Are handheld games fundamentally the same as the ones on our big televisions, or are they distinct, more intimate? There's no correct answer to that question, necessarily, but it's still one that's been batted back and forth among designers for years. The Game & Watch and Nintendo DS offered experiences you couldn’t find anywhere else, while the Switch now offers a middle ground. Valve’s Steam Deck offers nothing less than an entire gaming PC in the palm of your hand (or both hands – it’s quite a hefty beast, the Steam Deck).

While approaches to handheld gaming change all the time, it’s pleasing to see the Playdate carve out its own niche. Here’s a device that sticks to the ‘withered technology’ pioneered by Nintendo’s Gunpei Yokoi: with its monochrome, non-backlit screen and limited, quirky inputs, it’s a system that challenges developers to work around its limitations. And as you’ll see on page 28, there are already lots of games that use the Playdate to engaging effect.

The Playdate’s wilfully off-kilter design may not be for everybody, but then again, neither’s the Steam Deck or even the Switch. Handheld gaming is almost as broad a church as the wider medium as a whole, and that’s no bad thing. Indeed, it’s something we’re celebrating in this very edition, from refurbished Game Boys to Playdate to our Python homage to the Game & Watch era. As always: enjoy!

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