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The year's best game revealed, and it's not what you think!

THE PS5 FACTOR: Immortals Fenyx Rising delivers 4K resolution, 60fps, ray tracing, and ultra-fast travel using PlayStation 5's super-speedy SSD *whew*

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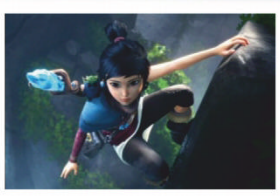
THE PLAYSTATION 5 LAUNCH REVIEW

How did Sony's biggest-ever hardware launch go down?



→ DEV ACCESS

KENA: BRIDGE OF SPIRITS

Inside PS5's hottest new action adventure for 2021

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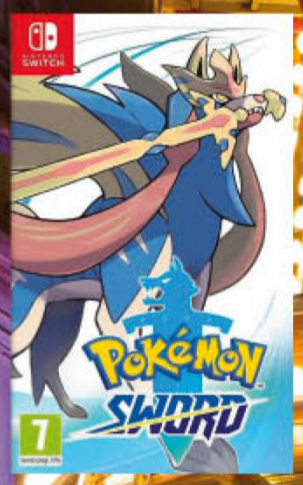

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Welcome

Welcome to your new Official PlayStation Magazine. What a way to start a new era too, with an old-fashioned reviews special, a blowout of the biggest games on PS4 and PS5 this holiday season. Argos has given up printing its catalogue, so feel free to circle the ones you want a loved one to get you in here.

The advantage of being in print is we take our time over our reviews and play to the credits, and then some. We don't need to rush to meet an online embargo and race with websites. It means you can trust our reviews and have faith that we've picked apart the games this issue to explain in detail why you should, or shouldn't, spend your money.

This commitment is more important than ever before as we enter the PS5 generation and games are going to cost £60 and above (don't be shocked to see £100 games becoming more common in 2021). While the quality of a game can always been understood, the value is far less easy to quantify. We take it all into account in our extensive reviews.

There are some clearer ways to play at a bargain price. It's commendable so many publishers and developers are offering free upgrades from PS4 to PS5. It's comforting to know when you finally get your PS5 there'll be a ready-made collection of games to dip into.

Speaking of which, PS Plus is coming on strong at the moment. Increasingly brand-new games are heading first to the subscription service (look for Worms Rumble this month), and with PS Plus Collection offering over 20 hit games to play on PS5 for free, it's offering quality *and* value.

As we head into 2021 there are going to be many new games to enjoy, so don't miss a single review from our writers by subscribing.

"YOU CAN TRUST OUR REVIEWS [...] WE'VE PICKED APART THE GAMES THIS ISSUE."

Ian Dean
EDITOR
OPM@FUTURENET.COM
@IanDean4

GAME OF THE MONTH
The Pathless
BEST GAME MYTH
The Lara Croft nude code

THIS MONTH'S MYTHBUSTERS

Oscar Taylor-Kent
GAMES EDITOR
Demon's Souls beaten, Oscar began building his own Archstone. He now has a room with a nightmarish view.

GAME OF THE MONTH
Demon's Souls
BEST GAME MYTH
Sheng Long is in SFII

Jess Kinghorn
STAFF WRITER
Just call her Activities Woman. Jess loves a good box-tick, so PS5's new Control Centre is her sweet task-jam.

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Observer: System Redux
BEST GAME MYTH
Squall died in FFVIII

Miriam McDonald
OPERATIONS EDITOR
Until The Witcher 3 comes to PS5 Mim's going to be a dedicated PS4 owner. At least one PS4 has a working fan.

GAME OF THE MONTH
Sackboy: A Big Adventure
BEST GAME MYTH
Fallout 3's predictions

Milford Coppock
MANAGING ART EDITOR
The stressful redesign done, Milf needs a nice calming break. A week in Boletaria sounds like a relaxing time.

GAME OF THE MONTH
Demon's Souls
BEST GAME MYTH
San Andreas' Sasquatch

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Immortals Fenyx Rising

It may be based on myths, but this open-world romp around the realms of Greek gods is destined to be a massive hit

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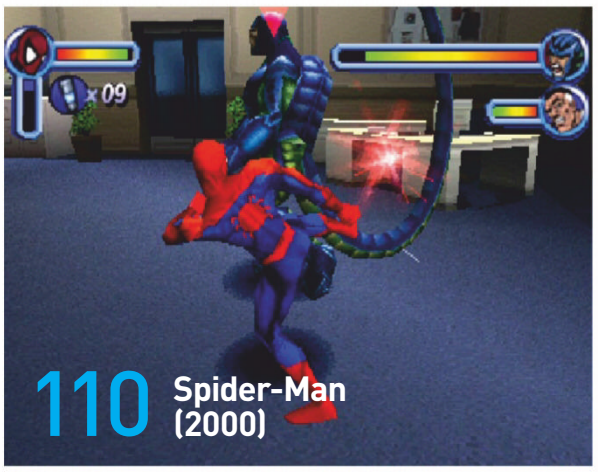

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Insider

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Worldwide PlayStation 5 blew PlayStation 4's 2.4 million launch sales out of the water.

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All aboard for a new generation

We look back at the most memorable console launch in years

Well, here we are. Given the way 2020 has gone, it feels a bit surreal to think PS5 has been out in the wild for a few weeks now. But we've made it and next gen is now current gen (new gen?). To welcome you to our brand-spanking-new redesign, we're going to look back on a launch that will undoubtedly remain memorable for years to come.

Japan, North America, South Korea, and New Zealand received their PS5s on 12 November, and we Brits got our mitts on the funky white box on the 19th.

To celebrate the release London Underground was taken over by a number of PlayStation icons. Bakerloo, Victoria, and Central Line platforms sported a new look, and various stop names were transformed, creating never-before-heard-of destinations such as 'Horizon Forbidden West Ham,' 'Gran Turismo 7 Sisters,' and 'Ratchet And Clankaster Gate.' Oxford Circus' Tube signs were given a PlayStation makeover too, each one styled after a different face button. An immersive 3D advert played above Piccadilly Circus, showing the extra dimension offered by PS5 and its DualSense controller.

Merry old London wasn't the only city to roll out the red carpet for PlayStation 5; others all around the world enjoyed a touch of next gen to celebrate release day. The PlayStation face button symbols took to the water and climbed the Piazza San Marco in Venice, while Paris lit up with another 3D ad. Similar stunts were seen in 25 different territories in total, including Northern Ireland, Brazil, Germany, and The Netherlands. Like so many other tourists, PlayStation posted all of its holiday snaps to its Instagram.

The Swiss Alps played host to a massive bit of sloganeering. Ski lift? Sales lift more like.

MAKING AN ENTRANCE

That definitely counts as making a splash. As for splashing out, let's talk sales. Between November 2013 and December 2019, PS4 sold 106 million units worldwide, with 2.4 million of those flying off the shelves in its first two post-launch weeks. It's worth remembering that that second number only really accounts for the North American release as PAL regions had to wait a fortnight and Japan didn't get PS4 until February the following year. So, how does PS5 compare?

Famitsu reported that 118,085 units were sold in Japan over the first four days of PS5's release. This doesn't hold a candle to the number of sales during the same period after PS4's launch – the earlier console shifted 309,154 during its first week. PS5 is far from struggling, though, as worldwide it blew PS4's 2.4 million launch sales out of the water, surpassing an estimated two million units sold *on day one*. There's a reason PS5s were in short supply, and it wasn't all due to Covid-19. PS5 is simply *hot*.

It wasn't all about sales, either. Shortly after launch Time magazine listed the console among its 100 best inventions of the year, praising it for "small advancements that combine to create a revolutionary experience." When we asked our readers it turns out you felt much the same.

LAUNCH PAD

Judging by those sales figures, it's likely you already have your own PS5 looming quietly in a corner of your living room. We took to Twitter to ask you how you spent launch day and what you played first.

STICKING THE LANDING

Back in July we caught up with industry veteran Lorne Lanning. He told us, "This is the thing I'm amazed at, [that] we are blown away [by]: how [Sony are going to] ship on time, right? How are they staying on schedule?" Well, Sony did it!

Director of global community at publisher 505 Games Antonela Pounder told us she booked the day off work especially for the launch. She says, "[I] got the Christmas tree out and waited nervously for my PS5 to be delivered and spent the morning on a video call with some friends who were also putting their tree up and waiting on their PS5."

Ah, the community always comes together. Pounder, a massive Astro Bot fan, first played Astro's Playroom, which is pre-loaded on every console. She was far from the only one endeared by the cute little 'bot's antics either.

As Astro trots over glass or tugs at parts of the environment in much the same way he tugs at our heart strings, the DualSense introduces a world of sensation to the palm of your hand. While some may unfairly dismiss Astro's latest adventure as a pre-loaded freebie or simply a DualSense tech demo, many have already seen for themselves why it's well worth your time.

In fact, 42% of those who responded told us they began with Astro's Playroom. As Twitter user @Wrestlepop20 rightly points out, "[it] demos the DualSense brilliantly." Reader Martin Bloom told us that he "absolutely [loves] what Sony have done with the DualSense [in Astro's Playroom]," and it's Chloe Haynes' "game of the year for sure." James Coogan as well as Twitter user @Strife1013 proudly say they've already platinumed it.

OLD GOLD

Twitter user @Change918 also began with Astro before going back to a PS4 favourite on PS5, telling us Ghost Of Tsushima "Feels like a new game at 60fps!" While some PS4 titles remain at a capped framerate, there are plenty of last-gen gems that are getting a new lease on life on PS5. Our very own editor hasn't been able to stop playing Days Gone on his PS5 now that it runs at a buttery-smooth 60fps in 4K. And that's not the only title in the PS Plus Collection (free for subscribers on PS5) that's worth a second look. Reader Ian Dodd spent launch day playing Spider-Man: Miles Morales but tells us, "There was one downside though – Crash Bandicoot N.Sane Trilogy was available to download for free [from the PS Plus Collection] so now my girlfriend wants to play that all the time."

Crafty gamer parents also chimed in. Graham Howe tells us, "Our disc version arrived [...] at [3:30pm] on launch day and was swiftly squirrelled away into our presents cupboard for Xmas day when we are going to present my [nine-year-old] son with Sackboy on PS5. [He'll] be gutted as it's not the PS4 version – we will then whip out the console."

Sounds like Christmas morning will be an emotional rollercoaster for at least one small lad, and for that we've got to give props to this mischievous parent.

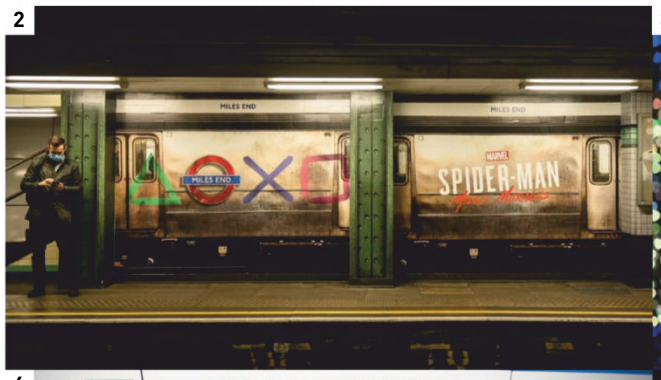
Whether you managed to nab a PS5 on launch day or are waiting before upgrading, here's to a whole new console generation – shenanigans and all. And the good news? More consoles are due before the end of the year. Fingers crossed.

*** What do you think of your PS5? Let us know your impressions @OPM_UK.**

Shortly after launch Time magazine listed the console among its 100 best inventions of the year.

This cutting edge 3D billboard in South Korea showcased PS5's 'play without limits mantra.

1



2

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4

5

1 Next time you're on the tube, which PlayStation setting do you want to end up in? **2** A sneaky Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales ad appeared on the London tube. **3** Okay, Sony didn't need to change much about one of the Oxford Circus underground signs but the other three look rad. **4** Next stop, Gran Turismo 7 Sisters! **5** Like Rita Ora, PlayStation's symbols are everywhere.

NIOH NOW
If you're one of the 1.2 million players who have already discovered the joys of Nioh 2, then you can download the latest DLC – The First Samurai – from 17 December. Promising tougher bosses and a new difficulty mode, this one's for the die-hard.

Taylor-made news

Oscar Taylor-Kent's news slap

PS5 upgrades aren't reserved for Triple-A, stone-cold hits. This month Nacon and Focus Home Interactive agreed to bring the sleeper hit RPG **Greedfall** to PS5, along with its new DLC. It's yet another under-the-radar game getting a new lease of life on PS5. Jess will be pleased.

What do you mean you haven't played **Metro Exodus** yet? We, or rather Ian, has been yapping on about this Russian-set train ride for almost two years. As it's now confirmed for PS5 as a free upgrade, there's no better time to get aboard 4A Games' shooter. The PS5 edition will be hooking up enhancements that include a faster framerate, increased resolution, reduced loading times, and ray tracing.

Not content with wowing us with PS5 tech promises, the dev also revealed the sequel is already in the works for PS5, as is a multiplayer spin-off by **World War Z** dev Saber Interactive.

Nioh bosses back

Not played it? Here are five reasons to...

Yatsu-No-Kami is no pushover. Once beaten you can summon it.

The Nioh Collection is coming in February 2021, with both games (and their DLC) remastered for 4K and 120fps – and with save transfers and upgrade paths too. Perhaps the only soulslikes to truly stand toe-to-toe with FromSoftware's, the tough bosses who await show why you shouldn't overlook Team Ninja's masterpieces when they return on PS5...

TACHIBANA MUNESHIGE

Your one-on-one duel with with this real historical figure reveals the depth of the series' combat. Every weapon has its own quirks and movesets, and you need to master them, including using the proper stances (low, medium, high) at the correct time, to best Muneshige.

YATSU-NO-KAMI

Faced early in Nioh 2, Yatsu-No-Kami is a huge horned snake that releases smaller snakes at you as it burrows around the arena at high speed, hurling poison into the bargain. Bows and long-range weapons are always at your side, and you need to make good use of them to create an opening.

ENENRA

This smoky, fiery lad is an early demon roadblock in Nioh 2. He's hulking, but able to turn into smoke to close gaps, and is faster than you might expect. He pulls you into the yokai realm to supercharge himself. But when you learn precisely when to dodge, strike, and turn into your demon form to counter his heavy attacks, you'll feel on the top of the world.

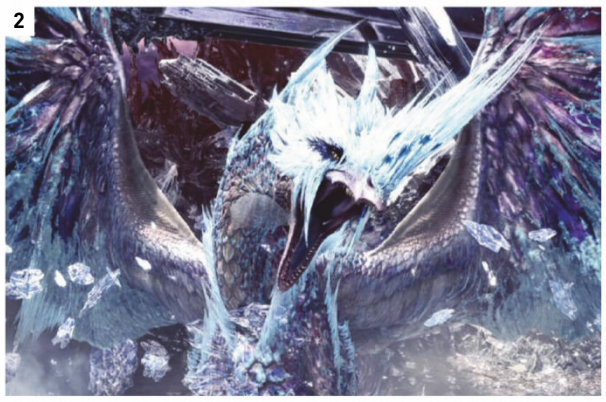
KAMAITACHI

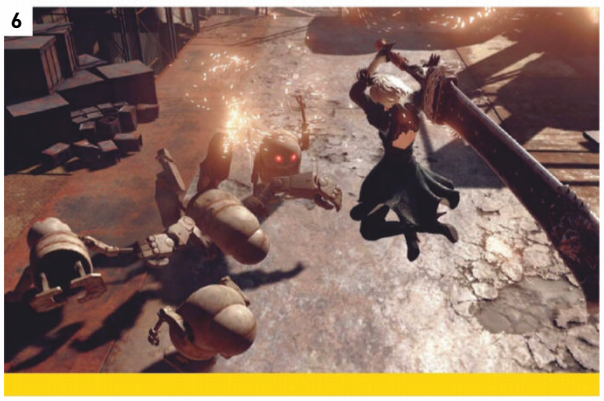
A high-speed weasel who protects the special trees you've been tasked to find, it proves not all Nioh bosses are about whaling on oversized enemies in a room. As he zips about, jumps on trees, and hurls blades of wind at you, you need to take cover in the foliage before picking your moment.

TATARIMOKKE

All three eyes of this massive demon owl watch you throughout the stage as you try to avoid being spotted. In battle, he flies around dropping red orbs that you need to take care of while also avoiding his airborne attacks. There's a lot to juggle.

*** The enhanced Nioh Collection will release on 5 February, for PS5.**





1 Sekiro is built for timing and benefits from a swish PS5 framerate boost. Maybe it's easier? [*Nope* – ed.]
6 Boosted on PS5, now you have no excuse not to play the amazing Nier: Automata.

Bursting from the frames

The PS4 games to replay with PS5's hardware boost

Plenty of old PS4 hits get nice upgrades on PS5 even without dedicated patches. There are too many to count (we've checked over 60), but generally if a game has an uncapped framerate, then it'll jump up to a smooth 60fps on PS5. Here are six of the best leaps we've found so far...

FromSoftware's **Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice**[1], is all about timing, fights a back-and-forth of blocks and parries. It massively benefits from the increased framerate, feeling like the kind of thing we'd pay for in a remaster in previous generations.

Not only does PS5's SSD speed up loading in **Monster Hunter: World**[2], but the smoother action makes each hunt feel brand new, the responsiveness giving us reason to go toe-to-claw with our favourite monsters.

If you've not yet explored all the planets in **Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order**[3] for hidden secrets, it's time to blast off again in sweet 60fps, just so long as you're playing in PS5's Performance mode.

> It's a pleasure to see 2B dodging disgusting amounts of projectiles with ease, all in super-smooth motion.

Another Performance moder is **Final Fantasy XV**[4]. Compared with it running on PS4 Pro, the difference is day and demon-filled night, feeling like a remaster. FFXV is visually stunning, and for the first time you can really appreciate just how much.

Hardcore boss rush game **Furi**[5] becomes even more electric with framerates this slick, making it clearer than ever that when you get stomped by these enemies it's *your* fault. No, seriously, it's your fault.

Finally we reboot **Nier: Automata**[6]. The combat in this robo-RPG elevated it above its predecessor, and it's a pleasure to see 2B dancing around enemies and dodging disgusting amounts of projectiles with ease, all in super-smooth motion.

*** Have you been testing your PS4 back catalogue? Let us know your favourites.**

DEV Q&A

Spirited away

Kena: Bridge Of Spirits' co-creators **Josh** and **Mike Grier** offer new details

Inspired by Disney and Pixar, Kena: Bridge Of Spirits is an indie with Triple-A values that looks set to be one of 2021's must-plays.

Our exclusive demo takes us through the game's beautiful first world. In action the hand-animated heroine looks as if she has escaped from a feature film. In combat she's fluid and nuanced, and when Kena takes time away from the many puzzles and battles we see a subtle smirk or eye-smile that few motion-captured games can sell.

Her army of Rot – cute wood sprites who can be called upon in fights and to manipulate the environment – steal the show. We see 100 on screen at once on PS5 and each is individual. We know this as one is wearing the tiny hat we bought it earlier.

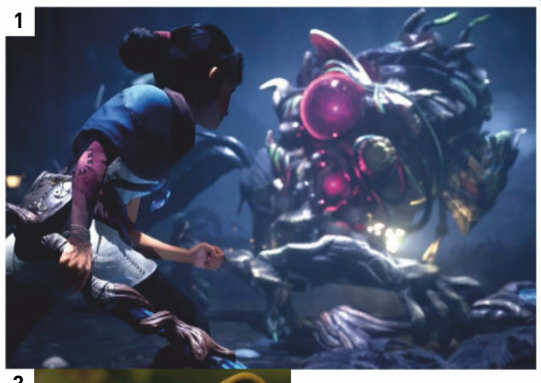
Kena's role in life is to send stubborn spirits onwards by showing them life is for the living and everything must move on, and so the mini- and main-boss encounters help create a story with real heart.

OPM: What are the themes of the game? Is the story as light as the Pixar style?
Josh Grier: [Kena] chose to help these spirits and that is taxing, and that's something we wanted to show through the narrative. We have these cute little kids and you've committed to helping them and unite them with their [dead] brother, but at the end of this level you have to let them go. It really ties into the themes of forgiveness and letting go, and allowing things to pass on. So yeah, there's a darker and more emotional theme that plays out.
Mike Grier: Kena needs help herself a little bit too. We expose that weakness in her and she goes through a change. The idea of being a spirit is that you have to help these spirits 100%, you have to be fully selfless. But if you're holding onto something yourself it can hold you back, and that's what comes to the head when you confront some of the more challenging spirits.

OPM: We've seen the first boss fight, with a fox-like creature built from artefacts personal to that spirit Kena has discovered. What has inspired the bosses in the game?
JG: Each boss is the corrupted spirit of a particular individual in the story who must let go of this world and move on. Ultimately, Kena struggles with the bosses to help them find peace. The boss design incorporates elements of the spirit's original personality and backstory. All are based on animals with characteristics that represent the spirit.
MG: We chose a fox to represent Taro's clever and resourceful character. When we were designing his boss, we tried to take the animal's features and push them to an extreme. We also wanted to incorporate elements from the Forest region, the area that players explore just prior to facing Taro's corrupted spirit. Constructed from wood and vines, the Taro boss incorporates corruption elements encountered by players throughout the level. We continue this style of repeating themes for each of the bosses in the game.

> **Each boss is the corrupted spirit of a particular individual in the story who must let go of this world and move on.**

OPM: Why the Balinese influence?
JG: The influence of south-east Asian cultures on Kena can not be overstated. However, our understanding and exposure to Balinese culture came only after we began collaborating with the Çudamani group. Our composer, Jason, reached out to Gamelan Çudamani with the hope of incorporating their musical style and traditional instruments into the soundtrack. Jason spent a lot of time working with the Çudamani team to build a collaboration that would bring their sound into the game in a respectful way. Through that collaboration we discovered the incredible Balinese culture included similarities with the game's core concept: helping trapped and struggling spirits move on. Music is an important part of this process in Balinese culture and the collaboration with Çudamani helped us build that out in an authentic way.



1 Bosses reflect the corruption around them. 2 Buy your Rot new hats to wear. 3 DualSense's haptics add weight to the combat. 4 Hand animation helps give Kena real character.

OPM: Gamelan Çudamani's singer, Emiko Saraswati Susilo, plays Kena. Can we expect a song and dance number?
JG: Not so much, she never breaks into song.
MG: As much as there's a Disney influence to the game we still wanted to keep everything more grounded. She does, however, perform on the soundtrack.

OPM: Speaking of that Disney style, there's no motion capture in the game, it's all hand-animated. How does hand-rigging give a different look to the movement?
JG: Using keyframe animation gives us the flexibility to add extra personality to the

stylised character we've developed. We invest extra time into the character face rigs so we can add the subtleties of emotion and expression to their performances.
MG: Keyframe animation is great for this style of storytelling. It also gives us the opportunity to develop dynamic gameplay animations. Even though Kena's movement is fantastical, we try to give all of her actions and attacks weight and keep the character controller feeling really tight and responsive.

OPM: How are you making use of the DualSense controller?
MG: We use haptics on all of Kena's abilities and shield, and at the moment we use the adaptive triggers when using the bow. You have a little bit of resistance on the right trigger that tightens as you full draw. When you do have the string fully drawn the bow has more power and more accuracy, and you'll feel that tension in the trigger as you pull back. There are some fun minigames too; these train you up to use the bow.

OPM: Is using the bow all about the DualSense or can we blast off arrows?
JG: If you don't pull it back completely you can fire off five quickly, but we've tuned the enemy AI so that when you start drawing your bow a lot of the enemies will rush at you. We didn't want players to camp with it because it's a pretty powerful weapon.
MG: In the bottom of the screen is a bow quiver, and you have four shots and there's a cooldown on each one, so if you fire too quickly you'll run out of shots before the cooldown [...] we're incentivising the tactical, thought-out, fully drawn arrow shots.

OPM: The game is incredibly detailed. Have you already planned for more games?
JG: Yeah, sure. The loop we've established where you're helping these spirits and each one has a story loop, that works really well as an episodic structure.

OPM: It sounds like there's room for DLC...
JG: Yeah, there're definitely opportunities for additional spirits that we couldn't get into this game that would have additional loops you could go on to open up in the game.

*** You'll be able to move on when Kena: Bridge Of Spirits is released in March.**

"A FEW GAME PROPERTIES HAVE AMAZING BIONIC ARMS, LIKE OVERWATCH, AND THE LATEST IS CYBERPUNK. I THINK CYBERPUNK, IN TERMS OF CULTURAL IMPACT, IS GOING TO BE MASSIVE."
SAMANTHA PAYNE, CO-FOUNDER, OPEN BIONICS

PlayStation Voices
The month in mouthing off

"SO HONOURED TO BE NOMINATED ALONGSIDE SUCH PHENOMENAL PERFORMANCES. THANK YOU."
VOICE ACTOR LAURA BAILEY APPRECIATES HER GAME AWARDS NOMINATION.

"OH, MONDO, YOU DECADENT GENIUSES. EXCUSE ME, I'LL BE LISTENING TO THIS ON A LOOP FOR TEN HOURS."
MIKE BITHELL GOES CRAZY FOR HIS TRON: LEGACY – VINYL EDITION SOUNDTRACK.

"EVERYTHING IS SOLD... I'M SPENDING A LOT MORE TIME ON TRYING TO INCREASE SUPPLY TO MEET THAT DEMAND."
PLAYSTATION CEO JIM RYAN REVEALS EVERY PS5 WAS SOLD AT LAUNCH.

MGS changes lives

Snake's iconic bionic arm is a real thing

The design beautifully mimics Venom Snake's arm in The Phantom Pain.

People with limb differences can face discrimination and extra difficulty in daily life, but one company, Bristol-based Open Bionics, has teamed up with Konami to break down barriers. The Venom Snake bionic arm clips onto Open Bionics' Hero Arm, a multi-grip bionic arm for below-elbow amputees, and has been based on the design used in Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain.

After being inundated with requests from users for an arm similar to the one Venom Snake wears, Open Bionics' co-founder Samantha Payne contacted The Phantom Pain's publisher, Konami, with a 'what if?' request. "They were so excited by the idea. They were already a fan of our brand and had been following us for a while. And they just really wanted to do it for their fans,' she tells us. "They were really super-helpful, very supportive, and put a lot of time into creating like the perfect look."

Because it's important to get a perfect fit the arm is custom-made for each recipient, including the software that reads a user's muscle mass responses and in turn controls the motorised fingers. Though each one costs £10,000 that's five times cheaper than the competition.

Projects such as the Venom Snake Hero Arm matter because they empower limb-different people, and the staff at Open Bionics have seen the difference their work makes. [The recipients] "absolutely love it. It is a badge of honour for them. It's really joyful to be around them when that happens. Because previously, there was such a big stigma attached to having a limb difference that people have felt like they had to hide it," explains Payne.

ARMY OF ONE

This won't be the last videogame arm we see from the team, as Samantha Payne has turned her thoughts to creating a PS5 and PlayStation-themed design.

"There's definitely a lot of appetite for a PS5-inspired bionic arm," she says excitedly, adding: "I think definitely, there's some nostalgia stuff as well that I'd like to play with. I think the PlayStation brand is extremely creative and playful [...] so I would like to play with that design."

With so many iconic models to choose from and be inspired by, Open Bionics is sure to please more happy clients.

*** Learn more about Open Bionics and its work at openbionics.com.**

FIFA 21 is a work of art

The PlayStation 5 edition makes its mark

This month saw the release of FIFA 21 on PlayStation 5, and to celebrate artist Scott McRoy took to the streets of the UK to create murals of some of football's rising stars, including Trent Alexander-Arnold, Phil Foden, and Mason Mount.

"There's a huge amount of excitement around the next generation, which I tried to replicate in this design," says McRoy.

There's artistry on the virtual pitch too, as we take a look at FIFA 21 running on Sony's new console. With more and longer animation the game is open to intuitive movement. Players can now trap the ball in multiple ways and moves can be cancelled mid-animation and transition into new moves for greater realism.

"So let's say [a player] takes the touch one way, but changes his mind halfway through; we can transition out of that animation and make it look believable. That's the beauty of the new tech," says FIFA 21's gameplay producer Kantcho Doskov.

> There's a huge amount of excitement around the next generation, which I tried to replicate in this design.

HAND OF GOD

The game makes good use of the DualSense controller. If your player kicks a ball with his left foot, the left side of the pad vibrates. As a player takes a penalty the controller also vibrates, and it's more intense depending on the match and situation.

"Going forward, we'll definitely want to continue to add features and make more use of the haptics because it's kind of game-changing," reveals Doskov.

If you've yet to play FIFA 21 on PS5 we'd urge you to lace up your boots and play.

*** FIFA 21 is released this month on PS5, and PS4 owners can get a free update.**

GEAR: STUFF WE LOVE

This issue, the best new soundtracks...

STREET FIGHTER III: THE COLLECTION

CAPCOM/LACED RECORDS £70 WWW.AMAZON.CO.UK

Featuring 72 tracks from all editions of Street Fighter III, this four-disc boxset is a lavishly put-together collection. Composers Hideki Okugawa and Yuki Iwai run the gamut of jazzy house, jungle, and drum'n'bass in this callback to the '90s' biggest dance crazes. Remastered and pressed onto heavyweight 180g 'Hadouken blue and white' discs, it's a fan's dream.

CUPHEAD CD SET: SONGS & SKETCHES

IAM8BIT JAPAN/STUDIOMDHR £39.99 WWW.IAM8BIT.COM

Cuphead's good-time jazz soundtrack is one of the best you can hear. Surprisingly, given the 1930s-style big band sound, it's full of absolute bangers, as lively as the on-screen action. This two-CD collection features the complete soundtrack and, for the first time, composer Kris Maddigan's extensive liner notes. Cuphead CD Set: Songs & Sketches is a glimpse into the mayhem.

THE PATHLESS 2XLP

IAM8BIT/ANNAPURNA £39.99 WWW.IAM8BIT.COM

The surprise indie hit at PS5's launch, The Pathless redefines how we play in open worlds (see p90 for our review). This original soundtrack from Grammy-nominated composer Austin Wintory echoes the game's themes of exploration with a whimsical quality. The gatefold edition is illustrated by Emmy winner Elaine Lee. The discs come in Cleansed Blue and Cursed Red vinyl to evoke the gameplay of The Pathless.

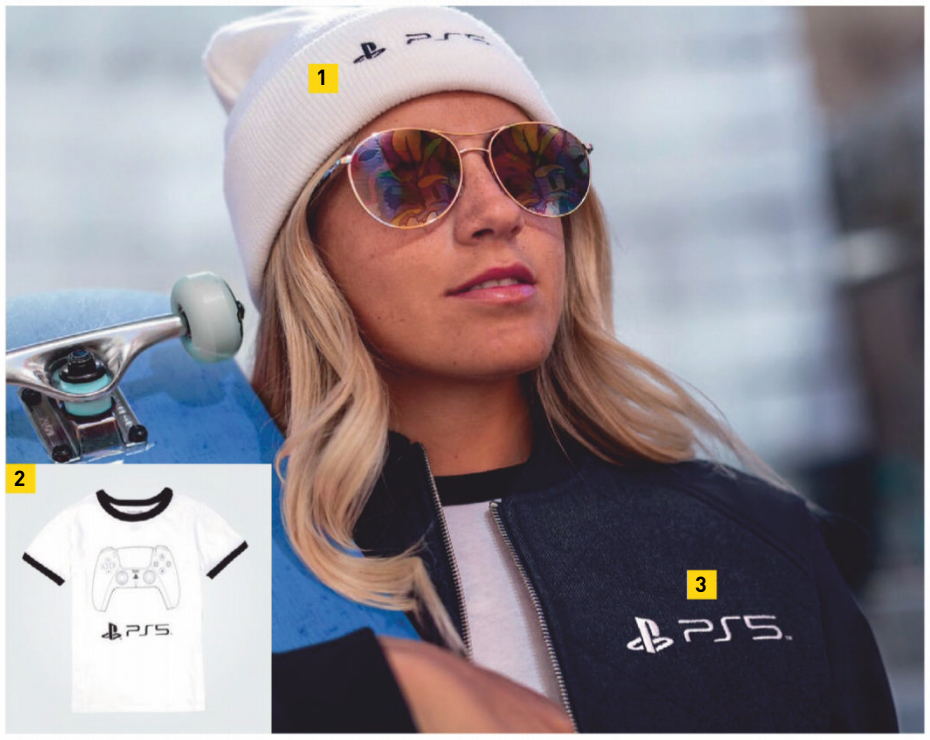
HAVEN – VINYL EDITION

G4F RECORDS £35 WWW.G4F-RECORDS.COM

Composed by French electronic musician Danger, the Haven – Vinyl Edition soundtrack features 17 tracks of cool Euro disco that evoke the atmosphere of this emotional RPG. The design and feel of the album matches the indie-cool of the game. Packaged in a pastel, grain-textured gatefold with a cover designed by Japanese animator and director Yukio Takatsu, this is an achingly cool record. Pre-order for January.

OVERWATCH BOOKED IN

Out now, The Cinematic Art Of Overwatch: Vol 1 takes us behind the scenes to see how Blizzard makes the varied, creative movies to accompany its hero shooter. Order from titanbooks.com.



1 Sony's PS5 range includes the **Debossed DualSense Wireless Controller Beanie**, 2 the **Youth DualSense Wireless Controller Tee**, 3 and the unisex **Quilted Bomber Jacket**. All are available at gear.playstation.com. 4 Nacon's **Revolution Unlimited Pro Controller – Call of Duty: Black Ops – Cold War special edition** will set you back £180. Get it at nacongaming.com. 5 Turtle Beach's premium-build **Stealth 700 Gen 2** headphones feature clear sound and chat, and a robust build quality for £130. Order at turtlebeach.com. 6 At the budget end, but still impressive, is the **Snakebyte Head:Set 5**, priced £18 7 and the **Snakebyte Twin:Charge 5** for £20. Both are available at mysnakebyte.com 8 The **Annapurna Interactive Deluxe Limited Edition** features eight hit indies in one stunning boxset, priced £200. Order at iam8bit.com.

JESS'S REAL DEAL

If I can match great art with a good cause then take my cash. The OneSpecialGame fan art competition raises money for the charity SpecialEffect, which helps people with disabilities play videogames. Profits from each poster go to a good cause. The final four winning entries feature art based on Mass Effect, Need For Speed, Stardew Valley, and Monument Valley.

Nico Vliek's beautiful Monument Valley illustration won the grand prize. "I strongly believe that games should be accessible to everyone, so to see all of the profits go towards this goal fills my heart with joy," he tells me. "To know I have contributed to their cause, especially by doing something I love, is incredible. I hope it helps them!"

Buy your framed collector's poster at redbubble.com (prices vary)

THE BIG SHOT

If looks could kill

Hitman 3 is slaying on PlayStation 5

Globetrotting assassin Agent 47 is heading to Chongqing, China in Hitman 3. The neon-lit scene on these pages isn't an outtake from a John Wick movie but a still from the game running in IO Interactive's Glacier Engine on PS5. The new lighting renderer, water simulation, and subtle animation brings this recreation of the Chinese city to life.

In action we see how Agent 47's clothes now get wetter the longer he stands silently in the rain, pondering his next move. As he walks through a puddle it ripples realistically and immediately our minds turn to how this will affect the game's AI. Will a careless splash betray us to a target?

The developer boasts there can be over 300 AI characters in a level at any one time, ensuring Hitman 3 will have some of the most complex and challenging assassination missions we've played yet. And if all else fails, as we see in the demo, Agent 47 can simply chuck a victim out of a window. And it all runs at 60fps in 4K on PS5.

If all that's not enough (you want *more*?), you can import your progress, maps, and levels from Hitman and Hitman 2 to enjoy in this new, more polished style.

Numbers Game

We do the maths

406

Seconds of Cyberpunk 2077 action graced YouTube late last month.

10,080

Minutes is all it took the Demon's Souls community to solve the mystery surrounding its new door.

850

Megabytes: Sony's latest system update for PS5 is a meaty one.

80%

Of Square Enix staff are working from home. The studio's offered it as a permanent option post-pandemic.

15,3432

Hours between the original R-Type Final launching and its sequel being announced this month.

4,745

Days (at least) will separate The World Ends With You from its sequel, Neo, which arrives on PS4 mid-2021.

295

Deaths clocked up by Ian in one hour playing Ghostrunner. Read his review of this Mirror's Edge-like on p95.

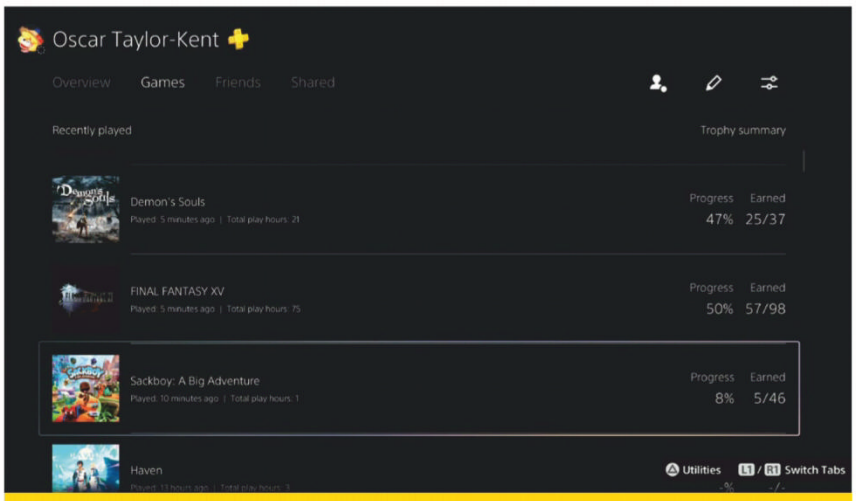
The PS5 power user guide

Shhh... these cheeky little secrets might save you some time

PS5 has been out for about a month in the UK now, and we've suffered through *weeks* to review the latest games (we're saints). In that time, we've stumbled on some little tips that might make your playtime a little brighter. Know them all already? We accept your smugness...

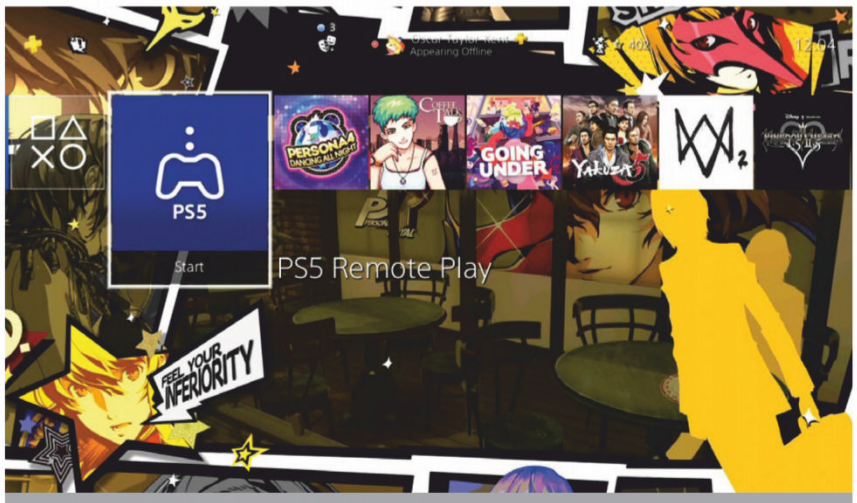
01 AXIS OF EVIL

To invert the controller axis, or not to invert? That debate has resulted in many crushed pastries at OPM Towers. But whether you're on the correct side [*Uninverted* – ed] or not, you can adjust default presets in settings for axes, resolution modes, difficulty, accessibility, and loads more.



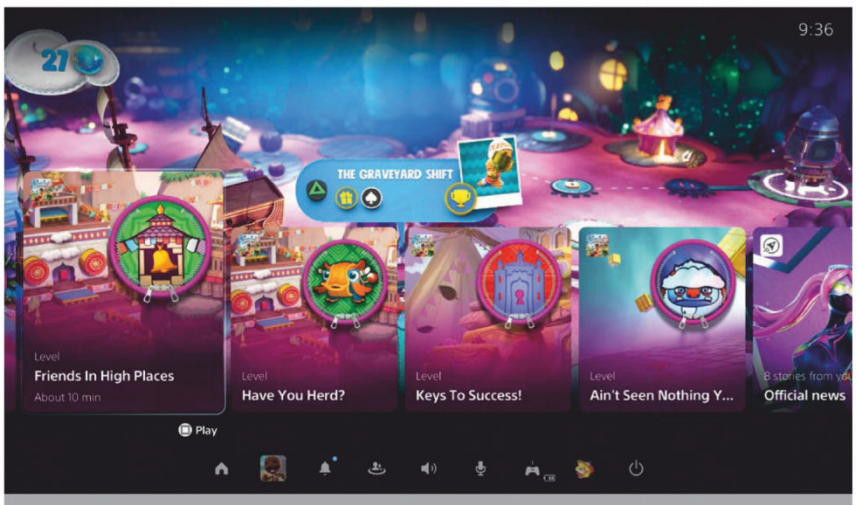
02 HOURLY RATE

Sometimes you're better off not knowing how much time you put into the likes of Fortnite or Knack (or, if you're Ian, PES). But if you're curious, navigate to your profile on PS5 and click over to your Games. The tracking spans back a few years, revealing some old habits that died hard.



03 REMOTE PLAY

While you can't remote play to your PS Vita (yet, anyway), you can beam your console directly to your phone, or even your PS4. This means if you want to play on your PS5 when away you don't have to lug the whole absolute unit around, or you can play in one room with it in another.

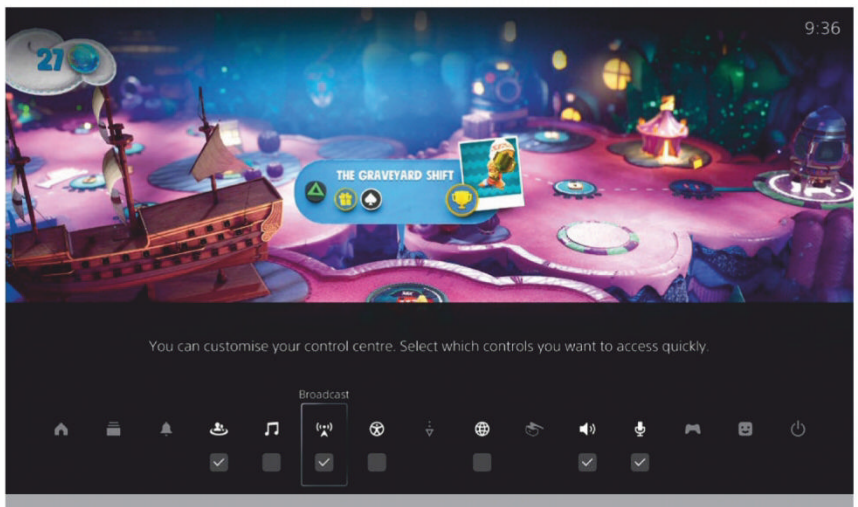


04 GETTING ACTIVE

It's easy to forget about Activities as they're so new, but pull up the Control Centre while you're playing something and you'll be greeted with a menu of recommended things to do in your game. You can even start some Activities instantly, warping straight across a map in open-world games.

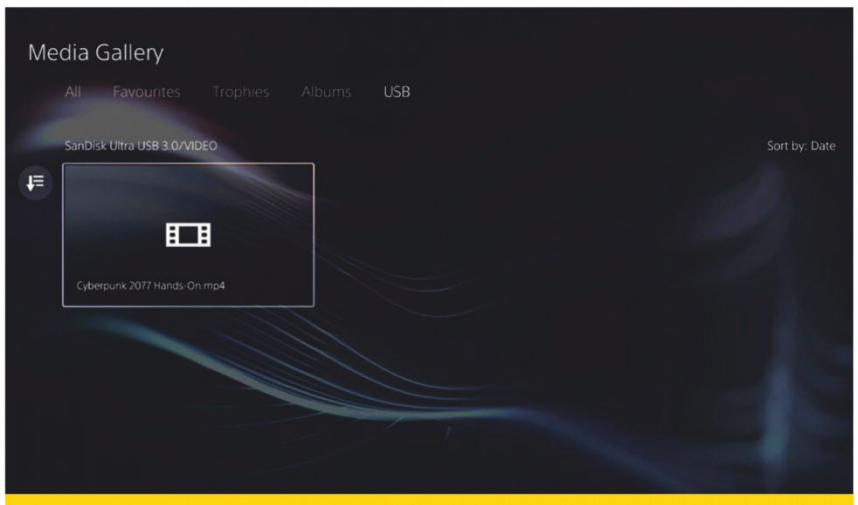
05 ZIP IT

Mama ringing while you're in a sticky situation, and your Tekken fighters grunting just a little too loudly on-screen to be comfortable? Fret no longer. Not only does a tap of the mic button mute your microphone audio so your pals can't hear her, holding it instantly mutes *all* PS5 audio.



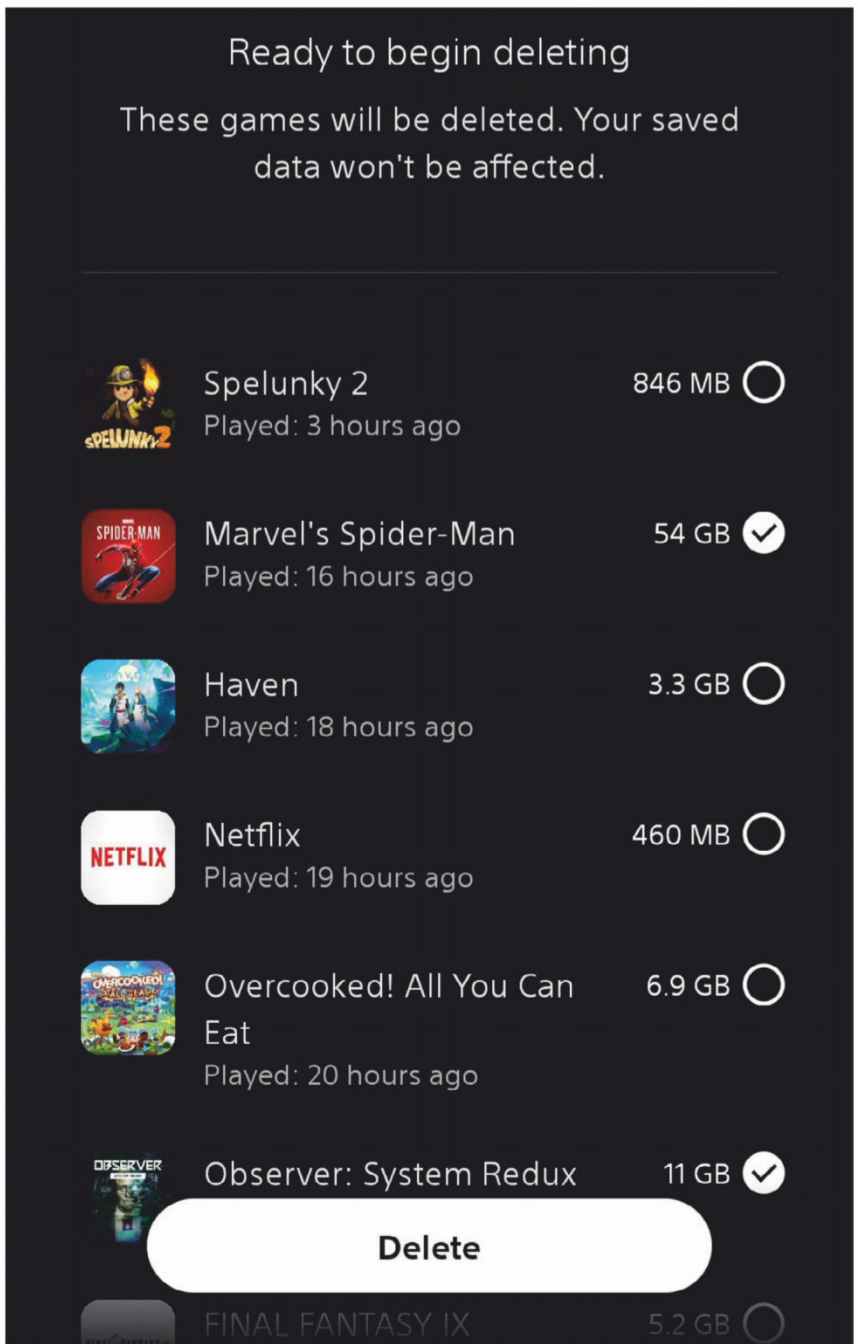
06 CONTROL BOOTH

Tapping the PS button brings up the Control Centre, your little PS5 home-from-home menu overlay, without stopping the game. You can customise some of what appears here, for example adding the Accessibility menu so it's within easy reach, or Broadcast if you're a streamer.



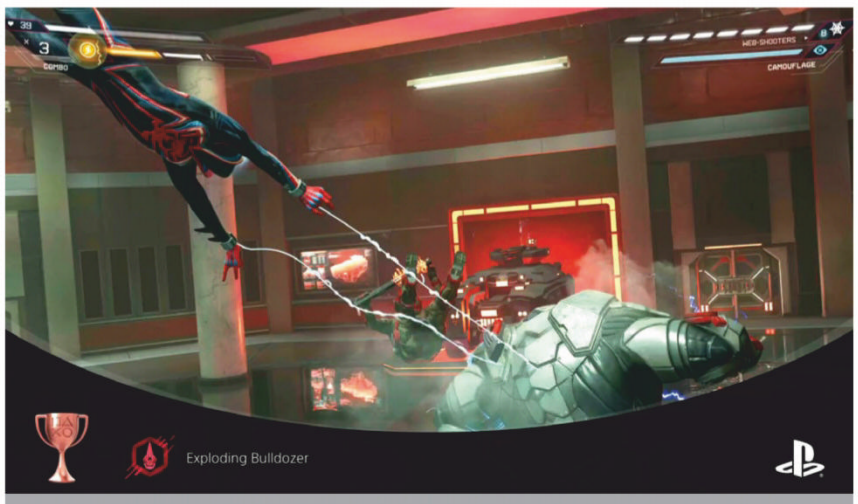
07 VID ON DEMAND

Got some videos you want to watch on the big screen, like a legitimately downloaded trailer or your friend's burrito-rolling how-to? Pop that on a USB stick in a new root folder, and you can watch it via the media gallery. (You can also listen to music if you put it in a root folder labelled MUSIC.)



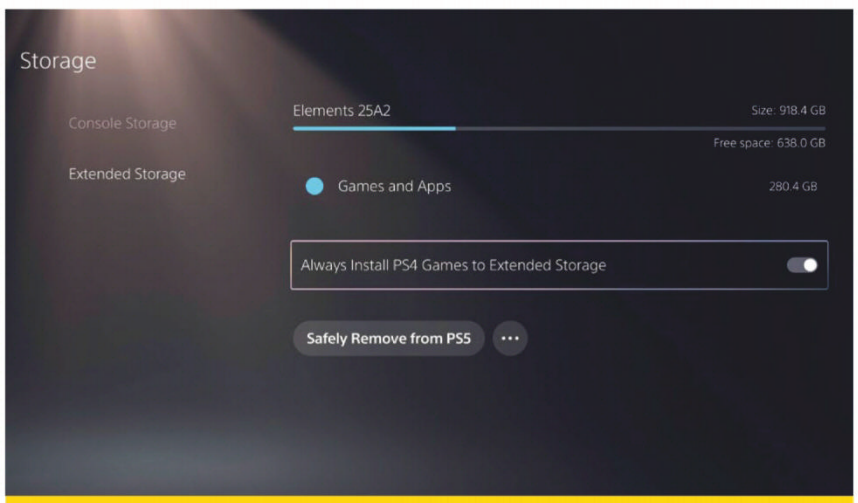
08 AN APP FOR THAT

The PlayStation App on your phone got an upgrade. Not only is browsing the store, messages, and your profile easier, but you can manage your games too. Install a game remotely, and you'll be notified when it's ready to play. Not enough space? You can remotely uninstall clutter to make room.



09 TROPHY CABINET

Want to gloat about killing the Storm King in Demon's Souls? Beyond being able to capture a video of your recent play, PS5 defaults to capturing 15 seconds of every trophy you earn with a special overlay. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, and that PS5 pudding is deliciously creamy.



10 EXTRA BRAINPOWER

Hook up an external hard drive or solid state drive and you can install and store PS4 games to it. Hop into your settings for the device, and you can set PS4 games to automatically default to install on the external drive, ensuring your sweet, sweet SSD is reserved for PS5 games that need to be there.

DEBATE

Which developer and film series are a perfect fit?

The news that Hitman dev IO Interactive is making a James Bond game gives Team OPM some ideas

IAN DEAN
EDITOR

JASON BOURNE AND ED BOON WOULD BE A MATCH MADE IN A VERY VIOLENT HELL.

If anyone can turn a toaster or a rolled-up magazine into a neck-snapping weapon it's NetherRealm. The Mortal Kombat dev is perfectly placed to take on the close-quarters, improvised combat of the Jason Bourne movies. The recent Mortal Kombat and Injustice games have shown Ed Boon's team are a dab hand at narrative too, so why not break free of the side-on fighter format and create a third-person adventure where every room can be weaponised? The team have come a long way from PS2's Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks, and I'd take any new game that lets me biro-kill an enemy. ■

JESS KINGHORN
STAFF WRITER

LOOKS LIKE THAT'S MY CUE TO SHOUT FROM THE NICHE CORNER.

Falling through memories in Observer: System Redux's Dream Eater sequences (reviewed p74), I'm reminded of Satoshi Kon's layered films where dream, fantasy, and reality run together. As much as I enjoyed Bloober Team's cyberpunk dystopia and expect its Perfect Blue would be a sight to behold, I think a game adaptation of Kon's work would require a less blustery touch. I'd love to see a studio like Fullbright have a crack at Millennium Actress and see how the devs go about telling a story through a less literal, physical space. After all, what's important is the journey, not the destination. ■

I'd love to see Creative Assembly's take on 1992's Bram Stoker's Dracula.

OSCAR TAYLOR-KENT
GAMES EDITOR

COPPOLA'S VISION OF DRACULA REMINDED ME THAT VAMPIRES CAN BE TRULY UNSETTLING.

There are plenty of games with vampires in, but often they're either common enemy types or *you* are playing out the bloodsucking fantasy. Few games really try to capture just how horrifying vampires can be in the way that some of the best fang flicks can.

Thanks to Alien: Isolation, we know Creative Assembly has the knack for capturing the atmosphere of cinematic source material. I'd love to see a similar take on 1992's Bram Stoker's Dracula. Playing as Jonathan Harker, you must escape Dracula's castle in secret, avoiding the ultimate hunter, able to turn into animals, gas, and shadow. And when you think you're free? He pursues you to London, through Victorian mansions at night, hospitals, ruined churches, and countryside alike. It'd be truly chilling – nearly as horrifying as Keanu Reeves' English accent. ■

MIRIAM MCDONALD
OPERATIONS EDITOR

JOHN MCCLANE WOULD GO TO HELL AND BACK UNDER SHINJI MIKAMI'S DIRECTION.

"How can the same *blorp!* happen to the same guy twice?" Well, it was five times in the end, John, but who's counting? The real question is, who can make a game about a man who lives in air shafts, loves punching European bad guys, and uses any excuse to strip down to his vest? It has to be the team at Tango Gameworks. The Evil Within horror series is all about brutalising its protagonist Sebastian Castellanos; Shinji Mikami takes great pleasure in tormenting his hero in much the same way as John McClane is a grubby-vested punchbag for life's unfortunate events. And Castellanos is also a detective *and* has an almost McClane-like talent for turning objects he finds into lethal weapons. It's a perfect match. Yippee-ki yay! ■

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THE PERFECT GIFT, EVERY TIME

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wilko

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IN THE MOOD FOR...

Brains

Like zombies, we only want one thing. These games show us their big ones

1 METAL GEAR SOLID V: THE PHANTOM PAIN

Huey Emmerich is arguably the brain behind one of the Metal Gears' most important aspects: their ability to walk. It's ironic, then, that Huey eventually loses the use of his legs. A true scientist, he does, of course, find a way to walk. While not an *evil* scientist, Huey's drive to invent motivates terrible actions.

2 DOOM ETERNAL

Arachnotrons are spider-like creatures, basically a giant brain on eight legs. They are descendants of the Spider Mastermind, which must be a sore spot for them – no matter how big your brain is, there's always someone with more grey matter. They're supposed to be an example of cybernetics gone bad, but we'd take a few extra legs and a turret.

3 RESIDENT EVIL 2

Few monsters in Resident Evil history are as horrifying as a Licker. The fact it's literally a brain with teeth isn't even the worst bit – just that glistening, exposed muscle, and, of course, a tongue long enough to make any frog jealous – shudder!

4 DESTROY ALL HUMANS!

The title says it all – in Destroy All Humans! you're part of an alien invasion out to destroy the human race. While you're doing it to save your own species, there's got to be a better way than popping brain stems out of heads with an anal probe. DAH got a remake this year, making us think an alien invasion would be the thing to improve 2020.

5 INJUSTICE 2

Brainiac, the main villain in Injustice 2, is basically Dr Nefarious in HD – a genius consisting mostly of cybernetic parts, hellbent on destroying the Kryptonian race. He has special attacks with great names such as 'Panic in the sky' and 'Skull Ship', and he's also strangely attractive. Look, it's that alien charm and good bone structure, what can we say?

6 RATCHET & CLANK

The aforementioned Dr Nefarious has a typical nerd problem – he's smart, but he was bullied as a kid. Now a robot with an equally big brain but a bug that makes him play episodes of Lance and Janice, Nefarious decides that humans are a waste of space and the universe should be ruled by robots instead.

7 SHERLOCK HOLMES: THE DEVIL'S DAUGHTER

When talking about characters with big brains, Sherlock Holmes is an obvious choice. Developer Frogwares made Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's hobbyist detective into a father, and a Jon Hamm lookalike to boot. Sherlock may be inhumanly smart, but let's not forget that in the game, it's actually *you* using your smarts to get your daughter back, so you'd better use that skull-stuffing of yours properly.

8 CRASH BANDICOOT

We don't know what it is with platformers and massive-lobed, villainous scientists, but Crash Bandicoot has a whole host of them, and all come with fun names such as N.Tropy or N.Trance. Evil supervillain Neo Cortex is yet another example of a prodigy who just couldn't handle being bullied (the N on his forehead apparently stands for 'nerd') and didn't have social media as an outlet.

9 THE EVIL WITHIN

Not only is the game *spoiler alert* set entirely inside someone else's brain, as you get closer to the credits you're asked to perform surgery to proceed. Your torturer's 'head' is opened up and you're challenged to probe the brain inside to unlock memories to *unlock* doors. Okay, it's a little on the nose but the game's photoreal approach offers more lifelike gore than an episode of Holby City.

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

Gradius V
Konami's classic shoot-'em-up makes you fight against a giant, sentient brain, thankfully the only body part to make an appearance.

Tekken Tag Tournament 2
Doctor Bosconovitch isn't exactly a well-known Tekken character – he deserves respect for what he can still do at his age, though.

Sam And Max: The Devil's Playhouse
Episode 3 is about Max's lost brain, featuring him given an interim brain and using a 'brain screw'. Nice.

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

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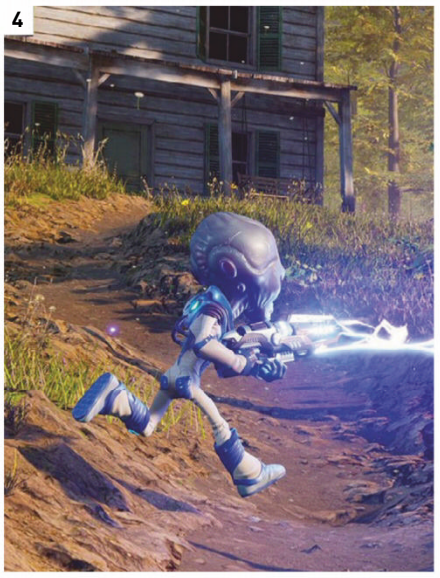

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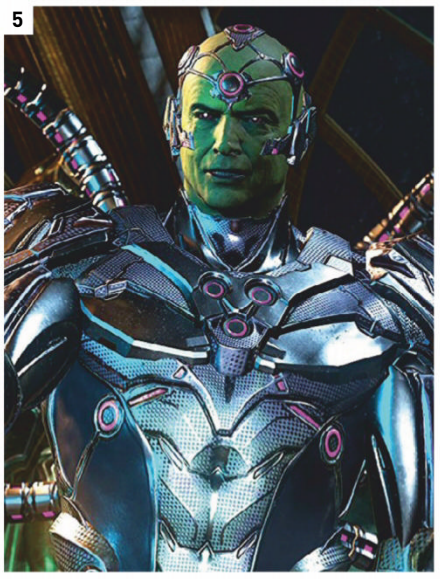

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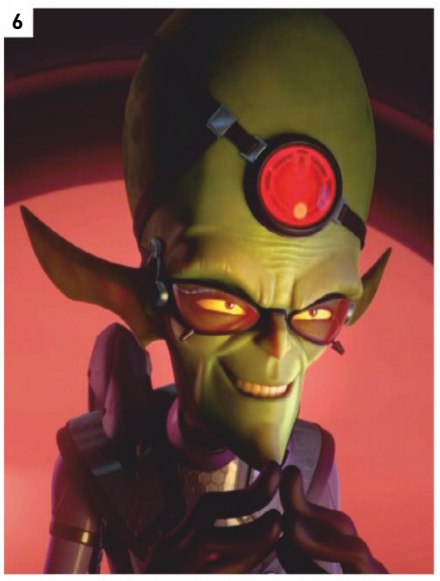

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"SHERLOCK MAY BE INHUMANLY SMART, BUT IT'S ACTUALLY YOU USING YOUR SMARTS HERE."

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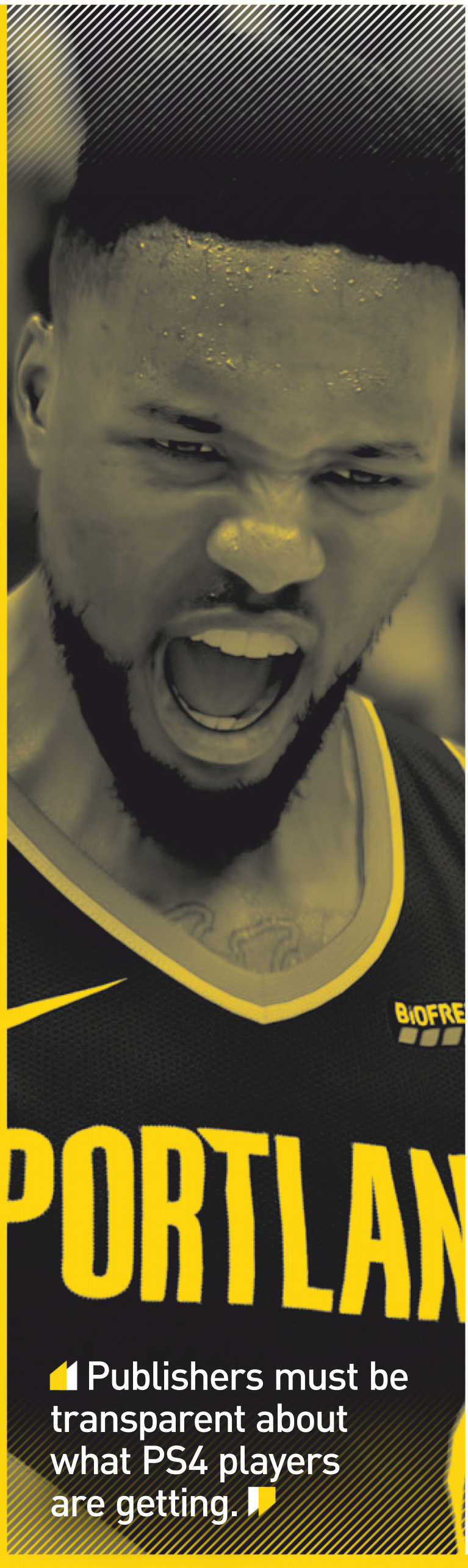

Publishers must be transparent about what PS4 players are getting.

OPINION

"SPORTS GAMERS DESERVE BETTER – THOSE ON PS4 AS WELL AS PS5."

Ben Wilson is okay with annual updates, if devs show transparency

WRITER BIO
Ben Wilson left OPM in 2014 in order to raise two children, but still spends a lot of time completing Squad Building Challenges. His eldest (7) is getting Madden 21 from Santa despite having no idea what a quarterback is.

2020 has been a deflating year in nigh-on every aspect of life, and with real sporting action thin on the ground elite sports gaming should have provided escapism for any fan of kicking balls or swinging sticks. (Helpful hint: don't get those two things the wrong way round.) Instead, this once-impeccable genre has fallen into line with other dispiriting facets of 2020. Which is to say, months of disillusionment, fatigue, and a looming question mark, preceded by five short words: when will this *blorp!* end?

Mercifully, football isn't more important than life and death – sorry, Bill Shankly – even if the FIFA community can sometimes make it feel that way. Still, those who shelled out £50 on FIFA 21, or NBA 2K21, or NHL 21 deserved better than the 7/10 and 8/10 retreads served up in return. Such review scores would be highly respectable if attached to new games exploring uncharted territory. For series that have had a decade on PS4 to reshape and upgrade they're unacceptable. Yes, I sound entitled. If you've spent £500 on FIFA games across this generation, you're allowed to be too.

In one sense, the light at the end of the dressing room tunnel is PlayStation 5. EA and 2K, the most-decorated of sports games developers, have clearly invested time and money in Gen-5 FIFA and NBA and both deliver strong first efforts. Porting Ultimate Team progress across two generations is a neat move by EA, and we've truly reached uncanny valley territory when it comes to 2K21 looking and feeling like a basketball broadcast. Throw in Konami making use of an extra year to make the new-gen version of PES and there's plenty to suggest that sports gaming will be big business once again in 2021. So long as you own a PS5, that is.

The latter sentence is a key caveat. In theory, everyone would own the very latest right now, or be getting one for Christmas; you wouldn't be reading this magazine if you didn't feel similarly. But there's still life in PS4 too. Sure as clockwork, all the above games will materialise on that format next autumn, with an asking price of 50 quid. However, no matter how good the PS5 versions are, if PS4 iterations repeat the format of this year – fundamentally the same game, with a few kits and pretend Panini stickers – it simply will not be good enough.

PRO EVOLUTION PROPER

Thankfully, Konami has already delivered the ideal solution. PES 2021 doesn't match the series' PS2 glory years, but it is at least refreshingly honest: its slightly long-winded full title is eFootball PES 2021: Season Update. Released at a reduced price, and available for just £15 as I write this, it's openly marketed as PES 2020 with updated teams and kits. Multiple patches over the past year mean it's actually a significant improvement on the original, but the point stands: if all PS4 players can expect for their money going forwards is a fresh lick of licensed polyester, then publishers must be transparent about it. Because they'll remember it when they upgrade to PS5.

Admittedly, FIFA 22: New TOTW Designs & Pogba Hairstyles might not roll off the tongue. But if sports games are correctly labelled and priced, it will enable PS4 players to avoid feeling punished for staying loyal to a series into which they've invested significant time, money, and emotion throughout the past decade.

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Access the Control Centre and you can instantly pull up activities to try out.

OPINION

"COULD PS5'S CONTROL CENTRE HELP MORE OF US REACH THE FINISH LINE?"

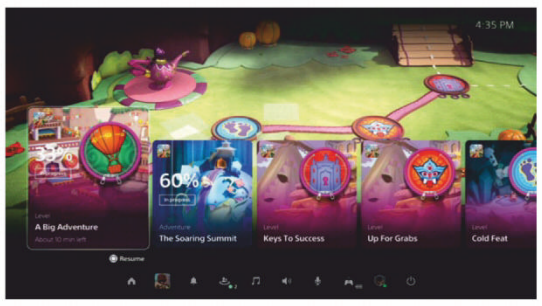
Nobody likes to hit a wall. Activities and guides keep you moving

WRITER BIO
Inspired by PS5, Oscar Taylor-Kent has come up with his own Activities to help him through life. Though, as he's not a Life Plus member, he's unable to actually access the guides to help him achieve his goals.

Brewing a good cup of tea takes a few minutes. How do you spend that time? If you're anything like me, you load up the brand-new PlayStation App on your phone and browse your trophy list. I love checking the trophy unlock percentages on my favourite games. If you've done the same, you'll know that it's a very rare game that has a high percentage of trophy unlocks for beating the game.

Often the ones that a lot of people have completed are games like Marvel's Spider-Man. That one's great, full of moreish collectibles that give you ample reason to keep the serotonin ride of webswinging around New York City going. But also, everyone appreciates a frictionless package (and we don't mean what's tucked away in the Spider-suit). Spidey on PlayStation is a game that just feels good to play.

This sense of easy enjoyment is only enhanced in the PS5 Remaster, and it's present in sequel Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales too. Tap the PlayStation button on your DualSense to access the Control Centre on your PS5 and you can instantly pull up recommended Activities to try out, which load in instantly thanks to the SSD. Side-activities such as clearing out Kingpin's construction yards can be started instantly from the main menu, and there's something to tempt everyone back into the game.



Spider-Man's not the only game to make use of Activities; others, like Sackboy: A Big Adventure, also feature them. You can see which stages you've yet to fully master and hop straight in, rather than trudge around the world to reach them.

Both these games are on PS4 as well as PS5, but on PS5 Activities enable you to dip into the bits you most enjoy, while the story mode still provides enough incentive to explore the open world on top. The benefit is noticeable when you look at cross-gen games that use the feature less, such as Assassin's Creed Valhalla, where collecting things you missed once you've finished the game feels like much more of a trudge.

HELPING HAND

But if all you needed to finish things was to start them, then I'd have baked thousands of cookies by now rather than simply gorged myself on cookie dough. PS5's Activities mean you never leave a game half-baked, because they don't just allow you to hop into challenges, they can also help you finish them thanks to guides specific to each card (providing devs have added them, and you're a PS Plus member, that is).

They are especially handy for tracking down those last few collectibles in the likes of Sackboy or Astro's Playroom, where you've masses of items to pick up. You don't even have to entirely spoil the story for yourself either. For hidden secrets, a glance at the thumbnail once you've clicked through can suggest the area where you should be looking, and in games like Demon's Souls the text on the card gives a little hint before you watch the video.

Not every game will feature Activities and guides as usefully as this, but players will be most likely to stick with the ones that do. After all, you don't want to have to force yourself to persist with a game, you just want your hands to keep moving over the controller, playing without coming up against walls, and that's what the Control Centre is doing with its smartly designed interface.

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#182 PS5 finally arrived, and we celebrated it over 180 fun-packed pages.

FETCH QUEST

I know this is a long shot, but was wondering if there was any way of getting hold of issues of the ORIGINAL magazines.
Sean Fleming

We're afraid not, and we won't take offence at our unwanted modern ways. Secondhand copies, even of very old issues, do pop up on eBay and other sites online from time to time, so your best bet is to keep an eye on those.

HIDDEN GEMS

I'm concerned that certain great smaller games are being overlooked and blatantly forgotten about thanks to the general games media. Games like Huntdown and Wintermoor Tactics Club are hidden gems for a reason – reviews are sparse and not even the great OPM has reviewed these games. I promise you if the team played either of these they'd be surprised by how good they are. I want to go on a crusade to get these games noticed because they are brilliant. Please tell me of any curios you love that haven't received wider attention.
James Davie

With limited space in the magazine sometimes we can't cover every game that gets released. Obscure but good games? We'd point you towards Gryphon Knight Epic. But as only 999 copies were made it's a real rarity.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND

Why did Sony make so few PS5s? I couldn't afford to preorder one, and now I don't know when I'll be able to get one – I'm definitely not paying the prices online 'scalpers' are charging. If Sony had made more, everybody who wanted a PS5 could get one and those people wouldn't be able to charge such ridiculous amounts.
Eva Gardner

Coronavirus had an impact on the number of PS5s that could be made, but more will be arriving in the shops in coming months.

"IF SONY HAD MADE MORE, EVERYBODY WHO WANTED A PLAYSTATION 5 COULD GET ONE."

STAR LETTER NEXT-GEN

My daughter has just turned four years old and has started to take an interest in watching me play games. So much so that we let her have a turn. She's been helping us prepare the veg and sabotaging our orders in Overcooked and even after I have cleared a temple in Ghost Of Tsushima she loves running around jumping, climbing ladders, scaling roofs, collecting supplies, calling for my horse and playing the flute (as long as the 'baddies' are gone. I've been impressed with how good she is.

Which got me thinking and doing a little research. As much variance and diversity as there is in PlayStation's huge catalogue, there isn't a huge lot of choice for kids of my daughter's age. I know it probably won't be a massive market but I still think devs are neglecting this area. Apart from Paw Patrol there isn't a lot of choice for a game which she can play on her own.

I am hoping in time we will be getting a few more games that cater for the youngsters, the future gamers.
John Allen

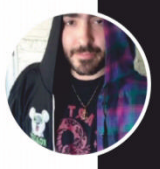
There aren't many, especially for tiny gamers. We'd recommend the Lego series or Spyro. Everyone loves Spyro.

CAN I GET A RT?

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

@Palhil
I seem to remember people complaining that it [PS2] looked like a stereo from the 80s. Now people complain that the PS5 looks like a router from the 2000s. How times change.

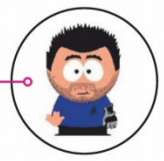
@realjallen1981
Man, when it comes to marketing, with the London Underground signs and everything else @Sony and @PlayStation are above everyone else. First class!!!!!



@JpOuterHaven
The Hitman franchise is pretty much about being the perfect spy.....and trained killer lol Actually for the 1st time in ages I'm interested in a 007 game. So this is great news.

@LlamaFluff42
Resubbed to @OPM_UK because this month's issue was an absolute banger, and I have a PS5 on the way, too!

TROLL OF THE MONTH



@trevnod
Do people still buy magazine subscriptions these days?! [*Yes!* – ed]

@ChessmanUK
The new issue of @OPM_UK is making me even more excited for Thursday's #PlayStation5 launch.

[*Hope it lived up to your expectations!* – ed]

@AJ_1448
Video games really are a treat for the eyes!

"THERE'S ONLY ONE PERSON IN THE UK THAT HAS ONE [A PS5]. EVERYONE ELSE HAD CAT FOOD AND NERF GUNS."
CHRISTOPHER SALTER'S HAD IT WITH DODGY DELIVERIES

"THE PS5 TO ME IS A BEAUTIFUL MACHINE, IT GOT CURVES MAN."
NORMAN WESSELS IS IN LOVE

READERS' MOST WANTED

Which games are bleeping loudest on your radar?

01

God Of War: Ragnarok
Looks like the new Assassin's Creed hasn't sated your hunger for Nordic action – Kratos' next adventure takes the top spot.
Format PS5
ETA 2021

02

Ratchet & Clank: Rift Apart
It's designed to make the most of PS5, and you can't wait for the best buds' return.
Format PS5
ETA 2021

03

Horizon Forbidden West
The future's bright – and packed with scary robo dinosaurs. You're ready to head West.
Format PS5, PS4
ETA TBC

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

05

Sniper Elite VR
Dust off your Aim controller (remember that?) and prepare for one of the best-looking PS VR games for quite some time.
Format PS4
ETA TBC

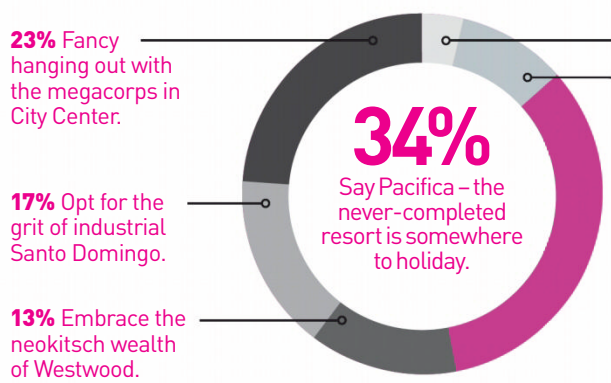
04

Kena: Bridge Of Spirits
It's those adorable Rot creatures, isn't it? We want to play with them too...
Format PS5, PS4
ETA Mar 2021

EXIT POLL

Our Facebook fans answer a final question

WHICH DISTRICT OF CYBERPUNK 2077'S NIGHT CITY ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO EXPLORING?



NEXT MONTH

Which Final Fantasy is your favourite?

THIS MONTH'S THEME SNOW

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

Winner

Kurt Buttstadt
Game: Red Dead Redemption 2

Our first winner is a trained photographer who takes his keen eye into videogames to grab the perfect shot.

"What I do is recognise that there's the potential for a shot based on the lighting, the terrain, and what my character is doing," says Kurt Buttstadt, adding: "Lighting is always the most important aspect I look for."

For his RDR2 shot that experience proved vital. "I took some inspiration from a shot I took in real life about eight years ago of my roommate while we were on a snowshoeing hike near where I live in Lake Tahoe."

Does our winner have a top tip for photo-moders? "Learn the rules of design and photography, then you'll know when to break them."

TEAM OPM PICKS

1 Ian Dean
Photo: Steep by Dominic Benedict

Ubisoft's Steep dominated many of the entries, and not just because it's snow-focussed. The game's photo mode is fantastic and this shot makes grabbing an action scene look easy. The subtle tilt of the camera to evoke movement coupled with the sun cresting the mountain to draw out highlights gives the scene life.

2 Jessica Kinghorn
Photo: The Last Of Us Part II by Iker

This makes me want a black-and-white edition of The Last Of Us Part II. The composition is fantastic and leads my eye across the scene, but it also sums up the game in a single shot. The way the use of black and white draws out and elongates the shadows gives the shot an uncomfortable lonesome feel. Love it.

3 Miriam McDonald
Game: Horizon Zero Dawn by Rex Lucila

This is a brain teaser! This one perfectly shows how a good shot can bend the rules of the game to create a photo to play with our imaginations. Rex's shot evokes the sense of epic exploration we love about Horizon Zero Dawn, and by twisting the camera's angle it forces us to question the world we're looking at. Clever.

NEXT MONTH'S THEME MOTION

IF I HAD SOMEWHERE TO LIVE...

I COULD GO ANYWHERE IN LIFE

When Abi's mum died, life got tough. She didn't get on with her dad and the arguments became violent. Abi felt her only choice was to leave home. With just the clothes on her back, and no idea where to go, she ended up sleeping on the streets in the freezing cold.

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Thousands of homeless young people like Abi are desperately trying to find their place in the world – but first they need a place to start again. **You could help right now by sponsoring a room at Centrepoint for just 40p a day.**

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Previews

"WRECK AS MANY OPPONENTS AS POSSIBLE."

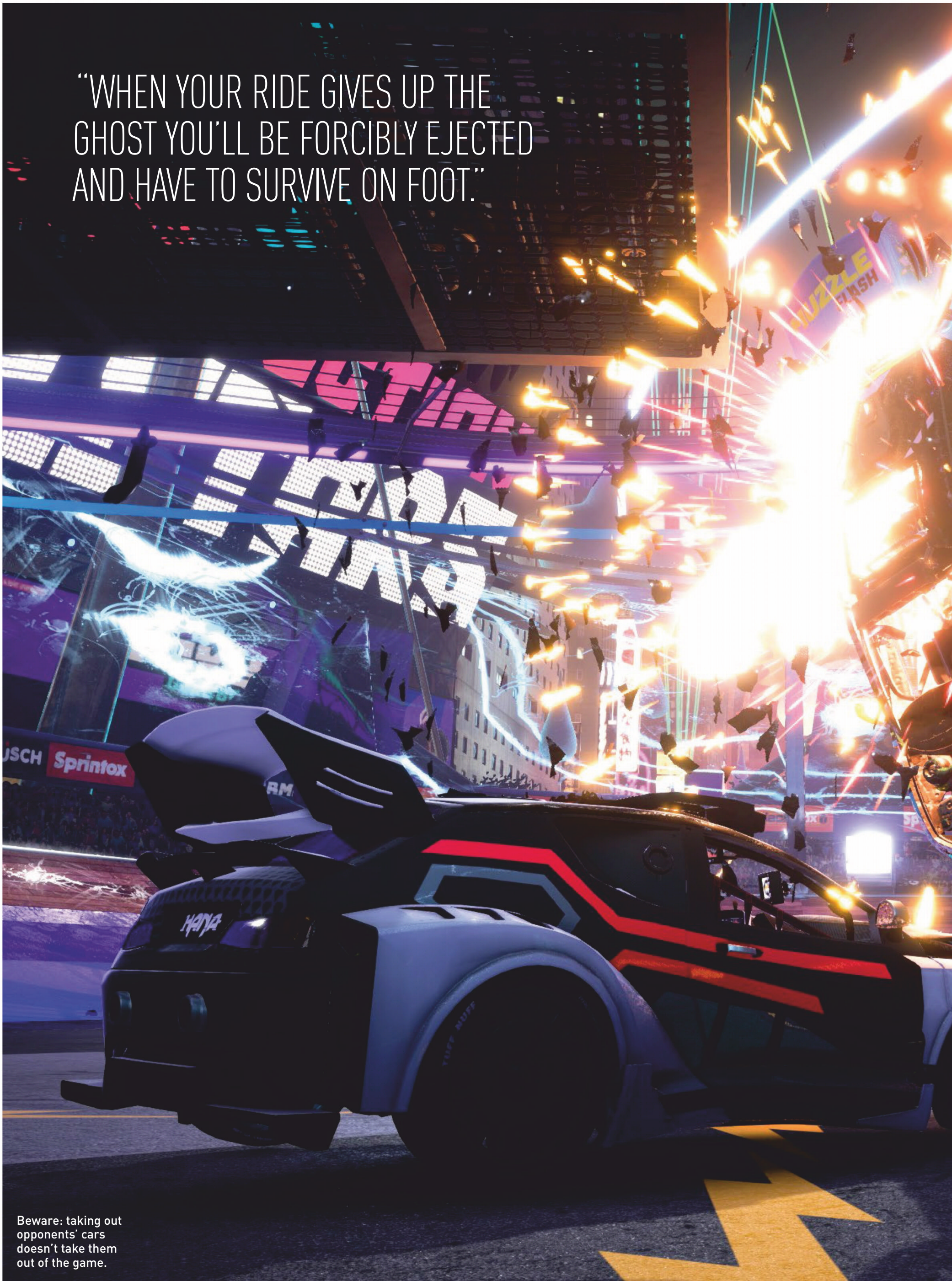
036 Destruction AllStars

42 Little Devil Inside

Come for the monster hunt, and stay for the mystery

HIGHLIGHTS

DESTRUCTION ALLSTARS 36 | CHORUS 40 | PRAEY FOR THE GODS 41 | JETT: THE FAR SHORE 44 | THE DARK PICTURES ANTHOLOGY: THE HOUSE OF ASHES 46 | DREAMHOUSE: THE GAME 47 | NEO: THE WORLD ENDS WITH YOU 47 | KING OF SEAS 47 | PARADISE LOST 47 | BLOOD BOWL 3 47 | OVERRIDE 2: SUPER MECH LEAGUE 47



"WHEN YOUR RIDE GIVES UP THE GHOST YOU'LL BE FORCIBLY EJECTED AND HAVE TO SURVIVE ON FOOT."

Beware: taking out opponents' cars doesn't take them out of the game.

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** FEB / **PUB** PLAYSTATION STUDIOS / **DEV** LUCID GAMES
PLAYERS 1-16 (ONLINE MULTIPLAYER)

Destruction AllStars

It's twisting our metal

What do you get if you take Apex Legends, Robot Wars, and a dash of Destruction Derby, haphazardly wrap them up in scraps of metallic wrapping paper from last year, and then run them over with your front tyre? Presumably shiny smithereens, but maybe something a little like this vehicular-combat-focussed battle royale.

Originally a launch title that would've set you back about 70 quid, PS Plus subscribers will instead be able to pick this one up for free in February. When you do, you'll be introduced to a roster of 16 different AllStar heroes to choose from, each with their own abilities and vehicle. Though each one has their favoured set of wheels, they're not bound to it.

PEDAL POWER

Whether you're playing as part of a team or solo, matches always begin with a dash to your vehicle – or to someone else's if it takes your fancy. Each has a unique ability, such as ruddy great shield or a rocket-propelled speed booster. For instance Sabre, Hana's vehicle, can deploy a car-cutting blade.

As you'd expect from that, it's possible for vehicles to take damage, and even be destroyed. But if you end up at the business end of Sabre or get battered by other drivers, it's not game over. When your ride gives up the ghost, you'll be forcibly ejected and have to survive on foot. This is where your options really open up. Yes, you could run around evading death by four-wheeler or make a break for a brief breather on one of the platforms suspended above the arena. Other players divested of their own vehicles can still give you a hard time, though, as you all scrabble for items or lure one another into traps.

Character-specific abilities might give you an edge, but if you're to have a fighting chance at the top spot, you're going to need another set of wheels. Time your evade just right or drop down from above with precision and you can grab onto a passing vehicle. Cling on long enough and you can hijack your opponent's vehicle. Once you do, the vehicle's skin switches, waving the flag for you with one of your unlocked character-specific skins.

GRINDING GEARS

If all that seems a little much to dive into head-first, there's no shame in

FACTRICK

1. LUCID DREAMING
The developer is Liverpool's Lucid Games, which was formed by staff from racing specialist Bizarre Creations.

2. SKIN TRADE
Though it will be free to PS Plus users, the PS Store says 'in-game purchases optional'. Skins for sale?

3. SOUNDS RIGHT
The soundtrack's provided by 2WEI and Tumult Kollektiv, both of whom have a strong track record in games.

TRACK RECORD Game director Colin Berry, lead designer Karl Jones, and tech lead Martin Linklater have worked on a number of WipEout games between them. Lucid Games previously co-developed Need For Speed Payback.

donning the training wheels. One of a slew of game modes, Training does exactly what you'd hope: it walks you through the basics and teaches you how to get the most from your character's abilities (the first lesson being that here they're called 'breakers').

But if you want to get straight down to business, Mayhem offers a classic Deathmatch mode for teams or solo players. The name of the game is to wreck as many opponents as possible within the time limit, and trashing the most nets you the crown.

UTTER CAR-NAGE

Want more, er, mayhem than Mayhem provides? Carnado kicks things up a notch. This mode goes a bit 'balloon battle with a chaotic twist'. Battered enemies give up their gears for you to collect – though the more you have, the more of a target that paints on your back, because other players are going to want to nab yours. You can also earn more points by grabbing new vehicles or even sacrificing your current one by driving it into the titular twister.

The fun and games don't end there, though. Stockpile, much like Carnado, revolves around gears. However, it's team-based, and the other big difference is that you have to leave your vehicle to collect and then bank fallen gears on foot. Talk about tense!

Gridfall is a bit like Mayhem, but takes a more PvE angle. This special arena falls away as the match wears on and you need to keep your wits about you if you want to be the last of 16 AllStars standing. If you're pushed over the arena's edge you can respawn but you've only got a limited number of second chances in this mode – make 'em count.

Alongside these modes (all of which are included at launch, with more on the way) there's a curated series of challenges that rewards you with a heap of exclusive cosmetics. AllStar Genesis' 'One Small Step' challenge series will pit you against tricksy AI at launch.

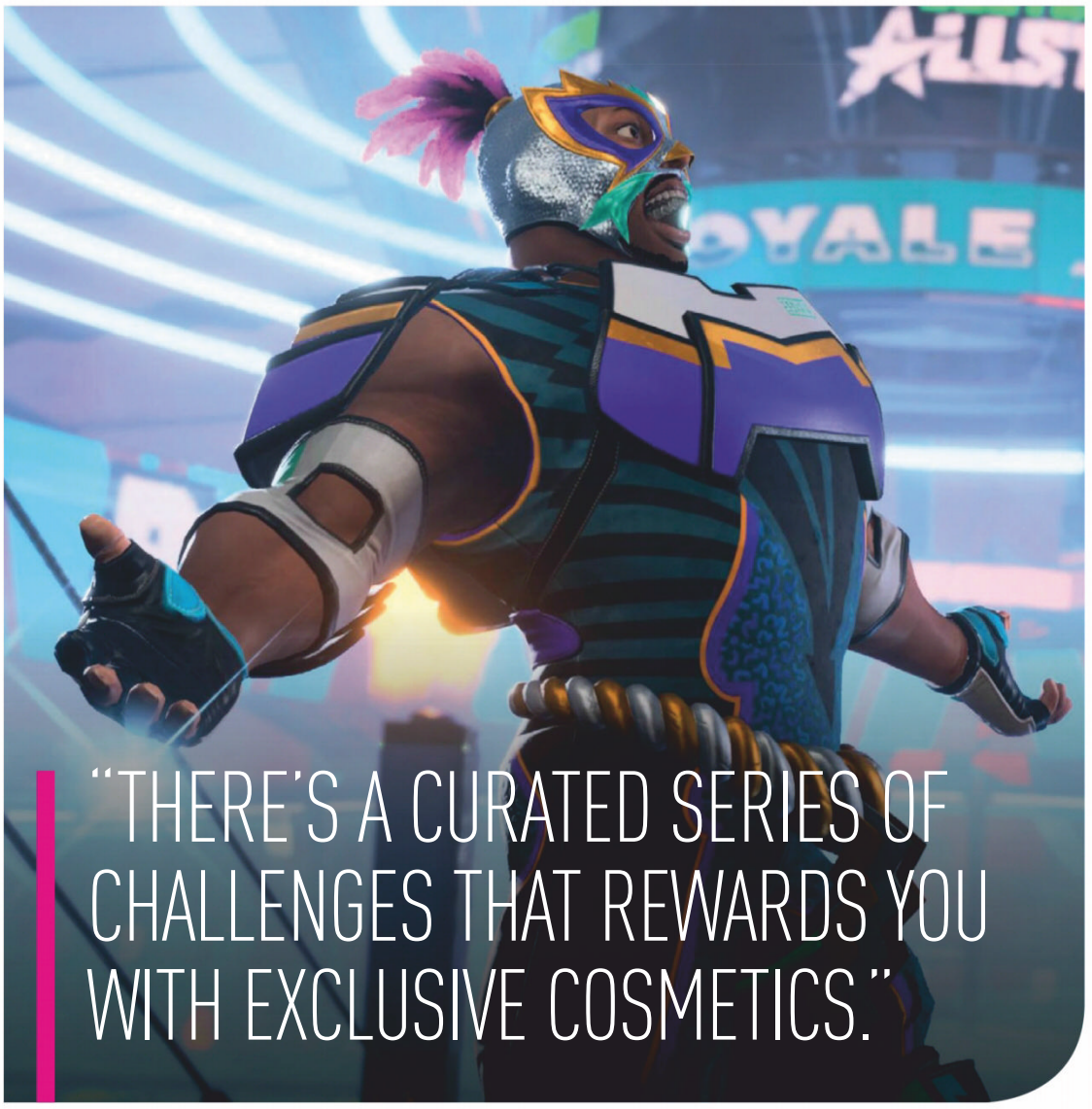
The game's certainly got bags of personality but whether it's got staying power beyond its mash-up novelty remains to be seen. Its wealth of content and a lack of live game competition may just give it the boost it needs in 2021.

IMPRESSIONS

Fall Guys' PS Plus debut obviously imparted a lesson but will Destruction AllStars be able to stand on its own? Offering masses of modes and options, we suspect it'll be an early favourite.

1 Leading the crew here is Jain – we know his name, but his special ability is still being kept under wraps. 2 Don't get mad – bust out your special ability, or 'breaker', and even the odds. 3 If your car gets wrecked, it's not over. Leg it for a second chance – do well enough and you can call in your hero vehicle. 4 Characters have their own cars, but if they take over someone else's, the livery changes to match the new owner.

The blade on Hana's Sabre can slice opposing cars in two.



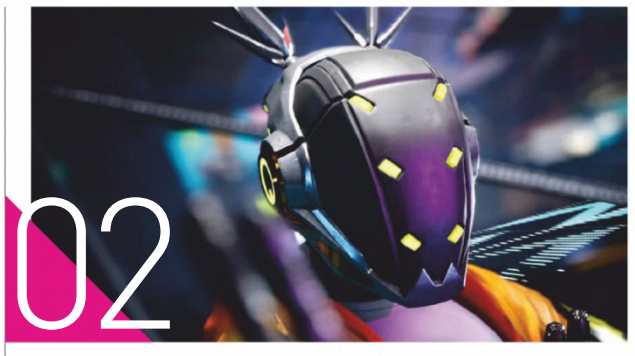
"THERE'S A CURATED SERIES OF CHALLENGES THAT REWARDS YOU WITH EXCLUSIVE COSMETICS."

AllStar lineup

Meet some characters, and check out their party tricks

01

Friend to the animals Lupita leaves a trail of flames in her wake when she uses her breaker in or out of vehicles. Don't get too close to this wild woman.



02

Sneaky beaky Shyft can turn invisible in or out of a vehicle to get the drop on opponents. Keep your wits about you in the arena or he'll sneak up on you.

03

Resourceful Boxtop is a team player, spawning in parcels that deliver buffs to his allies and damage to his enemies. Don't judge a book and all that.

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 2021 / **PUB** DEEP SILVER / **DEV** FISHLABS / **PLAYERS** 1

Chorus

Warming up for a new space opera

Layered with horror overtones and a sprinkle of Control's new weird, this space shooter is more than the genre it's part of. The game's galaxy is both beautiful and horrific. Swirling asteroids, inhospitable worlds, and oppressive architecture dominate – and encourage exploration.

Keeping this galaxy under its fascist thumb is the Circle, a religious sect that is brainwashing the inhabitants to follow its rule. When not coercing from the shadows the Circle's members are more than happy to get their minds dirty by psychically attacking ships, with Control-like results; ships are overwhelmed by viral cuboid matter.

Protagonist Nara is a pilot who's seen the light and split from the Circle. She's waging a one-woman war to clean up the galaxy, aided by her AI spaceship and companion, Forsaken. Psychically empowered, Nara can break the Circle's control of trapped ships and outposts, but her powers are also handy for ensuring Chorus' combat avoids the trappings of the genre.

TAKE CONTROL

When fighting, Nara can use psychic abilities, called rites, to break the follow-or-flee grind dogfighters can become tied to. For example, she can warp behind enemies to flip between targets. Couple those abilities with a solid arsenal of weapons (heavy machine guns, fire-and-forget missiles, and shield-sapping lasers) as well as nuanced controls that enable Star-Wars-Squadrons-style drifts, and Chorus looks like it's shedding the trappings of space-based dogfighting.

> "SHEDDING THE TRAPPINGS OF SPACE-BASED DOGFIGHTING."

An upgrade path enables you to improve Forsaken's abilities while also unlocking new Circle rites for Nara. Eventually you'll learn to use both builds in tandem to create imaginative, deadly combos.

When not blasting holes in the Circle's fleet, Nara is free to explore her galaxy. Side-quests promise to build a believable universe, and both Nara and Forsaken have skeletons in their closets to uncover.

IMPRESSIONS

Teasing Control's style, psychic abilities, and eldritch overtones, this could breathe new life into the space shooter.

On PS5 expect ray tracing and space debris that reacts to your mass and movement.

ON THE HORIZON

The next six months, mapped out

02 months

RIDERS REPUBLIC

Pedal, fly, and board across America's National Parks in 50-player races on PS5, 20 players on PS4.

FORMAT PS5, PS4
ETA 25 FEB / **PUB** UBISOFT

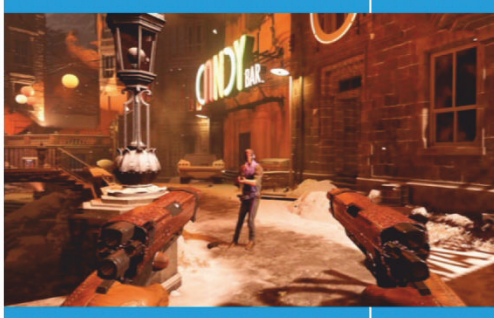
04 months

GUILTY GEAR STRIVE

The anime brawler is now due on both PS4 and PS5, promising 15 characters at launch with more to follow.

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 9 APR / **PUB** BANDAI NAMCO

06 months



DEATHLOOP

Kill, die, and kill again in Arkane Studios' impressive time-loop first-person Hitman-alike. It'll be one of 2021's best.

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** JUN
PUB BETHESDA SOFTWORKS

"How's the weather up there?" "Chilly."

FORMAT PS4, PS5 / **ETA** EARLY 2021 / **PUB** NO MATTER STUDIOS / **DEV** NO MATTER STUDIOS / **PLAYERS** 1

Praey For The Gods

These titans are a big deal

In a world gripped by a never-ending winter, where life dwindles in the constant freezing cold, your lone hero has to travel to a mysterious island to fell the very gods they once worshipped. To take down these humongous creatures you need to clamber all over them, but unlike in Shadow Of The Colossus (a game this reminds us of in more ways than one) you have some useful traversal abilities, which factor into how you ascend the deities.

You can use a glider and a grappling hook to float and climb through huge areas, where the structures around you make you feel just as tiny as the gods do. There's a tremendous sense of scale to the whole of Praey's world that makes it one of the few games we've played to capture the feeling of insignificance Shadow Of The Colossus still evokes.

From smaller enemies you need to bash around to environmental puzzles – this world's more eventful than Shadow Of The Colossus' purposefully sparse one. The way everything's nonlinear, and you take on the gods in any order you see fit, plays to the strengths of an open world, and we look forward to seeing how our playthrough differs from our friends' (and hope the game gets picked up by the speedrunning scene).

"YOU CAN TAKE ON THE GODS IN ANY ORDER YOU SEE FIT."

Blizzards aren't the only dangers, either. Simply surviving is tough. You must hunt for food, craft weapons, and create fires if you're to make it through to topple the deities.

This seems an ambitious project for such a small dev team, but No Matter Studios is up to the challenge. It's ensuring the game plays to PS5's strengths, running at a smooth 60fps even on its high graphic setting, compared to PS4's 30fps. The studio's particularly keen to embrace DualSense, using the adaptive triggers to simulate drawing a bow string and the haptics to make you feel and hear snow crunch underfoot. Which version should you get? There's no reason to be picky; the PS4 version comes with a free PS5 upgrade.

IMPRESSIONS

A PS5 version that delivers 60fps, DualSense support, and super-fast loads? We're eager to get clambering.

1 The island's permanently frozen. When you're not hunting gods or solving puzzles, you need to light fires to fend off the bitter cold.
2 As though tackling deities weren't enough of a challenge, you also face smaller enemies, including the animated remains of those who tried to kill the gods before you, but failed.

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

Little Devil Inside

On the hunt for something original?

Our hero tracks a great beast across a foggy land. He stops to huddle beside an open fire beneath a craggy overhang as the rain streaks down beyond. If the little guy didn't look like he'd stepped out of a Minions movie we'd be concerned about him. As it is, this indie RPG charms us into submission.

"The governing design principle we are trying to adhere to is minimalism," says Little Devil Inside's creative director Kody Lee. "And minimalism that is expressed using contrast, for example, how the game uses simple, stereotypical expressions, toy-like characters, and symbolic elements that directly contrast against a more realistic background and atmosphere."

FACTRICK

1. ON TRACK

There's no fast travel in the game. You'll need to catch trains to far-away destinations.

2. MOVE US

DualSense is being used to make moving heavy objects and interacting with the world feel more lifelike.

3. BILLY BOY

Lead character Billy not only represents the world of Little Devil Inside, but also its creator, Kody Lee.

WHAT'S UP DOC?

The visual style perfectly suits the game's world, which is one where the supernatural, science, and technology co-exist. As the world moves on the fantastic beasts of this place are being overwhelmed. Professor Vincent (think Doc Brown meets David Attenborough) aims to study these dwindling monsters to create an encyclopedia of the weird and the wonderful. Along for the ride is Vincent's inventor pal Dr Oliver. We play as Billy, the descendent of a fallen noble out to prove himself.

"During the journey, they become acquainted with influential figures and various organisational bodies with discreet and secretive interests. Vincent's team undertakes requests for them and gains some foothold," details Lee. "However, as they dig deeper, ancient clues start to unveil. The adventure to unravel the origins and reason behind the existence of the mystical beings continues..."

Set on one large explorable map and populated with random encounters and weather events – you enter a cute tilt-shift perspective for a toy-like look – the game is then divided into two level types: open and 'iconic'. Open levels are those you can explore at your leisure; they're filled with secrets to find and quests to undertake. Iconic levels are designed as self-contained locations, smaller in scale but equally open to exploring for new events and unusual encounters.

The team are keen to point out that while there is a main story to play through, hung from the emotional bond between the three main characters, you're free to approach missions when and how you like. The game is built around "mini-events and encounters," says Lee, "some fixed and some random," that you can choose to engage with or avoid.

BUILD-A-BOND

The developer stresses this is not a loot-slasher or roguelike. Little Devil Inside is a curated experience designed to have a vital-feeling world. Billy has basic combat moves he can use to stay alive in the wild but he doesn't cast spells or drink mana. Crafting is restricted to building fires, cooking meals, and making basic tools – using an axe to fell a cactus will reveal water, for example. "He will need to resort to technology and his survival instincts," says Lee. "He can get sick, take a good beating, can be fearful... and it is those very human characteristics that we, the creators, have become fond of."

Crafting and upgrades are designed to support the flow of the game, not to be a crutch for players to grind through. Dr Oliver is Billy's 'Q', the tech guy who will develop new gear and tools tailored around a questline or mission. We've seen the diving suit deployed to explore a giant-squid-infested ocean floor, a fiery sword illuminating a cavern, and a blunderbuss being the perfect weapon to take on a bear.

Out in the world Billy can also buy items, gear, weapons, and upgrades from store owners he comes across. It's a vast, dangerous place and you'll need all the help you can get. That said, this land is also a beautiful and quirky one, filled with jungles, swamps, deserts, oceans, and mountains that all hide secrets and wonderfully stylised creatures. Even the werewolf, though scary and dangerous to take on, looks goofy and adorable. We can't wait to build our bestiary.

> "HE CAN GET SICK, TAKE A GOOD BEATING, HE CAN BE FEARFUL."

IMPRESSIONS

It feels like Monster Hunter: World made by Pixar, and for that reason alone Little Devil Inside should be soaring up your most-wanted list. We can't wait to see more from this impressive indie team.

4 Craft basic tools, such as torches, to help you explore deeper into the world. 5 The creature design continues to charm us – this werewolf is too cute to silver-bullet. 6 The town of Herrington, and other small villages, are safe spaces. Here you can buy new clothes, relax in a bubble bath, sip a fancy coffee, or even run errands.

TRACK RECORD This is Neostream Interactive's first game, but the studio's got plenty of experience. It was founded in 1998 and started out creating animation and creative assets for other media companies. Little Devil Inside has been in development since 2015.

1 The world of Little Devil Inside is a vast and varied place, featuring deserts... 2 ...Rolling corn fields populated by long-lost tribes... 3 ...And large oceans to explore, both above and below the waves. The world is 'real' and designed to contrast with the beautifully stylised character and creature designs.

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

Jett: The Far Shore

On your marks, get Jett, go

Making its first pitstop during PS5's showcase stream last June, Jett's arrival has been pushed back from this winter to some time next year. The project has puttered along for many years with Superbrothers' Craig D Adams, Pine Scented Software's Patrick McAllister, and composer scntfc at the helm, but in the past 18 months the crew's expanded to 30 people.

Artist Sam Bradley is one of them. We asked him and Craig D Adams about the places Jett will go. He tells us, "Part of the experience of playing the game is just the sensation of moving through the space, discovering new things [...] while moving in interesting ways."

JETT PACKED

Jett is a spacecraft piloted by a people threatened with extinction, who are finding a new home on a watery world. You'll have "character moments with the other people you're exploring this planet with," and interact with "foreign alien life." Bradley concludes, "That's like one side of the design space. And the other side is more in line with what you'd imagine when you think of a walking sim."

Adams summarises, "We wanted it to be fun to zip around, interesting to contemplate, and then a bit like with [our previous game Sword &] Sworcery, have some heart and some soul and a bit of style."

Bradley follows up, "There is a lineage that you can trace back to Craig's previous game [...] even though [...] aesthetically, they're very different [...] I think someone imagining the Sworcery artist making a 3D game would [think] voxels, right? Like, giant cubes everywhere, squares for heads – Jett is not that. But when you see it and you move around in the space, all of a sudden it clicks [...] You're like, 'ah, of course, this is the natural evolution.'"

We won't lift off until next year but we've got more to share from the captain's log. Check back next issue for more from The Far Shore.

IMPRESSIONS

They say it's all about the journey, not the destination, and it certainly looks as though our fellow passengers will make the trip an interesting one. But knowing that this project has been percolating for a few years, we can't wait to climb into the pilot's seat.

TRACK RECORD Superbrothers' first title, Swords & Sworcery (a collaboration with Capybara Games) was released on iOs in 2011. The option to share snippets to social media was excised from the 2018 rerelease.

"WE WANTED IT TO HAVE SOME HEART AND SOME SOUL AND A BIT OF STYLE."

FACTRICK

1. MOVIE STAR

Sam Bradley has worked in film and TV. He has also been a visual development artist for Netflix.

2. WHO YOU KNOW

Sam and Craig met through Jim Guthrie, who composed music for Sword & Sworcery and a short film by Bradley.

3. HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Superbrothers was founded in 2003, and Jett: The Far Shore will be the studio's second game.

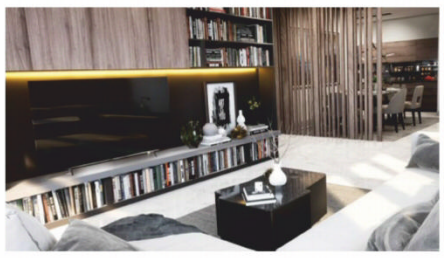
With "pockets of threat or mystery to problem solve," as Adams puts it, it won't all be smooth sailing.

"A SPECIAL FORCES TEAM STUMBLES UPON A SUNKEN SUMERIAN TEMPLE."

The Dark Pictures Anthology: The House Of Ashes

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 2021 / **PUB** BANDAI NAMCO
DEV SUPERMASSIVE GAMES / **PLAYERS** 1-5

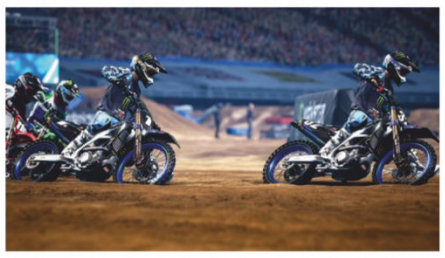
Looking like a mashup of The Descent and The Ruins, this third chapter in Supermassive Games' The Dark Pictures Anthology feels like it could be the most horrific entry yet. Set at the end of the Iraq war, a special forces team hunting for Tony Blair's fabled Weapons Of Mass Destruction stumble upon something far more deadly than a dodgy dossier: a sunken Sumerian temple. Inside ancient creatures are out for blood, and the two warring sides must team up to survive the night. The premise sounds scary as hell. We're in.



Dreamhouse: The Game

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** 2021
PUB DESAND GAME STUDIOS
DEV DESAND GAME STUDIOS
PLAYERS 1-4

Notable as the first game to be shown running on Unreal Engine 5, Dreamhouse: The Game is Grand Designs meets the Ikea catalogue. This is the game every closet George Costanza has been dreaming of, allowing you to live the life of an architect and design, build, and furnish your aspirational creations. You'll start at the bottom with a small hut or renovation and work up to building your 'dream house'. Using real-world objects, photoreal textures, and basing everything on physically accurate materials, Dreamhouse is gamified arch-viz. Featuring multiplayer, VR support, and a photo mode, it's a curiosity.



Monster Energy Supercross – The Official Videogame 4

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 11 MAR
PUB NACON / **DEV** MILESTONE SRL
PLAYERS 1-4

You'll need an energy drink just to read that name. Heading to PS5 as well as PS4, this two-wheeled racer looks the part. Offering 60fps at 4K and featuring deep simulated mud there's something uniquely engaging about seeing Supercross 4 in action. But it's the new career mode that could raise this above the standard Milestone fare on both PS4 and PS5. Now you can rise through the real-world leagues, from Supercross Futures to the 250SX and 450SX categories, and build your own unique rider through skill tree upgrades. Racing and bike fans alike should keep an eye on this.

Neo: The World Ends With You

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

Pick a style of RPG, and Square Enix can do it. 2007's The World Ends With You became a cult classic, introducing many to the popping beats and sharp style of Shibuya, Tokyo (something Persona 5 fans will appreciate). While that was released on Nintendo DS, this fully 3D sequel brings the action to PS4. Forced to take part in the Reaper's Game, Rindo and friends must battle the demonic Noise – manifestations of peoples' negative emotions. Completing missions from enigmatic Composers might allow them to change their fate. The catch? They're trapped in limbo themselves, and invisible to the living. Real-time combat and groovy tunes will hook you in.

King Of Seas

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** JAN 2021
PUB 3DCLOUDS / **DEV** 3DCLOUDS
PLAYERS 1

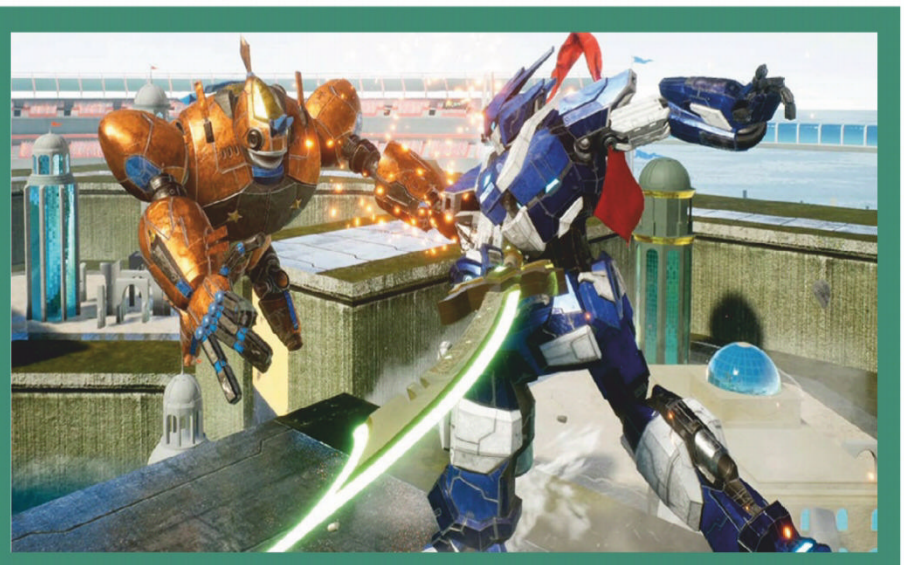
Playing as either a brother or sister, you're the offspring of the King Of The Seven Seas, setting out on your own naval boat for the first time. In your absence, dear poppa is assassinated, and you've no choice but to seek refuge with a band of unruly pirates. What follows is sailing, trading, and naval combat, exploring the colourful world from a top-down perspective. In combat, you use L2 and R2 to fire left and right cannons, and voodoo for special attacks. From what we've played it's simple good fun, and has us curious to explore the high seas. The use of procedural generation to create the game's world ensures there's always a surprise over the horizon. It's shaping into a seaworthy RPG.

Paradise Lost

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 2021
PUB ALL IN! GAMES
DEV POLYAMOROUS / **PLAYERS** 1

World War 2 lasted for a further 20 years until the Nazis gave up and nuked Europe. That's the alt-history backdrop to Paradise Lost's bunker-exploring mystery. As 12-year-old Szymon you stumble across an abandoned Nazi shelter and venture inside.

Played in first-person, Paradise Lost blends walking sim curiosity with horror overtones. The hidden world of the bunker is beautifully realised, and as abandoned wood-panelled offices give way to a cavernous hangar containing dormant German rockets we can't help but think bad things are lurking below. A voice from the darkness calls to Szymon: Ewa is another lost child in the bunker and she needs our help. Time to explore a little further.



Override 2: Super Mech League

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 22 DEC / **PUB** MODUS GAMES
DEV MODUS STUDIOS BRAZIL / **PLAYERS** 1-4

As we go hands-on, it's clear this sequel makes the most of PS5. This mech brawler has limb attacks mapped to shoulder buttons (paired combinations resulting in special attacks), and there's a satisfying weight to strikes. Things get chaotic in four-player brawls, while ranked rumbles pit you robo a robo (alongside a new career mode). Everything has a hyper-stylised sheen, at times feeling like plastic toys in a stop-motion movie. Sign us up for round two.

Blood Bowl 3

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** SPRING 2021 **PUB** NACON / **DEV** CYANIDE STUDIO / **PLAYERS** 1-2

Games Workshop's cult tabletop game is charging back, and now it's bringing its fantasy-themed American football to PS5 as well as PS4. Don't let the sports theme throw you; this remains a turn-based tactics game but goblins, dwarfs, elves, and orcs replace burly pro footballers. This sequel parodies videogame sports sims as much as real-world sports, with new Star Players feeling like a nod to FIFA Ultimate Team. More in keeping with the tabletop original are the Special Play Cards that enable you to add temporary abilities to players, or even assassinate a rival before the starting whistle is blown.

Once again we've been at each other's throats arguing about the year's best games. The only way to settle things was to throw the task over to you and let you choose. Here are the 2020 Games Of The Year, in order of greatness, as decided by you and all of OPM's other readers!

GHOST OF TSUSHIMA

In a year beset by lockdowns, Sony offered a great escape

In many ways you've played this before: the historical open world, tense assassinations, side-questing for loot, and galloping over the next horizon for the thrill of the unknown. Yet Ghost Of Tsushima never forgets to be fun, and it presents everything with so much colour you can't turn down Sucker Punch's escape out of lockdown.

Jin Sakai is a samurai living beneath a dark cloud. With his family murdered and his island home, Tsushima, torn apart, he begins to see all is not as it seems with the people he trusted. If we're honest, Jin isn't the best character in the game. He's a Batman-like platform from which the game can launch its colourful cast of sidekicks.

Sucker Punch has a history of creating memorable support casts, and in its female trio of Tomoe, Yuna, and Masako Adachi the game finds its true heart. This matters because while the main story arc manages to land some emotional notes, Ghost Of Tsushima delivers its best moments when you venture from the Golden Path and see what else this world has to offer away from Jin's main quest. These wonderfully orchestrated story vignettes are just one of the reasons Ghost Of Tsushima deserves to be Game Of The Year.

Now turn the page to discover five more reasons to play…

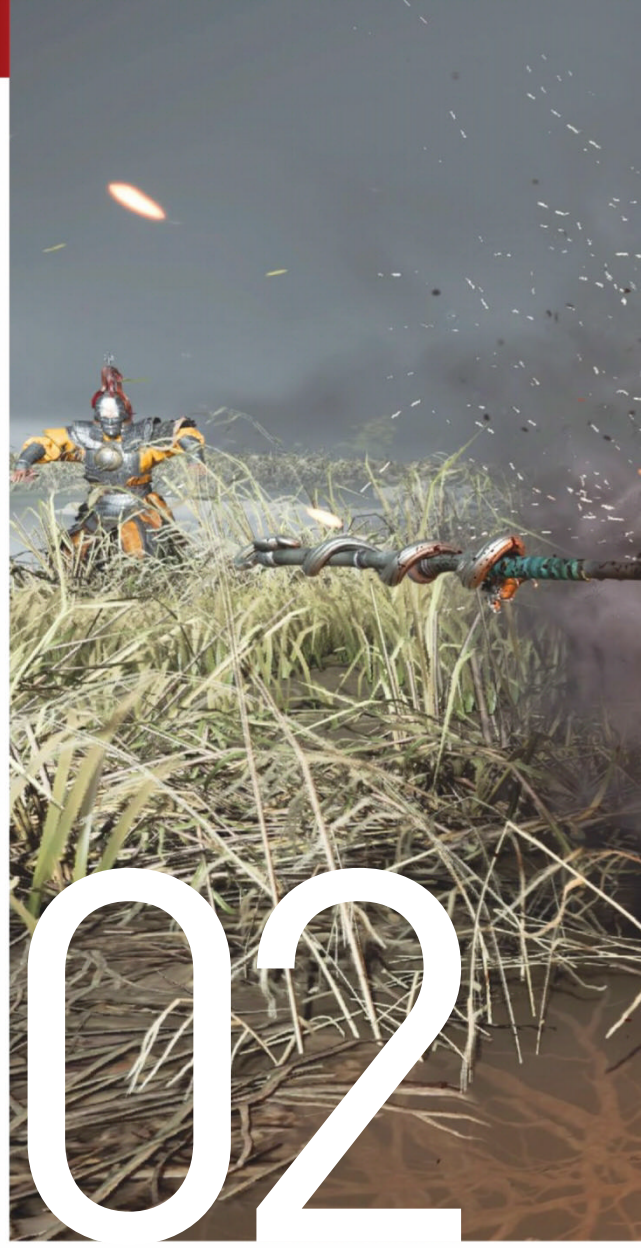
01 THE WORLD

You think you've seen it all in games and then along comes Ghost Of Tsushima and presents a mostly historically accurate feudal Japan bathed in a glorious riot of colour and sun-soaked scenery.

The game's hyperreal stylisation teases the senses and encourages exploration. You're not running over the crest of a hill to hunt a blinking target but rushing to see what the next stage of Sucker Punch's world looks like. We call it a stage because this world is pure theatre. Its nods to the past resemble set dressing on a sumptuous West End play (remember those?) and every new mist-shrouded bamboo forest, crisp white mountain peak, or blossom-swept clifftop temple is a scene you'll want to raise the curtain on. Ghost Of Tsushima offers a world without equal.

HAVE YOUR SAY...

"Ghost Of Tsushima is a beautiful game, beautiful cinematics and scenarios, fun to play."
Brend



02 SUBLIME COMBAT

Clank! Clink! Spa-dink! These are the noises that dominated our summer as sword met shield and arrow hit armour. Ghost Of Tsushima channelled the spirit of soulsbornes into something flexible, pliable, and... fun.

The block-parry- thrust gameplay may hint at a Dark-Souls-like core, but in Sucker Punch's hands combat is more giving and open to experimentation. Mixing samurai and ninja styles we're able to control large crowds of enemies. There's a sense of satisfaction that comes from winning a standoff and slicing through four enemies in a row. Like a rather gruesome Dance Dance Revolution, timing delivers killer moves. Throw in parries, staggers, stances, and a Ghost Stance that goes full Tarantino, and there's depth to this combat.

05 GOOD OLD FUN

Taking a liberal approach to realism, Ghost Of Tsushima would rather be fun to play than consistently historically accurate, and we love it for its occasional deviation.

The gorgeous world is a joy to gallop around and there's none of that branch-dismounting realism that plagued Red Dead Redemption 2. It also runs at 60fps on PS5. Joyous.

Exploring every nook and cranny of this world reveals some lovely hidden treasures. Who doesn't want to take down a samurai lord wearing a Sly Raccoon bandana?

03 TAKE A BREATHER

Most games want to ping you with suggestions for things to do *all the time* *cough*Assassin's Creed*cough*, but Ghost Of Tsushima is brave enough to give you space to relax and take a time out.

That's right, this is an action game that also wants you to consider your mental wellbeing. Relaxing in picturesque meditation spots to compose a poem or slowly slipping into a mountain hot spring to consider the journey so far are not simple gimmicks but an essential part of the game's world-building.

Ghost Of Tsushima reveals the subtler aspects of its story in these quiet moments – and the fact we earn a rare headband to wear into our next battle is a bonus. These quieter moments are also a chance to reflect on the game's hand-crafted landscapes, which is all the excuse we need to break out that smashing photo mode one more time.

04 BECOME A LEGEND

Why does Ghost Of Tsushima deserve to be our Game Of The Year? Because it was bold enough to save the best for last, and at no cost at all.

Legends mode, which is free to PS Plus members, was released in October, months after the main game, and offers new co-op missions separate to the story. Choose a class (Samurai, Ronin, Ninja, or Assassin) and jump into one of four game modes (Quickplay, Story, Survival, or Challenge) for a unique experience.

Our pick is Story mode where we play through 30 chapters of events, based on Japanese mythology, with a friend. Completing Nightmare-level stories unlocks rare gear, too.

If the thought of more excellent action doesn't tempt you, the new gear will.

Duels are the game's secret sauce. One serving of side-quests has hero Jin Sakai being hunted by expert sword fighters who insist on battling in beauty spots. Well, if they insist...

It wouldn't be 2020's GOTY without a brilliant photo mode, and Ghost Of Tsushima has one of the best around. Good job too, as this game's world is absolute photo heaven.

FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE

Years and years in the making, this was well worth the wait

The opening to the 1997 PS1 original is iconic: the camera pans down over a sci-fi city, switching from a cutscene of a train into hands-on action.

Fans were overjoyed when it was recreated with cutting-edge tech… except that was for PS3 in 2005, and was only a tech demo. A full remake seemed to be a pipe dream. Until it wasn't. Veteran devs who worked on the original teamed up with new talent to create the phenomenal game you voted second place. It might be a 'part one' of sorts, but there's nothing episodic about this Midgar-set tale.

01 MIDGAR BURNING

In the original, a fraction of your time is spent in Midgar. But here the city's plight gets much more attention, and details are expanded. Chapter 2 shows this wonderfully, as Cloud picks through the wreckage of the bombing run gone wrong, something he just helped carry out, turning what's just a few screens on PS1 into a living, breathing, suffering reality.

02 SWORD UP

While remaining true to its turn-based ATB origins, combat in Remake is electric, allowing you to switch between three party members and issue commands to those you aren't controlling. Whether you are buffing each other with materia or timing skills and heals just right, even the smaller scuffles feel rewarding, let alone fights with some of the bosses.

HAVE YOUR SAY…

"Deffo Final Fantasy VII: Remake for me, it was better than my expectations and the vast musical score and length was just amazing."
Azurkane

03 GETTING STUNG

We wondered how the saucy Honeybee Inn would be reinterpreted. Who could've dreamed it'd be a cabaret where Cloud deadpans his way through pop songs after a beautiful makeover? The chorus "stand up, cast your fears aside" is far from cynical. Push buttons in time to the beat and Cloud reveals he's got more than fighting moves, while Aerith laps up the show.

04 RE-MAKE AMBITIONS

Unlike Shadow Of The Colossus and Demon's Souls, Final Fantasy VII's not afraid to declare itself a remake. But the further you get into it, the more the story hints at diversions, and you get a menacing sense that the past game still exists within this one. You realise that 'remake' might have literal connotations (as we've come to expect from Tetsuya Nomura).

THE LAST OF US PART II

Naughty Dog's game designer Arnaldo Licea sheds some light on your No.3

Some eyebrows were raised when Naughty Dog's long-awaited sequel landed in the No.3 slot, but you, reader, are in charge. Ellie's journey into despair as she seeks revenge is a tough ride, but the Uncharted developer pulled out all the stops to make this 'part two' a blockbuster.

To discover more we meet recent BAFTA Breakthrough award winner, and The Last Of Us Part II game designer, Arnaldo Licea. "One of my levels was the flooded city level, which is all water, and the question I had to answer was 'How does water combat feel in The Last Of Us?'" Licea tells us. "It's a combination of things that we wanted to do in the first one that we couldn't."

WATER WORLD

The Flooded City is a standout sequence in the game. Technically it's a marvel of psychics-based movement, but the overriding sense of dislocation that comes from winding your way through the waterlogged shops and streets of Seattle is what's memorable. Dark and uncomfortable, it was inspired by Uncharted 4's boat exploration.

Licea puts down the success of this stage, and the game in general, to the collaborative way Naughty Dog works. "Everyone at the studio takes a look at the game and gives feedback and gives their opinion, gives you ideas [...] There could be a comment, and that comment just changes everything about what you're doing for the better," he says, adding: "When you finally play it's nice and polished and awesome. That's an incredible feeling."

From its flexible stealth gameplay to the authentic performances and visual realism, The Last Of Us Part II is the biggest and most ambitious game Naughty Dog has made. Licea says what we all thought after playing it: "I love that every single level, every single moment, is so unique." A worthy No.3.

MARVEL'S SPIDER-MAN: MILES MORALES

Miles' turn in the spotlight made PS5's launch electric

Miles swings out of Peter Parker's shadow to protect New York City solo over ten twisty-turny hours of this story, but every web-sling of the way his adventure is also firmly about his personal life. Just what kind of superhero can Miles be when standing on his own? And how do his superheroics affect the most important people in his life?

He lost his father to supervillain terrorism in the previous game, and every member of his supporting cast – his mother, his friend Ganke –is someone you feel for, making you wonder how each event in the game might come back to haunt them. Excellently paced and superbly written, the story's just the right length to feel like the script could've been from an MCU movie (and one of the good ones at that). Watching the credits recount the important plot beats is reminiscent of the satisfaction at the end of an excellent cinema outing.

Just as the story's uniquely Miles', so is the combat. He's got superpowers of his own to supplement the web-slinging combat he's learnt from Peter. Venom blasts add extra moves to brawls that you get to use at a decent clip, and camouflage helps you take a breather whether in a fight or a stealth section.

The whole thing's so good it'd be hard to go back to playing Peter in a Spider-Man 2 – just how will Insomniac surpass the high bar it's set itself?

DOOM ETERNAL

Ripping and tearing its way onto your list

This iconic series has always recognised the shoot-'em-up genre isn't just about pointing and clicking to get headshots, it's about how that shooting makes you feel.

The most recent entry delivers all those shooter feels. Tricky combat encounters with demons are as seat-of-the-pants as ever, forcing you to stay on the move as you kill them in specific brutal ways to earn enough resources to survive for a bit longer. The difficulty only adds to the feeling that you *are* the Doom Slayer, facing the hordes of Hell and making *them* afraid.

Even outside of combat that feeling of being the unstoppable fist of fate is slathered on thanks to how other beings react to you, from the terror of the first Hell Priest you behead to the awe of humans as you walk through their moon base.

ASSASSIN'S CREED VALHALLA

We're all aboard for Eivor the revengin'

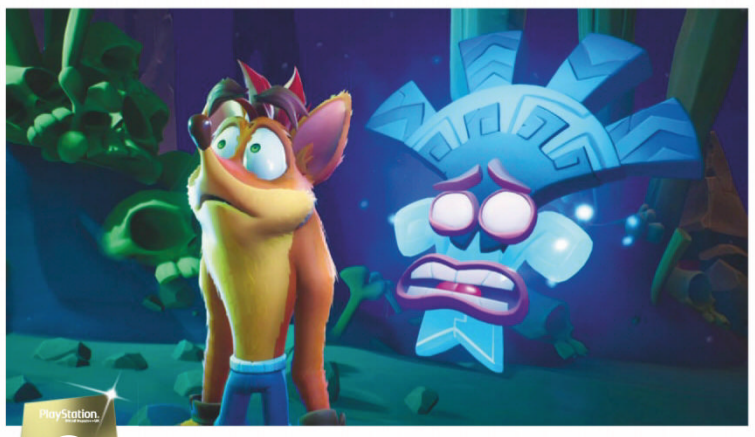
The Vikings are coming… right onto your Game Of The Year list at No.6. Ubisoft's annual stab at a somewhat twisted history lesson is one of its best. The new build-your-own Viking town structure lends this Assassin's Creed roots previous games lacked.

When the fields of England and the mountains of Norway begin to feel too small the game throws in a new world to explore: Asgard. With the best art direction of the series, even when the grind raises its horned head Valhalla manages to perfectly frame its repetition.

7 DEMON'S SOULS

You love the grind

The title that started the entire soulsborne craze looks better than you would have thought on PS5, thanks to being lovingly remade by Bluepoint Games. It became one of the new console's best games at launch, and landed on your Game Of The Year list, proving great gameplay doesn't diminish with age.



8 CRASH BANDICOOT 4: IT'S ABOUT TIME

It's as good as that pun

Not simply a cash-in on Crash's renewed popularity but a game that feels like a genuine sequel to the '90s Crashes. A visual upgrade ensures it looks like a true PS4 game, and the time-hopping action and new gadgets make this one of the year's best platformers.

9 SPELUNKY 2

What you're looting for

At first glance it's more Spelunky. But rub your eyes, pick up the pad, and embrace one of PS4's best-ever sequels. Everything we adored in the original – the puzzles, platform mazes, traps, and treasures – returns, and there's no question of turning down the difficulty. Oh, and you can mount a turkey. 2020 in a nutshell.

10 NIOH 2

A slice of heaven

This feudal-Japan-set demon-slaying RPG offers a genuinely new take on the familiar FromSoftware format. The inclusion of Diablo-like looting and a stance-and-weapon-based combat system that offers more complexity than Dark Souls or Bloodborne ensures Nioh 2 plays like no other game in its genre.

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Reviews

"ROWDY COMBAT THAT BORROWS FROM DEVIL MAY CRY."

060 Immortals Fenyx Rising

82 Demon's Souls

No pain, no gain? You'll get a lot from this ground-up remake

HIGHLIGHTS

IMMORTALS FENYX RISING 60 | FUSER 64 | BUBBLE BOBBLE 4 FRIENDS: THE BARON IS BACK! 65 | MARVEL'S SPIDER-MAN REMASTERED 66 | CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS – COLD WAR 68 | ASSASSIN'S CREED VALHALLA 70 OBSERVER: SYSTEM REDUX 74 | GODFALL 76 | HAVEN 87 | SACKBOY: A BIG ADVENTURE 88 | THE PATHLESS 90

Immortals Fenyx Rising

Is this mythical mission godlike or more Jason and the Argh-onauts?

INFO

Format PS5 (reviewed), PS4
Price £59.99
ETA Out now
Pub Ubisoft
Dev Ubisoft Quebec
Players 1
Length 30+ hours
Accessibility Colourblind mode, menu narration, resizeable subtitles

Greek myths make a solid videogame template. They invented the fetch quest (Golden Fleece); the boss fight (Medusa); even the glowing weak spot (Achilles' heel). It's frankly amazing Kratos has been able to hog this territory for himself. Now along comes Fenyx, lighter on dismemberment than the angriest man on PlayStation, but equally keen to pillage the source material.

Here, it's about a nobody – that's you – helping divine somebodies. With the gods trapped in cartoonish forms, the quest splits between reliving their greatest hits and offering impromptu therapy to revive them. It's an oddly spiky tale, given the welcoming Disney looks. Fruity lovers' tiffs and off-colour commentary from Zeus and Prometheus are close to the knuckle. The game feels like it's aiming for the 'good for kids and adults' sweet spot of a Pixar film, but gags about castration and Eros' happy ending will cause more awkward questions than laughs.

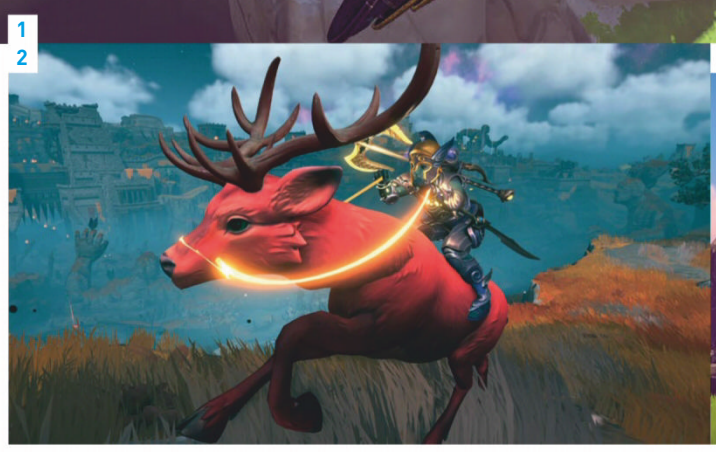
Also, listening to two squabbling voices while figuring out a pressure switch puzzle or dodging boss attacks isn't ideal. It's like having a backseat driver but worse, as you never have to contend with a cyclops on the M4. Shifting this much storytelling responsibility onto voiceover also risks you losing the thread as a wandering mind begins to tune out key exposition.

GREEK CHORE-US

When Immortals isn't babbling in your ear you discover a mix of familiar Ubisoft habits and fresher influences. Yes, the meat of the action is pilfering hundreds of doodads littered across the Golden Isle. Even by Ubisoft standards this is bloated, with more currencies than a bureau de change. There are tokens for health and stamina, *four* types for weapon upgrades and another for

The sense of scale and art direction are breathtaking throughout – definitely Insta-worthy!

> Even by Ubisoft standards this is bloated, with more currencies than a bureau de change.



1 Keep necking stamina potions and it's possible to stretch a glide over entire continents. 2 Taming exotic beasts is neat, but doesn't the ground seem pedestrian when you've got wings? 3 When all else fails, make like David and the Goliath and heave a rock into your opponent's eye.

skills. Fenyx can't help but feel like a bunch of piggy banks taped together, rather than a well-rounded character who's growing over time.

But get over that hurdle and there's more interesting stuff. Much has been written about Immortals' similarities to Zelda: Breath Of The Wild [*Never heard of it* – ed]. It's another massive world where you tackle the main questline in any order, peppered with self-contained puzzle vaults and navigated with gliding wings and the ability to climb anything, stamina permitting. And why not? For all its plaudits, Nintendo's [*Who?* – ed] series is rarely cloned.

The thing is, the resemblance is merely skin-deep. Immortals has more arcade zip, for one. That's largely due to rowdy combat that borrows more from Devil May Cry and its focus on combos and aerial drubbings than Zelda. Driving up a stun meter with hammer blows to then paff a dazed harpy into the horizon feels impactful and meaty without resorting to blood and guts. It's a rare case of being both kid-friendly and spectacular in its own right. It's slightly let down by limited enemy variety and recycled boss monsters, perhaps, but never less than punchy.

Any worries that it might tread on Assassin's Creed Odyssey's toes quickly vanish.

The Golden Isle also feels less like a living world and more like a holding pen for puzzles and tests of prowess. They are not elegantly folded into the natural beauty, but plonked willy-nilly. Coming upon a load of pressure plates, levers, and buttons in the middle of a field is not immersive. Worse, there are places where you struggle to find the boundaries of a riddle and are left wondering if you're missing the point or simply haven't found a key part.

ALL YOUR VAULT

This isn't a problem in the Vaults, which are separate voids where those abstract puzzle parts fit better. You also sense level designers taking the gloves off as they push for more lateral thinking with your grasp of crate telekinesis or advanced gliding techniques. This feels like the stuff of classic Zelda dungeons, albeit undermined by a few rough edges. There are some ball mazes you manipulate from afar that are hostage to wonky physics. Maybe it's a joke about the cruelty of the Greek Fates. More likely, it needs more QA.

And this isn't to say the overworld puzzles are bad. A tad old-fashioned, maybe, in their love of box-pushing and lighting lamps with fire arrows. But to see Ubisoft take its open-world format and fill it with brain food is a welcome change after the endless murdering in Far Cry and Assassin's Creed. It's just a shame there's not much *between* the fixed activities. It reminds us of a Greek myth theme park where you move between the attractions without engaging. Certainly the world map, with its themed districts, has big Disneyland energy.

It's telling that the memorable stretches of the tale are those that make use of Immortals' OTT topography. Clambering up a giant forge or scaling a frosty peak by moving between pockets of warmth requires you to engage with the

4 Medusa's eye lasers: bad for the skin, but good at showing off a TV with HDR. 5 Fenyx's parry has generous timing. Good news for you, bad news for Winnie The Pooh here. 6 Climbing statues has echoes of Shadow Of The Colossus.

lay of the land. Elsewhere, too much drama is left to the Vaults; you're whisked away from the island for vital boss fights or key revelations. Nothing encapsulates this disappointment like a request to fight the Hydra: it's a beast that towers over the entire map, only to finally appear as a ropy-looking snake in a Vault.

HEY, GOD-LOOKING

It would be great if Immortals could find more action to fit the setting, because it is indisputably amazing. Any worries that it might tread on the toes of Assassin's Creed Odyssey quickly vanish as designers morph each region to fit the personality of its ruling god and scale everything up so you've constantly got a killer horizon to gawp at. The broad cartoon looks are also a great fit for PS5's Performance mode – you don't feel like any detail is being lost and that silky 60fps refresh rate dazzles.

And, as mentioned with the combat, there's something cheering about Ubisoft Quebec throwing its weight behind an epic that younger gamers can enjoy. It's very easy to palm youngsters off with terrible movie tie-ins and unambitious platformers; this is the kind of chunky, weekend-hogging game they can dig into without the emotional scarring of, say, watching Valhalla's Eivor decapitate monks. This isn't to say they won't bounce off the same wonkiness we did, but at least it won't disturb them.

Like the Greek myths it's based upon, Immortals provides brains and brawn, and a slightly uneven journey along the way.

Immortals has heart and when it comes together it can soar. But those wings are waxy and the sun is hot – tinkering is needed before it properly takes flight. **Matthew Castle**

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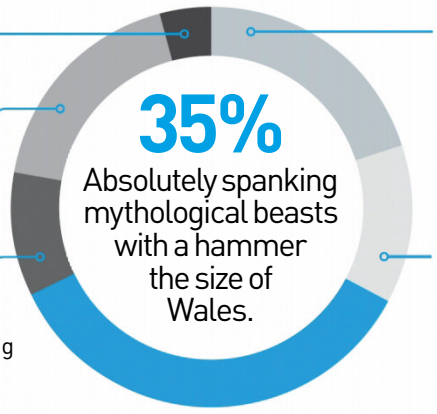
THE OPM BREAKDOWN

WHAT YOU DO IN: IMMORTALS: FR



4% Stunning bears and then punting them into the stratosphere. Sorry, Yogi.

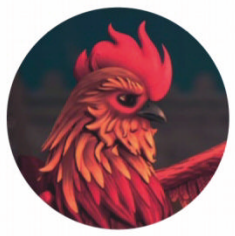
18% Trying to juggle the 18 different currencies.

10% Standing on a tall thing, straining your eyes to spot a very small thing.

20% Pushing boxes onto pressure switches like it's 1998 all over again.

13% Looking up Greek myths on Wikipedia so you actually get the jokes.

FRIENDS & ENEMIES



ARES
God Of War's final boss would have been much easier to deck in this chicken form.

HERMES
The dashing herald of the gods, which basically means he doesn't shut up.

PHOSPHOR
This burny bird not only flies at your side but has over powered dive bomb attacks.

STATPACK

01
Thousand: the distance, in metres, you have to glide in one go to claim the Floor Is Lava trophy. Find a high point, and good luck.

34
Unlockable skills, ranging from essential aerial launchers to rather less vital swimming lessons. Will you collect the whole lot?

04
Skins for each piece of Fenyx's equipment. That might sound like a lot, but we say if you're going to smite mythical evil, you should do it in style.

LOVING/HATING

TOMB WITH A VIEW
God Vaults are superb: they'll give you big puzzles to solve, and an even bigger bald patch from all the head-scratching.

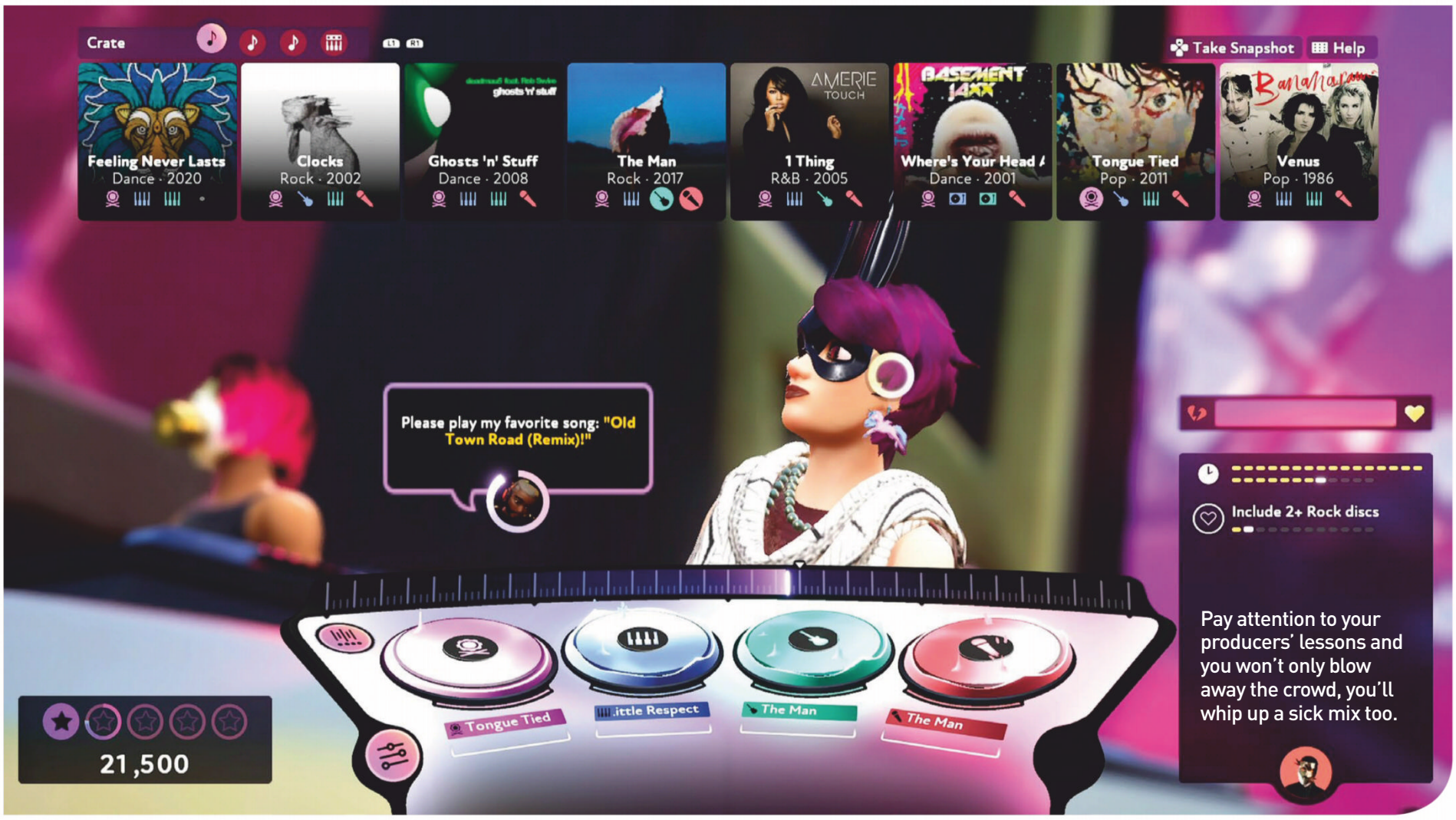
EAGLE EYED
Icons must be manually added to the map, making for lots of pixel hunting as you scan the horizon listening for controller rumbles.

IS IT BETTER THAN?

NO
Suffers from similar repetition, but the island of Tsushima feels more like an enticing, living world.

YES
Fenyx's scrapping is punchier, and the scale of the world dwarfs most other child-friendly fare.

NO
Immortals lacks the RPG depth and variety, and Fenyx just isn't as good company as Kassandra.



Fuser

This return from Harmonix is music to our ears

INFO

FORMAT PS4
PRICE £59.99
ETA Out now
PUB NCSoft
DEV Harmonix
PLAYERS 1-2
LENGTH 10+ hours (campaign)
ACCESSIBILITY Colour blindness modes, basic subtitles

Just picture it: the light show becomes oddly subdued as a hush falls over the crowd, everyone waiting to hear how you'll wow them from centre stage. Okay, maybe that scenario would make you break out in a cold sweat in real life but it's an enticing fantasy that Fuser delivers on in spades.

You start out as an amateur DJ, guided through the basics of splicing together different instrumental and vocal tracks from well-known songs by a generous producer. The UI for swapping tracks and adjusting your mix is centred on a cursor. It's fiddly if you don't fine-tune your settings but works well otherwise.

With 100 songs to play with at launch, from artists like Dolly Parton to The Clash to 50 Cent, there's bound to be a handful you've never heard of, but the vast majority are certified bangers. Failing that, you may just walk away with a new appreciation for something you weren't playing on repeat before. The real party trick, though, is how quickly you end up bobbing your head along to whatever you spin up. In essence, Fuser's a lot like board game Dropmix, though there's more of a focus on developing your own style rather than just scoring points.

SPIN TO WIN

With requests for effects, downbeat drops, and more coming from all sides, it can be tricky to keep everyone in the arena happy, and you'll mangle your late-game star ratings if you're not paying attention to their requests. Getting three or more stars earns you new threads, though accumulating cosmetics isn't the focus here. That said, coveting five stars had me coming back for more, and revisiting earlier stages is always a welcome change of pace. However, best of all, I never felt like a lack of musical talent put me at a disadvantage.

But the campaign is just an extended, tutorialised prelude to what the community will make. You can take a snapshot of any particularly smooth-sounding mixes you come up with by pressing ↑, and after that mess around with it in Freestyle mode or start from, ahem, scratch. You can then share your mixes on social media for other DJs to rate or riff on. This is really Fuser's headline act.

Harmonix's long-term hopes for Fuser are clear. The drip-feed of free looks, hooks, and more (we're promised an 'ever-expanding soundtrack') feels like the most good-faith effort to foster a live-game audience we've seen in a while, and the team's deep, demonstrable love for music is the refrain that binds it all together. Only time will tell if this is a return to form for Harmonix, but we think the crowd will at least really dig its opening hook.

> **Share your mixes on social media for other DJs to rate. This is really Fuser's headline act.**

The most fun we've had with a music game in ages. Sophisticated yet approachable for those who belt out bangers and virtuosos alike – it's got real potential. **Jess Kinghorn**

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INFO **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £19.99 **ETA** Out now **PUB** Size Five Games **DEV** Size Five Games, Ant Workshop

Lair Of The Clockwork God

Cog of the walk

Ordinarily, we'd say that anybody who makes themself a protagonist in their own game is either a genius or an egomaniac, but Ben Ward and Dan Marshall seem to sit halfway between. The genius element is easy to see. This is a game that forces platforming and point-and-click together in an electronic cupboard for seven minutes of heaven – and against all odds, it just about works.

Dan is the jumpy boi, while Ben treats life as an old LucasArts adventure. The platforming sections aren't very good, partly due to iffy controls, but this can be forgiven. From start to finish, the adventure refuses to take itself seriously, and constantly hurls jokes at you. Many land with a thud – the script has the air of being edited by the same people who wrote it – but on occasion, it's hilarious.[1]

The objects of humour are varied, but game genres and their tropes come in for regular ribbing. Most of these jokes have been made a hundred times before, however, and even worse, the game sometimes commits the sin of forcing you to play through the very thing that is being parodied. Make no mistake though, the consistently lighthearted attitude is *very* welcome.

Lair Of The Clockwork God is sometimes very, very clever, although this cleverness leads to rare instances of self-indulgence that obscure the way forward, which is thankfully the exception rather than the rule. When the disparate parts fit together, and you overlook the ropy platform controls, there's an unusual game in here with personality. It's a jolly (and occasionally filthy[2]) adventure, the likes of which we'd love to see more of. **Luke Kemp**

7 PlayStation.

FOOTNOTES 1 The game ends with a very funny song. More games should end on a song. **2** We'll never look at wall-jumps the same way again.

INFO **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £34.99 **ETA** Out now **PUB** Inin Games **DEV** Taito

Bubble Bobble 4 Friends: The Baron Is Back!

Forever bursting bubbles

Whether it's the earworm music or the simplicity of the core loop – trap enemies in blown bubbles and pop 'em to win – this update rarely steps too far out of the shadow of the 1986 original,[1] which is thankfully included.

That's okay, though, as Bubble Bobble 4 Friends: The Baron Is Back doesn't need to change what isn't broken. As in the original, each screen is a puzzle-maze of monsters to clear with some fast bubble blowing. The addition of air flow corridors trapping and pushing your bubbles around the screen adds a new layer of strategy. You need to plan ahead to ride bubbles to unreachable areas or think more carefully how to pop that last remaining unreachable enemy to clear the screen.

Unlockables add the abilities to pause air flows, explode bubbles, and injects bursts of speed that drag Bubble Bobble into Super Meat Boy territory.

This revamp comes into its own after you've finished the first set of worlds and Hard mode is unlocked. Previous levels are reworked and the original '80s game morphs into a tower survival marathon.

Playing solo it can feel too casual but Hard mode stages with a friend (or four) fare better. Ultimately, the inclusion of the original arcade game is a saving grace and is as addictive as ever.[2] **Ian Dean**

8 PlayStation.

FOOTNOTES 1 The original game was aimed at couples to play on dates. Fukio Mitsuji, the original's designer, wanted to break the male dominance of 1980s arcades. **2** The original game is crammed with hidden extras, such as jewel rooms that can only be accessed by not losing lives. Oh, and the game can only be completed with two players.

INFO **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £11.99 **ETA** Out now **PUB** Gammera Nest **DEV** Open House Studio

A Tale Of Paper

Welcome to the fold

There aren't many games where the primary antagonist is a Roomba. You know, those automated vacuum cleaners beloved of Aziz Ansari in Parks & Rec. But they make for a fearsome foe in A Tale Of Paper because you're playing as a tiny origami golem, and the threat of shredding is very real.

Being made of paper has its advantages, though. Over time, you learn to fold yourself into a frog, a paper aeroplane and a whole bookload[1] of other shapes including that most iconic of forms, the wadded ball of paper. Which – and this is genuinely brilliant – you have absolutely no control over. Because, of course you don't. You're a ball of paper. You're made to be lobbed into the recycling.

Wads aside, most of the other shapes you can take on are essentially stand-ins for basic platformer moves: a double jump, dash or glide. Coupled with the less than imaginative use of the shapes you create is platforming that lacks any spark. The ideas, on paper, and better than the execution when it comes to the fine art of navigating your papery protagonist. Still, it's a cool little concept at heart, but one that A Tale Of Paper never really builds on in a fulfilling way. In part, that's because of how quickly it all wraps up. You're looking at around the runtime of a Marvel movie. Which isn't necessarily a bad thing – some of our best friends are single-sitting games – but here, it feels a little thin.

You'll use each ability a scant couple of times, to access previously inaccessible areas,[2] and perhaps once in combination, but the puzzles and platforming challenges never really require you to get creative. The result, sadly, is an idea that's more interesting on paper than in practice. **Alex Spencer**

5 PlayStation.

FOOTNOTES 1 Literally – you gain these abilities by finding diagrams in books. **2** It's a pity the game doesn't go harder on these metroidvania aspects.

Even henchmen must appreciate how much better this looks, right before they get kicked.

Marvel's Spider-Man Remastered

Does whatever a spider can, but at 60fps

INFO

FORMAT PS5
PRICE £69.99 (For Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales Ultimate Edition, which this is part of.)
ETA Out now
PUB PlayStation Studios
DEV Insomniac Games
PLAYERS 1
LENGTH 22+ hours
ACCESSIBILITY Customisable holds, presses, and assists, option to skip puzzles, adjustable vibration and triggers

Played through the original in 2018? Then there's not loads new to this shiny remaster (which includes the DLC). But if you didn't, this is a great excuse to play one of the best superhero games ever made.

Granted, the Batman: Arkham series is a strong contender for that title, but though the games share rhythmic counter-based combat this one's very different. Peter Parker's superheroics are all about being agile, zipping around in combat, switching between aerial and ground combos with ease, and swinging around the city doing flips and hoovering up collectibles and challenge missions.

Remastered has two visual settings, much the same as Miles Morales (currently the only way you can get Spider-Man Remastered is as part of its Ultimate Edition). The default Fidelity mode is native 4K at 30fps with graphical features that include ray tracing, enhanced lighting, and additional visual effects, while Performance mode runs at 60fps, drops those additional features, and is dynamic 4K (from a lower resolution base, though it's not a large difference).

Fidelity definitely looks like a step up from the PS4 game. Swinging through Times Square at night, basking in the true reflection of its many screens on the glass skyscrapers, is tremendous. But outside of those moments there's less reason to stick with it compared to Miles Morales, which was built around those graphical leaps right down to some of Miles' suits having special lighting or effects. Even though Remastered has improved textures and character models, they're still not up to Miles Morales' level.

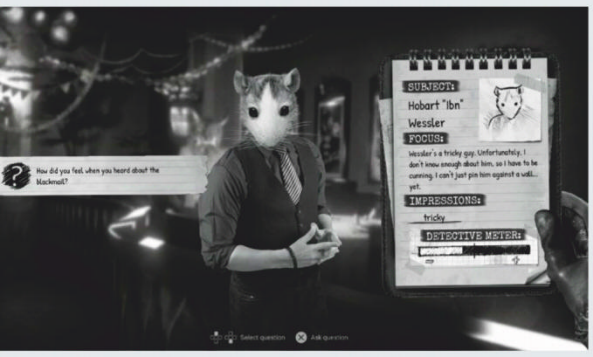
CITY SLICKER

In Performance mode, while the reflections aren't as good as those you get using ray tracing, Insomniac's original use of cube-mapping still looks great in action. It's almost a shame you have to pick one or the other (especially for an older title like this), but for our money replaying the game at 60fps felt like a bigger leap than a boost in prettiness. That smoothness complements the feeling of nimbleness that is integral to Spider-Man, so it ends up feeling the more natural evolution of what was so great about the original. Try playing at 30fps for five minutes then switch to 60fps. We can't overstate how much more responsive it feels.

First-party back compatibility patches have already added PS5-specific support to other games, such as Days Gone's phenomenal dynamic 4K at 60fps, and in comparison the tweaks made to Marvel's Spider-Man Remastered don't set it apart much from the original. It's a great game, but not a must-play if you've been there and done that before.

Though not too different from the original, the graphical enhancements look brilliant, and 60fps is so good it's hard to give up. But you have to pick one. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**

INFO **FORMAT** PS4, PS5 **PRICE** £15.99 **ETA** Out now **PUB** HandyGames **DEV** The Wild Gentlemen



Chicken Police – Paint It Red!

Do you feel clucky, punk?

You might let the title fool you into thinking you're in for a lighthearted time. However, the noir world of Chicken Police provides a truly impressive one-of-a-kind experience.

The story is nothing new: you control Sonny Featherland, a jaded detective who is blackmailed into investigating a case, and you team up with your trigger-happy ex-partner Marty McChicken to get answers. The premise and the relationship dynamic between the two are extremely clichéd, but the nods to classic noir tropes sprinkled throughout, from a feline femme fatale to night-time driving scenes, make the story a delight.[1]

The game takes the visual novel storytelling route but goes beyond point-and-click to incorporate classic adventure game aspects. The dialogue underpins the game, but elements such as car chase sequences and shooting range minigames keep things dynamic. Dialogue options follow the same format throughout, but you're fed the story at a pace that captivates. You can't replay interrogation scenes to achieve better scores – but then, what detective gets a second go at a suspect?

Despite the 1940's film noir theme, the setting is colourful and vibrant. The combination of photorealistic 3D and 2D graphics makes for uniquely appealing visuals. The sound design is atmospheric, but where the game really shines is in the superb voice acting.[2] Sonny's voice, in particular, expertly brings the sharp and absurdly humorous dialogue to life.

From the cinematics to the script to the sound design, Chicken Police delivers. If you're a lover of film noir aesthetics and solid witty dialogue, peck it up. **Tundun Folami**

9 PlayStation.

FOOTNOTES 1 Like if Robert 'The Killers' Siodmak had made videogames. **2** Cluck, cluck! That's the (incredibly entertaining) sound of the police.

INFO **FORMAT** PS5 **PRICE** £49.99 **ETA** Out now **PUB** Nacon **DEV** EKO Software

Warhammer: Chaosbane – Slayer Edition

Miniature improvements

Just a second,' takes on new meaning as we settle into our second playthrough of EKO'S Diablo-like loot-slasher. It's not something you'll mutter to delay a family meal as your desire to level up trumps pie and mash, on Ps5 'just a second' is the time the game takes to load.

Speedy SSD-loading doesn't change the basics. Warhammer: Chaosbane is a horde-shooting, loot-hoovering action RPG, and you've a whole heap of stat-tweaks to plot through. Your hero's setup makes more difference than skill, ensuring enjoyment comes from how much you love finding +0.125% attack-buffed boots.

Chaosbane gets better the more you play, with the Legend stat level offering a new upgrade path. It's a status made easier on PS5 as all the DLC, including the excellent Egypt-meets-Iron Man fun of Tomb Kings, is included.[1]

CHAOS CONTROL

Subtle uses of the new console abound, with the DualSense's triggers 'hardening' if a power is still in cooldown.[2] Running at 60fps in 4K, Chaosbane manages to feel fresher than it should. Even when the screen fills with enemies, zinging notifications, and colourful projectiles, it never misses a frame. All that said, Chaosbane remains the same generic game behind the PS5-ness. **Ian Dean**

7 PlayStation.

FOOTNOTES 1 The added content includes the Witch Hunter character, new enemies, areas, and the Tower Of Chaos; the latter asks you to grind through floors of enemies to sweep up high-grade loot. **2** You can also feel the chug of every bullet or arrow you shoot as they hit enemies. You'll find this is immensely satisfying.

INFO **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £24.99 **ETA** Out now **PUB** Bandai Namco **DEV** Namco, Monkeycraft

Katamari Damacy Reroll

They see me rollin'

While rather too akin to a fever dream to be classed as relaxing, Katamari Damacy Reroll is as satisfying as a perfect cuppa. It thrives on the sheer joy of destruction, and the thrill of getting big enough to roll up things such as stationery, then animals, people, and eventually buildings, is simple yet addictive. The soundtrack is a whole can of earworms, too, and is topped off by sound effects from the puzzlingly expansive array of objects at your mercy, which all combine to create an experience embodying chaos and calm simultaneously.

The premise is that the King Of All Cosmos wiped out all the stars in a fit of gleeful destruction and now wants you, indebted to him as his son, to amass eclectic balls of stuff that he can yeet into space to be the new stars. You roll all sorts of things up to achieve this, and your unique cosmic contributions will even be named according to what materials you gathered most of in that particular level.[1]

Some levels see you tasked with gathering an abundance of a certain item (swans, crowns, crabs) or require you to find one specific item but the biggest possible. These are a nice change of pace from the usual 'go wild and consume everything in sight with reckless abandon' approach. But the key rule is that bigger is always better, and the King encourages you to go above and beyond meeting the level's target size.[2]

Though the game is brief, you'll return to it for a go at beating your high scores, or to take on a pal in the competitive mode featuring the Prince's colourful cousins. It's a truly bizarre game through and through, but all the better for that. **Max Williams**

7 PlayStation.

FOOTNOTES 1 Astronomy is never going to be the same. **2** Even success won't stop you disappointing your parents – just like in real life!

Zombies are dead serious about taking you down. Get it? Oh, please yourself then.

Call Of Duty: Black Ops – Cold War

World needs saving? Here I go, Reagan, on my own

While we're sorely disappointed at the lack of leg warmers and double denim upon our CIA crew, Treyarch choosing to set the latest COD in the 1980s has resulted in some interesting decisions. Weapons and tech are less exciting than in previous Call Of Duties, and so innovation has had to jump up elsewhere. There are still problems, but they are (*just*) forgivable.

Let's get the heavily-armed elephant in the room out of the way first. The campaign is a fictional tale set during the very real Cold War, told from a US perspective. While it's still very much a case of 'America saves the world', it's not as disturbingly illiberal as Modern Warfare, and there is a *little* nuance there. That said, we felt uncomfortable playing the flashback sequences as American soldiers in Vietnam.

The COD campaign structure's been shaken up a bit, and all changes are for the better. Don't worry, you'll still be shooting an incredible number of strangers in the face and blowing things up on a regular basis. However, an element of choice has been tentatively sprinkled into the mix. Most of it is of little consequence, but in the context of the series, it's a welcome and refreshing change.

INFO

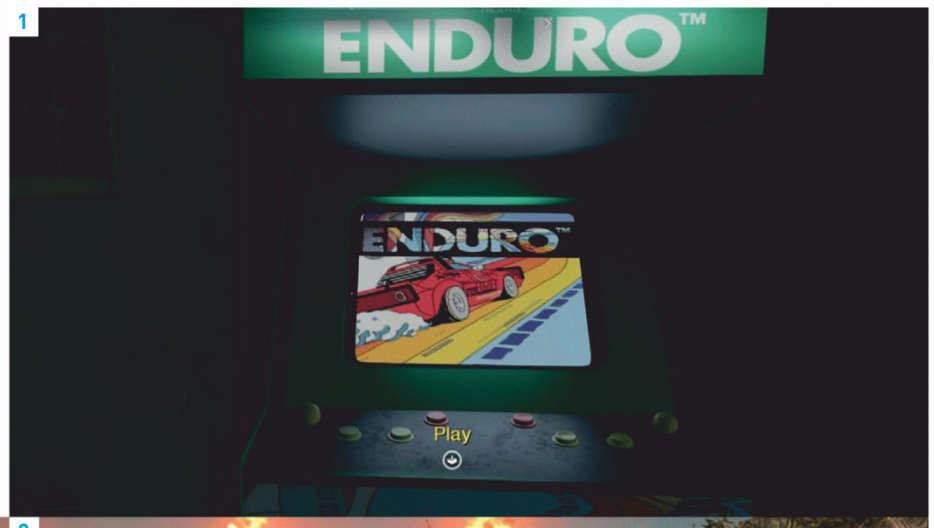
FORMAT PS5, PS4 (reviewed)
PRICE £64.99 (PS5), £59.99 (PS4)
ETA Out now
PUB Activision
DEV Treyarch, Raven Software, Beenox
PLAYERS 1-40
LENGTH 5-6 hours (campaign)
ACCESSIBILITY Subtitles, colourblind modes, optional controller vibration

RUSSIAN AROUND

Things get more interesting elsewhere. Collectibles are nothing new, not even to COD, but here they include pieces of evidence that can help you out in two optional missions. Once you've gathered all the optional evidence, you need to actually *think* to interpret it. Fancy that! Then there are multiple endings, depending on choices that you make. Okay, this is a little misleading – there are basically two endings, with minor details varying to a greater degree in a sequence that follows – but it's a great idea that even results in two completely different final missions (one of which surprised and delighted us).

Backtracking a bit, two missions take bold steps away from the COD formula. One, which seems to count among its influences the PT demo, of all things, is a huge gamble that pays off handsomely. The other, unfortunately, manages to make playing as a KGB double agent rather dull. Which is actually kind of impressive.

> The COD campaign structure's been shaken up a bit, and all changes are for the better.



1 There are retro arcade games to find in the campaign. Yes, you can play them! 2 Ah, now *this* is reassuringly familiar. It's still COD at its heart. 3 "I don't get it. If we live in the free world, why's everything so expensive?"

Multiplayer, the lifeblood of any COD, is good… but inferior to Modern Warfare's online offering. The graphics aren't as sharp, and the maps favour shooting at great distance, two things which combine to give snipers a significant advantage. The new modes, meanwhile, are a mixed bag. VIP Escort, where teams take turns trying to ensure one of their number extracts at one of two locations, is excellent. Modes that try to ape Battlefield, meanwhile, such as Dirty Bomb, are much less successful. This is not a problem unique to Cold War, though.

BACK FROM THE DEAD

Co-op favourite Zombies returns, and it's as fun and panic-inducing as ever. Only one map is available at the time of writing, but more are planned. Then there's the PlayStation timed exclusive Zombie Onslaught, a slightly more traditional horde mode for two players. Dead Ops Arcade is back too, allowing up to four players to enjoy its top-down twin-stick shooting shenanigans. It's not very deep, but it's a nice bonus.

Things can be summed up by a sequence in the campaign set in Berlin-Wall-era Germany. You can sneak past guards entirely, take them out quietly, or go in guns blazing. It's representative of the choice sometimes available, but also of the fact that historical conflict is not afforded any subtlety. Any German in a uniform is fair game for your blade and gun. We're just glad there weren't any postmen around.

There's a surprising number of changes, and most work. With an enjoyable campaign and a generous amount of online content, Cold War deserves a warm reception. **Luke Kemp**

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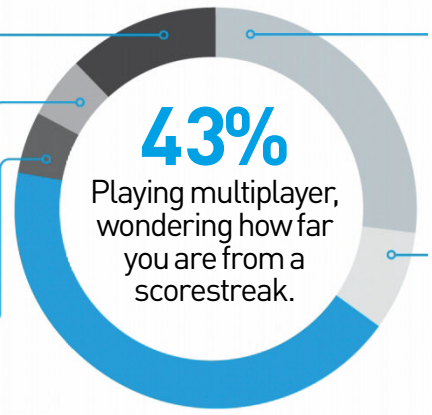
THE OPM BREAKDOWN

WHAT YOU DO IN: COD: BO – COLD WAR



12% Grabbing an enemy for a body shield just because you can.

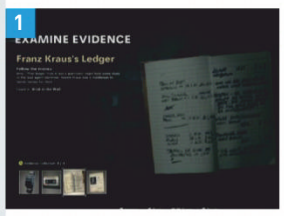
5% Saying "Ooh, I didn't expect that!" while playing the campaign.

5% Choosing dialogue options, wondering if it will make a difference.

27% Popping zombie heads, trying to convince yourself that you're not scared.

8% Making the Red Menace more red with gun and knife.

HOW TO… IDENTIFY THE SUSPECT



1 First, collect all three pieces of evidence pointing to the Operation Red Circus suspect. Look carefully in Brick In The Wall, Echoes Of A Cold War, and Desperate Measures. 2 Compare the dates, places, and pronouns within the evidence against the movements and identities of the suspects. 3 Now, do the mission!

FRIENDS & ENEMIES

RONALD REAGAN
Boss of America. Wrinkly. Not a playable character or shootable enemy.

RUSSELL ADLER
Gruff CIA hardman. Never smiles. Looks a lot like, but probably isn't, Richard Gere.

HELEN PARK
Token English person. Your character finds her familiar, but can't quite remember why…

ALSO ON PLAYSTATION 5

There's 4K and 120fps if you have the TV or monitor for it, otherwise the graphical improvement is slight but makes for a smoother experience online. The fairly weedy guns feel better thanks to the DualSense, but trigger feedback is disappointing for some. Shotguns and rocket launchers lack the oomph of previous games.

IS IT BETTER THAN?

NO
Cold War easily has the better campaign, but it's online play that holds longevity in COD.

YES
2018's Blops 4 is good, but Cold War just has the edge over it – and also a (very good) campaign mode.

NO
A memorable campaign and arguably COD's best online maps. Old Faithful wins.

> The meaty stun-and-finisher-focussed combat is some of the most satisfying in the series.

You can choose Eivor's gender, though it ultimately has no impact on the action.

Assassin's Creed Valhalla

Let me axe you a question

INFO

FORMAT PS5, PS4 (reviewed)
PRICE £59.99
ETA Out now
PUB Ubisoft
DEV Ubisoft Montreal
PLAYERS 1
LENGTH 45+ hours
ACCESSIBILITY Colourblind modes, QTE options, full button remapping, text/icon resizing, menu narration, customisable subtitles and closed captions, separate combat/stealth/exploration difficulty modes

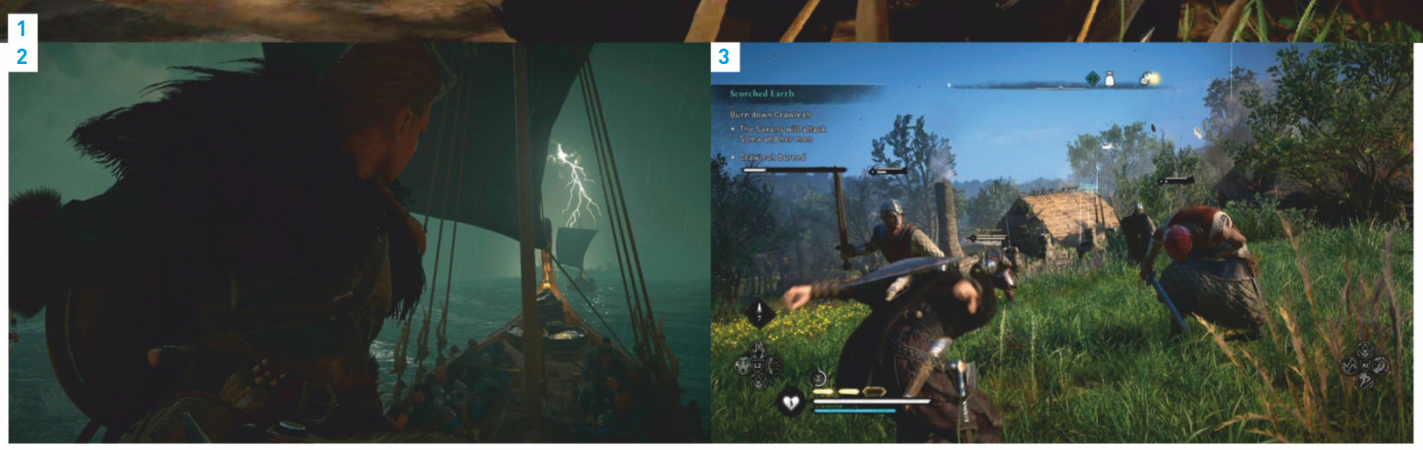
Despite being built on the same bones as Origins and Odyssey, this 872AD-set open-world adventure is surprisingly different from both. Primarily set in England during the Viking invasions, the longboat exemplifies this. There are no ship battles, instead it's your primary mode of transport as you weave through England's rivers.

Many enemy camps are dotted along rivers too, meaning you can either deploy your raiding crew from your boat from the get-go, or call on them should a stealthy approach go wrong. When it does, the meaty stun-and-finisher-focussed combat is some of the most satisfying in the series.

While there are plenty of camps to plunder, they don't litter your map – this isn't checklist central. On default exploration difficulties, vague dots mark points of interest (wealth, artefacts, or mysteries), but you only find out what they are when you get close enough. Your bird's-eye view (a raven this time) is mostly just that too, not an unstoppable enemy marker.

Many 'mysteries' are short but sweet side-quests that feel like dynamic incidents you happen to stumble across. They're often silly: one sees you meeting a band named The Prodigy who sing "smack my bishop" as you wallop a meddling man of the cloth. Others are collectibles that require interaction, from balancing cairn stones to circling henges as you try to line up mysterious markings, or undergoing platforming trials to obtain England's relics. Valhalla is grounded, but still steeped in the mythological, and the spectral presence of Odin lends some legendary mystery. England doesn't have Ancient Greece's vibrancy, but the lighting and fog of its rolling hills is breathtaking and beautiful in its own way.

The story revolves around Viking Eivor, whose parents were brutally killed by a rival Norwegian



1 Fans of Vikings rejoice: Valhalla is pleasingly gory and meaty in its combat. 2 Assaults all feel unique, with set-pieces like bearing down on a fort in a storm. 3 Abilities give you fearsome skills, like the talent to toss a truckload of axes around yourself.

king. Shacking up with friends of the family, a king and his son, Sigmund, you learn the murderer was in league with the Order Of The Ancients. Sigmund, having travelled the world, brings two members of the Hidden Ones back to Norway, and they fill him in on what will one day evolve into the Templar-Assassin rivalry. Soon enough, Sigmund's gaze is drawn to the Four Kingdoms of England: Northumbria, East Anglia, Wessex, and, at the centre, Mercia, where you begin.

Your goal is to forge alliances so your settlement, Ravensthorpe, can thrive. Each territory has its own Saga taking a few hours, and it's often up to you which order you do them in, unlocking access to more as you progress. Suggested power levels guide you along a recommended path, but these feel less strict than in previous games, aided by your raiding crew having your back near rivers and the early Advanced Assassination skill allowing you to kill enemies of a higher level than you with one hit of your hidden blade by completing a quick-time prompt.

This does mean the pacing's occasionally odd. You might have your understanding of the world and perhaps all of Assassin's Creed lore shattered in one saga, only to end up having to play matchmaker between a quarrelling lord and lady in another to progress the story. Aside from your own clan, you don't get much sense of the lives of ordinary people, being more concerned with those who rule. Maybe that's not something any Assassin's Creed has dealt with particularly well, but only in Valhalla do multiple missions revolve around burning down villagers' homes, so it feels like the opportunity to address it in depth has been missed. The ending peters out too, requiring busywork clearing what felt optional before to resolve dangling plot threads.

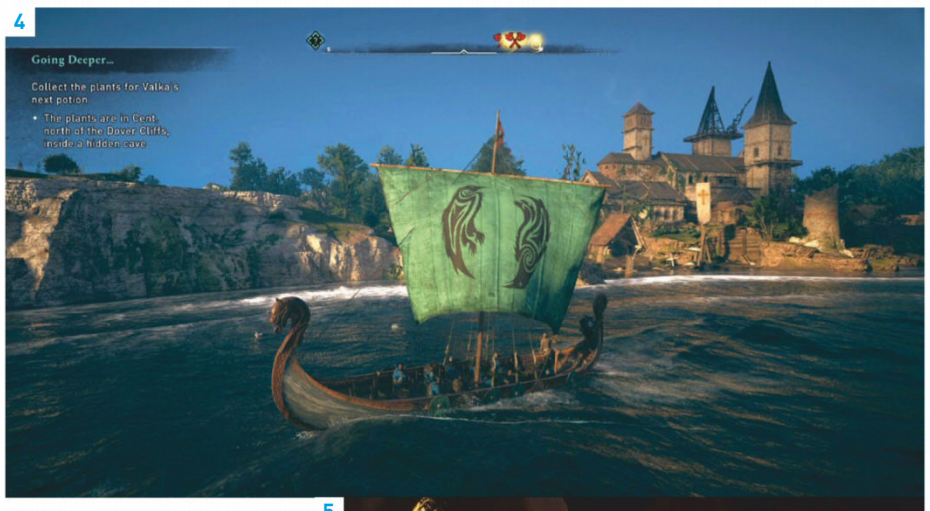
Assaults on castles have you busting through defences with an army at your back.

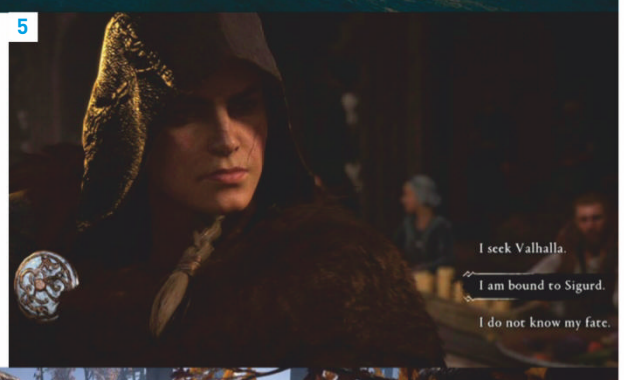
Many missions culminate in assaults on castles or camps, which have you busting through defences with an army at your back. Even these manage to feel substantially different each time, and are open to a wide range of approaches, from getting stuck into the fray to parkouring your way over walls and opening barricades from the inside – an evolution of the fort-storming activity we haven't seen since Black Flag and Rogue. That said sometimes Valhalla is buggier than you'd expect: I experienced several hard crashes, often during raids, and broken AI that I had to reset to fix, alongside missing button prompts, and twirling boats.

LOOTY CALLS

Raids mean treasure, and eradication of bloat extends to your inventory. Gear drops are now obtained from special chests or as quest rewards, and have unique effects. Essentially anything you find will be worth keeping if you upgrade it enough. While I played around with new pieces as I found them, I mostly stuck to Eivor's starting axe, which has sentimental value, and the first armour set I obtained (all black, *very* in vogue in 872AD).

Like Kassandra/Alexios in Odyssey, Eivor is given a





4 Rivers, the original A-roads of England. Expect to put in a lot of sailing time. 5 Choices can have a dramatic effect on the story. 6 There's less handholding on enemy placement, so reconnoitre thoroughly.

list of Order Of The Ancients members to take out, though the story trims quite a few of the branches when you travel to big cities like Lundun. These populous settings hearken back to the more city-centric earlier years of the series, and it's great to feel like you're tracking down specific ne'er-do-wells.

SPACE RAIDER

Ironically, given the series as a whole shrugged off urban settings in favour of wider open worlds, the city areas are some of the most refreshing in the game. But the game does have a real issue with interiors. While there are many forts, castles, and churches, the act of infiltrating an interior space often feels limited and unsatisfying, frequently depending on finding keys to open doors or ways to smash barricades, which becomes repetitive. It's frustrating as it's something the series mastered in the Unity/Syndicate duology.

Social stealth also returns in 'distrust' areas – a middle ground between places where you can travel freely and restricted areas. In distrust areas you can cloak up, blend in by sitting on benches or wiping tables, lure drunks to create distractions, or walk among similarly hooded monks. It's great to see this return, but it's again overshadowed by how it attempts to reinvent the wheel. In the fiddly interior platforming and limited social stealth we found ourselves missing Ezio's more precise controls and ease of stealth. Given his games are about ten years old now, that's not a great feeling.

When Valhalla is at its best, it evolves series mechanics. And when you're cruising down river, about to blow your raiding horn, there's nothing quite like it. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**

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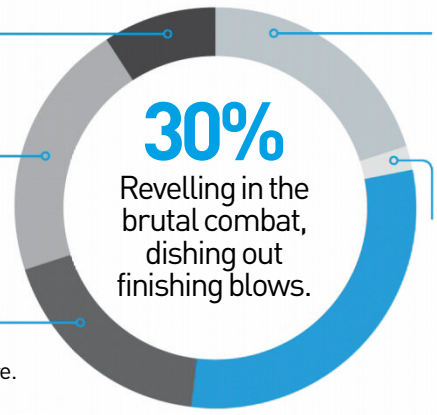
THE OPM BREAKDOWN

WHAT YOU DO IN: AC VALHALLA



9% Screaming while trying to balance cairns at certain viewpoints.

21% Trying to stay undetected before blowing your horn to unleash chaos.

18% Grinning when you spot a reference to AC lore. There's a lot here.

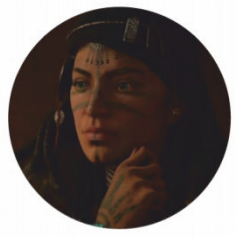
20% Sailing around listening to Birna recount her bawdy shagging stories.

2% Trick or treating in Glowecestre-scire dressed as the Mari Lwyd.

FRIENDS & ENEMIES

ALVIS
He teaches you the rap-battle-like flyting, raising your charisma for dialogue choices.

RANDVI
Keeping Ravensthorpe in order, she helps you decide which territories to take on.

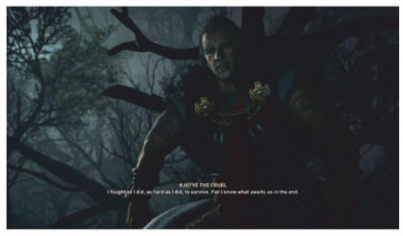


VALKA
Build her hut and she'll brew potions to send you on world-hopping vision quests.

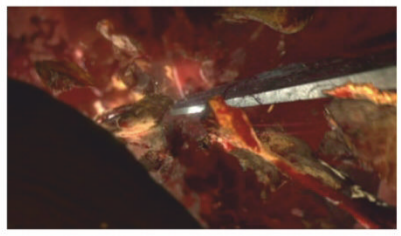
ALSO ON PLAYSTATION 5

Visually it's crisper, and you'll definitely notice the higher framerate in combat, which is lovely to see. But it doesn't make that much difference when exploring muddy old England. Use of Activities is limited, as is the DualSense, and loading still takes a while. If you've got it, great, but don't hold out for the PS5 version.

LOVING/HATING



DEATH METAL
Your targets' death monologues return with a death metal twist. Bodies claw at them, and one dude is impaled by a tree. We love it.

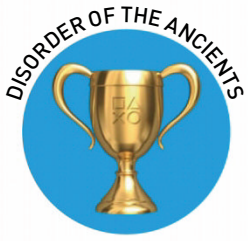


FINISH HIM
But we didn't need the Mortal-Kombat-style killcam, which zooms in to show bone crunching under your hidden blade. Ew.

TROPHY CABINET

BRONZE
Find a big slope of snow and slide 150 metres down it for this. Wheee!

SILVER
Fully upgrade your settlement's level for the ultimate homecoming.



GOLD
Track down and assassinate all 55 of your nasty proto-Templar targets.

Ray tracing options heap depth and atmosphere on what were already visually impressive scenes.

Observer: System Redux

A cyberpunk adventure worth augmenting?

INFO

FORMAT PS5
PRICE £24.99
ETA Out now
PUB Bloober Team
DEV Bloober Team, Anshar Studios
PLAYERS 1
LENGTH 8+ hours
ACCESSIBILITY Optional vibration, head bobbing, and chromatic aberration, skippable hacking minigames, options for fine-tuning subtitles and crosshair

Detective Daniel Lazarski – posthumously played by Rutger Hauer – isn't any old copper. If you can't or won't remember a crime, the authorities will call him in to traipse through your memories. While out on patrol one night, a message from his estranged son lures him to a run-down block of flats. After discovering a mutilated body in an abandoned apartment, Lazarski is prepared to go off-book to get to the bottom of this nightmare.

This electric dream debuted on PS4, and now developer Bloober Team has given it a graphical update and reincorporated cut story content for its rerelease on PS5. As the apartment building goes into an unexplained lockdown and the tenants wring their hands about the possible resurgence of a recent plague, the timing may feel a little unfortunate. But this version improves what was already one of the most compelling cyberpunk dystopias on PlayStation in recent years. That said, many of the original's blemishes persist as well.

POPPING UP, SHUTTING DOWN

With much of the apartment complex open to explore early on, you get the most out of this mystery by going door-to-door and staring at doorbell video screens (you can tell it's a dystopia because almost every tenant has one of the blasted things). These conversations are as essential to Observer's world-building as walking through the holographic halls of the complex – though, as in the original release, the atmosphere so strongly set up here is undercut by clumsy stealth sections and loud, jumpy scares later on.

Early exploration seamlessly integrates much of the new story content. From stomach-turning shrines in the complex's dingiest corners to a pokey VR-porn studio that leads you to some dodgy dealings in the basement, there's a griminess to this world that makes us hope a hacker never figures out how to make these walls talk. All of that is to say the original's edginess has been whacked up to 11, and that may well turn off some would-be investigators.

This rerelease offers optional ray tracing allowing for realistic reflections. When switched on, it's a largely smooth experience save for occasional dropped frames. As little of the building is well-lit beyond the glow of neon strip lights, the effect is subtle, with the aforementioned new areas benefiting the most. However visual distortion effects, influenced by the mental state of Lazarski and those he jacks into, muddies otherwise impressive art direction. Not only that but it proved especially obnoxious over a long play session and gave this reviewer an eye-strain headache. The future certainly looks bright, but I'm going to go and lie down in a dark room for a bit.

> The original's edginess has been whacked up to 11, and that may turn off some investigators.

A compelling game given new dimension. New wrinkles in the tale justify revisiting, but the more abrasive parts of its personality are wearing thin three years on. **Jess Kinghorn**

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INFO **FORMAT** PS5 **PRICE** £49.99 **ETA** Out now
PUB Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment **DEV** NetherRealm Studios **PLAYERS** 1-2

Mortal Kombat 11 Ultimate

Some breaks don't need fixing

Any sense of déjà vu you'd expect to get when replaying MK11 on PS5 is jettisoned the moment the action kicks in. Running at 60fps in 4K gives this fighter a new lease of life. The real question is, can you stomach seeing Cassie Cage skewered through the throat in pin-sharp 4K?

This isn't a trivial question. Mortal Kombat 11 Ultimate is so sharp you can see every tiny, shiny detail. At times the game looks photoreal and comes close to the ambition that drove the original game to use its 'realistic' digitised sprites. So when that bone-breaking gut punch lands, or new boy Rambo shoves an arrow through your character's jaw, you'll struggle not to wince.

Not content to make everything look like a remake of Big Trouble In Little China by Blumhouse, NeverRealms' fighter puts PS5's SSD to work so there's near-instant loading. Going from the Home menu to the game and into a fight takes seconds. Rounds breeze along, ensuring the steep learning curve is massaged as you can start a new fight faster than you can muster a frustrated *blorp!*.

PERFECT PUNCH

There are plenty of reasons to keep dipping into MK11's PS5 brawls, too. This Ultimate Edition features every piece of DLC released since launch. That's around 32 packs of characters and costumes, and includes the impressive Aftermath story expansion.

> Going from the Home menu to the game and into a fight take seconds. Rounds breeze along.

Longevity comes from MK11's detailed 'Kustom' options that enable you to create your own fighter. These go beyond simple cosmetic upgrades and includes combo and moveset creation.

Everything comes with the caveat that this is all old content, and fans have had two years to perfect their online moves. So be warned, accepting a challenge will result in swears and many face-skewers.

It's the MK11 you know and maybe love but it looks like a new game on PS5. Running at 60fps in 4K gives this brawler a new lease of life. A must for newcomers. **Ian Dean**

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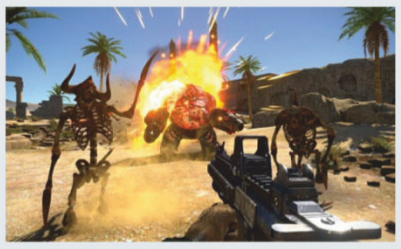
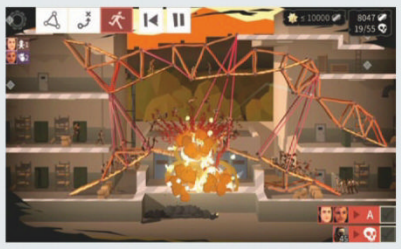
THREE TO PLAY

PSN games you might have missed

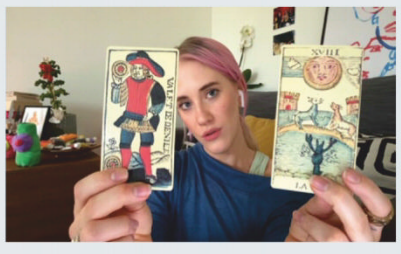
New games are constantly popping up on the **PS Store** to surprise all of us. While some are the gaming equivalent of an '80s straight-to-video movie, others are genuinely worth seeking out and playing. How do you know which is which? That's where we come in...



Sometimes you just want to shotgun a pumpkin-headed, chainsaw-wielding hillbilly in the head. And for that urge we have the **Serious Sam Collection** (Devolver Digital, £24.99). This one-hit bundle brings Serious Sam HD: The First Encounter, Serious Sam HD: The Second Encounter, and Serious Sam 3: BFE to PS4. There's little subtlety to this series of shooters, which call back to the heady days of classic Doom, Quake, and Duke Nukem. Serious may be the name of the game, but it's far from the spirit of it. For maximum mayhem, we recommend jettisoning the story mode immediately in favour of running riot in the online deathmatch. This collection reveals a shooter series that rarely evolved, but fills a gap when all you want to do is headshot angry aliens.



There's a little more innovation in **Bridge Constructor: The Walking Dead** (HeadUp Games, £11.99) which manages to crowbar two franchises that really shouldn't co-exist into one surprisingly fun package. Like a Miley Cyrus and Leo Sayer mashup, you may vomit a little into your mouth at the idea of a bridge-building puzzle game hugging it out with AMC's long-in-the-tooth zombie series. But somehow the combo works. There's a casual, bizarro-Lemmings-like appeal to building complex physics-based traps to smush the zombie horde. Hardly essential but fun for five minutes while you wait for Amazon to track down your missing PS5.



More of a traditional guilty pleasure, rom-com FMV game **Five Dates** (Wales Interactive, £9.99) feels like it's been made for our Oscar, and quite possibly only for Oscar. You play lonely heart Vinny on a mission to cruise a new dating app for a perfect match. (He's male, they're female; this is strictly straightsville.) The cast of 'comedic' characters includes a pink-haired self-defining quirky vegan hipster, a fitness influencer, and a stressed nurse. If the idea of 'Gogglebox meets every Drew Barrymore film from the 1990s' appeals to you then a) you need a new DVD collection and b) you need a date with Oscar. The cast of Five Dates, at least, are having fun.

Godfall

All that glitters may not be gold, but it can still be a lot of fun

INFO

FORMAT PS5
PRICE £69.99
ETA Out now
PUB Gearbox Publishing
DEV Counterplay Games
PLAYERS 1-3
LENGTH 8 hours (campaign), open-ended (Dreamstones mode)
ACCESSIBILITY Adjustable letterbox back-shading on subtitles; adjustable aim and lock-on assists, and HUD detail

Arriving with a swoosh of glitter and delivering a world built from those foil wrappers left over in a Quality Street tin, Counterplay Games' first release is an extravagant, camp, but shallow brawler. It's commendable that every box-tick feature you want from a PS5 debut is in here, but you can only smash so many sparkly space knights in the face before you start wistfully wishing for something *more*.

The mad god Macros is on the verge of ascending, which threatens the fabric of the universe. He's gathered a rag-tag group of allies to defend his tower as he takes the Rites Of Ascension to become, well, something the game never makes clear. It's bad, though. You and two friends are the last of the Valorian knights, all that remains of the order, hulking armour-clad, massive-weapon-wielding warriors dedicated to protecting the world of Aperion. It's your typical loopy game lore.

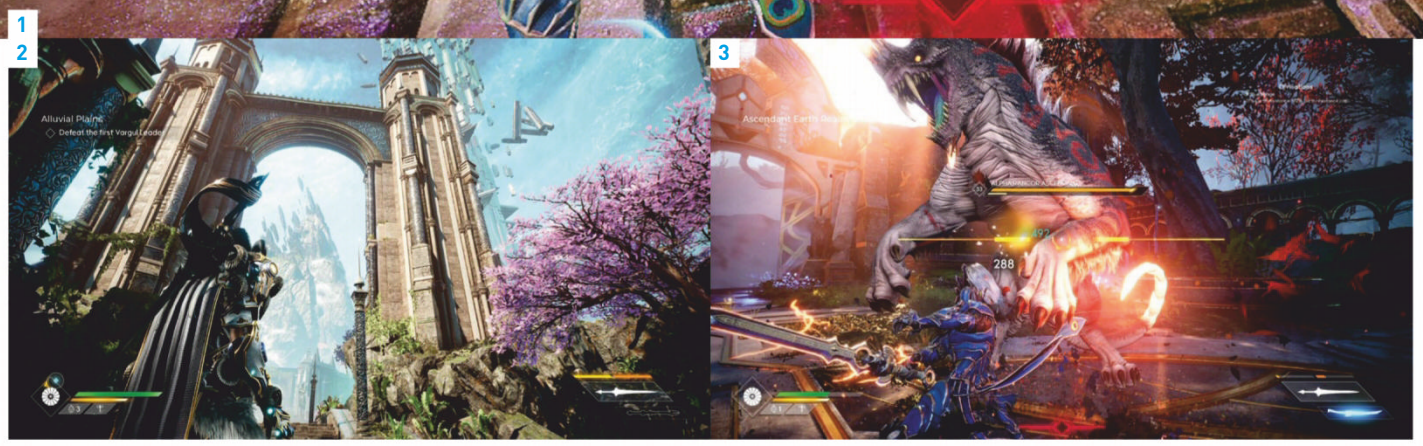
The setup is clear: work your way up through the central tower and explore three core realms to reach Macros' throne room and wrap a dirty great big sword over his head. Between you and a safe Aperion are hordes of Macros-minions and a roster of bosses that could have been brushed off the design docs of Monster Hunter: World. It's a steamlined premise that permits the combat to breathe but lacks any emotional footprint to keep you motivated. And therein lies the rub.

OLD HACK

The hacking and slashing is fun and open to experimentation. Light attacks are on R1 and heavy hits on R2, with your shield on L1 used to block and parry weapon and projectile attacks. Going deeper, you're able to 'rev' heavy attacks by holding R2, feeling the feedback in the DualSense for better timing. Landing hits on enemies fuels

It may be shallow but Godfall is one of PS5's best-looking launch games, including ray-traced environments.

Between you and a safe Aperion are hordes of Macros-minions and a roster of bosses.



1 Regardless of how repetitive it is, Godfall always puts on a show. 2 Resolution mode features more detailed textures and longer draw distances, but a drop in framerate. Godfall is best played in Performance mode. 3 Missions vary, but the ones you'll head back to are the Hunt – tackle mini-boss beasts for rare loot.

the Archon meter, which offers a burst of carefree chaos. Two specials, Northern and Southern Weapon Techniques, enable you to beam into enemies for easy damage when powered up.

Godfall's squirt of special sauce is in the blend of weapons (hammers, longswords, polearms, and so on) and Valorplates (craftable armour that comes with pre-set buffs). Mixing and matching weapons and Valorplates, along with charms, rings, and more shiny accoutrements than an '80s glam rocker, offers new attack sets and a chance to deliver bonus afflictions.

Going deeper, you can make use of Rampage by stringing together multiple attacks, manually target weak spots, and employ Soulshatter to inflict extra damage if you land a light-heavy combo on a staggered enemy. At times it can feel overwhelming, and when you're surrounded on all sides by half a dozen enemies you can fall into fumbling at the controls.

Everything moves at a frightening pace, and once mastered the basics are a mish-mash of haphazard luck and skill. There is a degree of strategy, however, as enemy types gather to form puzzle-like cabals to overcome. Shield warriors need to be attacked with a running shield barge, sword fighters are dealt with by using parries, other enemies succumb to flurries of fast hits and the Soulshatter technique. It's *very* God Of War, and as fights become a rhythmic blend of dodges, parries, combos, and space-saving specials it's easy to warm to the game's idiosyncrasies.

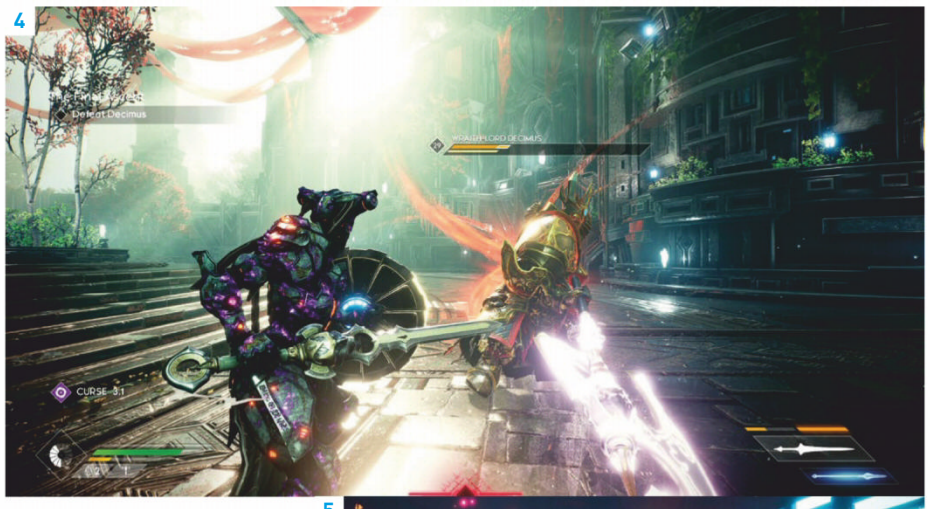
Fights become a rhythmic blend of dodges, parries, combos, and space-saving specials.

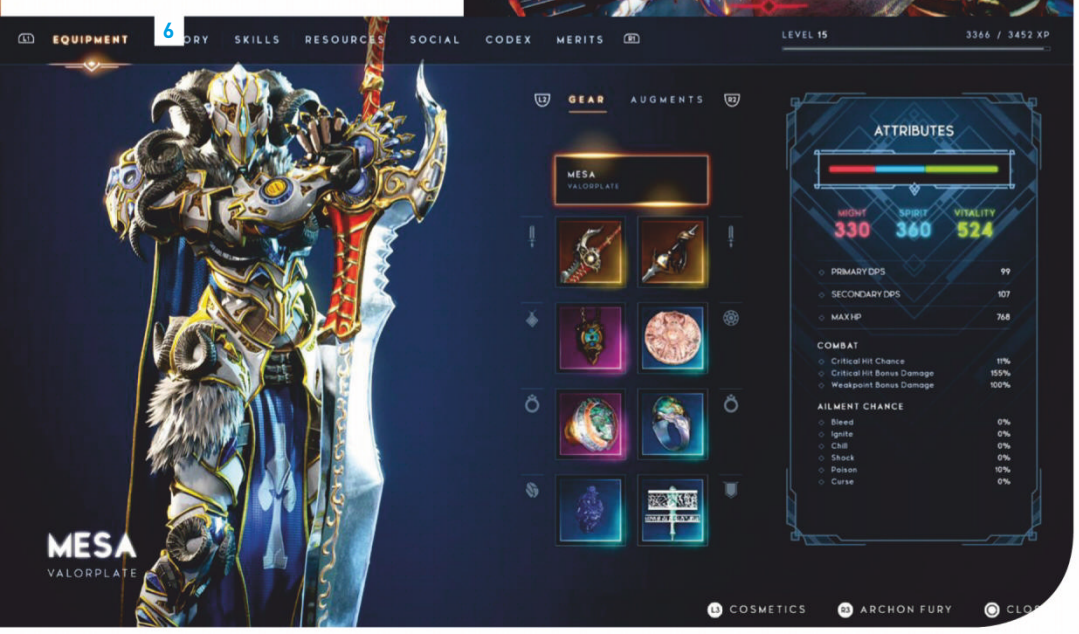
SHINE ON

Godfall's next-gen-ness comes from its pace, and the fact it's throwing every item on your wishlist at you: 4K at 60fps with ray tracing and 4K textures across two modes: Performance and Resolution. In action it's a barrage of gold-plated, sparkly, camp nonsense. Every attack bursts with visual oomph and an explosion of fluorescent fireworks, which can, on occasion, lead to stuttering.

The game screams 'LOOK AT ME', and does so to mask the fact you're not really doing much. Its Destiny-like grind demands you replay the same three environments many times over in the hunt for the resources and XP you need to upgrade your space knight. There's Electrum, Aetheric, and Jasper (why do I feel the urge to gamble with some crypto-currency?) that can all be fed into your character. The goal is to reach a level that allows you to hold your own against one of the many mini-bosses, gateway duels to unlock the end-of-realm main event. These creative beasts and epic knights are always a highlight. I chortled quietly at the guy who brought a bucket to our fight – then he pinned my golden boy to the floor and poured burning hot coals over him.

Problems arise as that enjoyable combat system begins to creak from the burden of its many buffs and upgrades. Weapons, gear, and Valorplates feature attributes that can inflict time-effect damage, poison, random effects, and more on





4 Mastering counters and parries is crucial when facing powerful enemies. 5 Bosses are creative and all require different tactics to defeat. 6 Like in Destiny you can upgrade and tailor your weapons and gear – but it's a muddle.

enemies. Everything feeds into one another to stack buff upon buff [*Fnar* – Mim] too, creating a dense meta-game.

YOUR DESTINY

For the most part you can easily chew through the oncoming waves of enemies in the campaign but once Macros is defeated and the endgame Dreamstones mode is unlocked, along with the fourth realm, you need a deeper understanding of Godfall's many systems.

In Dreamstones mode you're presented with three missions to complete, with the final one a duel against one of the campaign's reworked kingpins. The previous missions, if completed properly, unlock a boss's weaknesses. You have to tailor your Valorplate with this detail in mind. While the game's bright and colourful, you can feel like you're fumbling in the dark to understand exactly what is happening behind all the number-crunching.

This lack of clarity is where Godfall diverges from Destiny and could leave its community scrambling to understand why they should continue to troop back into Aperion. But there is comfort to be found in the core combat loop. Dreamstones mode does deliver some incredibly challenging missions. Familiar bosses you dispatched with ease in the campaign are now nightmare reincarnations of their former selves. New methods of attack are one thing, but how about taking on three evolved bosses at once? Put your big-boy golden pants on and enjoy the spectacle, because that's all Godfall has.

Repetitive, Godfall isn't the Destiny-with-swords we'd hoped for. But there's fun to be had from its core combat, Dreamstones mode, and next-gen visual wallop. Ian Dean

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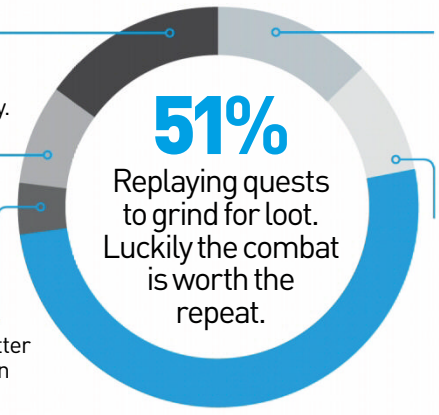
THE OPM BREAKDOWN

WHAT YOU DO IN: GODFALL



15% Tinkering with the many stats and not fully understanding why.

8% Wishing it did a little more with the DualSense controller.

4% Suffering the odd framerate stutter when *everything* on screen explodes.

13% Gawping at the endless, beautiful ray-traced reflections.

9% Heading back into Dreamstones mode to unlock more epic loot.

THE FIRST EIGHT HOURS

1 After trawling through the Earth realm we make it to the Water one, which is a colour bomb. 2 We've replayed quests, looted the three realms and are nearing our fight with Macros. But what do all these stats do? 3 With the universe saved, we head to the fourth realm and Dreamstones mode, a loot-hungry boss rush.

HOW TO... EARN LOADSALOOT

Head to the Tower Of Trials. Ascend the Central Tower collecting keys in survival waves. The faster you go, the more keys you win. Then through to one of three doors for a challenge. Complete a timed event (survival, boss duel, etc) and you get chests to unlock with those keys.

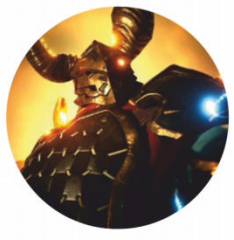
3D AUDIO: SOUNDS OF THE FUTURE

Though Godfall does the minimum with DualSense, when it comes to audio the game delivers. Inside your headphones every strike of your blade pings, but it's the tinkling of wind chimes around you that sells the game's sense of place.

FRIENDS & ENEMIES

SOBEKU
The giant croc-boss can turn invisible and summon mini-crocs to fight you.

BLACK TIDE ENFORCER
His projectiles are easy to counter but can you beat two at once?



NYAK SUMMONER
He fills the arena with electricity and exploding drones.

On PS5 NBA 2K21 feels like a step above its PS4 counterpart.

UPGRADED FOR PS5

NBA 2K21

Rebounding in style on PlayStation 5

INFO

FORMAT PS5
PRICE £59.99
ETA Out now
PUB 2K Sports
DEV Visual Concepts
PLAYERS 1-4
LENGTH 8-10 hours (MyCareer)
ACCESSIBILITY Everything is game-focussed, including Pro Stick, AI, passing, and shot adjustment

Foam fingers have never been so much fun. As our player sets up to take a penalty shot, the camera shakes with the stamping feet of the crowd, and behind the basket our gaze is drawn to the masses shaking their giant foam fingers in anger. It's unsettlingly real on PS5 in 4K.

On Sony's latest console NBA 2K21 features a roster of fresh features that drags the game up by the laces of its Air Jordans. The AI-driven crowd and arena detail, viewed through the dynamic new Rail Cam, really do get you into the action. The camera sits just behind and slightly above the front row, so the heads of fans are in your eyeline. As you play, you can see them get excited as you drive the lane or frustrated as you miss a three-pointer. Behind the court you can see vendors selling hot dogs, adding to the realism.

On PS5 realism comes from compounding small details – one player nervously picks at his nails, another rolls his eyes to the arena gods at a foul call, others shake down and flex their muscles, call out to rivals, fist-bump, and grit their teeth.

HOOP DREAMS

The same attention has been levelled at NBA 2K21's on-court action, too. This game has hit the gym and returned to the courts with improved player movement, AI-controlled animation, and more responsive controls. You can now twist and turn your player in mid-air, for example, to spin from opponents. A new meter offers greater control over shot pace and height – though it is fiddly amid the tussle of a match, it points to a depth and manual control dedicated fans are going to adore.

You can *feel* the action on PS5, too. Try running with a tired player and the DualSense's R2 trigger tightens, so it's harder to make them do what you want. Likewise the presentation detailed earlier only lands because loading times are less than a second – cutting to incidental animation, courtside reports, and more works because it's instantaneous.

> It points to a depth and manual control dedicated fans are going to adore.

Behind all of these swish additions it's the choice-led MyCareer that impresses. Now you can choose how to go from high school to the NBA, in a cinematic story mode with some surprises for fans. The addition of City mode, an expanded version of the standard online Neighborhoods, adds a much larger path to play and upgrade through than on PS4.

While we love this PS5 edition, the caveat Ben highlighted in his review (OPM#181, 7/10) applies: the game is *obsessed* with selling you clobber. If 2K can wean itself off this obsession, future releases will be a slam dunk.

This PS5 edition offers new ideas and swish next-gen presentation. It looks, plays, and feels a step above PS4 but is held back by a similar need to open your wallet. **Ian Dean**

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INFO **FORMAT** PS4, **PRICE** £24.99 **ETA** Out now **PUB** Microids **DEV** PlayMagic Ltd

XIII

Bourne again?

Nothing says 'Gen-X detached irony' more than David Duchovny deadpanning through retro-chic action sequences while Adam West exaggerates every last word he's asked to deliver. It's 2003 and Ubisoft has delivered one of the year's most unusual shooters.

Well, it's now 2020 and Duchovny and West remain but oh dear, the pages of this comic-book adaptation have yellowed and faded from glory. It's not that the ideas are bad. Or that the newly-textured cel-shading is an eyesore (it's not, though purists argue it's spoiled the game's most distinctive feature). The problem is XIII is a lazy remaster. The AI is dumb enough to not see you when you're under a guard's nose and then overly sensitive that you'll be spotted from across the map, even when hidden. There are occasional game-breaking bugs that force restarts. Visual corruption occurs regularly as models warp and enemies drop like mannequins frozen in position. You can be shot *through* walls by unseen soldiers. On many levels XIII is a disaster.

Yet we play to the credits, and even hit restart to track down missing dossiers.[1] Something draws us back. The 'Jason Bourne meets The Fugitive' setup perhaps?[2] Waking with amnesia on a beach, the number XIII tattooed onto our hero's chest, the race is on to discover his identity, save the President, and uncover a conspiracy. The premise *is* a good one, even if it doesn't feel exactly fresh. You're free-ish to tackle missions head-on or find stealthier routes, too. A physics-based grapple hook adds some skill to exploration. By modern standards, however, even these ideas feel limited – shooting is functional, freedom is illusionary, and those bugs sap away at XIII's credibility. Ironically, this played better in 2003. **Ian Dean**

3 PlayStation.

FOOTNOTES 1 Hidden dossiers reveal the full story so you're compelled to suffer some more. **2** The Lalo Schifrin-inspired soundtrack is XIII's best asset.

INFO **FORMAT** PS5 **PRICE** £39.99 **ETA** Out now **PUB** Team17 **DEV** Ghost Town Games

Overcooked: All You Can Eat

Talk about stuffed!

This is a series that needs no introduction but for those new to the kitchen: you and up to three other sous chefs can jump into increasingly silly culinary conundrums in either local or online multiplayer. This definitive rerelease collects both mainline games as well as a heaped second helping of all DLC, plus a few new sweet treats besides.

Presented as one menu, everything is playable at 60fps in 4K resolution[1] (the original Overcooked has been remade in the Overcooked 2 engine). In all that's more than 200 courses to chew on. There's a plethora of accessibility options, from colour blindness options and a dyslexic-friendly font to the ability to make rounds longer.

New and exclusive to this compilation is The Ever Peckish Rises. Found along with all other DLC under Extra Trimmings, it tells a tale of culinary adventure spread across seven increasingly improbable kitchen setups. It doesn't exactly reinvent the cheese wheel but offers more of that irresistible umami gameplay loop.

Now, we've got to be honest: it's a lavish spread that our waistbands strain at the mere sight of. If you've already sampled the delights of this series one way or another, rebuying content you already own is understandably a hard sell.[2] But if you've never embraced the heat of the kitchen, allowed it to burn bridges between you and your loved ones, on the couch or online: you owe it to yourself to add this tasty treat to your PS5 library. **Jess Kinghorn**

8 PlayStation.

FOOTNOTES 1 Not that these cartoony shenanigans needed it. Do you really need 4K to experience flinging burned soup in the bin, or lobbing chicken at a friend's head? **2** Though that price for this much game hardly leaves a bitter taste in the mouth. This could keep the whole family busy for months, if you have enough controllers.

INFO **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £49.99 **ETA** Out now **PUB** Square Enix **DEV** Square Enix, Indieszero

Kingdom Hearts: Melody Of Memory

Full of sax and violins

Stuffed with tunes from the Kingdom Hearts RPGs, from the very first game to the more recent Kingdom Hearts III, Melody Of Memory is a rhythm game that's meant to be a celebration of the Disney/Square Enix mashup series.

Rather than just putting button prompts on screen, developers Square Enix and Indieszero came up with a great idea to make matching rhythms feel reminiscent of Kingdom Hearts' action combat. During the main campaign, Sora, Donald, and Goofy enter different Disney worlds and run down a musical stave, fending off Heartless that appear before them to the beat. You control a team member by pressing ⊗, R1, or L1,[1] but in most cases it's enough to use one button for all melee attacks. Sometimes Sora also needs to cast a quick spell or glide in the air to collect a row of notes.[2]

Mindful that this could be the first rhythm game many Kingdom Hearts fans play, Melody Of Memory poses little challenge, even on its most difficult setting. This makes a lot of well-meant options go to waste, such as health and synthesis items intended to help make the going less tough or the option to add enemies to achieve the opposite. Despite this, the wealth of songs and a fun co-op mode make it worth a look.

This isn't a game for hunting high scores or even for getting your hands on new lore (you get about 20 minutes of new, low-stakes cutscenes), but it is a good fit for lovers of Kingdom Hearts music or young players who are usually put off other rhythm games by the high difficulty. **Malindy Hetfeld**

7 PlayStation.

FOOTNOTES 1 MOM also features boss battles with a slightly different control scheme. **2** Kairi is stylised as the hero, but she mostly retells the plot of past games.

> The core of Demon's Souls doesn't feel at all tired a little over ten years on.

Honey I shrunk the adventurer. You always feel small in the face of Boletaria, every inch detailed.

GOLD AWARD
PlayStation Official Magazine - UK

Demon's Souls

The Old One reawakens after one incredible, loving makeover

INFO

FORMAT PS5
PRICE £69.99
ETA Out now
PUB PlayStation Studios
DEV Bluepoint Games, FromSoftware
PLAYERS 1-6
LENGTH 19 hours
ACCESSIBILITY Vibration, subtitle, trigger, and motion blur customisation, aiming toggle/hold option, and colourblind modes

We've been here before. Boletaria, smothered under a blanket of fog, demons unleashed to reap souls for the awakened Old One. But we've never seen it looking quite like this. Bluepoint's incredibly faithful remake breathes fresh life into the PS3 original, not just turning it into one of the best-looking games we've ever seen, but using sumptuous soundscapes and the DualSense controller to create an immersive dark fantasy like no other.

The core of Demon's Souls doesn't feel at all tired a little over ten years on. And it's a core Bluepoint has remained faithful to with every cautious, shield-raised step forward building the remaster. It might look prettier, and quality-of-life changes and minor tweaks have been made, but the soul of Souls is still intact. As is standard these days, you've got Performance and Cinematic modes to choose from. Performance runs at 60fps and is the default option here, and we'd recommend it, as it's eyeball-poppingly good.

CORPSE PARTY

Every stage, no matter how challenging, is a joy to play through, because the mechanics still feel tight enough that the game feels fair (except for the Swamp Of Sorrows, of course). New rolling mechanics are where Bluepoint has deviated the most from the original, allowing for eight-direction dodging. Otherwise, though, much is as it was, right down to enemy placement, perhaps a testament to the strength of that original design.

Some of the cheesier strategies you can use to gain an advantage are still effective, from abusing backstabs to packing huge amounts of healing items, and even using the thief ring to bamboozle bosses into losing track of you so you can poison them from a distance. Bluepoint has respected

1 Fan-favourite the Flamelurker comes alive on PS5. 2 Rescuing NPCs often means they'll sell you things in the Nexus later on. Mate's discount? 3 The character models and animations are vastly improved in this beautifully detailed PS5 remake.

the original enough to let it shine, mainly adding things like extra armour sets and new weapons. Even sticking to what I know, there's a huge variety of builds and weapons to play around with. Magic is still somewhat overpowered (at the cost of defence), and the dev's really gone to town on making it feel that way. Charging up a fireball has serious weight; it hums in the DualSense's haptics. What's more, the way it lights the environment as it soars forward is fantastic. While the cadence to combat is familiar, both sword and sorcery have a satisfying extra feeling of heft.

As before, Boletaria is filled with threats that'll happily cut you to ribbons if you get too comfortable. The very first enemies you encounter, felled with a couple of quick swipes (light attacks on R1, heavy on R2), can take you out if you let them get off their flurry of attacks. And pick up a glowing piece of loot from a nameless corpse without checking the nearby corner and you might find yourself punted off a ledge to your doom. But now the excellent sound design can help with your awareness, as can the humming from the DualSense's haptics (you'll feel the thrum of a firebomb an enemy lights just before they throw it, for instance). Still, for the most part the onus is on you not to die.

While the cadence to combat is familiar, both sword and sorcery have an extra feeling of heft.

SOUL SURVIVOR

As you learn the stages and the way enemies move you'll come to master combat and work to your own strengths – when to risk a parry, when to use your shield, when to deftly dodge. But, that doesn't mean Demon's Souls doesn't know when to punish you. Boletaria's foggy curse is one of death and rebirth, but you won't hop back into your decaying body easily once you revive. Instead, you'll be trapped in soul form, with your maximum health brutally cut down to half (or three-quarters if you slip on a cling ring as one of your two buff-providing rings). Thanks to your PS5's SSD, though, you're right back into the action almost as soon as the now-iconic phrase "you died" fades onto the screen. Jumping back into the action is less grating.

As punishing and gruelling as some areas of the game can be, you're rarely stuck; progress comes naturally. As soon as you've made it past the game's first area and obtained your first demon soul, you're free to take on the five worlds in any order you wish. Most are split into three discrete levels that flow one into another. It's almost bite-sized. They can be accessed through The Nexus, a large hub area where characters you meet will gather, and the grubby-footed Maiden In Black who tends to the shrine will level you up in exchange for souls you collect from your foes (die and they drop where you fall, although you can scoop them up if you make your way back without dying).

Each area has its own World Tendency, swinging between white and black depending on how well you do, with new secrets unlocked at the extremities of each. Even when you feel comfortable with a stage, you'll have the sense

4 Let a Mind Flayer paralyse you and it'll suck your face off faster than a Frube. 5 Bosses vary, but they'll all give your behind a clench workout. 6 Customisation options remain as deep as they were in the original.

it's holding something back, mysterious secrets you'll never truly be able to understand. That sense of mystery is great within the world, but not so wonderful within the menus, which, while redesigned to be easier to navigate, still feel a bit clunky and obtuse.

BOLED OVER

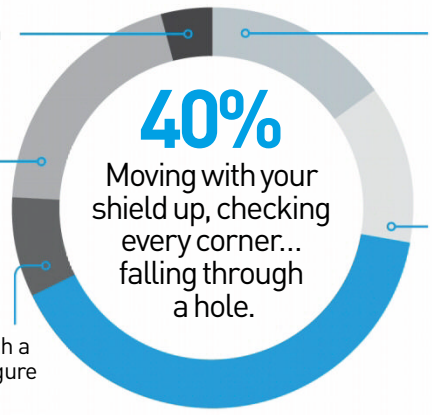
Because you're zapping from one world to the other, there's room for a huge amount of visual variety, increased all the more by the way Bluepoint has dug deep into the source material to eke out and expand the world's character in new ways. The regal ruins of the Boletarian Palace are sombre, dwarfed by massive twin mountains; the dark, lava-filled mines of Stonefang Tunnel contrast with the bright, arid land above; The Tower Of Latria's dark prisons are dim and menacing, lit only by distant flashes of lightning piercing the dark blanket of clouds; the Shrine Of Storms is lashed by tempestuous, unrelenting rain as you roll desperately away from the encircling Storm Beasts; and the Valley Of Defilement creaks and groans as you desperately peer through the darkness, trudging through the swamp below.

Pumped up with this visual splendour, Demon's Souls shines as the entry in the series with the most variety (we'd love to see such an array of environments from FromSoftware again). This launch game is triumphant, a classic that feels wholly new, combining amazing visuals with razor-sharp mechanics.

Even old Demon's Souls hats will find plenty new to marvel at in this faithful and stunning recreation that showcases just why PS5 is so impressive. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**

THE OPM BREAKDOWN

WHAT YOU DO IN: DEMON'S SOULS



4% Screaming as a Man Eater thumps you off the bridge. They still suck.

20% Sighing when you make a stupid mistake, steeling yourself to get revenge.

8% Puzzling over a new secret wall with a door nobody can figure out how to open.

15% Cackling as you impale legions of low-level foes with oh-so-satisfying soul arrows.

13% Clashing with players invading your game, dodging, blocking, and (sometimes) winning.

HOW TO... HELP

It's a hard game, but Bluepoint is ready to help via the game's Activities. Each level has three guides: the text entry gives you a nudge in the right direction, and the video shows more, such as suggesting you run from dragon fire. Aside from the obvious, there are some great tips.

STATPACK

02
Rings can be equipped at once. Start as a Royal to nab a handy MP-regenerating fragrance ring, which will ensure you have an easier time.

16
Bosses to take on, featuring loads of variety and inversions on what you might expect. (One can be controlled by another player online.)

05
Archstones leading to different worlds. Plus an extra shattered one, originally cut content. We'd love DLC to bring it back into use one day.

THE DUALSENSE DIFFERENCE

DUALSENSE SPEAKER
Even without headphones, the DualSense builds an impressive soundscape. Use a magic shield and you can hear it hum until it peters out.

HAPTIC FEEDBACK
Whether cues for enemy attacks or the immersive thrumming of a giant heart pumping, it's incredible.

IS IT BETTER THAN?

YES
It got the job done, but this PS4 remaster isn't a patch on Bluepoint's full-scale renovation project.

NO
Yharnam's world is rich and exuberant, narrowly outclassing the seeds planted in Demon's Souls.

YES
A close one, as Nioh 2's level structure is reminiscent of Demon's Souls', but has less variety.

Arcade racers have always showcased new-gen technology, and Dirt 5 is certainly a looker.

UPGRADED FOR PS5

Dirt 5

After such a great showing on PS4, how's the PS5 version?

INFO

FORMAT PS5
PRICE £49.99
ETA Out now
PUB Codemasters
DEV Codemasters
PLAYERS 1-4
LENGTH 8 hours (story), unlimited online
ACCESSIBILITY Subtitles, 'Tricksteer' handling model for Gymkhana events

Dirt 5's on PS5, but are you actually playing the PS5 version? Maybe not. The superb PS4 game has a free next-gen upgrade, but what's not obvious is that you have to find it on the PS Store and install it separately. Oh yes. Suddenly (well, after another 19.714GB download) the blocky spectators and 30fps action are replaced with 4K/60fps loveliness and that sweet, sweet new-gen difference is clear.

The control feels totally different too, thanks to the DualSense's adaptive triggers. They give way under your accelerating finger as you spin your wheels in the mud, which feels hyper-deluxe. Load times are vastly reduced, which makes things much snappier and keeps the emphasis on the action.

But of course it's the visual upgrade that most of us are interested in, and for the most part it doesn't disappoint. There are PS5-optimised graphics modes; rather than prioritising image quality or framerate as before, there's one that prioritises image quality at the expense of constant 4K, and one that sticks to native 4K at the expense of some graphical sheen. Neither mode is flawless, with some draw-in evident and very minor framerate drops, but these are tiny blemishes on the face of an otherwise handsome game. And not only does it fulfil the 60fps and 4K dream impressively well for a launch title, there is a mode for 120Hz smoothness if your TV supports it, which is a first for console racers. This comes at the expense of yet more detail and resolution, but its inclusion is welcome, bringing us into the realm of previously PC-only framerates.

OFF-ROAD BUGGY

A super-fluid version of the game that got such a high score in the last issue should be easy to recommend. However, this PS5 version doesn't feel as finished as the PS4 one. Known bugs from the preview stage that weren't present in PS4's retail code are still present on PS5. There are lighting glitches, track limit errors that reset you for driving the racing line, and the game can crash completely. The difficulty balancing hasn't been improved, with some races still being way too easy and others being almost impossible even on default settings. And it's interesting playing through the game again (saves don't carry over to this version) to note that if you skip the podcasts, the core action itself feels way more detached; proof that more personality in the races themselves, like in Dirt 2, is surely the way forward.

> Bugs from the preview stage that weren't present in PS4's retail code are present on PS5.

Patches have been coming thick and fast so many issues are likely to be fixed by the time you read this, but right now this is too flaky to deserve the same score as the superb PS4 version.

Much buggier than the PS4 version, Dirt 5 is nonetheless a showcase for PS5 gaming, and a much-needed champion for split-screen racing. **Justin Towell**

8
PlayStation. Official Magazine - UK

Now if they could just use this technique to clean up the kitchen too...

Haven

Fly on the boots of love

INFO

FORMAT PS5 (reviewed), PS4
PRICE £24.99
ETA Out now
PUB The Game Bakers
DEV The Game Bakers
PLAYERS 1-2
LENGTH 10 hours
ACCESSIBILITY Big text, customisable HUD, subtitles, combat difficulty, and traversal

The Game Bakers might be the studio that brought you hardcore boss rush Furi, but Haven is something very different. Much sweeter in tone, it revolves entirely around Yu and Kay's romantic relationship. (That in itself is unusual; try to think of your favourite long-term couples in videogames and you'll come up surprisingly short.) Their love is forbidden by their culture, so they've escaped to space, where they've crash-landed.

Specifically they've landed on Source, a remote planet made up of cracked, floating islets, held together by Flow. Essentially raw planetary matter, Flow is the backbone for how their civilisation's space travel works.

Not only does it power their ship, The Nest, it also fuels their hoverboots. Hold R2 and the couple zip around, collecting resources, sucking up Flow by following trails (drifting to stay on top of it), and scooting over Rust to cleanse islets of corruption. Rust affects the wildlife too; you may need to enter turn-based combat to purify their bodies of it and save the animals.

IT TAKES YU

Everything depends on how Yu and Kay work together. When zooming along, the other is always at arm's distance (and they hold hands when close enough), and you control both at once in combat. Often you need to synergise their moves, both making same type of attack to achieve a more powerful result, or stunning an enemy with a ranged attack while the other character gets in close, or even just covering them with a shield. You can play in co-op with a pal if you think your communication is good enough.

While the game's not meant to be deeply challenging, the combat can get frustrating later on. You have to charge moves up to select them, which can become annoying when you have too many enemy attacks coming your way (though you are able to select options to make this easier). You don't *have* to do much fighting if you don't want to, or even explore much outside of finding the necessary parts to fix the Nest. Levelling up comes from increasing your relationship points, which you can do in many ways.

Haven's largely what you make it, and you won't get tired of seeing what new islets have in store. There are a lot of fun moments to stumble upon, like a secret hidden beach or finding action figures in a house. It's nice that the relationship feels at the forefront of everything, and the writing conveys a true understanding of what it's like to be in one. This might be rated 18, but it's one of the most wholesome 18s you'll play, that rating mostly coming down to the couple's raunchy humour and frequent horniness.

> **Everything depends on how Yu and Kay work together. Often you need to synergise their moves.**

Mechanically simple and sometimes a bit repetitive, Yu and Kay's relationship feels original and genuine, and their journey full of chill vibes. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**

7
PlayStation Official Magazine - UK

There's something oddly satisfying about slotting batteries into place with a dive-bomb attack

Sackboy: A Big Adventure

This eager-to-please platformer is a hand-crafted charmer

Can I hear Bruno Mars impatiently tapping his watch? Almost. The strains of his biggest hit fill the air, but I've Uptown Funked him up by spending too long gathering up scattered Collectabells. The band dutifully plays on, while the singer steps back from the mic until I move on and he can finally start the chorus. These musical levels pretty much sum up Sumo Digital's likeable 3D platformer: an upbeat entertainer that takes too long to get to the *really* good bits.

If Sackers is surprisingly slow off the mark, that's perhaps because he controls like he's carrying a bit of lockdown weight. No bad thing, you might think, given his trademark looseness would be a bad fit for Big Adventure's more demanding later stages and optional time trials. But as he strains every sackcloth sinew to cross larger gaps with a flutter jump, or puts his all into thumping enemies, he's never quite as lithe and responsive as you'd like. When the pace and the challenge pick up, the ace-of-spades symbol that tells you you've beaten a stage without dying becomes much more elusive.

DREAM MACHINE

But don't be put off before it gets up to speed. Because between that oddly languid opening and a few annoying late-game sequences, Sackboy's Big Adventure more than lives up to its name. Sure, at heart it's a simple, exploration-based, collectible-focussed platformer. Your main goal is to make it to the finish line, obviously, but each stage hides five Dream Orbs, of which you'll need to gather plenty (though not all) to unlock the next world, with outfit pieces besides to let you dress up as anything from a tiger with octopus legs to a guitar-wielding yak. Yet if it were any more well-nourished with ideas – even if many of them have been magpied from elsewhere – it'd have to move its belt up a notch.

Rocket boots! Wall-walking! Washing machine maintenance! Who needs cohesive world design when a game is this unfailingly keen to surprise players with new and different things? Shifts in perspective, from top-down to side-on, to pseudo-isometric, are as common as new mechanics and fresh, hand-crafted environments. These range from nervy undersea escapes to creature-herding quests to treacherous train rides and even a visit to a space station run by a malfunctioning AI (where you leap on and off a moving lift while platforms electrify and enemies charge to the beat of Britney's Toxic).

GETTING STITCHED

Whether you're sliding down pearlescent fish scales, rolling along inside a transparent sphere or carrying a jellyfish to

INFO

FORMAT PS5
PRICE £59.99
ETA Out now
PUB PlayStation Studios
DEV Sumo Digital
PLAYERS 1-4
LENGTH 18+ hours
ACCESSIBILITY Colourblind mode, customisable subtitles, dyslexia font, HUD movement/camera shake options, game assists

> **If this game were any more well-fed with ideas, it'd have to move its belt up a notch.**

1 There's at least one too many on-rails stages, but this one is good. 2 The 'grapple, bounce, swing up and over' technique (about to be illustrated here) feels fantastic. 3 The post-stage photo op uses classic LBP controls.

illuminate invisible walkways, the visual dazzle and constant parade of ideas are enough to distract you from Big Adventure's shortcomings. It's so colourful and busy in places that you'll sometimes find it hard to determine where you (or certain floating collectibles) are in 3D space.

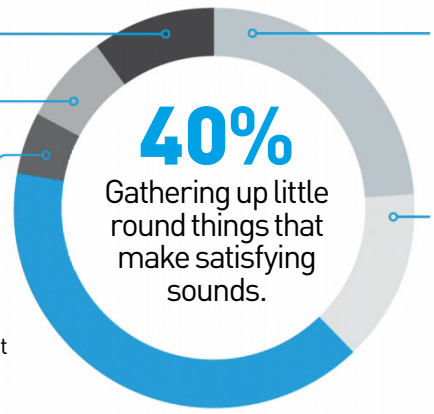
That said, a few ideas are rehashed to diminishing returns. Respawns can occasionally be unkind, and collision is slightly spotty. And it seems unduly restrictive that you can earn enough orbs to unlock the next world, but the game won't actually let you do that until you've played through the entire critical path, with only a handful of stages left optional. None of these things are deal-breakers, but together they add up to an annoying itch you can't quite scratch.

But all is forgiven when you're jostling for space with your co-op partner for the end-of-level photo, one of you dressed up as a luchador with yak horns and the other as an Elvis impersonator with green satin skin. Or when you enter a level soundtracked by The Chemical Brothers' The Private Psychedelic Reel. Or when you finally nail a gold-medal run on the fiendishly tough Knitted Knight trials and beat your friends' best time in the process. Sackboy: A Big Adventure is no straight masterpiece, but this rambling, weird, scrappy platformer has a homespun charm that'll put a grin on your face as broad as that of its beaming star.

Magical in conception but uneven in execution, it overcomes the slowest of starts to become one of the most imaginative platformers in ages. Chris Schilling

THE OPM BREAKDOWN

WHAT YOU DO IN: SACKBOY: ABA



10% Wishing Sackboy handled a bit more like Astro (sorry, Sackers).

7% Thinking Richard E Grant should play videogame villains more often...

5% ...and that Dawn French might be 2020's best in-game mentor.

24% (Jungle) boogieing along to a soundtrack of absolute bangers.

14% Mixing and matching the weirdest outfits at Zom-Zom's clothing store.

STATPACK

0:31 Our best time on the Ain't Seen Nothin' Yeti trial. The one-life Knitted Knight challenges are very tough. Beat our time if you can!

21 Different actions in Sackboy's action almanac. All his moves, basically. And you'll make the most of them on your way to the finish.

160 How many Dream Orbs you'll need to collect in order to reach the Centre Of Craftworld. You'll see a lot of levels on the way there.

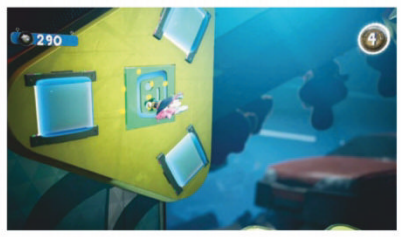
THE DUALSENSE DIFFERENCE

DUALSENSE SPEAKER
You'll hear Sackboy's wails from the DualSense when you fall. Even though restarts are quick on PS5, it's upsetting.

HAPTIC FEEDBACK
Rumble, rumble everywhere – it's used a tad heavy-handedly but carpeted areas feel *lush*.

LOVING/HATING

GUARDIAN ANGLES
The wonderfully inventive boss battles keep finding creative perspectives on familiar platforming ideas.



CAMERA SHY
Occasionally the screen won't scroll fast enough, nor will it give you the most helpful view of your surroundings.

TROPHY CABINET

BRONZE
Chuck 30 enemies to their deaths. Brutal of our woolly hero? Nah, they deserve it.

SILVER
Beat 30 levels without dying once. Trust us, that's not as easy as it first seems!

GOLD
A gold medal time on the ultimate Knitted Knight trial, The Ripsnorter? Gulp.

EDITOR'S AWARD
PlayStation Official Magazine - UK

The Pathless

This launch lineup adventure isn't a misfire – or lacking in direction

INFO

Format PS5 (reviewed), PS4
Price £29.99
ETA Out now
Pub Annapurna Interactive
Dev Giant Squid
Players 1
Length 10+ hours
Accessibility Adjustable vibration intensity, adjustable camera shake, adjustable motion blur, hold button *or* toggle dash, subtitles (non-adjustable)

The world has been plunged into darkness – but enough about 2020, what's the game about? Easy jokes aside, here you play as the last Hunter. On a quest to restore light to the world, she travels to the source of the all-enshrouding darkness, a cursed isle that none return from, where the worlds of man and spirit intersect. There she must shoot and dash across the realm in search of spirits known as the Tall Ones, with the aim of purging their corruption.

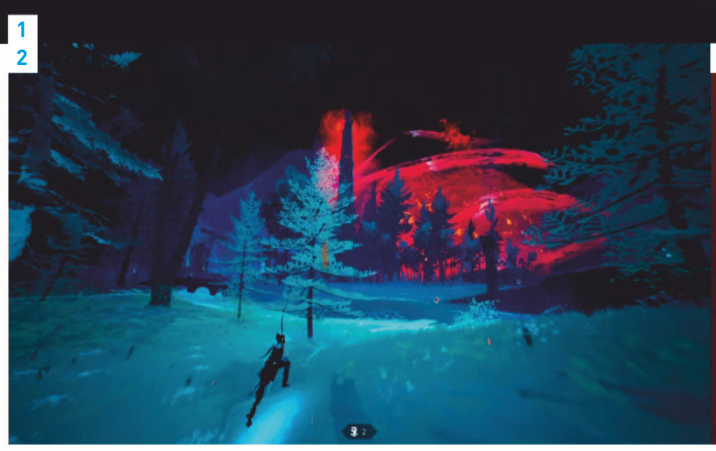
A particular refrain haunts the early areas of the cursed isle and sends me down a memory rabbit hole. The twanging strings echoing through The Pathless' ruins cast my mind back to Ico and its memorable theme, Castle In The Mist. As I venture into the domain of the first cursed spirit, my thoughts continue to wander: "It's definitely not a guitar, or a mandolin – but what could it be?" But that's not all that's reminiscent of PS2's own 2002 attempt at myth-making.

The Hunter's marks aren't easily cornered. For one thing, each cursed spirit is invincible when you first encounter it, shrouding itself in a raging storm. You need to scour their realm for lightstones and then restore these to the three obelisks dotted around their domain for even a shot at them. Early on, the environmental puzzling required for each lightstone relights parts of my mind palace rarely illuminated since Fumito Ueda's 2002 fairy tale. Couple that puzzling with characters communicating in a devised language, a puzzle-solving companion you develop a measure of care for, and focussed 'game design by subtraction,' and Ico's influence is clear.

Now, a helpful commenter and a number of amateur covers reveal the string instrument heard in Castle In The Mist is likely an Irish bouzouki – though that's not what you hear in The Pathless. It

The sense of scale and art direction are superb throughout – definitely postcard-worthy!

Your feathered friend plays a pivotal role in solving puzzles and purifying the cursed spirits.



1 The headline act really is the puzzle-infused boss fights. Snaky Nimue here grows extra heads. Talk about a showstopper! 2 The spirit mask not only shows another side to the plateaus but is your main method of identifying points of interest and finding your way around the world. 3 Chasing a cursed spirit after restoring light to the obelisks can become a drawn-out affair if you don't rack up speed boosts with your bow.

turns out that what accompanies your first foray onto the cursed isle is an oud. Like the bouzouki, it's a member of the lute family but there's not really a strong family resemblance. All of which is to say that comparison can only tell you so much, and while I'm getting strong Ico vibes from everything here, and you probably will too, this is by no means an Ico-alike.

FLYING HIGH

The Pathless is about going your own way in more than a few respects. For one thing, its open world does away with traditional waypoints. In fact, there's not even a map. Instead, the Hunter dons a mask with △ to peer beyond the veil into the spirit world. Points of interest reverberate with a red hue, and range from large ruins that host involved archery puzzles to smaller secrets that require a shift in perspective to solve. Having to find things this way and investigate them makes for a fantastic sense of discovery.

The drive to explore is complemented by a wonderful freedom of movement. Floating talismans dot the isle, and when you strike one with a perfectly timed shot, it refills the Hunter's stamina meter and grants you a speed boost as you dash around. Chain shots together in mid-air to make your jumps go further with an acrobatic flourish. Your constant companion, the eagle, can turn a jump into an extended glide, and the loop of dashing to jumping to gliding is wonderfully fluid, making exploring this open world much less daunting.

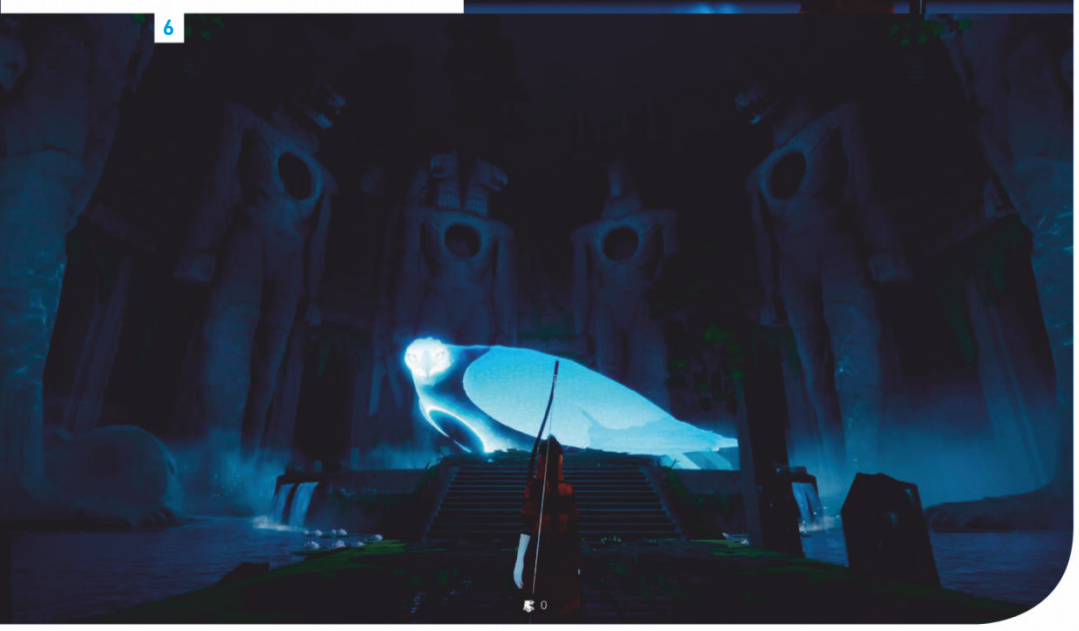
And why, you might wonder, are you hanging out with an eagle? Your feathered friend is essential to completing your journey, playing a pivotal role in solving puzzles and purifying the cursed spirits – and the corrupted Tall Ones know it. Get caught in the red, raging storm and you'll be separated, your only option afterwards being to carefully creep towards the eagle's distressed cries as you avoid being detected by the eye of the storm. Its keening never fails to tug at the heartstrings. After reuniting and dissipating the storm, you need to take a moment to pet and clean the eagle. The game's myth-making deliberately works to hold you at arm's length and so it's instead left to these moments of care, as well as the beautifully expressive animation found throughout, to draw you in.

The bond between you and your avian ally isn't the deepest or most fleshed-out but you'll become invested enough that you won't want to place the eagle in unnecessary peril. For this reason avoiding the storm is a real source of tension early on; trust me, there's nothing worse than finding yourself trapped in the valley and it slowly dawning on you that you've got no quick way to extract yourself.

A SURE SHOT

Once you've returned the lightstones to the obelisks, their light traps the cursed spirit within its own storm and you're able to give chase. These pursuits are followed by a final

The drive to explore is complemented by a wonderful freedom of movement.



4 You'll need to work together with your feathered friend or shift your perspective to solve plenty of puzzles. 5 Pet the eagle to keep it happy. 6 You uncover plenty of secrets and hidden lore on your quest to defeat the Godslayer.

showdown where that gloriously quick, fluid movement seamlessly metamorphoses into puzzle-infused combat. All of The Pathless' visual ambitions come to fruition in these memorable encounters, each one building on the one before it and only becoming grander in scale. They really are the headline act, but what's also interesting is how, even if you take a heap of damage, you're not out of the fight. There's no real death or fail state here, resulting in an adventure that glides along serenely. But then, this isn't an adventure that *needs* to put you right on the edge of your seat.

That said, in some ways this forest's paths feel ever so slightly overgrown. I love the otherworldly effect created by the devised language, and how it renders major voice acting talent like Laura Bailey and Troy Baker unrecognisable (check the credits, they're in here). However, the subtitled script could've been streamlined and dialogue used more efficiently; in its current state, it saps some of the mystery. I also enjoyed speaking with the dead, their stories revealing another side to the land's turmoil, but they too often echo each other; if the title didn't clue me in, I got the sense that the Godslayer was kind of a bad dude long before I'd exhausted the land of its lore. It's still rewarding for lore fiends to piece together the narrative but the tale comprises only a few threads.

Nonetheless, The Pathless is a beautiful adventure, and it's one worth venturing off the beaten track to undertake.

A stylish adventure that makes like Fleetwood Mac and goes its own way. Beautiful to ear and eye, this is a trek through the forest that you need to take for yourself. **Jess Kinghorn**

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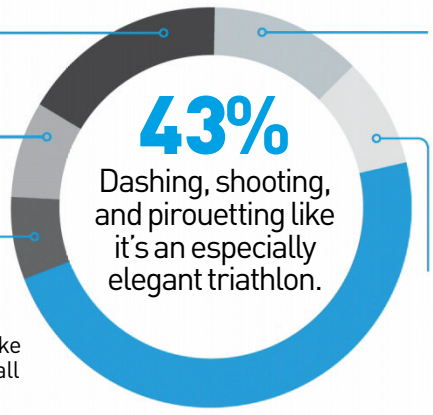
PlayStation. Official Magazine • UK

THE OPM BREAKDOWN

WHAT YOU DO IN: THE PATHLESS



15% Trying to outrun the storm. And failing.

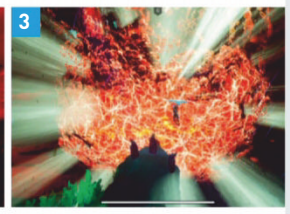
7% Soaking in the soundtrack and wondering exactly which instruments you're hearing.

6% Feeling thankful that – unlike in Ico – there's no fall damage here.

11% Wincing with guilt every time you hear the eagle cry.

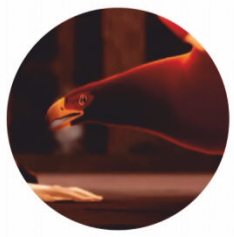
8% Hoovering up blue orbs of lore. It's so satisfying you'll be at it for hours.

THE FIRST THREE HOURS

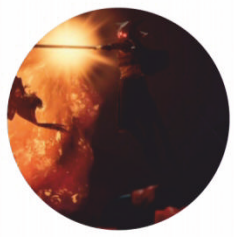


1 I'm the last Hunter on a quest to restore light to the world by travelling to an isle none return from. No pressure! 2 I thought I was being careful. Unfortunately, the storm caught up to me and it's time for stealth. 3 After polishing off puzzles for a stamina boost, it's time to turn the tables and chase the storm myself.

FRIENDS & ENEMIES



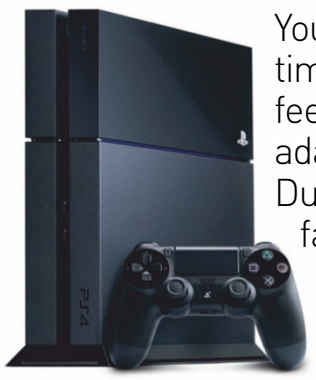
THE EAGLE
Your companion not only helps you glide from A to B but can assist with puzzles.



THE GODSLAYER
He seeks to remake the world by abusing the power of the isle's spirits. Stop him!

THE TALL ONES
The island's spirits. Usually benevolent, they've been corrupted by the Godslayer.

ALSO ON PLAYSTATION 4



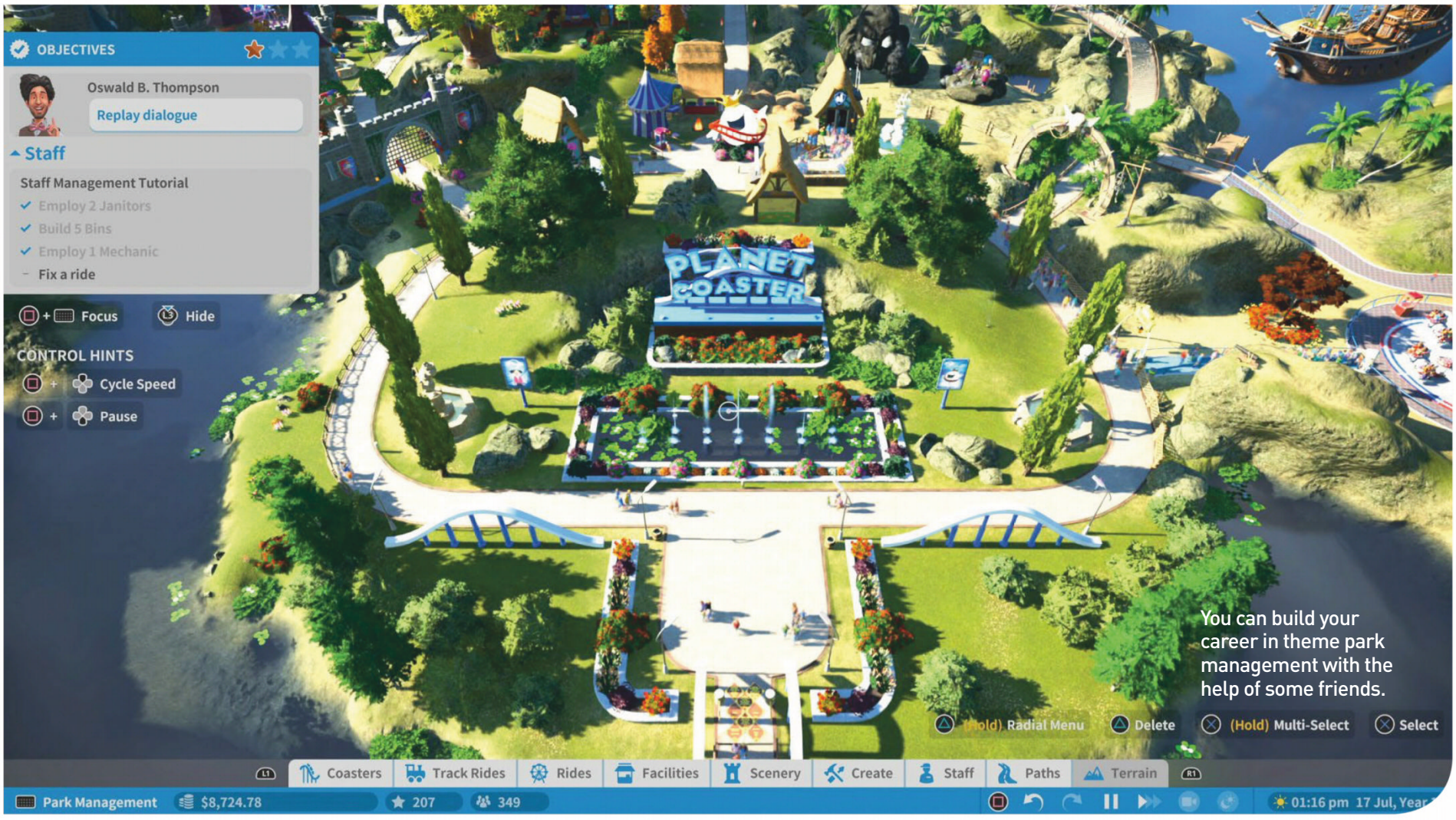
You may need to relearn the timing of your shots without the feedback from the DualSense's adaptive triggers. Instead, the DualShock 4 vibrates for every fall and loosed shot. Thanks to strong art direction it looks great, but puts the Pro through its paces for fewer fps.

TROPHY CABINET

BRONZE
Just drop to the ground when you're flying high. There's no fall damage here.

SILVER
This one's easy for lore masters: discover 45 lore messages by talking with the dead.

GOLD
Find *all* lore, lanterns, and lightstones and perform a selection of acrobatic feats.



You can build your career in theme park management with the help of some friends.

Planet Coaster

Life is a rollercoaster, just gotta ride it

INFO

FORMAT PS5, PS4 (reviewed)
PRICE £39.99 (console edition), £47.99 (deluxe edition)
ETA Out now
PUB Sold Out
DEV Frontier Developments
PLAYERS 1
LENGTH Infinite
ACCESSIBILITY N/A

Visiting theme parks may be off the cards for the time being, as we ride out this metaphorical rollercoaster that is 2020. But hey, you can at least make all your Disneyland dreams come true by creating your own theme park and running it, as the spiritual successor to the much-loved Rollercoaster Tycoon finally makes its way to PS4 and PS5.

The career mode is the ultimate crash course in building and running your own theme park. It gives you some comprehensive tutorials and a series of tasks to unlock new rides, facilities, and scenery and learn the nuts and bolts of park management, like how to keep your staff and visitors happy. You even get the chance to build your own rollercoaster from scratch. You do all of this with the help of a few wacky characters: park owner Oswald B Thompson, hard-hearted chief financial officer Cynthia Clarke, and theme park 'influencer' Lucy Summers.

A THRILL RIDE

If you're in the mood for a bit of free creation, sandbox mode lets you make your dreams a reality. You get to unleash your unlimited budget on a range of backdrops, whether it's a winter wonderland, a bustling cityscape, or a sandy expanse. If you really want to get those creative juices flowing, you can opt for a custom environment. There are lots of different themes: how about offering your visitors swashbuckling fun with a pirate theme, or if you want your park to be the happiest place on earth, there's a fairy-tale theme. However, it's slightly lamentable that there isn't a wider selection of themes and feels like a missed opportunity. Who wouldn't want to create a Halloween-themed park? Or a superhero-themed one? Though disappointing, that doesn't ruin the game – there's plenty to play with nonetheless. In fact, some people might find sandbox mode overwhelming. As you expand your park, build more rides and attractions, and hire more staff, it can be hard to keep up with everything.

There's also a challenge mode, in which you receive limited starting cash and are set a series of tasks. You're able to adjust the difficulty to ensure the level of challenge is just right.

If you're having serious real-world theme-park withdrawals, Seat mode enables you to take a first-person ride on your rollercoaster without having to stand in a queue.

Planet Coaster offers a high level of colour and vibrancy with its very impressive visuals, and combined with its accompanying upbeat soundtrack, it is the perfect antidote to not being able to go to any theme parks now. Maybe not the ride of your life, but well worth queueing for.

> **Unlock new rides, facilities and scenery and learn the nuts and bolts of park management.**

Planet Coaster is uplifting and allows you to let your imagination run wild. It's full of charm, wit and is the perfect escapism that fits your every need. **Laura Francis**

INFO **FORMAT** PS4 (PS5 2021) **PRICE** £29.99 **ETA** Out now **PUB** All In Games, 505 Games **DEV** One More Level, 3D Realms, Slipgate Ironworks **PLAYERS** 1

Ghostrunner

Put a ghost in your machine

Prepare to become very acquainted with the Ⓐ button. With each death you'll press it instinctively to jump back in for one more go. And you'll do this a lot. In one hour I racked up 295 restarts. That's a lot of swearing and pad-twisting.

The thing is, every one of those leaps back into Ghostrunner was a joy. Yes, my teeth are clenched, the air swells with swears, and a prayer to the game gods is muttered, but the sense of accomplishment when everything comes together cannot be understated.

In the far future the Burst has left humanity on the brink of oblivion. Those who remain have taken sanctuary in Dharma Tower, a sprawling, colossal arcology that just happens to be ripe for wall-running.

All is not well, however, and Mara, also known as the Keymaster, has taken control and wiped out Dharma Tower's protectors, the Ghostrunners. Or has she? As Jack, the last Ghostrunner, you team up with Adam (the improved AI of the Architect, your creator) and Zoe (a rebel with a cause) to take back the tower.

RUN, JACK, RUN

Ghostrunner is one part tactics, one part reaction test, and a whole lot of luck. Wall-running is automatic, but timed jumps on R1 and slow-mo using L1 require thought. Using them together ensures you can corral enemies into place before landing a killing blow.

Maps are tightly plotted puzzles with one path to success. Testing the maze of hanging runways, lasso points, and enemy placements can feel like a descent into despair, particularly as there's a frustrating element of trial and error to many levels. (Unlike Mirror's Edge, here you can run anywhere and plot your own course.) But hang in there, tease out Jack's new abilities, such as the skill to link kills and run through gunshots, and you'll pick up a map's rhythm. When the pieces fall into place, and the game's blend of Mirror's Edge and Superhot gels, Ghostrunner truly shines.

> **The sense of accomplishment when everything comes together cannot be understated.**

Ghostrunner frustrates and thrills in equal measure. There is too much trial and error at times, but persevere through clenched teeth and you'll be rewarded. Ian Dean

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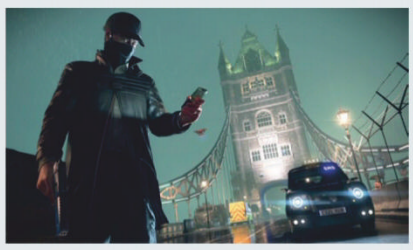
BANDWIDTH

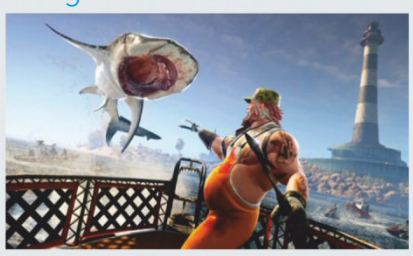
PS4-to-PS5 game updates chewed on

This new generation of console is a weird one, partly because of all the fun you can have double-dipping into updates to some of your PS4 games. We've reviewed some standouts elsewhere in this issue, but here are some that caught my attention for good, and bad, reasons.



How many PS5 features does it take to drag a bad game out of your personal bargain bin? That's the question we have to ask as **Watch Dogs Legion**'s update arrives. Boasting ray tracing, 30fps, and 4K output this game does little surprising with PS5, just heightening what the game does well, making its shiny 1:1 recreation of London more enticing. However, wedded to the same flawed gameplay it does little new with that sense of place.

Likewise **Borderlands 3**'s PS5 upgrade doesn't alter much. It brings 4K resolution and runs at 60fps. Its calling card to PS5 owners, however, is the addition of three- and four-player split-screen local multiplayer to bring old-school couch co-op to the new gen.



Chewing scenery is something Tripwire interactive's shark RPG **Maneater** has done with relish on PS4. Its PS5 upgrade goes further than some with 4K and HDR, ray tracing, and a new lighting model and effects, and it all runs at 60fps. The developer has also included haptic feedback support on the DualSense controller to get us even closer to the feel of digging our great white's gnashers into a passing whale or banana-boat rider. Who can turn that down? If you've been putting off taking a dip into Maneater's unusual wave of roleplay (it's a ShaRkPG, apparently), this free PS5 update is the perfect way to get your sea – erm – fins.

The arrival of **Rainbow Six Siege** on PS5 puts the game back on our radar. The tactical shooter has never left some fans' consoles, but if you've not tried Ubisoft's team shooter yet then this free update ticks all the boxes, and then some. Delivering 120fps at 4K resolution, with new DualSense controller features to make every room breach feel thunderous, Rainbow Six Siege has us eagerly reinstalling the game. Include Activities and fast loading, and this shooter could emerge as one of the clear winners of PS5 launch window.

TOP FIVE ONLINE GAMES

Team up with pals or take on the world

GHOST OF TSUSHIMA: LEGENDS

One of our favourite single-player games of the year has gone multiplayer. New story missions are designed for two players, with raids and survival missions challenging four-player squads. Well worth revisiting.

DEMON'S SOULS

This release still feels fresh – the best time to get involved with a soulsborne's online aspect. Put down your summon sign to help new players with the tougher bosses, or invade to cause some grief. Whether you're making or breaking someone's day, it's fun.

GENSHIN IMPACT

We had a great time with this colourful, free open-world RPG on PS4, but it's next-level on PS5. The occasional questionable framerate has been ironed out, and it now achieves 60fps smoothness. We said it's free, so what's keeping you?

FALL GUYS: ULTIMATE KNOCKOUT – SEASON 2

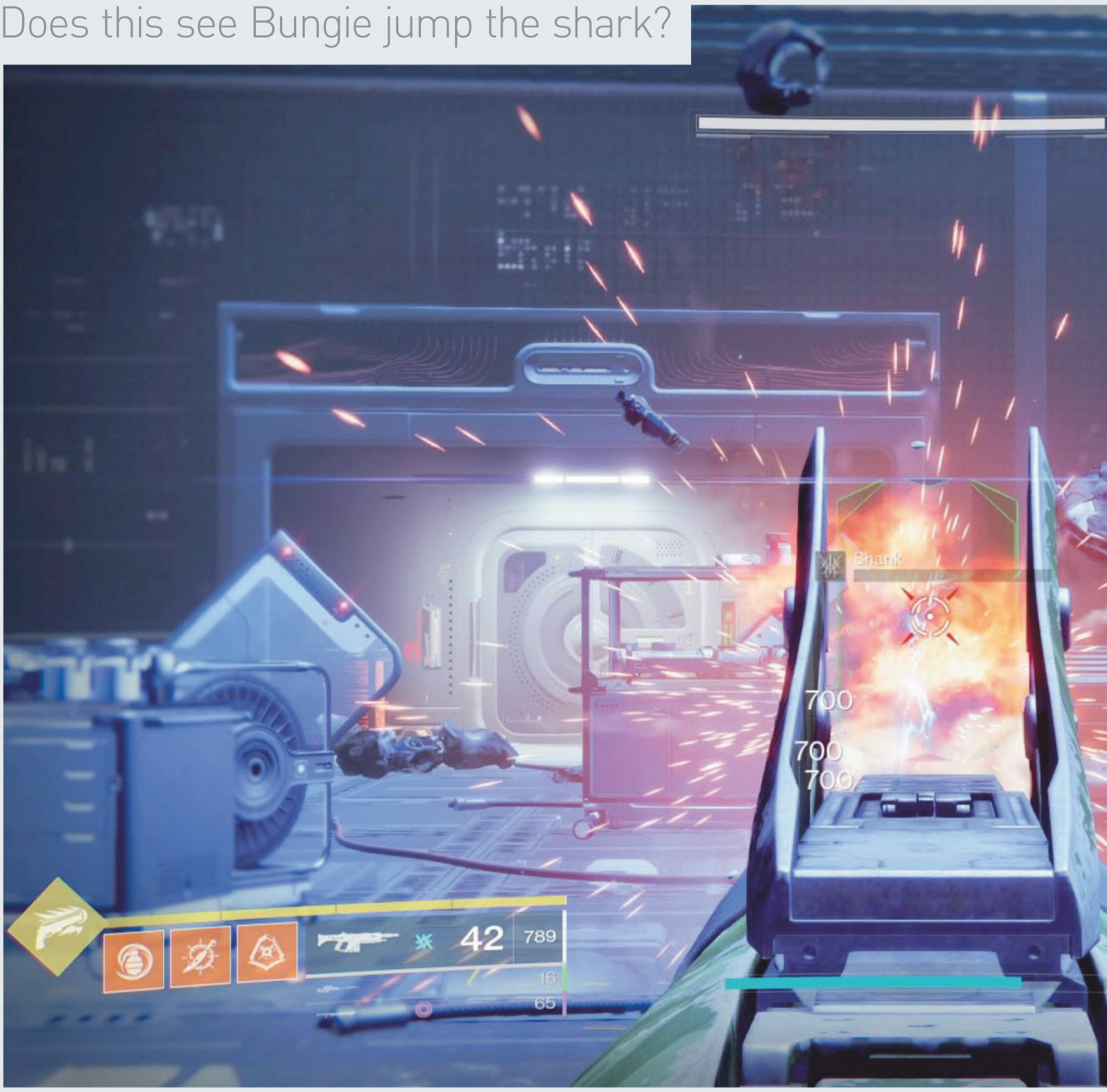
The beans have gone medieval for the second season. Knight Fever is a favourite, which has us timing our way across drawbridges, ducking out of the way of logs, and avoiding sneaky traps.

GRANBLUE FANTASY VERSUS

With the second season underway, there's a lot to love about Arc System Works' fighting game take on the mobile JRPG phenomenon. As the roster expands, each character still feels unique. Hop online and give it a go (or get battered).

Destiny 2: Beyond Light

Does this see Bungie jump the shark?



INFO

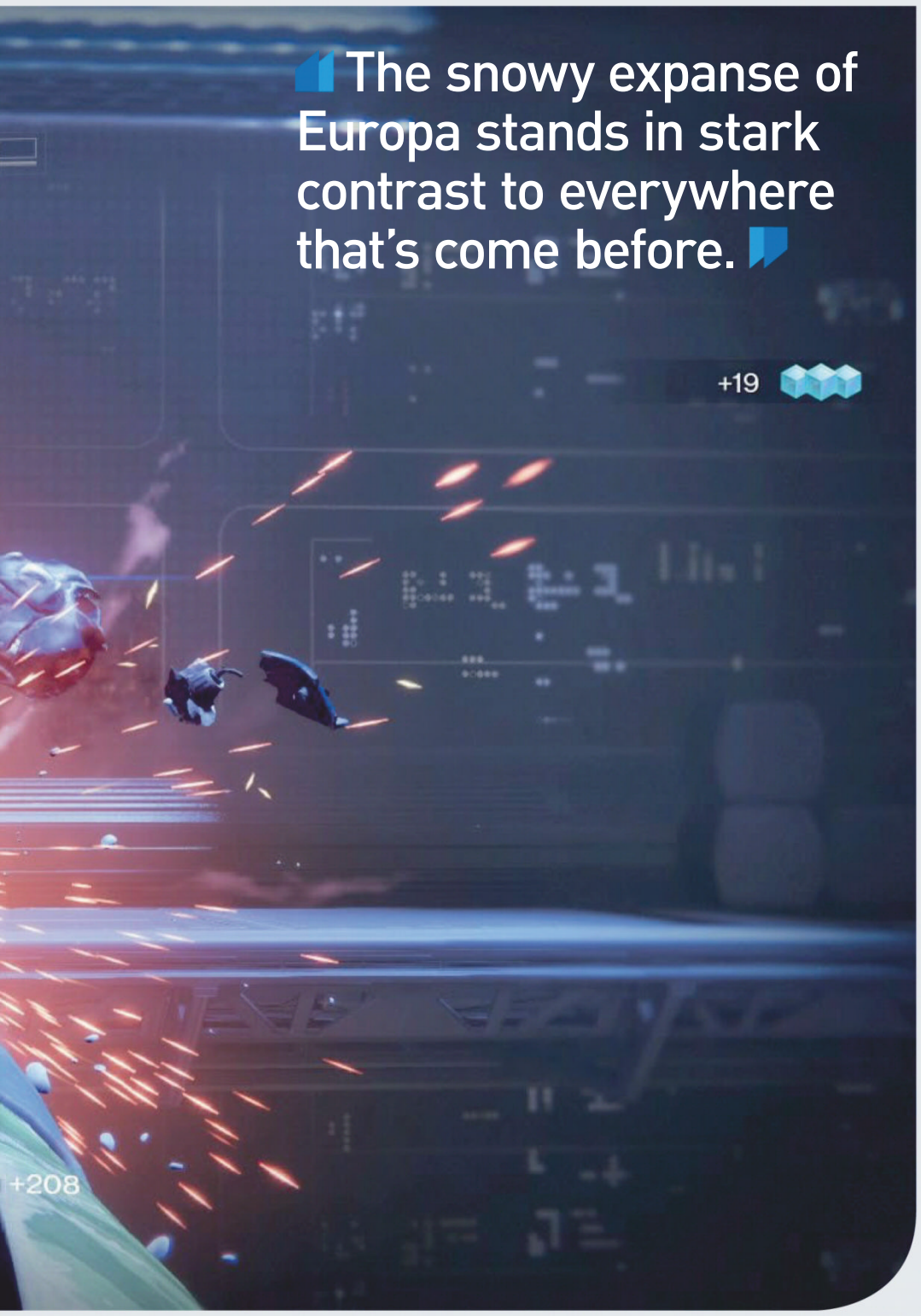
FORMAT PS4
PRICE £34.99
PUB Bungie
DEV Bungie
OFFLINE REVIEW N/A
PLAYERS 1-100
CROSSPLAY No

Destiny's latest expansion is all about The Darkness, and not because Bungie believes in a thing called love. First introduced as a malevolent force, you can now tap into it for some new abilities to play around with. The way that they're dished out – the way that *all* the new content is unlocked – shows that (some) lessons have been learned.

In order to unlock what are essentially ice powers permanently, you need to make your way through the campaign. If you're a Destiny veteran with a fireteam you regularly run with, great; the campaign's not too long, you'll be used to grinding for levels between missions, and your friends can watch your back if you're not at the required level. If you're new to the game, though, or you play solo, you'll find that Destiny's continued refusal to provide matchmaking for campaign missions very much works against you. In that case, don't expect to get your virtual hands on all the new content in a hurry.

NOW YOU DLC IT...

Although some old content has been controversially 'vaulted' (removed), including some paid DLC content, the snowy expanse of Europa has been added. It stands in stark and welcome contrast to everywhere that's come before, and has plenty to see and loot. The majority of activities and items are locked behind completion of the main story, but this is at least better-designed than previous campaigns. It's always clear where you need to go and what you need to do.



> The snowy expanse of Europa stands in stark contrast to everywhere that's come before.

The new Stasis powers, once you have them, breathe fresh life into existing missions and Strikes. You can use them to slow and freeze enemies as well as damage them, and summon barriers to use as temporary cover before they're shattered into damage-dealing shards. And if you're heavily invested in Destiny lore? Then this is a real treat, with heaps of detail and Variks and The Exo Stranger playing a big part in the story.

The new Strike and other public events give you plenty of opportunities to share PvE fights with strangers; though you'll soon be running over old ground. In fact, while structurally unambitious (ultimately, you won't be asked to do anything you haven't already done in Destiny a thousand times before), the presentation and the best of the rewards will keep you coming back again and again.

Come for the change of scenery, stay for the change of abilities. Even if you don't usually enjoy the grind, you should end up warming to this chilly package. **Luke Kemp**

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PlayStation. Official Magazine - UK

FIFA 21

Lacks pace in between matches

INFO

FORMAT PS5, PS4 (reviewed)
PRICE £32.99
PUB EA Sports
DEV EA Vancouver
OFFLINE REVIEW 7/10
PLAYERS 2-4
CROSSPLAY No
CROSS-GEN No

Pro Clubs and exhibition matches have their place in EA's football series, but the meat of its online offering is Ultimate Team. Some good news, then: pack odds are more generous this year and a month in I'd amassed a squad containing Marcus Rashford and Joe Gomez, along with 200,000 coins. Customising your own stadium is a unique personal touch, and Squad Building Challenges remain even more addictive than the on-pitch action. Yet there's a caveat: menus are agonisingly slow to navigate. For once FUT doesn't leave you short-changed, but adjusting your squad is the Ultimate test of patience. **Ben Wilson**

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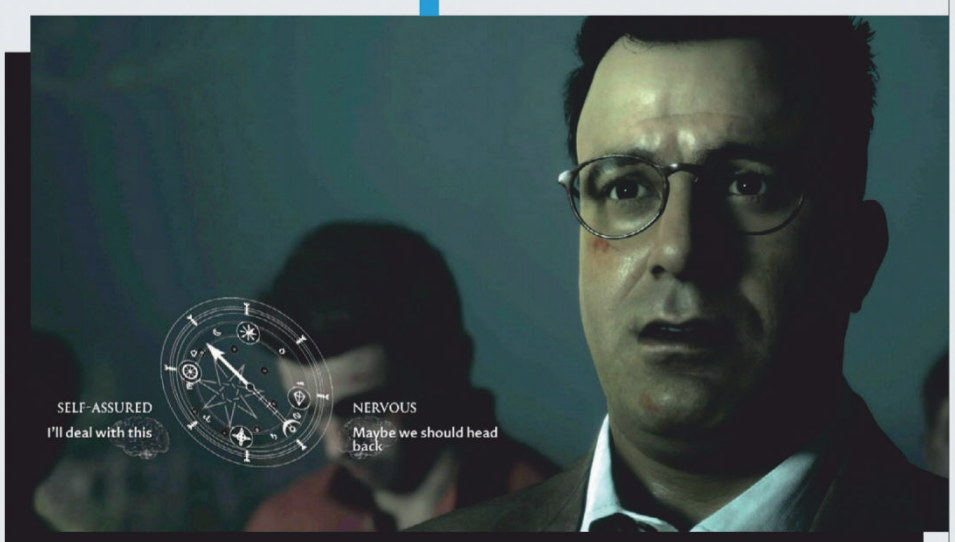

The Dark Pictures Anthology: Little Hope

Thrills for some, chills for others

INFO

FORMAT PS4
PRICE £24.99
PUB Bandai Namco
DEV Supermassive Games
OFFLINE REVIEW 7/10
PLAYERS 2
CROSSPLAY No
CROSS-GEN No

Setting up a party chat gives this much the same energy as watching a slasher of questionable quality and doing your best Mystery Science Theatre 3000 impressions. It's particularly rewarding as a second playthrough option as your partner's ill-advised choices steer you towards alternate outcomes you may well have missed all over again, and whatever trophies they unlock pop for you as well. The only down side is the pacing, which can drag even more if you're playing with someone who doesn't follow the script. (Why no run button?!) It's still worth playing with friends to see where you'll end up, but not in one sitting. **Jess Kinghorn**

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PlayStation. Official Magazine - UK

EXPANSION

£4.99

Borderlands 3 – Season 2

Slice up rivals with the Designer's and Director's Cuts

Some of our favourite Borderlands 3 missions came as part of the wacky season pass expansions, so we're more than happy to see a second season pass come to the game. This one's a little different from the last season's, however.

The first part of the pass brings us the Designer's Cut. This isn't just something that turns the ending into a lingering shot of an origami Handsome Jack, but adds material that could fundamentally change the way you play through the entire original game.

Each Vault Hunter now has a completely new skill tree, which is important as in Borderlands these upgrade paths offer different ways to play each character (hence the title 'Designer's Cut', as it lets the game designers have extra fun). The new Arms Race mode gives you plenty of room to experiment with the DLC's new levelling options, as the mode is a fast-paced roguelike experience that enables you to appreciate random loot drops and quirky weapons like never before.

Arms Race couldn't come at a better time, as Borderlands 3 has been given a free PS5 upgrade (60fps at 4K resolution, DualSense support, and more tweaks) following the console's launch, so this ensures an entire replay of the game to feel fresh.

Spring 2021 will bring the second part of the season pass, this one is called the Director's Cut, which also promises to change up the game in similarly radical ways.

> The new Arms Race mode is a fast-paced roguelike experience.

DLC

£4.99

MORTAL KOMBAT 11 – KLASSIC MK MOVIE SKIN PACK

Do you wish MK11 was actually based on the 1995 movie? Make your fantasy real: Christopher Lambert's Raiden, Linden Ashby's Johnny Cage, and Bridgette Wilson-Sampras' Sonya Blade are all present as skins here.

£9.99

PLANET COASTER – DELUXE RIDES COLLECTION

Combining both the Classic Rides and Magnificent Rides collections, there are plenty of new coasters, tracks, transports, and flat rides to jam into your theme parks, from chain lifter Vector to the soaring Golden Eagle.

£7.99

DRAGON BALL Z: KAKAROT – A NEW POWER AWAKENS SET

Take on Beerus and then Frieza's powerful new form in this set collecting both parts of Kakarot's DLC. Adapting the most recent DBZ movie content, this adds fresh forms for Goku and Vegeta, and new super attacks as well.

ALSO ON PSN

£39.99

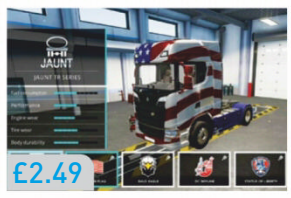
FUSER – 2020 BACKSTAGE PASS

Pricy, but you get all of 2020's DLC content. That's nine cosmetic packs and 21 more songs to mix (including Deee-Lite's Groove Is In The Heart), all released through to 31 Dec.

£3.29

NARUTO TO BORUTO: SHINOBI STRIKER – SHISUI UCHIHA

The mysterious ninja integral to Itachi's past joins the striker fest as an Attack-class striker, along with cosmetics and moves for your own avatar to learn.



£2.49

TRUCK DRIVER – USA PAINT JOBS

What's more American and freewheeling than hauling cargo on the open road, just you and your massive truck? Show it off with this cosmetic pack dedicated to the US of A.

£3.99

LET'S SING 2021 – LEGENDARY HITS

Five classic songs to warble through, including The Cure's Boys Don't Cry and Gloria Gaynor's I Will Survive. Other expansion packs priced the same are available.

£5.79

SNOWRUNNER – EXPLORE & EXPAND

Two new maps for the off-road driving sim covering the wintry Yukon, Canada, put you to the test. With new cargo, vehicles (including CAT vehicles), and skins, it's snow joke.

LIVE GAMES

CHARACTER

Kate Bishop is taking AIM

Assembling for a new chapter of Marvel's Avengers

Being a superhero is never smooth sailing, and that's been all too true for Marvel's Avengers. After a rocky launch and a delay to the arrival of its first new superhero and story drop, it's been an online game in need of a comeback.

The heroic task of enlivening things has fallen on the shoulders of Kate Bishop, the main attraction of the Taking AIM storyline, which continues the ongoing narrative about the Avengers Initiative. With both Nick Fury and her mentor Clint Barton (Hawkeye) missing, combined with the tachyon rift time distortions, she's got a full itinerary. She might be an extremely gifted archer and a world-class gymnast, but she has to work with the Avengers to get to the bottom of what's going on.

But things don't end so neatly, as the story ties in closely to the next update on the horizon, all about Clint Barton. It's nice to have more characters to play for free, but we've yet to see if a double dose of Hawkeyes is really the remedy we needed.

Still, Kate's powers are different enough to be interesting alongside the heroes we're familiar with, and taken on its own this update proves there's still excitement left in Marvel's Avengers, though it might need some bigger additions to really achieve the MCU-level spectacle fans crave.

UPDATE

FORTNITE – PS5

The biggest live game on the market makes good use of its PS5 update, outputting 4K at up to 60fps, adding more physics to the battle royale island and loading more quickly. Even split-screen is running nicely. Ultimately, though, cross-platform play requires a level playing field if it's to be enjoyable for all players.

Fortnite Crew is also here, a monthly subscription netting you the current battle pass, plus 1,000 V-bucks and a monthly Crew Pack containing an outfit and accessory.

UPDATE

FINAL FANTASY XIV – FUTURES REWRITTEN

RPG fan? If you are, get in here right now, because it's all kicking off. This latest update to FFXIV: Shadowbringers has a huge amount of content, setting the stage for FFXIV's future as our heroes return home from The First, while the Eden storyline concludes with huge consequences. There's also a dungeon, and updates to the Weapon story that see you taking on the Emerald Weapon itself. There's never been a better time to be into Final Fantasy.

UPDATE

WARFRAME – PS5

This upgrade to the online action game is a massive one (though cross-gen play is supported, so PS5 owners can carry on playing with friends who've yet to get the new console). Thanks to the power of PS5, Warframe can run on Digital Extremes' new graphics engine, transitioning to 4K/60fps. In the open world areas that makes a huge difference. Being a space ninja has always meant being slick, but now you really feel it as you wall run and slide your katana through hordes of enemies.

LIVE GAMES

Online games still keeping our attention

With the last generation, live games – games you can keep playing, that keep evolving – catapulted to success on PS4. But with so many out there vying for your attention, just how do you build a game that'll keep people around?

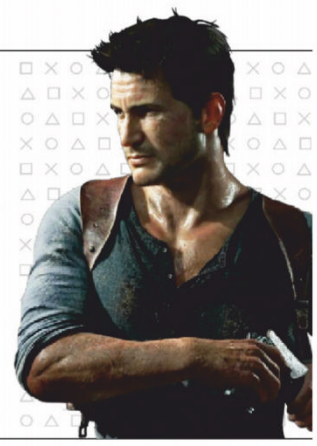
There's no concrete answer, or I'd be rich in V-bucks. But one thing's for sure, developers need to make it easy for people to give a game a go. No barriers to entry. Otherwise, with so many famous free games, why would someone bother checking out theirs? (It might be too little, too late for **Rocket Arena**, which was one of last month's PS Plus games.)

One of the greatest lightning strikes in recent memory was **Rocket League**. Being free on PS Plus at launch brought car-based football to the big leagues. More recently, **Fall Guys** followed suit, and last month we had **Worms Rumble**. You needed a PS Plus subscription to get them for free, but it guaranteed a huge injection of potential players.

Thanks to that, PlayStation understands how to stack the odds in its favour. The decision to charge £69.99 for **Destruction AllStars** as a PS5 launch game seemed odd, and PlayStation has now delayed the game until Feb 2021 when it'll launch as (you guessed it) a PS Plus game. It could make the difference between the dynamic car combat game being flat on arrival or having the shot at success it really deserves. Next year, we'll be ready to get behind the wheel.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

09

Assassin's Creed Odyssey

A beautiful open world where every Greek island tells a unique story. AC Odyssey is a 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

Resident Evil Remake

Jess Kinghorn beats the winter chill her own way

We've all got our comforting rituals for long winter nights. Some people appreciate a bath bomb, but I reckon you can't beat replaying a classic that set the bar for updated reimaginings. The Lisa Trevor storyline is creepy in all the best ways while the threat of downed zombies resurrecting as more aggressive Crimson Heads introduces a new layer of tension. And I haven't even begun to bang on about why the fixed camera angles are still great! But I'll stop there, lest I rant all the way into January.

PICK #2

Hitman: Blood Money

Oscar Taylor-Kent is still contracted to this classic

With Hitman 3 looming I've run out of options, as I've played both previous games in the series to death. So, it's time to dust off the stone-cold classic's remaster. Packed with iconic missions at every turn, it still has some deviously intricate tasks for me to carry out, and really holds up once I remember the now-fiddly control scheme. Honestly, if shooting the glass bottom off a rich loser's hot tub at his Santa-themed porn party doesn't bring a smile to your face this Christmas, nothing will.

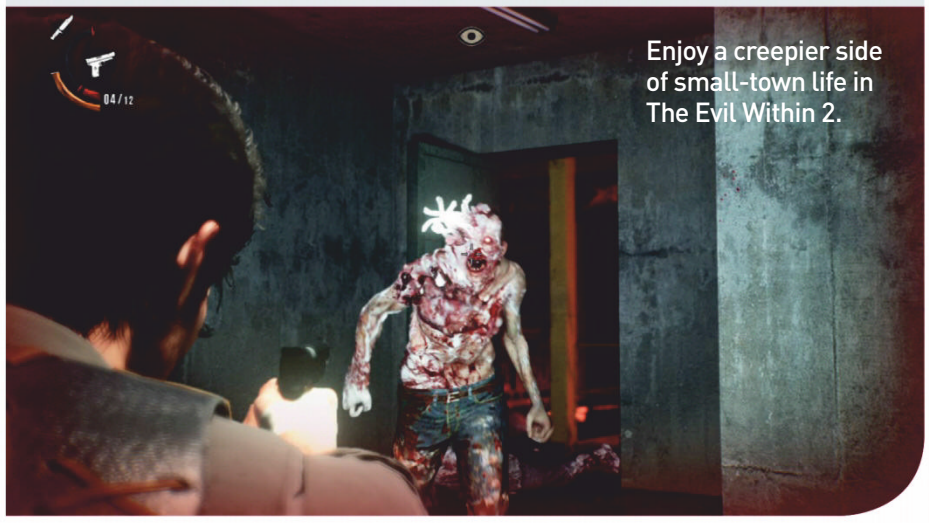
> Shooting the glass bottom off a rich loser's hot tub will bring a smile to your face.

PICK #3

The Evil Within 2

Ian Dean takes a tour of Union

Having overlooked this horror hit at launch I'm finding myself drawn into Sebastian Castellanos' inner anguish. This sequel offers a disturbing view of small-town America even the residents of Silent Hill would struggle to live with; the town itself is twisting above and in on itself. It's a setting that lifts this sequel out of the shadow of the runaway rollercoaster original and delivers a space to enable the jump scares and shocks to land more consistently. Do yourself a favour and pay Union a visit.



Enjoy a creepier side of small-town life in The Evil Within 2.

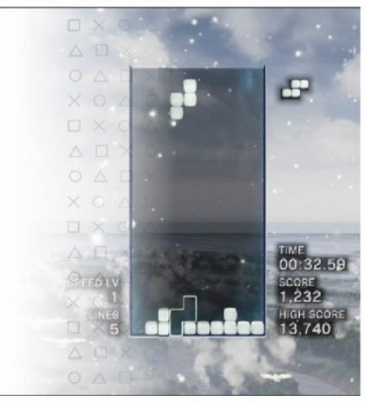
PS VR Hall of fame

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.



02

The Persistence

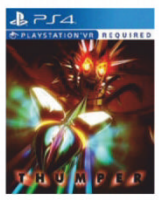
This first-person horror roguelike offers perfectly sized chunks of survival bursts. It's everything you'd expect from a full PS4 release, but in PS VR it's filled with clever ideas, unique weapons, genuine jump scares, and fab looks – plus great couchplay as well.

03

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.

04



Thumper

Make no mistake: the brave chrome beetle gives Rez a run for its money. Hurtling 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.

05

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.

06

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.

07

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.

08

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.

09

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 Ian issue any instructions – KABOOM!

10

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.

11

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.

12

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.

13

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.

14

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.

15

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

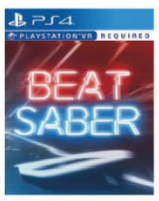
Batman: Arkham VR

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

We spy an emerging trend for PS Plus, as following on the squidgy heals of Fall Guys: Ultimate Knockout and the living-food weirdness of Bugsnax, Sony is offering **Worms Rumble** as a freemium game for all PS Plus members in December. Is this a trend?

First, clever me for spotting the emerging pattern. Second, I still can't quite believe we're being treated to yet another new, full-price game for free. The arrival of **Worms Rumble** suddenly puts this reinvention of the classic tactical series back on my radar. As time is the only currency any of us need to spend dropping online for a round of wormaggedon how can we turn it down? We, erm, *I* can't.

Another biggie, but not a newie, is open-world playground **Just Cause 4**, which graced our cover at one time. The game is a little rough around the edges compared to newer do-as-you-like adventures but few other games let you ride a jet like a wild horse, skydive from anywhere high enough, or use a tornado as a makeshift weapon. We can forgive the game's flaws when it offers such enjoyable nonsense.

Less forgivable is **Rocket Arena**, EA's colourful self-consciously 'zany' 3v3 shooter. Designed during a marketing team's lunch break it's like someone Frankensteined together Overwatch and Fortnite and forgot the new ideas.

In happier news, the PS Plus Collection for PS5 is still with us, and is the year's best gift. **Days Gone** steals the show. What Bend Studio has managed to accomplish here with its biker zombie paradise feels almost like a magic trick, like the PS4 version of the game was secretly a PS5 game in disguise all along. Running at 60fps in dynamic 4K, its open world is so lively it makes the whole thing feel like a surprise PS5 launch game. If you haven't already welcomed grizzled biker Deacon St John (and those hordes of pesky pursuing Freakers) into your life, do it now. Your PS5 demands it. Ian says you must.

Imagine this image hitting your eyeballs 60 times every second. Pure gaming bliss.

DIGITAL OFFER

FOR PRINT SUBSCRIPTION DEALS, TURN TO PAGE 56

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PLAY NOW

Launch games

Three to play for free on PlayStation Now. This issue: launch window games

FANTAVISION

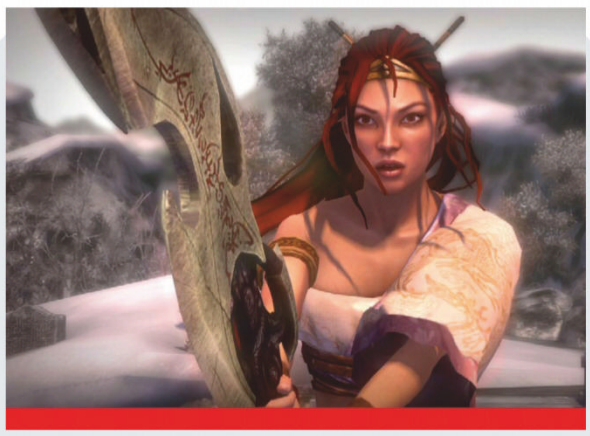
DEV SONY, PS2, 2000

This feels like a tech demo when you play it, because it is. Fireworks puzzler Fantavision began life as a light show demo to wow would-be PS2 buyers with the power of the Emotion Engine.[1] The action is simple: match three or more like-coloured fireworks and chain them into screen-dazzling displays. Taking things further, you can daisy-chain more fireworks in, and even add different-coloured ones to your displays to earn more points.[2] Any fireworks you miss fall off the screen and deplete the Play Meter. For those of us who grew up on wood-panelled cars, corduroy, and home haircuts, Fantavision plays a lot like Missile Command.

On PS Now we get the 2015 remaster rather than the original PS2 game. This means you can play Fantavision in HD and download it, which is handy as it stutters a lot when streaming. It also means we get two-player support that wasn't in the original European PS2 release.

Fundamentally it still plays the same, and makes for a distracting few minutes of eye-candy. A perfect PS Now game in many ways, there's even the curiosity of seeing random footage of smiling children, families, and other cute scenes between stages. Perhaps this was PS2's real emotion engine? Twenty years ago it probably felt cute; now it's just creepy.

FOOTNOTES 1 PS2's custom CPU was nicknamed the Emotion Engine, because it was so powerful. **2** Also, if you're nimble enough you can capture white 'Starmines' to enter a special bonus mode.



HEAVENLY SWORD

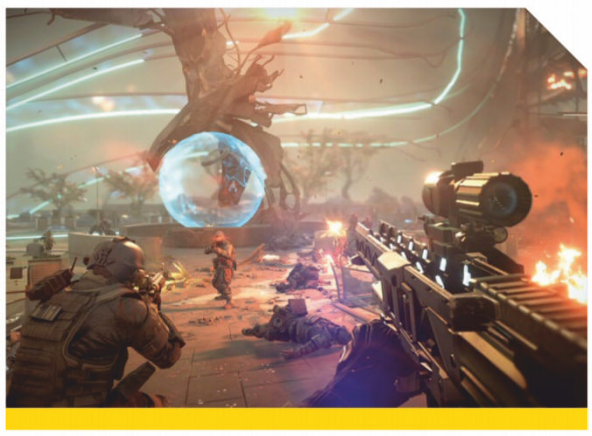
DEV NINJA THEORY, PS3, 2007

Before Ninja Theory wowed the gaming world with Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice it stole headlines with this PS3 launch-window hack'n'slasher. Promising movie-quality CG performances from the likes of Steven Berkoff and Andy Serkis and 'next-gen' Sixaxis control, we couldn't get enough of its lead character Nariko[1] in 2007.

On PS Now Heavenly Sword's combat holds up well, even with the occasional frame drop – the simplicity of the controls ensure it's not game-breaking. Changing between three stances (speed, power, and range) alters the mode of your weapon, the titular Heavenly Sword, and ensures you can juggle and control large groups of enemies with two-button combos. A succinct Superstyle system enables you to grapple enemies, giving the game a chance to showcase its still-impressive animation.

Even 13 years on Heavenly Sword looks good. It manages to blend the kind of spectacle we love about God Of War[2] with a more realistic visual style, particularly in its cinematics, which come close to achieving the ambition of being a playable movie. Short in comparison to modern games, and overly simplistic, Heavenly Sword is worth a PS Now toe-dip just to experience the epic Dynasty Warriors-sized grand finale.

FOOTNOTES 1 The red-haired heroine was played by Fringe and Mindhunter actor Anna Torv. **2** Like Kratos' games of old, combat is peppered with quick-time events. Everyone liked that back then!



KILLZONE SHADOW FALL

DEV GUERRILLA GAMES, PS4, 2013

A series of games few wanted but most of us still played came to an end on PS4 as Sony turned to Guerilla Games for a console launch shooter. It looked, and still does, fantastic.[1] But then, Killzone always looked good. The problems occur as we begin to play: Shadow Fall is just *dull*. No amount of shine and JJ-Abrams-aping lens flare can save a shooter that still feels this slow and sluggish on a PS4.

We love how the game foreshadows the accomplished storytelling that really shines in Sony's later PS4 titles, as we begin by seeing this sci-fi world through the eyes of a child. Other touches, such as the game's experimentation with small sandbox maps and a touchpad-controlled drone (our OWL[2]), mask a shooter that even now feels like style over substance.

Killzone Shadow Fall remains a curiosity rather than an essential play, even when you're getting it for free on PS Now. Indeed, with the superior and remastered Killzone 2 and Killzone 3 also on the streaming service, we'd point you at those rather than this PS4 release.

FOOTNOTES 1 Sony's 2010 E3 conference led on the game's sweeping city cinematic, all beautifully rendered in-game. **2** Swipe the DualShock touchpad to give orders to your sleek and shiny drone companion.

HAVE YOUR SAY

OPM readers tell us what they thought of our choices

"I WAS UTTERLY MESMERISED BY IT. "IT CAN'T GET MUCH BETTER THAN THIS" MAY HAVE BEEN MUTTERED MORE THAN ONCE."
@Big_Ozwin

"AMAZING GAME! GREAT GAMEPLAY MECHANICS WITH THE USE OF THE SIXAXIS. GREAT CHARACTERS AND STORY. WOULD LOVE A SEQUEL!"
@Loaf112

"VERY [UNDERRATED]. DOESN'T STICK EVERY LANDING, BUT IT'S PRETTY, EXPERIMENTAL, AND DYNAMIC. LOVED IT."
@ByWatterson1

▷ We nose around some of PlayStation's **horror classics**. It'll get messy!

DEFENDING

Ratchet & Clank

Oscar Taylor-Kent still has time for Sony's 20-year-old destructive duo

Every generation needs a defining double act, whether it's Ant and Dec, the Chuckle Brothers, or, for those of us playing on PS2 in 2002, Ratchet and Clank. The early noughties was an era when PlayStation *needed* new mascots (Crash no longer being exclusive, and the Tomb Raider games in something of a decline), and these two unlikely allies were the ones who really stepped up. And we still need them on PS5, that's their legacy.

Sure, some may argue Jak & Daxter were a better duo. They'd be wrong, obviously. Where Jak and Daxter languished once PS3 came out, abandoned by Naughty Dog and only dusted off for a ottsel solo run on PSP, Ratchet and Clank continued to flourish. They starred in some of Insomniac's most inventive and ambitious work on PS3.

Let's be honest, were Jak and Daxter ever *really* a good duo? [*Ouch* – ed] Jak's the one who puts in most of the work. What's wonderful about Ratchet and Clank is that they need to be together to form a perfect platforming whole, each contributing to the action at every stage. Clank'd be minced cogs without Ratchet's arsenal of zany weapons, and Ratchet would be squashed Lombax without Clank's navigational oomph. Whenever games have split them apart, the other's absence has been keenly felt. Neither feels relegated to the sidekick role.

With the duo headlining one of the most vibrant PS5 games on the horizon, and Insomniac Games finally a fully fledged first-party studio, it feels like there's not much argument any more. These two *are* the face of PlayStation (though it's cute that Astro tries).

INFO

BEST GAME
Ratchet & Clank: A Crack In Time

STATS
The series has sold 26 million copies

The pair appear in numerous Jak & Daxter games

SPIN-OFFS
Ratchet & Clank: Full Frontal Assault

Secret Agent Clank

Ratchet and Clank: Size Matters

Ratchet: Deadlocked

HOW TO PLAY?
PS Now

"BLAMING YOURSELF AND TAKING FULL RESPONSIBILITY ARE TWO VERY DIFFERENT THINGS."

Clank doesn't hold back in the original game on PS2.

THE INTERVIEW

With greatness comes PlayStation

As you swing through a beautifully ray-traced New York in PS5's Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales, the designer of PS1's beloved Spider-Man, Chad Findley, reflects on the hero's 2000 debut

The Spice Girls had just split, Johnny Vaughn was making Denise van Outen look funny, and PlayStation was into its second wave of game releases. The year 2000 was peak PlayStation, and Spider-Man was one of the year's best releases.

Even when you replay it today, with its roster of famous villains, 1970s TV-show theme song, and Stan Lee narration this Spider-Man game feels like a love letter to the comic book. "I was a crazy voracious comic book reader during my college years," says the lead designer on the game, Chad Findley. The game dev turned to comics to relieve the stress of studying at MIT, and as it turned out, that gave him the knowledge to make the game.

"When I got a chance to work on this game I absolutely wanted to do the comic book justice and bring as much of the amazing stuff I had enjoyed to videogame players," he says. "And even then when we couldn't fit any more into the main storyline, we still tried to fit as much as possible into other places."

This passion for the source material resulted in the creation of the game's 'What If?' mode and the option to unlock new Spider-Man suits with different abilities.

SWING HIGH

Development began in 1998, and the decision to make Spider-Man a full 3D game on PlayStation was a given. "Going to 3D was definitely a challenge and we knew that we were treading into very unfamiliar territory for this franchise in particular", says Findley, who offers a glimpse into what it meant to create a game at the time of the switchover from pixels to polygons.

"There were definitely things about those times that were not ideal – it was way more of a frat-like boys' club in almost every studio. As well, the idea of a work/life balance was nonexistent," shares Findley. "That said, many parts of those 'early years' were also pretty spectacular."

Photos from Neversoft's press tour at the time reveal an openness you rarely find in today's billion-pound game industry. Even this Triple-A game only took 18 months to make, and with lower costs the team, says Findley, were left to their own devices to make the game they wanted. "As long as we met our milestones, we got to keep rolling," he jokes.

> "When I got the chance to work on this game I absolutely wanted to do the comic justice."

Even working with Marvel, a company notorious for licensing today, was easy. In 1998 one person could sign off on the game's use of the comic's characters. Today, says Findley, "it often goes through multiple committees and/or review boards".

There were never more than 30 people working on Spider-Man which "made the company feel way more like a single-focussed, collaborative unit". Modern teams are in excess of 500 people across multiple studios. "Trying to get large teams on the same page or to change direction is *really* hard, and that inability is often the most damaging thing to the process," shares Findley, who has also worked on the Guitar Hero and Call Of Duty franchises. "And while it is true that production values have gone way up with these larger teams, the development *fun* level and collective agency of the process tends to also go down considerably."

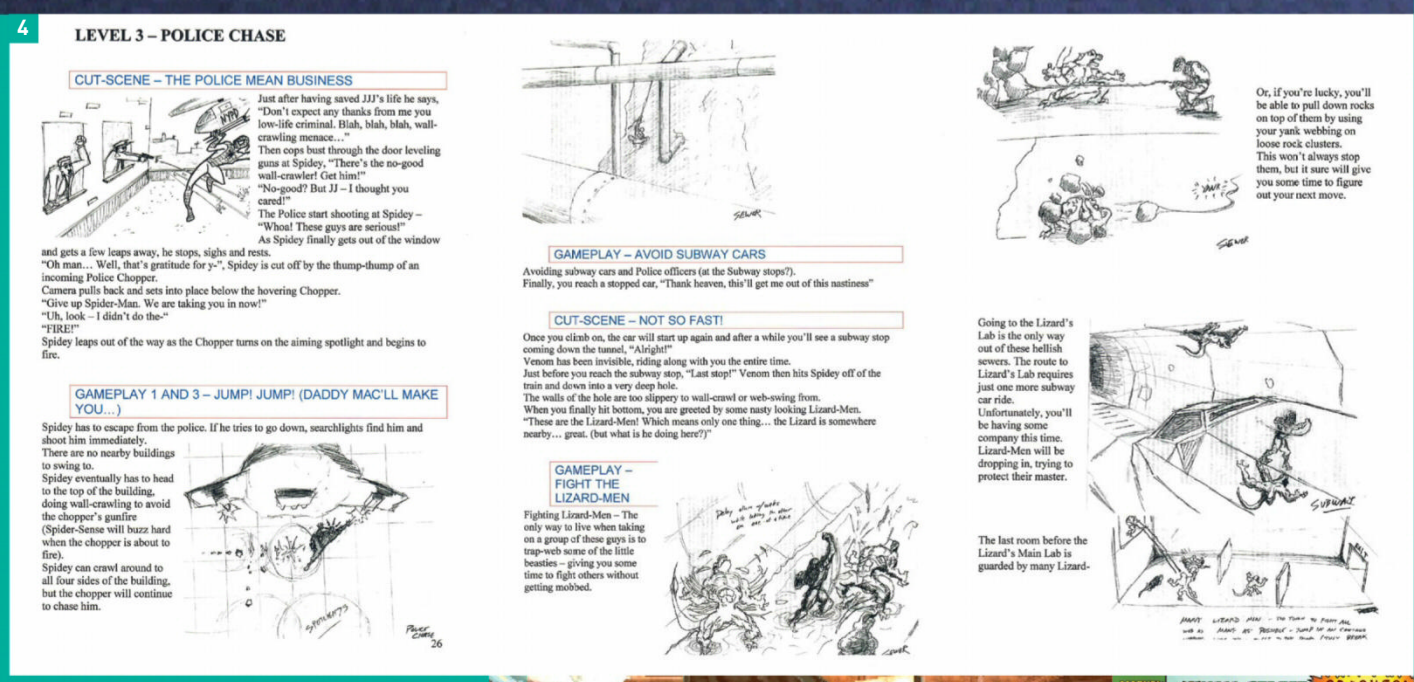
TRUE BELIEVERS

That small-team dynamic can be seen in this aging classic. This was the first time we swung or wall-crawled as Spider-Man – anywhere – in three dimensions. Lead engineer Dave Cowling – "who was crazy smart and fast" – had the game running in weeks, but it took eight months to get it playable.

"For the swinging we had to reverse-engineer a system in which we tried to figure out where the player wanted to swing and then work out the best web-shot location/swing curve to use," details Findley.

The effort paid off, and Spider-Man became one of PlayStation's biggest hits. It broke out of the comic-book cul-de-sac of the era at a time when a colossal Marvel movieverse was unthinkable.

"I was glad that we made a game that fans of Spidey would like, but I was also super-stoked that we were able to reach people who were unfamiliar with the book," shares Findley, adding: "And we did it, for the most part, while having a good time."



LEVEL 3 – POLICE CHASE

CUT-SCENE – THE POLICE MEAN BUSINESS

Just after having saved JJJ's life he says, "Don't expect any thanks from me you low-life criminal. Blah, blah, blah, wall-crawling menace…"
Then cops bust through the door leveling guns at Spidey, "There's the no-good wall-crawler! Get him!"
"No-good? But JJ – I thought you cared!"
The Police start shooting at Spidey – "Whoa! These guys are serious!"
As Spidey finally gets out of the window and gets a few leaps away, he stops, sighs and rests.
"Oh man… Well, that's gratitude for y-", Spidey is cut off by the thump-thump of an incoming Police Chopper.
Camera pulls back and sets into place below the hovering Chopper.
"Give up Spider-Man. We are taking you in now!"
"Uh, look – I didn't do the-"
"FIRE!"
Spidey leaps out of the way as the Chopper turns on the aiming spotlight and begins to fire.

GAMEPLAY 1 AND 3 – JUMP! JUMP! (DADDY MAC'LL MAKE YOU…)

Spidey has to escape from the police. If he tries to go down, searchlights find him and shoot him immediately.
There are no nearby buildings to swing to.
Spidey eventually has to head to the top of the building, doing wall-crawling to avoid the chopper's gunfire (Spider-Sense will buzz hard when the chopper is about to fire).
Spidey can crawl around to all four sides of the building, but the chopper will continue to chase him.

26

GAMEPLAY – AVOID SUBWAY CARS

Avoiding subway cars and Police officers (at the Subway stops?).
Finally, you reach a stopped car, "Thank heaven, this'll get me out of this nastiness"

CUT-SCENE – NOT SO FAST!

Once you climb on, the car will start up again and after a while you'll see a subway stop coming down the tunnel, "Alright!"
Venom has been invisible, riding along with you the entire time.
Just before you reach the subway stop, "Last stop!" Venom then hits Spidey off of the train and down into a very deep hole.
The walls of the hole are too slippery to wall-crawl or web-swing from.
When you finally hit bottom, you are greeted by some nasty looking Lizard-Men.
"These are the Lizard-Men! Which means only one thing… the Lizard is somewhere nearby… great. (but what is he doing here?)"

GAMEPLAY – FIGHT THE LIZARD-MEN

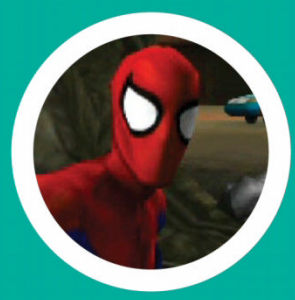
Fighting Lizard-Men – The only way to live when taking on a group of these guys is to trap-web some of the little beasties – giving you some time to fight others without getting mobbed.

Or, if you're lucky, you'll be able to pull down rocks on top of them by using your yank webbing on loose rock clusters. This won't always stop them, but it sure will give you some time to figure out your next move.

Going to the Lizard's Lab is the only way out of these hellish sewers. The route to Lizard's Lab requires just one more subway car ride.
Unfortunately, you'll be having some company this time. Lizard-Men will be dropping in, trying to protect their master.

The last room before the Lizard's Main Lab is guarded by many Lizard-

1 The team assembled in one of the most 1990s photos ever. This was a close-knit team. 2 The great Stan Lee narrates the game and brings an authenticity to everything. 3 Boss fights are a game highlight, and even Miles Morales nods to this game's Rhino fight. 4 The classic police chase across New York City's rooftops is detailed in these design docs… 5 …And here's the level in action. 6 The game is littered with nods to the most famous Spider-Man comics.



CUT FROM HISTORY

Chad Findley reveals the ideas that never made it into the final game

"THE VULTURE WAS ALSO SUPPOSED TO BE A BOSS IN AN EARLY DESIGN, BUT THAT WAS CUT FAIRLY EARLY ON AS WE KNEW NOT ONLY THAT SOMETHING HAD TO GET CUT, BUT ALSO THAT IT WOULD TAKE A VERY LONG TIME TO GET AN AIRBORNE BOSS WORKING WELL."

"THE LIZARD WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A BOSS YOU FOUGHT MULTIPLE TIMES THROUGH THE SEWER LEVELS."

"THE ORIGINAL ENEMIES IN THE FIRST LEVEL WERE CALLED THE 'RED EYE GANG' AND HAD RED GOGGLES, BUT THEN THE MOVIE MYSTERY MEN CAME OUT A COUPLE OF MONTHS BEFORE OUR RELEASE AND HAD A GROUP OF BADDIES CALLED THE 'RED EYES' COMPLETE WITH RED GOGGLES, SO WE CHANGED OUR GOGGLE COLOUR TO GREEN AND CHANGED A FEW LINES OF DIALOGUE TO CALL THEM THE 'JADE SYNDICATE'. PROBLEM SOLVED!"

"SPIDEY WAS SUPPOSED TO SAVE MARY JANE FROM VENOM ON THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE [INSTEAD OF IN THE SEWERS] AS A CALLBACK TO A GREAT SPIDER-MAN STORYLINE 'THE DEATH OF GWEN STACY'."

FIND THE TIME

Dipping back even further into gaming's past. Can you remember this? Do you even want to remember it?

10 YEARS

January 2011 saw the release of LittleBigPlanet 2. "I regret giving LBP1 a 10/10 because it's left me with nowhere to go for this hugely improved sequel," our reviewer said. We're sure ol' Sackers didn't mind getting a second perfect 10.

15 YEARS

Sony reported its first annual profit in 11 years (yes, over a decade!) racking up 70 billion yen. Not thanks, as you might think, to PlayStation or PS2, but to PSP, the first handheld PlayStation. We reckon there's room for a new one in PlayStation's current lineup.

20 YEARS

According to Oftel, only 40% of British households were online in 2001. Luckily PS2 had launched the previous November, and if Santa had been generous we had a new console and Ridge Racer 5 for some January 2001 couchplay fun.

OPM YEARBOOK

Five years ago on OPM

We went all-out for Street Fighter V in **OPM #118**, with five different covers to knock you out

PLAYSTATION 4 2016

Capcom could have simply refreshed the fighting roster and polished up the visuals. That, for many, would have been enough. Capcom could have just added some new moves and tuned up the overall gameplay. That too, for a lot of players, would have been enough. But for a developer like Capcom – one that, if it didn't invent the one-on-one fighting game, certainly honed its execution into an art form – that wouldn't have been good enough. Not even close.

And so Street Fighter V isn't an incremental update, or a polished improvement. It's an exhilarating, across-the-board clean sweep, which resets, rebuilds and revitalises everything you thought you knew about modern Street Fighter. And, rather wonderfully, everything you thought you knew about Capcom, too.

HIGH-VOLTAGE ACTION

The difference is immediately obvious, long before you start plumbing its unfathomable depths, and before you begin to discover and experiment. Without even knowing the giddy delights of the game's new, overarching systems, Street Fighter V feels fresh. Even picking up series stalwart – and oft-undervalued all-rounder – Ryu sends an immediate shock through the fingers and right up into the brain. He's faster, more aggressive and yet easier to handle.

He just flows around the screen, his slicker movement and friendlier, more accommodating combo timings dropping out lightning-fast barrages of beautifully animated, seamless abuse via a consummate ease-of-use. Sometimes it feels as if he's translating your will directly into on-screen action before you've realised it yourself. Street Fighter V is a relentlessly responsive fighting game, as delicate in its handling as it is robust, as clear and communicative in its feedback as it is spectacular to behold.

But before long, that lightning speed will become literal, as you discover the first of many bold,

Think you know Ryu? Think again. Street Fighter V represents a radical, sweeping step forward.

STREET FIGHTER V

A true fighting evolution, and this time everyone's invited

Format PS4 ETA 16 Feb Pub Capcom Dev Capcom

Above Street Fighter V was the first game in our massive 2016 preview. With everything from the mayhem of Overwatch to the brain-bending puzzling of The Witness and (*finally*!) the incredible AI of The Last Guardian, it did indeed turn out to be a fantastic year.

Below left Of course, we'd just had a great year. Mim is *still* playing your Game Of The Year 2015. It's that good.

Below And 2015 delivered great games right up to the end. Trust us, in Battlefront we definitely shot first.

Far left *sigh* But someone always lets the side down. Here's proof that dinosaurs don't make everything better.

Left Cleanse that sick filth from your mind with a reminder of Uncharted 4. Nathan Drake *does* make everything better.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF

Lara Croft

Impress your friends with your Crofty trivia

Debuting in 1996, the original trilogy was a PS1 hit. Inspired by Indiana Jones there are Easter Eggs to find in TR1. →

Despite Lara Croft's death in The Last Revelation before it, Chronicles was the final game on the original PlayStation. →

The Angel Of Darkness debuted on PS2, and adjusting to the new hardware was infamously an uphill struggle. ↓

Lara Croft has been on over 1,000 mag covers. Crofty has released two albums in France; 'hits' include Getting Naked and Feel Myself.

Lara is named after a real lady, from Derby. Ms Croft has never been married, but she was engaged in 1996.

TRIPLE THREAT

Three Laras, 20 years...

While Croft's adventures have taken a serious slant in recent years, she's still puzzling her way through tombs and stealing their artefacts. From devil-may-care heiress to earnest youth just trying to save her best friend, Lara's personality has varied over the years. But some things stay constant: for example, 6.3 million tombs have been raided in Shadow Of The Tomb Raider. We love a good tomb.

LEGEND WAS CRYSTAL DYNAMICS' FIRST GAME, RESURRECTING THE SERIES AFTER THREE YEARS OF SILENCE FOLLOWING THE POOR ANGEL OF DARKNESS.

Celebrating ten years, Anniversary is a remake of the first game.

Tomb Raider: Underworld is Legend's true sequel. It's also the last mainline game series co-creator Toby Gard wrote for.

Shadow Of The Tomb Raider is the fourth game to be set in Peru.

Lara has been played by nine models, two actresses, and five voice actresses. Nell McAndrew did it first.

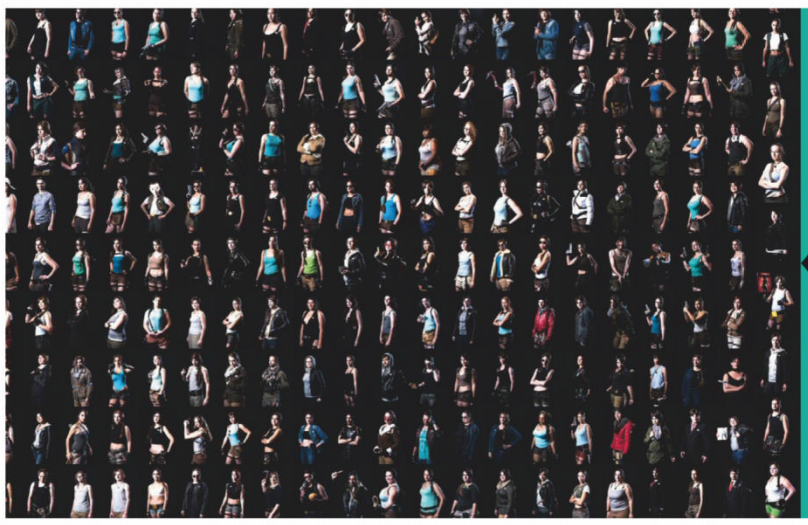


Image: Crystal Dynamics & Antony Gomes

RECORD BREAKER

Lara cracks more than tombs

Lara Croft is a record breaker on many levels. She's the best-selling videogame heroine in history; the Tomb Raider series has sold over 75 million copies. In 2016 she went into the Guinness Book Of Records for 'the largest gathering of people dressed as Lara Croft'. At Paris Games Week 270 Tomb Raider fans donned shorts and made history.

▷ Next issue: Come back for **Agent 47**'s most iconic moments

LOOK AWAY! SPOILER ALERT

#99

Christmas sweet treat

Ghostbusters: The Video Game delivers a squashy heap of nostalgia that's more addictive than any sugar rush

FORMAT PS3 / **PUB** ATARI, SONY / **DEV** TERMINAL REALITY / **RELEASED** 2009 / **SCORE** 8/10

The fluffy white stuff floats past the twinkling lights and for a moment we're filled with cheer. But that snow is marshmallow and the lights are burning. The Christmas cheer turns to delicious fear: ahead of us there's a 100-foot Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man. While the big pillow is out to chew on us, we feel as if Santa has come early. We've waited decades to fire up the proton packs and take on one of cinema's greatest villains.

Just like its big-screen namesake, Ghostbusters: The Video Game uses the feel-good tingles of Christmas to frame its sense of dread. We can see the detritus of Times Square scattered around us. Cabs and cars burn and smoulder, and presents lay unopened in the snow. The horror! In the distance we can see Stay-Puft. We duck from cars he throws – that's why they lay in pieces around us.

From our street-level view the heap of sweet stuff looks threatening. Yes, really. Created from the imagination of fellow Ghostbuster Ray Stantz in the movie, here we can take on the Puftster thanks to some gamesy shenanigans. Ray's as surprised as us, and as he's voiced by Dan Akroyd we feel closer to the movie than we'd ever thought possible.

The ensuing battle takes us from the city's streets up through an apartment block to get up close and personal with Stay-Puft. The mallowy monster is angry and on a sugar high, a bad combination. Hanging from the side of the building we deliver the final blast and watch as Pufty explodes into white sweet goodness. "You're my desert!" quips the actual Bill Murray. Christmas perfection. ■

TIME TO PLAY? Though you first spot Stay-Puft at the start of the fourth level, you don't get to battle the massive marshmallow until the fifth. The good news is you don't have to wait long to proton old Pufty back to Gozerville; this fight is around three hours into the game.

NEXT MONTH

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On the hunt for something original?

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