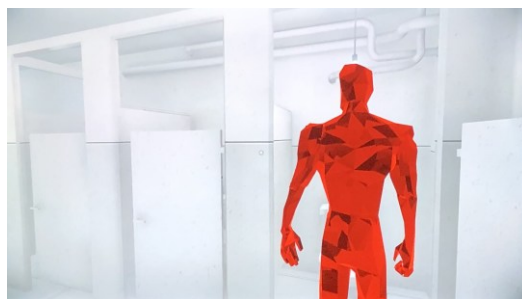
The graphics may seem bland in screenshots, but in practice it's really good. Red dudes are your focus.



I only have two complaints.



One, the game does a “super” “hot” “super” “hot” chant after each level during the real-time replay, which is annoying and apparently can't be disabled. Two, the campaign is a bit short, but post-game challenge modes extend it.



For me, it really lived up to the hype. Recommended.

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

The Final Stage

Christmas Themed Games and Levels

If you're in the mood for Christmas games, look no further than these videos and articles about the best examples of Christmas themes used in video games.

The 10 Best Christmas Themed Video Game Levels (MojoPlays):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6w8g4l2QLho>



10 BEST Christmas levels to play while avoiding your family (PC Gamer):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1N8QxLge5k>

The Best Christmas Video Games & Levels (bonus-action.com):

<https://bonus-action.com/games/christmas-video-games-levels/>

Top Ten Christmas-Themed Video Game Levels (superphillipcentral.com):

<https://www.superphillipcentral.com/2017/12/top-ten-christmas-themed-video-game.html>

The Best 10 Christmas-Themed Levels in Video Games (Screen Rant):

<https://screenrant.com/best-christmas-themed-video-game-levels/>

Holiday Gaming

It's here; my annual two-plus weeks off work at Christmas and New Years. I get plenty of time off throughout the year, but this is when I take *this much* all at once. I plan to finally play *Conker's Bad Fur Day* (either in *Rare Replay* or on Analogue 3D, although I might just go for *Live and Reloaded* instead). My son just beat *Tunic* and insists I play it next. High on my list are also a few N64 games, and *The Alters*.

Next Week

2025 comes to a close, and there are so many games I'm bound to enjoy that I just haven't had time to play. That makes doing my "best of 2025" list a little premature, and if my 2025 backlog drags on into 2026 for any extent, it might be incomplete even when I do.

Several that come to mind are *Cronos: The New Dawn*, *Dispatch*, *The Outer Worlds 2*, *Ninja Gaiden 4*, *Avowed*, *Citizen Sleeper 2*, the remaster of *The Thing*, *Blades of Fire*, *Hollow Knight: Silksong* (although I'm not sure I'm in the mood for a super hard game), *Kingdom Come Deliverance II* (although I'm not sure I'm in the mood for a 100-hour sequel to a game I didn't play), *Hotel Barcelona*, *Wuchang: Fallen Feathers*, *Dying Light: The Beast* (although I wish it was on disc), *Little Nightmares III*, *The Alters*, *Tormented Souls II*, *Ghost of Yōtei*, and quite a few others.

What I can do, though, is write about the games I *did* play this year. I don't know if I'll rank them, although I'm bound to point out which ones are my favorites. I envision this as more of an *everything* list – like a journal of my year in gaming, including the older games.

Thanks for reading, and see you next week!

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/>.

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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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