

IS LEANING INTO “HOMETOWN PRIDE” A WINNING FORMULA FOR GAMES STUDIOS?

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French developer Sandfall Interactive’s sleeper hit Clair Obscur: Expedition 33 has, by most accounts, been the big success story of 2025 so far.

Receiving universal critical and audience acclaim for its updated take on the classic JRPG formula. Expedition 33 borrows generously from the likes of Final Fantasy and Persona, with a smattering of Paper Mario’s rhythmic parrying for good measure.



It’s not just these influences that have made it such a hit: it’s also just remarkably, refreshingly French. So French in fact, it could have been deemed off putting outside a European market. As [the Guardian’s Keza Macdonald](#) pointed out: “I can imagine several large publishers deeming this game simply too French to be marketable, but Sandfall was able to make it anyway.”

The question of whether a game can be ‘too French’ to succeed clearly hasn’t hurt Sandfall’s commercial prospects. Expedition 33 sold more than [3.3 million copies](#) in 33 days (a statistic so satisfying you couldn’t make it up) and is predicted to go [even further](#).

But Expedition 33’s Frenchness goes beyond baguettes, berets and Breton shirts (though admittedly, Expedition 33 [has these in spades](#)). Sandfall Interactive’s breathtaking vision of a calamity set against the backdrop of La Belle Époque is arguably its biggest draw.

Originally, Sandfall Interactive's initial setting was going to be set in the heart of Steampunk London before ultimately looking to Paris as its canvas.

Expedition 33 seems all the better for it and both critics and audiences seem to agree. Clair Obscur: Expedition 33 currently stands as the best-rated game of 2025. If that wasn't enough of an endorsement of its French credentials, President Macron also gave the game his seal of approval.

It's exciting to see any new IP celebrate such successes, but it begs the question: Can British studios find similar success by embracing their cultural identity? My mind immediately wanders to Rebellion's Atomfall, which released earlier this year to "immediate" success.

Atomfall's British identity would be apparent at the most cursory of glances: Red phone boxes, village greens, and an achievement for taking high tea, its British influences are about as subtle as a cricket bat to the bonce.

Atomfall was Rebellion's most successful launch ever in the publisher's 32-year history. That's no small feat given their long running tentpole franchise, Sniper Elite, continues to perform well, both commercially and critically with regular iterations.

With talks of a sequel (and possibly even a TV series) already underway, publishers are eagerly looking to emulate those success stories. With Summer Game Fest taking place this weekend, who knows? Maybe we'll see more studios show some hometown pride.



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