

Bluespade's Personal Game of the Year 2024 Ranking List:

Second year in a row, I'm ranking all of the games I played this past year,* using the Let's Fight a Boss method: cutting each game one by one to figure out which one's I feel the strongest about. As someone who struggles with introspection, this is a great method of determining exactly which games I actually loved the most.

Last year I got an XBOX and Game Pass for the first time, which led to me trying out a huge number of games—I ranked 50 last time. This year was quite a bit different. I got a bit burned out on Game Pass and cancelled it early in the year, though I have recently jumped back in, and I spent quite a lot of this year replaying old games I'm not going to put on this list.

So for this year, I've got 24 games to go through. Same disclaimer as last time: these are all games I played this year, not all ones that were *released* this year. Some are remakes or remasters, but this time I cut everything I don't really have anything to say about, I think. Before we get to the ranking proper, about that asterisk...

The Replay Extravaganza

2024 was the year that Elden Ring's Shadow of the Erdtree expansion was released, which I do have on this list as I feel like it's got more than enough content to count as its own game. Before Erdtree was released, though I had switched over from PS4 to the XBOX, meaning that if I was going to play Erdtree, I would need to go through the whole game again from the beginning. So replay Elden Ring again I did, for the third year in a row... it really is the game that never ends. But playing the expansion *also* put me in a reflective mood on From Software in general. So in the span of a few months after I'd finished Shadow of the Erdtree, I replayed, in quick succession, Armored Core VI (my pick for Game of the Year last year), Dark Souls Remastered, and Bloodborne. Kinda surprised I didn't get another Sekiro playthrough in there as well. Despite that, though, I felt like I didn't want to rate any of those games on this list as they're all games I've played through multiple times over and can no longer rate them as they're own distinct games, but more as pieces of the rich tapestry that is modern FromSoft games.

Going back to Dark Souls was especially interesting. Considering how much faster, flexible, and fluid movement and combat is in Elden Ring, I assumed Dark Souls would be a breeze, as it's well known that the enemies and bosses have become exponentially more complex since those old games. I quickly found myself disabused of this notion. Dark Souls is extremely simple, and as such, it requires a good deal of mastery of that simple system to get by. I actually found it quite difficult. It was mostly in the open areas, rather than the bosses, as more than any of the other games it really punishes complacency and will knock you back to 10 minutes of backtracking the instant you make a mistake.

More interesting was how replaying old FromSoft games actually kind of sold me on the shift to open world, something I was still mixed on after having finished Elden Ring thrice. I still hope that future Souls style games have a larger focus on linear areas than Elden Ring, more large dungeons like Stormveil Castle and a smaller open world. But it really is kind of hard not to feel the lack of the open world once I've had it. Either way, I'm sure I'll enjoy whatever FromSoft puts out, as in my opinion they haven't had a miss since they started this whole trend with Demon's Souls.

And oh yeah, I also played another full 30 hour playthrough of Subnautica this year, because I saw my brother playing it and I can't help myself.

The List:

Remember, I'm starting from the bottom and working up to the top, so these earlier numbers are naturally going to have a lot more negativity, but I really didn't play many bad games this year, so I don't think it'll take long to get to the good stuff. And on that note, here we go, starting with number 25, the least good game I played this year!

Number 24: Eiyuden Chronicle: Hundred Heroes

This one hurts. A spiritual successor to the Suikoden series, kickstarted by the original series creator Yoshitaka Murayama.

Suikoden 2 is one of my all time favorite childhood games, one I've replayed many times over. I love Suikoden 1 and 3 as well, and it was a terrible disappointment to me that the series went downhill with 4 and 5 and then faded into obscurity. I'd

wished for a long, long time for a spiritual successor to arise. My wishes were answered a few years ago with the Kickstarter for Eiyuden Chronicle: Hundred Heroes... and I immediately felt concern upon seeing it. Everything that was said in the reveal sounded good. Character designs were nice, and it clearly seemed to be taking inspiration specifically from Suikoden 2, my favorite. But something about the footage always felt off to me. Partially it's the use of the Octopath Traveler "HD-2D" pixel art that I've always disliked despite its popularity. Other than that, I couldn't pin it down exactly... but I always knew I was going to play this game no matter what. Every subsequent trailer made me feel more and more uneasy, even as I resolved to give it a chance and hope for the best. I was relieved to hear the game would be on Game Pass day 1, so that I wouldn't have to actually buy it outright.

And, yeah, my fears were founded. This game is mediocre almost across the board. It brings me no joy at all to say so, but the fact was, I had basically no fun at any point while trying this game. I believe the creators were really trying here, and the exact problems are hard to pin down specifically. The game has most of what was there in Suikoden 2, on a base level, but it lacks any of the heart and artistry that made it so special to me. I think the single largest problem arrives when you compare the story to Suikoden 2.

In Suikoden 2, you spend about five minutes getting to know the two main characters before the inciting incident kicks off with your entire child soldier military unit being slaughtered by your own nation in a false flag operation to kick off a war. An emotional farewell establishes the powerful friendship between the two characters, followed by a magnificent silent montage over credits establishing their childhood. A couple hours of fast paced story later and you've reunited with your friend and sister and been exiled from your home, joining up with a mercenary band bent on stopping another war like the one that killed your parents.

I spent about 6 hours playing Eiyuden Chronicle, and the story just hadn't really started yet. You spend the earliest bit doing little odd job for one of the game's nations, getting introduced to the character who is obviously meant to be your foil for this game, but the two characters have no relationship like in Suikoden 2, and there is no war or other major problem on the horizon to give it any sort of stakes. I was frankly bored out

of my mind playing Eiyuden, and I had no interest in playing any further even with all of the goodwill I have towards the creators.

The simple truth, which has been shown time and time again like with the Mighty Number 9 debacle, is that you can't expect old creators to just dust off 20 years of rust and whip out another banger of a game. People change, and even if they're as sharp as ever, they aren't going to make the same kind of art as they did when they were younger. Expecting them to do so is a recipe for disappointment.

Played on Game Pass

Number 23: Monster Hunter Rise

As a fan of FromSoft, I've been recommended the Monster Hunter series many many times. I've always looked on those recommendations with skepticism, as they clearly aren't the same kinds of games at all, even if I recognize the similarities that might appeal to fans. But I've always intended to give it a try, and Monster Hunter Rise was on Game Pass, so try it I did. And yeah, I'm not a Monster Hunter fan.

I didn't spend much time with this one, but enough that I felt I had gotten a taste. This is one of those games that I don't have a lot of criticisms for. It's clearly a franchise that has iterated on itself many times over and polished it into a sharp clear version of what it wants to be. It's not that it's a bad game, it's that it's exactly the kind of game that doesn't appeal to me. The aesthetics and attention to detail in the world were impressive, and I think the most fun I had was in the game's great character customizer. But the game's basic premise of hacking away at a giant monster for tens of minutes at a time for the chance of getting one piece of material you need for a piece of equipment you might not even like does nothing to make me want to keep playing. That combined with the general lack of story made me drop this pretty quick. Not bad, just not for me.

Played on Game Pass

Number 22: The Wandering Village

A neat civilization sim game with a fantasy twist: the society you're building is on the back of a giant wandering brontosaurus-like creature, which causes interesting

changes as it passes through different biomes, gets sick, or potentially encounters other giants. I had fun figuring out the systems and poking at this one for a few hours at a time. I found it a relaxing and chill game to play in between other games, but these sim games have never much been my thing, and the fact that it is poorly designed for console without a mouse doesn't help. I do think it was a pretty nice game, just didn't hook me.

Played on Game Pass

Number 21: A Plague Tale: Innocence

This was a game I've been meaning to get around to trying for many years. I saw the sequel, which looks more interesting, on Game Pass, but I wanted to at least try this one first since it's a direct story continuation. I like the setting and characters of this game, and it's pretty competent and entertaining all around. But nothing about it really grabs me. It feels like the most standard of modern videogames, with every aspect of it a tried and true trope that's been done many times over. I played around 4 or 5 hours and got to the point where it really did start to get more interesting. But every time after I thought about going back to it I just never wanted to. Maybe I'll give the sequel a try sometime though.

Bought on Xbox

Number 20: Lords of the Fallen

Another non-Fromsoft soulslike. I found this one kind of bizarre, considering it, like Mirror's Edge last year, is 2 game franchise that rebooted itself after only a decade. The admiration for Fromsoft is obvious, to a slightly embarrassing degree at times, but Lords does actually do some new and unique things. The method for using ranged weapons and magic is probably better here than in Fromsoft's own games, and it has a pretty neat dual-worlds mechanic that adds a lot to the exploration and discovery. Like Plague Tale, this is a very competent game, and I did eventually get into it and start really having fun with the mechanics. It also slightly scratched the itch of a more linear but still very expansive explorable world after Elden Ring went full open-world.

Ultimately, the game's aesthetics and lack of a strong original concept left me slightly cold on it, so I didn't play that far into the game. But I would definitely recommend this game for fans of Dark Souls or Bloodborne who really want another more standard soulslike that knows what its doing.

Played on Game Pass

Number 19: Witch on the Holy Night

This visual novel is dripping with atmosphere. The production on it is very impressive, with magnificent backgrounds, great character art, good voice acting, fantastic music, and a slick, well polished feel that helps alleviate the fact that you are just hitting the continue button over and over. Unfortunately it does still have what appears to be THE visual novel problem, at least when it comes to Japanese ones: insanely slow pacing, to the point that after reading a solid 4 hours (and I have a pretty fast reading speed) I felt like it still hadn't really gotten to the start of the story. From my limited experience this seems to be kind of par for the course for classic Japanese visual novels for some reason. Maybe I'll pick it up again sometime, but either way, I'm glad I played as much as I did and got to experience Aoko in all her grumpy, misanthropic-yet-altruistic nature.

Purchased on Switch (by my brother)

Number 18: Darkest Dungeon II (Switch port)

Yes, this game was on my list last year too. But I have a good reason to include it here. I screwed up last time and bought the game on a PC that simply couldn't handle it, and when the game was first supposedly "released" (though it continued to be reworked afterwards, almost like it was still in early access...) and not yet feature complete. I had a very bad time attempting to play it then, but fortunately, this year, it was released on the Switch with everything good and finished!

Except not. You can read my scathing review of the port if you want to hear me bitch and moan about the experience ruining bugs that weren't fixed for months after the game launched. But at least I did get to play it this time, to an extent. And unfortunately, it just doesn't do it for me like the first game did. I like a lot of things that have changed,

and I did have a pretty good time with it when things worked correctly. But I definitely got soured on it, and to this day I still haven't bothered to fully finish it. I'll probably pick it back up again some day when my frustration has worn off. Sorry that this sounds so negative when I still kept it this long. I swear these will get unambiguously positive fairly soon lol.

Purchased on Switch

Number 17: Prey (2017)

I had an absolutely amazing first couple of hours with this game. Playing alone at home on a very loud stormy night with the game's spooky narrative slowly revealing itself, I was all-in for a good while. The environments and immersive sim balancing is fantastic and kept me intrigued for a good long time. This game does suffer a lot from a lack of interesting enemies, and I never really found a method of combat that felt good and effective for me, even making it into the late game. It's not a genre that super appeals to me, so I count it as a major point in its favor that I enjoyed it as much as I did, and I would absolutely recommend it to anything who likes spooky sci-fi games or immersive sims.

Played on Game Pass

Number 16: Made in Abyss: Binary Star Falling into Darkness

I rated this game 2 out of 5 stars, yet here I find it making it farther than a bunch of 3 star games I played. Am I just swayed by my affection for the source material? Sure, to an extent. Mostly, I really was pleased with a lot of this game's concepts and goals. It just... clearly had a budget that was nowhere near what it needed to be to make even a basic workable version of its ambition. I kind of have a soft spot for Spike Chunsoft, despite not actually being a fan of any of their games, because they always seem to give it their all and swing for the fences with neat ideas.

I found this a very relaxing chore kind of game, the sort where you put on a podcast and just kind of chip away at the slow and meticulous tasks you need to perform to move the game forward. It's the massive amount of padding that lets this game down. If they stripped it down to its basics and just let you blitz through a layer of

the abyss in an hour of play, it'd be a really short game, but I think it'd be a lot better for it.

Purchased on Switch (by my brother again)

Number 15: Chrono Trigger

Please, calm down. Chrono Trigger being here really isn't representative of its overall quality, just how much I enjoyed replaying it this year. I have a long history with Chrono Trigger. I played it back on the SNES at the end of the 90's, and while I never really saw it as the end-all-be-all of JRPGs like a lot of people apparently still do, I was really really into it at the time. I used to go by the name "Tempo" on the internet, a name I stole from the main character (and writer) of a Chrono Trigger fanfic, lol.

I played about half of this game on Steam at some point this year, and it was a pleasant trip down nostalgia lane. But there's nothing about CT that really holds up as exceptional in this day and age. It does have very good sprite art and music, and is a clear sign of the direction the Final Fantasy series could have gone in if they'd kept iterating on their pixel art instead of moving into 3D. As is often the case with me, I probably would have finished this game if it had been on a console and not PC. I don't know what Square Enix is doing waiting so long to port it. Probably thinking about doing a full remake, which I really don't think would work visually.

Purchased on Steam

Number 14: Reverse: 1999

I'm not sure how to talk about this game. I'm not sure I've played a more confusing game, from a narrative perspective, in as long as I can remember. And gacha games are also extremely confusing from a mechanical standpoint as they bombard you with 20 separate menus and 50+ materials right off the bat. You just kind of have to keep playing them and have faith that they'll make sense eventually.

I got into this game hoping for a replacement for Fate: Grand Order, which I got out of around 3 or 4 years ago. It was pretty similar, enough that I think it is inspired by it. But while Fate's setting is a complete barrage of nonsense that I honestly believe NO ONE truly fully understands, at least it is built around the very understandable premise

of summoning heroes from history to serve as your collectable minions. Reverse: 1999's characters are... themed, in some way. The writing feels very early 2000's Deviantart, which I don't actually hate, having been active on it back then myself, lol. But it is extremely murky and might be hiding its writing behind an intentional veil of vagueness, lol. So I lost interest in sticking with it after playing every day for about 3 weeks.

I was extremely impressed, I'll say, with the production, visuals, animations, music, and most especially the voice acting. You can choose from a large variety of languages, but even better, you can customize which *characters* speak each language individually. Since the cast is made up of all sorts of people from all over the globe, it's really fun to hear them speak in their own accents, pepper in bits of English or their own language into other dubs, and be able to set the ones I didn't like to a different language.

I'm not sure I'll remember that much about this game, but I'll never forget my badass adorable gacha daughter Mondlicht. I never got to her story, but she seemed cool, lol.

Free to play on Android

Number 13: Tales of Symphonia (Remaster)

I got into the Tales series in a huge way back at the end of 2019, and since then I think I've played some kind of Tales game every single year. It's kind of the perfect JRPG series for me: a bright, generally upbeat fantasy series with a huge emphasis on character development, worldbuilding, and lots and lots (way too much for some people) writing. These older ones, with the 2D simple combat and the extreme budget digital toy look, don't do it as well for me though. I didn't finish Tales of Vesperia despite its reputation as one of the best, and I didn't finish this one either. I made it quite far though, I had over 40 hours in it, and I generally quite enjoyed my time with it.

The characters are a lot more simple and a lot more literally childish than the other Tales games I've played, but they still have heart and an interesting web of relationships that grows and changes. The world of mysteries layered on top of mysteries and the fantasy/sci-fi blend really reminds me of Xenogears, one of my fave classic JRPGs. I think what let me down the most was just the simplicity of the combat.

You naturally spend a long time in this long game engaged in combat, and after a while it just kind of loses its charm.

I'm very happy I played it though, and got to experience the early days of the Tales series finding its footing.

Purchased on XBOX

Number 12: Lost Odyssey

Another very old JRPG in a row, though this one wasn't a remaster or anything. The story behind this game and its specific circumstances is a wild one. Basically one of the all-time top guys responsible for the Final Fantasy series kind of took the fall for the failure of their Final Fantasy: Spirits Within film and resigned from the company. He then went on to found a rival studio. Lost Odyssey feels like it easily could have been in the lineup of FF10-13.

Much and more has been said about the game's outstanding visual novel style short story sections that cover some event from the past of the immortal protagonist's life. The first one made me cry straight off the bat, and it's not the only one to do so. They were written by a big name proper author in Japan, and his writing chops are clearly on display. The actual in-game story and writing is less consistent. At times it's excellent, like with the reunion of the protagonist with his long-lost daughter, now grown up with children of her own, dying from disease just as he'd finally found her. The worldbuilding and plotting is generally good... but it does suffer a bit from dumbass protagonist syndrome, where it kind of feels like nothing the party is doing really makes all that much sense. They're also mostly a group of very intentionally unlikable characters who slowly grow into better people, and that did make it hard to relate to them in the early game.

Much like with Symphonia, what really wore me down on this game was its combat system, which is perfectly adequate, but nothing special. Still, I really enjoyed my time with this game even if I opted to not finish it.

I have to thank the excellent youtuber Majuular for bringing this game to my attention. If you have any interest in long, in-depth retrospectives that are super relaxed

but at the same time snappy and effortlessly digestible, check out his channel. He might be my favorite active video essaysist right now.

Number 11: Slay the Princess

You are on a path in the woods, staring up at a cabin on a hill. A voice in your head tells you that there is a princess locked in its basement, and it's your job to slay her. If you don't, the world will surely come to an end.

Slay the Princess is a visual novel with an enormous amount of interactivity. At every step, you can question its premises, argue with the narrator, perform all sorts of actions and try to struggle against the fate you've been dealt or go along with what you are told. From there, the story spirals off into a huge variety of alternative realities, each based on your actions and opinions in the previous one, each slowly building to a cataclysmic climax.

I have pretty mixed feelings on this game. Its presentation is great, with art that straddles the perfect line between looking kind of charmingly amateur and extremely expressive. The art is the major draw here, with all sorts of creativity on display throughout the reality warping story. The writing is generally really good as well, with the titular princess and another character I won't spoil being constantly engaging and memorable.

But I didn't really have a great time with it on my first blind playthrough, when I let myself follow a certain line of logic that led me to what was probably the most unsatisfying experience available for me out of the game's many potential routes. Going back and replaying it alleviated that a lot, but it's frustrating to spend the first playthrough figuring out how the game works before I could use that knowledge to make it truly enjoyable.

And despite it being one of the absolute core features of the game and the culmination of tons of work, I personally didn't think the multiple personality voices you interact with added anything of value to the game for me. I would recommend Slay the Princess to anyone who has been interested in visual novels but is frustrated with their lack of interactivity. Or to anyone interested in seeing the very personal work that is something like a web comic/manga as a visual novel.

Purchased on Switch

Number 10: Infinitode 2

I played through this game back in 2019, and it's been long enough that I can re-experience it now with almost the same experience of bumbling through its puzzles for the first time, thanks to my terrible memory. Ever since my days playing tower defense modes in Star Craft in the early 2000s I've always wanted a good tower defense game, and this one feels like the definitive experience. I'd hoped there'd be a third game by now, but it feels like the dev is caught in the successful indie game loop of wanting to keep supporting and updating the old game indefinitely so that they never get around to making another one.

If you're looking for a free mobile game with no scummy behavior (I actually had to look up how the game makes money a few days ago) that's super addictive and challenging, Infinitode 2 is a great little game.

Number 9: Sifu

I wrote a pretty extensive review for this already, so check that out if you're interested in more. I had a blast with this game. Almost all of its shortcomings kind of fall away in the face of the pure exhilarating martial arts gameplay. I'm almost certain this will be one of those games I come back to every few years. I'd love to see a sequel or a follow up of some kind as well.

Purchased on XBOX (it's now currently on Game Pass)

Number 8: Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance

MGR is kind of famous for continuously being played, recommended, and growing more popular as the years go on, despite being a fairly middlingly popular game that's over a decade old now. I finally decided to try it this year, and I'm really glad I did. This game is pure insane fun. I found the parry system pretty difficult to figure out and adapt to at first, but the game gives you no option but to master it, because that's kind of the whole game (similar to Sifu). The fun insanity extends to the game's story

and presentation. No matter how stupid it gets, the story is clearly sincere, and it touches on a lot of really interesting ideas with a clumsy enthusiasm that I can't dislike.

So much has been said about this game I don't really think I have anything much to add, other than to say it mostly lived up to the hype.

Purchased on XBOX

Number 7: Nine Sols

I'm currently playing this one, still about halfway through, so maybe it would score higher if I did this in a couple weeks. Even so, I have nothing but praise for it. I can't pretend to be a big fan of metroidvanias, but I have played and enjoyed a number of them over the years. Nine Sols is the best metroidvania I've ever played and nothing else really comes close.

The two biggest weaknesses of the genre are, in my opinion, dull, simple combat and anemic storytelling. Nine Sols solves both of these issues with style. Its Sekiro inspired combat system is deep and rich, allowing a wide variety of exciting engagement even in the simple 2D movement system. Nine Sols is quite difficult, but it is the kind of gameplay that pushes you to excel and become an expert, and its extremely satisfying. It has some of the most fun boss fights I've experienced this year.

Most metroidvanias don't really even attempt much of a story, but Nine Sols was made by Red Candle Games—a studio that has, up until now, produced extremely story focused games. Even pivoting into this action series, they have their skilled writing and pacing very much on display. Nine Sols is written in a naturalistic manner, with the protagonist being the sort of character who already knows the answer to all of the mysteries and it is left to the player to follow along and figure it out through context. It's got a good supporting cast and a colorful rogue's gallery of main villains to work through. It is pretty simple still, but that simplicity suits the genre very well and motivates me to keep playing far more than if the game was purely mechanics driven.

Played on Game Pass

Number 6: Elden Ring — Shadow of the Erdtree

This ranking is for the dlc expansion specifically, ignoring the rest of the game. Elden Ring is the game that keeps on giving—so much that I sometimes wish I could stop myself from going back to it, lol. Erdtree is a great expansion, one of the best of Fromsoft's catalogue... but not the best, I think. Erdtree's highs are extremely high. The way they reworked the system of exploration, already Elden Ring's greatest strength, into an even better version. The new method of character progression being tied to exploration instead of standard leveling. Some of the new incredible bosses...

That said, I do think this expansion showcases both Fromsoft's great strengths, and some of their weaknesses. The commitment to absolute extreme difficulty makes sense to the degree that this is extra content for those who have completely conquered the game and want more... but there is a limit I have, even after playing these games for over a decade, when it starts to become more tedious than challenging to me. The narrative of the expansion was really great in some areas but pretty lacking in others, and, for better or worse, does nothing to patch in holes in the game's story up til that point.

Mostly, though, it's the anticlimax of the final boss that I found disappointing. A boss so overtuned that the difficulty reaches the point of not feeling like a challenge to me, but rather just a problem I needed to get past for the sake of checking it. Narratively, it felt kind of out of nowhere and unsatisfying as well. The entire expansion builds up Miquella as an intriguing character, but when we meet him he's just kind of a generic boss, quickly done away with.

Those are the reasons this insanely high quality expansion of one of the best games of the generation by my favorite developer ONLY made it to the 6th slot of this year's list, lol. I spent around 60 hours just playing this expansion, and I probably loved at least 50 of them, so that's pretty solid.

We're into the real heavy hitters now. I didn't really expect this game to go out this early, and at this point, I'm still not sure what my number 1 is gonna be.

Number 5: Fear and Hunger 2: Termina

Last year, Fear and Hunger didn't really get its full due. It went out at number 8, when I hadn't finished it yet, before I got truly, deeply *obsessed* with it in the early part of

this year. I went on to write a gush of a review in which I said it was the most interesting game I'd played in years. Sadly, history repeats itself this year, because once again, I haven't finished Fear and Hunger 2 yet. I got overwhelmed, starting a bunch of different playthroughs with all of the different characters, then got kind of burnt out after playing so much and put it aside for a while, and I haven't found the right time to go back to it. Right now I plan on finishing up the 2 games I'm actively playing in the next couple weeks, then sometime in January, I'll be starting Fear and Hunger 2 over again. So for now, I have to go off incomplete info.

But holy shit this game is good. It has a very different vibe and focus than the first game, for which I am grateful as I always prefer a sequel try new things rather than continue a strict continuation. I want to think it is pretty much better than the original in almost every way, other than having less of a clear iconic premise. I'd heard a lot of people criticize it for being a lot easier, but I think that's from the kinds of people who played the first game for a hundred or more hours before jumping in to Termina. For me, it's much, *much* harder, which is part of the reason I haven't beaten it.

The horror of Termina is great, but its the cast of characters that really stand out this time. In the first game, each of the 4 protagonists was slightly different, mostly due to equipment restrictions and a small list of skills they could start with. Termina has 8 protagonists, all of which play very differently from each other and can be specced from the beginning in a variety of different ways. This led me to start the game over and over and over trying them all out with their unique systems, and there's one I still haven't played because I *died during character creation*. That's kind of the vibe this series has.

As of writing, I've played 22 hours of Termina without beating it once, and I still plan on playing through with at least most of the characters. When I was playing it, I was obsessive, the kind of game you can't stop thinking about when you're not playing it. I'm getting excited thinking about going back to it. So for now, it can rest here in 5th place, but I'll probably look back at this and shake my head next year.

In fact, let's do that for Fear and Hunger and last year real quick, lol. Yeah, looking at my list before, I think I'd currently rate Fear and Hunger higher than everything else I put above it except *maybe* Armored Core VI. If I'd finished it, it easily

could have been my Game of the Year. Hey, maybe I'll do a Game of the Decade in 2030 and it'll get its due then lol.

Number 4: Star Wars Jedi: Survivor

I said last year I was shocked to find a Star Wars game in my top 10. Here one is again, higher than ever. I'm not surprised anymore, I am fully invested in this game series now.

I started out really annoyed with this game, I believe I publicly whined about it both online and to my friends in person. I hated the shift to open-world and found it particularly irritating how most of my exploration just resulted in gated areas requiring abilities from later in the game. Once I got over that and realized the best way to play the game—covering one specific linear area at a time, and taking breaks between them to explore just a bit of the open world—it clicked with me, and the game got great.

There were a lot of improvements from the initial game, especially in tightening up the combat and improving its feel. But for me what really stands out about this game is its story. I rolled my eyes initially at how many Jedi/former Jedi were running wild after the supposed annihilation from Order 66. That was before this game started dropping them like flies.

I don't want to give much in the way of spoilers, but the game's ending really hit me surprisingly well. It involves a multi person funeral, with protagonist Cal absolutely devastated in a way you just don't often see in modern fiction. It really made me think of all of the action movies and games that have some horrible loss of life and destruction in the third act, but then acts all super celebratory and happy when the heroes stop the worst case scenario from happening, as if no one cares about the very bad things that *did* happen. Jedi Survivor ends in an appropriately somber way, before a brief after credits scene that adds just a little hope for the future.

I also really liked the portrayal of Merrin, Cal's cool goth alien girlfriend. Her role in the first game was kind of minor and more of a set up, and having her come back after years apart made me assume she was going to continue to be put on the backburner. But I really appreciated the chemistry the two of them had, with Merrin

showcasing a very fun mix of cold teasing and genuine warmth, having really matured over the time she spent alone between games.

Cal continues to be a surprisingly great protagonist, with this game really beating him down and challenging his ideals. The game sets up a third, probably final game that I'm really looking forward to, though the exit of the game's primary creator does bring into question whether it will keep its identity. Until I have reason to think otherwise, though, I have faith in the game's developers and am expecting good things.

Played on XBOX Game Pass

Number 3: Etrian Odyssey IV: Legends of the Titan

I said last year that Etrian Odyssey III was where the series found its footing and figured out what it wanted to be, and I stand by that. But this game, *this* is the one that knocked it out of the park. I can't decide whether this V is better or this one, and V is on my All Time Favorites list. I've talked about the Etrian games a bunch before, and well, they're all pretty similar, so I'm not sure what else I need to say about this one, other than it's excellent. I suppose the standout feature compared to the other games is this one has a story, and a pretty good one, with actual characters that even join your party throughout the game. That's not the Etrian Odyssey way, but it really added a little extra here.

Played on a literal Nintendo 3DS in the year 2024

Number 2: Unicorn Overlord

According to the devs, this game took like 10 years to make, and the dedication is there on display. It's an absolutely beautiful game, with an enormity of unique content that I can only really compare to Elden Ring. I have a hard time getting into strategy rpgs because of how easy they usually are, but Unicorn Overlord delivered a complex, difficult, and extremely deep system that kept me fully engaged for over a hundred hours. The system of basically programming each of your many military units ahead of time before they actually engage in battle is weird and feels kind of pointless at first. But when you get further into the game you realize that so much happens in every little battle that once you have a full team of leveled characters it would take far too much

time and attention to play them all out manually. Having to think out the best flow chart for what skills to use in specific circumstances, foreseeing issues and plotting contingencies, and then adding all that onto the layer of real time strategy in the actual battles creates a system like none other I've played in an rpg.

The story is kinda weak, but that's made up for by the huge cast of characters that all have in-depth relationships with each other. Unicorn Overlord is the game I wanted Fire Emblem Three Houses to be.

Purchased on Nintendo Switch

Number 1, my 2024 GAME OF THE YEAR:

It's..... METAPHOR: ReFantazio!!

I haven't finished this game yet either, though I am literally 80 hours into it, so I have a pretty solid grasp on it. Just hoping the ending doesn't suck, and if so, it's shaping up to be one of my favorite rpgs of all time. The team that made the Persona series getting out of their comfort zone into traditional fantasy is a great mash up. The series feels fantasy in the ways that matter, but it really feels like a unique world with the inspiration from a more modern setting. At first I was annoyed with how much of the game is "Persona in medieval times," but having broken free from the Persona conventions, they pretty much improve everything established in those games.

Without having seen the game through to the end, I find it hard to talk about the game's story here... and to be honest, I'm about on the verge of falling asleep, lol. I'll just say I've been excitedly waiting for this game for around 8 years, and the wait turned out to be worth it.

Conclusion:

Another great year of gaming. This one was a little more laidback, a little more reflective. There were parts of the year I wasn't up to gaming that much, and other parts where I felt I needed to go back to old familiar classics for my own sanity. I kept up my goal of trying lots of new things, but I stuck a bit closer to my comfort zone this year.

There's a lot coming up in the coming year for me to look forward to, Hades 2, Elden Ring: Nightreign, Citizen Sleeper 2, Suikoden 2 Remaster. Holding out hope I

hear about another Tales of and Etrian Odyssey game this year. I'm planning on trying out the Atelier series with its next release, and if the whole Xbox final fantasy thing goes through maybe I'll get to try out FF16. And maybe, just maybe, that Switch 2 they've been talking about for years will finally be revealed, lol.

Thanks for reading, y'all. Here's to next year.