



THE VIDEO GAME GENERATIONS NEWSLETTER

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Issue #43 – June 21, 2026

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Loading Screen

I had intended to write about SGF and various summer gaming showcases earlier in June, but... well, I just didn't. It's old news at this point, but it's never a bad time to look back over the slate of announcements for upcoming games.

Part of my delay is because I've been busy on a *007 James Bond* gaming and movie marathon (mostly just the movies that tie into the games). I'm trying to play as many console games in the franchise as I'm able, which is where being a decades-long collector comes in handy. I've been going (mostly) in release date order, but decided to add a couple GameBoy and DS entries to my marathon. Look for an issue dedicated to *007* games at some point this year.



Why is there a spoon in the popcorn? Is it a spoon? I didn't ask for that. What's that red smear on the end of it? Why is the Summer Game Showcase itself a video game? Why do I keep doing this?

Recent Events

Happy Pride Month!

I didn't make time to do anything special in the VGGN this year, but Happy Pride Month!

Last year, I wrote about LGBTQ+ characters in video games for [Issue #8](#). Check it out here:

<https://vggpodcast.com/news/vggn-008.pdf>

GTA 6 Cover Art and Pre-Order Date

Unless there's a leak or another Rockstar announcement, we won't actually know if publisher Take-Two is going to stick with the industry-standard \$70 price (which, IMO, should have remained \$60 this gen for the health of the market, but I digress), or if the rumors and speculation are correct in predicting it could be \$80, \$90, even \$100, until pre-orders go live on June 25th.

What I want to know is, what's in the physical release? The whole game? Part of it? Just a key?



Source:

<https://www.videogameschronicle.com/news/grand-theft-auto-6-cover-art-revealed-pre-orders-start-next-week/>

The Pixel Arcadia Showcase

A showcase dedicated to retro games is scheduled for August 24th. The story at VGC has a bit more context, but [this one](#) seems like it'll be hyper-focused on retro re-releases, remasters, and new retro-styled games, rather than the indie games scene in general, which is already a focus of other events.

I need to make time to watch showcases like this. There were a number of smaller events around SGF that I simply didn't make time for this month.

Source:

<https://www.videogameschronicle.com/news/pixel-arcadia-is-a-new-showcase-dedicated-to-retro-games/>

About This Issue

Even though I did watch the SGF showcases while they were live-streaming, I didn't make notes and I forgot plenty of what I saw. So, for this issue, I did a partial rewatch, partial skim through, to find out more and grab captures of many of the games shown. My write-ups were done during the rewatch, so it's one part recap of my original thoughts, and one part live reaction to watching each trailer again.

Each image can be clicked for a direct link to the appropriate timestamp for the game shown, in each respective video. Better yet, CTRL+click to open in a new tab, or right-click and select the "open link in new tab" option, so you don't lose your place in this issue.

On mobile devices, you may be able to hold (long-press) each one and select "open in new tab" that way, for any game where you want to jump to the source trailer.

My Collection Inspection this issue ties into the main theme (recapping SGF), but for the selection of mini-reviews, they're mostly arbitrary and random. There's no theme or common thread; just some older mini-reviews I decided to include this time.

The Summer Game Showcases

Technically, summer hadn't started yet during *Summer Game Fest*, so I'm not sure why the Geoff Keighly event is called that. Maybe it's meant to kick off the *upcoming* summer?

At any rate, E3 is gone (the *Electronic Entertainment Expo*), and in its place is a variety of presentations and showcases for individual platforms, publishers, and groups. These are rarely in-person conventions like E3 used to be, but for those of us who watch from home (in other words, most of us), not a lot has changed.

My son and I watched the four big ones this year. While there was no "jump out of my seat I'm so excited" announcement (it's too early for a *Fallout 5* and *Half-Life 3* was never a serious possibility), both of us found a lot to look forward to.

PlayStation State of Play

Sony's presentation went live on Tuesday, June 2nd, kicking off this year's showcases.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvh0xXmu0bs>

They opened the show with several bloody minutes of gameplay for Insomniac's upcoming *Wolverine* game, in which Logan attempts to rescue kidnapped mutants. It's due out on September 15th. I haven't put in my pre-order yet, but I probably will. Looks cool!



Next, *MARVEL Tōkon: Fighting Souls* is due out on August 6th and seems to be getting a lot of attention from fighting game fans. I didn't pay much attention to this trailer, since fighting games like this aren't really my thing.

My son correctly guessed the next one was *Rayman* just from the first few seconds. It looks fun. One of these days, I intend to play *Rayman 2* on N64, which I re-bought recently after selling my original copy many years ago. This one looks to be a reimagining of *Rayman Legends* called *Rayman Legends Retold*, so it's more a 2.5D side-scroller. It's due out on October 1st, according to the trailer.



I do love a good platformer, but I haven't prioritized playing them lately.

A game called *Bancho the Chef* was shown after *Rayman*. It looks to be a stylish cooking game from MintRocket; not really my thing.

What is my thing might be yokai-hunting action game *Kemuri*, slated for 2027. After the trailer, the ever-energetic Ikumi Nakamura talked a little about the game.



At E3 2019, she was the bubbly Tango Gameworks developer who helped announce *Ghostwire Tokyo*. This new game is from her own new studio called UNSEEN, and then it immediately clicked for me why the *Kemuri* trailer made me think of *Ghostwire Tokyo*. The game has a vague 2027 release window.

The remake of the original *Tomb Raider*, called *Legacy of Atlantis*, is also my kind of game, although it already had one remake nearly 20 years ago called *Tomb Raider Anniversary*.

The surprising thing here – and if this was already known when it was first announced back in December at *The Game Awards* then I forgot – is that it's being worked on by Crystal Dynamic and Flying Wild Hog. FWH, if you're unaware, made the fun *Shadow Warrior* reboot trilogy, *Hard Reset*, *Trek to Yomi*, and *Evil West*. I put them on my short list of underrated but highly talented studios.



The game is due out February 12th next year.

I wouldn't have guessed that the next game announced seemingly has nothing to do with *Jurassic Park* or *Jurassic World*. It's a game called *The Lost Wild*, from Annapurna and Great Ape Games, coming sometime in 2027.

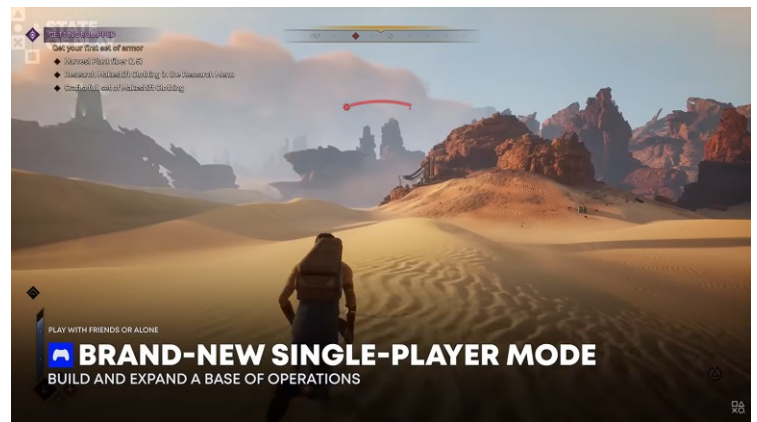


I couldn't remember the title of the next game shown until they revealed it later in the trailer, but I recognized the sword-fighting cinematic combat where the protagonist is for some reason holding a baby. Maybe they were inspired by *Death Stranding*, although this one isn't safely tucked away in a transport pod.



The game is called *Phantom Blade Zero* from S-GAME, and it looks totally bonkers. I'm in.

Dune: Awakening is coming to PS5. For some reason I thought this was an RTS. Isn't there a *Dune* RTS? This isn't it, apparently. It's a multiplayer open world survival RPG that's currently PC-only (probably why it wasn't on my radar), but the console release is getting a single-player mode of some sort, so we'll see.



Dynasty Warriors 3 is being remastered. I hear these referred to as “musou” games. They feature a lone protagonist fighting against thousands of enemies on a battlefield. The formula has never appealed to me, but I've never given one a serious try. I've played a few minutes of various *Dynasty Warriors* games in my collection, but never stuck with one.

The next game from Moon Studios, makers of the two excellent *Metroidvania Ori* games on Xbox, is called *No Rest for the Wicked*. It looks to be an action RPG coming to PS5 in October and was announced as a “brutal Souls-like” which is probably a game I’d enjoy, although I’m not the biggest fan of the *Diablo*-like isometric view.



It’s already out on Steam in early access, which might explain why I thought people were already playing it.

I need to play the *Onimusha* games. In fact, I posted on [Threads](#) last month that it was on my agenda for 2026 (along with several games I’ve already completed, including *Of Orcs and Men*, the *Legacy of Kain* series, and a couple *Indiana Jones* games).

I need to play the *Onimusha* series, though, because Capcom’s *Onimusha: Way of the Sword* is due out in September – and because I’ve always heard they’re good games – and because Capcom is on fire (in a good way) the past few years.



They also announced that a demo is out now. I’m not generally a fan of demos. I know a lot of people like them because it’s better than relying on influencers and waiting for reviews, but I prefer to experience the whole game.

I’m hoping *Silent Hill: Townfall* is more to my liking than last year’s *Silent Hill f*. The latter has plenty of fans, but for some reason it just didn’t resonate with me.

Maybe it was because I played through it a second time trying to get the true ending, but didn’t realize (until it was too late) that you can’t use a single red capsule to heal (even though I did all the extra stuff to get the special purified sword) and so I ended up with the exact same ending as the first time.

Townfall looks like a return to form, though. I have this one pre-ordered. Capcom has been good about putting full games on disc, too, which has been a deciding factor for me in several recent pre-order cancellations.



This is another September game. I have until then, I guess, to exhaust myself of playing games from my backlog.

Fans of jet plane combat games probably cheered for *Ace Combat 8: Wings of Theve*, but this is another genre that doesn’t interest me. Maybe my gaming tastes are too limited.

I’m also not a driving/racing game guy, so I’m not interested in *Stuntman: Hollywood*. My collection includes a few older *Stuntman* titles, but I haven’t played them.

The DeLorean from *Back to the Future* and KITT from *Knight Rider* were featured in the trailer, which make me wish I was a fan of driving/racing games. I also heard music from *Miami Vice*, which features into the game as well. No specific release date was shown.

It looks like it’ll be a fun game.

When the Mundfish logo popped up next, I thought we were about to get a look at *Atomic Heart 2*, the sequel or follow-up to the 2023 game I enjoyed so much that it landed a spot on my all-time top 10 list.

Instead, it's a freaky horror game they're publishing called *Ill*, from Team Clout. I think we've seen it somewhere before (maybe The Game Awards, or SGF last year). It's slated for 2027. It looks bizarre and gross and definitely something I want to check out.



As if September wasn't already packed, Remedy is releasing *Control: Resonant* on September 24th. I had resigned myself to not playing this game at launch because I expected they'd skip doing a physical release (as they did with *Alan Wake 2* until months later, and even then it wasn't fully on disc).

Surprisingly, it *is* being released on disc. As of now, the placeholder case art doesn't have that disappointing disclaimer about an internet connection being required, and so my pre-order is in. Don't get me wrong; I do play games with the latest patches. I just don't like paying full price for incomplete games that leave us at the mercy of future server shutdowns, broken updates, and so on.

They're also totally worthless for collecting.



If ever I wished a genre of game was for me, it's the multiplayer live service shooter genre in light of how cool Bungie's *Marathon* looks.



Rather, I wish it had a single-player campaign. It's been out a few months and seems to be finding its fans (despite the predictable drivell from trolls declaring it DOA before it even released), but PlayStation wanted to let everybody know that season 2 has started.

Rapid-fire PlayStation Plus games were shown next, starting with *Runescape: Dragonwilds*. I remember when *Runescape* originally released as an in-browser game using Flash or Silverlight or something, decades ago. It was at a time when I ran my own browser-based games. I tried so hard to play it on a computer that just wasn't up to the task. It ran at maybe two frames per second, and often not at all.

The PlayStation Plus classics catalog is getting *Gitaroo Man* from the PS2. I never played it, but it looks to be a wacky rhythm game. It's in my collection.

In July, they're adding *Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy*, which I enjoyed a lot when I played it a few years ago. It's a third-person shooter with guns and psychic abilities.

When I do get around to my *Onimusha* series playthrough, it should include *Dawn of Dreams*. It's not a numbered entry in the series and might be less highly regarded, although its Metacritic score of 81 isn't much lower than the scores for the other games. Anyway, *Dawn of Dreams* was announced as a classics catalog title for PS5 in July.

Can *Until Dawn 2* live up to the high bar set by the first game? Supermassive Games has been trying to match it for years with their *Dark Pictures Anthology* horror series, but now FireSprite is taking a stab at it with an actual follow-up. It too seems to follow the anthology format, without any direct story or character connections to that first game.



If it follows the pattern – and I have no reason to think it won't, especially given the trailer – characters will live or die by player choices (and mistakes) with branching paths that allow the story to continue no matter what.



To wrap up, PlayStation's Sid Shuman returned to the virtual stage and announced a 20+ minute gameplay preview for a new game.

Despite this game looking incredible and with every likelihood of *being* incredible – the game being *God of War: Laufey* – all the usual cave-dwelling emotionally-stunted internet chuds have been out in full force insisting that Santa Monica Studio has not only ruined the series by featuring a protagonist that is in fact *not* the God of War (Kratos), but that you (gasp)

play as a *woman* – a mythical creature these dorks have apparently never seen up close. It doesn't matter that Fey was Kratos's wife, the mother of his son Atreus, and the instigating factor for the journey they take in GOW 2018. It doesn't matter that she was already described as a powerful, skilled woman in her own right. The dumbest complaint of all is probably that the in-game version of Deborah Ann Woll (of *Daredevil* on Netflix/Disney) isn't as pretty as the actress herself.



No, what matters to these fools is that the series is called *God of War* which means there can be no other main character; semantics in service of disguising their misogyny and prejudice. I don't get it, but I do get it, because of course this was going to be the reaction from that subset of the gaming community.

There's also backlash to the gelatinous cube, voiced by Jack Quaid. Come on, people. Just let the rest of us who actually play and enjoy games bask in the hype for this one.

A gaming clip montage ended the show. All in all, there was a lot to like announced and shown during the PlayStation State of Play.

Summer Game Fest

After two hours of SGF, my son and I decided to skip the hour-long *Day of the Devs* show afterwards. It's all there in the full SGF YouTube video for anybody interested.

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

I skimmed through it just now. *Tenebris Somnia* looks really cool, featuring pixel art horror gameplay and weird live action cut scenes. Quite a few of these indies look cool, and I do enjoy the kinds of unique experiences you don't get from AAA games, but in the interest of not going overboard with this issue, I'll stick to the main two-hour SGF.



This showcase aired on Friday, June 5th. After a feel-good “games are great” opening from Geoff Keighley, the first trailer shown was for the long-rumored *Resident Evil: Code Veronica X* remake, called simply *Resident Evil: Veronica*.

Until the title reveal near the end, we were both making guesses as to what it might be. We did that a lot through all the showcases. The production quality of that opening cinematic made it seem like a Capcom game (or something equally AAA), but my mind didn't go to the *Resident Evil* series.

This is great, because the only time I tried to play RE:CVX, I gave up quickly because I wasn't in the mood for tank controls.



It looks like this will be Capcom's 2027 entry in this now-annualized series.

Next, a *Cuphead* puppet announced that Studio MDHR is working on a new *Cuphead* game. Nothing of the game was shown since it's still in early development, but the little puppet *Cuphead* newscaster skit was fun.

I never played *Cuphead*. I was deterred by how punishingly difficult it is, and because it's primarily a series of big boss battles.

They also revealed a second game from a small team within the studio, a retro-styled side-scrolling platform action game called *Mighty Cuphead Adventure*.

According to one slide, it's even being released for 8-bit consoles (in addition to modern consoles and PC). I didn't notice that until now, but the game collector side of me wants to get my hands on a cartridge. I don't have a way to play Sega Master System games, but apparently there's an adapter for the RetroN5 if I'm willing to spend \$60 on it. That assumes it will work on RetroN5 though.



The third announcement had me guessing, but I was nowhere close to the actual reveal. I knew an *Alien: Isolation 2* was in the works, and I'm beyond hyped for it. The first game is one of the best stealth survival horror games I've ever played. They didn't show a release date, but two reps from Creative Assembly were on stage afterwards to talk a little about the game.



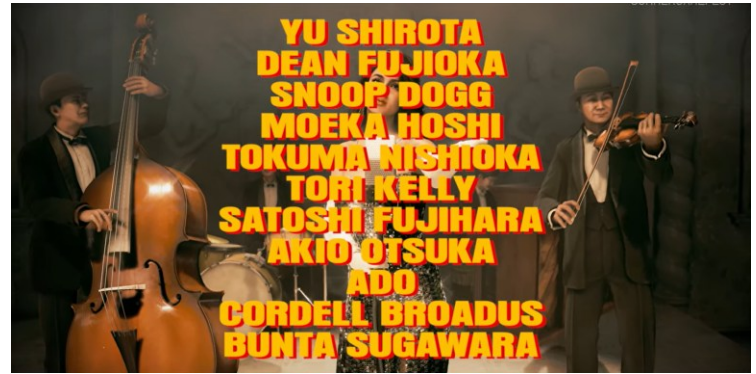
Oh! Yeah. I guess this showcase was also an in-person event. The audience was pretty excited about this one too.

In the audience was legendary game designer Fumito Ueda (*Ico*, *Shadow of the Colossus*, *The Last Guardian*). After a call-out from Keighley, they revealed that "Project Robot" (Ueda-san's next game) now has a title. It's called *gen ATLAS*. The seemingly sci-fi story and vibe of the game seem like a departure from his prior work, but I'm sold simply by my love and reverence for those prior games (especially the first two).



Next, *Blood Message* is a single-player action game set in 9th century China, being published by NetEase. No shade to the developer (which appears to be 24 Entertainment) – the game looks super high quality – but it kind of blends together for me with a dozen other games of a similar look and style. Then again, I gravitate more towards sci-fi than historical fiction. I didn't even play last year's *Ghost of Yōtei*.

Here's a weird one. *Stranger Than Heaven*, the next game from RGG Studio (makers of the excellent *Yakuza/Like a Dragon* series) has added Tupac Shakur to the game; or, his likeness, at least. Snoop Dogg (also in the game) then strolled out on stage to greet Geoff and Yokoyama. I honestly think Geoff found it a little silly. He seemed unable to stifle his amusement, but maybe I'm reading too much into it. Maybe he was starstruck.



This open world action adventure *Haex* looks cool. Geoff even says so. It looks as though it might be multiplayer, although what appear to be other players don't have name tags above their heads. If there's a single-player campaign, I'm intrigued.



The title reveal at the end only shows it coming to PC platforms, but maybe if it's a hit we'll get console versions?

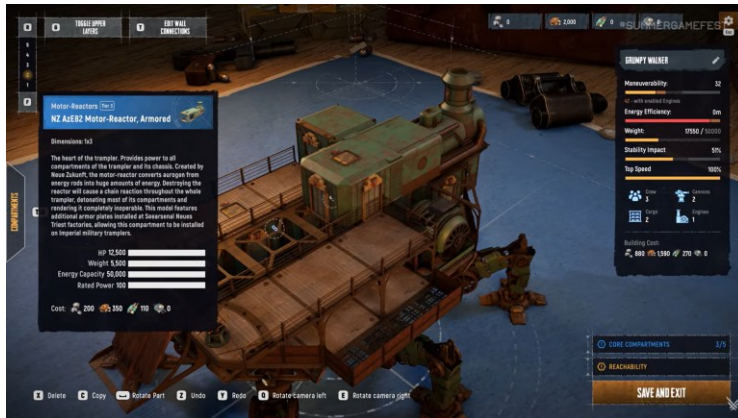
The tenth anniversary of *Dead by Daylight* has come and gone (June 14th) and it's not a game I've ever been interested in, but fans were probably happy with the announcement. I couldn't really tell if they were teasing new characters or just drumming up hype for their anniversary event.

Again, though, probably good news for fans.

I played and enjoyed the first *Mortal Shell* a few years ago on PS4. It was a unique (and fairly short) *Souls-like* before there were so many of them. Like many of the SGF trailers, the brief *Mortal Shell 2* open beta reveal was probably just a paid advertisement.

There's an enemy that reminded me of a *Dead Space* necromorph. I'd probably take a new *Dead Space* over a new *Mortal Shell* (I still need to play the remake of the original game), but still, this looks like something I'd enjoy.

Next up was *Sand: Raiders of Sophie* from tinyBuild. It looks to be first-person shooting mixed with base-building, but the apparent multiplayer focus was a big "nope" from me; plus, it looks to be PC only, on Steam.



I don't think I'll play the *Assassin's Creed 4: Black Flag* remake, but for those who never have, this will be a fantastic experience. I just hope it doesn't fall victim to the social media pile-on where it's become cool to mix up the hate for Ubisoft as a company with the games they release (which are almost never deserving of such hyperbolic criticism).

I miss the modern-day Animus stuff though.

I've heard a bit about that *TMNT: The Last Ronin* game. I think it's based on a graphic novel that's supposedly fantastic, where it's a future in which only one mutant turtle is still alive (I forget which one). There wasn't much to the trailer aside from vibes.

To be honest, I tuned out mentally when Ben Starr went on stage to talk about *Fortnite* and I somehow tuned out again re-watching it just now for my VGGN recap. Despite being one of the biggest and most important games on the planet, I just have no interest in it.

I did manage to guess the franchise featured in the next game just from the Bandai Namco name-drop from Lucy James, and that it's one of the most influential sci-fi franchises ever created, and from the first few seconds of the trailer. I've never played a *Gundam* game, but I have quite a few of them. I don't know how I feel about piloting big mechs after my big disappointment with *Armored Core 6*, but *Gundam: Rogue Orbit* might be good.



Next up, Lucy James (I forgot to mention, she's Geoff's co-host this year) announced that she's directly competing with me via her new gaming-focused newsletter at:

<https://lookingfor.game>

I kid, I kid. I signed up. It looks like there's a paid subscription tier also. At least I'm not charging for this. At least... not yet... I kid.

Solo-developed co-op goose game *An Egg-Stremely Hard Game* was shown next.

A new team of developers who left Naughty Dog, Infinity Ward and others have been working on what appears to be a AAA for the past five years. It looks like a two-player co-op third person military shooter... at first. Is that the actress who had the head-bursting power in *The Boys*? There's some supernatural stuff going on in this trailer, and *Cross/Fire* seems like the most generic name possible, but this was an interesting reveal.



Jacob's beard/mustache combo is sure a choice. The studio leads from *That's No Moon* came out on stage to talk about *Cross/Fire*.

Scratch what I said about it being co-op. Maybe that's an option, but the other guy made sure to say it's a single-player game.

If it wasn't enough to see more of *Control: Resonant* at the PlayStation event, Remedy's upcoming mind-bending sci-fi follow-up was shown again at SGF. This was more of a tone piece to get us hyped, rather than anything showing much gameplay, which I think I prefer in my efforts to not see spoilers ahead of time.



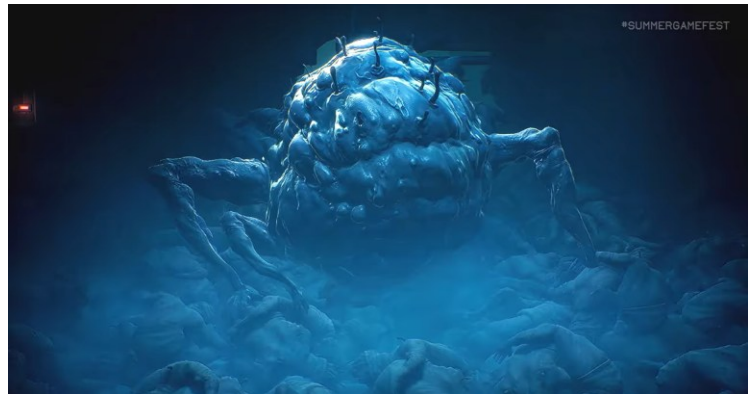
I guessed every franchise possible for the next announcement, never coming close to *Guild Wars 3*. I make no secret of my lack of interest for MMOs, but yay for the people who want it.

Shown next was *Star Wars: Galactic Racer*, seemingly a spiritual successor to that PS1 pod racing game and probably the least interesting thing (to me) that can be done with the *Star Wars* franchise. To be fair, it looks fantastic. I'm just really bad at racing games.



It's releasing on October 6th this year.

A trailer for *End of Abyss* has me intrigued for what appears to be an isometric fixed-camera sci-fi horror third-person action shooter, coming October 1st. Just look at this thing.



Rather than featuring tinyBuild games back to back (*Sand: Raiders of Sophie* was shown earlier), some kind of sea fishing and cooking action horror zombie game was presented next. I'm not a fan of *all* those things, and it was only announced for Steam, but *Last Harbor* does look interesting.

I was sure that by this point in the showcase, the audio was completely borked to the point of being several seconds out of sync with the video, but maybe they fixed it and re-uploaded the VOD? I don't know. I would have assumed it was just me, but the first comment for it on YouTube mentions the same problem. So far, this re-watch has been entirely stable.

Virtua Fighter 2 was fun as a “check this out” diversion at a movie theater I used to frequent back when the game was new, but I’ve never been drawn to the fighting game genre enough to figure out how to play them without random button-mashing and blind luck. I used to play as some old drunk guy.

I just read that last sentence back to myself, and at the risk of having it misinterpreted, I’m going to leave it. I myself wasn’t old or drunk.

The trailer doesn’t say so, but *Virtua Fighter: Crossroads* is being developed by RGG, who are also busy working on *Stranger Than Heaven* and presumably the next game in the *Like a Dragon* series. It’s due out in 2027.

They briefly featured *Runescape: Dragonwilds* as a PlayStation Plus game at Sony’s event a few days prior, but another trailer with gameplay was shown at SGF.



Another bit of trivia I just remembered from my failed attempts to get the original game to run back in the day is that the canonical name was actually *RunEscape* because it was so addictive, you were better off getting away before your life was consumed by it.

No, not really, but that was a joke people made at the time.

Nintendo decided to throw a small bone to SGF by way of a Switch 2 trailer featuring Square Enix’s new HD2D RPG *The Adventures of Elliot*, the split-screen co-op *Orbitals*, and Devolver’s new multiplayer *StarSeeker* game.

Whenever I see a game that looks like *SoulFrame*, I kind of assume it’s a *Souls*-like even if it doesn’t have “Souls” in the title.

From what I gather, it’s not, which makes the title a little unfortunate, much the way it was for the action game *Soulstice* a few years ago.

It looks cool, and you get to ride a big white wolf. Is it multiplayer? Is it a spin-off of something else? These questions probably have answers, but I’m speeding through this write-up and won’t look it up until later.



Obsidian’s *Grounded* is getting a sequel with *Grounded 2*. Was this already announced? I guess it’s already out in early access. Per usual, multiplayer online live service games aren’t my bag, so I haven’t kept up with news.

I find it tough to get excited about expansions for game I already played, even if I really enjoyed them. Part of that’s because I forget the controls. It’s not always ideal to be an early adopter, when waiting a few months (or years) can lead to a better, more complete experience.

Case in point: *Mafia: The Old Country* is getting a story expansion called *Man of Honor*. That was a great game. I don’t always avoid DLC (ex: *The Witcher 3*, *Fallout 3* and *4*, *Alan Wake 2*), but I’m unlikely to return to *Mafia*.

The original creator of *Assassin’s Creed*, Patrice Désilets, has a new studio working on something that looks completely in my wheelhouse, despite being historical fiction.

It's a game called *1666 Amsterdam*. Sadly, it ended with a screen showing Steam and Epic Game Store only. A short demo is available, with an early access release later this year.



If it comes to consoles (and gets a physical release), I'd be excited to check it out. Geoff says it's been in development for 16 years.

That creepy puppet from the *Saw* movies rode out on stage on a tricycle to kick off the trailer for a new Bloober Team horror game called *Saw: Genesis*. The title card says it features a 3-vs-1 multiplayer format, so sadly I'm out.

Speaking of horror, and if you'll forgive my tangent, my son and I went to see that new movie *Obsession* this morning (maybe an odd time of day for a horror movie). He was "shook" he said. I kind of was, too. Leave it to Blumhouse to put out something so bizarre and original. I got into a discussion via text with him and my daughters (who had already seen it) afterwards, and we all had varying take-aways from the story and the message (if any) it was trying to convey. Anyway, thumbs up on this one. It was an experience.

Back on topic, a new *Lords of the Fallen II* trailer was shown. I enjoyed both of the prior games (very much *Souls*-like in design). The CEO of CI Games has proven to be a bit of a chud with his anti-woke comments, but I don't know if that'll be a factor in whether or not I pick this one up.

If anything will, it might be *Souls*-like fatigue. I still want to play *Another Crab's Treasure* (which my son actively hated), but we'll see.

I don't think this boss with wings made out of human arms is wearing a top. Yep. Yep, she's mostly naked.



I think *Star Wars: Zero Company* was leaked or revealed ahead of SGF. A trailer for the game was shown next, and is apparently a strategy tactics game from some unidentified industry veterans. Although it isn't a genre I'm normally excited about, I've been known to enjoy a good *XCOM* or *Metal Gear AC!D* or *Ghost Recon: Shadow Wars* or *Midnight Suns* or *Mario + Rabbids* or *Miasma Chronicles*, so I might enjoy this too. It looks cool, and ends with a brief reveal of battle-scarred Anakin Skywalker still sporting a blue lightsaber.



I was already sold on vampire action adventure game *The Blood of DawnWalker*, but this new cinematic trailer got me even more hyped. This one is slated for early September, further proving that I'll have plenty to play that month. I might go broke.



A stand-alone (and seemingly single-player) new *Among Us* game is in the works from Innersloth, which seems to be called *Among Us Story: On Guard*.

There's also a new *Among Us* animated TV series on Paramount Plus, and it looks cute. I guess this was a good time to promote it too.



Sometimes, I envy gamers who don't blink twice at spending full price on new digital-only AAA games, or for fake discs that require a download not just to patch bugs, but to even install and play a complete version. If I cared less about preservation, their value to me as a collectible, and the very real possibility of eventual server shutdowns rendering them useless, I'd probably be a lot happier.

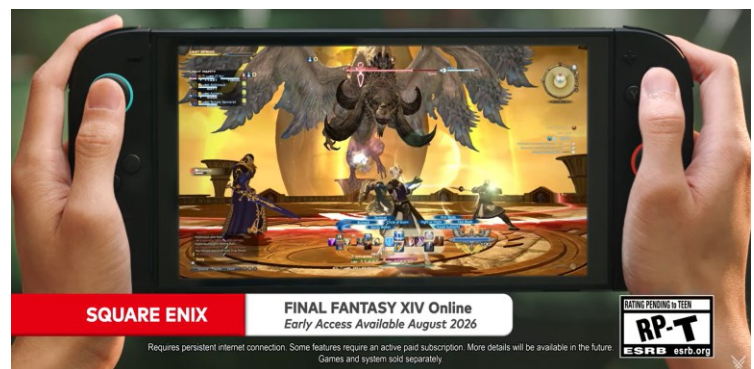
Such is the case with *007: First Light*, a game that's by all accounts fantastic. I had it pre-ordered for a long time, but cancelled in the 11th hour after finding out it wasn't fully on disc. Sure, the biggest AAA games are too big to fit on a *single* disc, but two-disc sets are a time-honored tradition that's conveniently fallen out of fashion as an excuse for locking physical releases behind digital downloads.

I'll end up getting it anyway, because it's what inspired my current *007* gaming marathon, but I had hoped to see it go on sale for a healthy discount before that. I'm roughly half-way through my marathon now, and any kind of substantial sale price seems unlikely unless I delay the conclusion of my marathon a while.

I mention all of that because the game's getting a new story mission later this year. I feel like there are main game story spoilers in this trailer, given that Lenny Kravtiz's Bawma was pitched as a Bond villain, but now seems to have an alliance of sorts with MI6.



Another Switch 2 ad was shown next, starting with another Square Enix announcement for an early access version of *Final Fantasy XIV* (the online MMO) coming this August. Next, *Turok: Origins*, which reminds me that the original three N64 games (which I own) all got remasters from Nightdive Studios (which I also own), and I should make a point of finally playing through those games as well. The three-game block ended with one called *Armatus*, which looks cool too.



Forgive another rant, but I've had zero interest in the Switch 2 after becoming disillusioned in knowing that so many physical releases for the system are those ridiculous key cards. At this point, though, I should probably start making a list of the Switch 2 exclusives I'd like to play, and decide whether I should take the plunge and finally buy one. I mean, I have no shortage of games to play on other platforms, but there are probably enough low-priced indies and non-key physical games to make it a worthwhile choice now.

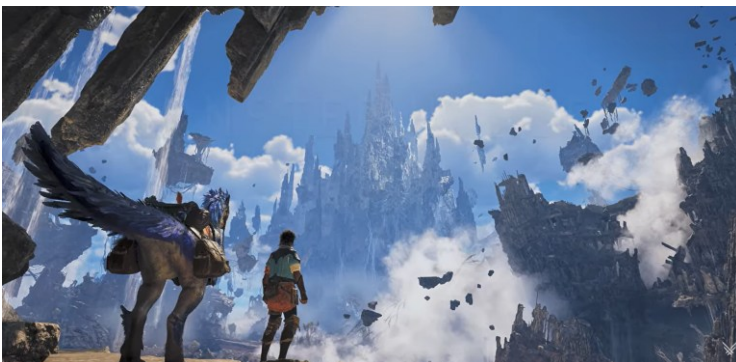
A trailer for the remake of the first *Gothic*, which is another game I had pre-ordered but cancelled once I found out it was a fake disc, was shown next. This was purely an ad. Many of these segments have just been ads, and there's nothing wrong with that in a show meant to get us hyped for new games, but it's a blurry line between *ad* and *announcement*.

The next game, *AION 2*, looks really cool, but finding out now that it's an open world free-to-play MMORPG takes it off my radar.



Cyberpunk 2077 spawned the excellent *Cyberpunk: Edgerunners* animated series on Netflix, which has now apparently spawned a crossover event with *Wuthering Waves*. For the time it took to reach that end card, I thought it was a new game rather than content for an existing free-to-play one. Darn.

Monster Hunter Wilds is getting what Geoff called a massive expansion. I've always been fascinated by this series, and even tried my hardest to enjoy *Monster Hunter World* when it released a few years ago, but I just haven't been able to. Maybe the missing piece is that I went it alone, and that's not where it shines.



A trailer featuring gameplay from a boss battle in *Swords of Legends* was shown after that. It looks like a fun single-player action game.



I wonder if brand tie-in alone will be enough to make *Hot Wheels: Infinite Rush* a hit? When I played a few hours of *Forza Horizon 5* a few years back, it had user-created content that included bonkers stunt tracks and physically impossible courses, all wrapped into a game with a lot more to offer.



I don't mean to disparage *Hot Wheels*, and I have the same concern about plenty of games in a risk-averse market where gamers have become fickle and there are just too many games can't find success (which is another rant I could make), but this one in particular makes me wonder who it's for.

Sega had an ad celebrating the first year of collaborations in *Sonic Racing: CrossWorlds* with a look ahead at the second year. This led into a short look at *Sonic Pico Park*, a pixel "indie" multiplayer game (as much as anything from Sega might be called an "indie"), but is that inside *CrossWorlds* or is it something separate?

My son insisted I watch the entire *Attack on Titan* animated series, and I only just finished it a few days ago. While I was disappointed in how certain things unfolded in the final season, I can't deny that it's a great show.

There have been two major *Attack on Titan* video games. I own just the first one, but I haven't played it. I might give it a shot, but maybe I don't need to if what Geoff said about *Attack on Titan 3* covering the entire series from beginning to end is right.



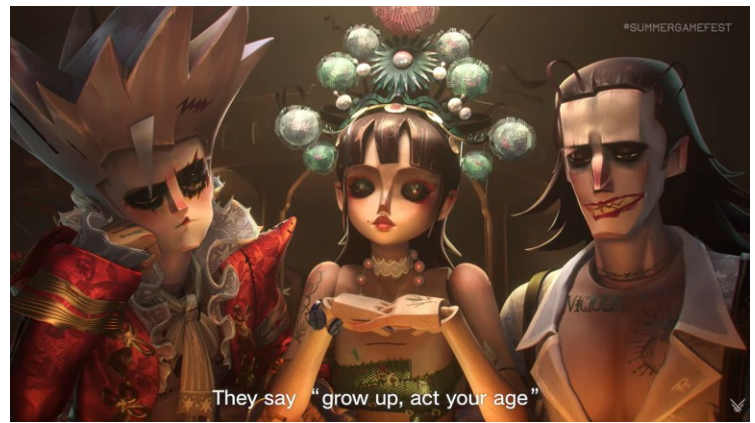
I see now why my son was in a panic telling me to turn away when the trailer started. I hadn't reached this part of the final season, so it comes across as plenty spoilery.

The release is mere days away, but I don't see a physical pre-order page at either Amazon or BestBuy. They usually do release physically, though, so I guess it's a waiting game for now.

I have little to say about *Clutch*. It, too, was either leaked or announced just prior to SGF. It's an open world driving game; not my thing.

The next trailer does that thing where the camera pans around a frozen-in-time scene a few times. It's for a game called *Chronicles: Medieval*, which sounds familiar but gives me those big battle *Dynasty Warriors* vibes. It also looks to be a PC exclusive.

I love the vibe, art style, and presentation of *Sea of Remnants* (and this song is a banger), but I can't be excited about a free-to-play multiplayer online game. *Sea of Thieves*?



The intro for the ad for Capcom's summer game sale was pretty hilarious. It gets funnier on a re-watch, with knock-off toy Ryu sporting a mustache, talking Texan, and attempting an ill-fated howdy-ookken fireball.



Elusive target Wiz Khalifa is coming to *Hitman: World of Assassination*. I didn't stick with that trilogy past the third game and never kept going back for the elusive targets like you're supposed to, but I loved all three of them. The third game in particular is a masterpiece, but the entire set is great.

Every once in a while, I get my son interested in a game I've played (and vice versa). He thoroughly enjoyed the *Hitman* trilogy too.

My son recognized *PalWorld* in the next trailer right away, but I would have sworn it was Pokémon (hence Nintendo's attempted lawsuit over it, I suppose). The only news here is that version 1.0 releases on July 10th. So all this time, it was an early access game?



I need to play *The Wolf Among Us*. People love it, and it's regarded as one of TellTale's best. A new trailer for the long-awaited sequel, *The Wolf Among Us 2* was shown.



The first game is getting a remaster later this year. I guess it started life in the PS3 and Xbox 360 generation, but it was already ported to PS4 and features a timeless art style that doesn't seem to merit a remaster.

I thought I recognized the *Stellar Blade* art style in the next trailer, but the more populated big city cyberpunk setting had me second-guessing it until the reveal at the end.

I loved that first game so much. It was my Game of the Year in 2024 by a country mile. I'm worried about what the chuds will think of a protagonist who now looks like a child, but I'm sure it won't be anything creepy and weird.

Maybe developers are just running out of unique subtitles for games, given that *Infamous: First Light* was the title of DLC long before the new *007: First Light* and this new *Stellar Blade* (subtitled *Blood Rain*) was bound to make me think of *BloodRayne*, another pair of action games with a side-scrolling spin-off or two.



I haven't given thought to my favorite reveals and announcements from this or any of the summer showcases, but given my love for the first game, this could easily be in my top 3.

Year 4 of *Street Fighter 6* was presented with some anime-styled character scenes. Tifa from *Final Fantasy 7* is joining the roster.

That wasn't the only *Final Fantasy 7*-related reveal, as the show wrapped up with a first-time look at the final chapter of the *Remake* trilogy, titled *FF7: Revelation*. This also has to be high up there on my list of favorite reveals.

The original PS1 game was a masterpiece. This remake, with its inventive twist on what it means to *be* a remake, has been fantastic. I can't wait for this, but I'll have to. No release date was given, other than just Spring 2027.



XBOX Games Showcase

As is usual for XBOX, their showcase was on a Sunday, June 7th. I feel a little conflicted about this one given recent reports of more layoffs and studio closures. Even Ninja Theory, with a new game presented here, is being shuttered.

I need to do more research (and I very well might, for the *Recent Event* section I haven't yet written for this issue), but it's either rumored or confirmed that Compulsion Games and Double Fine are also in danger of being shut down. What is XBOX even doing?

I enjoyed *Contrast* as a PS4 launch game. Their game *We Happy Few* was inventive and fun, although I didn't get far into the second character's story. I didn't like the combat in last year's XBOX exclusive *South of Midnight*, but everything else about the game was top notch. Compulsion Games is a great studio.

The real travesty would be the closure of Double Fine. I mean, Tim Schafer built the company up from *Brütal Legend* and *Psychonauts*, managed to stay independent for years until finally finding a path forward by allowing Microsoft to purchase them, and may now have to pay the price for it.

More knowledgeable people at more well-informed sites and podcasts have covered this news and these rumors better than I can, but I feel like it all comes down to profit. These companies are rich. Their shareholders are greedy. It's not that they can't continue to support these studios and their creative efforts; it's that they simply won't, because the people at the top demand ever-growing profits. Yeah, it's not a charity, it's a business, but that's a cruddy way of looking at an industry that thrives on expression and art.

In a perfect world, artistry would win out over corporate greed. Sadly, today's biggest games can't be funded by hopes and dreams.

The XBOX presentation is on YouTube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ixDQYUxN8>

This showcase opened with a long look at *Gears of War: E-Day*. It'll be exclusive to XBOX, which was a surprise given their prior push for multi-platform releases, but in the context of their 25-year history where exclusives were the norm, it's not all *that* shocking. The game comes out October 6th.



It took a while for me to recognize the next trailer as *Fable* because I was mesmerized by digital Hayley Atwell (who wouldn't be?) but the Playground Games frame gave it away.



This looks so, so, so good. We have to wait until February 23rd to find out. I could always play the one I never did – *Fable III* – until then.



The next trailer was obviously *Halo*-related, but it looked to be a new game; maybe a side story with a goofy vibe. I guess it is a new side story of some sort, but for three new missions in the upcoming remake of the first *Halo* (which we already knew is called *Campaign Evolved* in a nod to that original game's *Combat Evolved* tagline or subtitle).



I loved those first two games, and sadly *only* the first two games. I'm not really hyped for this remake, but hopefully it finds its fans.

Next up was the first third-party release featured in the showcase. The first game in the series, *A Plague Tale: Innocence*, seemed mostly based in the reality of 14th century France (aside from the overwhelming plague of rats that Hugo learns to control). The second game went a bit more supernatural.

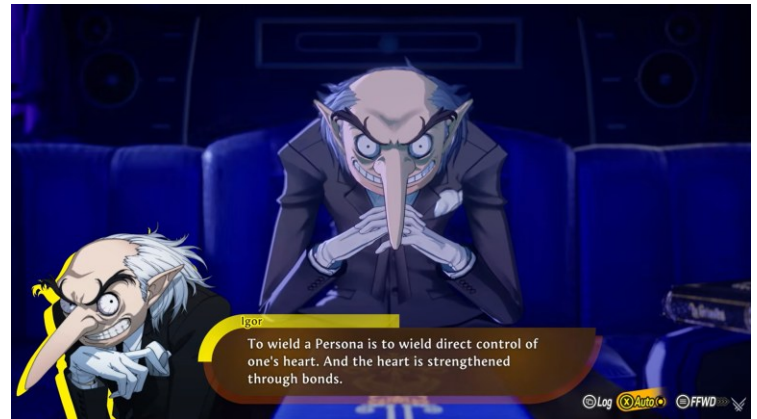
The new game, which doesn't appear to feature Amecia or Hugo (given that their stories wrapped up in the second game) is even less grounded in reality, and it looks great. *Resonance: A Plague Tale Legacy* is set to release on August 27th. Wasn't I saying something earlier about game subtitles? Here we have our other upcoming *Resonance*, set to release a month before the new *Control*.



My son just played through and got the platinum in *Persona 5 Royal*, so his biggest wished-for announcement was *Persona 6*. It's been leaked or rumored. He keeps telling me about a main character with a bowl cut.

The ATLUS logo was a glimmer of hope, but on a yellow static TV image, it was more likely to be the *Persona 4* remake – which it was.

He's excited about that too, and is committed to playing *Persona 3 Reload* as well. I'm as proud as a dad can be.



P4 Revival is due out on February 18th.

The next game's trailer started out with a clever trap in which a modified cassette tape player attracts zombies while winding up a string to unpin a grenade. Knowing that we're overdue for *State of Decay 3* news (and then seeing the Undead Labs logo), I was correct.



The first *State of Decay* should have been something I enjoyed, but I just couldn't get into it. I tried to play solo, which (as always) may have been the problem. I've been known to enjoy janky open world zombie games.

Are *all* these games coming day one to XBOX GamePass? They seem to be. I still have 2 or 3 one-month codes I can redeem.

Sea of Thieves: Custom Seas was announced. It allows user-generated content for the popular open world multiplayer pirate game.

Moving on.

I loved the *Metro* games (*2033*, *Last Light*, *Exodus*). They're atmospheric first-person shooters set (at first) in the underground tunnels of Moscow, although the third game took the post-apocalyptic adventure to new places. This looks to be a return to form, where you play as a new character trying to hunt down the original main character.



It's due out in February, which (just like September) seems to be getting stacked.

Kudos to a game like *Bad Magpie* for getting featured in a world premier at a major showcase like this. I try to mix indie games into my rotation of AA and AAA releases, retro games, and my never-ending backlog. This one doesn't *look* like my kind of game on the surface, but I've been surprised many times.



The next world premier was a sequel to *Wo Long: Fallen Dynasty*, called *Wo Long 2: Wings of Ember*. I enjoyed the first game well enough, but maybe less than Team Ninja's other similar *Souls*-like *Nioh* series.

That reminds me, I don't even have *Nioh 3* yet. I need it. The 2nd game was particularly great.

This game *Join Us* looks like goofy fun, but creating a cult (even in video game form) has never seemed like a good idea to me. It's so over-the-top, action-packed, and seems to feature actual cult gods (aliens, eldritch horrors) that maybe I *should* check it out when it releases next March.

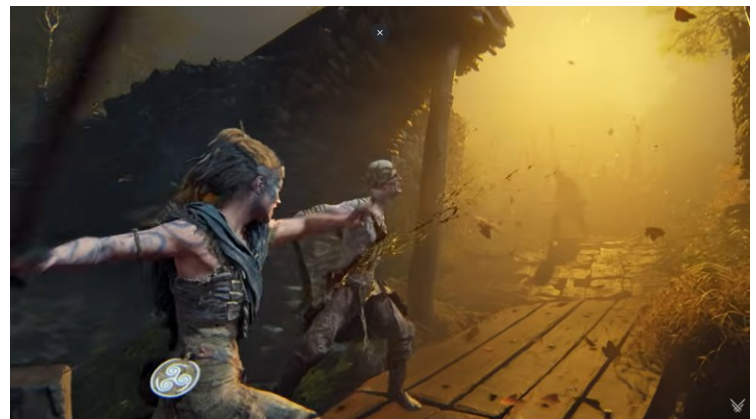


A third game to follow up from *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* and *Senua's Saga: Hellblade 2* is in the works.

Wait, no. Recent reports suggest the studio (Ninja Theory) is being shut down or sold off, and the fate of the new game (simply called *Senua*) is now unknown. Worse, reports suggest that XBOX leadership knew this before the showcase, the studio staff may not have known, and its inclusion in the showcase (if putting any sort of positive spin to things) was meant to help Ninja Theory attract interest from other publishers in possibly purchasing the studio from Microsoft.

Source:

<https://www.videogameschronicle.com/news/microsoft-already-planned-ninja-theory-closure-when-it-announced-senua-its-claimed/>



When I played *Fallout 3* way back on Xbox 360 (it became my favorite game of all time, incidentally), I kept thinking it would make a wonderful massively multiplayer online game. I wasn't into MMORPGs (and never have been) but it just seemed like a perfect fit.

Flash forward to *Fallout 76*. I downloaded it once and booted it up once and went no further than the first few minutes.

Congrats to Bethesda, though, for taking a game that wasn't a huge hit at launch, sticking with it, and turning it into a long-running live service with plenty of dedicated fans. The XBOX showcase featured a celebration trailer for new and upcoming content, starting with a fun animated short featuring the vault boy.



I have him on a black t-shirt doing his iconic thumbs-up. I wear that shirt way too often.

The Bethesda block continued with new campaign content for *Doom: The Dark Ages*.

It's one of the games I hope to play when I eventually redeem these GamePass codes (I have to fit it into my schedule), although my GamePass backlog is stacking up to a point where there might be no way to get through them all before those months run out.

The last time I redeemed a code, I managed to play *South of Midnight*. That's all. Now I've got this, *Keeper*, *The Outer Worlds 2*, *Avowed*...

Fans of the long-dormant *Crazy Taxi* series are probably excited for *Crazy Taxi: World Tour*, scheduled for release in 2027. The trailer appropriately features a well-known song from The Offspring.



This looks like a blast, but my *Crazy Taxi* experience is limited to the bicycle food delivery side-mission in the latest *Like a Dragon* games, which is supposedly *Crazy Taxi*-inspired (and both games are published by Sega), but I didn't love that mode enough to want an entire game where you're doing that.

My pie-in-the-sky hope as the next part of the presentation started was for an announcement that *all* original XBOX games are becoming backwards-compatible. I had just started the OG XBOX section of my 007 series playthrough, and I had even introduced my son to the iconic OG XBOX start-up.

That same start-up presented on a CRT leads into a scene of an XBOX-themed bedroom – the console, controller, games, posters – in which a localized tornado sweeps it all away and crunches it down into a green OG XBOX-themed XBOX Series X and controller, for the 25th anniversary of the brand. I mean, I should have known they wouldn't revisit backwards compatibility. I'm just glad a number of those older games already did make the cut.



Another game that isn't for me was shown next: *Age of Empires IV*. This was a trailer for the *Raiders of the North* expansion, coming this fall. I'm happy for all the *AoE* fans.

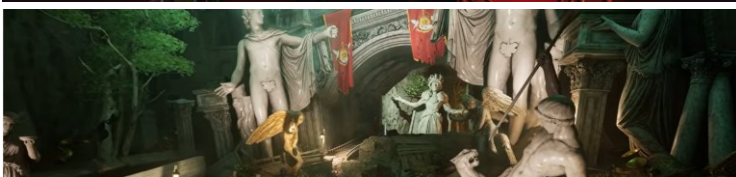
On September 29th, *Minecraft Dungeons II* is scheduled for release. I never got into anything *Minecraft*-related. I haven't even seen the Jack Black and Jason Momoa movie. I hear TellTale's *Minecraft Story Mode* is good (from my son) but haven't gotten around to it.



I briefly thought the next trailer might be a new look at *Clockwork Revolution* (which we do see later), but I wouldn't have made that mistake if I had noticed Uppercut Games (not inXile) on the opening title card.

This one has *We Happy Few* vibes. It's revealed to be *Magicians: The Devil's Deal* at the end, and I know nothing about it other than what the trailer shows, but it looks great.

It's first-person with hints of *Bioshock* and magic powers. How did I forget about this one before I started this re-watch? A search-up suggests it's single-player. Okay, yeah, this one is high on my list now.



The next trailer also seemed like it might be *Clockwork Revolution*, but no, it's *Valor Mortis*, which reminded me of *Dishonored* with first-person combat and a grappling traversal power. It looks so good! Napoleon Bonaparte factors into it somehow.



This, too, is slated for September, releasing on the 24th. Has the fear of *GTA 6* really messed up the fall release calendar this badly?

A *Thieves Guild* expansion for *The Elder Scrolls Online* was shown next. Okay.

Content focused on national parks and monuments was then shown for *Microsoft Flight Simulator 2024*. Okay again. I don't mean to be dismissive, but I don't have much to say about games I'm not interested in. They also teased something called *National Championship Air Races*; a tournament, maybe? The game has fans. Good for them.

I'd heard of *Where Winds Meet* before, but this trailer gave me my first look at the game (which appears to be out already), with a *Hidden Mountain* expansion coming in July. It looks super cool, mixing sci-fi and fantasy into a 10th-century China setting, but being a free-to-play MMORPG means it's not really for me.



It would be fun to do a *Castlevania* marathon, but I've already played so many of them and I prefer to spend my gaming hours on stuff I've never played. There are two 3D ones for the PS2 on my retro backlog. The next trailer was another look at *Castlevania: Belmont's Curse*, coming out on October 15th this year. I pre-ordered this one back in March, after it was originally announced.



This looks to be a 2D exploration Metroidvania (hence the “vania” part of that portmanteau), but not in a retro pixel art style. It's similar in style to *Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown* from a couple years ago.



The trailer for *Vivarium* looks cool, with a throwback 70s and 80s Japanese anime (maybe Ghibli-styled) aesthetic. It seems to lean into the life-sim genre, though, which I'm probably not going to check out myself.



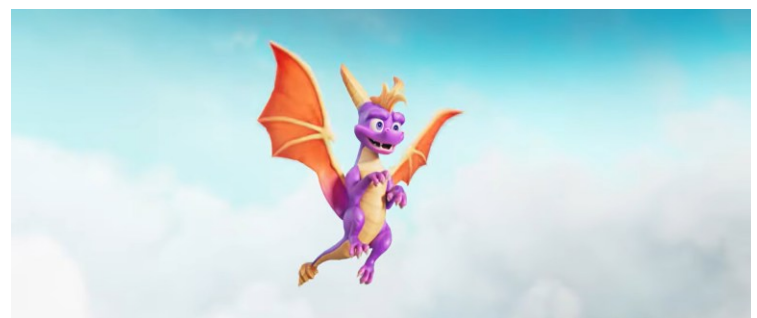
My son's wish came true with the world premier, finally, of *Persona 6*. Both of us were disappointed that it was only a mood piece – rows of tombstones in a dark forest followed by a surreal rapid-fire collage of mostly indecipherable imagery. It does seem to confirm rumors that the dominant color theme is green this time (*P3* was blue, *P4* was yellow, *P5* was red), but my son wondered why it didn't even include character reveals, since they'd already been shown or leaked.



There's no release date or anything, but we have a feeling it'll be 2028 at the earliest, since the *Persona 4* remake is next year.

The next world premier, from XBOX-owned Activision, wasn't the next *Call of Duty*. Instead, we got a first look at a new *Spyro the Dragon* game called *Spyro: A Realm Beyond*. This is another series I've never played.

It seems focused on forward-facing flight and shooting. Is that how all the games were?



After that, my patience was rewarded with a lengthy trailer for inXile's highly anticipated (by me, and by anybody else with taste) new game, *Clockwork Revolution*. This is another with *Dishonored* vibes. The studio founded by Brian Fargo (of the *Wasteland* series) has seemingly moved up to a new tier with this.



Sadly – but as I said before, not surprisingly – XBOX leadership has opted to keep it platform exclusive to XBOX. This might be my most anticipated upcoming game, aside from *Grand Theft Auto 6*.

I have two well-founded fears. The first is a “me” problem, in which I worry that the physical release (if it even gets one) will be a dreaded “key disc” without the full game. If nothing else, it will spur me to redeem a GamePass Ultimate code from my dwindling stock, or even subscribe for a month if I’ve used them all before this is out in 2027.

The second is that I fear for the future of inXile if this game underperforms, as seems likely with it tied to a platform with a rapidly declining reputation and a smaller market than PlayStation. I would for sure buy it if I knew it was getting a proper physical release.



Chief Content Officer Matt Booty talked over a montage of the upcoming games before leading into their final trailer for the DMZ multiplayer mode in the next installment of *Call of Duty*. This went on for several minutes as I’m finding out with this re-watch, but my son and I shut it off well before it was over.

The showcase video then leads into a thirty-plus minute look at *Gears of War: E-Day*. I’m already looking forward to playing it. I don’t need to see any more. The developer commentary is probably worthwhile, but I opted not to watch any of it.

It’s all just too much of a spoiler for me. Just let me experience and appreciate the game.

Nintendo Direct

I apologize to Nintendo fans reading this (heck, I’m one myself) because I’m opting not to cover the Nintendo Direct from June 9th to the extent I did the first three. I watched it with my son, but there wasn’t a lot I’m personally hyped for, especially since I don’t yet own a Switch 2 and rarely do anything on Switch 1.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PvUPDSDZg1k>

Of the big reveals, the now-confirmed *Zelda: Ocarina of Time* remake might be the headliner. The show featured plenty of announcements for existing games getting Switch 2 ports, which doesn’t excite me.

I’ve never played a *Fire Emblem* (I should) aside from the *Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE* collaboration, but *Fortune’s Weave* (which was previously announced) was another major highlight of the show. They spent ample time on the *StarFox 64* remake too, in a post-show Treehouse presentation, which we didn’t watch.

My most get-hyped moment was for *Xenoblade: Genesis*. I might finally be able to justify buying a Switch 2 for that game in 2027.

Collection Inspection

This issue's *Inspection* is inspired by announcements from the summer game showcases – in particular, *Gitaroo Man* coming to PlayStation 5 as a PS2 Classics title, the new *Fable* from XBOX, and the upcoming *Gears of War: E-Day*.

Gears of War 3 – Epic Edition

Platform: Xbox 360 / **Edition:** Collector's Edition

Comments: I had a heck of a time fitting the Marcus Fenix statue and the wrap-around foldable cardboard art back into the box after taking these photos. Also, this box is huge. The game itself is inside the black box with a silver gear on it, which I've never opened. The plastic and tape you see on the art book is there to prevent scuffing. It's taped to itself – not the book.



I'm not sure what this extra-long foldable art scene is for. In the box, it forms a circle around the statue. Maybe it's meant to help stage a scene with the statue or something. I don't know. It's cool, though.



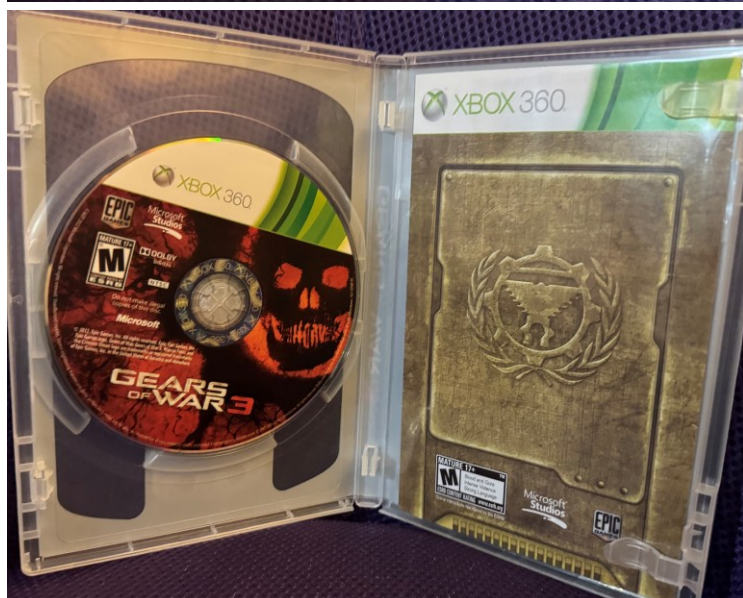
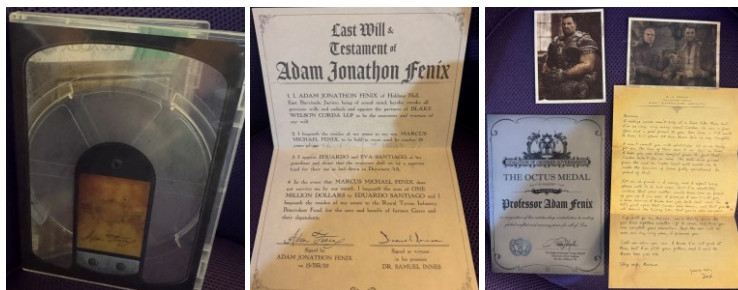
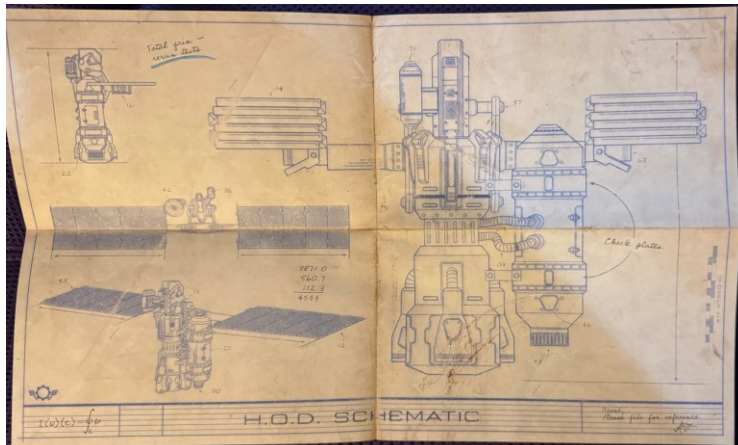
This statue seems really high-quality. It's heavy, and there was a bag of tiny guns or something that go with it. I didn't check out all of that, but here are two angles of the statue itself.



Gears of War 3 – Limited Edition

Platform: Xbox 360 / **Edition:** Limited Edition

Comments: The unopened portion of my GOW3 Epic Edition is probably the same stuff from this Limited Edition (which is what the Epic Edition box says is included). It consists of the game disc and insert in a translucent case, a couple photos and letters, some kind of blue cloth flag with a silver Gears logo, and some kind of blueprint.



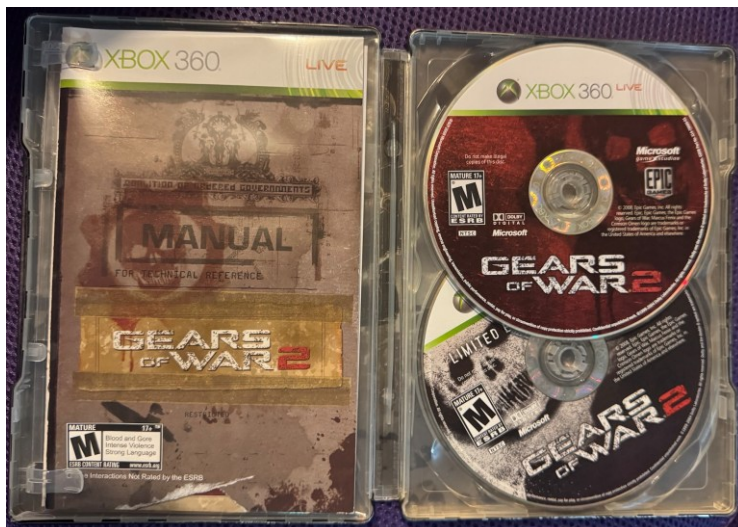
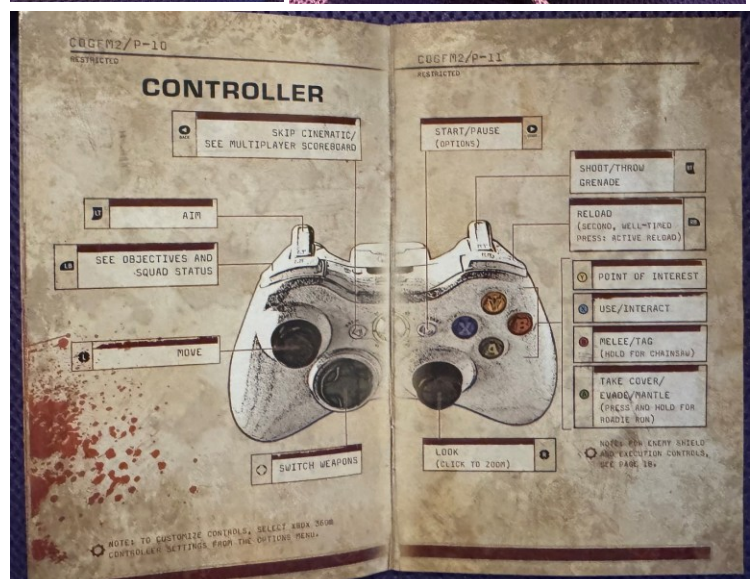
Gears of War 2 – Limited Edition

Platform: Xbox 360 / **Edition:** Limited Edition

Comments: I must not have bought this one new, because I wouldn't have opened it (I played the standard edition) and the outer box shows a good amount of wear (which wouldn't happen under my watch). It includes a metal case, a cardboard sleeve, a bonus disc, and an art book that I didn't unwrap (from plastic I added myself) to photo the interior.



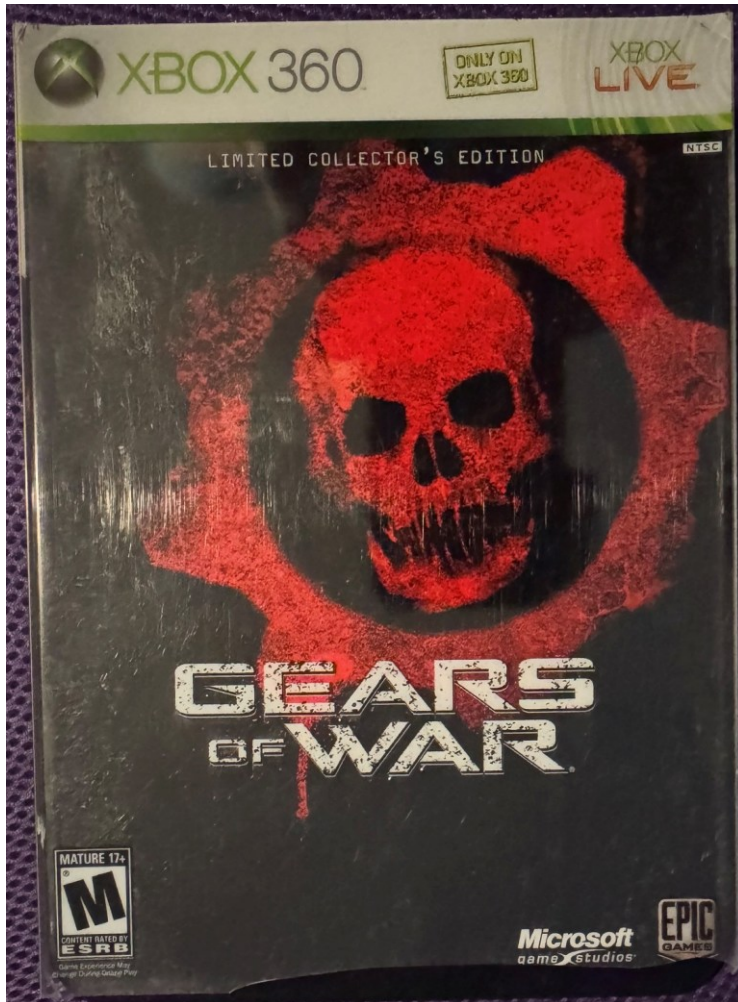
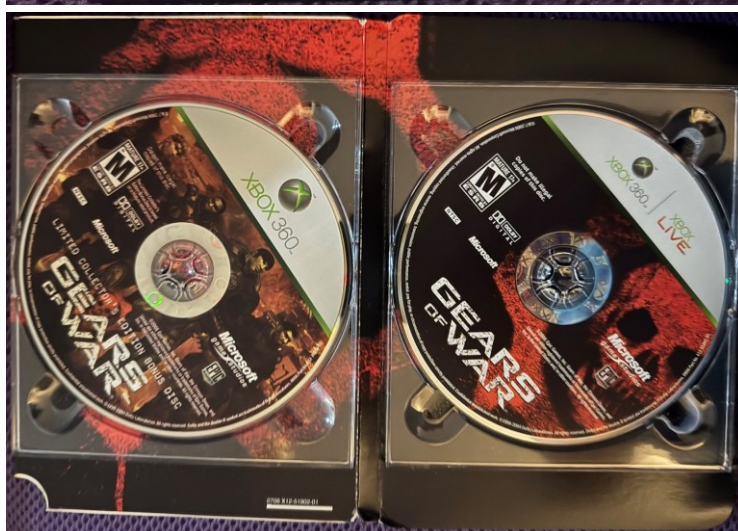
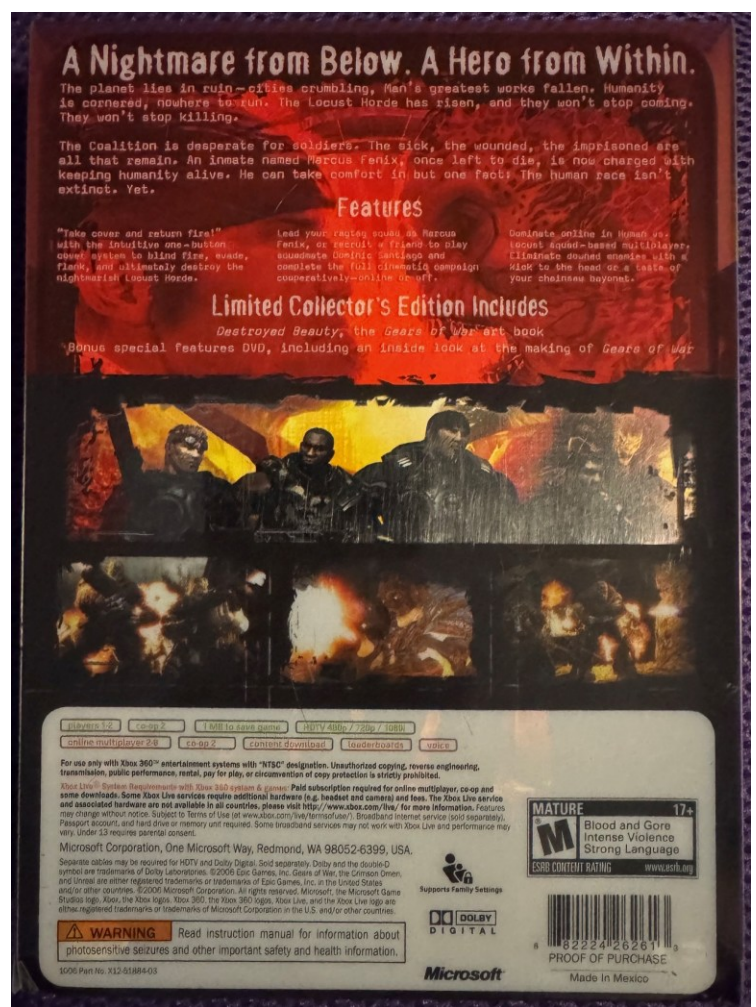
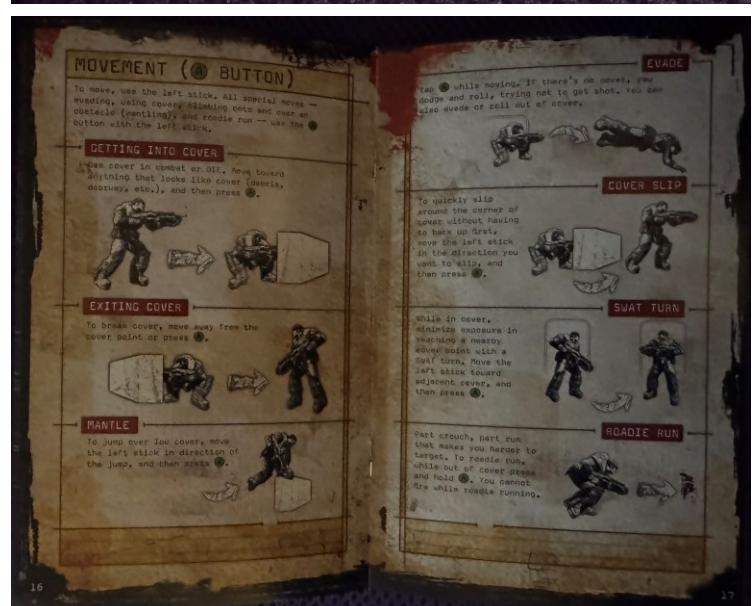
The bottom disc is a bonus DVD for this version.



Gears of War – Limited Collector's Edition

Platform: Xbox 360 / **Edition:** Limited Edition

Comments: Yes, there was a time when a single console generation got every game in a trilogy; this, *Mass Effect*, *Uncharted*, and others. The *Limited Edition* for *Gears of War 1* is interesting because the contents are in a metal cigar box (maybe there's a better term for it), but the two discs are in a pretty cheap-looking cardboard foldable sleeve with two clear plastic disc trays affixed to them. There's also an art book, but again, I left it in my protective plastic.

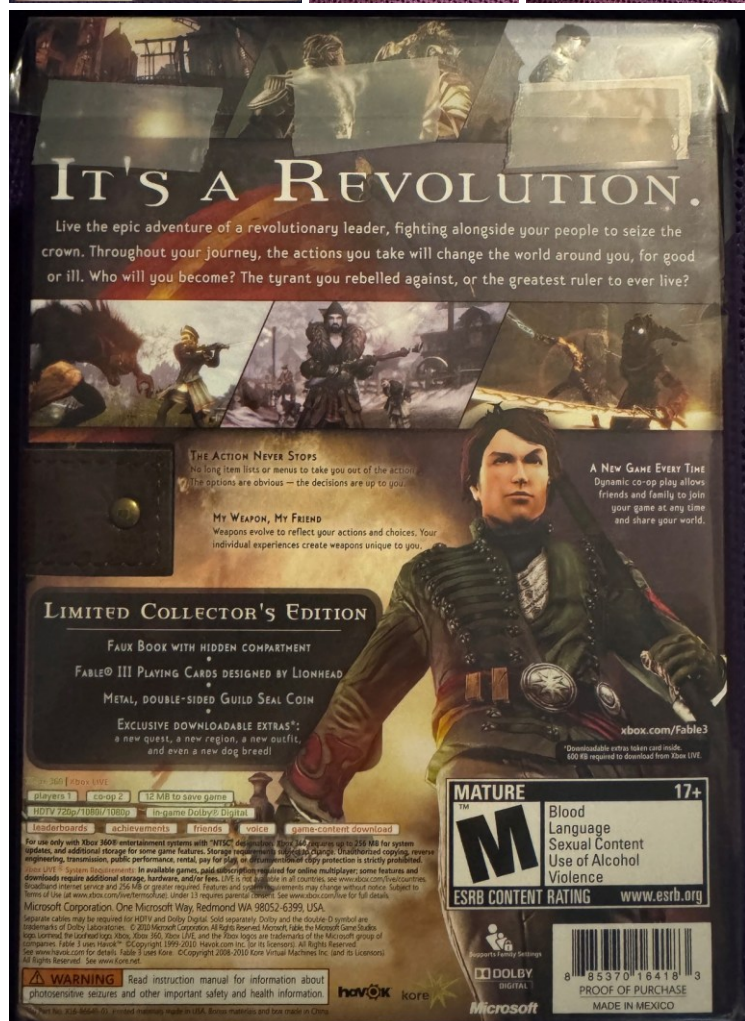


I have various other GOW standard and Platinum Hits editions, *Gears of War: Judgment*, plus *Gears of War 4* and *5* for Xbox One, but these special editions are the most interesting ones to include here.

Fable III – Limited Collector's Edition

Platform: Xbox 360 / **Edition:** Limited Edition

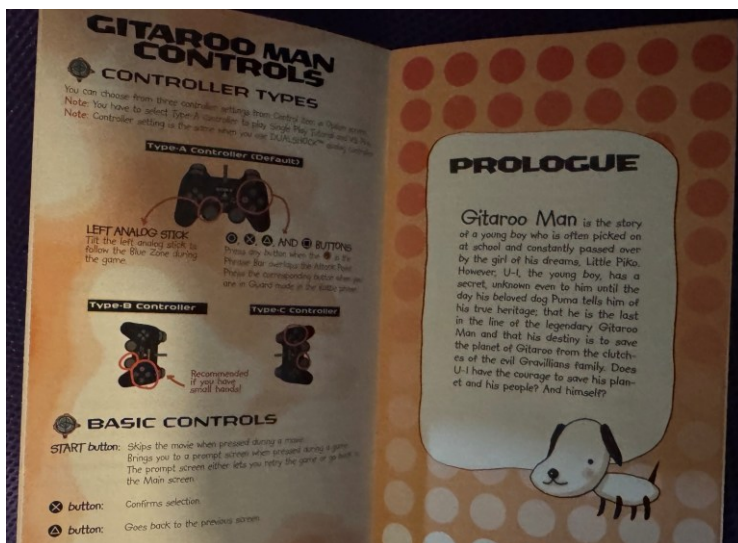
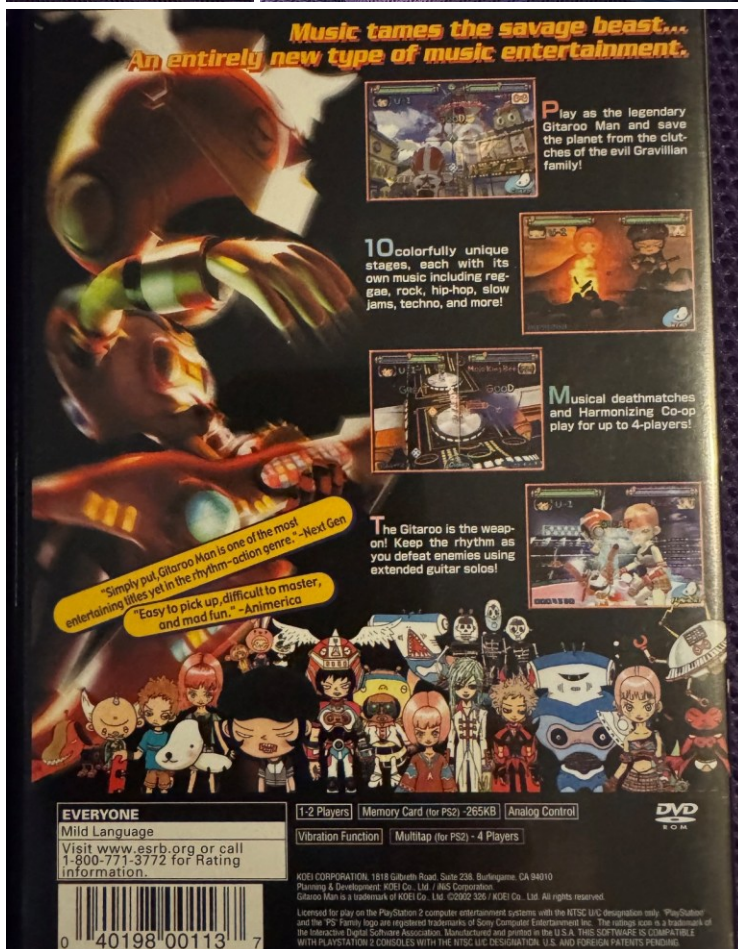
Comments: I thought about opening this factory-sealed copy of the *Fable III Limited Collector's Edition* (which is also bagged in plastic to protect the factory wrap), but I decided not to. It might be fun to show off the contents, but the cool thing about this edition is the book-shaped box it's packed in.



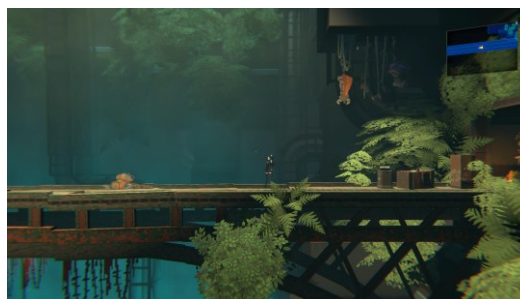
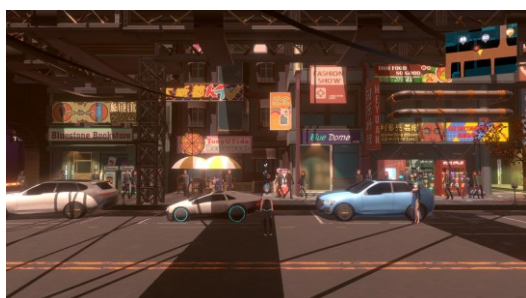
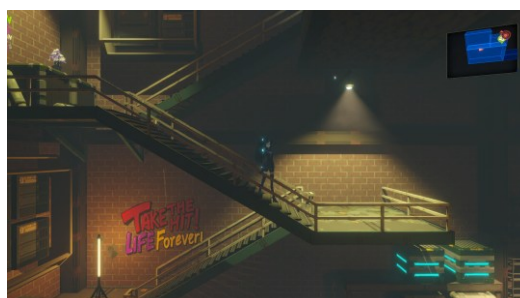
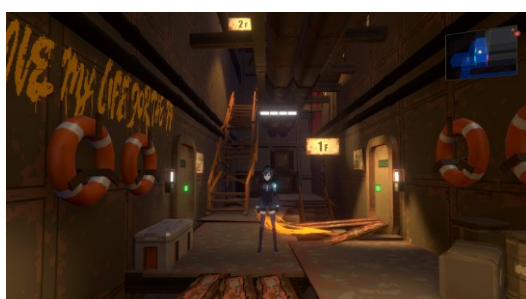
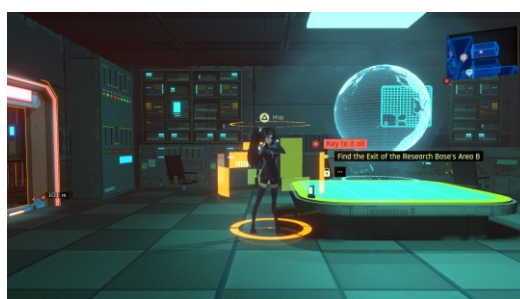
Gitaroo Man

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

Comments: It looks wacky, but I never played it.



Mini-Review: ANNO - Mutationem



It has a lot of contradicting elements merged together; none of it easy to explain without seeing it in action. There's the graphic style which is a beautiful 3D pixelated world but with characters being 2D sprites.

The gameplay is one part exploration, conversation and investigation, and one part 2.5D side-scrolling action with melee, shooting and RPG systems.

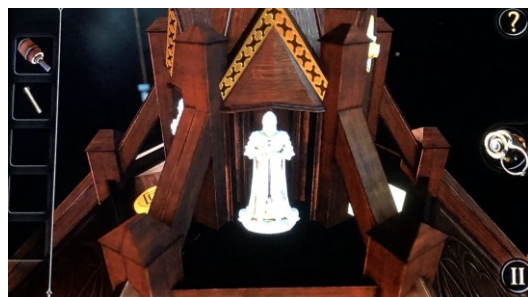
The story is a unique take on cyberpunk yet later on it decides it wants to be Remedy's *Control* instead, with a series of revelations that end up making the cyberpunk aspects feel like an afterthought.

The side-scrolling combat sections become more expansive and Metroidvania-like, and the initially-easy combat gets tough in one particular late-game fight.

For all these dichotomies, I couldn't put it down. An awesome experience.

Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: 01/03/2023.

Mini-Review: The Room



You know how a lot of point-and-click adventure games have certain puzzles that are actual puzzles? Some kind of mechanism where you turn disks and flip switches and line up symbols? *The Room* is entirely that; a series of interesting puzzle boxes.

I've seen this game on other platforms (PC maybe, and definitely iOS) and decided to try it out on Switch. It doesn't support the Pro Controller (being point and click/drag/move/turn), but works in handheld (touch) or in TV mode with one joycon (which works great as a pointer).

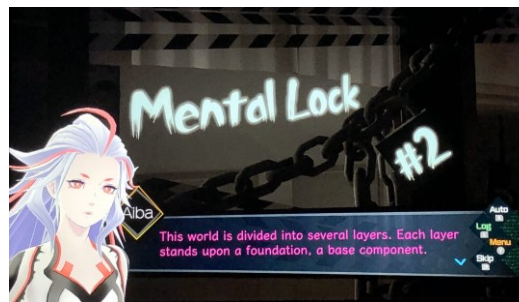
I quite enjoyed it.

A built-in clue/hint system is there, but I didn't need it. It seemed pretty short though; kind of ends abruptly with a promise of more to come eventually.

Anyway, it's a fun little puzzle game that knows what it is and provides a nice (if short) challenge.

*Played on console: Switch.
Originally posted: 12/31/2019.*

Mini-Review: AI - The Somnium Files



The latest from the creators of *999*, *Zero Escape*, and *Zero Time Dilemma*, *The Somnium Files* is part visual novel, part puzzle/adventure, with a wild premise and a branching story of twists and surprises. Very entertaining.

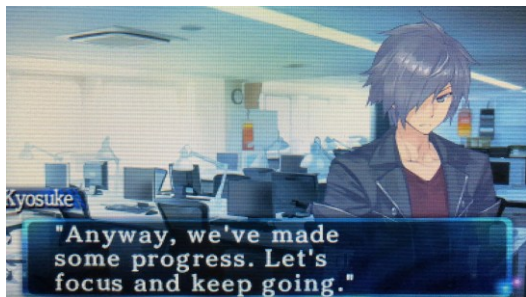
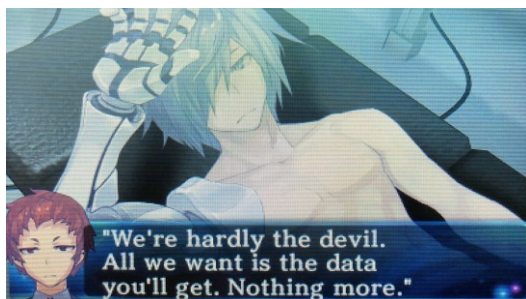
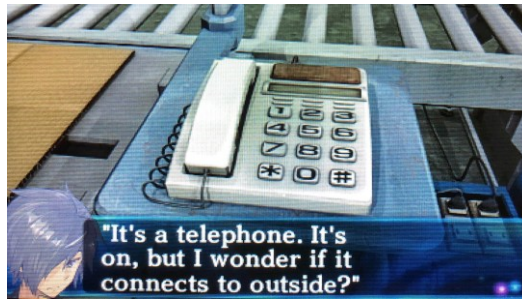
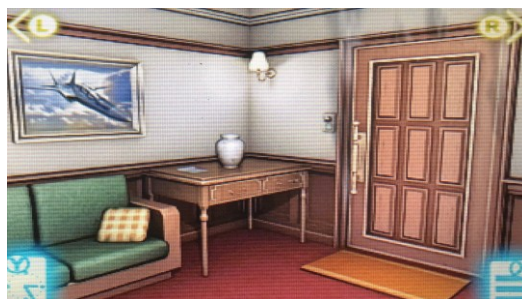
The game's flowchart lets you jump around in the story, but I found it more linear than the *ZE* games since some paths require unlocking via progress in another. Also, unlike *ZE*, this is used mainly for gameplay reasons, not the story. Still, an interesting hook used well.

It's a bit heavy on innuendo (even some that's more overt than implied) but it fits the game.

Certain music reminded me of *Phoenix Wright* (a plus). All in all, not quite as great as the *Zero Escape* series but a worthy stand-alone sci-fi murder mystery told in an interesting way.

Played on console: Switch.
Originally posted: 12/26/2019.

Mini-Review: Parascientific Escape - GD



Full Title:

Parascientific Escape - Gear Detective

Second in a series, *Gear Detective* is part visual novel (with choices that apparently affect the ending) and part escape room point-and-click adventure. I got the bad ending but I'm not really interested enough to play through again.

It's not a super long game or anything, especially if you've already figured out how to solve the puzzles (which feature a cool "manipulate things in the past" mechanic) but I just never felt too invested in the story.

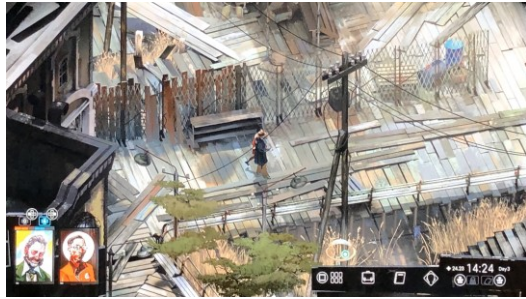
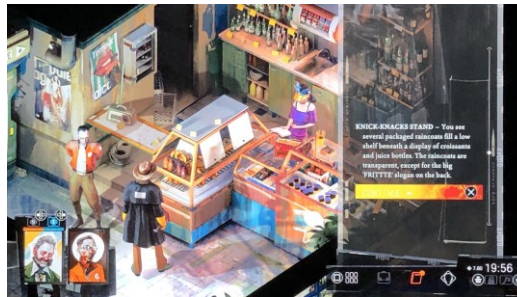
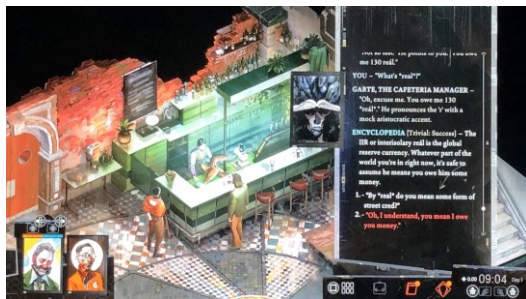
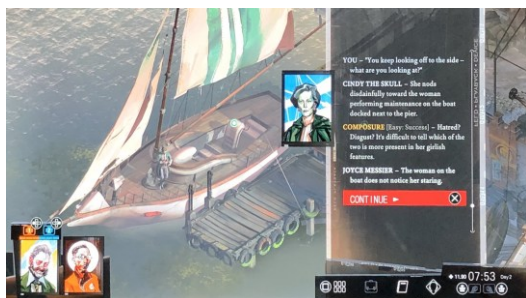
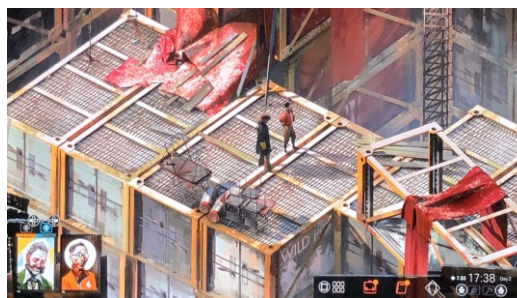
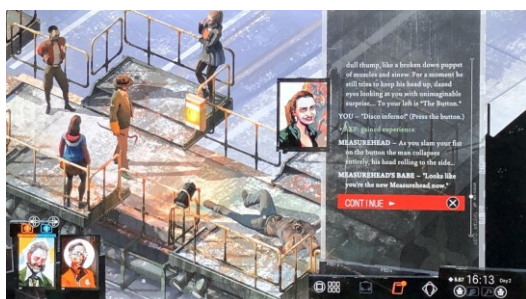
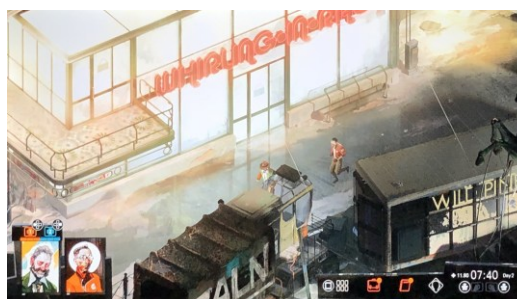
It has quite a few mistakes in the localization (text only) that make it feel a bit under-polished.

I remember the first game had similar problems, but I also remember enjoying it a lot more. I didn't *not* enjoy *Gear Detective*, but there's not much payoff to the bad ending. It's worth a look, though.

Played on console: 3DS.

Originally posted: 07/28/2021.

Mini-Review: Disco Elysium – The Final Cut



Aside from the protagonist's amnesia, everything about this isometric RPG is unlike any I've ever seen. There's no combat, but skills and modifiers help determine chances for success in conversations and various other tasks.

It also involves themes of political extremism, degrees of racism and religion as core to the story and the world. Much of it went over my head; there's a lot to digest.

You determine how level-headed or wacky and unhinged you want to be.

It's at times vulgar, at times very sentimental, surprising, mysterious, engaging, thought-provoking, depressing... it runs the gamut.

Aspects of the main character's fractured psyche serve as narration and guidance. I can see why people love and laud this game, but I think I need more time to reflect and process it.

Played on console: PS5.

Originally posted: 04/24/2021.

Mini-Review: Immortals – Fenyx Rising



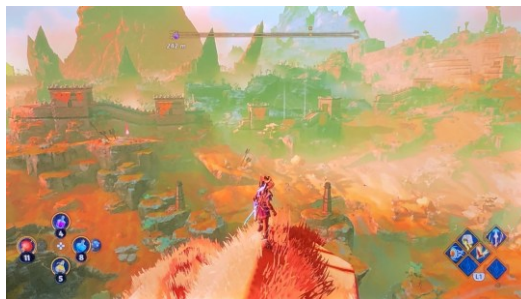
A big open-world Ubisoft action-adventure with some surface-level similarities to *Zelda BotW* (colorful world that's more stylized than realistic, climb anything with a stamina gauge). It took a few hours before it really hooked me, but not because it takes a while to get good or anything.



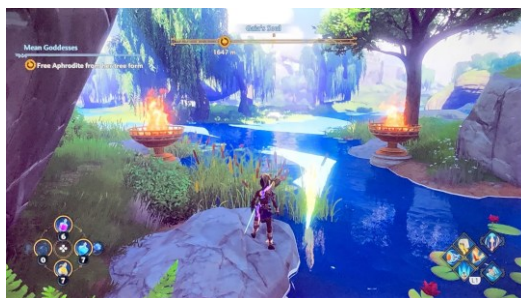
It's more that I just needed to be in the mood for another open world with tons of little puzzle and combat areas (in the world and in dozens of vaults/dungeons).



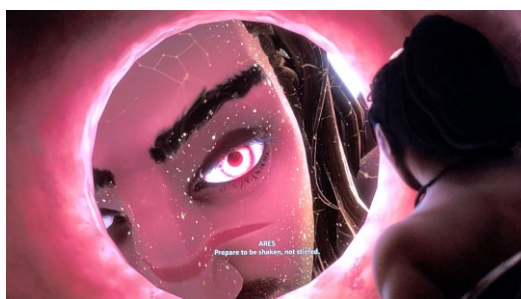
I started on Hard, became overpowered, and ended up on Nightmare halfway through (hardest - which also became a bit easy).



It's an interesting take on Greek mythology with a lot of banter between the gods (which hits and misses).

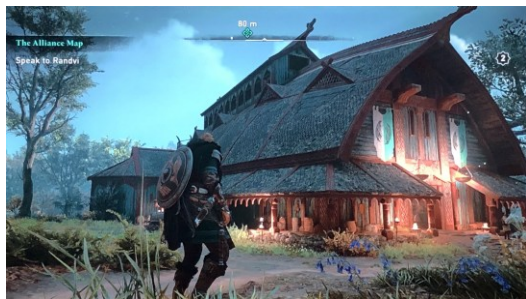
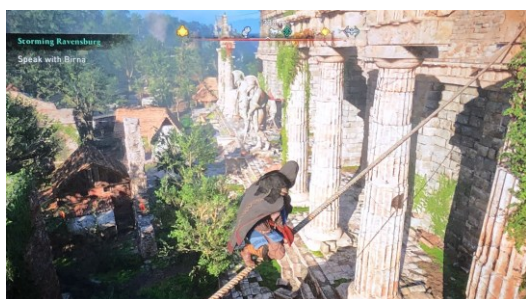
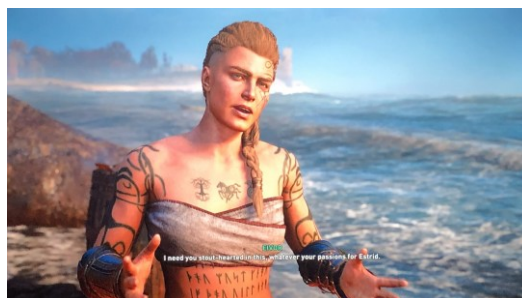


Overall, a fun story (not deep or groundbreaking) and a game I enjoyed a lot. Count me as a fan.



Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: 03/12/2021.

Mini-Review: Assassin's Creed – Valhalla



This time, we play as prolific killer Eivor Wolf-Kissed (can be male or female) in the time of vikings. It bears little resemblance to the AC of old; now an epic action adventure RPG having more in common with The Witcher than AC.

For the first few hours, it didn't grab me. This changed over my 135+ hours of play, and I ended up really enjoying it - especially when the story began to include more of the overarching series lore.

I did lots of exploring and side content, and on Very Hard mode. A mainline play-through wouldn't take as long, although I have a bit more to do still for the Platinum.

It looks great in 4k 60fps, although there's occasional screen-tearing. The series has changed and I miss the old, but in many ways it just keeps getting better. Well worth playing.

*Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: 12/12/2020.*

Mini-Review: Assassin's Creed – Mirage



I really thought we'd never see Ubisoft release another *Assassin's Creed* in the classic style after the success of the latest three larger RPG-focused *Witcher 3*-like open world entries, but here we are.

I missed this. It doesn't hit every aspect I enjoyed about those earlier games, but it's close enough.

After a few glitches in the early game where I floated above the ground or got hilariously flung miles across the map for no reason, it ran bug-free.

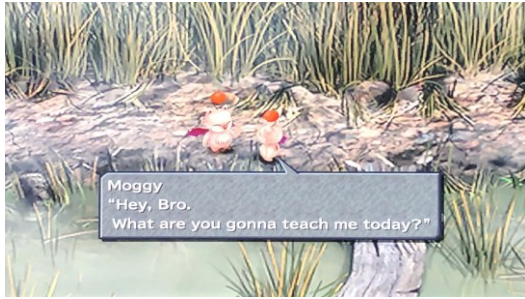
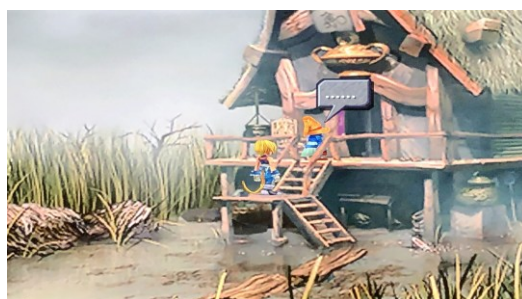
At around 35 hours to platinum and do all side quest stuff, it's easy to recommend, and at \$20 less than its triple-A current-gen peers.

It's playable stand-alone, although knowing Basim's role by the end of *AC Valhalla* would greatly help with the otherwise confusing ending. My only gripe is the complete lack of modern-day story.

Played on console: PS5.

Originally posted: 10/12/2023.

Mini-Review: Final Fantasy IX - Remaster



I really liked this one!

The "remaster" holds up surprisingly well, with a battle system that's fun and more straightforward than *FF8* (which I liked but maybe not as much as *FF9*). It's much more fantasy than sci-fi this time, with memorable chibi characters, animal people, a network of Moogles and plenty of artfully-designed locations in signature *Final Fantasy* style.

Like *FF8* on PS4, the original pre-rendered backdrops are low-res and blurry, but better character textures help it to be way less jarring than *FF8*. The pause menu provides access to boosts/cheats (fast speed, battle assist, no random encounters) yet in *FF9* I never felt the urge to use any of them.

It was a fun, fair, epic 50 hours that may just put it behind *FF7* as one of my favorites in the series so far. It's a great RPG.

Played on console: PS4 Pro.
Originally posted: 01/30/2021.

The Final Stage

The New York Times: Connections

My son introduced me to the *Connections* word game from *The New York Times* two or three weeks ago. Our routine, now that he's out for the summer, graduated high school, and living with me full time as he's starting college nearby in the fall, is to collaborate on solving the daily *Connections* and then compete for fewest guesses in *Wordle*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/games/connections>

We always click the light bulb icon and look at the difficulty level first. We've failed a couple times, but by teaming up, we've mostly had successes where we sometimes solve it with no wrong guesses in under a minute. We don't have specific goals – just to solve it – but it's fun when we see the patterns quickly.

The game presents you with 16 words that must be grouped together into 4 categories, but it's up to you to figure out what those categories might be. The game doesn't tell you. Some can be easy – breeds of dogs, popular movie titles, and so on.

Others can be diabolical, involving wordplay (as with today's "starting with kinds of insults" that grouped together Barbados, Diggity, Dissect, and Slapdash), things that only make sense together when you add another word or remove part of each one, or things associated by concept rather than anything tangible.

You get limited wrong guesses, and it's up to you to figure out which words seem like they should go together. It's often deceptive, with two or even three words having an obvious connection that isn't actually the one you're supposed to find, only eliminated as a possibility when you realize there aren't four words that would fall into that category.

Anyway, I highly recommend it, especially if you can work on it with family or a friend.

The nice thing is that you really only need to figure out *three* of the categories, because the final four words have to go together. We usually spend extra time trying to think of what they have in common anyway, and only reveal the final answer when we figure it out or we give up on trying.

The screenshot shows the Connections game interface. On the left, under "The Puzzle", is a 4x4 grid of words: DIGGITY, ROCKS, SLAPDASH, SCRUBS; SURPRISES, RAIN, DISSECT, FLOORS; BARBADOS, COMMUNITY, STUNS, SPRINKLES; SHOWERS, WINGS, DRIZZLE, FRIENDS. Below the grid are buttons for "Shuffle", "Dissect All", and "Submit". On the right, under "The Solution", are four colored boxes representing the categories:

- PRECIPITATION** (yellow): DRIZZLE, RAIN, SHOWERS, SPRINKLES
- NBC SITCOMS** (blue): COMMUNITY, FRIENDS, SCRUBS, WINGS
- BOWLS OVER** (green): FLOORS, ROCKS, STUNS, SURPRISES
- STARTING WITH KINDS OF INSULTS** (purple): BARBADOS, DIGGITY, DISSECT, SLAPDASH

 At the top of the puzzle area, it says "Create four groups of four!".

Next Issue

Bill reminded me of how he phrased a topic suggestion I mentioned in the last issue:

Games that, as a gamer, I'm embarrassed to say I haven't played.

What might also be interesting is a look at games on my backlog; not necessarily just the important ones that everybody should play, but the games I'm disappointed I haven't gotten around to yet. It could be a bit of both.

There is also, of course, my 007 James Bond gaming marathon. See you next time!

End Credits

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Images sourced from elsewhere on the internet are clickable, linking to the source site and serving as a credit for each image.

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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