SKOAR!*

LIVE TO GAME

INSIDE

REEVU
Xbox Series X

FIRST IMPRESSIONS
Watch Dogs Legion Online

PHEACHUR
Bluestacks 5

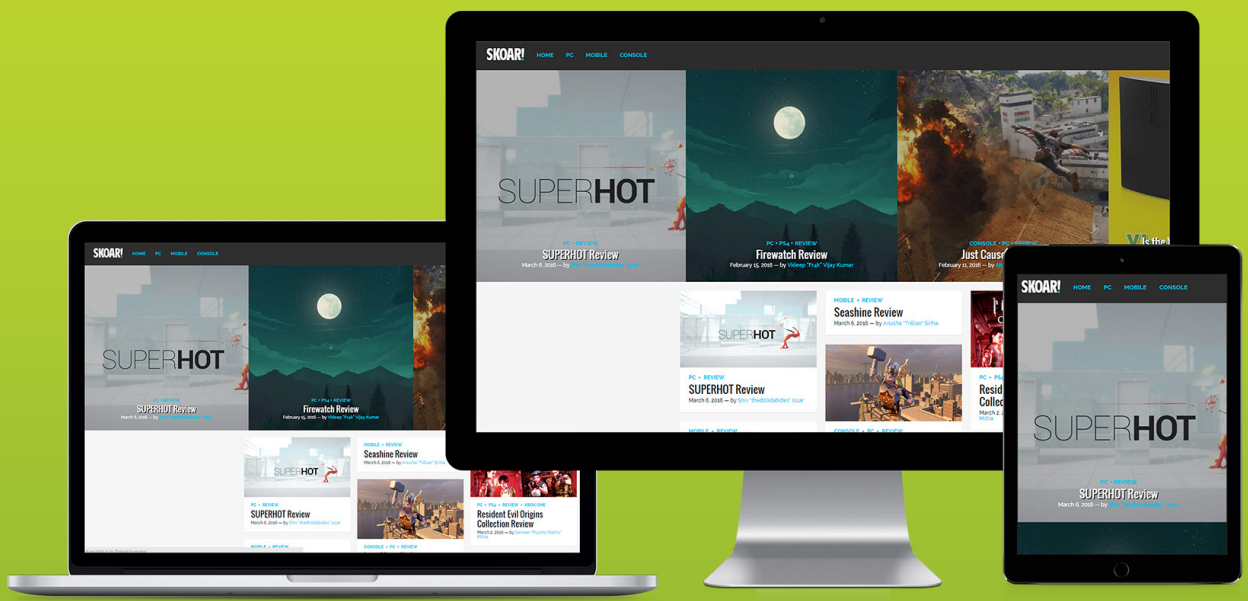


THE BIGGEST SURPRISE HITS OF 2020

TAKING THE WORLD BY STORM

FROM OUTTA NOWHERE





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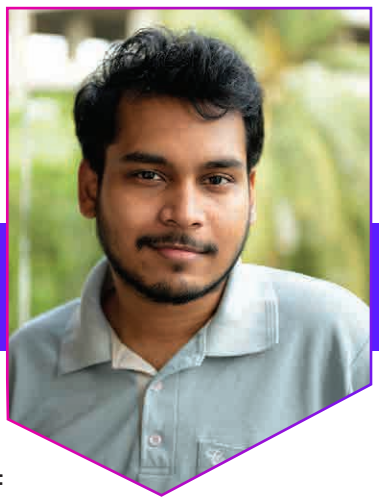
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YOU THINK YOU HAVE TIME...



Manish "Trigger-Happy" Rajesh
SKOAR! Overlord | feedback@skoar.in

...But it has a way of slipping out from under you. February has been a wringer of a month. We've had to deal with writers falling sick, it's exam season, plus, the month's just shorter. You know what they say, when it rains, it pours. You'll notice that this month's issue is much shorter than usual. The idea was that we'd keep this issue short and get it out sooner, and get a head-start on the next issue. Unfortunately, things haven't gone as planned. ***sigh*** One of these days we'll definitely get it out in time. Hopefully with the coming issue.

Coming to the cover, this month we're taking one last look (well, I wouldn't really call it our last look, tbh) at 2020, and looking at some of the surprise hits of last year. The sleeper titles that nobody expected to blow up, and the titles people knew were coming, but knocked expectations out of the park. There were quite a few in 2020, and hopefully we got all of them.

In other news, E3 is planning to make its digital comeback this year, while its "replacement" the Summer Game Fest is already gearing up for round two. Anthem's officially dead and Blizzard disappointed more fans, so nothing new there... Oh, and Viking survival game Valheim is apparently all the craze right now, so you might want to pick that up. I don't even want to talk about Nvidia because that's just depressing.

Skoar! Digital is free, as anyone reading this would know, so we'd appreciate it if you shared the love! The more the merrier. Also, we'd really love for you to join us and hang out on Discord, here: https://discord.gg/ZErhPSWNvG. That's the best way to easily reach any of us, and chill out with us, maybe even play some games. *

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SKOAR!*
LIVE TO GAME

OVERLORD
Manish "Trigger Happy" Rajesh

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Executive Dukes: **M P Singh, Mohd. Nadeem Ansari**

***Legal stuff we can't mess with**
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Editor: **Vikas Gupta**



What's New



OVERWATCH 2 AND DIABLO 4 NOT RELEASING ANYTIME SOON

While there was no confirmed release date for either Overwatch 2 or Diablo 4, fans will certainly be disappointed to know that neither game will be releasing this year. It was pretty much confirmed by Activision that neither game will be launching in 2021 during a quarterly financial call. "Our outlook does not include Diablo 4 or Overwatch 2 launching in 2021," as said by Activision chief financial officer Dennis Durkin. However, Diablo Immortal, the mobile version of Diablo that was announced at BlizzCon 2018 (to the dismay of many), will be releasing later this year.

http://dgit.in/ov2delay



SUMMER GAME FEST GEARS UP FOR ROUND TWO

Geoff Keighley's Summer Game Fest, the online digital, industry-wide summer celebration of video games is all set to return for 2021. The event made its initial debut last year, in response to the cancellation of major gaming events and conventions due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. There is no news on what events or showcases to expect this year. But what we do know is that the festival will be "more condensed" than the debut year, which ran for 4 long months. As per a tweet from Geoff Keighley himself, you can expect this year's Summer Game Fest to wrap up within a month.

http://dgit.in/sgf2



BIOWARE CANCELS ANTHEM

From genre-defining titles like the Mass Effect series and Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic to the crime against humanity that is Anthem, Bioware are no longer the powerhouse they once were. Long thought of as one of the biggest names in gaming, Bioware has gone from AAA developer to a mess of a studio that can't even release a working game. Case in point, Anthem and the terrible Mass Effect: Andromeda. Well, you can say goodbye to one of them as Bioware have finally cancelled Anthem. **http://dgit.in/bbanthem**



CHECK OUT THE NEW MORTAL KOMBAT TRAILER IN ALL ITS GORY GLORY

Warner Bros. Pictures has finally released the first official, red band trailer for Simon McQuoid's upcoming Mortal Kombat movie. Debuting just a month after they revealed the first look for the film, the gory trailer proceeds to give a seemingly accurate depiction of the iconic video game franchise. The film is set to release on 16 April 2021 in theatres and on the HBO Max streaming service.
http://dgit.in/mktrail



JACK BLACK IS CLAPTRAP

We already knew that a Borderlands movie was in the works and that Kevin Hart was going to be in it. Now we have news that the iconic Jack Black will be taking on the role of the iconic Claptrap. And honestly, it's a match made in heaven. Work on the movie has been going on since 2015. Historically, video game based movies don't do too hot, but Borderlands definitely has a stellar cast going for it.
http://dgit.in/jbct

LAUNCH NEWS

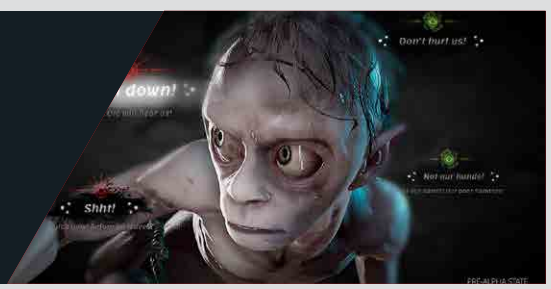
Indiana Jones game – In the works!

http://dgit.in/ijg



Lord of the Rings: Gollum – Delayed!

http://dgit.in/lotrgd



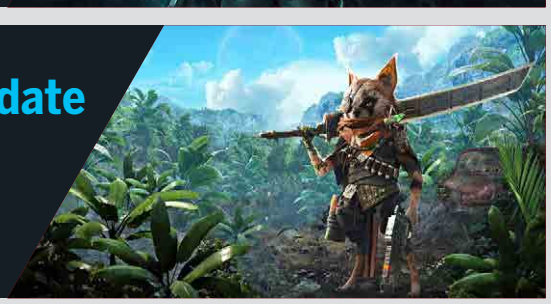
Returnal – Delayed!

http://dgit.in/retdel



Biomutant – release date confirmed! – May 25

http://dgit.in/bmrd



Hogwarts Legacy – Delayed!

http://dgit.in/hoglegdel



Vampire the Masquerade: Bloodlines 2 – Delayed!

http://dgit.in/vtmbl2d



UP AND COMING



CRASH BANDICOOT 4

Crash Bandicoot 4: It's About Time is making its way onto the PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X and Nintendo Switch this March. It will also be making its way to PC later in the year. Which is fantastic because this is an excellent modern platformer.

Release date – March 12



MONSTER HUNTER RISE

The next Monster Hunter game after the impressive Monster Hunter World will be going back to its handheld roots. Monster Hunter Rise will be released for the Nintendo Switch this March, featuring both familiar and new gameplay mechanics.

Release date – March 26



KENA: BRIDGE OF SPIRITS

Kena: Bridge of Spirits is expected to release in March this year, hopefully without any delays. The game has charming cel-shaded visuals and looks like it'll be a great casual action-adventure title.

Release date – March TBC



MORE FUN WITH FRIENDS

BY MANISH "TRIGGER-HAPPY" RAJESH
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We had the opportunity to try out the upcoming Watch Dogs Legions Online Mode in a closed Early Access last month. Here are our first impressions.

Watch Dogs: Legion Online didn't feature much in the way of a narrative expansion when we first played it about a month ago. However, it definitely comes with a lot more chaos added to the equation, thanks to the addition of (duh) coop online gameplay. Now, depending on how you enjoy playing Watch Dogs Legion, this could be taken as either a pro or a con.

FIRST STEPS

When we first stepped into the online mode, we had a short tutorial to go through, essentially a refresher course to re-



learn the game's mechanics, which we'd imagine a lot of people will need if they're picking the game up again since its launch last year. Once you're through the tutorial, you're free to do as you please in Watch Dogs Legion's open-world London. At this point, you'll be put into a random online session, or you have the option to start your own session if you're planning on playing with friends. For the Online mode early access, the games were hosted on a peer to peer basis, so ideally, you want the friend with the best Internet connection hosting the game.

GAMEPLAY

Coming to Online gameplay, like we mentioned above, you've got the open-world to explore. You can free roam with your group now, and participate in events and side activities as a group. Or, if you're in a random session, you're free to do your own thing. Of course, during all of this you're free to continue and recruit people into DeadSec, just like you could in single-player. Each player will have access to their own individual pool of recruits. However, you can't just keep recruiting willy nilly, recruiting is expensive, and the same resource (influence points) is required for upgrades as well, so choose carefully. As you play more online content, you'll gain experience and gain ranks which in turn will reward you with more influence points.





CO-OP MISSIONS

We had the opportunity to go through a gauntlet of the new co-op missions Watch Dogs Legion Online has to offer. For the most part, you have a lot of the single-player missions that have been adapted for co-op gameplay. Here's where recruitment can play a huge role. You can have the perfect team setup to handle every situation, with each member of the group filling a role. However, the end result largely depends on your group. If you're the patient sort who likes to plan missions and find just the right team for the job, well that's great. If one of your group is trigger-happy, well, then your planning is all for naught. This is the chaos we were talking about earlier in the intro. There was variety between the missions that we played, which is always a good thing. Variety also means plenty of different





approaches. Construction Drone approach still #1. There are missions which are more strict about teamwork and coordination, while others can be finished by simply running in and shooting up the place.

TACTICAL OPS

Watch Dogs Legion Online will also be featuring the game's first co-op Tactical Operation, called "Leader of the Pack". We didn't actually get to try this out during the Early Access; if we did we'd probably lose on round one. The Tactical Op consists of five interconnected narrative missions which are essentially Watch Dogs Legion Online's endgame content. In order to succeed at these players will need to strategize and communicate effectively with their teammates and

ensure they have upgraded gadgets and recruited a strong cast of characters.

SPIDERBOT ARENA

Finally, Watch Dogs: Legion Online also features the game's first PvP mode, the Spiderbot Arena. It's a free-for-all between four players, who are each controlling an armed spiderbot. It's a fast-paced, high intensity deathmatch, and we thoroughly enjoyed this mode. It reminded us a lot of playing Quake, back in the day.

Additionally, as part of Watch Dogs: Legion's post-launch plan for the year, players will get access to free future updates, including an Invasion PvP mode, new co-op missions and free characters.

VERDICT

Overall, we found Watch Dogs: Legion to be a lot more fun with a group of friends, as opposed to the single-player mode. In terms of narrative content, there isn't much here. Season Pass holders will unlock two new single-player missions. There is however, quite a bit of co-op content for returning or newer players to get through. And with a group of friends, there's no telling how any two missions will go. Playing Watch Dogs: Legion Online can very well be compared to playing GTA Online, with hacking. And GTA Online can be pretty fun, especially if you're messing around with friends. *



NOT YOUR TYPICAL JAPANESE RPG

BY ANDREW "EDGECRUSHER" LU

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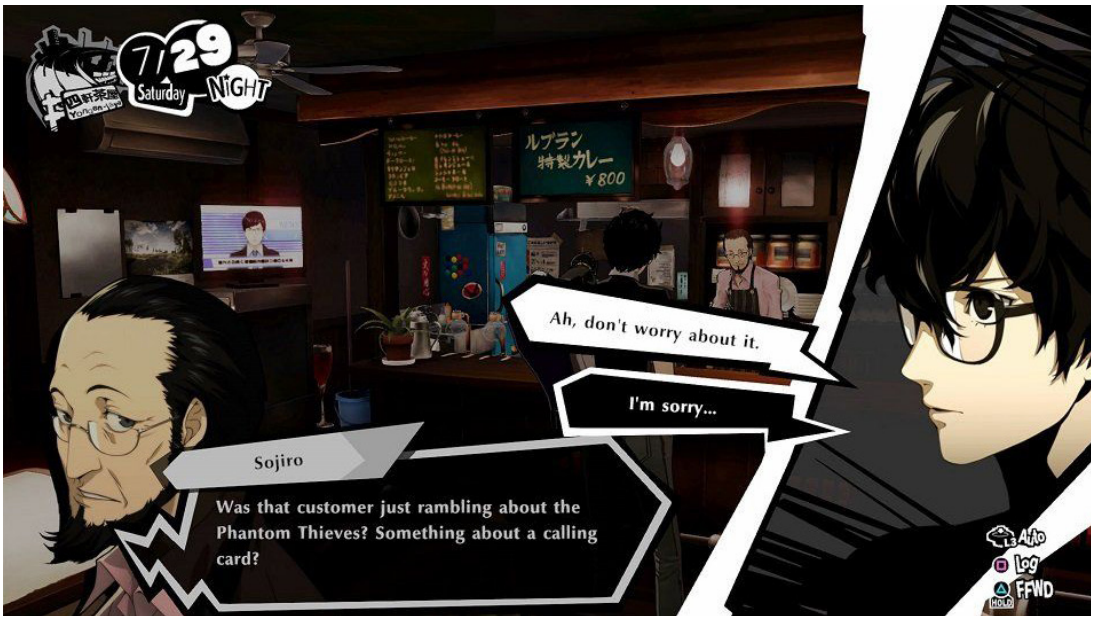


The Persona series is back with another entry into the quirky world of Japanese RPGs. Persona 5 Strikers isn't the same game as its previous incarnations. Sure, the story takes place right after the events of Persona 5 but the gameplay and combat are as far as you'd get from a Japanese RPG. Do note that Persona 5 Royale does not take place in the main Persona universe. As we've mentioned before in our Persona 5 Royale review, we're not JRPG regulars. We've played a few games here and there but

for the most part, the genre has eluded us. But, Persona 5 Royale drew us in with its wild story, endearing characters and tactical turn-based combat on the PS4. We loved the art design and for an old school anime buff, the animation was on point. But enough about that, how does Persona 5 Strikers play and is it fun? Let's find out.

STORY

Persona 5 Strikers takes place after the events of Persona 5 and not Persona 5 Royale. Yes, it can get a little confusing, but bear with us. After a chance meeting with a model called Alice, you are then thrust into an alternate dimension where the Phantom Thieves must journey across Japan to stop beings called Monarchs who want to destroy the minds of people in the real world. On some level, we feel that the story of Persona



exists to push the game forward and more than a plot, features character development and storytelling. You'll see the length and breadth of Japan in Strikers by travelling in an RV. It truly gives off the feel of a massive road-trip with your closest friends, and it really hits home hard. The dialogue and interaction between Sakura, Ryuji, Joker, Ann, and Morgan feels like it's been written by long-time friends who really get each other. These, by far, are the best story beats in the game.

COMBAT/GAMEPLAY

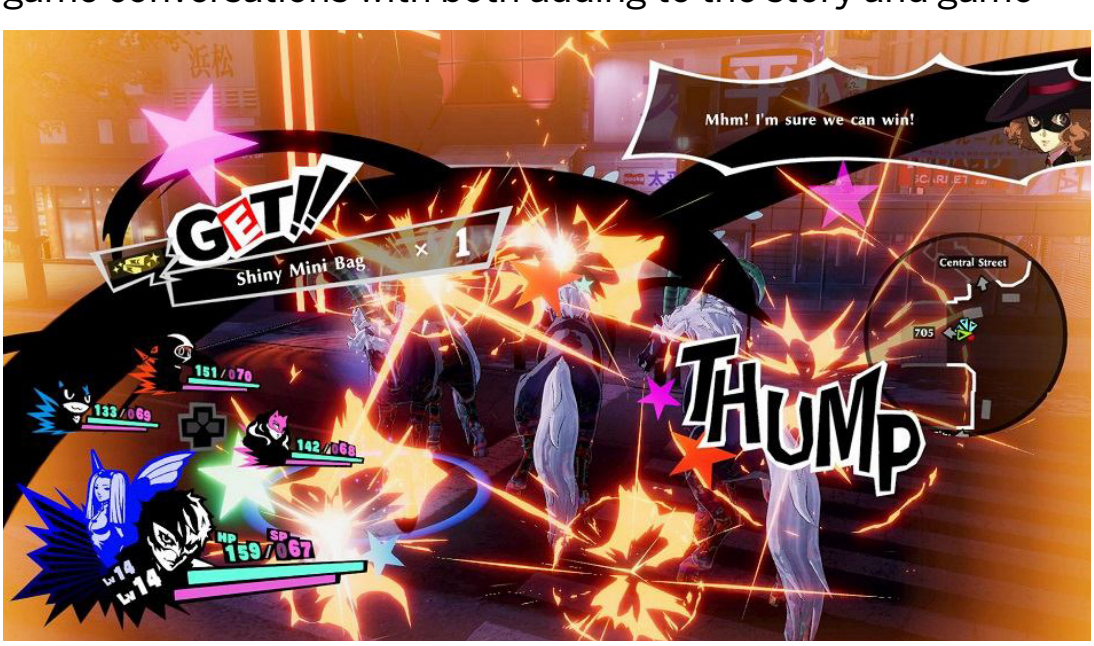
In terms of gameplay, the game functions like a social simulator with you running around talking to NPCs. Then, it flips the script and goes full-on Dynasty Warriors in a large arena. The



Musou-style of gameplay was jarring at first as we were used to a very tactical approach in the turn-based combat of 5 Royale. But here, you're blasting through waves of corrupted entities using a combination of knife combos and special magical attacks. You have four characters in total and can switch between each of them for unique attacks and moves. The action is hard and fast until you select a Persona attack, at which point, the game will slow down to a crawl, giving you a tactical overview of the situation. You can then select the best attack to correspond with your situation. It's a sleek combat system that will please fans of Musou games like Dynasty Warriors and even Hyrule Warriors. It's fast-paced but does come with its own tactical strategies and play style.

GRAPHICS

The cutscenes are divided into full-on Anime snippets to in-game conversations with both adding to the story and game-



play. The animations are what you would expect from an Anime-inspired game with exaggerated actions and poses. Look, if you're not a fan of Anime and its funky and outlandish designs, this may not be the game for you. But, if you're someone who has played a lot of JRPGs, the art design and graphics in Persona 5 Strikers are some of the best in the genre. Menus look great with stylized lettering and presentation while even the save screen looks relatively cool and well-thought-out. Basically, the game has an art aesthetic that is perfect for Persona 5 Royal and anyone who enjoys that kind of art style will have a blast. It's got a very punk aesthetic to it all, and it really works for a game like Persona 5 Strikers.

AUDIO

As usual, Persona 5 Strikers knocks it out of the park with the acid-jazz styling of its music. Right from the first frame, you're hit with some of the catchiest and sophisticated tunes in gaming. We loved the composition and track selection in the game.



The music when you're just walking around has a cool, summery vibe to it while during combat, the music builds to a crescendo of guitars, drums, trumpets and so much more. If anything, we could just listen to the music of Persona 5 Strikers by itself. It's that good!

FUN FACTOR

If you were expecting the tactical turn-based combat of previous Persona games, you'll have a hard time dealing with the fast-paced combat of Strikers. There is no getting around that. But, if you like that sort of gameplay, you will enjoy Persona 5

Strikers. More than anything, we had an amazing time just hanging around the Phantom Thieves. They really had a great dynamic and sometimes even took us back to our childhood just hanging out with friends. It's got that charm that truly separates it from the modern AAA game that is basically a novel with light gameplay and themes that a 14-year-old came up with (yeah, we're looking at you Last of Us 2).

VERDICT

If you're looking for a game that is different, unique and a little quirky with going over the top, then you should really check out Persona 5 Strikers. We're glad we did. And, even though the grand battles can seem boring in the beginning, once you start understanding the combat systems, it becomes a whirlwind of combos and magical attacks that is like a fireworks display on screen. *

MOAR!

TESTED ON
PlayStation 4

DEVELOPER
P-Studio

PUBLISHER
JP Atlus, US Atlas USA, PAL Deep Silver

PLATFORMS
PS4, PC and Nintendo Switch, also available on PS5 via backwards compatibility.

PRICE
₹3,499

SCOTT PILGRIM VS. THE WORLD™: THE GAME

COMPLETE EDITION



BY MANISH "TRIGGER-HAPPY" RAJESH

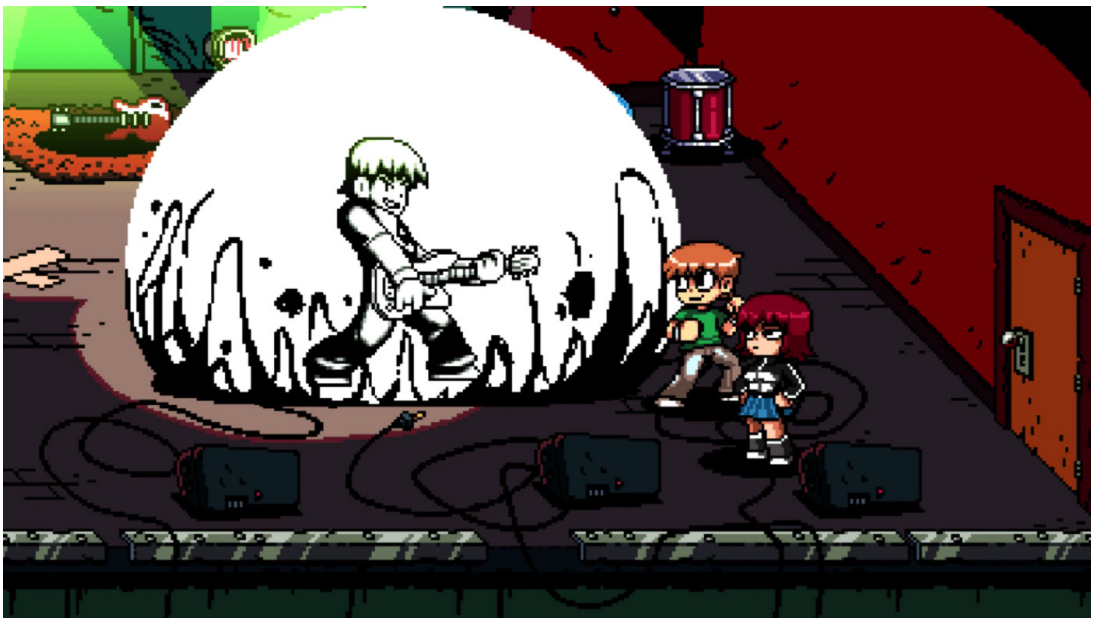
FEEDBACK@SKOAR.IN

Scott Pilgrim vs. The World: The Game first came out a little over a decade ago for the PlayStation 3 and the Xbox 360. It was released as a tie-in game alongside the release of the live-action movie, which had the same name. The game was quite the hit, so it came as a surprise to everyone when in 2014, Ubisoft pulled the game from all digital storefronts. Now, 7 years later, the game is back from the dead. Is it as enjoyable as it was back in the day? Does it hold up to the current generation's gaming standards? Let's find out. As a side note, the game's also available on PC this time around, which we already see as a point in its favour.

STORY

The game and the movie are both based on the Scott Pilgrim comic book, where Scott Pilgrim is trying to win the affections of one Ramona Flowers. While Ramona is all for it, she can't be with Scott until he defeats her seven evil ex-boyfriends and their minions. It sounds silly because it is. And the game knows this, which leads to some of the best kind of humour you can





get: the self-aware kind. The seven evil exes also set up for seven different thematics or zones when it comes to levels.

GAMEPLAY

If you've played any 2D sidescroller brawlers before, such as Double Dragon, or Streets of Rage, you'll feel right at home with Scott Pilgrim vs. The World: The Game. You've got a wide assortment of enemies heading your way to get the pulp beat out of them. And beating the pulp out of them is incredibly satisfying. You've got your standard punching, kicking, and throwing-stuff-at-people moves. Combined with the game's overall retro aesthetic, what you have here is a really fun beat-em-up.

However, there are some potential downsides. Scott Pilgrim vs. The World: The Game has a bit of a grind to it. You see, in order to beat this beat-em-up, you're going to need to power



up. This is done by purchasing permanent stat-boosting items from stores which you'll find at various levels as you progress through stages. The currency you'll be using are the coins that enemies drop when you defeat them. In addition to that, you've got snacks which replenish health, and clothing items which provide added defenses. You can already see where we're going here with the grind part.

Scott Pilgrim vs. The World: The Game is not an easy beat-em-up to begin with, plus, it can turn people off with its grind. Also, the hitboxes could use some work. However, the grind does allow the game to feature some lite RPG elements, which in turn means that the game has a fairly decent replayability value.



In addition to Scott, his bandmates and Ramona are also playable. These guys also level up as you play, and each new level unlocks new attacks and combos that you can use. Each playable character features a unique moveset and different combos for you to master.

GRAPHICS AND AUDIO

The retro aesthetic is pretty commonplace nowadays. For that matter, it was rare back in 2010 when the game first launched, but now, not so much. Still, the game's retro style pixel graphics and arcadey chiptune music compliment the overall presentation of the game really well. The comic books are very well represented by the game, and Anamanaguchi's soundtrack is one you'll want to keep listening to, even once you're done with the game.



COMPLETING THE EDITION

This version of Scott Pilgrim vs. The World: The Game comes with all the extras that were once DLC, including Knives Chau and Wallace Wells as add-ons, and four extra game modes, including Zombie Hordes, Boss Rush, Dodgeball and Battle Royale. Most of these are pretty self-explanatory; Zombie Hordes has you facing off against a horde of zombies (duh), Boss Rush sees you taking on the game's bosses in quick succession, Dodgeball features four players playing, well, dodgeball. Battle Royale is not the kind you're thinking. Instead, you're inside a wrestling ring; think Battle Royale before PUBG ever happened. These game modes are a great distraction from the main game if you're feeling a bit burned out from the grind.

MOAR!

DEVELOPER:
Ubisoft Montreal, Ubisoft Chengdu[a]

PUBLISHER:
Ubisoft

PLATFORMS:
Microsoft Windows, Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4, Xbox One

PLAYED ON:
Microsoft Windows

PRICE:
INR 749 (EGS)

VERDICT

After seven years, the cult-classic is back, and nothing has changed. Which is actually a good thing in this case. Scott Pilgrim vs. The World: The Game has aged surprisingly well, and definitely still holds up as a fairly decent brawler/beat-em-up game. It's one of the few video game adaptations that stays true to its source material, and combines solid, fun, gameplay, with a timeless retro aesthetic. *



Xbox Series X Review

FEELS MORE LIKE A PC UPGRADE

BY SAMEER "PSYCHOMANTIS" MITHA
FEEDBACK@SKOAR.IN



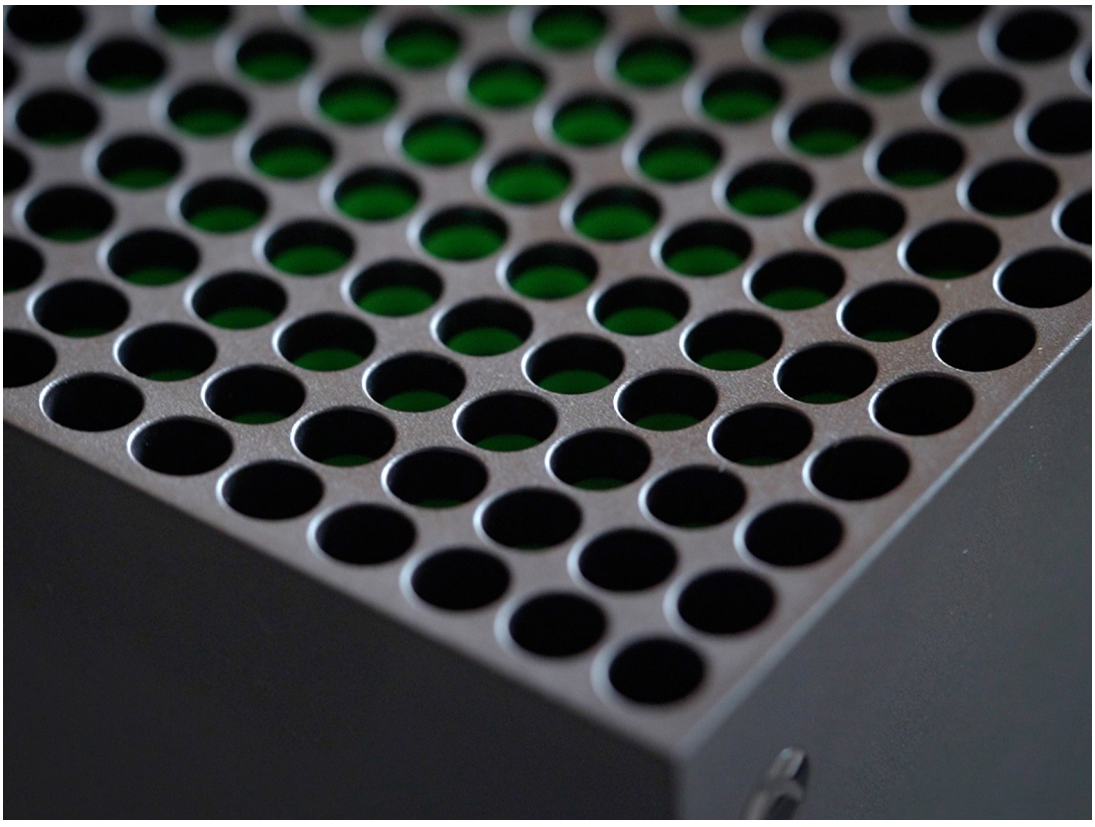
Microsoft had a rocky start back in 2013 when they launched the Xbox One. Not only was the console mocked for looking like a VCR, but the decisions around game sharing, DRM and always online weren't well-received by fans. Not to mention the fact that the console came bundled with the Kinect and was more expensive than the PS4.

Fast forward to 2020 and Microsoft has not only made the necessary changes to appease fans but has also made strides in the right direction to ensure gamers keep coming back for more. You have a service like Game Pass offering a library of more than 300 games on the Xbox as well as a large library on PC via Game Pass Ultimate. With xCloud, Microsoft hopes to let you stream your favourite Game Pass titles on your smartphone. Needless to say, while Microsoft is competing with Sony to be the preferred console of choice to sit under your TV, that isn't their only goal.

In the past few years, Microsoft has acquired a host of studios to ensure its platform and service has enticing enough exclusive games. In the midst of this "Play Any-



where" mantra, the company launched the Xbox Series X and the Xbox Series S to take on the PlayStation 5. While the Xbox Series X and PS5 are at loggerheads for space below your TV, the Series S is a different story entirely. Since we have the Series X for review only, let's focus on the premium console and see what it brings to the table. We've been gaming on the Xbox Series X for about 2 months now and here's what we think of Microsoft's latest console.



BUILD AND DESIGN

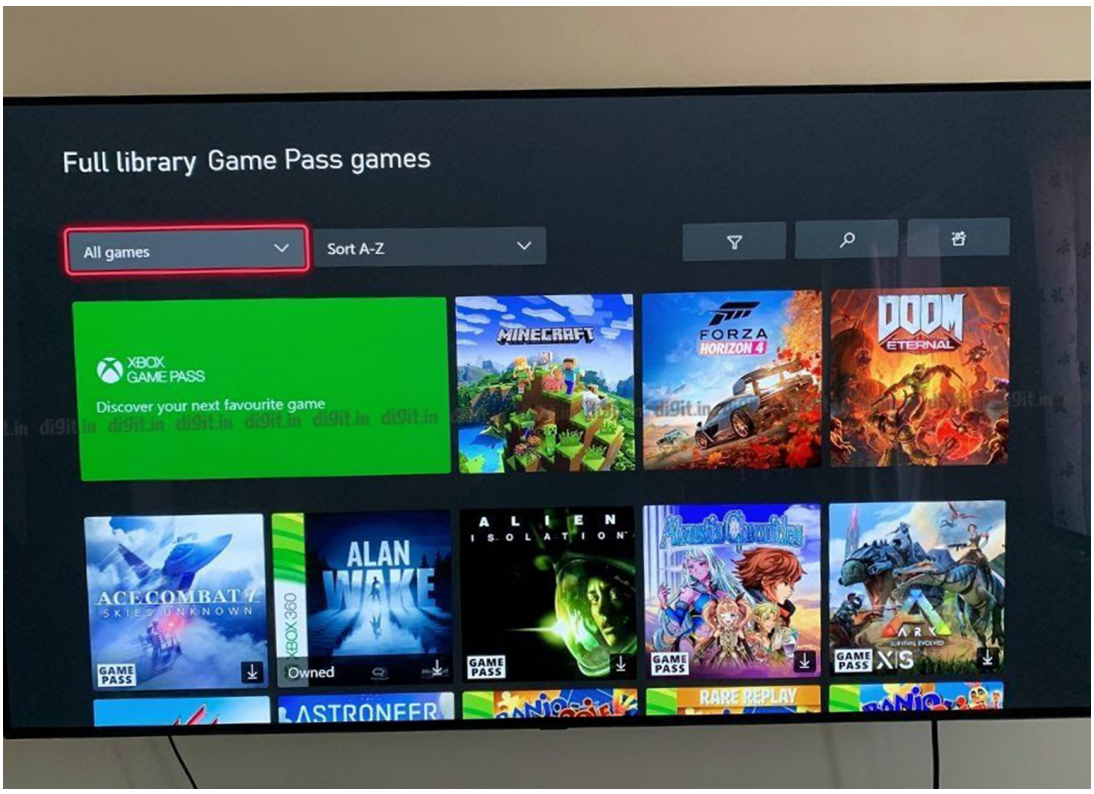
One look at the blocky monolith like design of the Xbox and you know that function over form was a priority. Unlike the PS5, which screams for attention in your living room, the Xbox Series X is more minimalistic and blends into your room's decor. It can be placed horizontally or vertically and switching orientations doesn't require you to get your screwdriver. However, the design of the power button and the non-removable base plate strongly suggests that the console was meant to be placed vertically. It's a lot shorter than the PS5 and honestly, we think it looks a lot better. It has more of the silent beast approach rather than the loud attention-seeking design of the PS5. Just so you know, the Xbox Series X is 151 x 151 x 301 mm in size. It also has a more rectangular cube-like design.

Functionally, the design allows the console to suck air from the back, and the hot air exits the console from the top.

SPECIFICATIONS

The Xbox Series X and S have different specifications under the hood, unlike the PS5 disc and digital edition, where the only difference is the absence of a disc drive. Since we are focusing on the Series X, here is a look at the specifications of the console.

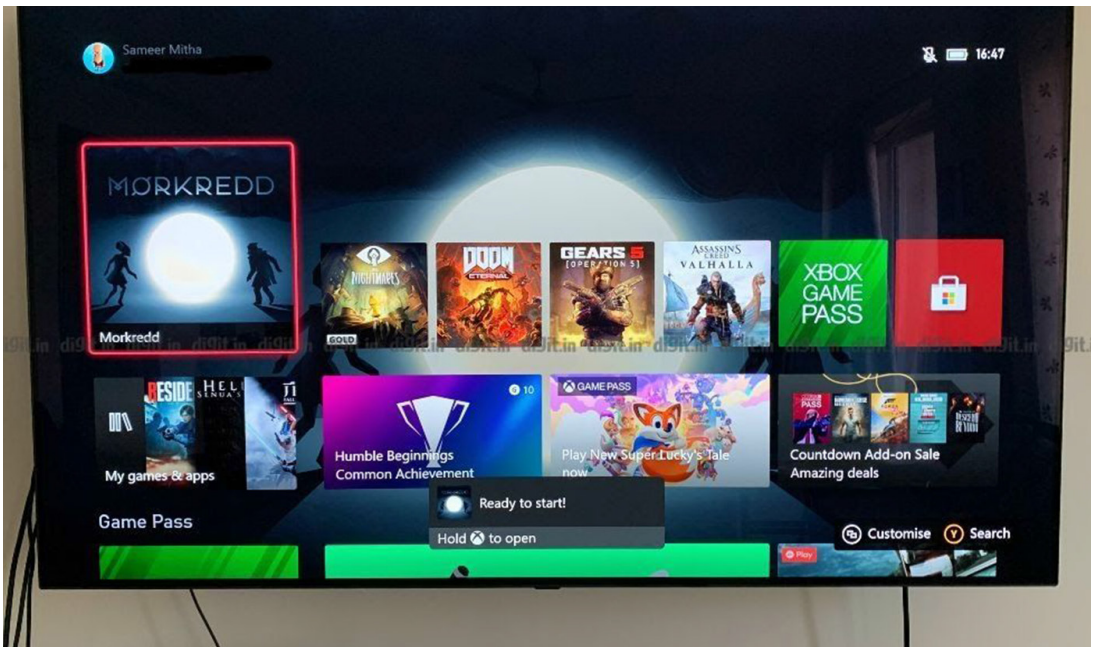
- **CPU:** 8x Cores @ 3.8 GHz (3.6 GHz w/ SMT) Custom Zen 2 CPU
- **GPU:** 12 TFLOPS, 52 CUs @ 1.825 GHz Custom RDNA 2 GPU. Ray Tracing Support.
- **Storage:** 1TB (802GB user available) Custom NVME SSD I/O Throughput: 2.4 GB/s (Raw), 4.8 GB/s.
- **RAM:** 16 GB GDDR6 w/ 320b bus
- **Expandable storage:** Yes, Proprietary expansion card for native Series X games. But backwards compatible games can be played off an external USB 3.0 drive.
- **Optical drive:** 4K UHD Blu-ray Drive
- **Video Output:** Support for up to 8K at 60Hz, 4K at 120Hz over HDMI 2.1 along with support for VRR.
- **HDR:** Yes
- **Dolby Vision:** Yes
- **Dolby Atmos:** Yes
- **3D Audio:** No
- **Wi-Fi:** Yes (dual-band only. No support for Wi-Fi 6)
- **Connectivity:** Three USB Type-A port, Ethernet port, HDMI port, proprietary storage expansion, power port.





This means you need to have enough ventilation around the back and the top of the console to let air flow properly. There is also a slit at the back of the console on the top to let hot air out, in case the top vents are slightly blocked. Our only concern with this design was do we want hot air from the console hitting the TV as the console sits right below the TV? This is a question that time will probably answer. The top vent of the console has relatively large holes and we are concerned about dust accumulation here over time.

Coming to the connectivity options, we have one USB-A port upfront along with the controller sync button. At the



back, we have two more USB-A ports, an HDMI 2.1 port, storage expansion slot, Ethernet port and the power port. The connectivity options at the back are neatly packed together and easy to reach.

WHAT'S IN THE BOX

The Series X is one of the best-packaged consoles we've seen in a while. In the box, you get the console, an HDMI 2.1 cable, power cable, two AA batteries and the controller. You don't get any games bundled with the console.

UI

Let's get the familiar out of the way. The Xbox Series X has the same UI as the Xbox One, albeit faster and smoother. Once you set up the console using the companion smartphone app or onscreen menu, you are good to go. It's easy to transfer your games via an external hard drive to the Xbox if you want. Copy the games optimized for the Series X on the internal drive and you are good to go. The UI between the Series X and the Xbox One is identical. If someone didn't see the new console under your TV, they'd think you are playing on the Xbox One. This isn't a bad thing as you have to spend less time familiarizing yourself with a new UI. Unlike the PS5, there are no hassles with game saves either. Once you boot up a game, your saves are automatically synced, letting you pick up right where you left off.

The Xbox UI isn't our favourite, even when you compare it to the PS4 UI. It also feels slightly old when you look at the visual representation of the PS5's UI. Nonetheless, we hope

Microsoft can improve on the UI with some new elements, tricks and hopefully a visual rehaul in the near future.

When it comes to the app's library, Microsoft has all the popular ones on the Xbox including Apple TV, Netflix, Prime Video, VLC, Kodi and many many more. If you would like to have a console double up as a media streaming device, then the Xbox Series X has more options than the PS5. Not to mention the fact that the Xbox Series X supports Dolby Vision and Dolby Atmos, something the PS5 lacks.

Overall, while the UI might be familiar, and has its flaws, it has improved over the years and above all, is the smoothest it has ever been on the Xbox Series X. With a host of legacy apps, the console is great for those looking for a device for media consumption as well.



PERFORMANCE

A feature we thought was overhyped was Quick Resume but it wasn't until we encountered it that we saw value in it. We wondered who would want to keep a couple of games suspended. But one night while playing Gears 5 online, a friend needed to step out for 20 minutes and we found ourselves opening the sidebar, clicking on AC Valhalla and behold! Because we hadn't quit the game, it picked up right from the pause menu. And 20 minutes later, we were back in Gears 5. No loading, nothing. While there are only a handful of games that can be suspended at a given point of time, it would be nice if the sidebar had a place to tell me which games are suspended for Quick Resume. Maybe we can expect this in a future update.



Moving on from Quick Resume, the console works like a dream. Using AC Valhalla as an example, one of the flaws of the previous generation was that textures and objects in open-world games would load in as you approached them. Not anymore! Same for when you transition between your aerial companion and Evor in Valhalla (on the Xbox One), there was a few seconds of loading. Once again, not anymore on the Series X. Fast travelling in AC Valhalla is super-fast and cold boot of games that don't need an online check happens almost instantly. It may be a year or 2 before we actually see games pushing the PS5 SSD more than the Xbox Series X, but on initial impressions, games load really fast on the Series X.

Even games like Devil May Cry 5 Special Edition, Forza Horizon, Gears 5, all look breathtaking on the console. Too bad there aren't any Demon Souls like console exclusives, but as of writing this review, the Medium is just around the corner, so fingers crossed for the first big Xbox exclusive.

A lot of games from the previous generation are getting patched to run at a rock-solid 60 FPS and the most recent one being Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order. It's amazing to see games run so fluidly on the Xbox Series X and with VRR support (with a supported display, of course) you can say goodbye to screen tearing.

Speaking of Fallen Order, we didn't have the game on the Xbox but on the PlayStation. But thanks to Game Pass, it's

now on my Xbox too. Yes, with Xbox Game Pass subscription, you get access to EA Play as well.

GAME PASS IS MAKING GAMING AFFORDABLE

We have a lot of people asking us which console to get. Most of them are not gamers or first-time gamers and it's easy to recommend those on a tight budget an Xbox Series S/X for one reason alone – Game Pass. With Game Pass you get access to more than a hundred games (last we counted,



there were a little more than 300 games) and a lot of them are AAA games. The icing on the cake is that all Microsoft first-party games will be available as a part of Game Pass on launch day. So, when Gears 6 or Halo Infinite launches, you will be able to play it on launch day without dropping INR 4000 or INR 5000 on it.

Game Pass Ultimate subscription in India costs about INR 825 (inclusive of taxes) and you can play games on your console or even a PC with this subscription. With Microsoft aiming to launch its cloud gaming apps for Smart TV's in 2021 and xCloud coming to India as well, the future of Xbox as a brand looks bright.

Coming back to the performance of the Xbox, it's too early to tell what developers will do with the power of the Xbox Series X. It's usually a few years after the launch of a console

that we see some truly stunning games. So expect to see some games with impressive fidelity hitting the Xbox Series X in 2022 or even 2023. If you are looking to game on a monitor, then know that the Xbox Series X supports 1440p from the get-go, a feature missing from the PS5.

CONTROLLER

Following the "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" philosophy, Microsoft has kept the overall design of the Series X controller the same as its predecessor. The changes are so small yet so significant, one can call them functionally drastic but aesthetically minimal. For example, Microsoft has reduced the overall footprint of the Series X controller to fit more hands comfortably. It's only when you use the Xbox One and the Series X controllers back-to-back that you realise the subtle difference.

The controller, this time around, has a textured grip at the back, along with textures on the triggers and bumpers. This gives the controller a better overall feel. There is also a share button on the controller and it does exactly that - captures your gameplay (photos and/or videos).

The controller still uses AA batteries. We managed to get about 30 hours of playtime with the batteries that come with the console, but investing in a play and charge kit is a no brainer for those looking or a more seamless gaming experience.



Unlike the PS5 where you can only play backwards compatible games with the DualShock 4, on the Xbox front you can use your old Xbox One controller and Xbox Elite Controller with the Series X without any issues.

Overall, the new Xbox controller is a move in the right direction, but the PS5 controller is definitely a generational leap with its adaptive triggers. Just the fact that Microsoft is surveying its customers on the DualSense controller should be proof enough that the company is contemplating introducing it.



VERDICT

Microsoft has laid a strong foundation for the future of gaming with the Series X addressing all the grievances gamers had 7 years ago and going the extra mile to make Xbox a more value for money proposition. Because of the sheer volume of games available on Game Pass, we find ourselves playing more on the Xbox than the PS5. With exclusives hitting the service on day one and more and more developers coming onboard the service, Game Pass could be the secret weapon that helps Microsoft turn some heads in its favour. Not to mention the fact that the Series X is a beast of a console. Sure, Sony has done something great with the DualSense controller and PlayStation brings with it an unmatched library of exclusive games. But for the price-conscious gamer looking to spend less on games in the long run, the Xbox is a great choice. *



PROMISING IDEA, LACKLUSTRE DELIVERY

BY SHREY "SHARKY" PACHECO
FEEDBACK@SKOAR.IN

I'll be honest, when I first saw Akshay Kumar's tweet announcing FAU-G, aka Fearless And United Guards, my initial reaction was of scepticism. You see, the developer already mentioned that the game was going to launch "soon". This could mean one of two things, either the developer has been working on the game for quite some time and the timing of the announcement just happened to coincide with the banning of PUBG Mobile in India. Or, this game was trying to cash in on the banning of PUBG Mobile and the patriotic fervour that was gripping the country. So, how good is FAU-G? Read on.

STORY AND AUDIO

There are three parts to FAU-G, and the only one available at launch is the Campaign mode, which is essentially a linear single-player experience. The other two are 5v5 Team Deathmatch and Free For All. Both these are locked at launch and one can assume that these will obviously include multiplayer elements.

The campaign story of FAU-G is based on the Galwan Valley clash that happened between Indian and Chinese soldiers last year, with some added Bollywood masala. The story is about a group of Indian soldiers who got caught in an ambush against an unnamed opposing force (nCore Games doing its bit to avoid any controversy). The player character is the only one left standing and it's up to them to rescue their fellow 'Faujis'. However, players only have a set time to complete the entire level, so they will have to be on their toes.

Truth be told, as cheesy as the story sounds, I'm all up for it. If the US Army can toot its own horn in games like Call of Duty and Battlefield, it's about time Indian soldiers got their time in the limelight. The narration in the cutscenes is also





pretty good and does well to add a little backstory, while the artwork that accompanies said cutscenes isn't too bad. What I find off-putting are the in-game one-liners and quips that your character makes every few minutes. I get the player character is supposed to be uber patriotic, but the dialogue is enough to make Sunny Deol's character in Gadar: Ek Prem Katha wince and cringe.

"Apne bhaiyon ko bachana mera farz hai. Aur unko pakadne walo ko marna, mazza..." - An actual in-game quote

While the player character and narrator speak in Hindi, the enemy speaks English in a weird accent that I simply cannot place. It's almost like an Australian was hired to imitate a Chinese accent, but has no idea what the Chinese accent sounds like.

GRAPHICS

The graphics of FAU-G are pretty basic, even from the standpoint of a mobile game. Detail and textures are pretty much non-existent. The player characters are pretty much the most detailed of the lot, but that's not saying much. Everything else has very little details, looks fuzzy and in low resolution. This includes rocks, water, boxes and crates. There is no vegetation too. But that kinda makes sense since this is supposed to be set high up in the mountains of Ladakh.

The game was set to 'Ultra' graphics when we played, but it is set to 'High' as default. The most notable difference between the different settings seems to be a drop in texture resolution, especially around the edges. In the lower settings, objects, and even enemies have a jagged edge to them, especially at a distance. However, props and objects like crates will still be fuzzy and lack detail, regardless of your graphical setting.

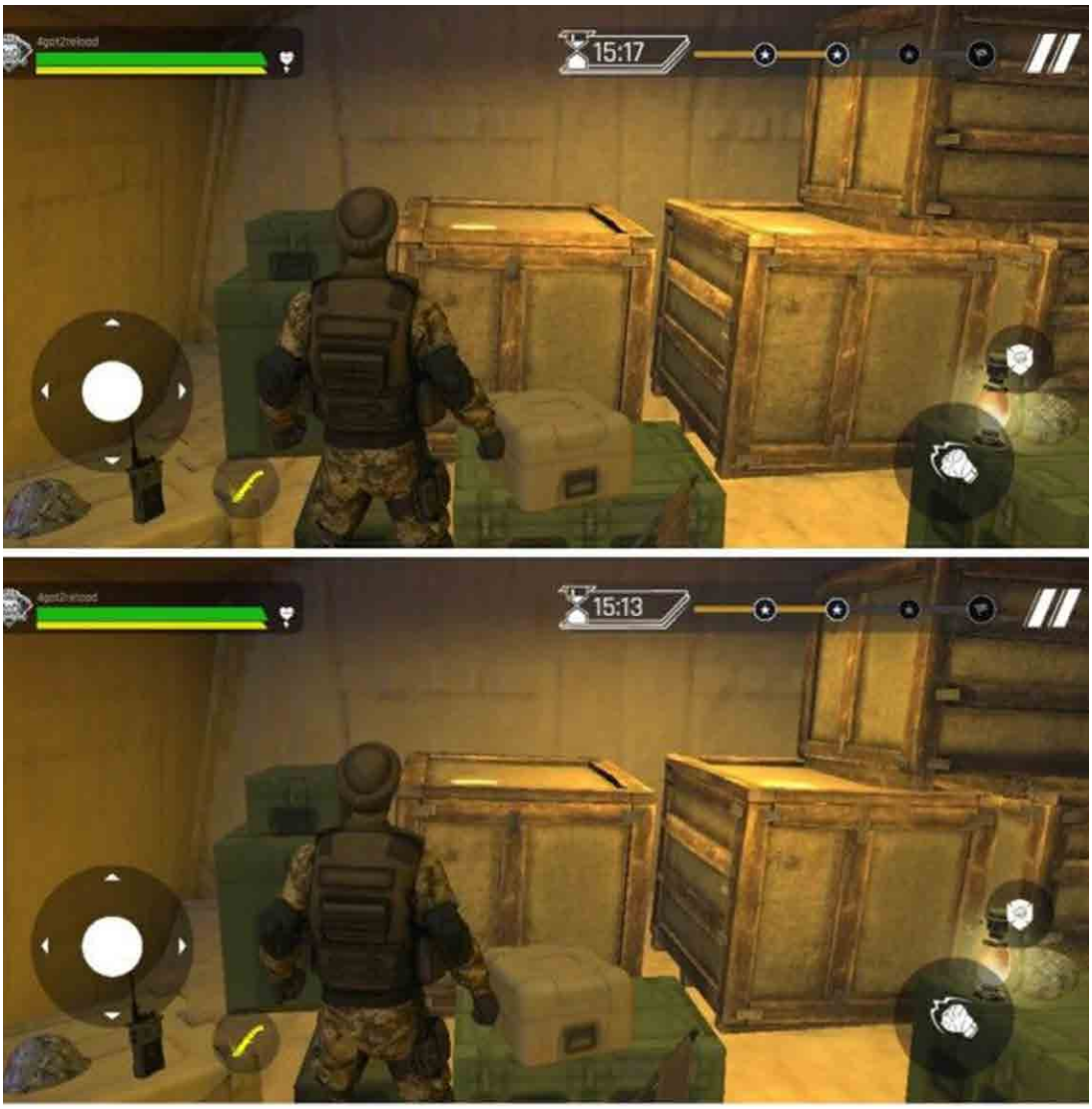


Top: Ultra Graphics setting;
Bottom: Very Low graphics setting
(Note: The firewood is noticeably more jagged in the lower setting)

CONTROLS

If the graphics of FAU-G were basic, then the controls are more-so. Movement is pretty much the same as any other game. However, your character only runs when walking forward. Strafing, or moving backwards slows him down to a walk. This makes backing out of a tricky situation much more difficult. Other controls include a button to attack, a button to block, and a button to switch between your fists and your melee weapon.

There is no button to crouch, go prone, or jump. So advanced movement is a no-go. This also makes levels pretty boring and straightforward. As such, the movement feels stiff and I'm forced to only move forward in order to have any speed.



Top: Ultra graphics setting;
Bottom: Very Low graphics setting
(Note: Regardless of graphics quality, the details on the boxes and crates remain fuzzy)

GAMEPLAY

The gameplay in FAU-G is lifeless, to say the least. As mentioned earlier, there is no option to jump, go prone or crouch. And trying to move anywhere but forward results in the player character walking at a snail's pace. As such, combat tactics such as sneaking up on the enemy, or strafing around them to get a better hit, is out the window. In any other game, this would lead to the game being impossible to play. Thankfully, nCore Games manages to overcome this by making the enemy AI as smart as a wet cheese sandwich.

Enemy detection range is pretty random. Sometimes, they will see you from quite far off, while at other times, they will seem oblivious to your presence till you are barely a stone's throw away. Even when they come, sometimes they wait for you to hit them first. While they will crowd around you, they will



Top: Ultra Graphics setting;
Bottom: Very Low graphics setting
(Note: The enemies and in-game marker have lower detail in the lower setting)

patiently wait their turn to attack. Very well mannered.

Combat reminds me of the Batman Arkham series of games, minus all the finesse and fun. Your player character locks on to an enemy and then you mash the button till the opponent is defeated and falls over. There are no combos to unlock, nor any special moves to pull off. Just mash the button till the enemy is defeated. When surrounded, you can switch between different enemies, but I never really felt that I had complete control over this.

Occasionally, there will be an enemy with a weapon, defeat him and you will be able to pick up the weapon. However, the weapon will only last you a few hits before it breaks, similar to Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild. You can carry two weapons at any time and switch to your fists if you want to save your weapons for later.



Health can be regained around campfires, similar to the Dark Souls series. However, doing so will run down the clock even faster. There are no health packs or items, and the player does not regenerate health. This makes the game quite tedious to play as you can be low on health, but have no option to regain it aside from attacking the enemy base and hoping for the best. And when you eventually die, you have to restart from the checkpoint.

All this makes for a worrying thought when it comes to the multiplayer component. How exactly will multiplayer work? The controls aren't that well polished for third person combat. On top of that, the lack of firearms would most-likely result in players just button-mashing their way through combat and the player with the most powerful stick would win, which makes for a worrying pay-to-win sort of a situation. Speaking of which...

MONETIZATION

To the game's credit, there are absolutely no in-game pop-up advertisements. In order to make money, the developers have opted for the in-app purchase route taken by games like PUBG







Mobile and Call of Duty: Mobile. However, herein lies a problem, and it is something the developers should have maybe taken into consideration.

The store offers a number of different weapons and player characters to choose from. These can be purchased using Silver, (FAU-G's free currency) or Tokens (premium currency). These Tokens are available for as little as INR 19, which adds 30 Tokens, to INR 2,999 that adds 4800 Tokens. Players can also get 5 Tokens for free by watching an advertisement.

This is pretty much on-par with what most mobile games tend to do. While I personally have issues with the predatory practices inherent in such 'freemium' games, it isn't really something I can deduct points from FAU-G for because everyone is doing it. That doesn't make it any less bad though.

It should be noted that there is also a button labelled 'Ice Spice' which takes you to a store to buy FAU-G merchandise.

My main issue is that while players can purchase weapons from the store, they can't really use them in the Single Player mode that is available at launch. So there is absolutely no incentive to buy them right now. Further, the weapons in the





store have a 'Durability' rating, which suggests that they will break after a while. Which begs the question, why would anyone want to pay real-world money for an in-game weapon that won't last an entire game?

Then there is the Catch-22 situation that is looming above everyone. If players don't make in-game purchases, then nCore Games may not be incentivised to work on the multiplayer aspect. But... if there is no multiplayer, then players may not make any purchase. Hopefully, nCore Games will release the multiplayer aspect of the game sooner, rather than later and let the players decide.

VERDICT

Coming to a verdict on FAU-G, and other games on mobile is actually more difficult than you may realise. On one hand, the game seems to be clearly in a rushed state and seems quite incomplete. The movement is stiff, controls are limited and gameplay is pretty much button mashing. But on the other hand, the game is free to download on Android.

So, if you want, feel free to download the game and try it out. But if you are expecting a polished gameplay experience akin to PUBG Mobile, Call of Duty: Mobile, or Garena Free Fire, then you are just setting yourself up for disappointment. This game needs work, a lot of work. I don't see why nCore Games didn't work on the game some more and release it later this year. Maybe even some time in 2022. There was little reason to rush through the development and while some Indian gamers wouldn't approve of the delay, it might eventually be worth it.

I like the idea of telling the stories of Indian soldiers via games. I also like the fact that it has minimal advertising, and the game should run fine on most phones. But the overall package needs to be better than this.

MOAR!

DEVELOPER
nCore Games

PUBLISHER
nCore Games

PLATFORM
Android

REVIEW PLATFORM
Android

PRICE
Free (with in-app purchases)

We played FAU-G on a OnePlus 6T McLaren Edition

Finding alternatives for FAU-G is slightly tricky as the main draw for the game seems to be its uber patriotism and 'Made in India' appeal. So if you really want to play a game as part of the Indian armed forces, you might be better off playing something like Indian Air Force: A Cut Above (available on Android and iOS). However, if you want to support Indian game developers, consider something like Raji: An Ancient Epic (available on Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Microsoft Windows). We are also looking forward to the remake of Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time which is being made by Ubisoft Pune and Ubisoft Mumbai. *





THE BIGGEST SURPRISE HITS OF 2020

TAKING THE WORLD BY STORM FROM OUTTA NOWHERE

BY MANISH "TRIGGER-HAPPY" RAJESH
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We've said it waay too many times at this point, but 2020 was a huge year for video games. Now, while we've already gone ahead and taken a look at the most anticipated titles of 2021, and we've even taken a look at the best games from 2020 (and given them awards), we think it's only fair that we take one last look at 2020, at some of the surprise hits of the year that came from nowhere. Nobody was expecting these games to be this good. So without further ado, in no particular order, let's take a look at some of the biggest surprise hits of 2020.

Hades

Supergiant Games are no strangers when it comes to great games. The game that put them on the map was Bastion, which they followed up with Transistor – another great game. Then they experimented around with Pyre and finally, last year we had Hades. There was no doubt that Hades would be good, the surprise was the fact that it was really good. So good in fact, that it even got nominated for Game of the Year, across the board, not just by us. Hades was an amalgamation of every-



thing Supergiant had learned from its previous games, to create what could arguably be one of the best procedurally generated rogue-lites to date. That's right, procedurally generated, no two runs will be the same. The replayability is through the roof. This is easily Supergiant Games' best-looking game to date as well, also the best combat we've seen from them, especially with all the variety.

Valorant

When Valorant was first announced, there were a lot of skeptics. Is it an Overwatch clone? Is it a CS:GO clone? Can Riot Games even make an FPS? It's probably going to suck. Well, as it turns out, Valorant is a fantastic competitive shooter. A team-based, hero-based, competitive shooter. You've got a combination of Overwatch style characters with powers, each encouraging different playstyles and approaches, paired with CS:GO's fast-paced competitive gameplay, with the classic plant and diffuse scenario. On top of that, Valorant gets a lot of other things right as well. You don't need a beefy rig to play this game, it's less graphic intensive than CS:GO. There's also the fact that it's completely free to play, with the only things you can pay for being cosmetics. It was pretty polished on release, and really, there was nothing stopping people from picking the game up and enjoying it.



Ghostrunner

This is a game that literally came from out of nowhere. One day it was simply there, and you could try a demo of the game out.



That was more than enough to get hooked. Ghostrunner plays like an fusion of so many different games. To start off, for the base gameplay, you've got first-person parkour movements, very similar to the kind we see in Mirror's Edge. Then you've got the clean katana combat, with the slow-motion slicing and dodging, very similar to Max Payne and Metal Gear Rising Revengeance, if you've played that. And of course, to round it all up you've got stealth gameplay, similar to your Assassin's Creeds, or Dishonored. All together, with the game's cyberpunk aesthetic, what you have is a futuristic cyber-ninja game that snuck up on everyone before taking them down with its awesome.

Phasmophobia

Another one of those games that just kinda popped up from out of nowhere. Indie games tend to do that a lot. This four player



co-op game labels itself as a psychological horror game, and rightly so, it's damn scary. So horror game fans, take note. It's also dirt cheap, as indie games usually are. Plus, you can play the game in VR for 2x the horror, if you happen to have a VR headset handy. As for the game itself, it's kinda like if you took one of those Discovery channel shows where they go ghost hunting, and converted it into a video game. If you've got a dedicated group of friends you game with, this is a must-try. Mind you, the game's still got plenty of bugs, but they honestly just add to the fun.

Immortals Fenyx Rising

This was probably one of the biggest, if not the biggest, surprise hits of the year for us. When we first saw the game, the first thought was, "another open-world game from Ubi, and it looks like a Breath of the Wild clone to boot, this'll probably be meh". It was anything but meh in the end though. Sure, the game may look like Breath of the Wild and it's cel-shaded graphics, and draws a lot of inspiration from it in many ways,



but at the same time, it is its own game as well. With solid and fun gameplay, a very enjoyable and new world to explore, new, well technically new, characters to meet and so much more. Even the story is fun and keeps you entertained throughout. Ultimately, Immortals Fenyx Rising was anything but a clone, and is probably one of Ubi's best releases of 2020.

Genshin Impact

2020s' Genshin Impact was a sleeper hit, no doubt about it. Much like Immortals, well, technically this came out before



Immortals, it draws a lot of inspiration from Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild, both when it comes to aesthetics and general movement and exploration. However, like Immortals, this is no clone. It's vast expansive world, massive lineup of playable characters, its RPG systems, and engaging combat all line-up to give you a unique experience like no other, especially for a game that's available on mobile as well! A whopping 6GB download for mobiles, mihoyo has done an excellent job of maintaining the game's quality on mobile, making it feel like there's little to no difference between the PC version and the mobile version.

Noita

Another one of those indie games that creeps up on you and takes you by surprise with just how gosh darn good it is. Noita took spellcrafting and essentially removed all the limitations from it. This is a rogue-like game that employs physics-based spell flinging; spells that you've crafted yourself, which can create some incredibly crazy spell effects. The game also encourages you to go wild as your screen lights up with your new spell creations and you obliterate all the things around you, including the environment. This is one of those games where it doesn't matter that there's a story, or anything else for that matter really, since the gameplay itself is so good. There aren't many games out there that have



accomplished magic the way Noita has managed to, even if it is rather pixelated.

Fall Guys: Ultimate Knockout

Jelly beans playing Takeshi's Castle is honestly the best way to describe Fall Guys. This was one of those games that blew up on Twitch and for a while, everyone was playing it. For good reason of course. Devolver Digital's chaotic take at a battle royale game managed to provide a hilarious and stupidly fun experience. It is a pure mayhem simulator that anyone can pick up with ease and have a good time. The game is a perfect mishmash of delight and annoyance. Where winning feels extremely rewarding, and the frustration from losing is short-lived. Plus, even if the craze has died down now, you'll still find plenty of people still playing the game if you're itching to jump back in.



Mortal Shell

Souls-like games are a dime a dozen, few get it right. Mortal Shell is one of them. While not exactly a lengthy game, which most of the original souls games are, Mortal Shell has its own appeal. The game utilises a clever body-swapping mechanic, in that you take over the "shells" of NPCs. This in turn adds a whole new layer of diversity to the gameplay and of course, combat. Each shell has its own individual skill tree as well, allowing you to further finetune them to your playstyle and preference. To top it off, the game's visuals are gorgeous, and exploration is a blast, there's honestly no excuse not to try Mortal Shell, especially if you're a fan of souls-like games.



Black Mesa

Black Mesa is the desperately needed remake of Half-Life that brings the classic game to more current times. Although it's fan-made, the remake is Valve approved, and a chance for those who have never played the game before to enjoy it in all its glory. Black Mesa is not exactly a 1:1 retelling of the original, while it stays as true to the original in terms of general storyline and structure, the scale of everything is much larger, and everything is a lot more detailed with much better production value. The combat and physics has also been brought up to Half-Life 2 standards. There are parts of the original Half-Life that have also been vastly improved in Black Mesa, such as Freeman's arrival on Xen for example. This redesign of the original can simply be seen as an improvement across the board and is a must try, both for old fans and new players alike.



Among Us

We guess it is kinda unfair to put a game that was released over two years ago on this list, but the game technically only blew up in 2020, with little to no action before then. And we guess it's definitely a surprise hit of 2020, since it didn't really take off in 2018. After Fall Guys, this was the game that took Twitch by storm. Heck, it's still pretty popular on the platform, and has enjoyed a much longer time in the spotlight than Fall Guys ever did. Simplicity is the name of the game with Among Us; the controls are easy, the general concept of the game is easy, one or two rounds into the game and you've pretty much got a grasp on how to play the game. With little to no investment on your part, you now have access to hours and hours of enjoyment, especially if you've got a group of friends to play with. And that's where the charm of Among Us lies.



So there you have it, 11 games that we thought were surprise hits of 2020. These weren't games that anyone was anticipating or expecting, but they slipped under our radars and pleasantly surprised us with their awesome. You might recognise some contenders for the game of the year awards as well, though we've tried to avoid overlapping. Were there any sleeper surprises we missed? Write to us and let us know! Or join us on **discord @ https://discord.gg/KTfJHYCP3c**. *



Why Xbox controllers still use AA batteries

BATTERIES IN 2021, REALLY?

BY MAYANK SACHDEVA
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It's past midnight, you are in a heated match of Warzone with your friends, and suddenly you can't hear anything. You look down to see your controller is out of battery, so you scramble through the drawers to find batteries but by the time you get back online, you are dead. PlayStation's players would have never felt this rage but we Xbox players definitely have, so let's look at why Xbox controllers still use batteries.

So, why does the Xbox Series X controller still use AA batteries?

Xbox's controllers have always shipped with a pack of AA Duracell batteries. Unlike the PlayStation controllers, Xbox players need to buy a rechargeable battery kit separately. This according to Xbox's partner director of program management, Jason Ronald, is an intentional decision because, "what it comes down to is when actually talking to gamers, it's kind of polarizing and there is a strong camp that really wants AAs. So just giving flexibility is the way to please both people. You can use a rechargeable battery pack, and it works just like it does on the Elite, but it is a separate thing." He continued to explain that the

divide between gamers who wanted rechargeable batteries and AA batteries is at about fifty-fifty.

In the same interview with Digital Foundry in March 2020, Ronald also said that the use of batteries allows for longer shelf life for the controller, as these can be easily replaced while internal cell units - like the ones found in the DualShock 4 on PS4 - eventually wear out, forcing players to buy a new controller. In a country like India, there are shops that will replace the internal DualShock battery for you, but it isn't official and hence not advisable.

Xbox Series X controller longer shelf life?

All of this came as a response to a statement made by Duracell UK's Marketing Manager, Luke Anderson, who argued that the main reason for Xbox to ship controllers with batteries and not a built-in battery like its competition was its deal with Duracell. "The deal is for OEM to supply the battery product



for the Xbox consoles and also the controllers' battery. It's a constant agreement that Duracell and Microsoft have in place. It needs to go for a while more" said Anderson in his interview with Stealth Optional.

Anderson's theory, as absurd as it sounds, does make some sense because a deal between Microsoft and Duracell does in fact exist, which involves Duracell often tweeting about using its batteries in the Xbox Controllers. In 2020, Duracell also announced a promotion that allowed users of their extra powered battery, Duracell Optimum, to try the Xbox Game Pass for two weeks. The specifics of this deal are still unclear, but Microsoft has consistently denied that they ship controllers with AA

batteries because of this deal, but do so to provide a choice to the consumer, which sounds reasonable enough.

Why do I use AA batteries to power my Xbox controller

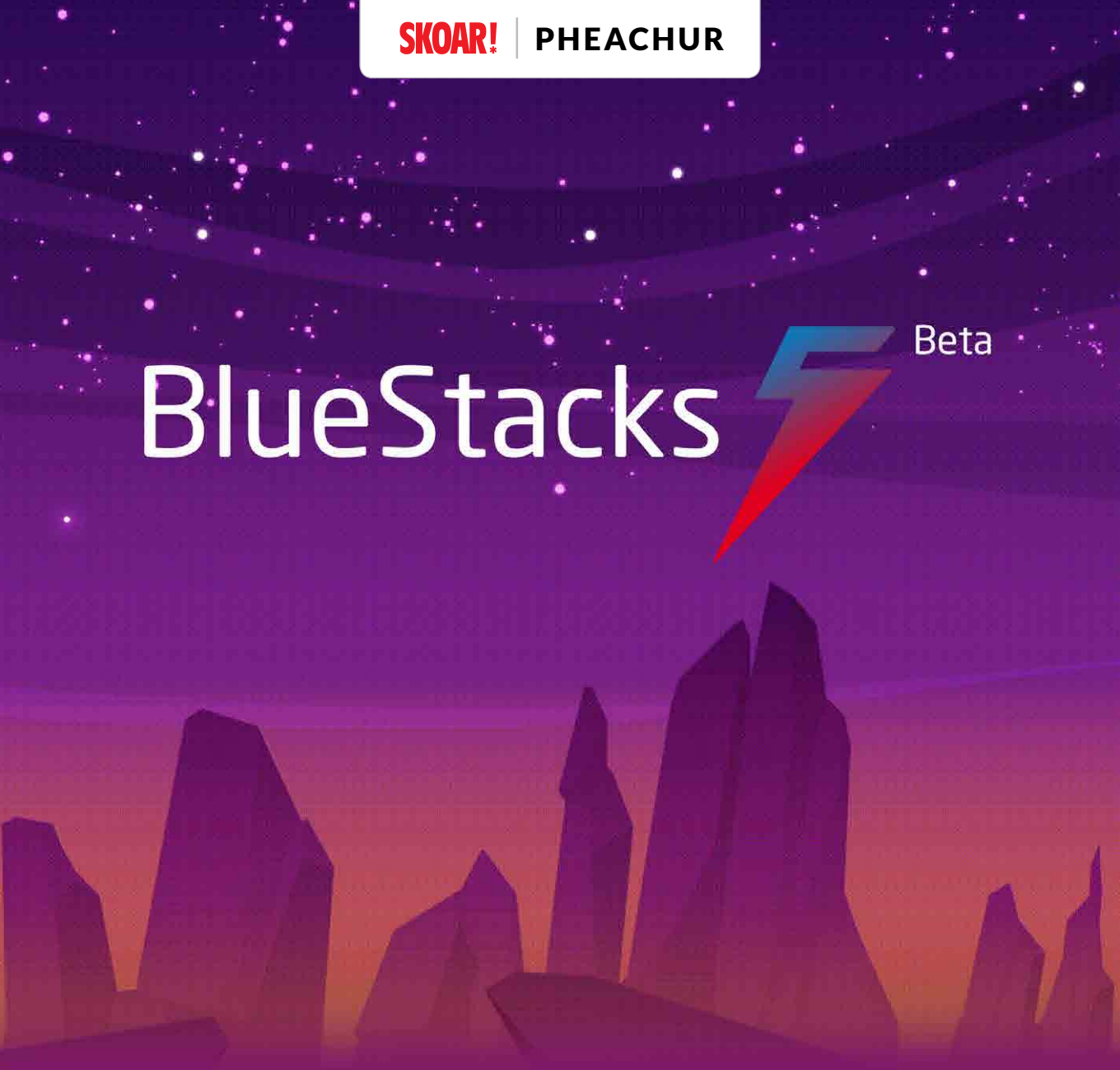
Personally, we are a proponent of this decision and primarily use the AA batteries to power the Xbox controller with occasional use of the rechargeable batteries when we're done switching their orientation to get every last bit of juice they can offer.

Microsoft has its official Play and Charge kit that one can purchase online in India, but there are a number of third party solutions as well which come with a docking station, so your controller is topped up every time you start gaming. You can also purchase a pack of rechargeable batteries and a charger and leave batteries to charge overnight.

We have seen a lot of third party peripherals address the issue of battery backup on console controllers. We have seen small power banks that hook up to the DualShock 4 controller and add a precious few hours of life.

Here is one tip if you have an Xbox controller and run out of AA batteries in the middle of the night. Simply, remove the batteries from its housing and hook up the controller to a power bank via a USB cable. As long as the power bank has juice, you will be able to game. Not an elegant solution, but one that gets the job done.

Just to put the new console controllers into perspective, the DualSense that comes with the PS5 has a battery life of about 10 to 15 hours based on use and the Xbox Series X/S controller can last for upwards of 30 hours when using a pair of good quality batteries. *



Test-driving the latest version of BlueStacks

BY MANISH "TRIGGER-HAPPY" RAJESH
FEEDBACK@SKOAR.IN

When it comes to emulating mobile games on PC, there are few options in the market, and one of the better known ones is BlueStacks. The Android emulation software has been around for sometime now and they haven't had an upgrade for a good two plus years now. BlueStacks 4 came out in 2018 and now, they've finally come out with BlueStacks 5. So what have they changed? We got a chance to take the beta version of the new BS5 on a test drive, here's what we found out.



ON THE SURFACE

According to the company, BlueStacks 5 is significantly faster overall; from faster boot times, to installation, launch times, the works. They've accomplished this with a "complete rewrite" of the previous system. However, it looks like they've still stuck with Android 7.1.2 Nougat – which is what Android came out with five years ago now, in 2016.

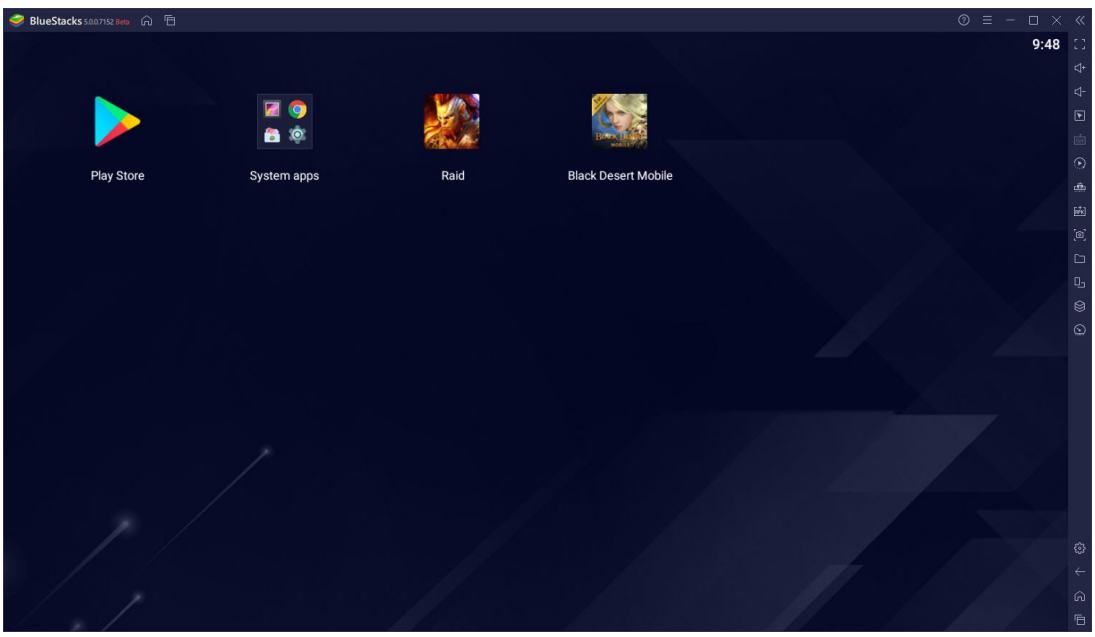
SETTING UP

If you've used BlueStacks before, or any Android emulation software for that matter, then you'll know that installation and setting up is kinda like setting up a new Android phone. Once you've installed the software and "booted" the emulator up, you log in with your Google account and you're good to go. You have immediate access to the Play Store and you can start

downloading apps. Downloaded apps show up in BlueStacks "app drawer" which is essentially the home screen.

BUILT FOR GAMING

BlueStacks has clearly designed the software with gaming in mind. Which makes sense considering how popular mobile gaming has become over the last few years. It's been a popular emulation solution for various reasons, be it the lack of a powerful enough phone, or simply preference of playing using a keyboard and mouse, among other things. To that end, the software comes with preloaded custom keyboard and mouse mappings for most popular games. These mappings are incredibly easy to customise and create yourself as well, in the off chance that BlueStacks doesn't have them. However, there is the issue of the Android version, certain apps require the latest or higher versions of Android in order to run, or run optimally. This applies to any app, and not just gaming apps. It's very possible that certain games won't even show up on the app store because of this issue.



WHAT'S NEW?

BlueStacks 5 does feel noticeably faster than BlueStacks 4. However, we can't really speak for stability since we did face a few app crashes here and there. The software is still in beta, so these issues could eventually be ironed out. The promise of reduced usage of resources however is visible. BlueStacks 5 does appear to use far less RAM and system resources. You can even fine-tine the amount of resources BlueStacks will be able to use. For lower-end systems, this is definitely a win. They've

changed the UI up a bit, while not completely different, it's cleaner and more frequently used options are easier to find, which is a good thing. These buttons are also not very in-your-face and can easily be hidden away while you're in the middle of a game if you don't want to see them. Important buttons like home are still easily accessible regardless.

VERDICT

There are few other softwares you can reliably use if you want to emulate Android on PC, especially if you're looking to emulate Android games. BlueStacks latest iteration is great for those with weaker machines who are struggling to emulate mobile games. And while slightly faster and less of a resource hog, the fact that it still runs on Android Nougat means that it's really not that significant an upgrade. If it worked fine for you in the past, chances are, it will still work fine for you now. *



PLAYSTATION 5

PEEKING INSIDE THE NEXT-GEN CONSOLE

BY DHRITI "DEEDEE" DATTA
FEEDBACK@SKOAR.IN
Images Courtesy: iFixit



PS5

PlayStation 5





Easy disassembly? Not entirely...

Despite the foreboding exterior of the PlayStation 5, the initial opening procedure is quite user-friendly. Both white panels on the sides pop off gently with a lift-and-slide motion. This allows you immediate access to the M.2 SSD expansion slot, the fan, and the vacuum-able dust ports. However, to go any further, you need the uncommon T8 Torx Security screwdriver. Thankfully though, the M.2 expansion slot is accessible. All you need to do is remove one Philips screw and a metal shield and you can upgrade the memory.

A path of security screws

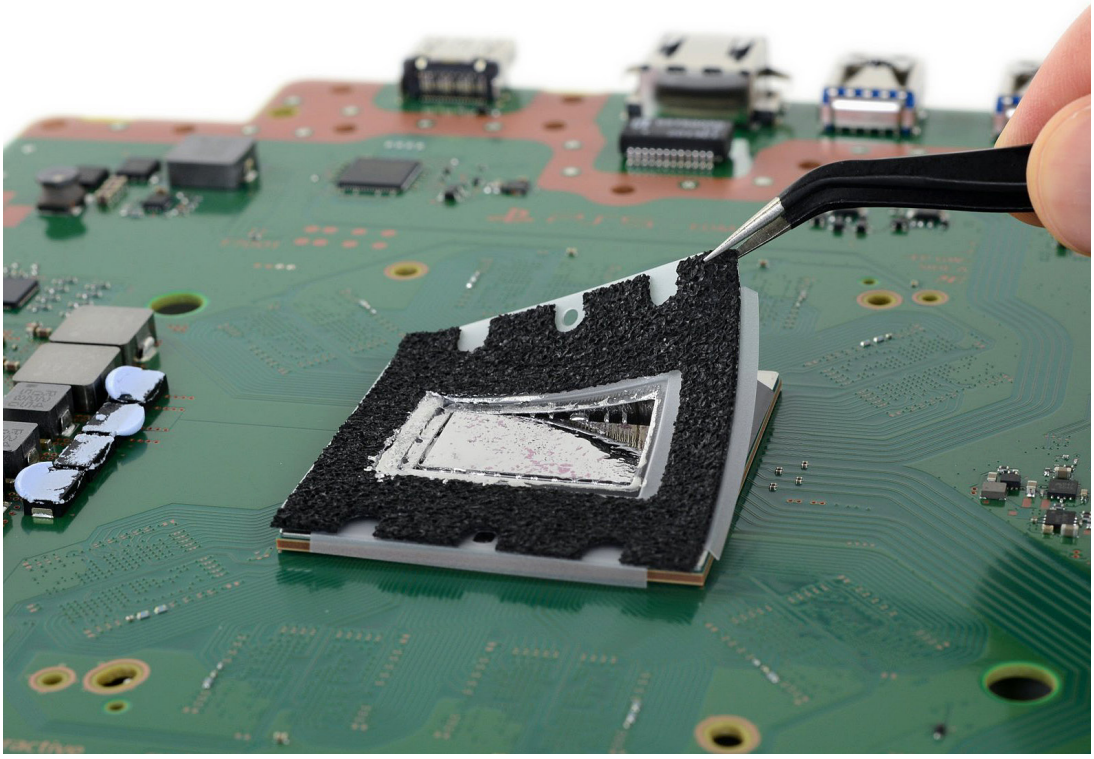
There are more security screws that line the path forward, one of which is housed under the tamper-indicator sticker (not to be confused with a 'Warranty Void' sticker). Taking off these



screws allows you to remove the first half of the black plastic shell and you're then greeted by the slim optical drive that comes off pretty easily. The optical drive is paired to the device's motherboard, so a simple replacement drive won't read the discs, unfortunately.

Serious cooling hardware

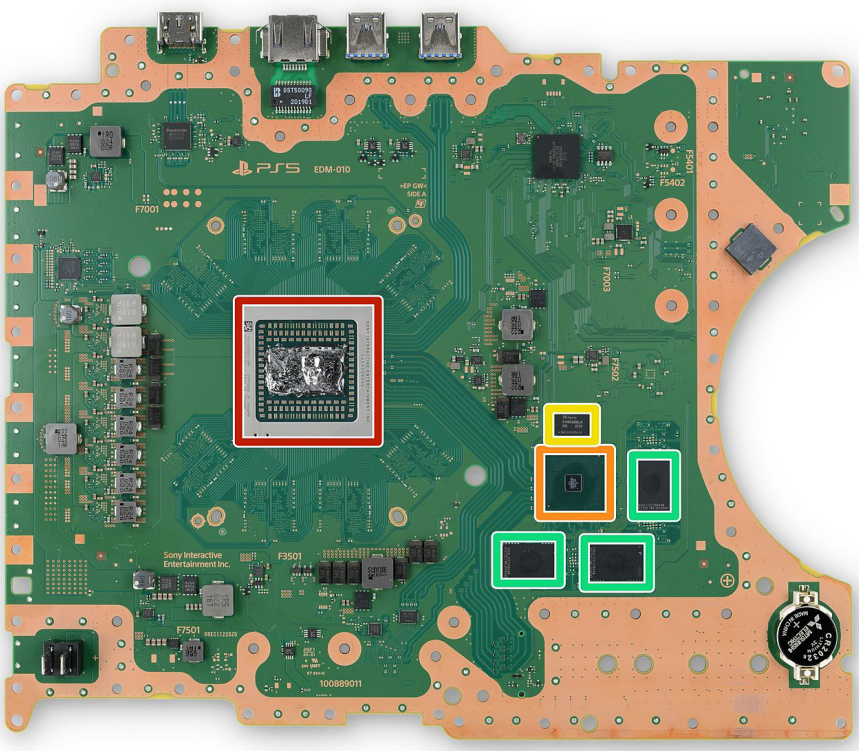
The steel plate that comes next features a ton of screws. Once removed, you can see the heat pipe for cooling a row of VRMs.



The part you can see here is the rear end of the mainboard, so naturally, there's a lot of cooling hardware mounted here. There's liquid metal that covers the processor that's extremely popular amongst PC modders and overclockers since it is more efficient at conducting heat than conventional thermal paste and putties. In order to avoid getting the material all over the place, Sony applied a patent for an insulated, foam-cushioned pouch that keeps the liquid metal in place.

The silicone

It's time to delve into the silicone that powers the PS5. There are chips such as the Sony Interactive Entertainment Inc./AMD CXD90060GG 8-Core CPU w/ GPU, the Sony Interactive Enter-



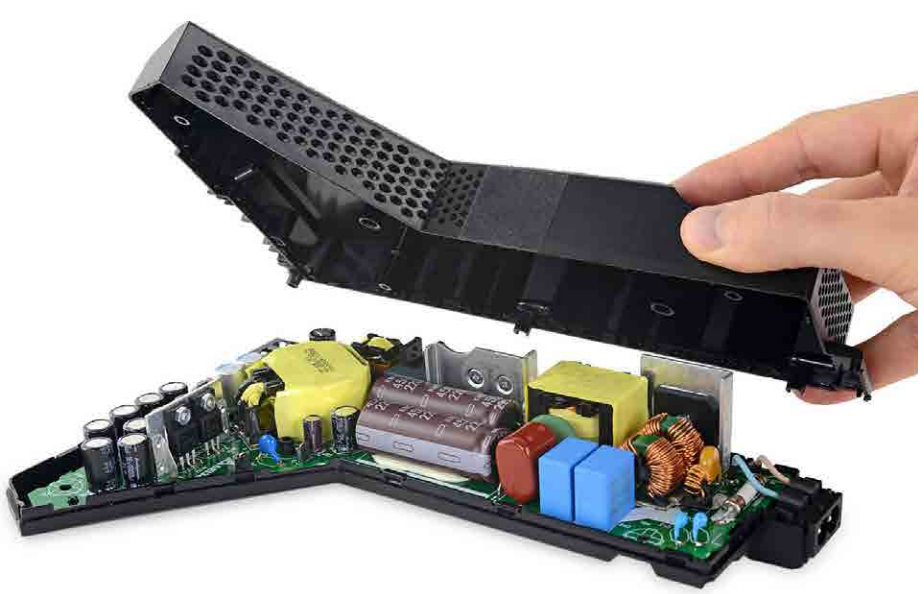
tainment Inc. CXD90062GG SSD Controller, SK Hynix H5AN4G8NBJR-UHC DDR4 SDRAM Memory - 512 MB, 6x (three per side) Kioxia/Toshiba Memory TH58LJT0T24BA4M BiCS flash memory, and Micron MT61K512M32KPA-14:B 2 GB GDDR6 SGRAM. These are just a few chips that are present on the mainboard. Check out iFixit's teardown to see all the chips on the mainboard of the PS5.

The heatsink and power supply

Underneath the second metal shield lies a massive heatsink as



well as the power supply. Since heat rises naturally, it makes sense that the heatsink in the PS5 is designed to move heat upwards through the heat pipes in the console. The heat radiating through the silver fin stacks, on the other hand, is blown away by the fan. Unde the heatsink, you can find the PS5's 350-watt enclosed PSU, which is larger than the 315W power supply on the Xbox Series X.



Relatively modular design

The PS5 is a massive leap forward in console gaming technology and the teardown has instilled that the unit is relatively modular and repair-friendly. However, some annoying Torx security screws and software locks can certainly mar the experience. Nevertheless, the disassembly is done almost tool-free and there's easy access to the fan. *

mobile madness

YOU HAVE TO TRY THESE GAMES OUT ON YOUR SMARTPHONE!

BY TEAM DIGIT



Princess Connect! Re: Dive

Princess Connect! Re: Dive is another gacha RPG for you to sink your time (and possibly money) into. What makes this stand out from all the other gacha RPGs out there? Quite a few things actually. For one, right off the bat you can tell that this is a high-quality game. From the art, to the animations, and the voice acting, they've definitely put in a lot of effort. This also explains the rather large download size at roughly 4.5GB. Thankfully, for those who have limited space or don't want to download large files, you can opt for a more modest download size without all the frills, i.e, the voice acting for example.



Coming to the game itself, this is a JRPG auto-battler with quite a bit of story, which is nice and drives the game. Another thing that's nice is the game's pacing. Most mobile gacha RPGs tend to overwhelm you with options when starting out, Princess Connect avoids that by easing you into the game's many systems. Combat, while for the majority is auto-battling, there is some strategy involved when it comes to creating team comps that work and timing your skill activations.

There are of course microtransactions, with the currency you can buy being jewels. However, you gain a steady supply of Jewels just by progressing through the game as well. Overall, this is not a bad gacha JRPG to start out with if you're looking to dip your toes.

War After



If you're tired of playing battle royale games like COD Mobile and Free Fire, then this one might suit you. There are a bunch of features that set War After apart from the rest. First of all, it is the ability to have auto fire and aim assist at all times. It will ruin the gameplay experience for others but if you're just a casual player who is trying FPS games for the first time, then that might come in handy to you. As of right now, the game has only one game mode i.e. Capture the Point but the devs have promised to release a bunch of other game modes once the game comes out of beta and has a full release. As it is still in beta, we noticed a few glitches and bugs here and there but they're not as noticeable and don't hamper the gameplay experience. It is also important to note here that the whole thing comes just under 300 MB with no additional download required in game. We think that the devs have done a pretty good job with the graphics and the gameplay and if you are someone who just wants to pass some time playing some FPS games, then you should really check this one out.



Shave Run



We have only included this one in the list because of its sheer peculiarity. In this game, you play as two razor blades and you have to make your way through the map by cutting all the hair that comes in your way. While doing that, you also have to dodge certain 'body parts' and lava. The main aim of the game is to cut all the hair in your way and reach the end of the map. The sounds in this one are also a bit weird. It has that ASMR hair cutting sound which fits weirdly well with the game and its gameplay. The game has only 3 levels as of now but it is expecting a full release with more levels included. Overall, if you don't get grossed out by seeing certain 'body parts' up close and have no problem with the ASMR sounds then you should give this one a try. It is a fun game to play after all.



Ronin: The Last Samurai



Ronin: The Last Samurai is an RPG brawler, one that focuses on timing and skill rather than button-mashing. It features roguelike elements as well, allowing you to improve yourself over the course of the game, gaining advantages over opponents you've already faced as you progress further ahead to face tougher opponents with each improvement.

It's a free to play game that employs all the usual f2p mechanics one might expect from a mobile RPG, including a stamina system; that can get in the way of your enjoyment.

However, the standout feature of Ronin: The Last Samurai is its graphics. Ronin features a beautiful hand-painted aesthetic, with everything looking like it's been painted with a calligraphy brush and ink on canvas; it feels like you're watching a painting in motion.



Coming to the gameplay, there are only a few controls that you need to learn, as opposed to a list of combos. Because, like we mentioned, the game focuses more on skill and timing rather than mashing. You've got the block and move (very very slowly) button on the right, and the attack button on the left. There's also a smaller skill button on the left, right beside the attack button.

While in combat, you need to block or parry attacks, and attack when you see openings. If you block at the moment right before they attack, you will parry, which staggers them, opening them up for follow up attacks. Similarly, if you attack them right before they land a heavy hit on you, you'll counter attack. Different enemies have different attack patterns, and as you progress you'll unlock new enemies. The skill button activates as you play, block, parry, attack etc. Activating it allows you a few seconds of special attacks that deal more damage. Eventually, you'll start needing better equipment and stat boosts to progress further in the campaign. This is where the game can feel a bit grindy and pay2win, but there's nothing stopping you from slugging it out. Overall, Ronin: The Last Samurai is a fairly decent free to play RPG brawler with great art. *

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