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by Khoe Hoon Chan  
Feb 22, 2025, 3:00 PM UTC

2 Comments (2 New)

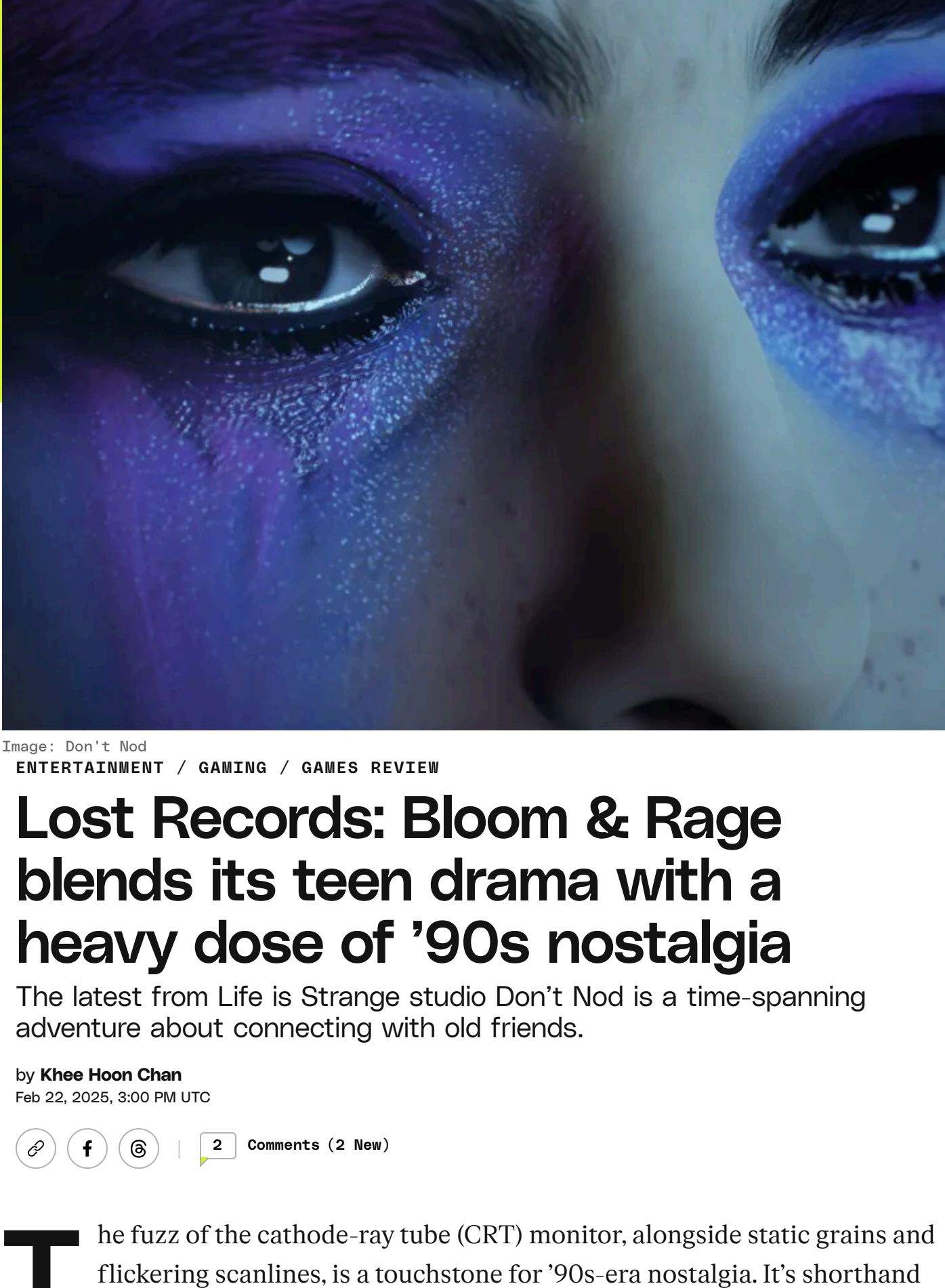


Image: Don't Nod

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# Lost Records: Bloom & Rage blends its teen drama with a heavy dose of '90s nostalgia

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The fuzz of the cathode-ray tube (CRT) monitor, alongside static grains and flickering scanlines, is a touchstone for '90s-era nostalgia. It's shorthand for those halcyon days when technology was predominantly analog and millennial kids spent their summers shoving bulky tapes into VHS players, recording favorite bits of their after-school television shows, and making their own home videos with camcorders. It's this vignette that developer Don't Nod Montréal leans heavily into in *Lost Records: Bloom & Rage*. The game follows a blossoming friendship — and apparent falling-out — of four teenagers over an unforgettable summer. And it all starts with a good dose of that nostalgia: the ubiquitously blue anti-drug message that precedes the title screen, complete with the telltale flicker of a CRT monitor.

Such adolescent longing is all par for the course for Don't Nod. Alongside *Telltale*, the studio popularized the choose-your-own-adventure style of narrative games with *Life is Strange*, while foregrounding the outsized pain and tribulations of teenhood. But more than just coating teenage drama in a layer of dreamy nostalgia, *Bloom & Rage* is also an opportunity for Don't Nod to write a story based in familiar settings. The era already has its own vocabulary and culture: it's the era of riot grrrl, Bikini Kill, *The Blair Witch Project*, and video rental stores. Doing so helps *Bloom & Rage* avoid the criticism of penning teenage slang and using outdated references that sound like they're written by much older adults. This means a lot less "hella cool" and more "let's bounce," which is *definitely* a phrase I remember using as a teenager.

At first glance, *Bloom & Rage* looks like another *Life is Strange*. Every moment is infused with the same emotional weight the series is known for, be it standing up to a bully or excitedly gushing about your new best friend to your cat. Then there's the tinge of the supernatural. But while promising, it's a tad early to see if *Bloom & Rage* can surpass the juggernaut that was the original *Life is Strange*. That's because *Bloom & Rage* is a two-part adventure game — a nod to the episodic roots of its forebears — with the second half of the game expected to release in mid-April this year.

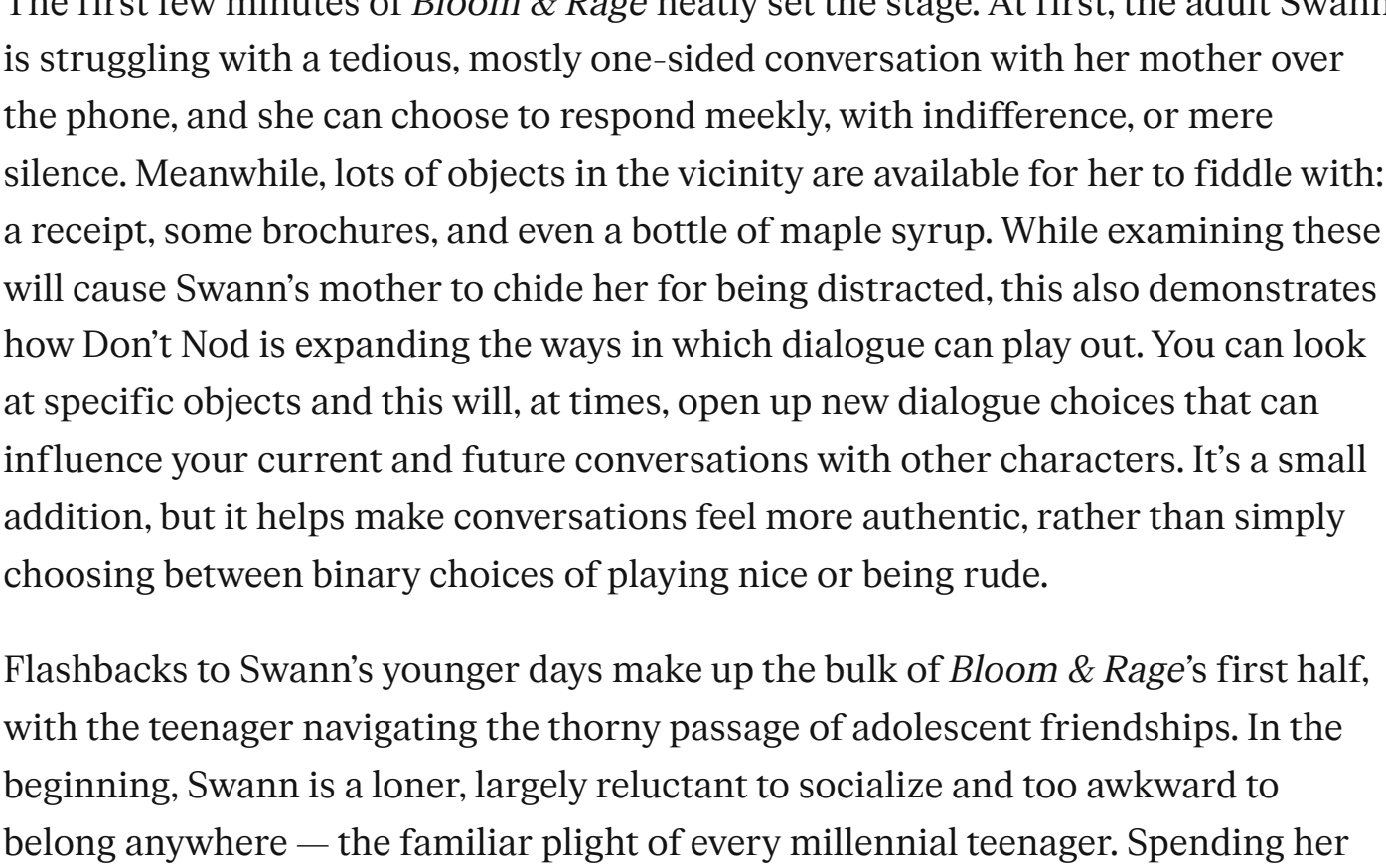


Image: Don't Nod

Set in the small town of Velvet Cove, you'll play as Swann, one of the four central teenagers. The story is depicted across two time periods: the present-day Swann as an adult meeting her long-lost friends decades later, and her earlier days as an awkward teenager during the summer of '95.

The first few minutes of *Bloom & Rage* neatly set the stage. At first, the adult Swann is struggling with a tedious, mostly one-sided conversation with her mother over the phone, and she can choose to respond meekly, with indifference, or mere silence. Meanwhile, lots of objects in the vicinity are available for her to fiddle with: a receipt, some brochures, and even a bottle of maple syrup. While examining these will cause Swann's mother to chide her for being distracted, this also demonstrates how Don't Nod is expanding the ways in which dialogue can play out. You can look at specific objects and this will, at times, open up new dialogue choices that can influence your current and future conversations with other characters. It's a small addition, but it helps make conversations feel more authentic, rather than simply choosing between binary choices of playing nice or being rude.

Flashbacks to Swann's younger days make up the bulk of *Bloom & Rage*'s first half, with the teenager navigating the thorny passage of adolescent friendships. In the beginning, Swann is a loner, largely reluctant to socialize and too awkward to belong anywhere — the familiar plight of every millennial teenager. Spending her days memorializing almost every waking moment with a camcorder, Swann will meticulously record clips of anything that catches her eye, before putting them together to make short films. Aside from the conversations, documenting Swann's everyday life is the game's central conceit, a bold gamble given how this can feel like busywork at first.

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From fulfilling objectives that move the storyline along, such as filming the local video store (it's one of Swann's favorite haunts), to discovering collectibles in the form of crude graffiti and exotic birds, this almost reduces the game to an object-hunting adventure. Eventually, you may develop the tendency to just whip out the camcorder the moment cutscenes conclude. But there's a lingering charm to this approach, highlighting how Swann tends to instinctively interact with the people around her through her camcorder. Making films is the one thing that empowers her. This is all the more poignant as she eventually comes out of her shell and hides less behind her lens.

And then there are Swann's newfound friends — Nora, Autumn, and Kat — who similarly are more than just one-dimensional caricatures. There's Nora who, for all her bravado and punk rock sensibilities, is one of the most conflict-averse individuals in the group and the quickest to suggest giving up when they get into trouble. Then there are seemingly villainous folks who are more multifaceted than what their initial hostility suggests, which isn't revealed until you examine their behavior and personal artifacts.

These point toward complexities that a young Swann may not fully comprehend, evident in some of her childlike responses, but that the older Swann — and by extension, the player — can probably recognize. This is what Don't Nod has always been adept at: crafting believable and deeply human characters and the abundant world that they inhabit.

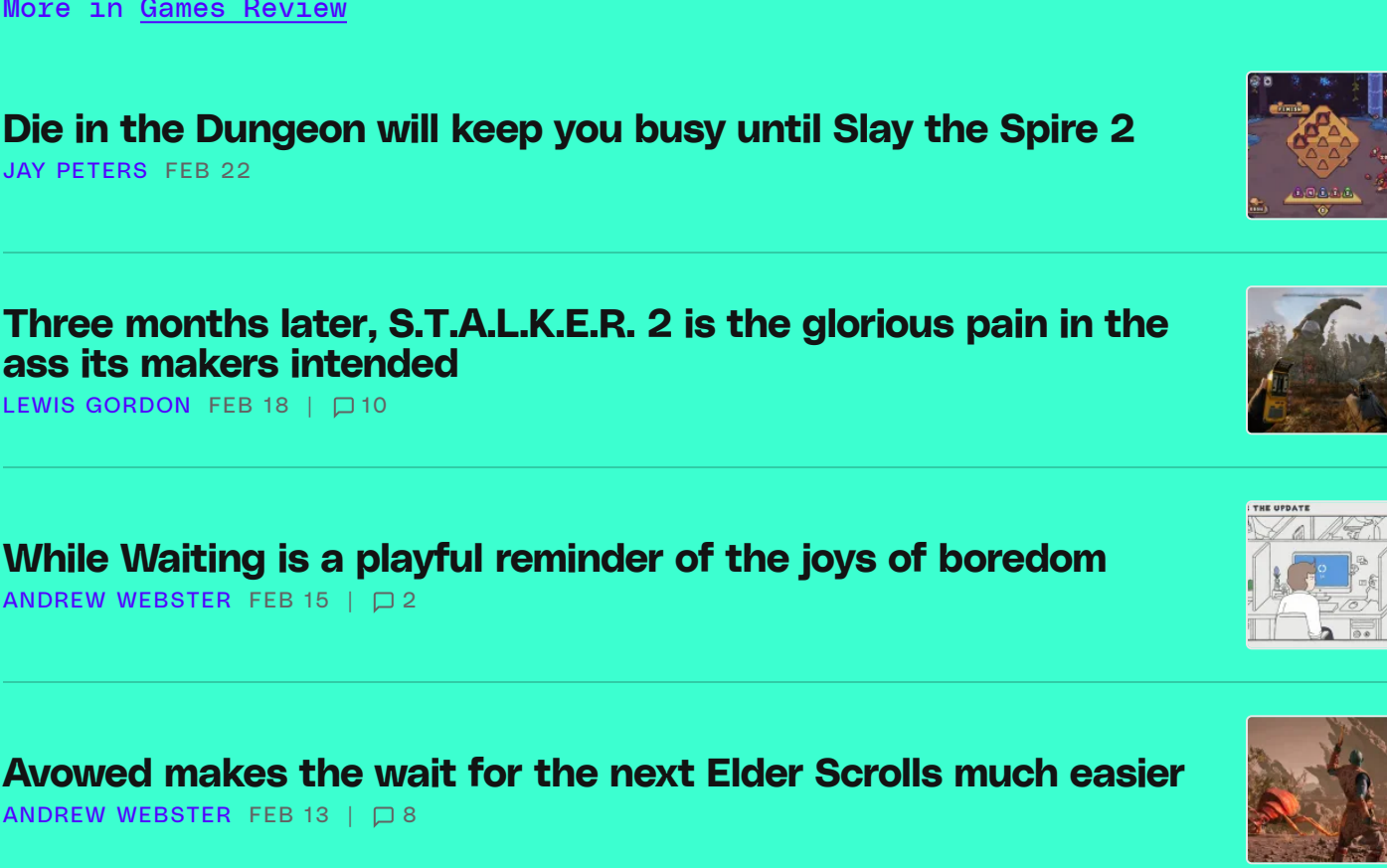


Image: Don't Nod

Experiencing the idyllic memories of Swann's days with her friends can be deeply emotional, as if chancing upon a time capsule you've forgotten about. These are long-buried moments about engaging in hours-long phone calls with close friends, partaking in rambunctious activities on the fly, and waxing lyrical about larger-than-life ambitions, like playing in famous bands or living in a secret getaway, hidden from the prying eyes of untrustworthy adults.

Seeing Swann, Nora, Autumn, and Kat trade lifelong promises and form intense bonds — ones so characteristic of deep female friendships — will hit close to home for many. It's this juxtaposition between these idyllic scenes and the constant, foreboding reminder of the group's inevitable fallout that feels so ominous, unnerving, and perhaps a little painful. And the vague, supernatural happenings only serve to heighten the anxieties of teenhood. Whether it serves a deeper, more metaphorical purpose still remains to be seen.

The first half of *Bloom & Rage* ends in a dramatic cliffhanger, of course, but it's one that's not quite as audacious as it seems. Some hints have been hiding in plain sight. But a small concern lingers. Stories like these often introduce so many twists that could derail the game, before the story goes off the rails so quickly that it inevitably plummets. This was partly why the recently released *Life is Strange: Double Exposure* faltered in its concluding chapters. For now, there's plenty of time to wonder: we still have to wait two more months or so for *Bloom & Rage*'s melodramatic conclusion. [/](#)

Lost Records: Bloom & Rage is available now on PC, PS5, and Xbox.

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