

GAMES REVIEW

Life is Strange: Double Exposure ends with a disappointing finale

The game's final episode also teases a larger Life is Strange universe to come.

By Khee Hoon Chan
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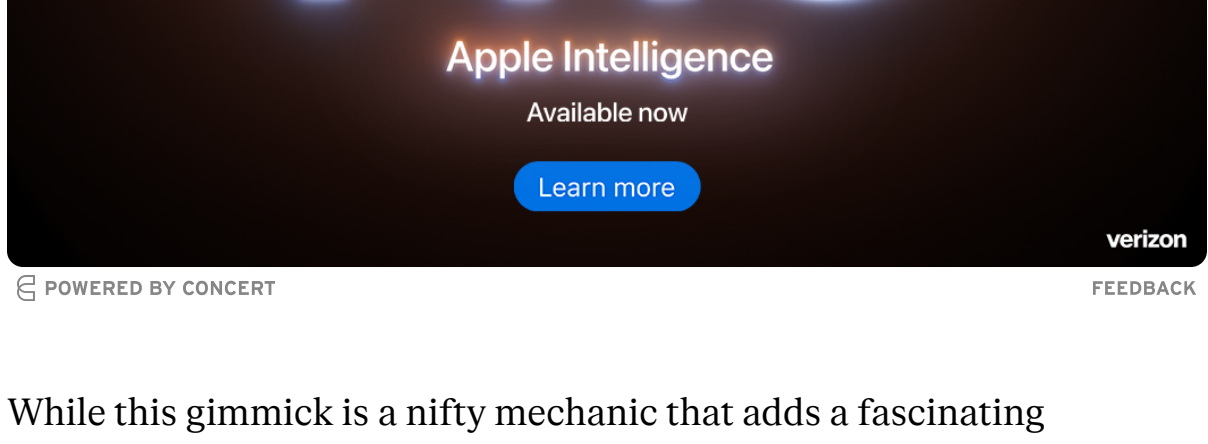


Image: Square Enix

At one point in *Life is Strange: Double Exposure*'s third episode, Max Caulfield tried to discuss the well-being of a student named Reggie with Loretta, another student on campus.

Loretta became somewhat bewildered, asking Max who exactly she was referring to. That was when Max realized, much to her chagrin, that she had gotten the two parallel realities of Loretta mixed up. Turns out, one Loretta has met Reggie, but the other hasn't. (Don't ask me which; I can't remember offhand, either.)

This moment is emblematic of how rapidly *Double Exposure* flits between its two universes. There's the "Living World," in which her best friend Safi was alive, and the "Dead World" where she wasn't. Several puzzles in the game follow this trajectory: to circumvent certain obstacles when investigating Safi's death, Max would tear a massive rift into the other reality to gather information she would otherwise not be privy to or grab some useful object as if pulling off a magician's hat trick before returning to the first.



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While this gimmick is a nifty mechanic that adds a fascinating dimension to Max's sleuthing, it can also get confusing and tedious, especially as events are spun off in wildly different directions. Even Max's fastidious note-taking does little to assuage this frustration. Ultimately, while the power does offer a look into the otherwise unseen facets of Max's life, it's also troublesome as a mechanic, at times reducing interactions to fetch quests.

This piece contains spoilers about Life is Strange: Double Exposure, its finale, and the first Life is Strange.

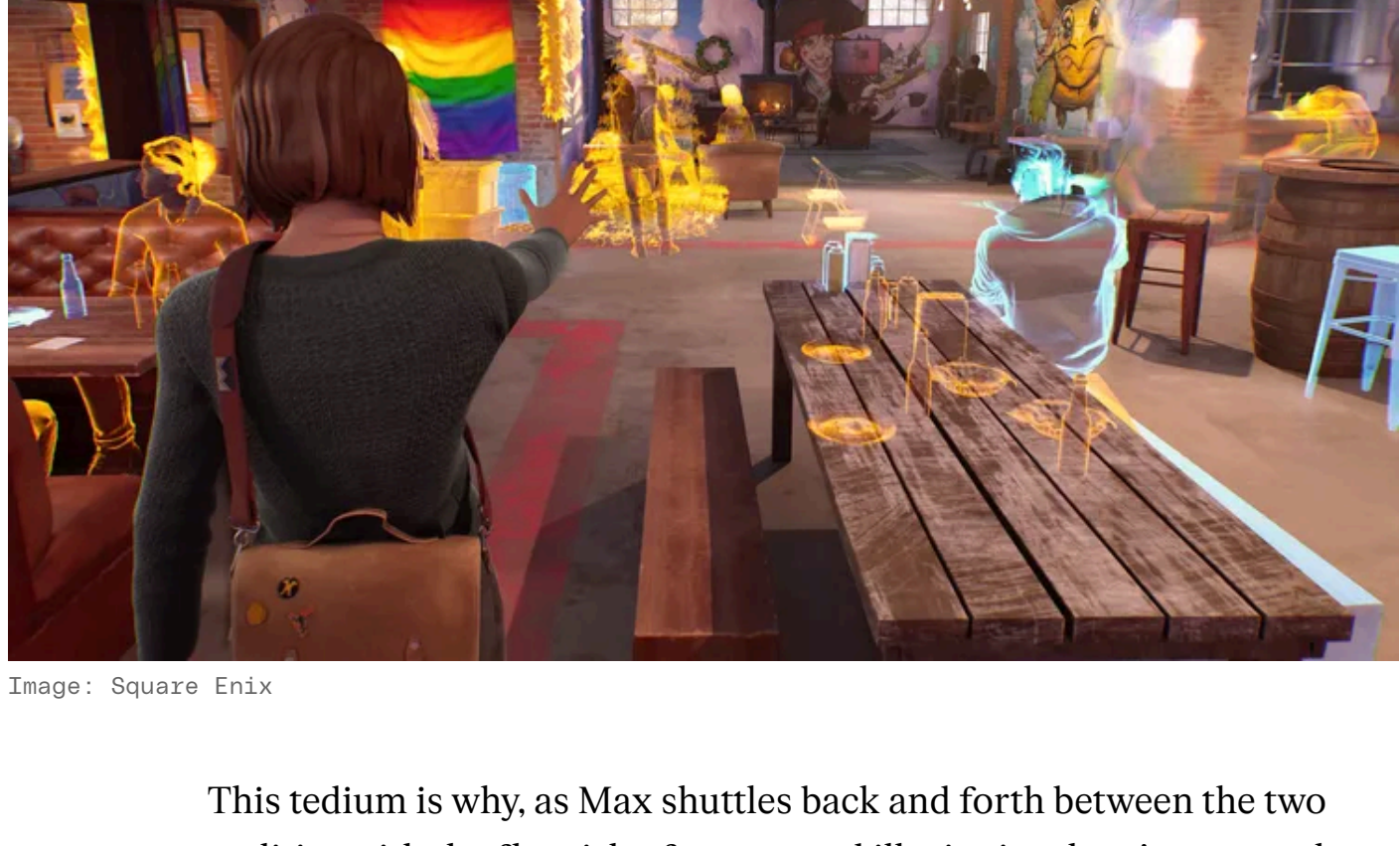


Image: Square Enix

This tedium is why, as Max shuttles back and forth between the two realities with the flourish of a seasoned illusionist, there's a sense that her inner turmoil is only growing. Her interactions vary between realities, and so do the myriad events that take place, leaving ripples in the way her relationships develop between universes. For instance, Max is close friends with the school's administrative assistant in one universe but merely acquaintances in another. It's no wonder she often engages in moments of quietude and self-reflection, such as pondering her decision to bombard a friend with relentless questions or ruminating over the dirty laundry of a disgraced colleague.

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Thus it's no surprise that as Max starts using her powers more, *Double Exposure* picks up from the largely languid pace of the first two episodes. The melodrama has significantly ramped up from episode two's astonishing cliffhanger, with major twists hinted at and then audaciously delivered with a sleight of hand. While it's

easy for these to become contrived, and for *Double Exposure* to lose the emotional core of its tale — that is, the game's smaller, more tender moments of affection — *Double Exposure* hardly falters, persisting without drowning in these bombastic reveals.

The good news is that Max is learning to live with her grief from the first game. Small yet crucial choices, such as retaliating against a self-absorbed colleague by interrupting his class, using her supernatural powers to unravel clues, and even choosing which love interest to kiss (or none at all), paint a portrait of Max's identity. Then there's the pivotal scenario in which Max is seemingly confronted with the prospect of making yet another impossible decision but realizing that she can simply choose not to choose at all. *Double Exposure* is also at its most confident narratively when it's chronicling her growth, with the game deftly bringing together the grandiose plot twists and the quieter, more intimate scenes with incredible sentiment.

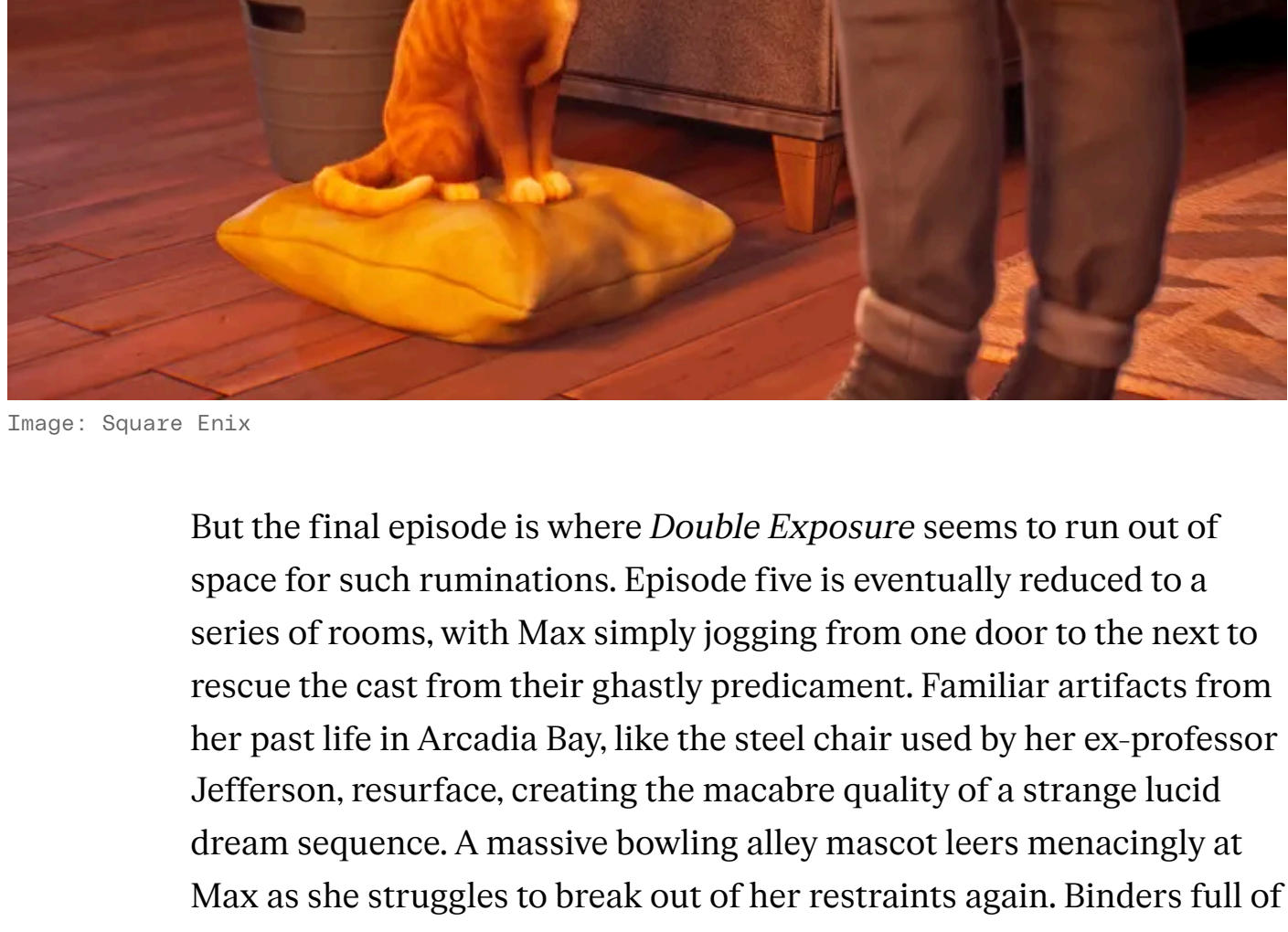


Image: Square Enix

But the final episode is where *Double Exposure* seems to run out of space for such ruminations. Episode five is eventually reduced to a series of rooms, with Max simply jogging from one door to the next to rescue the cast from their ghastly predicament. Familiar artifacts from her past life in Arcadia Bay, like the steel chair used by her ex-professor Jefferson, resurface, creating the macabre quality of a strange lucid dream sequence. A massive bowling alley mascot leers menacingly at Max as she struggles to break out of her restraints again. Binders full of photographs — the centerpiece of Jefferson's twisted portfolio — taunt Max into perusing them once more. It's a throwback to Max's meltdown in the final episode of the original *Life is Strange*, but it felt like such an obligatory nod that it was more repetitive than inventive.

More disappointing still is that, in its conclusion, *Double Exposure* has opted to clumsily reconstruct the series — one beloved for exploring the emotional depths of everyday life — into a sci-fi story featuring a cast of troubled superheroic teens. It fails to understand that these powers, like Daniel's telekinetic abilities in *Life is Strange 2*, are merely a lens with which to examine the anxieties of life at a heightened level. Without a stronger emotional hook, this development feels like a ham-fisted attempt to expand *Life is Strange* into an endlessly repeatable formula, set in another cinematic universe. A bigger failure is how Max is being established as the face of this new direction, with the credits announcing that "Max Caulfield Will Return."

Perhaps an ending where Max gets a reprieve from the slew of misfortunes that the world seems to enjoy hurling at her is too idealistic. After all, reality can be just as perverse for the rest of us. But the idea that *Life is Strange* will present Max's powers as somehow extraordinary feels a bit discordant. This isn't the conclusion that *Double Exposure* deserves. [/](#)

All episodes of Life is Strange: Double Exposure are available now on PC, PlayStation, and Xbox.

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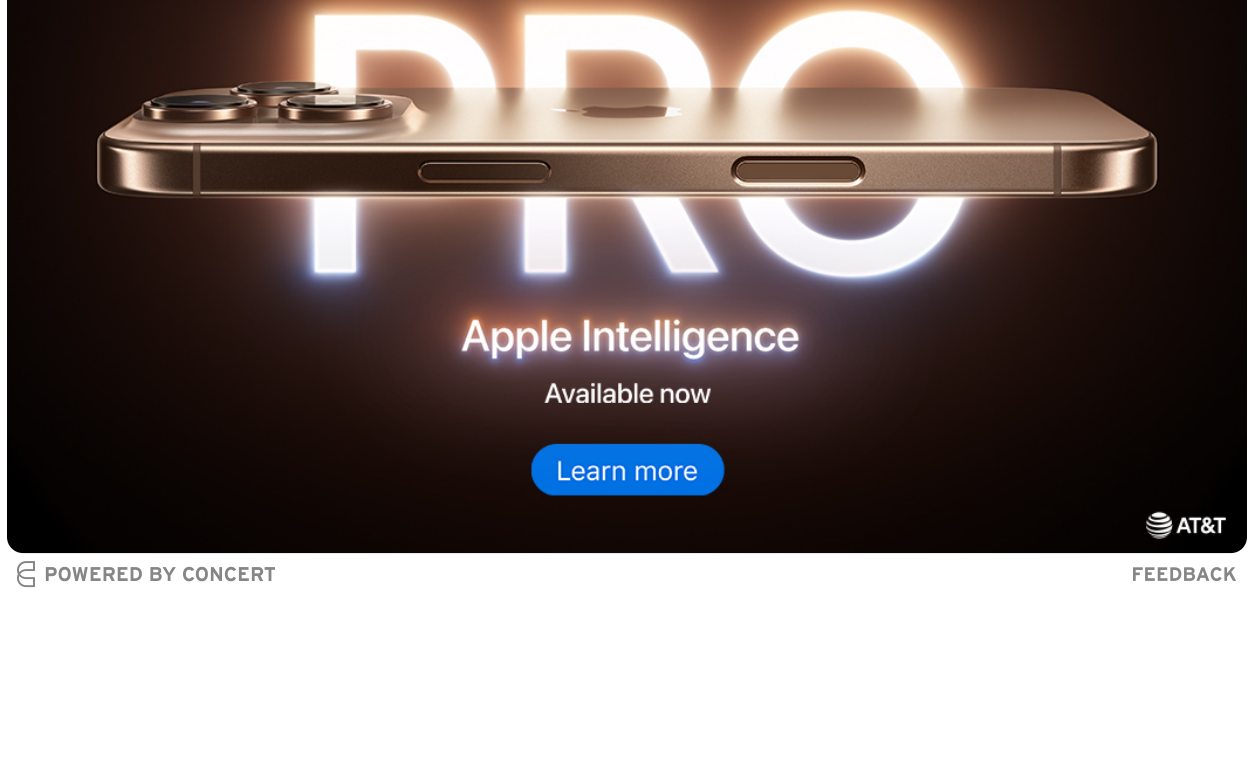
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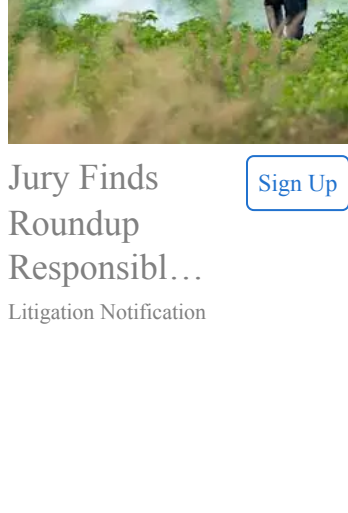
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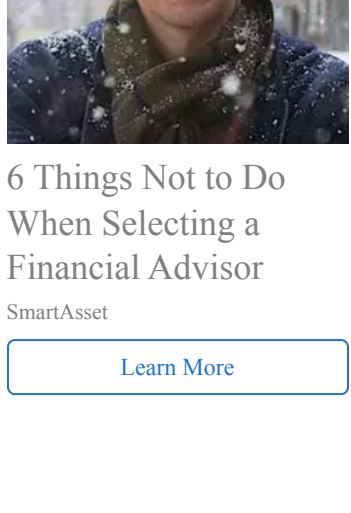
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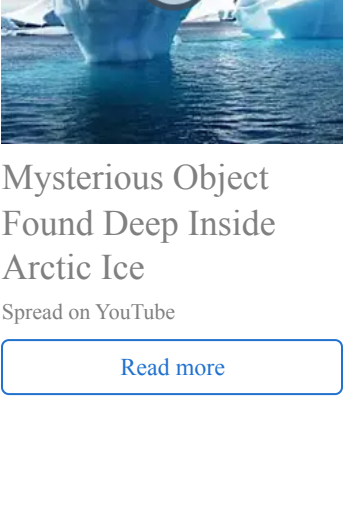


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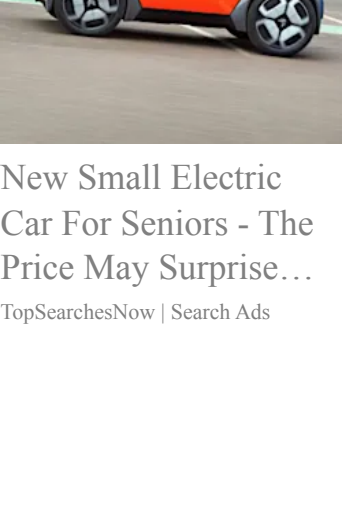


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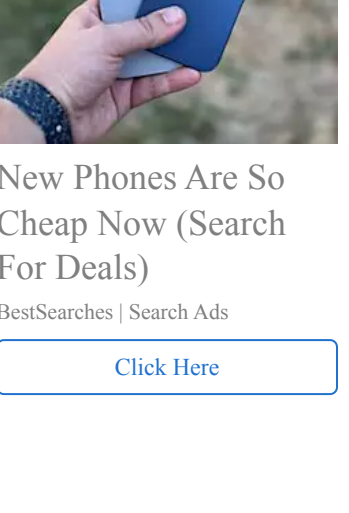


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