The 10 Best Games of GDC 2019

By Kelly Green and Dante Douglas | March 25, 2019 | 6:00pm

GAMES / LISTS

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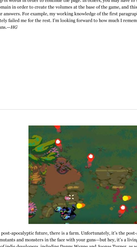
This year's GDC was once again not only a place for the industry's best and brightest to gather together and support its innovation and creativity, but also a spot to scout some of the upcoming games that will awe and inspire for the next few years to come. From Day of the Devs to the Indie Megabooth, Train Jam, AGAD GDC, Mid-Rompus, IGF and more, we visited every pocket of queer-expo space, played everything we could get our hands on, and came away excited about what's in store for the near future. Here's the best of what we found.

Wrong Box

Playing Wrong Box is such an interesting experience for me as an early childhood—I don't think I ever expected that one day I would come to view a very specific slice of internet history with such nostalgia and fondness. Maybe in a weird way I thought the internet itself would never evolve or move on from exactly where I last left it, during the time of my development that would come to define me the most. *Wrong Box* is such a nostalgic specimen of the online world I once knew, a veritable walking tour through my teenage social life, from the shiny *Stylized clip art* and the crude *pop-up ads*, to the niche web forums and tacky personal pages, each bursting with the hope and promise of random but meaningful human connection.

When I spoke with Aquina, one of the developers on the game (along with Mollyfinka), I described *Wrong Box* as surreal and he asked me what I felt was surreal about it. At first I didn't know how to answer but now that I've had time to think about it, I suppose it's the sense that the game conceives of the internet as sentient and accessible as a physical space. I found myself almost wanting to go back to the old days of AIM, ICQ and Myspace—I guess so I could remember what it felt like when the internet still seemed fun and new. Go play the full game now over at itch.io. —Holly Green

Disco Elysium



The first game from Estonian development team Studio ZA/UM, *Disco Elysium* is a dark and gritty detective game set in a modern fantasy world inspired by the architecture and politics of post-Soviet Estonia. It's a CRPG that takes inspiration from hallmarks of the genre such as *Baldur's Gate* or modern interpretations like *Shadowrun: Returns*, but doesn't have less closely to any particular title. Taking the role of a police detective who wakes up with no memory of the past few days, you use wits and cunning to explore your surrounding area and discover what on earth is causing the distorted events related to your amnesia. —*Dante Douglas*

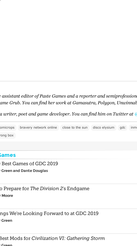
Loseswords

I find *Loseswords* fascinating because it essentially gamifies the process of reading and almost turns it into a competitive sport. In this mobile title, major works of literature have been transformed to incorporate objectives. In one chapter of a volume, for example, you may need to fill in the blanks in a specific passage with a preset group of words in order to continue the page. In others, you may have to swap out specific sentences. The development team pulled several books from the public domain in order to create the volume at the base of the game, and this adds a unique aspect to its gameplay by adding a dash of familiarity from which to draw your answers. For example, my working knowledge of the first paragraph of *Pride and Prejudice* helped me sail through the preliminary chapter. It however absolutely failed me for the rest. I'm looking forward to how much I remember of *Alice in Wonderland*, one of my favorites. This will be a great release for book fans. —*HG*

Atomicrops

Somewhere in the post-apocalyptic future, there is a farm. Unfortunately, it's the post-apocalyptic future, so most of your farming is going to have to be done in between blasting mutants and monsters in the face with your guns—but hey, it's a living. That's the premise of *Atomicrops*, a "farming roguelike" from an experienced team of indie developers, including Dave Kilgore and Joonas Turner, as well as artist Tully Dixon (whose style you may remember from *Hollrage 3*). *Atomicrops* combines an exploration-focused bullet hell roguelike experience with the fast-paced tactics of defending your farm, including turrets, cows, and upgradable weaponry. In between bouts of action, return to town and romance some locals! Or just buy more weapons. Your call. Watch out for *Atomicrops* this year on PC.—*DD*

Sloppy Forgeries



In general it feels like forgery is such an underexplored concept in videogames, which is unfortunate given how rife with potential it is from a thematic and gameplay standpoint. Luckily, there's *Sloppy Forgeries*, a game that is impressive for many reasons, but most of all because it's just dang fun. I got to play this one over at the Day of the Devs booth with former *Paste* intern Aiden Strawbun, and we were screaming out loud with enthusiasm. Players are given a public domain painting to recreate with a set of primitive art tools within a limited time. Points seem to be determined based on how much of the painting is successfully filled in and recreated, but of course, the precision of the final work is completely subjective. It's simple and hypercompetitive but also an absolute hoot. I just adore this game.—*HG*

Bravery Network Online

GLOAM Collective, the developers behind *Bravery Network Online*, were clearly inspired by Pokemon's battle style, but in a few moments of playing their game it's clear there's much more happening here. Taking the same concept of team battles with one character active at a time, *Bravery Network Online* streamlines and simplifies some of the complex guesswork of the battle genre and turns it into a fun, fierce beast, supplemented by lively, "post-post-apocalyptic" characters. A healthy dose of punk styling and bouncy music made *Bravery Network Online* a clear standout of GDC.—*DD*

Inmost

Thanks to their oversaturation on the market during the heyday of the early indie game scene, it's been awhile since I really got into a pixel 2D adventure platformer. But for *Inmost*, I have to make an exception. The game stars three separate protagonists, each with their own stories that intertwine as they progress. As they make their way through an old abandoned castle they must avoid, sneak and maneuver their way through traps and some truly terrifying enemies. Rarely does a game with this particular art style manage to do quite so much with so little. Backing a full color palette for a striking, muted black and white peppered with moody fog and lighting effects, it just looks stunning. On top of that, it's also surprisingly scary—despite the primitive aesthetic, I found myself tense and on-edge during the demo. I am truly looking forward to the full release of this title.—*HG*

Wintermoor Tactics Club

It's 1982 and you and your friends are the dorks playing tactical fantasy *RuneSapiens* at your school—but what's this? Your principal is pitting all the school clubs against each other? Suddenly, it's the *Wintermoor Tactics Club* against the world—or, at least, against the other clubs. Take control of Alicia, a young student at Wintermoor, as you navigate the day-to-day of school life between your ongoing RPG campaign and regular bouts against other clubs. Small-scale tactical battles (think *Final Fantasy Tactics*, with a healthy dash of *Into The Breach* mixed in) break up your school days, and during non-combat times you can feel free to explore Wintermoor Academy and hang out with friends and rivals in the game's deep visual-novel-styled campaign. *Wintermoor Tactics Club* is expected out this year for PC.—*DD*

Mutazione

Mutazione is just so pleasant. While the Day of the Devs demo available this year didn't seem to give me the full picture of what the game will ultimately be about, I don't know that I care. It's character and narrative driven, which very much appeals to me (the developers cite *Twin Peaks*, *Deep Space Nine*, *Grey's Anatomy*, and *Lost* as sources of inspiration) but most of all I like that there's a little garden where I can plant seeds I've collected during my journey, from rock and water and regular soil plants, and that each are unique in their own intriguing way. The story, which revolves around the mutating effects of a meteor crash on a small community and the ensuing intrigue and drama, sounds like it's right up my alley. But even if the whole game were just me collecting seeds and planting pods in a small pond, I think I'd be okay.—*HG*

Close To The Sun

Set in a world where Nikola Tesla's research and inventions were brought fully into reality, *Close To The Sun* puts you in the shoes of journalist Rose Archer as she searches for her sister, Ada, onboard the massive ocean liner *Helios*, Tesla's greatest and most mysterious creation. The ship cruises international waters, and keeps world peace by an apocalyptic threat: should any nation enter into war, the *Helios* would obliterate it. It's a dark and moody game, not as much pure horror as tense mystery, as Rose Archer makes her way onto the *Helios* to discover that all is not well onboard. Run, hide, and investigate your way through the gargantuan hulk of the ship to discover what happened to your sister…and to everyone onboard. Look out for *Close To The Sun* later this year, on the Epic Games Store.—*DD*

Holly Green is the assistant editor of Paste Games and a reporter and semi-professional photographer. She is also the author of Fry Scores: An Unofficial Guide To Video Game Grub. You can find her work at Gamasutra, Polygon, Unwinnable, and other videogame news publications.

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