

CATHODE ZINE

FALL 2025
ISSUE 1

IN THIS ISSUE:

Walking and Delivering
Again: Revisiting
Death Stranding

Lose Control

Caught by a Tractor
Beam of Fun



Walking and Delivering Again: Revisiting *Death Stranding*

I finished re-playing *Death Stranding* again for the first time since 2020. I originally bought the game at the end of 2019 and finished my first playthrough in early 2020. It left a big impact and it was a relief to see the game find its audience over the years. For this playthrough, I bought the Director's Cut upgrade for my PS5. It was interesting to see what was changed compared to the original. Some changes, like the jump pads, feel like they should have been in the original release.

It's hard to believe that it's been five years since 2020. COVID-19 has reshaped the world in so many ways it's hard to recall that things haven't always been this way. In the early days of the pandemic, the smell of hand sanitizer became all too familiar. Similarly, every time Sam Bridges enters a distribution centre, his suit is decontaminated.

I recall feeling anxious yet strangely calm during the lockdowns. At the time, I thought, so many of my hobbies were indoors that I wouldn't mind having some more time to enjoy them. Yet I don't think I could possibly have guessed how much the pandemic would affect all of us. And as much as I did enjoy diving feet first into my hobbies, it didn't take long before I dearly missed hanging out with friends and going to restaurants. At one point, I seriously considered buying a restaurant

booth to simulate the feeling of sitting in a diner. I still might someday, assuming I have the space and the money to do so.

Contemporary commenters noted how prophetic *DS1* felt in the heart of the pandemic. We suddenly found ourselves disconnected from each other and the "normal" was completely disrupted. *DS1*'s cast of distrustful preppers and inhabitants felt all too real. Many of the people encountered throughout the journey are wary of joining the UCA (United Cities of America), wondering if re-connecting with others is really worth the risks.

Climbing the snowy mountains to reach Lockne's distribution center, building ziplines to make the trek to the wind farm easier, and meeting Heartman in his cozy home are just some of the memories that stood out from my first time playing. On this new playthrough, however, I was struck by how much I had forgotten in the intervening years. I didn't remember how easy it is to get completely overwhelmed by the BTs if you're not careful. I forgot how satisfying it is to ride a floating carrier down a mountain. The frequent email messages from the various characters that Sam meets during his journey took me by surprise.

Admittedly I didn't read all of the lore documents this time. I think I was more interested in experiencing the delivering and cutscenes rather than putting in the effort to read all of the optional materials (of which there is an abundance).



Above: Sam Bridges, man on a mission.

I watched all of the cutscenes. It's evident that Kojima was still finding his way as a director for talented actors. Keep in mind that *DS1* is his first attempt at working with people from the film and TV industries. (Keifer Sutherland portraying Big Boss in *The Phantom Pain* was mostly a voice acting role, and didn't involve motion capture.) The performances are interesting. The actors are clearly giving it their all, even in parts that may not work all that well. It makes me intrigued to see how Kojima handles the upcoming feature film set in the same universe.

Before I knew it, I had managed to put another 60 hours into the Director's Cut before credits rolled. On the first playthrough, I think I clocked in around 80 after doing quite a few of the optional deliveries.

DS1 is relaxing and making deliveries is satisfying. The gameplay loop of planning the best route to make multiple deliveries at once is fun. Unlocking new equipment to make the journey easier feels like a lot of care and attention to detail went into each tool. There are many vistas, all of which still look impressive.

Death Stranding 2: On the Beach came out at the end of June. It has already received praise for building on what makes *DS1* enjoyable. I've been avoiding watching all that much coverage of

it, eager to experience it for myself. Re-playing the first game beforehand feels like a good way to ease myself back into the game's world. Granted, I will probably wait just a little bit longer before trying *DS2*. Playing it so quickly after replaying the first may lead to burnout. Perhaps Christmas 2025?

Including a Hololive Vtuber in *DS2* is just the kind of self-indulgence that I love to see. I can't wait to equip the Pekora hat on Sam and never take it off.

Bobvids released a video on August 16, 2019 discussing *P.T.* ("playable trailer"), Hideo Kojima's final project at Konami. Bob argues that *P.T.* wasn't really a trailer for a new *Silent Hill* game. Instead, it's a project made by a man experiencing great sadness at being sidelined at a company

where he has made his entire career. You should watch Bob's video if you haven't seen it already; it's great. Check it out at the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yr4RvdREwI8>

At the time Bob released his video, *DS1* wasn't out yet. Bob's argument in the video is made all the more convincing by playing *DS1*. It really feels like a game made by a depressed man who is grieving for the loss of his control over his artistic creations. It makes me wonder if *DS2* will still feel like Kojima coming to terms with the inability to make more entries in his long-running *Metal Gear* series. Or will Kojima come into his own again and let his creative muscles flex once more? Either way I'm interested to see and play *DS2*. ◀



Above: One of the many distribution centers found in the post-Death Stranding America.



Above: The Oldest House, a far more interesting setting than first glance may lead you to believe.

Lose Control

I dismissed *Control* (2019) when it first came out. I saw gameplay footage and thought, “Gee, that looks kinda boring. The whole game is inside an office building? Talk about a dull setting.” It wasn’t until the game was included as one of PlayStation+ subscription games that I decided to give it a try for myself. It instantly captured me and blew me away. How could I have been so wrong at first glance? This situation speaks to that tired (yet still true) idea that video games are unlike other media *because* of the expectation of player interaction. Playing a game is not the same as watching someone else play it (both can be enjoyable, of course).

As far as shortcomings, there’s only one major issue that

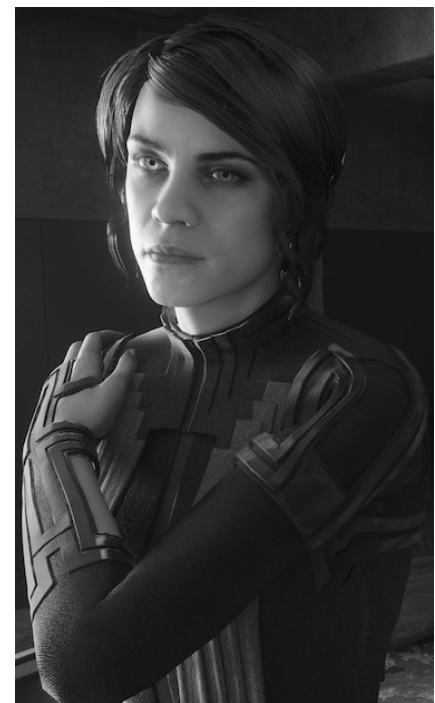
comes to mind: *Control* is a difficult game. I’m fine with difficult games. I don’t like difficult games that include a bunch of near-instant death attacks. The combat could be made better if the enemies didn’t hit so hard (or, conversely, if Jesse had a bit more health).

To mitigate the above, *Control* deserves praise for its accessibility settings. If a particular section or enemy is giving me grief, I can simply turn on invulnerability and relax a bit.

With those minor gripes out of the way, I can’t help but gush about the setting, story, and mood. The developers have really captured something special here. The style of the game is consistent and appealing.

Jesse is a terrific main character. She’s a fish out of water, and the player is engaged in her plight to find out more about the

Federal Bureau of Control and the Oldest House.



Above: Jesse stretching.

Yet Jesse isn’t spelling everything out for the player. Who

does she keep talking to? How much does she know about this organization? How did she even find it? Why is she able to do the things that she can?

The design of the Oldest House is incredible. The setting has been treated with the attention and energy necessary to make it stand out. It feels like another character.

One common critique that can be found online is that the map available in the game is inadequate for the large, confusing location. On my first playthrough many years ago, I shared the same feeling. I'm not the best at navigating in 3D spaces in video games.

On this most recent playthrough, however, I've flipped. I think that the locations in this game are distinct enough that the simplistic map is actually in the

game's favour. By having a simple map, the game is expecting the player to develop a more intimate understanding of the layout of the Oldest House. It also makes sense in a thematic way. The characters that inhabit this environment find the Oldest House confusing and frequently get lost themselves. It makes sense that the maps available would not be able to adequately capture the whole space.

Aside from the combat quibbles mentioned above, the fighting and powers feel great. Jesse continues to become stronger as the player explores the Oldest House, eventually gaining the ability to levitate at will. Flying enables the player to find hidden areas and move through the environments much quicker. The

levels have a lot of height to them, allowing Jesse to take full advantage of levitation.

Apparently a sequel is still in development at Remedy Games. I'm cautiously optimistic that they'll be able to build on what makes *Control* work so well. Remedy Games clearly showed an understanding of how to make a sequel with the release of *Alan Wake 2*, a game which seems to have far surpassed the original in every way.

With any luck, the fact that *FBC: Firebreak* has received such negative reviews won't impact the development of *Control 2*. *Firebreak* is also set in the Oldest House and, unfortunately, is yet another example of studios wanting to capitalize on games-as-services, à la *Fortnite*. ◀

Caught by a Tractor Beam of Fun

Fifty games in one?! I've followed Derek Yu for a little while. I remember his old indie games developer blog, Tigsources, which used to be a regularly-updated source of all sorts of indie video game news. I also played the free version of *Spelunky*. To a certain degree, I still prefer the original's aesthetics. The art style chosen for the commercial release makes sense and doesn't look bad of course; merely a preference.

UFO 50 is moderately ambitious. Gather a group of indie

developers and, over the course of a few years, develop fifty retro-style games to be sold in a compilation.

Not all fifty games are made equal. Some of the games included in this package feel a little rough around the edges. In some ways, it's true to life. Many old NES games are not very fun to play by modern standards ("fun" being difficult to define, of course).

This compilation is fascinating for people who have a certain degree of familiarity with the old games that they take inspiration from. I don't think I could do justice trying to list all of the references I noticed in this anthology. Instead, I'll note a few stand-outs.



Above: A cowpoke holding a gun.

Valbrance is a *Dungeon Master* clone, mixed with *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!* It's a good

mash-up and I can tell it's going to take me a while to beat.

Pilot Quest plays mostly like the original *Legend of Zelda*, with some modern resource-farming mechanics thrown in. Its art style reminds me of the gross-out aesthetic of the 1990s, commonly seen in Nickelodeon cartoons of the time as well as television channels like YTV. The overall vibe is oddly reminiscent of *Mother* (localized as *EarthBound Beginnings*). Makes me think Itoi Shigesato would enjoy this one. The yo-yo weapon seems like it may be a direct nod to *Startropics*.

Campanella 2 plays like Derek Yu's *Spelunky*, with the addition of side-scrolling stages. The art style in many of the sci-fi titles looks a lot like *Kabuki Quantum Fighter*.

Mini & Max controls like *Super Mario Bros. 2*, complete with the ability to pick up objects by standing on them and pressing a button. Although it's a platformer, it's not based on completing stages. It's probably my favourite game of the entire collection. Its premise feels like a story out of the newspaper comics of the 1980s.

Think *Calvin & Hobbes*. The whole game is charming and wholesome.

Rail Heist is a sidescrolling strategy game, in which the player takes on the role of a band of bank robbers stealing valuables from different trains. When the player is spotted by a guard, the game becomes turn-based, with the computer having an opportunity to move his guards for a few seconds before the player's turn to do the same with their robber.



Above: Mini and Max on the adventure of a lifetime.

Night Manor is a point-and-click adventure game, reminiscent

of *Uninvited* and *Shadowgate*. It nails a creepy atmosphere. The pixel-hunting is minimal. The story is simple, yet effective.

One point of criticism that I tend to level at most games is whether or not they include accessibility options. There are none here. Not even color blind mode for some games where it would probably be required. I understand that the spirit of this collection was to match the challenge found in titles of the 1980s. At the same time, accessibility options serve as a way to keep the games fun and open to more people (don't developers want more people to be able to play their games?).

At the end of the day, how much do you enjoy playing old NES games that you've never heard of? If that sounds like a terrible way to spend time, there's not much else in this package for you.

This collection is a killer app for the Steam Deck for me (I know it's also available on Nintendo Switch). Although development started before the Deck existed, the developers couldn't have asked for a better platform. ◀

Tiny Reviews

Below are just some of the many games that I've played over the course of 2025. Sometimes I don't have enough to say to warrant a full article. Tiny Reviews allow me to mention them in bite-sized pieces. Review scores aren't helpful, so you won't find any here.

Annalynn is an arcade game best-described as a side-scrolling take on *Pac-Man*. Players take on the role of the titular character as they collect coins and evade a pack of snakes.

Annalynn is clearly a labour of love. The game controls great and there's been a lot of effort to

ensure it looks and feels like an arcade game that got an NES port.

Golf with Your Friends is a mini-golf game. It boasts local and online multiplayer, and a plethora of different game modes. It even features a level editor, although it's a bit challenging to use and features absolutely no

documentation or tutorials. While there are tutorials on YouTube made by third-parties, it seems pretty lazy to not provide any kind of in-game help. Even including a 10 minute crash course would go a long way.

Golf with Your Friends regular levels are a mixed bag. It seems like the game was really intended to be played in some of the sillier modes rather than the straightforward “classic” mode. Some of the pars are ridiculous considering the difficulty of the stages.

Although I’ve never played *Walkabout Mini Golf*, the developers of *Golf with Your Friends* should take some notes from that one. The levels are much fairer and look far more like real-world mini golf courses. I spent less than \$10 on *Golf with Your Friends* and feel like I got my money’s worth.

Nubby’s Number Factory is a delightful arcade game (“roguelite”, am I saying that correctly?) that reminds one of old Flash games. It doesn’t take itself too seriously. I got interested in this one after watching a certain lion of the north play it.

Silent Hill f is a return to form for the long-maligned series. For fans of 1, 2, and 3, *SHf* will feel like the good old days. It’s spooky, thoughtful, and maybe even a little cozy. It even has some *Fatal Frame* vibes.

While playing, I couldn’t help but wonder what a remake of *Forbidden Siren* would look like using the same rural Japanese village art assets.

Apparently future titles in the *Silent Hill* series will do their own thing. It’s exciting to think that the series may finally become the horror anthology that it was always meant to be.

The Talos Principle is a puzzle game similar to *Portal*. Players take on the role of an android in a virtual world solving various puzzles. Each stage is self-contained. The game does a good job at introducing new concepts gradually, building up the complexity over time.

Xanadu Next is an old game developed by Nihon Falcom. Some reviews on Steam described it as being similar to *Diablo II*, but its gameplay is not exactly like that.

It’s okay. It definitely feels like a game that was made for an old platform back in a time with different expectations. ◀

Demos for the Demos

Remember demo discs? Those were awesome. What better way to get someone interested in a game than to let them play a portion of it? Demo discs are back! In digital form. Unless noted otherwise, all demos below are available on Steam.

House of Necrosis is a re-imagining of the original *Resident Evil* as a *Mystery Dungeon*-style game. Beyond just wearing its

influences on its sleeve, the entire premise is lifted wholesale from *RE1*, right down to the special forces team sent to a mysterious mansion in the woods. I reached about level 4 before having to escape using an item. What I saw of the level generation indicated that it was a relatively simple roguelike. Rooms were mostly empty aside from occasional items and enemies; not unusual for simpler roguelike games, but there are so many of them now that it may be better to include something

to help the title stand out. The demo is generous in that it lets players continue exploring quite a lot of what the game has to offer.

Metro Gravity is a cool 3D platformer with a protagonist that can walk on almost any surface in order to change her personal gravity. The level design is interesting and makes good use of the gravity mechanic. Movement feels pretty decent. Unfortunately the fighting feels a bit clunky. Perhaps it’s a matter of practice,

but it does feel like a game that could have done without combat entirely.

Mullet Madjack is an FPS that requires players to shoot their way through stages on a tight timer. It has a lot of style. In-universe, everyone needs constant streams of dopamine or else they'll die. The protagonist's exploits are being live-streamed.

Scarmonde is a *Final Fantasy III* clone. Its description promises solid gameplay with little to no story whatsoever. It delivers on that promise.

Splintered is an interesting take on *Dragon Quest 1*: the world is randomly generated every time the player dies.

I found the enemies to be a little obtuse at first. I kept running into ghost enemies that seemed to be impervious to all attack. But perhaps their presence was to ensure at least one death to randomly generate the world again?

Vividlope is a love-letter to classic Sega Dreamcast games. It oozes style and wouldn't feel out of place on a Dreamcast at all. It's an arcade platformer where the player needs to flip the colour of tiles by walking on them. Performance is ranked based on speed and how many tiles are walked on without retreading old ground.

This demo boasts about 30 stages and gives interested players a good idea of what to expect from the full game.

Ultrakill is a stylish FPS that's still in active development. While I enjoyed the first bit that I played, I could never get a score above C grade. I clearly do not have the requisite reflexes to pull off the cool moves this game demands.

Zortch is a boomer shooter made by a single developer. The protagonist has been scammed: thinking they were on a vacation destination of a life-time, they wake up in a slave colony on an alien planet. The shooting and controls are solid. Level design is typical for boomer shooter: labyrinthine with a lot of branching paths that loop back.

The demo is generous, letting players enjoy the first four levels. ◀

Editorial

Thank you, kind reader, for staying with us all this way. I hope this zine introduced you to your next video game obsession. I've just finished a second playthrough of *Silent Hill f*, and will be taking a break from the game before returning for any of the other

endings. Don't want to burn myself out, you see.

This zine came about because I felt like making one for a while now. It's been fun taking what were originally meant to be blog posts and turn them into something else entirely. I got to re-use some old moldy files that were sitting on the old hard drive. What better way to fill in a zine quickly? Of course,

that means that I had to edit text that wasn't quite ready for prime time.

On the Internet Archive, I've seen anime zines, video game zines, and even *Twin Peaks* zines. It's really inspiring to see what other people achieved with even older software back in the day.

See you next time, space cowboy. ◀

Writing, Editing, and Layout
cathodenuke

Check us out on the web: <https://stoicclub.neocities.org>

Cathode Zine is copyright © 2025, all rights reserved. Images are copyright their respectful owners and are included under fair use. ◀