

PlayStation®

ISSUE 184 FEBRUARY 2021
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Official Magazine UK

**YOUR NEXT ESSENTIAL
PS5 & PS4 GAME IS HERE!**

89
NEW GAMES
INSIDE

2021

PREVIEW SPECIAL

INCLUDING DEATHLOOP RESIDENT EVIL VILLAGE GRAN TURISMO 7
RATCHET & CLANK: RIFT APART FINAL FANTASY XVI & MORE!



HORIZON FORBIDDEN WEST

Life's a beach as Aloy returns on PS5 & PS4

**THE DEAD SPACE
TEAM IS BACK ON
PLAYSTATION 5**

**PS4'S EXCLUSIVES
CELEBRATED – WHICH
IS YOUR FAVOURITE?**

**CYBERPUNK 2077
REVIEWED – DO THE
PATCHES WORK?**



→ **FIRST LOOK**
**YOU ARE AGENT 47
IN HITMAN VR**
IO Interactive discusses
bringing the hits to PS VR



→ **LIFE IMITATES GAME**
**CYBERPUNK 2077
IN REAL LIFE**
Forget the bugs – life doesn't
crash if you are a cyberpunk





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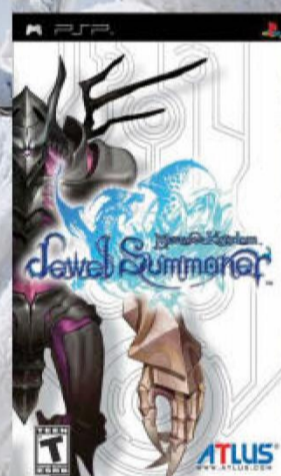
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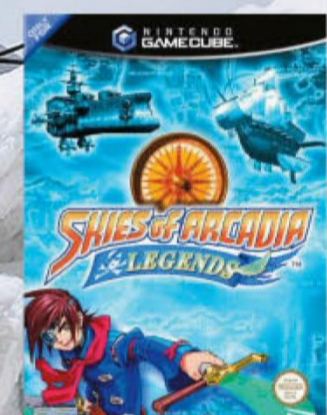
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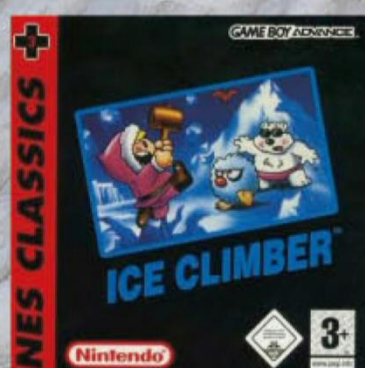
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! Welcome



It's 2021 and PS5's launch is a footnote in history, so what's next? That's the question on the lips of everyone who's seen the credits of Demon's Souls. And if you've yet to join Sony's new gen we

have games for PS4, too. Either way, this issue we round up over 80 new games that will ensure this year is going to be one to remember for the right reasons.

Last year ended on a low as Cyberpunk 2077 finally released to the consternation of PS4 players – the game was broken. You may have wondered why we never reviewed it last issue; well, now you know. We only review finished games so you're never in doubt if a release is worth your money and time. You can find our review on p82.

Over-promising and under-delivering is all too common with videogames, as ideas overreach technology. As we look forward to

“WE CELEBRATE THE HITS-IN-WAITING THAT MAY NOT CURRENTLY BE ON YOUR RADAR.”

the games releasing in 2021 there could well be more Cyberpunk 2077s on the list. But that's why we love games, and why Official PlayStation Magazine will always be here for you. You can trust us, and we'll be your guide to what's hot and what's not throughout 2021.

As well as the familiar favourites that will be topping everyone's most-wanted lists, such as Horizon Forbidden West, Gran Turismo Sport, and Ratchet & Clank: Rift Apart, this issue celebrates those hits-in-waiting that may not currently be on your radar. Pick of the bunch are Deathloop from Dishonored's Arkane Studios – subscribers get an exclusive cover – and Kena: Bridge of Spirits. The latter indie is shaping one of this year's best-kept secrets.

Those are my ones to watch for this year, now turn to p28 and start reading. In this issue somewhere will be *your* new favourites for 2021. Videogames are good like that; we all have our favourites.

Ian Dean
EDITOR

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@IanDean4

BEST NEW CHARACTER?
Julianna Blake (Deathloop)
2021'S BEST COMEBACK
Horizon Forbidden West

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SEE PAGE 78 FOR MORE DETAILS

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THIS MONTH'S FORWARD-THINKERS



Oscar Taylor-Kent
GAMES EDITOR

Cris Tales has Oscar thinking in four dimensions. He has/is/ will be playing this time-based RPG on p66.

BEST NEW CHARACTER?
Crisbell (Cris Tales)
2021'S BEST COMEBACK
Ratchet & Clank



Jess Kinghorn
STAFF WRITER

Can Jess find more to say about Goodbye Volcano High? Of course; this is going to be dinomite.

BEST NEW CHARACTER?
Fang (Goodbye Volcano High)
2021'S BEST COMEBACK
Final Fantasy XVI



Miriam McDonald
OPERATIONS EDITOR

"2D or not 2D? That's the question." Our Mim is over-thinking things after enjoying our preview of Oddworld Soulstorm.

BEST NEW CHARACTER?
Nara (Chorus)
2021'S BEST COMEBACK
Ratchet & Clank



Milford Coppock
MANAGING ART EDITOR

Witch game is Milf's most wanted? That's hardly a diffi-cult question. It's Resident Evil Village.

BEST NEW CHARACTER?
Kena (Kena Bridge Of Spirits)
2021'S BEST COMEBACK
Resident Evil Village



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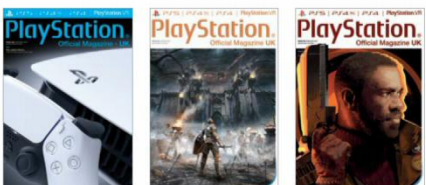
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SPECIAL

ISSUE 184
FEBRUARY 2021



030 Deathloop

The Dishonored developer is back with a time-fiddling new shooter, and we exclusively interview the team



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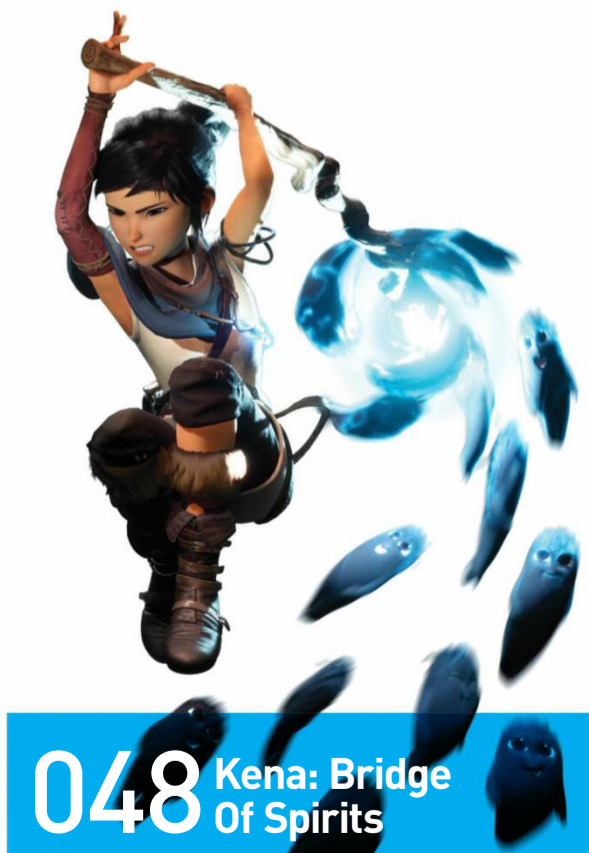
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Getting you closer to PlayStation's most exciting stories, people, and culture

It's hard being a prisoner on Callisto. Even in the far future, orange is a *tough* look to pull off, but you manage it.

Not only is this 2320 jail state-of-the-art, but the surrounding moon is uninhabitable.

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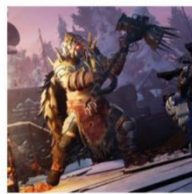
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How PS VR brings you closer to Agent 47



Initiate The Callisto Protocol

The creator of survival horror Dead Space brings chills to this space prison

We might have to wait for 2022 for Striking Distance Studios' debut project, but we're already confident it'll bring the thrills. The studio is led by Glen Schofield, who had a hand in the first Dead Space, alongside other ex-Dead Space devs, and it's looking to bring those space scares to PlayStation 5.

Publisher Krafton has given the team the opportunity to make a game that matches their vision. "They basically have given me carte blanche and creative control," says Schofield proudly. "I've heard that before, and not always gotten it, but they have been right to their word, man, and they have been great to work with." The Callisto Protocol has been in the works for a while, with the idea of a survival horror set in a prison being the original pitch (as part of a detailed 20-slide PowerPoint presentation).

You might recognise Krafton as the publisher of PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds. The Callisto Protocol is actually set within the same universe as the game that ignited the battle royale craze, though the two aren't too tightly linked. Striking Distance is also helping Krafton create lore for PUBG. "They have a timeline, and we fit on that timeline now. It's not going to be really deep, our connection with it," says Schofield. "But there will be little connections here and there. We'll probably be referencing one another from time to time."

In The Callisto Protocol, Callisto, one of Jupiter's moons, is home to the Black Iron Prison. It's where people are

incarcerated to ensure they're completely isolated from humanity. Not only is this 2320 jail state-of-the-art, but the surrounding moon is ice-cold and uninhabitable. When an alien-like horror takes over the base (one monster we see even has an extra bit of mouth like a Xenomorph), there's nowhere safe to run – unless you can escape to space.

Striking Distance researched the real moon, which is about -139°C at surface level. However, the frozen ocean that's thought to lie beneath the thick ice is why some scientists believe the moon could be colonised, harsh though the conditions may be. It makes it the perfect place for some shady government to shove undesirables.

From there, "it's just a lot of imagination and studying Antarctica a bit, and studying the other cold places on Earth, and how we survive there," says Schofield. The game might be set 300 years in the future, but the way people try to survive is based on the approaches humans have taken throughout history, and from there the devs have extrapolated how better tech could lead to an icy, hellish prison literally in the middle of nowhere. And besides, it's science fiction. "That's what I like about it. Right?" says Schofield. "People can't really tell you that you're wrong."

SPACE JUMPS

You play as a prisoner trying to escape Black Iron Prison after something has gone horribly wrong, resulting in humans being slaughtered by aliens. Those in charge of the prison seem less perturbed, so there's a shadow of conspiracy upon the slimy extra-terrestrial outbreak.

There's a genuine uneasiness to the dirty metal atmosphere, and the strange way the creatures move. The back of the prisoner's neck sports a green readout, hinting at a

The icy moon is home to an isolated prison. Not a luxury ski resort in sight. What a waste.





CHILLY LIZZY

Glen Schofield was the director of both *Gex 3D: Enter The Gecko* and *Gex 3: Deep Cover Gecko*. It's another series that fans clamour to see return, so perhaps we can hope for a *PUBG*-set spiritual successor in the way *Callisto* is for *Dead Space*?

diegetic display system for health similar to the one in *Dead Space*.

Creating horror is a fine art, and requires a degree of imagination and creativity that can't be reduced to a formula. "Scaring people is hard. I'll admit, it's a challenge, but it's always been a challenge, right? On *Dead Space*, it was a challenge," says Schofield. "We already know because we have people testing it, and playing it, and going, 'Man, you've got me. You've got me on that one.'"

Creating a true horror experience takes more than designing spooky monsters to jump out at the player. "You can use old tried-and-true methods, and then, you know, we're trying new stuff for how we can get them. But it's not just about the jump scares. It's also about creating the tension," Schofield says. "What's around the next corner? As long as you can keep them tense like that for a while, then the jump scares come easier, or a normal scare, or whatever a normal scare is. [...] The main thing is

trying to get this atmosphere – this really good atmosphere of, you know, 'Sometimes I'm scared, sometimes I'm terrified.' Other times we've got to hold back the brakes to let you have a chance to catch your breath."

HEAR YOU SCREAM

The goal is to build an action horror game so scary that it'll define the sci-fi horror genre in much the same way that first *Dead Space* did. And that means taking full advantage of new-generation technology.

"What we're building, right? It looks real," says Schofield, talking about the graphical power of new consoles. "And, you know, they've looked real before, but it looks more real. There's so much detail we can put into it now, it's crazy." The CG trailer revealed at The Game Awards back in December definitely looks stunning.

The detail isn't confined to things like textures; *Striking Distance* has been able to put much more into environments. "There's

so much detail that it's taken a lot of time. You can put everything that's in my room here into a room in the next gen," says Schofield. "I mean, pencils and pens and every little detail you could possibly think of. And we're trying to do that. We're trying to get every kind of detail in there."

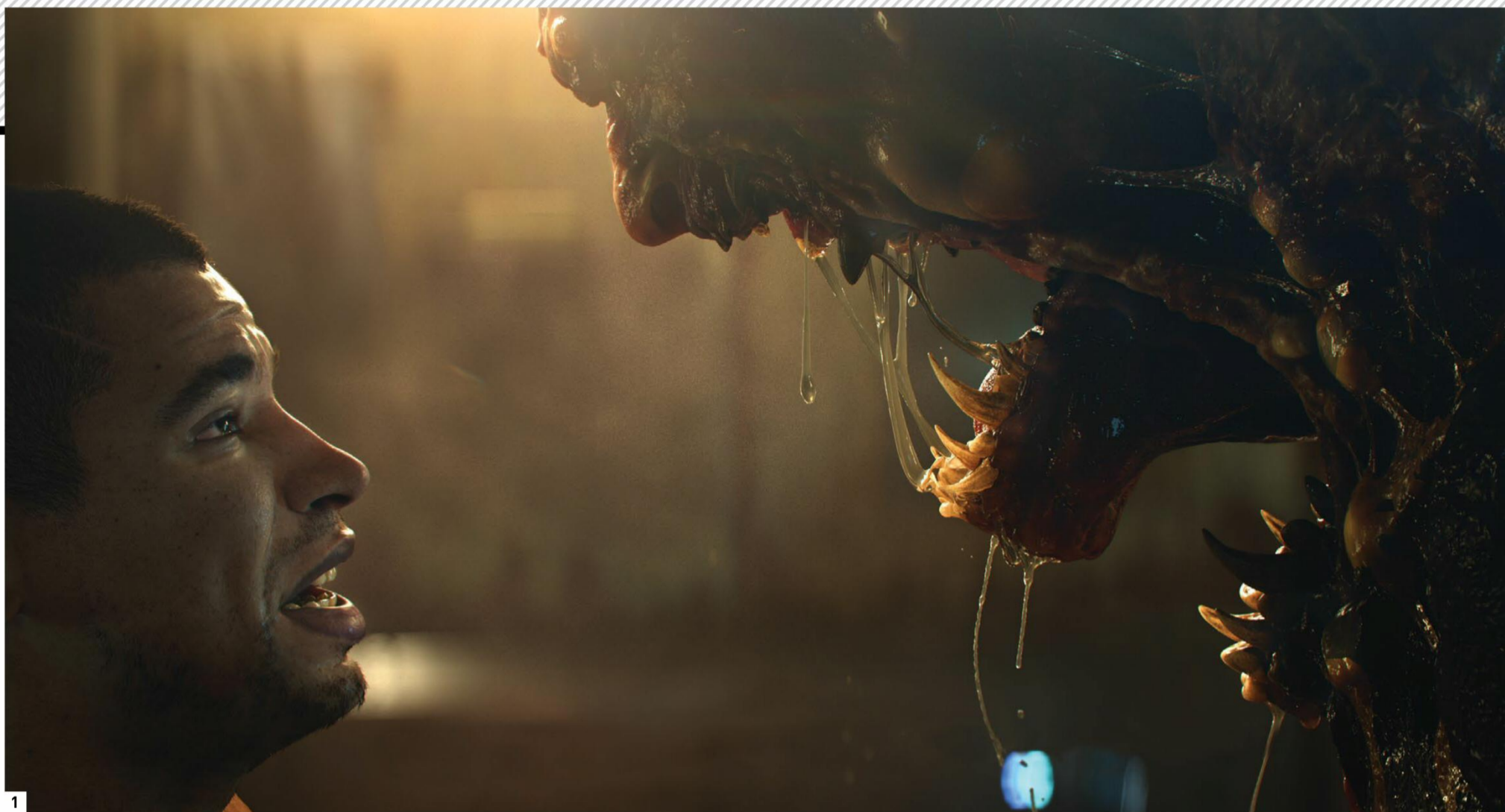
Most horror devs we've spoken with praise PS5's Tempest 3D AudioTech, and with good reason. Sound plays a huge part in making a good scare work. "The sound is pretty amazing. It's the 3D sound, and what you can do with that. And that is integral to creating a survival horror game," reveals Schofield. "You've got to have great sound. So the sound alone – I could just talk about the sound because it's amazing. You can hear something, and it sounds like it's behind your back, or it's just above you. With headphones on, it's insane." The team have ideas for using the DualSense's haptic feedback to immerse you in the horror too. "We'll see how we can get that to work. But I think we can get a couple of scares right out of the controller itself," he says. "There's a number of things that are really going to help us make a next-generation survival horror."

▶ The sound is amazing. You can hear something, and it sounds like it's behind your back, or it's just above you. ▶

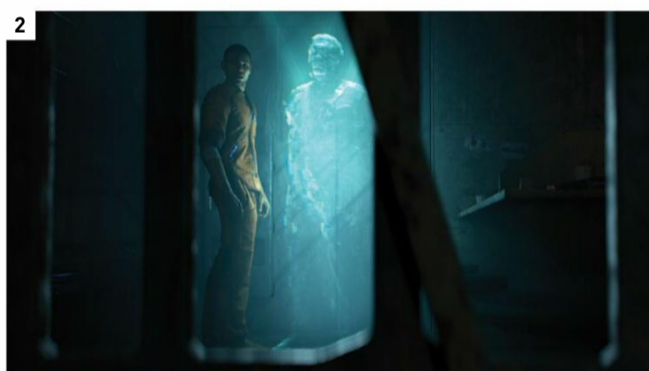
*** Are you ready to try to survive on Callisto's surface? Tweet us @opm_uk.**



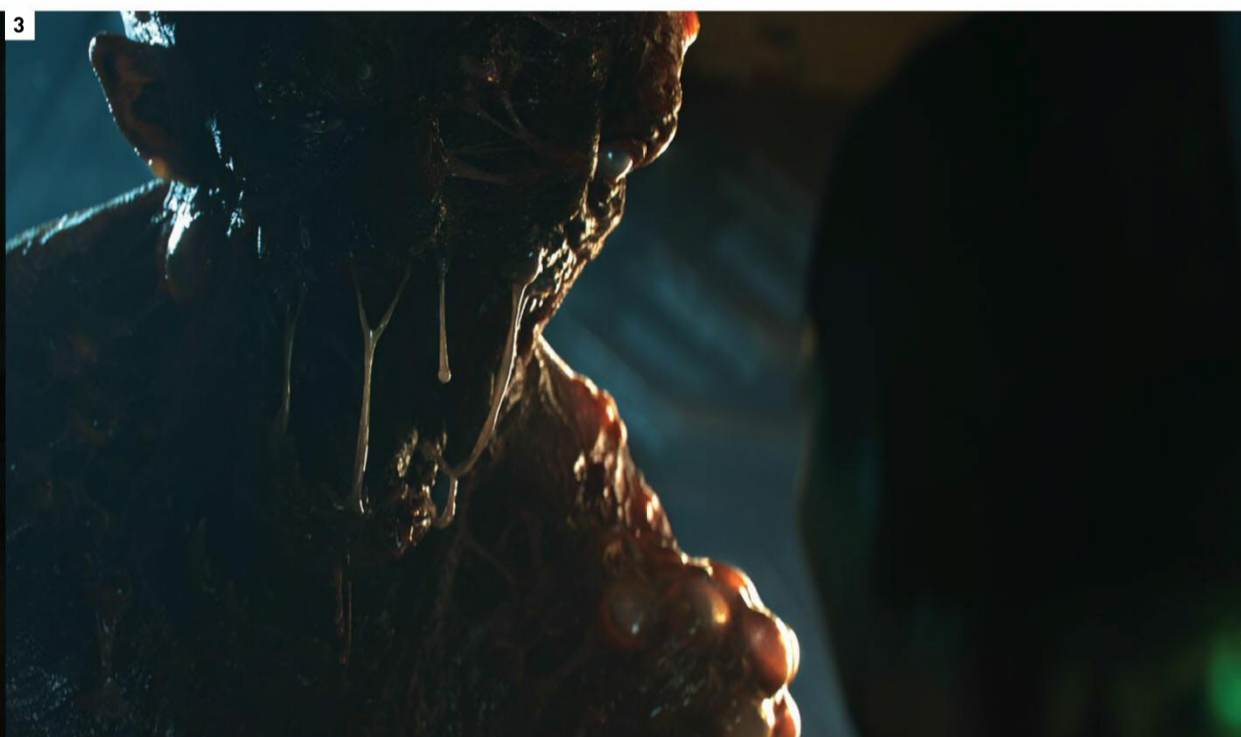
"Don't turn around, I'm changing... into an alien monster!"



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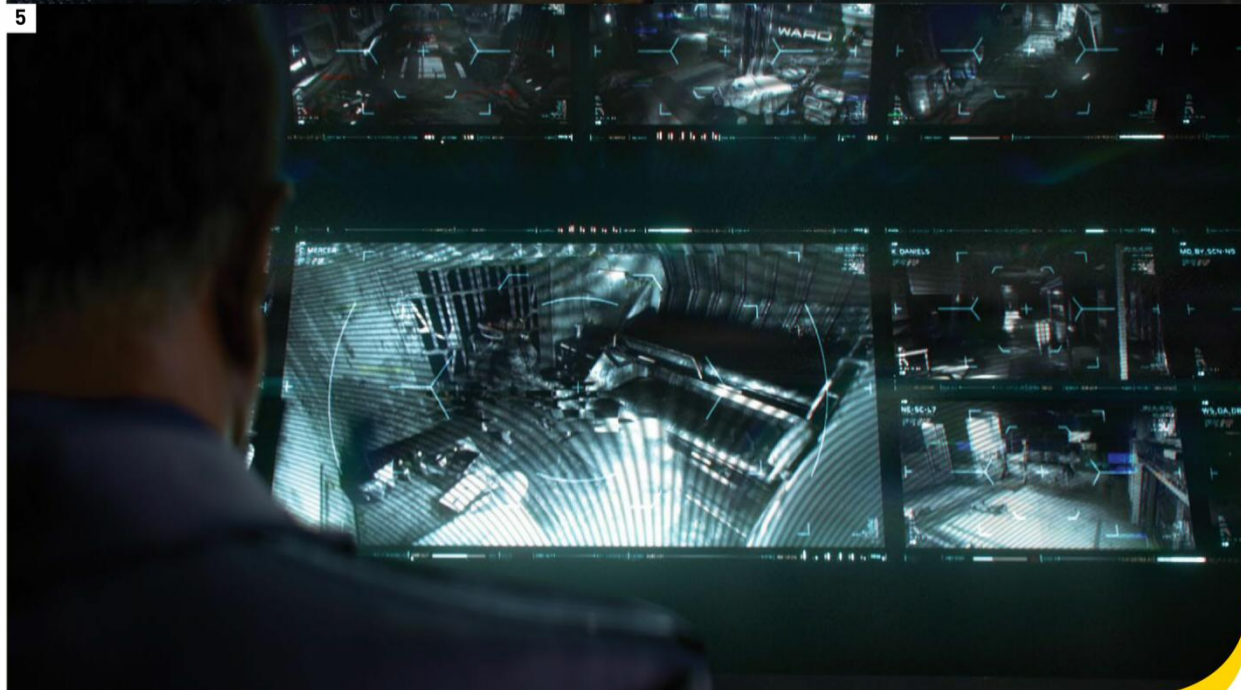
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5

1 You're not you when you're hungry. Quite literally for this poor bloke's cellmate, who seems to have mutated into some sticky alien mess, and just wants to take a bite with one of its many mouths. Time to do your best Ripley impression.

2 Holotech reminds you this rusty prison is somewhat high-tech. A health readout on the back of the neck throws back to *Dead Space*.

3 We've all had bad spot breakouts but this takes the cake. Be a pal and help your cellmate pop those things won't you? **4** Ah, we love a robot guard. Very efficient. Who wants to bet we'll be fighting off both aliens *and* robots at some point? **5** When Candid Camera goes horribly wrong... Someone's definitely getting sued over this little mishap.



EXPERIENCED HEROES

Different characters have their own abilities and specialities, and can be tweaked to have different passive bonuses depending on how you play (and craft recipes). You build XP and level up from scratch each game, a little like in a MOBA.



Taylor-made news

Oscar Taylor-Kent's news slap

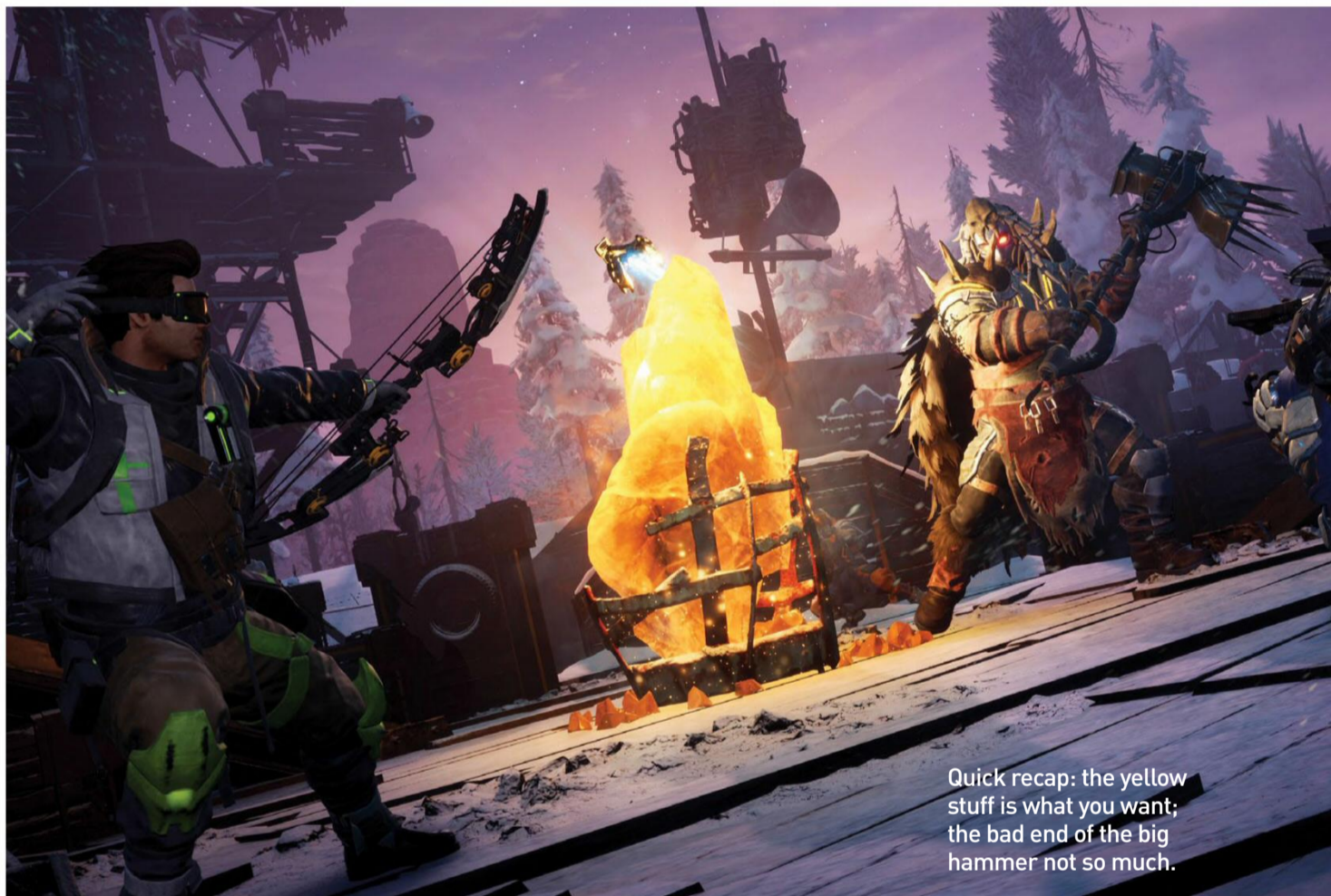
BioWare has upgraded from a single-image **Dragon Age 4** teaser to a few moody cinematic vistas (and a glimpse of ol' Solas). Maybe next year we'll see something that actually hints at gameplay but who knows? As great as it is to see BioWare doing well, a BioWare-feeling game, the big question is: where's PS5 trilogy remaster news? If **Mass Effect** fans are to get one, then so should those who prefer things scaly.

Speaking of fantasy, Pearl Abyss (the dev behind the rather pretty MMO **Black Desert**) showed off its new thing, imaginatively titled **Crimson Desert** (not a red velvet cake; this has one 's'). It looks jaw-droppingly good, filled with huge open environments and a Viking-like tone (plus a big dragon). While it has a narrative, single-player action focus, Pearl Abyss hopes to blend that with online functionality, which is what it does best.



Taking on the trash

Scavengers delivers a shot of new ideas



Quick recap: the yellow stuff is what you want; the bad end of the big hammer not so much.

How many times now have we stared down from a dropship, standing alongside a huge number of other online players, and prepared to battle to be the last team standing? Scavengers might seem to fit the familiar template, but a few hours with the beta proves **Improbable's take on mass online gaming is a deep, tactical shooter, and something wholly unique.**

Full matches have 60 players divided into three-person squads, but more often than not you won't be gunning down other players very quickly. This is PvPvE (player vs player vs environment, not something you need to ask your doctor about), and if you want to top the leaderboards and win you'll have to secure enough data. Achieving that means grabbing sufficient materials to craft gear to protect you long enough to make it to the dropship before it takes off.

DO THE TWIST

Because of the need to survive and get away with your data, every match is a careful balancing act (and takes about half an hour on average). Checking the map, you need to see which points remain unscavenged while determining which ones players are likely to be fighting over. At the same time a storm closes a ring around you (standard battle royale fare, though here it never gets tiny), and freezing tornadoes worm their way across the battlefield – you need to stop by fires to

restore your heat or take cover in structures, otherwise your maximum health will drop off.

Many AI enemies lie in wait protecting resources, and these encounters are random in each game (to a point), so you'll never be able to draw up an entirely foolproof strategy. Each camp plays out like a mini-Borderlands encounter, except you also need to be aware of other squads of players that might be nosing around. Spend materials to fix up a vehicle, then have another team nick it while you're busy? That's tough.

Even if you don't bank enough data to win the game, then at least getting out alive is still something, right? Don't take survival for granted. If you're on that dropship when it takes off, you manage to get out alive, but other players can still use those final seconds to kill you and take your data. The results aren't as definitive as, say, Fortnite. Often as the clock ticks down there's still everything to play for, and if you're skilful you could snatch a last-minute victory.

*** Get ready to gather data and scramble for the dropship later this year.**

Model Romany strikes a pose. Would you wear it to Tesco though? [Yes – Ed]

Night City comes alive

Cyberpunk 2077 without the crashes? It's called real life

Photographer Nahemi Capetillo has a track record of creating amazing shoots based on her favourite games. She began her Cyberpunk 2077 project two years ago as part of a commercial set, which she says is why the photos are tame compared to the game's sexualised world.

Working with models MorguenMarie, Amithyste and Romany, as well as the artist Irina Istratova, who retouched the photos,

Capetillo has brought to life the world of Cyberpunk 2077 beautifully.

We know Capetillo is an avid gamer, but what made her choose Cyberpunk 2077? "Being a fan of tattoos, piercings, basically body modifications, this game takes it to a level I can only dream of. To top it off, the colours used are insanely amazing!"

IS ART GAMES?

When art meets games we have to raise the spectre of that old argument – are games

art? "I absolutely see an artistic merit in videogames," says the photographer. "I draw a lot of inspiration from them and I'm sure many artists everywhere do. Though still a young medium in comparison to the fine arts, it plays a big part. There are many qualities that only videogames possess."

Capetillo tells us she finds the character development, narratives, music, and visual design of games inspirational. Often she is drawn to the smallest details. "Each creator spent so much time to bring all elements together and I'm sure they were very meticulous with it," she says. "I respect the artist and draw inspiration from that as well."

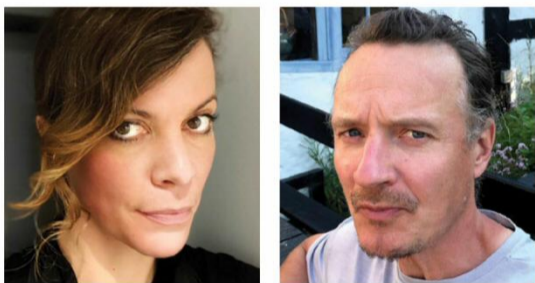
* See more of Nahemi Capetillo's work at noamythephotographer.com.

Being a fan of tattoos, piercings, basically body modifications, this game takes it to a level I can only dream of.

DEV Q&A

Reality hits hard

IO Interactive spills the details on bringing Hitman VR to wonderfully realistic life



IO Interactive's Sidsel Marie Hermansen and Eskil Mohl reveal Hitman 3's PS VR secrets.

Agent 47's hands seem even bloodier when you wave them in front of your VR face, which you can do thanks to Hitman 3's PS VR support. It's all here too: every location from the World Of Assassination trilogy is playable from this new perspective. PS VR brings plenty new to the table, from revamped physics to finer control over your placement. We're chatting with lead game designer Sidsel Marie Hermansen and senior game designer Eskil Mohl to uncover just how the developer has done it.

OPM: Do you think the first-person perspective will surprise Hitman veterans?
IO: The first-person perspective will bring back positive memories for some of the long-time players. Blood Money in 2006 was the last game to have first-person and it definitely adds a different element to how you play the game. For VR, it really allows you to get more immersed into the world and that does bring some challenges. It'll take some adjustment to having completely free camera

It's the end of the trilogy but also a 'rebirth' through the VR mode.

movement but also things like taking cover. A third-person camera lets you easily look around and track guards, but in VR you'll need to peek out of cover just to see what's happening around you.

OPM: How do you keep track of disguises when in first-person view?
IO: Looking down at your suit or disguise was something we made sure was part of the VR experience. Sometimes you do need to check exactly what disguise you're wearing, because with the first-person camera you don't see it all the time!

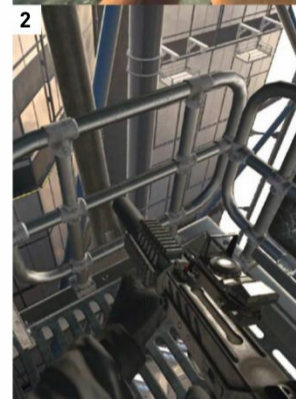
OPM: You can use a pistol to smash glass. Is that a result of objects you can find having more physicality when in your VR hands?
IO: Many things in the game were 'ready-made' for VR in some ways. The locations were already built with items and props that had specific properties, often used for other areas of the game. A lot of these properties worked for VR out of the box, you could say, and gave items a new lease of life. For example, you can pick up and inspect items by moving them closer to your face, throw items away when you're done with them and even use them to smash glass. Some ingenious players have been taking advantage of some of these advanced physics in the game in the non-VR version already.

OPM: In VR you have to prime weapons to use them. How did that idea come about?
IO: Because we caused chaos running around with a sword! Seriously. Before we had 'priming' in place, the weapons you could carry were deadly all the time and made it impossible to control what you actually wanted to do. Now you can prime a weapon, or even your fist, so that you know when you want to tap a guard on the shoulder and when you want to punch him in the face!

OPM: 47 has always had to ready his fibrewire. Was priming an evolution of that into something intentional?
IO: Yeah, we knew we wanted to 'prime' the wire to really sell the fantasy, which is

something long-time fans will remember. That notion merged into the other items and how we wanted players to handle them.

OPM: 47 can tap a guard on a shoulder, move out of the way, then whack him in the face. It's hilarious. What other surprising ways of interacting with the world are possible in VR?
IO: The motion-tracked controls free 47's arms, which has created some new experiences. For example, when you're dragging a body, it's now possible to use your momentum to 'fling' it, rather than just drag.



1 Hate fishing? Take it into your own hands.
2 Dubai's skyscrapers have our knees shaking in VR. **3** You feel the density in some locations. You could get lost in the crowd.

In fact, a lot of new gameplay areas have opened up in pretty much all of our locations simply because the perspective has changed. Now, you can hide under a staircase and fire through individual stairs when guards are in pursuit. It's also possible to crouch under a table and fire out from underneath it, which isn't possible unless you play in VR.

OPM: How important was it to support all the World Of Assassination levels?
IO: It's something we've all been saying for years now; one executable [file]. The studio has been behind that, no matter what obstacles were in the way. It's also been really fun to revisit the places that we know so well and see them in VR and it really starts to feel like a different game. In a lot of ways, Hitman in VR feels right. It's the end of the trilogy but also a 'rebirth' through the VR mode.

*** Which Hitman location will you be visiting first in VR? Tweet us @opm_uk.**



To see what disguise you're wearing, you'll simply have to look down at yourself.



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Celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Nier series these three sizeable statues from Japan's Prime 1 Studio are amazing (and admittedly rather costly). They range in price but the quality remains equally high across the collection. The Deluxe version (left) brings together the main cast – 2B, 9S, and A2 – and contains swappable parts to build your own scenes.



NIER: THEATRICAL ORCHESTRA 12020 BLU-RAY

SQUARE ENIX £64.99 [BIT.LY/NIER_THEATRE](http://bit.ly/nier_theatre)

With orchestral and vocal performances recorded during the Tokyo performance of the Nier: Theatrical Orchestra 12020 concert, held in March, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the series, this Blu-ray is your only way to experience the event (due to Covid-19 there was no audience). As a bonus you can watch the concert's projected visuals as standalone movies.



NIER: AUTOMATA / NIER GESTALT & REPLICANT ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK VINYL BOX SET

SQUARE ENIX £55.99 [BIT.LY/NIER_MUSIC](http://bit.ly/nier_music)

Across four vinyl LPs and 35 exclusive tracks, this special box set commemorates the games in the Nier series. All the haunting music was composed by Keiichi Okabe, who's also known for the Tekken series. The classy package is made even better with new, unique illustrations by Tokyo Ghoul artist Sui Ishida.



NIER: AUTOMATA PLAY ARTS KAI ACTION FIGURE 2B

SQUARE ENIX £134.99 [BIT.LY/NIER_FIGURE](http://bit.ly/nier_figure)

Acclaimed collectible figure maker Play Arts casts an eye over YoRHa No. 2 Type B to create this beautiful action model. Care has been taken to ensure every detail and texture is accurate and proportionate to the game's design. The kit comes with swappable parts and accessories, including the Virtuous Contract weapon. It's 244mm high of Nier perfection.

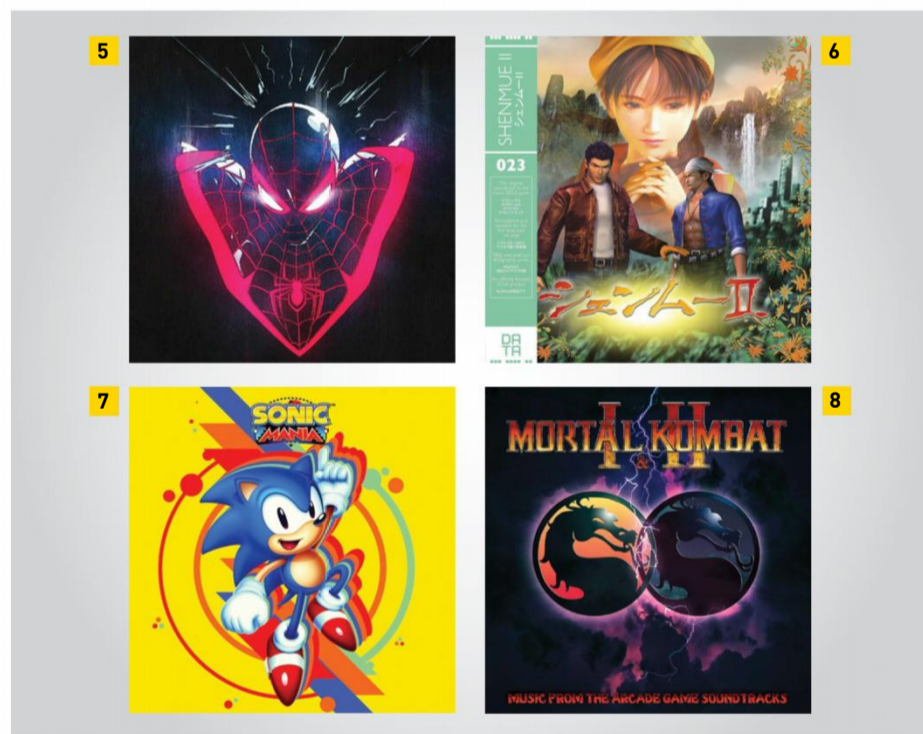


OVERWATCH BOOKED IN

Though the UK Sega Store has its own Sega-themed face masks, the US store features this special one. We love it. Nothing says Covid-safe like a smirking cartoon hedgehog. (At shop.sega.com.)



1 Sony's new **PS1 Console** 2 and **Classic PlayStation Sublimated Fleece Blanket** are snug ways to celebrate PlayStation. Order from gear.playstation.com. 3 Bandai Namco's **Little Nightmares II Pale City T-shirt** looks awesome; order at store.bandainamcoent.eu. 4 The **Adidas Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales Superstar Shoes** are a must-buy at adidas.co.uk. 5 There's more Miles loot with Mondo's **Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales Original Video Game Soundtrack 2XLP**, price and ordering TBC. 6 We also love the **Shenmue II – Original Video Game Soundtrack LP**, and 7 the **Sonic Mania** vinyl is back in stock, both from Data Discs, data-discs.com. 8 Finally, the **Mortal Kombat I & II – Music From The Arcade Game Soundtracks LP** celebrates '90s cheese with 25 original tracks. Order from enjoytheriderecords.com.



JESS'S REAL DEAL



Look at him! Would you just look at the size of that pussy cat. How could I resist this ludicrously large Final Fantasy merch? The Final Fantasy XIV giant Fat Cat cushion may cost an eye-watering £217.99 but the idea of this 'pleasantly plump' minion sitting in the corner of my flat makes me smile. Even if I do know it has a rather dark reason for existing.

I'll happily lounge around on this overly large feline friend (it's 7kg of foamed styrol and polyester) while I have another playthrough of Cyberpunk 2077. Trust me, you'll need something cosy to get you through that long ol' game's many (many) crashes. The downside? I'll have to wait until 26 March to get myself up close with this kitty.

You can pre-order the Final Fantasy XIV Giant Cushion – Fat Cat at bit.ly/ff-fat_cat.





DEBATE

Is a new Mass Effect a good thing?

The news that BioWare is making a new Mass Effect is exciting but raises questions



MILFORD COPPOCK
MANAGING ART EDITOR



A MIX OF THE OLD AND THE NEW COULD SEE A RETURN TO FORM.

BioWare going back to what it knows feels like a good thing, but it also feels like the developer has lost its way. Rather than drawing a line under past glories and looking for new victories it's had its nose bloodied with Anthem and is recoiling back to what is familiar. Maybe the way forward is the halfway house of Mass Effect Andromeda, and a sequel to that poorly received entry. The studio created a new galaxy and it would be a shame to see it left on the shelf. Likewise, Anthem did some things well; it would be great to see the jetpack combat back in Mass Effect setting. ■

Andromeda proved the original trilogy was perfect the way it was. ■



OSCAR TAYLOR-KENT
GAMES EDITOR



ANTHEM HAS BEEN FORGOTTEN WHILE BIOWARE PLAYS THE HITS.

I'm happy for the Mass Effect and Dragon Age fans whose wishes are coming true, but won't somebody please think of the Anthem fans? It's been almost two years since the mech-based online game launched, and we've been promised a shakeup relaunch of 'Anthem 2.0' for most of it. Anthem was disappointing. But for something to be a letdown, there had to be hope. BioWare's RPG bones are in there somewhere, and the Javelin suits were fun to control. This rusty sci-fi world was meant to be the start of BioWare's next great sci-fi story. And it still could be. So where is it? ■



JESS KINGHORN
STAFF WRITER



I KNOW IT LOOKS SMALL FROM UP HERE BUT THE EARTH HAS SO MUCH MORE TO OFFER BIOWARE.

Listen, I'm not denying the series' lasting legacy but isn't it time to set a course for galaxies new? Yes, I'm well aware of how disastrous that was for Anthem but not all of BioWare's future endeavours are going to be the exact same train wreck. We mustn't forget that our failures can teach us just as much as our successes, and I don't doubt the studio still has the ability to surprise us.

To be quite honest, I'm a little bit anxious about the developer returning to the Normandy to play only its greatest hits across the stars for ever more. For me, Andromeda proved the original trilogy was perfect the way it was and no amount of retreading of old ground can rekindle that magic. Personally, I'd much rather see the studio shake things up with a more down-to-earth setting. Well, I guess there's always Dragon Age 4... ■



IAN DEAN
EDITOR



BIOWARE CAN GET BACK TO ITS BEST IF EA LETS THE TEAM WORK WITHOUT INTERFERENCE.

BioWare's reputation has taken a beating over the last three years, with Mass Effect Andromeda seen as starting the rot. But in hindsight it was nowhere near the mess Cyberpunk 2077 turned out to be. Regular patches have resulted in a series entry worth playing. I for one am confident the developer, which includes returning talent from earlier games, can make Mass Effect a name to be respected again. Destined for PS5, a new Mass Effect could be the game to put the studio back on the map, so long as lessons have been learned from previous work. EA must take a step back and trust one of the industry's most revered teams to do what it does best: craft well-written, ambitious, complex RPGs. ■



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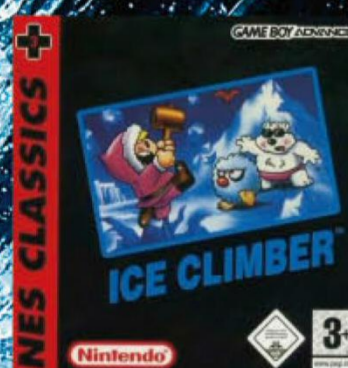
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IN THE MOOD FOR...



Toilets

We all need to use the facilities, so these games helpfully included them

1 DONUT COUNTY

Everything works a little differently in Donut County, a game in which you play a hole in the ground. Donut County is a place where animals and humans share their doughnuts in peace, and where raccoons, just like us, sometimes play mobile games on their tablets in the bathroom. Thus the bathroom turns into a place of great equality between animal and man.

2 HEAVY RAIN

When Heavy Rain first came out, it was a source of amazement and amusement because it allowed you to experience even the most mundane tasks in-game. So yes, at more than one point in the game a toilet isn't merely decoration, but a usable item. After so many games that don't let you, well, go, there's an odd satisfaction and relief in letting your character relieve themselves.

3 BORDERLANDS 3

Part 3 of the Vault Hunter saga upholds Borderlands' tradition of using portable loos as treasure chests. The feeling of trepidation upon opening their doors is definitely the same as the one you get on opening a chest, as you never know what may, er, spring forth. Even if there's no enemy waiting for you inside the Turdis, the sight that greets you

may make you think twice about whether the loot is worth it.

4 THE LAST OF US PART II

The TLOU franchise continues the proud tradition of many horror games – hiding horrifying creatures in bathrooms. Early in TLOU2 there's a scene when you know entering a staff bathroom is bad idea, but we brave the jump scare for the reward. "How do they get in here?" Ellie asks afterwards. You see Ellie, TLOU is a videogame, and...

5 OVERWATCH

This unsuspecting outhouse on Route 66 was briefly newsworthy after Blizzard patched out a few magazines, a cheeky suggestion of what characters could get up to in there. Now it's just a rickety old outhouse, easily destroyed. Despite the heart carved into the door, it's hardly inviting. No worries, you're generally busy with delivering a wholly different sort of payload anyway.

6 UNTITLED GOOSE GAME

In the backyards of Untitled Goose Game you learn that sometimes the best toilet is a repurposed one. Here, potting your flowers takes on a whole new meaning, celebrating the toilet's owner as a connoisseur of avant-garde gardening the likes of which you won't see on Gardener's World. Freed of its

original purpose, the lavvy finally gets a second life as a more fragrant backyard statement piece and conversation starter.

7 THE SIMS 4

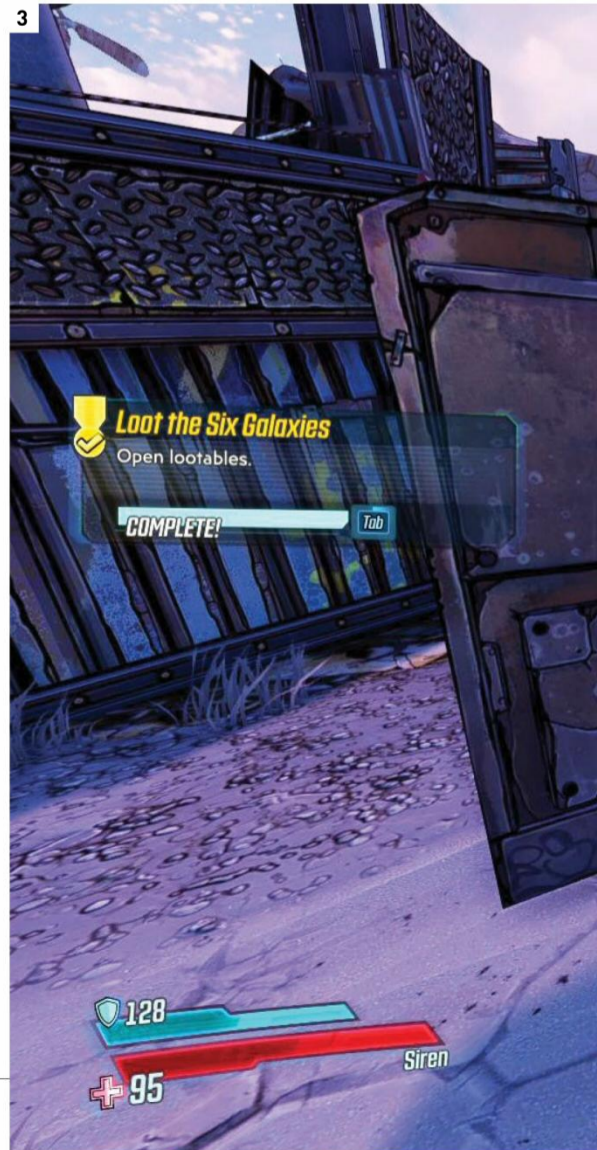
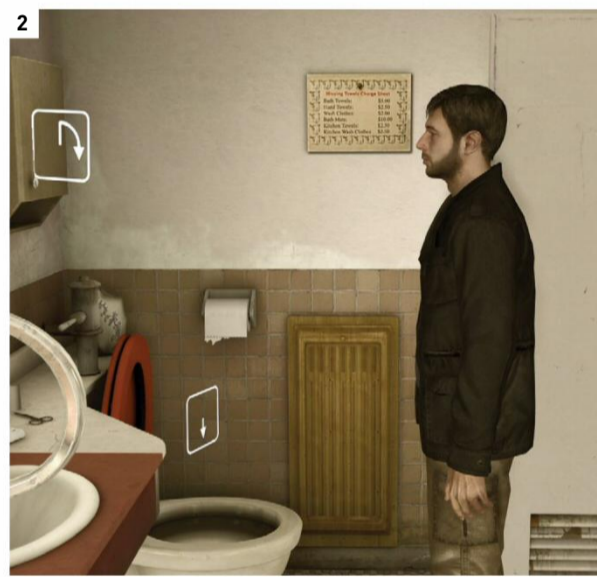
Sure, you visit a lot of toilets in games, but only in The Sims do you get to enjoy the experience of choosing a toilet that goes with the rest of your bathroom interior, sending your Sim there like a hapless child, and hoping to God they won't forget to wash their hands. Truly a game filled with love for the porcelain bowl.

8 KNIGHTS & BIKES

In Foam Sword's big outdoor adventure, it stands to reason that if you're a small girl out and about all day, you're going to need the loo at some point. Thankfully Penfurzy Island is a tourist-friendly island and as such there are 'restrooms' near the golf course and the camping grounds. They're free to use.

9 YAKUZA KIWAMI 2

If there's ever a videogame bog to tell your grandchildren about, it's this one. Because as if life as a yakuza isn't already exciting enough, Toylets aim to make relieving yourself fun. Use your stream to blast an opponent out of a virtual ring or imagine it as a gust of wind that raises a young woman's skirt! We honestly have nothing to add.



HONOURABLE MENTIONS

Silent Hill

The classic franchise proudly features disgusting bathrooms in every instalment. Their state is only bearable to those already dead.

Persona 5 Royal

P5R introduces bathrooms as "good for thinking," finally celebrating them as places used for emptying both body and mind.

Control

The bureau's facilities are usually the best place to find collectibles – or a loo door to telekinetically smash into someone.

Did we miss your best bogger? Got a brilliant In The Mood For idea? Show and tell at twitter.com/opm_uk.





OPINION

“THE YAKUZA SERIES DESERVES PRAISE FOR HOW POLITICAL IT IS.”

But it's easy to overlook the politics given so many other distractions



WRITER BIO

Malindy Hetfeld is glad about the rediscovery of the Yakuza series, but she hopes that it teaches people more about Japan than good food.

When you hear people talk about Yakuza: Like A Dragon, the latest instalment in the Yakuza series, they most often mention its inherent kindness. From the way it portrays homeless people to how hero Ichiban Kasuga treats people he meets, to the friendships that form between middle-aged men, this is supposedly more of a feelgood game than the Yakuza games before it.

The Yakuza series' dissonance between silly fun and violence, yakuza thriller and everyday issues, played the most important part in the Western rediscovery of the games, starting with Yakuza 0. But the lens of this rediscovery is the same lens we like to apply to a lot of Japanese media – we like to emphasise the unfamiliar. Things like the Toylets minigame or the reappearing pervert are fun, but to me Yakuza is most impressive for how it talks about politics.

Whereas in the West game developers and publishers shy away from making political statements, Ryu Ga Gotoku Studio, for all that it's a very Japanese studio responsible for a very Japanese game, says something surprisingly universal: humans, especially politicians, are susceptible to corruption. This isn't even a particularly revolutionary thing to consider. What's important is that to Japanese people with just rudimentary

knowledge of the yakuza, the references the games make are as recognisable as references to US politics would be to most people in the West. The series has charted each of the yakuza's attempts to retain their businesses in the face of Japan's increasingly stringent anti-crime laws.

LIE ABILITY

While Yakuza doesn't romanticise crime itself like mafia media does, it's careful to always put a barrier between the characters you control and the rest of the yakuza. The implication for Ichiban Kasuga is that he is too stupid and too kindhearted even to extort money from someone, and for him the realisation that yakuza have a connection to the political establishment is a huge surprise. In real life yakuza have always had political connections, all the way back to the bakuto (forerunners to the yakuza in 18th-century Japan) who were occasionally even hired by the government to win back workers' earnings. Series heroes Kazuma Kiryu and Ichiban Kasuga as characters represent what real yakuza claim to be: chivalrous individuals.

Yakuza have certainly used their influence to do good, and they make it a point to not involve themselves in crimes by paying someone else. These actions make it easier to imagine the existence of characters like Kiryu and Ichiban, and forget that you too are supposedly playing a criminal. In Yakuza everyone except you engages in crimes so you don't have to think much about that the yakuza's inherent criminality yourself, while at the same time saying very clearly that yakuza are criminals, often wrapped up in political conspiracy that hits close to home for those living the reality. The series' one act of shying away from these very firm political statements is how easy they are to forget when you're busy playing UFO catcher minigames and helping old ladies across the street. The romanticised part – the weirdness, the exoticism – is sadly what stood out to Western players the most.



Yakuza: Like A Dragon is weird, but finds room for a political message.

Yakuza have always had political links, all the way back to the 18th century.

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OPINION

“IT’S GREAT TO SEE SO MANY IDENTITIES IN SUPERHERO VIDEOGAMES”

A Marvel-ous way to bring cultural diversity and representation



WRITER BIO

For Laura Francis, with great opinions comes great responsibility. Our guest writer’s finely tuned nerd senses are tingling as she meets Miles...

There’s been a lot of discussion about cultural representation in games – that’s no secret. Seeing the likes of Miles Morales and Kamala Khan, characters who are still fresh blood within the Marvel Universe, placed front and centre in videogames is a massive deal for many people from marginalised groups, who long to feel seen, heard, and validated.

Even though its playerbase is currently pretty sparse, there was no doubt that the brightest spark in Marvel’s Avengers was Kamala Khan, aka Ms. Marvel, and her coming-of-age arc. For many, it was the first time a modern Pakistani or Muslim was represented in a big way. What makes it so special is that Kamala calls her dad ‘Abu’, for example, and that she has a dupatta (a shawl-like scarf) hanging from her bag. It’s commendable that a lot of care and attention went into ensuring authenticity. In the comics, her Islamic faith was respectfully explored and helped her stand out against the rest of the Marvel Universe

FLYING THE FLAG

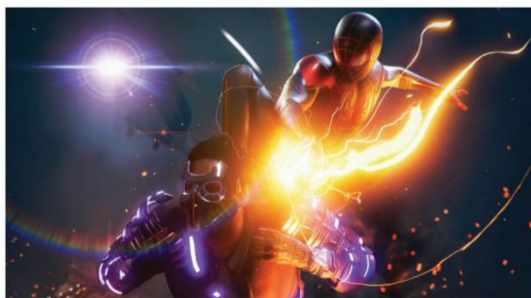
And we’ve recently had Marvel’s Spider-Man: Miles Morales, in which we delve a lot deeper into Miles’ life and relationships and his new home in Spanish Harlem. New York is a giant

melting pot of cultural diversity, so it was important that it was reflected a lot more in this game. The game also does a great job representing both aspects of Miles’ cultural identities – African American and Puerto Rican. A lot of attention was paid to all those little cultural nuances, for example Miles and his mother, Rio, speaking in Spanish. It was moving to see that extra attention to detail throughout, as it’s something not seen very often in videogames.

Harlem feels every inch like an extra character in the game, the way in which it comes to life adding so much personality, right down to the street art of the Puerto Rican flag sprinkled throughout the district (used as a backdrop with Miles posing for Hispanic Heritage Month in promotional material for the game). There’s also a very timely addition of a Black Lives Matter mural, adding to the theme of solidarity within the community of Harlem. Then there are the unlockable suits within the game, which are cleverly used to address parts of Miles’ identity as an Afro-Latino. Most of the suits come with a fancy hood, which is interesting as hoodies are symbolic of the struggles faced by young Black and Latinx men in the US.

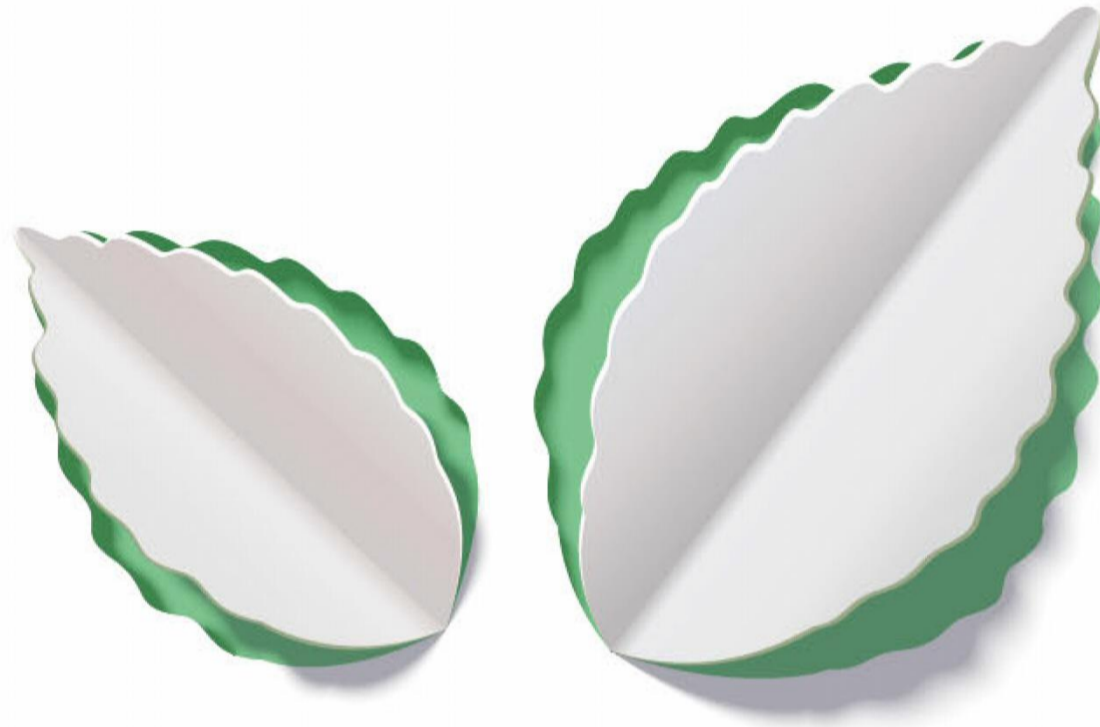
Another extra detail exploring Black identity in Spider-Man: Miles Morales is that one of the collectibles in the game is a Wakandan flag, and one of the unlockable suits is inspired by Wakanda, with a black and gold colour scheme.

Both much-loved Marvel characters mark such a huge step for cultural representation. For Muslims and Puerto Ricans, it’s seeing their culture take a dominant position in a beloved genre. And if these trailer reaction videos that have recently popped up online are anything to go by, it’s heart-rending to see people bursting with emotion and reduced to tears at finally being seen and heard. It’s a no-brainer: diversity and representation are needed in all types of media. Here’s to seeing a lot more of it as we step into the next generation, and beyond!



Marvel’s Spider-Man: Miles Morales was diverse and an incredible game – win-win.

Her Islamic faith, respectfully explored, helped her stand out in the Marvel Universe.



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REPLIES

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#183 We got a new look, and spoiled you with a massive pile of reviews.



A SMALL PROBLEM

I have been an enthusiastic reader of the magazine for many years and a yearly subscriber. The latest edition though has a much smaller font and as a result I have difficulty reading it. Today I was looking forward to immersing myself in the new addition but quickly got a headache trying to read the articles. Could you please revert back to the normal size of font please. Yes, I am getting on a bit but don't need reading glasses!

Steve Barrie

We make this magazine for you, the readers, so you can expect refinements of

our new look over time. Keep reading!

HYPED OUT

I know you need to be enthusiastic about games before they're released, but in the light of Certain Games not delivering everything they promised – or even being completely playable on PS4 – should you really be hyping them up as much as you do? Let's just say something I'd been looking forward to for a

long time is now really bugging me...

Jes Callender

When we see early builds of games, like all videogame fans we get genuinely excited. But when we review games we're not afraid to tell it like it is, and we only review finished games.

FOUR THOUGHT

Congratulations on the new look – just promise me you won't be abandoning PS4 owners. We can't all afford a shiny new PS5 (and not everyone who wanted one was able to get one anyway).

Jack Clarke

We definitely won't be abandoning PS4 owners – even the members of the team who have PS5s are keeping their older consoles too, and our Mim has no plans to upgrade yet as she's got plenty to play on PS4. It's a fantastic console and we'll continue to cover it.

“PROMISE ME YOU WON'T BE ABANDONING PS4 OWNERS. WE CAN'T ALL AFFORD A NEW PS5.”

STAR LETTER POSTER CHILD

Long-term reader and subscriber. I was there for the original PS release, and I'm still here for the PS5 release. I'm now 33 years old, and have built my digital business around technology and games. I have finally got my own space to call an office (a spare room in my home), and I am in desperate need of gaming posters to disguise the white walls. Please, please, please, include some posters in upcoming issues so that I can be surrounded by the things that make me happy.

Kris Middleton

We've no immediate plans for posters, but we'll bear it in mind next time we put a gift on the magazine cover. (We could do with some ourselves while we're all working from home too!)



CAN I GET A RT?

The most pleasing tweetings from the @OPM_UK timeline...



@jasminetwts

Really digging the new @OPM_UK design, @milfcoppock and the team have smashed it



@Martin_Bigg

I still have my complete @OPM_UK magazine collection since issue 1 in 1995!



@TheMicroLoft

If you enjoy reading about video games, love #PlayStation gaming and appreciate the finer things in life, then make sure to grab the new look @OPM_UK mag this month. Blood, sweat and a whole lot of WFH bandwidth went into making this possible! Well done team!



@TheGameBakers

Haven is one of eight unique subscriber-only covers of @OPM_UK, to celebrate the new look. We are so proud to see Yu & Kay in the front of this huge magazine :)



@TerryWillard

They still make OPM? Wow



@pastel_pixels

I think Lara Croft has been on many magazine covers before in real life. @OPM_UK and @PlayMag_UK comes to mind.



@Quinny_Bob

Hate to be a gaming history nerd but Natalie Cook was the first Lara model back in '96 (You caught us – ed)

T TROLL OF THE MONTH



f "KONAMI WON'T GIVE US A FREAKIN' SILENT HILL, SO THIS GAME IS THE CLOSEST THING TO IT. I ENJOYED THEM A LOT."
JASON PEGRAM ENJOYED THE EVIL WITHIN 2

f "IT IS THE SCARIEST GAME OF ALL TIME IT'S JUST AS GOOD AS RESIDENT EVIL."
JON RILEY ENJOYED IT TOO

READERS' MOST WANTED

Which games are bleeping loudest on your radar?

01

Horizon Forbidden West

Aloy's adventures will continue, and you're keen to head west along with her. Just watch out for those nasty red vines, okay?
Format PS5, PS4
ETA TBC



02

God Of War: Ragnarok

If one man can join in a world-ending battle, it's Kratos. Our money's on the angry Greek chap.
Format PS5
ETA TBC



03

Final Fantasy XVI

Even a hero named Clive (Clive! Honestly...) can't dampen your eagerness for a fresh mainline FF.
Format PS5
ETA TBC



05

Ratchet & Clank: Rift Apart

Two pals on a dimension-hopping, SSD-pushing adventure? We're in.
Format PS5
ETA 2021



04

Returnal

When roguelike meets bullet hell, the result is a fast-paced game you're eager to get your mitts on.
Format PS5
ETA TBC



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Tell us the five games you can't wait to play at opm@futurenet.com

EXIT POLL

Our Facebook fans answer a final question



WHICH FINAL FANTASY IS YOUR FAVOURITE?

21% Fell for FFXVIII and angsty hero Squall.

14% Say VI – the first non-medieval Final Fantasy.

11% Choose FFX, with Tidus and blitzball.

46%

Choose Final Fantasy VII – the first part of which got a slick remake in 2020.

3% Opt for FFIII, which was remade for PSP back in 2012.

5% Reckon FFXV, Noctis' and co's boys' own road trip, was best.

NEXT MONTH

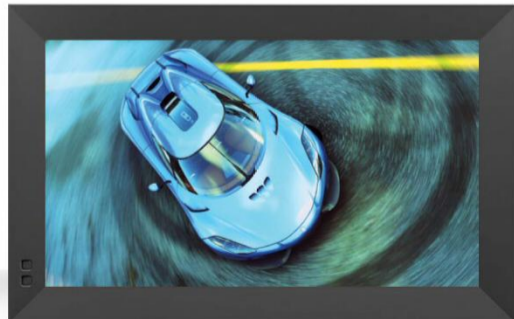
What's the best monster in the Resident Evil series?



THIS MONTH'S THEME MOTION

Hot Shots

We're celebrating your very best PlayStation photo mode moments



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The best entry every issue wins a Nixplay digital photo frame to showcase their beautiful game photos. The 15.6-inch Nixplay Smart Photo Frame is the perfect way to show off your photo mode art. Free-standing and wall-mountable, the Nixplay frame works with Google Photos, Dropbox, Facebook, and Instagram. It's also controllable from the iOS and Google app, and comes with a remote. Best of all, one tree is planted for every Nixplay Smart Frame sold. www.nixplay.co.uk



“IF YOU SEE INTERESTING LIGHTING IN A GAME, USE IT.”



Winner

TJ Marinelli
Game: Drive Club

This issue's winner loaded up DriveClub for his shot because “all those cars make it a perfect game to experiment with”.

The shot took TJ 30 minutes to set up. Choosing single-player mode meant he could select the track and take his time, and he could adjust settings such as weather, so “I could use reflections from the rain and

ground”. After sending the car into a doughnut, our winner opened photo mode and played around with the settings, framing, and filters. “Looking at photography or cinematography inspires me to improve my style and shots,” he says.

Our art ed Milf loves this image because it makes him dizzy just looking at it. Congrats TJ!



HONOURABLE MENTIONS

1 Kevin McAllister
Game: Days Gone



“Days Gone is my favourite game, and it's the game that got me into photo mode,” says Kevin McAllister. He tells us he used Freakers as obstacles to drift around to get the perfect motion shot. “Experiment with all the different sliders, try different angles, and pay attention to the lighting,” advises McAllister.

2 Antonis Gravity
Game: God Of War



“I love taking pictures when I see an opportunity. I love pictures with particle effects, and that moment was perfect for me,” says Antonis Gravity, adding: “I just lowered the exposure and used a filter with low opacity.” Gravity reveals how he often takes 20 photos to get the right one. Patience pays off!

3 Laura Anne Spencer
Game: Death Stranding

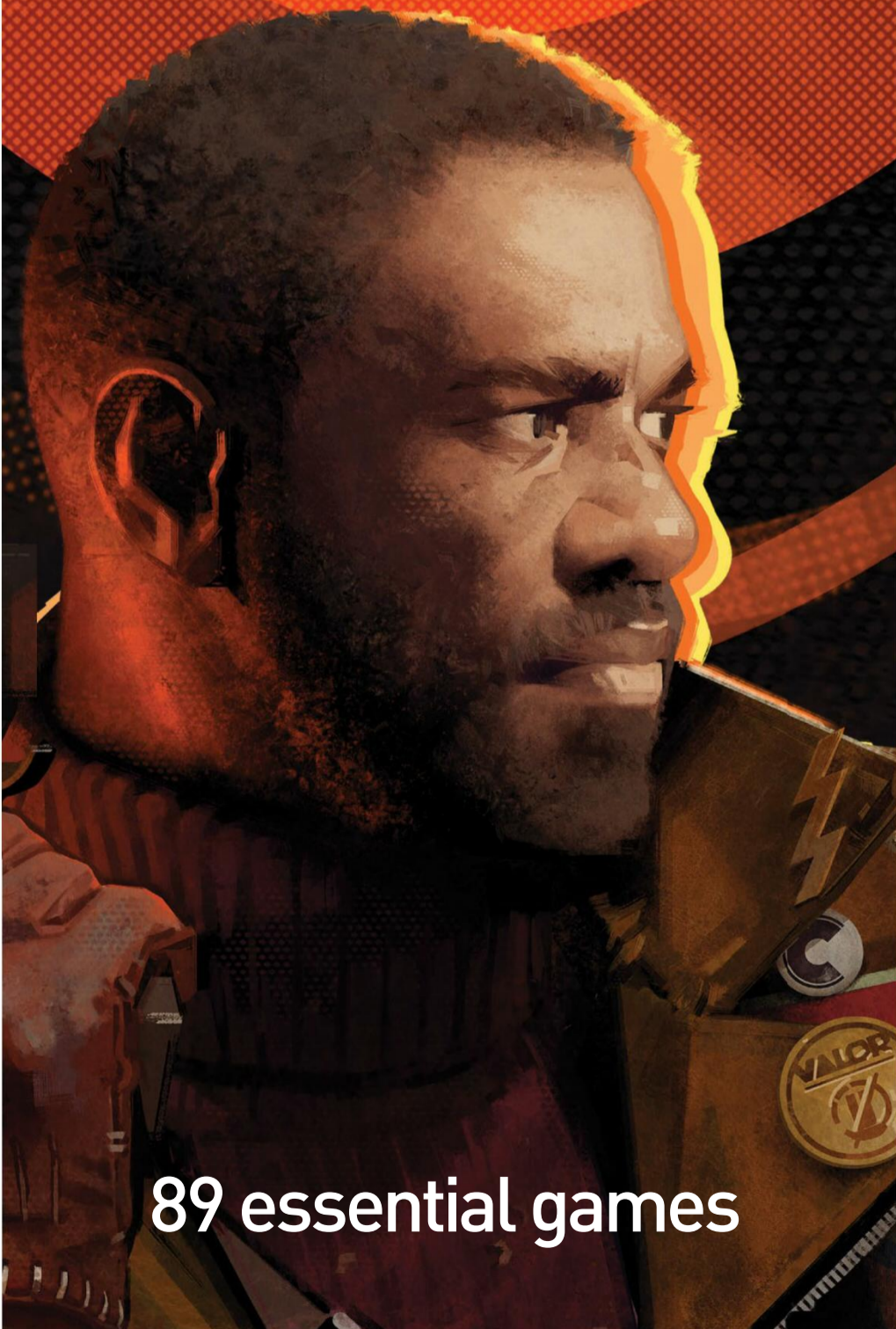


“Unfortunately it did involve letting poor Sam Porter Bridges get hit with various projectiles for a while,” says Laura Anne Spencer as she reveals what it took to take this shot. “Lighting is the most important thing, if you see interesting lighting in a game environment use it to your advantage,” she adds, offering a top tip.

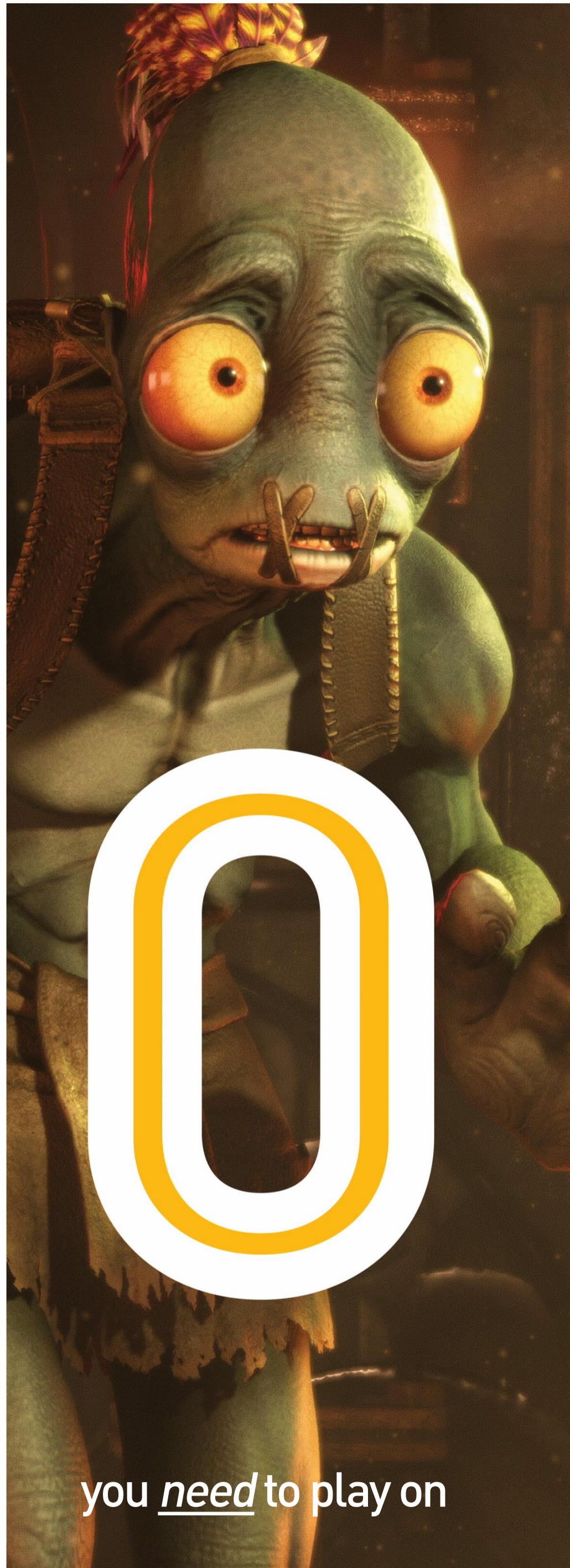
— NEXT MONTH'S THEME RED —

2021 PREVIEW

2



89 essential games



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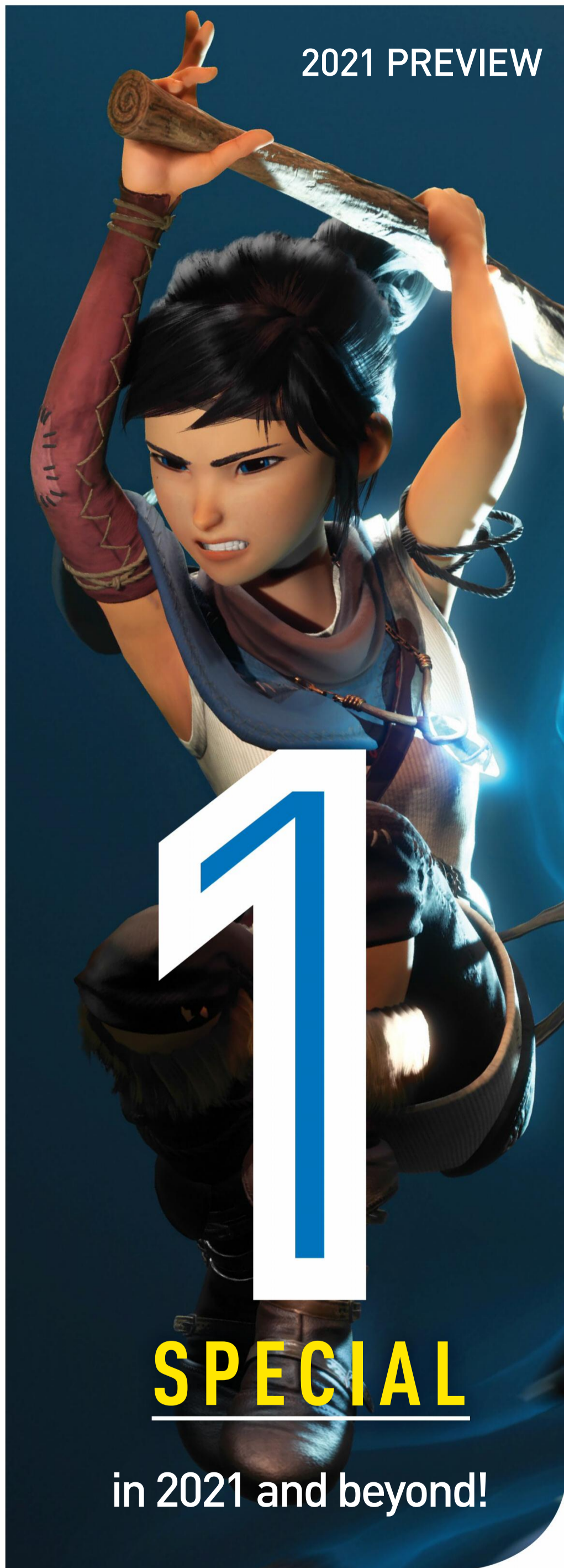
you need to play on



2

PREVIEW

PS5, PS4, and PS VR



2021 PREVIEW

1

SPECIAL

in 2021 and beyond!

F FORMAT PS5 ETA 21 MAY PUB BETHESDA DEV ARKANE STUDIOS PLAYERS 1-2

DEATHLOOP

Game director Dinga Bakaba reveals why we'll have time to kill in 2021

W here other developers find comfort in the conventional game narrative, the A-to-B race to the credits, Arkane Studios looks upon this structure as a thing to fight against. Its past games, such as the

Dishonored series, have enabled us to play with a sense of freedom but in small specific ways. Deathloop explodes its narrative into tiny pieces and expects you to pick up all the bits.

"The structure is a little bit more crazy," understates game director Dinga Bakaba. He refers to

Deathloop as an "experimentation," a game that builds on Dishonored's approach to player agency but in new ways. Deathloop represents the crossroads of the old and new for this French studio. Like the art direction, which blends retro-kitsch decor and fashion with science-fiction technology, Deathloop

2021 PREVIEW

Colt's a serious contender for the title of Coolest Videogame Character.

represents an appealing mix of the old and new.

"The main thing we are experimenting with is the player-driven campaign," says Bakaba, who explains how the structure is unexpected. "And because we want to focus on time loop gameplay and the invasion of Julianna, we

have a small cast of characters, we have one place so you can build some familiarity, there is one big event and one goal. In a way it's something more focussed than an epic tale of empires and countries."

GOING LOOPY

Such a cosy setup belies a complex

"THE MAIN THING WE ARE EXPERIMENTING WITH IS THE PLAYER-DRIVEN CAMPAIGN."

web of cause and effect, of choices that evolve this small world and affect its cast in many unexpected ways. You play as Colt, an assassin trapped on the island of Blackreef, who realises his only way off this rock is to break the time loop that has kept its residents alive for decades (maybe centuries). To do this he must kill the eight Visionaries responsible for maintaining the loop. And he



2021 PREVIEW

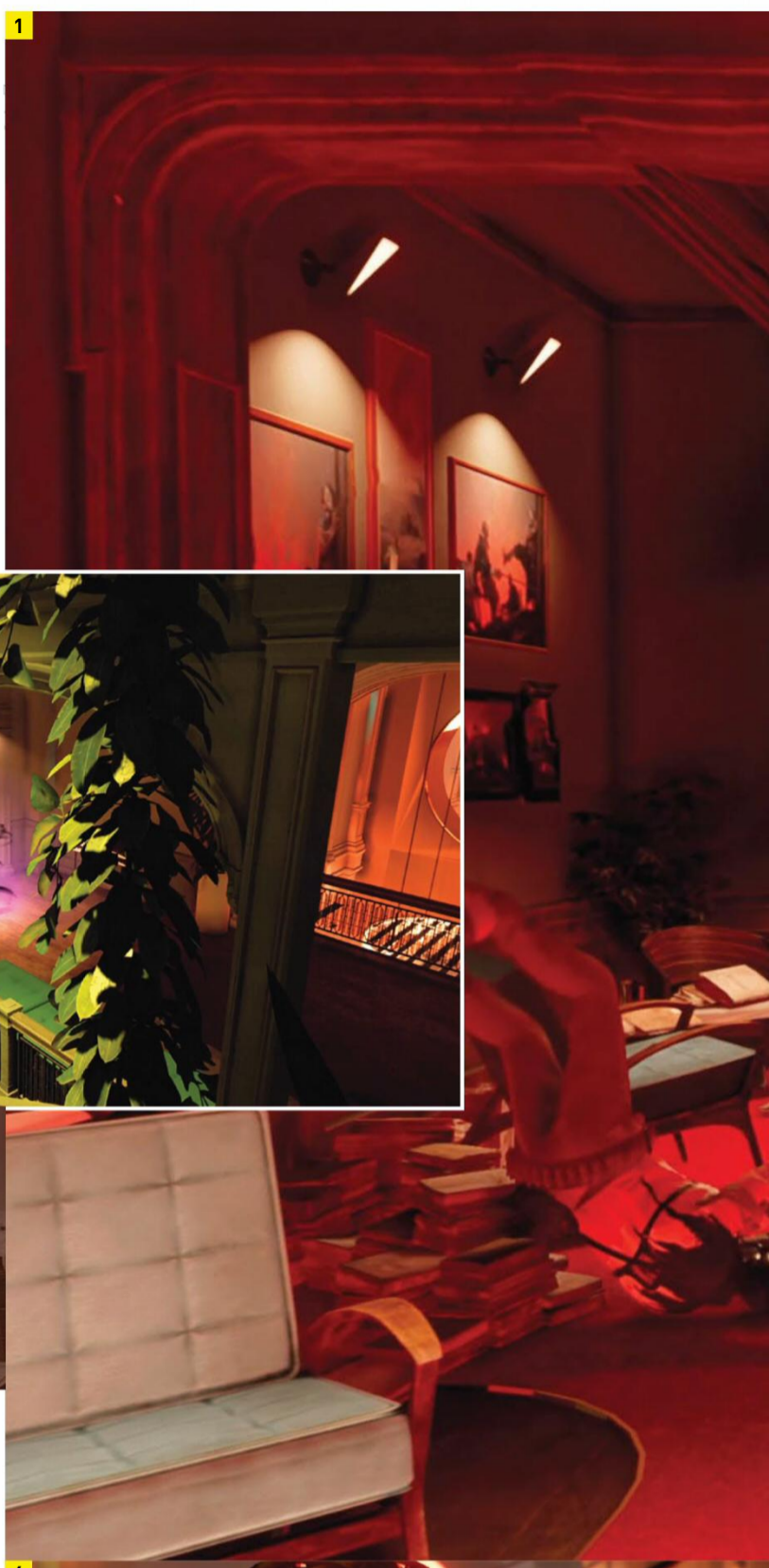
➤ only has a day to do it, because every 24 hours time resets and everything begins again.

“You have this small, short campaign of one day, but you have to explore it in various ways in order to find the solution to this puzzle. There’s one solution. But there are various ways to come to that solution,” says Bakaba.

‘Puzzle’ is the key word here. The world may be small on the surface, consisting of four districts spread across the island, but you’re thinking too literally. Deathloop exists in a state where every action has an outcome, and where everything from the time of day to the weather can affect the consequences of the actions you take. This is a dense world of many outcomes. You need to explore, play, and replay through its complex web of cause-and-affect events to manipulate your targets to where you need them to be for their deaths to make a difference.

Bakaba explains how it all works: “The moment-to-moment experience is very freeform, like an arcade game, but although there is only one way to break the time loop, how you learn this solution is completely up to you. Even when you know how to do it, it won’t be an easy feat to accomplish. You have to use your knowledge of the

1 Wolf-obsessed Aleksis Dorsey is throwing a party at his tacky mansion, so you’ll know where to find him. **2** See that purple swirl? Colt’s about to teleport behind that unsuspecting NPC. **3** This structure is powering the time loop, but who built it and how does it work? Let’s explore. **4** Is this Julianna, or has she already swapped appearances with an NPC?



environment and your skills to accomplish this task.”

PARTY HARD

Every district has a unique theme. “Each district tells its own story,” explains Bakaba, who reveals

Blackreef’s background. He explains the Visionaries are the island’s original settlers, who “struck gold” and decided to have an “everlasting party”. Over the course of the day you can see the party getting started and climaxing at Aleksis’ gaudy mansion.





“Everyone’s armed because they want to protect the party [...] you can see the crazy things those people do for fun and sometimes see the consequences,” teases Bakaba.

In action we see some of the Eternalists – young people recruited by the Visionaries – being killed for fun. Life is cheap when you can begin again the next day.

CAN YOU DIG IT?

Not everything you do on the island is overtly about corralling your targets to where you want to assassinate them. The island is open to experimentation. Bakaba shares how small changes can affect how the space around develops. In the game we see a group of Eternalists digging a hole. If we kill them in the morning and there’s no hole, then that could affect our target’s plans. Or maybe we needed that hole? Perhaps the dig would have opened a tunnel into our target’s district?

“It is all of those small things that the player can explore and have fun with,” explains Bakaba. “When you get to the end of the day it resets

and you can choose another path or act upon the knowledge that you’ve just gathered.”

This is no Groundhog Day, Bakaba tells us. “This time loop is a dirty process,” he says. This matters because characters in the world may change their patterns based on things you do, but in very subtle ways. A kind of déjà vu can take over. For example, one day a Visionary can grab a gun and head to the library to confront Colt. On the following day that target could get the sense they shouldn’t do that – after all, you did kill them the day before at the library. It means Deathloop’s world has small inconsistencies that creep in after repeat plays, just tiny enough to make the world feel alive and less rigid. You can affect and change it but there are always variances.

Bakaba tells us: “There is a limit to this, so an experienced player will know about all of the computations. These are rare, and most targets have a predictability.”

There’s just enough grit in the loop to raise some doubt and make

you constantly question the world. This matters because you’re not alone on Blackreef. Julianna is out for your blood, and like Colt she has a similar ability to remember everything that’s gone before. The difference is, while Colt initially wakes drugged and groggy, Julianna knows exactly why she’s on the island. As Colt stumbles around and

“DEATHLOOP’S WORLD HAS SMALL INCONSISTENCIES THAT CREEP IN AFTER REPEAT PLAYS.”

explores Blackreef to learn more of its secrets and about his own past, Julianna has one clear goal in mind: kill the dude.

“The two of them are close, in a sense,” says Bakaba. Julianna will talk to Colt throughout the game, over an earpiece. She is the one





1 One of Colt's targets, Aleksis, loves wolves – but which of these men is he? **2** Weapons have a handmade quality and each one feels different on the DualSense controller. **3** The game is fast-paced and has the freedom of movement of Arkane Studio's Dishonored. **4** We're intrigued by Bakaba's suggestion that we'll eventually find a way to hang onto our weapons from one day to the next.



» character who Colt can discuss events with. “Theirs is a relationship that goes in weird directions. She is unpredictable [...] She has a wide range of emotions. I love this character. She’s an interesting villain,” expresses the director.

“That’s the thing with villains,” he continues. “If they are not likable they are forgettable.”

You’ll want to like her, because you’ll also play as her. When in Julianna’s shoes your role is to drop into other players’ games and prevent Colt leaving the island. You can go head-to-head with him or get messy by taking on the appearance of any other character, even Colt himself. When this happens Julianna swaps appearances with them. You may have Julianna in your sights but she could actually be standing right next to you. And the NPC is clever enough to make use of every trick, too. It’s here that a knowledge of the island and its routines is your greatest weapon, both as Julianna and Colt.

“If a player is familiar with the loop and the environment they’ll pick up on discrepancies. But there is this moment of confusion, of hesitation, and new players will be affected but seasoned players will come to spot the small changes,” says Bakaba.

LOOPED IN

Nuance is the real name of the game here, as Bakaba reveals your memory is your best weapon. It’s the kind of attention to detail that will set Deathloop apart. While Colt needs to kill all eight Visionaries to break the loop and leave the island, “that doesn’t mean that every single one of them is a monster,” shares

Bakaba. “We didn’t want to make a game where somehow the targets deserved to die. It’s a shitty situation in which you have to do shitty things.”

He adds: “There are some things that you might not feel very comfortable with doing. But sadly, this is your condition, or you can choose to stay here for eternity. Definitely Colt has to get his hands dirty in some cases, and there are some side-quests that play with that aspect of ‘I’m not sure this is nice, but it’s one more reason to break this loop.’”

There’s a sense in what Bakaba’s not telling us that Blackreef is a





place that needs to be put out of its misery. Exploring the island and tampering with its routines will reveal more than ways to kill Colt's enemies. There's a secret history that needs to be discovered. The director hints how the Antenna, the massive machine that powers the time loop and dominates the island's skyline, isn't the only weird thing on this rock.

"Very early on Colt will find that this island has a few weird rules and the time loop is not the only thing influencing the island," he hints.

Exploration rewards you with more than unspeakable secrets. Bakaba teases how nosy players will find a "something" somewhere on the island that can directly affect how they play and even upgrade Colt. Usually anything you pick up in the game will be lost the following day as the 24-hour reset takes hold, but it seems there is a way to save found weapons. "And because of that 'thing' there is some progression, it's not a roguelike. There are powers, perks, weapons, and upgrades to unlock... you can basically build an arsenal," says the dev, tantalisingly.

"PS5'S SSD IS BEING HARNESSSED TO ENSURE REPLAYING THE DAY IS A SEAMLESS PROCESS."

After spending time with Arkane we're confident Deathloop is going to be one of the hottest games on PS5 in 2021. The team have it running at 60fps in 4K, and the SSD is being harnessed to ensure replaying the island's single day is a seamless process. DualSense is used to enhance the feel of everything in the game, from the sensation of loading ammunition into a gun to sliding across a marble floor. "You could see the smile on my face," says Bakaba as he recalls his first time with the new-generation controller in Deathloop.

We know you'll be smiling too when Deathloop arrives this May.



FORMAT PS5 ETA 2021 PUB CAPCOM DEV CAPCOM PLAYERS 1

RESIDENT EVIL VILLAGE

Small town, big scares

Ethan and Mia Winters had put the Baker estate incident behind them but the past has a habit of intruding on the present, especially in this series. The Winters' idyllic life is brought to a deadly end by none other than Chris Redfield, former Resi protagonist and now apparently an assassin for a counter-bioweapon NGO. The real twist in this tale, though, is that the Winters had been living under the protection of the



Massive weapon? Check. It's hermit hammer time. Yes we know, *hilarious*.

Bioterrorism Security Assessment Alliance – the very organisation Redfield works for.

Whether Redfield has gone rogue or the situation is even more complicated, Ethan apparently survives his encounter with Chris long enough to later stumble upon the titular village. Described as both beautiful and terrifying by multiple members of the development team, the horrifying hamlet is just as detailed as the previous game's domestic setting but slightly more open. You still pick your fights with mutated monsters in first-person, but rather than beating back overgrown petri dishes like last time, foes here are the stuff of both fairy stories and gothic tales. The town itself



Is this a face that only one particular Mother could love? We'll find out in 2021.

is far from deserted too, and the isolated community Ethan finds conduct strange rituals in praise of a being named 'Mother Miranda.'

Resident Evil Village will be making the most of PS5. For starters, it will support PS5's Tempest 3D AudioTech for immersive scares. Thrills and spills will

**"YOU STILL PICK
YOUR FIGHTS WITH
MUTATED MONSTERS
IN FIRST-PERSON."**

be rendered in 4K with ray tracing, and the DualSense's adaptive triggers will also factor into how you interact with your arsenal. The SSD will keep you on the edge of your seat by minimising interruptions to the experience with greatly reduced load times. Naturally the game will be a looker, with cutting-edge animation delivering epic boss battles. We're certain you'll enjoy your stay!

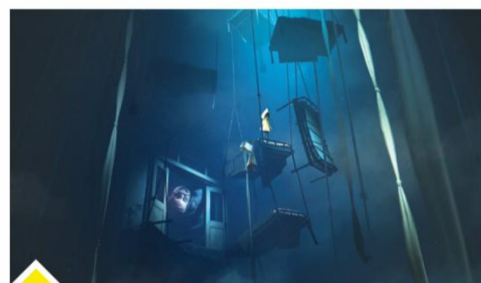
THREE MORE FRIGHTENERS



VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES 2

F FORMAT PS5, PS4 ETA 2021 **PUB** PARADOX INTERACTIVE
DEV HARDSUIT LABS **PLAYERS** 1

PlayStation people may have missed out on the PC-only original, but after a wait of 17 years, a sequel is on the horizon to this vaunted RPG – and we get to join in. Hopefully, it won't suck. (Sorry, that joke is compulsory for vampire games.) It's all about choice. What sort of human were you? Which powers will you choose? Who will you ally yourself with? What emotional state do you want your victims to be in? The vampire you are will be up to you, but one thing's for sure: it's always dinner time.



LITTLE NIGHTMARES II

F FORMAT PS5, PS4 ETA 2021 (PS5), 11 FEB (PS4) **PUB** BANDAI
NAMCO DEV TARSIER STUDIOS **PLAYERS** 1

Are you ready for more creepy puzzle-platforming in this macabre children's storybook world? The uneasy atmosphere is heightened from the last game. Eerie lighting illuminates the way through the dark forest opening. Empty, save for nasty traps, it's heart-in-mouth-mouth time as we pad forward. Gory bear traps are hidden in leaves, which scatter into the air as teeth trap shut. Just hope you've picked up a shoe (leftover from a vanished body) to clear it rather than your own delicate flesh. This sequel delivers the chills.



WRAITH: THE OBLIVION – AFTERLIFE

F FORMAT PS VR ETA 2021 **PUB** FAST TRAVEL GAMES
DEV FAST TRAVEL GAMES **PLAYERS** 1

The titles based on tabletop games, they keep a-coming. Set in the same universe as Vampire: The Masquerade, you're totally dead in this one, but that means you enjoy ghostly abilities such as supernatural senses and walking through walls.

Exploring a poorly-lit mansion from a first-person perspective requires nerves of steel. And when that mansion has monsters in it, and you're playing in VR, it's officially squeaky bum time. We're both excited for, and scared of, this one.

2021 PREVIEW



THE INSIDE VIEW

HARRY KRUEGER,
GAME DIRECTOR,
HOUSEMARQUE

"It's a very exciting time for us. In many ways Returnal has been a dream project for many of us. Having this almost once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to break into this new creative chapter of our company but also be on a new platform."

F FORMAT PS5 ETA 19 MAR **PUB** PLAYSTATION STUDIOS
DEV HOUSEMARQUE **PLAYERS** 1

RETURNAL

A change of space

Lost in space on a planet that is always changing, there's one constant: you keep dying. As astronaut Selene you wake up on a mysterious alien world amid the wreckage of your spaceship. Why you're here and how you can get off this rock are just two of the answers you'll seek as you struggle to regain your memory and fend off the beasts out for your blood.

Blending bullet-hell gunplay with a roguelike, procedurally generated loop,

"THE LIVE-DIE-REPEAT LOOP PUSHES PS5'S FAST-LOADING SSD TO THE LIMITS."

Returnal is a progression of Housemarque's identity. "It's a bold ambition for us, with plenty of crazy ideas that we never thought we'd put into a game," says Harry Krueger, game director at the studio.

Every time Selene dies the world resets, changing to make every run a surprise. Your arsenal of weapons changes too, ensuring you need to constantly rethink your strategies. There are ways to progress, however, as you can use scavenged alien tech to upgrade and improve Selene's abilities.

In action the game is as frenetic as anything the developer has created before. The screen fills with colour as Selene battles wild alien life amid the ruins of the planet's ancient civilisation.

SSD-LITE

Playing like a third-person Nex Machina blended with Dark Souls, the live-die-repeat loop ensures PS5's fast-loading SSD will be pushed to the limits to ensure you're back on the planet's surface in seconds.

Housemarque is making good use of the DualSense too, with the controller's adaptive triggers used to hot-swap between fire modes: instantly switch from down-the-scope aiming to each

weapon's alternate fire mode by squeezing the trigger. The pad's haptic feedback is used to bring to life details in the game, such as experiencing fragments of Selene's memory or the explosive feedback of the game's exotic alien weapons.

For game director Krueger PS5's 3D audio on PS5 makes the real difference. He explains how, as Selene, when we stand in the wreckage of our spaceship we can hear the rain dropping from the trees above plus the sound of crackling flames. It sounds like you're there.

Known for its bullet-hell throwbacks, Housemarque is embracing PS5's core tech to make Returnal something unique and incredibly modern.



With so much effort being put into creating sound for the game, we expect to have to listen out for alien lifeforms.

FAR CRY 6

Every hero needs a great villain



The island of Yara looks so real, it makes the stakes feel higher than ever.

Since Far Cry 3's Vaas, every entry in the series has had to have a great villain. Antón Castillo, Presidente of the island of Yara, could be the most memorable yet. He's played by Giancarlo Esposito, who chilled us in the likes of Breaking Bad, Okja, and The Mandalorian, and the acting legend brings real presence to the role.

Esposito adds a layer of depth to the cold and calculating dictator that looks like being reflected in the game as a whole. Playing as guerilla fighter Dani Rojas, you're trying to topple Castillo's regime, while he does everything in his power to keep Yara under his rule.

SAMBA DE AMIGO

Against his military force, you're a true underdog, which is where Far Cry operates best. Because Yara's isolated from the rest of the world, the design will feel like a mix of time periods, and the huge island has plenty of distinctive areas. Returning systems, and Amigos, the game's evolution of the Fangs For Hire system, mean this will feel closer to Far Cry 5 than New Dawn, with weapon and equipment crafting as usual.

While we've seen a little of Castillo and his efforts to raise his son Diego to follow in his dictatorial footsteps, we know less about Dani Rojas. But we do know he's already invested in the revolution, not an outsider. The relationship between Castillo, Diego, and Rojas could be compelling, and result in a story that's deeper than usual for Far Cry, giving us a reason to really care about Yara's fate.



FORMAT PS4 ETA TBC PUB NIS AMERICA DEV GRANZELLA PLAYERS 1

R-TYPE FINAL 2

Forcing its way onto our must-play lists

The Bydo Empire is back. Classic shooter R-Type is returning on PS4 with a host of modern tricks up its plasma cannon. You can choose from a hangar of fighters to customise with new and classic weapons, Force units and Bit devices. The stages are no longer static – instead the Bydo

'corruption' that is resurrecting the wreckage of old conquests changes the world around you as you fight, meaning the enemy will evolve and adapt. If your old-school skill on the flight stick proves too good, the game's real-time difficulty meter increases to match your performance.



FORMAT PS5, PS4 ETA 2021 PUB KEELWORKS DEV KEELWORKS PLAYERS 1-2

CYJNI: ALL GUNS BLAZING

Powering up our senses

Choose to route power to weapons or shields in a twin-stick shooter that recalls the heady days of hanging out in sweaty arcades. Developed by former film VFX artists, Cygni is a riot of colour and eye-popping animation. Between missions you can upgrade your ship to stand a better chance of

taking down the enemy bosses yet to come. Cygni isn't looking to reinvent the shooter but is a celebration of everything we love about the genre: eye-candy visuals, screen-engulfing boss battles, and bullet hell mazes, all wrapped in cinematic spectacle. Slip into the cockpit this spring.

2021 PREVIEW

FORMAT PS5, PS4 ETA 2021 PUB TBC DEV KO_OP PLAYERS 1

GOODBYE VOLCANO HIGH

Get ready for an eruption of drama and... musical theatre?

We ask co-directors Saleem Dabbous and Kyle McKernan, “So, is it a bit like *Saved By The Bell* but with dinosaurs?” The pair respond with uproarious laughter.

Dabbous says, after a beat, “Not tonally!”

“Yeah... No.” McKernan adds.

Well, we had to ask. The project instead draws inspiration from films like *Lady Bird* and *Booksmart* as well as some particularly angsty anime, but this story-driven game isn’t trying to be a playable version of those stories either.

McKernan tells us, “It’s hard to pin down in a word or two, what it is – which I think is actually to the game’s strength in a lot of ways. [We’re still trying to] figure out ways that we can continually surprise the player with the choices they’re making [by] messing with how flexible our user interface is.”

Dabbous clarifies, “What we’re trying to hit is the feeling of both watching something kind of cinematic or television-like [...] You’re watching this story, but you’re also participating in it. [...] Fang is writing songs, and you’re also influencing that.”

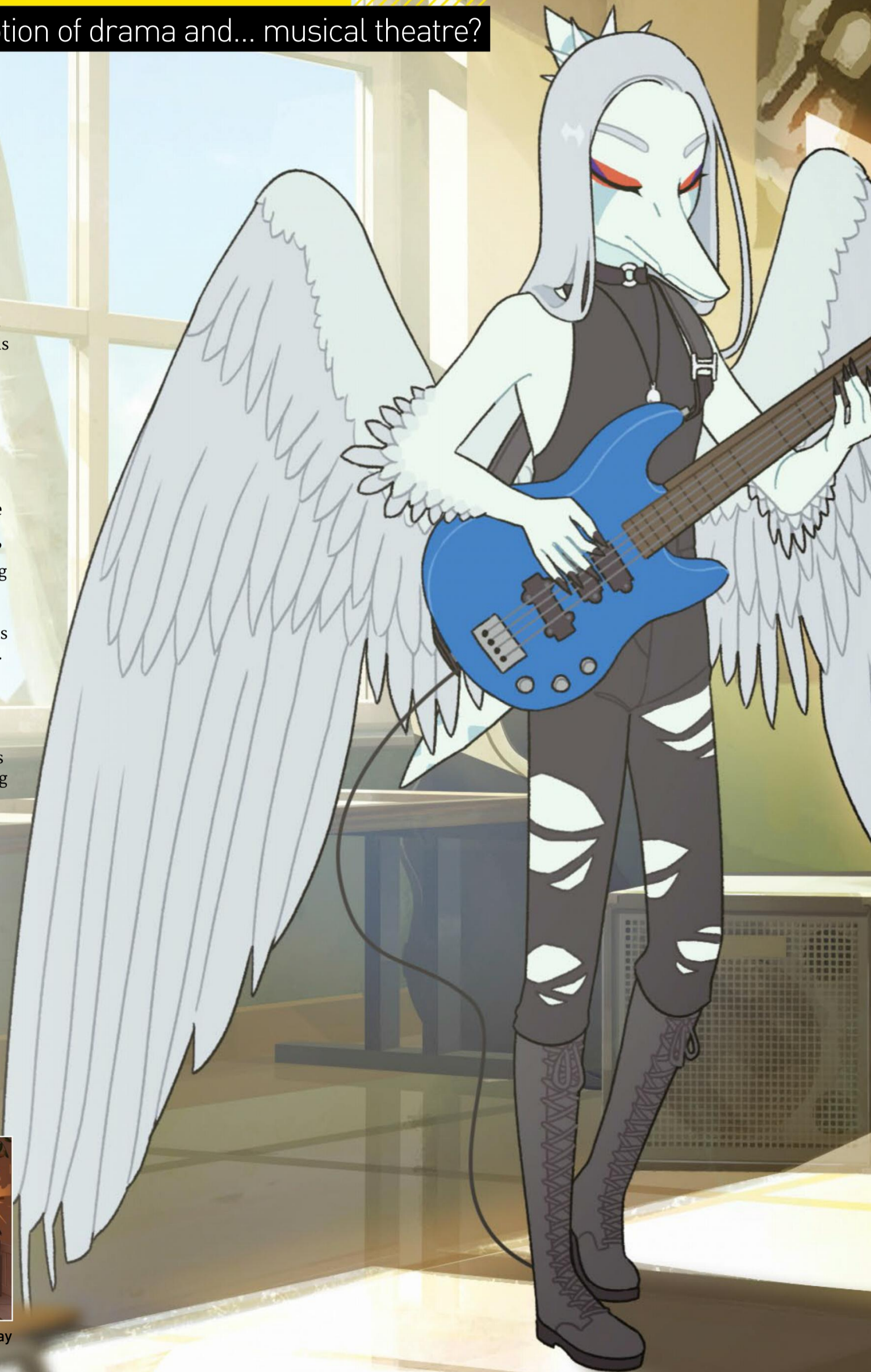
KILLING US SOFTLY

Moving fluidly between making choices and experiencing the story is something the devs stress, but so too is the role of music. Protagonist Fang has a band, *VWorm Drama*, with their best friend, Trish, and the developers tell us how you feature in these performances.

Dabbous explains, “It’s really been the core of our work for a while and it was something that has always been a part of this project – but we weren’t really ready to talk about it. [...] This is something that we can’t wait to really show off [...] Music is [central] to Fang’s identity and to the storyline of the game and how we express Fang’s changing emotions and personality and growth.”



Choose your words carefully – what you say will affect the way the story plays out.





Fang is voiced by nonbinary actor Lachlan Watson, who you may know from playing Theo in *The Chilling Adventures Of Sabrina*.

McKernan tells us, “It really is like a creative and emotional journey for Fang [...] so we want the player to be a part of that.”

Finer musical gameplay details are still being nailed down and the devs say they don’t want to enthuse about a particular aspect of this too early when it could be different in the final game.

Dabbous says, “We’re still exploring musical concepts. Our audio director has composed over 40 different tracks – and those are just style explorations.”

He then explains, “That inspires the game design and then the game design in turn inspires the music writing process.”

Dabbous later says, “[Goodbye Volcano High is] actually really similar to something like *Gnog*, or *Winding Worlds* – our previous games – because those are all games that rely on the final polish and the visual fidelity of our artists’ intent and the animations and the music all working together. That’s only something that lands and fits and falls into place at the end of our development process.”

He goes on to say, “There’s this amazing quote from [technical artist] Jane Ng [...] where she was like, with a content-driven game like *Firewatch* you don’t know if it’s good until the very end so you just have to have all of this faith that you’re going to get there – and that’s kind of where we’re at right now.”

Kyle candidly shares, “There’s like that screenshot of you and me [that] you

“MUSIC IS [CENTRAL] TO FANG’S IDENTITY AND TO THE STORYLINE OF THE GAME.”

tweeted the other day where I’m just like ‘Saleem, is our game good?’ And you were like ‘I don’t know yet!’”

We all laugh because understanding the value of a piece of work is a struggle any creative person will know intimately. As they say, you can’t rush a masterpiece, and we’re looking forward to *Ko_op*’s symphony of teenage angst when it debuts on PS5.

THREE MAGICAL TALES



THE GOOD LIFE

FORMAT PS4 **ETA** SUMMER 2021 **PUB** THE IRREGULAR CORPORATION **DEV** WHITE OWLS INC **PLAYERS** 1

More than 12,000 fans Kickstarted this strange, ahem, tail. Directed by Swery of *Deadly Premonition* fame, you are New Yorker Naomi, a photojournalist who has come to the British town of Rainy Woods in search of a scoop. Little does she know she’s about to stumble on a murder mystery most a-paw-ling. The maiden impaled by a sword in a pond is just the tip of this iceberg as it turns out the town’s residents can turn into cats and dogs! But now we think about it, maybe there was a clue in the town’s name all along...



PARTY ANIMAL

FORMAT PS4 **ETA** TBC **PUB** SOURCE TECHNOLOGY **DEV** RECREATE GAMES **PLAYERS** 4+

No, this isn’t Team OPM’s alter-ego but a physics-based brawler in a similar vein to *Gang Beasts*. Choose from a charming roster of plushified animals – including little lizards, pudgy corgis, and even unicorns – before throwing down with at least three other escapees from the petting zoo. But it’s not just your fists doing the talking: in the demo we saw opponents knocking the stuffing out of each other with lollipop batons and even bits of the environment. We’re warming up to, ahem, join the conversation. Put ‘em up!



A SPACE FOR THE UNBOUND

FORMAT PS4 **ETA** 2021 **PUB** PQUBE **DEV** MOJIKEN **PLAYERS** 1

Set in ‘90s Indonesia, this pixel-art coming-of-age story is a joy to look at. Centring on the relationship between a boy and a girl, it deals with some serious issues while also revolving around the playful imagination of children. There are doses of dreamy magical realism here with its supernatural elements.

You explore the town in which the pair live, solving puzzles in an adventure game manner, and delving inside people’s minds to do much the same. We always love a slice of life with a magical twist, and expect to shed a tear or ten over this one.

2021 PREVIEW



Gollum versus Ringwraith?
We wouldn't put our money
on the little guy.

FORMAT PS5 ETA 2021 PUB DAEDALIC ENTERTAINMENT DEV DAEDALIC ENTERTAINMENT PLAYERS 1

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: GOLLUM

Is this adventure PS5's precious? We speak to Daedalic Entertainment to discover Gollum's secrets – and perhaps some of Sméagol's

Wait until you look into his cute big eyes," exclaims Tilman Schanen, lead narrative designer on *The Lord Of The Rings: Gollum*. We've dared to ask whether a vicious, spiteful character like Gollum can ever be likable.

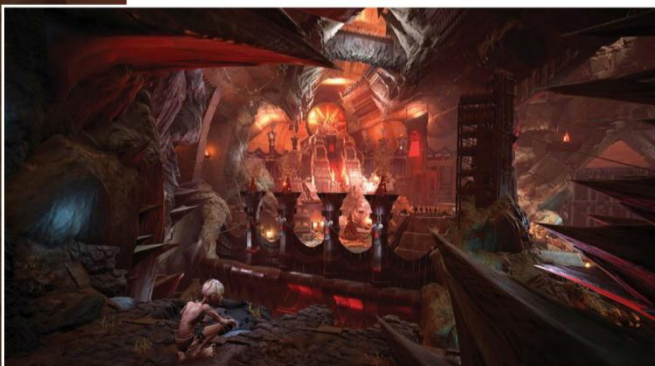
"Gollum can be vicious, and as players we will not agree with everything he does," continues Schanen. "But there is also good in him, and now it is up to the player to push him more towards his old, innocent Hobbit-origin or be all-out nasty Gollum, if they want to."

The setting and story of Daedalic's game, with its early levels playing out in the oppressive caves and castle keeps of Mordor, has been chosen for a reason: we see Gollum surviving alongside characters vastly more evil and deranged than our ring-obsessed ex-Hobbit.

Schanen explains: "We all love to root for outsiders and underdogs, and Gollum is both an outsider and an underdog wherever he goes. We will constantly find ourselves in trouble seemingly too big to handle for the little guy, and our game designers do an excellent job of making you feel just that."

LOOK WHO'S TOLKIEN

Though the game begins amid familiar surroundings, particularly for anyone who's familiar with JRR Tolkien's fantasy source material, the developer tells us it features areas of Middle-earth that have not been seen in detail before. Gollum will be heading to the Black Pits of Sauron's Dark Tower, for example.



"The one place in Middle-earth we don't want to see any closer," Sam called it.

Will we be visiting completely new environments not seen in the films or described in the books? "Yes and no," teases Schanen.

Taking place parallel to the first part of the Fellowship Of The Ring, while Frodo is biding his time in the Shire awaiting Gandalf's return, Gollum is set on stealing back his precious. "He is looking for some 'mighty friends' who could help him retake the Ring that Bilbo stole from him," shares Schanen.

Soon these plans unravel as the Dark Lord turns out to be less than friendly and Gollum realises he is truly alone in this violent world. His mission is admittedly a selfish one: to steal the One Ring and protect it from anyone who wants to take it from him, be they Dark Lord, Orc, Hobbit, Elf, or wizard.

"Unfortunately, Sméagol, who had been under Gollum's thumb for many years, will ultimately develop his very own aspirations, and that creates new goals but also new conflicts for players to navigate," Schanen tells us, teasing the internal struggle we'll play through as we balance the two conflicting halves of our fish-snacking protagonist's personality.

This aspect of the game lends itself to choice-led narrative branches. Gollum likes to debate with himself, or rather with his alter ego Sméagol, and in the game we get to play through those conversations. "This will lead to some branching, although for the most part the story will be quite linear. Not every decision we make will change the story dramatically. But yes, there will be alternative endings," says Schanen. "Ultimately, Gollum's own ending, of course, is set in stone by Professor Tolkien. But within our own story, the player can influence the outcome and will affect the characters he meets on his journey."

BOOK TO BASICS

The story is set up to drip-feed famous faces from the books into Gollum's adventure. Schanen confirms Gandalf will meddle in your efforts to reclaim the Ring Of

Power, and there'll be cameos from other characters familiar to fans.

"We do not try to force lore characters into the story," Schanen explains to us. "All the characters we meet will be characters that Gollum could have and would have met on his journey. Tolkien never described in great detail what happened to Gollum in the time of our story. That gives us the opportunity to also introduce entirely new characters to the universe, whose lives the player will be able to impact through his decisions."

When Gollum comes up against these characters it's not in his nature to fight them, but the game does feature a unique stealth mechanic. Being a withered, wiry character, when Gollum tries to choke a human you'll need to tussle

"GOLLUM IS BOTH AN OUTSIDER AND AN UNDERDOG WHEREVER HE GOES."

with the DualSense controller to counter your victim's movement. "Players will have to counter the tumbling movement of their victims with the joystick in order to hold on to them until they pass out," explains lead game designer Martin Wilkes. "Frontal assault against human-sized enemies only serves to briefly distract and disorient them. Overall, we want players to weigh every encounter carefully. Gollum's strength lies in cunning, not combat, so whenever players decide the latter is the best course of action, it takes quite a bit of effort and comes with considerable risks."

That is what makes this game so unique: it captures the pitiful essence of its central character and places his flaws at the heart of the gameplay. It's down to you how far you want to lean into this big-eyed protagonist's characteristics.

F FORMAT PS5 **ETA** 2021 **PUB** PLAYSTATION STUDIOS **DEV** INSOMNIAC GAMES **PLAYERS** 1

RATCHET & CLANK: RIFT APART

Through the looking glass

Talk about smart business moves. When PlayStation bought long-time collaborator Insomniac Games last year, making it a first-party studio, who'd have thought together they'd be releasing one of PS5's defining launch games, as well as one of its most important new-generation showpieces?

Rift Apart is more than just another entry in a long-established franchise. It uses the quirkiness of this third-person shooter to show what the technology in your white-winged box can really do. Don't let the cartoon visuals fool you (though they look tremendous, and make use of a Resolution/Performance mode toggle); under the hood this new Ratchet & Clank pushes PS5 hard.

The zany arsenal of overpowered and comical weaponry makes use of the DualSense so you finally feel what Ratchet feels, and the new rift-hopping powers employ the SSD to make the colourful environments feel like playgrounds. Whether you're hopping between different planets, or using a grapple hook (the Rift Tether) to fold levels in on themselves or shoot yourself across a gunfight instantly, it's some of



SONG OF HORROR: COMPLETE EDITION

F FORMAT PS4 **ETA** SPRING 2021 **PUB** RAIDER GAMES **DEV** PROTOCOL GAMES **PLAYERS** 1

Originally released episodically on PC, this collects together all five parts of Song Of Horror along with post-launch tweaks. Each chapter centres on a new location where you're hunted by The Presence, a creature of old sprung forth from a music box. The AI means on multiple playthroughs you'll never be quite sure when you'll be set upon. Different characters have their own advantages, and if they die they're gone for good, your next hero following in their footsteps (and sometimes discovering what happened to them).



DUSTBORN

F FORMAT PS4 **ETA** TBC **PUB** TBC **DEV** RED THREAD GAMES **PLAYERS** 1

Hit the road in this post-apocalyptic tale of hope, friendship, love, robots – and the power of words. As Pax, an ex-con con artist with special abilities fuelled by disinformation, your goal is to get some precious cargo through America's now-divided states alongside your found family. Two authoritarian groups, the stalking Puritans and the hard-line Justice, make your journey anything but a jaunt and, rounding off the list of Pax's present problems, you're four months pregnant too. This third-person story-driven action-adventure looks set to be a ripping good yarn when it debuts next year.



MUNDAUN

F FORMAT PS4 **ETA** TBC **PUB** MWM INTERACTIVE **DEV** HIDDEN FIELDS **PLAYERS** 1

This hand-pencilled first-person adventure looks like it's been taken directly from the artist's scribbles into the game, and to a degree it has. Your grandfather had died in a mysterious fire, which leads you back into the Swiss Alps. Rather than clear answers you find more questions as an evil presence is turning the locals into bloodthirsty weirdos. Item management, clever puzzles, and a unique sense of place puts this right up there with Silent Hill. If you're hankering for a return to classic, atmospheric horror then scrawl Mundaun on your 2021 must-play list.



MAQUETTE

F FORMAT PS4 **ETA** TBC **PUB** ANNAPURNA INTERACTIVE **DEV** GRACEFUL DECAY **PLAYERS** 1

What's big and small at the same time? No, it's not a lost Alan Carr joke, it's the premise of this first-person puzzler. Everything in the game's world, from its elegant buildings to each blade of grass, is simultaneously tiny and huge. The world can be zoomed in and out of time and again to discover new angles and solutions to puzzles: zoom out and out, and a crack in the pavement becomes a chasm. To link the puzzles, you play through key moments in a couple's life, the game evoking the sense of how minor problems in a relationship sometimes feel big and out of control.

the best use of PS5's super-fast loading capabilities we've ever seen, as it's inextricably linked to the moment-to-moment action.

GOING METROPOLITAN

In practice it turns what's always been a breezy and bombastic series into something that feels incredibly slick and responsive. In arenas that have plenty of rifts to make use of, you can avoid getting pinned down by staying on the move, popping out behind enemies to outflank them. As you might expect, the game also utilises 3D Tempest AudioTech, so it's worth slipping those headphones on to help reorient yourself after a rift jump during combat. It might take a bit of getting used to, as we're not used to instantly reappearing at the other side of the map in shooters, but it's certainly impressive and fits naturally into the style of the series as we know it.

After all, it's been a while since the last true entry in the series, as PS4's Ratchet & Clank was akin to a reboot to tie into the animated film. This time the action returns to the universe we came to love on PS2 and PS3, with the robotic Doctor Nefarious back like a bad penny, and what we've seen so far mainly centres on Metropolis city, full of high-rises, plants, and glittering glass.

The return of other fan-favourite planets has also been hinted at, so long-time fans will have plenty to look forward to. That said, with ray-tracing, more varied enemies than in any preceding games, and more visual effects, even those older planets will feel brand-new. Near-instant travel

between planets is also, of course, new, so expect the pace to be a little different. Despite that we still expect there'll be plenty of time for the series' trademark slapstick (and slightly crass) humour.

There are plenty of new teases too, including an enigmatic female Lombax who Clank seems to end up paired up with due to the universe being torn to shreds. Could this be a parallel-universe Ratchet, and might there be an alternate version of Clank to match? We don't know for sure, but what we do know is that this launch-window PS5 exclusive is going to be one of the most impressive adventures on the console.

“THE NEW RIFT-HOPPING POWERS EMPLOY THE SSD TO MAKE THE COLOURFUL ENVIRONMENTS FEEL LIKE PLAYGROUNDS.”



QUANTUM ERROR

i **FORMAT** PS5, PS4 **ETA** TBC **PUB** TEAMKILL MEDIA
DEV TEAMKILL MEDIA **PLAYERS** 1

Cosmic horror threatens the fabric of space and time. Who you gonna call? The fire brigade. This indie's been on our radar for over a year, and while the low budget is evident it's not stopping the team of brothers from cramming their game with ideas. Playing like a mix of Doom, Half-Life, and Control, Teamkill's ambition isn't in doubt, though only time will tell if Quantum Error can live up to all those references. The team is promising to make use of PS5's features (though the game is PS4-bound too), so expect some DualSense fun, like being able to 'feel' if a door is hot by the purr of the pad.



DISCO ELYSIUM: FINAL CUT

i **FORMAT** PS5, PS4 **ETA** MARCH **PUB** ZA/UM
DEV ZA/UM **PLAYERS** 1

After 18 months of teasing, the world of Elysium – one already teetering on the brink, the unexplainable Pale punching holes in reality between its islets – is coming to PS4 and PS5. We discover the world via a surly police detective and the murder he's trying to solve. The problem? He's forgotten who he is. Aided by temporary partner Kim, the mystery spirals out of control. This Final Cut edition features extra quests, new characters to quiz, and a whole new area to explore. As well as this, the PS5 version will run at 40K/60fps and make use of the DualSense controller.



ENDLESS DUNGEON

i **FORMAT** PS4 **ETA** TBC **PUB** SEGA
DEV AMPLITUDE STUDIOS, SEGA **PLAYERS** 1-4

Somewhere in the deep cold of space you stumble across an abandoned station. With thoughts darting between discovering the reason it's lying dormant and 'How much loot can I steal?' you recruit a team and dive into its corridors. This roguelite tactics shooter has a familiar loop wrapped in colourful visuals: set up your squad and defences before you open the next door and defend against the horde. Your aim is to get a crystal to its power source unharmed, to unlock the next area of the station. Endless Dungeon is a grind, but the kind you love to return to time and again.



IT TAKES TWO

i **FORMAT** PS4 **ETA** TBC **PUB** EA
DEV HAZELIGHT **PLAYERS** 1-2

"It'll blow your *blorp*ing mind away," exclaimed Hazelight's founder Joseph Fares when he announced It Takes Two last summer. At odds with that bravado, the game is a co-op platform adventure where you play out a child's trauma when her parents separate. She projects her feelings onto two dolls – controlled by you and a friend – that must navigate fantastic worlds, one of which is a level built around the child's emotional state. It's gaming as allegory and while Fares is slowly becoming videogames' PT Barnum, when it comes to classy co-op he can back up his words with actions.



DEV Q&A



i FORMAT PS5, PS4 ETA 2021 PUB NEOSTREAM INTERACTIVE DEV NEOSTREAM INTERACTIVE PLAYERS 1

LITTLE DEVIL INSIDE

The devil is in the tiniest details

Looking like a Pixar short mixed with *Monster Hunter: World*, this RPG's cute yet dangerous setup draws you in. Your job is to help Professor Vincent catalogue the strange creatures of your world before magic disappears and takes these wonders with it. Aided by the Prof's close friend Dr Oliver, who creates your arsenal of tools and gadgets, the great adventure begins. The world is free to roam, and across the map are deserts, oceans, and mountains to explore.

OPM: What has influenced and inspired Little Devil Inside?

Kody Lee: The world of Little Devil Inside did not originate from a single particular inspirational source. It is something that was conceived and grown from our creative director's personal recollections as a gamer ever since childhood.

We are aware that a lot of the visual style has been compared to the *Zelda* series and we can understand the aesthetic similarity created in people's minds. There have been many influences from *Karateka* and *Wonderboy 2* to *Relentless*, *Little Big Adventure*, *Alone In The Dark*, *Betrayal At Krondor*, and, of course, the *Zelda* series and *XCOM*... the list goes on.

The governing design principle we are trying to adhere to is minimalism. And minimalism that is expressed using contrast – for example, how the game uses simple, stereotypic expressions, toy-like characters and symbolic elements that directly contrast against a more realistic background and atmosphere.

OPM: How does survival work?

KL: Survival gameplay is not designed to



What sort of magical creatures live in the desert? Only one way to find out...

be a tedious chore but something that supports and amplifies some of the hardship the protagonist goes through when exploring the outside world or trying to fulfil some of the missions and quests.

One of the key features we are trying to achieve in the physical world is diversity in atmosphere and that obviously involves different weather and climate. So when not prepared for the worst, you will need to struggle confronting mother nature.

Survival elements such as crafting tools, setting up campfires, taking shelter in a tent, scavenging for food ingredients and resources, cooking up meals etc. are not intended to be a mind-boggling puzzle but something very simple to do.

Put simply, we do not intend to make a hardcore survival game but a need that comes naturally.

OPM: How important is the hometown space in the game?

KL: The hometown or Herrington (that's what we're calling it for now) is a safe place that is once again, in direct contrast to the dangers of the outside world. It is somewhere you can return to after a long hard journey. People go about living their everyday lives not too concerned about what goes on outside.

We think the hometown will provide a contrasting stage to offer a more relaxed gameplay experience in a pleasant and comfortable environment. You can shop around at various shops to restock your gear and supplies, sell off looted items, treat yourself to some luxury at a fancy café, take a soothing hot bath, buy and sell clothes or even perform simple errands for people to earn some extra crowns.

There are some mini villages located in certain regions in the world map that offer some of these functions but not in the same mood and atmosphere.

OPM: Is the game co-op?

KL: Co-op multiplayer was a feature we really wanted to do where up to four to six players can form a team to perform quests together or simply mingle in town. However, with other scope of the main game expanding, we did not have the manpower to do everything, so much as it hurt us, we decided to put a hold on this.



The map covers many landscapes – it's going to be absolutely massive.

FORMAT PS5, PS4 ETA 2021 PUB PLAYSTATION STUDIOS DEV GUERILLA GAMES PLAYERS 1

HORIZON FORBIDDEN WEST

So much to sea, so much to do

Humanity only narrowly survived a first extinction event, which happened generations before the time *Horizon's* set. We won't go over exactly what went wrong in case you haven't played the first game (the Complete Edition is on PS Now, so it's a great time to catch up), but robotic AI animals stalk the land, and civilisation had to start anew. Aloy, having successfully fended off a dark threat in *Zero Dawn*, now turns her gaze westward, where a new threat of extinction is brewing.

This journey takes her towards the Pacific Coast, away from her home in what was Colorado (the first game also featured a lot of landmarks from Utah). The new land, known as the Forbidden West, was teased in the

last game as a mysterious and dangerous place, filled with deserts, ruins, and more dangerous machines than the ones we've become familiar with.

UNDER THE SEA

Though it may be harsh, we've seen Aloy pass through the inhospitable deserts to discover the Forbidden West is home to many biomes, from overgrown, ruined cities to wooded valleys and tropical beaches. Along the coast some of the ancient ruins of the Old Ones (which were our own cities) have been partially submerged by rising sea levels.

Underwater exploration seems to play a role in how you tease out the mysteries of this more dangerous location. The ruined cities are more towering than before, Aloy seeming tiny against skyscrapers wrapped in dense green

and even a dilapidated Golden Gate Bridge covered in plantlife – making us want to go out and explore for ourselves.

Aloy doesn't just have to worry about rising sea levels, but the very climate itself turning against the planet. Something in the Forbidden West seems to be causing tumultuous storms that threaten to destroy everything humanity has rebuilt, and naturally she needs to stop that from happening. That means forging alliances with the people who call the Forbidden West their home, besting new corrupted machines, delving into the past once again, and meeting old friends and enemies alike.

Expect to be doing more of what you're used to, with PS5 allowing more fidelity in the actions you can take. You'll be fighting huge machines with your bow and staff; salvaging parts to craft traps against them and hacking into them (and taking on humans too); and exploring a map much bigger and more detailed than the one in *Zero Dawn*. The first game was something special, but here Guerilla Games is really showing that its open-world series can be one of the most inventive and awe-inspiring you'll ever play.

"A MYSTERIOUS, DANGEROUS PLACE FILLED WITH DESERTS AND RUINS."



FORMAT PS5, PS4 ETA SPRING PUB EMBERLABS DEV EMBERLABS PLAYERS 1

KENA: BRIDGE OF SPIRITS

Rotten to the core, in the best way possible

After teasing us for over two hours in our demo with the promise of 100 cute and cuddly Rot to collect and use, EmberLabs' co-founders Josh and Mike Grier finally cave in and show us the mass of wholesome goodness in action. On screen 100 big-eyed, black squidgy creatures dance to our every command.

It's hard not to be impressed by the spectacle. Running on PS5 there's no slowdown, the 4K visuals remain clean and sharp, and every Rot has its own personality and action. Some will follow obediently, some will dally in the Disney-like

colourful scenery, while others play and tussle with one another. We know they're individual little Rotties because we bought one a hat earlier, using the game's Gem currency, and we can see the cap bobbing around amid the muddle of cuteness.

While the developer is aiming to bring the same level of detail to the PS4 edition of Kena: Bridge Of Spirits, currently you can only see 20 Rot on screen at once.

ROT A LOT

Your Rot matter because they're the glue that binds everything in the game together. Out of combat you use your Rot to manipulate the environment and solve puzzles; ➤

The hand-animated characters have a real sense of personality.

2021 PREVIEW

"ON PS5 THERE'S
NO SLOWDOWN;
THE 4K VISUALS
REMAIN CLEAN."



2021 PREVIEW

1 You can collect hats for your Rot – it's great when you spot one you've dressed up in action, helping you out in a fight. **2** The purified world is a really beautiful place. Exploring is a joy. **3** However, it's not all wandering in lovely landscapes. Kena's task is to purify the world of the corrupted spirits that threaten it, helping them to move on.



» you can command them to help move objects, such as statues and boulders, in order to discover secrets and collectibles.

Areas of the world are locked away if you don't have enough Rot to open new paths or solve puzzles. Usefully the DualSense rumbles lightly when a Rot is hidden nearby, and on the map we see tallies indicating how many Rot remain in areas of the world.

"It's a pretty big world, so to go and find all 100 Rots could be a little difficult," says Mike Grier.

"Even if you know there's two Rot left it's still a challenge to find them," adds Josh Grier.

"You'll want to as well, because when you find that last Rot the entire world opens up," chips in Mike.

In the heat of action they join protagonist Kena to buff her weapons and create Rot-enhanced attacks. We see the Rot

Hammer in action. It's a heavy attack on **B2**. We grin as the tiny goofs gather around Kena's staff and turn its tip into a weighty hammer. As she smashes it down into a corrupted spirit



"THE MORE ROT YOU'VE FOUND IN THE WORLD, THE MORE ABILITIES YOU CAN SUMMON."

the little guys explode off, becoming a makeshift projectile attack.

Your tribe of Rot won't be at your side from the off during combat. First Kena must swing solo to coax the playful creatures from hiding. By landing combos of hits on her enemies you build courage, and the better you do, the more Rot come to join the fight. And the more Rot you've found in the world, the more abilities you can summon.

ROT WHISPERER

As you make progress through the game not only can you build your Rot army to make life a little easier, you're able to unlock new abilities and moves. During our demo we're shown an upgrade that permanently empowers a portion of our Rot, so we begin every fight with a pack of

the little guys to call upon, enough for one attack.

A new late-game weapon the team show us is the Rot Bomb. This explosion of whimsy can be used to harm enemies or clear areas of the environment. Hurl a ball of Rot at enemies and they'll explode before scurrying away to rejoin the pack.

When you're not weaponising your Rot they can be used in more tactical ways, to swarm enemies and disorientate them just long enough for Kena to strike. As a crowd-control method your Rot come in handy, and the more them you can collect, the greater your chance of managing larger groups of enemies.

Later we are shown something more intriguing. Called the Rot Clump, when you have enough courage banked you can call on the





little guys to group together for a controllable special. The left stick moves Kena while the right handles the Rot Clump; slam and spin attacks are on the **R1** and **R2** buttons.

“It’s pretty powerful; it can cut through corruption in the environment or you can destroy enemies with it. [...] It gives you a little burst of havoc,” says Josh.

But it’s more. The Rot have their own story to tell, and collecting all 100 reveals what they are. The Rot Clump is a glimpse of this secret; at level one we see a snake-like creature, at level two a face emerges.

“The Clump hints at their previous form. Its body will evolve and retake the shape of the actual Rot when they come together,” explains Josh.

Combat is focussed on corrupted zones, areas where a stubborn

spirit’s refusal to move on has infected the world. We approach a glade and the grass and trees have been turned to red dust. We need to clear the area of enemies, then cure the revealed flower ‘heart’. Doing so instantly evaporates the corruption and the scene turns over in a wave of colour – the power of PS5 and its SSD ensures this happens in real time, in the blink of an eye. It’s a tingling, satisfying moment.

BOW DOWN

Exploration has a light metroidvania structure. “We think of it as ‘wide linear,’” says Josh, “you have options, you have choice, but the core path is pretty much set for you.” It encourages us to



THE INSIDE VIEW

JOSH GRIER,
CO-FOUNDER,
EMBERLABS

“The currency in the game are small gems you collect. These can be used to buy hats, cosmetic upgrades for your Rot. There are around 60 different varieties of hats in the game, and they’re themed to the world and enemies you’ve defeated.”

nose around the beautifully rendered world. Unlocking Kena’s bow, for example, will enable you to discover new routes – a targeted shot at a series of cogs in a complex puzzle mechanism opens a new path. The bomb works in a similar way, and the more Rot in your pack, the larger the object they can lift and move, and the more elaborate puzzles you can solve.

It all comes to bear as we see the core loop of the game in action. Playing through the first world, a lush forest with a ramshackle village at its heart, Kena must explore the area to clean corrupted zones of this world’s unhappy spirit, and its ‘helper’ spirits. In-game this means searching the world for three relics, objects the spirit valued in life. Each is marked on our map but we





- 1** Other people in the forest will need your help. These sweet little children need to be reunited with their brother.
- 2** The bow uses the DualSense's haptic triggers to enhance the feeling of fighting the corrupted spirits, and you can play minigames to develop Kena's abilities.
- 3** The DualSense will rumble when a hidden Rot is close by.
- 4** Defeat the enemies and cure the heart to clear an area.



» must hunt around to reach them. Each relic is either held by a mini-boss, or we have to solve a large puzzle to earn the item.

“We think of each world as a dungeon, where you run around and find the keys, and bring them back to a central location,” says Josh.

In our demo we battle two spirits. The Kappa is agile and puts up a fight; its speed is countered with our Rot as they scramble over to slow its movement and pin it down just long enough for us to damage it. Once we've defeated it and mopped up the other enemies, the corruption's heart opens and we Pulse it – an ability on **Ⓜ** that's also used to find health-giving Tears and reveal hints in the environment – to clear the scene, and open a way forward.

The second boss is the Wood Knight, and this one reveals Kena's gamesy heritage as we need to target yellow weak spots with our bow. Aided by the Rot to slow its movement and a short slow-mo buff as we jump and shoot, the



“OUR QUEST LEADS TO A SHOWDOWN WITH THIS WORLD'S MAIN TROUBLEMAKER.”

creature is defeated. This time we can shoot the revealed heart, demonstrating how Kena's growing arsenal of abilities opens new areas.

Our quest leads to a showdown in a corrupted wood with this world's main troublemaker, Taro. The world around us dims, the sky darkens and a crystal-sharp rain peppers the screen, the ground turns to mud and the overall tone changes. It's impressively cinematic and oppressively foreboding as we're taken back to the moment Taro died.

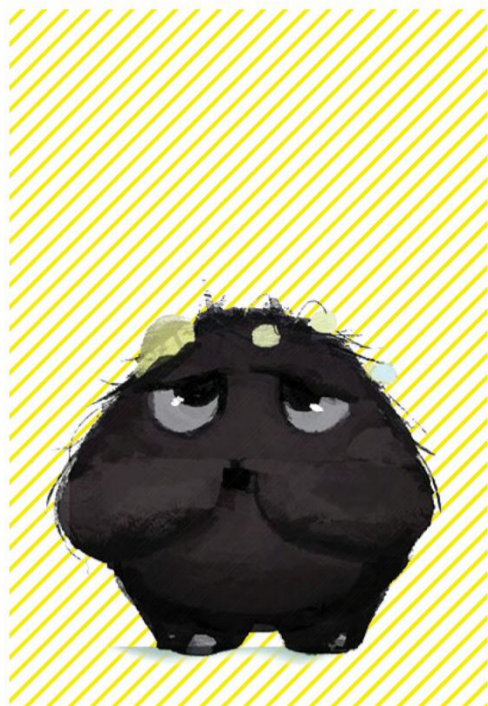
The spirit bosses are designed around animal motifs and references to that apparition's life – this one is

a fox-like creature built from the shiny metallic relics we've been collecting. It's an astonishing design, and an immediate classic.

Defeating Taro requires a blend of the techniques we've learned to get here; dodge-rolling from attacks and deflecting strikes using our shield energy is key, as is launching a horde of Rot to distract the creature and hurling Rot-buffed arrows – the DualSense's triggers tighten as we pull the bowstring.

OLD GOLD
There's definitely a lot of 'game' here. As we play further, new moves





open up deeper ways to play, such as a Rot-powered bow attack that 'binds' enemies and another that fires multiple Rot-shots, which bounce off the main target and seek out new ones.

Couple all that with multiple currencies, upgrade paths, a secret mask-based vision mode, and even a fourth hidden world that you only gain access to after completing all the game's side-quests, and Kena: Bridge of Spirits has an unabashed, old-fashioned approach to game design, wrapped in the kind of visual spectacle, pace, and tactile assault on the senses PS5 offers.



SCARLET NEXUS

i **FORMAT** PS5, PS4 **ETA** TBC **PUB** BANDAI NAMCO
DEV BANDAI NAMCO **PLAYERS** 1-2

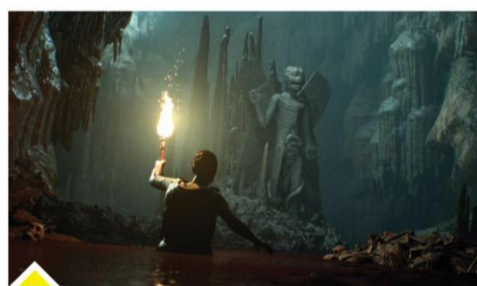
Brimming with flashy anime nonsense, Scarlet Nexus catches the eye because it's running in crisp 4K at 60fps on PS5. You play a psychically attuned soldier in the Other Suppression Force, defending human brains from an alien invasion. Between missions you get to chill in a social hub and build relationships with AI characters. Combat is typically genre-embracing, with fast-paced melee attacks buffed by psychic abilities. The twist? You can borrow psychic powers from team members and mix them into your combos.



THE INVINCIBLE

i **FORMAT** PS5 **ETA** TBC **PUB** STARWARD INDUSTRIES
DEV STARWARD INDUSTRIES **PLAYERS** 1

The premise sounds like a 1950s-set Fallout 3 in which the USSR conquered space. After crashing on a remote planet you need to locate your crew. Between you and them are alien creatures, massive spider-legged robots, and the hostile environment. Blending elements of FPS, survival, and roleplaying, The Invincible could be one of 2021's sleeper hits. There's a hint of Arkham gadgetry to navigation and puzzle-solving too, with discovered and crafted tools enabling you to explore further and uncover the planet's secrets.



THE DARK PICTURES ANTHOLOGY: HOUSE OF ASHES

i **FORMAT** PS4 **ETA** 2021 **PUB** BANDAI NAMCO
DEV SUPERMASSIVE GAMES **PLAYERS** 1-2

Some of the best moments in Until Dawn occur in a mine shaft, so we're thrilled Supermassive Games is revisiting the subterranean theme. Set at the end of the Iraq war, a special forces squad exploring a cave system for weapons of mass destruction discovers a buried Sumerian temple. Before anyone sensible can say "Don't open the tomb," ancient creatures are released. Promising more choice-led gameplay, House Of Ashes could be the best entry in The Dark Pictures yet.



SNIPER ELITE VR

i **FORMAT** PS VR **ETA** TBC **PUB** REBELLION
DEV REBELLION, JUST ADD WATER, COATSINK **PLAYERS** 1

Ball shots are back, and now they're right in our face. The transition of Sniper Elite to virtual reality is shaping up to be a real highlight of 2021. The blend of stealth and sharpshooting, trap-setting action makes this PS VR shooter something special. It makes good use of the PS Aim controller; you're free to move about, but the real fun comes when you scope out a Nazi and pick them off from hundreds of feet away. We're particularly keen on the post-story modes Rebellion is promising, including a shooting range and challenge missions.



RECOMPILE

i **FORMAT** PS5, PS4 **ETA** 2021 **PUB** DEAR VILLAGERS
DEV PHIGAMES **PLAYERS** 1

Prepare to second-guess clearing your recycle bin on your desktop. In Recompile you play a program that's become self-aware and is trying to escape its own deletion by traversing a gorgeous voxel world of code. With particle effects aplenty, the minimalist visuals are striking. Quickly amassing powerful abilities, the way you progress is metroidvania-like. From solving puzzles to blasting and hacking, it's a constant buzz to play as you fight your way through the Mainframe, fighting off malicious code that wants to delete you.



NEO: THE WORLD ENDS WITH YOU

i **FORMAT** PS4 **ETA** SUMMER 2021 **PUB** SQUARE ENIX
DEV SQUARE ENIX **PLAYERS** 1

Looks like someone got their Reaper's Game wish. A sequel to handheld action RPG The World Ends With You, this 3D update offers another helping of serious style and an all-new combat system. A clutch of fashionable teens are caught up in a death-defying game and tasked with fighting strange demonic creatures known as Noise. If they refuse to fight, they'll be erased and blink out of existence. But when you add to the mix strange visions of the future and help from the last game's maths-obsessed villain, all bets are off.

2021 PREVIEW

F **FORMAT** PS5, PS4 **ETA** 2021 **PUB** SUPERBROTHERS, PINE SCENTED
DEV SUPERBROTHERS, PINE SCENTED **PLAYERS** 1

JETT: THE FAR SHORE

The journey, not the destination

The devs behind *Superbrothers: Sword & Sworcery EP* are back with an interstellar journey following a people 'haunted by oblivion.' As well as elements of a space-based exploration game that takes you beyond the stars to alien landscapes, it contains shades of the walking sim and immersive sim genres as you interact with both your ship's crew and alien neighbours. When we ask creative director Craig D Adams how long this spacefaring followup has been in development, he jokes, "It all goes back to the spring of 1917."

The development team consisted of just Adams and his collaborator Patrick McAllister, the technical lead at Pine Scented, for many years. Composer and sound designer Andrew Rohrmann, better known by his stage name scntfc, joined the project during this period and Adams explains, "It was sort of two people full time, and then someone kind of on an erratic orbit around the project. And yeah, that's how it has been since... gosh, the launch of the PS4, let's say."

The project has gained steam and the number of people working on it grown over the last 18 months. Now almost 30 people are involved in what Adams playfully describes as an "international conspiracy." Sam Bradley is one of these developers, drawing on over a decade of experience of working in animation to contribute to the art direction and visual development. Interestingly, he tells us, "When I came on Jett [...] there was an entirely formed game there."

What Bradley calls the "heart of the project" was very firmly set from early on even before he joined the team, and he tells us, "I was able to sit down and



This landscape's just begging for us to explore it – what will we find out there?

"THERE IS A SENSE OF HISTORY AND RICHNESS TO THE WORLD AND THE CHARACTERS."

play the game from start to finish the first day – the first couple of weeks I guess – I was on the project."

According to Bradley, the last year and a half has been spent on polishing and refining the game, ensuring that "the experiences people are having with the game are the best version of what those original ideas were."

HEAD IN THE CLOUDS

Bradley explains how he feels there are many things that have inspired Jett during its development, but "they've been baked in and distilled down in a way that they might not be surface-level evident, even to me having come onto the project a year and a half ago."

The most obvious influences to Bradley would be the works of anime film director Hayao Miyazaki. That doesn't mean we'll be stalking Totoro, however. "What people expect when [they] hear something like that, versus what I mean, are two different things," he begins, adding: "What I really like about Miyazaki's movies [is that] there's a real sense of a lived-in world in pretty much everything he created."

Bradley explains, "Partially due to the fact that the project has been in development for a while there is like, a sense of history and richness to the world and the characters and how and why they exist [...] Personally, that's something I find very appealing. It's one of the things that attracted me to the project from the start."

When we ask Adams directly about the project's inspirations, he declares, "I'm gonna step in with just a long list of things that I'm not going to explain."

The bouquet of inspirations he presents includes but is not limited to:

We suspect we won't be alone on this beautiful, unfamiliar planet.

Kubrick's 2001, Dune ("the book, but probably the upcoming movie"), Ridley Scott's Alien, French artist Moebius, the works of fantasy author Ursula Le Guin, and Adams' personal "patron saint of science fiction, Dan O'Bannon." A number of games punctuate Adams' list too, with titles that range from Monster Hunter to MotorStorm: Pacific Rift making an appearance. Adams enthuses that he's a huge fan of this latter game and says, "I, for a long time, gave that my game of the year and there's inspiration there."

Adams also explains that the project is trying to draw inspiration from "What I consider to be the classics of interstellar science fiction, and maybe films that have themes of conquest, but are being thoughtful about that and the implications of that."

With a smile, Adams says, "Anyway, I'll leave it there."

A list like that suggests we could have a whole sky to explore, and we'll be more than happy to lift off later in 2021.

2021 PREVIEW



i FORMAT PS4 ETA 23 APRIL PUB SQUARE ENIX DEV TOYLOGIC INC PLAYERS 1

NIER REPLICANT VER.1.22474487139...

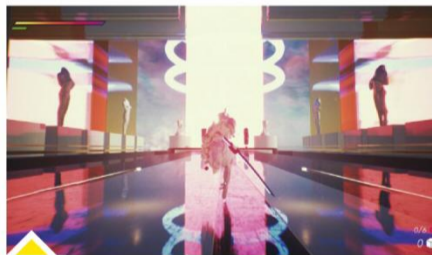
Won't be a Nier miss

Don't let the somewhat clunky title put you off. If you came to the series thanks to Nier: Automata and missed the original Nier on PS3, this is your chance to catch up via a loving remaster of the previously Japan-only version.

The main difference between this and the version originally released in the West is that here you play the brother of a dying girl, rather than her father. The

story's as wonderfully complex, however. Nier is crammed full of more surprises than one game has any right to hold. Some sections throw you into a completely different genre, there's a story twist that shines an entirely different light on your actions, replaying the game will result in very different endings, and it enjoys one of the most gorgeous soundtracks in gaming history. There's a lot to look forward to here.

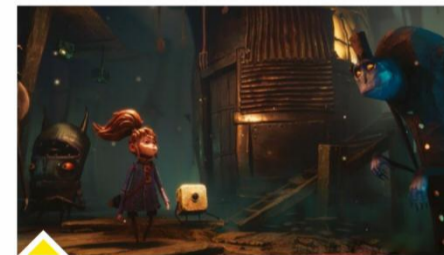
"NIER REPLICANT IS CRAMMED FULL OF MORE SURPRISES THAN ONE GAME HAS ANY RIGHT TO HOLD."



MOONRAY

i FORMAT PS5 ETA 2021 PUB EVERYTHING IS FULL OF GODS DEV EVERYTHING IS FULL OF GODS PLAYERS 1

Now *this* is an action RPG to keep your eye on. Not just because of the graphics – but let's talk about those anyway. Your character makes their way through a colourful, futuristic, slightly surreal world full of shadows and reflections, punctuated by the occasional pulsating piece of scenery. The visual effects move in time to the soundtrack as you seek your creator, a being who has conquered worlds but now lies trapped by the cult that worships her. You need to chop and shoot through enemies, upgrading your weapons along the way. This one's coming our way in style.



LOST IN RANDOM

i FORMAT PS4 ETA 2021 PUB EA DEV ZOINK! PLAYERS 1

Many games, whether you realise it or not, are rolling virtual dice behind the scenes. This one shows you the dice. Literally. One of them actually accompanies you on your journey, and its name is Dicey.

This is a land where the course of everyone's lives is decided by the roll of a die. Dicey could let her push the odds in your character, Even's, favour, but we don't yet know much more than that. What we *do* know is that, with graphics reminiscent of Burton movies *The Corpse Bride* and *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, we're ready to roll out.

2021 PREVIEW

Abe rescued his people in the last game, but the Glukkons Are At It Again.

[THIS GAME] "JUST FEELS CLOSER TO THAT VISUAL MOVIE EXPERIENCE."



FORMAT PS5, PS4 ETA TBC PUB ODDWORLD INHABITANTS DEV ODDWORLD INHABITANTS PLAYERS 1

ODDWORLD: SOULSTORM

A classic returns on PS5

By now, you should be familiar with the story of freedom fighter Abe, his fellow Mudokons, and the carnivorous corporation they are all enslaved by. Abe's Oddysee introduced us to their plight on the original PlayStation all the way back in 1997 but we didn't get the full story.

Abe's Exoddus debuted a year later. While well-loved in its own right, this second game was not how the developer had envisioned the Oddworld series continuing, and ultimately was rushed into production due to pressure from the series' publisher at the time. The developer remade the first game in 2014 as Oddworld: New 'n' Tasty! and is now hoping to realise the quintology's true part two in 2021.

NEW PERSPECTIVES

Soulstorm is a followup that, while reimagining the story, stays true to the series' beginnings. Director and series co-creator Lorne Lanning tells us, "The reason we went back to [a side-scrolling, 2.5D platformer], was the audience was telling us that's what they wanted."

While the perspective will feel familiar to series fans, there's far more depth to every screen than in conventional 2.5D games, and the developer refers to this as closer to a "2.9D" angle.

Industry veteran Bennie Terry III has been part of the Soulstorm team for more than half a decade as executive producer and he tells us that the extra "0.4D" required large parts of the project's core code base to be rewritten. He says,

"Going that far, and getting that dimension was hard."

He later adds, "The first thing that came back from playtesting was 'God, people love moving through the world that way!' And so you know, it's all worth it in the end."

ANOTHER DIMENSION

As we've previously covered, Lanning has always preferred this perspective in the Oddworld games as, unlike a twitchy first-person shooter (for instance), it makes the action easy for multiple spectators to follow and comment on. Team OPM certainly remembers our collaborative puzzle-solving when we replayed Abe's Exoddus as recently as issue 150.

Lanning elaborates: "I thought 2D games were dead. You know, when PS2 came out, and PS3 and they're [...] going '3D? We're really gonna do 3D now.' I was like, that's it, no-one's gonna be interested – and yet, they were, you know, like, we keep coming back. And we keep seeing this format prevailing. [...] So we were like, 'Well, how do we modernise that?' – 'That' [as] in the genre of what we call, you know, side-scrolling platforming – 'How do we modernise that in a way that just makes it feel more like you're in a movie and doesn't lose the spectator?'"

Lanning says that the team has always aimed "to get the viewer more engaged." He adds "We think in this one, we're just taking that another step, which just feels closer to that visual movie experience."

PUNCHING UP

Soulstorm will have a darker tone than earlier Oddworld games and we've already seen the first threads of this in gameplay trailers. Lanning tells us, "The beautiful thing today is you get real-time feedback. You can watch that night about what YouTubers are saying [...] and I was really amazed to see people going 'Wow, man. Oddworld's looking really dark this time!' I was like, 'Oh, wow, we haven't shown shit yet!' Like, we haven't even gone there."

However, the series' trademark sense of humour is far from absent.

Bennie Terry reassures us, "What Lorne and I talk about all the time [is] that slapstick humour [...] The story has more weight to it [and] Abe's on a deeper journey that is emotionally and from a narrative standpoint [...] darker [in] tone [...]. The world is heavier, right? And Abe has to shoulder more. But then there's still these moments where you're laughing, because one of the followers said something funny [...] or he did something that was hilarious in that moment."

Lanning says, "When we get really heavy in the content – it's kind of like great writers are always aiming at – it's like, when do we pull the rug out on the person? Right when they're at the peak of expecting something else."

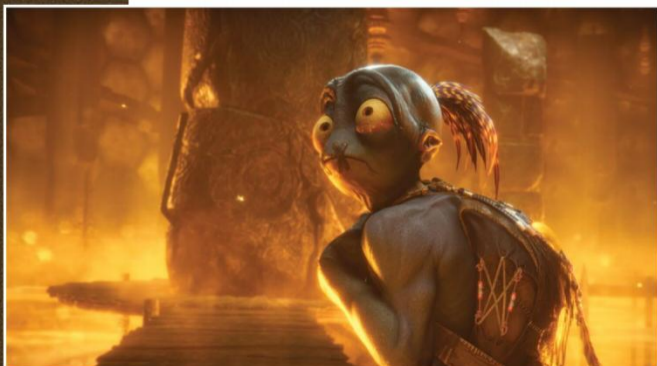
Comedy in games is often a challenge to get right. Lanning describes the relationship between

“THE WORLD IS HEAVIER [...] BUT THEN THERE'S STILL THESE MOMENTS WHERE YOU'RE LAUGHING.”

the humour and these darker elements as "A battle [between] diametrically opposed possibilities that can happen in one minute."

Terry adds, "I think that's what separates [Oddworld] – like you have other platformers out there that do great platforming, from a mechanics and technical standpoint or there's great storytelling, right? Like the world has evolved since the first generation of Oddworld games where a lot of those [lessons] have been utilised in other games, right? It's not necessarily brand-new, but it's the humour [...] that I think will make [...] old fans remember and relate. [...] New fans will see it as something that stands out and [is] different because you just don't see a lot of that in the games of this particular style still to this day."

We'll enjoy Abe's humour and Oddworld's dark side later this year.



Abe has upped his game for PS5. The game looks great on the new console.

2021 PREVIEW

i FORMAT PS5, PS4 ETA 25 FEB PUB UBISOFT DEV UBISOFT ANNECY PLAYERS 1-50 (PS5), 1-20 (PS4)

RIDERS REPUBLIC

Go on, get on your bike

Supporting a new title, this spiritual successor to *Steep* promises plenty of freshness, from a brand-new, neon-soaked attitude to mixing snow environments with other biomes supporting new extreme sports. Bikes are the standout discipline here, promising hectic, crowded multiplayer races and challenging gravity-defying paths to careen down.

Within bikes alone, there's a variety of models available to suit the many different events: road, freestyle, slopestyle, enduro, and downhill. You need to pick the right tool for the job as there's a range of competitions to take part in, from trick battles to races across 6v6 arenas through to mass starts. If you're playing on PS5 you'll be able to take part in races against 49 other players on PS5 (the upper limit on PS4 is 20 racers).

Beyond ensuring everything from handlebars to helmets look wonderfully shiny, PS5's bigger brain allows for more chaos on the race pathways, all with a smooth 60fps target so the action always looks good and feels great to play – agile

responsiveness is important to extreme sports, after all.

GRAND NATIONAL

Whereas *Steep* was set in the Alps (as it was focussed on snow sports), *Riders Republic* mashes together real-life American National Parks (including the likes of Yosemite Valley, Mammoth Mountain, and Bryce Canyon) into a sort of fantasy biome where they all flow

into one another. This means you have craggy dusty peaks to mountain bike over, leading to snowier environments that highlight the returning skiing and snowboarding disciplines. *Riders Republic* is big in every way that counts.

"ON PS5 YOU'LL BE ABLE TO TAKE PART IN RACES AGAINST 49 OTHER PLAYERS."

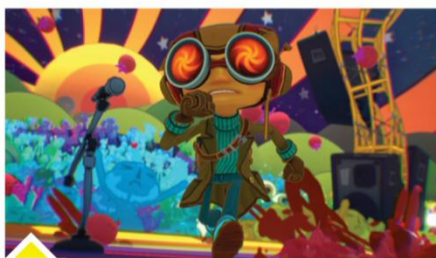


KING'S BOUNTY 2

i FORMAT PS4 ETA MAR PUB DEEP SILVER DEV 1C ENTERTAINMENT PLAYERS 1

An RPG set in a medieval world is always a good idea. Add monsters such as skeleton warriors and zombies and it becomes a very good idea. Don't worry if you missed the first *King's Bounty* – as it was released in ye olde 1990 many people won't have played it, and this one can be enjoyed in isolation.

There's an open world to explore, where you pick up quests and enjoy turn-based combat. There are choices to make, but consequences result from your actions rather than dialogue. And hey, if something goes wrong, you'll always have a soldier to cry on.



PSYCHONAUTS 2

i FORMAT PS4 ETA TBC PUB XBOX GAME STUDIOS DEV DOUBLE FINE PLAYERS 1

Comedy, psychology, and platforming isn't an obvious combo, but Double Fine pulled it off in style back in 2005. Now, the sequel we once feared would never happen is almost upon us – and best of all, the original team are working on it.

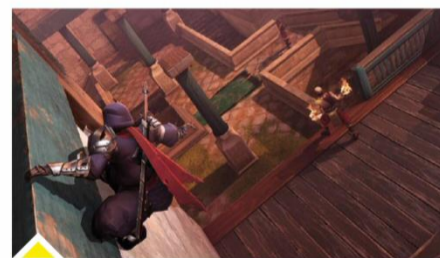
Officially part of the physics-defying agency following his previous adventure, Raz makes it to Psychonaut HQ, but all is not well. It's time for him to dive into more minds, and fight and puzzle his way through a series of wonderfully surreal locations to save the day once again. We're looking forward to navigating this mindfield.



ALEX KIDD IN MIRACLE WORLD DX

i FORMAT PS4 ETA TBC PUB MERGE GAMES, SEGA DEV MERGE GAMES, JANKENTAM PLAYERS 1

Despite the fact that he's older than many of our readers (the first game appeared on Sega's Master System in 1986), master Kidd looks as youthful as ever in this remake of his very first adventure. And it's definitely a remake rather than a remaster. The graphics have been given a coat of 21st-century loveliness, new levels have been added, and boss fights have been redesigned, though you can enjoy the original 8-bit wonder in Classic mode. However you decide to play, it's a piece of gaming history at your fingertips.



ARAGAMI 2

i FORMAT PS5, PS4 ETA 2021 PUB LINC WORKS DEV LINC WORKS PLAYERS 1-3

Do you want to be a ninja? Okay, silly question. Of course you do. If you played out this fantasy with the first game, then the sequel looks set to give you more thrilling wish fulfilment, and, interestingly, the developers have said that they're aiming for "a completely new experience" with this.

It remains *Aragami* at heart. It's still primarily a stealth game, encouraging you to use the shadow powers that your character is cursed with to remain undetected. Combat, when necessary, is demanding – but you can take two friends with you, to inflict multiple ninjuries together.



We're hoping the varied biomes will give PS5's haptics a workout.



OPM TEAM PICKS

IAN DEAN EDITOR



DEATHLOOP

The more I hear and see of this shooter from the team behind Dishonored, the more I love it. This looks like a retro grindhouse rampage with the puzzle logic of Hitman, and has some of the canniest AI yet to stalk us in a game. It's exclusive to PS5, too, and is making great use of the SSD to power its die-and-retry action loop.

OSCAR TAYLOR-KENT REVIEWS EDITOR



ELDEN RING

If you thought I was going cuckoo for FromSoftware's ambitious new project before, then you should see me after playing Demon's Souls. Bluepoint might have revitalised the PS3 game, but it reminded me just how inventive From can be. Teasing an open-world concept, Elden Ring is definitely something new for the studio, but any time From breaks out of its box, gold ensues.

JESS KINGHORN STAFF WRITER



GOODBYE VOLCANO HIGH

I first saw the trailer during the Future Of Gaming stream, boasting a wonderfully realised, unique visual direction and hinting at a storyline that I know will make me cry in the middle of OPM Towers. It was love at first sight. I can't wait to say hello to Volcano High.

MIRIAM MCDONALD OPERATIONS EDITOR



LEGO STAR WARS: THE SKYWALKER SAGA

As it's Lego humour's a given, and with nine film-based worlds to play through this one guarantees many hours of compulsive stud-collecting, ability-compounding fun. As long as DualSense can't convey the feeling of treading on a Lego brick, this is going to be brilliant.

MILFORD COPPOCK MANAGING ART EDITOR



RESIDENT EVIL VILLAGE

The remakes of Resi 2 and 3 reminded me what I loved about the series all those years ago, but it's been three years now since the last new mainline game, and I'm ready for something completely new. Hopefully this game will clear up what Chris Redfield's been up to, and what the reborn Umbrella Corporation is trying to achieve – while still delivering memorable monsters to take on.



GUILTY GEAR STRIVE

i **FORMAT** PS5, PS4 **ETA** 9 APR **PUB** BANDAI NAMCO **DEV** ARC SYSTEM WORKS **PLAYERS** 1-2

More anime-styled beat-'em-ups exist than you can shake a spiky haircut at, but there's a reason the Guilty Gear series has been going strong for over 20 years. With gorgeous graphics, characters that feel as different as they look, and an accessible yet incredibly deep fighting system, a new entry is always something to get excited about. This latest entry is going to look *incredible* on PS5, and crossplay will be enabled between generations. If you start with the PS4 version, you can upgrade to PS5 for free, including any purchased DLC. Practise those button inputs now.

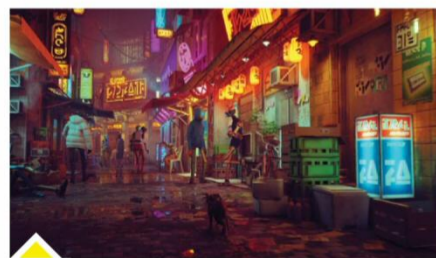


BALAN WONDERWORLD

i **FORMAT** PS5, PS4 **ETA** 26 MAR **PUB** SQUARE ENIX **DEV** BALAN COMPANY, ARZEST **PLAYERS** 1-2

A new platformer directed by the creator of Sonic, who's reunited with the guy who worked on art for Sonic and Nights Into Dreams? Yes please! This adventure will take you through 12 vibrant areas, either alone or playing locally with a friend.

Over 80 costumes are scattered throughout the game, each giving your character a unique ability as well as a spiffy appearance (you can carry up to three at a time). There are also cute little creatures – amusingly named Tims – that can help with things such as locating items. We can't wait to find what this colourful world has in store.



STRAY

i **FORMAT** PS5, PS4 **ETA** 2021 **PUB** ANNA PURNA INTERACTIVE **DEV** BLUETWELVE STUDIO **PLAYERS** 1

We love cats. We love robots. We love cyberpunk-styled cities. So the prospect of controlling a four-legged bundle of mischief in a neon-sprinkled future city populated by robots is very exciting for us. We want it right now.

Inspired by the now-demolished Kowloon Walled City in Hong Kong, this is a place where you'll slink through at ground level and prowl across the rooftops. We're promised a mixture of exploration, action, and puzzles. Best of all, it sounds like there will be a meow button to annoy the mechanical city inhabitants with! We cat wait for this one.

FORMAT PS5 ETA TBC PUB SQUARE ENIX DEV SQUARE ENIX PLAYERS 1

FINAL FANTASY XVI

The future of the JRPG is crystallising

Forget the likes of Cloud and Noctis, Clive's our man now. A member of the Rosfield family, as the firstborn son of the Archduke Of Rosaria it's Clive's job to protect his younger brother Joshua. His fate, like that of all those in Valisthea, is dictated by crystals (no surprise for FF fans there), and mothercrystals loom over the world's six realms.

Those big ol' crystals bless the lands around them with aether, keeping the population safe from blight. Each bestows unique magic on the realms it harbours, and is also connected to an Eikon – essentially the Summons we've come to know and love, like Shiva, Ifrit, and Titan. These powerful beings are bound to the bodies of individuals, called Dominants, and are able to manifest and erupt from them. Each realm treats the blessings and Dominants differently, from beings of worship to champions of war. In some places they are even ostracised and executed.

CRYSTAL CHRONICLES

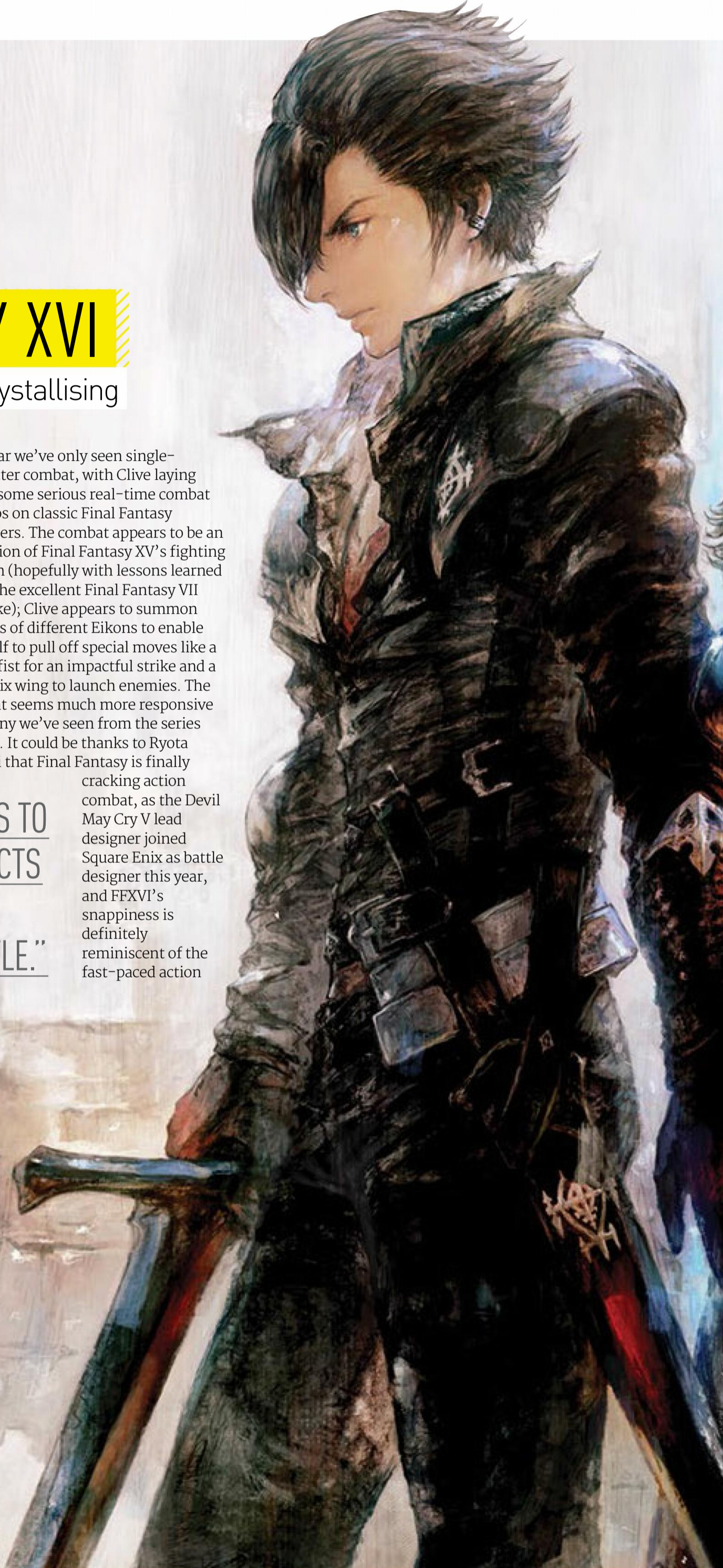
Clive and Joshua's idyllic life, shared with the Archduke's ward Jill Warrick (from the Northern Territories), is threatened as the blight encroaches on the surrounding realms. Peace between nations starts to erode. Joshua, a Dominant of Phoenix himself, passed down through generations of Rosarian Archdukes, ends up awakening alongside Ifrit in a deadly incident that throws their destinies into peril.



In a fight, Clive is able to use more than his sword – check out this phoenix wing.

So far we've only seen single-character combat, with Clive laying down some serious real-time combat combos on classic Final Fantasy monsters. The combat appears to be an evolution of Final Fantasy XV's fighting system (hopefully with lessons learned from the excellent Final Fantasy VII Remake); Clive appears to summon aspects of different Eikons to enable himself to pull off special moves like a stony fist for an impactful strike and a phoenix wing to launch enemies. The combat seems much more responsive than any we've seen from the series before. It could be thanks to Ryota Suzuki that Final Fantasy is finally cracking action combat, as the Devil May Cry V lead designer joined Square Enix as battle designer this year, and FFXVI's snappiness is definitely reminiscent of the fast-paced action

“CLIVE APPEARS TO SUMMON ASPECTS OF DIFFERENT EIKONS IN BATTLE.”



Clive is the elder, but his brother, Joshua, has the connection to Phoenix.

in Capcom's character action opus. That said, we hope party-based combat will still be involved somehow, as the vibrant world that's already been revealed has us salivating at the prospect of making new friends who will fight at our side in battle. Either way, it's shaping up to be quite the luxurious production, and in the hands of superstar producer Naoki Yoshida (who took Final Fantasy XIV to great heights) and director Hiroshi Takai (another FF veteran), production seems much more smooth than FFXV's long and tumultuous development history. All we have to do now is wait.



DEV Q&A



FORMAT PS5, PS4 **ETA** 2021 **PUB** WARNER BROS INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT **DEV** WB GAMES MONTRÉAL **PLAYERS** 1-2

GOTHAM KNIGHTS

Bat-friends will be there for you

The team behind the criminally overlooked **Batman: Arkham Origins** return to the Bat-verse with a co-op adventure that you can play solo if that's your Bat-jam. Hot-swap between Red Hood, Batgirl, Nightwing, and Robin in an explorable Gotham City. The storyline poaches from the Court Of Owls comic, and a roster of villains that has teased Mr Freeze and Two-Face. Embracing RPG ideas you'll be able to create versions of these famous heroes that fit your style, which also means when going co-op expect to see familiar faces, as two Batgirls can exist in one Gotham. Creative director Patrick Redding sheds a little light on this new Bat-game.

OPM: Is the game based on the Gotham Knights comic?

Patrick Redding: I think that was kind of a starting point. And then when we started looking at where in the Bat-universe lore we could really make a stylistic choice that would be different, we looked at more recent editions, like the Court Of Owls storyline.

OPM: What are the themes of the game?

PR: One of our goals was to really tap into aspects of the Batman universe that hadn't necessarily had exposure yet in games. We drew on the idea of the Batman Family, really as a core element of that. Family, in general, has become a theme in this game. It's kind of interesting. But it's how the Batman Family has evolved in this kind of very divergent cast of characters, who each have their own unique spin on the crime-fighting vigilante fantasy.



Take on the villains of Gotham alone, or ask a friend to join in the fun.

OPM: Will fans recognise where this game is heading with its comic references?

PR: We are connecting them in an original way. Definitely, the connective tissue of the game is something surprising, and it's things that people, even people who are into the comics, might recognise elements of it, and say, 'Oh, that's cool. That's kind of like that.' But it's linked in a way that is, one, extremely accessible to people who haven't necessarily been reading the comics [laughs], but also, I think, will surprise and delight the people who know the lore.

OPM: Can we play any of the Bat-family at any point?

PR: It was important for us that you own your story – your progression through the storylines. And you have your cast of characters. We know you're going to gravitate towards your favourite. But if when going from one part of the main mystery to a new part of the main mystery, you decide, 'Actually, I'd really like to take Red Hood on this particular piece of it,' you can do that. It's not like you have to go back and restart the storyline with that character.

OPM: Are we free to play how we wish?

PR: Yes, that means, for example, having the ability to play in a stealthy way or in a combative way, no matter what – regardless of what the specific scenario is; regardless of whether it's a crime in the open world or a particular point in a major story mission. The idea is that you can use your style, you can use your tools, and the game will respect that and sort of valorise it by giving you great opportunities.

OPM: The belfry looks like a place to manage upgrades. Can you elaborate?

PR: It definitely reinforces that idea that you don't have the Batcave any more. Batman's gone. You don't have his resources fully. You need to be a bit more resourceful as you're on your own, and you're trying to build up your own approach towards defending Gotham City. But I think what's great about that is, it taps in really nicely into the idea of you needing to improve your gear, and to hone your abilities. It gives you a space to do that which is different from the Batcave. And it's also very heavily associated with the Batman family.

FORMAT PS5, PS4 ETA 2 FEB PUB SQUARE ENIX DEV PEOPLE CAN FLY PLAYERS 1-3

OUTRIDERS

Bartek Kmita reveals People Can Fly's shooter secrets

We've seen squad-based looter shooters before, but few that feel like this. With retro-blasts such as *Bulletstorm* under its belt, *People Can Fly* has crafted some incredibly moreish, fast-paced shooting. We speak with creative director Bartek Kmita about how the studio blends that secret sauce...

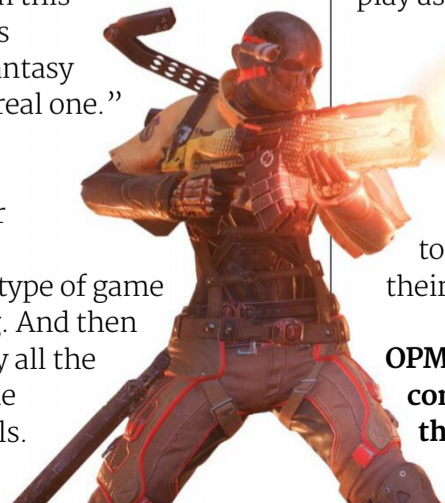
OPM: One of *People Can Fly*'s strengths seems to be the guns. What's the team's approach to crafting great gunplay?

Bartek Kmita: Gunplay for every shooter is this Holy Grail, that you have to do *this* good and that you have to do *this* properly. Unfortunately, different players have different opinions on what is good and what is bad [laughs]. We can take recoil for example – some people like the recoiling guns, some

“LET’S GIVE THE TOOLS FOR THE PLAYERS TO BUILD A FANTASY, TO BUILD THEIR OWN OUTRIDER.”

people don't like the recoiling guns. So first you have to be sure that what you're doing is the best approach for your kind of game.

And there will be people who will complain “Ah no, the recoil is too big or too low.” Some people will complain: “This is not tactical shooting from this gun,” “This is more [of a] fantasy gun than [a] real one.” [...] So, first basically is knowing your audience and knowing the type of game you are doing. And then unfortunately all the magic is in the details. Details.



There are so many details that are basically changing the good gun behaviour from bad gun behaviour. That is enormous. And people who are not doing this on a daily basis are probably not aware how many factors, small things, are making the overall gun experience fun. There's not one or two things – do this, and this, and that we will have great shooting – no, it's 100 small elements that all together make this game have a good feeling or not.

OPM: Building on that, how do the different weapons fit together with the four classes in the game?

BK: We are not restricting class, that this class has to use this kind of weapon. [...] We are trying to give as much diversity, as much freedom to create your class, to create your fantasy, and sometimes even making some stupid... [laughs] or what *shouldn't* work, but then you realise it is working.

Which we see all the time [...] When we created, in the beginning, this [Trickster class] assassin guy, we wanted this guy to be close-combat, the typical assassin fantasy. But then we realised that some people are playing for example, sniper rifles, and are using all this teleportation – which was meant to close distance to outsmart enemies – to pick up the ammunition for the sniper rifle, and then to make the distance longer again. And then we decided ‘Okay, everyone is playing this game differently, let's make this an advantage, let's give the tools for the players to build a fantasy, to build their own Outrider, to let them play as they want.’ And then in one moment we had our whole design philosophy, basically the main core: give people tools to allow them to build their own fantasy and playstyle.

OPM: Does that mean people can come up with their own three-player squad

combinations from specing the four classes differently?

BK: Exactly. We are not making this holy trinity so you have to be tank, healer, and DPS like most fantasy RPG games. We decided that if you want to play three damage dealers, play this way. Maybe this will not always be efficient, or maybe you come up with a strategy that will support your playstyle, and we can manage the weaknesses of this kind of composition to be efficient. You can do this. But if you want to create this supporter class and tank and DPS, please go with this. But we are not restricting, and we are trying for this game to be balanced that you will find with even playing with three classes, the same three classes, every character can be built differently.

OPM: As well as guns, it feels like players can set and use their special abilities very often. Is that a deliberate choice?

BK: We didn't want to have the ultimate that you're basically stacking [then] waiting, waiting, waiting, then pressing a button then you are killing the whole arena. No, we wanted to do skills and guns as the same complementary thing. So, with this philosophy, then we started to create all the skills that have rather low cooldowns.

OPM: As a Polish studio, do you think you're able to draw from different influences to, for instance, American sci-fi?

BK: I was not thinking about it, [but there was a] moment when one of my writers said to me when I was presenting [...] that it seemed to him that there's a Polish idea that let's say an American would not come up with – because they have a different story and different experiences from life. So probably there will be some things that – maybe even this grittiness and little bit of pessimism – is more Polish than the classic American story about the joy of life. So I hope it will add a fresh perspective to the stories of our world and adventure.



2



1

2021 PREVIEW



- 1 There are four character classes. Needless to say, the Pyromancer is good with fire.
- 2 Co-op Carnage is the mode that allows you to team up with friends and tackle enemies on a nightmarish battlefield.
- 3 Turrets are one of the Technomancer's tools.
- 4 You're not forced to adopt specific roles when fighting as part of a squad – though things may be more difficult if your team is unbalanced.
- 5 The Trickster class makes darting, hit-and-run attacks.



3

4



5



2021 PREVIEW

FORMAT PS5, PS4 ETA 2021 PUB WARNER BROS INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT DEV AVALANCHE SOFTWARE PLAYERS 1

HOGWARTS LEGACY

Revelio! Enjoying life in the Wizarding World

You're late to class, and when we say 'you' we really mean it in this roleplayer set in the Wizarding World of the 19th century. Despite being set within the history of the Harry Potter series, you can create your own character, attend classes, solve mysteries, and affect the world around you. We're sure Potterheads will be taking notes on how their actions could conflict with future events.

We've glimpsed the world of Hogwarts Legacy and on PS5 it looks fantastic. There's a little disconnect between the visually photoreal scenery (this has some of the best foliage textures we've seen) and the

fantastic beasts of the Potter-verse. But in motion, there's no denying that Avalanche Software's world is a broad and varied one. The dev has confirmed that you'll be able to travel the world, exploring Hogwarts, Hogsmeade, and the Forbidden Forest. New locations are also being created for the game.

Yet it's the core RPG features, which include a morality system, that will ultimately determine how successful Hogwarts Legacy will be. Whether you're loitering around the halls of the College Of Magic And Sorcery, attending classes, or nosing around on a quest, you'll be confronted with moral dilemmas that will affect how your character develops and how the other students and characters you encounter will see you. Will you cheat in a test and veer towards life as a Slytherin or play it straight and get invited to a Hufflepuff party?

This idea of a moral heart to the game could become more important than is

immediately apparent right now. In Potter-lore, up until 1875 young magicians could practice magic anywhere, then something happened to ban students from 'wandering' about in public. Maybe that something is explored in Hogwarts Legacy.

POTTERING ABOUT

The world is one place we can't wait to experience. We've read about it in books

and seen it in films, of course, but now we can actually experience it. This is the first truly open-world depiction of the Wizarding World, and its inhabitants will include many

"TRAVEL THE WORLD, EXPLORING HOGWARTS AND THE FORBIDDEN FOREST."

of the fantastic beasts we've come to love in the books and films. We've already seen a hippogriff being used to travel over distance, allowing a rider to live out those The Prisoner Of Azkaban fantasies, but confirmation of a confrontation with a Boggart, the creature that personifies our worst fears, as well as Trolls, Thestrals, Inferi (Potter-verse zombies), cats, owls, and the obnoxiously cute Mooncalves suggests this depiction of JK Rowling's world will be packed to the pointy-hat-brim with famous creatures. Including dragons, as you can see. Here be dragons in Hogwarts Legacy.

It's in the fine balance between faithfulness to the source material and creating magic of its own that Avalanche's game will succeed. If the dev gets it right, it will cast an Imperio on us all.



We're guessing physical combat will take a back seat in this game's encounters.



2021 PREVIEW



Past, present, and future
are in your hands – with
some help from Matias.

FORMAT PS5, PS4 ETA SPRING 2021 PUB MODUS GAMES DEV DREAMS UNINCORPORATED, SYCK PLAYERS 1

CRIS TALES

An RPG where you're up against the clock

Time is a mysterious thing, and it's what *Cris Tales* is all about. Not only is the action built around a time-shifting, time-scriving mechanic, time's also core to the game's identity. Inspired by the dev team's passion for classic roleplaying games like *Chrono Trigger*, *Cris Tales* is their attempt to evolve what they loved about those RPGs into their own modern take on the genre.

What results is a game that isn't just thematically about time, but one where its effects can be seen in every visually wonderful frame. Once lead character Crisbell has unlocked her powers, when you walk around and explore the world you see past, present, and future represented all at once, the screen divided into three images.

To achieve this the devs haven't simply created all the characters and environments three times (which would be a lot of work in itself), they've produced many more variations, as you can alter the past and future on your adventure.

You'll encounter craftily designed puzzles which make use of the different time periods, and fit neatly alongside the more traditional turn-based battles. Your froggy companion Matias can hop between the three time zones to interact with the world in order to, for instance, help a seed grow into a tree, or track down some missing medicine. Seeing everything side-by-side can give clues to puzzles

(for example, if a lock that's rusted in the present looks perfectly fine in the past, you know you need to travel in time to get it open), or lead to different outcomes (convince kids to stop littering in a lake in the present, perhaps, to find a key and save the lake, or dig around in the polluted garbage in the future to find the key if you're unable to get them to change their ways).

Displaying all three time periods together helps to tell a story about how the world the characters who inhabit it can grow and change. You might see one character grow up to be an old lady with a happy family, or notice the eerie absence of another while looking into the future (this world is under threat, after all, and not everyone gets to have a happy future).

BATTLE TIME

While the exploration elements add a nice element of puzzling to the RPG, the time mechanics are also important to the battling. You're able to shift time during combat to gain the upper hand over enemies. A slime, for instance, might degrade over time to become smaller and weaker in the future (though bigger and stronger in the past), while another enemy might become tougher and more battle-hardened over the years.

Beyond affecting how the enemies appear (again, the designs change noticeably between time periods), time travel also affects how Delta Status Ailments work. One tricky boss we take on has a solid shield for defence, but by using attacks to apply Wet, and then whacking them into the future, we're able to rust their shield and make them vulnerable.

Synergy between party members' skills can be enhanced by the use of time powers. Wilhelm, who joins Crisbell on her quest, uses natural magic, meaning that if his skills travel forward in time they become much more powerful. For example, if he throws mandrogora poison in the future it will affect a group of enemies rather than just one.

It all speaks to how well thought-out *Cris Tales*' central conceit is. Tightly wound like a finely crafted clock, all the components interlock to create something that works on just about every level. It's great to see a time mechanic that's not just a gimmick, it's the core around which everything is built, and the developers clearly have the design chops to pull off something complex hiding beneath a very simple, easy-to-understand system.

GOT THE TIME?

"We see game mechanics as a sort of mine where you have to dig, and we think we found a particularly deep one," says Carlos Rocha Silva, CEO of Dreams Uncorporated and SYCK. "We want to see how we could update to modern-day design some of those classic ideas,



"YOU'RE ABLE TO SHIFT TIME DURING COMBAT TO GAIN THE UPPER HAND OVER ENEMIES."

but really bring our own flavour to the mix." That taste is influenced by the Colombian studio's culture which he says is "intrinsically attached to every part of the project, from the way people dress, to the architecture, to even the mechanics themselves" such as the in-game coffee item.

The visuals help keep everything user-friendly, and look gorgeous to boot. The 2D art style is fantastic, and you can tell a lot of fun has been had in designing enemies and characters throughout different time periods. Walking around, you move between the background and foreground, and chunky text boxes and crystal-shard-like battle menus means everything clicks into place without you having to think too hard about it.

What results is something truly special. It might have been inspired by beloved JRPGs, but both the visuals and the commitment to gameplay design on show here would make any of those titles blush. The clock is ticking, but we don't care how long we have to wait to play this one – *Cris Tales* can take all the time it needs.



Your time-shifting powers can be used in battle to weaken enemies' defences.

2021 PREVIEW

FORMAT PS5, PS4 ETA TBC
PUB DEEP SILVER DEV FISHLABS PLAYERS 1

CHORUS

Watch this space

Our ship coasts through the interior of the Artok, a vast derelict vessel adrift in space. The light from the stars streams through cracks in the hull patterning our tiny craft. It looks beautiful, and recalls the grand descents of fantasy RPGs. But this is spacebound; we're reminded of our location as debris bounces and rebounds around us in zero-G.

Exploration becomes easier when we tap into protagonist Nara's Seventh Sense Detection Wave, a spiritual 'rites'

"EXPLORE THE GALAXY FOR SIDE-QUESTS, RESOURCES AND LORE."

ability enabling her to scan the environment. It's the first sign that Chorus involves more than generic space dogfighting. We leave the wreckage and our demo pivots to later in the game, and Chorus' broader ideas are revealed.

ORBIT OF ALRIGHT

Nara is reunited with her sentient spaceship, Forsaken, and after finding a moral backbone the pair turn their backs on the Circle, the powerful cult-like empire that has taken over the galaxy. Fighting for the resistance, we are free to follow the Golden Path and see where this space opera will take us or explore the galaxy for side-quests, resources, and lore. Don't let the trappings of

Chorus' cockpit view of the world fool you, this is an RPG and you're free to play your way.

The universe Fishlabs has built continues to amaze as we take flight in a later portion of the game. Skimming through an asteroid belt, man-made



Want to know what's hidden in the asteroid belt? You'll have to explore it for yourself.

structures appear on rocky outcrops. We're able to dive inside and explore, while illuminated cracks in passing rocks tease hidden caverns. While missions fall into familiar routines – defend the friendlies, assault the bases, wipe out the patrols – new veins of interest pulse through the mundane scenarios. Some ships have Control-like crystalline growths encasing them from the inside out; this is how the Circle punishes anyone who strays. Nara is able to use her rites abilities to cleanse these ships. It's yet another hint that Chorus leans in a new weird direction.

In discussion the developer teases where all this will lead, suggesting another plane of existence behind the



2021 PREVIEW

Western outlaws hunting vampires? Count (ha!) us in.

F FORMAT PS5, PS4 ETA TBC PUB FOCUS HOME INTERACTIVE
DEV FLYING WILD HOGS PLAYERS 1-2

EVIL WEST

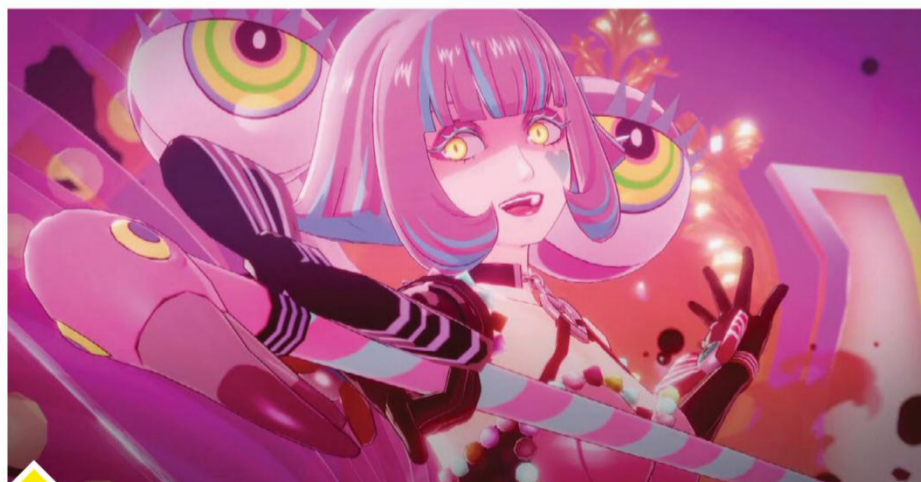
Make our day, steampunk

The developer behind the old-school run 'n' gun shooter series *Shadow Warrior* is back on PlayStation with a new game packed with what it does best: chaotic, fast, and gruesome gunplay. The newly announced *Evil West* plays like *Doom* meets *Call Of Juarez*, and we're excited to see exactly how this shooter mashup will turn out.

Stepping into the spurred boots of vampire hunter Jesse Rentier, you're the weird west's last chance for survival. In this alt-history a darkness has begun menacing the American frontier. As

a member of the secretive vampire-hunting society called The Institute you're called on to track down every demon, beast, and bloodsucker that's begun crawling out of the crowd.

Playing either solo across a narrative campaign or in co-op, you're able to call upon the usual upgrades and perks to create a unique way to play. Naturally six-shooters and shotguns are evident, but Rentier can also make use of a unique gauntlet powered by lightning, plus gadgets crafted within the game, (most likely from remnants of defeated demons). We'll use anything to get the upper hand against the horde.



F FORMAT PS4 ETA 23 FEB PUB ATLUS DEV OMEGA FORCE, P-STUDIO PLAYERS 1

PERSONA 5 STRIKERS

A road trip across Japan with style

We're always ready for adventures with the Phantom Thieves. Set six months after the main game, *Strikers* follows the friends as they investigate mysterious events across Japan, their investigation turning into a road trip.

You won't be battling turn by turn through the Metaverse. Developed

by *Dynasty Warriors* creator Omega Force, this game is all large-scale real-time action, with you mowing down loads of enemies. But it's not a *Warriors* reskin. It incorporates familiar mechanics, from ambushes to elemental weaknesses. Somehow, it still *feels* like *Persona 5*.



F FORMAT PS5 ETA 2021 PUB SCAVENGERS STUDIO DEV SCAVENGERS STUDIO PLAYERS 1

SEASON

Last chance to see

Season is very different, and a lot more personal, than *Scavengers Studio*'s last game, the free-to-play multiplayer *Darwin Project*. This is an adventure of the mundane, a bicycle road trip.

You play as a traveller exploring the world for the first time... and the last. On the precipice of change, your

goal is to travel and record, capturing the last moments of the cultures you discover for posterity. You're saving the world in the sense that you record memories, rather than make any grand rescue. That mundanity becomes of great importance, and this surreal journey melancholy.



FORMAT PS5 ETA TBC PUB BETHESDA DEV TANGO GAMEWORKS PLAYERS 1

GHOSTWIRE: TOKYO

A shock to the system

Tokyo has been devastated by a paranormal event that has seen vengeful spirits released across the city.

Before anyone can say ‘who you gonna call?’ you take on the role of the city’s saviour, ready to calm the spirits and find the cause of the disaster.

Set in an open but condensed version of Tokyo, this adventure from the team behind The Evil Within series (and the original Resident Evil) is exclusive to PS5. Played in first-person, the standard shooter mechanics have been swapped for close-up martial arts. You can only vanquish the Visitors, the various creatures and ghouls between you and

the truth behind the ghostly invasion, by destroying the ‘cores’ that lay at the heart of each spirit.

UNWANTED VISITORS

The enemy design catches our attention. Each spirit has its basis in Japanese myths and urban legends, including modern digital takes. The headless Schoolers look like students; they’re speedy and agile and can get up close fast to attack you. Other, innocent-looking children dressed in yellow raincoats look harmless, but they act as watchers, calling on Rainwalkers, faceless spectres disguised as businessmen, if you’re spotted. The

“THE HEADLESS SCHOOLERS LOOK LIKE CHILDREN; THEY’RE SPEEDY AND AGILE.”

Bride is another spirit who’ll take you by surprise. They drift silently in the street but if they see you have the ability to close the distance on you in an instant.

This all means you’ll need to adapt your tactics to survive on Tokyo’s ghost-infested streets, mixing stealth and hand-to-ghoul-hand combat.

Tango Gameworks has revealed DualSense will play an important part too, with the controller’s adaptive triggers being used to deliver the sensation of power building up in your on-screen hands. Coupled with great use of the SSD, 60fps at 4K, and haptic feedback, this PS5-developed horror could be one of 2021’s biggest shocks.

2021 PREVIEW

F FORMAT PS5 **ETA** FEB **PUB** PLAYSTATION STUDIOS **DEV** LUCID GAMES **PLAYERS** 1-16

DESTRUCTION ALLSTARS

More fun than a ten-car pile-up

We reckon if we told you that multiple WipEout series alumni's next project was a hybrid vehicular combat game, you'd dash straight off to dig out some protective headgear. Well, it is their next project, it will be coming to PS Plus this February, and all subscribers with a PS5 will be able to check out the mayhem for themselves for free. Bargain.

Offering a variety of different game modes at launch, every match begins with a dash to your chosen vehicle. Each of the 16 titular AllStars has a preferred set of wheels but regardless of which one you hop into, your vehicle will transform to your chosen colours. Every AllStar has abilities that can benefit them in and out of their cars because 'demolition derby' is just phase one of any given match.

GET WRECKED!

Once you've sent another player's wheels to the scrapheap, they're left to run around the arena on their own two feet. Far from powerless without a car, they can pop off a stylish evasion manoeuvre to bait drivers into smashing each other up. For example, animal



BLOOD BOWL 3

F FORMAT PS5, PS4 **ETA** 2021 **PUB** NACON **DEV** CYANIDE STUDIO **PLAYERS** 1-2 (TBC)

Not familiar with the first two games, or their Warhammer origins? The main thing you need to know is that the series concerns a sport that's a cross between American football, The Lord Of The Rings, and a busy slaughterhouse. Nobody plays nice.

A dozen fantastical teams will be available at launch. You're literally fighting for the ball in turn-based matches, each of which could be the last that you see. With the ability to tweak the appearance and kit of each team member, we're looking forward to making fashion choices that will make our teams feel orc-ward.



AWAY: THE SURVIVAL SERIES

F FORMAT PS4 **ETA** 2021 **PUB** BREAKING WALLS **DEV** BREAKING WALLS **PLAYERS** 1

We love nature documentaries. They're fascinating, and always have something new to teach us. Now we're on the verge of getting one we can play! This game lets you not only watch, but *control* a sugar glider (a marsupial a lot like a flying squirrel).

As the tiny beastie you run, climb, glide, explore, and fight your way through lovingly detailed environments to save yourself and your cute family, keeping an eye out for both predators and prey. There will be opportunities to briefly control other creatures, too. Fun *and* educational? Breaking Walls might just pull it off.



HEAVENLY BODIES

F FORMAT PS5, PS4 **ETA** 2021 **PUB** 2PT INTERACTIVE **DEV** 2PT INTERACTIVE **PLAYERS** 1-2

Our experience of performing tasks in a space station is rather limited, but we feel confident in saying that it's not easy. It's especially difficult here because as well as a lack of gravity, you've got controls which move each limb individually. Let the comical shenanigans commence!

Moving from one place to another requires skill, and simply pulling a lever is a challenge. Add DualSense support that will let you experience sensations such as losing your grip on something and feeling the ship give an unnerving shudder, and this is a game to keep in your orbit.



CURSE OF THE SEA RATS

F FORMAT PS4 **ETA** 2021 **PUB** PETOONS STUDIO **DEV** PETOONS STUDIO **PLAYERS** 1-4

Ordinarily, we wouldn't want rats in our PS4. When they're the stars of a hand-animated metroidvania, though, we welcome them with open arms. This Kickstarted adventure has brains as well as furry beauty. It's a non-linear quest with combat (including boss fights), puzzles, secrets, and multiple endings. Perhaps this is due to the four playable characters (Douglas, Buffalo, Akane, and Bussa), all of whom can appear on screen at once in local co-op. You'll chase down the pirate witch(!) who cursed you in order to regain your human form, and find out where your tail ends.



Even when your car is destroyed you can cause mayhem in the arena.

lover Lupita can leave a trail of flames in her wake that roasts the competition whether she's in or out of her vehicle, while metalhead Shyft can turn invisible and lie low... or set up a sneak attack.

If you've no wheels left, you can always take someone else's. Get up high among the platforms above the arena, line yourself up, and drop down for a hostile takeover. Your opponent will do their utmost to shake you off but if you hang on long enough, you can commandeer

"IF YOU HANG ON LONG ENOUGH, YOU CAN COMMANDEER SOMEONE'S CAR."

their car. This push-pull dynamic certainly keeps things interesting and we can rest assured that, even if we're eliminated early, we'll remain entertained as we watch from the bench.

It remains to be seen just how lively Destruction AllStars' community will get but, in the wake of Fall Guys: Ultimate Knockout's summer of success, offering it free to PS Plus subscribers seems like a smart move. We'll get behind the wheel of this PS5 exclusive very soon.



DEV Q&A



WEREWOLF: THE APOCALYPSE – EARTHLOOD

i FORMAT PS5, PS4 ETA 4 FEB PUB NACON
DEV CYANIDE PLAYERS 1

Game director Julien Desourteaux explains why we should sharpen our claws for this eco-horror RPG

OPM: How familiar were you and the team with the World Of Darkness before working on Earthblood?

Julien Desourteaux Several of the team members used to play the tabletop RPGs Vampire: The Masquerade or Werewolf: The Apocalypse in the late '90s. Then we started some campaigns of Werewolf: The Apocalypse at work with colleagues to immerse ourselves and to help our team members who had never played it before to better understand the universe and what it is to be a werewolf in World Of Darkness.

OPM: Has adapting the game from a tabletop RPG presented challenges?

JD Of course. It is challenging and exciting, because it will be the first game about werewolves. We want the player to feel the rage and the power of the beast in visceral and brutal combat, and also the versatility allowed by the shapeshifting part of the werewolves.

OPM: Is there anything in particular that fans of the tabletop game should look out for?

JD They can expect to see some familiar lore as well as feeling the rage and the power of the werewolves during their playthrough. The fight for Gaia against the Wyrm and the spiritual realm that the Garous protect, the human greed gathering and destroying nature through the big corporations like Endron. Strong enemies keep the game challenging, like big exo-skeletons gearing to face the werewolves, different types of powerful Fomorians (humans corrupted by banes, developing strange and disturbing mutations and abilities), corrupted werewolves, and great spirits.

OPM: How have the team worked to leave their own mark on Werewolf?

JD Some of the situations and events the players will see, and some of the main characters' backgrounds, are pulled directly from campaigns we played together and with other friends.

OPM: How will the game run on PS5?

JD PS5 will allow us to run the game with higher fps, so combat and navigation will be really smoother.

OPM: How are you planning on using the DualSense controller?

JD We are still working on how to use it the best we can to make the player feel the rage of the beast and the impact of each single hit.



TRIBES OF MIDGARD

i FORMAT PS5 ETA 2021 PUB GEARBOX PUBLISHING
DEV NORSFELL PLAYERS 1-10

Bad news: you're in the middle of a Norse-flavoured apocalypse. (Yes, another one.) Good news: this is an excuse for some epic fights! The gods seem to have abandoned you, but you're not alone. Although you can play the game solo, you can also work with up to nine other players. Either way, you need to build defences to keep your village safe. This is no mindless hack-and-slasher.

Giants are on the rampage, so you need to harvest materials and build items to give you and your team the best chance of protecting the Seed Of Yggdrasil. Stay the Norse.



BACKBONE

i FORMAT PS4 ETA 2021 PUB RAW FURY
DEV EGGNUT PLAYERS 1

A raccoon named Howard, you say? Working as a private detective? We are most definitely interested. Point-and-click gameplay, with a sprinkle of stealth thrown in, is presented through lovingly crafted pixel art. Even the soundtrack is fascinating, as it's apparently 'doom jazz'. Doesn't that sound awesome? Inspired by film noir, your journey through the city looks set to include lots of rain, sumptuous lighting, and (of course) a trenchcoat for your raccoon detective. There's even a rabbit with a moustache. The evidence so far is pointing towards a case we want to crack wide open.



ENDLING – EXTINCTION IS FOREVER

i FORMAT PS4 ETA 2021 PUB HANDYGAMES
DEV HEROBEAT STUDIOS PLAYERS 1

Think you've seen every possible take on a post-apocalyptic world? Think again. Set in a worryingly realistic future when mankind has ruined the planet, you play as the last adult fox on Earth, doing everything you can to ensure the survival of your three tiny, cubs. So, you know, no pressure.

You need to feed, protect, and care for your cubs on your way to the final area, which means a combination of exploration, tracking, and hunting. There's little room for mistakes, as that tagline makes horribly clear.

FORMAT PS5, PS4 ETA TBC PUB WARNER BROS. ENTERTAINMENT DEV TT GAMES PLAYERS 1-2

LEGO STAR WARS: THE SKYWALKER SAGA

Every Star Wars movie has been rebuilt brick by brick

We've been waiting to play through the Star Wars' saga's greatest moments, and this year will finally see the release of this tour around the galaxy far, far away.

While the PS5 version will use the console's SSD to ensure faster load times, Dawn McDiarmid, lead hub designer at TT Games, tells us that DualSense, ray tracing, and 3D audio won't be supported at launch, which is disappointing. With the bad news out of the way, we quiz her on what is included, and why this could be the best game in the Lego series.

OPM: How has the extra development time helped you?

Dawn McDiarmid: The biggest thing we've gained from our extra development time is really a chance to polish and refine the systems and features that needed that extra little

"A MORE IN-DEPTH QUEST SYSTEM FEATURES MORE ELABORATE AND RIDICULOUS QUEST CHAINS."

bit of love to make them as fun and challenging as we hoped they could be. Our amazing team has been pulling out all the stops for this one, even while the whole studio adjusted to working from home.

OPM: How did you choose which Star Wars events to include?

DM: There is always a lot of discussion around what moments to feature when it comes to breaking down well-known films such as Star Wars. There are a lot of big Star Wars fans at the studio and everyone has an opinion about and a favourite moment that simply *must* be included in the game, so the first

thing we look at is the story. We break down the important beats that the story cannot do without, such as important plot points and big, memorable moments. Then we look at the unique gameplay opportunities these moments provide and then we go from there. Throughout the process elements can be cut, moved around, or changed in size but we try to make sure that when you play through one of the films you feel like you are part of the excitement and wonder you experience when watching them for the first time. Also, I can't forget – what is a Lego game without our unique brand of humour? During this process we are always on the lookout for opportunities to make jokes and have fun with the franchise we love.

OPM: How does this game differ from previous Lego games?

DM: Not only is it the biggest game we have made but it was also built from the ground up with a new engine. We want players to experience Star Wars how they want, and to that end when you start the game you can play through any of the nine films in any order! You are not locked into a linear progression through the entire series, so if you want to start with Clone Wars or work backwards from The Rise Of Skywalker, you can. We've incorporated several new gameplay features such as ADS (aiming down sight) shooting, a brand-new upgrade system, and a more in-depth quest system which features not only more elaborate and ridiculous quest chains (some of which I am happy to note GNKS feature heavily in), but a whole new tracking system on your datapad with which to engage with the quests, and the ability to do multiple quests simultaneously.

OPM: How do random encounters work and what can we expect?

DM: Our random encounters take place in the space sections of our

open world. Each planet has its own local space where various events take place, such as quests which have ventured off-world, but these open spaces also gave us opportunity to explore the spaceship combat that serves in many of the most memorable Star Wars scenes. So, for example, when you are flying around Tatooine you might enter a contested area and find a dogfight taking place where Rebel soldiers are locked in a battle with the Empire, and you can pick the side you help! One of our biggest new space features is also a part of the random encounter system, the capital ships. If the player is intercepted by a capital ship they can fight to disable the huge ships and then board them!

OPM: How many characters are in the game? Do you have a favourite?

DM: There were around 300 playable characters made for this game but altogether about 800 unique characters were made. Our character team did a truly amazing job. My favourite would have to be Yaddle – there is just something I love about her that I can't put my finger on – or maybe the Wampa, who is just adorable! I think fans of the new trilogy will be pleased to hear that Babu Frik is making an appearance as a playable character and he is possibly one of the cutest things I have ever seen.

OPM: How explorable are the moons and planets?

DM: There are 23 planets/moons with 28 unique locations that the player can visit, each full of quests, challenges, items, and characters to find. If you have a favourite Star Wars location it's pretty likely you can visit it in-game. Each of these planets also features a local space where you can take advantage of the many ships you can unlock to get in dogfights and defeat capital ships which, when boarded, reveal even more areas to explore!



2



1

2021 PREVIEW



1 The 300 or so playable characters include favourites old and new. **2** You can play through the films in any order – Team OPM’s old farts will be starting with A New Hope. **3** Whatever your favourite Star Wars moment is, it’s sure to be in here somewhere. **4** We’re intrigued to see how things like Jedi powers will be acquired and used over the course of the game. **5** We felt Rise Of Skywalker could do with much more Finn – so this will be our chance to put things right.



3



4



5



2021 PREVIEW

F FORMAT PS5 **ETA** TBC **PUB** PLAYSTATION STUDIOS
DEV POLYPHONY DIGITAL **PLAYERS** TBC

GRAN TURISMO 7

Fuelled and ready to roll

The exciting thing about Gran Turismo 7 is that number: this is a proper sequel and will cram in all of the modes, cars, and events we've come to expect from a full-fat series entry. This means we get a campaign mode, with you beginning as a novice in lesser cars

before rising through the ranks to unlock the your dream cars.

The hub screen, called GT Town, shows all manner of events and modes, including a teased social club called GT Café plus School, GT World, GT Sport Live, and Used Cars. This last entry was missing from GT Sport, and it's where you can pick up a damaged car for less than a new one. It's handy then, that GT7 sees the return of car tuning. You can modify vehicles' engines, suspension, drivetrain and chassis parts, along with their tyres.

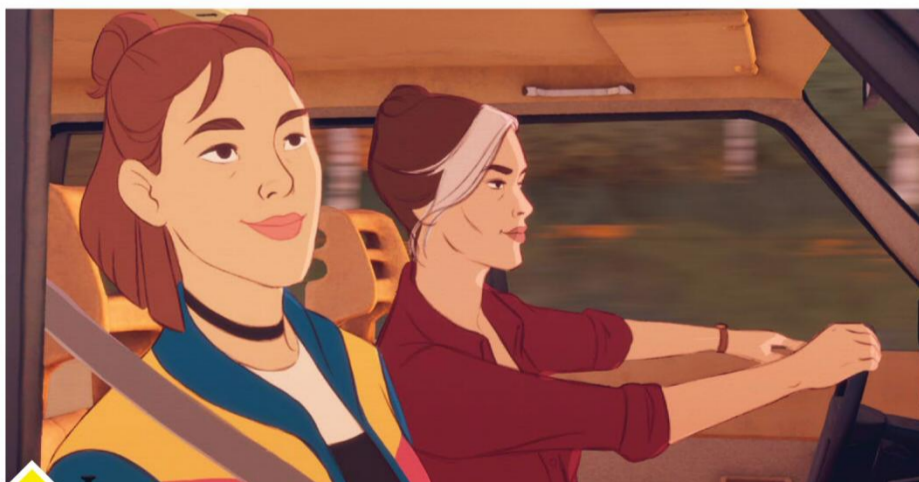
TOP GEAR

The developer is making the most of the power of PS5. Polyphony Digital has confirmed it's implementing ray tracing, alongside 4K, HDR, and a targeted 60fps framerate, making GT7 one of the console's most accomplished games. The SSD is being employed to ensure races are set up and entered in seconds, and taking a car from tuning to test track will be seamless.

DualSense is fast becoming PS5's real secret weapon, and it will make racing a supercar around returning tracks such as Trial Mountain a visceral thrill. You'll be able to feel the ABS vibrating through the pad and a car's acceleration.

As a recent demo showed, GT7 is able to back up all its technical mastery with something that plays perfectly. Gran Turismo has always managed to race a fine line between sim and arcade racer; an blockbuster all-rounder. The cars are immaculate, the treeline reflects realistically from the driver's helmet, and the window screen vibrates over rough tarmac and calms down as the road smooths. GT7 just *feels* right.

All the thrill of a real racing car with virtually none of the expense.



F FORMAT PS5, PS4 **ETA** 2021 **PUB** ANNA PURNA INTERACTIVE **DEV** FULLBRIGHT **PLAYERS** 1

OPEN ROADS

Becoming drawn together

The studio behind *Gone Home* and *Tacoma* once again champions narrative, this time telling the story of a mother-daughter journey that uncovers family secrets. After they discover a box in their attic, what starts as a journey to find stolen loot begins to hint at something darker...

The hand-animated style helps focus on the characters, as the journey between destinations is as important as searching old properties for clues. Big acting talent helps sell this two-hander: Kaitlyn Dever (*Booksmart*) plays 16-year old Tess and Keri Russell (*The Americans*) is mother Opal.



F FORMAT PS5, PS4 **ETA** 22 JUN **PUB** WARNER BROS INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT **DEV** TURTLE ROCK **PLAYERS** 1-4

BACK 4 BLOOD

It's (un)dead good

Four-armed zombie monkeys, muscle beasts, an undead goo-spitting stalker and a horde of walking dead: this co-op shooter from the team that created *Left 4 Dead* delivers everything you want from a side-step sequel.

There have been many imitators on PlayStation but Turtle Rock Studios'

heritage ensures this is the real deal for our console. The gameplay remains resolutely *Left 4 Dead*-y as *Back 4 Blood*'s gameplay demos team horde shooting at its best. It's smooth and fast, with an intuitive momentum that means you'll upgrade from pistol to Uzi to shotgun on the fly.

GTA V has sold over 135 million copies, but we still want to play a PS5-enhanced edition.

2021 AND BEYOND

Here's the best of the rest

We're up and running in 2021 and... we're getting excited for **GRAND**

THEFT AUTO V all over again. Yes, really. We've already seen how new-gen upgrades to PS4 games can make these classics feel fresh, so triple-dipping back into San Andreas on PS5, a console exclusive, could be one of 2021's highlights. No doubt Rockstar has a few surprises in store; we'd expect 4K at 60fps with a new weather model, ray tracing, and a denser, more detailed world.

Likewise CD Projekt Red has its work cut out bringing **CYBERPUNK 2077** to PS5, as well as a revamped **THE WITCHER 3** – both could be must-play revivals.

Still tracking for this year is the open-world soulsborne juggernaut **ELDEN RING**. This team-up between Bloodborne's Hidetaka Miyazaki and Game Of Thrones' George RR Martin will be one of the biggest games of the year. On its heels will be **LORDS OF THE FALLEN 2**, which could be a surprise. PlatinumGames' **BABYLON'S FALL** should finally shuffle onto PlayStation too.

This is also a year of returns, whether that's indie hits such as **HOLLOW KNIGHT: SILKSONG** or 2K Sports' return to NFL with a rumoured arcade sports title in the style of EA Big's classic Street series. We'd also expect

DYING LIGHT 2, and possibly **SPYRO 4**, to heat up the year ahead.

Looking beyond 2021 it's hard not to get excited; **GOD OF WAR 2** is sharpening its axe, and **SUICIDE SQUAD: KILL THE JUSTICE LEAGUE** will take flight. EA has a new **MASS EFFECT** lined up and the next **DRAGON AGE** is polishing its armour. All of that and IO Interactive's **007** game has us practising our Sean Connery impressions. Except Ian, who's a Timothy Dalton fan. The weirdo.

Only on PS5, we're excited for Square Enix's open-world RPG **PROJECT ATHIA**. The publisher has created a new studio, Luminous Productions, just to make this ambitious game, and for two years it'll only be on PS5 – a timespan hinting at post-release expansions.

Capcom's **PRAGMATA** is in the wings, and this new weird sci-fi adventure showed promise at PS5's launch.

There's so much to look forward to!

“NEW-GEN UPGRADES TO PS4 GAMES CAN MAKE THESE CLASSICS FEEL FRESH.”



1 Rocksteady's *Suicide Squad: Kill The Justice League*, **2** a new *Mass Effect*, **3** and *Project Athia* are heading to PlayStation 5. Can you wait?

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"EXPLOSIVE LAMBS
BOUNCING COMICALLY."

096 Worms Rumble

Reviews



82

Cyberpunk 2077

Ambitious world-building – but the bugs are only outnumbered by the fake phalluses

HIGHLIGHTS

PUYO PUYO TETRIS 2 86 | WHEN THE PAST WAS AROUND 86 | SPACE INVADERS FOREVER 87 | FIFA 21 88
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Cyberpunk 2077

Needing no introduction but deserving plenty of judgement



INFO

Format PS4
Price £49.99
ETA Out now
Pub Bandai Namco Entertainment
Dev CD Projekt Red
Players 1
Length 40+ hours
Accessibility
 Adjustable subtitles (which occasionally fail to accurately describe what is being said), colourblind modes, aim assist, camera and visual effect options. There's an epilepsy warning but no option to avoid the epilepsy-triggering Brain Dance boot sequences.

Just in case you've been sleeping under a rock, allow us the dubious honour of yelling "WAKE THE *blorp!* UP, SAMURAI!" CD Projekt Red's latest immersive RPG is finally on shelves, swapping The Witcher's rolling fantasy fields for Night City's dystopian science-fiction cityscape. It's an impressive pivot for the studio – to say nothing of the widely reported crunch working conditions that facilitated its creation.

On PS4 the game is hugely ambitious but skids past the landing strip. On a Pro you *will* experience crashes, surreal graphical glitches, kneecapped framerates, and more texture pop than you can shake your mantis blades at. These problems are exacerbated on a base PS4, and even on a Pro there's no getting away from the fan's best impression of a jet engine. Compared to the PC build, the PS4 version also lacks the same sense of depth to its Night City scenes due to last-gen's more limited lighting tech. It's playable – just.

The Witcher 3's PS4 debut also left a lot to be desired and CDPR has a track record of bringing lacklustre launch builds up to speed. Cyberpunk has already received a number of post-release patches with more on the way throughout 2021 but as it currently stands, OPM can't recommend playing on PS4. It's a classic case of 'wait and see.'

TOTAL SYSTEM FAILURE

Still here? Beyond the disastrous release build, there's still plenty to talk about. For starters, the first-person perspective is a bold choice that pays off in tense confrontations and draws you into the world – though you might wish for more theatrical flair from some scenes. As mercenary V, you acquaint yourself with Night City through far more than simply staring down the barrel of a gun in a darkened alleyway. The setting's level of detail and



Each district in the city has its own distinctive personality and look.

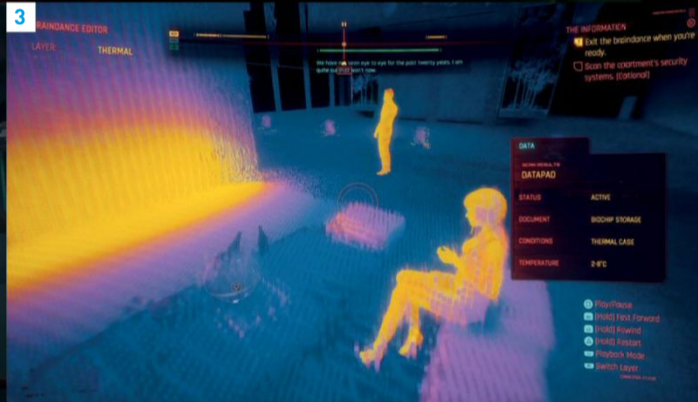


■ The first-person perspective is a bold choice that pays off in tense confrontations. ■



Jackie: No, he's alive, well and kickin'. An' he sends his regards.

1
2



1 The first-person perspective really adds to tense scenes. Just please don't ask us about the sexy times...
2 Jess' gran reads everything we write but given Cyberpunk's raunchier aspects... please look away now, Felicia. 3 Brain Dances lean into light detective mechanics. Scrubbing through another person's memories is seldom a forgettable experience.

verticality places it miles ahead of the 'Chad Valley play mat' feel of so many other open-world locales. Far from a plastic-fantastic wonderland, the streets are cluttered and believably grimy. It's best to explore on foot not only due to the framerate taking a hit whenever you get behind the wheel but also for the sense of discovery. You'll often just stumble on things, but getting to know the cast will earn you plenty of intriguing tip-offs.

The crisp silhouettes of Corp skyscrapers reach ever-upwards, adding to the sense of place and scale, but there's no escaping the more abrasive aspects of Night City's personality closer to the ground floor. Almost everywhere you look, ads blare at full blast with boobs, butts, and orgasmic moans. It's all meant to be tongue-in-cheek world-building to demonstrate how this particular hyper-capitalist dystopia exploits people, but feels closer to adolescent preoccupation in context.

The character creator is emblematic of this one-track mind, allowing you to select your jiggly bits while omitting options that allow for a body that looks anything other than Insta-famous. Furthermore, things like hair are gender-locked

and there's no barber or nail tech in all of Night City either so you're stuck with your first choice. In the future, you can look however you want – just not like *that*, apparently.

It's possible Cyberpunk's particular brand of edginess appeals more to players in their teens rather than 20something connoisseurs of filth. Get used to seeing *lots* of dildos stashed everywhere... but unfortunately, it's not all raunchy fun and safe-word games.

RETRO-PERSPECTIVE

Based on the tabletop game Cyberpunk 2020, this is a distinctly '80s-style vision of the future. This means wired connections are commonplace, cyberware has a heavy-metal look, and unfortunately economic anxieties about Japan are reproduced throughout the broad strokes of the story. It's a throwback take on the genre that shows no interest in interrogating these uglier aspects or the temporal distance

between itself and its 40-year-old sources of inspiration.

There's an obvious confidence to the storytelling that makes it all the more baffling when the writing and direction lean on tired stereotypes or otherwise punch down. There's no escaping the worst offenders either – they're plastered all over the city.

When 2077 isn't tripping over itself to impress the wearily unfunny crowd who've made causing offence their whole personality, there's still plenty to enjoy. Despite Night City's mean-spirited edges, more tender moments with the expansive cast are given a surprising amount of space. Particular standouts include how you choose to say goodbye to an old friend at the beginning of act two and, for me personally, falling in love with Judy Alvarez.

Side-quests are smartly treated with the same attention to detail as the core narrative, elevated by a sophisticated animation system (when it

Side-quests are smartly treated with the same attention to detail as the core narrative.



4 Shooting, when the framerate is on your side, feels good but aiming on a DualShock 4 is fiddly.

5 Side-stories are fully featured and deep. It's worth seeking them out. **6** Hacking feels more like ESP than tech wizardry but is still fun.



works) and extensive use of motion capture performances. Keanu Reeves' Johnny Silverhand features heavily, at turns both menacing and unlikeable but never anything other than compelling.

BLUE SCREENED

Sizeable technical issues aside, Cyberpunk plays like an action flick that's stylishly realised through punchy dialogue and set-pieces. While you will struggle through shootouts due to lost frames and AI with questionable instincts, stealth and hacking shine. Going full Netrunner and levelling up your quick hacks plays a bit like Jean Grey on a bad day but there's something satisfying about picking off heavily armed enemies while rocking a body stat of three yourself. It's

consistently rewarding to specialise and unlock new perks that complement your playstyle even if the design of combat-focused missions isn't really breaking new ground.

The fact that some of this 2020 game's missions are reminiscent of 2008's Fallout 3 aside, your arsenal and boss fights are always memorable. Specialising away from strength won't come back to bite you but against one light-footed foe who refuses to stand still, quick hacks can only do so much. The flexible gameplay means there're more ways to skin a cyborg. A smart gun with homing bullets does the job and feels incredibly satisfying to let rip. Loot is generous to the point you won't be able to swipe everything. Though if you've got a PS5, you might have fun trying,



A hugely ambitious, immersive RPG that too often works against itself. Perhaps worth playing – just not at full price and not on PS4 without further patches. Jess Kinghorn



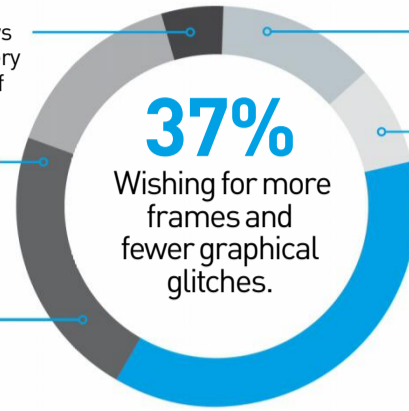
THE OPM BREAKDOWN

WHAT YOU DO IN: CYBERPUNK 2077

5% Finding sex toys sequestered in every nook and cranny of Night City.

15% Scavenging your next outfit of the day: tiger print hot pants and camo vest.

22% Pressing **L1** to see what devices you can mess with.



13% Having your ear talked off by half the city on the holo.

8% Falling in love with Judy Alvarez. Then planning your cosplay.

THE FIRST THREE HOURS



1 The Nomad character class prologue sees V bonding with the nicest man in all of Night City, Jackie Welles. **2** The mysterious Evelyn Parker hooks V up with their first Brain Dance and makes an offer they can't refuse. **3** Head still spinning, V comes face-to-face with the Maelstrom gang – and surprisingly sees eye-to-eye.

SECOND OPINION NIGHT RIDER



CDPR follows its fantasy detective game with a sci-fi detective game, and its strengths remain – the worldbuilding and atmosphere are intoxicating, and the side-quests bolt on substantial story. It drips ambition. So much so that you struggle to feel it in this PS4 version, which is compromised. I'm waiting for patches or the PS5 version to continue my life in Night City. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**

FRIENDS & ENEMIES



JACKIE WELLES
A merc with a heart of gold and your partner in crime. Loves to pump iron.



JUDY ALVAREZ
Night City's premier Brain Dance editor. Usually one to keep a low profile.



JOHNNY SILVERHAND
A dead rocker, played by Keanu Reeves. Your fates are intertwined.

ALSO ON PLAYSTATION 5



Playing the PS4 version on new-gen hardware will treat you to an uncapped 60fps, though crashes still persist. Still, the edges it does smooth out leave us feeling optimistic about how the eventual PS5 version should perform, especially as that will take advantage of the new console's ray-tracing capabilities. We hope.

INFO **FORMAT** PS5 (reviewed), PS4, **PRICE** £34.99 **ETA** Out now **PUB** Sega **DEV** Sega **PLAYERS** 1-8



Puyo Puyo Tetris 2

Bubbles, blocks, and everything rocks

Throw blocks and googly-eyed jellies into a blender and you get the sort of forbidden smoothie that shouldn't taste good, but somehow is incredibly delicious. Tetris and Puyo are both board-based puzzlers, but on paper are very different. So how do they work together?

Mainly focussed on battling head-to-head, in PPT2 you clutter up your opponent's board with junk to force them to fill their screen and lose the game.¹ Similarly, Big Bang has you solving board puzzles quickly to the same effect. But where it really gets exciting is in Fusion and Swap modes. In Fusion you play both Tetris and Puyo Puyo simultaneously, with heavier tetronimos sinking beneath puyos, altering their placement, so you need to combine popping groups of the four jellies with clearing Tetris lines. Swap sees you juggling two boards on a timer, chaos coming from trying to remember the play you were setting up as the timer ticks down.

New to this sequel are Skill Battles, where junk damages an overall health bar, and your main character and two allies can unleash support skills, ranging from clearing out junk to shielding and healing. It's a neat addition, as they can even gain XP and level up, but it can be easy to beat the AI by using powerful skills.²

There's plenty more, from comprehensive lessons for both puzzlers to a hefty, fully English-language voice-acted adventure mode. Very much in the Puyo Puyo mould, it's goofy fun about the dimensions crossing over. PPT2 isn't a game-changer, but is still one of the best puzzlers around.

Oscar Taylor-Kent



FOOTNOTES ¹ Whether you choose Puyo or Tetris, the game feels balanced. ² We wouldn't wish Skill Battles away, but the purer mashups are better.

INFO **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £34.99 **ETA** Out now **PUB** Paradox Interactive **DEV** Romero Games **PLAYERS** 1



Empire Of Sin

Al Kaput

From sci-fi to western and fantasy, pretty much every traditional gaming genre has been used for a round-based game, with the exception of the 1920s crime drama. Romero Games¹ tries to fix this glaring oversight with Empire Of Sin, a crime empire management/strategy combat hybrid that unfortunately sounds much better on paper than it plays.

As one of 14 mobsters, you enter Prohibition-era Chicago, ready to make the city your own. In order to do that, you and your hired hands first need to clear the different buildings of a district of members of the opposing clan, and then turn them into something that makes you money – like a brewery, or a hotel.

Empire Of Sin has the idea of a management game with deep systems right – you can manage anything from your own roster of criminals to take into combat,

right down to the alcohol you're serving, but the actual choices you make are simplistic because for all the rows and rows of numbers the game shows you, you only have influence over a few factors. Changing the beer your establishments serve, for example, takes one button press, and that is the extent to which you can affect building logistics. You can spend a lot of money on upgrades, but their effect remains difficult to gauge.

In combat, the AI-controlled enemies tend to leave themselves wide open, and even if they don't, you can still hit even the most cunning gangster from several doors down.² All this means you're soon so overpowered that nothing poses a challenge, making diplomacy pointless. The result is a game that while atmospheric, turns monotonous very quickly, and whose ideas are never developed in a way that makes it interesting to play. **Malindy Hetfeld**



FOOTNOTES ¹ Brenda and John Romero are both veteran game designers with over 25 years of experience; they founded their independent studio Romero Games in 2015. ² AI enemies will completely ignore cover to get you, as they should in a game where you have better chances of hitting someone three doors down.

INFO **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £5.79 **ETA** Out now **PUB** Toge Productions **DEV** Mojiken **PLAYERS** 1



When The Past Was Around

Welcome to the love nest

This year, we've seen plenty of indies about death, but Mojiken's When The Past Was Around approaches the subject in its own way. It's an hour-long story of love and grief with a dream logic twist, all wrapped up in a gorgeous hand-drawn art style.

It tells the story of a young woman grieving over the death of her partner, a violinist with the head of an owl (a bit weird but go with it).¹ Through magical-realist scenes that combine light puzzle solving with non-verbal storytelling, we get to see how the two met, became close, the unfortunate declining health of our feathered friend, and his subsequent end.

You're taken through a string of the young woman's memories, with each scene possessing a handful of brain teasers. Puzzles are a series of exercises in finding hidden objects and then using them on a particular item, like finding a key that opens a locked music box.² Although they are simple point-and-click endeavours, the majority have a romantic twist. This can include brewing the right teas for the protagonist and her owl friend, and in another searching the night sky for a particular constellation.

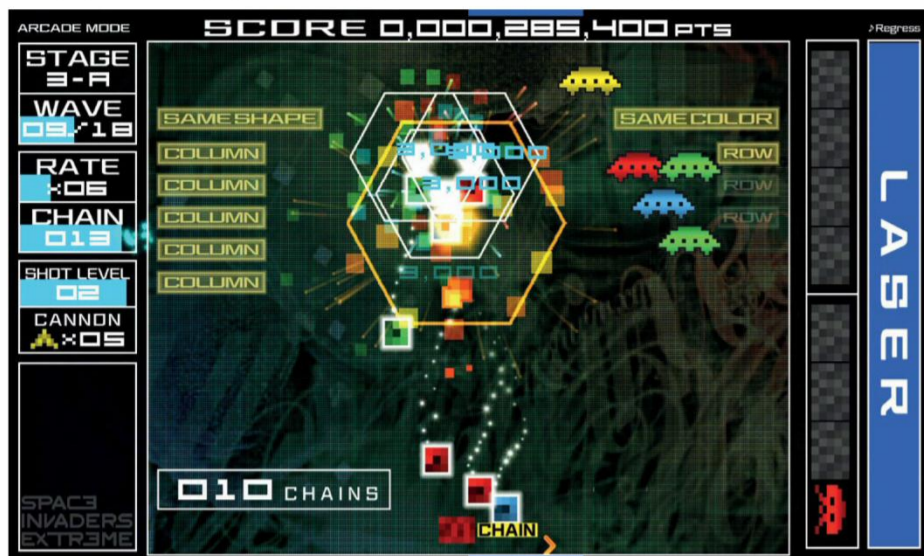
As breezy as the puzzles are, there are some particularly small items that the DualShock isn't precise enough to land on, meaning lots of fiddly manoeuvring of the joystick, which is a bit of a pain.

Despite that, When The Past Was Around is an endearing game that is a celebration of two people's shared love of music. It teeters on being sappy, but its dreamy, abstract nature brings it back from the brink. It's an endearing pocket-sized tale and a wonderful gem from the Indonesian indie game scene. **Rachel Watts**



FOOTNOTES ¹ A man with an owl head is pretty creepy but this owl-man is charming. ² You'll find a crowbar in a grandfather clock. Classic dream logic.

INFO FORMAT PS4 PRICE £24.99 ETA Out now
 PUB Inin Games DEV Taito Corporation PLAYERS 1-4



Space Invaders Forever

Should you keep your distance?

Space Invaders is so resolute even Adam Sandler couldn't put a dent in its venerable reputation. This is a collection of three old-ish games that update the four-decades-old action in numerous ways, with differing levels of success.

The pick of the pack is Space Invaders Extreme, an audio-visual spectacle that takes the classic arcade activity – shoot descending aliens before they crush you – and turns it into a pulsating, rhythmic disco-

Space Invaders Extreme is a fun, if shallow, experiment.

POOR SHOT

Fairing less well is Arkanoid Vs. Space Invaders. Fans will smile at the deeper meaning behind the crossover (Space Invaders' designer, Tomohiro Nishikado, was inspired by Breakout, which in turn Arkanoid is a clone of). But that's likely the only smile you'll have while playing this made-for-mobiles game. Using the Touchpad to bounce shots back at aliens, while collecting bonuses and currency 'Medals',

Power-ups help to clear a screen and send the musical score into rapture.

shooter. Each round presents an assortment of Invaders: some explode on touch taking others with them; some deflect shots; one may dive-bomb you; another will swell to three times its size. Blast chains of the same-coloured alien type and you're rewarded with time-limited power-ups that help to clear a screen and send the musical score into rapture. As updates of classic ideas go,

is rarely challenging. So casual it's the velvet loungewear of gaming, but not as comforting as that sounds.

The final spin on the format is Space Invaders Gigamax 4 SE, which reworks the 1978 original into a four-player couchplay marathon, and it's a solid reinterpretation. As with the collection overall, the fun is determined by just how much you love Space Invaders.



A collection of Space Invaders variants with diminishing returns. Come for Extreme, hang around for Gigamax SE, leave when Arkanoid Vs. rears its ugly head. **Ian Dean**



THREE TO PLAY



PSN games you might have missed



Every month, loads of games come to the PS Store. So many, in fact, you'd be hard-pressed to play them all. In this column we take a look at some extras we didn't have time to fully review, and this time around things feel like a bit of a retro throwback...



Notoriously delisted from PSN back in 2014, Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World: The Game was a digital-only brawler that became the poster child for annoying licensing agreements getting in the way of playing great games. We couldn't stand to see it that way. If you hadn't bought it and downloaded it to a PS3, you were out of luck. Until now, that is. **Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World: The Game – Complete Edition** brings it to PS4 along with its DLC characters, Knives and Wallace. The Anamanaguchi soundtrack is a banger, and the chaotic, colourful action is punchy (despite some annoying stun locks). All we need now is an excessive limited-run physical printing, but it's good to have Scott back.



Colourful monster catching and battling title **Temtem** might not have pixel art, but there's no getting around the fact it's obviously heavily inspired by Nintendo's Pokémon. [Poke a what? – ed] That's a franchise that, due to its success, can be stuck in its ways, so Crema's take on the genre manages to add some fresh spice. This PS5 release is still in early access, but exploring the Airborne Archipelago alongside your Temtem partners is a joy nonetheless, as is seeing the world inhabited by other people playing online. Our favourite feature, though? Battling your way through the dojo leaders can be entirely co-op, with dual battles. If you want to get in early on this monster battler, it's worth the cost of entry.



As for game three? Giant robot battles will always be retro to us. **Override 2: Super Mech League** even features Ultraman himself as a preorder bonus in the Deluxe Edition. The concept here is much the same as in the original: you pilot a giant robot, using the triggers to unleash limb-specific moves, combining button presses for combos. On PS5 it's a looker, the art style popping in a way that almost looks like action figures doing battle – like a kid's dream come true. With up to four players, battles can be a little too hectic, and the controls are occasionally clunky, but when it all comes together it's a unique fighter that scratches that mecha itch.



Players look more convincing than ever, even if celebrations remain the same.



UPGRADED FOR PS5

FIFA 21

DualSense is the star player of this mid-table offering



INFO
FORMAT PS5
PRICE £59.99
ETA Out now
PUB EA
DEV EA Canada
PLAYERS 1-4 offline, 1-22 online
LENGTH (hours): Infinite
ACCESSIBILITY Colour blindness adjustment, remap right stick and shoulder buttons for menus, subtitles, gameplay-focused adjustments



While there's always something special about seeing a series make its debut on a new generation of consoles, it's pretty rare to be more impressed by what's in your hand than on the screen. But that's the case with this transitional season of FIFA. All I want to do in the first few games I play is ping simple passes in midfield, purely so I can feel the DualSense indicate which foot a player has taken the ball on.

While dinking the ball around doesn't sound like the most exciting use of this tech, it does show the deep care that has gone into crafting a tactile new-gen experience for EA's football behemoth. I may not have had the chance to be inside Goodison Park in 2020, but playing there in FIFA mimics the live experience in ways I would never have guessed would be possible.

The way the DualSense pulses as the crowd reacts to a bursting run from Richarlison, the sudden judder on one side as James Rodriguez whips in a corner, the insistent rumble when Calvert-Lewin slams a header into the goal. It's like EA found a way to get across the sensation of limbs everywhere.

ENGINE ROOM

Even the adaptive triggers fight you as the match wears on, tightening up and forcing you to use more pressure as your players get tired. It all adds up to create a sense of the football on offer

coming to life that only feels possible on PS5.

Elsewhere, other tweaks are not quite as impressive. As you would expect from a showcase sports game, player animations and likenesses are noticeably improved. Players gesticulate naturally, hair sways realistically, and scoring in big moments,

might improve the immediacy of matches, but it still doesn't address the lingering issues that we flagged in our PS4 review (OPM#182, 7/10). Games still feel like they can turn on an improbable pass or lacklustre tackle, while watching the AI laser around passes on harder Ultimate Team difficulties as

It's like EA found a way to get across the sensation of limbs everywhere.

such as the dying minutes of a match, gets an appropriately exuberant new celebration. Fantastic when you're the one scoring in the 85th minute, infuriating when you're not.

The problem is that the foundations are the same on PS4 and PS5. The DualSense

you struggle to get close is still eye-twitchingly annoying. If anything, the improvements elsewhere only serve to throw these deficiencies into sharper relief. Hopefully, a proper next-gen run out next year might see meaningful on-field change.



While FIFA 21 is as good a showcase for the potential of the DualSense as we've seen so far, the underlying issues with this entry remain. **Ben Tyrer**





INFO **FORMAT** PS4, **PRICE** £11.99
ETA Out now **PUB** Humble Bundle, Inc.
DEV Sneaky Bastards **PLAYERS** 1-2



Wildfire

One of the smartest stealth/puzzle games in years

Part puzzler, part stealth action game, *Wildfire* is a unique blend you don't see often – taking risks that mostly pay off.

You play as a witch who can manipulate the elements: Fire, Water, Earth, and Spirit.¹ These Elemental powers are combined and intertwined with the stealth gameplay, livening up what could otherwise have been a repetitive adventure.

One thing *Wildfire* excels at is the pace at which it introduces new mechanics, whether it's a nifty new Elemental power or an additional character who plays a little differently from the witch (such as a cat).

Each level has its own objectives with a unique design, forcing you to think quickly when your plan is unexpectedly shattered. It can sometimes be frustrating to get through a stage entirely undetected, but you don't have to – you only lose if you take damage, making hitting credits forgiving.

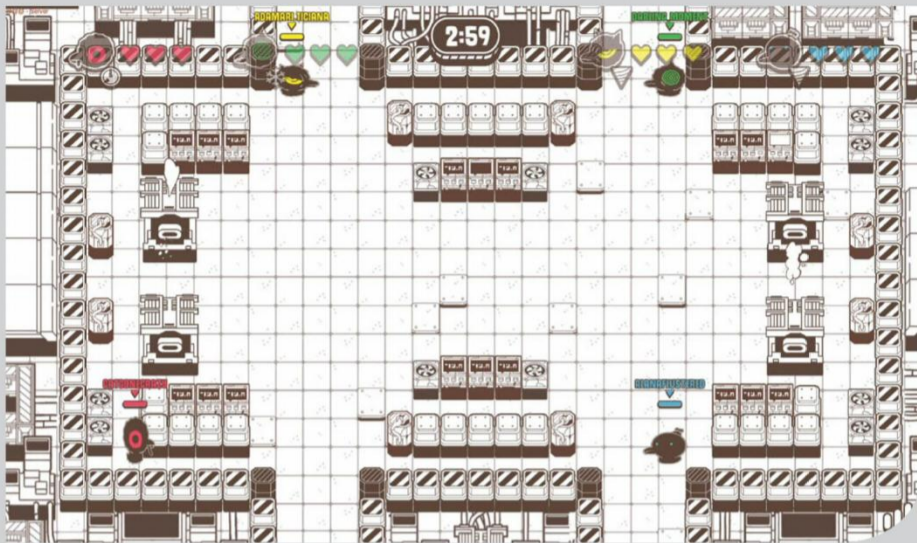
The rules of its stealth are individually interesting but familiar, and yet become far more enticing in combination. For example, you can hide in tall grass, but can also burn it away to scare your enemies into leaving. Burn it all, though, and you have nowhere to hide. Deciding how you use your powers to alter the environment, be it freezing water, encasing enemies in ice, growing vines to climb up, or more, requires weighing up the pros and cons.²

Many of the levels can be tackled in a multitude of ways, and a deep level of thought has clearly been put into the design of every stage. When you combine all of the smart design decisions with superb writing and dialogue, you get a truly memorable game, proving you don't need a Night City-sized budget to impress. **Joseph Yaden**



FOOTNOTES **1** As you progress, you unlock more elemental powers. **2** Various level objectives enhance replayability, as completing them gives upgrades.

INFO **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £11.99 **ETA** Out now
PUB Zordix **DEV** Purple Tree **PLAYERS**: 1-4



Ponpu

The golden egg of grotesque

Oddities are always welcome, but *Ponpu* is slightly too odd for its own good.

At heart it's a new take on multiplayer classic Bomberman, only you control a small duck, laying explosive eggs and kicking them across the top-down arenas.

Sounds cute, right? Well, it isn't. *Ponpu*'s artwork actually revels in the grotesque¹ with unnervingly sinister animations, like a tube that physically inserts special weapon eggs, then seeps dark liquid on the ground. Accordingly, the genre's usual bright, cheerful visuals are replaced with essentially two-tone artwork, meaning it can get hard to discern between environmental objects, resulting in annoying pitfalls in story mode and confusion in multiplayer matches.

Thankfully, the three multiplayer modes are all actually very playable and work

well both online and locally, supporting up to four players. These are standard deathmatch, a coin grab mode in which dying drops all your coins for others to pick up,² and a paint battle where you try to cover the arena in your team's colour. Power-ups like super-speed and health recovery can be uncovered, but the game's far more about reading each situation and playing skilfully than simply relying on finding cool stuff. It's smooth and tactical, but without any online ranking system it's ultimately too easy to put down.

The five-to-six-hours-long single-player mode is certainly challenging, with some very well-designed boss fights, but the main maze-like levels feel basic and dreary. It's a slog.

Ponpu's clearly best suited to local party play, but... well, it would be a pretty strange party if you got this one out.

Justin Towell



FOOTNOTES **1** Like the cheerful arcade-style announcer who shouts 'Bombs up!' before every bout, it's clearly subverting convention. Very clever and worthy, but not exactly appealing. **2** This is the best mode, especially as you can see the clock counting down, allowing for a sudden, targeted final assault before scarping like a git.

INFO **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £34.99
ETA Out now **PUB** Square Enix
DEV Square Enix **PLAYERS** 1



Dragon Quest XI: Echoes of an Elusive Age - Definitive Edition

Polished-up Switch port sweetens the deal

The JRPG megahit comes to PS4! Again! Only this time it's a port of the Switch version, which is a bit weird, but means it includes all the Definitive Edition bells and whistles, which do a lot to provide a smoother experience. You can now speed up battles, switch between English and Japanese voiceovers, swap from 3D to nostalgic 2D visuals, and flick the soundtrack from full orchestral to charmingly bleepy MIDI.¹

While the new content seems a little sparse, after a while it becomes strange to imagine playing without the polish.² Wandering through the vibrant world without the other characters trailing behind you like brightly coloured JRPG ducklings sounds kind of lonely (especially with the new photo mode allowing you to pose everyone to snap pics). Far and away the most exciting additions are the character side-stories, which give different party members a welcome opportunity to steal the spotlight.

There are also tougher Draconian Quests options, and you can even masochistically opt in to that horrible thing where the game ends if the main character dies. Yes, there are enjoyable new ways to make yourself suffer! There are even new mounts for dungeon-traversing, and Tickington pays homage to previous series titles in 16-bit side-quest style.

Though nothing groundbreaking, this version provides a collection of nice-to-have additions which boost an already great game, making it the one to go for (unless you're a graphics snob). **Max Williams**



FOOTNOTES **1** You can swap these around whenever you fancy. **2** Not graphical polish. That took a bit of a hit in the move from Switch.



When you work out how to slay a previously tough enemy, it's quite the rush.

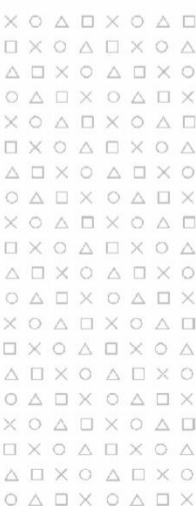
Chronos: Before The Ashes

If you fall I'll catch you, time after time



INFO

FORMAT PS4
PRICE £24.99
ETA Out now
PUB THQ Nordic
DEV Gunfire Games
PLAYERS 1
LENGTH 8-10 hours
ACCESSIBILITY Subtitles, vibration toggle on/off



Game protagonists can do many things – store dozens of huge guns in their pockets, scale buildings in a matter of seconds, break international treasure hunting laws with a cheeky grin, and so on – but most of them can't age. Here, however, it's a central mechanic. Starting at the tender age of 18, you age one year each time you return from the dead. There's more to it than growing increasingly amusing facial hair.

You're tasked with saving your land from the threat of a dragon in another dimension. You travel there via a World Stone, landmarks you'll discover more of which double as spawn points and a means of fast travel. You won't make much use of the latter feature, though, as you'll spend most of your time moving forward through the huge, sprawling castle that you find.

There's a distinct whiff of Dark Souls to the combat. It's slow, deliberate, and with a small but varied selection of weapons and shields to find and equip. You won't get far if you don't make good use of blocks, parries, and dodges. This is far more forgiving and, indeed, accessible than FromSoftware's series, though, in part because there are three difficulty options and – shock, horror – a pause button!

Death (almost) always comes from your own mistakes or impatience, rather than an ambush you had no way of anticipating. Study your enemies and adapt to their tactics accordingly, and you'll power through the game at a satisfying

speed. Indeed, when we went a full 90 minutes without dying, we felt rather smug. If you do die, it adds extra wrinkles to the game, because there *are* benefits to death, thanks to the ageing mechanic. On every tenth birthday starting at your 20th, you get to choose a permanent buff; although to be honest, we

a certain point, you won't be able to put any more points into Agility because you're too old. It's an interesting idea, but takes quite a few deaths to kick in. Finishing at age 53, we never saw any of this ourselves.

The developers have done a good job with a clearly limited budget, although the more

You won't get far if you don't make good use of blocks, parries, and dodges in battle.

usually found it hard to discern the difference.

AGEING BULL

There's still traditional levelling, and you choose where to put the points you earn as you go. The game advises that Arcane becomes more important than Strength in old age, and after

imaginative ideas are few and far between. Bosses are (surprisingly) less satisfying to fight than standard blade fodder, and the puzzles swing between 'clever' and 'annoying'. Still, with a strong atmosphere and an intriguing story teased out to you in chunks, you'll gladly see it through to the end.



If you liked the look of Dark Souls but bounced off the difficulty, Chronos offers a solid (if cheaper), more user-friendly, yet still demanding alternative. **Luke Kemp**





INFO **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £11.99
ETA Out now **PUB** Focus Home
 Interactive **DEV** Douze Dixièmes **PLAYERS** 1



Shady Part of Me

Not living in anybody's shadow but your own

Don't be fooled by the slightly unfortunate name; this has nothing to do with someone's wheeler-dealer tendencies. It's a tale regarding what appears to be a young girl in a psychiatric hospital who, along with her alter-ego (represented by her shadow), travels through surreal environments that are a mixture of her surroundings and memories. You switch between both characters as they help one another progress.

The girl moves in 3D, while her shadow essentially exists in a 2D platformer with some extremely clever twists. You manipulate objects and their light sources to move and create objects in the shadow plane,¹ while the shadow girl can also help by using shadows cast by switches as though they were solid. The 'real' girl cannot enter the light and the shadow girl cannot leave it, forming the basis for some truly ingenious puzzles.²

The story is told through dialogue, environments, and literal environmental storytelling (words and phrases appear on scenery)... and isn't as focussed as it needs to be. The art direction, meanwhile, is fantastic, creating a mesmerising world while feeding into the puzzles themselves. The gorgeous laid-back soundtrack deserves praise too, a delight from the first moment to the last. The decision to allow you to rewind time without limitations is a brilliant one, ensuring repetition and frustration never set in. While the success of the storytelling (and its exploration of psychology and mental health) is up for debate, there's no denying this is a wonderful puzzle-platformer that is intelligent, unique, full of surprises, and, at five to six hours, never threatens to overstay its welcome.

Luke Kemp



FOOTNOTES ¹ While vaguely reminiscent of Contrast, this is better. ² The difficulty curve is superbly judged; many heads will be scratched after the halfway point.

INFO **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £24.99 **ETA** Out now **PUB** Dontnod Entertainment, Bandai Namco
 Entertainment **DEV** Dontnod Entertainment **PLAYERS** 1



Twin Mirror

A no-thrills mystery

Protagonist Sam Higgs has always had a hard time making friends. A prickly investigative journalist, he won few allies when one of his articles led to the shuttering of the mine in his hometown. When his best friend dies in a horrific crash he's called back to the town, and compelled to stay by his goddaughter's¹ insistence that not all is as it seems. Something is definitely in the water at Basswood – but unfortunately it's nothing more than an infectious sleepiness.

This psychological thriller was significantly reworked during development. Sadly, rather than feeling like a finely honed mystery, the final product feels cut down to size and ultimately left me far from thrilled. From phoned-in voice performances to inexpressive character models and animation, the tension deflates before it can build.

There's visual flair to reconstructing crime scenes in Sam's mind palace, but the detective work sees you going around and around, waiting for the game to arbitrarily concede that what you see before you is indeed a clue.

Sam himself isn't a saving grace either. A wearily cynical young man, your choices can lead down a compelling narrative thread about learning to be vulnerable. But this character growth is disastrously kneecapped by the questionable choices Sam makes without your involvement² and the framing of one of your last major decisions.

Sam is implied to be neurodivergent, and is forced to pick between masking his differences for a happy 'normal' life or living authentically but miserably in a forced existence. Twin Mirror is bleak, often flawed and far from Dontnod's best work – case closed.

Jess Kinghorn



FOOTNOTES ¹ The dynamic between Sam and goddaughter Joan (AKA Bug, due to her fascination with creepy-crawlies) can be very sweet, but unfortunately remains too thinly sketched. ² Was starting a fire in that location really the *only* option, Sam? The big decisions can feel out of your control.

INFO **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £19.99
ETA Out now **PUB** Big Sugar
DEV 2 Ton Studios **PLAYERS** 1



Unto The End

Slash, block, die, repeat

Some ill-placed sword swipes and misjudged parries is all it takes to condemn this unnamed Viking to death. Most hack-and-slashers would likely cut you some slack, yet Unto The End's more deliberate approach to combat – where knowing when exactly to block or attack and at which height is vital for dispatching foes – doesn't allow for it. Such a brutal challenge can lead to some frustrating bouts, sure, but this is a 2D actioner in which precision and patience are key; the feeling of slowly getting better at them is the ultimate reward.

Even the most common 1v1 encounters are punishing, forcing you to read your opponent's tells ahead of time and deploy your handful of combat techniques. Rolling, shoving, and ducking all prove just as useful as basic sword manoeuvres, especially in later sections when you're greeted by more than one enemy and are being attacked from both sides. Much of the game takes place in caves, so in addition to your sword you also have to maintain a torch as a light source.

Luckily, the game's one forgiving element is its checkpointing, though even a fast restart upon death has limited benefits when light is scarce and your armour will hold up for only one more hit. Gathering resources from slain foes and crafting at a nearby fire¹ improves your chances of success.

Carrying you through this arduous journey are the minimalist story² and art style – both of which are just detailed enough to remind you what you're fighting for. Unto The End's brand of intelligent combat makes for a demanding challenge that isn't for everyone, yet its unpretentious nature results in a refreshing, if brief, melee-based adventure. **Aaron Potter**



FOOTNOTES ¹ Gather herbs to create a healing potion. ² The muted, pastel colour palette works well to communicate the game's lightly-sketched story.



While not too much of a looker on PS4, WRC 9 looks great on PS5.

UPGRADED FOR PS5

WRC 9 FIA World Rally Championship

Car blimey, this runs like a dream on PS5



INFO

- FORMAT** PS5
- PRICE** £49.99
- ETA** Out now
- PUB** Nacon
- DEV** Kylotonn
- PLAYERS** 1-2 (offline), 2-8 (online)
- LENGTH** 20+ hours
- ACCESSIBILITY** Colour blind mode, toggleable haptic feedback, customisable vibration



When we first played through this on PS4, we had a good – not great – rally experience. On PS5, it's the same game with new-gen bells and whistles. But oh, how clearly the bells ring. How divine the sound of those proverbial whistles. Most surprisingly of all, perhaps, it proves to be an excellent showcase for the DualSense. You're in for a rough ride in the best possible way.

The graphics don't for a second betray the game's previous-gen origins. Bumps and scrapes reward you with realistic dents and scratches on the smooth, detailed car models. The environments, with their dynamic weather, finally look as great as the developers intended. Trees and bushes look better than ever as they wave gently in the wind, and water and dust impress as your tyres throw them from the road. On PS5, WRC 9 runs at a minimum 60fps, supporting 120fps if you have the display for it. It's now a racer that can be enjoyed by spectators almost as much as players.

Gameplay remains the same, for good and for bad. That means that there's plenty for hardcore rally fans to enjoy, with demanding controls, varied tracks and weather conditions, and a decent amount of tinkering under the hood possible. The physics can still embarrass themselves on

occasion, though, and the available assists haven't changed; they don't go nearly far enough to accommodate the more casual rally aficionado.

NO SPOILERS

It's with a DualSense in your hands, though, that the improvement over the PS4 version is truly noticeable. Developers are still learning how to get the best out of Sony's latest controller, but Kylotonn gives every impression of having developed for it for years. There's a more powerful rumble over rougher ground, sure, but the haptic feedback is much deeper than that.

There's a subtle knock in the pad each time you change gear.

Tarmac and ice offer little resistance, while the controller will jolt you a little over gravel and dirt. Bumps and full-on crashes are felt in your hands with impressive variety, as though the steering wheel really is in your grip. Should you let your car become particularly damaged, the DualSense practically fights you for control, the vehicle shuddering in protest as you force it on.

Okay, the cars still sound like washing machines out of warranty and yes, in a year or two impressive racing haptics will probably be common. If you want to get as close as you can to driving a rally car without actually doing it, though, this is just what you're looking for.



An impressive PS5 upgrade that makes excellent use of the DualSense. This does a rally good job of letting you feel the road as well as see it. **Luke Kemp**





INFO **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £19.99 **ETA** Out now **PUB** Coatsink
DEV Bit Loom Games **PLAYERS** 1-2



Phogs!

Mutts about solving puzzles

Two heads, so they say, are better than one when it comes to solving problems. So surely the same rule applies to doggos? That's what developer Bit Loom Games must have been thinking when making *Phogs!*, a physics-based co-operative puzzler in which you and a pal must independently captain the two ends of a conjoined, pug-like creature while navigating through imaginatively chaotic levels – ideally without biting each other's heads off in the process.

You'll need both communication and co-ordination if you are to

work together in the pursuit of panting pawfection.

The danger with such a creative concept is that the deliberately awkward control scheme soon grows tiresome, but thankfully there's enough creativity found in both the puzzles and worlds that it never becomes an issue.

FAR FROM RUFF

One minute you might be zooming through the air in a ball as part of a pirate-themed golf course, the next you'll find yourselves dangling from a great height mimicking the actions of an arcade grabber machine. *Phogs!* isn't lacking in imagination, mixing it

Levels have been designed to twist and topple any pair who aren't willing to work together.

be successful, as you try your best to manoeuvre each head to the desired position either using separate controllers or sharing two sides of the same DualShock controller.

The game has clearly been conceived with the latter option in mind, as all the levels, accessed through a trio of distinct hub worlds, have been designed to twist and topple any pair who aren't willing to

with some quintessentially British iconography.

Playable alone but more hilarious with a local buddy by your side, *Phogs!* is a delightfully madcap spin on the 'tricky to control' sub-genre of puzzle games. Barking, stretching, and bouncing through scenarios always elicits a chuckle and is a fun, if brief, way to test the bonds of your friendship.



While it's never a stretch to find yourself in a twist, *Phogs!* makes getting out of these predicaments a joy thanks to imaginative puzzles and level design. **Aaron Potter**



BANDWIDTH



PS4-to-PS5 game updates chewed on



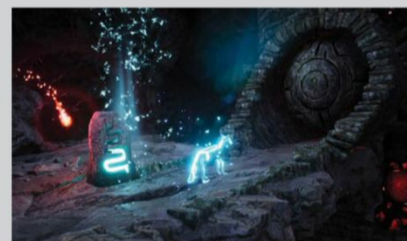
With our PS5s still factory-fresh, now's the opportunity for PS4 games to be polished up, and us to be offered an (ideally free) upgrade to favourite old titles. We've taken a look at some here (*FIFA 21* – see p88), but there are plenty more you shouldn't overlook either.



The rule of thumb has been that the truly next-gen sports games don't arrive on a console until we've had at least one older-looking entry. But that page has been ripped from the rulebook for this new generation, even if *PES* is still sitting on the bench. With the likes of **NBA 2K21** (#183, 8/10) being one of the best-looking PS5 games at launch, and *FIFA* stepping it up, the new format of upgrading pre-existing games as brand-new, unique releases seems to be allowing sports to get back into the game right away. And it's not all hoop dreams...

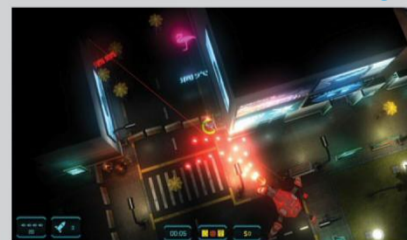


For those who like their footballs a little more egg-shaped, **Madden NFL 21** arrives on PS5 as a free upgrade (redeemable up until the release of the next game in the series), transferring Ultimate Team data. Boasting enhanced animations, deferred lighting and rendering, and faster loads, it also uses 3D audio to bring the on-field action and the crowd to life.



If you've been missing travelling this year (pilgrimages to the pasty shop have been as exciting as it gets for us), then Iceland is looking even

better than ever. In **Spirit Of The North: Enhanced Edition**, that is. Based on folklore, the beautiful icy landscapes you explore as the fox-formed Guardian Of The Northern Lights look stunning running at 4K and 60fps. Remastered textures, lighting, and objects make this feel new, even if the gameplay is still lightweight.



Sometimes the wonders of nature and the thrill of sports don't cut it, and you need to do some blasting with serious prejudice. Own the PS4 version, and you get a free upgrade to the shiny PS5 version of **JUDGE** (not a typo, but a savvy dodge away from 2000AD's lawyers, as this has similar stylings to a certain Dredded lawkeeper). This twin-stick shooter is fully co-op, and blends *Hotline Miami* with the likes of *Nex Machina*. While it's not as good as either, it's a fun thing to hop into on PS5.



Call Of Duty: Black Ops – Cold War

We answered the call; reception was fuzzy

300 NW 330 345 1 15 30 NE 60



INFO

FORMAT PS5, PS4
PRICE £64.99 (PS5), £59.99 (PS4)
PUB Activision
DEV Treyarch
REVIEW #183, 8/10
PLAYERS 2-40 (co-op and competitive depending on mode)
CROSSPLAY All platforms

As good as Cold War's campaign is, Call Of Duty remains a series that largely sells itself on its multiplayer modes. In that respect, this is something of a mixed munitions bag. It's good fun – we've played dozens of hours already – but there's a lot of work to do if it's to reach Modern Warfare's level, something it just might do yet.

Putting Dead Ops Arcade to one side (it's a neat distraction, but unlikely to consume the majority of anybody's playing time), we'll jump straight to PvP. None of the weapons carry the feeling of weight or power that Modern Warfare's offer, something that is more pronounced online. Scoring a kill isn't quite as satisfying when there's a very slight disconnect between your actions and

■ If you ignore Dirty Bomb mode, it's easy to see why the servers remain packed. ■

seeing another player's avatar slump to the ground.

Apart from the fact that there aren't quite enough of them yet, the maps feel inconsistent. They click *eventually*, and the full-size version of Armada is fantastic for flag-based modes (diving under the ship for surprise attacks FTW). Most, though,

favour snipers and campers a little too much.

Nonetheless, if you ignore the new Dirty Bomb mode – an awkward mashup of Battlefield and battle royale gameplay – it's easy to see why the servers remain packed. Bringing back scorestreaks means more people get a shot at calling in support,



winning *always* feels great, and there are enough blind corners for satisfying charges and even more satisfying assassinations of campers. Oh, and those health bars above everybody? You can thankfully switch 'em off.

THE CAMPING DEAD

The other big draw is the return of Zombies. There's little change to the basic template. You're still gradually expanding the map, and therefore the entry points for zombies, as you go, picking up perks and stronger weapons throughout. It quickly becomes frantic and challenging, which means that staying together is essential, something a frustratingly small number of players seem interested in. With just one map at time of writing, though, it's hard to recommend

STONE-COLD KILLERS

01



The M79 grenade launcher is great fun, especially combined with the Scavenger perk to offset the low ammo. It's weak against the Flak Jacket perk, though, and doesn't unlock until level 52. Ouch.

02



The Type 63 is arguably the best tactical rifle. Effective at almost any range, equip rapid fire as soon as you can to turn this single-shot gun into a force to be reckoned with.

03



Ah, the knife, the classic COD humiliation kill weapon (not for throwing here, that's the tomahawk). Sadly, it's not really a viable choice for most of the maps, as it's too easy to see you coming.

above the mode in previous, cheaper games.

Zombies Onslaught (which takes place on maps from the PvP modes) keeps you and one other player within a small space that moves with each wave, and you kill lots of zombies. It's very simple, but all the better for it, and a great addition. There's plenty

of fun to be had online in Cold War, even if it feels lacking in some areas. Post-launch support means things will only get better, though, so who knows what it'll look like in a year with more maps and modes? Right now, it's a great online experience, but far inferior to Modern Warfare.



Modern Warfare's a tough act to follow, and Cold War struggles to keep up. It's still enjoyable though, and with many updates to come, it's just getting started. **Luke Kemp**

7

PlayStation
Official Magazine UK



TOP FIVE ONLINE GAMES

Team up with pals or take on the world



MONSTER HUNTER WORLD: ICEBORNE

Can you appreciate living in a society before you've been saved at the last minute from becoming Rathalos feed by a random stranger? PS5 breathes fresh life into this favourite, with 60fps and super-quick loads.



WARFRAME

We're falling in love with online all over again thanks to PS5, and Warframe has made a massive leap thanks to a graphical overhaul as well as an improved framerate. Recent open world updates provide plenty to show off.



DEAD BY DAYLIGHT

One of the smartest online games we've played looks amazing in this free PS5 upgrade that makes good use of the console. Featuring many horror villain cameos, including a Silent Hill tie-in, it's definitely unique, and a total riot.



DARK SOULS III

Looking for more online co-op now you've mopped up Demon's? This takes a surprising amount of influence from its ancestor, and runs even better on PS5 than it did on PS4, hitting a super-slick 60fps on Sony's latest console. It's a must-play.



CALL OF DUTY: WARZONE

This second COD stab at battle royale is proving a mainstay, and for good reason, as it's the best realistic-styled take on the genre. If Cold War's multiplayer provision isn't quite what you're after, this free game might be it.

Worms Rumble

Let's get ready to bumble



INFO

FORMAT PS5, PS4
PRICE Free (PS Plus)
ETA Out now
PUB Team 17
DEV Team 17
OFFLINE REVIEW N/A
PLAYERS 1-6
CROSSPLAY PS5, PS4, PC

Oh, how the worm has turned. Or, rather, stopped taking turns. The latest wriggly entry in the series has made the move to real-time combat, and online-only play, in order to slither onto the battle royale bandwagon. It's a move that works better than you might expect... though not quite as well as you might hope. What on earthworm went wrong with this classic series' comeback?

The new direction has resulted in a cross between a platformer and a twin-stick shooter. Your worm can shuffle along, roll for speed, use zipwires, and wall-jump – they're well-trained tiddlers. The right stick is used to aim your weapon in any one of eight directions. It's a system that helps the slightly odd idea of a 2D battle royale work.

Weapons and items are a mixture of new additions and series favourites, though the way they've been implemented has resulted in some

balance issues. This is most apparent with the Sheep Launcher; you'll have a significant advantage there for as long as your ammo lasts, thanks to the explosive lambs bouncing comically around the map. Small things make us chuckle into or coffee.

PINKING FEELING

You wouldn't expect campers to exist in a 2D game with a wide view of the screen... and yet. There are vents and corridors, the interiors of which are only visible when you enter them. Very useful for quick getaways and surprise attacks, but abused by some players.



Last Squad Standing and Last Worm Standing are self-explanatory, and fun, if unremarkable. Deathmatch, meanwhile, is a free-for-all battle across the map, with infinite respawns until the time runs out. Whichever mode you play, the tiny size of your worm can throw up roadblocks.

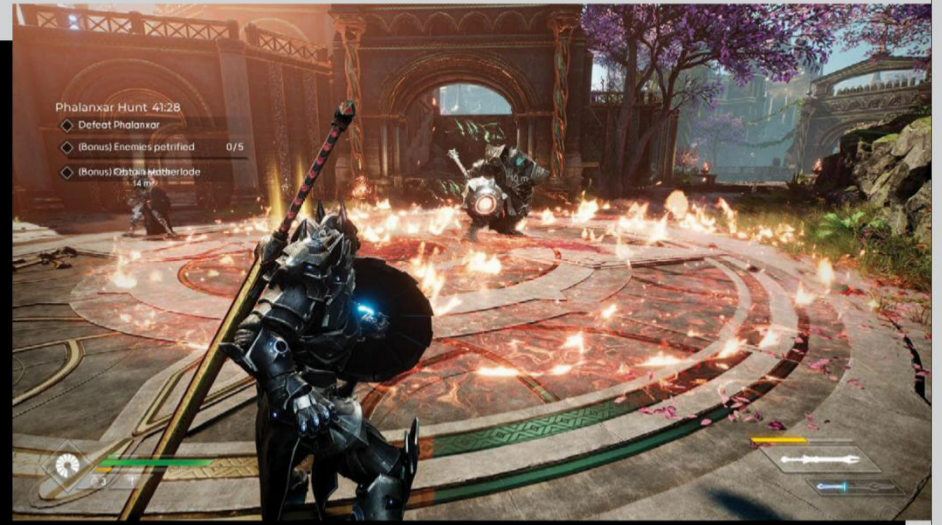
While losing track of ourselves on screen is rare, we usually need a few seconds to properly identify weapons

and items that we pick up, and to check how much ammo remains. This isn't a problem if we have some breathing space, but in the middle of a fight it can lead to mistakes that should be avoidable.

Having finally spent some time with Worms' return to PlayStation we can see why this was a PS Plus freebie. But sadly it lacks the chaotic spectacle of previous freebie Fall Guys, and indeed, its forebears.



It's fun in bursts of 20-30 minutes or so, but this is the sort of thing you play in between sessions of games you enjoy more. Worms deserves more love. **Luke Kemp**



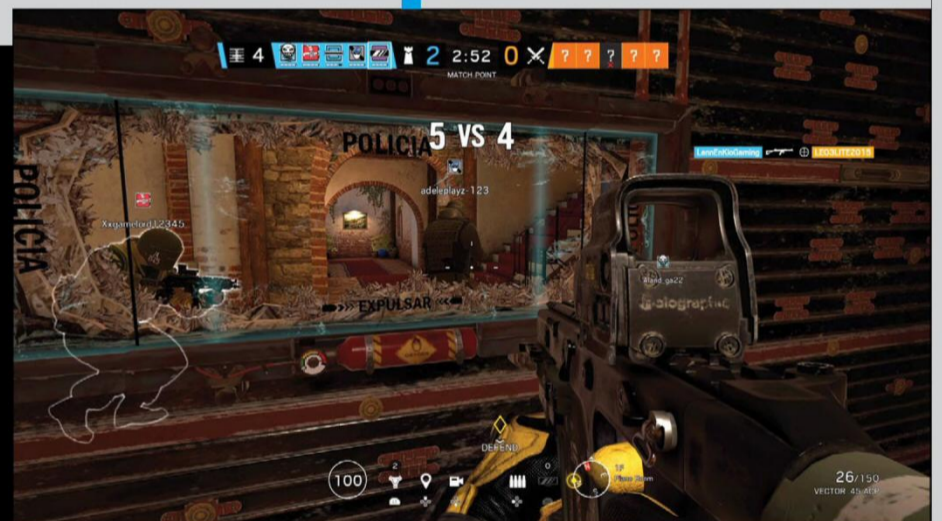
Godfall

Hardly a knight to remember

INFO

FORMAT PS5,
PRICE £69.99
ETA Out now
PUB Gearbox Publishing
DEV Counterplay Games
OFFLINE REVIEW #183, 7/10
PLAYERS 1-3
CROSSPLAY No

Godfall is Godfall regardless of whether you're playing online or off. With friends in tow you'll get a little more satisfaction from taking down a boss or three in Dreamstones mode. But the same niggles persist: the world is empty, the grind never-ending, and combat remains the game's greatest hook. Technically there's no down side – it runs without a hitch online – but you're on the same loot-hungry treadmill as offline, only now everyone's in the grind together... as long as they're friends, as the game doesn't support matchmaking. This feels like a misstep for a PS5 release with a small community. **Ian Dean**



Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Siege

Blowing up the streets and houses

INFO

FORMAT PS5 (reviewed), PS4
PRICE £24.99
ETA Out now
PUB Ubisoft
DEV Ubisoft Montreal
OFFLINE REVIEW #119, 8/10
PLAYERS 2-10
CROSSPLAY PS5, PS4

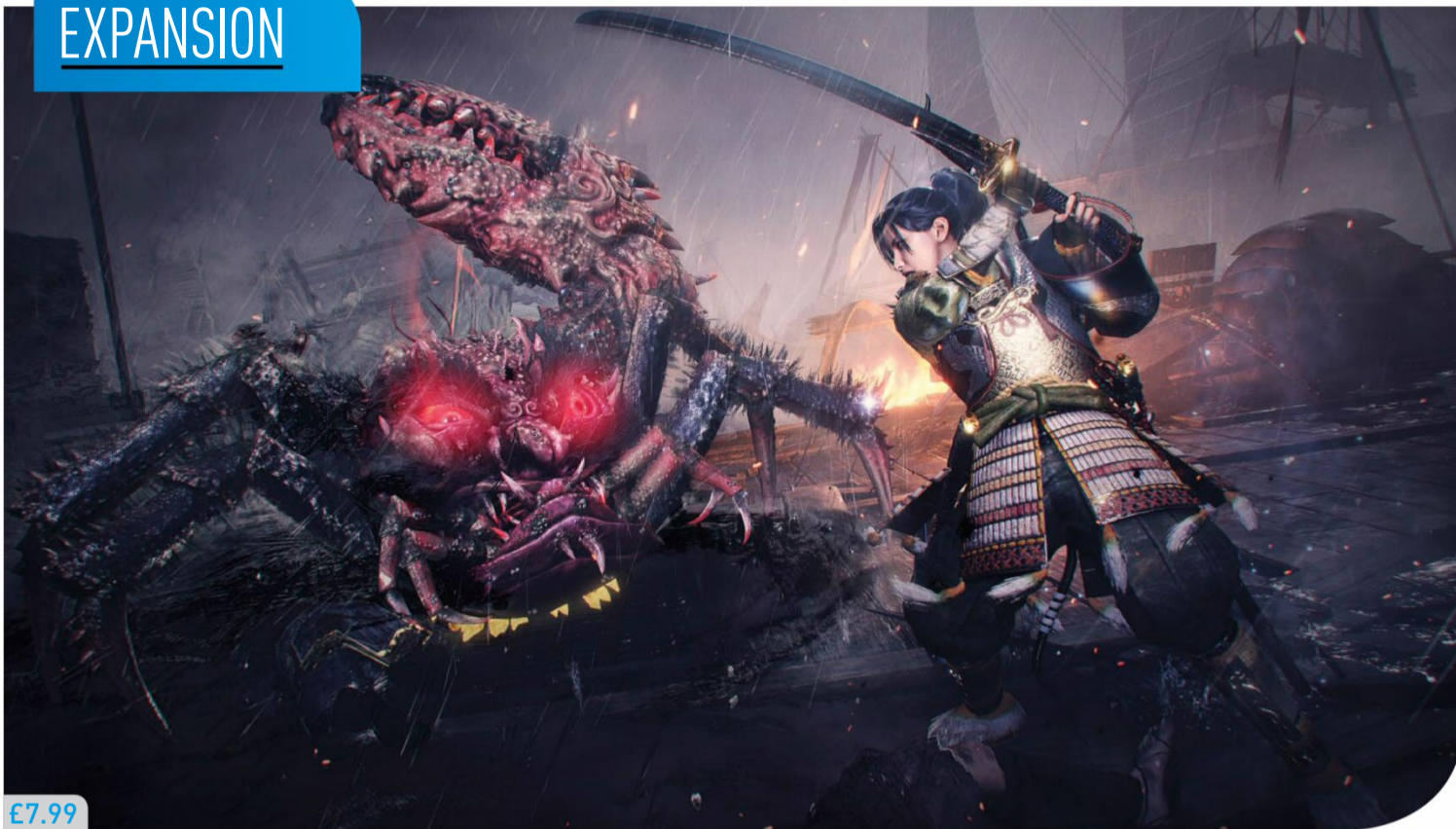
Proving that hide-and-seek is more exciting with guns and explosives, Ubisoft's 5v5 rescue-'em-up is better than ever five years after release... and now, there's a PS5 version.

The graphical upgrade is more of a step than a leap, and crossplay with PS4 means loading times remain largely the same. The DualSense brings a little more depth to drone and weapon handling, though, and the built-in mic makes it easy for anybody to jump in with warnings for their team. It's not a huge improvement, but this is the definitive edition of a still brilliant game. **Luke Kemp**





EXPANSION



£7.99

Nioh 2 – The First Samurai

This yokai shiffling is a cut above the rest

February is looming, and with it the PS5-ifying of both Nioh games via The Nioh Collection. But if you can't wait to check out the final DLC for Nioh 2, we can't blame you. The already-packed base game has been beefed up even more by robust post-launch offerings, and The First Samurai finishes it off in serious style, hurling you into even more challenging soulslike action.

Once again, the Sohayamaru transports your custom character back to the past to reveal more demonic secrets. This trip down memory lane relates to your mysterious mother, herself yokai (and the reason for your own 'shiffling' yokai powers), and how your fate is tied to Otakemaru's and your connection to the legendary Sohayamaru. And just what is the

reality behind the mythical First Samurai (whose armour you could get as a pre-order bonus all the way back before the game launched)? The DLC even introduces an harder difficulty mode, if you're up to taking on Team Ninja's self-proclaimed 'masocore' challenge. Gulp.

All that's mighty tempting, but if you can wait just a little bit

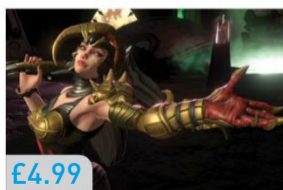
longer, your copy of Nioh 2 and your DLC will be available to upgrade to PS5 for free, meaning this final foray could also be your first experience of the enhanced game – Team Ninja's debut on PS5. We're talking a sharp 4K resolution and up to 120fps for the most responsive soulslike you've ever played. One of PS5's best yet? We think it could be.

Introduces an even harder mode if you're up to the challenge.

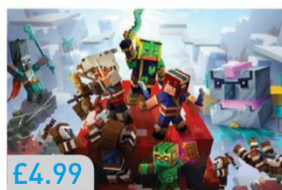
ALSO ON PSN



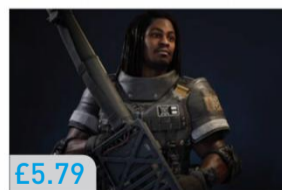
GOING UNDER – OVERTIME
This roguelike sendup of tech culture adds replayability from Jackie's new room. A dungeon rush adds extra challenge, and comes with more difficulty options.



POWER RANGERS: BATTLE FOR THE GRID – SCORPINA
A fan-favourite villain from the original television series, Rita Repulsa's minion packs a proper sting. Using her claw and tail, she can zap the rangers.



MINECRAFT DUNGEONS – HOWLING PEAKS
This first dungeon add-on in the new Season Pass proves even wide-open spaces outdoors can be a dungeon – specifically this tall, wind-ravaged mountain vista.



PREDATOR: HUNTING GROUNDS – DANTE 'BEAST MODE' JEFFERSON
NFL star Marshawn Lynch plays this new Fireteam character, known for his custom rocket launcher – the only one in the game.



CAPTAIN TSUBASA – RICARDO ESPADAS
Alongside some other popular faces from the manga, Ricardo Espadas gets onto the pitch. Favouring quick, aggressive play, he's a flexible keeper and the Mexican rep captain.

DLC



ZOMBIE ARMY 4 – ALPINE BLITZ
The Death From Above campaign continues as you and your deadhunter pals find yourself in the sights of a zombie... zeppelin. Attempt to escape via a train packed with zombies as you avoid the UFO (undead flying object). There are new skins and weapons included too, including Christmassy hats.



NO STRAIGHT ROADS – CHRISTMAS EDITION
We love this rhythmic action game, and the Christmas update brings a lot of new fun. Switch to Christmas Remix and boss stages get a makeover, and 1010's boss gets a new remix. There are new tunes and outfits too.



SOULCALIBUR VI – HWANG
Back for the first time since Soulcalibur III, the royal blademaster returns as the final Season Pass 2 DLC character to stomp the competition with his quick kicks and sword skills. Combined with his new lifeforce techniques (and a Soul Chronicle story), there's a lot of content here.



LIVE GAMES



LIVE GAMES

Online games still keeping our attention

This section of the mag is all about live games, ones that constantly update and evolve over time to keep the playerbase engaged. But what happens when we reach the inevitable end, as all things must? *Monster Hunter: World* has a good answer.

On PS4, it was perhaps one of the biggest surprises, wonderfully iterating the *Monster Hunter* formula and getting us to strap on our hunting hammer time and time again to face new challenges through the paid expansion, **Iceborne**. But now its final update has come and gone.

We saw things you wouldn't believe. Meeting Geralt Of Rivia. I wielded Dante's Force Edge to fell a Rathalos on the Ancient Forest's great tree. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in the rain.

Except... they won't. Capcom released version 15.10, laying a final foundation for new adventures. The Safi'jiiva Siege can now scale for one or two Hunters (previously it required 16), the seasonal Astera/Seliana Fests rotate every two weeks, and "virtually all" event quests will be live so you can scoop up what you missed.

Limited event quests are fun, but we've all had the FOMO of not being able to get what we wanted. *MHW* has always been good at allowing events to return, but this future-proofing is a great way to keep the fun going. Plus, winding down the updates means a *Monster Hunter: World 2* has to be around the corner, right?

UPDATE

The Traveler grants 4K/60fps

Upgrade to *Destiny 2* on PS5 for free

Bungie's first truly independent step (after its split from Activision) was a firm one: November's *Beyond Light* expansion, which we gave 8/10 to in #183. Not content to rest on its laurels, Bungie's delivered all of *Destiny 2* as a free upgrade on PlayStation 5.

Always noted for excellent traversal and responsive gunplay, it feels like a perfect fit for PS5, running at 60fps in 4K. We already got a taste

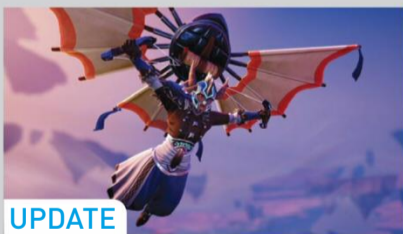
of the much-needed faster loadtimes on PS4 as the game's backwards-compatible, but on PS5 the effect is transformative. Playing *Beyond Light* or older material (some of which now includes reworked content from the first *Destiny*), it feels like a brand-new game.

It's a good job that what you've already played gets this new lease of life, as the controversial choice to 'vault' a lot of *Destiny 2* (including paid expansions) creates

something of a content drought, especially for more casual players.

Bringing in new players is still something of an issue, even though the visuals might draw attention. It remains especially appealing for the devoted, as the PS5 upgrade feels like a treat for your commitment.

However, we can't deny that *Beyond Light* and the season ahead put *Destiny 2* in prime position to reign on PS5 in the years to come.



UPDATE

DAUNTLESS REFORGED

While *Monster Hunter: World*'s content updates are coming to an end (see Live Games, right), this free-to-play Epic-published monster hunter has undergone a makeover. The Hunting Grounds offers 18 new islands where you can stalk and slay Behemoths in open-ended long-form hunts. Progression has been completely reworked so now the Slayer's Path offers more clarity and agency, plus there's a more intuitive tier system for gear, and a new ice-themed Hunt Pass, Cold Front.



SEASON

FALL GUYS – SEASON 3

Get your winter bean wear ready, because our waddly competitors are about to get frosty. This new season adds ice-themed stages to the Takeshi's-Castle-inspired last-bean-standing challenge, including new outfits like a Yeti and Rudolph. One team stage centres on the adorable Bert The Pegwin. Holding him earns you points, so try to keep him away from opposing teams. Tundra Run and Ski Fall challenge you to avoid getting snow on your face, and Thin Ice is a new slippery variant on Hex-A-Gone.



LEVEL

GTA ONLINE – THE CAYO PERICO HEIST

Annoyed that Grand Theft Auto V didn't get enough DLC? Then you're not paying attention. This new heist is one of the biggest yet, and one of the most challenging jobs you've ever seen in a GTA, asking you to take on a notorious drug dealer's island compound. There's plenty of loot and blackmail evidence to nab, and it's up to your team how you get past security (or you can go solo for a bigger cut). Loud or quiet, smart or brash, as long as you make it back it's fair game.



PS4 Hall of fame

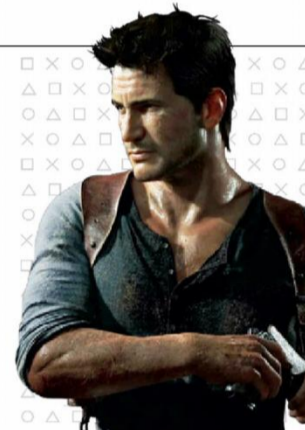
THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO THE LAST GEN'S GREATEST GAMES

01



Uncharted 4: A Thief's End

Nathan Drake's swan song is a daring evolution. It combines series-defining set-pieces, quietly devastating storytelling beats, and sprawling levels that make you feel like a real-life explorer. This franchise finale retains its signature charm, with the wisecracks firing as fast as the bullets, while the new characters each justify their inclusion. With an astonishing attention to detail, it's Naughty Dog's best yet.



02



Red Dead Redemption 2

There are a lot of open-world games, but none that make you feel like you're a part of a world in quite the same way as Arthur Morgan's wild west adventure. Tremendously physical, an epic story, and some of the most satisfying headshots you'll ever find.

09



Assassin's Creed Odyssey

A beautiful open world where every Greek island tells a unique story. AC Odyssey is an epic in the truest sense, with lively writing, mythical beasts to battle, and a poignant Assassin's Creed story that lays the bed for all the lore to come. A brilliant spectacle.

03



Grand Theft Auto V

Laughing in the face of other cross-gen ports, GTA V on PS4 is more than a mere HD remaster. Upped to a glorious 1080p, it weaves everything that made the PS3 original great, with new music, more dynamic weather, and a game-changing FPS mode.

10



Horizon Zero Dawn

A staggeringly large world that condenses cracking combat, accessible systems, and uncut eye candy into an action RPG that will please anyone. In Aloy, PlayStation might just have a new icon. Come for the robo-fights, stay for the exquisitely dense mythology.

04



Final Fantasy VII Remake

It feels like the game you remember from PS1, and that's Square's greatest achievement. Everything is dragged up to date, from the combat to the visuals. This remake even manages a late-game twist that could reset the franchise. Brave, bold, essential.

11



Marvel's Spider-Man

Borrowing heavily from Rocksteady's acclaimed Batman series, this delivers the heart and soul of Marvel's superhero. It ticks every box you could ask for: perfect web-swinging, a powerful story, a roster of classic villains, and all of New York City to defend.

05



God Of War

A departure in some ways but a resounding return in others, Kratos is back with a son and a ruddy big axe. Taking the legend from Greek to Norse mythology, this entry brings a lot to the table while improving on what was core to the earlier series' identity.

12



Persona 5 Royal

The most stylish JRPG ever made finds its definitive form in expanded release Royal. It combines dark and moving teen angst with unforgettable friendships that power you up in the heart-invading dungeons, and sets the gold standard for the genre.

06



The Last Of Us Part II

Arguably the original is holistically better but there are few games that push PS4 to its limits as this sequel does. With near photoreal visuals, emotional twists that land, and enough new ideas to ensure you're always thinking, this is a slick followup.

13



Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice

FromSoftware's latest adventure repackages its unflinchingly difficult combat into a fantastical take on feudal Japan. More accessible than Bloodborne but layered with equally clever and subtle ideas, this is director Hidetaka Miyazaki's best yet.

07



Dreams

This is a feature-laden platform of artistic tools that enables you to create everything from characters, elements, and scenes to entire games, and resets any ideas about what a console 'game' should be and do. Dreams should be installed on every PS4.

14



Bloodborne

With the finest third-person melee combat in gaming, droolworthy art design and the most twisted monsters imaginable, this is a gorgeously gothic must-have. The Old Hunters expansion adds enough nightmare fuel to make a return to Yharnam essential.

08



The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt Game Of The Year Edition

The White Wolf's epic journey is an RPG experience like no other on PS4. It's been made even more spectacular with this gigantic pack stuffed with DLC, making it a must-have part of any gaming library.

15



Monster Hunter: World

Presenting a vibrant open world, light on story but heavy on monster-mashing action, this is the most accessible entry in the series yet. Perfecting the feel-good grind through its complex systems and pitch-perfect multiplayer, it's a PS4 must-play.

16



Resident Evil 2

Powered by the RE Engine, this remake is more than a classic game with a facelift. The new Tyrant and improved zombie AI add tension, and fresh areas not seen in the PS1 classic update the core gameplay making this Resi 2 a celebration of PS1 and PS4.

17



Hitman 2

Agent 47 sneaks his skilful way into the ultimate PS4 stealth-'em-up. With a fantastic set of new maps, it also plays host to legacy content for all the missions in the first game, making it the de facto Hitman hub. No stealth game is more satisfying on PS4.

18



Control

Running, gunning, flying, flinging – this one has it all. Satisfying gunplay plus a slew of telekinetic powers make a winning combination as you explore one of the most compelling settings on PS4 to date, the Oldest House. (New) weird and absolutely wonderful.

19



Days Gone

On the surface this seems to be a step backwards: a testosterone-fuelled Freaker-killing adventure, one man and his bike versus the apocalypse. Slowly you realise Bend Studio's playing with you, and everything's flipped on its head – while the action's excellent throughout.

20



Devil May Cry 5

Another classic PlayStation series returns to cracking form on PS4. Slicing up demons and doing so stylishly has never felt better, especially when each of the three characters (Nero, Dante, and V) plays so uniquely. It looks stunning, and is even better to play.

21



Resident Evil VII: Biohazard

Capcom's greatest series returns to terrifying form thanks to a trip to Louisiana to meet the Baker family, who stalk you around their mansion. While the second half of the game doesn't match the intensity of the first, this is still essential for any horror fan.

22



Dishonored 2

The follow-up to a PS3 great, mixing a creative skillset with impressive level design to create a Kaldwin-ning immersive sim. From the shifting rooms of The Clockwork Mansion to learning to link your powers, there's so much scope for experimenting.

23



The Last Of Us Remastered

This modern masterpiece just gets stronger with age, like a full-bodied stilton. A brutal, emotionally honest take on the end of the world, Naughty Dog's stealth shooter is simply one of the best games ever, even if this PS4 port doesn't add much to it.

24



Metro Exodus

Larger but maintaining an emphasis on storytelling and experimentation, this sequel to Last Light pulls no punches. If you're looking for one of the best narrative-led shooters on PS4 this mix of FPS, horror, stealth, and survival shouldn't be ignored.

25



Shadow Of The Colossus

Bluepoint completely overhauls the visuals of Team Ico's masterpiece but still manages to match the original step-for-step in its remake. New controls and a beautiful photo mode add to the package. Wander's tragic quest has never looked or played better.

STILL PLAYING

Games that continue to hold our attention

PICK #1



Final Fantasy XIV

Jess Kinghorn has been summoned to Eorzea

I've not had much time in recent months to dive back into the premiere MMORPG experience. My Miqo'te mage has languished in an offline limbo for so long it'll be a wonder if she's able to pop off a fireball. But Creative Business Unit III is continuing to build on the success of Shadowbringers through update patches heaped with new story content. I've still got a lot to catch up on but the gal-pal-centric art for patch 5.4, AKA Futures Rewritten, has given me more than enough motivation.

PICK #2



Batman: Arkham Asylum

Oscar Taylor-Kent returns to where it all began

I've been practically inhaling Spider-Man action lately, so it felt fitting to return to the other greatest superhero series. This is one that always feels just as good as I remembered every time I return. It's just the right length, with just the right complexity, to pick up, play, and be having a great time in minutes. Later entries go bigger, but this focussed and almost claustrophobic Arkham adventure still effortlessly ticks any Bat-fan's boxes. Can Rocksteady better this series?

This focussed Arkham adventure still effortlessly ticks any Bat-fan's boxes.

PICK #3

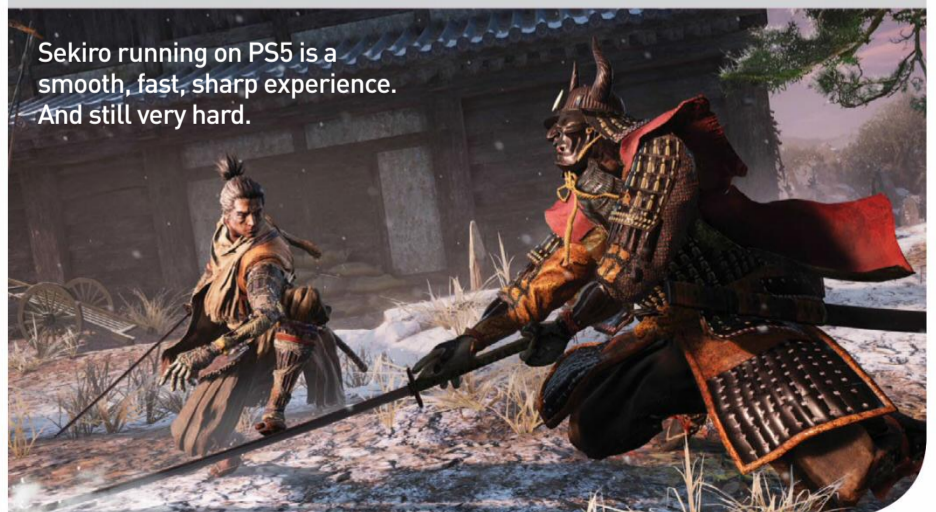


Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice

Ian Dean tries again, at 60fps

Witnessing Oscar rinsing this game like a soulsborne savant while I struggled to defeat the first boss, Shigenori Yamauchi, was depressing. After discovering Sekiro now runs at a silky-smooth 60fps on PS5, with visuals as sharp as the Wolf's katana, I lull myself into believing this has made the game easier. Miracles don't exist; Sekiro remains FromSoftware's toughest challenge. Without the grind for XP and loot, this is one game that simply demands I 'git gud'. At least it looks better than ever.

Sekiro running on PS5 is a smooth, fast, sharp experience. And still very hard.





PS VR Hall of fame

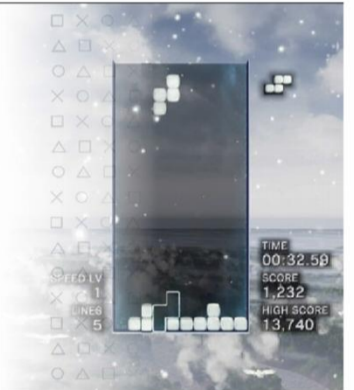
THE VIRTUAL REALITY HITS YOU HAVE TO PLAY

01



Tetris Effect

Tetris, yeah? It might be a great game, but it's easy to understand why you'd brush this version off as 'just more Tetris' at a glance. Yet Tetsuya Mizuguchi's trippy, transcendent take on the block-based puzzler is nothing short of a masterpiece. Sure, you can play it without PS VR, but in the virtual space it really becomes next level, transforming one of the tightest puzzle games ever made into an emotional ride.



The Persistence

This first-person horror roguelike offers perfectly sized chunks of survival bursts. It's everything you'd expect from a full PS4 release, but in PS VR it's filled with clever ideas, unique weapons, genuine jump scares, and fab looks – plus great couchplay as well.



Keep Talking And Nobody Explodes

Who knew bombs could bring people together? With one headsetted Defuser, and as many Experts as you can fit around a 23-page manual, no other VR game comes close for inclusive, endless multiplayer fun. Just make sure you don't let lan issue any instructions – KABOOM!



Rez Infinite

Tetsuya Mizuguchi's vision becomes reality in PS VR. This psychedelic rhythm rail shooter has achieved its final form. Its crowning achievement? New level Area X; it's powerful enough to bring players to tears. Worthy of its name, this is a timeless title.



Statik

Saw meets Portal in this fantastic puzzler. It makes ingenious use of the DualShock 4 by giving every button a specific function. You'll need to use them all to free your hands from the strange box in which they're trapped. An intriguing concept done well.



Thumper

Make no mistake: the brave chrome beetle gives Rez a run for its money. Hurling down a violently kaleidoscopic track, pounding notes and scraping round corners is exquisitely tough – and the manic magic is enhanced and perfected in PS VR.



Firewall: Zero Hour

There's only one game mode, a cat-and-mouse assault to find and either destroy or protect a laptop, but when the shooting is this laser-focused, who could want more? A PS Aim controller is a must to get the most from PS VR's standout shooter.



Astro Bot Rescue Mission

This pint-sized adventure packs charm in spades even if it isn't exactly chock-full of challenge. Bringing the classic puzzle platformer formula bang up to date in PS VR, it won't take many levels before you're calling out, "Beam me up, Botty!" Also, the nippers will love it.



Resident Evil VII: Biohazard

Can you can go eye-to-eye with the Bakers? Playing in VR raises the tension to almost unbearable levels and has gameplay benefits such as face-aiming, which makes shooting a lot easier. A brilliant example of how VR can improve already great games.



Star Wars: Squadrons

A fan's dream come true: experience epic Star Wars space battles from the cockpits of the films' most famous starfighters. Whether you're flying a TIE fighter or X-wing there's absolutely no thrill like skimming the surface of a Star Destroyer in PS VR.



Doom VFR

A new take on a classic game, this proves first-person shooters can shine in PS VR. A mix of control choices, including the PS Aim controller, ensures Doom is as fast and fluid in VR as it's ever been. Every PS VR owner needs this demon-slaying outing in their collection.



Iron Man VR

With a finely-crafted control setup that enables flight within small sandbox maps, and gives you the option to inhabit the designer shoes of the billionaire playboy too, Iron Man VR is almost a perfect interpretation of the famous Avenger. It's a PS VR must-play.



To The Top

This creative platform-puzzler enables you to scamper, jump, and skate across its 35 sandbox worlds, with the aid of your PS Move controllers. It's as physically demanding to play as it is perplexing, and all the better for it. To The Top is a PS VR one-off.



Blood & Truth

The truth? You can't handle the truth. But if you can, then you'll discover one of PS VR's best shooters, tied to the kind of slick cinematic narrative we're used to from Sony's non-VR releases. Blood & Truth is one of the most complete games for PS VR.



Star Trek: Bridge Crew

Mixes the fanboy fantasy of nestling in the Captain's chair (or taking control of the helm, weapons, or engineering section) on a USS starship with the strongest co-op experience on PS VR. This is Star Trek's finest hour on PlayStation, and the community's great.

16



Everybody's Golf VR

Golf and virtual reality go together like ham and eggs or rhubarb and custard. Mmm, tasty. In PS VR you swing and chip shots, lean over putts, and become immersed in the act of putting a ball in a small hole. It's near perfection, and one of PS VR's essentials.

17



Sprint Vector

A crazy mix of SSX racing and obstacle course hijinks, Sprint Vector makes use of the best control setup on PS VR to deliver a near-perfect experience. A single-player Challenge mode and online races impress; only the poor single-player AI holds it back.

18



Batman: Arkham VR

Not only is the training mission an unparalleled exercise in wish fulfilment (Wayne Manor! The Batcave! Batarangs!) but the defiantly sharp, if short, campaign is the epilogue to Arkham Knight we needed and deserved. Bats off to you, Rocksteady.

19



The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim VR

Though compromises have been made to texture detail and controls, you get all – yes, *all* – of The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, including the expansions, inside PS VR. It's immense. The scale and organic nature of the world at your feet overcomes any shortcomings.

20



Beat Saber

With your PS VR headset firmly on and PS Move controllers in hand, Beat Saber feels like the game both pieces of hardware were made for. In it you have to master songs and challenges by swiping your neon swords through the air and dodging with your head.

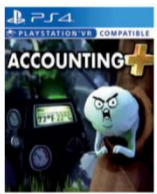
21



Moss

Guide adorable mouse heroine Quill through a fantasy storybook world full of virtual puzzles, fights with insects, and perfectly pitched Disney influences. There's no need to say cheese, because you'll be smiling as you play, all day long. This is effortlessly charming.

22



Accounting +

One of PlayStation's funniest games is a dark, twisted journey into the world of accounting. No, don't walk away now! It's an Inception-like dive into increasingly bizarre and frequently hilarious scenarios that will scratch the itch of any Rick And Morty fan.

23



Farpoint

This sci-fi shooter is a brilliant showcase for the PS Aim controller, a versatile bit of kit that makes the satisfying range of weapons it stands in for feel weighty and real. The game matches it, delivering a strong story and challenging co-op for great VR action.

24



Knockout League

Punching things is possibly the least creative use of the VR medium, but when it's used to create a classic arcade boxing sim that plays like a brutal puzzle puncher, it's irresistible. It's also good for you: it tracks your calorie count as you work up a sweat.

25



Apex Construct

This story-driven FPS demonstrates five-to-eight hour adventures can work in PS VR. Building its narrative organically through physically exploring the game's world while fending off mechanical creatures with a trusted bow and arrow is a delight. Ambitious.

PLUS POINTS



The month's freebies reviewed



Last year, it seemed the only thing you could count on were the bangers offered as part of PS Plus. I predicted we'd see "plenty more blasts from the past, oddly appealing critters, and definitely way more than one unexpected combo," and even I'm surprised at how right I was.

One of those blasts from the past was **Uncharted: The Nathan Drake Collection**. Now, we know what you're thinking, but Uncharted did come out *over a decade ago* – definitely in 'The Past.' The roguish thief's exploits were followed in February by **BioShock: The Collection**, a series that makes us feel just as old. Just where do the years go? Probably lost in a pocket dimension somewhere down the back of the sofa. March then featured **Shadow Of The Colossus**, a 2018 remake of a game from 2005. Much like PS Plus bangers, the years start coming and don't stop.

March led us neatly into 'unexpected combos,' as PS Plus paired the meditative, lonely journey of **Wander Through the Forbidden Land** with fan-fiction fuel **Sonic Forces**. The only other unexpected combo that

winded us in the same way was the one-two punch of redeeming **Street Fighter V** in September only to discover that it came without all of the bells and whistles of the Champion Edition and that upgrading would cost more than £20.

Now let's talk oddly appealing critters. In July, **Fall Guys: Ultimate Knockout** made its debut, and while at least some of its success was due to PS Plus, we suspect a portion of players were drawn to the squidgy 'forbidden marshmallow' aspect of the Guys' themselves.

Speaking of ill-advised treats, that brings us to the first Plus offering for PS5: **Bugsnax**. Kinda cute, often mildly horrifying, it was a memorable first PS5 freebie. Last of 2020 was **Worms Rumble**, a fittingly old franchise to end on. With **Destruction AllStars** confirmed for February, we're expecting big things from 2021.



In Bugsnax Muppets-like creatures turn into what they eat... sick or cute?

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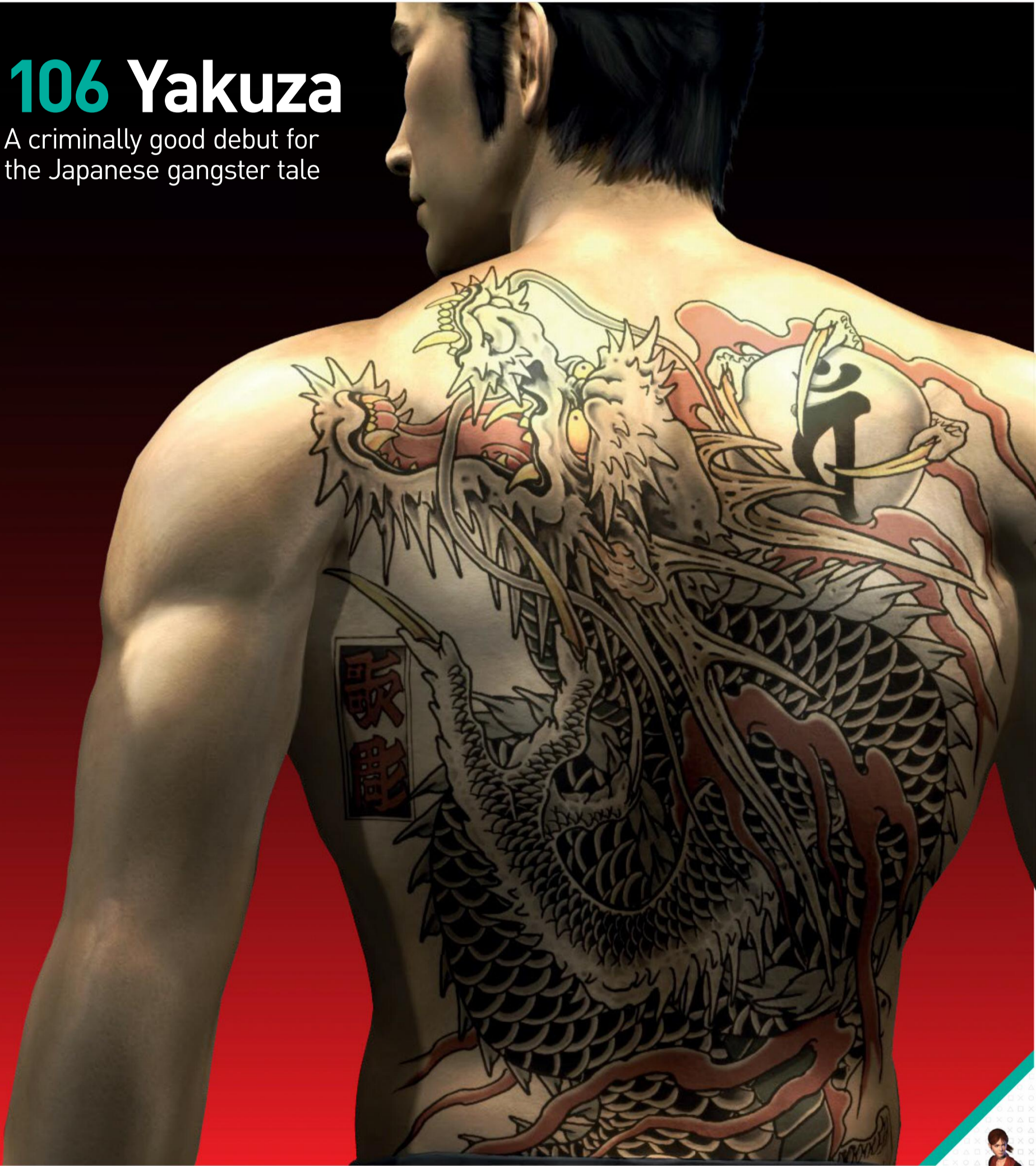
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RetroStation

106 Yakuza

A criminally good debut for the Japanese gangster tale



HIGHLIGHTS

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PARTING SHOT: MARVEL'S SPIDER-MAN [114](#)





CLASSIC GAME

Yakuza

Bare-knuckle down with the start of Sega's crime series





- 1 What separates Yakuza from GTA is an emphasis on roleplay. And cinematics.
- 2 Kazuma never starts a fight but he'll sure finish it.
- 3 Shop at Don Quijote for its prices. Stay for its catchy jingle.
- 4 Brutal Heat actions make every move feel weighty and over the top.
- 5 The emotional story gets to you, even on PS2.

Following the runaway success of GTA3, the PS2 era saw just about every developer muscling in on the mature crime market – The Getaway, True Crime: Streets Of LA, even The Godfather himself – though few passed the test of time. So how of all of them did Yakuza, a plucky upstart from Japan, end up spawning a decade-long saga? Character.

Yakuza enforcer Kazuma Kiryu isn't someone you'd want to cross when you owe his boss 200 million yen, but underneath his tough-guy exterior, he cares most about his adopted family: sworn brother Nishiki and Yumi, secretly the love of his life. It's why he takes the fall for Nishiki, who murders their boss for trying to rape Yumi, landing him a ten-year prison sentence and expulsion from his yakuza family, the Tojo Clan.

Once he's finally out of jail, a perfect storm is brewing as the Tojo Clan chairman is assassinated and rival families jostle for power, all while the clan is missing ten billion yen. But on a more personal level, Kazuma just wants to find Yumi, who apparently suffered amnesia and then went

you get down to it, Yakuza is all about knocking the *blorp!* out of thugs. Getting confused by the storyline? Don't worry, old Kaz will punch his way through it.

DRAGON PUNCH

Combat involves stringing simple combos to build up a Heat meter that can be used to trigger more brutal finishers like slamming your opponent against a wall. You can also upgrade your skills, for example extending Heat moves to weapons. And by weapons, we mean just about anything you can pick up, be it a crate, a bicycle, or those bright advertising signs. Kiryu's a creative chap. It's at times simplistic and perhaps too reliant on getting you to put up your dukes, especially during story missions when you're facing a huge gauntlet of goons, yet it's very effective fun and the brawling mechanics have essentially remained the same for all subsequent games. That was, at least, until this year's Like A Dragon took things turn-based. But you could go from Yakuza 6 right back to this original and instantly know how to play the game, as even the mappings on the DualShock have remained the same over the years.

cabaret club or killing time hitting home runs at the batting centre.

KAMING HOME

The first Yakuza might have been our introduction to the streets of Kamurocho, but even here it's such a strong location that it's returned in every Yakuza (as well as in spin-off games, like Judgment). Series fans can trace every step between its bustling streets just from muscle memory, and appreciate the subtle changes throughout the series.

In recent years the series has gained wider recognition in the West, and it's easier than ever to catch up on its legacy with the 'Kiwami' remakes. Yet the original is still worth tracking down. Sega did an admirable localisation job including hiring cult actors like Michael Madsen and Eliza Dushku, while Mark Hamill had the honour of playing sadistic fan favourite Goro Majima. With the latest instalment once again incorporating dubbing (if you prefer the Japanese voices, dual audio is available) it's almost like a dragon has come full circle. ■



INFO

PUB Sega
DEV Ryu Ga Gotoku Studio
RELEASED 2005 (JP), 2006 (PAL)
GET IT NOW

NEED TO KNOW

- 1 The developer's name, Ryu Ga Gotoku Studio, translates as 'like a dragon'.
- 2 Sega hired Takashi Miike to direct a live-action film adaptation.
- 3 The team attended hostess clubs during development for 'research' purposes.

“Underneath the open-world action adventure trappings and light JRPG mechanics is a cracking brawler that harks back to Streets Of Rage.”

missing. He also winds up looking after a nine year-old girl, Haruka, who's searching for her mother.

An adult yakuza drama was unlike anything Sega had made before – producer Toshihiro Nagoshi's last big game had been cute arcade puzzler Super Monkey Ball, while director Ryuta Ueda was the artist for the cel-shaded cult classic Jet Set Radio. Yet underneath the open-world action adventure trappings and light JRPG mechanics is a cracking brawler that harks back to Streets Of Rage and Nagoshi's own arcade title Spikeout. Because when

What endures most about Yakuza is its sense of character. By that we don't just mean the personalities of the people but the spirit of the town of Kamurocho itself. It's closely based on Tokyo's real-life seedy district of Kabukicho, while product placement featured heavily to add to its level of authenticity. Despite technical limitations and short freezes as you're loaded onto another street, this small open world remains instantly recognisable, densely packed with distractions, whether that's refilling your health by dining at a ramen joint, chatting up hostesses at the





FIND THE TIME

Dipping back even further into gaming's past. Can you remember this? Do you even want to remember it?



10 YEARS

In February 2011 Activision closed its Guitar Hero division. The series had had a good run since 2005, but multiple releases a year and incompatibility with PS3 took the shine off. Still, we'll always love those guitar-shaped controllers.



15 YEARS

The 2006 Winter Olympics opened in Turin. And yes, there was an official videogame, Torino 2006. The ancestor of this magazine, Official PlayStation 2 Magazine, awarded it 5/10 and noted the commentary would "soon get on your tits". Well, that's you told.



20 YEARS

Final Fantasy IX launched in the UK. It's one of the most popular entries in the series ever, but if you missed out on 2001 the cartoon-styled, medieval-set game was released on PSN in 2010. Even then we gave it 9/10.



OPM YEARBOOK

Five years ago in OPM

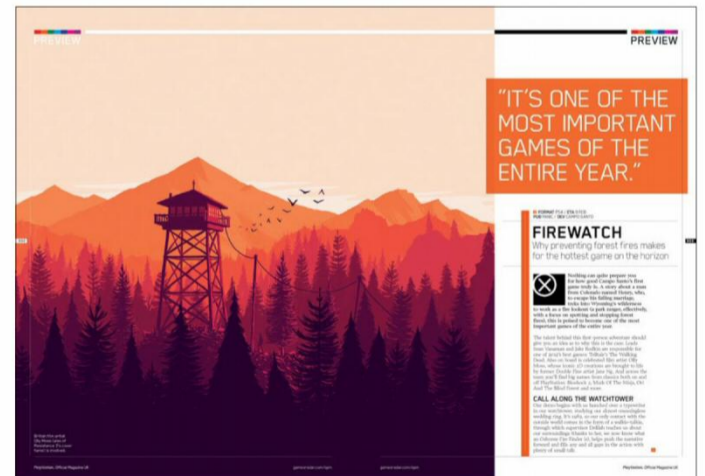
"35 new PS4 games inside!" we declared on the cover of **OPM #119**. Who doesn't love new games?



Above The new game we were most excited about was the remake of Final Fantasy VII, which we optimistically talked about hoping to play in 2016. We were so hyped, we were almost at bursting point by 2020, when it was finally released. But it was worth every extra second.

Below left We filled in the time reimagining icons of gaming as Lego figures. Isn't Kratos adorable?

Below We went hands-on with Campo Santo's incredible Firewatch. Not played it? Rectify that. Go on, play it now!



Far left Hideo Kojima set up his own studio. In the end, Death Stranding wasn't a console exclusive, but we've got to admit, the old boy delivered.

Left Emulated PS2 games came to PSN so we dug out the best. GTA Vice City? That takes us back.



DEFENDING

Emily Davis

Jess Kinghorn says nice girls finish last and roots for the bad lass

Headstrong Emily Davis has long deserved defending, and I can't be the only person who thinks that. Introduced as a key perpetrator of the prelude's fatal prank, I must admit first impressions do count for a lot. In the present day, she's sniping at her ex's new girlfriend – her former best friend. Even I've got to admit that the mean-spirited practical joke and what she later says to Jessica are both way out of line, but in my girl Em's defence she *had* just been dumped, and how was she to know killer wendigos were out there on the mountain?

Throughout chapters seven and eight Emily is confronted with the consequences of her actions the year before. She can expire in more gruesome ways than any of the other poor unfortunate souls stranded on Blackwood Mountain, but if you let her live, this is when she'll demonstrate why she more than deserves Final Girl status. Whether it's fashioning a torch out of her own clothes or making the most of mining machinery, Emily consistently shows her quick thinking, mental fortitude, and resourcefulness – often while being actively chased by the wendigo. She may not be the nicest girl but a girl shouldn't have to be nice to be respected; Emily shows that female characters can have interesting depths beyond being uncomplicated people-pleasers. Plus, she's the only one who doesn't immediately take Josh's apparent demise at face value. What can we say? It takes one dubious prankster to call out another.

Besides all of that, various members of Supermassive – including Dan McDonald back in OPM #175 – have repeatedly flown the flag for Team Emily Is Great Actually. Whether you agree with me or not, I'm counting that as vindication.



RULE NUMBER ONE, EMILY IS ALWAYS RIGHT. RULE NUMBER TWO, NOTHING ELSE MATTERS BECAUSE EMILY IS ALWAYS RIGHT."

Can't really argue with that, can we?



INFO

GAME

Until Dawn

STATS

The game was in development for five years

It was originally intended to be a PS3 release using the PS Move controllers.

It debuted on PS4 in August 2015.

Supermassive says the game outperformed its expectations but sales numbers have never officially been released.

SPIN-OFFS

Until Dawn: Rush Of Blood

The Inpatient

HOW TO PLAY?

PS Store (PS4)
PS Plus Collection (PS5)



THE INTERVIEW

Celebrating old Horizons (and more)

Artist **Syed Ali Qaiser** wanted to celebrate PS4's greatest hits his own way, and caught the eye of Sony's biggest devs along the way

Can PlayStation 4 really be retro? We're being liberal with our definition, but let's not forget Sony's hit console was released seven years ago. In our minds, the likes of *Until Dawn*, *Journey*, and *Bloodborne* feel like hits of yesteryear. It's a feeling evoked by artist **Syed Ali Qaiser**, who wanted to celebrate the best of PS4 in style.

"It all started by looking back and recalling what made the PS4 so memorable, as the foundation of this idea was to pay tribute to an amazing generation of exclusive games by Sony," says Ali Qaiser.

He tells us it was hard to whittle down almost ten years of blockbusters, indie hits, and revivals into 12 favourites, "but in the end I simply chose which games left the biggest impression and the fondest memories."

We're right there with the artist as we scan across his collection of collectible illustrated posters. We recall the hokey teen jump shock shenanigans of *Until Dawn*,

the horror of a different kind as *Bloodborne*'s Gehrman, the First Hunter, puts yet another scythe through our skull.

Ali Qaiser joins in the trip down memory lane as he recalls *Bloodborne*: "There is something about that game, and the world it introduced, which is still so captivating and mysterious to me. The city itself was a character with many memorable locations that branched off later. Even just the attention to detail of the statues that littered the city, holding candles and creepy lamps,

weeping women covered in veils... it's a feast for the eyes to explore every nook and cranny of Yharnam."

PIN UP

Each of the 12 posters has been created around one of the four PlayStation face button symbols, as iconic as the games themselves. Deciding which game should sit within each symbol was the easy part, as the artist had to capture the feel of each game within that frame. "I had to think about what each game would visually demonstrate and it needed to be something that connected with both my own memories as well as everyone else's," he says.

As if he needed to add more stress to the job, Ali Qaiser decided to leap headfirst into the retro challenge by painting each poster on same the day of the year as the original

android, Connor," he tells us. The extra work paid off, though as the poster project caught the eye of some of Sony's leading talent. "Yes indeed," chips in Ali Qaiser, as he tells us that Hermen Hulst, the head of PlayStation Worldwide Studios, complimented his work on Twitter, along with Shawn Layden, the previous CEO of Sony Interactive Entertainment America, and Neil Druckmann, Naughty Dog's vice president and director of *The Last Of Us Part II*.

"While there was tremendous support from people all over the internet, it's really hard to reach a particular set of people. Above all, I wish Cory Barlog and Hideo Kojima could have seen it," he reflects. We guess you can't catch 'em all.

PS POWER

As he reflects on his posters, Ali Qaiser tells us how this collection has made him appreciate what PlayStation has meant to him over the years.

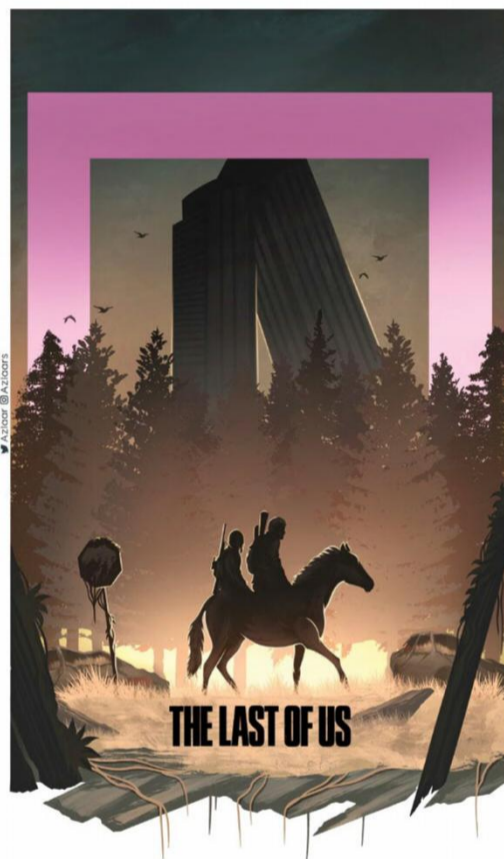
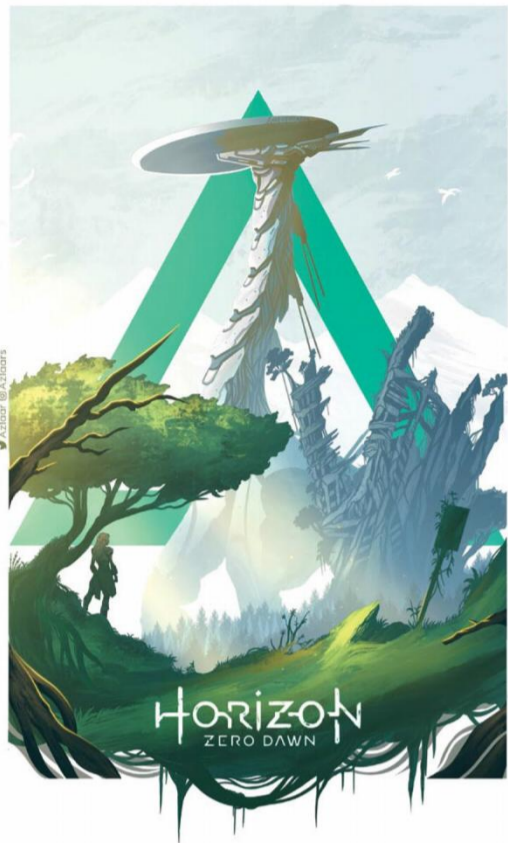
"PlayStation was always my escape from reality, and part of the reason I got into art at a young age," he says. "As

"PlayStation continued to provide memorable worlds to explore, stories to remember."

time passed, PlayStation and its first-party exclusives continued to provide unique and memorable worlds to explore, stories to remember, and characters you cared about and got attached to. To me, PlayStation is defined by its exclusives, which connect to all kinds of gamers from around the world. This was my opportunity to give something back, as a thank you for an amazing generation."

game was released. Once the brainstorming phase was over, and the foundations were laid, each illustration took Ali Qaiser around four to six hours on average. However, he reveals that two illustrations jumped to the eight-hour mark: *Uncharted 4* and *Detroit: Become Human* soaked up his time. "For *Uncharted*, it was a debate over which location to choose, between Libertalia or the iconic mountain, while for *Detroit* I wanted to show the androids and their dynamic nature, as well as my favourite

If you agree, you can buy into this collection yourself, and order the posters online at inprnt.com/gallery/azlaar. ■



PLAY NOW

Horror games

Three to play for free on PlayStation Now. Do these horrors still hold up?



SILENT HILL 2 HD

F FORMAT PS3 / RELEASED 2012
DEV TEAM SILENT/HIJINX STUDIOS

The first time we meet Pyramid Head he's stuffing an oddly-limbed, living mannequin,¹ a denizen of Silent Hill, into a sink's garbage disposal. It's a sign this horror adventure is playing for keeps, but also of just how times have changed. Our protagonist James Sunderland barely grimaces. There's no emotional delivery, internal monologue, or stressed exclamation. He just fires off a clip of bullets and returns to the task at hand: finding keys and unlocking obscure clock-puzzles.

Don't let this dash of cynicism dampen just how great Silent Hill 2 remains, even in this maligned HD version that was released on PS3.² The atmosphere remains untouched. The strum of the mournful music and the crackle of your trusty radio as an enemy lingers in the fog, out of sight, can't fail creep you out. Don't underestimate that fixed camera either. The game regularly asks you to move out of the screen, your view ahead obscured, and you've only the hiss and sputter of that radio detector to warn you if something nasty is lurking ahead. It's of its time, but in Team Silent's hands the limitations of PS2 are harnessed to deliver subtle shivers.

Equally of their time are the game's puzzles and character development, but you'll suffer those to soak up the chilling atmosphere.

FOOTNOTES 1 That's what our gentle minds like to see; the reality is possibly far more disturbing. 2 There are texture problems, high contrast between FMV and gameplay, and more issues besides.



THE EVIL WITHIN

F FORMAT PS3 / RELEASED 2014
DEV TANGO GAMEWORKS

The father of Resident Evil, Shinji Mikami, returned with this all-new horror but still brought us all the things he loves, namely claustrophobic, violent, and schlocky horror. Turned way up. Upon entering the Beacon Mental Hospital, police detective Sebastian Castellanos is thrust into Inception-like layers of graphic and gruelling torture.¹

Far from subtle, the game's premise – you're trapped inside the mind of a psychopath by techno-babble-machine-gubbins – means Mikami and his team can run riot across a series of genre sets. Naturally there's a nod to Resident Evil 4's ramshackle village, but shootouts through bloodied hospital wards, eerie asylum corridors, and a gothic villa deliver variety. In different hands it could feel disembodied; divorced from a lesser narrative and levelling system² it would be easy for the game to drift, but Mikami ties The Evil Within's many backdrops together with ease.

It helps that around every corner lurks an inventive creature that wants your blood. You track invisible enemies by their footsteps in puddles, need to unplug a giant brain (yes, really), and take on a hulking butcher with a safe for a head. Even when repetition sets in, this cast of nasties continues to surprise.

FOOTNOTES 1 Our hero spends the entire game being burnt, sliced, blown up, chewed on, and more. 2 A Nexus-like asylum ward run by the mysterious nurse Tatiana is your safe space to upgrade your skills.



RESIDENT EVIL CODE: VERONICA X HD

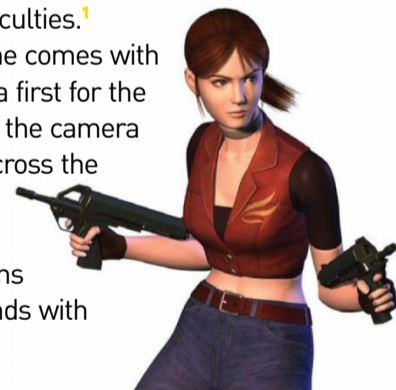
F FORMAT PS3 / RELEASED 2011
DEV CAPCOM

Often overlooked in favour of Resident Evil 3, this was actually the true sequel to Resident Evil 2 and delivers some classic puzzle-solving/zombie-headshotting thrills.

Taking place three months after the events of Resident Evil 2, the action switches to Claire and Chris Redfield nosing around an abandoned prison (Rockfort Island) in the middle of the ocean, and an Antarctic research facility. Umbrella and Albert Wesker are never far from messing with our duo's heads.

What you do remains closer to the original two games than the more gung-ho third outing, with item management, solving puzzle rooms, and survival trumping a fast trigger finger. That's not to say there isn't more action here; the Redfield duo get to have fun with guns on further playthroughs and difficulties.¹

The real shift in tone comes with the 3D backgrounds, a first for the series, which enables the camera to zoom in and pan across the screen. On PS Now you get PS3's HD remaster, which means this new approach lands with more detail.² Bonus.



FOOTNOTES 1 Finish the game to unlock Battle mode, which offers infinite ammo and challenge rooms. 2 The game always looked better than the PS1 originals but this remaster offers a new crisp resolution.

HAVE YOUR SAY

OPM readers tell us what they think of our choices



THE MUSIC, THE SCENARIOS ARE GREAT, HORRIFIC AND INTRIGUING, THE CHARACTERS ARE ALSO INTERESTING. A MASTERPIECE."

@ALejbtz



IT'S A LITTLE BIT CLUNKY BUT THE SETTING AND ATMOSPHERE IS SOLID. ONE OF MY FAVOURITE HORRORS LAST GEN."

Joshua Daniel French



IT WAS ALWAYS MY LEAST POPULAR ORIGINAL RE TITLE. THEY WERE ALWAYS CAMPY BUT CV WAS A TOTAL SOAP OPERA OF DUMB."

@taff_owst

▶ We nose around some of PlayStation's co-op classics. It'll get messy!



A BRIEF HISTORY OF Agent 47

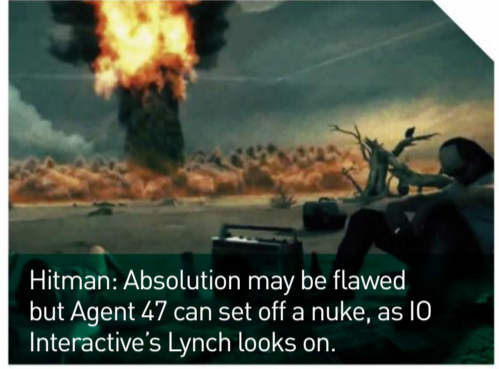
Impress your friends with your baldy facts



His first appearance on PlayStation was actually in the second game in the series. Silent Assassin is still a hit.



Hitman: Blood Money keeps on giving. In the 2005 game Agent 47 can make the White House's marines dance.



Hitman: Absolution may be flawed but Agent 47 can set off a nuke, as IO Interactive's Lynch looks on.

It may sound like the plot of a 1980s Steve Guttenberg movie, but **Agent 47 had four dads.** It means in the first game he committed quintuple patricide. **He's bald because hair couldn't be rendered.** Cult shooter Freedom Fighters is canon.

HISTORY OF HITS

Six games, one husky voice

There have been six mainline games on PlayStation including spin-offs and collections. Actor David Bateson has voiced Agent 47 in every mainline game. He almost missed out on Hitman: Absolution but outcry from fans ensured he returned to voice old baldy. In 2012 Eidos Montreal started developing a Hitman game, which became mobile title Hitman Go. IO Interactive carried on with the mainline games.



HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY'S 'A NEW LIFE' LEVEL, SET THE STANDARD FOR EVERY GAME TO COME. A SADISTIC SANDBOX SET IN THE 'BURBS, IT REMAINS A TRUE CLASSIC.



Hitman 2 on PS4 is Agent 47 at his best: blow a target off a rooftop film set...



... In the game's finale you can go full Wicker Man by sabotaging a fiery statue, locking Zoe Washington inside. And our favourite...



... Embracing our inner douche as stabby tattoo artist P-Power.



Agent 47's barcode reveals his birthday: September 5, 1964. What a codger. But he's looking good for his age on PS5.



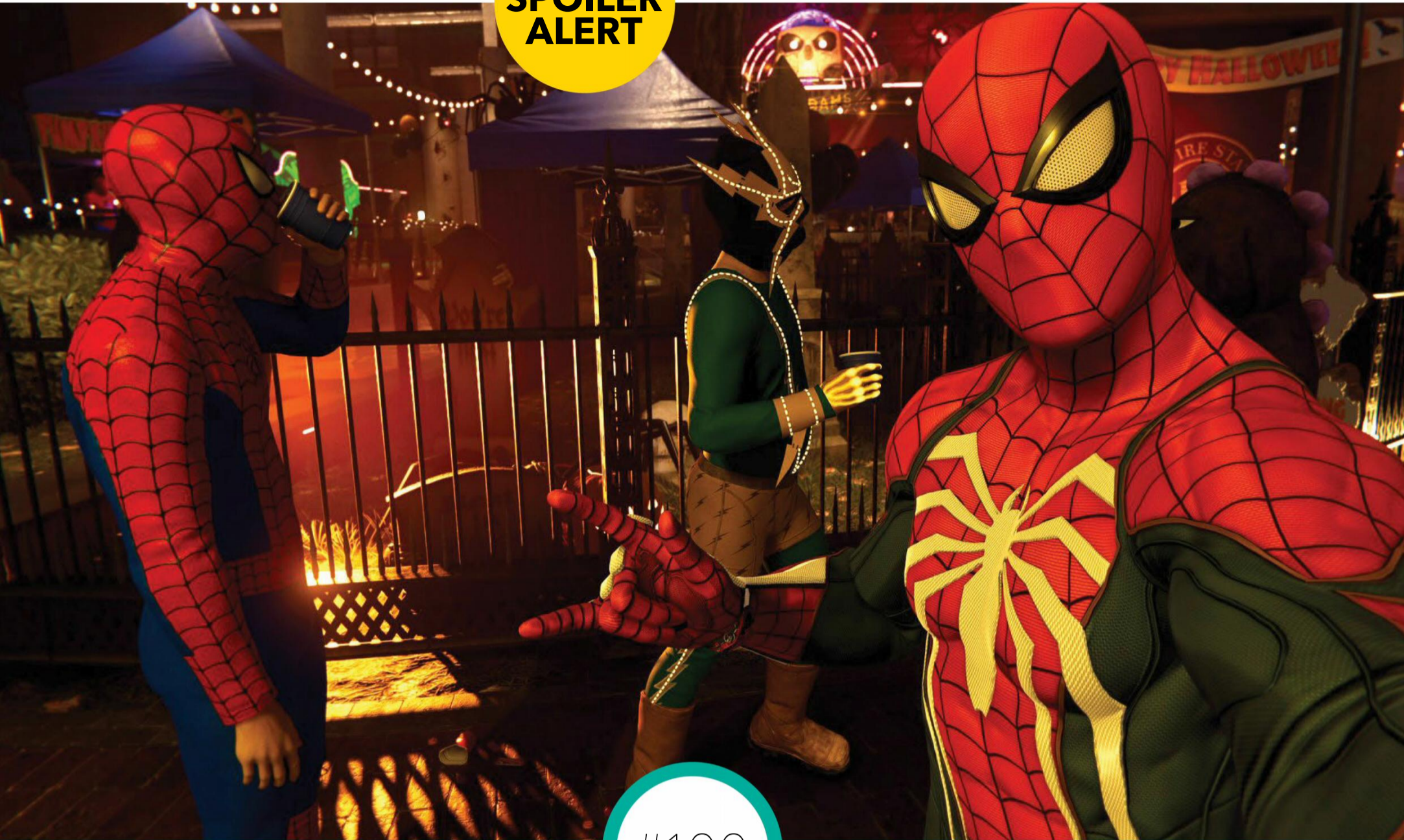
JUST A SEC...

Breaking necks and records

The fastest kill in 2016's Hitman was achieved by Brazilian player Mendietinha, who managed to complete the first Elusive Target, The Undying, in a mere 38 seconds. As if to rub it in, he ended the mission dressed as a clown while riding on the back of a dolphin. Unimpressed? Well, YouTuber punkstarfunk finished The Undying Returns in 26 seconds.

▶ Next issue: Come back for as we take **Sonic** for a spin

LOOK AWAY!
SPOILER
ALERT



#100

Party hard

Peter Parker faces his Demons in Marvel's Spider-Man. But who's the real villain at this fancy-dress party?

FORMAT PS4 / PUB PLAYSTATION STUDIOS / DEV INSOMNIAC GAMES / RELEASED 2018 / SCORE 9/10

Hot on the trail of good-samaritan-turned-supervillain-terrorist Martin Li (AKA Mr. Negative), Pete sets his sights on one Dr Delaney. Negative needs him to help unleash a deadly pandemic (which takes on a whole new feeling replaying it today). The problem? Delaney's attending ESU's Halloween costume party, so he's hard to identify.

Luckily, Spider-Man has a costume of his own – perfect for a drunken bash. Other partygoers are dressed in low-end wallcrawler costumes,

and there are plenty sporting classic costumes of Parker's nemeses. You have to track down each appearing in a social media post with the Doctor to find out which he is, requiring you to engage with the spooky shindig.

What follows is a low-stakes chase through a Hall Of Mirrors with a Mysterio wannabe, parkouring up stands to confront a Vulture throwing out candy, and going easy on a rubber-suited Rhino who's got a bit too much of a buzz going on.

It's a fun section that plays with the history of a Spider-Man who's already

built up quite a rogues' gallery, and it plays with the space inventively (you even wall-crawl through decorations as you follow the doctor, who's being held hostage, a little later). It goes to show that some of Insomniac Games' best Spidey moments are ones where the studio shows it hasn't forgotten to keep Peter grounded within everyday New York life. While his ESU scuffle with Mr. Negative goes bad, you're always reminded of the people who just want to live their lives. After all, that's what a Friendly Neighbourhood Spider-Man protects. ■

TIME TO PLAY?

This level, Back To School, comes roughly two-thirds of the way into the story, so you should be in the swing of things by the time you get to it. While most of the cast is in disguise from the start, it's the first time Peter P sees Martin Li changing into Mr. Negative.

NEXT MONTH

ON SALE 9 FEB



THE HOTTEST INDIES OF 2021 REVEALED

The best and quirkiest new games you need to play

PlayStation
Official Magazine - UK

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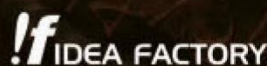
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