

Netflix's test of streaming games is small, but it's poised to be a big deal

Enlarge / Netflix's growing games division wants to be available as many places as possible, so now it's rolling out tests of TV and browser-based games (at least on Mac and PC).

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Having quietly released a phone-based TV game controller for iOS devices last week, Netflix has both made their ambition for streaming subscription gaming official—as well as expanding it to PCs and Macs through the web.

In a blog post today, Mike Verdu, vice president for games at Netflix, states that the streaming content company is rolling out “a limited beta test to a small number of members in Canada and the UK on select TVs starting today, and on PCs and Macs through Netflix.com on supported browsers in the next few weeks.”

The first two games available on bigger-than-mobile screens are the visual novel-esque adventure game *Oxenfree 2*, from Netflix-owned Night School Studio, and *Molehew's Mining Adventure*, described as a “gem-mining arcade game.”

Those two games and future titles can be streamed. Those early testers playing on TV can use Netflix's app-based controller, while Netflix says that members “on PCs and Macs can play on Netflix.com with a keyboard and mouse.” There's no mention of

controller support, Linux, or other systems that have browsers. Given the mess that Linux users encounter with web-based DRM, and Netflix's peculiar device support, it's not a likely bet, at least for now.

That said, the games are already compatible with the most popular streaming boxes: Amazon Fire TV devices, Chromecast with Google TV, Nvidia Shields, Roku devices, Walmart ONN, and smart TVs from Roku, LG, and Samsung.

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Netflix has an established, if quite low-key, mobile games division, providing subscribers with free games on iOS and Android devices through the App Store or Google Play. As we noted a few months ago, Netflix Games is poised in some ways to succeed beyond the limited impact Apple Arcade or Google's Play Pass have made. Netflix Games has picked up some games and developers that had been previously seen on Arcade, offering its wide user base something new without requiring a secondary subscription, using a separate app store, or forcing developers to adapt to an unfamiliar platform.

Streamed games have not had an easy launch in their still-early days (RIP Stadia). But here, again, Netflix is not taking the traditional approach or targeting traditional game archetypes. The two streaming games announced, and their mobile games so far, lean heavily toward puzzle, casual, party, adventure, and light action (and *Kentucky Route Zero*). This is not a value judgment, as there are some well-regarded titles in the mix that may make their way to streaming, including *Moonlighter*, *TMNT: Shredder's Revenge*, *Laya's Horizon*, *World of Goo Remastered*, *Shovel Knight*, *Immortality*, *Desta: The Memories Between*, *Reigns*, and *Into the Breach*.

Netflix seems to have big ambitions for games, recently investing heavily in its studios and third-party titles. Its latest ploy for even more access could mean the entry of a new, quirky competitor for our already highly sought-after

screen time.

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