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Stranger Things 3: The Game Review

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In 1987, **Lucasfilm Games** (<https://www.lucasfilm.com/what-we-do/games/>) under the direction of visionaries Ron Gilbert and Gary Winnick changed the world of video games. This year, *Stranger Things 3: The Game* released.

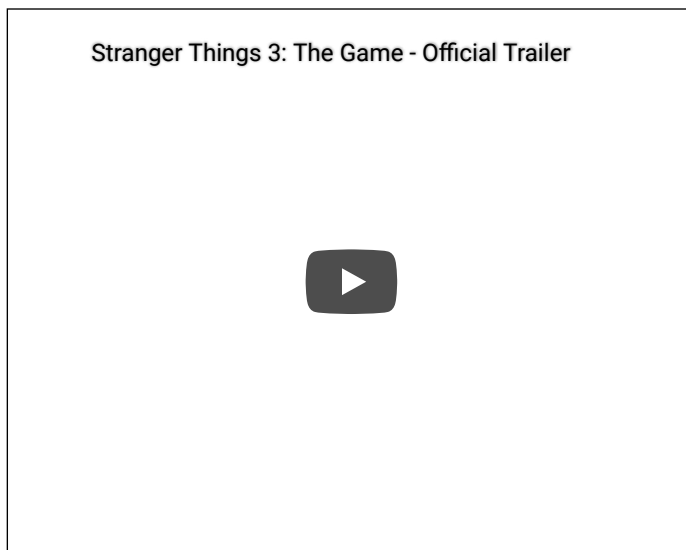
Maniac Mansion, a comical graphic adventure created an experience and a game engine that did for adventure games what *Castle Wolfenstein* did for first-person shooters.

Gilbert and Winnick reinvented the genre by developing the game engine SCUMM. SCUMM relies on a point and click, pop-up dialogue box interface instead of the static command lines used in text adventures like Infocom's *Zork*, *Planetfall* and *Wishbringer* which had been the standard up until that time.

Maniac Mansion was so successful and so popular as a game-changer it led to other blockbuster games from Lucasfilm like the iconic *Zak McKracken and the Alien Mindbenders* and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*.

Just like the Netflix series is a riff off everything eighties, *Stranger Things 3: The Game* (<https://cultureofgaming.com/stranger-things-collaborating-with-nike/>) is a tribute to those revolutionary Lucasfilm games of yesteryear.

A reader alert before we go any further though. *Stranger Things 3: The Game's* storyline follows that of the show very closely so I would highly recommend watching the Netflix series first in its entirety before starting up the game otherwise you will have much of it spoiled for you.



Just like the show, *Stranger Things 3: The Game* begins with our group of awkward teenage heroes undergoing some profound changes. Most are experiencing their first real crushes. Those sophomore romantic relationships are having an adverse effect on those who aren't paired up causing massive strife within the group of friends. It's your standard teenage movie, television show trope.

You are always with Jack or Jill! You don't hang with the gang anymore! You are ruining our friendship!

Blah. Blah. Blah. You know the rest.

I am not a fan of the mushy stuff. I wish The Duffer Brothers would focus on the horror aspects before the show goes the way of the *Big Bang Theory* which became a shadow of the delightful nerdfest it used to be, a dreadful humourless version of *Friends*.

An old enemy from the Upside Down overshadows the adolescent angst though as a new threat emerges resulting in a situation akin to a 1956 sci-fi, horror movie starring Kevin McCarthy in the role of his career.

Although you can play as Hopper, Lucas, Dustin, Joyce and most of the characters from the show, you begin with just Lucas and Mike and have to unlock the rest.

At the start, Mike carries a baseball bat and has the power to taunt foes which makes it easier to clobber them. Lucas can throw bombs and has a slingshot. As a solo player, you can and must switch between the two characters to complete tasks and solve physical puzzles like having one character remain standing on a pressure pad so a door will open and the other character can walk through it.

The game also has a co-op mode which eliminates all of that solo back and forth.



Like *Zak McKracken*, *Marvel Ultimate Alliance*, & the *Lego* games (<https://cultureofgaming.com/review-the-lego-movie-2-videogame/>), each character also has their own specific powers as part of the team. For example, being the computer and science genius that he is, Dustin can hack keypads and sophisticated locks.

The cast of baddies aren't a distinctive bunch though. There are evil Duke Nukem or Arnold Schwarzenegger brutes, grumpy security guards carrying tire irons, crazed rats from the series, evil Hazmat creeps and sinister soldiers. The approach to each foe is basically the same button mash strategy so the combat itself is not complex or difficult. Each throwdown is more of a petty annoyance than a real challenge.

Since it is a homage to those Lucasarts games, *Stranger Things 3: The Game* also carries with it some of the faults of that genre too. There are a lot of fetch or search quests, a lot of backtracking and even though there is a map, you may find yourself at a physical dead end or even an intellectual, strategic one when you have run out of options or paths to follow. Often to break through that roadblock it will take a lightning bolt of inspiration or perhaps making sure that you have searched every area and used every object that you can to find that one thing you overlooked or missed. You must be patient and thorough or you will end up being your own unbeatable boss.

The main campaign is an edited walkthrough of season three's main plot from Dustin referencing the X-Men with his homemade HAM radio to Billy and Mrs. Wheeler getting jiggy with each other. The campaign is comprised of side missions, story branches that are unique to the game itself like locating the ingredients to mix a toxic milkshake which will make one of the Hawkins Pool lifeguards puke his guts out to curing the Starcourt Mall of its rat problem for a custodian before you can catch a screening of Romero's *Day of the Dead*.

Like so many games these days, there is a (insert a BIG sigh here) crafting element but it is not used to combine ingredients to create objects used to solve riddles like you might do in other adventure games. It is all about creating "trinkets" that once equipped grant your characters bonuses. Thankfully, the trinkets and crafting are not essential so don't waste your time unless you feel the bonuses are absolutely necessary.

Once you defeat the game a new mode Eliminator will open. All of the characters are available from the start but once they die, they disappear from your roster.



Throughout his lifetime, I have introduced my technological spoiled Generation Z son who has grown up on blockbuster movie quality games like the modern day sequels to Halo and Call of Duty to the more simpler Time Pilot, Pac Man, Defender, the arcade, Atari and ColecoVision games I grew up with. He often placates me with a polite...*That's cool, dad!*..before turning on his game console with its 4K resolution and Dolby sound. What he doesn't understand is that there is often beauty in simplicity. What really matters always is not the graphics or the sound but how fun a game is to play in the first place. The 16-bit art style, the gameplay, the cut-scenes, even the music makes *Stranger Things 3: The Game* a perfect sequel to those adventure games of the past. If you grew up with them as I did, you will appreciate *Stranger Things 3: The Game* on a far higher and different level than someone who might not have still, if you are a fan of the series and adventure gaming in general, just living out, playing out those famous scenes may be worth the \$19.99 bargain price tag.

THE GOOD

- ⊕ Embodies the spirit of the show and its characters.
- ⊕ Follows the Season 3 plot closely while also introducing some new elements.
- ⊕ You can craft Freddy Krueger's glove?
- ⊕ Love those eighties references.

THE BAD

- ⊖ With throwback gameplay comes throwback flaws.
- ⊖ The combat is monotonous.

8.5

Great

Review Summary

Dudes, don't have a cow. This release is phat, fresh and tubular. Word.

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