

#3

The Monthly Silly



GOBLETS.

ougghghhhhhhhghgh

god i hate the game awards

CUM

Table of Contents

1 – Silly Spotlight

Review of any two games of my choice.

5 – Kill Your Friends

Section where I recommend a good multiplayer game.

7 – Easy Emulation

Game review focusing on anything from before the PS1/N64, guaranteeing that if you see something interesting here and have a computer, even a bad one, you can play it for free via emulation.

9 – Shame Corner

A review of a really bad game, typically so bad I need to rant about how bad it is just to get it off my chest. If your game is here, consider yourself a complete and utter failure.

11 – The Yap Trap

Just me rambling about whatever I feel like. Always something gaming-related, but generally not about a specific individual game.

13 – What's Next?

I give my thoughts on trailers and pre-release footage for a game that isn't out yet.

Silly Spotlight 1

KLONOA

—Door To Phantomile—

Klonoa: Door to Phantomile, released in 1997 for the PS1, is a 2D platformer starring Klonoa, a silly little animal creature who travels to mystical lands in his dreams, as well as his best friend Huepow – although, calling it a “2D platformer” isn’t entirely right. You can only move in two dimensions, but the game takes place in a 3D environment, and often requires the player to interact with these 3D elements in order to progress. Klonoa’s moveset consists of a jump, a short little flutter he can do to stay airborne for longer, and the Wind Bullet, a short-range attack that allows you to pick enemies up.



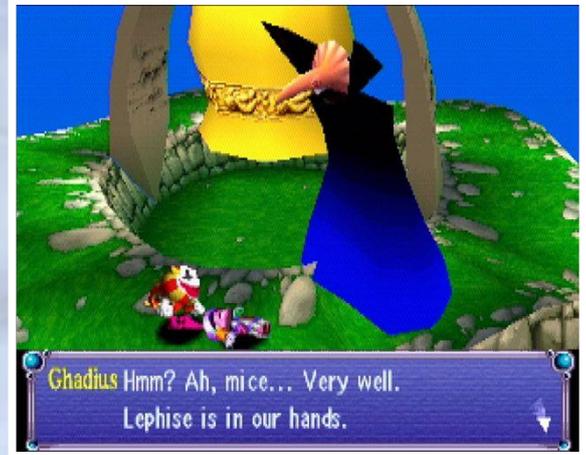
Once you’ve picked up an enemy, you can either throw it, in front of Klonoa or towards the background, or you can bounce off it in midair for a one-time double jump. For a moveset, this might seem simple, but the game manages to get as much as possible out of it. For example, later on there are enemies that interact with your Wind Bullet in unique ways, such as the Boomies that explode after a set time but can be grabbed and

thrown as much as you like, and the level design is stretched to its limits to get every last drop of potential out of this moveset; the best example is how, later on, it lines up multiple floating enemies over bottomless pits, forcing you to jump off one, grab another, and jump off that one, chaining these jumps together to get across the gap.

Another point the game has in its favour is its atmosphere; at first, it starts out like any other bright, cheery mascot platformer, but over time, the locations you visit start to become much darker and more mysterious, the game taking on a mystical, almost surreal feeling by the end that fits its dream motif perfectly, aided by the excellent soundtrack.



The game's story also follows in this theme of dreams; the main villain, Ghadius, wishes to turn Phantomile into a land of nightmares, and it's up to you to stop him! There are other things that happen, but most of the game's story is contained within the last 20%, so it's a difficult one to talk about without spoiling anything. For now, all I'll say is that the story is good, in spite of how cartoonishly simple it seems at first, and you'll just have to believe me on that one.



Despite the lack of things happening for most of the game, though, it does have an entertaining cast of characters throughout. Two personal favourites of mine are Joka, Ghadius' dimwitted but still threatening henchman, and Balue, who can only be described as the world's most dedicated simp. You meet him early on, where it turns out he's building a tower to the diva Lephise, which is a bit like erecting a giant statue of

Taylor Swift and expecting people to give it offerings of gold so that she may bless them with good luck on their travels. Needless to say, I love Balue, he's hilarious.

Overall, Klonoa: Door to Phantomile is a really good game. It's a fairly simple 2D platformer with a few interesting twists on the genre, and the story is deceptively far more interesting than it appears at first glance, but what really sells this game is its atmosphere; from the bright, upbeat early areas of the game, to the darkly mysterious Moon Kingdom, the game's unique visual style keeps things interesting throughout, and the truly amazing soundtrack does a great job at selling the overall vibe and feeling of every place you visit. Honestly, even if you don't particularly care for platformers, or you don't believe me when I say the story is actually really good (fair enough honestly), I'd still recommend Klonoa: Door to Phantomile just for how amazing its music and art direction both are.

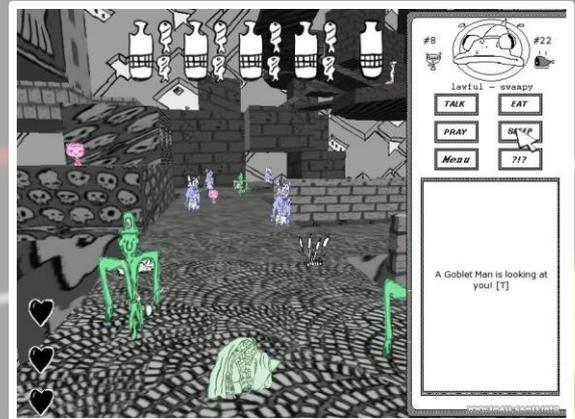


Final Score	
Gameplay - 8	8
Story - 7	
Look/Sound - 10	

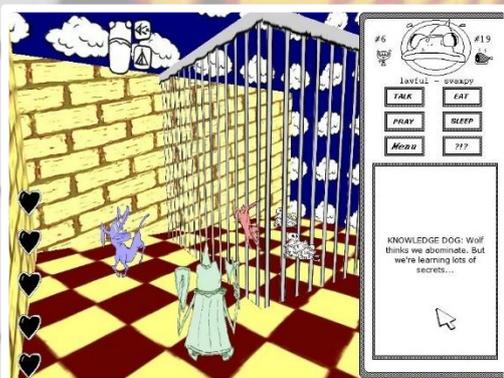
Silly Spotlight 2

GOBLET GROTTO

For this one, I've really decided to put the "silly" in "Silly Spotlight". Goblet Grotto was released in 2012 by Irish (wooo yeahh) developer thecatamites, and is a... I have no idea what kind of game this is. In Goblet Grotto, you journey throughout various incomprehensible areas, all while your main character talks at you nonstop in meaningless symbols displayed at the top of the screen, and are told that your objective is to collect the Goblets scattered throughout the land, although collecting them does nothing and your goblet counter is reset to zero every time you load your save file.



As you might be able to tell, this game is certainly a... unique experience, and is more just the kind of thing where you wander about trying to see



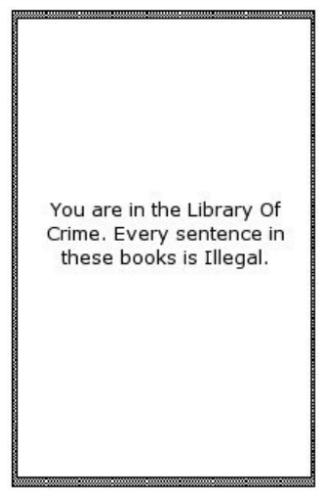
what weird surreal nonsense worlds you'll end up in next, rather than something with any kind of coherent objective. The gameplay is extremely simple, with the player only really needing to occasionally eat food and fight enemies, which can mostly all be killed in one hit, but that's not really the point. Throughout your travels, you'll come across a variety of equally absurd locations, from the

Dwarf Mines located inside a thing called the Bio Cube, to the melting meat soup land shown below, to the Land of Jumping, Screaming Murderers! I'm not explaining that last one.

At first, this game might just seem like a nonsensical hodge-podge of deliberately absurd worlds that don't have any rhyme or reason to them whatsoever, but if you look for it, there's a surprising amount of lore to be found here. Granted, most of it doesn't make much sense, but there's still a bizarre, alien sense of logic to each of the game's worlds, and exploring around and getting to learn what makes them tick can be oddly engaging. You won't learn why there's an army of skeletons that tosses its enemies into the Slop Pits to turn them into more skeletons, but you'll at least get to find out it exists. It's a game with plenty of surprises, and far more going on than it seems at first glance.



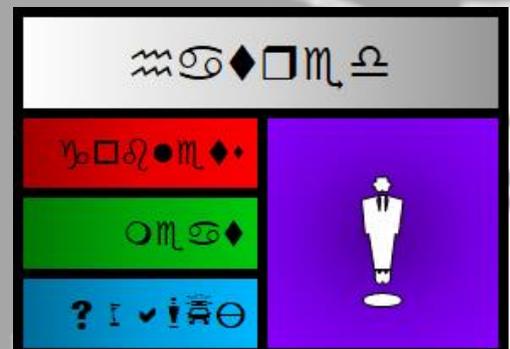
This sense of discovery is aided by the game's writing. On the right side of the screen, there's a text box that displays information about your current location, ranging from straightforward descriptions to pure gibberish, but the descriptions are always entertaining, and add an extra layer of character to each of the game's various locations. Additionally, there are also NPCs you can talk to! None of them are helpful. The NPC dialogue is consistently well written and entertaining to read, but more often than not, you'll just be left with more questions than answers after talking to them. You might like this game, but it doesn't like you back. It wants you to suffer.



The game also comes with a manual! Remember those weird glyphs I mentioned earlier that appear at the top of your screen? Well, the manual comes with a handy guide to understanding your character's words! Here's some of the symbols' meanings:

			
"No"	North	Sound of panic hyperventilating	Paranoia
			
Shouting bird	Sorcery	South	Submerged
			
Toad	West	Searching for	Blood
			
Hatred	Horn	Wild	Darkness
			
Twitching	Unclean	Weeping	"Who is there?"

I think I understand less than I did before. Goblet Grotto really isn't a game you can rank by any typical metric, just by virtue of how bizarre it is. I love it personally, but is it a good game, is it a bad game? Who knows? Who cares. Goblets.



Kill Your Friends!



Naruto: Ultimate Ninja 3 was released in 2005 (or 2008 if you don't live in Japan) for the PS2, and is a 2D fighting game based on the Naruto anime and manga series. Now, I know if you're reading this, chances are you have not read Naruto, but also, I don't care, I like this game and I review whatever I want here. Plus, the game's mechanics are strange and interesting to talk about, so I think you'll enjoy reading this anyway, even if you don't especially care about Naruto.



But, what do I mean by that? Well, for one, the game features... one attack button. Granted, it does different things depending on the direction you hold, and if you press either the up or



down button twice before pressing it, you get a unique special move that consumes a small portion of your Chakra gauge, but this control setup still doesn't offer a lot of variety in terms of character playstyles.

Even the few unique special moves you do get tend to fall into one of two categories, either a short-range attack that leads into a small mini-cuts scene, or an attack that quickly moves you forwards. As a result, most characters feel very similar to each other, although there is some variety; Naruto and Sasuke play nearly identically, for example, but Gaara and Kiba feel completely different to play as compared to each other. Overall, though, the character movesets are generally very simplistic, which could be a detriment if you're looking for a game that faithfully recreates the unique nature of the Naruto cast's powers. At least Shikamaru is a setplay character, though, they got that much right.



However, one thing that helps to spice up the game's combat is the item system. Occasionally, items will appear on the battlefield, and when you walk over them, they get added to your inventory. You can use the L1 and R1 buttons to cycle through your items, and the square button to use them, adding a fun layer of strategy and resource management to the game's combat. If the items weren't here, the game would likely feel absurdly simple and boring, but their addition helps it to become far more enjoyable.



The game also features a wide variety of different modes; there's the basic versus mode, where you can fight either a CPU or a human opponent, but there's also two different campaign modes – Ultimate Contest mode, where you can run around a fully explorable Hidden Leaf



Village and take on various different missions, and Hero's History mode, where you play through various important battles from the anime, with fully voiced and animated cutscenes in between. Hero's History is how you unlock a majority of the characters, which ends up making Ultimate Contest feel somewhat pointless by comparison, but both are great, and definitely fun additions to have.

Additionally, the game also comes with a few different minigames; Tenten's Target Practice, where you have to use quick reflexes to hit targets as they appear, Tree Climbing, where you and an opponent both race each other up a tree, and a training minigame with Rock Lee I forgot the name of. Tree Climbing is by far the best of the three, but they're all good fun, and help to add variety.



Overall, Naruto: Ultimate Ninja 3 is a great time for anyone who enjoys the Naruto anime or the (vastly superior) manga. The gameplay, while simple, is still great fun, the item system helping to add some much-needed strategic depth, and even though characters' movesets vary in how well they reflect their powers, it's still fun seeing how their various Ultimate Jutsu techniques are animated, as they're all excellently done. Ultimate Contest mode can be tedious at times, but Hero's History and the various minigames are both great, and while your enjoyment of this game might be limited if you're not already a Naruto fan, I'd recommend it to anyone who likes the sound of it.

Final Score	
Gameplay - 7	7
Story - 5	
Look/Sound - 8	

Easy Emulation

Joy Mech Fight

Joy Mech Fight is a fighting game released exclusively in Japan for the NES in 1993, and by all means, should not work. The mere idea of an “NES fighting game” feels like a contradiction, something which should never be brought into this world, and yet Joy Mech Fight makes it work. The story is simple: you have two scientists, Little Emon and Ivan Walnuts, and one day, Ivan suddenly decides he feels like taking over the world, so Emon is forced to remodel Skapon, a comedy robot, into a “war robot” in order to fight back against Ivan’s evil robot army.



To start with, you play as Skapon (I’m not calling him Sukapon, I don’t care what Nintendo says), and are presented with 7 enemy robots to fight against in whatever order you like, with Emon reprogramming them once they’re defeated so that they’ll



fight alongside you, allowing you to play as them in the story mode. Once you defeat them, you’re presented with your first boss character, an ostrich robot named Dachon, and are then given the choice between playing on Easy or Normal difficulty.

Here’s where you need to know something; the rest of the story mode has you fighting against 3 more waves of 8 robots followed by boss fights, but once you beat them, Emon won’t reprogram them like with the first wave. For the rest of the story mode, you’re stuck with just the first 8 robots, but once you beat the game, you’ll unlock the other 24 non-boss robots for use in the multiplayer versus mode – but only if you do it on Normal. Beating the game on Easy is effectively pointless, and really not recommended if you don’t want to waste your time.

Additionally, beating Normal mode also unlocks Special difficulty, a much harder version that unlocks the four boss robots when you beat it. Personally, I don’t think this is worth it, but it’s up to you if you go for this or not.



So anyway, how's the actual fighting part of the fighting game? Well, surprisingly... very good! It's fairly simple and straightforward compared to other games in the genre, but I'd argue it's



perhaps the first genuinely great fighting game, and definitely one of the best of its decade. Featuring an exceptional roster of 36 characters, they each feel thoroughly distinct from each other, although not all of them are very good. Skater, for example, is perhaps one of the worst characters in any fighting game, as he lacks even a single way to damage a blocking opponent, while at a high level, characters like Wai and Gaian can effectively win a round off one good hit. This is perhaps one of the game's main flaws; multiple characters have tools that can make the game downright torturous to play if the player knows what they're doing, so it's one of those games where it gets less fun the more you both know about it. But still, for what it is, it's still an extremely impressive game, and despite what I've said, far more well-balanced than you'd expect from looking at it.

Even at a high level, the game has a variety of characters that are strong enough to be at least playable competitively, from the fast, high-speed Legend and Superzak, to the much more patient and reactive Shenlong, to high-damage powerhouses like Gaian and Ra. While all of the game's characters are fairly simple to play as, there's still a lot of variety in how they work, and the game manages to be simple and beginner-friendly without completely slowing down to a crawl and making everyone feel identical to play as, something plenty of fighting games struggle with achieving even today.



Overall, Joy Mech Fight is a great game, even though it really feels like it shouldn't be; 90s fighting games generally tend to be a bit shit, and the idea of getting one to run on the NES feels like it should be impossible, but Joy Mech Fight pulls it off without sacrificing any amount of depth or character variety. In spite of its simple exterior, the game has a surprisingly high amount of competitive depth, and even if you're not looking to play it against other people, the singleplayer campaign is still fun enough that it's well worth your time. The large amount of infinites is annoying, but for a game made in 2 weeks, released at a time when fighting games were still quite new, it's really not something you can blame the developers for, and for the time, it's still surprisingly balanced, and holds up excellently well even by modern standards. Ignore all those other "beginner friendly" fighting games, if you want a fighting game but most games in the genre are too complex for your tastes, you still won't get anything better than Joy Mech Fight.

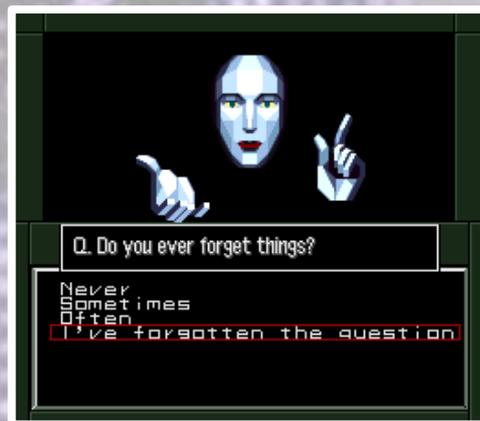
Final Score	
Gameplay - 8	8
Story - 5	
Look/Sound - 7	

Shame Corner

SHIN • MEGAMI • TENSEI

if...

Shin Megami Tensei: if was released exclusively in Japan for the SNES in 1994, and is a spinoff of the existing SMT series. Unlike its predecessors, though, I think it's a good thing this one never made it outside Japan. It takes place primarily within a Japanese secondary school, and is often cited as the inspiration for the Persona series, but where it differs from those games is that it's significantly worse. In SMT: if, your school gets transported into a world known as the Expanse through an occult ceremony performed by Ideo Hazama, another student at the school, and you take it upon yourself to explore this strange new world, no doubt infested

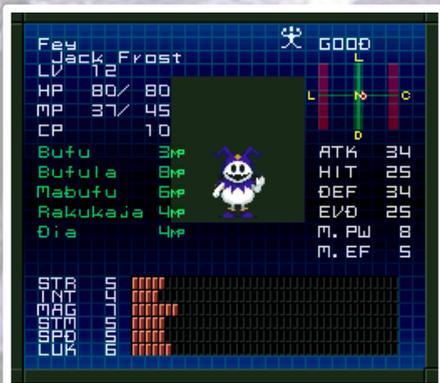


with demons of all sorts, alongside a student of your choice. Sound interesting? Great! That's the most plot development you'll be getting for the next 20 or so hours. After the school is transported into the Expanse, nothing really happens in terms of the story, and you just end up exploring through a total of five different Domains, each named after one of the seven deadly sins. So, let's go through each of them in order, shall we?

First is the Domain of Pride, which to the game's credit, is actually quite good. It does a good job of introducing you to the game's mechanics, and provides a good challenge while still being easy enough to be a good introduction, and the boss at the end is excellently designed. Speaking of the mechanics, it's a turn-based RPG that plays exactly the same as the first SMT game which I reviewed in the previous issue, and has many of the same gameplay problems that plagued that one – high encounter rates, fickle demon negotiation – only much more linear, and without any fun exploration to redeem it.

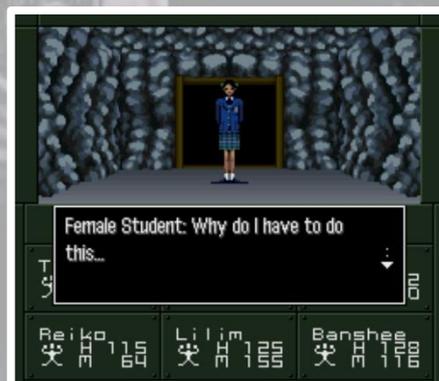


Next is the Domain of Gluttony, which, while not as good as Pride, is still alright. Here, the encounter rate is a bit more annoying, and the level design occasionally spins you around and points you in the wrong direction, but it's nothing unbearable. Additionally, it also turns out that the principal of the school has been turned into a demon and trapped here as punishment for his sins, which is funny. What's less funny is the part where you get forced to go inside his colon to defeat the parasite controlling him, which aside from being a generally disgusting area to look at, feels like it has another random encounter on



every single tile you walk over. Fortunately, though, this part is short-lived, and after you defeat the parasite and free the principal, it's onto the next area, the Domain of Sloth!

So far, this game might not seem that bad, maybe slightly below average, but this area alone is enough to earn the whole thing a place in the Shame Corner. In the Domain of Sloth, the whole gimmick is that you're presented with maybe eight or nine different pathways to go down, a randomly selected one of which has the item you need to progress, and all others are dead ends. But see, the fun part is this: in order to move through these pathways, you need to walk up and down them nonstop for, as far as I remember, around 30-60 minutes EACH, for every single one, slowly, agonizingly making your way through, hoping and praying that you picked the right path – and, chances are, by the end, you'll have accomplished nothing.



I'm not exaggerating when I say this might be the worst singular area I've ever had the displeasure of going through in a video game. You might have noticed there's not a lot of space left on the page! That's because I never finished this. I lied, you're not getting reviews of the other two Domains, I'm not telling you what happens in them. Oh, are you annoyed? Do you feel like

I've wasted your time with false promises? Now you know how it feels to play SMT: if. The Domain of Sloth alone brings this down from being a mediocre RPG with some interesting ideas to one of the most infuriating games I've ever played. In hindsight, I regret ever picking it up, because now, those first two Domains feel like they just wasted my time. Much like what Hazama did at the start, I wish I could perform a demonic ritual to expel this game out into the Expanse, far away from any unsuspecting new players' hands.

Final Score	
Gameplay - 1	1
Story - 2	
Look/Sound - 6	

The Yap Trap

When did gaming peak?

The question of when “peak gaming years” were is one that interests me a lot, and which I’d like to talk about for a bit here. It should be no surprise that I don’t really like a lot of modern games – only two games I’ve reviewed positively here, *Goblet Grotto* and *BlazBlue Centralfiction*, were made after 2010, meanwhile two of the three Shame Corner entries have been from this decade – but trying to define a specific timeframe where I think gaming “peaked” is something I’m not entirely sure how to do, and I’m fully aware of how subjective it is, so I love hearing other people’s takes on the subject (if you’re reading this and thinking, “wow, this guy has no idea what he’s talking about”, please elaborate to me in person, I’d love to hear your thoughts in more detail).



Pictured above: modern AAA slop.

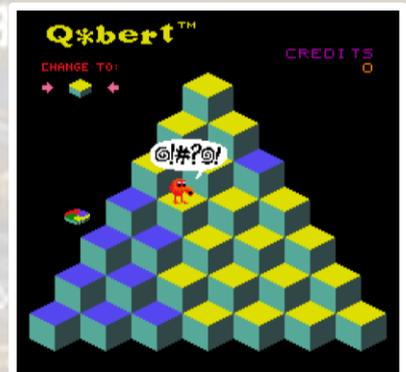


Pictured above: ????

For me, the start date for peak gaming years is unquestionably 1990. Before this point, the technology wasn’t really there for games to be... well, good. You still had some occasional bangers, like the first three *Super Mario Bros.* games, or *Pac-Man*, the first ever good video game, but there was unquestionably a lot of slop too. Technology aside, video games were still new enough back then that people didn’t really know how to make them fun yet.

It’s not uncommon for early games to outright waste your time on purpose, with limited lives systems that force you back to the start of the game if you die too much and general poor level design – and when it wasn’t misguided, it was fully intentional.

A lot of early game design tropes can be attributed to their arcade origins. Some made sense, like how limited lives were added to make sure an entire machine wouldn’t be taken up by one guy for hours on end, but many early arcade games would go out of their way to kill you unfairly and try their best to mask it; after all, more deaths means more coins inserted into the machine, which means more money for the developers. People can rightly criticize modern gaming monetization all they like, but this approach was just as bad, if not arguably worse. These design tricks would also make their way into home console games of the time too just out of sheer habit from designers, although here it was less predatory and more just weird and annoying.



So, we've established the start date for peak years as 1990 – by this point, the arcade tropes had mostly been shaken off, and technology was starting to improve to allow games to be much more in-depth than before. Some games from before this point are still fun, sure, but it's hard to praise most without saying they were good “for the time”; by contrast, even the early 90s produced a wealth of absolute classics that have aged flawlessly, such as Chrono Trigger, Super Metroid, A Link to the Past, and many others. But, if that's when peak years started, then when did they end?



This one's harder to define in terms of a specific year, but from the 2010s onwards, most major AAA games just got really annoying. In 2013, The Last of Us was released, and everyone jacked themselves off about how “deep” and “moving” it was, calling it one of the “best games ever made” even though it's barely a game at all; this made Sony realize there's money in making shite TV shows with occasional gameplay thrown in, so they went all in on the movie-game trend, much to the joy of annoying people worldwide. They still haven't stopped.



And when modern games aren't pretentious slop, they're

predatory slop. “Live service” is a term used to describe games where rather than being able to just buy the damn thing and be done with it, you either buy it or get it for free, but the developers create new content for the game over time.

They're not games you “beat”, you just keep playing. Sounds fine on paper, but the problem is that developers are nearly always really goddamn annoying about it. Explaining live service monetization would take up too much of my limited page space, but just know I hate all of it. Live service games aren't art, they're slop designed to be as efficient at getting you to spend all of your money on them as possible, and since the early to mid 2010s, they've become an increasing norm.



In conclusion, I'd say the end date for peak gaming years was... probably 2012. The decline definitely started before then, I'd argue it was as early as 2008 with the increasing push for “realism”, not to mention constant handholding and “accessibility” mechanics made by developers terrified of a real challenge, but there were still lots of amazing games made from 2008 to 2012, and by this point, the decline was subtle enough that it wasn't really a problem yet. This isn't to say no great games were made after 2012, SMT 4 and Breath of the Wild came out in 2014 and 2017 respectively and are some of my favourite games I've ever played, but I definitely think 2013 onwards is where the bad truly starts to outweigh the good.

What's Next?

BLEACH REBIRTH OF SOULS

Bleach: ReBirth of Souls is an upcoming 3D fighting game based on the Bleach anime and manga series releasing in early 2025, and I'm honestly quite excited for it. At launch, the game will feature content from up to the end of the Arrancar arc, and seems to include a full story mode detailing the events of the story up to that point; admittedly, it's a little disappointing that we won't be getting any Thousand Year Blood War content in the base game, but that makes sense given that the anime hasn't finished yet, so I'd imagine they're planning a TYBW-themed DLC for around the time it finishes.

My only concern with this is that Bleach as a series really likes to introduce characters and wait for several hundreds of chapters to show you the full extent of their power, so characters like Urahara or Shunsui might end up with movesets that don't accurately reflect their full combat potential.



Characters aside, the game seems like a straightforward enough 3D fighting game, albeit very visually impressive, with the exception of the bizarre health system. You have multiple “Konpaku” as well as a “Reishi Gauge”; hit your opponent to lower their Reishi Gauge, and then once that's done, you need to hit them with a special Kikon Move to destroy one of their Konpaku, and once you destroy all of their Konpaku, you win. I think this health system seems kind of pointless and annoying to deal with, but who knows, maybe it'll be fun. Additionally, a lot of promotional material surrounding the game seems to revolve around the idea of “reversal”, and dramatic comebacks akin to what you'd see in the anime, which has the potential to make the game either extremely annoying or really fun and exciting depending on how it's executed. The game does seem a little slow, and some of the mechanics I've mentioned seem potentially concerning, but I'm still excited for it overall. I don't want to be too optimistic, there's a chance it'll be terrible, but I'll still more than likely buy it when it comes out.