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Overland Feels Right at Home on Switch, and Nine Other Indie Games We Loved at GDC 2019

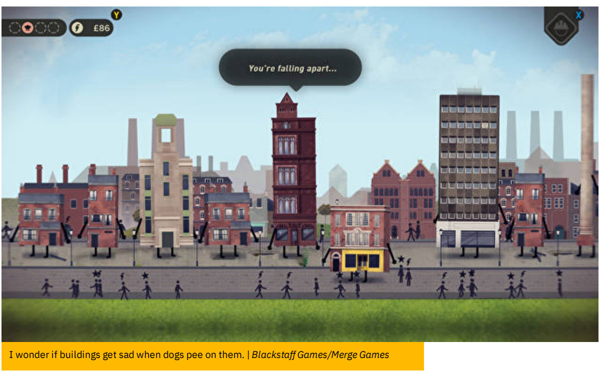
Another GDC, another year of great indies.

By Caty McCarthy
Features Editor
03/25/2019

Another Game Developers Conference has come and gone, which means we played a staggering amount of video games big and small all week long. For the time being, we'd like to focus on the smaller stuff. The games put on display on the expo floor, in behind-closed-doors demos, from developers' laptops and phones in Yerba Buena Park. The great thing about GDC 2019 is that there's a lot of games basically everywhere you look, even when you don't expect it.

GDC 2019 was no exception for cool, promising games. It was such a packed week that I even missed out on playing games like the newly announced Rad from Double Fine that was on display at Day of the Devs in the latter half of the week, and Void Bastards, which practically everyone I talked to was buzzing about. I suppose the problem with a busy week running around a conference playing games, attending talks, and chatting with developers means you can't do *everything*.

Regardless, the following are the indies that stuck out in my mind long after I played them in the past week. Most are shooting for release in 2019, while others have yet to announce a date at all. Some may never even release! Still, these were the best indies I played at GDC 2019.



I wonder if buildings get sad when dogs pee on them. | *Blackstaff Games/Merge Games*

Buildings Have Feelings Too

Platforms: PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch, PC
Release Date: 2019

Buildings Have Feeling Feelings Too is a city management simulation with a bonus touch: the buildings themselves are sentient and have their own emotions to reckon with. Rather than keeping your citizens happy, your job is to make sure your *buildings* are pleased. Some buildings get along, others don't, and managing what buildings are close to one another while theorizing the entire town is a complicated task.

The art style itself is cute too, with its Belfast-set town (which will vary to different locales too) bearing heavy inspiration. The Belfast-inspiration makes sense too, as it's where developers Blackstaff Games are from. A developer on the project told me that inspiration for the game came from walking around cities and admiring the character that's in architecture all around. It's easy to see in the happy (and unhappy) buildings that populate the cute management sim of Buildings Have Feelings Too.

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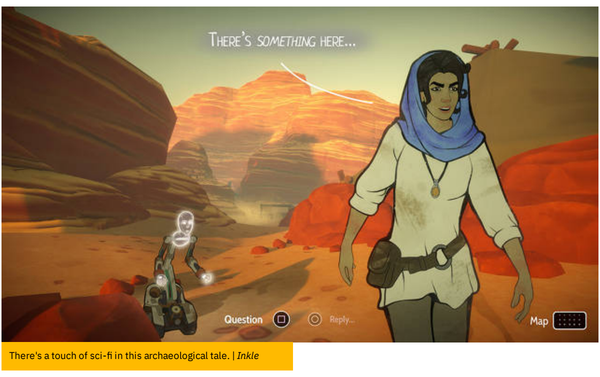


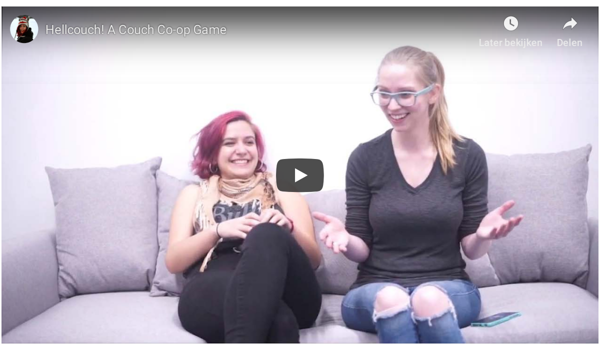
There's a touch of sci-fi in this archaeological tale. | *Inkle*

Heaven's Vault

Platforms: PlayStation 4, PC
Release Date: Spring 2019

It's been five years since 80 Days shattered conventions for narrative driven games, taking players on a rousing journey across the entire world. Since then, developer Inkle has released two more entries in the Sorcery!, a text-graphic adventure series that ended with its fourth part in 2016. Heaven's Vault is something different entirely: an archaeological adventure game about deciphering ancient languages.

Visually, it's pretty unique too. While stitching together glyphs of a long-forgotten language, you may be distracted by the hand-drawn 2D art, kind of reminiscent of comics, overlaid with the 3D environments you navigate as Aliya Elasra. **In true Inkle fashion, the story twists and turns according to the most minute decisions you make**, whether it's in choosing to trust characters you make or the detours you make on your journey investigating ancient civilizations.


Hellcouch! A Couch Co-op Game
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Hellcouch: A Couch Co-Op Game

Platforms: A Couch
Release Date: Touring

Okay, Hellcouch isn't something that will be coming to an Ikea near you, but it should. Constructed by Carol Mertz and Francesca Carletto-Leon, Hellcouch is a literal couch co-op game where yourself and two other people work together to release a demon who has haunted a couch. To do so, you use your butt, standing up and down as an LED strip of lights in front of you bids you. When you successfully exorcise the demon, smoke emits from the couch. Leading you on the journey is a Haunted Mansion-like narrator, which makes it feel almost like a Disneyland ride. At GDC 2019's **Alt.Ctrl.GDC area** this year, Hellcouch was a sight to behold.

I'm off to mod my couch to freak out my roommates now!

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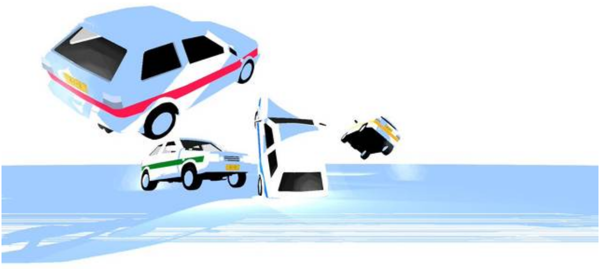
Dead Cells Has Sold More Than One Million Units, With Switch the Top Console
During a Dead Cells postmortem at GDC 2019, Motion Twin unveils how well Dead Cells has sold.

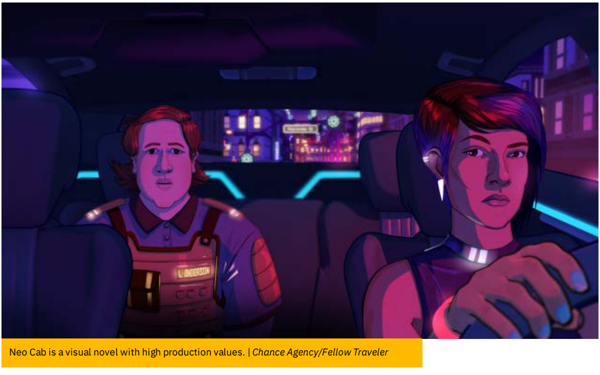


I love small scale games like Need 4 + E9 Speed. | *Kalonica Quigley, Jason Bakker*

Need 4 + E9 Speed

Platforms: PC
Release Date: TBD

Need 4 + E9 Speed is simple when you think of it. It's for up to four players, and you drive around a shiny white space. Somehow, it captivated my friend and I for a solid 10 minutes, as we honked and drove our pristine cars off big jumps, watching them glitch into the space of nothingness. It was originally made by developers Kalonica Quigley and Jason Bakker for Arty After Party 2018, but was on display at this year's Mild Rumpus in the quiet third floor of the Moscone Center where GDC 2019 was partially held. Need 4 + E9 Speed proved to be a welcome respite, away from the crowds, soundtracked by my own joyous laughter.



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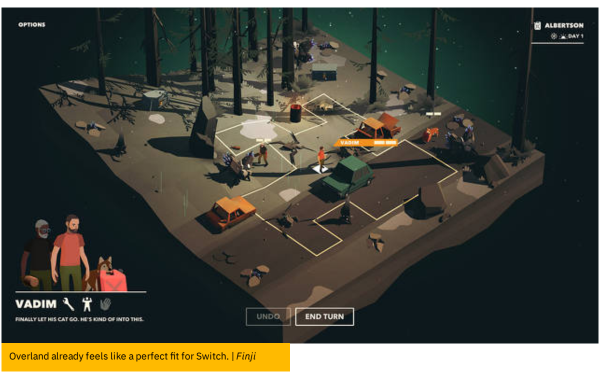
Neo Cab is a visual novel with high production values. | *Chance Agency/Fellow Traveler*

Neo Cab

Platforms: Nintendo Switch, PC
Release Date: 2019

My favorite part of taking Lyft and Uber rides is hearing my driver's stories; and I'm sure vice versa, for them it's hearing stories from the people they drive around. I remember these sort of confessional rides fondly. Neo Cab, a game about being a human cab driver in a future where taxis are automated, feels immediately familiar. Heck, in an era where I roll into a city like Las Vegas and immediately get notifications of self-driving car Lyft rides, it's might as well be set in the present day.

Developed by Chance Agency and featuring writing from the likes of Leigh Alexander and Bruno Dias, in Neo Cab, no two playthroughs are the same. Across the futuristic city of Los Ojos, you dictate which riders to pick up, make conversational decisions in talking to them according to your mental health (if you're in a good or bad mood, you get different conversation options). The developers even did immense research on mental health, the gig economy, and the trials and tribulations of rideshares to get every detail right. Your playthrough in the hyper-stylized world will be different for each route, with every sentence uttered.



Overland already feels like a perfect fit for Switch. | *Finji*

Overland

Platforms: PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch, PC, iOS
Release Date: Fall 2019

I've heard about Overland for a long time. From people I know all-in on its early access on itch.io, or just in seeing its entrancing GIFs on Twitter. It's been described a lot as XCOM meets *The Road*, and after playing its **newly announced Nintendo Switch version at this year's GDC**, I'd say that's pretty apt.

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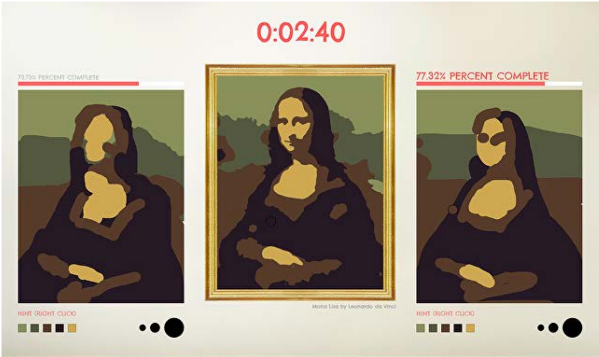
Within little dioramas, you direct a party of characters (most of whom you recruit after rescuing them from various situations) as they scavenge for supplies, fuel up their vehicle, and avoid scary monsters. It even has a photo mode, which is excellent for its picturesque aesthetic. During my demo, I even stumbled upon something special for its Nintendo Switch release: in one of the randomly generated character bios for a comrade, it listed that his uncle worked at Nintendo. We'll see if more Nintendo-related surprises await when Overland leaves early access, and launches officially on pretty much everywhere later this year.



Don't sweat the details in Sloppy Forgeries. | *Jonah Warren*

Sloppy Forgeries

Platforms: PC
Release Date: TBD

Sloppy Forgeries from developer Jonah Warren feels destined to be a big party game. In it, you and another player must plagiarize a great artistic work, like Edvard Munch's "The Scream," or Vincent van Gogh's "Starry Night." But there's a complication: your artistic tools amount to a few sizes of paint brushes and colors, and you have a limited amount of time to create your masterpiece. You're judged on your work of art by an unknown metric, with percentages tallying up how accurate you are to the classic artwork you're seeking to emulate. It's a lot of fun, and I can't wait to see what other works of art pop up in it.

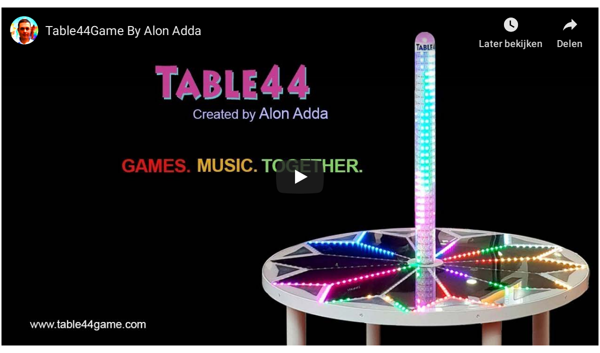


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Table44

Platforms: A Table
Release Date: Touring

I wish every barcade I've ever gone too had Table44. Another unique game posted up at the Alt.Ctrl.GDC area, Table44 is a small round table with a touchscreen tabletop and LED lights that shoot around its corners. Oh yeah, and a big pole in the middle of it. A bunch of players stand all around it, and tapping a button will reveal what color they are. Then once everyone has a designated color, they start the game.

Here's where it gets fun: the LED lights shine the designated colors on every corner, and players are left slapping their own color on the table to get points. Each slapped color gets on the big pole in the middle, and the winner is whoever can reach the top first. Like I said before: this is the perfect barcade game. Can you imagine a bunch of drunk people in a circle slapping each other on accident? It's perfect.

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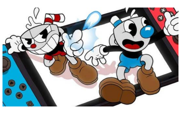
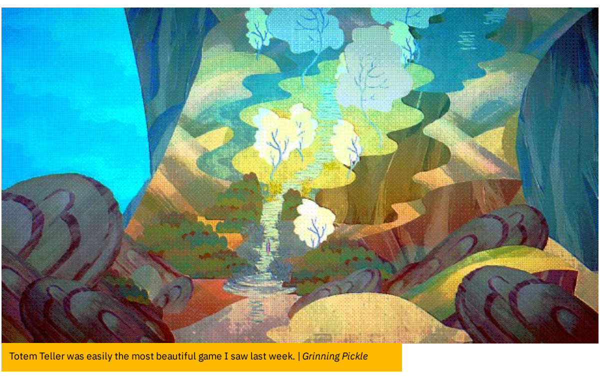


"It's A Surprise to Us Too:" Studio MDHR Co-Founder On Bringing Cuphead to Switch, Fixing Load Times, and More

Cuphead defeats the boss of Microsoft exclusivity, and lives to tell the tale.

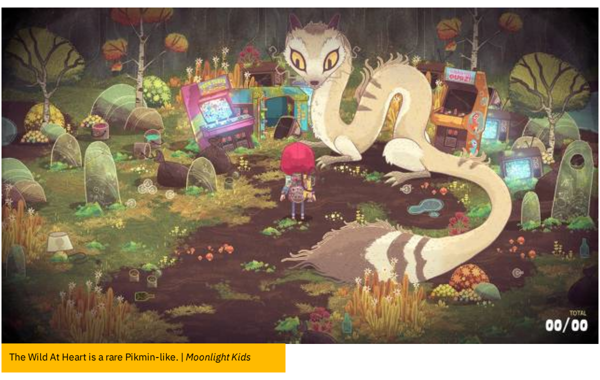


Totem Teller was easily the most beautiful game I saw last week. | *Grinning Pickle*

Totem Teller

Platforms: PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch, PC
Release Date: TBD

I've never seen anything quite like Totem Teller. It's an adventure game built of fractured worlds; like a glitch so accidentally beautiful you can't look away from it. Mechanically, it's very simple with characters to meet and beautiful worlds to explore. I was transfixed during my demo of its Xbox One version.



The Wild At Heart is a rare Pikmin-like. | *Moonlight Kids*

The Wild At Heart

Platforms: Xbox One, PC
Release Date: TBD

The art style of The Wild at Heart isn't really for me, but as a big fan of Pikmin, I fell in love with how it used a similar idea of collecting little critters and sending them on specific tasks like cracking rocks to reveal paths or fighting giant frogs. These little creatures are called spritelings, a developer with Moonlight Kids tells me, and the world my young protagonist has found himself in is called the "Land of Forgotten Things," giving me **slight Forgotton Anne vibes** in seeing abandoned televisions and other domestic items.

Edit, 3/26/2019: *We have amended the platforms and release window for The Wild at Heart, which is only confirmed for Xbox One and PC.*