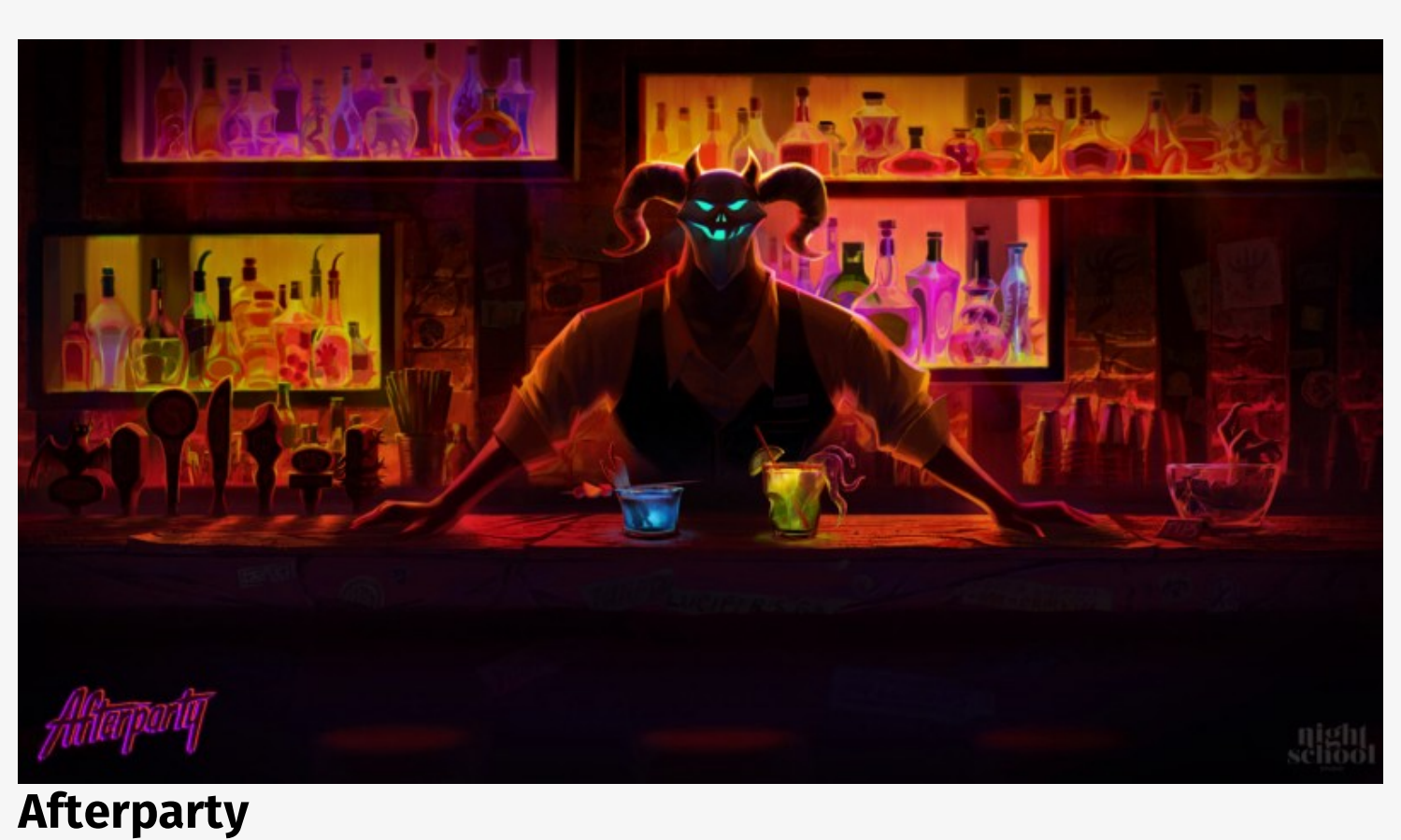
The Best Indie Games of GDC 2019

by GAME INFORMER STAFF on Mar 22, 2019 at 09:15 PM

Every year, many of the best and brightest minds in video games converge in San Francisco to attend the Game Developers Conference. Many of them bring along brand new games ready for their moment in the spotlight. From the large GDC Play area and the Indie Megabooth to specially curated showcases hosted by Nintendo and Microsoft, there is no shortage of exciting titles.

Here is an evolving list of the coolest and most interesting indie games the *Game Informer* crew saw at the conference. Come back each day, as we plan to continually update this list with more promising titles throughout the show.

Games are listed alphabetically.



Afterparty

Platform: PS4, Xbox One, PC
Developer: Night School Studio
Release: 2019

Night School Studio, the creators of Oxenfree, has a knack for creating unique premises and interesting dialogue. Afterparty is no exception, placing you right in hell. Your only way out? Outdrink satan himself. Apparently, hell is all about alcohol and what you drink impacts your personality, such as making you more aggressive or flirty. This gives you different dialogue options and opens up various paths to completing your objective.

Our demo had us trying to get into a VIP room. While there are a few different ways to do this, we chose to impress our way in with our beer pong skills. The intense match had us taunting our opponent to get them to fumble and trying our best to aim the ball to reach the cup. All the bars you visit have their own theme, one plays off the bustling Tokyo's bustling Shibuya, while another puts you in a Nebraska wasteland. The game obviously takes a more comical tone, but also explores the nature of friendship by having your swap between BFFs Milo and Lola, who just graduated from college and end up in hell due to an accident. Thankfully, you'll have your chance to drink with the devil and discover more soon enough as Afterparty launches later this year. – *Kimberley Wallace*

Airborne Kingdom

Platform: PC
Developer: The Wandering Band
Release: 2020

Take a city builder like SimCity and put it in the sky and you have a bit of an idea what Airborne Kingdom is like. In this creative sim from The Wandering Band, you manage and build a massive airship that slowly grows into a city. I started with a small town hall and only a dozen people, but as I built new houses, gathered food, and satisfied the needs of my population, I attracted more people to my utopia in the sky. However, you need to maintain balance; if you build too much on one side of the city, the whole thing can actually tip over. After building sky oars, I was able to move my city through the atmosphere, so I could meet other land-based nations. Some of these cities give you quests – like building specific districts or reaching new population limits – and when you complete these small tasks you earn new building blueprints and other technology. Airborne Kingdom is still in the early stages, but I'm already planning my own version of Columbia. –*Ben Reeves*

Barotrauma

Platform: PC, Mac, Linux
Developer: FakeFish, Undertow Games
Release: Spring

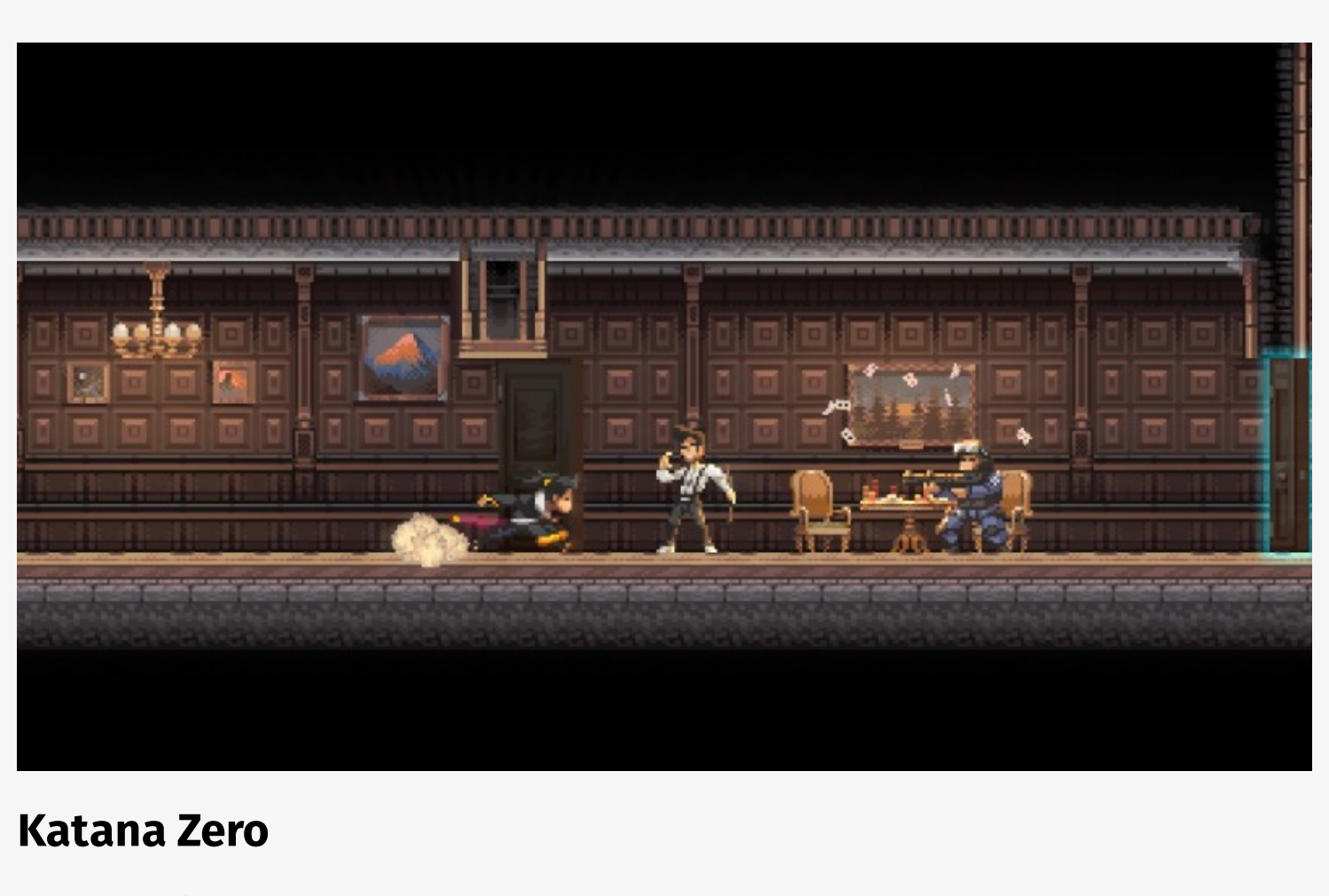
We've encountered hundreds of different types of games since *Game Informer* was formed in 1991, but we've never played a 2D cooperative online drowning simulator in space before. That's the descriptor developers FakeFish and Undertow use to explain Barotrauma. In this game, a team of up to 16 players works together to navigate the treacherous waters under the frozen surface of Jupiter's Europa moon. Each person takes assumes a particular role aboard the ship, from the captain and security officer to the electrical engineers and mechanics needed to keep the sub running. Along the journey, anything that can go wrong will. Monsters attack the ship, forcing players to man the turrets and repair hull breaches before the flooding disrupts vital operations. Crew members get sick, systems fail, fires break out, and when these hazards pop off simultaneously it makes for some frantic play sessions. –*Matt Bertz*

Dead End Job

Platform: PS4, Xbox One, Switch, PC
Developer: Ant Workshop
Release: 2019

With a great sense humor, a cool *Ren and Stimpy*-inspired art style, and an engaging gameplay loop of working your way up the ranks, Dead End Job is a game to keep your eye on. You may be an "everyday Joe" who cleans up after others, but instead of clearing areas of trash you're actually a ghostbuster, working at Ghoul-B-Gone. As the name implies, you eliminate various apparitions by blasting and vacuuming them up. You start at the bottom of the totem pole as an intern, but the better you get, the more glamorous your job title becomes. Your score rises with every baddie you defeat and citizen you rescue, allowing you to rack up the bill for your clients.

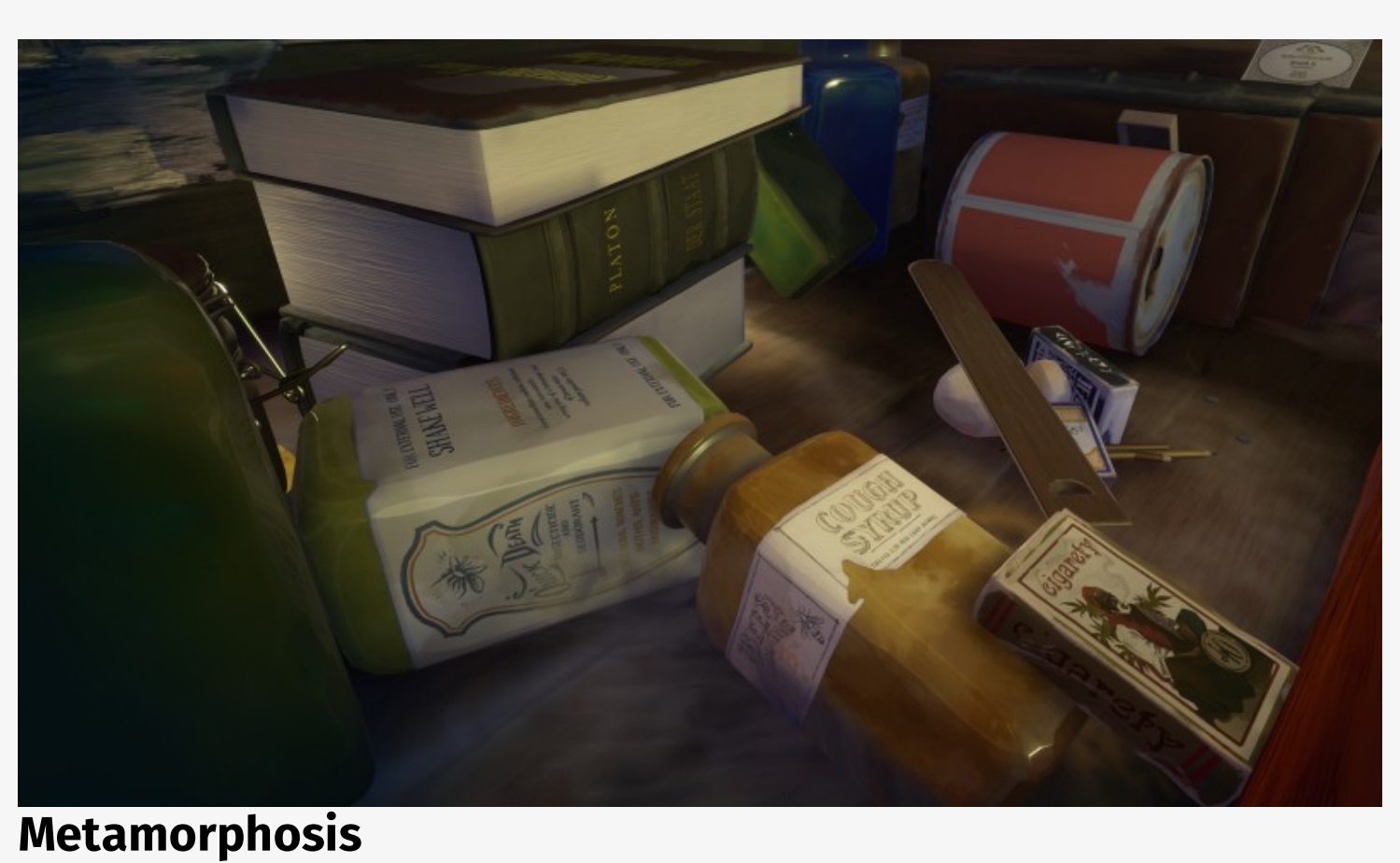
The game has procedurally generated areas that take place in offices, restaurants, parks, and more. Each stage has power-ups and health items that pop up as you defeat baddies and complete simple objectives, like find and rescue a certain amount of people. Ant Workshop wanted to find humor in the mundane, and I enjoyed what I played, giggling at every promotion title and ridiculous-looking enemy. Dead End Job will also have couch drop in/drop out co-op, so you can bring a friend along for this crazy journey. –*Kimberly Wallace*



Katana Zero

Platform: Switch, PC
Developer: Askiisoft
Release: April 18

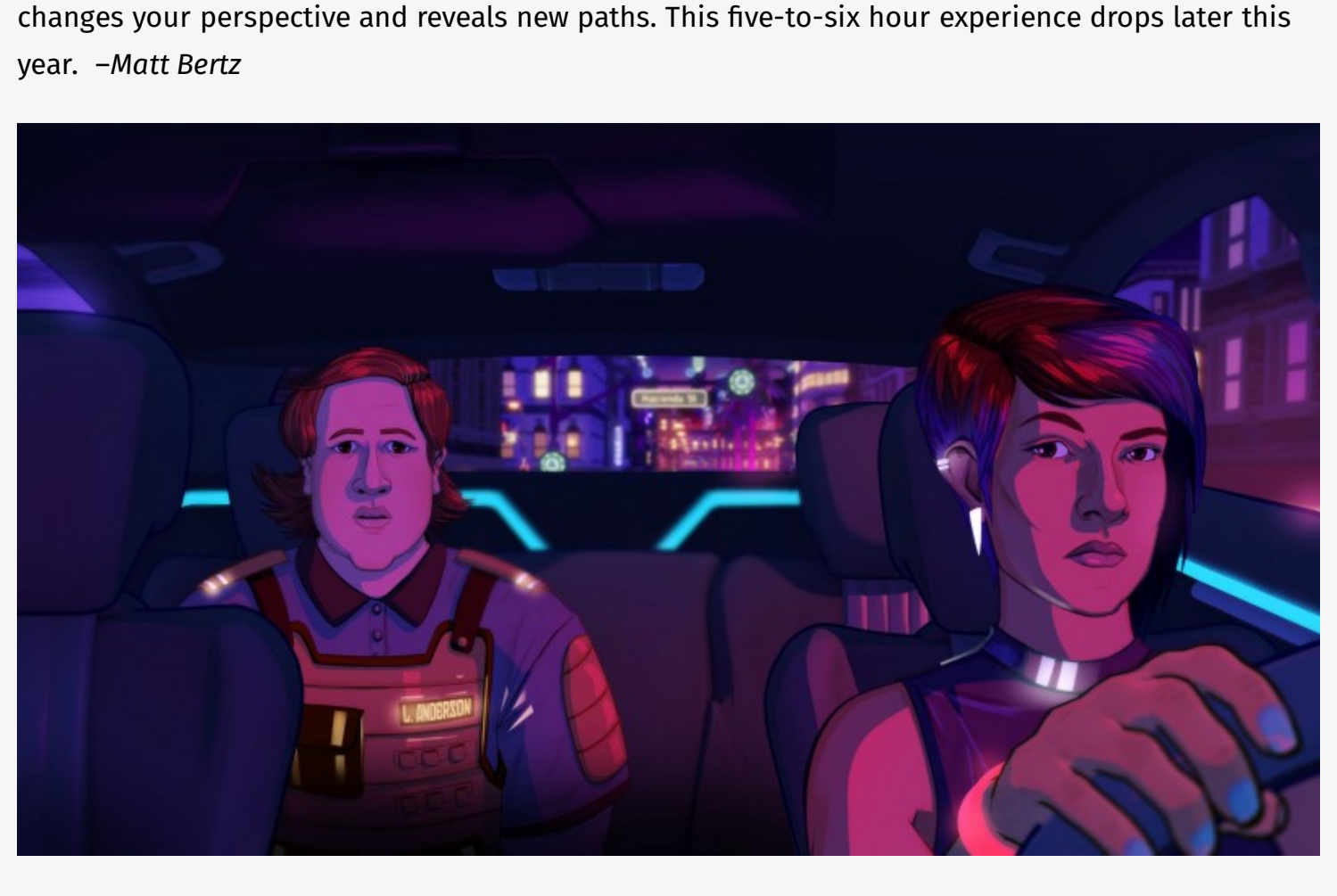
Imagine the perfect run through any one screen in a game: not a single wasted movement, kicking open doors to knock one enemy into another, hitting enemy bullets back at them, generally laying waste to whatever stands in your way in seconds. That is the idea behind Katana Zero, a fantastic 2D action game coming soon to Switch and PC. Players make their way room-by-room through hordes of enemies in a Hotline Miami-style single run. The rooms get longer and longer as you proceed and one mistake means starting the whole room over. Katana Zero also has an interesting dialogue choice system where jumping the gun can save your life or ruin your mission, so you have to think carefully before acting. –*Imran Khan*



Metamorphosis

Platform: PS4, Xbox One, Switch, PC
Developer: Ovid Works
Release: Fall

Polish studio Ovid Works is using the absurdist classic Franz Kafka short story as inspiration for a brand new puzzle platformer. You take the role of salesman Gregor Samsa, who awakens surprised to find himself transformed into a bug. You must traverse through both mundane and fantastical settings while Samsa wrestles with his existential crisis. The game focuses deliberately on the humor and absurdity of the situation, and the gorgeous, hand-drawn textures make it a treat to explore this microcosmos. Should you get stuck, you can pull up a handy overview camera that changes your perspective and reveals new paths. This five-to-six hour experience drops later this year. –*Matt Bertz*



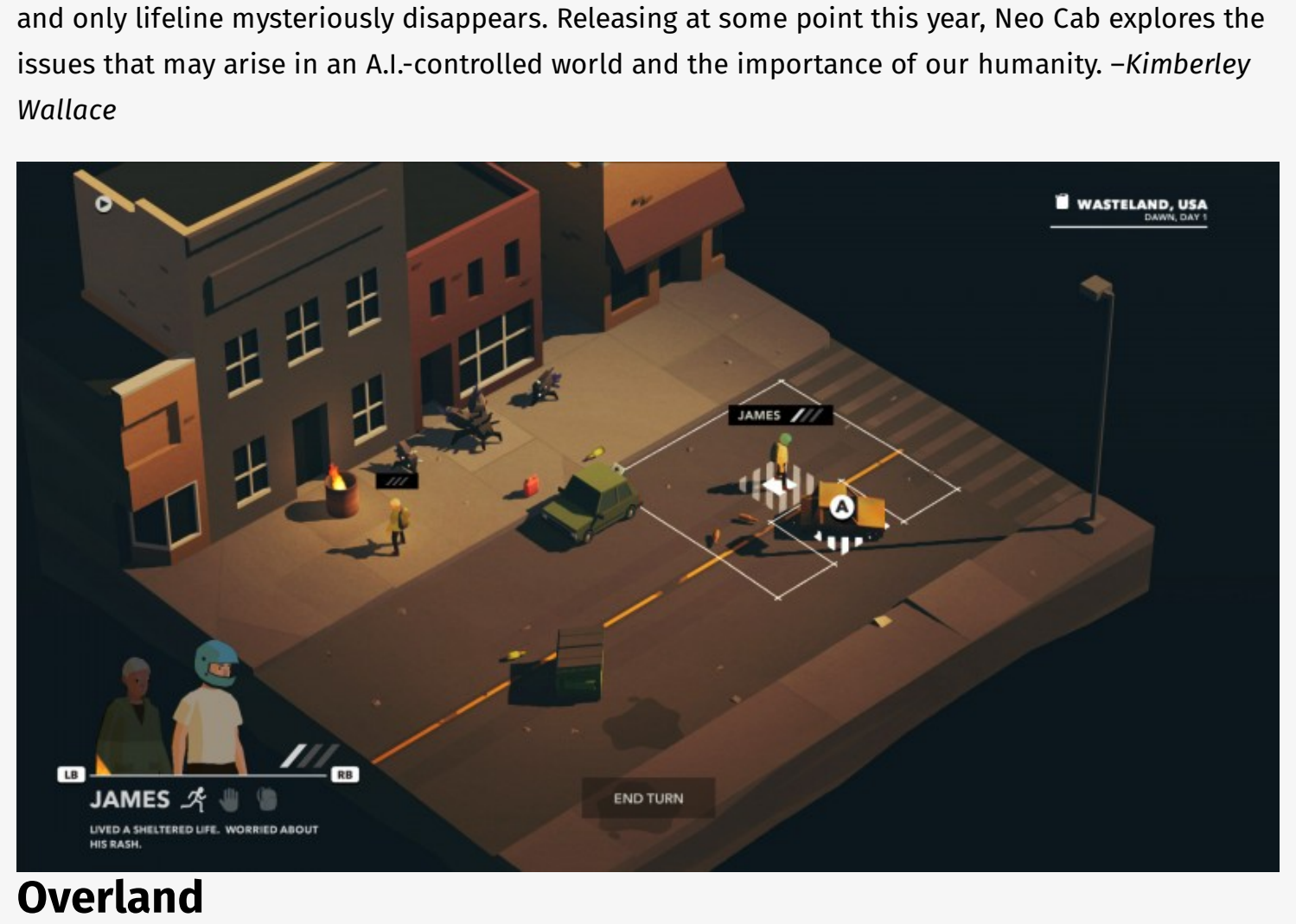
Neo Cab

Platform: Switch, PC
Developer: Chance Agency
Release: 2019

A narrative-driven game set in the near future, you play as the last human driver for a rideshare service in a world that revolves around automation. As Lina, you must pick up customers, keep your emotions in check, and do whatever you can to keep your five-star rating. Challenges also include making sure you have enough money coming in to keep your gas tank full and cover the occasional mishap, such as a parking ticket.

Balancing your own needs is just as difficult. Do you sleep to improve your physical state, or take on more rides for extra cash? Do you compromise your own feelings and opinions for the sake of pleasing a customer? These are just some of the choices in your hands and your emotional state can change the options before you. For instance, if you're depressed, you won't be able to choose the flirty option for customer conversations.

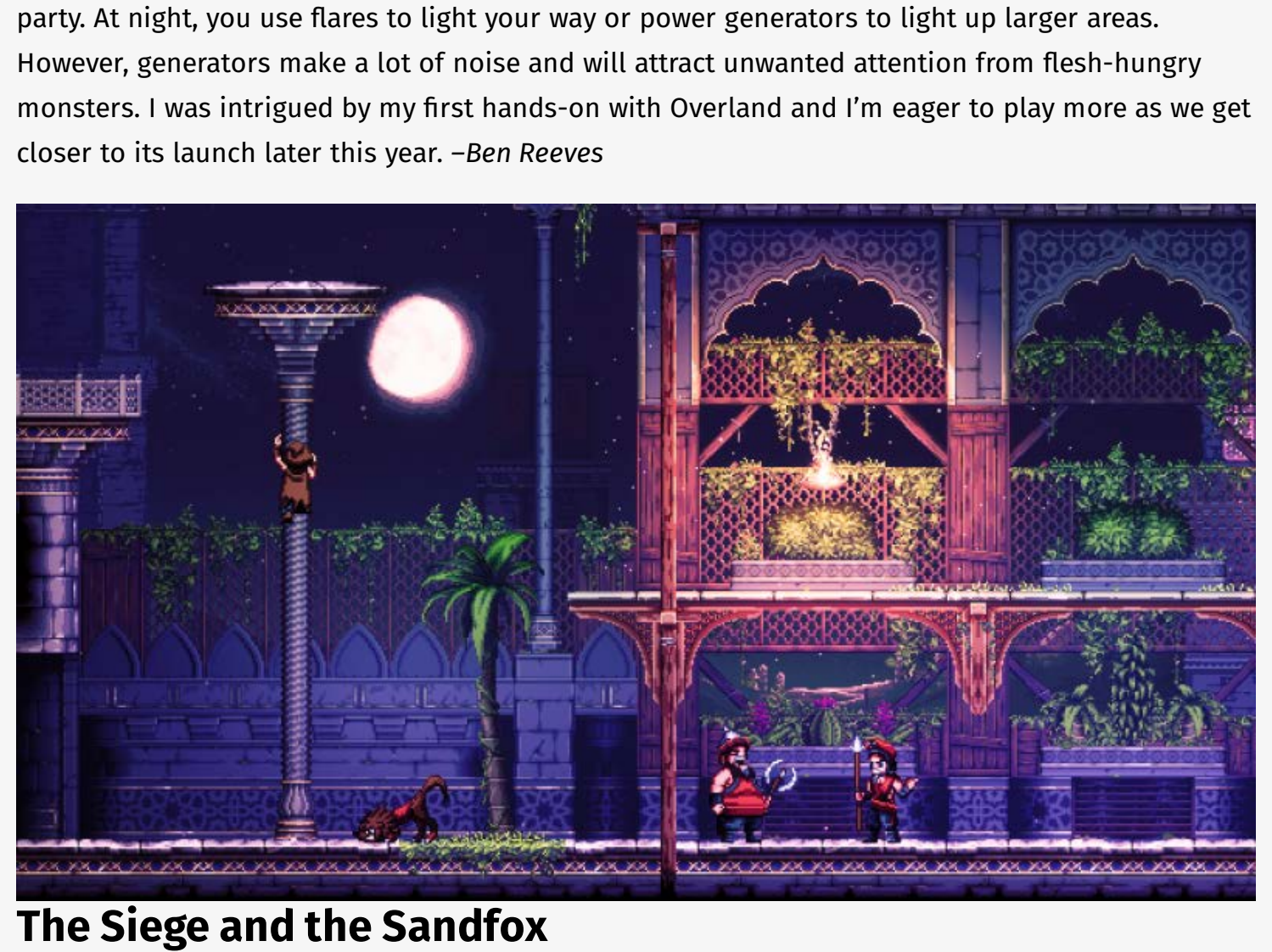
Besides making cash and pleasing your clientele, Lina also is new in town, learning more about the corrupt technologically advanced world around her, but things take a worse turn when her friend and only lifeline mysteriously disappears. Releasing at some point this year, Neo Cab explores the issues that may arise in an A.I.-controlled world and the importance of our humanity. –*Kimberley Wallace*



Overland

Platform: PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Switch, PC
Developer: Finji
Release: 2019

From the creators of Canabalt comes this new squad-based strategy game that challenges players to survive a journey across a post-apocalyptic United States. Each level is procedurally generated, so every journey is completely new. Unlike a lot of turn-based strategy games, combat in Overland is generally the last resort. Instead, you try to avoid enemy movement as you scavenge for supplies. The early levels I played featured a big focus on siphoning gas out of cars so I could fuel my car and reach my next destination. Along the way, you meet other survivors who can join your party. At night, you use flares to light your way or power generators to light up larger areas. However, generators make a lot of noise and will attract unwanted attention from flesh-hungry monsters. I was intrigued by my first hands-on with Overland and I'm eager to play more as we get closer to its launch later this year. –*Ben Reeves*



The Siege and the Sandfox

Platform: PlayStation 4, Xbox One
Developer: Cardboard Sword
Release: TBD

These days, there is no shortage of games inspired by Metroid and Castlevania, but Cardboard Sword's The Siege and the Sandfox puts a unique spin on the genre by adding stealth mechanics. You are a notorious assassin who has been falsely accused of murdering a king and then thrown into a labyrinthine network of dungeons beneath the city. You must escape your prison and find a way to clear your name, but you are clearly outmatched and need to sneak through these lushly-detailed pixel environments. As you parkour through the environment and avoid traps, you make noise, which can attract a variety of dangerous guards. This level of noise is represented by visually onscreen, so you know how much chaos you're creating. But, if you manage to sneak through dangerous areas, you can knock out guards from behind them. Cardboard Sword hasn't announced a projected release (the team was originally hoping for 2018), but the Siege and the Sandfox looks like it should appeal to fans of games like Mark of the Ninja. –*Ben Reeves*

Sloppy Forgeries

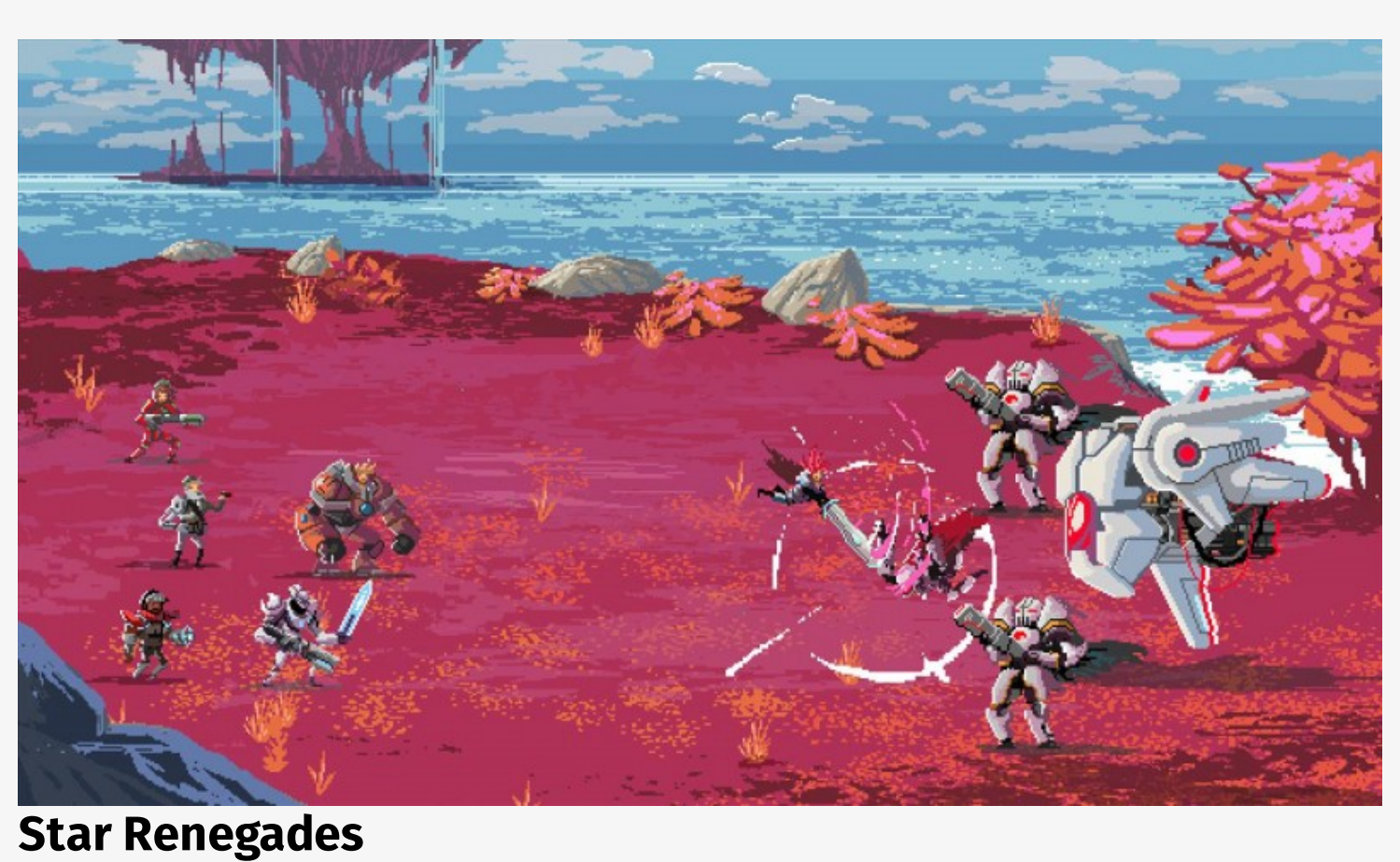
Platform: PC, Mac, iOS
Developer: Playful Systems
Release: Summer

Fans of Drawful and Draw Something have a new party game to look forward to in Sloppy Forgeries. This two-player competitive local multiplayer pits wannabe artists against one another to try and recreate famous paintings like the *Mona Lisa*, *Starry Night*, *The Scream*, *La Danse*, and *The Whistler's Mother* using a mouse or touchpad. Their forgeries are made all the more hilarious considering they must work under the constraints of a timer to replicate the masterpieces. Watching players rush to mimic these works of art is hilarious, and the game uses a pixel comparison to see who gets closest. –*Matt Bertz*

The Sojourn

Platform: PS4, Xbox One, Steam
Developer: Shifting Tides
Release: 2019

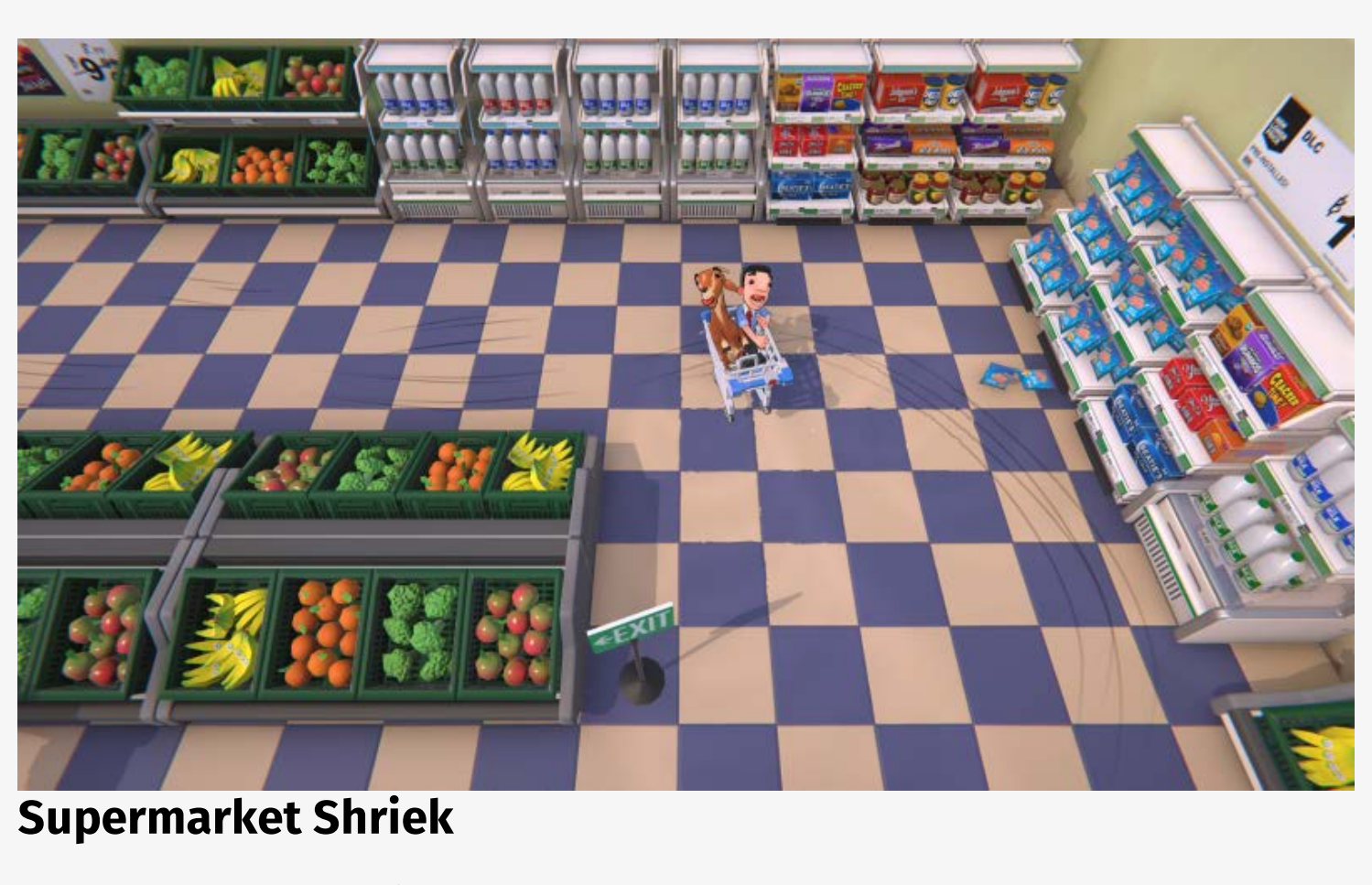
Described by its developers as a cross between games like Portal and Journey, The Sojourn is a first-person puzzler that puts players in a series of instanced puzzle rooms that play with time and space to bend your mind in ways that only magic can. In puzzle rooms, a dark magic portal gives you abilities like reassembling broken bridges or exchanging places with a statue, but the magic runs out as you take steps. So to cross a bridge, you have to take the most efficient path. To put a statue in the correct place, you have to do a lot of clever warping and inching to the correct place. The art in The Sojourn is absolutely lovely and seeing the ruins assemble from strewn about bricks in the environment is a wonder to behold. It will be interesting to see if the game keeps up its creativity throughout the entire game when it releases later this year. –*Imran Khan*



Star Renegades

Platform: PS4, Xbox One, Switch, PC
Developer: Massive Damage, Inc.
Release: 2020

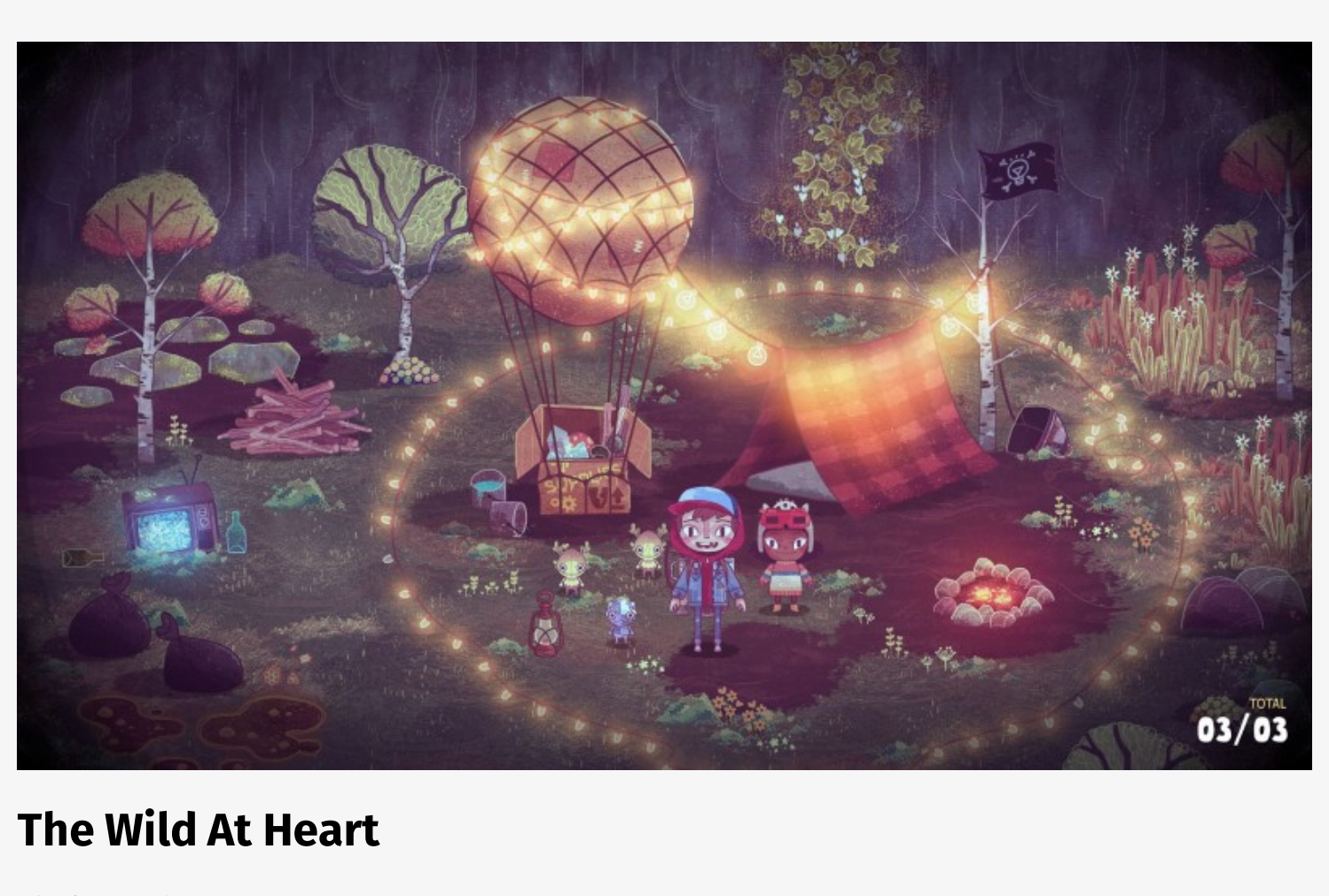
Pixel games are almost ubiquitous with indie gaming, so it takes a lot for one 16-bit inspired game to stand out these days. Star Renegades is one of those gems. Not only does Massive Damage's stunning pixel work stand out on a crowded floor, the tactical rogue-lite RPG looks to offer a rewarding challenge. You lead a ragtag squad of rebels on a quest to push back against an imperious empire. Combat plays out in a series of turn-based RPG battles. At the bottom of the screen, you always have a clear view of the enemy's next attack and how much damage they will deliver, so you can better plan your teams counter attacks and combos and know when to defend yourself. Each run is procedurally generated, but players unlock dozens of new characters during their playthroughs, which will better augment your team's survival strategy. The developer says that they were inspired by games like Dead Cells and Into The Breach, so we'll see if Star Renegades lives up to that high-quality bar when it releases early next year. –*Ben Reeves*



Supermarket Shriek

Platform: PS4, Xbox One, Switch
Developer: Billy Goat Entertainment Ltd
Release: 2019

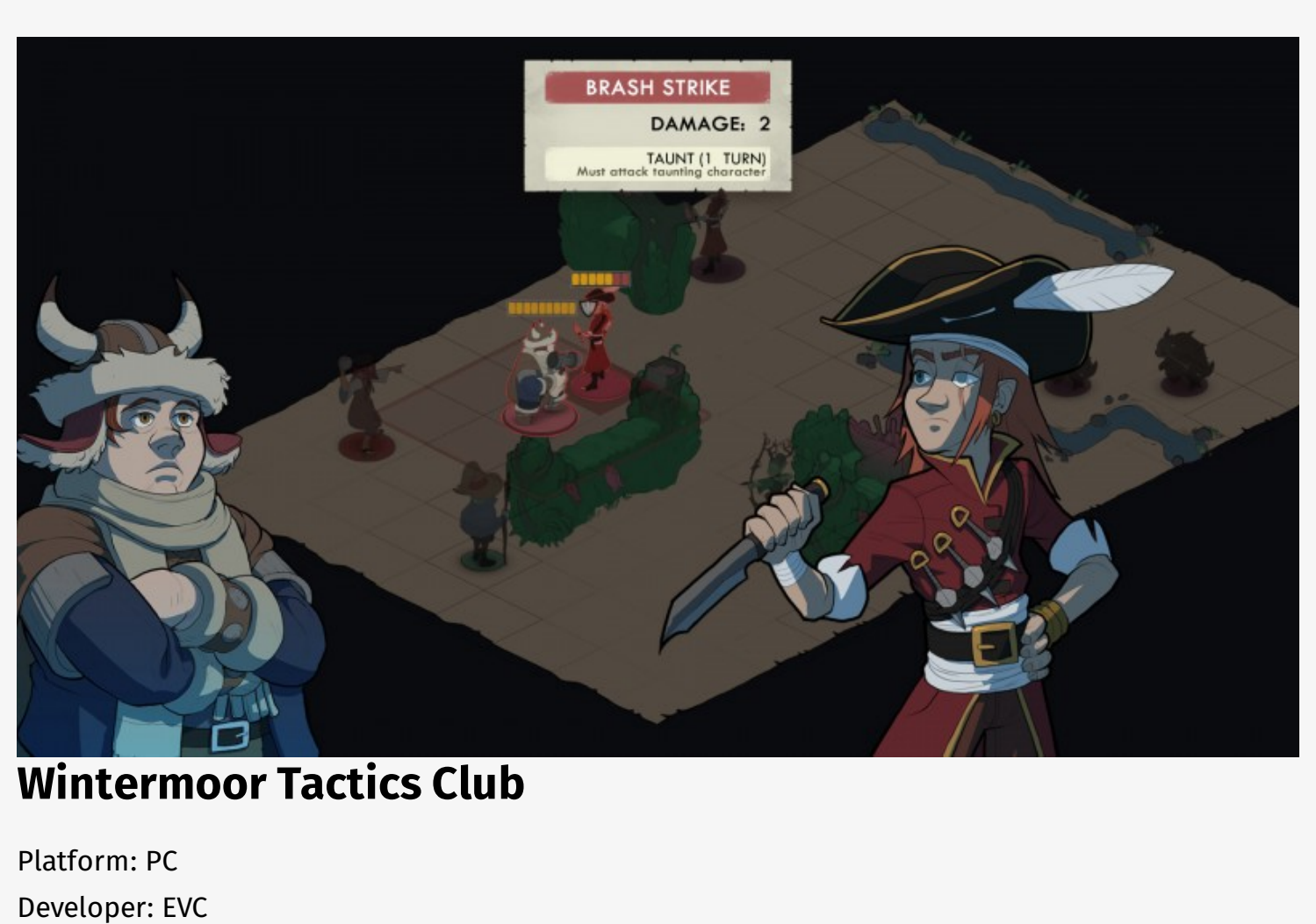
After a hapless shopper runs into a goat on a shopping cart, the odd duo is thrust into a series of oddball races and obstacle challenges. Navigating these challenges is easier said than done, however. If it wasn't obvious, Supermarket Shriek is a goofy game; your shopping cart is actually propelled by the screams of the goat and the man inside it. This odd propulsion system is also a little unwieldy because Supermarket Shriek features traditional tank controls, so when players hold down the right bumper they will turn right and when they hold down the left bumper they turn left. Naturally, holding down both buttons pushes you forward. Billy Goat Entertainment intentionally designed Supermarket Shriek's controls to be a little loose, which is where the game's challenge comes from. Obstacles within each supermarket include fire pits, swinging axes, and giant towers of baked beans. Supermarket Shriek can be played single player, but it plays better as a party game where two players each control either the right or left side of the cart. An alternative mode allows players to scream into microphones in order to control the direction of the cart, but either way you play you'll probably be screaming at your friends. –*Ben Reeves*



The Wild At Heart

Platform: Xbox One, PC
Developer: Moonlight Kids
Release: 2019

The Wild At Heart immediately catches your eye due to its beautiful, vibrant art style that is reminiscent of Studio Ghibli and Saloon films (Song of the Sea, The Secret of Kells). The game has you playing as a boy named Wake, who has a troubled home life and ends up discovering a fantastical place with magical creatures when exploring the woods. It's up to you to discover the truth of this forgotten world and its inhabitants. To help the critters and survive, Wake has his trusty Gustbuster to vacuum up objects for crafting, which lets you create everything from costumes to new tools. Similar to Pikmin, the magical beings also help him through the journey. You can chuck them at enemies, send them to collect resources, or have them break down barriers to get further into the forest. There's a childlike wonder to discovering this world and befriending its strange creatures, and we can't wait to step in it when it launches next year. –*Kimberley Wallace*



Wintermoor Tactics Club

Platform: PC
Developer: EVC
Release: 2019

Inspired by Final Fantasy Tactics and Steven Universe, Wintermoor Tactics Club is a lighthearted turn-based tactics game set in an elite boarding high school during the 1980s. Players control a group of friends who form a tabletop gaming club at the Wintermoor Academy. However, the survival of their group is threatened when every association at the school is challenged to a giant snowball tournament. These nerdy nobodies are transformed into magical heroes in a series of grid-based snowball battles. EVC is looking to deliver an experience that is very approachable but still offers some depth for strategy fans. Each hero has only two attacks, but many of their skills combo well with others, which encourages teamwork. For example, Alicia is a warrior mage who unleashes area attack spells and can set the ground on fire, and this works really well with her teammates who can push and pull enemies into the blaze. The snowball tournament kicks off later this year when Wintermoor Tactics Club releases on PC. –*Ben Reeves*

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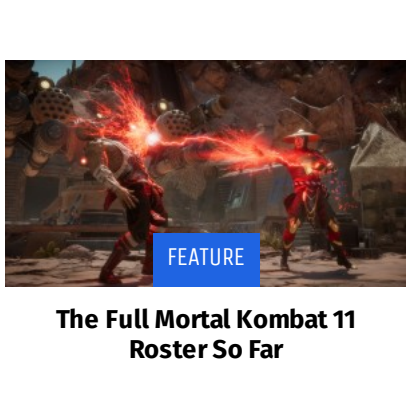

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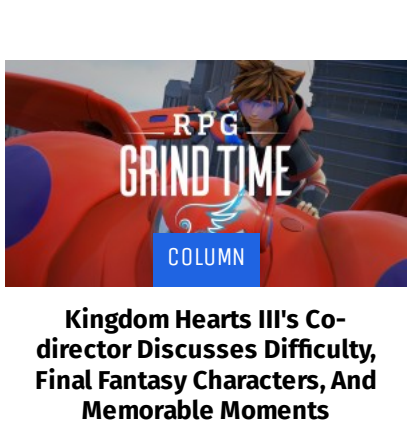

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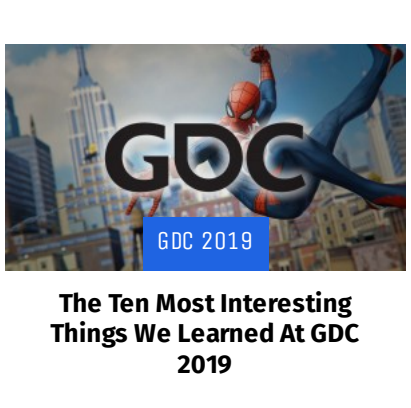

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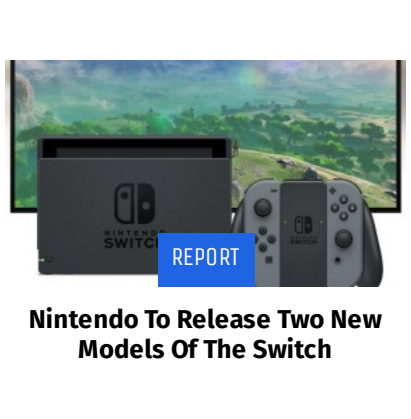

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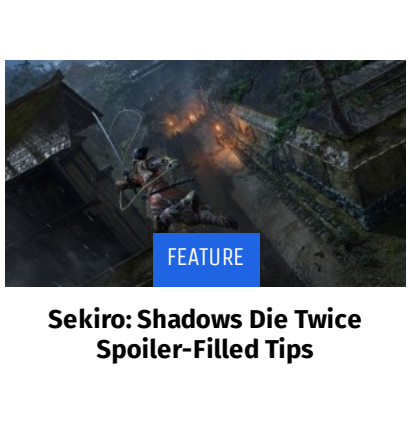

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