



THE

VIDEO GAME GENERATIONS

NEWSLETTER

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Loading Screen

Ordinarily, each issue of the VGGN has a topic that I run with to varying extents, depending on the topic.

I include game mini-reviews, *Collection Inspection* where I take photos and write briefly about some of the physical games I own, and I come up with some central feature related to the topic (the greatest “little guy” sidekicks ever, a quiz about monsters, retrospectives about my own game development, space ships in video games, and dozens of others).

This time, there's none of that. I've been fascinated by several recent announcements in the world of video games, and so I wanted to dedicate an issue entirely to that. Yes, it's an all *Recent Events* issue.



Surprisingly no, in case you're wondering, I don't do mushrooms or other hallucinogenic drugs or recreational drugs of any kind.

Recent Events

Naughty Dog Announces Another New Game

I guess it was inevitable, since Sony's Naughty Dog studio no longer makes family-friendly platformers like *Crash Bandicoot* or the *Jak* series, yet there's still a big demand for further adventures starring Jak and his ottsel sidekick.

The compromise, apparently, is to team-up with Showtime to reboot the *Jak* series. The new game is simply called *Jak and Dexter*.



Details are thin right now, but we do know that Michael C. Hall will provide the voice of his character *Dexter* from the hit Showtime series of the same name. It involves time travel and an alien abduction, where Jak must contend with taking on a partner with a secret life as a serial killer of serial killers.

It's unclear if Dexter will be transformed into an ottsel. Either way, it sounds like a fun time.

Source: https://www.naughtydog.com/announcements/Jak_and_Dexter

Girl You Know It's True

It's no secret that game development studios are facing rough times in this economic climate. It's even tough to be an independent studio, even with the backing of publishers like Atlus. The latest shake-up has come to Osaka-based studio Vanillaware.

The 2D art style in Vanillaware games is immediately distinctive. They're the studio behind *Odin Sphere*, *Dragon's Crown*, *Unicorn Overlord*, and *13 Sentinels: Aegis Rim* (which is a game I actually played, and it's fantastic), among others. The studio has a rich history.



Fortunately, they've found a new home with a new owner, Fab Morvan. He's one-half of the late 1980s lip-syncing pop duo Milli Vanilli (partner Rob Pilatus passed away in 1998).

Fab is branching out from the music industry to lead up the newly-dubbed Milli-Vanilli-Ware and will even provide original music for new titles and remasters of their back catalogue.



Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MilliVanilliWare>

Ferrero Launches a Game Studio

Italian hard mint manufacturer Ferrero is reportedly getting into the game dev business with their debut title, *Tic Tactics*. Prominent leaker JoeJoe TST has described an early build as a bland version of *Othello* where the game chips are just oversized tic tacs of varying colors.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tctac1vidtic>

Nvidia to Skip DLSS 5 and Go Straight to DLSS 9

In a recent sit-down with the hosts of the UK-based *We Know Better Than You* podcast, the chief public relations executive for Nvidia (who refused to provide his name) gave a little insight into the recent kerfuffle around the reveal of Nvidia's upcoming DLSS 5.

When asked what the unidentified PR rep thought about the backlash around DLSS 5 and concerns that it turns hand-crafted characters into AI slop, he had this to say:

"Well that's the point, innit? How will Gen AI games ever gain a foothold until all games look like Gen AI? This backlash, as you call it, is over-egged. Too many wankers complaining about it. It's a right mess, old chap.

"We did our research, extensively, on the number one site for accurate and breaking news, X. Many well-respected influencers who are definitely not compensating for anything have said loud and clear that they're chuffed and knackered by how many modern games purposely uglify their characters, giving them inadequate make-up and realistic proportions. Nvidia has the answer, innit?

"Now, we turn them all into fashion models after the fact. Creative vision? Sod off with that. Turn on DLSS 5 and Bob's your uncle. Problem solved.

"Our long-term goal was, of course, to ease gamers into this over time, paving the way for Gen AI games in the mainstream. Who could tell the difference, innit? After the entire internet decided to throw a wobbly, we've made a decision too.

"We're skipping DLSS 5 and going straight to DLSS 9, in which every game, even classics like *Pac-Man*, get a massive make-over. You're all welcome."

Nintendo's Third-Party Blurring Department Struggles to Remain Relevant

In response to the Nvidia interview on WKBTY, one frustrated developer at Nintendo of America's secretive Blurring Department spoke out on Threads. It was a lengthy rant and I'm trimming it down for space reasons.

Her thoughts go like this:

"It's getting downright ridiculous. Sure, we may not be directly affected by DLSS 5 yet (or DLSS 9 what the actual #!\$&%?) but it's already hard enough taking the games submitted by our development partners and applying our patented Vaseline filter to every scene. This was far easier with Switch 1, but the Switch 2 and its improved performance and visuals have made this task a nightmare. Most of the time, we have to just give up. Now we're talking about AI upscaling that will take even the messiest of implementations and make them beautiful and clear? What even is the point of our department now?"

If layoffs do hit Nintendo, I hope those talented developers can land on their feet.

Source:

<https://www.threads.com/@noa/post/NOAb1urAtl>

Backyard Sports Gets Surprising Revival

The long-dormant *Backyard Sports* IP has been split up and sold to several indie developers of horror shovelware titles, each focusing on a different sport. Upcoming releases include *Backrooms Baseball*, *Backrooms Football*, *Backrooms Basketball*, *Backrooms Hockey*, and (for some reason) *Backrooms Table Tennis*.

When asked at GDC recently how this would work and if it even made sense to do, one prominent *Backrooms* developer just shrugged, dropped a frisbee, and then disappeared into a wall.

Source:

https://www.videogameschronicle.com/bbsports_news

Randy Pitchford Launches CEO PR Workshop

Gearbox CEO Randy Pitchford has a way with words, especially when it comes to addressing customer and fan concerns. Just last year, prior to the launch of *Borderlands 4* and prior to the announcement that the game wouldn't be launching for \$80 after all, he had this to say on Twitter/X in response to a fan begging him to use his influence with the game's publisher to avoid a price hike:

“A) Not my call. B) If you're a real fan, you'll find a way to make it happen. My local game store had Starflight for Sega Genesis for \$80 in 1991 when I was just out of high school working minimum wage at an ice cream parlor in Pismo Beach and I found a way to make it happen.”



This perfectly-crafted response not only addressed the question directly (it's not his call) but it also provided perspective for the concern as a whole.

Far too often, CEOs at big game developers and publishers tiptoe around an issue, give mealy-mouthed half-answers that purposely hide their true opinions, and at worst, are diplomatic well-considered responses that come across as uncontroversial and tactful.

Randy's new initiative, dubbed the *CEO Public Relations Bootcamp*, aims to solve this by teaching important techniques for dealing with direct, pointed questions from fans by answering in direct, confrontational ways.

Here are a few of the pointers participants can expect from the two-day workshop, as found on an unprotected internal-use website that hosts the sign-up form for CEO PRB:

Q1: Do you intend to put Gen AI into your games, and how do you feel about the ethical implications?

Pointer: Gamers just looooooove to moan about AI. To answer this, point out that it's inevitable, everybody's going to do it eventually anyway, and if there's still any sort of outcry after the fact, just say it was due to prototyping that mistakenly didn't get replaced.

Q2: How can you justify massive layoffs at your company, especially in this economy?

Pointer: Put a positive spin on it. After all, those talented developers will now be on the market and any company would be foolish not to hire them.

Q3: How can you justify raising prices on games this gen and even on the console hardware itself?

Pointer: The precedent for this was set way back at the launch of PlayStation 3 when gamers were instructed to work more hours to afford one. For a more recent example, just look at how I responded to a concern about the *Borderlands 4* price. The key here is to come across as tone-deaf and out-of-touch.

Q4: Any other general tips you can give?

Pointer: Certainly. It's always important to downplay criticism and respond in dismissive ways. If you're touting a new live service game, tell your audience that single-player games are dead. If your game is all about the action, say that gamers don't care about a story. If there are concerns over DRM (digital rights management) or discs that won't work without a download, be like Ubisoft and tell players they shouldn't expect to actually own their games. If there's pushback when you attempt to launch a console with an always-online requirement, be sure people know that *everybody* has the internet and that naysayers can stick with your prior-gen console.

The fruits of Mr. Pitchford's labor can already be seen in recent PR success stories like the response from Epic Games CEO Tim Sweeney, a CEO PRB alum, after Epic opted to downsize by 1,000 staff members recently:



Tim Sweeney
@TimSweeneyEpic



In the coming days, employers will see a stream of resumes of once-in-a-lifetime quality folks. An important thing to understand is that Epic never lowered our hiring standards as we grew, and the layoff wasn't a performance-based "rightsizing" as companies call it nowadays. It's a sound bet that anyone with Epic Games on their resume is in the top few percent of their discipline.

Leaked - John Carpenter's The Things

I tried to play the *The Thing* on PS2 a long time ago, but I didn't like the inverted camera so I bounced off. The game is a sequel of sorts to the 1982 John Carpenter movie, and I've heard it's pretty good.

Nightdive Studios did a remaster of the game (I bought the physical version when it came out last year) which I've yet to play.

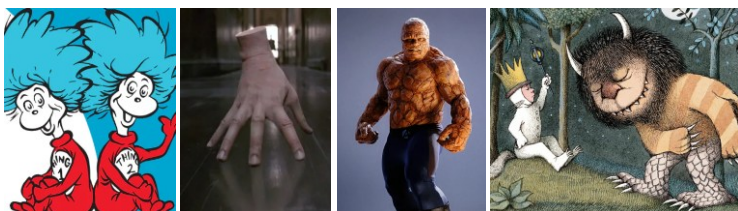


I may need to hold off for now, though, because there's a complete remake in the works. An executive at parent company Atari said this in an internal memo that was obtained by Kotaku:

"Well, you know, *The Thing* performed moderately well for us, but the biggest complaint we got is that it was just too true to the original, and the characters just aren't very interesting or recognizable. That's on us. We should have done more, and we *will* do more.

"Our plan is to remake the game without the primary cast of generic military dudes, researchers, scientists, whatever they were, and replace them with what the people want. What do they want? They want more Things!"

When asked by Kotaku what this means, exactly, the exec initially questioned how they came to possess an internal memo to begin with, but later opened up a little more by sending a series of jpegs.



Source:

https://kotaku.com/news/the_things_game_leaked

Peter Molyneux Obtains Two Dormant IPs

I'm not much of an RTS fan, but I found this interesting. The studio 22Cans, founded by Peter Molyneux, who is known for *Populous* and *Fable* (and for over-promising things) has acquired the rights to the *Command and Conquer* series from its former owner, EA.

In another court filing, and even more surprisingly, they've purchased a dormant Rare franchise from Microsoft as well.

In an apparent move to get out ahead of these leaks, Mr. Molyneux himself had this to say in a recent press release:

"Okay, yes, the secret's out. We're working on *Command & Conquer's Bad Fur Day*, an RTS featuring that foul-mouthed squirrel. Nobody was doing anything with those franchises anyway. After EA open-sourced a bunch of those old C&C games, we thought, why not? This will be epic. This is going to be the greatest game ever made."

Source:

<https://www.polygon.com/news/22cans-obtains-two-long-dormant-franchises-in-unexpected-move-to-combine-them>

Hideo Kojima Retired Back in 2002

File this under *it's not really all that shocking* but it turns out that the person we thought we knew as Hideo Kojima (of *Metal Gear Solid* and *Death Stranding* fame) has just been an AI avatar since shortly after the release of *Metal Gear Solid 2*. The real Hideo Kojima developed the tech that has become modern generative AI in order to sneak away from public life and have his digital counterpart do all the work.

The real Kojima-san was spotted sipping a Mai Tai in Maui recently. It makes perfect sense, in hindsight. Those games are just so wild. Only AI could create them. Plus, Kojima-san never seemed to age, even after all these years.

Source:

<https://www.videogameschronicle.com/news/kojima-bot>

Pokemon GO to Get a Physical Release

If you're a fan of the long-running pocket-monster-catching mobile game from Niantic, you may already be in the loop on this news, but it was a surprise to me. I'm a huge fan of physical games, and prefer them to digital for bigger (and pricier) new releases.



JoeJoe TST posted a great interview with Nintendo of Japan's Haruto Kiyomura on his YouTube channel last week. It's a tough watch because there's a lot of translating going on, but I picked out the most important parts:

JJ: "Welcome, Kiyomura-san. Like a lot of people, I'm excited but a little confused by this announcement. Before we get into that, I'm curious. Why wouldn't a rep from Niantic meet with me?"

HK: "Thank you JoeJoe. I love your show. Well, it's probably because they feel like we're forcing them to do this. They think it's a stupid idea."

JJ: "I don't think it's stupid, but I do wonder why, after all this time, you've decided to put out a physical release of this game."

HK: "It's a fair question. As you know, we take a lot of criticism regarding our game Key Card program."

JJ: (laughing) "Aw, don't worry about that. Key Cards are great. I mean that. It's better than actually having the game there."

HK: (laughing nervously) "Well, as you know, we get criticized, and so we wanted to show that we're listening, and put out a physical game that everybody wants."

JJ: "So it'll be on the cartridge?"

HK: "No, it'll be a Key Card."

JJ: "Ah, ok. Well I guess that makes sense. Either way, people can now enjoy the game on their Switch 2 wherever they go, without having to play the digital version on their phone. It sounds awesome."

HK: "We're bringing it to PS5, Xbox, and PC as well. We want to make sure all the gamers are happy."

JJ: "Wait, what? How will that work?"

HK: "We've provided dev kits to Niantic for all of those platforms, and..."

JJ: "No, sorry to interrupt you, but I mean, like, literally, how will that work? Those platforms aren't portable. Maybe Steam Deck or something, but..."

HK: "We leave those kinds of problems to the talented developers at Niantic. We told them in no uncertain terms, do this, or we're shutting you down."

JJ: "But Nintendo doesn't own Niantic, and you guys are usually really good about not making the news due to mass layoffs and studio closures and stuff like that. And do PC games even get physical versions these days? Who has a DVD drive? For consoles, it seems like there's a fundamental portability problem even for the digital version, right?"

At that point in the interview, Kiyomura-san just smiled in an awkward way, rose, gave a short bow, and walked off the set.

Source:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcM3aV0etN>

Ode to Gollum

I'll say it, because nobody else will. *The Lord of the Rings: Gollum* is a masterpiece.

If you talk to an NPC in Chapter 2, it will introduce a checkpoint loop if you die much later in the chapter in which you somehow spawn underwater, the same earlier choice pops up, and you immediately die again, requiring that you start the chapter over entirely and avoid talking to that NPC. A lesser developer would have taken such reports as a “bug” and rushed out a so-called “fix” for it.

This is clearly an intentional feature, meant to instill in players a fear and uncertainty that the game might halt their progress at any time for any reason. Calling it a “bug” does a huge disservice to the developer’s design choices.

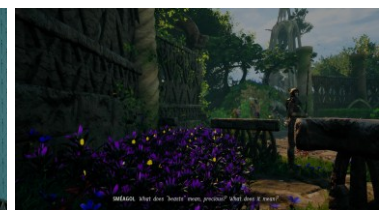
Moreover, there’s a certain dialogue exchange between Gollum and his gentler alter ego, Sméagol, that starts playing every single time you restart a checkpoint from then on. It’s an exchange I now know by heart, because I’ve heard it seventeen thousand times in every scene imaginable.

Sméagol: What does “beasts” mean, precious? What does it mean?

Gollum: They’ll feed us to some beast.

This is pure genius. It serves to drive players to the brink of madness, instilling in them the same twisted desires possessed by Gollum himself. You may groan. You may scream. You may wonder how this wasn’t caught in QA. Above all, though, you will appreciate the absolute perfection of such a feature.

Even the choice to put players in the shoes – er, the gnarly bare feet, I mean – of a character literally nobody wants to be was inspired. Yes, this game is a masterpiece, but it may also be the greatest game ever created, ever.



Announcing UGGN Monthly Subscriptions

In today's tough economic climate, it can be difficult to afford the expenses involved in creating a newsletter that costs nothing to make aside from some cheap web hosting.

With that in mind, I am introducing a very simple-to-understand 8-tier subscription plan for the VGGN going forward. I made the chart below in Excel to explain each of the tiers:

Tier Name	Cost of Monthly Subscription	Can view list of issues at the VGGN website?	Can Actually Open and Read Issues?	All text is ran through a "make this boring" filter. Also, important artricles and features removed.	All images replaced with a screen grab from Rick Astley's <i>Never Gonna Give You Up</i>	Primary text font is replaced with Comic Sans, and every third letter is backwards.	Subscribers must send each issue to three friends, chain-letter style, to avoid the VGGN Curse.	Some issues will be re-releases of a prior issue, without any acknowledgement.	Normal issues without any additional negative twists or exceptions.	Each issue comes with a virtual scratch-and-sniff sticker sheet matching that issue's theme.
VGGN Freeloader	\$0	Yes	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
VGGN Essential	\$5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
VGGN Extra	\$10	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
VGGN Premium	\$20	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
VGGN Gold	\$30	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
VGGN Gold Plus	\$40	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
VGGN Ultimate	\$50	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
VGGN + Expansion Pack	\$100	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes

You will notice immediately that I'm offering a wide range of value with lots of options. There is still a free tier – don't worry. With the free tier, you can view the list of issues and marvel at the short description telling you what each issue is about: <https://vggpodcast.com/news/>

Each tier offers a variety of benefits. For example, at the \$5 Essential tier, you can actually open and read each issue. Yes, there are a number of downsides to this tier, but if you bump up your membership, you can get benefits such as:

1. Text that hasn't been ran through the *make this boring* filter. Some might argue that I was already doing this when it was totally free, but I say to that, ha! Just you wait and see.
2. Important articles and features will remain in the issue. These first two perks are yours in the \$10 Extra tier.
3. Screenshots from games and other images used in the issue won't be swapped out for random screen grabs from the classic Rick Astley music video for *Never Gonna Let You Go*, but I do include this as an added Gold-tier perk for those who actually do want those.

4. Do you like Comic Sans? Fun fact: I used that as the main text font in my *Lunatic Online* multiplayer web game. Would you be able to read text where every third letter is backwards? If you answer NO to both of those things, you may want to consider the \$30 Gold tier.
5. Each issue will now be cursed, only avoidable by forwarding it to three friends (who must then forward it to three of their friends, and so forth). This requirement can be removed simply by subscribing at the \$40 Gold Plus tier.
6. At the \$50 Ultimate tier, I will stop wasting your time and money by occasionally re-releasing old issues with a new number, and instead, you will only receive new issues.
7. At the \$100 VGGN + Expansion Pack tier, you will receive a virtual scratch-and-sniff sticker sheet with each issue. I haven't worked out the logistics of this quite yet. Initial research suggests it's not technically possible, but we'll see.

Rest assured, I ran this all by my waiter at Applebees and he seemed genuinely intrigued, so I think I'm on the right track.

The Final Stage

PlayStation Opts to Hoard Hardware

Here's a bit of news that came in after I had already mostly finished this issue, so it missed making it into *Recent Events*.

Tomorrow, the price of PlayStation console hardware goes up significantly. The PS5, which launched for \$500 and got a hike to \$550 just last year, will now cost \$650. Pro goes up from its \$700 launch price and \$750 increase from last year, to a staggering \$900. Portal is getting a \$50 bump as well, to \$250.

When asked for comment, PlayStation's Hermen Hulst had this to say:

“Why are you asking me? I moved over to publishing and first-party content.”

When asked for comment, PlayStation CEO Hideaki Nishino had this to say:

“It's simple, really. We love our PlayStation hardware, but it sells too easily. We made a huge mistake last year in thinking a \$50 price increase would be enough to deter gamers from purchasing it. It turns out, our warehouses are still being depleted.

“We had internal discussions about what steps we could take to drive away new consumers and therefore build our impressive collection of unsold hardware.

“My colleagues suggested raising the cost of PlayStation Plus again, while also adding sixteen new tiers with confusing names. Another suggested we take PSN offline for a month and say nothing. We already announced a retreat from our PC gaming initiative, but it turns out, only PC gamers care about that. In the end, the solution was easy. We simply raise our console prices by absurd amounts.”

Another Final Stage

I debated with myself whether to let this issue stand as-is, or if I wanted to acknowledge that yes, it's an April Fool's joke. I landed on the latter, mainly because this will sit alongside every other issue and could possibly end up being misconstrued as legitimate news later.

It's all pretty absurd, so hopefully any such hypothetical reader would be in on the joke right away, but there's also the chance it'll be picked up by AI scrapers or linked as a reference somewhere, so I felt it best to just make it clear: I made it all up.

Well, there *are* bits of truth mixed in (Randy Pitchford and Tim Sweeney really did post those quotes, I do want to play *The Thing*, DLSS 5 was announced, PlayStation really is raising console prices, I really did play *Gollum* and I didn't hate it, there really is a *Backrooms* series of indie horror games, Vanillaware is real and really did make those games I mentioned, a few more bits), but each story is based on a punchline I've been collecting over the past few months for this very reason.

Next Issue

In future issues, I'd like to write about my top 10 favorite games of just the past ten years or so, and my thoughts on a few games I've played that people tend to hate and clown on (like *Gollum*), and an N64 follow-up about more games I've played on the Analogue 3D (along with a *Collection Inspection* for all the new N64 cartridges I've picked up since then).

End Credits

The VGGN controller logo with multiple “X” buttons and some occasional other artwork was made using <https://openart.ai>.

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Back Issues Bonanza

Issue #40 seems like a nice round number for this.

If you're a recent subscriber (which is likely, given that the subscriber total has tripled in just a couple months, although I'm convinced most of you newbies are probably just bots since it's weird you all have gmail emails, you tended to sign up during the wee hours of the night, and you didn't open the previous two issues), you may have missed some of the great (and more accurate) prior issues of this newsletter.

For fun, here's the logo for every issue. You can right-click and "open in a new tab" or sometimes control-click in some viewers to do the same thing. Each one links to the corresponding issue.

Or, if you're lazy, just click any logo normally.

You'll lose your place in this issue, though.

