THE VIDEO GAME GENERATIONS NEWSLETTER

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Start Menu

Loading Screen 1
Recent Events 2
The Great Escape (Room) 3
Collection Inspection 4
A Physical Game Rant 7
Mini-Review: Between Time 8
Mini-Review: Palindrome Syndrome 9
Mini-Review: How 2 Escape 10
Mini-Review: Escape Academy 11
Mini-Review: 60 Minutes to Extinction 12
Mini-Review: Pyramids and Aliens 13
Mini-Review: Regular Factory 14
Mini-Review: Escape 2088 15
Mini-Review: Project 7 - Escape Room 16
Mini-Review: The House of Da Vinci II 17
Bonus Review: We Were Here - Series 18
The Final Stage 19
Strand Games 19
End Credits 19

Loading Screen

This "just whenever" release schedule is making me lazy, but I've also been in better spirits as I spend more of my free time gaming again. It also means that "recent events" aren't always very recent by the time a new issue is ready.

From the start, part of my pitch has been "news you've already heard," so there's that.

Somehow, the number of VGGN subscribers has more than doubled since the last issue. I don't know how or why, but thanks, and welcome!

This week's issue is about escape room puzzle games, which is a sub-genre of adventure games. It's mostly my mini-reviews for the few I've played.

Let's see... 4 digits in 2026, 4 letters in VGGN, and G must be 2?

Recent Events

PlayStation Has Closed Bluepoint Games

Tell me if this sounds familiar: a big publisher acquires a talented game studio and decides to shut it down just a few years later. If incidents like the Microsoft closures of Tango Gameworks and Arkane Austin come to mind, you're right. Heck, studio closures in general have been a frequent thing the past couple of years, as if no developer is ever truly safe.

Bluepoint did the *Shadow of the Colossus* remake, which my son enjoyed, but I've only ever played (and loved) the original. They did the excellent *Demon's Souls* remake that launched with PlayStation 5, too.

Source:
https://www.videogameschronicle.com/news/sony-is-shutting-down-bluepoint-developer-of-demons-souls-remake/

Sarah Bond and Phil Spencer Out at Xbox

IGN has a huge write-up about this (see the source link below) as do every other gaming news outlet, but as I understand it, head of Xbox Phil Spencer retired and Xbox President Sarah Bond seemingly just decided to quit at the same time.

Speculation (mine, anyway) is that there was internal tension, whether with a difference in vision between Xbox and Microsoft, or with their decision that Bond *wouldn't* replace Spencer as Xbox CEO upon his departure. I mean, being passed over for a big promotion is enough to make a person question their future with and loyalty to any big company.

There may also have been tensions between Sarah Bond and other Xbox staff in general, if rumors are to be believed.

In Phil's place, Microsoft has appointed Asha Sharma as the new Xbox CEO. What I've heard elsewhere is that she's not really "into" video games the way Phil was. She was reportedly the President of Microsoft's CoreAI product and a big champion of AI in general, which is a bit troubling for a market that is very opposed to generative AI in any form.

Sources:
https://www.ign.com/articles/phil-spencer-retiring-sarah-bond-out-matt-booty-promoted-as-microsoft-ai-exec-asha-sharma-named-new-xbox-boss-exclusive

https://blogs.microsoft.com/blog/2026/02/20/asha-sharma-named-evp-and-ceo-microsoft-gaming/

Xbox Won't Enforce AI Usage

Every big (and even not-so-big) tech company is mandating the use of generative AI. Maybe it's different in creative spaces like video game development, where consumers aren't on board with it at all, but elsewhere, it's like a gold rush that has executive leadership seeing dollar signs just thinking about all the people they *won't* have to hire and how much more productive they believe their current people will become. I don't believe for a second that it's not being mandated, at least for behind-the-scenes day-to-day work.

Sources:
https://www.videogameschronicle.com/news/we-need-to-draw-lines-on-what-we-dont-do-xbox-isnt-enforcing-the-use-of-ai-new-gaming-ceo-says/

The Great Escape (Room)

I would assume, based on nothing but a hunch, that there are way more escape room games for PC than on consoles, but I've found a pretty good selection of them on PS5.

Many of them proudly proclaim they're an *Escape Room* in the title, but not always.

Real-world escape rooms brought the idea out of video games and into reality by focusing on themes (a museum, an alien autopsy lab, and so forth) and puzzles. They took the core concepts of puzzle games and point-and-click adventures and focused it into the tangible goal of "escaping" from a room or series of rooms, hence the name.

I've only done two real escape rooms. The first was several years ago during a business trip when our boss organized it as a team-building exercise. It was fun. I forget the theme, but we almost "escaped" (we missed the final clue).

The other was last summer with my three kids (teenagers). It was the aforementioned alien autopsy, and I don't think we even came close. We got too focused on the wrong things, weren't working well as a team, and just kind of botched the whole thing.

Before the first one, I was clueless on how they could actually even work. I figured it was just a room with some puzzle charts you had to solve or something, but no.

Various kinds of keys and locks are a big part of it. They also do a lot with magnetic switches, so that (for instance) finding a small figurine and placing it on a pedestal triggers a panel to fall open, revealing a clue or a key. There are, of course, the logic puzzles that reveal a combination or code when solved, and various other clues and items that all work together to create the experience.

This, in turned, spawned video games that are themselves patterned after escape rooms. It comes full circle, I guess.

Because there are elements of puzzle games and point-and-click adventure games in escape rooms, the dividing line can be a little blurry. Is *Myst* an escape room? It's built from the same general concept, and retroactively might be categorized as one, but for the purpose of this issue, no, it's an adventure.

A game like *Tempus: Level Escape* has "escape" right there in the title, but I found it to be more akin to *Myst* (at least the *Myst* remake) and other first-person adventures.

This week's main feature is perhaps a bit lazy, because it's not really a main feature at all. I've collected all the mini-reviews I wrote for the various escape rooms I've played, put them in chronological order, and included them in this issue. I've already written about them, so why write about them all again?

The best I could come up with for *Collection Inspection*, in keeping with the theme, are the three games in the *Zero Escape* series. I played them before I was doing mini-reviews, but I talk about all three of them a bit in old episodes of the VGG Podcast (episodes 80, 81, 83, 84, 105, 106, and 107). My co-host (daughter Addie) turns 21 this year. Wow.

They predate the "escape room" genre, but very much embody the same kind of puzzle design. They also tell a pretty wild story, just as you'd expect from Spike Chunsoft.

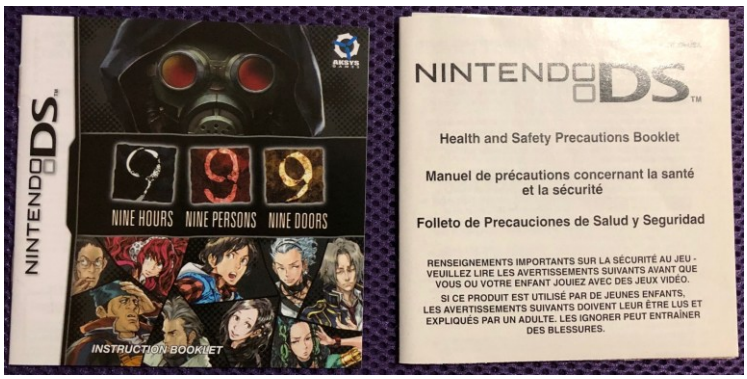
Collection Inspection

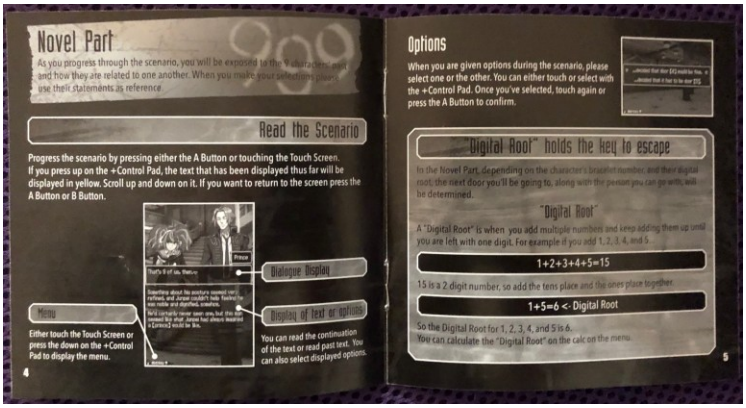
I played *999* on the DS, then *Virtue's Last Reward* on PlayStation Vita, then *Zero Time Dilemma* on PlayStation TV (Vita), which is why every other copy remains factory sealed.

999 – Nine Hours Nine Persons Nine Doors

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

Comments: I don't know if this was planned as a trilogy, but the first game launched on the DS without the *Zero Escape* series branding seen on later entries.



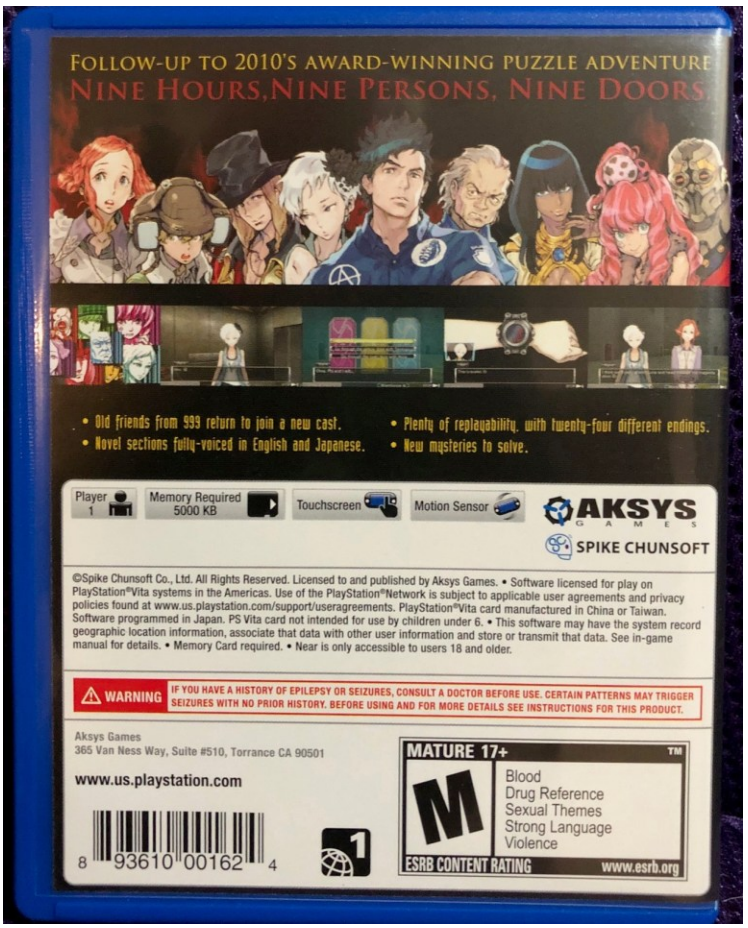


Virtue's Last Reward

Platform: Nintendo 3DS / **Edition:** Standard
Comments: I never opened my 3DS copy. This was back from a time when I was buying almost every new game I could get my hands on, to satisfy my urge to collect, and because it was impossible to predict what games might be valuable in the future.

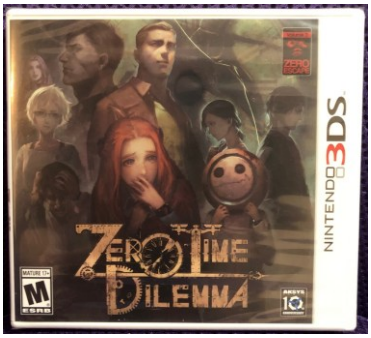
Virtue's Last Reward

Platform: PlayStation Vita / **Edition:** Standard
Comments: For whatever reason, I opted to play the Vita version of this sequel to *999*. It may have been for the bigger screen and better (in theory) graphics, but I also enjoy the 3D gimmick and some well-placed touch controls, so I don't know if that was the right choice or not. Here's where they started branding these games as the *Zero Escape* series.



Zero Time Dilemma

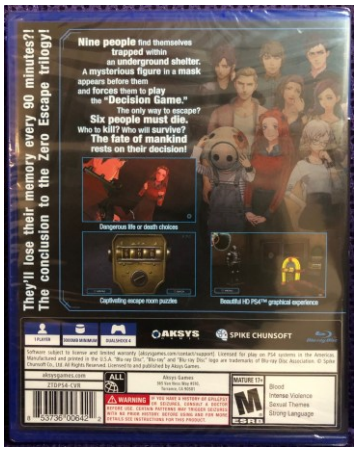
Platform: Nintendo 3DS / **Edition:** Standard
Comments: My 3DS copy of the final game in the trilogy also remains unopened, which makes this feature far less interesting. While I have a little extra space to fill here, I should probably say that these games are excellent. If you have a chance to play them and enjoy this kind of game, whether it's on 3DS, Vita, PS4/PS5, or PC, I recommend them.



Zero Time Dilemma

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

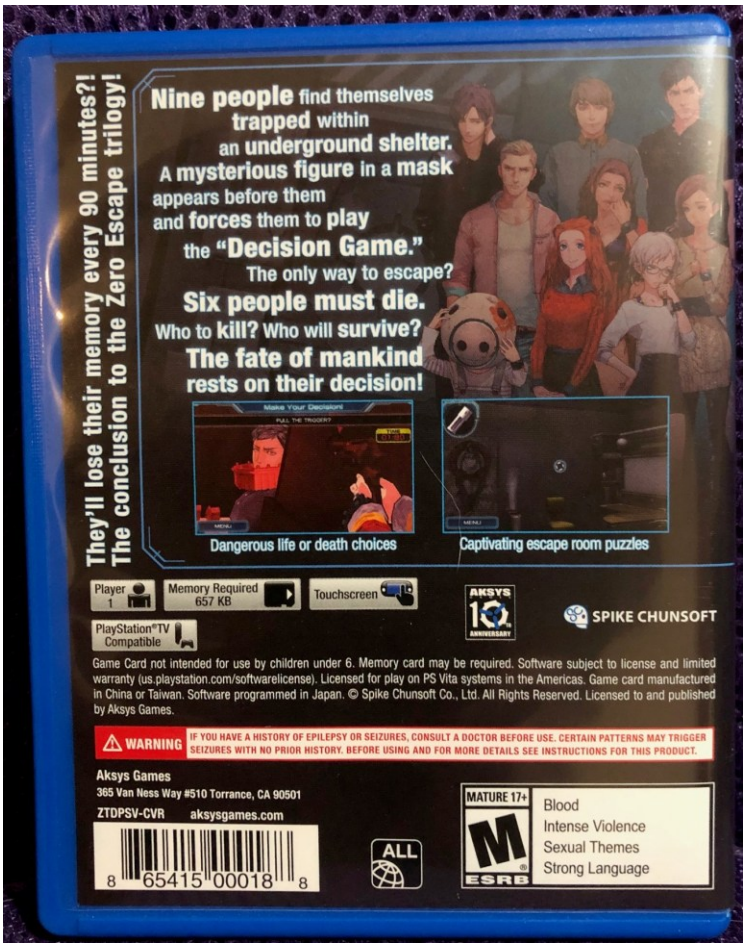
Comments: Yes, I bought another copy when it came to PS4 a year later. No, I probably shouldn't have, although this *does* seem like the one that'd be easiest to access today (aside from the PC version, which as I write this is on sale for $1.99 on Steam, with the entire trilogy priced at under $4 right now, but the sale ends on March 19th so unless you follow me on social media, you've probably missed out already).



Zero Time Dilemma

Platform: PlayStation Vita / **Edition:** Standard

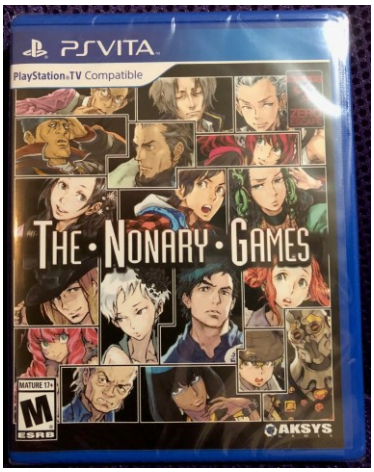
Comments: Here's the version I played. These games are bonkers, and again, I highly recommend them.



The Nonary Games

Platform: PlayStation Vita / **Edition:** Standard

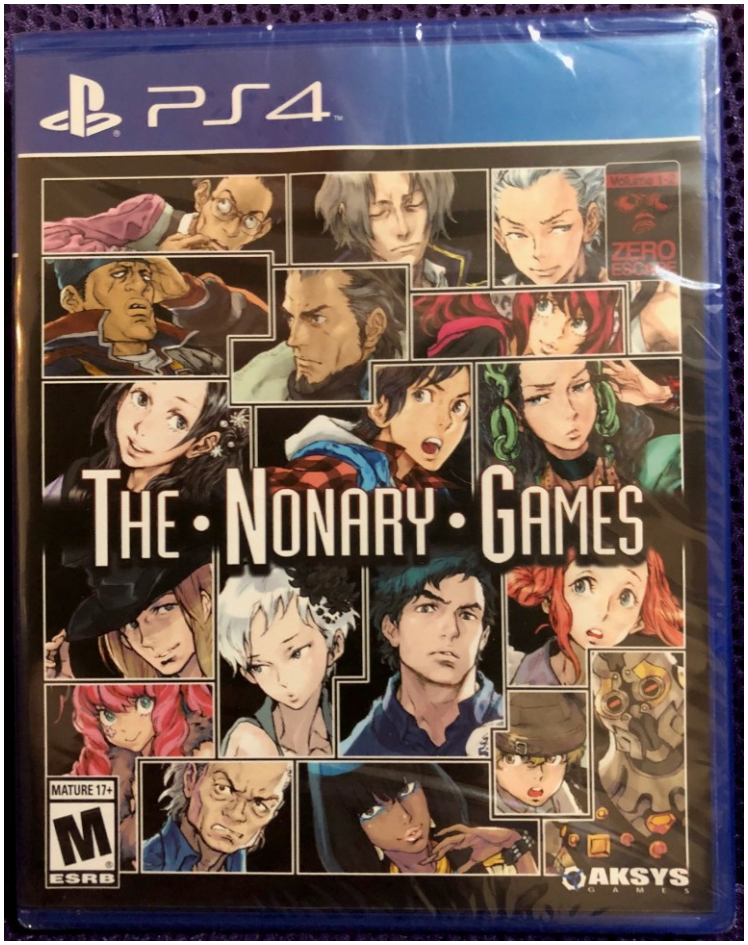
Comments: The first game (*999*) got a remaster for PS4 and Vita, and was bundled with *Virtue's Last Reward* as *The Nonary Games* duology.

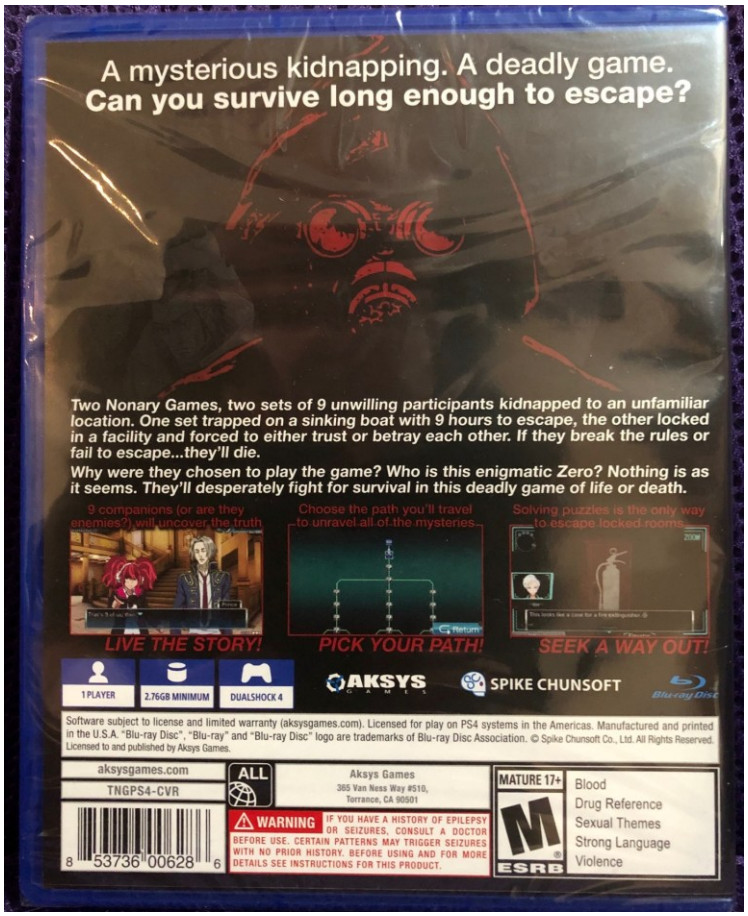


The Nonary Games

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

Comments: The first two games finally came to PS4.





A Physical Game Rant

I wasted far too much time on Twitter recently, arguing with idiots after it came to light that the physical version of *Crimson Desert* isn't fully on disc. I had been looking forward to it, with my pre-order in place months ago.

Why is that people who buy and collect physical games don't mind that digital games exist, yet some people who only buy digitally act as if physical media should go away and can come up with a thousand excuses why it's OK that publishers are starting to ruin their games with key cards and key discs and other forms of incomplete physical versions?

There's so much misinformation about it, too. Yes, it's becoming more common, but some people think it's been the norm for a decade. No, it hasn't. Yes, most games have a day-one patch to address bugs and such, but it's only in the past two or three years that publishers started getting away with not even putting a full unpatched 1.0 version on the media at all.

Reasons to want a full game on disc or cartridge:

1. We've already given up expecting games to release when they're finished and polished. We shouldn't give up at least expecting that there's *some version* of the full game on the disc.
2. Needing an update to make a game better isn't the same thing as needing an update even to launch the game to begin with. There's a difference, and no, the latter isn't and shouldn't become the norm.
3. It's bad enough that digital games can't be installed (or even played at all in some cases, via license checks) when the service has a temporary outage. Incomplete discs/carts extend that problem to physical media too.
4. Collecting and preservation goes out the window. Sure, I may not even be alive in 25 years, but I'd like to think the game I bought can still be installed and played. When those servers eventually shut down, they won't.
5. Although uncommon, there have been instances where later patches break achievements and trophies, making them impossible to unlock. This can sometimes be resolved by installing the original pre-patched version.
6. Developers/publishers often change the content of a game over time, whether to censor things, remove licensed media, or just "improve" stuff that may or may not actually be an improvement. When we don't have the game on disc, there's no way to go back before that and compare or experience the original.
7. Multi-disc games are a time-honored tradition, going back decades. A game being "too big to fit" is not an excuse, especially for premium full-price AAA games.
8. No, not everybody does have unlimited data and fast internet, or plans to install and play when they do.
9. Platform holders can ban your account and even blacklist your console. How will that affect a person's ability to make use of games that require a connection to those services to even install? Negatively, I assume.
10. Having the full game on disc doesn't diminish anybody else's ability to buy games digitally. *Not* having the full game on disc *only* benefits the publisher.

Reasons to be OK with key discs/cards:

1. EvEry gaMe neEds a paTch anYwaY.
2. EvEryBoDy hAs thE iNteRneT nOw.
3. I dOn't caRe beCauSe I bUy diGitAllY, sO I dOn't seE wHy anYboDy eLse waNts oR nEedS a fUll gaMe on diSc.
4. I cAn stIll tRade aNd sEll iT.
5. It'S toO biG to Fit On oNe disC.

Sadly yes, I do think we're going to start seeing this more and more.

Ubisoft and WB Games have been doing it the past several years, and I even bought several without realizing it. It was so unheard of that it's not even something I thought to check for or would ever have expected.

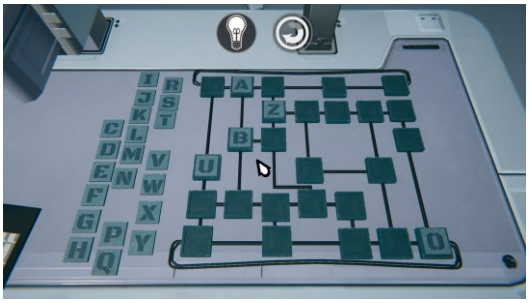
Xbox has pretty much been doing it for their releases across the board now. Nintendo has baked it into their release pipeline and dubbed it *Key Cards* with Switch 2, as if it's a *good* thing.

A great resource for checking whether or not a physical game is fully on disc is https://www.doesitplay.org/. Even when the full game is there, they report on what to expect when playing the original unpatched version.

And follow me on Threads, Twitter/X and BlueSky @vggenerations.

Thanks for reading.

Mini-Review: Between Time



I tried an escape room once. It didn't involve time travel, or an A.I. encouraging you to steal valuable treasures through history.

In digital form, these are a lot like point-and-click adventures, albeit with far less emphasis on inventory items and way more on just solving a series of logic puzzles (as opposed to what I'd call narrative-focused puzzles in adventure games).

If it feels like you're taking a classic I.Q. test, it's probably an escape room.

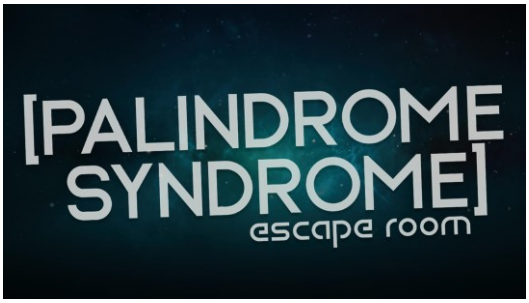
I only used the built-in hint system once, and it thankfully helped explain how the puzzle worked rather than just giving the solution. Some post-game experimenting leads me to believe they're all like that.

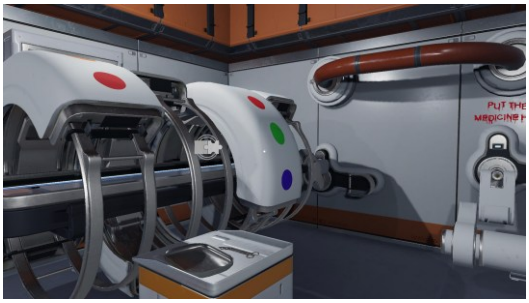
Five levels. An easy platinum; just solve everything.

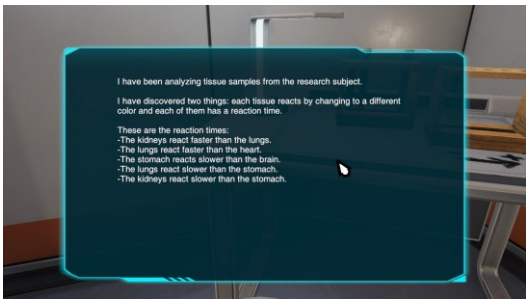
A good mental work-out while waiting on January's new games.

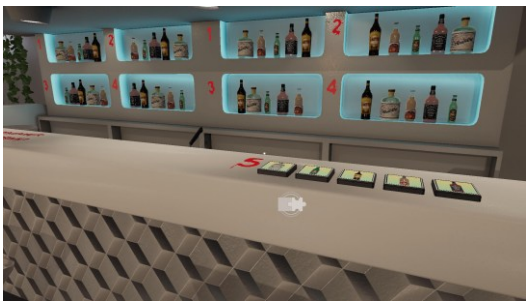
Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: 01/16/2024.

Mini-Review: Palindrome Syndrome









It turns out there's a whole series of these escape rooms (four so far) from Marcer Games.

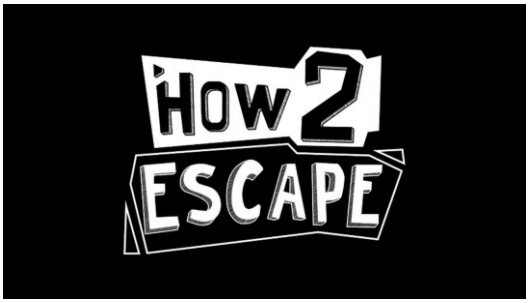
I've been hearing this new term going around; "cozy games" or "cozy gaming". If I understand it correctly, this probably doesn't fit the bill (there's a lot more thinking involved than what I understand the term to mean, and the story (short though it is) ends up being on the darker side), but it's definitely a game you can just relax into and take at your own pace.

It lacks the puzzle hint system and the room variety of *Between Time* (see my review from last week), but I found the puzzles slightly easier and the futuristic space station setting a good cohesion for it as a whole.

It's an easy platinum without feeling cheap or unearned, and a good game to finish in a sitting or two.

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

Mini-Review: How 2 Escape



It's usually my son's idea to play these co-op escape room games. I enjoy them, but it's especially frustrating when a timer is ticking down and we can't agree on what to do or how to solve a puzzle.

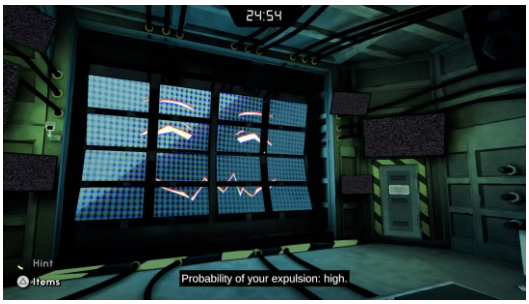
Each of the game's six levels is set aboard a different themed train car. The timer for each varies, but is pretty generous. We never ran out of time, although we totally cheated.

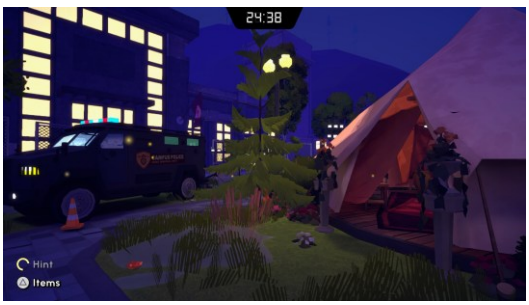
It's unique in that one person is trapped on the train (escaping) and the other uses an actual cell phone app. There's no online play or connection required between the two at all, because it all works off codes and hints told between the two players.

It's a unique concept for this kind of game. You're not supposed to screen-cheat, but we did (mostly later on) and still enjoyed solving all the game's puzzles.

Played on: PS5 Pro + Mobile.
Originally posted: 01/01/2026.

Mini-Review: Escape Academy





Here's a puzzle-filled escape room game that can be played solo or with a friend in split-screen couch co-op. It's not built around hiding information from the two players (we've enjoyed those too); rather, just allowing two people to work in the same room at the same time, much the way you could in a "real" escape room.

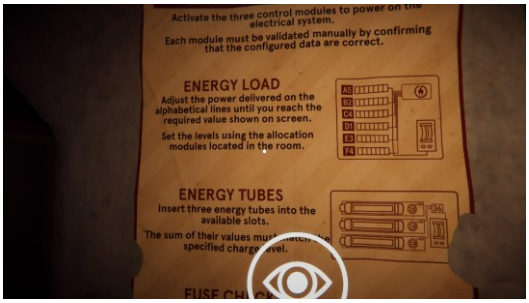
This is a blessing (two people working towards a solution, with one player even being able to look at charts or items or clues so the other one doesn't have to run back and forth) and a curse (if both of you try interacting with a thing at the same time).

The most frustrating part for us was the latter; for example, swapping tiles on a board since you're not picking separately.

It has a bonkers story to go with it. Not too long or overly difficult, despite time limits.

Played on console: PS5 Pro.
Originally posted: 01/03/2026.

Mini-Review: 60 Minutes to Extinction



By my count, there are 7 of these escape room puzzle games on PS4/PS5 developed by mc2games (8 when counting *Secrets of Blackrock Manor*, published by Marcer Games but from a different developer).

This one is shorter than the others I've played, designed without the ability to save progress and with a one-hour countdown to complete it in its entirety.

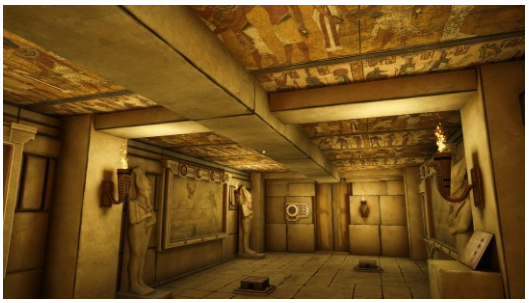
My son claims to have finished it on his first attempt with 10 minutes to spare. In my first attempt, I had used up 40 minutes of my hour completing the first major section and part of the second, so I restarted and was able to get back to that point in just a few minutes. Knowing the puzzle solutions helps.

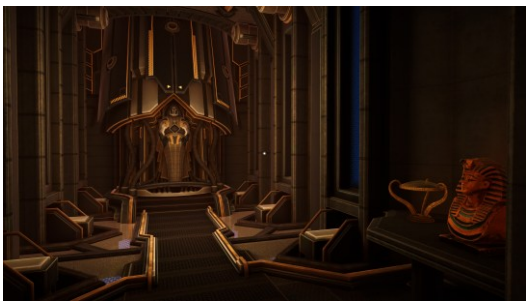
From there, I finished it in time and enjoyed it.

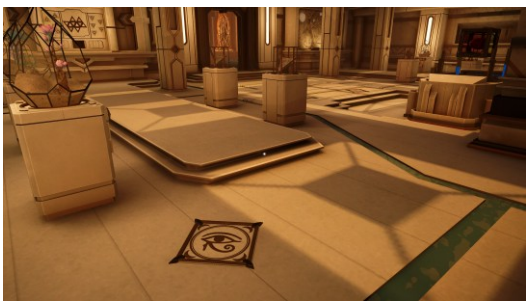
I do prefer the longer ones with no time limit, though.

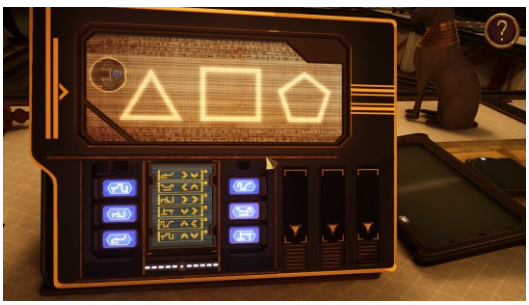
Played on console: PS5 Pro.
Originally posted: 02/22/2026.

Mini-Review: Pyramids and Aliens









This is one of the most recent ones from mc2games and is much bigger in scope than the bite-sized *60 Minutes to Extinction* I played last weekend. Of their *Escape Room* games I've played so far (which is all but two), this may be my favorite.

My only complaint is that the frame rate seemed a bit low on PS5. It was either slightly sub-30 or I'm just getting too spoiled on 60fps that it seems that way.

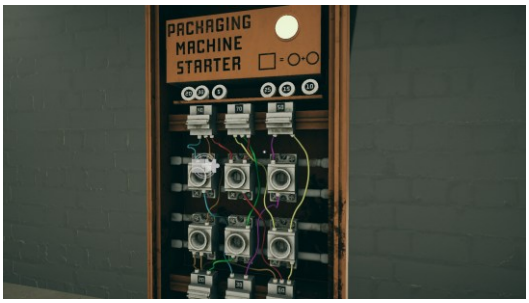
The puzzles are mostly fantastic. I really don't know how they keep coming up with new ideas, or twisting familiar puzzle concepts in new ways.

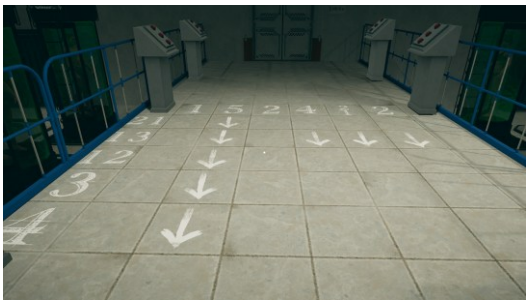
Some require clues from multiple rooms (which is new), play with positioning and line-of-sight, or involve multiple steps.

I highly recommend it.

Played on console: PS5 Pro.
Originally posted: 02/26/2026.

Mini-Review: Regular Factory





It's the 4th in a series of 7 (so far) single-player escape room adventure games from mc2games. You'll probably see more reviews like this soon, as I'm prepping for an escape room-themed issue of the VGGN.

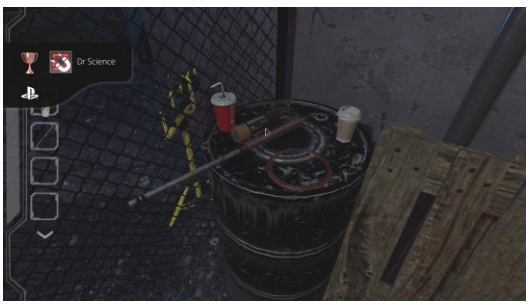
It's becoming tough to review these, though, because there's only so much that can be said without spoilers and they all function the same way.

The difference is in the story (never very deep or involved, but it helps add an air of mystery to keep players motivated) and the specific puzzles players must solve to advance through areas of the game.

This one had me making more notes and diagrams than usual to solve a few, and I was stumped for a while at least twice, but I never needed hints. Some puzzles were variations on ones we've seen before, but it was still very fun.

Played on console: PS5 Pro.
Originally posted: 03/07/2026.

Mini-Review: Escape 2088



As my escape room binge continues, I played through this short three-chapter game last night, where each chapter is a single room. There's no save system of any kind, but the main menu lets you start from any of the three.

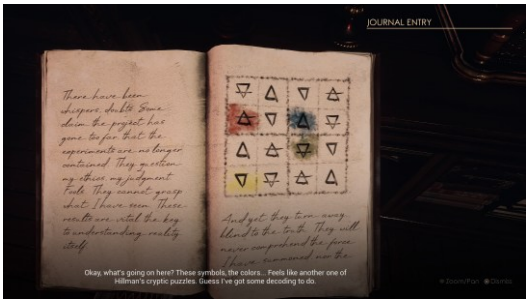
It lacks the freedom of movement found in others I've played (particularly the mc2games ones), with a first-person camera anchored to the middle of the room that can be panned around in any direction. You can click on things to zoom in for a closer look in an on-rails kind of way.

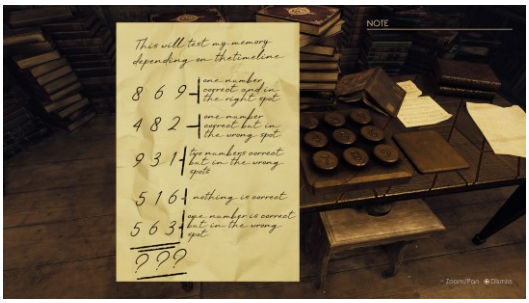
I was hopelessly stuck in the first chapter and needed a guide, but the other two seemed better clued and solvable without assistance.

There are fewer logic puzzles and more point-and-click style adventure game trappings. Also, no story. There's some audio at the end, but I have no idea what it means.

Played on console: PS5 Pro.
Originally posted: 03/14/2026.

Mini-Review: Project 7 - Escape Room





I enjoyed this one a lot. It's paced in a way that kept me progressing through the mansion without ever being stuck for very long, except at the end, and even then, once I figured out a couple things, I really liked those puzzles too.

Each room just has two or three puzzles, so I never had that paralysis of choice where I couldn't figure out what thing I should be focusing on first.

Nothing is very complex, and some puzzles are prone to solving by trial-and-error, although I didn't need to. It leans more into logic puzzles, requiring some math and deduction, but there are a few key items to find, carry and use as well.

Your character's inner monologue is voiced (and oddly expressive) as he searches for *Project 7* and a way out.

It's two or three hours of puzzle-solving fun.

Played on console: PS5 Pro.
Originally posted: 03/14/2026.

Mini-Review: The House of Da Vinci II

The first game in the trilogy wasn't on sale, so I jumped right into the sequel as I wrap up my recent *Escape Room* binge.

This one is more about fiddly clockwork gadgets and less about looking around for clues, although there's some of that too.

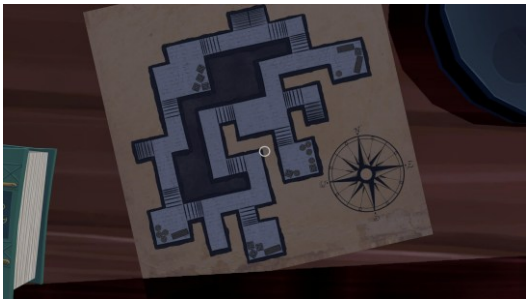
The game has players turning dials and pulling levers to figure out the intricacies of puzzles and locks. It's another that doesn't offer full control of movement through each room, instead working in a *Myst*-like manner where you click things to zoom in or out, or quickly walk (on rails) to another part of the room.

Stubbornly, I refused to use the built-in hint system except for two or three times in chapter 4, and I found it gave me just the right nudge.

There's also an interesting story in this one that I don't want to spoil.

Played on console: PS5 Pro.
Originally posted: 03/21/2026.

Bonus Review: We Were Here – Series



My escape room retrospective wouldn't be complete without mentioning this great series of co-op puzzle games. They're not marketed as escape rooms, but the idea is the same. You work your way through each game by solving logic puzzles.

What's more, you do that with a co-op partner. It's online only, since these are built around hiding facts from each other that need to be shared by communicating.

I played them all with my son, although he was in the next room so we often cheated. Some sections were diabolically hard if we had played fair.

My mini-review for each one can be found in VGGN issue #9, when I wrote about co-op gaming:

We Were Here + WWH Too
We Were Here Together
We Were Here Forever

The next entry, *We Were Here Tomorrow*, is due out later this year (hopefully).

Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: July 2024

The Final Stage

Originally, I wanted to play a few more escape rooms before finishing this issue. After having my brain fried solving *The House of Da Vinci II*, though, I felt that I needed a break.

A few I didn't get to include *Access Denied: Escape* (appears to focus on puzzle boxes), *Without Escape* (although I played a game of the same name on Xbox Indies back in 2012, and some quick research leads me to believe it's the same game), *Mystic Academy* (the last of seven mc2games escape rooms I've yet to play), *Secrets of Blackrock Manor* (a different solo developer but same publisher), *How 2 Escape: Lost Submarine* (a second game in the asymmetrical co-op escape series) and *The Experiment: Escape Room* (which appears to be horror-themed).

That's not to say I'll *never* get to them. There's also a series called *Escape First* that looks interesting, but I'm getting conflicting info on whether they're co-op, competitive (which doesn't sound fun to me), or single-player.

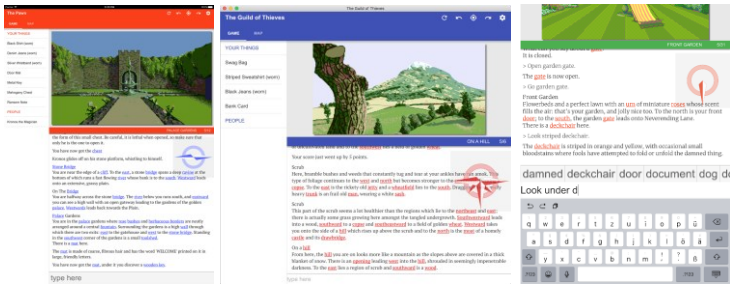
Strand Games

No, this has nothing to do with Hideo Kojima or the *Death Stranding* series.

Way back before VGGN issue #7, I put out a request at the interactive fiction community forum for info and profiles. I included the few who responded, but entirely missed a reply sent to me by email, from Strand Games. I found it all these months later.

I didn't necessarily miss a profile, but it would have been cool to include this at the time. At least now, there's even more to the initiative I can write about. It started out as an effort to remake and remaster text adventures from Magnetic Scrolls, but has grown to include original games as well, dubbed mini-games.

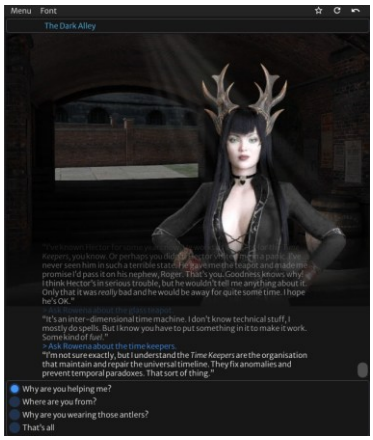
So far, their remasters include *The Pawn*, *The Guild of Thieves*, and *Jinxter*; see https://strandgames.com/.



A remaster of Magentic Scrolls' *Fish!* is also in the works. I've seen a comparison video showing old vs. new photorealistic graphics. It's impressive just how much the updated visuals capture the exact geometry and composition of the originals. Both are included.

Several games listed on their mini-games page are still in the works, but a couple are out now. *Tempest in a Teapot* is described as a choice-based visual novel. I briefly checked out the free demo.

Another that caught my eye is a free one called *Dr. Who and the Dalek Super-Brain*. A minor nit-pick, but it's always *Doctor*, never to be abbreviated as *Dr*. It's not officially licensed or anything, and I'm guessing the Magnetic Scrolls remasters aren't either, but those are also free and widely seen as abandonware.



End Credits

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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.

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