



FROM SLY, TO SILENT.

Playstation's first-party lineup is as bare as it is baffling.

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Growing up in the 2000s as an only child, I felt constantly out of step with pop culture. The 90s nostalgia permeated everything, leaving me feeling like I'd missed out.

TV was a stark reminder. Arriving home late from after-school programs, I resigned to being the "Cinderella" of late-night TV. I coped by quoting Fran Drescher to bemused 4th-grade classmates and wondering when that prince "prince" would actually bother showing up in Bel-Air.

This sense of being out of step with pop culture extended to gaming, too. My most treasured gaming memories come from the time I spent in after-school programs, where I would often be handed a controller for a console that was made before I was even born. I'd never seen anything other than a GameCube controller. Triangles? Squares? Circles? Where was the A button? Where was my friendly Italian plumber in overalls? Why are the PS1 control

sticks so slippery and round? (A question still unanswered.) But all these questions faded away once the game started. I remember the thrill of playing Crash Bandicoot, that magic marsupial leaping from the screen in stunning colors, introducing me to a new gaming world. The frustration of trying to master Parappa the Rapper's rhythm-based gameplay. The awe of exploring the vibrant world of Spyro the Dragon. These experiences shaped my love for gaming.

For years, I longed to have my own PlayStation, cherishing every moment spent with colorful characters like Parappa the Rappa, Spyro the Dragon, and Jak and Daxter. Unbeknownst to me at the time, many of these games were considered classics and continue to impact game design today. It's disheartening to ask, but what has become of these intellectual properties?

Booting up the PlayStation 5 is a whole different story. Of course, things have changed drastically in both audiences and game design. The shift towards more mature and story-driven games reflects the changing demographics of gamers and the increasing influence of cinematic storytelling in the gaming industry. Still, one thing is astoundingly clear: If I'm looking to play a first-party PlayStation title released within the last five years, I'm choosing between a majority of games with muted color palettes, graphic violence, and story-driven cinematic titles with severely reduced replay value. That's not to say titles like God of War and The Last of Us aren't good. I enjoy those games, but sometimes it's nice to break away from the gray and green tones and excessive gore permeating the triple-A landscape.

Struggling to maintain a diverse genre of IPs is one thing, but the active silence and closures from Playstation's internal studios are alarming. One of the most significant and concerning changes was the disbandment of Japan Studio in 2021. This studio created and nurtured many of PlayStation's most iconic and quirky franchises. Japan Studio gave us gems like Ape Escape, Patapon, and LocoRoco and collaborated on some of the highest-rated titles of all time, like Shadow of the Colossus and Bloodborne. Their closure marks the end of an era for PlayStation, signaling a move away from the experimental, often whimsical games that defined much of the brand's early success.

Further, Media Molecule, the creators of Little Big Planet and Vita gem Tearaway, have gone radio silent since 2018, focusing all their attention on a game development/creative tool called "Dreams."

Sony's logo has been slowly drained of color and originality in favor of brand uniformity



While Dreams is an innovative platform, it's far from the approachable, charming games that once defined a generation. The fate of beloved franchises like Sly Cooper, Ratchet & Clank, and Twisted Metal remain uncertain, with years passing between new installments, if they come at all.

As we look to the future, it's clear that PlayStation's strategy is evolving. The business logic behind these changes is undeniable. AAA titles and multimedia franchises offer significant revenue potential and help maintain PlayStation's position in a competitive market. Yet, I can't help but feel a twinge of nostalgia for the days when booting up a PlayStation meant entering a world of vibrant, diverse, and often wonderfully weird experiences. Perhaps there's still room for both approaches.

As the gaming industry continues to grow and evolve, maybe we'll see a resurgence of those colorful, character-driven games alongside the gritty epics. After all, the joy of gaming lies in its ability to transport us to all kinds of worlds - from the realistic to the fantastical. And while I've enjoyed slaughtering Clickers and traveling across the Nine Realms with Kratos, nothing compares to pulling off a heist with a gang of woodland creatures or chillin' with a two-dimensional paper-thin rap music-obsessed dog. It's weird, it's wonderful, and I miss it.