

QD SWITCH PLAYER



WELCOME TO SWITCH PLAYER

Hello everyone!

As you are reading this the Nintendo Switch 2 direct has probably happened, such is the quirk of print deadlines. We spent this issue making some wishes and predictions for what we want to see from the Switch 2, and we will have some fun going over them all next time to see how right we were!

Until then it's business as usual as we cover some more original switch content, and some of the best, most recent games, as we have for the last 8 years now. That's crazy to think that this all started that long ago, and over the course of 73 issues we've been fortunate to review and feature so many games,

go to many amazing events including many at Nintendo. It all seems so surreal – this venture started as a hobby project, and whilst Switch Player itself isn't self-sufficient financially, it has allowed me to write about games for a living and provide paid writing opportunities for so many people.

The next issue will be our last one as we prepare to hand over for a new era with a new magazine. Thanks for being with us, and we hope you'll continue to support what we do.

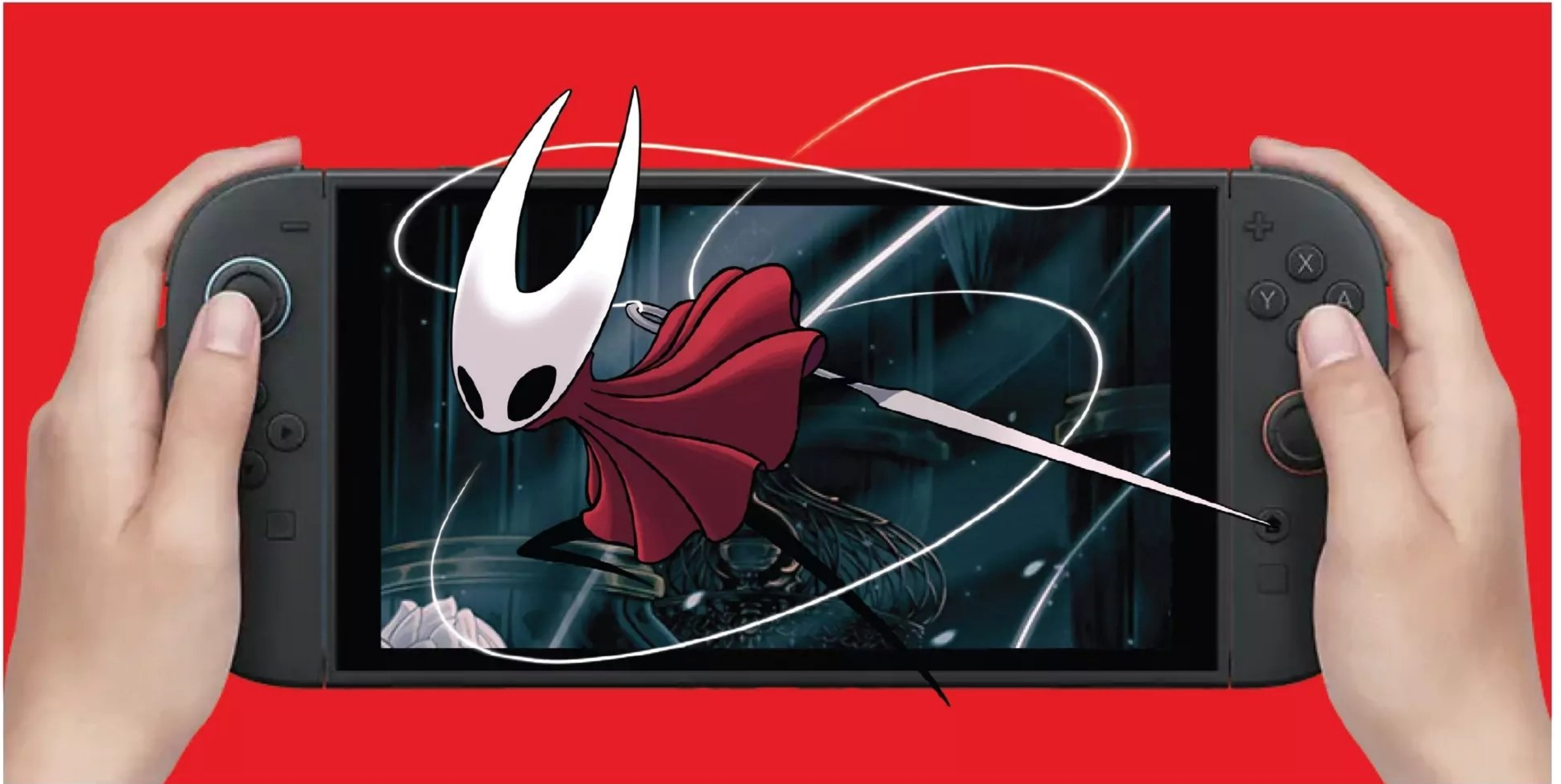
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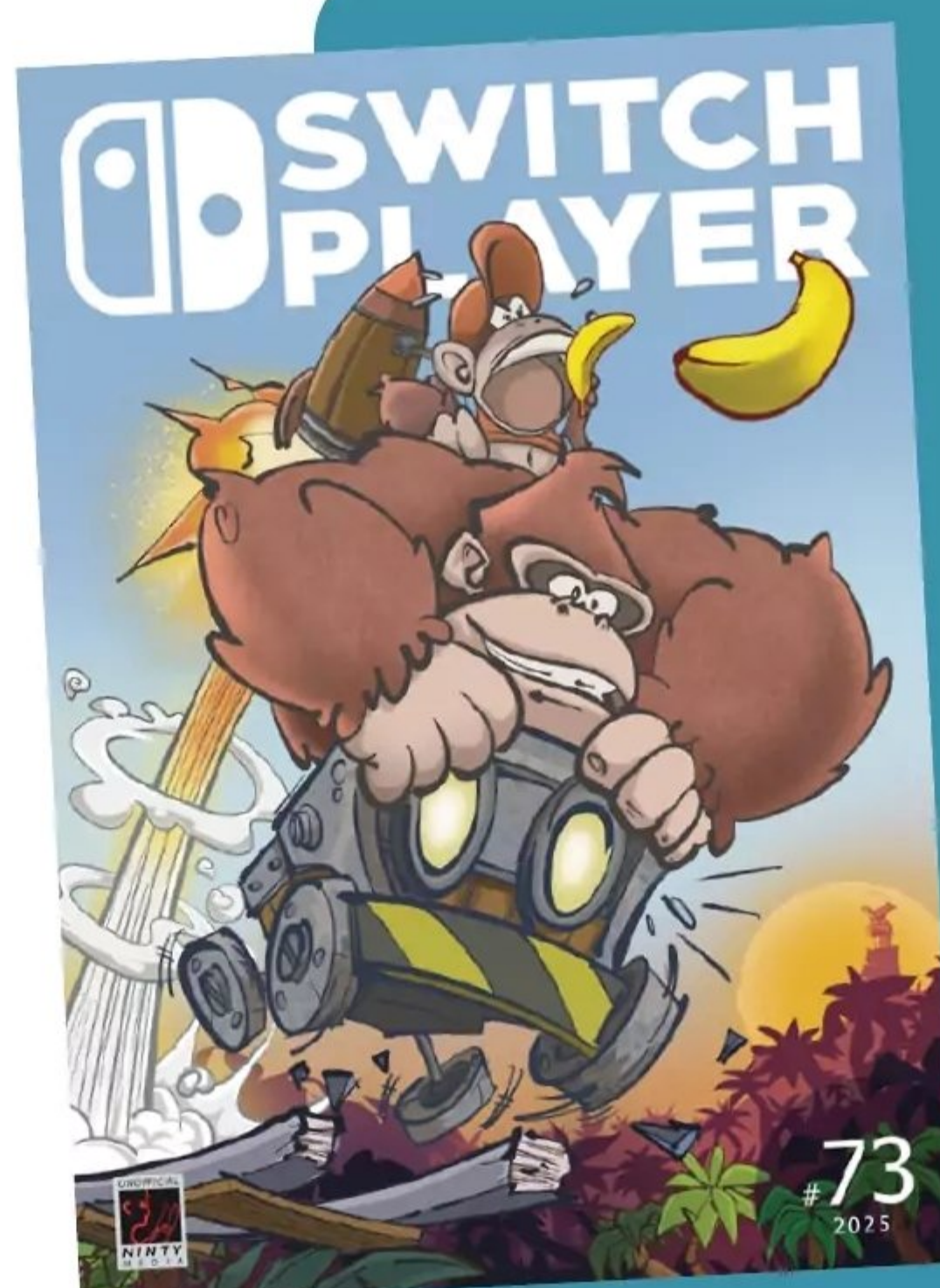
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Uncovered

Even though it is not the new DK game we all want (at least, not yet), the (second? third?) return of *Donkey Kong Country Returns* deserves a cover worthy of the big smiley kong, so we asked Darren Palma (@shinpalmondos) to create a funny and beautiful rendition of our two favourite Nintendo apes.

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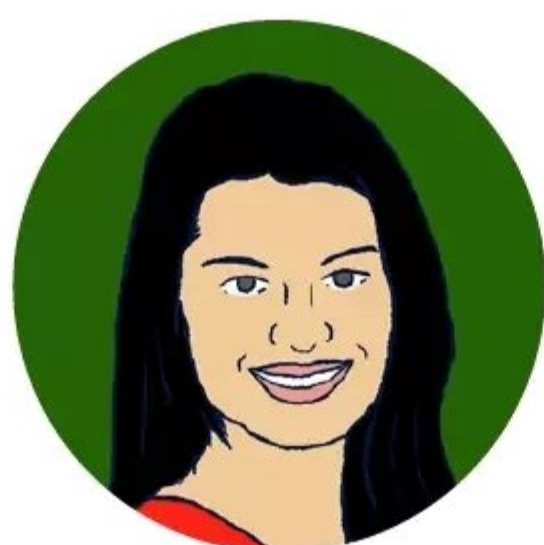


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not do this without you.

IT TAKES TWO

Are you planning to replace your Switch 1 anytime soon?

Written by **Paul Murphy**

After eight years, 73 issues of Switch Player and far more games than any of us have time to play, we finally know what's coming next and by the time you've digested this issue, we will probably know everything meaningful about the Switch 2.

Yes, Nintendo did something they've never done before and just made it a straight sequel. Long-time readers will know I've long championed this approach. With almost 150 million Switch systems sold, Nintendo will want a repeat of their success, and whilst many of us and you are all savvier about Nintendo's approach, not everyone is. I'd wager that the overwhelming majority of those that make purchasing decisions aren't as technologically literate. By sticking a 2 on the hardware it's obvious that it's new. It's why – in my lowly opinion – the 3DS initially struggled, why the Wii U failed spectacularly and why the big N are keen to avoid struggling upon this succession. I'll discuss how awful I think the 2 on the logo looks in a future editorial though!

Nintendo will want a repeat of their success, and whilst many of us and you are all savvier about Nintendo's approach, not everyone is.

Whilst we are all eager and excited to see what's around the corner – we all love shiny new console launches – I'm equally keen to see how they'll continue to support the original Switch hardware. Previous console cycles have still yielded some great releases in the later, post new generation lifespan and with Nintendo obviously eager to surpass not only the Nintendo DS (154.02 million), which they expect to reach by the end of June, but the PlayStation 2's tally (160 million) should surely be attainable, right? Unless someone at Sony HQ finds a few more receipts in the next year. With the new system also being backwards compatible, it will take a while to get the install base for the new device, so

continuing to sell Switch games (maybe with Switch 2 enhancements) will ensure strong sales for software for a while. Maybe, just maybe, it isn't quite time to throw the old one away. Who am I kidding, obviously I'm day one.

When I launched Switch Player in early 2017, I was very privileged to be involved in covering the launch of a new piece of hardware. I cannot believe that this has been going long enough for me to be able to do it again a second time. Rest assured we will be here, covering it all in print. We just need to have a little evolution first, but we will tell you all about that next time.

When I launched Switch Player in early 2017, I was very privileged to be involved in covering the launch of a new piece of hardware.

PLAY YOUR CARDS RIGHT

I know I keep blabbing on about *Pokémon Trading Card Game Pocket*, but I'm addicted to it. Rinsing £30 a month on Pokegold and ploughing through new packs, but this latest trend of a new set (or booster) every four weeks is grating a little. It's fine for me, as I'm willing to pump a small amount of cash in each month but I feel for those that cannot or will not justify that expense. With the overarching mechanic being "catching them all", free-to-play players will be left behind. Now, I don't have EVERY card, I've completed all base sets, just missing a fair few 1 star, 2 star and immersive or crown cards, but for those trying to play online, or complete challenges, not having the cards puts them at a disadvantage. I'm sure someone will say "yeah, that's how gacha games work" which I am aware of, I just think it's a little unfair and borderline slimy. And yet, I still find myself compelled to throw cash. It's a clever business model; no wonder it's a runaway success.





DONKEY KONG COUNTRY THROUGH THE YEARS

Written by **Stuart Gipp**

WITH DONKEY KONG COUNTRY RETURNS HD NOW GRACING YOUR SWITCH HOME MENU, WHAT BETTER EXCUSE TO REVISIT THIS STORIED SERIES AND REVIEW ITS GLITTERING HISTORY? RARE'S PRIMATE PLATFORMERS HAVE A STRONG REPUTATION FOR A REASON, NOT TO MENTION INTERESTING PORTS. AND BANANAS CONTAIN A LOT OF PORT-ASSIUM! (YOU'RE FIRED - ED).



From the first foreboding beats of those jungle drums, you know you're in for something special with Donkey Kong Country. Its outstanding graphics and sound are often used to accuse this admittedly simple platformer of style over substance, but that couldn't be further from the truth — the somewhat pared-back

level designs and momentum-based enemy bouncing lend themselves to experimentation and a high skill ceiling, meaning it's just as fun to replay levels as it is to experience them for the first time. Breezier than its follow-ups yet packed to the brim with just as many secrets, it's still the very best.



DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2 DIDDY'S KONG QUEST

(SNES, 1995)



Many players consider this the best game in the series and it's not difficult to see why. It's an altogether more confident, complex and varied title than its predecessor, though it loses some of its freewheeling spirit in the process and becomes much more of a collect-a-thon. That doesn't matter, however, when it's one

of the greatest collect-a-thons of all time, essentially codifying the entire genre that Rare rose and fell on, the blueprint for a clutch of Nintendo 64 classics and yet superior to every single one of them. Some of David Wise's finest musical compositions complete the package.



DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 3 DIXIE KONG'S Double Trouble!

(SNES, 1996)

Underappreciated in its own time, this second sequel aims to locate the middle ground between DKC's linear action gaming and DKC 2's exploration, creating something which, while a brilliant game in its own right, fails to satisfy either impulse as completely as you'd hope. Eveline Fischer contributes a haunting, different soundtrack to this

Canada-coded ape rampage, with the expanded overworld map offering more of an adventurous theme to the proceedings, seeing you take control of different vehicles to scale waterfalls and bypass rocks to reach new worlds. The weakest of the SNES trilogy, but it's still more than worth playing.



(GB, 1995-1997)

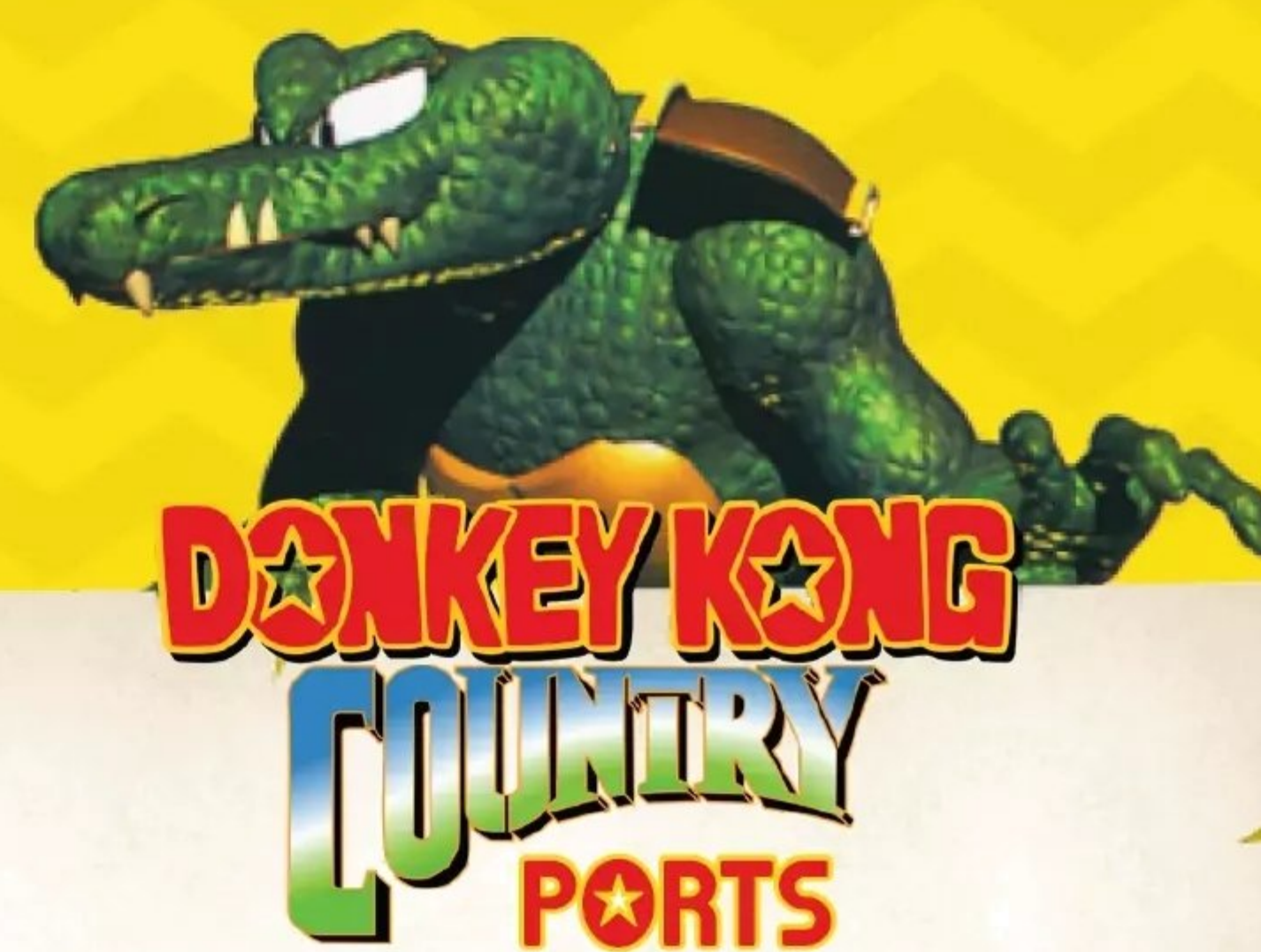


Obviously it would have been impossible to squeeze all the graphical splendour of the Donkey Kong Country series onto the monochrome Game Boy, but Rare had a damn good go at it, releasing a trilogy of companion Donkey Kong Land games for Nintendo's iconic handheld. The first one is the most interesting, featuring many biomes

that don't appear in the SNES game at all, while Lands 2 and 3 are closer to being simply diet versions of their bigger brothers. Don't expect the earth, but they're fun. Land 3 also received a Game Boy Color version, released in Japan only.



Against all odds, Donkey Kong Country eventually received a shockingly good port to Game Boy Color, which packed all the stages in along with a brand new level. The GBA received all three SNES titles, with some excellent bonus features — a brilliant DK Attack mode in the original, new secrets in the sequel, and an entirely new extra world



(GAME BOY COLOR/
GAME BOY ADVANCE, 2000-2005)

in Donkey Kong Country 3. All three titles also received superb new mini-games, though the visuals took a hit — the first two titles were brightened to the point of being garish, in order to account for the unlit original GBA screen.





(Wii, 2010)



Nobody expected a brand new side-scrolling Donkey Kong from Retro Studios — last seen crafting the Metroid Prime series — but that's what we got, and goodness me it was good. The level design is outstanding, with cleverly-hidden secrets and creative stage gimmicks. The challenge level is steep, but never unfair

or unreasonable, and visually it's one of the best-looking games on the Wii. Some struggle with the “waggle” controls, but they're perfectly responsive. It got a very good port to 3DS in 2013, which included a world's worth of stages new to that version. Now available in HD on your Switch!



Ported to your Switch in 2018 (infamously with a “New Funky Mode”), Tropical Freeze is one of the most acclaimed 2D platformers of all time, though I'd personally argue that it errs on the side of frustrating difficulty more than its predecessor, with some prolonged boss battles outstaying their welcome and

certain checkpoints locking you out of secret exits when you're on the hunt. Regardless, nine out of ten journalists agree that this is not only a superior sequel, but the best Donkey Kong game of the lot, with the mighty David Wise returning to compose an absolutely magnificent soundtrack.



(Wii U, 2014)

SWITCH 2



WISHLIST

Well folks, it's finally happening! On the 16th January 2025, Nintendo finally dropped the announcement we'd all been waiting for. The Switch 2 is real, and it's arriving this year! More of a tease than a full blown reveal, the persisting secrecy around the console has all of us here at Switch Player wondering just what this shiny new hardware might have in store for us. So, we've put together a wishlist of just some of the things we hope to see from Nintendo as they transition into a new era. From dual screen dreams, to back catalogue extremes, this is what we hope Nintendo has in store for us with the Switch 2. Safe to say we might not all get what we're hoping for...

DOUBLE OR NOTHING

The Switch has given new life to so many older Nintendo games.

Games from the Wii U, Gamecube, even the NES have benefitted from a Switch refresh, but perhaps most surprising are the titles from the DS and 3DS that have found their way onto the console. Games like *Luigi's Mansion 2*, and *The World Ends With You*, as good as the ports were, just felt like they were missing something - that specific DS charm just hadn't made the leap to Switch with them.

I attribute this to the lack of the dual screen, and can only marvel at the possibilities that would arise from the

Switch 2 having some sort of dual screen attachment itself. The stellar lineup of the entire DS era would suddenly become so much easier to bring to a modern audience, allowing Nintendo to celebrate this unique chapter of their history without compromising what made the games special in the first place. It's easy to dismiss the DS as a novelty, but for every game where the touchscreen was simply used as a menu (handy in its own right) there was also a game like *Kirby: Power Paintbrush* that dared to innovate, and I'd love to see developers take those possibilities further into this new console.



by **Joe Wescott**

ALL RISE FOR UPRISING

One of the best games on the 3DS is *Kid Icarus: Uprising*.

A bold claim given that system's pedigree, but one I'm willing to make nonetheless. Where *Uprising* falls down in many estimations however is with its unorthodox control system - an admittedly tough pill to swallow. Prolonged play sessions may be a (literal) pain, but the game more than makes up for this with the oodles of character bursting from every element. Whether that's the inventive character design, hilarious writing, rewarding gameplay, or gripping challenge, *Kid Icarus: Uprising* is a game that should be enjoyed by as many people as possible.

So, bringing it to Switch 2 with its

significant power boost over the 3DS could only be a positive, and allow the game to finally reach its true potential. Rumoured mouse controls for the Switch 2 could potentially solve the control issues, though I would hope the game wouldn't be solely reliant on this. Nintendo proved with the Switch that franchises that had struggled to find an audience in the past could still make it big. It's a legacy I hope they continue with the Switch 2, and there would be no better game to cement this idea with.



BEYOND GAMING

While there's very little room to complain about the game catalogue available on Nintendo Switch, the same can't really be said about its multimedia options.

Across the Switch lifespan, we saw the release of very few video and streaming apps, only seeing services such as Hulu, Pokémon TV, YouTube, Crunchyroll, and Twitch (albeit some of these have been discontinued already). Unfortunately, though, other relevant multimedia brands such as Netflix, Disney+, HBO/Max, Amazon Prime, and Spotify never bought their apps to Nintendo's hybrid console.

Some people could argue that nowadays everything is a Smart device, and you could access these services via a smartphone or through most TVs, directly. However, I think that having more multimedia options on Switch 2 could really add lots of value that goes beyond the gaming landscape alone. More interesting than just having the apps, however, is the idea of a truly integrated multimedia console, which could maybe offer multiscreen and backplay options. Having a small screen at the side with a video while you grind some levels in an RPG could be neat, not to mention how cool it would be to be able to play your favourite song playlist while racing through *Mario Kart*. Can I dream?



by **Jhonatan Carneiro**

A PROMISING QUEST

Despite being a third-party franchise, the *Dragon Quest* series has a very strong connection with Nintendo's consoles, which can be seen across the generations in all sorts of partnership deals, exclusive releases, and special editions.

There's no greater example of that than the fact that the release of the Switch version of *Dragon Quest XI* was seen by its development team as the fulfillment of a personal promise they had made to Satoru Iwata himself. After such a heartfelt project, I can only hope and expect to see *Dragon Quest XII* shining brightly on Switch 2.

Titled *Dragon Quest XII: The Flames of Fate*, it has been a long time since the next main entry in the *DQ* series was announced with just a teaser trailer. Ever since then, Square Enix and Yuji Horii's team have been quiet about the project, not showing anything to us starving *DQ* fans. Personally, I think the Switch 2's Nintendo Direct in April could be a perfect moment to reveal the game in its full glory. However, even if we don't see the game just yet, I still hope to see the game reaching Nintendo's new platform. After all, JRPGs are made to be played on the go.





LEMME ANALOGUE A LITTLE

Whenever Nintendo gets a new idea for the next, new, shiny thing, it always seems like they have to lean into it a little bit too hard.

It seemed to start with the DS touch screen: it sounds good on paper until you have to switch quickly between furiously tapping with the stylus to getting that right thumb back on that A button (anyone else always holding their stylus in their mouth?). Then there was the Wii, which needed another special attachment (Wii MotionPlus) to make it “work better”. One of the best things to ever happen to *The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword* was its

remaster on the Switch allowing players to NOT have to use motion controls.

Sure, it’s fun to try new things and envision new ways to engage with games; but there is also something wonderful about a simple set of analogue sticks and buttons that allow for muscle memory style immersion that can be just as valuable. So please, let us have some games on release that don’t require the motion (or new “mouse”-looking) controls. Sometimes I just want to beat up baddies with the A button and save my arm swinging for the gym.



by **Ash Rose**

COSY ROBO HAPPY TIMES

Back in 2005 a game about a little robot came out for the GameCube.

Chibi Robo! Plug Into Adventure! had players running around as a 10cm tall robot doing helpful household chores for your new family in order to bring more love into their lives. You carried a toothbrush to wipe up stains, picked up trash, and even had a syringe to water the household plants. You

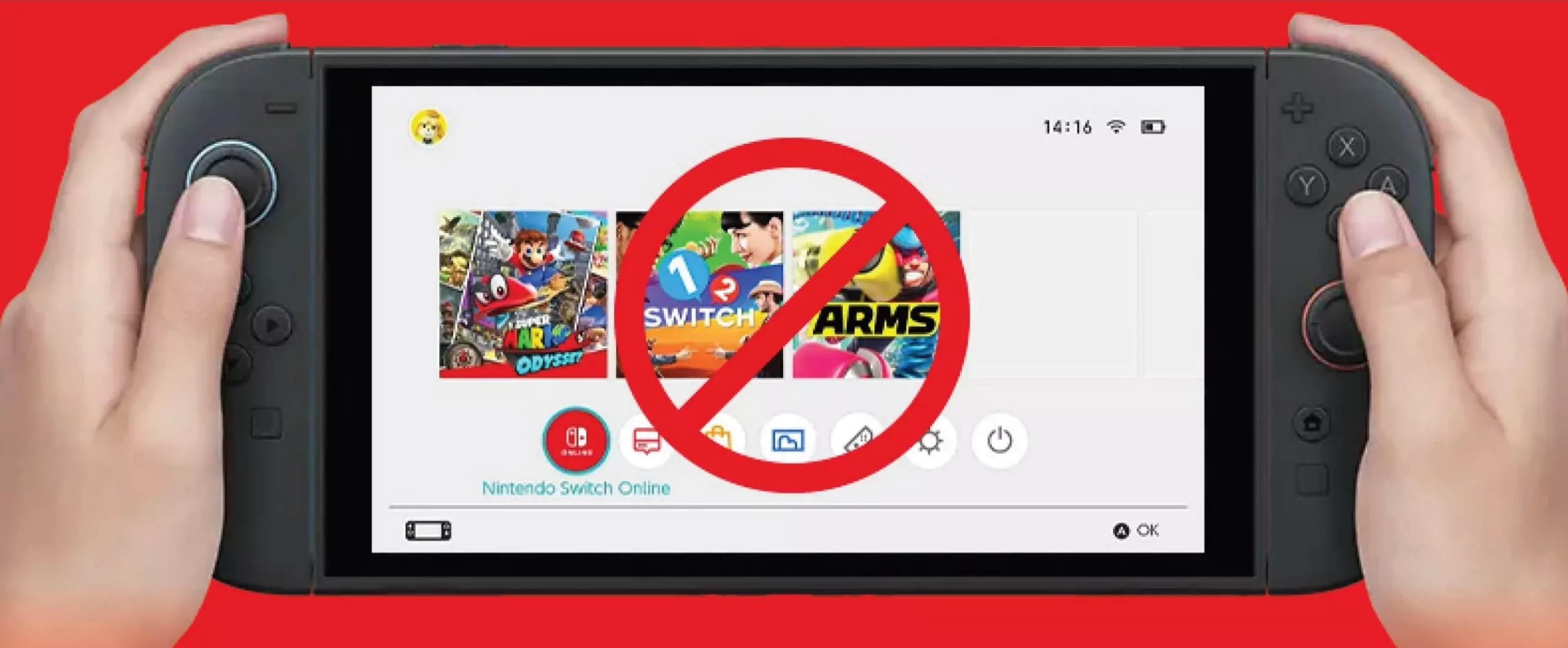
had to monitor your battery usage, and if you were getting low on juice you had to plug in to recharge.

It was cuteness incarnate, and about as cosy as anyone

could ask for; with the popularity of “cosy” games these days, it would be almost criminal NOT to remaster *Chibi-Robo!* and bring it onto the Switch 2. Don’t we all just want to be a lil guy who spreads joy? A beautiful counter to some of the helplessness we might feel now with everything that’s happening in the world today.

Sales of the original game, and some of its sequels, weren’t all that great, but I believe it came before its time; so please bring back a cute little robot living in a cosy house just trying to bring happiness to everyone around them.





MENU EMERGENCY

For all of the innovation and success of the Nintendo Switch era, the bland-as-wet-bread menu UI was not among Nintendo's best decisions.

Nintendo used to be the most idiosyncratic game company, and the vibrant visual flair of, say, the 3DS exemplified this. But the Switch hasn't had that same aesthetic charm.

Even the music that scored the menus of the Wii and Wii U was absent from the Switch. Where's the endless charm of the Wii, where every channel had its own identity? From idle tunes in the Mii channel, to the Wii Shop channel's

bossanova beat, to the frequently-updated light strains of the 3DS' shop (which a youtube playlist tells me had a staggering 13 different songs over its life cycle), Nintendo has demonstrated its capacity for catchy tunes repeatedly in the not-too-distant past. The launch of the Nintendo Music app means we can more easily access these smooth jams than ever, and have entire catalogues of unique, memorable music at our fingertips. Why not add to this legacy? Why not build forward with a whole new suite of laidback tunes to game to?

This console's been an aesthetic wasteland, and it's time for Nintendo to make it right.



by **Ryan Stevens**

FOX YEAH

The Nintendo Switch brought us so many franchise redefining titles: *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*, *Super Mario Odyssey*, *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*, *Splatoon 3*, the list goes on and on.

But our dear friends in the Lylat system didn't get any kind of love, and outside of *Super Smash Bros.*, Fox McCloud and company are still collecting Franchise Unemployment.

Technology has advanced quite a bit since Fox's most recent outing, 2016's ill-fated *Star Fox Zero* on the Wii U. It's also not hard to see why *Zero* is one of the few Wii U games that hasn't been ported over to the Switch for some easy cash - it wasn't

very successful and Nintendo seems ashamed of it, and by extension, all of *Star Fox*. But gamers love a comeback story, and the Switch 2 is a golden opportunity to show players what this new hardware can do. Push it to the limit with dazzling interstellar dogfights and leave no doubt that Nintendo is entering a new era. If the rumors of the Switch 2's mouse-mode capabilities are true, could we have a prime opportunity to bring Starfox into the modern PC-shooter style of game? Yes please!



TIME TO GET TOUGH

It isn't any kind of secret that the Switch Joy-Cons – what should be a marvellous method of game control – simply aren't in an acceptable state.

The dreaded and appalling “stick drift”, causing your in-game avatar to list in one direction as if the analogue stick is being slowly tweaked at all times, is effectively the immediate death of your gaming enjoyment. Some people may be able to tolerate this – but not me. If I'm not in control of my character, of my ship, of my stupid little pixels, then I'm not playing the game. How can I be? And how can Nintendo consistently ship expensive hardware that

simply does not work properly?

Buying Joy-Cons is something you should really only have to do once, and that's when they're initially packed in with your system. I've got a Game Boy that must be coming up on 35 years old and it still works flawlessly. Nintendo shouldn't be known for half-arsed accessories and it's a crying shame that not only were the Joy-Cons utterly unfit for purpose, but that by and large people seem to be fine with it. Well, not this hack. Sort it out for Switch 2, Big N. Disgraceful.



by **Stuart Gipp**

THE FUTURE IS KIRBY!

Did you play *Kirby and The Forgotten Land*?

HAL's best little boy embarked on his first fully 3D adventure, transposing the classic side-scrolling activities into the world of depth in a shockingly impressive debut. Indeed, as a long-time Kirby obsessive I was nothing short of outraged that the series had forsaken its 2D platforming roots, but had no choice but to tuck in to a corvid supper when the game turned out to be a cast tungsten banger.

And I want more. Because almost every Kirby sequel showcases such a leap over its predecessor that I just know for a fact

that a *Forgotten Land* follow-up is going to blow even the superb original out of the water. Take a look at *Kirby Triple Deluxe*, an enjoyable but largely safe 3DS entry that was absolutely mugged by the astonishing *Kirby: Planet Robobot*, one of the very best games in the entire series. With the ostensible proof-of-concept that is *Forgotten Land* now out there and proving 3D Kirby works, HAL have the opportunity to develop its ideas, knock out a few of its dents and refine to perfection one of the Switch's best games. And I've no doubt they already are.



SICK DOCK

My memory is not renowned for its accuracy — let's not even go there.

But I swear I recall many predictions of a wondrous innovation, back when the Switch was still being referred to as the NX. I'm now practically certain that, in 2016, with discussions surrounding Nintendo's new hybrid at fever-pitch, there was talk of a dock that upgraded the base console. Much like similar devices you can plug a computer into, the dock would bring something extra to the table, adding graphics capabilities, extra storage space, and maybe even processing power. As it turned out, the dock was little more than a

couple of ports in a convenient package.

I would love to see the Switch 2 fulfil that early speculative promise and bring us a reason to plug in beyond just a big-screen experience. The hybrid approach means Nintendo really has to walk a tightrope to please all audiences, but those scales need tipping further in the direction of home users, in my opinion. Just the possibility of more power would enable a greater range of games and encourage third-party publishers to support the Switch 2. It wouldn't hurt to compete on firmer ground with Xbox and PlayStation consoles, either.



by **Bobby Jack**

HOLLOW PROMISES

December 2020 was a different time.

A coronavirus was still ravaging the UK. No US President in history had incited an insurrection. And the sequel to *Hollow Knight* was due to launch any day. Four years later, and the world remains a disturbing and bafflingly *Silksong*-free place. I could survive without a new 3D *Zelda*, even one with an original world map. I can leave *Super Mario Odyssey 2* for another day, maybe when I've finally polished off all 999 moons from the first. But I will not abide another year without *Silksong*.

I'm not overreacting here; compared to the deep-end off which the *Silksong* Reddit community has dived, I'm pretty sane and reasonable. But there's been next-to-no word on this been-anticipated-so-long-it's-a-joke follow-up and I can only keep replaying *Hollow Knight* for so long. Maybe another couple of years. But then, after that, Team Cherry, please for the love of Godhome, let me play *Silksong* on Switch 2!





SOMETHING TO ACHIEVE

Having spoken at length about this before, I think it's high time Nintendo adopted an achievement system.

Many games already have some sort of statistical tracking within menus, so why not go the whole nine yards? When all the competition uses it, it's not simply copying, you are the anomaly and not adapting it makes it glaringly obvious.

Especially when you consider that multiplatform games have them and there's an audience (and websites) dedicated to tracking them. For me personally, I enjoy the thrill and challenge of going for things, especially silly little rewards. It also keeps

me playing for longer, as I become inclined toward extracting every possible reward from the game.

I know that these things can be divisive but come on. Surely, it's time. PlayStation and Xbox have had these things for 20 years now. You could even tie it into My Nintendo for the pants rewards they give you for buying games.



by **Paul Murphy**

THE ULTIMATE RACECOURSE

Ever since I played *Burnout Paradise*, I've had it in my head that an open world *Mario Kart* would be a good thing.

This has only been amplified by the *Mario Kart* sequence in the *Super Mario Bros. Movie*. Imagine traversing around the Mushroom Kingdom, tackling championships, battle modes and all manner of missions whilst exploring.

Earning upgrades and car parts to make your little go-kart more powerful, like a fully-fledged RPG mode, where all manner of characters and cameos combine to ensure the ultimate Mario Kart experience. It's also how you could ensure the in-game logic for retro tracks.

I can see it now, moving from kingdom to kingdom, each themed around a different antagonist with a multitude of races to compete in, before tackling off against that world's boss race for a cup.

Just driving around at my own pace, with the game having online connectivity too so you can be challenged by racers or even see your friends as they play and throw random projectiles to impede them without even being in the race. You know it would be funny!



Pokémon Presents

Not Quite the Stuff of Legend

Written by Joe Wescott

As is tradition, The Pokémon Company rolled out another presentation on 27th February to celebrate Pokémon Day, and as is also tradition, the event left a lot to be desired.

These events have settled into a comfortable formula by this point, consisting of a slew of updates regarding Pokémon's vast array of mobile offerings, some teasers of its multimedia offerings such as TV shows and the trading card game, before finishing things off with a blowout of whatever the next big game is. You pretty much know what you're getting is the point, and while there was at least one intriguing surprise this year, nothing on show really had that wow factor that I think a lot of Pokémon fans are yearning for right now.

Proceedings started off strong with an unprecedentedly speedy pace! In years past, these presentations have gone into excruciating detail about every tiny update for every single mobile game, which takes any hype that might have built up to that point and (super) effectively grinds it into the dirt. This time however, the Slakoth like pacing was nowhere to be seen, as we whizzed through the mobile updates with all the gusto of a Greninja. This had the added bonus of actually making the updates seem appealing. As someone who has fallen off a lot of these games over the years, the high production trailers (which are naturally nothing like the games themselves) definitely enticed me. Ultimately though, that's the job of these mobile games: a continuous stream of updates designed to draw you back in and entice you to spend money. Joke's on them though, I'm not that gulli-OH MY GOD THERE'S A GLACEON EX CARD IN THE NEW TCG SET TAKE MY MONEY!

Moving swiftly on, the most surprising reveal from the presentation was that of *Pokémon Champions*; a



new battle focused game coming to both the Switch and mobile devices. Similar in style to previous games such as *Pokémon Battle Revolution* and *Pokémon Stadium*, this new title looks set to refine the battle experience down to its core elements. The competitive battle scene for Pokémon has grown tremendously over the years, so could this be the start of a new era? There exists a significant portion of the Pokémon fanbase who mainly play the games for the battle experience, and with the ability to connect to *Pokémon Home* and bring all your existing Pokémon into this game, there's a high chance the series is about to undergo a whole new evolution.

Perhaps it shouldn't be much of a surprise that *Pokémon Champions* is on its way, as the next mainline game for the series is another entry in the *Pokémon Legends* series, which looks set to continue the tradition of eschewing the regular battle format for something entirely different. *Pokémon Legends Z-A* has been a curious mystery since it was first teased a year ago. It's unusual for The Pokémon Company to be so quiet for so long about a game, and so there were hopes that the full reveal would be something special. Unfortunately, it was not, however there was just enough teased to remain excited for the game. *Pokémon Legends: Arceus* was one of the biggest and best surprises from Pokémon in a long while, and while Z-A is looking unfortunately similar to *Scarlet* and *Violet*, and the expansive world that made *Arceus* such a breath of fresh air seems to have been worryingly condensed; I still find myself excited. A more action-based combat system, the return of mega evolution, and Chickorita as a starter (!) has me intrigued, and though they perhaps haven't earned it in recent years, I'm willing to give the Pokémon Company the benefit of the doubt. Now please just ask Monolith Soft for some help!



Happy News for Part of Latin America Bad News for All of it

Written by **Jhonatan Carneiro**

Something very unusual happened during this year's Pokémon Presents: The Pokémon Company focused a portion of the event on the announcement of the inclusion of a new language to the upcoming games, *Pokémon Champions* and *Pokémon Legends Z-A*.

In a dedicated segment, Tomás Curtijo, Regional Director of Latin America for The Pokémon Company International, proudly announced that following what had happened with the physical version of *Pokémon Trading Card Game*, the next Pokémon video games will also be translated to Latin America Spanish. Hurray, right?

While having games available in more languages is always great news, as it makes them more accessible to certain people, Curtijo's speech didn't resonate as well with a specific (and very big) part of Latin America: Brazil. After all, despite all the memes, Brazilians do not speak Spanish.

For better context, Brazilian Pokémon fans have been waiting for translated games since forever, and after Nintendo's efforts to start localising games to Brazilian Portuguese (which started with *Mario Party Superstars* in 2021), fans believed it was something that should be happening sooner than later. It is weird to think that we have a localised version of *Pokémon Trading Card Game*, as well as the mobile Pokémon games. What about the mainline games?

To make things even weirder, just last year, The Pokémon Company opened an official Instagram account for Pokémon Brasil. Yet, The Latin America department decided that it is more important to add a second version of Spanish than to address the concerns of Portuguese speakers from all around the world. In the end, it is really baffling that games from a franchise as big as Pokémon are available in only ten different languages.

While my language rant can be seen as a very

regional complaint, just a single day after the Pokémon Presents, Nintendo decided to give a reason for the entire Latin America to become angry as well, because they increased the prices of their entire first-party catalogue in multiple countries, including Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Chile, and Argentina. This is probably a direct consequence of everything that's happening around the globe, including the dollar fluctuation, but it is something that hurts a lot of fans.

I know localised prices are a complex and sensitive matter, but it is something that makes a huge difference to customers from countries that have to deal with fragile economies and importing limitations. More often than not, when a game that costs \$60 has its price directly converted to a regional currency, the final result is a product that is virtually inaccessible to a huge portion of that population. As an example, until the end of February, \$60 Nintendo games were priced at R\$300 here in Brazil. Now, they cost R\$350. This transforms gaming into an even more inaccessible hobby, especially when you consider the fact that Brazil's minimum wage is currently set as a little more than R\$1500. Do the math.

And it is no different in other countries from Latin America, which also saw a 16% (or more) increase in the prices of every game published by Nintendo. As a consequence of that, a game such as *Breath of the Wild* is more expensive now than it was when it was first released in 2017. The same happened to every Pokémon game available on Switch. Everything simply became even more expensive to us. At least some countries from Latin America can be somewhat happy knowing that the next Pokémon games will be available in their native language, yet, having to pay more to that transforms it into a bittersweet moment, at best.



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The background of the page features a vibrant yellow-green gradient with a subtle pattern of small, light green dots. At the top, there are green vine-like decorations. In the center, a large, detailed illustration of Donkey Kong is shown. He is a brown monkey with a large, expressive face, wearing a red cap with a white 'DK' logo. He is holding a large, red, diamond-shaped object with a yellow 'DK' logo. Behind him, a smaller, similar monkey (Dixie Kong) is visible, also wearing a red cap and holding a red object. The bottom of the page features a green border with a repeating pattern of small, stylized plants and a brown, textured base.

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY RETURNS HD



We're in Kong Country now.



Dev:
Retro Studios,
Forever Ent.

Pub:
Nintendo

Date:
16 Jan 2025

Price:
£49.99
€59.99

Size:
9GB

Donkey Kong is a Nintendo icon, but you wouldn't know it from looking at his recent output.

Sure, he's got a big theme park and had a big role in the Mario movie, but in the video game world he hasn't had a major new release since *Tropical Freeze* back in 2014. That game was re-released on Switch, and now its predecessor has been re-released too, ported straight from the Wii with new content previously exclusive to the 3DS version and sold at a pretty hefty price tag.

At this point, Nintendo has a pretty long history of re-releasing games at full price. It's not surprising that this is a turn-off to some people, considering this is a 15-year-old Wii game with rather minimal improvements. They did the same with *The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword*, a much more expansive game. No matter how good the original game might be, paying the full retail price to get a relatively short retro platformer will be difficult for some to justify.

That doesn't take away from the quality

of Donkey Kong's 2D resurgence. Back in 2010, this game was a fresh, creative adventure, and it easily stands the test of time. There's a lot of love for the original DKC games here, but it presents everything in a way that still feels modern today. While its sequel *Tropical Freeze* might best it in certain ways, like the music or level design, *Returns* is still a vibrant platformer full of challenging courses and tons to collect and unlock.

In *DKCR*, things are constantly being smashed and destroyed. DK will wake up a nest of bugs by slamming their eggs with abandon. He'll shoot out of barrels and break through the terrain with the sheer force of his gorilla girth. It's a stark contrast to the whimsical fun of Mario or Kirby - Donkey Kong is about brute strength and just beating the living daylights out of everything around him.

This is a very violent game. I'm joking, of course, but it kind of is - in a special kind of way that only Donkey Kong can be. That's



Reviewed by
Dani Cross



highlighted at the end of boss battles, where you'll be spamming buttons on your controller to punch the evil Tikis as many times as you can. The same thing occurs with the end-of-level barrels that offer different rewards - time it right and you can maximise your earnings, possibly grabbing over ten lives in one go if you can pound your controller enough.

The differences between DK and his contemporaries continue throughout the gameplay. DK is a lot heavier and his jumps feel less acrobatic, but he gains a lot of

speed if you roll then jump afterwards. He falls quicker than Mario, so timing your jumps is even more important. With Diddy Kong on your back you gain a jetpack that makes platforming a breeze, but take just two hits and you'll be flying, or rather plummeting back down to earth, solo. You'll need to stop and smash the ground at various points to break things or trigger new parts of the level to spawn, while other times require quick reactions and careful jumps.

DKCR is a dangerous game too. Levels

MAKE SURE YOU CHECK EVERYWHERE FOR THOSE TRICKY JIGSAW PIECES. EACH LEVEL HAS A BUNCH OF THEM IN HARD-TO-REACH PLACES, AND SOME MIGHT EVEN BE HIDING AWAY BENEATH FLOWERS YOU HAVE TO BLOW OUT OF THE GROUND. THERE'S ALWAYS GOING TO BE AT LEAST ONE IN A PARTICULARLY SNEAKY SPOT, SO SCOURING EACH LEVEL IS KEY IF YOU WANT TO ACTUALLY FIND THEM ALL YOURSELF. MAKE SURE YOU COMPLETE THE SECRET MINIGAMES TOO - THESE GIVE YOU 30 SECONDS TO COMPLETE A QUICK PLATFORMING CHALLENGE BEFORE REWARDING YOU WITH ANOTHER SHINY PUZZLE PIECE.



are full of hazards that can take you out in one shot if you're a bit too slow to react. Rising lava, rolling boulders, giant plants and pirate ships are all out to make DK and his best friend extinct. As a seasoned player, this game is still quite brutal at times.

The original Donkey Kong Country games have always been pretty challenging, and going back to play the first one recently made me realise just how

This game does actually do something that I've become increasingly tired of, which is levels that send you right back to the start if you die.

similar the new and old are. *Returns* might be more forgiving but at its peak it's actually significantly harder than the original, with some secret levels demanding flawless execution if you want to clear them.

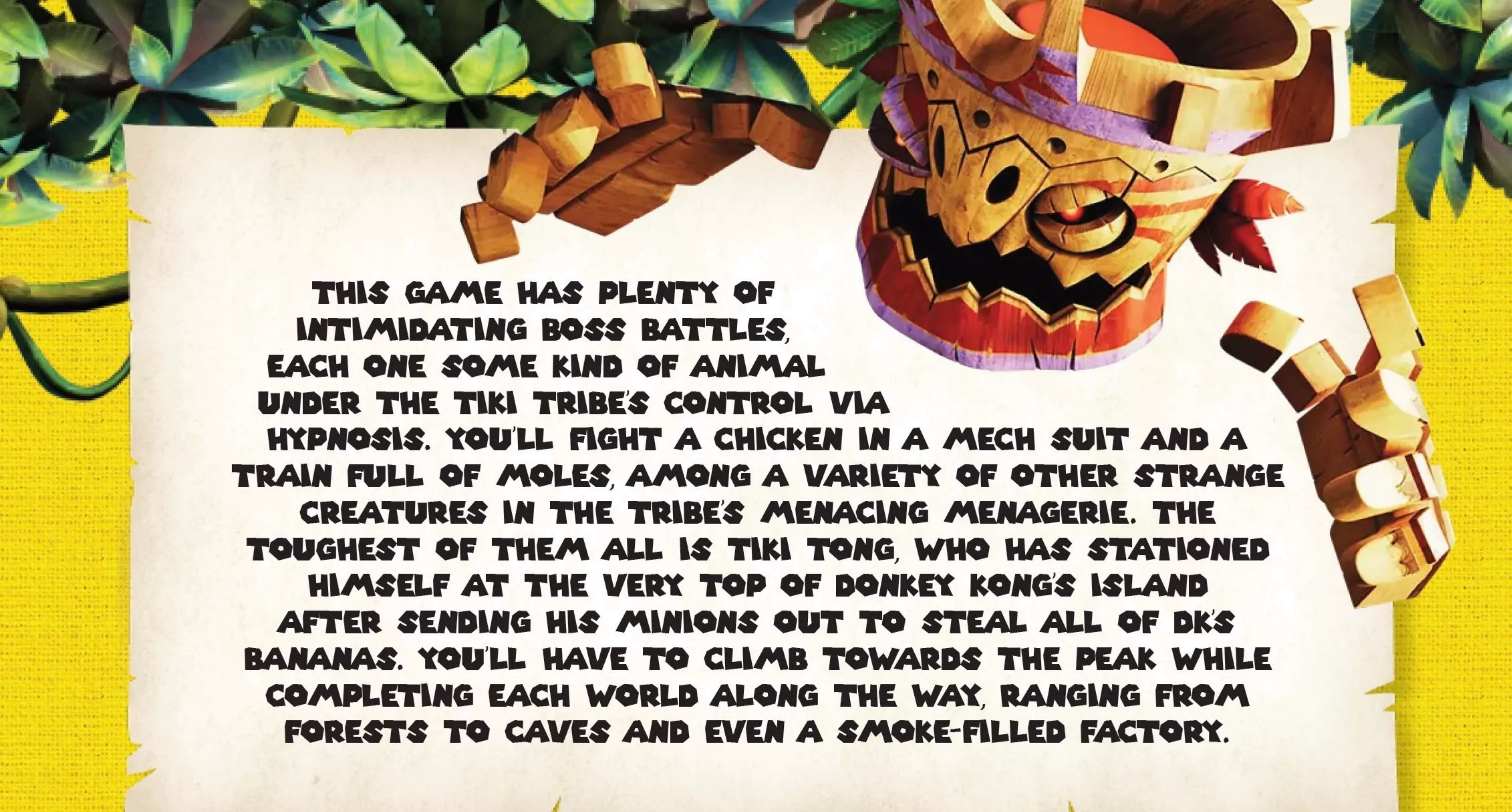
This game does actually do something that I've become increasingly tired of, which is levels that send you right back to the start if you die. This kind of level only shows up

occasionally, restricted to secret levels unlocked through collecting KONG letters in each world, but it's never fun to make a mistake at the very end of a tough level and have to repeat it over and over. I wish these kinds of levels were a thing of the past frankly - it's not a test of your skill to repeat the same sections you've already completed 100 times.

Other than that, the difficulty can be a bit overwhelming if you're looking for a fun, casual platformer. The early worlds are fine, but later ones have some diabolical levels. The minecart and barrel levels might prove particularly problematic for players who can't quite get to grips with the speed and reactions they require. When you're doing well, these levels are exhilarating. When you're not, they can quickly get frustrating.

With all that being said, I'm glad Nintendo has a harder platformer as an alternative to the absolute breeze Mario's 2D platformers usually are. While this game doesn't hold a candle to something like *Wonder*, it still has creativity in spades and the levels are a blast to play.

If it's immersive level design you're after, *DKCR* is one of the best platformers you



THIS GAME HAS PLENTY OF INTIMIDATING BOSS BATTLES, EACH ONE SOME KIND OF ANIMAL UNDER THE TIKI TRIBE'S CONTROL VIA HYPNOSIS. YOU'LL FIGHT A CHICKEN IN A MECH SUIT AND A TRAIN FULL OF MOLES, AMONG A VARIETY OF OTHER STRANGE CREATURES IN THE TRIBE'S MENACING MENAGERIE. THE TOUGHEST OF THEM ALL IS TIKI TONG, WHO HAS STATIONED HIMSELF AT THE VERY TOP OF DONKEY KONG'S ISLAND AFTER SENDING HIS MINIONS OUT TO STEAL ALL OF DK'S BANANAS. YOU'LL HAVE TO CLIMB TOWARDS THE PEAK WHILE COMPLETING EACH WORLD ALONG THE WAY, RANGING FROM FORESTS TO CAVES AND EVEN A SMOKE-FILLED FACTORY.

can play. The world feels believable and the locations feel alive, with the scenery around you acting as a colossal jungle gym for DK to roll and swing around in.

The trees, cliffs and vines are your platforms and apparatus, and objects in the background or foreground often interact with the terrain you're traversing. Pillars will collapse from somewhere behind the level and end up crashing through the level itself, destroying parts of it or opening up new pathways.

The price tag feels a bit too steep for many people - it's essentially the exact same game from back in the day, just with some minor additions.

The game plays with perspective in interesting ways. You might enter a barrel that shoots you into the background, where you're essentially playing the same game but very far away. At other points you might end up super close to the camera. This game can get highly cinematic, with a surprising focus on high octane chases or

action-packed set pieces in many of its levels. These help to make each course feel more like its own adventure, rather than a series of platforms and a finish line.

Then there are the amazing silhouette levels, which look absolutely stunning. Drenching the whole level in shadows allows the vibrant backgrounds to pop, providing a perfect backdrop for DK to bound around as a silhouette figure. We only get a few levels like this. I'd love to have seen more, but it does make sure the gimmick feels special every time it shows up.

I can keep singing the praises of this DK revival, but it'd be wrong not to mention the shortcomings too. Disappointingly, this remaster doesn't really improve upon the base game much. Not that the actual gameplay needs much improvement, but certain aspects that could have been altered have been left untouched. That's another reason why the price tag feels a bit too steep for many people - it's essentially the exact same game from back in the day, just with some minor additions.

Time trials are a clear sore spot. When you load into one, you have to sit through a pretty long loading screen before the time trial begins. Then you have to learn the level,



which can be pretty tough - this mode is designed to be a challenge. Once you've beaten the level, you have to sit through another loading screen to give it another go. If you have to restart at any point, the loading screen returns. If you die, you respawn back at a checkpoint, rendering the time trial a failure - guess what, it's loading screen time again.

The amount of time wasted here makes actually completing these time trials a complete hassle, and more trouble than it's worth since there's not much of a reward.

It's a real shame the developers of this version didn't fix this. Maybe I'm just impatient, but sitting through a bunch of loading screens just to get the gold medal in a level from World 1 isn't my idea of fun. I can't imagine how annoying it gets in the later levels. Doing these levels contributes to your overall completion of each world, so to 100% the game you'd have to do them all.

The co-op mode also needed some improvements, namely the fact that you can't bounce off the same enemy as your co-op partner. This worked in the original



Wii game, but it was changed in the 3DS version. In the Switch version, if you try to jump on the same enemy that your friend jumped on 2 milliseconds ago, you'll fall straight through it. This makes certain levels impossible to do without one of you dying. It also just makes the flow of co-op gameplay less satisfying. It would have been a simple fix, and hopefully there's a chance it gets patched to work the way it used to.

Visually, the game looks pretty nice, but perhaps not quite as nice as it could. Again,

this is a game being sold for the same price as other Nintendo heavy hitters. It's easy to feel like a bit more could have been done to spruce up this title, but it's definitely still good looking.

Regardless, I had a great time playing through this game again for the first time since 2010. It feels like it could've been released much more recently, and it's got quite a bit of depth beyond just completing the game. From secret levels to hidden collectibles, there's a good amount of stuff to do after finishing the game.



Each level has a bunch of jigsaw pieces tucked away in hard to reach locations, and collecting them all unlocks special dioramas, concept artwork and more. You can view everything in a gallery featuring all the extras. I love this kind of thing, even if the rewards are pretty insignificant. It just makes finding things feel like it's worthwhile.

Better yet, you don't need to collect all these jigsaw pieces in one go. Unlike the KONG letters, you can grab them safely without worrying about losing them if you die. Some of them are very difficult to find, and I ended up finishing most levels with one or two missing, but going back through the levels to find the ones you need is easy if you stock up on items at Cranky Kong's shop.

The KONG letters are a more meaningful collectible, as these unlock new levels in each world and eventually lead to a whole new endgame zone. Making sure you grab them all and stay alive can be pretty nerve-wracking in the more fast-paced levels. I'm a fan of having things to collect and unlock in my games, and *DKCR* certainly tickles that part of my brain.

This is all to say that despite some of this port's shortcomings, I thoroughly enjoyed playing this game again 15 years later. It's a wonderfully immersive platformer with some really great levels, satisfying gameplay and addictive collectibles. It felt fresh back in 2010, and still feels more modern than a lot of other platformers today.

Despite that, I'd only recommend parting with your money if you know this is the kind of game you're likely to enjoy. There are so many good platformers on the Switch, including this game's superior sequel, which makes it difficult to suggest to anyone not already a fan of the game. DK keeps returning, but hopefully he'll return with an actual new game on the Switch 2. Until then, this game is a fun time and a nice challenge for any platforming fans who might be looking for a new title to swing into.

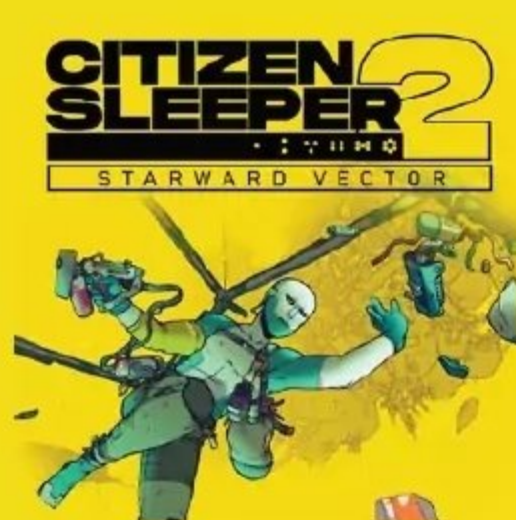
SUMMARY: *Donkey Kong Country Returns HD* is a nice addition to the Switch library, but it doesn't offer much in the way of new content that'll make it worth revisiting for some people. It's a great platformer, just not an essential purchase.



CITIZEN SLEEPER 2

STARWARD VECTOR

In space, no one can hear you screw up a dice roll.



Dev:
Jump Over
the Age

Pub:
Fellow
Traveller

Date:
31 Jan 2025

Price:
£20.99
€24.99

Size:
793MB

It was supposed to be an easy job.

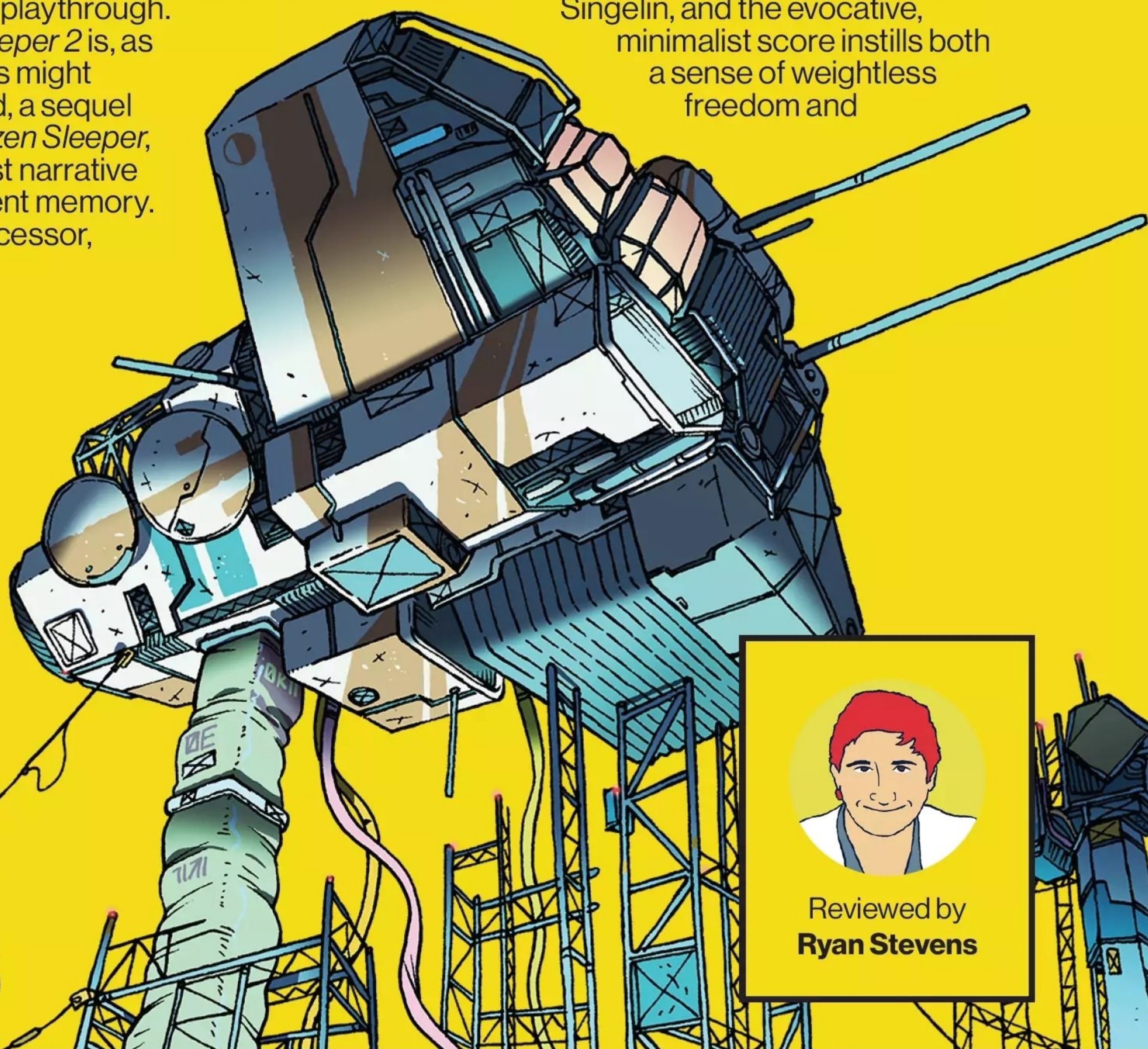
Fly out to a derelict space station, scavenge some scrap, and escape with my salvage, ready to turn a profit. But once I got there, I realised I was out of food. Which meant that I was getting stressed. The stress made me mess up. Messing up drained my energy even further. Losing energy hurt my chances to succeed. I bungled the job, I ruined the space station, and I fled the scene empty handed.

This misadventure occurred in the first three hours of my time with *Citizen Sleeper 2: Starward Vector*. These mistakes, born out of unfamiliarity with core mechanics and wide-eyed zeal, would haunt me for the rest of my playthrough.

Citizen Sleeper 2 is, as astute readers might have deduced, a sequel to 2022's *Citizen Sleeper*, one of the best narrative games in recent memory. Like its predecessor,

Citizen Sleeper 2 puts you in the role of a titular Sleeper, a sort of robot bearing a replicated consciousness of a human being – imagine someone right-clicked you, selected “Copy” on your soul, and then hit “Paste” in a robot body. In a world where Sleepers are viewed as second class citizens with dubious personhood, you strike out on your own and try to cobble together a life in the harsh reach of space.

This far-flung future is beautifully realized from every design standpoint. Sharp, space-brutalist structures floating in the void contrast the lovingly rendered, personality-filled character portraits drawn by illustrator and cartoonist Guillaume Singelin, and the evocative, minimalist score instills both a sense of weightless freedom and



Reviewed by
Ryan Stevens



The first *Citizen Sleeper* was all about finding a sense of community in harsh conditions, so it's neat to see the sequel dig even deeper into this theme of found family and kinship.

unending melancholy. I'd let certain screens sit uninterrupted, just drinking in the interstellar ambiance.

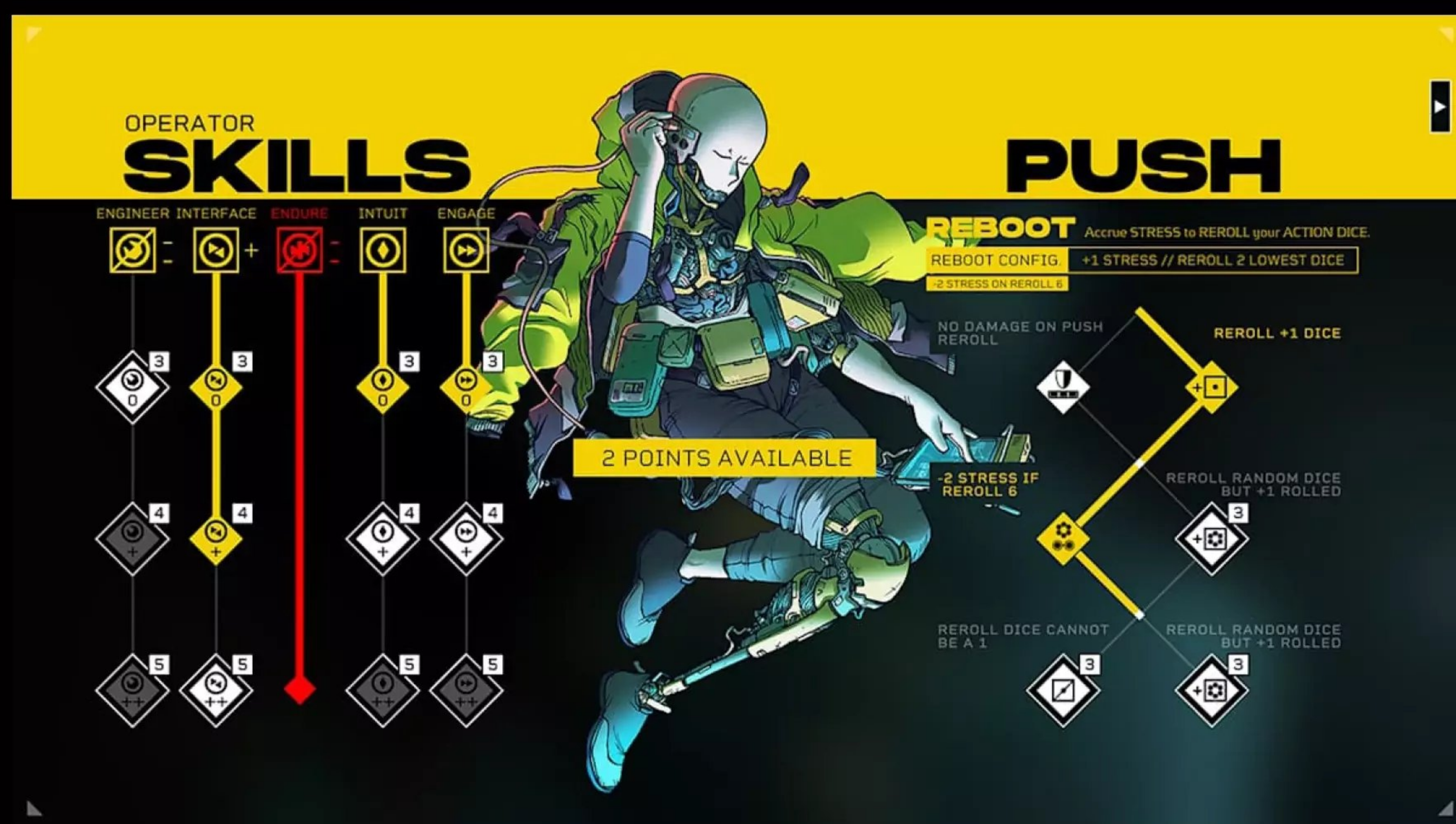
In the original *Citizen Sleeper*, you spent the game exploring the various cultures and social groups on a single space station, called The Eye. In the follow-up, you're not so interested in the sedentary life. With your friend/rescuer Serafin, you now have the entire Starward Belt to explore, home to myriad space stations, colonies, and lightly-populated asteroids. Your trusty ship serves as your home as you jet from place to place, picking up missions, working odd-jobs, and trying to stay on top of the

forces that enslaved you in the first place.

It's a neat way to up the ante from the first game – you're now part of a much larger world, with complex factions to meet and balance. A crime syndicate from one area might be causing trouble in another – you'll be traveling far and wide to complete your objectives. You can also bring on more crew members to make the work easier. The first *Citizen Sleeper* was all about finding a sense of community in harsh conditions, so it's neat to see the sequel dig even deeper into this theme of found family and kinship among strays. You aren't just making friends around town – you're welcoming people into your ship, and by extension, your day-to-day livelihood.

This sprawling narrative comes through via a steady stream of text - *lots of text*. In the CRPG lineage of *Planescape Torment* or *Disco Elysium*, *Citizen Sleeper 2* paints you pictures with free-flowing prose – prose that is exceptionally well-written, and brimming with charm and style. It may look like someone snuck a book into your video

GIMME STATS, STAT!



Wearing its table-top influences proudly, *Citizen Sleeper 2* has you choose from three pre-made character types, each with varying points in five stats: Engineer, Interface, Endure, Intuit, and Engage. As you progress, you'll be able to improve most of these stats and give yourself a better chance for success – but no matter what, one of your core five stats will remain in the toilet. Luckily, you can usually choose what you roll during certain challenges, so as long as you make sure no two stats are trash, you'll have at least a fighting chance. Nothing's easy out here in space!

game, which is technically true, but if you can accept that you'll need to use your literacy, you'll find a story exceptionally well told – and when you start rolling dice, you might wish you'd just stuck to reading.

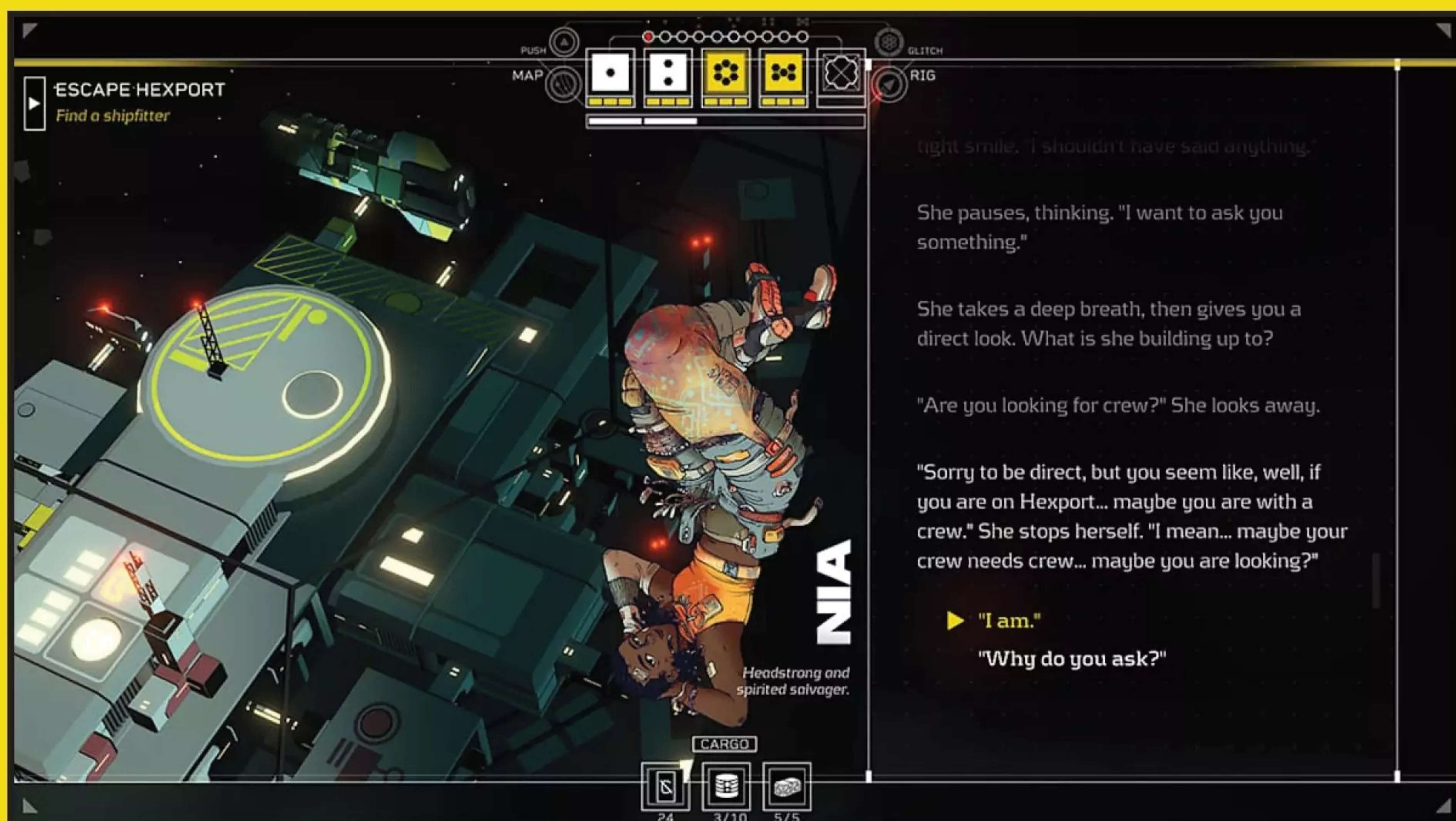
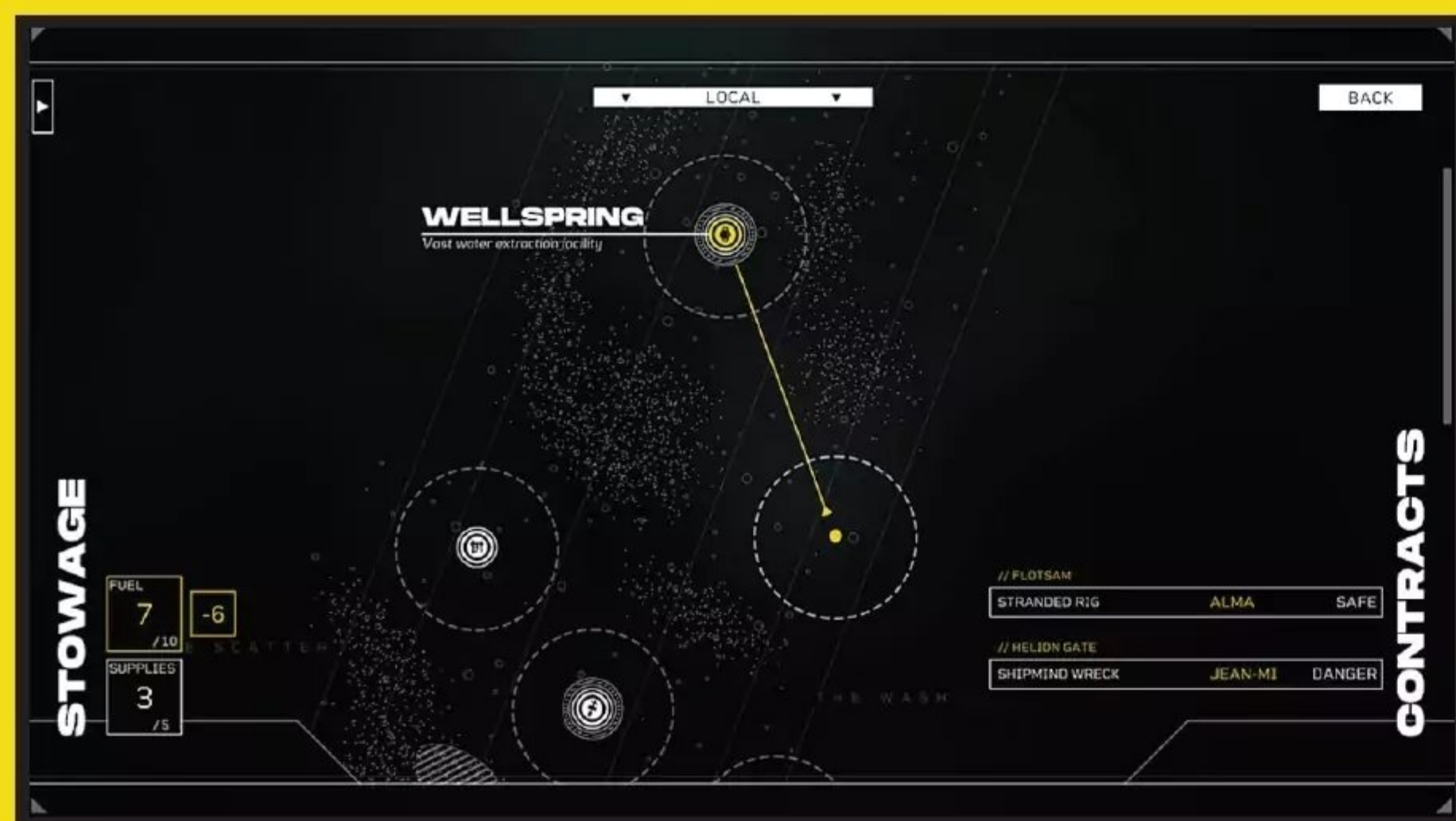
As a runaway Sleeper, with no safe harbour, no resources, and very little prospects, you are meant to feel the weight of debt and disenfranchisement.

You play *Citizen Sleeper 2* with a unique spin on rolling dice. Each day, you wake with a maximum of five dice at your disposal. Each of these dice is rolled randomly 1 to 6. You can slot these dice into different tasks, like working a shift at a restaurant or trying to operate heavy machinery. The higher dice you roll, the better your chances of success. Slotting in a '3' dice will give you a 25% chance of a positive outcome, a 50% chance of a neutral outcome, and a 25% chance of failure, while using a coveted '6'

will give you 100% chance at positive results. The numbers are also mediated by different skills. When you start the game, you choose your stats, meaning some rolls will get an automatic +1 or -1 depending on what your Sleeper is best at.

Each dice has hit points, which can degrade over time if you're low on energy (replenished by eating) or high on stress (replenished by relaxing or traveling). Lose a dice, and you lose your maximum number of tasks on any given day. Repairing your dice is costly, and imprecise. In other words, if you're not careful, you back yourself into a corner and have no dice to roll, and no way either to get the money needed to repair them, or to get the fuel and supplies needed to travel somewhere else. Juggling these meters is exhilarating when you're on top of things, a fun bit of friction when you get a surprising set-back or a small run of bad luck, and downright soul-flattening when the chips are really down.

In a way this bleak difficulty feels thematically resonant. As a runaway Sleeper, with no safe harbour, no resources, and very little prospects, you



If you're not careful and considerate at every step of *Citizen Sleeper 2*, your failures can cascade catastrophically and leave you in a deep hole.

are meant to feel the weight of debt and disenfranchisement, and *Citizen Sleeper 2* makes sure you do. But as a game, a thing that's meant to make me want to keep playing, the harshness here had me ending sessions looking for something a little lighter. When you need an escape from your escapism, something might be out of whack.

There are three difficulty settings, and the easiest does allow you to roll a '1' die for broken dice, but that's barely any help when you're probably bound to fail anything you attempt. If you're not careful and considerate at every step of *Citizen Sleeper*

2, your failures can cascade catastrophically and leave you in a deep hole.

I like consequences in my games, and I also like that even when I completely bungled a story event, the story kept on rolling and took my failure into account. However, if you think you'll just save-scum your way to victory, *Citizen Sleeper 2* hard-counters that by autosaving after just about every dice you roll. You have to live with your failures here, no matter how much it hurts (and it hurts a lot).

SUMMARY: *Citizen Sleeper 2: Starward Vector* is beautiful to behold, but brutal to play. With patience (and luck), you'll find an engrossing, expansive RPG that respects you enough to keep the story rolling even when you fail.



AFTER LOVE EP

A posthumous, unfinished mixtape scratches out a song.



Dev:
Pikselnesia

Pub:
Fellow
Traveller

Date:
14 Feb 2025

Price:
£17.99
€19.99

Size:
5.0GB

At the start of 2024, I became obsessed with grief — pre-grief, more specifically.

My own health was in the gutter, I was terribly depressed an ocean away from home, and I desperately missed my partner. I believed something terrible was going to happen at any moment — to me, my family, my partner, the world — and I felt that, if I wasn't prepared, if I had not already pre-grieved an ample amount, I would be obliterated by this catastrophe. And yet, when something did happen, when I was suddenly heartbroken and alone in a New York City apartment, when my country elected a convict and predator deadset on making my existence illegal, I was caught unawares and crumbled.

There is no preparation for grief. Tragedy, anticipated or not, is a sudden, earth-shattering feeling. Your brain goes into shock, your emotions numb, you stop eating, and you start thinking

impossible things. You begin to cope through magical thinking. Rama, the protagonist of *Coffee Talk* creator Mohammad Fahmi's new game, *Afterlove EP*, is deep in the throes of magical thinking: he believes he can hear the voice of his dead girlfriend, Cinta. Sometimes, he can even see her.

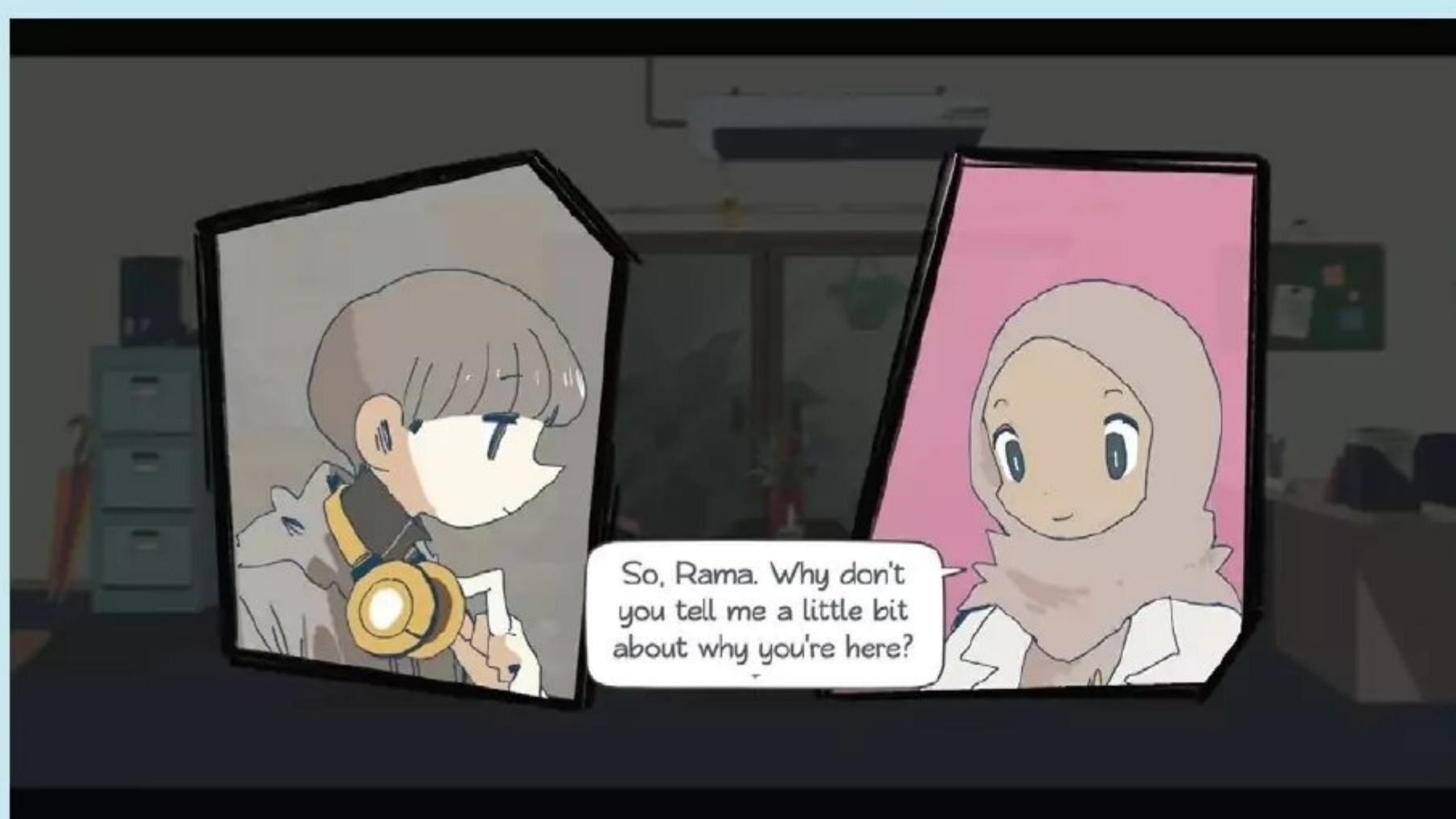
Afterlove EP takes place a year after Cinta's passing, and player's control Rama over a month while he attempts to reintegrate into the world, reconnect with former and new friends, and perform the biggest show of his life with his band Sigmund Feud. Rama's friendships are contentious at best — former bandmates Tasya and Adit feel justifiably abandoned, and potential love interests Satria and Mira clock Rama's writer's block as a sign of deeper problems that he has yet to, or blatantly refuses to, confront. Oh, and Cinta will not shut up in his head: she comments on every tiny detail, both distracting Rama from the present and riling him up through toxically positive support.

To put it bluntly, Rama and Cinta are two of the most frustrating characters I have ever encountered. And, to the team at Pikselnesia's credit, that is by design. Rama's personal growth is his character arc. Over the six-ish hour runtime, Rama is intended to confront his stubborn selfishness, learn to healthily communicate with his friends, and possibly move forward in his life by letting Cinta go. It's a bold gambit by Fahmi and the team, forcing players to cart around a deeply dislikable character while sympathising with his pain.

I wanted to help Rama become a better person: I brought him to therapy weekly, I forced him into difficult conversations with Tasya and Adit, I pushed him toward a budding romance with Satria. And yet,



Reviewed by
Mik Deitz



It's a miracle that *Afterlove EP* exists at all, something that was only possible due to Fahmi's extensive outlining and intense collaboration with narrative director Galuh (Sasha) Elsa.

these sidequests did not affect his behavior in the main story. For a visual novel centered around player choice, it felt invalidating and disempowering to have all my progress ignored so Rama could yell at his band yet again for not catering to his childish whims.

It feels unfair, however, to lobby complaints at Pikselnesia: in March 2022, creative director Fahmi suddenly passed away. The video game they had spent years working on suddenly bled into reality, and development was put on pause to allow the team time to grieve. It's a miracle that *Afterlove EP* exists at all, something that

was only possible due to Fahmi's extensive outlining and intense collaboration with narrative director Galuh (Sasha) Elsa. The team finished and released the game as an homage to Fahmi, an act of immortalisation and remembrance of a creative soul lost far too soon.

Understanding the context of Fahmi's passing and the game's difficult development is essential to both deepening *Afterlove EP*'s narrative resonance and explaining the many baffling and unfinished aspects of the title. But while I deeply feel for the studio's loss and respect the time and effort that went into finishing the game, this is still a product being released by a company for money. And this review is criticism about a piece of art. Engaging with *Afterlove EP* purely as a text — a story with intentions and ideas and mechanics and desires that are all (theoretically) working together to evoke emotions from a player, to guide them down specific paths that say something important — is necessary to the critical process. And as a text, *Afterlove EP* is



a messy, frustrating experience sprinkled with moments of profundity that have deeply affected me in my current post-breakup state.

As a video game, *Afterlove EP* falls flat on multiple fronts, and it doesn't do so in any interesting ways. Players cart Rama around four neighbourhoods in Jakarta in search of people to talk with, locations to busk, or memories with Cinta to uncover. It's a visual novel that aspires to greater interactivity without fleshing out the mechanics into anything novel or fun. Rama is a guitarist, singer, and lyricist, so playing guitar and busking should be perfect

vehicles for engaging gameplay, but they aren't. Playing guitar is a confoundingly simplified rhythm game — hit one of the four arrow buttons, mostly the Up arrow, to the beat, or the strum of a guitar, or both, or neither, each prompt chosen without any rhyme or reason. The inconsistency drove me absolutely insane. Busking boils down to reading a few stanzas of Rama's improvised poetry and choosing a rhyme out of three options.

I never encountered reactivity: no character ever complimented one rhyme over another and there is no meter counting your perfectly played notes versus missed ones. Even the dialogue choices, a fundamental aspect of visual novels, seemingly all lead to the same response. I might be wrong — maybe I'm just really good at the game and my bisexual rizz was just that good — but, unless I replay the game, I'll never know!

Uninteresting gameplay needs a strong narrative to bolster it, and this story rarely breaks out the spinach (a la Popeye). As

Playing guitar is a confoundingly simplified rhythm game — hit one of the four arrow buttons, mostly the Up arrow, to the beat, or the strum of a guitar, or both, or neither.

A VERDICT WITHOUT A SCORE

Due to the unfinished nature of *Afterlove EP*, it felt cruel to assign a number to the experience. The game earnestly tries to say important things about grief and friendship and personal growth, and although often it falters in its execution, that deserves to be celebrated.

Yes, the gameplay may be underbaked. Yes, the visual novel might be unreactive. Yes, corners on development and design may have been cut. But Pikselnesia completed development as an act of blatant love — for the game itself, for themselves, and for Fahmi — and that is not something that can be boiled down to fit a ten-point rating scale.



previously mentioned, Rama spends the majority of the month just arguing with his bandmates while Cinta uncritically backs him because, as the game infuriatingly acknowledges and ignores in equal measure, she is a delusion. Cinta is supposed to be Rama's conscience, the voice guiding him back into society and toward a better life full of communication, but she mostly just hypes him up. Cinta distracts and distances Rama from his life and his friends, meaning the player is distracted and distanced from them, meaning they remain two-dimensional cutouts: the overworked bassist yearning for success, the indecisive drummer who wants to cook, the overpromising agent, the prickly gay record store owner.

For all of its faults, however, I am glad I played *Afterlove EP*. It might never actually show Rama's writing process, but it does reference the unfettered joy of following a passion as far as it will take you and being grateful for the experience. It might not let Rama truly recognise Cinta as a coping

mechanism, but it gently reminds you that moving on is not a linear process, that sometimes the people we love most are the obstacles blocking our way forward. These lessons might be basic on the surface, but I am grateful to be reminded of them right now, newly-single and in search of a new identity. Maybe I have more Rama in me than I care to admit; maybe, like Holden Caulfield before him, my distaste stems from a reflection of my worst parts.

And that's the point of art and life, right? To challenge something within yourself and come out the other side changed and all the better for it.

SUMMARY: *Afterlove EP* is a disjointed, sometimes ambitious, but borderline simpleminded game that dares to force the player to control an unlikable person dealing with the unimaginable and, slowly, watch them grow.



WHILE WAITING

It's about time.



Dev:
Optillusion Games

Pub:
Optillusion Games

Date:
5 Feb 2025

Price:
£17.99
€19.99

Size:
1.9GB

What happens when nothing is happening?

In a broad sense, answering this question is the main focus of *While Waiting*, a very unique adventure game that proposes to create a 5-hour long narrative entirely constructed over moments where you are waiting for something to happen. With around 100 different situations for you to experience, the main catch here is that, if you wish, you can actually beat the whole game by doing nothing — you can literally wait for every situation to eventually come to an end, and boom!, roll the credits.

As you might expect, though, this is a video game, so it needs to throw in some kind of interaction for it to be labelled as such. Consequently, while you can beat the whole thing while doing nothing, every single level of *While Waiting* presents a situation that invites you to try to do something. Have you ever watched one of those old Windows 98 screensavers that play themselves, and felt that you should be able to interact with it somehow? That's basically what *While Waiting* is: a seemingly passive adventure that plays with our anxiety and expectations.

Most of the time, *While Waiting* takes the most mundane human situations and transforms them into real tests of patience. Wait for the bus, wait to fall asleep, wait for a message, or a call, or for something else to happen. Wait. That's what the game wants you to do. However, in addition to the option to wait, you can also mess around, interacting with the environment, objects, characters, to see what unique reaction you can get.

From that comes both the biggest strengths and worst weaknesses of *While Waiting*. As a consequence of having such a myriad of situations, each level in *While Waiting* can have the most unique formats. Sometimes, you have control of your own

character, and can walk around while interacting with stuff. In certain situations, though, you may control only your own hand, or maybe your smartphone, or even just your own point-of-view, as if the game suddenly became a first-person adventure.

Thanks to this huge variety, *While Waiting* feels like a game that's constantly throwing a new idea at you, which is awesome as each level can feel like an entirely different game, where you have a unique set of controls and skills. A particular level may present you a cool and funny stealth minigame, only for you to be locked into your bed in the next moment, playing three games at the same time in your dreams. At its best moments, *While Waiting* feels like something akin to a *WarioWare* title, except it gives you way more time to beat each minigame.

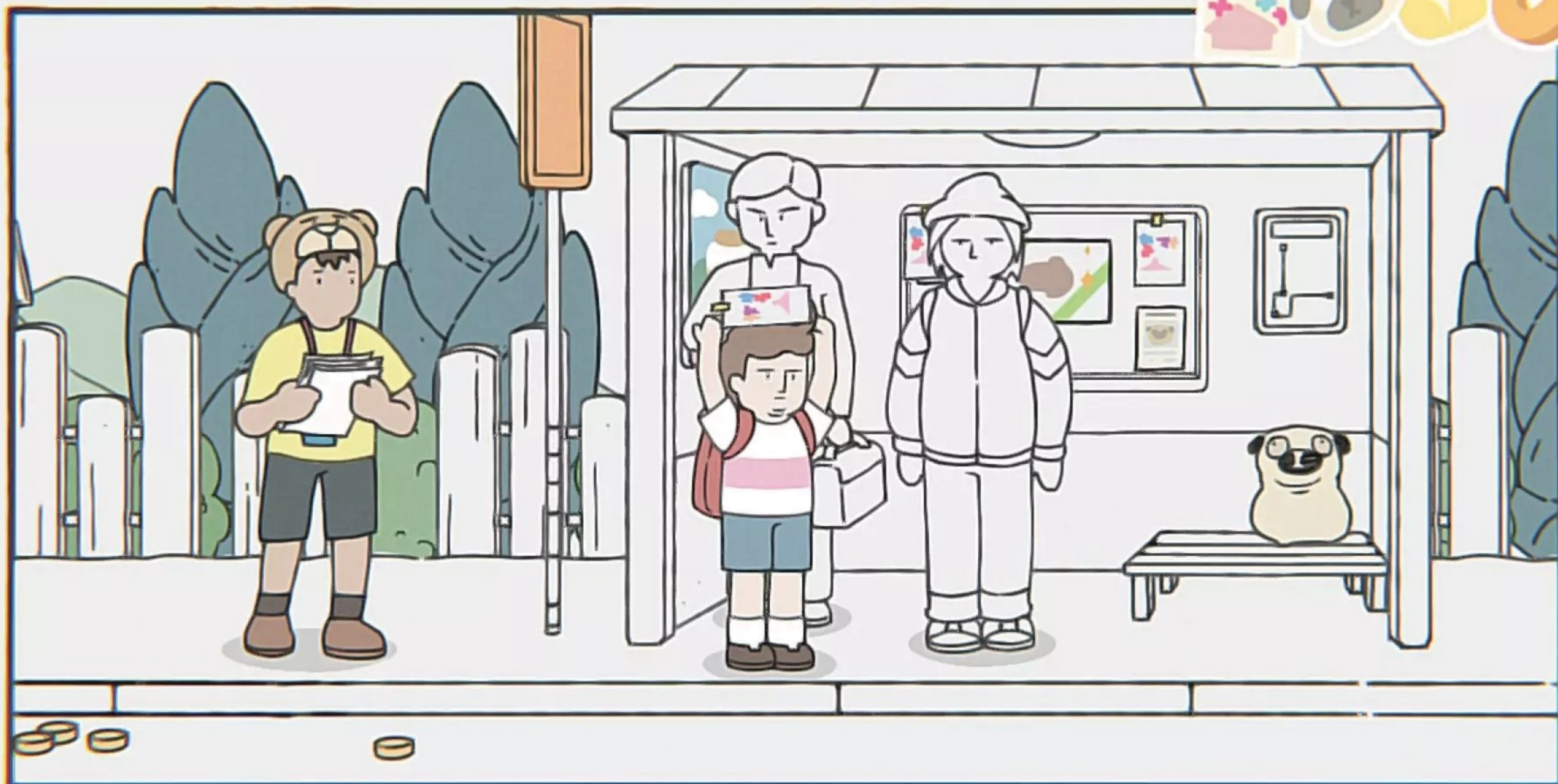
Unfortunately, the drawback of that lies in the fact that not every level or mechanic is explored to perfection. In order to have such a huge variety in the gameplay department, *While Waiting* also brings some clunky and uninteresting levels to the mix. My biggest complaint regarding that aspect of the game is related to levels where it is simply too hard to understand what your possibilities are. I'd argue that the *mystery* of not knowing what you can do at each moment is part of what makes the best moments in *While Waiting*, but some levels can be too frustrating, especially when you may spend a very long time trying to interact with the same two or three elements available with no success.

To alleviate that problem slightly, each level in *While Waiting* comes with four or five stickers which work as guides to the available possibilities. So, when you are at a level that asks you to play a game on your smartphone, for example, a sticker like "Am I spending responsibly?" feels like a subquest that invites you to explore the



Reviewed by
Jhonatan Carneiro

Wait for the bus



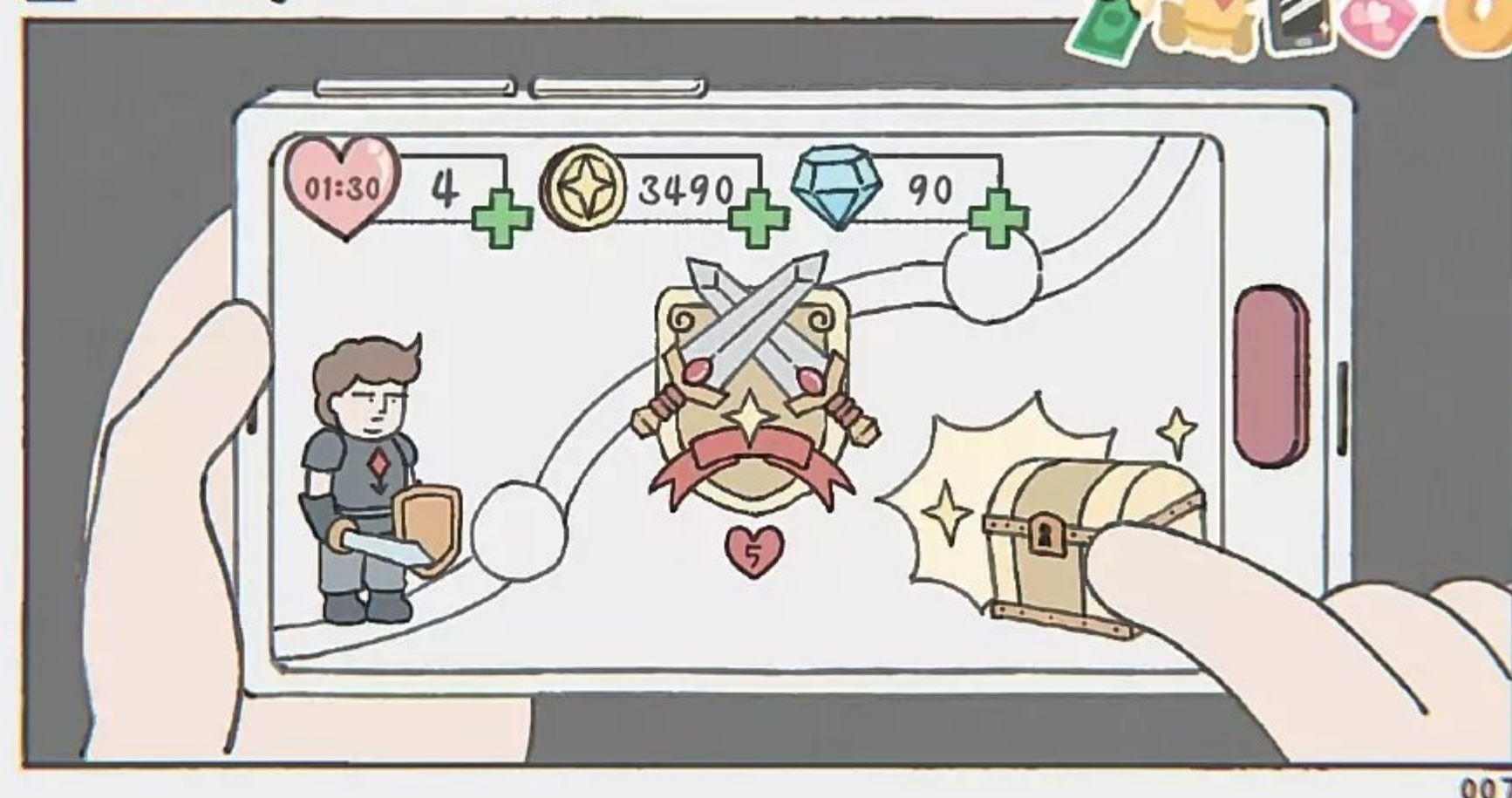
004

Wait to arrive at the airport



030

Wait for your AP to replenish



007

spending options available in the smartphone store — just like you should not be doing in real life. Not every sticker is as clear as that, though.

For the most part, *While Waiting* chooses to transform mundane moments into quirky and funny situations, and does a good job at that.

All those unique levels are presented with a very pleasant hand-drawn style that adds lots of personality to the game, and the soundtrack is composed of famous classical music that, albeit familiar, helps to create a specific mood for each situation. Also, it is worth mentioning that the levels

connect to each other, telling an overall narrative that ties in the entire adventure. I don't think the game offers the most interesting or compelling narrative,



but it has some moments where it does delve into interesting topics and subjects.

For the most part, *While Waiting* chooses to transform mundane moments into quirky and funny situations, and does a good job at that. While certain levels can present clunky controls, the variety and creativity is still worth a look, especially if you are looking for a game that is different from most offerings available on the eShop. After all, not many titles have the nerve to ask the players to wait like *While Waiting* does.

SUMMARY: *While Waiting* is not a perfect experience, but it does something that very few games have the audacity to do. By asking the player to wait, it invites you to do the complete opposite, interacting with unique levels and different (yet sometimes clunky) mechanics.





MIGHTY MORPHIN POWER RANGERS: RITA'S REWIND

Making morphin more fun.



Dev:
Digital Eclipse

Pub:
Digital Eclipse

Date:
10 Dec 2024

Price:
£29.50
€34.99

Size:
858MB

Haim Saban didn't become a triple billionaire without having some idea of what he must have had in those hands back when he brought *Kyōryū Sentai Zyuranger* over to the west as *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*, but even that maniac must have been taken aback at the powerful kicking legs of the franchise, running as it has to *thirty seasons of ever-developing tokusatsu action*.

Sensibly, though, developer Digital Eclipse have thrown the vast majority of it all in the bin and stuck with the original 90s series for this new beat-'em-up adventure, correctly kow-towing to nostalgic adults rather than those with their fingers on the pulse of the no doubt fascinating and intricate Power Rangers multiverse.

Rita's Rewind takes a lot of cues from the outstanding *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shredder's Revenge*, both in gameplay terms and with its visuals and sound. The arcade game looks are closer to "SNES on steroids" than the cartoon appearance of the Turtles game, and it comes together brilliantly with a frankly best in class soundtrack from composer Sean Bialo (*Penny's Big Breakaway*), all ripping riffs and electric breakdowns that add a dose of adrenaline to every single encounter. Seriously, that music is almost worth the money on its own – there wasn't a moment of gameplay that didn't feel perfectly scored. It pairs brilliantly with the Zord levels in particular, which take the form of into-the-screen 3D stages that make for a cross between *Wild Guns* and a Sega Super Scaler arcade title, with you shifting your crosshair all over the screen to blast away every enemy and obstacle in your path before jumping in the Megazord for a one-on-one mecha battle reminiscent of the Goemon Impact sequences from Konami's *Mystical Ninja* series. More than

just a beat-'em-up, then, and it's a very successful melting pot.

The fighting action is great, too – when the game launched it was a little slow-paced, but a quick patch job has seen it boosted to a much more enjoyable speed. Your rangers don't have a whole lot of moves, but what's present represents function over form. Punch and kick combos, launchers, downward slams and screen-clearing "Mega Crash" attacks are the order of the day, with a very Shredder's Revenge-esque dodge manoeuvre also on tap. It's closer to the planted feet of the *Double Dragon* series than the very loose *Streets of Rage 4*, but it works – you'll be cancelling your cartwheels into lightning-quick ripostes in no time.

Good as it is, there are some minor pacing issues. The levels can be a couple of enemy waves too long, given the relatively limited moveset compared to... yes... *Shredder's Revenge*. And look, I know that's the third time it has come up, but if *Rita's Rewind* didn't want to be compared to that game, it shouldn't have bit its style quite so hard. The "Rewind" portion of the title also leads to the inclusion of Time Disruptors, a device occasionally brought on-screen by enemy Putties for you to smash. Fail to do so in time and the machine explodes, causing a literal *rewind* as the action seeks backward until the point the Disruptor was originally ferried into the level, reviving any fallen enemies in the process. In practice, this is just a more visually creative way to implement further salvos of baddies, but psychologically it is a little tedious watching your work quite literally being undone before your eyes. Thankfully, the Time Disruptor will retain damage you already dealt, making it a minor nuisance at worst.

It's also a little disappointing how similar the (initial) five playable Rangers are – while they carry different weapons and have



Reviewed by
Stuart Gipp



unique animations, they don't feel any different to play; again, this is far from a deal-breaker, but it could have been cool if there was a little more variation. A more significant gripe is the limitation of online co-op to two players – you can play with up to six players locally, so it's a shame this couldn't have been implemented across NSO. Still, beat-'em-ups are far better when played with friends in person, so it's nice that six of you can get together and smack some monster heads.

And smack some monster heads you

will, across a greater number of levels than you might expect. The inclusion of the Zord stages breaks things up nicely and a host of memorable boss battles and hidden collectables will keep you glued to your Pro Controller. It's a clear labour of love from a team who just get Power Rangers – visiting Angel Grove High School between stages is a treat, and they even got the ludicrous Bulk and Skull theme music in there. "Proustian rush" doesn't even begin to cover it.



SUMMARY: An action-packed riot of a rewind, this is a throwback in all the right ways. An aesthetic marvel, you can feel the love for the property oozing out of every pixel. It's only very minor problems keeping this one from the top of the beat-'em-up heap. The heap-'em-up?





MYTHWRECKED: AMBROSIA ISLAND

Book yourself a Hera appointment!



Dev:
Polygon
Treehouse

Pub:
Whitethorn
Digital

Date:
5 Dec 2024

Price:
£22.49
€24.99

Size:
1.5GB

In this busy society we live in it can feel like the only thing in your life is work, meetings, and deadlines.

The cure for all of this overwork: a good old-fashioned vacation. This is where we join our protagonist Alex, on a boat to an exotic island vacation and looking forward to unplugging, relaxing, and taking a break from the world. Of course, this promise of vacation-bliss all goes haywire when a storm, in a sickly shade of green, leaves Alex washed up on the shore of a mysterious island. Then Alex stumbles upon a talking statue that— Wait, a talking statue?!

Alex has washed up on the shore of Ambrosia Island, a little piece of paradise inhabited solely by (some of the) Greek Gods. However, all of them have amnesia. They can't remember who they are, why they're here, or most importantly: how someone might be able to leave this island. So, Alex decides to go searching for a way to help the gods get their memories back and find a way to return to her life.

In *Mythwrecked*, the way to help the gods is by going on a never ending string of fetch-quests. Right at the start of the game you meet the Oracle (Ora for short), she provides you with an Ambrosiadex (the island-specific smartphone) where you can access the map, menus, and exchange contact information with the other island residents.

The most important functionality of your Ambrosiadex however is the island radar. This lets you attune to each individual god which will show you where to find their lost mementos. The fetching gets repetitive quickly, as there isn't much of a challenge to any of these fetch quests. And they never change, or increase in difficulty, so the game eventually becomes running back and forth to pick up items and return them.

If you happen to be someone (like me)

who knows a lot about Greek mythology, then it is usually pretty easy to discover that, say, a pair of winged sandals belongs to Hermes, or a broken army toy belongs to Ares. Of course, if this is your first delve into ancient Greek myth then you can always take anything you find to Ora who will give you a hint to point you to the item's owner.

Helping the gods remember themselves will raise their friendship levels with you, which will then allow you to ask them for more information and buy things from their individual shops. The island currency is ambrosia fruit: a little yellow fruit that grows on almost every bush scattered around the island. After a certain amount of time the fruits restore and you can pick them again. Frustratingly, some of the god's shops have important and necessary items, and the rest are simply superfluous collection items. One of the gods specifically has mementos in his shop that you literally cannot progress the story without buying. So start saving (your fruits), or start running.

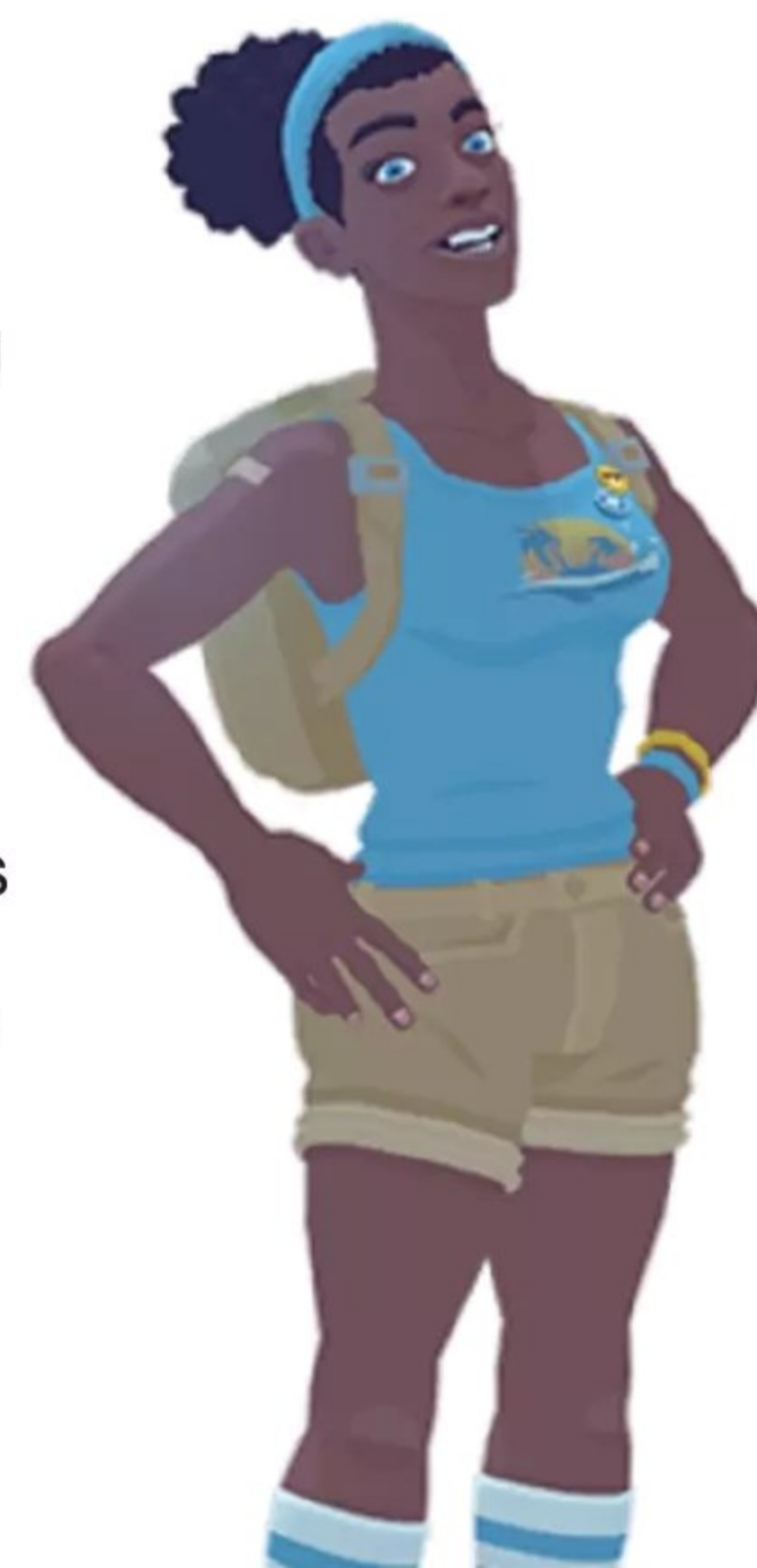
The controls are a bit strange; you press Y to run, and then A to interact. This makes for a lot of jerky movement as it's not particularly smooth or easy to hold Y and press A at the same time without smashing one of the other two (and X is the menu button).

The music and artwork is where this game really shines. The character designs are the absolute best part of the game. I love that Hera has a mohawk, or that Hades wears a crop



Reviewed by
Ash Rose

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top that says DED on it. The music is good at conveying the mood as well.

The game is a little bit too much sunshine and rainbows. Those of us that have studied Greek mythology know that their gods were not good; they were selfish and cruel, and in fact, Greek myth is generally regarded as tales on how NOT to behave. In *Mythwrecked* everyone is just so

ambrosia fruit to buy the last story quest item. The controls could be smoother, considering all of the unused buttons available, and while there are some ultra-short descriptions of Greek myth, it is baby's first introduction to Greek mythology stories. The art and character design is stellar, and I never got tired of looking at the characters themselves; and the music is lovely. This game is very: nice person helping other very nice people remember how they are very, very nice. All in all, *Mythwrecked* is, well... nice.

The music and artwork is where this game really shines. The character designs are the absolute best part of the game.

gosh darn good. This is, of course, Polygon Treehouse's own artistic license; however, they could have made up random characters, or used a different pantheon, and it would have had the same effect.

Mythwrecked leaves us with what feels more like a fetch-quest extravaganza trapped inside a visual novel. There isn't any real challenge to be had, especially when the biggest challenge is needing 200

SUMMARY: *Mythwrecked* has you helping the gods in this fetch-quest extravaganza. The art and character design is marvelous. Everyone in the game is a little too good to be true; but hey, sometimes it's nice to take a break from bad guys.





SYMPHONIA

Orchestrated excellence



Dev:
Sunny Peak

Pub:
Headup
Games

Date:
23 Jan 2025

Price:
£16.99
€17.99

Size:
1.0GB

The platformer is a genre that has gone through many iterations over the years.

Whether it's the wonder of Mario, the spectacle of Spyro, or the seething rage of Super Meat Boy, there is a platforming experience out there for everyone. So, in a genre as saturated as this, how on earth could any game truly stand out at this point? The answer - it seems - pick a single idea and build an exciting and challenging world around it. That's what I believe the developers of *Symphonia* have done at least; their entrancing, music filled world being a blast to play around in.

The world of *Symphonia*, delightful as it is, is currently experiencing some hard times. Music is the lifeblood of the land but following the disappearance of the founders of *Symphonia* and their orchestra, silence has fallen, and only you – a mysterious being named Philemon armed with a trusty violin – can restore sound, and thus life, to the world. As if performing wasn't enough pressure already!

It's hardly an original premise, but one that drives the game forward and allows us to experience its true beauty: the music. Simply put, *Symphonia* is one of the most beautifully scored games I have ever had the pleasure of experiencing. Based on the romantic music period and crafted by composer Olivier Esman and his partners Alexandre Bucas-Français and Lou Corroyer, the soundtrack employs the work of the Scoring Orchestra Paris to masterful effect. Each section of the world champions a different family of instrument, including Woodwind, Brass and Strings.

You can tell great care has been taken to pay tribute to what makes each group unique, and the music flows and crescendos as each stage goes on. As you reach the end of each particular section, you're essentially treated to a mini performance. Other games might have

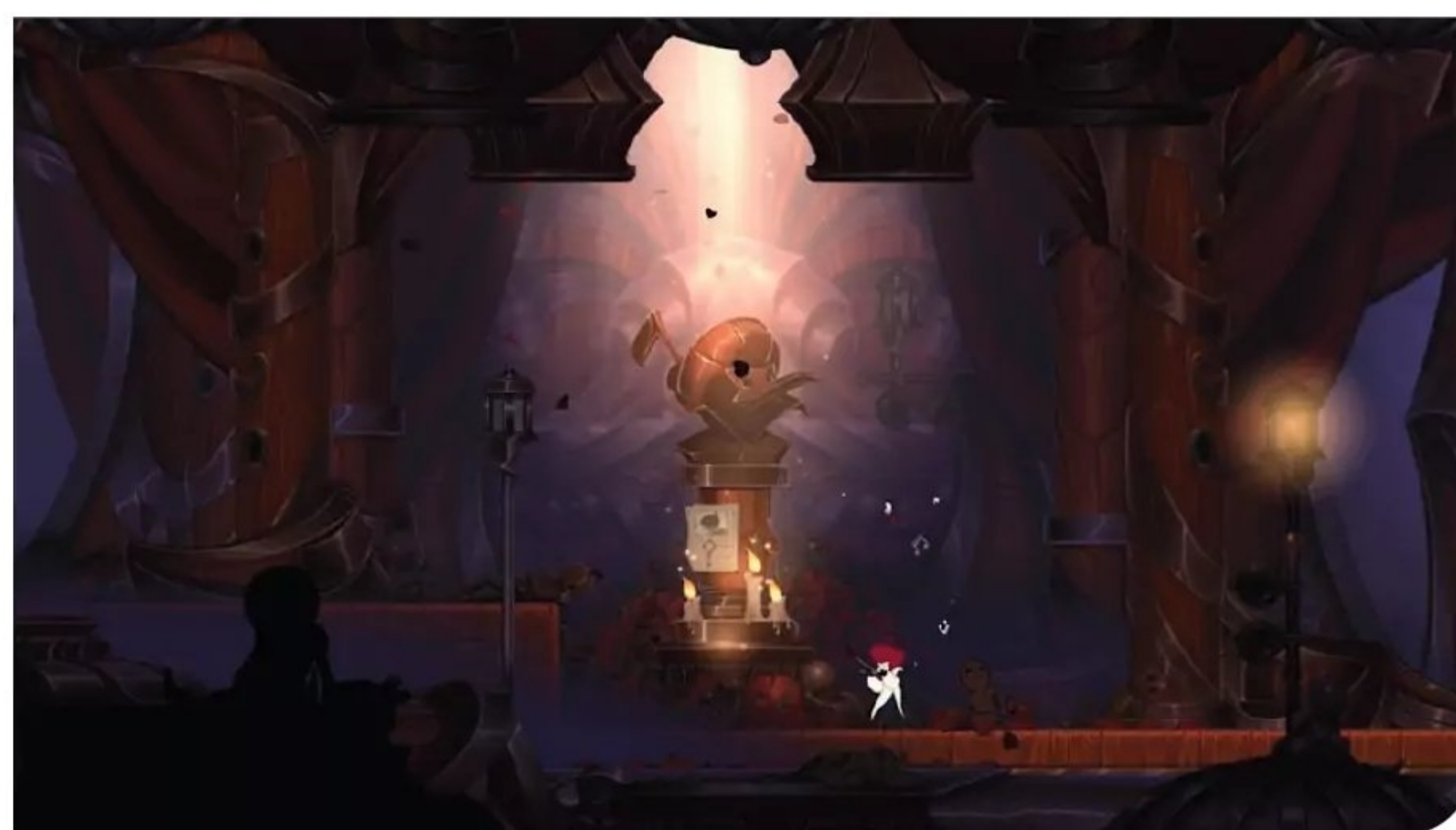
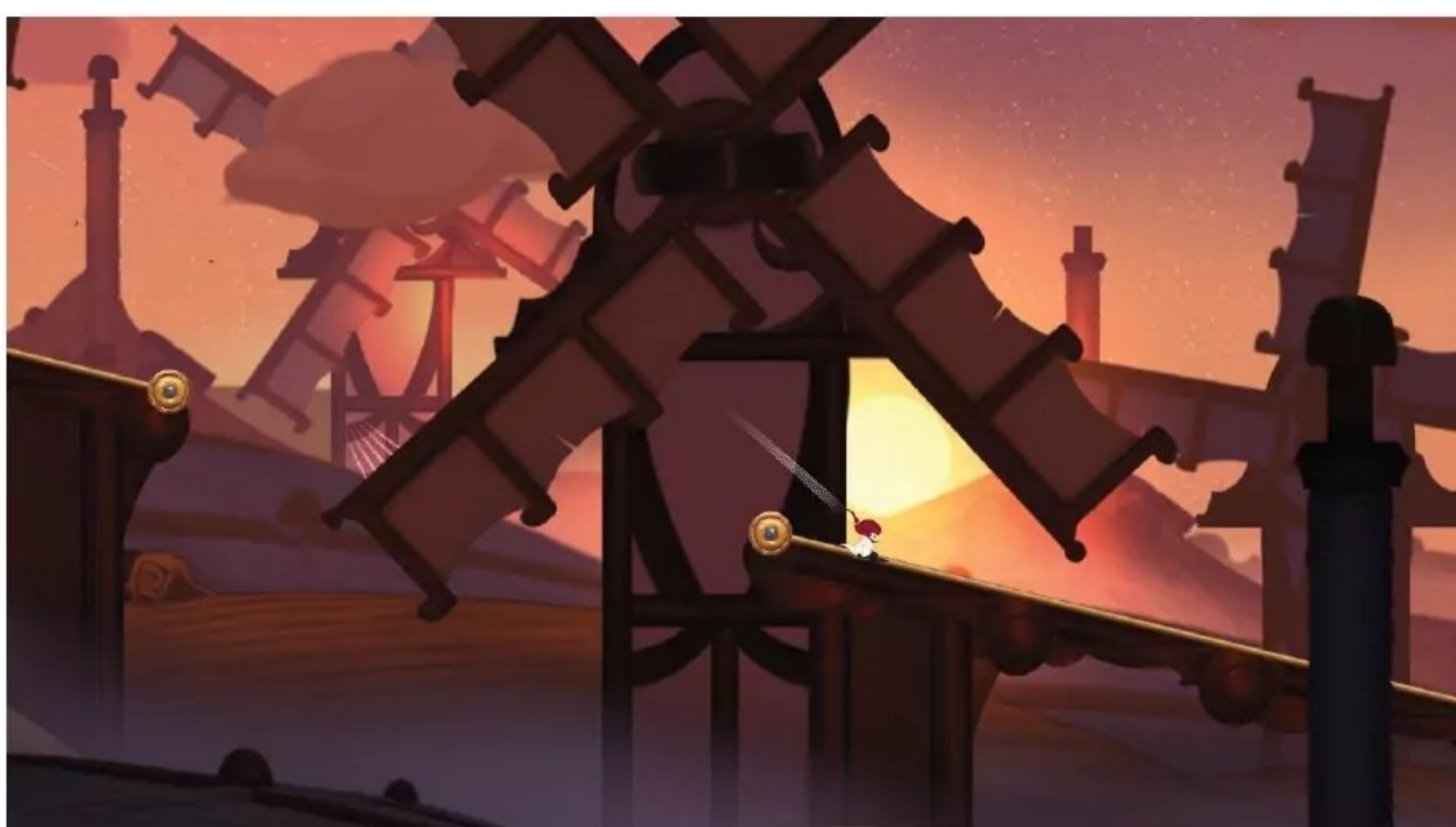
opted to include a rhythm-based puzzle in these moments to give the player more agency, but after having sweated through a gauntlet of increasingly challenging platforming segments, these performances provide a moment of well-earned levity. They're a reward essentially, for making it to the end, and one that's oh so more satisfying than a shiny trinket or achievement.

The platforming is incredibly robust, with plenty of different gimmicks to test your skills. Surfaces fall away at the slightest touch, while rotating platforms threaten you with a spiky demise. The shifting environment challenges you to race against the very world itself, and projectiles force you to sharpen your reflexes. None of this ever overwhelms you however; new challenges or obstacles are dished out at a satisfying pace that allows you just enough time to hone your abilities before introducing the next foil to your adventure.

There is little margin for error here, however. A lot of the moves you need to make require the highest levels of precision platforming, and the game is not afraid to throw you back a fair distance should you fail. A fine challenge is all well and good, but I unfortunately found that the controls weren't always the most responsive or well-tuned, resulting in some of these sections becoming more enraging than engaging. One of your abilities for example allows you to essentially catapult yourself when attached to certain surfaces. The strength, and thus the distance, of said catapult seemed to vary wildly at times, despite strict adherence to the control scheme on my part. It's a small niggle, and one that wasn't as disruptive as it could have been, but in a game so focused on the precision of your movements, it's unfortunate when your inputs don't hit as they should.



Reviewed by
Joe Wescott



Gameplay wise, nothing particularly inventive has been brought to the table, yet it remains a fun and challenging time.



In any case, these are easy things to overlook when the presentation of the game is as beautiful as it is. Aside from the aforementioned musical prowess, the game is visually stunning as well. There's a painterly quality to the visuals that pairs well with the Romantic musical stylings. Various cutscenes dotted throughout the game convey the beauty of the animation, and work in tandem with the music to bring life and emotion to a story that is essentially wordless. You can see the passion with which the musicians play and feel the power of the music flow through you.

Symphonia is a perfectly

adequate platformer, elevated by a beautiful soundtrack and gorgeous visuals. Gameplay wise, nothing particularly inventive has been brought to the table, yet it remains a fun and challenging time, even if some of that challenge is unfortunately enhanced by unreactive controls. You're unlikely to pay this any mind however, as the delicate music flows through you and you're enveloped in the warm embrace of a world where music is the key to life itself. This isn't just a game; it's a musical journey – one well worth embarking on.

SUMMARY: With a soundtrack designed to make you swoon, *Symphonia* incorporates music into the very roots of its design. The gameplay won't blow you away, but it's an enjoyable enough gateway to what this experience truly has to offer.





HELLO KITTY ISLAND ADVENTURE

Photograph Guudetama for extra fun!



Dev:
Sunblink

Pub:
Sunblink

Date:
30 Jan 2025

Price:
£35.99
€39.99

Size:
2.4GB

How much cute could a video game cute if a video game could cute cute? The answer is, *Hello Kitty Island Adventure*!

The first time you load into the game you'll create your character from a selection of adorable animals such as a cat, dog, or bird. Once you've created your cutie, you'll be in-game at the tail-end of a flight headed to a tropical island vacation destination. You and a bunch of other new friends.

After saying hi to Hello Kitty, My Melody, Kuromi and the others, Hello Kitty will fire up the totally normal plane-oven to make strawberry cakes. Alas, the oven goes haywire, spitting cakes every which way; so everyone is hurriedly given a bunch of balloons and told to jump out of the plane to safety.

Originally released in June of 2023 on Apple Arcade, *Hello Kitty Island Adventure* might sound like one of those trademark cash grab types of games, but it is actually a surprisingly addictive and fun time.

The game has been frequently compared to *Animal Crossing*, and it's not a bad comparison to make. You are on a tropical island, you collect and craft items, there are bugs and fish to catch, and special holiday themed events and items. You can invite your friends to join you in some multiplayer fun, and there is even a similar time feature where "time-travelling" is discouraged. In fact, there's a disclaimer at the beginning of the game saying that attempting to do so could result in glitches or your save data being erased.

There is also an in-game day/night cycle, so you do not actually have to wait until 10pm your time to do things that happen at night. You can sleep in your bed and adjust what time of day it is as well. *Island Adventure* has also added in daily and weekly quests in order to keep players engaged. So every day (real-time) you log in, there are new things to do.

Basically, your main goal is to make friends with all of the Sanrio characters by giving them gifts they like. You can collect gifts (like bugs or fish), or you can craft or bake things as well. Every level of friendship you achieve with a character unlocks something new: from important storyline quests, to Kuromi gifting you a spooky mirror, or being able to unlock recipes and bake sweets with Hello Kitty, there is a LOT of friendship to be made here. Once you have a high enough level of friendship, you can also ask the other characters to walk around and hang out with you. Each character has a special ability (for example, My Melody gives you a chance of getting extra rewards when giving gifts). So start penciling them into your calendars.

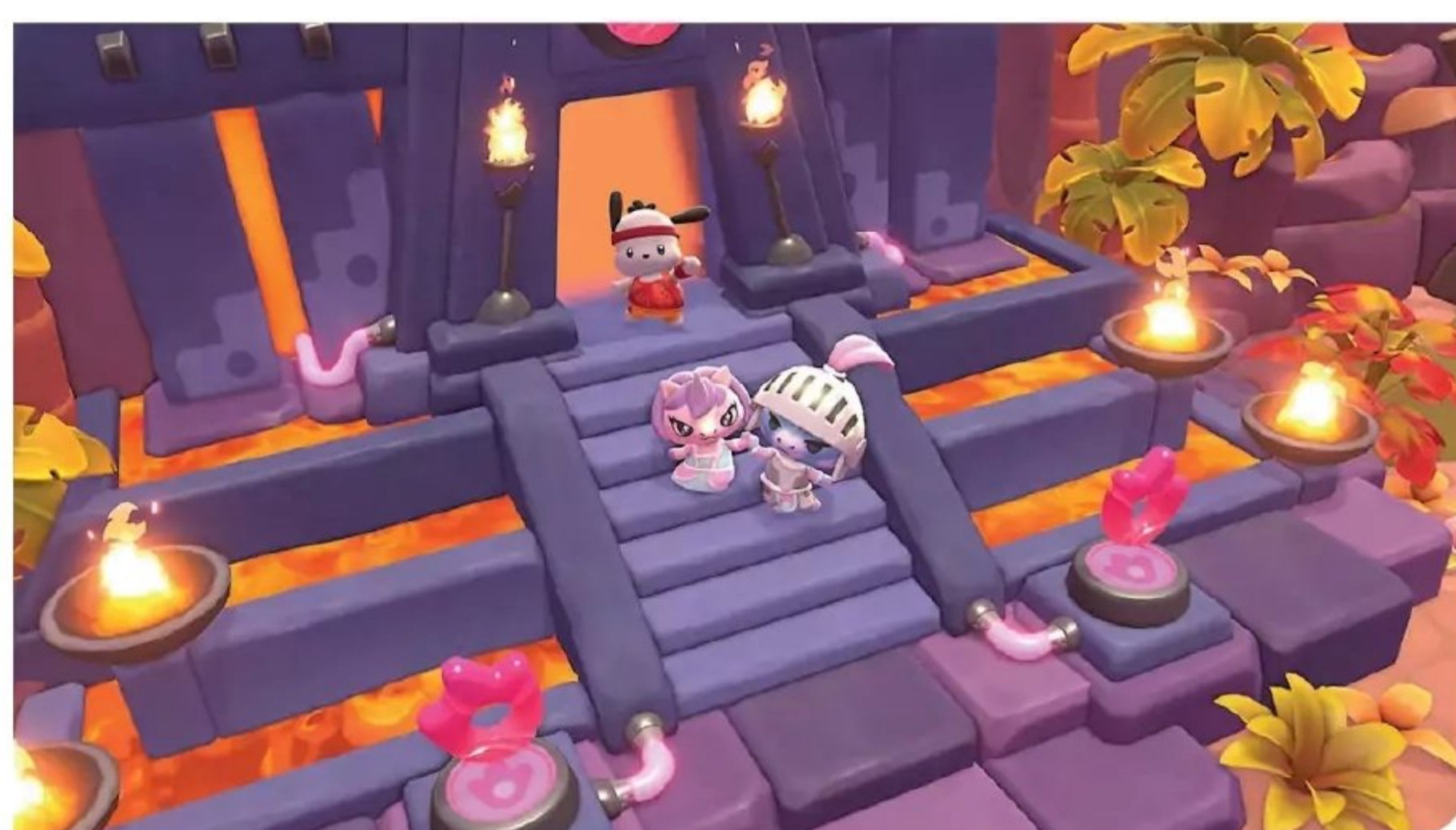
These Sanrio characters have been around for years now, and thus they all have distinct personalities; from Hangyodon being a stand-up comedian to Kuromi loving spooky-scary stuff, it's interesting getting to know all of them, and they're all so silly and cute!

To put the cherry on top, you will also be tasked with unlocking the other island vacation cabins and filling them with furniture. Not just any furniture though, as time passes, other Sanrio characters (such



Reviewed by
Ash Rose





as Hello Kitty's boyfriend Dear Daniel, or all of the Cinnamoroll Angels) will be travelling at certain times of the year. If you happen to have a cabin furnished with the things a certain character likes, they will visit your island. If they visit enough times, perhaps they will even move in permanently!

That being said, there are a few flaws, and most of it has to do with how the game runs. The Switch is simply getting old.

The music and artwork are stellar, and add to the endearing quality. The game is wildly easy, there are a few puzzles sprinkled around the island, and some of them can be a tad challenging, but nothing about this game is going to have you throwing your controller. It is mainly just fetch quests and delivering things. Despite this, I somehow found myself unable to turn it off. It has that certain addictive something that makes 5pm turn into 11pm in what feels like a mere thirty minutes.

That being said, there are a few flaws, and most of it has to do with how the game runs. The Switch is simply getting old, and has a hard time with newer releases. There are lag issues every so often - it's far from breaking the game or making it unplayable - but it can be mildly annoying. As well, when you first boot up the game, you do have to spend a good minute or two staring at the load screen. At first I thought the game had crashed, it takes that long.

But after all is said and done, your cosy island fix is here for you to enjoy in *Hello Kitty Island Adventure*.

SUMMARY: For all of its technical flaws, *Hello Kitty Island Adventure* is a pretty fun game. If you like things cute, pink, and fluffy, full of cosiness, friendship, and a healthy dose of relaxation, then this is a game you just might want to pick up.





FITNESS BOXING 3: YOUR PERSONAL TRAINER

From Contender to Champion.



Dev:
Imagineer

Pub:
Nintendo

Date:
5 Dec 2024

Price:
£39.99
€49.99

Size:
2.82GB

In this corner, returning to the ring for the third time in five years... The Sultan of Switch, the King of K-O... Nintendo's own *Fitness Boxing 3: Your Personal Trainer*!

The franchise comes back swinging with notable new features, as well as a renewed focus on the Instructors themselves.

After loading in my data from *Fitness Boxing 2: Rhythm and Exercise*, I was ready to jump right into the action. At its core, this latest installment serves up exactly what the series is known for: basic boxing moves are synced up to music, creating a *Dance Dance Revolution*-style rhythm workout. It's exhausting, it's exhilarating, and yes – it's legitimately good exercise. It's also playable with up to two people either sharing Joy-Cons or using two sets. Players learn offensive and defensive tactics such as jabbing, ducking, and blocking, mixing them up to create combos. All the while, a fitness instructor demonstrates new techniques and stands center-screen to model the proper form. They'll also dole out plenty of helpful reminders and motivation.

The main mode, "Daily Workout," is an evolving set of exercises that's meant to serve as your regular routine. Each day's sequence changes as you learn more combos; its overall length and intensity can be tailored to your personal fitness goals. Returning players will notice a new dynamic stretch: it's a short movement session which lies somewhere in-between the basic stretch and the full workout. Series veterans will also notice a revamped song list featuring a few original tracks... and yet another onslaught of iconic pop songs ruined by tinny MIDI instruments. On the bright side, the new backgrounds prove far less visually distracting; I feel more grounded and focused in these areas than I did in *Fitness Boxing 2*'s chaotic realms.

Now, it's time to dive into what really sets this sequel apart. Outside of Daily Workout and Basic Training, there are two new ways to enjoy Free Training (a.k.a., free play.)

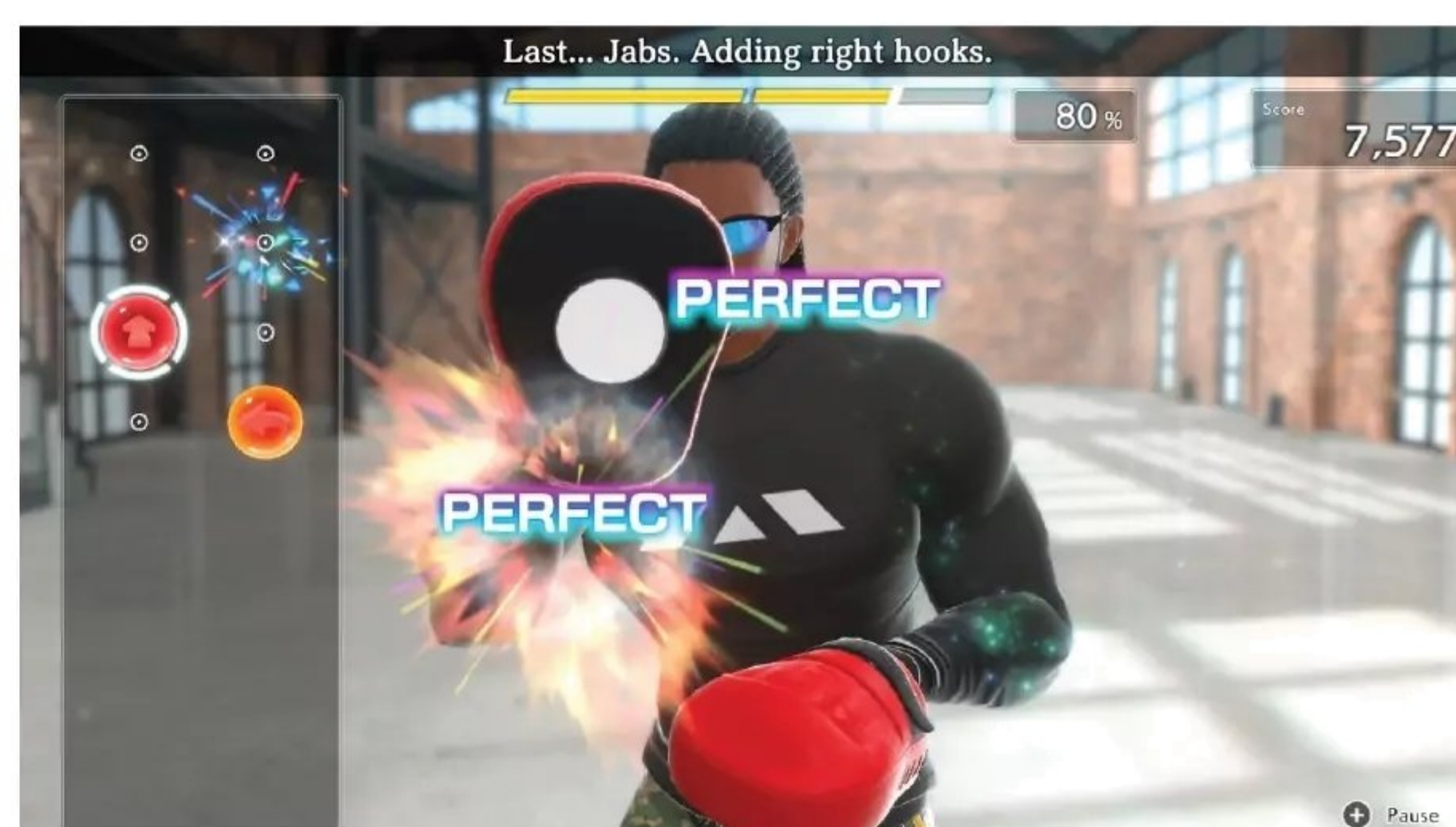
"Mitt Drills" ditch the rhythm requirement, allowing you to practice combos in short bursts at any pace; I enjoy using this mode to test my speed, but it's also a forgiving means to practice tricky combos. The second new mode is called "Sit Fit Boxing," the title of which speaks for itself. This seated workout isn't simply for lazy days: it serves as an accessibility feature aimed at those who can't stand for long periods. I am pleased to see that Sit Fit Boxing is also available in two-player mode, as it's the perfect way to "ease" friends into a game that's fatiguing in full swing.

My favourite new feature is the addition of daily and weekly goals. Why does it stick out when we already have Achievements to strive for? Well, it's no secret that the most difficult aspect of fitness can often be *showing up* for the workout; it's easy to push exercise to the bottom of the priority list. So, in an effort to K-O complacency, we're given a list of tasks with *time limits*. It's a formula that's successful in so many other online games, and I'm already noticing how it affects my interactions with *Fitness Boxing*. Now I know that if I do just a *few* extra workouts by Friday, I can earn more coins to buy swag for Bernardo.

That brings me to the Instructors. There are now only six people to choose from, but thankfully they're still down to let you pick their wardrobe or dye their hair. They're also now offering "Box and Bond" sessions: these workouts, which are unlocked after spending time with each instructor, offer some light conversation along with a simple workout – and more importantly, additional clothing! It's not much, but that's more incentive than we've ever had to try out all of the instructors. However, much like the



Reviewed by
Anna Karasik



consistently disappointing music, our Instructors' voices are once again a major letdown: most of them sound noticeably robotic – awkward and devoid of warmth. All in all, these pretty faces are still just motivational dress-up dolls who remind us to hydrate.

The franchise comes back swinging with notable new features, as well as a renewed focus on the Instructors themselves.

Despite its faults, *Fitness Boxing 3: Your Personal Trainer* lives up to its name. This sequel's focus is clearly on helping us build better fitness habits through a variety of training, timed goals, and a desire to hear

our Dragonball-buff instructors tell us that we're "Looking good." (Back at you, Bernardo.) After playing *Fitness Boxing 2* on and off for years, I can safely say that the only way to stop your muscles from burning after a Fitness Boxing session... is to *make it a routine*. So it is that reigning Fitness Boxing champs like myself will appreciate the improvements that set this title apart from its predecessor. Although this contender takes some minor blows, it packs a punch.

SUMMARY: It's easier than ever to build an indoor workout routine thanks to *Fitness Boxing 3: Your Personal Trainer*. Although this game can occasionally offend the ears, there are enough new features to consider this sequel a major improvement on a fabulous formula.





STAR WARS EPISODE I: JEDI POWER BATTLES

“The negotiations were short”.



Dev:
Aspyr

Pub:
Aspyr

Date:
23 Jan 2025

Price:
£17.99
€19.99

Size:
4.4GB

The Jedi Council at Aspyr seem at this point to have carte blanche access to even the deepest holocrons within the Lucasarts archives, and almost 25 years after its original release on PlayStation, *Jedi Power Battles* receives a seat in the Switch library, but it isn't quite granted the rank of master in the minds of many fans.

Perhaps more so than any of the other re-released Star Wars titles from this publisher, this title elicits a duel of internal fates between rose-tinted nostalgic exhilaration, and jank-induced frustration.

As someone who fondly remembers buying this with my pocket money back in the day, from WHSmith of all places, and playing with my brother after school, I guess I'm firmly in the former camp, but I'm not completely blind to the allure of the outstanding box art and premise.

(Seriously, though, that box art is an all-timer, right? It has to be the best Star Wars game box art).

What results in this definitive package is a warts-and-all representation of a classic Stars Wars game that is well worth a replay for fans of the franchise, so long as they accept that the challenges ahead are more than just the swathes of droids.

An action-filled beat-em-up with plentiful platforming, *Power Battles* mercifully forgoes getting bogged down with the political bloat of the Trade Federation blockade, and sets players on a breakneck journey through the 1999 film's most memorable set pieces. You'll have to slash, dodge, and jump your way to victory, mastering your chosen Jedi's skills and upgrading as you go to match up to Darth Maul's challenging final stand, and ultimately avoid Qui-Gon's tragic canonical end.

In keeping with the wider Star Wars oeuvre that has grown exponentially since

2000, *Jedi Power Battles* has some modern trimmings in this remastered package from the Aspyr team. For starters, you'll notice that Mace Windu's lightsaber on the cover art has been retroactively turned purple, as have all playable characters' blades.

Traditionalists will be glad to know that his blue option is still available, in keeping with the Power of the Force mail sneak preview action figure. A bit of a deep cut, but when will I ever get the opportunity to write about that in print?

Other improvements in this new release, based on the Dreamcast version of the game, include all levels and secret characters being unlocked from the start, as well as a bunch of new extras such as Jar Jar once you complete the game.

With a cast ranging from Plo Koon to Captain Panama, there's something here for everyone to get a kick out of, with the Jedi characters having their own unique force powers to suit the play style of aspiring knights, and the gun-wielding characters helping the non force-sensitive to not have to worry too much about potential difficulty.

A fully open level select is a particularly great touch for this throwback release, as it allows players to rattle through cherry picked stages in a 'greatest hits' fashion, like the excellent finale battle level with Darth Maul, or the STAP riding level through the streets of Naboo. All are accompanied by John Williams' incredible score from the film, and the sound effects are, of course, second to none.

Short of a T-14 hyperdrive-level boost to performance and visuals, this is very much Jedi Power Battles as you remember it, for better and for worse. I can imagine new players finding this difficult to get to grips with and enjoy. For myself and others playing with fond memories of the original it's like slipping back into an old



Reviewed by
Ethan Hunt



familiar Jedi robe.

The arcadey levels can be unforgiving at times, but the satisfaction you get from executing a perfect rolling slice, or the happy mumble from Yoda as you find a secret points bonus before your partner, is simply bliss.

Your best bet for enjoying this one is to invite your friends around.

A lack of online co-op is the only thing that Aspyr have failed to include in this game's rerelease, but given the pinpoint accuracy required for some of the platforming, and the magnified frustration that even the slightest of latency issues could create, I can sort of forgive it not being here.

Your best bet for enjoying this one is to invite your friends around for some classic couch co-op action, and with all levels unlocked from the beginning you can jump straight into your favourite scenes from the film. So long as your favourite scenes don't include corrupt politician Sio Bibble.

Jedi Power Battles isn't the best game in

the world. It's not the best Star Wars game. It's not even the best game based on Episode I. But it is still a ton of fun, and this is the best way to play it.

I hate to end this review as a glutton yearning for even more from Aspyr, but with the 20th anniversary release of *Revenge of the Sith* on the horizon, Aspyr has the opportunity to release yet another fan favourite. In the words of Chancellor Palpatine: "Do it".

SUMMARY: 25 years later, *Jedi Power Battles* is still an incredibly entertaining, action-filled rendition of The Phantom Menace story. Trading in clunky political dialogue in favour of frustrating pixel-perfect platforming might seem like the lesser of two evils, but I know which I'd rather play with friends in a couch co-op session.



NEXT TIME...



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