

SPRING 2024

vol.1 // no.1

pixel perfect!

The gaming magazine made
by women for women!

QUIZ!

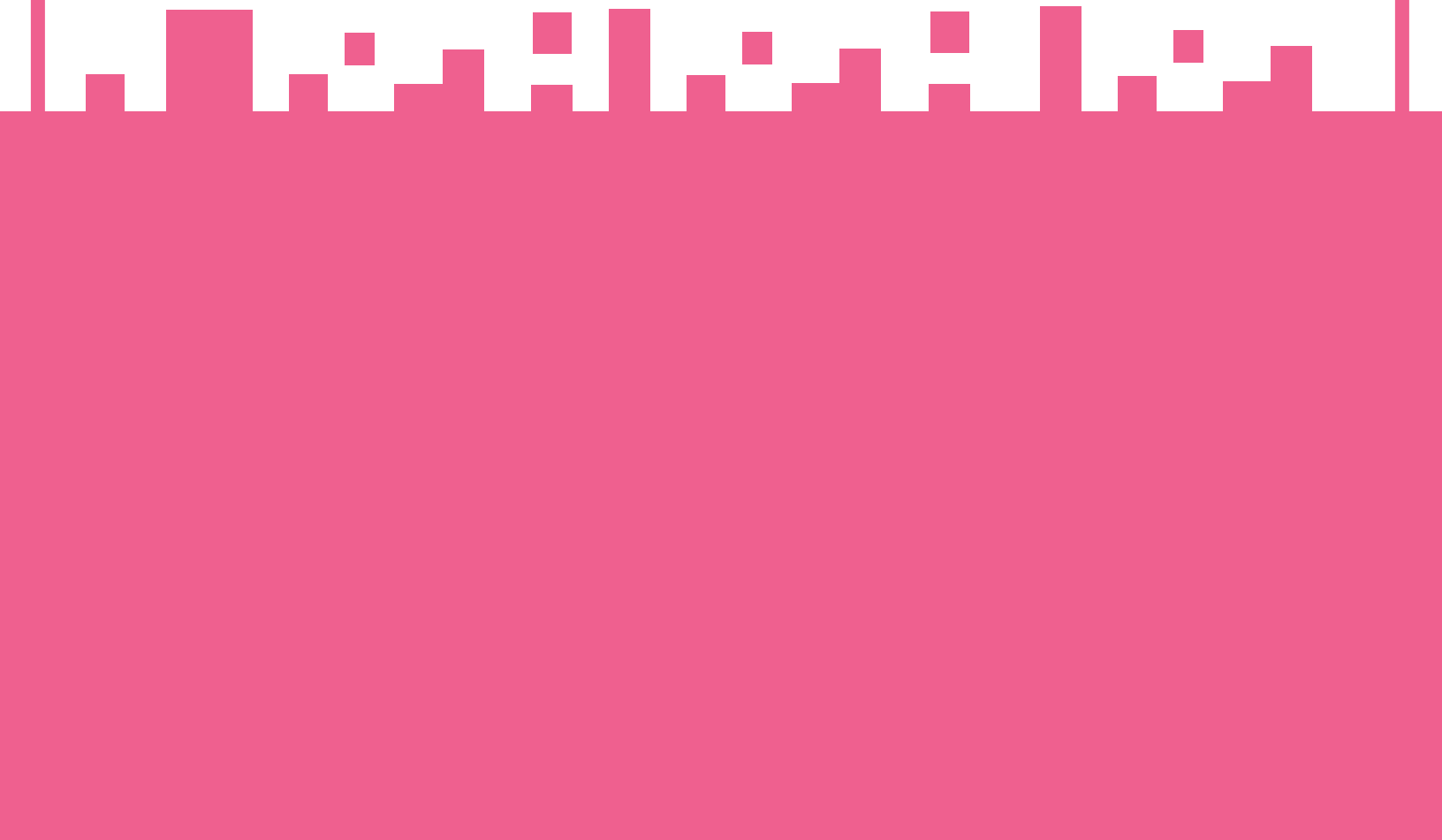
**YOUR NEXT
GAME GENRE**

**SHOWTIME!
WITH PRINCESS PEACH**

GAMING HISTORY

MURIEL TRAMIS

NEW Exclusive Look at Final Fantasy VII: Rebirth!





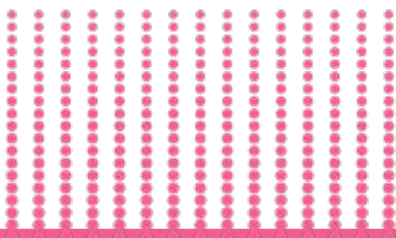
EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to the first issue of *Pixel Perfect!* Videogames have been a huge part of my life since I was in grade school, but I noticed that most of the gaming magazines released at the time were written by and for people that didn't look like me. Although the landscape has significantly changed within the past fifteen years, I still feel like we have so much work to do to make women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ folks feel like they have a space within gaming communities. My hope is that *Pixel Perfect!* can be a safe place for these audiences while covering important issues within the gaming industry.

Final Fantasy VII: Rebirth, which has been the much anticipated sequel to the smash-hit *FFVII: Remake*. This issue also covers the massive layoffs in the gaming industry, which may only continue to grow worse until the industry (hopefully) stabilizes again. Enjoy nerding out over new titles and getting to learn about some old ones in the process! ♦

Eemaan Butt
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
@goodlittlegork

The two featured games in this issue are *Princess Peach: Showtime!*, the first Mario title with Peach as the main protagonist since 2005, and



pixel perfect!

VOLUME I // ISSUE 1

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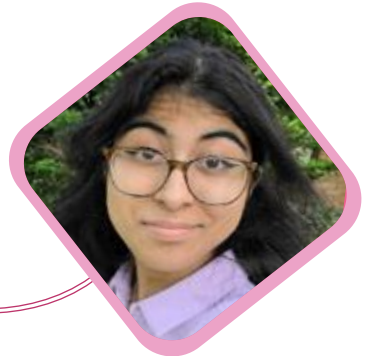
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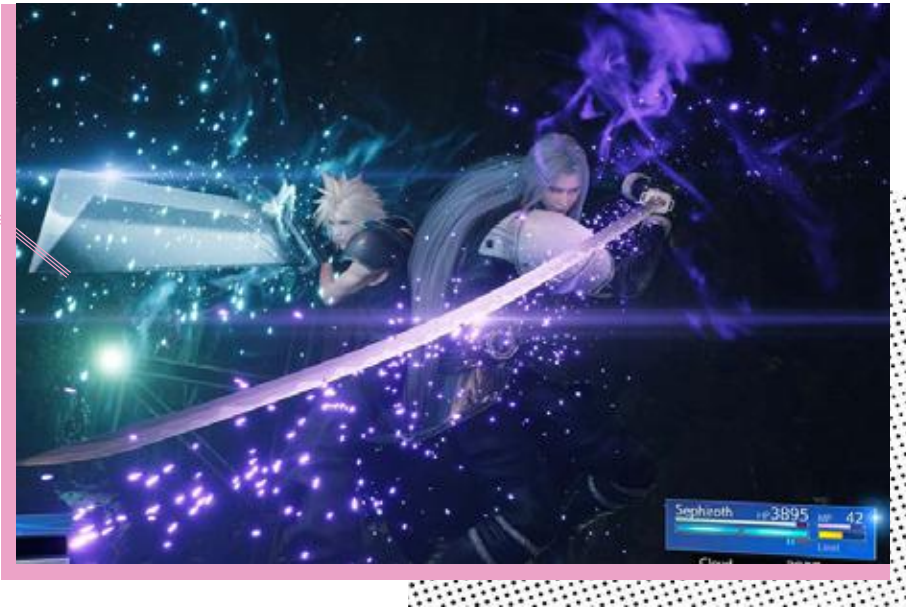




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QUIZ

YOUR NEXT GAME

WHICH GENRE SHOULD YOU PLAY NEXT?

1. What genre of books do you like reading the most?

a) **fantasy**

b) **sci-fi**

c) **mystery**

2. Do you like playing games by yourself or with friends?

a) **solo!**

b) **teamwork!**

c) **a mix of both!**

3. How often do you like playing games?

a) **less than an hour**

b) **1 - 2 hours**

c) **more than 2 hours**

4. What do you like the most about playing videogames?

a) **exploring new worlds!**

b) **watching the story unfold!**

c) **beating people up!**

5. In the apocalypse, what type of weapon would you want?

a) **a sword!**

b) **a gun.**

c) **a baseball bat!**

6. What's your favorite retro console?

a) **the NES**

b) **the SEGA Genesis!**

c) **the Playstation!**

RESULTS



IF YOU GOT MOSTLY A's...

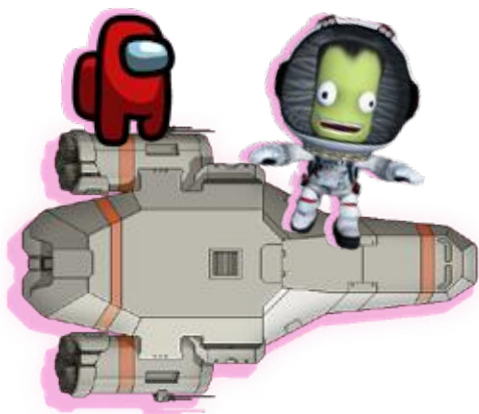
you might like **Open World RPGs**! You're the type to explore as much of the level as possible before moving on to the next stage, looking for whatever secrets hidden within the game.

RECS: *Skyrim, Tears of the Kingdom, Xenoblade 3*

IF YOU GOT MOSTLY B's...

you might enjoy playing **Space Simulation** games! You like a challenge combined with new ideas for what a videogame could look like.

RECS: *Among Us, Kerbal Space Program, Faster than Light*



IF YOU GOT MOSTLY C's...

you would really enjoy playing **Fighting** games! Get your thrill of landing unique combos and having a good time playing against your opponents!

RECS: *Super Smash Bros, Street Fighter 6, The King of Fighters*



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The Legend of Zelda, Jordyn W.
TWITTER: @02redacted

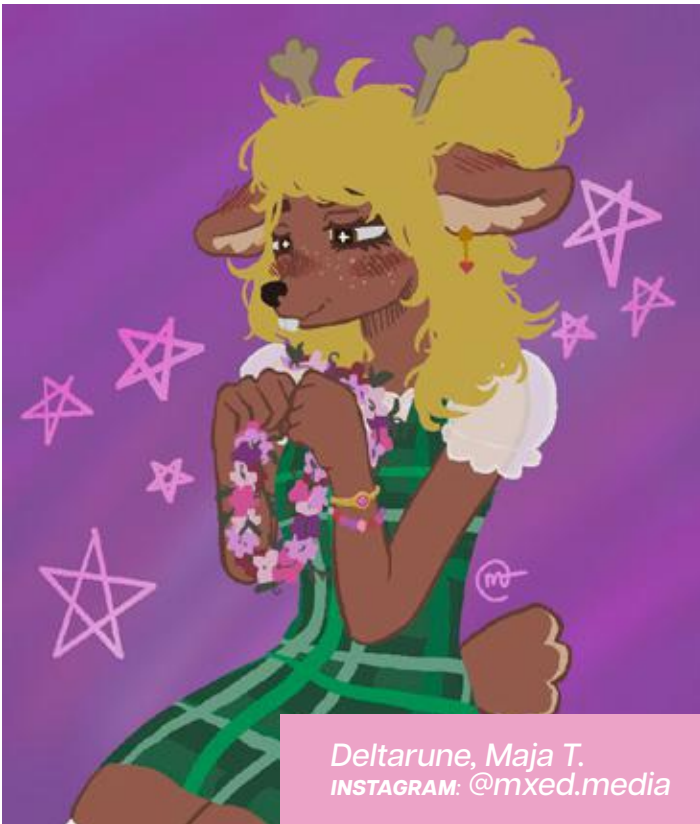


Pokemon, Angie O.
INSTAGRAM: @teacupweeb



◆ PIXEL ART ◆

Showcasing the work of our talented readers!

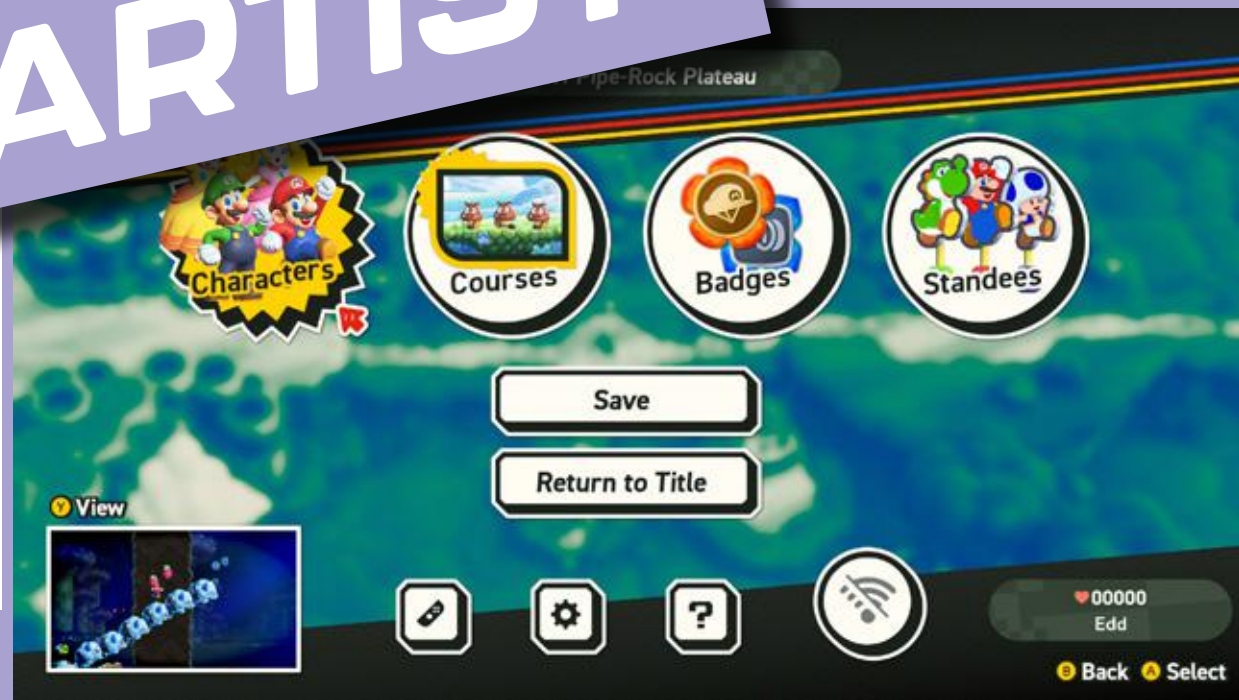


Deltarune, Maja T.
INSTAGRAM: @mxed.media



Fire Emblem, Felix
INSTAGRAM: @kurilix

UI ARTIST



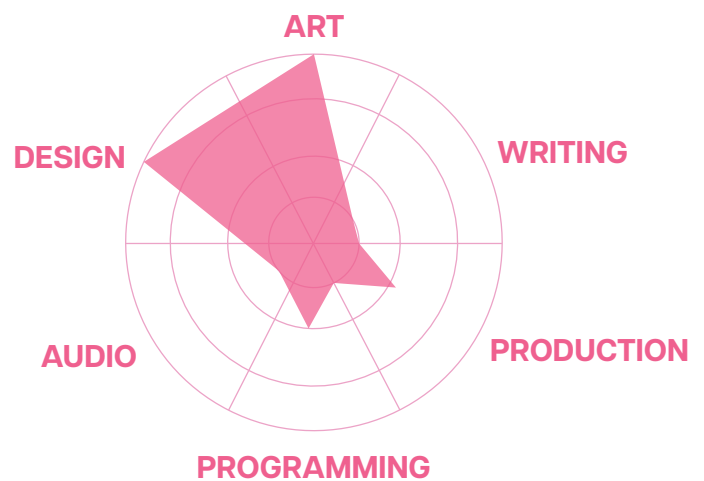
Pause Menu in *Super Mario Bros: Wonder*

Ever played a game and were immediately drawn to how clean the main menu looked? If the answer is usually “no,” that’s okay! In this month’s issue of Pixel Perfect, we’re focusing on UI, or User Interface Artists, an underappreciated role within games but is still vital to a game’s personality and functioning.

WHAT DOES A UI ARTIST DO?

A User Interface (UI) Artist creates the visuals for the parts of the games that convey information to the player. This includes everything from main menus, character customization, and HUD, to the system settings and in-game tutorials. They have a lot of knowledge on graphic design, art theory, animation, psychology and even computer science to make it as easy as possible for players to complete tasks both in and outside of the core gameplay. The role can overlap with being a User Experience (UX) Designer, but is focused more on what the player sees than the overall interaction.

UI Artists work with the Design and Engineering teams to implement the user interface into every part of the game.



Yakuza: Like A Dragon

USER INTERFACE ART MIGHT BE FOR YOU IF...

- ◆ You have a keen eye for detail
- ◆ You have an interest in art, graphic design, and computer science
- ◆ You like figuring out how people think

HOW DO I BECOME A UI ARTIST?

Every UI artist has a portfolio showcasing their best work, with detailed explanations from their first idea to the final product. As a starting artist, practice recreating screens from your favorite games! It's a great exercise to find the small details in your favorite menus, and to get used to training your eye for design.

You don't necessarily need a degree to become a user interface artist, but if you're a university student, take a combination of classes in art, graphic design, psychology, and even some programming classes!

CREATIVITY FOR ALL



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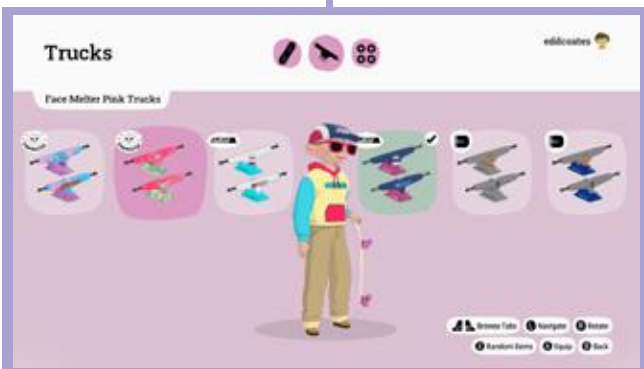


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SOFTWARE TO KNOW

- ◆ **Adobe Creative Suite**, such as Photoshop and Illustrator
- ◆ **3D Software**, such as Maya and Autodesk
- ◆ **Game engines**, such as Unity and Unreal Engine



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ASHA'S ADVICE

I've started my first year in college, and I didn't realize there was going to be so much homework! All I can think about is playing video games but I need to get my assignments done on time if I want to keep up having good grades and a scholarship. Do you have any tips to balance school and my games?

- Academic Victim #70



Hi A.V.! Your question takes me back to my own freshman year, almost scarily so. College can get hard when it seems like the only things you have time for are getting all your projects done and studying for exams. My number one tip is to get a planner to keep track of all your assignments, deadlines, class schedules, and any outside extracurriculars or jobs you need to go to. Write everything down, no matter how small the assignment. But make sure to

also schedule time for relaxing with your friends and playing games, because college isn't just restricted to academics. It's all about making sure that you get your academic priorities done most of the time before you can let loose.

If you're having trouble sticking to your planner, it can help to have a friend hold you accountable. If your friend happens to be in your class, the two of you can have study sessions together outside of your dorms, which is a win-win situation for the both of you!

My friend isn't really a gamer, but the other day they said that they wanted to start playing video games with me. I was really excited when they told me, but there are so many games out there that I don't know what to recommend to them! What should I have them play?

- Wide-Eyed Bestie



Hey W.E.B! It always makes me so happy when I hear that another person has started to discover how cool playing games can be. I would suggest it all depends on the type of genre and their interests outside of playing games. My guess is that they're looking for something that doesn't take up too much time, so we can rule out 50+ hour RPGs (sorry, Xenoblade fans). Ease them into playing something short and sweet like **Unpacking**, and if they would like something that they can always come back to, have them try **Stardew Valley!**

On the other hand, if you know they're the type of person that would enjoy some competition, try introducing them to **Street Fighter** or **King of Fighters**, and the fun can continue with the both of you! Just make sure not to get mad if they have a stroke of beginner's luck on them.

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Yo Asha, help me and this guy at work settle an argument. He keeps saying that Ocarina of Time is the best Legend of Zelda game, but I believe firmly in my heart that the best Zelda game has to be Breath of the Wild. What do you think?

- Angry Zelda Fan



This is going to be a hot question, A.Z.F! Usually, I don't like to argue with other people about what games in a series are the "best," because best can be very subjective. People play games for different reasons, and can even gravitate towards the same game in

completely different ways. Both Ocarina of Time and Breath of the Wild were important games for the Zelda series in that same way. One reason that Ocarina of Time is considered the best is the introduction of large-scale exploration combined with a compelling time-travel story, but the lack of notable sites when traveling through Hyrule Fields made the game feel quite empty. The argument for Breath of the Wild is that the game goes back to the series' roots, with an emphasis on open-world exploration and non-linear storytelling. However, some players have criticized the game for not being as challenging as times goes on or the extremely tedious Korok sidequest. Both games have their own flaws,

so it is up to you as a player to determine which flaws you are willing to work with or cast aside in favor of the things that the game gets right.

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WOMEN IN ESPORTS

DORIS SELF



When you think of “competitive eSports,” the types of people that probably come to your mind first are teenage guys invested in a Valorant or Smash Bros. tournament. But competitive gaming extends beyond the most popular multiplayer fighting games, and beyond the typical player base. Doris Self is known as the “Queen of Q*bert,” and currently holds the Guinness World Record for the oldest competitive video gamer. She was a serious force to be reckoned with at a time when videogames were still gaining their footing in the entertainment industry.

Q*bert was an arcade game first released in 1982 by Gottlieb, a company that at the time was known mainly for their pinball machines. The player was able to control Q*bert by having him hop on top of cubes that formed a pyramid. The goal of the game to make the top of every cube have the same color. Although the rules are pretty simple, the number of times you would need Q*bert to hop on a cube to change the color would increase over time, and you would have enemies to dodge as well, making the player scramble to complete the level in time. This setup made Q*bert one of the earliest games to have tournaments to see who could reach the highest score in the game.

Self first discovered Q*bert when she was taking her daughter to Chuck E. Cheese and they had an arcade machine available with the game on it. She took an interest in the game and was instantly hooked. She would visit her local 24-hour arcade and play from around 11pm to 7 in the morning to sharpen her skills.





Her dedication paid off extremely well! In 1984, Doris Self made a name for herself for achieving the highest score in Q*bert at the Video Game Masters Tournament, earning a whopping 1,112,300 points, even more impressive considering she was playing at the highest difficulty that the tournament allowed. She held the record for three years before losing the title to Drew Goins in 1987, who scored 2,222,220 points. Even after losing the title, Self was determined to earn the record back, continuously entering Q*bert competitions around the United States and the United Kingdom.

Although Doris Self passed away in 2006, her legacy was monumental in early videogame history. Even outside of videogames, she loved to be active and to live her life to the fullest.

DID YOU KNOW?

Before venturing in competitive gaming, Doris Self was one of the first female flight attendants for Eastern Air Lines! She was part of the graduating class of 1945. The plane that she used to work in, the DC-3, is now hanging around at the National Air and Space Museum.



IT'S SHOWTIME!

PIXEL REVIEWS

When was the last time that you could recall playing a Mario title where Princess Peach was neither the damsel in distress or a supporting character? For most players, it would be *Super Princess Peach*, released in 2005 for the Gameboy Advance. Now, almost 15 years later, comes a game ready to put on a performance, with our titular character as the star of the show.

The Basics

In this mix of an action-2D platformer, Princess Peach arrives at the Sparkle Theatre, hoping to enjoy a theatrical performance, when her crown is taken away from her by a jester-like witch! She must retrieve it back with the help of the Theatre Guardians and through transforming into different battle gear, Sailor Moon-style. In total, there are around ten transformations that Peach can acquire throughout the course of the game:

The Gameplay

Patisserie Peach, Figure Skater Peach, Cowgirl Peach, Mermaid Peach, Kung Fu Peach, Ninja Peach, Swordfighter Peach, Dashing Thief Peach, Detective Peach, and Mighty Peach. Each costume comes with its own unique sets of power-ups, which will need to be used accordingly depending on the environment.

What might surprise the players the most about Princess Peach: Showtime is that this game does not play at all like other main series Super Mario titles. Instead, the mechanics of this game are akin to possibly Bayonetta, albeit on a much simpler level. The star of the show relies on the ability switch when swapping through Peach's outfits. For example, Swordfighter Peach allows for the game to turn into hack-n-slash style action, cutting down enemies through quick-use of her sword. On the other hand, Cowgirl Peach relies on her lasso to perform long-ranged attacks and to rope items closer to Peach.

Although the game is certainly fun, it doesn't

A SNEAK PEEK AT AVAILABLE COSTUMES



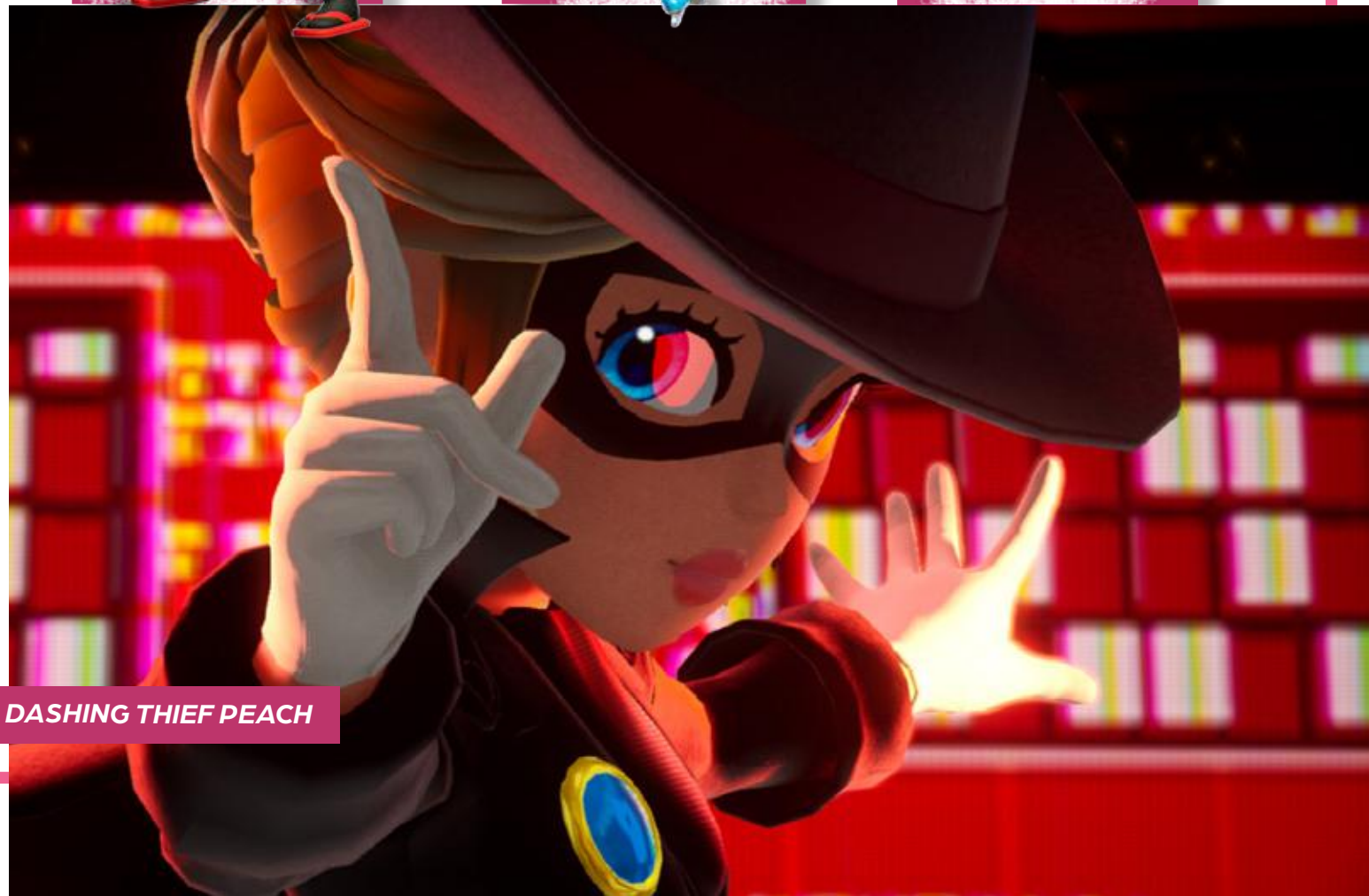
NINJA PEACH



FIGURE SKATER PEACH



MERMAID PEACH



DASHING THIEF PEACH



WHAT TO KNOW

DEVELOPER: Nintendo

PUBLISHER: Nintendo

PLATFORMS: Switch

GENRE: Action-adventure

RATING: E10+

present much of a challenge if you're looking for something complex. It seems as this game was designed with younger players in mind, which is perfect if you have a younger sibling or cousin that you want to get introduced into gaming. But don't think that more seasoned gamers won't enjoy trying to collect all the items in each level! Showtime has a plethora of secrets hidden within, much like other *Super Mario* titles, that won't always be collected during the first playthrough.

may not be as complex as other action-adventure games, this is still a title worth playing, even if it's purely for the theatrics of it all. ♦



The Visuals

The production design is what takes the cake for me. Each stage appears as if it was crafted to balance between stunning the audience while not taking attention away from the main performers, much like how set designs are constructed at theatres in real life. The attention to detail within costuming and the background design is what kept me coming back to revisit each stage, alongside generally trying to 100% the game. One detail that I really enjoyed was how the Western set reminded me a little bit of the scene in *Toy Story 3* when Andy is playing pretend with Woody and the rest of the toys.

Even's Peach's character herself gets a little bit of a design overhaul in *Showtime!* Her facial expressions are more varied as compared to her usual renders in previous games, allowing us players to see the variety of her emotions, especially as she shifts into different personas through her outfit transformations.

Even if the gameplay for *Princess Peach: Showtime*

8

A much-needed edition to the *Super Mario* library of games

EXCELS AT

- ♦ *Stunning visuals*
- ♦ *Level design that makes you want to come back*
- ♦ *Showing the range of Princess Peach's character in action*

NEEDS WORK

- ♦ *The action is a little too simple*
- ♦ *Completing a level isn't very challenging*



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RETRO REVIEWS

PERSONA 3 FES (2008)

WRITTEN BY
LUKAS J. BECEA

Persona 3 FES was a video game developed for the Playstation 2 by ATLUS, released in the United States on April 22nd, 2008. Persona 3 FES is hailed as one of the best JRPGs of all time and is what rebooted the Persona franchise. With the release of the remake, Persona 3 Reload, I wanted to discuss if it's still worth playing FES today and how it holds up compared to modern gaming standards.

Persona 3 FES' story is one of the best I've experienced in a video game. You play as the hero/protagonist (you name your own character), who gets thrown headfirst into the Dark Hour, a time between one day and the next, where monsters, called Shadows, roam. You are given

one in-game year to end the dark hour and bring peace to the city of Tatsumi Port Island. Over the course of the year you attend school, befriend your squad members and people in the city, and of course, fight shadows.

I would recommend Persona 3 FES based on the story alone.

FES is all about how death can affect people, but also how to live despite it. Death is a constant thread in this game, lingering throughout the plot. Over the course of the in-game year, you will experience the highest highs, lowest lows, and so much more. I'm not the kind of guy who cries easily at things, but this game made me sob like a baby. If you're looking for emotional impact, FES is the way to go.

Every character is written like they are a real person, and the lines are delivered that way too. I feel a lot of modern games fall into the trap of trying to make every character likable, which in turn makes some of them harder to relate to. Persona 3 FES does not make this mistake, giving characters flaws, quirks, likes, and dislikes that make them feel multidimensional. Something that drew me to FES was that the main cast feel more like co-workers than friends in the beginning. You will dislike some characters and love others, and honestly, that's a good thing. The writing and line delivery make each of them grow on you despite first impressions. The audio quality definitely shows its age but I would still say it holds up today too. The game

has a big cast including industry greats such as Yuri Lowenthal, Tara Platt, and Liam O'Brien.

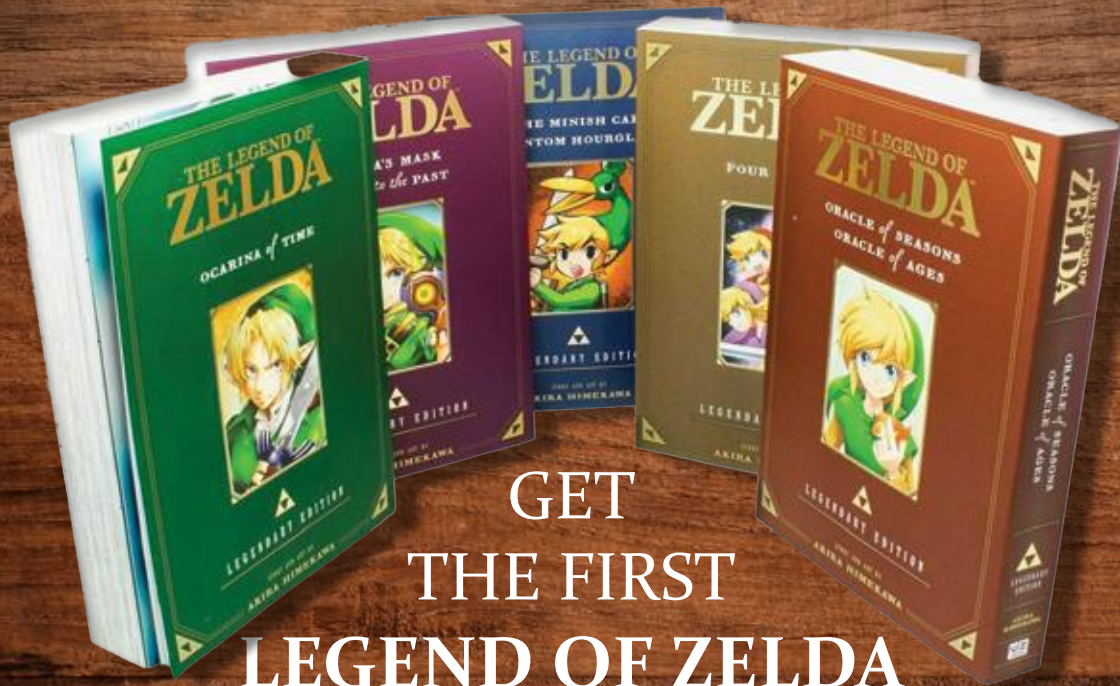
One thing that definitely does not hold up today is the gameplay. It is rough to say the least. The game has a turn based combat system, a Persona staple, but was the first iteration of the iconic press-turn battle system that would be perfected over the course of the series. You can really tell that this was the first use of this system, considering that your party members besides the protagonist, are not playable. You can only give them commands like "focus on healing" or "focus on this enemy", adding a steep learning curve that can be a lot to handle. The AI likes to pick very interesting options in

battle that make it feel like you're fighting their choices more than the shadows.

There's also the fatigue/sickness system. After a while in Tartarus (the main location you explore during the Dark Hour), you and your party members will start to feel tired, usually signaling that you should leave. If you push your squad too far by ignoring fatigue, you and your friends can get sick, meaning that you or that sick party member cannot go to Tartarus the following night. This can lead to progression and leveling issues if not taken seriously. I personally like the fatigue system, as it sometimes forces you to pick party members you usually wouldn't use, but I can see why many dislike it.

Another gameplay issue is in *The Answer*, the epilogue to the main game. It is notorious for being insanely difficult. Every character is reset to level 25, but the enemies are still scaled to be late game. I know few people who have beat *The Answer*. Even I, a hardcore Persona fan, gave up because of the difficulty spike.

All in all, despite the dated gameplay, the story still lives up to the high praise it got when it originally came out. If you have the time to spare and a PS2 or emulator, I would highly recommend playing *Persona 3 FES*. It's a game that changed my life and perspective on so many things, and I have no doubt it will do the same for you.



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**AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE MOST
ANTICIPATED GAME OF THE DECADE**

VENTURING OUTSIDE

OF MIDGAR

After four years of hot anticipation, fans can finally continue through the 3-part saga of *Final Fantasy VII*, and this second installation certainly does not disappoint. *Final Fantasy VII: Rebirth*, consuming a whopping two discs, has both a breadth and depth of land to discover with Cloud and crew in tow. If you think the world within *Remake* was fleshed out, *Rebirth* makes the first game look tiny in comparison. Approximately 80 percent of the game is exploration-based, containing loads of side quests and character development that gives depth to the inhabitants of Gaia. But if you're concerned about the lack of a main story quest, don't worry! The other 20 percent of the game is expected to take 40 hours to complete, about the same amount of time that it took to complete an initial playthrough of *Remake*. Get prepared for a whole new world to explore, which we will take a look at in-depth in this issue.



WAIT, WHAT HAPPENED IN THE FIRST GAME?

Great question! Let's bring you up to speed.

Our main protagonist, Cloud Strife, is an ex-SOLDIER-turned-mercenary that begrudgingly joins AVALANCHE, a radical group that wants to prevent the extraction of mako, the planet's natural resource, to prevent the planet from dying. This is a direct threat to the Shinra Electric Power Company, which uses mako to power the entire city of Midgar. While Cloud is on a mission to blow up one of the Reactors in Sector 8 alongside

Barret Wallace and other team members, he runs into a florist who goes by Aerith. Although he doesn't know it at the moment, she will become very important to both AVALANCHE and the main team members later in the story.

Cloud also keeps having visions that involve Sephiroth, an ex-SOLDIER that now has plans to destroy the planet for his own personal gain. Cloud has to tie these threads of Aerith and Sephiroth alongside people he reunites with, such as Tifa, his

childhood best friend and the only person that he was close with before he joined SOLDIER. The game takes a dramatic turn towards the end, with (spoiler warning!) Sector 5 getting crushed by a large plate from above, and Cloud having to fight Sephiroth for the first time. Cloud, Aerith, Tifa, Barret, and Red XIII—a dog that the party meets while searching through Shinra to rescue Aerith—enter a portal to exit Midgar, and the story ends from there.



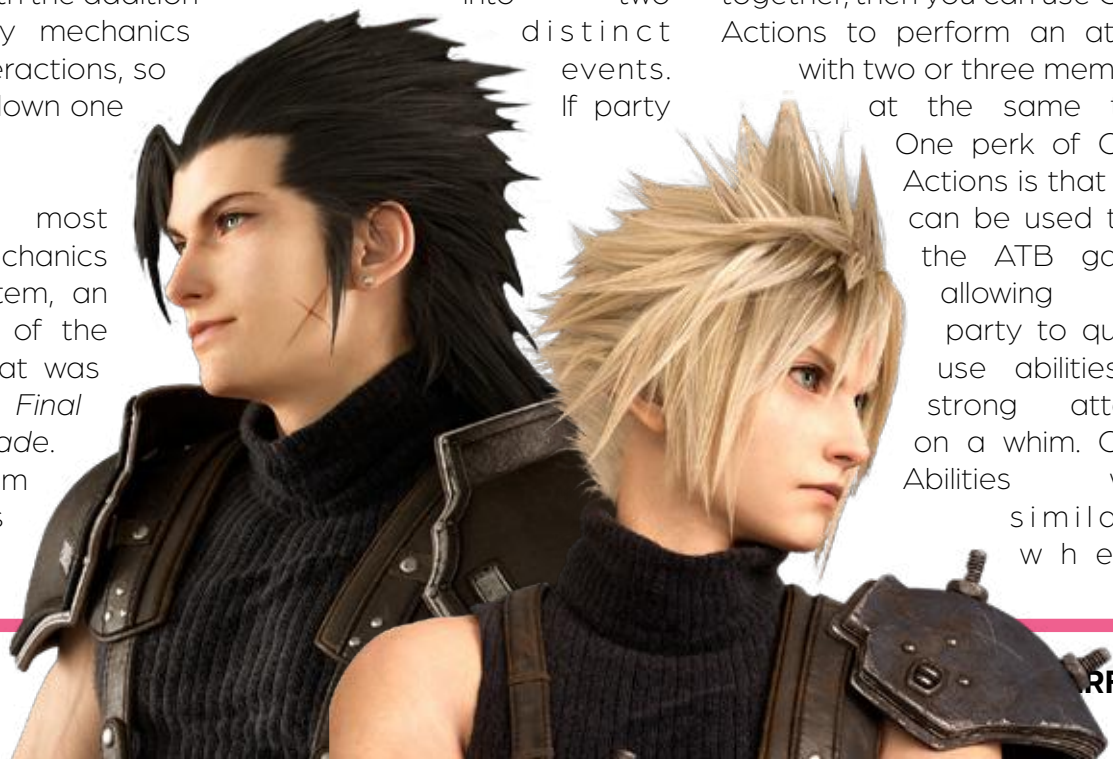
GREAT, SO WHAT'S NEW?

Even better question! The answer: a TON, primarily with the addition of new gameplay mechanics and character interactions, so let's break these down one at a time.

One of the most important new mechanics is the Chain System, an improved version of the Synergy Mode that was introduced in *Final Fantasy VII: Intergrade*. The Chain system builds upon this foundation by

separating actions and abilities into two distinct events. If party

members are battling enemies together, then you can use Chain Actions to perform an attack with two or three members at the same time. One perk of Chain Actions is that they can be used to fill the ATB gauge, allowing your party to quickly use abilities or strong attacks on a whim. Chain Abilities work similarly, where





Aerith

EN: Briana White
JP: Maaya Sakamoto

A florist from Sector 5 that meets Cloud at the start of Final Fantasy VII: Remake. She has previously had a shaky past with Shinra which she has tried to escape multiple times, but has still come back to haunt her in the story. Aerith has a unique connection to the planet, granting her special abilities and allowing her to utilize a staff to cast magic spells, ranging from healing party members to temporarily stunning enemies.



Tifa

EN: Britt Baron
JP: Ayumi Ito

A trained martial artist and bartender at Seventh Heaven in Sector 7, Tifa is Cloud's closest childhood friend. Although they drifted apart for a few years when Cloud began his service as a member of SOLDIER, their bond remained strong when the two of them reunited during Remake. Despite her shy and reserved demeanor, Tifa is extremely strong, excelling at delivering hard blows to enemy units both on the ground and midair.



Yuffie

EN: Suzie Yeung
JP: Yumi Kakazu

The youngest yet spunkiest party member, Yuffie is a ninja hailing from Wutai, a neighboring country to Midgar. The main party meets her while she is hunting for Materia, which she hopes to use in order to restore Wutai to its former glory. She loves to lug around a massive shuriken, which can be used in a mix of melee and ranged attacks. Be wary of her, as she loves to deceive others to steal their materia!

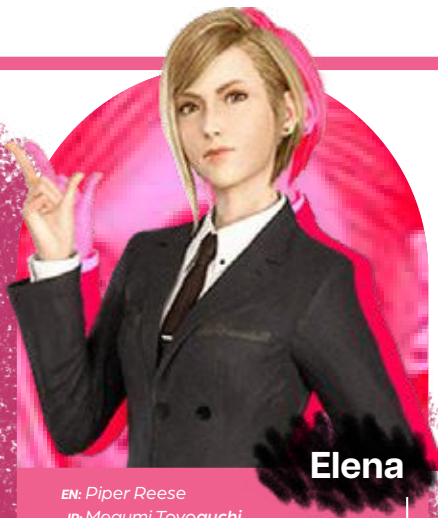
activating them can enhance party members abilities, with the only downside being that it uses part of the ATB gauge. Chain combination attacks were added because story-wise, the bonds between characters leading up to the Forgotten Capital are crucial. Mastering when to use Chain Actions and Abilities will let you maximize your strengths and minimize your weaknesses in battles.

Additionally, **the Affinity system** has been greatly expanded upon in this edition of the *Remake* series. In the original *Final Fantasy VII*, the dialogue options that the player would choose would have consequences in the future, the future being who will go on a Ferris Wheel trip

GET TO KNOW THE CHARACTERS

MINIGAME MADNESS!

The Gold Saucer is widely known as a tourist attraction complete with a plethora of minigames for the party's amusement in the original *Final Fantasy VII*. The minigames have been updated to allow for a more immersive experience, and take full advantage of the Playstation's Rumble effects on the controller. Additionally, there is a special event on the Ferris Wheel if the player manages to raise their Affection Points high enough with a certain member of their party! Take a look at some new and returning minigames!



Elena

EN: Piper Reese
JP: Megumi Toyoguchi

Elena serves as one of the newer members of the Turks, an elite task force that does the Shinra Company's dirty work. Although she takes her job very seriously compared to her peers, she has an unfortunate tendency to tell spill classified secrets or act impulsively. She fights your party using a mix of martial arts, ranged explosives, and Manipulate effects.

with Cloud at the extravagant Gold Saucer amusement park. Depending on how Cloud builds up his relationships, either one special person of the player's choosing will spend time with Cloud, or he will sit in silence with

teammates that he isn't very fond of.

The best part about *Remake* and certainly about *Rebirth*, is the character interactions. I was not expecting a dog of all beings to get on its hind legs and demand to speak to a manager because they weren't able to enter a tournament of Queen's Blood (yes, this is a real scene that happens!). The voice acting to this game is phenomenally delivered, and I can't help but wonder how anyone could have ever played the original game without knowing this much about the people within Gaia. Each side quest brings a little more depth and fleshes out each new addition to the party from before. I guarantee that you will leave this game having a favorite NPC (it was Regina for me).

And that's not to forget about the main interactions between Cloud and the main cast. You can't help but have your heart twist a little when something goes awry when Cloud and Tifa start to

argue with each other, or have it start beating faster every time Sephiroth appears on screen. It can be downright frustrating seeing Cloud still attempt to keep his nonchalant persona, even when the situation at hand calls for too much emotion. But like the first game, the player starts to see Cloud shift from a cold, unfeeling mercenary to a person that deeply cares about the well-being of his friends and —dare I say— loved ones. Square Enix has done a fantastic job at getting me to still root for Cloud, even at his toughest moments. Although I can't give away too much of the story, there is something satisfying about learning more about Zack and how much he made Cloud into the person that he is by the start of *Remake*.

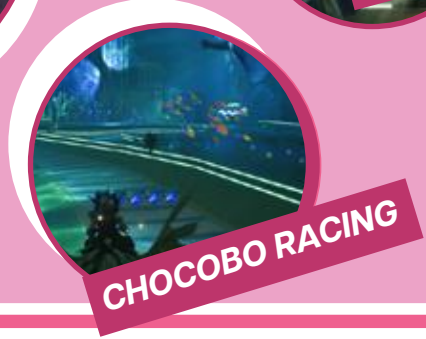
One of the few problems that I had with this game, however, was sometimes that the minigames were a little too difficult for my liking. For example, attempting to beat Tifa's fans at doing sit-ups took me a long time to successfully complete, even



QUEEN'S BLOOD



3D BRAWLER



CHOCOBO RACING



PIANO PERFORMANCE



Sephiroth STUNS in every frame.

though it seemed as if it would be an easy task. However, maybe that was just a skill issue on my part, rather than any actual fault within the game. Additionally, on a graphical level, it seems as if some of the lower quality textures were ported over from the first game into the second. Given the massive undertaking developing this title might have been, I'll excuse it though. Making a game is not easy work!

SO WHAT DO THE DEVELOPERS THINK ABOUT THE GAME?

Well, it would be a little strange if the devs didn't like what they had made, but not entirely out of the question. Considering

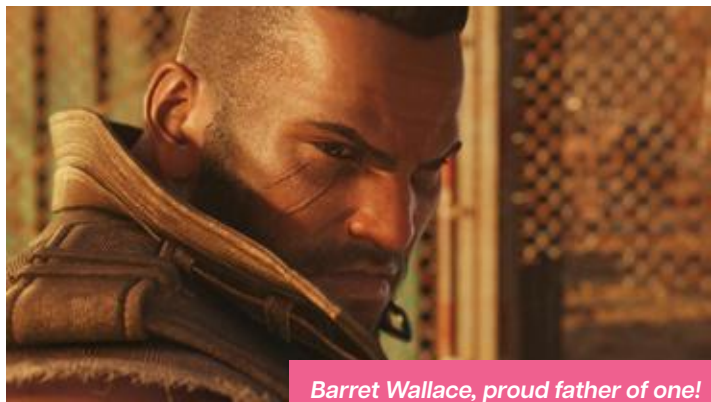
that the development cycle for the first part of *Final Fantasy VII* took a whopping ten years, it's a miracle that this game was able to release within less than half a decade later. Tetsuya Nomura, the lead character designer and one of the directors for the series, noted that during the game's initial planning stages, the Square Enix developer didn't want to create three separate games, but had started with an overall plan of how to reconstruct the story. Once the developers had realized that they wanted to expand upon the story, they knew that putting all the content into one game was simply not possible, thus launching the three-game model. Knowing this and already having knocked out the first title,

much of the grunt work and technological limitations have been overcome. It is now easier to take existing assets produced for the first game and then import them into the second game, only taking time to do touch-ups if necessary.

The purpose of the *Remake* trilogy would have been to capture "the spirit of *Final Fantasy*" in a way that previous technology in the '90s simply could not do. Yoshinori Kitase and Naoki Hamaguchi, also two directors of the game, remarked that this spirit was "an open sandbox of ideas" where the players could try "anything and everything," which translated into the large open-world design within the second game. A side



Cloud and Sephiroth's Chain Ability.



Barret Wallace, proud father of one!



Vincent Valentine the vampire!

note about Hamaguchi—he actually wasn't part of the team that had originally developed the first *Final Fantasy VII*, but was actually a fan of the game when he was younger! Talk about fulfilling one of your biggest dreams!

It's clear that there was heart and soul poured into this game from the very beginning. The breathtaking shots are screenshot worthy no matter where you take Cloud, and I was constantly wondering to myself what kind of wizardry was necessary to make this game come to life. Although I was not a fan of the series before *Remake* came out, I can completely understand why the game took so long to make, and have a lot

of respect of the development team for wanting to put out a game that they felt had satisfied all their personal requirements for what a remake truly should be. There were some departures from the original game that had shocked fans, and now I eagerly await the conclusion to this game, however long it may take to finish in production.

SO WHEN'S THE LAST GAME GONNA COME OUT?

Your guess is as good as mine! Though there are hints that the game may release in 2028. For perspective, that will have been three US presidential elections!

I WANNA PLAY THIS GAME. WHERE CAN I FIND IT ?

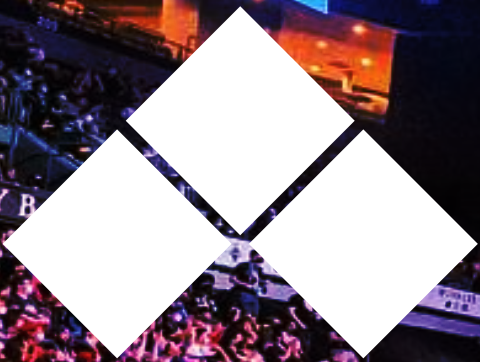
As of now, *Final Fantasy VII: Rebirth* remains a PS5 exclusive. If you don't have a PS5, you may be out of luck, so let's start saving up to play this game!



Key art featuring Cloud, Sephiroth, and Zack.



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A PLEA FOR CHANGE

How the videogame industry is hurting its workers and its games

Picture this. You wake up at 7:00 am on a Friday, ready to perform your daily routine. You change into your work outfit that you had meticulously planned out the night before, hoping to get a few compliments here and there from your coworkers. By the time you finish preparing yourself for the day at 8:00 am, you get an unexpected notification from middle management of a surprise meeting at 12:00 pm. Confused, you clock in at 9:00 am, exchanging glances and hushed conversations with your coworkers. You can't fully concentrate on your assigned tasks for the day, but you still try your best to get them done.

At 12:00 pm sharp, you and a few of your coworkers walk into a shiny conference room to be greeted by someone who you cannot recall ever seeing during your time at this job. With a bright smile on their face, they boast that your company was able to break record profits this quarter, and players are satisfied enough with the quality of your games. In the same breath, they announce that due to some bad decisions by executives, the company needs

to reduce costs, which includes eliminating almost entire departments. They have cut your team from fifteen people to five. You and your coworkers have until the end of the week to pack up your belongings and leave. You cannot believe what you're hearing. You spent months, even years dreaming to land a job at this company, all for it to be taken away by someone who you've never met.

“

I've never seen things this bad. Everyone is scared and waiting to see if their studio is going to be next.

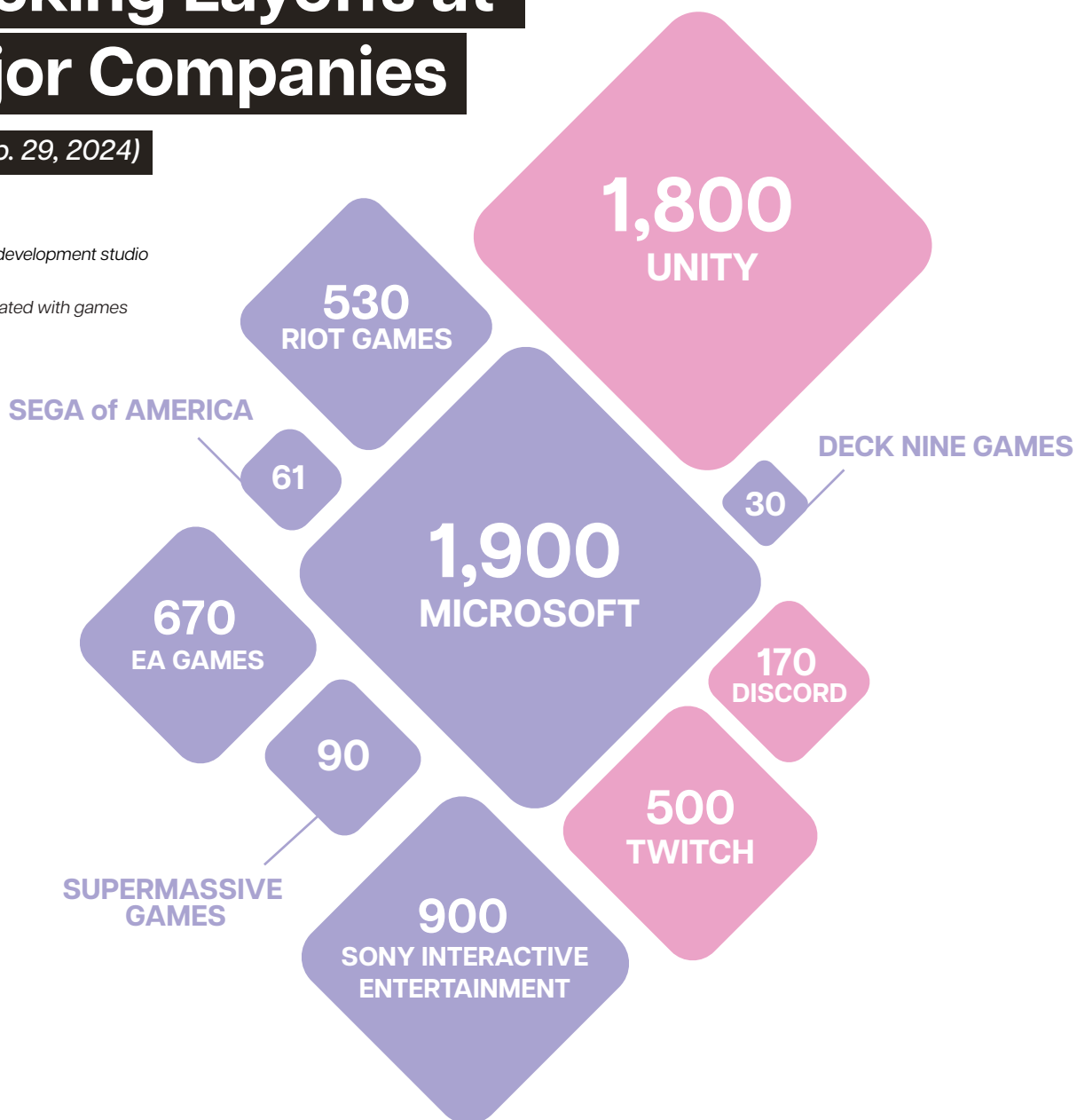
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Tracking Layoffs at Major Companies

(as of Feb. 29, 2024)

KEY

- Game development studio
- Associated with games



This scenario may seem hyperbolic, but this has been the reality for tens of thousands of game developers since 2022. Headline after headline pops up on social media feeds of game companies reducing their labor costs by laying off their workers, many of whom are notified only hours before or even through checking their company's social media accounts. Although the main reasoning behind the layoffs has appeared to be companies overhiring during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, many

developers are not buying it. The gaming industry has seen record revenue and profits, with the global industry generating a whopping \$180 billion in 2023. Yet the workers responsible for these gains were seemingly punished for their labor.

Developers have been frustrated with these practices for years, and for good reason. The gaming industry has been empirically known to be a center of instability and "crunch," a practice

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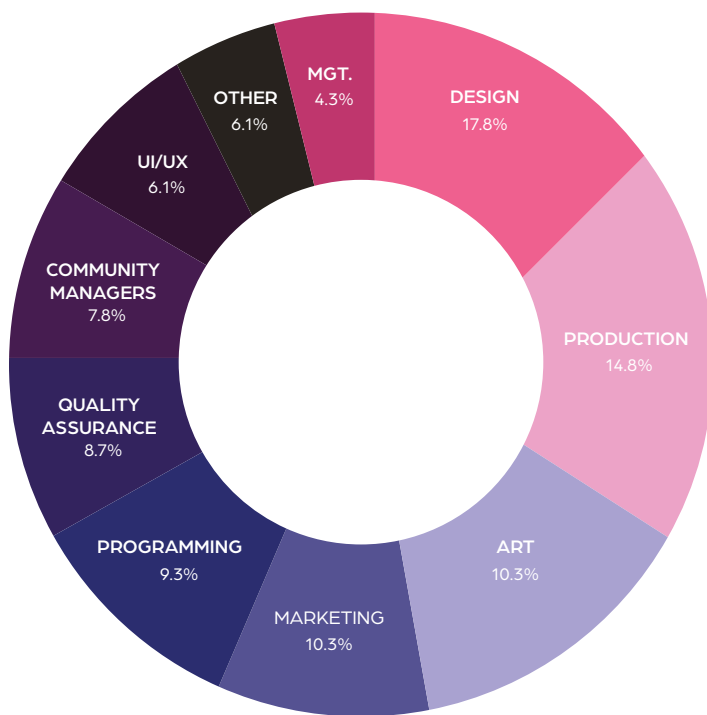
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“ I’ve started to have widespread muscle pain just from the stress. I’ve definitely gone downhill. ”

where workers will put in 60–80 hour workweeks in the months leading to an upcoming game release to make sure every department meets deadlines on time. These periods are known to put a strain on employees both mentally and physically, and they often are not compensated enough from the amount of time they put into their projects. One



Positions Affected by Layoffs

GRAPHIC ORIGINALLY CREATED BY TAKE THIS.

nasty case in particular, as reported by a former Activision employee, ended with one of their coworkers suffering from a heart attack on the job.

This strain put onto hundreds of people in order to meet deadlines already places an unhealthy amount of dread on the workforce, but with massive layoffs at a moments coming into the picture, it is impossible to imagine being able to properly enjoy what is considered a “dream job” for most when the threat of having your livelihood taken at a moment’s notice looms over your head. These mass layoffs have also emerged within the broader tech industry within the last couple years, as companies that also overhired during the pandemic to artificially inflate their profits have had to reduce labor costs, with senior programmers now competing with college graduates for the same jobs.

“ The industry at large is unwilling to pay for quality and wants to maximize profit instead--even if it results in a worse product. ”

As more data is reported about the people that were laid off, their job position, and how many years of experience they had in the industry, there is a possible trend suggesting that women and BIPOC are more likely to be affected by mass layoffs. There could be several reasons for this, with the main one being that gaming companies



Workers protesting outside the 2023 Game Awards.

have only recently begun initiatives to have more inclusive hiring practices. During layoffs, those who have seniority are usually kept around while the rookies get cut, and since there are historically less women and BIPOC in leadership positions, they're more likely to get cut. It is disappointing to see that the games industry is taking steps backward from having diverse workforces in exchange for reducing costs. Women, especially women of color, have already had to endure entering what has been seen as a "boy's club" that is the gaming and broader tech industry, and now they have the added stress of wondering if they were fired because of their marginalized status.

Developers with disabilities are especially hit hard whenever a layoff happens. Many workers rely on their employer in order to receive health insurance, which can give access to life-saving medications that can drastically improve someone's quality of life. Without the security of a job or ties to outside employment, some former workers have had to decide between which medications they can afford to ration or not to take until they have a steady income again. The situation worsens if it's not just the worker themselves but one of their loved ones that relies on the employer's health insurance, as now there are multiple lives on the line. About 1 in 4 Americans have some type of disability, so

although this problem may seem invisible, there are many, many more people with chronic health conditions than you may think.

As mass layoffs continue to happen even when blockbuster hits perform well in sales, there may be another underlying issue within the gaming industry: the exorbitant costs to create games. It is estimated that AAA games can cost hundreds of millions of dollars on production alone, and after marketing is factored in, the price can skyrocket into numbers that seem almost abstract. Games are churned out with over sixty hours worth of content in an open-world setting with characters having skin so clear that every pore is visible on close shot. These games take over the course of minimum four-five years of development, which can quickly lead to employee burnout, especially after considering the long periods of crunch involved with a lengthy timeline. Although it appears that a significant portion of gamers are at least somewhat satisfied with the end results, there is a sizable community of those concerned about whether it is sustainable for every studio to keep releasing massive games.

So what can be done in the meantime? A common answer that has been popping up within game dev communities online has been to pivot towards working for indie studios. They argue that since indie studios are usually beholden to less shareholders and are generally more lax with their deadlines, they will be easier to work with and will generally treat their employees well. However, a massive problem that indie studios face is the lack of funding that comes from not having wealthy people invest in their games. The financial risk is much higher, and the workload is spread out less evenly because of how few people work at a single independent studio.

So what would the answer actually be?

The second opinion, which has been brewing for



“The first time, it felt like a reality of capitalism that I was expecting, but the second being so close to the first, it was like, ‘We really are just cogs in the machine’.”

years in tandem with growing dissent among entertainment workers in general, is to unionize. In the fall of last year, screenwriters and actors collectively went on strike to protest the unfair working conditions within Hollywood. The Animation Guild of North America is gearing up in preparation to go on strike in the summer of this year, which is well deserved given reports of animators working twelve-hour work days on the critically-acclaimed *Spiderman: Across the Spider-verse* or having to revise character designs months before release.

Game development is seen as both a lucrative and creative field for the majority of consumers. Since it's a relatively new industry, there is a lack of regulation or worker protections beyond what is already in place on a federal level for all professions. And like any other industry known for its workers' passion for their craft, it is rife with exploitation. Lives are put on the line for the sake of generating profit for a select

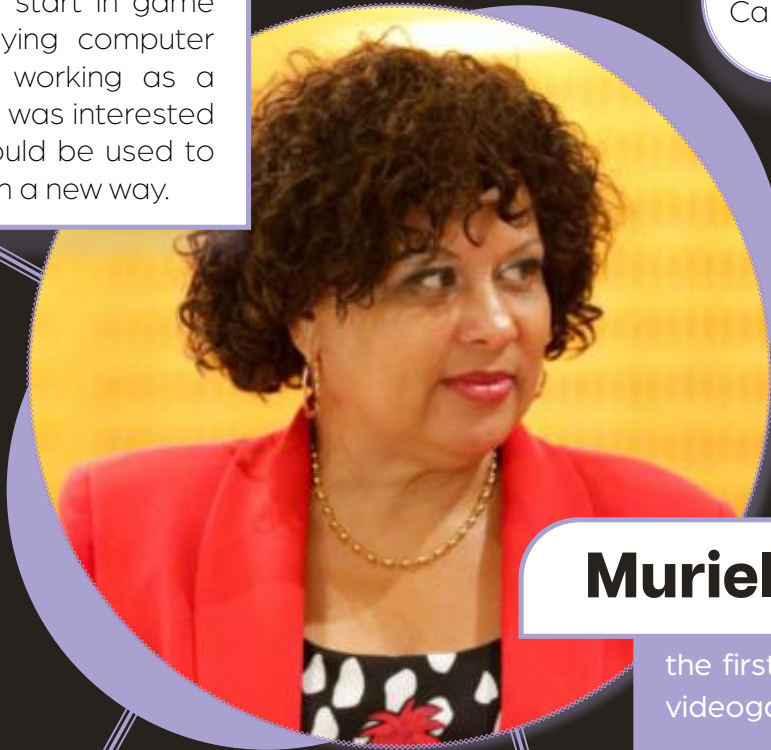
few people, and years of blood, sweat, and tears could be axed in an instant depending on how the boss feels that day. Even though some workers are given a cushion of support from family and friends, there are many who are not lucky enough to share the same fate.

The future of the gaming industry is at stake if mass layoffs continue in this fashion. If workers aren't happy, that translates into the quality of their work, and if the work isn't good, then players won't buy any games, leading to another vicious cycle of layoffs and cost-cutting. It's about time that game developers start to stand up for themselves and for the work that they have put their souls into, and it is partially our responsibility as consumers to stick up for them when they inevitably get pushback from executives. It's the least we can do to try to change this industry for the better. ♦

GAMING HISTORY

In 1987, Tramis began working at a French videogame company known as Coktel Vision. She was able to create and develop her own game, titled *Freedom: Rebels in Darkness*. The game was well known for its historical accuracy and interesting gameplay. The story centered around a slave uprising in the Caribbean during the 1700s.

Tramis initially got her start in game production after studying computer science in Paris and working as a software engineer. She was interested in how videogames could be used to tell meaningful stories in a new way.



Muriel Tramis

the first black female videogame designer

Although Tramis left the games industry after several years, her contributions have not gone unnoticed. She was appointed in 2018 as a Knight of the Legion of Honor, the highest award that a civilian can earn in France.

Freedom: Rebels of Darkness was one of the first videogames to depict a historical event. Another key note was that the game makes use of French-Creole, a language that Tramis was familiar with due to her own French-Caribbean heritage.

Another popular game of hers was *Lost in Time*, released in 1993. This game was marketed as the first adventure game to use "Full Motion Video Technology," meaning it relied on pre-recorded video files to display action sequences within a game.



INDIE SPOTLIGHT

VENBA

A heart-warming mini cookbook for you!

WHAT TO KNOW

DEVELOPER: Visai Games

PUBLISHER: Visai Games

PLATFORMS: PC, Switch, Playstation, Xbox Series & One

GENRE: Narrative, Puzzle

RATING: T (violence, death)

Venba is a welcome departure from long adventures and intricately shaded 3D graphics, instead providing an emotionally engaging and unique cooking game.

The story initially begins in the 1980s, where Venba and her husband, immigrate to Canada in order to secure a better economic future for their family. Venba has brought a recipe book with her that was given by her mother the night before she leaves, but there are parts of the recipe book that are either torn or missing. You are tasked with helping Venba uncover the missing instructions through a trial-and-error while she is preparing the food. Along the way, players will see Venba's family situation take dramatic turns, all while learning more about South Indian cuisine.

Although the game is surprisingly short (about 2-3 hours), I was still struck by the realistic portrayal of the South Asian immigrant experience, and there is no better way to my heart than through cooking delicious meals.



Players will fall in love with the gorgeous artstyle and sound design, all crafted with the intent of reminding them of home and comfort. As this is the first title by Visai Studios, I eagerly await any future games that they produce, especially any further stories about the South Asian experience. I also eagerly await a physical cookbook of Venba's recipes in the future!





Final Fantasy VII: Rebirth

DEVELOPER: Square Enix

PUBLISHER: Square Enix

PLATFORM: PS5

GENRE: RPG

WWE: 2K24 (Deluxe Edition)

DEVELOPER: Visual Concepts

PUBLISHER: 2K Games

PLATFORM: PC, XBOX, PS5

GENRE: Sports



Dragon's Dogma II

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM

PUBLISHER: CAPCOM

PLATFORM: PS5, XBOX series, PC

GENRE: RPG

3

Shin Megami Tensei V: Vengeance

4

DEVELOPER: ATLUS

PUBLISHER: ATLUS, Sega

PLATFORM: PS4, Nintendo Switch, PC

GENRE: RPG



5



Taxi Life: A City Driving Simulator

DEVELOPER: SIMTERACT Sp. z o.o.

PUBLISHER: Nacon

PLATFORM: PC

GENRE: Simulation

UPCOMING GAMES THAT ARE ANTICIPATED BY LONGTIME FANS AND NEWCOMERS ALIKE!

PIXEL PERFECT SOUNDTRACKS

1



Bomb Rush Cyberfunk

Various Artists

2



Final Fantasy XVI

Masayoshi Soken

3



Tears of the Kingdom

Manaka Kataoka, Masato Ohashi, Tsukasa Usui

4



Void Stranger

eebrozgi

MUSIC TO LISTEN TO ON REPEAT

HONORABLE MENTIONS



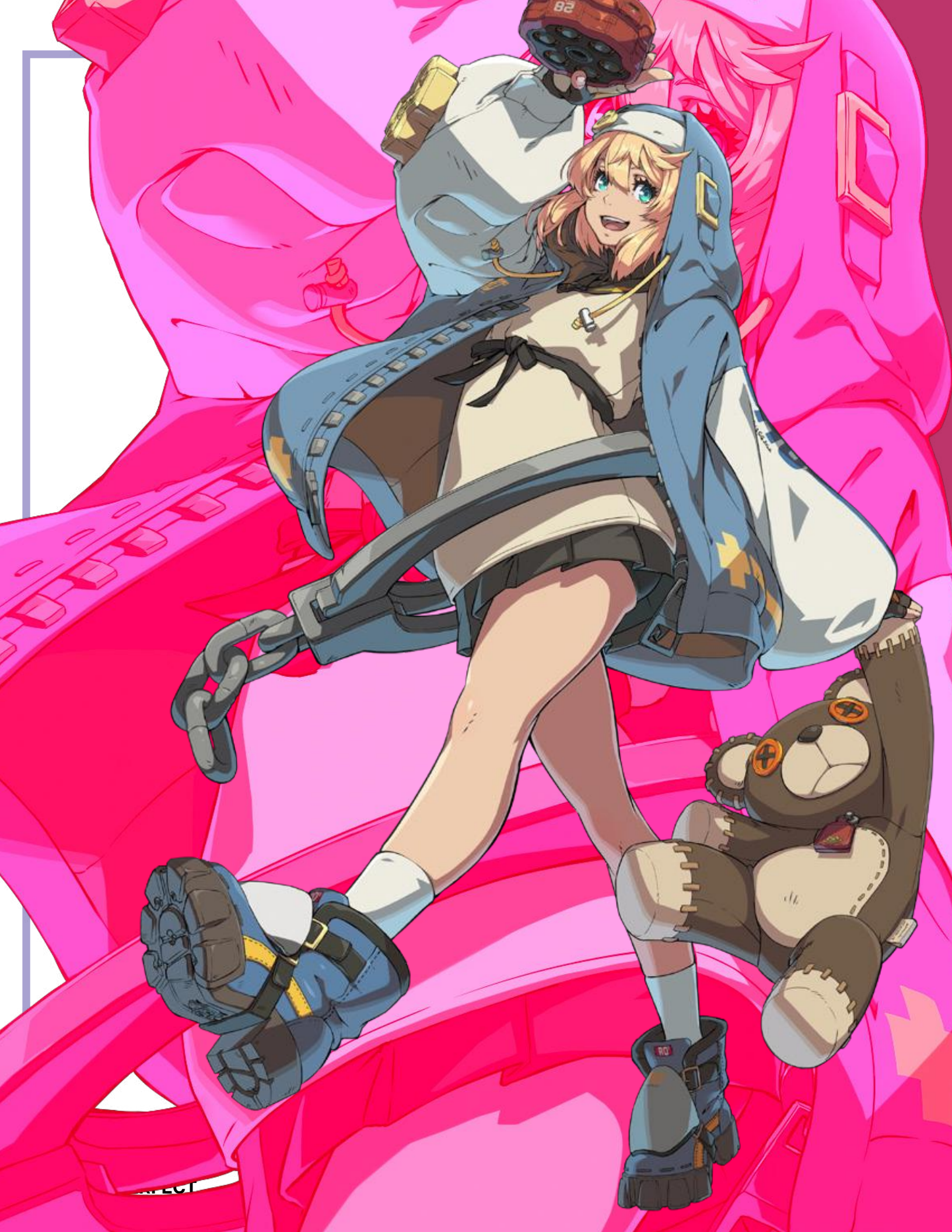
Diablo IV



Hi-Fi Rush



Spiderman 2



UNLEASHING

POWER & GRACE

a look at Bridget from *Guilty Gear*

The *Guilty Gear* series has risen to prominence in the fighting game community for its flashy artstyle, cel-shaded graphics, and killer soundtrack. First released in 1998 by Arc System works, the series has received several sequels with varying degrees of critical acclaim. A fan favorite and now beloved trans icon from the series is the yo-yo wielding Bridget.

Bridget first appeared in *Guilty Gear X2* in 2002, assigned male at birth as one of two twins of a very wealthy family. Bridget's village believed that a pair of identical twins was a sign of bad luck, she started presenting as a girl. She would dress as a nun, use she/her pronouns, and introduce herself as a cisgender woman. Bridget was initially not confirmed to be queer, so up until that point, audiences speculated as to whether or

“ Don't underestimate the cute ones! ”

not she was transgender. She started to present as a man to make her parents happy, but at the expense of her own happiness. Eventually, she went back to presenting as a woman, and was officially confirmed as trans in 2022 at end of her storyline in *Guilty Gear Strive*.

Daisuke Ishiwatari, creator of the *Guilty Gear* series, initially designed Bridget as an “unconventional” type of cute character, placing more emphasis on her androgynous fashion. He wasn't 100% sure how players would receive a character like her, so he had the development team emphasize that Bridget was a man. In

later interviews that coincided with Bridget officially coming out, Ishiwatari confirmed that Bridget is a trans woman.

Bridget's confirmation as transgender is nothing short of monumental. It's extremely rare for fighting games to include openly queer characters in their roster, much less characters that avoiding leaning into LGBTQ+ stereotypes. What was once a collective agreement between portions of the *Guilty Gear* community turned into an official fact about her. Trans players can resonate with her story, since it can be argued that it parallels parts of the trans and broader queer experience.

Trans representation in videogames still has a very long way to go, but Bridget's character in recent *Guilty Gear* installments is a step in the right direction, and hopefully a sign of better days to come.

PREVIEW

WHAT'S NEXT



PIXEL REVIEWS: *Metaphor Re:Fantazio*



TIPS & TRICKS: *How to Win Tekken 8*



PIXEL POLLS: *Your Favorite Games*

