

2026 FANTASYCRITIC DRAFT GUIDE



FANTASY CRITIC

Hello and welcome to my 2026 FantasyCritic Draft Guide. I am Matt aka HikarW. I have played four seasons of FantasyCritic and began prepping for year five this past September. I have also played fantasy football for over a decade, and I annually consume unhealthy amounts of draft prep content for my fantasy football leagues each year in order to be overly and maybe even detrimentally prepared. I realized that while there are countless websites, channels, outlets, podcasts, etc. that cover upcoming video game releases, as far as I can tell there isn't really an annual FantasyCritic draft guide (if you know of any please lmk) so I figured I may as well give it a shot. I'm going to break down my general strategy and draft plan for '26, and of course tier and rank all of the games I think are definitely FantasyCritic relevant and expected to release this coming year.

A Few Disclaimers You Can Skip If You Don't Care

So unlike fantasy football or most other fantasy games, FantasyCritic has a lot of flexibility and options with each league's rules, which means very few leagues will look exactly alike. While the scoring is pretty set in stone, the number of players, roster sizes, add/drop rules, and especially the tags that your league does and doesn't allow on rosters, or even require a certain number of can all vary greatly. I will do my best to provide as universal of advice as possible and to use language that can apply to leagues of all shapes and sizes. If you're curious, before this year I have only played in one league. It is a 4 team league, with 16 game rosters (9 drafted, 7 via bids) and 3 counter pick slots (1 drafted).

At the bottom of each draftable game I will attach score projections. To be clear I am not a fantasy data expert with some complex fine-tuned model I am using to categorize each game. I am simply just putting some numbers down that look right to me. I will reference previous games from the franchises and developers, trailers and previews and more to back up my projections, but they are ultimately nothing more than my opinion. To be clear, floor refers to what I think is a realistic low scoring outcome, and ceiling refers to what I think is a best case scenario score outcome. Obviously I am going to be wrong about a lot of stuff...

(I thought Clair Obscur: Expedition 33's ceiling was an 85 and I spent my second round draft pick on Unannounced 3D Mario). I am actually really excited to check this guide as the season plays out to see what I got right and wrong.

I AM NOT DISCUSSING ANY REMAKES OR REMASTERS OR EVEN REIMAGININGS. This is for two reasons. First, I don't think you should allow them. The fun is trying to predict what games will score well. Remakes often are of games that already are good, so what's the fun in including them. Second, I don't really feel like saying "This game scored **XX** back when it released and now it's gonna be prettier and maybe include one extra mission!" fifteen times. I don't think you should play with these games because it's less fun, and if you do you probably don't need my help to know what they'll score. I AM ALSO NOT DISCUSSING EXPANSIONS. That is because I ran out of time. Good luck if your league has those! I will have a brief section at the back end discussing counterpick strategies and targets.

Just to be clear, the goal of this project is to gather my thoughts on these games and build a plan I think could lead to success in my and your FantasyCritic leagues, NOT to preview and build hype for the coming year of games. At times I will be referring to games strictly by their average review scores or calling them bad value picks, or generally talking about several video games in...

ways that can seem very reductive. I obviously do not mean any ill will or disrespect to any of these projects or developers, especially because I have obviously not even played a lot of them. So much hard work from so many people goes into the development process of any game. An aggregate review score should never solely define a game, and I do not want to give off the impression that games with lower scores are totally meritless for players.

I have separated the games into tiers and then ordered them within the tiers to match the order I would draft them in. If you end up drafting my fourth game in A tier ahead of the third game in A tier I wouldn't be bothered by that decision, but I do think sticking to games from each tier and then the order of the tiers as the draft unfolds will generally set you up for success. Hopefully.

All scores referenced are obviously taken from OpenCritic unless otherwise specified. All Hype Factors were pulled from the site on Dec 30, 2026 and are subject to change as more people draft.

This is obviously for the 2026 fantasy year. If you're reading this before Jan 1, 2026 and I say this year just know I'm referring to 2026. If I get my lingo about this year and last year mixed up, my bad lol.

Grand Theft Auto VI | Rockstar Games **Nov 19, 2026**

Hype Factor: 94.4 (#2 Hyped Game)

I know GTA VI doesn't even really require a blurb, but I will give it one just so we are all on the same page. In the history of Metacritic, which dates back to the late 1990s, there are 45 games (excluding collections, repeats, and remasters) that have scored a **95** or higher. Of those 45 games, 5 of them are the five most recent main series Grand Theft Auto games. And 2 more of them are Red Dead Redemption and its sequel. Put together that's more than the six Zelda games, four valve games, three Mario games, two naughty dog games, etc. (remember that with default scoring if a game scores above **90** you get double points for each point above **90**). And unlike last year, there is a hard date attached to this game. I know there are people out there who don't believe in this November release date, but I do. Yes it is true GTA VI was delayed from May to November, which means any further delay would almost certainly knock it out of '26, but I personally would be pretty surprised if Rockstar delays the biggest game launch in the history of game launches out of a holiday season. Red Dead Redemption 2 was also delayed twice so I don't think the current trajectory for the games launch is out of the ordinary for Rockstar. In my opinion, this should be the first overall pick in every FantasyCritic League, and when it releases it will probably finish as the highest reviewed game in the history of OpenCritic.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 95

CEILING: 98

BEST GUESS: 97

Marvel's Wolverine | Insomniac Games **Fall 2026**

Hype Factor: 89.9 (#4 Hyped Game)

The floor of this game is ridiculously high. Marvel's Spider-Man, Spider-Man 2 and Ratchet & Clank: Rift Apart all received an **88** on OpenCritic, and Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales received an **85** with the complaints mostly focused on its shorter length and smaller scope. Insomniac consistently brings excellent gameplay to all of their projects, and the visceral and bloody combat Wolverine is known for is a major contrast to Spider-Man so I expect this game to be a big hit with critics. The physics on the blood in Wolverine particular really stood out to me in the breakdown from the September State of Play. The way blood bursts from the impaled enemies and precisely splatters onto Wolverine is just one example of the incredible level of detail Insomniac has brought to all of their superhero games. Also as you will see as you continue to read this guide (plz do this took a long time to research and write k thanks!) I highly value when games have set in stone dates assigned to them. Wolverine does not, however I feel very confident it will arrive this coming fall. The original teaser was first shown all the way back in '21. Insomniac has released Spider-Man in September of '18, Miles Morales in November of '20, and Spider-Man 2 in October of '23 with no announced delays, so fall '26 falls right into their release cadence. And with GTA currently scheduled for mid November, there is room for a major title like Wolverine to release in September or October without being overshadowed. If you are not willing to pull the trigger on Grand Theft Auto VI, this is the next best option in FantasyCritic to me.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 87

CEILING: 92

BEST GUESS: 90

Forza Horizon 6 | Playground Games

2026

Hype Factor: 84.3 (#8 Hyped Game)

Forza Horizon 6 was announced at Tokyo Game Show this past year, with the teaser showing “2026” at the end. Forza Horizon 2 was released on Sep 29, 2014 and received an **88** on OpenCritic. Forza Horizon 3 was released on Sep 27, 2016 and received a **91** on OpenCritic. Forza Horizon 4 was released on Oct 2, 2018 and received a **92** on OpenCritic. Forza Horizon 5 was released on Nov 9, 2021 and received a **92** on OpenCritic. It is true that Playground Games is now also working on Fable, but it has been confirmed that Playground Games will be at the January Xbox Developer Direct, and based off of the release cadence of the previous four games, and the fact that it has been five years since Horizon 5 and three years since the last Forza Motorsport, I feel 100% confident this game will release in ‘26. This game is also set in Japan, which might as well be a free +1 to its score for video game critics. Not even all of the turmoil Xbox has been going through the last couple years should impact the level of quality Playground Games has brought to this series. This should be a top 4 pick in every draft. Right now its hype factor is 8th, and if you can get it anywhere outside of the top 5 in drafts that is an incredible value.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 86

CEILING: 92

BEST GUESS: 90

Marvel Tokon: Fighting Souls | Arc System Works

Hype Factor: 67.3 (#16 Hyped Game)

2026

Arc System Works has been making outstanding fighting games for a long time. Their primary franchise Guilty Gear (Strive got an **86** in '21) has a die-hard fanbase, so combining that history and reputation with the backing of Sony, the Marvel IP, and the decision to make it a tag team fighter could lead to this being a breakout hit. The most encouraging tidbit from the initial reveal was that Sony not only sought out Arc System Works, but when checking on their work early in the process of development encouraged Arc to go further, and to "show us the Marvel that you want to create." That was clearly taken to heart as the game jumps off the screen with Arc's signature style. The character designs in particular stand out in a big way, which is really hard for any Marvel project to do these days. There is no hard date for the game yet, but it was revealed at Summer Game Fest and has had two closed betas already. I think a Q1 release in order to be present at EVO is very likely, and a '26 release date is practically guaranteed. Feedback from the closed betas was very positive, with many players praising the game's movement and feel, accessibility for novice players, and crucially the rollback netcode. Literally my only concern that I think could hold this game back would be a small roster of fighters at launch. We have still only seen eight characters from the roster, but I'm sure that the final game has at least double that many fighters. Street Fighter 6 (**91**) proved that excellent fighting games can hit a high review score, and I think Arc System Works is capable of reaching those same heights with this project. I believe in this game and I think it should be picked fourth to sixth in drafts. Based on current hype factors, you might be able to get it in the 12-15 range, and if you can I think that could be a major steal.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 86****CEILING: 91****BEST GUESS: 89**

SAROS | Housemarque Games

Apr 30, 2026

Hype Factor: 91.8 (#3 Hyped Game)

Basically (and possibly actually) a sequel to Returnal (**86**), Saros may not have the name recognition or developer reputation of many of the other top games in Hype Factor, but I think it is a very safe bet to score well. Housemarque has shipped several well received action games, and Saros will be the longest they've spent on a single project. It also seems poised by Sony to be one of the main showpieces for the PS5 Pro. When evaluating sequels I like to look for original games that reviewed well but also left room for improvement, such as Ghost of Tsushima (**84**) into Ghost of Yotei (**87**), and I think Returnal and Saros fits that mold. If Saros successfully iterates and builds on the lessons Housemarque learned from Returnal, I believe it could match that **86** score, and I think if the narrative is a big hit with reviewers it could go even higher. And of course, that April release date means you likely don't have to worry at all about it not releasing this year. I think this is one of the safest picks in FantasyCritic this year. It should not escape the top 5 of any drafts, and if you want to play it very safe and take it as high as first or second overall I understand.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 84

CEILING: 90

BEST GUESS: 88

Mina the Hollower | Yacht Club Games

2026

Hype Factor: 66.4 (#17 Hyped Game)

Shovel Knight (**89**) might be the only game Yacht Club has ever developed, but it and its many DLCs (which are basically full releases in terms of how much content they contain) are all so well regarded that Mina the Hollower deserves all the hype it has off the back of Shovel Knight alone. Mina is bringing the same incredible retro pixel art and soundtrack to a Link to the Past style adventure game, with combat intense enough that I have seen some calling the game a pseudo souls-like. There has been some interesting reporting that Mina the Hollower is a “make or break” release for Yacht Club. While that is a pretty surprising and somewhat alarming report, I don’t think it raises concern for the quality of the game itself for me, especially considering how long it has been in development. Mina may have cost you last year with its delay, but as far as ‘26 goes this game is practically guaranteed to release this year so this is an indie you can draft without any reservation. You will also rarely find an indie game with a floor this high in drafts, and it should absolutely be one of the top drafted games this year. This is a title some people seem to be wary of, and I think that could lead to you getting it in the 12-15 range of drafts, which would be a huge value.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 86****CEILING: 90****BEST GUESS: 87**

Resident Evil Requiem | Capcom

Feb 27, 2026

Hype Factor: 98 (#1 Hyped Game)

When I first started writing this draft guide I was expecting Requiem to be my 2nd overall pick with the legendary reputation of the Resident Evil franchise behind it, not to mention the run that Capcom has been on lately. I do think it is worth noting that although Resident Evil 2 Remake (**92**) and Resident Evil 4 Remake (**92**) were some of the highest scoring games in their respective years, the last two brand new installments in the series didn't score as high as you might think they did, with Resident Evil 7 scoring an **86** and Resident Evil Village scoring an **84**. The hard date in Q1 (which is also around the end of Capcom's fiscal year so a delay is all but impossible) is definitely a point in its favor, and the combination of a darker and more intense horror atmosphere in Grace's segments and more high octane action sequences in Leon's segments, plus a return to Raccoon City is very exciting. I am by no means suggesting this game does not deserve to be a high draft pick, but this franchise does not have a flawless history by any means, so I do think Requiem's floor is lower than a few of the other games with similar hype factor. Considering it is currently the number one hype factor game and I have it ranked outside the top 5, I am essentially saying you should pass on this game. I would let someone else in your league take it in the first five picks or so, because I do think it is possible it underperforms critically, and I think there are a few safer picks in this range. But I am by no means saying you should not draft it. I think 7th pick and beyond is when the games around it begin to drop down a tier, and once the six games I ranked above it are gone I would draft it without hesitating.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 83

CEILING: 91

BEST GUESS: 87

Gears of War: E-Day | The Coalition

2026

Hype Factor: 39 (#32 Hyped Game)

Once upon a time this franchise was reviewing as well as any series in the industry. Epic Games might be a little too busy these days to stoop so low as to develop a triple A shooter, but The Coalition has done a nice job taking over the series. With E-Day being a prequel at the initial moment of the alien invasion, Marcus and Dom returning, and reportedly a more linear design than Gears 5 it should be a big hit with critics and fans of the series. Phil Spencer promised Gears would be one of the titles we get from Xbox in '26 (and they doubled down on '26 in their Game Pass ad during The Game Awards), and '26 is the 20th anniversary of the series, so I believe you can count on a release this year. Until we see gameplay there isn't much more I can say about E-Day itself, but I think the series pedigree combined with the return to beloved characters gives this game a ridiculously high floor. Even without a set date, this is one of the safest picks you can make in all of FantasyCritic this year. It is criminally underrated in hype factor right now, so take advantage of that whenever you feel comfortable drafting it.

SERIES REVIEW HISTORY:

2006	Gears of War	94
2008	Gears of War 2	93
2011	Gears of War 3	91
2016	Gears of War 4	85
2019	Gears 5	85

metacritic

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 84****CEILING: 88****BEST GUESS: 86**

Monster Hunter Stories 3: | Capcom Twisted Reflection

Hype Factor: 51.8 (#24 Hyped Game)

Mar 13, 2026

This might be the game I am the highest on compared to the consensus opinions/Hype Factor. Capcom has been on a tear lately, but that's not the only reason I am all in on this game for FantasyCritic. Monster Hunter Stories (**79**) was a solid spinoff in '17, and its sequel Wings of Ruin (**81**) was generally seen as more of the same with some minor improvements. The series received praise for its turn-based combat, and for its systems for raising and customizing your monsties (yes that's what they're called), but they were both considered to be very light narratively, tonally a bit too casual and geared toward younger audiences overall. If you watch the trailers for Monster Hunter Stories 3, it is immediately apparent that this game is a major step up in the presentation, visuals, tone, narrative, and so much more. The character and monster models are no longer a chibi style, but fully realized and also more stylized than before. The landscapes are MUCH larger, more detailed and more vertical, and you can freely ride and fly around on your monsties to traverse them. The combat animations look very fun and flashy. There is also a new habitat restoration mechanic that rewards players for repopulating endangered species, and can even reward players with special variants of monsters. There are several fan favorite monsters that have yet to be featured in the stories series we know will be in Stories 3, which helps the game's roster of monsters feel fresh and exciting. Maybe most of all, the plot and voiceover looks to be on another level, bringing a gravity to the series that should make players feel more invested. I feel strongly that Twisted Reflection's floor is higher than the final scores of both of its predecessors, and its ceiling is as high or higher than some games in the top 10 of the hype factor list. I personally want this in every draft I am in, and with its current hype factor that is very doable.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 84****CEILING: 88****BEST GUESS: 86**

Nioh 3 | Team Ninja/Koei Tecmo

Feb 6, 2026

Hype Factor: 84.7 (#7 Hyped Game)

Nioh is definitely not as exciting of a franchise as it once was. The original was received very well critically and commercially in '17, and stood out as a real competitor to the Souls series. Now there are countless souls-likes, including four more from Team Ninja in Nioh 2, Wo Long: Fallen Dynasty, Rise of the Ronin, and Stranger of Paradise: Final Fantasy Origin. With that being said, this is still a very strong option for FantasyCritic. Nioh 3's main new features include some open area levels as well as being able to freely swap between a samurai and a ninja loadout/moveset during combat. I do worry the larger environments could contribute to the bloat this series is already known for, but the first two Nioh games reviewed very well (Nioh - **88**, Nioh 2 - **85**) and I think the combat in the Nioh series is excellent and gives this game a high floor. This feels like one of the few truly known quantities in FantasyCritic, and I think you should covet it pretty highly this year. I have it ranked tenth, but if your goal is to play it safe I think you could draft this as high as sixth overall.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 83

CEILING: 88

BEST GUESS: 85

Pragmata | Capcom

Apr 24, 2026

Hype Factor: 83.8 (#9 Hyped Game)

When Pragmata was first teased in 2020 I was personally very excited to see what a brand new sci-fi Capcom IP could be. Now that we have seen what the game is and how it plays, it's nothing like what I was expecting but it is very intriguing. The combat hook of combining hacking mini games and third person shooting is very unique. Pragmata was playable at Summer Games Fest and Gamescom and has a free demo available, and a lot of the hands-on impressions I've seen have praised how fun the game is to play. Capcom has delivered several games that have reviewed great in recent years, and I don't see any reason why Pragmata would buck that trend. I know this game has been delayed so many times already both publicly and internally, but there was a 15 minute gameplay showcase posted online in addition to the trailers and playable demo, so I think the end is finally in sight and this April release date will hold. This game is also only \$59.99 so that could help its case with reviewers. I am happy to continue to bet on Capcom to keep delivering games that score well. I do think it is a tad too high in Hype Factor, but it is not a stay away. To me, Pragmata should go around the 10th pick and should not fall further than pick 14 in any league.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 80

CEILING: 88

BEST GUESS: 85

Onimusha Way of the Sword | Capcom

2026

Hype Factor: 65.3 (#18 Hyped Game)

This is a bit of a tricky evaluation since Way of the Sword is the first mainline title in this franchise in more than two decades. Impressions from media who have gone hands-on with the game has been positive overall, and I think its old school style gives it a chance to stand out to reviewers from the innumerable souls-likes of late. To me, the main reason to draft this game is that it's a Capcom game. Capcom has been on an absolute HEATER of great releases dating back to '18. The initial reveal for Way of the Sword was back in December of '24 at the game awards, and there have been playable demos at Summer Games Fest and Gamescom as well as several trailers since. Capcom has a lot of projects slated for this year, but they all have a set date in the first half of the year, so a '26 release for Onimusha feels like a safe bet to me. I don't think this game has a very high ceiling or is even necessarily likely to hit its ceiling, but I feel like you can practically lock in a mid 80s score. You probably won't win your league because of Onimusha, but you should get a solid return that will help keep you in the mix.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 81

CEILING: 88

BEST GUESS: 85

Fire Emblem: Fortune's Weave | Nintendo

2026

Hype Factor: 78.9 (#10 Hyped Game)

So most people might see this game and think "It's just more Fire Emblem it'll probably be pretty good", but I do think it's worth digging deeper on this game. Fire Emblem: Three Houses (**89**) was a big hit critically and commercially in 2019, in large part due to its beloved characters, excellent writing, and branching story. Fortune's Weave is seemingly connected to the lore of Three Houses, though we don't know exactly how and to what extent yet. Fire Emblem: Engage (**81**) came out in '23 and scored quite a bit lower than Three Houses. It was aesthetically off putting to a lot of people and had nowhere near the same caliber of characters or writing and a much more streamlined narrative. But many series fans praised it for having some of the better gameplay and strategy in the series, and the performance and presentation of the game is very strong compared to Three Houses, which when you take a closer look is very lacking in those departments. Intelligent systems was the lead on both of these games, and Koei Tecmo supported in both, but Three Houses' support came from a group from Team Ninja whereas Engage's support came from Gust who among other things has worked on the Atelier series. We don't currently know what exact group is working on Fortune's Weave. We currently don't know what teams if any are supporting Intelligent Systems on Fortune's Weave. That's a whole lot of words to say we don't know what end of the Three Houses to Engage spectrum Fortune's Weave will fall on in several areas. As of right now we have not seen any gameplay or heard any significant details. We don't know if there will be multiple paths in the story, or if there's a new gameplay hook, or what we can expect from the writing and characters. I am worried that Three Houses was a ceiling outcome for the franchise in terms of review scores and it will be hard for a sequel to reach those same heights, even with Engage sandwiched in the middle. So much of the love Three Houses received was for its characters, and that can be really hard to replicate with presumably a mostly new cast. I do think this franchise has proven to have a strong floor (all 3 Fire Emblem games on the 3DS scored at least an **84**). I suppose if Fortune's Weave manages to be the perfect marriage of Three Houses and Engage then it could match or surpass that **89** score, but I don't think that is likely. Fortune's Weave was the closing announcement of the September Nintendo Direct, so I think this will be one of Nintendo's main releases for Switch 2, and a '26 release is all but certain (though it should be noted that Three Houses was delayed about 4 months, but not into a different release year). Fire Emblem has had some major hits as a series but also has had lulls, and I don't expect a sequel to Three Houses to be how this franchise reaches its next peak. I do think this will be a solid and decently safe option to add in FantasyCritic, and it's Hype Factor is right around where I value it. I just don't think you should expect it to carry you to victory.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 82

CEILING: 88

BEST GUESS: 84

Underhyped**!DELAY RISK!**

A TIER | #14 Overall Game | #7 Game in A TIER

Vampire Crawlers | Poncle

Early/Mid 2026Hype Factor: 39.7 (#31 Hyped Game)

Vampire Survivors (**88**) was a breakout hit that practically spawned a new genre all on its own. Poncle has now gone from being a solo dev to a team of more than 25 people, and Vampire Crawlers is their first new project since. Poncle has said that they want Crawlers to be accessible, affordable, replayable, and immediately exciting just like Survivors was. I'm really intrigued by Crawlers not just because of that, but because I think its premise is awesome. It is a combo deck builder and dungeon crawler, but built off of a lot of the familiar upgrades, visuals and setting from Survivors. I think that's a really compelling genre mashup for this spinoff that will test player's strategies, and the little gameplay we have seen still shows off some broken actions players can hope to achieve. I don't think it is necessarily a lock to reach the same score that Survivors did, but I think it is possible, and its floor is still high. Crucially Poncle has said this game will be a full release, so this game should dodge early access for FantasyCritic purposes. Poncle's website says they are "...aiming for early/mid 2026" which is already two qualifiers on its nonspecific release date. I know it may seem like a small and simple project but being a full development team is still relatively new for Poncle so I don't think a delay knocking it out of '26 is out of the question. There are a few safer options in this tier, but I do think this should still be a game all players should want to try and get on their team. With its current hype factor around 30, you can definitely be patient with this game while drafting.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 82****CEILING: 88****BEST GUESS: 84**

The Duskbloods | FromSoftware

2026

Hype Factor: 72.8 (#13 Hyped Game)

In my opinion, The Duskbloods has one of the widest range of outcomes of any game in '26, and might be the hardest game to rank this year for FantasyCritic drafts. Let's start with the downside. This is a PvPvE, seemingly always online multiplayer game. Very few recent multiplayer/games as a service projects have had great critical reviews (Arc Raiders' **87** is much more of the exception than the rule). When a game is always online and/or strictly multiplayer it means there are so many additional aspects of the game that need to work well together on top of general areas like gameplay, narrative, presentation, and performance. It creates so many more ways for reviewers to poke holes in the game and as a result significantly limits its upside. From Software also doesn't have a good track record when it comes to performance, and this is currently slated to be a Switch 2 exclusive which could exacerbate that issue. We have minimal details from the actual gameplay loop from an interview Miyazaki did with Nintendo, which says players will "compete for blood," and that victory will often come down to last player standing but not always. You could assume it will be pretty similar to Elden Ring: Nightreign (**80**), and therefore might have a good floor, but Nightreign uses so much from Elden Ring that I don't think you can safely say a new IP would have the same floor. And perhaps worst of all for our purposes, From Software has shown they are willing to take their time with their projects. Elden Ring was released nearly 3 years after its first trailer, the Switch version of Dark Souls: Remastered was delayed about six months, Elden Ring's Switch 2 release was delayed into '26, and both Sekiro and Armored Core 6 were reportedly pushed a year beyond their internal targeted release.

As for the upside, this game is being directed by a man named Hidetaka Miyazaki. I know most of you know, but just to be clear, this guy directed Demon's Souls and Dark Souls (which are now so renowned that the action rpg genre has basically been renamed after them), Bloodborne (**91**) Dark Souls III (**90**), Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice (**90**), and Elden Ring (**95**). This game is also returning somewhat to the Bloodborne-esque gothic style many fans have been desperate for more of, and the snippets of gameplay from the reveal trailer shows some very flashy movement and combat options. Literally the last two video games Miyazaki directed were awarded Game of the Year at The Game Awards, and From Software is the only developer with two GotY wins in The Game Awards' history. There is still so much about this game that is uncertain, ESPECIALLY the release date, but there is reporting the game was originally in development for Nintendo Switch and that Nintendo approached them about making it for Switch 2, so there is a real chance it could be out sooner than you may expect. There are a lot of games I personally cannot value Duskbloods above just because they are safer bets overall, but eventually at some point in the draft all of us are going to look at the list of available games and ask ourselves "Why is Miyazaki and From Software's next project still available?" For me that's around pick 15. If you're able to get a game with this kind of ceiling in this range of the draft and it hits its ceiling, it can be a major part of how you win your league. It could also be just ok, or even worse just a goose egg on your score. I do think this game is worth drafting, but I also think it is definitely not worth reaching for.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 77****CEILING: 90****BEST GUESS: 85**

007 First Light | IO Interactive

May 27, 2026

Hype Factor: 87.5 (#5 Hyped Game)

IO Interactive worked on the Hitman series dating all the way back to 2000, but the soft reboot of the series in 2016 was when they really hit their stride (Hitman 2016's levels all released episodically so the reviews scores are pretty sporadic, but Hitman 2 scored an **83** and Hitman 3 an **85**). Now they are taking on a new IP in a similar vein to Hitman in the world of James Bond, and it seems like it could be a match made in heaven. However, I personally do have questions about how 007 First Light will live up to the Hitman reputation as well as the James Bond IP. IO has obviously shown they are capable of designing incredibly intricate levels and exciting events within them, but the freedom and creativity available to Hitman players is its biggest strength, and I wonder how much of that will be present in a presumably more linear and story driven game like 007. And although James Bond does have a legendary game of his own, I don't know how much of what his character is known for will be fully realized in a video game, particularly the car chases, gadgets, smooth talking, and adventures that are more than just fist fights and sneaking around. There is a hard date attached to this game (it received a short delay but that's not a concern), so at least that variable is handled. I think there is a high ceiling for this game, and a high enough floor that it won't hurt your team, but also a low enough floor that you may end up looking back on the games that went around where this is projected with envy. Currently this is the 5th most hyped game on FantasyCritic, and I think that is too high. This should still be a top 15-20 draft pick in my opinion, but I'm not confident it will be fully worth a top 5 or even top 10 investment, so I'm personally a bit lower on it. I'm not out on drafting it, but with where I have it ranked it I probably won't have it on any of my rosters.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 80

CEILING: 89

BEST GUESS: 83



Unannounced Mainline Half-Life Game | Valve

n/a

Hype Factor: 47.2 (#26 Hyped Game)

As I type this I almost cannot believe it. For the first time in my 27 years of life, there seems to be substantial smoke that Half-Life 3 is real and maybe even imminent. And as I type that I ask myself how stupid can I be for believing any of it. There's really only three things you need to know as far as Half-Life in FantasyCritic goes. 1.) On MetaCritic, Half-Life and Half-Life 2 have a **96**, and Half-Life: Alyx has a **93** on OpenCritic. Also Portal has a **90** and Portal 2 has a **95**. Valve is pretty good at making games. 2.) Arguably the biggest smoke signal is the announcement of the GabeCube aka the Steam Machine. Of course Valve does not need to release any games to sell hardware, but it seems logical that they might want to launch one of the most anticipated games of all time to help market it. 3.) I don't care how many leaks and insider reports and posts on whatever forums you've read, no game that isn't announced is ever a certainty to come out in a year's time, and that goes ten times extra for a title as infamous as Half-Life 3. This could obviously be a league winning pick up at any range of the draft. If no one drafts it in a league I'm in and it gets announced mid year I will immediately spend 80% or more of my budget on it. But if you do draft it, we hear nothing about it, and you lose this season by a small margin, you have no one to blame but yourself. I have no clue where to rank this. Ultimately it comes down to whether you have the guts to roll the dice or not. I probably don't. Right here in the 17-20 range is when I would feel comfortable taking this risk (if its a league with 5 or less players, in a larger league I would wait a bit longer), and I imagine in a lot of leagues someone will shoot their shot on it before that. And even if it is available for me in this range I have a feeling in the moment I might default to drafting something else that's safer.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 90****CEILING: 96****BEST GUESS: lol**

Mewgenics | Edmund McMillen

Feb 10, 2026

Hype Factor: 62.5 (#20 Hyped Game)

Edmund McMillen has made not one, but two legendary video games in Super Meat Boy (**90** on Metacritic) - one of if not the best 2D platformer not made by Nintendo, and The Binding of Isaac (Rebirth is an **87**), the granddaddy of the roguelike genre (as well as dozens of flash games). Mewgenics is his next project, and that alone is a big deal. This is still a roguelike, but it is a grid based tactics rpg where your party is made up of cats. Those cats have different classes, traits and abilities, and can be bred to create stronger units that will inherit some of their parents' traits (as someone who played Fire Emblem Awakening, I can attest that breeding units with powerful traits for tactics combat is very fun). There are also some light life-sim features in between runs. McMillen is known for his dark and twisted sense of humor in his games, and Mewgenics is definitely carrying on that legacy. My main concern for this game is McMillen started the project in '12, and then just kind of stopped for a while before picking it back up in '18. I don't know if that necessarily counts as development hell, but it isn't exactly smooth sailing either. It is also true that McMillen's games and general style are not for everyone, so I think that caps this game's ceiling at least a little bit. I think this game is properly rated in terms of hype factor. I would not reach for it, but right around this range is when I think you should draft it.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 82

CEILING: 87

BEST GUESS: 84

!DELAY RISK!**Underhyped**

B TIER | #19 Overall Game | #2 Game in B TIER

Witchbrook | Chucklefish

2026Hype Factor: 21.4 (#44 Hyped Game)

This is an Indie game I am willing to bet on this year. I have seen a lot of people comparing this game to Stardew Valley. I do want to point out that while developer Chucklefish did publish Stardew Valley (**90**), they did not make that game. However the comparisons are definitely warranted. The graphical style is obviously reminiscent of Stardew Valley, but so is the freedom to decide whether to focus on your wizard classes, visit the town and work with local businesses, befriend and date NPCs, explore the woodland, customize your home and outfits, plant your garden, participate in seasonal events, etc. You can also play online co-op up to four players. Chucklefish's last two releases were Wargroove (**83**) and Wargroove 2 (**84**), and I think this game could exceed those scores. Most importantly, this game was originally planned for a winter '25 release before getting delayed into '26. Hopefully that means a release this year is a safe bet, although the developer blog post mentions how they are using the added time to add more content as well as polishing and porting to consoles. There is always risk drafting an Indie game without a set date, but I believe Witchbrook has the potential to score as well as some of the games I have in S tier. This is a game I absolutely want on any FantasyCritic team I have when it releases. Unfortunately it is not as safe of a pick as I would like it to be, but it is currently outside the top 40 in hype factor, so there's a good chance you could wait to draft this until around pick 30 or even longer.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 82****CEILING: 89****BEST GUESS: 87**

Professor Layton and the New World of Steam | Level-5 Hype Factor: 18.6 (#47 Hyped Game)

Professor Layton is not a household name, but this franchise went on a run on the DS and 3DS systems. It built a loyal fan base and received consistent praise from critics across six games by combining a charming visual style, brain teasing puzzle gameplay, and compelling mystery solving narratives. New World of Steam was first teased in February of '23, and originally planned to launch in '25, but Level-5 announced at TGS it was being pushed into '26. Level-5 has promised New World of Steam will feature the most puzzles in series history, and the story starts a new arc in a brand new setting, which should help it be a good entry point for newcomers. The only real concern I have for this game is with the series moving to the Switch from the DS that using a joystick instead of a stylus could make interacting with a point and click world somewhat frustrating to control, but perhaps some Switch 2 mouse functionality could alleviate that. This will be the first mainline release for the franchise in a long time, and while I do not think this game has a massive ceiling, I expect it will be a return to form for this franchise. Right now this is just inside the top 50 in Hype Factor. I would be comfortable taking it as high as here, but in some leagues you could probably wait much longer and draft it as a real value pickup.

2026**SERIES REVIEW HISTORY:**

2008	PL & The Curious Village	85
2009	PL & The Diabolical Box	84
2010	PL & The Unwound Future	86
2011	PL & The Last Specter	83
2012	PL & The Miracle Mask	82
2014	PL & The Azran Legacy	81
2014	PL vs. Phoenix Wright	80

 metacritic**PROJECTION****FLOOR: 82****CEILING: 87****BEST GUESS: 85**

REPLACED| Sad Cat Studios

Mar 12, 2026

Hype Factor: 41.9 (#30 Hyped Game)

This game was originally unveiled all the way back in '21. It was originally planned to release in '22, but Sad Cat Studios is comprised of many Ukrainian developers who had some more pressing matters to attend to. Now the game finally has a release date in Q1 this year. Replaced's visual style and aesthetic is definitely the main reason it has stuck in people's minds, with handcrafted 2.5D pixel art mixed with realistic lighting and a cinematic shifting camera angle to build a really enticing look for a 80's cyberpunk setting. The combat has a Batman Arkham style counter system, and the game will switch between more linear narrative sections for progressing the main story and open-ended sections that allow you to explore and take on side activities. It is always hard to project how a debut indie title will be received critically and I think Replaced has a wider range of outcomes than most of the games I have ranked around it, but with the amount of care and especially time Sad Cat has put into this game, and with a release date finally set, I think you can confidently draft this game in this range.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 79

CEILING: 87

BEST GUESS: 84

Scott Pilgrim EX | Tribute Games

Hype Factor: 13.3 (#59 Hyped Game)

Yes this is a real new game and not a rerelease or remake or whatever else. Tribute Games was founded in 2011 by some former devs of the original Scott Pilgrim, and they have had several critical hits, particularly in the beat-'em-up genre lately. Scott Pilgrim EX brings some new playable characters, solid pixel art, a new story that comes from Bryan Lee O'Malley (the original creator of the Scott Pilgrim comics) and a new soundtrack from the artist that worked on the original game, and of course local and online 4 player co-op. The game was revealed last summer and has had a developer interview and some extended gameplay looks since, so combined with a reported "early '26" window I feel confident it will be released this year. Scott Pilgrim is clearly a franchise meaningful to Tribute, and I expect this to be yet another strong release from them. I don't think it has a crazy high ceiling, partially because there have been so many other beat-'em-ups in recent years, but the floor is very high. This should be a great add in your drafts. Right now it is criminally overlooked based on Hype Factor so this could be a steal in a lot of drafts.

Early 2026

Tribute Games Recent Pedigree:

2017	Flinthook	77
2020	Panzer Paladin	80
2022	TMNT:Shredder's Revenge	87
2025	MARVEL Cosmic Invasion	81

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 81

CEILING: 86

BEST GUESS: 83

LEGO Batman: Legacy of the Dark Knight | TT Games

May 29, 2026

Hype Factor: 73.4 (#12 Hyped Game)

I'm probably a bit biased because I grew up on all the TT Games' Lego games, but I think this latest effort has some real promise. Gone are the days of one or two Lego games being cranked out on an annual basis. TT's last release was Lego Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga (**82**) in '22, which had a much larger scope and ambition than any of their previous Lego titles, and now four years later they are giving Batman the same treatment. Legacy of the Dark Knight is an open world experience that pulls story beats and characters and costumes from Batman Returns, The Dark Knight Trilogy, The Batman, as well as several comics and animated series. The combat looks to be borrowing from the Arkham series so it is likely to be more engaging than you might expect from this franchise. And unlike most Lego games where you unlock a cast of hundreds of different characters, in this game you can actually only control seven characters (Batman, Robin, Nightwing, Batgirl, Jim Gordon, Catwoman, and Talia Al Ghul if you care). When you combine that with the promise for deep customization of the Batcave and Bat-vehicles and tons of unlockable Batsuits (good lord typing bat this many times is a lot), I think this game could have a lot to offer and could really leave an impression on critics. At least that's what I thought before I knew this game was top 15. The pedigree of TT games gives it a floor you can feel good about, and the fact that they've been working on this game and only this game since '22 makes me confident you can bet on a release this year. Currently I think it is being overvalued, but if it falls in your draft around the 20th pick I think it will be a solid return at that value.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 81

CEILING: 85

BEST GUESS: 83

MOUSE: P.I. for Hire | Fumi Games

Mar 19, 2026

Hype Factor: 52.9 (#23 Hyped Game)

The first thing almost everyone will think of when seeing MOUSE: P.I. for Hire is Cuphead, as both games have the same art style inspired by classic animation that really stands out in a video game setting. Thankfully MOUSE is fully black and white and also a first-person boomer shooter, so I do not think critics will be too hung up on the comparison. Fumi Games is clearly putting tons of effort into making sure their debut title delivers. Two things that really stand out to me are the variety of the environments (which is crucial for a game with such a limited color palette) and the animations for the weapons and items for being very exaggerated and fun. Another key detail they have talked about is making sure that the old-timey detective characters and setting isn't just for show. Players will find clues and have conversations with NPCs to progress the story and ultimately solve the case. I think whether that element of the game resonates with critics will be the difference between this game getting a score on OpenCritic in the upper 80s or right around 80. This game was originally supposed to release in '25, but got a short delay late in the year moving to a confirmed date in March of '26. I think this game has a lot of potential, and the presentation alone gives it a good floor. For a debut indie title, something I will often have significant reservations about drafting, I think this one is worth a pick in this range.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 79

CEILING: 87

BEST GUESS: 83

Splatoon Raiders | Nintendo

TBA

Hype Factor: 6.2 (#79 Hyped Game)

This may seem like a hard game to project, but I don't think it is at all. Currently all we know this is a spin-off of Splatoon and there is a brief trailer, but we do not know what the gameplay style or loop necessarily is, or if the game is single player or multiplayer. This might sound crazy but I don't think I care what style the game is. Splatoon's core game mechanics are good, the visual style is good, the single player content is good, the competitive multiplayer modes are good, and the cooperative multiplayer modes are good. I bet whether this is a single player campaign with co-op, or an extraction style game, or whatever else it will probably be good. And even though we don't have a release year announced, I think Raiders will almost certainly launch this year. It was revealed all the way back in June of last year and Nintendo will want to keep up their momentum with exclusive Switch 2 releases. I will rarely draft a game at all if we know this little about it, but it's just really hard for me to envision a way this doesn't get solid review scores. Splatoon (**81**), Splatoon 2 (**83**), Splatoon 3 (**83**) all did. I think this is a super safe option with a really high floor, and considering it is currently outside of the top 75 in hype factor, this could be one of the best value picks in the entire draft.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 80****CEILING: 85****BEST GUESS: 82**

Cairn | The Game Bakers

Jan 29, 2026

Hype Factor: 42 (#29 Hyped Game)

This is the latest project from The Game Bakers, who are most known for Furi (**78** which I cannot believe is that low), and also released Haven (**75**) in 2020. If you played FantasyCritic last year someone in your league probably added Cairn in the summer and was then devastated to hear about its delay into 2026. The good news is the devs said in their post about the delay that the game is content complete and they are just polishing the game, so you can feel 100% confident it will release in '26. I remember when Cairn was initially revealed it took me a second to realize it wasn't Jusant (**84**), which is in fact a different game from Don't Nod that is also about climbing a mountain. They are not the same game but it is sort of good to know a climbing game on a smaller budget can land with critics. The gameplay of Cairn seems very deliberate and slow paced. Climbing involves controlling your individual limbs to scale cliff faces, and players have limited resources and must eat and set up camp in order to keep going. I also think that Cairn is the best looking version of The Game Baker's cell-shaded art style. I am definitely biased because Furi is one of my favorite indie games of all time, but I think this will be the best reviewing project for The Game Bakers. My main concern is that the game might be so focused on creating a grueling and immersive simulation of climbing that some critics might be turned off by the difficulty. The floor is maybe not as high as I would like, but I believe in this game and feel it is definitely worth adding to your team.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 77

CEILING: 85

BEST GUESS: 82

REANIMAL | Tarsier Studios

Feb 13, 2026

Hype Factor: 63.3 (#19 Hyped Game)

Tarsier Studios is the team behind Little Nightmares (79) and Little Nightmares 2 (83), and notably not responsible for Little Nightmares 3 (71). Reanimal brings an ever darker tone and atmosphere with some really disturbing chimera-like freaks. The game can be played alone or in co-op, and the gameplay will consist of puzzles, stealth, platforming, and generally escaping the aforementioned freaks. It was initially revealed in August of '24 and now has a hard release date in Q1, which is early enough that it will release this year, even if a delay gets announced last minute. I think this game will be a solid addition in FantasyCritic, but right now I think it's being valued a little too highly based off of Hype Factor. Little Nightmares is a beloved series but the highest it reached critically is only an 83, and I think it's unlikely Reanimal can do much better than that. This is another game I like in this early to mid 20s range, but I would not reach to draft it in the teens.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 79

CEILING: 84

BEST GUESS: 82

Fable | Playground Games

TBA/2026

Hype Factor: 55.1 (#22 Hyped Game)

There have been three main series Fable games, and I am not even going to list their review scores or much else about them, because Fable III came out all the way back in 2010 and Lionhead Studios was closed back in 2016, so those games and their critical reception have next to nothing to do with the upcoming Fable “4”. This project is coming from Playground Games, who are behind the excellent and critically acclaimed Forza Horizon series (see the S Tier for more on Forza Horizon), but that is literally the only franchise the developer has ever worked on, so we can’t be certain that their talents will translate to the RPG genre. There is one trailer for this game, and while it showcases some of the sharp wit the series is known for, it is a CG trailer that shows no gameplay. This is yet another Xbox game that the Steam page does not list a release window, but Phil Spencer did mention Fable at the end of the Summer Showcase as a title they are planning to release in 2026. Also it has been confirmed by Matt Booty that Playground will be showing up at the January Xbox Developer Direct, though we don’t know for certain if it will be to show off Fable, Forza, or both. I will not fault anyone for wanting to add this game to their team, especially with the level of quality Playground has brought to the Horizon series, but personally I don’t think we have seen enough for me to confidently draft this game, especially at cost. Looking at where this game’s Hype Factor sits, it isn’t massively overhyped, but there are multiple games behind it that I have way more confidence in. It’s tough timing for FantasyCritic that we will likely get to see a lot of what the game looks like right after drafts. I believe the ceiling for this game is very high, but I would generally rather minimize risk and take a game I think is a safer bet. However once you get to the late 20s range of the draft I would feel comfortable taking a shot on it.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 78

CEILING: 88

BEST GUESS: ??

Mixtape | Beethoven and Dinosaur

2026

Hype Factor: 28.5 (#37 Hyped Game)

Mixtape is a tough projection, and also a hard game to say much about, because it is a heavily narrative driven game, which to me means it has a very wide range of outcomes. If the narrative lands with critics I think this will be a big hit, and if it doesn't it could be a detrimental use of a roster spot. I do think the coming of age adventure, extensive list of licensed music, and general vibe is likely to land with a lot of critics, so I do think a ceiling outcome is more likely. Beethoven & Dinosaur's only other project is The Artful Escape (**80**). Mixtape may not have a date yet, but it was originally planned to release last year so I think a '26 release is highly likely. Based off of it's current hype factor, you can probably add this game fairly late in your drafts, and I think it has a decent chance to payoff in a big way.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 75****CEILING: 86****BEST GUESS: 81**

Crimson Desert | Pearl Abyss

Mar 19, 2026

Hype Factor: 56.7 (#21 Hyped Game)

Before I try to give analysis on Crimson Desert, I just want to preface by saying what a cool thing it is. A game like this just doesn't happen very often. Pearl Abyss has been running Black Desert Online for over a decade now, and while I will never even remotely consider trying it out, what bits and pieces I have seen of the game have always looked very flashy and much more detailed and polished than most other MMO's. So the fact that they are just making a single player game at all, especially one that is borrowing so much from Black Desert is really cool, and I am fascinated to see how it turns out. With that being said I really just don't know how likely a ceiling outcome for this game actually is. So many moments from the trailers give off that "too good to be true" sort of vibe that many MMOs also have in their marketing. Visually the game's effects, models, and environments all look great, but I am concerned that it may not perform as well on consoles or less powerful PCs which could hold back its scores. It is also very hard to guess whether the side quests and larger narrative will be satisfying since the developers have never had to design those for a single player experience. Even the several long gameplay videos released on IGN this past October look very nice, but leave me so uncertain about how the final product will feel as a whole. I was keeping tabs all of last year trying to see if I should place a cheap bid for this game had it gotten a '25 release date, but drafting it is a larger commitment that I do not know if I can fully get on board with. I do really believe Crimson Desert has a very high ceiling, but I think the number of variables that could affect its score and as a result the range of outcomes is just too large. Right now its Hype Factor is too high for my taste, but if it does start to slide in your draft then right around 30 is where I would be willing to draft it.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 75

CEILING: 88

BEST GUESS: 80

Phantom Blade Zero | S-Game

Sep 8, 2026

Hype Factor: 75.4 (#11 Hyped Game)

I do not have high hopes for this game in FantasyCritic. Phantom Blade Zero is essentially a debut title for Chinese developer S-Game as their other two projects are mobile games. In Phantom Blade Zero you play as a character named Soul, an elite assassin who is a member of The Order (how creative!). The developers have talked about how they have gone to great lengths to study and portray Chinese martial arts in Phantom Blade Zero, and it shows in the insanely fluid and flashy combat animations. On the other hand, the environments, enemies, and even the weapons all seem very generic and samey to me. There are even some moments in trailers that appear to be clips of gameplay but watching them more closely it's really hard to tell how much of what is playing out on screen is direct player actions versus long complex animations running their course. This game (and probably every single player AAA game made by a Chinese developer for the next half-decade) will obviously draw comparisons to Black Myth: Wukong, and whether that is fair or not I do want to remind everyone that despite selling very well and being a GotY nominee at The Game Awards, Wukong only scored an **82** on OpenCritic. And from what we've seen so far, I think Wukong's character design and style stands out way more than Phantom Blade Zero's. I don't think this game will be bad, but I do think it has a very limited ceiling, and the fact it is a debut title means it is not a high floor game either. This game has been flirting with the top 10 in hype factor, which in my opinion is wayyyyyy too high. I don't think that it's an awful pick, especially since we now have a set release date, but I think there are way better options to pick from more established developers that are doing more interesting things.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 78

CEILING: 83

BEST GUESS: 81

Denshattack! | Undercoders

Spring 2026

Hype Factor: 14.4 (#55 Hyped Game)

There's no history or precedent I can lean on to explain why I believe in Denshattack. Undercoders have never released a game that scored above a **78** on OpenCritic (or a game I had heard of before looking into them). Despite all that, Denshattack! simply passes the eye test for me. It has a simple concept that is still creative. The art style looks incredible (especially the extra effects when you're grinding and doing tricks), and it looks like a blast to play. The levels vary between achieving a high score, accomplishing objectives, racing foes and even boss fights. It was revealed at Gamescom this past August and it seems they've shown a complete picture of what this game has to offer. It has a spring launch window which is early enough the game could even survive a short delay and still launch in '26. I think it has a high enough ceiling to be worth draft capital, and the more I see of it the more I personally believe it can reach its ceiling.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 76

CEILING: 83

BEST GUESS: 82

!DELAY RISK!**Underhyped**

C TIER | #33 Overall Game | #2 Game in C TIER

Darwin's Paradox! | ZDT Studio

2026Hype Factor: 2.8 (#>100 Hyped Game)

Darwin's Paradox was first shown off in a State of Play last year, and comes from ZDT studio, which is a new studio comprised of some gaming industry veterans, including a former Director at Arkane and some animators and visual effects experts. That animation experience shows in the playable octopus's movements being very fluid for such a complex creature. The recent gameplay trailer shows off a lot of variety and creativity in the environments and movement options. This game just passes the eye test for me, and it does for Sony as well as it was first revealed at the State of Play in February of '25. I think the ceiling for Darwin's Paradox is a lot higher than it is getting credit for and I think it has a great floor as well. It is currently slated for '26. ZDT was founded in '22, so I do think there is risk this game gets delayed, but I think it is still more likely to come out this year than not. This game is outside of the top 100 in hype factor right now, which is way too low in my opinion. You could probably wait to bid on this game if you wanted, but I think this game is worth a late round draft pick.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 80****CEILING: 86****BEST GUESS: 83**

!DELAY RISK!

overhyped

C TIER | #34 Overall Game | #3 Game in C TIER

CONTROL Resonant | Remedy Entertainment 2026

Hype Factor: 86.4 (#6 Hyped Game)

Control Resonant was revealed at the most recent Game Awards, and it looks like a fascinating project. The sequel to 2019's Control (**84**), Remedy is boldly going in a very different direction with Resonant. It promises to be an action RPG that takes place in a sprawling and disfigured Manhattan, and you will play as Dylan Faden, the sibling of Control's protagonist Jesse Faden. Combat seems to be character action style centered around Dylan's weapon, The Aberrant, which can transform between a two-handed hammer, swift twin blades, and presumably even more. The reveal trailer also shows off some very abstract environments and epic boss designs. Remedy's last major release Alan Wake II (**89**) was a major critical success so this studio is clearly capable of making games that get high scores. With all that being said, I am a lot lower on this game than its current hype factor. As cool as the new direction looks, I don't think it is guaranteed to land with critics. An RPG style game that promises more freedom and player agency sounds great, but could lose some of the tone and style that made Control resonate with a lot of people. What is an even bigger concern to me is the release. The reveal may say it is coming this year, but according to Remedy's own financial reports the game only moved to full production in '25. To me, that means this game probably isn't close to being done, and if it does release in '26 it would be at the tail end of the year. And with GTA VI currently planned for a November release (and with me believing it will launch on that date), this just doesn't add up to me. Resonant has tons of potential and definitely could surpass Control's score, but I think this game is currently being overdrafted off of hype from the reveal and too much faith is being put into its release this year. I think I would feel comfortable drafting this game in the later rounds of a draft, but that means compared to its current hype factor this is basically a stay away for me.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 81****CEILING: 88****BEST GUESS: 84**

MIO: Memories in Orbit | Douze Dixièmes

**Jan 20,
2026**

Hype Factor: 22.2 (#42 Hyped Game)

MIO is an indie metroidvania, which is simultaneously great news as several of those have reviewed very well in recent years, and also bad news because it feels like there is an endless supply of indie metroidvania games that makes it hard to know which ones will stand out. MIO has a lot of the elements you want to see in a Metroidvania: moody atmosphere and soundtrack, a beautiful art style, varied environments, menacing bosses, and exciting looking movement options. Douze Dixièmes' only other release is Shady Part of Me (77) which was a narrative heavy puzzle platformer that reviewed ok but not well enough to make me believe MIO is a slam dunk. There is a demo for the game, and the main concern with it seems to be the combat being very bare bones. I think this is a draftable game. The January release date is almost bad in this case because it forces you to make a decision really soon when I would almost prefer to wait and see with MIO. I would consider taking this game late, and if you're in a more casual league you could probably scoop this up with a cheap bid once the draft wraps up.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 78

CEILING: 84

BEST GUESS: 81

Big Walk | House House

2026

Hype Factor: 22.6 (#41 Hyped Game)

This title is from House House, the makers of Untitled Goose Game (**80**) which came out all the way back in 2019. Big Walk was first announced at The Game Awards in '23 and got a more extensive trailer at Summer Games Fest last year. '26 would seem like a very reasonable release year, but indies are typically more willing to take their time to finish their game and House House is a team of just four people, so until we get a set date I won't be super confident. This is also a multiplayer game which I tend to be wary of, but the nature of its cooperative play that could lead to goofy and fun moments seems super fun. I think there is a world where this is one of the breakout multiplayer games for a group of friends or for Twitch streamers this year similar to PEAK (**83**) last year. The little we've seen from trailers shows a lot of creativity in the puzzles, especially in how they used proximity chat. Big Walk does not have a massive ceiling but this is a studio I'm willing to bet on. I would hope to wait and add this game via bid once we get a date, but if the board starts to look thin at the end of your draft or if you are in a deeper league, I would be comfortable using a pick on it.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 79****CEILING: 84****BEST GUESS: 81**

Resonance: A Plague Tale Legacy | Asobo Studio **2026**

Hype Factor: 18.5 (#48 Hyped Game)

The previous Plague Tale games both reviewed well (A Plague Tale: Innocence (**82**) in '19 and A Plague Tale: Requiem (**83**) in '22), bringing a tight and emotional story with good characters, solid gameplay and progression, high fidelity visuals, and most importantly, rats. Resonance is a prequel with a new protagonist that looks to build off of the success of these two games. It features an expanded combat system with a higher emphasis of parrying/dodging without abandoning the stealth aspect, and will have segments that flash back into ancient times. The game was unveiled last year and '26 would fit into Asobo's release cadence for this series. I don't think this game has a very high ceiling, and there is always a chance that critics will start to feel some fatigue with the series, but I think the floor is still good. I wouldn't reach to draft it but I think it is a safe addition to the back end of your rosters in drafts.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 79

CEILING: 83

BEST GUESS: 81

Blighted | Drinkbox Studios

2026

Hype Factor: 3.2 (#>100 Hyped Game)

When I originally saw the reveal trailer for Blighted it didn't really stand out to me, but Drinkbox Studios has a very strong record of their games scoring well. Blighted is an action-rpg similar to Nobody Saves the World, but it is also a metroidvania. It is the studio's first 3D project (even though it is still a top down isometric perspective), and it also allows for co-op. Their signature art style is on full display in both the screenshots and gameplay. I think this game has a solid floor, but part of me suspects it will not reach the ceiling of some of their other projects. The game seems to be more serious in tone than their previous titles, which is not a bad thing, but I think that could lead to it feeling less special and not as impactful with critics. Drinkbox showed off extended gameplay of the game last summer, but it is still just a '26 release with no date. I think it's likely to release this year but not certain. Ultimately this is a somewhat safe pick, and while the ceiling could definitely be higher than I'm projecting based off of the studios pedigree, I don't think it's likely to reach the high 80s like some of their other titles have.

Drinkbox Studios Pedigree:

2014	Guacamelee! (super turbo championship edition)	89
2016	Severed	84
2018	Guacamelee! 2	86
2022	Nobody Saves the World	81

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 79

CEILING: 84

BEST GUESS: 80

Highguard | Wildlight Entertainment Jan 26, 2026

Hype Factor: 8.9 (#70 Hyped Game)

The internet at large may have been upset that the '25 Game Awards' final announcement was a hero shooter, but I don't think this game is irrelevant in FantasyCritic. Wildlight Entertainment is made of former Respawn devs who worked on the Titanfall series and of course Apex Legends (**81**), so you can bet the controls and gunplay (spellplay? you get it) will be top notch. My favorite thing they are doing is rolling out the game in a very similar way to Apex Legends. This game will be available for any and everyone to play less than two months after being revealed for free. The characters and art style may not be anything special and the hero shooter genre may be well past its time as the top trend in gaming, but I do think the fantasy setting means it brings something different to the table compared to other competitive shooters. On top of that, it's described as a "raid shooter" where players will raid bases and capture territory to earn score, which sounds like a somewhat new type of gameplay loop for a multiplayer shooter. It is a live service game, so there is some risk and not a very high ceiling, but there is a proven instance of these developers delivering a project like this that reviews well. Ideally I wouldn't draft this unless in a deeper league. My preference would be to see if we get some hands on impressions and then maybe throw a minimum bid at it. But I do think you can feel ok drafting this with your last pick.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 75

CEILING: 83

BEST GUESS: 80

The Adventures of Elliot: The Millenium Tales| Square Enix

2026

Hype Factor: 18.6 (#47 Hyped Game)

Square Enix may be absolutely horrible at naming their HD-2D JRPGs, but they have all reviewed well, whether or not you include the Dragon Quest remakes. Initially revealed last July during a Nintendo Partners direct, Adventures of Elliot is a new IP with an active combat system as opposed to the turn-based combat of the Octopath series. Square Enix has published all of these HD-2D games but they have had a few different development studios working on them. Tomoya Asano is the one who pioneered the HD-2D style and he has been a producer on all these games, but seems to be in a less prominent role for Elliot. Claytech Works are co-developing this game, and they did not work on any of the Octopath games but did co-develop Bravely Default II (77) and the Live A Live Remake (82) so they do have a solid enough track record. I do not think Elliot will hit the highs of the Octopath series because I do not think what we have seen of the real time combat looks great, but I have no reason to doubt any other aspects of the game (other than the name of the game's continent being Philabieldia). Even though there is no set date the HD-2D games have come out pretty consistently, and Nintendo needs games to fill out their '26 release calendar so I believe this an an almost certain '26 release. I think this is a high floor game that will be a decent draft pick, but its ceiling is not that high and I do not expect it to reach it either.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 79****CEILING: 83****BEST GUESS: 80**

Stranger Than Heaven | Ryu Ga Gotoku Studio

TBA

Hype Factor: 4.2 (#93 Hyped Game)

It is very hard for me to be objective in my analysis for this game because I am very excited for it. I've personally admired the Yakuza series but never played any of them. Stranger than Heaven's more serious tone and narrative that spans multiple decades of Japan in the early 1900s is very intriguing to me and seems like the perfect way to jump in to Ryu Ga Gotoku's work. Based off of how they're rolling out trailers for this game at The Game Awards and Summer Games Fest, it seems to me Ryu Ga Gotoku Studio is treating this as their next big release and not just another Yakuza spinoff. The combat from the reveal trailer seems like it is towing the perfect line of being more grounded, bloody, and impactful than the mainline Yakuza series while still maintaining some more goofy and flashy moments. There are obviously tons of releases in the larger Yakuza series, but since Yakuza 5 RGG have really hit their stride. And if you are concerned about how the studio will fair now that Nagoshi has left, he was not involved with Infinite Wealth and that is the best reviewing game they have ever released. I do recognize there is no date or even release year currently attached to this project (I was pretty surprised we did not get one at The Game Awards) which is normally something I would be very wary of. According to SEGA's financial reporting the game is expected to be a fiscal year '27 release, which for them is between April of '26 to March of '27. Based on their track record RGG Studio makes games faster than I can make FantasyCritic draft guides, so I do think this game has a shot to still come out in '26. Stranger than Heaven should have a really solid floor, and based off of the last two mainline Yakuza games I think it's ceiling is much higher than most people might think. If this game had a set date I would probably have put it at the end of S Tier. It is currently outside the top 100 in hype factor, behind some games we know for a fact are not releasing in '26. I have it ranked here just to emphasize that I think it has a chance to pay off with a score most drafted games in this range do not. Of course you could always let this go undrafted (which it looks like it will in most leagues) and then save your budget to win a bid for it if we do get a date. I typically try to play the draft very safe, but if you want to take a hail mary shot on a game this year, this is the one I would choose.

SERIES REVIEW HISTORY:					
Main Series:			Remakes:		
2005	Yakuza	75	2016	Yakuza Kiwami	81
2006	Yakuza 2	77	2017	Yakuza Kiwami 2	86
2009	Yakuza 3	79		Spinoffs:	
2010	Yakuza 4	78	2018	Judgement	83
2012	Yakuza 5	83		Lost Judgement	
2015	Yakuza 0	86	2021		83
2016	Yakuza 6: The Song of Life	84	2023	The Man Who Erased His Name	79
2020	Yakuza: Like a Dragon	86	2025	Like a Dragon: Pirate Yakuza in Hawaii	81
2024	Like a Dragon: Infinite Wealth	90			

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 84

CEILING: 91

BEST GUESS: 89

Hermit and Pig | Heavy Lunch Studio Jan 22, 2026

Hype Factor: 0.1 (#>100 Hyped Game)

This is the first title from two person studio Heavy Lunch. It is an RPG reminiscent of Earthbound where you play as a “reclusive hermit and his truffle-hunting pig” on a quest to fight back against an evil corporation. The art style is super cozy and fun, but many of the game's mechanics, such as a timer that ticks down pretty quickly during your turn based and conversations with NPCs that are meant to mimic social anxiety, seem to counteract its appearance. The game also has over 100 mushrooms for you and your pig to find that can be used for buffs and for trading. This seems like a really cool passion project that probably won't get a ton of attention or many reviews but could be a hit with whoever does give it the time. It could be that the January release date is getting me too excited but I think this could be a great add to your team. I would consider taking it in the later rounds, and if you think it won't be on your league's radar it is probably worth a cheap bid right after the draft. It is a debut title, but everything else about it tells me this game is worth your attention.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 76

CEILING: 84

BEST GUESS: 81

Well Dweller | Kyle Thompson

TBA

Hype Factor: 0.1 (#>100 Hyped Game)

Revealed this past August at a Nintendo Indie event, Well Dweller comes from Kyle Thompson, who has made '20 Sheepo (**75**), '22 Islets (**79**), and '24 Crypt Custodian (**83**). Usually I would be extremely hesitant about drafting a game from a solo dev without a set date, but all three of Thompson's last games released every other year in August, so I think it's pretty reasonable to expect a Q3 launch for Well Dweller this year. All of these games are metroidvanias, and they all have gotten progressively better scores. Well Dweller has a charming art style, but nothing else about it really stands out to me, at least in the trailers. I think it could outscore Crypt Custodian, but isn't guaranteed to. It's hype factor is almost zero, so unless you know someone in your league is a fan of this game you can almost certainly draft it with your final pick. You definitely could just wait to bid on this game, but I also think it should be on your radar when preparing for drafts.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 76****CEILING: 84****BEST GUESS: 80**

Yoshi and the Mysterious Book | Nintendo **Spring 2026**

Hype Factor: 32.7 (#33 Hyped Game)

Yoshi's Woolly World (**80**) and Yoshi's Crafted World (**80**) both reviewed fairly well, and frankly I do not know how. The Yoshi "franchise," if you can even really call it that, has not exactly been pushing boundaries, but it has shown to have a good floor with critics.

Mysterious Book does look to have a somewhat unique presentation style with the mixture of stop motion style and some fancy book page effects, and it is possible that finding and cooperating with various random creatures could lead to some interesting gameplay wrinkles. If you can't tell yet, I am a Yoshi hater. I love Nintendo but these latest Yoshi games all seem so boring and uninspired to me. If I was in charge of the score these games got then you should counterpick Yoshi and the Mysterious Book. BUT, I will admit that this game looks to have a little more going on than the last two Yoshi entries, and if those scored an **80** each then this should be a reasonable add in the later round of your fantasy drafts. I will not draft it. But I get it if you do.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 78

CEILING: 82

BEST GUESS: 80

Bloodstained: The Scarlet Engagement | ArtPlay 2026

Hype Factor: 9.7 (#67 Hyped Game)

Bloodstained: Ritual of the Night (**83**) released in '19 after Koji Igarashi, one of the key developers of Castlevania: Symphony of the Night, successfully kickstarted the project. Even though the Metroidvania genre is a bit oversaturated, Ritual of the Night brought enough to the table to stand out, and I think The Scarlet Engagement looks like it can still do the same as a sequel. It features two playable characters that you can switch between on the fly and adds a class system for expanded combat depth. Visually the game's models, environments, and overall style definitely look like a step up, and it's a prequel so it is more inviting than most sequels for newcomers to the series. I don't think it has a massive ceiling, but I think Ritual of the Night's review score combined with what we've seen of Scarlet Engagement gives it a very safe floor. The main issue with this game is the release. The announcement trailer was released in June of last year, and gave the vague '26 release window. It is true that Ritual of the Night came out in 2019, which would be almost seven years worth of time invested in developing The Scarlet Engagement. It is also true the Ritual of the Night was originally supposed to release in 2017, and was delayed twice into 2018 and then 2019. If this game had a hard date I would probably value it higher, but there is real risk of this game leaving a goose egg on your roster. I would try to hold out on drafting this game as it is a likely counter pick target, but if you get lucky and it does release this year it should score well.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 80****CEILING: 85****BEST GUESS: 84**

!DELAY RISK!

overhyped

C TIER | #46 Overall Game | #15 Game in C TIER

Ace Combat 8: Wings of Theve | Bandai Namco

2026Hype Factor: 42.1 (#29 Hyped Game)

Shoutout to Bandai Namco who had been working on the Ace Combat series for three decades at this point, and has done a good enough that as far as I know there are not any other fighter plane combat franchises trying to compete with it. Bandai Namco's official website page doesn't offer many details for what's new in Ace Combat 8. It promises "dynamic multi-layered cloudscales" as well as the chance to bond with your squad mates between missions, which we see briefly in the reveal trailer. The most recent release was Ace Combat 7: Skies Unknown (**81**) back in '19. That game did come out four years after its initial reveal and two years later than the first release year ('17) it was planned for, so even though it's been seven years and Ace Combat 8 is currently slated for a '26 release there is risk that it could be delayed. I think this could review well, especially because this is such an old franchise that Ace Combat 8 might actually get credit from critics for how far it has brought the series forward graphically. I wouldn't target this game in drafts, and I would ideally wait to bid on it if we can get a confirmed release date, but I think it's a good enough pick to make at the end of your draft.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 76****CEILING: 83****BEST GUESS: 80**

Tomodachi Life: Living the Dream | Nintendo

**Spring
2026**

Hype Factor: 14.3 (#56 Hyped Game)

The original Tomodachi Life (74) released all the way back in 2014, and while it was not a critical success it has become a cult classic. Based off of the trailers Living the Dream is leaning into that same quirky tone and freedom to observe and meddle with whichever Mii's in whatever zany ways you want. This game was first revealed in a Nintendo Direct in March last year, and it is supposed to release this spring on the original Switch as well as Switch 2. I just don't know what features or additions Nintendo could bring to this game that could make it much more than what it already is. It seems like a game that is a hit with its audience but isn't going to leave much of an impression on critics. I'll almost never label a Nintendo game as a total stay away, but I think Living the Dream's ceiling is very limited and its floor is low enough for it to be a detrimental pickup. I would hope your draft doesn't fall in a way where you feel like this is your best available option with your last pick.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 74

CEILING: 81

BEST GUESS: 78

Pokemon Pokopia | Nintendo/Game Freak **Mar 5, 2026**

Hype Factor: 45.4 (#27 Hyped Game)

When I first saw the trailer for this game I personally felt physically uncomfortable as I watched Ditto turn into a little girl, but this is definitely a game that a lot of people are very excited about. It is not outright confirmed, but there is speculation that the team from Koei Tecmo working with Game Freak on this title is the same one that helped develop Dragon Quest Builders 2 (85). If Pokopia lands the same way that game did it could be a major hit, but to me it just doesn't look like a super high quality game. Game Freak is also a developer I just don't have a lot of faith in personally. I don't think this is an undrafted game, but I do think it is way overhyped right now. It's possible this is a game I end up being very wrong about, but this is definitely a stay away for me.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 75

CEILING: 84

BEST GUESS: 77

Aphelion | DON'T NOD

2026

Hype Factor: 1.5 (#>100 Hyped Game)

Aphelion has a lot of interesting variables that I think could make this a solid project. Earth is in jeopardy of being uninhabitable, so a ship has been dispatched to a nearby ice covered planet in a last ditch effort to save humanity. There is a mysterious alien creature on the planet that will try to hunt you down, a formula that was worked very well for several games in the past. Most uniquely, you will play as two protagonists who used to be in a relationship that fell apart and will have to work through that on top of trying to survive and save humanity. For presumably a shorter game, it graphically looks excellent. Don't Nod is obviously known for their storytelling in games, but narrative heavy games do have a chance to be hit or miss with critics, so I think it's good this game seems to have at least more emphasis on gameplay than some of their Life is Strange adjacent projects. Personally I think the trailers have shown off a lot, maybe even too much parkouring and traversal, which I think could get old after a while. This game was initially revealed this past summer so I do think a release this year is likely, but Don't Nod has delayed a few of their recent titles so there is some risk to this game. This is a hard game for me to get an exact read on so I will likely draft other games ahead of it, but I do think it is draftable and has a ceiling high enough to be a meaningful addition.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 74

CEILING: 83

BEST GUESS: 79

Tides of Tomorrow | Digixart

Feb 24, 2026

Hype Factor: 2.6 (#>100 Hyped Game)

Tides of Tomorrow is a very ambitious project. It is a narrative driven first person adventure game that takes place in a flooded city on an ocean planet where pollution is threatening the world. This game's unique twist is that it has an online element where each player's decisions will leave "echoes" that you can follow behind to see how their decisions play out and if you want to copy them or make a different decision. Frankly I think a mechanic like this either works really well or it doesn't work at all, and as a result this game has a high ceiling and a low floor. Digixart's previous title is Road 96 (**78**) which did not produce a super inspiring score but also wasn't a bad enough game that you should write this studio off. The one thing you should not have to worry about is the release. With a set date in February, even a delay should not push this game out of '26. I totally get if someone in my league drafts this game, and I think it might even have upside to be one of the best scoring games on your team at the end of the year, but personally I am hesitant to bet on a game that's main selling point is a multiplayer narrative mechanic, so ideally I would hope this game goes undrafted and then reevaluate if it worth adding via a cheap bid in early February. However, its current hype factor is outside of the top 100, so if you are in a deeper league and want to swing for the fences, this may be worth your last pick.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 74

CEILING: 85

BEST GUESS: 78

Out of Words | Kong Orange/WiredFly

2026

Hype Factor: 0.1 (#>100 Hyped Game)

Out of Words is a side scrolling puzzle platforming adventure with a beautiful stop motion art style. Both of the protagonists have lost their mouths and ability to speak, and must go on an adventure to get them back. What I love about this game is that the loss of their voices is both a story beat and a gameplay mechanic. This is a co-op game that can be played online but features no text or voice chat. Players must use their actions and gestures to work together and solve puzzles. This game is being co-developed by Kong Orange, who's last project was Felix the Reaper (**70**) in '19, and by WiredFly, a stop motion animation studio that has made several short films and is now working on their first video game. There definitely isn't a ton of pedigree critically from these two teams, but it's being published by Epic, and the core concept and visual style of this game looks really solid. It is currently set for 2026, but without a set date I don't think a release this year is certain (stop motion takes a really long time.) Ideally I would hope this game goes undrafted and you could then bid on it if we get a release date, but it was revealed last summer at PlayStation's event, so in a deeper league I think you could take a chance on this in the later rounds.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 74****CEILING: 84****BEST GUESS: 80**

Directive 8020 | Supermassive Games

Hype Factor: 4.7 (#88 Hyped Game)

First Half of 2026

Supermassive Games' Directive 8020 will be the fifth installment in The Dark Pictures Anthology series, which has built off the formula of their 2015 hit Until Dawn. While these games have established a fanbase for their branching horror narratives, critically they have not been very successful. There are a couple of factors that I do think could help Directive 8020 break this trend. For one the classic isolated spaceship and mysterious alien skulking around is a great fit for this series and has obviously worked for other game franchises like Dead Space and Alien: Isolation. Supermassive has also reportedly improved the controls, movement, and general moment to moment gameplay, and added more survival horror/action-adventure elements. This game was originally slated to release late last year, but was delayed to the first half of '26, which I think is great news. The rest of The Dark Pictures Anthology wasn't received the way Supermassive hoped, so I'm glad to see they are putting additional time and effort in to try and elevate this series. I don't think this game necessarily needs to be drafted in every league, especially because as I said Supermassive has yet to have a game reach 80 on OpenCritic. I personally prefer it as a watchlist game to try and snatch up with a cheap bid., but I do think it has potential to be a breakthrough for Supermassive critically, and think it is worth considering drafting with one of your last picks.

SUPERMASSIVE REVIEW HISTORY:

(excluding VR games)

2015	Until Dawn	79
2017	Hidden Agenda	68
2019	Dark Pictures Anthology: Man of Medan	71
2020	DPA: Little Hope	73
2021	DPA: House of Ashes	73
2022	The Quarry	79
2022	DPA: The Devil in Me	72
2024	The Casting of Frank Stone	68
2025	Little Nightmares III	74

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 73

CEILING: 83

BEST GUESS: 79

Rhythm Heaven Groove | Nintendo

2026

Hype Factor: 16.2 (#49 Hyped Game)

This will be the first Rhythm Heaven title since Rhythm Heaven Megamix (**81**) in '16. We still don't have a date but as I've mentioned for other Nintendo games the Switch release calendar is wide open, and this game was revealed back in March of last year. We have seen brief glimpses of gameplay, and I don't really have anything to say about it other than it looks like Rhythm Heaven. It's definitely not a one-to-one comparison, but Nintendo's WarioWare series has a somewhat similar style with loads of different mini games, and WarioWare: Get It Together! (**76**) and WarioWare: Move It! (**73**) both released on the switch and reviewed ok, but not well enough to be worthwhile additions in FantasyCritic. I do think there is a chance this could be a grand return for Rhythm Heaven as a series, but the floor is low enough that this could be a poor use of a roster spot and I suspect the ceiling can only go so high for this genre. It's probably best to wait and see more from this game in a Nintendo Direct and decide then if it is worth adding on the cheap, but you could draft this game late in a deeper league.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 74****CEILING: 82****BEST GUESS: 78**

Code Vein II | Bandai Namco

Jan 30, 2026

Hype Factor: 21.7 (#43 Hyped Game)

Code Vein aka Anime Slop Souls did not review well (**74**) when it released in 2019. A lot of Code Vein II is going to be more of the same. It will have an insanely deep character customization system, a narrative with the fate of the already apocalyptic world in the balance, an aggressively mid combat system, weapons and outfits that are simultaneously too edgy and not edgy enough, and ten-foot tall bosses with boobs the size of basketballs. As I've mentioned I like to target sequels where the originals left room for improvement, and the original Code Vein certainly did. The environments in Code Vein II are more open, even large enough that players will use a motorcycle to traverse them at times. That might sound like exactly what every other game is doing nowadays, but this is actually a big deal as the world of the first game was described by many critics as boring, linear, and drab. There are a lot of things Code Vein has already done right to appeal to its target audience like the character customization, exaggerated finishing moves and partner NPCs that join you for missions. It's possible with a bit of refinement in the right areas this could be a sneaky value pick. It's also possible that if this game didn't have a January release date I wouldn't even be giving it the time of day. Sometimes it just feels good to get points on the board early in the season even if it's not very many. I'm not going to plan on drafting Code Vein II, but I think if you're in a deeper league it is basically the last game I would consider as draftable.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 74

CEILING: 80

BEST GUESS: 78

!DELAY RISK!

overhyped

D TIER | DRAFT STAY AWAYS, NOT WORTH IT

The Blood of Dawnwalker | Rebel Wolves 2026

Hype Factor: 32.1 (#34 Hyped Game)

The Blood of Dawnwalker is the game with the highest hype factor game that I do not have a draftable grade on. This game is oozing with promise and potential. It is a brand new expansive and immersive RPG from a brand new studio, Rebel Wolves, comprised of several former CD Projekt Red/Witcher developers. You play as a vampire, and each day you can explore and engage in quests and other activities disguised as a regular human, and at night you are free to unleash your vampiric abilities, such as walking on walls, teleporting, and whatever else is necessary to quench your thirst for blood. The swordplay features a directional blocking and striking system. As a vampire you have to keep your hunger in check at night or you could lose control of your mind. There is also an in-game clock of 30 days and nights, and tons of objectives for you to choose between, too many to do in just one playthrough. The last two gameplay showcases for the game both end by saying coming 2026, but if you go to the official website there is no mention of a release date/window anywhere, and the game's pages on Steam and PlayStation Store say Coming Soon and TBD, so I do not think Rebel Wolves is as attached to 2026 as a cursory google search may make it appear. The studio itself was only founded in 2022. To me this game is either going to get delayed into 2027 in order for them to have time to achieve their ambitious vision for this RPG, or it will release this year in a state that will not reach the ceiling review outcome this game is capable of. For that reason, this is a total stay away for me, especially considering it's current hype factor.

(This range reflects what I believe is the range for The Blood of Dawnwalker if it releases this year. If it does get delayed to next year I think both the ceiling and floor will be notably higher.)

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 76****CEILING: 85****BEST GUESS: 79**


Ontos | Frictional Games

2026

Hype Factor: 28.7 (#36 Hyped Game)

Frictional Games has delivered several beloved indie horror games, and Ontos is their latest project. Revealed at the '25 Game Awards, Ontos is described as a spiritual successor to Soma. Players will explore and abandoned hotel and mining colony on the moon. Ontos promises system based interactions, freedom in how you solve puzzles, complex moral decisions, and moments that will make you question reality. I and many others are stoked to see how this game turns out, but there's one small problem. I know the trailer ended by saying 2026, but I'm not buying it. Soma itself was delayed about six months. As awesome as Ontos looks, the trailer is only 90 seconds long. I know many people may assume it's a likely October release since it's a horror game, and that is definitely possible, but their last release was in the summer of '23 and this is still a smaller studio, so I am not banking on it. I think this game's ceiling is very high. If we do get a date mid year I would put a very large bid on it, but in drafts I think this is too big of a risk.

Frictional Games Pedigree:

2010	Amnesia: The Dark Descent	85	 metacritic
2015	Soma	83	
2020	Amnesia: Rebirth	78	
2023	Amnesia: The Bunker	77	

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 81

CEILING: 90

BEST GUESS: 85

Order of the Sinking Star | Thekla Inc.

2026

Hype Factor: 15.7 (#51 Hyped Game)

This is probably the biggest gamble of the year. Jonathan Blow (whose last name is derived from the desire that many players get to blow their brains out when stuck on a puzzle in his games) has developed Braid (**93** on Metacritic) which released back in '08 and The Witness (**86**) which released in '16. That is a super strong pedigree, and Order of the Sinking Star is his next project, and it looks to be his most complex. The game world is made up of more than 1,000 interconnected handcrafted puzzles that will evolve and become more complex as players progress. This game has not exactly been a secret, as Blow has live-streamed while working on the game several times, but it was finally properly announced at The Game Awards with a '26 release window. If it releases this year I think it has league winning upside, but a project like this obviously needs tons of polish and care, and Jonathan Blow clearly is not in a rush. I personally think this is highly unlikely to release in '26, so I would not use a draft pick on it.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 83****CEILING: 90****BEST GUESS: 88**

Unannounced Mainline 3D Mario Platformer | Nintendo

n/a

Hype Factor: 24 (#39 Hyped Game)

I don't want to say for certain that there will not be a new Mario project of some kind in '26, especially with the Mario Galaxy movie coming this year. But the fact of the matter is Donkey Kong Bananza (91) was made by the team that made Odyssey and was the big year one of Switch 2 title a lot of people assumed was going to be a Mario game. Even if a Mario platformer does get announced this year, I think there is a chance that it could be something akin to Bowser's Fury and may not fall into the scope of "Unannounced Mainline 3D Mario Platformer." Drafting this game that does not necessarily currently exist is a bad idea. Not only is it a long shot to come out this year, drafting it opens you up to an immediate counterpick that could permanently stick a likely 0 to your roster.

PROJECTION**TOO EARLY FOR A SCORING RANGE**

Super Meat Boy 3D | Sluggerfly, Team Meat **Early**

Hype Factor: 30.4 (#35 Hyped Game)

2026

This is not being made solely by the original developers of Super Meat Boy, but apparently Sluggerfly did approach Team Meat with a pitch to make Super Meat Boy 3D. Sluggerfly's last game Hell Pie (**70**) was a 3D platformer with more of an action adventure style and it did not receive strong reviews. The gameplay for Super Meat Boy 3D looks reminiscent of classic Super Meat Boy, especially the quick respawns to keep you in the action, but taking the series 3D could lead to less sharp platforming and more frustration for players. There is a demo, and it has received some praise, but others have pointed out that exact concern about a lack of precision. The good news is the latest trailer ends by saying early 2026. This is a revered franchise so it might be worth a cheap bid, but I would not use a draft pick on it.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 69

CEILING: 78

BEST GUESS: 74

!DELAY RISK!

overhyped

D TIER | DRAFT STAY AWAYS, NOT WORTH IT

STAR WARS: Galactic Racer | Fuse Games 2026

Hype Factor: 24.1 (#38 Hyped Game)

Star Wars Galactic Racers was announced at The Game Awards and comes from Fuse Games, a new studio made up of former Criterion developers. Galactic Racer is looking to bring back the pod racing that so many people love from the prequels and played in the cult classic Star Wars Episode 1: Racer back in 1999. The trailer shows off some cool pod racers and tracks, and also shows speeders racing so there will be some variation in the types of vehicles as well. The official website says this is a runs based game where you will customize your build each time and also choose which events to participate in, but it is also a game with a narrative where you play as a specific character. I don't know if many people got that impression from the trailer so I'm interested to see how it all looks when we finally see gameplay and a further breakdown. Right now I don't wanna draft this game if I can help it because it is a new developer and we have not seen gameplay. I also hesitate to believe a Star Wars racing game can have a high ceiling, and I don't know if I necessarily trust the 2026 release year. Its current hype factor is way ahead of where I would feel comfortable drafting it. With that being said, people love Star Wars and this is a game a contingent of fans have been hoping for, so I think this game is definitely worth keeping an eye on as the year goes on.

PROJECTION**TOO EARLY FOR A SCORING RANGE**

Mario Tennis Fever | Nintendo

Hype Factor: 19.5 (#45 Hyped Game)

As much as I love a Q1 release date I do not think you should draft this game. The fact of the matter is Mario Tennis and the greater Mario Sports series has not reviewed well enough to be worth adding in FantasyCritic ever. I don't think Fever has as low of a floor as Ultra Smash, as trailers have shown off a large roster of characters and customization options, but the ceiling is not high and the floor is low enough that I would not risk it. This is the type of game you would only add in December if you literally need 5 points to lock in a victory, and it's launching in February. To me this would be a waste of a roster spot whether you take it with a draft pick or put even one dollar of your budget on it.

Feb 12, 2026

SERIES REVIEW HISTORY:

2014	Mario Golf World Tour	78
2015	Mario <u>Tennis</u> Ultra Smash	56
2017	Mario Sports Superstars	61
2018	Mario <u>Tennis</u> Aces	75
2021	Mario Golf Super Rush	71
2022	Mario Strikers: Battle League	73

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 69

CEILING: 78

BEST GUESS: 75

At Fate’s End | Thunder Lotus

2026

Hype Factor: 11.7 (#64 Hyped Game)

Spiritfarer was one of the best reviewed games in ‘20, and now Thunder Lotus has unveiled their follow up project in At Fate’s End. This is a fairly different game to Spiritfarer, with a fantasy setting and an emphasis on combat. The art style stands out with incredible detailed animation, layered and atmospheric environments, and expressive characters. There seems to be a strong narrative emphasis, with an expansive menu that breaks down the characters and relationships in the game. I do have two hangups with this game. First is the fact it’s an indie game without a set date. Even though we did see an extended gameplay look last year, it was all from early in the game and labeled as “pre-alpha footage.” Second, I don’t think the combat looks bad, but I do think it looks unremarkable, and that is probably going to be a large chunk of players’ time with the game. Those two things are enough for this to be a stay away for me. I am not confident it will come out this year, and I also don’t think it will reach the heights that Spiritfarer did.

Thunder Lotus Pedigree:		
2015	Jotun	79
2017	Sundered	76
2020	Spiritfarer	87

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 77

CEILING: 83

BEST GUESS: 79

!DELAY RISK!

overhyped

D TIER | DRAFT STAY AWAYS, NOT WORTH IT

Enter the Gungeon 2 | Dodge Roll

TBAHype Factor: 11.8 (#63 Hyped Game)

Enter the Gungeon (**84**) released all the way back in 2016 and is widely regarded as one of the best bullet hell roguelites ever. Even though it has been a decade, without a hard date I am not confident it will be released this year. All we have seen of the game so far is a 30 second teaser trailer. Beyond that, I am not really sold on this game's direction. The shift to 3D does help this game stand out from the original and allow them to be creative in new ways, but I worry the 3D gameplay may be a little more frustrating and less sharp for a bullet hell style game. I also don't think the game looks bad, but the models just aren't as appealing to me as the original pixel art. This is a stay away in drafts for me.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 75****CEILING: 81****BEST GUESS: 78**

Valor Mortis | One More Level

2026

Hype Factor: 4.6 (#89 Hyped Game)

Valor Mortis is a first person souls-like from the creators of Ghostrunner (**81**). Set in a fantastical Europe, you play as a former soldier for Napoleon. Combat features swordplay and parrying, as well as guns and magic. The designs of the enemies in 1800s military uniforms is pretty cool as well. This game seems solid, but first person melee combat never really seems to work as well as you want it to so I don't think it has a high ceiling. The game was announced last year at Gamescom and is slated for '26, but there isn't a date yet. This game has potential, but I think drafting it is a little too ambitious.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 77****CEILING: 81****BEST GUESS: 78**

Beast of Reincarnation | Game Freak

2026

Hype Factor: 5.4 (#83 Hyped Game)

If you just watch a trailer for Beast of Reincarnation, you may be intrigued by its lush biomes, massive creatures, flashy combat, and especially the dog companion. Or you may be turned off by seeing yet another souls-like/wukong-like or whatever type of action RPG this turns out to be. But the thing that makes this game stand out is of course that it is being developed by Game Freak. Frankly that only makes this game harder for me to rank. I only know two things about Game Freak: #1 is that they make Pokémon and #2 is that they bring the same “bare minimum just skating by” energy to Pokémon that I brought to my assignments in high school. I have no idea if this game will turn out to be a passion project that some members of Game Freak have been hoping to make for a long time and delivers the level of quality and polish you would expect the studio entrusted with the most profitable media franchise on this planet to be capable of, or if it will come and go with barely a blip on the radar like so many action RPGs seem to these days. And I especially have no clue how to give any definitive statement on when I expect it to be released. This game could totally review well whenever it does come out, but as it stands right now all we have to go on is one trailer that is less than two minutes long. I will definitely keep an eye out for more information this year but I don't think you should use a draft pick on it.

PROJECTION

TOO EARLY FOR A SCORING RANGE

Clockwork Revolution | inXile Entertainment TBA

Hype Factor: 10.3 (#65 Hyped Game)

inXile Entertainment was acquired by Microsoft in 2018, and Clockwork Revolution will be their first project that was started since the acquisition. Xbox is clearly very proud of it because it was announced in 2023, but more importantly given a very detailed feature in the Xbox Summer Showcase that was over five minutes long. Clockwork Revolution really looks like the total package. It has a great steampunk style, the writing and voice acting for the characters seem strong, the character and weapon customization looks very in depth, and the time rewinding mechanic that looks to be useful in combat and progressing your characters' story is super promising. inXile may not be a household name, but their track record on OpenCritic speaks for itself. An **86** might seem like a ceiling outcome for this game at first glance but I also don't think it's crazy to think with the increased budget and tons of time and freedom to work on this game that Clockwork Revolution could surpass that. My biggest concern by far comes down to whether or not it will release in '26. It's segment from the Xbox showcase ended saying "Coming In Due Time" and the cut to an NPC doll saying "Let me alone and piss off!" I love to hear any studio saying they are taking their time, but from a FantasyCritic perspective that does not inspire confidence, especially with Xbox already planning to put out a new Forza, Gears, Fable, and Halo: Campaign Evolved in '26. I would not draft this game. I think it has massive, dare I say GotY nominee upside, but I do not see a reasonable path to this launching in '26.

inXile RECENT RELEASES:

2014	Wasteland 2	81
2017	Torment: Tides of Numenera	80
2020	Wasteland 3	86

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 80

CEILING: 91

BEST GUESS: 87

There Are No Ghosts at the Grand Hotel | Friday Sundae 2026

Hype Factor: 2.7 (#>100 Hyped Game)

This is another game I am personally very high on. Initially revealed at Xbox's Summer Showcase last year, you play as someone who's father has just passed away and left you a large hotel on the British coast in his will. You will renovate the hotel and surrounding areas during the day and fight off ghosts at night while you work to uncover the secret of what is plaguing this town. You use a magical "gun" that can demolish areas, paint walls, put books back on shelves, and of course fend off the ghosts. I think the presentation looks solid overall, and the NPCs not only look great but have a chance to be very compelling characters and a big reason why this game lands with critics (especially the mysterious talking cat). There are just two small problems. First, the game has a loose commitment to '26 but no set date. Second, this a debut title for Friday Sundae, and even though according to my research they were founded in '17, it seems they only began working on No Ghosts at the Grand more recently. There is a demo out on Steam right now, but I do not think that is enough for me to believe this game's release is imminent. I was tempted to have this as a fringe draftable game, and in a deeper league I would consider it, but I think this is most likely a '27 or even beyond title. If it does get an announced date in '26 I will put a lot of dollars into my bid for it, but I think it is too risky to commit a draft pick to this title.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 78****CEILING: 86****BEST GUESS: 83**

Orbitals | Shapefarm

2026Hype Factor: 23.1 (#40 Hyped Game)

This is a debut title for Shapefarm that is exclusive to the Nintendo Switch 2. It Takes Two (**88**) and Split Fiction (**91**) were such successes as co-op games that it was only a matter of time someone else tried to copy their formula, and Orbitals is at least the first one I've seen. This game has an awesome retro anime art style, and in the trailer we can see a few variations in the gameplay mechanics which is a key aspect of Hazelight's latest co-op games. It is being published by Kepler Interactive, and they helped put out Clair Obscur, Sifu, and Pacific Drive among other games recently so there is at least a little bit of pedigree from them. I don't think this needs to reach the heights of Hazelight's games to be a big hit with critics. If there was a hard date attached to it I may draft this in the 30s, but with just a '26 release window I worry if this will even come out this year. Unless you are in a deeper league I would not draft it, but I think this should be a watchlist game, and if it gets another solid trailer with a date I would do my best to win a bid for it.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 78****CEILING: 84****BEST GUESS: 82**

Neverway | Coldblood Inc.

2026

Hype Factor: 8.2 (#73 Hyped Game)

The debut title for three person studio Coldblood Inc., this is a pixel-art horror RPG. The visual style of this game is really striking, always using a very muted and limited color palette to drive home the eerie feeling it's going for. The pixel art in the few cutscenes we've seen in particular is excellent. The gameplay is supposed to have some action combat with RPG elements as well as life sim and farming elements. I think this game has tons of potential, but this is a prime example of what I talked about in my disclaimer about Indie games. This will definitely be on my watchlist, but I do not think I will ever use a draft pick on a debut indie game that does not have a release date.

PROJECTION

TOO EARLY FOR A SCORING RANGE

STAR WARS Zero Company| Bit Reactor 2026

Hype Factor: 12.1 (#62 Hyped Game)

This is a strategy game reminiscent of XCOM set in the Star Wars Universe during the Clone Wars. The good news is that developer Bit Reactor, despite being a brand new studio, is comprised of former Firaxis developers who have worked on XCOM and Civilization. We have only seen snippets of gameplay so far edited together at the end of the reveal trailer so it is hard to make any definitive assessments about the game. I do think this is almost a draftable game when you consider how well XCOM has reviewed as a series, but I am hesitant to draft a game from a brand new studio without a hard date.

PROJECTION

TOO EARLY FOR A SCORING RANGE

Coven of the Chicken Foot | Wildflower

Interactive

TBA

Hype Factor: 1.1 (#>100 Hyped Game)

Coven of the Chicken Foot comes from Wildflower Interactive, a new studio founded by Bruce Straley, co-creator and game director for The Last of Us. This game looks entirely different from any recent Naughty Dog title. It is a “character puzzle-platformer” with a cell-shaded art style and a playable grandma with bird feet. You will take on this journey alongside an NPC companion who is a large beast of some kind, and you will have to give it commands and work together with it to solve puzzles in ways somewhat reminiscent of The Last Guardian. This game seems super unique and like it has a lot of charm so I will definitely keep it on my watchlist, but it was just revealed at the most recent Game Awards, and without a year tied to it I think it is most likely to release in ‘27 or beyond.

PROJECTION**TOO EARLY FOR A SCORING RANGE**

Crowsworn | Mongoose Rodeo

TBA

Hype Factor: 1.5 (#>100 Hyped Game)

Crowsworn has shown super well every time we have seen it. The art style and overall presentation looks great, the combat looks really solid, and the Metroidvania genre typically does very well with critics. Yes if you're cynical it might seem a tad derivative of Hollow Knight (so were Nine Sols **86** and Bo: Path of the Teal Lotus **80**), but I think Crowsworn brings enough to the table to stand on its own merit. This game launched its kickstarter back in '21, and we have seen a few updates since then, including most recently a trailer at the Xbox Partners Showcase this past November. Unfortunately, that trailer did not even include a release year, much less a date. I think this is absolutely a watchlist game but one that is too risky to use draft capital on.

PROJECTION**TOO EARLY FOR A SCORING RANGE**

Bradley the Badger | Day 4 Night

TBA

Hype Factor: 6.2 (#80 Hyped Game)

Bradley the Badger was revealed during the pre show of the most recent Game Awards, and its trailer really stood out. It is a 3D platforming adventure, but its unique hook is that Bradley the Badger will travel to various “unfinished” game worlds featuring other zany mascots. Bradley also has a metaphorical/literal game developer tool kit with him to help fix these worlds up. This is a super clever idea that has a chance to be a very introspective and bring some meta commentary on game design itself, which is something very few games do. Day 4 Night is a new studio co-founded by Davide Soliani, the creator and director of the Mario+Rabbids series (and you probably don’t need me to tell you about that other studio made up of former Ubisoft devs just made a game that won GotY). That being said, the studio was founded in 2024. I would be absolutely shocked if this game comes out in ‘26, but it seems so cool that I will definitely be keeping it on my watchlist.

PROJECTION**TOO EARLY FOR A SCORING RANGE**

Acts of Blood | Eksil Team

TBA

Hype Factor: 0.4 (#>100 Hyped Game)

This is a debut title from Eksil Team, a small studio from Indonesia, which is also the setting for their game. Acts of Blood clearly takes inspiration from Sifu (**81**) and Sleeping Dogs, which are not critical darlings but are definitely beloved games. I think the game's style and visual presentation isn't groundbreaking but does fit really well for this genre. The trailer shows off a lot of flashy combat with brutal finishers, but without going hands-on with the game or at least hearing from media members that have it is hard to say that it will definitely be a strength of the game. It was first shown off at Summer Games Fest last year, and Eksil Team is largely a solo developer with some help, so with no set date this is definitely not something you can use draft capital on, but it is worth keeping tabs on throughout the year.

PROJECTION**TOO EARLY FOR A SCORING RANGE**

Militsioner | TALLBOYS

TBA

Hype Factor: 0.1 (#>100 Hyped Game)

This is an immersive sim from a small Russian team where you play as a resident of a small town that is overseen by a gigantic policeman who sits around and stares at you all day. You are then suddenly falsely accused of a crime and must escape the town before the trial. Most everything you do is seen by this policeman, so you must navigate angering, appeasing, giving gifts to, or even romancing him in order to get to safety. The developer Tallboys Games has only released two projects: Pandemic Express, which is an asymmetrical multiplayer game from 2019 and does not have an OpenCritic page, and Prisoner of Luck which is an itch.io project. It is being published by Critical Reflex, which in the last two years has helped put out Mouthwashing (**84**) and No, I'm Not a Human (**80**) among other games, so I don't think this is a total shot in the dark for FantasyCritic. Militsioner still does not have a date, but it does have a demo. If it does come out it probably will not receive very many reviews, but I do think this is an interesting project with a unique premise that is worth keeping an eye on.

PROJECTION**TOO EARLY FOR A SCORING RANGE**

ILL | Team Clout Inc.

TBA

Hype Factor: 0.8 (#>100 Hyped Game)

Team Clout Inc. showed us their debut title ILL, a first person horror game, at Summer Games Fest last year. Some of the developers' have worked previously on horror film and TV projects, and that experience definitely shows in the design of the environments, enemies, and overall atmosphere of the game. The devs promise "Advanced physics: interactive environments, active ragdoll, dismemberment, real-time body transformations" on their Patreon, which obviously sounds awesome, but the bits of gameplay we have seen seem heavily scripted, so until we see more or media gets hands on it's hard to know if that promise will come to fruition. This is yet another debut game that does not have a hard date and will not get a draftable ranking from me, but I am personally very interested in this title and will certainly add it to my watchlist.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 74****CEILING: 85****BEST GUESS: 80**

ARMATUS | Counterplay Games Inc.

2026

Hype Factor: 0.2 (#>100 Hyped Game)

This was revealed at the Xbox Partners Showcase in November of '25, and comes from the developers of Godfall (**60**), which I will admit is not exactly encouraging news. I do think the trailer looks good and the action/shooter combat looks like a lot of fun, so I do not want to totally write it off. It appears this game is strictly single player which is good because the games as a service aspects of Godfall were a huge part of why it was not received well. I would obviously not draft this game, especially with no date, but the roguelite structure and combat style is at least a bit intriguing. I'm not saying it's going to be the next Returnal, but I will be keeping tabs on this one because I think it could be a solid game you could probably add for a minimum bid.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 70****CEILING: 80****BEST GUESS: 77**

Mudang: Two Hearts | EVR Studio

TBA

Hype Factor: 1.3 (#>100 Hyped Game)

Mudang: Two Hearts is the first project from Korea's EVR Studio. The initial reveal for this game was all the way back in November of '22. The latest trailer from last summer's Xbox showcase looks really promising with solid visual fidelity, a lot of options for how to stealth around levels, and some exciting looking enemies and bosses. Obviously Metal Gear Solid and Splinter Cell are beloved tactical stealth franchises that have been missing from the gaming landscape for quite a while now, and while I think it's often a bit unfair to compare games to those franchises and burden them with the weight of trying to live up to those games, I think there is room for something to fill that void, and if Mudang delivers on what the trailers have shown it could be that game. Even though this has been in development for a long time, we have not seen enough yet for me to trust that 2026 release window (EVR's official YouTube channel has uploaded tons of videos showcasing tech and other work in progress looks at the game, which is really cool, but makes me think this game is still very far from being finished), so I would not draft it. But this is a game I am excited to learn more about and think could turn out to be a hit whenever it releases.

PROJECTION**TOO EARLY FOR A SCORING RANGE**

Light No Fire | Hello Games

TBA

Hype Factor: 2.4 (#>100 Hyped Game)

No Man's Sky may have a **71** on OpenCritic, but I think we all know with how that game has evolved and how Hello Games has learned to manage a live service multiplayer project, that Light No Fire has a much higher ceiling and floor (maybe. probably. right?). I think the hype for this game should be major with the promise of a single shared earth sized world, dragon mounts, and presumably base building and other similar mechanics from No Man's Sky's many updates. With that being said, this has no release window, and also could potentially be a candidate for early access. If it suddenly gets a release date this year, I would jump all over this game in bidding, but drafting a project of this scale when it isn't currently even planned to release this year is not wise.

PROJECTION**TOO EARLY FOR A SCORING RANGE**

Dead as Disco | Brain Jar Games

TBA

Hype Factor: 1 (#>100 Hyped Game)

This is a stylish 3D beat-em-up from a brand new dev team. Its combat features a Hi-Fi Rush attacking on rhythm with the music mechanic, and the soundtrack features some fun licensed tracks as well. It was playable at Gamescom, and there is a demo on Steam that has received 98% positive feedback from players. I don't necessarily expect this game to launch this year, but I think it has a lot of the ingredients necessary to be a great pickup during the year. Definitely do not draft it, but this will be a watchlist game for me and I am excited to learn more about it.

PROJECTION**TOO EARLY FOR A SCORING RANGE**

Felt That: Boxing | Sans Strings Studio

TBA

Hype Factor: 0.7 (#>100 Hyped Game)

This game was originally unveiled at Summer Games Fest '25. It almost doesn't look like a video game, to the point that when it was introduced Geoff Keighley assured us that parts of the trailer were gameplay and running in-engine. The very realistic puppets bring a super unique look for video games that really sets this project apart, and a structure reminiscent of Punch-Out is sure to land well with critics. It is hard to tell how well it will feel to control until we hear/see more. I think this game has a high ceiling so you should keep an eye on it, but especially with no release year mentioned yet I don't think you can draft it.

PROJECTION**TOO EARLY FOR A SCORING RANGE**

Unannounced Pokémon | Nintendo

TBA/2026

Hype Factor: 14.4 (#54 Hyped Game)

This is probably the only currently unannounced title I feel very confident is launching next year (other than Call of Duty). We have literally never gone more than four years in the history of the Pokémon franchise without a new generation game releasing. However I definitely would not draft it. Whatever you think about Game Freak and how they have handled the Pokémon IP, the ceiling of the Mainline Pokémon series lately is ok at best, and the floor is of a total wasted pick. I would not invest in this game until we see something, and that something would have to be very encouraging. There are some leaks/rumours suggesting that this next game will have some major shake ups for the series, but I do not want to bet on those rumors with draft capital.

RECENT REVIEW HISTORY:		
2013	Pokémon X & Y	86
2016	Pokémon Sun & Moon	87
2019	Pokémon Sword & Shield	80
2022	Pokémon Scarlet & Violet	71

PROJECTION

TOO EARLY FOR A SCORING RANGE

Marvel 1943: Rise of Hydra | Skydance New Media

Hype Factor: 4.1 (#92 Hyped Game)

“Beyond Early 2026” Imao

Marvel 1943: Rise of Hydra is being developed by Skydance New Media, which was founded in 2019 and has yet to release anything (Skydance Interactive which put out Behemoth on VR platforms is a different branch of Skydance Games). The big industry name associated with Skydance New Media is Amy Hennig, who is most known as the creative director and writer for the Uncharted trilogy. I don't want this to come across like I am an Amy Hennig hater, but since leaving Naughty Dog in '14 she is only credited on two games: Battlefield Hardline (writer) and Forspoken (story concept). I know that is mostly due to EA's mishandlings and not hers, but my point is that Hennig sometimes gets mentioned like a titan of the industry when the reality is it has been a very long time since she has released a project at all. There has been one trailer for Rise of Hydra that released in May of '24, and it is comprised only of cutscenes. Skydance announced this past May that the game was being delayed to “early 2026” and then later they posted on X that they have “...made the decision to shift their release window beyond early 2026” (this post was made one hour after Rockstar announced the GTA VI delay, which is hilarious). I was already skeptical of this game, but now with the nebulous delay to an unspecified time, I would not touch it with a ten foot pole. This game still could score well when it does release, but I would be pretty surprised if it comes out in '26, especially considering Marvel might prefer to keep Wolverine and Rise of Hydra's launch dates far apart from each other. Even if it does beat the odds and launch in '26, a project that has been in the works for this long, has had multiple delays, is being developed by a largely unproven studio, and has not shown off any gameplay will not be a draftable title for me in any range of the draft.

PROJECTION

TOO EARLY FOR A SCORING RANGE

Romeo Is a Dead Man | Suda51

Hype Factor: 13.3 (#58 Hyped Game)

Feb 11, 2026

Even if you're a huge fan of Suda51 and Grasshopper, you can acknowledge their games do not have a track record of critical success. Romeo is a Dead Man looks like it has Suda's signature style, humor, and action combat featuring guns and swords. A new IP as opposed to more No More Heroes could make this a better entry point for people who have never tried one of these games, but I think it will largely feel like more of the same. It does only retail for \$49.99, so that's cool at least. I do think there is a chance that this game ends up being worth rostering in FantasyCritic, but I don't think it's likely. I wouldn't be opposed to adding it via a very cheap bid, but I think you can do better during the draft.

<u>Most Recent Suda & Grasshopper Games:</u>		
2016	Let It Die	75
2019	Travis Strikes Again	68
2020	No More Heroes 3	76

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 69

CEILING: 80

BEST GUESS: 76

Tides of Annihilation | Eclipse Glow Games **TBA**

Hype Factor: 12.9 (#60 Hyped Game)

I'm not necessarily proud that Stellar Blade was on my team in '24, but I am proud that I spent \$1 of my budget to bid on Stellar Blade and got 12 points for it. Tides of Annihilation is not made by the same developers as Stellar Blade, it's made by Eclipse Glow Games, a brand new studio from China. It is similar to Stellar Blade in a lot of ways though, being an action game with a female protagonist who looks, y'know, but also both have a good visual style and unique enemies. A lot of this game's art direction is inspired by Arthurian legend which I think gives it an overall look that stands out a least a little bit. There is no release date yet or even a year so I would definitely not draft this game, but if upcoming trailers/previews continue to look solid and we get a date I would consider this potentially being worth a minimum bid.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 74

CEILING: 83

BEST GUESS: 79

Invincible Vs. | Quarter Up

Apr 30, 2026

Hype Factor: 9.4 (#67 Hyped Game)

This might seem like a game you can pretty easily dismiss, but the team working on Invincible Vs is made up of former Killer Instinct devs. I have seen some buzz and hype about this game from the fighting game community, but I am worried the Invincible roster might all feel too similar to play as. I will keep an eye on this one, but it is probably a long shot it will be relevant in FantasyCritic. I would not draft it even in a deeper league.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 70****CEILING: 80****BEST GUESS: 76**

Coffee Talk Tokyo | Chorus Worldwide **Mar 5, 2026**

Hype Factor: 8.4 (#72 Hyped Game)

The first Coffee Talk released back in 2020. Many people are fans of its chill and cozy vibes, interesting characters, soundtrack etc. But that game only got a **74** on OpenCritic. Coffee Talk Tokyo is adding some new features but is mostly the same thing again. I think it could outscore the original, but not by a significant enough margin to be relevant in FantasyCritic, even with the cheat code that is a Japanese setting and aesthetic.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 73

CEILING: 79

BEST GUESS: 76

Unannounced Call of Duty | Activision

Hype Factor: ??? (#?? Hyped Game)

(It should be noted that some leagues do not allow annual installment franchises so check your league’s settings)

We do not know for certain what ‘26’s annual installment of Call of Duty will be (there are rumors it will be Modern Warfare 4, the 7th installment in the Modern Warfare series), but as far as the draft goes it doesn’t really matter. Call of Duty has been about as up and down critically as any franchise in recent years. I do think that this next Call of Duty release will be better than Modern Warfare 3 and Black Ops 7 and has a chance to be a value add in FantasyCritic, but as a bid later in the year. I definitely would not draft it sight unseen.

SERIES REVIEW HISTORY:		
2018	Black Ops 4	84
2019	Modern Warfare	81
2020	Black Ops Cold War	75
2021	Vanguard	72
2022	Modern Warfare II	75
2023	Modern Warfare III	58
2024	Black Ops 6	83
2025	Black Ops 7	66

PROJECTION

TOO EARLY FOR A SCORING RANGE

Tears of Metal | Paper Cult

2026

Hype Factor: 0.5 (#>100 Hyped Game)

This is a hack and slash co-op roguelike in a medieval setting with a solid art style and tons of gore and blood splatters. Paper Cult's previous title Bloodroots received a **78** and I would guess that's about where this game will land as well. I don't think it looks bad, but I suspect it will land better with friend groups playing together than it will with critics. No hard date means you definitely cannot draft it, and there's a chance it could be an early access game as well. I think there will be several games you can bid on throughout the year with a much higher ceiling and floor than this.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 72****CEILING: 80****BEST GUESS: 77**

Deer and Boy | Lifeline Games

2026

Hype Factor: 0.4 (#>100 Hyped Game)

This is a debut title for Lifeline Games. Deer and Boy promises to be a dialogue free emotional platforming adventure with a moving soundtrack that will make you cry. Sometimes games like this hit in a big way, and sometimes they just come and go. This game looks solid, but we haven't seen enough for me to fully believe in it yet. Without a date, I would wait for more information before investing anything in this game, but it is definitely possible it could score well enough to be relevant in FantasyCritic.

PROJECTION**TOO EARLY FOR A SCORING RANGE**

Zero Parades: For Dead Spies | ZA/UM

2026

Hype Factor: 5.9 (#81 Hyped Game)

I do not have the time, knowledge, or energy to even begin to unpack what has happened with ZA/UM, the developers of Disco Elysium (**92**) since that game was released (check this link to a reddit post if you want a better idea <https://www.reddit.com/r/DiscoElysium/s/0yDt7sF721>). What that means for Zero Parades is that as much as it looks like the follow up to Disco Elysium, I don't think you can count on the studio's pedigree because so much has changed for them internally. This game also does not have a set date yet. If you do consider adding Zero Parades to your team, it should be with a bid after learning more details, definitely not with a draft pick.

PROJECTION**FLOOR: 70****CEILING: ??****BEST GUESS: ??**

Pathologic 3 | Ice-Pick Lounge

Jan 9, 2026

Hype Factor: 8.7 (#70 Hyped Game)

This is the latest installment in a narrative horror series that has a bit of a cult following. The third installment introduces a time travel mechanic that lets you go back and potentially alter some of your decisions. That being said, Pathologic 2 only scored a **70**, so I don't think you can have very high expectations for 3. On top of that, because the game releases in early January, you basically need to make a decision on it during your draft. I think this game is unlikely to get a score that's meaningful in FantasyCritic. You have basically the whole year to find games via bids, and a lot of them will have a better floor and ceiling than Pathologic 3.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 70

CEILING: 78

BEST GUESS: 76

Inkonbini | Nagai Industries

Apr 2026

Hype Factor: 0.5 (#>100 Hyped Game)

In Inkonbini: One Store. Many Stories you operate a small Japanese convenience store. Players will stock shelves and manage inventory as well as interact with customers and see how your decisions affect their stories. It was most recently shown off at the Playstation Japan Direct and was given an April 2026 release window but not a hard date. I don't think this game has a very high ceiling but it could potentially be a solid addition as a cheap bid.

PROJECTION

FLOOR: 73

CEILING: 81

BEST GUESS: 77

Marathon | Bungie

Mar 2026

Hype Factor: 9.1 (#69 Hyped Game)

Look. I do think there is a world where Marathon does score just well enough to be relevant in FantasyCritic this year. Bungie is not what they used to be, but they always bring excellent gunplay to their titles. It also just got a “revamp” after its first playtests that should help it land with players, and it is going to come out very soon. With that being said, I think you are out of your mind if you draft this game. This is a multiplayer live service game that has had about as bad of a run of negative press leading up to its release as I can recall. And it still is going to cost forty US dollars. The floor is negative points. You cannot draft this game. It will get counter picked instantly. And even though I think it’s possible it could score like an **80**, I do not think it is likely at all. I promise you can find games out there with a better ceiling and much less risk.



COUNTERPICKS

Counter picks are one of my favorite parts of the FantasyCritic experience. Obviously there's only so much advice I can give when I don't know what games your league mates have drafted, but I'll lay out my general strategy and list a few games I would target.

My goal on draft day is to counterpick a game that I believe will not release this year. It's very hard to find games that will net you positive points in the counter pick spot. Redfall (57) and Forspoken (66) level flops do happen but not consistently every year. I of course will also counterpick games that I don't think will review well, but I think typically those are easier to find as the season goes on and your league starts bidding on games. If there's a game you're staying away from in the draft because you're afraid it won't come out, you might as well commit to that with your counterpick. That 0 instead of a -5 can make a real difference, especially since you get to keep that game pinned to your opponent's team.

First I'll start with my list of no brainer counter picks. These are games I think have no shot of releasing this year. Some of them we literally know are 2027 or beyond. These will likely only get drafted in more casual league in my estimation.

Okami | Total War Warhammer 40K | Star Wars: Fate of the Old Republic | Judas | OD | Divinity New Bioshock Game | Untitled Mass Effect Game | Kingdom Hearts 4 | Black Myth: Zhong Kui Gang of Dragon | The Witcher 4 | FFVII Remake 3 | Intergalactic: The Heretic Prophet

If none of those freebies are available, then....

Dragon Quest XII: The Flames of Fate - this probably belongs with the above list, I just think there is a very slim chance it could launch this year

Unannounced Next Mainline Animal Crossing Game - there will definitely be one for Switch 2, and Nintendo currently does not have an announced game that we expect to be their main fall release outside of Pokemon, but I don't think it will be AC. New Horizons received a patch and a 3.0 update last year which suggests to me AC is not imminent.

Unannounced Mainline Mario 3D Platformer - this is a scary one, but I don't think this game is likely to happen and should be a safe counterpick.

Marathon - I don't think this requires explanation

Marvel 1943: Rise of Hydra - this game is starting to flirt with development hell, and I think it could either miss '26 or not be good

Half-Life - I'm even more scared to counterpick this than I am to draft it, but it should be mentioned here as an option.

From there, I would just reference my D-Tier games and see which of those you prefer to counter. Like I said it's a bit tricky to know what to recommend without seeing your league, but hopefully that gives you a good idea to work off of!

If you made it this far, you're a legend. Thank you so much and good luck!