

VIDEO GAMES

POKÉMON LEGENDS: Z-A

Redefining the age-old adventure

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After the refreshing new take on mainline *Pokémon* games that was *Pokémon Legends: Arceus*, its spiritual successor arrives as a bold evolution of the concept. *Pokémon Legends: Z-A* is the second iteration of the *Pokémon Legends* series, sharing a lineage with its predecessor but charting a distinctly different course. Where *Arceus* *isekai'd* teleported players to a past Sinnoh devoid of modern technology, *Z-A* is set in the present day, unfolding in the Kalos region five years after the events of 2013's *Pokémon X and Y*.

The story

The narrative casts you as a newcomer to a Lumiose City undergoing radical "urban redevelopment". The city now features dedicated "Wild Zones", where Pokémon roam free among the boulevards, and nocturnal "Battle Zones" where registered trainers compete to climb the ranks from Z to A, the game's titular goal. Those who reach the pinnacle, Rank A, will be granted a wish from the city's mysterious planners.

As a lifelong fan, I must admit that *Z-A* features one of the most engaging plots in the series. Without venturing into spoiler territory, the game's characters are quite memorable, and the writing uniquely blends quirky side-stories with moments of genuine hilarity, often making the game feel like a whimsical comedy or slice-of-life anime – a refreshingly unique tone for *Pokémon*.

What works

Released in October 2025 amid much hype, *Legends: Z-A* delivers on its promise of a brand-new experience. Building upon *Arceus*'s real-time foundations, it abandons turn-based combat entirely for a fully real-time system, bringing back fan-favourite "Mega Evolutions", which have been absent in mainline games for quite some time.

Furthermore, each move that Pokémon can use has its own cooldown, hit range, and animation speed, making positioning, timing, and physically dodging attacks as crucial as raw power. This creates an exhilarating, high-stakes pace that is a franchise first for a mainline title, and a challenging but welcome change of pace for fans both old and new.

The setting of Lumiose City is also a marvel of density. It's a vast, explorable



urban jungle packed with secrets, environmental puzzles, and rewarding side quests. This focus allows for verticality and detail not seen in the wider, but often, more sparse, open worlds of recent titles. Furthermore, *Z-A* is arguably the most accessible game yet for shiny Pokémon hunting, offering a clear endgame pursuit for dedicated collectors.

What doesn't work

Despite its strengths, *Z-A* reveals significant flaws the more you play it. The most glaring is the repetitive gameplay loop that emerges during the main story and worsens in the post-game. This issue is exacerbated by the DLC, which, while adding an enjoyable new story and additional side quests, ties its best rewards to heavy grinding without sufficient quality-of-life improvements to ease the repetition, thus making it hard to justify the additional USD 30 price tag on top of the base game's USD 60 (USD 70 on Switch 2) cost.

Moreover, the singular city setting of

Lumiose, while impressively built, ultimately cannot match the biome variety of *Legends: Arceus* or other older *Pokémon* games. Exploring a metropolis – no matter how large – lacks the wonder of traversing diverse wilderness such as forests, mountains, tundras, and coastlines. This limitation is compounded by the omission of beloved series staples: Pokémon Abilities, breeding, riding Pokémon or bikes, and interactive features like Amie or Camp. The total available Pokémon of roughly 364 species (with DLC) also feels like it's not enough.

As a result, while the game's first few hours feel genuinely magical, the post-game, particularly in the base release, comes across as sparse compared to the near-infinite playability for which other *Pokémon* games are loved and remembered.

Final thoughts

Pokémon Legends: Z-A delivers a bold new combat system, a fun story, memorable characters, and a captivating initial experience. In many ways, it redefines the age-old Pokémon adventure, turning familiar mechanics into a fresh, real-time, and immersive journey that feels strikingly modern. While it may not have as much variety in features or post-game playability as some previous titles, *Z-A*'s vision and execution make it a genuinely unique and thrilling experience that raises the bar for the series going forward.

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