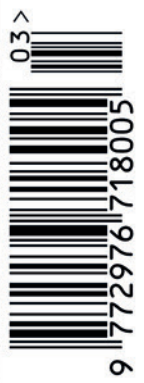


# TOP 100



**RHYTHM IS  
GONNA  
GET YOU!**

**HEADBANGERS RHYTHM  
ROYALE - HAVE YOU HEARD  
ABOUT THE BIRD?**



PENANCE NEVER ENDS



blasphemous III

OUT NOW



# Welcome to Debug magazine

**O**ne of the things I love about the indie gaming community is how it's just so unpredictable. Last month we had the wonderful *Cocoon* as our cover star – a slower-paced game where concentration and puzzle solving is the key to success. This month we've got singing/dancing/rapping pigeons. Who'd have thunk it?

Both are interesting games and worthy of their cover position, but they couldn't be more different. Now take a look through the games we've lined up for you in this issue – the most yet – and again, you'll see incredible diversity and inventiveness.

We speak to The Behemoth about the return of their cult classic, *Alien Hominid*, share our love of one of the finest indie platformers ever made, chat to developers who are creating games about dogs (in space and otherwise), classic driving games and homebrew *Mario* clones in 30 days. All different and all fantastic.

The gaming calendar has aligned perfectly for us this issue, and not only have we somehow managed to squeeze in over 20 reviews, but included in that number are four of the biggest games of the year: *Cocoon*, *Bomb Rush Cyberfunk*, *Sea of Stars* and *Viewfinder*. They may be big releases but do they live up to their hype? Head to the reviews section to find out.

That just leaves me to say, once again, thank you so, so much for all your support and kind words. We're so pleased you like the mag. Also, if you're an indie developer (solo or otherwise) and you're working on something you'd like to share then please do get in touch. We try to cover as many of your games as possible.

**Thank you for picking up a copy of the magazine. We all really hope you enjoy it, and please do send any feedback to us at [hello@teamdebug.com](mailto:hello@teamdebug.com).**

**Dean Mortlock**  
EDITOR





# HEADBANGERS RHYTHM ROYALE

**WORDS** DEAN MORTLOCK

## **BIRDS OF PLAY**

One could argue – and probably quite successfully – that gaming is at its best when you’re playing against other humans rather than sweating alone in the dark on yet another solo action-adventure game. The rise in popularity of the battle royale genre proves that multiplayer gaming is bigger than ever, and its latest addition, *Headbangers Rhythm Royale*, is a game that apes the best of them but still has a few tricks hidden under its wing...

Glee-Cheese has been clever to pick instantly recognisable characters for the outfits. Did you spot Ziggy on our cover, too?

# WINGS OF DESIRE



# NOT ONLY ARE THERE PLENTY OF GAMES TO PLAY, BUT THERE'S ALSO A DECENT AMOUNT OF VARIETY BETWEEN THEM ALL

If you remember back to the last issue of *Debug*, we put a small mention of *Headbangers Rhythm Royale* in The Hub. It was the smallest of glances at the game – mostly indicating that its release date had been confirmed as October 31 – but we knew then that we'd be covering the game in much greater detail in this very issue.

There was something about the game that caught our eye. Yes, it was a party game with pigeons, but it was clear that it was also so much more than that. And it was that potential in the game that made us happy to make it issue three's cover star. We've been lucky enough to have had the game in our possession for a while now, and first impressions are very positive.

*Headbangers Rhythm Royale* is the work of a small independent developer based in France. Comprising of four main team members – Charles Bardin (composer/designer), Valentin Ducloux (composer/designer), Alexandre Rey (art direction) and Maxime Constantinian (programmer) – this is only their second title. Their first one, *A Musical Story* (are you spotting the theme here?) was released in March of 2022. Although it too has a very musical theme, as you would expect from the game's title, the story is very different – focusing on a man attempting to connect to his past through music. There's a demo available on the Steam store, and we definitely recommend you check it out.

## FALLING IN LOVE

Straight off the bat, it's clear that *Headbangers Rhythm Royale* has been hugely influenced by *Fall Guys*. From the slightly phallic design of the lead characters to the elimination-style gameplay, this is a game that screams 'battle royale!' from every pixel. But game structure and domed protagonists aside, *Headbangers Rhythm Royale* is a very different beast under the hood.

You begin a tournament with 29 other players, and the object is to be the last pigeon standing at the end of four rounds. Much like *Fall Guys*, players are slowly eliminated at the end of each round. So 30 start in round one, the top 20 qualify for round two, then 10 for round three and finally the five best players get to peck off in the fourth and final round. It's easy to spot where you're ranked at any point because it's shown clearly in the top right-hand corner of the screen, along with a visual marker on how you're doing compared to the other players.

Like any party game, the first time you play any of the mini-games is usually the hardest. While the games are loading you get an instruction screen with a breakdown of what you need to do, though – along with the bonuses you can earn – and this definitely helps. While we're on the subject of bonuses, it's worth going into a little more detail here, as these can really swing a game in your favour. During a round, a bonus box will fly across the screen. Hit the correct key before any of your opponents, and you snaffle the bonus inside. You'll then earn one of four things: 'Bonus', 'Super Bonus', 'Penalty' or 'Global Attack'. They mostly do different things depending on the mini-game you're playing.

## PECKING ORDER

One of the things we liked about *Headbangers Rhythm Royale* is not only are there plenty of games to play, but there's also a decent amount of variety between them all. They've all got either a musical or movement theme, but while one minute you'll be copying a dance instructor's moves or the march steps of a Naval Commander, the next you'll be timing button presses to duplicate a rhythm – much like *Dance Dance Revolution* or *PaRappa the Rappa*.

The mini-games start easy but it's not long before the wheat is looking confident while the chaff is looking decidedly nervous. You want to make it through to the fourth round? Great, well you have ▶



## HEADBANGERS IS DESIGNED FROM THE GROUND UP TO BE FUN

to earn that place. *Headbangers Rhythm Royale's* 23 mini-games will test your memory, rhythm, reaction time, reflexes and your rapping ability.

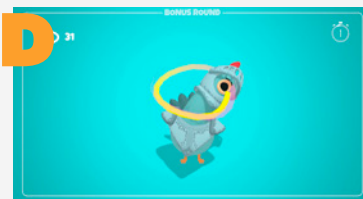
Although the music in the game isn't licensed or recognisable – aside from a few classical tracks – thankfully, they are all good. Most of them are peppered with a range of sound effects, and considering most of them are directly linked to the gameplay, it's a marriage that is extremely effective.

Each game you play, regardless of whether you win or lose, earns you points (or 'Crumbs', the in-game currency). Obviously the better you do, the more Crumbs you'll get, but when you've amassed a hefty pile then you can head into the store for a spending spree. From full outfits to individual items, it doesn't take long to build up a decent account and kit your pigeon out in everything from an Elvis costume to a Worms mask.

You can also earn bonus outfits by completing a number of challenges. These start fairly simple ('Play 8 Games') but the final outfit is something that only the masters of the game will be able to unlock.

A party game's success relies on two things: a varied selection of fun mini-games to play, plus that 'just one more go' itch that you need to continue scratching. You could be playing against mates in your own house, or a selection of people in various countries on a variety of devices – *Headbangers Rhythm Royale* is thankfully cross-platform. We've also tried it on a Steam Deck, and it plays beautifully on that, too.

*Headbangers Rhythm Royale* strikes us as a game that's designed from the ground up to be fun, so we're already looking forward to some heated on and offline battles when the game's launched at the end of October. [👉](#)



### A BIRDY BONUS

Every now and then a bonus round will pop up, giving you the option to earn a chunk of bonus Crumbs. From collecting hearts to spinning your pigeon's head as quickly as possible by rotating one of the analogue sticks on your controller, get as high a score as possible to bring home the bread.

Also, keep an eye out for the Bonus Round prompt during a game. When it flashes you need to stop what you're doing and start spinning that stick.

### PIGEON FANCIERS

Want to be a cool pigeon rather than a stool pigeon? Here's the *Debug* guide to dressing your bird in style.





# Q&A

## Obvious question first: Why pigeons?

A great first question, and there's a funny story about how we landed on pigeons. In September 2020, when we had the idea of making a competitive online music game, we were looking to test our concept with videos and the creation of a first prototype.

We needed a character that would represent the madness we wanted to bring to the game, and it was while we were looking for ideas that my wife said to me: "Every time you listen to music you move your neck like a pigeon". It was a revelation! We talked about it with Alexandre, the game's art director, and decided it was the best idea – the whole world knows pigeons, and everyone has wondered at some point or another, what goes on in their brains to make them bob their heads in the way they do. That's how our pigeons were born.

## The mini-games are devilishly original – how did you come up with the ideas for them?

Thank you so much for the compliment! Our way of doing things is the Nintendo way: gameplay first. One special thing about our studio is that out of the four members, two are composers, and they are the ones in charge of game design. So first, before we do anything, we have a gameplay idea that interests us as composers and as game designers – not an easy thing to find.

In *Headbangers*, what we were looking for was a way to tackle many different aspects of what makes music: rhythm, of course, but also pitches, sounds, and even dynamics. Once the initial ideas have been selected, they pass through Alexandre's crazy brain, where he gives them totally unexpected, yet incredibly funny and coherent context.

For each mini game, we try many combinations until we find the formula that has the best balance. We then create a load of sound and musical variations to ensure each time a player starts up a new game, the gameplay will be different. It's impossible to know a mini game by heart, and that's our way of keeping the experience fresh and interesting. We think we've probably created the videogame with the most musical content ever.

## And do you have any personal favourites?

Tough question. I think my favourite would have to be *The Battle Box*. It's a Round 3 mini-game where you duel other players in rap battles. The way it combines rhythm, movement and lyrics

**Personally, I have nothing against pigeons; pigeons are cool. But you do have to wonder why they in particular became the stars of *Headbangers Rhythm Royale*. What was the thinking behind that, and how did Glee-Cheese come up with the ideas for the mini-games? We demanded answers, and because they're lovely people, they kindly supplied them...**

makes it a really unique mini-game and, I think, very intense.

I'm also very fond of the final round mini-game, *Oui Votre Majesté*, where the aim is to reproduce actions as quickly as possible, with the time you have to react getting increasingly shorter. It's a very simple idea, derived in a way from 'Bop-it', but with its own frenetic flavour where you can be eliminated by making just one mistake. The context of the King of France giving silly orders to his people also made us laugh out loud.

## You could argue that *Fall Guys* started the party game renaissance. Was that game a big influence on *Headbangers*?

*Fall Guys* was of course a big influence, but it was by no means the biggest. When it came to setting up functional menus, and managing progression in a battle royale, they'd already tried out different ways of making it work, and that made our work a little easier, but at the heart of the game, the two experiences are very different.

We were keen to create a truly competitive game, very intense, and where concentration and practice make all the difference. Personally I'd love for it to become an e-sports game, because we designed and balanced it that way. Even though there are similarities in them being colourful, our pigeons also differ a lot from the *Fall Guys* characters. Their humorous aspect places them closer to Rabbids, or Minions, and the frenzied gameplay ultimately bringing it closer to *WarioWare*.

## Can we expect DLC for *Headbangers* in the future?

We are currently working to make sure the launch version of *Headbangers Rhythm Royale* is the best it can possibly be, so there's nothing to share on that just yet.

## Glee-Cheese, with *A Musical Story*, are no strangers to musically themed games. Is that something you're looking to develop in future titles?

As I mentioned earlier, having two game designers in our studio also be composers heavily influences our choices, but that doesn't mean we refuse any idea on principle. We always have many unique ideas in mind, so we'll see where that takes us in the future!

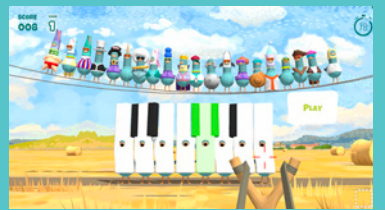
## PECK 'N' MIX

There's a total of 23 mini-games in *Headbangers Rhythm Royale*, and one is picked at random in each of the four rounds in a tournament. All of them have their merits, but here are a few of our favourites.



## GUESS IT!

You'll hear the sound of an instrument and then you have to pick it from a selection.



## FIRST PIANO SHOOTER

Shoot at piano keys with a catapult to follow a basic riff. This is another game that starts nice and easy.



## RUN PIGEON RUN

Locked in a videogame, you have to kick high or low to stop anything getting past you.



## SPACE RACE

The four controller buttons are layered on a rotating spaceship.



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# THE HUB

TOMORROW'S GAMES TODAY

## SLAP HAPPY

### IT'S ICE HOCKEY, BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT IN **ODR** **HOCKEY HEROES**

**T**he Hockey Godz have frozen the earth, and the only way to save the planet is by winning a divine hockey tournament. Welcome friends, to *ODR Hockey Heroes*...

Let's assume that your gaming knowledge is expansive enough to know just how playable and influential EA's hockey games of the '90s were. On the Mega Drive there were few experiences better than a few quick rounds of *EA Hockey*.

*ODR Hockey Heroes* brings that playability slap (ahem) bang up to modern gaming by mixing it with a cracking story, a fair dollop of humour, a ton of characters, power ups and an RPG element that allows you to upgrade your team and its equipment. You can try it for yourself, as there's a Steam demo available now.

You can find out more on the game's Kickstarter page, which is live until the end of October. Scan the QR code to go straight there. [G](#)  
**James Oakwood**

#### INFO

**Developer**  
Treewood  
Studios

**Publisher**  
Treewood  
Studios

**On**  
PC

**Demo**  
Yes

RELEASE  
2024



WATCH IT

RELEASED  
TBC



# THE NEW WAY TO RACE

## MAKE WAY FOR A WHOLE NEW MULTIPLAYER RACER

**W**hen it comes to multiplayer gaming, few titles have captured the thrill of gathering around a console or PC better than *Micro Machines*. Now Ice BEAM hope that their game will capture the feel and fun of a classic.

Many developers have tried to replicate that feeling over the years, and many have failed, but personally speaking, I've always had a glimmer of hope that one day we'd play a modern multiplayer driving game inspired by one of the best. Now, after playing *Make Way* for an extensive hands-on session, I think we may have found it.

Load up a game and it feels instantly familiar. The objective in *Make Way* is to try to lead the pack. Slip too far behind and you'll literally drop off the screen and be out of the race until the next checkpoint. So far so normal, but the twist reveals itself when you get to the end of a race for the first time. It stops abruptly, but then you and your

opponents get to pick an additional piece each that, when bolted to the end of the track, carries it on in all manner

**“ The twist reveals itself when you get to the end of a race for the first time ”**

of wonderful twists and turns. You then start the next round of the race from the beginning, with the extended track added on.

This carries on until one person reaches the score limit, but as you can imagine, with up to four players adding

### INFO

**Developer**  
Ice BEAM

**Publisher**  
Secret Mode

**On**  
PC, PS4/4,  
Xbox Series,  
Switch

**Demo**  
Yes

track at the end of each round, eventually you have an extremely long, crazily inventive and wholly original track to race on – no two tracks are likely to ever be the same. We haven't done the maths behind that, but trust us, the odds are huge.

Adding to the mayhem is the fact that you don't just add track pieces, as *Make Way* also kindly offers you a range of hazards to pick from, including seesaws, loops, train crossings and corkscrews – and that really is the tip of a devilish iceberg, as there are so many fiendish traps waiting for you in the game. Oh, and cars can also pick up power-ups too, *Mario Kart* style.

Anything else? Well, you can play either local or cross-platform multiplayer, and the game is fully customisable, so you're free to tinker with the settings as much as you like in order to customise the perfect game set up.

Want to find out exactly what we think about it? Check out the review in issue four of *Debug*. [📄](#)

**Dean Mortlock**



WATCH IT

## Q&A MAKE WAY

We like to chat about games, and *Make Way's* lead developer, Tom Goodchild, also likes to talk about games. Here's what he had to say about his upcoming racer.

**Tom, could you start by letting us know a bit more about the games you've previously worked on?**

My first job was working in Dundee as a designer/scripter on *NARC*. This was a mid-budget openworld action game based on the original classic arcade game of the same name (by the industry legend Eugene Jarvis).

I then worked on *Haze*, a Ubisoft PS3 launch title developed by Free Radical Design (of *TimeSplitters* fame). I also worked on a handful of *MotoGP* titles for both Climax and Monumental Games. Lastly, I worked on *F1 Race Stars*, a light-hearted take on the sport of F1, and *Toybox Turbos*, a spiritual successor of *Micro Machines*, both for Codemasters.

***Make Way* is clearly influenced by *Micro Machines*, a series you worked on. What were the best aspect from those classic games you could bring over to *Make Way*?**

I've always had a soft spot for *Micro Machines* since I played it with four players on my Mega Drive as an early teenager. Also, *Mashed* is one of my all-time favourite party games, and felt like the last truly great entry in the subgenre.

A lot of the current top-down racers don't use the multiplayer elimination camera mechanic that, in my mind, defines *Micro Machines*.

**Can you tell us more about *Make Way's* unique feature – the ability to build your own tracks?**

When I started out trying to bring something new to the game, I thought modifying the tracks with hazards was a fun way of making the game more unique. But after a few weeks of prototyping, I just had the idea 'why not actually lay the track pieces'. It just made sense in my mind right away, as I grew up with slot car racing toys in the '80s.

**Did you start *Make Way* with a focused idea of what you wanted for the gameplay, or has it evolved over the game's development?**

A little bit from column A, and a little bit from column B, I suppose. Any game designer worth their salt knows you have to remain flexible and 'find the fun'.

I knew I wanted the elimination camera, and the sense of near-constant chaos the subgenre is known for, but only really knew the very broad strokes. There were many milestones where the quality of the game design stepped forward after fundamental changes.

The first of which was the track building. Then it was clear early on that, because of the very nature of the core gameplay, people were eliminated often. So, I introduced the idea of checkpoints, and specifically respawning eliminated players early on, so the game remained fun for all players.

Finally, I added the different modes, which turns off guard rails, and turns on weapons and hazards, so the game can be more easily enjoyed by players of all skill levels.

**And are there any other hazards that didn't make it past the design stage?**

Sure! Well, most of them were implemented in some capacity. Some didn't work, and some just fell off the wagon due to time constraints.

One idea I had was a teleport, but I could never come up with a way of making it work, so it was ditched before I even wrote a line of code.

**We're guessing it gets played a lot in the Ice BEAM office – any in-house rivalries, or is it all very civil?**

Steam is telling me I have played the game for over one thousand hours!

To be fair, a lot of that was debugging the game, but still, yeah, I have played it a lot. I had outsourcers help me with the development of the online crossplay functionality, so we played a lot over the network to test functionality, performance, and balancing of new features. Probably my main rival was Ash Henstock. He won the final game we tested before he rolled off the project. Something I will never forgive him for.



### THE BACK CATALOGUE

The people who made this also made...

#### Socketeer

Ice BEAM's first game was this cute shooter where you take over a space station by hacking robots.

# DREAD AND BREAKFAST

## WE DOUBT YOU'LL FIND **BLOODY HELL** **HOTEL** ON AIRBNB ANYTIME SOON

**N**ow this is something a little different. Part first-person horror action game and part strategy title, *Bloody Hell Hotel* is shaping up to be oodles of fun.

Revived from a centuries-old coma, you play a vampire that has awoken to find his beloved hotel in ruins. Luckily for you, everything you need to renovate it is hidden away in the maze of tunnels and caves under the hotel. Find what you need, kill the monsters guarding said items, repair the hotel and then open it to a swarm of eager guests – which you can then eat, naturally.

*Bloody Hell Hotel* is the latest title from Unfold Games, who gave us the absolutely stunning *Darq*, and although the tone here is definitely lighter, we suspect the gameplay will be just as riveting. [U](#)

**James Oakwood**

### INFO

**Developer**  
Unfold Games

**Publisher**  
Unfold Games

**On**  
PC, PS4/5,  
Xbox Series

**Released**  
2024



WATCH IT







RELEASED  
2024

## Q&A DOGGY DON'T CARE

Imagine you're a dog with oodles of free time and a penchant for mischief. Got that? Okay, now imagine you're being given devious tasks to perform by your best mate. Who's a bird. That's the plot for *Doggy Don't Care*, and we spoke to its creator, Rohan Nowell.

**We're guessing it'll appeal to fans of *Untitled Goose Game*, but what other games influenced *Doggy Don't Care*?**

I loved *Untitled Goose Game* and have tried to create a similar feeling for this *Doggy Don't Care*, while making it unique and different. It's also inspired and influenced by *Banjo Kazooie* on the N64, with cheeky dialogue and a collectathon aspect to the game as well. It's a nice mix of destruction, collecting things, cheeky humour and puzzles.

**Any particular reason why you picked a pug as the star of the game?**

I'm aiming to keep the game minimalistic, and I found pugs to be a great choice to get the dog breed across visually to the player without adding too much detail.

**Tell us about the story behind the game? What is the overall objective?**

You're a cute dog left at home alone getting up to mischief. Your feathered friend Rocko has created some Mischievous Badges for you to earn by doing naughty things around the house. It's up to you to explore and discover what naughty things you can do in the interactive environment.

**So few games are genuinely funny, so what inspired you to create something that clearly is?**

I was working on a game before *Doggy Don't Care*, codenamed 'SOL', which was about processing grief. It's a personal and important game to me, but it became too heavy and depressing. I wanted something fresh, fun, positive, and even 'stupid' to make instead. So I threw a dog into a void and made him pee big yellow circles on the ground. It made me laugh and was already fun just running around doing that. I continued to build more mechanics on top of that and introduced items and objects which eventually evolved into a house.

It was so refreshing to laugh and enjoy playing my own game again, so I leaned further into the humour side of things and decided this will be a game about having fun and a laugh!

**What are some of the most outrageous things Doggy can do?**

You can break furniture, flush things down the toilet, and play the piano to name a few things. I want players to enjoy exploring the world and be surprised at some of the things they can do;



### INFO

**Developer**  
Rohan Nowell

**Publisher**  
Rohan Nowell

**On**  
PC

**Demo**  
Yes

rewarding them for thinking outside the box. I would love them to find some hidden easter egg tasks for being extra mischievous, so I will leave it up to the player to discover how silly and outrageous they can be.

**Is the whole game set around the house and garden, or does Doggy escape to the wider world?**

The player will definitely escape the house/garden, and I've already started building the second level which is set on a farm. This opens up a whole new world of possibilities, and a new feathered friend with more mischievous badges to collect!

It's a lot of fun introducing more animals to interact with, and I'm excited to introduce yet another level or two – possibly a museum, carnival, and/or zoo! 🐾



RELEASED  
24 OCT

# GUNS N' SORCERY

## DARK ENVOY DELIVERS AN RPG WITH PLENTY OF ACTION

**C**o-op adventure *Dark Envoy* uses tactical real-time combat to put the class in classic RPG, set in a conflict-torn world between magic and weaponry. So far so good, but we thought we'd take a closer look to see if it can tear us away from some of the more established titles.

You and a potential co-op partner play as a party of relic hunters embarking on a tale of destiny, as you dive into the depths of the ancient dungeons of Jään. Not a bad start, and *Dark Envoy* looks to bring classic RPG mechanics with a skill-based combat system with the foundation of classes and specialisations. Adept, Warrior, Engineer or Ranger, each class comes with extensive customisations to create a party your way. Develop your skills, improve your stats and prepare loadouts to master synergies on the battlefield.

It's fully playable alone or in online co-op, and you can take full advantage of the game's in-depth crafting system featuring research and enchantment.

With an emphasis on technology meeting magic head-to-head, you can control how you tackle combat scenarios. Plan carefully in either slow or pause combat from an isometric perspective to give yourself time to react to dynamic situations. Use the terrain to your advantage by separating your enemies from their support, and taking control of health and mana sources.

### THE BACK CATALOGUE

#### Tower of Time

A story-rich dungeon crawler with real-time combat and permadeath.

### INFO

**Developer**  
Event Horizon

**Publisher**  
Event Horizon

**On**  
PC

The enemies aren't pushovers however, as you'll be taking on the defence-based Imperial Infantry Corps, quick and offence-oriented Elves, and the aloof Shades, eternal Revenants protecting the tombs of their masters who left a millennia ago.

*Dark Envoy* looks to be an incredibly vast and expansive RPG with all the classic tropes from some of the best to do it. You won't have to wait too long to play it either, as the game releases this month, so get your spells ready and we'll see you in there. [T](#)

**Josh Thompson**



WATCH IT



RELEASED  
2024

# TAKE THE HIGH ROAD

## SING A HIGHLAND SONG ON A HIKE THROUGH STUNNING RURAL SCOTLAND

**K**nown for their immersive adventures like *Heaven's Vault* and *80 Days*, developers inkle are once again taking us into a world of rich, layered storytelling, this time set in the bleakly beautiful peaks and valleys of the Scottish Highlands.

Teenager Moira McKinnon knows every last stone, tree and crag in her corner of the Highlands. Eager to discover what lies beyond, a letter from her Uncle Hamish inviting her to his distant lighthouse is all the encouragement Moira needs to run away from her mother and home and embark on this daring adventure. Her dangerous journey has even been inspired by game director Joseph Humfrey's own chilling experience of survival while lost in the Highlands in his youth.

As Moira climbs, jumps and slides her way through the wild terrain, she battles with her stamina, the cold, wet

and windy weather and the small matter of which direction to head in next. The occasional discovery of map scraps and small clues keeps the story moving, while sheltered spots and resting restore energy.

Along the way there are echoes of history, long-forgotten ruins and intriguing inhabitants to discover. Brilliantly, there are also occasional action sprints involving rhythmic button tapping, accompanied by

### INFO

**Developer**  
inkle

**Publisher**  
inkle

**On**  
PC, Switch

the enchanting music of composer Laurence Chapman and Scottish Folk legends Talisk and Fourth Moon.

The world itself is built from layer upon layer of exquisitely drawn terrain, like paintings come to life, lending an almost dreamlike ambiance to the trip. Moira herself has been painstakingly hand-animated frame by frame, and pops pleasingly from her surroundings.

Banish the thought of linearity too, as there are multiple paths through the game, with discoveries to be made along each route.

Stashed items carry over into subsequent playthroughs too, opening up even more ways to tackle the trip.

*A Highland Song* is shaping up to be an adventure well worth taking when it's released in 2024.

With its open platforming, masterful storytelling and rhythmic gameplay, we should be in for a real treat when it arrives. [U](#)

Dan Morris



WATCH IT

# PAST PRESENT FUTURE

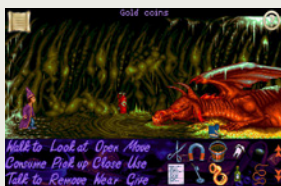
Where we ask someone who really knows their indie shiz about the first game they played that really stood out, what they're currently obsessed with and (yep, you guessed it) one title they're really looking forward to.

Hey all, I'm Roxy (A.K.A. Crafty Dragon on Twitch and YouTube). I am a variety streamer with a primary focus on indie games. I also enjoy making YouTube content showcasing indie games or their demos to give viewers a taste of what's to come. What I enjoy most about indie games is the variety, size and overall pace of the game. I often find large maps and long lists of main or side quests overwhelming, which often prevents me from being able to enjoy the overall game and experience in more mainstream titles.

Being a disabled and mostly housebound streamer, it's very important for me to be able to chat with my viewers throughout my streams. By playing indie games, I find I am able to continue chatting while still progressing through the games. I love spending time trying to work through puzzles with viewers or discussing past games that they are reminded of.

## PAST

My fondest gaming memories from my childhood were the hours lost playing *Simon the Sorcerer*. A point-and-click adventure game developed and published by Adventure Soft in 1993, it had me in stitches thanks to the voice acting of Chris Barrie – I was a huge *Red Dwarf* fan growing up, so I immediately levitated towards the game when it was released. The fairy-tale graphics, the confusing puzzles, and the dry humour were right up my street. This game started my love of point-and-click adventures.



## PRESENT

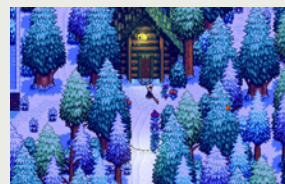
I recently played *Unpacking* and was blown away by the depth



of the storyline. To the casual observer this game involves you unpacking boxes as the protagonist moves to different places throughout their life. You unpack and arrange their stuff in the correct places, but once you are immersed in the game you see their life progress, and you can't help but feel happy as you see improvements for them. It's a wonderful little game that everyone should experience in my opinion.

## FUTURE

There are many amazing games on the horizon but the one myself and many others are waiting for with bated breath is *Haunted Chocolatier*. I have spent hundreds of hours in *Stardew Valley* and I can't wait to see what the devs has in store for us. Unfortunately, there is not a confirmed date for when this will be coming out but I know it will definitely be well worth the wait.



[www.twitch.tv/crafty\\_dragon](http://www.twitch.tv/crafty_dragon)  
[www.youtube.com/c/CraftyDragon](http://www.youtube.com/c/CraftyDragon)

RELEASED  
2023

# LIVE TO ROLL ANOTHER DAY

## ROLANDO DELUXE IS BACK TO TAKE THE THRONE

**P**reviously a flagship title on the mobile app store all the way back in 2008, *Rolando's* recent remake in 2019 – titled *Rolando: Royal Edition*, is taking the leap from our phones and onto the Steam store.

Completely remade in a new engine, *Rolando Deluxe* has kept all its endearing qualities while giving it a fresh coat of paint to make it the definitive version to play. The puzzle-platformer sees you taking control of each Rolando as you roll around the action-packed environments, with puzzles to solve and secrets to find. From the wall-climbing Spikey Commandos, the dozing King

Edward, the unlucky Prince Gladstone, and the mysterious Figmento, all of their abilities will be combined to take on the challenges that lie ahead.

The Rolando Kingdom also has an abundance of powerful Spirit Objects – special devices that aid your adventure. Forge magical bridges, deploy bomb cannons, manipulate light beams and more to support the Rolandos as they blast through rock formations and leap across treacherous chasms.

With a delightful world brought to life by Finnish artist Mikko Walamies, you'll be exploring the whimsical Honeycup Meadows, the frightful depths of Shadow Valley, as well as other diverse lands to save the wise sages from the clutches of the Shadows. Don't be fooled by the

### INFO

**Developer**  
HandCircus

**Publisher**  
HandCircus

**On**  
PC

world's wonderful aesthetics though, as each area presents a unique challenge for the adorable Rolandos. Are you ready to roll in and reclaim the kingdom? *Rolandos Deluxe* is coming Very soon to a Steam store near you. [👉](#)

Josh Thompson



WATCH IT



## THE BACK CATALOGUE

### Okabu

A platforming adventure where you guide a cloud whale to save the once-peaceful lands of Okabu.

## STUFF ENUFF – A GAME GUARANTEED TO LOSE YOU FRIENDS

Party games are clearly a popular genre at the moment – we put one on the ruddy cover, so they must be. One that cropped up on our radar recently was *Stuff Enuff*, a party game that the developers claim is 'designed to ruin friendships'.

Up to four players will be able to compete across a series of mini-games – Red Zebra Studios are hoping to have 50 games spread over three game boards.

You play as one of eight cute stuffed animals, but don't let that fool you as each one is aiming to rip the virtual stuffing out of anyone stupid enough to get within paw range.

Although it's still early in development, *Stuff Enuff* does sound like a lot of fun. [▶](#)  
James Oakwood

### INFO

**Developer**  
Red Zebra Studios

**Publisher**  
Red Zebra Studios

**On**  
PC, Consoles



WATCH IT

# THE RIGHT STUFF

RELEASED  
TBC

We don't make pizza  
But we do make games



Feed your consoles new cartridges and pixels



[megacatstudios.com](http://megacatstudios.com)



[discord.gg/megacat](https://discord.gg/megacat)

# THE HUB

## HOUSE FLIPPER 2





# BUILD IT YOUR WAY

## MAKE THE HOUSE OF YOUR DREAMS IN HOUSE FLIPPER 2

Another genre clearly in vogue at the moment is the clean/mend-'em-up – basically games that let you repair, clean or renovate stuff. *PowerWash Simulator* may well be one of the best, but 2018's *House Flipper* was a close second.

This sequel introduces a whole raft of improvements. The graphics have been updated, and you can now build a house from scratch – recreate the flat from *Friends*, your own house or your dream pad, the choices are pretty much endless. You can also now share your houses with your mates, recycle rubbish, repair roofs and paint walls square-by-square.

*House Flipper* was a game you could easily lose days to, and we suspect the sequel will be even harder to put down. [Q](#)

Dean Mortlock

### INFO

**Developer**  
Empyrean

**Publisher**  
Frozen District

**On**  
PC

**Released**  
December 14



WATCH IT





RELEASE  
TBC

# THE WAY OF WATER

## IT'S TIME TO CLEAN UP THE PLANET, **LODDLENAUT** STYLE

**W**hen you think about it, few games have tackled the climate crisis to a significant degree, but that's all about to change with *Loddlenaut*, a game that sends you to a polluted ocean planet for the mother of all clean-up campaigns.

The problem when game designers get bogged down trying to shoehorn a serious message into their gameplay is that the end result can be a bit of a mess. Luckily here though, the developers, Moon Lagoon, have made sure that the point they're making is wrapped up in some delightfully playable locations.

*Loddlenaut* started life as an NYU Game Center thesis project by two programmers. After graduating in 2020, they set up Moon Lagoon and transformed the game into a full commercial release.

Here you play as an 'interstellar custodian', an environmental warrior who's called out to the planet GUP-14 to clean up its oceans after it's been abandoned by a polluting corporation. Rubbish is scattered liberally, and oil spills cover both the ocean bed and plant life,

and this also needs to be cleaned up – do so, and the plants are rejuvenated, and burst back into blooming health.

Variety is important in any game to keep it fresh, and as you progress through the various locations on GUP-14, you're able to unlock new gadgets that enable you to recycle/clean up new items. In some parts of the game you'll be picking up rubbish with your bubble gun before dropping it in the correct recycling bin, and in others you'll be zapping waste from plants in gameplay that reminded me of *PowerWash Simulator*.

But there's more. During your ocean-based explorations, you'll encounter the indigenous underwater population known as 'loddles'. You start by rescuing them, and then, after cleaning up their habitat, you can release them back into the wild.

### INFO

**Developer**  
Moon Lagoon

**Publisher**  
Secret Mode

**On**  
PC

We were lucky enough to play *Loddlenaut* recently, and there's some smart gameplay mechanics at work here, as well as a genuine sense of achievement when you clean up one of the locations. One to watch. [▶](#)  
**Dean Mortlock**



WATCH IT



TIME: 00:00:000

BEST: ---:---:---

RD: 166666:39:000

RELEASED  
2023

# GENTLEMEN, START YOUR ENGINES

## WE'RE RACING BACK TO THE ARCADES WITH **SP GP**

**T**his is a game we've had our eye on for some time now. In fact, we first reached out to *SP GP*'s creator, Ross Pateman – better known online as Rozz Games – back in May. Now though, with the game about to be released, it's finally time to start getting excited – especially those with a passion for '90s arcade racers.

I would imagine there are few readers scanning this page that didn't automatically picture *Virtua Racing*'s super-smooth tracks and polygonal cars, and that's obviously been one of the largest influences on *SP GP*. And that's no bad thing at all.

*SP GP* has been the main project of solo developer Ross for some time now, and we've loved following the game's progress on Twitter – scan the QR code on this page to go straight to his page. Ross has uploaded regular videos showing the game's development, including both the good and the bad. And as impressive as the screenshots on this page are, it's nothing compared to when you actually see it moving.

Y'see, *SP GP* is both fast and very smooth. Try to imagine *Virtua Racing* blended with *Burnout* and running at a silky-smooth framerate, and you'd be getting fairly close.

We spoke to Ross a few days before deadline to find out more about his plans for the game, and it looks like *SP GP* will launch with Early Access some time in October – and for a very reasonable price. Initially the game will come with eight tracks, a full arcade mode and also a championship mode as well. You will also be able to pick from one of 15 different cars, all of which are individually tuned.

*SP GP* will be updated regularly to hopefully feature over 40 tracks, a VR

### INFO

**Developer**  
Rozz Games

**Publisher**  
Rozz Games

**On**  
PC

mode and online multiplayer as well.

As someone with a long history with SEGA and a personal love of their driving games, I

really couldn't be more excited about this one. [📺](#)

Dean Mortlock



WATCH IT



# THE HUB

FOLKLANDS // BIRD WATCHING SIMULATOR



RELEASE  
TBA

## SETTLING DOWN

### THERE'S ANOTHER SETTLEMENT THAT NEEDS DEVELOPING IN **FOLKLANDS**

Settlement games are pretty common on PC, but *Folklands* was created as a digital homage to classics in the series, such as *Age of Empires* and *Settlers*.

Gameplay is much as you would expect, so you develop your settlement by farming the land, managing your resources and keeping everyone generally happy and healthy.

You can play online too, and build up trade routes to increase your town's wealth a bit quicker.

*Folklands* is definitely a game that grows on you the more effort you put in. There's a demo on Steam, where you can also follow the game's development through devlogs. [📄](#)

**James Oakwood**

#### INFO

**Developer**  
Bromantic  
Games

**Publisher**  
Tribal-Storm

**On**  
PC

**Demo**  
Yes



WATCH IT

Lit Show

### FANCY A MORE CALMING GAMING EXPERIENCE? HOW ABOUT **BIRD WATCHING SIMULATOR?**

No, it's true. It really is a game where you watch birds. In *Bird Watching Simulator* you live in a city obsessed with our feathered chums – so much so that people are queuing up to buy your photos of the local ave population.

You sell your pictures and then you can use that money to upgrade your own aviary, or just buy food for the birds. You need to keep an eye on the sky though, as random birds spawn roughly every minute, and if you're ever going to complete your own collection, then you'll need to spot the rarest ones.

We're looking forward to playing this one. [📄](#)  
**James Oakwood**



WATCH IT

#### INFO

**Developer**  
HeathenJeff

**Publisher**  
The Reef  
Production Co.

**On**  
PC

## WATCH THE BIRDIE

RELEASED  
TBA



RELEASED  
2023

# GATEKEEPING FOR FUN AND PROFIT

## LIL' GUARDSMAN – A MODERN TAKE ON THE BORDER SIM

**T**he developers of *Lil' Guardsman* describe their upcoming game as a comical fantasy blend of *Papers, Please* and classic adventure games like *The Secret of Monkey Island*. Those are big boots to fill, but by the time I've finished the game's demo I completely understand the comparison.

The 'narrative deduction game' opens with its 12-year-old protagonist, Lil, dropped into the hot seat as the city's head guardsman. From there, it's up to Lil to interview would-be visitors and to either deny them access or allow them to pass into the city.

More than 100 distinct characters come knocking, each with their own story and reasons for visiting. Some are harmless and honest, like the granny delivering muffins to her son. Others, such as the 'wizard' – who is quite obviously two goblins in a robe – have more nefarious intentions.

The player uses dialogue choice and a toolkit of items (such as truth spray, a bullwhip, and an X-ray scanner) to

navigate the often-hilarious encounters. As the story grows, so do the consequences of our conversations and decisions, and the way we experience the kingdom. Soon Lil is given freedom to explore whimsical locales beyond the guard shack – the local tavern, the coliseum, the docks, and more.

These spaces, and the characters who inhabit them, are dense and rich, brought to life by the game's distinctive hand-drawn cartoon style, which melds 1980s retro tech with all the right fantasy tropes.

As someone who grew up playing classic point-'n'-click adventure games, *Lil' Guardsman* feels like a lovingly made modern refresh of the genre. If

### INFO

**Developer**  
Hilltop Studios

**Publisher**  
Versus Evil

**On**  
PC, PS4/5,  
Xbox, Switch

the demo is an accurate measure of what to expect, (amazing art, endearing characters, clever gameplay and plenty of laughs), I think

we could be in for something rather special. [U](#)

**James Tocchio**




WATCH IT



# THE HUB

## STORIES FROM SOL: THE GUN-DOG

RELEASED  
2024



Dylan  
Oh, hey, lieutenant, how's it going?

## Q&A STORIES FROM SOL: THE GUN-DOG

Last issue we took a quick look at Space Colony Studios' first game, *Stories from Sol: The Gun-Dog*, but since then we've had the chance to play the demo. We liked what we played, so spoke to the game's creative director, Jonathan Durham, to find out more.

### As this is Space Colony Studios' first game, can you briefly explain how the team got together?

The original plan was that I'd do everything on my own, however I quickly found that I didn't have the skill to achieve what I wanted *Gun-Dog* to be. I was lucky enough to recruit our composer, Daniel, and pixel artist/ animator, Kevin, on Twitter while our programmer, Ben, is actually my brother-in-law! I had to do some convincing to show that *Gun-Dog* was more than a pipe dream to get the guys on board but we all came together pretty quickly after that.

### And was it clear from the start what type of game you were going to make?

Definitely. *Gun-Dog* originally started life as a TTRPG which I ran for some friends that never quite took off, leaving me with a lot of ideas for the characters and setting, as well as the rough design for a narrative. As I've always had a soft spot for visual novel/graphic adventure games, it seemed obvious that the best place to realise these ideas was in a narrative-focused game.

### We love the retro graphical style. What was the thinking behind that?

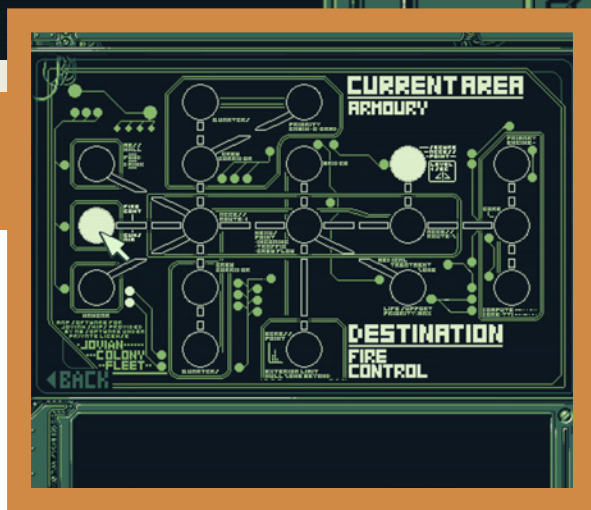
I've always been inspired by how striking pixel art can be, and as *Gun-Dog* takes place in a retro-future setting, I decided to take inspiration from the games that came out in the '80s/'90s for the PC-98. The games on this platform are the epitome of retro Japanese pixel art, so we borrowed a lot from their general art style and presentation.

### And why the green monochrome look in particular?

To tie things further in to the retro-future aesthetic, the decision was made to go with monochrome green as a callback to the single-colour phosphorescent monitors that you'd get in older science fiction movies.

### We suspect the influences on the game are many, but what were the main ones?

*Gun-Dog*'s a real love letter to lots of things so if we had to tell you all the inspirations we'd be here all day! The big ones though are graphic



## INFO

**Developer**  
Space Colony Studios


**Publisher**  
Astrolabe Games

**On**  
PC

**Demo**  
Yes

adventure games, particularly Hideo Kojima's *Snatcher* and *Policenauts*, '70s and '80s sci-fi movies like *Alien*, *Blade Runner* and *The Thing*, and then mecha anime like *Mobile Suit Gundam*, *Martian Successor Nadesico* and *Macross*.

### This is the first in a series of *Stories from Sol* games. Can you tell us more about future plans?

A big part of *Gun-Dog* has been about paying tribute to our inspirations, and there's a lot out there that we haven't touched yet. We've got plans to explore a lot of different settings, and we also want to utilise different types of mechanics and gameplay, as well as going bigger and better in terms of content and presentation. If you like what we do in *Gun-Dog* then there will definitely be more for you in upcoming games! 



# GUN-DOG

The war is over.  
But war was just the beginning.  
機動戦艦ガンドッグ



# STORIES FROM SOL GUN-DOG

It's time to get on board and set sail for danger, adventure and romance amongst the stars in Stories from Sol: The Gun-Dog, the first visual novel / graphic adventure from Space Colony Studios (@ColonyCreations)

A narrative rich experience with a focus on exploration and social interaction, Stories from Sol: The Gun-Dog is a love letter to classic science fiction and Japanese animation.

Take on the role of ship's security officer on the JFS Gun-Dog as it is sent to investigate mysterious signals coming from beyond Jupiter. As an unknown danger threatens the crew, can you save them from it? As camaraderie breaks down and paranoia breaks out, can you save them from themselves?

Rendered in a monitor busting 640 x 400 resolution, Gun-Dog features a state of the art command based point and click adventure system, allowing players to get closer to the action than ever before.

# THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

## THE QUESTION IS: WHAT WOULD I DO WITH **THE TIME I HAVE LEFT?**

**T**he premise for *The Time I Have Left* is both simple and chilling: 'In 6 Hours You Will Be Dead'. This is what greets you as you start playing the game, controlling Aline, a character suddenly marked for death by a mysterious phenomenon known only as 'The Miasma'.

An action-RPG (with the emphasis on 'action'), you navigate Aline around a seemingly deserted city trying to uncover the truth behind The Miasma – and obviously hoping to extend your life by, oh I don't know, 40 years or so.

*The Time I Have Left* caught our attention in a number of ways. The story, obviously, but watch the trailer for yourself, and you'll see that the style and attention to detail is outstanding throughout. One for your Wishlist say us. [U](#)

Dean Mortlock

### INFO

**Developer**  
GROUND  
Game Atelier

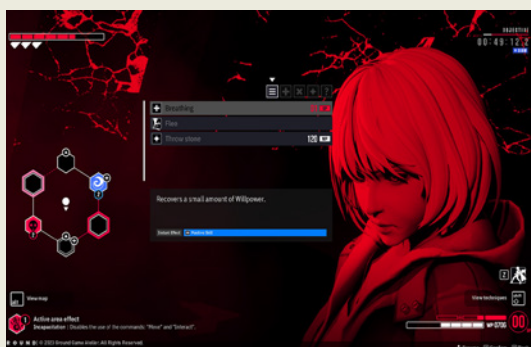
**Publisher**  
GROUND  
Game Atelier

**On**  
PC

**Released**  
2024

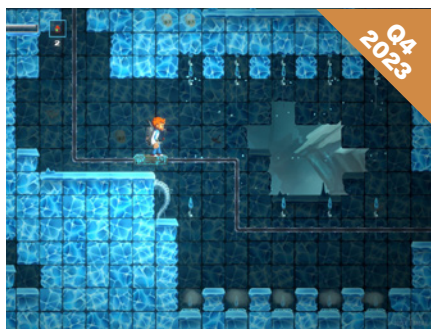


WATCH IT









Q4  
2023

### KLAUS LEE – THUNDERBALLS

**Developer** NUKLEAR **Publisher** Assemble Entertainment  
**On** PC, Mac, Switch **Demo** PC

Here's a retro-style platformer that has its tongue very firmly placed in its cheek – go and check out the *Klaus Lee – Thunderballs* Steam page and you'll see what we mean.

Behind all that though, there does appear to be a pretty good game. Like us, you're probably getting *Rick Dangerous* vibes, but *Klaus* has also got plenty of tricks of his own, too. You're looking at 100 or so levels, all manner of devilish enemies and puzzles, and – best of all – the game comes with a custom level creator.



TBC

### SIMPLER TIMES

**Developer** stoneskip. **Publisher** iam8bit  
**On** PC **Demo** Yes

The story goes that one half of the stoneskip. team decided to digitally recreate his room during the lockdown. He shared the results, people liked it, and so development on *Simpler Times* began.

The lead character, Taina, is leaving home for university, and as she packs, childhood memories are triggered. There are lots of objects in Taina's bedroom, and many are interactive – you can browse books, take photos, listen to music and even paint a picture. And there's a demo too, which we suggest you download ASAP.



TBC

### ASTROMETICA

**Developer** BeryMery  
**Publisher** RockGame S.A **On** PC

Essentially, *Astrometica* is a survival game set in space. It's just you, a handful of tools and items, and the infinite blackness of space in all directions.

Just floating around in space wouldn't make the most riveting gameplay though, so you'll quickly discover that in order to survive you'll need to collect resources – the more you collect then the more you can build, from tools and items to a complete base.

There are some original touches here, and we're keeping everything crossed that the gameplay does them justice.



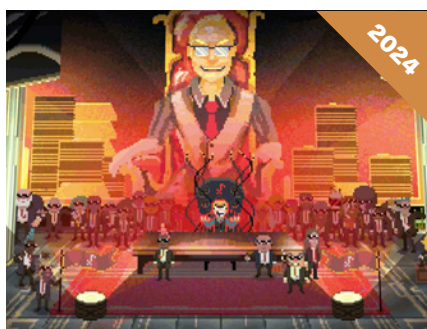
OCT  
2023

### STRAY SOULS

**Developer** Jukai Studio **Publisher** Versus Evil  
**On** PC, PS4/5, Xbox Series

Bless Daniel's dear old granny. She's popped off and left him her entire house, and the only possible thing that could rain on his parade is if said house is some sort of conduit to every freakishly unappealing demon that ever slid out of the depths of Hell itself. Bugger...

*Stray Souls* is looking rather impressive to be fair. The clips we've seen look genuinely pretty terrifying, and the graphics have that super-lovely I've-been-made-in-Unreal-Engine-5 look about them. Best of all, it should be out around Halloween.



2024

### FRETLESS – THE WRATH OF RIFFSON

**Developer** Ritual Studios  
**Publisher** Playdigious Originals **On** PC

If there was ever going to be an official Tenacious D game then we suspect it would play a bit like *Fretless*. It's basically an RPG set in the world of ROCK, where your character – simply known as Rob – must battle the wonderfully named Rick Riffson and his evil minions.

Your weapon is your instrument, which is fully customisable, and combat is rhythm-based and looks hugely enjoyable. We honestly wouldn't be surprised if this ended up being enormous amounts of fun.



TBC

### SCARLET DEER INN

**Developer** Attu Games  
**Publisher** Attu Games **On** PC

*Scarlet Deer Inn* is a narrative-based platformer that doesn't look unlike *A Highland Song* in motion. The difference here though is that all the characters are actually embroidered!

As you can see in the image above, that also extends to speech bubbles too, although the game's impressive backgrounds are all hand-drawn.

Attu Games are a husband and wife team that do everything themselves – from the embroidery to the painting, animation and soundtrack.

I gotta clean up this mess.

Looks like you're stuck fixing up that ship.

Grab the hose next to the bell and put this shit out.

RELEASED  
2024

# BUILD A ROCKET BOYS

## IT'S DEFINITELY A JOB FOR LIFE AT UNCLE CHOP'S ROCKET SHOP

**W**hile it might feel comforting to know that, you should probably read the small print under 'repercussions if position isn't fulfilled to a satisfying degree' before signing the contract, as the role of Lead Service Engineer at Uncle Chop's Rocket Shop isn't a job for the faint-hearted.

If you're wondering how we pick the games that make up The Hub each issue then it's a variety of things. There's a mixture of titles from larger indie publishers/developers, the solo-developed stuff (as well as games from smaller teams) and the quirky gems that are often completely original and beautifully designed. What they all have in common though, is that we think they're games you'll want to hear more about. *Uncle Chop's Rocket Shop* is a game that fits very neatly in the 'quirky gems' category.

So what are we dealing with here? Okay, so you play as Wilbur, a Fox who works at a service station repairing spaceships for the evil (and we mean

really evil) Uncle Chop. You see, if Wilbur has a bad day then he won't get a snide telling off by the boss, but will instead be exterminated – and in a number of increasingly inventive ways.

Your job is to simply make sure that Wilbur has a good day, and every day. There are a number of spaceships to fix each shift, and each one has a specific manual. Read the manual, follow the instructions and complete the tasks via

### INFO

**Developer**  
Beard Envy

**Publisher**  
Kasedo Games

**On**  
PC, PS4/5,  
Xbox Series,  
Switch

a series of fun mini games. If you've played *Keep Talking and Nobody Explodes* then it's a bit like that – with spaceships instead of bombs, and just the one player.

*Uncle Chop's Rocket Shop* is funny throughout, with a definite dark edge to the humour. And it's that, coupled with some genuine inventiveness in the mini games, that piqued our interest. It'll be out some time in 2024 on PC, PS5, Xbox and Switch, and we're already looking forward to getting our hands on it for review. [U](#)

Dean Mortlock

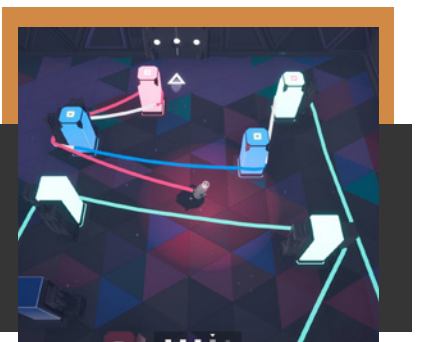


WATCH IT

## THE BACK CATALOGUE

### Filament

A super-tough puzzler with a cracking story. This one will keep you absorbed for weeks.



RELEASE  
TBC

# A RITE OF PASSAGE

## WILL PHABULA GAMES' HEXRITE PUT A SPELL ON YOU?

It's still relatively early days for *Hexrite*, but we were contacted by Phabula Games and offered the opportunity to take a closer look at the game they were working on and jumped at the chance. Our conclusion? There's definitely potential here.

*Hexrite*, in its most basic form, is a third-person action-adventure game. And we're fully aware that there's no shortage of those, but the trailer for the game – which you can view by scanning the QR code – clearly shows off some neat gameplay touches that reassure us that *Hexrite* is definitely a game with promise.

You play the role of a sorcerer who, unsurprisingly, is on a quest (they're always on a quest). They need to complete an ancient ritual, but on the way to discovering said ritual, they'll navigate varied landscapes, meet all manner of peculiar characters, and probably kill quite a bit of stuff, too.

Being a sorcerer, magic is obviously an important part of the gameplay, and there are dozens of spells to collect in the game. From summoning magical portals

to freezing time, there's no set way to dispatch your enemies. You can be as creative as you like, and *Hexrite* gives you the tools to do just that. Spells can also be upgraded, which is something you'll need to carefully manage to take on the bigger bosses that you come across.

Then there are also Auras, powerful magical domes that alter the state of the area around you. So, for example, you could summon a poisonous cloud or turn the floor into a slippery field. These Auras, combined with the range of spells at your disposal, should make combat a huge amount of fun.

If you can imagine a *Souls*-like but a bit lighter on the touch, and with quicker gameplay, then that's pretty close to what you can expect from *Hexrite*.

The vibrant graphics and smooth

### INFO

**Developer**  
Phabula  
Games

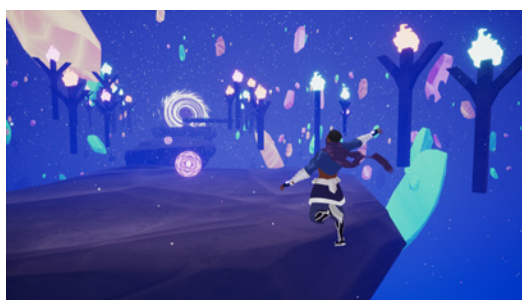
**Publisher**  
TBC

**On**  
TBC

gameplay indicate to us a game that looks to be a blend of RPG, action-adventure game and platformer, and although there's still a way to go to its release, we're hammering the Watchlist button and suggest you do the same. [▶](#)  
**Dean Mortlock**



WATCH IT





# debugdiscord

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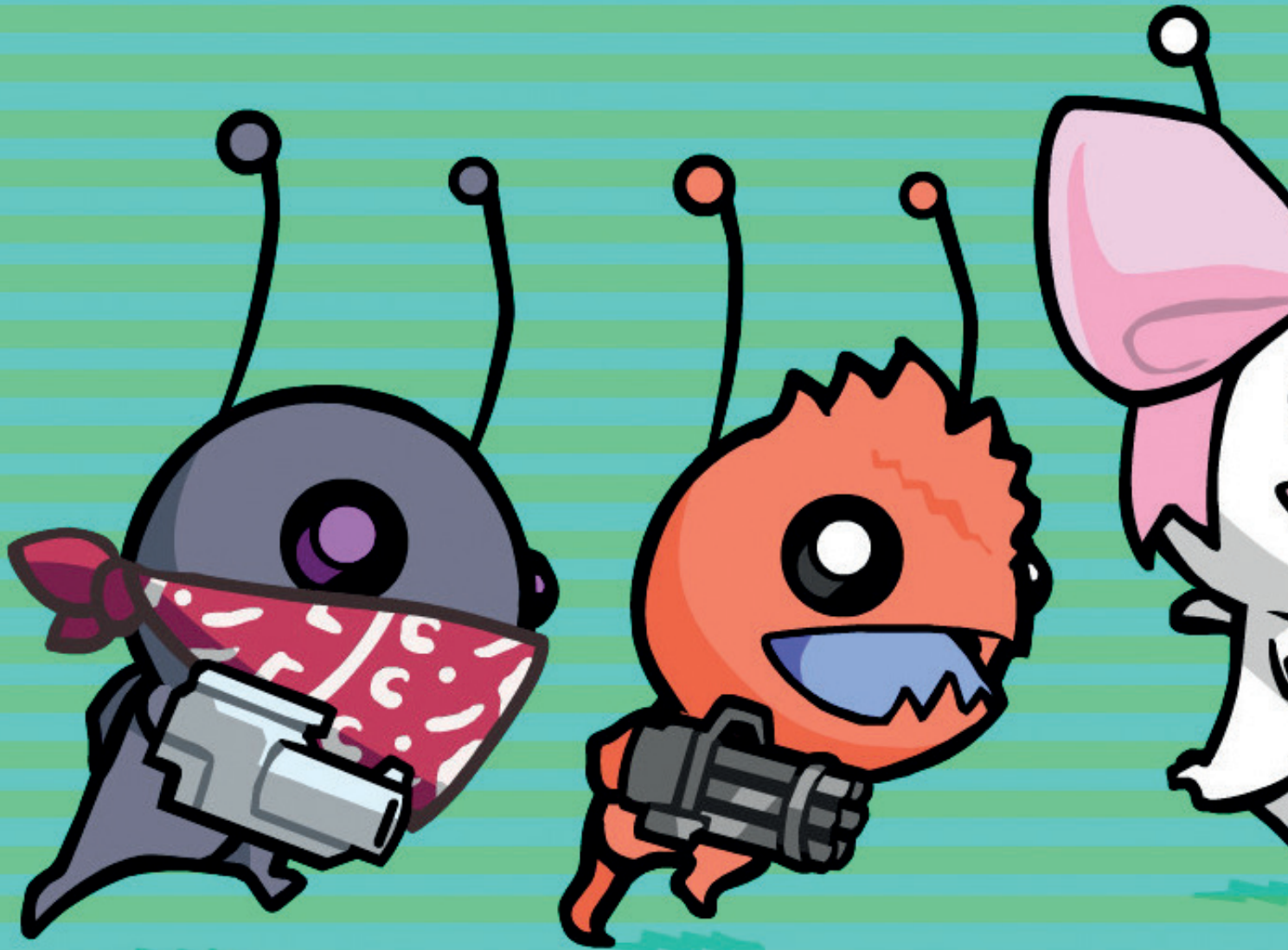
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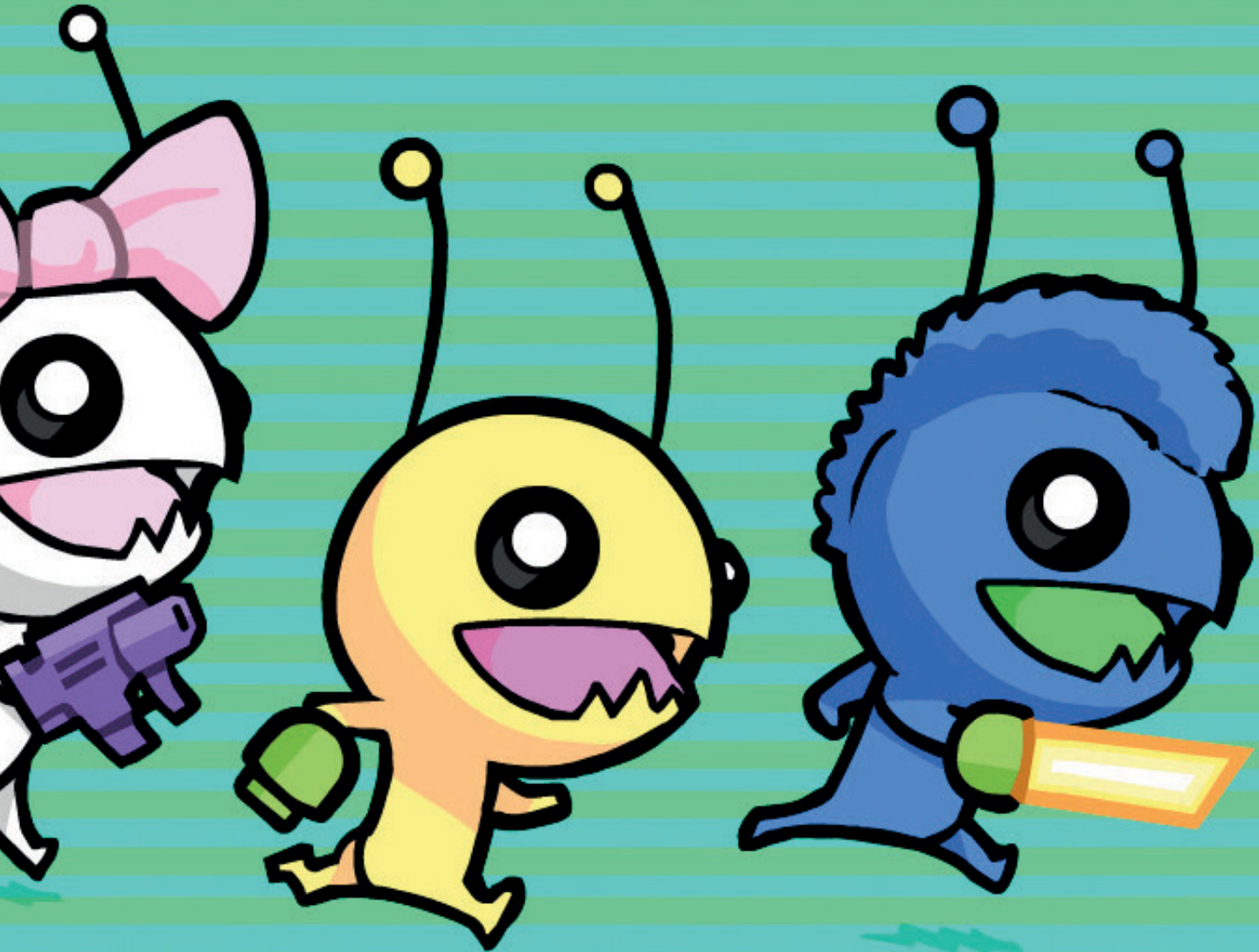
# DEBUG IS INFILTRATING THE

# ALIEN



It's been 20 years since *The Behemoth* formed, and the award-winning developer is celebrating by looking back to where it all began. Its latest game, due later this year, is *Alien Hominid Invasion*, a reimagining of its first release.

# BEHEMOTH TO UNCOVER AN BREACH



**A**lien Hominid was released on just about every platform going when it crash-landed on Earth in 2004. A tough-as-nails run-'n'-gun, that garnered a cult status, it was the springboard needed for developers The Behemoth to come into being. But we need to go even further back, to August 2002, to uncover *Alien Hominid's* true roots. The concept was first released as a browser game on the Newgrounds website and mustered an impressive 20 million plays.

The Behemoth have described it as 'Alien Hominid Prototype' as it consists of just one level and two bosses.

Following Prototype's success, The Behemoth was founded when John Baez, who had played the game, discussed developing it into a fully-fledged title with its creators Dan Paladin and Tom Fulp and then spent the next two years developing *Alien Hominid*.

They kept the basic principles of the browser game but everything was rebuilt from the ground up. The game was developed for consoles and mobile devices, and enjoyed a HD remaster on Xbox 360 in 2007.

*Alien Hominid* was well-received by critics at the time and still plays well today, but The Behemoth moved on to other projects. That was until recently when a reimagining of the original game was announced by the team. The new version features lots of new gameplay mechanics, such as a health bar instead of instant death. There's also a focus on four-player action as well as larger levels with different routes. After we sampled the demo we tracked down The Behemoth and have been lucky enough to speak to the devs about this hotly anticipated return of a classic.



**For starters, please tell us who you are and what you do at The Behemoth.**

Hello, these answers have been sourced by a few different people:

**John Baez** – Company President and co-founder.

**Dan Paladin** – Lead Artist and also co-founder.

**What made you want to revisit *Alien Hominid* all these years later?**

**Dan Paladin:** With the original *Alien Hominid* only available on older gaming consoles, our latest project began with the idea of bringing our alien pal to today's gaming systems. During this process, we quickly shifted focus to the creation of an entirely new game, developed with modern gameplay mechanics that highlight the skills our team has learned throughout the history of our studio.

**You've described it as a reimagining, so why did you take this direction instead of a sequel?**

**Dan Paladin:** Typically, The Behemoth doesn't make sequels or revisit old titles, so *Invasion* is the first time we're really doing this. It's not that we're entirely against sequels, but if we were to make one, we'd want to have a unique spin on the original story and introduce fresh game mechanics.

In this case, we wanted to show off what *Alien Hominid* would be like if it was created today, hence being called a reimagining of the original. At the same time though, *Invasion* will give insight on what happened to the original alien, where the agents came from, and more on the story of the original. So is it a sequel or a reimagining? Probably somewhere in the middle!

**What improvements to the gameplay can we expect in *Invasion*?**

*Invasion* is a lot different than the first *Alien Hominid* game, which was originally developed in 2002 on Flash for Newgrounds. Because of this, it may be better to highlight the differences in game mechanics rather than improvements.

In *Invasion*, the alien has a health bar compared to the original's one-shot kill mechanic. Coupled with three difficulty options available to the player, this makes fighting and progressing in *Invasion* a little easier. Players will also have much more customisation options in the new title, being able to choose the alien's head, pigment, gun, mutation, and extra boosts.

Up to four players can join forces in *Invasion* (as opposed to two player co-op in the original), and each player will be able to choose their own difficulty level, regardless of what their friends choose.

*Invasion* also introduces a non-linear approach that allows players to choose their own path of destruction. While navigating the map, alien teams can choose certain hazards or enemy swarms to approach or avoid, in addition to seeking out bonus levels or hideouts to secure loot.

**You've kept the same visual style. Why was this, and was there any temptation to try something different?**

**Dan Paladin:** People generally tend to be happy with the way

our games look, so I haven't had an urge to change the style of the graphics. We also have a bit of brand recognition at this point, because when someone sees our games they immediately know what company made the thing. Sure, I've thought about what some of our games might look like done differently, but The Behemoth tone is really all about that dumb goofy fun with your friends, and the art style supports that kind of angle. Who knows, though?

**There is now a big emphasis on multiplayer. How did your previous games influence this new direction?**

Our games have always been heavily influenced by going to the arcade, spending the night using all of grandma's quarters, and having a blast with your best friends. This is seen in both how the game is stylised and in the multiplayer aspect – except this time you don't have to spend all of grandma's change. All of our games are programmed to support local co-op to show our appreciation for playing games in real life with your pals.

**What are the main challenges in bringing back a series for a new generation of gamers?**

**Dan Paladin:** I'm not sure if there are more challenges or benefits, really. On one hand we have a baseline to work from, experiences to reference, and recognition of our characters. At the same time there are also expectations to meet, nostalgia goggles, etc. As creators we like to revisit things in a fresh way, which can potentially conflict with those expectations. Enough has changed in gaming that there are certain ways a game needs to be made now to meet the new standards, which doesn't allow simple revisitation, and that's exactly how we like it.

**You've been travelling a lot to showcase the game, how does it feel connecting with gamers around the world?**

**John Baez:** Connecting with our fans has always been a major part of developing games at The Behemoth. When we went to our first Comic Con with the original *Alien Hominid* in 2003, we had a 10x10 booth with a PC, emulator, and PlayStation 2 controller. We had crazy long lines of fans who thought what we were doing was so cool, which gave us an incredible morale boost as a new indie studio. We've engrained going to shows and meeting fans into the very core of our company ever since.

**What has the feedback been like so far?**

**Dan Paladin:** There are some interesting things regarding feedback of *Alien Hominid Invasion*. I think the biggest surprise was how much people wanted gore to be present. I never really heard anyone mention gore when talking about the original *Alien Hominid HD*, just the difficulty and style really. So I didn't assume it was very important to the audience. However, as soon as we showed the new gameplay, about 25-30% of the comments were all about how there wasn't any gore, and how that was disappointing. So we took the time to give the people what they wanted – there was a lot to go through! Thankfully, after having a demo at PAX and multiple demos online, we've tuned the game based on these thousands of notes and observations.

**When can we expect to see it released?**

We don't have an announced release date yet, but the game is coming this year. 📅

“ IS IT A SEQUEL OR A REIMAGINING? PROBABLY SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDDLE ”



# HEAD BANGERS

## RHYTHM ROYALE



**PRE-ORDER NOW**  
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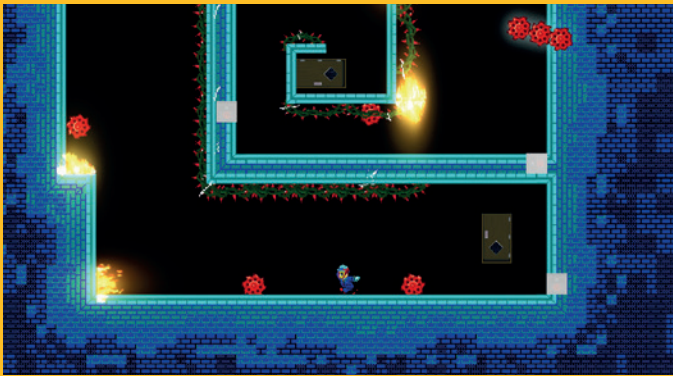


**WORDS**  
DEAN MORTLOCK

# HORACE



“I rarely get charmed by a game, and *Horace* charmed me completely”



I'll start this essay, and it definitely is an essay, with a confession. *Horace* is a relatively new game to me. Bragging rights in videogames are the same as music – it's so much cooler when you can say you were there from the start – but it wasn't until I read Stuart Gipp's review of *Horace* in issue one that my curiosity was piqued.

I'd heard of the game obviously, and I knew that it was considered a fine example of independent gaming, but our first five-star review? Really? So, skip forward a week or so and I find myself in the enviable position of having the house to myself for a week. The big TV came into the office and I had a shop-fresh copy of *Hogwarts Legacy* to plunge into. Life was good, and I was about to get all expelliarmus-y over anything stupid enough to wander into the path of my wand.

Before that though, I thought I'd tackle the second opinion on the *Horace* myself. After all, Stuart gave it five stars and this is a man who knows his shit, so it was installed and loaded before *Hogwarts Legacy* had the time to dust off the Sorting Hat...

The thing about *Horace* that doesn't always get a fair airing in reviews is just how bloody funny it is. This is never more apparent than in the first five minutes of the game. In a cut-scene narrated by Horace himself, he's explaining how his creator is uploading software to his system. The screen shows the list of programs being added, which included *Deluxe Paint II*, *The Last Ninja*, and my personal favourite, *Emlyn Hughes International Soccer*. Sure, this will mainly appeal to gamers of a certain age, but that brief sequence set the tone perfectly for what was to come. Peppered throughout the 15 hours of gameplay are multiple zingers and more Easter eggs than a Tesco warehouse in January.

Every level is packed with character cameos, cultural references and massive, muscle-spraining nods to videogame classics, including *Final Fantasy*, André the Giant, *The Golden*

*Girls*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and a whole level where every NPC is a character from a US sitcom.

But all that is just a wonderful shine enveloping the multitude of pleasures under the hood. At its heart, *Horace* is a pixel art platformer – in the sense that you move along platforms, collect stuff, avoid other stuff and generally avoid the sweet release of a digital death. So why this game? What makes this one so special? Well, as someone who's played not only my own fair share of videogames but possibly also yours too, I rarely get charmed by a game, and *Horace* charmed me completely. It's rare to see something that superficially is another entry into a well-supported genre, but is actually so much more than that on so many other levels.

Every stage feels different. The overarching objective in the game is to collect a metric ton of rubbish, but it's all done so beautifully that even though you'll die multiple times on certain sections, it never feels like a chore to replay any of them.

Every enemy placement, every platform, NPC or spinning instrument of death feels like it's exactly where it should be. It's like the developers spent months tweaking their placement to ensure that each level was tricky but never tricky enough to put you off. Which they probably did.

So where was I? Oh yes, week off. Big TV. *Hogwarts Legacy*. But I never did take that trip to Hogwarts that week. I eventually did, and it was fine, but *Horace* captivated me from the opening scenes through to the end-game sequence. Five stars? Too bloody right.





**debug**  
**GAME OF THE MONTH**

**COCOON**

We had high hopes for this one, and it delivered on every count.

- ★☆☆☆☆ ROTTEN
- ★★☆☆☆ FLAWED
- ★★★☆☆ GOOD
- ★★★★☆ WISHLIST
- ★★★★★ ESSENTIAL

- 46 Sea of Stars
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- 55 The Many Pieces of Mr. Co
- 56 Everspace 2

- 57 Station to Station
- 58 Kentucky Route Zero
- 59 Boti Byteland: Overclocked
- 60 Full Void
- 61 Ad Infinitum
- 62 Girl Genius
- 63 The Repair House
- 64 Solar Ash
- 65 WrestleQuest



**GUEST REVIEWER**  
**DAN MORRIS**

After starting a PlayStation fanzine in 1997, Dan went on to run the Rock and Metal mag *Satan's FishTank* for most of the 2000s before jumping back into gaming with a YouTube channel. But please don't hold that against him.



## SEA OF STARS TAKES AIM AT THE RPGS OF YESTERYEAR, BUT CAN IT BETTER THEM?

**A**s the sparkling chip-tune notes ring out from *Sea of Stars*' title screen, you're already preparing for a journey into gaming's past. A classically styled JRPG with beautiful 16-bit era visuals, you could mistake it for a missing SNES cart, while its tale of the past – narrated by the mysterious Archivist – continues that sense of a bygone age. A legend centring on conflict and conviction – doesn't it always? – may cement the feeling that you've seen this all before, but *Sea of Stars* breaks out of its genre conventions to deliver a thoroughly modern RPG that balances its nostalgia like the glimmering blades of its protagonists.

The two central characters, **Zale and Valere**, are embarking upon their final test to become **Solstice Warriors [1]**, an admired and deified order of fighters that protect the land. While they play into every heroic fantasy, there's an immediate sense that there's something rotten about this supposed honour, with two older Solstice Warriors worrying over your selection from the off.

As you set out to undo the **Fleshmancer's** hideous work, this is a tale that's thoroughly well told, with unexpected twists, characters you'll care about, and a wry sense of humour that hits most of the targets it takes aim at. Like *Paper Mario* and *South Park: Stick of Truth*, ***Sea of Stars* takes classic turn-based combat and twists it into a more action-packed form [2]**, so your attacks gain extra

**LIKE THIS?  
TRY THESE...**

**Chained Echoes**  
Another incredibly well-designed 16-bit RPG adventure.



INFO

Developer  
Sabotage Studio

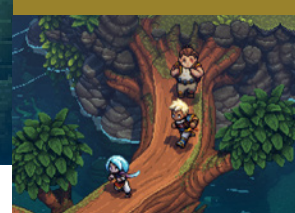
Publisher  
Sabotage Studio

Price  
£29.50

Released  
August 29

On  
PC (tested), PS4/5,  
Xbox Series, Switch

Demo  
Yes



SECOND  
OPINION

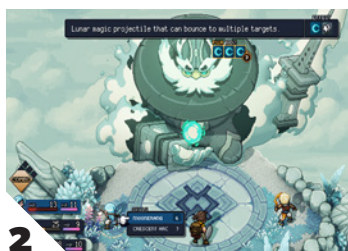
Sea of Stars is an excellent game, and I know this because role-playing games are a genre that I've only casually dipped my toe into, and yet I couldn't stop playing it.

I have played a fair few of the classic 16-bit ones though, and this gem is easily up with the best of those. It's playable, beautifully animated and a treat for the ears. And the fact that it's free for Game Pass and PS Plus owners is the icing on the cake.

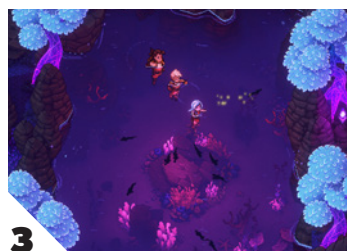
Dean Mortlock  
Reviewed on PS5



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damage – or defend against it – by hitting a button in time with your chosen action. Your magic is also heavily influenced by your ability to time attacks. So, for example, Valere's Moonerang repeatedly bounces back to you, with each press to deflect it causing more damage to your opponents. This can become an invigorating test of your skill, though it may draw a few odd glances as you frantically ping it back at an increasingly rapid speed. The added interaction had me glued to each encounter, large and small, rather than seeing combat as an opportunity to check my messages.

Sea of Stars' greatest trick is convincing you that it's an RPG from the 16-bit era, but it's one that has lashings of modernity running through it. It has no qualms with thrusting you into the thick of its adventure and that brisk pace stays throughout, a

welcome adjustment, and one that fits more easily with modern sensibilities.

Those gloriously vibrant visuals truly capture the heart of a bygone era [3], evoking memories of games like Chrono Trigger, Golden Sun and The Story of Thor, while updating them enough to provide a few 'wow' moments, whether that's an eye-catching sleeping dragon or the animated cut-scenes that litter the adventure. The diverse characters you encounter in particular – such as the pirate who can only do magic while wearing two eyepatches – are also a delight.

Sea of Stars is a glorious reimagining of the classic JRPG, weaving an enchanting tale around its beautiful retro-styled visuals. Essential for fans, and recommended for everyone else. [U](#)

Dominic Leighton



WATCH IT

Cosmic Star  
Heroine

A sci-fi role player with great cyberpunk combat.

CrossCode

A retro-styled 2D action-RPG that's set within a fictional MMO.



THE BACK CATALOGUE

Sabotage Studio hail from Quebec and originally found retro-themed success with their first title, excellent action-platformer The Messenger.



## TAGS? CHECK. LINES? DOUBLE CHECK. **BOMB RUSH CYBERFUNK** REALLY WRITES ITS OWN TAGLINE

It's fair to say that Dreamcast classic *Jet Set Radio* (*Jet Grind Radio* if you're nasty) and its Xbox sequel, *Jet Set Radio Future*, have each held the position of beloved cult classic pretty much since their respective 2000 and 2002 release dates.

The beautifully cel-shaded [1] skate-'em-ups exuded a rather effortless cool, thanks to their Hideki Naganuma soundtracks and anti-authority storylines, not to mention the slick graffiti-tagging gameplay. With no sequel forthcoming from the original developers, indie devs Team Reptile decided to plug that gap in the market themselves with *Bomb Rush Cyberfunk*, a game so close to *Jet Set Radio* that they're lucky not to be getting a pissy letter from SEGA's legal team (at the time of writing). With a chilled-out vibe closer to *Future* than the original *Jet Set Radio* and the return of Hideki Naganuma to tuneage duties, this really couldn't have captured the vibe better, and fans will be in seventh heaven as the adventure switches from Neo Tokyo to New Amsterdam.

**LIKE THIS?  
TRY THESE...**

**OlliOlli World**  
More skating fun in a similarly colourful environment.





INFO

**Developer**  
Team Reptile  
**Publisher**  
Team Reptile  
**Price**  
£33.50  
**Released**  
August 18  
**On**  
PC (tested), PS4/5,  
Xbox Series, Switch  
**Demo**  
Yes



LOOKS  
FAMILIAR

If you've never played *Jet Set Radio* before then you'd be forgiven for not knowing what all the fuss is about. We think that *Bomb Rush Cyberfunk* takes a good game and improves it in a number of ways, though.

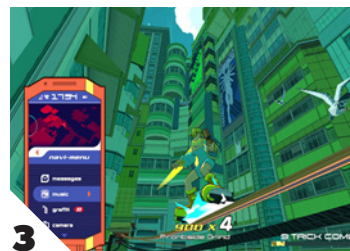
For starters, you're not limited to just rollerblades, as in *BRC* you can also ride on skateboards and BMX bikes. Oh, and the slide move in *BRC* makes chaining combos much easier. And there's a decent story, better soundtrack, parkour moves and a few other smaller bits.



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The action is smooth as silk, setting you loose in a world full of skaters to find the best lines and score big. Secretly though, this is an exploration-focused game at heart, with collectables and graffiti spots tantalisingly visible yet seemingly inaccessible – becoming something of a joy when you finally figure out **how to reach these elusive spots [2]**. It's not unlike the *Tony Hawk* games, though the pace is slower and there's no balance meter to worry about. **Grinding rails is as simple as hopping up on them [3]**, and tricks are as simple as a tap of the face buttons.

In a sense, the missions you'll take on are the least interesting part of the game, but only because they often see you following another character's line, or engaging in the somewhat weak button-mashing combat. They do weave into the exploration quite

well, however, as they usually show you new ways to get around the area. It's a structure that supports itself cleverly, and allows your skill level to rise gradually along with the challenges that you're tasked with completing.

The brilliantly colourful visuals and excellent triphop/funk/electro-dance soundtrack come together to create a game that's much more than the sum of its parts, and actually exceeds its source material rather than slavishly recreating it. If you're not already a *Jet Set Radio* fan you may find it a little floaty and a tad sluggish, but I also believe that you'll get used to the feel quickly and find yourself painting New Amsterdam red (and green, and blue, etc.) in no time at all. [▶](#)

**Stuart Gipp**



WATCH IT

Sludge Life

Graffiti-based open-worldy borderline unexplainable madness.

SkateBIRD

You skate. You're a bird. What more do you want?



THE BACK CATALOGUE

*Megabyte Punch* (2013), *Lethal League* (2014) and *Lethal League Blaze* (2018), each with a similar vibe to *Bomb Rush Cyberfunk*.



## COCOON IS A MASTERCLASS IN MIND-BENDING PUZZLES AND EVOCATIVE WORLD BUILDING

It begins with a beam of light descending from the sky and hitting a rocky tower. The light travels down to a metallic cocoon, which bristles with energy, then opens to reveal your character, an insect-like humanoid with beetle wings. There are no words, no explanation. It's up to you to work out your role in this strange, alien planet.

You won't really have an idea until the very end, and even then your true purpose remains obscure. This is one of *Cocoon's* greatest strengths: presenting a beautifully crafted world that often defies your understanding, a world that constantly intrigues and delights, and keeps you hooked on seeing what surprises lie around the next corner.

It's other great strength is mind-bending puzzle design. The core concept of *Cocoon* is revealed when you **step onto a portal [1]** that shoots you into the sky and out onto another plane, and you suddenly realise that the entire alien planet you were exploring is contained within an orange orb that you're now stood next to. An orb that you can hoist onto your back and carry with you. An orb that you soon realise you can carry inside other orbs, other worlds. The dizzying implications of this slowly become clear as puzzle solutions start to involve tucking one orb inside another, and then another.

All of this world diving could potentially be bamboozling, but *Cocoon* does an astonishingly

**LIKE THIS?  
TRY THESE...**

**Inside**

The game the Geometric Interactive founders worked on before *Cocoon*.



### INFO

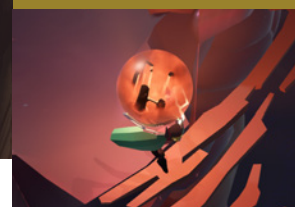
**Developer**  
Geometric Interactive

**Publisher**  
Annapurna Interactive

**Price**  
£20.99

**Released**  
September 29

**On**  
PC (tested), PS4/5,  
Xbox Series, Switch



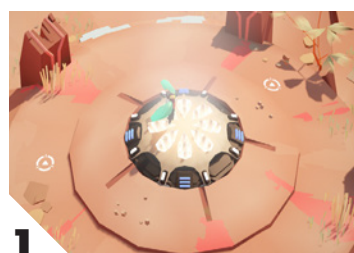
### SECOND OPINION

Shakespeare was clearly wrong when he told us that 'all the world's a stage'. It's quite clearly an orb!

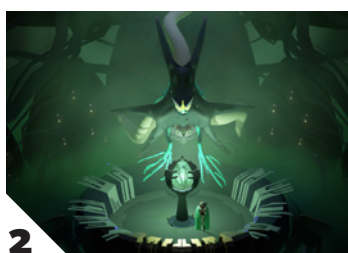
*Cocoon* is a real breath of fresh air, with logical puzzles that don't set out to frustrate, gorgeous graphics and minimalistic sound and musical effects to create atmosphere.

Quite simply, *Cocoon* is one of my favourite Indie games of 2023 and an essential purchase for anyone who likes puzzle adventure games.

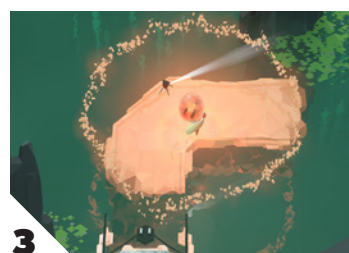
**Marc Jowett**  
Reviewed on PC



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good job of gently guiding you through the complexity, gradually introducing one element after another. The admirably simple control scheme helps to ground you – it's all controlled with a single button, which has different functions according to where you're standing. There's no health bar to worry about, no jumping or falling off ledges. **Combat is limited to the guardian of each orb [2]** – fights that each introduce a unique mechanic, whether it's teleporting or bomb throwing. If the guardian catches you, they boot you out of the orb and back to the start of the fight. If you succeed in defeating them, they unlock the orb's unique power.

**The first orb's power is to reveal invisible paths [3]** while you carry it. Later ones do things like manifest platforms or shoot energy bullets. Gradually the puzzles become more and more complex,

involving the powers of multiple orbs across multiple worlds. But they're perfectly pitched, and difficult enough to make you stop and scratch your head, yet logical enough to present an answer with a little thought. Most importantly, you'll feel like a genius for solving them.

There's no filler in *Cocoon*. New ideas are constantly introduced, old ones remixed, and every new area presents a twist or surprise. The artwork and animation regularly astounds in its intricacy, with even something as simple as an opening door becoming breathtaking.

*Cocoon* took six years to make, and takes around six hours to finish, but every one of those hours is perfect. [U](#)

**Lewis Packwood**



WATCH IT

### Outer Wilds

*Outer Wilds* has some of the best mind-bending puzzles in gaming.

### Viewfinder

Another game that allows you to manipulate the space around you.



### THE BACK CATALOGUE

*Cocoon* is Geometric Interactive's first game, but the studio was founded by the former Playdead employees Jeppe Carlsen and Jakob Schmid.

### INFO

**Developer**

Sad Owl Studios

**Publisher**

Thunderful Publishing

**Price**

£19.99

**Released**

July 18

**On**

PC, PS5



### SECOND OPINION

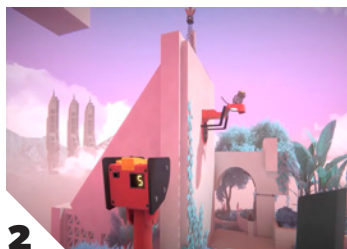
I've never played anything quite like *Viewfinder*. It's centrepiece trick is genuinely amazing, and shows just how versatile Unity really is. But what's most impressive is how that trick is explored and augmented to fill a good six or so hours of ever-progressing gameplay, while also telling a decent story. An absolutely extraordinary game, one that everyone should try, and one that'll often make you feel very clever indeed. Almost as clever as it is.

**Justin Towell**

Reviewed on PC



1



2



3

## CRITICISM: VIDEOGAMES ARE ALL THE SAME. REPLY: MAYBE IT'S TIME YOU PLAYED **VIEWFINDER** THEN

**I**f you've seen a video of *Viewfinder* running then you'll know just how breathtaking its central gameplay dynamic is in motion. And for those of you still in the dark, scan the QR code or read on.

*Viewfinder* enables you to walk into a still image – either one already taken, or one you take yourself with the **in-game camera [1]**. It's a feat of programming that is just south of utter genius, and astonishing the first few times you activate it. The problem when you create a game with a strong original feature is building the gameplay around it. *Viewfinder* takes a fair stab at it, with a decent graphical style and a story of such.

The important thing to know is that you're always looking for **portals to (literally) jump into the next level [2]**. These are either hidden or lacking power, or

both. You may find a single battery for the portal but the level requires four to activate it. A problem that's easily solved by photographing that battery, spinning the photo around so the battery falls out and then doing that two more times.

I also liked the fact that there was a real mix of art styles – it's possible to walk into an Impressionist painting, explore the vibrant area and then **head straight into a pencil sketch [3]** or an Expressionist creation.

It's almost worth buying *Viewfinder* just to experience the thrill of walking into a photo. For me, the gameplay wasn't quite enough to hold my interest, but it's impossible not to be impressed by the technical achievement here. [▶](#)

**Dean Mortlock**

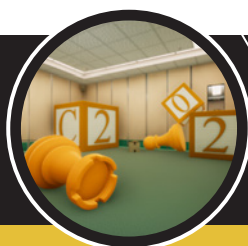


WATCH IT

### LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

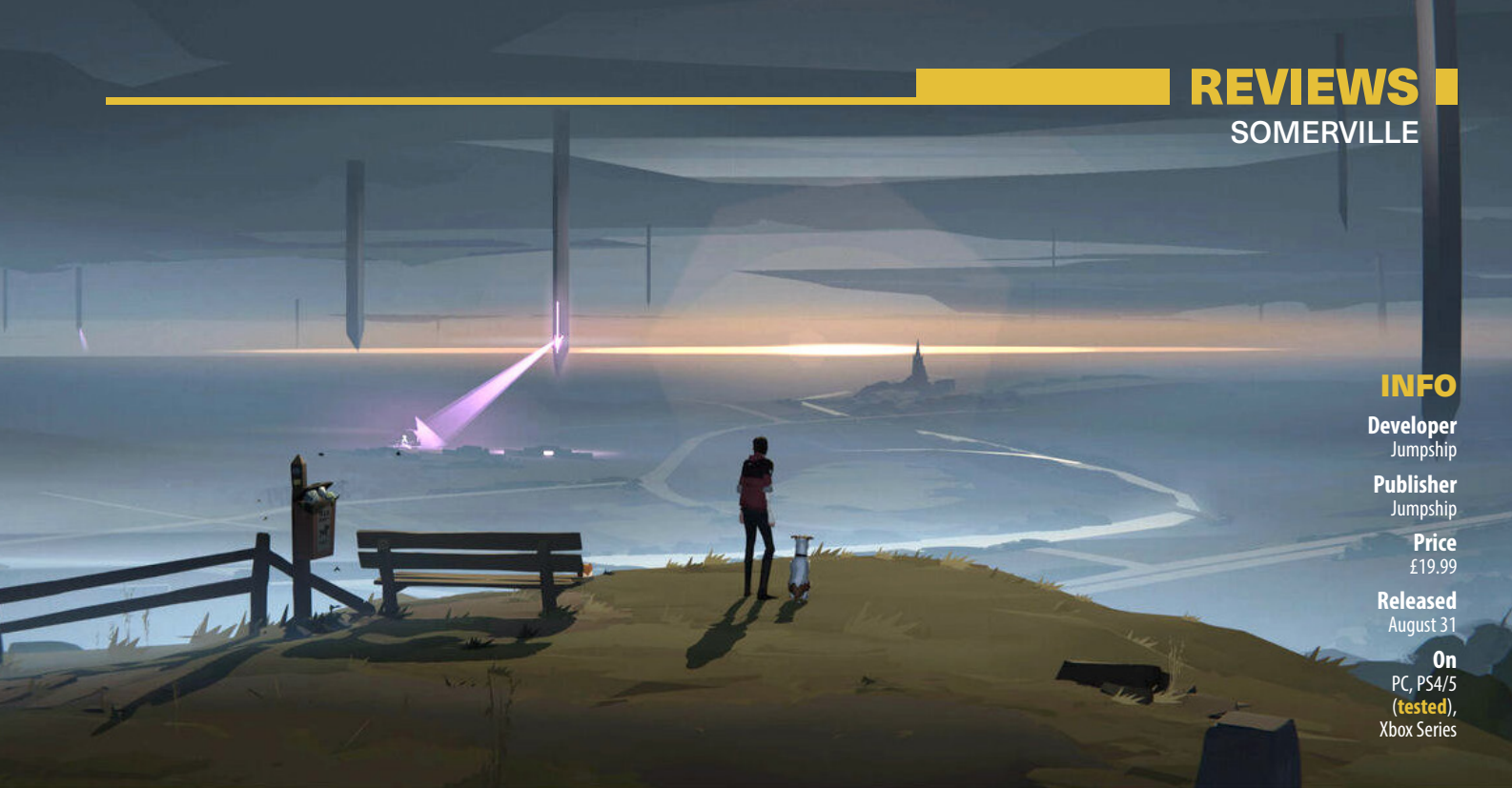
**Superliminal**

*Viewfinder's* pretty unique, but this is its closest comparison.



### THE BACK CATALOGUE

Not only is this Sad Owl Studios' first title, but it's also the first commercial release that the game's director, Matt Stark, has worked on. A pretty good start, we reckon.



INFO

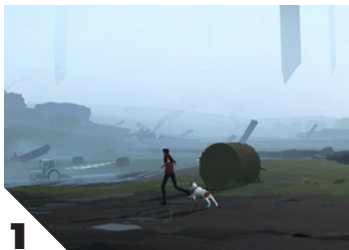
Developer  
Jumpship

Publisher  
Jumpship

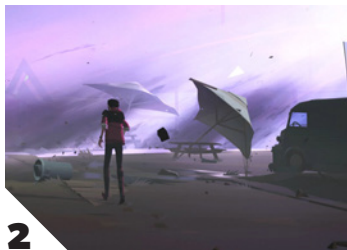
Price  
£19.99

Released  
August 31

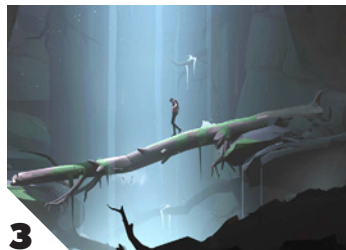
On  
PC, PS4/5  
(tested),  
Xbox Series



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# MINIMALIST STORYTELLING SHINES IN **SOMERVILLE**, BUT IS THE DESTINATION WORTH THE JOURNEY?

**F**rom its vast, sweeping landscapes to its deep, claustrophobic caves, *Somerville* captures the very essence of desolation after a catastrophic alien invasion separates our silent protagonist from his wife and son.

Described by the developers as a sci-fi adventure, our journey plays out across rural England, from farmers' fields [1] and abandoned mines to market towns. Each exquisitely realised location is eerily reframed by the extraterrestrial obelisks that hang in the sky, scanning the landscape with their purple beams [2] as they seek out the remnants of humanity.

Puzzles mostly take the form of environmental object movement, and manipulation of both electrical sources and strange alien sediment that often blocks

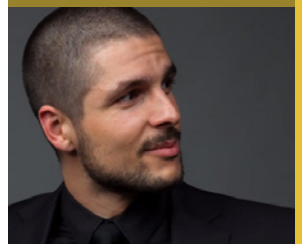
your path. The latter is manipulated by powers you pick up as you progress, and interesting new ways of using these powers ensure that no puzzle mechanic outstays its welcome. Control is kept simple and unobtrusive – the PS5's trigger haptics adding subtly to the mood.

*Somerville* excels in its foreboding, lonely atmosphere [3] with masterful sound design and beautifully bleak visuals. With a four-hour play time, it's a journey worth taking. And although the story doesn't quite end the way we expected it to, *Somerville's* four hours of gameplay prove to be both surprising and rewarding. Not a game of *Inside/Limbo* levels, but still a pretty good alternative. [U](#)

Dan Morris



WATCH IT



## INSIDE INFO

Just in case this is the first time you've heard the name Dino Patti, he was one half of Playdead – along with Arnt Jenson. The two fell out quite spectacularly (allegedly) in 2016 and Patti left with a substantial payout to set up Jumpship and launch *Somerville* on PC last November.

Thankfully, *Somerville* is a very different game from Patti's previous work, and clearly he's a imaginative developer, so we can't wait to see what he works on next.

## LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

**Inside**  
Playdead's 2016 puzzle platformer remains a night-on perfect masterpiece.



## THE BACK CATALOGUE

This is Jumpship's first game, but studio co-founder Dino Patti worked on both *Inside* and *Limbo* during his time at Playdead.

# REVIEWS

## DUNGEON GOLF

### INFO

**Developer**  
Ant Workshop Ltd

**Publisher**  
Ant Workshop Ltd

**Price**  
£14.99

**Released**  
September 18

**On**  
PC



### SECOND OPINION

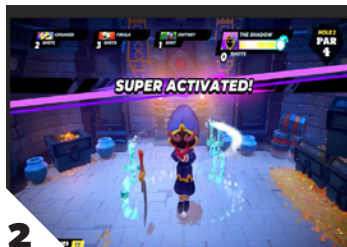
In real life I find the game of golf about as enjoyable as a colonoscopy, but there's no denying this version of the game is a lot more fun. You need no golf-related skills whatsoever (thankfully), but there is definitely a degree of skill that you need to become a half-decent player.

As Stuart says, the presentation is top notch, as is the character design and overall polish. I'm definitely going to see how this one develops.

**James Oakwood**  
Reviewed on PC



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## PLAY THE BALL AS IT LIES... BENEATH. HIT THE RANGE OF BEASTIES IN **DUNGEON GOLF**

**T**here's really nothing to hide with a title like *Dungeon Golf*. You're in a dungeon. And guess what? You're playing golf [1].

Specifically, miniature golf, tackling holes on ramparts, in torture chambers and generally hostile environs laced with tricks, traps and monsters to raise your stroke count, in more ways than one.

In an effort to even the odds somewhat, the playable characters have a number of special abilities [2] that'll take care of monsters and help you loot this dungeon's many chests of their spoils. It's all styled like a TV sports presentation with hosts commenting and quipping on your prowess or lack thereof, and while it's a fun quest to get a Gold on every hole, it's even better to grab a friend or nip online to play some multiplayer.

Every effort has gone into making things as smooth as possible. Applying aftershave to your golf ball with the analogue stick feels great, and the variety of different challenges matched with smart level design [3] make for a compelling single-player experience.

It's multiplayer where *Dungeon Golf* comes alive though, making an already-enjoyable game into a bit of a winner. The only thing letting the proceedings down is a tendency towards lengthy loading screens, but the game is Early Access so some tech teething is to be expected. Fore! Out of five. [G](#)

**Stuart Gipp**



WATCH IT

### LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

#### What The Golf?

This masterpiece pushes golf even further into total manic absurdity.



### THE BACK CATALOGUE

Ant Workshop's previous game is the BAFTA-nominated *Binaries*. This precision platformer saw you controlling multiple spheres at the same time.



INFO

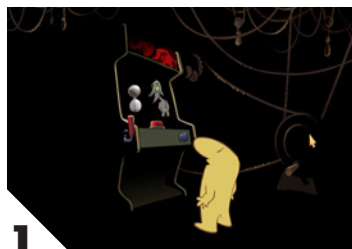
**Developer**  
Gamera Nest

**Publisher**  
Meridiem Games &  
Astrolabe Games

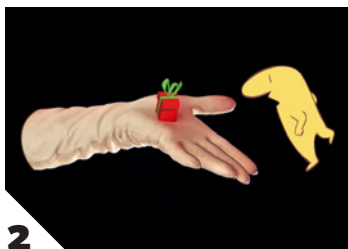
**Price**  
£15.99

**Released**  
September 7

**On**  
PC (tested), PS4/5,  
Xbox Series, Switch



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# LOOKING FOR AN ANIMATED ADVENTURE? THE MANY PIECES OF MR. COO MAY BE FOR YOU

**M**ovie-length games have their detractors – people who think that interactive experiences should provide as much bang per buck as possible. However, as gamers get older, have families and work longer hours, there are plenty who relish a shorter, more focused experience, too. Such people would take great delight in the journey of Mr. Coo.

As a simple, if abstract, point-and-click adventure, it's seemingly nothing to write home about. The puzzles are short and serve more as a means to get to the next scene, but are obtuse enough to often require the use of the **in-game hints book [1]**. The game unfolds kind of like a play, with numerous acts each set in a specific area, telling the story of Mr. Coo, and the situations he finds himself in.

The beating heart of this experience though, is its visual and sound design. Animator Nacho Rodriguez has created a truly fantastical world here, filled with simple yet striking character designs that run the gamut from '50s cartoon joyfulness, to otherworldly *Aeon Flux*-esque bizarreness. **Mr. Coo himself is an expressive yellow creature [2]** who I enjoyed controlling throughout. A mix of **hand-drawn and photographed backgrounds [3]** compliment the characters, and the sounds and music push the whole thing to even greater heights.

If you want to experience something unique and heartfelt, I implore you to give *The Many Pieces of Mr. Coo* a try. [E](#)

**Andrew Dickinson**



WATCH IT



## SECOND OPINION

There's no denying that *The Many Pieces of Mr. Coo* is truly a work of art; beautifully animated and clearly drawn by the hand of a master. And the gameplay's pretty fun too, leading you off on tangents you wouldn't have thought possible.

Sadly there's a fairly substantial 'but' here, and that's the game length. *Mr. Coo* may well be both short and sweet but I'd wait for it to show up in a sale before splashing out.

**James Oakwood**  
Reviewed on PC

## LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

**Deponia**  
Another point-and-click adventure with a cartoony art style.



## THE BACK CATALOGUE

This developer has had a busy few years, releasing numerous titles such as *Delirium*, *Insomnis*, and *TAPE: Unveil the Memories*.

# REVIEWS

## EVERSPACE 2

### INFO

**Developer**  
Rockfish Games

**Publisher**  
Rockfish Games

**Price**  
£49.99

**Released**  
August 15

**On**  
PC, PS5 (tested),  
Xbox S/X

**Demo**  
PC



★★★★☆



### SECOND OPINION

*Everspace 2* literally couldn't have arrived at a better time for me. All I've heard over the past few weeks is 'Ooh, doesn't *Starfield* look pretty?' and 'Hey, check out my multi-level space base that only took me 43 hours to build and decorate'. Pah!

There was a space adventure game-sized hole in my life, and *Everspace 2* will fill that quite nicely. Light RPG elements, some rather impressive graphics and dog fighting in space and I'm completely sated.

**Dean Mortlock**  
Reviewed on PS5



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## EVERSPACE 2 BOLDLY GOES FORWARD INTO A NEW FRONTIER WITH HAND-CRAFTED STAR SYSTEMS

**A**fter the randomly generated levels of its roguelike predecessor, Rockfish Games' *Everspace 2* tightens up the experience while retaining the fast-action appeal.

Steering clear of the genre's biggest titles like *Elite: Dangerous*, *Everspace 2* instead **focuses on randomised loot drops, crafting and RPG elements [1]**, all taking place in over 100 handcrafted areas. A spiritual successor to Digital Anvil's 2003 title *Freelancer*, the similarities are immediately evident. Unlike that game however, it's 30-hour campaign doesn't use 3D cut-scenes, instead opting for hand-drawn story segments. There's a further 60+ hours of optional exploration plus end-game loot runs.

Blending the thrill of Luke Skywalker space combat fantasies with the constant lure of new weapons, perks

and abilities makes this an engrossing and surprisingly intense experience. **Dogfights can become lethal if you get overwhelmed by enemies [2]**, but that just pushes you to think more tactically, considering your approach to key tasks and cooldown time on special abilities, and managing ammo levels.

Visually gorgeous, **the asteroid fields and low-orbit views of alien worlds look sumptuous in 4K [3]**, complemented by well-acted radio chatter. While the story isn't tremendously exciting, the curated reveals of new areas add greatly to your own sense of discovery. The result is a highly competent, if unoriginal, space RPG with a fun arcade slant and a likeable penchant for loot. **[1]**

**Justin Towell**

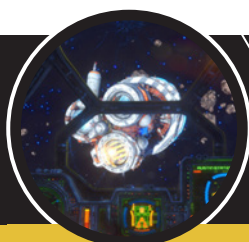


WATCH IT

### LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

#### Rebel Galaxy Outlaw

This *Rebel Galaxy* prequel is fast-paced and colourful.



### THE BACK CATALOGUE

Founded in 2014, Rockfish Games has only made *Everspace* before this sequel, along with its DLC expansion pack, *Everspace Encounters*.





INFO

Developer  
Galaxy Grove

Publisher  
Prismatika

Price  
£19.99

Released  
October 3

On  
PC



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# LOVE TRAINS AND CONNECTING THINGS? YOU'RE ON THE RIGHT TRACKS WITH **STATION TO STATION**

**T**here's a definite logic to *Station to Station*. Making a puzzle game using trains, connecting buildings and towns by laying track just makes sense.

You begin a stage with the basic buildings you need to get started. For example, a Mill, Wheat Farm and Bakery. To make the bread, each of the buildings must be connected, so you simply build a railway station in front of each building and start laying the track to connect them – the Wheat Farm supplies wheat to the Mill, which makes flour which is then transported to the Bakery. There's a wonderful logic to the gameplay.

Later levels introduce cities that require a selection of items linked to them [1], such as milk, cheese and fish. The trick though, is working out how to connect everything without making a mess of the terrain.

Things get more complicated with the introduction of Challenges. These range from making sure you finish a stage with a certain amount of money, or having a limit to the amount of track you can lay forced upon you.

**Graphically, *Station to Station* is a delight [2].**

The voxel art graphics work brilliantly here to show off the landscape. And although each stage is colourless when you start, connect a few buildings and the terrain bursts into life, with fields of crops and lush grass.

A comprehensive Custom mode lets you set up your perfect level, and you can even make one without buildings to just lay a track on **as you would with a model railway [3].** *Station to Station* is an easy game to recommend.

Dean Mortlock



WATCH IT

## VOXEL CAVALIER

So if you've read the main copy and were wondering what voxel graphics were then here's a short lesson.

The simple answer is that voxels are three-dimensional cubes, while a pixel is 2D. Creating a game with voxels makes it easier (apparently) to make landscapes and structures that could potentially be destroyed. For example, *Teardown* is made with voxels, which makes the destruction of buildings potentially more realistic.

## LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

### Railgrade

More of a rail simulator, but if you get the bug then it's a good step up.



## THE BACK CATALOGUE

So Galaxy Grove are shiny and new, and *Station to Station* is their first title. We expect big things from this Netherlands-based team in the future, though.

# REVIEWS

## KENTUCKY ROUTE ZERO

### INFO

**Developer**  
Cardboard Computer

**Publisher**  
Annapurna  
Interactive

**Price**  
£20.99

**Released**  
August 17

**On**  
PC, PS4/5, Xbox  
Series (tested),  
Switch



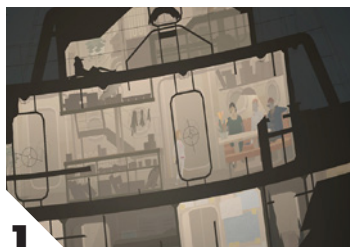
★★★★☆



### SECOND OPINION

You'll know pretty quickly after the game starts if *Kentucky Route Zero* is for you. Surreal, unconventional and very hard to summarise effectively, it's a game that plays by its own rules, dipping in and out of the gameplay handbook as and when needed. It's a confident move from a maverick development team, but I personally found it riveting on so many levels. My advice? Give it a go. You'll either love it or it'll confuse the hell out of you.

**James Oakwood**  
Reviewed on PS5



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## EVER HEARD OF MAGICAL REALISM? KENTUCKY ROUTE ZERO EXPLAINS NOTHING... BUT THAT'S THE POINT

**A**n early Kickstarter success, *Kentucky Route Zero* was developed by Cardboard Computer over seven years, split across five acts and released as instalments.

Now available as a complete 'TV Edition', it also includes some 'interlude' sections previously released as playable teasers.

The game mostly plays like a point 'n' click adventure [1], though there are some wireframe 3D sections and direct control at key moments. It's character-driven, but based on a style of fiction writing where unusual events or situations are never questioned by the characters [2]. The result is a strange tale, told 99% of the time through text boxes with multiple choices.

It's a difficult game to love, as it's painfully slow at times. Act II literally feels like a bureaucracy simulator,

which simply isn't fun. And yet the whole is undeniably brilliant. Characters' stories overlap beautifully, your choices feel like they change fundamental elements of the plot [3], and there's genuine poetry and depth in some characters' musings. The telephone bonus section – adapted from a real-life helpline you could phone during the game's long development – is a standout, combining superb, captivating voice acting with delicious surrealism.

Simultaneously unsettling, brilliant, boring and complex, it's a game of contradictions that won't be to everyone's taste, but if it is then you'll love it. Even so, few games stand out as much as this. Definitely worth a look. [G](#)

**Justin Towell**



WATCH IT

### LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

#### Oxenfree

Night School Studio's adventure has a similarly surreal, unsettling vibe.



### THE BACK CATALOGUE

Cardboard Computer have also made smaller but recognisably similar projects *Ruins*, *Balloon Diaspora* and *A House in California*.

## INFO

**Developer**  
Purple Ray Studio

**Publisher**  
Untold Tales,  
CouchPlay Interactive

**Price**  
£16.75

**Released**  
September 15

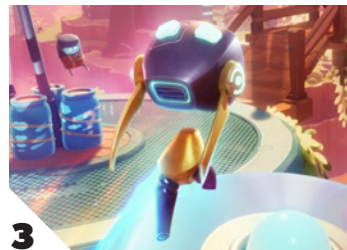
**On**  
PC



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## SAVE THE COMPUTER BY DEFEATING THE VIRUS IN BOTI BYTELAND: OVERCLOCKED

**A**t its heart, *Boti Byteland: Overclocked* is a 3D platformer designed for younger gamers. It features Boti, a newcomer to the computer who is tasked with overclocking the system and eradicating any virus threats. Imagine if *Tron* and *Kirby* had a baby and you'll get the idea.

There are eight worlds to complete, each representing a different component – from processors to graphic cards. Boti has several moves that include gliding and dashing [1] and most of the action is exploring the large levels and collecting computer parts. Controlling Boti is fun, and although the game is linear, there's a lot to explore and many secrets to uncover. Boti has different outfits to discover, and once unlocked are selectable in the hub world.

Those who enjoy a solid platforming collect-a-thon will revel in the hundreds of items that must be found to fully finish the game. While each world has a distinct theme, the overall mechanics are repetitive, with only a smattering of set pieces involving slide challenges [2] to break up gameplay. However, the graphics are vibrant, and the characters will certainly appeal to younger gamers [3]. Boti's story also matches the target audience but lacks originality and uses all the usual children's story tropes.

Overall, *Boti Byteland: Overclocked* is a good game for kids that ticks all the right gameplay boxes without offering anything substantial to move the genre forward. [E](#)

Faith Johnson



WATCH IT

★★★★☆



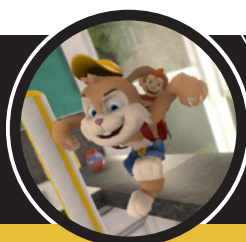
### SECOND OPINION

The first thing that *Boti Byteland: Overclocked* reminded me of was *Ratchet and Clank*. When I played it a wee bit more though, I got definite aromas of the *Astro Bot* games on PlayStation. Two fantastic influences, I'm sure you will agree, and while *Boti* doesn't come close to either series, it's still very playable and a lot of fun, and a great way to ease those withdrawal symptoms until the next *Astro Bot* game.

Dean Mortlock  
Reviewed on PC

### LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

**Clive 'N' Wrench**  
Collect-a-thon fun as two friends travel time to save the world.



### THE BACK CATALOGUE

Known for puzzlers and action platformers, Purple Ray Studios has a distinct art style and isn't afraid to blend genres.

# REVIEWS

## FULL VOID

### INFO

**Developer**  
OutOfTheBit

**Publisher**  
OutOfTheBit

**Price**  
£13.99

**Released**  
September 12

**On**  
PC, Xbox Series,  
Switch (**tested**)



### SECOND OPINION

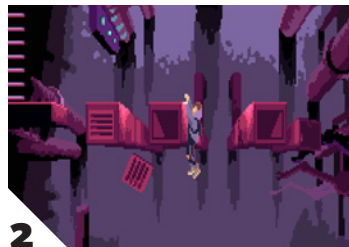
There's a lot to like here. The graphics perfectly capture the pixel art feel of games like *Flashback* and, more recently, *Lunark*, and the whole thing oozes atmosphere. Little touches, like the way that the silhouettes move across windows as you walk past, just add to this.

Yes, as Faith says, you are likely to complete the whole thing in a few hours, but I would argue that it's enjoyable enough to mean that it's a game you'll definitely return to.

**James Oakwood**  
Reviewed on Xbox



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## EXPLORE A DYSTOPIAN FUTURE, BATTLE EVIL ROBOTS AND SAVE HUMANITY IN **FULL VOID**

**S**et in a future when robots have taken over the world, *Full Void* sees one teenager on a mission to save humanity. Featuring bold pixel art and mesmerising atmospheric sounds, this adventure is packed with set pieces and an intriguing story.

It plays like a classic single-screen title with tricky platforming sections, puzzles and action that gets more difficult as the game unfolds. The young character jumps between platforms, climbs ladders and uses a computer to control the robots. Without spoiling the story, they eventually joins forces with a smaller robot that helps with the puzzles [1] while adding an extra pair of arms to pull levers and activate machines.

*Full Void* is an accomplished cinematic experience that looks beautiful throughout. The hand-drawn pixel

art is sensational and there is great use of shadows. It can be tough in places, but logical save points mean there isn't much backtracking if you make a mistake.

**The jump scares are expertly implemented [2]** and some of the death scenes are truly shocking. It controls excellently and some of the set pieces require precise timing that at times end in an exciting quick time event.

**Anyone who is a fan of dystopian futures will love the world and enemies [3]** that stand in your way. It's a little short – chances are that you'll easily complete it in around two hours – but the entire game is thrilling from start to finish and is as playable as the classics it's inspired by. [▶](#)

**Faith Johnson**



WATCH IT

### LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

#### Lunark

Cinematic action meets puzzle platforming in this hand-drawn world.



#### THE BACK CATALOGUE

*Super Arcade Racing* – race through 50 tracks while rescuing your brother in a racing game with a thrilling story.

## INFO

Developer  
HekatePublisher  
NaconPrice  
£29.99Released  
September 14On  
PC, PS4/5 (tested),  
Xbox Series, Android

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## AD INFINITUM WILL (LITERALLY) KEEP YOU COMING BACK AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN

**A** *d Infinitum* (Latin for 'to infinity') focuses largely on a single German family during the First World War. You play as one of two sons [1] who follows in his father's and grandfather's footsteps by enlisting in the army (against his mother's wishes) switching between the trenches and his family's decadent home over and over to resolve an intriguing mystery.

At home you wander alone, solving light puzzles to piece together the family's story. The house is expansive and well detailed [2], with a few supernatural scares thrown in for good measure. Many puzzles require backtracking, which can prove difficult in a mansion full of locked doors with no map. Locating a ringing phone, for example, proved to be more than a little frustrating for this writer.

In the trenches your viewpoint extends to your fellow soldiers, scattered dead throughout the environment as you explore the front line. The manifested horrors of this place require some sneaking and hiding, and there are some difficult and lengthy chase sequences, but by and large these monsters don't ruin the flow or atmosphere of the location – the trenches remain incredibly dark, oppressive and brutal [3].

A few technical hiccups and gameplay frustrations do grate, but by and large the game is a fascinating – if disturbing – look at the human psyche, generational trauma, and the cyclical nature of the atrocities of war. [E](#)

Andrew Dickinson



WATCH IT



### SECOND OPINION

This visually stunning descent into the horror of the First World War is an atmospheric piece of work that doesn't shy away from being as grotesque as necessary. It's more of a mood piece than a mechanically brilliant videogame, but it's thoroughly absorbing while it lasts (surprisingly long), with detailed, immersive environments. Pro tip: Change the voiceover language to German for a more authentic experience.

Stuart Gipp  
Reviewed on PC

### LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

**Layers of Fear**  
Another horror puzzler that we're happy to recommend.



### THE BACK CATALOGUE

This is the studio's first game, but co-owner Lukas Deuschel has worked on games such as *The Elder Scrolls Online* and *Wolfenstein: The New Order*.

# REVIEWS

## GIRL GENIUS: ADVENTURES IN CASTLE HETERODYNE

### INFO

**Developer**  
Rain Games

**Publisher**  
Rain Games

**Price**  
£24.99

**Released**  
September 5

**On**  
PC, Mac  
(Console soon)

★★★★☆



### READ ALL ABOUT IT

The *Girl Genius* comicbook series started way back in 1995 by Kaja and Phil Foglio, a married couple who previously illustrated *Magic: The Gathering* cards. Set in a Steampunk-style alternative reality – the writers describe it as ‘gaslamp fantasy’ – the books follow Agatha Heterodyne/Clay in a series of action-packed stories.

When asked about the origins of the series, Phil said: “We wanted to do something with a strong female lead character. We both like the tropes associated with mad science.”

## GIRL GENIUS LEAPS FROM THE PAGE FOR HER FIRST VIDEOGAME

**A**pparently *Girl Genius: Adventures in Castle Heterodyne* is a videogame spin-off from a well-known comicbook series. Well, that’s fresh new to me, but luckily no background knowledge of the series is needed to play this game.

The star of the game is Agatha, who’s returned to her ancestral home to restore it to its former glory. Under AI control, all manner of obstacles and hazards have been placed in your way to stop you achieving your aim. Thankfully though, there are some things set up to help you – including Sanaa Wilhelm, a character you meet right at the start of the game and who is packed full of helpful advice and guidance. Your first weapon is a basic ratchet, but as you progress through the game, you soon upgrade that to something more impressive.

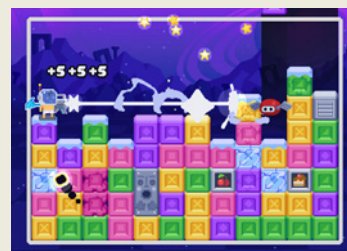
Tools can be built at workbenches, and blueprints revealed during your mission allow you to craft useful item such as a torch or grapple gun, which opens up new parts of the castle.

I get very nostalgic for PlayStation 2 era 3D platformers. I found games like the *Spyro* series hugely enjoyable, and *Girl Genius* very much reminded me of those. If you can accept the game for what it is – a retro-inspired 3D platformer – then it’s limited but certainly playable. Fans of the comicbook series will obviously get more out of it, but if you can pick up in a future Steam sale, then there’s fun to be had here. [E](#)

**James Oakwood**



WATCH IT

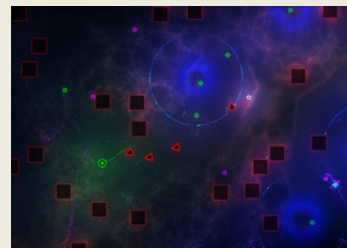


### UFO: UNIDENTIFIED FALLING OBJECTS

★★★★☆

**Developer** Andrew Morrish  
**Publisher** Gearbox Publishing  
**Price** £23.79  
**Released** August 9  
**On** PC, Switch (tested)

Those of you that remember the fantastic *Super Puzzler Platformer* will definitely be interested to play this, as it’s from the same developer. In *UFO* you have to destroy blocks while also avoiding the ones falling on your head. It’s classic arcade gameplay and a must for anyone who enjoys classic 2D titles. **JO**



### THE LIFE OF A MAGICAL CIRCLE

★★★★☆

**Developer** Solideo  
**Publisher** Solideo  
**Price** £4.99  
**Released** August 1  
**On** PC

The developer of *The Life of a Magical Circle* claims that his game is unlike anything you’ve played before, and he was pretty much right. It’s hard to explain what the game is without giving it away, so I’ll just advise you to buy it (really, do) and leave it there. Night, folks. **JO**

### LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

**Spyro Reignited**  
Three stunning examples of top-quality 3D platforming.



### THE BACK CATALOGUE

Norwegian developers Rain Games have a few titles under their belt now, but are probably best know for the *Teslagrad* series of games.



## INFO

**Developer**  
Quantum Logic Games

**Publisher**  
Fireshine Games

**Price**  
£15.99

**Released**  
July 19

**On**  
PC



1



2



3

## GRAB YOUR TOOLS AND EMBRACE THE SIMPLE JOY OF RESTORATION IN THE REPAIR HOUSE

**I**f you've ever experienced the dopamine hit of taking something broken and making it work again, there's a fair chance you'll adore this repair and restoration simulator from Quantum Logic Games.

*The Repair House* tasks you with bringing new life to a huge array of defective devices, **from toys, game consoles and guitars to pinball machines, arcade cabinets and jukeboxes [1]**, all of which arrive in your workshop via customer orders or through your own discovery at flea markets, garage sales and auction houses.

The fun comes from being able to **disassemble items in exquisite detail [2]**, logically stripping each down to its component parts before **cleaning, sandblasting and repainting [3]** them. Reverse the

process to reassemble your items before selling them on or returning them to their owners for a healthy profit.

As you level up and build funds, workshop expansions unlock, allowing the intake of bigger and more challenging items for your attention. You can even heavily customise your house with an array of decorations, wall colours, shelving units and furniture.

What at first seems like a fairly benign idea for a game soon flourishes into an enjoyable and relaxing time-sink, as you strive to repair, restore and perfect every item that comes your way.

If you fancy yourself as a bit of a fixer upper, *The Repair House* could really surprise with its easy-to-learn gameplay mechanics. [U](#)

**Dan Morris**



WATCH IT



### SECOND OPINION

To be honest, I wasn't sure I was going to enjoy this one, but it's easy to get pulled in. The level of detail involved with taking an object, slowly stripping it, replacing or repairing items and then putting it all back together is strangely addictive. And you definitely need to keep several plates spinning as you juggle the various jobs on your workbench.

Need convincing? Check out the demo.

**Dean Mortlock**  
Reviewed on PC

### LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

#### PowerWash Simulator

You'll lose days to FuturLab's clean-'em-up.



### THE BACK CATALOGUE

Developer Claudiu Kiss was the creator behind 2019's wildly popular *PC Building Simulator*, a sedate and satisfying, er, PC building simulator.

# REVIEWS

## SOLAR ASH

### INFO

**Developer**  
Heart Machine

**Developer**  
Annapurna  
Interactive

**Price**  
£33.49

**Released**  
September 14

**On**  
PC, PS4/5, Xbox  
Series (tested)

★★★★☆



### SECOND OPINION

As a PC owner, I've been lucky enough to be an owner of *Solar Ash* for some time now. As a software developer's technical demo it's impressive enough, but there's also a game with real bite in there, too.

I found *Solar Ash* via *Hyper Light Drifter*, Heart Machine's previous game, and although they're set in the same gaming universe, *Solar Ash* most definitely isn't a sequel. What it is though is a game I find very easy to recommend.

**James Oakwood**  
Reviewed on PC


## FIGHTING GIANT BOSSES IN A BLACK HOLE? THAT'S SOLAR ASH

**Y**ou may well be confused here, as *Solar Ash* is hardly a new game, but while PC and PlayStation owners have been able to play it for some time now, it only recently arrived on Switch and Xbox.

So, assuming you're arriving at this fresh, what exactly is *Solar Ash*? Essentially it's a visually stunning 3D action-adventure game. Clearly designed to be a feast for the senses, you play as Rei a Voidrunner inside a black hole – which opens the floodgates for some incredibly inventive set-pieces and boss battles. But there's more to *Solar Ash* than that.

Rei is able to move through her environments at great speed, which is mostly down to the fact that she's basically traversing them on invisible skates. Control is smooth and immersive, and that seems to have been the focus of the game's design. The developers – Heart Machine, who also gave us *Hyper Light Drifter* – have regularly stated that *Solar Ash* is less about combat and more about movement.

There's lots to talk about when it comes to the variety in *Solar Ash*'s stages, and the beasts that inhabit them, but space is against us, and I suspect there's more joy to be had revealing the game's many twists and turns than reading a review that tells you about them.

*Solar Ash* is definitely an interesting game. Just long enough and packed with a number of emotional punches, it's still a game to savour. 

**Dean Mortlock**



WATCH IT



### [I] DOESN'T EXIST

★★★★☆

**Developer** LUAL  
**Developer** DreadXP  
**Price** TBC  
**Released** October 5  
**On** PC, Mac

I have to be honest and say that it's quite some time since I played a text adventure game, but it was so lovely to get engrossed in one again. *[I] doesn't exist* is clearly inspired by some of the best in the genre (*Zork*, *The Pawn*, etc.) but it does use the graphical window to great – and often surprising – effect. There's a demo on Steam, to check out, too. **DM**



### SUPER SPACE CLUB

★★★★☆

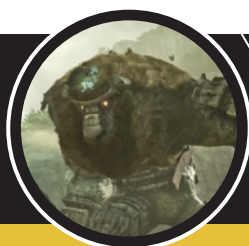
**Developer** GrahamOfLegend  
**Publisher** GrahamOfLegend  
**Price** £12.79  
**Released** August 4  
**On** PC

Imagine if someone said, 'I know. I'm going to create the perfect super-chilled shooter that has vibrant graphics, super-easy gameplay and a soundtrack that, frankly is punching well above its weight'. Good idea, right? Graham Reid certainly thought so, so that's exactly what he did. **DM**

### LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

#### Shadow of the Colossus

Well, you do get to fight some enormous bosses.



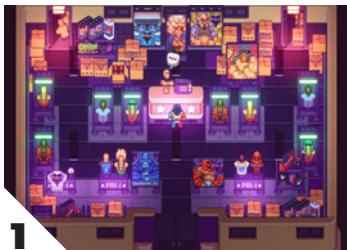
### THE BACK CATALOGUE

As we mention in the review copy, Heart Machine previously developed *Hyper Light Drifter*, which is set in the same universe as *Solar Ash*.

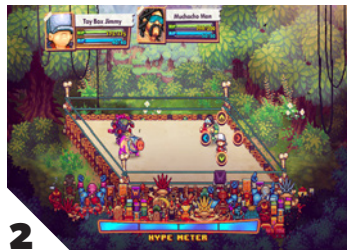




**INFO**  
**Developer**  
Skybound Games  
**Publisher**  
Mega Cat Studios  
**Price**  
£21.99  
**Released**  
August 22  
**On**  
PC (tested), PS4/5, Xbox Series, Switch



1



2



3

# IS WRESTLEQUEST THE BEST THERE IS, THE BEST THERE WAS, THE BEST THERE EVER WILL BE...?

**T**here are a lot of pro wrestling games, but most of them are simulations rather than an attempt to encapsulate the spirit of 'sports entertainment'. The drive, the attitude, the showboating and the drama that make it so appealing to its fans. *WrestleQuest* is a game that absolutely reeks of awesomeness, a passionate paean to the dance of violence; the promos, the bodyslams, the hurricananas, general managers and – yes – love. Taking control of up and coming wrestler Muchacho Man, you set out to get over.

A turn-based action RPG, *WrestleQuest* is a brilliant distillation of the essence of grap into a deeply enjoyable adventure through pro wrestling, both inside and outside the squared circle. **The characters in this**

**world take the form of toys [1]**, a nod to wrestling's significant action figure fandom and making for an enjoyable visual presentation.

**The matches are the best part [2]**, seeing you trash talk your opponent before beating them down, hitting your finisher and pinning them one-two-three, all performed with timed button presses akin to the *Mario & Luigi* series. Well-written dialogue, enjoyable exploration and the inclusion of real-world wrestling greats like Diamond Dallas Page and **Macho Man Randy Savage [3]** make this a great experience for pro wrestling nuts, but it's an enjoyable peek behind the curtain for non-fans, too. Anyone can appreciate an RPG as joyful as this. **U**

**Stuart Gipp**



WATCH IT



## SECOND OPINION

It's a brave move mixing wrestling and role-playing, and on the whole, *WrestleQuest* does it well.

It is an absolutely huge game, and there's no shortage of cool stuff to do. There is a lot of fun to be had with the various quests and challenges, although sometimes the game loses its flow a wee bit and can be tedious.

That said though, *WrestleQuest* is a treat for nostalgic wrestling fans, and that's the bottom line cause Marc Jowett said so!

**Marc Jowett**  
Reviewed on PC

## LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

**Wrestling Empire**  
A masterpiece that showcases why pro wrestling is so



## THE BACK CATALOGUE

Mega Cat are best known for their contemporary NES, SNES and Mega Drive software, as seen on several Evercade cartridges.

# ALSO RELEASED

Actual space may well be infinite, but in magazine terms it's quite the opposite. Bearing that in mind, here are the freshest dishes from the indie buffet that we weren't able to squeeze in for review but are still worth a closer inspection.

## BLASPHEMOUS 2 PC, PS4/5, Xbox Series, Switch

A very welcome sequel to the 2019 original, *Blasphemous 2* remains a super-smooth and highly playable side-scrolling action/platformer – or, a 'Metroidvania' if you will. This is one game that's clearly heavy on the 'vania' though, so fans of that series will find plenty to like here.

Updates for the sequel include some brand-new weaponry and less focus on just pure combat – meaning that you can expect more light puzzling and platform sections.



## DEPOWERBALL PC

Playing as one of four characters, your aim is to feed the Dragon Queen more than the others. A simple idea and a really fun party game.



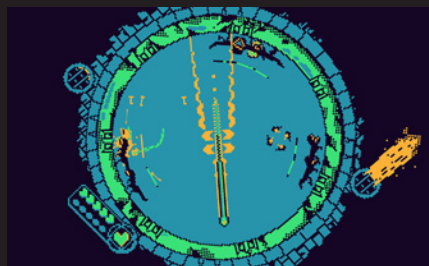
## MAQUETTE PC, PS, Xbox Series, Switch

Already out on PC, PlayStation and Switch, this inventive puzzler finally received an Xbox launch in July.



## KILL THE CROWS PC

A pixel art arena shooter with a Western theme. Very playable and oodles of fun.



## ROTO FORCE PC

Think you've seen every variation of twin-stick shooter? Think again.



## BIT.TRIP RERUNNER PC

An update to the classic *Bit.Trip* game, including a level editor, too.



## EN GARDE!

PC

Sometimes you don't want to wade through a multitude of menus and complicated branching plot lines. Sometimes you just want to bounce effortlessly over a series of platforms and swipe your sword through a series of increasingly inventive enemies. *En Garde!* is one such gaming experience.

Gameplay-wise is where it shines. Smooth animation and superb combat are coupled in a game that's hard not to love.



WATCH IT

## HERETIC'S FORK

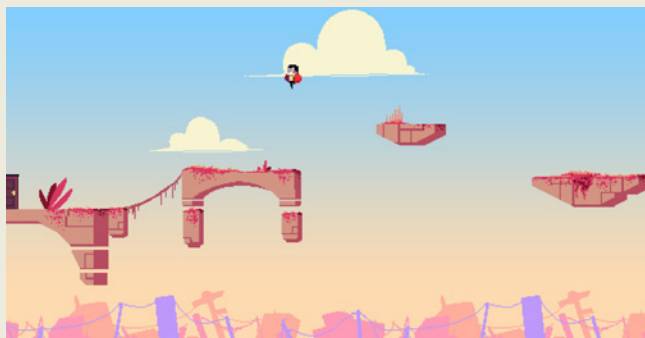
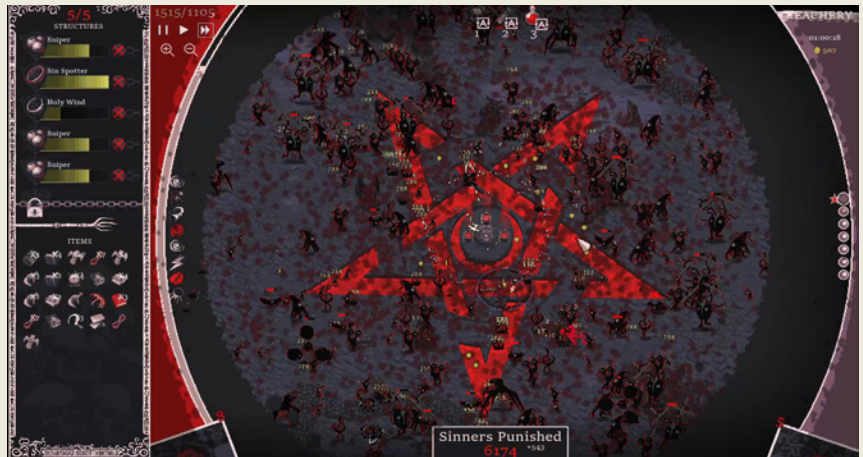
PC

Imagine, if you will, a game that's sort of a cross between a decent tower defence game and *Vampire Survivors*. Now imagine added a deck-building element and setting the whole thing in the depths of Hell, and you're imagining *Heretic's Fork*.

You've been recruited as Hell's manager, and your job is to stop souls escaping. And that's all you need to know. It's a fun game too, with more than a few original touches.



WATCH IT



## DERE VENGEANCE

PC

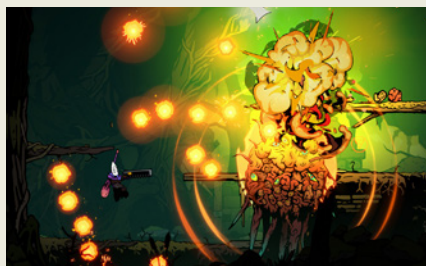
A wonderfully original game about a haunted platformer. And it's also about as meta as you can get. Great fun and full of surprises.



## SUPER ADVENTURE HAND

PC, Switch

An adventure. Where you play as a hand. And it's super – in both name and gameplay.



## MADSHOT

PC, Switch

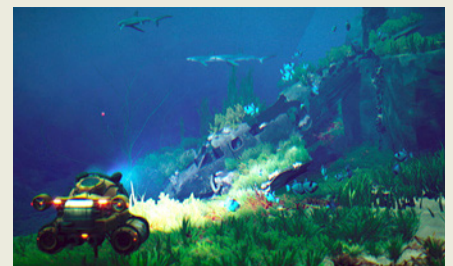
Wonderfully over-the-top cartoon violence, and an almost infinite combination of weapons.



## HEAVY BURDEN

PC

An abstract and very original game focusing on the Greek myth of Sisyphus.



## UNDER THE WAVES

PC, PS4/5, Xbox Series

Described as a 'love letter to the oceans', and we wouldn't disagree with that.

# THE INDIE STARTER KIT



Casting an eye over the rise to prominence of indie gaming, **STUART GIPP** searches for the needles in the haystack of brilliance that is this scene. Let's dive right in.

## UNDERTALE

2015  
Toby Fox



This is the videogame equivalent of your favourite childhood movie. *Undertale*'s 'pacifist' RPG action is at turns exciting, hilarious, frightening and downright tearjerking. Great art and music round off a perfect package. If your boat is floated by this then check out *Deltarune* – Fox's second game – too.

## SHOVEL KNIGHT

2014  
Yacht Club Games



Over-promising in its ambitious Kickstarter didn't prevent *Shovel Knight* from delivering on every front – though it took until 2019 to deliver everything. This terrific platformer may not have been the first aesthetic throwback indie game, but it certainly put the style on the map. Bursting with brilliant ideas and levels.

## CAVE STORY

2004  
Studio Pixel



It could be argued that this classic Metroidvania was the title that put indie games on the map. With tons of secrets, superb boss battles and a beautifully crafted world, it still puts many modern releases to shame. Nicalis' paid version adds some tat, but the freeware original still sings, so that's the one I'd go for.

## CELESTE

2018  
Maddy Makes Games



The mascore platforming genre isn't the easiest thing to get into – hence the name – but *Celeste* does a terrific job indoctrinating you in the dark arts of air-dashes, double jumps, wave-dash-jump-cancels and, of course, dying. Regular stages give way to B-Side ones which... well, look. Like I said. Dying. A lot.

## VAMPIRE SURVIVORS

2022  
Poncle



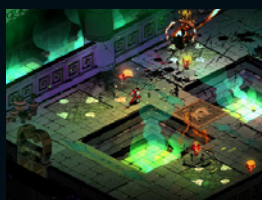
This is a bona fide modern classic, even if it is less a game than a slot machine, preying on humanity's capacity for addiction. So it's a dangerous, derivative thing, throwing you into a sea of monsters, levelling up from a useless little scrote to whirling dervish of magical death. And once you start, it's impossible to stop. I tried.

TOP  
TEN

**THE WORLD** of indie games is, as you will have gathered by this point in your esteemed copy of **Debug**, enormous. There are layers upon layers of brilliant games available from the most prestigious visionary developers to the most lowly bedroom coder. But where to begin? What are the core games that people think of when they think 'indie'? Naturally it's completely impossible to say, but the 10 singled out here should be a reasonably satisfying platter of gaming goodness, recognisable as gateway games which forged a path into the industry via their innovation or sheer quality.

**HADES**

2018  
Supergiant Games



Many roguelites came before. Many will come after, including its own sequel. But *Hades* is top of the heap, its utterly beguiling isometric action melding perfectly with richly drawn characters to create a game that really does offer something new every single time you play. A build for every play style.

**FTL: FASTER THAN LIGHT**

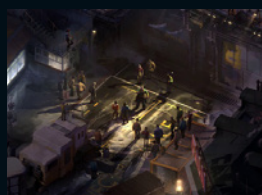
2012  
Subset Games



You'd think a randomly generated spaceship would be simple to manage, wouldn't you. Wait, of course you wouldn't. It would be impossible, and you would end up killing all of your crew over and over again. So many things can go wrong and in your time with *FTL*, pretty much all of them will.

**DISCO ELYSIUM**

2019  
ZA/UM



A true role-playing game, this masterpiece puts you in control of an amnesiac detective, then essentially lets you off the leash in a spectacular world of tabletop-style skill checks and a phenomenal amount of fascinating, hilarious, heartbreaking dialogue. The kind of original game that you really only get once in a blue moon.

**STARDEW VALLEY**

2016  
ConcernedApe



Taking cues from Natsume's *Harvest Moon* series, this agriculture-'em-up delivers a full-tilt farming experience, easing you into its myriad systems with a chilled-out vibe that lets you loose in its world to forge industry as you so please. There's so much to see and do, and it's all hugely enjoyable.

**HOTLINE MIAMI**

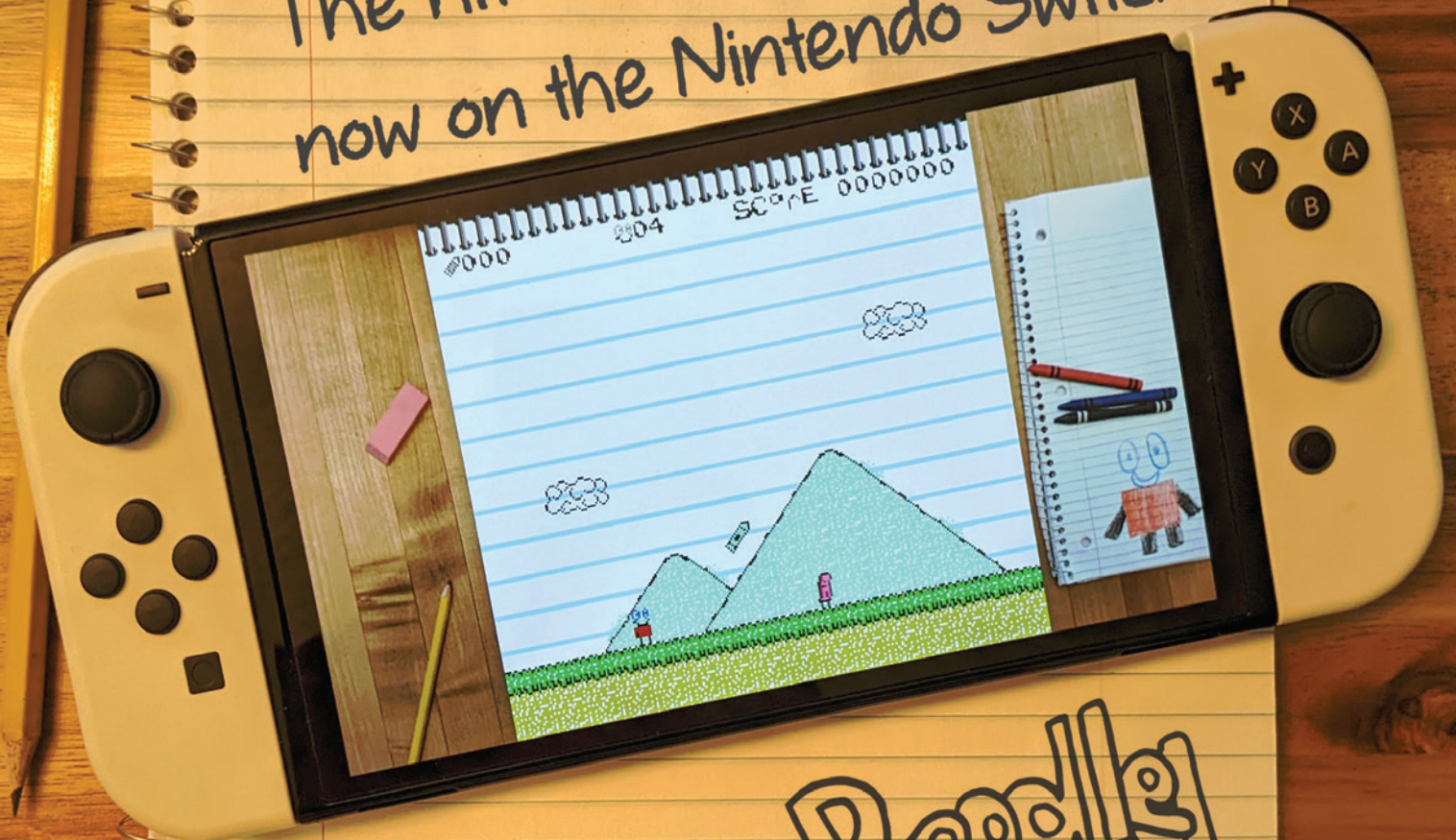
2012  
Dennaton Games



Dennaton's top-down murder simulator manages to nourish the sadistic part of your cerebellum that other games cannot reach. Make your way through impeccably designed environments, using anything to annihilate everything in your path. It's unmatched, even by its own sequel, with a thumping soundtrack to boot.

# PENCIL NOT REQUIRED.

The hit indie NES game,  
now on the Nintendo Switch!



The evil King Eraser and his office supply minions had stolen the magical crayon used to create Doodle's amazing world! Play as Doodle and travel across the world to defeat King Eraser and his minions.

Doodle World Deluxe includes the original version of Doodle World and the all-new game, Doodle World Redrawn!

## Doodle World Deluxe



[DoodleWorldGame.com](http://DoodleWorldGame.com)

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Marc Jowett brings us a whole load of **new stuff** to play on **old stuff**



## Affinity Sorrow

**Developer** SECOND DIMENSION **Publisher** SECOND DIMENSION **On** MEGA DRIVE  
**Released** TBC **Socials** @alterdimension

**Turn-based RPG *Affinity Sorrow* hit its Kickstarter goal last year and tells the story of Nex, a young man setting out to save the world from a race called the Emphyreans, a group set on the whole 'world domination' thing.**

This is an RPG after all, so Nex won't be alone, and there will be the usual recruits on hand to help him on his journey. As well as the main storyline, there will also be plenty of side quests for us to sink our teeth into, too.

Javier Leal from Second Dimension tells us, "*Affinity Sorrow* is a new and 16-bit old-school RPG heavily inspired by classics like *Final Fantasy*, *Breath of Fire*, *Dragon Quest* and the *Mana* series.

"The game presents an original story with lots of playable characters to recruit and quests to complete, and will also feature a crafting system."

The team have set five key goals for the project in order to make it the ultimate RPG.

**Storytelling** – Delivering an epic tale full of adventure, from humorous moments to more emotional segments.

**Engaging look and feel** – *Affinity Sorrow* will have a retro, nostalgic feel to it, but at the same time, the team want to deliver a high-quality product that wouldn't feel out of place among today's RPG games.

**Exciting and fun exploration** – From green fields to beautiful castles, the game will have a varied array of terrain to explore.

**Solid and intense combat** – Stay and fight or run away? *Affinity Sorrow* promises an easy-to-use turn-based combat system.

**Customisable experience** – Levelling up, raising stats, new characters. Y'know, shit like that.

There is no concrete release date currently for *Affinity Sorrow*, but the game is shaping up to be very special indeed.



WATCH IT



## Sacred Line 2

**Developer** SASHA DARKO **Publisher** MEGA CAT STUDIOS  
**On** MEGA DRIVE **Released** TBC **Socials** @SashaDarko

Sasha Darko's horror graphic adventure novel *Sacred Line 2* is Mega Drive bound, and will serve as both a sequel and a prequel to the original game. It's anticipated that *Sacred Line 2* will be 2-3 times bigger than the original and will feature a huge array of puzzles and extended areas to explore.

You play as Sarah, a protagonist with a haunted past, who has been captured by a religious cult. Did we mention Sarah is dead? Killed at the hands of the cult? Ah, okay. Yes, that's quite an important plot point.

Death in the game is no big deal though, and you are taken back to the last checkpoint. There is no game over, meaning the game will be incredibly user-friendly.

With a massive cast of characters, a haunting orchestral soundtrack and multiple endings, there should be plenty of replay value. Every choice you make impacts the end game.

James Deighan from Mega Cat Studios tells us that there is no firm release date currently, but the team are working hard on fine-tuning the game. 📺



## Mystic Searches

**Developer** THE NEW 8-BIT HEROES **Publisher** THE NEW 8-BIT HEROES  
**On** NES **Released** NOVEMBER 2023 **Socials** @New8bitHeroes

The fantasy adventure game *Mystic Searches* stems from a concept dating all the way back to the early 90s and led to the creation of the *NESmaker* tool, which is used by a lot of indie developers today.

Taking on the role of Julian (a young minstrel), we are told you will traverse a vast land, combat terrifying creatures and ultimately learn the song that will restore peace and balance to the world. Naturally, you come armed with a trusty lute as well. All good minstrels have a lute, right?

*Mystic Searches* has a *Zelda*-style feel to it, something which the developers openly admit was an influence on the direction of the title.

With a vast array of areas to explore, enemies to do battle with and items to craft and upgrade, *Mystic Searches* is shaping up to be one of the most ambitious NES games for some time, and will really push the NES to its limits. We're keeping everything crossed to have a review copy in time for issue 4 of *Debug*. 📺







## The Fallen Crown

**Developer** ATAVIST GAMES **Publisher** BROKE STUDIO **On** GAME BOY COLOR **Released** 2024

It took just 36 hours for Metroidvania game *The Fallen Crown* to breeze past its Kickstarter target, and it will see a physical release next year via Broke Studio.

You play as an undead warrior with no memory of his past. The goal is to recover both your body and your memories.

There are three classes to choose from, and you're equipped with both primary and secondary weapons. Armour and weapon upgrades are possible as you progress.

*The Fallen Crown* will also contain classic platform sections and puzzle elements. [📄](#)



WATCH IT



## Hunter Girls

**Developer** PSCD GAMES **Publisher** PSCD GAMES **On** MEGA DRIVE **Released** WINTER 2023

*Hunter Girls* is a 2D endless runner game, which increases in difficulty as the game progresses.

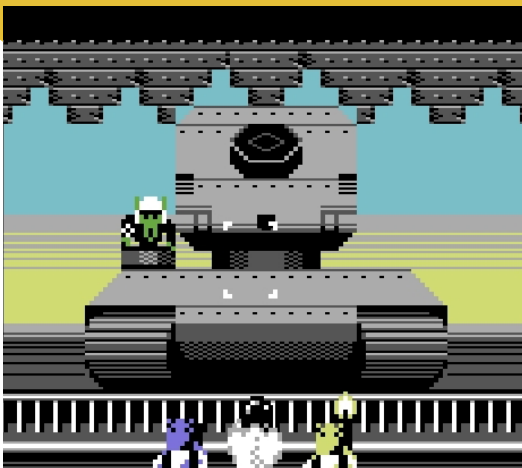
Starting with Agnes and her shield, you are soon joined by two other girls, and the challenge is to use each of their strengths at the correct time in sequence – shield, sword and magic. All three need to be replenished as well, so you can't just button mash.

A multiplayer option will also be present, allowing for a much easier experience switching between the girls.

*Hunter Girls* is almost complete and will be out around the time you are reading this. [📄](#)



WATCH IT



## Captain Ishtar 2

**Developer** ALF YNGVE **Publisher** PSYTRONIK SOFTWARE **On** C64 **Released** SPRING 2024

Space adventure *Captain Ishtar* is getting a sequel, with developer Alf Yngve aiming for a release early next year.

The game will put you back in the shoes of the captain himself and is a mixture of genres spread over five parts as Ishtar once again battles those pesky futuristic aliens.

*Captain Ishtar 2* will include a side-scrolling shmup, a hoverboard chase, a 3D flight sequence, arcade-style shooting and an adventure part. This effectively turns the game into a 5-in-1 collection of mini-games. [📄](#)



WATCH IT



## Traumatarium

**Developer** HORATIU.NYC **Publisher** BROKE STUDIO **On** GAME BOY **Released** WINTER 2023

*Traumatarium* is a randomly generated dungeon crawler presented as a static screen adventure book, and your decisions will determine how each playthrough pans out. Battle sequences involve pressing either the A button to attack or the B button to use an item. Weapons and items can be purchased.

With the game being randomly generated, *Traumatarium* will lend itself to multiple playthroughs, and we are told that during some playthroughs, hidden relics may be visible but not accessible, meaning further playthroughs are required to acquire them. On occasion, explorers may also provide hints as to where the special rooms are located. [📄](#)



WATCH IT

## Full Quiet

**Developer** RETROTAINTMENT GAMES **Publisher** 8 BIT-LEGIT  
**On NES** **Released** OUT NOW **Socials** @retrotainmenthq

**Full Quiet is an open-world survival adventure, which sees you having to restore radio relay grids to find your missing son. As you navigate each part of the map, you are required to remove static, solve puzzles and defeat enemies along the way.**


Puzzles include *Pipe Mania*/*BioShock* style fixing pipes, to having to memorise Morse code signals. There are hints along the way – via radio signals and scraps of paper – but it isn't always obvious what you need to do. *Full Quiet* is a survival game that leaves you to figure the answer out for yourself at times.

The game itself is absolutely huge – possibly one of the biggest NES games ever made. Don't expect an easy ride at any point either, with tough enemies from the off. You do have unlimited ammo which is welcome, but you also have to reload, so expect strategic battles with the enemy.

An excellent addition to *Full Quiet* is the full day/night cycle, with enemies getting stronger as day turns to night. You will want to unlock and remember the locations of the safe houses to get back safely before nightfall.

There are a few minor gripes I had with the game. Enemies respawning as soon as you leave and return to an area can be very frustrating, and the controls can be overly complex at times. While there is help in the instruction manual, it didn't appear to give all the information needed.

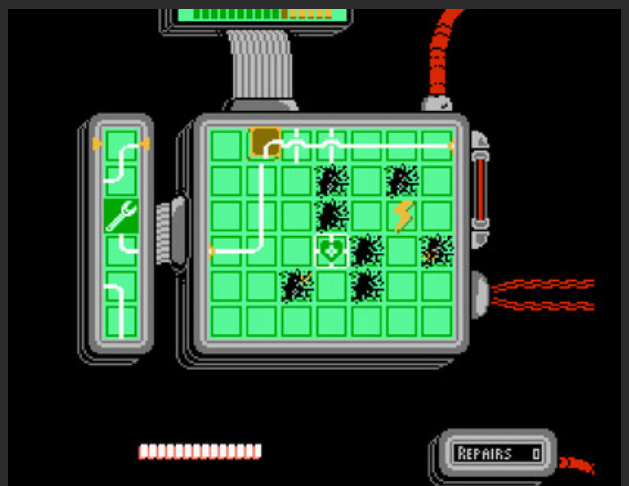
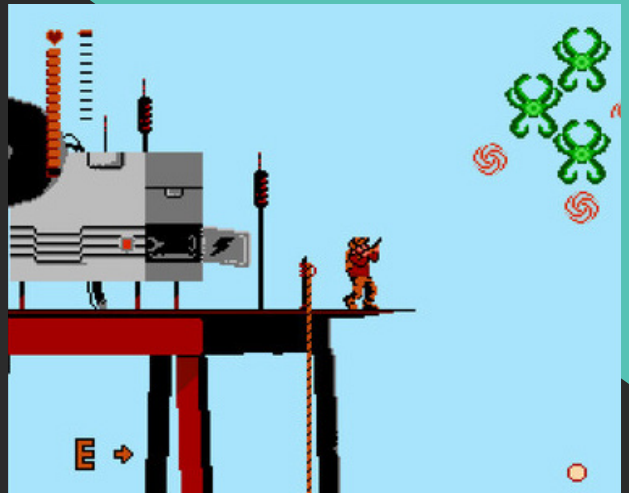
Graphically, *Full Quiet* is impressive indeed, with a lot of varying animations and sprites. The hard work Retrotainment has put into this NES version has to be applauded.

*Full Quiet* isn't simply a game you can complete in a few hours, it's an epic adventure that draws you in and gets better as you put the hours in. 

★★★★☆



WATCH IT





## Extreme Volleyball Infernal League

**Developer** RAPHNET TECHNOLOGIES **Publisher** RAPHNET TECHNOLOGIES **On** MASTER SYSTEM  
**Released** OUT NOW **Socials** @raphnet\_tech

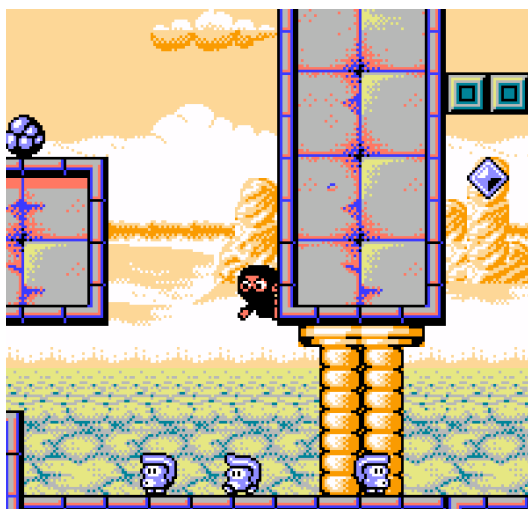
*Extreme Volleyball Infernal League* isn't simply a game of volleyball. It's a game of setting opponents on fire while smashing the ball directly at their face, fully justifying the acronym *EVIL*.

*Mortal Kombat* fans will quickly notice the frequent nods to that most famous of fighting games – especially if you choose the tournament mode, which comes complete with that mountain of opponents to climb.

Two other modes are also available: Rogueball is perhaps the most interesting, and is a survival-type story mode. It sees you work your way across a grid, defeating opponents, playing bonus games and collecting power-ups. The other mode, Duels, is a simple one-on-one affair versus an opponent of your choosing.

Each character has two different attributes, speed and jump, and these vary between characters.

*EVIL* is a lot of fun while it lasts, and a very unique take on the game of volleyball. 📺



## Sam's Journey

**Developer** KNIGHTS OF BYTES **Publisher** KNIGHTS OF BYTES **On** NES  
**Released** DECEMBER 2023 **Social** @knightssofbytes

*Sam's Journey* is a side-scrolling platform adventure, but it isn't your typical platform game as it dares to think outside the box. Can't reach a platform but see a spring? Move it into the right position and you'll be able to bounce up to it. See? That's new.

Yes, there are typical platform elements, but throughout the game, Sam encounters different costumes he can try on and these costumes provide different effects. As a ninja, you can bounce off walls; as an astronaut, you can propel upwards to higher areas. And we swear we were just dressed up as Elvis.

While each level can be completed with a relatively small dollop of ease, if you want to 100% complete any of them then you'll need to grab coins, trophies and gems as well. This is where *Sam's Journey* suddenly goes full-on *Crash Bandicoot*, becoming a much tougher affair for those completionists. To succeed with this challenge then you need to make sure you don't hit an enemy and lose that important costume.

With fluid gameplay, a vast amount of levels and delightful jingles to accompany you, *Sam's Journey* is an absolute must for platform fans and one of the best indie games I have played this year. 📺





## Q&A: Matt Hughson

**Matt is a homebrew developer that we've been keeping an eye on for some time now. He's already released a couple of impressive retro-themed titles, but it was when he announced earlier in the year that he would try to create a complete game in 30 days that we really started paying attention.**

**Then in the summer he revealed the Homebrew Summer Showcase, over 140 homebrew submissions from coders all around the world. So we did the only thing we could do, drop the man a line asking for a quick chat. Luckily, he obliged.**

**Can you start by telling us a little bit about your programming experience – some of the titles you've previously worked on?**

I didn't do much (if any) programming growing up. I went off to University in 2001 thinking I was going into a game design course, but it turned out to be a really intense programming degree! Luckily that turned out to be a great fit for me, and I fell in love with game programming.

Since graduation, I've been working professionally in the games industry for about 20 years. Over that time I worked on a bunch of games. Some of the bigger series are *Gears of War*, *Dying Light*, *Prototype*, and a whole bunch of EA games.

Throughout that time I've always enjoyed working on personal indie game projects in my spare time. I did stuff for Android, PC, and even Windows Phone! Those projects never made much of a splash until around 2020 when I started doing homebrew development for the NES, and released my first homebrew title: *From Below*.

Homebrew, if you aren't aware, is what we call games developed for obsolete consoles, like the NES, Game Boy and SNES.

My homebrew projects are written primarily in C, with some assembly. I tend to trade ease-of-coding for poor run-time performance. In other words, I prefer to have a less performant game, if it means it's easier to maintain and code. I could increase performance by writing everything in assembly, but prefer to use C as

much as possible – especially for gameplay code.

**And where are you working now?**

My day job is working at The Coalition in Vancouver, Canada. I've been there for about 10 years, working on games like *Gears of War 4* and *Gears 5*.

All of my indie development is done in spare moments between work, family and sleep!

**You seem to prefer to work on retro Nintendo consoles like the NES and Game Boy. Why Nintendo in particular? And would you consider porting your games to other formats?**

I would say it's twofold...

First, I grew up in a time and place where the NES was king! It dominated all aspects of a kid's life, and it has deeply embedded itself in my psyche. Playing an NES game is like comfort food for me, and with NES homebrew I get to become the chef!

In addition to that nostalgic draw, the NES and Game Boy have very mature workflows for modern game developers, and are very welcoming to programmers that are wanting to use C as a programming language. If you've ever programmed a game before on a modern platform, I am confident you could make an NES or Game Boy game.

I think from the outside looking in, creating games for retro consoles can look like dark magic – something for elite coders and hardware wizards – but it's really not. I think it was at some point, but today anyone can do it!

**Where do you find the time to do all this and hold down a full-time job?!**

It's basically all I do with my free time, outside of work and my family. I have a wife, and two young daughters, so it honestly doesn't leave a ton of time to work on personal projects. I find that putting in a little bit of time every day goes a long way. I actually wonder if having less free time helps. Ever since I had kids, I've found I really value every spare moment I have to myself, and I rarely waste it. I make the most of every minute... usually.



Super Sunny World



Witch n' Wiz

### Do you prefer working for the modern platforms or the retro ones?

I would say that for personal projects, working on retro consoles has been amazing. It's so fun working on limited hardware, where every line of code actually matters. The consoles also force the game projects to be a little smaller, so I feel less obligated to spend years working on a game. Working on the NES feels a lot like a game jam, in which you get to cut corners and make concessions, and the audience gets it.

### Being Mario fans, we're particularly interested in *Super Sunny World*, which I believe you aimed to develop in just 30 days. How did that go?

Earlier this year I was working on a much larger platformer game for the NES. That project was somewhat inspired by *Zelda 2: The Adventures of Link*, with a mix of top-down overworld, side-scrolling dungeons, and non-linear progression.

I reached a point in that project where I had the core platforming mechanics done: animation, AI, scrolling engine, etc. and it occurred to me that with those ingredients in place, I was very close to having everything needed to make a *Super Mario Bros.* game (aside from some additional enemies, levels, etc). So I (publicly) made a goal to create a *Mario*-like game for the NES in 30 days!

Well, that was in March, and it's now October...

That might sound like things went horribly wrong, but it's the opposite! Development over that 30 days went really well, and I probably could have put out a decent game at the end of it. However, I was really loving what I was creating, and loving working on it. I made the decision to turn it into something slightly bigger, and more polished, rather than rushing it out to meet the 30-day deadline.

So I kept working on it, and to be honest, summer break hit and progress slowed a lot during that time. With the kids back in school now though, I'm working on *Super Sunny World* a bunch again, and things are looking awesome. I just integrated the final tileset, most of the core enemy types are done, and I'm ready to start putting it all together into a proper game experience.

I recently played another *Mario*-like game called *Snail Hop* for the NES, and it inspired me to try and build proper bosses for the game too. Originally I was just going to have something similar to Bowser in *Mario 1*, but *Snail Hop* showed me I can take things further without a huge time investment. I've never programmed a boss fight before, so that should be a challenge.

My hope is to have the game finished by the end of the year.

### The homebrew scene is incredibly prolific. Do you have any favourite developers yourself?

I personally find the journey of homebrew development to be the most interesting part, not the final game products. So the developers I tend

to enjoy the most are those that share a lot of in-progress work. Here's a few I would recommend checking out:

Something Nerdy Studios (NES)  
Bite the Chilli Productions (NES, GBA, Atari)  
Stefan Trifunović (NES)  
Chris Cacciatore (NES)  
Morphcat Games (NES)  
PSCD (Genesis/Mega Drive)  
FG Software (NES, PC Engine)

### We loved the Homebrew Games Summer Showcase you did this year, as it was such a celebration of how vibrant the homebrew community is. For those who are unaware of it, can you explain what it is and how it came about?

Sure! The Summer Showcase is inspired by all the E3-type shows that the big publishers put out every year, highlighting their upcoming games. I saw those and thought, 'I think we should have something similar for homebrew games!'

I put the call out for game submissions, expecting 20 or so replies, and ended up getting over 140!

Originally I planned to show 1-5 minutes of each game, but with so many games, that was dropped to 5-30 seconds for each one.

The result is a super-fast-paced, blast-to-the-eyeballs, video of non-stop homebrew gameplay. You can find it on YouTube!

### And is it going to be an annual thing?


Yes I hope so. Last year I published a homebrew magazine, *RETROBREW*, but creating it was very time consuming. The Homebrew Summer Showcase fills a similar role, but it is much easier to put together. So I think it may end up replacing the plans I had for *RETROBREW* magazine.

### Anything you can tell us about future releases?

Top of the list for me right now is *From Below Pocket*, a Game Boy port of my first homebrew project, *From Below* for the NES. As we are doing this interview, the physical version of the game is on sale for a limited time at [www.frombelowgame.com](http://www.frombelowgame.com)! The sale ends on October the 16th.

If you are interested in NES platformers, find me on social media (@matthughson) to get updates on *Super Sunny World*. I think it's going to be my best game yet!

I'm also working on a Sega Genesis/Mega Drive port of my previous game, *Witch n' Wiz*, which will hopefully be going on sale sometime this year, or early 2024.

You can find out more about Matt and his work at [www.matthughson.com](http://www.matthughson.com) or [mhughson.itch.io](https://mhughson.itch.io) 

# debug

## road trip

\*Or pics from swanky game events we go to that mean we can leave work early.

If we're stuck indoors for too long then we get decidedly cranky, so thankfully there are regular gaming events we can attend. This could be a packed gaming market, a weekend event or an industry gameathon. We'll go, take pictures and report back.

This month: WASD and Timeless



**Where:** Truman Brewery, London

**When:** September 14-16

**What is it?** The good and the great of the gaming world gather for this industry get together. It's an ideal opportunity to chat to some of the developers and also get to play some of the indie games due for release in the coming months.

**More info:** [www.wasd.live.com](http://www.wasd.live.com)



**Goodboy Galaxy** - released in October for Game Boy Advance. Shown here on Evercade, which has a December release date.



Evercade's indie stand. There were some cracking games here.

# 'TIMELESS GAMING CONVENTION

**Where:** Arcade Club, Bury, Manchester

**When:** August 16

**What is it?** It was the second year for the convention—formerly known as Nerdcon, which has wisely set up shop in Arcade Club Bury, the home of Europe's largest arcade. Pre-orders have already gone live for next year's event, so we advise you to get in quick for the best ticket deals.

**More info:** [www.timelessgaming.co.uk](http://www.timelessgaming.co.uk)



A live performance inspired by the soundtrack to *C-Smash VRS*. A signed vinyl EP was available to purchase on the day.



Nick speaking with the developer of *Heretic's Fork* via the WASD-provided video chat set up.







# FREE

# PLAY

Hundreds of indie games are released every week, and some of them are completely free. Every issue we'll go through the latest ones to bring you the most interesting games for nowt.



## 1 HOLOCURE – SAVE THE FANS!

The influences here are very obvious, as *HoloCure – Save the Fans!* is obviously a *Vampire Survivor* clone, but this one has the advantage of featuring VTubers from Hololive in Japan – an agency for VTubers, apparently. All that will mean little to those outside of Japan, but it did help

*HoloCure* get 50,000 downloads on the first day when it was launched on itch.io last year.

The game has been available on Steam since August, and has an Overwhelmingly Positive rating with nearly 18,000 reviews. In other words, it's good.



WATCH IT



## 2 LITTLE MAN HAS A DAY

In this case though, Little Man's day only lasts about 15-20 minutes. Yep, it's a very short game indeed, but also rather sweet.

Little Man wakes up and doesn't know what to do with his day, so he needs your help. You get up, wander around, talk to a few people, and then it ends. Ultimately, the game attempts to show how people live with depression, and we think it does it rather well.



WATCH IT

## 3 LAST BROADCAST

The developers of *Last Broadcast*, The Disc Jockeys, describe it as an 'experimental narrative' game, and we suspect that's a pretty accurate and succinct way to put it.

The world is coming to an end, and rather than spend it with family or friends, your character in the game – who's a DJ – decides to give their last show as the sun turns red and the world burns.

Three separate callers ring in during the show, and you pick responses from a branching narrative. You also get to pick from a selection of 15 musical artists to play during the show.



WATCH IT



DEBUG01.oddsandsods.indd @ 74% [GPU Preview] × \*DEBUG02.lastminutewinner.indd @ 74% [GPU Preview] × \*DEBUG03.rev\_bombbrushcyberfunk.indd @ 74%

30 20 10 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 110 120 130 140 150 160 170 180 190 200 210 220 230 240

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100

**FEATURE**

# LAST MINUTE WINNER

Sometimes we find out about games just a tad too late to get it in the mag. We don't want you to miss out though, so here's 'Last Minute Winner', the page we put everything that turns up literally just before our deadline.

**BOBLS**

Here's a game that sadly caught our eye too late to be featured as a full preview, but check out the video via the QR code and you'll see why we like it. Smooth, smart gameplay involving collecting gemstones and bouncing on bubbles. There's a level editor to make your own stages, too.

**MONOLITH: REQUIEM OF THE ANCIENTS**

Although it's not released until next year, there's already a lot to get excited about in Monolith: Requiem of the Ancients. Described as an action-RPG by the developers, you'll pick up magical powers along the way, learning new skills and abilities as you do. Definitely more on this one soon.

**TEARDOWN**

Yes, *Teardown* has been out for a while now, but it's been such a success on PC that the news it's being converted to PlayStation 5 is big enough to feature here. PS5 owners can start tearing stuff down from November 15, and PS Plus owners get it from day one.

**BANG-ON BALLS: CHRONICLES**

Despite the slightly comical name, *Bang-On Balls* is a game that, until now, had eluded me. Which is a shame, as it looks rather fun. Mixing elements from some of the best platformers, it's been received warmly since its 2021 release on PC. And this October sees a release across most consoles.

**MINIATURES**

Four items are in a basic wooden box: a toy lizard, a captured moth, a screwdriver and a seashell. *Miniatures* is a game made up of four adventures that link all the objects together. Each adventure features varied gameplay, and we're definitely looking forward to this one. More next issue.

**ASTRONIMO**

A team of four space explorers are stranded on a small planet, and their only hope of survival is to explore the planet, solve puzzles (naturally) and gather as many materials as possible to build a shuttle to get them off to safety. *Astronimo* is currently in Early Access for PC.



**Publisher**  
Daniel Crocker

**Editor**  
Dean Mortlock

**Art Editor**  
Kate Munday

**Community Manager**  
Nick Crocker

**Contributors**  
Andrew Dickinson,  
Dan Morris, Dominic Leighton,  
Faith Johnson, James  
Oakwood, James Tocchio,  
Josh Thompson, Justin Towell,  
Lewis Packwood, Marc Jowett,  
Stuart Gipp

**Special Thanks To**  
All the lovely people who made this magazine a reality, and all the incredible developers making fantastic games. In the words of the Third Doctor: "It's the end, but the moment has been prepared for."

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