play! zine

No. 204 | SEPTEMBER 2026.



REVIEW:
BEAST OF REINCARNATION

LOCAL SCENE:
INTERVIEW WITH MILAN MANIĆ

FILM & TV:
VIDEO GAMES ON THE BIG SCREEN

COMING UP:
PLAY!CON AUTUMN 2026

GAME OF THE MONTH:

MORTAL SHELL II

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WELCOME

The last hours of the summer holidays are upon us, heralds of the inevitable bell announcing the return to school or the office. Still, whether you spend your time at work or relaxing with your loved ones, there is always time for games, whatever the season! We at Play!Zine have lived by this philosophy for over 20 years, as our long-time readers already know. But if you have only just stumbled upon our site, you can see it clearly in the September edition of our beloved magazine!

In the biggest section of issue 204 you will once again find a medley of reviews which, although not as varied as last year's, offers a mix of all sorts of genres. Leading the review section is Mortal Shell II, which exceeded all our expectations. Spoiler: it's much better than an ace!

Besides looking back at earlier issues of the magazine, this time the Play!Flashback section takes you through the entire history of the FIFA | EA FC series, while in the section that brings together films, series and video games you can find the premiere dates of upcoming live-action adaptations.

On the local scene, two completely different interviews await you, as well as an announcement that will delight everyone following the Serbian and regional game dev scene. The first autumn, and 11th overall, edition of the Play!Con conference takes place this September at the Festival of Epic Fantasy!

The demo is over, thanks for playing. Now move on to Play!Zine 204 1.0!



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Rough release windows revealed for the new Kingdom Come and Darksiders 4

In Embracer Group's new financial report, we learned the expected release windows of many upcoming games, including Darksiders 4 and the new Kingdom Come, also known as Salvation.

Both titles will reportedly come out during fiscal year 2027/2028. On a regular calendar, that corresponds to the period from April 1, 2027 to March 31, 2028.

The report states that Darksiders 4 will be available on PC, PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X/S, while the platforms for the next Kingdom Come have not yet been officially specified. Besides these games, it also mentions Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War 4, Stage Tour, Tomb Raider: Legacy of Atlantis and Metro 2039.



Warner Bros. officially announces Hogwarts Legacy 2

After the huge success of the original, Warner Bros. has confirmed that Hogwarts Legacy 2 is in active development. The first game sold more than 40 million copies worldwide, so working on a sequel was a completely logical step, and now it has been formally confirmed.

What is especially interesting is that the developers plan to connect the story more widely across different media. The company confirmed that many aspects of the sequel's story will tie into the upcoming Harry Potter HBO series, which comes out this December.

With the fourth anniversary of the first game approaching, and the TV reboot arriving at the end of 2026, many speculate that the first trailer for the sequel will be shown at The Game Awards.

Amid the uproar over dropping discs, Astro Bot is emulated on PC

Sony's decision to stop producing physical discs for future PS games angered many, and motivated some to do something productive.

Released in September 2024 and named GOTY that same year, Astro Bot became hugely popular with players of all ages. It never got a port outside PS5, and given that Sony has now locked all first-party single-player games to PS, the chances of it officially appearing on PC are zero. "Officially" is the key word here, as a user called RSantila managed to run Astro Bot on PC using the SharpEmu emulator.

Experts describe SharpEmu as an experimental PS5 emulator, but it already seems capable of running some games.



Games Workshop revealed that acclaimed horror writer and director Mike Flanagan (The Haunting of Hill House, Doctor Sleep) will write a live-action TV series set in the Warhammer 40K universe. Besides being an executive producer on the project, well-known Warhammer fan Henry Cavill (The Witcher, Man of Steel) has now revealed that he will appear in the series.

"Mike and I have been working on the concept for a while and have made real progress. Many of you asked whether I'll play the lead. I absolutely will!"

"As fans already know, this is a huge, seemingly impossible project, but I think we are on the right track. We are working hard to create the best and most faithful version of this rich universe!"



Henry Cavill will appear in the new Warhammer 40K series



Roman Bellic reveals his favourite GTA story

An exciting and dangerous world of crime, plenty of surprises and a pile of bizarre characters are the backbone of every good GTA story. Everyone has a favourite, including the actors who voiced the most famous characters of this legendary series.

We mean Jason Zumwalt, who voiced Roman Bellic, Niko's cousin, in GTA 4. In a new clip on the loveitfilm Instagram channel, Zumwalt said he doesn't understand why GTA 4 still hasn't had a remaster, and along the way said the following:

"People always tell me I'm biased and going for the obvious favourite, but I honestly think GTA 4 has the best story in the whole series. For me, this story is extremely personal. It's the easiest one to relate to."



Golden Axe gets an animated series

Paramount and Sega have unveiled the trailer for Golden Axe, an animated take on the late-eighties retro classic. The series arrives on Paramount+ on September 16.

Golden Axe follows the warriors Ax Battler, Tyris Flare and Gilius Thunderhead, who unite to save the kingdom of Yuria from the evil Death Adder. Their mission is further complicated by Hampton Squib, an inexperienced young man who is not at all ready for what lies ahead.

The trailer shows a modern animation style, as well as many characters that everyone who played the original game will recognise. The tone is distinctly comic, with plenty of references and fourth-wall breaking, which sometimes goes a bit far.



Tomb Raider: Catalyst delayed to 2028

The head of Amazon Games has revealed that the release of Tomb Raider: Catalyst has been moved to 2028.

This news isn't very surprising, given that Legacy of Atlantis has already been delayed from 2026 to February 12, 2027. We don't know the internal reasons, but gaming companies usually don't want to release games from the same franchise in the same calendar year.

Tomb Raider: Catalyst is a new chapter in Lara's adventures, announced alongside a modern remake of the original 1996 Tomb Raider, which got a new title – Legacy of Atlantis. Announced at The Game Awards 2025, the Catalyst trailer shows Lara fighting a mysterious enemy in India.



Dave Bautista is the new Kratos

Dave Bautista has been cast as Kratos in Prime Video's TV adaptation of the God of War series. The former WWE world heavyweight champion takes over the role from Ryan Hurst, who left the shoot due to an injury in July.

It has been confirmed that Hurst will need a longer recovery, especially since playing Kratos involves very physically demanding scenes. The production therefore had to find a replacement quickly so filming could continue as planned. In the end they opted for Bautista, best known in the acting world as Drax from the MCU.

Filming began in February in Vancouver. Callum Vinson plays Atreus, while the rest of the cast

Hideo Kojima is just shy of 63, but he is still a pioneer of innovation in a field where it is hard to be original today. Although full of energy, he often talks about transience, death and the legacy he leaves behind.

A few months ago he said that after his death he would leave a USB stick full of game ideas for his team to make. At a recent film festival in Italy, he revealed how he wants to leave this world. In a statement translated by Genki_JPN, Kojima said:

"I have always wanted to die in a cinema. What I love most is that moment before the film starts. I walk into the theatre, the lights go down, the ads and trailers start, and right before the film begins I'd like to pass on to the other side."

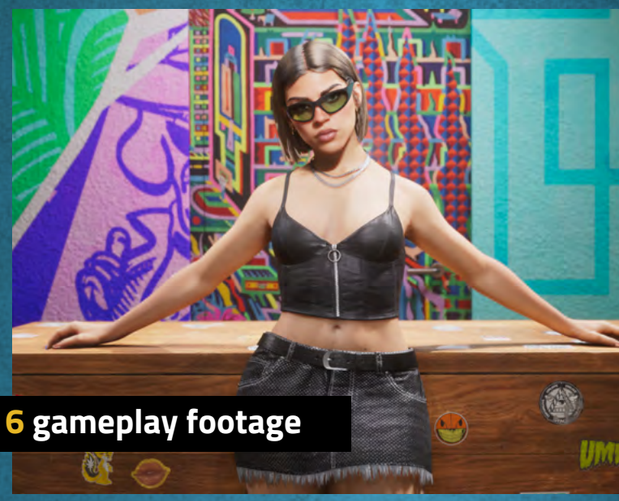


Kojima reveals how he wants to spend the last moments of his life

Late on August 18, numerous videos and images from GTA 6 suddenly appeared online. The fact that Take-Two Interactive immediately started removing all the leaked content practically confirmed that the gameplay footage really is from GTA 6.

A few hours after the first clip appeared, the hacker CYBERLEEK was identified as the source, who, besides the leaked material, was also promoting his own cryptocurrency.

The clips arrived about ten days before the game's big official presentation and showed exploration, driving, the wanted system, several side activities, locations and interactions between NPCs. It also seems that the police now recognise and remember players' faces,



Leaked GTA 6 gameplay footage

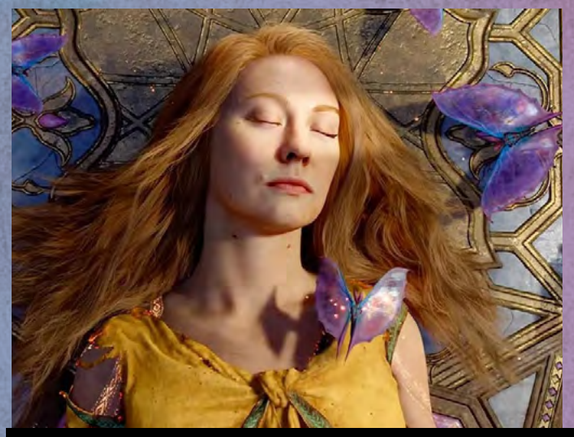


Fallout 5 comes out after Elder Scrolls 6

Bethesda's Todd has revealed new details about the future of Fallout. Although he stressed that the franchise is a big priority, he described the development of Fallout 5 as a "long-term goal". At least four Fallout projects are in the works, but despite being part of the main series, the fifth game is the furthest from release.

Todd added that most of the studio is currently working on TES 6, while Fallout 5 is in pre-production. That makes it almost guaranteed that TES 6 will come out before the new Fallout.

"With more than 65 million copies sold, players are still exploring Skyrim 15 years later, but we know we have to push on with the development of the sixth game. Everything is going to plan, we're happy with how the game looks and we play it every day."



God of War: Laufey gets a release date

PlayStation has revealed the release date for Laufey, the next chapter in the God of War series, in which the central role goes to Faye, Kratos's late wife. Santa Monica Studio has now revealed the exact release date - February 16.

Although November is considered the biggest month because of GTA 6, February 2027 is packed with exciting new releases too. Besides Laufey, Tomb Raider: Legacy of Atlantis, Persona 4 Revival, Metro 2039 and Fable all come out then.

Laufey premiered during the State of Play presentation in June 2026. Some fans are worried that the series' long-time hero has been pushed into the background, but SMS has confirmed it is already working on a new game with Kratos in the lead role.





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"THE 12-MINUTE LOOP IS THE BEST PART OF THE GAME, BUT ALSO ITS BIGGEST CURSE, WHICH DRAGS IT DOWN AT TIMES."

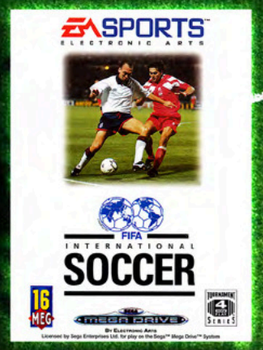
- NIKOLA AKSENTIJEVIĆ ON TWELVE MINUTES

PLAY! 97
SEPTEMBER 2016

"STORY AND ATMOSPHERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN TELLTALE'S BIGGEST STRENGTHS, AND THIS BATMAN ADVENTURE IS NO EXCEPTION."

- NIKOLA SAVIĆ ON BATMAN: THE TELLTALE SERIES

FIFA | EA FC COVERS THROUGH THE YEARS



1993
FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER



1994
FIFA SOCCER 95



1995
FIFA SOCCER 96



1996
FIFA 97



1997
FIFA 64



1997
FIFA: ROAD TO WORLD CUP 98



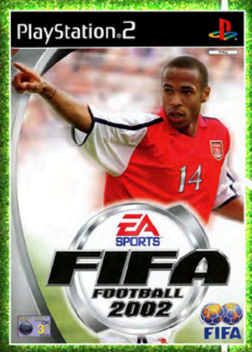
1998
FIFA 99



1999
FIFA 2000



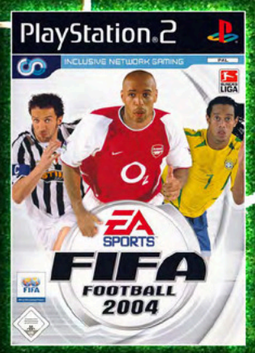
2000
FIFA 2001



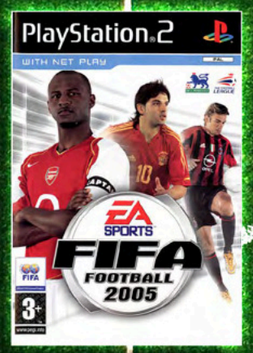
2001
FIFA FOOTBALL 2002



2002
FIFA FOOTBALL 2003



2003
FIFA FOOTBALL 2004



2004
FIFA FOOTBALL 2005



2005
FIFA 06



2006
FIFA 07



2007
FIFA 08



2008
FIFA 09



2009
FIFA 10



2010
FIFA 11



2011
FIFA 12



2012
FIFA 13



2013
FIFA 14



2014
FIFA 15



2015
FIFA 16



2016
FIFA 17



2017
FIFA 18



2018
FIFA 19



2019
FIFA 20



2020
FIFA 21



2021
FIFA 22



2022
FIFA 23



2023
EA FC 24



2024
EA FC 25



2025
EA FC 26



2026
EA FC 27



Interview with Dušan Fajler - Sverun Games

IF YOU WANT TO BREAK THROUGH ON STEAM TODAY, YOU NEED 10,000+ WISHLISTS

During Play!Con Winter 2024, we had the honour of talking with the Serbian two-man team Sverun, made up of brothers Dušan and Marko Fajler. At that event, Sverun presented their project Crowned in Steel to visitors of the Games.con festival, and we got to try the demo ourselves.

We stayed in touch with the Fajler brothers in the months that followed, and now, after more than a year, we decided to sit down with Dušan and step back into the dark world of Crowned in Steel.

HI DUŠAN! THE LAST TIME WE SAW EACH OTHER WAS LAST APRIL, SO TO START, TELL US WHAT HAS CHANGED FOR SVERUN AND CROWNED IN STEEL SINCE THEN.

Dušan: Crowned in Steel is an action adventure inspired by heroic classics from the eighties and nineties such as Conan, as well as the wider Sword and Sorcery genre. If you look at the general premise and gameplay, an outsider might say nothing has changed in the game - you still control a muscular hero and cut down everything in your path. However, Crowned in Steel is now completely different - from the new protagonist to the animations... a lot has changed.

YOU AND MARKO HAVE BEEN WORKING ON CROWNED IN STEEL FOR ALMOST FOUR YEARS NOW. LOOKING BACK, WHICH PART OF DEVELOPMENT HELD YOU BACK THE MOST?

Dušan: On the technical side there weren't any particular surprises, since we've been in that world for a long time. Actually, the biggest challenge is universal to creative projects in any field, and that's free time. Our biggest motivation came from players who genuinely connected with the whole concept. We are really happy when someone says Crowned in Steel is a spiritual successor to the old classics we mentioned, because that was exactly our goal.



ABOUT A YEAR AND A HALF HAS PASSED SINCE YOU RELEASED THE DEMO ON STEAM. NOW THAT THE DUST HAS SETTLED, HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE COMMUNITY'S REACTIONS?

Dušan: Comments are mostly positive, but there will always be negative ones. Overall they're very varied. For example, one player didn't like that the hero carries his sword on his back instead of on his hip, as is correct. This isn't a realistic game, so we thought it would be much cooler to put it on his back like Conan. All in all, the extreme comments are always more interesting, much more so than generic ones.

WHAT KIND OF COMMENTS HELP YOU MOST IN DEVELOPMENT?

Dušan: Story-writing suggestions generally aren't useful, because people often don't understand what we want to do conceptually. We get the best feedback from gameplay footage, when we can see exactly where players get stuck and what problems they run into. It all shows through play.

A concrete problem we will fix in the next update concerns the controls. For example, when you find a piece of lore text in a level, you can open it with E, but you can only close it by moving far enough away from it.

Players don't know that, so they instinctively press ESC, which only opens the main menu. It's not a big deal, but we always strive to create the most intuitive and fluid experience possible, so comments like these mean a lot.

HOW OFTEN HAVE PLAYERS DONE SOMETHING UNEXPECTED THAT TURNED YOUR IDEA OF THE GAME COMPLETELY UPSIDE DOWN?

Dušan: Very often, because that's the reality of game dev and every game. For example, Crowned in Steel has stamina that is used for attacks and various actions. When stamina runs out your attacks get slower, which we intended as a penalty for spamming. Players, probably because of the animation, thought it was some kind of heavy attack that deals more damage, which is the complete opposite of what we intended.

WE'D LIKE TO TOUCH ON THE BALANCE BETWEEN FUN AND CHALLENGE IN GAMING AGAIN. HOW DO YOU DEFINE A HARD BUT FAIR AND FUN GAME TODAY?

Dušan: Pretty much the same as before, except that now we have a bit more real experience and feedback we can apply. Our game is primarily focused on combat, so the combat has to feel fair.

If you make a mistake, if you don't dodge in time, mistime a parry or miss, it has to be your fault. It must never be the game's fault. If, say, a sword passes through an enemy mid-swing and doesn't do damage, that's our failure. That is very frustrating at crucial moments and it must not happen.

DID YOU HAVE TO MAKE SOME SEGMENTS EASIER BECAUSE PLAYERS FOUND THEM TOO HARD? HOW DO YOU TELL APART A PLAYER'S "LACK OF SKILL", SO TO SPEAK, FROM FLAWS IN GAME DESIGN?

Dušan: Definitely. We made some easier, and some even harder. As for the second question, that's much harder to determine when it comes to combat. If, for example, the parry timing is off, we as developers can help a little by telegraphing attacks.

Making the enemy's swing start a bit slower and then speed up, so players learn attack patterns more intuitively through the animations.



Dušan: We haven't managed either yet, we're still in the process :D. I'd say we're about halfway on both. I can't say one is harder than the other, it all depends on the project, but if you make a good game, it will partly promote itself. That usually isn't enough, which is why you have to actively work on it too. We are mostly focused on development, so our marketing is still quite limited - for now it mostly comes down to posting short clips on social media. X brings us the most audience and wishlists.

IS THERE A BOSS OR MECHANIC YOU ARE STILL DEBATING?

Dušan: Right now we only have one boss and he isn't especially unique. He is a bit smarter and more aggressive than other enemies, but later we will definitely add much more unique bosses that throw things at players and maybe have several phases and so on, but more on that later.

BESIDES THE BOSS, IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WANTED TO ADD TO THE GAME BUT HAVEN'T HAD TIME FOR YET?

Dušan: Here I would mention the advanced dismemberment system, which already exists in basic form in the demo. If you deliver a finishing blow to an enemy with a sharp weapon such as a sword, you will sever the body part you aimed at. Now, we wanted to enable this system mid-fight too. For example, if an enemy holds a sword in his right hand and you cut it off, he will have to keep fighting with his left. Unfortunately this is very demanding work and most likely won't make it into the final version, but we'll see.

WHAT'S HARDER, MAKING A QUALITY GAME OR ATTRACTING AN AUDIENCE?

HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT REACHING OUT TO SOME STREAMERS?

Dušan: Yes, that's a must these days. We have a list of several hundred streamers that we've been putting together for a while by following games in similar genres on Twitch. When the time comes, we'll contact them.

HOW MANY STEAM WISHLISTS DO YOU CONSIDER A SUCCESS FOR AN INDIE PROJECT LIKE THIS?

Dušan: We learned a lot about marketing from a man called **Chris_Zukowski**, who covers these topics on his YouTube channel. It used to be that around 7,000 wishlists was the minimum for Steam to notice you and push you forward. Times change, and today that number exceeds 10,000.

WHAT DOES YOUR WORKING DAY LOOK LIKE, GIVEN THAT YOU MAKE THE GAME IN YOUR FREE TIME ALONGSIDE A JOB?

Dušan: Pretty unglamorous. We are very far from the days when we added something new every day, from mechanics and levels to enemies. Today it looks quite boring, even to us who love doing it. One example is optimising controller responsiveness.





There are lots of little things like that, but each one is key to improving the player experience, so we can't really complain.

WHAT'S IT LIKE WORKING WITH YOUR OWN BROTHER? LET'S USE THE CHANCE WHILE HE'S NOT HERE WITH YOU :D.

Dušan: There are lots of benefits. Since we grew up together, we played very similar games. I know what he likes, he knows what I like, so we don't have to talk much about the basics. Of course, there are more complex topics we definitely discuss, but we like that we can be very open and direct with each other, without any constraints. A relationship with a business partner would be completely different. There were of course some details we couldn't quite agree on, but that's the classic relationship between brothers.

WERE THERE MOMENTS WHEN YOU SERIOUSLY THOUGHT ABOUT GIVING UP ON THIS PROJECT?

Dušan: Not on this game. We had a couple of earlier projects that we not only thought about abandoning, but actually did. Maybe we'll go back to them later, but a game like Crowned in Steel is more or less the reason we started learning programming and game development, so we don't plan on giving up.

With the earlier games, our motivation and discipline simply weren't at the right level, and on top of that the scope was too big. That's the biggest trap and a beginner's mistake, but sometimes you first have to get burned and experience everything first-hand to gain experience naturally. When we started out, we all wanted an MMO with thirty classes.

HAVE YOU AND MARKO EVER THOUGHT ABOUT A GAME: "WE WISH WE HAD MADE THIS."

Dušan: I think we feel that way about all our favourite games. For example Blade of Darkness, which is the main inspiration for Crowned in Steel, although, fine, it's very, very old, so we couldn't have. But besides that one, there are Sekiro, Factorio and Path of Exile. Personally, PoE is one of my favourite games!

Support Sverun and add Crowned In Steel to your Steam wishlist.







INTERVIEW WITH

MILAN MANIĆ

FROM THE ARCADE TO THE TOP OF THE WORLD

Today we met with Milan Manić, a multimedia artist, writer and chess player from Pančevo, originally from Pirot, who turned pure nostalgia and a love of arcades into an incredible achievement. Milan is the current world champion in the retro arcade gaming category on Twin Galaxies, one of the world's best-known score databases for classic video games and an organisation whose data is also used by the Guinness World Records in the field of gaming.

Outside the world of gaming, Manić is a member of ULUS (the Association of Fine Artists of Serbia), the author of two published books, a participant in more than 120 exhibitions at home and abroad, and the winner of some twenty awards for his art and writing. His work has been shown at international exhibitions in several countries, including Brazil, China, Poland, Hungary, Lithuania and North Macedonia.

Besides art, he holds the title of FIDE Arena International Master and plays for the chess club PAŠK Pančevo, while in his youth he won a bronze medal at the Serbian karate championship and trained with the Yugoslav national karate team.

In a very honest and open conversation, Milan took us through his life's journey.

WHAT WAS GROWING UP LIKE, AND YOUR FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH VIDEO GAMES?

Milan: As a boy I grew up in Pirot, at a time when arcade games were the meeting place of a whole generation. A token wasn't cheap, especially during the nineties and the sanctions. Sometimes I would sacrifice my lunch just to play one more game. My mother sometimes came looking for me in the arcades so I wouldn't be late for school.

I remember that older players often gave up the tall bar stool in front of the machine for me. It wasn't just a stool. For a kid, it was recognition that he belonged among the best players in town. It seems that was when I got my first audience. I had no idea that this boyhood passion would one day take me to the top of the world.

WHY DID YOU FIND YOURSELF IN GAMING? WHICH PART OF THE EXPERIENCE DREW YOU IN THE MOST?

Milan: I was never drawn to winning itself. I was drawn to how you get there. I can only appreciate a result when a lot of work, patience and dedication have gone into achieving it.

YOU WENT THROUGH A BIG TURNING POINT VERY EARLY IN LIFE. TELL US MORE ABOUT THAT.

Milan: Before I turned twenty, soon after the bombing of our country, my life changed completely. I was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia. My bone marrow was about ninety percent lymphoblasts (cancer cells), and my peripheral blood about seventy percent. Chemotherapy followed, then a bone marrow transplant, a long fight with graft-versus-host disease, immunosuppressive therapy and numerous complications. More than once, the doctors weren't sure I would survive.

This June marked twenty-seven years since that fight began. When a person lives so long between uncertainty and hope, over time they start to see the world differently. You no longer count years, but opportunities.

After treatment, I didn't try to return to my old life. I tried to build a new one. Art, writing, chess and retro gaming weren't just an escape from reality. They were a way to put that reality back together.



WHAT WOULD YOU SAY CONNECTS YOUR INTERESTS?

Milan: In chess I love a combination that feels like a work of art. My favourites are quiet moves and zugzwang – moments when almost nothing happens, yet the whole position starts to collapse on its own because the opponent no longer has a good answer.

In visual art, I'm drawn to the moment when a composition seems about to fall apart, yet stays in balance as if frozen an instant before it breaks or starts to collapse. I love geometry that is alive rather than cold. Symmetry that doesn't mean perfection, but a search for inner peace. What attracts me most is the moment when everything seems about to fall apart, yet stays in balance. That hint of breaking is stronger for me than the break itself.

In writing, I never wanted to decorate sentences. My characters often talk to themselves, hold inner dialogues, and face absurdity, fear, transience and the need to keep one's dignity even when there is no great victory. I'm more interested in questions than ready-made answers. I don't like it when literature explains everything to the reader. I believe more is achieved when the ending is unusual, unexpected, even absurd, and the reader is left to resolve what was left unsaid.

DOES THE SAME PHILOSOPHY CARRY OVER TO THE WAY YOU PLAY GAMES?

Milan: In retro games I look for the same thing. I'm not interested in the easiest path to a result. I often deliberately take on bigger groups of enemies than necessary. That increases the uncertainty, tension, difficulty and visual dynamics of the game. I want a run to look like choreography, not a mechanical collection of points. Maybe that's exactly why people like watching my videos.

YOUR VIDEOS HAVE ATTRACTED A BIG AUDIENCE.

Milan: The videos I have published about chess and retro gaming have so far gained more than fifty-two million views. Those very videos brought me a partnership with YouTube. It turned out the audience isn't only looking for a result. It wants to see the idea, the style and the beauty of the execution.

WHEN I LOOK BACK TODAY, IT SEEMS TO ME THAT MY LIFE LOOKED MUCH LESS LIKE A STRAIGHT LINE, AND MUCH MORE LIKE A GAME OF CHESS IN WHICH EVERY GOOD MOVE WAS FOLLOWED BY A NEW, EVEN HARDER PROBLEM.



HOW HAS YOUR APPROACH TO GAMES CHANGED SINCE YOUR FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH ARCADES?

Milan: When arcade machines disappeared from Pirot around the turn of the millennium and internet cafés took their place, there was no longer a way to keep playing as before. Only a few years later, with the arrival of the MAME emulator and other programs for running old arcade games, did I come back to them. But by then I was no longer a boy.

I started analysing every game the way a chess player analyses a match. Looking for patterns, the best routes, psychological moments, economy of movement. And most importantly — correct positioning with timely reactions that would prevent or soften the enemies' attacks. That analytical approach is exactly what took me to the top of the world. And what makes the feat unusual is the technique of playing with crossed hands on an ordinary computer keyboard, which I'm known for today.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS.

Milan: On Twin Galaxies I officially became the world's number one player in the cult arcade game Crude Buster, and I'm also among the best in "Final Fight", "Golden Axe" and "Splatterhouse", games that defined the golden age of arcades. All results passed international technical verification.

WHAT, FOR YOU, IS THE GREATEST SIGNIFICANCE OF RETRO GAMES?

Milan: Many people think retro games are just nostalgia, but for me they are much more than that. The pixelated graphics of the eighties and nineties, the hardware limitations, simple forms and strong colour contrasts left a deeper mark on me than I first realised. Today, when I look at my abstract digital works, I can see that those early visual worlds influenced my artistic path. Maybe that's why I never felt that art, chess, literature and games were different worlds. For me they are different languages of the same idea. Each one demands concentration, patience and imagination, and each, in its own way, tries to make order out of apparent chaos.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR LIFE'S JOURNEY? HOW DO YOU SEE YOUR EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS TODAY?

Milan: The long years of treatment, and later a disability pension and particular life circumstances, probably gave me something many people don't have – time. Instead of experiencing it as a limitation, I tried to turn it into an opportunity. I had more time to read, write, create, analyse chess positions and study games down to the smallest detail. I don't think that makes me special. I think I simply tried to make the best use I could of what life left at my disposal.

When I look today at everything behind me – more than a hundred and twenty exhibitions, two published books, some twenty awards, membership of ULUS, an official online chess title, world-class results in retro gaming and millions of people who have watched my videos – I don't see separate successes. I see one and the same path.

If there is a common thread in everything I've done, it is persistence. I still believe that a person can't always choose the circumstances they live in, but they can always choose what they make of them. I have tried to turn every hardship into something meaningful.





The Play!Zine team presents the 11th edition of Play!Con, the conference dedicated to the gaming industry in Serbia and the region and to all video game fans! The first autumn edition of our beloved event takes place at a brand-new location - the Festival of Epic Fantasy (FEF)!



FEF will be hosted by the MTS Hall in Belgrade (Dečanska 14), from September 25 to 27. Over the weekend of September 26 and 27, starting at 12:00, Play!Con will take place at the Play!Zine stand at the festival.

The upcoming conference will follow the format of previous years, with speakers and representatives of Serbian and regional game dev studios talking about all kinds of topics related to game development, their own projects and personal experiences from the gaming industry. Visitors will have the chance to meet the conference guests, take part in discussions and learn things they couldn't otherwise find online.

In the coming weeks we are preparing more announcements for Play!Con Autumn 2026. Follow the official site and Instagram page for all the news, schedules and the full list of guests taking part in the conference, as well as the topics they will present.

FEF is the ideal location for Play!Con Autumn 2026, since epic fantasy fans often sail gaming waters too. Besides our modest conference, the festival offers a varied programme with creative workshops, talks, cosplay, board games, D&D one-shot sessions and other fun activities. Visitors will also be able to buy fantasy comics and books, as well as handmade jewellery, clothing, illustrations, toys and much more.

The first Play!Con was held online in 2020, and the next four editions also followed this format due to pandemic restrictions. By summer 2026, a total of ten Play!Con conferences had been held, the fifth of which was the first to take place live, at the Games.con festival in Belgrade.





MILOŠ MAJDEVAC WILL REPRESENT SERBIA AT THE ESPORTS NATIONS CUP

Scheduled for November 2027, the Esports Nations Cup is the closest thing to the Olympic Games in gaming, where the world's best players, in teams or individually, compete in more than 15 disciplines, or games. As the counterpart to the Esports World Cup, more than 100 countries will take part in this championship, including Serbia.

In chess, our country's colours will be defended by Aleksandar Inđić and Alexei Sarana, who secured their places in the final tournament a few months ago. Now, after a new round of qualifiers, Serbia also has its EA FC representative for the ENC.

The ENC qualifiers were split into two stages. As many as 256 players competed in the first, and after seven matches and a 5-2 record, Miloš Majdevac, better known as brstimir, made it into the next round.

In the first two rounds he recorded two important wins



against Beasta74 from Poland and Krompe from Finland, followed by a defeat to Montaxer from Italy, which sent him to the lower bracket. There he faced Germany's Duschko, who beat our representative 11-6.

Since under tournament rules no country can have more than two representatives, brstimir managed to qualify for the ENC, even though he finished the qualifiers tied for 17th-24th place.

Miloš is one of the best-known and most successful Serbian professional EA Sports FC players, who started his career back in the FIFA era. He has represented Serbia in regional leagues and international competitions such as the FIFAe Nations Cup, where he achieved notable results.

The Esports Nations Cup was originally supposed to take place in November 2026, but was recently moved to November 2027. The decision was made after a detailed assessment of the wider regional situation and extensive consultations with key partners, with the aim of ensuring much-needed safety and stability for all participants. Given the unprecedented international scale of the tournament, the organisers stress that postponement is the only responsible decision at a time of regional uncertainty.

Although esports fans will have to wait an extra year, the ENC's main goal remains the same: creating a unique global platform where the world's best players compete exclusively for their countries instead of their clubs.

BEST-SELLING GAMING CONSOLES

1. PlayStation 2 — Units sold (millions): **160**

2. Nintendo Switch — Units sold (millions): **155,92**

3. Nintendo DS — Units sold (millions): **154,02**

4. Game Boy & Game Boy Color — Units sold (millions): **118,69**

5. PlayStation 4 — Units sold (millions): **117,2**

6. PlayStation — Units sold (millions): **102,49**

7. Wii — Units sold (millions): **101,63**

8. PlayStation 5 — Units sold (millions): **95,3**

9. PlayStation 3 — Units sold (millions): **87,4**

10. Xbox 360 — Units sold (millions): **>84**

VIDEO GAMES ON THE BIG SCREEN

THE NEW GENERATION

STREET FIGHTER

PREMIERE: October 16, 2026

Not everyone would agree that we are in a golden age of game adaptations, but it's hard to ignore the financial success of the latest releases and the fact that they aren't as disastrously bad as some earlier attempts to bring our favourite games to the screen. Besides established blockbusters like Mario, Sonic and Minecraft, many more adaptations of famous franchises are on the way, including one of the biggest fighting game series – Street Fighter.

Set in 1993, the film follows Ryu (Andrew Koji) and Ken (Noah Centineo), who return to the world of street fighting after meeting the mysterious Chun-Li (Callina Liang), and absolute chaos ensues. The trailers so far have shown plenty of action scenes from the World Warrior tournament, with a big focus on comedy and over-the-top situations in which Ken usually draws the short straw. Besides those rivals and Chun-Li, the film will feature many recognisable fighters such as M. Bison (David Dastmalchian), Blanka (Jason Momoa) and Balrog (50 Cent).



RESIDENT EVIL

PREMIERE: September 18, 2026

Resident Evil expanded beyond games back in the early 2000s, above all with the film series led by Milla Jovovich. At the end of summer we officially enter a new era of RE films, opened by the film of the same name from director Zach Cregger (Weapons, Barbarian). The director explained that the film will "take place in the world and timeline of RE2 and RE3", but will "stick more to the tone" of RE4. He added that fans can expect an original story unrelated to previous RE films, and that it will be "extremely innovative and a little weird".

The story follows Bryan (Austin Abrams), a human organ courier who gets an urgent call from a hospital in Raccoon City. However, as usually happens, his journey takes him in a completely unexpected direction. Cregger will surely keep his recognisable style, which means lots of gore, twists and bizarre, sometimes funny situations – not that far from the typical RE tone. Still, keep in mind that well-known RE characters such as Leon won't appear.



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 4

PREMIERE: March 19, 2027

Although the first Sonic The Hedgehog film was announced amid huge controversy over the hero's design, the series quickly became one of the most successful game film franchises. Since the first three films and the spin-off series were a great success, we weren't surprised when a fourth film was confirmed.

It's an understatement to say the Sonic films have restored the old glory of Sega's cult franchise. It has already been confirmed that the fourth film will feature Metal Sonic and 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 in roles yet to be revealed. The main cast returns too, including Ben Schwartz as Sonic, Jim Carrey as Dr. Eggman, Idris Elba as Knuckles and Keanu Reeves as Shadow.

The Sonic series has been a big box office hit, earning more than 1.2 billion dollars from the first three films.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

PREMIERE: April 30, 2027

It was only a matter of time before one of the most important gaming franchises got a live-action adaptation. With Shigeru Miyamoto's blessing, Wes Ball (the Maze Runner trilogy, Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes) will direct the film version of Link's adventures, while Avi Arad (Spider-Man, Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse, Borderlands, Uncharted) produces.

It has been confirmed that Dichen Lachman (Severance) will play Impa, adviser to Princess Zelda, who is played by Bo Bragason. Yvonne Strahovski (The Handmaid's Tale) and Uli Latukefu, who plays Ganondorf, were also named. The last member of the team is Benjamin Evan Ainsworth (House of the Dragon) as Link.

The film will also feature legendary actor Sam Neill, who died this July at the age of 78. Since filming wrapped in April, this may turn out to be his last project.

The Legend of Zelda film was shot in New Zealand, home to many fantasy/sci-fi productions such as the Lord of the Rings and Avatar franchises.



HELLDIVERS 2

PREMIERE: November 10, 2027

Soon after Helldivers 2 became a worldwide phenomenon in 2024, Sony Pictures announced a film adaptation. The project is led by Fast & Furious director Justin Lin, while the script is written by Gary Dauberman, known for It, Annabelle and Until Dawn.

Lin wants to highlight the "humanity" of the Helldivers universe, expand the game's political satire and build a rich world around the elite soldiers defending Super Earth from alien threats.

Lin is currently also working on the BRZRKR film with Keanu Reeves and an adaptation of One Punch Man, while Dauberman is one of today's most prominent horror writers. The duo says the Helldivers film will be an ambitious project combining action, absurdity and horror, just like the game. We will surely compare it to the original 1997 Starship Troopers film, which served as inspiration for Helldivers 2.

It was previously announced that Jason Momoa would play one of the lead roles, but he left the cast in June this year.



ELDEN RING

PREMIERE: March 3, 2028

Elden Ring is undoubtedly one of FromSoftware's greatest achievements, and soon it will get the chance to win over audiences on the big screen too. Publisher Bandai Namco and renowned film studio A24 (Hereditary, Everything Everywhere All at Once) are actively working on a film adaptation of this masterpiece, and filming has already wrapped.

Alex Garland will direct and write the script, which is quite encouraging given the success of his earlier projects, including Ex Machina, 28 Days Later and 28 Years Later.

This year 13 cast members were revealed, most notably Nick Offerman (Parks and Recreation, The Last of Us, Civil War), Kit Connor (Heartstopper, Warfare), Ben Whishaw (Perfume: The Story of a Murderer, Skyfall, Cloud Atlas), Cailee Spaeny (Alien: Romulus, Civil War) and Jonathan Pryce (Brazil, Game of Thrones, The Two Popes).

Although filming has wrapped, the team now faces more than a year of post-production work. We expect a large amount of CGI, so the extra time is very welcome.



CALL OF DUTY

PREMIERE: June 30, 2028

In September 2025, Paramount officially acquired the rights to produce a film based on the Call of Duty series. Activision president Rob Kostich said the partnership with Paramount was crucial to realising the project and bringing CoD to the big screen. The deal currently covers only one film, but there is a chance of sequels depending on its success.

Peter Berg (Friday Night Lights, Deepwater Horizon) and Taylor Sheridan (Yellowstone, Landman) are writing and producing, with Berg also directing. David Glasser and Kostich are also producers on the project. We had earlier heard rumours that Steven Spielberg wanted to direct it.

Sheridan and Berg previously worked together on 2016's Hell or High Water, which earned four Oscar nominations, including Best Original Screenplay.

The film will be set in the Modern Warfare era and is expected to be available on Paramount+ after its premiere.





REVIEW

AUTHOR
Stefan Mitov Radojičić

METROIDSCROLLVANIA

What happens when you take the extremely beautiful graphics of the Octopath Traveler games and, instead of a JRPG, make a modern Zelda? In short, you get The Adventures of Elliot: The Millennium Tales. Although we've had indie Zelda clones before, unlike the others Elliot truly radiates an homage to the old Zelda games, and does it very well. At a time when more and more games rely on proven formulas, huge open worlds and endless activity lists, The Adventures of Elliot: The Millennium Tales is a refreshing reminder of a time when adventure, exploration and storytelling came first. This title manages to combine



the classic spirit of action adventure with modern presentation, creating an experience that will especially please fans of traditional RPGs and adventure games (not to say OG Zelda fans).

The story follows a young adventurer, Elliot, who unexpectedly finds himself at the centre of events that threaten to change the fate of the world. What first looks like a simple quest soon grows into an epic tale of ancient civilisations, lost secrets and powers hidden from the world for centuries. The narrative isn't especially revolutionary, but it's written well enough to hold your attention throughout. The characters Elliot meets along the way have their own motives, personalities and development, which makes the world feel more alive than you might expect at first glance.

Elliot is joined by Princess Heuria, linked by Bluetooth to his earrings, who won't shut up. I get that this is an homage to Navi from Ocarina of Time, but they overdid it. There is an option to reduce how much she comments, but then she just keeps repeating a couple of phrases. "Hey, you picked up a diamond, hey, you found a checkpoint, hey, nice kill..." and round and round and round... She is incredibly tiring, and she isn't the only companion who does it.

AKATORI OFFERS SIMPLE BUT FUNCTIONAL GAMEPLAY

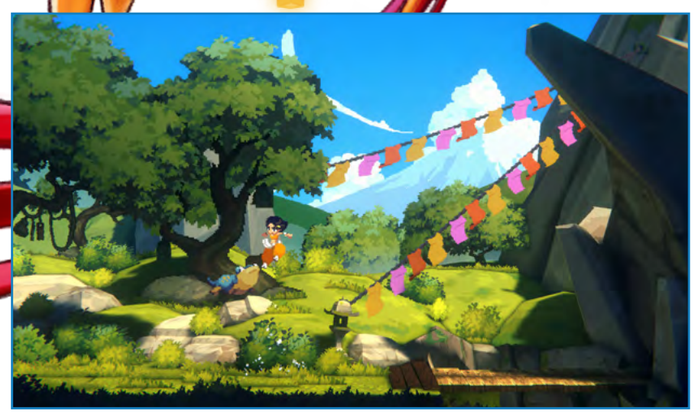
The world design is one of this adventure's main strengths. From forgotten temples and dense forests to underground ruins and ancient cities, every area has its own identity. Exploration rewards you with hidden items, extra stories and secrets, and it's especially commendable that the game rarely holds your hand.

The combat system combines real-time action with lighter RPG elements (and of course it is very reminiscent of Zelda, Link's Awakening for example). During the adventure Elliot gains new abilities, weapons and special skills that gradually expand his options in combat.

There is also a gem system where you collect gems and craft passive abilities for weapons, so you can put together a basic build (I like to min/max games). The fights are dynamic and varied enough not to become monotonous even after dozens of hours of play. Still, genre veterans will probably notice that enemies sometimes don't offer enough challenge, especially during the middle of the campaign. The difficulty is mostly well balanced, but at times the need for a more serious tactical approach is missing.

Puzzles are an important part of the experience and are often built directly into exploring the environment. Their complexity is mostly accessible, which means they rarely lead to

THE COMBAT IS BASIC, TO PUT IT MILDLY







frustration, but they do manage to break up the rhythm between combat and exploration. Some of them make particularly good use of the environment and Elliot's abilities, giving a sense of satisfaction when the solution is finally found.

Visually, the game is gorgeous. I don't have much to add beyond that - if you like the fantastic design of the Octopath games with crumbs of Bravely Default, you'll like Elliot's Adventures. The panoramic vistas and rich colour palette that gives every area a recognisable look stand out in particular. The compositions fit the atmosphere of each area nicely and often recall the golden age of JRPGs.

Despite its many qualities, Elliot sometimes stumbles. The pacing of the story occasionally slows down, and some missions feel like unnecessary padding of the campaign. The progression system could have been deeper, while greater enemy variety in the later stages of the game is badly needed to keep things dynamic.

The Adventures of Elliot: The Millennium Tales may not redefine the genre, but it manages to deliver what many modern games often forget - a sense of adventure. The combination of exploration, likeable characters, interesting locations and accessible action makes it a game I can easily recommend to anyone who loves classic adventures with more modern production values. Although I think Elliot is best played on handhelds such as the Switch 2 or Steam Deck; somehow it looks more "at home" there.



THE STORY HAS MASSIVE SHIFTS IN TONE

RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 11 64-bit
CPU: Intel Core i5-3470
GPU: GeForce GTX 1050 / Radeon R9 380
RAM: 8 GB
SSD/HDD: 10 GB

PLATFORMS:
PC, Nintendo Switch
DEVELOPER:
Contrast Games, Code Walkers
PUBLISHER:
Games Harbor, Esprit Games
TEST PLATFORM:
PC
PRICE:
14,99€

SCORE 6

- ✓ Easy to pick up and understand
- ✓ Nice, functional gameplay design
- ✗ More side-scroller than metroidvania
- ✗ Enemies are either frozen or attack cheaply
- ✗ A fair number of bugs still in the game

Game provided by:
Contrast Games



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REVIEW

AUTHOR
Stefan Mitov Radojičić



THE SINKING CITY 2

SQUELCHING NIGHTMARE

Frogwares is returning to its roots and this summer presents a new chapter in the Sinking City series, which brings a fair number of changes and innovations compared to the original. The question immediately arises of how players will take this approach, but rest assured that the sequel is also teeming with creepy creatures, Lovecraftian madness and detective investigation.

This time we enter the Sunken City as a new protagonist, Calvin, and the location of legendary Arkham changes too. In search of new knowledge from the world of the unknown, the inexplicable and the unimaginable, Calvin and his partner Faye wander the mysterious Dreamlands.

Since journeys like these carry great risk, Faye suddenly falls into a coma, while Calvin returns to reality with no memories at all. It is up to him to return Faye's soul to her body as he sinks deeper and deeper into the darkness of Arkham, surrounded by monsters and other dangers.



What will immediately catch the eye of fans of the original is the massive change in the core gameplay mechanics. Unlike the first game, the second is more like a typical survival horror, similar to games such as Resident Evil and others that are more linear.

Everything that made the first game interesting has been thrown out, so the sequel is done in the style of other, older Frogwares games with more focus on story, linear progression, detective deduction and solving mysteries.

Right at the start you get to choose between two difficulty levels for the detective part, but neither is very complicated. The other part of the gameplay involves fighting monsters you will clash with at regular intervals. The first and newest enemies are Slithers, big bloody worms that crawl into corpses and turn them into zombies, but if you don't get rid of the parasite, it will find a new host. A weak-point mechanic has been added, so you can, for example, kill the worms faster if you shoot them in their huge, disgusting pustules. Still, I have a problem with how fast and unpredictably they move. In fact the other monsters, mostly Deep Ones returning from the previous game, are also much faster and deadlier than before. In other words, you will definitely have to develop tactics for each enemy individually.

UNLIKE THE FIRST GAME, THE SECOND IS MORE LIKE A TYPICAL SURVIVAL HORROR

There is much less gear and material in the sequel, which is also affected by the chosen difficulty. On the subject of difficulty, interestingly, if you pick the easiest level you get the option to turn on invincibility if you just can't get past a section, which is very nice for people who only want to experience the horror without struggling against huge numbers of enemies. Either way, you will still find ammo, healing items and the materials to craft them, just in much smaller quantities.

I also have to mention the mask, which will





IF YOU POKE YOUR NOSE IN WHEREVER YOU CAN, THE GAME WILL REWARD YOU NICELY

give you the option to survive one moment in which you would otherwise die, which isn't bad if you happen to get completely surrounded by a huge number of zombies. With certain dream crystals you will upgrade the mask, or talent tree as in the first game, while exploring will also turn up extra weapons such as a pump shotgun and a tommy gun.

Although Sinking City 2 is mostly linear, it gives you the option of doing some detective investigation in almost every location, and in the end you always get something useful, be it an inventory upgrade, a new weapon attachment or something else. If you poke your nose in wherever you can, the game will reward you nicely.

The typical Frogwares visual style is still there, but I would point out that they captured the period between 1920 and 1930 very nicely. Although, let's say, it's been seen before, the whole horror atmosphere of a sunken city is masterfully done. The voice acting is excellent and suits every character very well, while the music has mostly given way to sound effects that further heighten the horror experience. By the end of the game you will definitely hate every watery, squelching sound.





Since I got to play a pre-release version, I naturally spotted a few bugs. Fortunately, I ran into very few irritating situations, and none of them blocked my progress through the game.

The only bigger problem is the enemy AI and their overly random movement, which leads to you either missing them or getting suddenly grabbed from too far away (even though you clearly dodged them). In any case, the team has already released the first set of fixes.

I'm aware that the sequel may disappoint fans of the original, but in my opinion Sinking City 2 is an excellent survival horror. If you're a fan of the genre, this is required reading, and if you're an old fan, give the new Sunken City a chance!

THE SEQUEL HAS MUCH LESS GEAR AND MATERIAL, WHICH ALSO DEPENDS ON DIFFICULTY





RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 11 64-bit
CPU: Core i5-14600K / AMD Ryzen 5 7600X
GPU: Nvidia GeForce RTX 4070 Ti / AMD RX7900XT
RAM: 32 GB
SSD/HDD: 70 GB

PLATFORMS:
PC, PS5, Xbox Series X/S

DEVELOPER:
Frogwares

PUBLISHER:
Frogwares

TEST PLATFORM:
PC

PRICE:
49,99€

SCORE 8

- ✓ New story, new city
- ✓ Great sequel, even with the new gameplay
- ✓ Very challenging scenarios
- ✗ Poor balance of resources and enemies
- ✗ The odd bug and poor optimisation
- ✗ Enemy movement is too random

Game provided by:
Wire Tap Media

AUTHOR
Milan Živković



POUR ME THAT RUM AGAIN, I'M BACK AT THE HELM!

Ubisoft apparently paid hundreds of thousands of dollars for professional consulting, training sessions and seasoned fortune tellers just to find out the following - that maybe forcing ideologies nobody cares about doesn't work so well with fans of the Assassin's Creed franchise. So when, caught unprepared at a moment like that, you don't know where to go next, and a change of direction is necessary, what is the safest move? Take the best-selling game in the series and remake it!



Ubisoft, kill me softly...

Black Flag is almost certainly the most popular game in the famous series, as the sales of this remake already show - it is selling twice as well as Assassin's Creed Shadows. And no wonder, because it comes from a time when the franchise was at its peak, untainted and free. When all it had going for it was fun gameplay, the open sea and the pirate life "to the max".

So Resynced is a remake of the original title, but to what extent?

In short, compared to the original, the game is a graphically improved but content-distilled product, which cuts the whole title off from the rest of the series and presents it as a standalone. This is no longer the fourth instalment, part of the narrative of Desmond Miles exploring the lives of his ancestors, but purely the story of Edward Kenway's pirate life, and that's it. All the sequences tied to the main story of the first games have been removed entirely. So now anyone can easily sail into the game, regardless of prior knowledge of the series.

How much the game fundamentally differs from the original could be described in a few sentences. But so that this review doesn't last less than a coffee break, allow me to say a few more words.

The story (once again) takes us to the golden age of piracy, where Edward Kenway, a man for whom money and freedom matter more than any ideals, ends up through a string of circumstances in the conflict between the Assassins and the Templars. Unlike many protagonists who know right away where they belong, Edward needs a little more time to find his place in the world. That's why he feels a little more human than most of the heroes the series later produced.

But Edward isn't the real hero of this title, although you could easily be fooled into thinking so. The star of Black Flag is undoubtedly – the sea! The open water and everything it brings and takes away.

There is something incredibly relaxing about raising the sails, letting your crew break into song and simply sailing. A bit of chasing merchant ships, a bit of exploring islands, and a bit of forgetting the main story exists because you've just spotted another curiosity you have to explore right away.

Looking back to 2013, I can't think of many titles that managed to make the sense of freedom feel this natural. Even back then, playing this title, I would often catch myself heading for one mission and realising an hour later that I had plundered four ships, found two treasures and had a terrifying run-in with a shark along the way, completely forgetting what I had originally planned to do. As they say, not a bad way to spend an afternoon...

Essentially, the game is an almost 1:1 copy of the original, dressed in a more modern coat. The graphics look incomparably better in screenshots because they are, but the character animations often betray their age. Movements in conversations can be stiff, facial expressions can look dated,



THERE IS SOMETHING RELAXING ABOUT RAISING THE SAILS, LETTING YOUR CREW BREAK INTO SONG AND SIMPLY SAILING







RESYNCED DIDN'T TRY TO CHANGE THE ORIGINAL'S DESIGN - ALL THE GOOD AND ALL THE BAD DECISIONS REMAIN UNTOUCHED

and some transitions between animations look as though time has not been kind to them.

It's nothing that will ruin the game, but it is enough to remind you from time to time that this isn't a completely new version after all. From those small details to the gameplay itself, you can strongly feel its age and that the game originally comes from a completely different era and generation of interactive entertainment.

As much fun as Black Flag is for me, I had once again forgotten how much Ubisoft loved tailing missions back then. Sometimes on foot, sometimes by ship, sometimes across half the city, and sometimes all of that in one mission. So here too you can feel that time has largely overtaken something that was once innovative. In a word, the game is pretty retro.

But the naval battles still look fantastic today. Every cannon hit has weight, boarding an enemy ship still puts a smile on your face, and constantly upgrading your beloved vessel drives you to explore further. Back then Ubisoft found a formula that worked so well that a whole game, Skull and Bones, was later practically built from it. Well, built and gone... not to say sunk.

Combat on land has stayed almost identical to the original. The counter system is still fun, but it has been "sharpened" a little, so you now need to be more precise with counters than I remember. True, after a few hours of play it becomes clear that you resolve most fights in almost the same way. That used to be quite enough, but today it also feels a bit dated.

On the other hand, exploration is almost timeless. The Caribbean islands are full of caves, temples, wrecks, secret passages and hidden collectibles. Even when the game uses the familiar formula of a map packed with activities, here it somehow bothers you less than in later titles. Maybe because the world is so

THE NAVAL BATTLES STILL LOOK

FANTASTIC TODAY







charming that you won't mind stepping off the ship once more to see what lies behind the next beach.

This brings us to a conclusion that tells you everything you need to know about the game. Resynced didn't try to change the original's design. All the good and all the bad decisions remain untouched. That means you will run into frustrating missions and dated mechanics, and often wonder how we once accepted all this as completely normal.

At the same time, you will be washed over by waves of nostalgia and the timeless charm with which the game secured its place on the pedestal of the industry's history. You raise the sails again, the crew starts singing, the sun sets over the horizon, and once again you forget every flaw and surrender to the experience.

That is exactly where Black Flag's greatest strength lies. It was never perfect, and it isn't now either. But it has that kind of adventurous spirit that very few games manage to emulate and convey to the player. It's not just about the combat or the story. It's about the feeling of being part of a world that exists even when you are doing nothing in it.

Resynced isn't a remaster that will change the history of the industry or make you believe you are playing a brand-new game. But it is by far the best way to relive one of Ubisoft's best titles ever.

If you adored Black Flag, this is probably the version you've been waiting for. And if you've never played it, you now have the perfect chance to see why so many players still consider it the high point of the entire series.

ALL THE SEQUENCES TIED TO THE MAIN STORY OF THE FIRST GAMES HAVE BEEN REMOVED ENTIRELY

RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 10/11 64-bit
CPU: Intel Core i5-10600K / AMD Ryzen 5 3600
GPU: NVIDIA GeForce RTX 3060 / AMD RX6600XT
RAM: 16 GB
SSD/HDD: 65 GB

PLATFORMS:
PC, PS5, Xbox Series X/S
DEVELOPER:
Ubisoft Singapore
PUBLISHER:
Ubisoft
TEST PLATFORM:
PS5
PRICE:
€59.99

SCORE 8

- ✔ A great sense of pirate adventure
- ✔ Addictive naval battles
- ✔ A living world and interesting characters
- ✘ The original's flaws, including repetitive missions...
- ✘ ...a shallow combat system...
- ✘ ...and a story that wasn't a masterpiece even back then

Game provided by: Ubisoft



REVIEW

AUTHOR
Milan Živković

INK-FECTIOUS FUN!



There are few things sweeter in video games than the moment you earn a reward. That rare, shiny item which, with every one of its stats, seems to say: "Yes, it was worth spending 22 hours searching for me. Your life is not a failure. Quit your job."

Actually, it can put it more nicely than that... Anyway!

When it comes to Splatoon Raiders, I have to admit this game very successfully reminded me of that feeling. Cutting through hordes of enemies for a tiny chance of stumbling on a rare weapon justified every hour I put into this extremely addictive title. But let's not get ahead of ourselves...

Splatoon is a renowned series of multiplayer games in which teams compete for control of an arena. Whoever covers more of the level in their team's colours, or completes a similar task involving painting – wins.

And while this isn't my first encounter with the franchise, I admit a couple of ideas have been going through my head ever since the first title. The one that stood out most was regret that the game is almost entirely a multiplayer experience. Yes, there were a couple of solo options, but nothing that could satisfy a single-player fan like me. That likeable, colourful and goofy world simply seemed to be crying out for an adventure in which a single player sets the pace.

Prayers answered! Because Splatoon Raiders is exactly that – a single-player adventure with only an occasional option for multiplayer.

A likeable plot, plenty of levels, a platforming presentation and heaps of rewards are a winning combination for me, whatever the game. And since I finally got exactly what I had been hoping for for years, I won't lie - I was especially pleased.

The protagonist is a mechanic you create with a modest set of visual options. It is up to them to support a team of treasure hunters heading to a remote archipelago and into the unknown to scout the situation. Things naturally get a little complicated when an army of "salmonids" blocks their way, whose motives are not very clear, and whose design is even less so. Yes, that's a good thing!

In fact, if the game had said the enemies were called "freakazoids", I wouldn't have doubted that choice of name for a second. They are literally creatures from the bottom of the ocean thrown into the world of Mad Max. I especially enjoyed meeting each new enemy and wondering whether this might be the one that would annoy me the most. Anyway...

Through constant upgrades to your base and gear, you paint your way through the imaginative ensemble of caricatures and reach the next treasure. Easy to understand? Absolutely. But at the same time very challenging...



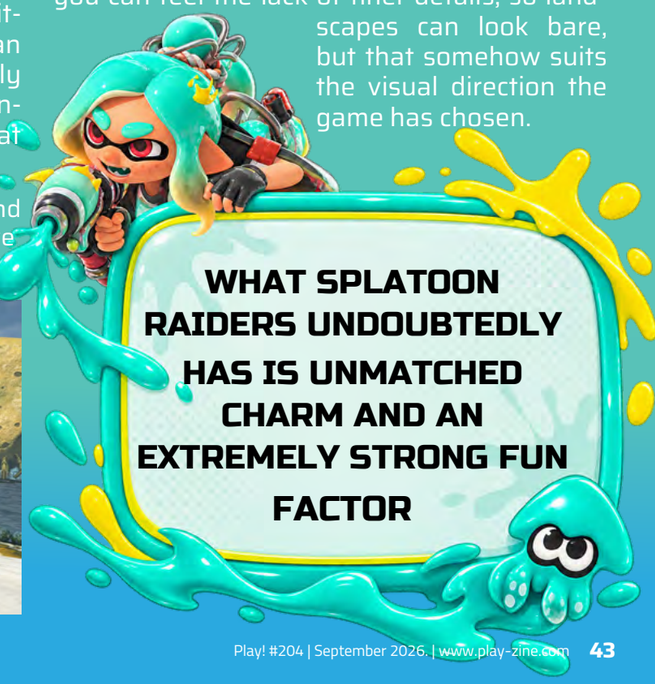
In fact, the whole challenge lies in how fast you want to finish the game and how far you are willing to go. If you rush, the levels will be extremely hard. Slow down a bit, invest time in upgrading your gear, and you'll cut through the slimy armies with paint with great ease.

The game constantly introduces new challenges, so even when you officially finish it, rest assured that at least as much play awaits you again if you want to collect absolutely everything it has to offer. Actually, maybe three times as much, given the level of upgrades that get unlocked.

Levels come in several varieties. There are linear sequences on little islands where you have to reach the goal, but also variants where you choose your own path until you collect enough resources to drill through the crystal from the start of the level.

There are also challenging fights inside small arenas, as well as sequences split into three stages, where a fight against a queen awaits you at the end (I haven't used that word in ages, I'll have to bring it back).

Visually, the game looks very nice whether you play on a TV or in handheld mode. The resolution is sharp and splashing paint has never looked better in this series. At times you can feel the lack of finer details, so landscapes can look bare, but that somehow suits the visual direction the game has chosen.





VISUALLY, THE GAME LOOKS VERY NICE WHETHER YOU PLAY ON A TV OR IN HANDHELD MODE

The fact that the game runs at a stable 60 frames per second is also very significant, because this is a fast action game. What's more, the action can sometimes be so chaotic that even at 60 FPS you can't follow everything that's happening, so I believe any lower frame rate would be a complete disaster.

If you played Donkey Kong Bananza and started digging through the ground for treasure in co-op, I think you have a good chance of following what happens on screen in this game too. Because the action here is sometimes only a little less crowded than in the game with the famous ape. Watch out for adrenaline levels, which can drop sharply after playing. Attention disorder incoming...

Partly because of the chaos and partly because of the design, at times I was reminded of the fantastic Bowser's Fury, especially when I looked around and saw nothing but large expanses of water. The stylistic direction Nintendo has taken with Switch 2 is interesting. Perhaps a little bolder, but brave and different, which I of course welcome.

The animated sequences look great and the sound design deserves praise too, as it rounds off the whole experience. Honestly, I was reminded how good it can be when there is no voice acting and the characters express themselves by mumbling in a made-up language. It fits the whole cartoonish style of the game perfectly, so it's a pretty good choice.

Finally, I would mention the controls, which, as far as I remember, have always been part of the Splatoon series and concern camera control. By default, motion controls are used to move the camera along the Y axis. In other words, you aim up and down by gently tilting the controller, while you move the camera left and right classically, with the analogue stick. This option can be changed separately for TV and handheld play, where in the latter it is definitely preferable to use classic controls so you don't tilt the whole screen and make playing harder. In any





case, both modes are excellent and give you a good sense of control over what's happening on screen.

I played Splatoon Raiders for about 16 hours, which was enough to finish the main game, unlock extra modes and gather a middling range of good weapons. The rest of my time was spent finding and upgrading gear to beat the toughest challenges the game reserves for hardcore players. Spoiler: I still have a long way to go...

Splatoon Raiders doesn't have great depth, nor is it the most sensible or most beautiful game of all time. But what it undoubtedly has is unmatched charm and an extremely strong fun factor. When a game hooks you so much that you catch yourself impatiently waiting to pick up the controller again, that's the moment you realise you have a real gem in front of you. Because that is the whole essence of video games and the interactive entertainment industry.

Not to drag this out any longer, I have some important, slightly messy business to attend to. Cheers!





PLATFORMS:
Nintendo Switch 2

DEVELOPER:
Nintendo EPD

PUBLISHER:
Nintendo

TEST PLATFORM:
Nintendo Switch 2

PRICE:
49,99€

SCORE 8,5

- ✓ Extremely addictive gameplay loop
- ✓ Stable 60 FPS and tight controls
- ✓ Plenty of charm and content
- ✗ Lots of text but a shallow story
- ✗ Action can sometimes be hard to follow
- ✗ Level design is a bit modest

Game provided by: CD Media

REVIEW

AUTHOR
Milan Živković

WHEN ONE APOCALYPSE JUST ISN'T ENOUGH...





More than two years have passed since the release of the great Granblue Fantasy: Relink. And while fans might by now have hoped that some kind of sequel would be announced, what we have is the result of an interesting move by the team. The game gets a massive expansion called Endless Ragnarok, which can be bought separately or as a bundle with the game. Disappointing? That depends on your expectations, but let me take it step by step.

Relink is a game clearly designed to win as many new fans as possible for this fairly young franchise. A likeable story, a colourful world, simple but appealing characters and action on an epic scale were the ingredients the chef put on the table when he started cooking up this treat.

The game follows a band of adventurers on their journey in search of the mythical land of Estalucia. But as usually happens, trouble that suddenly befalls one of their most important members forces the crew off course and into a completely new adventure.

Along the way, a host of interesting locations awaits you, divine battles and an enviable number of animated scenes that are a joy to watch. Telling any story with this quality of production would raise the final impression, regardless of the story's quality.

The game isn't designed as a linear adventure in some huge world. It's more about launching different missions from a home base, where you return after successfully completing a task. You head off to a new location and back – and round again.

It sounds like something that could easily get tiresome, were it not for a genuinely fun story and a huge amount of challenge that easily motivates you to play at least one more mission. Essentially, there is an abundance of side content, and that's where most of the action and the materials for upgrading characters are found.

ENDLESS RAGNAROK BRINGS SIX MORE BRAND-NEW PLAYABLE CHARACTERS

And that is exactly where Endless Ragnarok comes into its own. Once you finish the main story, including the hidden ending, you unlock access to bonus content made up of several important parts.



The first concerns a completely new story. It takes place after the original campaign and introduces a new threat in the form of powerful monsters that appear all over the land and herald the end of the world. While the original game's story was full of animated scenes, here we get a much more modest presentation, which may disappoint players who hoped for a spectacle like the one they first experienced.

But the point of Endless Ragnarok is the challenge, further defined by a mode called "The Conflux". It's a kind of multi-layered endgame challenge that deepens the further you go into the Endless Ragnarok story. Different levels give different materials for progression, so first you will work on forging new weapons,



only to then upgrade them and take them to a whole new level. In other words, The Conflux isn't just a couple of new missions, but a completely new system around which much of the endgame "grinding" is organised.

Endless Ragnarok brings six more brand-new playable characters. And if you played the original game, you know how interesting it is to test the differences between them and devote some time to upgrading them. The new characters fully uphold the tradition of interesting, well-designed characters, each with their own style and way of playing.

If I carried on listing things like this, I could write a whole extra page, and we all know I much prefer it when players still have room to discover the game after reading my review. I'll just add that there is also a new player rank, new "summons" that deepen the combat mechanics, the so-called "primal burst" that further powers up the existing "full burst", as well as higher difficulty levels, weapon upgrades, new missions and "queens", and much more.

THE GAME IS BURSTING WITH GREAT LOCATIONS AND DIVINE BATTLES

Compared to the original game, I'd say that in terms of progression depth Endless Ragnarok adds as much content again as the original had. Which is absolutely incredible for an expansion...

There are also improvements to the base game in terms of the camera and controls, HUD elements and even some graphical touches. So it is now more than clear that this edition is the best possible way to experience Granblue Fantasy Relink and everything it has to offer.

This is a beautiful title. In terms of graphics, animation and a simple but emotional story. And in terms of combat, locations and design. A simple yet deep progression system offers an easy





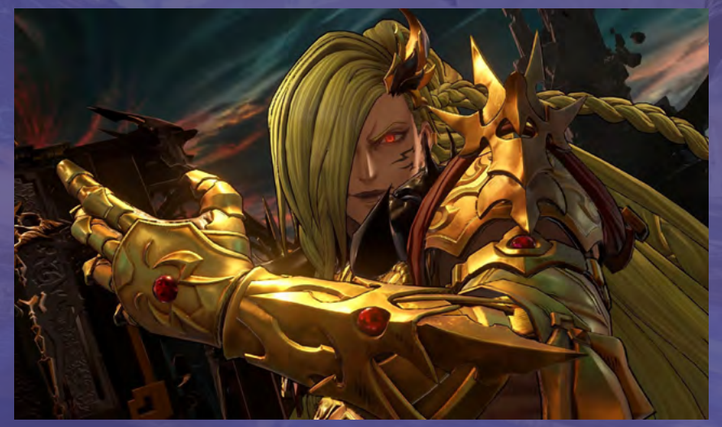
ease-in for more modest players, and more than enough content for those who like to push everything to the limit. For them, I believe there are over 700 hours of content here, if they want to unlock every single weapon and every skill of every character. So, if that's your thing, help yourself...

From players who just want to witness a dazzling, utterly charming epic spectacle, to those who want to spend a year polishing characters and testing skills – Relink will undoubtedly satisfy many appetites. But for the handful who want more freedom, exploration and a story that will keep them awake until next spring, I can't recommend even the Endless Ragnarok edition.

All that's left for me is to recommend the game to both groups of players. So far I've managed to slip a controller into the hands of two people who aren't fans of this type of game. And by all accounts, they haven't regretted it.

Looking for my next victim!

ONCE YOU FINISH THE MAIN STORY INCLUDING THE HIDDEN ENDING, YOU UNLOCK ACCESS TO BONUS CONTENT





RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 11 64-bit
CPU: Intel Core i7-8700 / AMD Ryzen 5 3600
GPU: NVIDIA GeForce RTX 2080 / AMD Radeon RX 6700 XT
RAM: 16 GB
SSD/HDD: 90 GB

PLATFORMS:
PC, PS5, PS4, Nintendo Switch 2

DEVELOPER:
Osaka Cygames

PUBLISHER:
Cygames

TEST PLATFORM:
PS5

PRICE:
€59.99

SCORE 8,9

- ✓ Gorgeously animated adventure
- ✓ Plenty of content, especially with the expansion
- ✓ Fun combat and upgrade system
- ✗ The Endless Ragnarok story is noticeably weaker than the original
- ✗ Most of the content isn't especially accessible
- ✗ Not for fans of exploration and deep narrative

Game provided by: Unturned

REVIEW

AUTHOR
Igor Totić



GOTTA CATCH 'EM ALL... MALEFACTS!

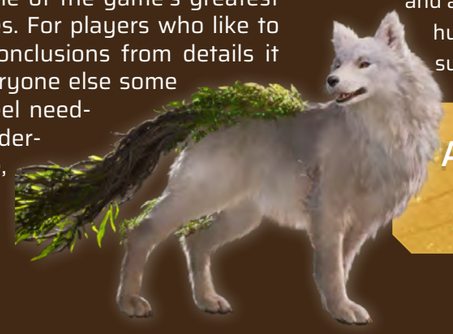
Game Freak has always been known as the Pokémon factory and has never strayed far from that franchise. Players have repeatedly asked them to blink if Nintendo is holding them hostage, because Pokémon games have been getting worse and lower in quality for years. It didn't help that Palworld completely wiped the floor with them and showed that a Pokémon-type game doesn't have to be stale, and that there is room for innovation and freshness. It seems Game Freak took this seriously and decided to embark on a new project to show us they aren't just Pokémon game stampers. So we got Beast of Reincarnation, a third-person action RPG that shows they are talented developers, but still very much in their shell.

Beast of Reincarnation takes us to a future Japan that



nature has almost completely swallowed. Humanity is fighting for survival in a world where the boundaries between nature, monster and human were erased long ago, and at the centre of the story is Emma, a warrior travelling with her unusual canine companion Koo. Their relationship is one of the most important elements of the game and, honestly, one of the reasons the story works better than it might on its own.

The bond between Emma and Koo isn't just decoration. Koo is an integral part of the gameplay, exploration and combat, and the way their cooperation develops gives the adventure a character that's hard to find in classic action games. The world is mysterious and much of the story is revealed through exploration and encounters with its inhabitants, which is at once one of the game's greatest strengths and weaknesses. For players who like to dig into lore and draw conclusions from details it will be a plus, but for everyone else some parts of the story may feel needlessly complicated or underdeveloped. What's more, most cinematics are extremely slow and



stand in complete contrast to the way Emma fights.

At its highest level, Beast of Reincarnation strongly resembles Stellar Blade, Sekiro and Nier, and if you have played any of these games, you will feel a huge similarity to at least one of them. The atmosphere and combat are Stellar Blade and Sekiro, the narrative and pacing are Nier, but unfortunately, those games all do this better than Beast of Reincarnation. Game Freak was inspired, but didn't separate the inspiration from its own idea well enough.

The game can be extremely intense, and then the next moment throw you out of that pace with long exploration sequences or relatively empty locations. That isn't a problem in itself, but the transitions aren't always natural enough. Game Freak wanted to make an RPG and action adventure with lots of exploration and an atmospheric story about the relationship between humans (their souls), technology and animals. It often succeeds, but the overall experience is still some-



inconsistent. With that in mind, it's hard to dispute how striking the world is. A Japan reclaimed by nature provides an excellent basis for level design, where huge trees, ruins of a former civilisation, overgrown buildings and traditional Japanese motifs create a visual identity that stands out from most modern action games. Beast of Reincarnation is definitely not a game you will play only for the graphics, but it's hard not to stop now and then and look around. Unfortunately, that's exactly why combat sometimes feels like a part of the game that didn't get the same amount of attention as the visual design and atmosphere.

Emma is one of those protagonists whose personality isn't revealed through big monologues or explicit explanations, but through what she lacks. She was born with the Blight, a condition that gave her the ability to manipulate plants, but at the same time took away her memories and emotions. Because of that, she is doomed from the very start to a life on the margins of society. People fear her, don't understand her and mostly see her as something to be avoided. As a Sealer, Emma has been taught to use her Blight against the Malefacts, absorbing their power into her own body. Her role is therefore both a weapon and a curse. At the start of the adventure Emma is almost completely emotionally absent; she doesn't have the classic charisma of a hero who wins you over in the first few minutes, nor is she written as someone who constantly explains what she feels, quite the opposite. Her coldness is an important element of the story, which is why finding a way to stop the Blight isn't her only goal; she also gradually uncovers her own identity. Koo is a Malefact, a being that poses a danger to the world and should be Emma's sworn enemy, but their bond is actually the heart of the whole game.

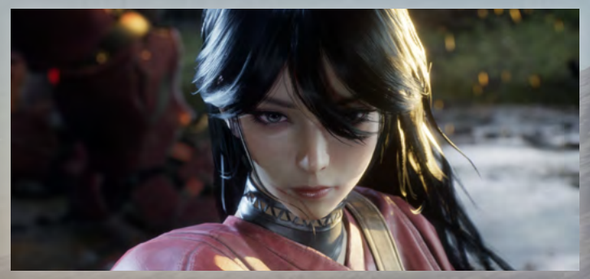
AT ITS HIGHEST LEVEL, BEAST OF REINCARNATION STRONGLY RESEMBLES STELLAR BLADE, SEKIRO AND NIER



Koo is the first real form of closeness Emma gets, and it is through their relationship that the way she sees the world around her starts to change. That's why Emma is much more interesting when you see her as a character in the process of rediscovering emotions, rather than as a classic action hero. This is often also why she won't click with everyone straight away, and sometimes why some people won't like her at all.

Combat is fast and puts a big emphasis on dodging, parrying and correctly timing attacks, while Koo adds extra options and an element of cooperation that gives the system some depth.

Koo shows Game Freak's pedigree, because his



attacks slow down time (like Final Fantasy VII Remake), and you then choose which attack he will perform. As in Pokémon, some enemies are weaker to certain elements and this is clearly shown - it's up to you to pick the best option with the resources Koo has available.

One of the more pleasant surprises in Beast of Reincarnation is the amount of freedom the game gives you when it comes to developing Emma and Koo. Instead of a classic class system, the game uses a combination of attributes, large skill trees, gear and the Spirit Stones system, so progression isn't just about simply increasing damage. Both Emma and Koo have their own attributes and separate skill trees, which means you are actually developing two characters whose systems complement each other.

Parrying with Emma fills the resources needed for

I WAS PLEASANTLY SURPRISED BY THE AMOUNT OF FREEDOM THE GAME GIVES FOR DEVELOPING EMMA AND KOO

using Koo's abilities, while well-chosen Koo skills can open up room for Emma's strongest attacks. That's why choosing skills isn't just a question of what gives the biggest numbers on screen, but also of how you want these two characters to work together as a whole. On top of that come gear and Spirit Stones, which further change stats and the behaviour of certain abilities. The result is a progression system that is much deeper than you would expect at first glance from a game that presents itself primarily as an action title. The number of systems can be a bit confusing at first, especially for players not used to RPG mechanics, but fortunately you don't need a perfectly optimised build to finish the game, so experimenting usually feels more natural than chasing a single "correct" combination (and there is a respec in the game).

The general idea behind the game is to be accessible, so it isn't too hard, even though this genre usually implies a bigger challenge. Some enemies can kill you with one hit, but experienced players won't struggle at all with either the bosses or the trash enemies. Enemy design and boss fights also have their ups and downs - the best encounters require you to really learn enemy behaviour and use all the available mechanics correctly, while the weaker ones can turn into repeating the same patterns without much enjoyment. That's where the difference shows most between a game that is very good and a game that could have been great.

Sadly, the tech doesn't always match the ambitious visuals. On PS5, even when you



picks Performance Mode, Beast of Reincarnation can show noticeable frame rate drops and uneven frame pacing. This is especially irritating during combat, where the game demands precise parries and split-second reactions. When the image stutters for a moment or movement becomes uneven, the problem is no longer just visual and directly affects the sense of control. On PC it's a completely different story, so I played the second half of the game on that version. Frames are consistent, it doesn't look like I'm playing through greasy glasses, the world is wide and visible, and the details on enemies can be made out. Right now, the only optimal platform for this game is PC, although I've seen in Steam reviews that people with weaker machines have plenty of problems.

Beast of Reincarnation isn't a perfect game, nor is its quality even across all areas. The combat has potential that isn't always used, exploration can be empty, and the story sometimes insists too much on mystery. Still, all things considered, it's far from a bad game.

Game Freak tried something new. They weren't entirely successful, but I think Beast of Reincarnation is a great first step. They need to find their own identity so that future games of this type have their own feel rather than being a mix of games we've already played, but at the end of the day, I had a great time (on PC) and gladly recommended the game to people I know love this genre. We initially got a review key for PS5 and the score is lower because of performance, but I still stand by the view that this game deserves a chance to perhaps become something unforgettable in the future.

THE GENERAL IDEA BEHIND THE GAME IS TO BE ACCESSIBLE, SO IT ISN'T TOO HARD





RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 11 64-bit
CPU: Intel Core i7-12700K / AMD Ryzen 7 5800X
GPU: NVIDIA GeForce RTX 3060 / AMD Radeon RX 6700 XT
RAM: 16 GB
SSD/HDD: 45 GB

PLATFORMS:
PC, PS5, Xbox Series X/S
DEVELOPER:
Game Freak
PUBLISHER:
Fictions
TEST PLATFORM:
PS5/PC
PRICE:
54,99€

SCORE 7,5

- ✓ Beautiful, atmospheric world
- ✓ Excellent synergy between Emma and Koo
- ✓ Interesting, deep combat system
- ✗ Poor performance on PS5
- ✗ Uneven pacing
- ✗ The story sometimes gets too complicated

Game provided by: Fortyseven

REVIEW

AUTHOR
Igor Totić



JUST MISSING SPYRO, CRASH AND SEPHIROTH

As I've said many times, Steam Next Fest is the best thing Steam has introduced recently. For those who don't know, three times a year Valve organises and promotes a digital video game festival on its platform, where developers and publishers get the chance to show their upcoming games through shorter or longer demos and betas. Windrose, I am your Beast and others are examples of how these demos can push a game out of the sea of indie games to the surface and onto your wishlist. Duskfade is one of the games that caught my eye during the last Next Fest, and I'm glad I spotted it.

There are games that try to bring back the feeling of another era, and there are those that do it so openly they almost become time capsules. Duskfade belongs to the second group. Weird Beluga has made a game that clearly loves the era of PlayStation 2 3D platformers, but doesn't approach it only through its visual style. At its core are ideas reminiscent of Jak and Daxter, Ratchet & Clank and Kingdom Hearts, with more modern action elements built on top of them, and a story that tries to be more emotional than you would expect from this kind of genre.



The game begins with a tragedy involving Allira, the sister of the protagonist you play, Zirian. A mysterious tower with a huge clock ticking at its top rises in the middle of the city, wraps the whole world in darkness and binds every zone with golden chains. With his mechanical little bird Cuckoo, Zirian sets off on an adventure to save his sister, understand what is happening and bring light back to his world. But this adventure comes with heavy themes such as regret, despair and death, all wrapped in a deeper mystery about ancient magicians, the Clockmakers, who are somehow part of the whole problem. At first glance, this is a very familiar setup: a young hero must save someone close and along the way become what he wasn't ready to be at the start. The problem is that Duskfade shows almost all the cards up its sleeve very early on.

The story is better, however, when it focuses on the relationship between Zirian and Allira than when it tries to explain the world's wider mythological framework. Their relationship gives the adventure emotional weight and is the reason the journey works even when the plot itself is quite predictable. Duskfade is about loss, facing what we can't change and the need to move on, while the tower and the eternal night work as very direct metaphors for being trapped in the past. The idea itself isn't particularly new, but the game manages to thread it through almost every part of its design.

This also shows one of Duskfade's biggest ambitions. This isn't a game that only wants to tell you a story about loss through dialogue and cinematics. Moving forward is literally the game's basic principle: Zirian jumps, dashes, uses a hook to swing, slides, grinds on rails and later combines different abilities in increasingly demanding sequences. From the start, the team stressed that "flow" is one of the key design principles, meaning the sense that actions follow one another without breaking the rhythm.

And movement is probably the best part of



DUSKFADE HAS EVERYTHING YOU'D EXPECT FROM A MODERN ACTION PLATFORMER





Duskfade. The controls are fast and intuitive, and the game gradually (perhaps too gradually) introduces new abilities so the player is never buried under lots of mechanics. Movement mechanics aren't just for getting from point A to point B. Every new ability changes the way you see familiar spaces and opens up the option of returning to previously visited areas. That's why Duskfade works best when it makes you move, not when it makes you stand and fight. The platforming feels like a game that wants to be fast and playful, while the level design is open enough for exploration to make sense. The hub zone, Tick Town, connects different parts of the adventure, and through it you unlock new options, NPC activities and access to extra content. Collectibles aren't just decoration, since exploring side paths is often the best way to find the resources you need for upgrades.

Combat is a more complicated story. On paper, Duskfade has everything you'd expect from a modern action platformer: combos, dodging, special attacks, locking on to enemies and various abilities. Especially interesting is the perfect dodge, after which time slows down and opens up room for a counterattack. This gives combat an extra dimension and occasionally produces very satisfying moments. Still, the basic attacks are fairly simple at first, and combat doesn't always manage to keep the same level of quality as the platforming. Enemies often don't have sufficiently varied behaviour patterns, and some attacks aren't always easy to read.

As new abilities unlock, combat gets more interesting, but it never reaches the depth its best systems might suggest. The addition of a heavy attack that works against certain enemies, as well as Cuckoo's combat abilities, gradually expand the arsenal, but the basic structure stays fairly simple. Also, lock-on is very clumsily done, so I relied more on running in the enemy's direction than actually locking on to them.

Boss fights try to strike a compromise between these two worlds. They usually aren't just classic fights against big enemies, but combine attacking with platforming and using the space around the arena. After you weaken the boss, you often have to move quickly around the environment, destroy certain objects or use your abilities to complete the next phase. The idea is good because it makes the player use their full arsenal, although the structure of some boss fights sometimes repeats itself too much.

So Duskfade isn't a masterpiece that will change the genre, but it is a very charming game that understands why classic 3D platformers have remained so loved. Its greatest value isn't in bringing something completely new, but in the way it combines old ideas with modern movement systems and a more emotional narrative. If you go in expecting a deep RPG story or a complex action system, you will probably be a little disappointed. If you want a well-designed, relatively compact adventure platformer with an interesting world, excellent movement and a story that, despite its clichés, has something to say about loss and growing up, Duskfade is much easier to recommend. »»





MOVEMENT IS PROBABLY THE GAME'S BEST PART

"FLOW" IS ONE OF THE KEY PRINCIPLES OF GAMEPLAY



RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 10/11 64-bit
CPU: Intel i7-9700 / AMD Ryzen5 2600X
GPU: : Nvidia RTX2060 / AMD 5700
RAM: 16 GB
SSD/HDD: 20 GB

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

DEVELOPER:
Weird Beluga

PUBLISHER:
Fireshine Games

PRICE:
29,99€

TEST PLATFORM:
PC

SCORE 8

- ✔ Phenomenal movement
- ✔ Beautiful world
- ✔ Pure nostalgia
- ✘ Combat is clumsy and often boring
- ✘ Predictable story

Game provided by:
JF Games

REVIEW

AUTHOR
Igor Totić

MORTAL SHELL II

DEATH, CARDIO, CARNAGE

Elden Ring has a special place in my heart, since it was the first FromSoft game I actually finished (on every platform, flex). I somehow leaned more towards other games of this type such as Lies of P, Khazan, Wuchang and others, but none of them scratched that Elden Ring itch of free exploration, surprises and epic moments – until I played Mortal Shell II.

The first Mortal Shell didn't win me over at all. The game was pure jank, in the truest sense of the word. I didn't like the mechanics (especially the hardening system), the combat, the exploration, absolutely nothing won me over. That's why I skipped the Mortal Shell II announcement like a weather forecast for Finland. Then the game started chasing me from all sides, on Steam and online, so I decided to download and try the beta shortly before release, just to see what the hype was about. And by Undermether, I would have regretted not trying it.

You play as the Harbinger, a mysterious being able to take over the bodies of dead warriors, and your task is tied to finding lost ova (eggs) and returning them to Marrow Keep (the game's main hub). The world has been destroyed by the presence of the Undermether and by events that left behind religious fanatics, grotesque creatures and the remains of former civilisations. As the Harbinger, you take over the bodies of dead warriors (Shells), and through them you get different abilities, playstyles and options for making builds. During the game you have to find all the Shells to unlock them, and there are eight in total. At the start, the game takes you through a short tutorial explaining the basics and how Shells work, gives you the location of the first two Shells, which are relatively close to the Hub, and then simply lets you loose down a river of free-form gameplay.

If you've played Souls games, you already know how this



works. Most of the story lies between the lines, in item descriptions, conversations and the world design itself. Mortal Shell II is much more interested in asking you a question than in giving you an answer straight away. Who is the Harbinger really? What do the ova represent? What is the nature of the Undermether, and why are the bodies you use so important? The answers exist, but the game expects you to find them yourself.

This works better than it might sound, primarily because the Shells are both a mechanic and part of the narrative. Each Shell represents a former person, a dead warrior whose body you now use as your own. The more you explore and invest in a particular Shell, the more you learn about its past. In this way, character development isn't just a question of stats, but a process of getting to know the person whose body you use as a weapon. Since the whole setting is pretty dark, these stories don't end happily at all.

And the Shell system is exactly the heart of the whole game. Instead of building one character who can become anything, Mortal Shell II makes you think about what kind of warrior you want to be. Different Shells have their own abilities, skill trees, passive bonuses and playstyles, and the differences are big enough that switching Shells really changes how you approach combat. One may be built around endurance and direct confrontation, while another rewards a more aggressive or specialised playstyle. I used Proxima for about 80% of the game, a beautifully, beautifully, beautifully designed Shell (if you know, you know).

Besides her great look and a very nice backstory, Proxima is the mistress of fast play and close encounters with enemies. She has a biosampler, a hook, which she uses to pull herself towards bigger enemies or pull smaller ones towards her, so you can either isolate a fight or throw yourself straight into the chaos. Paired with the Axatanas (two katanas that can merge into a big axe during heavy attacks), I felt like an unstoppable sexy ninja cutting down everything in her path.

THE SHELL SYSTEM IS THE GAME'S HEART





THE TEAM HAS MADE IMMENSE PROGRESS IN WORLD DESIGN

As I progressed, I unlocked other Shells too and couldn't decide whether to switch, because Proxima was so much fun at that point, but the other Shells were tempting as well. For example, Gragu is a berserker who can wind up a punch and blow enemies into a red mist of blood, while the monk Smert (a lot of our people worked on the game and it shows) can freeze enemies and pile up damage before time runs out. In the end I settled on Genessa. She isn't a classic Shell (I won't spoil why) and her mechanics revolve around clones she can send at enemies – like the Diablo IV Necromancer. Paired with a huge scythe, I very easily handled most challenges and bosses.

Mortal Shell II drops the stamina bar (and loses nothing in challenge or difficulty), which is a pretty bold move for a soulslike. You can attack and dodge without the classic endurance limit, so combat is much more aggressive and dynamic.



That doesn't mean the game has become a mindless hack-and-slash. Attacks have weight and you can't simply cancel every animation to save yourself when you realise you've made a mistake. That's why the rhythm of combat is so interesting. You can dodge an enemy attack and immediately counter, but if you misjudge the situation, the enemy will punish you. It works especially well when you have several enemies around you, because the game doesn't let you rely entirely on one pattern. You need to judge when to attack, when to back off and when to use one of your special abilities.

The return of the Harden mechanic gives combat extra identity. Instead of classic blocking, you can temporarily "petrify" your body and absorb an attack. In the sequel this mechanic is tied to the Seal system, which let the developers integrate it into the wider build system. On top of that, Resolve fills up with successful melee attacks and is used for special attacks and various ranged weapons. In this way the game actually rewards aggression: the better you play in close combat, the more options you get to expand on it. From the start I completely ignored the Harden system and used the classic parry, which suits me much better, and I can say I didn't regret it.

That's why weapons are much more than stat changes. Besides classic swords and heavy weapons, there are some completely wacky options, including weapons that seem to have been added just to make the game more fun. It's especially charming that even a lute can become part of your arsenal. Mortal Shell II occasionally shows that it isn't interested in being a completely serious Souls clone, and it's exactly those moments that give the game character.



Enemies are mostly varied and have different attack patterns, but in the second half of the game you start to notice certain enemy types being recycled. Boss fights are much more memorable, with imaginative design and attacks that have clear patterns, and the best encounters require you to use everything you've learned while exploring the world. Not every boss fight is perfect, but the best of them are exactly what a soulslike should be - a brutal, tense and extremely satisfying experience when you finally win. Enemy placement is often too dense, so sometimes you end up in a fight with a much bigger horde than you planned. It doesn't help that the aggro range is huge and they can spot you from far away. In most cases, if a crowd surrounds you, even of the weakest enemies, there's no saving you.

The team has made immense progress in world design. The original was relatively compact and often claustrophobic, while the sequel uses interconnected areas that offer much more room for exploration. Still, this isn't a huge open world trying to copy Elden Ring. Mortal Shell II is much denser; areas are designed with more passages, shortcuts, hidden locations and reasons to come back later. That makes exploration one of the game's strongest aspects. You don't explore just to find another group of enemies; the world hides new Shells, Tarstones, weapons, resources and information about its history. Often, simply finding a hidden room is reward enough, because it makes you rethink a part of the world you have already passed through.

Of course, not everything is perfect.

Navigation and exploration can often be frustrating, especially since Beacons (Sites of Grace from ER) are very scarce and after dying you will often have to run marathons back to your corpse or the boss. Although the map is beautifully designed, the game is often vertically oriented, so sometimes you don't know which level your corpse is on or where you actually need to go next. That would be an okay part of the whole exploration experience, but the lack of spawn locations first made me nervous and later irritated, because I felt I was wasting more time than actually progressing. Elden Ring, for example, has very subtle design that tells you which direction the next Grace is in. But Elden Ring has a linear story with non-linear exploration. In Mortal Shell II you aren't tied to anything - your goal is to find a certain number of ova, close the corrupted gates and then head into the linear final zone (a legacy dungeon, as they say).

I USED PROXIMA FOR 80% OF THE GAME



So it makes little sense for the game to tell you “where to go”, but it would help if it showed how close the next Beacon is, or if there were more of them. Several times I fled enemies on a sliver of HP hoping to stumble on an undiscovered Beacon, which rarely happened.

Besides being beautiful, the game also works very well technically. I didn’t have a single crash in my 40-odd hours of play, but I did have a pile of bugs. Some examples: I couldn’t activate a button, my weapon disappeared from my hands while the animations stayed and I did no damage, falling through textures and the like. The worst bug I had, very consistently right to the end, was the behaviour of Genessa’s clones. When I activated them, they would either attack the enemy I had marked, randomly hit a rock off to the side, or stand still. I didn’t have this problem with bosses because there is only one target, but out in the world I really struggled.

In the end, Mortal Shell II is one of those games where the sequel has justified its existence. Cold Symmetry didn’t just increase the amount of content; it improved the original’s core idea and gave it room to really work. The Shell system is more interesting, combat is faster and deeper, exploration is much more meaningful and builds offer enough room for experimentation.

Most importantly, the game no longer gives the impression of a “cheaper Dark Souls” with one good idea. Mortal Shell II now has its own identity. It isn’t perfect and still has problems with balance, navigation and some parts of its design, but when the combat clicks, when you find a Shell that suits your style and start connecting different systems into your own build, it becomes clear how much potential the original had.

That’s why Mortal Shell II is much more than a solid sequel. It is a game that shows how a soulslike can take a familiar formula, change a few of its basic rules and still stay true to what players love about the genre. If the first Mortal Shell was proof that Cold Symmetry had a good idea, Mortal Shell II is proof that it now knows what to do with it.



RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 10/11 64-bit
CPU: Intel Core i7-10700K / AMD Ryzen 5 3600
GPU: NVIDIA GeForce RTX 2060 SUPER / AMD Radeon RX 6600
RAM: 16 GB
SSD/HDD: 70 GB

PLATFORMS:
PC, PS5, XBOX SERIES X/S

DEVELOPER:
Cold Symmetry

PUBLISHER:
Playstack

TEST PLATFORM:
PC

PRICE:
49,99€

SCORE 8,8

- ✓ Much better than the first game
- ✓ Exploration and the world
- ✓ Combat
- ✗ Too few respawn locations
- ✗ Enemy placement and range
- ✗ A fair number of (fixable) bugs

Game provided by:
Playstack

MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE GAME NO LONGER GIVES

THE IMPRESSION OF A “CHEAP DARK SOULS”



REVIEW

AUTHOR
Lazar Drašković

ON THE WINGS OF THE EAST WIND

Tired of dying without much meta-progression in deck builders like Slay The Spire, Monster Train and similar games? Driven mad by the constant fear that one tiny mistake can lose you the whole run? An almost total absence of any narrative? Worlds Upon The Wind is the game for you!

Many modern deck builders expect you to make decisions methodically and with surgical precision, where mistakes are usually fatal. Worlds Upon The Wind completely defies this kind of gameplay and lets you take your time with decisions, with relatively mild penalties.

The game's story certainly won't win any awards, but it serves as a solid foundation for everything that happens. Cast as some kind of exalted being, your goal after an unknown apocalypse is to put the world back together and help people rebuild civilisation.

Worlds Upon The Wind starts with a short tutorial that teaches you the basic rules. In each new run, which the game calls an expedition, it sends you to a patch of land and asks you to help the people stranded there to rebuild homes. At the top of the screen are inspiration points, which effectively represent your life energy, the resources the village needs in the current expedition, relics that grant a variety of unique effects, the quest log and so on.

When building a village you need to meet its resource demand, otherwise failure drains inspiration. The start of an expedition is pretty easy and requires a minimal number of resources: Food, Safety, Beauty, Harmony, Research, Adventure and Productivity, each represented by its own symbol. Once you circle the spot that yields the most needed resources, which also marks where the village will be built, the game shows how many resources, and which, it will give if its requirements are met.









THE COMBINATION OF GAMEPLAY AND AUDIO-VISUAL PRESENTATION GIVES AN ALMOST MEDITATIVE FEELING

To fulfil a requirement, you need to fill specific symbols. For example, building a village requires ten Food. The chosen patch of land gives the same amount of this resource if you fill the field with the empty green symbol. That means you need to place a card with the same symbol on that field for it to be satisfied and yield resources (in this case ten Food). However, it isn't always that simple.

The deck contains cards that can carry seven different symbols, three basic and four advanced, the so-called Glyphs, each representing an element. The starting fields, which usually yield the fewest resources, typically require one or a few basic symbols. Some can reveal an extra branch that usually asks for a specific combination of all possible symbols, but also brings a much bigger and more varied yield.

The starting hand consists of five cards and you can draw five new ones only once more, discarding the rest of your hand, before construction of a given village ends. Didn't meet the required quota? You lose inspiration, which, if it drops to zero, ends the expedition on the current patch of land.

Unlike many deck builders, a bigger card pool is often better, because new cards usually have several different symbols and can be used as wildcards, while the starting deck doesn't have this advantage. Cards also often have extra effects, which can be activated with a right click instead of placing them on a resource field. This system often leads to a dilemma: use a very limited number of cards to meet the quota, or keep manipulating your hand to secure as wide a choice of fields as possible?

The gameplay is further spiced up by unique events, illustrated with real historical artworks from ancient Japan, each telling its own story in the form of a dilemma. They are resolved by choosing one of four answers, which usually have specific requirements such as cards and resources. There are about 200 of these events, which adds nicely to replay value.





After building three villages on the current patch of land, so-called exploration kicks in, which widens the available area for further development and reveals bigger resource deposits on it. Exploration offers unique events that follow a structure similar to the others, except that they always require filling card symbols to fulfil one of the four answers.

After building three more villages, you need to place a castle and connect them. This is where the pink diamond cards come in, and you need as many of them in your deck as possible to connect all the villages, otherwise you lose a large amount of inspiration. Of course, each additional village increases the resource requirement, and Japanese demons also appear, usually bringing negative consequences for construction.

After each completed expedition you get inscription points, which can be spent on crafting new cards or buying some of the many passive upgrades unlocked as the main story progresses. You can also take some of the many pets along on later expeditions!

The sound and art style are very obviously inspired by Japanese culture, and the whole combination of gameplay and audio-visual presentation gives an almost meditative feeling. Even if an expedition fails, there are no big penalties, because every completed task reveals a new piece of the narrative, while inscription points add to a sense of constant progress no matter what.

DESPITE THE LOSSES, THE SENSE OF PROGRESS IS EVER-PRESENT

As an extra bonus, Worlds Upon The Wind offers a special mode where you can learn Japanese characters, the so-called kanji, since every card is represented by one that stands for its name. Although it isn't the best way to learn for those without at least some basic knowledge, the very fact that the developer bothered to implement this option is more than positive.



The game isn't without its flaws, though. Performance sometimes drops, the odd bug crops up, and RNG can ruin an expedition. On the other hand, the developer





THE GAME OFFERS A SPECIAL MODE WHERE YOU CAN LEARN JAPANESE CHARACTERS, THE SO-CALLED KANJI

constantly releases new patches and is willing to help and listen to players' criticism. He is active on Steam and Discord, a quality that sadly many developers lack. Given that the game isn't very well known, his enthusiasm is a big plus in my eyes.

If I count Slay The Spire, which is probably the pinnacle of deck builders, Worlds Upon the Wind is definitely in second place for me in this genre. The price is also pretty laughable, given that I spent over 80 hours in the game last month, and I will certainly keep playing it for years. Whenever I want to relax a bit and spend half an hour to an hour with a game, it will definitely be Worlds Upon The Wind.



RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 10 64-bit
CPU: Anything recent
GPU: Anything recent
RAM: 4 GB
SSD/HDD: 4 GB

PLATFORMS:
PC
DEVELOPER:
Max Shawabkeh
PUBLISHER:
Max Shawabkeh
TEST PLATFORM:
PC
PRICE:
9,75€

SCORE 9

- ✓ Extremely relaxing
- ✓ Art based on real Japanese works
- ✓ A chance to practise Japanese writing
- ✗ RNG can sometimes really ruin everything
- ✗ Noticeable FPS drops at certain moments

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REVIEW

AUTHOR
Nikola Savić

WHEN THE ALTERS GET TOO ALTERED



The first big expansion for The Alters confirmed to me once again that all things really are relative, and that the only measure of how good something is, is the reference point we take as our starting value. So Jan the Scientist, the alter of the original Jan who is the main star of this expansion and who was probably the most irritating and arrogant of all the alters in the original game, is now probably the most reasonable and open of all the alters in the expansion. Because in The Last Variable, he is the base from which all the new alters spring.

Confused by this first paragraph? Probably because you haven't played the base game, in which case I recommend reading my review for Play!Zine from last year. We won't dwell too much here on the basic story and gameplay setup of the first game, since that's not our topic, but here it is in brief. In the first game you played as Jan, an ordinary labourer who somehow ended up on one of humanity's most important space missions. The mission goes wrong on landing and he is the only survivor.

Being probably the least skilled of all the crew members, his first thought was that the mission had completely failed. However, he soon manages to set up a base with the help of mission control on Earth. It turns out that the base's quantum computer can make replicas of people, the titular alters, which aren't pure copies but variations on "what if". The machine runs complex calculations and creates alternative versions of you, as if you had made different decisions at certain stages of life.

One of those variations was Jan the Scientist, who at the end of the original story is the only one to stay on the planet instead of escaping, because he wants to keep studying its phenomena, specifically the incomprehensible Oasis teeming with life



in the middle of a radiation-ravaged planet. And it is exactly that story that our DLC continues.

Decades after all the Jans left at the end of the original story, we find a very old Jan the Scientist who, on his deathbed, gives instructions to you, his identical copy (not an alter, but an actual copy of Jan the Scientist). It turns out the aged Jan the Scientist was very diligent and put enormous effort into these fifty years. He built a new underground base, assembled a new quantum computer, left behind extensive research and Jan Bot, who will be a kind of instructor for you.

And most importantly, he built a cryochamber for hibernation, where you can sleep through the terrible solar storms that last 13 years at a time without ageing (which he didn't manage, since he built the chamber near the end of his life). It is now up to us to continue his work and uncover the secrets of the Oasis.

Unlike the original game, where the story is split into chapters, with a set number of days to escape the solar storm and reach the next point (back then the base was a giant wheel on the surface), here we are fixed in one place, because our base is underground. In that sense, The Last Variable has some metroidvania elements, since you will often come across inaccessible areas that open up over time as you progress and unlock ways to reach them.

So, what's the gameplay like? At first, more or less everything is as it was. On one hand you develop your base and make sure everything is as it should be, that the base works, that the necessary blocks are there, you research what you need and so on, while on the other you go outside, explore unknown areas, gather resources, set up mining and material extraction systems, discover new paths, and round again. So in that sense it's more or less the same.

JAN THE SCIENTIST IS THE MAIN ALTER IN THIS EXPANSION

THE NEW GAMEPLAY MECHANICS ARE MOSTLY TIED TO THE OASIS, WHILE THE REST ARE MORE OR LESS THE SAME AS IN THE BASE GAME



The main new gameplay mechanics are mostly tied to the Oasis. The map is divided into zones you unlock over time, and your ultimate goal is to examine how the Oasis manages to stay untouched in the middle of a catastrophic solar storm, after which you will want to turn the whole map into an Oasis with the help of new tools.

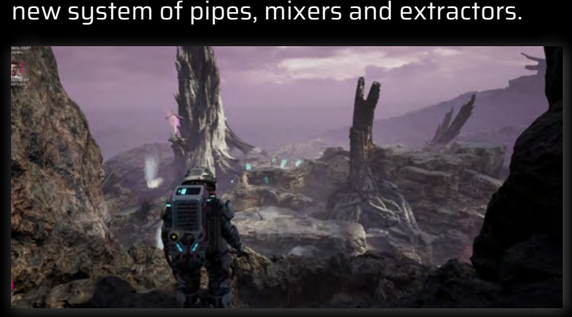
There are also new resources you discover by exploring the Oasis, which become more and more complex as you progress. You will have to use so-called "mixers" to create new compounds you need to progress further, unlock new technologies and build structures that will turn the whole map into a green Oasis and let you understand what is going on there.

Now comes the part where I give my opinion. Unfortunately, it won't be very positive. At first, precisely because the game is basically "more of the same", I really enjoyed it and had the same urge to explore and dig around an alien planet and uncover its secrets as I did when playing the original story. However, cliché as it may sound, the DLC doesn't have the magic of the original. Let's start with the alters, who are interesting in essence, but nowhere near as deep and complex as in the original.

One of the many things I loved about The Alters is that it wasn't just a survival/base-building game, but a very complex story carried above all by its characters, where through his alters Jan actually comes to know himself, his flaws and virtues, and so learns to love himself. It was a kind of introspection through conversations with versions of himself that never came to be.

In The Last Variable, the new alters are somehow washed out and much less complex, and certainly much worse written than in the original. It's as if the main point was for them to look visually interesting, serve a gameplay purpose and be "quirky", but they are completely flat as personalities. I think that's a great shame, because honestly that was the best part of the first game when it comes to writing.

I could have somehow forgiven that if the developers hadn't completely messed up the gameplay. As I said, in the first half, where we explore and slowly progress, the game is relatively fun and interesting, because exploration was the other thing I loved about the original. However, at some point the main new gameplay mechanic takes centre stage, and that is combining various resources with the help of a new system of pipes, mixers and extractors.



Not only is it poorly explained how this works, it is also very tiresome and just complicates things needlessly, turning the second part of the game into a very unpleasant and exhausting experience. I get the feeling the goal was to complicate things for the sake of complication. Don't get me wrong, I don't mind complicated things in themselves, but complicated things that are simply bad and kill the enjoyment of the game. That is exactly this





system of pipes and mixing all those new resources.

Unfortunately, this isn't something you can avoid, because it is the main mechanic in the second part of the game that you have to get through to progress, since that is how you make the resources you need for research and the structures required to continue the story.

And as the cherry on this rather unpalatable cake of bitter pills, the very story that makes you try to push through this boring, tiresome gameplay and force yourself to finish the game ends up unfinished and unexplained. If you're longing for answers, you'll be disappointed there too.

I'm sorry to have to write this way about this DLC, because The Alters was one of my favourite games of 2025, one I enjoyed in every sense. It represents something truly new that combined elements of survival-crafting games with quality narrative elements, a very bold experiment that paid off for the developers. Unfortunately, I can't say the same for The Last Variable. I advise you to try it only if you really want more The Alters material, but there's a good chance you'll be disappointed.

SADLY, THE DLC LACKS THE MAGIC THAT THE ORIGINAL HAD





RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 10/11 64-bit
CPU: AMD Ryzen 7 5800X / Intel Core i7-8700K
GPU: AMD Radeon RX 6600 XT / NVidia GeForce RTX 2070
RAM: 16 GB
SSD/HDD: 50 GB

PLATFORMS: PC, PS5, Xbox Series X/S
DEVELOPER: 11 Bit Studios
PUBLISHER: 11 Bit Studios
TEST PLATFORM: PC
PRICE: 74,99€

SCORE 6,5

- ✓ A visually beautiful experience
- ✓ The first half of the game
- ✗ The pipe mechanics kill the fun
- ✗ In the second half the DLC becomes very tiresome
- ✗ Exploration isn't as exciting as in the base game

REVIEW

AUTHOR
Nikola Aksentijević

GENSHIN WITHOUT THE GACHA



DragonSword: Awakening is an interesting example of a gacha game turned into a premium action RPG without microtransactions. The change still shows in the mechanics that are part of the original design, in how the game handles characters, gear, currencies and progression. None of the things that make the free-to-play model frustrating are here, so there is no gambling, no rolling for characters and none of the typical timers that would make the experience significantly worse.

The story begins with Lut, a character whose journey takes him from a simple priest to a member of a mercenary group. After a shipwreck he ends up on an island, with a central mystery about his own identity and his connection to the dragons that are an important part of this fantasy world. The narrative is mostly at a decent level, although it isn't something that will hold your attention. The central mystery around the dragons and the world itself is enough to keep things moving, and many of the main story chapters are satisfying, but, as is often the case with games like this, the pacing of the narrative is often a problem. Running between locations will be a big part of your experience, where the balance between gameplay and story can be a bit uneven and very loose, with moments where you will often spend half an hour in conversations with very little combat and exploration. Fortunately, the group of characters you lead keeps things fresh and intriguing, with a couple of moments you'll remember even after finishing the game.

PROGRESSION CARRIES THAT OLD GACHA DNA, BUT MONETISATION ISN'T PRESENT IN THE GAME



Outside the story, you will spend most of your time exploring DragonSword's open world, packed with side quests, materials for your gear, dungeons and the like. Everything you could expect from an RPG in every sense. The world initially seems smaller than you'd expect, but it opens up as the story progresses and is full of really good level and environment design, as well as verticality and hidden things. Since you are part of a mercenary guild, this part is a pretty good, if well-worn, framework for high fantasy stories. Some missions will be a bit dull because they come down to typical fetch quests, such as deliveries, gathering resources or minor bosses you'll take on for much-needed money and resources.

Dungeons are pretty fun and require you to prepare your party, where besides the level needed for combat, you will have to keep an eye on the composition and synergy of your characters in a very similar way to Genshin Impact. There is also a light multiplayer component where you can invite friends on these adventures to hunt monsters and materials together. Although it is definitely not the main focus of the game, it's certainly nice to see a co-op component.

Combat is what DragonSword handles best. Each character has their own set of skills, and the basic combat system involves attacking enemies and then breaking their defence meter through combinations of your characters' skills, where aerial combat and combos play a prominent role. Some of your characters' abilities aren't always available and can only be triggered on, say, stunned enemies, or after triggering a combo with another member of your team, ultimately supporting the strategy of building your ideal team and working out which characters work best together for this.



Switching characters is seamless. You can swap them during combat, while in some situations special characters can join certain fights or situations. The elemental attack system is the core here, so, as in similar gacha titles (although this isn't one of them, I'll point out again), you have fire, ice, poison and so on, which together lead to new effects and a huge jump in the damage you deal to enemies, with additional status effects.

Combat does have a couple of problems that come up relatively often. Although it is very responsive and you can dodge attacks within the limits of your stamina, some attacks can feel less impactful than they should. Visual clarity can be a problem in very flashy environments, since a lot can often happen on screen at once, so I often had trouble understanding what exactly I was looking at. The camera is the biggest enemy here, though, as you can often take a hit from attacks that are hard to see or identify. Boss enemies are very fun and have unique attacks that demand much more attention and caution. Although the game generally isn't brutally hard, it can often keep you on your toes.

Progression carries that old gacha DNA, although monetisation itself isn't present in the game. Experience books and materials are the primary methods you'll use to level up your characters, while the main "adventure rank" effectively controls progression and difficulty in the open world. You get characters through main and side quests, and you use your "cards" to choose whom you want to unlock without gambling, while some characters are unlocked naturally through the main story. The full roster counts no fewer than nineteen characters with unique personalities, abilities and combat roles.

Building up your gear is a bit more complicated. You can find it through classic loot dropped by enemies, and you can also craft it yourself. The main gear stats can be manipulated, but the extra effects are completely random and can turn into a grind for the ideal sword, ARPG-style. The grind is much more noticeable later in the game, where currency can become much harder or scarcer to obtain, especially since you are developing several characters at once, and this is one of the systems that didn't translate best from the gacha model into a full-blooded single-player premium RPG. Even so, progression is much better and more generous than what you could expect from a gacha game, and often a single dungeon run will yield enough resources to upgrade your character.

Visually, the world is beautiful and the amount of detail is impressive, especially for an independent studio. The animations are excellent too, primarily in combat, where attacks and movement are very fluid. Not everything is perfect - reflections in water and a couple of environmental elements can look a bit dated, and





COMBAT IS THE MAIN ASSET, WHERE SYNERGY AND COORDINATION WITH YOUR PARTY SHINE BRIGHTEST



the lack of ray tracing support doesn't help correct these shortcomings. The CGI cinematics are very polished and look high-budget given the price and the size of this studio. As for the sound, the soundtrack mostly consists of the generic orchestral score that adorns many Asian anime games and doesn't leave much of an impression, but it certainly serves its purpose. The voice acting is mostly decent, with an accompanying Korean dub that I'd say is a class above the English one.

DragonSword: Awakening is a special project and in my opinion it's one of the best things that could have happened for fans of the anime RPG genre. Nobody disputes the quality of many gacha games at the core of their gameplay and design, but we all know the problem of aggressive monetisation, which not only causes gambling addiction but also spoils the experience for most casual players. DragonSword is everything you wanted from a title in this genre, just without microtransactions. A warm recommendation if you are a fan of anime or simply of a good action fantasy RPG, especially at this price.

THE BALANCE BETWEEN GAMEPLAY AND STORY CAN BE A BIT UNEVEN





RECOMMENDED PC SPECS

OS: Windows 10 64-bit
CPU: Intel i7-9700F
GPU: NVIDIA GeForce RTX 3060
RAM: 16 GB
SSD/HDD: 25 GB

PLATFORMS:
PC
DEVELOPER:
Hound13 Inc.
PUBLISHER:
Hound13 Inc.
TEST PLATFORM:
PC
PRICE:
29,99€

SCORE 8,2

- ✓ Combat
- ✓ World and exploration
- ✓ Plenty of content
- ✗ Slow and inconsistent narrative pacing
- ✗ Poor camera
- ✗ Repetitive side quests

HEART OF DARKNESS™

When we were young, our parents always told us there was no reason to be afraid of the dark. Still, some of us couldn't fall asleep without a sliver of light, afraid that a monster would crawl out of the darkness and, worst of all, eat us. In the case of Heart of Darkness, our childhood fears were fully justified.

In this game we go back to childhood as Andy, a boy who spends most of his days playing with his dog Whisky, his best friend. During a seemingly carefree summer walk in the park, a total solar eclipse suddenly occurs. When the light returns, Andy realises his dog has been taken and that the eclipse is really a portal to another dimension. So he quickly jumps into his home-made aircraft, ready to fly into the world of darkness and face his fears.



Heart of Darkness is a 2D platformer designed by Eric Chahi, creator of the cult hit Another World. It follows a similar formula: dark atmosphere, puzzles, slightly "fiddly" platforming and terrifying creatures. Though the story looks like a classic children's adventure, the game is full of brutal death scenes. If you're not careful enough, Andy will soon become dinner or end up



in the abyss of the dark dimension. This kind of gameplay wasn't revolutionary at the time, but Heart of Darkness stood out for its visual style and high-quality graphics. The animated sequences were rendered in 3DS Max, which today sits in the shadow of other 3D modelling software. Sadly, the game's development was so gruelling that Eric Chahi almost completely left the games industry.



THE ORIGINAL RELEASE CAME WITH A PAIR OF 3D GLASSES

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AUTHOR
MILOŠ HETLEROVIĆ



EPOMAKER G84 HE

MAGNETS, HOW DO THEY WORK?

These days it seems a new gaming peripheral brand pops up practically every day, which on the one hand creates a little confusion among buyers, but on the other allows for creative solutions others may not have thought of. So we got an Epomaker gaming keyboard that prides itself on keys that aren't mechanical but magnetic!

The first look at the box the G84 HE comes in doesn't promise much - it looks solid but quite generic. One thing that caught my eye is a QR code on one side labelled "Unbox", with "Share" on the other. The link leads to the Epomaker Discord server, so the idea is obviously to encourage every user to share their first-hand impressions straight away. When you open the box, everything inside is very nicely and neatly packed, and the keyboard immediately stands out as very well made at first glance, even though it is plastic. Interestingly, there is a label telling you where to open it to take out the accessories, as if we couldn't work that out ourselves, but it's nice that besides the cable you also get a tool and several spare keycaps, which we always support.

THE MAIN ASSET OF THE EPOMAKER G84 HE ARE ITS MAGNETIC KEYS



The keyboard is quite heavy for its size, given that it is a model with 80% of a standard keyboard, meaning it has no numpad while everything else is there. But that very heft adds even more to the impression of build quality: it will sit firmly and stably on your desk, and it gives the impression it will last a very long time. There are also some interesting details, such as feet that adjust the tilt in two steps, and under one of them there is a slot for the USB wireless adapter, which is a very handy spot, I must admit.

The keys are nicely deep and lit by RGB lighting that looks very nice, and of course it can be fully customised in the software you download from the manufacturer's site. Also, above the arrow keys there is an Epomaker logo on a silver plate, backlit with RGB, which is both discreet and very effective in my opinion.



There are several keycap colour options, and the model we tested had colours fading row by row from white at the top to blue at the bottom, again quite an interesting combination. The keyboard can be used equally with Windows and Mac computers, which is reflected in the key legends, and on the back there is a switch for toggling between the two modes. Next to it are the USB-C port and a button for switching between USB, Wireless and Bluetooth modes, which immediately tells you all the ways you can connect the device to a computer. It should also be stressed that it has a very large 8,000 mAh battery that should give you plenty of playtime, but keep in mind that battery life will be significantly shorter if you use the RGB lighting at full brightness.

THE KEYBOARD IS QUITE HEAVY FOR THE STANDARDS OF AN 80% MODEL

SPEED AND CUSTOMISATION

The main asset of the Epomaker G84 HE, however, is its keys – these aren't classic mechanical but magnetic switches, where you can set the actuation distance in software. This means you can set a press to register with as little as 0.1 mm of travel, or as much as 3.3 mm. In practice, everyone can set it to suit them: at 0.1 mm you only need to lightly brush a key for it to register, while at the other end of the spectrum you have to press it all the way down for anything to happen. Interestingly, the software lets you set these travel distances individually for each key, which you probably won't do one by one, but it makes sense to have different settings for, say, the space bar, WASD or other







keys you use often in the games you play. An extra advantage of magnetic keys over mechanical ones is that they are simply much quieter, practically like membrane keys, so in that sense they can be a much better solution for an office or other situations where the noise of constant clicking is actually a problem.

On top of this, Epomaker boasts a polling rate of as much as 8,000 Hz, which means that when connected by cable this keyboard communicates with the computer eight thousand times per second, which is truly more than enough to register the smallest movement. The keyboard also has SOCD and DKS technologies: the first stands for Simultaneous Opposing Cardinal Directions, meaning that if you press both the left and right arrows, or up and down, at the same time, the device firmware will see which was pressed last and send that as the input to the computer. For example, if in a split second you realise you need to move left rather than right, having already pressed right, the keyboard itself will react and pass on only the last instruction. DKS stands for Dynamic Keystroke, which means you can define what the keyboard should do depending on how deeply you press a key. So there can be one command if you just lightly press it, another if you press it all the way, and a third when you release it, something like macro commands, but paired with the ability of magnetic keys to distinguish press depth.



CONCLUSION

We have already come across magnetic keys from big manufacturers, but the fact is that up-and-coming brands like Epomaker can offer the same at a significantly lower price, and we always support that. Besides, the G84 HE offers some really interesting options, looks nice, has solid build quality and brings plenty of options for connecting to different devices. If magnetic keys are something you are considering, it also makes sense to try a more affordable model like this one to get a feel for whether they suit you better than mechanical ones.



POLLING RATE OF UP TO 8,000 HZ

A GUIDE THROUGH THE HISTORY OF VIDEO GAMES

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

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

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

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

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

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



AUTHOR
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MOYE TRUE WIRELESS EARPHONE

WIRELESS EARBUDS WITH ATTITUDE

Wireless earbuds for phones have definitely become part of our everyday lives and are now so affordable and simple that many people use them both for calls and for consuming digital content. However, precisely because there is a huge number of models available and they have become a standard accessory for every phone, there is plenty of room for those who would like something a little more personal, in tune with their interests and favourite characters from the world of entertainment. In that sense, we got several models of the same earbuds from Moye that differ significantly in looks.

Looking at the technical specs, the earbuds themselves are fairly typical: there is a small carrying case with two buds, along with extra rubber tips to fit people with wider and narrower ear canals, a user manual and of course a charging cable. The shape of the buds is fairly standard, but it suits most people perfectly well. There are also touch controls on the side for playing/pausing a song or answering a call. They connect to your device via Bluetooth 5.4, and it all works really fast and stably, without any lag or similar issues. It should be noted that this model has no noise cancelling, so if you need it you'll have to choose one of the more expensive models. The earbuds offer about four hours of use, and there is also a charging case that extends their battery life, certainly more than enough for the vast majority of uses.

The most important thing about these earbuds, though, isn't so much the technical specs as the very interesting designs they come in. Keep in mind that the branding is done very thoroughly and completely - it's not just a sticker on the casing of an existing product; it is designed from start to finish in the spirit of the franchise it represents, and all the models really catch the eye.



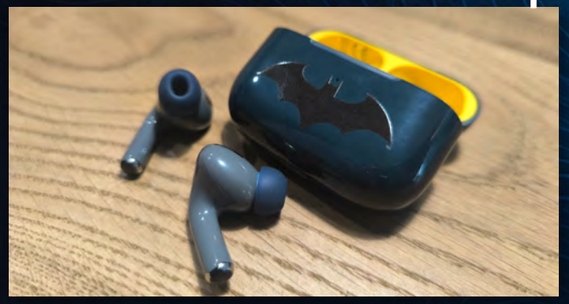
The Rick and Morty earbuds in a way have the least interesting design of all the ones we got - the box is extremely attractive, but when you open it you only get a blue case with the show's logo printed in green and a combination of blue and green buds.



The Looney Tunes, or for us older readers "Bugs Bunny", earbuds are already a serious step up, combining red and blue with a big logo on the front and the bunny chewing a carrot above it, which all together really leaves a very nice impression.

We come to the Harry Potter franchise, which in my opinion is one of the best examples of this branding, because the whole device is in the recognisable brown and yellow colour combination, with a very nice and visible Hogwarts logo in the middle of the case – a really nice visual experience for fans of the series.





Batman is also one of the more interesting franchises, and these earbuds come in a combination of navy blue and the recognisable yellow, with a big bat logo on the front.

If I could fault this model for anything, it's that the black bat isn't visible enough against the dark blue background, but maybe that was actually the idea, to be a little more understated while still clearly showing your allegiance to this superhero.



Finally we come to my favourite of the designs on offer - Superman, which combines all three of the character's striking colours: red, navy and yellow. Red and navy naturally dominate, while only the tips of the buds are yellow, just like his costume, where yellow only adds that extra touch. The logo on the front is also masterfully executed and printed. If you were choosing by design and the hero himself didn't matter much to you, this is definitely the model I would personally pick without a second thought.

The Moye True Wireless Earphones don't bring anything revolutionary on the technical side, but they let you carry, for relatively little money, a gadget that will constantly remind you of your favourite hero, and it is done in a really interesting way. Given the relatively affordable price of the device, this can be a nice birthday present or a gift for another occasion.

AUTHOR
MILOŠ HETLEROVIĆ



LOGITECH SIGNATURE FOR WORK

ERGONOMICS COME FIRST

As summer ends and we all get further away from our holidays, we are slowly returning to the routine of regular work obligations, and that's exactly why this time of year can be extremely useful to change some perhaps not-so-good habits. Most of us, especially since working from home became completely normal, tend to forget about ergonomics when using a computer, and over time that can affect our productivity as well as our overall health.



One of the first "culprits" is the so-called business laptop, which is of course used both in the office and at home. Although these devices have improved over the years in terms of keyboards, touchpads and screens, the fact remains that this is a computer format designed above all for portability, with everything else coming second. That isn't much of a problem if you want to spend an hour over a drink in a café doing some work, but when you use it hunched over all day, every day, with a narrow keyboard and a touchpad instead of a mouse, problems start to appear that you may not even be aware of at first. Of course, one of the obvious solutions is to get an external monitor for the laptop, or at least raise the laptop on a stand so the screen is at eye level in places where you know you'll work often, i.e. the office, whether at home or in a business building. But then another problem arises: it becomes very hard to use the laptop's built-in peripherals at all, and even if you manage, it certainly won't be optimal or comfortable.

THE DESIGN OF BOTH KEYBOARDS IS DEFINITELY INSPIRED BY THE MX MODELS

This is where a new line of peripherals "signed" by Logitech comes in, actually called Signature, which can provide a top-notch experience and ergonomics whether you work from home or the office, and whether your main device is a laptop, a desktop or even something else! This time we get to know the Signature Slim Solar+ K980 keyboard and the Slim Combo MK950 mouse and keyboard set.





Let's start with what is very similar on these two models, and that's the look of the keyboard. The design is definitely inspired by the MX models from Logitech's collection, so both keyboards are very understated and discreetly made, with keys that are fairly shallow but still very comfortable to use. You can see that ergonomics come first, but it must be admitted that they also look very pleasant and will surely fit into any serious business environment.

Both models are full-size keyboards with a numpad as well as extra keys for connecting to multiple devices, dual functionalities for the function keys, keys labelled for both Windows and Mac, and four extra keys above the numpad tailored to business functions – calculator, screenshot, search or locking the computer. Of course, you can further customise all this in the Logi Options+ software to suit your needs; I really liked the shortcut that automatically minimises all windows, for when your boss walks in while you're watching who knows what on YouTube! One thing to keep in mind for both keyboards, especially if you often work in the dark, is that to save battery neither of them has backlighting.

THE SIGNATURE MODELS CAN CONNECT TO UP TO THREE DEVICES AT ONCE



In addition, credit must go to the Logi feature, now also coming to the Signature models, that lets them connect to up to three devices at once, either by cable, the Bolt wireless adapter or Bluetooth. In practice this means you can take the keyboard for the desktop you normally have at home, and when you work on a laptop, just flip a switch and carry on. If you need to, you can also connect it to a TV, for example, which makes searching in streaming apps much easier.

Of course, the K980 and MK950 keyboards also differ in a few ways.

The first and most basic difference is, as the name itself says, that the Slim Solar+ K980 is solar-powered, meaning it is enough for the keyboard to spend some time each day in a reasonably lit room to charge its internal battery, and you can expect not to have to worry about it at all for the next ten years! This is a really great fact for anyone who has ever had a wireless device's battery die exactly when they needed it most. The MK950, on the other hand, uses two standard AAA batteries for the keyboard, which should last as long as 36 months, which again is not bad at all. My personal observation is that I like the MK950 a little more because it has feet on the back for adjusting the typing angle, which the K980 doesn't, but here we are getting into nuances that will matter to a really small circle of users.



An added bonus is that the MK950 is actually a set, so you also get a mouse that is very nicely ergonomically shaped. On the sides, where you actually grip the mouse, it has rubberised sections, so it sits beautifully in the hand. It also offers completely silent buttons and a scroll wheel with SmartWheel technology, which lets you scroll the screen a little at a time when you need to, or simply spin it when you have to get quickly to the other end of a long document or web page. It uses an optical sensor with a resolution of 1,000 DPI and runs on a single standard AA battery that should last around 24 months.



Improving the ergonomics of your workspace is something people definitely don't pay much attention to, yet it is extremely important for long-term productivity and health. In that sense, you should definitely consider investing in quality peripherals, because they are practically the interface between human and computer and something we absolutely have to use every day. If you are ready to improve your productivity and comfort at better prices, now is the right time to explore exclusive Logi offers. Look out for Logi Work Deals Days, from August 31 to September 11.

THE K980 IS SOLAR-POWERED, WHILE THE MK950 USES TWO AAA BATTERIES





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