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NEWSLETTER

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Issue #41 – May 2, 2026

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Loading Screen

At least one person read my April Fool's Day issue of VGGN and told me – and I quote – it's "an instant classic." Granted, that person was Bill, a good friend of mine, but I don't think he's wrong. I'm biased, of course, but I think it turned out well. If you missed it, check out the absurdity [here](#).

It was fun to be creative and just make stuff up for a change, but I don't know if it's something I'd do as an annual thing. The world (or at least the internet) seems to be growing weary of April Fool's Day.

This week, we're back to normal with an issue dedicated to my top 25 favorite games of the past ten years. Are any of my picks on your list?



Which of these games will make the list? None. It's all gen-AI slop.

Recent Events

Developer “Spiders” Closed by Nacon

When it became public recently that Nacon was having financial issues, my first concern was what’s going to happen to Spiders? My pre-order for the PS5 version of *GreedFall 2* got cancelled (since the physical release was cancelled), but I hoped that would be the worst of it. It looks like it did come out for Xbox physically, so that’s an option (although not ideal, as I don’t normally buy new physical games for Xbox), or I could wait for a sale and get it digitally (full price retail is beyond what I’m usually willing to spend on a “license”).

Now, though, it wouldn’t surprise me if the game was pulled from digital stores as well, if Nacon closes up completely and leaves their games in limbo. But, why did it have to be Spiders? They’re a studio known for some Eurojank masterpieces (if known at all) like *Bound by Flame* and *The Technomancer*, but more recently some better-polished (if a bit under-the-radar) hits like *Steel Rising* (a cool *Souls*-like on the easier side) and *GreedFall*.

GreedFall 2 did get criticized for a lack of polish that people felt was a step backwards for them, but I was still looking forward to it.

Spiders is (was) one of my favorite developers. They took inspiration from games like *Mass Effect* (the romance options and structure) and *The Witcher 2* (the 3-act structure they aped in *Bound by Flame*), and made some of my most memorable RPG experiences.

The only game of theirs I haven’t played (and yes, I even played *Faery: Legends of Avalon*) is *Of Orcs and Men*. I have it for PS3, and I might just give it a go in tribute to the Spiders legacy.

Source:

<https://www.videogameschronicle.com/news/nacons-collapse-claims-first-closure-as-rpg-studio-confirms-it-no-longer-exists/>

I almost said at least we still have Piranha Bytes (I loved *Elex* and *Elex II*, and they also made the *Gothic* series and *Risen* series), but no. Embracer Group shut them down in 2024.

Source:

<https://gameinformer.com/2024/07/08/gothic-elex-developer-pirahna-bytes-has-reportedly-shut-down>

PlayStation’s Confusing Hidden DRM

It was a wild few days on social media after it came to light that newly-purchased digital games were showing a 30-day license expiration on PS4 – something that wasn’t there previously. With Sony silent on the matter, there was a lot of speculation about what it meant and how it worked.

At first, it seemed that any new game purchased in March or April would require an online license check at least once every 30 days, else the game would be unplayable. To me, that’s a doomsday scenario. Although I prefer to buy physically, my PS4/PS5 digital library has 2000+ games at this point. The problem for me is my son’s console is set as the primary so he can play from my library too. Once in a while I’m locked out of *all* my own digital games on mine for at least 24 hours, due to failed license checks or some bug where PlayStation thinks I’m somehow already playing elsewhere. It’s a pain.

Clarification from Sony seems to suggest that this new DRM is put in place just on new purchases as a means of blocking an exploit that might allow them to be played after being issued a refund, and it only needs to happen once before converting to a non-expiring permanent license after the refund period. I didn’t even know Sony *had* a refund policy.

Sources:

<https://www.videogameschronicle.com/news/playstation-has-seemingly-added-a-30-day-drm-check-to-all-newly-purchased-digital-ps4-and-ps5-games/>

<https://www.videogameschronicle.com/news/playstation-finally-explains-30-day-timer-for-digital-games-says-its-only-a-one-time-check/>

A Decade of Masterpieces

It hurts my head trying to figure out my top 10 games of all time. I need to TARDIS it and fit 100 spots into my top 10 (tip of the hat if you get that, although that's an easier feat now than it might have been three decades ago).

My recent attempt, from 2023 (wow, that was three years ago now), produced [this list](#), which is invalid now that I look at it again, since it's missing the original *Deus Ex*.

1. *Fallout 3* (Xbox 360)
2. *The Last of Us* (PS3)
3. *Half-Life 2* (Xbox 360)
4. *Bioshock* (Xbox 360)
5. *Elden Ring* (PS5)
6. *Dishonored 2* (PS4)
7. *Persona 5* (PS4)
8. *Portal 2* (Xbox 360)
9. *Atomic Heart* (Xbox Series X)
10. *Chrono Trigger* (SNES)

Maybe someday I'll do a top 100 list, but today is not that day. Instead, this is a topic I've been mulling over for a while. What are my favorite games of *just* the past ten years?

In order to include one in particular, I needed the 10-year window to start January 1st 2016, otherwise #18 wouldn't make the cut. With that in mind, I'll be listing my favorite games released from 2016 through 2025. As good as a couple of the new releases from this year are (*Pragmata* and *Resident Evil: Requiem* so far), I wouldn't include them on this list.

I've also decided to make it a top 25 list, in reverse order from #25 to #1 (to preserve the suspense, I guess). As usual, I will probably kick myself later when I realize I forgot a game that should have bumped something else off the list.

If you know your release dates, I may have spoiled some of my list already, since a game that made my top 10 of all time would likely make it onto my top 25 of the past ten years.

Their order in the list also becomes less arbitrary as I get into the highest-ranking games. For many of them, I could probably swap them around in the list easily and not feel bad about it. In fact, I did swap around the ones that also appeared on that 2023 top 10.

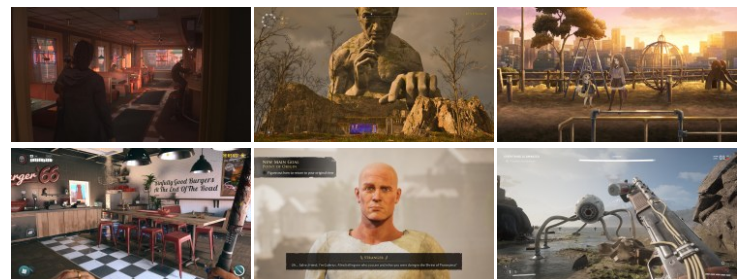
I loved all of these games and consider them all to be masterpieces, but if I was trying to be objective, I might not give them all a 10 out of 10 for various reasons. Some (even most), sure, but I can recognize that they're not all perfect, through a purely critical lens.

They are, however, games that left an impression on me. For some, I finished and immediately knew I had just found one of my favorite games ever. For others, it only became obvious in the days that followed, when I couldn't stop thinking about the game and reflecting on how good / cool / fun it was.

Some of these won't be a surprise. You may think of course *that would be here*. Others may be far less obvious.

For each entry on the list, I'm including the release date (hopefully my research was right), the console I played it on, and the Metacritic score for that version if it's available (otherwise any other version with a score). I'm not listing every platform a game is on, though, so if any of these pique your interest, check to see if it's on your platform of choice before writing it off as unavailable.

Let's just get into it. I present to you my top 25 video games of the past ten years. Enjoy!



#25: The Killing Game Series Concludes

Danganronpa V3: Killing Harmony

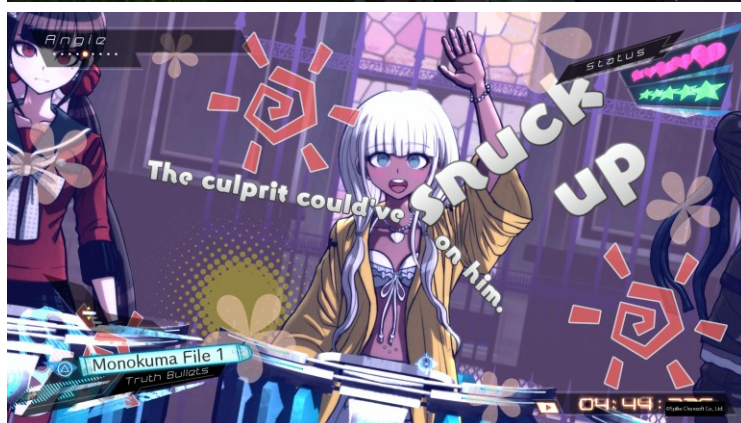
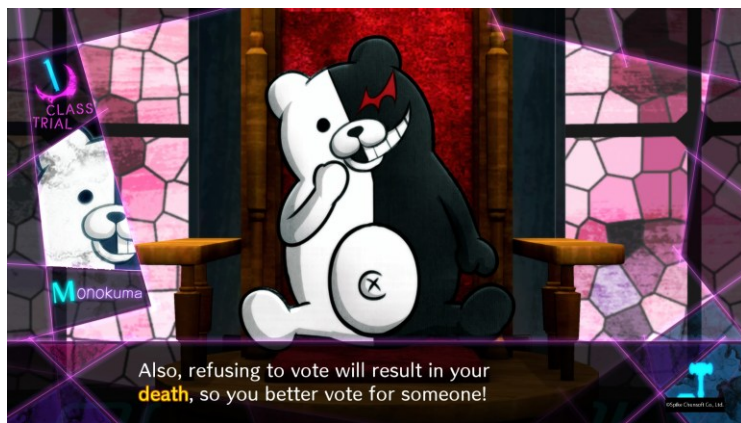
Played on Platform: PS4

Release Date: September 26th, 2017

Metacritic Score: 81 (PS4)

Mini-Review: No, but I did a deep-dive audio review in the [VGG Podcast Episode 155](#) (it starts at 17:14).

Some of the magic and mystery of the first (and even the second) game is absent here, but the game's writers decided to come up with a definitive ending and an even wackier twist to the series than what they'd done before. I'm not sure I totally loved what they did with that, but it was certainly bold, and I enjoyed the series' conclusion a lot.



#24: Murder in a Paradise of Immortals

Paradise Killer

Played on Platform: Xbox Series X

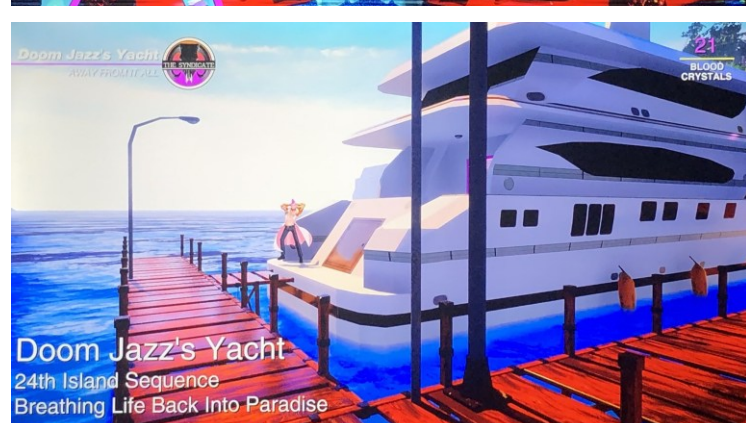
Release Date: September 4th, 2020

Metacritic Score: 81 (PC) or 89 (PS5)

Mini-Review: [VGGN Issue #14 Page 23](#)

This game made it into the 90% Weird category back in VGGN [Issue #14](#), but *weird* doesn't mean *bad*.

It's a tough game to describe, with a bonkers story involving immortal zealots and abducted humans that are forced to worship bizarre gods, and a murder that only Lady Love Dies (sequestered away in exile and so the only one not under suspicion) can solve. Lots of exploring. Lots of investigating. Super weird.



#23: Time Loops and Golden Rules

The Forgotten City

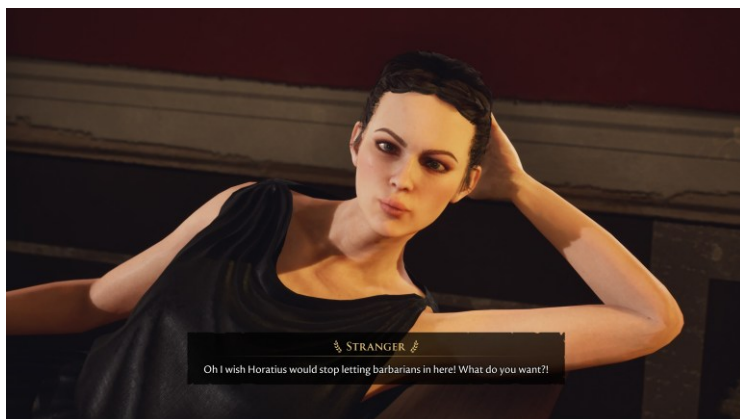
Played on Platform: PS5

Release Date: July 28th, 2021

Metacritic Score: 85 (PC and PS5)

Mini-Review: Yes! Look for it later in this issue!

My son just started playing this a few days ago, but I don't think it's grabbing him yet. It does take a little while before the brilliance of this game shines through, but when it did for me, this is easily one of the most memorable (but overlooked) games of the past decade. It started life as a *Skyrim* mod, but became a fully-fledged time-looping puzzle adventure that's unlike anything else out there.



#22: The Latest in a Series of Epic RPGs

Xenoblade Chronicles 3

Played on Platform: Nintendo Switch

Release Date: July 29th, 2022

Metacritic Score: 89 (Switch)

Mini-Review: [VGGN Issue #5 Page 11](#)

I liked how *Xenoblade Chronicles 3* pulled together elements from *XC1* and *XC2*, even if I don't quite remember (or fully understood) how. It's an epic, sprawling RPG with great characters, great music, and a great world to explore. It may be a little overlooked by RPG fans (as a Switch exclusive), but the whole five-game series (which includes *Xenoblade X* and the stand-alone *Torna* game) is great.



#21: Surprisingly Great Zombie Sequel

Dead Island 2

Played on Platform: PS5

Release Date: April 21st, 2023

Metacritic Score: 73 (PS5)

Mini-Review: [VGGN Issue #22 Page 12](#)

Dead Island and *Dead Island Riptide* catch criticism for being janky, but I loved them. After Techland moved on from the series (they do *Dying Light* now), *DI2* reportedly had a troubled development that saw it passed off to multiple developers and rebooted twice. I don't think anybody expected it to be good, let alone great, yet it is. It's a visually stunning zombie game that really delivers.



#20: Puzzles and Action Abound

Hell Is Us

Played on Platform: PS5 Pro

Release Date: September 4th, 2025

Metacritic Score: 75 (PS5)

Mini-Review: [VGGN Issue #36 Page 19](#)

This is the most recent release on my list, and it joins two other games that released in 2025. I always thought it looked interesting from the trailers, but I tend to avoid too much of that so as not to spoil my own experience. The game turned out to be weird and unique. It looks *Souls*-like, but isn't. The world is full of puzzles. The combat is fun. The story (and setting/backstory) is pretty wild. It's great.



#19: An Immersive Fantasy RPG

The Bard's Tale IV – Barrows Deep *Director's Cut*

Played on Platform: PS4 Pro

Release Date: September 18th, 2018

Metacritic Score: 84 (PC) – Unscored on PS4

Mini-Review: [VGGN Issue #21 Page 20](#)

I had never played any of the earlier games in the *Bard's Tale* series, aside from a few early minutes of whichever one was on PS2 or the original Xbox. I thought it was supposed to be funny and goofy, but I don't remember this being like that when I played it almost six years ago. What I do remember is the music, the interesting and immersive world, the turn-based combat, and various puzzle gauntlets.



#18: An Island Full of Puzzles

The Witness

Played on Platform: PS4

Release Date: January 26th, 2016

Metacritic Score: 87 (PS4)

Capsule Review: [VGGN Issue #12 Page 10](#)

Game designer Jonathan Blow has become a bit controversial for his strong and off-putting opinions on some things, but I can't deny that he makes great games. I was a big fan of *Braid* (and its twist), but I was unprepared for what *The Witness* had in store. It's an island full of puzzles (often in the sense that you walk up to a board and solve a puzzle), but it's so much more than that, with an open world structure that binds everything together. It's amazing.



#17: Board the Ship and Solve the Mystery

Return of the Obra Dinn

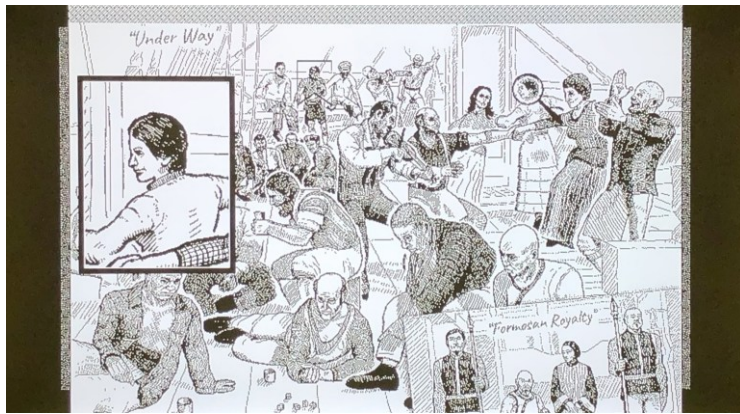
Played on Platform: Nintendo Switch

Release Date: October 18th, 2019

Metacritic Score: 86 (Switch) or 89 (PC)

Mini-Review: [VGGN Issue #30 Page 16](#)

The first time I heard about this game, it was from a discussion on the [4PP](#) (the 4 Player Podcast). I'm finding less time for podcasts like that these days, but something I like about 4PP is their wide range of gaming tastes, and how they manage to zone in on really great must-play indie masterpieces like this.



#16: A Five-Part Surreal Adventure

Kentucky Route Zero – TV Edition

Played on Platform: Nintendo Switch

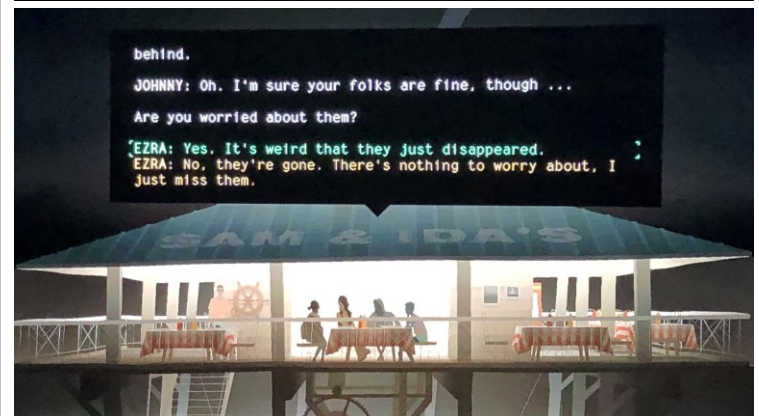
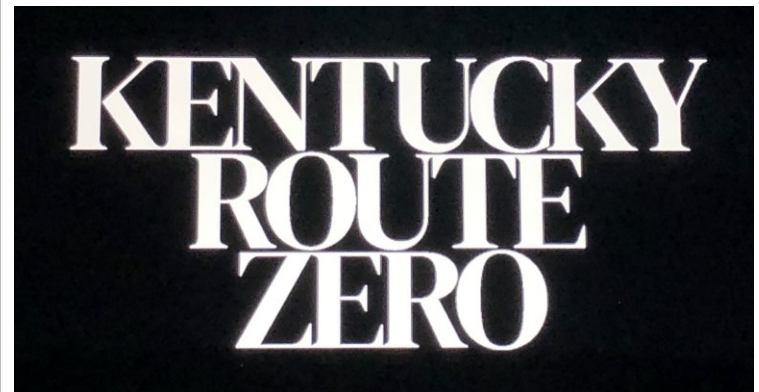
Release Date: January 28th, 2020

Metacritic Score: 87 (Switch) or 88 (PS4)

Mini-Review: [VGGN Issue #14 Page 19](#)

This started as an episodic PC game that, as I understand it, took forever between episodes. It always sounded intriguing, but it wasn't until the full package (as the *TV Edition*) was released for consoles that I gave it a try.

What a game. It's surreal and weird, hard to describe, and absolutely fantastic. The story goes to some weird places. It didn't wrap up like I thought it would (my prediction for how it would end was wrong), but that's totally fine.



#15: The Writer's Nightmare Isn't Over

Alan Wake 2

Played on Platform: PS5

Release Date: October 27th, 2023

Metacritic Score: 89 (PS5)

Mini-Review: [VGGN Issue #11 Page 21](#)

The irony here is that I wouldn't have played *Alan Wake 2* until much later (if ever), since it launched as a download-only digital release. As it turned out, I had to put in several days of minimal-rest crunch time after an emergency happened with some data corruption at work, and my boss bought me this and a couple other games as an extra thank-you. I'm so glad I got to play it near launch. I loved it.



#14: Expertly Crafted First-Person Puzzles

The Talos Principle II

Played on Platform: PS5

Release Date: November 2nd, 2023

Metacritic Score: 90 (PS5) or 85 (Xbox Series X)

Mini-Review: [VGGN Issue #12 Page 23](#)

The first game had a story, but it was kind of mysterious and vague until the end. It was one of the first *Portal*-like games I ever played other than *Portal* and *Portal 2* and a couple others (in the sense that it's a first-person puzzle game with exploration elements).

The second game, though, had a way more interesting story, with top-notch puzzles and world design that makes it an all-time favorite.



#13: The Twists Just Keep Coming

13 Sentinels – Aegis Rim

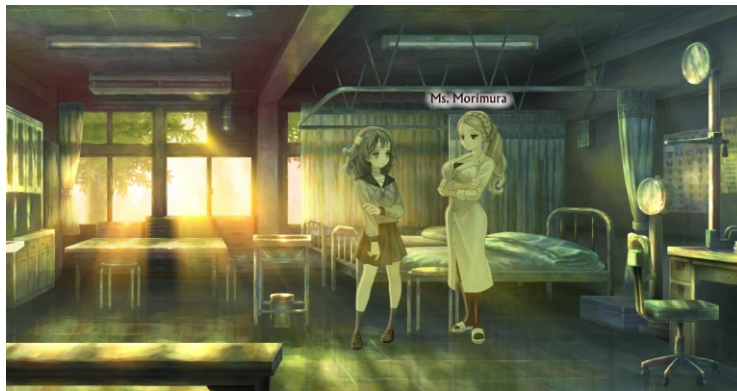
Played on Platform: PS5 (PS4 version)

Release Date: September 22nd, 2020

Metacritic Score: 85 (PS4) or 88 (Switch)

Mini-Review: [VGGN Issue #15 Page 17](#)

Vanillaware's art style and character design is distinctive in games like *Odin Sphere*, *Dragon's Crown*, and *GrimGrimoire*, but I never played more than a few minutes of any of them until *13 Sentinels*. I'd be remiss to spoil anything because (like everything on my list) I consider this a must-play game for everybody, but there are twists upon twists in a story that's interspersed with tactical mech combat missions. Did I mention the story?



#12: A Porter's Work is Never Done

Death Stranding 2 – On the Beach

Played on Platform: PS5 Pro

Release Date: June 26th, 2025

Metacritic Score: 89 (PS5) or 91 (PC)

Mini-Review: [VGGN Issue #11 Page 21](#)

Much of the first few hours of the first *Death Stranding* are spent in slow-paced hikes where timefall (a special rain that ruins your cargo) is a constant pain. My son started it, but bounced off because it just didn't grab him. I loved that first game, but the sequel is even better. I did way more road-building and rarely walked anywhere after the opening. It was my second favorite game of last year.



#11: Pick Your House, Chosen One

Hogwarts Legacy

Played on Platform: PS5

Release Date: February 10th, 2023

Metacritic Score: 84 (PS5) or 85 (Xbox Series X)

Mini-Review: [VGGN Issue #15 Page 16](#)

By no means am I a *Harry Potter* super fan. I read the first one-and-a-half books (and only after the movies), and like many, I'm sad that author J. K. Rowling isn't more open-minded about some things. I was also skeptical of a game set a hundred years before *Harry Potter*, given that the movies have a distinct vibe and design that resonates with me. The game is fantastic, and does justice to the franchise.



#10: Unsurprisingly Great Zombie Sequel

The Last of Us – Part II

Played on Platform: PS4 Pro

Release Date: June 19th, 2020

Metacritic Score: 93 (PS4) or 90 (PS5 remaster)

Mini-Review: [VGGN Issue #22 Page 14](#)

As seen in my now outdated top-10 list from 2023 earlier in this issue, *The Last of Us* is my second favorite game ever (and, unless I was to really weigh my options, that's where it remains). I felt it was a perfect story that ended in a way that never needed a sequel.

The sequel is just as good, if not better, and adds plenty to the narrative. It's also a highly divisive story among fans, somehow.



#9: My Favorite in This RPG Series

Xenoblade Chronicles 2

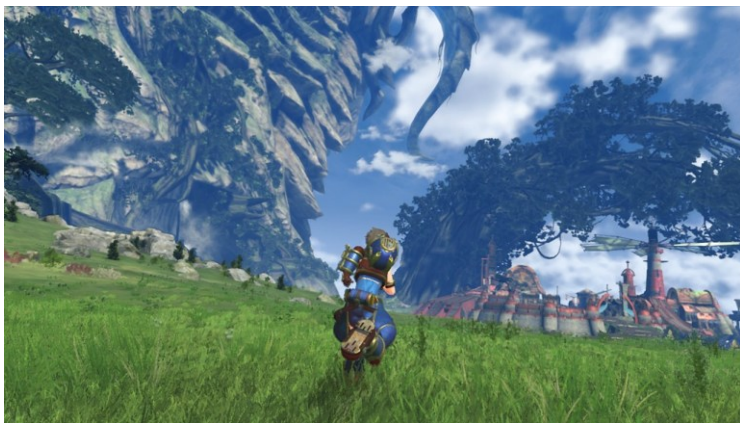
Played on Platform: Nintendo Switch

Release Date: December 1st, 2017

Metacritic Score: 83 (Switch)

Capsule Review: [A single post on Twitter](#)

Yes, *Xenoblade Chronicles* makes a second appearance on my list, in a much higher spot. It gets the edge over *Xenoblade 3* for me, for reasons I can't quite pin down. Like others in the series, it has some fantastic music and visual design, which pushes the Switch hardware without breaking it somehow. This has become one of my favorite RPG series. Is Monolith Soft working on a new one yet?



#8: Multiple Endings in the Far Future

NieR – Automata

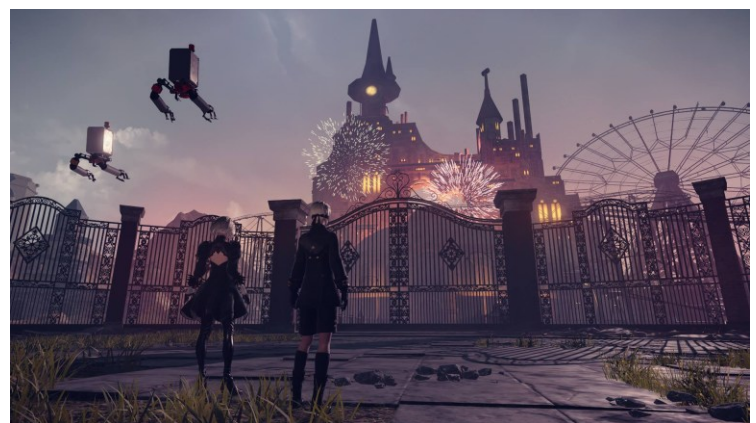
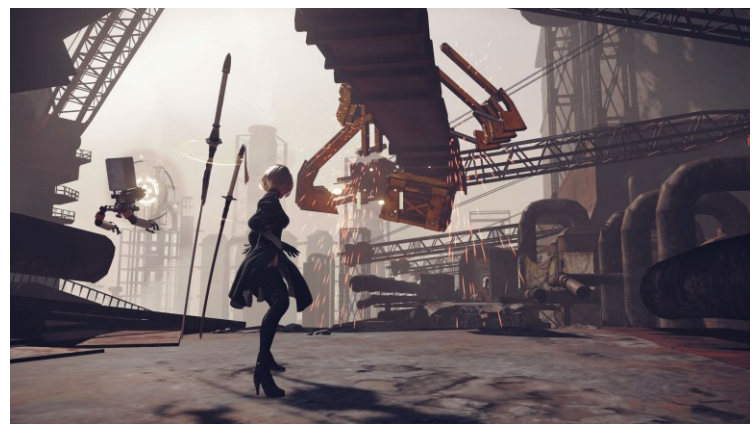
Played on Platform: PS4

Release Date: March 7th, 2017

Metacritic Score: 88 (PS4)

Mini-Review: No, but I did a deep-dive audio review in the [VGG Podcast Episode 142](#) (it starts at 36:33).

As with *Xenoblade*, the soundtrack for this game has a permanent place in my Spotify favorites. I enjoyed the original *NieR*, which I played on Xbox 360 way before the *NieR: Replicant* remake/remaster was a thing, and that was great, but I enjoyed *Automata* even more. My son played through it for the first time last week and enjoyed it as well.



#7: Great Stealth and Great Vibes

Dishonored 2

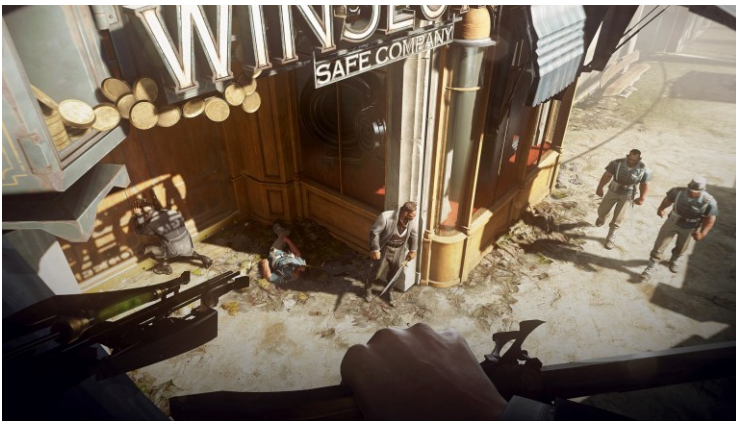
Played on Platform: PS4

Release Date: November 11th, 2016

Metacritic Score: 88 (PS4)

Mini-Review: No, but I did a deep-dive audio review in the [VGG Podcast Episode 124](#) (it starts at 34:55).

As much as I loved the original *Dishonored*, and the smaller-scoped follow-up after the second game (*Death of the Outsider*), it's *Dishonored 2* that easily stands out as the best in the series. Its immersive sim aspects allow you to fight or hide. I always did stealth, even if it meant constantly reloading my save. Each level is truly memorable and inventive.



#6: The Phantom Thieves of Hearts

Persona 5

Played on Platform: PS4

Release Date: September 15th, 2016

Metacritic Score: 93 (PS4)

Mini-Review: No, but I did a deep-dive audio review in the [VGG Podcast Episode 149](#) (it starts at 30:40).

As much as I loved *Persona 5*, I played it a few months after launch and never went back after the *Royal* edition was released. Atlus really loves releasing definitive editions with lots more content. I just can't force myself to wait for it, though, but I rarely want to invest another 120 hours to play through them again.

Fun fact: I named my newest cat Morgana.



#5: The Best Time Loop Game Ever

Outer Wilds

Played on Platform: Xbox One

Release Date: May 28th, 2019

Metacritic Score: 85 (Xbox One and PC) or 82 (PS4)

Capsule Review: [VGGN Issue #20 Page 16](#) plus a mini-review of *Echoes of the Eye* (DLC) in this issue!

It was tough for me not to put *Outer Wilds* even higher on this list. Ironically, it's a game that I was initially more critical of, when I first finished it, but I couldn't stop thinking about it afterwards. The banjo-driven theme song and the soundtrack in general (Andrew Prahlow) adds a lot to it, but the whole experience that involves space exploration and solving the game's many mysteries during a time loop is unforgettable. It's really something special.



#4: Don't Let the Chuds Ruin This One

Stellar Blade

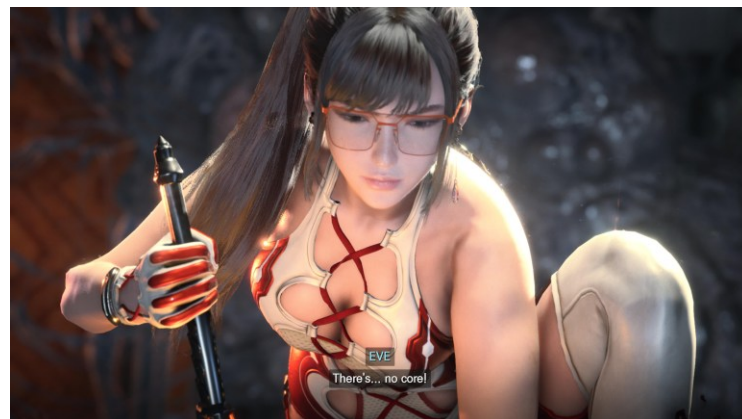
Played on Platform: PS5

Release Date: April 26th, 2024

Metacritic Score: 81 (PS5)

Mini-Review: [VGGN Issue #5 Page 12](#)

To be fair, I have to ask myself if I would have liked this game as much as I did, if the main character was some burly guy instead of Eve. On one hand, yes, because the music is fantastic, the gameplay is great, and the world it's set in is stunning and fun to explore. On the other, it would be a different game and I don't know how the story would even work. For the game it is, though, I absolutely loved it.



#3: A Popular RPG Formula, Perfected

Elden Ring

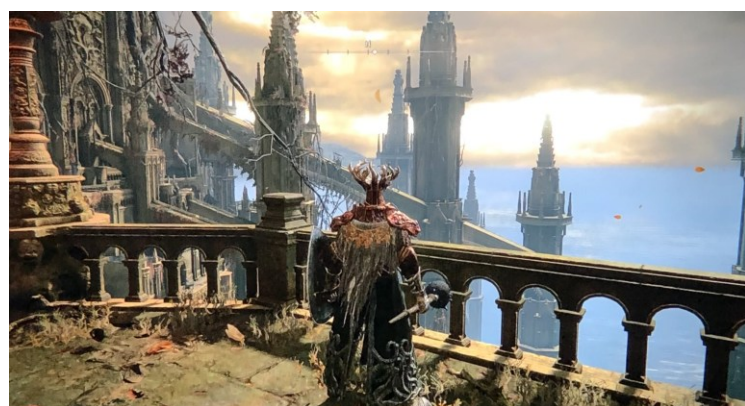
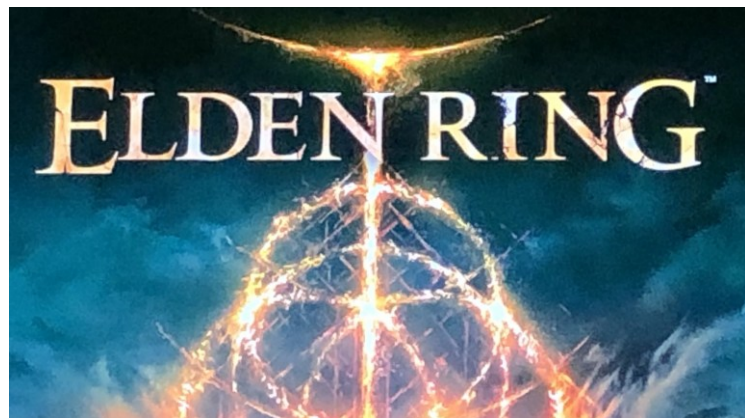
Played on Platform: PS5

Release Date: February 25th, 2022

Metacritic Score: 96 (PS5 and Xbox Series X)

Mini-Review: [VGGN Issue #35 Page 21](#)

This is right in the middle of my top 5, and really, a case could be made for any of them being in the number 1 spot. *Elden Ring* takes everything that's great about *Souls*-likes (a sub-genre of action-RPGs that FromSoft themselves invented with *Demons Souls* and *Dark Souls*) and puts it in a sprawling, dangerous open world. It's full of wonders and bizarre creatures. It's more approachable than any of the games that came before it.



#2: The Paintress Must Die

Clair Obscur – Expedition 33

Played on Platform: PS5 Pro

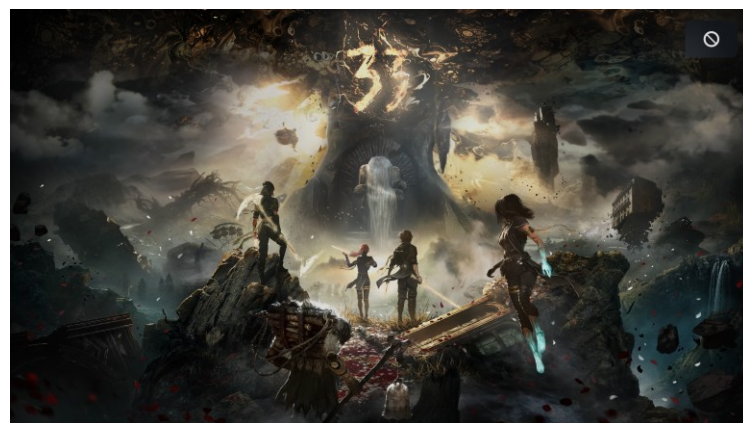
Release Date: April 24th, 2025

Metacritic Score: 92 (PS5)

Mini-Review: [VGGN Issue #32 Page 13](#)

Hands down, this was my favorite game of last year. I'm tempted to say it wasn't even close, but last year was a pretty great year.

The game is magical. It's amazing. I don't know how else to put it. From the story to the music to the setting and art design to the turn-based combat with some real-time aspects, it excels in every category. In fact, it won Game of the Year awards in many of them.



#1: Bioshock + Half-Life + Doom + Far Cry

Atomic Heart

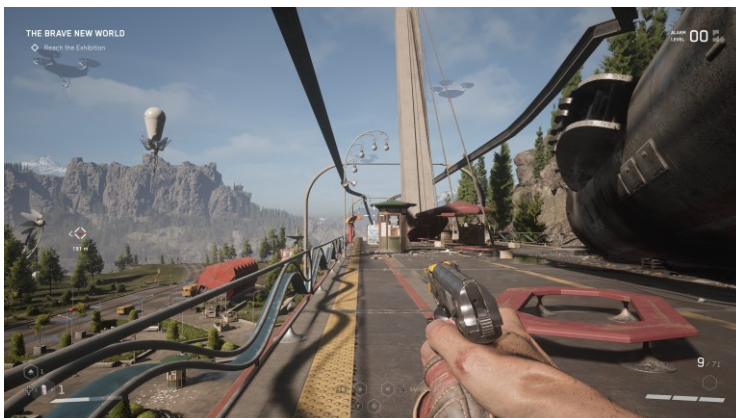
Played on Platform: Xbox Series X / GamePass

Release Date: February 21st, 2023

Metacritic Score: 73 (Xbox Series X) or 70 (PS5)

Mini-Review: [VGGN Issue #5 Page 13](#)

Throw a little *Portal 2* in the mix, and that's the soup that spawned *Atomic Heart*. I had this as #9 on my top 10 games of all time (from 2023), but I've come to appreciate it enough (despite only playing through it once) that I've bumped it up above the three other games of the past ten years that also appeared on that list. It's criminally underrated, if you ask me. There's DLC I never played, and a sequel on the way.



Omissions and Honorable Mentions

You may be wondering why *The Legend of Zelda (Breath of the Wild and Tears of the Kingdom)* – two of the most critically-acclaimed and well-loved games in recent memory – aren't on my list. In the case of *BotW*, it just didn't wow me. I probably wouldn't even put it on my top 100, but maybe that's because I played it at a bad time (and a few months after release, after everybody had already hyped it up to such a high level). I guess *TotK* did wow me (a fantastic game), but it's not one I look back on as a memorable, unforgettable experience like I do with so many others (and it was a year after release).

Maybe I'm too stuck on old-school Zeldas; or maybe I'm a fool and I made a mistake in not including at least *Tears of the Kingdom*.

Other great games from the past ten years that would easily fit my list if I was counting to 50 or beyond (and in no particular order):

Control

Hitman III

Marvel's Guardians of the Galaxy

DeathLoop

Baldur's Gate 3

Wasteland 3

The Hundred Line – Last Defense Academy

Indiana Jones and the Great Circle

High on Life

Immortality

Horizon – Forbidden West

Psychonauts 2

Assassin's Creed – Odyssey

Wolfenstein II – The New Colossus

Days Gone

Hollow Knight

Metro – Exodus

God of War – Ragnarok

Uncharted 4

Yooka-Laylee

The Surge 2

Quantum Break

If I had to pick just one of those to swap in to my top 25, it would probably be *Immortality*.

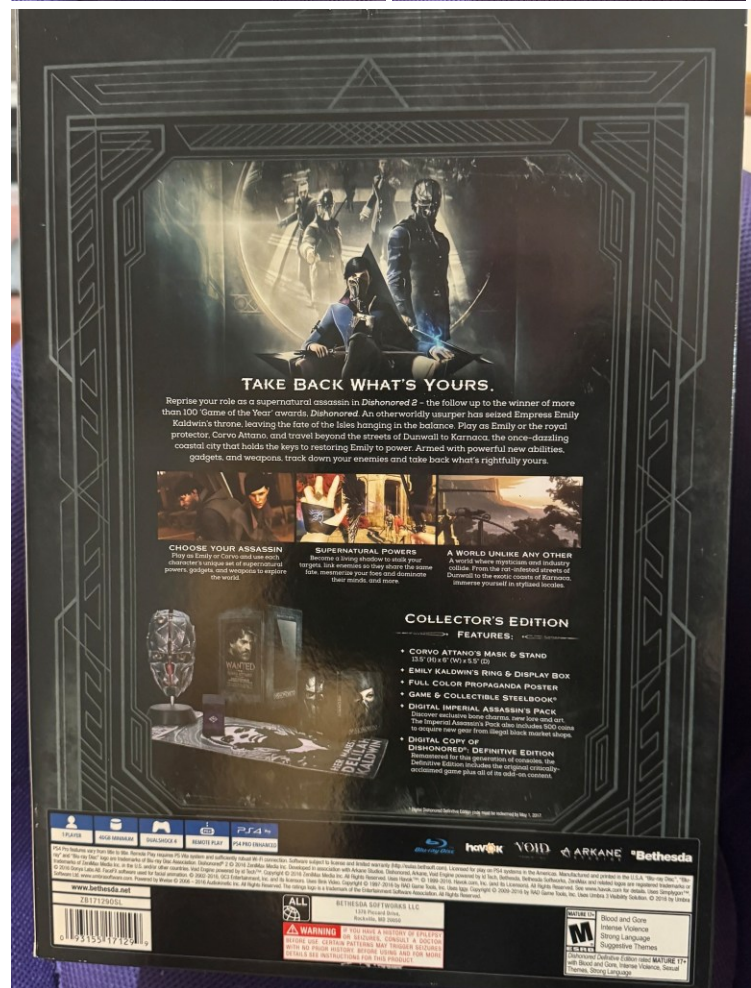
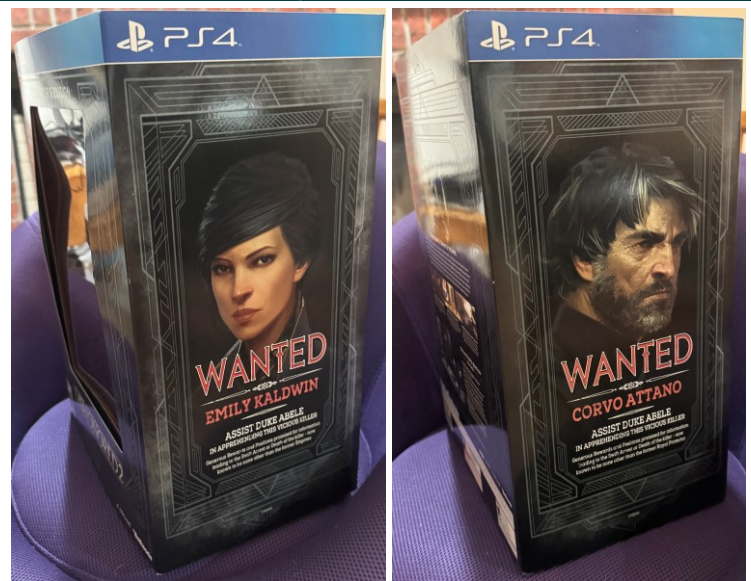
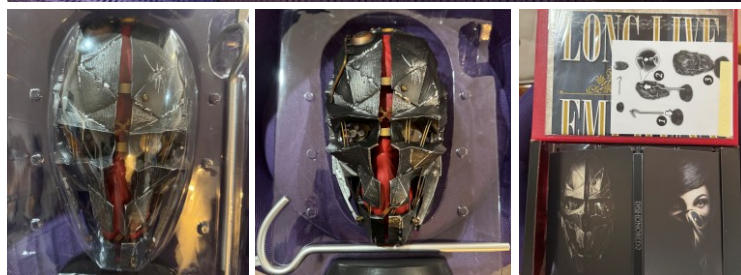
Collection Inspection

Here's a look at a few of the games that made my list. With minimal exceptions, these are collector's editions or special editions, but per usual, some of them are still factory sealed because I'm one of those dorks who likes to leave them unopened so they're (in theory) more valuable down the road.

Dishonored 2

Platform: PS4 / **Edition:** Collector's Edition

Comments: I didn't do my usual thing of buying a collector's edition *and* standard edition, so the box is opened. I rarely buy collector's editions these days.



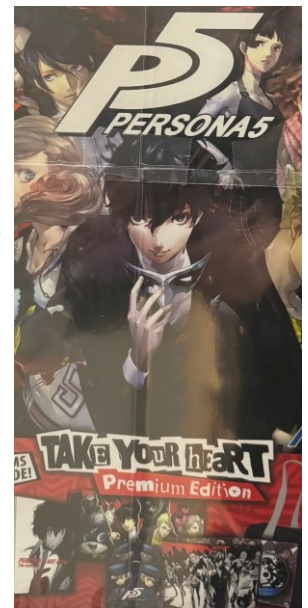
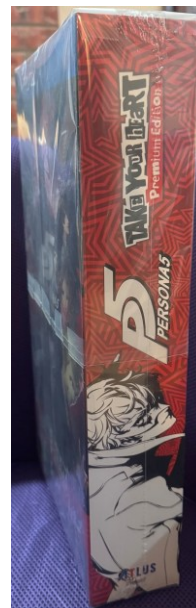
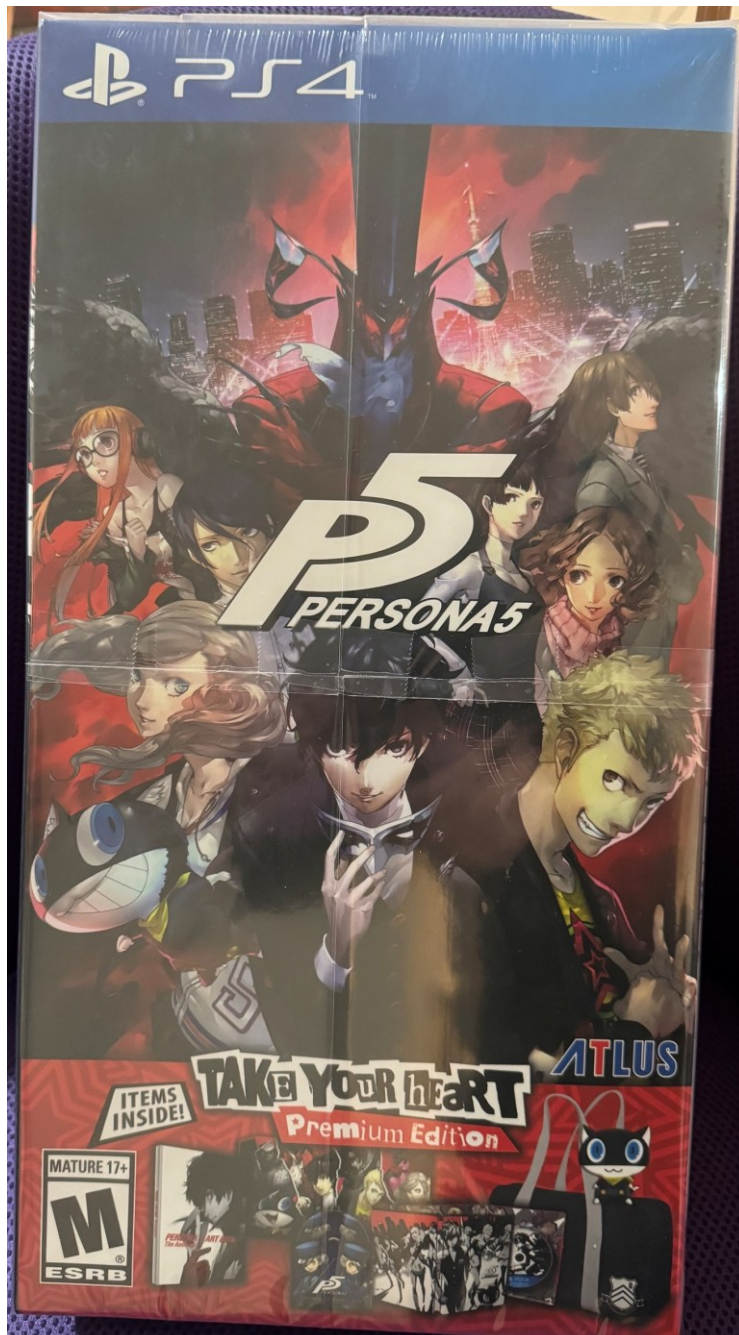
Persona 5 – Take Your Heart

Platform: PS4 / **Edition:** Premium Edition

Comments: It probably isn't obvious from the photos since there's nothing to provide a comparison, but the box is pretty big (15 inches tall) and holds the game, a Morgana plush, a tote bag, and other goodies. The tape and plastic you see is an additional protective layer (taped to itself, not the box) for help protect from shelf wear and dust, which I tend to do with these.

I said earlier that I never played *Persona 5 Royal*, but just reminiscing about how great and stylish this game was makes me want to. Maybe I'll do that once I retire and have all the time in the world.

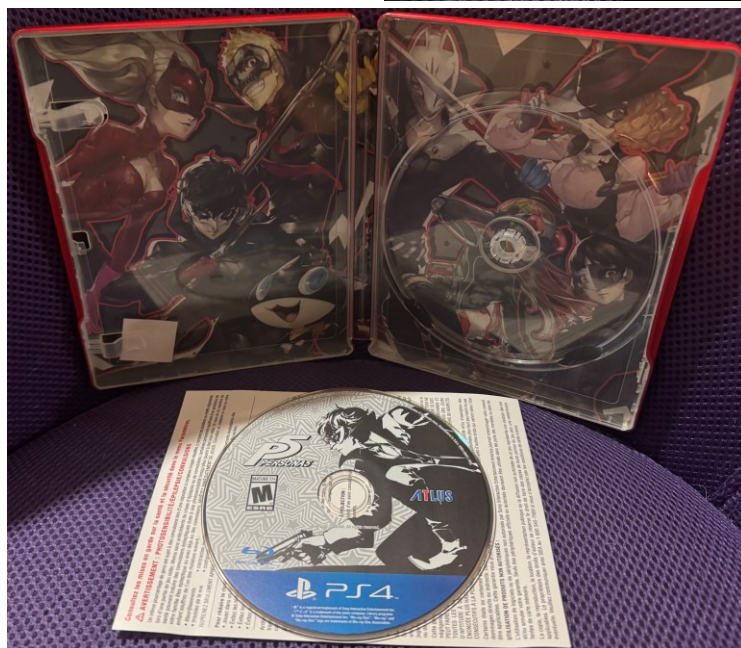
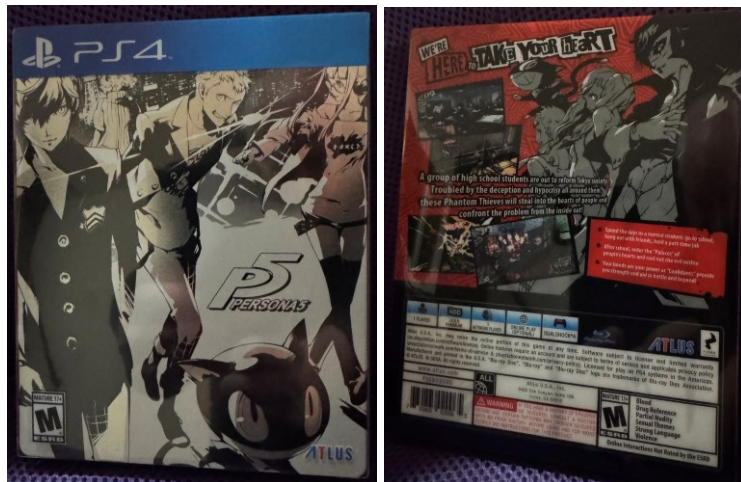
The *Persona 5* anime follows the same story and is a fun watch for anybody not interested in investing the time into playing the actual game.



Persona 5

Platform: PS4 / **Edition:** Steelbook

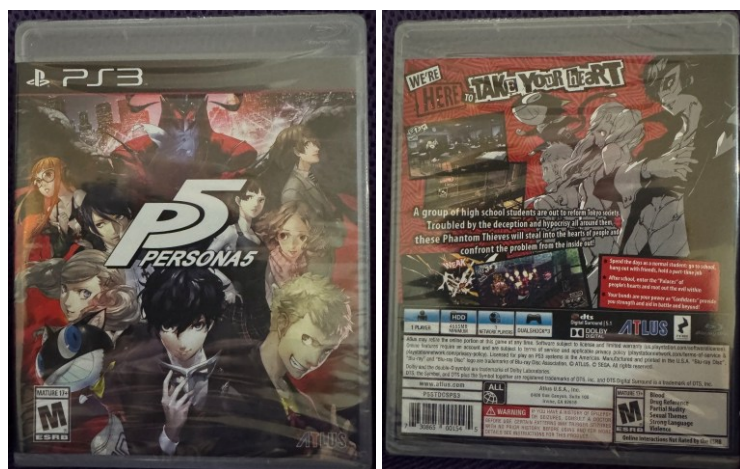
Comments: This version came in a cool red steelbook case with an outer plastic slipcover. Sadly, there were no other goodies (such as a soundtrack CD, sticker sheet, postcards, art book, or other such things you sometimes get in steelbook editions). I guess that's what the *Premium Edition* was for.



Persona 5

Platform: PS3 / **Edition:** Standard

Comments: It's easy to forget that *Persona 5* was a cross-generational game that also launched on PS3.

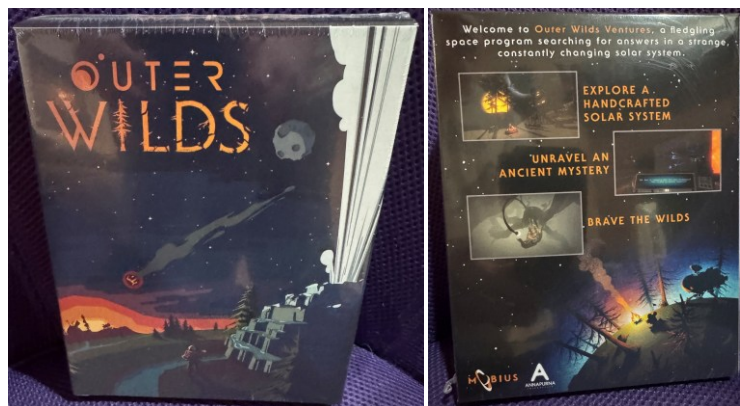


Outer Wilds – Explorer's Edition

Platform: PS4 / **Edition:** Limited Run Games

Comments: For the first hundred or so releases from Limited Run Games, I was a junkie, buying every game in every variation offered. Eventually I broke (or was broke) and stopped, almost completely, except for the very rare one-off when they put out a game that I just absolutely must have in my collection – like this.

They included LRG stickers at first. Those were cool. I never used them; just put them with the game in my collection. Then, they started doing numbered trading cards. Those are pretty cool too. Did they start over? I could have sworn there were 100 cards before this.



13 Sentinels – Aegis Rim

Platform: PS4 / **Edition:** Art Book Edition

Comments: I wasn't sure there was even a standard edition of this game, but I did a search on eBay (my cheat code for figuring out stuff like that) and there does seem to be a version without the outer slipcover and art book. Then again, it's exactly like the copy that comes in this edition, so it's hard to tell for sure.



The Bard's Tale IV – Barrows Deep

Platform: PC / **Edition:** Kickstarter

Comments: It's super hard to take photos of reflective surfaces, but I didn't want to remove my extra layer of plastic covering on this big-box PC edition I got as a Kickstarter backer reward.

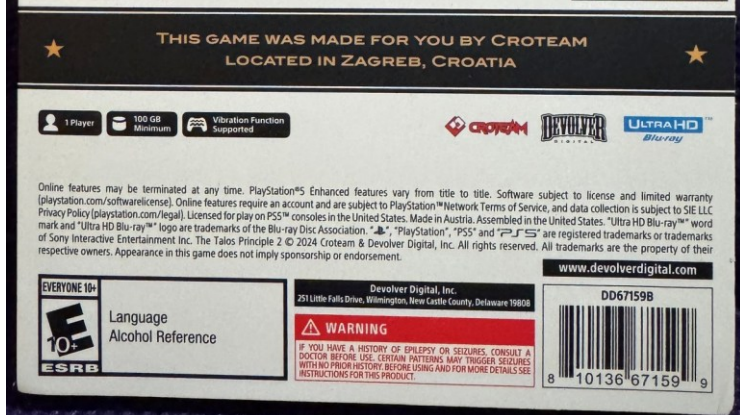
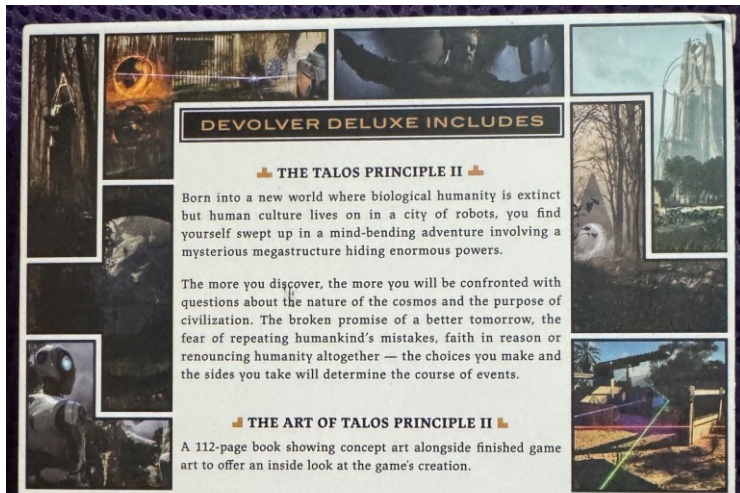
This is probably the least interesting thing in this edition of *Collection Inspection*, given that it wasn't a retail release, so there's no text or screenshots all over the box. I had to break myself of backing every high-profile game on Kickstarter after a while – an obsession that started with *Double Fine Adventure* (which became *Broken Age*). I don't even play PC games (well, not never, but rarely). I did play the *Director's Cut* of this on PS4 Pro, and loved it enough that it made my top 25 list earlier in this issue.



The Talos Principle II

Platform: PS5 / **Edition:** Deluxe

Comments: The art book included with this edition is pretty spectacular. It has the same problem most do, though, in that it's so high quality and stiffly bound that you have to bend the spine to actually open and see the pages – something I'm hesitant to do.

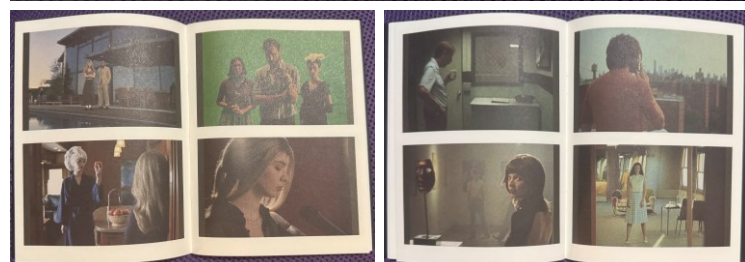
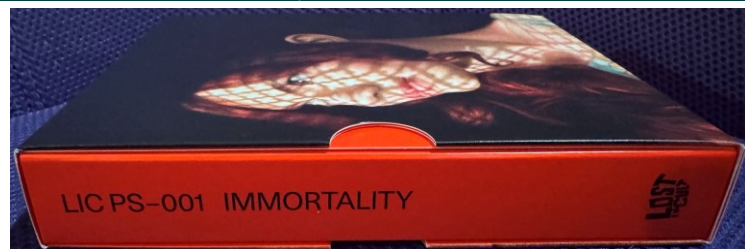
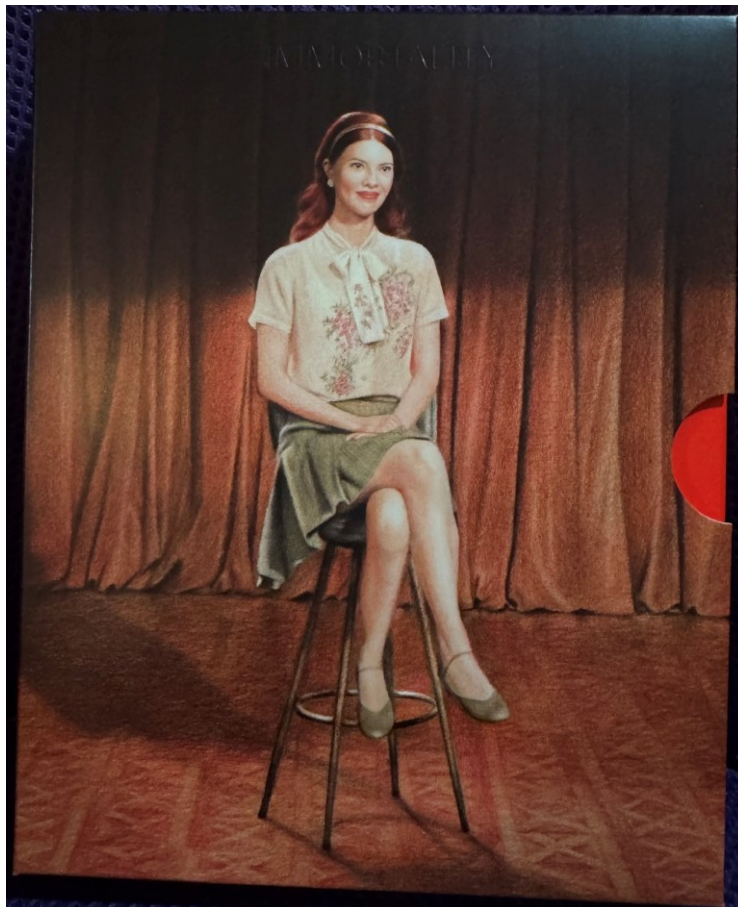


Immortality

Platform: PS5 / **Edition:** Lost in Cult “Editions”

Comments: I overlooked *Immortality* when putting together my list this week, and only remembered it once I was adding honorable mentions. I considered bumping #25 off (sorry, *Danganronpa*) so I could fit this in somewhere in the top 10. It’s that good. Maybe I should have, but it would have meant restructuring and moving stuff around, and I’m too lazy for that. As it happens, my “Editions” collector’s edition from Lost in Cult arrived today, and so I get to include it here in *Collection Inspection*. It came in a cool “Lost in Cult” box, which I’m including here too. This is one of the best works of visual interactive fiction ever made.

Also pictured is the standard edition, which I bought a while back. It’s the one with flames on the cover art.



Mini-Review: The Forgotten City



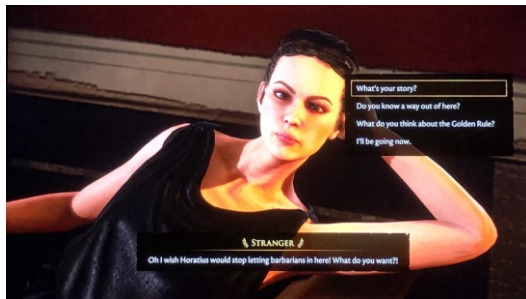
Finally! I was starting to think this year's crop of time loop games just wouldn't resonate with me, but *TFC* is fantastic. I loved it.



I just got the canon ending, which was highly rewarding and a great way to finish (although I still have more I want to do, so I'm diving back in after I post this).



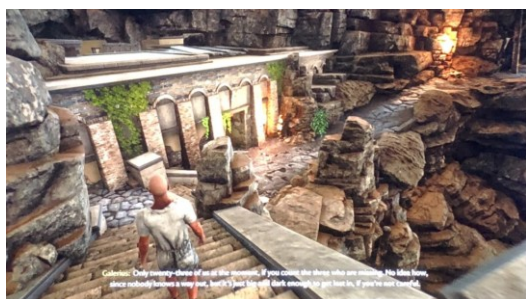
It's a game by a core team of three guys (with credits for localization and publishing partners and a big voice cast) that apparently started life as a mod for some other game. *Skyrim*? I forget.



The way objectives work (and the time-saving shortcuts you get) keep it from feeling repetitive or tedious. You get to know these characters, and it's fun to explore this ancient Roman city; but there's so much more I can't spoil.



Kudos to these developers for making one of my favorites of the year.

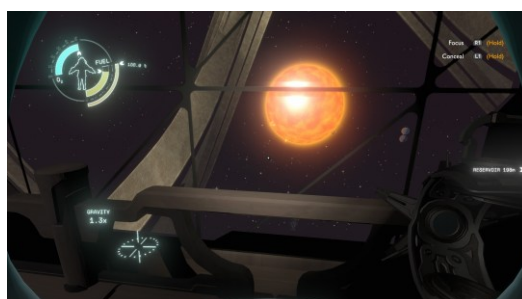
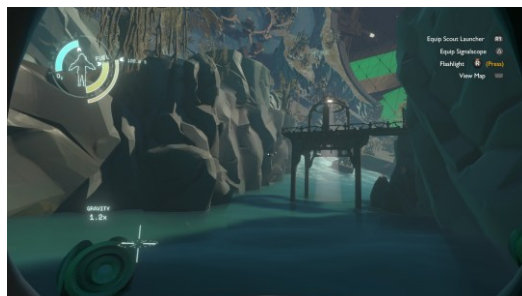
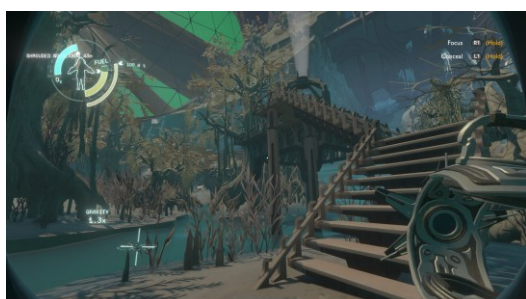


Note that the screenshots are a little blurry due to me still taking photos of the TV instead of actual screenshots back when this was first posted.

Played on console: PS5.

Originally posted: 08/21/2021.

Mini-Rev: Outer Wilds - Echoes of the Eye



I'll never know if I could have finished this game (DLC) completely unassisted, because when my son insists I play something, it's usually so he can watch and make disapproving noises until finally giving me hints whether I want one or not.

That said, I needed hints to piece everything together at the end of the main game a few years ago, and it's still one of my favorites.

Echoes of the Eye (DLC) has players explore a single expansive location with lots of surprises and puzzles that are baked into the very foundation of this new area. This might make it feel more focused and less overwhelming.

Despite losing out on some of that discovery given the circumstances, I still really enjoyed it and would highly recommend it. It's an awe-inspiring, immersive adventure worth taking.

Played on console: PS5 Pro.
Originally posted: 02/20/2026.

The Final Stage

Immortality

I really should have put *Immortality* on my list officially. Dang it. I guess, unofficially, slot it in at #9 and bump everything else down one.

Played on Platform: Xbox Series X / GamePass

Release Date: August 30th, 2022

Metacritic Score: 88 (Xbox) or 84 (PS5)

Mini-Review: [VGGN Issue #7 Page 19](#)

It's a "game" that's hard to follow at first, where you have the ability to jump around between film clips by clicking on things, but there's a bigger mystery baked into it. It's amazing what Sam Barlow and his Half Mermaid studio accomplished with this masterpiece.



Next Issue

At this point, I've played through quite a few N64 games on the new Analogue 3D. I could dedicate another issue to those. I also bought an absurd number of N64 cartridges off eBay (I really shouldn't have – that money could have gone for better things), so I could do a big *Collection Inspection* on those.

Another idea I've had is a feature about games that get a lot of hate, but aren't as bad as their reputation would suggest. It's pretty subjective, sure, and maybe I'm the only person who actually *did* find something worth liking about those games, but it might make for an interesting article.

I put out a request on [Threads](#) (and [BlueSky](#) and [Twitter/X](#)) earlier today, asking for ideas:

"I'd like to do some upcoming issue of VGGN about high-profile "bad" games that were either judged unfairly (subjective, I know), are better in hindsight, or just have some measure of fun to offer despite the critics. For me, examples would be *LotR Gollum*, *Biomutant*, and *MindsEye*. Not necessarily games in a gray area (ex: *Days Gone*) or where some people were just critical for dumb reasons (ex: *Dragon Age: The Veilguard*). Any other ideas? I may include some responses in that issues (if I get any)."

By the time issue #42 is out, it will have been a year since issue #1. I could always do an anniversary retrospective issue or something.

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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Images of the physical games in the *Collection Inspection* feature are photos I took of games in my own collection and weren't sourced from the internet.

Screenshots used in my video game mini-reviews and some screenshots used in other articles or features that weren't already attributed to a different source (ex: those that are not clickable) were captured by me in-game and are used here in what I believe is "fair use".

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