GAMER GUNK

TAKE THE PLUNGE WITH

Peaks of Yore

See which game won 2025

GUNK
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Janurary 2026

GET YOUR GUNK ON.

Intro
with Cameron Harizal

Hey Y'all, the year may have come to a close, but the news never seems to take a break. So I hope you all had a good holiday because this issue is gonna be a doozy. The *Expedition 33* Awards went about how most of us expected, with the exception of a really bland final reveal that left fans of *Half-Life*, *Elder Scrolls*, and *God of War* very disappointed. Yeah it's from ex–*Titanfall 2* devs, but I think the last thing we wanted to see is another hero shooter. In other award

show news *Blue Prince* got indie game of the year at the Indie Game Awards (yippee) after it was reported that *Expedition 33* used AI in some of its processes, mainly the concept art phase (aw beans). Look, I've already shared my thoughts on AI last month so I'll cut to the chase: I'm not thrilled by this even if it is just concept art. However I'm actually pissed that Sandfall Interactive hid this until their game won all of these awards, as if knowing there would be backlash. It left a

bad taste in a lot of people's mouths, myself included. I would like to add as a note that *Blue Prince*, despite what a poorly researched article would have you believe, did not have any generative AI used in its creation, that was just made up. What a crazy end to the year… but luckily it's in the past now and we can look forward to a new, and hopefully brighter, year in games.

DO THE GAME AWARDS NEED A CHANGE?

Cameron Harizal

The Game Awards were very interesting to experience, especially watching it with people that vehemently hate the game awards. The one thing that upset them and some people online was how many awards *Expedition 33* won. I think that *Expedition 33* had every right to win most of those awards while others I don't think should have even been nominated. That is an article for another time, though the comments on the game awards got me to thinking more about the types of awards that are given out at this and other gaming award shows. While some like Art Direction, Sound Design, Musical Score, etc. are a must when celebrating the time and effort put into games, others leave me questioning why they're there. So let us look at the VGA's under a microscope, examine the awards they're giving out, and maybe make some adjustments.

Outside of the awards focusing on game creation, the award categories are kind of a mess. You have a couple for genres, a few for indie games (love that), some for games that didn't even release this year, and four for things that aren't even games. The awards don't really have any structure to them, it feels like this uncomfortable mystery blend of the Grammys and the Oscars. Both are good award shows in their own right because they have structure; the Grammys focus on purely genre and the Oscars focus on individual elements of filmmaking. Without that structure, some awards feel more important and overshadow other awards whose recipients are pushed to the side. The VGA's know this is an issue too and rather than restructure the show, they've separated the show into a preshow and a mainshow, pushing those award winners to the kids table away from the **"BIG BOYS"**. If we're gonna make our first real change, we put all of the awards into one big show where any big announcement can happen at any time. If that's too much because "we only have the venue for so much time" then you can do this really cool thing where you take the money you made from the *High Guard* ad and **PAY FOR MORE TIME!** Coming back to the awards, some of these

need to be swapped out, because they either just don't fit or are confusing as hell. The esports series of awards have gotta go. That's nothing against esports, I love watching (but never playing) fighting games, but it's the same five games, with usually the same five teams and players, we're all over it. Also isn't winning the championship enough of an award for them, why are we voting on who won theirs the best? But hey, if the esports teams do care about getting awards at the video game Oscars, they can get the Saudi's to fund their own award show. Content Creator of the year is another we don't need because they have their own award shows, plural, that they can win awards at. Also based on MoistCr1TiKaL's reaction this year, I don't think any of them really care about it. The multiple indie game awards can stay because I'm biased, the multiple multiplayer awards can as a consequence of my bias, and even though it's slowly turning into a gacha ad, Players' Voice can stay. With the four newly opened slots we can add some awards that highlight more games, like a gacha category. In all seriousness, adding awards focusing on genres like horror and roguelites, and gamemaking elements like Boss and Quest Design would allow more games to get represented at the award show… and if they added a best mod category, that wouldn't hurt either.

The VGA's also have a difficulty actually

naming and describing the awards and why games are nominated. All the awards suffer from this vagueness. Is best game direction the entire game or just gameplay? Why is racing separated from sports? What does

Expedition 33 Development Team
Vulture (2025)

games for impact even mean? The most egregious example is the Action-Adventure games category, by itself it's a fine category, but then you look two inches to the left and see the Action games category, it's confusing. Either get rid of one of them or rename Action-Adventure to just adventure, the latter has the added benefit of allowing more types of games to be nominated. It would also help certain awards if you told

The 2025 Game Awards
Variery (2025)

us what they did to get nominated. Look at Innovation in Accessibility, a category no one can care about because they don't tell you what accessibility options they improved or made. So everyone just votes for their favorite game, even though accessibility options allow for incredible amounts of customization that everyone has access to. Like even a little blurb about new color blindness options or universal controller support would make the category actually well, accessible.

The VGA's are a fun award show, we get to see some cool new games coming out and celebrate the ones we just played. I just worry about losing sight of all that focusing on wrong things and pushing smaller projects to the sidelines. In all honesty, if I had it my way, I would tear down all the awards and start fresh. At that point however, I'd be making my own award show and I don't have the time or money to do something like that… maybe one day. Alright, let me wrap it up before I'm played off stage. Through the trailers and world premieres it's easy for some winners to get lost in that noise. That's why it's so important that the awards part of the Video Games Awards is fine tuned so we don't forget who we're celebrating.

Geoff Keighley & Miss Piggy
Vulture (2025)

MAJOR RELEASES

Jan 9th   **PATHOLOGIC 3**   SEQUEL, SURIVAL HORROR

Jan 28th   **SEVEN DEADLY SINS ORIGINS**   NEW, ACTION ADVENTURE

Peaks of Yore

A Peak-bagging Adventure

THE PLUNGE

Cameron Harizal

Hello there lad, do you fancy yourself a wee bit of peak-bagging? Oh you haven't the faintest clue of what peak-baggin' is? Well as a peak-bagger and member of the Official Ascension Society it'd be my honor to "show ya the ropes". A little peak-bagger humor for ya right there. Peak-bagging is a hobby where climbers try to summit a series of mountains usually determined by some organization, or in other words when you summit a mountain, you bag the peak. Peak-baggin' is open to anyone. Some people use climbing hooks, ropes, chalk, or whatever else helps ya climb but ya don't need all of that for baggin'. Alls ya gotta do is find a peak and start climbin' and you're off to start baggin' your first peak.

There have been a lot of climbing games ever since *Getting over it with Bennett Foddy* took the world by storm. None manages to portray the gravity of your situation quite like the first person perspective in *Peaks of Yore*. You can really lose track of how quickly you're scaling the peak until you pause your progress for a moment and look down. The ground feels miles away and the only thing keeping you from reaching that ground in seconds is your hand gripping for dear life on the cliff's edge. Playing on mouse and keyboard mimics the feeling of a gripping hand quite well. I would regularly have to switch to my nondominant hand just to shake the strain from my forearm before continuing the climb. At certain points you need to build momentum by swinging

your body and fling yourself at higher rocks. These act as climbing transitions because without these leaps of faith you would have a very simple climb to the top. This can lead to some awkward moments when climbing with some NPC, because when they give you a hand it can feel like you're about to rip their arm out of their socket. Generally though they work well to separate the climb into chapters allowing the mountain to introduce different kinds of challenges throughout. The difficulty of the climbs really picks up after bouldering is introduced, one of my favorite sections of the game. Instead of focusing on long grueling mountains you get these tiny puzzle climbs that only take a few seconds to climb, if you can figure out the correct way to climb it. The amount of times I circled a rock because I thought surely, SURELY I'm going up the wrong side, I could've walked to Everest and back. Alas I was not, but by the time I was trying not to get struck by lightning on stone henge (not hyperbole), I found that my climbing skills had become much better. These bouldering challenges acted as a late game tutorial making sure you understood the minutiae of the mechanics later .

Setting the game in the 1800's allows for a very unique aesthetic and explains the fascinating lack of PPE shown throughout the entire game. As an added level of realism, you can play the game completely in black and white, because as we all know color wasn't invented until the 70's. You

get to live out in this cabin in the middle of nowhere and climb mountains without a care in the world. It's a very cozy feeling getting to live out your hobbies unintruded. The only real visitors you get are those that share the hobby so you get to enrapture yourself in the world of peak-bagging, no distractions. As you interact with the community of climbers they eventually become more like friends than just a group you talk about climbing with. You're able to see two coffee makers pursue their dreams as you see them at later climbs. A father and daughter are reunited in spite of differences because of a picture they thought they lost on their climbs. Though you may have come to the mountains just to climb, you find yourself at the center of this community of peak-baggers and find there is more to all of them than just the climb. A lot of hobbies are kind of like that, you don't always pick them up to meet people but like a magnet, you're drawn to each other. *Peaks of Yore* is about a bit more than just the mountains, it's about the people who climbed before, the people you climb with, and the people who will most certainly climb after you.

METAGAMING

In Their Shoes
Gaming as Roleplaying

Bryce Goetz

When we seriously examine games as a sort of escapist medium, it is inevitable that we encounter the idea that games offer a way to vicariously live alternate lives through the characters we play. As players being in the shoes of our characters, mechanically or emotionally, we can immediately understand how this art form can allow us to experience stories in a direct way that requires our input and decisions. What exactly about roleplaying in games is so compelling and satisfying, and why do we feel the need to do it at all?

For obvious reasons, RPGs are going to be a key category for directly engaging with the topic of roleplaying. It's quite literally in the name. The category itself, however, is broad enough to offer many different experiences or forms of roleplaying. A popular recent example, *Kingdom Come: Deliverance 2*, tackles the question of roleplay by means of immersion. The player must understand and live in the medieval setting to succeed as Henry, from quite literally brewing potions as if following a recipe from a cookbook to forging weapons manually or even teaching yourself how to read in the previous entry. The clear intent here is to drive the escapism by making you be Henry, with
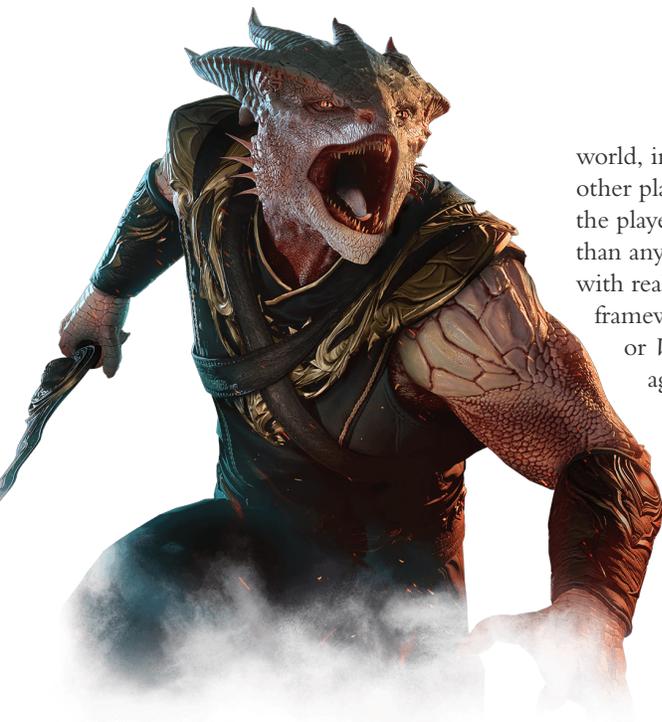
all his shortcomings and skills, while also letting the player guide his journey. Henry initially sucks at fighting, so you do too; the same is true for most other skills. It is the mastery of these mechanics, the satisfaction of advancing Henry as a character as well as you as a player, that drives a unique sense of escapist fulfillment found in no other medium. You grow together, and that symbiotic growth drives a sense of self-

actualization by proxy, since, you know, you the player were never in any actual danger and can restart a checkpoint at any time.

Contrasting with the previous example, we do have other RPG facets, such as *Baldur's Gate 3*, categorically a CRPG. In this regard, the goal of roleplaying is more focused on driving storytelling outcomes with our character as a sort of brush. It is no coincidence that the game offers

Blacksmithing in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance 2*
CrypticFox, Youtube (2025)

several origins for the players to engage in, providing unique scenarios for the player to adapt to the overall story and try driving decision-making as a function of the *Dungeons and Dragons* framework. Broadly, the purpose of the character is less to play out a mostly determined story and more to

"roleplaying manifests as an alter-ego"

drive specific, player-tailored outcomes in a setting that acts more like a canvas. Playing the Dark Urge, for example, compels the players to act out that characterization in several ways, gleefully engaging in and justifying instantaneous murder or willfully resisting the urges and heroically overcoming your dark nature… or something in between. Commit frivolous murder and find yourself having to justify this to every other member of the party, resulting in some leaving or otherwise socially punishing you for these acts. For this instance, roleplaying manifests as an alter-ego, not necessarily inserting yourself as a player into your chosen character's shoes so much as you are consciously playing out the story you believe this character *should* have, in classic D&D fashion.

There are, of course, games where roleplaying is less relevant to the in-game world, instead being more important to other players. MMORPGs, famously, force the player into more a mechanical role than anything else, compelling cooperation with real human players through the same framework. Whether it's *Final Fantasy XIV* or *World of Warcraft*, the player is less an agent of storytelling and more a key member of a team. Your decisions as a character are less important to any sort of quest outcome and more relevant to whether your team beats the raid boss. In this way, the roles are rigid and socially enforced by other players as well as mechanically integrated to compel a player to act as part of a greater whole with the common goal of leveling up or getting better skills or loot. Got a healer that insists on not being a healer? Sucks, the boss just wiped you guys and now you're all getting roasted in the Discord server. Here, roleplay manifests as the player acting within a community to accomplish great feats and slay the greatest of foes, engendering a form of kinship among other players that reinforce a player's place in that machine. Satisfaction derives from developing your own personal ability to win, guide others, trade, or otherwise advance a broader player community as well as a character.

So, what do these variations of roleplay have in common? For lack of a better term, these all have calculated advancement. Whether it's going through the day-to-day of a medieval everyman or gearing up to take down the big bad guy with your buddies, there is a statistical, numerical measurement to just how well you're doing. This visible, straightforward indicator of something like an attack rating or a blacksmith skill level gives the player a tangible sense of real progress. The roleplay is impossible to separate from the statistics because the roleplay requires them to function. Think of it, whether it's rolling the dice on a *Baldur's Gate* Charisma check or getting a new set of objectively better armor, you must defer to the numbers that guide your capabilities. Granted, the decisions are not always numerical – sometimes you just want to drip out a character or smooch the right romance option – but most outcomes still usually require calculation. As a result, when we step into the shoes of these

characters and experience their stories, we are not just along for the ride but engaging in an exercise of perfectionism, seeking out outcomes narratively or gameplay-wise that we're looking for to fulfill our escapist tendencies. Real life does not really offer this straightforward optimization, this careful planning of story or statistical outcomes. If only it were so easy as to allocate a stat or perk at a time of real human struggle, then maybe games wouldn't be necessary at all.

THE GUNK

Cameron Harizal
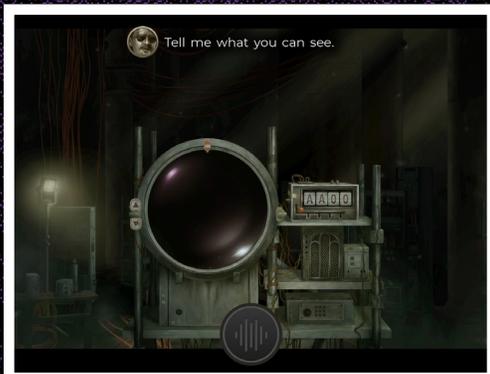
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NEW, MYSTERY, INDIE
JANUARY 21ST
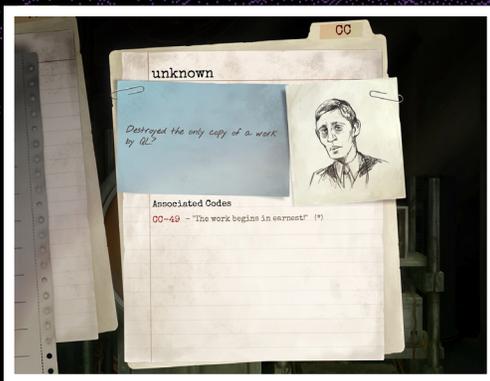
You come across a computer from the second World War hidden away from the world in a church basement. It speaks to you asking for your help to find a book- you only have the title to go on and not a lot of time- so you better get moving. When I say there's not a lot on this game I mean it, no demo, no extra trailers, and no interviews, Just a trailer and a couple of screenshots on steam. I personally like the secrecy especially for a mystery game like this. Based on the information we have it looks like the computer's controls are very tactile and the information tracking system is very robust so any mystery game fans out there should have a blast.
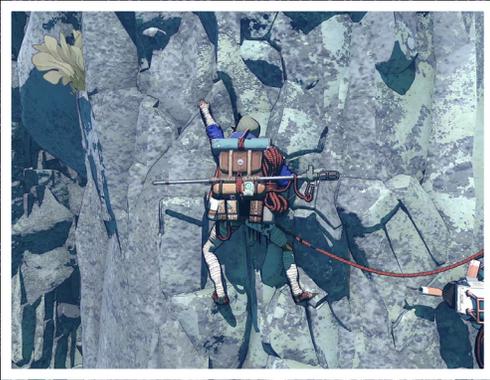
CAIRN
NEW, CLIMBING, INDIE
JANUARY 29TH

I've been on a huge climbing game stint as of late (for a project I'm working on more specifically) and this one caught my eye in October. Mainly because it has the most indepth mechanics I've ever seen in a climbing game. With the ability to control exactly where each limb goes on the mountain, it's the closest thing any game has gotten to replicating the feeling of mountain climbing. You can get your legs into some odd configurations, I bent myself into a pretzel getting up a crevice. The rate at which you lose stamina is heavily dependent on your limbs position and your weight.

DON'T STOP, GIRLY POP!
NEW, ARENA SHOOTER, INDIE
JANUARY 29TH

The bubblegum-pop is blaring, glitter has gotten all over the place, and you cannot stop moving, so Don't Stop Girlypop! In this love letter to the tween culture of the mid-2000's, you are a being made of love whose only want in life is to destroy shareholder value. Armed with a flip phone, a Tomogachi, an iPod Shuffle, and about 20 different guns... you're more than ready. Every weapon in your armory, including these hands, are fully customizable, bedazzleable, denimable, and of course you can't forget glitterable. So get out there and destroy the stock price of a mining company looking absolutely stunning!!!!

GUNK
OF THE YEAR

With all of the votes counted I'm proud to say that the winner of the 2025 Gunk of the Year is... **DISPATCH!!!!!** Come out at the very last possible moment and being the only game from this year that one of our lead designers played, it was a shoe in for the award. Though the dream for this award is to show more obscure indie games, celebrating a game that revived the choice based adventure game genre seems apt. It's not as though this game doesn't deserve it in its own right either, no matter who plays, me included, they can't seem to shut up about this game. Which is fair because it's a game that warrant, nay DEMANDS discussion from its players. Every decision felt controversial, from which character to romance to whether or not you had like donuts. With such a splash of a first entry we at Gamer Gunk are excited to see what AdHoc brings to the table with there next game. For winning, of course a glass jar with the patented **Gamer Gunk™** will be sent to the *AdHoc* offices, as reward for winning. Congratulations!

EVENTS
JANUARY 2026

DETECTIVE FEST

Jan 12 - Jan 18, 2026

BOARD GAME FEST

Jan 26 - Feb 2, 2026

Outro
with Cameron Harizal

And that's everything, we hope you have enjoyed this issue of Gamer Gunk. We have an entire year of wonderful issues ahead that we hope you're ready for. This month was a bit smaller, but things are going to pick up quickly in February so get ready. We're also hoping to bring on some guest writers to spice things up a little bit in the coming issues, so be on the look out. Thank you so much for reading, liking, following, and sharing on whatever platforms you found us on. If you have any suggestions on the games I include please feel free to let me know. If you played any of the games I recommended please let me know if you liked them. Thank you and Bye <3