Ghost Trick is a summer beach read in video game form

Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective is 2023's perfect summer video game.

Now, you might be wondering how I could call a Switch port of a Nintendo DS game from 2010 "perfect" (the game's also available on PS4, Xbox One, and Steam) over any of the games actually released this year, like *Diablo IV* or *Final Fantasy XVI*. But while I enjoyed both of those games, I actually don't think either are ideal summer games for two reasons.

1. They're way too involved, requiring a bit too much mental commitment to play.

Their hardware requirements force you to play them indoors. Therefore, a perfect summer game must instead:

Be portable
(Yes, I know you can play *Diablo IV* on your Steam Deck with a bit of work, but level with me here.)

Ghost Trick was directed by Shu Takumi, the same developer who created the *Ace Attorney* series, which explains why *Ghost Trick* feels very much like *Ace Attorney* while also being wildly different in every way.

For starters, in *Ghost Trick*, you're not solving other people's murders but your own. Also, you're not doing the solving in a courtroom but at the scene of the crime. In *Ghost Trick,* you play as a recently departed ghost who must use his newfound powers of matter manipulation to solve his murder by saving the people around him from their own untimely deaths.

Each life you save (notice I said “life” not “person,” remember this) brings you that much closer to the truth of your own life and death.

You save lives via your ability to rewind time to four minutes before a death and by interacting with common objects, aka the titular “ghost tricks.” Thwart an assassin by shining a spotlight in his face or stop a death row inmate’s execution via an elaborate ghost-powered Rube Goldberg machine that has you jump from object to object until you can guide the inmate to safety.

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Unlike *Ace Attorney,* which requires you to look and listen for the tiniest details to thwart your enemies, *Ghost Trick* is straightforward, which is why I enjoyed it so much as a summer game. It allowed me to play while I baked my body in the hot Las Vegas sun, blitzed on (way too expensive) drinks by the pool.

Despite *Ghost Trick*’s simplicity, I was caught off guard by how sweet the game is and how emotional it made me. What started as a simplistic “I have lost my memory and I’m dead, I must find out who I am and who killed me” premise turned into a deep story about love and devotion that hit me so hard in the game’s final moments.

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I won’t get into spoilers, but I will say this: remember how that *Futurama* episode “Jurassic Bark” made you feel… yeah.

Some of *Ghost Trick*’s puzzles are a little unintuitive, while

others require split-second, twitchy timing that I didn’t expect and, at times, found hard to execute given that I was, y’know, out of my mind in Las Vegas. The story also takes some too-wild turns in the third act, and it gets a bit unwieldy keeping track of who’s who. But there were several stunning points where it pierces the veil between game and player that are cleverly done and make for real “holy shit” moments.

There’s something about Capcom’s visual novel murder mystery games that just make them perfect for the summer. If you’re looking for a low-effort, outdoor-playable game, give *Ghost Trick* a shot.

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