play! zine

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HARDWARE:
APPLE MACBOOK NEO

LOCÁL SCENE:
INTERVIEW WITH RADOŠ NIKOLIĆ

ESPORTS:
SERBIA AT THE NATIONS CUP

FIRST LOOK:
WINDROSE

GAME OF THE MONTH:
SAROS™

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ART DIRECTOR/LAYOUT:

Milica Rosić

CONTACT:

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www.play-zine.com | www.play.co.rs

Belgrade | redakcija@play-zine.com

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WELCOME

Unless Rockstar decides to delay GTA 6 for a third time (serving us a consolation, but sweet, prize in the form of a new trailer along the way), November 2026 will go down in history as the peak of this gaming year, and probably of the whole decade (provided the next trip to Vice City doesn't turn out to be a total miss). Since everyone will avoid November like Blighttown in Dark Souls 1, most studios and gaming companies are trying to get their games out in earlier months. Thanks to that strategy, by the end of April a ton of phenomenal games had already come out, some of which we'll certainly remember for a very, very long time.

As far as this issue of Play! is concerned, we're thinking above all of Saros, the new hit from Finnish studio Housemarque, which leads a kind of cocktail of the roguelite, bullet hell and third-person shooter genres. Among our favourites of the second spring month are also PRAGMATA and Replaced, an indie title that once again proves video games can stand shoulder to shoulder with other, classic art forms such as literature and film.

Outside game reviews, our esteemed hardware expert presented an Apple product that is actually affordable (compared with the rest of their range, of course), while in Retro Corner we looked back at the significance of the first female fighter in the fighting genre ahead of the new Street Fighter film this October. On the local scene, we talked to Radoš Nikolić, an experienced programmer but relatively new game developer, who is behind the soulslike project Horns. The game isn't out yet, but you can try its demo on Steam!



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Ubisoft dates Assassin's Creed: Black Flag Resynced

There was plenty of uncertainty after the new wave of layoffs and cancelled games, but Ubisoft kept its promise – we finally know when Assassin's Creed: Black Flag Resynced comes out, the modern edition of Edward Kenway's thrilling adventure. We're returning to the golden age of piracy with one of the most anticipated remakes of the last five years, bringing plenty of improvements and new features.

At a presentation broadcast on April 23 at 18:00, Ubisoft confirmed earlier rumours – Resynced comes out on July 9. During the 30-minute programme we also learned that the game won't have DLC, multiplayer or RPG elements, and that the campaign brings plenty of new content, with combat that puts a much bigger focus on action.



Call of Duty film gets a release date

During this year's CinemaCon, Activision officially confirmed the release date of the Call of Duty film - the cinema premiere is set for June 30, 2028, and the film is then expected to be available on Paramount+.

The screenplay and production are in the hands of Peter Berg (Friday Night Lights, Deepwater Horizon) and Taylor Sheridan (Yellowstone, Landman), while Berg will also direct. David Glasser and Activision president Rob Kostich are also producing.

"We will approach this project the same way we did with Top Gun: Maverick, to guarantee it lives up to the exceptionally high standards this franchise and its fans deserve," said Paramount.

The theme song for 007 First Light is out, performed by Lana Del Rey

On the subreddit dedicated to Lana Del Rey, fans noticed a new song in the ASCAP database back in October, called First Light. Since James Bond themes almost always carry the title of the film itself, many believed this would be the main theme for 007 First Light. Now, a little over a month before the game's release, the song has appeared on YouTube, performed by Lana Del Rey herself.

Lana has recorded a song for a James Bond film before - she revealed that the song "24" from her 2015 album Honeymoon was originally intended for Spectre, which came out the same year. However, the producers turned it down and went with Sam Smith's Writing's On the Wall.

First Light arrives May 27 on PC, PS5 and Xbox Series X/S.

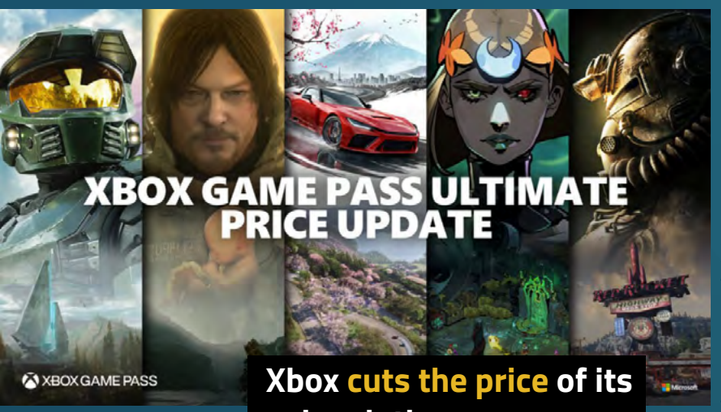


4A Games and Deep Silver have officially unveiled METRO 2039, the next chapter of the dark universe created by Dmitry Glukhovsky. Developed in cooperation with the author, the game comes out this winter and will be available on PS5, Xbox Series X/S and PC. We don't know the release date.

The trailer takes us into the heart of post-apocalyptic Moscow, where the last survivors fight desperately for survival in the tunnels of the ruined city. We'll explore the central themes through the eyes of the protagonist, called the Stranger. The Stranger is a loner haunted by nightmares, forced to journey into the Metro despite swearing he would never return. The underground factions are ruled by an authoritarian regime that gives the inhabitants false hope of a new life on the surface.



METRO 2039 arrives this winter, first trailer reveals story details



Xbox cuts the price of its subscription

More than half a year after its controversial price hike, Xbox has announced a new Game Pass price cut. The head of Microsoft Gaming revealed that the new monthly price of Game Pass Ultimate is 20.99 euros (it previously cost 26.99 euros). On top of that, PC Game Pass has also become cheaper – in Serbia the price of this subscription has dropped from 1,100 to 950 dinars.

Xbox also announced that new games in the Call of Duty series will no longer be available on Game Pass Ultimate or PC Game Pass on launch day. Future CoD games will be added to the platform during the following holiday season (roughly a year after the original release), while earlier titles will remain available to subscribers.



Disney quietly pulls 15 more games from Steam

If you were planning to complete your collection of classic Disney or Star Wars games on Steam, you may already be too late. According to data shared by the well-known insider Wario64, on April 14 Disney completely removed 15 games from the platform.

The publisher gave no official explanation or advance warning for this unexpected move. The "retired" titles span various genres, including Star Wars: Rebellion, Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End and Planet of the Apes: Last Frontier.

This is already the second time in 2026 that Disney has made such a move. In January it quietly removed 14 games, bringing the total number of deleted titles to as many as 29.



Here's how much Rockstar earns daily from GTA Online

The hacker group ShinyHunters, which carried out a cyber attack on Rockstar Games, has now published confidential company data after the creator of the GTA series reportedly refused to pay a ransom. No interesting details about GTA 6's development were found - it's mostly analytics data relating to GTA Online and Red Dead Online, including how much these games earn daily and weekly.

What stands out most is that GTA Online earns about 20 times more than Red Dead Online, specifically around 1.3 million dollars a day. For the period from September 2025 to April 2026, Rockstar is estimated to have earned almost half a billion dollars from GTA Online alone.



PS6 may have a 1 TB SSD, reportedly will cost over 600 dollars

Sony hasn't unveiled PlayStation 6 yet, but plenty of information about its specs, rough release date and other details has already appeared thanks to insider reports.

The latest information comes from the well-known insider KeplerL2, specifically his comments on NeoGAF. Citing the current estimate of production costs, the report talks about the console's price - it could potentially cost 760 dollars, which with the expected subsidy could come down to 699 dollars. Besides discussing the price, Kepler said the PS6 will have a 1 TB SSD and won't have a disc drive. As for the release date, we learned that the console's launch may be pushed back to 2028 or even 2029.

Filming of The Legend of Zelda film has officially wrapped

Sony Pictures has confirmed that The Legend of Zelda film is ready to enter the next phase of production after six months of filming. Director Wes Ball (the Maze Runner trilogy, Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes) revealed that the whole process is on schedule and that the team is now moving into post-production.

Filming took place in New Zealand, home to many fantasy/sci-fi productions such as The Lord of the Rings and Avatar. Zelda is played by Bo Bragason, while Benjamin Evan Ainsworth has taken on the role of Link. As for other characters, a video leaked in November 2025 suggests that Impa will be played by Ms. Casey from Severance.

The Legend of Zelda film is scheduled to premiere on May 7, 2027.



Given the franchise's success and the unresolved parts of the story, it's somehow taken for granted that Insomniac will sooner or later release a new instalment in the Marvel's Spider-Man series. The current focus is on Wolverine, which should come out at the end of the summer, but it seems development of a new Spider-Man project is already well under way.

Ben Jordan, the actor who lent his likeness to Peter Parker, posted a photo from a motion-capture shoot on social media with a spider emoji and the message: "If you know, you know". The original Instagram post was soon deleted, but the photo spread to other networks. Predictably, many interpreted the post as confirmation that the third main game in the Spider-Man series is in development.



Actor claims Insomniac is working on a new Spider-Man game



A brand new Don't Starve game announced

On Thursday, April 9, we watched the Triple-i Initiative Showcase, an event dedicated to the world of indie games that brought us as many as 40 trailers. As with any presentation of this kind, it's important that the last announcement leaves an impression. If you're a fan of the Don't Starve series, it will surely make you happy!

Klei Entertainment unveiled Don't Starve Elsewhere, a new game in a series considered one of the most important in the survival-crafting genre. The trailer shows gameplay and an art style that fans will recognise, as well as good old characters like Wilson, Willow and Wendy. On the other hand, we also saw completely new environments, monsters and dangers we'll face.

No release date yet.



Elden Ring film cast officially confirmed, along with premiere date

Just a few days after Activision and Paramount revealed that the adaptation of the Call of Duty series will premiere in June 2028, Bandai Namco and A24 announced that the film adaptation of FromSoftware's hit Elden Ring arrives in cinemas on March 3 of the same year.

The release date news is accompanied by the announcement of the film's full cast, which is pretty solid. The list includes plenty of old and new faces, but we don't know which roles they'll play – for now there's only a rumour about Cailee Spaeny, who may play Melina.

You can see the full list on our website, and the cast includes Kit Connor, Ben Whishaw, Tom Burke, Ruby Cruz, Sonoya Mizuno, Nick Offerman and Jonathan Pryce.





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MAY 2021

"WITHOUT ANY DOUBT, THIS IS ONE OF THE FIRST GAMES TRULY WORTHY OF THE NEXT-GEN PS5 TITLE."

– NIKOLA AKSENTIJEVIĆ ON RETURNAL

PLAY! 95
MAY 2016

"WHOEVER DOESN'T SHED A TEAR AT THE END OF THE GAME... MUST HAVE CHEATED!"

– MILAN ŽIVKOVIĆ ON DARK SOULS III



THE DAWN OF A NEW CIVILISATION

Dushman Gaming Studio, led by solo developer Dušan Perišić, has released a new trailer for All Roads Connected, a complex but relaxing city builder for fans of management, simulation and strategy.

The game is on Steam and currently has no release date, but you can try the free demo.

All Roads Connected is set in the distant future after a catastrophic Third World War. Generations have lived in shelters, while memories of the old world turned into myths. After a long period of silence and oblivion, the planet has recovered and humanity is waking up, and it's up to you to build a new civilisation from the ground up!

With this title, Dushman Gaming Studio brings us an ambitious strategy experience in which exploration, planning and resource management play a central role. An endless world full of opportunities and challenges changes from game to game, so the replay value is very high.

Your task isn't just to survive, but to create a mature civilisation, expanding your settlements and developing industry, with 20+ different resources, including wood, clay and cotton.







Buildings that generate resources are very important, so careful placement of mines and farms is key to making the most of the land's potential and ensuring the stable development of your civilisation. Exploring the map reveals not only new territories but also traces of a lost past - artefacts scattered across the world hold answers about what really happened and what awaits humanity in the future!

We got in touch with Dušan, who gave us a better insight into the development process and further plans for All Roads Connected through a few questions.

How would you describe working on a city builder as a solo developer?

Dušan: This is my first game, not counting small tutorials and prototypes. All Roads Connected is also the reason I started doing game dev, when it was all just a hobby. Back then the game didn't even have a name or a story, just the idea of an endless 2D world where every tile represents a resource, similar to Minecraft, which was one of my inspirations. Except this game is 2D and the buildings automatically consume or collect resources.

The game is far from my whole original vision, because I wanted thousands of resources and online trading that mimics the real world. I quickly realised that isn't possible even for a bigger studio without a player base, let alone for me. Thank goodness for common sense, so I quickly gave up on that idea! Graphics were never important to me, but I put a lot into pixel art too. You can even notice that the buildings added later look nicer than the original ones.

I have to admit I almost gave up after I deleted three months of progress. But I'm still here, happy as a little kid that at least someone is playing the demo and that I'm now talking about it. Working on the game is certainly extremely exhausting, a bit thankless, but very fulfilling in an artistic sense.

What is the most important aspect of a city builder?

Dušan: I divide city builders into aesthetic ones, road management, resource management and combinations of these. All Roads Connected is resource management with a special hook where the world is explored and the player is rewarded with resources and new suitable locations for the city. As the player gains new resources, management itself becomes harder.

Do you think an early access phase would suit a game like All Roads Connected? Can you reveal a rough release date?

Dušan: I didn't plan early access because I personally don't like that system. Maybe that would change if I got more publicity and players pushed me into early access. I certainly don't like buying games in early access, and I'd most like them to be complete and bug-free from day one, because I know I won't sleep those days waiting for bug feedback.

I'm afraid to reveal the release date because I've already pushed the game back twice. It should already have come out under both the first and second plans, but now I can say that All Roads Connected is definitely coming out this year.

Support Dushman Gaming Studio and add All Roads Connected to your Steam wishlist.





UNREAL IS LIKE A BOTTOMLESS PIT FROM WHICH NEW CHALLENGES KEEP POPPING UP

RADOŠ NIKOLIĆ ON DEVELOPING HORNS

In the first week of spring we got the chance to try one of the most interesting local projects - Horns, an ambitious souls-like RPG from Serbian developer Radoš Nikolić.

In our conversation with Radoš, we went deep into how the game came about - from the first idea and inspiration, through the development of gameplay systems and combat, all the way to the worldbuilding and atmosphere that define this genre. We talked about what it's like to make a souls-like as an indie developer, how hard it is to find the balance between challenge and fair gameplay, and how to make something original in such a popular genre.

We also touched on the technical challenges, the game's visual identity, and the reality of developing a big RPG project from Serbia, how much support is available, how much the community means and how much player feedback actually shapes the final product.



WELCOME, RADOŠ! WHAT WAS THE STARTING POINT IN THE GAME'S DEVELOPMENT?

Radoš: It all started with the story. I like writing, mostly fantasy, and Horns was a story that wasn't finished yet at the time. I somehow recognised this hobby as a chance to get into the games industry, so I started sending my work to big companies like Remedy, Konami, Capcom and Rockstar, some of which had open positions for writers.

Unfortunately, I got very few replies, without any useful feedback.

After that I decided to go back to Horns and finish the story - I wrote over 120 pages but still didn't reach the end. While working on it, I realised it could serve as the story for a game. That's where it all started.



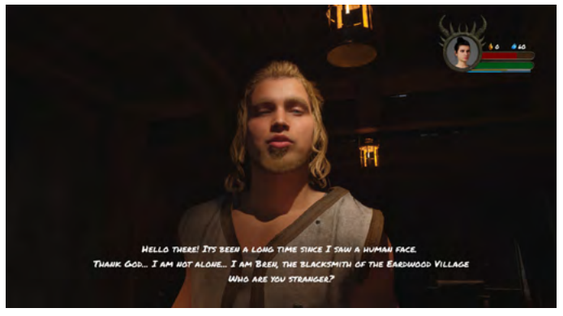
TELL US MORE ABOUT THE STORY.

Radoš: Horns takes place in a magical world called Velharion, specifically in its southern region. The protagonist is the general of Velharion's capital and the king's right hand. The story begins with an attack by the Arcanists (mages) on the capital, after which the protagonist loses all her memories. It's up to you to find out where the king is and what happened during the siege.

Magic plays a huge role in the story and world-building. Most of the population are Arcanists, sorcerers born with a magical seed inside them, while humans are a minority in this world.

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE BEFORE YOU WERE HAPPY WITH THE CURRENT STORY?

Radoš: It wasn't constant work, but all things considered, I think it took me about six months. And if I add the time I spent writing the gameplay concept, learning and development, I think I've been working on Horns for about a year in total.



THIS GENRE USUALLY GOES HAND IN HAND WITH EPIC FANTASY STORIES, BUT WHY DID YOU CHOOSE A SOULS-LIKE RPG?

Radoš: I've been playing games since the mid-nineties. RPGs are one of my favourite genres, and recently souls-likes too. I've played every Dark Souls, Demon's Souls, Bloodborne and Elden Ring, into which I poured over 600 hours of my life (base game only, without DLC). That's why I think this project was destined to become a souls-like RPG, or at least to borrow elements of the genre to some extent.

WHICH ELEMENTS DID YOU ADOPT?

Radoš: My approach to creating the concept is to try to apply all the best elements from my favourite games, old or new, and fit them into Horns' gameplay and story. As for role models from the souls-like genre, you'll immediately notice the dark atmosphere and the soul-based "currency", and soon after, the combat.

Timing and precision in combat are key, whether you're fighting in melee or using magic. However, unlike the combat in Elden Ring and other From-Soft games known for their difficulty, I decided to take a gentler path. There are challenging enemies and bosses, but fights are generally more relaxed. Although I'm a fan of souls-likes, I really don't like killing the same boss 60+ times.

As for mechanics from other games, I won't reveal too much, but I'd mention the inventory system. It leans more towards old games and is quite limited in that respect - you can't carry 20 axes and 40 swords like in Elden Ring.

In that sense, inventory management is much more challenging. I partly borrowed this concept from Resident Evil 1 and 2, as well as the approach to puzzle design and the horror atmosphere in some sections.

I'd also mention that I recently added an attribute I haven't seen in games before. You'll see!

HOW DID YOU MANAGE TO COMBINE ORIGINAL IDEAS WITH MECHANICS FROM WELL-KNOWN GENRES AND GAMES?

Radoš: Phew... I'm still working on it! I'm trying to fit everything together so it makes sense, while Horns still stands out as a unique game.



IN COMBAT, HOW DO YOU STRIKE A BALANCE BETWEEN CHALLENGE AND FAIR GAMEPLAY?

Radoš: To start with, the maths matters - the HP values and the damage dealt by the player and the enemies. Then come different moves, their speed and the logic of how they're performed, and many, many other details. The balancing process basically consists of a bit of calculating and a bit of testing. And you can freely replace the word "bit" with "lot"!

DOES ANYONE HELP YOU?

Radoš: For the first half year I worked alone. I'm a programmer with 14 years of experience, but since I hadn't worked in game dev before, I had to throw myself into learning. I quickly got the hang of writing code, but the engine was too hard for me. Unreal is like a bottomless pit from which new challenges keep popping up.

After those six months, when I was slowly bringing Horns to a demo version, I was joined by a school friend from Niš, Vladimir Zdravković. He didn't have any previous gaming experience either, so he also had to start by learning. He managed to figure out some engine basics in about a month, and then joined me in active development. He helped me a lot and I'm very grateful to him for everything.

TELL US ABOUT THE GAME'S VISUAL IDENTITY.

Radoš: Since I don't have artists on the team, I had to rely on the asset store. I had a clear vision of how to compose them, since it relies directly on the story, so that part went relatively smoothly. However, given the engine and the quality of the assets, I ran into a big problem in terms of hardware demands and optimisation. Horns runs great for me at 90+ FPS (I built my computer specifically for Unreal game dev), but on other, weaker PCs it's a totally different story. The game runs poorly even on computers that run Elden Ring and Red Dead 2 without problems.

That's why optimisation is the biggest technical challenge I've ever faced. I've watched lots of lectures and panels led by FPS game developers (frame rate is much more important there), and the whole issue is extremely serious and complex.

As for the details, I can say that the shadows and lighting in the game absolutely devour the graphics card and processor.

In this case, as a developer you have to make a compromise - graphics vs performance. We're still working on it, but I can say the first tests have shown extremely good results.

HOW MUCH TIME HAVE YOU SPENT PLAYING YOUR OWN GAME?

Radoš: I have to admit I've played the full demo only twice (it lasts about two hours on average), but I've gone through certain sections well over 100 times. Each run served a different test.

BESIDES ENGINE AND OPTIMISATION PROBLEMS, HOW CHALLENGING IS IT TO DEVELOP A PROJECT LIKE THIS IN SERBIA?

Radoš: I think a project like this is challenging wherever you're from. You have to set aside a lot of time and sacrifice certain aspects of life for development to progress. But I'd definitely name promotion as the hardest part. Hundreds and thousands of games arrive on Steam every month, so Horns is just a tiny needle in a haystack. That's why it's terribly important to focus on marketing. I'm trying, but it's not going too well so far :D

HAVE YOU GOT IN TOUCH WITH THE SERBIAN GAME DEV COMMUNITY?

Radoš: Since I'm a newcomer to the whole thing, a junior as they say, I hardly know the Serbian gaming scene at all (I only know of one company from Niš). There'll be opportunities!

Support Radoš and add Horns to your Steam wishlist.









THE ROAD TO THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Serbia picks its coaches for the Esports Nations Cup

The Esports Nations Cup (ENC) is a prestigious international tournament where the world's best esports players will compete as national teams. The first edition of the event, which takes place from November 2 to 29 in Riyadh, is organised by the Esports World Cup Foundation (EWCF), the organisation also behind the Esports World Cup (EWC), the event that holds the record for the biggest prize pool in esports history ($75,000,000).

After the application and selection process, the organisers have officially published the list of coaches (730 in total) who will represent their national teams at the upcoming esports championship. For this tournament, Serbia has chosen coaches for six esports disciplines, that is, for the teams that will defend our country's colours at the main event. On this list you'll find names that have contributed significantly to the development of esports in our country.

The ENC will bring together national teams from Europe, North America, South America, the MENA region, Africa, Asia, and Southeast



DOTA 2
NIKOLA „HAIRY_FREAK“ BABIĆ

LEAGUE OF LEGENDS
ĐORĐE „SPALE“ SPASIĆ

PUBG
MARKO „ITSDUL1K“ DULIĆ

PUBG: MOBILE
„EXPLEGIJA“

ROCKET LEAGUE
MARIO „1STNEXX“ DERDIĆ

VALORANT
PAVLE „PAKKO“ KOSTIĆ

Asia and Oceania, competing in team and individual disciplines including League of Legends, Rocket League, Trackmania, PUBG Mobile, chess and many others.

Each coach will now form a team for their assigned discipline. At the end of this phase, the complete teams will take part in qualifiers for the main tournament in Riyadh. The qualifiers will take place from May to August, with exact dates expected in the coming weeks.

The ENC brings an element of national pride to the global esports scene through a format that will be held regularly, and is the first event of its kind on this scale. Leading companies from the video game industry, including Electronic Arts, Krafton, Tencent and Ubisoft, are taking part in organising the inaugural edition. While the Esports World Cup gathers the best esports organisations, the ENC opens a new chapter with a focus on national identity.

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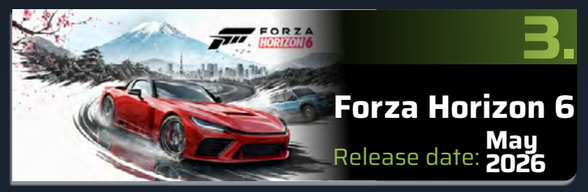
TOP WISHLIST APRIL 2026



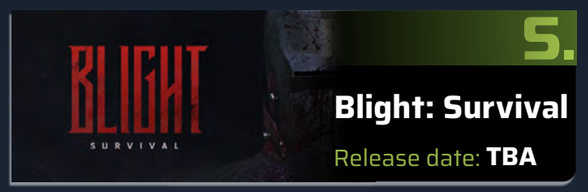
1. Subnautica 2
Release date: **2026**



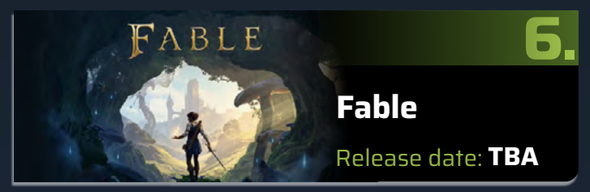
2. Deadlock
Release date: **TBA**

3. Forza Horizon 6
Release date: **May 2026**

4. Light No Fire
Release date: **TBA**



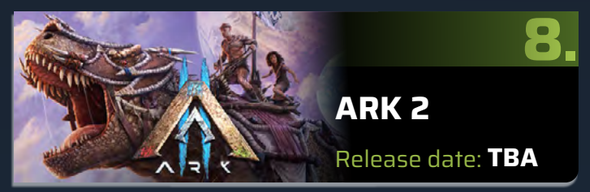
5. Blight: Survival
Release date: **TBA**



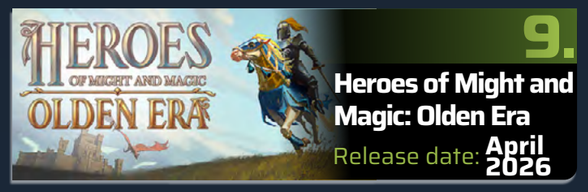
6. Fable
Release date: **TBA**



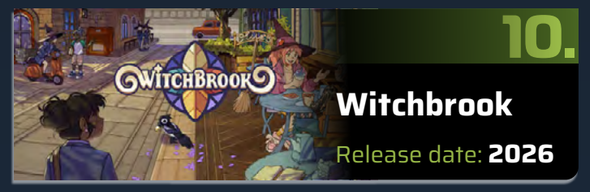
7. Kingmakers
Release date: **SOON**



8. ARK 2
Release date: **TBA**



9. Heroes of Might and Magic: Olden Era
Release date: **April 2026**



10. Witchbrook
Release date: **2026**

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Igor Totić



PIRATHEIM

Five years have passed since Valheim came out in early access and completely changed the approach to survival games. Until then we had Ark, Rust and DayZ, which focused on serious survival mechanics and constant PvP, where at any moment you risked losing everything you had gathered and built. Valheim toned things down and let players survive together and enjoy a sandbox environment, adventures and challenges where everything depended only on cooperation and the players, not on griefers and cheaters. Unfortunately, Valheim is still in EA and the gaps between new patches are very long, but luckily many games have followed this kind of survival approach, such as Enshrouded, and now Windrose.

I tried Windrose at Steam Next Fest and immediately fell in love with the game. From the very start I had the feeling it was heavily inspired by Valheim and Enshrouded, and I didn't want to spoil the experience by analysing the demo in depth, so I waited for the game to come out in EA. Back at the peak of Valheim I set up my own dedicated server



and often hosted games for myself and friends, especially games of this type. Together we racked up over 1,000 hours in Valheim, Enshrouded, V Rising and others, so I knew Windrose would be a perfect hit, especially on working EA days. But, like every EA title, Windrose has serious problems.

Windrose is literally Valheim with a pirate skin, and that's not bad. What sets Windrose apart from Valheim, besides the theme and the graphical approach, is that a lot of attention has been paid to sailing and ship combat. Almost everyone who plays Windrose has also played Black Flag and remembers how good the naval combat was. Windrose prides itself on trying to replicate that feeling, and in most cases it succeeds.



CRAFTING AND PROGRESSION ARE TAKEN STRAIGHT FROM VALHEIM

After creating your pirate, you enter a world at the height of piracy, with Blackbeard, Benjamin Hornigold and other famous pirates of Tortuga and the Caribbean. Blackbeard is of course causing chaos, playing with dark powers and magical artefacts that, through a twist of fate, leave you immortal but stranded on a desert island. It's up to you to start surviving and find out what Blackbeard is up to.

The game starts very typically for the genre – you're poorly equipped, hungry and without any help. You start the usual gathering of stones and wood and building basic survival tools, and slowly improve. As your base grows, so do your power and ability to explore further. Through quests you get your first ship, and the game opens up for exploring the islands and the world.

Crafting and progression are taken straight from Valheim. You have workstations that you upgrade over time and use to make new gear and weapons. By exploring the islands you can find locations with special recipes that give you decorations and upgrades for your camp. Decorations raise your comfort level, which gives you a buff for faster stamina regeneration, just like in Valheim. Food is similar too: you eat to increase your HP, and rarer recipes also give you stat bonuses.





The game also has level progression similar to Enshrouded and Dark Souls, where you raise standard stats such as Strength, Vitality and so on. Each stat affects the type of weapon you use, and each weapon has a corresponding stat that boosts its damage - just like in Souls games. On top of this, there's a passive talent tree through which you can focus on a build you like. Weapons are varied and interesting - from sabres and rapiers, through muskets, pistols and blunderbusses, to two-handed swords and hammers. It's very easy to find your playstyle, because the game offers whatever pirate experience you want.

The combat itself is basic, and I don't understand why people online swear by the combat system. You have a basic and a heavy attack and can technically chain them into a basic combo, but that's it. Hit feedback is weak and you don't get the feeling you've walloped someone on the noggin with a two-handed sword. It's the same whether you've stroked them with a sabre or smashed them with a hammer; the enemy's HP just drops by more or less. The AI is very random and sometimes offers a challenge, while sometimes it just goes dumb and does nothing. All enemies have their own level, and some hit like trucks even at your gear level - it's very inconsistent.

Ships are generally Windrose's main asset and one of the few elements that truly belong to the game. While sailing you can fire broadside and bow cannons, and once you've damaged an enemy ship enough, you can board it and deal with the crew.



Battles are dynamic, fast and often challenging because of waves and weather, but that makes them great fun. In this first stage of EA, upgrades and combat are quite simple and quickly understood, but I hope they'll enrich the system with more complicated options such as sail control, a bigger influence of wind on movement, special cannon attacks and the like. In any case, even in this state, ship battles aren't something you avoid, because they're always fun. Of course, sailors can sing sea shanties while sailing, which is very important in these games, if not the most important thing.

The biggest problem in the game, at least from my perspective, is exploration and quests. The game holds your hand A LOT, and every task is clearly marked on the map. On top of that, all the islands have clearly marked locations where you can find special resources or mines. Once you reach these locations, which are always available (especially mines), you simply won't need to explore the rest of the island unless you want to gather some basic resources. The game also has a fast-travel mechanic that's very useful but completely kills the immersion of survival and exploration.



You'll never think you're not ready to go somewhere, because you can always very easily return to base or, if you die, return to the place of death. This considerably reduces the challenge and the sense of exploration, which bothered me a lot. I remember my friends and I planning in Valheim exactly where we'd go, how we'd get there and what we'd take with us. Although we generally knew what awaited us, we didn't know where, for example, a mine or dungeon would spawn, which required a lot of exploration, but that was the charm. In Windrose we went through content extremely easily and quickly and at no point did I feel threatened. The thrill of adventure or an expedition wasn't there, because we could always return to base without any penalty.



SHIPS ARE GENERALLY THE GAME'S MAIN ASSET

Even co-op is weak. The developers recommend playing with up to four players, although more is possible. The three of us went through bosses and camps like a hot knife through butter, and we weren't even particularly well geared. On top of that, each player gets their own ship, which turns naval battles into a total farce. We agreed to sail on one ship, since each player can control one set of cannons while the fourth steers. But when things get hot, any player can at any moment summon their own ship, which appears instantly and changes the course of the battle. For now, solo play seems more challenging but also more fun to me.

Although this sounds like heavy criticism, it doesn't mean the game isn't fun or that I won't keep playing it. According to the developers' comments, the EA period will be fairly long, but I think Windrose could become perhaps the best pirate game on offer (OK, the Black Flag remake is coming out soon, but it isn't co-op). Like every EA title, it has its problems, but if they listen to the audience, I think it will sail to the top of the survival charts. Now all we need is some ninja survival game to close the circle.



RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 11 64-bit
CPU: Intel Core i7-10700 / AMD Ryzen 7 5800X
GPU: : NVIDIA RTX 3080 / AMD Radeon RX 6800 XT
RAM: 32 GB
SSD/HDD: 30 GB

DEVELOPER:
Kraken Express

PLANNED RELEASE DATE:
2027-2028

PRICE:
€29.99

STEAM LINK:
https://store.steampowered.com/app/3041230/Windrose/

- ✓ Ship battles
- ✓ Valheim's approach to survival
- ✗ Holds your hand too much
- ✗ It's too easy
- ✗ Combat is clumsy

Game provided by:
GAMESHOP



REVIEW

AUTHOR
Igor Totić

YOU SHOULD BE ASHAMED OF YOURSELVES!

Legacy of Kain was slowly making a comeback, or so I thought, with the great remasters released recently. Just a month ago I had the privilege of playing the Defiance remaster, which thrilled me. Along with its announcement, a completely new game in the series was unveiled, Ascendance. I was as happy as a little kid, but I was surprised they added a new character, Elaleth, about whom I knew nothing and who I don't remember being mentioned in previous games. I did a bit of research and found out she appears in the comic The Dead Shall Rise, a Kickstarter project they said is canon, so I decided to read it to prepare for the game. The dumbest thing I've ever read in my life.

In the comic, Elaleth is the best, most powerful, most important vampire, directly responsible for everything that happened in the LoK series, and she overturns all the decisions Kain, Raziel, Moebius and Janos made in previous games – she directly influenced everything. Besides the bad writing (everything happens because her boyfriend died), Elaleth can do absolutely anything. She can travel through time, fight better than Raziel, give him wings (!!!!!), defy Kain and Moebius, and on top of all that she's IMMUNE TO THE SOUL REAVER. The story later develops stupidly, as she chases a paradox to save her boyfriend no matter who gets hurt along the way, guided by Ky'set'syk, another complicated and irrelevant character who is now more important and powerful than Moebius. In general, the story, the art, the consequences of decisions, practically everything in the comic is bad and needlessly destroys already excellently written lore. So I hoped Ascendance would learn from those mistakes and fix the comic's silly moments in favour of the story already told (since Ascendance is considered canon). THE WHOLE GAME IS A RETELLING OF THE COMIC!!



Gameplay in previous games was always a second priority to the narrative. The great Amy Hennig and her team managed to create a phenomenal vampire story that we'll remember for a long time, but that also raised the bar. Since we've already established that the story in Ascendance is, to put it mildly, nonsense, then gameplay must have taken first place. No, it hasn't.

Ascendance is a 2D pixelated platform adventure and it goes no further than that. Although pixels don't allow deep definition of characters and environments, many games have used this

ASCENDANCE IS A 2D PIXELATED PLATFORM ADVENTURE AND IT GOES NO FURTHER



THE GAME IS BASED ON THE COMIC THE DEAD SHALL RISE, WHICH IS EXTREMELY BAD

graphic style and managed to create masterpieces (e.g. Octopath Traveler). Here everything is the bare minimum. The characters barely stand out, and only by their familiar silhouettes, while the environments are simple, very repetitive and boring.

You start the game with Elaleth, and the first thing you learn is that every pixel of fire on screen can damage you, while your HP drains constantly. This is similar to the original games: vampires need to feed. You'll feed on people you find and defeat along the way, or on slaves who are tied up and helpless. Controlling Elaleth is sluggish and imprecise, and the level design constantly punishes you. Although there are lots of checkpoints, from the very first level you feel like you're playing Super Meat Boy rather than a Legacy of Kain game. You soon unlock wings, and then the game becomes trivial, because you can either fly over half the map or use flying attacks against enemies. Enemy AI is completely unpredictable, but not in a good way - they'll either read your inputs and jump higher than a vampire from one side of the screen to the other, or get stuck in textures and take free damage. The bosses are no smarter.

Besides Elaleth, you'll get to play as Raziel and Kain (and only for one level!). Raziel has a level in his human form as well as in his majestic winged form. Human Raziel is more or less helpless and his level is boring, full of silly enemy placement and very few checkpoints, while vampire Raziel is similar to Elaleth, only much weaker (just because).

Combat is very stiff. Whoever you play as, you'll plant yourself on the spot and spam attack until something dies, without any nuance or strategy. You have a block/parry you can use to stun most enemies in one hit, but it's no better than endlessly jumping on heads or dodging everything and flying across the whole map.

As I already mentioned, the maps are boring in every possible sense. The game will often test you to jump onto a rock (indistinguishable from the background) and avoid a measly little fire that pushes you into the abyss. On top of that, the developers played (or watched someone play) Symphony of the Night once and decided they could do the same, so you'll sometimes hit a random wall and find a hidden piece of lore. You can also find some passive upgrades on the map, but since the game doesn't let you move the camera to see if there's anything below or above you, you'll stumble on upgrades by chance or miss them completely.



IT MADE ME SICK TO PLAY THIS INSULT TO FANS



You can finish the whole game in about four hours, and it isn't much of a challenge once you figure out the flying attacks. The game is extremely hard at the start, even on normal difficulty, because enemies read your inputs and fly everywhere while you, as I mentioned, are sluggish and stiff – just as a vampire should be, right?

I can't possibly recommend this game to fans of the LoK series, and I wish it had never happened. Unfortunately, Ascendance will surely do badly, which the publisher may interpret as the franchise being dead, but that's far from the truth. We didn't need a retcon, and they should be ashamed for even thinking they could improve an already finished story. It was really painful for me to play this spit in the fans' faces, and I hope this is the last time we're treated this way.

RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 10 64-bit
CPU: Intel Core i5-11400 / AMD Ryzen 5 3600
GPU: NVIDIA GTX 1650 / AMD RX 580
RAM: 16 GB
SSD/HDD: 5 GB

PLATFORMS:
PC, PS5, Xbox Series X/S, Nintendo Switch/Switch 2
DEVELOPER:
Bit Bot Media
PUBLISHER:
Crystal Dynamics
TEST PLATFORM:
PC/Steam Deck
PRICE:
€19.99

SCORE 3

- ✔ Technically a new LoK game
- ✘ Story
- ✘ Design
- ✘ AI

Game provided by:
Sandbox Strategies



REVIEW

AUTHOR
Igor Totić

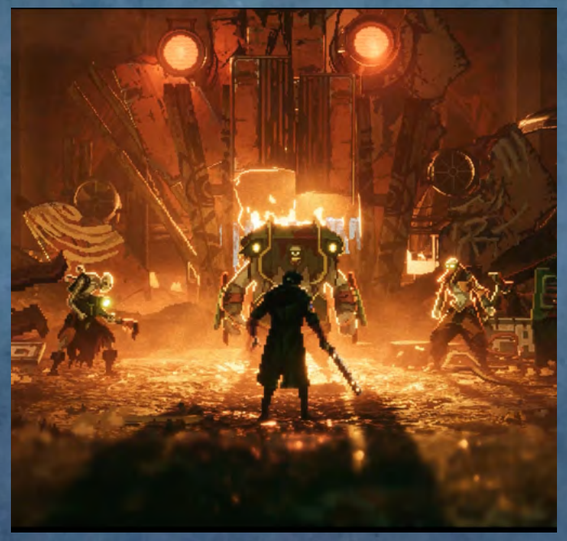


REPLACED

WHAT MAKES A MAN, AND WHAT MAKES HIS SOUL?

As chance would have it, I'm currently reading Neuromancer by William Gibson. This novel, alongside Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? (Blade Runner), is the founder of the cyberpunk genre both in literature and in gaming. Cyberpunk 2077, as well as the tabletop RPG it's based on, deal directly with themes from these novels. One of the main ones is the idea of a dystopian future where corporations control every part of our lives and human rights are mere suggestions, which unfortunately is slowly coming true in reality too. Replaced deals with exactly these themes and the idea of what is human and what is AI, as well as the question of whether these two entities can coexist.

Set in an alternative version of the 1980s, after a catastrophic nuclear event that forever changed the course of history, Replaced is a true masterpiece of modern pixel-art aesthetics and atmosphere. The first thing that catches the eye is the incredible combination of



2D pixel art and 3D environments. Phoenix City, the central setting, exudes decay, but also a neon glow that masks the moral rot of society. Every frame of the game looks like a carefully composed painting. Details such as reflections on wet pavements, smoke lazily curling from vents and the way light pierces the broken windows of abandoned factories create a level of immersion rarely seen in titles of this type. Character animations are fluid and natural, achieved through rotoscoping and hand-drawing every movement, giving weight and meaning to every step the characters take.

Developer Sad Cat Studios has managed to create a world that feels both familiar and deeply unsettling, drawing players into the role of an entity called R.E.A.C.H., an artificial intelligence trapped against its will in the human body of its creator, Warren. R.E.A.C.H. is trying at all costs to return the body to its creator, but along the way tries to find a mysterious person whose body parts it badly needs. The premise alone serves as a perfect metaphor for alienation and loss of identity in a world that has itself lost its compass.

Unlike classic cyberpunk stories where people strive to become machines to overcome their biological limits, here we have the opposite perspective. The protagonist struggles with the sensory overload of human existence. Pain, fatigue and the confusing nature of emotions are alien concepts it must process in real time, while also trying to understand the purpose of its existence in a decaying society. This dynamic creates a constant feeling of inner conflict; R.E.A.C.H. isn't just an observer in Phoenix City, it's a stranger in its own skin, which the player feels through every interaction and uncertain movement. Society is shown as a system in which people have become replaceable goods, mere fuel for machinery that refuses to stop even after a nuclear apocalypse. The idea of "replacement" runs through every level of the game, from the physical replacement of body parts with prostheses, through the replacement of moral values with mere survival, to the most terrible replacement



of all: the loss of the human soul in favour of corporate efficiency. Through the game, the authors weave a sharp critique of unbridled technological progress that doesn't serve people, but slowly erases them from the equation.

Phew, that sounded very arrogant, pretentious and full of itself, but when you look at the game as a whole, this is the core that runs through all its elements, from story and themes to gameplay, music and atmosphere. Replaced tries very hard to show you how bad things can get and where we're heading. The people you meet mostly live outside the city, cast out, poor and sick, where most are just trying

GAMEPLAY IS BALANCED BETWEEN EXPLORATION, PLATFORMING AND COMBAT



to survive, while a small group fights for their rights and a return to Phoenix City. You'll find yourself in the middle of this melancholy and will be their only hope of returning to something that can be called life.

Gameplay is balanced between exploration, platforming and combat. The combat system is direct and brutal, relying on precision and timing, and is generally inspired by the Batman Arkham style, where you wait for the parry and strike back. At first you only have a baton that can transform into a pistol, and



REPLACED IS
A TRUE MASTERPIECE OF MODERN PIXEL-ART AESTHETICS AND ATMOSPHERE

a basic set of attacks and executions. Some attacks can't be parried, so you have to dodge them or use the baton/pistol's special abilities. What I didn't like is that all fights are very obviously predefined and mostly serve as breaks in the story, stopping the flow because they aren't dynamic events. Combat only stops being repetitive later, when you unlock more of your weapon's abilities. All in all, combat is functional but isn't a key element of the game.

The soundtrack deserves special praise. Synth sounds steeped in melancholy and dark tones perfectly complement the game's visual identity. The music dynamically follows what's happening on screen, heightening tension during chases or emphasising loneliness in empty industrial zones. The audio design,





from the sound of footsteps on metal grates to the echo of gunfire in the distance, creates an audio-visual package that's hard to beat. The music was composed by my namesake Igor Gritsay with vocals by Marina Thorik, and I can tell you the whole soundtrack is already on my Deezer favourites list.

Replaced isn't just a game you play, it's an experience you consume with all your senses. Although by genre it can be classed as an action platformer, its soul lies in its storytelling and an atmosphere that stays with the player long after the end. Sad Cat Studios has set high standards for independent production, proving that vision and dedication to detail can create a world that is both terrifying and irresistibly attractive. Although the game starts very slowly, and develops slowly too, the overall experience is truly unforgettable. This is a must-play for anyone who values a deep story, top-notch aesthetics and games that have something to say. Replaced is a dark, beautiful ballad about survival in a world that long ago forgot what it means to be human.

THE SOUNDTRACK DESERVES SPECIAL PRAISE

RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 10 64-bit
CPU: Intel Core i5-8400
GPU: GeForce GTX 1060 (6GB) ili slično
RAM: 16 GB
SSD/HDD: 8 GB

PLATFORMS:
PC, Xbox Series X/S
DEVELOPER:
Sad Cat Studios
PUBLISHER:
Thunderful Publishing
TEST PLATFORM:
PC
PRICE:
€19.99

SCORE 8,5

- ✓ Atmosphere
- ✓ Cyberpunk immersion
- ✓ Audio-visual experience
- ✗ Very slow start
- ✗ Fights break the game's flow



REVIEW

AUTHOR
Stefan Mitov Radojičić

SCOTT PILGRIM VS. VEGANS, ROBOTS AND DEMONS



Another Scott Pilgrim adventure has arrived, but this time it takes us on a journey through time and alternate dimensions, where we fight vegans, robots and demons. Throughout all that madness, fans will immediately notice a bunch of references to older, classic games, with their levels, action and music.

In the mysterious year 20XX, a bunch of portals suddenly appear in Toronto, leading to other eras and dimensions. Our hero's day turns into hell when Metal Scott suddenly bursts in and kidnaps his whole band. Scott will now have to team up again with Ramona and other memorable characters from the Scott Pilgrim universe to save the city and his friends. In terms of atmosphere, Scott Pilgrim EX oozes retro style so much that its opening, plot and world are irresistibly reminiscent of coin-op arcade games.

As in the previous Scott Pilgrim game, the gameplay here is done beat-em-up style. You'll still have standard attacks, heavy attacks and a special move. Combining them gives interesting results, and you can also grab and throw enemies, block attacks, dodge them or even parry, both melee hits and things thrown at you. On that note, the game puts a big focus on items you can pick up and throw.



The story oozes retro atmosphere and will instantly awaken your nostalgia



You'll often use some of them only as melee weapons, from yo-yos to bats, while you'll throw others, and almost every item will have a unique effect on enemies.

One of the more important special moves is calling other characters in to help you. Each has a special effect - some will heal you, boost your damage resistance or scatter enemies.

There are also mini RPG elements in the form of gear that boosts certain stats. Of course, there's also a level-up system that improves you automatically.

Unlike the previous Scott Pilgrim game, here you'll notice a very interesting addition of metroidvania elements. This isn't a true metroidvania, but it offers elements very characteristic of the genre - unlocking new abilities to open new parts of the map, and generally continuous progression through the world instead of individual levels. On top of all this, you'll run into a number of side quests and even the odd puzzle, which you can solve or not.







The fights themselves, or arenas, can be interesting and well designed, with meaningful enemy placement, and sometimes mega irritating and exhausting. The biggest problem the game has is the fact that you have to get through several waves of enemies before you can even start any boss fight.

You'll often have to fight a complicated boss with its own tricky mechanics while weakened. Each of those mechanics will have some interesting and unique attack type, the arenas will change or just get more complicated, and regular enemies will keep coming too. All in all, the game would be more fun if there were some kind of checkpoint system before the start of a boss fight.

A big plus for the game is that you have as many as seven characters at your disposal, each with a specific fighting style and powers. Even better, at almost any moment you can go to a location where you can switch characters.

Of course there's also a co-op mode for up to four players, local or online, with which the chaos and difficulty of the game can change drastically.



The game would be more fun if there were some kind of checkpoint system before the start of a boss fight

The graphics feature detailed pixel art done in the familiar style of the Scott Pilgrim comics. You'll see quite a few interesting characters and locations, and the animations are also very clean and recognisable, so you won't have trouble seeing what's happening in the heat of battle unless you're really surrounded by enemies.

Following the retro style of games like this, unfortunately there's no voice acting, although it would be perfect to hear all those memorable characters. The music, on the other hand, is very varied, and practically every location has its own track, which is extremely good and won't bore you to death as you pass through a zone again.

As I mentioned earlier, the biggest problem the game has is the excessive number of enemies before every boss fight. Smaller problems come down to too much on screen, which can definitely bother you at times. Also, vertical movement is much slower than horizontal, especially with the dodge move, so it's very hard to avoid some attacks.

Generally, the price for the amount of content and length is perhaps a bit steep, especially if your friends have to buy it too (unless you play locally). If you're not a die-hard fan of this genre or the Scott Pilgrim universe, wait for a discount.



Scott Pilgrim EX brings metroidvania elements into the classic beat-em-up formula

RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 10 64-bit
CPU: Intel Core i5-2400 / AMD FX-6300
GPU: Nvidia GeForce GTS 450 / AMD Radeon R7 250
RAM: 4 GB
SSD/HDD: 2 GB

PLATFORMS:
PC
DEVELOPER:
Tribute Games Inc.
PUBLISHER:
Tribute Games Inc.
TEST PLATFORM:
PC
PRICE:
€28.99

SCORE 7

- ✔ A brawler with metroidvania elements
- ✔ Great multiplayer
- ✔ Satisfying progression
- ✘ Gauntlet arenas before boss fights
- ✘ Poor checkpoint system
- ✘ Short game



REVIEW

AUTHOR
Milan Živković

SOUTH OF MIDNIGHT



A SECOND SWAMP TOUR AND THE MAGIC OF SOUTHERN BLUES

When the same game moves to another platform, one question always arises: has something fundamentally changed, or has it just arrived in new packaging? In the case of South of Midnight on PS5, I'd say - somehow neither. And that's OK again!

This is still the same game that won me over with its atmosphere and identity, but now it feels... more rounded! As if the console suits it naturally.

True, it isn't a title PC players remembered as a benchmark of modern graphics, but it wasn't without its shiny assets either.

The story of Hazel and her search for her mother still carries most of the experience. I won't repeat everything I already said earlier (flip through issue 190 of our magazine for my initial impressions), but the essence remains the same. This isn't a classic adventure where you rush from point A to point B. Every encounter has some weight, every enemy has a reason to exist, and the game constantly tries to tell you something through those small, personal stories.

Combat? Well, combat is still combat. If you expected the PS5 version to magically deepen the mechanics, unfortunately it won't. It's still a relatively simple system that can fall into repetition. But what I noticed before applies here too - once you get the hang of it and start combining abilities the way that suits you, it all gets a rhythm that can be really fun.

The difference is that here everything flows somehow... more smoothly? Not in the sense that it's now a drastically different experience, but simply as if there's no friction. You pick up the controller, play and don't think too much about the technical side, and everything looks as tight as it can be. In terms of experience, that's often half the job.





The visual style is still what stays in your head the most. I won't sing its praises from the rooftops again like the first time, but the fact is the game still looks striking. The stop-motion style of character animation is still a bit debatable. Some will find it brilliant, others distracting. For me it's still somewhere in between, but I appreciate that there's an option to turn it off and play without the effect.

Where the game unquestionably hits every target is the atmosphere. Swamps, forests, decaying landscapes – it all has weight and character. It isn't just scenery, but an active part of the experience. In those moments, South of Midnight really shows why it's different from most similar titles.

Now, the music still rocks! I said it before and I stand behind it even more strongly now. That combination of a Southern sound and something "warped" fits perfectly with what's happening on screen in those moments. Rarely does a soundtrack manage to breathe so naturally with the game it belongs to. If you have no better reason to play this title, let it be this great soundtrack.

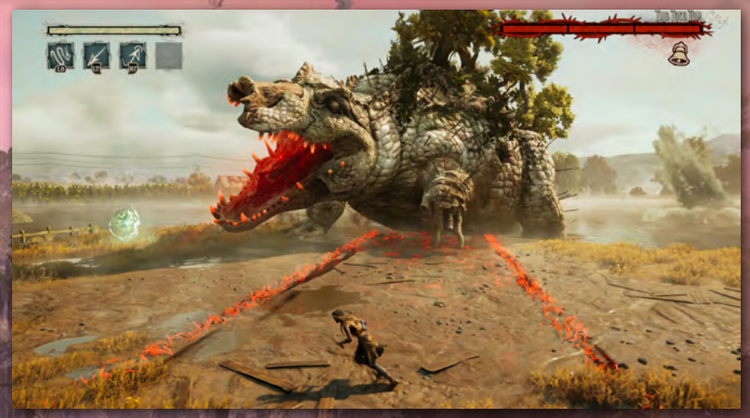


IF YOU EXPECTED THE PS5 VERSION TO MAGICALLY DEEPEN THE MECHANICS, IT WON'T

The acting also holds its level. Nothing jumps out as a spectacle, but at no moment does it feel weak or unconvincing. Everything is just where it should be, and sometimes that's exactly what a game needs in order to shine. When the average pushes above average, it isn't average!

Exploration seems to have suited me even more this time. Maybe because I already knew what to expect, so I paid more attention to details. Either way, the game nicely rewards curiosity, which is always a plus. Now that I stop and read my own words, I realise I'm writing about the game almost as a new experience, not something I've already finished. Unheard of, especially considering that I claimed the game isn't for multiple playthroughs.

RARELY DOES A SOUNDTRACK MANAGE TO BREATHE SO NATURALLY WITH ITS GAME



THE VISUAL STYLE IS STILL ITS MOST MEMORABLE FEATURE

I get that this still holds true, but after some time has passed, I have to change my statement to – it is worth replaying, from time to time. Who would have thought, Milan was wrong.

In the end, the conclusion comes down to the original one. This is a game that has its flaws and doesn't hide them at all. But it also has enough character to overpower almost every one of them. The PS5 version didn't redefine the experience, but it made it polished enough to "click" even more easily.

And sometimes that's quite – completely, quite enough.

RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 10/11 64-bit
CPU: AMD 1600X / Intel i5-7600K
GPU: AMD RX 6600 / Nvidia RTX 2060 / Intel Arc A580
RAM: 16 GB
SSD/HDD: 60 GB

PLATFORMS:
PC, PS5, Xbox Series X/S, Switch 2

DEVELOPER:
Compulsion Games

PUBLISHER:
Xbox Game Studios

TEST PLATFORM:
PS5

PRICE:
€39.99

SCORE 8

- ✔ Still a great visual style
- ✔ The game oozes character
- ✔ The music slaps!
- ✘ Action is still repetitive
- ✘ Some moments stand out less
- ✘ Not for replaying (within one calendar year!)

Game provided by: Microsoft

REVIEW

AUTHOR
Milan Živković



AT WHAT DEPTH OF STEEL DOES THE HUMAN HEART HIDE?

If you ask me, a good premise is half the job. The graphics can creak, the story can scream, the atmosphere can suffocate, but the game can't score less than 5! OK, I'm sure some development team could easily disprove my theory, so let's move on before they read this.

Anyway, PRAGMATA is precisely an example of a game with a good premise. A stranded space engineer makes contact with a humanlike and utterly charming robot girl. Together they try to escape the shackles of a space station, resolve a cataclysm threatening Earth and, along the way, build one of the most charming relationships between two characters in a game – ever. Sound familiar? You bet! Just change the setting and they're Joel and Ellie, Kratos and Atreus, Booker and Anna. Two well-designed characters automatically build chemistry between them.

The protagonists of this game are Hugh and Diana. And while Hugh is a perfectly solid character, Diana is so charming that she boosts this duo's aura by 200%. For a start, I didn't like the English voice acting, so I switched to Japanese, which was the right choice for me. But it wouldn't surprise me if people have a great experience in English too. It just can't be that "kawaii", ha!

The visual presentation suggests what can't be hidden. PRAGMATA was announced literally at the presentation where PlayStation 5 was unveiled (almost six years ago!) and is actually the second-to-last game from that event still unreleased (Little Devil Inside, you've broken every record, congratulations). Multiple delays meant not only that the game strayed from the initial vision promoted by the first trailer, but also that in 2026 it smells like a title several years old.

That doesn't mean the game looks bad. Realistically, some games as old as 20 years can look good by today's standards. But at the same time you can tell the chassis started being built at the crossover of the last gaming generations, and that most of the modern beauty is contained in make-up applied afterwards.

Luckily, that fact immediately brings excellent performance, because on the base PlayStation 5 in quality mode, the frame rate almost never drops below 30. And I'd say it runs at a solid 40+ through most of the game. Unfortunately, the internal rendering resolution is disappointing, because the naked eye can see it isn't native 4K but an upscale, probably from 1440p.

Despite everything, in my personal opinion PRAGMATA looks great. The design of enemies and environments is imaginative and varied. The models of weapons, gear and the general effects are more than solid. And the protagonist and, of course, his lovely companion look best of all. I also like the fact that work has obviously been done on Diana's hair in the last couple of years, so it constantly flutters in an utterly charming manner.

The core of the game is the gameplay, and it's presented as a third-person action shooter, with an excellent twist. While you shoot it out with all sorts of robotic creations the way the genre has long established, Diana simultaneously hacks enemies, exposing their weaknesses and making them five times weaker to your lead. I can tell you I really liked this kind of multitasking, because it both constantly holds your attention and makes every fight tenser but also open to more options.





I think if the game had come out just a few years ago, this mechanic would have been an absolute hit. But since we've seen plenty of genre and gameplay experiments in the meantime, I think it unfortunately won't dazzle everyone now. Either way, PRAGMATA probably won't pick up many awards for innovation, but rest assured it's a hell of a fun title. The presentation, however linear, goes hand in hand with mechanics that will keep you invested from start to finish.

WHILE HUGH IS A PERFECTLY SOLID CHARACTER, DIANA IS SO CHARMING THAT SHE BOOSTS THIS DUO'S AURA BY 200%

A number of motifs are borrowed from other genres, so the level design is full of secrets, invisible walls and the need to return to previous locations to finally reach that missed "power-up". And there's never a shortage of content in the form of unlockable weapons and outfits the protagonists can wear. What can I say, when finishing the game itself unlocks the motivation to fully clear all levels and extra challenges to get the "ultimate reward".

What makes the game a title I certainly won't forget any time soon is the amount of emotional charge. It's an understatement to say PRAGMATA broke my heart a couple of times with its storytelling. Without intending to spoil anything, bear in mind that the more you invest in the story, the more you risk getting stung at certain moments.

"Luckily", the story isn't the finest piece of writing ever, so you may see it more as passing lemonade not worth fussing over. But if you allow yourself to invest in a few of its characters, I'm sure you'll remember the game longer than it may initially seem.

In the end, all things considered, the whole game was a whirlwind of impressions. The initial motifs and visual identity reminded me of the long-forgotten gem Vanquish. The gameplay undoubtedly exuded recognisable Capcom flavours, and the atmosphere at times took me back so far that I had flashbacks to one of my favourite games – Dino Crisis 2. The innovative mechanics and a ton of content that never stops pouring in were certainly one of the stronger impressions. And finally, the bond between two charming characters, which inevitably created an unforgettable relationship, was more than the cherry on top of a great cake.

The game could have looked a bit more modern, true. The spaces could have been wider. The story could have been more impressive and the experience a bit longer







(to unlock literally everything, you'll need about 25 hours). But despite everything, PRAGMATA is a very charming experience whose gameplay core manages not to get boring for the whole game. I even think New Game+ couldn't wear down the extremely addictive and high-quality gameplay of this title.

With that in mind, maybe this game objectively deserves a slightly lower score, but I simply can't allow myself not to round it all up to a great nine. When I look at literally all the flaws the game brings with it, I can really only fault it for one thing. That it didn't come out a year or two earlier...

But hey, better late than never! Right?



RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 11 64-bit
CPU: Intel Core i7-8700 / AMD Ryzen 5 5500
GPU: NVIDIA GeForce RTX 2060 Super 8GB / Radeon RX 6600 8GB
RAM: 16 GB
SSD/HDD: 40 GB

PLATFORMS:
PC, PS5, Xbox Series X/S, Nintendo Switch 2

DEVELOPER:
Capcom

PUBLISHER:
Capcom

TEST PLATFORM:
PS5

PRICE:
€59.99

SCORE 9

- ✓ Strong protagonist chemistry carries the game
- ✓ Terribly fun shooting/hacking mechanic
- ✓ Imaginative locations, enemies and fights
- ✗ The story could have been a bit stronger
- ✗ Noticeable upscaling
- ✗ The environment cries out for more open spaces

Game provided by: CD Media

REVIEW

AUTHOR
Nikola Aksentijević



A bloodthirsty dance with horrors from the cosmos

In 2021, Returnal presented a masterful evolution of the third-person shooter, a genre that had been stagnating for some time. Combining roguelike elements with excellent shooting and a high budget, it definitely put Housemarque on the map of serious development teams in the industry, all with an excellent narrative. Saros is roughly a sequel, perhaps not narrative but certainly spiritual, putting you in the role of Arjun Devraj, who travels to a planet called Carcosa to gather resources as one of the soldiers of the private company Soltari. Carcosa is a very inhospitable planet, and solar storms and eclipses cause it to constantly change its relative position in its solar system.

SAROS IS THE SPIRITUAL SUCCESSOR TO 2021'S RETURNAL

Although the story is conceived as a mystery revolving around your missing crew members, the difference from Returnal is that here you aren't completely alone and hopeless; your crew members have survived, even though gradual madness is eating them up from the inside. The story here is much more focused on Arjun's inner aspects, often pushing the sci-fi elements into the background. Saros still tries to position itself in a niche of sci-fi horror that isn't quite fulfilled here. Although the mystery is there, the game definitely suffers narratively, because the story's focus and pace shift very abruptly and are often inconsistent, although the final result is generally satisfying.

Still, Saros shines most in its gameplay, as well as its environment design. As you travel through Carcosa's different biomes, you'll notice much greater enemy variety than in Returnal. You'll dodge huge amounts of projectiles bullet-hell style while eliminating threats to Arjun in this controlled chaos. Projectiles are marked with different colours depending on whether you can block them or must dodge them or parry them back at the enemy. This makes Saros feel a little like a rhythm game, especially once you figure out how all the mechanics around you work, as well as the timing of enemy projectiles and blows, and everything will feel like a bloodthirsty dance for survival; in that sense, the game was very exciting for me from start to finish.







There are different tools as well as bonuses you can collect, including souped-up guns, new abilities and special weapons that help in the fight against ever stronger and denser waves of enemies. Very often you'll have to adapt to what you get in the current run, constantly demanding resourcefulness and versatility from the player.

Saros sends you back to the start of the game when you die, in true roguelike fashion, but it has eased the entry experience a little by giving more options and keeping the last weapon you died with at the start of the next run, of course with lower damage than the previous version. The systems that make Arjun stronger from attempt to attempt are much more transparent here, in the form of a typical experience-point tree, with which you unlock new abilities using resources that stay with you permanently between runs, which is typical of roguelite titles like Hades.





What I didn't like is that each biome is treated as a separate instance. Although it has more biomes than its spiritual predecessor, unlike Returnal you won't have to replay previous biomes with each new attempt; instead you can start from the last one you survived to. This is a double-edged sword that will definitely make Saros

YOU'LL DODGE HUGE AMOUNTS OF PROJECTILES BULLET-HELL STYLE WHILE ELIMINATING THREATS IN MASSIVE, CONTROLLED CHAOS

more accessible to a wider audience, and therefore easier, but at the same time puts off a somewhat more dedicated roguelike audience. On the other hand, runs are now not as long as in Returnal, so Saros is much easier to play in shorter sessions, especially in the later stages of the game, where again you aren't forced to go through all the previous levels.

There are considerably more bosses, as well as mini-bosses. They're a factor that definitely makes runs harder, because they can unpredictably change your circumstances, especially if you're already surrounded by ordinary enemies in these fights.

Biomes will also change throughout the game, shifting from a natural to a so-called corrupted state, complete with new enemies, loot and challenges, so the game encourages you to go back and explore previous levels. You can also add various modifiers to each run



THE STORY IS MORE FOCUSED ON THE HERO'S INNER ASPECTS, OFTEN PUSHING THE SCI-FI ELEMENTS INTO THE BACKGROUND

of difficulty, both positive and negative, constantly balancing reward and challenge and introducing even more variety into each run.

As for the graphics, the game looks magnificent and somehow manages to be even prettier than its spiritual predecessor, which still holds an exceptional standard for visual presentation to this day.

Everything around you feels alive, very alien, and contributes to the atmosphere like never before. Despite the procedural generation, the level design is truly exceptional, primarily because of the very great variety and interesting interwoven paths that can be both horizontal and vertical. The voice acting is also excellent, especially from Rahul Kohli as Arjun.

Saros is literally a sequel to Returnal in almost everything except its name. Housemarque has carefully built on the foundation laid



CERTAIN CHANGES TO THE ROGUELIKE FORMULA MAKE SAROS A LITTLE MORE ACCESSIBLE TO A WIDER AUDIENCE

by the previous game, and we've got an excellent, tight roguelike bullet-hell experience. The balance of challenge is masterful, above all because every fight is very fair, and every mistake, which will definitely be punished, can be corrected. Although the story can let up a little in pace and you'll occasionally forget what's even happening, the voice acting, excellent gameplay and beautiful audio-visual presentation are enough for me to place Saros as one of the games that will definitely mark this year in the best possible way.

PLATFORMS:
PS5

DEVELOPER:
Housemarque

PUBLISHER:
Sony Interactive Entertainment

TEST PLATFORM:
PS5

PRICE:
€69.99

SCORE 9

- ✓ Top-notch gameplay
- ✓ Great acting and visuals
- ✓ Variety of enemies and environments
- ✗ The story is solid, but won't blow you away
- ✗ Levels aren't connected, but instanced

Game provided by: PlayStation



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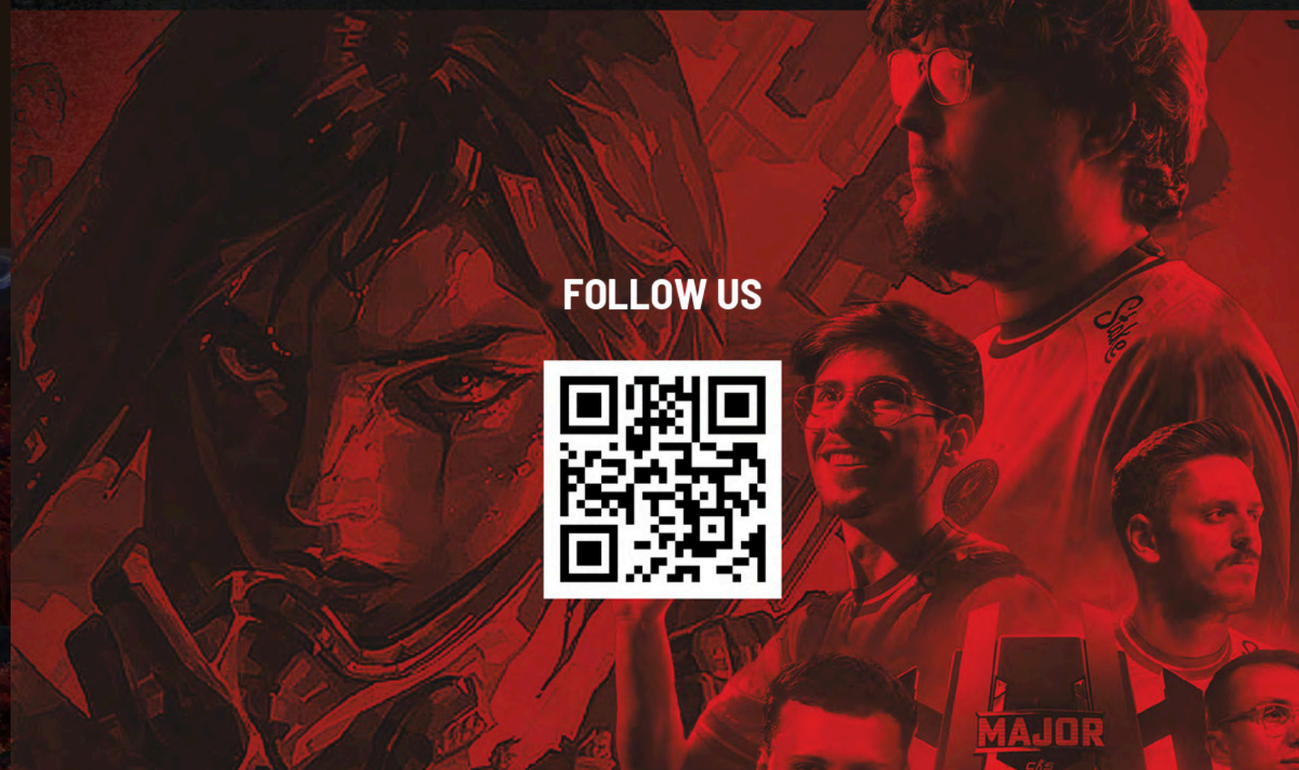

AUTHOR
Stefan Mitov Radojičić



Max and Chloe together again

After several sequels and attempts to introduce completely new characters, powers and adventures, Deck Nine Games plays it safe and brings back the main couple responsible for starting the whole Life is Strange series, created by studio DONTNOD. Of course, the question arises whether Max and Chloe, in their later years, will manage to grab our attention and tug at our emotions like before, or whether their finale will be one big miss.

We begin the story with Chloe, who is getting ready for a concert, after which she falls into a trance and sees an unreal scene she can't explain. Then we jump to see what's currently happening with Max. On her way back from a trip, she returns to her college campus, which is in the middle of a heated protest, where a big fire breaks out in the chaos. Although she doesn't want to use her time powers, Max jumps into a photograph taken three days earlier so she can stay in town after all, find out what happened and save a close friend.



Whether or not you're familiar with the series, before the story begins you'll get to watch a "previously on" sequence that effectively shows all the key moments from its predecessors, which is very important for the context of the narrative that follows. Since these moments generally come down to player decisions, you'll also be able to set those choices based on your earlier experiences. You have complete freedom here, so you can effectively choose whatever you like.

Once you've checked all the decisions, the game finally begins, though the first hour serves as a tutorial for the powers of the protagonist, Max. For those who aren't familiar, Max has the ability to rewind time, which you use to solve puzzles, prevent certain events and change choices in conversations. The rest, that is, most of the game, comes down to watching cinematics and answering dialogue options that will affect how other characters treat you. But this time it isn't just Max on stage: you'll often play as Chloe, who will have a big impact on the story in certain scenes.

The visuals follow the established style of the predecessors with more modern graphics, except that this time we see some characters in a slightly more grown-up form. As for the surroundings and locations, they're truly beautiful, and sometimes you'll wish you could go back to a college that looks just like the ones in these games. The same goes for the music, while the voice acting is solid as usual. Still, bear in mind that Chloe is again played by Rhianna DeVries from Before the Storm, not Ashly Burch from the original.

The story follows the culmination of Max and Chloe's relationship



The biggest flaw is a surprising number of technical problems on PS5, mainly graphical. Characters will often glitch, almost every cinematic will have texture pop-in and the like, giving the impression that they decided to rush the console version in particular. What does make the game very approachable, though, are its extremely good accessibility options, which can help you with some irritating moments you may have had in previous parts of the series.



With a few minor additions, the gameplay formula remains largely the same

A possible missed opportunity is that Reunion wasn't done in a co-op style, like It Takes Two or A Way Out, where two players would simultaneously control Max and Chloe, which might have breathed new life into a series that has followed practically the same gameplay formula for years.

I don't want to give my impressions of the story and its ending, since that is, after all, the core of the Life is Strange franchise. Although anyone can jump into Reunion, the game is very clearly made for fans of the series, which the team confirmed as soon as it revealed Chloe was returning. In that sense, you face a host of choices that may finally lead you to the ending of Max and Chloe's story you've always dreamed of. On the other hand, if you love Life is Strange but aren't happy with the path Deck Nine has taken, Reunion may not be for you.

Performance on PS5 is extremely poor



RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 11 64-bit
CPU: AMD Ryzen 5 3600 / Intel Core i5-10600
GPU: AMD Radeon RX 6650 XT / NVIDIA GeForce RTX 3060 Ti
RAM: 16 GB
SSD/HDD: 30 GB

PLATFORMS:
PC, PS5, Xbox Series X/S

DEVELOPER:
Deck Nine Games

PUBLISHER:
Square Enix

TEST PLATFORM:
PS5

PRICE:
€39.99

SCORE 7

- ✓ The main characters return, only older
- ✓ New mechanics and ways of solving puzzles
- ✗ Technical problems
- ✗ Debatable writing

Game provided by: Iris Mega

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SCAN AND FOLLOW US:

AUTHOR
Milan Živković

DARWIN'S PARADOX!

PARADOX, OF COURSE!

Just five minutes into Darwin's Paradox!, it was clear to me. The game obviously drew inspiration from one of my favourite 2D adventures – Inside.

Although that sounds a bit unusual given the theme, it pulled the motifs in another direction, so in the end the game gave me the final impression of a mix of Inside and Stray, another game very dear to me.

Now you probably think that means I'll score the game highly, right? Well, allow me to demonstrate how impartial and objective games journalism works! Darwin's Paradox! is a game with a very interesting premise and an extremely strong presentation that on paper must work flawlessly, but in practice it just shows that video games are a combination of many elements. If one element lags behind the rest, the final impression can be significantly spoiled. But as always, let's take it step by step. The game is colourful, with a charming design and a solid atmosphere that carries you along through sheer presentation.

Finding out where the tentacles of the eight-armed protagonist will take you next, and what fate awaits him, are the strongest reasons most players will reach the final credits screen as they roll through the members of the development team. And that really is a pretty significant achievement for any game, to get you to finish it completely. But what I have a problem with are the elements found between the end and the beginning.

THE MECHANICS ARE DEFINITELY NOT USED ENOUGH

Darwin is an octopus who, by cruel fate, gets pushed along a chain of incredible events.

From an adventure where he tries to save his own skin, our unusual protagonist will in a way also hold the fate of humanity in his tentacles. And right from the start this sets high expectations, before the ball of yarn starts to unwravel. Sorry – unravel.

The game is a 2.5D adventure where the graphics are 3D and movement is completely restricted to two dimensions. Darwin isn't especially fast, but he can climb various surfaces, spit ink or use the power of camouflage – everything you'd expect from an octopus. And while the locations he passes through are very



imaginative and interesting to look at, the exploration itself undermines some basic elements a video game should have.

There are moments where you'll wonder where to go next, but most of the game is characterised by average level design. There are optional locations, and it's interesting to discover them, but the passage through the levels itself is pretty odd. The game is linear, and yet you get the impression you're going the wrong way or doing something wrong. There are puzzles, but everything often trips over fiddly controls and unpolished interaction with the environment.

The mechanics are definitely not used enough. It gives the impression that you're aware of the potential, but that "wow" moment is missing. Moments where you rack your brains quickly become predictable, and the pace occasionally slows down too much.

The simplest way I could characterise this game is uneven pacing. The game is like a boring ride with the occasional moment that stands out.

And now that I've trashed the game enough, let me say something nice about it.

The visual style is very striking. If you like Pixar films, you'll probably like this game too, as the animations are high quality and the characters very vivid. So Darwin himself, although he doesn't speak, is very charismatic and feels alive. Well, as alive as an animated octopus can be.

Although many of the main mechanics are expected, what I didn't expect is that I can't remember





any other game that simulates playing as an octopus in this style. No, no, Octodad doesn't count. Next to him, Darwin is a textbook example of a mollusc!

The humour is also good, so the game can seriously charm you at times. Even in its darkest moments, it still leaves enough room not to take it too seriously. And despite some sections that are really hard, and unfairly so, it gives casual players the chance to enjoy the whole game almost as much as more experienced ones.

The final asset is something I'll just repeat once more: the creative premise. An octopus going through hell to save its own skin, and humanity along the way, isn't



something you see every day. And a kind of homage to one of my favourite game series - Metal Gear Solid - is the reason I'll play this game once more.

Or even better, watch someone speedrun this already short experience. I believe a condensed presentation of the game in just two hours of fast, super-skilled gameplay would be the best way to enjoy this unusual adventure.

Although as a whole it's a shaky experience, Darwin's Paradox! is a fistful of candy in a storm. If you open your mouth, something sweet is bound to fly in... OK, this is definitely one of the worst analogies I've ever used. A shaky review for a shaky game - oh, the paradox!

RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 10/11
CPU: AMD / Intel 8 cores CPU, 3.5Ghz+
GPU: Nvidia GeForce RTX 3060 / AMD Radeon RX 6600 XT
RAM: 16 GB
SSD/HDD: 10 GB

PLATFORMS:
PC, PS5, XBOX SERIES X/S, NINTENDO SWITCH 2

DEVELOPER:
ZDT Studio

PUBLISHER:
Konami

TEST PLATFORM:
PC

PRICE:
€24.99

SCORE 6,9

- ✓ Excellent presentation and visual style
- ✓ Good humour and tone
- ✓ Creative premise
- ✗ Mechanics aren't used enough
- ✗ Uneven pacing
- ✗ Too many boring gameplay sequences

Game provided by:
G4MESHOP

A GUIDE THROUGH THE HISTORY OF VIDEO GAMES

The Play!Zine team proudly presents *A Guide Through the History of Video Games*, a collection of the first four issues of the Play!Retro special. Join us on this exciting journey as we explore the roots of gaming, the rise of the video game industry and its impact on the development of technology and culture.

***A Guide Through the History of Video Games* covers four unique eras. First we visit the Old Age (1940-1976), a time when computers were in their infancy and the concept of video games was still unexplored. We meet the first commercial home console and many arcades, including Atari's Pong.**

Our next stop is the Golden Age (1977-1983), a major turning point for the video game industry and an era that produced some of gaming's greatest titans, such as Space Invaders, Pac-Man, the Atari 2600, the Commodore 64 and many more. After the twilight of the Golden Age and the great crash that brought gaming to the brink of collapse, the industry fully recovered in the period that followed – the Gaming Renaissance (1984-1989). Much of the credit for this goes to Nintendo, its new console and of course Super Mario, who won the hearts of gamers around the world.

Our adventure ends in the mid-nineties with the Era of Innovation (1990-1995), when video games moved from 2D to 3D worlds, opening the door to completely new adventures. Thanks to revolutionary technologies, this period gave birth to new, never-before-seen genres, while many legendary franchises first saw the light of day, including Doom, Sonic the Hedgehog, WarCraft and others. Nor should we forget the companies founded at this time, thanks to which video games became one of the most popular, and most profitable, media in the whole world.

This guide is not just a nostalgic trip into the past, but a reminder of how much video games have shaped the world around us.

The book "A Guide Through the History of Video Games" is available in Delfi and Vulkan bookstores, and online via delfi.rs, knjizare-vulkan.rs and the rekt.shop store.



AUTHOR
Bogdan Karadarević

CHUN-LI

A retrospective on the significance of the first female fighter in the genre



Chun-Li is one of the most recognisable characters in the entire history of video games, but her significance isn't measured only by popularity, but also by her influence on the whole industry. As a key fighter in the Street Fighter franchise, Chun-Li became a symbol of a forgotten era in which fighting games defined what it meant to be a skilled, fast and competitive player. When Capcom launched Street Fighter II in 1991, one of the first esports, few could have guessed it would lay the foundations of modern fighting games and at the same time change the way audiences see female characters in the genre.

At the time, fighting games were almost exclusively the domain of male characters and a male audience, and it was Chun-Li who broke that pattern as the first female fighter.





Her speed, agility and specific moves, such as the famous "Hyakuretsukyaku" (Lightning Kick), made her unique and tactically relevant. Narratively, her motivation, revenge for her father, fits classic heroic archetypes, but the way she is presented gives her an extra dimension.

At the same time she is an Interpol agent, which gives her an identity beyond fighting itself - she is the embodiment of authority, intelligence and discipline. In that sense we could even say Chun-Li is "Lara Croft before Lara Croft". Interestingly, her development wasn't carefully planned by the Street Fighter team at Capcom. Creators Akira Nishitani and Akira Yasuda had only a few weeks to shape her final look and fighting style. Precisely because of that pressure, Chun-Li got a design that is both striking and functional - her powerful legs, which became her visual trademark, are directly connected to the fighting style she uses, but at the same time are also part of a broader discussion about the sexualisation of female characters in games.



Chun-Li has always been a character on the border between progressive and problematic. On one hand, she opened the door for whole generations of female characters in fighting games - without her, it's hard to imagine later characters like Cammy, Kitana or the modern heroines of other fighting franchises. On the other hand, her design and presentation were often shaped through the prism of the male gaze, which led to different interpretations of her significance.



Over the years, Chun-Li has evolved together with the Street Fighter series. From a pixelated character in the arcade days to detailed rendered models in modern titles, her identity has remained surprisingly consistent. She still represents a symbol of discipline, justice and strength, but also of nostalgia for the golden age of arcade games.

Her presence has spread beyond the world of video games through animation, films, comics and pop culture in general. That's why it's no surprise she appears as a reference even in music, such as Nicki Minaj's song Chun-Li. When a globally influential artist takes her name, it confirms that Chun-Li has long been not just a character from an old video game, but a cultural symbol. She is an interesting blend of contradictions, a pioneer of representation and a product of her time, but also an icon of strength and a subject of debate about aesthetics.

Her uniqueness lies precisely in that complexity: she isn't perfect, but she is enduring.



AUTHOR
MILOŠ HETLEROVIĆ



LENOVO THINKBOOK PLUS GEN 6 ROLLABLE

LAPTOP, STRETCH!

Lenovo is one of the companies that experiment most with the classic laptop format, which is best seen in its Yoga series. Now we've received a ThinkBook, something that in theory should be more oriented towards business than home users. At first glance it really looks like the most ordinary business laptop, until you click one button and the screen starts to extend upwards!

The full name of this device is quite complex, but its most important feature is cleverly hidden in it - rollable means this model has a flexible OLED screen that partly simply bends and hides under the keyboard. In the box we see a perfectly average 14" laptop, although I have to admit it's a bit telling that the bottom part (where the keyboard is) is somewhat thicker than the screen part. That's strange from the start, but it plays a very important role.



THE PART OF THE OLED SCREEN THAT SLIDES OUT IS HIDDEN UNDER THE KEYBOARD

If you switched it on and started using it normally, you'd think it was a perfectly ordinary computer. Apart from this fairly standard experience, I'd point out that Lenovo's OLED screens are really extremely beautiful and easy on the eye, and that's the case with this one too, with a 120Hz refresh rate and a resolution of 2000x1600 pixels.

However, the magic starts when you press a certain button (or make a gesture in front of the camera, I didn't try it) and start watching the top of the screen rise upwards with a special built-in motor. It practically "pulls out" the rest of the screen, which until then was bent under the keyboard, and within a couple of dozen seconds we can see the screen extend by a good fifteen or so centimetres, that is, it "grows" from a 14" diagonal to 16.7" and a resolution of 2000x2350 pixels. So you get another 750 pixels on the vertical axis.

The mechanism is truly unnoticeable and works very well, and the whole build of the laptop is at a truly top-notch level. What I mean is that, however problematic this might seem from some perspective because of potential failures and the like, it seems that won't actually happen, given how much attention has been paid to every detail.

My second worry was that on phones with foldable OLED screens I could very often see that crease in normal use, so I didn't know what to expect from the screen bending under the keyboard.

To my great delight, that effect is almost non-existent here, probably also because the angle at which the screen has to bend is smaller. In theory, the creases can be seen if you look at the screen from the side, on, say, a completely black background under strong light, but in practice they're not noticeable at all in real work, which is a big plus.

Another thing that worried me at first is that with the screen extended like this the laptop becomes quite tall, so I was afraid it might tip over backwards.

However, that is actually solved by the solid bottom section, which houses all the important components and serves as a kind of counterweight, so the whole device is extremely stable whether in its normal or "stretched" form.

Of course, none of this would mean much without suitable Lenovo software, which immediately detects when the screen is extended and places very useful widgets such as a calendar in the extra space, but everything can be customised, so you can use this part of the screen for watching videos, for a video call or presentation notes, and it also makes room for more rows in Excel or a big PDF.

The device's other external features follow Lenovo's very solid logic for business devices – there's a good webcam with a privacy shutter, an excellent backlit keyboard, a good touchpad and Harman Kardon speakers for full enjoyment. A good thing is that the computer comes with a 65W GaN charger that is extremely compact – it seems strange to me that premium laptop manufacturers didn't opt for this technology earlier, since it has existed for phones for several years.





Another good thing is that with the supplied charger you can charge the battery to 80% in just 60 minutes. Battery life itself isn't exactly record-breaking, since it has to power a larger screen and a motor (extending the screen certainly affects battery life), but I'd say the battery is adequate for, say, a whole working day of normal business activities without a charger.

Looking at performance, it's clear this is a higher-end business model. There's an Intel Core Ultra 7 processor, 32 GB of RAM and 1 TB of storage. Paired with a truly excellent keyboard and touchpad, this makes the computer a highly usable business toy. The graphics are integrated Intel Arc 140V, which is better than the earlier Iris Xe models, but realistically don't expect to play demanding games, especially since the screen resolution is higher from the start. Still, it could be OK for some casual titles.

PERFORMANCE IS ON A PAR WITH HIGH-END BUSINESS LAPTOPS

THE DEVICE IS VERY STABLE EVEN WITH A FULLY EXTENDED SCREEN

A rollable laptop certainly isn't for everyone, especially since its price is of course considerably higher than standard models.

However, however sceptical I was at first about yet another "reinventing the wheel", here I have to note that I was wrong – a bigger screen really can be an advantage in some situations, especially in some business environments, while the rest of the computer deserves every praise for the quality of its materials and build. In that sense, this product targets a specific niche that someone might actually need after all.





AUTHOR
MILOŠ HETLEROVIĆ



LOGITECH MEETUP

PROFESSIONAL REMOTE MEETINGS

Online meetings and presentations have somehow become part of our everyday lives ever since the pandemic shut everyone up in their homes. However, it seems everyone met that moment unprepared, with the heads of the biggest companies using webcams through which you could neither recognise nor hear them. In the meantime this segment has progressed significantly, and companies like Logitech concluded that not only personal computers need such devices, but also offices and conference rooms where several people take part in an online meeting at the same time.

At first glance the MeetUp looks as if someone combined a TV soundbar with a fairly large webcam lens. And this design direction is no accident – the idea is precisely to mount the MeetUp below or above the TV in a meeting room and automatically have everything ready for talks with another team or individuals on the other side. The camera also comes with a remote control, which is also very important, since the idea is that you can fully control the meeting without needing to reach for a keyboard and mouse.

So how do you equip a room for the Logitech MeetUp? First of all, the idea is that you'll put the device somewhere a TV is already fixed, let's assume most often on the wall. Then you can mount the



MeetUp below it, and if you don't want the cables behind it to show, you can even run them into the wall, while the camera either stands on its base or that base is used to hang it on the wall too. It's powered through a single standard USB-C port, which also connects it to a company computer used for video conferencing, so that isn't a problem.

The camera has a lens that delivers 4K resolution and up to 5x optical zoom, plus a motorised mechanism that lets it focus on different people in the room. There's of course a built-in speaker and a whole microphone system that carefully picks up only what the current speaker is saying. If needed, you can even buy an Expansion Mic – an additional microphone that lets speakers sitting much further from the camera be heard clearly.

HOW DOES A MEETING ACTUALLY WORK?

The main advantage of the Logitech MeetUp camera is the software integrated into the Logitech Sync platform. It lets admins control the camera even remotely, while users just come into the room, click one button on the remote and connect to the right call. If, say, several people are joining a call, a template is chosen before it starts for how it will look – whether it will be just a wide shot, a wide shot plus focus on the person currently speaking, whether, for example, only three people actually sitting next to each other are shown as close-ups on a third of the screen each, and so on and so forth. This system can of course be used with all current video-conferencing software such as Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, Zoom and the like.

4K RESOLUTION AND 5X OPTICAL ZOOM ARE THE MAIN ADVANTAGES OF THIS CAMERA

Then the MeetUp starts "working its magic", in the sense that the software itself, using RightSound technology, determines who is currently speaking in the meeting and puts the emphasis on them. What Logitech calls RightSight can then move the camera lens and zoom and focus on that speaker, so they look best to the people on the other end and practically appear as if it were just "their own webcam". We tested this in practice, and it really looks as if you're in the room together with all those people, which leaves a much more natural impression and allows much better communication. The microphones also do an excellent job even without any add-ons - the flow and sound of the meeting always feel natural, almost as if you're really there, even though you could be thousands of kilometres away.





THE MICROPHONE SYSTEM DETECTS WHO IS CURRENTLY SPEAKING IN THE MEETING

CONCLUSION

MeetUp is a really interesting step forward for Logitech in terms of cameras meant for filming several people at once, and it can be excellent for teams of, say, three to ten people who need frequent communication with external partners away from the office. Of course, a device like this costs several times more than an ordinary webcam, but you should always bear in mind the possibilities it brings. For those who need even more people in the room communicating directly with others, the good thing is that this is practically the "smallest" such device in Logitech's range, and there are much more serious models with even more advanced features, which of course require considerably larger investments. In that sense, it's really good that someone has dedicated themselves to this kind of online communication, so teams can choose what best suits their needs.



AUTHOR
MILOŠ HETLEROVIĆ



APPLE MACBOOK NEO

APPLE MADE SOMETHING AFFORDABLE?!

In a world where we've got used to the prices of everything rising every day, while Apple stands out on the tech front for its overpriced devices, I really didn't expect to be writing about a MacBook as an affordable and sensible option on the market. However, that's exactly what happened, and Apple decided to offer a device aimed primarily at less demanding users, students, older people and the like, but in line with its policy of high quality.

For years we've been used to Apple having two laptop series: the MacBook Air, which is extremely thin and aimed more at standard users; and the MacBook Pro, which puts more emphasis on raw performance and is aimed at programmers, designers, photographers, video editors and the like. Now the MacBook Neo comes to fill the price gap below the MacBook Air series, since that has of course become more expensive in the last few years.

The box itself has the classic Apple design, while inside we can see the blue model and, besides that, just one, admittedly quite nice and high-quality, 1.5m USB-C cable. Yes, you heard right: in line with new trends, environmental protection, logistics challenges, the war in the Middle East and who knows what else, now



you don't even get a proper charger with a laptop! OK, realistically, newer phones now have 65W or stronger chargers, which is more than enough for a device like this, but I have to admit it really annoys me that you can't open your new gadget and simply use it straight out of the box without any extras. To make things worse, the laptop itself takes up only about a quarter of the box's volume, there's the cable, and the rest is... air?! The box could literally have been at least three times smaller... But since I've gone mad about the state of the industry in general, let's move on to much more positive things, of which there are really plenty.

As soon as you pick the laptop up, it's indescribable how much you get that "Apple feeling" - it's really very well built from aluminium, has a dose of weight in the right places (you can comfortably open it with one hand without it moving) - it's simply clear this is a very seriously designed and executed device. It must be noted that the laptop is somehow a bit thicker on all sides than, say, the Air, and obviously a bit less aesthetically appealing than the MacBook Pro, but you still feel that Apple design influence everywhere and it unmistakably belongs to the family. On the side there are only two USB-C ports, through which it also charges, which may mean you'll have to buy some dongle later, but at least for Apple there are plenty of those. There's also a 3.5mm headphone jack, and that's it as far as ports go.

THE COMPUTER ACTUALLY USES AN IPHONE PROCESSOR

The trackpad is traditionally large, but has no haptic control, so you rely on the two clicking buttons integrated into it, but again the experience is significantly better than on equivalent PC models. Finally, the keyboard is identical to the one on the MacBook Pro, which for me is generally one of the best I've ever tried on a laptop, so this is a big plus for the "budget" Neo. What you should bear in mind is that the Neo comes in four different colours and two SSD capacity options, 256 and 512 GB, but that isn't quite the only difference. Namely, the 256 GB model we tested has only a "lock" button next to the keyboard, while the more expensive model has a real Touch ID button, i.e. you can unlock the computer with your fingerprint if you pay another 100 currency units for the larger drive.

Finally we come to the screen, which really thrilled me. Although on paper it's just an IPS screen, when you compare it with any PC model of similar specification, there's a noticeable difference in quality, significantly in favour of Apple and its Liquid Retina screens. Practically the only thing I'd compare this screen to in the PC world right now is the OLED screens on Lenovo Yoga models, and it's maybe a little below them, but bear in mind we're comparing two completely different technologies and price categories. Interestingly, Apple has tailored its new macOS Tahoe to the MacBook Neo, so if you buy the blue one, like the one we tested, the whole operating system will by default be in that colour, while the yellow or pink will look different again. Of course, all that can easily be changed later, but at first glance it looks very nice for the user.

EVEN IF YOU'RE NOT A FAN OF THE WHOLE APPLE STORY, IT'S HARD TO FIND AN ARGUMENT AGAINST THIS DEVICE



THE KEYBOARD IS THE SAME AS THE MACBOOK PRO ONE

Performance

We come to what many might hold against this MacBook and what looks very modest on paper: its performance. First of all, bear in mind it's powered by the A18 Pro processor. For those who aren't familiar, Apple now designs and makes all its processors itself, which allows better integration and control, and so far M chips were meant for computers while A chips were for phones and tablets. So





the MacBook Neo is actually powered by a processor from a 2024 phone, specifically the iPhone 16 Pro and Pro Max. Now, someone would say that's weak, but you have to consider the wider context. First of all, mobile chips have become much better in the meantime, and even in the PC world we now have computers powered by Snapdragon processors. When benchmarked, the A18 Pro chip comes out roughly on a par with Apple's M1 chip in both single-core and multi-core applications, and I've heard almost no one with a MacBook Air or Pro of that generation complain particularly about performance. It's certainly much stronger than any Apple computer with an Intel processor.

However, that brings us to the second point, which is that the Neo comes with only 8 GB of RAM, or as Apple calls it, unified memory. In practice this means the chip shares it as both system and video memory, which nowadays doesn't seem like much, considering how common phones with 12 or 16 GB are. And finally there are SSD options of just 256 and 512 GB, where even the larger one isn't especially "comfortable". Then again, as more and more files are stored somewhere online rather than locally, the question is whether you really need more. In that sense, everyone has to answer that question for themselves. In traditional Apple style, both the memory and the SSD are soldered directly to the board, so don't expect to be able to upgrade anything.

Conclusion

The MacBook Neo's main asset is actually its price, which is roughly 700 currency units, although it's traditionally cheaper in America, and there's even an extra 100-dollar student discount. It's clear who this device is for - someone who needs their first computer, someone who writes or surfs the web, who's an influencer, for whom looks matter and who wants something really high quality. For someone who wants to play serious games, edit photos, edit video or do some programming, this isn't the right choice. However, even for those who aren't big fans of the whole Apple story (and I count myself among them), it's very hard to find an argument against this device - if you simply look at the price range and what's offered in a similar bracket on the classic PC laptop market, the offer isn't comparable. To my general surprise, the MacBook Neo now offers the best value for money! Let's hope this pushes other manufacturers to stop offering "plastic junk" for big money and to offer higher-quality solutions despite the constant pressure to raise prices.







play!
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