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HORIZON

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MASS EFFECT ANDROMEDA

All-new mechanics detailed as the legendary series returns

THE ELDER SCROLLS ONLINE

MORROWIND COMES TO PS4

Explore the revival of The Elder Scrolls' best-loved chapter

FINAL VERDICT

GHOST RECON WILDLANDS

Mammoth hands-on with March's jaw-dropping open-world shooter

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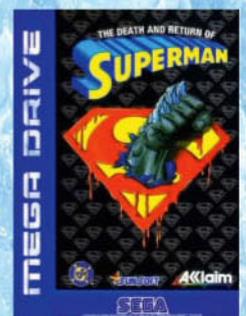
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Goodbye



GAME OF THE MONTH
Resident Evil VII: Biohazard
FAVE DINOSAUR GAME
Dino Crisis

"IT'S BEEN AN
UNBELIEVABLE
THRILL. I CAN'T
WAIT TO SIT
BACK AND
READ THE
MAG AS A FAN
ONCE AGAIN."

There's no shortage of amazing games due in the next year (you knew that already, yeah?), but I can honestly say Horizon Zero Dawn currently eclipses absolutely all of them. Guerrilla Games needs no introduction, of course – the Killzone developer is famed for crafting some of the most jaw-dropping experiences in Team PlayStation's history – yet with PS4 the Dutch studio has reached dizzying new heights. Before you do anything else, turn all the way to p56 for a dino-sized look at Sony's biggest exclusive of 2017. So far...

But you're probably wondering about that ever-so-slightly-scary "Goodbye" up there. Everyone relax – OPM isn't going anywhere. No, quite the opposite: it's going to be an awesome year. However, expect to see a new face up here next month, as after three heady years as editor I'm waving goodbye to OPM Towers. I want to thank every reader, new and old, for supporting OPM (and not objecting to my many puns!) – it's been an unbelievable thrill. I can't wait to sit back and read the mag as a fan once again.

Matthew Pellett
DEPARTING EDITOR
opm@futurenet.com
@Pellocki

Secure
OPM #134
+ 20 DualShock 4
light bar decals

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THIS MONTH'S DINOSAUR HUNTERS



Jen Simpkins
GAMES EDITOR
Rollerskating madness saw Jen shatter her wrist and attempt to play games with one hand. It's what Gal*Gun was made for.

GAME OF THE MONTH
Yakuza 0
FAVE DINOSAUR GAME
Warpath: Jurassic Park



Ben Tyrer
STAFF WRITER
To get in the mood for his Horizon trip, Ben cosplayed as a T-rex. It backfired when his tiny arms couldn't reach the pad. P45 time.

GAME OF THE MONTH
Resident Evil VII: Biohazard
FAVE DINOSAUR GAME
Lego Jurassic World



Miriam McDonald
OPERATIONS EDITOR
In fact, Horizon has put dinosaurs on the brain of the full team. Word queen Mim's determined to make everyone study Thesaurus.

GAME OF THE MONTH
Kingdom Hearts HD 2.8
FAVE DINOSAUR GAME
Robinson: The Journey



Milford Coppock
MANAGING ART EDITOR
And then there's OPSM1 veteran Milf, our very own fossil. He doesn't leave PlayStation mags after 19 years – he's too petrified.

GAME OF THE MONTH
Resident Evil VII: Biohazard
FAVE DINOSAUR GAME
Tomb Raider (1996)

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080 RESIDENT EVIL VII: BIOHAZARD

We survived the Baker house – and we'll tell you why you need to step inside it too.



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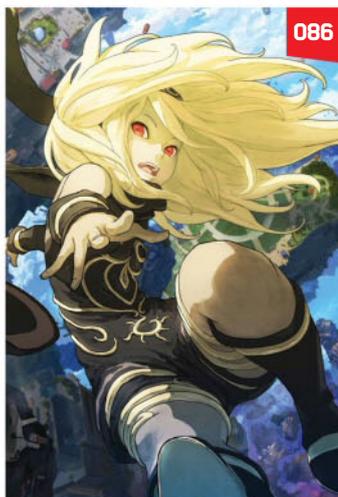
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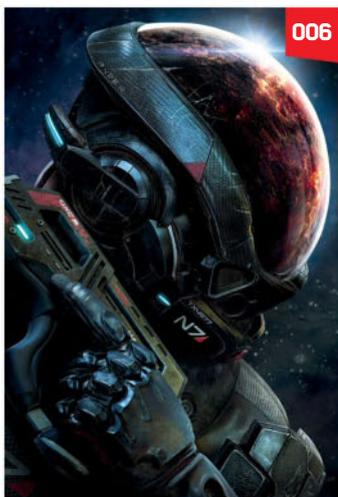
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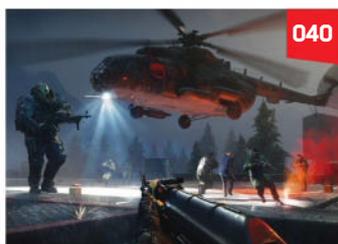
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It's likely this no-nonsense chap is your in-game dad, Alec Ryder. The scratched name on the helmet is a giveaway.



006

👉 WE'RE ALREADY MAKING BUG EYES AT THE FLAMETHROWER. THIS TECH POWER SHOOTS FIRE FROM RYDER'S HAND. 🗨️



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A brand-new WipEout may be coming.

The Big 10

STORIES EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT

New Mass Effect mechanics march ahead of launch

Bioware announces release date and drops more details for ME Andromeda

01

This is it, Pathfinders. A new galaxy beckons and the arrival date is now in sight. After years of

teases and rumours, we finally know that the spacefaring saga's latest adventure will be touching down on PS4 on 23 March. Considering OPM's first hands-on was only last November, we're delighted - and even a little surprised - at being able to head back into orbit so soon.

But unsurprisingly, the floodgates are now starting to open, and we're being hit by a tidal wave of info on what to expect when you arrive in Andromeda. Surfing on top? Details of how you use skills on your quest to find a new home for humanity in the Heleus cluster. New protagonist Ryder is now able to equip three separate powers to use in combat, and these fall into three different categories: Tech, Biotic and Combat. Depending on the ones you pick, they either give you passive benefits

during a fight, such as 'Auxiliary Power', or are more active abilities that you choose to trigger.

Out of those, we're already making bug eyes and kissy-faces at 'Flamethrower'. This Tech power shoots a stream of fire straight from Ryder's hand, burning anybody foolish enough to be at the wrong end of it. Basically, it looks like a Jedi trick (as if we needed even *more* reasons to be desperate for the new Mass Effect). And as you'd expect from any RPG worth its salt, you have the ability to rank up individual skills. So, when you decide to max out Flamethrower, it'll add bonuses such as +50% damage against armour or +25% damage over time. Simply put, there's plenty of firepower at your disposal now.

SECRET SKILLS

Intriguingly, one of the skills we notice provides a hint at the role of a new race, the apparently mechanical Remnant. Bioware's been cagey on the specifics of these mysterious beings since introducing them at last year's PS4 Pro event. Yet one power



The Big 10

STORIES EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT



EXPANDING HORIZONS

Mass Effect Andromeda is getting a trio of novels from Titan Books to fill in the details of humanity's huge expedition. The first will be Nexus Rising, releasing in spring, with Annihilation and Initiation following later in the year.

in Ryder's arsenal, 'Remnant VI', shows you'll be able to use one of them as a skill. How exactly? The game's menu describes this skill as a "retrofitted Remnant Observer," implying the Andromeda Initiative manages to modify one of these flying drones to help in combat.

It's no wonder humanity wants to make the most of this new tech. Remnant VI can attack a target you direct it to, cloak itself when damage is critical, and repair itself. This power also tells us that the Remnant are neither clear friends nor foes, and the ability to hack them in Ryder's favour means they could be AI using mechanical bodies, like the Geth. Either way, it's not long until we find out exactly what role they play in the new galaxy.

SMOOTH INFILTRATOR

Next up are profiles, and we've got a better idea of how they function. This new class system is reworked from the original trilogy, with new protagonist Ryder far more flexible in approach than Shepard. Whereas the old Commander had to stick to a class, Ryder can change classes on the fly. All you need to do is head into a menu and switch to the one you fancy. (Commitment's for chumps.)

Of course, there's a lot more depth to it than that. You see, each profile comes with its own bonuses, depending on its rank. At rank one

the Engineer gets a Combat Drone, which helps speed the recharge rate on their tech powers, whereas the Soldier gets higher damage bonuses for taking out enemies in a small window of time. This is where the powers you equip and profiles you choose dovetail together. The skills you unlock affect what rank your profile is, and the higher your rank, the better those bonuses are. It's an elegant way of being able to tailor Ryder to your preferences.

MATTER OF CHOICE

This level of customisation is stretching into Ryder's equipment as well. Modular designs for armour allow you to kit your Ryder out with helmets and gear for their chest, arms and legs that boost their attributes in different ways.

You're also able to upgrade specific parts of your vehicle, the Nomad. That includes its thrusters, shield, radar and, best of all, paint job. Yep, the Nomad will have different cosmetic designs to pick and choose from. Time to start crossing all your fingers for a Hot



dev talk

"Over the [Christmas] break, developers at Bioware took home a version of the game in what we call the 'holiday build'... Coming back from holiday, the feedback has been great. Getting the endorsement from members of our studio, many of whom played key roles on the original trilogy, was definitely a key factor in helping us lock in on the date."

Aaryn Flynn
General manager, Bioware

Pink decal to make you stand out on those hostile alien planets.

Finally, there are melee weapons. According to lead designer Ian S. Frazier, you'll be able to craft and name your melee weapons. Frazier specifically mentions the Krogan Hammer, which featured in ME3's multiplayer DLC. There'll also be a dedicated melee weapon slot, so your shiny Bludgeon-ator never has to leave your side for a single moment. (Okay, maybe commitment's a good thing - though be wary of new squeeze Cora, who could be the Illusive Man's daughter...)

YOU SHALL NOT SEASON PASS

Bioware is also hinting at post-launch plans, with general manager Aaryn Flynn tweeting that there won't be a season pass for the game. That doesn't mean there won't be DLC, however. Considering every Mass Effect has had post-launch content, it's a sure thing.

With just a month to go until we get to zoom back into this incredible universe, the scope of Andromeda's ambition is astounding. From the refinement of your character building to the tantalising powers and equipment you'll get to play with, this is shaping up to be Bioware's best game yet.

* Check back on 14 March for one final Mass Effect Andromeda pre-launch drop.

MODULAR DESIGNS FOR ARMOUR LET YOU BOOST RYDER'S ATTRIBUTES IN DIFFERENT WAYS.



Andromeda will certainly be a diverse galaxy, if this lovely forest area is anything to go by.



Nope, it isn't Elder Scrolls' Khajit. This new cat-like race is called the Angara.



This just has to be top of everyone's 'things to try in Andromeda' list.



That robot is a Nullifier, and getting over its shield is the key to taking it on.



009

■ These are your customisation menus, where you'll pick your profile and skills for the crew... or just hit the auto-level up button to get back to the action.



Loyalty missions are back, and this one is for Vetra, a female Turian in Ryder's team.



Caution! Dirt 4 over crest

Dirt returns as Rally's realism meets classic racing

02

Thought Dirt Rally was all we'd see of the Dirt series for a few years? So did we. But it's back already on PS4, and

not merely as a quick spin-off like PS3's Dirt Showdown. Codemasters is readying a proper Dirt sequel, and it's due out in June.

What's more, it's not a return to Dirt 2's Katie Justice and "Dudebro" presentation.

True to its predecessors, Dirt 4 is an exciting, breakneck, off-road racer with a mix of point-to-point rallying and close-contact racing in outdoor arenas. But Dirt 4 is like Dirt 2's older, wiser, 'already-turned-professional-don'tcha-know' brother. And even though that wonderful

buggy racing is back (and you'll now even get to muck about in new qualifier series Cross Karts), this is as much a successor to Dirt Rally as it is Dirt 3. Arguably even more so.

FLY GENERATION

Learning tracks through repetition isn't what rallying is about, and Dirt 4 annihilates Dirt Rally's problem with literally millions of unique tracks, thanks to procedural generation known as Your Stage.

Routes are built like a virtual Scalextric set laid out by your PS4. Codemasters has selected and ordered hundreds of these tracks to make the career more accessible for newcomers while still satisfying die-hard racing fans.

THERE'LL BE MILLIONS OF PROCEDURAL TRACKS.



dev talk

"We still have all the authenticity that we deliver in Dirt Rally, but we also have more of that relaxed style of off-road motorsport that people loved in Dirt 2 and Dirt 3. The fun is still there, it just speaks a little bit better to real-world motorsport than the slightly bombastic styles in some of the old Dirt games."

Clive Moody
Senior executive producer,
Codemasters

While it's a tad disappointing Your Stage isn't a true, full-featured course designer like that of V-Rally 2 on PS1, you can select track length and complexity with two slider bars, choose the weather and time of day, then hit 'Generate'. You can race your track, share it with your friends, or set up a league in which to compete on your creations.

If you find you feel short-changed by algorithms, you needn't worry. Seamlessly populated with spectators and environmental features, the tracks all look just as good as anything in Dirt Rally. No racer has ever done this kind of track generation so convincingly.

More traditionally, the Rallycross tracks are all precise, licensed replicas of real venues, and the Land Rush tracks have been hand-designed to be fun, while still echoing real life motorsport venues, so



Hit the road, Jack – and revel in the opportunity to race along a completely new track.



NERFED THIS

Codemasters is working with Hasbro and says that some of the firm's toys will turn up in Micro Machines, including Nerf, Hungry Hungry Hippos and, intriguingly, Ouija. Will we see a haunted track?

The Big 10

STORIES EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT

Ganging up on Ben is going to be even easier now we don't all have to be in the same house.



Micro Machines are going global

Classic couchplay racer zooms back onto PS4

011

you're still getting persistent raceways too.

Fitting with the 'realistic but also fun' mantra, the handling has a hardcore option for admirers of Dirt Rally's realistic driving, and a simplified option for more casual racing fans. This more basic handling still uses the same impeccable physics engine, but there's some "help" between your inputs and the car's movement. Not so much it feels like you're not driving it yourself, but enough to help you stay on the road.

Initial impressions suggest Dirt 4 retains everything that's great about Dirt Rally, and applies it with delicacy to the stripped chassis of Dirt 2. The brash bumper stickers and furry dice may have been removed, but the bodywork is still lovely and Dirty.

* We'll have an in-depth and hands-on preview next issue, on shelves 14 March.

03

Before TowerFall and Tricky Towers, our multiplayer diet consisted of tiny cars, missiles and powerslides past a giant toaster in Codemasters' top-down racing friendship-ender. After taking an 11-year hiatus from PlayStation, Micro Machines World Series sees the franchise skidding back to where it belongs on 21 April, bringing home those split-screen hijinks that make the series so special.

It wouldn't be a proper Micro Machines without couchplay and this revival supports it for up to four players. However, it'll be going global in every sense of the word, with 12-player online multiplayer added to the mix. Humiliating your friends no matter where they are? Sign us up.

The changes don't stop there, with World Series adding new modes to the familiar old Micro Machines

formula. Chief among the additions are Battle Arenas, Capture The Flag and King Of The Hill. Battle Arena promises all-out warfare rather than races to the finish line, while the other two are teamplay games, which means you'll have to work with the people sitting on the sofa next to you rather than try to put your hands over their eyes or hit the

pause button to wind them up.

Don't worry though, this isn't a radical shake-up and there'll be plenty for returning fans to get misty-eyed over. Areas such

as the kitchen, garden and workshop will trigger plenty of memories. And as for the famously diddy motors themselves? There'll be 12 customisable vehicles, each with its own abilities and weapons. With the dual fuel of nostalgia and novelty behind it, we expect a podium finish.

**ONLINE:
HUMILIATE YOUR
FRIENDS NO
MATTER WHERE
THEY ARE.**

There'll be more on this new batch of mini mayhem in a future issue.

“ THAT’S WHY I
LIKE VIDEOGAME
MUSIC - THERE
ARE NO RULES. ”

TINA GU

GA



TAKE A BOW

Tina Guo plays on film and television soundtracks as well as videogame ones. She's contributed to major projects such as Vikings, Iron Man 2 and Wonder Woman.

The Big 10

STORIES EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT



Guo worked with composer Hans Zimmer on Call Of Duty: Black Ops II.



Final Fantasy VII (as if it could be any other FF title) is Game On's second track.

Videogame music is Bach, baby

Tina Guo's album is the soundtrack to our lives

04

Classical music scholars, hold onto your mortar boards: the videogames are coming.

Awesome orchestral versions of famous gaming themes are big business lately, with live concerts celebrating Skyrim and Tomb Raider popping up at the end of 2016, and 12 videogame tracks breaking into Classic FM's 2015 Hall of Fame.

Tina Guo, an internationally renowned cellist, has been gracing game soundtracks for some time, playing cello on Journey, Diablo III and Call Of Duty: Black Ops II - and now she's striking out on her own by releasing and performing her new album of videogame music, Game On. OPM met up with her in London to chat about how she got into the, er, game. "With Journey, my friend Austin Wintory was the composer," she says. "After Journey, I played on his score for Assassin's Creed Syndicate. That was literally the

most difficult music I've played. He's got... not a vendetta, but he's like, 'I'm just gonna eff her up!'"

Guo's move from traditional classical music into videogame tunes revealed one crucial difference. "[Some classical musicians] say, 'Oh you're playing Bach too slow, too fast, too emotional, not emotional enough'... you can't please anyone. That's why I like videogame music - there are no rules, we can do whatever we want. It's being created in the moment." Living composers, she says, are much easier: "I've never had a composer say: 'You have to play it this way'."

Want to witness Guo's dynamic performances live? You might have the chance to see her sooner than you think. "I want to reach out to every gaming convention," she says. "Just cold call them, obsessively, until they pick up, and set up a con tour!" Keep your eyes (and ears) wide open for Game On 2017: coming to... well, possibly every convention ever.

* Game On's out now and stars 14 tracks from Skyrim, Tetris, Journey and more.

GAME ON! GUO



the big shot
eagle-eyed analysis

Rime and reason return to PS4

Delayed puzzler launches this May

05

Good things come to those who wait. After two years with no new information on this intriguing adventure, developer Tequila Works is finally slapping a May release date on former OPM subs-cover star Rime. Alas, the PS4-exclusive is now a multiplatform title.

An exciting cross between The Witness' pastoral world and a Team Ico-style adventure, in Rime you take control of a boy who

washes up on the shore of a mysterious island. From there you journey to a huge tower that breaks the horizon, solving grey-matter-bothering puzzles on your way, including one where you take control of the day/night cycle to open up paths.

Oh, and you'll even get to befriend a fox who'll help on your quest, which is almost too adorable. Let's hope it's easier to train than Trico.

★ We'll have an extensive hands-on preview of Rime next issue.

This little critter's introduction is rather mystical, as you bring his statue to life.

Tequila Works acquired the rights from Sony, and Grey Box and Six Foot are taking over publishing duties.

The island is full of wildlife, although some animals you encounter seem friendlier than others.



number game we do the maths

8:47:49"

The time it took editor Matt to finish Resident Evil VII on Normal.

224

Number of people who braved the real-life Resident Evil VII Experience.

\$7,000,000

A grant given to Witcher developer CD Projekt RED by the Polish government.

63

The height in inches of a limited-edition statue of Kojima Productions' mascot.

8,700,000

The staggering number of copies of Uncharted 4 that Sony sold in 2016.

225

The number of days TMNT: Mutants In Manhattan survived on the PSN store.

#1

Rocket League tops the list for most downloads of a game on PSN in 2016.

16/05

Want a good Batman vs Superman? Injustice 2 launches on this date.



You'll learn more about the boy's backstory as you progress and discover secrets and collectibles.

This won't be an open-world game - Tequila Works confirms it'll be split into individual levels.

From Cartanica Station, you can see the unused landscape stretch into the distance.



Final Fantasy XV's lost world

Uncovering a second, unfinished open world in Square Enix's RPG

06

As lovingly, lavishly presented as Final Fantasy XV's world is, it's difficult to shake the feeling that the long-

awaited RPG is unfinished in some places – particularly in the second half of the game. Noctis' tour with the lads is interrupted by a PS2-grade dreadful survival horror section, for example, but more pressingly there's also a whole second area that can only be viewed from afar from inside a moving train...

A few crafty players have found a way around the latter problem, though, and have uncovered a whole undeveloped open world in FFXV.

REMNANTS OF THIS WORLD ARE ODDLY EERIE, AND FASCINATING CURIOS.

Thanks to player Fotm Hero, who escaped the world's boundaries in the Cartanica mines area of the story using an unpatched version of the game, we've snagged a pretty comprehensive look at the kinds of environments the varied landscape contains. These areas are filled with low-resolution textures, train tracks

that just stop in mid-air, and basic detail like trees and shrubs, but there's also evidence that this place may once have been intended for more than just window dressing on Noctis' train journey.

COLD MOUNTAINS

There's a substantial-looking desert town near Cartanica Station filled with many complete-ish buildings



dev talk

"For the long term, we are looking at making certain key characters playable, and even considering the possibility of customisable avatars, in addition to other features over time... We're looking at content you can enjoy in real-time, including new bosses with exclusive rewards and achievements, and limited-time hunts."

Hajime Tabata
Director, Square Enix

and parked cars, for example. In Niflheim (the snowy mountain area which makes a fleeting appearance as players acquire Shiva in the story) there's an icy landscape to tread – even a stretch of highway and a road suggesting you could drive around there. The setting of the second half of the game exists in an interconnected environment, basically – not all of what the later chapters show you loads in as Noctis wanders across the environment, but the foundations are there. Could it have once been intended as an explorable open world, like Lucis in the game's opening chapters? Square Enix hasn't commented on this at the time of writing...

It's hard to believe that these areas were only ever meant as background detail. When you pull up the map in the second half of the game, you can see that you're

The Big 10

STORIES EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT

EVERY CLOUD...
We'll hear something about the FFXVII remake in 2017, according to director Tetsuya Nomura. "We're steadily progressing on production," he told Famitsu.



The Hand of the King
Reboard the train.



■ Once Prompto stops being able to take selfies, FFXV goes a bit off the rails.

environmental art – so it'd be a surprise if this whole area ever became explorable in the upcoming DLC chapters. It would be nice to see certain pockets reclaimed by the developers, though – even if it's just a smaller slice of Niflheim to explore, or a more comprehensive version of Tenebrae. As it stands, this unfinished world is a fascinating curio, and oddly eerie in how barren it is.

At some point games have to be declared finished, and even with its flawed final hours, FFXV had more than its share of time in development hell. The world could perhaps feel more complete than it does, and the story could be less fragmented, but it's the first time the series has shown signs of life compared to the modern standard of RPGs in about a decade. Final Fantasy is a contender again, with or without another continent to explore, and Square Enix has plenty of lessons it can learn about players' expectations going into the VII Remake and the inevitable Final Fantasy XVI. We won't mourn the continent that could've been, but we're still hoping it'll re-emerge in some form as the season pass content rolls around.

★ Fancy some video tourism? Go to bit.ly/FFlostworld to see the secret sights...



■ You spend too much of FFXV's second half on this train, rather than exploring.

info patches

update your brain



THIS IS 4D PLAYERS

For the bravest of gamers, Numskull Designs has released a 4D candle for Resident Evil VII, designed to enhance your VR experience. It brings the smells of the Baker mansion into your living room for an extra layer of immersion... and an extra five minutes in the shower to wash the stench off.



SEE YOU IN JUNE, KAZAMA

At long last, 3D fighting title Tekken 7 has a UK release date: 2 June. And Heihachi and co will hit doubly hard thanks to exclusive content, as Jukebox Mode allows you to create playlists of iconic series tunes to scrap to, in costumes available only on PS4. We cannot wait. Street Fighter V beware.



THE WHITE STUFF

A brand-new Glacier White slim PS4 is now on shelves, if you feel the current black design doesn't quite match your interior decor. Costing £259 and coming with a 500GB hard drive, the change in colour may only be a cosmetic upgrade but it's, er, ice to have an alternative option. (You're fired – Ed.)

essentially running along a straight line through a new area – so why do you even need a world map? It's not like you can go off-piste. In the case of some locations, such as Niflheim, or the city of Tenebrae, some of your stops are so brief that you wonder why they're even in the game to begin with. There's a real problem with narrative context in these later chapters, and pacing them apart with exploration would no doubt have been welcomed by players. However, it also would've been really hard for the developers to pull off in time.

NO COUNTRY FOR YOUNG MEN

Realistically, finishing this part of the world to the same standard as Lucis would've added months or years onto the development time. Adding hunts, dungeons, side-quests and populated towns wouldn't be a small job – not to mention finishing the



A new Wipeout? The future's bright Omega Collection likely not the end...

07

Apocalyptic. Too strong a word for Wipeout Omega Collection's reveal at the PlayStation Experience? You can't blame us – it's a dramatic moniker. Omega? As in, the end of all things? As in, *the last Wipeout title we'll ever see?*

Of course not. The remastered collection is just the beginning. Would Sony XDev make a new Wipeout? "I think we would," producer Mark O'Connor tells OPM. "It's PlayStation, it's in our heritage. I don't see why we wouldn't."

Brilliant news. We can't help but wonder what a Wipeout created

for current-gen consoles would be like. "What we haven't done with Wipeout so far is customisation," O'Connor continues. "Maybe you could buy parts or upgrades... Something like that where you can – if you invest the time – customise and get what you want out of your ships. Better handling, faster or more attack-minded."

TRADING RACES

"And trading maybe, or online races that you can set up and start building a community. The trading of parts, challenging people... that type of thing would be great," he says. "That's where PS4 is now. It's online, it's

IT WAS QUITE IMPORTANT FOR WIPEOUT TO COME BACK. IT'S IN PLAYSTATION'S DNA.

community-based. So maybe that would add to Wipeout."

For now we're content with cooing over the gorgeous PS4 Pro-powered remaster. "It was quite important for Wipeout to come back," O'Connor muses. "It's within PlayStation's DNA. It's always been there. Who knows; hopefully this'll be the springboard for something bigger and better in the future."

The PS4 collection includes content from PS3's Wipeout HD and Fury, plus Vita's 2048.

★ Ready? Set? Wipeout Omega Collection races onto PlayStation 4 this summer.

the rumour machine our sources understand...



Green Goblin to be the main villain in PS4's Spider-Man game? IMDB says so, at least.



Shuhei Yoshida has told Dengeki PlayStation that Sony's working on "unannounced titles." Please be Bloodborne 2.



Devil May Cry 2 director Hideaki Itsuno's tweet about revealing a new game in 2017 has set the rumour mill abuzz. Is it a new DMC? Dragon's Dogma 2? Rival Schools?

Whispers hint that you'll be able to customise Sora in Kingdom Hearts 3.



A leaked cutscene on COD: Infinite Warfare's Reddit seems to show a new mission team named "Blood Anvil".



PARALLEL DIMENSIONS
A new wave of Lego Dimensions packs is hitting shelves. Expect to see The Batman Lego Movie Story Pack, which includes Robin and Batgirl, and the Knight Rider Fun Pack with KITT and mini-Hoff.

PlayStation voices

the month in mouthing off

“The banging is pretty good.” Mass Effect Andromeda producer **Michael Gamble** is full of praise for the romantic nuances in Bioware’s new RPG.



“I am just trying to clear my schedule after Guardians comes out so I can play Mass Effect Andromeda.” Director **James Gunn** gets ready.



“I’m packing up my climbing axe plus a little venison jerky... and bidding a fond farewell to Lara.” Writer **Rhianna Pratchett** is moving on from Tomb Raider.



Dragons aren't your style in Lego Worlds? Then herd gorillas or ostriches instead.

It's a hard block life for us

Lego Worlds and Lego City Undercover come to PS4

08

It's no secret that we love our Lego at OPM Towers (remember those Kratos and Crash minifigs we had made for issue #119?), so we're giddy at the thought of two PS4-bound Lego games from Traveller's Tales in the coming months.

The first, arriving on 10 March, is Lego Worlds. Think Minecraft-meets-Lego: you can build whatever

you can dream up within different procedurally generated worlds. You'll have complete control over the environment by changing it one brick at a time, you can discover creatures to ride, and you can team up with buddies via online and split-screen multiplayer. So, just like in your youth, you can shout at your friends for stepping on your bricks.

Next, it's Lego City Undercover, coming later in spring. A remaster of one of Wii U's best exclusives, this cops-and-robbers adventure sees you work undercover - shocker! - as Chase McCain, on the hunt for the dangerous Rex Fury. It's a more traditional Lego platformer, but in a huge open world and with lashings of tongue-in-cheek humour. Sounds like the family-friendly GTA we've been waiting for... and a good excuse to rebrand our office Brickly Towers.



■ Lego City Undercover miscreant Rex Fury is a fan of close calls with the police.

★ Will you be heading out of this World or going Undercover? Tweet us @OPM_UK.



instant opinion strong vs wrong

THOR BLIMEY!

Shocker: Tomb Raider dev Crystal Dynamics and Deus Ex team Eidos Montreal are making a Marvel's Avengers game! We'll need to wait 'til 2018 to see it, mind.

VIRTUAL RIPLEY

In the living room, everyone will hear you scream - the VR experience for Alien Covenant is due to hit PS4's headset later in the year. Eeek!

HACK FRIDAY

Haven't given Watch Dogs 2 a chance yet? A trial is now live on PSN and it hands you the first three hours of the game for free. We highly recommend it.

GOOD KNIGHT

Sad news - RIGS and MediEvil dev Guerrilla Cambridge has closed. We're gutted: the former is one of PS VR's best titles. Our hearts go out to everyone affected.

FACE THE MUSIC

A year and a half after release, Harmonix is still trying to port old Rock Band track packs into Rock Band 4. Frankly, it's too little, too late.

FELINE OFFENDED

The awful trailer for PS4 title Life Of Black Tiger shows a crudely animated tiger swiping polygonal prey into the stratosphere in a PS1-era scene. The only thing we learn about the game is to avoid it.

Unlike the trolls you find on the internet, this one is here to help and doesn't know any racial slurs.



Troll & I stomps onto PS4 in March

Aims to fill the Trico-shaped hole in our hearts

09

Stop us if you think you've heard this one before. A boy and a large, cuddly creature slowly grow closer as

they embark on a life-or-death quest together. Sounds a bit like incredible 10/10 adventure *The Last Guardian*, right? Well, we'll soon find out just how similar they are when *Troll & I* arrives on 21 March.

Taking place in the mountains of 1950s Scandinavia, you play as nomad Otto, who travels with his family through the wilderness. When they get separated by an attack on their village, he

meets the mysterious and titular Troll. It wouldn't take Humphrey Bogart to figure out this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

It's not a carbon copy of *The Last Guardian*, mind. *Troll's* visual design is a lot more straightforward than *Trico's* - no wings or feathers, but loads of dreadlocks - and, crucially, you are able to control him directly. You can switch between Troll and Otto at will, taking advantage of their differing skills to suit the situation.

Troll's size allows him to stomp over smaller enemies and leap great distances, whereas Otto is more agile.

And it's not all computerised chums, either. You'll also be able to rope in a real-life friend, with split-screen multiplayer letting both of you guide Troll and Otto through their quest for survival.

We doubt it'll be treading on *Trico's* exquisitely-crafted toes - but if you're desperate for another tale where you bond with a giant mythical beast, then *Troll and Otto's* outing might be your PS4's new best friend.

YOU CAN SWITCH BETWEEN TROLL AND OTTO AT WILL.



Even those dreamcatchers put us in mind of TLG's mysterious glass eyes.

★ Companionship continues on p94 with *The Flame In The Flood's* girl-and-dog tale.



NAUGHTY BUT NICE

It's a yearly tradition for Naughty Dog to release a set of Valentine's Day cards, and it'll have to work extra hard to best its efforts from 2016. Express your feelings with Drake instead of roses this year.

The Big 10

STORIES EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT

10

just one more question...

the team debate this month's burning issue

Which game will you be playing with your Valentine?



MATTHEW PELLETT
EDITOR



THINGS WILL BE HEATING UP... IN OVERCOOKED'S UNDERSTAFFED KITCHENS.

After seven years of marriage, sparks will definitely still be flying in my house this Valentine's Day. Unfortunately it may be because between me washing plates and the wife chopping lettuce in Team17's crazy culinary co-op comedy, we'll both forget about the burger patties on the stove until towering flames have engulfed half our kitchen and probably a few of the diners, too. (Serves them right for taking their dates out for burgers on Valentine's - why not some spicy pizza action, guys?) Sorry neighbours, there will be loud cries of "GRAB THE BUNS!" through our walls. Now, which way's the oven? ■



BEN TYRER
STAFF WRITER



THE LAST GUARDIAN WILL GIVE ME THE PETTING EXPERIENCE I'VE BEEN WAITING AGES FOR.

Fun fact: my partner and I are desperate for a cat. Honestly, every dinner conversation circles around to how and when we can adopt a kitty to call our own. So instead of dinner and a movie, we'll be plumping for catbird Trico and an evening on the sofa. It makes sense. Trico's cheaper than a real-life moggie, certainly more interesting to look at thanks to the wings on its back, and it's actually useful - as much as I love my old cat Whiskey, I don't remember her offering me her tail to swing on at any point, let alone helping in any fights. Plus, I don't need to take out insurance on a disc. ■



MILFORD COPPOCK
MANAGING ART EDITOR



WHAT COULD BE MORE ROMANTIC THAN SAVING YOUR LOVED ONE IN KEEP TALKING AND NOBODY EXPLODES?

Picture the scene. I've donned the headset, and my other half has the manual strewn across the floor. The deathly timer has already started its inevitable countdown to explode o'clock, but we've done the symbol and Morse code panels in good time. "Good work! Things are going well, darling," I offer. "This is definitely a relationship maker rather than a break... OH MY GOD IT'S THE COMPLICATED WIRE PUZZLE!" Cue much paper shuffling, shouting and tears. BOOM! And just like that, my romantic hopes for the evening lie in tatters, like so many shredded defusal pages. ■



JEN SIMPKINS
GAMES EDITOR



PERSONA 5 BROKE MY HEART. BUT I BELIEVE THERE'S LIFE - ER, DEATH - AFTER LOVE.

Sure, I might be Team OPM's resident singleton - but I had my Valentine's Day planned out well in advance. Droolworthy JRPG Persona 5's 14 Feb release was set to kindly provide the eye-candy and gimme some Shadow-battling sugar... until it got delayed to April. Yep, I got stood up by a videogame. (I'll admit this is not how I pictured my life turning out.) Fortunately, there's a timely replacement: brutal Souls-like Nioh. Not only is it just the sort of gaming challenge I'm head-over-heels for, but I actually played the first free demo alongside my long-time crush - perhaps it's our chance to reconnect... ■

PS4

“One of the most anticipated games of the past decade”

IGN

The Last Guardian™

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12

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JAPAN Studio

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△×□
PlayStation 4
EXCLUSIVE



REPLIES

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#132 The Last Of Us Part II, Yooka-Laylee and Crash Bandicoot.

Playing an ace

I was absolutely blown away by Battlefield 1's missions surrounding Friends in High Places and the aerial combat involved. Having been raised on Nintendo, I have long been longing for a game that provides dogfights on a par with Lylat Wars - kudos EA DICE.

Hopefully I'm not alone and the positive reactions will encourage other developers to take to the skies (The Battle of Britain would make an excellent mission). In the meantime, could you use your sizeable knowledge of the PS3/PS4 back catalogue to recommend any other games that contain great

single-player aerial combat?

Chris Rowlands via email

That's an easy one: PS3's IL-2 Sturmovik would be our top pick. And turn to p36 to read about Ace Combat 7...

X-tacy

I've just spent the last five days getting to know PS VR and one 'title' has just blown me away: the X-wing VR mission for Star Wars Battlefront.

THIS IS HOW TO DO A STAR WARS EXPERIENCE... THE FUTURE OF PS VR LOOKS BRIGHT.

Wow! George Lucas take note... THIS is how to do a Star Wars experience! I must have grinned for the entirety and giggled like an over-excited schoolboy multiple times, and especially when flying through the fleet. I was in that cockpit, no doubt about it. The future of VR looks bright and The Force is certainly with it.

James Edwards via email

We loved it too - like you say, simply getting into the cockpit of the X-wing is amazing. Though not everyone feels that way...

VR? No, ta!

Whilst PS VR is a good entry-level piece of kit, I have to admit to being a touch disappointed. Thumper is great and Batman: Arkham VR superb, although more of a demonstration than an actual "game." But it's the mid-distance graphics in things like DriveClub VR that really disappoint. It's almost unplayable. You

Star letter Access all areas

Naughty Dog's addition of an accessibility option for Uncharted 4: A Thief's End was the greatest leap forward for me as it removed the QTE problem which ruins games, as I cannot press keys quick enough due to my medical condition (ataxia). Today I have had to abandon Tomb Raider and Batman: Arkham City. I think all developers need to take a steer from Naughty Dog.

Martin Birnie via email

Different games have different sorts of accessibility options - we've seen visual cues for deaf gamers, overlays for colour-blind players, one-button modes and so on. But we'd love to see more games incorporating as many as possible - and better ways of advertising those options. Games for all! And, for you, a free year's subscription to OPM!

can't see the corners coming up. You only have to get a bit warm and the lenses fog up. The Star Wars X-wing 20 minute add-on is good but it feels like you are hardly moving.

And Sony doesn't seem interested in advertising VR. I love my Vita but that has died a death. Could VR go the same way?

Matt Jarvis via email

Just wait till devs have had a chance to explore PS VR's potential. As Resident Evil VII (p80) proves, VR's on the rise.



CAN I GET A RT?

The most pleasing tweetings from the @OPM_UK timeline



@TAYLORSON

Arrived today. Thank you very very much @OPM_UK It's gorgeous. Even the paper is nice!



@GAMERSDELIGHT

I have @OPM_UK to thank for how rad my room looks.



@MIKROFILM03

Thanks for all of these posters. My wall is closely filled up.



@ADAMJT74

Where do I start? Prey, Mass Effect, Elite, RDR2?? Oh no! My wife has just spotted Sonic...



@HI_MAHOU

An #Aibo designed to look like #Trico would be great.



@DAZFINK

I got VR for Xmas! I'm going to play it forever! *plays Kitchen* I'm never gaming ever again.



@PLAYSLAV3

Don't like the (OPM subs cover) artwork much. Seems a bit amateur.



@GRAPHURE

Soundtrack selection disc on a magazine... just like the old days.



@BYRONB1986

A CD! How many readers of a certain age will be asking where in the iPod it goes?



@MLFOXWELL

I want this. I don't own a PlayStation nor will I read the magazine. But this CD must be mine.

TROLL OF THE MONTH

T



"I loved the co-op in the third game. The craziest part was that they made one of the players hallucinate things that weren't there."

DEAD SPACE WAS ACTUALLY FAIRLY LIVELY FOR ROBERT OLIVIER.



"Trico's AI is the exact opposite of 'smart'."

ADAM ROZZIER'S NO DR DOLITTLE.

READERS' MOST WANTED

Which games are bleeping loudest on your radar?

1/

Horizon Zero Dawn

Aloy's almost here, and the closer she gets, the more excited everyone becomes - it got as many votes as the other four games here put together. Turn to p56 to see what all the fuss is about.

FORMAT PS4
ETA 1 MAR

2/

God Of War

News that God Of War director Cory Barlog has played the game in full sends it rocketing back up the Most Wanted list. Kratos is on his way - but will he be tackling Thor, as so many people hope?

FORMAT PS4
ETA TBC

3/

Mass Effect Andromeda

Plenty of people are ready to take off across the galaxy with the Ryders in March. While you're waiting to board your flight, flip to p6 and catch up on all the latest information.

FORMAT PS4
ETA 23 MAR

5/

Crash Bandicoot N. Sane Trilogy

We may mock Jen for her obsession with Crash, but it seems she's not alone in her marsupial-mania. The fantastic graphics in this "remaster plus" have got all of us in a spin.

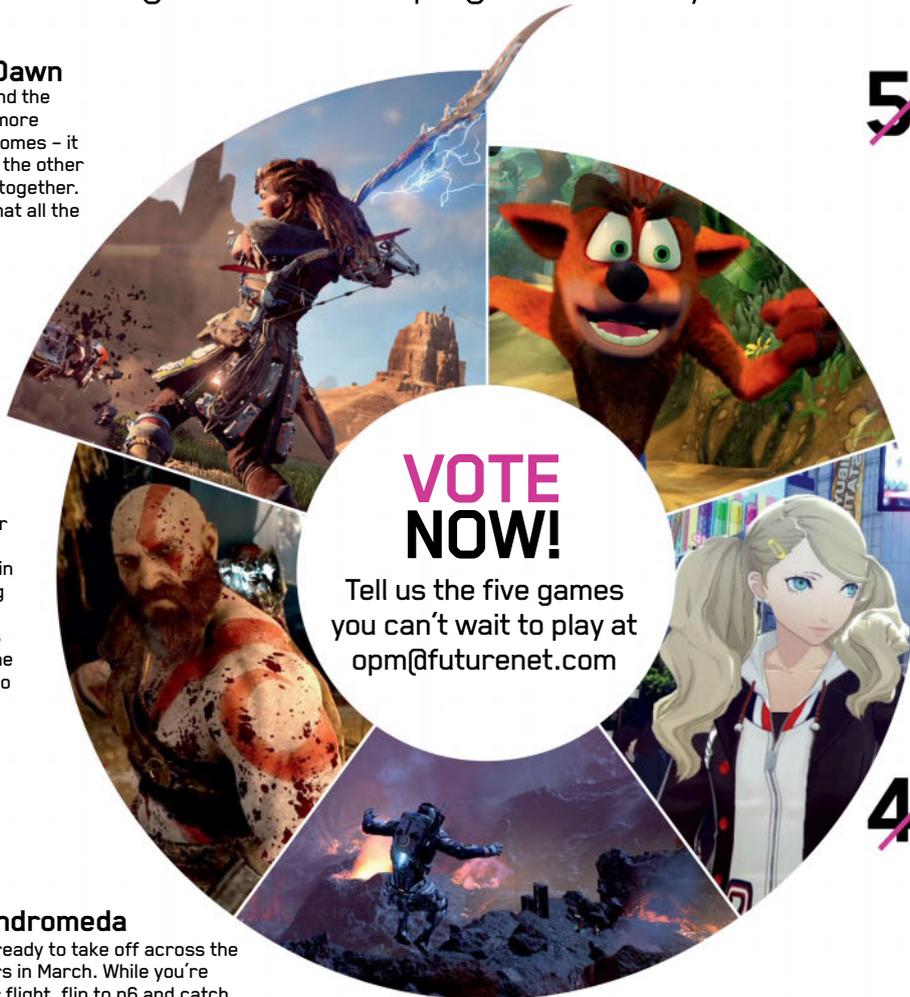
FORMAT PS4
ETA TBC

4/

Persona 5

A newcomer to this list is Atlus' high school-based RPG. Fancy thieving the corrupted hearts of adults? On p32 we look at why that'll steal your heart in the process.

FORMAT PS4, PS3
ETA 4 APR



VOTE NOW!

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

?

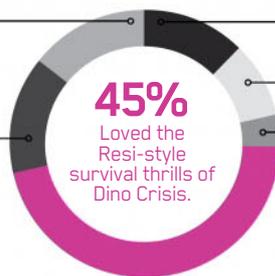
EXIT POLL

Our Facebook fans answer a final question

What's the greatest dinosaur game in PlayStation history?

15% Think Tomb Raider's a dinosaur game. Lara's not that old. (Oh, you meant the T-rex...)

15% Enjoyed hunting human enemies across PS3 Turok's dino-infested landscape.



12% Liked the arcadey action of Dino Crisis 2 best.

9% Would rather tame the 'saurs in Ark: Survival Evolved.

4% Kept it old-skool, opting for reptile fights in Peter Jackson's King Kong.

NEXT MONTH

We're thinking about spaceships in videogames - which one would you like to join the crew of?

Matthew Pellett

GIVE ME AN IMPERFECT GAME THAT SPARKS AN EMOTIONAL REACTION OVER SOMETHING POLISHED BUT FAMILIAR ANY DAY.

Why we need more experiences like The Last Guardian

Games are not vacuum cleaners. That seems like an incredibly obvious thing to point out, but in the wake of The Last Guardian's launch I found myself thinking long and hard about why certain reviewers and players had such extreme reactions at both ends of the spectrum – and concluded that not everyone agrees.

My experience of The Last Guardian was, admittedly, different to most. I played it on my own, from start to finish, over the Christmas break, having spent all night sitting up with a very poorly pet rat. Wilson, I'm sorry to say, slipped away that next day, but before he did I found myself resting on my sofa with him curled up by my side, and me alternating between stroking him while he slept and playing through another section of The Nest. When I reached the hand-feeding scene in which Trico's almost motionless at the bottom of a giant tower, the duality of my situation hit me with full force. The Last Guardian instantly became one of my favourite titles of 2016 and, indeed, of the entire PS4 library.

You see, I'm a gamer who likes being fed through the wringer. Any kind of emotional transaction – whether I'm made to feel strong waves of sadness, anger, fear or anything else – seriously pushes



WRITER BIO

Outgoing editor Matthew Pellett never gave any game a 10/10 during his three years on OPM, but fully agrees with our perfect TLG mark. He *should* have given the Big Score to his favourite PS4 title, The Witness, and will forever regret not reaching for double digits.

my buttons. It's why I always want to play horror games (and am bitterly disappointed when the fear fails to materialise). It's why Jazzpunk, the first game to make me properly belly-laugh in years, gets a big thumbs up from me. It's also why Mass Effect 3's Paragon-favouring plot twists really let me down (I'm one of the few people who shot Mordin Solus in the back to sabotage the genophage project for extra war assets, and felt ripped out of the fiction when I learned that ducking the difficult choices and playing the good guy would have earned me so much more).

That TLG scene tore into me like nothing else I've ever played, and when I finally hit the credits I eagerly read some other takes on its impact... and was dismayed to find some reviews that felt like teardowns of household appliances, nothing more. Through hours of shared journeying, The Last Guardian made me fall in love with Trico. I genuinely adored that monster; an astonishing feat for a game to achieve. Who the hell loves a Dyson? (Actually, don't go there.)

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

I'm not going to pretend I didn't find the camera occasionally irksome (I did), or that Trico followed my every instruction without fail (it didn't – but I'll forgive that on the grounds that I bought into the narrative and decided the beast shouldn't be 100% obedient). Yes, I occasionally needed to be patient when waiting for Trico to behave early on, but what were all those years of delays doing if not teaching us the virtue of patience?

I relish reading pieces that vary from my opinions because different points of view are the lifeblood of debate and discussion. My own review would have been slightly different to Dave's in OPM #131 – I'd have talked more about those niggles and why I forgave them – but I'd have ended with the same score, because as our score guide says over on p79, a 10/10 is given to: "The kind of phenomenal experience rarely seen in a console generation."

Skipped frames... awkward cameras... I'm not saying these things don't matter, but they're not *all* that matters. Emotional connections trump technical perfection every single time.





Chris Scullion

IT'S TIME FOR IN-GAME COLLECTIBLES TO FINALLY GIVE US SOMETHING WORTH HUNTING FOR.

A call for developers to turn concept art and sound tests into legit treats for the player

Has there ever been a less exhilarating message in gaming than “concept art 63 unlocked”? Call me a fuddy-duddy but after I’ve trekked halfway across a needlessly large world map to find a well-hidden shiny thing, a lo-res sketch of a random enemy isn’t really the sort of thing that will make me happily sit back and contemplate a quest well done.

This has to end. We have to take a stand. No more are concept art, character models and sound test tracks acceptable rewards in gaming. It’s time for developers to show a little invention and bring us more substantial goodies that better suit modern technology.

Here’s the clever bit: they don’t even have to change what they give us. They just need to give it to us in a different form. My plan is for some sort of website where you can register and receive your rewards as you collect unlockables in the game.

How rubbish is it when you unlock concept art that you can only view in an ‘Extras’ menu, where you have to zoom in and out and pan

across the image on your screen? What if instead, when you log into your account on the website, the art is available to download as a hi-res image in a variety of sizes so you can use it as wallpaper on your desktop or mobile?

PLAY! LISTEN!

Sound tests? Most of these games have incredible soundtracks, but they’re going to waste because life’s too short to be staring at a static screen while listening to them. Let us log into our account and download them as MP3s so we can enjoy them on the go. “But that means they can’t buy the soundtrack, Chris.” Hey, we’ve already dropped £40 on your game, throw us a bone.

Not a fan of this website idea, developers? Sound like too much work, with the account setup and all? Then here’s my secret weapon: instead of concept art galleries and character model screens, give us a VR museum where we can wander around, see all the game’s characters in actual size and view the concept art displayed on massive walls.

The rewards don’t have to change. But how we’re given them does.

WRITER BIO

Chris Scullion dreams of a day where games reward him with 3D printer files of their characters and vehicles so he can make little toy versions. Essentially, what he really wants is a tiny PaRappa he can share his secrets with.



Kim Richards

SEX IN VIDEOGAMES IS RUBBISH IN PRETTY MUCH EVERY WAY, AND IT SHOULD BE BETTER.

It always feels like a dare from one developer to another; a naughty scrawl on a bathroom door

February is the month of love, so let’s talk about sex. Specifically, why sex in videogames is so awful. I’m not against titillation, but for all the boasts of ‘most realistic graphics yet’ and the rise of emotive storylines, sex is still depicted as soulless mannequins lifelessly rubbing their downstairs bits together, interchanged with lovingly rendered nipples and the classic fade-to-black transition.

Maybe I’m still traumatised by David I don’t like game mechanics’ Cage’s QTE sex scene in Heavy Rain. It was bad enough watching Ethan and Madison’s woodenly animated mouths go at each other like hungry carp, but having to ‘press X to commence rutting’ made me feel as empty as my Valentine’s Day Pot Noodle For One tradition. Good grief, you don’t even get a trophy for this freak show.

Sex is always going to be an awkward topic in a medium that is vastly consumed by young people. But I feel that as games become more progressive with romance plotlines and sexual diversity, we deserve a higher level of

quality in the rumpy that accompanies these stories; not just in terms of animation, but dialogue and tone too. Sex in real life is fun, emotional, intimate, and I’ve yet to find a game that does it justice. Instead, you get cringe-worthy conversations (“Come alive with me tonight, Thane!”), clumsy movements and a sense of immaturity, pulling you out of the scene the developer is trying to portray. I’m looking at you, every single Bioware character.

STICKY BUMPERS

Thanks to modern motion capture technology, developers are able to animate the most subtle of movements in Nathan Drake’s rugged face. So why can’t we get the same attention to detail when it comes to Yennefer and Geralt mucking around on the back of a stuffed unicorn in The Witcher 3? Especially then. It’d certainly make developers’ behind-the-scenes videos far more interesting; watching spandex-and-bauble-clad mo-cap actors roll around. Come on, devs! Stop making the act of bumping uglies so ugly!

And now that I’ve written this article, I’m off to clear my Google Search history.

WRITER BIO

Kim Richards is an old hack games journo and corrupt YouTuber. She’d like to assure you she’s a well-fulfilled person who isn’t always thinking about sex. Her most famous YouTube Let’s Play? A Minecraft series called Flux Buddies. Ahem.

IN
THE
MOOD
FOR...

Cats

Get the string on standby, as we cuddle up with PlayStation's coolest kitties

1 DARK SOULS II

Sweet Shalquoir. Damn, that's a badass moniker. Dark Souls II's friendly feline shopkeeper resides in Majula, and sells all manner of mystical rings to help your Hollow one out. She's one of the few beings in FromSoftware's sequel who doesn't want to murder the hell out of you, although her steep prices will slash your stash of souls.

2 FAR CRY PRIMAL

Here at OPM, we're all about celebrating cats of all sizes, whether they're the dinky household variety that snuggle at your feet, or 600lb extinct brutes with fangs the size of prehistoric bananas. Primal's sabre-toothed tigers prove to be ass-kicking allies once tamed, none more so than the legendary Bloodfang version.

3 DEAD RISING 2

The WWF must be livid with Ted Smith. Dead Rising 2's big-boned psycho is the trainer of one Snowflake: a performing tiger that's forced to share the Yucatan Casino with 700 undead gamblers. Luckily, Chuck can give Snowflake a good home back at the safehouse once Ted bites it. Good kitty.



4 FINAL FANTASY VII

Not to be confused with a Youngling-murdering, fallen Jedi, Cait Sith is one cool cat. Well, 'cat' is slightly inaccurate. Technically, Cait is a human Shinra exec who remote-controls a tuxedo cat... who's riding a moogles. Make sense? Anyhoo, Sith appears in other FFs as various summons and allies.

5 EARTHWORM JIM HD

Evil the Cat will make you a dog person, even if you aren't one to start with. This dastardly creature is the personification of hate, ruling over the volcanic planet Heck with an iron fist... um, paw. Being a total git, Evil has filled Heck with spike pits, rivers of lava, and, worse, motivated lawyers. Throw in kitty's acid-covered furballs, and this is one puss that deserves to be booted.

6 SONY CAT

Or 'Toro Inoue', to his pals. Sony's Japanese mascot first popped up in virtual life sim Doko Demo Issyo, back in '99. He's since cameoed in the likes of Street Fighter X Tekken, and Toro's even been known to try his claws at journalism, in Weekly Toro Station: a regular PSP news service.

7 BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY

The average kitty is supposed to rock nine lives, but Catwoman severely pushes that figure in Arkham City. Attempted acid baths at the hands of Two-Face. Brutal botanical encounters with Poison Ivy. Super-greedy, stupidly daring bank jobs. (If you ever get your own spin-off, Selina, we suggest staying in with a saucer of milk.)

8 SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

All right, Celosia isn't really a 'cat', per se. Colossi the 11th may be an elephant-sized rock monster at first glance, but look a little closer, and it's clearly just a gigantic, frightened feline. Its claws and cat-like movements immediately scream puss, as do its big sad eyes. D'aww.

9 GRAVITY RUSH

Dusty the cat is a feline phenomenon. Not only does it bestow Kat with the power to control and manipulate gravity, its lush black coat seems to contain a mini solar system - just look at all those gorgeous speckles of light. It'd win Best In Show every time. The game hints that Dusty belongs to the alien Nevi race...



HONOURABLE MENTIONS

God Of War

GOW's Chimera is only 33% cat, but that proud lion head is way cooler than its dud goat and snake parts.

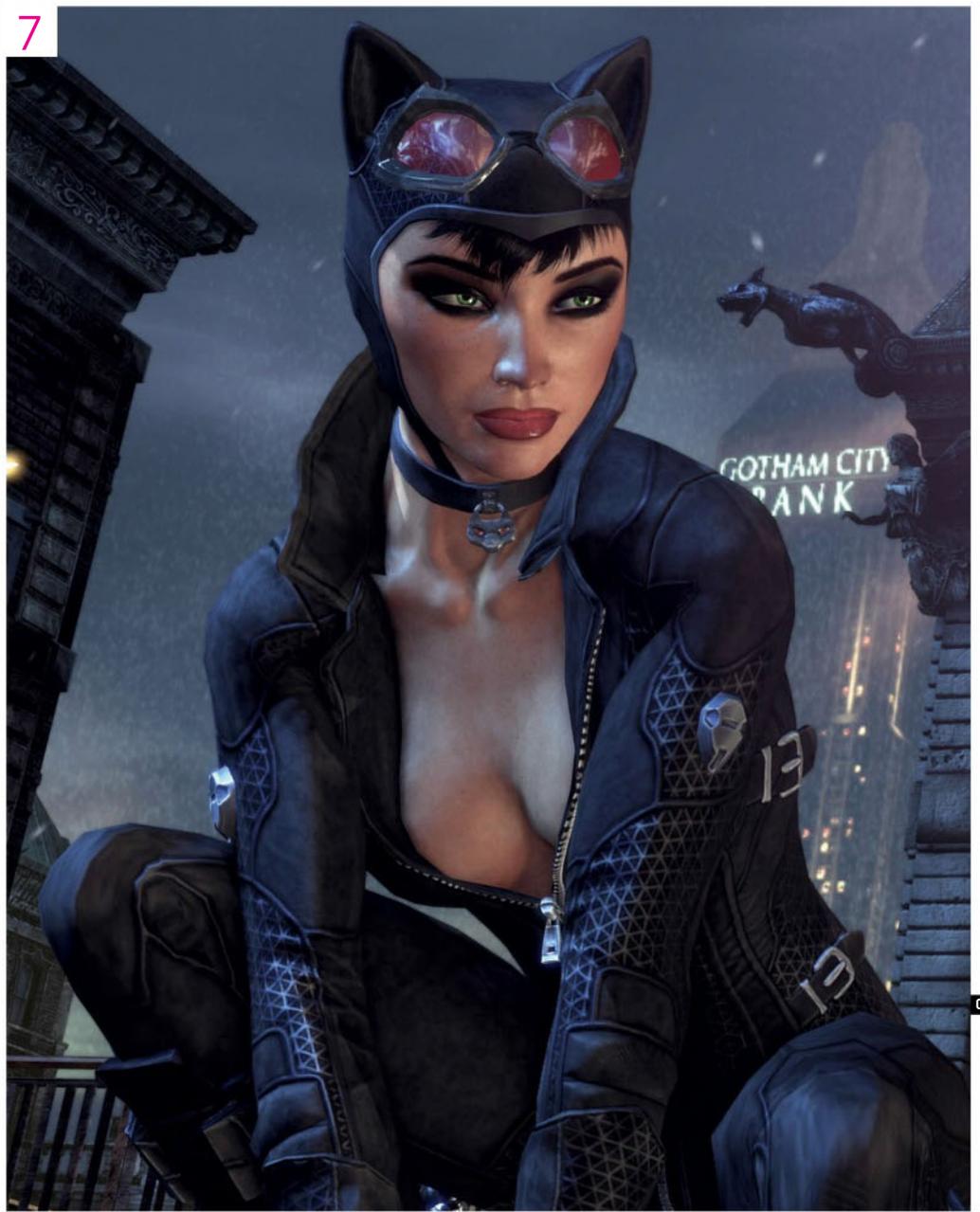
Red Dead Redemption

Watch out, Mr Marston! Red Dead's cougars love to supplement their diet with a hearty helping of outlaw.

Life Of Black Tiger

Only two Honourable Mentions this issue - our final entry is an extremely Dishonourable Mention. BAD KITTYY! NO!

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



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IT’S ICONIC”
Scarlett Johansson

GEMMA
ARTERTON
“I wasn’t showing
who I was”

**SUPERMAN
GOES TO WAR**

CHARLIE
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Arthur



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44 GHOST RECON WILDLANDS

The Ghosts are back, and they're waging the War On Drugs in Bolivia.

PREVIEWS



031

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PREVIEW



032

In this entry, characters rip off their masks to summon Personas. All very symbolic...

"IT'S AN UNFOLDING
POP-UP BOOK FROM
THE SEXIEST
CIRCLE OF HELL."

FORMAT PS4/PS3 / ETA 4 APR
PUB DEEP SILVER / DEV ATLUS

PERSONA 5

Jung-at-heart JRPG series
unmasks its true power on PS4



Eyeballing the latest entry in the Shin Megami Tensei series, you'll believe a graphic novel can come to life. Pause for breath? Impossible. Hit Options, and the protagonist whirls round, menu in tow, slamming his hand into your screen. Crimson swathes, stark monochrome details – it's an ever-unfolding pop-up book from the sexiest circle of hell, like a mangaka's dipped his magnum opus in acid jazz and battered you across the face with it. (And... yep, it turns out that's your, er, thing.)

Persona 5 is holding nothing back. After its essential PS Vita predecessor, it can't afford to. Persona 4 Golden was many players' first taste of the series, drawing them into a double life: by day, studying at school, joining clubs and making friends to level up; by night, entering the shadow realm to fight Jungian nightmare manifestations of characters' real-world problems using 'Persona' powers. Relationships built up through charming daily interactions directly affect the moreish dungeon-crawling and deep turn-based combat, and vice versa.

It's a brilliant conceit. From our hands-on with the English-language version of the new title, however, it's clear its best self lies in Persona 5. So how is the formula streamlined? Like all things these days, via an app. Put the Midnight Channel's time- and weather-dependent TV portal to the back of your mind: entering the shadow realm now is a simple matter of whipping out your smartphone, any time, >>

PREVIEW



Left You and your fellow Phantom Thieves are out to reform corrupted adults by stealing their rotten hearts.

Right What's black, white and red all over thanks to its painfully cool UI? Well, you know the punchline.



The addition of stealth is key, as causing too much of a kerfuffle will now attract more enemies.

Cult of Personality

How the JRPG series carved its own identity



1 St Hermelin High students fought demons in utopian city Mikage-cho in Revelations: Persona, which hit PS1 in 1996 but took 'til 2009 to arrive on UK PSPs.



2 Not one, but two Persona 2s - Innocent Sin and Eternal Punishment - were ported to PSP, with stories centring on powerful, reality-altering rumours.



3 PS2's Persona 3 brought serious edge. Characters summoned Personas by firing guns (Evokers) at their heads, and all could be controlled in battle.



4 Originally on PS2 but bolstered by Western fans, Persona 4 went Golden on PS Vita with new content. Polish and charm makes it the best entry - for now...



Above Refining a key series mechanic, SNS messages let you develop Confidant relationships (previously Social Links) while on the go.

“GUITAR LICKS UNSPOOL AT A PACE; WE PULL OUT OUR GUN TO FIRE REAL-TIME ROUNDS AT FOES.”



Above Traps aren't uncommon in Persona 5's hand-crafted dungeons. Using "Third Eye" helps flag up potential danger.



Above Safe Rooms are plush, Shadow-free places to chill in – a chance to regroup, check your progress and talk tactics.

anywhere. It's a clever change, seeking to curb the tendency to grind XP in one world over exploring the other. We're assured that there are more cause-and-effect parallels than ever between the two to keep you and your fellow Phantom Thieves dimension-hopping.

One of those Phantom Thieves is new westerner Ann, and when we bump into her in the metro, humming placid and white below downtown Tokyo's neon night, it's obvious she's got some troubles. Actually, that's an understatement. No story spoilers here – but things get real dark, real fast.

MIND PALACE

Our girl needs help. School's become unbearable for her, and other students, thanks to volleyball teacher Kamoshida. It's time to round up the gang (rebel kid Ryuji and shape-shifting kitty guide Morgana), boot up the app and hurtle over to the other side in search of a solution. We're dropped into the Palace, which throbs the purple-red of a fresh bruise and is haunted by lumbering suits of armour. Slipping into Stealth mode via **L1** wreaths our protag in smoke. Aiming the camera at handily-placed cover (dungeons are now built bespoke for each boss, rather than the randomly-generated offerings of previous entries), we can creep by in a splatter of black and pink, sneaking up on enemies. **X** performs a throat-slitting Ambush and we've the advantage in our first battle.

FACTRICK

1. CHEQUERED PAST

Our quiet protag's no pushover, expelled from his former school for assaulting a well-connected sex pest.

2. FUSION JAZZ

Long-time series composer Shoji Meguro returns to craft the soundtrack. (It's already on loop in the office.)

3. PLAY TO SIN

Some of the bosses you'll face off against are based on the Seven Deadly Sins. Kamoshida's "Lust". Ew.

We've three Shadows to face. Guitar licks unspool at a frantic pace as we cycle through options. Should we unleash our characters' Personas on the hunt for a specific weakness? Or clobber 'em with a melee attack on **C**? Nope – we thump **↑** to pull out our gun, then move the reticule to fire real-time rounds at foes. But our penchant for peacocking leaves our magazine empty and our health gauge heart nearly shattered. Fortunately, we hit our opponent's sore spot (Fire-type attacks) on our next turn. Our reward is the chance to Baton Pass, or gift our turn to another

player, so we chuck the extra move to Morgana, who's got the capability to heal us. Time to finish this. A press of **A** triggers the series-staple All-Out Attack, and we're briefly convinced we can see the telly melting under the dynamism of the pop art punch-up that ensues. And just when we think we've caught our breath, a bloody results screen yonks it right back as our masked protag runs endlessly through onomatopoeic puffs of XP.

Unshackled from the limits of a handheld, Persona 5 is shockingly, achingly stylish, especially during boss battles. Rose petals flutter from the ceiling as a pink-Speedoed King Kamoshida holds court next to a sickeningly sexualised Valley Girl clone of Ann... and then erupts into a multi-limbed, tongue-wagging horror that'd give Junji Ito night terrors. The sheer power on display here is intoxicating; the depth of strategy needed (and mechanically, provided for) to nix this abomination the merest sniffer of the complex challenges to come in the next 100 hours.

As Kamoshida's castle crumbles and we sprint back to modern-day Tokyo, we can hear something else toppling too: Persona 4: Golden's reign as PlayStation's slickest JRPG. Take heart – come April, Persona 5 will be crushing fellow GOTY contenders underfoot. And they'll probably enjoy it, too. ■

PREVIEW



■ Ace Combat 7's PlayStation VR mode will be cockpit-view only – and if you look down, you can see your pilot's body. Hello, meatsack!

“OUR STOMACH PALPABLY DROPS AS WE HURTLE OVER THE WAVES.”



036

The campaign's story is told from the perspective of many characters, and is set ten years after ACS.



Above The protagonist, in line with Ace Combat 4 and 5, will be both silent and faceless. A far cry from Assault Horizon's gobby Will Bishop, then...





F **FORMAT** PS4/PS VR / **ETA** 2017 / **PUB** BANDAI NAMCO / **DEV** PROJECT ACES

ACE COMBAT 7

VR takes you right into the danger zone



We probably shouldn't be piloting a fighter jet. For one thing, we haven't had a lick of formal training. For another, we've just remembered we hate heights. Yes, thanks to the immersive magic of PlayStation VR, it really does feel as though we're flying a very real, very dangerous metal cylinder. This is the "true" way to play the latest instalment of the flight sim series – at least according to producer Kazutoki Kono – so we'd best grip the sticks a little tighter and wing it.

Fortunately, Ace Combat 7 makes us feel at home (and far more qualified to pilot a plane than we actually are) from the moment we slip on the VR headset. An ultra-realistic cockpit has always been a key component of the series' allure, but never has it felt so immediate. All manner of gloriously complex HUD elements wink green at us from various angles. As we crane around in our seat to take it all in, we feel ourselves gently rising, bright sunlight streaming in through the canopy and over our left shoulder. We're moving slowly across the surface of an aircraft carrier. Ground personnel helpfully wave us into position. We're prompted to hold **R2** to take off, there's an almighty roar as we zoom, arrow-straight, over the edge of the ship – and our stomach palpably drops while we hurtle just above the shining waves.

The series has always plumped for simple, accessible fun over stoic realism. As ever, taking to the skies is an easy, breezy, candyfloss-cloud-swirled dream. Pushing

the left stick forward points our tin birdie's nose upwards and we climb higher. The numbers on our digital altimeter tick over into quadruple digits. Piece of cake, this flying a plane business, we think, tilting to swoop through a gauzy patch of clouds. With the technical clout of PS4 powering it, Project Aces' new atmosphere is stunningly lifelike. Not only is it ridiculous fun to cavort in fully three-dimensional clouds (previously only made up of flat layers clumped together) like the heavens are your own personal kiddie pool, this makes for a more tactically robust combat simulation. Top gun nibbling at your jet stream? Now, with enough finesse, you can dive

into cloud cover to lose 'em. It's a neat trick – especially if you're planning on donning the headset for dogfighting, have a sensitive stomach and fancy avoiding enemies, evasive manoeuvres and effusive results in equal measure.

STRANGEREAL THINGS

But if you can stomach a barrel roll or seven, then virtual reality is absolutely the way to play Ace Combat 7. It's an experience made for PS VR. As the first wave of foes spatters our HUD with square-shaped reticules, we turn sharply to flank right, craning our head round to the left side of the cockpit to keep an eye on targets. (Well, indicators – the draw distance doesn't render the actual plane models until you're practically kissing tailfin.)

We thunk out a homing missile, which follows our head-tracked aim and arcs gracefully at one unlucky opponent. Bingo. All that's left of the poor sod is a plume of spark-sodden smoke – we race through it, hot on the trail of the next wave of NPCs. The UAV drones are smaller, nipper craft, and despite our immediate familiarity with the controls, they soon fly rings around us as we struggle to orient ourselves in the seemingly-endless blue of Strangereal's sky.

Yes, the latest outing returns to the series' fictional universe, its single-player campaign picking up the story of the war between Erusea and the Osean Federation. Contextual radio chatter mixes with rock riffs as we manage to put paid to the last of the drones and head back to base.

Our all-too-brief flight is a revelation. Classic Ace Combat feel keeps us grounded, but the new levels of immersion have left our head in the clouds. Is it PS VR's next killer app? Absolutely – if execution can keep pace with innovation. As Slider might say, "No points for second place." ■

FACTRICK

1. ALPHA? BRAVO

Online multiplayer will feature. Here's hoping the cool call signs from PS3's Assault Horizon return.

2. FLIGHT CONSOLE

We reckon Ace Combat 7 will be best in VR, but it's fully playable without a headset on PS4 and PS4 Pro.

3. FRAME ASSIST

Action's locked at 60fps for VR and non-VR. Good news for stomachs, not-so-good news for graphics...



“ROBOTS THUNDER AFTER US LIKE KIDS TOWARDS A MILDLY TERRIFIED BIRTHDAY CAKE.”

Technically, it's a marvel: perfect particle physics and screen-shuddering explosions are delectable.



FORMAT PS4 / ETA SUMMER / PUB HOUSEMARQUE / DEV HOUSEMARQUE

NEX MACHINA

There's no rest in this wicked, laser-focused arcade shooter



“Hakuna matata.” It's a wonderful phrase... and evidently one Resogun and Super Stardust developer Housemarque's never heard in its life. “No worries!” is the exact antithesis of its deliciously anxious arcade shoot-'em-ups. And now – under the guidance of legendary Atari game designer Eugene Jarvis, no less – there's a new, neurotic kid on the block.

We're dropped into the midst of the first brightly-coloured stage of the twin-stick shooter. Our Mega Man-esque hero is already auto-spewing blue bolts as rings of light appear on the moss-soaked tiles around him. No time to explain – but also no need. As crab-like machines teleport out of the sky and thunder after us like children towards a mildly terrified birthday cake, the objective is clear: shoot the child- er, robots, and stay the hell alive.

The claustrophobia is palpable. Peril closes in. Invincibility frames on our teal-trailed dashes let us race right through a wave unscathed, and we push our right stick left to direct fire back at befuddled foes. When the last enemy falls in an ultra-fine shower of voxels, several things occur at once: a 10,000-point “No Death” bonus flashes before our

eyes, what sounds like Glados's standoffish cousin announces “Multiplier Up,” and the whole world flips round as we're automatically boosted to the next area.

PRESSURE ADVANTAGE

Purple lasers baby-gate us in with certain doom. (Even the camera joins in, swooping from top-down view to an inescapably tense third-person angle.) Rather than work within the parameters, we think logically, shooting their sources – and Nex Machina's destruction engine rewards us. Finally, we've room to breathe, strafe and prioritise power-ups such as triple-shot guns and overshields. And then a curious thing happens. When the electro music thuds into a higher gear and we face boss Beamtron, we're not intimidated – we're salivating. With a flow this fluid and precise to control, being caged in with danger is a reason to celebrate because escaping's so much fun. ■



Above The bullet-hell bullies are disenchanting machines taking revenge upon us nasty, social media-addicted humans. #dramaqueens

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FORMAT PS4 / ETA 4 APR / PUB DEEP SILVER / DEV CI GAMES

SNIPER: GHOST WARRIOR 3

Like most modern games, Sniper has gone open-world



The third *Sniper: Ghost Warrior* game is a blatant testament to the sales success of its predecessors. Clearly benefitting from a greater investment than any other entry in the series, the big selling point this time around is the wide open world that's there for the exploring before you make your nest and start popping enemy skulls.

While the PS3 prequels found an audience thanks to their utter dedication to the art of sniping, the shift in world design for *Sniper's* leap to PS4 is a clear indication that CI Games is training its sights on a new suite of players. Also: it's a clever way to stand this entry apart from *Sniper Elite 4*. Very sneaky...

It still wants to be taken seriously, however. As much as you may long to run into an area and open fire – which you can do, should you have the confidence – the best approach is usually a more considered one. Surveying an area with your drone and locating the enemy's position, CCTV cameras, and other hazards will pay dividends, especially when you start your slow, tactical foray into unfamiliar territory.

It's fair to say it lacks the thrills of a *Call Of Duty*, but then that's not what it's trying to be – despite the majority of screens to your right suggesting otherwise. Gauging distance and wind before pulling the trigger during key sniping sections is still a big part of the proceedings. Simply having someone's head in your rifle's sights doesn't mean diddly squat here; you've got to use your brain.

GETAWAY RIDE

This is why the open-world approach feels like a huge plus for the series. As well as a safe house where you can accept and plan missions, you've now got a Jeep to roam around in. Although this can also be used as a vehicle of destruction should such carnage take your fancy, it moves *Sniper* into, dare we say it, *Far Cry* territory. An inspired addition, actually driving to your intended location offers greater depth than before and makes the

overall experience more dynamic. A fast-travel system is in place too, but there's sometimes value in relying on the car instead.

You see, memorising the terrain and exploiting certain vantage points will help no end, especially as the AI takes no prisoners. One particular mission we sample asks us to constantly be aware of our surroundings behind enemy lines. We wouldn't go as far as to say it's home to *MGS V* levels of stealth, but it's not far off – here, a single misplaced step can turn a routine exercise into an all-out war.

GUNS OUT

This is where *Sniper* stutters a touch. When you've found your groove and are quietly executing people in the shadows there's a real sense of satisfaction (mixed with the tiniest spot of dread). Make a mistake, though, and a ludicrous volume of resistance is sent in your direction – and the resulting faster-paced gunplay doesn't hold together as solidly. Fiddly and nowhere near as polished as the sniping action, it's frustrating to have to rely on this if you do screw up.

The lesson here? Don't be rubbish. After all, *Sniper: Ghost Warrior 3* is aimed at those who prefer to take their time and plan ahead, and who shouldn't be getting into too many all-out scraps in the first place. It'll also be a playground for those who wish to experiment: locked doors, for example, can be opened with stolen keycards or just blown to smithereens... though the latter will summon some angry guards fairly sharpish.

Put a gun to our heads and we'd still bank on *Sniper Elite 4* being the victor of 2017's PS4 sniping war. Even so, the improvements here are encouraging. ■

FACTRICK

1. AIMING HIGH

Despite plenty of low scores (we gave the second game 4/10 in OPM #83), the series has sold millions.

2. BULLET CAM

As before, a well-placed shot will be followed by a slow-motion bullet cam showing your kill.

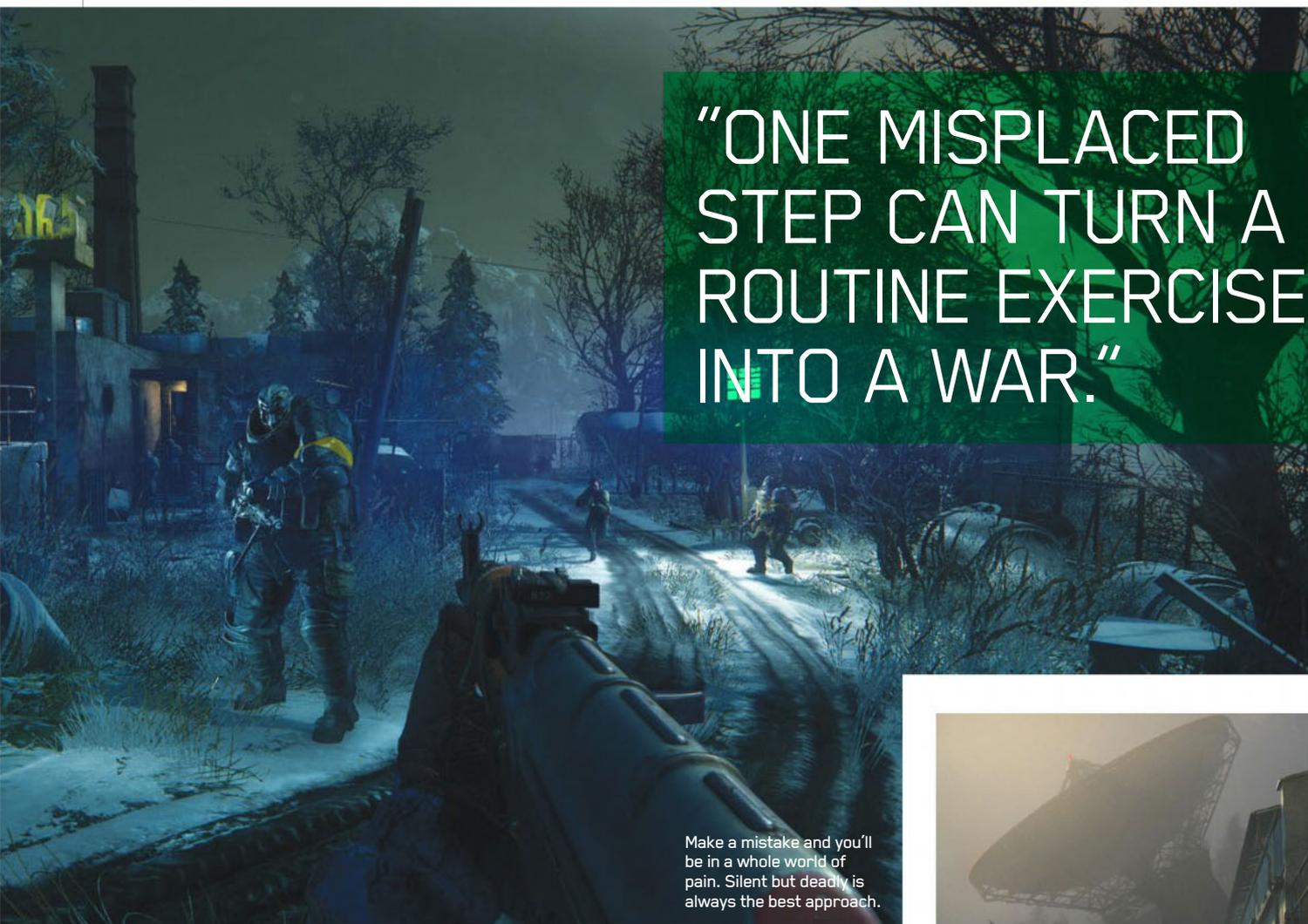
3. CREATOR KILL

An in-game workbench allows you to craft special bullets, weapons, medkits and gadgets.





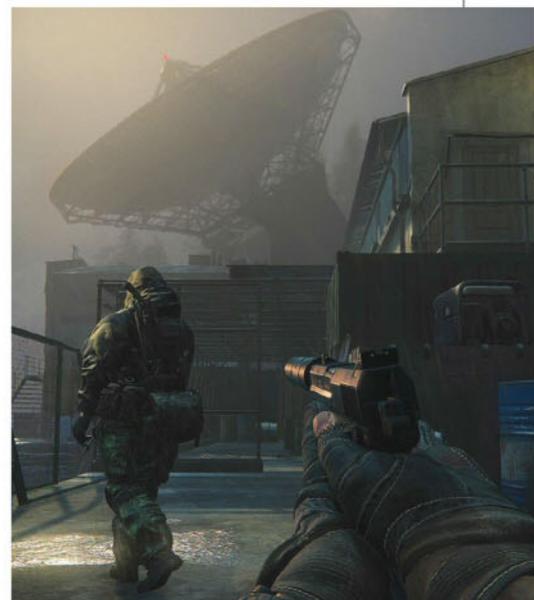
■ Sniping from a distance? Don't forget to factor in the wind. Going closer might be the answer, but then you have to watch out for guards.



“ONE MISPLACED STEP CAN TURN A ROUTINE EXERCISE INTO A WAR.”

041

Make a mistake and you'll be in a whole world of pain. Silent but deadly is always the best approach.



Above Taking time to get to know the terrain definitely pays off when you put a foot wrong and need to make a quick escape.

"A STAGGERING AMOUNT OF VARIETY IN A VERY SMALL WINDOW."



A free DLC pack will dub over the English dialogue with the unique language of Maheeran.

FORMAT PS4 / ETA SPRING / PUB FOCUS HOME INTERACTIVE / DEV ENIGAMI

SHINESS: THE LIGHTNING KINGDOM

There's nothing shy about this bamboozling indie RPG



This overwhelmingly ambitious adventure packs a staggering amount of variety into a very small window. One moment we're watching hero Chado hunt wildlife through a vibrant forest to gain loot, the next he and his travelling party are solving environmental puzzles to open up new areas on the map. Add in an experimental combat system as well as a unique language written for the game and we need to catch our breath. Impressive? Yes, but it's also extremely exhausting.

The combat is a perfect example of the game chucking too many systems at you. When you go into battle, a magical dome surrounds you and your foe for a one-on-one duel. Taking more inspiration from Street Fighter than Final Fantasy, you can punch, block and parry blows with some simple combos or use magical attacks to scrap. Doesn't sound too intimidating, does it? Well, we're not even near a surface to scratch yet.

BLUNDER AND LIGHTNING

You see, those magic spells are split into four elements, such as fire and earth. While fighting, the arena pulses in different colours, indicating which element you should use. Correctly matching element to pulse enables you to deal bonus damage.

Then there are your allies to think about. While you have a party, just like in most JRPGs, they stay on the sidelines during combat until you tag them in. They aren't useless, though. While waiting to join the fray, they will cast spells and buffs to help out, which you must set up beforehand.

Keeping track of all of this in real time isn't the hardest thing to do on PS4, but it's needlessly elaborate and feels at odds with itself. Fighting games rely on quick reactions, but this requires you to study the layout in a much more involved way that inhibits the flow of action.

The thing is, when Shiness doesn't overcomplicate, it's incredibly engaging. Not only does the cel-shaded anime style look gorgeous, but interesting bosses, such as a fallen king who lurks in his crumbling palace while going insane, help to build an intriguing world we want to explore.

We're crossing our fingers that the complexity makes much more sense once we get the chance to play from the start. With the benefit of working through tutorials we hope to love it – otherwise we can imagine Shiness leaving us dazed and confused. ■



Above The cartoon visuals make this pop nearly as much as a Ni-No Kuni game.

on the box

judged only by their covers



GHOST RECON WILDLANDS

The Ghosts must take down Ray Mears' evil empire. Dropped into a forest, your team will have to make fire, kill and eat enemies, and fight off the hungry bear attracted by the Snickers some twit left in his pocket.

FORMAT PS4 ETA 7 MAR



SOUTH PARK: THE FRACTURED BUT WHOLE

Beat-'em-up featuring the residents of South Park – but with superpowers. Can you kick the Mr Hankey out of Spider-Kenny? Finish him – you bastards.

FORMAT PS4 ETA 31 MAR



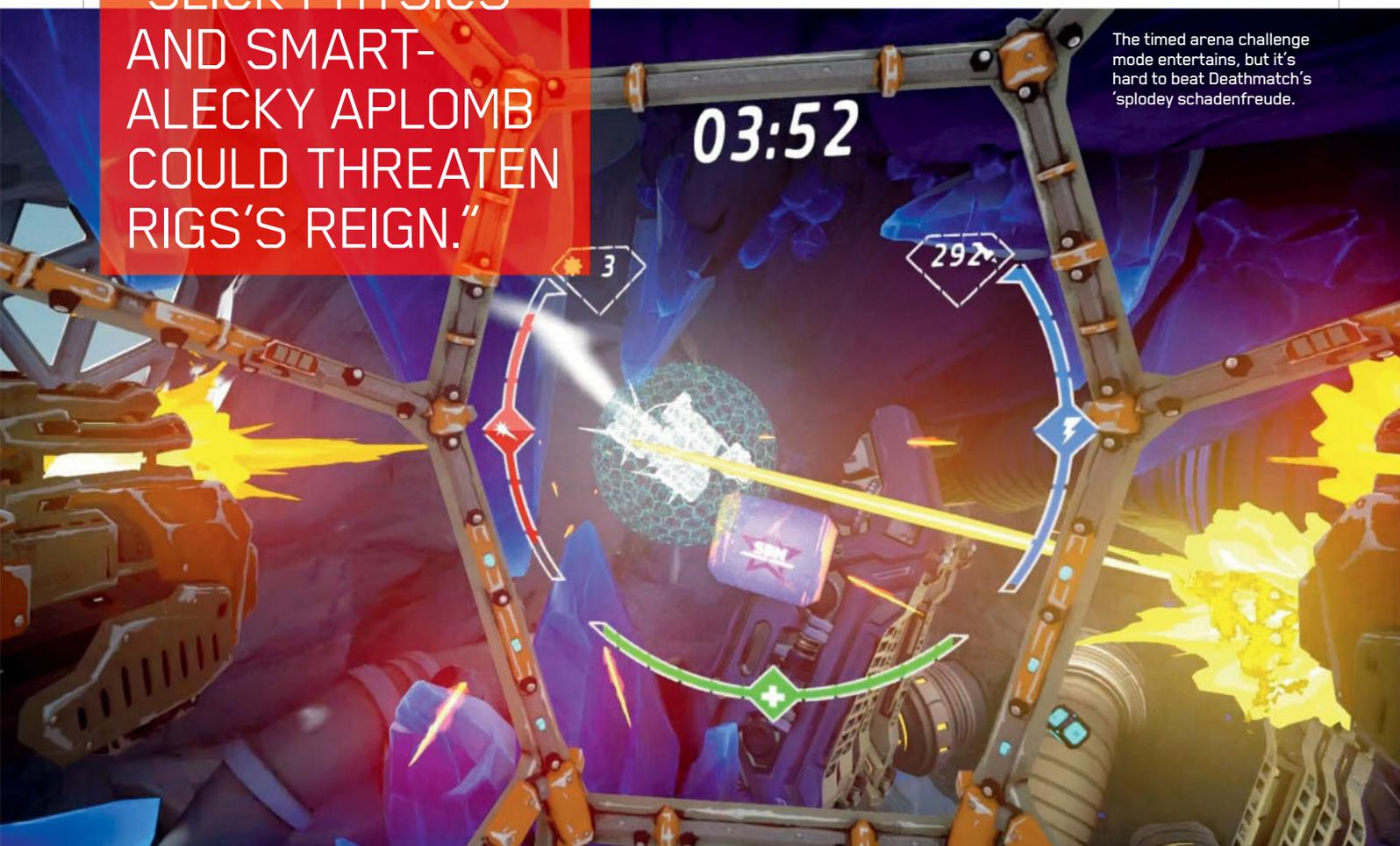
NIER: AUTOMATA

Platformer in which you switch between three saucy witches – one digs, one fights, one flies on a broomstick – in order to reach Macbeth and persuade him to kill the end of level king-boss.

FORMAT PS4 ETA 7 MAR

“SLICK PHYSICS AND SMART-ALECKY APLOMB COULD THREATEN RIGS’S REIGN.”

The timed arena challenge mode entertains, but it’s hard to beat Deathmatch’s ‘splodey schadenfreude.



FORMAT PS VR / ETA MARCH / PUB SONY / DEV WHITEMOON DREAMS

STARBLOOD ARENA

A virtual reality Descent into multiplayer madness



Here are six words that might not sit well with you: six degrees of freedom in VR. *passes you a sick bag* Chances are, you can’t even read that without turning green about the gills. But here are six more words that’ll probably surprise you: pitching, yawing, rolling mechs feel fine. The devs at WhiteMoon Dreams must be warlocks.

After selecting our pilot – smack-talking, pistol-toting all-rounder Alice, who reminds us of Overwatch’s D.Va – we tentatively float into the battleground, a sort of metal sphere filled with alien architecture and cheesed-off NPCs. Our weaponised robo-giant glides from side to side in mid-air. We blast our twin cannons at an enemy, then instinctively flip out of the way of incoming fire and... nothing. Our lunch remains inside us. Magic.

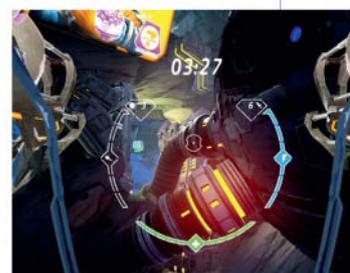
Of course, there is a sensible explanation. As we strafe around in the air in our tooled-up robot, the wizardry’s subtle but noticeable: the crisp graphical quality of the cartoony art style; the fluid framerate; centralised focal points. “The two things we spent the most amount of time on were user comfort and gameplay control,” WhiteMoon co-founder and CEO Jay Koottarappallil reveals. “Easily one year solid of

just doing those two things.” Aiming at enemy ships using head tracking is soon second nature (our first being mouth-foaming mecha-aggression, natch). Once we suddenly realise we’ve been merrily sinking homing missiles into other mechs without knowing or caring which way is up, we’re sold.

HIGH VAULTAGE

“[During testing] we started to hit this beautiful nirvana where people weren’t thinking about getting from point A to point B anymore, they were only thinking about who to attack next,” says Koottarappallil, full of pride.

We believe him. Our hands-on reveals the slick physics of PS1 3D shooter Descent plus Borderlands-esque, smart-alecky aplomb – an intuitive VR title that could threaten RIGS’s FPS reign. Campaigns for each character, a co-op horde mode, up to eight-player Deathmatches and ship customisation? We’re positively giddy. Figuratively speaking. ■



Above The final roster will feature nine pilots – but the devs are raring to add more if Starblood Arena’s community flourishes.



PREVIEW

The Ghosts have been sent to Bolivia by the US government, but their mission is the toppest of secrets.

044





“THE GOVERNMENT
TURNS A BLIND EYE
TO THE CARTEL’S
COCAINE EMPIRE.”

F FORMAT PS4 / ETA 7 MAR
PUB UBISOFT / **DEV** UBISOFT PARIS

GHOST RECON WILDLANDS

Ubisoft’s impressive open-world
adventure strikes from the shadows



Santa Blanca is the most feared drug cartel in South America, and has all but taken control of Bolivia. The collapsing government has turned a blind eye to the cartel’s vast cocaine empire, and it’s grown to the size of a small army – a situation the US is, understandably, a teeny tiny bit concerned about.

A DEA agent is sent to investigate, but his cover’s blown and the cold, merciless leader of Santa Blanca, El Sueño, orders his assassination. A crude bomb is detonated in the American embassy – the flashpoint that triggers the events of Wildlands. Cleaning up the mess? Special Forces team Ghost Recon, off to covertly reclaim country from cartel: a mission the US government will deny all knowledge of should any of its members be killed or captured.

Our demo begins as the Ghosts arrive in Bolivia by helicopter in the midst of a raging storm. It’s pitch black outside, but flashes of lightning occasionally illuminate the mountains, briefly revealing the immense scale of the game world (its biggest to date, Ubisoft says). Undercover CIA agent Karen Bowman briefs us on the situation, informing us that we’ll need to deal with the boss of each region before we can draw El Sueño out of hiding.

This gives Wildlands its structure. The map is divided into multiple territories, each with its own boss, and it’s your job to eliminate them and reclaim



PREVIEW

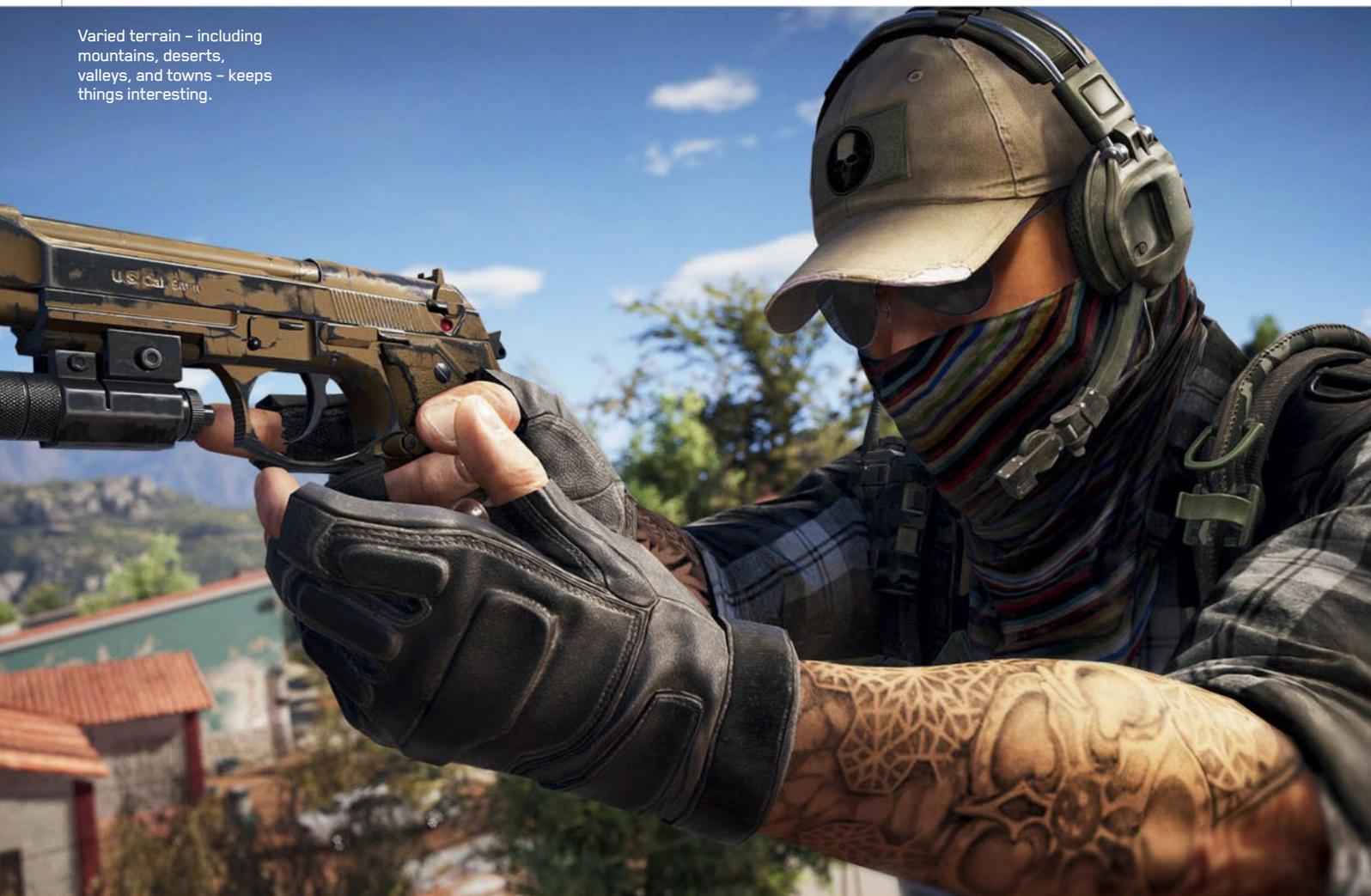


Left Robust character creation includes the ability to choose race, gender, tattoos, and the severity of any added face-whiskers.

Right You can unlock clothes and tactical gear for your character, as well as countless extra parts for your weapons.



Varied terrain – including mountains, deserts, valleys, and towns – keeps things interesting.



Employment history

The Ghost Recon squad's varied career so far



1 In the first Ghost Recon game, the Ghosts travel to Georgia to intervene in a separatist uprising, angering Russia and almost triggering World War 3.



2 Ghost Recon 2 has the team head to North Korea to deal with a power-hungry general staging a coup and threatening to nuke the United States.



3 Advanced Warfighter sees the Ghosts dealing with another coup in Mexico City, not to mention rescuing the American and Canadian Presidents.



4 Future Soldier takes the Ghosts to the deserts of Zambia as they attempt to assassinate a local warlord involved in a terrorist plot.



Above There's more than one way to gather information. Sometimes you've got to "persuade" people to tell you everything you need to know.

"TRUE TO THEIR SQUAD NAME, GHOST RECON FAVOUR QUIET STEALTH OVER A DIRECT ASSAULT."



Above Once you've rescued Amaru, you can call on Katari and get a helicopter – handy if you get lost in the vast open world.



Above You'll need to hunt for intel to sniff out the powerful boss of each region and reclaim their territory.



the land they control. The first, and easiest, region is Itacu. Our chopper lands there and we meet with Pac Katari, a local rebel leader who'll we need to make nice with for a helping hand. But he's wary of the Americans, and to butter him up we must prove our loyalty by rescuing his uncle from a cartel compound.

UNCLE QUESTER

Night turns rapidly to day with a cool time-lapse effect, and our first mission begins. We're high in the mountains, gazing across a sweeping valley that seems to go on forever. The Ghosts pile into an off-road truck and we follow the GPS to the cartel's compound, which takes us along a series of twisting, narrow country roads with a sheer drop on one side. We arrive at the mission area and ditch the truck, concerned that if we keep on driving, the enemy might hear us approaching.

The Ghosts, true to their name, favour quiet stealth over a direct assault. To scout the area we fling a drone into the air, flying it over the compound and marking enemies on the HUD. As we tag a baddie, our character announces what he's packing. (Er, weapon-wise, that is.) Satisfied we've revealed everyone, we equip a silenced pistol and creep into the base. But after quietly, efficiently dealing with the small group of goons, we realise Katari's uncle Amaru isn't here.

One of El Sueño's lieutenants is, however.

We grab and interrogate him to find out where Amaru is being held. He reluctantly marks the location on our map, and we climb back into the truck, heading to a nearby farmhouse. The drone reveals a much stronger enemy force here, so we'll have to make use of our squad to deal with them and rescue the captive. Bringing up the command menu, we position each Ghost carefully around the house, then begin the attack.

FACTRICK

1. PAGE QUIT

Despite Tom Clancy's name being in the title, Ghost Recon is not based on any of his novels.

2. BANNED SAGA

Several Ghost Recon games were banned in South Korea for depicting war on the Korean peninsula.

3. ROAD TRIP

The developers of Wildlands travelled to Bolivia to extensively document and learn about the country.

GRIEVOUS BODILY FARM

Stealth, though preferred, isn't always the answer, and it's not in this case. The area

erupts with gunfire and we use the distraction to flank the enemy and wipe them out. Wildlands plays like any other third-person shooter, but there's no cover system, and it gives you fine control over the behaviour of your buddies. You can order them to move to specific locations, attack a single enemy, or regroup if you lose track of them. The AI does what it's told, but is sometimes a little slow to respond.

We move carefully into the house and free a bloodied and battered Amaru from his cell, extracting him via a conveniently placed helicopter. Flying by day now, the sheer scale of the world is nigh-on unbelievable. Katari is delighted and pledges his rebel army to help us. Later in the game, this'll allow us to call for armed backup and even order vehicle drops. So if you find yourself lost in the middle of nowhere, you can have a chopper delivered. Now that's service.

The intel the lieutenant gifts us is yet another important part of the game's structure. Finding the boss of each region requires gathering information, including squeezing it out of high-ranking cartel members and copying data from laptops. Katari blabs the names of Itacu's bosses, Yuri and Polito. Just as we set off to find them, our demo ends, the screen fades to black, and the Ghosts slip into darkness once more. We'll have their backs come March. ■

PREVIEW ROUND-UP

We're knocking on the Grim Reaper's door this month. There's a look at indie co-op puzzler *Death Squared*, as well as a gander at *Death's Gambit*. Fortunately, the bodacious waves of *Surf World Series* should provide a relaxing antidote...



SURF WORLD SERIES

FORMAT PS4 / **ETA** TBC
PUB VISION GAMES
PUBLISHING / **DEV** CLIMAX STUDIOS

There's yet to be a PlayStation game that really captures the thrill of surfing, so this arcade offering could make waves. Like old-skool Tony Hawk's games, the aim is to master the art of surfing by pulling off tricks. Taking in five locations around the world, including the beautiful beaches of Hawaii, you have the choice of honing your skills in single-player or challenging up to 15 other players online. While the animation looks stiff at the moment, our insatiable appetite for extreme sports games means this has still unhinged our Jaws. ■



DEATH'S GAMBIT

FORMAT PS4 / **ETA** TBC
PUB ADULT SWIM GAMES / **DEV** WHITE RABBIT

“Hyper-detailed pixel art, but for a metal album cover” is the design philosophy for this exciting 2D RPG – which is an instant hook for us. But it's not just the superb amount of detail that goes into the game that marks it as one to watch, but the fact that some bosses are immortal. Defeating them in different ways can trigger different types of loot, an intriguing twist on the David-versus-Goliath type of boss battles it throws at you. We'll have much more on this promising and grungy Dark Souls-alike adventure next issue.



DEATH SQUARED

FORMAT PS4 / **ETA** SPRING
PUB SMG STUDIO / **DEV** SMG STUDIO

Fancy discovering how strong your friendships are? This ingenious co-op puzzler gives you a grid with an assortment of dangers on it and says: “Figure out the answer.” Placing the emphasis on discussion and experimentation pushes you and a partner to get creative, while a single-player story mode means you don't have to put the game down when you're on your tod. It also helps that the cubes have more personality than any space marine you care to mention. If you fancy a little more brain in your couchplay fun, *Death Squared* offers thinking outside the box. ■



VALKYRIA REVOLUTION

FORMAT PS4/PS VITA
ETA SPRING / **PUB** SEGA
DEV MEDIA.VISION

Not only do we now have a better idea when the latest entry in the anime game series will be launching (this spring), we also have our first idea of what the story will be about. Taking place in an alternate universe to the original *Valkyria* games, this focuses on the efforts of the 'Circle of Five', a group of friends who manipulate their country into war. If this murky morality adds depth to the story, then a customisable weapons tree, where you can choose upgrades for your kit, gives the action side of things a serious boost. We're eager to join the front lines of this revolution. ■



SUNDERED

FORMAT PS4 / **ETA** TBC
PUB THUNDER LOTUS GAMES
DEV THUNDER LOTUS GAMES

A *Metrovania* action game where the levels generate procedurally, *Sundered* is a fascinating take on the genre. Dying is inevitable, which means levels constantly offer new challenges thanks to random layouts. When you croak it, you can upgrade your abilities at the skill tree, and an exciting twist to the progression system comes after you defeat the game's bosses: they drop corrupting Elder Shards, which offer powerful upgrades, but at the cost of your humanity. With the developer promising multiple endings, it presents a moral conundrum we look forward to suffering through. ■

Elite Speak

We sit down with one of gaming's most influential developers, David Braben, OBE, to discuss the future of space travel and Elite's long-awaited PlayStation debut

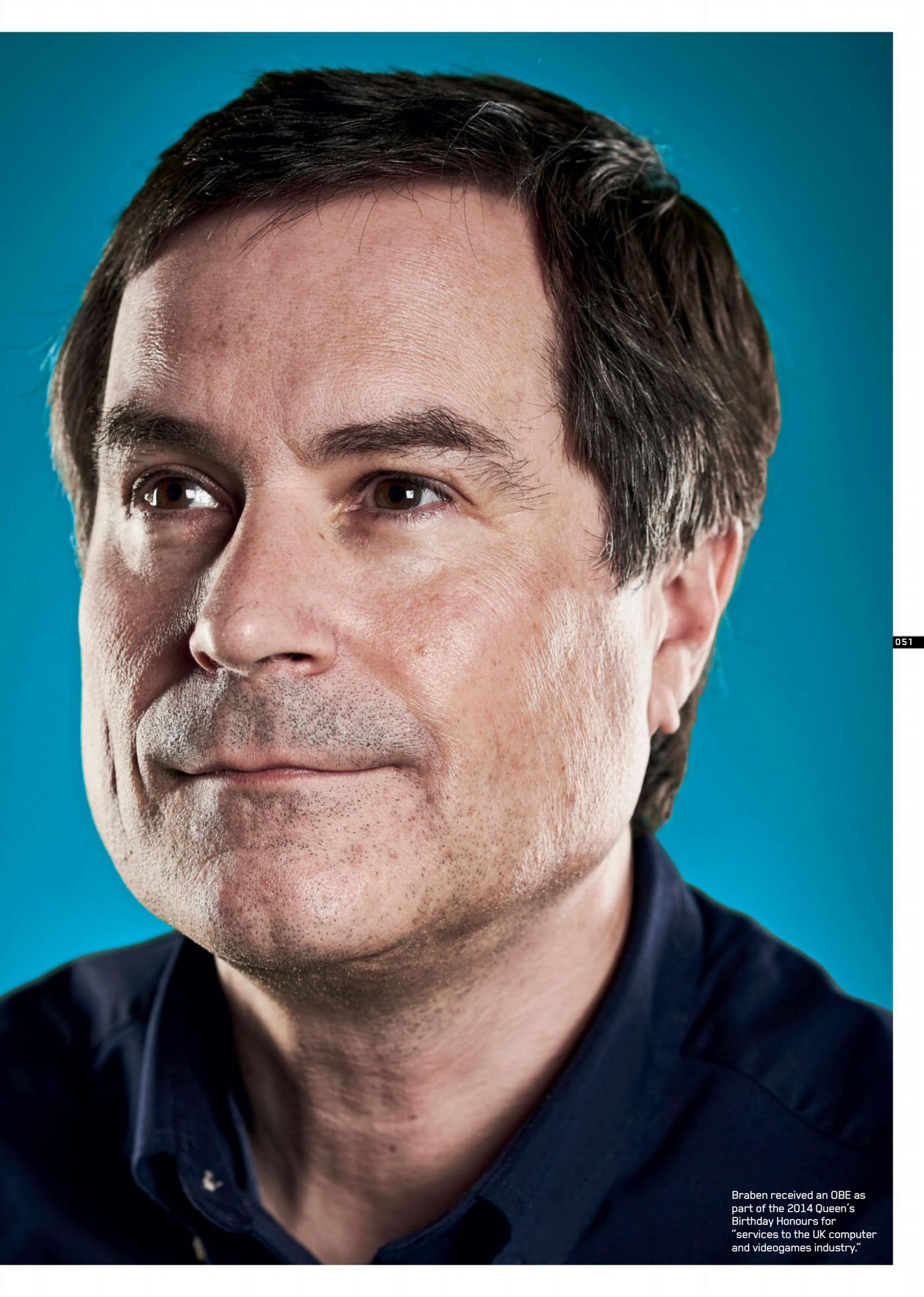
Elite Dangerous: Horizons changed forever on 5 January. Before then, the PC and Xbox One sci-fi simulator was a deep-space adventure filled with inter-player wranglings, political flashpoints and only small hints at there being something larger at play. But on 5 January a major event occurred: Commander DP Sayre was ripped out of a hyperspace jump and his ship was temporarily stripped of power as a massive alien Thargoids ship made first contact.

It was a game-redefining moment to kick off what's set to become the biggest year yet for Elite's newest form: the alien invasion has been years in the making, and to top it off Frontier Developments' celebrated space saga will finally make its PS4 debut in a few months' time. So we caught up with the man who started it all to discover why Elite Dangerous: Horizons is one of PS4's most important games yet.

OPM: Rewinding back to when you first made Elite in 1984, did you imagine it would have the impact that it had and that you'd get to make a project like Elite: Dangerous over 30 years later?

David Braben: I'd obviously hoped that. I mean if you'd have asked me what the world would be like now, I would say that we'd be on a moon base. If you think of the progress, it had already started to tail off in the '80s but





Braben received an OBE as part of the 2014 Queen's Birthday Honours for "services to the UK computer and videogames industry."

THE OPM INTERVIEW

PEOPLE ARE VERY COMPLICATED THINGS TO MOVE AROUND. WE'RE BASICALLY BAGS OF WATER, AND THERE ARE A LOT OF DANGERS.

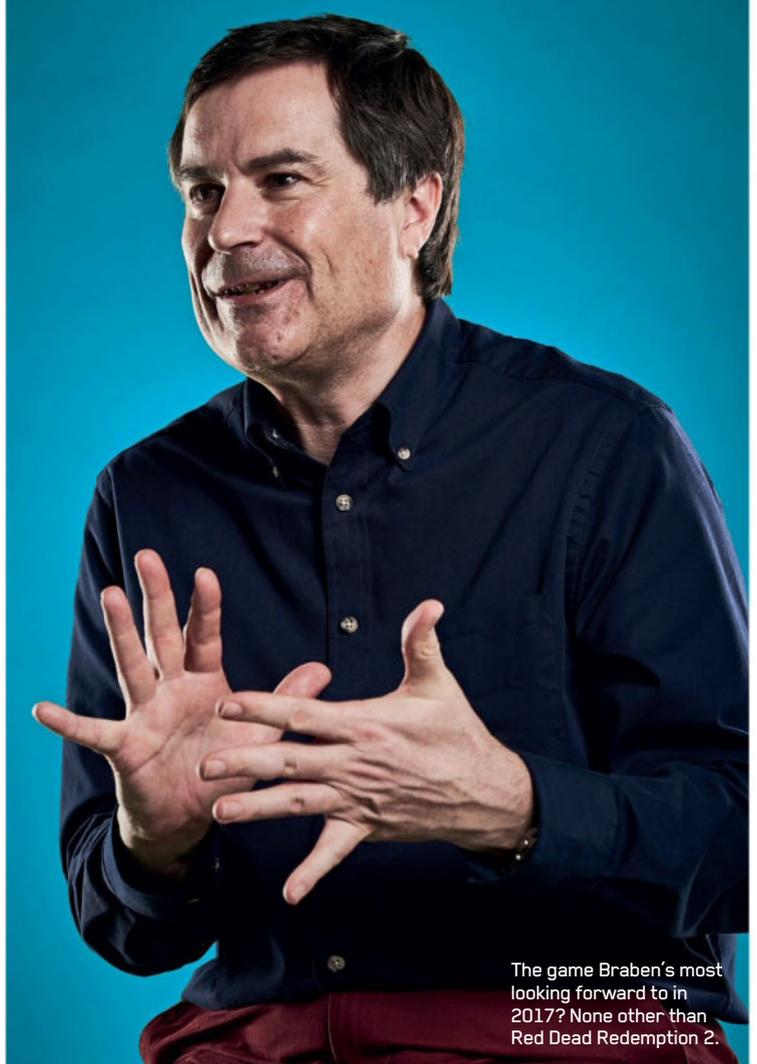
» at least we had the promise of space shuttles and that sort of thing.

In '82 or '83 I remember thinking: "Why hasn't anyone done a 3D game?" There were games that called themselves 3D but they were mostly sprites going bigger and smaller. In '83 I was quite down in the dumps a little bit because the publishers we'd spoken to weren't interested in what we had. They were going: "Oh, it's technically very interesting but will it be a good game?" And we went to see Acorn, and they were the opposite. Acorn was made up of people like us, really. They were enthusiastic. Their offices were messy, not shiny. One of the things I loved about the Acorn offices on Market Hill was that you had to sort of almost go climb past the dustbins to get into it.

And so in '84 I was very upbeat because I thought once we got Elite out there, hopefully there will be enough people [out there], because we'd written the game assuming the audience was quite like us; we wanted it to be quite difficult and we wanted it to be adventurous and exciting – all that sort of thing. I suppose the cynic in me thought something would go wrong, and some things have gone wrong, but they've been little things that we've been able to sort out.

OPM: And what about the future of mankind? Do you think the fantasy of Elite's premise – of us owning spaceships and reaching out into the unknown and trading and all of that – can ever become reality in the far future? Or will it forever remain nothing but fiction?

DB: Sadly, I don't think we'll get to know. A lot of the vision is possible, but one of the key enablers is faster-than-light travel, which I don't see [being cracked] because even though there are some theoretical ways of getting very close to the speed of light, it's very hard to imagine unless there's a huge breakthrough. There are some sorts of ways that things might be possible when you start talking about how



The game Braben's most looking forward to in 2017? None other than Red Dead Redemption 2.

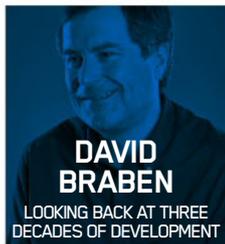


Middle PS4 will be receiving control tweaks to make full use of DualShock 4's features. **Left** Cockpits are full of HUD elements. **Right** Though always-online, you can play alone.

subatomic particles travel, but people are very complicated things to move around. It's not just the vast distances and speed, it's the g-forces as well. We're basically bags of water and we can't take really fast accelerations, so I think there are a lot of dangers that we haven't really faced up to.

The way the story in the game goes, it's sort of bypassed, but we feature other elements in our story; the rise of non-biological routes like AI, for example. It's very hard to imagine that, at some point, that doesn't just become our future. Whether we are somehow the AI ourselves because we're moved onto silicon... whether, Skynet-style, they take over... It's hard to imagine something like that not happening at some

NEED TO KNOW



DAVID BRABEN

LOOKING BACK AT THREE DECADES OF DEVELOPMENT

1984
ELITE

■ Co-developed with fellow University of Cambridge student Ian Bell, Braben becomes one of the biggest names in the industry thanks to the monumental impact of the first *Elite*. The Acorn and BBC Micro sim inspires dozens of games, spawns three sequels and makes a full generation of gamers terrified of docking.

2003
WALLACE & GROMIT
IN PROJECT ZOO

■ Frontier Developments is established in 1994, and the studio initially works on a series of action titles. But the opportunity to make the first *Wallace & Gromit* game for PS2 sees the developer branch into new areas.

2004
DOG'S LIFE

■ Jake the Labrador is the star of this underrated PS2 adventure that sees players smelling their way through brightly coloured locations.

Some have been discovered already: places where the Missing set up something like a base, but they never quite made it because they'd have to have lived for hundreds of years having travelled such a distance. Going right back to the original game, there was a concept of generation ships, which are ships where people set off in the full knowledge that it's going to take generations to make the distance and live while travelling at sub-light speed. Basically travelling on today's technology where you could plausibly, in a few generations, reach a nearby star system, but you've got to completely rely on the fact nothing goes wrong, or at least the things that do go wrong can be repaired en route, because if they're not repaired they're just going to go on and on on that trajectory and never slow down.

OPM: With games now moving away from traditional boxed products and more into the realm of continual services, has *Elite* reached its final form?

DB: I do hope so. I mean, I think the final form varies. It's one of those strange things. If you look at the game today, it's getting so much better – we're putting so many more things in that I think we're moving towards the final game, but it's still a long way away. I'm sure if you asked JK Rowling when she was writing the first *Harry Potter* whether she expected to get the success she got from writing all

point, and I think that would actually enable this sort of future in a bizarre way, because then the ability to fast-travel, or the ability to be hugely long-lived, all becomes possible.

OPM: You're trying to recreate the entire galaxy inside *Elite Dangerous: Horizons*. Does facing such vast constructions every day make you, and us, feel kind of small?

DB: I've been interested in astronomy for a very long time, which has probably come across in some of my games! I find the whole idea of just how tiny the Earth is, even in our solar system, incredibly humbling in the sense of how everything is so small. One of the things that I really wanted to get across – and hopefully we have – is just the vast scale of our galaxy. Even the distance between stars is huge. The very fact that you can travel so fast in the game does shrink it a bit, but it still feels utterly vast. We're trying to get that majesty together at the same time. We've now got scales all the way down, down to where you're driving a little vehicle and you can see that your spaceship itself is actually pretty big; and at the top end of the scale you've just got these ridiculous distances which are mind-boggling, and where the speed of light is actually quite slow.

We've touched on the concept of the Missing. So the Missing are, well... when humanity could first go into space, you could buy, or a group of a hundred people could buy, a vehicle to get on and just head off into the unknown. It would be completely unregulated, and that's essentially what's happening in our game. So quite a lot of them did make it, and they set up much like exploring the US in the 16th/17th/18th Centuries, founding various towns and so on. But quite a lot of those wagon trains never made it, and maybe 50 years or 100 years later someone would say: "Oh, what's all this wreckage here?" Something bad happened to them, whether it was a storm, whether it was being attacked, or sort of thing. I love the concept of the Missing, who are the people who didn't make it.

those books and then all the films... I'm sure things changed a little bit!

We've sort of laid out what our plot is, but we don't know the details. Our unfolding story is very interesting. It's not really storytelling in the traditional sense; it's led by our players. We're creating lots of interesting things and places for the players to take the story to. It's a story that genuinely involves lots and lots of people. PlayStation 4 players actually join us at a great time, because we're just at the beginning of the real story flow.

OPM: You're very proud of the fact that *Elite's* community is responsible for shaping the story through their actions. Is there a risk attached to handing players control of your game's path?

DB: Well, I think we get a lot more richness this way. We've got to have an eye on making sure that we don't end up in a dead end, but I don't think we will. Think of it almost like a role-playing game with us playing the gamesmaster: the players can do completely unexpected things within the framework.

So in terms of how the story unfolds, this is an interesting way to go forward. I find it really exciting. There are a lot of secrets in the game now, and it's very interesting to see how they unfold: how people find them and what people do when they find them.

OPM: You actually had players who located the secret ancient ruins co-ordinates by looking at the teaser trailers and then using the stars in the sky to plot a course to the relevant planet...

DB: Yes. That is incredible, because you're essentially recognising patterns of dots in the sky. It's a real achievement to recognise constellations that don't match our own. The way Commander XDeath, who was the guy to first discover them, managed it was he saw where Andromeda is in the sky and that the stars in front of it were just slightly different to the relative positions that you'd expect, and tried to work out where the image was taken. Our video was actually taken directly from the game – someone in the office did joke that we should paint out some of the stars, but as everyone could see, we didn't.

OPM: A lot of PS4 players might look at *Elite Dangerous: Horizons'* premise and draw comparisons with *No Man's Sky*. Would that be fair? What sets you apart?

DB: They're both space games, obviously, but they're very, very different. Consider first-person shooters – there are so many different versions of first-person shooters which come at things very differently.

Here, the Venn diagram only just intersects. Okay, we have planets and spaceships that travel between them, but the way we do it is so different. *No Man's Sky* doesn't have a lot of the things we have, and there are things in *No Man's Sky* that we don't have.



Planetary exploration via buggies isn't just about slowly driving around empty, desolate wastelands...



» We're trying to do, and I think have very successfully done, a representation of our whole galaxy; the real galaxy. We've not just plucked big numbers, but it's looking at what's there and gradually building it out with a lot of content. No-one's questioned it's beautiful as a game, it's just very different.

I remember a long time ago when talking about an Elite-type game with publishers, they said: "Oh yes, well there are quite a lot of space games around, like Dead Space." And I think I went: "Wait, wait, wait... can we just rewind a bit? Yes it's got the word space in the title, but it's such a different game." If you look at the PR materials you see pictures of space stations. Similarly, Alien: Isolation. They are space games, but once you cut away the top layer they're completely different.

It's like comparing FIFA with Call Of Duty. Yes, they both feature people running around but then very quickly the comparisons start to break. Okay, that's a bit extreme, but speaking of which – Call Of Duty has now come to space. Isn't that interesting and exciting? So I'm trying to look at the parallels, because I think you could just as easily say that the latest Call Of Duty has an overlap in the same way No Man's Sky has. What we're all trying to do is creatively provide a world and tell a story for people to get engaged with, and each one is different and not every one appeals to everybody, whether it's FIFA or COD or Elite.

As a gamer, I actually really like it when games are different. It does annoy me when two games try and copy the same idea, and it does happen from time to time. I won't name them,



Above Back on 5 Jan, Commander DP Sayre became the first Elite Dangerous player to make contact with an alien race – this is the Thargoids ship that was spotted.

but I always think that's a shame. I'd much rather they'd actually blaze their own trail, because if the first game is not really my cup of tea then the next one won't be. Ironically, I felt the last few Call Of Duties were quite same-y – I've not yet played Infinite Warfare because I've been busy playing Elite and another game we're making!

OPM: Given that this is your work can you still play Elite Dangerous: Horizons for fun and enjoy it? Or is it hard to shrug off work mode?

DB: I've played a lot in the Betas so I often end up doing obscure things just to check that they work. But that's a sort of different thing – but I do play a lot in the main game as well as Commander Braben, and I tend to go out to places. I generally go to where there's something new happening and end up chatting to people.

OPM: Can the game still surprise you, two years since it first launched?

DB: I have been surprised! I was delighted by a story that a lot of people wanted which was about the space station Jaques, which is now a long

NEED TO KNOW

2006
THRILLVILLE

■ Having developed RollerCoaster Tycoon 3 on PC, Frontier Developments brings its unique brand of theme park management over to PlayStation 2 (and follows it up the very next year with Thrillville: Off The Rails). In 2016 Frontier also releases Planet Coaster for PC, but a PS4 release sadly isn't on the cards.

2009
RASPBERRY PI

■ Braben helps create the Raspberry Pi Foundation, a charity that encourages computer science teaching to get more people into coding. The foundation also develops the tiny Raspberry Pi computer, which almost instantly turns into a massive success.

2014
ELITE: DANGEROUS

■ Kickstarted back in the tail end of 2012, pre-release builds of the fourth Elite game are made available to backers in 2013 but the full game's launch takes place in December 2014. The massively multiplayer adventure continues to expand with major patches (the Horizons series of expansions adds planetary landings, for instance) and a PS4 version is announced in Dec '16.

announcing features, but the way I'd like to frame it is just by looking at the things that we've added over time. When the game was very first released on PC you couldn't go down to planet surfaces. It's really because I wanted the experience to be a good one and hopefully a rich one, and there were a lot of things that we needed to do to make that possible. There are a lot of things that we have already talked about that are somewhere in our future road map, without saying how far off: planets with atmospheres, gas giants and just straightforward richness of interaction between the players.

Multi-crew will come to PlayStation, where you've got multiple people in the same ship. That's a very interesting experience as a player, just from the social side of it and going exploring. Think of it in terms of different roles that are in the ship: controlling the helm, controlling the weapons... I don't want to go too deeply because obviously there's a lot that we're going to talk about [later], but, yes, you'll be able to work together on the ship. I also imagine there's a mentoring role here as well, where one person can help out. You could just go along almost like a passenger to see what they're doing, how they're doing it, and to see some of the things that they can see. If you're just a beginner, that's a fun way of learning.

And there are aliens. That will change the way a lot of people choose to play the game because we will see the rise in the military and we may see people looking at the world differently. There's a current sort of a



Above Asteroid belts make for great ambush zones, but one careless manoeuvre can easily wipe your ship.

way away in this area called Colonia. We had about 40,000 players travelling out there taking part in a Community Goal to supply the station. That's 12 hours solid gameplay, just to get there, so to have so many people wanting to take part in what I thought was a very obscure Community Goal was really good, because it shows the level of excitement and engagement and also what we've been trying to do is make sure we're providing the things that those people want to make the game rich.

The rise of strange things happening around Merope and Maia in the Pleiades is also exciting because there's a big story happening there. I've gone there – was there right on the first barnacle and met quite a lot of players – and it's bizarre because it's not a surprise to me because I know what's there, but in terms of meeting people I find it really interesting just chatting, seeing what they think and why they came. My surprise comes from the ingenuity of players to solve puzzles. We're making things in the game now that are way harder than we would have done a while back, just to set a challenge to people.

OPM: You've got more features planned for future updates, including multi-crew ships – could you go into more details about what we can expect to see being added to Elite?

DB: Well, I do want to be careful about

ALIENS WILL CHANGE THE WAY A LOT OF PEOPLE CHOOSE TO PLAY THE GAME, BECAUSE WE WILL SEE THE RISE IN THE MILITARY.

cold war, almost, between the Empire and the Federation, which is hotting up a bit at the moment. People don't really know where the aliens are going to go, but then as that gradually changes... how will that change the game?

OPM: And given all this peering into the future, what would you want, as a developer, from the next PlayStation console?

DB: A machine that has plans for the future built into it, because the world of technology is continuing to change. Looking at what Sony is doing now with PlayStation 4 Pro is very interesting, where you've actually got two machines that are compatible but at a different power point, because what that enables Sony to do in a really good way is to plug in to the rapid evolution of technology. It doesn't have to be annual – it could be a two-year, three-year tick.

I find it quite frustrating when my games library becomes obsolete, but I can't bring myself to throw it away. When do you disconnect your games machines of the older generation? To be able to play old games is great. If you think of it that way, and think of PS4 Pro as being backwards-compatible, that is a lovely trajectory. At some point in the far future, it could almost end up with minimum spec [situations]: so this game needs PlayStation Pro 1 or higher, for example. I'd rather it did that.

At some point there might be a PS5, but this is a good way of extending cycle in a way that doesn't punish people, because we've got some very big, very high-demand technologies coming like 4K, 8K, VR and AR, which are very, very power hungry. It future-proofs the technology.

The other thing I'd like to see is much more ability to cross-play outside the domain, with other players, because there's this whole "Oh, I'm playing on PlayStation" barrier and frustration. Things are changing like that in a really good way. ■





JURASSIC WELD

1,000 years after the apocalypse, the old world and the new collide. As Guerrilla Games prepares to launch its epic action-RPG, Ben Tyrer uncovers the mysteries of [Horizon Zero Dawn](#)

HORIZON ZERO DAWN



HORIZON ZERO DAWN



fter stealing the show at E3 two years on the trot with colossal robo-dinos and a sumptuously verdant open world, you wouldn't think that spying a bit of ice in Horizon Zero Dawn would be so captivating. Yet here we are getting to grips with future PS4 superstar Aloy... and admiring a subtly wintry wilderness with astonishment. Cobalt reeds poke out in the

carbonite-clad Han Solo.

Underestimate it at your peril.

Fortunately, the same can be said of Aloy. We dash forward off our rocky perch, landing with a tangible thud before rolling forward into tall grass. This Bellow fellow's no slouch, though, and it isn't enough to shake off his gaze. We decide to 'brute force' our way out of this situation, pulling back a flaming arrow and firing. The arrow hurtles at his back and might as well be a matchstick, for all the good it does. We're in for the long haul with this one.

Freeze-frame; record scratch. You're probably wondering how we ended up in this situation. Fear not – there's plenty of context to be gained from our huge, four-hour hands-on with Horizon. Indeed, this long journey shows us every fibre of Guerrilla's deftly woven creation. Two different futures – the apocalypse and a millennium after it – combine into a stunning vision of life after the collapse of civilization. And it all starts with a little flame-haired baby and her guardian...

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

We're coming into this world as fresh as the freckled orphan, our

"THE ARROW HURTLES AT THE BELLOWBACK, BUT IT MIGHT AS WELL BE A MATCHSTICK."

foreground. Fog lingers in the distance, although it's not thick enough to obscure trees that stretch their limbs into the far beyond. Frosty clouds seem to swirl around Aloy's feet and – oh, this isn't good.

Turns out, in our snow-struck dilly-dallying, we've caught the attention of a Bellowback. A giant kangaroo-like machine with an unmissable sac of liquid on its back (and throat), it looks closer to a big, mechanical marsupial than the towering steel-osaurs we've previously encountered in Horizon. Still, having the capacity to spit out dangerous fluids from a decent distance means it'll turn Aloy a few degrees colder than a



parallel stories starting with would-be protector Rost taking her high into the mountainous region of Mother's Embrace, where she'll be given the name 'Aloy'. Despite the pomp and circumstance of this moment, it's clear they're not welcome here.

These two are Outcasts of the Nora tribe, a matriarchy who have banished our tiny hero, leaving her to grizzled veteran Rost. The pair can live within the Nora's walls but are forbidden to talk with any of the tribe's people. (Yep, not even a casual 'Alright, mate?')

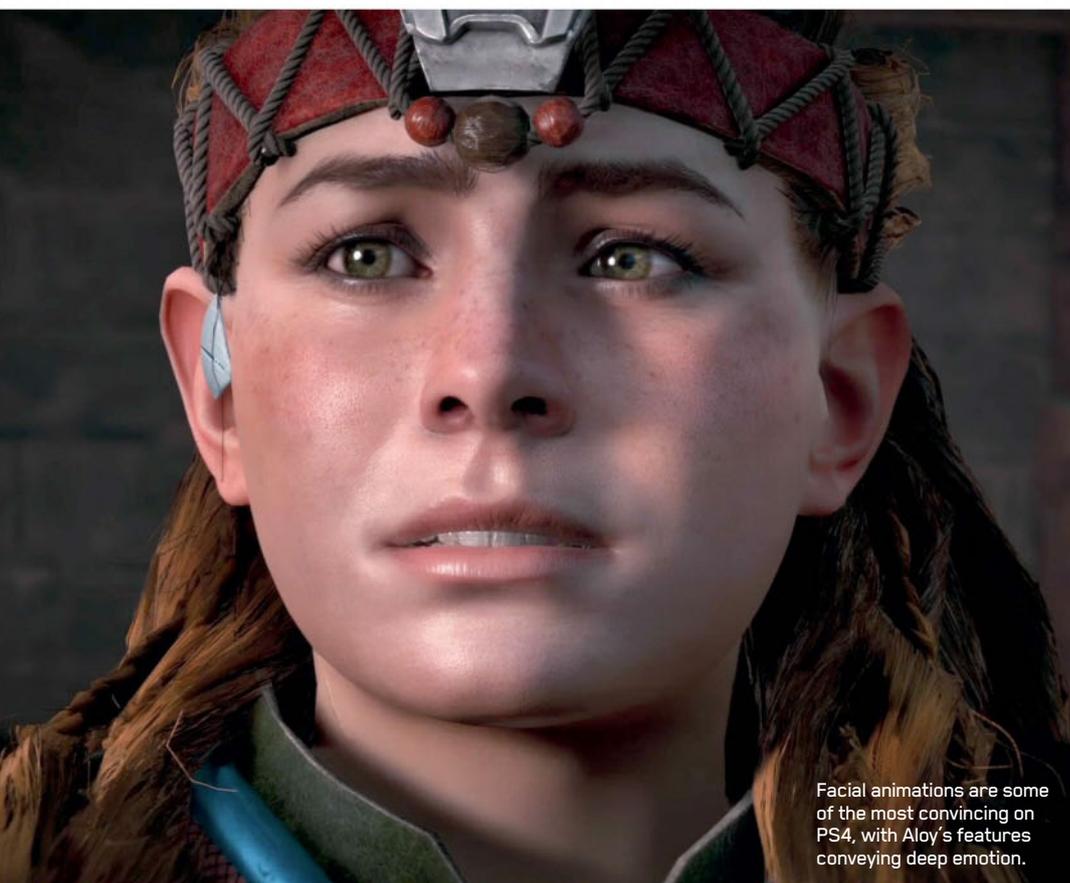
It's a suitably refreshing twist on what you might expect from a game set after the end of the world. The High Matriarchs of the Nora are strong leaders, and their cultural practices are



Aloy can buy different outfits and then modify them with material she discovers. One that will keep her warm is a good start.



This is High Matriarch Teersa, one of the few Nora who show some kindness to Aloy.



Facial animations are some of the most convincing on PS4, with Aloy's features conveying deep emotion.



RAIN OR SHINE

MATHIJS DE JONG
GAME DIRECTOR

OPM: How did you approach designing the ecotopes, and how will they affect gameplay in Horizon Zero Dawn?

Mathijs de Jong: I think in general we have a very elaborate weather system, which is way more sophisticated than you would think when you first see it. For example, we have a very advanced cloud rendering system as well as a day/night cycle and dynamic weather, which are very smooth in a way. But it doesn't necessarily directly impact gameplay other than visually... The weather system is more [about the] impairing of vision; for example, at night, robots can be harder to see but also can have lots of light and sparks when you shoot at them, so there's a bit of a balance there. In general, things feel more dangerous when your vision is more limited. And the same's true with the weather system. We have - in a region that you haven't played yet - dust storms as well, which really limit the visibility.

HORIZON ZERO DAWN

genuinely fascinating. Our early glimpses show how much importance they place on the role of the mother in their society, and lead writer John Gonzalez explains how this will affect Aloy. “To have someone who doesn’t know where she comes from in that culture seemed uniquely painful. And that I think that was why... it had interest for us.”

FIRST STEPS

Jumping forward six years, we see how this seclusion is already impacting Aloy’s life. Desperate to fit in, she

natural, lithe. Sensing a real weight to her animations, we clamber through rocky passages to discover that we’re actually in the subterranean ruins of the Old World. We spy dusty, dank bookshelves and computer screens slanting upwards from desks like crooked teeth. It’s like being trapped in a museum’s maw overnight, an eerie quietness threatening to roar at any moment. Fortunately for our heart rate, we’re the only living thing prowling around the ruins (barring the occasional rat), but then an odd blinking draws our attention to the

“THE FOCUS DEVICE IS A POWERFUL PIECE OF TECHNOLOGY THAT ALOY CLIPS ONTO HER EAR.”

spies on other children picking berries and runs over to be part of their group – only to be rejected emphatically by everyone. She runs away in a flood of tears, unaware that she is about to tumble directly onto the discovery of her life... but more literally, into a nearby cave.

Once she hits the ground, we finally get to take control of Aloy for the first time. Her movements are uncanny:

floor. It’s the Focus Device, a powerful piece of technology that bathes the room in a warm neon purple when Aloy clips it onto her ear.

The way ahead lit up in violet, the remarkably brave six-year-old curiously examines a dead, heavily decomposing body, and jumps back when the Focus Device projects a hologram. It’s a father’s poignant message to his son, and for a moment

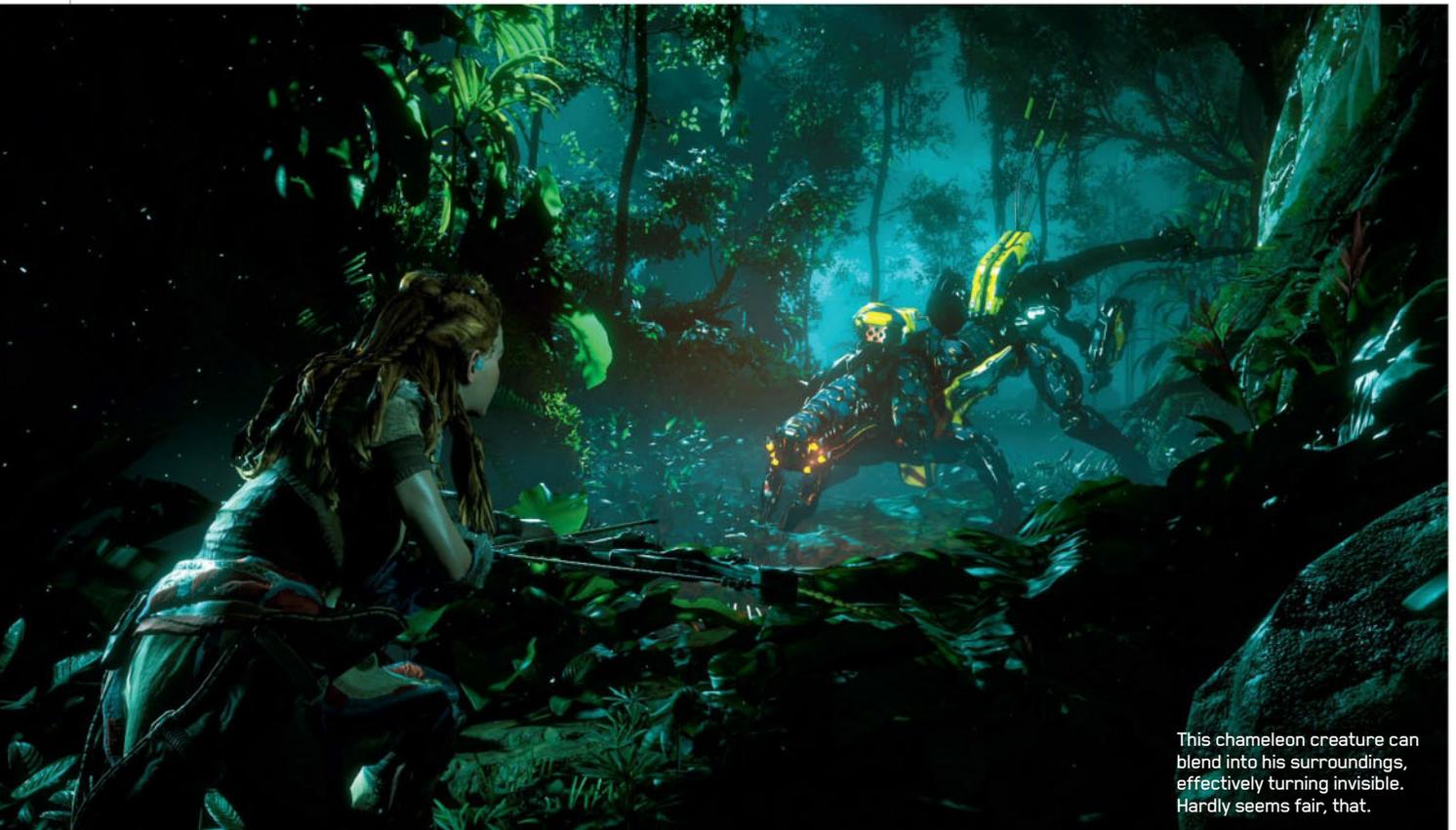


These creepy creations are part of a plan to corrupt the machines that roam the world. How unfriendly.

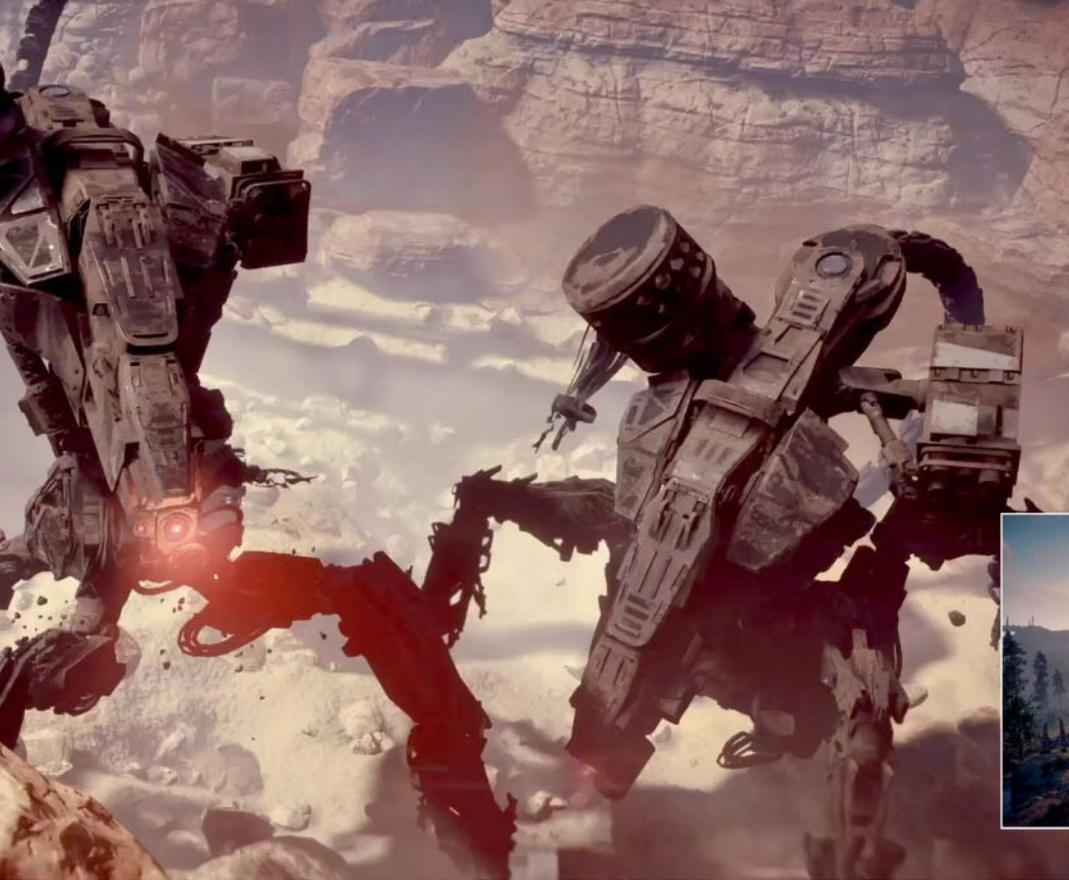


You can identify the Nora by the blue face paint some members of the tribe wear.

060



This chameleon creature can blend into his surroundings, effectively turning invisible. Hardly seems fair, that.



Mesmerising vistas are a common sight as you make your way through the map.



This enemy tribe seems to prefer the more arid corners of Horizon's landscapes.

we're taken back ten centuries to 2066. More corpses litter the hallways of this forgotten tomb, each triggering holograms revealing little details about what happened to the world as we know it. One audio log orator mentions New Year's Eve. Another refuses to go quietly into death and we hear him shoot himself. Another regrets not travelling while they had the chance. These quiet moments of reflection start to paint a picture of the lost world that spawned Aloy's.

Eventually, we hear the reassuring rasp of our foster-father Rost's voice and follow it. Like any fretting parent, he's just happy to see Aloy is okay. It's the first sign of a true affection between the pair; an affection that

only deepens as they embark on their first hunt as a duo.

SLAY TOGETHER

The quest is a clever fusion of tutorial and character building. As Rost teaches Aloy the basics – how to hide in tall grass, how to distract robots with rocks, how to craft arrows – we see how strong the bond is between the two. Aloy is quick to learn and keen to pay attention, but, importantly, she's also willing to stand up for herself. As she and Rost slowly inch their way through a pack of one-eyed Watchers, they spot an injured Nora tribesman. Our girl's



WORLDS APART

JOHN GONZALEZ
LEAD WRITER

OPM: You've had to design two different versions of the future, one in the far future and one in 2066. How did you approach that?

John Gonzalez: One of the things that really attracted me to the project was this kind of idea. How exactly did this world, that has a juxtaposition of elements that you normally wouldn't expect to occur together, evolve? How do you end up having people who are living at a tribal level alongside these high-tech beasts? Why is it that they do not have high tech themselves? And so that's where we actually began – in the ancient past. The ancient past of these characters, of course, is actually in our future. So that was really interesting, imagining our world from where we are now, forward to some kind of cataclysmic event, and then how this world arises from that. And there are a lot of deep threats as you play the game and you go and discover. As you play this game through to conclusion, you will understand a lot about where Aloy came from, what her origins are, who her parents were, things like that. You're going to understand how this world came to be and I'm not going to say that every single mystery is going to be solved, because personally I think it's best when there's still some kind of mystery. You solve a mystery, but that gives you an even greater vantage onto a mystery beyond it.

HORIZON ZERO DAWN



While the Nora's style is practical, futuro-Village Person chic is easily our favourite.

» desperate to help, but Rost forbids it. As she runs ahead, all he can do is fumble for her bow as she goes, leaving Aloy unprotected and sneaking determinedly towards the fallen Nora.

The Focus Device is a handy bit of tech that's useful for more than just scanning dead guys. A click of **RB** gives the ginger hunter information on the creatures of the world and the ability to tag them so she can follow their movements and, crucially, see their patrol paths. As Watchers stalk the grassy field that separates Aloy and the other Nora, she sees where they'll move right, making stealth an enjoyable breeze. In no time at all she's saving the day, leading the tribesman to safety as he exclaims, "How are you doing that?" Looks like the Focus Device is destined to be the hot new gadget of the season.

Rost isn't happy. While he now understands the power of her device, he reminds Aloy that as Outcasts, they'll land other Nora in trouble just for talking to them. That's a pretty heavy concept for a six-year-old to come to terms with.

The end of the first hunt introduces a decision system called Flashpoints. As Aloy slinks back to her house, a rock crashes into her head. Bleeding, she looks up at the group of Nora youngsters she wanted to join earlier,

who are glaring down at her with disgust. A blond boy called Bast hisses "No-Mother!" at our intrepid warrior before flinging another stone, but this time, she catches it. Three options appear: 'Head', 'Heart', and 'Fist'.



"A DECISION SYSTEM CALLED FLASHPOINTS WILL HAVE AN EFFECT ON THE STORY."

If you plump for 'Heart', Aloy shows compassion and drops the projectile. Go with the fist and she'll fling the rock right back at his stupid face. We decide that using our head is the best way to go. Aloy hurls the rock back, but aims at his hand, to scare him away. This will have an effect on the story later on down the line, but for now, Bast runs off with his tail firmly between his legs. Unlike most moral choices, each aspect here feels true to what the character might do in that situation, with our decision a gentle guiding hand that tips Aloy towards a different identity. Drake has his quips, but Aloy has substance.

Through a Rocky-esque training montage, we watch Aloy's years-

long education, as she aims to become the champion of the Proving, a tribal ritual that might shed light on her hidden past. For now, we're skipped forward a few missions and have a chance to leave the Nora homestead. Should we head north, east or west? The map, shrouded in clouds, gives us little indication of what lies ahead. Let's find out.

STRIDERS IN THE STORM

Erm, we should probably sort out a ride first. A quest marker directs us to another newly revealed robo-creature, the Strider. A sleek, colt-like machine, we find it grazing conveniently close to the gates of the Nora's home. As the dynamic weather system



On a few occasions, you'll spot towering monoliths that have succumbed to the passing of time. Let's hope they stay dead.

CHUMS AND SCUMS

You don't just have to watch out for robo-saurs: not every human is your friend



MAJOR VILLAIN

No, Guerrilla hasn't got lazy when it comes to names, it's just being very quiet when pressed about this terrifying bloke. He's the leader of an unnamed tribe which has access to Focus Devices like Aloy's, and he plays a role in the corruption that is currently affecting the machines. He's got his monologuing game down too, hissing: "From the depths, I will raise an army. A storm of shadows to take back what's ours!"



SILENS

During our tour of the Amsterdam studio, we spy concept art for this character that names him as "Silens." We don't know if he's actually deadly, but he is a curious figure who pays close attention to Aloy's adventures. "You've come a long way since the Citadel," he tells her via a holographic chat. Is he friend or foe? He looks to be a little more ambiguous than either of those simple labels imply.



OLARA

A member of the Nora tribe who also tasks you with one of the game's early sidequests: to find her Outcast brother. It's an intriguing aside, as you hunt him down by tracking blood trails from his camp, and your mission ends in a surprisingly touching fashion. Like the other settlers who appear during early quests, Olara doesn't mind risking punishment for talking to an Outcast, so she's alright in our book.



ROST

Aloy's father figure is a bit like Obi-Wan Kenobi. He's wise, patient and has seen some pretty grim stuff in his lifetime. Even before the corruption starts affecting the robots, they will attack wandering humans, so he trains munchkin Aloy how to avoid, trick and hunt them, and he warns her their power is to be respected. As cool as he is, let's face it: as Aloy's mentor, Rost is almost certain to die.

HORIZON ZERO DAWN



The Bellowback has different liquids in its sacs, with some flinging fire instead of ice.

▶ kicks in, rain whips across the screen, lending a grim atmosphere as we sneak up behind the horse-bot. Game director Mathijs de Jonge explains the subtleties of the system. “We had lightning strikes that would randomly hit enemies or randomly hit the player, but it felt unfair because you have no control over it. It just naturally happens and suddenly you have a lot of damage. So we took that out in the end.” We can confirm that Aloy doesn’t take a bolt to the noggin, which means we easily override (read: hack) the oblivious Strider with our multi-purpose spear and gallop away from our home, sour home.

We decide to head out west and, as we trot away from the towering mountains we’re accustomed to, the landscape shifts into fluttery forestry, the rain melting away into a calm night. There’s a whiff of Middle-Earth’s grand vistas as we forge ahead along our path. Whatever brief peace we find, however, shatters as we stumble upon three corpses (the body

count’s already getting high) in the road and a man sitting next to them.

ALOYED ASSAULT

His name is Nil and he informs us that the road is dangerous thanks to “a killer – the kind that gives honest killers a bad name.” Turns out we’re trundling into an area riddled with bandits, who’ll attack Aloy with no warning. Take out their campsite nearby and you’ll make life easier. Tracking them down is easy. An indicative blue icon appears on the radar, leading us to trek up blustery mountains. We ditch our Strider for stealth and start to plan our silent assault.

We can’t help but think of Far Cry’s outposts here. **R3**

lights up our earpiece and out flows the geometric bubble of Focus mode, which enables us to tag unaware baddies. Further into the camp, we clock our points of interest: a gaggle of Nora prisoners surrounded by several large enemies sporting massive heavy weapons called Firespitters, which... spit fire. Again, like Far Cry, how you approach the camp’s forces is entirely up to you. Softly, softly is our initial idea. We time our shots perfectly, using Aloy’s arrows to thin the crowd of patrolling

The Nora aren’t the only tribe. The Carja occupy the city of Meridian and appear to be allies of Aloy’s.

miscreants, then we free the Nora from their restraints.

But we can’t resist having a go with the Firespitter. All we need to do is take out the brute wielding it (a problem best solved with Aloy’s slingshot and a few grenade-esque Blast Bombs) and wrench it from his still-warm death-grip. It’s a thrilling weapon, slung by the waist, deadly sparks fizzing from the barrel towards anyone unfortunate enough to be on the wrong side of it. It’s not long before every bandit falls foul of our deadly new toy.

Don’t think if a machine isn’t corrupted it’s safe. Like the animals they’re modelled on, they will hunt you down if you’re not careful.



WARRIOR WOMEN

JAN-BART VAN BEEK
ART DIRECTOR

OPM: When it came to designing Aloy's character, what were the influences?

Jan-Bart van Beek: That changed over time. When we initially started... we're all dudes, so our references are things like Terminator with Sarah Connor, and Ripley. Those are our big heroines from the '80s and '90s, and as we were developing, other tones also come across. Maybe there are certain other characters... I guess Katniss was somewhat inspirational, and there was a little bit of Ygritte in there. Those things happen as things start developing. You start seeing certain traits in new female characters, that maybe sometimes work and sometimes don't work. Ultimately the main thing was making sure that she was her own unique character and not necessarily clearly borrowed from somewhere else, but had her own unique identity.



The inky red cloud that lingers around the robos is the visual sign of the corruption.

"WE CAN'T RESIST HAVING A GO WITH THE FIRESPITTER... IT'S A THRILLING WEAPON."

The battle with the bandits is an unexpectedly lively section, and one clearly influenced by the successes of other open-world games – bespoke, tightly-constructed action breaking up free exploration. Like those jaw-loosening monster duels, adaptation is key and reacting to a challenging situation keeps the adrenaline flowing as fast as Aloy's slipstream.

TEST YOUR MIGHT

With the camp now safely in the hands of the Nora, we push further forwards to the west, away from the

mountains and into the wintry plains around their base. Squinting up at a tent on a hillside above us, curiosity takes hold and we climb up to a discover the Valleymeet Keeper, who offers a series of time trials for Aloy to sharpen her skills. We fancy seeing how well we measure up. Despite his nervy nature – he's quick to assure Aloy that he has no quarrel with the Nora – he sets us a test: take out Striders by exploding the canisters on their backs. There's both valuable XP and loot to earn, depending on how quickly we nail the Fire Fight Trial.

Wasting no time, we rush towards the rope that leads to the hunting grounds as the clock starts ticking.

We go into Focus mode immediately to scan the distance for any roaming Striders. Spotting one, we ghost into the tall grass nearby for a bit of a cover and ready our Fire Arrow. This is almost too easy as we slow down time and hit a bullseye on the canister. Fire jets out in tiny streams before the mother of all explosions engulfs everything we see. It's like being at the centre of an atomic blast. We have become death, destroyer of Striders. ➤

HORIZON ZERO DAWN

Unfortunately, this means any other Striders in the area know we're here and decide to scarpers sharpish. It gives us a chance to catch our breath and look out across the landscape. Cobalt reeds. Light fog. And Aloy's feet swept up suddenly in a frozen cascade, that blasted Bellowback glinting at the other end of it.

AIN'T NO BELLOWBACK GIRL

It's a timely test of all our skills. While one Fire Arrow barely bothers the hefty machine, a few more to the pouches around the neck see it burst into flames underneath its armour plating. Aloy's nimbleness helps, too. We dart and dash around its charge attacks and, using some craggy rocks that naturally jut out of the ground, we can clamber above the creature to get the height advantage.

Thanks to the Hunter Reflexes upgrade we've previously unlocked, every time we jump, time slows to a sticky crawl. Couple that with the few



These guards aren't from around here – anyone sensible would have a top on.

disintegrates. We breathe a sigh of relief and excitement. And forget all about our Fire Fight Trial.

A NEW DAWN

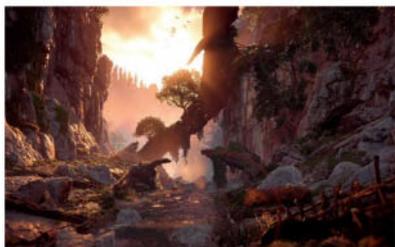
In all honesty, the Bellowback is a mid-tier enemy. He's challenging, but compared to the looming Thunderjaw encountered back in our cover feature in #113, he isn't the ultimate adversary,

“THE KIND OF EVENTS OTHER GAMES ARE BUILT AROUND COME EVERY OTHER MINUTE.”

extra feet we give ourselves over the Bellowback and we place a few more arrows where it hurts. But this approach is merely whittling at his health. A Blast Bomb ought to take a chunk out of him.

Whoosh. A mesmerising, lava-like flame envelops the innards of the poor robo-roo, as we start to notice scorch marks where our arrows are landing. Sensing its weakening state, we equip the Ropercaster – which lets us shoot tethers into targets – and start to pin our prey down.

Despite a frantic struggle, there's little the panicking creature can do. We leap past its last-ditch attacks to go in for a close kill. Aloy pirouettes through the air with her spear, thundering it down into her foe, which shatters into pieces. Sparks fly; armour



Ginger snaps! You'll be able to take pictures of the world thanks to a Photo mode.

or the most complex to puzzle out. Yet Horizon's chief pleasure is taking these seemingly ordinary encounters and making them feel monumental. We're taking on your average, only relatively-intimidating mecha-marsupial, but Guerrilla's poured care into every destructible piece of the beast, each sinew of Aloy's bowstring-drawing arm, and even the individual tiny sparks dancing along the doomed machine's metal plates. The unbelievable attention to detail in world-building means even learning the controls or grinding Striders are water cooler moments. They're the kinds of events other games build themselves around – but it's every other minute in Horizon Zero Dawn.

Every square inch of the worlds, above ground and below, fascinates us, and the further we push on into the enormous wilderness, the more we discover. Each sliver, cell and fragment comes together to create a grand whole that marries Guerrilla's technical excellence with a story and environment that is on course to surpass anything we thought possible.

The futures might be uncertain in Horizon Zero Dawn, but on the strength of what we've experienced? It's anything but for us. ■

If this isn't a crazy boss fight that'll have us tearing out our shiny red hair, we'll eat our slingshot.





The dynamic day/night cycle means hunting after dark requires drastically different tactics.



LAND CRAFTED

MICHEL VAN DER LEEUW
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

OPM: Horizon's been in development for six or seven years now. How has it changed over time?

Michiel van der Leeuw: I don't think it has changed, but there were so many unanswered questions when we started. I mean: how much RPG? How much action? How are we going to balance these things? How are we going to build these things into one world? Because the juxtaposition of the future, sci-fi element and the beauty of this open world are difficult to get into one concept that makes it believable. I think it was more like, there's a thousand knobs we have to

tweak to get something that feels like it's a coherent whole. So I don't think it has changed much. It's more like implementing the vision was really, really quite tricky.



Welcome to the Mushroom Kingdom

Matthew Pellett visits the home of **The Elder Scrolls Online** to witness **Morrowind**'s long-awaited appearance on PlayStation



TESO: MORROWIND



TESO: MORROWIND



ne word has been looming large over The Elder Scrolls ever since the franchise arrived on PlayStation. More powerful than the strongest of Dragon Shouts belled out in Skyrim is the name of the game that many veterans consider to be the pinnacle of the series: Morrowind.

Not heard of it? Now approaching its 15th anniversary, The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind skipped PlayStation when it first launched back in 2002, but that didn't stop it from establishing the framework for all subsequent open-world role-playing games. Morrowind was a landmark event in the history of gaming, one that continues to outshine both Oblivion and Skyrim, and thanks to The Elder Scrolls Online its legacy will finally arrive on PS4 — not as a remake or a reimagining of the PC and Xbox original, but as an all-new game set 700 years before the events of TES III.

It's due on 6 June 2017, three days before TESO's two-year anniversary on PS4. Sold not through the in-game Crown Store as per every other slice of DLC, but either as a standalone boxed game for newcomers (one that will also include the base TESO: Tamriel Unlimited adventure), or as a premium expansion via PS4's Store for existing Tamriel travellers, The Elder Scrolls Online: Morrowind is the next major story chapter for The Elder Scrolls.

"It's an homage," says creative director Rich Lambert. Yet as we begin to unpick everything that's coming as part of Morrowind's offering during a day-long visit to developer Zenimax Online Studios, the h-word feels like it's underselling it somewhat. An homage would suggest a fairly straight



cut-and-paste job of the world, populated with a few score missions and some new loot. Yet 30+ hours of questing, radical new competitive multiplayer gametypes, the first additional character class and much more besides, all taking place in a ground-up redesign of the island of Vvardenfell, by far and away the largest single TESO province yet seen? At the very least this is a Destiny: The Taken King-sized overhaul, and even that estimate seems woefully small.

A LIFE LESS WARDENARY

Push aside the headline attraction that is the entirety of the island of Vvardenfell for a moment and Morrowind's fresh features are pretty revelatory for the popular MMO. Take Battlegrounds, a player-versus-player gametype that pits three teams of four against one another.

It's a stark change of pace from TESO's current competitive multiplayer offering: whereas





Battlegrounds is a new, fast-paced PvP mode in which three four-player teams fight for victory.



One Tamriel to rule them all

A closer look at last year's triumphant update

A lot has changed since we originally passed judgement on The Elder Scrolls Online. The faltering MMO that first launched in June 2015 is no more thanks to a year of steady patches and upgrades, all building up to the grand launch of One Tamriel last October.

Totally obliterating any unaddressed complaints still lingering from our 5/10 review in OPM #112, the free One Tamriel update has now redefined the MMO: killing off Alliance restrictions, auto-leveling characters so they can cope with combat in any zone, and letting you explore the game in the order you choose, with players able to pick the quests and travel to the locations they want to.

On top of all that, One Tamriel added duelling, new Ultimates for weapon skill lines, Event systems, a raft of new Crown Store items and the not-so-tiny addition of a revamped Craglorn brimming with single-player content. The main reason why June's Morrowind chapter isn't aiming to fix The Elder Scrolls Online's problems and change its mechanics? Simply because One Tamriel has done much of that heavy lifting already.

What Morrowind can do, however, is pull departed players back into the game (not to mention attract a new crowd altogether) who can then discover the new and improved TESO first-hand – players can jump between Morrowind and the base game at will.

“I KNOW PEOPLE WHO JUST PLAY THROUGH THE MAIN STORY AND THEN ARE DONE.”

Cyrodiil's large-scale battles are giant wars capable of swallowing evenings, Battlegrounds are quickfire hits topping out at 15 minutes per game. And rather than taking place in a sprawling world where players can scarp from danger, intimately small arenas with few places to hide guarantee fast, in-your-face action from the off. As for those three teams? Alliances mean nothing here – you may team with whomever you want, as it's all for fun. Well, fun and loot and leaderboard glory, that is. Three modes are due at launch (currently pegged as Team Deathmatch, King Of

The Hill and Capture The Flag, though things could still change), with more expected later on in future updates and as part of quarterly content packs.

While not everybody plays TESO for its multiplayer (“I know people who just sit down and play through the main story and bigger quests for, maybe, 60 or 70 hours and then they're done,” says game director Matt Firor), one addition that should be on all radars is the surprise emergence of another character class – something many thought they'd never see.

The new creation is the Warden, and it's a nature-loving blend of Druid,

Hunter and Ranger tropes that wields water and plant magic and calls upon spirit animals for aid. Like the rest of TESO's character classes the Warden's skillsets are split into three key roles: the tank-like Winter's Embrace line, the healing-focused Green Balance abilities and the damage-centric Animal Companion moves.

Expect castable blizzards, runes that teleport enemies, conjured healing forests and even friendly cliff racers and stamina- or magika-sapping bull netches. Oh, and get ready for what's surely the finest Ultimate in the game so far: the Wild Guardian grizzly bear, which stays by your side once cast, eats enemies for breakfast and only disappears if it's killed. Nice one, Yogi.

CLOCKING OFF

Both Battlegrounds and the Warden are game-changers, however it's our hands-off tour of Vvardenfell itself that has us most excited. As big fans of TES III (sorry Lord Sony, we did

House of Vvards

An at-a-glance guide to the improved world of TES III: Morrowind



1



Seyda Neen

Still the Gateway to Morrowind

Here's a sight that should be instantly familiar to anyone who played *The Elder Scrolls III* a full 15 years ago: Seyda Neen is the first place you visit when you step off the boat. The same is true in *The Elder Scrolls Online's* take on Morrowind, too: after a tutorial zone elsewhere (Zenimax Online Studios isn't saying where just yet), the port town also introduces you to the island of Vvardenfell – and is home to the ancestor of a familiar character who tries to welcome you in exactly the same manner...

2



Balmora

Lose yourself in Vvardenfell's stone forest

The second largest town in Vvardenfell, the city of Balmora is bisected by the Odai River and has four main districts. Located in the superbly named West Gash region of the island, it was a keystone point for multiple quests in *The Elder Scrolls III* – though returning fans will see it's far lushier than before, having not yet had the life choked out of it by the Ghostfence. Of the five great Houses of Morrowind (TESO is set in the early days of the Sixth House's rise), the settlement is affiliated with House Hlaalu.

3



Ald'ruhn

The town where everyone's a bit crabby

Long before both *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* and *The Elder Scrolls Online*, a giant Emperor land-crab named Skar roamed the Ashlands. When Skar was eventually slain, a settlement was formed around its carcass and beneath the solid shell. More than a simple burrow, Under-Skar quickly became a great base for House Redoran, and the city attracted enough Dunmer to become one of the busiest settlements in all of Vvardenfell. Cue all the Genji: Days Of The Blade flashbacks...

4



Ashlands

The early days of the fiery wastelands

You don't need a geology degree to understand why the area cupping the base of Vvardenfell's volatile volcano, the Red Mountain, is known as the Ashlands. But compare *The Elder Scrolls III's* map (right) with that of *The Elder Scrolls Online's* depiction of Morrowind and you'll see that the Ashlands are set to be much smaller on PS4 – the result of fewer volcanic eruptions due to TESO being set over 700 years in the past. Warning: the Red Mountain *will* erupt deep in the main quest...

5



Sadrith Mora

Morrowind's wizards are fungis

The district seat of House Telvanni is home to the Telvanni wizards, and the mushrooms are dead giveaways of their power. The larger the plants growing around a tower, the stronger the wizard inside – that Redwood-like central growth with multiple, parasol-esque toadstool offshoots is clearly housing the mightiest, shroomiest wizard of all. Sadrith Mora's also an island settlement in the Zafirbel Bay, meaning you can't simply stroll into the area from Vvardenfell's mainland.

6



Vivec City

Discover the capital before it was finished

Morrowind's Dunmer worship the three gods of The Tribunal: Almalexia, Sotha Sil and Vivec. It's Vivec who's the focus of TESO: Morrowind's main story – the warrior-poet is severely ill and it's up to you to cure him during the main questline. The infamously sprawling Vivec City is actually still under construction during TESO, meaning the majority of cantons are covered in scaffolding, and a huge moonlet stone floating above the city will fall and crush the capital if Vivec grows much weaker...



The Imm

TESO: MORROWIND

“THE CHANCE TO REVISIT OLD LOCATIONS TRIGGERS WAVES OF NOSTALGIC EUPHORIA.”



There's no need to fear the skies - Morrowind's dreaded cliff racers won't be returning enemies.

➤ cheat on you in a former generation), the chance to revisit old favourite locations that have been rebuilt and renovated thanks to two generations' worth of improved console hardware triggers waves of nostalgic euphoria.

Better still, this isn't Morrowind exactly as we remember it, but tweaked and reimagined to account for the different time period. As we pick through the world we see that Vivec City is only partly founded, with trenches dredged in the seabed indicating where future cantons will be erected, and the oppressive Ghostfence that sliced across Vvardenfell's surface like angry scars is nowhere to be seen. Rediscovering routes ingrained deep in memory banks is made all the more enjoyable by the added bonus of picking out subtle differences and stumbling over Easter eggs.

The infamous Clockwork City returns too. The dizzying labyrinth of cogs, spools and blade traps plays host to TESO's new 12-player Trial (think

'Raid' in typical MMO vernacular), but Zenimax Online Studios is also hand-crafting entirely new areas: forgotten, multi-floored Dwemer ruins with sloping walkways that all feed into towering central structures and are home to bosses on each floor, for instance. "We call it the Quake level," laughs Rich Lambert, sprinting through the monolithic, enemy-packed cavern.

GONE WITH THE 'WIND

The return of Vvardenfell should make fans both excited and apprehensive — the revival of The Elder Scrolls' most revered instalment isn't a task that should be undertaken lightly. But it's clear that complacency hasn't set in, and in spite of eye-wateringly large PS4 player numbers Zenimax is more focused than ever to do right by the fanbase. "We want to do it justice," says Lambert. Even with our most critical eye trained on Vvardenfell, Morrowind's return is giving us a buzz akin to a hard night on the Skooma. ■





MATT FIROR
GAME DIRECTOR

OPM: Morrowind is such a big part of The Elder Scrolls' history – do you feel added pressure now you're bringing it back?

Matt Firor: There's always a lot of pressure when making any new content in any Elder Scrolls game. We've been dealing with this ever since we launched TESO: we have Cyrodiil in the game and we have areas that haven't been in Elder Scrolls games since 1994. That it's set 700-1000 years in the past gives us some leeway, but it also lets us do cool nostalgic things because we can go back and revisit areas that people are familiar with but then tell slightly different stories. That distance makes us able to do our own thing but have it still be a homecoming for players.

OPM: Many PlayStation players might not have had a chance to play Morrowind – and, terrifyingly, many gamers might be too young to remember it! So how are you ensuring nostalgia factors don't dominate?

MF: It has to stand on its own as a great game and as the next story chapter to tell in TESO. It's not that it doesn't matter how nostalgic it is, but what it'll do is that those younger players who aren't familiar with Elder Scrolls III will either Google it, or they'll ask their older friends or their older siblings, and discover Morrowind set the gold standard for Elder Scrolls games. It's a conversation starter for those guys, because they're then going to see how revered the game is and I think that'll pique their curiosity.

OPM: The Elder Scrolls Online has changed drastically over the course of development and since release – how has your vision changed alongside this natural evolution?

MF: The studio was founded almost ten years ago and the game's development really started at around 2009. If you just look at how the industry has changed in terms of online, of technology, and with PS4... We couldn't have run this game on PS3, it just wouldn't have worked! When we were first designing the game we were thinking that this is an Elder Scrolls MMO, but over time the term MMO got really diluted. It doesn't necessarily mean game systems that have been tried and true since Everquest and World Of Warcraft; it's now more just players are in one place and they're all clamouring for content and they don't have the preconceived notions of what an MMO is. They just want to have a fun game experience. That's the biggest thing that's changed since we started.

The technology's better and we're a little smarter about how to design content to let people of disparate levels, playstyles,

Q&A

SCROLL PLAY

Zenimax Online Studios founder and game director Matt Firor talks the changing systems of The Elder Scrolls Online: Tamriel Unlimited, the evolution of downloadable content and bringing back the lauded land of Morrowind

ages and free time have a good game experience. About 18 months before we launched, Skyrim launched. And Skyrim changed *everything*. Before that, Oblivion was our standard, but Skyrim was so big that it changed people's perceptions of what an Elder Scrolls game is and so we had to change a lot of stuff to make sure that we were hitting some of those marks. We didn't have time to do it before we

“OBLIVION WAS OUR STANDARD. BUT SKYRIM CHANGED EVERYTHING.”

first launched, but then after launch we sat down and made some changes, got part of the way there and asked: “How do we get the rest of the way there?”

That was the conversation with the designers that embarked us on a year-and-a-half-long quest to get more systems in: the Champion system, the Justice system, removing the subscription, adding virtual currency... It made our team constantly challenge assumptions, and that continues even to this day, with 2016's One Tamriel [update] and now with Morrowind, which is a new way to deliver content to players.

OPM: Dropping the subscription model involved a dramatic shift in business plan. This is a large project with a big team and the base game isn't slight – so how do you sustain the project long-term?

MF: I'm an old-school MMO guy and so this has been an education for me, but players are very much used to now, with mobile games and free-to-play games and MOBAs, spending money on games that they want to spend money on, and to buy things that they want to buy. That's always the rub with the subscription model – there's a group of players who love the subscription model and will always play it and they appreciate it, but there are others who just want to log into the game when they want to log into it, and they don't feel like they want to pay for the rest of the month. But if you loosen it and let them pay when they want to and give them cool things like costumes... we're very much into visuals and our virtual currency system, because we don't want to sell power directly.

So we give people the opportunity to get things in the game via virtual currency that they want. Not that they need, but that they want. There's a big difference there, and that's how it's sustainable, just like in any free-to-play mobile game. If a player is in the game in the big sense, and they play every day and are part of a community, they have no problems spending money.

OPM: We know of players who willingly bought Horse Armour not because it was good but to thank Bethesda for Oblivion...

MF: Hey, that was the first DLC sold on a console, like, ever – and it was an Elder Scrolls game. Yeah, we've evolved a little bit since then! They were completely in the dark there – it was completely new, virgin territory, and they had no idea how much that should cost. Nobody knew. But now players really have an idea of how much things should cost and they buy things or don't buy things based on their perception of value.

OPM: And is it that perception that's led to Morrowind being the first add-on content that isn't available with virtual currency?

MF: Yeah. That decision also represents a lot of work to do with the new class and the new world – it's really a next step for TESO rather than an add-on. After Orsinium, which was our last big zone, went over so well, we knew we wanted to do another big piece of content. The problem is that it takes a long time! With our set 12-week DLC cadence we couldn't find the time to do it unless we came up with another way to give it to users.

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REVIEWS



80 RESIDENT EVIL VII: BIOHAZARD

Scares aplenty at the Bakers' - try not to end up in the steak bake.

OPM SCORES

GOLD AWARD

PlayStation.
Official Magazine - UK

GOLD AWARD

Awarded to a game that's brilliantly executed on every level, combining significant innovation, near-flawless gameplay, great graphics and lasting appeal.

EDITOR'S AWARD

PlayStation.
Official Magazine - UK

EDITOR'S AWARD

Not at the very highest echelon, but this is a game that deserves recognition and special praise based on its ambition, innovation or other notable achievement.

10 INCREDIBLE

The kind of phenomenal experience rarely seen in a console generation.

9 OUTSTANDING

Unreservedly brilliant - this should be in every collection.

8 VERY GOOD

A truly excellent game, marred by just a few minor issues.

7 GOOD

A great concept unfulfilled or the familiar done well, but still well worth playing.

6 DECENT

Fun in parts, flawed in others, but more right than wrong.

5 AVERAGE

What you expect and little more, this is for devotees only.

4 BELOW AVERAGE

Any bright ideas are drowning in a sea of bugs or mediocrity.

3 POOR

A seriously flawed game with little merit on any level.

2 AWFUL

Disgraceful: the disc would be more beneficial as a coaster.

1 HORRIFIC

Own this and you'll be swiftly, justifiably, exiled from society.

CONTENTS

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GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

@Pelloki



RESIDENT EVIL VII: BIOHAZARD

2017's first must-have shocks for (nearly) all the right reasons



INFO
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 ALSO ON PS VR
 ETA OUT NOW
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Mortal Kombat X has just been eviscerated: in the all-time list of violent PlayStation videogame nasties, Resident Evil's first-person reinvention has revved up a chainsaw and carved its way to the top. I'm not squeamish, but one early scene of violence is so distasteful I turn to my wife and ask: "Can they *really* get away with that?"

Capcom may have ducked the censors, but I smell tabloid outrage ("Depraved! Sick! Immoral!") incoming over the searing scenes of torture and body horror. I also detect heaps of praise from the Resident Evil fandom. You can officially consider this a faltering series no longer... although VII *does* try its best to undo some of its hard work deeper into the adventure.

HOUSE PROUD

Everything you've seen so far? All the tiptoeing around a dilapidated Louisianan plantation, hiding from angry, invincible Baker family members and sniffing out keys to unlock new parts of the estate? That only forms half the experience, and it's a chapter that rivals absolutely anything from the series up until now.

The core mansion, hemstitched with fear and riddled with architectural idiosyncrasies that have defined Resident Evil from day one, is as iconic

"CAPCOM MAY HAVE DUCKED THE CENSORS BUT I SMELL TABLOID OUTRAGE: DEPRAVED! SICK! IMMORAL!"





Prepare to freeze every time dear ol' Granny pops up in a different part of the house.



Above Insects are the most annoying enemies – it's tough to torch nests without getting stung.



Don't be fooled by her frail frame – Marguerite Baker is quite the formidable opponent when she's on the prowl.



082



Above left Wince all you like – it still looks better than my mum's cooking when I was a kid.

Above right And the "Most Pointless Subtitle" award goes to...

Left Appreciate the sunlight while you can – there's not much of it to be found.

Right Mia is the reason you've travelled to the Bakers' plantation in the first place.



» as the Spencer Estate. Considerably smaller, it must be said, but no less evocative.

“Who builds this sh*t?” exclaims player-character Ethan after placing a bizarre object on top of a plinth and rotating it so that the shadow cast by an old projector lines up with a silhouette on a painting; a process that causes the wall to swing open and reveal a narrow secret passage. He’s talking about the puzzle, of course — a deeply illogical construction that has no purpose in the house other than to give me access to an otherwise inaccessible room — but he might as well be asking about the entire house.

From underlit, monster-riddled basement to quiet, unnaturally still attic, its atmosphere feels imported from a freshly discovered time capsule that was hermetically sealed in Capcom’s HQ back in 1996 after the original game’s production ended. The same is true for the other buildings found dotted around the Bakers’ compound.

“Who builds this sh*t?” then? That one’s easy: a development team scorned by years of mixed reviews and of dwindling fan support, and a studio desperate to revive Resident Evil’s fortunes and rediscover what made the series into such a phenomenal success in the first place.

BAKERS’ COVEN

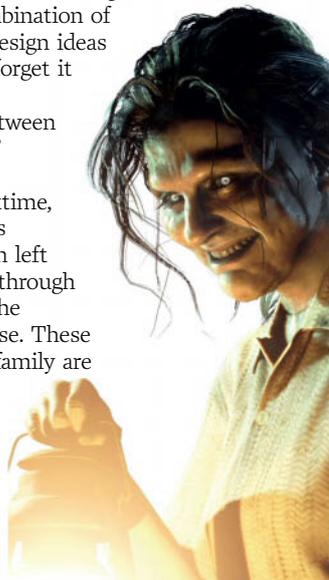
There’s no question the team has succeeded. For five hours, Resident Evil VII is every bit the 10/10 game we predicted back in OPM #131. The meandering treks through dingy corridors are among PS4’s premier horror experiences. Each wooden board, pane of glass and nail used to build the Louisianan setting has been placed according to Newton’s Third Law: for every action there’s an equal and opposite reaction.

In this case, the thrill of unlocking a new room is instantly dissipated by the fresh wave of revulsion at the grim discoveries hiding behind the door; the relief at every herb and ammo pack pocketed is balanced out by the swell of dread at the understanding that I’m being gifted these items for a reason; the surging terror of a frantic chase is matched only by the incredible elation of shrugging off my pursuer. Screams and laughs, wincing and sighs of relief; the combination of nostalgic flashbacks and modern design ideas gel so seamlessly that it’s easy to forget it hasn’t always been this way.

There are unnerving parallels between the world and its effect on players’ psyches. In the opening minutes sunlight quickly gives way to nighttime, and after some hard-hitting shocks in the punchy prologue chapter I’m left creeping over raggedy carpets and through creaky hallways, sanity fraying as the indestructible Jack Baker gives chase. These games of hide-and-seek with the family are unpredictable and unbearable — at one point I find myself cowering on the bottom floor of the grand hallway, desperately trying to match Jack’s movements on the balconies above so that he doesn’t create an open line of sight, spot me and

“THE MANSION IS EVERY BIT AS ICONIC AS THE FIRST RESIDENT EVIL’S SPENCER ESTATE.”

Below Even our Jen doesn’t swear as much as Marguerite Baker. Shocker.



come charging down the main staircase with his shovel held aloft, intent on bashing my brains all over the floor.

By the time I reach a near-collapsing swamphouse, with broken wooden walls and flooring that’s sunk into the murky waters of the bayou below, my touchpoint to reality has as good as rotted away. It’s at this point, followed by a thoroughly welcome return to the main house (a trick that mirrors the Guardhouse and the return to the main mansion in the first Resident Evil), that Resident Evil VII builds up to its pinnacle: genuinely scary, how-the-hell-do-I-

survive-this-nightmare boss encounters, exquisitely drawn-out frights and stomach-troubling gross-out

moments all tumbling into one bubbling cauldron of rising momentum that has to be played to be believed.

FINDING GORY

But just as my mind begins to completely unspool from the full effect of what’s as close to being a perfect first half as I can imagine, so too does the game’s focus. As you’ve no doubt noticed, the score over on p80 isn’t a 10, and that’s because the second half of Resident Evil VII loses sight of its successes and trades patient, atmospheric tests of nerve for a stronger action bent that resembles the series post-Resident Evil 4. It also swaps the mesmerising plantation setting for two entirely different locations, neither of which can even begin to match up to what’s come before.

There are still isolated patches of terror, including a superbly judged weaponless situation — but to be frank, the rush to the credits sacrifices games of cat-and-mouse for all-out slaughter. Thankfully, the action is consistently great. Zombies *don’t* make an appearance (and their absence is definitely a missed opportunity); however, the new standard enemies, the Molded, are excellent adversaries.

Born out of clumps of the black slime found slathered

over surfaces, the Molded are frighteningly powerful bipedal freaks that lurch from side to side at a cadence that proves to be terrifyingly adept at dodging handgun bullets.

In the first hours, ammo and health is scarce enough to leave me limping away from most battles barely intact, with fewer bullets and shells left than fingers. Stumbling backwards and frantically firing forwards as the monsters wheel their way towards me with fangs and claws prepped for shredding is never comfortable given that, at any point from start to finish, one mistake can see a single Molded kill me with no trouble.

Eventually, I find myself armed to the teeth with more weapons, ammo and health than I know what to do with. Limited inventory slots stop me going full Commando, granted, but there’s definitely a shooting gallery element to the twilight hours. It’s a perplexing switch in tone — surely Capcom didn’t feel it still needed to cater to fans of Resis 5 and 6? — but I’ll begrudgingly admit that dismantling Molded with grenade launchers and machine guns is still fun.

What happened to variety, though? Resident Evil started off with zombies, but pretty soon it introduced dogs, giant tarantulas, Hunters and more. Resident Evil 2 pitted us against zombies first of all before turning to Lickers, Tyrants and so on to coax out the sweat beads. Take the Baker family out of the equation and Resident Evil VII has the Molded and some insects. Admittedly, there are different subspecies of Molded, but ultimately they’re all dark sludge monsters.

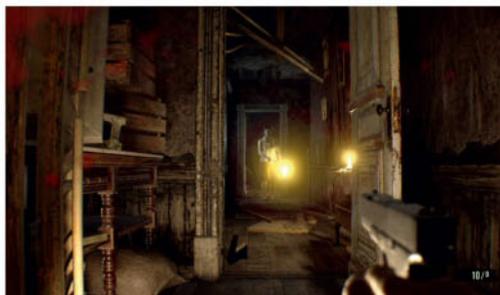
WHO SCARES WINS

Still, the first-person gamble is an inspired one. Clomping around the world in third-person would have been fun, but by looking through the eyes of Ethan — especially if you’re opting to play in VR — you’re thrust deeper into the nightmare, and Capcom’s not afraid to take advantage of this fact. Near-photorealistic visuals in places and a hideous disregard for personal space on the part of the Baker family (I lose count of the number of times they end up screaming in my face) are fine replacements



0 / 12
5 / 69

Right Hide-and-peek mechanics work really well, so it's a shame they're forgotten in the second half.



Left There are 18 antique coins dotted about – find them all to buy stats boosters and a shiny new gun.

for the first Resident Evil's infamously unhelpful fixed camera angles when it comes to dreading what's lying in wait. When it wants to play for scares, it does so exceedingly well.

The plantation peregrination is about more than pure peril, however. The realistic visual style and the lack of the classic visual item glint effect demands you play the part of a magpie as well, searching high and low for hidden treasures and the occasional puzzle item. Meticulously hunting down the house's secrets and scooping up precious ammo is a joyful timesink, swallowing psychostimulant pills to uncover hard-to-spot goodies a thoroughly welcome new cartilage for the classic Resident Evil skeleton. There are useless items too. Grabbing and inspecting animal corpses and voodoo dolls might not grant any bonuses, but helps immerse you even more.

Another cute new item-hunting feature? That would be the Polaroid pictures of hidden treasure spots, which demand watchful eyes and gift invaluable goodies when solved. That these hunts take place under threat of a Baker popping up

for a deadly game of tag means I'm frequently on edge while sniffing out the secrets; low inventory thresholds further heightens this internal struggle as I'm forced to make daring dashes to and from classic Resi Item Boxes without ever being truly sure if the routes are clear.

Again, it's a formula that works so well it's downright bizarre that the overall pace shifts from harrowing horror to Saw-style boobytrapped areas to blanket arcade action, trampling these secret-seeking side-quests underfoot in the process. Whether it's down to a lack of faith in the more sandboxy plantation or an exhaustion of ideas, the second and third chapters feel plucked from a different game. Not a bad one, just not as special.

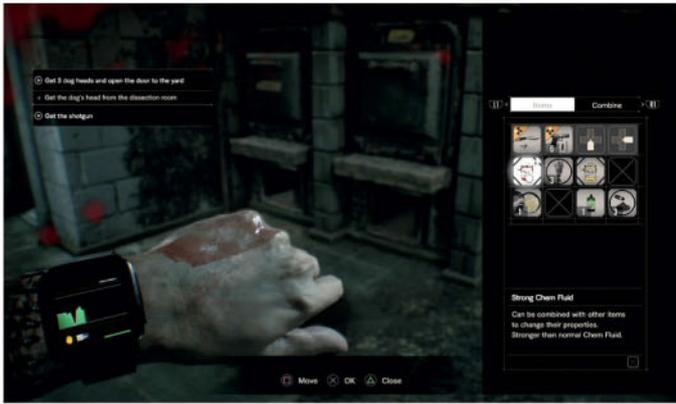
AFTER HOURS

If you're one of the many who rinsed the free Beginning Hour demo, which hinted at deep secrets and brain-tickling

conundrums, know that the puzzling aspect plays a smaller role than you might expect. Early hunts for crests and keys aside, there's not much in the way of sticking points. When puzzles do crop up, the clues are clear to the point of straight-up providing the solution, and never threaten to cause trouble – one portrait-rotating lock is flat-out embarrassing when compared with the classic birth-to-death picture puzzle found in the first game's killer crow corridor.

You also shouldn't expect to find yourself turning to a Mercenaries-style side-mode after the story's done, either. Resident Evil VII is one of the leanest entries to ever bear that famous brand, and isn't a game that can be revisited for anything other than another trek into the campaign at higher difficulties – at least until the DLC chapters, with wacky-sounding Jack-feeding elements, drop later this year.

“THE OVERALL PACE SHIFTS FROM HARROWING HORROR TO BLANKET ARCADE ACTION.”



Above Inventory space is tight, but backpacks grant you four more item slots.



Right Not sure, but we think we've seen one in our office.



Above The Bakers are up there with the series' best-ever villains.

All of which might make it seem like there's a Tyrant-sized shadow looming over the game, when actually Resident Evil VII deserves to be championed for completely halting the series' slide into mediocrity. Make no mistake: if this villain-fronted, first-person outing is indicative of the franchise from now on, then Capcom has a startlingly bright future to look forward to.

FOGGY STYLE

As for what that future should involve, let me point a dummy finger of my own back to the first half of the game. Backtracking. Rationed items and weapons. Supernatural elements that hark back to the incredibly freaky, sadly aborted Resident Evil 3.5/4 'Fog' Version (if you don't know what I'm talking about, rush to YouTube and get it down your eyeballs). These are firm foundations upon which Capcom can build the series back up to its former strength and beyond

— an idea that seemed totally inconceivable before the game's reveal last June.

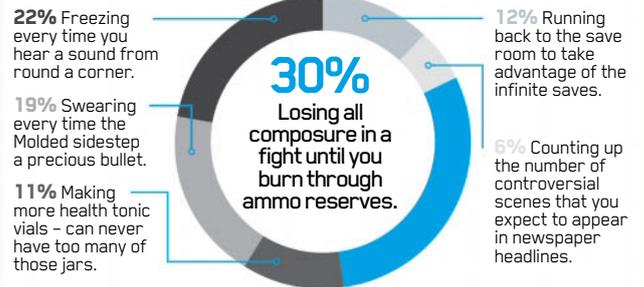
More importantly, these foundations ensure that despite its missteps, Resident Evil VII shoots to the top of the horror pile on PS4. Shorter than its competitors it may be (expect an 11-12 hour playtime — my sub-nine-hour run benefitted from having played the first four hours for OPM #131's cover story), a concentrated first half delivers the finest horror rollercoaster of the generation, Alien: Isolation included. A preposterously good year of PS4 gaming starts in the best possible way.

VERDICT

The truly incredible opening half alone makes this an essential horror game. Mixed fortunes later on recall the series post-Resident Evil 4, but it nonetheless remains one of gaming's greatest ever comebacks. **Matthew Pellett**

THE OPM BREAKDOWN

WHAT YOU DO IN... RESIDENT EVIL VII



IS IT BETTER THAN?



YES

Almost a coin flip situation, this, but Resi's resurrection from averageness wins it for us.



NO

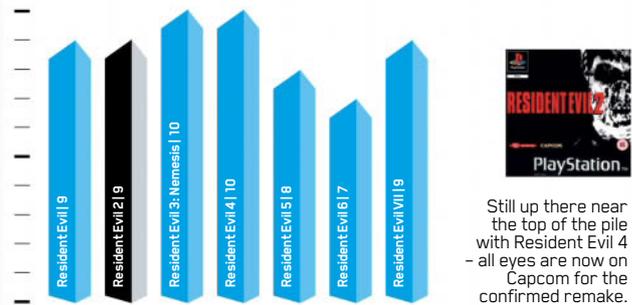
The PS4 port may be imperfect, but the fourth in the series is unquestionably a better game, still.



YES

Both are great games, and both have their ups and downs, but Mikami can't match REVII's highs.

SERIEOGRAPHY



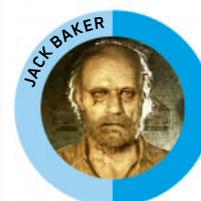
Still up there near the top of the pile with Resident Evil 4 — all eyes are now on Capcom for the confirmed remake.

ALSO ON PLAYSTATION VR

Got PlayStation VR and the stomach to brave first-person games? Then you absolutely need to play in VR. The opening hours are the scariest, and many will be put off by the prologue, but combat's significantly easier with face-aiming, and VR ratchets up the atmosphere.



FRIENDS & ENEMIES



Chases you around in the early hours. Shrugs off bullets for fun.

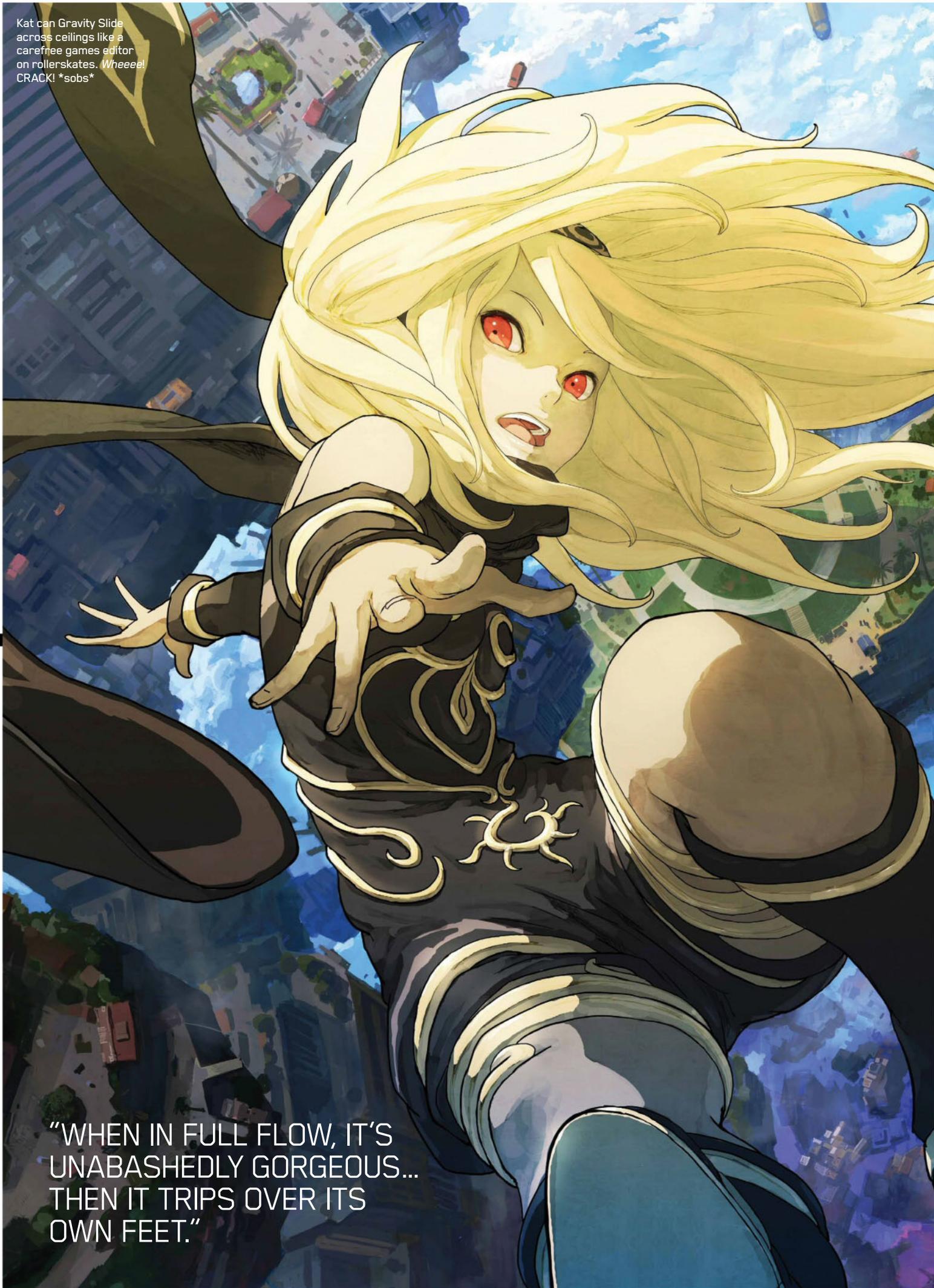


If she spots you she'll fire swarms of insects in your direction.



More conniving than his parents, Lucas sets up Saw-like traps.

Kat can Gravity Slide across ceilings like a carefree games editor on roller skates. *Wheeee!* CRACK! *sobs*



“WHEN IN FULL FLOW, IT’S UNABASHEDLY GORGEOUS... THEN IT TRIPS OVER ITS OWN FEET.”



FORCE OF HABIT

@itsJenSim

GRAVITY RUSH 2

This ambitious sequel doesn't fly, it falls... with style



INFO

FORMAT PS4
ETA OUT NOW
PUB SONY
DEV SIE JAPAN/
PROJECT SIREN

Nobody could accuse Kat's second outing of being half-hearted. It fizzes with energy – just like its gravity-shifting hero. From up in its sprawling cities and colourful clouds, right back down to the charming lumps and bumps of its cast and their shenanigans, gravity girl and her sequel are a bath bomb soaked in pink lemonade and giggles. In short? Effervescent.

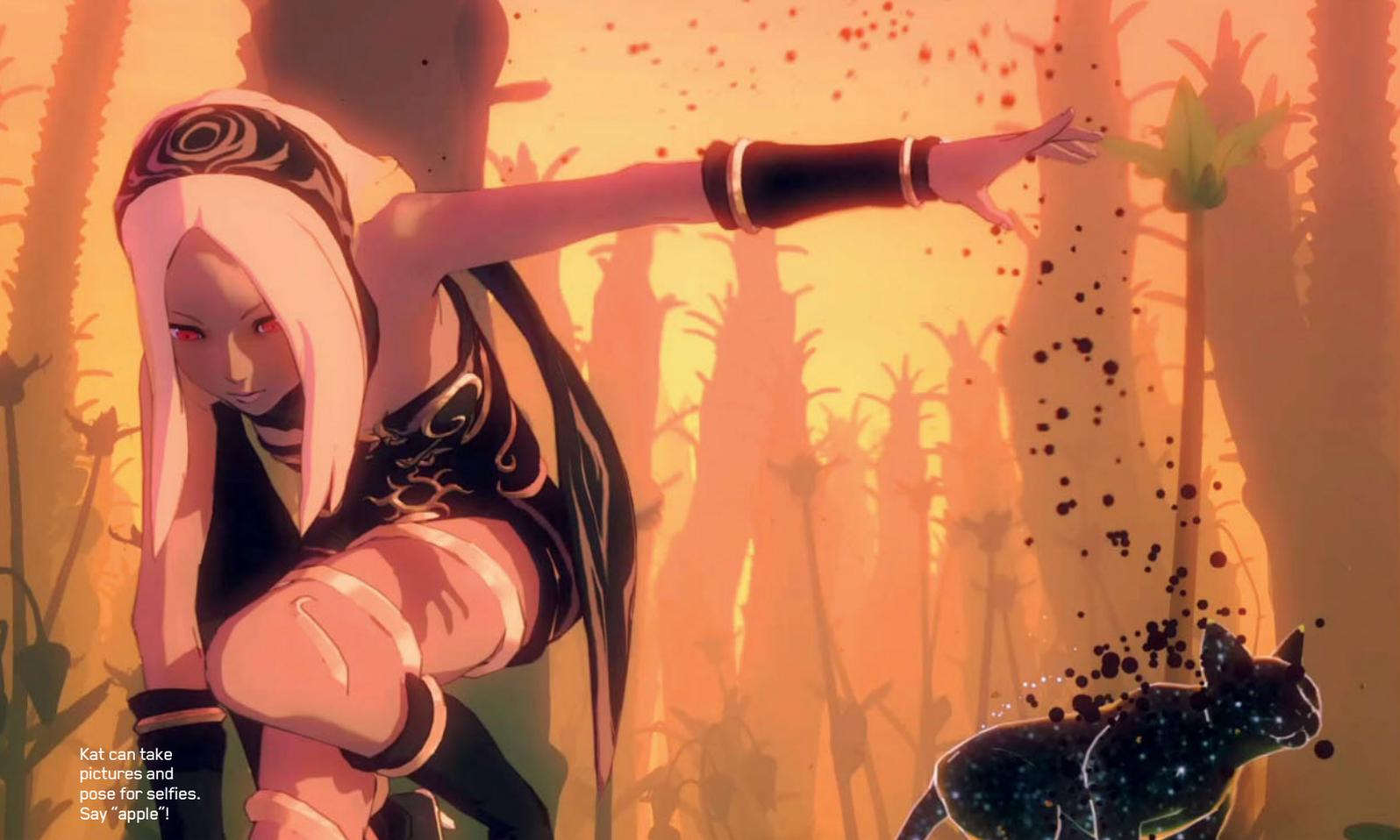
Given time, however, the bubbles inevitably lose their buzz. Kat and Katventure are one and the same: easy to love, but clumsy as hell. When in full flow, there's nothing more unabashedly gorgeous; when it trips over its own feet, you want to look away in embarrassment. This is a pretty way of saying that, while peerless in terms of atmosphere, much of Gravity Rush 2 stumbles at the most basic hurdle: being a consistent and well-designed videogaming experience.

Sadly, this is nothing new for the physics-manipulating series. That's not to say that it isn't a remarkable bit of fantasy craftsmanship, mind. Despite an ultimately frustrating combat system, the obtuse narrative, and some hellaciously dull mission templates, original PS Vita offering Gravity Rush was a marvel. The act of hurling Kat around the steampunk glow of floating metropolis Hekseville made for handheld delight. But blown up on the big screen via a PS4 remaster, the cracks in the foundations were made all too obvious. Surely a sequel, tailor-made for the console, would finally fix and strengthen the shaky framework of the supernaturally lovely creation? As it turns out, Shirley's just a name for your aunt and Gravity Rush 2 is determined to shatter every bone in its beautiful body.

PLANET WISELY

And holy God on a hoverbike, is Kat's latest escapade beautiful. With the added oomph





Kat can take pictures and pose for selfies. Say "apple"!

Right The sequel offers even more powered-up moves to unlock with gems.



Left Reformed bad lass Raven returns (and will star in free DLC in March).

of PS4 powering proceedings, the quasi-open world stretches as far as the eye can see (no, really – impressive draw distances mean you can spy the next city you’re zooming to this time). Airborne archipelagos twinkle with life. Both Kat and lilting background music wind through the bustling, tropical markets of Lei Colmosna; the dusk of Lei Elgona mutes tentative footsteps.

But the real magic lies in sweeping Kat off her feet. Yes, the most inventive movement system on PlayStation returns – and it’s more elegant than ever. Tap **RB** and our hero floats in mid-air, having temporarily disabled gravity’s influence on her. Moving the reticule toward your desired destination and then pressing **RB** again sends her whizzing over to the new “downwards”. It’s genius, and the thrill never wears off. Even better, the sequel adds two new types of gravity: light and nippy Lunar style, and heavy but hard-hitting Jupiter style. (Newton’d be rolling in his grave.)

Both have their own distinct feel and use. Bounding, balletic, through the air with Lunar style’s Rocket Jumps is pure poetry, and throwing

Debris Balls using Jupiter style’s what omnipotent dreams are made of... until you’re in trouble with a gang of Nevi. Switching gravity types via the touchpad is a fumble at best, impossible at worst: if there’s one thing Gravity Rush 2 loves more than scripted, impossible-to-win boss fights, it’s robbing Kat of her powers in an attempt to create false tension. There’s no doubt that, for better and worse, combat’s evolved. When it works, it’s a breathless, varied volley of stylish Wormhole Kicks and mid-air dodges. When it doesn’t, it’s more frustrating than it’s ever been.

FATAL ATTRACTION

Old problems return. Carefully aimed, slow-moving attacks miss slightly shifting enemies. Narrow side streets and massive Nevi nasties have a habit of basically swallowing the camera whole. Unpredictable off-screen

attacks smack Kat upside (or downside, depending) the head. The awe inspired by the planet-sized Lost City boss fight is quickly replaced by dread as you struggle against the wobbly controls... followed by derision as you realise beating it simply requires the same brand of cookie-cutter, ticky-boxy, Evil Eye-stomping as everything else in the game.

While combat makes an admirable attempt to change up the “mash **D** to win” grind of the first Gravity Rush, almost the exact same meagre mission ideas feature – only now they’re stretched thinly over an outing nearly three times longer. Kill X number of enemies; collect X number of crystals; carry X number of objects from here to here; rinse, roll eyes and repeat. But tedium is preferable to outright outrage. I’ve got three words for you: insta-fail stealth missions. Sprinkled in for colour (if that colour

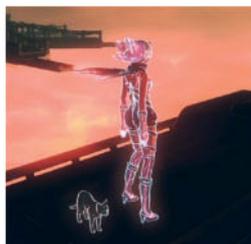
“STEALTH MISSIONS ADD COLOUR. THAT COLOUR IS A VIOLENT, APOPLECTIC PUCE.”



Above Designed to levy PS4's superior power, boss fights are now utterly spectacular.



Right Not content with just Nevi? Try fighting against humans in giant mech suits.



Above Kat's eagerness to please is unfailingly charming. Fetch quests, ahoy!

is a violent, apoplectic puce), you're forced to sneak past hyper-aware foes — despite zero indication of lines of sight or opportunities for cover — in a title chiefly concerned with tumbling haphazardly through the air like a winged refrigerator. It's nothing short of madness. Thank goodness they're as infrequent as they are infuriating.

But reprieves, via moments of whimsical invention, abound. A clever opening sets the precedent for a sequel that's found its feet tonally. By the time quests involve queuing for crepes and performing impromptu QTE concerts, you're falling for the world so hard that other foibles seem to melt away. The reappearance of sultry shifter-in-crime Raven adds an enjoyable extra veneer of magical girl anime sparkle to showdowns — she pulls off finishing moves by Kat's side, the duo's dynamism carrying a fairly fractured three-act

narrative. And just when I find myself longing to re-experience the flawed, but fresh, frisson of the first Gravity Rush, the three-act story buffets me back to a dramatically more detailed Hekseville... and Kat's humble home-in-a-pipe.

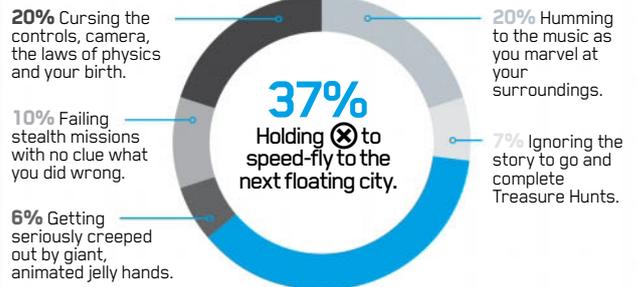
It's a lovely nod to fans, but ultimately, sheer verve and past momentum isn't enough to support an ambitious follow-up. There's still sparkle and buoyancy to be found, but its flattened under the weight of a fundamentally shonky combat system, copy-pasted mission design and simple mechanical oversights. Hold the champagne celebration, but grab your trustiest bubble wand — at least this lovable klutz is a trip.

VERDICT

Although endlessly exuberant, and often truly original, the sequel fails to fix the first game's issues while introducing new stumbling blocks. Hardly smooth shifting. **Jen Simpkins**

THE OPM BREAKDOWN

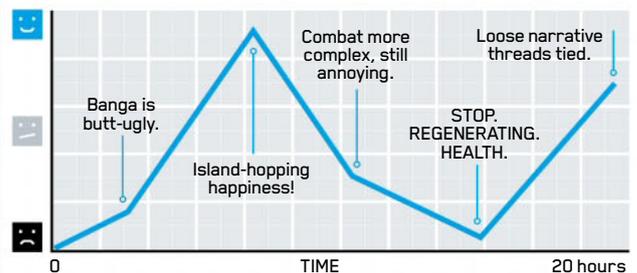
WHAT YOU DO IN... GRAVITY RUSH 2



TROPHY CABINET

 BRONZE Collect five stat-boosting, perk-granting Talismans. You'll be doing a lot of collecting anyway, so why not?	 SILVER Tough to get - defeat ten enemies with just one Micro Black Hole. One to be especially proud of.	 GOLD Complete every single side-mission. It's worth it - the doggy-themed mission has the best reward...
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COMPEL-O-GRAPH



LOVING/HATING



BOOTY CALL

Notifications from other players trigger Treasure Hunts, where you use their reference photo to track down a chest full of extra gems.



PALMED OFF

Random stone tablets dole out infuriatingly rote missions in the Rift Plane... then massive jelly hands (WTF?!) guide you to the next chore.

SECOND OPINION FREE FOOL



Gravity Rush 2 is the sort of game you don't see many studios making any more: the type of adventure that's content to have you chasing seagulls around to try to recapture stolen kebab sticks (expect Spider-Man 2/missing balloon mission vibes). Provided you don't expect an Uncharted-beater, this quaint curio is full of flailing fun. **Matthew Pellett**

Outrun and Space Harrier await in the arcades. Outrun includes this classic sit-down cab.

EDITOR'S
AWARD

PlayStation.
Official Magazine - UK

090 TOKYO LOVE STORY

@nathan_brown



YAKUZA 0

Sega heads back to the '80s to move things forwards

There's a certain danger in taking a series back in time: it risks the game itself feeling like a step backwards. Worried that *Yakuza 0* – which breaks the steady, linear timeline by leaping back from the modern day to the late 1980s – falls foul of this problem? Don't be. In fact, this is Kazuma Kiryu's finest outing to date.

Indeed, that risky bit of time-travel is one of the game's greatest tricks, at least in story terms. Prior to *Yakuza 0*, Sega has made five mainline games starring Kiryu, each with its own complex narrative – tales of double- and triple-crosses in the gangland power struggle. Start a new game of any recent entry in the *Yakuza* series and you'll be given the option to watch lengthy recaps of each game's story. By the end, if you're a newcomer, you'll be quite, quite baffled.

By hitting the reset button, developer Yakuza Studio gets right down to the action, unencumbered by the weight of the series' convoluted (though marvellous) history. Yes, there are treats here for fans. It's a chance to see how Kiryu and secondary protagonist Goro Majima got started in their lives of crime; an opportunity to stroll around a beloved world 30 years in the past. There are brief cameos from younger versions of bit-part characters. But for once, novices can jump in cold and not feel lost.



INFO
FORMAT PS4
ALSO ON PS3
ETA OUT NOW
PUB SEGA
DEV YAKUZA STUDIO

Within minutes of starting, Kiryu has been framed for murder, triggering a rollicking tale that's as satisfying to a series newbie as it is a die-hard fan. By the end, chances are the former group will now count themselves as members of the latter.

BRAWL OR NOTHING

In the meantime, there are hundreds of heads to stove in. Combat, despite the reduction in protagonists (*Yakuza 4* had four, for instance), is more diverse than ever, since both our heroes can switch between three different fighting styles in real time. Majima's are a particular delight – one gives him a baseball bat, another a suite of lengthy, flashy

breakdance combos – but Kiryu's are excellent as well, especially for fans who've spent hundreds of hours in over five games locked to a single style. While you'll quickly find your favourite combo strings, you're advised to mix up your approach: variety affects the fights' payouts, and money has never been more important, used to upgrade styles through a colossal skill tree.

And yet, this series is about more than knocking off noggins on the way to the narrative's conclusion, satisfying as both elements might be. *Yakuza Studio's* way of fleshing out an open world is among the best in the business, with dozens of charmingly written side-stories. These are as much

“FOR ONCE A NOVICE CAN JUMP IN COLD AND NOT FEEL COMPLETELY LOST.”

Right Majima is introduced with a cutscene for the ages, as he deals with a sozzled visitor.



Below Fill your Heat bar and you can perform brutal finishing moves.



Above This is what videogame arcades looked like back in the day.

about the people in need as the hero who saves them: the elderly lady whose daughter has been hoodwinked by a cult, the schoolgirl peer-pressured into a mucky underwear-selling business, the young woman who needs you to pose as her boyfriend to avert an arranged marriage. You'll fill in as a TV producer, distract a crowd so a human statue can sneak off for a wee, and win a toy from a UFO catcher for a girl whose father left her and her mother to fend for themselves.

Each helps flesh out Kiryu or Majima as a kind-hearted, noble sort, despite their day jobs. But it's about the people you help, not the job, reinforcing the game's remarkable sense of place. This is a world full of people. And people have problems.

CITY LIMITLESS

Elsewhere there are arcade-perfect renditions of Sega classics, pub games, fight clubs,

food stalls and karaoke spots. Nightclubs, cabarets, mahjong parlours and shogi dens stud the streets of Tokyo with possibility. You can set up and manage legitimate businesses, or head to the red-light district for all kinds of embarrassingly grubby activities.

There are fight masters to learn from, random friendships to strike up, and no end of thugs to beat down. There's lots to do, much of it brilliant. 40 hours in, as the credits roll to a close after one of the most thrilling Yakuza finales to date, I am shown my completion percentage: 16%. New Game Plus can wait. I have unfinished business to attend to.

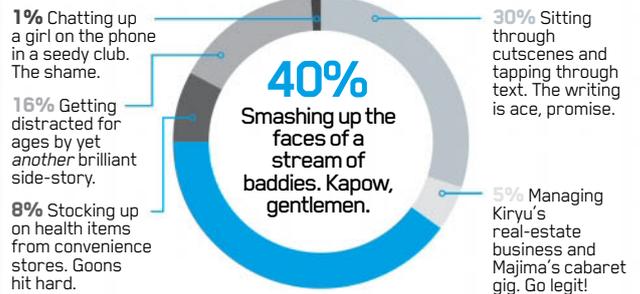
VERDICT

With a wonderful story that actually makes sense to newcomers to the series, brilliantly varied fighting and a world packed with things to do, this is the best Yakuza yet.

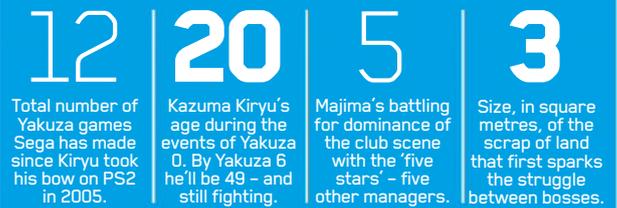
Nathan Brown

THE OPM BREAKDOWN

WHAT YOU DO IN... YAKUZA 0



STAT PACK



HOW TO... BEAT ANY BOSS IN THE GAME



1 Focus your attention on Majima's slugger style, which grants him permanent access to a nice solid baseball bat. **2** Walk your opponent to the edge of the arena, tap **Ⓞ** three times, then mash **Ⓐ** for a flurry of nunchuck-style blows, ending with a kick that knocks them down. **3** When your Heat meter is full, press **Ⓐ** in a neutral situation to smash your opponent in the face. Rinse, lather and repeat. You'll take some hits using this technique, but victory's pretty much assured.

MULTIPLAYER



This has rather limited online functionality, but does offer real-time distractions such as pool and darts. Climax Battles mode is a series of timed challenges (with modifiers and limitations), featuring online leaderboards for all you scorehunters.

IS IT BETTER THAN?



YES

No great achievement. Sega's zombie-infested spin-off from the main series was a load of old bottom.



YES

Dubbed in the west, and not well. A subtitled PS4 remake, Kiwami, is due for US/EU release this year.



YES

Entertainingly violent, it's our personal series favourite - until now. Yakuza 0 is the real deal.



Fill Velvet's Soul gauge and she can unleash a special attack with her daemonic slugger.

FANDOM LIMB

@bravelyjen



TALES OF BERSERIA

Less Little Red Riding Hood, more Big Bad She-Wolf



INFO
 FORMAT PS4
 ETA OUT NOW
 PUB BANDAI NAMCO
 DEV BANDAI NAMCO

Two children run through a dark forest. Behind them? A village engulfed in flames. Above? A moon as red as blood. Ahead? Their brother-in-law, who picks them up and carries them to the hollow of a tree. “You hide here, Velvet,” he says, before handing the girl and her kid brother two shiny apples. “They’ll give you the courage you need to survive.” And with that he departs, an eerie silence falling over the woods. Sinister stuff...

Daemons, death, human sacrifice – Tales of Berseria is no fairytale. It’s a horror story; one presented in a wrapper of chiselled anime-style artwork as sharp as the characterisation of its heroine. Reminiscent of Underworld protagonist Selene, Velvet is a lethal death dealer with a tragic human past. But where many games might settle for showing her backstory through flashbacks, Berseria lets you play through her hellish transformation step by painful step.

From porridge-prepping country girl to rag-clad prisoner to revenge-seeking swashbuckler stirring up the seven seas, Velvet’s is a voyage that demands to be felt. It’s visceral, and that’s a quality that lends itself very well to combat.

“DAEMONS, DEATH, HUMAN SACRIFICE – NO FAIRYTALE, THIS IS A HORROR STORY.”

Performing combos left, right and centre is as easy as (X) (O) (O), while unleashing Velvet’s daemon arm to do the dirty work is just an (R) trigger-squeeze away. ‘Act now, think later’ is the nature of Berseria’s beast, a battle system that thrives on heat-of-the-moment muscle memory and snappy knee-jerk reactions.

SOUL SEARCHING

It’s not all button-bashing, though. Following in the paw prints of its Tales predecessors, mini-games and side activities abound. My personal favourite? Collecting the Katz Spirits – floating, glowing orbs belonging to a group of magic cats who ate a feast so meowvelous their souls flew right out of their bodies... Oh, Tales, how I’ve missed your whimsy! Scattered across the world, Katz Spirits can be used to open pink, cat-eared chests containing costume accessories and cute kitties. Dream. Come. True.

Oh, and those light-hearted slapstick skits Tales is known for? Well, they’re back too, and

this time they take centre stage. Want to learn more about witchy drama queen Magilou or Eizen the coin-flipping pirate? Just tap (A) when you spy that party chat prompt and you’ll get all the goss.

Now, don’t get me wrong – Berseria isn’t perfect. Heck, it’s not even close, with the latest entry retaining many of the grizzly bugbears Tales fans have tolerated for years: too much to-ing and fro-ing without a sprint option; too many wordy pop-up tutorials; treasure chests that remain defiantly marked on the map even after you’ve pillaged them blind. And yet... it has it. Yes, it – that special something, that je ne sais quoi, that inimitable fun factor that will have you hitting New Game+ before you can even say “Apple Gel, ahoy!”

VERDICT

Long-time Tales fan? Zestiria’s prequel is a must-play. Crisp characterisation and a battle system with real-time bite? That she most certainly does not blow. **Jenny Baker**



No sword for you, Sora
- the keyblade is your
weapon of choice.

POETRY IN FLOWMOTION

@bravelynjen

KINGDOM HEARTS HD 2.8 FINAL CHAPTER PROLOGUE



093

Time to Reconnect. with this fan-friendly collection



INFO

FORMAT PS4
ETA OUT NOW
PUB SQUARE ENIX
DEV SQUARE ENIX

Hold up: we know you're not here to read about Kingdom Hearts HD 2.8 Final Chapter Prologue. You're here to hunt for the skinny on Kingdom Hearts III – its plot, its release date, its deepest, darkest secrets. Well, about that... spoiler alert! JRPG Kingdom Hearts 2.8 isn't exactly a glistening treasure trove of new information.

So, it looks like you're going to read about 2.8 after all. If you're new to the series, just imagine a world where Square Enix and Disney characters co-exist, add in some kids fighting to save said world from darkness using key-sword-thingies and you're there. As well as two games, 2.8 also contains a short film, but I'll get to that later. First, let's cover Dream Drop Distance HD, 2.8's biggest block of content, a remastered version of a 2012 release for Nintendo 3DS.

The portable title's eye-wateringly bright colour scheme pops like a paint-filled balloon away from 3DS's Minnie-Mouse-size screen. Using Flowmotion (a parkour-like movement mechanic) for the first time on console, combat is more dynamic than in previous PlayStation entries, with heroes Sora and Riku bouncing off walls, gliding over rooftops and swirling around piñata-style enemies with effortless ease.

It's fun if you're new to it, but if you've already played it, the second time around the game's

convoluted storyline really starts to drag its heels – take a keyblade exam, save the princess, find Pinocchio. And the little things that were once so endearing on 3DS's cosy touchscreen? Well, they've lost their charm somewhat in translation, with your fingertips made to feel like clumsy sausages navigating your DualShock 4's touchpad.

MIRROR, MIRROR

Thankfully there's more to 2.8 than that, and the fairest offering of them all is 0.2 Birth By Sleep. This episode is completely new (despite the title, it takes place *after* the 2010 PSP game Kingdom Hearts Birth By Sleep), and links things to Kingdom Hearts III. Possessing magic mirrors that will force main girl Aqua to confront her innermost demons, an unlockable Critical Mode and a theme song by Utada Hikaru that you will catch yourself humming on

and off for days after your first listen, it easily outshines its compilation co-stars... despite a total play time of just three to four short hours.

At this point you're probably wondering: if 2.8's best bit is that brief, is 2.8 even worth it? Honestly, you'll have to follow your heart on that one. For fans, 0.2 is the best pre-III appetiser available right now. For new players looking to buy their first ticket for the KH hype train, Kingdom Hearts HD 1.5 + 2.5 ReMIX, scheduled to drop in March with a more palatable price tag than this hotchpotch, should make for a much sweeter starting point. Oh, and that film, Back Cover? It's a cute apéritif, at least.

VERDICT

A collection of highs and lows, Dream Drop Distance is fluid but flawed. It's Aqua's heart-stirring tale that will make seasoned keyblade wielders rejoice.

Jenny Baker

If you see this guy coming for you, it's advisable to run like the wind.



094

CURRENT AFFAIRS

@bentyrer

THE FLAME IN THE FLOOD

Survival adventure burns bright, but not for long



Death can come slowly or quickly, but you'll rarely escape it. That's what you learn as you travel through an unusually serene, post-apocalyptic America. Good planning and careful resource management might save you from starvation, but it won't mean a lot if you get on the wrong side of a rampaging bear. Happily, there are plenty of reasons to head back out on your journey after the Grizzly Reaper comes calling.

You play as Scout, a young girl who has nothing but the clothes on her back until her new doggy friend, Aesop, drags a bag and radio to her. It's the start of a deceptively simple quest: to head to higher ground in the hope of picking up a radio signal. The only problem is that you have no idea what's waiting for you, and the only way to learn is to set sail on Scout's rickety raft.

What is out there is an accessible mix of procedurally generated exploration, the need to look after Scout's basic needs (such as hunger, hydration and fatigue), and careful resource management. You split your time between sailing down a grand river towards your goal and hopping between the small islands along it.

WILD AT HEART

Those pockets of land are where you gather resources, nab food, hunt different types of



INFO
 FORMAT PS4
 ETA OUT NOW
 PUB CURVE DIGITAL
 DEV THE MOLASSES FLOOD

animals, and grab 40 winks if you're lucky enough to find shelter on an archipelago.

While it's easy to grasp what you're doing, there's a biting realism to your adventure that keeps the tension at a high level. For example, if you craft a trap and catch a wolf in it, you'll need both to skin the wolf and to cook the raw meat you get from it. If you don't heat it up before eating, expect a lethal bout of food poisoning.

Like in real-life trekking, one mistake can finish you off. Sounds harsh? Well, it's not quite permadeath — there are checkpoints along the river that you can restart from should you die — but it does have a lasting impact, and sometimes heading back to the beginning

of the game and starting over with a bit more knowledge is the smarter decision.

The first few hours, which you spend learning the rules of the wilderness, really showcase the game's rich art and music design. An angular, hand-drawn look makes it as harshly alluring as the scattered islands you plunder, while the alt-country music that plays while you're travelling along the river is a perfect fit for the game, conjuring a spirit of weary resilience as you push further on in search of a signal.

Throughout this early stretch, as you're learning and scavenging and trying not to die, it nails the balance between escalating tension and compulsive micro-management

"EVEN IN ITS WEAKEST MOMENTS, THERE'S A RICH MYSTERY TO THIS WORLD."

Right Just before a storm the scene turns a moody grey to warn you of the downpour.



Below The rapids toss your raft about. Treat them with caution.



Above The PS4 port comes with a bonus director's commentary.

while maintaining some engrossing low-key storytelling.

MORE IS LESS

Unfortunately, it doesn't last. The closer you get to the ultimate destination, the less the pilgrimage has to offer. Resources become scarcer in an artificial attempt to increase the difficulty, but upgrading your raft can take care of most of your basic needs – sleep and clean water – to make your life easier. As long as you play smart and hoard long-lasting food, there's little incentive to keep investigating islands.

Plus, you'll quickly discover ways of cheesing your way through. Hunting, which should be a paranoid game of cat-and-mouse, becomes a slog of luring animals to the entrance of an island to a point where they won't attack, then picking them off with tainted meat or arrows. Late game areas turn from atmospheric to numbing, as the challenge seeps away.

You should also be wary of the bugs that plague The Flame In The Flood. A near-constant nuisance throughout, sometimes I get a harmless glitch that causes a docking animation to not play properly, others see grizzly bears decide to glide over the environment. For a game that relies heavily on atmosphere, these moments shatter any tension developer The Molasses Flood has built.

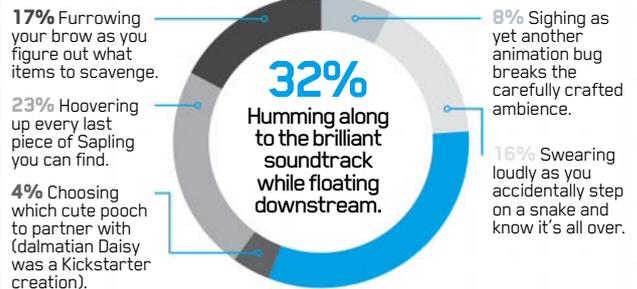
So why should you bother to make it to the credits? Even in the weakest moments, there's a rich mystery to this world that remains captivating. While it can't maintain the high standards of the early going, this is still a ride worth taking.

VERDICT

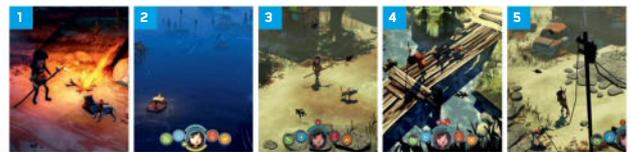
Tense at first, the initial thrills dampen the more time you spend in its company, but The Flame In The Flood's warm ambience and unusual design are worth discovering for yourself. **Ben Tyrer**

THE OPM BREAKDOWN

WHAT YOU DO IN... THE FLAME IN THE FLOOD



THE FIRST FIVE HOURS ...



- 1** Your new best friend, Aesop, is here to help – and he comes bearing gifts.
- 2** Time to head out into the great unknown to discover this flooded world.
- 3** You die for the first time as you tread on a snake by accident.
- 4** You're hobbling after a boar charges you down. Broken bones aren't fun.
- 5** With growing confidence, you start pillaging towns for all they're worth. We'll make an outdoors person of you yet.

HOW TO... OUTWIT A BEAR



Trying to one-hit KO a bear with a single poxy arrow won't work, but you *can* get creative with it. Prep a route of at least two traps for Winnie to charge into. When set, plant an arrow in its noggin to get its attention and run past your traps. Et voilà.

TROPHY CABINET



BRONZE

Nab this reminder of a so-so Liam Neeson action film by murdering your first wolf.



SILVER

Earn this trophy by tricking a predator into stepping on a snake. Better it than you, after all.



GOLD

Prove you truly are one with nature by surviving 200 miles in Endless Mode. You're now one-fifth a Proclaimer.

SECOND OPINION MASTER BAITER



This survival game stands out in a crowded genre thanks to its flooded vistas, twangy country soundtrack, and strikingly authentic mechanics. It's a shame, then, that it so outstays its welcome – thanks to escalating difficulty and repetition, only the most masochistic of players will reach the story's rather excellent end. **Robin Valentine**

INFO FORMAT PS VR ETA OUT NOW
PUB HALFBRICK TEAM DEV HALFBRICK TEAM



PS VR REVIEW

FRUIT NINJA VR

Coconut kiboshers is one bad apple

This slice of papaya-pummelling action may be the least complicated game I've ever played. And y'know what? That's not entirely a complaint. Yes, this is a one-note experience that'll have greengrocers across the land wincing, but at least it does feature the most satisfying berry-butcherer you'll ever witness.

Fruit Ninja VR first started out life on mobile devices, and the seed-stuffed core of the initial finger-tapping action translates seamlessly onto PlayStation VR. Of course, hitting your phone or PS Vita's screen with smudgy digits to duff up fruit can't match the accuracy of dicing watermelons with a pair of PS Move controllers. Thanks to spot-on motion tracking, destroying some farmer's juicy produce with a pair of on-screen blades is a doddle. Really, that's all there is to it: you cut up apples, bananas and the like with katana and hope none hits the floor before you've had a chance to go postal on all that potassium.

There are four different modes, though all revolve around the same 'cruelty to melons' conceit. Arcade and Survival modes offer more intense bouts of blade-on-blueberry fury: both allow you to miss only three pieces of fruit¹ before failing, while the latter also hurls edibles at you from robotic contraptions. Classic and Zen modes are much more relaxed, letting you slash (and miss) as much fruit as you like within 90 seconds. They also throw in modifiers, such as a freeze ability perfect for slaughtering limes in slow-mo.

Is it fun in small, vitamin C-rich doses? Absolutely. Is it essential at £13.99? Absolutely not.² My advice? Go punch some plums instead. **Dave Meikleham**



FOOTNOTES 1 Slicing multiple pieces of fruit in one motion is the key to big combos. 2 You can chase high scores on leaderboards, but other than that, there isn't much to incentivise extended play.

INFO FORMAT PS4 ETA OUT NOW
PUB SQUARE ENIX DEV BULKHEAD INTERACTIVE



PS VR REVIEW

THE TURING TEST

Ever questioned your originality?

The test from which this sci-fi puzzle game gets its name¹ is designed to be passed by humans and failed by machines. For example, question one: do you dream of electric sheep? Question two: do you also dream of playing a game like Portal, but with less originality and no jokes? Then greetings, robot! Thanks for taking the time out from the machine uprising to read about the other sci-fi puzzle game. Yeah, the one crucially *not* developed by Valve.

That might sound harsh, but it's tough not to be. Portal raised the bar so high that any pretender with a female protagonist, suspicious AI 'helper'² and challenges that involve 'testing' you in increasingly fiendish conundrum chambers is doomed to pale in comparison. Unlike the Portal gun, your puzzle-solving tool here transports and fires balls of energy, opens doors, and so on. Hardly the most inventive device.

It's the quality of the headscratchers that earns Turing a passing score. The lack of frills on the aforementioned gadget keeps the focus firmly on the brainteasers. The 70+ tests you'll find here get tricky quickly, demanding concentration and observation of every inch of your surroundings. There's nothing quite like seeing an obstacle course that looks impossible (how the hell do I get up there?), then feeling the mental gears click into place as you smarts your way through. Your reward? Well, the plot's more forgettable than your mum's birthday, but there's a steady drip-feed of smug satisfaction with each solution.

If you've exhausted Portal, and your patience with Valve (y'know, that company that used to make games), you'll be Glad- er, glad this exists. **Tom Stone**



FOOTNOTES 1 Created by Alan Turing, whose code-cracking in WWII helped defeat the Nazis. 2 It needs you to bypass the Turing Tests for it. Not suspicious? Were you actually born yesterday?

INFO FORMAT PS VR ETA OUT NOW
PUB SOLUS GAMES DEV SOLUS GAMES



PS VR REVIEW

STARSHIP DISCO

Saturday flight fever awaits

Be wary of neck strain and fatigue," the main menu warns. "Not to worry, Starship Disco - my neck is as sturdy as a century-old oak tree," I think. What a fool. Zip ahead 25 minutes after firing up this jaunty take on Guitar Hero meets Rez Infinite, and I'm begging for a neck brace.

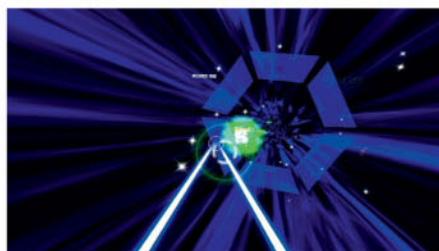
Blame it on my terminal lack of rhythm, but I find keeping up with Starship Disco's brand of breakneck intergalactic shooting bloody hard. All right, 'shooting' isn't the most accurate term. Technically, you *do* blast a load of spaceships as they come hurtling at you down a virtual reality wormhole, but lining up shots depends more on musical timing than it does your trigger finger.

Downing enough craft to keep the game's song-length levels going is utterly dependent on your sense of rhythm. Each ship's reticule corresponds to the beat. Misjudge a cue and you'll miss the next four or five spaceships, ending your run. With so many craft flying towards you at such a rapid pace,¹ it's all too easy to lose your timing (and possibly your lunch as part of the bargain).

All seven levels can be played using PlayStation VR's head-tracking to aim and a pad to fire; alternatively, you can play with either a single PS Move or a pair of motion controllers. Plump for the wands, and a ship appears in front of your face to make judging shots simpler. It's a matter of personal taste; I find the added depth perception that comes from aiming with the headset more helpful.

If you can keep up with the tunes,² this is quite the sensory experience.

But unless you're blessed with serious rhythm, Starship Disco's brutal beat will quickly overwhelm. **Dave Meikleham**



FOOTNOTES 1 There are three difficulties - on 'Hard', you can only miss three ships. Easy's still tough, though. 2 You can even import your own tracks via USB. Birdie Song, anyone?

INFO FORMAT PS VR ETA OUT NOW
PUB TEAM17 DEV THREE FIELDS ENTERTAINMENT



PS VR REVIEW

BULLETS FOR MY VALENTINE'S

@Scully1888

LETHAL VR

A half-cocked power fantasy for Die Hards only

There are now probably more virtual reality shooting galleries than there have been Big Brother contestants (544 if you're asking), and most of them are about as interesting. Lethal VR is the latest to throw its gun into the ring, and thankfully it's more Shilpa Shetty than Chantelle and Preston.

Much like said reality show contestants, Lethal VR is pretty mindless. You're placed in a transforming room similar to the X-Men's Danger Room and, armed with a series of weapons, have to take on 30 different challenges which essentially amount to "shoot loads of stuff." Things are made more interesting with a regularly changing selection of weapons. One minute you're using a pistol to take out cardboard hooligans, the next you're firing a couple of semi-automatics at some vases, the next you're chucking hunting knives and throwing stars at your targets.

While it's nothing groundbreaking, what Lethal VR offers is relatively entertaining for the most part. Motion sickness, which can plague some VR titles, is nonexistent here, there's a pleasingly loud bang when you shoot the guns, and there's always something satisfying about expertly destroying

a table full of vases like an Uzi-toting bull in the world's unluckiest china shop.

SHOOTING BLANKS

The problem is, while the point is to destroy things, you can't always blast away with the level of accuracy you might like. Whereas other VR shooting games tend to offer little laser sights so you can better see where your shots are aimed, Lethal VR only does this during the menu screens. As soon as the action starts the laser sight disappears, leaving you with just your weapon and the targets. Aiming at stuff dead ahead is fine and dandy, but your accuracy drops the further to the left or right you're aiming, which can be incredibly frustrating.

On top of the inaccuracy, at times the PS Move tracking will pack in completely and your weapon will glow an infuriating red through no real fault of your own. This is a shame, because when it works Lethal VR is simple, stupid fun, which anyone can enjoy. But for the last round in this mag's Reviews chamber? This one's hardly a magic bullet.

VERDICT

A decent-ish shooter that makes you feel like the Terminator... until you start regularly crashing. If it were more reliable it would be highly recommended. **Chris Scullion**



LAST MONTH ON PS PLUS



How's everybody getting on with their New Year's resolutions? Personally, I'm finding my promise to "share more" to be... challenging (get your FILTHY PAWS off my limited-edition DualShock). But PS Plus set a stellar example for me last month, with freebies sharing the love across PS4 and PS Vita alike. Warmed my cold little heart, it did.



Yes, compatibility with Cross-Play meant that **DAY OF THE TENTACLE**

REMASTERED wrapped its feelers – or, rather, feeler – around both consoles. As irreverently rib-tickling as it ever was on ye olde MS-DOS back in 1993, the point-and-click's lick of graphical paint and eternally ingenious puzzles were a welcome New Year gift.



But we were suckers for a good sob story with second headliner **THIS WAR OF MINE:**

THE LITTLE ONES (PS4). The charcoal-smudged, strategic survival sim was tough in more ways than one. The brutal difficulty of keeping yourself and your wee whippersnappers safe, plus heart-wrenching moral decisions to make... We'll never forgive ourselves for robbing that old lady blind.

Psych! **THE SWINDLE** proved we were all born thieves. Stealing onto PS3 and PS Vita as well as PS4, the cybercrime caper pitted players against high-security buildings, permadeath and a 100-day countdown to filch as much as you could. Less ambitious was arcade racer **BLAZERUSH** (PS3). A handful of entertaining modes and a valiant attempt at some Micro Machines-esque colour couldn't save it from skidding into relative insignificance.

But while simple 'match-three' PS Vita puzzler **AZKEND 2** suffered a similar fate, it was tiny **TITAN SOULS**'s Dark Souls/Shadow Of The Colossus tension that kept us bouncing between PS4 and PS Vita – again! – for just one more boss fight. Maybe I *could* get used to sharing.

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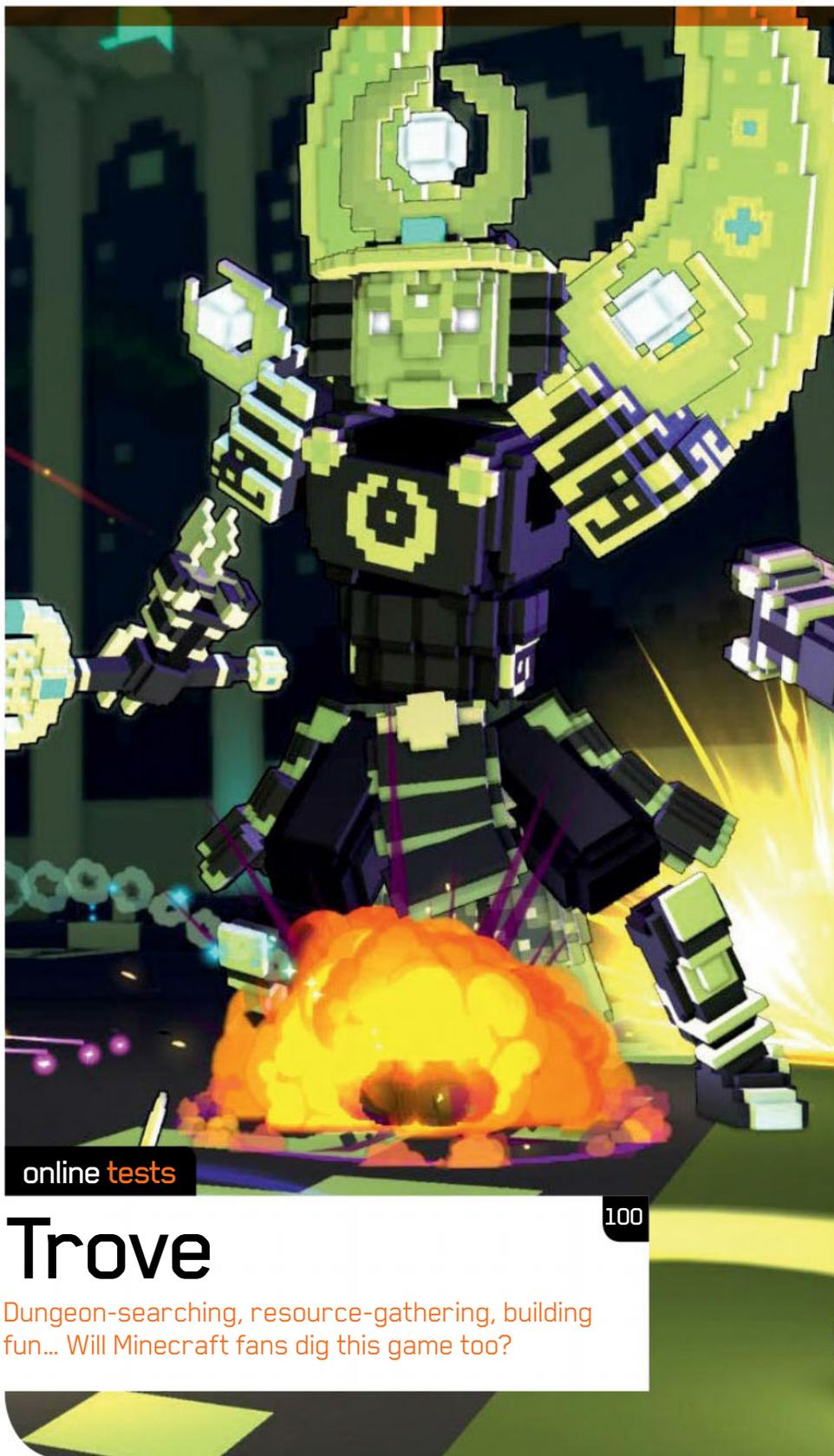


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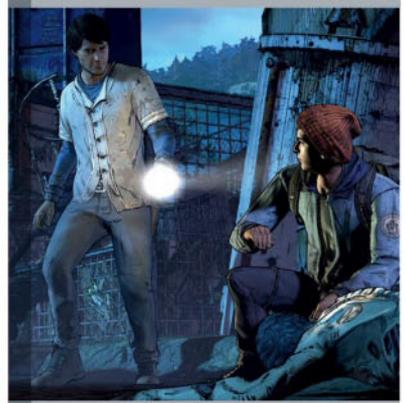


network

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this month



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A sympathetic new hero - and some shocking twists - lead season three of Telltale's zombie series.



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on your xmb

104 **Doctor Strange**
Marvel goes mystical as its surgeon-turned-sorcerer takes on hordes of extradimensional nasties.



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105 This month's hottest tunes

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Trove

100

Dungeon-searching, resource-gathering, building fun... Will Minecraft fans dig this game too?

online tests

MULTIPLAYER MODES PUT THROUGH THEIR PACES BY OUR TEAM OF EXPERTS

WHAT WE'RE PLAYING NOW



OVERWATCH

Matthew Pellett falls madly in love with a certain Korean Starcraft player

It's 2am and my lounge is filled with cries of "Nerf this!" again. I usually can't stand people sharing their gaming pics and videos on Twitter, but D.Va and her exploding bunny Ultimate is turning me into my own worst enemy - no matter how hard I try to hold back I find myself hopping onto Twitter to share every single Play Of The Game and rabbit on about it. My greatest success? An early morning moment of mushrooming mech mayhem that sees me muller a total of eight players and turrets in one big bang. "Game Over!"



FIFA 17

Some extra salt for Ben Tyrer's wounds

My Ultimate Team wears Everton's 84/85 kit and plays at Goodison Park, so it wouldn't take the combined IQ of Stephen Hawking and Albert Einstein to work out which team I support. Indeed, one opponent makes the connection after beating me 0-1. Unfortunately, he's a Liverpool fan and can't resist reminding me of the recent IRL result between the two teams in a message. "Just like the derby" comes flying into my inbox, with "Wahey" swiftly following. Eh, what the heck do I care?



OVERWATCH

Jen Simpkins' angelic demon-slaying goes unappreciated, world continues to turn

As a Mercy player, I've come to accept - with a strange, grim, self-immolatory sense of pride, even - my role as "unpaid babysitter." It's why when I get zero upvotes from my teammates after: healing everyone through a final payload push; surviving being frozen by she-Satan Mei; strafe-dodging an icicle and whipping out my pistol to ice her right back; and then shutting down an ulting Pharah (achieving 'on fire' status) to secure victory... I'm not surprised. But this play not making my "Highlights" section, Blizz? Whole new levels of snubbery.

REVIEW



INFO

FORMAT PS4
PUB TRION WORLDS
DEV TRION WORLDS
REVIEW N/A

Trove

Digs deep, but comes up empty

Survey the geometric world and you might feel an odd sense of déjà vu. Your surroundings bear a striking resemblance to those in a game that rhymes with Shineshaft. What to do first? Tackle the hourglass-shaped dungeon in the distance? Or excavate some glowing minerals? Yet despite all this potential, this free-to-play MMO has as much depth as a mineshaft dug with a teaspoon.

For an online Beta, Trove can be surprisingly lonely. Raiding dungeons is a solitary adventure, as finding a club to join is a difficult process (it's secondary school all over again *sob*). Even when someone works out how to tag along, the lack of emotes means you can't silently proposition them to stick around and come plundering with you. It's a pity as the kooky classes - Candy Barbarian, Dino Tamer and Chloromancer, to name just three - are made for mischievous

group adventures. Admittedly, slashing your way through dungeons is addictive, as the quadruple-jump mechanic makes dodging during its frantic fights as key to winning as dishing out the hurt.

Sadly, Trove's a ghost town as far as NPCs and quests go, meaning you've got to create your own fun. But the community is a goldmine. Strutting their stuff in the peaceful social hub,

everyone shows off their skills while mock-fighting. You won't feel isolated constantly, though. After a random knight trawls through a spectre-infested castle with me, a message from them pops in. The poignant missive? 'GG'. As they ride away, I find myself staring wistfully after my mute companion.

If you're hankering after some team-based duelling, Trove has PvP matches where you

IT'S A GHOST TOWN FOR NPCs AND QUESTS, MEANING YOU'VE GOT TO CREATE YOUR OWN FUN.

TUTTI BOOTY

There are three types of loot: hats, weapons and faces (ick!). Inventory clogging up? Chuck it into the Loot Collector to record its design, which you can then apply to your fave equipment.



You gained 39 experience!
You got 1 Glim

Hacking our way through dungeons is fun... if only we could dig up some chums.

either battle 5v5 or play Capture The Flag. Currently, players of all levels fight together. Some you'll send to the grave with a couple of swipes of your spear; others can decimate you with one hit. Random loot boxes floating around are supposed to give you a helping hand, but often do zilch when you run through them. But, aspiring architects, rejoice: you can erect your dream home on your small plot of land. Upon creating a club, you get an entire world to personalise however you wish.

With some serious bug fixes and some well-made tweaks to the multiplayer formula - cobbling together a club really shouldn't eat up this amount of time/gold/brain cells - its impish community could make it well worth playing. But Minecraft can rest easy: for now, at least, Trove's overoptimistic little trowel scratches only at the surface of greatness.

VERDICT

Neither as effortless as multiplayer Minecraft, nor as objective-focused as Dragon Quest Builders. That "best of both worlds" game continues to elude our clutches... **Zoe Delahunty-Light**



Let It Die

Great feedback for loopy F2P title's online grind

INFO

FORMAT PS4
PUB GUNGHO ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT
DEV GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE
REVIEW ISSUE #132, 8/10

Grasshopper games hold the attention. This one's no different, its savagely clever, always-online PvP system ensuring you're perpetually on edge. Downed fighters transform into Haters, then go walkies around others' games. Icing foul-mouthed enemies yields exclusive items. (Smacking your buddy's minion in the face with an iron is the epitome of satisfaction.)

Tokyo Death Metro's auto-raids trigger the true chaos. Met creepy robot Tetsuo? Your freezer-dwelling fighters can now target friends' Waiting Rooms, holding people to ransom in toilets and climbing ranks. It's not funny when it's happening to you - and recovering's pricey if you buy currency - but it's a real incentive to stay frosty... and keep playing.

VERDICT

An unashamedly clunky hack-'n'-slasher, but Let It Die's online systems are as brutally graceful as a varial kickflip. Uncle Death must be proud. **Jen Simpkins**

101



Steep

Snow better than playing on your own

INFO

FORMAT PS4
PUB UBISOFT
DEV UBISOFT ANNECY
REVIEW ISSUE #132, 6/10

Rule one of an always-online game should be that the permanent connection is absolutely necessary. Sadly, this open-world winter sports simulator can't even manage that. The idea is that nearly every rider you see in the world is a real person who you can team up with, but the problems start with the eerie lack of people to play alongside - and when you do find someone, the action's sterile.

You don't race directly against each other, but compete to top leaderboards for events your group does together. Yet because you can restart events at any point, it just ends up feeling aimless and no different from playing the game alone. Given how empty the servers are already, you may have no choice.

VERDICT

Like every other aspect of Steep, its ambition ends up backfiring. With a rapidly dwindling player base, you'll find yourself quickly getting, er, board. **Ben Tyrer**

on the store

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The Walking Dead: A New Frontier – Ties That Bind

A brave new world for Telltale's defining series

Abandon any expectation of picking up where you left off in Telltale's continuing post-apocalyptic saga. This series immediately places you in the shoes of new playable character Javier García, and while Clementine plays a big role throughout this opening two-parter (you'll need to buy each episode individually), this feels more like a soft reboot rather than a sequel. Fortunately, this turns out to be a masterstroke.

That's largely thanks to Javier. Dropping a new protagonist into an established story is always risky, but his simple task of staying ahead of the undead hordes and protecting his family makes him instantly sympathetic, while his fast wit makes him fun to follow.

Importantly, his introduction and Clem's continuing presence means anything can happen to the pair, and their survival is far from guaranteed. So while the broad story beats will be familiar to returning fans – interactions with other survivors tend to go as well as you expect – the twists, so far, genuinely

shock. The only issue is that the technical performance don't match the superb art design and storytelling, with characters sometimes moving with the grace of a decade-old Barbie figure.

Still, it's a promising start, and we'll have a full review of the whole series when it wraps up.

👍 **JAVIER GARCÍA'S SIMPLE TASK OF PROTECTING HIS FAMILY MAKES HIM INSTANTLY SYMPATHETIC.** 🗨️

ALSO ON PSN



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Rejoice Dragon Ball Xenoverse 2 fans, because two new characters are dropping into the action. Cabbe and Frost arrive, along with three new Parallel quests.



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Goat Simulator continues its quest to be the quirkiest game of all time. This brings new missions, masks and animals to fling around, including a dolphin in a wheelchair.



FREE

AUGMENTED COVERT AGENT PACK
Deus Ex: Mankind Divided's pre-order pack is now gratis, giving you access to the Desperate Measures mission and various reskins.

DLC

FREE



OVERWATCH – OASIS

It's off to the Middle East for Blizz's latest freebie, a Control map that's one of the best yet. Be wary of the motorway that runs next to sections of the map (games of chicken are deadly, kids) and prepare for some gymnastic, new jump pad-powered POTGs...

£11.59



CALL OF DUTY: INFINITE WARFARE – SABOTAGE

This first update brings four new maps and a new Zombies level, Rave In The Redwoods. The pick of the bunch is Dominion, an adaption of Modern Warfare 2's Afghan set in the future. Sadly, none of the maps is named after the Beastie Boys.

FREE



YOOKA-LAYLEE – TOYBOX

There's still time to get an early sample of Playtonic's platformer as a pre-order bonus. This is a demo world, made up of basic level furniture, that gives you an idea of the moves the chameleon and bat have up their non-existent sleeves. You'll be Reptile Rolling like a pro by the time the game drops.

how to...

DOCTOR PLAYSTATION

Our console medic fixes your tech woes with actual science



THE PROBLEM

You bought a new-fangled, official third-party pad, but you're inexplicably still not an eSports superstar. Forget all that "practice" nonsense - just tweak things to your advantage.

Fine-tune your pro pad

Get competitive by customising your new controller

1

STEP 1
MAKE SURE YOUR PAD'S IN TIP-TOP SHAPE



You're among friends. Admit it. You've felt the urge. And take it from your trustworthy pal the Doc - there's no feeling like ripping apart something perfectly healthy. Your brand-new, officially-licensed Razer Raiju pro pad, you say? Well, that wasn't what I meant. You say "tomato", I say "career-endangering felony."

To get the most out of your £149.99 peripheral, you should customise it to fit what your mum calls your, er, "unique" playstyle. Aww. First, get the thing working. Pulling the plug isn't an option, for once: you'll need to connect pad to console via the USB cable. Pros don't let pros suffer input lag in competitive matches.

Hear a faint audio hiss through your headset? Not to worry - it's easily fixed. Head to Razer's site, download the firmware, hook up the controller to your PC, run the updater and click "OK". Sorted.

2

STEP 2
CALLOUSLY DISMEMBER YOUR SHINY NEW TOY



Now for the fun bit - open-pad surgery! Kind of. Okay, not really, but let me dream. This is the only way I'm able to elicit anything approximating feelings from my - admittedly unbelievably ripped - husk of a body.

Inside your carry case, there's a small screwdriver made for removing and replacing the extra triggers on the underside of the controller: engage in a bit of lefty-loosey, righty-tighty twiddling with the screw in the centre of each chrometastic doodad. Need to melee without clicking in your thumbstick and throwing off aim? Put 'em on! Accidentally hitting them with your ring fingers? Take 'em off! The triggers, not the fingers. That's my job.

Two topside sliders will adjust trigger travel. A shorter travel means fast, complete presses (yay, shooters!); longer makes feathering easy (yay, driving!).

3

STEP 3
REMAP YOUR CONTROLS TO DESIRED BUTTONS



Now that you've bolted on the requisite parts of your beautiful Frankenstein's monster, it's time to make them dance. And guess what? Reconditioning this thing isn't anywhere near as tricky as brainwashing a human being. (You wouldn't believe the amount of kit that takes.)

Two simple tools on your Raiju let you remap your controls - the leftmost pair of shortcut buttons on the bar at the bottom of your controller. To rejig your presets, hold down the far-left button (with the arrow and the dot). While doing so, depress the button you'd like to reassign, then tap the button you'd like to transfer the function to. Voilà! Transplant complete. Shame about the lack of blood. Rather boring. The other shortcut - the recycling bin-esque symbol right next door - allows you to switch between your custom profiles on the fly.

THE VERDICT

Your pro pad's now broken in, brainwashed and beautiful - just like the Doc's ex-husband. Here's hoping it improves your game instead of taking you to court and suing you for emotional distress.



NEXT MONTH

The Doc swaps scalpel for katana to show how to conquer brutal Nioh. Will there be blood? *Is the Pope Catholic?*



BLU-RAYS



Doctor Strange

Marvel's sorcerer supreme is wizard

Serving as an introduction to the mystical side of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Doctor Strange is a movie at odds with itself: visually adventurous, but narratively conservative. Though the story of Stephen Strange's walk on the weird side may be superhero origin 101, it still has a few tricks up its sleeve.

After his hands are mangled in an accident, neurosurgeon Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch) travels to Nepal in a last-ditch attempt to find a cure. There he meets The Ancient One (Tilda Swinton), who opens Strange's mind to a new plane of existence, and enlists him in her quest to protect Earth from interdimensional terrors and their acolytes, including Mads "Death Stranding" Mikkelsen's Kaecilius.

More successful as an introduction to a new corner of the MCU than a standalone tale, Doctor Strange owes a debt to the first Iron Man in structure and plotting. There are even echoes of

Tony Stark in Strange's hubris, humour and immaculately contoured facial hair. This over-familiarity can prove wearisome, while several of the supporting cast (notably Mikkelsen and Rachel McAdams' fellow surgeon) are severely underserved.

But visually this is the most ambitious Marvel movie to date. Weapons are conjured out of thin air, cities twist and fold on themselves, and action sequences defy all known laws of physics. Kudos too for a final set-piece that subverts the increasingly clichéd city-levelling climax in gleefully inventive fashion – quite the illusion.

Jordan Farley



■ The good Doctor can next be seen in this year's Thor threequel, Ragnarok.

COMING SOON



KING KONG VS GODZILLA

20 FEB

The English-language version of the 1962 Japanese cult classic: the kidnapped ape and defrosted dino do battle.



INFERNO

20 FEB

This Dan Brown adaptation sees Tom Hanks' crime-solving symbologist and Felicity Jones track down a virus that could wipe out mankind. It's bobbins.



I AM NOT A SERIAL KILLER

20 FEB

Christopher "Doc Brown" Lloyd stars in this indie horror about a homicidal teen (Max Records) who hunts a supernatural killer.



FREE STATE OF JONES

20 FEB

Matthew McConaughey stars as a Confederate soldier who joins in a rebellion alongside slaves after being branded a deserter.



AMERICAN HONEY

20 FEB

Road movie about American teens selling magazines door-to-door by day and partying by night. Foolishly, they don't stock OPM.



PERSONA 3: MOVIE 2

27 FEB

The months before Persona 5's release starting to feel like a lifetime? Scratch that itch by picking up this entry in the Persona 3 film series.



OUIJA: ORIGIN OF EVIL

27 FEB

Superior sequel to 2014's Ouija, about a family who unwittingly invite an evil spirit into their home in 1967 Los Angeles.



JACK REACHER: NEVER GO BACK

27 FEB

Tom Cruise's ass-kicking military investigator returns to prove Cobie Smulders' Major has been framed.



A STREET CAT NAMED BOB

27 FEB

Feelgood Brit-flick about a cat (frequently played by the real Bob) who saves the life of a homeless musician living on the streets of London.



IN A VALLEY OF VIOLENCE

6 MAR

Revenge-fuelled western starring Ethan Hawke as a drifter left for dead by the son of lawman John Travolta. Lots of shooting.



A sequel is due this year, while the rights to an American remake have been snapped up.

Train To Busan

Proves there's life left in zombies yet

Don't be put off by the subtitles: Korean horror *Train To Busan* isn't just one of the year's most entertaining horrors, it's the best zombie movie in ages. Not only that, with social commentary baked into its DNA, it's the natural successor to George A Romero's genre-defining undead trilogy.

Set almost entirely on the titular train from Seoul to Busan, the colourful cast of characters includes an absentee father and his young daughter, a high school baseball team, a working class father-to-be and his wife, a pair of elderly sisters, a selfish CEO, and a convulsing woman who, it turns out, has been bitten and is infected with a virus that turns her into a ravenous zombie. With all hell breaking loose on the train – and, we learn, in the surrounding countryside – the ragtag group battles its way through the carriages in order to survive the journey to South Korea's second city, where they believe salvation lies.

Thrillingly shot, paced and edited, *Train To Busan* is an absolute blast from departure to arrival. But there's more

meat on the bones than mere zombie carnage. Class structures and the pressure-cooker setting lead to interesting conflicts between the human passengers aboard the train, all of whom are – naturally – desperate to survive. Indeed, Busan's most hate-worthy character is a boo-hiss human baddie.

Director Yeon Sang-ho also wrings a surprising amount of emotion out of the setup – these are characters you genuinely care about, each errant bite, scratch and betrayal landing an almighty gut punch. It may not introduce anything particularly revolutionary to the saturated zombie genre, but this is an express train to fun well worth boarding. **Jordan Farley**



MUSIC



RUN THE JEWELS RUN THE JEWELS 3

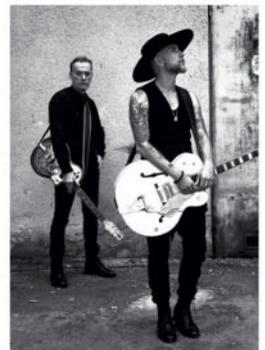
FORMAT ALBUM ETA OUT NOW PRICE FREE

El-P and Killer Mike bounce back with their third album of hard-boiled rap tomfoolery. Like its predecessors, 3 is a highly entertaining collision of slamming beats and "Did he just say that?" punchlines (yes, El-P really did claim "My dick got a Michelin star"). runthejewels.com

ME AND THAT MAN SONGS OF LOVE AND DEATH

FORMAT ALBUM ETA 24 MAR PRICE £7.99

Nergal is the front man for Polish metallers Behemoth, but moonlights as the vocalist of country duo Me And That Man. This should be dark manna for anyone who adores Nick Cave, Johnny Cash, et al. meandthatman.com



105



THE RAVEONETTES 2016 ATOMISED

FORMAT ALBUM ETA 16 FEB PRICE £7.99

Throughout 2016, Danish duo The Raveonettes recorded a track a month. Now they've brought all 12 together into an "anti-album," and it's a fascinating insight into seasonal moods. theraveonettes.com



GEORGIA FEEL IT

FORMAT TRACK ETA OUT NOW PRICE £0.99

London-based multi-instrumentalist (she plays drums, bass, guitars and keyboards as well as sings) Georgia returns with a glimpse of her next album – a raucous, synth-fired blast of electro and dancehall with an inspiring video that shows a host of female drummers going wild behind the kit. Yup, we're feeling it. georgiak.com/feelit

R



PlayStation.

INFO

PUB KONAMI

DEV KCEJ
PRODUCTIONS

RELEASED 1999, PS1

GET IT NOW PS3/PS
VITA STORE, £7.99

NEED TO KNOW

- 1 The game was originally designed for the 3DO.
- 2 A SWAT team gave KCEJ advice on MGS's guns.
- 3 Christopher Walken inspired Snake's face.

Yoji Shinkawa's character sketches are incredibly stylish, and have endured the test of time splendidly.

Hideo - and - sneak

Every month we celebrate the most important, innovative or just plain great games from PlayStation's past. This month, we duck beneath a scuffed-up cardboard container to celebrate PS1's legendary stealth smash hit...



Metal Gear Solid

How the hell has it taken us this long to choose Snake's PlayStation debut for Classic Game?! Truly, the OPM Goat Of Shame is burning holes into *all* of our faces – and has threatened to do so continuously for a good few months yet. All we can say is that the iconic stature of Metal Gear Solid almost made it too obvious a choice for these pages before now.

Almost. Hideo Kojima's espionage adventure isn't just one of the best games to ever grace PlayStation, it's one of the most influential titles in the history of the medium. It made stealth games newly relevant for the first time in a generation, and just as the world and the power of PS1 made Snake 'Solid', the bandana-sporting merc in turn transformed the landscape of 3D sneakers forever. Without Koj's Alaska-set stealth classic, there would be no Splinter Cell, no Second Sight, nor would you have sampled The Getaway: Black Monday's utterly borked, covert cockney sneaking bits. (Cheers for that one, Snake, mate.)

What made it great? Amazing hide-and-peek highjinks with the best AI soldiers in the biz. The coolest, most effortlessly creative boss battles you could imagine. A stone-cold classic

soundtrack. Top-tier, movie-rivalling voiceover work that made you feel like you were watching an (albeit super-blocky) action flick. A winding, deliciously layered, military-fetishising, nuclear-war-ruminating plot. Oh, and only the most kickass character ever to creep his way onto PlayStation.

SNAKE IT AWAY

This is hands-down the most entertaining Snake in the illustrious stealth series' history. Unlike the near mute incarnations that pop up in MGS 3 and MGS 4, the bona fide, accept-no-substitutes Solid 'David' Snake from the first Metal Gear Solid is a superbly sketched character crackling with quips, barbs and all manner of cynical putdowns. The Phantom Pain's tight-lipped Venom 'Did-Konami-not-pay-Kiefer-Sutherland-enough-to-record-more-than-six-lines?' he is not.

Whether bantering with Vulcan Raven about the World Eskimo-Indian Olympics, where he suggests the hulking shaman

SNAKE IS BASICALLY JOHN MCCLANE SHOVED INTO A SKINTIGHT SNEAKING SUIT.

must be a "real threat in the 'Muktuk Eating' contest," or celebrating his victory against Liquid's Hind-D by claiming "that takes cares of the cremation" as the downed whirlybird burns in the distance, MGS 1's Snake is a personable, hugely loveable action hero. He's basically John McClane, stripped of the manky vest and shoved into a skintight sneaking suit.

And what about those now mythic 'classic Koj' moments? The famed director repeatedly smashes the fourth wall with the least expected of sledgehammer strikes, confounding and delighting his audience in equal measure. Whether you're following Campbell's advice and checking the 'CD case' – the back of MGS 1's physical box – for Meryl's Codec frequency, or plugging your pad into a different port to outfox Psycho Mantis and his telepathic parlour games, few games can rival MGS 1's subversive playfulness, even 18 years on.

The quality of the VO work and eye for a killer camera angle in those masterful cutscenes floors everything else on PS1. Never before had gamers experienced this level of storytelling craft or Hollywood-aping production. Granted, it may now look like KCEJ drew Snake's eyes with the pencil tool in MS Paint, but when PS1's ultimate sneaker first launched, this was as close as games had ever come to mimicking silver-screen spectacle. Nearly two decades and many supreme sequels later, Metal Gear Solid has created one of PlayStation's greatest legacies. Not bad for a bloke who skulks around in a battered cardboard box, eh?



■ Snake's physique was modelled on Van Damme's.



■ The build-up to the Cyborg Ninja fight is brutal.



■ Psycho Mantis: the best boss battle of all time?

Name that game

Guess the four games, and their scores, from these review quotes

1 YOU'LL BE PROPERLY STEAMING WHEN, SEVEN HOURS IN, YOU STILL HAVEN'T EXHAUSTED THE TUTORIALS.

2 THE EVENTUAL CONCLUSION YOU'VE FOUGHT SO VALIANTLY TO REACH DELIVERS MORE LOOSE ENDS THAN A LOST SEASON FINALE.

3 THERE'S ENOUGH GORE-SPILLAGE HERE TO SATISFY THAT JAPANESE HORROR HARDCORE. JUST WATCH OUT FOR THE SEVERED HEAD IN THE GOODY BAG.

4 PLAYING AGAINST AI CHARACTERS IS... ESSENTIALLY PRACTICE FOR THE ONGOING, LIMITLESS CHALLENGE OF TAKING ON REAL PEOPLE.

- ANSWERS**
- 1. Final Fantasy XIII, issue #41, 9/10.
 - 2. Assassin's Creed, issue #13, 8/10.
 - 3. Corpse Party: Book Of Shadows, issue #82, 6/10.
 - 4. Soulcalibur IV, issue #22, 9/10.



OPM TIME MACHINE 5 YEARS AGO

We called it the evil issue, but in retrospect the gore-packed **OPM #68** was perhaps just misunderstood...

cover game
Prototype 2

More brutal than **Arkham City**...
More bloody than **Dead Space 2**...
More freedom than **Dark Souls**...

Welcome to 2012's most destructive open-world game

Matt Elliott enters New York Zero to experience the mutant powerhouse that is **Prototype 2**

Above We made some pretty bold claims about Prototype 2 - it was the sort of thing that gets the 'videogames breed violence' brigade waving their pitchforks. And yes, it was brutal, but our early look left us anticipating a whole lot of future fun.

Below left Hitman Absolution took a more personal approach to killing than Prototype 2. *Bespoke* evil.

Below right Obviously, Resident Evil had to be included. We took an early look at Resi 6.



Far left We had no idea just how good - or moving - The Last Of Us was going to be. We're now desperate for the sequel.

Left And because all that evil was contagious, we gave you a guide to the 13 worst games we could think of. *cackles*

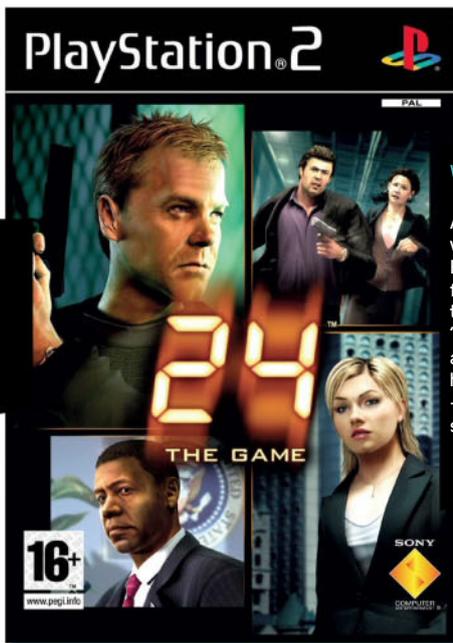
DON'T MAKE ME PLAY! 24: THE GAME

Don't like it. Never tried it. Every month we force one of our team to play their most feared game



WHO?

Spending far too much of his youth devouring 24 boxsets means Ben Tyrer has happier memories of this game than most. But is his nostalgia misplaced?



INFO

PUB SONY
DEV CAMBRIDGE
STUDIO
RELEASED 2006
GET IT NOW AMAZON,
£5.49

WHAT?

A tie-in to the TV show where CTU Agent Jack Bauer must keep the free world safe from terrorists by shouting "Damn it" constantly and torturing anyone he can get his hands on – if he hasn't already shot them.

Despite everyone in the office telling me how wrong I am, I have a strange appreciation for Jack Bauer's PS2 outing. Maybe it's the fact I want to know what happens between seasons two and three of the show. Perhaps I get misty eyes over how the game chucks you rapidly between different sections. Mainly, I just love supporting star Tony Almeida's soul patch.

So why am I afraid? Well, despite the distinctive ticking clock and Kiefer's vocal cords, I fear time will finally get the better of Bauer and my colleagues will be right. And within seconds of the opening credits, I discover I'm right to worry. Kicking off in a dockyard is lazy, even by 2006 standards, and the visuals are fuzzier than a mouldy orange.

It's not much better when you take control. It's a struggle to wrestle

I'M RIGHT TO WORRY: THE VISUALS ARE FUZZIER THAN A MOULDY ORANGE.

Bauer through grey corridors, and when it comes to popping caps into asses, there's a distractingly long delay between shooting a terrorist and their reaction. The final twist of the knife is the signature split-screen effect turning out to be a lot less stylish when you're actually in control of the action.

To be fair, there are some interesting ideas amid the wreckage. The ability to arrest surrendering enemies adds an element of complexity to shoot-outs, and the interrogation scenes are where the game comes closest to standing up to scrutiny. Having to vary your approach to get info out of blubbing evil-doers is at least intentionally fun.

What's fun for a different reason is the voice acting. Coming across like an am-dram adaptation, there's more ham in these performances than in a foot-long sandwich, with every person displaying only two emotions in total (either angrily yelling or dramatically whispering). So yes, it's pretty dump... but at least it's better than season six.



■ A younger – less critical – Ben wrote a reader review of 24: The Game for predecessor mag OPSM2. He even liked the voice acting. It's the most embarrassing thing he did as a teenager.

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO CURRENT-GEN'S GREATEST GAMES

PS4 HALL OF FAME



1



UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END

Nathan Drake's swansong 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 flowing 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.

2



THE LAST GUARDIAN

After a decade in development, Ueda's PS4 debut is both a technical marvel and emotionally devastating. Trico's mannerisms make it feel like a real creature - one we truly care about - while escaping The Nest is a captivating test. Some things are worth waiting for.

9



DISHONORED 2

This strong follow-up to one of PS3's greatest mixes a creative skillset with impressive level design to create a Kaldwin-ning immersive sim. From the shifting rooms of The Clockwork Mansion to discovering how to link your powers, there's near-endless scope for experimenting.

3



METAL GEAR SOLID V: THE PHANTOM PAIN

While retaining that distinct storytelling and sense of wonder that defines an MGS title, MGS V offers a level of freedom and creativity unheard of in any sandbox. Grand, majestic and bittersweet, it's an instant classic.

10



TITANFALL 2

Respawn's mech masterclass crashes onto PlayStation, bringing an inventive single-player story (including some of the finest levels ever to grace PS4) and a fluid multiplayer that rewards creative thinking. This is now the gold standard for pure shooters on PS4.

4



GRAND THEFT AUTO V

Laughing in the face of other cross-gen ports, GTA V on PS4 is more than just 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.

11



THE LAST OF US REMASTERED

This modern masterpiece just gets stronger with age, like a full-bodied stilton. A starkly brutal, emotionally honest take on the end of the world, Naughty Dog's stealth shooter is quite simply one of the best games ever, even if this PS4 port doesn't add much to it.

5



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 this a must-have part of any gaming library.

12



OVERWATCH

PS4's best multiplayer shooter bursts with colour, character and charm. At its core, Overwatch is a pleasing mix of empowerment and teamwork, enhanced by a raucous roster. Expect to become obsessed with landing Play Of The Game. Boop.

6



BLOODBORNE

With the finest third-person melee combat in gaming, drool-worthy 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 Yhnamam return essential.

13



TES V: SKYRIM SPECIAL EDITION

Last-gen's best RPG gets a remaster that will shave months off your life all over again. All manner of graphical upgrades breathe new life into Tamriel, while bugs are a much rarer occurrence. Mod support's sadly limited by Sony, but it's still ace.

7



STREET FIGHTER V

Mechanically, this is as close to perfection as any fighter on console - everyone from hardcore fans to first timers can grab a pad/fightstick and have serious fun. The launch game's lean, but with free add-ons coming all the time, it keeps getting better.

14



DARK SOULS III

Offering heady nostalgia for veterans, as well as one of PS4's most well-realised worlds for first-timers, From Software's masterpiece is one of PlayStation's most rewarding challenges. It's a fitting conclusion to a mesmerising and engrossing RPG treasure.

8



DESTINY: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION

Bundling the base game and all four expansions (September's Rise Of Iron included) into one bumper package, this is the most complete and moreish satisfying shooter any PS4 owner could wish for.

15



THE WITNESS

The ultimate puzzle game? Thekla, Inc's behemoth boasts one of PS4's most stylishly inviting, and resolve-testing, worlds to explore. It then crams it so full of secrets that even the platinum isn't the end of the adventure. It's a true original.

16



PES 2017

The best gets better. PES 2017 improves on all the bits we love: crisp passing, natural animations, blasting shots. A rejuvenated Master League recaptures the brilliance of the PS2 era, meaning solo sessions are just as fun as couchplay matches.

17



INSIDE

Six years in the making, the follow-up to Limbo is a harrowing adventure that resonates long after it's finished. The 2D trek through an oppressive and dangerous world is crammed with cunning puzzles, horrifying deaths and a stunning end sequence.

18



RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

The definitive edition of an excellent sequel, giving PlayStation players the chance to wander the halls of Croft Manor in VR, fight off zombies, survive the wilderness in co-op and, you know, enjoy the main course that is Lara's Syrian and Siberian caper.

19



DRIVECLUB

The premier current-gen racer leaves its rivals for dust due to gorgeous graphics, strong social features and great handling. Major add-on Driveclub Bikes is also the greatest bike racing game on PS4, thanks to making driving on two wheels fun again.

20



ALIEN: ISOLATION

Explore Ridley Scott's original vision of a horrifying future in startling fidelity with an attention to detail that borders on the obsessive. It's time to remember what made the xenomorph so scary in the first place... and then get killed by it.

21



TOWERFALL ASCENSION

You haven't lived until you've enjoyed a four-player free-for-all in this instant couchplay classic. The solo campaign is fine by itself, but almost *nothing* beats the arrow-grabbing, death-defying last-second kills of local multiplayer's mayhem.

22



BATTLEFIELD 1

Flinging the action back to WWI was an inspired decision. Demanding multiplayer matches offer a mix of depth and immediately gratifying pleasures. The single-player stories see developer DICE hone its storytelling chops, creating a fantastic package.

23



XCOM 2

Earth is lost, but the magic isn't in the sequel to PlayStation's best strategy game. Leading a ragtag resistance against the scourge of the galaxy offers brain-straining challenges along with an aggressive style of play that always keeps the pressure up high.

24



BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT

Rocksteady sends the Bat out with a bang. A compelling, cathartic story adds new layers to the Dark Knight, while PS4 allows Gotham to blossom with a truly amazing engine. The stealth still sings, the fisticuffs are fab and the Batmobile is brill.

25



DOOM

A superb reboot of a classic, taking all of the things we adore about the '93 original and throwing them back at us in a chaotic shower of bullets and body bits. It's PS4's most frantic FPS; its satisfyingly sprawling levels filled with brutal possibilities.

BUBBLING UNDER Alternative picks

We dive into PS4's library for gold.
This month: dating simulators

PICK # 1



STARDEW VALLEY

Bonkers bachelorette Jen Simpkins on why 16-bit rural romance is this RPG's heart



In real life I may be hopelessly – I mean blissfully – unattached, but in this farm sim, I'm a regular Casanova. Ahem. Thanks to realistically written personalities, trying to win the affections of NPCs (via gift-giving and careful dialogue choices) feels far more real than seducing Harvest Moon's twee anime tropes. The down side? Getting rejected at the Flower Dance properly stings. *stifled sob*

PICK # 2



THE LAST OF US: LEFT BEHIND

Single shut-in Jen Simpkins diversifies the dating pool with Ellie's coming-of-age tale



And if there's a better way to kick me while I'm down than this bittersweet add-on, I can't think of it. Although not technically a dating sim, or an 'alternative pick' given that it's in our Hall Of Fame, playing through Ellie's final rendezvous with BFF Riley – lobbing bricks and sharing a kiss – is disarmingly genuine. Even now, it's an unparalleled PlayStation portrayal of LGBT love.

IT'S AN UNPARALLELED
PLAYSTATION PORTRAYAL OF
LGBT LOVE, EVEN NOW.

PICK # 3



HATOFUL BOYFRIEND

Loveless loser Jen Simpkins accepts that charismatic pigeons may be her only option



Call me crazy, but there's just something about a young, healthy bird-boy that gets my feathers in a lather. Perhaps I've not gone totally insane and it's just this visual novel's pin-sharp writing, multiple engrossing story strands and dreamy, dateable avians – nope, I've officially lost it. Ah, love... Your beautiful mystery is the shining peak of life itself. And I should know: I just turned 24.



What starts out as a (er, mostly) stereotypical title develops into a gripping tale of biological warfare, world domination and pudding.

THE VIRTUAL REALITY HITS YOU HAVE TO PLAY

PS VR HALL OF FAME



1



REZ INFINITE

Fifteen years after the original's release, the psychedelic rhythm rail shooter has achieved its final form. In PS VR, creator Tetsuya Mizuguchi's vision becomes reality, the glittering polygonal trance-world and pounding techno inspiring total synaesthesia within you. Its crowning achievement? New level Area X, powerful enough to bring players to tears. Deserving of its name, this is a truly timeless title.



2



THUMPER

Make no mistake: the brave chrome beetle gave Rez a run for its money for our top spot. Hurtling down a violently kaleidoscopic track, pounding notes and scraping round corners is exquisitely tough - and the manic magic is enhanced and perfected in PS VR.

3



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.

4

NEW!



STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT ROGUE ONE: X-WING VR MISSION

Climbing into the cockpit of an X-wing is one of the most potent bits of wish-fulfilment on PS VR. It may only be 15 minutes long, but this free Star Wars Battlefront DLC is a magical portal into the movies.

5



RIGS: MECHANIZED COMBAT LEAGUE

Mech-suited, shooter b-ball where you dunk yourself through the hoop? It might sound goofy, but it's PS VR's most elegant team sport. Potential nausea aside, this is the future of competitive gaming.

6



BATMAN: ARKHAM VR

Not only is the training mission an unparalleled exercise in wish fulfilment (Wayne Manor! The Batcave! Batarangs!) but the defiantly sharp, if short, campaign is the epilogue to Arkham Knight we needed and deserved. Bats off to you, Rocksteady.

7



THE PLAYROOM VR

No-one can resist a freebie, least of all when it's this adorable. The Playroom robots return in a multiplayer mini-game collection designed for all, besting many premium titles with its quality. (Play ace platformer Robot Rescue; pray for a full-length sequel.)

8

NEW!



WEREWOLVES WITHIN

An ingenious mix of party game and paranoia-fuelled investigation, your group needs to chat to identify which of you is the werewolf. Getting the right mix of chums is essential, but you won't even notice the full moon rising as you figure out who is the monster.

9



PLAYSTATION VR WORLDS

The demo disc that ate all the other demo discs (and occasionally puke-inducing) five-game variety show has you pull off heists and go face-to-face with sharks in some of VR's most immersive experiences.

10



TUMBLE VR

With its sassy robot, pinpoint-accurate motion-tracking and block-stacking brainteasers, the virtual reality version of the PS3 physics puzzler is utterly absorbing. Multiple modes including lasers, mines and ticking timers make it PS VR's smartest entry.

11



BATTLEZONE

The headset's most complex treat hides fiendish systems under the minimalist glow of its art style. Looking for hours of smooth, satisfying tank warfare? If you're strong of stomach, you'll find it in the immersive cockpits, roguelike campaigns and co-op.

12



JOB SIMULATOR: THE 2050 ARCHIVES

The distant future; the year 2050. The 9-to-5 is history, so this hilarious sim lets you simulate your wildest, funniest grafting dreams of chucking eggs at punters and photocopying your own brain.

13

NEW!



I EXPECT YOU TO DIE

You're a '60s-esque super-spy taking on escape room challenges in this stylish puzzler. Your secret agent might not be able to move, but a handy control scheme allows you to psychokinetically control objects. Worth it for the Bond-aping opening credits.

14



WAYWARD SKY

Shepherding young Bess through a candy-coloured world in the clouds is made nausea-free and constantly fresh by this puzzler's innovative controls. Switching from third- to first-person perspective is a clever twist, making this one of PS VR's sweetest.

15



TETHERED

Fuzzy-eared Peeps might look harmless, but they're populating a strategy game that can prove teeth-grindingly tense. As their spirit guardian, you order Peeps to fight monsters, build taverns and scavenge resources. Surprisingly robust and cuddly to boot.

YOUR EVERY NEED FOR ON-THE-GO GOODNESS

PS VITA HALL OF FAME



1



TEARAWAY

Peerless crafty platforming from Media Molecule, this time using PS Vita's raft of touchscreen/touchpad controls to surprise and delight you in new ways for hours on end. Full of whimsy, charm and enough personality to put most games to shame, Tearaway's papercraft world remains Vita's most vibrant title.



2



PERSONA 4: GOLDEN

This thoughtful and unique JRPG epic gives you another stab at high school - only this time with intrigue and superpowers instead of nerves, acne and an unpredictable vocal register.

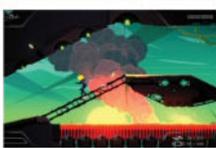
3



RAYMAN LEGENDS

Rather than losing its lustre on the move to PS Vita, Ray's second slice of sumptuous side-scrolling is even better on handheld. Touchscreen gestures make this fine platformer all the sweeter.

4



VELOCITY 2X

A ludicrously enjoyable puzzle/platformer hybrid that should come with a health warning. So joyous is the side-scroller's twin-stick teleporting, there's a danger you'll smile your face clean off the bone.

5



LITTLEBIGPLANET

Sackboy's back, smaller but just as lovable as ever. His platforming antics work perfectly on Vita, and the new control inputs complement the level creator brilliantly. Also: d'awwww.

6



SUPER MEAT BOY!

The new music doesn't match up to the classic tunes, but Meat Boy's long-awaited PlayStation debut is the finest, fleshiest twitch platformer of all. An essential, thumb-destroying masterpiece.

7



FINAL FANTASY X/X-2 HD REMASTER

Two examples of JRPG royalty, lovingly restored to their former glory for your portable pleasure. Their new touch controls are - gasp! - a welcome addition.

8



GRAVITY RUSH

Use a gravity-defying cat to break the laws of physics and zoom across the skies of a floating steampunk city. With stylish comic-book looks and a sassy heroine, this is a rush to remember.

9



METAL GEAR SOLID HD COLLECTION

Two of PlayStation's finest adventures scale down beautifully, with enough cutscenes to fill a transatlantic flight. Even less excuse not to play, then.

10



SPELUNKY

With more than a subtle nod of its fedora to a certain whip-wielding Dr Jones, Spelunky's procedurally generated dungeons and platformer/roguelike mashup shines brightest on PS Vita.

11



STEINS;GATE

This mind-bending, tongue-in-cheek visual novel takes something as simple as a mobile phone and turns it into a time-travelling extravaganza that's fit to bursting with comedy and drama.

12



HOTLINE MIAMI

Part puzzler, part top-down murder-'em-up that's as brutal as almost anything else on PlayStation. It's hard but never frustrating, with instant restarts and lightning-fast gameplay.

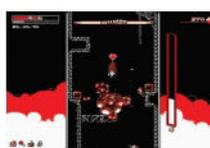
13



CRYPT OF THE NECRODANCER

Take Guitar Hero and Spelunky, then whack them in a blender. You'll get this gem, with its addictive soundtrack and moreish rhythm-action monster-slaying.

14



DOWNWELL

There's an engrossing simplicity that powers Moppin's surprise hit. All you can do is move left and right and fire your gunboots, yet hours later, we still can't turn it off. Fair to say it's gone down well.

15



UNCHARTED: GOLDEN ABYSS

Drake proves he's just as adept at adventuring on the go. A prequel story plump with classic jungle action, and crammed full of typical Uncharted charm.



No.49

In the (undead) dog house

Resident Evil's mutts spring PS1's best jump scare

FORMAT PS1 / PUB CAPCOM / DEV CAPCOM / RELEASED 1996 / SCORE 9/10

Last
Month

GTA: Vice City
Going for that first drive with Billie Jean pumping out of the speakers.

Man's best friend can be the *worst*. The hairy buggers will dry-hump anything in sight, eat their own weight in biscuits, and release bodily fumes so repugnant you'll want to cleave your nose off with a scythe. Oh, and occasionally, the undead Doberman variant of *canis familiaris* smashes through windows, scaring the bejesus out of already-wary S.T.A.R.S. agents. Bad dogs! Heel!

The original Resident Evil's Cerberus are the deadliest decomposing pooches you'll ever meet. After chasing Jill and Chris

inside the opulent and incredibly spooky Spencer Mansion, they sporadically pop up to nick vital keys or hone in on our heroes' throats like toothy heat-seeking missiles. Where's a harmless zombified kitty when you need one?

Their defining cameo occurs in the quiet confines of the L-Shaped Hallway. At first, this drab corridor seems unremarkable, aside from a choice in wallpaper that's sooooo 1996. Then, as you wander through your claustrophobic surrounds, you notice a large window... DEAR GOD WHERE DID THAT UNDEAD DOG COME FROM?!

Resi's 'dog bursts through window' set-piece is the most wonderfully orchestrated PS1 jump scare of all time. There's precisely zero build-up to the moment the Cerberus obliterates that pane, making its glass-shattering appearance even more nerve-shredding.

Cutely, in 2002's REmake, Capcom even subtly tweaked the scare, replacing the pouncing pooch with a slight window crack. But when you enter the L-Shaped Hallway from the other side, doggy doom awaits. Clearly, you *can* teach a rotting mutt new tricks. ■

Next
Month

50 Cent: Blood On The Sand
Fiddy's second outing gets off to an audacious start.

NEXT
MONTH

PlayStation[®]
Official Magazine - UK



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14 Mar

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page 76

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20 PS4 PAD
LIGHT BAR
DECALS!

INDIE GAME SPECIAL!

Yonder, Hob, Rime, and more star in our bumper celebration of the very best indie games heading to PlayStation in 2017

RAZER™
RAIJU GAMING
CONTROLLER



DESIGNED FOR ESPORTS

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