



THE VIDEO GAME GENERATIONS NEWSLETTER

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Issue #34 – December 27, 2025

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It's rare that I make the main newsletter topic something other than what I said I'd write about at the end of the prior issue. My original plan was to write about all the games I played in 2025. The problem is, I got lazy over my break (which is still going), slept late several mornings, put way more hours into gaming than I've been able to since *starting* the newsletter, and just ran out of time.

To at least give this issue a theme, I'm writing briefly about my history with the *Metroid* series this week, mostly in the *Collection Inspection* section. I've also included a few *Metroid* mini-reviews (including for the recently-released *Metroid Prime 4*), and a few for others that are just "Metroidvania" in nature.

Anyway, here's wishing everybody who reads this a very Happy New Year. We're just about into 2026!



Recent Events

Respawn's Vince Zampella Has Died

I don't know if my son knew who Vince Zampella was, before letting me know earlier in the week that the Respawn founder and long-time video game industry veteran had been killed in a car accident. He came across the news before I did.

Formerly of Infinity Ward (working on the *Call of Duty* series), he left Activision and co-founded Respawn to work on new projects with EA, like the two *Titanfall* games, *Apex Legends*, and the *Star Wars Jedi* series.

Andy Robinson's write-up at VGC is far better than anything I could do, so head over there for the complete story. Just heartbreaking.



Source:
<https://www.videogameschronicle.com/news/an-unimaginable-loss-games-industry-reacts-to-tragic-death-of-call-of-duty-co-creator-vince-zampella/>

007 First Light from IOI Gets a Delay

This is one of my most anticipated games of 2026, but I'll be waiting a couple months longer after an announcement from the game's developer IO Interactive that the game has been pushed back from its original date of March 27 to May 27.

It sounds like they just need a little more time to put the finishing touches on, and to make it the best version it can be at launch.

Source:
<https://x.com/007GameIOI/status/2003511022141817016/photo/1>

The AI Witch Hunt Continues

Last week, it was torches and pitchforks over a comment from a Larian studio head about how generative AI is being used to speed up some initial art asset prototyping.

Now, it's Sandfall Interactive under fire for some level of generative AI use in their award-winning *Clair Obscur: Expedition 33* (which is also my own hands-down Game of the Year).

The game was disqualified from its Indie Game Awards (IGA) nomination. I'm sourcing VGC here, but the article doesn't provide too much extra context aside from the game being disqualified since that's against the IGA rules. It does say that a user on Reddit speculated that AI was used to create newspaper textures in the game, which were already removed.

Source:
<https://www.videogameschronicle.com/news/clair-obscur-expedition-33-game-of-the-year-award-pulled-after-admitting-to-generative-ai-use/>

I get it. I do. I've given my often conflicted thoughts about generative AI here multiple times, and I've made no secret that I use it for the VGGN logo and title image, as well as a "cartoon me" which I usually (but don't always) include on the cover page. I'm not trying to create art or pass it off as my own. It's basically a way for somebody (me) doing this as a hobby (and for the *writing*) to end up with a better looking (also totally free) end result than I'd get if I tried drawing stuff myself.

The danger, though, is that it *is* becoming a witch hunt. I use semicolons and em dashes when I write, yet those are being heralded as telltale signs of AI text generation. I've started using both things less *because* of that misconception.

I've also seen artists on social media relate stories about how they've been accused of using AI generated artwork which in fact *was not AI generated*. Much of the outrage seems forced and performative anyway, but it isn't getting any quieter. It's just easier to target the little guys.

Collection Inspection – Metroid Series

I was just going to include a couple Metroid games from my collection this week, but then decided, hey, why not just include them all?

Unless I'm mistaken, my collection is missing only two games in the entire series, aside from any alternate versions or editions of any I already own. I don't have *Metroid II: Return of Samus* (for GameBoy) and I don't have *Super Metroid* (for Super Nintendo). I owned both of them at some point in the past, but sold them before I decided to really start hoarding.

Metroid

Platform: NES / **Edition:** Standard

Comments: Here's the game that started it all, although it's not my original copy. Actually, I'm not sure I ever owned this originally. I played it back then, but I think I borrowed it from a friend.



Metroid: Samus Returns

Platform: Nintendo 3DS / **Edition:** Special Edition

Comments: I never opened this (bought it mainly to just collect), but I also bought the standard edition, which I opened and played. The tape you might see in the photos isn't on the box. I'm not a monster. I use clear archival plastic to wrap games like this to protect from scuffs and dust, and the plastic is just taped to itself. I played but never finished the original *Metroid II*, but this remake is of course far superior.



Metroid: Samus Returns

Platform: Nintendo 3DS / **Edition:** Standard

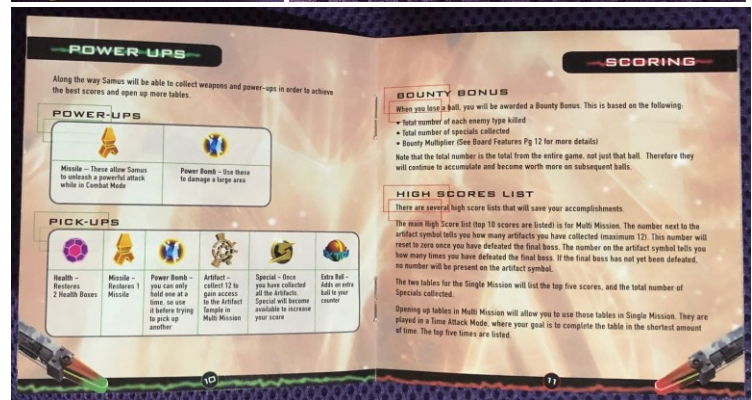
Comments: Like I just mentioned, I also have the standard edition of *Samus Returns*.



Metroid Prime Pinball

Platform: Nintendo DS / **Edition:** Standard

Comments: Entirely morph ball mode, I would think.



Metroid Prime

Platform: GameCube / **Edition:** Standard

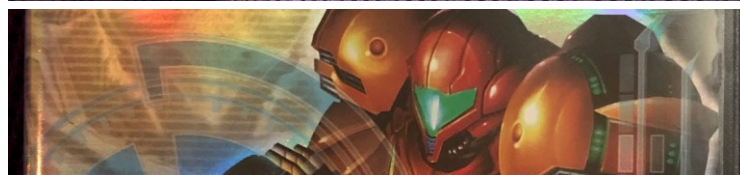
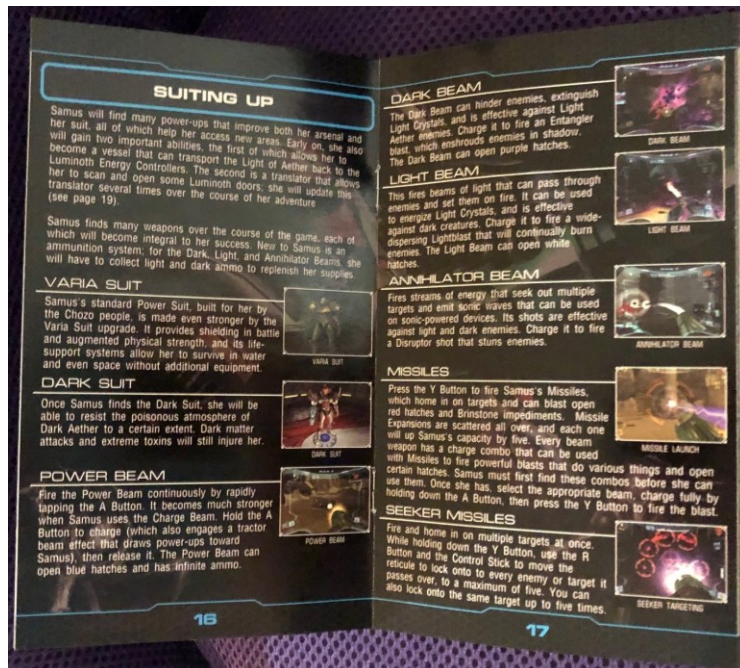
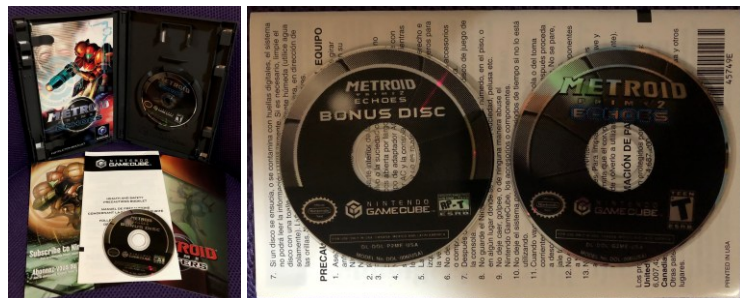
Comments: What a game. Later entries introduced new twists, but seeing Metroid in first person for the first time felt so revolutionary and mind-blowing when it came out. I had been looking forward to this game for years, and it didn't disappoint. I never was able to beat the final boss (although I did in the more recent Switch remake, thankfully), but I still had tons of fun getting to that point.



Metroid Prime 2: Echoes

Platform: GameCube / **Edition:** Standard

Comments: The cover art for this game is reflective; like, metallic mirror reflective, making it tough to get a good photograph. I'm surprised Nintendo hasn't done a remaster or remake of this (and Prime 3) for Switch. Rumors abounded that the entire trilogy was being remastered, but we only ever saw Metroid Prime 1.



Metroid Prime 3: Corruption

Platform: Nintendo Wii / **Edition:** Standard

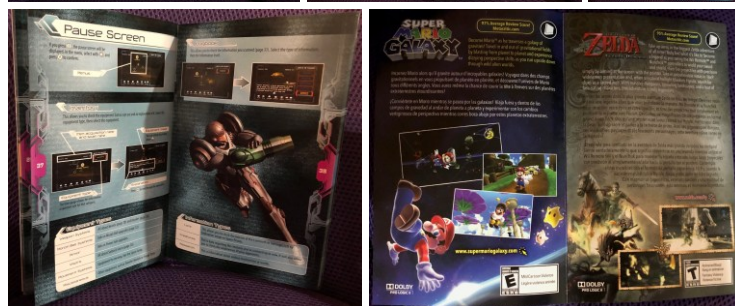
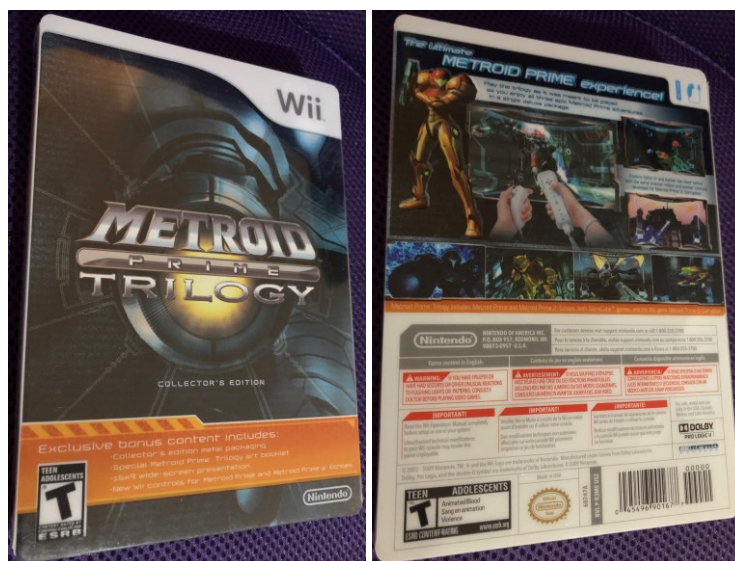
Comments: The third game in the original *Prime* trilogy didn't make it to GameCube, launching only on the Wii instead (complete with motion controls).



Metroid Prime Trilogy

Platform: Nintendo Wii / **Edition:** Collector's Edition

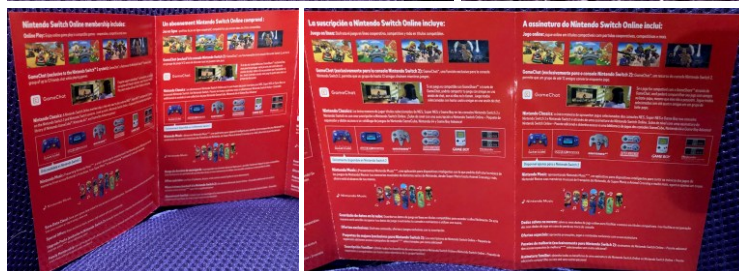
Comments: Nintendo bundled up the original *Prime* trilogy, added motion controls to the first two games, and released the *Metroid Prime Trilogy* for Wii. This edition comes in a steelbook with an outer plastic slipcover for the whole thing.



Metroid Prime 4: Beyond

Platform: Nintendo Switch / **Edition:** Standard

Comments: Sure, it's not a full instruction booklet (because publishers stopped doing that years ago, sadly), but at least they did include a red fold-out ad card for Switch Online. That's something, I suppose. Anyway, this game was a blast, and my mini-review is up later in this issue. The game is (somehow) divisive, but I loved it. Well, I *really liked it*, at least.



Metroid Prime: Federation Force

Platform: Nintendo 3DS / **Edition:** Standard

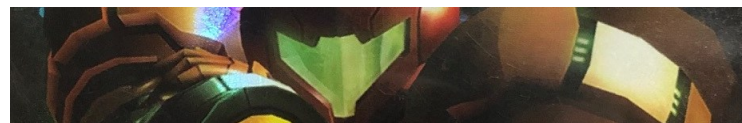
Comments: I never played *Federation Force*. Heck, I never even opened it. By most accounts, it wasn't a very good game. Have any of you out there played it?



Metroid Prime: Hunters

Platform: Nintendo DS / **Edition:** Standard

Comments: I *did* play this one and enjoyed it a lot through the single-player campaign, until I decided to try out the competitive online multiplayer. What an absolute nightmare. It probably *would* have been fun, but by the time I played, the only people online were apparently people using hacks and cheats. It was no fun whatsoever in that context. Just a nightmare.



Metroid Prime: Remastered

Platform: Nintendo Switch / **Edition:** Standard

Comments: It's an excellent remake of the original.



Metroid: Dread

Platform: Nintendo Switch / **Edition:** Standard

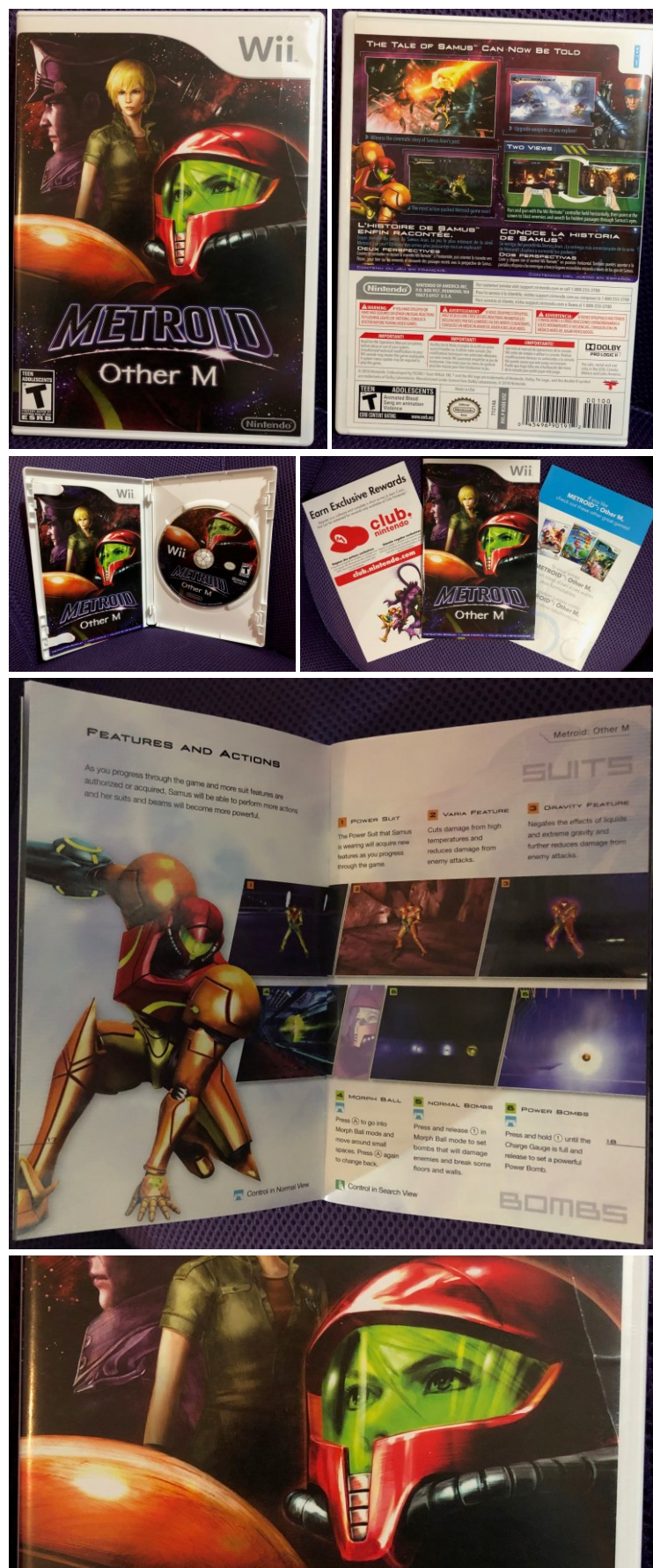
Comments: This is a great 2.5D entry in the series.



Metroid: Other M

Platform: Nintendo Wii / **Edition:** Standard

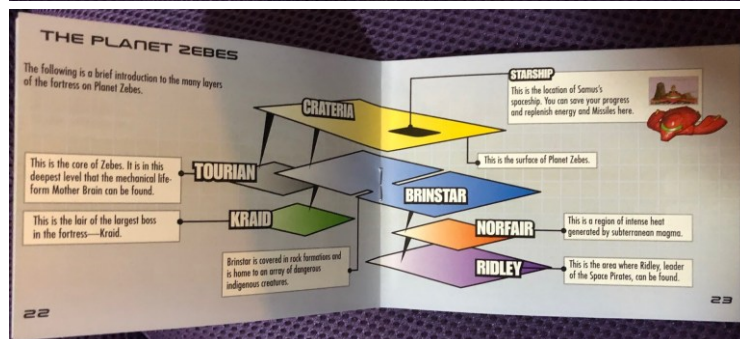
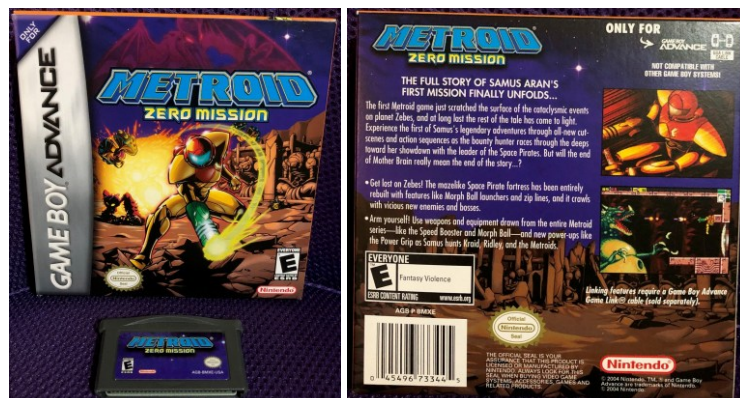
Comments: I realize most Metroid fans rank this near the bottom of the series, maybe just above Metroid Prime: Federation Force, but I enjoyed it.



Metroid: Zero Mission

Platform: GameBoy Advance / **Edition:** Standard

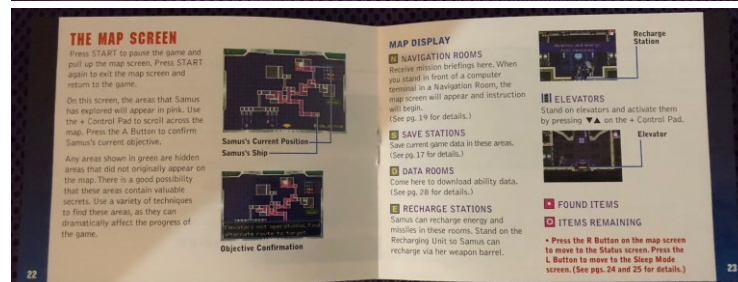
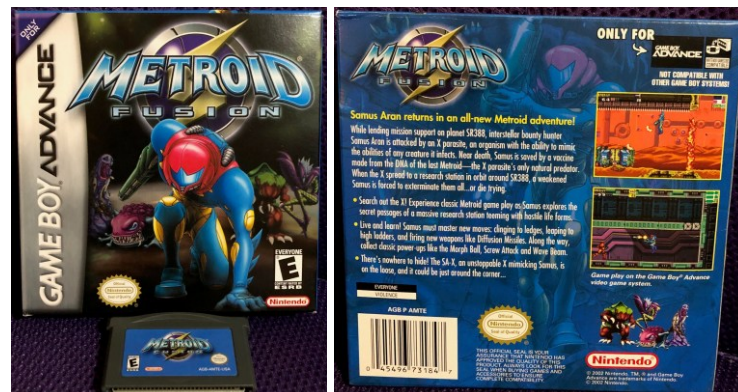
Comments: This full remake of the original *Metroid* is really good, and I have my original copy in excellent condition, complete in the box with all contents.



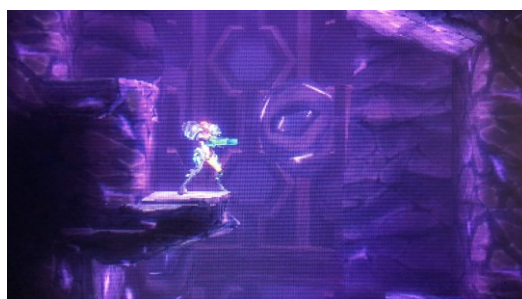
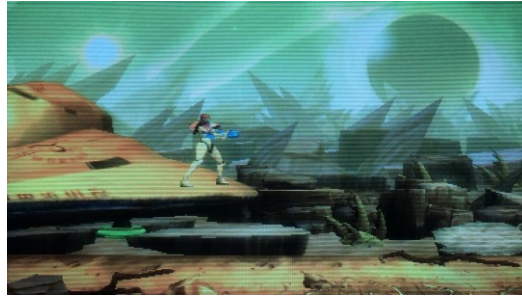
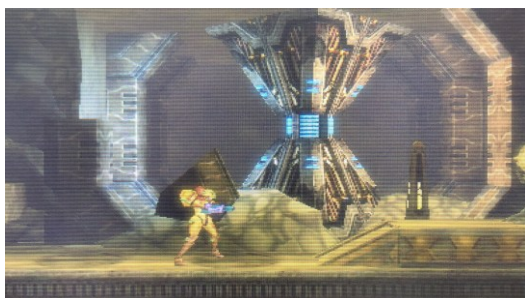
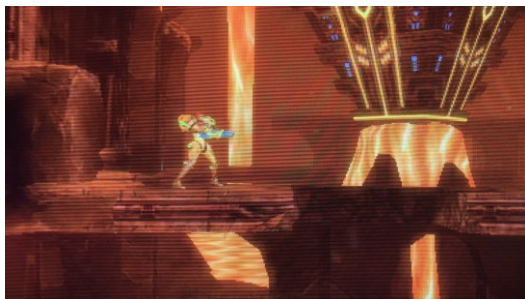
Metroid: Fusion

Platform: GameBoy Advance / **Edition:** Standard

Comments: This original entry for the GBA had to tide fans of 2D *Metroid* over for nearly nineteen years until *Metroid: Dread* came out. I have fond memories of *Fusion*, although I don't remember many specifics.



Mini-Review: Metroid - Samus Returns



A reimagining of *Metroid II* from the original GameBoy that is pretty much unrecognizable from the original. It's a remake; upgraded and expanded in every way.

I like the 3D effect and always leave it on. I know others prefer 3DS in 2D but the visuals in *Samus Returns* really take advantage of the gimmick and benefit from it. With 3D off, foreground and background often blend together, but when on, the environments of planet SR388 are vibrant.

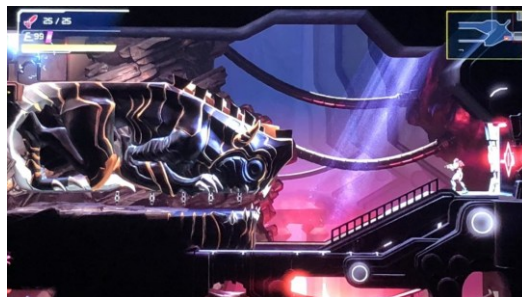
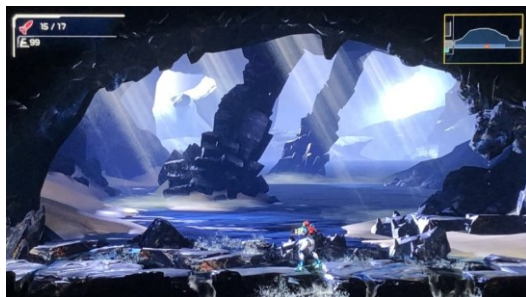
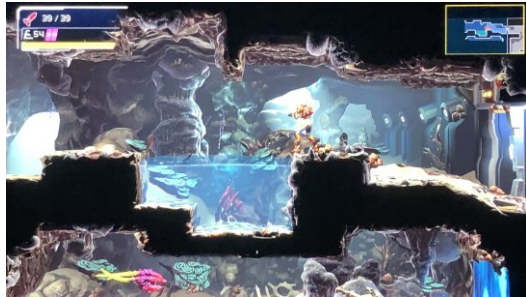
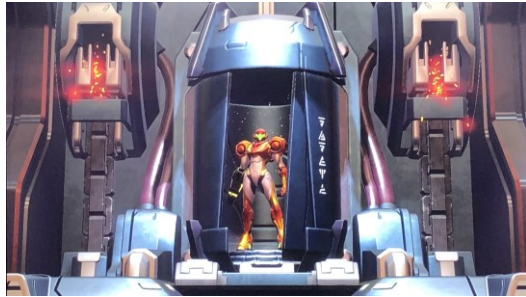
My poor attempts to photo a few scenes don't do the game justice.

Almost every familiar *Metroid* upgrade and technique are here; grapple beam, power bomb, Varia suit, space jump, spider ball, etc. The map marks important things when you scan, making it easier than usual to 100% it all.

I enjoyed it quite a bit, and would definitely recommend it.

Played on handheld: 3DS.
Originally posted: 07/31/2020.

Mini-Review: Metroid – Dread



Even though plenty of *Metroid*-like games (or *Metroidvanias*) exist now (*Ori*, *Axiom Verge*, etc.), with some being arguably better (ex: *Hollow Knight*), there's something special and exciting about an authentic Samus Aran adventure.

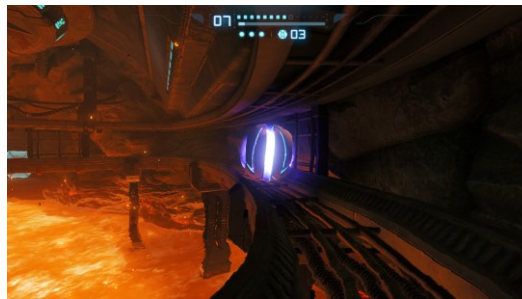
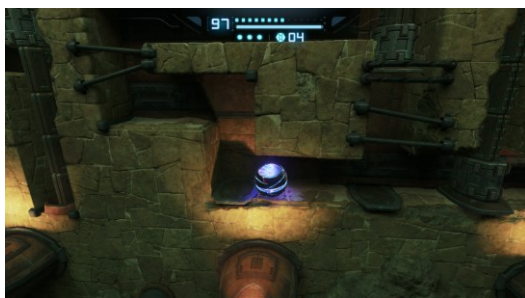
Of the 2D *Metroid* series, this is as good as it's ever been, if not better, with one exception; the music. *Metroid* music is always atmospheric and memorable, but in *Dread*, none of it stands out. For me, none of it was memorable or additive to the experience. I guess that's a small complaint for an otherwise great game though.

Boss encounters were fun and challenging, until the final one, which was absurdly more difficult than anything prior.

Anyway, it's a big world of connected zones with power-ups, puzzles and fast action. It lives up to its heritage.

Played on console: Switch.
Originally posted: 10/10/2021.

Mini-Review: Metroid Prime – Remastered



When I played the original way back on GameCube, it took me forever to beat Ridley at the end, and I never did beat the final boss. I'm not even sure if I beat its first phase.

Now, in wonderfully remastered form, I've finally done it. Tough to say if this is because I got better or because the modern controls (plus using a pro controller) made it much easier.

I did fumble with buttons along the way; morph ball mode when I meant to cancel scanning, for example.

The little details are taken for granted today, but were surprising at the time: a 3D map, rain and steam on your visor; charge shots that do a screen warp effect; the reflection of Samus's face after a flash of light; even scanning to get context and backstory.

It looks and plays better than ever; the best version of a classic.

*Played on console: Switch.
Originally posted: 03/27/2023.*

Mini-Review: Metroid Prime 4 – Beyond



While it's hard to recapture the magic of a series that was, for me, revolutionary at the time, *Beyond* gives it an impressive try.



Much hubbub was made online over Vi-O-La (the motorcycle), the open world desert area, and the few Federation marines Samus finds stranded on the planet.



To hear some talk, all of that ruined the series. Thankfully - and pretty much as expected - none of that's true (for me).



The marines are fine, the motorcycle is fun, and the game sends Samus through several different zones/areas to explore, gather power-ups and abilities, and progress the story.

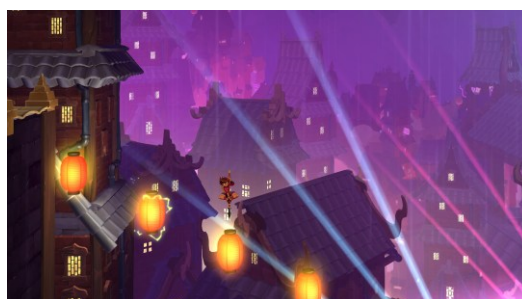
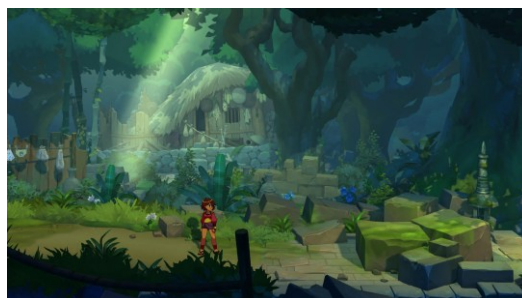
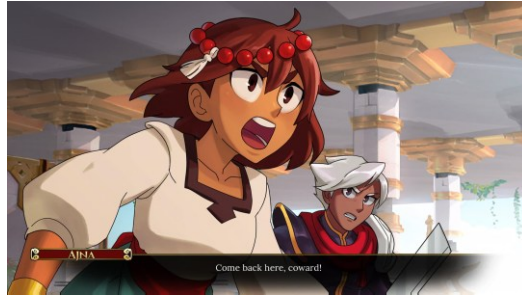


The lack of guidance in prior games is gone, now with occasional waypoints shown or tips from a marine (plus an area-scan you can find to reveal hidden items) but it's still *Metroid Prime* as I know and love it.



Played on console: Switch.
Originally posted: 12/24/2025.

Mini-Review: Indivisible



I'd heard this was good and I expected to like it, but I didn't know I'd end up enjoying it this much.

It's a 2.5D side-scrolling RPG with some combat in-world but mostly in ATB-style encounters, combined with Metroidvania world design and platforming galore.

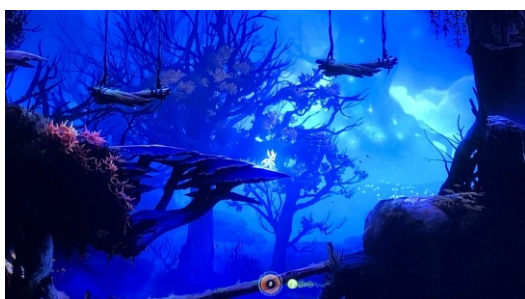
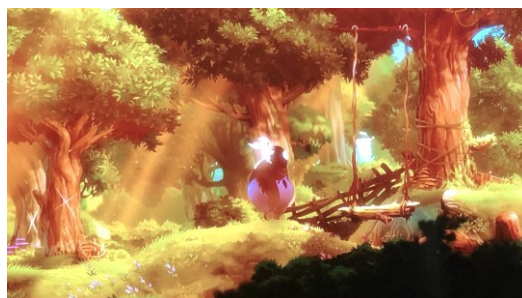
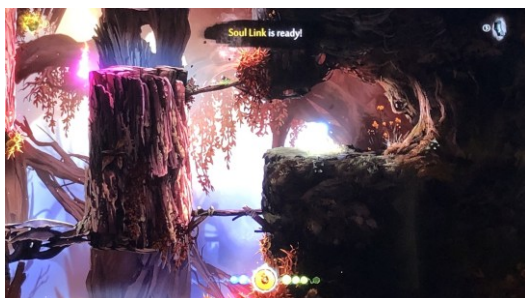
The abilities just keep coming as you progress, which not only opens up new areas and routes but makes traversal increasingly complex and interesting when you go from pole vault jump to wall jump to pogo bounce to air dash and more.

The main character Ajna has a sort of Skywalker whiney teenager vibe at first (voiced wonderfully by Tania Gunadi; the whole eclectic cast is good, actually), but matures in a way that's a core point of the story.

A large roster of party members with different combat styles join over time. Great game.

*PS4 game played on PS5.
Originally posted: 10/22/2022.*

Mini-Review: Ori and the Blind Forest



I seem to gravitate toward games in specific niche categories, such as *Souls*-likes, or in this case, a *Metroidvania*.

It's a beautiful 2.5D world with an emotional story. I admit I was choked up a bit at the end. The abilities you get for traversing the world and reaching new areas were surprisingly fresh, or at least clever and fun twists on mechanics seen elsewhere. By the end, I was jumping, dashing, countering projectiles and zooming around in complete control. It felt great.

It feels like an epic adventure despite its actual length (about 12-13 hours to 100% on normal).

For me, it's in the upper echelons of *Metroidvanias*; not quite *Hollow Knight*-level greatness, but still great. There are a few hard platforming bits, but it somehow never got frustrating.

Great music too.

*Played on console: Xbox One.
Originally posted: 06/06/2020.*

Mini-Review: Ori and the Will of the Wisps



Although objectively it's pretty great, it didn't pull me in like the first game did. I feel like that's a "me" problem though.



Everything about it is fantastic; at least, if you're into beautiful 2.5D art, exploring a dangerous maze-like land Metroidvania-style, finding upgrades and new abilities, learning moves that let you dash and grapple and reach new places, great music, emotional storyline... I could go on.



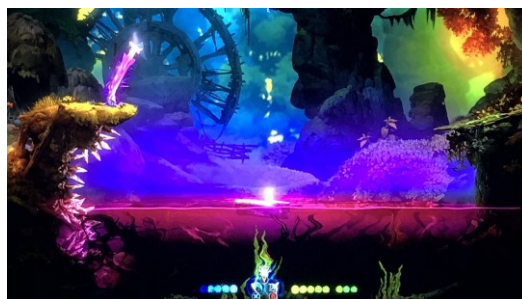
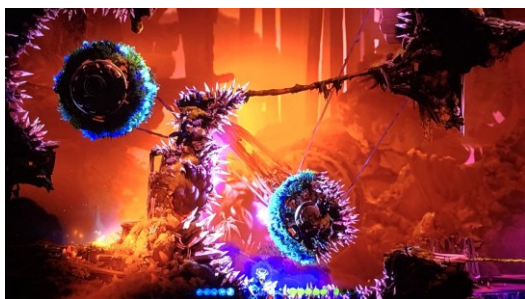
Yet with all the reasons it's the kind of game I'd usually want to 100% and get every hidden or hard-to-reach item, finish every side quest, fully unfog every corner of the map, I just didn't.



Maybe I just never mastered the move set like I did in the first game; or maybe I was distracted by other games these past few months.

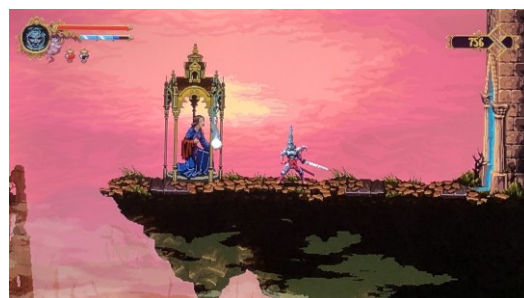
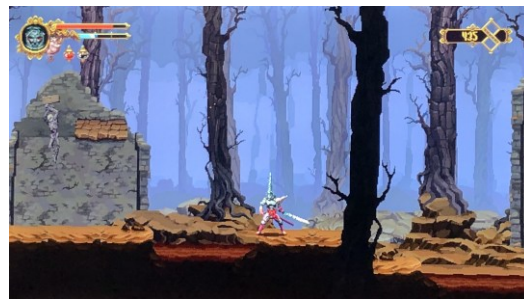
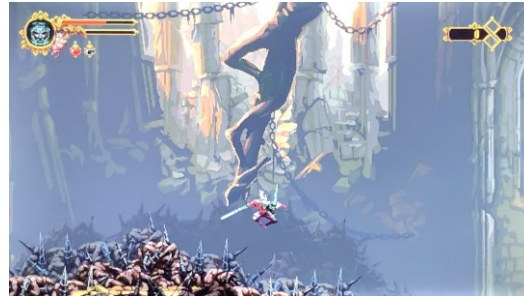
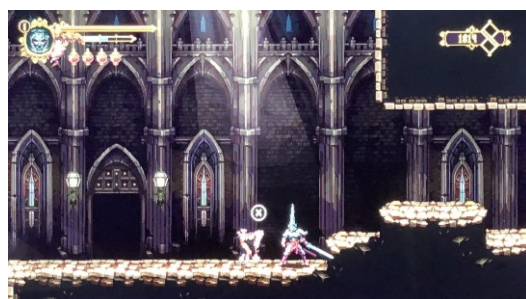
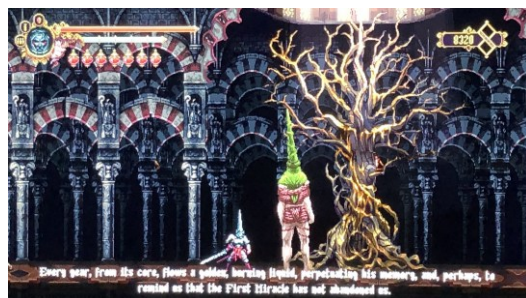


Glad I finished it though.



*Xbox One game played on XSX.
Originally posted: 12/08/2021.*

Mini-Review: Blasphemous



An excellent 2D action adventure game, like *Castlevania* (specifically of the *Metroidvania* style) with some *Souls*-like elements.

Pixel art and animation is outstanding; imagine the best-looking SNES game ever. The music is pretty good as well.

Lots of collectibles, upgrades of several types and secret areas.

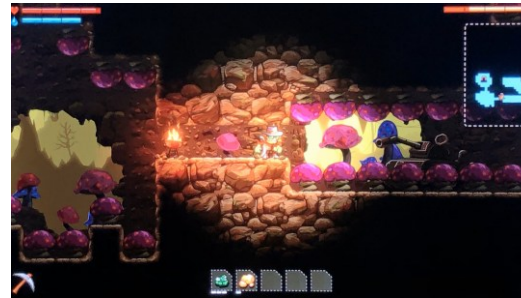
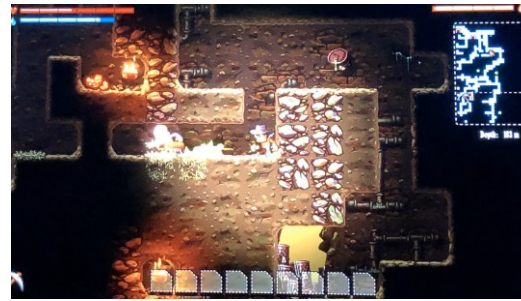
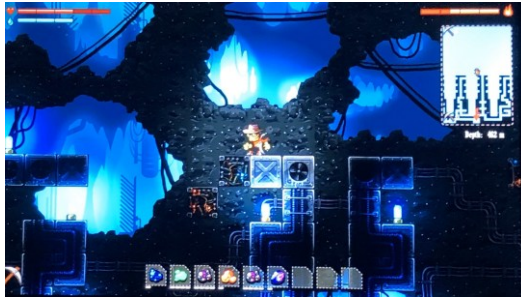
The story was impossible to decipher, at least for me; some bizarre, twisted religious themes and imagery.

Most of the game was perfectly balanced; challenging but fair, with great boss battles to learn and master. The penultimate boss was a pain, but ultimately rewarding.

The last boss though, took way too many tries. I could write a paper on it. Pattern learning wasn't enough. I needed luck too. It came close to ruining the fun I had prior, but not quite. This was an unexpected gem for me.

*Played on console: Switch.
Originally posted: 05/15/2020.*

Mini-Review: Steamworld Dig



Full title:

Steamworld Dig – A Fistful of Dirt

Here's a fun take on the 2D Metroidvania genre. As Rusty (a robot), you inherit a mine in an old west-themed future. The gameplay loop of exploring, finding new abilities, bringing back ore, buying upgrades is addictive.

I'm not a big fan of the term "it doesn't overstay its welcome," but that's true enough here. In fact, it may be a little too short, depending on how leisurely you play. At just over 6 hours, I was surprised to reach the end. But, I've heard the sequel is great, so I plan to play that too.

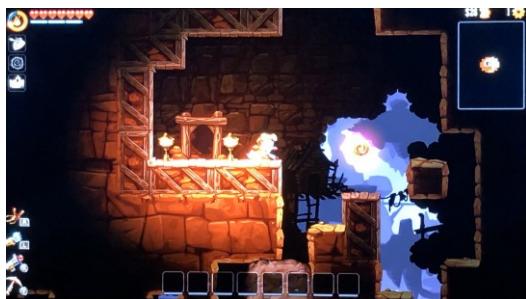
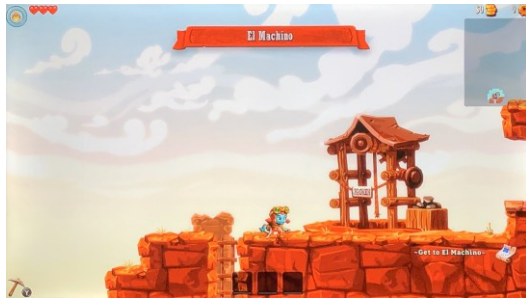
There are a few enemies in the depths for you to kill or avoid, but the real draw is in that main explore/gather loop. For completionists, there could be many more hours of that, beyond the story itself.

I liked it and recommend it, but I'm most looking forward to the sequel.

Played on console: Switch.

Originally posted: 04/09/2020.

Mini-Review: Steamworld Dig 2



The first game was really good. The sequel is great. It expands and improves on everything. Fast travel is better. Combat is more rewarding, instead of feeling tacked-on.

New tools and abilities provide even better gameplay now.

The dig/gather/return/sell loop is still present and it's still what sets it apart the most from other Metroidvanias, but there's an even bigger focus on exploration and discovery now. It's also a bit longer, clocking me at 10 hours vs the first game's 6 or so; that's just right.

Like in the first game, there's a lot of optional stuff here too. I kind of wish I'd played on PS4, where trophy-hunting might encourage me to get everything from every dungeon area, earn all upgrades, explore it all.

Still, it looks and plays great on Switch. Highly recommended.

*Played on console: Switch.
Originally posted: 04/15/2020.*

Capsule Reviews

Before I started formatting my mini-reviews on social media (just Twitter at the time) to be exactly three “tweets” with four screenshots each, I posted one-tweet capsule reviews that sometimes included no screenshots at all. I had no set format at first, although from time to time I’d include the game’s title screen or a second follow-up tweet on the review, and eventually a few screenshots too.

It was also from a time when I was foolishly just taking photos of my TV screen using my cell phone. Anyway, here are three of those.

Hollow Knight

Incredible, expansive Metroidvania that surpasses even the games its genre is named for. Great music. Fantastic art style. Controls perfectly. New abilities, charm bonuses, secrets, and area progression kept me hooked.

A must-play; easily recommended.

I finished with 84% completion, and nearly 50 hours on the in-game clock. I did a lot of extra exploration, so I don’t know if that time is typical. Still, with 16% more to do for 100%, it’s definitely an epic experience.

And so atmospheric. It’s an outstanding game for sure.



Played on console: Nintendo Switch.

Originally posted to social media on: 06/11/2019.

Yoku’s Island Express

The 2.5D art style of *Rayman Legends*. The exploration of a Metroidvania, with pinball gameplay. Sounds strange, but trust me, it works! A delightful adventure in a world of bugs and frogs, with quests and secrets galore. I loved it.



Played on console: Nintendo Switch.

Originally posted to social media on: 05/20/2019.

Omega Strike

SNES-styled Metroidvania that looks great and controls perfectly. Some hints of *Metal Slug* and *Mega Man*.

Three characters hot-swappable with unique abilities. Great music.

Fun the whole way through, and not overly difficult.

Highly recommended.



Played on console: Nintendo Switch.

Originally posted to social media on: 04/20/2019.

The Final Stage

Losing My Motivation

I mentioned already at the start of this issue that I ended up getting lazy and not sticking to my original plan of writing about every game I played this year (including the older games).

If I'm being honest – and I always try to be – I'm just losing my motivation. When I sit down to write each issue, I *do* enjoy it. It's just that lately, I'm starting to wonder if this is really something worth doing. I really hit my stride over the summer and into the fall with some topics and features I'm really proud of, but lately, it feels more like a chore or a self-imposed obligation than anything else.

This is something everybody who creates *anything* undoubtedly goes through, whether it's art or writing a game or being a streamer (which, admittedly, I don't fully understand the appeal) or working on a novel or making a web comic or... anything, really.

I'm not sure what I hoped would happen when I started this newsletter back in May. I guess I thought it would take off from word of mouth, and I'd have thousands of subscribers by now. That hasn't happened, and, still being honest, I'm not sure I would *want* it to.

More readers means more pressure. There's a certain calm involved in knowing that this just goes out into the endless internet void, where nobody is sending me hate mail because I decided to use small amounts of AI images or because I enjoyed (or didn't enjoy) a game that some hypothetical reader felt entirely opposite about.

It also makes it far easier to just give up and announce that VGGN is ceasing publication. That's not what I'm doing today, but it might not be too far off at the rate I'm going.

If I think about what I wanted to accomplish, in some ways, I already have. I kept it up for several months. I wrote a lot about my own games, and a lot about the games I've played.

My son keeps suggesting I go bi-weekly or even monthly, but that alone is a slippery slope that's just the first step in ending a thing altogether. Knowing me, I'd wait until the last day or two (as I did again this week), then scramble to get something – anything – written in time, even if it's not on par with my prior issues.

What I've told my son is that created work can, in theory, live forever. It's one of the big benefits of *making* video games, and it's true when it comes to writing a newsletter. When I eventually die (sorry, yes, it's probably morbid to even say that), old issues of VGGN might still be around, even if some of it (like *Recent Events*) is far less relevant.

There's a very good chance I'll call it quits on the newsletter soon. We'll see. That day is not today, but I feel it creeping up on me quickly.

Next Week

I'd like to do my 2025 wrap-up issue like I had originally planned for this week, but maybe I'll wait one more week on that. If I do, then I'll come up with something simple and easy for issue #35; something like I did for this issue, but maybe with *Souls*-like games this time.

End Credits

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