ISSUE 155 OCTOBER 2017

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King of the castle



Stephen Ashby
Editor
The news that there would be officially branded *Destiny 2* scented candles made Steve sigh so hard this month that he blew all of his possessions away. We lit a candle to calm him down.

One of the pleasures of working on **OXM** is that we often get to sit down with developers who really love what they do, and are genuinely proud of their creations. This month, I got the chance to do just that during a trip to Bethesda's offices to play *Wolfenstein II*. The game is as ridiculous, over-the-top and fun as you would expect, but I came to appreciate it even more after hearing how Jens Matthies, its creative director, talked about the project. There are plenty of people who point fingers at modern developers and claim they are purposefully deceiving players, or making design decisions purely to squeeze money out of them. In my experience these examples are few and far between – far more often, I see people who pour everything they have into making a great experience. It's what makes the games industry so damn cool. Enjoy the mag!

THE OXM TEAM



Daniella Lucas
Deputy editor
Dani moved all of her stuff to a different desk this month to be closer to us all. D'aww! It took four trucks to transport the plushies and collectibles.



Warren Brown
Senior art editor
Warren had to visit our magazine archive this month to dig out some retro gems. He came back smelling of nostalgia (and damp) but it was worth it.



Russell Lewin
Production editor
Rodents set up home in Russell's house this month. Their tiny parties kept him up all night, and worst of all, he wasn't even offered a drink. Rude.



Phil Iwaniuk
Contributor
Phil stepped back in time for us this month to revisit *Braid*. Not literally, of course – he broke his time machine following a jaunt to the future last week.



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→ HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY? WHY NOT WRITE TO TEAM OXM AT OXM@FUTURENET.COM

insider

Life is better with friends, but that fact can be hit and miss with videogames. Final Fantasy XV (p08) recently had a beta test of its *Comrades* multiplayer update, which lets you build your own character and head out on missions with your mates, but will it ever be able to recreate the road-trip feeling of the main game? Elsewhere, *Call Of Duty: WWII* shares details of its Zombies mode (p10) and it's looking more terrifying than ever with a new breed of undead that seem to enjoying having metal bolted to their faces. It's great extra support for brain-chomping. On to another kind of controllable zombie next, as The Sims 4 (p12) has finally been announced for Xbox One. Control an (almost) mindless family of Sims and build a life for them. Watch them flourish in their chosen careers, then forget to help them reach a toilet and watch in horror as they wet themselves in front of a potential 'woo-hoo' partner. Finally, a giant spider gets a surprisingly sexy makeover in Middle-earth: Shadow Of War (p13). Extra leggy.



008



010



012



013




EXP
201
Samuelwroberts
Level 11
Max HP 708

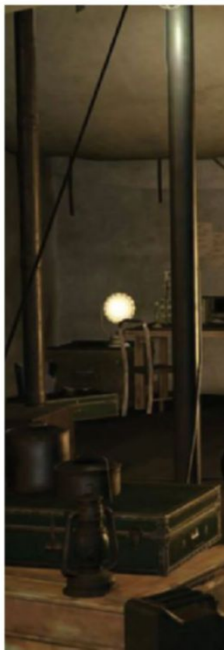










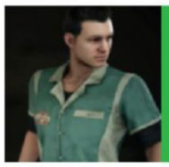












POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Final Fantasy with friends

Final Fantasy XV is at last letting you bring three pals to the party, but the closed beta doesn't leave a thrilling first impression

Months after release, *Final Fantasy XV* is finally getting its long-promised multiplayer mode. It's called Comrades, and it'll be available with the game's £20 season pass or sold by itself if you bought the standard version. The closed beta, which was running just before we went to press, doesn't leave a great taste, however – if you hoped this would replicate *FFXV*'s charming road trip format, only with a few human buddies instead of AI, it's much simpler and far less exciting than that.

It's more like a micro version of *Destiny*: you create an avatar of either gender, gather in a base camp, pick a mission, then go tackle it with up to three other players. The quests in this demo take you to disappointingly tiny patches of *FFXV*'s gigantic map. You and three players then hit some creatures for a while, before being taken back to camp when the objective's complete. Your rewards include new equipment to take with you during future quests, and an expansion of the main game's cooking-based food buffs.

FFXV's existing real-time combat system is retrofitted around the three extra players. Blocking an enemy attack protects the people behind you, and likewise, a healing spell can help your allies in range. Comrades also replicates the chain link combos of the main game: successfully blocking an enemy attack opens that creature up to a flurry of swipes from your party. This is probably the best translation of *FFXV*'s systems to the co-operative mode, in that it can bring all the players together for a big action moment. Generally, though, it all just feels a little mindless.

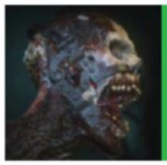
Missed a punch

That's mainly because everyone is just off doing their own thing. Each quest is like four simultaneous single-player fights in *FFXV*, which makes fights a bit noisy and incoherent. While *XV*'s combat system is flashy and full of spectacle, it has never had a ton of depth. Calling in the help of Noctis' friends is one of the few things you can use to tactically shift a fight in the main game. In Comrades, you're all mashing the attack button, healing when things get a bit hairy, casting attack spells and occasionally switching weapons – but that's about it. The quest types have some nice variation, though, and the finished version will feature a city-based hub and story-driven quests, as well as the ability to play as the main game's characters.

This is just a beta, and considering that it's thrown in with the season pass – which most people will be playing for the single-player episodes – Comrades isn't a bad way to kill some time. It's just hard to envision it becoming anyone's next multiplayer obsession when it launches in full. ■

Forza Fantasy

Here's a nice freebie for Xbox fans. *Forza Horizon 3* players can now download *Final Fantasy XV*'s Regalia car, the one Noctis and pals spend most of the game driving around in. All you've got to do is head to the game's message centre, then it's yours to drive around – and it's a pretty faithful-looking replica. Unfortunately, unlike *FFXV*'s version, you can't stick an upgrade inside it to make it fly.



FLESHING IT OUT

Redawn of the dead



The brain-biters are back, as the scariest ever Nazi Zombies mode comes to Call Of Duty: WWII

"Toto, I have a feeling we're not in *Nacht der Untoten* anymore." Sweet undead Jesus! **Sledgehammer Games' take on Nazi Zombies looks like one hell of a departure for the absurdly daft mini-game's roots – a lone map back in 2008's *Call Of Duty: World At War*. You can tell key members of the Activision-owned studio once worked on EA's seminal survival horror *Dead Space*, because this looks absolutely terrifying.**

"I have built more than just a new type of soldier," hisses a sinister German doctor. "I have created the devil himself." Anyone else miss firing campy ray guns back in *WAW*'s silly spin-off mode? Clearly, *Call Of Duty: WWII*'s Nazi Zombies wants to be an altogether different breed of brain-biter. The undead you see in the mode's debut trailer, which was revealed at San Diego Comic-Con, are feral, homicidally motivated savages. A lot of them also seem to be on fire. Dandy.

"We're going back to our roots," senior director Jon Horsley tells **OXM**'s sister website GamesRadar. "We're back to World War II, with a gritty, realistic portrayal of the settings. We're part of that universe, of that darkest corner of that universe. Our charter was to have the scariest zombie mode ever." Well, if those flaming zombs are anything to go by, mission horribly accomplished.

Killing machines

Indeed, *COD*'s latest coffin-dodgers have been purpose-built for warfare, as the mode's lead director Cameron Dayton tells GamesRadar. "So many other stories have explored the biological, viral, infectious plague element of the story and we wanted to see, what if these were zombies that were constructed? What if they were engineered and built as

"Our charter for the game was to have the scariest zombie mode ever"

weapons as war?" The trailer certainly lingers on a variety of chilling pieces of Frankenstein-esque laboratory equipment, and this latest zombies reboot seems more interested in giving its undead a proper origin story.

The human cast of this four-player online co-op should also be more fleshed out than the clichéd '80s archetypes seen in *Infinite Warfare*'s carnival-themed take on *COD* Zombies... well, at least until that flesh is ripped off in agonising fashion. Ex-*Doctor Who* star David Tennant plays art thief Drostan Hynd, *Daredevil*'s Elodie Yung is former historian Olivia Durant, *Pulp Fiction*'s Ving Rhames stars as the group's muscle, Jefferson Potts, while Katheryn Winnick of *Vikings* fame appears as Marie Fischer, an engineer out to rescue her brother.

The cast may mine Hollywood, but the actual setting is a smidge more hypothermia-courting. Set in the snowy Bavarian village of Mittelburg, Hynd and co must band together to recover priceless works of art stolen by the Axis powers – and yes, we're also now picturing that episode of *The Simpsons* where Grandpa and Mr Burns fight over WWII paintings. Of course, said village also houses a Nazi army of the dead. Sorry, art lovers.

Nazi Zombies has always offered throwaway fun, but the last few instalments of this slapstick spin-off have struggled for genuinely fresh ideas. Let's hope Sledgehammer's take can scare the wits out of all of us while throwing in terrifying new gameplay tweaks when *COD: WWII* launches on 3 November. ■

We'll check in on the Nazi Zombies again next month.

Arty pants

Sledgehammer Games clearly wants to inject a more fully rounded back-story into the undead proceedings this time round. Framing the narrative around a quest to reclaim prized works of art gives the four lead characters a clearer motivation beyond merely 'cap the goose-stepping, freedom-hating zombs'. This focus on reclaiming paintings from Axis forces has also permeated into the group's backstory; Olivia Durant used to work at the Louvre before she gave her career up to serve in the military.

→ EXCITED? HORRIFIED? LET THE WORLD KNOW AT WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/OXMUK





ABOVE A Nazi doctor has been doing experiments on the dead. They were a success.

RIGHT This guy just heard you say how bad his skin looked, and now he's going to nibble you.

HOT TOPIC

WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THE NEW DIRECTION FOR COD ZOMBIES?



"Dude, it is gonna be scary. These are the people that made the *Dead Space* games."
Lukas Wagner



"I don't get it. Just make a survival mode with 50 to 100 levels (of leveling up) like in *Modern Warfare 3*. Make it epic. *Black Ops 2* had some exciting zombies but the mode is dead... no pun intended."
Zaid Adams



"Hmm, looks creepy. A darker shade of *Killing Floor* maybe?"
Lawrence Brooks



"Oh look, the same thing as the last few games but with better graphics. Is this all they can do?"
Paul Eller



"Can't wait to try out the new formula. I'm doubtful that it will be better than *World At War*'s zombie mode but it has to be better than retro..."
@ChiefTommeh



"Finally, like back in the day!"
@ogsamppa



"That's what I look like before my morning coffee."
@WarBot3000

Are you looking forward to shooting zombs? Tell us at facebook.com/oxmuk



BEING HUMAN

Fashionably late

Three years on from its PC release, The Sims 4 arrives on Xbox One

BELOW New emotion and mood mechanics affect not just if, but how Sims perform tasks.

'Better late than never', or so the saying goes, but just try telling that to the Sims we've left floating face down in their swimming pools. "Look guys, we've added in the steps again! It was all a big joke! You can come out now... guys?"

Still, we're mightily pleased to report that *The Sims 4* will be making its belated Xbox One debut on 17 November. The series, which last appeared on Xbox some seven years ago, had up until that point enjoyed a surprisingly consistent run on the platform – with the first three entries all appearing on either the original Xbox or Xbox 360.

EA has announced that the port, which it promises will be as faithful to the PC version as possible, will include 'many' – though potentially not all – of the subsequent expansion and content packs. Just which ones will be included remains unknown, though early pre-order incentives suggest that the game's bevy of smaller, largely aesthetic 'Stuff Packs' may not make the cut.



Speaking of which, fans who opt to pre-order the game will receive the Perfect Patio Stuff pack – which includes hot tubs, outfits and assorted bits of furniture. Those who cough up for the Deluxe Party Edition meanwhile, will also receive the Life Of The Party and Up All Night packs – including laser light shows and a very *Banjo Kazooie*-esque tiki bar.

Deluxe players will also receive three days of early access to the game as well as an array of 'awesome animal hats' – perfect for anyone looking to re-enact *GTA V* heists. In addition, EA Access subscribers will also be able to play *The Sims 4* a whole seven days early. That's a whole week of trapping your Sims inside closets and forbidding them to use the toilet! Wait... that is the objective, isn't it? ■

The Sims 4 will be reviewed in a future issue of OXM.

PLAY/EJECT

THE THINGS PUSHING OUR BUTTONS (OR NOT)

Spotify on Xbox One
After months of rumours, the Spotify app is finally available to download to Xbox One. At long last we can listen to our 49-hour playlist of pan-pipe remixes during our epic *Titanfall 2* overnight sessions.

Interface in yo' face
Microsoft has demonstrated an all-new user interface coming to Xbox One. It's customisable and we're predicting a launch around 7 November.

Scanda-game-ian
Ubisoft is opening a new studio in Stockholm, Sweden, led by Patrick Bach, previously of DICE.

PES-imism
Neymar Jr's insanely expensive transfer to PSG means Konami will have to change the cover of its special Barcelona edition version of *PES*. Oops!

Borderlands blanked
Gearbox is making a new game! But it's not *Borderlands*, it's a FPS called 'Project 1v1'. We want Handsome Jack!

Shadow of Loot
Shadow Of War has become the latest game to announce the addition of loot boxes. Sigh.

→ More Xbox news at gamesradar.com/oxm



SPIDER BITE



BELOW Shelob in the (grotesque) form you'll know and not love.

Creepy crawly

Shelob gets an extreme makeover in Middle-Earth: Shadow Of War

Spiders are revolting creatures, what with their too many eyes and too many legs all eerily working in unison. It's not natural, dammit. Shelob from *The Lord Of The Rings* only made matters worse thanks to her incredible size and horrible labyrinth of webs that could easily ensnare someone human (or hobbit)-sized. But after seeing what she looks like in the upcoming *Shadow Of War* we're really confused – she's lost the extra limbs and now takes on a new form; that of a brunette woman.

In the game's lore she was driven out of Mordor to the mountains by Sauron and often sends out raiding parties to fight his Orcs. You share a common enemy (that's probably how you end up crossing paths), but given that she's still also an evil giant spider half of the time she also shouldn't be trusted lightly. She's got her own agenda to pursue, though what that is we'll only find out in October.



Itsy-bitsy

She allows our hero Talion to see through her many eyes so he can have funky visions – perhaps why he holds her in high regard – but his wraith counterpart Celebrimbor is a lot less trusting. This leads to conflict between the two, which Shelob seems to delight in. Will she drive a wedge between the two spiritual besties, or will you overcome it?

Still, it looks like her powers are going to come in handy not just for peeking into the future and finding Sauron, but for the game's fortress raids as well. One of the powers you can use lets you recruit an army of eight-legged friends who scamper around poisoning foes or driving them mad with fear, while you go about the business of slaying orcs.

Everything we see of *Shadow Of War* excites us more, so we're curious to see where this imaging of Shelob in this version of Mordor takes us. The introduction of the Nemesis system in *Shadow Of Mordor* was a delight, and *SOW* looks like it's set to surprise us just as much as the original. ■

Middle-Earth: Shadow Of War will be released on 10 October.



BARREL WATCH

GAMING'S FAVOURITE PROP RATED BY OUR RESIDENT COOPER



Destiny 2 Beta
These yellow wonders are currently a prototype for the beta - here's hoping for more classic wood finishes for the final thing.



Player Unknown's Battlegrounds
It's a barrel-royale – only the most perfectly curved survive to be crowned king of the set-dressing awards. A true honour.



Metro Exodus
The humble barrel is truly the best of engineering inventions. Capable of surviving a nuclear fallout, it's *the* storage unit of choice.



Friday The 13th
After all that murder we've forgotten the true victims here, our cask friends who were forced to watch such brutal acts of violence with no escape. Those poor darlings.



A Way Out
Look after your barrel and it will look after you. Don't leave it to lie alone and succumb to rust like these two heartless creatures – that's how they ended up in jail.



Bouncing forwards

Indie hit Slime Rancher leaves Game Preview for a full release

After almost a year in the Game Preview program, the bouncing blobs have finally been fully unleashed on Xbox One in a full release. You play as Beatrix LeBeau, who has moved to a new planet to seek her fortune finding and farming slimes with her trusty vacpack that lets you suck up objects and spit them back out again.

While in Game Preview the game has received tons of updates and there are now loads of new areas to explore, and new types of slime to catch and breed. As you feed your slimes new food they'll produce plorts, aka slime poop, which you then sell for cash to spend on expanding your farmstead with new buildings, or upgrading your gear. Your happy blorpy cattle can be crossbred to create new kinds of slimes, generating even more valuable poo with which to line your (probably pongy) coffers.

It's a bright, happy game with loads of charm, so if you were holding off before for a full release now is the time to dive in. ■

You can find it now on Xbox One.



MAIN IMAGE Down on the Ranch it's looking livelier after a period in disrepair.

Steve Hogarty is...

The Fixer

Steve searches for a solution to **inventory screens**

What's in your pockets right now? I'll wait here while you empty them out on the table. Of course, I'm not actually waiting, I'm being silly and fun. Writing is one-way communication and I have no idea who you are or what you're doing at any given – oh, you've finished emptying them? Good.

Now I will guess what's in front of you. A mobile phone. A wallet. A crumpled receipt from Lidl for tin of chickpeas. A bad crayon drawing of either a small horse or a large dog. A blood-spattered Polaroid of a brother whose murder you vowed to avenge. A blood-spattered Polaroid of a brother whose murder you vowed to justify. The key to the room that nobody must enter. An off-brand *Coronation Street* fidget spinner. A motivational sticker that says 'Keep on keepin' on', and a well-thumbed book of advanced fidget spinner tricks.

If I'm wrong about most of these, it's for the simple reason that we just can't carry that much stuff on our person. The situation is worse still for women, who rarely even enjoy the luxury of pockets and so must drag all of their belongings around behind them in a beautiful silken bag on the end of a piece of string. Yet games perpetuate the well-established myth of the bottomless pocket, the infinitely expandable backpack and the burdenless armoury. Games created the accursed *inventory screen*. And it's time we – or more accurately I, alone, in my capacity as a Renowned Fixer of Game Problems – fixed it.

The Problem

There are a variety of types of inventory in games, and they are all terrible to some degree. The first is weight-based, as seen in all Bethesda RPGs, a system that paralyses you for picking up one too many grapes. The second is tile-based, as seen in *Resident Evil* games,



"Collect a sword and you must strap a microwave to your back"

which inexplicably attempts to replicate the boundless frustration of packing a suitcase while being attacked by feral dogs. The third is slot-based, pioneered by the original *Halo* and now found in most modern shooters. It permits you



to carry just one big gun, one little gun and one flavour of grenade. The final and most egregious form of inventory is the sprawling, scrolling, uncategorised list of every potion, cog and pork chop you've picked up throughout the course of your adventure. Impractical and ugly, the listed inventory is very much the 'kitchen drawer of assorted crap' of organisational methods, and along with its variants has led to such miserable gaming quirks as freezing time mid-battle to eat nine wheels of cheese.

The Solution

Many games have attempted to supplant the tyranny of inventory screens with their own systems, but with little success. The 2004 remake of *Alone In The Dark* had you pulling items from your inside jacket pockets, which bulged like the trenchcoat of a shady Rolex salesman. Interestingly, the game didn't pause as you rifled for ammunition, so monsters could attack you mid-rummage. The satirical Discworld point-and-click adventure went in the opposite direction, justifying your impossibly capacious inventory by having all your stuff follow you around inside an anthropomorphised treasure chest.

I applaud that level of realism, but we can go even further thanks to my very practical solution. Games should force you to stand on a set of scales as you play. With each in-game item you collect you must place an equivalent weight somewhere about their person. Pick up a virtual coin and you must pick up a real one. Collect a nice sword and you must strap your microwave to your back. As you play you become increasingly – and very realistically – encumbered until, finally, you are sensationally crushed beneath your own sofa in one beautiful, spine-crushing moment of accurate inventory simulation. Glorious. ■

Steve wrote this column with a keyboard tucked into his belt like a pistol.


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Daniella Lucas is...

The Traveller

Dani goes glamping in **Friday The 13th**

I can't say I'm one for jump scares and horror, but if you ignore all the murder and deathrattles of your fellow campers you can have a delightful time by the shores of Higgins Haven in *Friday The 13th*. Set deep in a remote forest full of pine trees and bordered by a serene lake, the camp is an ideal place to get in touch with nature. A visit is also sure to get your adrenaline pumping thanks to the pursuit of a lumbering and eccentric local called Jason. There really is no better way to appreciate the atmosphere of a forest at night than by being chased through it by a harpoon-wielding maniac. Now *there's* something that should be included on the brochure.

While the game itself is small, it's still found great success (with a fair few technical hiccups along the way) thanks to the design of its locations. Each map is tiny, but is packed with places to hide and items to uncover. Every time you enter the map, the location of various things such as the radio, phone and car parts, shifts so it always feels fresh when you feel the urge to hunt down counsellors as Jason Voorhees, or be hunted by him. It's the compactness of the camp that makes it special; it's the perfect size to get lost in while still being tight enough to keep you on your toes. It's a perfect example of a small space done well, utilising every inch of space to its fullest.

The facilities

There are also plenty of activities on offer to keep you entertained while you're out there, including moonlit walks, classes in car mechanics and frequent hide-and-seek tournaments which award great prizes such as bear traps and even, if you're very lucky, the gift of life.

Should you decide to visit you can get closer to nature and rough it in a tent by a log fire, but the only way to experience camp life at its fullest is to rent a rustic chalet with your friends. Each one has several rooms for you to spread out in and includes drawers to hide your knickknacks, as well as plenty of underbed storage space should you feel the need to hide. Scattered around the forest, they are little oases of hope in a wilderness full of dread – sneaking inside one gives you a brief moment of calm and a source of inspiration as you uncover items to plan your next moves. Healing items, car parts and makeshift weapons can all be found in your lodgings when taking part in one of Jason's games.



"You find yourself jumping at every shadow in the pale moonlight"



Moonlit walks

There are two places in Higgins Haven that stand out above everything else – the main lodge, and Jason's cabin. Spread over two floors with multiple rooms and a cosy fireplace, the lodge feels like a smaller map within a map. With plenty of room for the counsellors to run around in and narrow stairs to contend with, players are forced into attacking Jason to escape if he steps inside. It feels very much like a condensed version of the whole map – you're forced into close contact so all of your interactions are far more intense, but being such a large cabin you've got loads of options in how you handle things. Do you dive out of a window? Or stand your ground and stun Jason with a flare gun? Or do you hide in a closet and hope he walks right past so you can escape later?

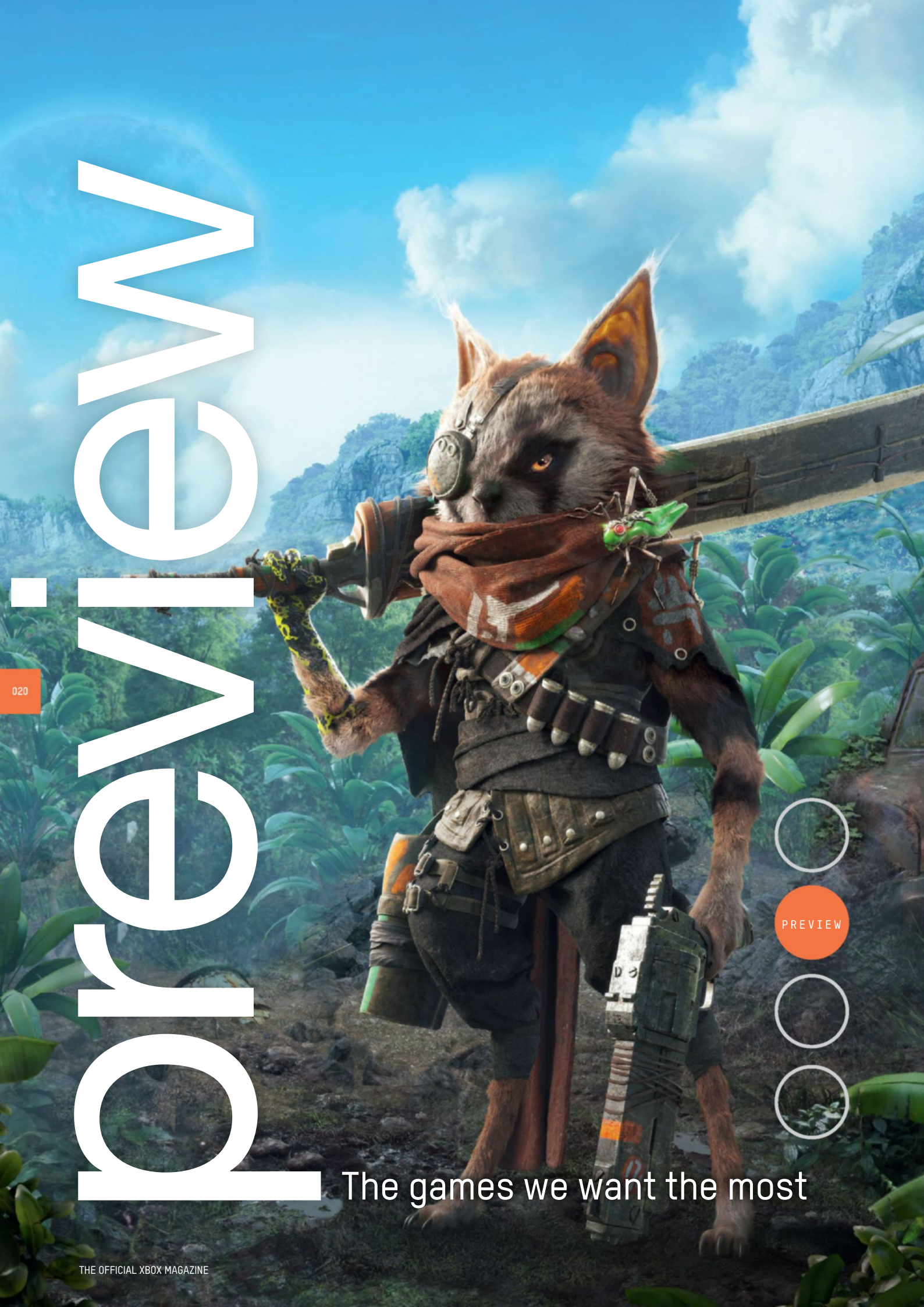
By comparison the forest outside feels positively wild; the tall pine trees feel overbearing, adding to the tension. You find yourself jumping at every shadow in the pale moonlight, nervously looking over your shoulder every time you duck into the bushes to hide. Stay outdoors long enough and eventually you'll stumble across a tiny, isolated cabin with a morbid secret inside – the dried-out remains or Mrs Voorhees and a crusty jumper that can stop Jason in his tracks. Finding it feels like winning a horrible jackpot – the prize being the most powerful item in the game, though you'll have to slip into a dead woman's jumper to be able to use it.

No matter how horrible it is, Higgins Haven is a joy to explore inch by terrifying inch. The nights you spend there are dark and full of terror, but it's worth the visit to see just how well a small space can build such a tense atmosphere. ■

You can see more of Dani's gaming travels on Instagram: @daniellamlucas.


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preview



The games we want the most

Themed *Destiny 2* energy drinks and Pop-Tarts will grant in-game XP boosts (sigh)

OXM'S MOST WANTED

Steve's pick
Biomutant
THQ Nordic's all-new mutant adventure looks as adorable as it does bright and beautiful. I've got high hopes for this.

Dani's pick
Dragon Ball FighterZ
I've already started practicing my Kamehameha attack in anticipation, but it's not quite at level 9,000 yet.

Warren's pick
Destiny 2
I checked out the beta when it was live in July, and it's whet my appetite for the full game. I can't wait to get my Hunter on.

Like to spend your time staring into space when you should be doing something else instead, such as taking back your home after a horrible alien invasion? Well then, Destiny 2 (p22) has you covered as its brand of space-faring adventure is looking absolutely gorgeous. Even if you are busy checking out all of the new gear and fancy guns there's always time to take a little break and stare up at the night sky. We expect that you'll also find yourself taking in the surroundings a lot of the absolutely magnificent-looking Beyond Good And Evil 2 (p26). It's got some of the best spaceship design we've seen in a videogame in ages, not to mention the ancient yet futuristic look of the cities you visit, and all of the outrageous characters you meet. If you like mixing in punchups with your space travel then you need to check out Dragon Ball FighterZ (p34). The aliens you meet might not always be friendly and have a tendency to gang up on in you in teams of three, but if you can give as good as you get you'll have a blast in this anime-inspired brawler. Finally the end is here, but if you stick to the underground colonies you might have a chance of surviving it, and if that fails then you can always hop on a train elsewhere in Metro: Exodus (p40). Just don't forget to bring your gas mask with you wherever you go.


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Bungie has admitted it didn't know what the first game's Darkness was, and won't mention it here





Destiny 2

In a world of Darkness, facing a new foe shines a bright light

Dom Peppiatt

PUBLISHER ACTIVISION **DEVELOPER** BUNGIE **FORMAT** XBOX ONE
ETA 6 SEPTEMBER 2017



MAIN The new Strike bosses seem to be much tricker and more complex than the first game's bullet sponges.

The world is falling apart. Your one refuge from the encroaching Darkness has been compromised. Your Tower has fallen. Your sanctuary is ripped apart, the remnants of humanity's final shelter buckled under the artillery of a new enemy: a Cabal splinter more violent, more aggressive than any that have come before.

You have a new enemy. A new face that has come to weaken your grasp on the Traveller's light – the Traveller that seemed to form the crux of all the mystical mechanics of the first game. "Do not look at me, creature," says Dominus Ghaul as he enters your home, the social space where you've made friends, organised Raids, decrypted countless engrams. "You are weak, undisciplined, cowering behind walls. You are not brave, you've merely forgotten the fear of death. Allow me to reacquaint you."

This is *Destiny 2*'s mission statement. It wants to remind you that warding off waves of the engulfing Dark shouldn't be easy, that you've become complacent with all your Exotic gear and your supernatural powers. *Destiny 2* has come to shake things up, rework the formula that's kept us coming back for years, forcibly make you re-examine how you use weapons, how you use powers, and how you work with a team.

The biggest change to *Destiny 2* is the weapons: they're the centrifugal part of the game. But it seems in *Destiny 2*, Bungie has built the weapon setup around PvP rather than PvE – snipers and shotguns have been relegated to the Power slot (formerly known as Heavy) and this has fundamentally altered the way The Crucible works, and made PvE harder too.

World of pain

When you're running through the world tackling the Fallen, the Vex, the Cabal, the Hive and whoever else is baying for your blood, you'll notice there's a lot less Power ammo knocking around, forcing you to rely on your two new Primary weapons a lot more. Hot-swapping from a kinetic damage submachine gun to an elemental hand cannon to tackle the new enemy variants works surprisingly well, and negates *Destiny*'s old 'shoot it enough and it'll die' problem... you have to apply a bit more thought this time around, play a dynamic game of rock-paper-scissors

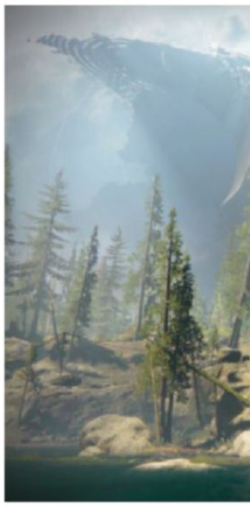
"Destiny 2 reworks the formula that's kept us coming back for years"

to ensure you can actually make it through the newly difficult Strikes and story missions.

Destiny 2 has upped its game with bosses, too – in the beta, you're introduced to Protheon, who seems to be exacting revenge for the first game's first Raid boss, Atheon. There was a cheese to push Atheon off the arena in vanilla *Destiny*, and now Protheon is intent on pushing *you* out of the arena in the Inverted Spire Strike. It's a very Bungie way of nodding to *Destiny*'s legacy and we hope to see more of this in the final build. That, mixed with how damn tough the new three-stage fight is, sets a promising precedent for how *Destiny 2* will deal with Strikes.

Weapons in PvP, alongside the new rebalanced 4v4 setup, make the



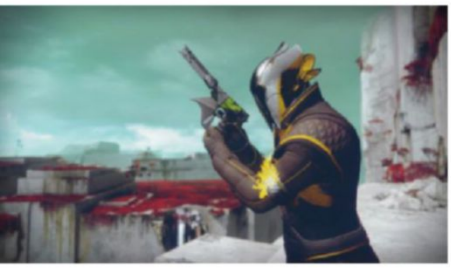


ABOVE The new 4v4 game mode makes *Destiny 2* more tactical than before.

LEFT The Titan's new cover options make for some useful ad-hoc cover.

Grimoire Cards from the first game is not returning: Bungie wants to focus on in-game storytelling







"The enemy AI remains as impressive as it ever has been in a Bungie game"

MONUMENTS TO YOUR SINS

Destiny 2's beta was riddled with references to the first game. Here are our favourites:

1 Paul McCartney performed a song for *Destiny*, and if you listen carefully in the Hangar in Homecoming, you can hear a jukebox playing the song.

2 Look hard enough in Homecoming, and you can see the Tower's ball all sad and deflated.

3 At the start of the Inverted Spire Strike, if you kill enough enemies, eventually some Fallen will turn up for you to fight.

BELOW The awesome natural structures might remind you of old *Halo* games.

→ Crucible a much more tactical place to lay down fire: running and gunning will get you nowhere now. You need to think carefully about how you use your characters subclass abilities – Warlocks are now effectively Bards; support class characters that can grant offensive or healing boons. Hunters are as agile as ever, but feel weakened in comparison to their supporting and tanking siblings. Titans with their cover wall can help set up entrenched defensive positions, meaning that in a little quartet of fighters (with just one class of each!) there are myriad different team setups that you'll need to experiment with in order to come out on top.

The time to kill has also been noticeably elongated; trading kills in *Destiny 2* is far less likely than in the first game, and we feel that's to the sequel's benefit. It's a big change to the Crucible – and a big change for Bungie – but we're keen to see how the meta matures in *Destiny 2*, and if it'll be a smoother evolution than *Destiny*'s original gimmick-ridden meta.

Single again

Back in the single player, the way *Destiny 2* throws you into the Homecoming story mission in the beta makes an intentional point of force feeding you narrative. The mission sees you interact with the Vanguard leader of each faction – the Warlock's Ikora Ray, the Hunter's Cayde-6 and the Titan's Zavala all have their part to play in the mission, and there's some beautiful poetic irony in how you see all three in action here, but will have to recover their scattered factions later in the game.

While *Destiny 2* is trying much harder to make the narrative aspect of the game more appealing, we still find parts of the story grating: Nolan North's vocal work as your Ghost continues to be impressive, but some of the script for his lines tries too hard to be funny, which contrasts harshly against the apocalyptic nature of *Destiny 2*'s doom-y setup.

At least having the Vanguard scattered across the solar system means that we get to see more of what Bungie excels at: world-building. The beta showed off a few maps, and they continue to make the Xbox One hum with bold colours, intelligent semi-open zones and a perfect mix of corridors and combat arenas.

The enemy AI remains as impressive as it ever has been in a Bungie game, and some new specialist-type enemies mixed in with aggressive, feral robo-dogs make for some wonderful encounters. The gunplay, naturally, complements the AI design perfectly – every enemy has a weak point, every gunshot feels impactful and every enemy that falls to your trigger finger makes you feel like the world's smoothest, coolest gunslinger. It's the *Destiny* power fantasy we've all come to love over the last three years, but more so, and you can't argue with the satisfaction every single gunshot elicits in you.

Returning *Destiny* players are going to find little to complain about in the second game. Bungie even seems to be addressing the complaints about how often the game was patched from the beta – in the time it was live, we already saw the developer fix a myriad of bugs and balance issues... and that's just for the beta. It sets a positive precedent for the final build of the game, a promise that Bungie will be keeping its ear to the ground, listening to the clamour of unhappy players should bugs and balance situations arise.

Destiny 2 is a remarkably familiar experience, something that works to the game's detriment and benefit: if you were craving something ostensibly new from the sequel, you'll be disappointed. If you were looking for more of the same, with a couple of fundamental changes to how the core of the shooting experience works, you're in luck. *Destiny* has always been a divisive game, and it looks like with *Destiny 2*, that reputation is set to become even more intense. Eyes up, Guardian. ■

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Despite garnering cult status, the original *BGAE* sold a mere 100,00 copies on the first Xbox





Beyond Good And Evil 2

Ancel's space-faring sandbox is all set to be an absolute Knox-out

David Meikleham

PUBLISHER UBISOFT **DEVELOPER** BISOFT MONTPELLIER
FORMAT XBOX ONE **ETA** TBC

Michel Ancel has been busy. If you think the French game director has been sitting on his hands these past 14 years since Jade's snap-happy sci-fi adventure hit the original Xbox, you're dead wrong. Oh sure, he got briefly distracted making an 'alright... ish' tie-in about a sizeable gorilla – the exhaustingly titled *Peter Jackson's King Kong: The Official Game Of The Movie*. Yet despite the detours, a massive amount of work has clearly gone into this hugely anticipated sequel.

Case in point: *Beyond Good And Evil 2* literally has its own solar system. Ancel recently hopped on YouTube to give a walkthrough of the E3 gameplay demo, and the first of Ubisoft's 'Space Monkey Program' episodes (yes, that's really what they're called) lifts the lid on *BGAE2*'s quite incredible scale. This is a sprawling sandbox where you can perform actions both intimate and epic. Be it whizzing about in a jetpack with a grungy monkey, or blasting off into the vastness of space in a 1300ft mothership, *BGAE2* is happy to tackle tiny or tremendous feats. See, Ancel and co *really* have been busy.

Let's go back to that monkey, though. Flying above the sprawling city of Ganesha looks all sorts of simian sexy. You can tell just by looking at the expressive, weighty animations there's a real suppleness and subtlety to the hovering controls. Knox's jetpack will aid your exploration no end, and in the demo Ancel makes the ape land on a 700-metre-tall statue of Ganesh, which you can apparently explore the inside of. Standing atop the mighty Hindu god also gives the director a chance to pan the camera around to highlight some stunning vistas, as the mighty elephant deity casts long, lonely shadows over the urban expanse below.

"Flying above the sprawling city of Ganesha looks all sorts of simian sexy"

GETTING IN EARLY

Ancel opened his gameplay demo by explaining that this was a very early build of the game, and that it was by no means close to final. He then went on to show a brilliantly animated monkey jetting across the skyline of a stunningly realised city and then launched out of the planet's atmosphere on a huge ship. If this is early code, we can't wait to see the finished article. As we suspect Knox would say, that shit is going to be *bananas*.

Ship shape

Once Knox has finished admiring the vertigo-inducing views, it's time to hop back into the mothership, which cutely, can hold smaller ships you acquire throughout the game. (Ancel compares this mechanic to stacking Russian dolls.) Even though it's the length of several football fields, this colossal craft is no slouch – it can reach speeds of up to 20,000km/h. And before he jets off into Ganesha's outer atmosphere, Ancel pulls off a series of effortless rolling manoeuvres and loop-the-loops. The designer also describes the mothership as a dogfighter, an assertion its multitude of mounted turrets back up.

"We want interactivity to be the heart of the whole experience," says Ancel. "Not just with characters, not just with spaceships, but also with a huge planet." It's that last part which really emphasises the insane scale of *BGAE2*. You can blast into the outer atmosphere at any time, the sprawling cities below soon reduced to scuttling ant hills. More impressively, the transition into space is handled instantaneously, with nary a hint of a loading screen. Indeed, intergalactic exploration looks so seamless, you could almost be fooled into thinking you're playing *EVE Online*... with added chattering chimps.

As Ancel stated earlier, Ubisoft Montpellier wants to make every part of this spectacular sci-fi ride truly interactive. He even says planets can be deformed in real-time if they're hit by massive asteroids. How's that for ambition? The wait has been agonising, but *BGAE2* is reaching for the stars, and we can't wait to strap ourselves in for the space-faring fun. ■









ABOVE Ancel promises planets won't be empty, and instead will house thriving biodomes.

FAR LEFT The jetpack's animations already look superb. Fun navigation should help this sandbox sing.

LEFT Concept art shows that jetpacks and ships won't be the only ways to get around.

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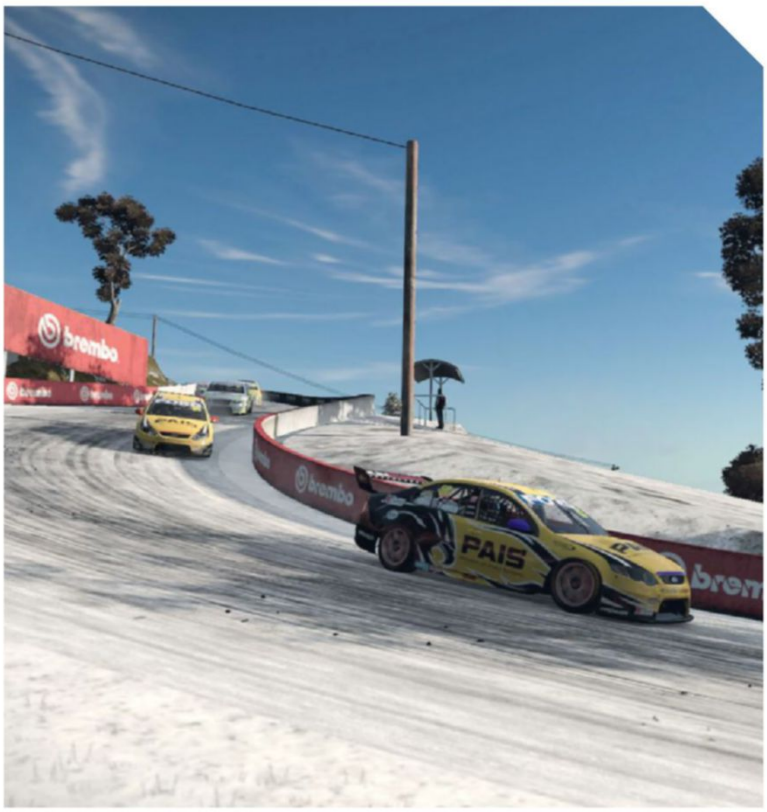
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Nicolas Hamilton, Lewis's brother, consults for Slightly Mad Studios and influenced its handling





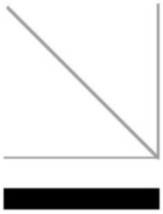


Project Cars 2

Battling elements in the sim racer that's all tyre and ice

Paul Taylor

PUBLISHER BANDAI NAMCO **DEVELOPER** SLIGHTLY MAD STUDIOS
FORMAT XBOX ONE **ETA** 22 SEPTEMBER



ABOVE Pick the length of your series, and whether you'll bother with practise sessions. We recommend you do.

Slightly Mad Studios is doing itself a disservice. The game should really be called *Project Tracks*, because there are more circuits here than in a box of Scalextric. Forty-six locations with over 100 routes, spanning the globe from Australia to the Azure Coast, California to, er, Caldwell Park.

Or perhaps *Project Time And Weather Permutations* thanks to the staggering combination of seasons, and conditions that turn a sweltering summer's day race into a blizzard. The effect is spectacular, a real back-of-the-box highlight. Other racing games offer weather effects, but seeing the changing weather and shifting shadows is a technical masterpiece.

There's 180-odd motors at launch, with a clutch of disciplines to please motorsport enthusiasts. We say 'enthusiasts' deliberately: this is no place for anyone who wants a quick and easy fang. You're in this because you want to be involved in the journey of racing cars and carving out a career punctuated with distinction, no matter whether you want to strap on your L-plates in karts or the one-make Ginetta Juniors and work your way up from there, or go straight to the ferocious IndyCar open-wheelers.

Ice, man

That's part of the *Project Cars* DNA, though. Like its predecessor, everything is open from the off – cars, circuits, the lot. The concept of grinding out race after race for puny credits isn't the way here.

So where's the challenge? That's up to you to carve out for yourself.

"This is no place for anyone who wants a quick and easy fang"

Seven 'Lifetime Goals' await, where you win the Indy 500 and the Le Mans 24 Hours, and become factory driver for Ferrari or Porsche. Lofty goals, though they're marked out for you. The true adventurer instead aims for competency at the new, nightmarish ice circuits. These are officially modelled on Mercedes Benz's test tracks, a worrying set of curves that swing back and forth around each other in the Arctic Circle, with Aurora Borealis on the horizon. Clip a snow bank on the edge and you're cooked – there is no rewind, just a hard restart.

Like many sims, you need a delicate hand if you're playing with a pad, but a decent wheel is undoubtedly the way to go. The handling model is best described as being 'agreeable' rather than 'tamed' when compared to the 2015 release: you'll know where you went wrong, and you're likely to make the mistake again, as we did, burying the nose of our Lancer into the powder. Over, and over.

There is one worrier: *Forza Motorsport 7*, out a month later and optimised for Xbox One X. *Project Cars 2* promises to run at 1080p60, even with a full armada of 32 cars on track (depending on the discipline and location), and with its sheer wealth of *stuff* jammed in, it'll be a race to your 'Box's hard drive. ■

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FIFA 18 has all 20 Premier League stadia, including Bournemouth's Dean Court, which seats 11,464







FIFA 18

The beautiful game just got even prettier

Stephen Ashby

PUBLISHER EA SPORTS **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA
FORMAT XBOX ONE **ETA** 29 SEPTEMBER 2018

NEWBIE TO PRO

EA are focusing on appealing both to newcomers and to the pro players in *FIFA 18* – it wants new players to be competitive, and work their way up the rankings. "There's always room to improve and become a professional FUT player," says Rivera. "We're focusing on basics for players joining the game, like fluidity, or on features to teach them how to train and learn."

Here at OXM Towers, we like to play a game when it comes to a new *FIFA* announcement – it's called Buzzword Bingo. We all put words like "Systemic Action" and "Physicality" on a bingo card and get the dabbers out. This year, Dani won when she finished a line with "Explosiveness". You won't be surprised to hear that the game is ultimately not as fun as *FIFA 18*.

A dribbling system overhaul is the change that fans of the series will notice most keenly this time around. Skilled players are now much more useful – taking it around opponents is easier and feels extremely satisfying. We played an early build, and with players like Messi and Ronaldo, we were concerned that balancing may become an issue as defenders helplessly fling tackles in the direction of these stars, unable to get the all-important foot in. So, when we sat down with Sam Rivera, Lead Gameplay Producer on *FIFA 18*, we asked if keeping the game fair has been a challenge.

"It is, but in the same way that we are doing the better dribblers, [who are] faster and more agile, we're also including better defenders, better tackling," he stressed. "And the new Motion Technology animation system allows us to have more responsive movement when defending. A big part of defending is staying in front of the ball and finding that right moment to tackle. Now it will be easier to stay in front of the ball because the player will react better."

"The new animation system allows for more responsive movement"

Fair enough, although Motion Technology sadly wasn't on our bingo sheet. That, by the way, is the new system that calculates an animation after every frame, rather than every step, and allows players to react more quickly to your inputs than previous games. Admittedly, Motion Technology is a tad catchier than our explanation.

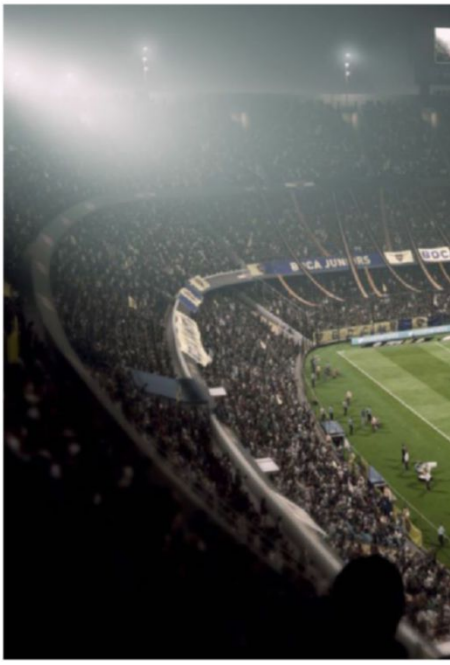
Shoot and score

Elsewhere, aside from some major visual work on some of the world's biggest stadia to improve the atmosphere and make them look more realistic, EA has also made the moment-to-moment play feel more special. It means that if you set up a great shooting opportunity, the chances of scoring a 40-yard screamer are greater.

"In real life if you have a shot, and you have space, you have time, and the ball is in a good position, you should have a very good shot," says Rivera. "It's up to the user to create the right situation to take the shot. We don't want every shot to go in, obviously, but what we did in *FIFA 18* was emulate those concepts from real football to make sure that they happen in *FIFA 18*. In *FIFA 17* there were cases where everything was perfect but you'd hit it and the ball would go flying somewhere else. That doesn't make sense."

The Journey is back this year, too, with a more global storyline, bigger decisions, and choices that actually affect the outcome of Hunter's story. "The story is much better," says Rivera. "There is more variety, and you get to do more things and go to different places." You can customise Hunter with hairstyles and clothing, too, and Rivera also teases that we would be playing as other characters this time around. "In the past it was always Alex Hunter, but now you will play, too, with some other people... although I can't tell you who they are," he says with a grin. The Journey was a surprise hit last year, so let's hope the new season can match it. ■





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ABOVE Ronaldo's dribbling will be terrifying for defenders this year – you'll need a strong back four to stop him.

FAR LEFT Stadia across the world have been given major upgrades, including real banners and new lighting systems.

LEFT When you score, the crowd will pour forward to the pitch and you can celebrate with them.

ABOVE Sebastian is heading back into the STEM worlds, this time by choice, in an effort to rescue his daughter.





Shinji Mikami won't direct this sequel; instead he will serve as its executive producer













The Evil Within 2

Things just keep on getting stranger and stranger Josh West

PUBLISHER BETHESDA SOFTWORKS **DEVELOPER** TANGO GAMEWORKS **FORMAT** XBOX ONE **ETA** 13 OCTOBER 2017

If the road to hell is paved with good intentions, Sebastian Castellanos is going somewhere far darker and more insidious. We won't pretend to totally understand what went down in *The Evil Within* (to be honest, we aren't sure the localisation team knew either), but what we *do* know for certain is that this is one down-on-his-luck detective that can't seem to catch a break. Lost his job, betrayed by his protégé, hunted by monsters, and, oh yeah, his daughter is back from the dead but missing in action – what seemingly innocuous part of your day were you moaning about earlier? Come on, get some perspective already!

If the original game was director Shinji Mikami's spiritual successor to *Resident Evil 4*, then this sequel is going to be something else entirely. You see, Mikami has stepped out of the directorial chair, dusted it off so it's all nice and clean, and allowed John Johanas to take his place – guiding production following his work on the Juli Kidman-focused DLCs, The Assignment and The Consequence. And Johanas, quite clearly, has a different interpretation to the true nature of fear.

The Evil Within 2 is leaning heavily into a different breed of survival horror, promoting a certain brand of psychological warfare that should have *Silent Hill* fans up in celebration and the rest of us cowering behind our couches. The focus is shifting away from turning the familiar into the farcical; from the frenetic gunplay that helped define its predecessor towards a more nuanced – but no less ridiculous – assault on your psychosis. The two DLCs demonstrated that *The Evil Within* could still deliver effective thrills when gunplay is stripped out of the experience and more emphasis is placed on puzzle design, stealth and the navigations of maddeningly insane scenarios. And that, from what we've had a taste of, at least, is what we can expect *The Evil Within 2* to deliver this October.

WHAT IS STEM?

So, STEM is the reason for all of the madness. It's a device that allows for a shared consciousness experience between people, connecting the user's mind to an alternative world – where it's controlled by a central core mind. Basically, it takes your thoughts, it messes them up and then it sticks you inside of them for a few jump scares.

"We are talking floors that become ceilings as you attempt to round corners"

Mission 'n' action

The story, as you may expect, is as bizarre as ever. Castellanos is back in action, on a mission to locate and recover his (definitely missing, but maybe also dead) daughter from her own deteriorating mindscape STEM world (don't ask). This shared-consciousness nightmare experience that she is generating (please) begins to twist and warp even further as it becomes apparent that she has somehow entered her own mind (we told you) and become lost within it (not to ask). You asked, didn't you? Listen, this STEM business makes about as much sense to us as it does to Castellanos, but then that's half the fun, isn't it?

The STEM world you'll be jumping into and out of has no link to Krimson City – the location of the original game – and so we should expect to meet a whole new cast of characters, monsters and oddities this time around. Union, the name of the new location, is based around your stereotypical Small Town, USA area, and it's rocking some seriously creepy vibes. We are talking eyes in the sky, mutated monstrosities with cameras for faces, floors that become ceilings as you attempt to round corners, and weird whispers on the wind. If survival horror games have taught us anything over the years, it's that when you start hearing whispers on the wind *that's* when you know you are really up a certain creek without your favourite paddle. ■

The game's based on the *DBZ* era, but the *Dragon Ball* universe is huge so there's lots to draw from





Dragon Ball FighterZ

Become a part of the animation

Daniella Lucas

PUBLISHER BANDAI NAMCO **DEVELOPER** ARC SYSTEM WORKS
FORMAT XBOX ONE **ETA** 2018

This anime-based brawler was first shown off at E3 but we didn't have the space to do it justice, so we decided to take a closer look. The *Dragon Ball* series has been around since 1984 as a manga and then a long-running TV show and features a cast of super-strong aliens taking part in epic fights with each other, usually because the world is in some kind of danger. There have been a fair few games already, but none that have come anywhere close to looking this faithful to the original.

From the special effect visuals it uses to the sound design, the attention to detail here is insane. Your hits gain impact lines as you strike your foes, and the sound as you teleport sounds like it comes straight from the show. Even the way each character moves feels like it's been hand-drawn, with movement that's truer to the animation than it is to real kicks and punches. When one fighter gets knocked out another zooms in from the sidelines for an anime-style face-to-face close-up before getting back to the action. You can also occasionally destroy buildings or rocks in the background after taking a particularly hard hit, adding a fun sense of impact.

"Even the way each character moves feels like it's been hand-drawn"

BODY COUNT

So far nine famous characters have been confirmed, including Vegeta, Goku, Gohan, Future Trunks, Krillin, Piccolo, Buu, Freeza and Cell, but more are on the way. Our money is on Android 18, Raditz and Broly also making appearances.

All of the fighters revealed so far come from the *DBZ* era when power levels first reached over 9,000 and Vegeta first appeared. You'll also get to visit the likes of Planet Namek to face off against Mewtwo-lookalike Freeza, perfectly recreated as a fighting stage.

Tournament saga

Unlike previous *Dragon Ball* fighting games which take a more freeform approach, everything here is 2D rather than 3D which is more in keeping with the show and looks just like animation in motion. It's also being made by Arc System Works – the developers behind the BlazBlue fighting game series – who are no stranger to anime-styled graphics, so it's in very safe hands. You can tell how much they're enjoying the source material thanks to how perfectly they've matched it.

It's also going after old-school fans of the *Marvel Vs Capcom* fighting series by using a three vs three character tag-in system to keep things really fast flowing and just as chaotic as the show itself. But unlike *MvC*, which has stripped back its famous tag system to 2v2 to make it easier on newcomers, *DBZ* has managed to keep it simple without compromising on the line-up. Switching itself is easy to pull off – a short press of a trigger will grant you a brief assist, but if you hold it down your characters will exchange places.

Each character has their own version of a fireball-style projectile attack and a teleporting move that seem to share the same inputs, giving you a strong base for learning to play each character, and to make switching between characters easier. Of course each one has their own unique moveset on top of that basic groundwork so there's a lot of depth here to explore. Mastering Aerial combat will be one of your major tactics – you can knock others into the air and keep them there by stringing combos together, but there also plenty of opportunities to break out of it so you'll never feel completely stuck.

If you've ever wanted to live out an episode of this iconic animation, playing this is as close as you'll ever get to doing it. ■









ABOVE The battles are 3v3 so you have to learn when to switch your characters in for the best combos.

LEFT This is Trunks. He's from the future. In the show there's also a normal timeline Trunks just to make things even more confusing.

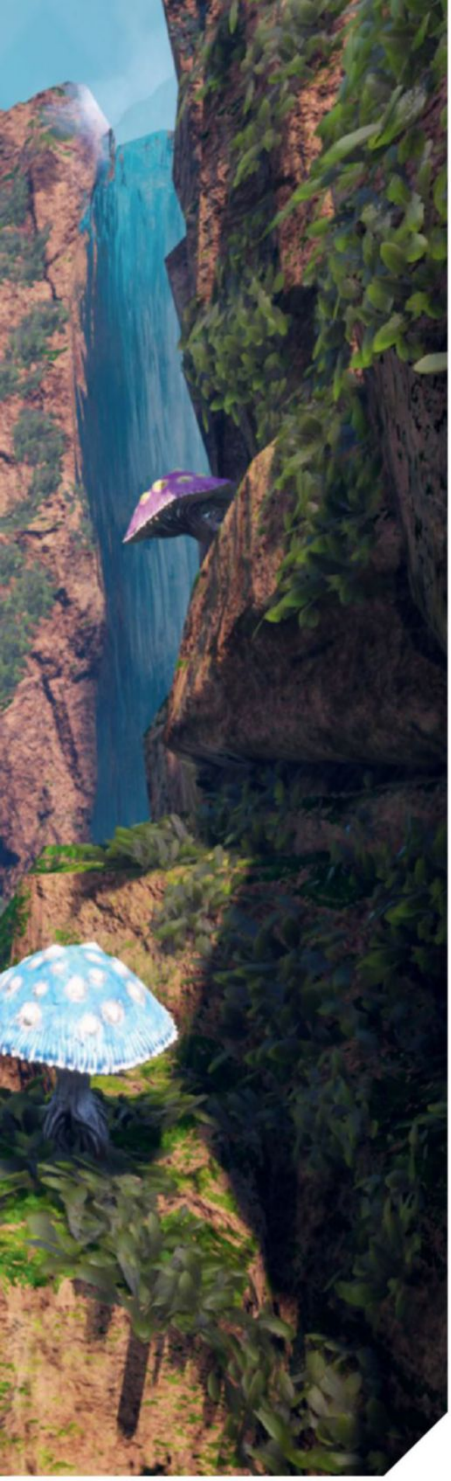
FAR LEFT The special effects look like they've stepped straight out of the anime.

ABOVE Players can adjust the main character's build, size and appearance to their liking.

RIGHT Both melee and ranged weapons can be handled solo or dual-wielded, with different buffs attached to each.



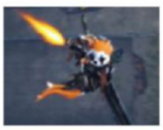
Experiment 101 is democratic by design, operating without producers or project leads













Biomutant

It's official. The gun-toting raccoons shall inherit the earth!

Samuel Riley

PUBLISHER THQ NORDIC **DEVELOPER** EXPERIMENT 101
FORMAT XBOX ONE **ETA** 2018

If looking after the planet were a full-time occupation, humanity's CV would already be lining a landfill. Still, what if mankind really were made redundant? Who, or what, would go on to inherit the earth? While *X-Men* makes the case for the mutants and *Planet Of The Apes* opts for... well, apes, Swedish developer Experiment 101 is choosing to embrace both. No more humans and a mutant critter on the loose? Welcome to 'a wolverine and the ex-men'.

This is *Biomutant*, an open-world action-RPG from the minds behind the *Just Cause* series. Designed as a sort of post-apocalyptic fable – and narrated in 'storybook-style' throughout – the game features intelligent animals battling it out as part of various warring tribes. The protagonist meanwhile, a diminutive raccoon-like creature (think Rocket cosplaying as a cowboy) is out to investigate the appearance of a thick black tar that could signal The End™.

So far so fairytale, or so it may seem, but make no mistake – *Biomutant* is no Pixar movie. Nor, however, is it unnecessarily edgy. This is a world of grit, grime, quirk and colour – being neither realistic nor totally fantastical.

Indeed, robust, nuanced design is at the heart of everything Experiment 101 is trying to achieve here. Side quests, we're told, will be highly engaging affairs, lower in number than your standard RPG perhaps, but easily more worthwhile. Crafting also promises to bring plenty of depth to proceedings – allowing you to tinker with weapons and gear at will, and to an impressively varied degree.

"The game's core combat system promises to be a cut above the usual action-RPG"

KARMA CHAMELEON

Biomutant's karma mechanic allows players to perform both good and evil deeds, though as the developer is quick to point out, morally 'grey' decisions will also prove compelling. Tribal groups will also take account of your rep – and previous allegiances – when deciding whether to work with you, like the old gang mechanic from *GTA 2*.

Darksiders May Cry

Speaking of weapons, the game's core combat system also promises to be a cut above the usual action-RPG. To that end, Experiment 101 has designed a fluid, freeform scrapping system that bears more than a passing resemblance to the likes of *Darksiders* and *Devil May Cry*. While face buttons handle the gunning, jumping, rolling and striking, shoulder inputs allow you to briefly 'remap' the pad in order to execute punishing mutant powers. It all adds up to a combat system that's less about dialling in the combos and more about using your skills in concert.

That's where mutations come into play. These abilities range from shooting lightning from your fingertips, to moving objects around with telekinesis. One particularly useful ability involves planting large mushrooms that double up as jump pads – perfect for getting to those hard-to-reach areas or launching your foes into an airborne combo. All told, the game will feature around 40 of these unique and quirky powers, with no two abilities working the same way.

This is 'character action' on a sandbox scale, though thanks to the game's Bionics system, getting around really ought to be a breeze – quite literally in the case of the Da Vinci-esque wingsuit. Other methods of transport include a bruising mech, a jet-ski-style watercraft and even other animals. Best of all is the 'hand tank', an oversized mannequin hand that scurries around like Thing Adams before shooting bullets from its fingers. Talk about redundancy – we can't imagine you'd want to ride around on anything else.

If that all sounds ambitious, that's probably because it is. Still, small studio or not, Experiment 101 clearly has good reason to be excited about *Biomutant*. Gamers ought to be, too. ■

On Xbox One you'll be able to play with seven friends locally on a single screen. Let the madness begin…

Laser League

Twitchy, top-down laser sport beaming its way to console

Robert Zak

PUBLISHER 505 GAMES **DEVELOPER** ROLL7
FORMAT XBOX ONE **ETA** Q3 2017 (EARLY ACCESS), 2018 (FULL RELEASE)



When a new sports game appears on the scene, bringing with it a whole set of unheard-of rules to learn, it's good to kick things off with a comparison that'll paint an immediate neon-tinged picture in your mind. *Laser League* is like *Rocket League* (without a ball) meets *Tron;* a fast-paced multiplayer arena showdown that has an easy point of entry, but a skill and strategy ceiling whose height will only become apparent when players really begin mastering it.

Two teams of two, three or four players battle it out from a top-down perspective to wipe out their opponents. Victory can be achieved in several ways. First, there are the special abilities of the six player classes, such as the Sniper's long-range potshots or the dashing slash of the Blade class. It's all one-shot kills, making each match a brisk battle of reflexes rather than attrition.

But the real strategy comes into play by capturing nodes, which activate moving walls of light corresponding to your team's colour, and eviscerate your opponents on contact. These walls move around the screen in patterns, forcing you to learn their movements while evading the attacks of enemy players.

"The game can quickly be turned on its head with a power-up"

Tron-spicuous

Everything about the game, from the fluorescent visual language to the minimal control scheme, is instantly scrutable. In contrast to Roll7's deceptively complex 2D skater *OlliOlli*, *Laser League* is designed for one-off sessions by novices as well as masters. "Whether you like it or not, you definitely can't ever be like, 'I just didn't get it'", is how Simon Bennett, founding director of Roll7, puts it.

From this simple foundation, Roll7 want to create a game of high skill. You can, for example, co-ordinate with your teammates to set up laser-wall traps for your opponents, or grab power-ups to swap your laser-walls around with the other team's. Having more nodes/lasers in your colour onscreen inevitably increases your chances of victory, but the game can quickly be turned on its head with a power-up or a plucky player who revives his teammates against the odds. Like all great sports, it creates conditions for dramatic turnarounds.

With the refinement in rules and mechanics a game like *Laser League* requires, there's a long way to go until we find out whether its potential gets realised. Bennett compares the process to basketball: "It took them 88 years to invent the three-point rule, which is now crucial within the game". So at least we know that Roll7 are in it for the long haul (although, upon further pressing, they confessed to us that post-launch support for 88 years may be a tad ambitious...). ■



ABOVE Yellow walls kill blues, blue walls kill yellows. See? You get it already.

BELOW Roll7 are still working on the visual design, so may yet add more comfy footwear.

XBOX ONE & WINDOWS 10 PC EXCLUSIVE



XBOX ONE Windows 10

Just like *Metro*, research indicates that a nuclear winter would take 20 years to thaw





Metro Exodus

In post-apocalyptic Soviet Russia, train catches you

Sam Riley

PUBLISHER DEEP SILVER **DEVELOPER** 4A GAMES
FORMAT XBOX ONE, PC **ETA** 2018

Think 'Metro': think mutants, madmen and mysterious odours (and that's just the one we ride to work every morning...). This Metro however, is all of that and more – more harrowing, more anxious, more Russian. More of... well, just about everything actually. For its latest outing, 4A Games is promising that bigger really does mean better, but will scale outstrip substance, or make this the mother-(Russia)-of-all sequels?

To find out, **OXM** sat down with 4A's executive producer Jonathan Bloch to discuss all things *Metro Exodus*. Our first priority: to discover just how players will traverse this huge sandbox?

With a great deal more freedom, according to Bloch. "Players will be able to wander around these large areas and approach their objectives how they see fit," he says. "There will still be story wrapped into these levels that will guide the player along, but there is plenty more to do that players can discover on their own." Think of it as straddling the line between true open-world scale and the sorts of gripping set-piece sequences that the franchise is known for.

If that all sounds a bit like *STALKER* – ie the cult classic PC series upon which many of the team cut their teeth – then that's very much by design. "Many members of our core team originally created *STALKER* before 4A Games was formed," explains Bloch. "We wanted to blend the two experiences together in order to bring our fans something they have been asking for, while still retaining that classic *Metro* gameplay, and the story-driven, atmospheric experience that they are familiar with."

That atmosphere, one of breathless tension and grime-lined realism, is still very much in evidence here. Oh sure, the monsters may not be real, but the filthy locales (and even filthier locals) remain every bit as authentic as before. It's an attention to detail that the team is proud to produce. Every weapon in *Exodus* has been designed with real-world practicality in mind, so much so in fact that every last one of them could – though probably shouldn't – be built in real life.

POWER UP

According to Bloch, the game really does look as good as *that* E3 trailer. "The power of the Xbox One X will allow us to ensure the game looks amazing. The trailer was recorded in-engine from a gameplay sequence players will find later on in the game," he says. "We removed things like HUD, and QTE prompts, choreographed the playthrough and music to fit the needs of the trailer, but the game looks like what you see."

"Every weapon could – though probably shouldn't – be built in real life"

You seen bolt

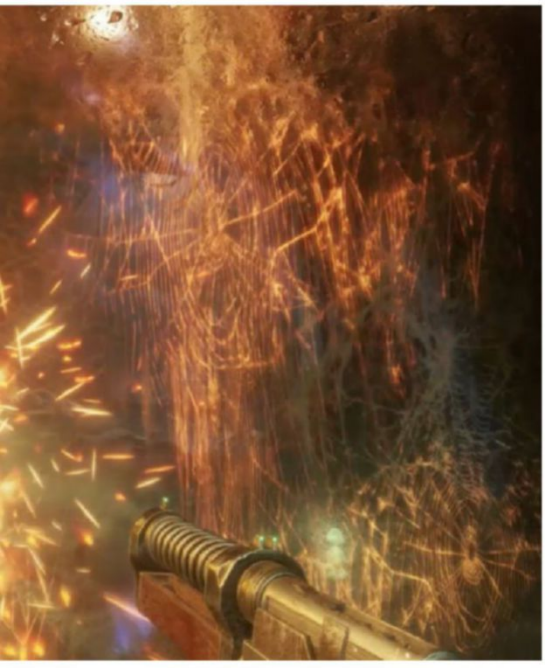
Bloch explains that the team even agonised over the size of the explosive crossbow bolt glimpsed in the game's E3 trailer. "There was a desire to make the arrow bigger and more noticeably an explosive round," says Bloch, "but our weapon designers pointed out that if the arrow was any bigger, it wouldn't fit through the barrel or the loading mechanism." Clearly, physics and realism are key.

Also glimpsed in the trailer was the game's new rolling hub, aka the 'Aurora' – a steam locomotive that looks set to replace previous games' city-station locations. Here you can stock up, trade and chat with your fellow passengers. As the train moves, so do the seasons – introducing new weather systems, and allowing players to utilise the day/night cycle to their advantage.

Before we go, we ask Bloch about the fact that the overworld now seems to be filled with (probably fairly pongy) oxygen, rather than face-mutating radiation. "Even though the player is able to breathe above ground in certain places, there will be pockets of radiation and other hazards that will require the use of the mask," he says.

Bigger, better, but still as bleak as ever, *Metro Exodus* is quickly shaping up to be one of the most exciting titles of 2018. Or is that 2036? ■





ABOVE Loadouts and weapon tweaks are now more numerous and vital than ever before.

FAR LEFT Who knew spider's webs were so flammable? It's probably something to do with the radiation.

LEFT Prepare to fight a lot of wild and mutated animals, both above ground and below.



ABOVE The series has always sold itself on dirtying up the most beautiful locales across the globe; something feels *right* about bringing the action to Montana.

RIGHT Say what you will about *Far Cry* and its familiarity, but there's real fun to be had with its excellent gun design and mechanics.



Far Cry 5 is the first game in the series to bring the action and violence to America







Far Cry 5

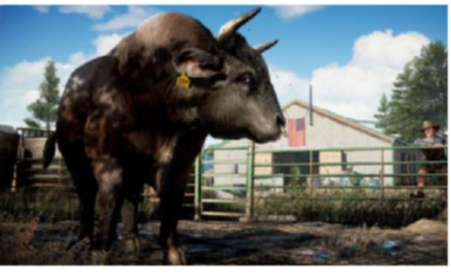
Good dogs and bad hombres in small-town America

Josh West

PUBLISHER UBISOFT **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL
FORMAT XBOX ONE **ETA** 2018







THE SIMPLE LIFE

Fishing in *Far Cry 5* is simple to execute, and no more complex than any other fishing mini-game; you cast out a line, wait for a fish to bite, and then reel it in. The thing is, it's also mad fun. It's a welcome break from all of the blood and murder.

It's already become clear to us that, unless something major should change, then this game is going to commit the ultimate gaming faux pas.

And listen, while we could use game, gun, world, sound and system design as a metric for judging a game's successes and failures we feel that you, the loyal reader of OXM, deserves better. Besides, this is *Far Cry* we are talking about here; imagine the aforementioned as they were presented in *Far Cry 4*, only now they have had three years of polish and fine-tuning behind them – trust us, game feel isn't something you need to worry about here.

So, what's the problem? Well, why don't you let us fill you in on the situation as it stands: *Far Cry 5* lets you pick from three Gun-For-Hire, AI-controlled companions that will assist you in your efforts to set small-town America on fire with such a vast array of weaponry that it would make a Second Amendment-loving gun-nut blush. One of these companions is an adorable dog – by the internet's standards, a certified good boy – who has a penchant for playing fetch with AK-47 ammunition. So far, so amazing; you can even pet the proud puppy to show your appreciation. By all accounts it looks like we're dealing with some serious GOTY material with this one, right?

But it all begins to fall apart once we jump into a pick-up truck painted in the ol' red, white and blues, and start cranking up the angelic church hymns to set the mood. We begin our pursuit of a convoy and turn our heads ever so slightly to the passenger door window, expecting to see our new buddy with his head sticking out of the window, soaking up the sun and smell of blood in the air – tongue waggling as we rocket through the countryside at breakneck speeds. But he isn't in the seat, nor is he in the back, barking at passing wildlife or at other enemies – he's vanished, and so too has our enthusiasm for *Far Cry*'s violence.

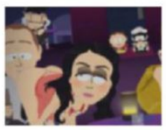
"It feels as if this is what Ubisoft Montreal has been working towards all this time"

Far Cry reborn

In all seriousness, *Far Cry 5* gets *almost* everything right, which means we have a little space to sweat it on the details. While it was difficult for us to get a sense of how cohesive the open world is, a few things were made perfectly clear. The gunplay is better than ever; weapons, particularly the shotguns and assault rifles, are hefty, precise, and truly empowering to wield – especially as you face off against throngs of enemies in trucker hats and double denim. The sound design deserves praise too, only serving to make gunfights feel threatening. Combined with the increased environmental destruction and improved enemy AI the changes make firefights thrilling acts of constant movement and aggression. All told, it feels as if this is what Ubisoft Montreal has been working towards all this time.

But then there's the dematerialising dog situation to contend with. It can't jump in the car but it *can* command space and time and warp to your position whenever you need it to. It breaks immersion, that feeling that the game's hold over your attention is all-encompassing. *Far Cry 5* is a world you'll want to spend time in – hunting, fishing, and eradicating a cult in the most violent ways imaginable. But if we are going to be given the option of doing so with a new friend by our side, at least give us the option of bringing him along for the ride. ■

The amount of content in *Fractured But Whole* is equivalent to two whole seasons of the TV show





South Park: The Fractured But Whole

Fans will love this flatulent sequel. Others will pinch their noses and run **Robert Zak**

PUBLISHER UBISOFT **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT
FORMAT XBOX ONE **ETA** 17 OCTOBER

Our biggest takeaway from playing *South Park: The Fractured But Whole* is farting; farting our way through a lap dance, farting a couple of drunk stripclub patrons unconscious, and farting into a cocktail of 'boogers n' cum'. Maybe you're chuckling right now, or maybe you're squirming uncomfortably. Whichever it is, your reaction to that intro will tell you right away whether this game is for you.

You are once again the new kid in town, but this time everyone's playing 'superheroes'. Your bespoke avatar is thrown into the middle of a rift between Cartman's crew, Coon and Friends, and Mysterion's Freedom Pals. Starting out as a sidekick to the uncoolest kid in South Park, Scott Malkinson, you eventually work your way up the superhero hierarchy to roll with Cartman and co.

In our hands-on, we infiltrated the not-so-subtly named South Park stripclub, Peppermint Hippo, in search of a missing cat. The animation is perfect, in so far as it's indistinguishable from an episode of the show, and the backgrounds teem with visual gags and references to the series – a man at the urinal sending wayward streams on the floor, several of the South Park boys' dads ogling the dancers, a transsexual stripper poking her head in during a battle to ask if anyone wants a dance. If you like *South Park*, you'll be in a state of fond, perpetual giggling.

There's a new combat system offering more depth by letting you move around on a turn-based grid, utilising the environment, and combining the 12 character classes to maximum effect. It works well enough, as we despatch drunk patrons using a combination of snowball flurries, double-team moves and, of course, farts, but it still feels shallow – a gameplay-lite excuse to listen to some crass dialogue written by none other than Trey Parker and Matt Stone.

Gassed out

We've always been 'sure, why not?' about *South Park*. We're privy to the odd runny-shit/shit-out-of-mouth joke, but after 15 minutes of *persistently* interacting with on-demand farts, condoms on ceilings, and cocktails that feature 'rat shit', we felt exhausted. For us excrement jokes are manageable in bite-sized chunks (urgh), not multi-hour sessions as this game encourages.

The TV show thrives in making viewers uncomfortable (the Britney Spears and Michael Jackson episodes spring to mind). The equivalent here is giving a flatulent lap-dance to a couple of drunk stripclub patrons who confuse you for short women. Yes, you – a child – are giving a lapdance to a man in a rhythm-based minigame. It's 'Funny' because 'Farting', or something, but we found it rather obnoxious, lacking any of the satirical undercurrent running through similarly uncomfortable scenes in the show.

Not that *South Park* fans are likely to be put off. Producer Kimberly Weigend told us that one of the goals here was to "make it pretty much just an extension of the show", and that's what *Fractured But Whole* is.

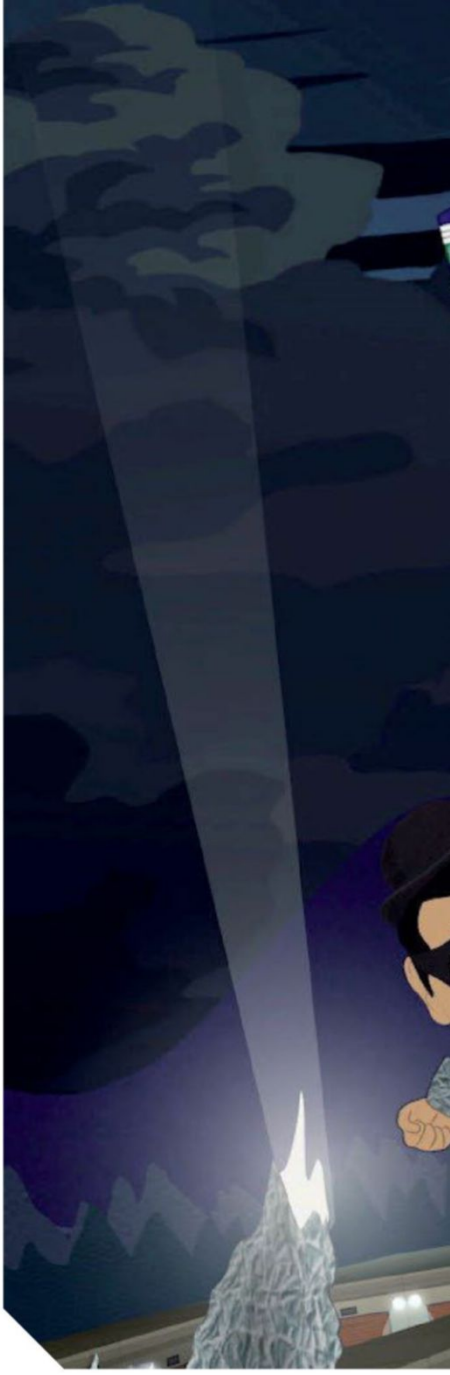
There's little novelty here, and from a pure gaming perspective it's only marginally less rudimentary than *Stick Of Truth*, but if that's your cup of smug farts, then by all means take a deep, indulgent sniff, and enjoy. For people who can take *South Park* or leave it, the stench may be a little stale by now. For haters, it will be as insufferable as ever. ■

"If you like South Park, you'll be in a state of fond, perpetual giggling"

HOW TO CAPTURE SOUTH PARK IN A GAME

Jason Schroeder – Director
"The *South Park* team has the ability to get a joke, see it, touch it, iterate it. We had to come up with a development process to work directly with Trey Parker and Matt Stone and get that ability out of them."

Kimberly Weigend – Producer
"We have to be true to *South Park* – that means pushing the envelope. If you go into it with that mindset, you'll enjoy the game."









ABOVE Butters aka Professor Chaos makes a return – in a machine made of Mexicans…

FAR LEFT The turn-based combat now includes grid movement, but is still mainly an excuse to hear lewd dialogue.

LEFT The lap-dance minigame is neither interesting nor funny – hopefully not a sign of things to come.





ABOVE Dr Robotnik recommissions the Egg Dragoon to take on Sonic once more.

RIGHT A long narrow track, gold coins and spring pads – this is Sonic in his element.

FAR RIGHT Electricity guns and the ability to create your own hero… Is it 'Sonic', though?

The songs in *Sonic Forces* use vocals for the first time in a *Sonic* since *Sonic Colors* in 2010









Sonic Forces

After the stodgy spin-off Sonic Boom, Forces looks to get the series back on track **Robert Zak**

PUBLISHER SEGA **DEVELOPER** SONIC TEAM
FORMAT XBOX ONE **ETA** Q4 2017

The identity of one of gaming's most iconic mascots has been in flux for years, bouncing around like a spinning Sonic stuck in an endless loop of spring-pads. From transforming into were-hogs in *Sonic Unleashed* to the ill-advised collect-athon of *Sonic Boom*, the troubled hedgehog has been looking unsettled, but now *Sonic Forces* wants to bring the series home.

During a hands-on event for *Sonic Forces*, we got to speak with head of Sonic Team, Takashi Iizuka. With so much turbulence in the Hedgehog's life of late, we ask Iizuka to pin down what he considers the 'essence' of the games to be.

"The core element has always been speed, and the different ways in which players can experience that," he tells us. "It's been a while since Sonic Team made a new game (*Sonic Boom* was outsourced), so with *Sonic Forces* we wanted to do something familiar for the fans."

The familiarity is palpable when we play a 3D level as 'Modern' Sonic, bolting through the burning streets of a city that we assume is Spagonia, the oddly Mediterranean cultural capital of the *Sonic* world that's been ruined by Dr Robotnik. As robots tear up the city in the background, Sonic himself is confined to a narrow fast lane of obstacles and enemies – which is where the series has always thrived.

The mechanics are simple – spin, boost, slide – and bolstered by the now-familiar auto-targeting system. The pace is relentless, and having a run abruptly halted by a mistimed jump or hazard is as jarring as that first time you spilled Sonic's coins all over the lime-green grass of Green Hills Zone 1. About halfway through the level, things neatly switch to the classic 2D perspective, sending you through a familiar assortment of springs, rings and showy corkscrews.

2D or not 2D

It's the other part of *Sonic Forces* that raises more questions. In the story, you alternate between playing 3D levels as Modern Sonic, 2D levels as Classic Sonic, then another bunch as a hero you create – using an assortment of mobian animal presets, goofy accessories and special abilities for your weapon. Iizuka admits that historically, new characters have sometimes been detrimental to the games, but it was hardcore fans who inspired him to add this element. "Fans would create their own characters and send the illustrations to me," he tells us. "So I figured there was demand for players to put their own creations into the game."

Iizuka isn't shy about naming *Sonic Adventure 2*, directed by himself, as his favourite *Sonic* game, highlighting its sense of rhythm in how the story shuffled players between Sonic, Tails and Knuckles. *Forces* looks to take inspiration from what's arguably the most loved game of the 3D *Sonic* era. "I want switching characters in *Forces* to have a similar rhythm to *Sonic Adventure 2*," he tells us.

It's a reasonable goal, though yet to be attained. While the Modern Sonic level and 'Classic' 2D section struck the right chords during our time with them, the 'Hero' level felt dissonant – slower-paced, and designed more towards generic platforming than the high-octane speeding of Sonic's levels. The lightning and fire power-ups, meanwhile, didn't stand up to Sonic's moveset. Thus far, as has so often been the case with this series, this is a *Sonic* game that feels best when you play as the titular hero. ■

THREE PILLARS OF SONIC

Sonic Team seems keen to distance itself from *Sonic Boom*. During our interview, Iizuka referred to "three pillars" of the Sonic brand. There's 'Modern' 3D Sonic, 'Classic' 2D Sonic, then there's *Sonic Boom*. The important thing to know is that *Sonic Forces* is a mash-up of the first two pillars, and nothing to do with wobbly third one. Got it?





"I figured there was demand for players to put their own creations into the game"

roundup



MORE MOVERS AND SHAKERS FROM THE GREAT XBOX GAMES-TO-BE LIST. JUST *COME OUT ALREADY* WILL YA? **PHIL IWANIUK**

PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS



PUBLISHER BLUEHOLE
DEVELOPER BLUEHOLE **DUE** WINTER 2017

Hey, guess what? A popular Early Access game isn't going to hit its initial release date! *Battlegrounds* won't be leaving Early Access on PC until late 2017 now, missing its planned September launch. Originally penned as an Xbox One X launch title, it's now unlikely that you'll be killing strangers in Yasnaya Polyana on November 7.

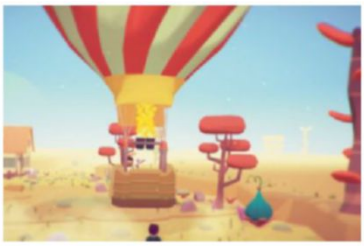
KINGDOM HEARTS 3



PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX
DEVELOPER SQUARE ENIX BUSINESS DIVISION 3
DUE 2018

It says something for the talents of a game developer when they can out-Pixar Pixar. And yet here we are, looking at *Kingdom Hearts 3*'s *Toy Story* world, asking ourselves if Woody & co ever looked this good. Due in 2018, this'll be *Kingdom Hearts*' first foray into Pixar and boy howdy, it's doing so in style.

OOBLETS



PUBLISHER DOUBLE FINE PRODUCTIONS
DEVELOPER GLUMBERLAND **DUE** 2018

Ooblets is the Zooey Deschanel of the games industry: stratospherically cheerful and quirky, and *almost* annoying. Here's some stuff that'll keep it between the lines though: a spooky newly revealed region called Nullwhere, populated by the terrifying,not at all adorable, um... Glanter and Snurfler. Run!

LEGO MARVEL SUPERHEROES 2



PUBLISHER TT GAMES
DEVELOPER WARNER BROS
DUE 14 NOVEMBER

If you're not already feeling hyped to the point of involuntary and embarrassing convulsions for *LMS2*, we have three words to send you over the edge: Howard. The. Duck. Howie is among a host of newly revealed characters, along with Vulture and Gwenpool, a hybrid of Spider-Man's Gwen Stacy and that Ryan Reynolds chap.

CRACKDOWN 3



PUBLISHER MICROSOFT STUDIOS
DEVELOPER SUMO DIGITAL/REAGENT
DUE 7 NOVEMBER

Terry Crews has become the unlikely it-girl of gaming in the last 12 months. His public audition tape for *Overwatch*'s Doomfist signalled the gargantuan actor's passion for videogame voice acting, and now he's getting his big break: Jaxxon in *Crackdown 3*. We're hoping his big strong arms lifts it out of the doldrums it looks destined for.

FAR CRY 5



PUBLISHER UBISOFT
DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL
DUE 27 FEBRUARY 2018

How long does it take to overthrow a cult of murderous fundamentalists? *Far Cry 5*'s lead writer Drew Holmes recently confirmed that it won't be a quick job: 20-30 hours for the main missions is his estimate. Revamped weapons are promised too, so every combat encounter should be something to savour.

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WOLFENSTEIN IS BACK WITH THE NEW COLOSSUS, BUT AFTER WE BLEW THE LIMBS OFF NAZIS ON THE MOON IN THE NEW ORDER, HOW DO YOU TOP IT IN THE SEQUEL? WE TOOK A TRIP TO BETHESDA'S OFFICES TO FIND OUT

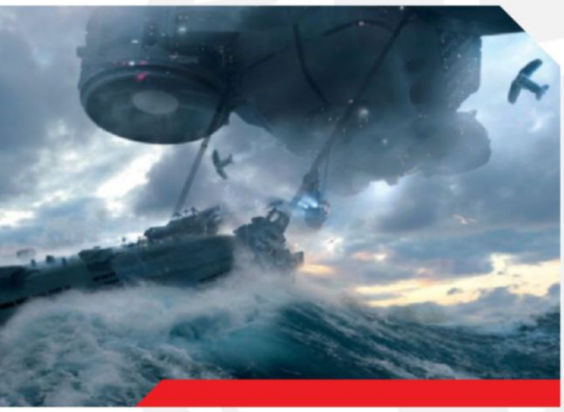
STEPHEN ASHBY



ABOVE The US setting has allowed the team to have fun with the game world.

FAR RIGHT Expect UFOs, huge rockets and more weird sci-fi stuff.

BELOW This huge sub is the Resistance base, aka home.



Punching Nazis is fun. There's no two ways about it: dishing out knuckle justice to those fascist fiends using our fists of freedom is fabulous. Chucking hatchets at them, or using those hatchets to open up new holes in their necks at close range, is also surprisingly entertaining. Oh! And so is shooting them close up with an automatic shotgun – sorry, we mean a Schockhammer. Or at long range using a laser gun that ruptures them into glowing, electrical embers. Or at medium range with a machine gun. Or silently with a suppressed pist... You know what? Hurting Nazis, in pretty much any way, is fun. Let's just go with that.

That probably explains why we had a great time doing just that when we headed over to Bethesda's offices to get our hands on the latest build of *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus*. We played through the opening level, which sees a wheelchair-bound BJ multitasking like a pro, and then a later section set in Roswell, New Mexico. It was here that we got to see a little more of the story and found that,as expected from a *Wolfenstein* title, this game is pure sci-fi.

Set in 1961, *The New Colossus* moves the focus to America more than ten years after the Germans defeated the allies. It's a setting

In one of *The New Order*'s plotlines, one of BJ's team members bore a striking resemblance to Jimi Hendrix…



"We were inspired by films that walk between being crazy, and also having serious drama"

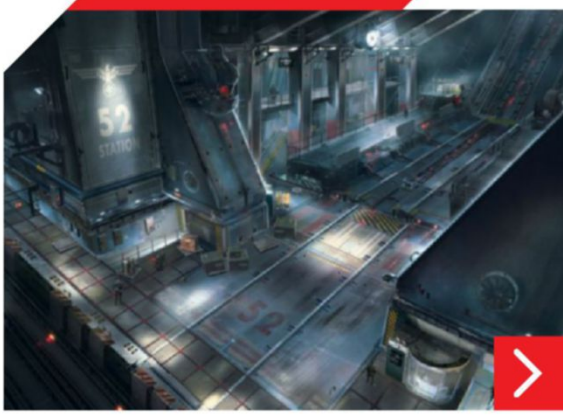
that the team at MachineGames had in mind from the start of the previous game in the series, *The New Order*. "We started talking about what a world like this would be like if the Nazis had conquered everything and over a decade had passed," explains Jens Matties, creative director at MachineGames. "Specifically, if you look at the US and the UK, where so many things happened culturally in the '60s, what would it look like if subverted by Nazi ideologies?"

The answer to that question isn't as simple as 'everything would be red, white and black'. As we explore Roswell, we soon learn that the team has managed to create a real sense of tension, a feeling that this world is balanced on a knife edge. Residents try to quietly go about their lives without causing a fuss, and the soldiers on the streets keep the American people in check. Yes, the town is plastered with swastikas and full of armoured German officers, but there's more going on, below the surface.

We approach a few of the residents to listen in on their conversations. We see two simple-minded KKK members unabashedly wandering down the street in their robes, getting interrupted by a German soldier who tests them on their German and threatens them when they fail to properly pronounce "danke schoen". Elsewhere, we hear a woman talking to her aunt at a shop door. The aunt reminds her that she will have some hardworking slaves for sale later in the week. Another soldier speaks to a young American woman, planning their next date, while a man has his ID checked by a drone.

Of course, this isn't a totally serious journey through an alternative version of history. Remember that part earlier where we lasered a Nazi into embers? Balancing this lighter, almost comical tone with the seriousness of Nazism can't have been easy, right? "It's super tricky," says Matthies, "but we were always inspired by things like the first *RoboCop* movie, or *District 9*, *Guardians*





Of The Galaxy... those films walk the tightrope between being super-bombastic, over the top and crazy, and also having really serious drama and darkness to them."

It seems that the team is getting the balance right so far – we notice it later, when we overhear two guards as we sneak into Area 52, the secret base near Roswell. They're chatting about the time one of them was stationed on Pluto for two weeks, and the other on the Moon. As they discuss the dreamlike feeling of unreality it creates, we realise that this deep philosophical discussion is happening between two Nazi soldiers talking about going to space. It's ridiculous. But, somehow, it *works*.

Werk it

The madness extends to the gameplay, too. The injured BJ isn't the soldier he once was; he's still recovering from his injuries following a near-Deathshead experience at the end of the last game. Thankfully, he's got some natty combat armour to clamber into. With it, you can run faster, drop huge distances without damage, and generally kick ass like you used to. Better than you used to, even.

The gunplay is fast and frenetic, as you would expect from *Wolfenstein*. The team was still balancing difficulty in our session, which perhaps explains why the enemies feel a little like Imperial Stormtroopers when it comes to weapon accuracy. Cutting through them is fairly easy, and there's plenty of armour and ammo to keep us going. We suspect this won't be the case as the difficulty increases (and there are plenty of settings to try out), but for us, the level of challenge right now is set a little low.

Still, that doesn't mean it wasn't fun. Dual-wielding now lets you combine any weapons, so we grab that auto-shotgun and pair it with a grenade launcher to create an explosive death-cone in our path. As we pump both triggers and eviscerate every Nazi in our path we realise just how much we're grinning. After planting a nuke in the secret base, a giant Nazi robot appears, launching rockets in our general direction and probably saying nasty stuff about our mum in German, so we blow both of his rocket-launching, fire-spewing arms off and make our escape.

As you might've guessed, the weapons are immensely satisfying. The core tools are all here – pistols, machine guns, that auto shotgun we mentioned – but there are the more unique firearms, too. Grab a laser cannon from a downed enemy and you can

1 Turns out it's easier than you would think to shoot people while riding down a staircase in a wheelchair.

2 Nazi mechs are everywhere, so choosing armour-piercing weapons is essential.

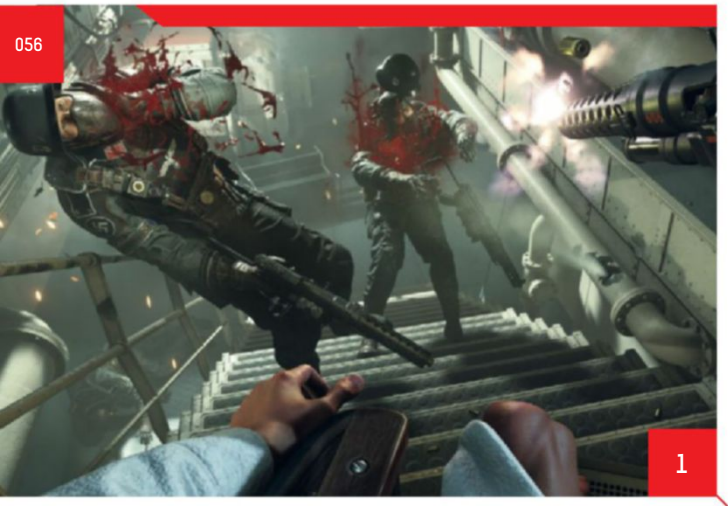
3 "Excuse me sir, I think you have something on your face."

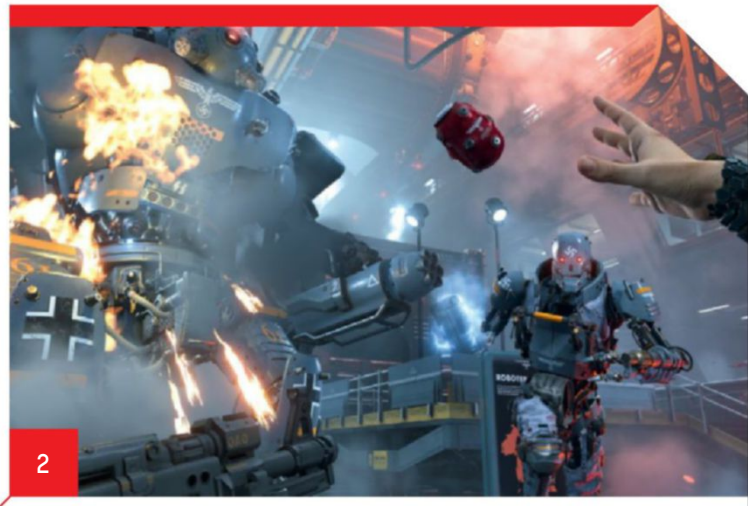
4 You'll see plenty of people 'enjoying' the Victory Day parade in Roswell.

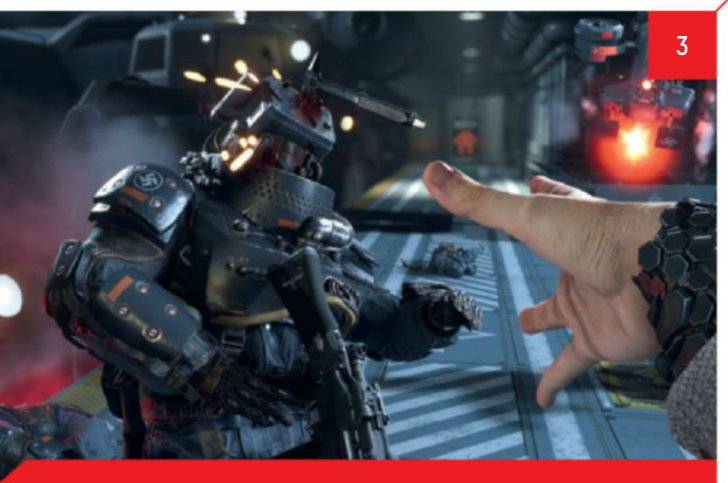
THIS PAGE Meet Grace, a tough, no-nonsense resistance fighter.

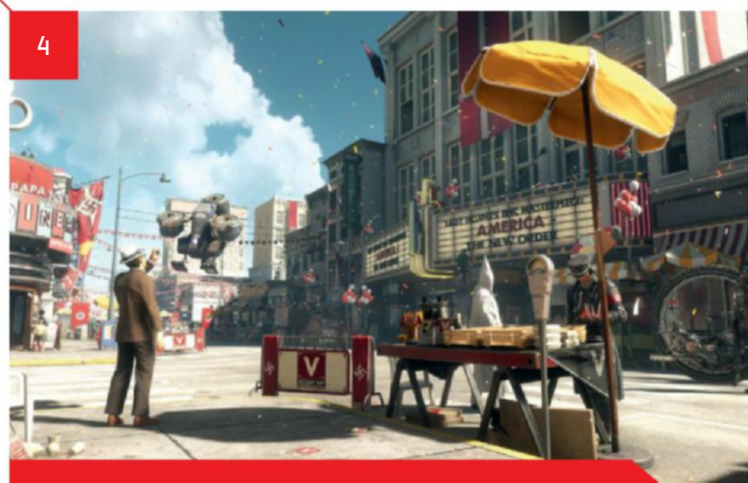
OPPOSITE BJ isn't in great shape at the start of the game. Ouchies!











Take a nap in a certain spot in *The New Order* and you would have a very retro 'nightmare'



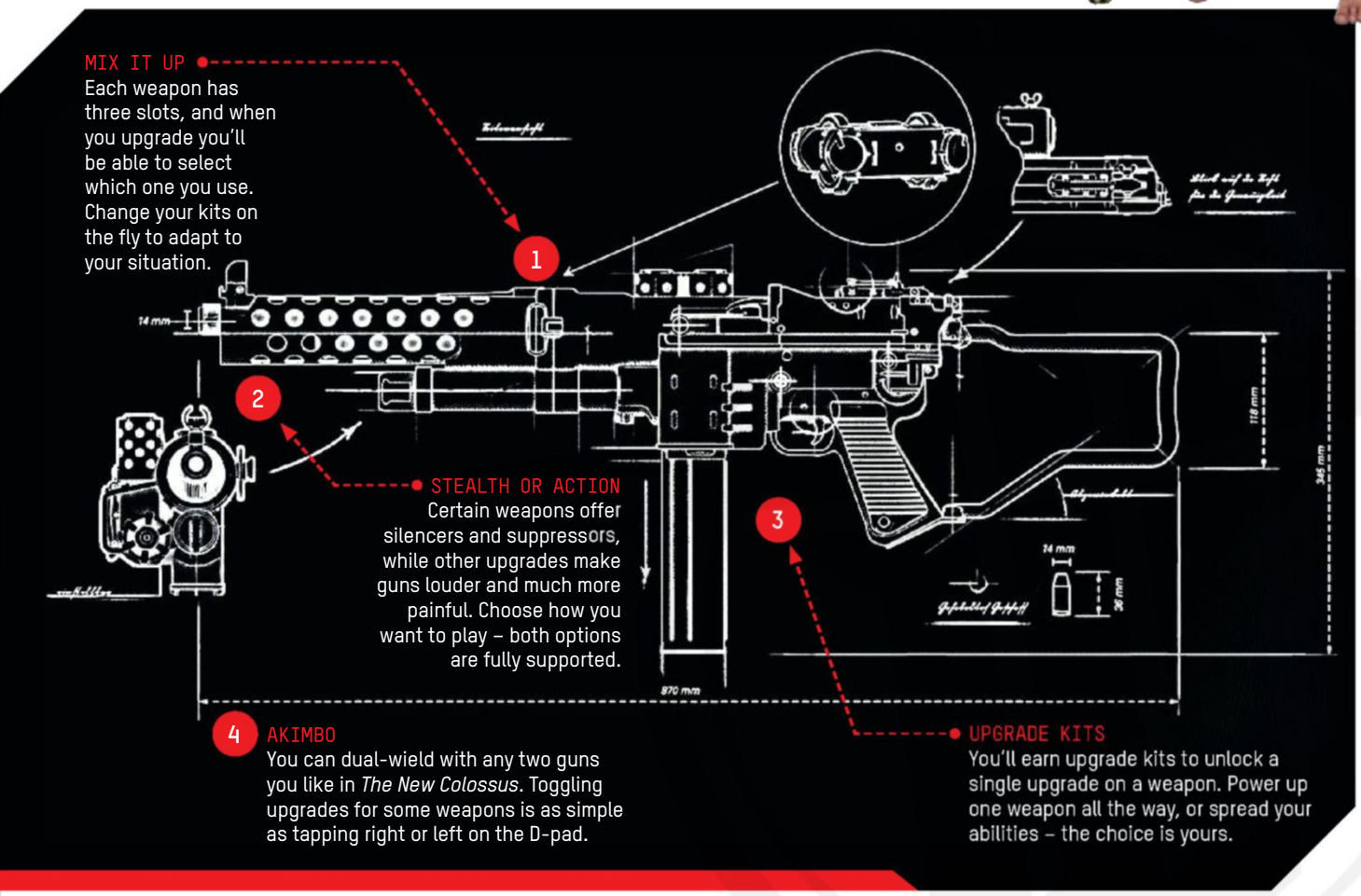
rinse through soldiers until it runs out of juice. Alternatively, pull out your signature weapon and you can wreak some serious devastation. Which one you get depends on the storyline you choose to play – there are two options, and each one will change the tone of the story and world a little, as well as deciding which gun you get to wield. "If you play the Fergus timeline, you have the Laserkraftwerk – it's like the upgraded version of what you had in the first game," says Matthies. "But if you play the Wyatt timeline you have something called the Dieselkraftwerk, which has evolved into something completely different."

It's the Dieselkraftwerk that we get to play with, and *goodness* is it enjoyable. "You can plant a number of projectiles and remote detonate them," suggest Matthies, clearly seeing the darkness in our souls. "You can plant them on enemies too, so if you're entering a scenario and you see a commander and three people you can plant one on each and detonate all of them at once, and cascades of blood follow, which is always fun." Jens just *gets* us, you know?

Other weapons have been given an upgrade for the sequel, too. Quite literally. You now have the option to upgrade any weapon in your armoury as long as you have an Upgrade Kit, allowing you to customise them to suit your playstyle. You can add silencers to some guns if you want to use the stealth mechanics to creep around like a blond, armoured ninja, or add fun things like 'Nailgun' or 'Jungle Magazine' upgrades which will rip through armour or make reloading faster. The system is simple – you can find out more about it below – but once purchased you can swap your upgrades out at any time, allowing you to switch from silent assassin to gun-toting Terror-Billy at will.

Reliving the past

Back to those dual storylines, though. If you played *The New Order*, you'll know that near the start of that game you have to make a decision that affects some of the plot points that you experience. *The New Colossus*, as a direct sequel, is no different – at the start of the game you can choose which timeline you want to follow. It's a small choice, but it will affect the game in several ways. Aside from the plotline-specific weapons you'll get to try, you'll also experience a different tone to the story. "The vibe changes. You can feel that you're in a different dimension



OBTUSE ENGEL

As BJ Blazkowicz ascends Deathshead's fortress in *The New Order*, Lieutenant Colonel Engel sends her lover, Hans Winkle (aka 'Bubi'), to tranquilise and murder him. Unfortunately for her, BJ is a total badass and fights back, stabbing Winkle to death as Engel watches in horror from a video screen. In *The New Colossus*, Engel is back and has vengeance (and the glory of the Third Reich) at the front of her mind. Her facial disfigurement appears close to fully healed, and her smug face will be front and centre from the start of the game. We're already predicting a 'Nazi In Battle Armour' boss fight against her in what is sure to be an outlandish and explosive finale.

LEFT Frau Engel had half of her face blown off in the last game, but Nazi plastic surgery is apparently very effective.



The game uses an all-new engine, so everything from facial animation to the AI has been overhauled



RIGHT A diner like this one is where you'll meet Super Spesh.

BELOW Super Spesh himself, a contact of the Resistance and builder of nuclear weapons.

depending on which one you choose," says Matthies. Don't worry, though, you won't have to have played the previous game to carry a save over, or anything like that. "You will have the option to put the train on the track that you want," he explains.

For fans of the series, this choice will add replayablility – something that Matthies notes is always hard to provide in what is a strictly single-player experience. According to the game director, it was a big task for the team, as it effectively meant creating two separate stories.

The other big change, to expand the scope of the first game, is the option to revisit areas later in the story at your own discretion, to see what has changed. For example, the Roswell level we played was bright, cheerful (if you ignore the Nazis) and combat-free on our first visit – but that would change if we went back. "The first time you play that there's this parade going on, you're undercover, and you're trying to accomplish something," says Matthies. "If you return later on there will be a combat scenario there and you can approach it differently."

It's not required though – we asked whether players could complete the game without ever seeing those levels for a second time. "All of that is elective, so if you want to see where the story takes you, and just do that, it's up to the player," stresses Matthies. "If you want to branch out and explore all of these other areas, that's also an opportunity." Unfortunately, we don't get to go back (we'd have loved to see Roswell after what we did with our cheeky nuclear bomb in that secret underground base), but it's sure to be a lot darker. Probably a bit more radiation-y, too. Sorry, Führer.

World domination

This broadening of the game world is a new step for *Wolfenstein*, which has previously been all about telling a specific story, guiding you along its path. It's an interesting choice from the team, but has made it all the more difficult to balance storytelling and that sense of exploration and adventure. Matthies explains that the story and gameplay teams work together, and both must agree on a new idea before it's implemented.

This applies across all parts of the game, but one aspect we were particularly interested in (after finding a newspaper that talked about how the German Reich had reduced fake news by 100% thanks to 'working closely with the press') was how the game might reflect modern-day politics. Could we expect a lot of references like this? Matthies explained that, while we should certainly prepare for some references to modern real-world events, the team were trying to create a timeless game, one that could be played in the future and still be applicable, and still work as a narrative, as well as visually.



The visual aspect will, at least, be helped by an all-new game engine, which has meant all kinds of things beneath the surface have had to be overhauled and redesigned for the new game. We can tell, too – in the cutscenes we get to see these new animation systems in action, and boy are they impressive. Whether or not these will be further improved by 4K HDR support on Xbox One X, we couldn't say – when we asked Matthies about the rumours of this support, he developed a serious poker face.

We've got a sneaky feeling that, by the time launch day comes around, Bethesda might have confirmed 4K support on Xbox One X – recent rumours would suggest so. For now the publisher is keeping schtum. Regardless, we're eager to see if the rest of the game can live up to our expectations. Things are looking good so far. ■

Q&A / JENS MATTHIES



What's the biggest change that fans will notice from *The New Order*?
I think it's visually, actually; we have a completely new engine now. Or audio-visually, I should say – I don't want to exclude the audio team, who are amazing. But the engine is entirely new, so all of the rendering is new, all of the first-person movement, AI, the sound and audio system is new… it's a total overhaul. You know, facial animation stuff… every component of the game, basically, has been rebuilt.

The first game was story-driven and scripted – you followed a path. Will the world open up a little more in *Wolfenstein II*, or are you still eager to tell a specific story?
It's a bit of both, and that's always what we as a developer always try to get better at. We want the story to support the gameplay and the gameplay to support the story, and we work a lot on coordinating them both. Then the challenge becomes how to open it up while maintaining that sort of sense that you're on this adventure.

Dave McCarthy X Marks the Spot

WE SIT DOWN WITH XBOX GENERAL MANAGER DAVE McCARTHY TO TALK ABOUT XBOX ONE X, AND HOW IT WILL SHAPE THE FUTURE OF GAMING

JAMES NOUCH

More than 35 existing games will get free 4K updates, including *Halo 5* and *Resident Evil 7*



While it wasn't shown at E3, you will be able to stand the Xbox One X vertically with an optional stand



BELOW *Forza Motorsport 7* is the showcase title for the One X – it's dripping in 4K gorgeousness.



There has been a trend emerging at OXM Towers in recent months. Whenever we chat with developers, we ask them what they think of the Xbox One X, and how they think it will change gaming. The thing we've heard most is how easy it is to get their games up and running on the new console, so when we sat down at E3 with Dave McCarthy, Xbox general manager, we thought we'd ask not only about the console and its games, but about Microsoft's attitude towards these developers, and how they've shaped the console's creation.

One of the things that Phil was saying at the E3 briefing was that this was 'the most diverse lineup ever'. What was the thinking behind that?

Where were we going? Yeah, it's interesting, especially if you juxtapose it against, 'Oh yeah, and it's the show where we're unveiling the world's most powerful console and talking about all that'. As we shaped up for the show, and we looked at all the content available, it dawned on us that we had every type of game for every type of gamer, and so we really started to gravitate towards this promise across the Xbox lineup that there are a bunch of different ways that gamers define themselves, right? Some love the 4K showcases like *Forza Motorsport 7* and *Anthem*. But community games are now hugely relevant to people, too; you've got experiences that can use things like Mixer. We showed *The Darwin Project* as an example using that in the eSports space. And I thought there was a neat surprise in the community space around *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds* as an Xbox exclusive. Some people really gravitate to the triple-A third-party publisher titles. Some of them go the indie route. We had games from around the world. We had *Minecraft*, the biggest gaming community in the world, going across all these devices. We love telling the story that you as a gamer may define yourself on a bunch of different avenues. The good thing is, they're all working across this lineup of Xbox One devices. They're going to play best on the Xbox One X, but we thought that diversity fit really well into our narrative that we were trying to hit.

"The good news is that your games library is going to come right over and it is going to play better"

And how do you foster that diversity? Do you go to developers or do they come to you?

You know, it's a good question. It's a bunch of different things. I think first and foremost you need a developer-friendly platform for them to come to, so we've done a lot of work over the past few years in making sure that the Xbox platform was really approachable to our developers. A lot of their input actually led to the design of Xbox One X. They were talking to us about stuff they were doing in the PC space with true 4K, and how that was really deepening their storytelling, and that led us to a lot of the decisions we made, like, 'Okay, we're going to put 40% more processing power than any other console, and we're going to go six teraflops, and we're going to create a situation where they can write to a 2160 frame buffer.' So making sure that we're really developer friendly [is important], and having a development platform where they can easily plug into the family of devices without having to do a lot of reworking. In fact, the existing lineup on Xbox One, with a developer not even touching it at all, is going to run better on Xbox One X, is going to load faster, should have smoother frame rates through dynamic frame rate techniques, and you should see the highest version of visual assets with titles that use dynamic resolution – which a lot of them do actually. So being really developer-friendly is part of it. There are programs like ID@Xbox, which have been really successful for us. Over 500 titles to date have come to the Xbox One family of devices through that. I think having the PC and Windows ecosystem is another part of that, right? I mean, that's a half billion monthly active devices there. And we have programs like Xbox Play Anywhere that play across them. So it's a really healthy relationship we have with our development partners big and small, and I think if you can provide those different avenues, that diversity kind of naturally comes to play in the ecosystem, which is what we're seeing now.

Moving onto the box itself, Scorpio is the One X.

It's the One X now. I can't make that mistake any more! [laughs]





Almost all of our readers will have an Xbox One. What does the Xbox One X offer for those people? What would you say to tempt them to upgrade?

So if you already have an Xbox, the good news is that your games library is going to come right over, your accessories are going to come right over, and it is going to play better from day one. I've experienced this myself. We've had the early development kits at home now for a couple of months, and it was pretty amazing. I was able to basically pull my HDMI cable out of my Xbox One S, put it in the back of my One X. I resynced my controller. I took my external hard drive, which I store all my games on anyway, and I plugged it into the USB port. And in five minutes I was off and running. I was playing with my son, but I obviously hadn't told him what machine he had in his house. He said, 'Dad, why is everything quicker? Why does it look better?' [laughs] So that promise of everything not just working but playing better is a nice safety for people who are considering the upgrade, I think. If you put a premium on true 4K, so not just 8 million pixels on screen but HDR (high-dynamic range), a wide colour gamut, spatial audio like Dolby Atmos... If you put a premium on those things you can tell the difference. And even if you don't have a 4K TV at home yet, we still do things like automatic supersampling to make sure that in 1080p the output from an Xbox One X looks great. So if you're an existing Xbox One user, I think whenever you're ready to make the jump, developers are going to take advantage of the high-end capabilities of it. We think it's a compelling combination of power, performance, compatibility, and also design. By the way, it's the smallest Xbox to date – that will really pull customers in. Some of them will be new to the Xbox family, as well, which I think is great.



TOP LEFT *The Darwin Project* is aiming to be one of Microsoft's big titles in the eSports space.

TOP RIGHT You'll get the latest Xbox One controller design with the Xbox One X.

ABOVE *Anthem* will be one of 2018's biggest and best-looking titles for Xbox One X.

What effect do you either expect or hope the One X will have on the gaming landscape? What do you think it will enable developers to do?

I think there's a round of storytelling that it's really going to unlock for a lot of developers. You saw Patrick Söderlund talk a little bit about that, both in the EA Play conference and when he was introducing *Anthem* from BioWare [at Microsoft's conference]. There's an immersion factor to true 4K. Like, you feel the heat come off those cars in *Forza*. The weather effects are stunningly real, and you find yourself sort of immersed in these experiences. Then I think you combine it with the other interesting aspects of what we do, right? On Xbox Live we have things



ABOVE We can't wait for *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds*, which is set for a 4K release next year.

RIGHT *Minecraft* will be getting a 4K upgrade this year, with better textures and beautiful graphical effects.





like interactivity through Mixer, right? You start to combine the high-fidelity high-immersion experiences with the power of Xbox Live, and it starts to bring together other communities.

A lot of our readers will be aware of other 4K consoles such as the PS4 Pro. For those who aren't as knowledgeable about the technical side of things, how does this console compare?

Well on some levels I think there's aspects of even Xbox One S that I'd compare [to the PS4 Pro] in terms of HDR gaming, 4K video streaming capabilities, 4K Blu-ray support. There are only two consoles in the world that support 4K Blu-ray, and they're both Xbox Ones – Xbox One S and Xbox One X. I make more of a comparison [with Xbox One X] to what the higher end PCs are doing right now. There is a big difference with 40% more processing power, in terms of ensuring that consistent frame rate, including that frame buffer that's going to get you all those 4K textures, ensuring the spatial audio is going to be at a premium for you. So it really is that top-end experience. But it's important for us to provide both those options in our lineup. And again, you don't really have to worry with your content or your accessories. They're going to work across Xbox Ones, depending on when you decide to make the leap, and that's true with your TV as well. If you don't have a 4K TV today, you're still going to be okay with

Recent rumours suggest that *Wolfenstein II* and *The Evil Within 2* will also support 4K



automatic supersampling from your Xbox One X down to your 1080p TV. It's going to look better on there as well.

Obviously this represents a new kind of console for Xbox in a way a mid-generation, noticeably more powerful machine. Is this what the console industry looks like now?
Well, I can say this much, I think that customers are familiar now with having a family of devices. I think that's a concept that's landed with people, whether it's through phones or other devices. They've sort of seen that happen. Xbox One X was born of developers pushing us to do the next big thing in the space. We said, 'Okay, we're up for rising to those challenges, but we've got these considerations of compatibility and design that we also want to nail along the way.' We're going to continue to listen to our developer community, big and small, to see where we should take things next, but I like that we've landed on a model that's not too foreign to customers but offers this broad choice. They don't have to give everything up, and they can do it when they're ready and when they see the proof points that really resonate with them personally. For me, *Forza Motorsport 7* already does it. I love racing games, and so it really speaks to me. But I think people are going to see developers introduce experiences quickly that really push the capabilities of the box, because one of the things we keep hearing back is how remarkably straightforward it is to get stuff on Xbox One X – they're getting games up and running in a matter of, like, one to two days. The exciting thing there for us as gamers is that means they have a lot of time to figure out what else they want to do with [that power]. I think we're going to see a range of experiences pop out of that.

"I think developers are going to introduce experiences that really push the capabilities of the box"



One thing that is already kind of a differentiator for Xbox is compatibility, and when you announced backwards compatibility with the original Xbox it got a huge cheer.
[Laughs] It did get a big cheer, yeah.

Will that work with discs? Will there be digital downloads as well?
We're working through all that stuff now. I can tell you this much – it's going to be a library of games. So it's not just *Crimson Skies,* which we showed [at the conference]. You know, we understand that there's obviously a delivery model we have to sort out. We have a plan on it, we're just working through the details, and we will be sharing stuff more throughout the year on exactly how it's going to work. I'm just glad we were able to deliver on the promise of more. You know, I think games are this really meaningful entertainment medium to our generation, and it's the only one where the generational boundaries have become an issue. It's not the case with music or movies or books. And to be able to go back and tap into some of those products that have great memories for our fans on Xbox, I think it's an awesome thing to do. I know they wanted it, because we see it on our user feedback site all the time, and we've seen heavy usage in our Xbox 360 backwards compatibility program. So I'm excited to see some more smiles and cheers when we announce the next round of titles that's coming in the library as well.

Do you know when we'll be able to hear some of that?
We haven't set the date, but it will be later this year we'll announce some stuff there. ■

Future Xbox Hits

TBC 2018
ANTHEM
Mixing *Mass Effect* with *Destiny* sounds like a recipe for success, and from what we've seen of *Anthem* so far, this could be a 4K classic. But don't expect it until mid-2018.

3 OCTOBER 2017
FORZA 7
The standout Xbox One X launch title, this game has been built alongside the console itself, and the team have had a great deal of input about the amount of power inside the box.

TBC 2018
PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS
A Twitch behemoth and a massive hit on PC, this game is actually still in Early Access. Expect the 4K version to land early next year.


Be
Toge



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WITH MINECRAFT'S BIGGEST UPDATE YET ON THE WAY WE INVESTIGATE EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW AND EXPLAIN JUST HOW IT WILL CHANGE THE GAME **DANIELLA LUCAS**

More great interviews at gamesradar.com/oxm

M

***inecraft* is one of those games that you'll always end up coming back to even if you've had a break for a few years. Its open, creative nature means it's different every time you play it, but for console players it's lacked the flexibility of other versions, with no way to try out all the exciting mods and servers available to PC players. But that's all going to change with the Better Together update out this autumn. Promising cross-play with mobile, Windows 10 *and* Nintendo Switch, as well as external servers and a busy marketplace, the marvellous world of *Minecraft* is about to open up considerably.**

So how is all of this going to happen? How do you make so many different versions of the game play nicely together? By changing it all to one single version, of course. When the update roles out the console version will completely change and become the same version as the Pocket and Windows 10 Editions. Don't worry, all the worlds you worked on will still be there and you'll be able to play them in this new version, except now you'll get to enjoy all of the extras they've had for ages, including stained glass and infinite worlds. That's right, no longer will you be confined by the edges of your map: the world you're in will just keep generating out in front of you.

What about the battle and glide mini-games? Well, that's a bit more complicated – you'll still be able to access them from the old launcher, but the hope is that with all of the new worlds and servers that will become available on the marketplace you'll be able to play versions of them on there instead, along with a whole heap of other new games to experiment with. You'll have access to a far greater range of things to do with your blocky friend going forwards, all easily accessible, and with loads more being added all of the time. You'll even be able to share your purchases across versions – so, for example, if you bought the Adventure Time texture pack on Xbox One, it'll also be unlocked to use in the mobile version. Although the Halo pack is an exception – that one will be locked to Xbox consoles only.

It does get a bit tricky when it comes to



TOP Parrots make their debut on Xbox One.

RIGHT Servers will be playable at release.

add-ons, though – these tools let Pocket and Windows 10 edition owners reprogram things like mobs to behave as they please to help them make in-depth creations of their own. Because of the hardware you won't be able to make these on Xbox One, however you *will* be able to see them and use them if they're part of other worlds or servers, so you won't totally miss out.

> "If you own Minecraft on disc you'll have to have played the game for at least five hours in the past year"

New ways to play

In the original PC version (now known as Java edition) you can join all sorts of servers and add mods as you please, but you have to dig around in your files to do so and mess around with things like IP addresses – plus, you'll often will end up running into issues. The Better Together updates are aiming to take that flexibility and make it easier and safer for Xbox owners to enjoy the custom servers Java edition users have had for a while now. From launch, several servers will be available to join directly from the game's menu.

To start with, Mojang will be working with Lifeboat, Cubecraft, InPvP and Mineplex to bring approved servers to everyone. As well as providing fun new ways to play *Minecraft*, they've also been vetted by the developers and more closely moderated to make sure any younger players are completely safe. Because they're all working so closely with Mojang it should also mean they'll be more stable and updated more frequently.

You can submit your own servers, but they'll have to make it through a strict checking process to make sure they're up to scratch. If you're just looking for a small space to play with your mates then Realms will also be available to Xbox One players for the first time. It's essentially a way to rent your own private server for a small fee – all of the background running of it is taken care for you, so you can just have fun with friends.

All of these extras are available through the Microsoft marketplace – a shop within the







game that lets you buy skins, worlds, texture packs and more with Minecraft Coins. You pay for Coins with your real money and use those to buy from the marketplace itself – by using its own currency it ensures the costs are kept the same no matter if you're playing on Xbox or even on a Switch.

How do you get it?

Everyone who plays *Minecraft* will now need to have an Xbox Live login to make sure all of your details are tied to you no matter which platform you play on – which won't be a problem for **OXM** readers, of course. Likewise, if you want to play online on Xbox One or Nintendo Switch you'll still have to pay for the consoles' online services – although those on Windows 10 and Mobile don't. It's a frustrating decision, but those costs are related to the hardware you choose to play on rather than the game itself, so you will have to shell out for Xbox Live Gold to play with your friends, if you haven't already.

Also, if you own *Minecraft* on a disc you'll have to have played the game for at least five hours in the past year for it to eventually upgrade to the updated version. If you've downloaded it already then you don't need to worry, everything will be ready to go once the update hits in November.

While there's still a while to wait for the full release you can access the beta version to check it out on your Xbox One. Simply download the Insider Program app and navigate to the Insider content hub where you'll find the beta to download. A lot of the content is being tested in waves; at the time of writing the Marketplace and Servers weren't available, but will be added later.

Because this is such a massive update there's tons of info here to digest, but what does it all mean for the future of *Minecraft* as we know it? With (almost) everyone now on the same platform, future content updates that add blocks or new mobs will now hit everyone that much faster, and will hopefully happen far more frequently as there are fewer versions of the game to deal with. After Xbox One owners have had to deal with being left behind for so long, this feels like a huge step forward and we can't wait to play better together. ■

GET IN EARLY

TRY IT OUT BEFORE EVERYONE ELSE

WANT TO JOIN THE BETA AND TRY OUT THE UPDATE BEFORE IT RELEASES? JUST FOLLOW THESE STEPS

1 Go to the Store app on Xbox One by browsing along the top tabs and search for the Xbox Insider hub page.

2 Download the app (don't worry about buying it, it's completely free) and make a cup of tea while you wait for it to finish.

3 Once it's finished installing open up the app and navigate down to the Insider Content tab.

4 Once there you should see the *Minecraft* beta. Now all you need to do is select join and you'll be able to try out all of the new features.

It's worth remembering that because this is just a beta test there will be lots of bugs that might crop up while you play, but that should also mean that they can squash them before the full release. You'll also have to wait until the final version to try out all those new servers, but at least you get a sneak peek at everything else!



More for your money

ALL OF THE COOLEST MAPS, TEXTURES AND SKINS THAT YOU'LL BE ABLE TO GET ON THE NEW MARKETPLACE

It's been on Pocket Edition for a while, but soon Xbox One players will also gain access to *Minecraft*'s marketplace with the Better Together update. Of course all of Mojang's texture packs and skins are there, but they're also partnered with big community creators such as Noxcrew to bring you worlds and servers to go out and explore, and plenty of new skins and textures to try.

It might not be out on Xbox yet (you can expect plenty of brand new stuff when the update does finally launch) but here's what else you can get your hands on for a few coins. Start saving up now!

06

THE KINGDOM OF TORCHWALL – IMAGIVERSE

This survival map is set in a medieval fantasy world that sees you spawn in the middle of an ancient kingdom full of history. The town and castle are huge, set upon imposing rock formations that fall away into the sea. The town is full of taverns, markets and peasant housing, while the castle itself has opulent halls and an impressive throne room. You can also find hidden tunnels throughout the city and passages that bore deep down into the cliffs. Will you choose to be the king of this bustling city or live the simple life of a peasant in the town? Either way this is a great place to play out your own story.





08

ADVENTURER'S DREAM MASH-UP: WORLD – NOXCREW

This Mash-up pack is pricer than most, but it's got a lot to offer. Its map is huge and is set up for exploring, with floating cities full of airships and magical forests. There are also several hidden dungeons that are full of puzzles and monsters to take on with your friends. There's even a huge cavern packed with dragons to beat if you're after a really tough challenge. Even the mobs have been changed to fit in with the world – you'll now find faeries, unicorns and plenty of mythical beasts. On top of all that you'll also get a bright texture pack to use in all of your own builds, and a load of skins to make sure your adventurer feels right at home in this vast world.



05

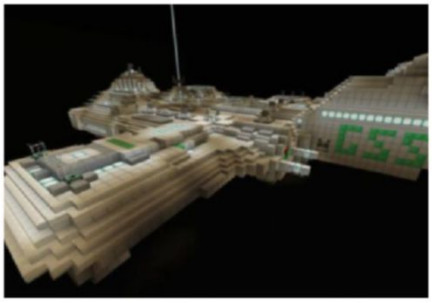
RELICS OF THE PRIVATEERS – IMAGIVERSE

A map for true adventurers. The whole thing has a *Pirates Of The Caribbean* theme, with giant ships, islands with golden beaches, port towns, hidden treasure and even a mermaid's lagoon. Take on puzzles to uncover hidden relics within the map and pirates to fight. It's a great example of the amazing things you can do in *Minecraft*. Oh, and if you're looking to improve your own building skills, there's a lot you can learn from this map.

07

SPACE BATTLE SIMULATOR – QWERTYUIOPTHEPIE

A genuinely original take on an arena battle-style game. Team up with a small group to take control of one spaceship while you try to destroy the other. You'll simultaneously have to protect your ship from invaders while teleporting over the other one to undo it from the inside. For example, teleport aboard and you can switch off the ship's shields, allowing your ship to fire its phasers – but if the enemy crew finds and destroys your reactor you'll be done for as you'll slowly run out of oxygen. The confined spaces make for an intense battle of wits and skill as you try your best to get the upper hand.





04

DESTRUCTOBOT 5000 – NOXCREW

This map makes a great use of add-ons and completely changes all mobs into various types of robots that have taken over the world. It's up to you to step into a mecha, packed with weapons and explosives, and go around destroying them all before they overrun the city. It's a fantastic map that brings a new style of play that console owners won't have been able to try before, and shows off the breadth of what will eventually be available. Who needs the battle mini-game when you can rumble around in a mech stomping robots?

03

PASTEL SKIN PACK – ENEIJA

With 20 different skins, this set is great value for money and adds a much-needed pop of light colour to the mix. It's broken down into five main colour themes, with four different types of people in each range – so, if you don't like the look of one purple outfit, there are still another three purple outfits to choose from. All of the clothes are quite simple, mostly featuring shorts and hoodies, but it makes for a nice change from all of the over-the-top outfits you usually find in *Minecraft*.



02

WISTERIA GROVE – IMAGIVERSE

This is a survival map set in a fantasy world of giant trees and flowers. It's beautifully designed with an enormous wisteria tree at its centre. There are plenty of hidden paths that burrow under the ground or pass across the forest's canopy to explore, and a whimsical fountain that feels like it belongs in an Elven city. It's a gorgeous build that makes for a great starting point in your survival game if you're going for a magical, fantasy theme for your world. It also includes five skins to help you get the perfect look to match the surroundings.



01

STONE AGE TEXTURE PACK – POLYMAPS

This pack takes you back to your caveman roots. What we're saying is: prepare for loincloths and wooden clubs. It's a simple but highly effective collection of stuff, including ancient bison in place of cows, tiny dinosaurs instead of rabbits, and dodos where chickens should be. All of the armour has been modified to look like bone or monsters skins, and even the paintings have been turned into cave-wall drawings. See if you can find a woolly mammoth roaming the icy wastes! The whole thing has quite a rough, rocky look to really set the mood. ■



XBOX ONE CONSOLE EXCLUSIVE

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Features and technical capabilities, including 4K and HDR, vary by console.
© 2017 Microsoft. All Rights Reserved. [1]Online multiplayer requires Xbox Live Gold membership (sold separately). Some content including some tracks and cars may require download from Xbox Live (ISP fees apply).
*Pre-release game; game release dates, availability, content and features subject to change.

Microsoft



review

REVIEW

Your gaming month sorted with our definitive reviews

Tacoma (the titular space station) is named after the city in Washington, where Fullbright first planned to set *Gone Home*'s sequel

Do you remember *Gone Home*? The game that has you investigating an empty house to find out what had happened there, telling a story in the process? Well the devs behind that surprising journey have finally released their next game, and this time they've jumped on a rocket ship and headed into space with Tacoma (p76). You'll have to figure out what happened to the crew aboard a space station after a meteor strike cut out a lot of their systems. It's been a fantastic month for interactive stories as we've also been playing What Remains Of Edith Finch (p80), which sees you uncovering the tales of a cursed family to find out what happened to each of them before they died, and why you're the last Finch alive. If that's not enough storytelling for you, or perhaps you want something that isn't going to make you sad, then Minecraft Story Mode Season Two (p84) will provide a light palate cleanser between rounds of crying. Plus llamas and undersea adventures, because why not? Game Preview has seen a boost this month too, with Fortnite (p88), which has you building your own base while trying to defend it from waves of monsters, and Fable Fortune (p90), which turns characters from the *Fable* series into a collectible card game in a similar way to *Gwent*. But is either worth dipping your toes into before their actual release dates? Read on to find out.



076



080



084



090

HOW WE SCORE:

Can't make sense of our out-of-ten rating system? Then see below for your at-a-glance guide.

10 A gaming masterpiece
9 An essential slice of brilliance
8 Give it a whirl and you won't regret it
7 Some minor flaws but still good
6 Solid, but not setting any loins aflame
5 Average. Not good, but not terrible either
4 Honks just a bit
3 Look away, lest ye be tainted
2 Angry-makingly bad
1 Just... no...

β Titles with this symbol are on Game Preview, so while they aren't finished, you can still find out if they're worth playing.

XBOX THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE
EDITOR'S CHOICE

Irrespective of score, the Editor's Choice award is given to games with the quality, ambition or uniqueness to stand out from the crowd.

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EDITOR'S CHOICE

PUBLISHER FULLBRIGHT / **DEVELOPER** FULLBRIGHT / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** OUT NOW / **COST** £15

Tacoma

GETTING SPACED OUT HAS NEVER BEEN MORE ENGROSSING **TOM SENIOR**

Imagine you're watching your favourite soap opera and, in the middle of a blazing argument, you get to pause the show and then go and look around the characters' bedrooms.

You can open their cupboards, read their letters and throw their pens around. Then you can go back into the room where the row is happening, rewind the characters and follow them back into different rooms where they sit around playing guitar and talking to themselves. Now imagine all this is happening in space and your characters are trapped in a terrible corporate arrangement aboard a space station that's in dire peril. Welcome to *Tacoma*.

It's a story game from the creators of mansion-exploring and cupboard-opening simulator, *Gone Home*. However, in *Gone Home* you simply walk around a mansion and read letters; in *Tacoma* you're exploring an entire space station and recovering details of the disaster, as though you're exploring a huge, interactive black box recording. You play as a contractor on a job to download the resident AI from the Tacoma space station shortly after it has been abandoned. The AI, Odin, addresses the station's inhabitants using an augmented reality system that layers digital information over the environment. Odin also records every sound and movement the crew makes. As you move between Tacoma's modules and download chunks of Odin, you can recover corrupted data in each area and watch the team's ghostly interactions.

ABOVE Even though you never see their faces, you still get to know everyone on board.

Six appeal

The six crew members are represented as coloured silhouettes, and they have a symbol on their back that represents their role – medic, station administrator, botanist. This helps you to quickly identify them early on before you come to know their voices and personalities. The first proper conversation you recover is a great showcase for *Tacoma*'s excellent storytelling system. The crew is having a party in the rec room. Two of them flirt at the main table. The medic plays pool in the lounge nearby. The station administrator practises her speech with Odin in a separate room, and the two other crew members prepare a cake in the kitchen. The sound of a huge crash unites the panicked crew members at the table. As they discuss the explosion they bring up their augmented reality interfaces, which you can access to read their chat logs and emails. These interfaces each have four icons, which you can press A on to open the email or chat log in a floating window. You have your own augmented reality overlay where you receive messages from your employer, as well as information about your character and her background.

→ More great reviews at gamesradar.com/oxm



If you get spaced you only have 15 seconds of consciousness. Use them to strike a dance pose before death



RIGHT Why don't the projections wear those party hats on the table?

FAR RIGHT The small private moments feel as big as the ones that include everyone.

The whole event is a four-dimensional play that you can rewind and examine at leisure. Pressing X sets all the characters in motion, and you're free to walk around and eavesdrop on any of them. X pauses the action again, and you can use LB and RB to scrub back and forth through the sequence. It's worth following the crew around and watching their every moment. Even when crew members are alone they often discuss personal matters with Odin, which gives you a little extra insight into their lives. Remarkably, though you are a mercenary trespasser hoovering up private moments for your own entertainment, it never feels nasty or voyeuristic. The crew's total lack of privacy is a contractual necessity of their employment on the station, and it feels as though their memories deserve to be recorded as they struggle heroically against disaster.

Natural goodness

The voice actors deliver strong naturalistic performances and the silhouettes are expressive enough to give you a sense of each crew member's mood. A few have also coupled up and their relationships are believable and, at points, quite moving. As you recover more scenes you discover moments of quiet intimacy that gives each character a strong sense of individuality. The abstract, phantom-like presentation of the crew works surprisingly well. A version of the same system with fully animated faces would likely have seemed more unnatural. The ambiguity allows your imagination to pick up the rest of the work.

The station itself is almost as interesting as the characters that used to live there. Each module is packed with objects that you can pick up, zoom in on, rotate close-up and throw around. Every little item has been painstakingly modelled to make the setting feel authentic – the pens even have the station owners' corporate logo embedded in silver.

The environments are full of little puzzles too. As you dig through a crew member's belongings you might find a key to a locker elsewhere. A door code hidden in someone's emails might grant you access to a new room. In each crew member's quarters you can dig through their personal belongings and learn a lot about their past, and their families back home. These puzzles aren't difficult, but they create some satisfying payoffs if you are good at rummaging. *Tacoma* rewards you for being nosy.

The game looks great, too, though there are hitches in performance. These are especially pronounced when you're hurtling down the elevators that link the zero-G central



LEFT More party hat questions: where did the crew get them from? Did they pack them in advance 'just in case' they needed to party? Or are they essential space station equipment?

short cut

WHAT IS IT?
A short, peaceful story game set on a mysteriously abandoned space station.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?
A fragmented play that you watch and piece together, bit by bit.

WHO'S IT FOR?
Anyone who loves good stories and going through other people's stuff.

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spindle to the station's rotating habitats. It's a minor annoyance, though, and has little impact on *Tacoma*'s gentle exploration. The station itself is made up of winding corridors and satisfying, chunky bulkheads. A lot of thought has gone into crafting a utilitarian space that is nonetheless designed to be lived in for long periods. It's sometimes a surprising space, too. One moment you're prowling the dark, businesslike medbay, then you discover the tea room – an observation deck full of plants with a little table. It's easy to imagine crew members enjoying a hot beverage and looking out at the stars here. Even though the crew isn't around any more, their decorations and general life-clutter bring a warm sense of humanity to Tacoma's grey corridors.

The station is managed by Odin's soothing presence. The AI is an interesting character itself; grown over time 'like a redwood' and moved between owners so that it can learn to better interact with humans, Odin is part of a richly conceived science fiction setting. The station is owned by the Venturis corporation, which keeps its crew in a form of servitude with a series of loyalty rewards and punishing insurance arrangements. Details of Venturis' activities are artfully seeded in Tacoma's clutter, and each crew member has their debts to pay. As *Gone Home* played with players' haunted house expectations, Odin's calm voice and secretive nature deliberately evokes *2001: A Space Odyssey*'s Hal 9000 AI, but then plays with that in interesting ways. We don't want to spoil any story details, but it's a satisfying tale with some surprising twists.

THE FINAL FRONTIER

Tacoma is an authentically constructed space habitat with some realistic touches. The station houses a botany department that helps to produce oxygen, and the illusion of gravity is created by the inertia of its rotating rings. Tacoma also recognises the fragility of life in space; a stray piece of debris is enough to send the whole habitat into chaos. Perhaps the least realistic element is a cryo-bay that can turn the crew into living ice lollies – unlikely to exist in a non-fatal form in 2088.

"When you know how the game ends small details earlier on take on fresh context"

We're crammin'

It's amazing that *Tacoma* manages to cram so much into such a short space of time. If you rush through you can polish off the whole thing in two hours, but the game is far better if you take your time and properly explore every shelf. *Tacoma* is also worth replaying once you know what's going on. When you know how the game ends, small details earlier on take on fresh context. As with a good book, particular moments and decisions stayed with us, and part of us still wants to go back and discover new stories beyond the station carapace. It's a good sign when it feels as though a game's wider fiction is strong enough to sustain more stories elsewhere in the universe.

Tacoma is the latest in a series of short narrative games that are creating clever new ways to tell stories. *Tacoma* is great because you have to actively participate to uncover story beats and connect them into an overall narrative. This is a significant improvement over comparable story games such as *Everybody's Gone To The Rapture*, which tells you a story with a series of virtual plays, but without the enticing ability to control the actors. Even the enchanting *What Remains Of Edith Finch* prefers to funnel you forcefully through its story beats. *Tacoma* is a puzzle rather than a slideshow, and it tells a story in a way that only a game could. Even with its uneven performance and short length, it's an easy recommendation to anyone who enjoys a well-constructed yarn in a compelling world. ■

XBOX THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

OXM VERDICT

A clever and absorbing interactive story set in an expertly built sci-fi world.

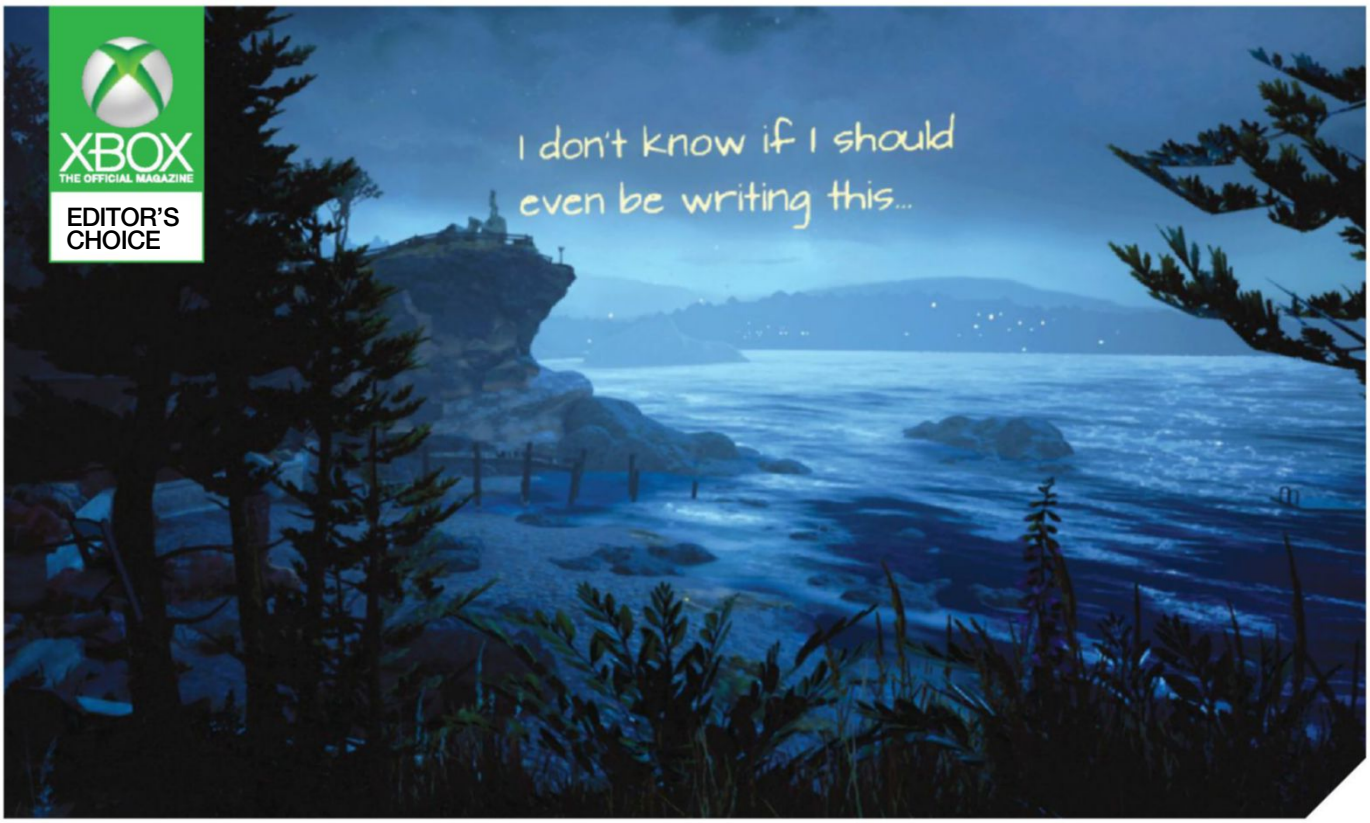
9

Composer Jeff Russo (who worked on the *Fargo* TV series) created the game's soundtrack

PUBLISHER ANNAPURNA INTERACTIVE / **DEVELOPER** GIANT SPARROW / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** OUT NOW / **COST** £14.99

What Remains Of Edith Finch

YOU CAN NEVER GO HOME AGAIN **JOSH WEST**



Do not read this review of *What Remains Of Edith Finch*, for that we ask you kindly. Walk to your console, install it, and endure it blind. To read too much into Giant Sparrow's spellbinding narrative masterpiece would be to do yourself a disservice. For this is an experience that is rooted heavily in mystery. It draws its power from the unknown, its hold over you only growing stronger as it builds towards its inevitable, decisive resolution. You must play *What Remains Of Edith Finch*, for it is perhaps the finest example of what a videogame can accomplish when it truly embraces narrative as a mechanism for play. The result is incredible, its impact undeniable.

You're still here? Okay. We will try to keep it light on the details, for your own benefit.

What Remains Of Edith Finch is built around a simple enough premise, one that is easy enough to grasp, but no less affecting in its resolve to leave you speechless by its closing moments. It is, in essence, a series of vignettes. You take on the role of Edith, experiencing pieces of family history slowly and methodically, building a picture of her past as she moves though an old, abandoned family mansion room by room. While that picture may become larger over the course of your time here, it is not necessarily made any clearer by what you uncover. But then that's all a part of life, isn't it? Sometimes it is messy and untidy – eventually, inevitably, somebody will have to pick up the pieces.

On this occasion, it is Edith, and you can feel the tension in her voice the second she returns to the estate after seven years away. For the family's story is one wrought with tragedy and heartache, dressed-up in fairytales and nightmares. The game is heavily rooted in tragedy, so much so that it can at times be difficult to will yourself to proceed deeper into its web – but so commanding is its momentum that you'll find it impossible to resist its pull.

short cut

WHAT IS IT?
A storybook adventure that unfolds gradually over time.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?
It's a beautiful ride, one that finds an astute balance between melancholy and happiness.

WHO'S IT FOR?
Anybody who wants to experience a uniquely crafted story, one that couldn't be told in any other format.

Love and death

That's because it understands that to command the resonance and weight of loss through story, first it must convey love. *What Remains Of Edith Finch* is evocative, not because it makes you confront death, but because it asks you to first embrace life. The game connects you to each one of its characters with a whisper before ripping them away again; in some instances it can be because of fantastical, almost unbelievable, circumstances, yet in others it can be heart-wrenching, close to home and difficult to bear.

“It isn’t often that the end of a videogame will cause genuine pause in a player”



RIGHT *What Remains Of Edith Finch* isn’t a long game, taking about four or five hours to complete, but it achieves a lot in that time.



FAR LEFT There are some beautiful gameplay moments to be found here; just try and leave as much to the unknown as you possibly can.

LEFT Giant Sparrow has done a fantastic job making the house, in spite of its quirks, feel like a very real place.

This narrative is told through beautifully delivered narration, through letters that drift on the will of the wind and through turning pages of diaries strewn across the house. Each vignette is essentially a mini-game in itself, each with its own intuitive method of control, style and feel. In fact, some might hesitate when calling *What Remains Of Edith Finch* a videogame; it is, in essence, an interactive storybook. But it’s one that employs somewhere in the region of 30 different control schemes, and it does so without once causing pause or confusion – it’s frictionless. That isn’t just impressive, it’s downright masterful. Each new mechanic brings yet another way to connect with a past family member, another way to emotionally connect with the spectre of death that has haunted the family for decades.

Giant Sparrow never treats death as a be all, end all here; instead it treats it as an inevitable part of life. Part of the cycle. Edith returning home is just another turn of it. It’s a shame, then, that the cycle is frequently disrupted by frustrating technical issues – clipping and slowdown are the biggest offenders, these brief moments of stalling an infrequent aggressor on the total immersion it almost achieves.

Echoes in the wind

Thomas Wolfe once wrote ‘You Can’t Go Home Again’ and perhaps he knew what Edith didn’t – or, at least, was unwilling to admit to herself. That while you *can* try to, you probably shouldn’t. You might not like what you find when you go digging around in your past; every family has a few skeletons hidden away in the closet, and in the case of the Finchs, perhaps a few more than most.

It isn’t often that the end of a videogame will cause genuine pause in its player. But *What Remains Of Edith Finch* does well to establish its story, characters and boundaries. It is built in such a way that it will always find a way to connect with the person behind the controller at a very base human level. And while this narrative experience might not be for everybody, those that are willing to cast out their aspersions of what is and isn’t to be considered a videogame will find something truly progressive for the medium. ■

MASTERFUL NARRATION

There are a handful of standout vignettes in *What Remains Of Edith Finch*, but the very best comes from Lewis. To say too much would ruin it, but it’s an incredible section of gameplay that pulls the lens closely on the nature of monotony, dead-end jobs and depression. It’s to be applauded for its nuance, and helps solidify what is an unmissable game experience.

XBOX THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

OXM VERDICT

A beautiful and haunting exploration of life, death and family tragedy.

9

Enemies don't die but instead explode into rubber ducks. Yes, really

PUBLISHER MERGE GAMES / **DEVELOPER** PROSPECT GAMES / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** OUT NOW / **COST** £14.99

Unbox: Newbie's Adventure

SPECIAL DELIVERY! SIGN FOR A PLATFORMING EXTRAVAGANZA HERE

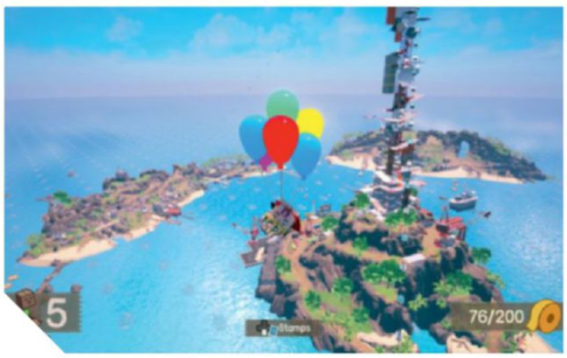
ZOE DELAHUNTY-LIGHT

Ordinarily you'd be confused if you received a package that's filled with seawater or has six other boxes stuffed inside it, or for some reason has a cape tied around it. But in *Unbox: Newbie's Adventure* all these odd features are signs that you've been enjoying the sights of its platforming postal-based mayhem, rather than having an eccentric postman tinkering with your parcels.

From the very start, the open world you find yourself dashing through is pleasantly full, populated with half-finished buildings, plenty of industrial machinery, and construction workers with bright yellow hardhats. I should mention that every NPC, like you, is a walking, talking cardboard box called a Zippie. Sounds odd at first, but a surprising benefit of being made of cardboard is that you're able to 'unbox' up to six times midway through a jump, which fires out a smaller version of yourself from underneath to give you a mighty midair boost.

Leap of faith

Once you get a hang of the powerful jumps (at first you're sure to overshoot and get acquainted with the deadly seawater) this unboxing ability ends up becoming a nifty tactic. Use it to quickly undo your miscalculated leap off the side of a tower you're meant to be scaling, or to give yourself a bird's-eye view of a Wildcard stronghold, the enemies that want to destroy your beloved



RIGHT Zippies populate the world in various colourful guises.

BELOW Scale the tower in the centre or explore the islands; it's up to you!



short cut

WHAT IS IT?
An open-world platformer where you're a brave new box set on saving the GPS.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?
Cheerful, full of personality, and crammed with things to do.

WHO'S IT FOR?
Someone who wants to master the art of the jump.

"Personality overwhelms Unbox, making the world feel alive"

GPS. Each bound is exhilarating, and I only wish there were more non-timed platforming challenges to test just how far you could innovate with it.

Nailing the jump is one thing, but landing takes some getting used to – because you're controlling a cube, the momentum from the leap means that when you land you have a tendency to roll a couple of extra feet. Mind you, all this does is make the platforming pleasantly challenging, as you're able to quickly correct yourself before bounding into the air once more. It only becomes frustrating on smaller platforms where precision is everything, but it's not hard to forgive.

One of your aims is to collect stamps by completing challenges. These range from climbing up a dizzyingly-tall spire – complete with moving platforms – to letting rip with rockets. There really should be more platforming sections as they're deliriously fun, but instead there's a multitude of timed missions. Most of the timers are generous, but they should only be attempted once you've mastered the jumping controls. One mistake and you'll find seawater seeping into your cardboard edges.

However, if these onscreen clocks don't do it for you there's a postal-van's worth of other stuff to do. Get obsessive and collect all 200 rolls of gold tape hidden around the map, or heroically save the Zippies that the Wildcards have locked in cages. You could even just hunt down the stamps, not attached to any challenges, that have been dropped somewhere and often require a puzzle-solving endeavour to uncover. There's plenty of Zippies to chat to as well; being given a bunch of balloons by a Giving Post and floating into the sky was a highlight, as was spotting a *Bioshock Infinite* reference. Personality overwhelms in *Unbox: Newbie's Adventure*, making the world feel alive and kicking – if boxes had feet, that is. ■

XBOX THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

OXM VERDICT
Jump, roll and unbox your way to pleasantly-challenging platformer.

8



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XBOX ONE X

*Broadband internet required (ISP fees apply).

Microsoft



PUBLISHER TELLTALE / **DEVELOPER** TELLTALE / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** OUT NOW / **COST** £24

Minecraft Story Mode Season Two: Episode One

IF YOU BUILD IT... **MARTIN KITTS**

Weaving a plot around a game that's effectively nothing more than a vast sandbox can't be a particularly easy task. How can a single story or character possibly encompass the countless different experiences you may have within the make-your-own-fun world of *Minecraft*?

If you've only ever played it as a sort of collaborative virtual Lego set you might not recognise the bustling society Telltale's writers have conjured within *Minecraft*'s borderless, goalless expanse. It's an Indiana Jones-ish treasure hunt set in a kind of blocky utopia where everyone's purpose in life seems to be to create and admire awesome builds. The entire population lives and breathes *Minecraft*.

As Jesse, principal architect, adventurer, saviour and leader of Beacontown, you're the object of the citizens' devotion/envy. It's a strange position to be in, like you're some sort of demigod who just happens to live next door to a bunch of ordinary folk. Some characters believe in hidden deities who direct their actions, while cameo appearances from the chunky avatars of actual prominent YouTubers only serve to hammer at the fourth wall and amp up the surreality.

Choices made in *Season One* will carry through to the new game, while newcomers can choose which key decisions they would have made had they experienced the battle against the Wither Storm and everything else that transpired during the previous episodes. You can also opt to start without any knowledge of Jesse's past. Either way, the game opens with a brief summary of the original party's story, as transcribed by rival turned teammate Lukas. The party then splits up and you're left with Jesse, and his (or her, your choice) best buddy Petra.

short cut

WHAT IS IT?
Choose your own adventure in the chunky world of *Minecraft*.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?
A lot of listening, a bit of puzzling and the odd fight against fat-pixelled baddies.

WHO'S IT FOR?
Minecraft obsessives and players who might be a bit young for other Telltale games.

Manic mining

Petra takes Jesse on an adventure in the mines below Beacontown, where they follow a treasure-seeking llama (don't ask) that leads them to a secret cavern with a sinister glowing gauntlet. Being the boss, Jesse decides to try on the gauntlet, finds he's unable to remove it, and a cavernous 'Heckmouth' opens up, spewing out creatures. Thus begins a new quest that introduces a couple of additional party members, a boastful rival from nearby Champion City and a super powerful foe known only as The Admin.

As far as gameplay enhancements go, certain combat scenes give you direct control of your character, allowing you to move, dodge and attack in realtime. It's an action-

The work of YouTuber Stampy Cat, who appears in the game, has had over six billion views





LEFT This is Radar, Jesse's number one fan and a bit of an oddball.

focused addition to the usual button-prompt quicktime events (which are still present in abundance), although a long way short of the quality you'd expect from a 'real' 3D action game. Movement is sluggish and death forces you to restart at the lengthy pre-fight cutscene. It wasn't much fun having to sit through one of these two or three extra times because the game failed to explain how to avoid an enemy's 360° stomp attack. For the record, the solution was to keep the enemy in the centre of the playing area and walk very slowly backwards until reaching the furthest allowable distance. I'd been failing because there was an invisible wall behind my character, preventing me from retreating far enough.

Crafting tables make a reappearance, in one instance asking you to create specific types of blocks to solve a puzzle. This was actually quite promising: examining the area, looking through the inventory and figuring out what the crafting recipes required. However, when I inadvertently created a similarly named but incorrect item, Petra decided not to let me have another go and instead placed the required ingredients on the table and told me exactly what to do. I know it's aimed at a young audience but it could at least have asked if I wanted any help.

Talking heads

The amount of mileage you get out of the story and the optional chats with the many incidental characters you'll find in Beacontown depends largely on how much enthusiasm you have for their one-track *Minecraft*-focused lives. They can talk at great length about what kind of block a wall is made of, which is definitely an important thing in the proper *Minecraft* game, but it doesn't always make for enthralling dialogue.

The pace is slow throughout, and in stretching the first episode past the two-hour mark the script contains an awful lot of filler. There were at least a couple of times when I zoned out while the characters waffled on and on about nothing of consequence and I ended up completely missing a timed dialogue choice, something that has never happened to me in a Telltale game before. There was a little message at the top of the screen saying so-and-so has noted your silence, or words to that effect. It's not the hallmark of a gripping plot, that's for sure.

Still, given that there are four more episodes to come, and knowing from experience that Telltale games tend to evolve somewhat over the course of a season, there's potential for this one to overcome its shaky start. The foundations have been set in stone but here's hoping they take their time in refining the rest of the build. ■

FAR LEFT The Admin awakes! It would have been cool if he was a giant human hand or something.

RIGHT Entering a spooky temple in search of the legendary Structure Block.



MAKE BELIEVE

Very early on you get asked to create something for a Beacontown resident who dreams of having his front yard adorned by a build from the great Jesse. This crossover of Story Mode and the proper *Minecraft* game is arguably the most successful part of the first episode, and although it's only a brief scene it raises the possibility of being able to tailor parts of the town to your own specification in future episodes. We certainly hope that's the case. What could possibly be more *Minecraft* than that?

XBOX THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

OXM VERDICT

Doesn't fully realise its potential, but these are early days.

6

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The game is another Kickstarter success – it was successfully funded on the site in October 2014

PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX COLLECTIVE / **DEVELOPER** SAND SAILOR STUDIO/ **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** OUT NOW / **COST** £14.99

Black The Fall

ATTACK THE BLOC **DOM PEPPIATT**

***Black The Fall* is an angry game. It's got a lot to say, and it uses you – the player – as its mouthpiece. You're a faceless drone, one of many, that needs to manipulate other faceless drones to prolong your tortured existence just a bit longer. That's the idea, anyway, but you quickly learn that these 'drones' are real people just like you, and you're all gears in a machine much bigger than you.**

You need to work through sadistic puzzles just to grab one more glance at a sky that's supposed to elicit a feeling of freedom, but somehow just seems to suppress you more.

The game clearly takes a lot of inspiration from both of Playdead's acclaimed platformers, *Limbo* and *Inside*. Thing is, where both of those games really picked apart what mute platformers can do with their puzzles, *Black The Fall* fails to do so. It's an unsubtle game, but where its message is strong and clear ('absolute power is bad!'), its platforming isn't exactly inventive.

There's still some interesting puzzling to be done in the game, but Sand Sailor Studios are notably less polished than their Danish counterparts. *Black The Fall* gives you extra mechanics to round out the game's puzzle set-up: laser pointers, command options, cranks and levers abound, and they help give the game a more robust rhythm, but it still lacks something major its dystopian genre rivals have managed to perfect.



RIGHT The game is dark and unapologetically bleak, with spots of red highlighting danger.



short cut

WHAT IS IT?
A 2.5D platformer following the story of one persecuted worker through a crumbling totalitarian empire.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?
Oppressive, bleak, and in many ways sadistic, it's tough and it revels in its own trickiness.

WHO'S IT FOR?
Anyone that's played *Inside* or *Limbo* and needs more of those sweet dark puzzles.

"Its message is strong but its platforming isn't exactly inventive"

It's a game that came from a Romanian developer, a game that was built under the shadow of Communist oppression, and that starts off by apparently trying to destroy your soul: the initial puzzles are trial-and-error heavy and seem to deeply reflect the narrative the game sets you into – everything is a tool for the 'machine', whatever that machine does.

...and breathe

As the game progresses, things ease up a little – getting out of the grinding industrial setting of the game's first third allows you room to breathe a little, and even gives you a new companion that offsets the game's bleak tone. This also opens the game up to new puzzle types and in the new outdoor area the game gives you to play in, you get to enjoy a bit more of San Sailor's take on a decaying industrial world, too. It's like *Blade Runner* met *Abe's Oddysee* at Playdead's house – if you're not playing this game for the puzzles, you'll be playing it for its world.

As the game reaches its final third, you'll have seen pretty much every type of platformer puzzle from the cinematic platformer rulebook. While the puzzles are tricky, none of them are completed with the finesse of Playdead's... it feels mean to keep making that comparison, but when Sand Sailor seems to have taken such significant inspiration from the studio, it's hard not to draw constant comparisons out of the game's dark, industrious core.

The end of the game ties up the story nicely, but it still feels kind of detached. You feel cold by the end – the oppression the game seeks to communicate is told well via its puzzles and despite a slightly misfired ending, we came away satisfied and only slightly harrowed. If *Inside* and *Limbo* are special games to you, you could do worse than playing Sand Sailor's Playdead tribute. ■

XBOX THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

OXM VERDICT
A satisfying if uninventive tribute to the new era of dark, narrative platformers.

7

The game is available in increasingly loot-encrusted bundles costing up to £120

PUBLISHER EPIC GAMES / **DEVELOPER** PEOPLE CAN FLY / EPIC GAMES / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** NOW (EARLY ACCESS) / TBA 2018 / **COST** £35+ (FREE TO PLAY IN 2018)

Fortnite

EARLY ACCESS WITH EPIC'S LONG-AWAITED BUILD-'EM-UP **MARTIN KITTS**

***Minecraft* meets *Left 4 Dead* is the concept behind this genre-bending mashup of game styles, not to mention a touch of tower defence and more loot-filled piñatas than you can shake a sword at. Six years in the making, it's now in early access. So how does it all stack up?**

The core gameplay is very familiar – you, three comrades and an array of hardware versus wave after wave of zombies – but where it differs from standard third person shooters is in its large, destructible, completely rebuildable environments.

A typical mission involves locating an item and building a fort to protect it before summoning the zombie horde. You can spend as long over the largely enemy-free preamble as you like, and at the start everyone tends to run off separately to gather resources, hunt for treasure and rescue survivors. Eventually somebody locates the item you're looking for and the fort-building phase begins.

There are just four basic types of building element – walls, floors, stairs and roofs – but you can customise each one by knocking out parts of its underlying 3x3 grid. For example, removing the top two rows of a wall turns it into a low barrier. Removing just the centre square makes a large wall with a window, and deleting the square beneath that adds a door.

Once you know a few simple recipes for the many different arches, pillars, corners and other architectural features that are possible, you can create some pretty cool stuff. There are traps, turrets and all sorts of defensive items to consider as well. You have constant access to the building menus, so whenever you feel the need to knock up an emergency anti-zombie barrier or an impromptu staircase, you can do so, even in the heat of battle.



RIGHT Every home should have a sniper tower and some spiky traps outside the front door.

BELOW The bits you need to craft ammo can be found by smashing cars up.



short cut

WHAT IS IT?
Guns, zombies, destruction, creation, defence, crafting, loot and endless daily quests.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?
Half a dozen different games crammed together in vintage Rareware style.

WHO'S IT FOR?
At the moment, the curious. Next year, maybe everyone.

"So polished it's easy to forget it's still in the 'closed beta' stage"

Fort knocks

You can make the fort as large as you like but there are bonuses for keeping it small. The zombie onslaught can be triggered by a single player at any time, and if nobody decides to veto it then you've got a few minutes of intense attacks to repel before everyone returns to their home forts with an equal share of the loot.

For the most part it's so well polished that's it's easy to forget it's still in the 'closed beta' stage. The menus are a bit confusing to navigate, the map could use some explanation and it did crash on us a couple of times, but to be honest we've seen just as many rough edges on supposedly finished games.

Fortnite isn't due to launch properly until some unspecified date in 2018, which gives loads of time for balancing and adding new modes. Right now it's a good game, next year it could be excellent, but by then it will also be free to play, which does make the paid early access thing somewhat questionable value.

No doubt one of the main parts they'll be tweaking is the grind-or-pay drip-feed of delicious loot, without which you'll be ill-equipped to battle the undead. Any of the current founders' packs won't leave you short of goodies, but you're still being asked to pay up front for a game model that's designed to tempt you into parting with smallish amounts of cash on a regular basis. As long as you're aware of what you might be getting into, *Fortnite* is worth keeping an eye on. ■

XBOX THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

OXM VERDICT
Slick co-op fun that already has a sizeable online community, and may grow further.

β

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Following the collapse of Lionhead, this is likely to be the only Fable we get for a long, long time

PUBLISHER MEDIATONIC / **DEVELOPER** FLAMING FOWL STUDIOS / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** 2017 / **COST** £9.99 (GAME PREVIEW)

Fable Fortune

IT'S ALL COME DOWN TO THIS JOSH WEST

We won't lie, it's all a little difficult to understand.

And we don't necessarily mean *Fable Fortune* itself, the CCG that thought it was appropriate to launch into Game Preview at £9.99 without a tutorial. We mean the circumstances surrounding the game's existence at all. This is all that remains of our beloved *Fable* and it's difficult to process how it has all come down to this. Let's just get this out the way: *Fable Fortune isn't* the game for those of you that were excited about jumping back into Albion for one last adventure.

Kind of Magic

It *is*, however, perfectly placed for any of you that have fancied your hand at a CCG but have bounced off of the complexities of *Magic: The Gathering* or *GWENT*. Because – and this is in spite of the lack of tutorial – *Fable Fortune* is indeed an easy game to pick up and play, designed to be enjoyed in short bursts and gradually learned over time as you earn resources through wins and losses, begin to purchase cards, and eventually get to grips with the intuitive deck building system.

The setup is incredibly familiar, especially to those of you that have ever put down your controller (heretic) and picked up Hearthstone on another device. The standard one-versus-one PvP scenarios see you and an opponent begin with a shuffled deck, 30 life, five starting cards and three gold coins for your opening turn – the currency acting as a resource gate for the type of cards you can drop onto the table, escalating and expanding the power curve of play with every go.



RIGHT *FF* is in Game Preview right now, but it will re-launch as a F2P game later in the year.

BELOW There are some balance concerns, but this will likely be addressed.



short cut

WHAT IS IT?
A competitive card game that you would expect to find in one of Albion's taverns.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?
It's fun, but it doesn't feel that much like a *Fable* game.

WHO'S IT FOR?
It's for anybody in desperate need of more *Fable* in their life.

> **"It fails to breathe the Fable spirit into its play – it's a dour experience"**

Every turn draws a new card and more gold; every turn you need to not only consider the scope and timing of your own assault, but assess the shifting balance of play. While *Fable Fortune* can often feel unbalanced, there is, admittedly, something exciting to be found in a competitive card game with no established meta. We're all learning the ropes, trying to work out the intricacies of play and of the benefits of each particular hero – archetypal classes such as the Knight, Prophet and Shapeshifter that feel like a hangover from the ill-fated *Fable Legends*. That can mean that rounds of *Fable Fortune* are often erratic, a mad rush as each player desperately tries to extinguish the 30 life from their opponent. It is, in its own little way, fun.

But there's still the lingering corpse in the room to contend with. *Fable Fortune* feels like a CCG without an identity, a troubling situation given the personality of its closest competitors. It fails to breathe the *Fable* spirit into its play – it's a largely humourless, quite dour, experience. And that just isn't *Fable, at all*. One aspect we'd like to see expanded is the Quest system. These in-game objectives – such as spending a certain amount of gold – can be completed between rounds and grant you small, in-game bonuses; it even tries to implement *Fable*'s good or evil metric, with different Hero bonuses being awarded depending on your alignment. It's a system we'd like to see Flaming Fowl go further with. But that's *Fable Fortune* all over. It clearly has legs as a CCG, but it doesn't feel as if it's bringing anything to the table. Right now *Fable Fortune* is a fun competitive game that's in search of an identity to call its own. ■

XBOX THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

OXM VERDICT
It's a fair amount of fun, but in need of refinement. And chickens. It needs more chickens.

β

Despite a short run time there's a load of additional content to unlock

PUBLISHER CURVE DIGITAL / **DEVELOPER** IFUN4ALL SA / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** OUT NOW / **COST** £11.99

Serial Cleaner

AVOID THE FILTH, CLEAN UP THE FILTH – MAKE UP YOUR MIND! **ROBERT DOUGLAS**

Stealth is a tricky genre for developers to get bang-on, as it requires a deft and subtle balance between taking power away from the player but still ensuring that they feel empowered.

Think of the best stealth heroes: Batman, Snake, Sam Fisher or Agent 47. In their most core stealth-flavoured adventures, they wouldn't last seconds in a straight fight. Outnumbered, out-gunned/knifed, and with the constitution of a wet napkin when it comes to a straight-up ruckus, these heroes nevertheless felt powerful. The trick is that great stealth games ensure that the player is given the right tools for the job. It's not just about staying out of sight, but about making deliberate decisions based off the sandbox before you and, well, playing with it. *Serial Cleaner* does not do this. Not at all.

Strip tease

In fact it strips everything back, leaving you, a guy whose job it is to clean up the mess left behind after mass killings, to dart about a series of top down levels. Avoiding the cops and cleaning up splashes of blood are the order of the day, broken up by bouts of body shuffling and awkward door puzzles.

It's infuriating.

A standard play session plays out thusly. You start a level and must eye up the map as a whole to get a handle on enemy placements, patrol routes and the locations of all the requisite bobbins that you need to collect/clean. You experiment with a route. You fail and you get caught. Then you try again. You get a bit farther and then fail again and start over again. Now, this is fine when restarts are quick and breezy à la *Hotline Miami* or when failure is all about the steady accrual of the necessary knowledge and muscle memory required in order to succeed à la *Dark Souls*. The problem here is that this is occurring within a play space where you have so little tangible or satisfying agency. There is no adequate spin of your role here beyond just not being seen. Other heroes might stalk from the shadows, fulton balloon out useful soldiers, utilise gadgets in different ways or change costumes to evade dreaded fail states.

While the idea of a pared-back hardcore stealth game sounds tasty, without at least some kind of interesting choice to make the whole experience falls flat, and quickly becomes irritating. Upon successful completion of a *Serial Cleaner* level you are more likely to punch your card and call it a night than punch the air and get stuck into the next.

One especially infuriating element which occurs across some levels is the random redistribution of the collectible objects. You can spend an age analysing enemy patrols and figuring out a safe route to a certain corner of the map. You can then fail doing something else afterwards and then the same object will be in a different place next time, rendering all your work (for this can't really be called play) and muscle memory completely worthless.

Stealth fans, heed our warning: *Serial Cleaner* might promise a hardcore genre fix, but behind the '70s veneer lies a game that takes pleasure in leaving you fuming. And unlike actual cleaning it awards you with none of the satisfaction of a job well done. ■



RIGHT Run away and hide before being caught, but this can take more effort than it's worth.

BELOW Those switches all need pulling in the correct order and at the correct time. Yep.



"The whole experience falls flat, and quickly becomes irritating"

short cut

WHAT IS IT?
A top-down stealth game where you play as '70s-era murder scene cleaner.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?
An overbearing parent forcing you to clean a vinyl floor before deliberately spilling red wine on it and making you do it again.

WHO'S IT FOR?
Stealth fans that haven't been spoiled on any stealth games for the last two decades.

XBOX THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

OXM VERDICT
Sisyphean stealth game which sees you cleaning up naughty murders again and again.

4

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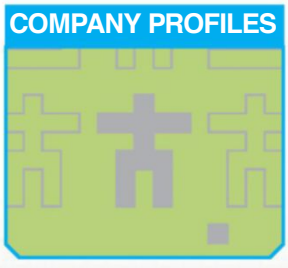
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extra

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EXTRA

extra

Dig deep inside yourself and what do you find? Buried away underneath all of those complicated human emotions and icky layers of flesh is your very own skeleton. It's impossible not to like your own boney building blocks, but there's someone who likes them even more than you do – Necromancers. If you don't take good care of your bones, they're more than happy to take them off of you to add to their army in the latest update for Diablo III (p96). If you find that a little unnerving then we've got the perfect distraction – a quick lesson in how to become a YouTube star (p100) – no one will want to steal your skeleton if you're already busy using it. Elsewhere we're still not quite over the excitement of the *Beyond Good And Evil 2* announcement from E3 earlier this year, so we're taking a detailed look back at the original Beyond Good And Evil (p102) and what made it so special. Finally, it's time to hit the books now that everyone is heading back to school, and we've got quite the syllabus in store for you with 10 lessons we learned the hard way on Xbox (p108). We've made a lot of mistakes in our time so you don't have to, at least that's what we tell ourselves to help us stop feeling like complete idiots. We hope you appreciate the pain we went through to bring you a decent education. Although the less said about the cheese incident the better…



096



100



102



108

PLAY NOW
ON XBOX ONE
BACKWARDS
COMPATIBLE

Keep an eye out for this badge over the next few pages: it indicates when a game of old can be booted up in shiny Xbox One-o-vision.

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Raise an army of skeletons with the Necromancer in Diablo III and you too can be rolling with your boneys

PAUL TAYLOR

PUBLISHER BLIZZARD / **DEVELOPER** BLIZZARD / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** AUGUST 2014



Blizzard is spectacular at treating its games as a service. That's a rather dry way of saying that it keeps on giving, adding, tweaking and balancing – and the fact that it does this for free (for the most part) is staggering. The company has constantly maintained that it will keep updating its games for as long as there's an interest – you might know that if you've ever checked out its library on PC. *World Of Warcraft* still has a juggernaut status with millions of subscribers, and *Overwatch* is the dev's darling, but even three-year-old *Diablo III* benefits from this ethos. And it is ruinous to my health.

The irony is high. As *Diablo III* gains more life, my mana depletes. The latest character class, the Necromancer, is unusual in that it's both forward-thinking and it looks to the past, hoping to scoop up lapsed players while still remaining relevant, new and exciting in the Xbox Games Store.

I definitely cannot recommend you start as the Necromancer if you've never played *Diablo III* before, as you won't get a good idea of what the game's about. Here's a character who raises dusty skeletons from the ether to form an unholy squadron, and sucks health points from corpses littered on the ground to feed herself. (Or, if you want to really get the most out of her, makes them explode like landmines – more on that later.) She's a bit like a witch doctor, but with better fashion sense. Originally found in *Diablo II*, this new-old character feels turbo-charged compared to the other classes. Funnily enough, there are only two Xbox One games that were released in 2014 that still enjoy luxurious updates from their creators: *Grand Theft Auto V* and *Minecraft*.

Number of the beast

Diablo is all about the numbers. Specifically, one important number:



damage. As the digits on screen show off the damage inflicted on enemies, rattling higher and higher, time ticks on with similar, unstoppable ferocity. 5,000dmg bouncing off the head of a Necromatic Minion and it's 11pm. 6,100, 11.30pm. 7,300, 12am, brief unconsciousness and then the alarm rings and it's 10 crippling hours until I can get home and dive back in. The numbers *sing*, man, a tune with a tempo that begs for more, more, more. The Necromancer delivers.

As I mentioned, the Necromancer in *Diablo III* is reminiscent of the 'Mancer from *Diablo II*, though I only know that because I did the barest amount of research possible for this piece, and *that's* only because I'm too busy enjoying raising an army of the dead.

I never played *Diablo II*, but my time sink example shows that I got horribly addicted to *Diablo III* just after its release – I reviewed it for these pages. Eight out of ten I gave it, which is a lowball score in some ways, as it's become one of my favourite games of all time and could be literally conceived as being endless. I had to give it up because I was in danger of losing my job, ironically for doing my job. There's never been a point in my life where I've really considered taking up cosplay, but thinking about it, if I'd I flushed a grey wash through my hair and painted my nails black I would've looked a lot like the Necromancer does right now in the promotional artwork.

I've learned that a lot of the 'Mancer's powers in *Diablo III* are either



the same as those from the PC game released in 2000, albeit with a slight nip and tuck. Take, for instance, the ability to slaughter a ghoul, and then if the bingo wheel that forms the game's random number generator decides to turn that dead baddie into a corpse, you can then blow it up. Guts akimbo, the splash damage then kills other nasties, who then turn into more corpses, and so on and so on. If you've ever seen the YouTube clip of a poor, deceased, sperm whale literally erupting all over the Faroe Islands and scaring the living piss out of the guy sent to dissect it, firstly, my condolences because it's harrowing, but secondly, it's that.

WHAT IS IT?

A time sink, where you and your cast of typical dungeon-crawling tropes smite the forces of darkness for loot and fabulous clothes.

Skeleton crew

Meanwhile, seven armed skeletons permanently surround me like a king's guard, cutting sick at whatever they collide into while we storm through a cathedral, or across the Stinging Sands. With a stab of the Y button they launch like a Trident II missile at my target. More numbers, more corpses. Mash RT and a skeletal mage appears, but keep mashing until essence runs out and more of them manifest onto the screen.

It is a cacophony. A legendary weapon spawns a minotaur, and an active skill gives me a golem that's basically a walking pile of corpses. His lot in life is to die, depositing a gooey, mushy equivalent of chunk of C4 wherever I so deign. I have a dozen spectral bodies, who all look like they've worn the same costume to a particularly brutal Halloween party hosted by accountants thirsty for numbers.

"You'd be bored within seconds if you put this on anything lower than expert difficulty"

So it's clear that the Necromancer is outrageously overpowered. Anyone with a couple of hours free Saturday afternoon can reach level 20, solo, and have unlocked the bulk of the active skills. You'd be bored within seconds if you put this on anything lower than expert difficulty, but if you and your crew are deep within greater rifts running at a decent Torment level then you've found your showman. Perhaps that's at the expense of your cohorts missing out on the fun, though, because you and the bone heads are too liberal at blowing everything up.

So is it worth it? For a shade over 13 quid, yeah, it is, in the same way that you'd spend the same money on bootleg fireworks and watch the whole thing go bang in a spectacular light show. You don't get any new story acts here, just a character, rolling with her boneys, who feels dangerous, unrefined – and a lot of fun. ■

ABOVE These skeletons guard you with their lives. Oh wait… well, you know what we mean.

BELOW Hope you don't mind the sight of blood, because it's kind of all over the place.



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Screwing over friends and fixing up windows in Call Of Duty: World At War's Nazi Zombies

DAVE MEIKLEHAM

PUBLISHER ACTIVISION / **DEVELOPER** TREYARCH / **FORMAT** XBOX 360 / **RELEASE DATE** NOVEMBER 2008



"George! Get your snout out of the lucky dip weapons box and board up the back window! George?! GEORGE?! Annnnnnd now we're all dead. Wunderbar." Nazi Zombies may well be the greatest minigame ever conceived. You, three friends, 20 waves of Hitler's finest goose-stepping brain-biters, and the naughtiest gun armoury of all time. What could possibly go wrong?

Honesty time: I can remember almost nothing about Nazi Zombies' parent game, *Call Of Duty: World At War*. I recall it was the first *COD* to dip back into the increasingly stale waters of WWII after 2007's *Modern Warfare* tore up everything we knew about the series. I think Gary Oldman *might* have phoned in a paycheque playing a shouty Russian dude. And that's literally it. Suffice to say, for me *WAW* may be the least memorable shooter in the megaton franchise's history.

Then again, it did give us Nazi Zombies, so I can look past its overly vanilla story mode. The upcoming *Call Of Duty: World War II* recently revealed its take on the undead-blasting minigame, so now feels like an ideal time to replay what initially seemed to be a throwaway curio that's since blossomed into one of the series' most enduring staples. Not bad for a minigame which is essentially equal parts zombie murder and glorified carpentry sim.

WHAT IS IT?

Nazi Zombies is a wave-based minigame where you blast the undead and board up a house to stop it becoming overrun. It's utter magic.

You're not just a hopelessly outmatched soldier locked in a creaky country house as coffin-dodgers try to break through every single window and door, oh no. In reality, you're more harassed handyman than Ash Williams wannabe. Killing zombs is important; boarding up window frames and hammering doors is everything. Surviving Nazi Zombies' increasingly frenzied waves demands tight coordination and constant communication. Fail to regularly talk to your teammates, and you're all toast. Said communication usually devolves into all four of you screaming at each other over headsets, begging your pals to repair that window in the kitchen you've all forgotten about.



"You're more harassed handyman than Ash Williams wannabe"

Away from pretending to be a trigger-happy Tim 'The Toolman' Taylor, *World At War*'s undead ace in the hole revolves around guns. Specifically, how you'll happily screw over your chums' desperate DIY efforts to nab yourself a better one. That little diatribe I opened on recalls a time when I was utterly obsessed with Nazi Zombies. Every night after work a gang of my colleagues and I would all furiously fire it up, laugh our asses off, then contemplate how something so simple could be so intoxicatingly addictive. The 'George' in question was my then editor of OXM's sister website, GamesRadar, and competent a shooter as my ed was, he also loved a sly spin on the minigame's randomised weapons crate when no one was looking.

Silly walks etc

The Mystery Box, to give it its official moniker, elevates Nazi Zombies to comedy genius on a level with Monty Python. On the surface, it lets you spend all that money you accrue from whacking the undead to buy better firearms. In practice, it's a joyous comedic device which encourages players to forget there's no 'I' in 'team' as they rush off for an elicit spin on the crate when they think their pals aren't watching. The ultra addictive appeal lies with the fact you never quite know what the Mystery Box will produce, as the weapons it spits out are randomised. The Holy Grail remains the laughably lethal Ray Gun; a firearm so overpowered, you'll gladly abandon your window-fixing duties in the vain hopes of landing one.

Of course, there's an undeniable futility at the heart of the mode. Fighting back endless undead onslaughts is akin to trying to sweep leaves during a hurricane. Yet despite my greedy comrades, and the slim chances of success, I'll always cherish Nazi Zombies' hysterical brand of chaotic camaraderie. ■



Why **Braid,** the indie poster boy's magnum opus, doesn't Blow us away nearly a decade later

PHIL IWANIUK

PUBLISHER MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS / **DEVELOPER** NUMBER NONE / **FORMAT** XBOX 360 / **RELEASE DATE** AUGUST 2008



I remember the furtive chatter more than the experience of playing it: *Braid* was the game that redefined games. It was clever in ways that defied explanation, they said, and it was made by one enigmatic man who became the reluctant star of a movie about the scene he reluctantly figureheaded. The Cult of Jonathan Blow lives on today in devotees who try to evangelise the genius within *The Witness*' punishing volume of maze puzzles, but it all began in 2008.

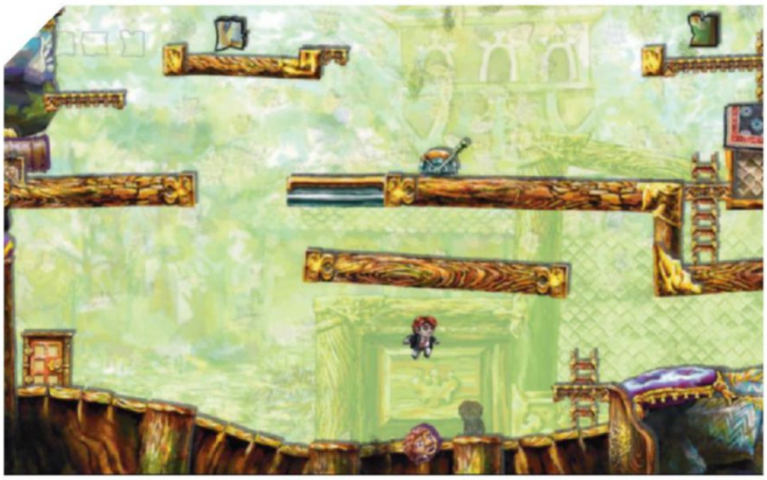
I was destined never to like it, of course. There's something in my brain that flips an irreversible 'I hate it' switch whenever people effuse about the Next Big Thing, because I'm a broken, pathetic man. Nevertheless I did play it in situ, and my thoughts at the time could be summarised as follows: *Jonathan Blow is cleverer than me, and he's reminding me of it with each of these dastardly little puzzles. I don't like this so I'm going to give up.*

But time matures the human condition, and almost a decade after it first bewitched the gaming masses, I thought it might be nice to travel back in time, if you will, to *Braid*. Hungry for humble pie, ready to admit that my contrarian hard-wiring got in the way of my enjoying an obvious classic. My thoughts upon returning to *Braid*? *Balls. Jonathan Blow is still cleverer than me.*

Braid is still a fundamentally challenging game, and I can respect both the intention and the experience of that challenge. It's difficult by its very nature, because its time-moulding mechanics are intended to deconstruct game design and smash preconceptions, like a watercolour-painted punk rock song about the Mario establishment. That's how Blow characterised it at the time, actually: a challenge to the status quo.

WHAT IS IT?

A side-on puzzler with a repertoire of temporal manipulation powers. Also an allegory for relationships, atomic bombs, and the game industry, apparently.



"What stands out now is how well the art direction in Braid has aged"

That's intrinsically interesting. Sometimes you have to see the status quo challenged in order to really see what it was in the first place, so Blow's endeavour is a worthy one. And on a level, there's a perverse enjoyment in pushing and pulling the same kind of pattern-led platform game enemies this way and that with the flow of time, subverting their behaviour for your own advantage.

It's a bit like bringing the console commands up, only more enjoyable. And as mechanics and narrative progress, in admirable harmony, *Braid* reveals further subversions of the norm: the role of the protagonist, the damsel in distress, and player agency.

Status questioned

But I'm meeting Blow more than halfway there. With all the will in the world, it'd be very hard to argue that the side-scrolling foes and 'The Princess is in another castle' damsel-saving actually represented the status quo in 2008, whether you're talking about gameplay systems or narratives. If *Braid* had been released in 1992 it'd be a different matter, but this was a post-Gravity Gun age in which *Half-Life 2*'s devs had empowered us to subvert the shooter norm and use enemies, alive or dead, as ammunition against their colleagues. Post-"would you kindly" too, with *Bioshock* having thoroughly deconstructed player agency in its narrative the previous year. The biggest games in 2008 were *Fallout 3*, *Left 4 Dead*, *GTA IV* et al – does *Braid* really have anything to say about those titles?

I digress. What stands out now in 2017 more than any high-mindedness is how well the art direction and the nuts and bolts of movement and interaction have aged. It's in that way, with the surrounding hype now long quietened, that *Braid* is really enjoyable. Tim the time-traveller is still visually distinct, iconic even, and nothing in the intervening years has managed to outdo *Braid*'s own painterly vision of platforming. Above all, what stands out is the clarity of one creator's vision, and how uncompromisingly they pursued it. Can't knock that. ■

HOW TO... BECOME A YOUTUBE STAR

Do you dream of being the YouTube sensation of tomorrow? Well, everybody has to start somewhere. We break down the basics **JOSH WEST**

YOU WILL NEED: A YOUTUBE ACCOUNT **OPTIONAL:** LOUD VOICE AND A CUTE DOG



So, you want to become a YouTube sensation? Of course you do! The fame, the cars, the free stuff and the scandals – after all, that's the dream, isn't it? Trust us, it is; and if you stick with us you'll go far, kid.

So what does it take to go from merely playing videogames in your bedroom to playing them at a fancier desk for an audience of millions? It's actually pretty easy to get started, but the true path to digital domination is paved with good intentions and a lot of hard work. You need to find your niche, then you've gotta find your voice, and *then* you need to start producing that delicious, click-baiting content. With so many people out there trying to replicate their favourite influencers (that's what they're called in the industry now – don't ask) it's going to take something fresh to cut through the noise. But you know what? We believe in you. That all said, everybody has to start somewhere, and you'll want to make sure you have these bases covered before you do anything else.





01 KNOW YOUR NICHE

If you want any chance of finding success on YouTube you are going to need a strong sense of the kind of content that you want to produce. The best channels are the ones with focus: are you incredible at FPS games and want to share that knowledge, or do you fancy yourself a comedian talking over gameplay videos? Build your niche around the content you feel the most comfortable creating.

Remember that audiences gravitate to genuine personalities and confident presenters.

02 USE A MICROPHONE

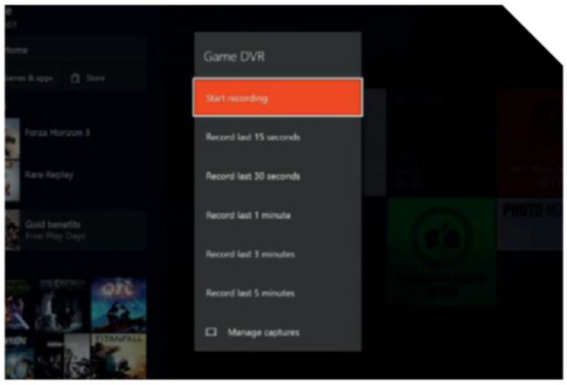
Having decent equipment won't hurt your chances of building an audience. If cash flow is tight, we recommend getting hold of a microphone that will bring versatility to your portfolio, such as the Turtle Beach Stream Mic. Not only is it great for recording audio over video at the editing stage, but it'll also give you the option of running high quality live streams directly from your Xbox One over Twitch and Mixer.



03

GET A CAMERA

If you want to people to idolise you on YouTube you'll need to put a face to the voice. Kinect will get the job done if you're looking to record and mix all of your clips on the Xbox One itself, but if you plan on editing your clips in a video editor on your PC or Mac before putting them live (highly recommended) get a Logitech C922 Pro Stream webcam – professional grade quality at a relatively affordable price.



04

RECORD YOUR GAMEPLAY

Hit the Xbox button and follow it with a quick tap of the X button while in-game and the Xbox One will automatically record the last 30 seconds of gameplay. For a more versatile selection of gameplay to draw from for your videos tap the View button and you can record up to the last five minutes, or start recording your game going forward. Failing that, invest in an Elgato HD60 capture kit for more versatility.



05

EDITING CLIPS

While you can edit clips together – adding video and voiceovers – on your Xbox One from the GameDVR app, the options are limited. Instead, you'll want to consider loading your clips into OneDrive and exporting them to your PC or Mac. Free editing software such as Windows Movie Maker and iMovie is easy to learn and will get the job done, letting you build YouTube videos you can be proud of.



06

ACTUALLY DO IT

Do you know what the biggest hurdle to finding success on YouTube is? It's *you*. It can be difficult to get the courage to put yourself out there, but you can't become a star if you don't try. Focus on getting your first video out there, and then a second, and then a third. The more content you produce the better you'll get; settle into a rhythm and stick to a schedule. We believe in you – good luck and have fun!

CHOOSE WISELY

Think real carefully about the name of your YouTube channel. You might be stuck with this name for years to come; if you're successful you won't be able to change it, branding is everything. Sure, an in-joke or meme-based name might be really funny now, but will it be next year or when you are making public appearances? Think about the way you present yourself to the world now, because you might just come to regret it later.

HOW TO...

THE EASIEST PATH TO YOUTUBE SUCCESS

PLAY MINECRAFT

The biggest industry secret? If you want success, and you want it real quick, you just need to play *Minecraft*. Everybody knows it.

HATE MINECRAFT

The problem is *Minecraft* gets real boring really fast. Take your growing hatred of the game and channel it into your content.

HIDE YOUR HATRED

It's been five years, and it's too late to stop; the kids *love* your videos. Smile through it, save the tears for when the camera is off.

QUIT!

Get your cutest dog in frame, announce your hatred of *Minecraft* and your intention to play something fun instead – like horror games.

RETROSPECTIVE
BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL





Beyond Good And Evil was a sci-fi classic 14 years ago, and it's still a gem today

DOM RESEIGH-LINCOLN

PUBLISHER UBISOFT / **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTPELLIER / **FORMAT** XBOX/XBOX 360



Like almost any game that's transcended from greatness to cultish reverence, *Beyond Good And Evil* was a commercial flop. Critics loved it – lavishing it with a glut of scores that set its multiple formats in the very respectable mid-to-high 80s on Metacritic – but gamers, sadly, just weren't buying it. To the media, director Michel Ancel had shed his status as the 'man that gave us *Rayman*' in glorious fashion. To everyone else – including Ubisoft – the French game designer had just made a mad game about oppressive regimes, hovercraft races and alien wildlife photography.

But what a game it is. A good 14 years on, and one HD re-release later, *BGAE* is still as great as the day it went gold from a small team at Ubisoft Montpellier. The years aren't often kind to the games we once loved and idolised, but Ancel's greatest work to date (which is high praise indeed considering he's also given us the first two *Rayman* games and *Rayman Origins*) laughs in the face of time and its endless butchery of nostalgia. Ubisoft was right – *BGAE* really is mad, but its genre-melding ideas are so full of heart you'll scarcely notice how hare-brained it really is.

Set on the distant planet of Hillys in the year 2435, you'd think Ancel would have drawn on his experience with platformers to create something akin to Insomniac's *Ratchet & Clank* over on PlayStation 2. And *BGAE is* a great platformer, but it's so much more than that. It's a rich and vibrant tapestry of genres, blended together with a dash of quintessential French creativity. It's part melee brawler; part racing game; part photography masterclass; part stealth actioner and all science-fiction melodrama.

PLAY NOW
ON XBOX ONE
BACKWARDS
COMPATIBLE

Jade's empire

Right from its opening scene, *BGAE* pulls you in and holds you in rapture. In the boots of a ballsy yet endearing photojournalist named Jade – and her unforgettable pigman companion, Pey'j – you're not forced into a lifeless trudge through ubiquitous sci-fi tropes, but a human drama where a group of multicultural beings are fighting for their livelihoods. There's certainly a grander saga there to be uncovered – it was, after all, conceived as the first part of an expansive trilogy – but here we're treated to a conspiracy thriller set on the other side of the universe. A place where the media is oppressed, and innocent people are abducted and forced into slavery.

Unsurprisingly, for a game that takes its name from a book by existential philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, *BGAE* juggles plenty of deep and powerful themes behind those anthropomorphic cast members and nefarious space monsters. We delve into a story involving human trafficking on a global scale, where governments collude with unscrupulous zealots while the common man is forced to survive in the wake of it all. Far removed from the cutesy safety of *Rayman*, *BGAE* offers an insight into the times in which it was conceived – a post 9/11 landscape where fear ran rampant through the Western world. Sure, the ending and 'hidden power' that Jade is revealed to possess (no spoilers) does take a tiny bit of shine off what

GOING HD

BGAE was first released for the Xbox in 2003, with a HD remake for the 360 in 2011. You can play it on Xbox One now thanks to Backwards Compatibility.

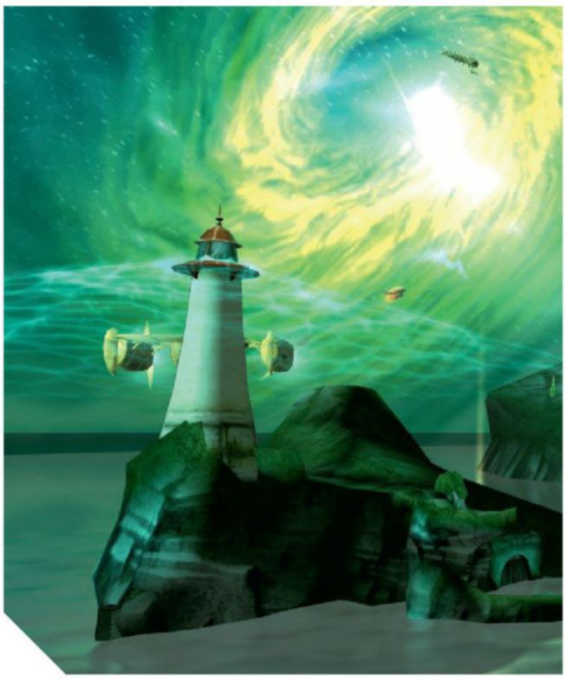


ABOVE Jade is one of the greatest gaming characters ever.

→ could be a stellar story, but the world you get to explore on the way holds *BGAE*'s integrity solidly intact.

Its world and inhabitants still feel real and memorably fleshed out, despite mostly being a ragtag bunch of talking animals and Latino holograms – and none more so than trendsetting heroine, Jade. Confident, inquisitive and compassionate, Jade's rather handy martial arts skills (and that aforementioned mysterious ancestry) certainly help when forced into a scrap, but it's her everywoman qualities that have secured her place among gaming's great protagonists. She's not oversexualised, or presented as some fantastical approximation of her gender. Instead she's a working class girl who runs towards danger, protecting the children at the orphanage she calls home, as her grumpy yet protective 'uncle' Pey'j grows frustrated at her inherent sense of civic duty.

And yes, she's a dab hand with her staff and is more than happy to throw a few jabs and roundhouse kicks when faced with a bunch of angry DomZ, but it's the way in which the game uses one of her passive skills that really proves there's more to her than satisfying the urge to beat up alien monsters. Through the lens of her trusty camera, we become intimately acquainted with Hillys' diverse ecosystem and interspecies community. We get exposition – the true currency of any lore-heavy videogame – but every successful animal snapped can also be traded for credits. For a character living in a community that's struggling to make ends meet under the weight of a corrupt government, Jade can power generators for her family and buy upgrades for herself off the back of a creative talent rather than simply looting corpses.



"Its world and inhabitants still feel real and memorably fleshed out"



Turn the Pey'j

Even the music that accompanies Jade's crusade for truth pulses with originality. To help bring his unique vision to life, Ancel turned to eclectic French composer Christophe Héral, who had previously made his name working on French films and animated features. *BGAE* is a multicultural affair after all, filled with wildly different people and places, so Héral took that mantra to heart, infusing every facet of the game's soundtrack with musical style and voices from world music. From the Caribbean warmth of Mammago Garage to the brilliantly eclectic soundtrack and the hovercraft races (funk metal, anyone?), *BGAE* has creativity on tap.

Take the music that plays in the background of the Akuda Bar – the Mos Eisley-esque drinking hole filled with chattering aliens and mini-games galore. The main song you hear within its walls, 'Propaganda', was written to lyrics in Bulgarian rather than French or English, invoking a palpable Cold War feel that tapped perfectly into the oppressive shadow of a shadowy enemy. With haunting Arabic strings and warm Indian percussion, it seamlessly encapsulates the cultural melting pot bubbling away in *BGAE*.

Even the dialogue for the game had the veteran composer pulling out all the stops for his first foray into videogames. For the menacing DomZ, Héral fashioned an entirely new language of guttural, rolling 'r's, and took the time to record all the voices of Hillys' background inhabitants himself. There's a wonderful DIY quality to every sound and snippet of audio you come across as you explore the Venetian waterways of Hillys, a sense of unbridled creativity that no doubt made *BGAE* so hard to market.

Even now it's really difficult to accurately pigeonhole Pey'j and Jade's adventure without reciting a long list of hyphenated genres and subgenres. The platforming mechanics that Ancel worked so hard to perfect in the wake of the greats of generations past offered a solid base, but the hand-to-hand focused combat smacks of your classic melee brawler. Stealth sections (with insta-fail rules, naturally) nodded furiously in the direction of *Metal Gear*, while those hovercraft racing and chase sections were part vehicular platformer and part karting mayhem.

Despite having so many moving parts, *BGAE* flits between each one like a foodie in the world's biggest all-you-can-eat buffet. One moment you're solving environmental puzzles, the next you're using line of sight to sneak around DomZ and other foes. Each mechanic used just enough to bring something different to the mix

The genre crossers

Need another fix of esoteric platforming and genre crossovers? If all this talk of *BGAE* has whet your appetite, feast your eyes on these three classics...



'NAUT WHAT YOU THINK

PSYCHONAUTS

The mind-bending tale of Raz and his fellow psychological secret agents might be Double Fine's finest hour.



WHAT'S OLD IS MOLYNEUX

FABLE

When it comes to vibrant games designed with huge visions in mind, *Fable* and *BGAE* are like peas in an action-RPG pod.



A TOP PLATFORMER

BANJO-KAZOOIE

A platformer brimming with personality and humour? Check. Loads of diverse worlds to explore? Check.



before being dropped for another round of cross-genre pollination. It's a game of many parts to say the least, but one that's still comfortable in its own virtual skin.

Hillys have eyes

And that's almost certainly while *BGAE* had such a rocky road to release. Its original design brief went down so poorly with critics when it was unveiled at E3 2002, Ancel and his team were forced to head back to the drawing board. Seemingly channelling the patented aggrandisement of one Peter Molyneux (a whole year before the British veteran dev went full Molyneux with the original *Fable* and its infamously unfeasible promises), Ancel wanted to ship *BGAE* with an entire universe to explore on one disc.

The final product was certainly reined in from the overreaching concept, but there's still a wonderful sense of freedom that pervades your time with *BGAE*. There's no escaping the invisible hand of linearity that pokes you in the direction of the main story, but you're still given the power to explore Hillys at your leisure. Ancel and his team spent so long building a rich ecosystem and cast of characters, why wouldn't they want to let you wander its many landscapes snapping pictures and striking up conversations with heavily accented, bipedal animals?

BGAE became a touchstone for Ancel, and paved the way for the projects that followed. Sadly, *Beyond Good And Evil 2* slipped into development hell as Ancel was forced to divide his attention elsewhere, but that reinterpretation of the platformer gave the French game director the time to reimagine *Rayman* in 2D with the brilliant *Origins* and *Legends*. That emotional resonance that made Pey'j and Jade's relationship so poignant no doubt paved the way for other potential unmarketable projects that followed in Ancel's wake, such as the heartbreaking and wonderful *Valiant Hearts: The Great War*.

With *Beyond Good And Evil 2* finally happening (although now as a prequel, seemingly without Jade or any other recognisable characters), at least we know we'll finally get to see the vast universe that was only hinted at in the first game. Could the mysterious client revealed at the end of its E3 2017 trailer actually be Jade's mother? Will we finally learn more about her origins, and those of DomZ? Regardless of whether *BGAE2* does indeed answer our questions, you know Ancel's second instalment will be just as culturally diverse and rewardingly exotic as the first one was back in 2003. It's time for *BGAE* to shed its cult status label and finally become the bona fide landmark in gaming it's always been. ■



TOP Welcome to Pey'j's Workshop (complete with its own hovercraft dock), where pig-sapiens fix clunky old sea vessels.

ABOVE The Akuda Bar - less a wretched hive of scum and villainy, more an eclectic watering hole full of talking sharks and bartending cows.

WHY I LOVE... OVERWATCH'S SPECIAL EVENTS

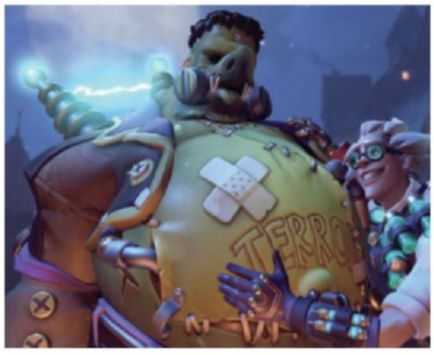


Content expansions with a twist: the genius behind the Overwatch events and their boundless charm **MATT NEWSTEAD**

PUBLISHER BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT / **DEVELOPER** BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** MAY 2016







RIGHT Blizzard's costume design team clearly have some fun with the seasonal skins.





If I had it my way, *Overwatch* special events would be the only occasions that need marking on the family calendar, but apparently 'Mum's Birthday' is just as important. Unlike content upgrades and DLC releases for similar titles, there is something about the *Overwatch* events that send a wave of excitement pulsing throughout the community. It could be that these signal the re-emergence of game director Jeff Kaplan for one of his eloquent developer updates, but I believe it is the variety within these events that house a centric function in the standout success of Blizzard's online shooter.

It has been over a year now since *Overwatch* first graced our screens and its popularity shows no signs of dwindling. A diverse character roster that offers something for everyone and a creative, engaging combat system has set a strong foundation for the *Overwatch* team to expand on. Naturally, a string of content expansions was announced on release but no one knew what these were going to be. New characters? Of course. Map additions? Sure. But that should come as expected for any title which intends a modicum of longevity. The trick is ensuring that these events not only provide a timely boost to keep players keen, but make events the part that players crave the most and *that* is where Blizzard hit the nail on the head.

Summer lovin'

First off, we had the Summer Games back in August 2016, bringing with it an array of Olympic-centric sprays, emotes and skins to fawn over. Key here, though, was the release of Lúcioball, *Overwatch*'s own take on Rocket League, but with the RC cars replaced by clones of a Brazilian DJ. It was the first demonstration of a limited-edition event – a shame given the enjoyment me and my friends have gleaned from it, but a smart move from Blizzard. A second season of the Summer Games is just coming to an end. Myself and many others have dived into some competitive matches of Lúcioball 2.0 before it disappears once again – hopefully just for another few months. The Christmas Winter Wonderland event had another limited time offering with Mei's Snowball offensive, an adorable snow shooter.

Some later additions are such a perfect fit to the *Overwatch* Arcade library that they have become semi-permanent rotations throughout the year. The most iconic of these being the 'Capture the Rooster' mode from the Year of the Rooster event, which followed the classic Capture the Flag format with a sprinkling of *Overwatch* chaos thrown in for good measure. While not overly impacting the game meta in competitive play, it gave players the chance to bust out some of the lesser-involved yet equally satisfying defense characters that weren't particularly prominent at the time. A similar result came from the *Overwatch* Anniversary event, with Lockout mode being added to the classic 3v3 and Mystery Duel modes. This forced players to get to grips with all characters and, as well as offering a new take on existing content, demonstrated just some of the many small ways that the development team rotate the game meta to keep all characters fresh in the long term.

Out of all that has been added since launch, however, it is undoubtedly the PvE events that have been the standout hit. The Halloween Terror event still sticks out prominently thanks to Junkenstein's Revenge – a four-player Tower Defense mode that tasked players with defending a castle from waves of enemies. Many attempts led to me and my squad screaming and laughing our way through a challenging new take on the standard *Overwatch* playstyle, albeit one which usually culminated in me never speaking to our Ana again because she seemed more interested in healing the wall. Just one event remains unmentioned and it was arguably the most ambitious of all: the Uprising event. Rather than being centred around a real-world event, Blizzard went for an all-out PvE experience which further expanded the lore of the game by reimagining one of the original *Overwatch* missions during the Omnic insurgence in King's Row. Here we also saw that *Overwatch* could offer a fantastic offline story mode going forward, with character interaction and a deep tactical element to the gameplay. Hint hint, Blizzard.

At this point in time, the game has nearly doubled in size and players haven't had to pay a penny extra. Of course, it is *Overwatch*'s entertainment factor as an eSport and general competitive nature that has seen it skyrocket to success, but for me, these events not only offer something contrary to the iconic *Overwatch* framework, they offer whole new possibilities for what the game can become in the future. ■

"It's undoubtedly the PvE events that have been the standout hit"

WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN

Far from the polished game of today, early *Overwatch* builds saw Tracer shooting lasers from her eyes and Bastion sporting a shield.

ABOVE Imagine him coming down your chimney, shouting "armour here!" and lobbing metal at your napping Gran. Merry Christmas!



→ WHAT GAMES DO YOU LOVE? SEND YOUR LUSTY THOUGHTS TO OXM@FUTURENET.COM

10 LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY ON XBOX



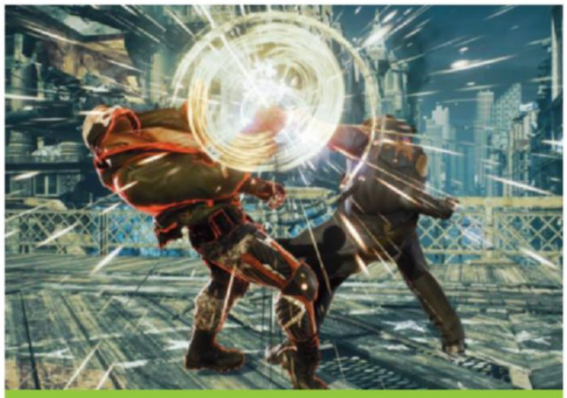
It's back-to-school time, and what have learned this summer? Not a lot. But it's not too late for you – learn from our mistakes with the things you should never do in Xbox games **DANIELLA LUCAS**

10

DON'T HOARD EVERYTHING FALLOUT 4

Look, we get it, you don't want to leave anything behind 'just in case,' but just because you can pick something up it doesn't mean you should. It's even worse in the latest game compared to previous entries as you can actually craft the junk you find into scrap for your settlements, so most things do have *some* use. But it also means you waste so much more of your time as you weigh up the pros and cons of picking up yet another tin can and then spend hours sorting through your inventory instead of, you know, actually getting on with completing some quests and getting a few good guns.





09

LEARN TO BLOCK TEKKEN 7

Knowing how to punch and kick is easy, just aim your limbs forcefully and you'll be fine. But no matter how aggressive you are there's always someone out there who will completely school you by knowing how *not* to punch. The ability to pull off uppercuts and throws flawlessly is one thing, but it's no good to anyone if you can't stop them happening to you. To do this, skip the combo training and instead go straight for the basics: learning to block every incoming blow so you don't get hit in the face over and over again. If you can master that, you'll stop losing fights like we do.

08

IGNORE THE MONGOOSE HALO

So you've just been dropped off with your fellow Spartans and you're ready to have fun and party, then you're presented with a choice. Clamber into the bouncy fun-bus that is a Warthog, or go for the two-man ride that doesn't even have a mounted gun on the back. If you ever find yourself in this position *always* go for the Warthog, even if you don't get the gunner's position. Taking the smaller and faster Mongoose is just never worth it, you'll just end up out in front looking like a bit of a useless pillock – especially if you don't have a friend with a rocket launcher – while your friends tear through bad guys heroically.

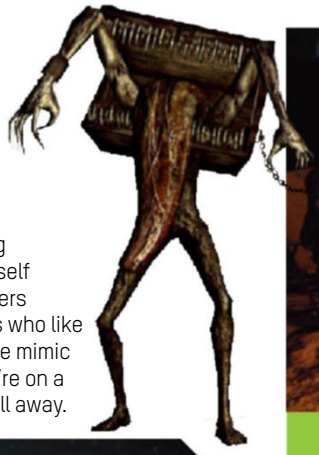


07

NEVER SPLIT THE GROUP LEFT 4 DEAD 2

'Let's split up and search for clues,' seems like such a good idea – you can cover more ground at a much faster rate and be more efficient... but it never works out like that, does it? You might think that there are only a few zombies around and you'll be able to clear them out faster... but that's the game lulling you into a false sense of security before unleashing something truly nasty.



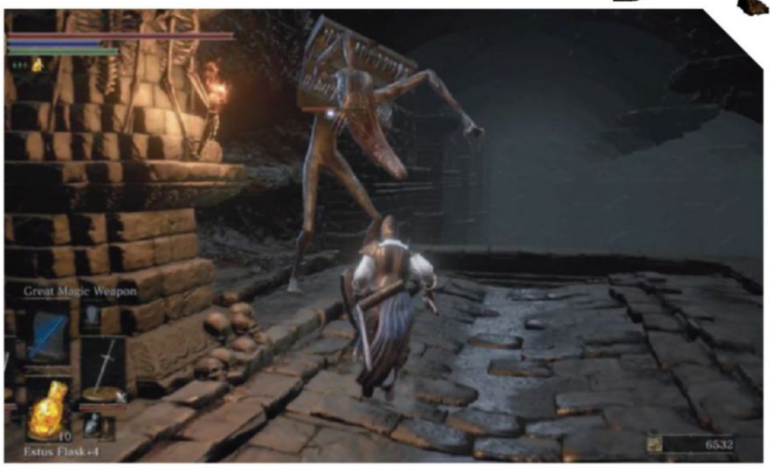




06

DON'T TRUST TREASURE
DARK SOULS

We know you love loot, we all do, but it's worth reminding yourself that there's always a catch. You might find yourself with a sweet new pair of greaves, but Dark Souls' designers are also very fond of mimics – the big-mouthed bastards who like to pretend that their coffer's full of gold to lure you in. The mimic model is slightly different to a real chest, but even if you're on a lucky streak, always swipe at the treasure and dodge-roll away.



05

ALWAYS PLACE A MANUAL SAVE EVERY GAME

Some truths in life are universal. For example: touching hot metal will lead to burns, and if you forget your umbrella it *will* rain. This is also true for games, and one truth carries across all things no matter the genre you're playing: you can never trust autosave. It might be handy when you need to quickly reload a level for a second attempt, but it also deceives. Having a save just before a tricky bit in a game doesn't help you if you need to go further back to grind a bit, or if it's autosaved a while after you made a bad decision that you now can't reverse.

04

GET NERVOUS IF YOU SEE EXTRA HEALTH PACKS EVERY GAME

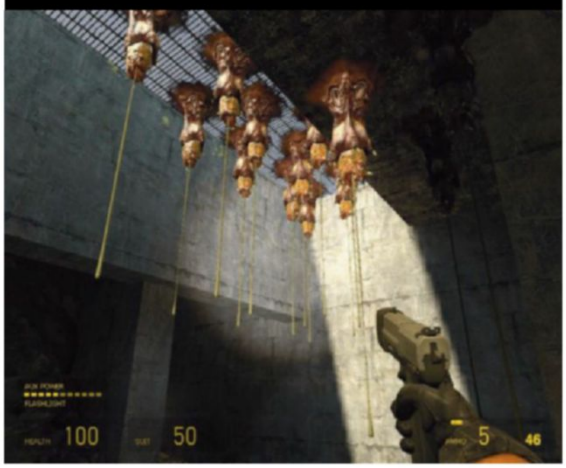
We don't think there's ever been a game in which this isn't true and, like all good lessons, if you haven't noticed by the third time it happens then you need to get out of the classroom. The stash of potions or health kits you inexplicably find when things quieten down is a staple of game design and it's also a warning – you've got a boss fight ahead. If you see an increase in healing items it's time to stop, maybe have a little bathroom break, sort out your inventory so those health items are easily reachable and then prepare yourself for a fight.



03

REMEMBER TO LOOK UP
HALF-LIFE 2

It all started out innocently enough, shooting at bad guys in *Half-Life 2*, but before we knew it we were being drawn towards the ceiling, levitating towards the maw of a murderous meat-sack made of teeth. The second time we managed to break free, only to be ensnared by another. There was no third time – from then on we scoped out the ceiling of every room, and continue to do so in every FPS we play.

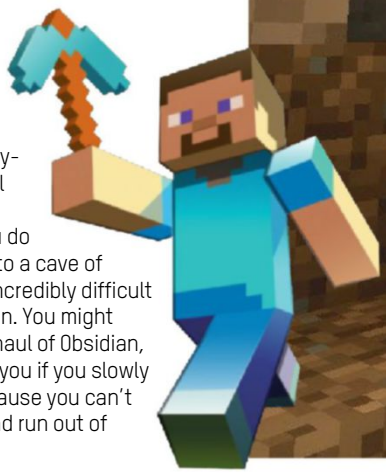




02

DON'T DIG STRAIGHT DOWN
MINECRAFT

The world of blocks grants you the freedom to do anything you want, be that exploring caves or building temples dedicated to the wonders of My Little Pony. But there is one thing you can do that's just never worth it – digging straight down. It might be a quick way to get down to where all the good materials are – iron and diamonds etc – but it's also a shortcut to death-by-lava and to losing all of your gear. On the off-chance that you do safely drop down into a cave of wonders, it's then incredibly difficult to get back out again. You might have found a good haul of Obsidian, but it's of no use to you if you slowly starve to death because you can't find your way out and run out of pork steaks to eat.



01

DON'T STEAL THE CHEESE
SKYRIM

We used to be adventurers like you, until we got caught fondling a slice of stilton on a shop-owner's nightstand. It couldn't be helped, it was just resting there, looking all delicious and ripe from being left out all day in the warm air. There was a seductively sweet pong emanating from its rich blue veins, and we couldn't help but reach out and caress its salty surface before stuffing it into our pockets. Then, from over our shoulder: "You have committed crimes against Skyrim and her people. What say you in your defence?" The guards had spotted us and we ended up with jail time. There are ways out of course – you can bribe the guard or try to break out of prison, but it's all such a hassle to deal with that it's just not worth the pain. Ignore those slabs of creamy goodness and go eat some butterflies instead.



DIRECTORIES

extra



Games, films and television – everything you need for the ultimate Xbox One experience

THE TEN BEST XBOX ONE GAMES

games

01 THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT



PUBLISHER BANDAI NAMCO

Hearts Of Stone and *Blood And Wine* have made an already outstanding RPG unmissable. One of the most authentic, entertaining game worlds ever.

DEFINING MOMENT **Geralt in a bath tub. It changed our lives.**

02 GRAND THEFT AUTO V



PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR GAMES

Brutal and beautiful in equal measures, *GTA V* is so rich in size, scope and spectacle it's hard to believe it was originally built for Xbox 360.

DEFINING MOMENT **Flicking between the three heroes during the huge final heist mission.**

03 DARK SOULS III



PUBLISHER BANDAI NAMCO

Get over the initial difficulty hump and you're rewarded with a combat system that gives you unparalleled opportunities to express yourself.

DEFINING MOMENT **Outsmarting an invading player and chucking them off a cliff into the shadowy depths below.**

04 BATTLEFIELD 1



PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS

Alongside a surprisingly affecting single-player campaign comes one of the most robust and satisfying multiplayer offerings on Xbox One. Brave and unforgettable.

DEFINING MOMENT **Jumping into a tank and knocking down an entire building.**

05 OVERWATCH



PUBLISHER BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT

Blizzard decides to have a go at making a multiplayer shooter and somehow ends up creating one of the best since *Team Fortress 2*. Just beginner's luck? We doubt it.

DEFINING MOMENT **Punching people off the map as Doomfist. 'Ave it!**

06 TITANFALL 2



PUBLISHER RESPAWN ENTERTAINMENT

This sequel to the ace (but multiplayer-only) game compensates with arguably one of the best solo FPS campaigns ever. It's a wall-running, double-jumping, mech-punching delight.

DEFINING MOMENT **Flinging a Fire Star right into a Titan's face.**

07 DISHONORED 2



PUBLISHER ARKANE STUDIOS

This supernatural stealth-'em-up is a superb action game and a landmark work of videogame world-building wrapped up in a sumptuous art style.

DEFINING MOMENT **Exploring Karnaca's shifting clockwork mansion and finding your way between the walls.**

08 GEARS OF WAR 4



PUBLISHER MICROSOFT STUDIOS

A soft reboot that respects what made *Gears* great, then introduces new threats and surprises for the best game since *GOW 2*. An essential entry for Gear-heads and newcomers alike.

DEFINING MOMENT **Fighting Swarm in the storm during the peaks of Act 4.**

09 WHAT REMAINS OF EDITH FINCH



PUBLISHER ANNAPURNA INTERACTIVE

An unforgettable narrative experience that combines dozens of short vignettes with unique control schemes. Just play it – you won't regret it.

DEFINING MOMENT **Lewis' story, focused on dead-end jobs and depression.**

10 HITMAN



PUBLISHER IO INTERACTIVE

IO's flashy reboot adds mystery and menace to *Hitman*'s bag of tricks. Each episode takes place in a different city, and each hit is more challenging. Easily the best *Hitman* game yet.

DEFINING MOMENT **Dressing up as a stoner and getting baked in a loft.**

→ READ THE FULL XBOX ONE REVIEWS AT GAMESRADAR.COM/OXM

films

INNER WORKINGS

FOR FANS OF *Inside Out*



Paul seems like a normal person... but as it happens his organs are all alive and have different ideas about what he should be doing with his life than he does. A gorgeous Pixar short which was originally released in cinemas along with *Moana*.

DOCTOR STRANGE

FOR FANS OF *Captain America, Iron Man*



An arrogant surgeon's world comes crashing down around him when he loses control of his hands. Desperate for his old life, Stephen Strange travels to see a mystic in Nepal who teaches him about magic and the ancient ways...

SWISS ARMY MAN

FOR FANS OF *Harry Potter, Wild Target*



After Hank becomes stranded on an island, he becomes suicidal... until he meets a corpse (Daniel Radcliffe) that he discovers he can manipulate like a Swiss Army Knife. Hank develops a sort-of friendship with the corpse in this surprisingly feel-good cult hit.

IT FOLLOWS

FOR FANS OF *The Badabook, The Conjuring*



A film that wants you to read between the lines, *It Follows* is all about dating gone wrong and uses supernatural horror to make some salient points about consent, culture and mental health issues. Terrifyingly paced and superbly acted.

MOANA

FOR FANS OF *Hamilton, Finding Nemo*



A musical fantasy adventure based around the mythologies of Polynesian tribespeople, *Moana* is a feel-good hit about never letting go of what you believe in. It features voice talent by Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson and Jermaine Clement as a villainous crab.

WAYNE'S WORLD

FOR FANS OF *Spinal Tap*



Wayne and Garth are intent on making a success of their public-access rock 'n' roll show, *Wayne's World*. When a studio buys the show, the duo must weigh up what's more important to them: commercial success, or staying true to their vision.

television

RICK & MORTY S3

FOR FANS OF *Futurama*



The foul-mouthed hit cartoon is back for season three. Beth and Jerry are getting divorced, Morty can't really deal with it and Summer is dealing with it a bit *too* well. And Rick... well, he's just being Rick; chaotic, unpredictable and Rick-diculous.

GAME OF THRONES S7

FOR FANS OF *Vikings, The Lord Of The Rings*



The penultimate season of *Game Of Thrones* is gaining momentum as the forces of Westeros rally themselves for what is likely to be an immense finale. Dragons, dwarves, the living dead, some light incest and all-out war – what more could you want?

COWBOY BEBOP S1

FOR FANS OF *Attack On Titan, Studio Ghibli*



This anime series combines philosophical concepts with off-the-wall sci-fi action, flirting with themes of romance, redemption and bounty hunting. Featuring a very cool protagonist (Spike) and a super smart Corgi named Ein, this is essential anime.

ORPHAN BLACK S5

FOR FANS OF *Dollhouse, Sense8*



It's a great month for long-running shows building up to something big. *Orphan Black*'s constant wind-up is getting tighter and more tense, with Sarah's general suspicions growing and the show's whole core knot of intrigue getting more dangerous.

IT'S ALWAYS SUNNY IN PHILADELPHIA S9

FOR FANS OF *South Park, The Office*



The bar-owning narcissists are back, and this time things get even viler than before: a musical number, some personal revelations and wanton destruction of property are just the start of the gang's problems.

DRUNK HISTORY US S1

FOR FANS OF *Taskmaster, QI*



Every episode, the producers of this show get the celebrity hosts plastered and force them to recount in-depth historical stories. Actors then form an ensemble cast to act out this drunk interpretation of events, often with hilarious consequences.

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OXM TEAM CHOICE

THE BEST GAMES WE'RE PLAYING AND WHY WE LOVE THEM



Steve's choice
DISHONORED: DEFINITIVE EDITION

I took a trip back to Dunwall to revisit Bethesda's beautiful (if rat-infested) city ahead of my playthrough of the sequel. It holds up brilliantly – I love the world the team built.





Dani's choice
SLIME RANCHER

Now that it's out of early access I've been busy hoovering up slime poo and selling it on the black market in exchange for home improvements. Also I've been playing some *Slime Rancher*.





Warren's choice
WOLFENSTEIN: THE NEW ORDER

After watching the in-game footage from Steve's hands-on with the sequel, I decided it was time to brush-up on my Blazkowicz this month. The action doesn't disappoint.



the disc slot

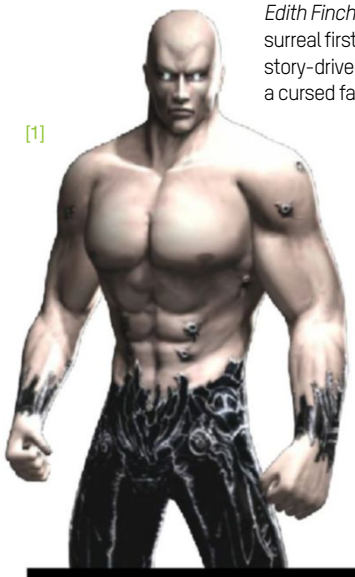
They make the games we love, but what do they play for fun? We ask developers to pick their faves from Xbox history. This month: Ian Dallas



Ian Dallas
Creative Director of Giant Sparrow
After spending his time writing comedy for, among others, *The Onion*, Ian started Giant Sparrow, an independent development studio. Its first game, *The Unfinished Swan*, won a Bafta but never made it to Xbox. Its most recent release, *What Became Of Edith Finch*, is a surreal first-person story-driven tale of a cursed family.

As a studio we focus on making games players will remember, so here are a few games I remember strongly. First up is Breakdown [1], which was a first-person combat game where each trigger controlled a different hand and you had to coordinate your movements to punch dudes, or even to perform actions like climbing ladders or opening doors. I loved it so much I bought a stack of copies and gave them away to anyone I met who hadn't heard of it. Next up is Viva Piñata [2]. The piñata animals you raise are so adorable but that doesn't stop them from eating each other. Deeply weird. I worked on FlatOut [3] as a QA tester and there was one level that was so hard none of the testers could gold medal it. Mostly I remember my friend buying it and gloating about his gold medal on that race. I like to think they made it easier in the final version but he probably really was just that good. I also remember Dark Souls [4] – everything about it feels heavy. There's a weight to the way you swing a halberd, or the 10 minutes you'll spend fighting your way back here if you die, or the black knight who won't stop chasing you until one of you is dead. I love how every detail is tuned to evoke this one feeling, a dread that's made worse because you know the task isn't impossible, it's just painfully hard. Finally, I've picked Manhunt [5]. I've done my share of killing in games but I've never felt like more of a monster than I did suffocating guards with plastic bags in *Manhunt*. It's unsettling, and not always enjoyable, but very memorable.

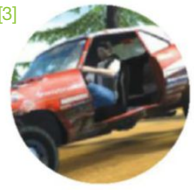
[1]



[2]



[3]



[4]



[5]



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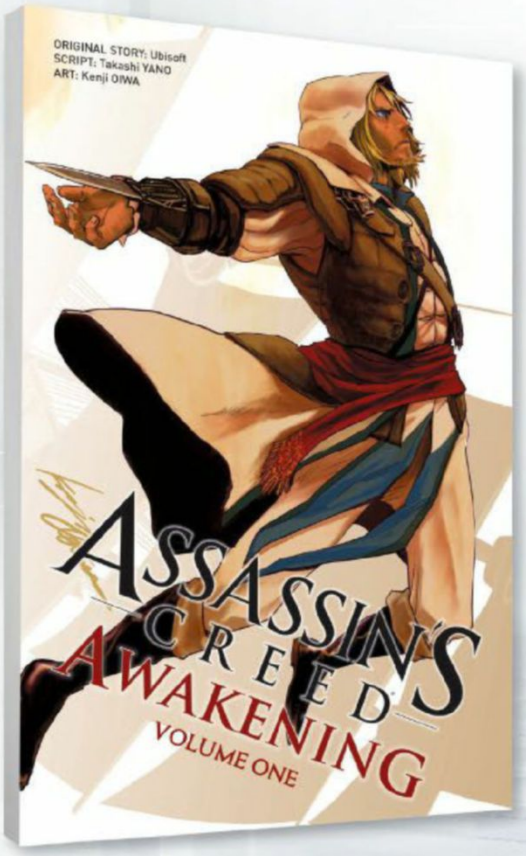
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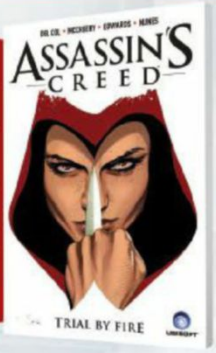
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