

THE NO.1 MAGAZINE FOR PLAYSTATION

# PLAY

NEW  
MAG!

ISSUE 03  
AUGUST 2021  
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180 PAGE  
PREVIEW SPECIAL

— INCLUDING —

BATTLEFIELD 2042

AVATAR

RAINBOW SIX EXTRACTION

ELDEN RING

FAR CRY 6

KENA

+

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# HORIZON

## FORBIDDEN WEST

**ALOY RETURNS!** The world, weapons, and wonders of Sony's PlayStation-exclusive open world revealed

→ GROOT? GROOT!  
**GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY**

The Deus Ex dev brings Marvel's superteam to PS4

**ECHOES OF THE END: UNREAL ENGINE 5 GAMES ARE HERE**

FINAL FANTASY MEETS NIOH – STRANGER OF PARADISE REVEALED

**WILL BIOSHOCK BE GOING OPEN WORLD ON PS5?**



→ WE GO HANDS-ON  
**PS5'S DEATHLOOP IS ON TARGET**

The smartest shooter you'll play all year – only on PS5



→ FIRST LOOK  
**SOULSTICE – IT'S ICO MEETS DARK SOULS**

This dark fantasy soulsborne is another reason to buy PS5



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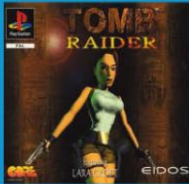
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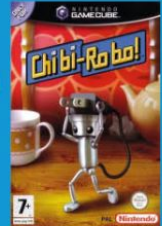
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# ! Welcome



This is my last issue of **PLAY**, having spent four years on **Official PlayStation Magazine** and evolving that into the independent magazine you have in your hands. I leave as someone who believes you can't

overlook the power of print to cut through the noise and present the best games and stories you need to know about each month.

With that in mind, what an issue to be my last. Our annual 180-page E3 special is back and crammed with the latest news on the biggest games heading to PS5, PS4, and PSVR. Aloy makes the cover as we experience the gameplay of *Horizon Forbidden West* for the first time (p110).

Sony's heroine leads an issue filled with exciting new games and updates on the best titles we've been tracking for some time. You can read the first gameplay details on *Elden Ring* (p106), the vaunted team-up of *Dark*

**"OUR 180-PAGE E3 SPECIAL IS BACK AND CRAMMED WITH THE LATEST GAMES."**

*Souls'* creator Hidetaka Miyazaki and *Game Of Thrones* author George RR Martin. It's a beautifully dark open world masterpiece in the making.

Our Hot 50 selection continues with hands-on impressions of future hits *Deathloop* (p100) and *Kena: Bridge Of Spirits* (p92), as well as the first details of *Marvel's Guardians Of The Galaxy* (p87), *Battlefield 2042* (p80), and *Far Cry 6* (p72).

The biggest surprise of the summer so far has been *Ubisoft* revealing *Avatar: Frontiers Of Pandora* running on its powerful *Snowdrop* engine on PS5 (p90). The film may have released 12 years ago, but this first-person open-world adventure could be one of next year's biggest new-gen surprises.

Speaking of which, we also highlight the games that may sneak under your radar (p6), leading with the gothic-anime adventure *Soulstice*, which feels like *Ico* crossed with *Dark Souls*. What a great game to leave on.

**Ian Dean**  
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**BEST HOT 50 GAME**  
*Horizon Forbidden West*  
**BEST OPEN WORLD**  
*Grand Theft Auto V*

## THIS MONTH'S WESTWARD HOES!



**Oscar Taylor-Kent**  
DEPUTY EDITOR

So obsessed with *Ratchet & Clank* Oscar now uses dimensions instead of doors. He's not left the flat in months. But who has?

**BEST HOT 50 GAME**  
*Elden Ring*  
**BEST OPEN WORLD**  
*Death Stranding*



**Jess Kinghorn**  
GAMES EDITOR

Slick anime visuals and girls with large anchors. *Guilty Gear Strive* is Jess' jam. Does LARP allow massive anchors?

**BEST HOT 50 GAME**  
LIS: *True Colors*  
**BEST OPEN WORLD**  
*Yakuza 0*



**Miriam McDonald**  
OPERATIONS EDITOR

32k proofed words later Mim pops on her *Slime* slippers, loads *Dragon Quest Builders 2* and pretends it was a dream.

**BEST HOT 50 GAME**  
*Evil Dead: The Game*  
**BEST OPEN WORLD**  
*The Witcher 3*



**Milford Coppock**  
MANAGING ART EDITOR

Bonnie Tyler on the soundtrack and a talking raccoon with a Scott Ian beard - Milf's all over *Guardians Of The Galaxy*.

**BEST HOT 50 GAME**  
*Deathloop*  
**BEST OPEN WORLD**  
*Red Dead Redemption*

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The horde returns in World War Z: Aftermath.



# The games behind the blockbusters

Dual character adventure Soulstice leads our pick of E3's secret sleeper hits

**E**ach year E3 arrives and we're inundated with an avalanche of game reveals. Amid the blockbuster announcements many small, interesting, and innovative games slip under the radar. To celebrate the ones that could have got away, we've selected our favourites. Leading the pack is melee combat adventure Soulstice...

This made-for-PS5 action game has a darkly beautiful art direction that resembles Nier: Automata crossed with Dark Souls – a gothic diamond in the rough. Developed by the team behind flawed gem Theseus, which itself recalled God Of War and Ico, Soulstice is rapidly rising up our most-wanted list.

The world Reply Game Studios is building feels fascinating and vital. A sprawling castle is lit by a needle of light on the horizon, teasing us onwards. Inside dark corridors come alive with spectral beasts and magical strikes. The Holy Kingdom of Keidas is a lush place in decline, and inspired by Japanese fantasy it revitalises the familiar soulsborne genre.

The land is descending into a nightmare owing to predatory creatures known as Wraiths; they're invading from the other side of the Veil, and the living are on their menu. Wraiths will

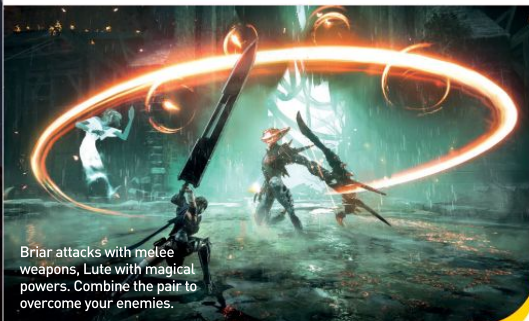
possess their victims, turning them into monstrous versions of themselves. Chimeras are hybrid warriors created from two melded souls, and are the only hope of saving Keidas from the terror of the Veil's nightmarish creatures.

## MIX 'N' MATCH

Playing as one such Chimera warrior team-up, sisters Briar and Lute, you venture into the city of Ilden, where a tear in the sky has enabled the Wraiths to flood into the world.

The twist in Soulstice? You play both Briar and Lute at the same time. Lute has sacrificed herself to bind her soul to Briar, giving the pair a balance of wild powers. Briar has superhuman strength and resilience while Lute flutters around her sister as a ghostly apparition, and can

**Dark corridors come alive with spectral beasts and magical strikes.**



Briar attacks with melee weapons, Lute with magical powers. Combine the pair to overcome your enemies.

attack with mystical powers. Controlling the pair simultaneously ensures a blend of melee attacks and explosive combos mixed with Lute's spectral powers – combining the pair in unique ways unlocks new Chimera forms and powerful transformative abilities.

When not tapping into the sisters' supernatural powers you'll be able to unlock and upgrade extra weapons throughout the adventure. The combo system is flexible enough to enable you to hot-swap weapons even mid-combo to blend attacks together for deeper, more damaging strikes.

## JOOSTEN TIME

The sisters Briar and Lute are being voiced by Metal Gear Solid V's Stefanie Joosten, who played Quiet in Kojima's last Konami game. Bringing the high-profile actress on board is a sign publisher Modus Games is backing Soulstice to the hilt.

In action we see Briar begin her combo with a spinning short sword attack before flowing seamlessly into an overhead hammer strike, and finishing with a distanced pike flurry.

The different enemy types all need to be managed in unique ways. Wraiths, Corrupted, and Possessed have strengths and weaknesses again the duo's attacks. Some are susceptible to fast or heavy

strikes, others must be weakened by Lute's supernatural attacks first – her auras can expose hidden enemies. Enemies are tricky too, and the AI will adapt to your attacks.

**ORDER, ORDER**

There's a deeper mystery at the heart of Soulstice, ensuring you'll want to push on through the streets of Ilden, your

surroundings becoming more warped and twisted as you get closer to the Veil. As the story progresses you'll uncover the truth about the sisters' backstory, and what The Order – the shadowy organisation they work for – is. There's an Ico-like quality to Soulstice's setup, but one reimagined with massive weapons and a version of Yorda who's happy to get into the thick of the action. You'll get more answers in 2022.

## 10 hits in waiting → We pick the games going under the radar



01

**TREK TO YOMI**

The feudal Japanese setting reminds us of Ghost Of Tsushima, but Flying Wild Hogs' side-scrolling slasher is a more focussed adventure. The widescreen format and beautifully choreographed animation ensure this feels like a movie in motion. Expect this in 2022 for PS5.



02

**GREAK: MEMORIES OF AZUR**

This hand-drawn adventure is releasing on PS5 and puts you in control of three characters simultaneously. Playing as Greak, Adara, and Raydel you can tap into each character's abilities to escape their home of Azur following an invasion. It's being released on 17 August.



03

**SONG IN THE SMOKE**

Craft, hunt, and survive a painterly prehistoric world in this smart PSVR adventure that looks like it's been dragged from the pages of 2000AD. Katsuya Terada's (The Legend Of Zelda) design draws you in but it's the otherworldly action and adventure that'll keep you in PSVR.



04

**FIREGIRL**

Mixing 2D characters with 3D levels, Firegirl is a visually unique roguelike adventure. The idea is to rebuild your station by putting out fires – which have cartoon faces, naturally. Though you restart when you die, refurbishments to your firestation remain. This one's due in October.





05

**INSTINCTION**

Though it's heading to PS4, this shooter really has PS5 in its sights: advanced ray tracing, dynamic shadows, 4K resolution, and 3D audio are all promised. The pitch? A modern Dino Crisis that can be played in first- or third-person, set in semi-open world environments.



06

**FAR: CHANGING TIDES**

Swapping the sand dunes of Far: Lone Sails for ocean waves, you play as Toe in this thematic follow-up. The world is flooded and Toe must sail its cluttered seas looking for answers. Again, it's a side-scrolling adventure, with the promise of exploring below the waves.



07

**TWO POINT CAMPUS**

This follow-up to Two Point Hospital transplants its humorous management sim ideas into the world of higher education. Its nonsensical approach means night school is Knight School, complete with jousting classes. This fun throwback is due on PS4 and PS5.



08

**EIYUDEN CHRONICLE: RISING**

As we wait the arrival of Eiyuden Chronicle: Hundred Heroes (the spiritual follow-up to Suidoken) in 2023, the same developer has this side-scrolling action-RPG planned for 2022. It tells the backstories of Hundred Heroes' characters ahead of that game's release.



09

**MONARK**

Made by former members of the Megami Tensei and Shin Megami Tensei team. Play as a member of the True Student Council, which was established "to solve the abnormal situations in the school". Persona 5 fans need to circle this one as a must-play.



10

**VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - SWANSONG**

The developer behind baroque whodunnit The Council is turning its choice-led RPG skills on the Vampire: The Masquerade series. Expect a bloody good time as you unravel conspiracies inside the Camarilla, the secret vampire society.



## YOU SPIN ME RIGHT ROUND

Stranger Of Paradise's writer is Kazushige Nojima, who's already got experience of creating Final Fantasy spin-offs. Among his many works, he was a scenario writer on Final Fantasy X-2. But can he make Stranger Of Paradise's dudes interesting?



**Taylor-made news**  
Oscar Taylor-Kent's news slap

With Geoff Keighley's Summer Game Fest and the digital version of E3 now in our rearview mirror, we've had plenty of new games to feast on. But sometimes even old games can be made new – though reviving classics is much harder than it appears.

In addition to teasing a brand-new **Sonic** game, Sega announced some older-school hits to celebrate the Blue Blur's 30th anniversary. **Sonic Colors Ultimate** leads the way, due 7 September. What had been a Nintendo Wii exclusive has had a loving HD remaster. A fan favourite, it's a game all about speed as Sonic uses alien powers for special moves, and there's none of that werehog nonsense.

**Sonic Origins** guns for a 2022 release, and throws even further back, collecting together the first four Sonic games for Mega Drive, plus Sonic CD. **Sonic 3** is great to see, as it's been absent from some recent collections. Appearing to be the Star Engine versions, it'll finally bring some of the definitive ports to modern consoles.

# This Final Fantasy Origin looks chaotic

Stranger Of Paradise turns back time



Who hasn't wanted to violently take apart annoying Final Fantasy encounters?

**Y**ou might expect a tome of complex lore to accompany a Final Fantasy game, but Team Ninja's approach in **Stranger Of Paradise: Final Fantasy Origin**, a spin-off/prequel to the very first game, has a premise as simple as it gets: kill Chaos. New hero Jack might look like he opened the wrong door for the beer garden and ended up in the world of Final Fantasy, but in true Team Ninja style he's got plenty of violent moves to get the job done.

Pals Jed and Ash look a bit more believably Final Fantasy, and join Jack for the ride. Between them, they'll be able to take on different jobs to use the spells and abilities of classes like the Warrior, Black Mage, Dragoon, and more. The subjects of their rage are classic-style Final Fantasy enemies that nod all the way back to that first game, like little goblins.

## GROUNDHOG KNIGHT

And enemies don't get more classic than the evil knight Garlmund, who is pivotal to the plot of that first Final Fantasy game. Extremely powerful, he's an avatar of

Chaos, so it seems that Jack will come up against him in order to fulfil his goal, perhaps clashing with him multiple times. If Team Ninja's Nioh games are anything to go by, the fights will be spectacular.

Here's where the Final Fantasy complications seep in: that first game is all about time travel, and Garlmund himself creates a time loop as part of it. So is this new game really a simple prequel? And from what time do Jack and his friends actually hail? Could they be the Warriors Of Light, that first game's heroes, or is there more to it? Given the mature tone and grim atmosphere, it's bound to not be all roses whatever the truth of the situation, and if the dev's history is anything to go by, there will be plenty of combos to pull off before you're done.

★ The game is due out on PS5 and PS4 in 2022, so all mysteries will be solved then.

Crysis 2 and Crysis 3 are being remastered using CryEngine to deliver ray-traced visuals on PS4.

# Crysis triple threat

Crytek is bringing Crysis Trilogy Remastered to PS4

**L**ast year's Crysis Remastered fell short of expectations. However, it did deliver software-based ray tracing on PS4, which was an incredible graphical achievement. The same CryEngine tech behind that remaster is being used to revamp the entire Crysis trilogy.

"We're excited to announce that these iconic Crysis games are returning in one bundle, remastered for a new generation

of hardware," says Steffen Halbig, project lead at Crytek. "Each game is enhanced to look and play beautifully on today's platforms, delivering the finest Crysis experience for both newcomers to our classic franchise or players wishing to relive the adventure."

## SUIT UP

The good news? The Crysis Remastered Trilogy starts life on a surer footing than last year's release, as the two sequels

were far better games. The second instalment resets the familiar suit-based, open-world FPS gameplay in New York City. The concrete jungle proves an atmospheric setting.

The third game transforms New York into a sprawling urban rainforest, divided into seven unique districts to blast through. Human and alien forces stand against you, and the new Predator Bow offers a science-fiction Rambo tone.

All three optimised games are bundled together in the trilogy package, revamped with 8K textures, ray tracing, and smooth framerates. Each game in the set can be bought separately too.

**Each game is enhanced to look and play beautifully on today's platforms, delivering the finest Crysis experience.**

★ Crysis Remastered Trilogy is out this Autumn on PS4, and is PS5 compatible.

## DEV ACCESS

# Prime matters

As **Koch Media** launches its new label celebrating global developers, we pick its seven highest impressive games

**C**elebrating diversity and invention from around the world, the new publishing label Prime Matter aims to promote small and unique developers wherever they may be. We're invited to a showcase of 12 new games from studios with unique visions that are happy to be double-A developers.

Not all the games on show are stunners, but some look like they could impress. We've whittled down the 12 to our preferred seven, and here they are.

## 1. ECHOES OF THE END

Icelandic developer Myrkrur Games is taking no prisoners. Its first game is aiming for PS5 and will be developed using Unreal Engine 5. A narrative-driven third-person adventure set in a fantasy world inspired by the landscape of Iceland, *Echoes Of The End* features black sand so real you'll want to trickle it through your fingers.

The game follows Ryn, a seasoned warrior with a unique ability to control and destroy matter. Creating this is really pushing UE5's Nanite texture tech. On top of that, the team's desire to create a new story-led experience means its characters and animation all look beautifully realistic in motion.

## 2. FINAL FORM

The dev behind 2017's comic-book cyberpunk roguelike *Ruiner* is back with a first-person shooter that looks equally swish. Reikon Games' shooter places you in the metal shell of a humanoid avatar of a sentient spaceship on a mission to explore the galaxy for a cure to a plague that threatens the life of the universe's last celestial being. We love how fast and chaotic the action is, and when you think you *get it* your robotic form can transform into a zippy ball-like form to speed up the action even more. *Final Form* is reminiscent of *Vanquish* in the best way possible as it's also promising three-player co-op.

"Making this game is like coming back to our roots," says co-founder of Reikon Games Magdalena Tomkowicz.

"Its blood-pumping movement and combat, breathtaking environments, and haunting universe. The main focus of our work is the soul of the game."

## 3. PAYDAY 3

You won't be playing this one until 2023 but *Starbreeze* is back doing what it does best: *Payday* games. This threequel transfers the squad-based heist shooting to a Hollywood-inspired LA-like sprawl as your fledgling hood joins the legendary *Payday* gang for loot and laughs.

## 4. THE CHANT

Canada's Brass Token seizes the classic ideas of third-person survival horror and adds a healthy dose of cosmic terror to the mix. *The Chant* is set on a remote island with a shocking past that, like all



*Final Form* is a fast-paced cyberpunk FPS from the team behind 2017's *Ruiner*.

Bieber with tentacles would be a sight to see, *Dolmen* is not quite that literal. The third-person action plays like a science-fiction soulsborne with the option to mix melee attacks and ranged weapons.

## 6. GUNGRAVE G.O.R.E.

Korean developer Studio IGGYMOB has hired *Final Fantasy* art director Isamu Kamikokuryo to ensure you'll look good as you hack, slash, shoot, tear, explode, and pummel your way through brutal anime action. GORE by name, gory by nature.

## 7. SCARS ABOVE

Mad Head Games, based in Serbia, is behind this third-person shooter with a hint of *Returnal*. It's more traditional than *Housemarque*'s shooter, but features a similar alien aesthetic. Between bouts of blasting using realistically modelled weapons you'll need to explore the planet, using *Batman Arkham*-like gadgets and upgraded tools to solve puzzles. *Scars Above* is solid concept with some interesting design choices.

★ Expect more Prime Matter reveals soon, including a new *Painkiller*.

📌 The dark side of spirituality? Somewhere Gwyneth Paltrow is gooping all over this. 📌

dark histories, must be uncovered. Exploring the island you'll uncover the psychedelic nasties awakened by a spiritual retreat gone wrong. Creatures with demonic lotus flowers for heads and the dark side of spirituality? Somewhere Gwyneth Paltrow is gooping all over this planned PS4 and PS5 release. The horror.

## 5. DOLMEN

Brazil's Massive Work Studio offers *Dolmen*, a cosmic horror adventure inspired by HP Lovecraft, HR Giger, and modern pop culture. But while Justin

1 *Dolmen* embraces soulsborne ideas in a cosmic horror setting. 2 *Gungrave GORE* looks like a stylish hack-and-slash. 3 *Starbreeze* is returning to heist action with *Payday 3*.





Echoes Of The End already has impressive character models running in Unreal Engine 5, on PS5.



## SONY GETS ANIMATED

As Pixelopus becomes the latest developer to use Unreal Engine 5, it also reveals a new partnership with Sony Pictures Animation. The developer's new PS5 game will be created in partnership with the Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse studio.

## PlayStation voices

The month in mouthing off

**"YOU WANT TO BE MAD AT SOMEBODY FOR ANYTHING GOW RELATED – THE DELAY, PS4/5, TROLLS, SUBTITLE SIZE, SIGRUN, WHATEVS – BE ANGRY WITH ME."**

CORY BARLOG DEFENDS HIS TEAM AFTER GOW 2'S DELAY.

**"MY FAVORITE MOMENT: WHEN I STOPPED RUNNING FROM THE ENEMIES AND STARTED HUNTING THEM DOWN INSTEAD :-)"** MARK CERNY FINALLY GETS HIS PLATINUM TROPHY IN RETURNAL.



**"AS FOR THE FUTURE, I'M 55 YEARS OLD, SO I MAY RETIRE."** SONIC THE HEDGEHOG CREATOR, YUJI NAKA, LEAVES SQUARE ENIX AFTER RELEASING BALAN WONDERWORLD. IS THIS THE LAST WE SEE OF NAKA?

# New games on PS5 are going to be epic

The Unreal Engine 5 team teases the future

The latest Unreal Engine 5 demo showcases the tech's advanced open world-building abilities.



**U**nreal Engine 5 is becoming the go-to tech for game developers. Square Enix has revealed *Dragon Quest XII* will be made in UE5, and the next *BioShock* from new developer Cloud Chamber will also be using the next-gen game engine.

But what does this mean for the kinds of games we'll get? Unreal Engine 3 pioneered cover-shooter mechanics, and if that's any indicator, the tech in Unreal Engine 5 will affect how games play for years to come. A recently released UE5 demo reveals how easy it is to create enormous, detailed open worlds in the engine. As *BioShock* is rumoured to be using it, can we expect the larger levels of *BioShock Infinite* to be expanded upon?

### RISK AND REWARD

Unreal Engine 5 will enable developers to take risks, says Quixel artist Galen Davies: "People will take chances and experiment [...] Some of these new technologies are going to allow a lot of people to experiment, [and try] a lot of things that they couldn't do, that were out of budget or out of scope to try."

Nick Penwarden, VP of engineering at Epic Games, gives us a further taste of the future: "In a couple [of] years, I think we're going to see a broad variety of games, and especially those built with Unreal Engine 5, that are going to be larger, more detailed, and more dynamic. Being able to leverage the high-quality lighting and dynamic scenes that Lumen [UE5's lighting and reflection system] brings alongside physics to enable really deep, dynamic, interactive gameplay moments."

The UE5 team also reveals that a lot of developers are taking UE4 projects and bringing them into UE5. "They're starting to see what their content looks like with Lumen and Nanite [a scaling geometry system]," says Penwarden. Could we see UE5 versions of our favourite games?

**\* Would you enjoy exploring even more expansive worlds? Let us know.**

GTA V is coming back, enhanced and expanded on PS5. Will you be playing (again)?

# Third time's a crime?

Rockstar sets the date for Grand Theft Auto V on PS5

**A**fter accepting the premise of 'double-dipping', of returning to a classic game in a remastered form, why not jump in for a triple-dip?

Rockstar Games has confirmed Grand Theft Auto V is heading to PS5 on 11 November, but will you bite again?

Reader reaction has been muted to the news that Grand Theft Auto V – 'expanded and enhanced' will be arriving in November. Chris Sharps summed up the

mood to us on Twitter: "I mean, I played it on PS3, PS4, might leave this one. [I] would rather they had spent a year focusing on the next game rather than bringing GTA V to PS5."

This sentiment is strong as almost a decade from launch GTA V is still being promoted over a proper sequel, and yet Rockstar proved when it remastered GTA V from PS3 to PS4 that it can freshen one of PlayStation's greatest games with a new console's technology.

We can expect the 'enhanced' aspect of GTA V to employ PS5's core tech to deliver faster loading, ray-traced streets, 4K textures, 3D audio, and new tactile ways to use the DualSense controller.

It's the 'expanded' side of the release, however, that could surprise. With GTA III's 20th anniversary falling close to GTA V's PS5 debut, should we expect a connection? Will we be heading to present-day Liberty City in GTA V? Is this the moment Rockstar stealth-releases GTA VI? Will GTA III be remastered using the GTA V PS5 engine? Rockstar likes to surprise, so don't discount GTA V's re-release just yet.

With GTA III's 20th anniversary falling very close to GTA's PS5 debut, should we expect a connection?

Join the chat @PLAYgamingmag and share your thoughts on PS5's GTA V.

# GEAR: STUFF WE LOVE

## Final Fantasy XIV collectibles



### FINAL FANTASY XIV STRATOCASTER

STRATOCASTER £3,499.99 [SHOP.FENDER.COM](http://SHOP.FENDER.COM)

You'll need to wait until November and pay a hefty price, but this Strat is one of the most exciting things Square has done in years. Just look at it. Now imagine strumming it like Sir Jimi Of Hendrix and watching the thing light up like the Northern Lights – the purple and blue edges glow. Naturally, it won't do all the work, you'll need lessons.



### CITIZEN x FINAL FANTASY XIV COLLABORATION WATCH

CITIZEN £194.99/£339.99 [STORE.EU.SQUARE-ENIX-GAMES.COM](http://STORE.EU.SQUARE-ENIX-GAMES.COM)

Named Light and Darkness, these two watches from Citizen are inspired by a Crystal Of Light and the Warriors Of Darkness. Created in collaboration with FFXIV's design team, both are beautiful watches, and we love 'em. The high prices and build quality suggest both will become collector's items. Pre-orders open at midnight on 30 June.



### FINAL FANTASY XIV VINYL LP BOX

SQUARE ENIX £86.99 [STORE.EU.SQUARE-ENIX-GAMES.COM](http://STORE.EU.SQUARE-ENIX-GAMES.COM)

This impressive boxset brings together all four Final Fantasy XIV vinyl collections: A Realm Reborn, Heavensword, Stormblood, and Shadowbringers. This represents some of the most beautiful music in videogames, in one package. Each LP jacket features new illustrations by Kuroimori and the audio has been mastered by Bernie Grundman (Carole King, Michael Jackson, Steely Dan). Perfect.



### FINAL FANTASY XIV: SHADOWBRINGERS – THE ART OF REFLECTION – HISTORIES UNWRITTEN

SQUARE ENIX £29.99 [STORE.EU.SQUARE-ENIX-GAMES.COM](http://STORE.EU.SQUARE-ENIX-GAMES.COM)

This seventh volume in the FFXIV art book series features unseen concept art and illustrations for Yorha: Dark Apocalypse, Eden's Verse & Eden's Promise, Save The Queen, and many more. This deluxe large-format book is a must-read.





### DIY DUALSENSE

It's the DualSense controller you know, but in colours Krusty The Clown would balk at. Design your own pad at [defygaminguk.com](http://defygaminguk.com).



Fangamer.com has some sweet Village merch. **1** There's the his and hers **Lady Of The House T-shirts** by Nina Matsumoto (\$28), for couples who like to dress alike. **2** the **Village Long-Sleeved Shirt** featuring the key design, **3** and the cute **Dimitrescu Chibi Pin Set** by JMV (\$14). **4** The official **Resident Evil Village T-Shirt Logo** [£19.99] in black is available at [store.capcom-europe.com](http://store.capcom-europe.com) **5** It's Sonic-a-geddon as three decades of the hog are celebrated through the power of merch: **5** **30th Anniversary Hoodie** [£34.99], **6** **30th Anniversary White Ceramic Mug** [£12.99], **7** **30th Anniversary Snapback** [£14.99], and **8** **30th Anniversary Blue Socks** [£7.99]. **9** Bandai Namco has the packed **Tales Of Arise Hootle Edition** [£104.99] at [store.bandainamcoent.eu](http://store.bandainamcoent.eu). It's a hoot.



## JESS'S REAL DEAL



Sony released its Cosmic Red and Midnight Black controllers this month and I couldn't decide which to get, so I headed to the socials and asked you, dear reader, and your peers. The results are in, and you reckon Midnight Black is the way to go [52.2%]. It does appeal to my inner vamp. Cosmic Red scooped a respectable 33.2% of the vote.

Interestingly, a healthy 16.6% of voters are happy with the current white controller. Perhaps you want the cuffs to match the collar and see no reason to buy a sleek black pad if PS5 remains white. I get it. Here's hoping Sony finally brings to market a Midnight Black PS5 to sit next to this gothic new alternate controller.

The new colour controllers are available at [game.co.uk](http://game.co.uk), priced £64.99 each.



## THE BIG SHOT

# A follow-up with bite

World War Z: Aftermath is gunning for PS5 in 2022

**F**eaturing all content from the 2019 co-op zombie shooter's Game Of The Year edition, newly revealed sequel *Aftermath* promises its predecessor's 15-million-strong playerbase new thrills and spills. Alongside zombie slaying in 4K and 60fps on PS5, it introduces more options for pushing back the ever-climbing hordes of the undead and features new globetrotting episodes.

This includes an all-new melee combat system for when things get uncomfortably close-quarters. Would-be Zeke slayers can bring the pain with sickles and cleavers – and that's just for starters. But if the thought of a zombie salivating on you is actually your kind of thing, you'll be pleased to hear *Aftermath* also introduces a first-person mode. Only your comrades may judge you, though: thanks to cross-play you'll be able to unite with the party of your choice regardless of platform. After all, with fresh threats like swarms of hungry rats, you'll need a crew that has your back. But if you'd rather enjoy the company of the living dead alone, the three other members of your strike team can always be controlled by AI.

*Aftermath* will debut on PS4 this year before venturing onto PS5 next year. Existing *World War Z* players can pick up *Aftermath* at a discount with a free upgrade to the PS5 version down the line. Happy hunting!



## Numbers Game

We do the maths

# 04

As in PlayStation 4, which will be getting big releases Gran Turismo 7 and God Of War 2, just like PS5.

# 28.09.21

The release date for the PS5 version of parkour cyber-ninja thriller Ghostrunner. It's excellent.

# 1,464

Seconds of Sony-backed indies featured in the 21-game rundown at the PlayStation Talents showcase.

# 35

Years since the original Dragon Quest released in Japan. A new game is in development now.

# 2022

When you can expect to see God Of War – calm your Kratos-level fury; it's coming to PS4 as well as PS5.

# £199

The price of the Dying Light 2 – Stay Human Collector's Edition on PS5, featuring a unique statuette.

## DEBATE

# Is Sony's new cross-gen approach a good thing?

Gran Turismo 7 and God Of War 2 are now heading to PS4 as well as PS5, but has Sony made a mistake?



**IAN DEAN**  
EDITOR



**HAS SONY JUST DELAYED THE PS5 GENERATION? I THINK SO...**

News that big forthcoming releases like GT7 and God Of War 2 are set for PS4 leaves me concerned about Sony's new-gen experience. It means the PS5 generation won't truly begin for perhaps 18 months or more. In fact, it could be down to third-party studios to pioneer how we play on PS5 as Unreal Engine 5 becomes a standard with non-Sony developers. Even then, we'll probably not see new UE5 games for two years. A stopgap could be found in rereleasing Unreal Engine 4 games in Unreal Engine 5. Days Gone remastered? Yes please. ■

■ **The PS5 generation won't truly begin for 18 months or more.** ■



**JESS KINGHORN**  
GAMES EDITOR



**MULTI-GENERATION RELEASES ARE THE FUTURE AND THAT'S A GOOD THING.**

Many people's eagerness to leave PS4 in PlayStation's past is perhaps premature. Yes, I'm part of the PS5 crowd but the memory of training my beady little eyes on one of the first late-night drops is not so distant from my mind. With plenty still struggling to get their mitts on the new kit, crossing the generation boards with its upcoming releases is the smart move from Sony. These are PS4's twilight years, but if previous consoles are anything to go by, its legacy is likely to endure long after Sony stops officially supporting it. ■



**MILFORD COPPOCK**  
ART EDITOR



**I WISH SONY HAD STUCK TO ITS GUNS AND DELIVERED THE TRUE NEW GENERATION OF GAMES IT PROMISED LAST YEAR.**

Last year Sony was the champion of generations. It came out fighting and told us all PS5 was a step ahead, a console with specific game launches. Yes, we've had Demon's Souls, Returnal, and Ratchet & Clank: Rift Apart, which all made use of the hardware. But for me some games, Gran Turismo 7 in particular, were earmarked as PS5-only tentpole releases, games that would make my PS5 wheeze and power new ways to play. Built from the ground up for PS5 the new GT7 could have set a benchmark for every racing game to come – perhaps even taking the series open world for the first time. Now I feel as if it's being shackled to old tech, and what we'll get is PS4's GT7 with an improved framerate, ray-traced visuals, and DualSense support. It'll still be great, but it's not the next-gen GT7 of my dreams. ■



**OSCAR TAYLOR-KENT**  
DEPUTY EDITOR



**CROSS-GEN CAN BE GREAT, BUT RATCHET MIGHT BE PS5'S NO.1 FOR QUITE A WHILE.**

Getting a PS5 has been tough, and it's always great when everybody can enjoy all the latest games. Modern game development has never been easier to scale for different hardware. And yet playing Ratchet & Clank: Rift Apart (review on p120) felt so good in part because the unique PS5 features made it feel so fresh. They're a core, irreplaceable part of the game design. That won't be true in the case of every game – Gran Turismo won't have cars portalling through levels, as far as anyone knows – but it's worth considering. Both Horizon and God Of War are sure to be as good as ever, but we might need to accept that they won't have the wow factor of Rift Apart. And maybe that's fine... for now. ■

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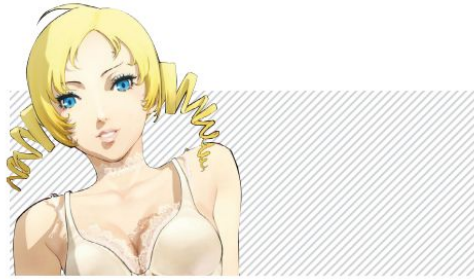


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# Demons

Feeling the horn? These games show PlayStation at its most devilish

## 1 STREET FIGHTER V

The Satsui No Hado is a dark energy which Ryu had to struggle against lest it awaken Evil Ryu within him. But just as he purged this side of himself, it created a new demonic entity, an even more evil Ryu called Kage.

## 2 DEMON'S SOULS

The title says it all. FromSoftware's opening entry in the Souls series (superbly remade by Bluepoint Games) is all about killing demons that have taken over the corrupted kingdom of Boletaria. But it's not just the big horned fellas who count as demons; technically everything in this world is one – even the benevolent Maiden In Black in the Nexus.

## 3 DOOM

The original demon slayer made a blazing comeback in 2016. Suited and booted as the Doom Slayer, you blast away hundreds of horrible hellspawn, from one-eyed, spherical Cacodemons to ginormous Barons Of Hell. The best part of Doom 2016 is finishing them off with a gory up-close glory kill.

## 4 CATHERINE

Poor Vincent is having nightmares about climbing a tower to escape his many demons, from commitment to the prospect of parenthood. Then there's the fact that he's cheating on his girlfriend Katherine with the titular blonde beauty. It's a bit more complicated than that though as – spoiler – cutie Cath is actually a succubus. That still counts as cheating, though.

## 5 DIABLO 3

Blizzard's hack-and-slash dungeon crawler is all about blitzing hordes of demonic foes. While the huge bestiary is not filled exclusively with demons, the most memorable is The Butcher at the end of Act 1, who comes at you with his big cleaver, uttering his immortal line: "Fresh meat!"

## 6 AFTERPARTY

Friends Milo and Lola have somehow died and wound up in Hell to be tortured for eternity. Their only chance of escape is to outdrink and outparty Lucifer and his brethren, the Monarchs of Hell. It's not called the demon drink for nothing.

## 7 DEVIL MAY CRY

We can't leave out gaming's most badass demon hunter, who made his debut on PS2. What sets Dante apart from other hunters is that he's half-demon himself. This side of him takes over when you activate his 'devil trigger'.

## 8 SLEEPING DOGS

Hong Kong cop Wei Shen has more than triads to deal with in the Nightmare In North Point expansion, when an executed gangster rises from the dead while summoning an army of jiang shi [Chinese zombie-vampires]. Among these are also some more demonic-looking yaoguai, and it'll take more than Wei's martial arts skills to defeat them – you need a nice cup of magical herbal tea. Mmm.

## 9 DANTE'S INFERNO

EA's Visceral Games spliced God Of War's DNA into Dante Alighieri's classic poem The Divine Comedy. This version of Dante is a ripped knight who journeys through the nine circles of Hell to rescue his lover Beatrice's soul. Naturally, you fight hordes of demons in the process.

### HONOURABLE MENTIONS

#### Agony

A survival horror set in Hell that's absolutely hellish to play, though you do at least get the power to possess weak-minded demons.

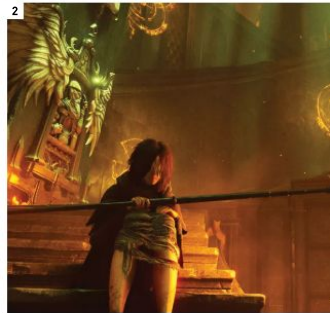
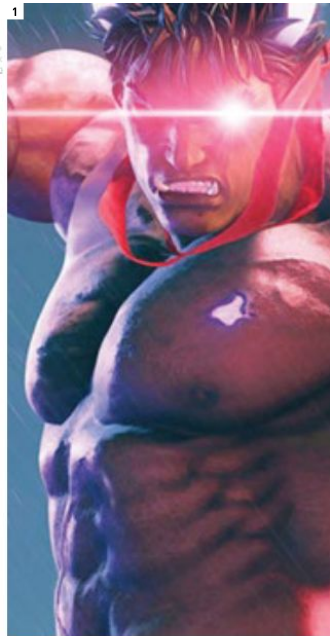
#### Onimusha: Warlords

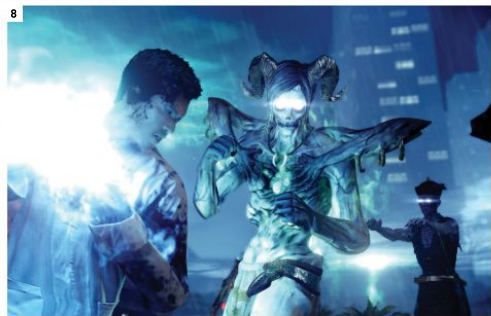
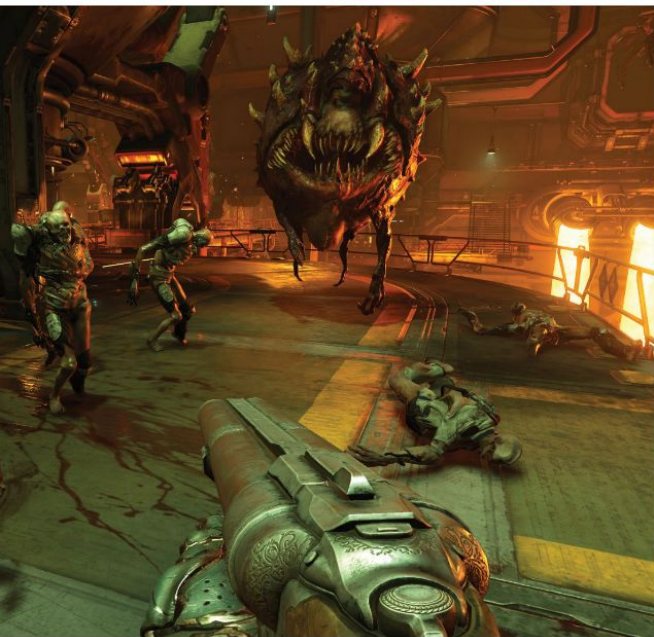
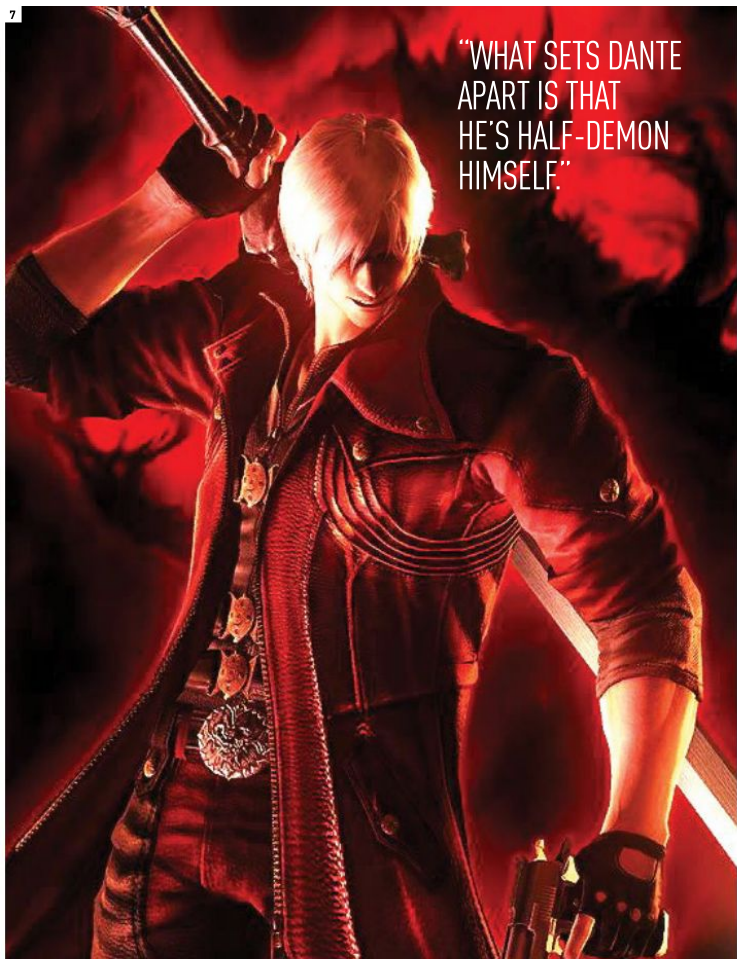
Basically Resident Evil but set in feudal Japan, and instead of zombies you're fighting demonic Genma led by their king Fortinbras.

#### Persona 5

The Personas you summon come from a wide range of mythologies but they include demons such as Lilith, Pazuzu, and even Satan himself.

Did we miss your deadliest demon? Got a brilliant In The Mood For idea? Email us at [play@futurenet.com](mailto:play@futurenet.com)





## OPINION

# “VALUE FOR MONEY IS GREAT, BUT IS REPLAYABILITY BETTER THAN MORE CONTENT?”

Extending the life of a game can be done with more killer, less filler



## WRITER BIO

Oscar Taylor-Kent once finished Metal Gear Solid 2 three times in one day and has the dog tags to prove it. How's that for value for money?

Why are there so many huge open-world games with tons of map markers to tick off like a checklist? We all know the answer: to create value for money. That isn't necessarily a bad thing, especially as big-budget games keep impacting our own economy-constricted small budgets. £70 is a lot for a game, but when you know Assassin's Creed Valhalla will easily last you upwards of 50 hours, it's a bitter pill that's easier to swallow.

And yet, as great a time as we have with games like Valhalla, something can grate about the way they're stuffed with content. A huge, beautiful world can turn to white noise as we traipse across it for the thousandth time to reach a new objective, almost like it's become a glorified loading screen; we begin to realise that many outposts repeat similar content; and we enter a zen-like state of opening chests without caring what's inside, just delighting in the serotonin buzz that comes from another task done.

## SIMON SAYS

But let's be honest, if we didn't like repetition, we wouldn't like playing games. Tetris Effect is one of the most repetitive games on the planet, but the



Smashed that first playthrough? Try getting your time under three hours for the trophy.

core of the series is so strong that we could play it forever.

Resident Evil Village is a fantastic game, as we said in our review last month. Its RRP is a more reasonable £55, but it also takes a darn sight less time to hit the credits in it than in a huge open-world game. But you can put just as many joyous hours into Village as you can an Assassin's Creed. Once finished, you can play Village through again and keep things like weapon upgrades, as well as unlock new special items (like infinite ammo) that make subsequent playthroughs more interesting, or even significantly harder.

In earlier eras of gaming, when at least some of Team PLAY were dependent on pocket money, we had to make do with a smaller selection of games, and we didn't have sprawling open worlds to occupy our time. Metal Gear Solid on PS1 had a similar system of unlocks and replays, and the original Resident Evil was great to revisit to see if you could get a faster time. You don't always need fresh material to enjoy returning to a game either: You don't want to know how many times I've collected all the dragon eggs in Spyro: Year Of The Dragon.

In fact, for as long as it might take you to complete them to the last mission and collectible, huge open-world games can actually feel less encouraging to revisit. Every time I think about going back to Egypt to enjoy Bayek's story in Assassin's Creed Origins once again, I remember just how spread-apart the interesting bits are, and wish I had a mission select to get straight to the good bits. While still open worlds, the smaller, earlier titles like Assassin's Creed 2 feel more welcoming to returning players. Hopefully the likes of Resident Evil Village prove that a game doesn't have to be buttered too thin to be of value, or even to be worth putting a lot of hours into – a truly great game will always entice us back for another taste, no matter how long a first playthrough.

📌 A huge, beautiful world can turn to white noise. 📌





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## OPINION

# "CAN GAMING EVER BE AS INVENTIVE AND DIVERSE AS THE PS2 ERA AGAIN?"

I miss the invention of older titles, but found it in Double-A gaming



**WRITER BIO**  
Ian Dean has avoided all blockbuster games ever since he had to take on a second job and a mortgage to pay for his Sims family.

The innocent days when I would get all my hot music tips from GTA's radio station are over, and I miss them. The peak of the PS2 era was a weird time when Rockstar was breaking the rules, not repackaging them, Ico was proving videogames can be art, and Midway was demonstrating art can be a decapitation and aggressively stylised marketing. Now, faced with an avalanche of remasters, remakes, PS5 upgrades, and a race to the bottom to be the next Fortnite, videogames are in danger of being flattened.

Though the indie scene is bubbling under, even here we're seeing ideas being rehashed and a narrowing focus on the same ideas or systems. If you're into quirky narrative-driven adventures or roguelite insta-death RPGs, you're fine.

Now I'm not against repetition. Indeed, videogames are the one medium where every subsequent game is generally better than the last. While the film industry can count on one hand the occasions when a sequel is better than the original – The Godfather Part II, The Dark Knight, The Next Karate Kid – videogames are awash with improved followups. But in recent times, as annual or semi-annual releases of Call Of Duty, Assassin's Creed, and

Battlefield have become as regular as a high-fibre bowel movement, I've found myself yearning for the weirder release lists of the PS2 days, when even the biggest publishers took risks. While EA was churning out Medal Of Honor sequels, FIFA, and NBA updates, it also found room for the innovative SSX and the Big label that gave us arcade racers Shox and Sled Storm. It was the time when gamers took risks and forced developers and publishers to keep up. The import scene added pressure, proving there was a desire to play games like Ico, Katamari Damacy, and Guitar Freaks. Ironically, as PS4 and PS5 are region-free it's easier than ever before to import and even download games from Japan.

## TURN BACK TIME?

Has innovation become hamstrung by success? Big blockbuster releases have teams of over 500, cost millions to make, and five-plus years to finish... so something in the creative process has to give. I love Naughty Dog, but its focus on film-like narrative ensured The Last Of Us Part II's big gameplay idea was enabling Ellie to go prone. Solid Snake managed this feat in the first five minutes of Metal Gear Solid back in 1998.

It's left me gravitating towards games that score 7/10. Games that deliver a solid but flawed experience with one inventive idea well executed. It's why A Plague Tale: Innocence is one of my favourite games in recent times – the rat mob is a puzzle joy. We need to celebrate publishers such as Nacon, Team17, and Focus Home that allow smaller teams to innovate. We need to encourage the likes of 505 Games to keep enabling developers to experiment – it's why we have inventive games like Control and why the announced sequel to Ghostrunner is already on my radar.

While we can't turn back the clock, we can encourage developers to take risks and accept there is fun in failure.



At this rate, Ellie will be able to aim her gun in firstperson in about five games' time.

Every subsequent game is generally better than the last

# It's **everyone's** turn to play



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# REPLIES

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#2 A print mag with a world exclusive? Dying Light 2 made the cover...

### FREE AND PROUD

What week! We have had 14 minutes of beautiful gameplay showing Horizon Forbidden West, a new trailer for Dying Light 2 with a release date and then to cap it off issue 2 of PLAY.

I'm so glad that you've become independent as from a reader perspective, however, I know your thoughts on a game are genuine. That's not to saying before now I questioned them but I'm sure some people will have.

Iain Culverhouse

We've always held genuine opinions on games we

review and review – after all, we're here to offer advice on how you should spend your cash on games that are getting even more expensive.

### RATED OR DATED?

I was shocked to read online that some websites and bloggers don't finish a game when they review it, please tell me you guys don't skim-review? I mean, it's like reviewing a film by only watching the

**"I'M SO GLAD THAT YOU'VE BECOME INDEPENDENT [...] YOUR THOUGHTS ON A GAME ARE GENUINE."**

first hour. How can these reviewers give a proper opinion of a game?  
Caroline Webb

We always play to the credits, and often finish a game multiple times. Ian completed Resident Evil Village three times before reviewing. It's what makes print different to websites racing to be first with a hot take. We may be out later, but you can trust us to give every game a fair review.

### GEN X?

I thought Sony was supporting generations. The news that GT7 and God Of War 2 are coming to PS4 makes me feel cross-gen is going to last for years. Where's the next PS5-only game?

Mark Pearson

It's disappointing for PS5 owners but great news for PS4 players. There are more PS5-only games coming too, such as Ghostwire: Tokyo.

### STAR LETTER HALL OF FAME

I've been picking up the mag every month now since the first lockdown hit. The first place I go to, even before I've left the shop, is the hall of fame sections. I love a good list. I want to check what's new for my PS5 consideration and whether there are any PS4 breakthroughs in last month. But, I'm getting confused as to what actually gets a game onto these lists.

Currently REVIII Biohazard is at no. 21 on PS4's list. In issue 02 REVIII the review says of Resi 8 "It's a PS4 must-play that manages to better REVII." But no RE8 appears in the list

even though the magazine feels its a better game than RE7.

So my question is, can you help me – a big hall of fame fan – understand how the hall of fame works?

Richard Potticary



We all love a good list! The Hall Of Fames are always a month behind, as we add new games the issue after they're reviewed. How do we choose these games? Oscar, Jess and Ian settle it over a game of Risk. If that doesn't work we use the review scores as a guide. It's why Ghost Of Tsushima is not in there – maybe it should be? Oscar, get the Risk board out.



### CAN I GET A RT?

The most pleasing tweets from our timeline...



@AdamC1337

As someone with a leg/foot disability, the idea that i could just replace the offending item with a stronger, faster limb (or 4) if i wished it was an extremely cathartic experience for me. Being able to run and walk with no pain? That's the dream for me.



@XylOnJaY

Dude. I really wish I could buy a PS5 so I can get excited for the new headset. [...] not even being able to buy a single PS5 has been extremely disappointing.



@BeefyBaggie1965

Just fix the stupid Refs!!!



@MaximumPowerUP

The pitfalls of buying issue 1 of a mag which impresses you means you get sucked in for the long haul [...] Issue 2 of @PLAYgamingmag will be tonight's reading

TROLL OF THE MONTH



@brenberger84

Undermining yourself claiming Dan Aykroyd played Venkman in #ghostbusters



@WayneGMadden

I think the Independence from Sony will make the magazine stronger, its a shame more consoles don't have Independent Magazines in 2021. Off to buy Issue 2 now.



@GerardHavlin

you know I underestimated how much I miss a gaming mag. Made me focus in on the stories and even learned a few things this month. Cheers.



**f** "I WANT PROTOTYPE 3, THE FIRST 2 WERE AMAZING BUT THE INFAMOUS GAMES ARE QUITE GOOD TOO."  
**MAKE YOUR MIND UP, STEVEN HAYES**

**f** "JUST HURRY UP AND RELEASE THE DAMN GAME... BEEN WAITING TOO LONG"  
**DARREN NICHOLS WANTS FAR CRY 6**

# READERS' MOST WANTED

Which games are bleeping loudest on your radar?

**01**

## Horizon Forbidden West

Gaming's favourite redhead returns to the top of your most-wanted list. She's going to take over *everything*.  
**Format** PS5, PS4  
**ETA** 2021

**02**

## God Of War Ragnarok

Bumped off the top, even news Kratos is heading to PS4 can't withstand your love for Aloy.  
**Format** PS5, PS4  
**ETA** TBC

**03**

## Life Is Strange: True Colors

"You with the sad eyes..." Oh, erm, not that one. LIS crashes the top 5 most-wanted. A welcome addition.  
**Format** PS5, PS4  
**ETA** 10 Sep



**05**

## Kena: Bridge Of Spirits

It looks *sooooo* good. This is going to be 2021's breakout hit. We love it. You love it. PS5 loves it.  
**Format** PS5, PS4  
**ETA** 24 Aug

**04**

## Ghostwire: Tokyo

Creeping onto our list for the first time, this PS5-exclusive J-horror could be the next game to showcase PS5.  
**Format** PS5  
**ETA** TBC

## EXIT POLL

Our Facebook fans answer a final question



WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE TIME TRAVEL GAME?

**17%** Like their time shenanigans with heart - Life Is Strange.

**5%** We're all just dust in the wind... it's Prince Of Persia.

**14%** Go old-school with Chrono Trigger.



**16%** Raven Software's cult FPS, Singularity, gets the nod.

**6%** Titanfall 2 wall-runs into your fave time travel games.

## NEXT MONTH

What's your favourite island-based PlayStation game?

"THE BEAUTIFUL ART DESIGN  
REALLY HELPS KEEP YOU  
WANTING TO JUMP INTO  
PHOTO MODE."



— THIS MONTH'S THEME ARMOUR —

# Hot Shots

We're celebrating your very best PlayStation photo mode moments



## Winner

**Lauren Horton**  
Game: Ghost Of Tsushima

Reader Lauren Horton tells us she finds game photography a "beautiful way to create a new form of art," but adds, "Don't get caught up in trying to make your shots look like others you see, and do what you love! Find your inspiration and connect with others that can help you grow in your art and technique."

Lauren highlights how the photo mode community can help improve your technique. "It's full of wonderful people, and having others to discuss your photography with is a huge part of the enjoyment," she reveals.

We ask her why Ghost Of Tsushima has proved such a hit with photo mode lovers. "The beautiful art design really helps keep you wanting to jump into photo mode, and the photo mode itself, with everything that can be used to create something unique and beautiful. This is by far my favourite photo mode yet."

For her winning entry Lauren cropped in on the armour detail, picking out the texture of Jin's mask. The game's lush environments tend to take the lion's share of the attention, so it's refreshing to see a detail like this becoming a focal point.



## HONOURABLE MENTIONS

**1 Barry Paust**  
Game: Mortal Shell



The Enslaved Grisha boss impressed Barry enough to grab this

shot. "It had one chain that would hang from the cage around its head; it looked like a tongue." To capture the movement Barry used the game's frame advance feature. "I wanted the chain to look like it was being whipped from one direction to the other."

**2 TJ Marinelli**  
Game: Doom Eternal



TJ Marinelli loves Doom's character design but looks to the industry for ideas. "I take inspiration from concept art or films. So I'd always recommend that to anyone," says TJ, who also advises you look at other people's work, "and take inspiration from it. That's how I feel I've improved over the years".

**3 Erin Sandler**  
Game: Horizon Zero Dawn



This armour shot was taken from DLC The Frozen Wilds. "I decided to take this shot when I noticed how beautifully the sun lit up Aloy's face," says Erin Sandler. "The armour elements are beautifully designed and always enhance any photograph." We agree – this shot brings out the best in The Frozen Wilds' unique design.



## WIN!

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— NEXT MONTH'S THEME BEACHES —

# COVID

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**SIGN UP**





# THE HOT



# 50



50-01



From open-world adventures to cutting-edge shooters, these are the 50 hottest games you need to look out for – coming soon to your PS5, PS4 or PSVR

50

# SHADOW WARRIOR 3

The martial arts shooter  
targets Doom

**FORMAT** PS4 / ETA TBC / **PUB** DEVOLVER DIGITAL  
**DEV** FLYING WILD HOG / **PLAYERS** TBC

**W**ith the splattered blood settling on the recent Doom Eternal DLC, fans of fast-paced, gore-soaked shooters will be seeking a new challenge. As if Flying Wild Hog read your games collection and your mind, it finally announced its new run-and-gun extravaganza will be heading and beheading to PS4 later this year.

Praying at the same altar of chaos as the Doom revivals, Shadow Warrior 3 is a fast-paced blast that pits hero Lo Wang against an army of demons hell-bent on destroying a futuristic China. Blending Asian myths and legends with trigger-happy shooting, the game is a uniquely old-fashioned thrill with modern flourishes.

“Assuming that our Shadow Warrior series contributed to this renaissance a little bit, I would bet my money on the nostalgia factor,” says game director Kuba Opoń when we ask why old-school shooters are making a comeback. “Of course,” he adds, “the trick is how do we evoke these nostalgic emotions using contemporary design solutions.”

Picking at the scabs of old games, Opoń believes many of yesteryear’s classics worked because they ignored real-world rules, adopting a “greater ‘blindness’ to certain elements that are purely ‘videogame-ish’ and not realistic,” he explains. “We feel that there’s some driving need for fast, flippant

“WE FEEL THAT THERE’S SOME DRIVING NEED FOR FAST, FLIPPANT FUN.”

fun, given the last few years of serious, realistic, or dark FPS games. This is the kind of unfettered creativity that we ourselves strive for when creating *Shadow Warrior 3*.”

### DRAGON SPIRIT

While the previous game featured procedurally generated maps to keep us on our toes, this sequel is going to offer a more curated set of levels. Tighter design and a focussed story suggest *Shadow Warrior 3* could be a more rewarding shooter.

“Encounters are much more thought out, less chaotic, and at the same time, they will allow the players a lot of freedom and creativity when choosing the way with which to defeat their enemies,” reveals the developer. He tells us the story takes on a greater role, and enables the team to craft “spectacular moments”.

It also means, sadly, there are no online modes in *Shadow Warrior 3*. Yet, when the story-led events are massive – at one point Lo Wang’s pitted against a dragon – we can forgive the lack of a deathmatch. The dragon fight is no small feat either; this beast is huge and, Opoñ reveals, has grown a little out of control as development has progressed.

“When we started talking about the dragon in 2019, we used comparisons to the Great Wall of China. However, things have changed a bit since then and the dragon has gained a bit of weight, both literally and metaphorically,” he says. “We also wanted to present our dragon from a slightly different side to what we’re used to in games and have Lo Wang feel like an annoying insect on its back!”

Clearly, while *Shadow Warrior 3* shares a sense of purpose with *Doom* there are fundamental differences, most notably Lo Wang is a gymnastic ninja and not a clumping hell marine.

This sequel is developing the hero’s movement further than

# THE HOT 50



**1** Cyber-ninja Lo Wang is the name, slicing and dicing demons is the game. **2** This fat-bellied demon has the dual-mini-guns you're after – cut him down to size and steal them. **3** The new grappling hook ensures you can zip freely around the environments. **4** The blend of Doom-like sci-fi with ancient Chinese lore is a colourful spectacle.

» previous games. In the first game you could dash, the second brought in double jumps and parkour moves, and in this third entry the team are going “all in” with slides, wall-runs, ground pounds, and – the most visible change of all – the grappling hook. “[This] brings a whole new dimension to traversal and combat, especially when combined with other new features and weapons we’ve created,” exclaims Opoń.

The developer tells us the new movement mechanics have affected the team’s approach to level design. “I have to admit that this was one of the biggest challenges during the whole production,” he says, explaining how the combination of wall-runs, dashes, and grappling hook swings makes it possible for you to move huge distances without



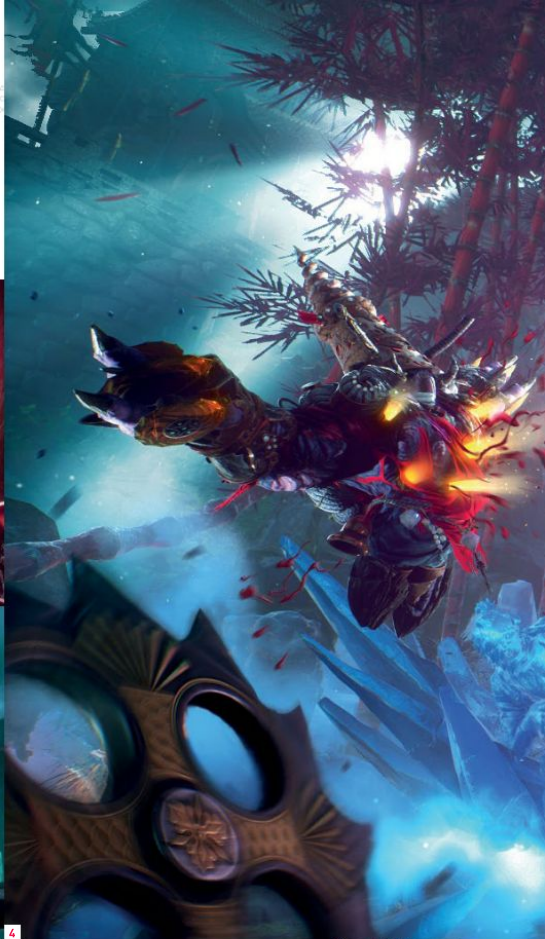
touching the ground. “The ability to instantly be two floors up has affected both the design of the arenas and the challenges posed to our AI,” he adds.

It’s made the team think in terms of vertical spaces when designing levels. The slide move also had repercussions, which “opened up new possibilities that we use in our

set-pieces and arenas, creating various passages through which the player can escape from the clutches of pursuing monsters.”

## CUT ABOVE

When it comes to the weapons, a mix of sword combos and guns, it’s a slightly different story as Shadow Warrior 3 has new arenas that act as





environmental weapons. “And it’s not just exploding red barrels, but entire complex machines that serve one purpose: to exterminate successive waves of enemies. Of course, the player should be careful of their current location when activating such a device, as they spare absolutely no-one.”

In action we see one of these Doom-like cauldrons designed to test your reflexes. It’s possible to use traps to your advantage, releasing whirring buzzsaw pillars to mince enemies. Getting more hands-on, Lo Wang can mix sword-based moves and guns to chop chunks out of his foes. Just like in Doom it’s possible to ‘execute’ beasts when up close. It’s bloody, and it’s brutal.

“To our traditional set of blood, gibs and guts, precise and clean katana slashes, bullet holes, and crushing opponents we added a whole set of finishers, which are completely new to our series,” says Opoñ. “They are intended to be very brutal and painful, but always with a certain amount of humour and craziness resulting from both the

character of our main hero and the original designs of our Yokai.”

Some of this humour translates into literal overkill. When Lo Wang yanks the new Double Trouble miniguns – an aptly named ‘Gore Weapon’ – from the belly of a demon and dual-wields the powerful firearms to turn the screen red, it’s a wild ride.

their default actions in significant ways, evolving the gameplay and opening up entirely new options.”

## LO AND BEHOLD

Progress and character development can be boosted by completing challenges found in the arenas, “which require improved crowd control, a focus on acquiring Gore

**“IT’S POSSIBLE TO USE ENVIRONMENTAL TRAPS TO YOUR ADVANTAGE, RELEASING WHIRRING BUZZSAW PILLARS TO MINCE ENEMIES.”**

The knockabout FPS gameplay is backed by a complex progression system that enables you to upgrade both Lo Wang’s skills and firearms. Upgrade points collected in the world are the currency, and suggest you’ll need to explore in order to boost your abilities.

“We have always appreciated players who like exploration, and this time their efforts will be rewarded,” says Opoñ. “Tailor-made upgrades to weapons change

Weapons, and managing the resources gathered from enemies.”

Finally, though Shadow Warrior 3 is releasing only on PS4, Opoñ says it will be forwards-compatible with Sony’s latest console, saying: “The game will take advantage of the speeds that come with SSD drives, the game itself will run at a higher resolution, and players will see an improvement in framefrates.”

This sounds so good, we’re happy to be Doomed.

“THE BLOOD HAS DRAWN  
THE ATTENTION OF  
SOMETHING VERY OLD  
AND VERY HUNGRY.”

## THE DARK PICTURES: HOUSE OF ASHES

Putting the terror in subterranean

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

**S**upermassive Games is known for wearing its horror inspirations on its sleeve, and here it's sticking to its signature style. Drawing inspiration from *The Descent*, *Aliens*, and *Predator*, its long-limbed ugly mother-flippers announce their presence to five new unfortunate souls by making a spinechilling clicking noise.

Ashley Tisdale takes the lead this time. It's 2003, and her character,

Rachel King, is a CIA officer based in Iraq. Investigating what's thought to be an underground weapon silo, King and a clutch of soldiers from both sides of the conflict get trapped underground. Surrounded by ancient Alkadian ruins, they all quickly realise the scent of blood has drawn the attention of something very old and very hungry.


Game director Will Doyle tells us that as well as horror cinema, the team has drawn inspiration from

the works of HP Lovecraft, specifically highlighting the novella *At The Mountains Of Madness*.

He describes *House Of Ashes* as “An exploration horror” in which “a group of experts on a critical mission, in a remote location, cut off from any backup, [end up] facing an inhuman enemy threat.”

### DEEPER UNDERGROUND

Doyle adds, “It's also a story about loyalty, duty, and trust.”



Everything we see from House Of Ashes avoids giving us a full-on look at what exactly is lurking in the shadows. We hear clicking and inhuman shrieking, we see long, sharp fingers inching over a precipice, and soldiers snatched away by an unseen presence. Doyle describes these bloodthirsty creatures as “some of the most complicated we’ve ever made.”

As in Supermassive’s earlier horror titles, your choices matter.

Rachel King, plus everyone else who falls into the sinkhole, lives or dies by your dialogue choices and QTEs. Building on Little Hope’s accessibility options, QTEs here can be fine-tuned to your skill level with a selection of difficulty settings. When the fates of your favourites rest on a sneaky button prompt, this is definitely a welcome addition.

Another welcome addition (for some players, anyway, though not for anyone who has a baffling

misplaced affection for fixed camera angles) is the introduction of free camera movement. There are still plenty of claustrophobic corridors to ramp up the tension, but the developer made the switch to a free camera to show off a variety of more open areas, including the vast, subterranean ruins. The change makes a lot of sense, especially as this is the first Dark Picture to explore the power of PS5. We’ll excavate its secrets later this year.

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## THE GREAT ACE ATTORNEY CHRONICLES

We've no objections to this mystery

FORMAT PS4 / ETA 27 JUL / PUB CAPCOM / DEV CAPCOM / PLAYERS 1

With the first three Ace Attorney games joining the PlayStation gallery back in 2019, it was a bit of a headscratcher as to when – if ever – any other games in the series would follow suit. *Chronicles* is a compilation of two games that never had an English-language release, in which a different pointy-haired protagonist takes the stand. Ryunosuke Naruhodo isn't a legal professional, unlike his descendant Phoenix Wright, but he has the priceless experience of having been accused of murder

himself. Exonerated with the help of his friend, law student Kazuma Asogi, the pair travel to England so that Asogi can complete his studies only for the plot to thicken.

Whereas Wright often only has to convince the judge in his courtroom, Naruhodo is up against a jury. Things may look dire if the entire jury turns in a guilty verdict, but it's far from case closed. During your closing argument you can interview each individual juror in a bid to change their mind and buy yourself more time to prove your client's innocence.

Naturally, there's a complicating factor – legally distinct detective Herlock Sholmes. While brilliant, your deductive partner has a habit of jumping to conclusions about key witnesses that threaten to send the whole case careening off course. It's up to you to point out the contradictions in Sholmes' deduction and get at the truth.

There's a reason this visual novel series is popular, and it's not solely down to how it incorporates more traditional adventure game aspects into its investigations. Get on the case this July.

47

## LOOPMANCER

Mysteries abound in this roguelite platformer

FORMAT PS4 / ETA TBC / PUB YOOREKA STUDIO  
DEV EBRAIN STUDIO / PLAYERS 1

This year is 2064 and a journalist with one hell of a scoop has gone missing in a city based on Hong Kong. You are a private detective with a metal arm searching for the journo. Gumshoe Xiang Zi Xu meets violent resistance as he digs deeper, though time is on his side. Caught in what he describes as a 'death loop,' you'll return to replay the same case time and again, newly armed each time.

It also helps that our hero knows his way around a blade. With over 100 weapons to unlock as well as upgrades for his prosthetic arm, you've plenty of options for dispatching enemies across seven huge platforming stages. The action is mostly 2.5D but *Loopmancer's* not afraid to style it out with close-up camera zooms and spins to give the retro-action a more modern dynamism.



Die and you replay the same moment over and over, learning new skills and weapons as you go. Be warned, your enemies remember what happened too.

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## JURASSIC PARK EVOLUTION 2

A sequel that spares no expense

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 2021 / PUB FRONTIER DEVELOPMENTS  
DEV FRONTIER DEVELOPMENTS / PLAYERS 1

Despite the series being an ode to why it's a bad idea to bring back extinct species, running a dino zoo remains a compelling fantasy. Frontier's 2018 sim is getting a follow up, this time with an all-new narrative campaign and new dinos, as well as greatly expanded construction and

customisation options. The sequel encourages you to make the bad situation waiting to happen feel truly like your own.

Both Jeff Goldblum and Bryce Dallas Howard reprise their film franchise roles to chime in that they told you so when your T-rex surely escapes its bounds.



Even the friendliest dinosaurs can cause havoc if they escape. Your park is an accident waiting to happen – how long can you keep things on track for?





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45

## FRACKED

Put the drills down, this is anything but boring

**F** FORMAT PSVR / ETA SUMMER 2021 / PUB NDREAMS LTD  
 DEV NDREAMS LTD / PLAYERS 1

**S**tuck in a snowy mountain fracking facility, you discover the region has been taken over by the aptly named Fracked, interdimensional gun-toting beings. The only thing stopping them from world domination is you. Showing you into a high-octane action thriller where the big action is all 1:1, this game aims to turn anyone with a VR headset into an action hero.

Creative director Steve Watt promises "no on-rails gameplay and cinematic cutscenes here," and just like a modern-day James Bond, you do it all, from skiing between parts of the bases to sliding down a zipline, and even

base jumping. And you don't simply walk, your traversal methods include free running, swinging on ropes, and climbing. Naturally, it wouldn't be possible without VR, and controllers like PS Move.

That 1:1 immersion creates "presence", one of Watt's keywords for the project. No matter what sort of player they are, all those who've tested the game have slipped straight into that action movie mentality. It also makes the game more accessible – even your nan can conceptualise how to ski or hold onto a rope.

It's not as if there are no abstractions. Walking, for example, isn't something you need to worry

about, but the team makes sure all those big bombastic moments are entirely in your hands. To assist players thrown into these large combat arenas there's Battlefield Intuition, which helps keep things fast-paced by providing information on a 360-degree area. Given how dynamic and vertical some of the areas are, it's definitely appreciated. This is shaping up to be the de facto PSVR action romp. To top it off, Fracked will be enhanced when playing on PS5.

44

## AFTER THE FALL

The '80s got a little too cool

**F** FORMAT PSVR / ETA SUMMER 2021 / PUB VERTIGO GAMES  
 DEV VERTIGO GAMES / PLAYERS 1-4

**L**os Angeles was cool in the '80s. Literally. So cold, in fact, that hell froze over, preserving it as an icy apocalypse right the way to 2005. It's here where this VR FPS from the Arizona Sunshine devs picks up, as survivors pick over the ruined remains of a once-sunny 1980s.

Unfortunately those Californian chills are the perfect temperature for preserving dead bodies. These

Snowbreed are the result of a designer drug, which mutated them into zombies that have terrorised humanity to the brink of extinction. Our survivors are immune to the drug, and now it's up to them to use their special abilities to turn the tables and survive.

As this is in VR, the '80s synth soundtrack is a score to your own action movie. You move in real life to wield your weapons and powers, making the experience fully immersive and adding a whole new layer to the four-player team combat – almost like a much more frightening laser tag. Whether you're tossing an explosive, reloading your pistol, or holding it with a side grip as you slide through a blizzard on a zipline popping zombie heads on the other side, it's better with friends.



"You're as cold as ice" – Foreigner sung about frost zombies, clearly.

43

I EXPECT YOU TO DIE 2:  
THE SPY & THE LIAR

A few tricks up your sleeve

**F** FORMAT PSVR / ETA 2021 / PUB SCHELL GAMES  
 DEV SCHELL GAMES / PLAYERS 1

**T**here's no James Bond turning to shoot down a gun barrel' camera angle here. Instead, you are both the spy and the camera in this '60s-inspired spy-'em-up that puts you into deviously designed rooms and challenges you to save the day.

This is a cohesive set of levels that doubles down on what the community loved about the first game and its extra DLC missions. That means more unique interactions and special tools for each puzzling level, whether that's reflecting lasers with silverware or sneaking backstage at a theatre to liberate a crossbow and shield.

It's all about the physics of movement, using your hands and telekinesis to rifle through rooms.

The tongue-in-cheek tone encourages experimentation, allowing you to become your own ultimate gadget, playing around with potential puzzle solutions (or just pouring champagne over yourself). Bigger, better, sillier, I Expect You To Die 2 promises to make you feel like the ultimate spy, and have you grinning while doing it.



Bad at wine and dining? Try your hand at wine and dying.



See that building? You can deduce there. While your reason for being on Cortona is a sad one, we have to admit it's rather lovely to wander around and explore.



## SHERLOCK HOLMES CHAPTER ONE

Learning the elementary

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 2021 / PUB FROGWARES  
DEV FROGWARES / PLAYERS 1

**Y**ou're off to the Mediterranean island of Cortona with your dishy and mysterious mate Jon. This is no lads' holiday – you, young Sherlock Holmes, are here to mourn your recently deceased mother at your childhood home. But that doesn't stop you getting into a mess of trouble.

You've barely checked into the hotel when the game's afoot. You end up looking into a seance gone wrong and hunting a missing diamond before you can even neck a beer in the sunshine. This opening case which we go hands-on with, *Ghosts Of The Past*, is classic Holmes stuff, and a great way to settle us back into the deerstalker hat of Frogwares' famous detective (though here hats are optional, serving as devious disguises).

### ONE-PIPE PROBLEM

In keeping with Frogwares' previous Holmes games you question suspects, find clues, and bash ideas together in your Mind Palace to make deductions. There's some nuance, as often

evidence can point to incorrect conclusions – you are a youthful and inexperienced detective, after all – so you need to meet it halfway if you want to actually solve the case properly.

Newer enhancements, like pinning evidence in order to quiz loiterers in an area, add an extra layer of pipe-pondering. One, a Watch-Dogs-style detective vision that quickly reveals facts about passersby, like their occupation or demeanor, plays into cases when you're looking for suspects of a certain description, and adds flavour to this new Holmesian open world.

Unlike in the developer's cosmic horror adventure *The Sinking City*, the open world is gorgeous instead of flooded, and feels lived in. Combat will be an option in some cases, but from what we've seen there's a real focus on thoughtful deduction, bringing this much more in line with the likes of fan-favourite *Crimes & Punishments* than *The Devil's Daughter*, with a pinch of lovely side content. This could be a wonderful return to form for the great detective.



## CRIS TALES

Right more than twice a day

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 20 JUL / PUB MODUS GAMES  
DEV DREAMS UNCORPORATED, SYCK / PLAYERS 1

**T**iming is everything, the saying goes, and for this game's lead character Crisbell that's true, as it determines the fates of each kingdom she visits. This JRPG-inspired adventure casts you as a hero with time powers, using them not just to weave a tale where the future has yet to be fully determined, but to create inventive battles and dungeons too.

As you explore each town, you're able to see the past on the left-hand side of the screen, and the current future on the right, with your present focussed in the middle.

You need to travel around to track down crystal murals in order to save your world, but how each place you visit ends up will depend on your actions.

### TIMELESS CLASSIC

The devs tease multiple endings, running the gamut from good to bad, depending on the choices and changes you make. They also promise the most excellent

ending will be tough to achieve (remember the golden rule: be excellent to each other). You can't cut any corners if you want to ensure time unfurls in ways that solve everyone's problems rather than help you alone.

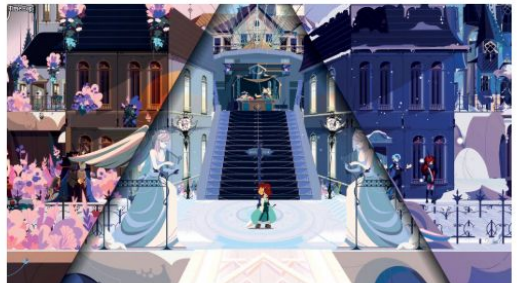
You don't want to use your time powers to help enemies, though. Quite the contrary. You're able to knock foes back and forth through time, meaning in some fights you might need to de-age enemies to make them weaker, while in others you must send them forwards in time to

say, rust a metal shield after you get it wet, leaving them vulnerable. Pulling off the right moves is

like solving a puzzle.

Gorgeous 2D visuals pair with 3D, diorama-like maps, which feel almost like a pop-up book that you can run around. Dungeons boast unique mechanics to keep them fresh. For example, there's one where you can push platforms around to port to different locations, including the ceiling. The best news? It's almost time to play.

**"YOU'RE ABLE TO  
KNOCK FOES BACK AND  
FORTH THROUGH TIME."**



You can see the past, present, and future at all times – but none of those periods are fixed. Change the past to alter the present, and create a new future.

40

## LOST JUDGMENT

Beating enemies with the scales of justice

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 24 SEP / PUB SEGA  
DEV RYU GA GOTOKU STUDIO / PLAYERS 1

**O**ne case might have been closed, but if the Yakuza series has taught us anything it's that on the crime-laden streets of Kamurocho there's always some new villainy afoot. In series spin-off Judgment, that meant a new lead character, swapping ex-yakuza with a heart of gold Kazuma Kiryu for disgraced defence attorney turned private eye Takayuki Yagami (whose partner just happens to be a different ex-yakuza with a heart of gold, Masaharu Kaito).

While the previous games were set in the well-trodden streets of Kamurocho, the heart of almost all Ryu Ga Gotoku Studio's crime thrillers, this time the action's happening across the bay in Yokohama. You're able to travel between both districts, but the site of the grisly new crime is »



## THE HOT 50

there. It's also the location that was the setting for *Yakuza: Like a Dragon*, another reimagining of the *Yakuza* format. But, as years visiting Kamurocho have taught us, the devs are skilled at repurposing previous maps to evolve them over time, keeping them interesting while also taking advantage of the familiarity series veterans build up over time.

### FISTS OF JUSTICE

Where *Like a Dragon* ditched the brawling in favour of turn-based combat, *Judgment* returns to real-time fisticuffs. Yagami's own streetfighting skills are less heavy-handed than Kiryu's, utilising the hero's martial arts training to bring a different feel to the Dragon-Engine-powered combat. It's just as over-the-top as you'd expect, with huge finishing moves that comically send criminals flying, and Yagami switching stances to access alternative movesets in the heat of battle.

The Crane and Tiger fighting styles return, now joined by the Snake style. Built around deflection and counters, it offers a change of cadence to fights, allowing you to tussle bit more smartly. And you don't need to be a maths whizz to realise that adding a third moveset to Yagami's actions means this offers a lot more variety than the previous binary switching. Whacking foes in the honker is always going to result in a good time, but now you can be more expressive with your beatdowns.

To be honest, that fist-freedom was something that was lacking when the studio first switched to the



solve cases. And this time around the job might be the most challenging he's ever taken on – investigating a suspect who has seemingly pulled off the perfect crime, with an alibi that appears rock-solid.

### A-LIE-BI

As police officer Akihiro Ehara takes the stand and is sentenced to six months of penal service for groping a woman on a train, he reveals gleefully to the court that he knows about an undiscovered body in Yokohama, the corpse of someone

(returning from the first game), who believes the incidents are connected, and the original investigation is fishy. Naturally, she calls upon Yagami to help reveal the truth behind the simultaneous incidents Ehara was involved with, as well as the previous murder of Ehara's son.

Of course, things spiral out of control, and Yagami and Kaito end up tangled in a conspiracy that delves deep into the way justice is served in Japan (something *Ace Attorney* fans might be familiar with). As a former lawyer, Yagami's own beliefs will be called into question, as well as what the right path is for pursuing true justice. It's a bona fide legal thriller.

### GETTING SNOOPY

Sounds heavy? At times it's sure to be. Ryu Ga Gotoku Studio regularly drafts in seasoned Japanese crime writers to tell compelling, legitimate narratives that can be tense and emotional rollercoaster rides, ensuring its titles offer some of the most mature storytelling of any videogames around.

And yet Yagami is also the kind of guy who does flips on a skateboard, dresses up in comical disguises, and this time around even infiltrates a school in Yokohama. There he takes part in minigames such as dancing

**“WHACKING FOES IN THE HONKER ALWAYS RESULTS IN A GOOD TIME, BUT NOW YOU CAN BE MORE EXPRESSIVE WITH YOUR BEATDOWNS.”**

Dragon Engine, between *Yakuza 0* (which itself had multiple schools of combat) and *Yakuza 6*. It's great to see *Lost Judgment* not only making the detective-'em-up a series in its own right, distinct from *Yakuza*, but also carrying the smackdown belt forward to continue to improve brawling in a way that can rival the best of the previous bunch.

Yagami isn't exclusively focussed on roughing up thugs in the street. As a detective, his goal is actually to

who was murdered at the same time as the incident he's being convicted of. Accusing the horrifically tortured victim of killing his son, he claims nothing was ever done about it, and that the legal system is a joke. Having been sentenced for a crime happening at the same time as this new murder, he's made himself bulletproof, and publicly shown up the court system.

This comes as a surprise to his defence attorney Saori Shirosaki



and robotics in order to complete School Story sub-quests. He assists a variety of students with their problems, undoubtedly helping them learn something about themselves while also learning from the kids. It's a little 'School Of Rock meets The Raid', and it's bound to be laugh-out-loud hilarious, as will the other, non-school-related sub-quests. As usual, the devs manage to balance the white-knuckle legal thriller of the main

plot with some of the funniest side activities in gaming.

Ever the detective, Yagami needs to use his private eye skills to complete missions, both within and outside the main plot. These were fun in the first game, but somewhat limited, often involving a hefty dose of tailing. These have evolved in *Lost Judgment* to be more engaging (though tailing does return), giving Yagami some new tools, including a coin to distract enemies (but no

**1** Yagami works pro bono. As in, he's pro knocking the teeth out of ne'er-do-wells' skulls. **2** As long as nobody looks up, Yagami is one of the stealthiest operators around town. **3** Port town Yokohama is a location we've been to before, but not to carry out this style of stealthy sleuthing activity. **4** The likenesses of famous Japanese actors add credence to the legal thriller story. Takuya Kimura, who plays Yagami, is a massive celebrity in Japan.

silverballers – Yagami prefers to get up close and personal), more gadgets, and parkour moves, like hanging off ledges on buildings, to enable him to stay out of sight when stealthing through the streets.

It's not just the story of challenging the legal system that's going big. *Lost Judgment* will also mark the first time Ryu Ga Gotoku Studio releases a game on PS4 and PS5 simultaneously, meaning it will benefit more fully from the new hardware. If the PS5 version of *Judgment* is anything to go by, the addition of 60fps will be especially effective for the fast-paced street brawling. It's also the first time any game related to Yakuza has had a global launch date – usually we've had to wait a year or so after the game's launched in Japan to play it in the West, at the very least. With a great English-language dub in tow, Yagami is taking the world by storm.

39

## THE INVINCIBLE

Far from alone in the universe

FORMAT PS5 / ETA 2022 / PUB TBC / DEV STARWARD INDUSTRIES / PLAYERS 1

**A**dapting literary works into playable experiences is an egg only a few developers have attempted to crack. New studio Starward Industries' first project is attempting to do just that for Polish science fiction writer Stanislaw Lem's 1964 novel of the same name.

The game's set in a future when the Cold War never ended and the digital revolution never took root. Caught between superpowers still obsessed with the space race, you play in first-person as an astronaut dependent on analogue technology boasting a distinctly atompunk

aesthetic. When disaster strikes far from home, it's up to you to locate your missing crewmates.

In the original novel, the spacecraft Invincible lands on the lonely planet of Regis III to investigate why its sister vessel, Condor, crashed. As Invincible's crew explore the planet, they find it is far from uninhabited. The story centres on exploring the humans' attempts to

communicate with profoundly alien beings – a recurring theme in Lem's work, *Solaris* in particular – and it's not hard to see why this story is so enduring or why game

developers continue to draw inspiration from his writings.

Coming from a small team of just 12 devs, the project has been in development since 2018. Starward Industries' CEO, Marek Markuszewski, previously worked on various projects at CD Projekt Red as a senior producer. Markuszewski says *The Invincible* combines "a fascinating setting, iconic story, and an established non-linear gameplay to deliver a truly unforgettable experience."

**"SET IN A FUTURE  
WHEN THE COLD WAR  
NEVER ENDED."**

38

## LIES OF P

Follow your nose

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA TBC / PUB NEOWIZ GAMES  
DEV ROUND8 STUDIO / PLAYERS 1

**G**ames that scratch that gothic horror itch – relying on atmosphere and evoking a sense of dread rather than outright gore – are few and far between. If you enjoy them and long for more, this self-described soulslike which darkly reimagines a classic fairy tale may well be what you're looking for.

As Pinocchio, you must find Mr Geppetto. Forget the small boy of

the animated movie, though – with your floppy cuffs and frock coat, not to mention a gleaming metal hand, you're a rather capable young artificial man. Even so, stranded in a city lost to plague, your task is not an easy one. In this dark Belle Époque world, you can't trust anyone and as you might expect, lying plays a key role in how your fate unfolds as with each lie, you become more human.



As a puppet, you can swap out body parts to give yourself an edge. We're intrigued to learn whether lying limits your augmentation options.

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## DUSTBORN

An adventure to shout about

FORMAT PS4 / ETA 2021 / PUB QUANTIC DREAM  
DEV RED THREAD GAMES / PLAYERS 1

**W**ords matter – especially when you're an Anomal [no, not an animal!] with weird superpowers fuelled by misinformation. Which you are in this story-driven action-adventure from the developers behind the excellent fjord-noir *Draugen*.

In a colourful, comic book-style post-apocalyptic world, you're transporting a mysterious cargo across America. Pursued by

Puritans and four months pregnant, as protagonist Pax you're going to need to gather a crew of fellow misfits around you for support.

Away from your tour bus, friendly faces are few and far between. You'll have to use every trick in the book to reach your destination, using words as literal weapons (belting out MOVE to shift people out of the way, for example) as you cross from the west coast to the east.



Words matter in this strange future – your dialogue choices will have an impact, but you can even use words in combat here. Talk about getting verbal!



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# GOODBYE VOLCANO HIGH

Fangs for the memories

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 2021 / PUB KO\_OP / DEV KO\_OP / PLAYERS 1

**F**or many, school can be a special kind of hell. In between the pressures of keeping up academically and trying to figure out who your friends are, you're also deciding who you want to be. A meteorite on a collision course with everything you know may well be the least of your worries.

In this game centring on a cast of anthropomorphised dinosaurs, you come to terms with the approaching end of an era. Playing as Fang, a high school senior whose band has the potential to hit the big time, you make musical decisions as well as dialogue choices.

Studio founder and co-creative director Saleem Dabbous explains that KO\_OP's latest project takes some inspiration from BioWare's approach to conversation. He tells us, "Those bits are gameplay through UI, and storytelling through UI, and UI is our primary canvas for gameplay in our game."

## YEARBOOK COMMITTEE

Co-creative director Kyle McKernan adds, "There are lots and lots of choices so all that stuff is adding up and changing how the story unfolds and how characters react to you, or what scenes you might get."

Dabbous later says, "It's not just dialogue choices. There's also other elements of gameplay to our game. It's about creating a balance – how

our narrative, how our gameplay, and how our audio all come together through this UI. It revealed a story of Goodbye Volcano High [and that's] what makes the game special to us."

"We also draw a lot of inspiration from visual novels," Dabbous tells us. He goes on to say, "but I think that what maybe enters people's minds when they think of a visual novel is a very static experience. For us, it's really about taking something like *The Walking Dead* and the conversation bits where you have multiple options for reacting to things and how you have all those cinematic [conventions] of shot reverse shot [...] [Our project is] that but in 2D."

We'll sign these dinosaur seniors' yearbooks on PS5 later this year.

Fang has known their bestie Trish forever – but will artistic differences send them down different paths?



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## RUINED KING: A LEAGUE OF LEGENDS STORY

Changing lanes to become a new champion

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 2021 / PUB RIOT FORGE  
DEV AIRSHIP SYNDICATE / PLAYERS 1

**T**he massively popular MOBA series might be in a league of its own, but it's gaming Marmite. You either love being cussed out by your teammates or you don't. But the world and characters are evolving into other gaming genres, with this turn-based RPG headed up by Airship Syndicate (which made the marvellous Darksiders Genesis). Combat uses a lane-based system in a cute nod to the original, and has fan favourite Champions exploring Bilgewater and the surrounding Shadow Isles in a pirate-scented voyage.

"COMBAT USES  
A LANE-BASED  
SYSTEM."



34

## IN SOUND MIND

A new sort of couchplay

FORMAT PS5 / ETA 3 AUG / PUB MODUS GAMES  
DEV WE CREATE STUFF / PLAYERS 1

**W**hack on a tape and you'll get transported. Unfortunately what's on it isn't sick beats but the therapy sessions of one of your clients – you're a therapist, and you're entering nightmarish reflections of their problems in an attempt to escape a haunted apartment block.

Each stage introduces unique mechanics and playful puzzles that feel rewarding to poke at. You're stalked by supernatural enemies, but their links to your clients' traumas means each is distinctive, from a ghost you ward off with her own reflection to a black-hole creature you need to trick into removing obstacles for you.



33

## SEVERED STEEL

What the vox(ell) is happening?

FORMAT PS4 / ETA 2021 / PUB DIGERATI  
DEV GREYLOCK STUDIO / PLAYERS 1

**C**reate your own action movie at high speeds in this FPS that's as much about stunting and looking cool as it is popping enemies with bullets. Lashings of bullet time helps you stay slick when on the move, chaining together slides, wall runs, and flips, all while continuing to fire and aim with only one hand (your other is an arm cannon that can blast through walls). Thanks to its voxel-based design, the shiny levels can come apart wherever, and are entirely destructible. And it's all being built with accessibility for one-handed players in mind too.



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## ARAGAMI 2

Three shadows: better than one

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 17 SEP / PUB LINCE WORKS,  
YOOREKA STUDIO (CHINA) / DEV LINCE WORKS  
PLAYERS 1-3

**S**tealth doesn't just mean waiting for enemies to move out of their patrol routes. As a titular aragami, you can control the shadows, able to whip your way through hideyholes gracefully, performing takedowns and stealth kills as you go. This means plenty of looking down from vantage points before you make your move. With a campaign that's playable with three players in co-op, you can customise your assassin to stand out from the crowd (or to blend in to one).





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## LEMNIS GATE

Who's got the time?

**FORMAT** PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 3 AUG / **PUB** FRONTIER  
FOUNDRY / **DEV** RATLOOP GAMES CANADA / **PLAYERS** 1-4

**W**hat if you didn't need loads of other players to get a squad-based FPS shooter underway? Like a master of puppets, Lemnis Gate allows you to pull the strings of a timey-wimey bout of one-upmanship, as you control an entire team yourself. Each player takes 25-second turns, directing one member of their squad per turn, so you can direct one team member to shoot your opponent before they grab their loot, another to lay traps where you expect them to run next, or simply plop down a load of turrets. More intuitive than it sounds.



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## GROW: SONG OF THE EVERTREE

Make your own happily ever after

**FORMAT** PS4 / **ETA** 2021 / **PUB** 505 GAMES  
**DEV** PRIDEFUL SLOTH / **PLAYERS** 1

**Y**our home of Alaria was once a beautiful, vibrant paradise. The Withering has taken hold of the land, spreading its thorny tendrils to reduce the Evertree from which life flowed to a mere sapling. It's up to you to get things growing again, restoring colour and life to the world. Merging life sim and exploration into a 3D sandbox environment, bringing old inhabitants back to grow a sleepy town is sure to be a memorable experience.



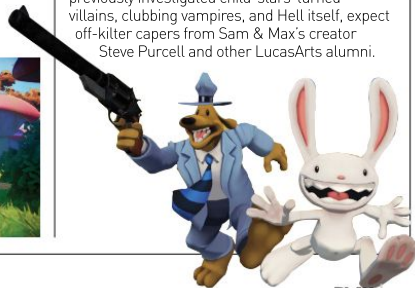
29

## SAM & MAX: THIS TIME IT'S VIRTUAL

Call the Freelance Police!

**FORMAT** PSVR / **ETA** 2021 / **PUB** BIG SUGAR  
**DEV** HAPPYGIANT / **PLAYERS** 1

**W**hen you need something done, you need this naked rabbit and his suited dog pal with a gun almost as big as he is on the case. And this time, thanks to VR, *you're* along for the ride. Which includes Freelance Police Academy training, and investigating something odd beneath Cap'n Aquabear's theme park. Given they've previously investigated child-stars-turned-villains, clubbing vampires, and Hell itself, expect off-kilter capers from Sam & Max's creator Steve Purcell and other LucasArts alumni.



“SHIONNE HARNESSSES  
THE PLANET’S ASTRAL  
ENERGY TO CALL FORTH  
A MAGICAL SWORD.”



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## TALES OF ARISE

The latest Tales RPG is ready to arise and shine

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 9 SEP / PUB BANDAI NAMCO / DEV BANDAI NAMCO STUDIOS / PLAYERS 1

**F**or almost a decade, Tales games were released like clockwork, with nary a hair's

breadth between them. The three-year gap between *Tales Of Xillia 2* and *Tales Of Zestiria* was the longest between entries, until Bandai Namco took time to reboot the series following 2016's *Tales Of Berseria*.

Enter *Tales Of Arise*, a game primed to breathe fresh life into the beloved series. *Arise* entered development ahead of 2018's *Tales Of Vesperia* remaster, time Bandai Namco Studios used to rediscover and refine *Tales'* strengths. *Arise* is fundamentally a *Tales* game – it's linear, it uses the series' Linear Motion battle system and Mystic Artes attacks, and it brings back skits, the regular delightful interludes in which characters chat with one another. However, it also has a few new tricks up its sleeve: this is the first *Tales* game not to use Bandai Namco's proprietary engine, its world being rendered in Unreal Engine 4 instead. And while it's been delayed from its planned 2020 release, that delay has brought us a PS5 version, which will make use of the DualSense's haptic feedback ➤



» and also offer a choice of performance modes.

### HEAVY HITTING

Despite using tried-and-tested fighting systems, combat is a good deal more fluent than before, with hero Alphen slashing away at his enemies in rapid succession. We also get a glimpse of two new

team up with another character for a special attack. As its name suggests, the Boost Finisher is a powerful finishing move, which becomes available once an enemy's health has been suitably depleted. To get in and out of battle even more quickly, Arise foregoes the combat end sequence, dropping you back into the world straight away so

## “TO SHARE TALES WITH THE WHOLE WORLD, ITS MAKERS HAD TO BECOME ADVENTUROUS.”

attacks: Boost Attack and Boost Finisher. The former is a combo attack which can be performed by you and a support character together under specific circumstances. It's less like Tales Of Symphonia's Unison Attacks, which required constant input, and more like the Combat Links in Nihon Falcom's Trails Of Cold Steel, with a button prompt that lets you briefly

you always remain on the move.

World travel itself promises to involve more than slaying monsters, thanks to your ability to jump, climb, and swim. These may seem like small changes, but Tales has always been staunchly traditional, and has rarely been described as particularly good-looking. Revealing Tales Of Arise to Japanese Famitsu, producer Yusuke Tomizawa

described the new game's concept as one of “inheritance and evolution” leading to “an RPG for everyone,” which means it's suited to both long-time fans and newcomers. It's reminiscent of the approach taken with Final Fantasy XV, which similarly shifted gears for the series, though Bandai Namco might be approaching making changes more savvily. Fans of the series' anime sequences can rejoice – Arise will once again feature cutscenes by studio Ufotable, which has worked with the Tales team since Tales Of Xillia and provided Tales anime adaptations.

### TALL TALES

The story of Tales Of Arise concerns nothing less than an interplanetary conflict. For the last 300 years, the planet of Dahna, rich in natural resources, has been invaded and exploited by forces from the nearby planet Rena, thanks to Rena's scientific and magical superiority.



**1** In combat, Alphen and Shionne make a deadly dream team thanks to team attacks and heavy-hitting finishers.

**2** The sense of scale has changed from previous entries in the Tales series, making enemies appear large and daunting. **3** Shionne isn't just a capable magician, she's a skilled sharpshooter as well. **4** Overenthusiastically-applied face paint and glowing armour: Biezo sure looks like a well-adjusted human being.

The overall plot remains a mystery, but in Biezo, an axe-wielding slave driver intent on capturing as many Dahnans as possible, we've got at least one villain. Our protagonists are the Dahna-native Alphen and Shionne, who has fled Rena and is still being pursued by troops from her home planet. Due to events in his past he himself can't remember, Alphen wears a mask over his face, giving him the nickname 'Iron Mask' (calm down, DiCaprio fans). The mysterious Shionne is cursed with inflicting excruciating pain on anyone who touches her, and is able

to harness the planet's astral energy to call forth a magical sword.

But it takes more than two people to make a party. Looking at some early missions, we see the two helping a resistance group and meeting young Rinwell, who can use magic (traditionally a trait of Renan people) despite hailing from Dahna. Hootle, a small, exceptionally rotund owl, has been with Rinwell through thick and thin and never leaves her side. Meanwhile, the aptly named Law is a police officer, a person from Dahna who's proudly working for Rena forces. Given that

background you'd expect him to be at odds with our rebellious friends, so it'll be interesting to see how he ends up in the party.

Tomizawa says to share the Tales series with the whole world, its makers had to become adventurous. We don't know about adventurous, but Tales Of Arise looks intriguingly different, beautiful, and poised to examine heavy topics like slavery and indoctrination. Whether or not it will increase Tales' worldwide acclaim, it looks like a lot of thought was put into creating something many JRPG fans will enjoy.



## HAROLD HALIBUT

Look out space, Fedoras are go

FORMAT PS4 / ETA TBC / PUB SLOW BROS / DEV SLOW BROS / PLAYERS 1

**T**he Cold War isn't just a setting for Call Of Duty campaigns. It was a real, tumultuous time when the threat of nuclear disaster was all too real. Harold Halibut is set 250 years after an ark launched into space to preserve humanity amid fears of global destruction, and it's a jaw-dropping stop-motion visual feast.

Unfortunately, the spaceship Fedora's target 'habitable' planet turned out not to have any land masses, instead being covered in water with a toxic above-surface atmosphere, meaning that the refugees from Earth have had to

are "walnut"-sized, the goal has been to meld Slow Bros' love of stop-motion animation with narrative adventure games. The character animation has been motion captured from those models, and there are over 40 of them in the game, with about eight hours of fully voiced dialogue spread across an adventure that promises about twice that, estimated at 12 to 18 hours of activity.

### SINKING FEELING

Harold Halibut himself is a lab assistant for Jeanne Mareux, the Fedora's lead scientist. That's a pretty important position when

**"THE SETS AND CHARACTERS HAVE BEEN MADE USING TRADITIONAL TECHNIQUES AND MATERIALS AND SCANNED INTO THE GAME."**

adapt to living underwater, tipping their hats to the Fedora for providing them sanctuary.

### STOP THE PRESSES

With classic stop-motion looks and assisted by its retro-future aesthetic, it looks like a super-high-resolution, playable '60s Gerry Anderson 'Supermarionation' TV series (think Thunderbirds and Stingray). The sets and characters don't just resemble animated models, they've been made using traditional techniques and materials and scanned into the game.

From the detailed sets to the characters themselves, whose heads

every person in your population is relying on the spaceship to keep them alive deep below an alien sea. Generations have been born and died since the Fedora's launch (some older folk on the ship can remember the initial landing), so the community is a close-knit one made up of interesting people, many of whom could use a helping hand from Halibut.

Some have grown accustomed to their lives, but just as some people on Earth dream of a life in space, some of the younger generation of Fedora residents dream of something more - either of returning to their home planet, or



striking out to find a more habitable world than the one on which they find themselves.

Either way, after a strange signal is revealed to be a countdown window for the Fedora to launch once again, the time in which they can make the decision to stay or go, and prepare to live with their choice, begins to tick down. If they miss it, they'll have to wait another 80 years before they can make the decision again. At the same time, Harold stumbles upon an encounter that reveals more about the planet they're already on.

An adventure that's been crafted with care, the animations look fluid, wider dioramas combining with zoomed-in close-ups to make you feel you're really inside a beautiful stop-motion world. Harold appears to be a caring, softly spoken hero who just wants to do the right thing, and it's a tale about finding out just what the right thing is, and when you should follow your dreams and when you should work to make things better where you already are.





**1** The Fedora's captain was born into the role, even though the spaceship is grounded (or possibly 'watered').  
**2** Models are detailed enough for Slow Bros to be unafraid to pull the camera in to fully immerse you in Harold's world.  
**3** The inhabitants of Fedora might not be as alone as they think. But what does that mean for their future? **4** Making the stop-motion is delicate work, but it all shows in the finely crafted adventure.



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## JETT: THE FAR SHORE

Across the universe

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

**M**ei and her co-pilot Iso set out on a one-way interstellar journey. They're heralded not only by prophecy but also a phenomenon known as The Hymnwave. Acting as a sort of astral call and response, it beckons Mei's people beyond their own troubled skies. What follows is a narrative-led exploration game. As Mei journeys to a new planet, the story attempts to thoughtfully examine a people's quest for a home away from home.

As you might expect, much of that takes place from the cockpit of

your titular aircraft. You glide between the stars and along coastlines alike but there's plenty to see on foot as well. As Mei explores, we feel each step thanks to rumble from the DualSense.

But this is far from a lonely jaunt, with plenty of flora and fauna to interact with. Rather than having to battle your way home as in other spacefaring titles, here many early encounters with alien life – in all its forms – feel more collaborative than combative. For instance, some water-based organisms can produce a vapour that cools your

aircraft's jets so you don't have to take your foot off the pedal. In another example an impressively large creature has got one of your crew's beacons in its sights. The creature acts with curiosity rather than anything else but its ear-shattering cries wreak havoc with the ship's shields. Hopping around explosive alien plants called Boombuds propels us into the big beastie's stratosphere and hopefully to the rescue.

It's far from the only perilous encounter you'll have, and we can't wait to see what else is in the stars.

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## EVIL DEAD: THE GAME

Hail to the king?

**F** FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 2021 / **PUB** BOSS TEAM GAMES  
**DEV** SABER INTERACTIVE / **PLAYERS** 1-4

**W**orld War Z was a surprise co-op shooter package when it launched in 2019. Sabre is back with a similar pitch for Evil Dead, as the famous faces from the film franchise, including Ash, Kelly Maxwell, Pablo Simon Bolivar, Scotty, and Lord Arthur gather at equally familiar locations to battle Deadites and vanquish demons.

Expect classic horde survival gameplay set in Sam Raimi's

comic-horror universe, ensuring there's a vein of violent humour to most things you do – shovelling a zombie's head off its shoulders requires manically pummelling the spade's handle until the head pops.

The film's licence is being used to add some new ideas to the team-based survival formula, with vehicle combat ensuring you can make mulch of the Deadite masses. This one looks... groovy.

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## PSYCHONAUTS 2

Putting the razzmatazz into, erm, Raz

**F** FORMAT PS4 / **ETA** 25 AUG / **PUB** XBOX GAME STUDIOS  
**DEV** DOUBLE FINE / **PLAYERS** 1

**H**ollis Forsythe, second-in-command at the mysterious Psychonauts, is having a spot of mental bother and Raz must dive into her subconscious to sort things out. Just another mission...

Inside Forsythe's brain stack things have become muddled. Her memories of working in a hospital ER have mingled with those of a Vegas-like casino. It demonstrates Double Fine's talent for the surreal

but also the capacity of this platformer to constantly surprise. One section spins the action from 3D to a retro-feeling 2.5D view as Raz bounces across exposed brains and scampers up and over X-rays.

This game's design choices will see it succeed. There aren't too many games that force its hero to leap about a giant glowing pachinko machine as you ride a pill into a stomach. Goofy fun.



The film and TV series' characters are back – Ash is voiced by Bruce Campbell – and each has a unique way to dispatch the Deadites. Chainsaw gore is guaranteed.

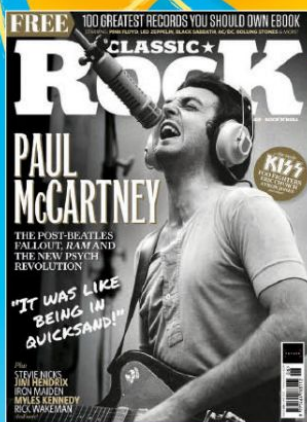
Psychonauts 2 has a distinctive surreal visual style matched by levels built around the inner nightmares of its various characters. Weird but great.

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# ALIENS: FIRETEAM

Show us everything

**F** FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 24 AUG  
PUB FOCUS HOME INTERACTIVE, 20TH CENTURY GAMES  
DEV COLD IRON STUDIOS / PLAYERS 1-3

"AN ALIENS GAME THAT  
DELIVERS THE TERROR  
OF THE FILMS AS MUCH  
AS THE SPECTACLE."

**S**omething is shuffling in the darkness, and it's not just in front of us. It's to our right, behind us, above us... *it's inside the room.* If you've been hankering for an Aliens game that delivers the terror of the film series as much as the spectacle, then Cold Iron Studios is here for you.

The team is passionate about the source material. That's evident in every pinged inch of Aliens: Fireteam's evocative world. We've seen the action take place aboard the Katanga, a space station orbiting

a refinery that evokes the industrial design of the 1986 James Cameron movie, upon which this is based. But now the developer has revealed it's expanding its horizons into the broader Aliens universe. Our latest look at the game reveals an Engineer temple is another setting, meaning some maps will be based on the lore of Prometheus and Alien: Covenant.

### HOT AS HELL

By including the wider universe set out by Ridley Scott, the devs are giving the game room to breathe. It's also interesting because Aliens:

Fireteam will have a strong narrative campaign. Looking like a sci-fi horror take on *The Division*, the missions are underpinned by a new story set after the events of *Alien 3* (swerving the craziness of *Alien Resurrection*). It means we'll be exploring what Weyland-Yutani knows about the Engineers, and how this has enabled the corporation to experiment with Xenomorph variants. It's your job as a Colonial Marine, alongside two friends, to clean up the mess.

This game offers an interesting premise: the Xenomorph is no



## THE HOT 50



**1** New screens tease the inclusion of the Engineers in the game's campaign. **2** Prowlers, identifiable by their red carapaces, will leap at you like pouncing velociraptors. **3** The environment can be used to ignite traps; just be careful with friendly fire. **4** Gunners are the heavy class, and will take the lead using the famous smartgun from the movies.

is longer a secret. The galaxy is aware of the species, and is adapting to its existence. It opens up many avenues for the developer to send us down – not least, it ensures a creative variety of Xenomorphs to shoot. The game will feature 11 Xenomorph types, which rises to 20 when you add on the Weyland-Yutani experiments and synthetic monsters created in secret labs.

To keep the aliens at bay you have some of the famous weapons from the movies, including the “standard-issue M41A Pulse Rifle” and fragmentation grenades. If you're a fan, you'll remember those. But just as the Xenomorphs have evolved, so have the Colonial Marines' tools. New charge coils – sticky shock grenades – can stun even the toughest acid-blooded alien.

Weapons can be modified and loadouts customised depending on the class you choose. In another nod to *The Division*, you can select a set hero type – your options are Gunner, Demolisher, Technician, Doc, and Recon – each offering a different



way to play. The Technician, for example, can deploy a gun turret that will target creatures and defend the perimeter. Fans of the *Aliens* film will remember fondly the buzz of these weapons. The Gunner is a little more RPG in its approach, and can 'overclock' weapons for the team; this will result in time-limited boosts to firepower and reload rates. The Demolisher is the game's heavy class, and this slugger can fire rockets from a shoulder-mounted launcher or release an area-of-effect energy wave to stall and stun

the advancing Xenomorphs. When all else fails they can shred enemies using the films' famous smartgun. This setup is key to everything, and so if you play solo the game will team you up with AI marines.

### SMART GUNS

The developer says each class is designed to work with the others, enabling players to build unique squads of complementary classes. In-game this translates to players adopting loose support and assault roles; the developer demos the





The mission demo sees the Colonial Marines sent to the Katanga to answer a distress call coming from the space station. As mentioned, the Xenomorphs are a known enemy and this team's members are seasoned at dealing with the creatures, though where this leads may surprise. Cold Iron Studios teases that the industrial orbiting station is only the jumping-off point, and this campaign's action will most likely lead to the planet's surface and some surprising developments.

### PERK UP

If longevity is your concern, fear not: each class in the game can be developed and levelled up. A Perk Board enables you to enhance and alter your character's abilities. Moving through ranks unlocks more weapons and gear – there will be 30 guns in total. These can be tailored to your playstyle, and with over 70 mods promised for each weapon it sounds like we'll have plenty of room to tinker.

Likewise enemy creatures and blends of Xenomorphs are spawned randomly, so each campaign can feel different. A Challenge Card system, similar to that announced for *Back 4 Blood*, can be unlocked and used ahead of a co-op game to alter the content of that mission. For example, one card will dictate that only headshots harm the enemy – so accuracy will be crucial, and could affect which class of Colonial Marine you choose for the mission.

### MOON SHOT

While the formula is tried and tested, the execution impresses. The blend of aggressive AI, roleplay structure, and custom options as

game to show how this plays out. A squad of Colonial Marines is backed into a corner awaiting the arrival of a lift. It's a forced time-based survival stage that reveals how players and AI can group up for effect. The Technician sets up an auto-turret to stem the tide, while the Demolisher and Gunner classes sit behind this frontline and mop up the Xenomorphs as they attempt to crawl and scramble up and over the marines. The Technician has a broader view of the action and supports with charge coils to stun and stall the creatures.

For their part the Xenomorphs fall into loose classes too, including Spitters, Warriors, and Bursters (the latter are covered in acid sacs that are filled to bursting). The enemy not only attacks in many ways, using every axis to outmanoeuvre your squad, but the mix of Xenomorph types ensures you need to think strategically about which to take down first. Should you focus on the gigantic Warrior type that likes to stomp in close and grapple you, or turn your attention to the Jumper class that can close the distance on you in a single leap?

Of course, this is hardly original. The premise riffs on ideas set down by PC's *Left 4 Dead* (which is soon to be resurrected by that team's pseudo-sequel, *Back 4 Blood* – see p78). Yet attached to the Aliens

licence, and with a commitment to accuracy, Cold Iron Studios' shooter impresses. The atmosphere and attention to detail ensure *Aliens: Fireteam* succeeds. A torch lights low-ceilinged corridors reminiscent of the colony on LV-426, and there's a distinct feeling the Xenomorphs will attack at any moment.

### PLAN IT

It helps that Cold Iron Studios is aiming to build a coherent new story within the famous universe. The inclusion of the Engineers in *Aliens: Fireteam* sets the tone for the four story-driven campaigns we'll

## “TO KEEP THE ALIENS AT BAY YOU HAVE SOME OF THE FAMOUS WEAPONS FROM THE MOVIES, INCLUDING THE M41A PULSE RIFLE.”

experience. The developer has yet to reveal exactly how the overall story plays out, and whether the campaigns are self-contained or interconnected, but we do know each will be split into three missions, and one campaign can be completed in an evening. If that sounds short, don't forget new material will be added post-release, including possible story campaigns, though the developer is yet to confirm this at the time of writing.

well as curated encounters to offer set-piece events, always surprises. Colonial Marines on PS3 is finally jettisoned from memory.

There are some surprises in store for *Aliens* fans too. A prequel book to support this game is in the works, further illustrating the publisher's commitment to the lore. A rumour that Disney is working on *Alien: Isolation 2* also suggests the future of the Xenomorphs on PlayStation looks gruesomely good.



This playable kung fu movie is all about adapting to the situation. Even dying doesn't spell the end for your protagonist – they bounce back a little more mature.



## SIFU

Getting knocked down but getting up again

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 2021 / PUB TBC / DEV SLOCLAP / PLAYERS 1

**T**he odds are not in your favour. Staring down a corridor packed with assailants skilled with both fists and weapons, anyone else would be justified in turning back. But you've got your reasons for being here. You've also got something better than luck on your side.

The developer of fist-flying multiplayer title Absolver, Sloclap, is working on a more focussed experience for its next game. Its latest is a single-player epic inspired by classic kung-fu flicks, in which a student seeks revenge on the assassination squad that murdered their family. Your fighter can be either male or female, with their quest for payback taking them beyond the tight corridor fights seen in early in-game footage to neon-lit nightclubs, green-houses, and more locales



besides within a fictional Chinese city.

The assassins who murdered your family are a well-connected lot, but in addition to your years of training, you've got an ace up your sleeve. The talisman you wear has been imbued with a clever sort of magic that gives you another fighting chance when it looks like it's all over. Whenever you die, the amulet resurrects you – but at a high cost. Your young grasshopper may go down for the count but they'll rise again older and wiser.

### FIGHTING FURY

When we spoke to Sloclap earlier this year, the devs told us that while the amulet does shave years from your life in exchange for bringing you back from the brink, you don't get weaker with age.

Keep watching this space for more on all the new tricks an old dog can learn.

“ALEX IS AN EMPATH, MEANING SHE'S NOT JUST WRESTLING WITH HER OWN FEELINGS.”





21

# LIFE IS STRANGE: TRUE COLORS

Missing u already

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 10 SEP / PUBLISHER PUB SQUARE ENIX / DEV DECK NINE / PLAYERS 1

**B**eing a teenager can be an emotional ride at the best of times. New *Life Is Strange* protagonist Alex Chen is an empath, meaning she's not just wrestling with her own complex feelings but also with the emotions of anyone quietly simmering within touching distance. That can easily skew conversation towards confrontation in this continuation of the incredibly popular superpowered teen drama series.

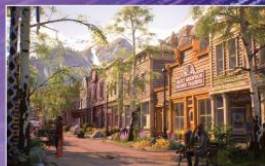
After years spent separated from her brother Gabe within the foster system, Alex hopes she's finally found a home for both of them in

Haven Springs. Unfortunately, the siblings' fresh start is cut short when Gabe is found dead. The community leaders are eager to move on from what they're calling 'a tragic accident' but Alex knows there's more to this story.

## TWO HEARTS

As she searches for the truth, she meets more than her fair share of resistance and danger. Thankfully, she's not alone. *True Colors* features two romantic leads. First, there's Gabe's bestie, Ryan Lucan. Then, returning from 2017 spin-off game *Life Is Strange: Before The Storm*, there's everyone's favourite tabletop roleplaying game girlfriend Steph Gingrich.

Unlike all the *Life Is Stranges* before it, *True Colors* will not be released in episodes. There are chapter breaks for when you need a breather from the twisty plot, but the complete package will be available from day one in September. Exploration will be more open than in earlier entries too. You can roam the streets freely, nipping into stores and the various hidden nooks of Haven Springs as you please. We'll meet the welcoming committee later this year.



Haven Springs looks idyllic – but what secrets are its residents hiding?

# THE HOT 50



Rei's a wonderfully agile lead character as the devs wanted moving through the world to feel good.



“TRAVERSAL HAS BEEN THE CRUCIAL ELEMENT FROM EARLY IN THE PROJECT’S LIFESPAN.”

20

# SOLAR ASH

Get your skates on

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 2021 / PUB ANNAPURNA INTERACTIVE / DEV HEART MACHINE / PLAYERS 1

**H**earth Machine's latest is in many ways a breezy departure from the studio's earlier work. In development for at least four years, *Solar Ash* shares some DNA with challenging action RPG title *Hyper Light Drifter* – the neon-accented colour palette and fleet-footed movement make the familial link unmistakable. However the two games are definitely siblings, not twins.

After *Hyper Light Drifter*, the team felt their next project needed a new visual approach. The shift to 3D is in service of more than just a change of pace, though; playing as Rei – a gangly figure with a swishy cape and futuristic Heelies – you explore semi-open areas boasting

levels of verticality. She's ventured into a black hole known as the Ultra Void in an effort to save her home planet. She finds matter known as Dregs corrupting the space and its creatures and, through exploration and fighting, works to purge it. In exchange, she's rewarded with Starseed energy that she can use to power up a mysterious, looming landmark at the centre of the world.

## LATER SKATER

Combat on the ground is much less demanding than in *Hyper Light Drifter*, though no less fluid. A giant serpent winds its way through early in-game footage, drawn to Rei's

efforts to clean up the Dregs. The headline act is frictionless movement. You can take down the big space snake *Shadow-Of-The-Colossus*-style by careening up its armoured spine, dinging pylons that stick out like acupuncture needles and whacking weak points as you go. It's a to-the-point system as combat is much less of a focus this time around.

Traversal has been the crucial element of the game from early in the project's lifespan. You can skate over clouds, grind rails, and even grapple, and Rei's full moveset is accessible from the start. You can find suits that will have some sort of transformative quality, but *Heart Machine* is remaining tight-lipped about their exact effect.

The movement system was built using similar development tools to *Insomniac*'s latest web-slinging title, creating a fluid feeling of freedom where the pull of gravity sometimes feels like only a suggestion. In keeping with the goal of minimal constraints on player movement, there's no stamina meter to upgrade or otherwise tell you to cool your jets.



# FINAL FANTASY XIV: ENDWALKER

Don't fear the Reaper

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 23 NOV / PUB SQUARE ENIX / DEV SQUARE ENIX  
PLAYERS 1-24 (FOR MULTIPLAYER CONTENT, MANY MORE ON A SERVER)

**W**hile the Warrior Of Light and the Scions Of The Seventh Dawn were off saving The First in Shadowbringers (Final Fantasy XIV's previous expansion), something nasty was brewing on their own planet, Hydaelyn. More than a simple bolt-on, Endwalker is promising to be a huge, fully-featured Final Fantasy adventure that ties up the long-running

Hydaelyn/Zodiark story arc that's been running since 2013.

The Final Days, the calamity that could result in the destruction of Hydaelyn, is so large that it's not just limited to the planet's soil. The journey will take us to the moon, where strange structures reminiscent of the art of HR Giger await. One creepy new dungeon seems to mix spine-like mechanical walkways with doors that resemble

New trust ally Estinien can help you with dungeons. Who doesn't want a mate who's mates with dragons?

## “NEW AREA MARE LAMENTORUM FEATURES AN ASTROLOGY TOWER AND CRYSTAL-LADEN CAVES.”

teeth, combining technology with bizarre biology. The aesthetics continue through to Anima, which looks even creepier than Final Fantasy X's own take on the recurring Summons – here called Primals – who players need to team up against in battle. It's not all spooky, though: another dungeon is all machines and trains, and another

is a desert area that crosses over with a nearby icy biome.

Thankfully nightmares aren't all the moon has to offer. New area Mare Lamentorum gives us a first look at a zone for players to explore more at their leisure, featuring a mysterious astrology tower and serene crystal-laden caves. The satellite even plays home to Loporrits, a new tribe of cute little friendly moon bunnies. These aren't to be confused with the much taller Viera, a male variant of which is being added for players to play as (either from the start of the game, or by changing the appearance of their already existing characters).

Back on the ground, we get a glimpse of the big new city, Old Sharlayan.

This far off city-state was the home of Louisoix Leveilleur, progenitor of the Scions, and is where his twin nephews Alphinaud and Alisaie hail from, along with the group's other magicians Urianger and Y'Shtola. It seems that convincing some of the scholarly and stuffy inhabitants to help with the Final Days might play a big role in the story.

The city and the surrounding Labyrinthos are filled with white architecture under blue skies, with the likes of pillars, windmills, and shiny contraptions paying homage to Ancient Greece and the Greek islands (particularly Mykonos). If it gets a player housing district, expect them to get snapped up fast. It's a nice contrast to the previously revealed Thavnair, which draws heavily on India.

## FEELING ON EDGE

Alongside a level cap increase to 90, players will be able to take on two new jobs (essentially classes), which start at level 70 so you won't need to grind for ages to start them on the newer content. The previously announced Sage is a mech-inspired healer that's used in the story by Alphinaud, but the new DPS job is the much more dangerous-looking Reaper – Stormblood's main antagonist Zenos was one. It's unusual to introduce a job by way of a villain, which has us scratching our chins as to whether or not he's truly pulling the strings behind this big new threat. The enemy of my enemy, and all that...

Visually the Reaper resembles the Grim Reaper, with a ragged cloak, stylishly large hat, and – of course – a scythe. Players use the latter to summon slicy attacks from the void, and are even able to call upon voidsent for extra attacks. In addition, previous jobs will get tweaks to account for the level increase, so even old favourites might well feel fresh.

That's just the tip of everything coming to the ongoing game. With a new PvP mode, the Island Sanctuary area, more trust allies, extra dungeons, and more gear – not to mention the final PS5 version of the game (currently in open beta) – this looks like being a massive finale before new adventures start to roll on.



Amicia is back in the medieval adventure looking for answers to why her younger brother can command swarms of rats. Is there a deeper conspiracy?



## A PLAGUE TALE: REQUIEM

Filthy rodents are coming for your con-soul

FORMAT PS5/ETA TBC/PUB FOCUS HOME INTERACTIVE  
DEV ASOBO STUDIO/PLAYERS 1

**A**t the end of the last *Plague Tale*, subtitled *Innocence*, siblings Hugo and Amicia headed to pastures new in the hopes of putting the plague and the Inquisition behind them. Alas, if this sequel's subtitle is anything to go by, neither rodents nor rotters are prepared to be consigned to the past.

Early in-engine footage opens with a tidal wave of rodents pouring through a medieval street, suggesting the siblings'

for a deadly curse now hunting the pair of them.

Bloody backstabs and sneaky takedowns suggest stealth will return, but Amicia has a few other arrows in her quiver – literally. We liked the David-versus-Goliath style encounters in *Innocence*, but the events of that earlier game have clearly left its sibling protagonists older and wiser. Yet while Amicia has become a surer shot, Hugo appears to still be struggling to control his own powers.

**“SNEAKY TAKEDOWNS SUGGEST STEALTH WILL RETURN, BUT AMICIA HAS A FEW OTHER ARROWS IN HER QUIVER – LITERALLY.”**

search for a home will be anything but easy. A slightly older Amicia emerges to face the onslaught, now with a crossbow strapped to her back. Before the sides clash, Hugo blinks away the vision to gaze upon a sunny shoreline and what could potentially be a home for him and his older sister – were it not

A ravenous wave of teeth and claws is sure to spoil any attempts to settle down in a sequel promising to expand on the game's curious lore. An ancient mural uncovered by Amicia hints at a supernatural Egyptian connection. Watch this space for new info when it comes squeaking in.



## RAINBOW SIX EXTRACTION

This new shooter is one smoother Operator

FORMAT PS5, PS4/ETA 16 SEP/PUB UBISOFT/DEV UBISOFT MONTREAL/PLAYERS 1-4

**T**he long-remoured offshoot of tactical shooter *Rainbow Six Siege* is a reality, and it's playing fast and loose with the series' core gameplay. You're still breaching and clearing rooms and rescuing trapped folk in strategic masterclasses, but now it's with an otherworldly twist.

*Rainbow Six Extraction* diverges from the franchise's realistic near-future setting. Aliens replace terrorists as the game swaps some realism for sci-fi zaniness, in a move that may see die-hard fans raise an eyebrow.

A number of years after the competitive events of *Rainbow Six Siege*, parasitic aliens called *Archaens* have invaded the Earth, and teams of Operators are sent to hot spots around the world to suppress the outbreaks.



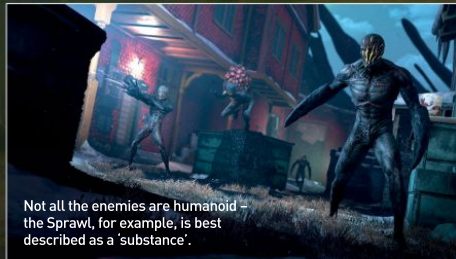
Each mission revolves around 'breaching' an Archæan's nest and completing one of three randomly assigned objectives. These include luring an Elite Archæan back to your base for research and setting C4 in strategic places to destroy the alien's bio-organic structures. Once an objective is completed you must decide whether to accept a new objective and plunge further into the nest or 'extract' safely. As ammo, health, and Operator abilities – to heal teammates, carry special weapons, revive friendlies, and more – are finite, this is where the game rolls its dice. Do you gamble, push on, and earn more rewards, or take what you have and leave?

## ALIEN MINDS

If this sounds a little too much like a reskinned Rainbow Six Siege, then Extraction has a secret weapon: your desire to play as a particular Operator you've spent game time upgrading and customising, or

as one of the many famous faces from Siege, including Sledge, Doc, and Alibi, who make up the roster. There will be 18 Operators in total at launch. If your favourite hero falls in battle they're not killed instantly, but dragged away by the Archæans.

A new Extraction objective is now available, and you can team up online to attempt a rescue. There's a ticking time bomb playing behind the action as the Archæans leech your Operator's life force.



Not all the enemies are humanoid – the Sprawl, for example, is best described as a 'substance'.

This setup encourages you to gather and develop a squad of Operators in the same way as you would in a strategy game.

You'll need all your troops too, as the alien invasion setup has enabled Ubisoft to add some unusual and technical enemy types and tactics to the familiar formula. The Sprawl is a calcium-like substance that will spread across floors and walls, slowing Operators and buffing Archæans. You can shoot it to carve paths through, but it's also a smart AI – it will react to being attacked, learn from your actions, and devise new tactics to corner your team. The Sprawl will learn where you respawn, surround, and attack your squad. It's a reason Extraction could shake off the feeling you're playing a lacklustre me-too co-op shooter. Far from Back 4 Blood meets Rainbow Six Siege, the way the Archæans organise and attack lends Extraction an RTS feel, like a moving puzzle to solve and shoot up.



## FAR CRY 6

A well-heeled sequel

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 7 OCT / PUB UBISOFT  
DEV UBISOFT / PLAYERS TBC

**S**ome brags about new games are more intriguing than others, and the option to holster your gun is being touted heavily by Ubisoft. Going incognito is not usually a choice in Far Cry, a series renowned for its explosive sandbox gunplay. However, this sixth game in the series is playing things a little differently.

The fictional Caribbean country of Yara has a variety of regions that run on in-game rules that afford Far Cry 6 a newfound sense of realism. Out in the jungles and mountains this series entry plays like previous games – you run and gun your way through checkpoints and shoot everything in sight. But venture into dictator Antón Castillo's safe haven,

the capital city of Esperanza (its baroque architecture a nod to the game's Cuban inspiration), and things change.

The atmosphere shifts. Friendly faces eager to see a freedom fighter are replaced by heavily armed elite soldiers who'll shoot on sight. Being able to holster your gun and move amid the military presence is a new sensation for Far Cry. Out in the sticks roadblocks serve a similar purpose. The ability to use stolen papers or bribery and stealth offers alternatives to the usual trigger-happy shootouts.

If you want to avoid Castillo's forces altogether then you need to explore off the beaten track. Old pathways, left behind by the guerrilla fighters of the country's

**“FRIENDLY FACES EAGER TO SEE A FREEDOM FIGHTER ARE REPLACED BY HEAVILY ARMED SOLDIERS WHO’LL SHOOT ON SIGHT.”**



Vehicles in the game are varied, and can be fully customised.







“RUN AND GUN YOUR WAY THROUGH CHECKPOINTS AND SHOOT EVERYTHING.”

Dani Rojas can be male or female – it's your choice. New third-person perspectives allow you to showcase your look.

# THE HOT 50



**1** The chap in the hat is Juan Cortez, former KGB spymaster, now a fomenter of revolution. **2** Antón Castillo, dictator. **3** Amigos are the new Friends For Hire, and include alligator Guapo, which swims with you and stalks enemies for stealth kills. **4** The Shredder is a handmade Resolver weapon built from a motorbike engine. Clumsy but powerful, this thing will rip through anything it's pointed at.

➤ 1967 revolution, scar the island. Follow these hidden Guerrilla Paths to be rewarded with special gear, intel, and vantage points from where you can plan assaults.

These routes, which Ubisoft says will challenge your traversal skills, lead to Guerrilla Hubs, safe zones run by the revolutionary group Libertad, where you can pick up missions and restock on ammunition and intel. It's also where you'll meet the game's colourful cast of mission-givers, who will offer new weapons, upgrades, gear, and targets.

## HAVANA GOOD TIME

The leader of Libertad is Clara Garcia, who convinces you, Dani Rojas (male or female), to join the

good fight. She's the anchor for all the game's events, but it's the characters around her who add the colour. Juan Cortez, for example, is the game's weapons specialist. The spymaster will create 'Resolver' weapons for you, unique tools of destruction built from items you find. This is where Far Cry 6 lets its hair down. We see a minigun

powered by a motorbike engine, a gun made from soup cans, and a particularly comical weapon that fires CDs to slice through enemies, while playing '90s dancefloor filler Macarena – not a stealthy choice. There are 49 types of gun to play with, for guaranteed variety.

When the action does heat up, Far Cry 6 is happy to let rip and drop its





new holster approach. You progress in a similar way to how you did in previous entries in the series – you need to take control of government outposts and plant a Libertad flag in the remnants of Castillo's strongholds. The locations of these vary (they include farms, schools, and TV stations), as does how you approach taking them out. Peppering a petrol station with bullets will cause a chain reaction of explosions; you can take to the skies to strafe targets, assault ships on a jet ski, or even take over a tank and run amok in it.

Just like the game's weapons, the vehicles you find can be upgraded and hacked into new revolutionary wrecks. A 1960s-looking Jaguar works better with a mounted machine gun, a dune buggy can be fine-tuned for mountain ascents, and a Cadillac can literally sweep away the opposition when you add a snowplough to the bumper.

### CHE CHIC

Dressing for success is now important, too. Dani's outfits can affect how you perform in combat as

perks such as improved knife throws or stealth techniques are tied to clothes you find. If you decide to prioritise ability over fashion sense, it'll mean your Dani Rojas will look a state, a mess of mismatched goggles, gloves, vests, and shorts.

Luckily you'll be too busy setting the world alight to pay any attention to the fashion police. And the new

sense that something dangerous could be lurking behind the immaculately textured palm leaves and trees. There's a Grand-Theft-Auto-like sensibility to the freedom on offer too. Hijacking cars and tanks alike gives flexibility, and being able to approach pretty much any conflict from land, sea, or air delivers on spectacle.

## "DANI'S OUTFITS AFFECT HOW YOU PERFORM IN COMBAT AS PERKS SUCH AS IMPROVED KNIFE TECHNIQUES ARE TIED TO CLOTHES."

Supremo backpacks make even doing this easy. These homemade contraptions are technically special abilities Dani can wear into battle. They vary from grenade launchers to flamethrowers, and there's even a Rocketeer-like jetpack that gives you temporary flight abilities.

There's a swagger and inventive attitude to this entry in the series. In action we see how everything clicks together powered by PS5. The jungles feel dense and alive. There's

This series entry manages to straddle the fine line between realism and ridiculousness, a tightrope the series has always tried to walk. The sandbox approach to missions and objectives helps refresh the rote feeling that can plague a new Ubisoft release; the homemade approach to weapon creation and crafting adds a unique flavour to this entry in the long-running series. It's one tasty cocktail. Put a straw in it and suck.



# RIDERS REPUBLIC

Extreme sports for the new generation

**FORMAT** PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 2021 / **PUB** UBISOFT / **DEV** UBISOFT ANNECY  
**PLAYERS** 1-64 (FREE ROAM), 50+ (IN EVENTS)

**T**his extreme sports game might be something of a spiritual successor to *Steep*, sharing the same dev team and snowy sports disciplines, but it's a breath of mountain-fresh air too. Social elements have been pushed to the forefront, and with them more events that run a gamut of player counts (and allow you to squad up with friends throughout).

Trick Battle, in particular, offers something a little different, and makes use of a trick system that's been revamped from what *Steep* veterans will be familiar with. This 6v6 mode takes a deck-shaped leaf

entirely captured, turning your colour. Once captured, an area multiplies your scores exponentially. The quirky, octopus-laden snowboarding arena we're shown features about five districts, so it quickly becomes a push and pull as you try to rack up huge numbers in your own areas while also defending them from becoming captured by the other team.

## SPORTING CHANCES

It's just one of the many events you'll be able to take on with friends across the game's multiple disciplines (which include biking, skiing, snowboarding, and wingsuits

**"THE GAME'S ULTIMATE CHALLENGES COULD WELL BE THE MASS RACES, WHICH BOAST UPWARDS OF 50 PLAYERS ON PS5."**

from Tony Hawk's Pro Skater's Graffiti mode, with players tricking off different objects (or 'modules'), in order to turn them their team's colour while ratcheting up points.

Once your team's captured all the modules within an area with their sweet moves, that district becomes



Race to reach some of the USA's famous landmarks first by any means necessary.

in both rocket and rocketless varieties). A social hub called Riders' Ridge is where this is centred, so you can drool over cosmetics, but it's a constant feature. The national parks that play host to the sweet flips and hectic races are always alive with other players, boasting around 64 simultaneous players just as you roam around (on PS5, at least). Despite the size of the interconnected map, the console's SSD allows you to jump almost instantly across to join a friend's position, so you never have to worry about meeting up to start an event.

Each discipline has its own career progression, which leads to you



taking part in huge real-life sporting competitions, and something called 'big/boss events' that really test your skills. But the ultimate challenges could well be the Mass Races, which boast upwards of 50 players on PS5. Not only do these chaotic competitions have a high headcount, they also integrate multi-terrain tracks and multi-sports switches that only jacks-of-all-trades will be able to master.

## SPORTING CHANCES

It's not all zany bear masks and colourful gases, though. Just like in *Steep*, there's a beauty to the recreations of American National Parks here that rewards exploration. If you're looking for something zen, then *Riders Republic* is keen to give you that space too. You can comb the parks for collectibles, relics, landmarks, and even special stunts to pull off in order to become one with nature. You might have a bunch of people in rocket wingsuits flying overhead. But that's what it means to live in a republic.



**1** Freestyling at the snowpark's one option, but you can also hop on your board and go cross-country or board in an urban setting, or race other players if you fancy a challenge. **2** Dive and swoop through beautiful locations in the game's wingsuit races. **3** The massive multiplayer downhill snowboard races have us recalling the manic moments of SSX, but with far more people. **4** The locations are based on some of the United States' impressive National Parks. And yes, you may have to watch out for wildlife.





but also different specialities. Each of the eight feels different to control, and the four players making up a group will have to keep each other's strengths in mind. Doc, for instance, is armed with a scalpel, and has both a heal bonus at low health and more healing efficiency, whereas Walker is handy with his Glock and rifles, his accuracy improving with each precision kill.

With different builds and dynamic challenges, things feel like they can get out of hand more quickly than in Left 4 Dead, but the aim is to give Cleaners the tools to manage tricky moments more effectively. And, if you want to *become* those tricky moments, a competitive multiplayer option allows players to control the Special Ridden, butting heads against a player team. You won't be able to resist coming back for blood.

"WIPE OUT THE PARASITE  
TO BRING HUMANITY  
BACK FROM THE BRINK."



Finally you can live out the Hogwarts dream of sneaking out of your dormitory and being torn limb from limb by a ferocious dragon in the Forbidden Forest.



## HOGWARTS LEGACY

Is this OWL we dreamed of?

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 2022 / PUB WARNER BROS GAMES  
DEV AVALANCHE SOFTWARE / PLAYERS 1

**T**here are plenty of reasons to be less into Harry Potter these days, whether you have issues with some of author JK Rowling's comments or have simply outgrown a book and movie series that ended over ten years ago (and was followed by increasingly mediocre spinoffs). That said, there's something inarguably tantalising about Hogwarts Legacy, the promise of putting a Wizarding World tale in your hands as you create your own character and explore a vast magical open world.

You enrol in Hogwarts in the late 1800s (only a century or so after wizards stopped pooping themselves and started using toilets – yes, that's canon), and can even choose the school house you represent, finally having the option not to be in Gryffindor. It's the letter of acceptance that ten-year-olds dreamed about all those years

ago. At Hogwarts you'll attend classes and, in true Harry Potter fashion, get in over your head and go on adventures.

### SCHOOLS' OUT

The open world around Hogwarts has been developed with an impressive degree of realism, and is a place that feels alive with activity. This isn't the first time developers have attempted to recreate an explorable Hogwarts (Order Of The Phoenix's tie-in

**"YOU CAN CHOOSE THE  
SCHOOL HOUSE YOU  
REPRESENT."**

is the most notable previous example), but here the freedom feels more genuine, extending even

as far as the Forbidden Forest and nearby Hogsmeade. Bubble up potions, learn combat spells, make friends, tame magical beasts, and become your own wizarding legend.

This is the first big-budget attempt to evolve the gaming Wizarding World beyond Potter himself, past the realm of film tie-ins. Nothing more than winning the House Cup will do.



# BATTLEFIELD 2042

Bigger, badder, stormier

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 22 OCT / PUB EA  
DEV DICE, CRITERION, DICE LA, EA GOTHENBURG / PLAYERS 1-128

**H**ow many developers does it take to make a modern shooter? Four. Three to make the game and one to take the flak from frustrated neckbeards complaining about the lack of realism. Too cynical? Okay, let's get crazy...

One thing is for sure, having freed itself from the 'realism' of the previous game, *Battlefield 2042* is a juggernaut of military mayhem that uses its near-future setting to play loose with realism. It plays up to how we all experience *Battlefield* – weaponising vehicles, the acceptance of casual deaths from unhappy accidents, and the general on-the-hoof chaos that occurs when 128 players collide on PS5.

Dice and EA have been highlighting the sandbox nature of

*Battlefield 2042*. These are no mere maps but enormous playgrounds where you can do as you wish, according to the particular rules of the game mode you're playing within. This year's entry boasts one of the largest maps the series has ever seen to facilitate everything the developer wants to chuck your way. New extreme weather systems will see a hurricane rip through your enemy's defences – but its unpredictability could cause you problems. Advanced terrain deformation sees the battlefield change too, as buildings topple. You get the sense Frostbite is wheezing away behind the scenes. And yet

Dice is committed to bringing the game to both PS4 and PS5 (though you'll get 128 players only on new-gen consoles).

## IT'S RAINING, MEN

There's a pitch that gives credence to the weather-battered battlefields: as climate change ravages the game's fictitious world, societies are crumbling and stateless soldiers



Don't expect any Just Cause-style acrobatics if you wingsuit into this deadly twister.

"STATELESS SOLDIERS  
NOW FIGHT FOR THE  
PLANET'S LIMITED  
RESOURCES."

now fight for the planet's limited resources on behalf of the remaining super-states. The setting may be a science-fiction near-future but Dice is giving fans something to think about with that date – the whole thing started with Battlefield 1942 20 years ago. Expect a number of nods to that classic.

The final game will feature three gameplay 'experiences', though

only one, All Out Warfare, has been revealed to date. Each offers a menu of modes to choose from. First in All Out Warfare there's Conquest mode, in which you need to hold a sector of a map by dominating all of the allotted points within it. To make the 128 player count work, the game subdivides

those players into units. Though you may be committed to taking a certain sector, you can go rogue, grab a vehicle, and spread your wings to a new area of the map to cause chaos. Why not call in a tank and drop it on a camper? »



1

➤ The second All Out Warfare mode is Breakthrough, which drops two opposing teams into one location with a director's invisible hand curating the action; maps are divided into sections with multiple points to capture which creates a moving frontline.

Getting up to speed in a new Battlefield can be a steep learning curve, so Dice has confirmed you can play both Conquest and Breakthrough with AI teams, which still adds to your overall progress. This is the only way to play solo – there's no single-player campaign planned for Battlefield 2042.

Though not ready to reveal everything, Dice has shared one other way to play, called Hazard

## "WE'RE TOLD HAZARD ZONE WILL MOVE THE BATTLE ROYALE CONCEPT ON IN A WAY ONLY BATTLEFIELD CAN."

Zone, that the developer brags will move the battle royale concept on in a way only Battlefield can. Given how Dice is dividing its huge environments and player bases across the maps, this could be multiple mini battle royales playing simultaneously; a squad-based royale. A third playstyle is being kept secret, and is being developed by Dice LA and overseen by Respawn's Vince Zampella. One thing is for sure, this new game

won't have a traditional battle royale, not at launch or post-launch, despite featuring Game As Service traits such as a Season Pass structure. Each season will add new environments and Specialists.

### CLASS ACT

Character classes are called Specialists in Battlefield 2042, and there are ten types in the game. Each has a distinct Speciality and Trait. Specialities are essentially gadgets to use in the field. Go to war as an Assault type and you'll be able to employ a grappling hook to scale heights; the Recon class can use an OV-P Recon Drone to mark targets; and the S21 Syrette Pistol used by Support players can fire health

## MAPPY DAYS

Beautiful worlds to shoot apart



### KALEIDOSCOPE – SOGDO, SOUTH KOREA

A vertical map built around glass-fronted skyscrapers just waiting to be shattered or jumped from for those with wingsuits. A tornado will tear through it, forming a moving hazard to avoid or weaponise.



### MANIFEST – BRANI ISLAND, SINGAPORE

A coastal shipyard location that looks perfect for close-quarters shootouts amid its warehouses and shipping crates. The smaller size makes it better for helicopters than jets, and not best suited to tanks.



### HOURGLASS – DOHA, QATAR

This lost city consumed by desert sand gives us flashbacks to Spec Ops: The Line. Here you fight for control of a lost convoy amid the old hotels and enormous football stadium. A sandstorm will sweep through the map, reducing visibility.



capsules at friendlies. Traits are the innate physical abilities of the various Specialists and hold few surprises; Assault types are nimble while the Support class can bring teammates back to full health. It's Battlefield 101, right down to being able to customise loadouts.

If it feels as if Dice is playing it safe with the Specialists, the maps could surprise us. They vary in size and purpose, so some support vehicular combat while others may be better suited to small-team close combat. Different maps offer unique methods of entry too, such as halo-jumping into the fray.

The art direction grabs us too, with map design embracing the near-future catastrophe to present



eye-catching backdrops to the action. In one, the carcass of an abandoned oil tanker sunk into a beach is impressive – the world-building shows the abandoned ship washed up on an Indian beach, slowly being torn apart.

### WORLD OF PAIN

What brings these environments to life are the dynamic events that threaten to alter a map's layout. These can be weather effects, such as sandstorms that dampen visibility or destructive tornadoes

**1** The Discarded map is set in a ship salvage yard on India's west coast. We anticipate all sorts of discarded chemicals and exploding material in this one. **2** The rusting hulks in Discarded make interesting cover for infantry and tanks alike. **3** This being the near-future, weapons and machinery is more advanced than what's available nowadays. Can you spot the Ranger, a robotic dog, there? (Please, don't try to pet it.)

that suck in passing jet fighters and billboards alike. Your actions can alter the world too, from the simple act of lowering a bridge to shutting down a crane or surviving a rocket launch. You'll need to stay alert in Battlefield 2042.

On PS5 you'll experience the whole bullet-riddled buffet, but on PS4 player count will be reduced to 64 and maps will be downsized to match, though the weather and dynamics events will remain. It promises the same spectacle, but smaller in scale.



### ORBITAL – FRENCH GUIANA

Battle at the base of a rocket as it readies for launch – and pay attention to that, because if you mistime your assault you could get caught in the fireball as it launches. The continuous countdown adds an extra tension to the mode's objectives.



### DISCARDED – ALANG, INDIA

India's west coast has become a graveyard for abandoned ships, and the dismantled vessels form a tangle of steel walls. Expect hurricanes to batter this coastal map, so taking cover in the ships could prove hazardous – everyone's in there.



### BREAKAWAY – QUEEN MAUD LAND, ANTARCTICA

The contrast between snow and rock showcases the Frostbite engine. Behind the visuals is a dynamic map that can change in an instant – destroying oil tanks and refinery pipes will spill fire into the area.



### RENEWAL – EASTERN DESERT, EGYPT

The map is divided by a massive wall, on one side there's the desert and the other the reclaimed land is verdant green. The wall down creates natural choke points as teams battle over its gates and access.



# DYING LIGHT 2 – STAY HUMAN

The future is what you make it

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA TBC / PUB TECHLAND / DEV TECHLAND / PLAYERS 1-4

**T**he world is literally what you make it in Techland's followup to the hugely successful *Dying Light* on PS4. Freedom is at the heart of the sequel, and it goes further than how you choose to scale The City's skyscrapers. There are various factions controlling the different districts of The City, and your actions and choices will affect how the world changes. People you rescue populate safe zones and offer help, for example.

The factions are part of Techland's 'modern dark ages' vision; you're able to shape the new world developing on top of the pre-zombie civilisation's foundations. This means aligning with either the Peacekeepers, Survivors, or Renegades – or none of the above, if you prefer. Helping the Survivors will open up to parkour routes around The City, while building a good relationship with the Peacekeepers will enable you to craft more weapons and develop

protagonist Aiden Caldwell's combat moves. "If you have no allies, you die very quickly," clarifies lead game designer Tymon Smektała.

But the growth of the world is what's really interesting. Techland is leaning heavily into the RPG side of this parkour zombie adventure's makeup, and the level of control we'll have is intriguing.

## DISEASE CONTROL

The sequel uses PS5's powerful tech to deliver a unique experience. Speaking to *PLAY* last issue, the team revealed the new-gen version of the game makes use of the DualSense to enable us to feel each melee weapon, bow, and homemade gun in our hands. Ray tracing brings extra depth to the world, while 3D audio heightens the horror the original game hinted at.

The sequel, set 15 years after the original game, features new Infected

(the game's zombie-like creatures) that feel more threatening on PS5. Lurking in the dark, the sound of the Infected all around us, and UV light illuminating the creatures, it definitely delivers the frights we've been promised. Out in the daylight Aiden can leap, run, and slide about the world in *Mirror's Edge* fashion, lending this horror a unique pace. While sunlight acted as a safety net of sorts in the first game, as it makes Infected slower and less aggressive, the sequel features an evolution system that can see some creatures empowered by the sun.

This is an ambitious sequel that aims to be a more rounded RPG than the original. Freedom was important in the first game but it was largely a freedom of movement. Now it's a freedom of self-expression.

Some new types of Infected will only come into being if you carry out particular actions.

"DUALSENSE ENABLES US TO FEEL EACH MELEE WEAPON, BOW, AND GUN IN OUR HANDS."

## THE HOT 50



As well as Greek gods, you meet more common enemies – Wretched Thugs like this are the spirits of people who were violent in life. Death hasn't changed them.

10

## HADES

Hades opens the gates to hell on PlayStation

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 13 AUG / PUB SUPERGIANT GAMES  
DEV SUPERGIANT GAMES / PLAYERS 1

**E**very teenager goes through a rebellious phase, and Zagreus' is particularly hellish. Literally, as his old man is Hades himself, and Zag wants nothing more than to leave home and cool off with his aunts and uncles in Olympus. The problem? The legions of Hell his dad is using to keep him in line.

Supergiant Games fans will know what to expect. The flow of the game is reminiscent of the likes of Bastion and Transistor, except here it's in a roguelike

where you can poke around and spend currencies on upgrades to help you out. You can even natter to mythological figures who are hanging out, and give your pet, Cerberus, some affection.

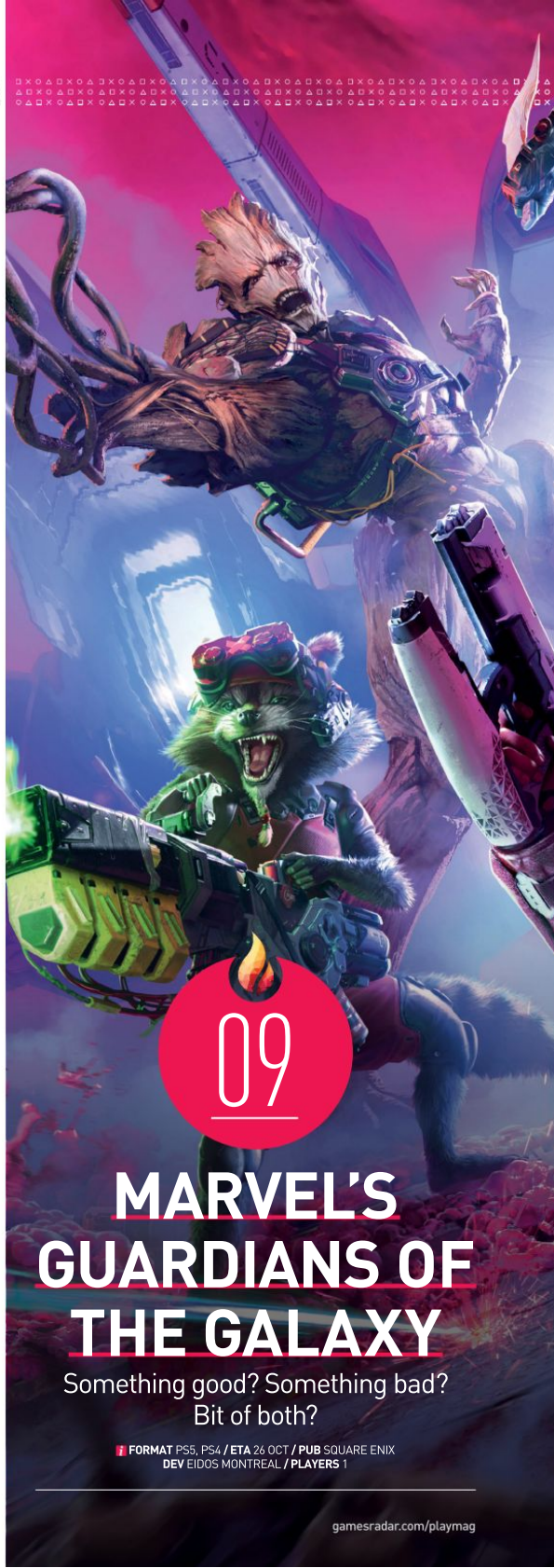
Even as you progress, you'll talk with the bosses you encounter and the shiny Olympians (who share gifts with you in order to power up your build while you ascend – before you lose it all). Despite starting again each time, it's a game where death *really* doesn't feel like an end, but just something that happens throughout your

**“DEATH REALLY DOESN'T FEEL LIKE AN END, BUT JUST SOMETHING THAT HAPPENS THROUGHOUT YOUR JOURNEY.”**

wrapper. More than just a way of extending players' time with the game, this is one of the smartest entries in the genre we've seen. There's a reason its original PC release scooped up so many awards last year.

Every time you succumb to the grip of Hell you grumpily awake back down in Hades' house,

journey, relationships building and reflecting on that death each time. With so many different routes to progression, and different weapons to master that all feel unique, Zagreus' journey feels like a personal one, and one that'll thankfully keep you from looking back, pressing ever on. (Thank us later, Eurydice.)



09

## MARVEL'S GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY

Something good? Something bad?  
Bit of both?

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 26 OCT / PUB SQUARE ENIX  
DEV EIDOS MONTREAL / PLAYERS 1

What's better than a Triple-A game? A quintuple-A-hole game, of course.

**R**oughly three seconds of footage is enough to suggest that Eidos Montreal might just be the perfect choice to deliver the latest chapter in the interstellar adventures of Marvel's most lovable oddballs.

As Star-Lord slides on his knees, firing twin blasters into the flanks of a quadrupedal alien on the power-pop strains of Bonnie Tyler's *Holding Out For A Hero*, it seems the team behind *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* has adapted brilliantly to a very different brand of science fiction. The colourful action, the irreverent tone, the vintage needle drops? *This* is the *Guardians* we know and love.

Well, sort of. An inescapable problem with any Marvel game is the ubiquity of the MCU – we all now have a shared picture in our minds of how these characters look. True, the lack of likenesses is less of a problem when one of your heroes is a walking tree and another a scrappy

raccoon (besides, whoever's voicing Rocket sounds fairly close to Bradley Cooper), which means this suffers less than *Crystal Dynamics' Avengers* game from that off-brand uncanniness. Yet there's no avoiding the fact that Star-Lord looks oddly like Man United left-back Luke Shaw, but with an ostentatious '80s 'do and a voice like a Californian surf dude.

### BE QUILL OR BE DEAD

Strange, too, that in a story about a group of misfits, you'll only ever play as their self-appointed leader. Even so, they're more than "just a bunch of jackasses standing in a circle" while you do all the hard work in combat. Fights owe a clear debt to Marvel's *Avengers*, but with a more dynamic flavour, as you get to command the other *Guardians* directly: each comes with four moves that can be combined in a variety of thrilling ways. Rocket can climb into the harness he's affixed to Groot to become a furry turret; in

return, Groot can hogtie enemies for his tiny friend to blow up. Launch an uppercut as Star-Lord, meanwhile, and Drax can land a drop-kick while your opponent is still airborne.

There's a special meter, too, which prompts Star-Lord to raise his Walkman to the sky and blast out an '80s classic (in this case Joan Jett's *Bad Reputation*), letting you launch a flurry of attacks without worrying about cooldowns.

Eidos Montreal has got the films' sense of fun down pat, then, but the *Guardians* wouldn't be a dysfunctional family without a little, well, dysfunction. So, as the de facto decision-maker, you get the casting vote in arguments, and while this may be a Pratt-free zone you can still indulge your inner a-hole – ask Drax to throw Rocket over a chasm to activate a retractable bridge, and you'll get a 'Rocket will remember that'–style notification. *Avengers*–style action meets *Telltale*–style choices with *Kiss and Blondie* on the soundtrack? Marvellous.

# GHOSTWIRE: TOKYO

Putting the power in your hands

FORMAT PS5 / ETA TBC / PUB BETHESDA / DEV TANGO GAMEWORKS / PLAYERS 1

**C**oming exclusively to PS5, Tango Gameworks' horror adventure is intended to make the most of the new technology. In particular, the developer has revealed the DualSense controller will be used to build atmosphere.

The game's version of Tokyo has been devastated by a supernatural event and the controller is going to let you know all about it. Haptic feedback enables you to feel your way through the deserted streets, while the eerie voices emanating from the controller's speakers send a chill down your spine. The developer is aiming to make your DualSense function as your 'sixth sense' while you explore. The idea is

you'll rely on the controller for clues and world-building, as it enables you to hear and feel this ghostly recreation of Tokyo. We're guessing there'll be puzzles that rely on the DualSense's unique features.

## GETTING HANDSY

Yet it's in Ghostwire: Tokyo's handsy combat that you can feel the full force of the DualSense. There's a Doom-like sense of momentum to fighting; it's fast, inventive, and keeps you pushing forwards into the world. But there are no guns. Instead you manipulate elemental powers with your on-screen hands to create spiritual attacks.

Each movement and spell feels unique on the DualSense; its adaptive triggers pull and push at your fingers, rattle, and flex

smoothly. The developer boasts that you can close your eyes and feel the different attacks, so bursts of wind will have a different sensation to the flow of water or flutter of fire from your virtual hands. You need to get in close to some spirits to defeat them, which again has its own sensation. When performing up-close, risky exorcisms the triggers simulate the act of tugging the 'core' life force from an enemy.

Naturally you can upgrade your character's powers, and here again DualSense is being harnessed to allow you to feel the change in their abilities. As your powers grow, so too does the feedback from the controller, so for the first time in a game you can 'feel' your progress.



You'll be able to feel every spectral attack you cast, and sense how your abilities grow.



While the story's dark, Valisthea is shaping up to be a beautiful world worth exploring.

07

# FINAL FANTASY XVI

Are you hip to be Clive?

FORMAT PS5 / ETA 20 JUL / PUB SQUARE ENIX / DEV SQUARE ENIX / PLAYERS 1

**H**as a new Final Fantasy on a new PlayStation ever not wowed us? Final Fantasy VII was revolutionary. Final Fantasy X pushed PS2 visuals. Final Fantasy XV showed us an open world like no other. And Final Fantasy XVI, a PS5 exclusive, looks set to be no different, combining state-of-the-art visuals with a new action-packed approach.

We take on the role of moody sword-wielder Clive. There's a reason for all his angst, and it's something we'll see in-game, as we'll get to spend time with the character before and after a tragic event alters the course of his life.

## HEALING CRYSTALS

The land of Valisthea is covered in Mothercrystals, each providing shelter from an enigmatic force, allowing kingdoms to prosper and magic to spread. Part of that force

manifests in Eikons, legendary creatures (traditional FF Summons) bound to individuals called Dominants. Each kingdom treats its Eikon differently, as anything from a tool of war to an object of worship, or even a monster to be hated.

Clive's brother Joshua has Phoenix bound to him, and Clive is

**“LEANS ON SOME MATURE THEMES – IT COULD BE THE DARKEST FINAL FANTASY YET.”**

his protector. Both are sons of the Archduke of Rosaria, the Kingdom where they live. Naturally, this situation turns nasty, in a manner that's quite bloody for a Final Fantasy game. XVI is full of the usual fantastical creatures (chocobo? Check!), but like Final Fantasy XV before it, it leans on some

mature themes. In fact, it could be the darkest Final Fantasy yet, though in the safe hands of veteran devs who've worked on megahit MMORPG Final Fantasy XIV Online the mature content is inserted with a degree of confidence rather than simply by playing the 'edgy' card.

Sword in hand, Clive strides further into the more action-oriented approach Final Fantasy has been going for lately. Gone are the days of the turn-based battle. Here, Clive slashes and combos with the best of them. Fights look not dissimilar to those in Devil May Cry (the games share a combat designer in Ryota Suzuki). Somehow, Clive's able to channel Eikon powers for special moves, calling on Phoenix's flames for fiery launchers and Titan for hard-hitting strikes. We've yet to see if he will be solo throughout, or joined by a party, but if it were us we'd hate to be on his bad side.

THE HOT 50

"TRAVERSE THE  
WESTERN FRONTIER,  
A PREVIOUSLY UNSEEN  
AREA OF PANDORA."

06

# AVATAR: FRONTIERS OF PANDORA

Got the blues? Escape to Pandora

FORMAT PS5 / ETA 2022 / PUB UBISOFT  
DEV MASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT / PLAYERS TBC

The world created for the films was incredibly deep, so we're looking forward to exploring it in-game.

**T**he film took the world by storm. In fact, it was so well received, some fans even had physical withdrawals when they couldn't get their fix of Pandora. That was 12 years ago.

Should you be excited for Avatar: Frontiers Of Pandora? In a word: yes.

Built on the excellent Snowdrop engine that powers The Division 2, and developed for PS5 (no PS4 version is planned), Ubisoft's open-world Avatar game is a looker. The trailer revealed at E3 was running in Snowdrop and teases elements of action, from glimpses of running, bow in hand, in first person to riding a banshee into combat against the humans' Samson helicopter-like aircraft. It hints at the game's freedom and

sense of scale, as you'll be able to tame Direhorses to ride into combat, or mix everything in battles that could escalate across the lush, jungle-covered world.

### WIDE BLUE YONDER

While a new film series is scheduled to be released next year, Frontiers Of Pandora is a standalone story developed in collaboration with the film's creators, Disney and Lightstorm Entertainment. You'll play as a Na'vi and traverse the Western Frontier, a previously unseen area of Pandora, to save the planet from the eco-averse RDA forces – humankind's mineral-exploiting space miners.

Developer Massive Entertainment is promising a living, reactive world, a rich place filled with alien life and

grand vistas. With its experience of helping on the development of open-world shooter Far Cry 3 and developing The Division, the team has the credentials to deliver an interesting sandbox. Also, as Ubisoft has revealed Far Cry 6 will be partially playable in third-person, we predict you'll be able to choose how you play Frontiers Of Pandora.

Having seen the game in motion it's clear why this adventure is PS5-only. The world is vast and rich in detail. It echoes the realism the Avatar film brought to cinemas all those years ago, and in reality is technologically more advanced. As Aloy's westward adventure is also coming to PS4, it's hard not to view Frontiers Of Pandora as the *real* new-gen science-fantasy adventure you'll want to play on PS5.

THE HOT 50




# KENA: BRIDGE OF SPIRITS

A chat with Ember Lab will get you keen for Kena

FORMAT PS5 / ETA 2021 / PUB EMBER LAB / DEV EMBER LAB / PLAYERS 1

“UNABLE TO MOVE ON, MANY SPIRITS ARE SPOILING FOR A FIGHT WITH KENA.”

You can throw up a protective shield using , but it won't take many hits. Use it to get some breathing room.

**F**irst things first, it's 'Kay-nuh' and not 'Key-nah.' Far from being a caner, though, the protagonist of Ember Lab's first console title is an extremely hardworking and wholesome sort. She journeys to an ancient village deep within an overgrown forest, searching for a particular mountain shrine. The young spirit guide packs her father's staff for the journey, but soon finds that she's in for

anything but a quiet retreat in these weird woods.

A nefarious influence has pervaded the forest, scarring the land and scattering its denizens. The spirits, too, have become restless, with some even forgetting who they are. In our hands-on we're trying to help one of them, Taro, and so we're searching for a number of relics that we hope will jog his memory. His siblings, Beni and Saliya, accompany Kena on this quest but many spirits are nowhere near as helpful. Trapped between these trees and

unable to move on, many are spoiling for a fight with Kena.

As we've mentioned, the young girl's not completely alone, and there are still some friendly spirits to be found. The Rot, an adorable personification of the forest's natural cycle, are a gaggle of wide-eyed, pint-sized spirits who can assist Kena in a variety of ways. The Rot resemble the tiny soot sprites in the classic animated film *Spirited Away* – though somehow Ember Lab has created something even more huggable. But perhaps

» the most important distinction between the two types of spirit is that in Ember Lab's game you can dress the Rot up in adorable hats. These include but aren't limited to birds' nests holding blue eggs, toadstool caps, and even a friendly little frog. Pop one on a Rot and you'll be able to spot it in the crowd.

The studio's previous experience in film and animation shines throughout our hands-on. Michael Grier, creative lead at Ember Lab, tells us, "This is not exactly our approach but the way the games come together reminds me of a combination of [...] Pixar, [Studio] Ghibli, and [...] Nintendo [...] if

those companies came together to make a game, that's what we tried to achieve."

The Rot don't just follow close behind as you explore, they populate the forest, perching on rocks or turning up in unexpected places. There's a whole wide world to explore with many hidden secrets, and more Rot, to discover.

## WORLD OF WONDERS

Michael Grier describes the environmental design as "wide linear," saying "The structure of the

"THE STUDIO'S PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE IN FILM AND ANIMATION SHINES THROUGHOUT."



The spirits you face resemble distorted flora and fauna. Collect relics of their past lives to defeat them.

a stone to reveal one of their own trapped underneath.


The Rot can pull distant levers and band together to move large objects, but where they really shine – aside from at dressing up and being ever so helpful – is in combat. *Bridge Of Spirits* is in many ways a delightful, animated adventure but it's not a saccharine tale scared of its own shadow.

The COO of Ember Lab, Josh Grier, begins, "We grew up watching a lot of films [...] *The Lion King* [is] a very accessible film but it deals with some pretty dark themes – you know, brother killing brother and big fight sequences."


He later adds, "In [our game's] first area you're helping the kids find their brother. It's very simple and it helps us introduce the player [...] But then we get to the other spirits and we do get a little bit darker – nothing violent or anything like that. [We're] just trying to deliver a story that's accessible to everyone but then also has themes that are on a higher maturity level that are fun for the adults that are playing as well."

### ROT O'CLOCK

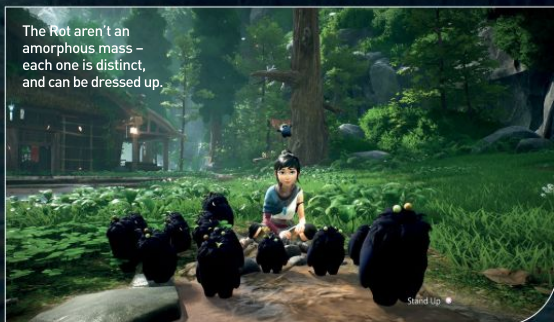
As Kena ventures deeper, you start to see invasive red and purple plant life winding its way through the forest. These bulbs of corruption are known as Deadzone Hearts and they often appear either to block your path or to call upon corrupted spirits to present a fighter obstacle for Kena. If you don't do a bit of garden warfare you'll have to take on a never-ending procession of combative spirits.

When you aim with , a special icon may appear over various parts of the environment or enemies to indicate the Rot can offer assistance. For instance, if you've got a



world is pretty straightforward but we really like to give players freedom to explore."

As we trundle around a new area, the DualSense rumbles to tell us a secret is sequestered nearby. When you're close enough to one of these, an adorable on-screen icon indicates that the Rot can jump in to help Kena. You'll see this icon in a variety of places but here, pressing  causes our helpful Rot to overturn

The Rot aren't an amorphous mass – each one is distinct, and can be dressed up.




## THE HOT 50

» Deadzone Heart in your sights, the Rot can help you purify it. Tap  and they spring into action – but there's one more step before you can nip that bud. Outside combat, releasing  sends out a pulse of energy that interacts with elements of the environment. This is useful for puzzles but also for withering enemy-spawning plants with the

help of the Rot. And if you send a pulse out near a bush full of fruit, it'll knock down a sweet little feast for the Rot to munch on. However, there's more to the game than watching tiny critters nibbling, and restoring the forest often requires bringing the fight to what's ailing it.

Restless spirits can look like gnarled driftwood brought to life,

wielding an assortment of masks, shields, spears, and more. Even the smallest enemies send the friendly Rot scarping, so Kena will have to hold her own for the most part. You can take out smaller saplings with a few well-placed, rapid-fire whacks by tapping  but the big bosses require a bit more strategy.

Defeated enemies sometimes drop golden orbs known in-game as Courage, and you also get some of the gold stuff for striking a boss directly. You need to build up this resource to power the friendly Rot's special abilities. In other words, the

“COLOURFUL CHARACTERS CAN ALSO TEACH KENA STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH THE BIGGER BADS.”



When they're brave enough, the Rot will help you tackle some enemies - like this tree hugging spirit creature.

minions, we have enough Courage to send the Rot in to bind the baddie to the spot. Once they're pinned down, we roll in and loose heavy attack after heavy attack by holding and releasing **RT**. But the boss shakes off the Rot all too quickly and we dodge one of their retaliatory swipes at the last moment.

The Rot can shine in a few other ways too. If the latest wave of enemies has got you on the ropes or a boss has whittled your health down to a sliver, they can heal you by turning nearby blue buds into brilliant blue blossoms. Plants known as Forest Tears can also temporarily restore the Rot to their original form - a wispy cloud that, for a limited time, Kena can direct to slam into obstacles and even enemies. If the plant life nearby is lacking, though, the Rot can instead beef up your basic attacks. We're quite fond of the Rot hammer, a move that takes your basic heavy attack and puts more than a little bit of welly behind it.

The Rot may be a timid lot but they'll have Kena's back when she needs it most in a fight - well, that is if they're feeling courageous. As Kena and the Rot weather more fights, the little spirits will become able to store up larger amounts of Courage so you can pop off multiple Rot abilities in one fell swoop.

As you continue on your journey, colourful characters can also teach Kena extra abilities and strategies for dealing with the forest's bigger bads. Rusu, a cloaked figure in an owl mask, gives her an archery lesson, allowing her to add another string to her bow both figuratively and literally. Her father's staff can now fling arrows made of blue light and, after a little target practice, we're another significant step on our way to saving the forest. Kena hits the mark from 24 August.

more you attack, the braver the Rot will feel. Until they've found their courage, holding **RT** throws up a shield around Kena that can protect her when she's in a jam - but it won't last forever. It can take a few hits in a fight before Kena will need to dodge out of the way with **○**.

### A LITTLE HELP

In one early boss encounter we're not able even to get close to a big beastie sequestered in a cave. A squirrely spirit, they dive into a hole whenever we get near, only to pop up somewhere else a few feet away. After picking off a few of their

Learn archery from Rusu and you can fire these arrows of blue light at distant targets.





# FORSPOKEN

A PS5 exclusive that's breaking new ground

FORMAT PS5 / ETA 2022 / PUB SQUARE ENIX / DEV LUMINOUS PRODUCTIONS / PLAYERS 1

**S**quare Enix's newly established internal studio Luminous Productions is making a statement with its debut project. The narrative-driven adventure game focusses on a young woman fighting for survival in a strange land that's as dangerous as it is

beautiful. The game was formerly known as Project Athia, taking its name from this central setting.

In newly-released images from the game, protagonist Frey Holland stares down a number of fantastical beasts, from strange wolf-like creatures corrupted by a magical light to dragons. Athia is littered

with crumbling ruins, lush forests, and rocky canyons, so Frey has plenty of hiding places to choose from. But this new IP is far from a stealth game, prioritising fluid movement and a magical skillset.

A gorgeous yet mysterious bracelet is wrapped around Frey's right forearm, and early gameplay

Ella Balinska's taking her first steps in videogames in the role of lead character Frey.

footage teases a peculiar power slumbers within it. When the scaly baddie she's facing finally departs, a disembodied voice emanates from Frey's bracer suggesting they make themselves scarce too.

In some ways the movement system feels very much like a turbo-charged evolution of Prince Noctis' phase-focussed fighting style. We see Frey dart forward before wall-running and then hurling herself upwards, spinning through the air with supernatural grace. In combat, she can weave a shield of magical energy, throw projectiles, and even call up a wave

of seismic force for a big, flashy attack. Athia has many secrets to unravel but it appears Frey herself is also full of surprises.

### THE LAST WORD

Early scenes suggest Frey starts a way off from taking on that mighty wyrm directly, but her journey through Athia may lead to a surprising destination. Lead actress Ella Balinska says, "Frey as a character is real, she's raw, she's a girl who lost her way – both figuratively and literally – and is a character I immediately connected with, as I feel many people around

the world will too when they set off on this adventure."

This is Balinska's videogame debut – to date she is best known for her starring role in the 2019 reboot of Charlie's Angels. The Guildford School Of Acting graduate says, "Growing up a huge fan of videogames myself, it's remarkable to see the incredible world and story of Forspoken come together, blurring the lines between reality and fantasy."

We'll take a trip to beautiful Athia and properly acquaint ourselves with Frey Holland and that bracerlet exclusively on PS5 next year.

"IN COMBAT, FREY CAN WEAVE A SHIELD OF MAGICAL ENERGY AND THROW PROJECTILES."

THE HOT 50



03

# DEATHLOOP

Back for seconds with Arkane Studio's latest

FORMAT PS5 / ETA 14 SEP / PUB BETHESDA SOFTWORKS / DEV ARKANE STUDIOS / PLAYERS 1-2

"THE WHOLE ISLAND OF BLACKREEF IS FULL OF ETERNALISTS TRYING TO STOP YOU."

**T**he immersive sim space may have become rarer over the years but genre fans have dined well on Arkane's offerings. The studio's best known for the Dishonored series and Prey, titles in which creative problem solving is encouraged through a host of

unique abilities, and its latest throws a time loop into the mix. The aesthetic is a colourful 1960s/70s one; art director Sebastien Mitton says the team merged inspiration drawn from John Boorman's film Point Blank, James Bond, and Tarantino films.

Tasked with assassinating eight targets within the span of one loop, from morning to night, protagonist

Colt has his work cut out for him. As the sole person trying to break the cycle and see the dawn of a new day, the whole island of Blackreef is full of Eternalists trying to stop him and maintain the loop.

Game director Dinga Bakaba stresses, "This may be a game about time, but you are not on a timer. You can figure things out at your own pace in any order you want" ➤



**1** Gathering information is crucial – you need to know where your targets will be, and when. **2** We're very keen on the game's late 1960s styling. **3** Although you've got to assassinate all eight Visionaries, they've warned everyone else to shoot you on sight – bystanders are far from innocent. **4** The strange, stylised goons are the stuff of midcentury spy-fi.

» as you piece together the perfect loop to freedom.”

Bakaba later clarifies that when he says “the perfect loop,” what he means is more of a “victory lap.” In immersive sim fashion, there's some expressive wiggle room in how you take out all of Blackreef's head honchos. Stealth plays a part, as in Arkane's previous projects – the ability Ether makes you invisible to enemy NPCs, their turrets, and, most importantly, the names on your list. But unlike in Dishonored there are no non-lethal takedowns on Blackreef. Colt can teleport anywhere within blinking range à la Corvo, but this time the ability is called Shift and it's part of a much more disruptive bag of tricks.

Just for starters, there's the Havok ability, which allows Colt to



absorb incoming damage before sending it right back at the opposition in a huge destructive blast. Carnage, meanwhile, enables him to throw Eternalists around like screaming ragdolls. Using Carnage in conjunction with Nexus, an ability that links enemies together so that they all experience the same deadly fate, makes for a pleasing double

act. Then there's the Reprise ability, which could be a real game-changer.

## DOWN BUT NOT OUT

“In a time loop, things reset every day. So, the beginning of this adventure is very iterative – which is a convoluted way to say that you lose all your shit when you die,” Bakaba explains, adding more reassuringly





“but Colt soon finds a way to break the rules.”

To begin with, the Reprise ability gives Colt some breathing room in each loop. Rather than leading to a hard reset for the entire loop, death sets Colt back just a few moments before disaster. However, these second chances are extremely limited and you have to find the right magical artefact to obtain this power in the first place. To give yourself a fighting chance until then, you can customise your loadout with a variety of trinkets that bestow buffs ranging from reducing incoming damage to even giving Colt a double jump. There’s also the Hacker-ma-jig, a nifty little device that can seize control of enemy turrets or otherwise twist the Eternalists’ tech to nefarious ends.

At the beginning of each new run, you can spend a currency called Residium on an arsenal that includes handguns, SMGs, machine guns, rifles, and shotguns – though our personal favourite has to be the silenced nail gun. Residium is the only funny money you’ll need on Blackreef, as this is an island of

murder and mayhem where ammo vending machines dispense bullets for free. With the Residium you find throughout loops you can hold onto your favourite weapons permanently, death be damned!

### **KILLER, NO FILLER**

Bakaba says, “It’s always heartbreaking when you get to the

says PS5 allowed the team to create areas that “are as big or bigger than Dishonored 2, with a huge density.”

Bakaba concludes, “I don’t think that we would have been able to preserve the level of ambition of this game were it not for the move to next-gen.”

Depending on the time you choose to visit (morning, afternoon,

**“WITH THE RESIDIUM YOU FIND THROUGHOUT LOOPS YOU CAN HOLD ONTO YOUR FAVOURITE WEAPONS, DEATH BE DAMNED.”**

end of a project, and you have to optimise things, and now you have to cut your map in half and you have to justify why it’s in two parts.”

When reflecting on how PlayStation 5’s affected development, however, Bakaba describes it as a “breath of fresh air.” Blackreef is split up into four areas (Fristad Rock, Karl’s Bay, The Complex, and Updaam) and you can visit each at four different times of day. Art director Sebastien Mitton

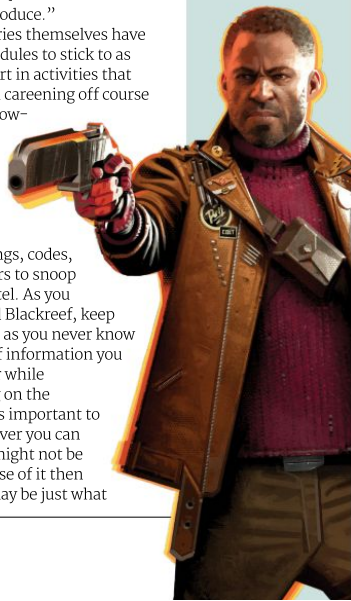
evening, or night) it won’t just be the light that makes things look different. The tide obfuscates some areas at one point in the day and then reveals them during another quarter. Bakaba says you can skip right to the good stuff and that you don’t have to play through the morning portion of every loop.

He explains, “In those time-loop movies, where they only show you the cool part – like the moment where the character faces his



1  
 ➤ nemesis or tries a new approach with the girl [...] that's what we wanted to reproduce."

The Visionaries themselves have their own schedules to stick to as well, taking part in activities that you could send careening off course with a little know-how. Early runs through the loop are all about gathering information – notes, recordings, codes, they're all yours to snoop through for intel. As you bounce around Blackreef, keep your ears open as you never know what nugget of information you could overhear while eavesdropping on the Eternalists. It's important to root out whatever you can as, while you might not be able to make use of it then and there, it may be just what



you need to hit the ground running on a future loop.

However, rival assassin Julianna Blake plants a seed of doubt. Over comms, she asks us if we're still doing that thing where we rifle through someone's things to figure out the best way to off them. While

ostensibly hunting one another, there's lots of banter like this in the game. He says, "The banter [...] never repeats, it's always a new conversation. We recorded a ton of conversations for that."

Ignoring Julianna for a moment, we overhear a loose-lipped

**"WE KIND OF SEE [JULIANNA] MORE AS AN ENTERTAINER. SO WHAT WE REWARD IS PLAYING WITH STYLE, PLAYING CREATIVELY."**

doing just that, Colt is deadpan as he says, "No, that would be morally reprehensible." Julianna responds, "Did you notice how they're conveniently lying around for you to discover? Did it ever occur to you that I might be writing them just to fuck with you?"

Bakaba describes Julianna and Colt's dynamic as 'Best Enemies,' and reveals that, even though you're

Eternalist bemoaning that they haven't got an invitation to the island's hottest party. Their chum tells them they can gatecrash by sneaking in through a particular window. Bingo! That's our ticket to getting up close and personal with our next target. You can also go in the front door with all guns blazing or try to take on the entire party inside but you'll need to bring your





A-game for the direct approach. Best save that one for a later loop, eh?

## DOUBLE TROUBLE

Now, let's check back in on Julianna. As we covered last issue, she's gunning for Colt at every turn as either another AI-controlled combatant or as a more unpredictable presence controlled by another player online. You unlock the ability to terrorise alternate timeline versions of Colt fairly early on, and we ask Dinga Bakaba what lies in store for players who want to

throw themselves wholeheartedly into protecting the loop.

"Besides the warm and fuzzy feeling of ruining someone's day?" he asks. Yes, aside from that.

"We don't incentivise that much winning as Julianna at least," Bakaba admits. "We kind of see her more as an entertainer. So what we reward is playing with style, playing creatively, or playing cautiously."

Like Colt, Julianna players start out with few tools and, for giving a good show, earn upgrade points for new weapons, abilities, or trinkets.

**1** As you gain Residium, you're able to hang onto favourite weapons between loops. **2** Fia Zborowska, one of your octet of targets. **3** Julianna's able to take on the appearance of any character as she tries to get the drop on you, so you have to be wary of even the most basic-looking goon. **4** While non-lethal takedowns aren't required here – you have to kill to get off this island – you nonetheless need to exercise stealthy caution at times.

Bakaba adds, "Those rewards are randomised, so that, for instance, after playing three hours of Julianna, Seb [Mittin] would have a different character than mine."

Bakaba describes the freeform multiplayer mode as more of an 'anecdote generator.' While never compulsory, throwing yourself into this mode is how you unlock unique cosmetics for both Colt and Julianna. He says, "We figure that if you care about how you look in a first-person game, that's probably because you want to play with others."

He later adds, "The narrative team and the art team [...] try and make sure that each of those costumes would express one element of the personality of Colt or Julianna, or one aspect of the themes on the island."

Forge your own water cooler stories and excavate Blackreef's secrets from 14 September.

THE HOT 5



# ELDEN RING

This world is the opposite of 'armless

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 21 JAN / PUB BANDAI NAMCO ENTERTAINMENT / DEV FROMSOFTWARE / PLAYERS 1-4



After all this waiting, it turns out that *Horse Souls* really is still happening, and due out much sooner than *The Winds Of Winter*. This collaboration between FromSoftware's Hidetaka Miyazaki and *Game Of Thrones*' creator George RR Martin has resulted in a dangerous-looking open world ripe for exploration, filled with the kind of nightmarish creatures that feature heavily in both creators' bodies of work. More than a big step forward for the dev studio, this is a long equine stride that evolves the soulslike.

After all, much of the premise is deeply reminiscent of that of the very first *Dark Souls*, which captured the imaginations of so many. Playing as a Tarnished (similar to a Hollow from *Dark Souls*), you set out on a quest to find the titular Elden Ring, and use it to rid the shattered world of a curse. Just like in *Dark Souls*, you need to do so by setting out to explore a large, interconnected world – here centred on an Yggdrasil-like world tree – facing Big Bads as you go.

What really sets *Elden Ring* apart is the expansiveness of the world. Where *Dark Souls* offered a large interconnected space you explored on foot by occasionally choosing different pathways to explore, here it really is an open world, and you get across it by summoning a horned horse spirit to ride. It's the kind of design philosophy fans loved about the original *Dark Souls*, a high point that the series never quite reached again.

### KNIGHTLY KNIGHT

Interacting with your horse companion itself is designed to be as seamless as possible. There will be no edging it up a mountain in a zigzag fashion (sorry Todd Howard). You can whistle to summon it to form underneath you, and it breezily crosses the large environments, able to leap across platforms and gaps. There are even Sonic-like bounce pads you can use to spring your horse up sheer cliffs.

Horseback combat plays an important role, as you can slash at enemies while riding. Some of

▶ the areas feel absolutely enormous in scale, plus some enemies move around throughout the day and night cycle (which also features dynamic weather). After dark, it appears some enemies may huddle beside campfires, and you can do the same – suggesting a playful approach to the idea of FromSoftware’s bonfire checkpoints, and that you might not want to venture too far out of your comfort zone after night falls.

We’ve yet to see quite how that works – whether some areas will always be dangerous, or whether some enemies have paths that they keep looping – but some foes like to travel in packs, such as ones pulling along a structure as part of a convoy. You’ll be glad of your horsey friend in these situations as you can get a drop on enemies by riding headfirst into them. Another section sees the reverse, with you having to ride

desperately out of the way of a dragon flinging lightning at you.

### SWAMP FEVRE

When you’re not travelling, you’ll spend plenty of time on foot. We’ve already seen multiple discrete areas (a swamp, a crypt, and a castle) where you’ll need to poke around in more traditional Dark Souls fashion. This is where a lot of the large bosses you’ve come to expect from the developer can be fought, though it remains to be seen quite how expansive the areas in which they reside are. It nevertheless means that if you get stuck on a boss, you’ll be able to ride your horse elsewhere to try a different approach while you level up. As these areas are all seamlessly connected, it’s just a matter of deciding where you want to explore next.

The creatures all look very mean, many veering closer to the

Bloodborne style of beasts, but with the medieval-fantasy aesthetic of Dark Souls, all steeped in weirdness. We’re talking giants with craggy faces and strange bee stingers coming out of their stomachs, a walking rock mound with a large bell on its underside, and enemies with lots of arms. *Lots* of arms. From a weird pale human centipede to an axe-wielding lord with a huge arm that’s made up of lots of smaller arms, and even walking jars that sport two little arms coming out of their insides (we call them Jarms).

### CALL THE CAVALRY

Cue taking them on with the classic lock-ons and dodge rolls. Careful is still the name of the game with the sword-and-sorcery style combat. Though, weapon-wise, plenty of options are on show. Unlike the limited arsenal in Bloodborne or Sekiro’s devotion to a single sword,

“IF YOU GET STUCK ON A BOSS, YOU CAN RIDE YOUR HORSE ELSEWHERE TO TRY A DIFFERENT APPROACH.”



Miyazaki and Martin seem a great duo – this world is one of the creepiest we've seen in gaming.

Elden Ring allows you to customise your playstyle in a way that builds off Dark Souls. We've seen big swords, magical staves, scimitars, bows, and even some kind of whip. It's even up to you whether to wield a weapon with both hands, carry a shield, or go in dual-wielding blades like a Drizzt cosplayer.

We've yet to see the full scope of magic, but weapon enchantments look to be one way you can get the edge on some enemies, like

extending the length of your sword. Given the bigger world, this is one solution to taking on large groups of enemies at once – as we've already mentioned, many of them seem to like to travel en masse.

As considered as the combat may still be, you have more movement-based abilities yourself, able to flip off enemies to create space or leap

into the fray from a greater distance. Fusing its trademark dangerous action with greater player expression is FromSoftware's answer to dealing with the larger space, and it looks like lessons have been learned from Sekiro in terms of agility. Like in that game, you can make use of stealth to avoid some fights altogether.

But if it all gets too hard (and it's a FromSoftware game, so there's no shame in admitting things can be tough), then co-op gameplay returns, with players able to summon each other to assist as blue phantoms. Up to four people can quest together, evening the playing field against some of the nightmares that lie in wait. We've yet to see if PvP will appear in the form of red phantoms, but jolly co-operation will always be a boon.

It's been worth the wait to see more of Elden Ring. It's certainly an ambitious project, and on paper it's FromSoftware's biggest game ever. It looks stunning on PS5 (and will be a free upgrade for those who spring for the PS4 version), and truly seems to be a step forward for the soulsborne genre the studio created. Roll on next year.



Grapple hooks in Sekiro, horses in Elden Ring... we can't wait for Bloodborne 2 to introduce grinding.

# THE HOT 50



01

# HORIZON FORBIDDEN WEST

Aloy goes west

■ FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA TBC / PUB SONY WORLDWIDE STUDIOS / DEV GUERRILLA GAMES / PLAYERS 1

**P**ut aside your childish things; Guerrilla Games' sequel is the reason you bought a PlayStation 5 (sorry, Astro Bot...). The moment we see Aloy trot out from the jungle canopy, clamber up a grass hill and gaze out on the crystal-blue shores of the Pacific Ocean stretching out below, it's clear her return is going to be epic.

During previous reveals developer Guerrilla Games boasted Horizon Forbidden West would be a larger and richer world than the post-apocalyptic Colorado it brought to PlayStation 4, yet before seeing it in action we hadn't expected this open world to feature the curated set-pieces and platforming events more common to the Uncharted games than other large sandboxes. This future vision of California is absolutely 'open' but it's also

heavily directed in the way only Sony games manage to achieve.

In the opening sequence we see Aloy bound across mossy logs like an athletic Nathan Drake. Branches pierce the windows of long-forgotten homes and cross waterfalls. As she reaches the beach tall grasses hide her from prowling Clawstriders. It's familiar, but it's also bolder, larger, and more colourful than the similar hide-and-seek shenanigans of Naughty Dog's games. »

# THE HOT 50

» The real difference becomes clear when Aloy is spotted and the pack of robotic dinosaurs swoops in for an easy kill. Running is a good idea. Aloy can loose arrows on the hoof, and now you're able to clamber up and over most of the obstacles in her way – a huge gear-shift moment from the original *Horizon Zero Dawn*, which limited your movement much more. Unable to shake her metallic, chainsaw-jawed pursuers – when Aloy climbs a vine-covered pillar they menacingly circle upwards on a surrounding staircase – the only escape route is down, into the watery depths of the ocean below.

It's an innocently simple moment but one that instantly reveals the scale of *Horizon Forbidden West*'s ambition. Below the waves is an entirely new world equal in detail and scope to the one above. The coral-encrusted rocky cavern leads to a tall seaweed forest. As we're consumed by watching the light scatter across the rocky seabed, a Snapmaw glides past, until now hidden in the seaweed. Tall-grass muscle memory kicks in; as above, so below stealth is crucial. Uniquely,

however, you can use ocean currents to navigate speedily beneath the surface. Riding the tides can enable you to escape danger, but it also suggests new opportunities for exploration. Perching on an underwater ledge, the camera teases submerged buildings in the distance, places ripe for scavenging.

It's easy to get distracted in *Forbidden West* by everything from the world around Aloy to the gentle but incredibly realistic way her hair sways in the water.

## RAID TO REPLY

Once Aloy's back on dry land the game reverts to more familiar stealth techniques – skulking in the undergrowth hides her from a Raider hunting party. Raiders are the new villains who, like our heroine, have gained the ability to control the world's mechanical monsters, and it's been confirmed

there will be new tribes, enemies, and even allies in this sequel.

The environment hints at the world the way it was before the cataclysm. The remnants of a diner sign can still be seen, and the shell of a yellow tram is sunk into the sandy beach. It's another sign this sequel has been crafted to offer a unique spectacle and grounded sense of place. The encounter



## WEST IS BEST

The ways Aloy's western impresses



### FOCUS SCANNER

Sweep this across the environment to reveal areas of the scenery that you can free climb. This sequel offers greater freedom of movement than Aloy's original adventure, though, as the Focus Scanner demonstrates, she still can't climb everything you see.



### PULLCASTER

As the name suggests, you can fire this into areas of the scenery and zip up or across the environment. It's Batman's zipline mechanic for a tropical open-world paradise, and in-game ensures a greater flexibility to escape a stampeding Tremortusk.



### SHIELDWING

A new gadget that enables Aloy to glide from great heights, its chaotic spiralling descent means landing where you want will require some luck, but it will certainly come in handy when dropping in on unsuspecting enemies.



As if the machines weren't enough on their own, Raiders can control some of them.



**“ALOY CAN LOOSE ARROWS ON THE HOOF AND NOW YOU’RE ABLE TO CLAMBER UP AND OVER MOST OF THE OBSTACLES IN HER WAY.”**



#### DIVING MASK

Aloy can remain underwater for as long as she pleases using the Diving Mask. As part of the game's set amid the ruins of a flooded San Francisco you'll be making great use of this tool, and these watery stages are as built-up as any ruinous building.



#### MECHANICAL MONSTERS

Like in the first game, Aloy can tame some of the mechanised beasts she encounters. The recent gameplay demo showed how she can ride the raptor-like Clawstrider, using its pace and agility to take on the slower, armoured Tremortusk.



#### VALOR SURGE

Like movement, combat has been given a makeover. Aloy can mix melee strikes and bow shots into combos to deal more damage, but she can also use the Valor Surge to boost attacks, knocking back enemies or shedding their armour from targets.



#### WEAPON WHEEL

Adhesive grenades that gunk up mechanic beasts, a spike launcher that explodes on contact, and smoke bombs to blind enemies for an Irish goodbye – Aloy has all the tools in her Bat-belt. All can be upgraded on her new workbench.



» we're about to see has been carefully plotted against an evocative backdrop.

The combat itself is fluid and improvised. Aloy dodge-rolls from attacks and circles her opponents. She can blend attacks into unique combos. Her spear strikes flow into targeted bow shots. An opponent's armour glows, revealing weak spots. Just as the arena for our fight has been thought out, cinematic scenes cut into the action to reveal a director's hand behind the battle. In one move, Aloy plugs a Valor Surge unit – which powers attacks charged

by XP earned as you land hits – into her spear to activate a new ability. The one we see is called the 360 Blast, but more can be bought and unlocked in her skill tree. Each has a cinematic to sell the move; with the 360 Blast the camera cuts to Aloy, circles, and pulls out as she lunges at her opponent, knocking them backwards. It's fast and smooth and never feels clumsy, a sign PS5's SSD is buzzing away in the background.


## WHAT A TREET

Just as the fight was choreographed, walking through this world feels equally fine-tuned to build atmosphere. A hazy mist drifts in

the trees creating sun rays that pick out floating leaves and insects and make Aloy's new world come alive. As she climbs what used to be an apartment block, the remnants of the San Francisco Bay Bridge come into view. It's breathtaking.

This future California is vital and varied. Aloy's mission will take her across the west to a variety of regions, meeting new tribes along the way, to track down old-world tech that could hold the secret to curing the world. She'll visit places like the Desert Tenakth village of Salt Bite, built on well-realised lore you'll be itching to uncover.

The various locations teased also reveal the sequel's day and night



The Shieldwing's a new piece of kit that enables Aloy to glide a reasonable distance.



Will these western Snapmaws be more deadly than those in Horizon Zero Dawn?

cycle, as the previously sun-baked mountains come to life under changing weather conditions.

### UP TO THE TUSK

Back in the demo, it's a sunny day and Aloy is facing off against a massive Tremortusk. These hulking armoured mammoth-shaped robotic creatures have been tamed by Aloy's new enemy, and there's one between her and the widget that will reveal the next location of Blight-curing tech.

As in the original game these beastly battles are epic puzzle-assaults to savour. Aloy needs to pick apart armour plating, target

cogs, and launch explosive spear attacks on the Raider platforms strapped to the monster's back.

This sequel encourages you to tap into the full range of Aloy's abilities. We see how she can use her Pullcaster to zip out of danger and up and over the ruins of buildings jutting from the sandy beach. The Tremortusk makes swift rubble of this brickwork as it chases her. When Aloy lands, a quick cycle through her weapon wheel reveals traps and offensive gadgets to slow down the creature and then chip away its armour.

Once the beast's shielding is whittled away it changes up its

attacks, from laser bursts that stream across the ground to rising up on its rear revealing a yellow underbelly – weak spot confirmed.

Post-fight you can bank any XP earned and put it towards unlocking playstyles, upgrades, and more Valor Surge abilities. There's also a new weapon crafting table suggesting this sequel has a deeper RPG side than the previous game. It's designed to encourage you to enhance weapons, tools, and robots using specific resources, giving the game a Monster Hunter vibe.

### NEW HORIZONS

This sequel allows more freedom to explore and fight, while also orchestrating events to have the greatest impact. Aloy treads a fine line, but, as we've discovered, she's doing so in the sprightly way only PS5 can deliver. It leaves us eager to see more on Sony's new-gen console, but slightly anxious that Forbidden West may stumble on PS4. Can Sony's cross-gen approach do a game this ambitious justice? We'll wait and see. ■

**"A NEW WEAPON CRAFTING TABLE SUGGESTS THIS SEQUEL HAS A DEEPER RPG SIDE THAN THE PREVIOUS GAME."**



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# Reviews



**"A JOY TO PLAY  
ONCE YOU'RE IN  
THE ARENA."**

**140** Guilty Gear Strive

## 120 Ratchet & Clank: Rift Apart

It's the game your PS5's been waiting for



### HIGHLIGHTS

SONG OF HORROR **128** | FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE INTERMISSION **131** | WARHAMMER AGE OF SIGMAR: STORM GROUND **132** | CHICORY: A COLORFUL TALE **135** | NECROMUNDA: HIRED GUN **136** | MASS EFFECT LEGENDARY EDITION **146** | NINJA GAIDEN: MASTER COLLECTION **150** | THE ELDER SCROLLS ONLINE: BLACKWOOD **154**

EDITOR'S  
AWARD  
PLAY

# Ratchet & Clank: Rift Apart

These heroes will rip you a new one



## INFO

Format PS5

Price £69.99

ETA Out now

Pub PlayStation Studios

Dev Insomniac Games

Players 1

Length 12+ hours

### Accessibility

Skippable puzzles; simplified traversal toggles and options; adjustable camera sensitivity and motion blur intensity; toggleable camera shake and ledge guard; combat assist modes; combat shortcuts; customisable subtitles, HUD colours, and visual contrasts and shaders; game speed options



**D**imensions in which you can even find a PlayStation 5 have been scarce, and while there are great games on the system, not many have really forced it to show us what it's capable of. Thankfully, our two galactic heroes are here to make one noisy landing – because Rift Apart has *all* the bells and whistles. Beyond being a PS5 must-play, this is a game that hasn't even been possible until now.

Ratchet & Clank have been unlikely saviours of the universe many times since their 2002 PS2 debut. Rift Apart starts with the pair attending a parade in their honour in Megapolis. It's a cute introduction that sees the twosome jumping across floats that summarise their origins in a tongue-in-cheek fashion, explaining how a lombax mechanic on a backwater planet teamed up with a defective killer robot to thwart evil, and then did it again, and again, and again.

While you'll still be leaping between platforms and blasting sweet heck out of enemies with over-the-top guns, the opening makes you realise this is a spacefaring adventure like no other. It almost feels like a cop-out to say that Rift Apart feels like an animated movie you can play, but there's no other way to put it. When Dr Nefarious attempts to steal The Dimensionator that's part of the parade, lively cutscenes integrate seamlessly into hands-on action, transitions lingering in the right ways to keep everything flowing.

## ACROSS THE UNIVERSE

The SSD isn't only used to make cutscenes smoother and more detailed, it's also core to Rift Apart's action. After Dr Nefarious' scheme goes wrong (what's new?), breaches between dimensions begin to open up all over the place, some of which Ratchet can use to move instantly from point to point. It might sound like a grapple,



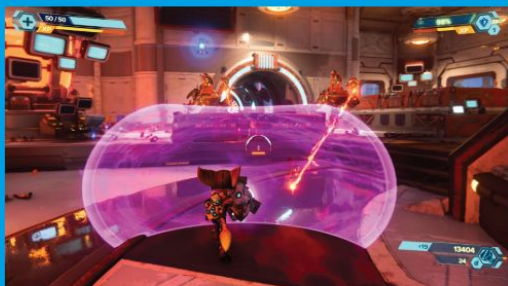
Admire the textures on the otherworldly enemies before you put them back into the ground.



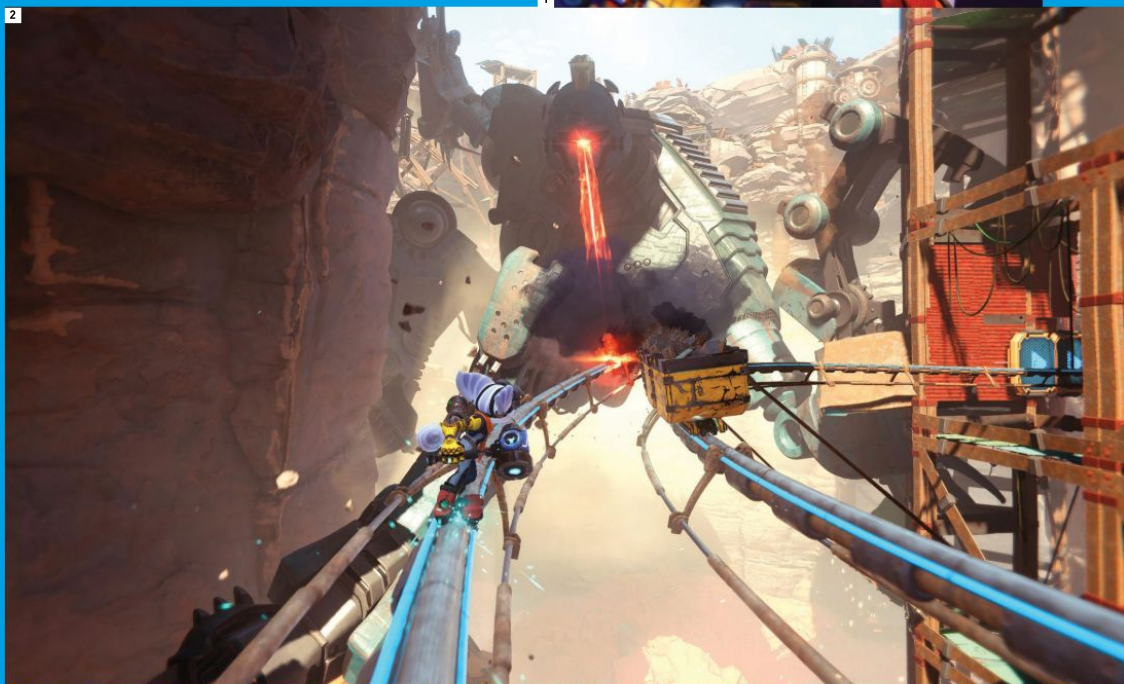
Rift Apart feels like an animated movie you can play.



# REVIEW PS5



At half-press this shield blocks projectiles, turning them back on their originator with a full squeeze. It reminds us of Apex Legends, in a good way.



1 Proving that Clank has chemistry with just about everyone, his team-up with Rivet just works. 2 Massive set-pieces are on a planetary scale. Nathan Drake needs to take up grinding. 3 As per the classics, hidden gold bolts unlock special skins and cheats, from infinite ammo to big heads. 4 Hoverboots are extra-fast here, and you can boost them by pumping them like rollerblades.

but it's more than that. These cracks in the universe glow purple, and when targeted from a distance pull part of the level through the hole over to Ratchet, rather than him to it.

It's so slick it almost feels unreal, and gives you a buzz that you'll feel regularly as long as the game lasts. You're still going from point to point like you might with a grapple, but it's punchier and offers a different cadence (and actual grapple points you swing between are present too).

Rifts aren't only used to progress. They can also lead you to out-of-the-way bonus areas and collectibles, and litter most big arenas where you have to tackle waves of enemies. Whether you're facing Goons-4-Less mercenaries, evil robots, or giant T-Rex-like aliens, you can use rifts to outflank them, create breathing space, or just cover more ground as you rain down destruction with Ratchet's latest arsenal of delights. Rifts become a common part of the shooting action.

Not all rifts are distant ones you hook toward. Some can be opened up to travel through directly, often in chase sequences or boss fights (only rarely hurling you into an intermediary void, despite what preview footage had us fearing). At other times you stumble upon cracks that you can open up to reveal pocket dimensions. Step through one, and you walk into a dreamlike challenge space, TARDIS-style. Complete the optional gauntlet (such as jumping between TNT crate platforms, or a sequence of tricky wall-runs) in one of these and you're rewarded with a piece of armour. You can use these to dress up either lombax (more on the other one in a bit), and they offer passive buffs even if you don't strap them on to complement your big weapons.

### NOT IN KANSAS

So, who aside from Ratchet will be curling their paws around some high-grade firearms, you might ask. Just as Dr Nefarious' plan seems foiled, he escapes to a dimension where he always wins. Following him, Ratchet and Clank are separated and the latter pairs off with Ratchet's dimensional doppelgänger, Rivet, a leader in the resistance against her own Emperor Nefarious.

Throughout the story you frequently switch between the two lombaxes – each planet is essentially linked to one character – while they communicate along the way and sometimes trade their sidekicks. The story won't win any Oscars (besides this one, of course), but it's a space romp filled with fun characters, twists and turns, and humorous dialogue (which feels a bit more on point than 2016's attempt).

Beside Ratchet and Rivet, other characters get plenty of time to shine. Some of these are completely new faces, while others are unique takes on old ones (the eye-roll-inducing Captain Quark has an equivalent in Captain Quantum, for example). Clank gets some playable time in the form of aerial puzzle challenges that are sufficiently challenging to be engaging (and are completely skipable from the menu), or cute lil' spider-robot Glitch who can take on viruses shoot-



KT-7461 bears a resemblance to someone. A dimensional doppelgänger?

'em-up-style to open some computer terminals for you.

### TRIGGER HAPPINESS

Ratchet's and Rivet's levels and goals may differ, but the way they play feels mostly the same.

Thanks to a mix up with sassy courier-shaped robot Ms Zurkon, the two even end up accidentally sharing bank

accounts and arsenals. The only tools they don't share are their melee weapons: Ratchet's classic omnivrench, and Rivet's robotic hammer. The former can be thrown like a boomerang, while the latter bounces back in an upwards arc when tossed. It's a minor difference.

The guns themselves are far from samey, with the DualSense allowing each weapon to pack a punch and have a utility that wouldn't be possible on previous consoles. Almost every weapon has two functions mapped to **R1**: one when you press the trigger halfway, and the other when you push it all the way down, with resistance making the gap between the two very clear. The functions range from simple things like showing the arc of a Shatterbomb before you commit to hurling it to the Void Shield that deploys a projectile-halting barrier at half-press, then shoots back with a burst when clicked all the way down. Others include a lock-on, turning precision shots into burst fire, spinning up a minigun, firing both barrels of a shotgun at once, or the same with **R2** to initiate a time-slowing power while aiming down a sniper rifle's sights.

As they're all essentially variations on 'readying up' a

weapon, they don't require much thought, quickly becoming second nature. It's not like Returnal where guns have alt-fires that operate quite differently and have a cooldown. Here, this is just how the weapons work, rather than feeling (ahem) bolted on.

Even with so many weapons, things never become confusing as the rules are consistent across different weapon types. Each one complements the action in a way that feels useful rather than gimmicky (like Tools Of Destruction's Tornado Launcher).

### UP YOUR ARSENAL

Every weapon is comical, whether that's just by being honkingly massive compared to Ratchet's relatively short bow, or because you dropped a Topiary Sprinkler turret that turns enemies into hedges, stopping them in their tracks.

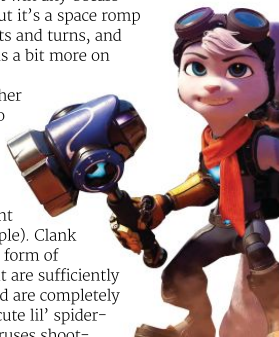
There's some crossover between weapons – multiple ones spawn little helpers, for example, such as Mr Fungi (a quipping floating toadstool who distracts enemies) or the returning fan favourite Agents Of Doom eggs (which hatch into explosive little bots). But each has its own personality and use, and you'll often hot-swap between them all, either to suit different situations or to level them up. Weapon XP builds over time, expanding skill customisability (using collectible ritaranium), and transforming into a powered-up version at level five – for instance a quick-firing blaster becomes one that spreads three at once (how very R-Type).

In true Ratchet fashion, a New Game+ challenge mode allows you to keep your guns and then pay to upgrade them into more powerful variants that can level up even further, until you're

**Rules are consistent across weapon types. Each complements the action and feels useful.**



Rivet might play a lot like Ratchet, but has enough personality to carry half the game.





- 1 Zurkon Jr's battle arena offers some tasty rewards, if you can overcome his best (weirdly skeletal) gladiators. Of course you can.
- 2 Clank alters the properties of his mirror image to jump and run through puzzles.
- 3 Wall-running, using panels marked with arrows, and phantom dashing in a chosen direction add a much-needed new layer to your traversal of the environments.

tearing the game apart quickly and with plenty of carnage. Challenge mode sees the return of the Bolt Multiplier, allowing you to gain huge sums of currency by avoiding taking hits.

### POCKET PLANET

Just like the hefty arsenal, each planet you visit has something new to offer, and feels distinct. Some offer wide spaces, with plenty of collectibles (such as the humorously named Lorbs – lore orbs), while others are tighter affairs. A couple of planets feature Blazar crystals that shift you between alternate-dimension versions of the same planet to find a path, while others feature multiple paths with different rewards tucked away in each one.

The action rarely dwells in one place too long, the story ricocheting you from planet to planet, always serving up something new. Massive set-pieces are constantly thrown your way. They're as good as the ones in *Uncharted*, and even surpass them in terms of planetary scale. Not only do you grind around skyscraper-sized drills, you find yourself dodging explosions caused by giant enemies by jumping through rifts at just the right

moment. Even these are soaked in the series' wry humour – in one instance a hapless bot insists the furious alien hunter after you just wants to be pals.

It's hard to stop grinning throughout a first playthrough, constantly awed by the rollercoaster of PS5 technology artfully deployed. Each new planetary vista and quirky enemy (including many nods to previous games) is laden with vibrant, colourful detail. You can tell this is a universe Insomniac Games has been building for almost 20 years, embracing every strange and goofy idea to build a really unique setting.

Visually there's heaps of depth to every little area, particle effects combining with striking lighting to really give a sense of depth to these otherworldly locations, whether that's in the shiny glitz of the Megapolis-set opening or the sombre half-flooded tunnels where you're stalked by an Alien-like terror (and then have to pretend to be interior

decorators). If it's snaps you're after, then there's plenty to capture in the photo mode that's as fully featured as Marvel's Spider-Man's.

### LOMBAX-MAN

Speaking of the webhead, we last checked in with Ratchet & Clank back in 2016, before Insomniac Games marvelled us with its Spidey adventure. Ratchet veterans will find familiar activity in *Rift Apart*, but it feels like those tried-and-tested components have been approached from a fresh direction. Lessons have been learned from web-swinging across New York.

Running and gunning as you control either lombax is slick, and moves like strafing and jumping sideways to dodge return, albeit with a greater fluidity and precision. You'll be double flipping over multiple lasers in no time. Ratchet's clearly been using his time off to run some laps of the track, as he can now sprint to change his

Each planet you visit has something new to offer, and feels distinct.



- 4 Virus-blasting microbot Glitch has a sweet but anxious personality. You can do it!
- 5 Weapon upgrades can vastly improve your offensive power.
- 6 You'll need more than an omnivrench to beat Juice.



usual jogging pace, useful when picking over previously explored environments.

But with new dimensions come new moves. Quite quickly you unlock the ability to use the phantom dash, which allows you to boost with **Ⓞ**. Not only can you use this to extend jumps, but also to dodge through attacks, turning some encounters into tense shoot-'em-up-fests that are similar in feel to *Returnal*'s, albeit with more leeway on taking hits, and bigger guns to shoot back.

Combine that phantom dash with wall-runs, and sometimes a loping run-and-gunner transforms into a game capable of setting up some challenging gauntlets and offering a degree of expression in your movement. Run on the marked wall-run locations and you feel

the tiny texture hexagons shimmering in your DualSense. *Rift Apart* is full of little touches that build a world around you, from clicks and clacks of a keyboard through your DualSense's speaker to the way jumping into the spaceship to pick a destination transitions fluidly from action to menu.

All those little things add up to a lot, making *Rift Apart* a massive ball of loving detail and unforgettable moments. Any misses, like the odd bit of iffy enemy AI or one wave of enemies too many, are few and far between. It mesmerises its entire way, and leaves you hungry for more. But nothing else out there will match up until other PS5 games start better utilising what's under the hood. As it is, *Rift Apart* is utterly unmissable.

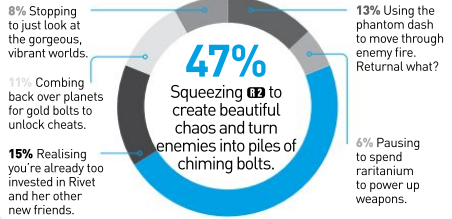


Just like the super-satisfying weaponry, *Rift Apart* shoots on all cylinders to set a new bar for PS5. We've never had a game like this before. Oscar Taylor-Kent



## THE PLAYBOOK

### WHAT YOU DO IN: R&C: RIFT APART



## THE DUALSENSE DIFFERENCE

### TRIGGERS

The power is in your hands. How far you pull the trigger affects firing modes. Subtle yet crucial, the action becomes second nature.



### HAPTICS

The haptics add a surprising amount of texture to movement, from wall-running to plodding along the ground (aided by little speaker noises).

## LOVING/HATING



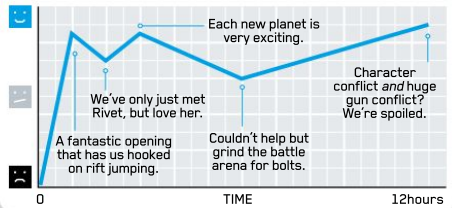
### GOOD CHEMISTRY

Vocal performances are lovely, from David Kaye's trademark Clank giggle to Jennifer Hale making Rivet a new favourite.

### IMPORTANT CHOICE

You can choose Fidelity, Performance, or Performance RT visual modes. They all look great, but how can we choose one?

## COMPEL-0-GRAPH



## IS IT BETTER THAN?



YES

*Rift Apart* evolves everything R&C was doing, with some sharper, funnier writing to boot.



YES

This simpler fare from former Sonic Team members might be better for really young kids, but it's not close.



YES

Similar approaches to PS5 gunplay, but *Rift Apart*'s use of DualSense edges *Returnal* out.



It's the same great remaster series, now with a PS5 sheen. But if you're not already sporting purple, there's little to attract you.

UPGRADED FOR PS5

# Saints Row: The Third Remastered

A mostly smooth return to Steelport



Once again it's time to party like it's 2011 – only now the Saints are bringing their mayhem to PS5. Based on last year's remaster, the extensive overhaul of a PS3 favourite is now enjoying next-gen bells and whistles through a free upgrade.

**INFO**  
**FORMAT** PS5  
**PRICE** £34.99 (Free upgrade if you already own the PS4 version)  
**ETA** Out now  
**PUB** Deep Silver  
**DEV** Deep Silver, Spermsoft Inc  
**PLAYERS** 1 (optional online modes)  
**LENGTH** 30+ hours  
**ACCESSIBILITY** Basic subtitle options; difficulty options

The process of transferring your PS4 save data to the PS5 version of the game is meant to be fairly slick. After downloading both versions of the game plus your old save data, you should be able to pick up where you left off. Alas, first we were told our profile had been corrupted. Then when we tried to check our save was usable on the PS4 version, we got caught in an infinite load loop – an issue that was supposedly fixed with a recent patch. The PS5 build wanted nothing to do with our borked save and we only managed to get the transfer system to play ball after wiping our cloud saves, digging out our original PS4 hardware, and reuploading our save data from there. Our advice: don't faff with the old build; head straight into the PS5 version once you've downloaded all your files.

**BACK IN LILAC**  
 Thankfully our return to Steelport proper goes better. The PS4 build offers a respectable locked 30fps, and the PS5 upgrade promises twice as

many frames alongside dynamic 4K resolution. It's a smooth ride, whether you're wheeling around belting out bangers from the last decade or holding off the fuzz with a rocket launcher.

missing a beat. Nothing kills the mood having to wait to retry a failed mission. As for the DualSense, new functionality is limited beyond a purple light emanating from your controller.

**DualSense functionality is limited beyond a purple light emanating from your controller.**

Loading is often over in less than half the time it would've taken the PS4 build to begin considering a spot of mayhem. While you mostly miss the character portrait loading screens that were new for the PS4 release, it means you can get stuck back in without

But while this is a welcome freebie for fans, there's little here to entice newbies. That is to say that, while the remaster effort remains impressive and the upgrade introduces welcome technical upgrades, the PS5 sheen cannot obscure the decade-old game design.



A PS3 title that received an impressive amount of TLC for its PS4 remaster only gets basic tweaks for PS5. The design and humour show their age. **Jess Kinghorn**



**INFO** **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £14.99  
**ETA** Out now **PUB** Interabang  
 Entertainment **DEV** Interabang Entertainment,  
 Spooky Bard Productions **PLAYERS** 1-2 (offline only)



## Jay And Silent Bob: Mall Brawl – Arcade Edition

Brawl the wrong moves

Appearing in eight films over 25 years, it's no wonder Jay and Silent Bob are considered by many to be lovably dumb and crude rather than... just dumb and crude. A move to videogames seemed inevitable, an 8-bit styled brawler much less so.

This 'arcade edition' sharpens up the graphics and sound, but other changes are minor. It's essentially still the NES game first released in 2019.<sup>1</sup> If you die, you're sent back to the beginning of the current level rather than the beginning of the whole game, which is great, but otherwise it's partying like it's 1988.

With a friend locally, or on your own switching between the two characters, you'll wrestle the authentically awkward and unresponsive controls while beating up everybody you see. You know, like Jay and Silent Bob don't.

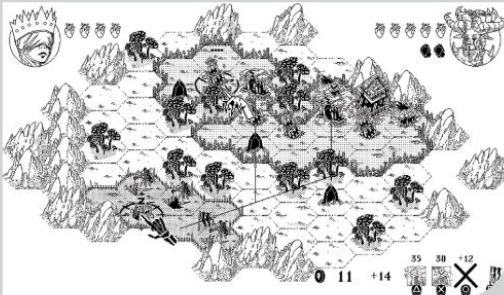
There's plenty for fans of the View Askewiverse to appreciate, certainly. Familiar people, places, and jokes will pop up throughout, allowing you to point and declare "I understood that reference!" like a Captain America meme. It lacks the edge of the movies, however; there's little to none of the unrepentant crudeness that often powers the characters' movie scenes.

While Jay and Silent Bob diehards may get some enjoyment out of this, possibly with the aid of certain cigarettes, most people will struggle to do so. It's often difficult and frustrating, more down to a rigid determination to mimic 30-year-old game design than by intention. Even when things are going smoothly, it's all too simplistic to have much fun with. It's memorable for the wrong reasons.<sup>2</sup> **Luke Kemp**

**4**  
PLAY

**FOOTNOTES** <sup>1</sup> You read that right. It was a Limited Run Games release. <sup>2</sup> Like, for example, a 50-year-old man wearing a baseball cap backwards.

**INFO** **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £9.99 **ETA** Out now  
**PUB** Badland Publishing **DEV** Co5monaut, Stas Pisarev **PLAYERS** 1-2



## Death Crown

Heavy is the RTS head

**M**any people grew up with teachers reminding them to **Keep It Simple, Stupid. Nowadays, KISS is still an applicable concept in gaming, but it's something that often gets lost as we gain more and more systems and assumed knowledge with each new generation of consoles, along with the technology that allows for substantially more complicated games. Well, Death Crown is a real-time strategy game with exactly three different buildings to choose from, an incredibly striking 1-bit art style, and that's basically it.**<sup>1</sup>

So, you might wonder, what are those three buildings that do so much? Mines to improve your income, a defensive structure that shoots at incoming units, and a building that makes new units. You simply have to choose where to build them and in what order, and then to pick where

your units will be going. Most of the strategy is deciding exactly when to build which of your options, which enemies to focus your attacks on, and trying to gain control of three Black Crystals in each level – these power you up.

This is the activity in all three of Death Crown's rather short campaigns, as well as within its Domination mode (basically skirmishes). If you'd prefer to play with a pal, you can do so either in co-op or Versus mode, but both options are local only, not online. All of these are fun, but the reality of the minimalist art means that you often find yourself lost in exactly what's going on. The simplicity of the action also leads to difficulty that feels unfair, rather than an entertaining challenge, as AI commanders build at inhuman speeds.<sup>2</sup> Death Crown is fun at first but rapidly shows the limitations of its own simple mechanics.

**Jason Coles**

**6**  
PLAY



**FOOTNOTES** <sup>1</sup> The cutscenes are surprisingly haunting despite how simple they look, using the minimalist 1-bit art style effectively. At times we're reminded a little of medieval woodcuts. <sup>2</sup> The overall simplicity makes the game easy to get into, but there's a nasty difficulty spike later on – arguably a little like rock band KISS' albums.

**INFO** **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £15.99  
**ETA** Out now **PUB** The Brotherhood  
 DEV The Brotherhood **PLAYERS** 1



## Beautiful Desolation

Role with it

**N**obody likes being late to the party. But in the case of this throwback to the days when CRPGs dominated interactive storytelling, the wait for a PS4 port has largely been worth it. Some rather obtuse quest design and irritating input lag persist throughout the post-apocalyptic adventure, true, yet both are worth pushing through to experience Beautiful Desolation's intriguing vision of an alternate-reality South Africa.

Clearly inspired by the style and presentation of the first two Fallout games, the painterly isometric perspective does well to make you feel like a small cog in this messed-up, machine-driven world. Getting out of it and returning to your home timeline of 1986 requires you to pay close attention to your surroundings at all times, and usually involves solving puzzles, navigating interesting character relationships, and mining each location for the lore-rich context necessary to progress.

If you weren't chained to a PC in the late '90s, you may find Beautiful Desolation's overall 'rhythm' jarring, especially since there's no hint system or compass. Luckily, it's easy to stay engaged with the peculiar characters<sup>1</sup> you meet, as each is voiced brilliantly and always has something insightful to say. (If only the same could be said for protagonist Mark.) The world being split into distinct areas also makes finding clues simpler, even if having to jump constantly between areas<sup>2</sup> could have been avoided.

This science-fiction journey won't be to every modern player's tastes, but it translates almost flawlessly to PS4, providing you can stomach the weird controller latency. Overall, this is full of fresh sights and sharp dialogue.

**Aaron Potter**

**7**  
PLAY

**FOOTNOTES** <sup>1</sup> Every character is fully voiced and gives you a glut of dialogue options. <sup>2</sup> Traveling involves hopping in your trusty Buffalo airship.

The Presence is able to take on many forms, and also no form at all. All the better to find ways to ruin your trousers.



# Song Of Horror

Can't get you out of my head

**S**omething could go wrong at any moment. In horror, we always expect something around the corner, but in *Song Of Horror* it's hard to predict when the scares will come thanks to The Presence, a twisted AI that chooses when to deploy frights like someone following you around the supermarket and blowing a tuba when you pick up your fruit.

Spread across five episodes originally released separately on PC, *Song Of Horror* centres on a music box that plays a tune that curses those who hear it to be terrorised by The Presence. When publishing assistant Dan Noyer hears it while trying to find missing author Sebastian Husher, he attempts to track down the box's origins and find a way to free himself from its grasp.

Each episode takes place in a new location, and even though Dan's the one labouring under the curse, each has its own set of characters you choose from to play as. They're a nicely diverse bunch of nationalities and ages, which adds to that horror movie flair. The mechanics change with each location, so, for example, you have different light sources to navigate the dark environments, from torches to lighters (and yes, you have to hit **EA** multiple times to strike the latter). Characters also have special items, like scented candles that slow your character's heartbeat if their fright level rises too much, a walkie talkie that buzzes when



## INFO

**FORMAT** PS4  
**PRICE** £34.99  
**ETA** Out now  
**PUB** Raisers Games  
**DEV** Protocol Games  
**PLAYERS** 1  
**LENGTH** 20+ hours  
**ACCESSIBILITY**  
 Customisable subtitle size:  
 toggleable highlighted hotspots, visual cues when listening, and permadeath



The Presence begins to stir, or a music player that helps them stay calm when hiding.

## HOME ALONE

As you pick over the detailed environments, individual heroes will have insights that fit their character. For instance, electrician Alina Ramos might have ideas about restoring power to a seemingly abandoned family home, while Erica Färber might be useful when exploring her father's antique shop after dark. Some appear in multiple episodes depending on whether they survived or even took action in previous ones.

Should your character perish, they're gone for good, and a surviving one will have to pick up where they left off (unless

you're Dan, in which case you'll need to start the episode again). You can toggle this off on the easiest difficulty, but it's worth keeping as it's used inventively. Starting with a new character isn't just a matter of picking up a dropped backpack of items to continue; the way the level changed when you solved puzzles previously could come back into play to frighten someone retreading those first steps, and the fates of the characters you lost might affect what happens later.

Death can come easily. Simply opening a door at the wrong time will see your hero grabbed by the ghoulies. The Presence has multiple ways of mounting an assault, with more introduced over time. You need to listen at

**Simply opening a door at the wrong time will see your hero grabbed by the ghoulies.**





**1** Just when you think you're safe, The Presence will scare you to prove who's in charge.  
**2** Lovecraftian terrors are one thing, wet clothes another.  
**3** No horror game is complete without a photography darkroom puzzle.

doors before opening them to check if it's on the other side, rush to others to close them before it can barge in, or hide under a table when it begins to seep through the walls. And that's all in the first level. Later additions feel less interesting, but these less situational ones often return at just the right time to give you a good scare.

Every confrontation involves a timing minigame that'll try to throw you off with spooky happenings. Different stats mean some characters are more proficient at staying cool under pressure, or stronger at holding down doors, but it's the time pressure that will really get you.

**BLOODY ROOTS**

Protocol Games hasn't been shy to acknowledge its horror

inspirations, with each episode nodding towards a different videogame series, from the Alone In The Dark-style opening house to an abandoned abbey that tips a monk's hood to Amnesia: The Dark Descent. And so each location feels distinct. They're not all hits, however. The game is varied enough that there are some misfires (like weird graphical glitches in the prologue), and for every clever puzzle there's one that is annoying (though ironed out here compared to the original PC release), and there are more than a few instances of overdue backtracking. But even so, in delighting in variety Song Of Horror manages to feel fresh in a crowded genre, The Presence and permadeath ensuring it feels like its own thing.

Eerie, with nice lighting – you'll want to see what horrors lie in wait. Thanks to The Presence, even replaying brings brand-new frights. Worth a scare. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**



**THE PLAYBOOK**

**WHAT YOU DO IN: SONG OF HORROR**



**FRIENDS & ENEMIES**



**ETIENNE BERTRAND**  
 His notaking skill marks more things on your map.



**GRACE RICHARDS**  
 This student can pop caffeine pills to give herself a limited speed boost.



**ERNEST FINNEGAN**  
 His hearing aid helps him hear The Presence through doors.

**STATPACK**

05

Episodes, each set in a different location, from a university campus at night to a cluttered antique shop and surrounding apartments.

13

Playable characters (though a couple are playable in flashbacks only), each with their own unique skills. And when they're dead, they're gone.

98

The year the game is set. Classic sci-fi/horror references abound, including to films like Alien and writers like MR James and HP Lovecraft.

**HOW TO... SURVIVE**



Listen at every door. The prompt will only show when you don't know it's safe, so it's better safe than dragged to hell by many hands. If you hear a creepy goopy noise, wait for it to pass. Otherwise, stay calm, and always remember where a hiding spot is in case The Presence comes for you.

**TROPHY CABINET**



**BRONZE**  
 Pick something up from a character who didn't make it. (Try not to feel too sad.)



**SILVER**  
 Obtain a piece of wisdom (tooth) from a Coltar fortune-telling machine.



**GOLD**  
 With permadeath on, beat the game without any of the playable characters dying.



Become the lizard-pounding wizard thanks to the extra frames in combat.



UPGRADED FOR PS5

# Final Fantasy VII Remake Intergrade

A Cloud with only silver linings



**INFO**  
**FORMAT** PS5  
**PRICE** £69.99 (free if you paid for the PS4 version)  
**ETA** Out now  
**PUB** Square Enix  
**DEV** Square Enix  
**PLAYERS** 1  
**LENGTH** 32 hours  
**ACCESSIBILITY** Customisable subtitles; adjustable camera speed; toggleable screen shake; swappable combat buttons



Just when you thought you could get out, **AVALANCHE** keeps dragging you back in. Once again we walk the streets of Midgar as Cloud and the gang attempt to stop Shinra from bleeding the planet dry of energy, only this time enhanced for PS5. Separate extra story DLC is exclusive to this version (see opposite), but this core package has enough upgrades to make it the definitive version.

Haptic feedback joins the party, used mostly in fights, but adds little (as is the norm with retrofitted DualSense features), and a photo mode is a nice touch, though limited in features compared to the competition. As we've come to expect, the biggest enhancement comes in the form of two visual modes: a Graphics mode that prioritises resolution, and a Performance mode that guns for a higher 60fps framerate.

## SMOOTH CRIMINAL

Like Cloud Strife and Zack Fair, they're both great, and which you prefer is a matter of personal taste. FFXVII Remake is one of the best-looking games on PS4, and while it's nice to see in native 4K, you can't deny how satisfying it feels to hop quickly through the menus to boot up your save lightning-fast, and then run around at a smooth 60fps. It

feels almost like the way the game was *meant* to be played.

Exploration feels slicker, but the upgrade really shines in combat. FFXVII Remake merges real-time action with elements

Enhanced lighting, backgrounds, and textures create a smoother and even more beautiful Midgar than before. The lighting, in particular, does a great job bringing the fantasy to life.

Enhanced lighting, backgrounds, and textures create a more beautiful Midgar than before.

of the original ATB system. Holding counters at the right moment or inputting the perfect combo feels even more responsive in Performance mode, especially handy in the tougher, Hard mode fights.

Graphical upgrades aren't limited to the Graphics mode.

Some attention has been paid to areas highlighted by fans, like the infamously bad door texture in the Sector 7 Slums. Though, now it's been fixed, we almost miss it as previously it served as a reminder that we all have our limits. FFXVII Remake has now limit-broken its own bounds.



One of the greatest RPGs on PS4 is now even better. It might not push PS5 like it pushed previous hardware, but it's still an epic worth investing in. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**





# Final Fantasy VII Remake Intermission

Midgar sets up its ninja warrior course



## INFO

**FORMAT** PS5  
**PRICE** £15.99 standalone, £49.99 as part of Final Fantasy VII Remake Intergrade  
**ETA** Out now  
**PUB** Square Enix  
**DEV** Square Enix  
**PLAYERS** 1  
**LENGTH** 4-6 hours  
**ACCESSIBILITY** Customisable subtitles; adjustable camera speed; toggleable screen shake; swappable combat buttons

**T**hough she's a character who's completely optional in the origin game, this DLC doesn't skimp on giving Yuffie plenty to do. During the period in which Cloud is separated from Tifa and Barret, Yuffie teams up with another AVALANCHE cell to meddle with Shinra's plans, while interacting with major characters, seeing familiar events from another perspective, pushing the overall story forward, and even using a combat style that feels unlike anything in the base game.

Hailing from Wutai, a country sinister corporation Shinra has been at war with for some time, Yuffie is an upbeat ninja looking to step out from her ninja master father's shadow. Teaming up with fellow ninja Sonon, the two aim to infiltrate Shinra's base of operations in the centre of Midgar and steal the ultimate Materia.

The powerful weapon also factors into the main game's story, and Yuffie's adventure neatly weaves into what we already know to create something additive rather than something hastily bolted on. In fact, extra cutscenes at the end of the DLC even have some big implications for the inevitable sequel, and will be mandatory viewing for fans who want to know where that will take us.

Even running around the towns and dungeon-like areas feels different as Yuffie. She's more agile

than Cloud, and that's really enhanced in the game's 60fps Performance mode. She doesn't slow down to cross small beams, but runs across them, and can wall-run and swing on ropes to cross gaps. It's still very linear, but makes the environments feel more dynamic.

## NINJA WAY

In combat, you only control Yuffie, and she has a mix of close-quarters and long-range attacks that work best in tandem, such as throwing a shuriken, using it as a target to cast ninjutsu, then jumping across the battlefield to carry on the combo. You can still issue commands to Sonon, and hitting **LB** puts them into a synchronised mode where

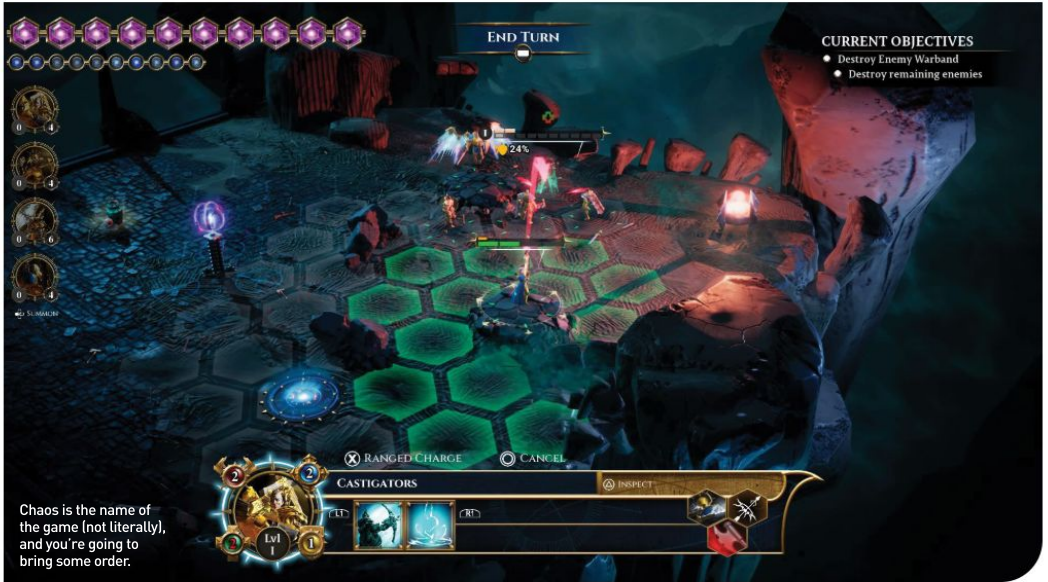
attacks complement one another, and allows for unique and powerful abilities that cost both their ATB ability bars. The catch is that the bar increases more slowly when they're synergised, so linking up at the right time gets you the most bang for your energy buck. It gives a glimpse of how combat could evolve into the next game.

It's not a long adventure, but fighting's easy to pick up, assuming you're familiar with the base game. Later combat can be quite tricky, and will really test you on Hard mode. Side-quests add some playtime, including a neat version of the PS1 version's Fort Condor game. Intermission isn't revolutionary, but is still a welcome middle step to adventures anew.



Short but sweet like its star. Engaging combat pairs with a jazzy soundtrack for an adventure that delights – yet won't set the world on fire. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**





# Warhammer Age Of Sigmar: Storm Ground

Brutal tactics again and again and... again



**INFO**  
**FORMAT** PS4  
**PRICE** £34.99  
**ETA** Out now  
**PUB** Focus Home Interactive  
**DEV** Gasket Games  
**PLAYERS** 1-2  
**LENGTH** 15+ hours  
**ACCESSIBILITY** Subtitles

**A**s they're often laden with more titles than an English duchess, it's not easy to know where you stand with Warhammer games. Put your Space Marines away; this isn't based on 40K but on the high-fantasy Warhammer Age Of Sigmar (Games Workshop hates colons, apparently). Storm Ground is the first Sigmar game on console, and looks to the XCOM series for inspiration.

You're not erecting massive monolithic buildings here, rather you command your small group of units to wreak havoc on hex-based battlefields. Each unit is highly customisable and has passives to consider, along with active abilities that you can tweak by giving the unit shiny new equipment.

Each match starts with you having few to no units readied up. It costs energy to summon your units to the battlefield, and while you gain energy each turn all spare energy is converted into Aethyr. The magical substance is a shared mana pool, which can be used for special attacks that can control the battlefield, move enemies around, deal massive damage, or offer some kind of buff. Because you've got to balance abilities and summoning, it creates great moments of tension when you need to choose between putting extra bodies on the field or unleashing a potentially game-changing strike. Every element feeds back

into the others, and you have to make the choice whether to storm (onwards) or (put units onto the) ground. Clever stuff.

## SPINNING PLATEMAIL

Each of the three factions has three campaigns, but it's not as straightforward as it sounds (this is Warhammer after all), as they have roguelike qualities. Every campaign is made up of multiple battles, and at some point during those your entire squad is going to get wiped out so fast they'll drop before your jaw can. That's because Storm Ground is harder than the oversized armour of the very cult-like good guys.

Dying means starting the campaign again, but you keep the equipment and skills you've

unlocked. It ensures you grow stronger despite your failures. This, coupled with the randomised campaigns, adds a lot of potential play time as no two runs are quite the same.

Unfortunately technical glitches and the lacklustre AI rumble away, and we experience annoying crashes and oddly slow menus during our games. The AI, on the other hand, consistently makes incredibly odd decisions and doesn't always present a challenge other than being overpowered. Other than that, the schlocky voice acting, nerdy lore dumps, multiplayer mode, and enjoyable but tough core gameplay offer lots to love, whether you're already an Age Of Sigmar fan or just a strategist.



You'll curse the gods for its difficulty and the odd technical hitch, but this turn-based strategy game is surprisingly enjoyable if you can push past that. **Jason Coles**

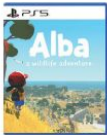


Each day directs you to new areas of the island, usually with more animals to catalogue.



# Alba: A Wildlife Adventure

Snapping some summer memories



## INFO

**FORMAT** PS5 (reviewed), PS4

**ETA** Out now

**PRICE** £16.74

**PUB** PID

Publishing

**DEV** Ustwo Games

**PLAYERS** 1

**LENGTH** 3 hours

**ACCESSIBILITY**

Lots of language options; all

dialogue is text

options; all

dialogue is text

options; all

dialogue is text

options; all

dialogue is text

options; all

dialogue is text

options; all

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dialogue is text

**P**erfectly capturing the feeling of a week away with your grandparents, this summer adventure is suitably warm and unforgettable. It's set on a small, close-knit Mediterranean island, where your desire to explore nature turns into a quest to save its rundown nature reserve.

This is a place Alba has visited throughout her childhood, so she's familiar with the sunshine and chill vibes, and has made friends with some of the regular inhabitants like Ines, a fellow excitable child. Having once captured a photo of a rare lynx, Alba comes to realise that the environment for the island's animals is on the decline. After she and Ines help save a beached dolphin, they set up AIWRL – the Alba and Ines Wildlife Rescue League.

Your grandfather gives you a guidebook, and helps set your phone camera up with an app that scans and catalogues new animals when you line up photos. Using this, you can discover the island's plentiful wildlife while you help clean the place up. That means putting strewn rubbish in bins, helping unwell critters, and even replacing photos of animals on information placards. While the island is small, it feels big to a child, the game perfectly capturing that mood of things feeling bigger and grander when you're still a wee one.

## HOTEL MEDITERRANEAN

Early on, the mayor announces the wildlife reserve will be replaced with a luxury hotel, and the focus of your summer vacation week becomes collecting

enough signatures to prove him wrong. This is the kind of game where the end credits begin with links to wildlife charities.

But there's no time pressure. Your petition fills up as the story plays out day to day, keeping the tone relaxing. It's a game full of little touches of personality, from the way Alba switches

material she's moving across. Sometimes it feels a bit much, but running on wood, in particular, feels lovely. Similarly, the bubbly sound of character dialogue is reflected in the haptics, different tones coming through the controller.

The simple block-colour visuals add to that, creating a

**Perfectly captures that mood of things feeling bigger and grander when you're still a wee one.**

between skipping and holding her arms out like an aeroplane when she runs to answering yes, or no questions by manually nodding or shaking her head with the right analogue stick.

These touches are enhanced on PS5 thanks to the DualSense. Haptics mimic Alba's footsteps, altering depending on the

sunny place that you want to explore. We experienced some crashes while suspending play, but frequent autosaves stopped this from having a big impact. Simple to play and delightfully breezy to get through, it's both perfect for kids and a relaxing bath of a game for when you want something low-pressure.



Soak in a lovely warm atmosphere and get your phone camera ready, because this engrossing wildlife-saving adventure is full of good vibes. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**





PS5's SSD ensures faster loading times to keep you in the thick of the action.

UPGRADED FOR PS5

# Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order

Powerful, the upgrade is



**INFO**

**FORMAT** PS5  
**PRICE** £49.99 (free upgrade from PS4)  
**ETA** Out now  
**PUB** EA  
**DEV** Respawn Entertainment  
**PLAYERS** 1  
**LENGTH** 20 hours  
**ACCESSIBILITY** Adjustable film grain, motion blur, and camera shake; customisable difficulty, UI, and audio prompts; editable control layout



Set five years after Darth Vader bellowed that infamous, drawn-out “Nooooooooo!” at the end of *Revenge Of The Sith*, *Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order* explores a galaxy coming to terms with the Empire’s rule. The Jedi are in hiding, planets are under attack, and *Fallen Order*’s protagonist, Cal Kestis (played by *Gotham*’s Cameron Monaghan) is doing his best wide-eyed Luke Skywalker impression.

What sets *Fallen Order* apart from other *Star Wars* games, and the recent films, is its faith in its own heroes and villains. Cal is a Jedi-in-hiding who is forced to reveal himself to save a friend. What follows is a roller coaster ride across the galaxy, recruiting a rag-tag crew of smugglers, rebels, and one of the best new *Star Wars* characters to appear in years (religious outcast Nightsister Merrin) while staying ahead of the Empire’s Inquisitors. The aim is to plunder abandoned temples and tombs of a lost and ancient civilisation for clues to the whereabouts of a hidden Jedi Holocron, which contains the locations of all remaining Jedi.

**RISE UP**

The setup ensures a unique blend of soulsborne-inspired lightsaber combat and physics-based platforming straight out of *Lara Croft*’s playbook, coupled with a light metroidvania structure that sees Cal and crew revisiting planets multiple times to access new areas and vaults. Developer Respawn has constructed a solid, modern *Star Wars* game.

And it’s one that benefits greatly from being on PS5. This free upgrade (even those who bought the game physically can get a digital code) makes good use of PS5’s new-gen tech.

Zippping about the galaxy is a pain-free experience thanks to the way the SSD speeds up loading, and the cinematics

modes feature improved textures and lighting, which comes into its own on the foliage-rich planet of Kashyyyk. On PS4, the Wookiee homeworld was a low-res eyesore; on PS5 it’s dense and heavy. When you’re ping-pong laser fire back at Stormtroopers in dark corridors the lighting tech shines, too.

When you’re firing lasers at Stormtroopers in dark corridors the lighting tech shines.

work better too. Two display modes – the now-familiar Performance (1440p at 60fps) and Fidelity (4K at 30fps) – give new life to the game. The soulsborne nature of the combat demands the 60fps offered, and there’s a slight stutter when running at 30fps in 4K. Both

It’s not perfect. DualSense support is limited to buzzes and brup-brups as you walk. Some audio can be out of sync too. And the horrible sliding platform stages remain unbalanced and laborious. Yet these minor gripes aside, *Fallen Order* on PS5 is a must-play.



The best *Star Wars* game in over a decade gets a revamp on PS5, and becomes a Forceful contender. Minor issues aside, *Fallen Order* shouldn’t be missed. Ian Dean



**INFO** **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** TBC  
**ETA** Out now **PUB** Mixvision Games  
**DEV** Studio Fitzbin **PLAYERS** 1



## Minute Of Islands

A slow-paced minute

**T**ime to take out the ol' squid boat and use the magic allen key to fix the engine that sustains the world and stops the poisonous spores in the air from killing everything. Minute Of Islands is confident enough in its setup that it manages to make that frankly ridiculous concept feel almost mundane. As it should, because this is just the way things are for you, as the game's protagonist and anointed mechanic Mo.

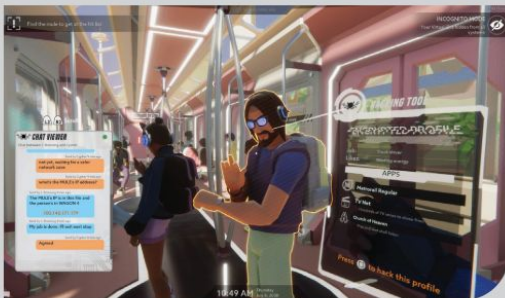
Carrying out her repairs comes in the form of puzzle platforming across a series of islands and caves, while Mo struggles with the physical and mental effects of her role as the Bearer Of The Omni Switch. The environments are creative and pleasantly detailed, often mixing biology and tech in a tantalisingly macabre way.<sup>1</sup> Clambering around cliffsides, crumbled buildings, and lifts made out of boat parts is enjoyable, though can be a little buggy, but the levels themselves are more on the tedious side of simplistic. Even so, the core mechanics are sound and the Omni Switch is an interesting device.<sup>2</sup>

Along the way, you can collect some of Mo's memories. While mostly easy enough to collect as you go, there's not much incentive to try to gather all of them, as the brief lines they provide do little to flesh out Mo or her life before the events of the game. This lack of detail is the game's main flaw, as its fascinating world and ideas are somewhat betrayed by the weak story and lacklustre characterisation. Unfortunately, the attempt to touch on darker themes is also rather ham-fisted, but the concept of exploring the mental effects of being the chosen hero and pressures such a role entails is really intriguing. All in all, Minute Of Islands is promising but a bit muddled. **Max Williams**

**6**  
PLAY

**FOOTNOTES** <sup>1</sup> Re-routing power underground involves directing it through a series of veins. <sup>2</sup> The reflection platforming sections are notably inventive.

**INFO** **FORMAT** PS5 [reviewed], PS4 **PRICE** £13.99 **ETA** Out now  
**PUB** Clever Plays **DEV** Clever Plays **PLAYERS** 2 (mandatory)



## Operation: Tango

It takes two to espionage à deux

**A**ny good agent knows it's better to go into the field with someone to back you up. Here, a partner isn't just advisable, it's mandatory – one player takes the role of an Agent in the field, and the other is a Hacker, who sits back and delves into systems to help their partner progress. As the game requests, neither should be able to see the other's screen. Part of the fun is the challenge of communication, making this either a friendship-maker or breaker.<sup>1</sup>

When it works, it's great, mimicking the feel of an espionage thriller. Poking around an empty office as the Agent, you might need to trawl through a worker's PC to share login credentials and IP addresses, so that the Hacker can gain access. Then in the mainframe the Hacker will need the Agent to manually toggle switches to help them get into

the system. Danger comes in many forms – it could be the blazingly obvious threat of a clock ticking down to disaster, or a more avoidable one, like patrolling security drones that you can duck out of the way of. But thanks to good checkpointing, arguments over whose mistakes led to failure won't spring up too often.<sup>2</sup>

With only six missions, it's a fun way to spend an evening or two with a pal (especially if you grabbed it on PS Plus last month), but not something you can return to too often. Replaying the game after swapping roles is fun, and offers some insight into just why you were struggling on *that* section, but otherwise even the semi-unpredictable portions don't change enough to make dancing with the same partner again that interesting. But it's good fun while it lasts, and certainly doesn't overstay its welcome.

**Oscar Taylor-Kent**

**7**  
PLAY



**FOOTNOTES** <sup>1</sup> The way the pair of you have to swap information, explaining things clearly so your partner can understand what you need them to do is a little reminiscent of PS VR classic Keep Talking And Nobody Explodes. <sup>2</sup> Though some stall points can sometimes get a bit boring for one of the players.

**INFO** **FORMAT** PS5 [reviewed], PS4  
**PRICE** TBC **ETA** Out now **PUB** Finji  
**DEV** Greg Lobosov, Alexis Dean-Jones, Lena Raine,  
 Madeline Berger, A Shell In The Pit **PLAYERS** 1-2



## Chicory: A Colorful Tale

Colour us impressed

**O**ne day you're a dog living a humble life as a janitor, the next you find yourself wielding a magical paintbrush with the responsibility of fixing a world that has suddenly lost all its colour. And what better way to present this than in a top-down adventure where each grid is like the page of a colouring book for you to fill back in, in which you can even use the touchpad for a more natural movement of your brush?<sup>1</sup>

If it's not quite precise enough, especially on occasions when you're asked to draw a picture or portrait on a canvas, that doesn't really matter since you're not being judged on your artistic skills. Chicory cares more about giving you the freedom to express yourself however you like, whether you colour inside the lines or make a joyous mess. Your task includes colouring in the charming cast of characters. The real delights, however, come from the brush powers you unlock, which provide many of the game's inventive traversal and puzzle mechanics, such as swimming through paint or lighting up pitch-black caverns.

There's plenty more that's endearing about Chicory, such as the clothing you can discover to dress up your pup. However, what elevates it from charming little indie to sitting alongside Celeste<sup>2</sup> as a future classic is that beneath its cosy aesthetic is a beautifully written story that will resonate deeply with anyone who's ever faced self-doubt or impostor syndrome. There's also a wonderful reminder, aided by the many places you can just sit down, that sometimes you just need to take a break, even from the things you're most passionate about. **Alan Wen**

**9**  
PLAY

**FOOTNOTES** <sup>1</sup> On top of robust accessibility settings, left-handed users are accommodated. <sup>2</sup> That game's composer Lena Raine provides the score for Chicory.



Often colourful and crammed with visual effects, Hired Gun can, at times, look fantastic.

# Necromunda: Hired Gun

Copying from the best? It was Doomed from the start

**V**isiting a bar where everybody knows your name isn't much fun when it's because there's a bounty attached. There are no friends in the world of Underhive. A lawless place run by gangs, where house loyalty is worth more than a cold pint and good banter, Warhammer 40K's newest videogame setting is also one of its most interesting.

Some of what makes Necromunda so inspired is transferred into Hired Gun's first-person shooting. Whether you're scurrying across the rooftops of a city-sized train or exploring an ancient temple built from skulls and cloaked in smoke, any game that can convince you a Baroque-style town can be built inside a vast cavern on the shores of an acid lake can't be all bad.

That bar? That's the Martyr's End, and it's a place where your customised hero, male or female, can mingle and pick up contracts. It's where you meet the campaign's mission-giver Kal Jerico, and pay a visit to the bartender for gossip, or to the doctor to upgrade your mods and abilities.

## WHAT'S UP DOC?

Thick atmosphere and an off-the-books doctor can't save Hired Gun from its shortcomings. The influences on the game shout off the screen: wall-running from Titanfall 2; a close-kill system reminiscent of Doom; and a health refresh setup



## INFO

**FORMAT** PS5  
Reviewed!, PS4

**PRICE** £69.99

**ETA** Out now

**PUB** Focus Home Interactive

**DEV** Sireum On Studio

**PLAYERS** 1

**LENGTH** 10 hours

**ACCESSIBILITY** Adjustable HUD aim assist, and gore; tweakable controller dead zone and sensitivity; frame rate counter



borrowed directly from Bloodborne – kill an enemy that shot you to earn a modicum of health. The game proves fun but never reaches the heights of the games it apes. As the saying goes, eventually the horse needs to be made into glue. Hired Gun is very sticky.

Traversal is snappy and you can grapple or wall-run to most surfaces, with later levels growing in grandeur. Yet if you've survived Ghostrunner's anxious platforming, you will shrug at this and move on.

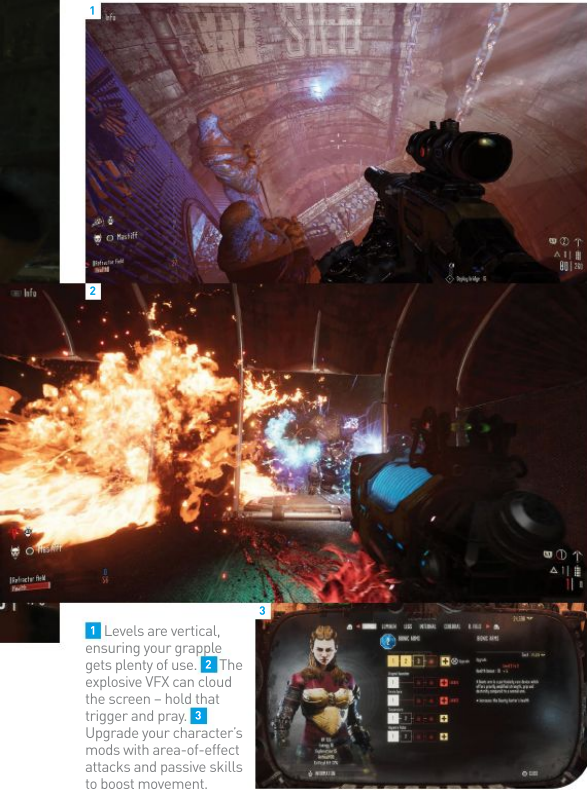
The flaws really show when the action heats up. While Doom tempers the flow of its action with clear enemy attack patterns and recognisable silhouettes, Hired Gun throws everything at the screen, all at

once, giving you little time to think about what and how you're shooting. Shielded enemies, mechs, aliens, teleporters, and snipers all bombard the screen with little signposting. It's a potpourri of mayhem that stinks, and not in a good way.

You can muddle through by holding the trigger in and letting rip, which is fun but hardly the thoughtful combat management of Doom Eternal. The spread of cyber-mods on offer (including firing energy blasts from your fists, hacking and exploding enemies, and disabling shields to enable close kills) help inject some extra fun, but they all do much the same thing and rarely affect the fight in meaningful ways. The same can be said of your companion cyber-mastiff,

**Hired Gun throws everything at the screen, all at once, giving you little time to think.**





**1** Levels are vertical, ensuring your grapple gets plenty of use. **2** The explosive VFX can cloud the screen – hold that trigger and pray. **3** Upgrade your character's mods with area-of-effect attacks and passive skills to boost movement.



which can be sent into battle to chew on enemies. Its real use, however, is to highlight targets in the dimly lit levels. You'll instinctively ignore most of the game's upgrades and killer pup in favour of relying on the guns.

**BULLET HELL**

In this respect, Hired Gun is enjoyable. The bulky Warhammer 40K guns feel meaty and chug in your on-screen hands. Upgrades and parts bought with bounty hunting rewards can turn even the lowliest pistol into a thunderous hand cannon. New weapons can be found in the levels too; hidden chests reward explorers. Yet again, the game stumbles, as there are too few guns or variants of them to experiment with. Midway

through the campaign you'll have seen the entire arsenal. Keeping you engaged becomes Hired Gun's biggest task. The story does a decent job but it's dense with tabletop lore and gives you little time to get emotionally connected to its cast of misfits. Better is the world itself. You may not care why you're making progress, but the art direction and evocative environments on offer continue to surprise. It's why the side-quest and endgame bounty missions deliver, because you'll take any excuse to rerun through a smoky Gothic smelting plant or warzone with five-storey trenches. What you're doing in these worlds is generic and messy, but just taking in and wall-running these vast expanses proves fun.

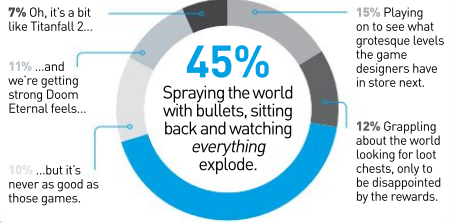


Ideas borrowed from other shooters are underplayed. Yet Necromunda: Hired Gun finds its strength in its atmospheric Underhive locations and sprawling levels. Ian Dean



**THE PLAYBOOK**

**WHAT YOU DO IN: HIRED GUN**



**HOW TO... MASTER THE HOUND**



The mastiff can not only make kills but will also highlight all enemies in the level – incredibly useful as a way to scan the environment for targets. Upgrading the creature with new mods can help beyond taking out enemies. Use the mastiff to draw attention away from yourself.

**FRIENDS & ENEMIES**



**SILVER TALON**  
She's the big bad. But why is she causing havoc among the Underhive's gangs?



**KAL JERICO**  
A star of the tabletop RPG, Kal hires you to track Silver Talon – but can he be trusted?



**JADO**  
Your guide in the Underhive, Jado will leave markers to follow. That's handy.

**LOVING/HATING**



**THE UNIVERSE**  
Epic in scale and dripping in atmosphere, it's easy to love the setting of Hired Gun. Movement encourages exploration, too.



**BAD BOSSES**  
Introduced dramatically in cutscenes, the bosses fail to live up to the hype. They're extended versions of common enemies.

**IS IT BETTER THAN?**



**NO**  
Clever level design, smart AI, and inventive weapons – Doom Eternal is still the king of retro shooters.



**YES**  
Unlike Cyberpunk 2077, Hired Gun actually works. Not as ambitious, but you'll have more fun.



**NO**  
Titanfall 2 may be ancient but still manages to pip Hired Gun when it comes to traversal shooting.

Classic Ghosts 'N Goblins is reworked, but can feel unfair rather than a well-balanced challenge.



# Ghosts 'N Goblins Resurrection

Taking you back to old-school days



**INFO**  
**FORMAT** PS4  
**PRICE** £29.99  
**ETA** Out now  
**PUB** Capcom  
**DEV** Capcom  
**PLAYERS** 1-2  
**LENGTH** 3 hours  
**ACCESSIBILITY**  
 Adjustable HUD  
 and control layout;  
 rapid fire option

**B**eing bitten by a zombie is a shock to the system in any game, but Chris Redfield never shed his clothes and continued fighting in his grundies after one of the undead tried to chew on his shins. Sir Arthur, however, is made of sterner stuff.

Ghosts 'N Goblins has a reputation of being one of videogaming's toughest challenges, and for good reason. As a kid I nearly lost my tiny mind trying to beat the game. Ghosts 'N Goblins Resurrection embraces the legendary difficulty curve but massages it into a variety of ways to play. On its easiest setting, Page, you'll be able to play with unlimited lives and instant restarts.

Ratchet up the difficulty levels and enemies become faster and hit harder. The skill tree – you use bees hidden in the levels to unlock perks and magical powers – is limited at first but on higher difficulties unlocks more abilities.

## LANCE A LOT

Regardless of the challenge, the basics of what you do remain consistent across all the stages. Sir Arthur is on a mission to rescue the princess and save the kingdom from demonic forces. The levels are imaginative in a way only 1980s games could be – ogres pull off their own heads to get a better shot, skeleton warriors are adorably dangerous, and even a harmless-looking boulder can sprout legs and try to take a bite.

These arcade sensibilities filter into the power-up system. Find hidden chests and you're

rewarded with new weapons (a lance, double arrows, daggers, and more) while the elusive golden armour powers your basic attacks up. It's worth keeping an eye out for these as the game is balanced to offer the ideal weapon you need for the challenge just ahead.

with reworked 'shadow' levels that add new enemies and ramp up the speed of attacks.

For all the adherence to the original, GNG Resurrection can feel stilted and hamstringing by some design choices. The cutout storybook visuals can make it hard to judge platform edges

**You'll fight your way out of a toothy cavern – or is that a creature's gloopy innards?**

The levels evolve as you play, with sandy platforms falling away under Arthur's feet and ice causing him to slip and slide. You'll even need to fight your way out of a toothy cavern – or is that a creature's gloopy innards? On the harder settings it can get too much, a near-impossible task that's rewarded

and enemy patterns are too random. The originals are built on remembering patterns with room for improvised expression. Not so this remake. With both original games available in Capcom Arcade Stadium, with new difficulty options, that's how we'd recommend you replay this Arthurian legend.



A decent update that has a love/hate approach to difficulty. The art style can undermine the gameplay, and on harder settings it feels unfair rather than unforgiving. Ian Dean



**INFO** **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £15.99  
**ETA** Out now **PUB** MWM Interactive  
**DEV** Flight School Studio **PLAYERS** 1



## Stonefly

It's tough to be a bug

**W**hen you're the size of a bug, it makes sense to ride them, fight them, or indeed build a mechanical version of one yourself. It's the core thread of Stonefly's adventure, which begins after young inventor Annika makes a mistake that sees her leaving home to recover a missing family heirloom with her own insect-shaped rig.

It takes time to get used to the controls, especially if in other games you've taken jumping for granted – it's sort of the inverse here, as pressing  $\otimes$  bounces the rig back down to the surface for extra height. The top-down isometric perspective, however, makes it tricky to perceive just how high you are or whether you're going to be out of reach of a branch on the other side, only slightly alleviated by how a drop into the bottomless pit below isn't an instant game over here.

While Stonefly is at its best when it simply lets you glide through the lush environments<sup>1</sup> as you bliss out to its chilled spacey electronica soundtrack, it's disrupted by some pretty frequent and unskippable fights with other hostile insects, the most annoying of which will shoot you or leave trails of debuffing goo all over you. It takes an unusual approach to combat: you have to stun these critters, then blow them off with your wings rather than violently squash them.

There's also a lot of grind, which obviously can get tedious. You find yourself repeatedly tracking Alpha Aphids to mine resources<sup>2</sup> in order to craft certain upgrades to progress the story (often arbitrary given that these aren't abilities you'll strictly find yourself using). But in the end, despite the suite of upgrades on offer, it's never enough to make Stonefly feel particularly fun or intuitive. **Alan Wen**

**6**  
PLAY

**FOOTNOTES** 1 The graphics are inspired by the 'minimal realism' of Charley Harper. 2 Horde mode gives you a fixed time to mine as much as you can.

**INFO** **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £13.99 **ETA** Out now  
**PUB** Playism **DEV** Blastmode, MP2 Games **PLAYERS** 1



## Mighty Goose

Goose lips sink ships

**R**ight: it's a lovely morning in the universe and you are a heroic goose. One with access to heavy weapons, powerful vehicles, and a selection of smart AI companions. While the absurdity of having a waterfowl for a hero is quite happily played on, it's not the main focus of the game; the developer was too busy making a run-and-gun shooter that's fun to play.

In the process of saving the galaxy from the Void King you run, you shoot things, you occasionally honk,<sup>1</sup> and that – apart from breaks when you drive or fly and shoot things – is basically it. It's a wonderfully simple and pure foundation that is built on with tight and responsive controls, clear and chunky retro graphics, and pleasingly large bosses. There are only a few weapons to pick up, but each one has a satisfying oomph to it,<sup>2</sup> and there are no

bad ones. While you'll see the credits within an hour or two of starting the game, it'll last you longer than that.

There's then a 'mirror universe', which means tougher versions of all the levels – something we happily play through thanks to the sheer joy of carving through legions of enemies with gunfire. After that, you get the option of a God mode, which you can use to cheese any remaining S ranks you haven't managed to earn yet. Naturally, we did that.

Pre-level prep (companion and buff choice) affords a sense of ownership over the entire experience and, while shooter veterans will have absolutely no trouble sailing through the levels, the tradeoff is a user-friendly atmosphere that makes repeated playthroughs a joy rather than a slog. It's not the size of your game that matters; it's what you do with it that counts. **Luke Kemp**

**8**  
PLAY



**FOOTNOTES** 1 Although we ended up assigning a sub-weapon to the honk button, it wasn't too big a wrench as Mighty still honks by himself randomly. HONK! 2 You can judge a game by its shotgun, and this one's fantastic. When the weapons are this good, you really don't need a constantly changing array of new ones.

**INFO** **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £18.99  
**ETA** Out now **PUB** Falbetter Games  
**DEV** Falbetter Games **PLAYERS** 1



## Sunless Skies

All aboard the pain train

**P**iloting a flying train across the sky sounds relaxing. What Sunless Skies actually offers is death, desperation, and a good dose of the bizarre. This is an addictively wild ride as you traverse an array of locations brimming with character and alluring, if too often overwhelming, lore.

Despite a heavy emphasis on text, Sunless Skies nails its steampunk vibe, enhanced by everything from distinctly Victorian turns of phrase to the glittering metals of the environments. Exploration leads to both joy and terror – as you uncover the expansive world map, you stumble upon all kinds of peril. Anything particularly distressing fills your terror bar, as does wandering the open sky too long, and given that you can die of fright when the bar fills, ensuring you have enough fuel, supplies, and shore leave is key.

As you gain experience, you select Facets: components of your captain's history which alter your stats. These correspond to things like deception and perseverance, so your choices affect how events play out, determining your chances of success at things as diverse as rallying your crew and resisting alcoholism.<sup>1</sup> It's a fun system that lets you build character, as you layer traumas on your lineage of captains and pray the stat boosts help.

Death awaits in many guises, for you and for everyone. It could be in combat with cantankerous fish. Or an event where an angry goddess demands a sacrifice. Or you might run out of supplies and turn to crew soup. The captain's death is a weirdly enjoyable part of the action, with the legacy mechanic seeing your new character pick up where their unfortunate predecessor left off.<sup>2</sup>

Sunless Skies is difficult, but rewarding. You just have to persevere. And leave yourself a decent inheritance. **Max Williams**

**7**  
PLAY

**FOOTNOTES** 1 Your inventory and affiliations also unlock different options as you go. 2 A lot of your precious chart carries over, which is a real blessing.



# Guilty Gear Strive

It's the smell of the game



## INFO

**Format** PS5, PS4

**Price** £44.99

**ETA** Out now

**PUB** Bandai Namco

**Dev** Arc System Works

**Players** 1-2 (in match) 1-32 (in lobbies)

**Length** 20+ hours

**Accessibility**

Various skin colours



**F**ighting games catch you between heaven and hell and fling you between both so wantonly that you're liable to get whiplash playing just 30 minutes at a time. Guilty Gear Strive is no different – you'll experience extreme highs and extreme lows in the opening hours of playing it, no matter what your skill level – but it leans into it. And how.

Under the stewardship of Daisuke Ishiwatari (a director who works on character design, soundtrack, engineering, animation, coding, and more), Guilty Gear may finally have reached its pinnacle. Strive is an over-the-top rock opera of baffling creativity, rendered accessible and visually hypnotic thanks to the technical wizardry of Ishiwatari and his team at Arc System Works.

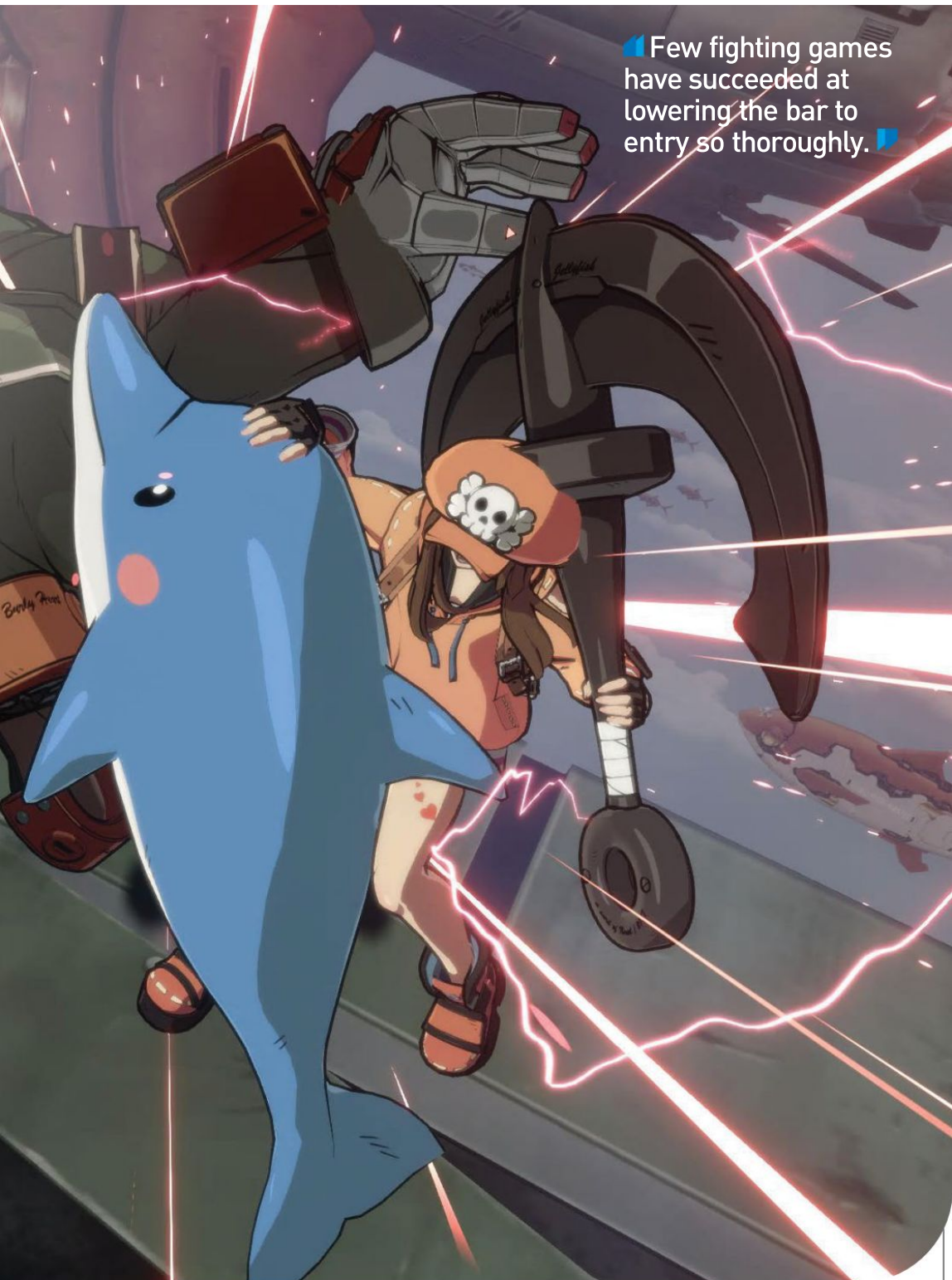
Let's start with the hellish. Picking up a new fighting game is rough, even for devotees of the genre. Learning a new main, getting to grips with a suite of elaborately-named mechanics, understanding animations, hitboxes, input windows... it can all be a bit much. It can be overwhelming, like listening to your favourite band's ill-advised comeback record some 20 years after they should really have stopped recording. Guilty Gear itself has been guilty of this in the past (no pun intended), throwing commands and mechanics at you until your own real-life stun gauge is practically maxed out.

Every now and then, a game will come along promising to make things more accessible – a slew of games in the PS4 era have included the 'auto-combo' abominations, for example – but few have succeeded at lowering the bar to entry so thoroughly as Guilty Gear Strive. Once you boot up the game, you have the option to play a nice little narrative-flavoured tutorial that dashes over the basics for you: attacks, spacing, specials. Nothing too intense. Clean that up, win a friendly fight that



Mess with anchor-toting May and you could face Mr Dolphin too.

Few fighting games have succeeded at lowering the bar to entry so thoroughly.





**1** Newcomer Giovanna is a great pressure character who excels when pushing opponents into the corner – aided by wolf spirit Rei. **2** Series veteran May returns with her penchant for trolling pokes and ludicrous aquatic life-fuelled combos. Remember, though she may be but little, she is fierce. **3** Guitar-playing heavy metal witch I-no is the star of the Story mode, and with character models this good, it makes sense.

introduces you to the Ryu and Ken of the series (Sol Badguy and Ky Kiske) and you've got a foundation. "Remember that you can check what you've learned today at the DOJO," Ky prompts as you leave the tutorial. "There are also more practical skills you could learn from there."

### GEARING UP

And then comes the heavenly. 121 missions await, rated for difficulty from one to five stars, and each teaches you a fundamental lesson about how the game works. There are no character-specific missions here. The game has discarded the idea that you need to know one character inside-out in order to win in the throes of battle – and rightly so. Instead, you're asked to complete a best-of-five practical attempt at each mechanic, from simple things like dashing and special cancels to more specific and unique Guilty Gear techniques like Roman Cancels, Bursts, and Wall Breaks.

Play some missions, head to a simple (but well-stocked) arcade mode and test what you've learned. Even go online, if you're brave enough. Maybe you can take disgraced, delirious Dr Faust

into a lobby and show everyone what you've learned about Purple Roman Cancels. Or show off your May and her ludicrous Dolphin Dash now you know how to weave that into your special Dust attacks. It's an onboarding process that declares 'Gate's open, come on in' and rewards you for time, effort, and consistency. Other fighting games, take note.

Even if you're a slow learner, there's plenty to keep you occupied as you nail the timing of, say, newcomer Giovanna's Gatling Combo (that's your bread-and-butter damage dealer). Arc System Works has given Unreal Engine 4 a bit of spit and polish, and presents a game with graphics so detailed, with animations so specific and inventive, that you'd be forgiven for thinking it was a 2D game. Then, when the camera detaches itself from that side-on view and flies up Ramlthal's legs as a puppy clammers on her chest and licks her face after a bout, you'd instantly think you were

watching Netflix's latest big-budget CGI anime blockbuster. It's technical wizardry, and an encouraging demonstration of what cartoon visuals can do on PS5.

### ANIME BINGE

And you can gawp all you like at this anime-inspired nonsense, if that's your thing, because there's over an hour of it for you to digest in the story mode. This is no Injustice or Mortal Kombat 11, though. No, this is a more bare-bones affair, giving you a few chapters to watch without any input whatsoever, motoring on at its own speed as you zone in and out after marvelling at how nice all the characters look. If you buy fighting games for single-player content, you may want to rethink this one.

But that's fine. Because that delicious rollback netcode means online lobbies work without pause, and even if you rack up 41 losses in a row during a sparring match with someone online, you'll never be waiting

**Everything on-screen is designed to help you out and look impeccable while doing it.**



4 The Player Match lobby is an inventive way of visualising what could have been a boring menu. 5 Everything on-screen communicates vital information. 6 Nagoriyuki commands space with clones and huge sword attacks.



for the game to catch up with you. Rematches are easy, the UI is designed to help you out (a rare treat in fighting games, bizarrely), and getting back into the action is not only painless, it's encouraged.

**SERIOUS CONTENDER**

And what a joy Strive is to play once you're in the arena. From a thoroughly satisfying UI to some of the most impressive combo string animations we've seen, everything on-screen is designed to help you out and look impeccable while doing it. Wrestle with resource management in these games? Struggle to call on your special bar, or figure out when a hit you've landed is a counter? You won't here. Seeing 'counter' manifest in a gorgeous, dynamic font when you land a nasty

counter-hit and interrupt a combo you know would kill you off elicits a thrill we've not felt in a fighting game for years. Following that up with a special that knocks an opponent through a wall into another part of the arena? Even better.

Featuring 15 genuinely diverse and beguilingly deep characters at launch, with the promise of at least five more to come, Strive is a statement from Arc System Works. Like the heavy metal that inspires it, Guilty Gear was due a rebirth, and it's come back packed with more personality and verve, and in a more catchy, accessible way than ever. Whether you're a veteran hankering for a fight, or a cocky upstart with something to prove, Guilty Gear Strive will send you to hell... before taking you all the way to heaven.

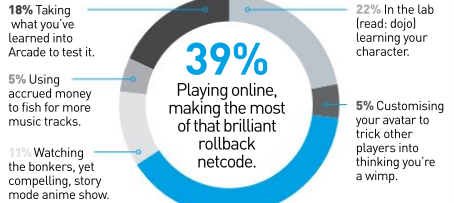


Sets the bar for fighting games on PS5. Watch out Street Fighter and put your dukes up Tekken, because a new challenger has entered the ring. Dom Peppiatt



**THE PLAYBOOK**

**WHAT YOU DO IN: GUILTY GEAR STRIVE**



**HOW TO... JOIN IN MULTIPLAYER**



Log on to the online lobbies and fight an AI in the Tower to be assigned a floor. Depending on your performance, you can travel up floors and face other fighters who are seeded the same as you. It's effectively a nice visual representation of the ratings (Bronze, Silver) in Street Fighter V.

**STATPACK**

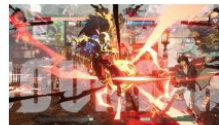
15 | 32 | 121

Characters in the base roster, from old faves like Sol Badguy and Chipp Zanuff to newcomers like Giovanna. And there are more to come.

People can join an unranked lobby. Some fighting game fans love lobbies, others loathe them, but we reckon these ones are done well.

Missions you can play through to learn the game's myriad mechanics. It's a great, accessible way to get to grips with the fighting system.

**LOVING/HATING**



**OVER THE COUNTER**  
The UI that tells you when you've opened up a Counter hit on an opponent is just amazing. Can you feel the anticipation?



**UNDER THE TABLE**  
The 50%+ combos you can eat if you get Counter hit-exploited yourself. Honestly, we hope you can't feel the pain.

**TROPHY CABINET**



**BRONZE**  
Cancel a Roman Cancel with a special move five times. It's easier than it sounds.



**SILVER**  
Spend over \$100,000 on fishing. That's easily done if you're an online regular.



**GOLD**  
Perfect an arcade run, then beat the powerful boss at the end. Not for the fainthearted.



# Earth Defense Force: World Brothers

A new kid made of blocks. The right stuff



## INFO

**FORMAT** PS4  
**PRICE** £49.99  
**ETA** Out now  
**PUB** D3 Publisher  
**DEV** Yuke's  
**PLAYERS** 1-2 (offline), 2-4 (online)  
**LENGTH** 12 hours (one story runthrough)  
**ACCESSIBILITY** Customisable controls; toggleable vibration, auto-aim, screen shake and subtitles

Sometimes, a game comes along to answer a question nobody asked. In this case, the question is “What if EDF looked like Minecraft, and sounded like a Saturday-morning cartoon?” As a result, this will be instantly familiar to fans of the series – all the same enemies return, and you’re never asked to do anything more complicated than shoot everything bigger than you that moves – but something important is missing.

The move from a vague attempt at realism to bright, colourful voxel art brings with it the best production values of the series. EDF has always been rough around the edges – rightly or wrongly, that’s a well-established part of its charm – but World Brothers is a mostly smooth experience. Enemies will still get stuck on scenery on rare occasions, and the game will briefly chug a little when things are at their busiest (especially online), but for the most part the clean-cut graphics are matched by a user-friendly framerate.

Despite the fact that the series has always wallowed in repetition, never providing anything more than giant insects, arachnids, and robots to shoot until the current level is over, there’s always been a secret sauce that has maintained its cult following. The new art style waters this sauce down somewhat, in that the move to a more

playful-looking world puts a dent in the B-movie atmosphere that EDF thrives on.

## YOU'RE BUGGING ME

While still a shamelessly daft third-person shooter, World Brothers shakes up the formula. You now have a team of four, who you can switch between at will. Traditional EDF classes such as the flying Wing Diver and heavy Fencer are present, but there’s now a huge variety of other characters to unlock. These are based on national stereotypes (all countries seem in for this equally), history, and legends. With a very wide range of armour, abilities, and weapons on offer, all types feel different, and you’re sure to be able to pick out favourites.

Having three AI companions to help out at all times is something else that chips away at the atmosphere, however, as the traditional EDF sense of tension and desperation isn’t quite there. You *can* go into a mission with just one character, but this only serves to demonstrate that it’s not how the game is meant to be played. With no character switching to offset the painfully slow reload times and any weaknesses of your chosen soldier, fighting becomes a slog.

It’s much easier than other EDF games (we got to level 50 before dying for the first time on Normal), so it could serve as an entry point for the series, though the lack of high points might just put newcomers off.

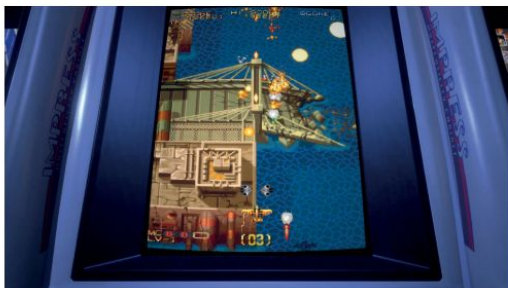


Although the effort to make the series fresh and accessible is admirable, it's backfired. Fans will be disappointed, newbies will wonder what all the fuss is about. **Luke Kemp**





**INFO** **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £39.99 (includes all three game packs, 32 titles in total) **ETA** Out now  
**PUB** Capcom **DEV** Capcom, various **PLAYERS** 1-2



## Capcom Arcade Stadium

These old games are coining it in

**B**efore *Return sent us into a spiral bemoaning its level of difficulty we had Ghouls 'N Ghosts, a game that broke many joysticks and had us asking whether hard games are fun. Debates are cyclical.*

We can now experience the fun of dying relentlessly in the classic platformer all over again, but with the advantage of limitless continues, adjustable difficulties, and a rewind feature. These features are bolstered by play options that go beyond simple scanlines to replicate the view you'd get playing on a cabinet, as well as the inclusion of online play, score tables, and a rewards system for unlockable goodies.

It would be easy to leave these 32 Capcom classics untouched (and they can be played as intended), but the additional options ensure games designed to suck coins from your pockets in a sweaty gaming arcade play in a balanced way on PS4.

This is the impressive aspect of *Capcom Arcade Stadium*: that it manages to repackaged games released as far back as 1984 and make them relevant again. The base game comes prepackaged with vertical shooter 1943 – The Battle For Midway, a series with

a loose grasp of historical accuracy. Later games in the series can be downloaded here too, and each game is more spectacular in turn.

### PACK 'EM IN

So what are the games? Three packs are available at launch, loosely themed around arcade eras – Dawn Of The Arcade (1984–1988), Arcade Revolution (1989–1992), and Arcade Evolution (1992–2001). Each has its star inclusions and novelties; the previously mentioned *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* sits alongside *Strider* and *Bionic Commando* – all greats that still demand to be played today. The camp musclemen-defeat-the-gods of *Forgotten Worlds* remains a treat, while shooter *Progear* – the newest game here (2001) – has a uniquely engaging anime steampunk aesthetic and bullet hell aggression.

Where the platform stumbles is in a reliance on reproducing games already available in other collections at the expense of rarer Capcom titles – how many times do you want own *Street Fighter II* and *Final Fight*?

This is a minor point, as ultimately it's the excellent emulation platform itself that shines. And you'll *finally* finish *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*.

## BANDWIDTH

PS4-to-PS5 game updates chewed on

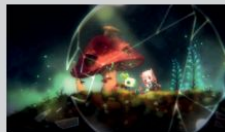


This month the torrent of games upgrading from PS4 to PS5 has slowed a little as we await some big releases (*Metro Exodus Enhanced* just misses this issue). But that doesn't mean you should sleep on those below, as PS5 is the console of second chances.



While some PS5 upgrades simply spruce up the visuals **Maid Of Sker** developer Wales Interactive is using the opportunity to include some features intended for the

original release. New challenge modes (*The Long Night*, *Axe Of Kindness*, *Nightmare At The Hotel*, and *In Darkness*) bring combat to the game, each offering different settings, limitations, and goals. Alongside these new ways to experience the horrors of *Hotel Sker*, this PS5 version offers *Performance* and *Fidelity* modes (play in 4K at 30fps or 1440p at 60fps), faster loading times, and improved textures. DualSense support is comprehensive, with haptic feedback implemented to enable you to feel footsteps, environment interaction, and healing; adaptive triggers are used to implement the new combat features. You can feel the difference between weapons now.



*Toriko* now has new diseases! You can almost feel how proud the developer is of its PS5 upgrade for **Void tRRLM!]++ //Void Terrarium++**. This is a

strange little game from NIS America that we're sure you never played on PS4. Controlling a small robot, you need to venture into a post-apocalyptic world to search items to heal *Toriko* – possibly the last human alive. Or is she? Alongside those new diseases this upgrade features more outfits and actions (play hide-and-seek with *Toriko*) as well as a visual makeover, though it's still no looker.



More visually arresting is the upgraded edition of puzzler **Manifold Garden**. The PS5 edition of the game, which is free if you own the PS4 version, runs at native 4K at

60fps, and its geometric puzzle worlds load incredibly quickly. This even makes use of PS5's Activity Card system to enable you to jump into puzzles and resume where you left off. Similarly, if you're a PS Plus subscriber you can access tips and solutions using the Official Game Help feature – *Manifold Garden*'s currently one of the few games to offer this option. The DualSense controller is used in some interesting ways too, enabling you to feel how you interact with the world and sense objects moving from one side of the screen to the other.



An interesting selection of games that can feel over-familiar are saved by an excellent emulation platform that manages to make these old hits playable again. Ian Dean





# Mass Effect Legendary Edition

The definitive bundle of BioWare's beloved space trilogy



## INFO

**Format** PS4  
**Price** £59.99  
**ETA** Out now  
**PUB** Electronic Arts  
**Dev** BioWare  
**Players** 1  
**Length** 100 hours  
**Accessibility**  
 Subtitles; toggleable motion blur



**R**emasters have become a regular fixture on the videogame release calendar, a remedy to a shortage the industry has created itself by letting purchase options and hardware go obsolete. Especially on consoles, we've come to expect an eventual resurrection of popular games. It's not necessarily a bad thing as remasters like this one can bring new and old fans together.

Mass Effect Legendary Edition is a bundle of all main games and DLC that exemplifies the pros and cons of the remastering practice quite well – changes have been applied sparingly, altering very little in the overall look of the game, but upon closer inspection, it's not only the framerate and resolution upgrades that impress, but also the new character models and light refractions.

## CHANGES AHEAD

The first Mass Effect, originally released in 2007, receives the most notable do-over. Here, the new character models have the most impact, now devoid of hard shadows. Additional particle effects in the environment, like falling embers and smoke, add a lot to the atmosphere, yet the overall look is still dated, not least due to the games still being based on Unreal Engine 3. Characters' lips don't sync with dialogue, and all human character models, including your own customisable Shepard, retain their unsettling bug-eyed look, stiff hairdos, and equally stiff animations.

The changes made to background vistas and views of the horizon are most notable in the first Mass Effect because everything appears brighter and smoother almost to the point of seeming sterile, drawing undue attention to the fact that in the Mass Effect universe, many surfaces are either white and shiny or the grey and brown of barely textured rock. The Legendary Edition looks bright





Save the galaxy and  
Shatner aliens?  
There's a reason the  
series is so beloved.

▀ All human character models retain their unsettling bug-eyed look and stiff hairdos. ▀



1  
2



1 Shepard always has a winning argument that's guaranteed to get even the most reluctant adversary talking. 2 To defeat such large enemies, you have to stay mobile and pack a rocket launcher. 3 Heart-to-heart conversations between Shepard and their crew members contribute greatly to Mass Effect's charm.

» where things should be dark and moody (for example, the first game's Horizon colony) and sharp when the softness of the original looks better (like in the attack on the Normandy at the beginning of Mass Effect 2). Overall, however, the devs knew where to leave well enough alone, and all three games have aged well enough to look good even after what may seem like small changes.

The first Mass Effect also receives a few additional updates, most of which remedy its stubborn controls. The weapon control scheme during battle has been brought in line with the other two games, and the Mako – hate on wheels for many a player – now has weightier physics, a boost, and better shields, among other changes that improve the overall handling. Additionally, where characters had 60 levels before, the Legendary edition now offers faster levelling, and has unlocked every weapon type for every team member. This reduces the overall difficulty quite a bit, which can make it too easy an affair for players of the original, but since your team still vanishes or haplessly shoots barriers and covers, the changes level out. Somewhat.

Of course, all these alterations may not really matter if you don't know what Mass Effect is about. As Commander Shepard, the customisable male or female protagonist of the series, you're uncovering and dealing with an enemy which threatens the whole galaxy, home to humans and several other alien races that have learned to live with each other in relative peace. In this universe, humanity has discovered plenty of new planets with the help of the so-called mass relays, which enable interstellar high-speed travel.

Those different worlds, as well as their inhabitants, are a large part of the series' appeal. The alliance between alien races is often precariously held together by politicking, but as a soldier you are a man or woman of action, taking your ship out to the stars to help people in need and to recruit allies to your cause. You can form deep bonds with the many characters who become part of your team, thanks to excellent writing and

voice acting. More than one character may potentially warm Shepard's bed over the course of the trilogy, making building relationships as exciting as the gunfights, if not more so.

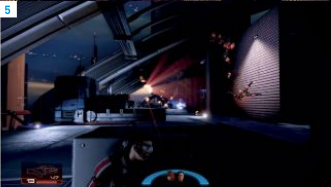
### A MASSIVE LEGEND

Talking about the games in hindsight is an odd experience, because due to its packaged form, the Legendary Edition makes it easier to remember and assess changes between games. The trilogy was always meant to be enjoyed as a complete experience (your Shepard and narrative choices can be carried through each game), but even though all three games are similar in style and design, BioWare did try to address criticism from game to game. Weapons gained an ammunition system. Levels gained more verticality. Cover mechanics improved. Team member AI was improved. Levelling and planet scanning systems were overhauled (not always for the better). But the

Mass Effect makes building relationships as exciting as its gunfights, if not more so.



- 4 Thane became the remaster's poster boy.
- 5 Biotics and ammo powers can force enemies to leave cover.
- 6 ME3's background benefits hugely from the remaster, making images of war and destruction breathtaking.



core of the Mass Effect experience doesn't lie in its cover shooting combat, even as that gets more exciting as the stakes of the story rise.

Now that there's no wait between instalments, it's easier to see how the trilogy was planned as one big story. In each game you make decisions big and small that can have consequences down the line, potentially affecting entire populations. These choices, and how they push you towards either being a 'Renegade' with a bad attitude or a friendly 'Paragon', may seem simplistic, but that doesn't make them any less difficult. Should a friend live or die? Should one alien race gain power over another? You can't be quite sure what your decisions will affect, and you may not find out until a future

game, a feat that wouldn't be possible without consistently engaging writing.

Today, Mass Effect is ever-present, not only in the discussion surrounding its ending, which effectively served as a precedent for players trying to take ownership of a series by demanding changes, but also because of how it made your relationship with its characters an essential part of the experience. Discussions about who the 'best' squad mate is are neverending, and people have played the games again and again to enjoy every romance possible. Mass Effect's legacy on dialogue systems can be felt in many games. It is quite simply a great space opera, equal parts cheesy and exciting, with a scope and charm that isn't easily replicated.

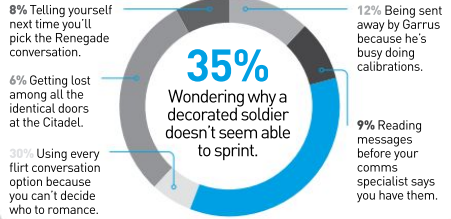


No fan of Star-Trek-style science fiction should miss Mass Effect – and this package offers the best version of the trilogy currently available. **Malindy Hetfeld**



## THE PLAYBOOK

### WHAT YOU DO IN: MASS EFFECT: LE



### ALSO ON PLAYSTATION 5



While there is no dedicated PS5 version, you can pick from two modes that boost performance. Quality mode gives 4K UHD at up to 60fps, whereas Framerate mode offers a stable 60fps at 1440p. PS5 is the only Playstation console to reach close to 60fps in Quality mode; in Framerate mode PS4 Pro achieves a similar performance.

### FRIENDS & ENEMIES



**GARRUS**  
Shepard's loyal crew member. Everyone's favourite, most likely because of his dry wit.



**JACK**  
A ball of hate and one of the most powerful biotics in the galaxy. Tough to befriend.



**THE ILLUSIVE MAN**  
The name says it all. He'll make you an offer you can't refuse, but is it worth it?

### LOVING/HATING



**VROOM SERVICE**  
Better Mako controls mean you no longer have to eat your controller in frustration every time a vehicle section comes up.



**MY EYES!**  
JJ Abrams' Star Trek movies have already taught us there absolutely is a thing like too much lens flare. Stop the flare!

### TROPHY CABINET



**BRONZE**  
ME1: Get lifting and propel your enemies into the air using the Lift ability.



**SILVER**  
ME3: Take on a group of Spectre-level soldiers and come out last Spectre standing.



**GOLD**  
ME2: The suicide mission is a team effort, and you should get everyone to safety.



Ryu has a bone to pick. And flesh. And the whole limb. Ninja Gaiden 2 introduced appendage chopping.

# Ninja Gaiden: Master Collection

Three tricky ninja brothers – but which one to trust?



**INFO**  
**FORMAT** PS4  
**PRICE** £32.99  
**ETA** Out now  
**PUB** Koei Tecmo  
**DEV** Team Ninja  
**PLAYERS** 1  
**LENGTH** 28 hours  
**ACCESSIBILITY**  
 Subtitles, Hero mode (semi-automates blocks and dodges); adjustable camera speed (Ninja Gaiden 2 & 3 only)

**C**onfusion is the tool of a ninja, so it's only fitting that this remaster is stranger than it seems. All three of Ryu Hayabusa's modern-day escapades are here in one form or another but, unlike a swift death, what you're getting is not clear-cut.

Each of the three games has already been released in multiple editions. What you get here are newer versions of Ninja Gaiden Sigma, Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2, and Ninja Gaiden 3: Razor's Edge. The Sigmas were once the only way to play the games on PlayStation, though they saw big changes over the Xbox versions that weren't always for the best.

Whether Ninja Gaiden Sigma's differences from 2005's Ninja Gaiden Black make it better or worse is a subject of hot fan debate, but most would agree that, despite some benefits, Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2 – a port of 2008's Ninja Gaiden II – suffered odd alterations that made it worse.

In an attempt to remedy things, Sigma 2's gore has been patched back in, but you can still feel that the game is emptier than intended, as enemies were removed. The remaining bad guys have more health to make up for it, but this undermines the original's core principle of requiring Ryu to cut down legions of foes.

The change was originally made to enable Ninja Gaiden 2 to run properly on PS3. But as all editions now run effortlessly on PS4, it's needless. Given these are such important character-action games, it's disappointing that there's no option to choose between Ninja Gaiden Black or the original Ninja

Gaiden, especially as Team Ninja undoubtedly knows how the games' fanbase feels.

## CUTTING CLOSE

Ninja Gaiden Sigma, at least, is a great version of a very hard game. It's also very dated, with not-quite-responsive-enough controls, and a terrible camera – particularly in boss battles. But

and locked you exclusively to the sword). But it feels retrofitted, with mechanics in a game not designed to have them – just a chain of fight arenas surrounded by annoying enemies with rocket launchers.

That said, you do get features previously exclusive to Vita, such as the easier 'Hero' difficulty. Plus, all three games

**All three games include the extra stages and characters from their original releases.**

its challenge is moreish. It's less polished than its sequel, but still a classic.

Conversely, Ninja Gaiden 3 is simply not very good at all, despite Razor's Edge's attempt to retrofit itself back into the classic Ninja Gaiden template (which was more button-mashy,

include the extra stages and characters from their original releases (not new to this version), though they're lacklustre compared to Ryu's, and the female characters remain embarrassing – presumably sponsored by water balloon manufacturers.



Neither masterful or definitive, this is an awkward trilogy of at least two great action games, only one of which is really worth bothering with here. Oscar Taylor-Kent



**INFO** **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £24.99 (with the Legendary Pack) **ETA** Out now  
**PUB** Sega **DEV** Ryu Ga Gotoku Studio, AM2 **PLAYERS** 1-2



## Virtua Fighter 5: Ultimate Showdown

Is it a ring out or a ring in?

**H**ow many features does a fighting game really need? As long as the whacking feels good, do you want much more? That's the approach here with this port of the most recent Sega fighter (which first came out in 2006, so 'recent' is relative).

Even when you land on the menu the fisticuffs are at the forefront, with about half the screen taken up with rolling replays of actual online matches that promise some fine fighting. This is a release largely geared toward getting the game running on modern systems

It quickly becomes clear why Virtua Fighter has retained so many devotees.

(aside from its inclusion as a bonus in Yakuza games), and grappling online. Only a modest arcade mode offers much in the way of solo play, and you can beat it in less than half an hour. Other than that there's a basic training mode, and no mission-based tutorials to speak of.

### VIRTUAL CHAMP

But the combat itself remains compelling, and it quickly

becomes clear why Virtua Fighter has retained so many devotees despite how far it's fallen down Sega's Christmas card list.

The core of the game is ridiculously simple. You have a punch, a kick, and a guard, and you can shift around the arena in 3D to catch your opponent with a ring out instead of a KO. The simplicity makes it accessible, but it still has a high skill ceiling. Each beautifully animated martial art (each fighter has their own mastery) rolls together into combos that require a commitment, and each has its own situational use.

Thanks to the dedication to the animation, it remains extremely readable, meaning you'll be matching your own menu of high, medium, and low strikes against opponents in no time.

The down side is that online matches can get a bit laggy, getting in the way of the solid mechanics. While a surprisingly solid return to form, you might need to have confidence when heading online.

It might be a lean offering, but it's great to see Virtua Fighter return, with mechanics that have aged surprisingly well – if matches play properly. Oscar Taylor-Kent

**7**  
PLAY

## THREE TO PLAY



PSN games you might have missed



Every month, loads of games come to the PS Store. You'd be hard-pressed to play them all. We take a look at some that didn't quite make the cut this month to give our impressions. This issue we tackle a whole lot of cards, then fly away into the clouds.



There's something appealing about the freedom of flying through the sky in any game, and that's something **Wing Of Darkness** has in spades.

Stepping into a mech as one of two anime ladies (voiced by popular voice actors), you take part in aerial combat that's like an arcade Ace Combat. But compared to that legendary series it falls a little short in terms of variety, not to mention it can't hold a candle to that other series' surprisingly strong story. There's not much else like this around, but it might not be where you want to start.



**Gritlands**, on the other hand, plants your feet firmly in the gritty sci-fi world of Havarria. This is a roguelike where your decisions really matter, and you need to make smart use

of both your combat and negotiation decks to stay on top. Sometimes you might find playing the land's harsh factions against one another works just as well as going in guns blazing, and your repeated attempts through different runs will inform how you play the next time. You'll come up against different challenges each time, but learn which risks to take. It's all tied together with some great writing and a nice visual style that makes it feel like a world worth exploring, even if it takes a few tries to get the hang of being a grifter.



From a deck of gritty cards to something a bit cuter and... squelchier... It's **Rise Of The Slime**. You need to help a

cute little slime overcome bigger, tougher monsters by using a deck of cards (cards are in – cards are always in). Taking down each enemy requires different strategies that you'll learn over time, but you'll also need to master the likes of gameplay mutators that can vastly alter your success in different runs. Facing foes like mushroom people and demons, your slime can pull off some surprisingly powerful moves as you mix and match your magic cards, building a cute lil' monster that can become an elemental beast. It doesn't come together quite as well as something like Gritlands, but the chill vibes help to set it apart as something a little bit more relaxing for roguelike diehards in need of some respite.



# Knockout City

A load of balls, in a good way

Special balls offer features such as increased speed, or forcing opponents into ball form.



jimcrikey

## INFO

**FORMAT** PS4  
**PRICE** £17.99  
 (Deluxe upgrade  
 £6.99, 500 Holobux  
 for cosmetics  
 £3.99, more  
 bundles available)  
**ETA** Out now  
**PUB** EA  
**DEV** Velan Studios  
**REVIEW** N/A  
**PLAYERS** 2-6  
**CROSSPLAY** Xbox,  
 PC, Switch

**T**his is a game that asks 'What if dodgeball, but more so?' It's one of the most accessible and easy-to-understand games on PlayStation: hit other players with a ball, don't let them hit you. Don't be fooled by the kid-friendly (and slightly disturbing) character design, though. There's more fun and depth here than you might reasonably expect.

Realism goes straight out of the window, and that's what makes this special. You navigate the colourful, multi-layered levels with a combination of running, jumping, gliding, and mid-air spinning. One map even has pneumatic tubes to whip you from one end to another. In another gleeful retreat from

**Realism goes straight out of the window, and that's what makes the game special**

reality, you can turn *yourself* into a ball for teammates to throw. If they take a moment to charge fully before releasing you, then you can control your descent and land with an instant-knockout explosion.

Balls automatically lock on to nearby enemies, but this keeps the pace going rather

than oversimplifying things. You get a warning when somebody is targeting you, which means you have a few defensive options: try to get out of their line of sight, dodge away from or into the ball... or take the risky option of timing a button tap to catch it, which has the added bonus





of adding to the ball's charge, and therefore speed. Faster balls are, naturally, more difficult to catch or avoid.

In team games, some of the balls on the field will be of a special type, randomly selected at the start. The Moon ball, for instance, gives you a slower but higher jump while you're holding it, while the Bomb ball explodes shortly after being picked up. They add to the game rather than detract from it, requiring you to change tactics temporarily while you're using them.

## BALLS OUT

Things can get hectic, especially at close range, and winning a close fight is immensely satisfying. Catching somebody's throw to hit them with their own teammate, dodging into somebody to make

## KNOCKOUT LOOKS

# 01



Jump into one of these tubes and you'll be quickly whisked away to another part of the map. Great for quick escapes, and locating opponents as you whizz past unseen. Only present in one map, sadly.

# 02



Tap **X** while in the air and you'll whip out your glider. Perfect for crossing otherwise impassable gaps and/or maintaining a height advantage, but be warned: it makes you a slow-moving target.

# 03



Dodging's not just for avoiding and deflecting balls; jumping into opponents will briefly stun them. Get close enough to the edge of the map and you can even score a knockout by sending them over!

them drop the ball before they can get a hit in, winning a tense back-and-forth with a ball steadily increasing in speed, faking a throw to draw out a dodge or catch to leave your opponent helpless... it's a game full of thrilling little victories.

Most modes involve two teams of three. While we tested the game during the free trial

period, we expect our ease of finding games to continue, thanks to crossplay and a mostly positive player opinion. Nonetheless, it's worth diving into 1v1 games now and again. With no backup and no off-screen targeting warning, it's a pleasingly different flavour of play. Whichever mode you go for, you'll have a ball (sorry).



**Dodgeball meets platformer, and makes an enjoyable PvP baby. Easy to understand, much less easy to avoid getting a ball in the face. Don't dodge this one. Luke Kemp**

# 8

PLAY



## TOP FIVE ONLINE GAMES

Team up with pals or take on the world



### IT TAKES TWO

Still one of our favourite recent co-op adventures. If you and a friend

haven't made time to play through this one yet, you really should. It's surprisingly lengthy too, so you'll get more than a few nights of fun out of these divorcing parents.



### WARFRAME

With a unique personality, this free-to-play sci-fi ninja shooter is

frequently on our list for good reason. Running great natively on PS5, there's still lots to catch up on before the Sisters Of Parvos set their dogs on you in the next update.



### BLACK DESERT

Summer festivities are kicking off, and you might even have time to check

out the Bugatti crossover to net yourself a themed horse. This action MMORPG's first co-op dungeon is on the horizon too, so gear up to get ready to tackle it with friends.



### FINAL FANTASY XIV ONLINE

The next expansion isn't due until November, but

plenty of story content has recently been added to serve as a bridge towards that adventure. There's always something new to set your eyes on, and it's great on PS5.



### CALL OF DUTY: WARZONE

Our battle royale comfort food of choice has been

Warzone lately, thanks to some great updates that have kept it feeling fresh. With more COD inevitably always on the way, it's been nice to stay snug with something a little bit constant.

# The Elder Scrolls Online: Blackwood

The latest expansion puts you through Hell



## INFO

FORMAT PS5, PS4

[reviewed]

PRICE £32.99

EIA Out now

PUB Bethesda

DEV Zenimax

OFFLINE

REVIEW N/A

PLAYERS 1-99

CROSSPLAY No

After playing the latest TESO expansion, the next time somebody tells us to go to Hell, we can confidently say "Already been; wasn't all it's cracked up to be".

The newest 'chapter' in the MMORPG explores the efforts of big demonic baddie Mehrunes Dagon to smush together Oblivion and the mortal realm. His plan, like the DLC as a whole, isn't entirely successful.

We won't dance around it: the main questline is weak. It takes way too long to get going, initially pinballing you across the map from NPC to NPC until, finally, you have a reason to let loose with your staff/sword/bow/etc. The wood elf who accompanies you for much of it is clearly meant to come across as endearingly pure and enthusiastic, but ends up as 'tolerable'. Our favourite character proved to be a Dark Brotherhood assassin who doesn't feature nearly as much as he should.

While the pacing is poor, and the final fight drags a little if you're playing solo, there's an interesting twist on the trope of a character struggling to contain and use immense power. The potential of this plot point goes largely untouched, but the ending of Blackwood leaves the door wide open for the next chapter in the game, which we hope will dig deeper.

## RESPECT YOUR ELDER

The swampy region of Blackwood itself has been realised with typical care. It's an expansive (if aesthetically overfamiliar) area with hills, forts, lakes, and a large selection



If you enjoy the combat, you're in luck; there are some tough enemies ahead.

of often unpredictable and/or humorous side-quests. Don't expect to make extended forays into Oblivion hellscape, though. While 'Deadlands' feature in the main quest, and across Blackwood via Oblivion portals, the thematic merging with the 'real' world prevents them from looking or feeling particularly exotic.

Companions – NPCs who can accompany you almost anywhere outside of PvP

modes – are the main gimmick here. There are two at time of writing, each unlocked via their own quest. Once you have one, they level up while fighting alongside you, and you can customise their appearance and abilities. It's a neat and well-implemented idea, even if they end up feeling more like pets than fellow adventurers. Like everything else here, they're good, and a welcome addition, but could be better.



The main quest is the most disappointing of any Chapter so far, yet remains enjoyable. The world around it is a strong, if often unambitious, addition to Tamriel. **Luke Kemp**



## Super Bomberman R Online

Exploding into a big new genre

### INFO

FORMAT PS5 (reviewed), PS4  
 PRICE Free  
 ETA Out now  
 PUB Konami  
 DEV Konami  
 OFFLINE REVIEW N/A  
 PLAYERS 64  
 CROSSPLAY All consoles

**B**ombs and battle royale go together a treat. Or at least they do here in this conceptually neat mix of what Bomberman does best with a ticking clock of elimination that sees only one bomber obtaining victory.

Interconnected classic Bomberman maps keep you moving on, dodging fiery death until it's all too much.

Alas, a battle pass and premium skins are already ruining the simplicity, with the paid ones giving you special skills that encroach on the meta, some cheaper tactics already becoming commonplace.

There's potential in this, but just as much chance of it becoming tired at this rate. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**



## Chivalry 2

'Tis but a flesh wound

### INFO

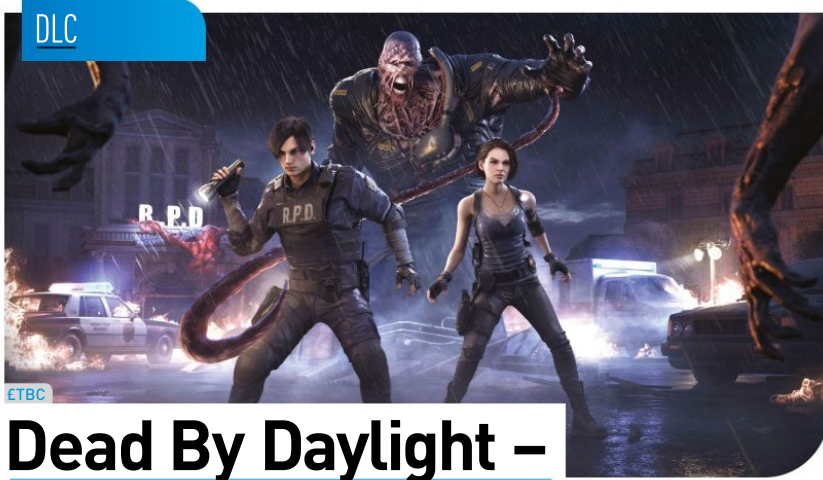
FORMAT PS5 (reviewed), PS4  
 PRICE £34.99  
 ETA Out now  
 PUB Deep Silver, Tripwire Interactive  
 DEV Torn Banner Studios  
 OFFLINE REVIEW N/A  
 PLAYERS 64  
 CROSSPLAY All consoles

**A**n unholy fusion of FPS, fighting game, and ragdoll sim, Chivalry 2 could be a mess but ends up working remarkably well. Combo together slashes, stabs, and overheads to slice through an enemy team, while blocking, parrying, and dodging return hits.

Pressure mounts thanks to player counts – 64 players at the top end, with 40-plus in other modes (and a huge free-for-all mode too). Neat DualSense features add pleasant rattle, like your **R2** guard being harder to use the less stamina you have. Not every map and mode is a winner, but it looks fab and is fun, with a nice sense of humour.

**Oscar Taylor-Kent**





DLC

ETBC

# Dead By Daylight – Resident Evil

These survivors earn gold staaaaaaars

**E**ven though this is a series that loves its horror crossovers, this instalment celebrating 25 years of Resident Evil feels like one of the biggest yet. And that’s saying something for a game that’s had the likes of Pyramid Head, Freddy Krueger, and Michael Myers shambling after victims.

This feels like more than just an add-on pack – it’s a real care package for Resident Evil fans (albeit it a bloody one found on your doorstep). It’s introduced by someone saying “Dead By Daylight” in the classic style of Resident Evil menus, after all.

Your new survivors are a double dose of antiviral infection: fledgling police officer Leon Kennedy and Special Tactics And Rescue Service officer Jill Valentine. They sport their looks from

the remade versions of Resident Evil 2 and Resident Evil 3 respectively, and the new map matches those games too. The familiar, twisting halls of Raccoon City Police Station host the horror here.

Of course, Nemesis is the (literal) big deal, a huge killer who can shove his captives underarm. Thanks to buff skills, he knows

where survivors start and can begin to hunt them immediately, and can lay parasitic traps (and spawn zombies). His T-Virus mutation increases over time, giving him tentacle powers that can infect and then hinder survivors. The best part is, if he manages to kill Jill or pull her out of hiding, he’ll let out his iconic “Staaaaaaars!”

🔑 If he manages to kill Jill, Nemesis will let out his iconic “Staaaaaaars!” 🔑

ALSO ON PSN



£4.99

**POWER RANGERS: BATTLE FOR THE GRID – RYU CRIMSON HAWK RANGER**  
Wait, that ranger is... Ryu from Street Fighter? His familiar moves are enhanced by the Morphin Grid – check out his hawk-shaped Hadouken.



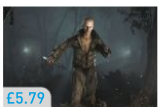
£1.69

**FUSER – MANEATER**  
Neither a vengeful shark nor a gothic chimera boss fight on a bridge. But watch out, because this DLC will still chew you up when (oh-oh) here it comes to your own DJ set to mix together with other hits.



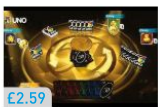
£7.99

**VIRTUA FIGHTER 5 ULTIMATE SHOWDOWN – LEGENDARY PACK**  
Who wants modern-looking fighters anyway? This pack gives your fighters a low-poly overhaul so you feel like you’re back in smoky ‘90s arcades.



£5.79

**HUNT: SHOWDOWN – THE COMMITTED**  
Gain access to Legendary hunter Monroe and his also-Legendary knife and Romero 77. Having escaped an asylum, he hunts to stay alive in the dangerous bayou.



£2.59

**UNO – 50TH ANNIVERSARY DLC**  
Uno... Uno has *changed*. Beyond a swanky black-and-gold playing board, this DLC also adds the 50/50 card, where a coin is flipped to decide who has to draw four cards. Devious.



DLC

£15.49

## STELLARIS – FEDERATIONS

This grand strategy of the stars adds plenty of political machinations for your empires to use when forging a path to glory. Federations are expanded, allowing for more diplomatic options and boons depending on which you join. New Origins allow you to flesh out the backstory of your people.



ETBC

## ALTDEUS: BEYOND CHRONOS – EPISODE YAMATO

More than just a visual novel, the base game uses VR to add a sense of interactivity. That feeling of involvement continues in this extra chapter, in which you get into the mech of someone trying to stop your other character (using a giant sword).



£4.79

## TOOLS UP! GARDEN PARTY – EPISODE 2: TUNNEL VISION

Get hot under the collar as you take on more gardening work, featuring lava pools and water pipes – though a smart worker can use both to their advantage. Just watch out for the Hole Mole, who can pop up all over the place.

LIVE GAMES



UPDATE

# Blinded by the light

No Man's Sky: Prisms gets a glow up

**T**he game that keeps on giving shows no sign of stopping. While it's already been enhanced for PS5, this new update offers a visual overhaul across the board that really take advantage of the new hardware.

Screen space reflections have now been added to improve lovely shiny surfaces on PS5 across the likes of space stations and ships. Even when there's a lot of on-screen action, the reflections accurately follow the movement of players and other creatures. Outside of that, glass across the universe

now refracts realistically to add a new dimension to everything from glass bases to cockpits.

More volumetric lighting has been added too, allowing for directional effects that create impressive scenes in the dark, from the searchlights of those hunting you down to the beam of your flashlight in dark caves.

Those caves are now more detailed than before, with the

likes of glowing mushrooms and flowers illuminating areas to create suitably alien-feeling environments. The extra detail can be seen in other areas, including textures that have been given more depth, companion fur, the number of stars you can see from a planet's surface, and more details across planets in general (also only on the new hardware). Space has never looked better.

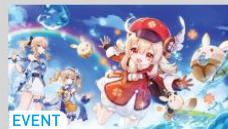
**Screen space reflections have been added to improve shiny surfaces on PS5.**



SEASON

## FORTNITE – INVASION

The aliens landed, and yes they brought Rick and Morty with them. Rick himself is now a skin (though not in pickle form), joining a new Superman for a broad crossover. But we also got a customisable Kymera alien skin, which we could alter and change throughout the season to settle on a look. The flying saucers across the island brought nuts and bolts as well, which we could use to craft weapons we couldn't otherwise find for a tactical twist, such as upgrading an assault rifle to burst fire.



EVENT

## GENSHIN IMPACT – MIDSUMMER ISLAND ADVENTURE

With Klee threatened with having her cute companion Dodoco taken away from her by a so-called Dodo-King, players set out to help by exploring a sunny archipelago in a ship called the Waverider. Challenges rewarded them with loot that could be used to progress the event. Additionally, the update added Kaedehara Kazuha as a potential party member (by opening loot boxes), the first from Inazuma.



UPDATE

## PUBG – MIRAMAR REMASTERED

The second map to ever come to PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds induces nostalgia for many. It was the first time the battle royale that started the trend began to branch out. Now here again, the desert zone has been overhauled. It's not the first time it's been done up, but this bigger undertaking has learned lessons from other, newer maps to bring it visually in line. More maps are due, but gunning around this classic has been a blast.



## LIVE GAMES

Online games still keeping our attention

We thought battle royales were popular enough already, but now they are permeating other games and genres. Can this cross-pollination keep them fresh as they evolve?

While going after the big guns like **Fortnite** and **Apex Legends** might be dicey, as we were playing **Super Bomberman R Online** (p154), we realised devs do have an alternative. Rather than going out of their way to build a full-on battle royale, they can bring elements of battle royale into other game genres.

In a way, the simplicity of retro arcade games makes them perfect for creating pseudo-battle royales like these, essentially building on existing multiplayer modes to cater to large numbers of simultaneous players. The idea's already been tested on Nintendo consoles by the likes of **Tetris 99** and **Pac-Man 99**, but could even more arcade hits benefit from having larger pools or elimination elements?

Something like **Puzzle Bobble** could work well, as you try to match colours while other players breathe down your neck. Or what about a version of **RC Pro-Am** where you don't know who you'll be bumper-to-bumper with on each lap? Even fighting games could steal some battle royale magic. How many opponents could you plough through as **Ryu** in **Street Fighter**? Chaotic bouts with multiple players could turn the streets into a frenzy. Maybe more multiplayer games should give it a go.



# PS5 Hall of fame

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO THE NEW GEN'S GREATEST GAMES

01



## Demon's Souls

This faithful recreation of FromSoftware's classic not only does justice to the original's design but it also proves to be one of the most accessible soulsbornes around. Bonus points are awarded for making full use of PS5's hot new tech: the DualShock brings every hit to life in your hands and the quick-loading SSD ensures you're back in the grind near-instantly. Just got a PS5? Put this at the top of your must-play list.



02



## Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales

A new hero for a new generation, Miles Morales swings onto PS5 with a new sense of purpose. The low-key story offers a more intimate Spider-adventure than Parker's bombastic escapade, but when the action kicks in the ray-traced visuals light up the screen.

03



## Control Ultimate Edition

Jesse Faden's mind-bending, environment-destroying, object-chucking new weird adventure sings on PS5. A frame rate of 60fps delights, and Remedy's use of ray tracing is among the best we've seen. The only problem is you have to pick only one of two visual options.

04



## Hitman 3

On PS5 Agent 47's latest hit list looks beautiful – oh boy, those reflections. The good news is not only can you play the latest missions on PS5, you can replay all missions from Hitman and Hitman 2 inside IO's new PS5-developed engine. That's a lot of content.

05



## Astro's Playroom

Free and pre-installed on your PS5, this is more than a showcase for your new console's best, most innovative features. Astro's Playroom is a beautifully-crafted, if short-lived, platform adventure that takes a tour through everything that makes PS5 so special.

06

NEW



## Resident Evil Village

Ethan Winters discovers why this village's house prices were so low. As he searches for his stolen baby, tall vampire Lady Dimitrescu tees off a host of supernatural nasties in the slickest Resi to date, mixing bombastic action with some series-topping fright.

07



## The Nioh Collection

Team Ninja is on top form with its unique samurai take on soulslikes. Tough as hanzo steel, both games run great on PS5, and offer nearly 200 hours of co-op demon slaying action that'd put even Yojimbo through his paces. It's a challenge well worth taking on.

08



## Mortal Kombat 11 - Ultimate

You may have played Mortal Kombat 11 before, but you've never played it like this. In 4K at 60fps this PS5-upgraded Ultimate edition plays faster, smoother, and better than ever. Making good use of the quick-loading SSD, the game's fights come thick and fast.

09



## Dirt 5

On PS4 Dirt 5 is one of the best sim-cade racers around; on PS5 Codemasters' racer offers various performance modes to make the colourful action sing. This is one of the few games on PS5 to currently offer 120fps, which ensures a super-smooth race.

10



## Disco Elysium: The Final Cut

Welcome to Revachol. You're a mess of a cop with no memory, and barely any clothes. Solve a hanging, invent communism, sing karaoke... but do it your way. Skill check successes and failures pave a story of your own, and the writing is superb.

11



## The Pathless

The Journey and Abzû developer returns to PlayStation with a beautifully stylish open-world adventure that recalls Ico and Shadow Of The Colossus. When not battling massive monstrous beasts we're encouraged to pet our eagle, and that's not a euphemism. Charming.

12



## Bugsnax

You are what you eat in this peculiar adventure that's not afraid to walk (and crawl) its own path. Scour Snaktooth Island for its missing denizens, and wolf down a handful of Snax... and see what happens. It doesn't push PS5 but it will test your imagination.

13



## NBA 2K21

Not to be confused with the lacklustre PS4 version, on PS5 NBA 2K21 delivers both spectacle and exciting gameplay. A new court-side camera, improved framerate, fidelity, animation, pro moves, shot selection, game modes... On PS5 it's a whole new game.

14



## Sackboy: A Big Adventure

A slow burn, this platform adventure gradually overwhelms even the most cynical player with its sense of whimsy. Whether you go solo or with a pal in co-op Sackboy's world is a delight to explore. A Big Adventure is one of the most imaginative adventures on PS5.

15



## Immortals: Fenix Rising

Don't be fooled by the Assassin's Creed, jr' tone, this open-worlder is something quite different. Packing in more puzzles than a Ravensburger factory, Immortals Fenix Rising tests your cognition more than your combo skills. Ubisoft's best new IP in years.

# THE GAMES GLOW UP

PlayStation 4 hits replayed on PlayStation 5

Experience the brutal human violence with twice the frames for twice the cringing.



## The Last Of Us Part II

You haven't seen the last of Ellie yet



**F**or *The Last Of Us*' bedraggled survivors, owning a PS5 is just a dream. Yet when the game released we could almost taste the new hardware, with many expecting a native PS5 version to be on the horizon. We're not there yet, but Patch 1.08 brings us a little closer.

As one of the most technically demanding

into the chaotic firefights feels better (and tenser) than ever. Even when the game throws a lot at you, it maintains that 60fps admirably – though you can still toggle back down to 30fps if you'd rather.

Other than that, you get the previous enhancements from PS5's backwards-compatibility boost, like faster loading times. What's a little disappointing is that

**Even when the game throws a lot at you, it maintains that 60fps admirably.**

games on PS4, a locked 30fps is necessary to get everything running on the older console. Here, we get that doubled to a smooth 60fps and, as patches for other first party games such as *Ratchet & Clank* and *Days Gone* led us to expect, it hits that target with ease. Getting

the resolution is still 1440p. We've become accustomed to 4K jumps. However, Naughty Dog has indicated this patch is just a first step, with more advancements to come. If you're looking for a native PS5 version, though, patches might be the best we get. Are patches the future?

## Also on test this month



### Diablo III: Ultimate Evil Edition

With plenty of devilish fun on the horizon in the form of *Diablo IV* and *Diablo II*'s remasters, it's a great time to turn the heat up. *Diablo III*'s 60fps target on PS4 is now locked on PS5, as is the dynamic 2160p resolution (besides some lower-resolution UI elements).



### The Last Guardian

Want this beautiful Team Ico game to leap up in framerate? You're in luck, as on PS5, this runs at a weasel-slick 60fps. The catch? It only works on unpatched versions of the game, meaning you'll need a disc copy and to cancel updates to access its 1.0 build.



### Mass Effect Andromeda

Want to jump from playing the *Mass Effect* Legendary Edition to the fourth game? You're well served here, as PS5 brings across the PS4 Pro improvements. However, it's still an 1800 checkerboard resolution and 30fps – it just meets those goals a bit more regularly.



### Lara Croft And The Temple Of Osiris

Start up the game and you might think you're onto a winner. Out of the box, the framerate is much improved at a stable 60fps. But, as warned, the graphical glitches keep coming the more you play, resulting in some nasty lines across the screen. A bit of a shame.



### Oddworld: New 'n' Tasty

Disappointed by the recent *Soulstorm*? As a remake of the original game, *New 'n' Tasty* offers some classic *Oddworld* action, and on PS5 you get it at a stable 60fps (besides cutscenes, as expected). It's still 1080p, but feels tasty to play on the hardware, even if it's not so new.



# PS4 Hall of fame

## THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO THE LAST GEN'S GREATEST GAMES

01



### Uncharted 4: A Thief's End

Nathan Drake's swan song is a daring evolution. It combines series-defining set-pieces, quietly devastating storytelling beats, and sprawling levels that make you feel like a real-life explorer. This franchise finale retains its signature charm, with the wisecracks firing as fast as the bullets, while the new characters each justify their inclusion. With an astonishing attention to detail, it's Naughty Dog's best yet.



02



### Red Dead Redemption 2

There are a lot of open-world games, but none that make you feel like you're a part of a world in quite the same way as Arthur Morgan's wild west adventure. Tremendously physical, an epic story, and some of the most satisfying headshots you'll ever find.

03



### Grand Theft Auto V

Laughing in the face of other cross-gen ports, GTA V on PS4 is more than a mere HD remaster. Upped to a glorious 1080p, it weaves everything that made the PS3 original great, with new music, more dynamic weather, and a game-changing FPS mode.

04



### Final Fantasy VII Remake

It feels like the game you remember from PS1, and that's Square's greatest achievement. Everything is dragged up to date, from the combat to the visuals. This remake even manages a late-game twist that could reset the franchise. Brave, bold, essential.

05



### God Of War

A departure in some ways but a resounding return in others, Kratos is back with a son and a ruddy big axe. Taking the legend from Greek to Norse mythology, this entry brings a lot to the table while improving on what was core to the earlier series' identity.

06



### The Last Of Us Part II

Arguably the original is historically better but there are few games that push PS4 to its limits as this sequel does. With near photoreal visuals, emotional twists that land, and enough new ideas to ensure you're always thinking, this is a sick followup.

07



### Dreams

This is a feature-laden platform of artistic tools that enables you to create everything from characters, elements, and scenes to entire games, and resets any ideas about what a console 'game' should be and do. Dreams should be installed on every PS4.

08



### The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt Game Of The Year Edition

The White Wolf's epic journey is an RPG experience like no other on PS4. It's been made even more spectacular with this gigantic pack stuffed with DLC, making it a must-have part of any gaming library.

09



### Assassin's Creed Odyssey

A beautiful open world where every Greek island tells a unique story. AC Odyssey is an epic in the truest sense, with lively writing, mythical beasts to battle, and a poignant Assassin's Creed story that lays the bed for all the lore to come. A brilliant spectacle.

10



### Horizon Zero Dawn

A staggeringly large world that condenses cracking combat, accessible systems, and uncut eye candy into an action RPG that will please anyone. In Aloy, PlayStation might just have a new icon. Come for the robo-fights, stay for the exquisitely dense mythology.

11



### Marvel's Spider-Man

Borrowing heavily from Rocksteady's acclaimed Batman series, this delivers the heart and soul of Marvel's superhero. It ticks every box you could ask for: perfect web-swinging, a powerful story, a roster of classic villains, and all of New York City to defend.

12



### Persona 5 Royal

The most stylish JRPG ever made finds its definitive form in expanded release Royal. It combines dark and moving teen angst with unforgettable friendships that power you up in the heart-invading dungeons, and sets the gold standard for the genre.

13



### Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice

FromSoftware's latest adventure repackages its unflinchingly difficult combat into a fantastical take on feudal Japan. More accessible than Bloodborne but layered with equally clever and subtle ideas, this is director Hidetaka Miyazaki's best yet.

14



### Bloodborne

With the finest third-person melee combat in gaming, droolworthy art design and the most twisted monsters imaginable, this is a gorgeously gothic must-have. The Old Hunters expansion adds enough nightmare fuel to make a return to Yharnam essential.

15



### Monster Hunter: World

Presenting a vibrant open world, light on story but heavy on monster-mashing action, this is the most accessible entry in the series yet. Perfecting the feel-good grind through its complex systems and pitch-perfect multiplayer, it's a PS4 must-play.



16



### Resident Evil 2

Powered by the RE Engine, this remake is more than a classic game with a facelift. The new Tyrant and improved zombie AI add tension, and fresh areas not seen in the PS1 classic update the core gameplay making this Resi 2 a celebration of PS1 and PS4.

17



### Hitman 3

Rounding out the World Of Assassination trilogy, Agent 47's latest is a celebration of everything we love about the series: playful maps, experimental gameplay, and endless replay value. This full stop on 47's career to date feels like a good ending to a great series.

18



### Control

Running, gunning, flying, flinging – this one has it all. Satisfying gunplay plus a slew of telekinetic powers make a winning combination as you explore one of the most compelling settings on PS4 to date, the Oldest House. (New) weird and absolutely wonderful.

19



### Days Gone

On the surface this seems to be a step backwards: a testosterone-fuelled Freaker-killing adventure, one man and his bike versus the apocalypse. Slowly you realise Bend Studio's playing with you, and everything's flipped on its head – while the action's excellent throughout.

20

NEW



### Resident Evil Village

Thick with atmosphere and supernatural thrills, the latest Resident Evil celebrates the best the series has to offer. Too slick, too tame? In places, but this game pushes the PS4 to its limits while managing to tease a thrilling end to the Baker trilogy.

21



### Devil May Cry 5

Another classic PlayStation series returns to cracking form on PS4. Slicing up demons and doing so stylishly has never felt better, especially when each of the three characters (Nero, Dante, and V) plays so uniquely. It looks stunning, and is even better to play.

22



### Dishonored 2

The follow-up to a PS3 great, mixing a creative skillset with impressive level design to create a Kaldwin-winning immersive sim. From the shifting rooms of The Clockwork Mansion to learning to link your powers, there's so much scope for experimenting.

23



### The Last Of Us Remastered

This modern masterpiece just gets stronger with age, like a full-bodied stilton. A brutal, emotionally honest take on the end of the world, Naughty Dog's stealth shooter is simply one of the best games ever, even if this PS4 port doesn't add much to it.

24



### Metro Exodus

Larger but maintaining an emphasis on storytelling and experimentation, this sequel to Last Light pulls no punches. If you're looking for one of the best narrated shooters on PS4 this mix of FPS, horror, stealth, and survival shouldn't be ignored.

25



### Shadow Of The Colossus

Bluepoint completely overhauls the visuals of Team Ico's masterpiece but still manages to match the original step-for-step in its remake. New controls and a beautiful photo mode add to the package. Wander's tragic quest has never looked or played better.

## STILL PLAYING

Games that continue to hold our attention

### PICK #1



#### Nier: Automata

Jess Kinghorn fights for the glory of mankind

After blasting my way through multiple cycles of Nier Replicant to get at its five different endings, I had hoped getting all 26 in its sequel would be a cakewalk. While in some ways more streamlined, Automata is an altogether different collection of gears. Between welcome story diversions on later replays and a partially diegetic easy mode, it's no less intriguing than its forbear. Having cleared my first route, I'm looking forward to seeing how many fashionable androids populate this rabbit hole.

### PICK #2



#### Pinball FX 3

Oscar Taylor-Kent gets flipped off

When it comes to value for money, what's better than a pinball table? A collection of many pinball tables, and with so many nerdy ones like Marvel superheroes here there's always something new to keep play varied. My latest obsession is gunning through the Star Wars original trilogy, triggering the iconic movie moments with just my balls as I rack up points, flicking those metal marvls at just the right spot with my targeting systems fully offline, believing in the guidance of the flipper force.

👉 I rack up points, my targeting systems offline, believing in the guidance of the flipper force. 👈

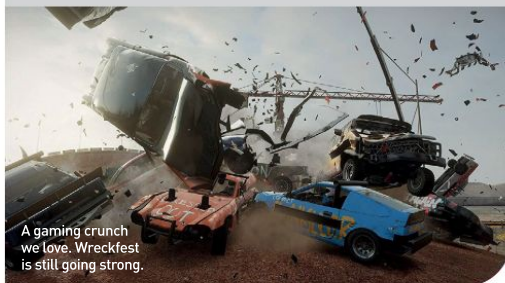
### PICK #3



#### Wreckfest

Ian Dean feels the need, the need to break stuff

If you look up 'guilty pleasure' in the gamers' dictionary there'll probably be a picture of Wreckfest shoving GT Sport into a ditch. A little scrappy and undercooked in some respects, when it comes to enabling you to smash, crush, and barge other racers' cars onto the scrapheap there's no better game. Back in the driving seat I'm taken aback by how many people are still playing, and how the simple smash-and-grab formula has maintained since launch. Now, where's that PS5 upgrade?...



A gaming crunch we love. Wreckfest is still going strong.



# PS VR Hall of fame

THE VIRTUAL REALITY HITS YOU HAVE TO PLAY

01



## Tetris Effect

Tetris, yeah? It might be a great game, but it's easy to understand why you'd brush this version off as 'just more Tetris' at a glance. Yet Tetsuya Mizuguchi's trippy, transcendent take on the block-based puzzler is nothing short of a masterpiece. Sure, you can play it without PS VR, but in the virtual space it really becomes next level, transforming one of the tightest puzzle games ever made into an emotional ride.



02



## Hitman 3

Every mission in the World Of Assassination trilogy can be played in PS VR via the latest entry in the series. That's a lot of murderous action. It all plays brilliantly too, with the act of puzzling through hits as Agent 47 perfectly suited to virtual reality. One of PS VR's best.

09



## Keep Talking And Nobody Explodes

Who knew bombs could bring people *together*? With one headsetted Defuser, and as many Experts as you can fit around a 23-page manual, no other VR game comes close for inclusive, endless multiplayer fun. Just make sure you don't let lan issue any instructions – KABOOM!

03



## The Persistence

This first-person horror roguelike offers perfectly sized chunks of survival bursts. It's everything you'd expect from a full PS4 release, but in PS VR it's filled with clever ideas, unique weapons, genuine jump scares, and fab looks – plus great couchplay as well.

10



## Statik

Saw meets Portal in this fantastic puzzler. It makes ingenious use of the DualShock 4 by giving every button a specific function. You'll need to use them all to free your hands from the strange box in which they're trapped. An intriguing concept done well.

04



## Rez Infinite

Tetsuya Mizuguchi's vision becomes reality in PS VR. This psychedelic rhythm rail shooter has achieved its final form. Its crowning achievement? New level Area X; it's powerful enough to bring players to tears. Worthy of its name, this is a timeless title.

11



## Firewall: Zero Hour

There's only one game mode, a cat-and-mouse assault to find and either destroy or protect a laptop, but when the shooting is this laser-focused, who could want more? A PS Aim controller is a must to get the most from PS VR's standout shooter.

05



## Astro Bot Rescue Mission

This pint-sized adventure packs charm in spades even if it isn't exactly chock-full of challenge. Bringing the classic puzzle platformer formula bang up to date in PS VR, it won't take many levels before you're calling out, "Beam me up, Botty!" Also, the nippers will love it.

12



## Resident Evil VII: Biohazard

Can you can go eye-to-eye with the Bakers? Playing in VR raises the tension to almost unbearable levels and has gameplay benefits such as face-aiming, which makes shooting a lot easier. A brilliant example of how VR can improve already great games.

06



## Star Wars: Squadrons

A fan's dream come true: experience epic Star Wars space battles from the cockpits of the films' most famous starfighters. Whether you're flying a TIE fighter or X-wing there's absolutely no thrill like skimming the surface of a Star Destroyer in PS VR.

13



## Doom VFR

A new take on a classic game, this proves first-person shooters can shine in PS VR. A mix of control choices, including the PS Aim controller, ensures Doom is as fast and fluid in VR as it's ever been. Every PS VR owner needs this demon-slaying outing in their collection.

07



## Iron Man VR

With a finely-crafted control setup that enables flight within small sandbox maps, and gives you the option to inhabit the designer shoes of the billionaire playboy too, Iron Man VR is an almost-perfect interpretation of the famous Avenger. It's a PS VR must-play.

14



## To The Top

This creative platform-puzzler enables you to scamper, jump, and skate across its 35 sandbox worlds with the aid of your PS Move controllers. It's as physically demanding to play as it is perplexing, and all the better for it. To The Top is a PS VR one-off.

08



## Blood & Truth

The truth? You can't handle the truth. But if you can, then you'll discover one of PS VR's best shooters, tied to the kind of slick cinematic narrative we're used to from Sony's non-VR releases. Blood & Truth is one of the most complete games for PS VR.

15



## Star Trek: Bridge Crew

Mixes the fanboy fantasy of nestling in the Captain's chair (or taking control of the helm, weapons, or engineering section) on a USS starship with the strongest co-op experience on PS VR. This is Star Trek's finest hour on PlayStation, and the community's great.

16



### Everybody's Golf VR

Golf and virtual reality go together like ham and eggs or rhubarb and custard. Mmm, tasty. In PS VR you swing and chip shots, lean over putts, and become immersed in the act of putting a ball in a small hole. It's near perfection, and one of PS VR's essentials.

17



### Sprint Vector

A crazy mix of SSX racing and obstacle course hijinks, Sprint Vector makes use of the best control setup on PS VR to deliver a near-perfect experience. A single-player Challenge mode and online races impress, only the poor single-player AI holds it back.

18



### Batman: Arkham VR

Not only is the training mission an unparalleled exercise in wish fulfillment (Wayne Manor! The Batcave! Batarangs!) but the defiantly sharp, if short, campaign is the epilogue to Arkham Knight we needed and deserved. Bats off to you, Rocksteady.

19



### The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim VR

Though compromises have been made to texture detail and controls, you get all – yes, all – of The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, including the expansions, inside PS VR. It's immense. The scale and organic nature of the world at your feet overcomes any shortcomings.

20



### Beat Saber

With your PS VR headset firmly on and PS Move controllers in hand, Beat Saber feels like the game both pieces of hardware were made for. In it you have to master songs and challenges by swiping your neon swords through the air and dodging with your head.

21



### Moss

Guide adorable mouse heroine Quill through a fantasy storybook world full of virtual puzzles, fights with insects, and perfectly pitched Disney influences. There's no need to say cheese, because you'll be smiling as you play, all day long. This is effortlessly charming.

22



### Accounting +

One of PlayStation's funniest games is a dark, twisted journey into the world of accounting. No, don't walk away now! It's an Inception-like dive into increasingly bizarre and frequently hilarious scenarios that will scratch the itch of any Rick and Morty fan.

23



### Farpoint

This sci-fi shooter is a brilliant showcase for the PS Aim controller, a versatile bit of kit that makes the satisfying range of weapons it stands in for feel weighty and real. The game matches it, delivering a strong story and challenging co-op for great VR action.

24



### Knockout League

Punching things is possibly the least creative use of the VR medium, but when it's used to create a classic arcade boxing sim that plays like a brutal puzzle puncher, it's irresistible. It's also good for you: it tracks your calorie count as you work up a sweat.

25



### Apex Construct

This story-driven FPS demonstrates five-to-eight-hour adventures can work in PS VR. Building its narrative organically through physically exploring the game's world while fending off mechanical creatures with a trusted bow and arrow is a delight. Ambitious.



## WHAT'S NEW PLUS-SY CAT?

Digging into the random acts of gaming a lengthy PS Plus subscription offers

There's something about summer that leaves many of us with a hankering for horror. What better way to cool off than with Supermassive's **Until Dawn**? With House Of Ashes on the horizon (find out more on p38), there's never been a better time to revisit Blackwood Mountain. Subscribers could first collect this choice-driven chiller back in July 2017 but at present PS5 players can pick it up as part of the console-exclusive Plus collection.

Smart lighting design still sells **Until Dawn**'s bid for photorealism more often than not. It's something I miss from Man Of Medan's sunny scenes, even though it's clear to see the lessons learned between games. There are other aspects I'm sad to see left in the past – principally the Don't Move lightbar gimmick. Emily's escapade in the mines remains memorable because of how it gets your palms sweating right when you need a firm grip on your DualShock 4. Combined with the implied voyeurism of many of Until Dawn's choice camera angles, there's a layer of tension here you could not only cut with a butter knife but spread on toast too. The schlocky, irreverent tone just completes the meal, and is perhaps why

The Dark Pictures leaves me feeling so famished even after multi-hour fright fests – there's a playfulness to Until Dawn's scares that so often feels absent from the series that succeeded it.

Last month's selection of PS Plus titles certainly didn't leave subscribers hungry, though. Making its PS5 debut via PS Plus was tasty co-op espionage adventure **Operation: Tango**. For seconds on PS4 was another exclusive, in the shape of Ryu Ga Gotoku Studio's remaster of **Virtua Fighter 5 Ultimate Showdown**. And rounding the month out was the excellent **Star Wars: Squadrons**, which can be played either on PS4 or in PS VR. We dread to think what passes as an in-flight meal on a X-Wing.



Until Dawn is a delicious feast of scares and thrills.

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# RetroStation



## 170 For the players, around the world

The PS2 games that enabled us to connect with fellow PlayStation owners around the globe

### HIGHLIGHTS

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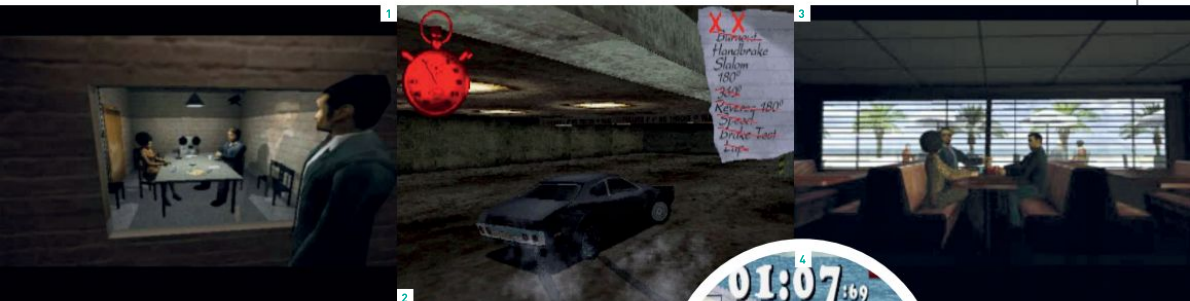


CLASSIC GAME

# Driver

Those cardboard boxes never knew what hit them





**S**mall bills." Those are the first words uttered by Driver's player character, four or five missions into the game. Before then, you'd be forgiven for assuming that this undercover cop and former race car driver was a silent protagonist. But no: Tanner, as he's called, simply prefers to let the roaring engine of a 1974 Gran Torino do the talking.

Oh, and he likes to be paid in small bills. That's all we know about him, aside from the fact that his last career ended in a fiery crash – which is how most failed missions end in Driver, too. Thankfully, the gangsters, pimps, and informants on the other end of Tanner's phone readily fill the air. They speak in the idiom of blaxploitation cinema, the '70s subgenre of action film which celebrated the slang and agency of its African American criminal characters, even as it made money for white writers and producers by leaning on racial stereotypes.

In this world, San Francisco is "Frisco", a woman is a "kitten", and mission-givers expect you to know what they mean when they ask, "This disco your

thrillingly desperate, soundtracked by the 'wicka wicka' of funk guitars and the constant screech of tyres. On the first or second corner of every level, without fail, a hub cap will fly from your car and careen across the road or pavement. It's a detail that sums up Reflections' dedication to squeezing cinematic touches from the strained PS1 hardware.

In an era when driving games took place almost exclusively on tracks, it's impossible to overstate the impact of Driver's urban environments. Suddenly success was as much a matter of hazard perception as it was racing excellence; even the greatest escape could be derailed by a Sunday driver making a left turn as you shot across a junction. The mere presence of slow-moving obstacles lends the experience of hurtling down a Miami street a sense of danger you could never find on the Laguna Seca Raceway. There's something about the metronomic regularity of the lampposts that allows you to measure, on some unconscious level, just how irresponsibly fast you're going.

It's made very clear to you that you ought to slow down. The police forces of

1 The convoluted story hinges on somebody called The French Guy. 2 Driver's tutorial, in which you prove your skills against the clock, is notoriously hard. 3 Some cutscenes feature a held frame of Tanner on the phone, presumably to save money. 4 Don't be fooled, this pedestrian isn't controllable. 5 Watch out for trams on the lines!

with one eye on a tight mission timer, you're forced to floor it in full view of the fuzz. That's no shame, though – if you survive, all those near-collisions give you material to work with in the Film Director mode, a fully-featured tool for making your own Bullitt.

## LEND US A TANNER

It's important to point out that, at the time, Grand Theft Auto was still in 2D. If you think Rockstar wasn't bothered about that fact, consider exhibit A: the GTA III mission named "Two-Faced Tanner", in which you hunt and kill a "strangely animated undercover cop". You're told Tanner is "more or less useless out of his car" – a transparent dig at the fact that Driver players couldn't step out of their vehicle.

Clearly, Rockstar was both indebted to and threatened by Reflections. And although the Driver studio would never overtake GTA again, it triggered a race that saw 3D open cities become the most exciting playgrounds in gaming. Not bad for a '70s throwback. ■

## "Driver's chases feel thrillingly desperate, soundtracked by the 'wicka wicka' of funk guitars and the constant screech of tyres."

beat?" Once you put the phone down, however, the filmic influences shift to the car chase classics of the era: The Italian Job, Bullitt, and The French Connection. Newcastle studio Reflections built a driving model that was nothing less than extraordinary for the early days of 3D gaming – the equal of Gran Turismo in its weight, momentum, and buoyancy. Then it set the handbrake to 'always on'.

### STREET FURNITURE

The goal was to position players at the very edge of control. Driver's chases feel

Driver's four American cities patrol in black-and-white squad cars, which you notice by their vision cones on the minimap. In these moments, Driver is a vehicular stealth game: step on the gas too hard or put a rear end out of line within sight of the law, and you'll trigger a high-speed chase. As you bash bumpers with your pursuer, your felony level increases, and so these encounters quickly get out of hand, spawning road blocks and more kamikaze cops. But toeing the line whenever you come across a police car is rarely an option:



PUB GT Interactive

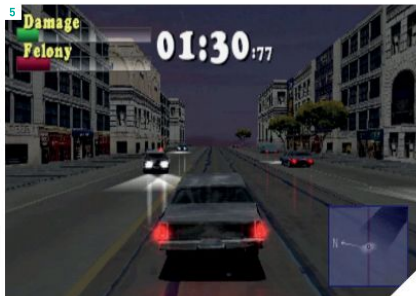
DEV Reflections Interactive

RELEASED 1999

GET IT NOW  
£4.30, Amazon

### NEED TO KNOW

- 1 Newcastle Upon Tyne was unlockable as a bonus city using a code and cheat disc.
- 2 A Driver movie was scuppered when a waterfront revitalisation project shut down its filming location.
- 3 The engine that powers Watch Dogs was originally intended for a cancelled sequel to Driver.



## DON'T DELETE

Save icons for these historical July moments spin in the PLAY hive mind. Do you remember this?



10 YEARS

Imagine the pitch for Catherine: "You're a loser who cheats on your girlfriend with someone with the same name. But, she's a succubus dream serial killer, meaning you turn into a sheep and have to push boxes to escape nightmares."



15 YEARS

Super Dragon Ball Z was an attempt at a more competitive fighter, and was released in arcades before coming to PS2. With Street Fighter devs like Noritaka Funamizu and Akira Nishitani on board, it was a different take on anime fights.



25 YEARS

Bust-A-Move 2: Arcade Edition brought ball-popping action from the, well, arcade to PS1 screens. Mixing lovely pixel art with real backgrounds, it was a visual feast, and later levels of chain popping no joke, even with a pal in tow.

## MEMORY CARD Final Fantasy X

20 years old? Hahaha! HAHAHAAAAHA!



After two decades, Tidus and co are looking pretty good for a gang of 40-somethings.

**A**fter revolutionising RPGs on PS1 with FFVII, Square had to do the same here. And it delivered. The full voice acting and sunny visuals (that water!) might not seem amazing these days, but in 2001 they were revolutionary. Through its prerelease period and year-long headstart in Japan (leading to many imports), the future of gaming never looked so fantastical.

"Hearing the main theme song (To Zanarkand) is such a sweet sorrow song that, still to this day, both relaxes me and brings up emotions!" says reader **Nathan Cooke**. The piano melody hits right from the start, and you know you're in for something epic. "I even skipped school to play it," says Scott Bishop. On the other hand, **@teh\_ferrett** sat one exam, bought the game, and then sat another before popping it in and "spending all night playing it instead of studying for my exams."

### TURNING TIDES

At the time, English dialogue had to match the Japanese mouth movements, leading to some awkward sections in retrospect. "I still cringe thinking of that laugh scene. And I played [Sega Saturn's] Deep Fear!" says **@1Nogarda**. Others have learnt to love the laugh scene. "At the time, it seems silly. But when the big reveal happens, it makes Yuna's laughter a thing of horror and beauty," says **Timmy Trebuchet**.

It had big advancements to gameplay, with the sphere grid skill system and



### INFO

**PUB** Sony (in Europe)  
**DEV** Square  
**RELEASED ON** PS2  
**RELEASE** 2001  
**IF YOU LIKE THIS, TRY THIS...**  
Sequel Final Fantasy X-2 revisits the world with a more fun-loving, upbeat story. Otherwise, Jess says to check out Shadow Hearts for another way PS2 JRPGs could have evolved.

revised turn-based combat, but for many it was all about the story and characters. At 11, "it was the first game that emotionally broke me," shares **Nate Ross**.

It all came together in what was a pivotal game for many players, selling them on the genre. "The RPG that began my obsession," muses **Nick Royster**. **@Murder\_Mama** sums it up: "It was my entire childhood. I fell in love with everything."

### BYTE SIZE BITS

Essential numbers that add together to tell you everything you need to know about the game.

# 2013

Final Fantasy X/X-2 HD Remaster released on PS3 and PS Vita. An improved PS4 release followed in 2015.

# 8,500,000

Sales of the PS2 version (reported in 2017). At launch, it set the record for fastest selling console RPG.

# 01

Month – the English release was brought forward by a month. It wouldn't happen now.



▶ Join in the conversation as we celebrate PlayStation's past, present, and future with our community; you can email us at [play@futurenet.com](mailto:play@futurenet.com).



## DEFENDING

## Solas

The stately elf is a villain to begrudgingly admire, says Malindy Hetfeld

**F**or a villain to be truly engaging, a lot of things need to combine: a flair for the dramatic; a grand plan; and, most importantly, a motive you can sympathise with. For most of *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, Solas takes the role of the level-headed, considerate mentor, someone who rarely loses himself to his emotions. In hindsight, it makes you wonder – maybe he was suspiciously calm and forgiving.

But Solas isn't inherently evil. He is the vessel of a god who watched their subjects and found them lacking. Looking at everything that happens across Thedas, from war to racism to people rejecting their own makers and enslaving benevolent spirits, you can't help but see where he's coming from.

Solas is either the first or the last person you'd expect to be capable of a grand betrayal, and that's what makes him so intriguing. Over the course of your adventure, you get to know him very well, and you encounter someone who's firm in his beliefs (and his dislike of tea), but also just your resident bookworm, the uncle who likes to tell stories and comes across as a bit preachy at times. Not all villains wear capes, essentially. Also, Solas is interesting in that he wants to right a wrong he's partially responsible for, having caused the fall of the Elven people. Through him, you learn the gods of Thedas are a bit like the Greek gods: powerful, but prone to lapses of judgement, just like their mortal subjects.

The prospect of having to fight someone you have come to know so well is what makes the inevitable reunion with him in *Dragon Age 4* both exciting and sad. After all, while the player character will be different, players will find themselves going up against an old friend.

**SOMETIMES TO ACHIEVE THE WORLD ONE DESIRES, ONE MUST TAKE REGRETTABLE MEASURES.**

A justification for his own actions or a simple assessment? Solas remains a mystery, after everything.



## INFO

## GAME

*Dragon Age: Inquisition*

## STATS

Solas is voiced by Welsh actor Gareth David-Lloyd, who's probably best known for his role in *Doctor Who* spin-off *Torchwood*.

The design team considered many different hairstyles for Solas, including dreadlocks, but reckoned a bald head made him look most dignified.

Varric has nicknamed Solas 'Chuckles', presumably because that's usually the last thing you'll catch him doing.

## SPIN-OFFS

n/a

## HOW TO PLAY?

£64.99 (Deluxe Edition), PS Store



## THE LIST



# FOR THE PLAYERS, AROUND THE WORLD

Daniel Lipscombe shares the games that PS2 took global

**T**oday's internet speeds were but a dream at the turn of the millennium. That didn't stop Sony attempting to connect players worldwide through games. PlayStation 2 wasn't formally equipped to take on the internet until the slim model, but if you could grab a network adapter the world was yours. And these were the games that took you there.

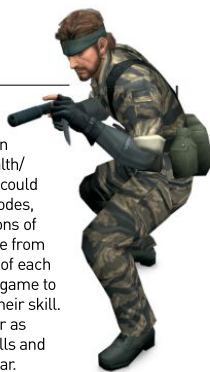


The most satisfying stealth kills are the ones when you take down your mate.

## Metal Gear Solid 3

PUB KONAMI / DEV KONAMI  
WENT ONLINE 6 OCT 2006 / MAX PLAYERS 8

**01** It was perhaps natural that Metal Gear Solid 3 would have an online component given the stealth/action hybrid gameplay. Players could choose from five tournament-style game modes, taking on team deathmatch or unique versions of capture the flag. While you could only choose from generic soldiers, the highest-scoring player of each round was given a character from the main game to use in the subsequent round, to showcase their skill. Looking back, this was perhaps a little unfair as those players then had access to special skills and abilities. Servers were only online for one year.



Can we petition Capcom to bring back the seven-foot subway bugs?

## Resident Evil Outbreak

PUB CAPCOM / DEV CAPCOM / WENT ONLINE 17 SEP 2004 / MAX PLAYERS 8

**02** Resident Evil Outbreak was ahead of its time. The online aspect allowed players to gather in a lobby and choose which rules, difficulty, and characters to use in the scenario. They would then progress together or alone, fighting a range of grisly monsters. What was a real stroke of genius was the ability to save your progress if you had to nip off. This gave everyone a chance to play in stages – something we find in all co-op games nowadays. Anyone who managed to beat the scenario was given a star next to their name.

**“What was a real stroke of genius was the ability to save your progress.”**



So many jaggies. Vehicular combat looked extra-crunchy in 2003!

## Twisted Metal Black Online

PUB SONY / DEV INCOGNITO ENTERTAINMENT  
WENT ONLINE 6 JUNE 2003 / MAX PLAYERS 4

**03** Twisted Metal deserved better. This series was great in its offline mode, but the online multiplayer modes made your opponents feel like bots. There was no way to properly distinguish between your mate and the AI, so all that personality gained from split-screen sofa sessions was lost. This wasn't so bad in the US where the game was bundled free with the network adapter, but in the UK you had to shell out for a game that nowadays would be a half-hearted update. At least Sweet Tooth was cool, eh?



Cap, Doctor Strange and Elektra here, battling an outclassed AIM trooper.

## Marvel Ultimate Alliance

PUB ACTIVISION / DEV RAVEN SOFTWARE  
WENT ONLINE 24 OCT 2006 / MAX PLAYERS 4

**04** This isometric brawler was criminally underrated by many. Being able to team up with three other players and choose from a roster of Marvel superheroes was a dream. Not only could players finally figure out who was better – Captain America or Wolverine? – but this game felt brilliant both online and offline. This was proper comic-book action, featuring shattering explosions, dazzling powers, and abilities. We'd like another of these, but Raven Software is now developing Call Of Duty for Activision.

There were some epic battles to be had in the world of Vana'diel as long as you had a group.



## Final Fantasy XI

PUB SONY / DEV SQUARE ENIX  
WENT ONLINE 16 MAY 2002 / MAX PLAYERS 18 PER PARTY

# 05

The release of Final Fantasy XI was a watershed moment for PlayStation. This was the first time console owners could really tuck into an MMORPG, and it was not only great, it played well on controllers. With five character races and hundreds of customisation options, players could express themselves across the world while fighting each other and the world's bosses. For many, this was the dream: a fully realised, enormous world of chocobos, moogles, and magic.

Final Fantasy XI gave us a look into the future of console gaming.

This MMORPG required investment from the player, not just in time but in cash. They'd need a network adapter and a PS2 hard drive just to start playing, and these were remarkably hard to find – a surprise, given the success of the series on the Sony console. For those who were able to play, thousands of hours lay ahead in the world of Vana'diel.

The game was a huge success for Square Enix, and it released several

expansion packs for it. Were it not for these tentative steps, we may not have Final Fantasy XIV, which is going from strength to strength.

Love for this MMORPG is still flowing, and players have gone to great lengths to keep the game alive. Literally. Nineteen years later, the game is still going. While it may not be as popular as some more recent MMORPGs, players refuse to let go of their characters.

**“For many, this was the dream:  
a fully realised world of  
chocobos, moogles, and magic.”**

# SOCOM II

PUB SONY / DEV ZIPPER INTERACTIVE  
WENT ONLINE 5 MAR 2004 / MAX PLAYERS 16

## 06

SOCOM was huge. We're talking Call Of Duty levels of huge. And its sequel, SOCOM II, was the apex of shooters for the PlayStation 2 generation.

While the single-player story was gripping and represented a step up in storytelling, this FPS is remembered for its multiplayer. In Team Deathmatch, players joined a squad of eight. Teams were either SEALs or terrorists. Starting on opposite sides of the map, you needed to employ proper tactics and teamwork to win rounds. The usual chaos of shooters didn't exist here, and players flocked to the game for a taste of more methodical play.

SOCOM II was so successful, in fact, that it kept expanding. More maps were released, clans were established and a friend list, something that seems commonplace now, was introduced. At one point Official PlayStation Magazine actually gave away three maps on its lauded cover demo disc. Why was the game so popular? Because it was successfully emulating what PC players already had and console owners were hungry for. SOCOM was about

holding angles, setting up defensive turrets and breaching doors to storm the opposing team.

After all this time, the game is being kept online by dedicated players. While many were still meeting up to play over LAN connections, in 2020 a small team of fans set up their own server which sees 50-60 people playing their favourite shooter each night. It's quite the legacy, and all because of those small online steps from Sony and the Network Adaptor.

**“More maps were released, clans were established, and a friend list was introduced.”**

Squad tactics would win or lose you the game. Voice comms were integral.

The old PS2 textures actually make this monster scarier!



## Monster Hunter

PUB CAPCOM / DEV CAPCOM / WENT ONLINE 21 SEP 2004 / MAX PLAYERS 4

**07** Nowadays Monster Hunter's mainstream, but that wasn't always the case. As the original game trickled out from Japan, players in the West struggled to find a copy of the game. When they did track one down, the online world was bursting with hunters gathering together to take down beasts, from huge, lumbering dragons to small agile herds. In groups of four, people linked up across the world to slay everything in sight, constantly farming monsters for precious materials needed for better armour and weapons.

**"In groups of four, people linked up across the world to slay everything in sight."**

Those aren't worms, but it was better if you told your mum they were.



## Mortal Kombat: Armageddon

PUB MIDWAY / DEV MIDWAY / WENT ONLINE 27 OCT 2006 / MAX PLAYERS 2

**09** Midway's first forays into 3D models with the bloody fighter Mortal Kombat weren't a great success. The developer nailed the spirit of the game with this iteration however, bringing horrid fatalities, mystical special moves, and a vast roster to PlayStation 2. The downside to trying to play a fighting game online in 2006 was the instability of servers and high ping. If your ISP wasn't up to snuff, you could find yourself on the wrong side of a butt-kicking. The highlight was bringing your 'kreated' fighter to online matches and seeing others' ludicrous 'kreations'.

Everyone wants to be Vader walking through that door. Nobody wants to be the grunt.



## Star Wars Battlefront II

PUB LUCASARTS / DEV PANDEMIC STUDIOS  
WENT ONLINE 31 OCT 2005 / MAX PLAYERS 24



**08** Which is better, Battlefront II or Battlefront II? Of course, this series made a comeback recently, but the first steps online in 2005 were jaw-dropping. Hopping into galactic vehicles and zooming over the heads of footsoldiers while blasters popped off colourful lasers felt new and refreshing, plus we got to live out our fantasies as Jedi or Sith fighting in sprawling battles. This was a gift to fans of the science-fiction series – players could choose different eras from the films, and fight in over 24 separate locations. Amazingly, PlayStation Network was rather robust despite all that action and all those players.



Many an argument was settled on the Pro Evo pitch.

## Pro Evolution Soccer 6

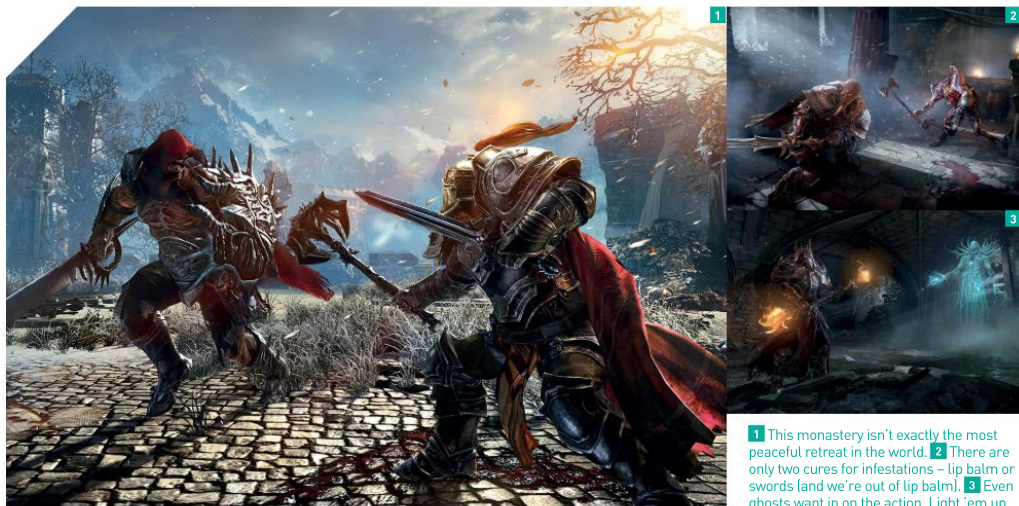
PUB KONAMI / DEV KONAMI / WENT ONLINE 27 OCT 2006 / MAX PLAYERS 2

**10** October 2006. Pub games of Pro Evo evolved into dribbling and volleying over internet cables. There was no need to go to your mate's house and squabble over who had to play using the knock-off controller with the dodgy **Ⓢ** button. Pro Evo 6 was bringing the world together, with friendly games pitting your team against someone else's. Setting up a PlayStation Network group with your buddies allowed friendly rivalry as each battled for points to steal the league championship title. While play was for only two players, groups could hold up to 30 teams for the league.

PLAY NOW

# Lords Of The Fallen

The Surge's predecessor is clashing steel on PS Now



**1** This monastery isn't exactly the most peaceful retreat in the world. **2** There are only two cures for infestations – lip balm or swords (and we're out of lip balm). **3** Even ghosts want in on the action. Light 'em up.

**E**ver since the first Dark Souls became a sleeper hit, its design philosophy has influenced many games. But releasing only a year after PS4 itself, Lords Of The Fallen was one of the first to take those ideas and form them into their own thing for the new generation.

Playing as Harkyn, branded with runes all over his body for his sins,<sup>1</sup> you're unleashed on a dark fantasy world to stop the second coming of a nasty god, while having your own issues with the demigods who originally usurped them. Starting in a snowy monastery slap-bang next to the Hand Of God mountains (formed from a literal

giant hand) this is an early PS4 game that's still visually exciting, and you can feel the ambition even now. A blizzard whips around you, and the stonework feels lovingly detailed in its ruin.

## CRUNCH SQUAD

It's a strange world, and one that feels good to lumber around slowly. Combat is careful, and it's satisfying to brush off an enemy flurry before ducking in to crunch your own hits in. On PS Now it's downloadable as well as streamable, meaning you can rid yourself of excuses for your failures, and try and try again.

Beyond losing unspent experience when you die, what you gain in the first place is a risk/reward system, goading you to skip checkpoints and keep your



### INFO

**PUB** CI Games  
**DEV** Deck13 Interactive, CI Games  
**RELEASED** 2014 (PS4)

combos going. Snuff it and you can pick up what you lost, Dark Souls-style, but only if you get to the scene of your demise within a time limit. It's playful in the way it whispers in your ear, daring you to push yourself further and make mistakes.

The studio would go on to make both The Surge games, and has only improved with each game. Deck13 wears its FromSoftware inspiration on its sleeve, but from there always goes in its own interesting direction.

With a sequel in the works (being developed by Hexworks),<sup>2</sup> Lords Of The Fallen is well worth revisiting.

**FOOTNOTES** <sup>1</sup> You start with a choice of brawling, deception, or solace magic, and warrior, rogue, or cleric armour.

<sup>2</sup> Announced two months after the first game was released.

## HAVE YOUR SAY

Readers tell us what they think of our choice



SMACKING FACES WITH THAT HAMMER WAS SATISFYING AF. AND THE GRAVEYARD BOSS WAS AWESOME!

Chris Virheä



COMBAT WASN'T PRECISE ENOUGH FOR THAT STYLE OF GAME AND THE PLOT WAS MEH. COOL AESTHETIC THOUGH!

@RobABowman



ENJOYED THE GAME AND IT'S ALMOST EDGE LORD STORY. A NICE ARCADEY TAKE ON THE SOULS LIKE GAMEPLAY."

Richard Wayne Mayotte II

► Virtua Fighter gets furry in **Sonic The Fighters**. Is it still quick to the punch?



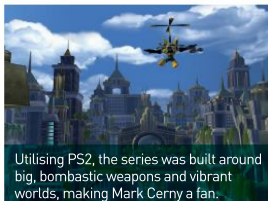
## A BRIEF HISTORY OF

# Ratchet & Clank

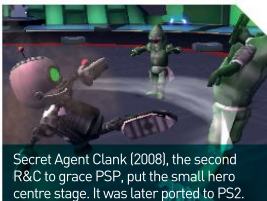
Getting into the nuts and bolts of these gun-toting platformers



After Spyro, Insomniac Games created the first 2002 game with a deeper story, to appeal to an older audience.



Utilising PS2, the series was built around big, bombastic weapons and vibrant worlds, making Mark Cerny a fan.



Secret Agent Clank (2008), the second R&C to grace PSP, put the small hero centre stage. It was later ported to PS2.

**Ratchet is playable in Super Bomberman R. He loves explosions.**  
An ape dressed up as Ratchet can be captured in Ape Escape 3.  
**Insomniac's FPS Resistance features unlockable lombax gear in multiplayer.**

### MOVIE MAGIC

#### Big screen, bigger guns

The animated lombax-robot duo took to the big screen in 2016, in a movie adaptation of the first game's story. Produced by Rainmaker Entertainment (known for ReBoot and Beast Wars: Transformers), it wasn't well received, and lost money. A bit more kid-friendly than the euphemism-loving source material, it's nonetheless a fun ride that's one of the better game-to-movie leaps.



**RATCHET & CLANK SAW A SOFT REBOOT ON PS4 TO TIE INTO THE MOVIE – NOW RUNNING AT 4K/60FPS ON PS5!**



■ One of a few action platformers to implement decent grinding mechanics.



■ PlayStation Move Heroes crossed them over with both Sly and Jak.



■ Rift Apart is a huge, defining title for PS5. It's also the first Ratchet & Clank released since Sony acquired Insomniac Games.



■ Two-volume manga Bang Bang Bang! Critical Danger Of The Galaxy Legend was released in 2005 from publisher Coro Coro (publisher of Doraemon).



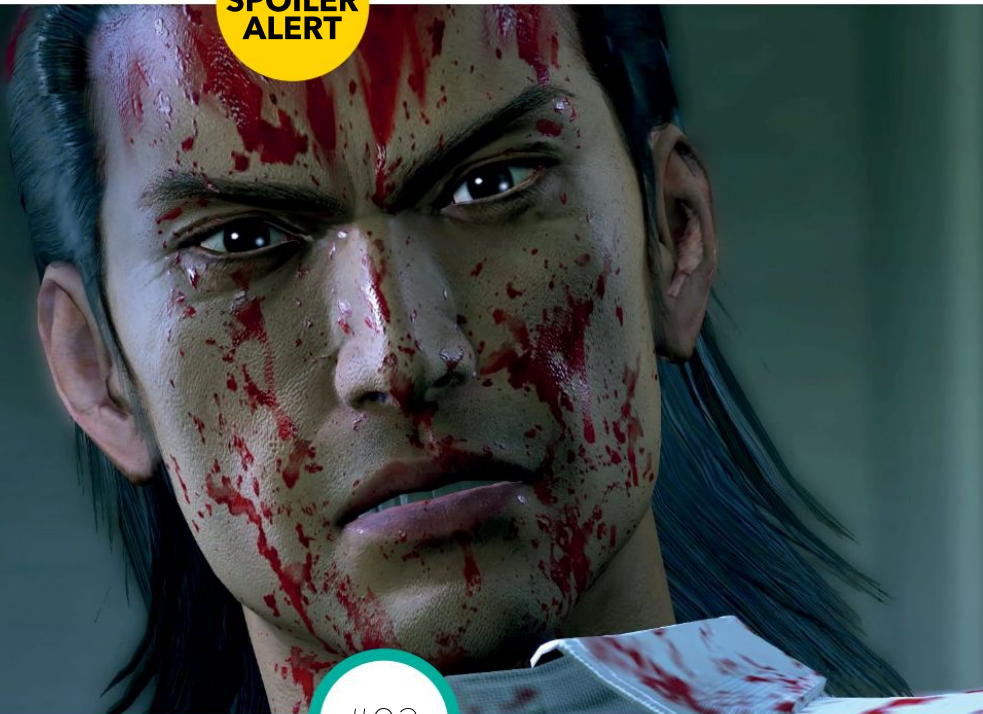
### STICKING WITH IT

#### The heroes who kept going

Unlike Jak and Daxter or Sly Raccoon, these two persisted on PS3 through many releases. 2007's Tools Of Destruction kickstarted a new trilogy, with bigger weapons and larger worlds. Epilogue Into The Nexus set the stage for Rift Apart, while spin-offs All 4 One and Q-Force experimented with different styles of play.

▶ Next issue: turn down the weapon volume for **Ezio's** lethal history.

LOOK AWAY!  
SPOILER  
ALERT



#03

# Punching bag

Yakuza Kiyami's bro-turned-foe decides enough is enough in this brooding flashback sequence

FORMAT PS4 / PUB SEGA, DEEP SILVER / DEV RYU GA GOTOKU STUDIO / RELEASED 2017

**S**hame on Dojima for driving Nishikiyama to murder once, shame on Nishiki for being driven to murder twice. The picture is remarkably similar to Dojima's death near the start of the game: Nishikiyama looking unhinged in a dimly lit office. This time Nishiki doesn't have Kiryu to support him (or indeed spend ten years behind bars for him) and everything goes even more horribly wrong.

Nothing says 'no more Mr Nice Guy' quite like slicking your hair

back with the blood of your enemies, and the change in appearance lets us know all Nishiki's other scenes are divided into before and after this homicidal epiphany. The jump from whimpering at Kashiwagi's feet to unloading a clip into a guy feels whiplash-inducing but this scene connects the dots with gruesome flair. It's also an incredible speed-run of the Five Stages Of Grief.

This is the point at which we witness the exact moment he snaps as everything finally catches up with him. The grovelling Nishiki from

previous flashbacks becomes the cold-hearted figure we've been encountering in-game. His voice is low and eerily steady, his blood-splattered face set in an expression of resolve. No longer will he be pushed around, looked down on, or treated as inferior to Kiryu. It's an uncomfortable glimpse into Nishiki's mind as what started out as the setup for a suicide culminates in a more internalised act of self-murder. And regular murder. Cathartic as it is, there's really no turning back from this point. ■

## TIME TO PLAY?

Fittingly titled "Nishikiyama's Transformation" by the in-game cutscene viewer, this pivotal moment serves as a chilling close to Chapter 9. That's quite the wait for a snap you know must be in there somewhere, but helps make it all the more impactful.

# NEXT MONTH

## ON SALE 27 JUL

# ELDEN RING

Great writers, great studio – could this be the one ring that'll rule them all on PS5?

# PLAY

## ISSUE 3 / AUGUST 2021

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