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20 YEARS WITH YOU

GAME OF THE MONTH:

FORZA HORIZON 6



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WELCOME

In the blink of an eye, almost six years have passed since I first stepped into the Play! newsroom. At first it was a surreal experience, because how often does a passion for video games become a job, and in Serbia at that? After a few months of working with the Play! crew, I realised that this cynical view was wrong, or at the very least exaggerated.

From my first issue, whose cover was graced by Crusader Kings III, I slowly began exploring the local and regional gaming scene as an editor, through events, conversations with developers and of course their games. I had the chance to meet some of the most talented and dedicated people of my whole life, who put a pure love of games first. By that I also mean the whole Play!Zine crew, from contributors and former editors to designers and writers, some of whom are still active to this day.

And here we are: a full 20 years have flown by since the debut of our beloved magazine. I wasn't here from the start, I'm not OG, but I feel immensely honoured to be part of the team and its whole history. I'm grateful for the great collaboration with all my old and new colleagues, each of whom, in their own way, has contributed to the growth of Play!Zine.

As we stand at a major milestone, we decided to celebrate Play!'s 20th birthday in a modest way, with a retrospective by the editors with whom it all began, as well as those who kept nurturing it for many years afterwards. Take a look at the Play!Flashback section!

Oh, and Forza Horizon 6 is our game of the month. Give it a go, it really drives!



46 GAME OF THE MONTH: FORZA HORIZON 6



18 LOCAL SCENE: TEAM ANOXIC INTERVIEW



36 REVIEW: DIABLO IV: LORD OF HATRED

CONTENTS

FLASH NEWS 6

PLAY!FLASHBACK 10

20 years of Play!Zine magazine..... 14

LOCAL SCENE: 18

Team Anoxic interview..... 18

ESPORTS 22

Serbia through IESF championship history.. 22

TOP CHARTS 25

Most-played titles of all time..... 25

FIRST LOOK 26

Heroes of Might and Magic: Olden Era..... 26

REVIEW 32

Directive 8020 32
Diablo IV: Lord of Hatred 36
Samson 42
Forza Horizon 6..... 46
MOUSE: P.I. For Hire..... 50
ZERO PARADES: For Dead Spies 56
Relic Arena..... 60

RETRO CORNER 64

The mother of M-rated games..... 64

HARDWARE 66

Is it time for an OLED monitor?..... 66



Epic Games announces Unreal Engine 6 and a new era for Rocket League

In July 2015, Psyonix released Rocket League in the late Unreal Engine 3 era. Almost 11 years later, during the Rocket League Championship Series Paris Major, it was officially announced that the popular esport is moving to Unreal Engine 6.

Tim Sweeney estimated that the new version will become globally available in 2027-2028. Unreal Engine 5.8 is expected as soon as next month, while version 5.9 should arrive later in the autumn.

The move from UE4 to UE5 didn't bring drastic changes right at launch. That's why some think the reactions to the first trailer are too optimistic, while others have pointed out that this transition comes too early, as UE5 hasn't yet fully taken hold in the industry.



Metal Sonic will appear in Sonic the Hedgehog 4

Jeff Fowler, director of the film series about Sega's lightning-fast blue hedgehog, confirmed on social media that filming of Sonic the Hedgehog 4 has officially wrapped. In the post he shared an image showing Metal Sonic, saying this will be the best film in the series so far. Sonic the Hedgehog 4 hits cinemas on March 19, 2027.

It has already been confirmed that the fourth film will also feature Amy Rose, voiced by Kristen Bell (Frozen, The Good Place). Amy first appeared back in 1993 in Sonic CD, where Metal Sonic was the main villain.

Ben Kingsley and Nick Offerman also join the new film, and the main cast from the previous films returns.

Destiny 2 is officially dead

Nine years after release, Destiny 2 is getting its last major update. Although it will remain playable, active development is coming to an end, which will let Bungie focus on new projects. The Monument of Triumph update arrives on June 9 with a host of changes, QoL improvements, new systems and events.

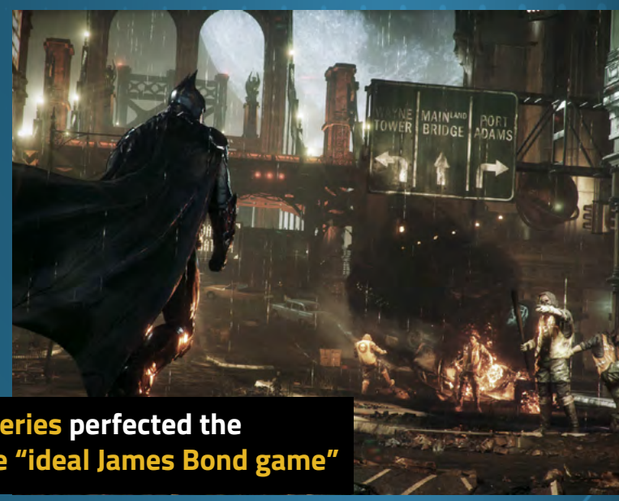
Bungie, part of Sony, currently has no new project for the Destiny 2 team. The studio is reportedly investing more and more in Marathon, which hasn't met expectations for active players.

Bungie is reportedly planning a significant number of layoffs after the final Destiny 2 update. Although rumours about Destiny 3 are already circulating, the studio currently has no plans for a sequel.



Chuck Beaver, former producer of James Bond games at EA, discussed the series' strengths and weaknesses in a recent interview. Less than two weeks before the release of IO Interactive's 007 First Light, he explained that in 2026 it isn't hard to make a good 007 game, unlike when EA held the licence almost a quarter of a century ago. He even said developers could find inspiration in Solid Snake from the Metal Gear Solid series.

"We handed the licence to Activision after 2005's From Russia with Love, even though we wholeheartedly wanted to keep working on the series. However, when we saw Arkham Asylum, we were blown away. Essentially, Batman is Bond with a cape and a mask."



The Arkham series perfected the formula of the "ideal James Bond game"



Warhorse announces a LOTR RPG and a new Kingdom Come "adventure"

The rumours were true! Warhorse Studios has officially unveiled two projects – a new Kingdom Come game and an open-world RPG set in Tolkien's Middle-earth. Details are very scarce – no rough release dates have been revealed, nor any details about gameplay or story.

The new Kingdom Come project has only been described as "a new adventure", which suggests Warhorse may want to experiment with other genres. Despite this franchise's popularity, the LOTR RPG has attracted more attention as the better-known and bigger IP.

On the subject of the LOTR RPG, an insider report from 2025 claimed that development is partly funded by the Abu Dhabi Investment Office (ADIO). Reportedly, ADIO has invested 100 million dollars in the project.



Ezio will reportedly appear in Assassin's Creed Hexe

New information about AC Hexe comes from the insider Rogue, who claims the heroine will be called Anika. The game takes place during the reign of the Holy Roman Empire, in today's Germany, during the Würzburg witch trials between 1625 and 1631. This was one of the biggest mass trials and killings in all of European history, which supports rumours that Hexe will be "one of the darkest AC games ever".

The most interesting claim is that the famous Ezio Auditore returns, and that Anika is a descendant of his sister Claudia! This sounds unthinkable, since Hexe takes place at least 100 years after his death, but Rogue claims Ezio will appear as a ghost who teaches Anika.



Breaking Bad star joins the cast of Fallout season 3

A new Deadline report reveals that one of the lead actors of the hit series Breaking Bad will appear in the next season of Fallout. It is Jesse Pinkman, the famous Heisenberg's long-time partner, played by Aaron Paul. The actor has already worked with the executive producers of the first and second seasons, on the series Westworld.

Besides playing Jesse, Paul is known for many film and TV projects, including BoJack Horseman, Black Mirror and Need for Speed. In the world of video games, gamers know him as Robert/Mecha Man from the excellent narrative adventure Dispatch, which won Telltale Games several awards last year.

We expect the third season to premiere in mid-2027.



Forza Horizon 6 player banned for 8,000 years for modding

According to rumours circulating online, as much as 155 GB of Forza Horizon 6 content has leaked, allowing certain users to access the game before its official release. As TheGamerVerse reports, one player who had supposedly already played the new Forza received a ban lasting until December 31, 9999. The ban screen, which quickly spread across social media, says the user has been "Suspended for Cheating/Unallowed Modding".

The user allegedly tried to put mods and cheats into the leaked version of the game, which was followed by a rather extreme punishment. Even if this ban isn't real, it can certainly serve as a warning to anyone who was thinking of doing the same.

Take-Two explains why GTA 6 launches on consoles first



Speaking to Bloomberg, Take-Two explained why the PC version of GTA 6 will be late. Strauss Zelnick admitted that console players are their primary customers, saying Rockstar targets this audience first because GTA 6 will be judged most fairly in their hands. He added that it will be hard to reach other users if console players aren't satisfied.

Asked whether the timed console exclusivity has anything to do with a marketing deal with PlayStation, Zelnick clarified: "No, historically Rockstar has always released games on consoles first." Neither Zelnick nor Rockstar has yet given even a rough estimate of when the PC version of GTA 6 could hit the market.

The first teaser for Alien: Isolation 2 has arrived



Alien: Isolation is considered one of the best horror games ever, and two years after it was confirmed that the sequel is in development, Creative Assembly surprised us with a new teaser.

The first game is set 15 years after 1979's Alien. Trapped in a space station, we were prey to a relentless Xenomorph, and it seems its hunt has now spread beyond Sevastopol. The sequel's teaser shows security doors opening onto what looks like an abandoned colony from the film Aliens. This suggests we will also explore outdoor locations, perhaps even caves full of facehugger eggs.

We don't know the release date – under the original post Sega only wrote "coming soon".



Croteam announces the final chapter of the Talos Principle trilogy

Croteam and Devolver Digital have suddenly unveiled The Talos Principle 3, the sequel that will bring the whole series to a close. The short teaser trailer shows no gameplay, but screenshots suggest it builds on everything we saw in the first two games – it will be full of interesting puzzles, probably with a few new twists. As for the story, the trailer description offers only a mysterious synopsis:

"What separates a story from the real world or a simulation? The real world exists forever, but a story must have a clear beginning, middle and end. That's why The Talos Principle, a story Croteam has worked on for more than ten years, must end."

The Talos Principle 3 comes to PlayStation 5 and PC in 2027.



CDPR unveils a new Witcher 3 expansion – Songs of the Past

Almost ten years after the release of Blood and Wine, CDPR has announced a long-awaited third expansion for The Witcher 3. The add-on is called Songs of the Past and comes out in 2027 for PC, PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X/S.

The Polish studio confirmed that we will once again play as Geralt, saying it will reveal more about the expansion during the summer. Alongside CDPR, the expansion is being developed by Fools Theory, best known for the single-player RPG The Thaumaturge.

Insiders suggest Songs of the Past could serve as a bridge between the third and fourth games. Some claim the story will take us to the so far unexplored region of Zerrikania. The expansion may also reveal more details about how Ciri became a Witcher.





PLAY! 149
JUNE 2021

"CASTLE DIMITRESCU ALREADY LOOKED IMPRESSIVE IN THE DEMO, BUT NOW, WITH THE REST OF ITS MAGNIFICENT HALLS, IT LITERALLY TOOK MY BREATH AWAY."

– NIKOLA AKSENTIJEVIĆ ON RESIDENT EVIL VILLAGE

PLAY! 96
JUNE 2016

"IF YOU SHOW YOUR BETTER HALF A GLORY KILL ON A MANCUBUS AND SHE DOESN'T TURN GREEN OR PALE, FEEL FREE TO MARRY HER!"

– BOJAN JOVANOVIĆ ON DOOM



PLAY! 1
JUNE 2006

"ONE OF THE GAME'S BIGGEST STRENGTHS IS ITS PVP SYSTEM, WITH NEW, CHAOTIC 12-VS-12 BATTLES BETWEEN WARRING FACTIONS."

– LUKA ZLATIĆ ON GUILD WARS FACTIONS



20 YEARS OF PLAY!ZINE MAGAZINE

2006-2026.

MILAN ĐUKIĆ

PLAY! WAS BORN OUT OF A WISH FOR THE REGION TO HAVE A COMPLETELY FREE GAMING MAGAZINE."

From this distance, 2006 seems a much more interesting year than the video game industry in 2026. The seventh generation of consoles began, with the revolutionary Nintendo Wii that drove the planet crazy (Wii Tennis, anyone?), and after the clunky original Xbox, Microsoft released the Xbox 360, which dominated the market (and was especially popular here because it could play pirated games).

PlayStation 3 lost that console war, but on its own it offered some significant titles, while Nintendo also successfully ruled the handheld field - the Nintendo DS Lite appeared that very year. All the while the PS2, and even the PSP, were still current, and speaking of the Japanese company, one of the best games of that year was The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess for the Nintendo Wii, but also for the GameCube, which was still current at the time!

If we shift our attention completely from hardware to software, that is, games, we can say that 2006 gave us some of the most legendary ones in history. Besides the Zelda already mentioned, there were The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, Gears of War, New Super Mario Bros., Wii Sports, Guitar Hero II, Company of Heroes, Rainbow Six Vegas, Bully, Just Cause, Prey, Saints Row and many others.

So it's no surprise that it was in 2006 that the wish was born to launch a magazine that would offer readers in the region a new view of the games industry, with plenty of write-ups, news, personal commentary and other content, completely free! Of course, paid magazines cost money for a reason, mainly printing costs, so the decision to offer a free magazine meant it would be digital. At the time phones weren't a relevant way to read this kind of content, so it was made mostly for traditional page-flipping on a computer screen.

The audience's reaction after the first issue showed we had chosen the right path, one that many Western magazines later adopted too, and it seems that only in the last few years has the digital concept of publishing magazines really taken off, while the traditional paper one is in decline.

Of course, none of us back then counted on how long Play! would last, even though we all said it would go on for many years. But here we are two decades later and Play! is still here, and we plan to keep it that way!

- 1976. 50 YEARS OF BREAKOUT
- 1986. 40 YEARS OF ARKANOID
- 1996. 30 YEARS OF EVANGELION
- 2001. 25 YEARS OF MAX PAYNE, HALO, MGS 2
- 2006. 20 YEARS OF PLAY! MAGAZINE

A YEAR OF BIG ANNIVERSARIES

LUKA ZLATIĆ

THROUGH ANNIVERSARIES WE LIKE TO CELEBRATE WHAT IS PART OF OUR IDENTITY."

People like to give power to words and numbers. Be it 616 or 666, 77 or 69... We also love round numbers, especially if they mark some particularly significant span of time or quantity of something we're fond of.

Through anniversaries we like to celebrate something that is part of our identity, that touches that nostalgic little part of our soul and reminds us of forgotten times, bringing faded emotions back to life...

Our friends from Svet Kompjutera have unlocked a rare achievement, reaching 500 published issues, on which we sincerely congratulate them and wish them a few hundred more.

If we drop a zero, we can say we're celebrating the silver 50 years since Atari released Breakout back in 1976. Forty years ago came out probably its best clone, Arkanoid, whose peers include timeless hits Castlevania, OutRun, Metroid, The Legend of Zelda and, especially dear to me, Bubble Bobble.

October 1986 is also significant in the world of comics: that's when the first issue of Dylan Dog came out in its native Italy (it arrived here a year later), a character who greatly shaped the comics scene in (ex-)Yugoslavia.

This year saw the end of the celebration of 30 years of Evangelion (truth be told, it started last year), the anime series that turned the mecha genre upside down and deeply imprinted on our subconscious the sound of cicadas that fills summer in Japan.

Maybe not all of us watched Eva in '96, but we did enjoy survival horror with Resident Evil, meet Lara Croft, and discover a new dimension of the FPS with Quake, or of platformers with Mario 64.

A quarter of a century has passed since we first entered bullet time as Max Payne, realised that you can play a serious shooter on consoles too - Halo - and kept discovering Hideo Kojima by playing MGS 2.

Exactly two decades ago, the first digital cover of a new video game magazine was graced by Guild Wars: Factions. Two months ago that same e-zine reached its jubilee issue 200. Now, in issue 202, we have the chance to mark these anniversaries and celebrate its 20th birthday.

How do you measure the significance of those 20 years? Through the countries we visited to report from video game fairs? Through the generations of hardware and peripherals we tested? Through the adventures we lived in virtual worlds?

Yes.

But for me personally, the most significant thing is that someone reading what we write today also read that first issue, someone who fell in love with video games together with us. That makes this moment especially powerful for me, and makes this anniversary one big jubilee.

2 DECADES OF DEDICATION



ALEKSANDAR ILIĆ

PLAY! SURVIVED PRECISELY THANKS TO THAT DEDICATION."

I have to say I was pleasantly surprised to hear that Play!Zine is celebrating its 20th birthday, especially since I was lucky enough to be part of it for a good number of years. Whether reviewing software, games or films, writing news, or as editor-in-chief of the magazine - it was always interesting. A lot changed in the magazine over that period - the people, the vision, the location, the technical details, the interests, but not the dedication - that was always there.

Play! always bore the stamp of the crew making it at the time, skilfully avoiding technical and rhetorical templates. There was always someone to invest their time and effort so that Play!Zine would survive, even in the worst financial, moral and ethical moments - and this is Serbia, so there were some. Play! survived precisely thanks to that dedication.

Over these 20 years gaming has reached into every part of life and pop culture, and the range of hardware you can play on today is huge, with something for every pocket - from simple "quasi" open-source consoles that run all the retro games, through the Steam Deck, which finally brought serious PC gaming to a handheld format, all the way to streaming and emulating console and PC games on phones and tablets, and of course Linux as a serious all-round platform for everything, gaming included.

It wasn't bad 20 years ago, but the Xbox 360, PS3 and Wii of the time can't compare with today's offer, not to mention that those consoles can be emulated with a solid degree of success on most of the platforms listed above.

Even more interesting, the endless quantity and quality of free software we could only dream of 20 years ago now gets so much work done, privately and in business - yes, it really sounds incredible. Still, perhaps the biggest culture shock is the number of games released daily, weekly and monthly - there's everything, for everyone, small and mid-sized publishers are flourishing, prices range from free to as much as you like, the choice is enormous - which is mostly good for players and users around the world. From a nerdy niche a couple of decades ago, gaming is now simply part of everyday life.

Unfortunately, a lot has changed for the worse too, in gaming and in the world in general - EA, Ubisoft, Google, AMD, NVIDIA, Microsoft, Intel, Facebook and the rest lost the plot long ago, but that's a story for another time.

I don't know what will happen to the world in 20 days, let alone 20 years, but somehow I'm sure Play!Zine will be here. It will still be run by dedicated people, as it is now and as it was before.

Happy birthday!

PLAY TIME /// 175,200 HOURS

NIKOLA SAVIĆ

SEE YOU AT 30, 40 AND 50 YEARS OF PLAY!ZINE!"

Video games have been (and still are) part of my everyday life for practically as long as I can remember. Since the early nineties, when I first played games on the NES and SEGA Mega Drive, up to today, as I approach 40, I have been and remain enchanted by that universe of virtual adventures - the digitisation of imagination.

That later turned into diligently buying video game magazines and reading them every month, slowly, studiously, cover to cover. As I grew up and the internet became part of my life, I began discovering local gaming forums (such as Junk, Klan RUR and the Svet Kompjutera forum), and through them, somewhere near the end of high school, I found out about Play! magazine (it wasn't yet Zine back then).

The concept of a digital magazine instantly thrilled me, especially because it gave designers more freedom in laying out each issue. You weren't limited by the needs and possibilities of print, so you could give every game full attention in its visual presentation (which is very important for video games, a predominantly visual art). Needless to say, at that very moment Play was added to the collection of magazines I would read every month.

I never dreamed that, some ten years later, I would become editor-in-chief of the very magazine that thrilled me from its first issue. I wrote my first piece for Play!Zine at the end of 2012, and became editor at the end of 2016. I'm extremely proud of every article I wrote, and of each of the more than 30 issues published while I was editor-in-chief - even today I can freely say it's what I'm proudest of in my professional work.

As someone who followed and made it for years, I can say Play!Zine has been and remains a magazine that, on the local gaming scene, covers all the important global gaming events at a level that absolutely rivals the biggest foreign portals, while putting huge effort into spotlighting the local scene and highlighting all the hard-working, talented and successful people developing the local industry.

And I'm sure that in the years and decades to come the local games industry will keep growing and become a factor on the world stage, and that Play!Zine will remain the pillar that gathers quality writers and brings the world of video games to new generations in the best possible way - by growing side by side with regional developers. See you for Play!Zine's 30th, 40th and 50th birthdays!



ONE COFFEE WITH A SPOONFUL OF SPACE DUST, PLEASE!

Coffee Raccoons, the new project from independent Serbian studio Team Anoxic, has officially landed on Steam.

In this game you take on the role of likeable raccoons running their own intergalactic café - by day you serve customers, and by night you travel to distant planets in search of rare ingredients and new flavours, exploring strange alien worlds.

The whole game is steeped in a scrap-punk aesthetic and a warm, cosy atmosphere, like going out for coffee with friends!

On that note, you won't have to run your café alone, since Coffee Raccoons also offers local co-op!

The gameplay offers plenty of interesting mechanics and focuses primarily on management, exploration and simulation elements. Besides running the café and gathering resources, players will be able to create their own menus for each customer's needs, and upgrade their exploration and coffee-brewing gear.

Team Anoxic is a two-person team made up of Ljiljana and Marko, who started working closely together after several game jam projects. The Steam page launch for Coffee Raccoons was very successful, so we took the opportunity to talk to Ljiljana and learn more about the development process, the inspirations and the game's art style.

IN TERMS OF GAMEPLAY, COFFEE RACCOONS IS SPLIT INTO TWO MAIN PARTS - RUNNING THE CAFÉ AND EXPLORING/GATHERING INGREDIENTS. WAS THIS THE PLAN FROM THE START, OR DID ONE OF THEM COME LATER?

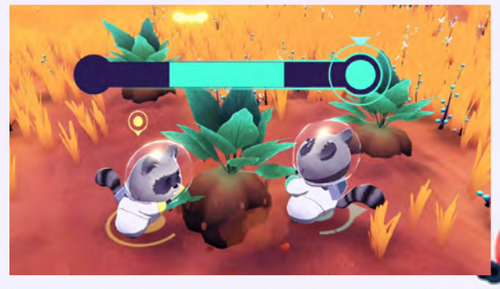
LJILJANA: When the idea for the game came up, both parts were there, but the first thing that came about was the concept of a space café. I was drinking coffee from a petrol station and thought a drive-thru café in space shaped like a takeaway cup would be an interesting concept, wrote it down and forgot about it. A couple of months later, we were talking about Factorio, resource gathering and automation in games. That conversation reminded me of the space café concept, so we started talking about what gathering resources to make different space drinks might look like, and which mechanics and progression systems could be implemented. We both liked the idea because it sounded fun!



IN THAT RESPECT, HOW HARD WAS IT TO MAKE BOTH SEGMENTS EQUALLY INTERESTING?

LJILJANA: That's something we're still working on and will keep working on right up to launch. Games like Dave the Diver, Moonlighter and Spiritfarer confirmed for us that it's possible to combine these two genres and make a coherent, interesting game. Making both parts equally

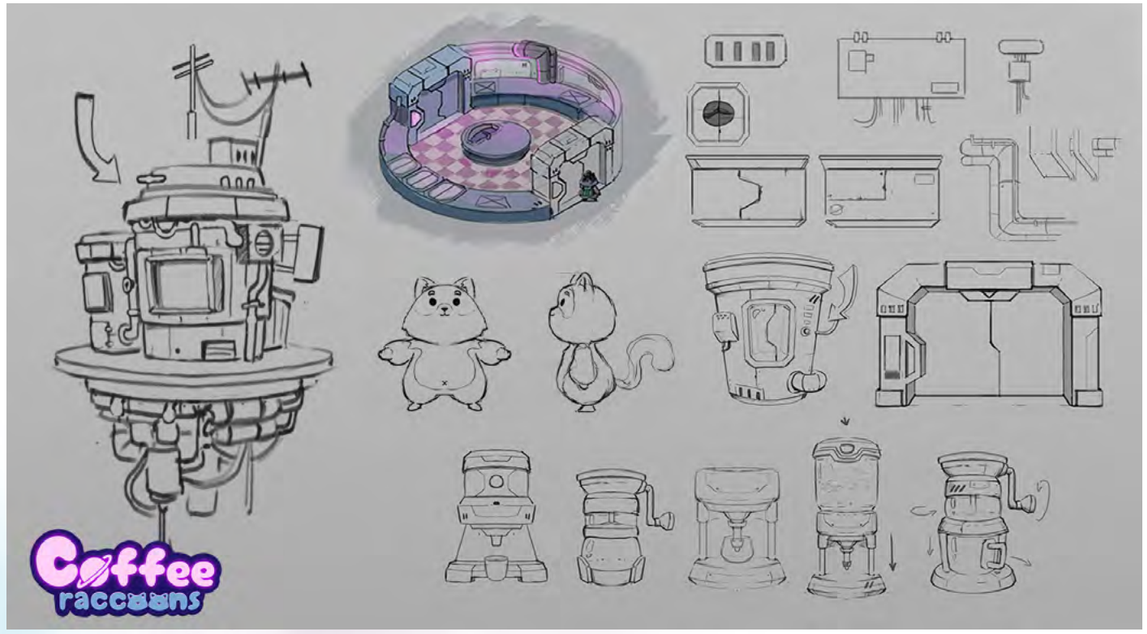
PLAYERS' SUPPORT GIVES US THE MOTIVATION TO PUT EVEN MORE LOVE AND EFFORT INTO IT



interesting is perhaps the biggest challenge we face. It's hard to judge what is objectively interesting, especially when it comes to your own game, which is why testing ideas with players is the best approach.

THE VISUAL STYLE AND ATMOSPHERE ARE THE FOUNDATIONS OF THIS GAME. TELL US ABOUT THE PROCESS OF CONCEIVING THEM.

LJILJANA: First of all, thank you! Before I started making any art for the game, I made sure to answer some key questions through a moodboard, such as shape language, atmosphere, lighting and palette, and to stay



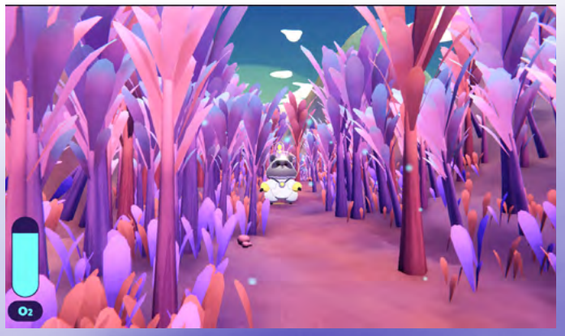
true to those decisions throughout the design. When I was thinking about the look of the café, I liked the idea of cyberpunk lighting, but the architecture of that style was too sterile for our game. Arcane had a big influence on how I treat architecture and technology. I loved the way the artists designed Jinx's workshop and her gadgets; everything looks cobbled together and improvised. Researching that approach to design, I discovered the scrap-punk aesthetic, which was exactly what I was looking for, because it fits perfectly with our main characters, the raccoons!

When it comes to planet design, the biggest inspiration is Studio Ghibli films and nature itself.

I wanted to achieve the warmth of Ghibli landscapes, and when it comes to plants and animals, nature has great references and is the best source of inspiration!

CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR EARLIER PROJECTS? DESCRIBE THE EXPERIENCE OF WORKING ON COFFEE RACCOONS AS A TWO-PERSON TEAM.

LJILJANA: Marko started his gaming career as an





indie developer and released his first game, Boxhead & Zombies, for Android in 2021. Since 2019 I had worked as an artist on various indie projects and children's books. We met at Two Desperados, and after that formed a team with which we took part in game jams, and after four joint projects we realised we work brilliantly as a team and share a love of indie games. Coffee Raccoons is our first joint commercial project.

Working in a two-person team means we both have to wear many hats and are constantly



swamped with all sorts of tasks. That's why we try to plan and prioritise tasks regularly. However, despite planning, situations often arise where you need to adapt and change plans and priorities, so flexibility is also essential when working in a small team.

At the same time we realised one very important thing - the only way to make progress in development is to set concrete deadlines and not chase perfection, but accept "good enough" as the final version.



GREAT ADVICE FOR ALL INDIE TEAMS! DO YOU HAVE A ROUGH RELEASE DATE FOR COFFEE RACCOONS? CAN WE EXPECT A STEAM DEMO SOON?

LJILJANA: It's still early to talk about a release date, especially since developing a commercial video game brings a host of hidden tasks that are impossible to predict. We only recently launched the Steam page, and that was a big step for us. In two weeks we managed to collect 2,000 wishlists, which we didn't expect, but which made us immensely happy! Seeing that people like what we're making gave us extra motivation to put in even more love and effort.

The next big step for us is the alpha version, which we're actively working on, and with it the demo. We're currently in a very uncertain situation and need funding to speed up the demo's release, which largely determines whether we'll release it before October's Steam Next Fest, or in March next year.

Support Team Anoxic and add Coffee Raccoons to your Steam wishlist.





SERBIA EIGHTH ON THE LIST OF THE MOST DECORATED COUNTRIES IN IESF HISTORY!



Founded in 2008, the International Esports Federation (IESF) is a global organisation that brings together national federations and teams with the aim of promoting esports as a legitimate sport, primarily through the annual IESF championship.

Now the organisation has published a list of countries that have won six or more medals at its world championships, and Serbia is among them.

Under the umbrella of the Serbian Electronic Sports and Esports Federation (SESE), our national team took eighth place on the list of the most decorated nations in IESF history, among more than 150 member countries of the international federation. With a total of seven medals, Serbia has further strengthened its position on the international esports scene. The IESF has named this group The Medal Club, further underlining the exclusivity of the achievement.

Serbia wins gold at the world championship in South Korea (2015)

Serbia achieved one of its greatest esports accomplishments in 2015, winning the title of best national team overall at the IESF World Esports Championship in South Korea.

Our representatives reached this historic result thanks to Miloš “d00m1n80r” Perović’s gold medal in Hearthstone, bronze for the League of Legends team, which then featured Jovan “Demented Clown” Jovanović, Atila “Colamax” Dudaš, Aleksa “DoubleAiM” Stanković, Aljoša “Milica” Kovandžić and Luka “BigFoot” Miletić, and Aleksandar “Beastyqt” Krstić’s excellent placing in the StarCraft II division.

Overall, Serbia finished the competition ahead of the big esports powers, ending the Korean team’s three-year dominance of the championship.



Serbian LoL team takes third place at the next IESF championship (2016)



The following year Serbia was again at the very top of world esports, when our League of Legends team won another bronze medal, this time in Jakarta. In the group stage, Pavle “Yoppa” Kostić, Luka “kaLuGG” Todorović, Đorđe “Baxauer” Lapčević, Gvozden “zdengvo” Moljković and Jovan “Demented Clown” Jovanović swept the competition without a single defeat. In the playoffs they then beat Malaysia, before being stopped by the Philippines in the semi-final 1:2.

Our players quickly recovered from the defeat, however, and convincingly beat Italy 2:0 in the match for third place, bringing Serbia a new IESF medal. South Korea returned to form on this occasion and deservedly won the title.

Serbia's LoL team goes a step further and wins its first silver medal (2017)

At the 9th IESF championship in Busan, we witnessed the greatest success of the Serbian League of Legends team. On the way to the first silver medal in its history, our boys literally steamrolled the competition - they reached the final after six straight wins (eight if we count every map), but in the decisive battle for gold they couldn't overcome the reigning champions and big favourites, South Korea.



Despite losing the final, finishing among the two best teams remained a historic result for the Serbian LoL scene and one of the greatest successes of Serbian esports overall. That year our team was made up of Andrija "klowny" Jovanović, Stefan "Stefan" Nikolić, Đorđe "Baxauer" Lapčević, Miljan "plOx" Mandić and Igor "TasteLess" Radušinović.

CS:GO bronze for Serbia in Iași (2023)



In 2023 Serbia won a new medal, at the most spectacular IESF championship of the post-pandemic era. Live in Romania's cultural capital, the beautiful little city of Iași, the CS:GO team of Ivan "choiv7" Živković, Nikola "Dragon" Bošković, Vladan "VLDN" Radević, Vladan "kind0" Mandić and Aleksa "Impulse" Stankić took third place. This is an outstanding achievement, especially considering the discipline and the competition.

Having topped their group, they cruised into the semi-finals, where their strongest opponent yet, Sweden, was waiting. After losing to the Swedes, they played the match for third place, where they absolutely outclassed Uzbekistan. Besides the bronze, our boys also won 20,000 dollars in prize money.

A second straight bronze for our team (2024)

Serbia continued its run of success in 2024, winning another bronze medal, but for the first time in the Counter-Strike 2 era. Our players finished the group stage in first place, then knocked out favourites Poland in the quarter-finals.
Although Serbia was stopped in
a dramatic semi-final against Portugal, the team managed to beat reigning champions Sweden in the match for third place and win bronze for the second year running. That year our country was represented by Ivan "choiv7" Živković, Luka "emi" Vuković, Vladan "kind0" Mandić, Nikola "Dragon" Bošković and Luka "cOllins" Živanović.





1. PUBG BATTLEGROUNDS — Peak players: 3,257,248

2. BLACK MYTH WUKONG — Peak players: 2,415,714

3. PALWORLD — Peak players: 2,101,867

4. COUNTER STRIKE — Peak players: 1,862,531

5. MONSTER HUNTER WILDS — Peak players: 1,384,608

6. LOST ARK — Peak players: 1,325,305

7. DOTA 2 — Peak players: 1,295,114

8. CYBERPUNK — Peak players: 1,054,388

9. ELDEN RING — Peak players: 953,426

10. BANANA — Peak players: 917,272

AUTHOR
Lazar Drašković

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC OLDEN ERA

GUNNAR RUNS SLOWER, BUT HIS AXE IS TWICE AS BIG!



A little over six months after the demo, Olden Era has finally arrived in early access. Was the wait worth it, and is it worth waiting for the final release? You'll find out at the end of this ar... No, no, I won't string anyone along, because the answer is one big YES. And about time, after 27 years of waiting for a true successor to Heroes 3.

I'll be very honest: I hated every Heroes Ubisoft released, even Heroes 5, which is objectively an OK game, but without a shred of the series' heart. When Unfrozen announced it was making Olden Era I was very sceptical and my expectations were below zero. The fourth team to work on yet another sequel since Ubisoft acquired the licence didn't exactly inspire hope after more than a decade of disappointment. But the more the developers talked about the game and its development, the better it looked. Gone were the "innovations" with which its predecessors tried to reinvent the wheel, and the people at Unfrozen, huge fans of the original games, decided to return to the fundamentals that made Heroes 3 famous.

Comparing Heroes 3 and Olden Era will be pretty much inevitable, but in case there are those who have never heard of the series (good grief), here is a short explanation. Heroes is fairly unique in its genre of turn-based strategy, where you command various, well, heroes who lead your armies against rival factions, gather resources and gear, and gain experience and new skills.

Heroes is a series in which, unlike the real world, your favourite day is Monday, because that's the only day your towns produce troops. Part RPG, part turn-based strategy, Heroes has been that from the very start, before even FPS games turned into some kind of RPG hybrid, not to mention other genres where many developers have an obsessive need to add some kind of experience points and progression.

For everyone who played the demo, at first glance not much has changed. But the devil is in the details. Unfrozen listened closely to criticism, fixed bugs and introduced lots of new features, from simple visual details of certain troops to some crucial changes such as a bigger battle map.

So what is the essence of Olden Era, and how does it differ from its predecessors? First, Unfrozen decided to ignore the dreadful Ashan setting and return to the good old Might and Magic world of Enroth, which covers Might and Magic VI-VIII and Heroes up to the third game, so the most popular titles in the franchise. The game offers six factions and for now there's no sign there will be more in the full release. Interestingly, three of the old factions are fairly similar to their originals from classic Heroes - Temple, Necropolis and Dungeon. All three have a more or less similar roster with now-iconic units such as Crossbowmen and Archangels for Temple, hordes of Skeletons and Death Knights for Necropolis, and Minotaurs and Dragons for Dungeon, alongside some other old acquaintances. Of course not everything is exactly the same, but the core and the feel are very similar to Heroes 3, so series veterans will get into it very easily.

While those three factions are pretty familiar, the other half is new in theory. Schism has in a way replaced Tower, with its snowy theme and Lovecraft-inspired army. There are all sorts of alien creatures, and they feel like a hybrid of the Tower and Naga factions from the original and Ubisoft Heroes, and they have also taken on a kind of "demon farming" tactic that Inferno had in Heroes 3. So they can permanently raise their slain units as other types. Visually, in my opinion, Schism stands out a bit too much from the franchise, but as for the gameplay itself, it has that Heroes core, with very powerful shooters that, like Tower, dominate neutral armies from start to finish.

Inferno has been replaced here by hellish bugs, now called Hive, and the narrative justification is that the Kreegans, the demonic race from the original, are preparing the ground for their invasion, possessing the minds of lesser beings and testing the planet's strength. The main criticism of the demo was that their units looked too similar, but thanks to the team they are now much easier to tell apart. Unfortunately, the old "curse" of the series' demonic factions is still present, so Hive is pretty weak compared to other towns, at least early in the game. Like Inferno in Heroes 3, Hive is extremely weak at





the start and constantly takes losses until you somehow get your hands on stronger units.

The last faction, Grove, offers a pretty interesting playstyle that requires exploiting all of Olden Era's new systems. At first glance these are classic elves, but they are actually a blend of the Sorceress faction from Heroes 2 and the Conflux elementals from Heroes 3. But let's move on to those systems.

First I'd highlight the option of two different upgrades for every unit, an idea taken from the last expansion for Heroes 5. Even better, as long as you're in a town where you own the upgraded building for that unit, you can switch it to the other version for free. This is a great option, because two variations of the same unit sometimes open up interesting synergies and unexpected strategies in battle.

Other novelties of course include units, artefacts and external buildings scattered all over the map.

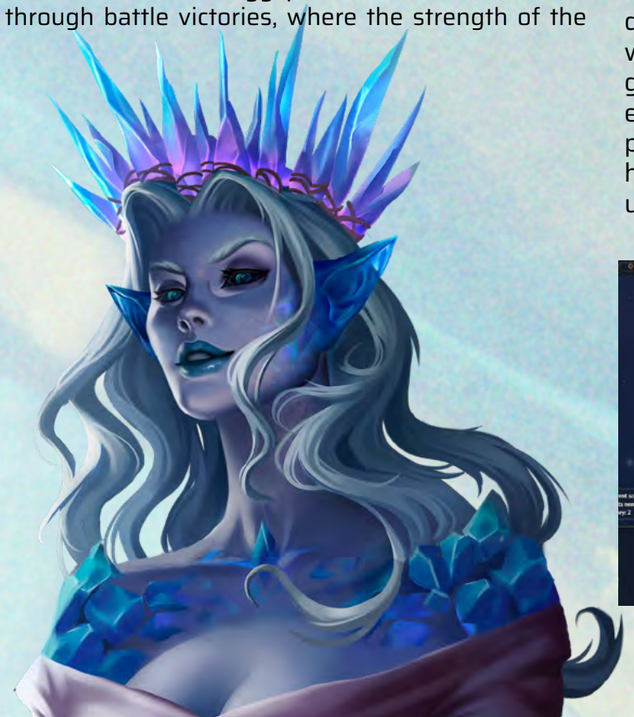
A good number of them are taken from the Horn of the Abyss mod for Heroes 3, which has been the standard for years, especially on the multiplayer scene. The levelling system has returned to Heroes 3, with small changes that take into account the system from the fifth game, meaning heroes will have a choice of three skills at every level. Each skill has three ranks, Basic, Advanced and Expert, and as you upgrade a Basic ability, the remaining ranks will offer you one of three bonuses. It's very important to make the right choice, which mostly depends on the bonus's synergy with your army or another skill. You heard right: skills are no longer always separate, and many of them can have synergies that strengthen them depending on your choices. Every hero starts with a skill unique to their faction.

Spells have also changed a fair bit, so magic heroes are finally on a par with might heroes. Divided into four schools, they can now be learned outside towns too, provided your hero has the right skill in the school in question. As in Heroes 3, they have five ranks, but you can no longer cast them constantly: all spells (except first rank) now have a cooldown, which can be modified by various artefacts and upgrades. Yes, spells can be upgraded, and each has three levels that can strengthen them, give them a bigger AoE or even affect all troops at once! Mage guilds also aren't absurdly expensive as they once were, and they now all share spells, so if two different guilds in your towns unlock the same one, it automatically and freely becomes a higher level!



It's worth mentioning that Dimension Door, Town Portal and similar spells that give a huge advantage in moving around the map can no longer be obtained "by luck"; instead they sit in a separate section for spells used outside combat. They can only be unlocked with special Astrology points (one of three new resources) and only if your hero is of the right level.

Law, Astrology and Alchemical Dust haven't been seen in any of the previous games, and they serve to make the game more dynamic and a little fairer. Astrology points can only be obtained by upgrading a certain building and are used to unlock the spells mentioned above. Law points unlock new "laws", upgrades that can sometimes significantly affect your approach to battles and overall tactics. The closest example is the tech tree from the Civilization series, and every faction has its own unique laws. Law points can be earned in two ways: the first is the same as Astrology points, and the second is through battle victories, where the strength of the defeated enemies generates a certain amount.



Alchemical Dust replaces sulphur from previous games and is primarily used to build upgraded unit buildings, and you can also use it to improve spells and artefacts. It can be found in small amounts as a resource on the map, at special locations that require sacrificing other resources, and through buildings that can be built very late, so they're only worthwhile on easier difficulties in single-player. Since there are no mines for this resource and it's relatively hard to come by, upgrading artefacts is a double-edged sword. Whether to upgrade your army, a very useful spell or a new helmet will often be a close call.

During combat, heroes now have a special bar representing their Focus points. With every hit dealt or taken, your Focus bar fills up, and when it reaches a certain threshold, the hero gains a point. Except in special situations, each hero can have a maximum of three Focus points, which can be used to attack with the hero, use special abilities or activate your units' skills. Almost all units in the game

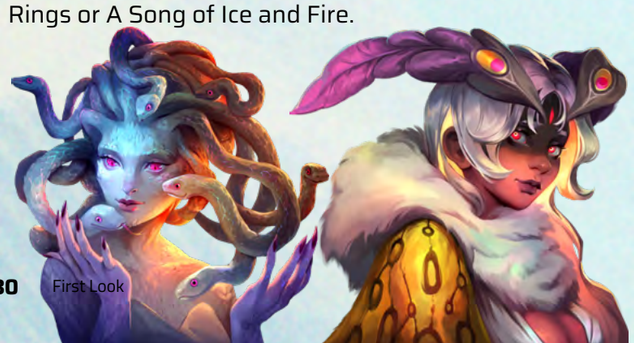




have one or more skills that can be activated by spending a certain amount of Focus. For example, Liches can revive your undead troops by spending two Focus points, while Angels can negate an attack by spending three. It's also very important to note that neutral armies generate Focus points too and gain them during combat. That's why it's sometimes better to avoid a fight if you aren't sure you can beat the enemy before their turn, especially if they have strong ranged abilities.

The campaign is currently unfinished and consists of roughly six non-linear missions. You play a hero familiar to veterans of the Dungeon faction, Gunnar, who has lost his movement specialty and replaced it with an improved ability called Heroic Strike, with which he hits enemies harder than others in combat. Sent by the Dungeon Triumvirate to investigate what is happening on its neighbours' borders, he must find out why fires that can't be put out have appeared. Surely that has nothing to do with the horde of fire bugs, right?

During the campaign, unlike its predecessors, you'll be offered a choice of which factions you want to help. The developers say these decisions will deeply affect the rest of the campaign in the final version, and that you'll need to play it several times to experience everything it contains. Honestly, although the story itself seems interesting, the same can't be said of the writing. Probably the game's weakest point, it is very far from the rich and expressive texts of Heroes 3 or the absolutely legendary original campaign of Heroes 4, where in my opinion the quality of the story and writing is on the level of famous books such as The Lord of the Rings or A Song of Ice and Fire.



In terms of single-player modes, Olden Era offers Arena, Classic, Single Hero and Scenario. Arena first appeared in Heroes 5 and gives you random troops, abilities and gear and throws you straight into battle against a similar enemy. Classic and Single Hero modes contain templates for randomly generated maps, while Single Hero is a novelty that gained popularity in Horn of the Abyss multiplayer and allows neither you nor the enemy to have more than one hero. Besides these, there are several scenario maps with their own little stories and somewhat different objectives. The selection of these scenario maps is still pretty thin, but it should grow in the final version.

Multiplayer contains the same modes as single-player, plus the popular hotseat mode, through which several players can play on one PC. Multiplayer is currently also the most complete, with its own matchmaking system, separate leaderboards for all three modes and the option of private lobbies. Fans of the competitive scene can find popular streamers such as Lexiav and Rito Sux on the leaderboard, as well as some long-time Heroes 3 players, and now probably Olden Era ones too. The only current shortcoming of multiplayer is the absence of co-op, which will be implemented a bit later.



The last three modes, Tutorial, Challenge and Map Editor, have special functions. The tutorial is there to teach you the absolute basics of turn-based strategy and Heroes, while Challenge mode is a collection of short missions for learning advanced tactics that don't seem that important at first glance - how to calculate a hero's movement, how to maximise movement per turn, how to split your army into smaller groups to more easily lure and destroy seemingly stronger armies, and the like. All in all, a very useful mode that Heroes has always lacked and which I think is key, especially for those who want to venture into multiplayer. The map editor is for making your own maps, but it lacks lots of options and advanced features to really work as it should.



For now it's on the back burner and will be finished when the game leaves early access.

Of course I mustn't leave out the fact that the music is still composed by the famous Paul Anthony Romero, who has worked on Heroes since the first game back in 1995. This time he is joined by Chris Velasco, known for his compositions for games such as God of War, Bloodborne and Mass Effect! They make the music together with the Hero Orchestra, a professional Polish ensemble made up of a good number of Heroes fans, which has gained great popularity on YouTube in recent years with its live concerts.

Olden Era is a perfect hit for fans not only of Heroes but of turn-based strategy, which doesn't surprise me, given that the Unfrozen team is constantly improving the game with regular patches. The developers also urge all players to report bugs, suggestions and the like on their Discord, and judging by the improvements they've made since the demo, it's clear they actually listen to the community. They've confirmed that in the first half of early access they will mostly focus on multiplayer, and the game's balance will probably also change considerably before the full release.

Although early access isn't scored, I'd say Olden Era deserves a solid nine, given that few EA games come with this much content, even though the campaigns and the Map editor are far from finished.



RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 10 64-bit
CPU: Intel Core i5 12400T / AMD Ryzen 5500
GPU: : Nvidia GeForce GTX 1660 /AMD Radeon RX 5600 OEM
RAM: 16 GB
SSD/HDD: 8 GB

DEVELOPER:
Unfrozen

PLANNED RELEASE

DATE:
2027

PRICE:
€39.99

STEAM LINK:
https://store.steampowered.com/app/3105440/Heroes_of_Might_and_Magic_Olden_Era/

- ✓ Heroes faithful to Heroes 3
- ✓ Ubisoft didn't meddle in the project
- ✓ A huge amount of content for early access
- ✗ Weak narrative
- ✗ Co-op still missing

Game provided by:
Hooded Horse

REVIEW

AUTHOR
Milan Živković

DIRECTIVE 8020
A DARK PICTURES GAME

IN SPACE, NO ONE CARES THAT YOU'RE BORED

Video games are, of course, made up of many elements, and while their synergy is always important, the significance of each depends on the genre. Sometimes it's the graphics, sometimes the audio, and most often the gameplay and playability come first.

Directive 8020 is the latest title from Supermassive Games, known for The Dark Pictures Anthology, a series of games preceded by their most famous one – Until Dawn. And while each game follows an identical recipe and differs only in some mechanics, it really is a mixed bag in terms of quality. Some titles truly shine in their intention to scare and entertain, while some, unfortunately, probably aren't worth your time.

The studio's newest game belongs somewhere in the middle of that list. The reason lies in its excellent presentation, but also in neglecting some of the most basic elements that mustn't fall short in a horror title.

My biggest complaint, without doubt, concerns the production time. While this studio's games tended to come out once a year, Directive 8020 was in development for a full four years. Probably the biggest reason was the move to the ever-complicated Unreal Engine 5, which is usually too high a price for too little benefit.



But thanks to that extra effort, some of the game's visual elements look truly great. Supermassive has always invested most in facial appearance, as one of the most important factors in any horror work. Seeing the fear and terror on the faces of characters fighting for their lives greatly enhances the immersion of the viewer, that is, the player. In that respect, and in the quality of the environments and lighting, they really didn't disappoint.

But for the graphics and the engine we pay the price in rather poor optimisation. The game I tested on PC has a generally uneven frame rate. While in some situations it runs great, at times it stutters enough that you have to sacrifice the whole visual impression to balance performance. This often means using upscaling techniques and frame generation, which is almost always a sign of poor optimisation.

SEEING THE FEAR AND TERROR ON THE FACES OF CHARACTERS FIGHTING FOR THEIR LIVES GREATLY ENHANCES IMMERSION

But when it comes to horror, in my opinion the most important elements besides visuals are the story and consistency, to achieve the best possible immersion. And while the story here is solid, it is very hard to get into because of a host of unconvincing moments. Uninteresting and unconvincing characters contribute to this most of all.

If I'm to empathise with the characters, care about them and worry about their fate, they have to feel like real people. And that of course means they behave logically in the given circumstances and in line with the expect-



ations of us on the other side of the screen. Directive 8020 has a cast that must be one of the strangest crews in horror – ever.

Their involvement in current events feels like they've just woken up and can't function without their first and second coffee. Their powers of deduction are on the level of a detective every criminal hopes for. The decisions they make, although half the time they depend on the player, narrow the choices through total mental blockages. They aren't aware of what's happening around them, nor do they have any kind of plan. This is a team presented as the most capable group of astronauts Earth has, yet they behave like a school trip that got lost and now doesn't know what to do.

In large part they reminded me of the first film in my beloved Evil Dead series, which was not only especially gruesome but had a cast that behaved like an unruly gang. A scene can last five minutes and involve one character, while the other characters,



ALTHOUGH IT LOOKS NICE, DIRECTIVE 8020 IS VERY POORLY OPTIMISED

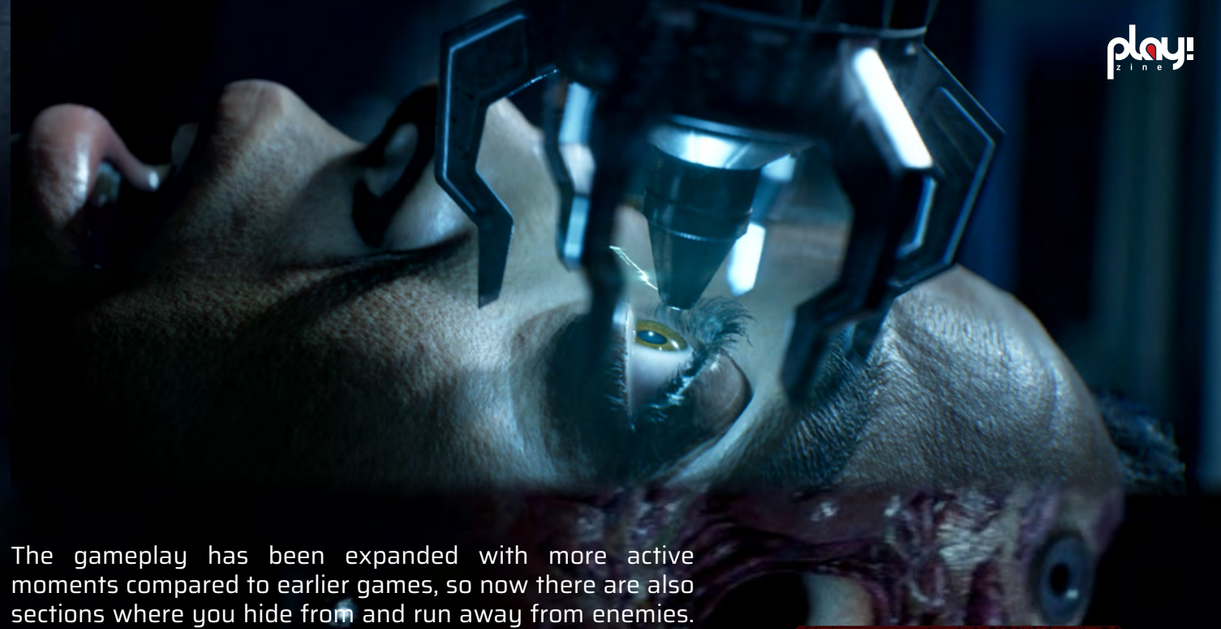
although in the same room and just off-screen, act as if they're in a completely different dimension. They won't react until the camera looks at them, and that's that!

It's very hard to get into the story and plot when the characters behave completely unpredictably. Even when they know certain things, they can't bring them up, or they act as if they're even less aware of where they are. Nor does the storytelling help, possibly drawing inspiration from the legendary series Lost, so the timeline will jump now to the distant past, now to the present, and now to a few days earlier.

This makes a solid story even less worth experiencing, because the way you reach your goals has no proper weight. And your desire for the characters to survive drops to zero, and with it goes any dose of fear you might have, which for a horror game is almost a death sentence.

Still, this story about astronauts on their way to find a new refuge for the survivors of our destroyed home planet has its bright sides. Although mostly confined to events inside the spaceship, the atmosphere has its good moments.





The gameplay has been expanded with more active moments compared to earlier games, so now there are also sections where you hide from and run away from enemies. If you like that kind of gameplay, this may feel refreshing.

But I can't help asking: what are a dozen people doing on a spaceship that can carry hundreds of passengers? The horror here doesn't arise from the circumstances; the circumstances are there for the horror. Once it becomes clear that the setting, the characters' behaviour and the plot are forced in the direction of scary storytelling rather than organically achieving fear and terror, Directive 8020 becomes one of those neither-here-nor-there titles on the quality ladder of the games this studio has released so far.

Play Until Dawn, Little Hope, House of Ashes, or watch (yes, watch) The Quarry. And if you've already devoured all that and need something new, you can take a look at this title too. As it stands, as a standalone work and game, I have no particularly strong reason to recommend it to you.

IT'S TERRIBLY HARD TO GET INTO THE STORY WHEN THE CHARACTERS BEHAVE UNPREDICTABLY



RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 10/11 64-bit
CPU: Intel Core i5-12400F / AMD Ryzen 5 5600X
GPU: NVIDIA GeForce RTX 3070 Ti / AMD Radeon RX 6800
RAM: 16 GB
SSD/HDD: 40 GB

PLATFORMS:
PC, PS5, Xbox Series X/S
DEVELOPER:
Supermassive Games
PUBLISHER:
Supermassive Games
TEST PLATFORM:
PC
PRICE:
€49.99

SCORE 5,9

- ✓ Solid atmosphere
- ✓ Great-looking characters
- ✓ OK story
- ✗ Unconvincing flow and character behaviour
- ✗ Uninteresting characters
- ✗ The environment is pretty boring

Game provided by: Iris Mega

AUTHOR
Igor Totić





DIABLO IV FINALLY OUT OF BETA

Diablo is one of those games that needs no introduction. Almost all of us remember the first time as kids we ran into the Butcher, or when Baal attacked Harrogath. I remember going from one gaming café to another with a Diablo II floppy that held a level 99 Necro, because farming must be done.

Diablo III went in a different, brighter direction and simplified the game to the max. The game was middlingly bad until the expansion, when it finally settled into a place fans respected. After a long break, Diablo IV (we won't mention that mobile game) was announced, and the first beta impressions were very positive. I was always in the "Diablo IV good" camp because the initial campaign was excellent, but the game generally had silly stat mechanics and was pretty simple in terms of gameplay design. Then came the Vessel of Hatred expansion, which brought some new endgame changes but a disastrously bad and boring campaign. The new class, Spiritborn, was a fresh addition to the whole series, but it wasn't what fans were asking for. The general feeling was that Diablo IV was a paid beta, and even the expansion was classified that way in online communities. With Lord of Hatred, I think they've finally nailed the point of the game.

First we got the Paladin, a new class that was playable from day one of the announcement for all players who pre-ordered Lord of Hatred. We already wrote about the Paladin in our ARPG report a few months ago, and effectively it hasn't changed much with the expansion's release (except talents, but more on that later). The Paladin has always been a fan-favourite class and is a great addition to the game. What's more, releasing it early was a great move, because it brought back a ton of players, veterans and newcomers alike. The Paladin is a visual spectacle of a class, since most abilities revolve around Holy Light, so your screen will be blazing with light and blood everywhere. The strongest builds are a little more passive to play, but they still fully deliver the Paladin fantasy.

The other new class released with the expansion is the Warlock, and that's where I spent most of my time. While the Necromancer deals with bones and corpses, the Warlock is a master of curses, blood manipulation and draining life energy directly from enemies. From my perspective, the Warlock is a mix of the Necromancer and Sorcerer classes, since it can summon temporary demons for help, but also rely on curses and fire magic to nuke.

THE WARLOCK IS A MASTER OF CURSES, MANIPULATING BLOOD AND DIRECTLY DRAINING THE LIFE ENERGY OF ENEMIES



THE EXPANSION BROUGHT A HUGE NUMBER OF CHANGES, AND IT FELT LIKE I WAS LEARNING IT ALL OVER

The class is designed to be fun and has a wide range of gameplay styles, so everyone will be able to adapt it to their preferred style. I literally tried every viable build, from minions and huge fire claws to a literal apocalypse where the goal is to clear the whole screen with a nuclear bomb (not literally, but that's what it looks like). These explosions feel phenomenal, but after a while your head starts to hurt from the huge amount of effects.

At the start of the expansion, the Warlock was the flavour of the month, as they say, and I managed to push to Pit 120 without much trouble. But then it was time to try other classes. The Barbarian returns in full glory this season, and the Whirlwind spin-to-win build is the absolute, unrivalled winner. The amount of crit you can cram into this build (and relatively easily) is incredibly high, and if you have a bit of luck with drops, you can very quickly clear the hardest content the game offers. All classes have shifted around on the tier list, so everyone will find something they're happy with, and progress will be good. There's generally no classic season theme this time, because so many mechanics have changed that there's no point in another irrelevant effect or quest. Blizzard has left us to play with the new changes, and I think that's a great move.



On that note, the expansion brought a huge number of changes, and it felt like I was learning the game from scratch. The first and biggest change is the loot itself, which is closely tied to the new (old) crafting mechanic in the Horadric Cube. The return of the legendary cube from Diablo II (and III) allows advanced crafting, rerolling stats on gear and converting materials. The recipes are similar to Diablo III, so veterans will find their way, but newcomers also have room to experiment and make mistakes. The Cube drastically reduces dependence on pure RNG and gives the player control over their gear. The loot itself is now completely different, in that affixes are much better and more specific, and with crafting even blue gear can now be extremely useful. A bit of RNG, a bit of skill and a bit of luck can this time bring you god-roll gear much more easily than before. On top of all that, Blizzard blatantly lifted the Loot Filter straight from Last Epoch, so you can create relatively complex filters and avoid the junk on the floor. It isn't essential, but it's useful for the endgame.

Another addition is talismans, passive slots that work like the sets in Diablo III and add a huge power spike to your build. On top of this,

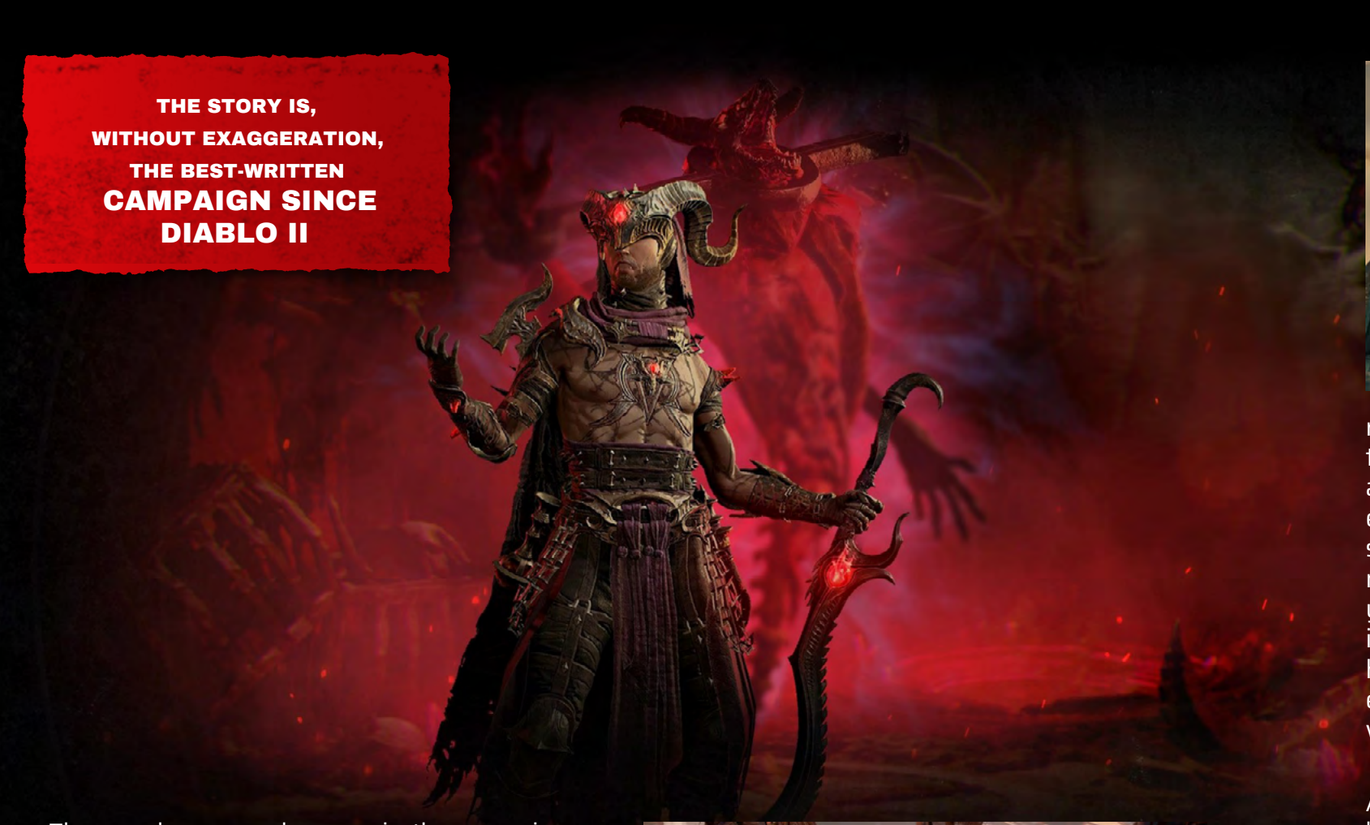


the level cap has been raised to 70 and the skill tree completely changed, but I don't like it at all. Although it looks huge and much more detailed than before, it's actually much simpler and more boring. Before this we had active and passive skills that worked together to define your build (sometimes successfully, sometimes very unsuccessfully), while the skill tree now focuses exclusively on active skills and their modifications, either functional or elemental. Each skill gives you two passive options and one key option that fundamentally changes it, but the template is the same for every one: you just dump 15 points into that skill's power, and it's very boring. That means that, technically, by the middle of the campaign (if you level through the campaign) you have your build defined, and then every new level you just dump a point into a skill. OK, this resembles Diablo II, I agree, but the power of these skills differs considerably, as does the sense of progression. The whole loop is very boring, because after ~30 levels you have nothing new to look forward to.

LORD OF HATRED IS ALL THAT FANS WANTED THE BASE GAME TO BE THREE YEARS AGO

The campaign is the star of this expansion. The story is, without exaggeration, the best-written campaign since Diablo II (although a couple of decisions the characters make are absolutely dumb). Blizzard has managed a fantastic pace, and the return of key characters from the franchise's past (including the shocking resurrection of Lilith herself) evokes pure nostalgia and chills. The characters are no longer just cardboard figures handing out quests; Lorath's suffering is palpable, and Mephisto's psychological terror over the world is shown through creepy cinematics and dialogue that hold your attention from start to finish. And the fact that they got rid of Neyrelle as early as the intro cinematic is just a bonus.

THE STORY IS, WITHOUT EXAGGERATION, THE BEST-WRITTEN CAMPAIGN SINCE DIABLO II



The new bosses and scenes in the campaign are unforgettable, not to mention the great locations that came with the new zone of Skovos, the most visually impressive region in Diablo's modern history. The art team made a bold and successful turn - instead of the eternal mud, grey and snow, Skovos offers volcanic shores and sunlit marble ruins. The aesthetic gently flirts with ancient Greece and the design of Titan Quest, but keeps that recognisable dirty, bloody Diablo tone. Stormy rainforests and sunken temples hiding forgotten knowledge from the time when Lilith and Inarius were first creating Sanctuary will keep you in the campaign from start to finish. The middle of the campaign slows down a little, but it isn't a big complaint.

What stands out considerably this time, besides





the usual excellent cinematics, is the music and effects. The soundtrack in Skovos combines the familiar gloomy strings with epic choral compositions that follow the drama of the fight with Mephisto. The tracks stay in your ears and surface even in the greatest chaos of demon slaughter. Every composition strives to maintain tension and immersion throughout the campaign, and does that job phenomenally. The sound effects are great too - the blows of the Paladin's hammer or the creepy whispers of Warlock curses sound powerful and meaty on good speakers or headphones.

Finishing the campaign in Lord of Hatred is only the beginning. Previous systems such as Helltides and Nightmare Dungeons are still there, but they've been upgraded through War Plans, a completely new progression system that lets the player create their own



road map through the endgame. You choose which activities you want to do and focus on gearing your character, and some plans can have their own modifiers that give you extra gear or crafting materials. Each activity has its own skill tree, so if you focus on Whispers, for example, you can modify it to get an extra chest, or if you play the Undercity you can summon goblins that give you extra loot depending on the chosen modifier (this is the expansion's farming highlight). War Plans don't fundamentally change the endgame, but they speed up moving between activities, with extra modifiers that are interesting in most cases.

And yes, the expansion also brought fishing! Although it sounds bizarre for a dark ARPG, fishing in the breaks between slaughtering demons serves as a perfect, relaxing mini-game that yields specific materials for cooking and crafting temporary buffs.

Diablo IV: Lord of Hatred is everything fans wanted the base game to be three years ago. This isn't an ordinary DLC with a few new missions; it's a comprehensive overhaul that redefines the game's identity. Skovos is a beautiful and refreshing region, the Paladin and Warlock are fantastic classes, and mechanics like the Horadric Cube and Loot Filter make everyday play a pure joy. Personally, I haven't had this much fun in Diablo IV since the game came out, and I haven't missed a single season. They really "cooked" with this expansion, as the kids would say.

Blizzard has proved it can listen to the community when pushed against the wall. If you gave up on Diablo IV, now is the perfect time to return to Sanctuary. Mephisto is waiting, and the fight has never been better.





RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 10 64-bit
CPU: Intel Core i5-4670K / AMD Ryzen 1300X
GPU: NVIDIA GeForce GTX 970 / AMD Radeon RX 470
RAM: 16 GB
SSD/HDD: 90 GB

PLATFORMS:
PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S

DEVELOPER:
Blizzard Entertainment

PUBLISHER:
Blizzard Entertainment

TEST PLATFORM:
PC

PRICE:
€39.99

SCORE 9

- ✔ The campaign
- ✔ Completely new systems
- ✔ Phenomenal soundtrack
- ✘ The new skill tree is boring

REVIEW

AUTHOR
Milan Živković



AN EPIC OF DIVINE LOCKS AND AN ARMY OF RAMPANT BUGS

Here's a game for you, if you like repetition.

Let's be clear: repeating the same actions in video games isn't necessarily a bad thing. In fact, many concepts revolve around exactly that, so the fun factor doesn't depend directly on how many times you repeat an action but on how fun that action is. As far as Samson is concerned, I couldn't say the loop around which the gameplay revolves is especially interesting. But it certainly has its moments.

On the surface, Samson looks like a GTA clone. In essence, that's only partly true. Here you play a man ready to do anything to pay off a hefty debt. And that means a number of shady jobs for which you'll have to get your hands well and truly dirty. I say get your hands dirty because Samson doesn't use firearms, only his fists and handy tools such as crowbars, bottles or some heftier steel implements. Punching out thugs who get in your way, stealing cars, car chases, and that's about it.

There are certain variables in the whole formula. You randomly get bonuses meant to motivate you to choose a certain type of mission. And there are points you can use to strengthen Samson's abilities so he becomes the deadliest guy in Tyndalston.

Yes, the game is set in a fictional city that tries hard to deliver an atmosphere of urban decay. Crime and a brutal environment against you, a man who trusts only one duo – his left and right fists. And to some extent the game succeeds. The credit goes mainly to the graphics, which do a solid job of depicting a city of sin. While looking too closely at the details can break the magic and leave a mediocre impression, at first glance the game looks pretty good. Especially when Samson starts swaying left and right in a brawling frenzy, and his hair flutters, giving an impression of realistic movement. I don't know whether this much emphasis on hair animation is there because the game is called Samson or the other way round, but I think we all get the joke. Samson is strong and has divine locks, moving on...

So we have solid graphics that look best as long as you don't look too closely, OK. There's also a repetitive gameplay loop that some may

SOME OF THE CLIPPING IS SO INTRIGUING THAT MULDER WOULD DEVOTE AT LEAST THREE EPISODES TO IT



SAMSON DOESN'T USE FIREARMS, ONLY HIS FISTS AND HANDY TOOLS LIKE A CROWBAR

enjoy, but it definitely lacks the elements to hold the average player's attention for more than five hours. And the game lasts about ten...

Finally, there's my favourite element – the (lack of) polish. While the fights are somewhat interesting and designed to look attractive, complete with finishing moves and use of the environment, I think the bugs steal all the attention.



Punches lose contact, and sometimes it's impossible to land them at all. Samson and his pals on the other side of the fist move like puppets on a runaway stick. And some of the clipping is so intriguing that Fox Mulder would devote at least three episodes to solving a mystery of that calibre.

The icing on the cake is the driving, which isn't disastrous until some creepy twist happens. If you clip something, expect unpredictable physics consequences. Even when you hit an object that should be like a leaf in the wind compared with your car, you may pull off a stunt that would make even Ghost Rider jealous. If you missed the bizarrely buggy driving from the otherwise excellent 2008 Alone in the Dark, here's your chance to relive it!

In the end, Samson is a very strange experience. Its solid visuals and the atmosphere of a city in

BUGS, A VERY WEAK STORY AND REPETITIVE GAMEPLAY MEAN THAT WHAT WORKS HAS NO STRENGTH TO STAND OUT





which a desperate man tries to survive can make you spend a few fun hours with the game. But the bugs, a very weak story and repetitive gameplay mean that everything that works has no strength to stand out.

There are frequent examples of games where the more you play, the better the experience gets. Unfortunately, this is the opposite case. I can't recommend Samson unless you're really craving a game where you punch people and drive cars and have exhausted all the alternatives. As it is, as an interesting experiment, it might be best to wait for a hefty discount. Unfortunately, I'm sure that awaits this game in the near future.

RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 10/11 64-bit
CPU: Intel i5-11400 / AMD Ryzen 5 5600 XT
GPU: Nvidia GeForce RTX 3060Ti / AMD Radeon RX 6700 XT
RAM: 16 GB
SSD/HDD: 15 GB

PLATFORMS:
PC, PS5, Xbox Series X/S

DEVELOPER:
Liquid Swords

PUBLISHER:
Liquid Swords

TEST PLATFORM:
PC

PRICE:
€24.99

SCORE 5

- ✔ OK atmosphere
- ✔ Solid graphics
- ✔ Divine locks
- ✘ A magical host of bugs
- ✘ Uninteresting repetition
- ✘ Boring story

Game provided by: G4MESHOP

AUTHOR
Nikola Aksentijević

FORZA HORIZON 6

JDM CULTURE IN FULL GLORY

Since the very steep decline of the NFS franchise, Forza Horizon is the only racing series I religiously return to with every new iteration. Fans' long-standing wishes have finally been granted, and this time the Horizon festival moves to Japan, bringing with it everything this racing Mecca has to offer. Touge? - check. Huge expressways? - check. Japanese aesthetics and anime? - you bet they're there.

When it comes to driving, this is definitely the best Forza yet. Rarely does a game manage to bridge that gap between serious simulator and the most arcade racers, and Forza Horizon 6, like its predecessors, remains in that very exclusive club. You can still tune cars with insane engines, and every drivetrain change can definitely be felt. Besides the performance classes cars are placed in, you also have to bear in mind that the most powerful engine in the lightest car won't necessarily deliver the best times and performance (you can even build a car that is absolutely awful to drive). Tuning has never had more impact, and there is obvious progress in the physics model.



As for the "story", if it can be called that at all, it still follows a similar path to its predecessors. At the Horizon festival you progress by completing increasingly challenging races, while you unlock the wristbands that mark your status through special events once you collect enough points from standard races. Beyond that, you'll also have narrative races, which are more like tourist tours of Japanese landscapes and landmarks, or some charming missions dealing with drift culture or restoring garages and cars. Alongside you there are a couple of side characters, but unfortunately they are very shallow and irritating. The main missions are great fun, and when you count that the sixth game has more than 170 different races, you'll spend many, many hours with it.

> Forza 6 manages to bridge the gap between serious simulator and the most arcade of racers

The map stands out as the game's main feature and the reason why the sixth game is so good. Every region has its own character, a very good mix of dirt roads, hilly meadows and winding tarmac. Numerous Japanese locations have been faithfully recreated in the open world, so you're sure to recognise some, if nothing else the Tokyo districts and Mount Fuji. Every race, whether on the streets or one that takes you through forests and fields, shows how flexible Forza is in its approach to racing, taking track dynamics and road variety to the highest level.

The sixth game offers the widest selection of the Japanese car industry and puts a big focus on the culture of street racing



Each region hides numerous barn finds, jumps, drift zones and speed traps as extra activities.

Another benefit of Japan is simply how many cars are made in the country. Forza 6 has an impressive selection of more than 600 cars, and if you're a fan of JDM or the Japanese car industry, this is the game that definitely offers the widest selection of it, and it clearly tries to focus on street racing culture. Here, though, I have a complaint. Despite the variety, I feel the focus on off-road racing is still greater than I'd like, even though it's relatively balanced. Japan is primarily famous for its street racing, and I think that aspect needed a bit more attention. The best-known touge roads are great fun, but it's disappointing that there aren't many tracks like these, so it remains to be seen whether the selection will be expanded in the future with an expansion.

The game constantly showers you with all kinds of rewards, opening the way to own as many and as varied cars as possible. One of the biggest additions this year is the track creator, as well as the option to decorate one of the houses and estates you can buy, and your own garage. Unfortunately, these houses serve no greater purpose than letting other players visit you, so they feel somewhat unfinished, since beyond decoration there's nothing to do. Track creation is certainly powerful, but you can't organise your own races - only during home visits can you and your friends drive around the hellish track you made earlier.



Numerous Japanese locations have been faithfully recreated in the open world



Visually, the game looks excellent, although it suffers from some problems that can be fixed with future patches. Visual glitches around smoke and lighting effects are frequent, a consequence of using DLSS, at least at the moment. Ray tracing definitely makes a difference compared with its predecessor, but the visual leap isn't as big as I expected after almost five years since Horizon 5. Despite that, the car models look phenomenal, while in my opinion the biggest improvement is in sound, so certain engines and vehicles now sound significantly more faithful to their real-life counterparts.

Forza Horizon 6 is definitely the best iteration of the series so far. Although it suffers from a few visual bugs and sticks to the same formula we've seen since Horizon 3 (with a few mild changes and additions), the overall ambience, environment design and the fun it provides are decisive. Multiplayer is still identical, but this time you have significantly more races, dynamic events and content that make the whole experience very varied and VERY competitive, which is of course a big plus in my book.

Japan was on the waiting list for far too long, but I think the wait was worth it, because this really is the ultimate Forza. Still, there's a slight impression that Playground Games will change the formula somewhat for future sequels, because I'm pretty sure we have now definitely reached the peak of the series, or at least of what it has represented so far.



RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 10 64-bit
CPU: Intel Core i5-12400F / AMD Ryzen 5 5600X
GPU: GeForce RTX 3060 Ti / AMD RX 6700
RAM: 16 GB
SSD/HDD: 167 GB

PLATFORMS:
PC, Xbox Series X/S, PS5 (2026)

DEVELOPER:
Playground Games

PUBLISHER:
Xbox Game Studios

TEST PLATFORM:
PC

PRICE:
€69.99

SCORE 8,8

- ✓ Better driving and car physics
- ✓ World, graphics, atmosphere
- ✓ Variety of races and tracks
- ✗ Same formula as its predecessors
- ✗ A few visual bugs

Game provided by: Microsoft

REVIEW

AUTHOR
Igor Totić

MOUSE

P.I. FOR HIRE



IN THIS TOWN, THE TRUTH IS LIKE EMMENTAL – IT HAS TOO MANY HOLES TO EVER BE WHOLE

The slow beat of a double bass holds the mood while rare, murky saxophone notes try to add the colours of smooth jazz to this grey city. The rain masks everything, from the tears of the downtrodden to shady people and heavy corruption. From tiny shrews to sewer crocodiles, this town can bring you huge misfortune, or reward greed and avarice.

My name is Jack Pepper, a mouse in a city too big for anyone with a crumb of conscience. Once upon a time I was a war hero; Trench Buster, they called me. Now I'm just a private eye in this corrupt city called Mouseburg. Mouseburg isn't Disneyland. It's a hole. A place where dreams turn to dust and justice stretches like the cheapest mozzarella on a reheated pizza. The game starts the way every one of my damn days starts: in a leaky office, with bills I can't pay and a headache knocking from the inside like cops at the wrong door.



They tell me I sound like voice actor Troy Baker. They say he was told to play Booker DeWitt again, only rougher. Damn, but I like it. In fact, all the inhabitants of this filthy town sound great and authentic, and try in every way to be part of this filthy town.

My life is very colourful, despite the constant grey, and my adventures will stretch from collecting smelly fish and cheese to uncovering evil conspiracies, dark cults and brutal murders. Of course, a beautiful mysterious woman will barge into my life and wake up my saviour complex. A mouse in distress always

must be saved. All the characters I meet are connected to my whole adventure in such a nice, tight way that sleep won't come easy; luckily there's cheese. Everybody asks me: "Jack, why is everything in this town about food?" Because everyone's hungry, pal. Hungry for power, hungry for money, hungry for respect.

The main villains in this game aren't just criminals – they're the big cheeses. They hold a monopoly on everything worth having. The police? They're only there to check whether your "paper" is clean. If you don't have enough "cheddar", you'll slip through their fingers like through a cheese strainer.

I met a guy, an informant. He told me: "Jack, watch yourself, this is a deep con-brie-racy." I thought he was joking. But when I saw how they'd linked city hall to the darkest sewer tunnels, I realised the whole system is riddled with holes like Emmental. Too many holes, and too few real answers.

As a war veteran, I have access to a huge arsenal scattered around the city.

Besides my trusty pistol, I can get anything from shotguns and machine guns to paint thinner, dynamite and cannonballs. Later in my adventure I'll come across stranger weapons that even Serious Sam would envy. Besides being interesting tools of death, they're actually fun to use. Every part of my arsenal is specific and unique. On top of all that, my friend Tammy, an engineer and weapons whiz, can upgrade all my guns if I bring her the special blueprints for them. During my investigation I expect heavy resistance, and I'm glad to have a big choice of solutions for it.

And what kind of mouse would I be if I didn't use all my assets? To get past obstacles I can spin my tail like a helicopter (helicopter) and fly over chasms, as well as use special boots to jump again in mid-air. Likewise, my military training lets me move quickly and reflexively to get out of the way of aggressive enemies or close the distance to them.



Of course, I have a few more tricks up my sleeve, but let's keep those a surprise.

Visually, this world is black and white. But don't let that fool you – only the moral zones here are grey. The animation recalls old cartoons from the thirties, that era when everyone thought the world was simple. But as soon as you pull the trigger, you realise this is far from kids' entertainment. Blood is black as ink, and enemies drop like ripe pears... or mouldy brie. The city is full of secrets. You have to sniff around. Literally. My nose is my best tool, unless I stumble on a warehouse of rotten Roquefort. Then I'd rather be dead. Most of the dark places my nose led me to are just parts of this city's story, but sometimes they're too big and leave a mouldy taste in your mouth. I prefer smaller meals with more flavour.

The music is that slow, lazy jazz that gets under your skin. Every note reminds you that you're alone,





but it also evokes moments from the past that follow you like angry ghosts you owe cheddar to. Be it soft jazz, electro swing or just atmospheric strings, the music in this town works for you and against you at every moment.

If you're looking for something light, keep walking. There are no free meals handed out here. But if you want to see how one mouse can bring down a house of cards (and cheese), then step into my shoes. Just watch out – in this town, the cats are the least of your problems. The biggest problem is whoever holds the cheese knife.

And now, if you'll excuse me. I heard some shrew was seen outside my office. Probably after alimony again, or she saw something she shouldn't have. Either way, it's time to get to work.





RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 11 64-bit
CPU: Intel Core i5 9600 / Ryzen 3600
GPU: : GeForce RTX 3060 Intel Arc B570
RAM: 16 GB
SSD/HDD: 11 GB

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

DEVELOPER:
Fumi Games

PUBLISHER:
PlaySide

PRICE:
€29.99

TEST PLATFORM:
PC

SCORE 9,5

- ✓ Atmosphere as thick as melted cheese
- ✓ Action that never leaves you alone
- ✓ A story with more twists than a Swiss roll
- ✗ Some levels are too dense, like yoghurt

Game provided by:

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AUTHOR
Nikola Aksentijević



SPIES ARE DEAD, BUT CULTURE IS ETERNAL

There's a certain striking irony in the lack of hype and anticipation I had for Zero Parades. Disco Elysium, the spiritual predecessor from the now completely changed ZA/UM studio, is one of my favourite games of all time and probably the best-written piece of any medium I've had the chance to experience. Every conversation, side story and corner drew me in so quickly and changed me irreversibly. However, at the end of 2021, the three pillars, that is, the main creators of Disco Elysium, were technically forced to leave the studio in one of the most complicated dramas the industry has seen, and as a result my killed hype for everything that followed came down to scepticism. I won't deal with that drama, though, since I want to approach Zero Parades first and foremost from an artistic perspective and separate the work from the artist, or in this case from the publisher, because I'm pretty sure the development team behind this game has nothing to be ashamed of and is full of very, very talented people.

Despite my scepticism, Zero Parades not only surprised me but did considerably more than that. The protagonist Hershel, aka CASCADE, is a spy back on assignment after a previous job that went, to put it mildly, the worst possible way. Unfortunately, her new mission doesn't start much better after she arrives in the city of Portofiro to find her partner Pseudopod, who is mysteriously catatonic and shows few signs of life, except, well... breathing. Now it's up to you to find out what happened to him, as well as the various secrets Portofiro hides.

Structurally, Zero Parades not only borrows tricks from Disco Elysium but at times blatantly copies them or draws very close analogies with it, although



ZERO PARADES IS AN RPG IN THE TRUE SENSE OF THE WORD, WHERE EVERY SKILL REPRESENTS SOME ASPECT OF YOUR PERSONALITY

I don't see this as a problem, because many of these similarities will be forgotten as the story progresses. You'll explore distant and remote corners of the city and talk to its inhabitants through a huge number of dialogues, and of course there are dice checks of your skills in a manner similar to DE. Just like its predecessor, Zero Parades' quests are not only optional diversions that build up the world and the city you're in, but put you in very interesting, often bizarre situations, such as investigating a strange hotline or searching for wild boar mint (if such a thing even exists). All the dialogues are not only detailed but also pretty well written, with a few exceptions or moments here and there that occasionally break the consistency of quality. The story that unfolds, though, is multi-layered, mature and a true spy thriller full of intrigue, betrayal and (in)significant decisions.

When I say the writing is good, I mean it's excellent, although I'd say DE has a subtler and perhaps more consistent approach to narrative expression. Although I put ZP a notch below its spiritual predecessor in this respect, that still places it on a potential Mount Everest of video game narrative. Every character is strange, funny, scared, mysterious, or all of that at once in some odd combination. The dialogue feels organic, even realistic as far as this bizarre reflection of the real world allows, and is on the level of a top-notch novel.

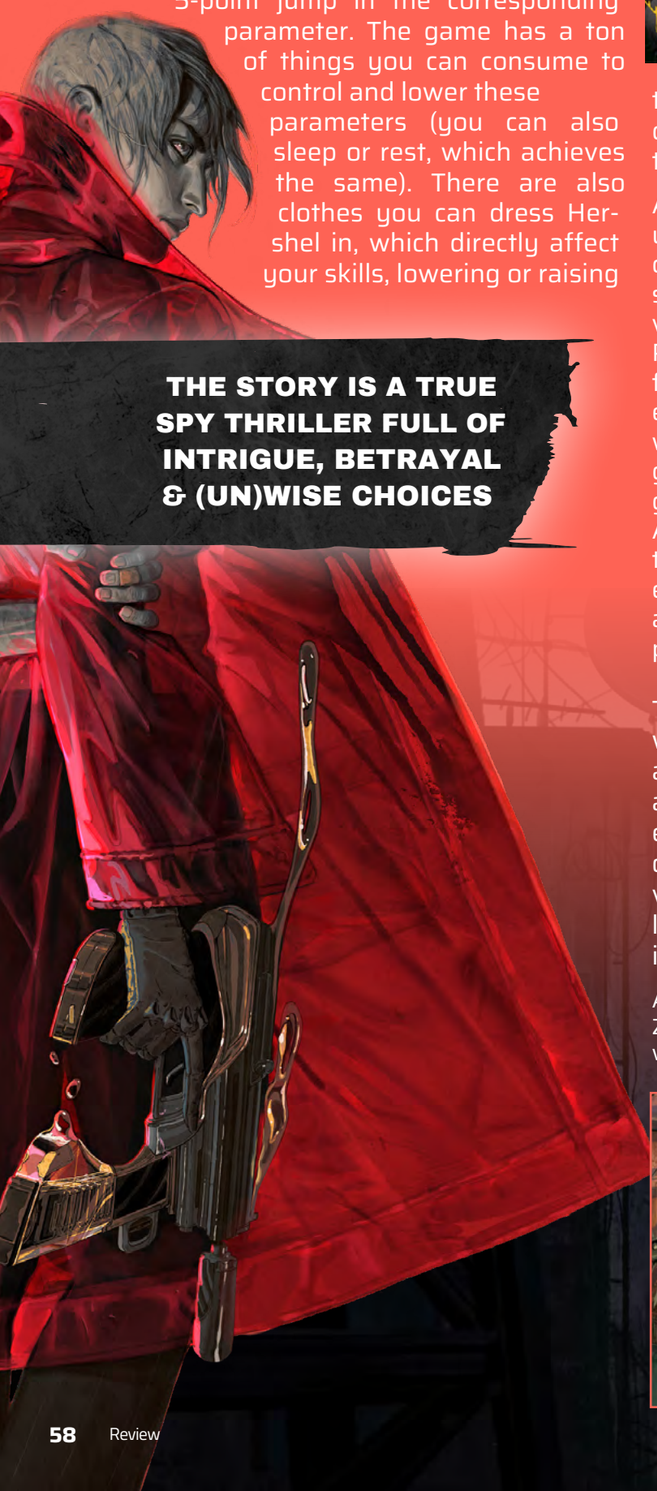
Your personality aspects, that is, the skills that talk to you and comment on what's happening around you, are still there. This is perhaps where the inconsistency in the writing shows most, since sometimes these very parts fall victim to postmodern meme culture in a not-too-subtle way. This game also has significantly less philosophical depth compared with Disco, often throwing out its predecessor's pretentiousness, which results in a not necessarily worse, but different experience. The theme of culture war, not just ideological, is much more present, and some parallels with the real world are very easy to draw, especially in terms of cultural influence on people's mentality.

For those less familiar with Disco Elysium, and therefore with the mechanics Zero Parades brings, this game is actually an RPG despite lacking a combat system as such. The game has RPG elements in the true sense of the word, meaning that every skill you upgrade represents some aspect of your personality.

In situations where a skill is needed, you'll roll dice and add a bonus to the result depending on the points invested in that skill. There are 15 skills, divided into three categories – action, relations and intellect.

Actions are physical or spy-oriented, and the correspond-

ing parameter they affect is fatigue. Likewise, relations are linked to anxiety, and intellect to delirium. When one of these parameters exceeds the maximum of 20, you'll be forced to lower one of three randomly chosen skills from the corresponding category. You can also rack your brains and roll an extra die on any task, at the cost of a 5-point jump in the corresponding parameter. The game has a ton of things you can consume to control and lower these parameters (you can also sleep or rest, which achieves the same). There are also clothes you can dress Hershel in, which directly affect your skills, lowering or raising



THE STORY IS A TRUE SPY THRILLER FULL OF INTRIGUE, BETRAYAL & (UN)WISE CHOICES



them and opening up further room to focus on certain aspects of personality and make the protagonist truly yours.

Although this sounds a bit tiring and muddled, the user interface Zero Parades uses is excellent and clear, so you won't have trouble navigating these systems, which are very often represented better visually than in text. Although on the surface Zero Parades' visual design largely borrows its style from its spiritual predecessor, the difference is easy to see, with ZP having far more colour, often with abstract graffiti and stylised drawings that go in a completely different direction from the gloomy surrealism DE deals in almost all the time. Although it can vary too much between ambient tracks for a good part of the game, the music is excellent and fits the atmosphere perfectly. There are also a couple of "bangers" you can find and play on your personal stereo.

The voice acting is excellent, although a notch weaker than DE, which had very few weaker actors. There's also the problem of partial voice acting, where some characters won't speak every line written on screen, meaning you'll often come across cut-off or completely missing voiced dialogue. This didn't bother me personally, since DE also launched without any voice acting until the Final Cut update arrived.

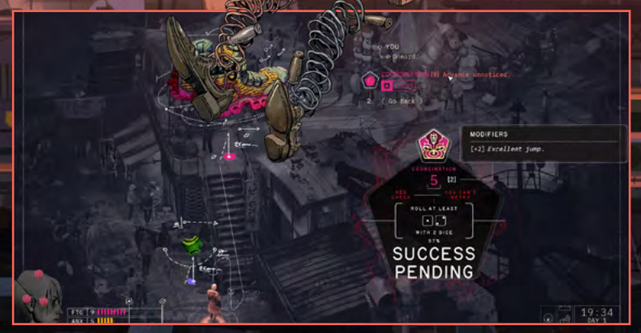
And there you have it: this text is really short for what Zero Parades has to offer, although part of me could write about this game for days and across many pages.





I also think you should go into this experience completely blind for maximum enjoyment, so I hope these basic pointers help you decide whether this is the game for you. Zero Parades isn't Disco Elysium, and probably nothing ever will be, and that's perfectly fine. But this isn't an empty shell feeding on leftovers and celebrating previous ZA/UM games; it's a commentary not only on culture and society, but also on the pirated clone of Disco Elysium, including a dose of self-irony and of irony towards the RPG subgenre DE has spawned in recent years.

Despite all the drama and the reasons you might not want to support ZA/UM, Zero Parades is fantastic and has the potential to join the select company of my favourite RPGs of all time, because again, well – the artist and their work shouldn't be correlated, nor should such a situation take away from our experience and perception of a work like this game. It is a showcase of the masterful skill and flexibility of its writers and designers, perhaps aiming to show us both ends of the spectrum, of art and of the gloomy reflection of the world we live in, just as if we were inhabitants of Portofiro ourselves.



RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 11 64-bit
CPU: Intel Core i5-10400
GPU: GeForce GTX 2070 8GB
RAM: 16 GB
SSD/HDD: 10 GB

PLATFORMS:
PC

DEVELOPER:
ZA/UM

PUBLISHER:
ZA/UM

TEST PLATFORM:
PC

PRICE:
€40.99

SCORE 9,2

- ✔ Excellent story
- ✔ Top-notch design
- ✔ Characters and world
- ✘ Inconsistent voice acting
- ✘ The writing quality dips at times

Game provided by:
ZA/UM

ZERO PARADES HAS A LOT IN COMMON WITH DISCO ELYSIUM, BUT I NEVER SAW THIS AS A PROBLEM

AUTHOR
Božidar Radovanović



TESLA, ZAP THESE BOZOS

Blizzard really outdid itself with its map editors. Innovative, rich and complex yet accessible, they offered players a platform for game dev and awakened their creative spirit, while paving the way for many new genres. One of the best known is certainly the MOBA, which traces its roots back to the early 2000s and the StarCraft map Aeon of Strife. The genre only gained popularity with the WarCraft III map Defense of the Ancients (DotA), which at the time dominated gaming cafés along with Counter-Strike 1.6. League of Legends arrived in October 2009, and two years later Gabe and co. introduced a direct sequel to the original map - Dota 2.

Similar to the WC3 editor, Valve gave players the chance to create their own custom maps, which they would then publish in the Dota 2 Arcade section. History repeated itself with the map Dota Auto Chess, which contributed greatly to the birth of the auto battler genre. Unlike MOBAs at the start of the 21st century, the rush was stronger than the frenzy for chicken at a Lidl opening - Valve released a separate game, Dota Underlords, Riot brought us Teamfight Tactics, while Blizzard launched Battlegrounds as a separate mode for Hearthstone.

Each of these games has its own quirks and identity, but the core that made auto battlers popular is ever-present - they're all accessible and mechanically simple, but offer plenty of tactical depth and room for experimentation. Another key element is enormous replay value, which comes with a solid amount of RNG management. If you're competitive by nature, you'll keep coming back to these games for a long time.



YOU CAN PLAY AS TESLA, AND THERE'S A SKIN INSPIRED BY SERBIAN FOLK COSTUME

After this overly long history segment, I'd shift the focus to Ability Arena, another Dota 2 Arcade map inspired by classic auto battlers and the Ability Draft mode. As a big Dota fan, I put a solid number of hours into Ability Arena and can say it's one of my favourite custom maps. Due to unforeseen circumstances and a lack of support from Valve, development had to stop, but thanks to the great dedication and perseverance of the original map's creators, Ability Arena has finally been resurrected as a separate, free game - Relic Arena.



Whether or not you've come across auto battlers before, the game stands out for its very interesting premise. What heroes are to Hearthstone Battlegrounds, real historical figures, that is, leaders, are to Relic Arena. The roster currently offers 17 leaders (more figures will be added in future patches), including Cleopatra, Genghis Khan, Vlad the Impaler, Nikola Tesla, Joan of Arc and even Harambe. Each leader has a unique ability that significantly affects your tactics and the flow of each match.

Before I return to the leaders, I should introduce you to the basics of Relic Arena. Each match throws you into a clash with seven opponents, and your goal is to survive as the last player in the lobby. After choosing your leader, you start building your mini army, made up of one hero at the start and four later in the match. Heroes are the counterpart of units in other auto battlers, except that Relic Arena has one key difference - heroes are just skeletons for your ideal build.

Once you choose a hero, you equip them with relics, that is, artefacts you buy in the shop with gold. Each relic is essentially a spell that can be active or passive - the Code of Hammurabi, for example, gives you magic resistance, while the Titanic summons a huge ship that deals damage and stuns in a large AoE. If a duplicate of a relic you already own appears in the shop, it levels up - at levels three and six you'll be offered one of three super upgrades, while at nine you get the ultimate, juicy upgrade. If you don't like what's on offer in the shop, you can reroll it for one gold.

Heroes are divided into four classes (Assassin, Ranger, Tank and Witch), and their stats roughly guide you on which relics to give them (each hero has four relic slots) - for example, if you have plenty of mana-hungry relics, you'll almost certainly equip them on a Witch, while physical DPS relics usually work best on a Ranger.





RELIC ARENA IS BASED ON A CUSTOM DOTA 2 MAP

Each match of Relic Arena is divided into rounds. Before combat you can buy relics, upgrade the shop or level up your leader. An upgraded shop offers a wider range of relics, levels boost your leader's base power and in some cases give you completely new spells. Managing gold is a key aspect of the game - the ability to judge when it's smart to buy a relic, upgrade the shop or your leader will heavily affect your final placing in the match.

Relic Arena is a game of RNG management that often punishes greed. I understand the moment of frustration when you can't find that one upgrade even after 10 rerolls (I've been in that situation), but sometimes you simply have to cut your losses and say "good enough". It's easy to blame RNG and make excuses like Norman Osborn before getting fired, but this mindset will only cost you matches.

Once you've equipped your heroes and placed them in the arena, you enter a 1v1 duel with one of the opposing players. Combat is automatic, and the losing player loses HP (everyone starts the match with 200 HP). When your HP drops to zero, you're out of the match, but you can still watch how it plays out to the end.

Leader powers are very varied, and I like that each at least roughly follows the theme of the figure it represents. Tesla stands out most here, periodically sending electric shocks across the whole arena, and at level five he also gets his famous Tesla coil. Other powers are generally passive and boost your heroes' stats, while some leaders focus more on economy and levelling relics, such as Beethoven and Karl Marx.

As a free-to-play game, Relic Arena offers a seasonal battle pass with in-game currencies, skins and other cosmetics.





IF YOU KEEP LOSING A KEY HERO, GIVE THEM A DEFENSIVE RELIC OR CHANGE THEIR POSITION

Each leader also has its own reward track, so you'll be able to personalise your mains more easily. Not all leaders are available at the start, but the grind isn't too extreme, so you'll unlock the figures that interest you relatively easily.

Replay value is something all multiplayer game developers strive for. In my opinion, Relic Arena dominates in this regard, especially considering it has only just come out.

With extremely fun and deep mechanics, Relic Arena is one big puzzle with infinite solutions, and every match is a unique experiment. It may not succeed every time, but it will give you an idea for the next one.

The team at Double Edge Games deserves every praise for its great relationship with the community. On the technical side I didn't run into any problems, and Relic Arena also offers what I consider key features for a multiplayer game. One example is the replay system, which has been there from the very start, while some "AAA" companies still haven't taken pity on us.

Relic Arena is one of the best auto battlers right now, and I warmly recommend it to all fans of the genre, but also to those who love strategy and enjoy the search for the ideal build. Although I roughly knew what to expect, having played the map it's based on, Relic Arena really thrilled me and I can't wait to see what the Double Edge Games crew has in store for us next.





RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 10/11 64-bit
CPU: Intel i5, 2.4 Ghz+
GPU: Integrated HD Graphics 520 w/128MB+
RAM: 16 GB
SSD/HDD: 4 GB

PLATFORMS:
PC

DEVELOPER:
Double Edge Games

PUBLISHER:
Double Edge Games

TEST PLATFORM:
PC

PRICE:
Free

SCORE 8,8

- ✓ Huge replay value
- ✓ Fun premise
- ✓ Massive potential
- ✗ RNG elements will put some players off
- ✗ Can be too intense for newcomers

Game provided by:
Double Edge Games

AUTHOR
Bogdan Karadarević

THE MOTHER OF M-RATED GAMES

The roots of Mortal Kombat

Like any other form of entertainment, video games come in a huge number of genres - from colourful platformers and family adventures to dark horror and brutal fighting games. Over the decades we've seen how diverse the industry can be, and Mortal Kombat is perhaps the most dramatic example.

The legendary Ed Boon and John Tobias, then game designers at Midway Games, introduced the first Mortal Kombat more than three decades ago, back in 1992. As a 2D fighter, at first glance it didn't differ much from the competition - series like Street Fighter and Fatal Fury already dominated the arcades, while Tekken and Virtua Fighter would soon redefine 3D fighting games. However, Mortal Kombat had something no other game of the time offered: raw brutality.

While other fighting games were stylised and visually resembled Japanese animated films, Mortal Kombat used digitised actors, more realistic animations and huge amounts of blood. The game's atmosphere itself was darker, more violent and much more serious than anything players were seeing in arcades at the time, but what made it revolutionary and extremely controversial was the introduction of the famous fatality.





Most fighting games of the time were simple. You fought until your opponent's HP dropped to zero, which usually just meant their character was knocked out. In Mortal Kombat, the bouts were fights to the death. Instead of the match ending in a knockout, the game let the winner perform a brutal execution on the already defeated opponent. It was a moment that completely changed the way people look at fighting games, and at video games in general.

Although the unique story, the mystical tournament and the recognisable characters also contributed to the series' success, the fatality undoubtedly became Mortal Kombat's trademark.

Characters such as Scorpion, Raiden, Johnny Cage and Sub-Zero quickly became icons of gaming culture, and each new sequel brought even more creative and bloodier finishing moves. They were all shocking, but one is especially remembered and practically defined the series' reputation: Sub-Zero ripping off his opponent's head along with the spine dangling from the body.

Quite predictably, the series caused huge controversy among parents, the media and politicians. In the early nineties there were even public



debates about violence in gaming and its influence on young people, and Mortal Kombat is often cited as one of the main reasons the ESRB game rating system was created. It may not have caused the first scandal of this kind, but it spent many years in the public eye, until GTA "took the baton".

Ironically, all those controversies only increased the series' popularity. Mortal Kombat moved from arcades to home consoles, got films, comics, animated projects and a huge number of sequels, including 2023's Mortal Kombat 1.



AUTHOR
MILOŠ HETLEROVIĆ

THE BEST PICTURE QUALITY FOR GAMERS

IS IT TIME FOR AN OLED MONITOR?



When it comes to monitors, gamers have somehow always had to make compromises – first we were stuck with LCD TN panels that had, to put it mildly, awful washed-out colours but phenomenally fast response times for the time. Then came IPS and VA, which brought good colours and viewing angles but suffered from "slow" panels. Finally, a couple of years ago OLED models started appearing, combining by far the best picture with phenomenally fast response, but at a really steep price. Still, like few things in today's world, OLED models are becoming more and more affordable for the average user, so the question now is – does it make sense to switch to the new technology?

PROS AND CONS OF OLED SCREENS

The first and fundamental advantage of OLED (Organic Light-Emitting Diode) screens over other types, such as all versions of LCD, is significantly better colour reproduction, above all in that black is truly black. So if, say, you have a completely black background on an OLED screen, the effect will be as if the monitor is switched off, while even the best IPS screens have some backlight "bleeding" through the image. On the other hand, the colours themselves and the screen brightness are better, so it looks much more vivid even compared with top IPS models, and this is especially visible when you consume HDR content, be it games or films. Finally, viewing angles are significantly better than with other technologies, and you'll see the picture clearly from practically any position.

However, gamers of course don't choose a monitor based on how colours look on it, but on how it behaves in games, and here OLED technology makes significant strides compared with the latest IPS/VA panels with good response times, and even compared with the until recently unrivalled TN panels, which boasted a response time of 1ms (gray-to-gray), or with some models even 0.5ms. For most OLED monitors, the response time is rated at 0.03ms GtG, which in practice means there's absolutely no chance you'll notice any artefacts, ghosting and the like, however quickly things change on screen. Of course the refresh rate follows this trend, so most OLED monitors aimed at gaming have either 240 or 360Hz refresh, which is more than enough even for the fastest esports titles. The technology is such that pixels change faster, so it happens that, say, a 240Hz OLED subjectively gives the impression of much better motion than an IPS panel with a nominal 360Hz refresh, which is why it's no surprise many esports pros now reach for exactly this type of monitor.

Of course, no technology is completely immune to flaws, and with OLED screens it's above all the problem of so-called burn-in, when a static image sits on one part of the screen and then stays somehow etched into the memory of the light-emitting cells themselves. This happens if you constantly watch, for example, the same TV channel, so the channel logo remains, or for gamers if you constantly play one title, so parts of the HUD and user interface are always in the same place.

However, newer models are much more resistant to this, and manufacturers are introducing things like pixel shifting or panel refresh cycles, which without any extra effort from the user virtually "wipe" the screen and clean it of any artefacts that may have built up. For video games this can be quite enough, but you should pay attention if you're the kind of user who, for example, leaves a Word document open all day and forgets about it; those effects can be more pronounced. Another small drawback of this technology is that, although excellent for games and films, it can be slightly less legible for small text and pure office work compared with, say, a top IPS panel. The differences are small, but if that's what you mainly do, you should certainly bear it in mind.

WHAT TO BUY

The most important thing lately is that prices of OLED gaming monitors are falling solidly and becoming more and more affordable for the average user. At the moment, especially when we consider the prices of other components, playing at 1440p resolution and a high frame rate





seems to be the most optimal choice on PC. A resolution like 4K really looks impressive, but bear in mind that a monitor is usually much smaller than the average TV, and it's hard to actually notice the difference between the two resolutions on a smaller screen, while playing at a high frame rate matters more for the best experience. In that sense, 27" monitors with a resolution of 2560x1440 pixels still seem to be the optimum for visually good and competitive gaming.

And if we look at the prices of some solid gaming models, taking a 240Hz refresh rate as the benchmark, 27" monitors with 2560x1440 resolution with IPS or VA panels range from 200 to 300 euros, while we already have OLED models from manufacturers such as Gigabyte, HP Omen or Lenovo Legion for 400 to 500 euros.

Here we see that the price difference has already shrunk dramatically, and it's simply a matter of time before OLED screens drop in price so much that they come dangerously close to older technologies. Bearing in mind that in the last couple of years we've seen prices of graphics cards or RAM jump by a few hundred euros in just a couple of months, it's good to see that there are parts of the market where the principle still holds that as a technology matures it also becomes more affordable.

What's also interesting about OLED models is that the technology is very adaptable, so we come across several ultra-wide models, practically as if you put two 27" monitors side by side. One of these is the 49" Philips Evnia, which can now be found for under 800 euros on our market, with the "compromise" being a 144Hz refresh rate. With a monitor twice as big, the resolution doubles to 5120x1440 pixels, so you also need a stronger computer to run games at that resolution, but since that's still lower than "ordinary" 4K, the machine doesn't have to be that much of a beast. And really, when you sit in front of a screen almost 50 inches across that somehow completely surrounds you, it's a special gaming experience.

CONCLUSION

OLED screens are definitely the technology of the future that we'll all slowly turn to, because they offer a significantly better picture without any compromise in response time; on the contrary, they're faster than previous technologies. Unfortunately, developing technology is expensive and is going much more slowly than we hoped, so prices still aren't at a level where it's easy to recommend such a monitor when the alternatives (which are still very good) are sometimes half the price.

However, in a world where we've somehow got used to technology prices going up rather than down, and where we're aware of constant price rises, I think it makes sense to invest in a quality screen that will give you a top-notch experience, since it's the part of your computer hardware you'll literally be in contact with the most. There's simply no point spending a lot of money on some glowing RAM and not enjoying top picture quality.



play!

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