

Review: For disappointed ‘Civ’ fans, ‘Anno 117’ will scratch that strategy itch

BY GIESON CACHO
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With “Sid Meier’s Civilization VII” a disappointment, “Anno” has an opportunity to snag the strategy game spotlight. The Ubisoft franchise has been in the shadow of Firaxis’ long-running classic, though it takes a different approach when it comes to mixing history and video games.

Whereas “Civilization” focuses on nation-building from ancient times to the future, “Anno” takes a narrower approach. Instead of running an empire that stands the test of time, “Anno” focuses on city building and creating colonies that work in unison to fend off and conquer their rivals.

THINKING ABOUT THE ROMAN EMPIRE

The latest entry to the long-running strategy series is “Anno 117: Pax Romana,” which takes place during the height of the Roman Empire. Players take on the role of a governor tasked with running an island. They start off with a trading post and they’ll have to send woodcutters to the forest and build sawmills for lumber.

That’s how the campaign starts, but from there, the city builder quickly grows more complex. Players have to nurture food resources, clothing, a military, public services and other needs. As a newcomer to the series, it can be overwhelming, and the best tutorial that “Anno 117” offers players is the single-player campaign, where they choose between Marcus Naukratius or Marcia Tertia, who each have their own storylines.

Although the origin stories about how they become governor differs, players are on equal footing when it comes to the political drama and shape of the campaign, which takes them through the death of the emperor and an exile to Albion, a new locale that’s a stand-in for Britain. The highlands and moors are where much of the campaign takes place before returning to Latium, where “Anno 117” opens up the full sandbox experience.

GOING FROM “CIV” TO “ANNO”

As a “Civ” fan jumping into



UBISOFT TNS

Players will need to plant lots of lavender to create soap, a product that certain groups use in “Anno 117.”

“Anno 117,” the gameplay is both familiar and new. It feels more granular when it comes to city building as players have to figure out the logistics of each structure and resource. Players have to place production facilities near warehouses and those also need to be near shops. The land and naval combat adds spice and drives the conflict in the campaign. Players have research bonuses that’s comparable to a tech tree, and how quickly that advances is influenced by the choice of island residents and structures. Religion is also another feature that adds bonuses to an island and is the counterpoint to research. On top of that, each island has a fertility of distinct resources, meaning players have to colonize quickly to score the best ones.

Those should be familiar to veterans of “Civ,” but despite the similarities, players will run into roadblocks and pit falls because of the complex systems. For novices, “Anno 117” has a learning curve the size of Mount Everest, and it’s daunting when realizing how they’re all connected.



UBISOFT TNS

Players will visit villas and other locations in “Anno 117: Pax Romana.”

MAJOR STUMBLING BLOCKS

Players will run into issues such as the lack of workers before realizing that building an army pulls service members from an island’s population. They can expand and build more resources, but not realize that the fire risks is rising within a city and that building fire station is more effective in the center of town rather than the edges. It’s not the major concepts that are intimidating. The systems make sense, but rather, it’s how they integrate with each other and how they’re deployed

that pose a challenge. Players need to do research on city layouts and the best ratios of buildings to people.

After mastering that, the scope of those logistics expands. It’s not just about building an effective megalopolis on one island. Players have to figure out how to specialize each location so that it fills role in the wider colonies. Meanwhile, players have to manage trade routes and diplomatic relations with other governors to acquire resources. All of this is needed to keep the Roman and Celtic

populations happy with their needs fulfilled while also offering security from attack.

The campaign fails to explain these intricacies well, so players will have to find outside sources to figure out what they’re doing wrong. Thankfully, the strategy title has plenty of resources online to guide players or at least offer hints on how to improve their city building. For those who love researching and stress testing systems, “Anno 117” is a game with bottomless depth.

It has little wrinkles that lets players experiment to maximize resources or come up strategies to try out in the sandbox side, but it will take time to explore it or even tread its waters. Being fluent in the game’s system will take weeks, but mastering “Anno 117” will take months, and that’s the draw of this game. It offers the potential for limitless fun that perhaps can last as long as the Pax Romana itself.

‘ANNO 117: PAX ROMANA’
Three stars
Platform: PC, PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X and Series S
Rating: Teen
Tribune National

Six intriguing games from Day of the Devs showcase

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With so many projects vying for attention, it’s difficult for indie developers to break through the noise. That’s where Day of the Devs comes in. The nonprofit pores over hundreds of submissions and highlights some of the best.

Even with that filter, the number of games shown during the presentation can be overwhelming. Here are the titles that stuck out and should be on your radar:

“Awaysis” by 17-bit: The Kyoto, Japan-based studio brings in new ideas to the dungeon brawler by adding physics to the mix. It isn’t realistic though, but rather, it blends with the gameplay to create weight to the weapons and a bit of unpredictability to the movement. Combine this with four-player co-op, and it could be a fantastic formula for a weekend of fun. Info: The game is scheduled for release in 2026 on Xbox Series X and Series S and PC

“Lucid Falls” by Eldamar Studio: This psychological horror title has eye-popping visuals that’s reminiscent of “Senua’s Saga: Hellblade 2” with its twilight hues and mysterious nat-

ural environments. Developer Yurii Radkevych said the game plays around with gravity as players discover that it doesn’t follow the rules. Info: The game has a listing on Steam.

“Rockbeasts” by Lichthund: Dozens of management type games have been published in recent years where players build up gas stations, a newspaper empire and more. Licthund puts players in a more glamorous role of a manager of budding rock band in the 1990s. Players will take the foursome from performing to ratty bars to selling out stadiums and being on the equivalent of the world’s MTV. As the band manager, they’ll also have to manage egos and the members’ self-destructive tendencies. Info: It’s scheduled to release on PC, Xbox Series X and S, PlayStation 5, Nintendo Switch and Nintendo Switch 2.

“Stretchmancer” by Triangle Wave: Gamers looking for a “Portal” fix will find an intriguing option with this title. It’s another first-person puzzle game, but instead of venturing for with a portal gun, players have the ability to stretch the environment. They can push objects to lengthen them. This is great for lengthening the room and escape your cell. They can



HANDOUT TNS

Players take on the role of Panko who cooks for Caretakers in “Beastro.”

also pull an object, which can create bridges to cross chasms. Players have to use these skills and more to defeat the Claustro Empire in this adventure. Info: The title is listed on Steam

“Beastro” by Timberline Studio: Most dungeon crawlers explore the heroes role, but fewer games take the perspective of the support characters who help the wizards and warriors on their journey. Developers have explored running item shops and battling monsters in “Moonlighter.” Now, this indie team is combining a restaurant sim with a card-battler.

“Beastro” is divided into two parts. It focuses on Panko, a restaurateur who cooks food for

Caretakers who guard the grown. Players farm the ingredients and cook them to power the heroes defense. In the second half, the Caretakers regale Panko with details of their adventures. It’s seen as puppet show that doubles as a card battle game, which players interact with. The deck is augmented by the food Panko feeds the caretakers before the adventure, tying in the two elements together. Info: The demo is available now on Steam. It is scheduled for release on PC and Xbox Game pass.

“Scramble Knights Royale” by Funktronic Labs: At first glance, this title looks like it was pulled from recent 2D “The Legend of Zelda” games, but when players

expand out, they’ll see up to 40 players on themap, and they’re all trying to defeat each other until there’s one standing. This isn’t “Fortnite” though. Players will have to explore short dungeons to power up their character so they can have the gear to defeat the other characters.

Even then that may not be enough for a victory because Funktronic adds dashes and rolls to create a more fighting game feel to combat. “Scramble Knights Royale” will have a solo queue, but it also sports teams and even couch co-op. Info: This indie title is scheduled for release in 2026 on PC and Xbox Series X and Series S

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