9 cool new games from GDC 2023

When thousands of developers descend into one place, you know there are going to be some excellent games to check out. That was definitely the case over the past week. We've been attending the Game Developers Conference in San Francisco, and in addition to watching press conferences and attending talks, we've also had plenty of opportunity to go hands-on with some intriguing indie games. And there's a lot to be excited about — so we gathered our favorites (in no particular order) right here. Most of these are due out later in 2023, so plan your free time accordingly.

a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>*Omega Strikers*

I know, I know, another free-to-play competitive multiplayer game. We're drowning in them. But *Omega Strikers* feels like it might be able to carve out a space in the crowded field. It's sort of like a mashup of soccer and *Overwatch*, a 3v3 game where you play across a handful of futuristic maps, with the goal of scoring on your opponent. Simple stuff. The twist is the hero characters you control, each of whom has unique characteristics and a special move that can turn the tide of the game if used right. Team composition becomes a big part of the strategy.

I wasn't able to get into that during the handful of matches I played, and yet I still had a blast. Matches were quick and dramatic, and I even managed a few goals. There's a lot that

goes into making this kind of game a long-term success, but *Omega Strikers* at least makes a good first impression. It's launching on Switch, PC, and mobile on April 27th.—*AW*

a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>*A Highland Song*

Inkle is best-known for its narrative games, like the globe-trotting *80 Days* or the archaeology adventure *Heaven's Vault*, but the studio's next release goes in a different direction. *A Highland Song* is a side-scrolling game about a young girl exploring the Scottish Highlands. It still has the choice-driven gameplay the studio is known for, as you select different paths through the mountains. But it also has surprising elements like a simple survival system, as you have to stay warm and dry and find shelter at night. At certain points it's even a rhythm game as you race across the landscape in time to music.

From what I played it was both thrilling and mysterious, with a dose of magical realism mixed with Scottish mythology. It also looked incredible, like a Cartoon Saloon film you can explore. *A Highland Song* doesn't have a release date, but it's coming to both Steam and the Switch.—*AW*

a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>*The Wandering Village*

At its most basic, *The Wandering Village* – which is actually out now as an early access title on Steam – is a fairly standard city builder. You harvest resources, use them to build and upgrade your town, and try your best to balance the needs of your growing population. The twist is that you're

building that city on the back of a giant, wandering creature.

This isn't just an aesthetic choice (although it does look *very* cool), but it also impacts the game itself. The beast will wander through different environments, so things like the weather are constantly changing, forcing you to adapt. At one point during my demo of the Xbox version, which is out this year, the creature ventured into a toxic forest, forcing me to race to stop the spores from infecting my crops and other plants. It's a fun twist on an age-old genre, and it's also surprisingly well-adapted to an Xbox gamepad.—*AW*

a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white">*5 Force Fighters*

Black people love *Dragon Ball Z* — it's a (near) scientific fact. And one of the ways that love manifests is through the video games Black people make. *5 Force Fighters* is a fighting game inspired by the *Budokai Tenkaichis* and the *Dragon Ball* M.U.G.E.N fan games of the world.

Made by a pair of first-time game developer brothers, *5 Force Fighters* drips, both subtly and overtly, with Black culture. The character designs and animations remind me of Huey and Riley from Aaron McGruder's *The Boondocks.* I was delighted by the text before a match that substitutes the typical "FIGHT" message with "THROW HANDS." The pre-fight match up screen features graffiti'd train doors as an homage to the brothers getting around on the Portland subway, and at the end of a match, instead of prompting for a rematch, it asks, "RUN IT BACK" — a neat little send-up to fighting game commentary.

It's also a game that's easy to pick up and play but suffused with so much technical depth that even the most particular labber will enjoy it. *5 Force Fighters* is coming to Steam.—*AP*