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(Image credit: Larian Studios)2023 has come and gone. It was an intense year of major new PC games nearly every month along with plenty of highs and lows for the industry itself. While we got to play more amazing games than in several years prior, it came with relentless layoffs for the people who make games.Down below you'll find a refresher on tons of PC game launch dates from the year. Remind yourself what you missed that needs to stay on your backlog for next year or look back at the games you didn't even remember you played. We're heading into the new year with a list of new PC games in 2024, so catch up with new releases there.While we might be closing out the year, we're in the age of game delays no matter what month it is. Even as we move into 2024, it'll be no surprise if some of the remaining games on the schedule get their release dates knocked back for some extra polish. If they're lucky, it'll just be one delay. Not all of them are lucky.Still, while release dates are always tentative nowadays, 2023 shaped up to be a huge yearparticularly for RPGs: June launched us into a frenzy of demonslaying in Diablo 4, Baldur's Gate 3 emerged from early access its August full release, and Starfield's sent us spaceward to kick off September.Related Articles Here was are full schedule of all the new games that released in 2023:May 2 Age of Wonders 4 - Fantasy 4X with tactical battles (Steam)May 2 Redfall - Co-op open-world vampire shooter (Steam)May 3 Ravenlok - Action adventure fairytale (Epic)May 4 Bare Butt Boxing (Early Access) - Physics-y butt punching (Steam)May 8 Cook Serve Forever (Early Access) - Frantic chef adventure (Steam)May 8 Darkest Dungeon 2 - Grueling eldritch roguelike sequel (Steam)May 9 Torchlight: Infinite - Action RPG leaving early access (Steam)May 9 Voidtrain (Early Access) - Survival on interdimensional trains (Steam)May 16 Humanity - Spectral shiba crowd control puzzler (Steam)May 16 HROT - Soviet-era boomer shooter (Steam)May 17 Ghostlore - Diablo-like set in Southeast Asian folklore (Steam)May 17 Greedventory - Grisly mouse-centric pixel art RPG (Steam)May 18 Firmament - New puzzle adventure from Myst devs (Steam)May 22 Inkbound (Early Access) - Storybook tactics roguelike (Steam)May 23 After Us - Surreal post-human puzzler (Steam)May 23 Convergence: A LoL Story - Riot's Ekko platformer spinoff (Steam)May 23 Miasma Chronicles - post-apocalyptic tactics RPG (Steam)May 23 Planet of Lana - Sci-fi puzzle adventure (Steam)May 23 Star Trek: Resurgence - Adventure games: the final frontier (Epic)May 23 Warhammer 40,000: Boltgun - Astartes boomer shooter (Steam)May 25 Diluvian Winds (Early Access) - Walrus lighthouse keeping (Steam)May 25 Dynopunk - Tech repair sim in cyberpunk dino-city (Steam)May 25 Landlord's Super - 1980s construction sim satire (Steam)May 25 Lord of the Rings: Gollum - Sneaky jewelry collection sim (Steam)May 29 Return - Stylish eerie scifi side-scroller (Steam)May 30 Everdream Valley - A cozy farm sim with animal transformation (Steam)May 30 Return to Grace - '60s scifi adventure with AI god (Epic)May 30 System Shock - Remake of the classic immersive sim (Steam)May 31 Decarnation - phantasmagorical 2D horror (Steam)May 31 Etrian Odyssey Origins Collection - DS RPG ports (Steam)June 1 Killer Frequency - First-person '80s slasher adventure (Steam)June 2 Street Fighter 6 - Ryu Ryu Ryu Ryu Ryu Ryu (Steam)June 2 We Love Katamari Reroll+ - Rollemup remaster (Steam)June 6 Amnesia: The Bunker - WWI sequel to hallmark horror (Steam)June 6 Diablo 4 - The long-awaited action RPG sequel (Battle.net)June 8 Harmony: The Fall of Reverie - Choice-driven visual novel (Steam)June 8 Mask of the Rose - Fallen London's 'sort-of' dating sim (Steam)June 8 Riders Republic - Ubisoft's downhill sports wildlife reserve (Steam)June 9 Greyhill Incident - LGM-shootin' horror FPS (Steam)June 10 Frogsong - Amphibious action RPG (Steam)June 10 Smushi Come Home - Tiny mushroom adventure (Steam)June 13 Dordogne - Gorgeous watercolor childhood adventure (Steam)June 14 Oblivion Override - Cyborg Dead Cells (Steam)June 15 Fall of Porcupine - Emotional adventure game (Steam)June 15 Layers of Fear - More horror from Bloober Team (Steam)June 16 Park Beyond - Tycoon simulator of the rollercoaster type (Steam)June 20 Aliens: Dark Descent - Xenomorph-slaying squad RTS (Steam)June 22 Bookwalker: Thief of Tales - Noir turn-based tactics (Steam)June 22 Dr. Fetus' Mean Meat Machine - Meat Boy match game (Steam)June 22 Feed All Monsters - Grid-based puzzles (Steam)June 22 Forever Skies (Early Access) - Post-apoc airship survival (Steam)June 22 Mars First Logistics (Early Access) - Rover design antics (Steam)June 22 Nova Lands - A friendly-looking Factorio-like (Steam)June 26 Kingdom Eighties - Base-building Stranger Things teens (Steam)June 27 Sludge Life 2 - First-person spraying (Steam)June 27 Story of Seasons: A Wonderful Life - Harvest Moon redux (Steam)June 27 Yomi 2 - Street Fighter in card form (Steam)June 28 Pekoe - Cat-owned teashop sim (Steam)June 28 SlavicPunk: Oldtimer - Polish cyberpunk isometric shooter (Steam)June 30 Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective - Poltergeist puzzler port (Steam)July 12 Oxenfree 2: Lost Signals - indie horror sequel (Steam)July 13 Gravity Circuit - Legally non-actionable Mega Man-like (Steam)July 14 Exoprimal - Co-op mechsuit dino shooter (Steam)July 14 Invector: Rhythm Galaxy - Rhythm-based space cruise (Steam)July 14 Jagged Alliance 3 - Turn-based merc tactics return (Steam)July 17 Sticky Business - Sticker shop simulator (Steam)July 18 Ember Knights - Roguelike with lots of item combos (Steam)July 18 My Friendly Neighborhood - Sesame Street horror FPS (Steam)July 18 Viewfinder - Trippy perspective-based puzzles (Steam)July 18 Xenonauts 2 - Classic X-COM-inspired tactics (Steam)July 19 Let's! Revolution! - Roguelite puzzle game (Steam)July 20 Frank and Drake - Rotoscoped modern gothic (Steam)July 20 Homeseek - Post-apocalyptic city-builder (Steam)July 20 Lakeburg Legacies - City sim meets dating sim (Steam)July 20 Punch Club 2: Fast Forward - Future fighter life sim (Steam)July 21 Crime O'Clock - Hidden object crime-busting (Steam)July 25 Crimson Tactics (Early Access) - FF Tactics plus ponies (Steam)July 25 Remnant 2 - Dark-Souls-with-guns sequel (Steam)July 26 Let's School - School headmaster management sim (Steam)July 26 Ratchet & Clank: Rift Apart - Prized platformer's PC debut (Steam)July 26 Xuan-Yuan Sword: Mists Beyond The Mountains - RPG remaster (Steam)July 27 Arcadian Atlas - Isometric turn-based tactics (Steam)July 27 Deadlink - Cyberpunk robot roguelike FPS (Steam)July 27 The Expanse: A Telltale Series - Ballad of Belter bosmang (Epic)July 31 F1 Manager 2023 - Speedy racecar management sim (Steam)July 31 Venba - A narrative cooking puzzle about family (Steam)August 3 Baldur's Gate 3 - Larian's take on the classic RPG series (Steam)August 4 Super Space Club - Colorful arcade space shooter (Steam)August 8 I Am Future (Early Access) - Ruined rooftop base-builder (Steam)August 9 30XX - Megaman X roguelike overhaul (Steam)August 10 Atlas Fallen - Monster Hunter meets righteous deicide (Steam)August 10 Banchou Tactics - High school delinquent tactics RPG (Steam)August 10 Lifeless Moon - Sci-fi adventure (Steam)August 10 Sengoku Dynasty (Early Access) - feudal Japan survival (Steam)August 10 Stray Gods - RPG musical about modern Greek gods (Steam)August 10 Tales & Tactics - Roguelike by Slay the Spire modders (Steam)August 15 Hammerwatch 2 - Open world hack-and-slash sequel (Steam)August 15 Moving Out 2 - Packing party game sequel (Steam)August 16 The Cosmic Wheel Sisterhood - Narrative tarot (Steam)August 16 En Garde - Comedy sword fighting (Steam)August 17 Book of Hours - Combat-free occult librarian RPG (Steam)August 17 Gord - Dark fantasy settlement builder (Steam)August 17 Shadow Gambit: The Cursed Crew - Tactics, ahoy (Steam)August 18 Bomb Rush Cyberfunk - Jet Set Successor (Steam)August 21 Jumplight Odyssey (Early Access) - FTL meets Rimworld (Steam)August 21 Six Ages 2: Lights Going Out - Clan survival sim (Steam)August 21 Whisker Squadron: Survivor - Star Fox-style roguelite (Steam)August 22 Fort Solis - Mars scifi thriller story (Steam)August 22 Immortals of Aveum - EA-published magic FPS (Steam)August 22 WrestleQuest - 80's pro wrestling meets retro RPG (Steam)August 24 Blasphemous 2 - Brutal Metroidvania sequel (Steam)August 25 Armored Core 6: Fires of Rubicon - From's robot return (Steam)August 28 Untamed Tactics - Tactics RPG with anthropoid animals (Steam)August 29 Daymare: 1994 Sandcastle - Third-person horror (Steam)August 29 Sea of Stars - Classic-style turn-based RPG (Steam)August 29 Under the Waves - Subaquatic psychological story (Steam)August 31 Trine 5: A Clockwork Conspiracy - fantasy puzzler (Steam)September 5 Chants of Sennaar - Linguistic puzzle adventure (Steam)September 5 Rune Factory 3 Special - Fantasy Harvest Moon port (Steam)September 6 Starfield - Bethesda's new original space RPG (Steam)September 8 Fae Farm - Farm sim with extra fairies (Steam)September 8 Synced - Match-based roguelike looter shooter (Steam)September 12 Eternights - Post-apoc hack-and-slash dating sim (Steam)September 13 Gunbrella - Metroidvania with lead-pumping parasol (Steam)September 14 AK-xolotl - Bullet hell roguelike with AR amphibians (Steam)September 14 The Crew: Motorfest - Ubisoft's open-Hawaii racer (Epic)September 14 Dune: Spice Wars - 4X on Arrakis (Steam)September 14 Pathfinder: Gallowspire Survivors (Early Access - Steam)September 14 Railroads & Catacombs - Darkest Dungeon on rails (Steam)September 14 Ugly - Braid-ish psychological puzzle platformer (Steam)September 15 Wandering Sword - Wuxia tactics RPG (Steam)September 19 Lies of P - Bloodborne, but you play Pinocchio (Steam)September 19 Mortal Kombat 1 - Liu Kang's cool new timeline (Steam)September 20 Moonstone Island - Creature catching farm sim (Steam)September 20 Party Animals - Gang Beasts as beasts (Steam)September 20 Warhaven - Medieval team PvP (Steam)September 20 Witchfire (Early Access) - Wizardly roguelike FPS (Epic)September 21 Astrea: Six-Sided Oracles - Deck-building dice roguelike (Steam)September 21 Payday 3 - Clown-masked crime co-op (Steam)September 21 Super Adventure Hand - a hands-on puzzler (Steam)September 25 Cyberpunk 2077: Phantom Liberty - Cyberpunk xpac (Steam)September 26 El Paso, Elsewhere - Neo-noir slowmo shooter (Steam)September 26 Mineko's Night Market - Cats and crafting sim (Steam)September 26 Paleo Pines - Dino-based farm sim (Steam)September 27 Fortune's Run - Deus Ex in space (Steam)September 29 Cocoon - World-hopping puzzle adventure (Steam)September 29 Saleblazers (Early Access) - Shopkeep survival (Steam)Ad Infernum - Immersive sim horror in demonic gas station (Steam)Alliance of the Sacred Suns - 4X Space Strategy (Steam)Anger Foot - Kick-heavy FPS (Steam)Ark 2 - More dinosaurs, plus Vin Diesel (Steam)Ascent of Ashes (Early Access) - dystopic colony sim (Steam)Banishers: Ghosts of New Eden - 1600s RPG (Steam)Beyond These Stars - City builder on a space whale (Steam)Blue Protocol - Online anime action RPG (Steam)Bounty Star - Mech combat meets farmsteading (Steam)Botany Manor - Plant-tending walking simulator (Steam)Breachway - Space dogfight deckbuilder (Steam)Capes - turn-based superhero tactics (Steam)Cart Life - Street vendor life sim (Steam)Chrono Odyssey - Fantasy MMOCorpus Edax - Immersive sim with punchy physics (Steam)Creature Keeper - Real-time combat creature collector (Steam)Crimson Desert - Singleplayer RPG from Black Desert devsCritter Cove (Early Access) - Castaway Animal Crossing (Steam)Depersonalization - Eldritch anime RPG (Steam)Diesel Legacy: The Brazen Age - Steampunk 2v2 2D fighter (Steam)Distant Bloom - cozy alien planet exploration and restoration (Steam)Earth from Another Sun - Open world galactic scifi sandbox (Steam)Echo Generation - 80s voxel adventure with turn-based combat (Steam)Edge of Sanity - 2D lovecraftian survival horror (Steam)Enshrouded (Early Access) - Valheim with more polygons (Steam)Europa - A Studio Ghibli-inspired platforming adventure (Steam)Everywhere - A vague metaverse dream from GTA producersFelvidek - Monochrome medieval RPG (Steam)Final Fantasy 7 Rebirth - The next chapter of the FF7 remakeFlintlock: The Siege of Dawn - Soulslike for musket fans (Steam)Flock - Co-op sky-shepherding and bird-shearing (Steam)Frostpunk 2 - Grim, snowy city management (Steam)Galacticare - "Dammit Jim, I'm a doctor" simulator (Steam)Goblin Stone - Turn-based roguelike RPG, but as goblins (Steam)Granblue Fantasy: Relink - Mobile megahit's action co-op (Steam)Harold Halibut - Claymation space story (Steam)Helldivers 2 - Third-person starship troopin' (Steam)Homeworld 3 - Sci-fi space RTS classic revival (Steam)Hyper Light Breaker (Early Access) - Hyper Light Drifter co-op sequel (Steam)I Am Jesus Christ - First Person Savior (Steam)Iron Meat - Gnarly Contra-like side-scroller (Steam)Killer Klowns from Outer Space - Asymmetrical horror throwback (Steam)Light Odyssey - Top-down boss rush Souls-like (Steam)Lightyear Frontier (Early Access) - Chill farming sim with mechs (Steam)Lil' Guardsman - If Papers, Please was Adventure Time (Steam)Lollipop Chainsaw RePOP - Remake of the zombie hack-n-slashLysfanga - Time clone action tactics (Steam)Men of War 2 - WWII RTS with co-op (Steam)Metal Slug Tactics - classic run-n-gun goes tactics RPG (Steam)Mika and The Witch's Mountain - Zelda meets Kiki's Delivery Service (Steam)NAIAD - Vibrant underwater exploration as a sea nymph (Steam)Nemire - Undead army tactics RPG (Steam)Nighthawks - A vampire RPG from adventure game veterans (Steam)Nightingale - Crafting survival RPG in the Fae Realms (Steam)Off the Grid - Blomkamp Battle RoyalePacific Drive - Driving survival roguelite in paranormal PNW (Steam)Palworld - Open-world survival with gun-toting Pokemon (Steam)Pepper Grinder - 2D drill-based burrowing platformer (Steam)The Plucky Squire - Colorful storybook escape adventure (Steam)Pragmata - Outerspace action adventure (Steam)Promenade - Cute cartoon platformer (Steam)QubiQuest: Castle Craft - Voxel-based castle building and defense (Steam)Replaced - Sci-fi action platformer (Steam)Reveil - First-person puzzle thriller (Steam)R-Type Tactics I - II Cosmos - Tactics spinoff of side-scroll shooter (Steam)Ruffy and the Riverside - Colorful character platformer (Steam) She Dreams Elsewhere - Retro-surreal adventure RPG (Steam)Skate Story - Chill skateboarding through atmospheric underworld (Steam)Skull & Bones - Ubisoft Pirating RPGSolium Infernum - Grand strategy in Hell (Steam)Songs of Conquest - Turn-based fantasy strategy RPG (Steam)Snufkin: Melody of Moominvalley - Moominverse adventure game (Steam)Stellar Blade - Flashy scifi hack-and-slashSuicide Squad: Kill the Justice League - Co-op cape killing (Steam)Surviving Deponia - More Deponia, now a colony sim (Steam)Stalker 2: Heart of Chornobyl - The Zone awaits (Steam)Tempest Rising - Archetypal base-building RTS (Steam)Test Drive Unlimited Solar Crown - Open world driving in Hong Kong (Steam)Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine 2 - Astartes action sequel (Steam)Witchbrook - Wizarding school life sim (Steam)Wrath: Aeon of Ruin - Quake-like retro shooter (Steam)Wrestle Story - turn-based pro wrestling RPG (Steam)Zoria: Age of Shattering - Fantasy tactics RPG (Steam)Keep up to date with the most important stories and the best deals, as picked by the PC Gamer team.For the first year in recent memory, scale did not necessitate tradition, and scope did not preclude getting weird. In 2023, nothing was sacred in video games, and so they felt more vibrant than ever.Sure, some of the more focused games threw us for a pleasant loop: Dredge begins as a lonely fishing sim before transforming into something otherworldly, and Humanity morphed from a pensive art project into an all-out war. Dave the Diver, similarly, is not so much about being a diver as it is about running a sushi restaurant, or hunting for alien artifacts, or conversing with said aliens, or you get the point. Whether you booted up your Steam Deck for a cross-country flight or hid your Switch off screen during that boring Zoom meeting, the game you returned to was rarely the one you left behind.This amorphousness (Im begging our copy editor to let this one slide, because what other word could adequately summarize the video games of 2023?) wasnt consigned to the newcomers, though. Larian Studios, fresh off two years of early-access development and riding the reputation it had garnered from Divinity: Original Sin 2, saw fit to release a role-playing game in which you can kill off nearly every main character the moment you meet them. Remedy Entertainment lets be honest, this group has always been strange made a sequel thats equal parts horrifying, hilarious, fun, and fabulous. And Nintendo? Well, Nintendo had another banner year. Thats no surprise. The real surprise? It finally let go, and let players toy with the digital molecules of its most revered series. More on this below.As the year comes to a close, its intoxicating to see developers of all sizes, in every genre, with every tier of budget, mining the depths of interactive design, branching this way and that as they follow their respective veins of gold. Theyre nowhere near the bottom of that particular expanse, of course and thats a heartening thought. Mike MahardyOver the past few weeks, the Polygon staff voted, championed, debated, and ultimately threw up its hands and marveled at the list of mammoths, curiosities, puzzle boxes, and black holes that is our top 50 games of 2023. Any video games that were released in 2023, received substantial updates in 2023, or achieved renewed cultural relevance in 2023 were eligible for this list. Last year, the cutoff for consideration was Nov. 30. (Youll notice a certain Firaxis Games joint fairly high up our list.) This year, the cutoff was the same. Should we be thoroughly enamored with Warhammer 40,000: Rogue Trader or Avatar: Frontiers of Pandora, well make sure theyre considered for next years top 50.Where to play: Nintendo Switch and Windows PCMr. Suns Hatbox is about a hat delivery person (or maybe its just a blob with legs?) that takes their job way too seriously. At the beginning of the game, a customers package gets stolen and whisked away to a nearby towering castle. Despite the clients apathy toward a single missing hat, the delivery company, named Amazin, proceeds to set up an entire subterranean paramilitary operation beneath the poor customers home. As its premise suggests, this pixelated 2D roguelite leans into the absurd. Part Metal Gear Solid 5, part Spelunky, you undertake missions where you blast away enemies and kidnap them for your own operation, all while slapstick action unfolds. While on a mission, anything from a desk lamp to daggers is fair game for a weapon. In between fights, you expand your base, where you manage a staff of brainwashed blob-people. Its fast, frenetic fun, and especially enjoyable to share with friends in co-op. Ana DiazWhere to play: Mac, PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, Windows PC, Xbox One, and Xbox Series XYes, Lies of P is a Dark Souls mixed with Pinocchio, and thats a questionable elevator pitch from the outset.In the years leading up to Lies of P, Pinocchiosouls was more of a running joke than anything this profane idea that you can take any world and slap some Dark Souls into it to get people mildly interested. But once youre in the game, eliminating bosses left and right with your sweet parry moves, youll quickly find yourself entirely unbothered by how strange Lies of P initially seemed. And youll start telling your partner things like I have to go back to Geppetto to upgrade my puppet body like its a perfectly normal task to assign yourself on a Tuesday afternoon.Its very rare for a Soulslike to ever feel like anything more than a knockoff even when theyre decent fun, like The Surge. But the best compliment I can give Lies of P is that it feels like the genuine article, a FromSoftware game developed in an alternate dimension and somehow released in this one by mistake. But it wasnt a mistake or luck that made Lies of P, and it wasnt FromSoftware, either; it was a talented group of developers at Neowiz Games and Round8 Studio that took a tired genre, paired it with a bizarre IP, and knocked it out of the park. Ryan GilliamWhere to play: PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, and Windows PCTchia is an open-world adventure game set in a fictional version of island nation New Caledonia inspired by Awacebs co-founders childhood in the country.Everything is filtered through the titular main character Tchias eyes, eyes with a special power that allows her to transform into any animals or objects in her environment. Birds, dolphins, a camera, or rocks Its all an option for Tchia.The game, while clearly inspired by The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild, ends up standing on its own because of the innovative shapeshifting mechanics. Tchia isnt as technically polished as a Nintendo title with hundreds of developers; Awaceb has a team of roughly a dozen. Still, its hard to innovate in such a ubiquitous genre, yet Awaceb has managed to do just that with Tchia, making it one of the best games so far this year. Nicole CarpenterDeveloper: The Game KitchenWhere to play: Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, Windows PC, Xbox One, and Xbox Series XLong gone are the days when the Metroidvania genre languished untouched for years on end. But despite an influx of entries in recent years, few have exhibited as much mastery as Blasphemous 2. Building off of the strong roots of the first game, Blasphemous 2 continues to use Spanish Catholicism as a narrative and aesthetic touchpoint, telling a twisted religious tale thats about as far from proselytizing as you can get.After the success of the first game, the developers have focused on refining the combat, adding multiple weapons and bizarre, hidden customization options that allow you to take command of how your character rips this world to shreds. The last time I played a 2D Metroidvania with this much polish and charm, it was Hollow Knight. Blasphemous 2 might not reach those same heights, but it comes damn close. Russ FrushtickDeveloper: Recreate GamesWhere to play: Windows PC and Xbox Series XI do not know how Recreate Games managed to render some of the cutest animals Ive ever seen. I also do not know how Recreate made me completely OK with picking up these cute animals and flinging them into black holes, poison clouds, or freezing tundras. The second the match starts in Party Animals, all those cute fluffy corgis, rabbits, kitties, and ducks become my enemies. I will beat them with a bat until they cant wake up anymore, and I wont think twice about it. Party Animals may have made me a monster? I dont know.The Gang Beasts-esque wiggly physics mixed with the cute characters makes for a perfect party game of fluffy fighting. Julia LeeWhere to play: PlayStation 5, Windows PC, and Xbox Series XLike its predecessor, The Talos Principle 2 tackles grand science fiction ideas, particularly about what it means to be human a theme thoroughly explored in this installment of the series set in a post-human society of AI-powered robots that are carrying on human culture and civilization. Also like its predecessor, The Talos Principle 2 is replete with philosophical commentary and references to famous artists and thinkers. My favorite is a riff on Werner Herzogs famous quote about birds: The enormity of their flat brain. The enormity of their stupidity is just overwhelming.But if youre like me, youre playing the game because youre an absolute freak for light refraction, gravity, and geospatial puzzles. There are so many puzzles in this game theres even a puzzle metagame, spread across the games gorgeous map and theyre each excellent, teaching you new concepts before refracting them and forcing you to think differently. Nicole ClarkWhere to play: Windows PCVideo games demand an account for your time. Some video games track the minutes and hours youve spent on screen. Others impose strict limits on how long you play, or how much you can do. But all video games constantly ask: How will you spend your time? Seiji Maruyama doesnt know how much time he has left. Fresh out of prison, hes not a young man anymore, but he doesnt want the streets to know. So he returns to his life as a yakuza heavy, hoping to make his mark again.Fading Afternoon ends when Seijis time runs out. Based on the choices you make, the consequences of which are initially obfuscated, this could be five minutes after the game begins, or it could be five hours. He has a bad cough and a pack of cigarettes, each a metaphor for the ticking clock inside of him. You could go to work, brawling on the streets. Or you can simply pass the time: Listen to a jazz band. Play video poker. Buy a home. Fall in love. You have the time, until you dont. Joshua RiveraWhere to play: Nintendo SwitchI thank VTubers every day for many things, but I will kiss the feet of the anime avatars that introduced me to Suika Game. The engrossing 2048-meets-Tetris-with-physics fruit drop game has become my go-to whenever I need to kill some time. Note that I am talking about the official Nintendo Switch version, not all of the horrific ad-plagued knockoffs that have flooded the App Store.The thing that makes Suika so special, in addition to its cutesy gameplay, is its quality as a social game. The same way we sit around and talk about our NYT Connections, we sit around and talk about our fruitless (ha) attempts at getting double watermelons or breaking the 3,000 point threshold. Its also a great game to watch: Nothing is funnier than seeing somebodys Suika run go downhill in 30 seconds flat. (Theres a reason why the game has taken the streaming world by storm.) JLWhere to play: Mac and Windows PCLeague of Legends 13th season is one of the games most balanced yet. Almost every champion has felt viable throughout the year no small feat for a game with over 140 playable characters and its led to great fun and variety on the solo queue ladder and in professional play, where an exciting Worlds just wrapped up.But theres another reason League had an outstanding 2023: Arena, a new game mode introduced during the games summer event. Arena is a 2v2v2v2 battle mode with fast-paced chaos, using Leagues roster of champions in a more approachable and containable setting (and with less rage-inducing teammates). The mode was removed after the conclusion of the summer event, but is reportedly returning soon. It cant possibly come soon enough; I know how Ill be spending a good chunk of my winter. Pete VolkWhere to play: PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, and Windows PCGoodbye Volcano High is a visual novel with rhythm game elements, and it takes place at the precipice of the end of the world. Its centered on a group of teenage dinosaurs entering their senior year of high school, a perfect balance between high school dramatics and the grim future of Earth, as a meteor rockets toward the planet. Though the rhythm game elements can feel a bit finicky and dont seem to matter much, in terms of progressing the game Goodbye Volcano Highs music only adds to the dimensional, raw experience created by worker-owned studio KO_OP.Its rare to find a game that takes the teenage experience seriously, but Goodbye Volcano High does just that. Its a time in your life where you feel so, so much. You can see that earnestness in the teenage experience where everything is a big, huge issue sometimes to the point of cringe tied up in that big, global issue of the meteor thats looking to destroy everything. N. CarpenterDeveloper: Blizzard EntertainmentWhere to play: Mac and Windows PCSomething very, very interesting started to happen in the retro version of WoW this year. While Blizzard has been content to march one half of the games community forward through its history of expansions, its started to come up with creative ways to keep the other half the half that wants to stay in the game as it was at launch engaged.The first of these was Hardcore, a brilliant permadeath mode that instantly made this aging game both more dangerous and more social, resurrecting the spirit of its 2004 servers. The second, just launched, is the wild Season of Discovery, which remixes and restructures the original WoW experience interpolating staggered level caps, shuffling class roles in ways that might just change MMO design forever. WoW Classic is quietly, and paradoxically, where Blizzard is doing its most forward-thinking work right now. Oli WelshDeveloper: Intelligent SystemsWhere to play: Nintendo SwitchFire Emblem Engage was designed for a very specific kind of sicko: one not particularly interested in the origin stories of a horde of teenagers, or the politics of a bourgeoise academy, or what kind of tea a teacher prefers, but instead one obsessed with the endless minutiae of combat stats, weapon loadouts, and team composition. I know this because I am one such sicko.If youve read any of my reviews or essays on Polygon, then you know I prefer strategy games that can get out of their own way. More precisely, I love when strategy developers can put their pens down, throw their hands up, and admit that the stories unfolding in the players head will almost always be more powerful than anything they could write. Fire Emblem Engage is one of the foremost proponents of this idea. It hurls an excess of characters, weapons, battle scenarios, and stat-boosting abilities at you, leaving the door open for you to observe character interactions on the battlefield and create the resulting fanfiction in your head. Its actual script is a quagmire of nonsensical JRPG tropes, and each cutscene is more skippable than the next. But if youre looking for an excellent turn-based tactics game that gets out of the players way, you can do a whole lot worse than Fire Emblem Engage. M. MahardyWhere to play: Windows PCPizza Tower is a perfect object, and fully committed to its vision. You play as Peppino Spaghetti, a chef who must race up the pizza tower in order to defeat the existential threat posed by Pizzaface, an enormous floating pizza that also happens to be sentient. Super normal stuff. To get there, you platform through a series of levels, picking up speed as you zoom through enemies and obstacles. Its easy to get into a flow state.Pizza Tower also beautifully captures the essence of the Wario Land series. The game is delightful to look at, with an irreverent art style thats referential to late-90s and early-2000s cartoons, and absurd enemies and animations. Levels are also chock-full of secret rooms, passageways, and treasures, making it hard to put down and fun to replay. N. ClarkDeveloper: grapefrukt gamesWhere to play: Android, iOS, Nintendo Switch, and Windows PCYou can play this delightful physics puzzler best described as dynamic minigolf on a pool table on Switch or Steam if you want, but its most at home on your phone. Its an absolutely ideal mobile game: a reasonably priced paid app with no ads, in-app purchases, or subscription, playable in a spare three minutes. Pocket adorable, smiling pool balls on tables adorned with conveyor belts, portals, and moving pockets, while challenging yourself with a host of mix-and-match rulesets (balls that crack, split, or home in on you, a locked starting position, more balls, no guideline for bounces, etc.). Mobile gamers of taste will recognize the work of grapefrukt, aka Martin Jonasson, Swedish developer of such elegant classics as Holedown, Twofold Inc., and Rymdkapsel. OWWhere to play: PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, Windows PC, Xbox One, and Xbox Series XIf only one developer could be said to have a masters grasp on interactive horror, Id have to tip my hat to Frictional Games. The Amnesia series has always been a thrill ride of terrifying chases and the quiet, a little too quiet, moments that build up tension between. Amnesia: The Bunker is no different. In fact, its one of Frictionals best.Set in a seemingly abandoned bunker thats been sealed by explosions during World War I, your simple yet difficult task is to find an exit. This being a horror game, though, you also have to collect fuel for the bunkers generator a veritable beating heart and scrutinize maps on safe room walls, before venturing into the titular structures labyrinthine bowels. Oh, also! Theres a monster hunting you. And it can ambush you from wall vents. And its attracted to even the slightest bit of sound. And whether youre juicing your hand-cranked flashlight, triggering long-forgotten tripwires, or just opening a heavy door into yet another concrete-encased corridor, youre going to have to make noise at some point. The Bunker is as potent in its terror as any horror video game out there. M. MahardyWhere to play: Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, Windows PC, Xbox One, and Xbox Series XIn an unprecedented year for game releases, I understand why youre surprised to see Lil Gator Game this high up on our list. But imagine how surprised I was to find myself, in a moment of introspection, realizing that it was one of my own favorite games in 2023. At the risk of diminishing its accomplishments, Im going to make a comparison that should cut to the quick for interested parties: This is the most A Short Hike-alike that Ive discovered yet, and Ive been chasing that singular high for years. So if you have a lazy weekend afternoon and want to spend it playing not gaming, but playing, in the joyous, unstructured sense of a day in the park I cant recommend this lil game enough. Chris GrantDeveloper: Bethesda Game StudiosWhere to play: Windows PC and Xbox Series XStarfield had so much to prove, its easy to lose sight of what it accomplished: top-tier world-building, a fantastically customizable ship builder, and Bethesdas most engaging combat to date. Galaxy-spanning faction quests give you plenty to do, but its the side quests that really make you feel like the captain in something Star Trek adjacent: generation ships and superhero hideouts and colonies of clones. Theres good sci-fi here for those willing to make the journey.Its true that the game oversold the idea of a galaxy with over 1,000 planets, a number that pales in comparison to the games most obvious competitor, No Mans Sky. Its a shame this became so much of the focus thanks to Bethesdas marketing, because that same focus obscured the absolutely fascinating new game plus mode at the games heart. Consider this: No Mans Sky is the game that realizes the universes infinite number of planets, while Starfield realizes the universes infinite number of possibilities. Clayton AshleyDeveloper: Nightdive StudiosWhere to play: Windows PCIn a year of several stellar remakes and immersive sims, it wouldnt have been surprising if System Shock showed its age of nearly 30 years. At least, it would have been understandable if the changes needed to update the game would leave it nigh unrecognizable. Thats why Nightdive Studios accomplish is so impressive: It updated the 1994 classic with a slick coat of modern paint while also preserving what made the game so thrilling in the first place.The element where thats most evident is in the games look, which captures all of the original System Shocks garish cyberpunk neons and frightening enemies in a style that appears like a modern high-fidelity game at a distance, but subtly transforms into retro pixel bitmaps on closer inspection. In much the same way, the gameplay feels surprisingly modern at a distance, but on closer inspection, you start to see how this proto-immersive sim is actually what inspired so much modern game design. You have to rely on your own curiosity, caution, and cunning to navigate the halls of Citadel Station and upgrade your hacker into a cybernetic death machine. Its a game that expects a lot from the player (and a little save scumming), but the experience is just as rewarding as it was in 1994. CADeveloper: Respawn EntertainmentWhere to play: PlayStation 5, Windows PC, and Xbox Series XIs Star Wars Jedi: Survivor an Empire Strikes Back level of sequel? Well, no, but it manages to get extraordinarily close to being one of the best follow-ups in the entire Star Wars franchise.The game improves upon Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order in every conceivable way, with a more entertaining, action-oriented start and a ton of aerial movements and lightsaber stances that make you feel even more like a seasoned Jedi Knight. Quality-of-life improvements like fast travel make the game less frustrating to play, while the new locales packed with hidden collectibles and upgrades make exploration more rewarding.But what makes Jedi: Survivor truly special isnt this crude matter, but its luminous heart. You feel it in the memorable characters you meet on your galactic journey, be it the people you help or the friendships you forge and reconcile with. Its in the classic, crowded cantina where you actually want to go check in with the barkeep. Its in the tactile, reverent way you craft your lightsaber. And its in the kinetic set-pieces that remind you of the serials Star Wars was originally inspired by. At its best, you really can feel the Force around you. CADeveloper: The New York TimesWhere to play: Android, browser, and iOSAfter the acquisition of viral hit Wordle, The New York Times Crossword ecosystem leveled up to full-fledged attention competitor NYT is a media company with a gaming platform. And its staff of puzzle writers and editors are not stooping to mind-numbing mobile content to keep the expansion going. Connections, its latest title to pair well with morning coffee, is one of the years best games.Connections offers you a grid of 16 words and a mission: Detect the common threads between four different sets of words without embarrassing yourself. The grouping logic ranges from simple (animals) to silly (synonyms for farting) to sneaky (countries when the letter A is added). Gruff game show watchers who claim the puzzle is just a clone of BBCs long-running Only Connect miss the personality within; Connections writer Wyna Liu brings a tremendous wit to each days puzzle, constructing thematic grids and throwing synonym curveballs. And like with Wordle, theres a sense of accomplishment when you land all four sets theres no better start to a day than gloating to friends and family about how you completely nailed Connections. Matt PatchesDeveloper: Tango GameworksWhere to play: Windows PC and Xbox Series XIn Hi-Fi Rush, you play as Chai, a guy who must escape the factory of a villainous corporation. In a workplace accident, Chais iPod gets punched into his chest, making him sensitive to sound and staying on beat. What follows is a joyful action-rhythm game where you explore, climb, and fight to the beat of the music.The game is a remarkably inviting take on a genre not exactly known for being accessible. But Hi-Fi Rush does away with hardcore precision in exchange for gameplay that always subtly nudges you back toward keeping in time. Failing to attack on a drum stroke doesnt mean failing a fight; you just dont get a combo multiplier. And the musical score never gets jarring as a punishment; punchy notes always play in time with the rhythm, even if you hit a button at the wrong time. The result is a game that evokes the thrill of feeling like youre acing it and getting into a flow, no matter your skill level. N. ClarkWhere to play: Android and iOSWhile Niantics post-Pokmon Go track record hasnt been the most consistent, Monster Hunter Now shows the company at its best, with a refined combat system, simple matchmaking, great monster variety, and extensive character upgrades. Granted, those upgrades are part of a monetization setup that gets a little heavy-handed, but if youre patient, theres plenty of game here for free. And unlike in some of Niantics other games, the real-world elements dont feel tacked on, with a design that blends almost perfectly with the companys map tech, allowing you to feel like youre tracking monsters as you get outside and walk around. It all makes for a big step forward in fusing Niantics real-world tech approach with combat and exploration mechanics that can stand up on their own. Matt LeoneDeveloper: Blizzard EntertainmentWhere to play: PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, Windows PC, Xbox One, and Xbox Series XWith Diablo 4, Blizzard Entertainment set out to marry the frenetic action of Diablo 3, the deep RPG systems of Diablo 2, and the dark tone of the original game. It was an ambitious promise, to be sure, but four years and a whole pandemic after the studio announced the long-awaited sequel at BlizzCon 2019, its here, and its fantastic.But Diablo 4s marriage of tone, action, and role-playing isnt what makes it so good. In addition to all of those other things, Diablo 4 is the best launch weve seen for a new living game in recent memory.With the likes of Destiny, Anthem, and even Diablo 3, it was clear from the start that there were some nuggets of potential. But being a fan meant slogging through mountains of frustration just to taste a morsel of what youd hope those games would become. Playing these games early on was a kind of gamble.Diablo 4, however, is unlike any of those projects, because its systems were deep and nuanced from the start, enough to spend hundreds of hours growing your character. And there is already loads of content to support that kind of time investment. RGDeveloper: IO InteractiveWhere to play: PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, Windows PC, Xbox One, and Xbox Series XHitman World of Assassinations Freelancer mode, which debuted in January and puts a roguelike twist on Agent 47s globe-trotting murder-for-hire missions, isnt for the faint of heart. It demands constant improvisation, to a degree that can challenge even veteran Hitman players. Repeated failures can make it feel more frustrating than fun.But as every fan of roguelikes knows, these high-stakes experiences have the capacity to deliver a sense of exhilaration like nothing else. Pulling off multiple daring kills, hiding the evidence (or going out with a bang), and trying to make it out alive with all the gear you brought into the mission its tense and thrilling, every time.Every move you make could be your last one; all it takes to ruin a flawless run is a single ill-considered plan, just one seemingly minor slip-up. With the abyss of failure forever yawning beneath 47, playing Hitman Freelancer can feel like tiptoeing along the top of a barbed-wire fence. The exultation of safely making it to the final exfiltration point, having defeated a crime syndicate after completing a lengthy series of dangerous missions, is a high Ill keep chasing again and again. Samit SarkarWhere to play: Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, Windows PC, Xbox One, and Xbox Series XI dont love to cook. For me, its more a necessity than anything else. So its not often that a piece of media or anything, really leaves me with the feeling that I need to make something, to spend time in the kitchen reveling in the tedium of chopping and the sizzle of onions frying. Venba elicited that urge, reminding me that food is not just something to keep me alive, but something to be cherished. Venba is a cooking game that focuses on an immigrant family thats moved from India to Canada. Food transcends the story by way of simple cooking minigames as I move through the chapters of main character Venbas life moments that switch between painful and heartwarming. Venba packs as much heart in its one-hour playtime as games 30 times its size. N. CarpenterDeveloper: Sad Owl Studios Where to play: PlayStation 5 and Windows PCAt the heart of Viewfinder is a magic trick that never gets old: You take a photo of the environment and paste that perspective into the game world to create a bridge or reveal a needed trinket. The experience of seeing reality distorted by your hands so easily is nearly on the level of thinking with Portals for the first time. Youll ponder a solution for minutes, sure its impossible and that the developers must have made a mistake, before youre struck by a eureka moment like a lightning bolt.The games lesson on perspective extends to its narrative, which, much like the photos you use to manipulate the world, contains multitudes. Though its told in fairly typical video game-y audio monologues that you uncover from the games trippy environments, the journey is powerful and topical. Just as differing perspectives can allow for unique solutions, they can also obscure truths that lead us to deny the reality thats right in front of us. CAWhere to play: PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, and Windows PCHumanity looks like a modern art project, recalls memories of early PlayStation oddity, and comes (in part) from the team behind game of the future Rez Infinite. But its most impressive feat is the way it gradually shifts genres, starting as a classic puzzle game, then taking on tower defense and shoot-em-up traits as it evolves into an all-out war. Think Braveheart, with a shiba inu general leading a troop of faceless, brainless low-polygon figures against a group of angry, lightsaber-wielding, even lower-polygon foes. Its the kind of design subtlety that stays in its lane yet builds on you, and before you realize it, ends very differently than it began. Much like humanity itself? MLWhere to play: Android, iOS, Nintendo Switch, and Windows PCSquare Enix has plenty of mega-franchises to fill its time (and its coffers). This year, we have new entries for Octopath Traveler and Final Fantasy, along with new Dragon Quest and Kingdom Hearts games in the not-so-distant future. Dayenu!And yet, the publisher cant help itself from bombarding us with surprising, interesting, sometimes great, often good-enough experiments. In 2022, we got an English-language remake of lost gem Live A Live, the surprisingly enjoyable tactical RPG DioField Chronicle, a bonkers Final Fantasy spinoff featuring the musical stylings of Limp Bizkit, and a pair of oddball card games lathered in lore from gamings best weirdo. This year, we have the Avengers of rhythm games, Theatrhythm Final Bar Line, and Paranormasight: The Seven Mysteries of Honjo, an excellent riff on the visual novel penned by a beloved storyteller whose best series has never appeared in the U.S.What should you know about Paranormasight before you play? Well, ideally nothing. Why else would I be eating up my word count?But if you insist: Its a mystery and a horror mystery at that. You travel to 1980s Japan, specifically the Tokyo neighborhood of Honjo, located not so far from the modern Tokyo Skytree. Its hard to imagine that modern landmark ever towering alongside these streets, which are filled with shadows and lethal curses.If you have even a passing interest in urban legends, spooky folklore, cults, and deadly rituals, or youve enjoyed series like Zero Escape and Danganronpa, Paranormasight is an easy recommendation. And if you just enjoy a good yarn and have access to basically any screen and $15, then youre a perfect mark too. It runs as well on console and PC as it does on iOS and Android, so dont fret about where you play, just do so and soon! Before Square Enix stops investing in all these oddities. Chris PlanteWhere to play: Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, Windows PC, Xbox One, and Xbox Series X[Ed. note: Marvels Midnight Suns was released in 2022, but it just barely missed the cutoff for our best video games of 2022 list, so its eligible for our 2023 awards.]I know what youre thinking: Another licensed Marvel game? Come on, right? But hear me out. I played Marvels Avengers, too, and this isnt that. It might seem like its going to be at first, because Midnight Suns makes the grave error of introducing Iron Man and Doctor Strange as its tutorial characters, and these two might just be the most irritating characters in the entire video game. (I have beaten the game, so I am allowed to make this call.) You must press on and give Midnight Suns time to win you over. Because it has so, so much more to offer than it may appear in its first few hours.Picture the romance and humor of Fire Emblem: Three Houses, combined with the high-stakes tactical battles of XCOM 2 thats what Midnight Suns becomes in its mid-game and endgame. Its a card-based strategy game, and each hero has their own customizable deck. I started off favoring Captain Marvel, Magik, and Blade, simply because their moves and hilarious dialogue kept me entertained, but I soon realized that every single character has something exciting or unexpected to bring to the battlefront. Over 100 hours later, Ive leveled up every single character and played all the main story missions and an unknowable number of optional missions, and Im still not sick of this combat or the kooky cast of characters that grows all the time (shoutout to the Deadpool DLC).No matter how sick of Marvel you might be, give Midnight Suns the chance to win you over with its clever combat. And once youve gotten hooked, you might find yourself sticking around to chuckle at Wolverine attending Blades book club (yes, thats a storyline in this game). Its worth your time, and you can take that from me, a person who again spent over 100 hours on it. Maddy MyersWhere to play: Android, iOS, PlayStation 5, and Windows PCI have been a... pretty die-hard Genshin Impact player since launch. Ive rolled for every character, grinded out all of said characters, 100%-ed the exploration, completed every quest did all the stuff that would burn anyone out. Honkai: Star Rail is Hoyoverses answer to the Genshin Impact burnout.The slower-paced turn-based combat, the ability to auto-battle (if your teams are strong enough), and the smaller maps make it the perfect daily game for me to funnel my interest into without feeling exhausted. The characters are fun, flashy, and easy to latch onto. Should I main the sneaky but elegant Kafka, who uses damage-over-time skills to whittle her opponents away? Or should I use the brooding Blade, who unleashes huge attacks at the cost of his HP? Ah, I guess Ill let my wallet decide it is a gacha game, after all. JLWhere to play: Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4, Windows PC, and Xbox OneIn Chants of Sennaar you climb up a kind of Tower of Babel, and your job is to decipher the distinct language each group of people speaks, eventually aiming to translate fluidly from one language to another. You do so by matching pictographic symbols the characters for each language to images of the nouns, actions, and concepts in a large dictionary-style book. It sounds complicated, but its wonderfully fun because the mechanics are so simple. You explore the isometric world which is rendered in a gorgeous cel-shaded style witnessing interactions between cultures and attempting to puzzle out the meaning of their written words. The game parcels out words for you to assign meaning to in little packets, to avoid overwhelming you. By the end, youll have translated numerous languages, and scaled your way to the top of the tower. Perhaps youll even change the tower itself. N. ClarkWhere to play: Nintendo SwitchFew games from 2002 hold up as well as Metroid Prime, and the remastered version of the game which was surprise-dropped during Februarys Nintendo Direct proves that Samus Arans first-person adventure is still worth experiencing, whether its for the first time or (in my case) the fourth. Retro Studios take on one of sci-fis most famous intergalactic bounty hunters controversially took her out of the 2D puzzle-platformer realm that made her famous (although Metroid Fusion also came out in 2002 a gift for the 2D Metroid purists which may also be why Fusion joined Nintendo Switch Onlines catalog shortly after Prime Remastered was released). By placing the player inside Samus helmet, Metroid Prime recontextualized the bounty hunters relationship with the hostile planets around her. As we donned Samus suit and explored strange planets, aggressive alien lifeforms could now get right in our faces, forcing us to dodge, strafe, and roll (in morph ball form, naturally) using all three dimensions. No longer would we sit back and watch as Samus dipped her toe into a pool of lava; in first-person, as molten fire spread over our visor, wed really feel the pressure to find that Varia Suit upgrade. And perhaps most importantly, from behind Samus visor, we gained the ability to scan our enemies and environment, collecting and translating logs from the long-dead Chozo aliens who once inhabited these now-hostile places.The world of Prime is harsh and unrelenting. (Save points will, at times, be quite far from one another.) But its worth buckling down and pushing through the pain points to discover this worlds secrets. M. MyersWhere to play: PlayStation 5, Windows PC, and Xbox Series XShadow Gambit: The Cursed Crew may very well be the most bittersweet entry on this list. It is, for my money, one of the best games to be released in 2023. It is also the swan song of Mimimi Games, one of the most underappreciated studios making games throughout the last decade. Mimimi announced its planned closure only two weeks after releasing its final game. This makes The Cursed Crew its swan song. It is also the teams magnum opus.Set in a tropical world of zombie pirates, religious fanatics, and talking ships, The Cursed Crew sees you traveling freely across an archipelago as you revive your undead crew, deploy them on dioramic worlds constituting some of the finest level design in video games to date, and dispatching enemies with a mixture of tactical stealth and supernatural abilities. Taken at a distance, this mixture is undeniably niche. But seen up close, The Cursed Crew is as potent a creation as weve seen since 2016s Shadow Tactics: Blades of the Shogun or 2020s Desperados 3, which respectively established and cemented the studios brilliant design chops. Ill miss Mimimi but I cant imagine a better farewell. M. MahardyDeveloper: Black Salt GamesWhere to play: Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, Windows PC, Xbox One, and Xbox Series XDredge is a Lovecraftian horror experience masquerading as a simple fishing game.The open ocean is filled with terrible creatures that can and will damage or destroy your boat. And each of the major islands you visit comes with its own evil sea beasts that must be dealt with if you want to progress the story or fish peacefully. Dredge ultimately tells a dark parable about loss, and how obsession can own you if you arent careful.But what makes Dread so special and one of the best games of 2023 is that under its foreboding story and twisted environments is a fishing game that grows more complex with every outing, centered around an upgrade system that feels amazing to progress through. As the dangers around you grow, so too does your ships capabilities. And by adventuring into battles metaphorical and otherwise with the seas most dastardly critters, youll always come out on the other side with some upgrades that allow you to catch even better fish and build an even bigger boat.By the time youve spent 10 or so hours with Dredge, youll feel like a commercial fisherman who just happened upon something bigger and more foreboding than they could have imagined and that, perhaps, youve stared deep into some kind of black abyss, only to escape forever changed. RGWhere to play: PlayStation 5Final Fantasy 16 kicks ass. The newest mainline entry in the long, winding series takes you on a lavish, unadulterated Game of Thrones-esque adventure. You play as a broody Clive Rosfield, a young man whose lifes work is to protect his little brother, Joshua. The story begins when Clives life takes a turn for the worse and he vows to destroy the monster who ruined his and his familys legacy. Developed by Creative Business Unit III, Square Enixs internal team behind the MMORPG Final Fantasy 14, 16 leans into patchwork territories of fantasy genre fare. There is palace intrigue, a whole lot of sex, and endless war between nations. But the developers then sprinkle in Final Fantasy elements like mother crystals, dazzling kaiju fights between summons (known as Eikons in this iteration), and of course, Chocobos. The quality of the story in this long and linear character-driven RPG waxes and wanes, but the action combat is among the best Ive ever played. The gameplay grips you from the very beginning as Clive smoothly dashes, parries, and swings his giant sword and varied magic with a dazzling amount of style. The gameplay didnt just help me stick with the game, but instead allowed my excitement to bubble over every time I took on a new mission. Ana DiazDeveloper: CD Projekt RedWhere to play: PlayStation 5, Windows PC, and Xbox Series XLike the best DLC, Phantom Liberty does as much to expand on the base game as it does to reframe it. Alongside the sweeping Patch 2.0, which revamped Cyberpunk 2077s role-playing progression systems, improved its enemy AI, and course-corrected a litany of other details, Phantom Liberty also adds a whole new district to the dystopian world of Night City, complete with its own spy-thriller storyline.The resulting Cyberpunk 2077 is not an entirely different beast than the one that was released in 2020, but it is a more evolved one. It delivers on the promise of building a hacker-samurai in a neon-infused open world replete with futuristic heists, daunting choices, and striking characters. Phantom Liberty and Patch 2.0 may not completely erase the memory of CD Projekts initial botched release, but they come pretty damn close. Three years after we first set foot in Vs shoes, Cyberpunk 2077 has finally justified the hype. M. MahardyWhere to play: PlayStation 5, Windows PC, and Xbox Series XWith The Last of Us on HBO and Resident Evil 4 back in the conversation, its already a banner year for survival horror. Motive Studios Dead Space remake is no exception. Following in the footsteps of Capcoms aforementioned title, the original Dead Space brought the third-person-action focus of Resident Evil 4s formula to a deteriorating ship in outer space. In the vein of Event Horizon, Sunshine, and Alien, Dead Space was a paragon for sci-fi horror in a confined and claustrophobic setting. Its remake has brought that same vision to gorgeous new life, bringing quality-of-life changes and underappreciated updates (it has made several previously useless weapons into viable tools in protagonist Isaac Clarkes arsenal), making it hard to imagine ever going back to Visceral Games phenomenal original. M. MahardyDevelopers: Square Enix, AcquireWhere to play: Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, and Windows PCThe first Octopath Traveler was one of those games that was as enjoyable to play as it was painful: enjoyable because so much of it kicked ass, but painful because so much of it dragged the positive aspects down. In other words, it stood on the precipice of excellence, but couldnt quite cross the line.Octopath Traveler 2 leaps across that boundary.

In place of the original games repetitive level design, monotonous narrative structure, and sometimes awkward characterization, the sequel demonstrates an expert ability to challenge your expectations at every turn. Yes, your general goal is still to recruit eight playable characters (hence the name) and follow each of their separate plot threads to their respective conclusions, participating in turn-based battles and side quests along the way. But said plots vary greatly from character to character, and if you so choose, you can see a handful of characters through several major plot points before recruiting the whole gang. Octopath Traveler 2 finely toes the line between that comfort food-esque repetition of the best JRPGs, and the subversive nature of great genre storytelling. M. MahardyWhere to play: Nintendo Switch and Windows PCYou could describe Dave the Diver as a fishing game and a restaurant management simulator, and thatd be correct. But that would also be underselling the game, and understating things quite a lot.Diving into the mysterious Blue Hole, Dave spends the first two quarters of his day swimming deeper into the colorful abyss, discovering both sea life and a story thats equally absurd and earnest. When youre not picking up sea urchins or spearfishing sharks, Dave is assisting the rest of Dave the Divers cast of characters his sushi business partners, a community of seafolk, an anime-obsessed weapons expert, and a pair of dolphins. At night, Dave slings sushi and pours drinks at the restaurant, frantically running back and forth between clearing dishes, delivering sushi, and refilling the freshly ground wasabi. Between all that, Daves harvesting rice and vegetables on a farm, curating a hatchery, racing seahorses with mermaids, and taking down a suspicious group masquerading as environmental activists. Somehow, theres even a well-done rhythm video game starring one of those anime idols that the arms dealer loves that makes perfect sense.It really shouldnt work; I cant imagine another game where all these disparate ideas coalesce so seamlessly. But Dave the Diver would feel less complete without any one of them. It makes for such a compelling loop, and a consistent advancement of the games story, that I kept finding myself in that one more day mindset, eager to jump back into the ocean for one more go. N. CarpenterWhere to play: PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, Windows PC, and Xbox Series XIt turns out, Capcom is good at remaking games.The original Resident Evil remake all but set the bar for the format in 2002, with sleeker controls, more nuanced graphical details, and whole new areas to explore in the iconic Spencer Mansion. The Resident Evil 2 remake changed the entire perspective of its source material without sacrificing the focus on horror and survival. Resident Evil 3s remake, as forgettable as it was, still brought the design conceits of the original game, warts and all, to a modern audience. And now we have Resident Evil 4 and what a remake it is.In this reimagined version of the 2005 action-survival-horror game, Capcom has managed to erase many of the blemishes on one of the most beloved games in the series, if not all time. The remake is full of new flourishes and extra details in each of its three sprawling areas, making it less of a remake and more of a dramatic reinterpretation. It has also managed to add even more survival elements to the originals action-centric combat, without sacrificing the camp and cheese that have made it such an enduring presence throughout the years. A lesser game would have shrunk in the face of such intimidating source material, but the Resident Evil 4 remake achieved the balancing act in spades. M. MahardyWhere to play: PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, Windows PC, Xbox One, and Xbox Series XNothing else feels like Armored Core.The giant robot you pilot heaves with the weight of a six-story building but flies into the sky as nimble as a hummingbird. You can skate along the ground, rocket into the air, and change directions in the blink of an eye. You are agile, resilient, deadly.With your hands tightly gripping the controller, you can unload four different weapons at once, weapons youve picked out of an armory that could rival a small nation. You target, aim, and fire while moving faster than a fighter jet, dodging streams of missiles, arcs of gunfire, bazookas, and flames.There have been many, many games in the franchise, but none have reached the heights of Armored Core 6: Fires of Rubicon. The levels have never had such ruined beauty, the enemies have never been as satisfying to fight, and the characters have never been more endearing. An ingenious new game plus mode packs the games story with surprises while you continue to build out your arsenal.Perhaps the decades-long wait for a new Armored Core game is part of the reason, because the lessons FromSoftware learned creating and popularizing Dark Souls are evident here. Bosses now put you through dastardly skill checks in classic Soulsian fashion. Many of them tower over the landscape, making you, the pilot of a giant robot, feel small. These set-piece fights are some of the most thrilling moments you could play in a game this year. They certainly have some of the most memorable lines.But Armored Core 6 doesnt just get badass one-liners stuck in your head; its gameplay lingers, too. When you watch videos of it in motion, it simply makes you want to play it, to feel that movement, that motion, for yourself.This isnt just because the series energetic action is unique, but because you decide exactly how your robot feels: how quickly its missiles get a lock, how fast its generator recharges, how far you boost when you swing your laser sword. Swapping components around as you scrutinize competing weight and power requirements is an engaging puzzle all its own. You become intimately familiar with a screen-filling spreadsheet of stats because all of those numbers add up to something that feels real. Tactile. Earned. Because nothing else feels like Armored Core. CAWhere to play: PlayStation 5, Windows PC, and Xbox Series XBoulderers, or rock climbers who dont use safety gear but also dont ascend very high, have a word for the routes they climb: problems. The idea is that, since youre never that far from flat ground, completing your route is more a game of mind over matter. You dont finish a problem. You solve it. Like a puzzle.When it comes to rock climbing, Jusant just gets it in a way few other games if any have.To be clear, Dont Nods Jusant isnt technically about bouldering. (A climbing game where youre never more than 12 feet off the ground would have precisely zero stakes.) But its an apt conduit for the spirit of bouldering, in that every route you traverse is a problem to solve. By alternating triggers to dictate which hand goes on which handhold, you navigate these problems. Environmental hazards and a pesky stamina wheel make things progressively trickier. Youre always clear on your heading. (Its up.) Figuring out how to get there is another matter.Even in games that prominently feature it, climbing is often functional, at best whether its Link refusing to acknowledge handholds are a thing or Nathan Drake snapping to ledges with a level of magnetism only thought possible at CERN.Jusant is the first and only game Ive played that gets it that sees the inherent grace in the sport and portrays it on the screen, not as a means of getting somewhere, but as the reason to go there in the first place. Ari NotisDeveloper: Insomniac GamesWhere to play: PlayStation 5Marvels Spider-Man 2 builds on the successes of the first game, both narratively and in its immensely satisfying gameplay. The games story takes a familiar Spider-Man narrative that of friends turned foes and adds new twists, building out compelling villains (and demanding ones) in the process. The game also sheds its predecessors odious Spider-Cop bits in favor of establishing a deeper connection between the Spider-Mans and their city, giving the game room to breathe while further immersing you in its heroes worlds and struggles.And then theres the gameplay. For my money, there are few experiences more enjoyable in gaming than swinging around New York City with Spider-Man. It was fun in the early 2000s, and its still fun now. And with a bigger map to explore (and wings to fly, if you so choose to use them), theres basically no limit to the fun you can get up to. The deployment of two protagonists is seamless Peter and Miles play differently, bringing their own stories and desires to the table and switching between them is effortless. Its also the rare open-world game that doesnt feel bloated with missions and side quests, instead leaving you wanting more Spider adventures. PVWhere to play: PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, Windows PC, and Xbox Series XAfter getting knocked down by a self-inflicted punch, no less with the feeble Street Fighter 5, Capcom has hit the gym and returned stronger than before with Street Fighter 6. We rightfully called its latest Street Fighter the ultimate fighting game toolbox in Polygons review; from a robust single-player mode to solid online modes to a cast of memorable new and returning World Warriors, Street Fighter 6 is Capcom at its most confident.For newcomers and the lapsed Street Fighter fan wary of jumping into online play, Capcom delivered World Tour mode, a robust, single-player, RPG-lite beat-em-up in the vein of Segas Yakuza games. In World Tour, players hit the streets of Metro City where, hilariously, everyone in town not only knows how to fight, but relishes impromptu fisticuffs with strangers. Its a matter of local pride. The streets of Metro City are part training grounds, part beginning of a silly, epic worldwide adventure where you learn the basics of Street Fighter 6. Untethered from any serious game narrative canon, Street Fighter 6 lets players of all skill levels and stripes have fun in World Tour mode.Street Fighter 6s approachability extends to its innovative new control scheme, an addition called Modern Controls. While the six-button layout from the very first Street Fighter is still available, after multiple attempts at giving players a simplified control scheme, Capcoms finally cracked it. Modern Controls are not only comparatively easy to grasp theyre pretty viable competitively.But its the finely honed one-on-one fighting mechanics, governed by a streamlined set of meters and flashy new moves, that give Street Fighter 6 its longevity. Thanks to a well-populated social space called the Battle Hub, and a rock-solid online infrastructure, theres a robust community of other Street Fighter fans to battle against on a daily basis. Add a compelling new roster of characters led by classics like Ryu, Zangief, and Chun-Li, and dazzling newcomers Marisa, Manon, and Kimberly, and its clear why Street Fighter 6 is one of the best games of 2023, regardless of genre. Michael McWhertorDeveloper: Geometric InteractiveWhere to play: Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, Windows PC, Xbox One, and Xbox Series XI think Im still trying to wrap my head around Cocoon. On the surface, the game appears to have a relatively simple premise: You play as a buglike creature that picks up and places glowing orbs to solve puzzles. However, this is where Cocoon hides its brilliant twist. Each orb functions like a world unto itself, which you can explore, or from which you can extract a new power for your bug. As you collect orbs, you thread together puzzles that will have you weaving in and out of realms in a truly mind-bending experience. Created by Geometric Interactive, a studio founded by developers who previously worked on Limbo and Inside, Cocoons brain teasers unfold in a dark sci-fi world. The game goes light on a story that combines biological and mechanical philosophies alike. As you make your way through, youll hear the hum of engines and the moist squishy sounds of unknown creatures moving flesh. Cocoon has one-off puzzles that are downright brilliant, but what makes it truly great is the sum of its parts. The pacing of each section feeds smoothly from one challenge to the next. Like the best puzzle games, Cocoon presents instances where an earlier brain teaser might serve as an unsaid tutorial that teaches you a step for a later, more complicated puzzle. Cocoon presents challenges, but its also just a joy to play. It is one of the most memorable puzzle games Ive ever played. ADDevelopers: Nintendo EPD, EightingWhere to play: Nintendo SwitchPikmin 4 is like the perfect amalgamation of Pikmin games. There are fun mini-dungeon caverns, but theyre not filled with terrible bomb traps. Theres new types of Pikmin, but not at the cost of getting rid of the old ones. And theres a dog now, and he helps corral the Pikmin and make operations run even more efficiently.The entirety of the game is a whimsical joy to play. Even as I completed every Dandori Challenge (which actually got pretty damn hard!) and collected every item, it never became a drag or a grind. It actually might be impossible to be angry while playing this game. Hearing the little Pikmin hum as they carry a huge peach (that they call a mock bottom) across the map is enough to melt anyones heart. In fact, I was pretty sad when the game ended. I could command these little guys and my puppy friend to collect things forever.All told, the game is beautiful, and, thanks to its quasi real-world setting, it makes me see my own world differently theres something special to be found everywhere, even in the tiniest corners. Maybe all my little trinkets go missing because a little guy needs it to return home. He can have it.Even if youve never played a Pikmin game before, this game is good, and its the perfect place to start. (And then you can play all the rest of them, which have been conveniently ported to the Switch!) JLWhere to play: Nintendo SwitchWhen you activate Super Mario. Bros. Wonders delightful whimsy via the aptly named Wonder Flower the game becomes more than a 2D platformer. Super Mario Bros. Wonder is a musical, a quiz show, a race, or a hidden object game. Pipes become inchworms, Piranha Plants burst into song, and Yoshi becomes a goddamn dragon. Wonder is the first side-scrolling 2D platformer in the Super Mario Bros. line since New Super Mario Bros. U in 2012, and its both a faithful rendition of the classic format and a complete reinvention of the series irresistible formula.Each and every level in Super Mario Bros. Wonder finds some new way to delight and surprise. Its constantly introducing new ideas, enemies, and wrinkles, only to pull back on them just when its on the verge of becoming rote. Like everything else in the Flower Kingdom, a few enemies shift and change in bizarre ways when the Wonder Flower is activated, like Hoppo, the bouncy, round hippo equivalent that grows in size to create chaos in one of Super Mario Bros. Wonders many mesmerizing levels.All of this weirdness, combined with Nintendos platforming expertise, makes Super Mario Bros. Wonder an entrancing romp alone, with friends, or with strangers online. This is the freshest Mario has felt in decades, and it bodes well for the iconic plumbers 2D future. N. CarpenterDeveloper: Remedy EntertainmentWhere to play: PlayStation 5, Windows PC, and Xbox Series XTheres a body in the forest with a hole in its chest. The forest, like the body, is also missing its heart, and a woman must find both. In each, there are pages. This is a story, broken into pieces, we learn. One that ended badly before. One that will likely end badly again. Will you still put it together?Alan Wake 2 is full of words but few are in order. It is set in places of confused geography, full of people who dont quite belong, in rooms that might be different each time you enter them. Alan Wake 2 is wrong, and you must make it right, if you can.Remedy Entertainments assured masterpiece is less about stories and more about dreams the way they can slip from frightening to absurd at a moments notice, about how we can get lost in them, learning from our experiences or succumbing to insecurities. How video games can mimic their shape, or lack thereof.It is about repetition, and the way we find meaning in stories and people and places by returning to them over and over, wondering if we changed or they did.In Alan Wake 2, everyones story is happening at once, branching out in endless directions, and we might not know the genre until its too late. Its a hypertext mystery, an ergodic game that molds itself to an audience raised online, though few computers are in sight. Its a game for a world suspended in an endless second act forever wars, live services, franchises, infinite scrolls endlessly searching for a conclusion. JRDeveloper: Larian StudiosWhere to play: PlayStation 5 and Windows PCBaldurs Gate 3 hit at the perfect moment. Despite the handful of truly great computer role-playing games that have been released since the early 2000s (Larian Studios itself made waves with its Divinity: Original Sin series in 2014 and 2017), the genre has largely remained a modern niche. But times have changed: Dungeons & Dragons has undergone something of a renaissance, thanks to actual-play series like Critical Role and Dimension 20. Whats more, Larian had two years of player feedback with which to build its new masterpiece. That masterpiece launched in August, and it garnered the kind of attention that catapults a game from niche interests to widespread acclaim.Old CRPG fans finally came home, the Mass Effect generation has discovered a new kind of RPG to sink its teeth into, and D&D fans have found an exceptional digital version of their beloved tabletop game to play alone or with their party in co-op. Like a good DM, Baldurs Gate 3 teases out story beats that feel personal to you, cleverly luring you into experiences that seem like they wouldnt make sense in anyone elses campaign. Every act delivers quiet, memorable character moments and anxiety-inducing battles. All of these situations feel organic, allowing Baldurs Gate 3 to replicate, perhaps as closely as a video game can, Dungeons & Dragons best feature: the intoxicating sense that anything could happen at any moment.The best games this year told their stories in interesting ways, be it ignoring your superpowers to bike through your old neighborhood in Queens, a musical number, or fractured memories hidden in a puddle. But Baldurs Gate 3 takes experimental storytelling to another level. Every choice and every new direction is a simple success, fail, or crit away. One roll of the dice after another can take you all the way from a crashed Nautiloid to the city of Baldurs Gate itself. In a year filled with beautiful stories and powerful moments, its the spinning whir of Baldurs Gate 3s d20 that defined video game storytelling in 2023. RGWhere to play: Nintendo SwitchPrincess Zelda is missing. Ganondorf has returned, somehow, and hes really hot. So an age-old hero in a green tunic has to step in. We all know the beats how could you possibly make that into anything new?Tears of the Kingdom definitely didnt seem like it was poised to make that happen: a sequel to one of the most popular Zelda games ever made, originally conceived as DLC, and built on the same map. Yet, it is something else entirely. Its not just that Breath of the Wild was a rough draft for Tears of the Kingdom its that the entire Zelda series was a collection of stepping stones that led in winding, influential pathways to this wacky, wonderful, and thoroughly new world of Hyrule. I mean, Ultrahand alone. Just absolutely slathering pieces of wood in what amounts to magical Gorilla Glue and watching in wonder as the games physics engine roars to life in response. I went into Tears of the Kingdom thinking I wouldnt build much Id just follow the story and get through it; I left feeling like a genius engineer, building all manner of bizarre contraptions (but mostly long bridges) to sail through skies and trundle over mountaintops.I still catch my breath remembering that first time diving deep into the darkness of the Depths the amazement I felt upon discovering a whole other world underneath the one I knew, filled with skeleton horses and gloom-splattered Bokoblins.And I remember when I realized where Princess Zelda really was and then, many hours later, learning where she really was.I never wanted to stop playing Tears of the Kingdom. I did stop, eventually the year of 2023 in video games has spoiled us all with hearty meals and sweet desserts but I never stopped thinking about it. Every now and then, I picked my Switch back up to seek out another Lightroot, or solve another shrines puzzle, until there were none left. And then Id just wander, collecting ingredients, talking to Great Fairies, imagining the next adventure.Tears of the Kingdom feels like someone holding my hands very close as they lean in to whisper, with eyes twinkling, Can I tell you something? The ride was wild; I laughed, I cried. And I cant wait for the next time, when its completely different. M. Myers Which PC games impressed professional reviewers the most during the past year? This page contains Metacritic's official list of the 20 best-reviewed titles released between January 1, 2023 and December 31, 2023 ranked by Metascore. Games must have at least 7 reviews from professional critics to be eligible for inclusion. By Darryn Bonthuys on December 20, 2023 at 6:56AM PST GameSpot may receive revenue from affiliate and advertising partnerships for sharing this content and from purchases through links. 2023 is set to go down as an all-time great when it comes to the most memorable years in gaming. It's not often that you get so many months of high-profile and critically acclaimed releases, but this year has delivered a seemingly endless line of AAA blockbusters and smaller games with impressive ideas at their cores. We're taking a look at the games that got a review score of 8 (which we deem "great") or higher on GameSpot over the course of the year.That's not to say that the games that scored below that threshold (or that we didn't review) aren't worth playing. But we've nonetheless got a hefty list to go through--games of an incredibly high standard that are spread out across a wide variety of genres and themes.This list has five games that got an ultra-rare 10/10 score from GameSpot. At the same time, dozens of other 2023 releases excelled in their efforts to provide unmissable entertainment on various platforms. The list below is encouragingly diverse as well, as between the usual high-budget blockbusters and sequels, there are titles with more intimate stories to tell, lower stakes, and innovative approaches to their respective genres.For more, the GameSpot Reviewcast will give you a behind-the-scenes tour of how our reviewers came to their conclusions.Simply put, Alan Wake 2 is Remedy Entertainment's greatest game yet. No small feat for a developer which has produced all-time classics like Max Payne, Control, and the original Alan Wake, but this sequel builds on those successes to create a masterpiece of scares and storytelling. A killer combo of dual campaigns that complement one another, fan-pleasing storybeats, and a fusion of multimedia ideas that propel the series headlong into survival-thriller territory, Alan Wake 2 is an illuminating experience for the ages.Read our Alan Wake 2 review. Available on PC, Xbox Series X|S, and PS5.Some of the most ambitious games around boast of giving their players an unparalleled level of freedom, but Baldur's Gate 3 rolls a D20 on that concept and scores a critical hit with its execution. It's that focused approach to giving players the tools they need to be the best adventurer that they can be, along with a memorable cast of characters, unique playthroughs, fantastic combat, and at least one instance of punting a squirrel into bloody giblets, that makes Baldur's Gate 3 so impressive.Read our Baldur's Gate 3 review. Available on PC and PS5.Pity any developer looking to remake a classic video game, because Resident Evil 4's remake is a hard act to follow. The original game has a permanent seat on any list counting down the greatest of all time, but it might have to give up its spot to a stunning remake that doubles down on the survival-action aspects of its predecessor and masterfully rebuilds the experience into a genre-defining adventure. Both respectful of its past and brimming with new and well-executed ideas, Resident Evil doesn't get better than this.Read our Resident Evil 4 review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4, and Xbox Series X|S.The first Blasphemous game, released in 2019, was an atmospheric but flawed fusion of metroidvania and Souls-like influences. Visually, the game left an impression, and developer The Game Kitchen used that foundation to build a significantly improved sequel. All that visual splendor inspired by the terror of the Spanish Inquisition, religious paintings from that era, and oppressive architecture have been kept intact and enhanced with fine-tuned combat, more engaging traversal, and wonderfully challenging platforming sections. It's a sinfully good time.Read our Blasphemous 2 review. Available on PC, Switch, PS5, and Xbox Series X|S.Developer Geometric Interactive has made a big splash with its debut game, Cocoon, as this intricate blend of puzzles and riddles pulls at your gray matter with captivating content. Not just a fun collection of brain teasers, Cocoon combines fantastic sound design and art with some of the tightest level design around to deliver a subtle but brilliantly told story.Read our Cocoon review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4, Xbox Series X|S, Xbox One, and Switch.The original Dead Space still holds up as one of the best sci-fi horror games of all time, and EA's Motive studio could have easily slapped on a new coat of 4K paint and called it a day. Going above and beyond, Motive's comprehensive remake doesn't just retain the edge-of-your-seat terror of 2008's horror-genre savior, it builds on it with thoughtful upgrades, a constant sense of dread that keeps you on your toes, and gnarly graphics that'll make you want to keep a bucket nearby.Read our Dead Space review. Available on PC, PS5, and Xbox Series X|S.A sequel in name only, Final Fantasy 16 continues the franchise's rich tradition of reinvention, delivering an action-packed saga for the ages. Backed up by excellent voice-acting, a rousing score, and one of the best pooches in recent memory, Final Fantasy 16 goes all-in on its premise to create a game that is awe-inspiring with its Godzilla-sized boss fights and surprisingly mature with its emotional rollercoaster of a story.Read our Final Fantasy 16 review. Available on PS5.For anyone looking to step out of the shadow cast by Persona 5, the next best thing is a trip into the past with Persona 4 Golden. The 2008 PlayStation 2 game has aged well, and with a welcome number of improvements to its interface and combat, you wouldn't think that it's 15 years old. Compared to Persona 3's incredible storytelling and Persona 5's flashy action, Persona 4 Golden hits that sweet spot for style and substance, and this new version makes it a must-have for fans of the series.Read our Persona 4 Golden review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4, Xbox Series X|S, Xbox One, and Switch.Returnal is developer Housemarque at its arcade-inspired best, an unrelenting score attack of intense action, bullet hell, and endless resets until you nail that one perfect run. On PC, the game is even better, a technical masterpiece that takes full advantage of that platform to deliver a gorgeous graphical upgrade to an already terrific game. Compared to some of the less-than-stellar PC ports that needed months of post-launch fine-tuning, Returnal sets the bar for how well a PlayStation Studios game should play on PC from day one.Read our Returnal review. Available on PC and PS5.The video game market is awash with RPGs designed to appeal to the nostalgic part of your brain, but Sea of Stars is more than just a fantasy adventure that looks like it belongs in an SNES library. Beyond those 16-bit influences, Sea of Stars is a surprisingly modern game at heart that puts a fresh spin on evergreen gameplay mechanics. Engaging combat and beautiful pixel-based art direction combine to create a charming time capsule.Read our Sea of Stars review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4, Xbox Series X|S, Xbox One, and Switch.The final game from developer Mimimi, Shadow Gambit: The Cursed Crew is a delightful and spooky swashbuckling adventure. A healthy mix of eccentric characters, satisfying stealth puzzles, and gameplay where you'll have to think several steps ahead if you don't want to be sent to Davey Jones' locker, Shadow Gambit is humorous, sometimes macabre, and endlessly satisfying. After all, nothing is better than a plan that comes together beautifully, and that's something that Shadow Gambit excels at.Read our Shadow Gambit: The Cursed Crew review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4, and Xbox Series X|S.If you had a musical number featuring the Greek gods of old as a GOTY contender on your bingo card, then we might want to ask you for some winning lottery numbers. Stray Gods: The Roleplaying Musical is a story with heart and incredible musical sequences, one where you feel like you have genuine agency in the story and every consequence feels like the reward that you deserve. It naturally has a banger of a soundtrack, and if you're looking for an auditory delight, this visual novel of emotional melodies is not to be missed. Just put a yoga mat down before you play, lest you tap a hole in the floor thanks to the catchy beats.Read our Stray Gods: The Roleplaying Musical review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4, Xbox Series X|S, Xbox One, and Switch.Compared to its predecessor, which needed a lot of post-launch work to get into fighting shape, Street Fighter 6 came out swinging when it entered the 2023 ring. Arguably the most influential brand in the fighting game genre, Street Fighter 6 is a masterpiece of tight combat mechanics, luxurious visuals, and a thriving multiplayer scene. More than that, the game is an incredibly approachable brawler thanks to its detailed tutorials and modern control schemes that encourage players to learn its various intricacies. And when you've got a game that encourages more people to play, everyone wins.Read our Street Fighter 6 review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4, and Xbox Series X|S.A brilliant puzzle game that'll stretch your mind and possibly give you an existential crisis with its themes of avoidable apocalyptic destruction, The Talos Principle 2 expands and improves on the original game in every way possible. A thought-provoking journey through logical fear, The Talos Principle 2 asks hard-hitting questions through a series of rooms that remain constantly engaging with the conundrums that they throw at you.Read our The Talos Principle 2 review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4, and Xbox Series X|S.Are there any classic horror franchises that haven't dipped into the pool of asymmetrical multiplayer? While we're still waiting for that dedicated Nightmare on Elm Street game, The Texas Chain Saw Massacre is a thrilling example of thinking outside the box and then cutting it to ribbons with a Poulan 245A chainsaw. TCM uses a 4v3 setup, a format that works brilliantly to instill a sense of tension and dread in players looking to escape Leatherface and his family. Respectful to the source material and anchored by a rewarding gameplay loop, this game feels like a horror movie coming to life.Read our The Texas Chain Saw Massacre review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4, Xbox Series X|S, and Xbox One.Thirsty Suitors buttons its coat up over a number of genres, easily alternating between turn-based combat, cooking minigames, and a skateboarding simulator with artistic flair. While there's an undeniable Scott Pilgrim influence driving the experience--protagonist Jala Jayaratne has her own league of evil exes that she has to face--Thirsty Suitors puts its own spin on that idea and elevates it with a nuanced story, unique battles, and choices that feel like they actually matter.Read our Thirsty Suitors review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4, Xbox Series X|S, Xbox One, and Switch.When an Amnesia game nails the balance for palpable fear, hide-and-seek with a lethal twist, and an unnerving setting, you can expect a terrifying game that'll make you want to sleep with the lights on. Amnesia: The Bunker sticks the landing when it comes to fear, nightmarish monster designs, and a surprising amount of replayability as developer Frictional Games delivers the best game in the series since Dark Descent. Amnesia: The Bunker is endlessly terrifying and relentless with its efforts to make your smartwatch think that you're having the mother of all gym sessions.Read our Amnesia: The Bunker review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4, Xbox Series X|S, and Xbox One.From Software's return to the world of Armored Core 6 is a welcome dive into thrilling mech combat that has been influenced by the studio's work on its grim fantasy adventures over the years. While it's not Elden Ring with mechs, Armored Core 6 has still inherited that sense of challenge and aggression from its younger franchise siblings. It's a treat for the eyes, and the comprehensive mech customization aspects allow for a diverse range of playstyles in this beautifully realized revival of a classic franchise.Read our Armored Core 6: Fires of Rubicon review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4, Xbox Series X|S, and Xbox One.Avatar: Frontiers of Pandora is easily some of the best digital tourism of the year. With a vast slice of Pandora to Na'vigate and no shortage of threats on the horizon, this alien world is a treat to explore, and alongside a robust crafting system, fun movement mechanics, and gorgeous cinematics, there's a compelling adventure at the heart of this game.Read our Avatar: Frontiers of Pandora review. Available on PC, PS5, and Xbox Series X|S.It's been nine years since the last Castlevania game, and even longer since the last game that had a more traditional format. Enter Dead Cells, one of the best roguelites on the market, and a Castlevania expansion that marries the gameplay of both franchises into a riveting and cohesive package. A match made in heaven, this Dead Cells makes the most of this crossover and has a plethora of Castlevania Easter eggs littered throughout its new biomes. We don't know when Castlevania will make a return to its whip-cracking roots, but until then, this is the next best thing for fans of the Konami franchise.Read our Dead Cells: Return to Castlevania review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4, Xbox Series X|S, Xbox One, and Switch.One of the best games of the year starring those immortal pain-in-the-necks known as vampires--sorry, Redfall--El Paso, Nowhere is a rollercoaster of action and trippy stages once it hits its stride. Woven between every bullet fired are Max Payne-inspired action sequences, and levels that look like they belong in a mid-'90s music video directed by David Fincher, is an intimate tale of love at the end of the world. Inspired by the past but not beholden to those influences, this gun-toting blockbuster has a fresh take--and stake!--on romance and some of the most exciting gunplay of the year.Read our El Paso, Elsewhere review. Available on PC, Xbox Series X|S, and Xbox One.PlayStation VR2 hardware has had some innovative games added to its library since launch, and Humanity is another fascinating use of virtual reality hardware to create something unusual and captivating. Also playable and every bit as worthwhile without VR goggles strapped to your head, this game puts you in the role of a Shiba Inu dog who guides hordes of spirits across geometric constructs is an audio-visual treat for the senses. Its gameplay is always evolving and its spatial puzzle premise is excellently executed.Read our Humanity review. Available on PC, PS5, and PS4.The Last of Us Part I gives Naughty Dog's modern-day classic the glow-up it deserves, but it's not just a visual upgrade here. Meaningful changes to the gameplay, tighter combat, and several quality-of-life improvements create a better version of an already excellent game, and with a comprehensive suite of accessibility options, a far more approachable one as well. The PC version has also been substantially improved after a less-than-optimal launch, and if you've yet to experience the game, this is now the definitive version on two platforms.Read our The Last of Us Part 1 review. Available on PC and PS5.Ever dreamed about building your own car and racing it down a hot stretch of tarmac? That's the gist of Lego 2K Drive: Open-world kart-racing for Lego fans, Lego 2K Drive is clearly inspired by games like Forza Horizon. A well-constructed racing game at heart, the playful Lego side gives the game a colorful identity and the robust building tools will keep you behind the tiny plastic wheel for hours.Read our Lego 2K Drive review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4, Xbox Series X|S, Xbox One, and Switch.Will we ever get a Bloodborne sequel or an improved version of the original From Software game? Only Sony knows, but for now, Lies of P is a stunning alternative when all flights to Yharnam are canceled. Undeniably influenced by the iconic Soulsborne, Lies of P is a very loose retelling of The Adventures of Pinocchio that is grimly gorgeous to look at thanks to the stunning Belle Epoque-infused art direction. While Bloodborne is a clear inspiration, Lies of P avoids being derivative by adding a weapon system that rewards experimentation, aggressive enemies that you'll need flexible tactics to overcome, and a sublime world to explore.Read our Lies of P review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4 Xbox Series X|S, and Xbox One.The Kazuma Kiryu's days might be numbered, but if Like a Dragon Gaiden: The Man Who Erased His Name is any indication, he'll be going down swinging. A tale that weaves itself between the events of Yakuza: Like a Dragon and next year's Like a Dragon: Infinite Wealth, The Man Who Erased His Name is a short but sweet entry in the franchise. It still has plenty of new features to keep you engaged in its thrilling tale, serving up a predictable but enjoyable dish of drama, action, and cinematic showdowns starring the Dragon of Dojima.Read our Like a Dragon Gaiden: The Man Who Erased His Name review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4, Xbox Series X|S, and Xbox One.For years, the nuanced politics and history of Japan that formed the core of Yakuza: Ishin made its developers consider this game to be an impossible port for Western audiences. Years later, developer Ryu Ga Gotoku Studio has managed to do it, updating its samurai epic for a global fanbase. Set during the height of the Edo period, Ishin brings an all-star cast of Like a Dragon's A-list talent back for a romp through history. It's a solid remaster, the familiar faces on display will have Yakuza fans excitedly pointing at their screens, and once the story gets going it moves along with almost unstoppable momentum.Read our Like a Dragon: Ishin review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4, Xbox Series X|S, and Xbox One.It's an exciting time to be a fan of the League of Legends universe, as there's no shortage of ways the franchise is expanding beyond its MOBA roots. The Mageseeker is a great example, as once you get past its slow start, this adventure following Sylas combines fluid spellcasting with satisfying melee action to deliver a thrilling League of Legends spin-off. With imaginative pixelated art, an enchanting soundtrack by the always-reliable Gareth Coker, and boss fights that punch way above their weight, The Mageseeker is downright magical.Read our The Mageseeker: A League of Legends Story review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4, Xbox Series X|S, Xbox One, and Switch.Insomniac's third outing on Earth-1048 doesn't offer much in the way of innovation, but there is plenty of refinement and improvement that makes Marvel's Spider-Man 2 one of the best PS5 games of the year. Packed with tweaks that improve the art of being Spider-Man, challenging new enemies, and a story that pulls no punches, the latest Spider-Man adventure is hard to put down. Riveting to experience and a blast to play, Marvel's Spider-Man 2 is the definitive reimagining of comic book's greatest everyman superheroes.Read our Marvel's Spider-Man 2 review. Available on PS5.MLB The Show 23 could have easily been the best MLB simulator of the year by default due to the lack of competition, but this year's entry is more than just an iterative update. The gameplay might feel familiar, but the respect paid to the rich history of the sport makes for a thrilling trip through time. With the spotlight on the forgotten Negro Leagues and the new Storylines mode exploring that pivotal moment in the history of baseball, this year's game is both thrilling and educational.Read our MLB The Show 23 review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4, Xbox Series X|S, Xbox One, and Switch.For anyone looking for a more vicious slice of fisticuffs this year, Mortal Kombat 1 is more than up to the challenge of sating your bloodlust. While it's not as feature-packed as the previous game, Mortal Kombat 11, the latest from NetherRealm is a kind-of restart for the series that goes back to basics. Fun new mechanics and an unpredictable storyline pave the way for an interesting new direction in the Mortal Kombat multiverse, fatalities are wonderfully ridiculous with the amount of crimson that you can spill, and the game is loaded with Easter eggs that celebrate 30 years of the franchise.Read our Mortal Kombat 1 review. Available on PC, PS5, Xbox Series X|S, and Switch.Two Persona remasters in a single year? What a time to be alive! Released during the twilight years of the PlayStation 2 era, Persona 3 is arguably the Persona with the strongest storytelling elements, even if some of them are incredibly dated. Beyond that, this remaster still holds up pretty well and benefits from flashier visuals and gameplay tweaks that enhance its dungeon-crawling escapades and darker narrative.Read our Persona 3 Portable review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4, Xbox Series X|S, Xbox One, and Switch.The Persona games have traditionally been complex tales with mature themes, and for Persona 5 Tactica, Atlus has delivered a game with a powerful message wrapped inside of an adorable art direction. While there are still complex themes to explore in this spin-off, Persona 5 Tactica offers a brighter and more lighthearted experience starring the Phantom Thieves, as well as tactics-based combat that rewards cunning players who make the most of this game's new systems. Plenty of thought and care went into crafting a game that combines the storytelling of Persona with fresh ideas, elevating this adventure into a must-have game for Persona 5 fans.Read our Persona 5 review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4, Xbox Series X|S, Xbox One, and Switch.If Resident Evil 4's remake takes an already excellent game and makes it even better, then its Separate Ways DLC takes a forgettable expansion and transforms it into an essential add-on. Starring Leon Kennedy's favorite frenemy, Ada Wong, this DLC adds to the brilliance of Resident Evil 4 with a few new gameplay ideas, reworked environments, and a story that complements Leon's journey. It's not a rehash of what has come before, but rather a fun extension with its very own identity.Read our Resident Evil 4: Separate Ways review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4, and Xbox Series X|S.With over two decades of entries, where does one start when they're looking to discover the worlds of Star Ocean, Square Enix's long-running JRPG series? Veteran fans consider 1999's Star Ocean: The Second Story to be the pinnacle of the series, and more than 20 years later, that beloved game has received a remake for modern systems that captures the retro feel of its PS1 incarnation while refreshing it with new battle mechanics and technical improvements. It's the definitive version of one of the best Star Ocean games of all time, a revamped adventure that expertly balances between nostalgic charm and modern-day upgrades that transform it into a more dynamic experience.Read our Star Ocean: The Second Story R review. Available on PC, Switch, PS5, and PS4.While the PC version might leave a lot to be desired from a performance standpoint, there's otherwise a lot to love about Respawn Entertainment's confident sequel to its smash-hit game Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order. Survivor builds on those successes with greatly expanded gameplay and a story that adds to the Star Wars mythos even if it takes place in an isolated pocket of the galaxy's Outer Rim. Lightsaber combat makes you feel like a seasoned Jedi knight, the puzzles add a welcome diversion when you're not dealing with bounty hunters, and the scale is impressive when this sequel jumps to hyperspace action.Read our Star Wars Jedi: Survivor review. Available on PC, PS5, and Xbox Series X|S.Another great remake for the 2023 history books, Super Mario RPG lives again in a package that rebuilds the beloved turn-based RPG from the ground up. While the presentation is brand-new, the foundations of this classic Squaresoft Super Nintendo game remain firmly in place. Several small quality-of-life adjustments have been made, but for anyone who missed out on the game when it was first released in 1996, now is the time to jump in and play a refreshingly lean RPG that is full of heart, charm, and wonder.Read our Super Mario RPG review. Available on Switch.It might feel like there are more Warhammer 40k games than there are grains of sand on a beach, and to stand out from the pack, it helps to offer something that hasn't been done before. Boltgun looks to the past for its inspirations, unleashing an homage to classic '90s shooters that captures all of the fast-paced action of that era and enhances it with the brutal zeal of the Warhammer 40k franchise. Every weapon is a joy to use as you turn heretics into squishy piles of organic matter and it fully leans into its source material with a gung-ho fervor.Read our Warhammer 40,000: Boltgun review. Available on PC, PS5, PS4, Xbox Series X|S, Xbox One, and Switch.There's no denying that Wild Hearts owes a lot to Capcom's Monster Hunter series, as this game features a very similar gameplay