



HOGWARTS LEGACY

AVALANCHE SOFTWARE: *Hogwarts Legacy*. [digital game].
Burbank, CA : Warner Bros. Games, 2023.

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Few digital games have been released with such expectations and at the same time with such fear of the audience as *Hogwarts Legacy*. The lovebrand of the wizarding world of Harry Potter, which even after so many years is fed by ever-increasing media production – from books to movies, from movies to another series of movies about events that happened only a few decades before Harry Potter came to Hogwarts and so on. And among that, of course, exist countless digital and tabletop games and much more. In short, this universe is a lovebrand that, like the giants of the film world, has a huge number of constantly active fans. It was therefore only a logical outcome that at some point an AAA digital game would be released, which would try to rekindle the interest not only of current hardcore fans, but especially to expand their ranks to include younger generations who have not experienced the biggest boom around the young wizard. While my generation (and probably yours) was the one that lined up in bookstores before a new book came out or went to midnight movies in cinemas, the current 15-25 generation did not experience that era. They jumped on the bandwagon, about halfway or towards the end of the original film series.

Hogwarts Legacy manages to do something that a game title rarely does – to attract those people to PCs and PlayStations whose most prominent gaming until now involved mobile games at best, and who until now were not interested in playing more complex titles. We can argue that an ordinary player would have encountered *Hogwarts Legacy* at some point and probably would have played the game whether or not they were a fan of the wizarding world universe. However, 'forcing' someone who does not consider themselves a gamer and does not play games is a tough nut to crack. However, this title manages to do just that. Of course, hardcore gamers could argue that there are countless titles that deserve more attention from someone new to AAA games, and it should be their favourite and award-winning game that should have this privilege, but a cultural and media phenomenon with an impact such as Harry Potter will hardly find competition in the segment of reaching new players, which is also proven by the increase in sales of game hardware in the month in which the game was released.¹

Even before the release of the game, the cancel culture indirectly earned a certain amount of media coverage for it, as they tried to cancel the game or at least minimize the number of people who will play it. The premise of this 'activism' was that by buying the game, players were supporting a transphobic ideology that wizarding world author J. K. Rowling more or less directly subscribed to via tweets and her blog. It is not up to me to evaluate how realistic the expectations of the cancel culture movement were, but the truth is that while they may have done it with good intentions, they chose an absolutely inappropriate way of doing it. They virtually attacked streamers who received a copy of

1 YADEN, J.: *Hogwarts Legacy Is Already The Best-Selling Game Of 2023 In The US*. Released on 29th March 2023. [online]. [2023-05-24]. Available at: <<https://www.gamespot.com/articles/hogwarts-legacy-is-already-the-best-selling-game-of-2023-in-the-us/1100-6512789/>>.

the game a few days before the official release and streamed it, joining their streams in groups, spoiling the end of the game, insulting the streamers, wishing them death and even threatening them. While some of the streamers managed these raids without problems, others decided to turn off the stream and not comment on the game anymore, and in some cases streamers even decided to end their careers altogether. To what extent these are adequate reactions or attention farming cannot be evaluated, but it is a fact that the streamers who made these decisions have not started creating new content even now, several months after these events, or have announced the end of their careers.² However, as it turned out, these cancel culture activities did not fall on fertile ground, as *Hogwarts Legacy* is one of the best-selling games of this year³, and is also in the running for the Game of the Year award, although the competition will undoubtedly be strong this year. By the way, the game as such is positioned inclusively to the theme of otherness in the socio-cultural context – the player meets characters who are transgender (Sirona Ryan – the first transgender character in the Harry Potter universe), who are openly homosexual (Nora Treadwell talks about her wife), are of different skin colours (Natsai Onai), and meets both extroverts and introverts (Amit Thakkar), etc. Of course, we could ask if it is enough in today's polarized world, especially in the context of the statements of the author of Harry Potter, and in view of these, some game portals have decided not to review *Hogwarts Legacy* or talk about the game, but from my personal point of view it is at least a small step towards a better and more inclusive world.

The gameplay itself takes place approximately 100 years before the events of the original Harry Potter series, so we will not meet any familiar characters in the game (which will surely save fans from potential disappointment). But what will bring an undoubted feeling of nostalgia are the places that we know – the stairs that change direction, the main dining room, some outdoor areas and surrounding buildings, flying on a broom and hippogriffs, etc. A large part of the player experience is about sentimentality and reminiscing about times long gone – while playing, you can't help remembering your own childhood and the magic of the original films. *Hogwarts Legacy* is an open world with a fairly large map and a lot of side quests that can keep the player busy for dozens of hours, as long as they try to complete the game to 100%. Of course, in the area of side quests, you cannot avoid repetitiveness and the occasional rage quit, when you cannot find the flying key you are looking for on the twentieth try. However, the main quest is attractively designed, unfolds briskly (with slight modifications depending on whether or not you decide to learn forbidden curses) and at the end two options for ending the main narrative (neither ending, however, gives the player any advantage or disadvantage for the next playing, which is unlocked after the end of the main story line) are provided. The mechanics and gameplay as such are not groundbreaking or innovative. We have seen them all before, ultimately it is a classic action RPG with adventure elements. On the other hand, if it also contained something innovative, it would maybe serve more harm than good. I am afraid that more complex mechanics could discourage new players and bring them more frustration than pleasure from playing.

Lastly, the success of *Hogwarts Legacy* is built on nostalgia and media *hype*. The Harry Potter series is a lovebrand whose outcome in the form of a game was not unexpected and the success of the game could also be predicted. The question arises as to

2 JIANG, S.: *Popular Vtuber Pikamee Retires Following Hogwarts Legacy Controversy*. Released on 2nd March 2023. [online]. [2023-05-24]. Available at: <<https://kotaku.com/pikamee-vtuber-hogwarts-legacy-stream-twitch-youtube-1850178628>>.

3 IVAN, T.: *Hogwarts Legacy has topped 15 million sales and grossed over \$1 billion*. Released on 5th May 2023. [online]. [2023-05-24]. Available at: <<https://www.videogameschronicle.com/news/hogwarts-legacy-has-topped-15-million-sales-and-grossed-over-1-billion/>>.

whether other titles that still have a strong fan base will choose this route. After the success of *Hogwarts Legacy*, this would be highly expected. It's also not surprising that after the success of the game, which manages to attract a huge number of people to keyboards and joysticks, the new Harry Potter series is planned for HBO Max, and *Hogwarts Legacy 2* is also rumoured, since the universe provides enough exploration to develop. You could say that *Hogwarts Legacy* was a kind of test (financially expensive, no doubt) of whether the fan base is still strong enough to make it worthwhile developing this universe further through other media products. And the answer is clear: Always.

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