EXPLOSIVE JUST CAUSE 3 PLAYTEST INSIDE

XBOX ONE

ESSENTIAL HANDS-ON VERDICT

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

- INCREDIBLE NEW MAPS, MODES AND WEAPONS TESTED INSIDE
- IS IT A TRAP?! WE GRILL DICE OVER THE MULTIPLAYER FOCUS

28 NEW GAMES INSIDE

RAINBOW SIX: SIEGE

WE EXPLORE UBISOFT'S STORMING RETURN TO FORM

HALO 5 GUARDIANS

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO KICKING ASS IN HALO'S MULTIPLAYER

MINECRAFT STORY MODE

BEHIND THE SCENES AT TELLTALE

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THE DIVISION JUST CAUSE 3 HITMAN FALLOUT 4 RECORE HOMEFRONT: THE REVOLUTION FIFA VS PES DOOM DESTINY

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Welcome to XBOX ONE



We're right in the middle of what we in the games industry like to call 'Silly Season'. It's that four-month period between September and December in which every blockbuster seems to be released one after the other. This month we've got tons of huge reviews, some incredible previews and more fantastic features than you can shake a lightsaber at.

And we *have* been shaking our lightsabers, too – we popped over to DICE's studios in Sweden to talk *Star Wars Battlefront*, and get an early hands-on with the beta ahead of its public launch. To say it captures the feeling of being in *Star Wars* in an understatement. You can read all of our impressions starting on page 6.

We've also gone hands-on with *Rainbow Six Siege*, *Just Cause 3* and *Homefront: The Revolution* this month – to find out what we thought check out the features starting on page 46. You'll even find a behind-the-scenes feature at Telltale studios on page 52; we talked choice, episodic gaming and *Minecraft* with the legendry studio, and it's well worth a read.

I haven't even talked about our Previews section, which contains hands-on impressions of *The Division* and *Mirror's Edge*, plus the latest news on *Doom*. There's loads more, too, but I'm running out of space. So enjoy the mag, and prepare your mind and body for some huge games heading your way in the coming weeks.

Steve Ashby

Stephen Ashby
DEPUTY EDITOR

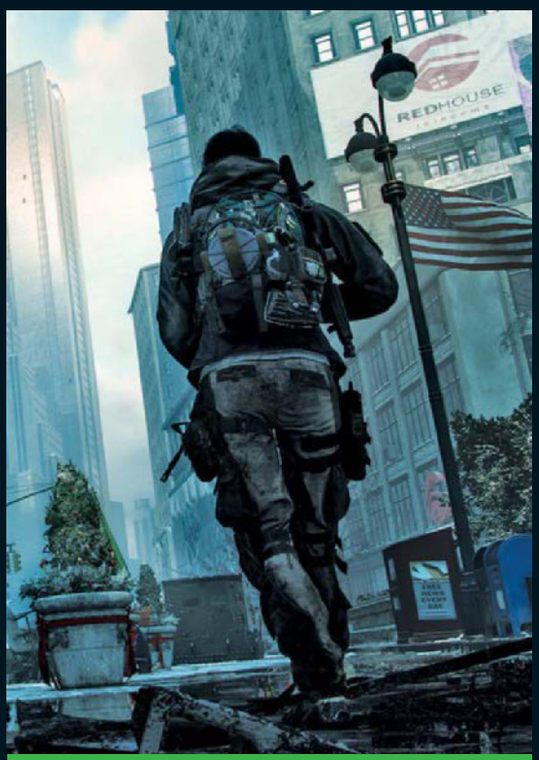
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Inside this issue

06 STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT
We grill DICE on the lack of single-player campaign and go hands-on with some impressive new multiplayer modes.

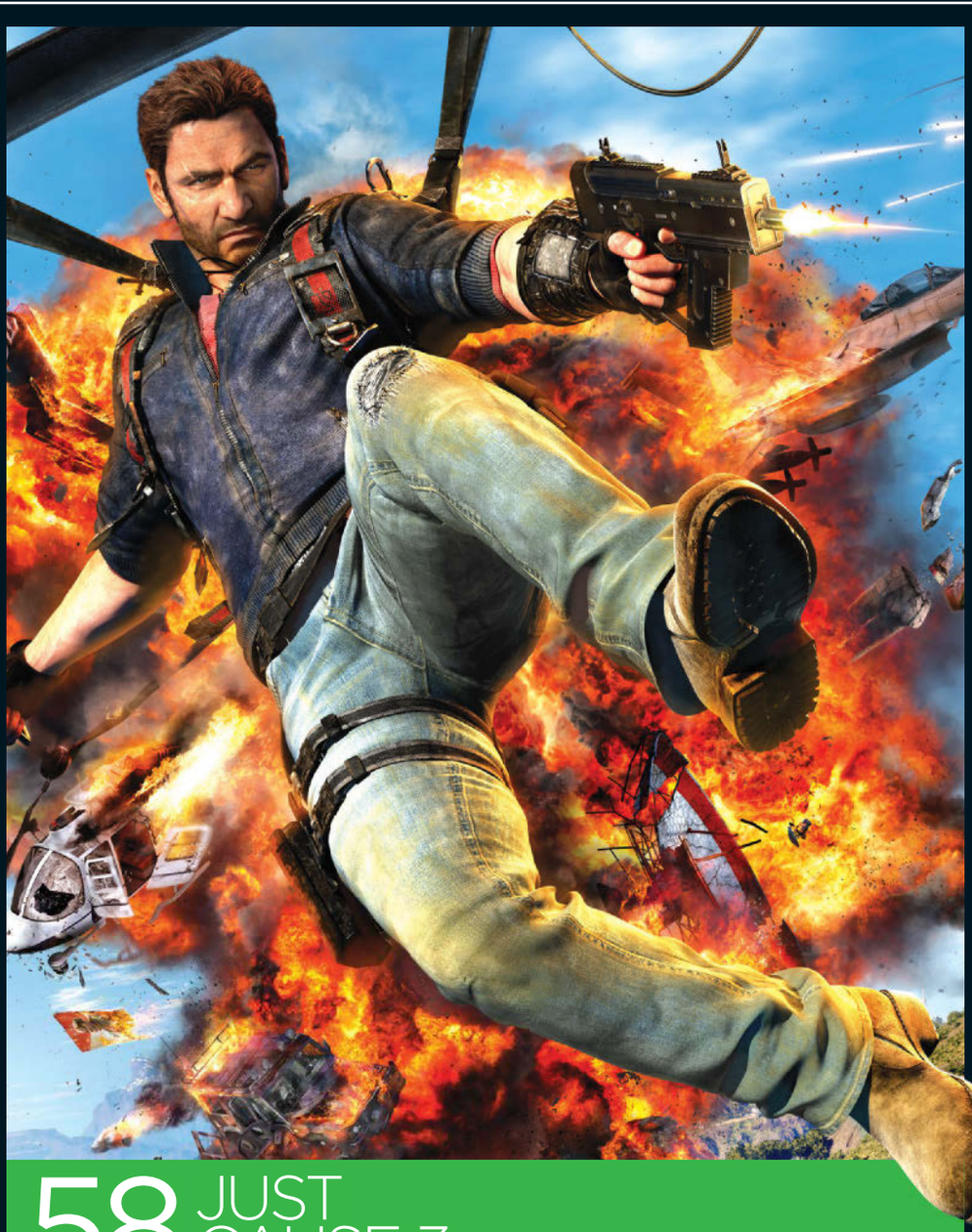
CONTENTS



18 THE DIVISION
We've finally played it, but has it been worth that wait?



52 TELLTALE: BEHIND THE SCENES
From humble beginnings to genre-defining creator, join us as we explore Telltale's world



58 JUST CAUSE 3
Is there more to Avalanche's latest than big explosions? We go hands-on with a near final build of the chaotic sequel



NETWORK
12 WHICH IP SHOULD MICROSOFT BUY NEXT?
16 WE SHARE



86 HALO 5: GUARDIANS WARZONE ULTIMATE TIPS
Want to kick ass at *Halo*'s new insane multiplayer mode immediately? Then you're going to want to get your eyes on our essential guide



46 RAINBOW SIX: SIEGE

Has Siege smashed its way into our hearts or just made a big mess of everything? Find out as we go in-depth with Tom Clancy's latest



74 MINECRAFT: STORY MODE

Has Telltale actually pulled it off and given *Minecraft* a story we care about?



64 HOMEFRONT: THE REVOLUTION

It emerges from development hell – is it worth your attention? We take a look at both sides



06 STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

Is the force strong with this one? X-ONE gets its hands on DICE's epic shooter

XBOX ONE

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PREVIEWS

18 THE DIVISION ONE
22 FALLOUT 4 ONE
24 DOOM ONE
28 RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER ONE 360
30 MIRROR'S EDGE: CATALYST ONE
32 RECORE ONE
34 MIGHTY NO. 9 ONE 360
36 HITMAN ONE
38 PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES: GARDEN WARFARE 2 ONE
40 LEGO MARVEL'S AVENGERS ONE 360
41 TRACKMANIA TURBO ONE
42 ROUNDUP ONE

REVIEWS

70 FIFA 16 ONE 360
72 PES 2016 ONE 360
74 MINECRAFT: STORY MODE ONE 360
76 SKYLANDERS: SUPERCHARGERS ONE 360
78 TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 5 ONE 360
80 LEGO DIMENSIONS ONE 360
82 THE ESCAPISTS: THE WALKING DEAD ONE
83 EXTREME EXORCISM ONE
84 BLOOD BOWL 2 ONE

CONNECT

86 HALO 5: GUARDIANS – WARZONE ULTIMATE TIPS
We've had some serious hands-on time with the new Warzone mode in *Halo 5*, and now you can learn how to kick ass online.

90 DESTINY: THE TAKEN KING DLC REVIEW
The Taken King carries a hefty price tag, but do the sweeping changes and new features make it worth revisiting?

91 HEAD-TO-HEAD: SHOULD ASSASSIN'S CREED JUST DIE?
Steve and Josh come to blows over whether *Assassin's Creed* games are still worth playing.

92 DYING LIGHT: THE FOLLOWING
X-ONE talks to Tymon Smektala, producer on *Dying Light* and the new expansion to the zombie kill-a-thon.

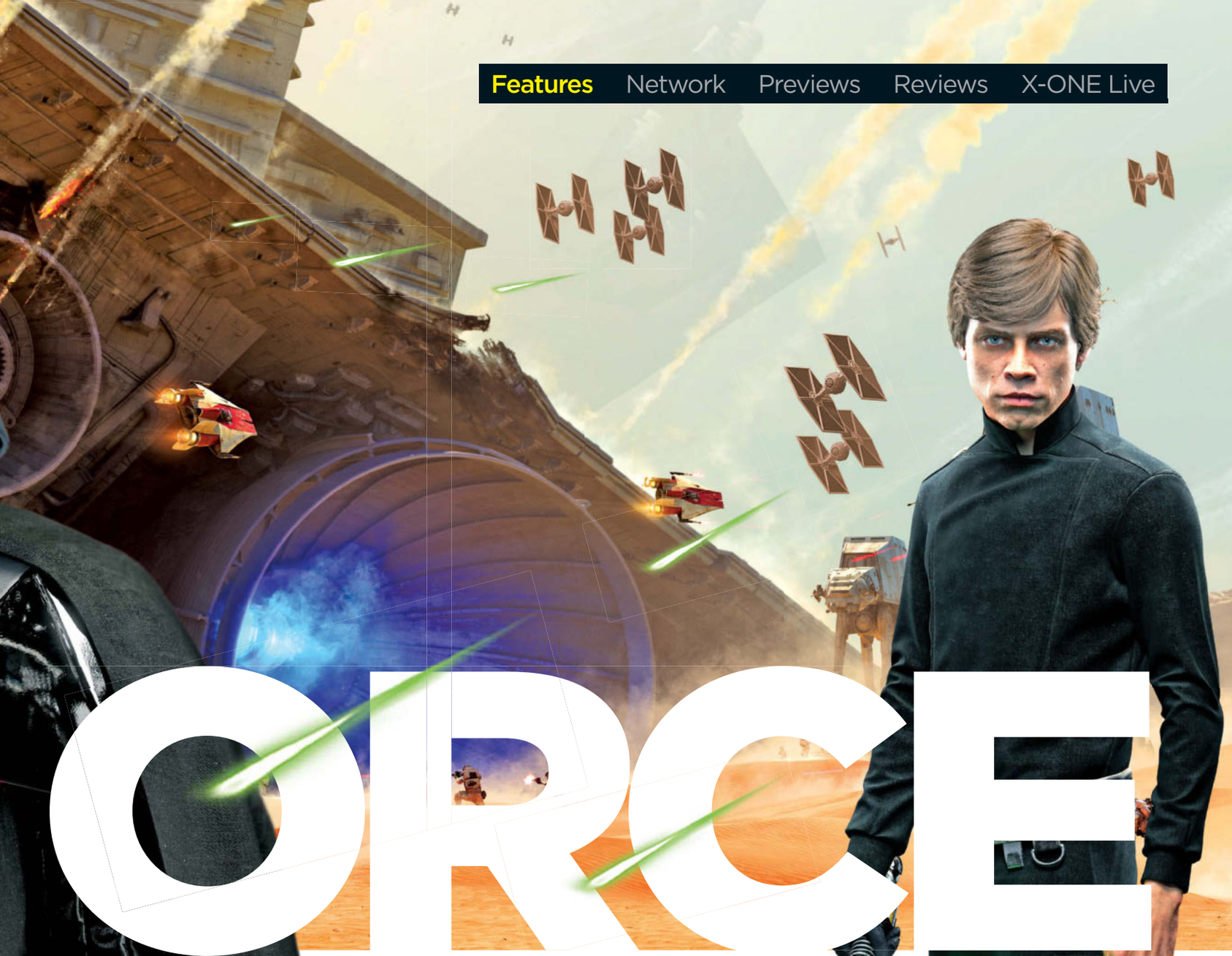
94 DLC REVIEW ROUNDUP
New content for *The Witcher 3* leads our DLC roundup this month, and we choose some fantastic new indie releases.

96 RECOMMENDED
We take a look at some of gaming's most kickass leading ladies, from Joanna Dark to Lara Croft.



Words Stephen Ashby

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE F



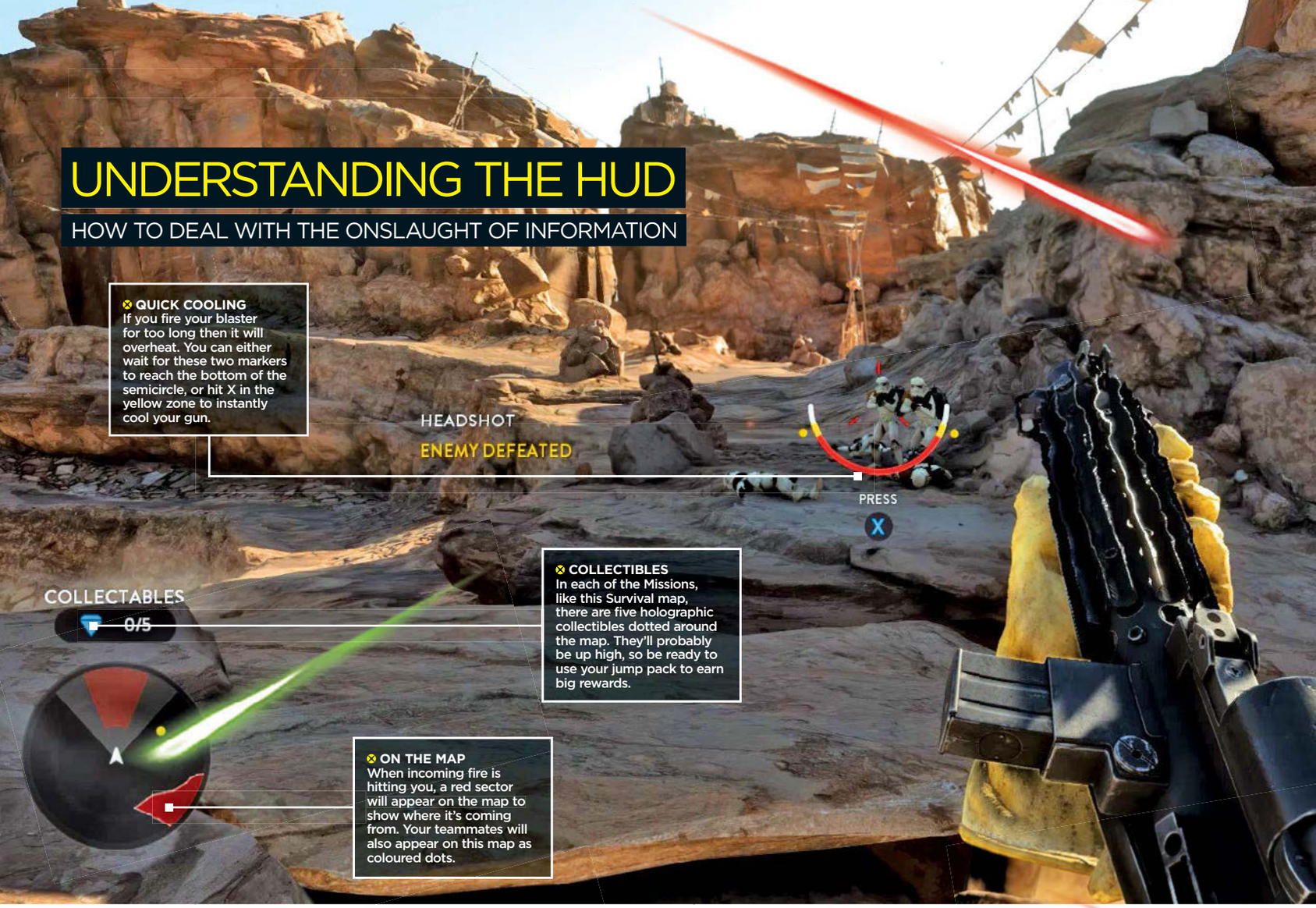
FORCE

WE TALK TO DICE ABOUT GOING TO WAR IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY...

Imagine the pressure involved in making a *Star Wars* game that is releasing a month ahead of an all-new *Star Wars* movie. Now double it, because that game is a *Battlefront* title, and then double it *again* because it's being made by DICE. Subtract the number you first thought of and then multiply it by *Episode VII*. Yeah. *That* kind of pressure.

However, as we sit down with Sigurlína Ingvarsdottir, senior producer on *Battlefront*, in DICE's hometown of Stockholm, we have to say that she and her team seem to be handling it remarkably well. As we ask her how it feels to be introducing fans to JJ Abrams' vision of the *Star Wars* universe, she has a smile on her face.

"Now that you've put it like that, pretty daunting!" she laughs. "No, it feels like an incredible privilege to get to do that with this game. We're excited that this is a new world that people haven't seen before, and we're excited about how it's connected to *The Force Awakens* as well."



She is, of course, talking about the *Battle of Jakku* DLC, which is being made available to everyone, for free, shortly after the game's launch. It sets the scene for Abrams' *The Force Awakens*, as we visit a new location for the first time and take part in a battle that occurs 30 years before the events of *Episode VII*. We've already seen the crashed Star Destroyer in trailers for the upcoming movie – in *Battlefront*, you'll be able to find out what happened during that battle.

Sadly, we didn't get to play through that level during our time with the game, but we did get a meaty slice of hands-on time with the game ahead of its public beta, and it raised as many questions as it did thrills.

KEEPING IT REAL

As you crunch through the snow on Hoth, a blaster in your hand, a dozen other Rebels behind you and TIE fighters screaming overhead, it's easy to get carried away. This is *Star Wars!* We're *living it!* Never has the universe looked and felt so real. We have to hand it to DICE – it has absolutely nailed the feeling of the *Star Wars* movies, and it's one of the best parts of the game.

> "There is a cluster of scorch marks on the Falcon that exactly represents the way it looks in the movie"

Of course, the graphics are a huge part of that – we first played on an PC with all the settings on high, and it looks just as stunning on the Xbox One – but there's more to the realism than how many polygons are on the screen at a time. Little details, small touches that only a fanatic will notice, have been recreated perfectly.

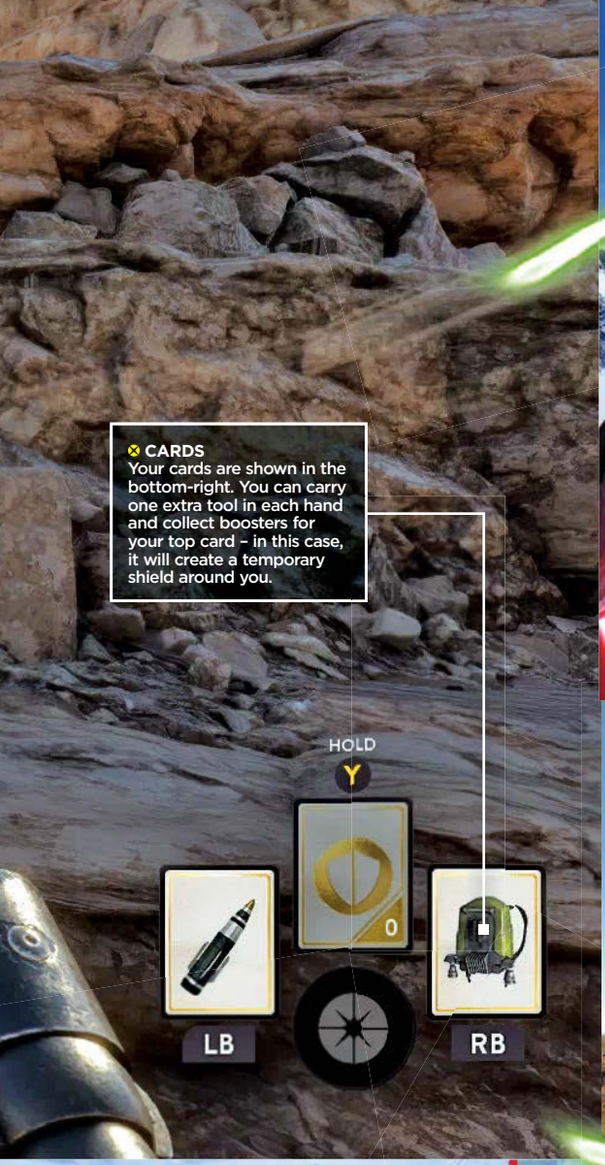
"The level of detail of some of the assets is stunning," says Ingvarsdottir. "If you were to look at our Falcon model as an example, you would find that there is a cluster of scorch marks on it that exactly represents the way it looks in the movie." While we may not have had a chance to jump into Han Solo's iconic ship in our playtest (it was just X-wings and TIE fighters for us), we saw tiny touches like this everywhere. It was a labour of love for DICE, who spent hours photographing props and sets at LucasArts. "It's these little details that it needs to have in order for it to feel authentic," Ingvarsdottir adds.

Whatever DICE has done, it works. Even the weapons feel totally *Star Wars* – the team had to take a few liberties with weapons and power-ups, but the new armoury still fits the *Star Wars* universe perfectly. "In the levels, you find these icons that give you power-ups, and some of those are something that you recognise, such as an orbital strike," explains Ingvarsdottir. "But then we had to invent our own as well, to complement the rest, where we felt like, 'Okay, *Star Wars* really doesn't have that class of weapon and we need it in the game.' So we have made additions to the arsenal in order to satisfy the design needs."

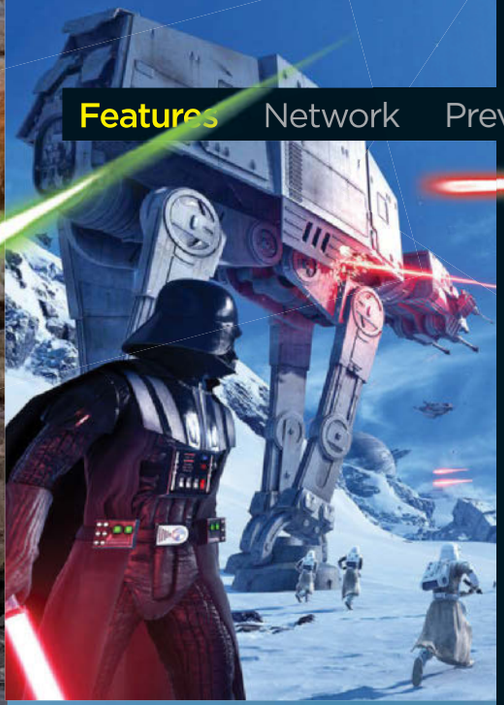
"ALL WINGS REPORT IN"

But not every design decision that the team made has been so well received by fans. Recently, after DICE and EA announced that the game wouldn't feature a single-player campaign at all, fans grabbed their lightsaber pitchforks and flaming blasters and took to the metaphorical streets to complain. Perhaps titles like *Titanfall*, which was well-received despite its lack of proper story-led campaign mode, helped the decision, but we were keen to find out exactly why DICE had chosen to drop single-player from the experience.

"The core of the original *Battlefronts* was the multiplayer – it was a multiplayer experience," explains Ingvarsdottir. "And that's very natural for us, but very early on in the conversation we also talked about what we wanted to bring in, and we wanted to bring you these experiences that you can play on the couch with a friend, or you can play by yourself. There's much more than the multiplayer content; the missions, which are a sizable chunk of the game, are designed with replayability and with co-op in mind."

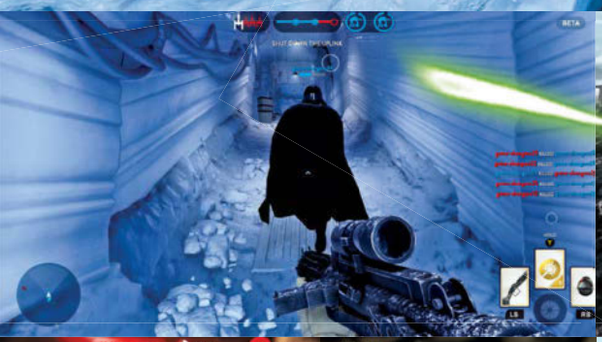


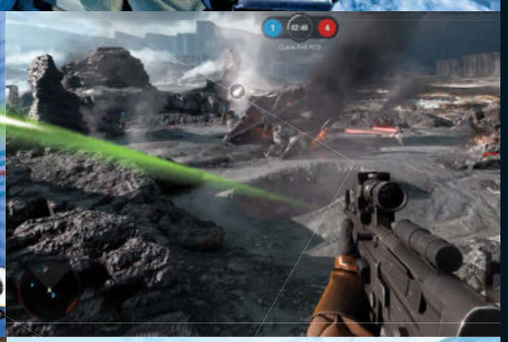
CARDS
Your cards are shown in the bottom-right. You can carry one extra tool in each hand and collect boosters for your top card – in this case, it will create a temporary shield around you.













You can aim down the sights of a weapon to zoom in, but they're designed to be fired from the hip.



THE SOUNDS OF STAR WARS

USE THE SOURCE, DICE!

One of the things that absolutely blew us away during our time with the *Battlefront* beta was its sound design. Without a doubt, this is one of the best *sounding* games we've ever played. We had to ask Sigurlína Ingvarsdottir how they achieved such incredible authenticity. Her response? A stellar audio team.

"One of the first presentations we did in a team meeting was our audio director Ben Minto," she says. "He did a presentation on 'The Sounds of *Star Wars*', and he explained things like... did you know that the sound of the TIE fighter is actually the scream from an elephant that has been modulated into the sound of a TIE fighter?" This is without a doubt one of the best facts we've heard this year – and we've been telling everyone we meet about it ever since.

Minto himself wrote in his blog about the sound design last year, and talked at length about his trips to different countries to record realistic audio. This included recording the air and 'feel' of redwood forests for the Endor levels, capturing bubbling Icelandic geysers for Sullust, and sampling a frozen waterfall in Sweden to add to the ambience of Hoth.

Combine these sounds with the original movie music of John Williams and sound stems from the films themselves, and you have a recipe for success pumping into your noise holes. "In the same way that our artists have geeked out about bringing the visuals to life," says Ingvarsdottir, "the sound guys have done the same with the audio."





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THE WEAPONS OF THE WARS

JUST A TASTE OF THE FULL SELECTION COMING AT LAUNCH



A280C BLASTER RIFLE

UNLOCK PRICE: 450 | RANK REQUIRED: 4

DAMAGE
RATE OF FIRE
RANGE
COOLING POWER

This powerful blaster offers a high rate of fire with excellent damage stats. The range is fairly good, too, making this a well-balanced choice. The favoured weapon of the Alliance.



E-11 BLASTER RIFLE

UNLOCK PRICE: 450 | RANK REQUIRED: 4

DAMAGE
RATE OF FIRE
RANGE
COOLING POWER

Don't be put off by the fact that this is the standard blaster of the Imperial Forces – its good range and high firepower make this a top choice for any trooper, Storm or otherwise.



DH-17 BLASTER PISTOL

UNLOCK PRICE: 750 | RANK REQUIRED: 3

DAMAGE
RATE OF FIRE
RANGE
COOLING POWER

This fully automatic pistol has a high rate of fire and excellent cooling power, while still offering a fair amount of damage. It's the perfect option for medium-range combat.



DLT-19 HEAVY BLASTER

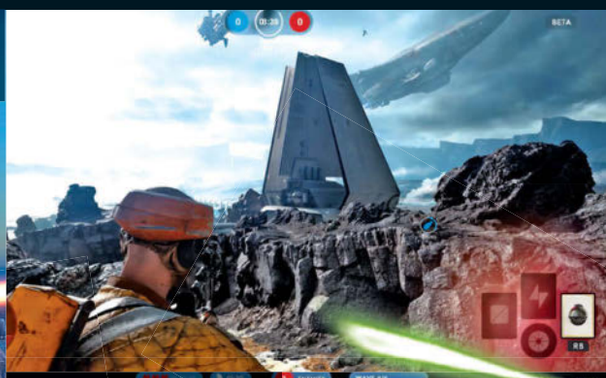
UNLOCK PRICE: 2250 | RANK REQUIRED: 5

DAMAGE
RATE OF FIRE
RANGE
COOLING POWER

An ideal weapon for keeping troops pinned down or taking out large groups of enemies, this heavy weapon combines a high rate of fire with good range and excellent cooling. A powerful choice.

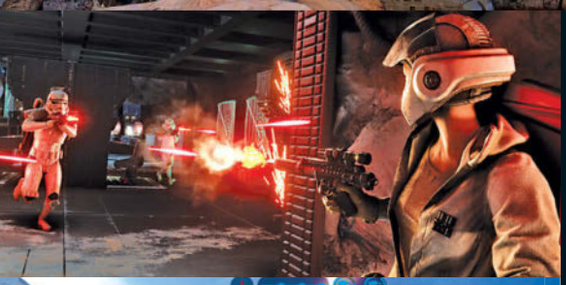


The little GNK droids run around the map making that classic 'GONK' sound effect to help you track them down.





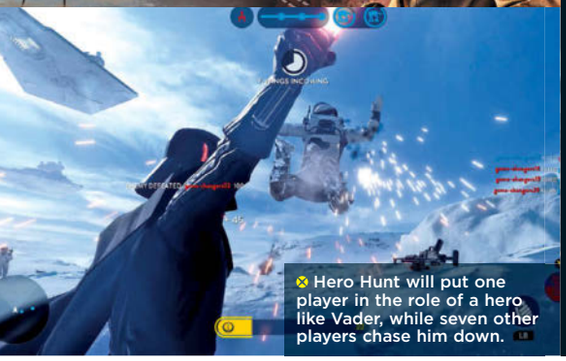
Power-ups, like Smart Rockets and Orbital Strikes can give you a major edge on the battlefield.



ALL-NEW MODES

THREE NEW GAME TYPES DETAILED

EA has also announced three new modes that will be appearing in the final game when it launches on 27 November. Droid Run tasks you with finding and capturing all three GNK Droids that are moving through the map. Hero Hunt sees one player becoming a hero, while seven troopers try to kill them. Whoever delivers the killing blow becomes the hero, fighting to survive against their ex-teammates. Finally, Cargo offers a twist on classic Capture The Flag modes. The score starts at 5 - 5, and each team has five pieces of cargo in their base. However, unlike normal CTF, you don't need to have your flag in your base to score. The result should be tense attack vs defence stand-offs in this 6v6 mode. We're hoping these three modes will help ensure the lack of single-player doesn't limit the title's longevity.



Hero Hunt will put one player in the role of a hero like Vader, while seven other players chase him down.



The *Battle Of Jakku* DLC will give players their first glimpse of JJ Abram's *Star Wars* universe.

IN THE ARMOURY

PICK YOUR STAR CARDS WISELY BEFORE EVERY BATTLE...



THERMAL DETONATOR

COOLDOWN: 9 seconds

UNLOCK PRICE: 100

RANK REQUIRED: 2

The most popular and widely-used grenade in the galaxy, the Thermal Detonator is easy to use and has deadly results. Chuck it, hide and wait for the bang.



CYCLER RIFLE

COOLDOWN: 7 seconds

UNLOCK PRICE: 750

RANK REQUIRED: 3

This is effectively a sniper rifle from *Battlefield 4*. It fires solid projectiles, works at long-range and deals massive damage for one-hit kills – but you only get one shot before cooldown.



ION SHOT

COOLDOWN: 20 seconds

UNLOCK PRICE: 500

RANK REQUIRED: 3

This weapon mod allows you to charge your primary weapon to fire ion-charged bolts, making it more effective against shields, droids and vehicles. It lasts for seven seconds.



ION GRENADE

COOLDOWN: 12 seconds

UNLOCK PRICE: 1200

RANK REQUIRED: 4

Unlike the Thermal Detonator, which is mainly for use against other troopers, this grenade deals massive damage to vehicles, shields and droids. Just don't drop it...



JUMP PACK

COOLDOWN: 15 seconds

UNLOCK PRICE: 2250

RANK REQUIRED: 5

Whether it's traversing large sections of the map or escaping a deadly firefight, the Jump Pack lets you leap into the air and fly up, or across, the map. Definitely our favourite Star Card.



PERSONAL SHIELD

COOLDOWN: 20 seconds

UNLOCK PRICE: 500

RANK REQUIRED: 5

Put yourself in a bubble with this personal shield – it offers protection from enemy weapons, but won't stop grenades or shots from the Cycler Rifle. You can't shoot out of it, either.



SHARPSHOOTER

COOLDOWN: N/A

UNLOCK PRICE: 4500

RANK REQUIRED: 5

This trait reduces the cooldown time of your other Star Cards as you get more headshots. It's expensive, but pair it with the Cycler Rifle and you will rack up kills like nobody's business.

It's true – the Missions, like the Survival mode we played on Tatooine, are designed for just one or two players, but after a few rounds we weren't convinced that it was going to be enough to sustain our single-player desires. At the end of a wave, when a single enemy remained, the large map meant that finding and killing them felt more like a Benny Hill chase scene than a climactic firefight. Plus, the five waves in the beta (there will be fifteen in the final game) felt far too easy. The multiple maps will add some diversity, and new modes like Battle (against another player or AI) should help, but we're still not sure it's enough to satisfy players in the long term. We pressed Ingvarsdottir on this, but she remained confident in the team's decision:

"This composition of multiplayer and missions felt like a good package that was logical together," she assured us. "I don't think with the original *Battlefront*s you think of them in terms of their standout story campaign, although they had an aspect of that. For us, that was the concept we came up with and what we pitched."

We'll have to wait and see whether this combination will be enough to satisfy fans when the final game launches, but for now we're unconvinced. We had more fun in the game's other two playable modes – Drop Zone and Walker Assault – than we did hunting for a lone Stormtrooper on Tatooine.



"This composition of multiplayer and missions felt like a good package that was logical together"

KNEE-DEEP IN LASERS

The first of these two modes, Drop Zone, took place on Sullust, the volcanic planet that is based on Ingvarsdottir's home country, Iceland. The level looks *incredible* – the blackened rocks and pale sulphur pools offer impressive detail, and as you sprint through the level you'll hear the wet slap of geysers bubbling away around you. Trust us when we say that you don't want to fall in.

As escape pods slam into the ground like unexploded WWII bombs, your team's job is to capture and secure them. Once you've claimed a pod, the race to defend it begins, and it's here that teamwork is vital. Run towards it alone and you can expect a blaster shot between the eyes, but storm in with your buddies and you have a good chance of taking the enemy team down and claiming the power-ups within the pod.

Unfortunately, if you take a hit, you may have to wait to get back into the fight. Respawns were regularly 100 metres (or more) away from the currently-contested escape pod, which made the mode more about sprinting across the rocky landscape than actually getting into the fight. Partnering with a friend lets you spawn with them, which alleviates the problem slightly, but it still really needs to be solved before launch.

The other mode, Walker Assault, is where we finally got to live out our dreams of taking part in a full-scale, 40-player battle across a sprawling landscape. The number of options on offer in this mode is outrageous – you can run-and-gun, jump into a Starfighter, take control of turrets, or even become Lord Vader himself (or Luke, of course) and wreak havoc with a lightsaber.

This mode really does play as good as it sounds. With so many players on the battlefield, there's always someone to shoot, some power-up to find or some objective to complete. The main goal for the Empire is to clear the path for their AT-ATs, while the Rebels are attempting to activate uplinks that will bring in Y-Wing bombers to wipe the giant walkers out. The balancing is impressive – wins were split between the teams during our play through – and if your team plays the objective and doesn't just charge around in a killing frenzy, you've got a great chance of taking the round.

TO THE SKIES

One thing that is less successful, unfortunately, is the flying; the controls were tough to learn, and in Walker Assault mode, taking out ground troops was really tough. It's classic DICE, though – air vehicles are always hard to control, so we shouldn't be surprised. What *did* surprise us, though, was when DICE announced that it wouldn't include space battles in *Battlefront*, instead focusing on surface-based arenas for its dogfights. Ingvarsdottir explains the decision for us.

"One of the things that we wanted to give [those battles] is a sense of three-dimensionality," she says. "[In Fighter Squadron mode] we have the power-ups basically on the surface of the planet; that's where you swoop down to pick them up, and the environment becomes part of your combat area as well. We feel that this adds quite a lot of variety to the battle." We can see her point, although we still aren't totally convinced by the balancing within Fighter Squadron mode, which we played during gamescom in August.

Thankfully, the gunplay so far seems to make up for the small niggles we have with certain modes. Weapons feel unique despite them all, ultimately, shooting red lasers, and the power-ups do a good job of keeping things varied. We've still got some problems with the game, but we're quietly confident DICE can allay them before its launch.

You may have noticed that we've gone through this entire feature without making a terrible *Star Wars* reference. If you find our lack of puns... disturbing, we— Oh no, wait. *Damn it.*

EXCLUSIVES WIN THE CONSOLE WAR



With Rise Of The Tomb Raider almost here and Minecraft still breaking records, which IP should Microsoft drop its cash on next?

Microsoft has been throwing its weight around to make the Xbox One a success – 2,312kg of it to be exact. Well, that's assuming the publisher turned up at Markus 'Notch' Persson's house late on a cold September evening in 2014 and showered him with 2.5 billion single dollar bills as it took Mojang and *Minecraft* off his hands and made it property of The G Man (that's what we call Bill Gates, we're besties, it's no big deal).

That isn't all of course, Microsoft also paid big bucks to secure Crytek's *Ryse: Son Of Rome* and Capcom's *Dead Rising 3* as launch exclusives, not to mention the deal with Square Enix that's keeping *Rise Of The Tomb Raider* out of those traitorous PlayStation 4 owners' hands for another 12 months. Microsoft is clearly prepared to do what it takes to win this console war, so this month we posed the question that's been on our minds for some time: which game franchise will be next? Or more to the point, which game franchise *would be best*?

There's a distinction, and it's important to note. Microsoft could drop a ton of cash and buy anything it wanted, but that doesn't mean it would benefit the console, let alone the IP in question. We put it to you, **X-ONE** readers, Twitter language warriors and Facebook stalkers, to see what games you think Microsoft could work wonders with as we move into the third year of Xbox One good times.

"Get Mass Effect Andromeda, make it exclusive and make the series a great RPG again."
PHAZONUK

"Now that Konami is out of the AAA business, hopefully Splinter Cell becomes the new #MGS for Xbox."
@JAMESTPORTER

"Finally bring MOBA to Xbox properly and get a console exclusive/cross-platform play with League Of Legends."
STEPH WADE

"Microsoft need to make Mass Effect exclusive again, the first one had so much ambition and it didn't need to cater towards the idiot PS fans who probably made BioWare make the 2nd one more action based."
TOONARMY1993

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"Opted for James Bond because I'd rather Microsoft bring something back than claim ownership on something that's already out there."
_MYNAMEISDREW

"They would probably ruin GTA, but imagine if the power of the Cloud meant there were just hundreds of criminals & cops running about, they could take the idea behind APB, but not make it shit."
RYAN HORNE

"It has to be Mass Effect but for the salty lol tears I'd love them to get a Rockstar game."
@JEZEBELJINX

"Wouldn't it be f*cking great if Microsoft got exclusive right to Silent Hills and the Sony fanboys would still be crying like babies over P.T. going from the store lol."
CREAT3RH8ER

"Resident Evil has sucked for so long, Microsoft should buy the exclusive rights, give it to The Coalition and give us a great game finally."
PEEZERINO

"Not fanboying, but I'd like Microsoft take its head out the corporate bum and get back to making Xbox unique. I can't think of any benefit of Microsoft specifically buying up any franchise."
MATT DOOSH

"If anything, Microsoft should get Metal Gear Solid just to save it the shame of being a KickStarter PlayStation exclusive."
@STR8NIRVANA

"Has to be GTA if they really wanted an exclusive to rub in Sony's face."
@NAUGHTSY

"Imagine the HoloLens support that Mass Effect could have if Microsoft really got behind the franchise again, it would be amazing."
LUKESEARLE84

WHICH IP SHOULD MICROSOFT BUY?

20.5 % MASS EFFECT

Mass Effect started its life as an Xbox 360 console exclusive, and it looks like you all want it to go back that way. Going full exclusive, or even just timed, would give BioWare the space to really focus its design for a core contingent of devoted *Mass Effect* fans – instead of trying to appease the masses.

3.11% ASSASSIN'S CREED

We think console exclusivity would relieve pressure on Ubisoft, and the series could be great again. Turns out though, you just don't care.

4.97% LEAGUE OF LEGENDS

With more MOBA games coming to console, it surely won't be long before someone makes a play for one of the industry's biggest, *League Of Legends*. With mouse and keyboard support on the way, this could be incredible for Xbox One.

4.97% CALL OF DUTY

We weren't going to include *Call Of Duty*, but many of you expressed disappointment that Xbox One had lost its timed-exclusive access to *Call Of Duty* DLC to PS4 with *Black Ops III*. It turns out, on the whole, most of you don't care when you get to pay for the maps, as long as you can do it eventually.

6.83% BURNOUT

With *Project Gotham Racing* gone but not forgotten, we would love to see another straight-up arcade racer on Xbox. *Burnout* with Microsoft's Drivatar tech behind it, as well as with the power of the cloud to populate roads and generate new levels of destruction, could be something incredible.

7.45% METAL GEAR SOLID

With rumours circulating that Konami is out of the triple-A game development business and with Hideo Kojima in the wind, the IP rights to *MGS* are waiting to be scooped up. Truth be told, we would be happy enough for Microsoft to collaborate with Platinum on a sequel to *Metal Gear Rising*, at least.



13.04%
007: JAMES BOND

It's been a long time since we last had a decent 007 game (18 years by our count) and we agree with you all, Microsoft could pluck this franchise out from development hell, license it out to a first-party studio and really work wonders with it.

11.8%
GRAND THEFT AUTO

We put this in as a bit of a joke more than anything, but *Grand Theft Auto* got a surprising amount of votes. We hate to break it to you, the chance of Rockstar taking its biggest IP and sticking any form of exclusivity on it is about as likely as the inevitable sequel featuring no guns.

THE NAME'S KOJIMA...

When you rowdy lot write in to us, we often get a lot of nonsense, but on (rare) occasions it's a revelation: "I voted for James Bond as the other ones seem fine or stale as they are. Can we get Microsoft to buy Kojima but make a Bond game, and make it great again?," commented Ian Rathbone over Facebook. What if Hideo Kojima *did* make a *007* game? It would be big, bombastic and the most mental spy fiction we've ever experienced. Listen up Microsoft, this needs to happen!

11.18%
SPLINTER CELL

Because of the incredible power of the original Xbox - compared to the PS2 and GameCube at least – *Splinter Cell* is often thought of as an Xbox exclusive. If it actually got picked up by Microsoft, we imagine the publisher would rein back the action and position it as an *MGS* replacement. Actually, that sounds great...

8.7%
SILENT HILL

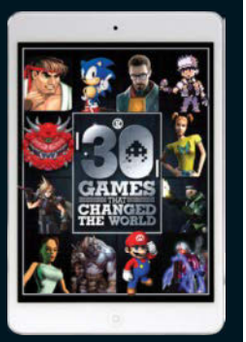
PS4 exclusive *Silent Hills* is dead, so what's happening with the IP now? It's probably on life support somewhere in Konami's offices. Not only is it a perfect opportunity to rescue the franchise, we could also secure exclusivity and, hell, maybe even get Guillermo del Toro and Hideo Kojima back.

7.45%
RESIDENT EVIL

Resident Evil has been struggling for so long now, that it's hard to imagine a scenario where it isn't. But if a publisher like Microsoft stepped in, pumped money into development and gave a studio room to return to its horror roots, we're confident it could rebuilt its reputation.

14 HOURS OF EXCLUSIVE GAMEPLAY ANALYSIS

The videos, trailers and live gameplay sessions we've been giving you on our social networks



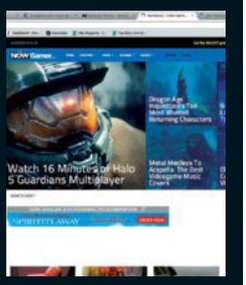
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HALO 5: GUARDIANS
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FORZA MOTORSPORT 6



BLOOD BOWL 2

XBOX ONE WEBSITE www.XB1.co.uk



QUANTUM BREAK
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JUST CAUSE 3



STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT



ELITE: DANGEROUS



FALLOUT 4

YouTube

www.youtube.com/XONEmag



DESTINY: THE TAKEN KING
Is it worth returning to *Destiny* for year two?



HOMEFRONT: THE REVOLUTION



RAINBOW SIX SIEGE



MAFIA III



DOOM



THE DIVISION
Our hands-on verdict of Ubisoft's long-awaited action game



SCALEBOUND



ASSASSIN'S CREED: SYNDICATE



HITMAN

5 THINGS WE LEARNT THIS ISSUE

The Xbox knowledge we picked up at **XB1.co.uk**

1



HALO 5 RESOLUTION: DISAPPOINTING

While *Halo 5: Guardians* will run at a smooth 60fps in the campaign, it won't always be 1080p; the resolution will scale back during bigger moments to compensate.

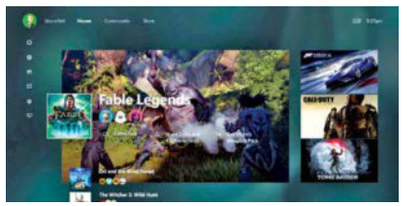
2



NEW TOMB RAIDER MULTIPLAYER

Rise Of The Tomb Raider probably won't feature PvP multiplayer, but *will* offer gamers the ability to compete with their friends in score attack modes and challenges.

3



SYSTEM FAILING

The new dashboard is in beta, but it's buggy. Some games – like *Destiny: The Taken King* – won't work, while others will have minor performance issues.

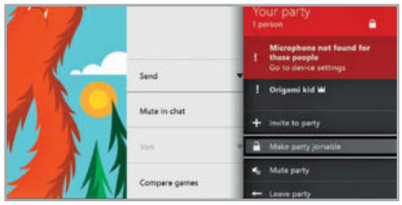
4



UBISOFT IS DOING DLC RIGHT

Rainbow Six Siege will have 11 maps at launch and will then be followed by a wave of free post-launch DLC, which is always appreciated!

5



GET CONVERSATIONAL

Microsoft has just rolled out an update for Xbox One, improving the Party Chat functionality; it now supports chat between up to 12 users at once.

Get your daily fix of Xbox One news, opinion and more at **www.XB1.co.uk**

THE DIVISION

Hands-on reveals Ubisoft's attempt to break away from expectation

DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
Ubisoft Massive

CREDITS
Ground Control [2000]
World In Conflict [2007]
Just Dance Now [2014]

PLAYERS
1-4

KINECT?
No

SMARTGLASS?
No

RELEASE DATE
8 March 2016

WEBSITE
www.thedivision.com

TWITTER
@TheDivision

XBOX ONE

Far Cry in the five boroughs, *Watch Dogs* in the apocalypse, *Splinter Cell* without the Sam Fisher factor; these are the easy ways to understand what targets *The Division* has in its sights. It's easy to think about Ubisoft's latest attempt to conquer the open world in this way because the publisher is all too often accused of reusing an ageing template for every one of its new releases. It's easy because it's been *so freaking long* since *The Division* was first revealed that remembering what it actually *is* seems to become harder by the month. But there's a problem with taking the easy way out: it often eschews expectation, warping reality into an untameable, unenjoyable beast. So, enough of the hyperbole, because we've finally had the opportunity to get hands-on and, truth be told, we aren't sure what to make of it.

Let's talk about bad first impressions. Our introduction to the two strangers comprising our three-person squad went from handshake to death state in 30 seconds as one 'accidentally' shot us in the back – as he attempted to work out how to change his weapon, no less. New York might be mid-crisis, but our team of Division agents was in full-blown meltdown from the second we were allowed to pick up the controller. This is *The Division*'s biggest inherent problem: there's a striking open world out there to be explored, but only if you have two friends ready to tackle the apocalypse with you. Ubisoft has constantly inferred that the game is built around seamless online integration – that you can go from playing alone, to in a group, to playing PvP, with little interruption – though we are still yet to see this in action. Instead, this demo shuffled us directly into *The Division*'s PvP-centric 'Dark Zones', where other agents and super tough enemy NPCs come together in heavily infected areas to battle it out over badass loot.

Attempts to lone wolf it were quickly shot down, quite literally, in flames. After clambering into the Dark Zone, our team encountered its first enemy resistance in the form of flamethrower-wielding sanitation workers and former prisoners from Rikers Island. They were not happy to see new faces in the quarantined areas. We each slid into cover in a fashion that *Watch Dogs* players would find

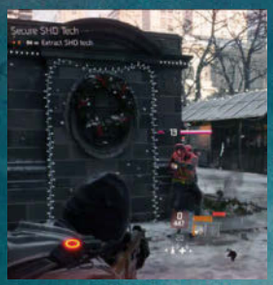
NEED TO KNOW

HERE ARE SIX THINGS YOU REALLY OUGHT TO KNOW ABOUT THE DIVISION



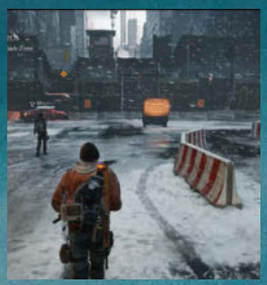
MOVEMENT

Movement was surprisingly heavy in *The Division*. Soldiers have a real heft about them, and the guns similarly feel weighty and difficult to fire – and that's a good thing; it makes it feel more inclined towards realism than arcadey nonsense.



MELEE

Inexplicably, *The Division* doesn't seem to feature a melee attack. On a handful of occasions we came face to face with other real world enemy players, only to come to a standstill, each looking for a punch-slash-stab button that didn't exist – at least not yet.



GRAPHICS

The Division is a really pretty game, but sadly it doesn't look quite as good as those first trailers made out. Yes, this is still in development, but we don't see it reaching those levels of insane detail on Xbox One. It looks like a sharper-resolution, winter-set *Watch Dogs*.



GLITCHES

Our demo was eager to highlight that it might not be representative of the final product, and we hope that is the case. Agents routinely got caught in the environment and the AI made genuinely stupid mistakes.



LOOT

Grabbing loot is a big part of *The Division*, and one of the best things that you can do in a Dark Zone is take out an enemy squad, steal their stuff and get it extracted for your own. Major kick in the teeth.



LEADERSHIP

Communication is important in co-op as it's way easier for an enemy NPC to kill you than it is for you to kill them. Someone needs to take point otherwise you'll end up divided and, eventually, very dead.

DID YOU KNOW? While *The Division* was originally due to feature quite smart second-screen support, that has since been cut due to balance issues



The Division is rather unlike any other *Tom Clancy* game you've ever played, but its mid-apocalypse story seems like a match made in heaven.

Ubisoft hasn't got *The Division* optimised to run as sexily on Xbox One as it has in those PC trailers just yet, but it's getting there – it looks great.

TALKING TO MARTIN HULTBERG

IP manager, Ubisoft Massive



How is the mixed PvP / PvE element going to work in the final release of *The Division*? We see a lot of people comparing the systems to *Destiny* – is that a fair comparison to make?
The setup allows you a seamless transition between solo, co-op and player vs player. This means no lobbies or menus – it is just one unbroken experience once you start the game. The world consists of areas that facilitate these different ways of playing and you will know, and choose, when you make the transition from one to another. So you can play alone or find friends to join up with in the social areas. Once out in the world together, you can decide to enter what we call a Dark Zone, where PvP becomes a possibility you have to consider. Still, it is not a certainty because the people you meet might just as well end up helping you. Nobody can be trusted in the Dark Zone, though, so tensions and risks are high – but so are the rewards.

Do you think the numerous delays to *The Division* have harmed the public perception of it?
I think what matters most is the quality of the experience. Taking the time to make sure it is right almost always proves to be worth it.

With such a heavy emphasis on co-op, how are you still catering for players that prefer playing solo?
You can play all of it solo if you so choose. At the same time, we are making it easy to transition into multiplayer, and hopefully some solo players will find that interesting and give it a try!

The PvP sounds like it can be taken advantage of by players that might want to troll others or be toxic. How are you going to balance and moderate the Dark Zones?
Balancing is, of course, a constant endeavour with any online game. We will test extensively, keep a close eye on things and balance accordingly. As for moderation, we don't have anything to share yet – but the Dark Zone is a dangerous place!

What were your biggest influences (whether gaming, cinema, literature or TV) when making *The Division*?
We have drawn inspiration from a wide range of sources: there is, of course, the reports and data coming out of the real Dark Winter exercise; the mystery and myths surrounding Directive 51; games like *DayZ*; movies like *I Am Legend*, *Contagion*, *Escape From New York*, *The Road* and so on have all added their own flair to things.

Considering the connection to the *Tom Clancy* franchise, does the setup of *The Division* imply that the Splinter Cell Third Echelon, Rainbow Six and Ghost Recon teams have all failed to carry out their primary duty of protecting America?
The Division is activated as a last line of defence against a catastrophic emergency threatening the very fabric of society worldwide – a threat that no one could predict or defend against...

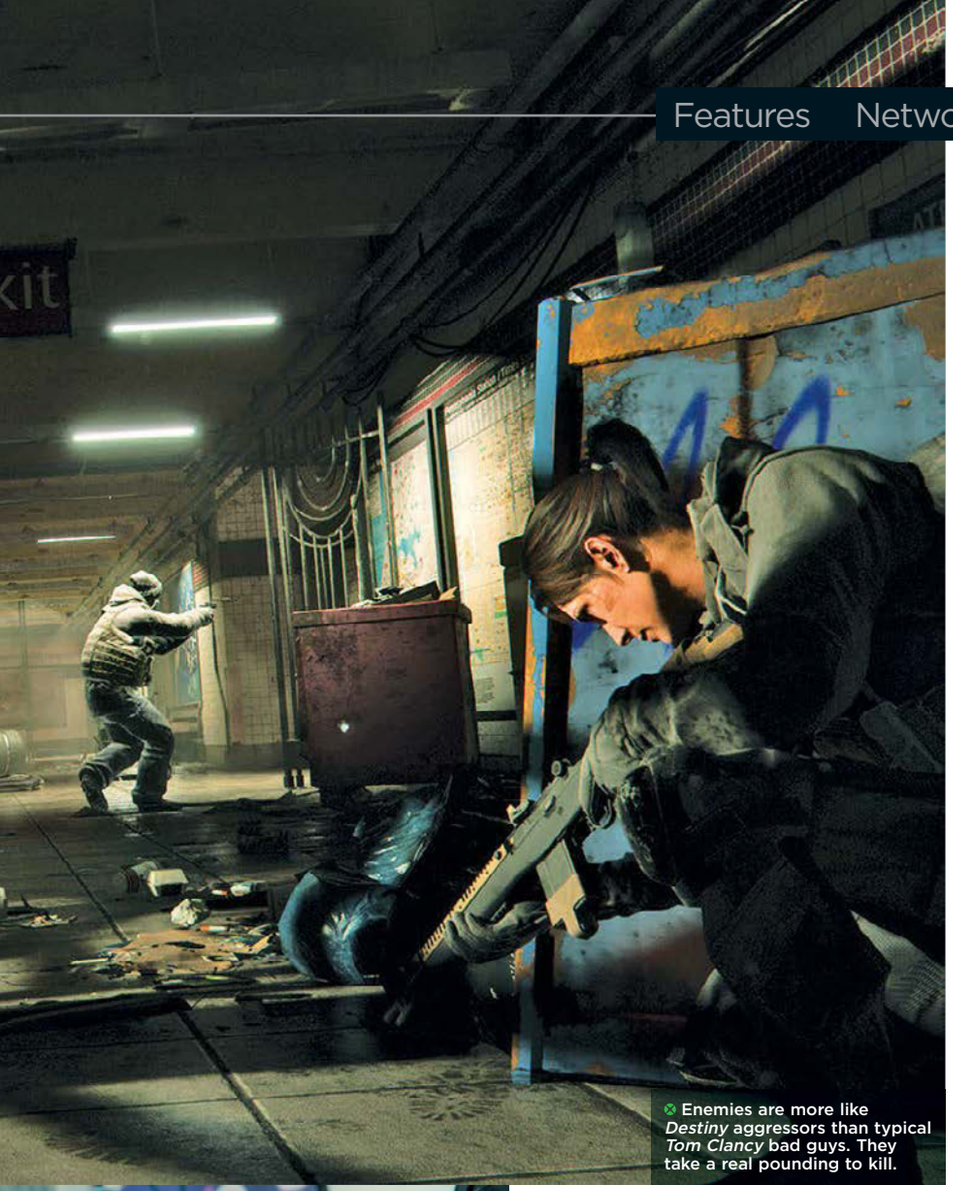
So are we likely to find Sam Fisher either dead or held captive by an enemy faction?
I won't spoil any stories here today!

eerily familiar, with the button prompts adorning the screen highlighting new areas of cover you can quickly switch between. What was initially a distraction quickly became a necessity; strategic positioning is mandatory to survival.

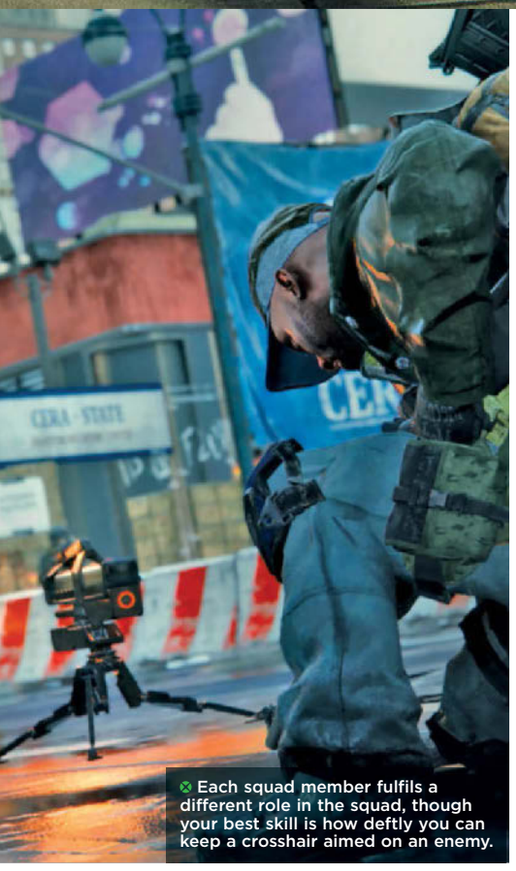
You need to hit enemies in their weak points – and no, it isn't necessarily the head – so this means working to flank and attack from behind, from high ground, and from any advantageous viewpoints that the environment might allow. This is often easier said than done; getting caught in the environment or seeing your agent struggle to vault cover was a regular annoyance in the slice of *The Division* we played. Either way, situational awareness is imperative if you want to win fights, especially when your team is incapable of basic human communication and the enemy rioters outnumber you five to three.

It's clear at this point that developer Massive Entertainment is cherry-picking great ideas from across the Ubisoft catalogue and improving each with next-gen wizardry. Fans of recent *Splinter Cell* games will see inspiration to the movement, while the cover system and basic gunplay – not to mention the overall tactical impetus – isn't dissimilar to that of *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter.* Where *The Division* does strike out on





Enemies are more like *Destiny* aggressors than typical *Tom Clancy* bad guys. They take a real pounding to kill.



Each squad member fulfils a different role in the squad, though your best skill is how deftly you can keep a crosshair aimed on an enemy.

its own, however, is with the surprisingly strong online RPG elements running through its core.

We never felt like our progress or success was at the mercy of an invisible dice roll, but you'd better be prepared for enemies taking an absolute pounding. While it obviously isn't finalised just yet, enemies had a tendency to stand, unflinching, in the line of fire, giving us a first-hand view of how bullet-spongy they truly are. Clip after clip was pumped into heads while grenades shattered pieces of the environment all around us, sending a dizzying array of particle effects all across the screen. Unsurprisingly, seeing that little 'XP earned' counter appear above the deceased is as satisfying as ever.

As is fighting past an especially tough group of enemies to get our hands on a bunch of highly awesome, highly infected, loot. This precious elite gear is some of the best the game has to offer. The problem? It has to be extracted and cleared for duty before you can use it. This is where shit hits the fan. It involves moving to an extraction point in the middle of a giant open area which is surrounded, not only by incredibly difficult enemies, but other squads of real-world douchebags – sorry, we meant *players*. Without any obvious way to communicate, the idea is that

"It's clear at this point that developer Massive Entertainment is cherry-picking great ideas from across the Ubisoft catalogue and improving each with next-gen wizardry"

players either have the opportunity to work together to extract each team's loot – aiding each other in silence to hold back the hordes of AI – or you can instead turn on everyone and take it all for yourself.

We mean literally turn on everyone. Friendly fire is still on, which means a player on your own team can go rogue and attempt to take everything and extract it for themselves, if they really want to. Thankfully, our two squad mates were far too disorganised to stage a coup, but they were bad enough to misfire at an AI just seconds before the chopper was about to show, hit another squad and start a god-damned riot. At this point, the whole game disintegrated into chaos.

The Dark Zone descended into a free for all, which only went to highlight how difficult it is to not only kill other players, but to keep track of who is on your team and what is going on. Praying and spraying became king here; anybody that wandered into our crosshairs got shot in the face – giving us a key opportunity to get revenge against the idiot that shot us in the back earlier – as the chopper prepared to accept the loot extraction.

Overall, *The Division* has the potential to deliver everything it has promised over the last two years of development and hype. The problem isn't so much with how it plays, but more so in the systems that are being introduced to incite co-operative and competitive play. Currently, it's way too easy to accidentally become rogue, or worse, be at the whim of multiple enemy players because of a slip or mistake from a team mate that you might not want to be matched with in the first place. Whether this will be a bigger problem that permeates through the entire experience – PvE included – whether it's fixed by being able to actually play solo, or simply just a bad vertical slice of the game, will hopefully be answered when we get our hands on *The Division*'s beta in December.

JOSH WEST

HOW'S IT LOOKING? *The Division* is coming together in ways we never imagined, but we still need to see how it functions in a single-player capacity to know whether this can be more than the standard Ubi open-world template in the apocalypse.

COMMUNITY REACTION

"Looks good but also now very fed up with it cause it taken so long to come out and not really bothered anymore!" **@NuttyWray**

"Remember when The Division was scheduled to come out two years ago? Me too..." **@IanBealio**

"I got to play a demo last week. It looks great. I hope it does for me what Destiny failed to do." **@MRATav**

"Looks really great. A new kind of experience. Very excited." **@TheInfamousBLG**

HIGH FIVE

1 GOT CLANCY
While the late Tom Clancy didn't contribute to *The Division*, it bears his penchant for military action and end-of-the-world situations. A cheery chap, he was.

2 SINGLE SCREEN
Once upon a time, *The Division* was going to feature awesome second-screen support, though it has been subsequently cut due to balance problems in the alpha.

3 WITH FRIENDS
The game is designed as a predominantly multiplayer-driven experience, with Ubisoft eager to get players working cooperatively to clean up New York.

4 UBI TEMPLATE
Guess how you'll be clearing up the infection sweeping the city? You got it! Defeating tough enemies and capturing outposts. At least Ubisoft is consistent.

5 THE UNKNOWN
In December a beta is launching on Xbox One, designed to give players all over the world a chance to sample the game for themselves.



Customising the hero isn't limited to making them hairy, or black, or blue-eyed. In *Fallout 4* you can choose a female if you prefer.

DID YOU KNOW? The game is reported to contain over 111,000 lines of dialogue, to accommodate your choices

FALLOUT 4

That extra S.P.E.C.I.A.L. series

DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Bethesda Softworks

DEVELOPER
Bethesda Game Studios

CREDITS
The Elder Scrolls Online [2014]
Fallout: New Vegas [2010]
Skyrim [2011]

PLAYERS
1

KINECT?
No

SMARTGLASS?
TBA

RELEASE DATE
10 November 2015

WEBSITE
fallout4.com

TWITTER
@fallout

XBOX ONE

You know what we'd never have thought would be a huge influence on the *Fallout* games? *Minecraft*. But that's exactly the case, according to Bethesda's studio head – the wonderfully charismatic Todd Howard. It's been seven years since the release of *Fallout 3*, and in that time crafting titles such as *Minecraft* have basically taken over gaming. *Fallout 4* has included a pretty comprehensive crafting system within its otherwise serious RPG walls, and that's down to the influence of Mojang's greatest hit.

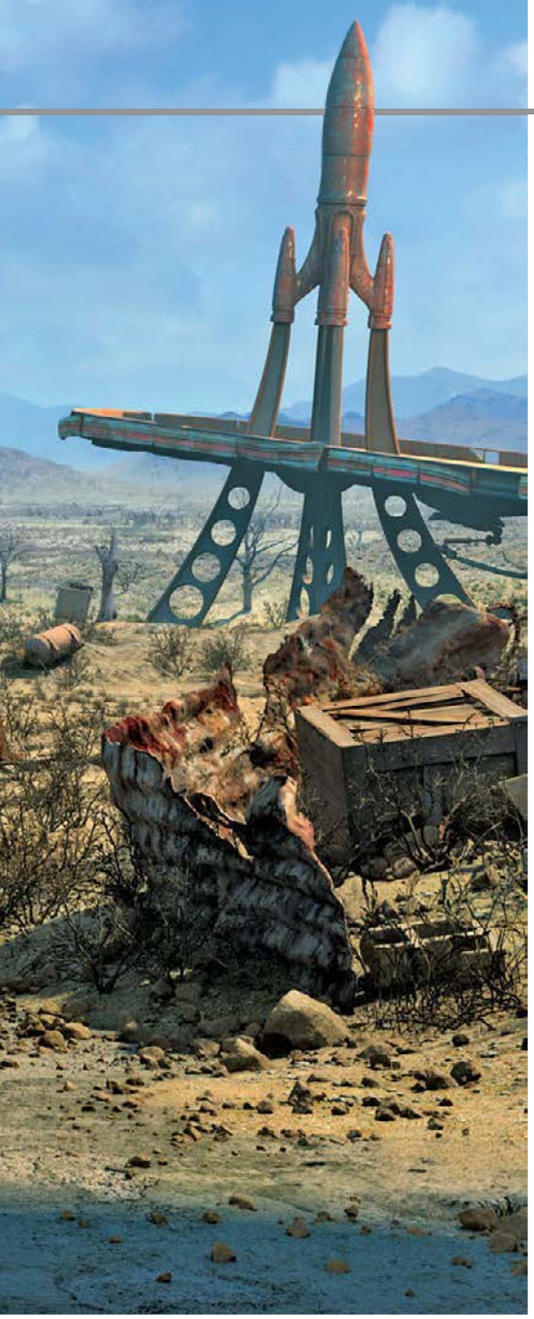
It might seem like a strange influence at first, but when you begin to think about how the *Fallout* worlds are built, it makes sense – everything you've seen in the previous wastelands (Washington and Vegas) has been modular... that is to say, all the props, items, clothing and armour is pulled from a huge asset library on the game's back end. Bethesda thought that for *Fallout 4*, it makes sense for the player to have access to that library and as such, *everything* is customisable.

> "Fallout 4 fuses all the best bits of a Minecraft-style crafting system with some of the most satisfying shooting you'll see this generation"

That means the way the economy works has been fundamentally altered since the last game, too – in *Fallout 3*, the dev team were very careful not to give you *too* much near the start of the story, because they didn't want you to become over-powered and steam through the game. This time, that's not so much of an issue, because everything you collect can be repurposed and put into your own hand-built house, or added to your armour, or made into part of your gun. It won't be like *Fallout 3*, where you could just horde everything and sell it for masses of caps, oh no. This time, you're going to need to think about *what* exactly you're going to do with all that junk in your metaphorical trunk.

But if this *Minecraft* influence is making you panic – 'It's too childish: that's not what *Fallout* games are about!' we can hear you cry – don't worry. There's another pretty hefty influence Bethesda is drawing on for this game, and its name is *Doom*. Bethesda didn't just buy out Arkane Studios and Tango Gameworks to make pretty games (*Dishonored* and *Wolfenstein: The New Order*); no, the developers of *Fallout 4* have been learning lessons from these games for years, and the result? Well, *Fallout 4* feels exactly like a modern shooter should.

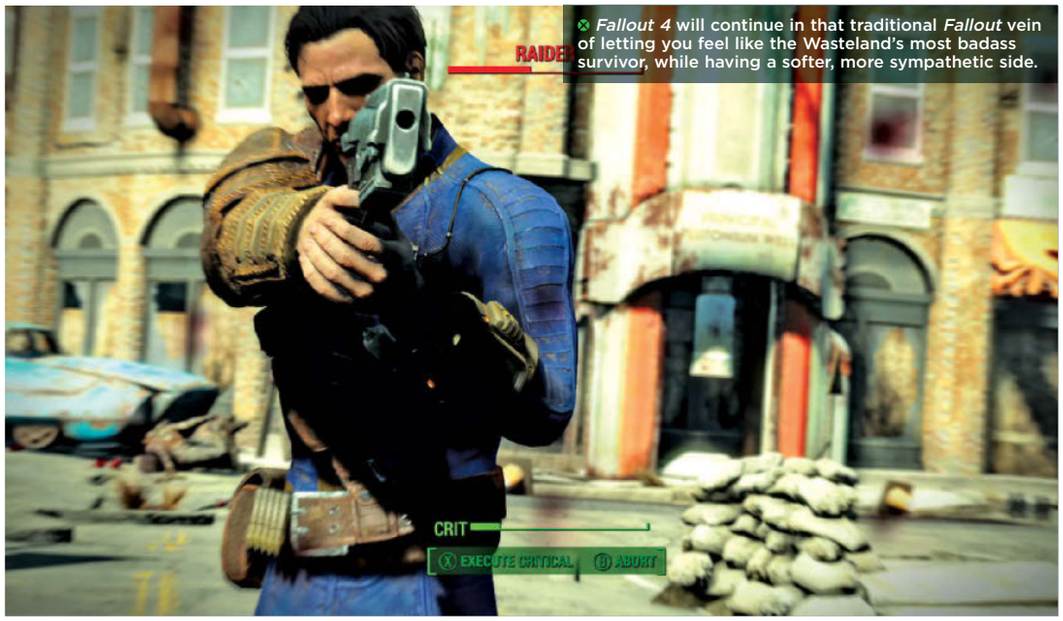
Unlike *Fallout 3*, you won't *have* to jump into VATS to pick your way out of the harder fights: the shooting mechanics themselves stand up on their own. Snipers feel like snipers, shotguns feel like shotguns, rifles feel like rifles. They don't have that tin-toy feeling they did in *Fallout 3*. VATS, then, will feel less like



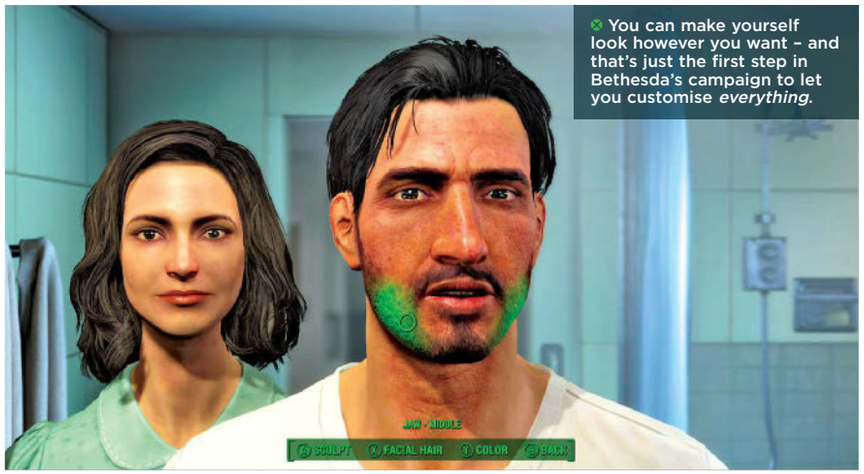


Whether you're in VATS or shooting from the FPS view, *Fallout 4* is going to feel like a proper, tight shooting game.





Fallout 4 will continue in that traditional *Fallout* vein of letting you feel like the Wasteland's most badass survivor, while having a softer, more sympathetic side.



You can make yourself look however you want – and that's just the first step in Bethesda's campaign to let you customise *everything*.

a necessary tool and more optional – something we're happy to report. It stops that pause-and-go rhythm you'd find yourself getting into in *Fallout 3* that could sometimes stand in the way of the game's pace and make heated firefights feel stale.

The result is a game that fuses all the best bits of a *Minecraft*-style crafting system with some of the most satisfying shooting you'll see this generation. If that isn't enough for you, *Fallout 4* has also re-done the way the perks system works, meaning levelling up and carving your character into your own speciality is now even more intuitive and seamless than ever. *Fallout 4* might well be a jack of all trades, but don't think that means it's a master of none of them... In fact, Bethesda's new title may well be the best crafting game, shooter *and* RPG we see hit the Xbox One this year.

DOM PEPPIATT

HOW'S IT LOOKING? Even if you've got open-world fatigue after this year, *Fallout 4* is going to make everything feel fresh again. Be excited.

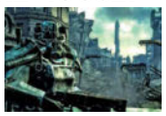
MORE OF THIS PLEASE

LIFE IN THE OLD DOG YET



We're suckers for lovely little dogs here on **X-ONE**, and *Fallout 4* is ticking all of our canine boxes so far. Like *all* the other *Fallout* games, you can recruit a faithful Alsatian pup to your side early in the game, and use the beast to gather items, attack enemies and do all manner of other tasks. This dog has been motion-captured and sound recorded from a real Alsatian that spent a few weeks in the Bethesda offices – how's *that* for authenticity?

PREVIOUSLY



1 FALLOUT 3
The granddaddy of the current open world trend, and the game that showed all the other devs how it's done, some seven years ago.



2 THE ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM
Bethesda isn't shy about admitting it needed to learn some lessons from *Skyrim*, and we're going to see all of those in *Fallout 4*.

THE EVOLUTION OF A DEMON

LOOKING AT HOW ONE OF DOOM'S ICONIC ENEMIES, THE CACODEMON, HAS CHANGED OVER THE YEARS IS A CLEAR INDICATION OF HOW FAR THINGS HAVE COME



DOOM (1993), DOOM II (1994)

Some claim that the first iteration of that floating red demon from *Doom* and *Doom II* was a rip off of a *Dungeons & Dragons* monster called the Astral Dreadnought.



DOOM 3 (2004)

In *Doom 3*, the Cacodemon underwent a radical design overhaul to help bring it from a 2D sprite into the third dimension. As you can see, the results were a bit rubbish.



DOOM (2016)

Finally, we have the new version of the Cacodemon. It could do with being a brighter shade of red, but it's a pretty faithful interpretation of the original nonetheless.

DOOM

It's time to go old school



The Revenant is one of *Doom*'s many returning enemies. In this game, though, we get to play as the demon in multiplayer.



DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Bethesda Softworks

DEVELOPER
Id Software

CREDITS
Quake Live [2010]
Rage [2011]
Doom 3 BFG Edition [2012]

PLAYERS
1-TBC

KINECT?
TBC

SMARTGLASS?
TBC

RELEASE DATE
Spring 2016

WEBSITE
www.doom.com

TWITTER
@DOOM

XBOX ONE

As we wait in anticipation for the return of the most influential FPS series of all time next spring, we find ourselves thinking of the disastrous revival of another of the Nineties' brash, fast-paced, and ostentatious shooters: *Duke Nukem*. The ill-fated return of the Duke proved two things. Firstly, it showed that sometimes it's better to leave the memories well alone, rather than trying to recapture past glories, like a once great boxer who can't resist coming back for one more fight, only to find himself looking up at the lights to a chorus of boos, his legacy tainted. The level of disappointment that emerged when everyone realised that *Duke Nukem Forever* was utter garbage also proved, however, that there *is* an appetite for a return to the old-school sensibilities that the likes of *Doom* and *Duke Nukem* represent, even if that particular game failed to deliver on it. The hope is that the new *Doom* can.

The thing that developer Id consistently returns to when laying out precisely how it is going to recapture the spirit of the original game is speed. It has repeatedly talked about how it wants you as the player to always be on the move, always be powering forward. It's worth noting, however, that speed in and of itself is not going to be enough to make that game stand out when pace and movement are such a vital part of modern shooters like *Titanfall* and *Black Ops III*. No, it's not so much speed that marks *Doom* out as distinct but, rather, intensity.

Fast-paced as the likes of *Call Of Duty* and *Titanfall* are, there are moments when you are encouraged to pause. When you're outnumbered, your first instinct is to retreat; when you've taken damage, you get behind cover so that your health can regenerate. *Doom* is being built in such a way that those moments of downtime simply do not exist. That's why there's no regenerating health in this game – if you've taken damage, the solution is not to cower in a corner, but to power on and shotgun a demon in the face so that it drops some health. It also accounts for the inclusion of gruesome melee 'glory kills' that can be pulled off after damaging enemies with gunfire. Id always wants you to be on the offensive, so it has included the glory kill mechanic to reward you for closing the distance on enemies, rather than punishing you for recklessness in the way other shooters might. In art director Hugo Martin's words, "the harder it gets, the more you have to move, the faster

PREVIOUSLY



1 RAGE
Graphically, it showed off the technical prowess for which Id is renowned, but not its skill in design.



2 DOOM 3
This game was something of an experiment, tilting *Doom* towards the horror genre.

HIGH FIVE

1 BFG IS BACK
One of the most famous guns in gaming will return. The 'B' stands for Big, the 'G' for Gun. We'll leave the 'F' for you to work out.

2 DEVELOPMENT HELL
The new *Doom* was originally announced in 2008, but that first iteration was scrapped as it failed to meet Bethesda's own standards.

3 JUMP TO IT
The current trend for double jumping in FPS games finds its way into *Doom*, adding verticality to the game.

4 NOT FOR THE FAINT-HEARTED
Doom's brutal kills are a clear sign that if you don't like violence, this isn't a game for you.

5 SMOOTH & SPECTACULAR
Bethesda says that the game will run at 1080p and at 60fps – surely an easy task for a studio with a history of pushing tech to the limit?



This Cyberdemon doesn't look like the most welcoming fellow...

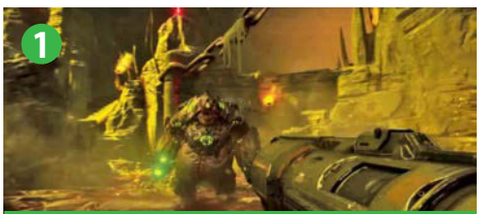
you have to play. If you stop and you try to hide, you just get wrecked." It's that never-let-up mentality that gives the game that intensity we talked about and that makes it exhilarating to play.

Those same principles are being carried over into multiplayer, where Id is also making some design decisions that are very interesting. It has revealed that there will be power-ups you can collect in each level, in particular referencing pentagrams that allow you to transform into one of the game's enemies: a rocket firing Revenant. While the developer hasn't said too much more, this indicates that the game is taking the old-school approach of putting all of its special abilities in the map itself, rather than basing everything around loadouts, perks and killstreaks. We've not got anything against that *Call Of Duty* way of doing things, but we're nevertheless excited by the idea that *Doom* could bring back the days of multiplayer shooters where everyone starts on level terms, meaning success is down to pure skill. It gives us hope that this game is going to be the spiritual successor to multiplayer classic *Quake III Arena*, where the strategy of controlling key power-ups in a level was just as important as how quickly you could respond to its fast, brutal and chaotic action.

Id has also recently talked about what kind of multiplayer modes you can expect to find in the game. Naturally,

GUTS & GLORY

We guide you through the process of pulling off one of Doom's brutal glory kills



1 This Mancubus will do nicely as an example of how Glory Kills work, but first he needs softening up...



2 A few rockets should do the trick...



3 Once an enemy is vulnerable to a Glory Kill they will glow. Aiming high or low will pull off a different, contextual kill.



4 In this case we rip his green demon heart off of his chest...



5 Now it's time to stuff it down his throat...



6 We step back and, after an epic burp, the Mancubus explodes in a shower of powerups. Job done.



Id has never been known to shy away from grotesque enemy design, and that trend looks to be continuing.

DID YOU KNOW? The famous *Doom* door sound effect is a stock sound that has turned up on multiple TV programs including *Doctor Who*, *Torchwood* and *24*

your standard deathmatch modes will be in there, along with shooter staple Domination. There are also a couple of less familiar modes, however. Clan Arena – a popular mode in *Quake Live* in which two teams start with all weapons and one life in a fight to the last team standing – makes an appearance. There's also Freeze Tag, a mode in which losing all your health causes you to be frozen to the spot. Team mates can thaw you by standing next to you for three seconds and you win by successfully freezing all your opponents simultaneously. We hope to see a couple more less common modes like this one make an appearance.

Perhaps the most interesting modes in *Doom*, however, could end up being created by the players themselves using SnapMap. SnapMap is an accessible drag-and-drop map editor through which Id hopes to bring the creativity of *Doom*'s dedicated modding community to consoles. What makes it really interesting is that it's not just about slotting rooms together, placing enemies, and so on. It also allows you to play with game logic to create your own rulesets. We'll have to wait to see just how flexible those editing tools are in practice, but the idea that the potential is there for someone to come up with some innovative and unique stuff, just like the modding community has proved it can on PC, is certainly a compelling one.

> "Perhaps the most interesting modes could end up being created by the players themselves using Id's drag and drop editor, SnapMap"

Of course, no one is going to go to the trouble of creating their own maps and modes for *Doom* if the game itself isn't up to scratch. Let's face it, it's never going to have the impact that the original game did, but we also don't think it is going to be another *Duke Nukem Forever*. What we've seen of the game so far suggests that it not only taps into the appeal of the original with its array of powerful weapons, iconic enemies and breakneck speed, but that it has the technical prowess in the fluidity of its action and the spectacle of its visuals to stand side by side with its contemporaries. This game doesn't look like an anachronism, but the ideal reinterpretation of an iconic old school shooter that we've been waiting for.

PAUL WALKER-EMIG

HOW'S IT LOOKING? Bethesda's careful thought about how to recapture the intensity and exhilaration of the original without making a game that feels either old-fashioned, or compromised by modern design sensibilities, seems to be paying off.



Bethesda has said that the game is set on Mars, but it looks like we'll be venturing into hell too.



One thing you'll notice about *Doom* is that there's always blood, limbs, bullets and explosions littering your screen.

RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

Hands-on impressions



New swimming sections take us back to retro *Tomb Raider* action, but now include some pretty gnarly takedowns.

DID YOU KNOW? Lara's adventure takes her around the world, including Syria and Siberia

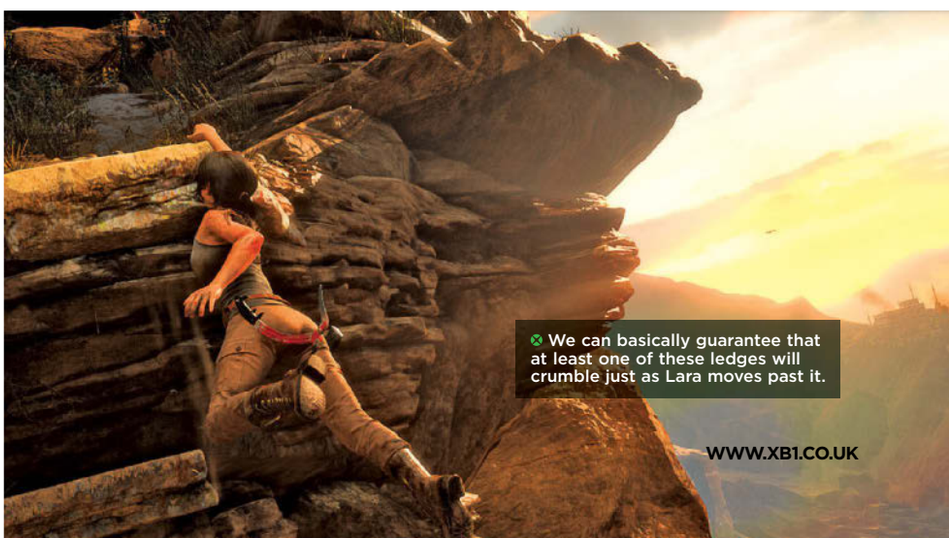


"The graphics are truly stunning, and the animations are even better, especially when it comes to Lara herself"

Stealth gameplay is almost forced upon you due to some powerful and deadly enemies, and it isn't always entirely successful.



Locales were impressive in 2013's *Tomb Raider*, but in *Rise* the graphics take the game world to a new level of awesome.



We can basically guarantee that at least one of these ledges will crumble just as Lara moves past it.

DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Microsoft Studios

DEVELOPER
Crystal Dynamics

CREDITS
Lara Croft and the Guardian Of Light [2010]
Tomb Raider [2013]
Lara Croft and the Temple Of Osiris [2014]

PLAYERS
1

KINECT?
N/A

SMARTGLASS?
N/A

RELEASE DATE
13 November 2015

WEBSITE
www.tombraider.com

TWITTER
@TombRaider

ALSO ON
XBOX 360
The 360 version of the blockbuster title is being developed by Nixxes Software. Will it look as good as it's Xbox One big brother? No. No it will not.

XBOX ONE

After years of floors and ledges collapsing under Lara's (presumably negligible) weight, you'd think she'd learn not to stand on things that look crumbly. But our heroine powers on regardless, sending what must by now add up to tonnes of rock tumbling into abysses. This has been the way of things in *Tomb Raider* since its reboot in 2013, and it's back with a vengeance in Lara's latest appearance.

Still, we can't deny that Crystal Dynamics has made the crumbling rock – and the rest of the world – look better than ever. The graphics are stunning and the animations are even better, especially when it comes to Lara herself. She might be getting on a bit in videogame years, but she's definitely still got it.

In our hands-on, we had a chance to play through one of the sections of the final game, and we experienced a whole range of different gameplay styles, from stealth to quicktime events. We have to say, coming off the back of *Metal Gear Solid V*, the stealth sections feel a little half-baked, but that's natural when compared to a title that is so open to player decisions. *Rise*, by contrast, signposts your options obviously as you play. Climbable ledges are clearly coloured, and other opportunities present themselves regularly. It's not *bad* by any means, but it does feel a little more staged.

Small things like pop-in and clipping sometimes slightly tarnish the extensive graphical polish – but bear in mind that this was an early build, so it can hopefully be remedied before launch. Ultimately, the game is looking impressive, which gives us hope that this won't be another title with a huge day one patch.

One thing we didn't get to see much of during our playtest were the survival and crafting aspects. These have been beefed up since the last title, and Lara will now have more skills to hone; we're eager to see how this will work – but that's something we'll have to wait to find out.

STEPHEN ASHBY

HOW'S IT LOOKING? Graphically stunning, with some neat touches and plenty of depth make this well worth your excitement. Prepare your wallets – *Rise* is likely to be another must-buy.

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Designed for XBOX

MIRROR'S EDGE CATALYST

How to sell a game in 14 minutes

DETAILS

PUBLISHER
EA

DEVELOPER
DICE

CREDITS
Mirror's Edge [2008]
Battlefield: Bad Company 2 [2010]
Battlefield 4 [2013]

PLAYERS
1-4

KINECT?
No

SMARTGLASS?
TBC

RELEASE DATE
26 February 2016

WEBSITE
www.mirrorsedge.com

TWITTER
@mirrorsedge

XBOX ONE

As soon as you lead Faith safely across her first death-defying leap in *Mirror's Edge: Catalyst*, it all becomes strikingly obvious. Developer DICE's first effort at *Mirror's Edge* was a colossal disaster. Every mistake and annoyance that was successfully crammed into that 2008 release makes vanilla *Mirror's Edge* seem like an even bigger misstep than we had previous appreciated; it's a tech demo that should never have slid out from under the protective wing of EA. Why do we think this? Because series reboot *Mirror's Edge: Catalyst* actually *feels like a game* – and not just any game, but a damn good one at that.

You are going to hear a lot of people prattling on about the rather large open world, the beautifully sterile graphical design, interesting synchronous multiplayer elements and, of course, the fact that Faith can no longer wield weaponry as proof of DICE's commitment to delivering on feedback. But all of that hype-mongering distracts from the purity at the heart of the *Catalyst* experience: movement. Movement is undoubtedly at the core of *Catalyst* and it's clear that improving Faith's traversal across the City of Glass has been a priority.

In our 14 minute hands-on demo (don't ask), we were given the freedom to explore a slice of the city, try three simple mini-games – which are examples of common quests off of the critical path – and even put one of the new gadgets to use. One was a fairly standard time trial, another has us working out a basic movement puzzle to get to a billboard, while the final one pitted us against a bunch of guards.

Considering the emphasis on combat, we thought it would be best to get it out of the way. Despite the setup being fairly contrived – thank god those highly-trained guards just happened to stand in exactly the right spots to let us chain together a series of fluid and immensely awesome attacks – it doesn't really matter, because it just feels great. A single button is used to attack, with Faith also able to avoid damage so long as she's moving. Go at an enemy at ground level and you'll enter into a fistfight, with a fancy finishing move waiting for those with impeccable timing, but if you assault while wall-running across a billboard or sliding down a roof, you'll be treated to a brutal takedown. It's all very satisfying.

> "When our 14 minutes came to an end, we were left convinced that Catalyst is the game the original Mirror's Edge should have been"

With that out of the way, we took on a race – it seemed like the obvious thing to do next, after all. It's here where the strength of the movement system really shines through as we are tasked with navigating to a nearby waypoint across rooftops and corridors. The controls are simple – left bumper is used to jump and clamber forwards, while the left trigger is required to slide or roll on impact – and it works perfectly. Used at speed, Faith seems to effortlessly glide through levels as she leaps between perilous gaps, swings around corners and slides through service tunnels with style. The intuitive approach to movement also shines through as we attempt to hack the billboard; using momentum to push us further up a building by using low-hanging ledges and poles to quickly ascend to the top and unleash electronic graffiti on a propaganda sign. Yes, that is actually a thing.

When our 14 minutes came to an end, we were left convinced that *Catalyst* is the game the original *Mirror's Edge* should have been. It feels great to play, the combat is visceral and intuitive, while navigating the city is a real delight – especially with the inclusion of gadgets that help bridge impossibly large gaps in certain areas. Aside from few bugs here and there (one gun continued to fire long after being dropped by a now-unconscious foe), *Catalyst* has the potential to change the way we think about movement in a 3D space.

JOSH WEST

HOW'S IT LOOKING? It's beautiful, fun to play and has convinced us that DICE is on the right track with *Mirror's Edge: Catalyst*. February can't come quickly enough.





COMMUNITY REACTION

"It's my most anticipated game! I loved the first game despite its flaws and *Catalyst* looks simply amazing."
@SketchARama

"I can't wait. The first game was a great concept let down by execution. *Catalyst* is much better though."
@OmegaTurtle

"I played it at EGX and it was so much better than I expected, I can't wait to play more than 10 minutes of it."
Kelly Manton

"The story is nonsense, but that's okay with me, the gameplay seemed fun from what I played of it."
Richard Phillips

While *Catalyst* won't feature traditional multiplayer, DICE has teased the inclusion of leaderboards and synchronous time trials against friends.

DID YOU KNOW? Designed to be part prequel and part reboot, *Mirror's Edge: Catalyst* is essentially re-writing the *Mirror's Edge* story



Movement is king in *Mirror's Edge*, we can't emphasise this enough – there has never been a parkour game this solid before.

LESS OF THIS, PLEASE

ALREADY LOST THE PLOT



Even from this brief taste of *Catalyst*, we are already fairly certain that the plot is going to be all together forgettable. All we've learned is that Faith shouldn't accept contact lenses from strangers and that hackers all like to dress up like Goth kids that have just seen *The Matrix* for the first time.

RECORE

Inafune talks development with **X-ONE**

DETAILS
PUBLISHER
Microsoft Studios
DEVELOPER
Comcept
CREDITS
Yaiba: Ninja Gaiden Z [2014]
Mighty No. 9 [2016]
PLAYERS
1-TBC
KINECT?
TBC
SMARTGLASS?
TBC
RELEASE DATE
Q2 2016
WEBSITE
www.recoregame.com
TWITTER
@ReCore Game

XBOX ONE

What we know about *ReCore* so far: there's a young female protagonist, one of the last remaining humans, caught up in a post-apocalyptic scenario, more *Dune* than *I Am Legend*. She's got an awesome robot dog as a companion and its core can be removed and inserted into another metal exoskeleton. Various companions and enemies can be forged, each with their own "unique abilities and powers."

Speaking to producer Keiji Inafune, we get the sense that the mystery surrounding *ReCore* is one of its best qualities. This can be one of the trickiest times in development, as the game moves out of pre-production and into full development – this is where mechanics and systems start to come together around the concept art and character designs; it's also where it can all fall apart. Thankfully, the response has been positive from Microsoft. "The reception and the feedback we had was even better than we would've thought," laughs Inafune. "The E3 presentation was really well-received by users, by press, and also internally at Microsoft, it had a really good reception. That was really much better than we would've dreamt of, so I think it's going in a really good direction."

Perhaps that shouldn't be a surprise; Inafune is quick to point out that he's always had a strong relationship with Microsoft. "It doesn't just look like a good working relationship – it really is a good one," he says. We don't doubt it. *ReCore* stood toe-to-toe with the likes of *Halo* and *Gears Of War* at E3 and came away looking like one of the coolest Xbox exclusives in the 2016 line-up.

What will be interesting now, is to see whether *ReCore* can deliver on its vision and release to global appeal. Microsoft isn't in the business of catering to a niche market. Thankfully, Inafune couldn't agree more, imploring us to keep our minds open to the work he's doing. "One thing that matters is really that it sells well worldwide. This is the target. What I have in mind with my games – like *ReCore*, now – it hasn't been developed for a Japanese market, but for a global market. It's not of concern if it does well in Japan because it should do well globally."

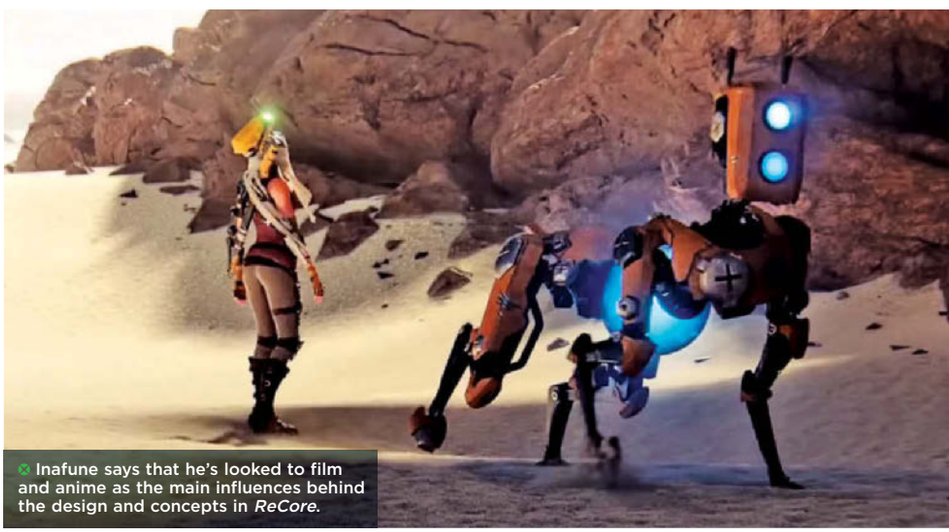
JOSH WEST

HOW'S IT LOOKING? We are desperate to see *ReCore* in action, but we're confident that legendary creator Keiji Inafune and his team (the makers of *Metroid Prime*) can pull it off, roll on 2016.

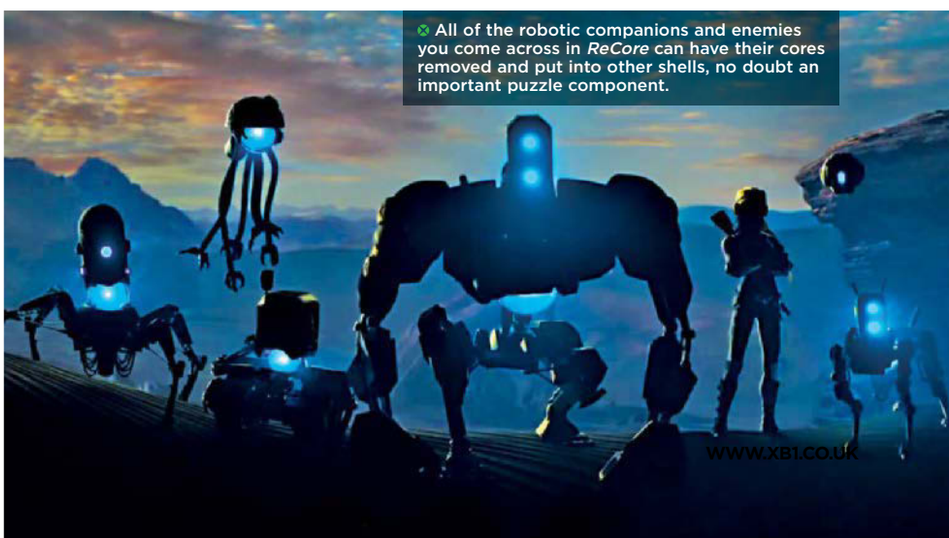


DID YOU KNOW? The game's OST is by Chad Seiter, who worked on the *Star Trek* movie





Inafune says that he's looked to film and anime as the main influences behind the design and concepts in *ReCore*.



All of the robotic companions and enemies you come across in *ReCore* can have their cores removed and put into other shells, no doubt an important puzzle component.

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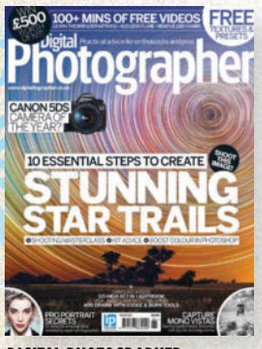
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MIGHTY NO 9

Should you be worried about the delay?

DETAILS
PUBLISHER
Deep Silver
DEVELOPER
Comcept
CREDITS
Soul Sacrifice [2013]
Guild02 [2013]
Yaiba: Ninja Gaiden Z [2014]
PLAYERS
1
KINECT?
No
SMARTGLASS?
No
RELEASE DATE
12 February 2016
WEBSITE
www.MightyNo9.com
TWITTER
@MightyNo9

XBOX ONE

Where is *Mighty No. 9*? You should be banging your head against its brick wall of difficulty spikes and moaning on Reddit about how it is or isn't better than how you remember *Mega Man* by now. But you aren't, and we weren't really sure why. So we went straight to the source, to producer Keiji Inafune himself to get a little more info on the delayed platformer.

"The game itself is totally finished, there's nothing else that we as Comcept would be doing with it," reveals Inafune through a translator, the duo picking their words carefully in order to best explain the situation. "The reason has really been bugs and final bug-fixing, and it was a hard decision to take but we thought by fixing the bugs we would be able to deliver something really perfect, and that's what we wanted to do.

"Because *Mighty No. 9* is a game we want to release on all eight platforms at one time, it means that even if there is a bug on only one platform, it really affects all of them, and that's something that's very specifically behind [the delay] for Mighty No. 9," adds Inafune, though he stopped short of suggesting which platform was causing the delay and we in turn stopped short of suggesting he should sack the lot of them off and make it an Xbox exclusive, like *ReCore*, to avoid the issue entirely.

Still, that doesn't help the legions of fans and Kickstarter backers that had been patiently awaiting *Mighty No. 9*'s proposed September release with baited breath. For what it's worth, Inafune assures fans that it wasn't an easy decision, and one done in service of the gamers that have supported him over the course of its two-year development.

"Many fans are unhappy that it's going to be later now. Talking with Deep Silver, we came to the decision to make it not just really good, but really perfect," he says. "It's better to wait this [extra] time to really achieve that, because it's something we did for the fans initially, so we want to have a really perfect game. So there may be considerations on the publisher's side, more economic considerations, [to ship a title] even if there are bugs, but in this case we don't want to do it, we want to deliver something splendid."

The famed developer – noted for his work on *Mega Man*, *Onimusha*, *Lost Planet*, and *Dead Rising* – looks tired as we speak with him. Perhaps he was exacerbated by the deluge of *Mighty No. 9* delay queries he's received throughout the day, but he didn't want to change the subject. In fact, he was only eager to talk about the title that's making him draw fond parallels to the earliest days of a career that spans almost three decades.

"It's certainly something that really feels nostalgic to me doing development with a small team on a small scale. It means also that it is totally different from developing a major title with a huge team of 300 people or something. It really means that I'm much more involved, I'm much more in a position where I can go deep into the whole development, and have my own ideas and thoughts in there much more than on a big-scale development."

That involvement is leading towards us getting a solid title with a lot of potential. We last got our hands all over *Mighty No. 9* a few months ago and we were pleasantly surprised by what we found: a game that's heavily inspired by the past, but doesn't necessarily feel beholden to. That makes *Mighty No. 9* feel retro in appeal but modern in its execution, and we're pretty happy Deep Silver has given Comcept the time to make it as perfect as it possibly can. Inafune has big expectations for his return to indie development, and it sounds like this won't be the last time we see Beck in action. "The idea would of course be to develop it further... to make it bigger. We would like to do anime, films," he says, adding with a knowing smile, "if it works!"

JOSH WEST



You will acquire different powers in *Mighty No. 9* by defeating bosses, each opening up new tactical options for Beck.

HOW'S IT LOOKING? *Mighty No. 9* is a pretty fun platformer, though those without a strong love of the retro games it's inspired by may find the difficulty a bit of a turn-off.





"The game itself is totally finished, there's nothing else that we as Comcept would be doing with it"

Bugs are behind the delay into 2016, and the game will now (hopefully) launch in February.

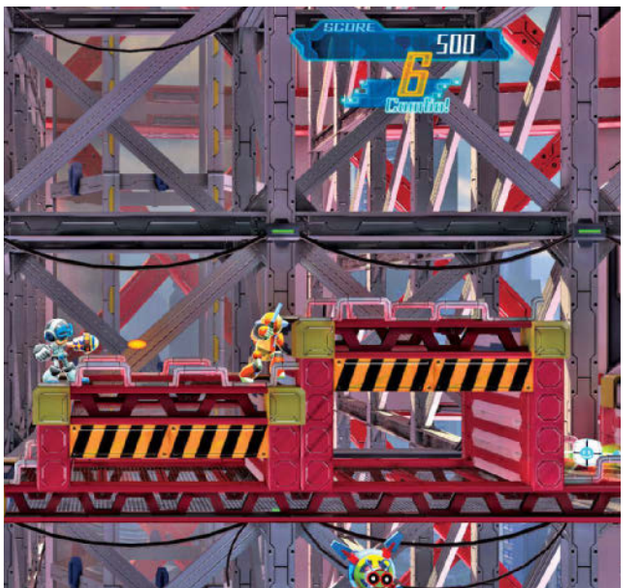
DID YOU KNOW? If you backed the game on Kickstarter, keep your eye on your inbox over the coming weeks for access to an exclusive demo



Fans of 2.5D platformers rejoice – *Mighty No. 9* is a wonderful homage to the games of retro days past.

MORE OF THIS, PLEASE

TAKING GAMERS TO TASK



Mighty No. 9 is challenging, there's no question about that, but we are *Mega Man* experts, we want it to be *harder.* While we have little doubt we will enjoy our first full play through of the game, we do hope it finishes with a suite of New Game+ modes to really test our skills and patience.

DETAILS
PUBLISHER
Square Enix
DEVELOPER
IO Interactive
CREDITS
Hitman: Blood Money [2006]
Kayne & Lynch: Dead Men [2007]
Hitman: Absolution [2012]
PLAYERS
1
KINECT?
No
SMARTGLASS?
No
RELEASE DATE
11 March 2016
WEBSITE
www.hitman.com
TWITTER
@hitman

HITMAN

Stepping out from the shadows

XBOX ONE

Hitman is seeking redemption from its fans for the missteps of *Absolution* and the missed opportunities of *Blood Money*. Agent 47 is making a killer return to Xbox, but it probably isn't how you imagined it would be. Sure, the master assassin is still an omnipresent shadow of death. He lurks in plain sight, any object within reaching distance a deadly weapon – but his only *true* enemy is time. "There are temporary targets, they only appear for a limited amount of time – say 48 hours – and you have a target, and you have to find him and kill him," teases IO Interactive's studio head, Hannes Seifert. "You have one chance of killing him, and how you do it goes on your record. If he escapes, he escapes. I think we've never been closer to the true assassination fantasy than in the moment you pull that trigger."

Hitman might be a single-player game on paper, but its gameplay ambitions are inherently multiplayer-focused. After 15 years of games in the franchise, hardware is once again driving the design. Not only will the power of the Xbox One be used to create elaborate, "high density" sandboxes with more "deathtraps per square metre" than before, but it is also being used to fill areas with jaw-dropping amounts of fully-scripted NPCs. Whichever way you look at it, it's impressive; the talking meat sacks may raise your body count into the hundreds, creating plenty of ways to get caught with your pants down amid a disguise change, or simply more tools to aid you in your assassination of high-profile targets.

The hardware is also allowing IO Interactive to play with new distribution and multiplayer features, some of which seem designed to confuse, while others could be the future of single-player gaming. Part episodic, part early-access, *Himan* is going to raise eyebrows when the first block of content is released next March. Meanwhile, timed assassinations seem designed to inspire conversation amongst the backseat gamer generation, pushing players to discuss new tactics and execution styles online before taking out a target and sharing it with the world on a timeframe. *Hitman* is going to be the biggest, most innovative game in the franchise to date, but it's also pushing to be the marquee title for a new generation of gamers, and that's truly impressive.

JOSH WEST

HOW'S IT LOOKING? *Hitman* looks better and better every time we see it, but we're still yet to get our hands on it, that's the true test to really know if it's made strides over *Hitman: Absolution*.

COMMUNITY REACTION

"I think it looks pretty cool, though I'm still a little confused by the release model. Why don't they just release all of it at once?"
@PhazonUK

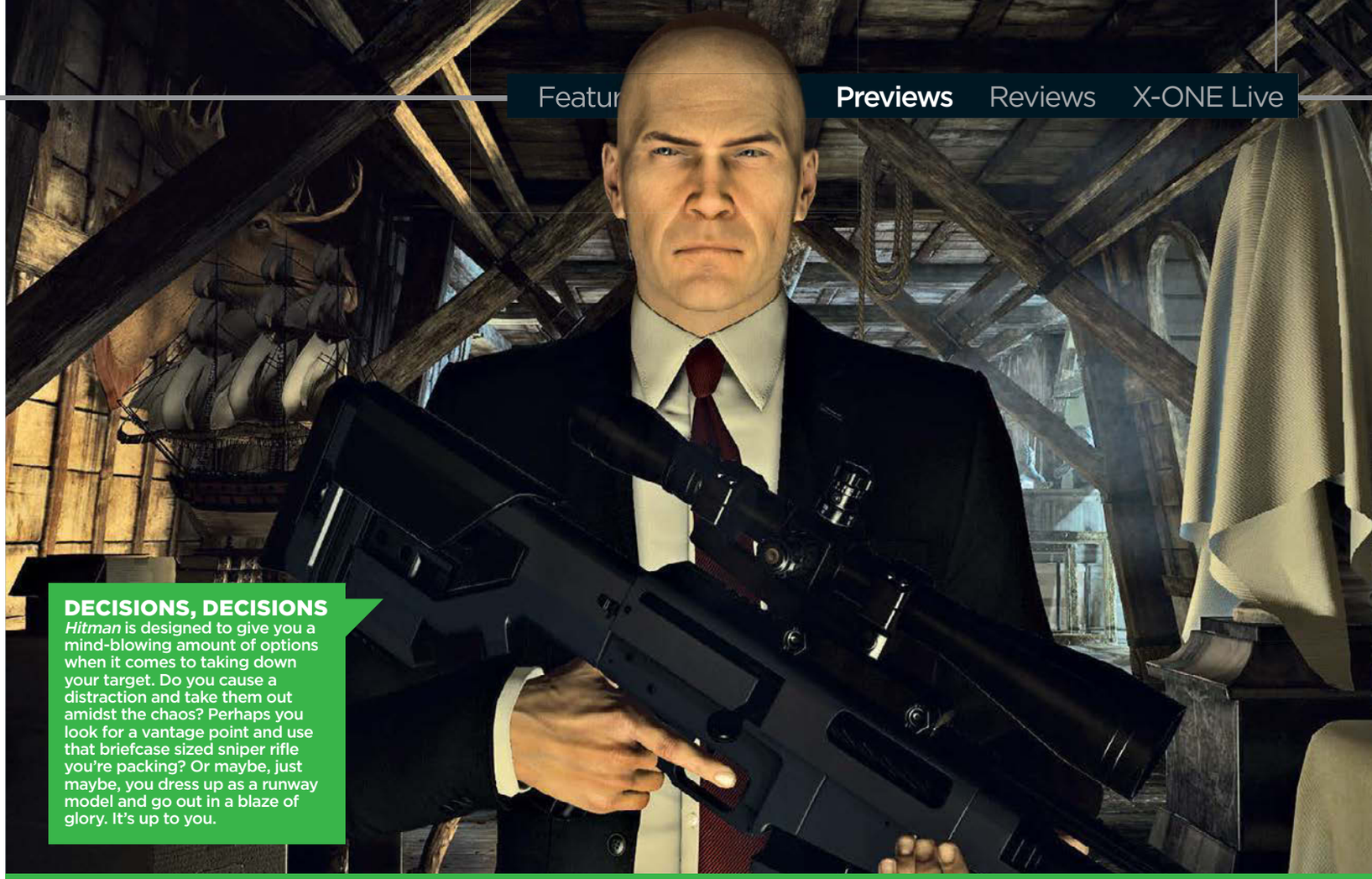
"The Paris fashion level looks freaking sweet, can't wait to get in there and push the A.I. to do crazy things!"
@TheRoadie

"If it plays like Hitman 2 but feels as innovative as Absolution then I'm sold! There's been a Hitman shaped hole in my heart for way too long."
Luke Searle

"The timed assassinations sound like the ultimate addition to Hitman, and I'm so happy IO Interactive hasn't felt the need to unnecessarily stuff traditional multiplayer in the box like Assassin's Creed and Tomb Raider tried."
Adam Casey



LOOKS THAT KILL
The first area that will launch alongside *Hitman* in December sees Agent 47 descending upon Paris' fashion show, and it's immediately impressive. Hundreds of NPCs walk the giant level with twisting corridors, grand halls, busy runways and multiple floors connecting it all together. While a handful of contracts will launch alongside the level, more contracts will be added weekly as timed assassinations.



DECISIONS, DECISIONS
Hitman is designed to give you a mind-blowing amount of options when it comes to taking down your target. Do you cause a distraction and take them out amidst the chaos? Perhaps you look for a vantage point and use that briefcase sized sniper rifle you're packing? Or maybe, just maybe, you dress up as a runway model and go out in a blaze of glory. It's up to you.

DID YOU KNOW? While the first area is set in Paris, IO Interactive plans to take Agent 47 on missions all around the world



RELEASE MODEL EXPLAINED
The first batch of *Hitman* content will launch with the Paris, Sapienza, and Marrakesh locations, comprising of six campaign missions, which will be followed by new content released across the year. There is no DLC and no microtransactions; this content comes as part of the initial £50 you pay. It will later be collected and released as a boxed product in 2016.

PLANTS VS ZOMBIES GARDEN WARFARE 2

Guns out, bums out

DETAILS

PUBLISHER
EA

DEVELOPER
PopCap Games

CREDITS
Plants vs. Zombies: Garden Warfare [2014]
Plants vs. Zombies 2: It's About Time [2013]
Peggle 2 [2013]

PLAYERS
1-24

KINECT?
No

SMARTGLASS?
NO

RELEASE DATE
Q1 2016

WEBSITE
pvzgw2.com

TWITTER
@plantsvszombies

XBOX ONE

Over-the-top, ridiculous, hilarious; there are plenty of words to describe PopCap's *Garden Wafare*, but boring isn't among them. The antithesis to the serious shooters of this world, *Plants vs. Zombies*' first console outing was one of last year's surprise hits, its unique style giving players a third person shooter with less brawn and more personality. Out with the ratios and in with the bum cracks – having fun is what this game was all about, and while it may have been a big hit with younger players, we're not ashamed to admit we racked up some serious hours on it too.

So, will we be playing the sequel? Based on what we've seen so far, definitely. Aside from the fact that there's a map set on the moon (awesome), there's also a bunch of new character classes, one of which we're particularly excited to play as. Named Citron, not only is this Mohawk-spouting orange a bounty hunter – he's a *time-travelling* bounty hunter. A cross between Doctor Who and Dog, our favourite move of Citron's is his Ball Charge, in which he curls up into a sphere and launches himself at a zombie. Then there's the new Graveyard Ops mode, the return of Team Vanquish and lots of interesting new character variants.

There's also the introduction of the new hub world in *Garden Warfare 2*, from which you will start every game. Named the Backyard Battleground, things such as daily challenges can be done here, taking on quests for either Crazy Dave or Dr. Zomboss. We're not overly excited about this; the limitations of the game's basic gameplay and weak storyline don't give us much hope for these RPG-style side missions. Fetch! Attack! Defend! – that's what we imagine these will entail. We could be wrong, but we think these quests could get quickly tedious, although some extra special loot could sway us into doing more of them.

Despite our reservations, we're still eager to play this; *Garden Warfare 2* is looking set to be, thankfully, every bit as amusing and insane as the first.

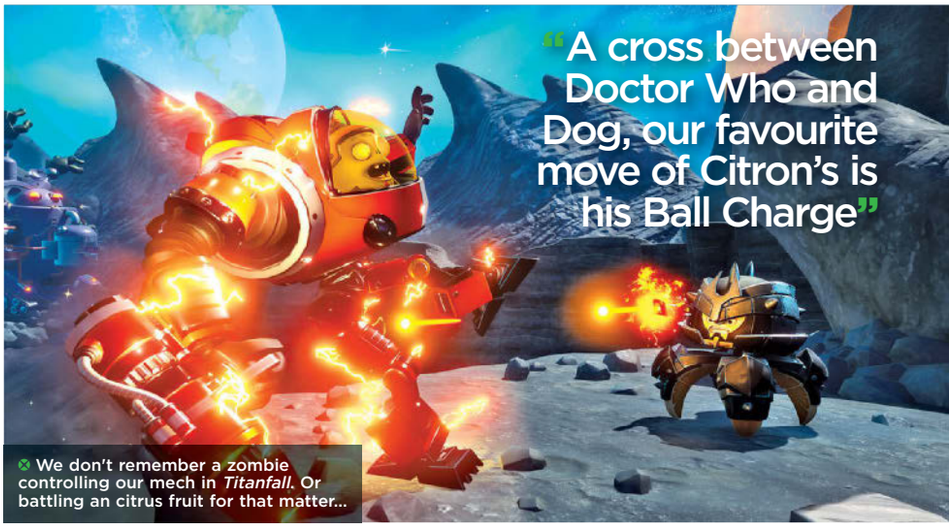
EMMA QUINLAN

HOW'S IT LOOKING? The vibrant world of *Garden Warfare 2* looks set to be just as much ridiculous fun as its predecessor. New characters, variants and maps should give us fresh reasons to play.



Oranges certainly don't look like that down the shop – and for that, our teeth are grateful.

DID YOU KNOW? Unlike its predecessor, each mode will have solo and couch co-op options



"A cross between Doctor Who and Dog, our favourite move of Citron's is his Ball Charge"

We don't remember a zombie controlling our mech in *Titanfall*. Or battling an citrus fruit for that matter...



Is it just us or does that goat look drunk? We'll have whatever he's having.



Being scared of sweetcorn sounds ridiculous, but when they look like this, can you blame us?

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LEGO MARVEL'S AVENGERS

Brings new meaning to the word 'blockbuster'

DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Warner Bros.

DEVELOPER
Traveller's Tales

CREDITS
Lego The Lord Of The Rings [2012]
Lego Marvel Super Heroes [2013]
Lego Jurassic World [2015]

PLAYERS
1-2

KINECT?
N/A

SMARTGLASS?
N/A

RELEASE DATE
29 January 2016

WEBSITE
lego.com/en-gb/marvelsuperheroes/marvels-avengers

TWITTER
@legomarvelgame

ALSO ON XBOX 360

360 owners can expect feature parity, though this is maybe the first game where the Xbox One version will look blockier.

XBOX ONE

At the heart of every LEGO game is wish fulfilment. Warner Bros.' ubiquitous franchise excels by taking everyone's favourite Danish blocks, combining them with another beloved property, whether it be *Star Wars*, or *Jurassic World*, and letting players have at it. We all blew up our own makeshift LEGO Death Stars and stomped around as necessarily abstracted dinosaurs when we were kids, and Traveller's Tales takes these childhood fantasies and makes them flesh. Well, plastic. Well, digital plastic.

While the above licences maintain an enduring appeal for people of a certain generation, few companies can claim the fervent following among today's gamers enjoyed by Marvel. Which is a big part of why *LEGO Marvel's Avengers* deserves your attention. Where 2013's *LEGO Marvel Super Heroes* featured an enjoyable original story starring dozens of heroes, *Avengers* is an homage to a few of Marvel's recent blockbusters – including *Avengers Assemble* and *Age Of Ultron*.

The chance to play out the Battle of New York and other iconic moments in miniaturised, blocky form is more than enough to get us on board. News that the game will be using the original audio from both films is encouraging too; nothing beats the real thing.

A steady stream of character announcements should see *Avengers* offer more than 100 new superheroes. Plus, confirmation that the game will also feature content from both *Captain America* movies, *Thor 2* and *Iron Man 3* gives us hope for a pretty lengthy story.

While it's fair to say that the wheel shall remain un-reinvented in *LEGO Marvel's Avengers* – a legitimate gripe given that we're entering the second decade of licensed LEGO games – for Marvel fans that isn't likely to matter much. Fan service is the name of the game, and Traveller's Tales is deferential and irreverent enough to its source material to do it justice.

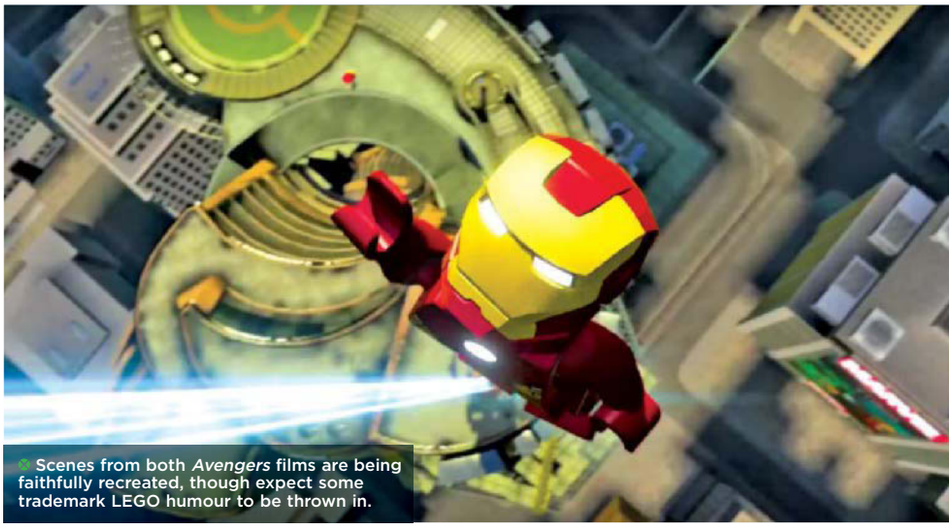
ROSS HAMILTON

HOW'S IT LOOKING? *LEGO Marvel's Avengers* is almost exactly what you'd expect, for better and for worse. It isn't breaking new ground, but you'll be hard pressed to find a more charming Xbox title.



Tiny but relatively huge; blocky but strangely cuddly: LEGO Hulk might be our favourite hero.

DID YOU KNOW? Stan Lee's Marvel cameos extend to this game as well – play as Iron Stan



Scenes from both *Avengers* films are being faithfully recreated, though expect some trademark LEGO humour to be thrown in.



"Fan service is the name of the game, and Traveller's Tales does its source material justice"

Black Widow is a blast to play as, and having Scarlett Johansson's movie dialogue makes it all the more enjoyable.



Captain America's shield is a classic, and it's just as effective in the LEGO Manhattan as the real one.



Alongside the 200 tracks and four massive environments, the track builder lets you build, share and generate new courses to race on.

DID YOU KNOW? Focus Home Entertainment originally published the *TrackMania* games up until the studio's acquisition by Ubisoft in 2009

TRACKMANIA TURBO

Dive headfirst into the bonkers world of Nadeo's gravity-defying racer

DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
Nadeo

CREDITS
TrackMania [2003]
ShootMania Storm [2013]
TrackMania 2: Valley [2013]

PLAYERS
1-12

KINECT?
N/A

SMARTGLASS?
N/A

RELEASE DATE
27 November

WEBSITE
ubisoft.com/en-GB/game/TrackMania-turbo

TWITTER
@TrackMania

XBOX ONE

TrackMania has always been about driving (probably upside down) around insane tracks at face-melting speeds, and that's exactly what we're getting in *Turbo*. We can't tell you how happy that makes us, either – after *TrackMania 2* was chopped up and sold as three packs, we feared the worst for the series.

Thankfully Ubisoft and its France-based developer, Nadeo, saw the error of its ways, opting to eschew said woeful money-grabbing business model in favour of a fully-stacked console release that shoehorns in a whopping 200 pre-built tracks spanning four environments. That said, don't be surprised if you find yourself forking out for additional locations post-release. Each landscape – Rollercoaster Lagoon, International Stadium, Canyon Grand Drift, and Valley Down & Dirty – can then be modified and tinkered with, allowing you to conjure up your own blisteringly anarchic racetracks to add to the already bulging roster available.

While gameplay remains largely untouched from previous entries, with an emphasis on rip-roaring speeds and pulling off bombastic stunts from the moment you're dropped onto the track via helicopter, there's a handful of freshly-cooked mechanics worth getting giddy about, including the ability to generate random tracks via the nifty track editor, a campaign mode and, most interestingly, Double Driver.



You can be damn sure this is one of the fastest, most vertigo-inducing racers you'll take for a spin in a long time.

Here two players need to synchronise with each other to control the same car across a variety of tracks whilst trying to best a series of lap times. While intriguing on paper, Double Driver could be the kind of mode that makes or breaks friendships as you try to work in tandem to steer, drift around twisting corners and work the breaks, all the while resisting the urge to clobber your co-driver in a fit of digital road rage.

Another curious addition to the aesthetic of the Nineties arcade-inspired racer is the use of music. Each time you whip past a checkpoint the in-game DJ drops a new track to encourage you to drive harder and faster to the beat. Fluff a turn, hit the breaks and slow down too much, the beats become muffled, forcing you to put pedal to metal to keep up with the thumping tunes the digital bass-dropper is hurling at you. With a release pencilled in for the tail end of November, we expect *TrackMania Turbo* to be the kind of game that brightens up many a dark winter's night here at **X-ONE** Towers.

SEBASTIAN WILLIAMSON

HOW'S IT LOOKING? *TrackMania Turbo* is a blast to play, but we're holding fast on a final verdict until we've had a chance to compete with the masses and put the game's servers to the test.



FINAL FANTASY XV

XBOX ONE

As much as the core game needs to focus on the RPG elements, it's always important to have other things to do. The better entries in the *Final Fantasy* series offer so much more than a convoluted storyline, levelling up for hours, and some damn pretty graphics; sure, that'll all be there with *XV*, but there'll be those necessary extras too. Newly-revealed chocobo-riding will allow you to explore, giving us a tantalising hope that an improved *Final Fantasy VII*-style chocobo breeding system will be included. There's also going to be a fishing mini-game, which really shouldn't excite us but it does look like a solid extra feature in a game already shaping up to be something special.

CRACKDOWN 3

XBOX ONE

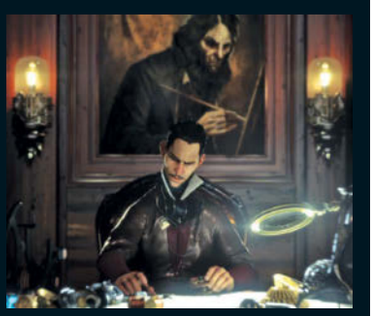
Red Faction was perhaps the biggest disappointment of the previous generation. *Guerrilla* was a fantastic – albeit overlooked – open-world game that used its complete destruction as its lynchpin, and it used it *oh so well*. Then there was *Armageddon*, which frankly killed any hope for another *Red Faction*, sadly, which is why we're thankful for *Crackdown 3*. While destruction was never really the series' selling point, it appears that the team are now giving you the option to raze buildings in the city to the ground with some well placed explosions and bullets. And you know what? It is *glorious*. The physics-based destruction isn't limited, either, at least in multiplayer; this is an entire city that can be utterly ruined, if you so wish. But what is most exciting is the prospect that *Crackdown 3*'s multiplayer city includes persistent, permanent destruction across whatever game session you're playing. This might sound like the most fun anyone has ever had, but in reality it means that the city would be obliterated within minutes of the game's launch; while developer Reagent Games isn't yet telling us its solution to this particular issue, we're *very* excited to find out more about this particular element.

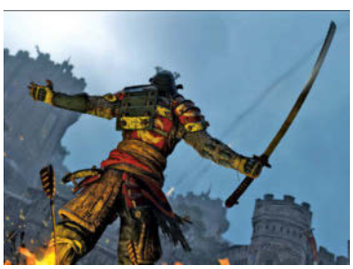


DISHONORED II

XBOX ONE

No matter how many new details we get, it just isn't enough. Thankfully we've learned of Karnaca, the setting of the sequel which moves away from the original's Scotland-inspired Dunwall to something a little more southern European. That means a warmer climate, more Mediterranean structures and a wider range of flora and fauna. We probably won't be possessing rats this time around, but this mechanic will continue with blood-flies. Great?





FOR HONOR

XBOX ONE

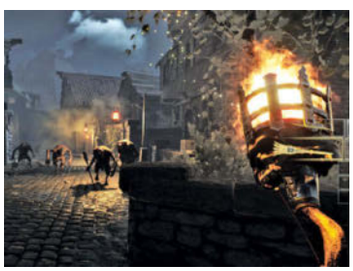
So far we'd only seen typical medieval knights in Ubisoft's multiplayer sword-fighting game, but what about the Oni? These samurai-styled warriors look the part in their wood and leather armour, and unique animations are badass, but they also have some unique abilities. They're equipped with a poisoned blade, making even a single strike a considerable threat. Then there's the kunai – weighted throwing daggers – and the ability to pelt an area with a volley of death from above. They'll definitely be our pick when *For Honor* releases.

ARK: SURVIVAL EVOLVED

XBOX ONE

This one will be heading to Xbox One through Microsoft's Game Preview program, like *Elite Dangerous*. It's an MMO, essentially, with a focus on creating a tribe, building a base and gathering supplies with allies and – in all likelihood – waging war against opposing clans. If that doesn't get you excited, however, then let this phrase do the job: tameable, rideable dinosaurs.





WARHAMMER THE END TIMES VERMINTIDE

XBOX ONE

There should be more interest in *Vermintide* than there currently is: it's a co-op *Left 4 Dead* style FPS that has you taking on scores of giant rats in a Gothic setting. It's the range of classes that will make it fun, like the newly detailed Witch Hunter and Bright Wizard classes. The latter is especially interesting, with a risk-versus-reward gameplay that can have you setting yourself on fire if you cast spells too quickly.



WE HAPPY FEW

XBOX ONE

Here's a procedurally-generated survival game about gathering food and crafting tools and equipment; ignore the alarm bells screaming 'yet more *Minecraft*', this couldn't be any more different to the blocky craftscape. *We Happy Few* places you in a fictional Sixties Orwellian town where the populace is controlled through a drug called Joy; you're a rebel, fighting against the totalitarian regime and refusing to take the population-placating drug... at a cost. You still need to eat, for one, and proceeding further and further into the heart of the town of Wellington Wells will require much better items. Your task, then, is to navigate the town, tricking townsfolk and officers alike into believing you're a good little citizen by acting as though you're high on Joy, all the while rummaging through bins and breaking into homes to find the goods you need to succeed. It's a unique concept, has a fantastic artstyle and could be set to become the next big thing.

SWORD COAST LEGENDS

XBOX ONE

With the likes of *Wasteland 2* and *Divinity: Original Sin* heading to Xbox One, console-based fans of turn-based strategy RPGs are getting unusually well treated these days. Enter *Sword Coast Legends*, another in the genre with similarities to PC classic *Baldur's Gate* and built around a robust version of the latest *D&D* ruleset. And with a full single-player campaign there's plenty to get out of it, but better still is the inclusion of multiplayer – complete with Dungeon Master. This means that the opposing DM can alter elements of a dungeon or task on the fly, turning storerooms into hidden, trap-filled treasure troves, preparing ambushes and picking the beasts to battle and even taking control of powerful bosses to take part in the action themselves. The fact that it's also possible to create and share your own campaigns and dungeons – built with the in-game editor – means that there will be plenty of hours for RPG fans to get stuck into.





CITIES: SKYLINES

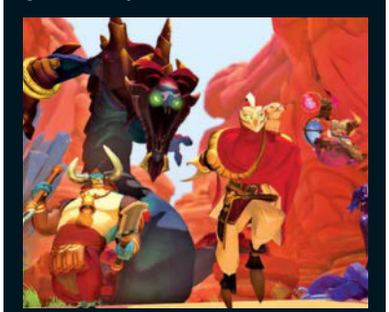
XBOX ONE

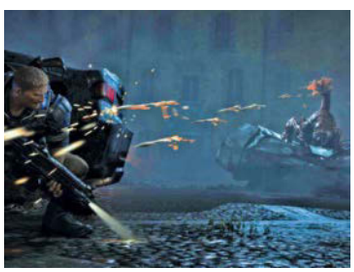
We've seen a wide range of genres appearing on Xbox One through ID@Xbox, even ones ordinarily to be found just on PC, like *Cities: Skylines*, a super-popular city-building simulation game with plenty of fans on PC already. Of course we should all be a bit concerned by how developer Colossal Order intends to port the typically mouse-driven gameplay to a controller, but if something like *Tropico* can work on console there's no reason why this couldn't either.

GIGANTIC

XBOX ONE

With the beta for *Gigantic* underway, we're able to get a better look at how this game is shaping up. Unlike *Evolve* – sadly flawed in a number of ways – *Gigantic*'s huge beasts are AI-controlled, their advancement across the map affected by the human players as they duke it out for supremacy. There's a lot to like here – the art style, the varied playable characters, the frantic but skill-based gameplay – making for a game that you need to look out for.





GEARS OF WAR 4

XBOX ONE

It's hard to know what to expect from *Gears 4* now that so much of its development has changed hands from Epic, but if there's one thing to be excited about, it's that the game will include split-screen local co-op. For many, the original Xbox 360 *Gears Of War* was popular because of this feature – we all remember late-night chainsaw assaults with friends – and the fact that the latest game will reintroduce the option can only be a sign of the series staying true to its roots.

STARBOUND

XBOX ONE

If you've played *Terraria* then you probably already know what to expect from *Starbound*, which is a 2D *Minecraft*-style survival game about collecting resources, defeating monsters and exploring the universe. It's not quite as creative-focused as *Minecraft*, however, with *Starbound* having you explore a multitude of different, procedurally-generated planets to hunt its creatures, mine its ores and kill anyone that resists. That's how we're going to play it, anyway.





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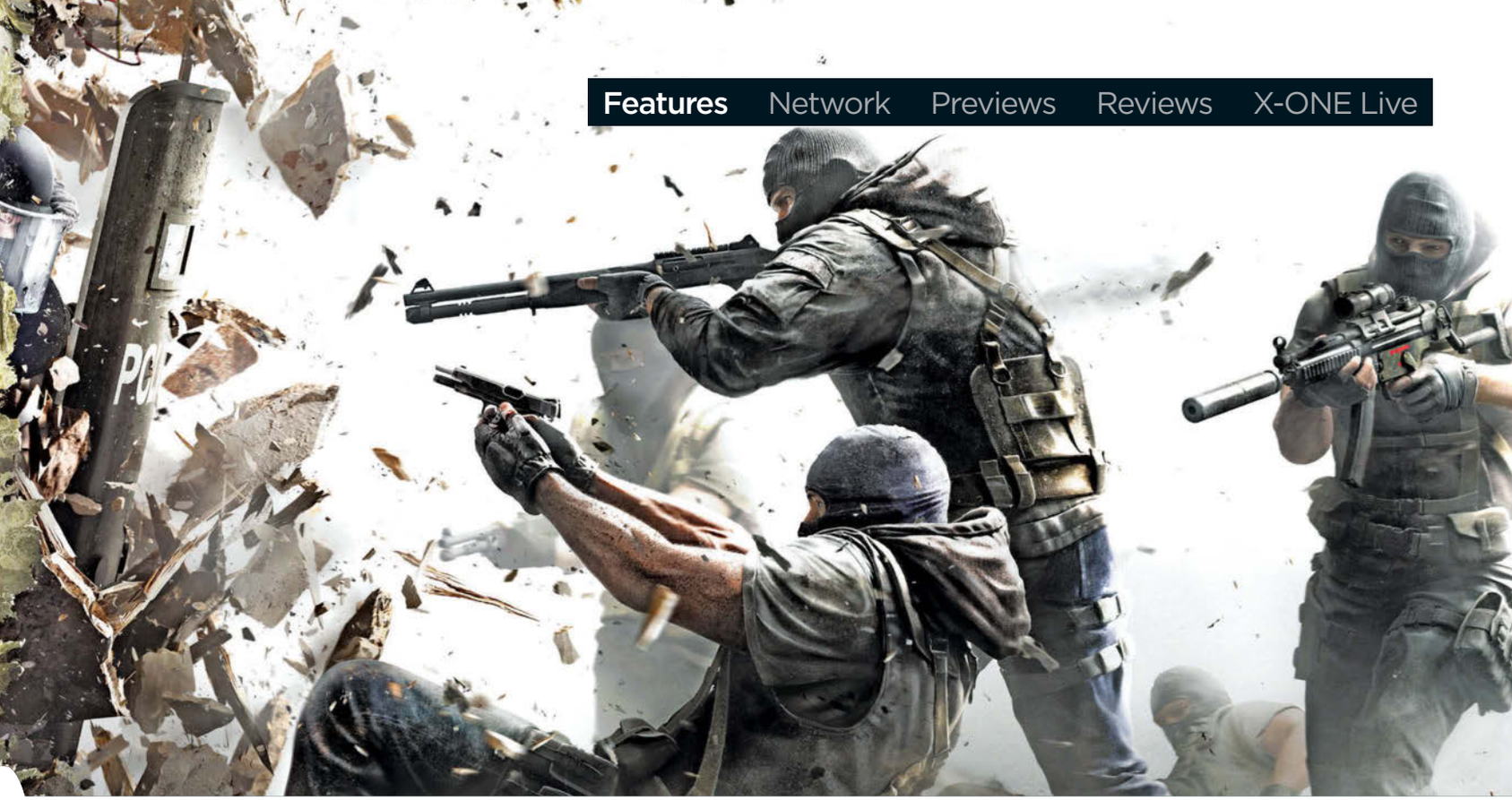


UNDER SIEGE

Words Stephen Ashby







DOES THE TACTICAL TERRORIST-OFF DO ENOUGH TO RESTORE OUR FAITH IN UBISOFT?



How do you tackle a title like *Rainbow Six*? For a series known for its tactical, realistic gameplay to survive in a world dominated by action-packed shooters is a tough task. But after getting our hands on the beta build for *Siege* – Ubisoft's first *Rainbow Six* title since 2008 – we're happy to say that the team has managed create a game that is true to its heritage and one that works surprisingly well as a modern shooter to boot.

One reason for this is, perhaps, that the game is built around standout moments. The short rounds – just four minutes long when you're playing against another team of five players – mean that every game can go from a slow tactical approach to a frantic, last-second rush without much time to catch your breath. And when you're the last player on your team, faced with three opponents, taking them out with a well-placed C4 charge and a burst of rifle fire is intensely satisfying – not to mention extremely difficult.

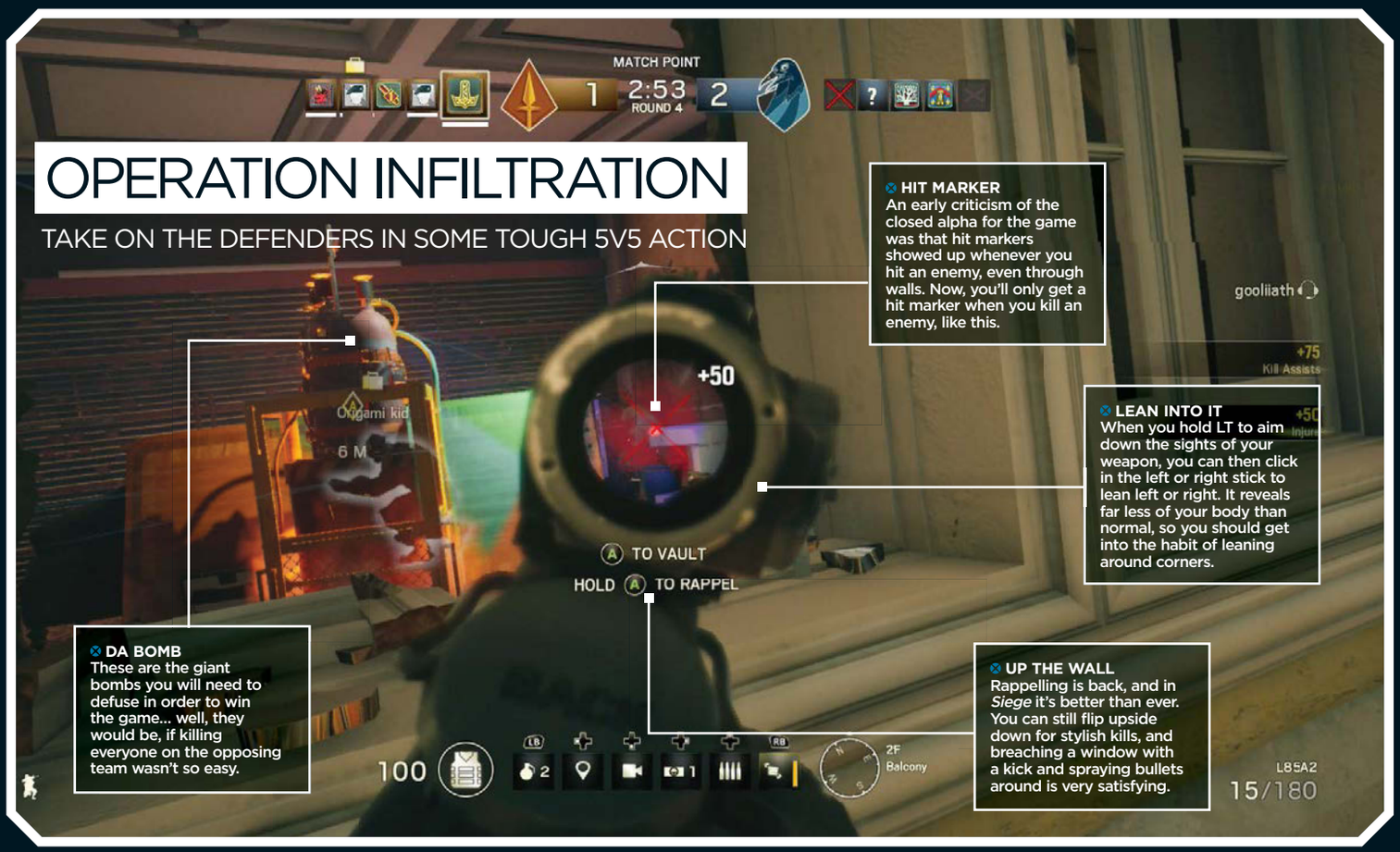
ON BALANCE

One of the biggest successes that Ubisoft has achieved is the balancing of the game. As you level up and earn more 'Renown' points, you can use these to purchase Operators, each with unique abilities. There will be 20 to choose from in the final game, and, while we had fears that some would unbalance the teams, we were really pleased by how even our games were. There was never a match where we saw one team totally dominate the other – both squads always had a fighting chance, and it always came down to each player's skill – something that was always a key part of the series.





WWW.IMAGINESHOP.CO.UK



By limiting each Operator to a single player in each game, Ubisoft has guaranteed diversity in every match – you'll need to learn how to play with more than one character in case your favourite is claimed by a team-mate before you can select them. We'll admit to barking a few sharp swears if someone snapped up Sledge while we took a sip of Red Bull, but there is enough choice that we soon found Montagne – a giant, stocky GIGN agent with an extendible shield. Every Operator plays differently, so you can't just use the same tactics in every match; it's a breath of fresh air for modern shooters.

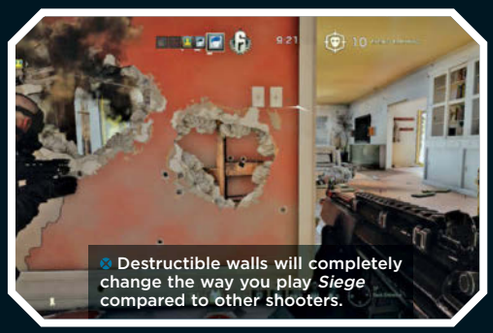
ATTACK VS DEFENCE

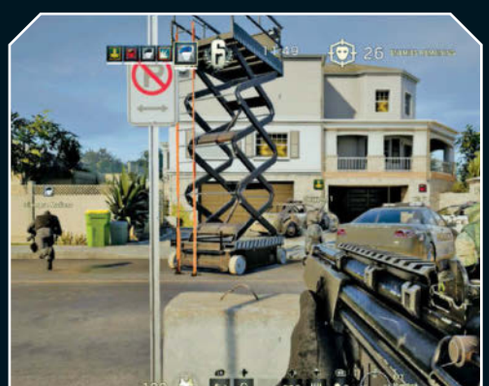
The main focus of the beta was on the 5v5 multiplayer mode. There were two main modes – Secure Area and Bomb. The former requires the attacking team to control a room for ten consecutive seconds without any enemy presence. Obviously, this is much easier said than done, as every defender usually sits in the room covering the entrances with explosives, barbed wire and shotguns; finding a way into the room, and forcing the other team out is a real challenge. The Bomb mode is similar, but requires you to place a defuser on one of two bombs before the timer runs out. Because there are two locations here, the defenders need to split their attention and protect both equally – organisation is key.

The problem with both of these modes is, unfortunately, that the objectives ultimately fall completely by the wayside, because the easiest way for either team to win is to wipe out the opposing squad entirely. In all the matches we played (and we played *a lot*) we only won a single round by actually completing the objective – on every other occasion shooting big holes into the opponents' torsos (or getting our own bodies similarly punctured) led to victory.



The defending team have control of the cameras, so you can tag enemies as they move.


Destructible walls will completely change the way you play *Siege* compared to other shooters.



It's something that really needs to be addressed before release – it makes no sense that a team sent in to disarm a bomb would kill all of the terrorists and think the mission was complete. 'Guys, there's still a bomb in here. Guys, seriously, it's beeping. Guys? Guys, where are you going?!'

The solution for these missions should perhaps be that you still need to complete the objective after you have killed the opposing squad – similar to *Counter-Strike*. For the attackers, that means the time keeps ticking and you have to defuse it before it hits zero. For the defenders, perhaps you could get a point boost for every member of the squad that escapes the blast zone before time is up. This would give both squads a reason to think carefully about their game – and you might see situations where defenders abandon the bomb with 20 seconds to go, and make a break to get out of the blast zone, while the attackers scramble to stop it. Timing the escape would add another tactical layer to what is already a complex game.

WAR ON TERROR

The other mode we got to try was Terrorist Hunt – a classic *Rainbow Six* game mode that we were thrilled to see return. In these games, you can either jump into a game on your own, and go in as a lone wolf, taking down as many enemies as you can. Alternatively, head in with a squad of up to five and you can sweep through the building,

flanking the terrorists or dividing the building between you and clearing a floor each.

The AI in these modes is really impressive – there are several different enemy types, including ambushers, rushers and the curse-inducing bombers. These giant, hazmat-suited bastards are strapped with C4, take a clip from a rifle without really even breaking stride, and detonate when they get close, making headshots essential. The enemies adapt based on your movement, and will react to hearing gunshots on certain floors of the map, or seeing you down a corridor. They aren't afraid to head outside or break down their own barricades, either, so you need to be constantly vigilant. You can't creep up to a door firing potshots and hope for the enemies to run in front of you – they'll probably end up hitting you in the back.

ON THE MAP

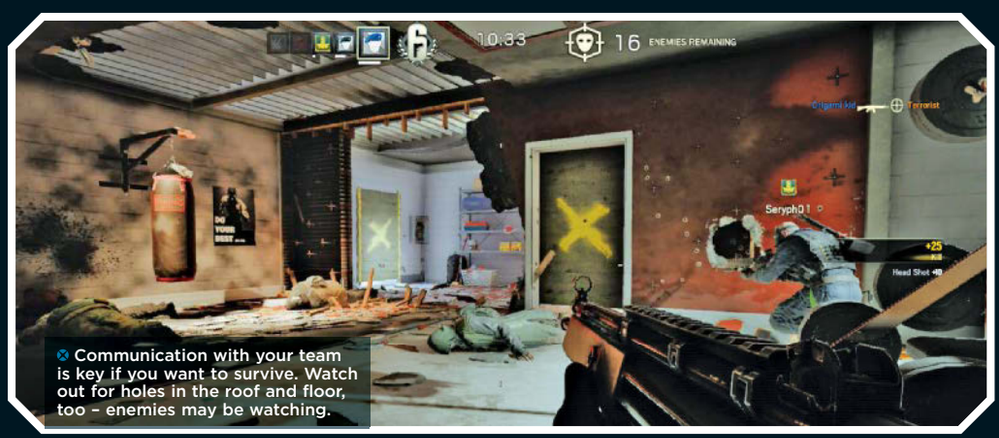
These encounters are helped by the map design, which uses space cleverly and offers a variety of locations to keep every match interesting. Opinion was split in **X-ONE** Towers regarding the size of the maps – some of us loved the smaller, tighter encounters offered in the House map, while others missed the large, sprawling maps of the older games, which required you to explore every area to find the terrorists and offered new experiences every time.

It's the destructibility, though, that helps to maintain this feeling in *Siege*. There are dozens of breachable walls and floors in the levels we played, giving you the chance to surprise an enemy by making a new door right next to where they were hiding. This makes for some fantastic gameplay moments – when an enemy is marked by a friendly drone, you can use the intel to move around next to them. We used Sledge to smash a hole right next to the hapless terrorist, and before he even knew why he was up to his knees in concrete, riddled with bullets.

Moments likes these are the biggest reason that we think *Siege* is going to work. There are so many memorable situations from our time with the beta that we're still talking about the game a month later. Whether it's missing that headshot on the Bomber and having him chase us around a garden as we desperately try to reload, or taking out the last eight terrorists on our own and leading the team to victory with just a sliver of armour remaining – the game is built to create these moments of brilliance, and we love it.

We have concerns about the longevity of *Siege* – we're worried the modes we played represent almost everything that the game has to offer. But if Ubisoft can add enough on top of the beta content to keep us interested (more maps, more variety and some story missions would help) then it might finally have a worthy sequel to *Vegas 2* on its hands. This one has serious potential.

> "You can't creep up to a door firing potshots and hope for the enemies to run in front of you"



Communication with your team is key if you want to survive. Watch out for holes in the roof and floor, too – enemies may be watching.



Operators have unique abilities that can give your team the edge in battle. Here, IQ uses her detector to find electronics like C4 charges.



QUICK FIRE QUESTIONING

WITH ANIMATION DIRECTOR **SCOTT MITCHELL**

■ **What sort of feedback do you guys get from a beta like this, and what impact does that feedback have on the game?**
We would expect, definitely, to get things balanced even better. [In the beta] we pulled out certain Operators, specifically fan favourites that were there before, like Ash, because of balancing.

■ **How have you managed to communicate the importance of the destructible environments to players?**
When players come in for the first time and try to approach it like it's arena-type gameplay, their tactics don't work. You're forced to communicate with your team. If you don't communicate, and you're not checking your corners, the concept of 'one life' is going to bite you in the ass really quick. A lot of people die quick, and then they start to figure out the pacing, that they need to look around, and communicate better... and then your day goes much better [laughs].

■ **How are you guys approaching single-player?**
There's no campaign, per se. There are missions and training that you can go into to learn and to play with all the different operators, to figure out your tactics. If you're playing in PvE, you can go in lone wolf against the terrorists. It's tough but we have levels of difficulty, you can customise matches and stuff like that.

■ **What are your top tips for new players?**
Choose a point man [like Montagne]; that's a great way to break into the game in my opinion. You've got a shield so you've got a little bit of breathing room, and it forces you to slow down, because they do move slower than the other operators. *Rainbow Six Siege* is all about pacing; it's tense right from the start.

■ **How much did you discuss facial mapping and other customisations, like in *Vegas*?**
There's no specific plans yet, but know that it is a hot topic in the community, people really want to be able to customise. What we do have available is weapon skins and attachments in [the beta]. But who knows for the future – it's a hot topic.



PICKING THE PERFECT TEAM



ATTACKERS

THERMITE

ARMOUR **MEDIUM**

SPEED **MEDIUM**

SPECIAL WEAPON
Exothermic Charge
Like standard breach charges, but this one will burn through reinforced walls, too.

PRIMARY WEAPON

SECONDARY WEAPON

GADGET

Thermite's medium speed and armour make him a good all-round character, and his Exothermic Charge is ideal for bursting through walls that the defenders think are totally blocked off. Make sure you pack some extra charges to breach normal walls and windows and you've got a deadly close-quarters operator.

MONTAGNE

ARMOUR **HEAVY**

SPEED **SLOW**

SPECIAL WEAPON
Extendable Shield
This shield can extend to cover Montagne's full body, but he won't be able to fire.

PRIMARY WEAPON

SECONDARY WEAPON

GADGET

This man-mountain is a perfect point man to lead the charge into a heavily-guarded room. Extend his shield by pressing and holding RB and the other attackers can lean out to shoot around him. Add a shock grenade and he's great for pushing forward into freshly-breached rooms, or just surprising heavily-fortified areas.

TWITCH

ARMOUR **MEDIUM**

SPEED **MEDIUM**

SPECIAL WEAPON
Shock Drone
Twitch's drone can show where defenders are hiding, and shoot to injure them.

PRIMARY WEAPON

SECONDARY WEAPON

GADGET

Twitch comes into her own before you breach into a room containing your objective. She can drop her drone and use it to scout the area out, including enemy locations and cover. The drone can even disable traps and injure enemies, giving you a slight edge when you burst through the door.

SLEDGE

ARMOUR **MEDIUM**

SPEED **MEDIUM**

SPECIAL WEAPON
Breaching hammer
Sledge's hammer enables him to smash through scenery several times in a round.

PRIMARY WEAPON

SECONDARY WEAPON

GADGET

Most operators can only carry one or two breaching charges, but Sledge doesn't need them because he's got a giant freaking hammer. He can breach through more than a dozen walls and doors in a round, which is handy, and with an Uzi and a secondary-weapon option he packs more than a punch.

FUZE

ARMOUR **HEAVY**

SPEED **SLOW**

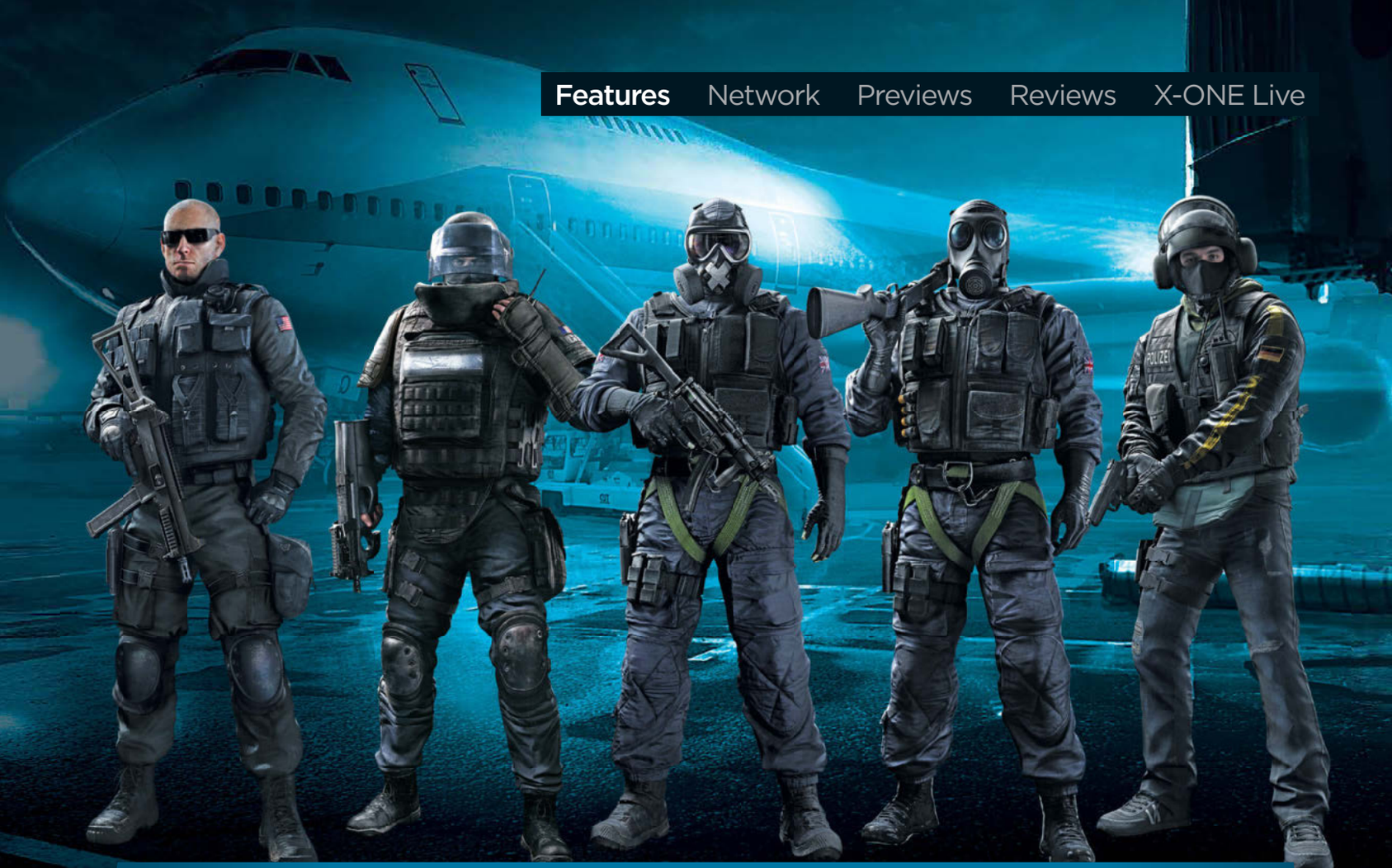
SPECIAL WEAPON
Cluster Charge
Place this charge on a breachable wall and it will fire five grenades into the room.

PRIMARY WEAPON

SECONDARY WEAPON

GADGET

Fuze is something of an all-rounder – he's got the option to take in a riot shield for close-quarters encounters, or he can equip a heavy machine gun for more impact. His cluster charge can also clear a well-defended room in a couple of seconds, making him a valuable member of your team.



DEFENDERS

PULSE

ARMOUR **LIGHT**

SPEED **FAST**

SPECIAL WEAPON
Cardiac Sensor

Pulse's heartbeat sensor picks up any human within around 5-8 metres.

PRIMARY WEAPON

SECONDARY WEAPON

GADGET

The fast and lightly-armoured Pulse might not be able to take too much punishment, but his heartbeat sensor can give you and your team the drop on approaching opponents. With good communication between you and your team, you can alert them to nearby enemies and catch attackers by surprise.

ROOK

ARMOUR **HEAVY**

SPEED **SLOW**

SPECIAL WEAPON
Armor Pack

The team can get an armour boost by grabbing extra kit from Rook's pack.

PRIMARY WEAPON

SECONDARY WEAPON

GADGET

Rook's heavy armour makes him a strong option for defenders, and if you choose to equip his deployable shield, you can create a small area that can be held even with multiple incoming attackers. Plus, with his armour pack, he can help the defending team get the edge over the opposition by giving them a health boost.

MUTE

ARMOUR **MEDIUM**

SPEED **MEDIUM**

SPECIAL WEAPON
Signal Disrupter

This handy disrupter will stop electronic equipment from functioning nearby.

PRIMARY WEAPON

SECONDARY WEAPON

GADGET

Combine Mute's signal disrupter with wall reinforcements and Bandit's shock wire, and you've got a recipe for success. Players won't be able to breach through walls or doors (even Thermite's charges won't work) and drones won't be able to get in to find the bombs that you're defending. Mute's a very handy addition to your team.

SMOKE

ARMOUR **MEDIUM**

SPEED **MEDIUM**

SPECIAL WEAPON
Remote Gas Grenade

This grenade will create noxious gases that harm attackers making it great for zoning.

PRIMARY WEAPON

SECONDARY WEAPON

GADGET

When you're being swarmed by attackers from a single direction, the easiest way to clear them out is with a remote smoke grenade. Drop it early in the round, then be ready to detonate it – if you time it right and catch a few enemies in the cloud, they may not escape, and if they do they'll suffer major damage.

BANDIT

ARMOUR **LIGHT**

SPEED **FAST**

SPECIAL WEAPON
Shock Wire

This wire will shock a reinforced wall or barbed wire trap.

PRIMARY WEAPON

SECONDARY WEAPON

GADGET

Bandit's a real team player, and he is most effective right at the start of the round. As other players run around putting down barbed wire and reinforcing walls, Bandit should be running around electrifying these traps as they go up, and laying down remote explosives to take out any stragglers who survive.



GAME OF THRONES

Proof that Telltale can transform any licence into an awesome game.



MINECRAFT

One of the biggest franchises in the world finally given a story.



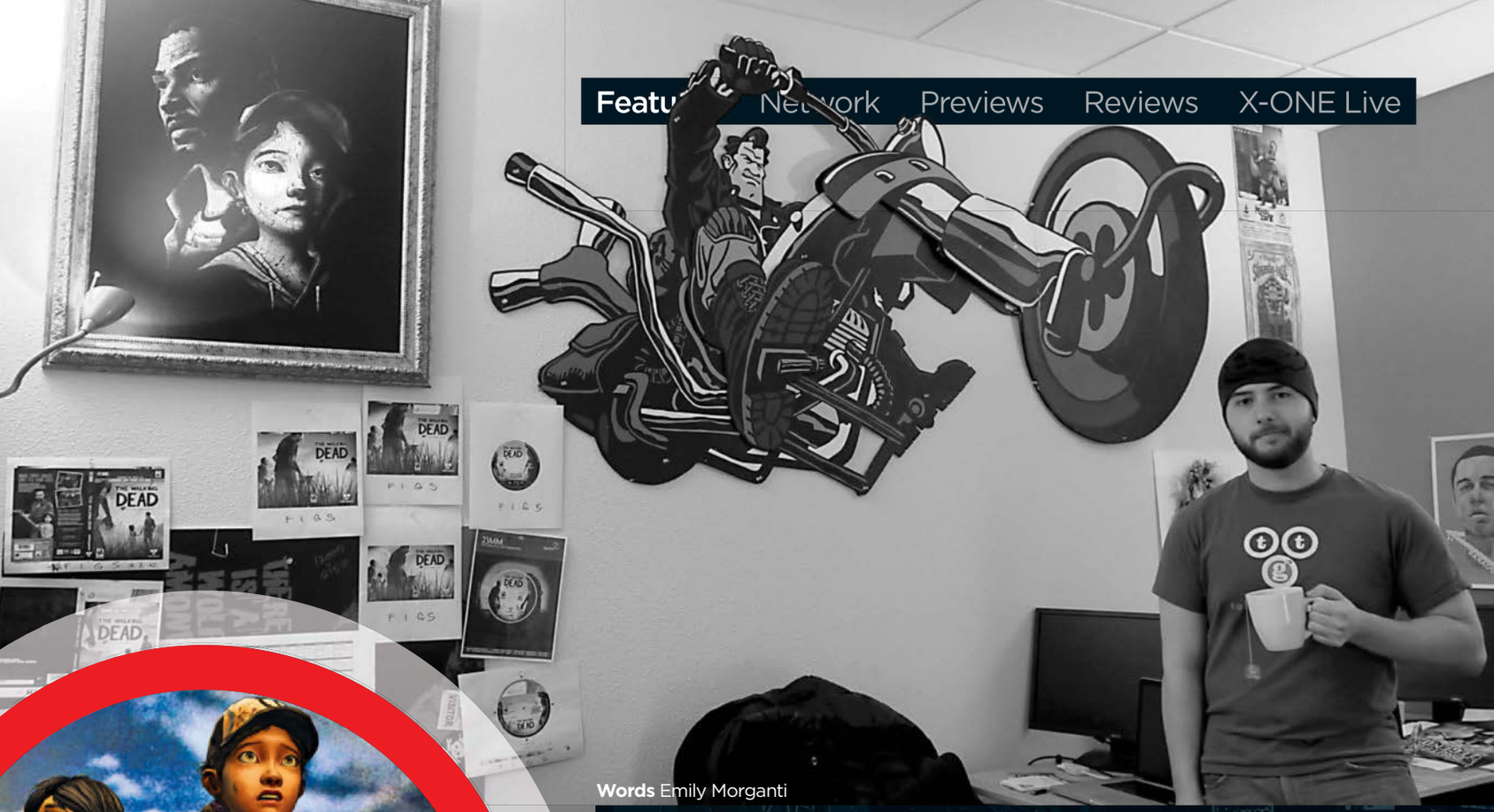






THE WOLF AMONG US

A kick-ass comic translated into a perplexing murder mystery tale.





Words Emily Morganti

TELLTALE: BEHIND THE SCENES

FOR 11 YEARS, THE WALKING DEAD DEVELOPER HAS BEEN CHASING DOWN THE FUTURE OF INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT. AS IT TURNS OUT, THOUGH, THE FUTURE IS NOW

In 2004, following the high-profile cancellation of the adventure game *Sam & Max: Freelance Police*, a trio of former LucasArts employees founded California-based Telltale Games with a vision for "television-style gaming": sitcom-sized episodes based on popular licences to be delivered digitally on a set schedule. At the time, cofounder Kevin Bruner expressed that Telltale's plans were "bigger than videogames" – the studio wanted to class up interactive entertainment the same way HBO was doing for TV with high-quality scripted shows like *The Sopranos*.

Back then, Xbox Live Arcade was brand new; if you wanted a game, you went to a shop and bought a boxed copy. Download a one-to-two hour slice of a game each month instead of binge-playing the whole thing at once? You're kidding, right?

Telltale's first attempts weren't far off the point-and-click adventures the company's earliest employees worked on at LucasArts, and digital distribution took some getting used to. A PC-only developer for years, Telltale didn't even show up on Xbox until 2009. But now, over a decade after forming, episodic games have found their footing and the name 'Telltale' has become synonymous with the choice-driven gameplay popularised in its 2012 breakout hit *The Walking Dead*. With series like *Tales From The Borderlands*, *Game Of Thrones* and *Minecraft: Story Mode* in its line-up, every Telltale release seems to get more buzz than the last.

"Getting people – and ourselves – to understand the way we wanted to entertain people was tricky. It's something we didn't expect to be able to do quite at this scale," says Bruner, who became CEO in

TELLTALE GAMES, THIS IS YOUR LIFE

HOW, IN TEN YEARS, TELLTALE HAS GROWN FROM AN INDIE TEAM MAKING NICHE ADVENTURES TO THE BIGGEST PLAYER IN INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT

2005

TELLTALE TEXAS HOLD'EM IS CREATED AS A PRACTICE PROJECT FOR TELLTALE'S PROPRIETARY ENGINE, FEATURING EMPLOYEE VOICE ACTING.



2005

BONE: OUT FROM BONEVILLE, BASED ON THE COMIC SERIES BY JEFF SMITH, IS TELLTALE'S FIRST EPISODIC GAME AND PROVED THAT THE CONCEPT HAD LEGS.



2015. "We're really true to our original vision, but we also have the ability to evolve that vision. I feel like one of the biggest things in my job now is to ask for things, because it feels like we're in this magical time where things we ask for might actually happen! So we should ask while the getting's good."

And Telltale has been doing plenty of asking, sometimes unconventionally. With *Tales From The Borderlands*, for example, there may have been cocktails involved. "We were talking to Randy [Pitchford] and the folks at [Gearbox] at the VGAs after *The Walking Dead* won, and it was at the afterparty [that] an off-the-cuff idea of, 'We should do something together with *Borderlands*, right?' And the seed was planted," Bruner explains, noting that many at Telltale were big *Borderlands* fans. "But then it became this itch that wouldn't go away, where the more we thought about it, the more we were like, 'Oh my god, we could do something really cool with *Borderlands*'."

> "It feels like we're in this magical time where things we ask for might actually happen!"

Their other recent blockbuster, based on HBO's *Game Of Thrones* TV series, was born from a more traditional pitch: "HBO, they don't do a lot of games licensing. *Game Of Thrones* is one of the crown jewels in the HBO portfolio, so that's a big fish to go after and a big fish to land that took a lot of due diligence," Bruner says. "So [going after licences] is a little bit of both, there's the organic dreamy, 'It'd be really cool to do something with *Borderlands*,' and then there's the bigger stuff that's like, 'There's no way HBO would let us play with *Game Of Thrones*.' And then you're like, 'Well maybe... what would it really take to make it happen?' and you just do the work."

And what if you want to make an episodic game based on *Minecraft*? You ask Notch, of course. "We started the conversation with Notch





With two lead characters – company man Rhys and con artist Fiona – *Tales from the Borderlands* takes place on Pandora after the events of *Borderlands 2*.

2006

SAM & MAX SAVE THE WORLD (SEASON ONE) DEBUTS WITH MONTHLY EPISODES. TELLTALE LICENSED THE CHARACTERS AFTER LUCASARTS' RIGHTS EXPIRED.



2007/8

EPISODIC GAMING GAINS TRACTION WITH SAM & MAX: BEYOND TIME AND SPACE AND STRONG BAD'S COOL GAME FOR ATTRACTIVE PEOPLE.



2009

CRACKING NEWS! TELLTALE FINALLY MAKES IT TO XBOX WITH WALLACE AND GROMIT'S GRAND ADVENTURES AND SAM & MAX PORTS.





Minecraft: Story Mode will be the first Telltale game where you can customise your avatar's gender and skin tone.



himself at GDC a few years ago," Bruner explains of *Minecraft: Story Mode*. "He was familiar with some of the work that Telltale had done, and we were having a conversation about how cool we thought *Minecraft* was, and how cool he thought Telltale was, and we were like, 'Well since we're both obviously crazy cool, maybe we could do something together.'" Though the deal predated Microsoft's Mojang acquisition, Bruner says Microsoft has been a great partner: "They really get *Minecraft*, and they're doing the right thing with *Minecraft*."

Telltale has proven with *Tales From The Borderlands* that an episodic story game based on another game can work, even across genres, but the initial reveal of *Minecraft: Story Mode* was met with some confusion. "It's kind of similar to *Borderlands*; when people found out we were doing a *Minecraft* game, they were like, 'What?! There's no story in *Minecraft*, there are no characters,' and all that," Bruner laughs. "But I think we've put together a really great *Minecraft* story, that's grounded in the things that are important to *Minecraft* – playing with your friends, building stuff with your friends, fighting, surviving, tearing stuff down. These are all things that are critical to the *Minecraft* world, and we've been able to build a really interesting story where all these elements are first-class citizens."

With the first episode out now (you can read our review on page XX), the five-episode series follows a band of blocky friends (including a pig) on an adventure to save the *Minecraft* universe via the choice-driven gameplay Telltale does so well. Though being a *Minecraft* fan won't be a prerequisite, Bruner says the team's focus is first and foremost that core audience: "When we make a *Minecraft* game, we're trying to make the best *Minecraft* game we could possibly make, not necessarily a game for people who like all the other Telltale games."

> "We've put together a story that's grounded in the things that are important to Minecraft"

With more than 70 million copies sold to date, that's a big audience to satisfy. "When we started looking into it, [we found] *Minecraft* fans are all over the place. There are a ton of people who play *Minecraft*," Bruner acknowledges. "There are a lot of kids that play, and it's fun to make games for kids again because we haven't done that in a long time. There are also a lot of adults who play, so in this case we get to make the best kind of content – a little cliché but it's true – it's content that works for all." He likens the tone they're aiming for to classic Amblin Entertainment movies like *The Goonies* – "films that are great for kids and have all kinds of gags and content that's great for adults as well."

Players itching for less family-friendly fare can instead return to Telltale's *The Walking Dead* series this autumn, but in contrast to Telltale's usual five-episode seasons, *The Walking Dead: Michonne* will be a three-episode "mini-series" starring the katana-wielding fan favourite from *The Walking Dead* comics and TV show. "[Michonne is] a really important canon character, and I think it's a real testament to [comic publisher] Skybound and Telltale that we're going to bring her into the interactive space," Bruner says. "And she's an awesome canon character. Michonne is such a sophisticated character, she's not just like a 'badass ninja' or anything like that, even though she is a badass. She's a really complicated, sophisticated character, and she's fantastic for the kind of stories we like to tell."

The mini-series shouldn't be confused with *The Walking Dead: Season Three*, also in the works. "We had this opportunity to tell a Michonne story, and we think it's going to be an incredibly cool

2009

GUYBRUSH THREEPWOOD, MIGHTY PIRATE™ SAILS AGAIN IN TALES OF MONKEY ISLAND THANKS TO A PARTNERSHIP WITH LUCASARTS.



2010

TELLTALE BRIEFLY EXPERIMENTS OUT OF THE USUAL EPISODIC FORMAT WITH NELSON TETHERS: PUZZLE AGENT AND HECTOR: BADGE OF CARNAGE.



2011

WITH BACK TO THE FUTURE AND JURASSIC PARK FIRMLY IN ITS HELM, TELLTALE TAKES ITS FIRST STAB AT TAKING ON MOVIE LICENCES.



Michonne story, but we also want to continue the *Walking Dead* universe that Telltale has built. This is a way that we can get both of those to happen at the same time," Bruner explains. While this story won't intersect with the adventures of Clementine and Telltale's other *The Walking Dead* characters, it may still have an impact on some of the future comics, as creator Robert Kirkman has given his blessing for Telltale's Michonne story to become canon. "It's really amazing that Robert has given us a moment in the comics where we get to tell officially what's happening with Michonne," Bruner says. "He is helping us craft the story – it's not written by Robert Kirkman – but Robert is closely involved with the story, providing a lot of input."

But the most exciting things happening at Telltale these days are the ones they won't talk about. In February they announced a "significant" investment – rumoured to be in the ballpark of $40 million (£26 million) – from Lionsgate Entertainment, the media company behind *The Hunger Games*, *Mad Men*, and *Orange Is The New Black*. ("Big Boo will remember this," anyone?) Telltale has also teamed up with Marvel Entertainment on an unannounced project slated for 2017. Though Bruner's tight-lipped regarding these partnerships, he's clearly excited about what they mean for the future of interactive entertainment. Like he said in the early days, this is bigger than games.

"Walking in from work and saying 'Xbox on' is pretty cutting edge, it's 'the future'. And I think everybody wants to figure out, for traditional videogames, what the next generation of entertainment or 'the future' is going to be," Bruner says. Of course, Telltale has been working on this puzzle for years, but thanks to the big licences it's landing and the ease of delivering episodes over services like Xbox Live, TV-style gaming has gone mainstream. "There are people who come home after work or after school and the first thing they do is turn on their Xbox. They don't turn on their cable box or anything else, the Xbox is their primary form of entertainment, and when they're done playing games, then they go browse the internet or watch regular TV. We think, for that kind of person, Telltale's content is really rich," Bruner explains. "You can play really hardcore games and then instead of watching TV [afterward], you can play a Telltale game. That's the kind of thing the partnerships with Lionsgate and Marvel will help us build – content for that generation of people, people for whom their Xbox is more important than their cable box."

> "You can play hardcore games and then, instead of watching TV, you can play a Telltale game"

With episodic gaming proven and Telltale-style games a genre other developers are now mimicking, Telltale's next big experiment will be "super shows," which Bruner describes as "part live-action scripted entertainment and part Telltale game, [with] the choice-based gameplay. There have been other initiatives that have done TV and game combined, but [super shows] are going to be handled in a very Telltale way. With partners like Lionsgate who know the television world so well, and our ten, eleven-year run with interactive storytelling, we're really enthused about being able to point our guns at a more traditional medium and see what we can do there."

Considering the size of Lionsgate's investment and that the press release announcing it hinted at collaboration on original properties, this all sounds like it goes beyond Telltale's usual licensing practice. "The thing is, with Lionsgate, they're a very progressive story company as well [as a big media company]. They've really embraced Netflix, they do commercialist binge-watching television as well as their traditional stuff, and they're best in class from a scripted narrative point of view," Bruner says. "When we were talking with them about where the future lies, there's alignment on where we think people are going to be – that

By moving away from point-and-click controls with *Wallace & Gromit*, navigation now feels more natural with a controller.



Telltale's *Game of Thrones* is based on the HBO series, not the books by George R. R. Martin.



In Telltale's game, Marty McFly was voiced by a soundalike, but Michael J. Fox made a cameo in the finale.

2012

"GAMERS WILL REMEMBER THIS": THE WALKING DEAD HAS MASSIVE SUCCESS, PICKING UP SEVERAL GAME OF THE YEAR AWARDS, FIVE VGAS AND TWO BAFTAS.



2013/4

WHY MESS WITH A GOOD THING? TELLTALE THROWS ITS CHOICE-DRIVEN GAMEPLAY AT THE WOLF AMONG US AND THE WALKING DEAD: SEASON TWO.



2015

"TELLTALE-STYLE GAMING" DIVERSIFIES WITH GAME OF THRONES, TALES FROM THE BORDERLANDS AND MINECRAFT: STORY MODE.



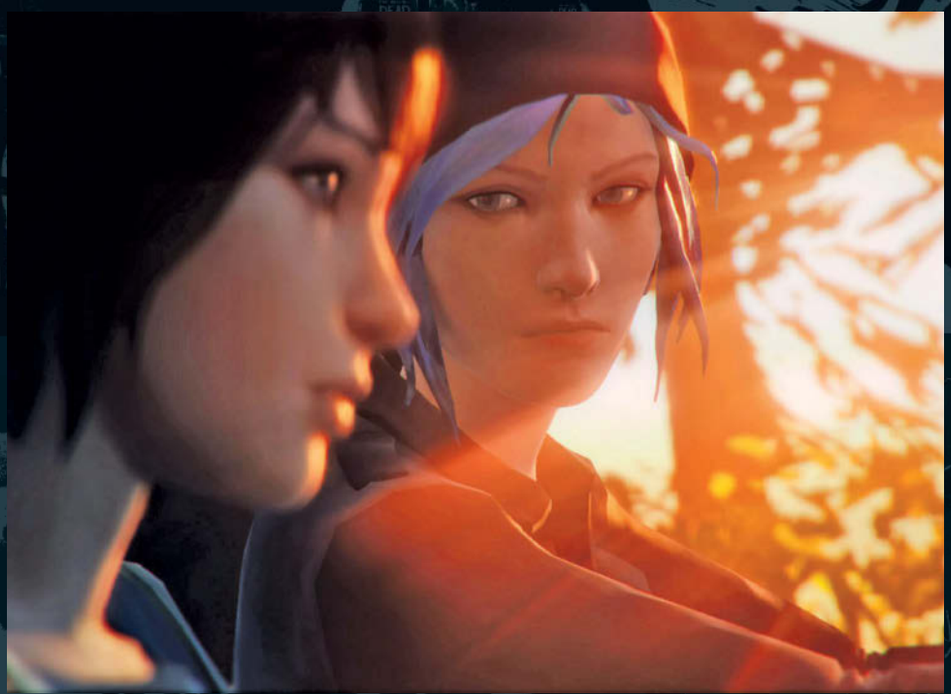






TELLTALE ON LIFE IS STRANGE

OTHERS HAVE TOYED WITH EPISODIC GAMING, BUT UNTIL NOW NO ONE'S PULLED IT OFF LIKE TELLTALE...



The supernatural teen angst serial from *Remember Me* developer Dontnod has given Bruner and others at Telltale a rare chance to experience an episodic game from the outside looking in. "We've been doing episodic story gaming for a long time so it's fun to look at another game purely from a consumer perspective, but I also can't help but look at it from a craft perspective," Bruner says. "Everybody here has been paying attention to it, we've really been enjoying that somebody else showed up at the party. I like the episodic experience from [a player's] perspective a lot – I'm genuinely excited about what's going to happen in *Life Is Strange* next." Like Telltale's recent games, *Life Is Strange* is heavy on player choice, but it also has some of the adventure game-y exploration and puzzle solving that Telltale has phased out over time. So what is Bruner's take on the gameplay? "I play it and I'm like 'Oh, why didn't we think of that...?' There's always that perspective. One of the interesting things that they've done is that they really have an anchored story mechanic that's [also] a gameplay mechanic, where you can rewind time. It would be really difficult for us to put something like that in *Game Of Thrones* or *The Walking Dead*, right? We have to find other things to play around with."

> "We really like the spaces in between the episodes and the opportunity the community has to talk about it"

same idea of people who come home and tell their Xbox to turn on. Both [we] and Lionsgate are really interested in bringing content to that person's life."

With so few details available at the moment, it's hard to picture how super shows will work at this point, but one thing's certain: they'll be released episodically. "We've talked about all the different ways to get our episodes out there. We certainly pay attention to what Netflix is doing, and what other game companies are doing, but right now we really like the spaces in-between the episodes and the cliffhangers, and the opportunity the community has to talk," Bruner says. "So we're going to stay serialised... and probably build more around it, more ways to support that space between episodes."

Whatever the future brings, Bruner stresses that even with the greater visibility they're enjoying these days, Telltale will keep making games the Telltale way: "We're still very independently driven. We still live and die by the games we decide to build and the way that we build them and whether or not people like them. We like it like that."

WWW.IMAGINESHOP.CO.UK



APPETITE FOR DESTRUCTION

Words Josh West

HANDS-ON WITH AVALANCHE STUDIOS' MOST EXPLOSIVE OPEN WORLD TO DATE

You want to know what the deal is with *Just Cause 3*? It's all about blowing shit up, and having a great time doing it. It's designed for those lunatics that just want to set the world on fire, without worrying about repercussions; it's a love letter to the psychopaths that feel at ease with a rocket launcher gripped between their mitts, a terrifying acceptance of those sociopaths who don't care who they hurt. This is Avalanche's opportunity to let you usher in a new age with dual SMGs. That's it. That's what *Just Cause 3* is. Wait, you want to know *more*? You greedy bastards.

There's an inherent problem with discussing and detailing *Just Cause*, because it just doesn't give a damn, not about itself, what you do in its insane sandbox or how you tackle its design. If anything, it spends all of its time goading you to break it – at least, that's how we felt after spending a few hours dicking about in the near-final build. *Just Cause 3* has the narrative depth of The Chainsmokers' *Let Me Take A Selfie* music video, and the same gleeful irreverence. And you know what? It's brilliant because of it. Whether you're a long-time series fanatic or just a weary gamer looking for a colourful palate cleanser after the litany of dreary open-world

JUST CAUSE 3

Cool guys don't look at explosions? Rico can't do that, otherwise he'd be walking around with his eyes clamped shut all the time.



We'd tether the helicopter to those two armoured cars and then grapple-parachute the hell out of there.





collectathons we've been subjected to this year. *Just Cause 3* has something for everyone; just remember to leave any expectation of nuance, relevance and consideration at the door.

PALATE CLEANSER

It's funny to think that *Just Cause 3* comes from the same studio that, just a few months ago, released *Mad Max*. It was a game that, almost in spite of its massive ambition and sandy scope, seemed to prove that the open world model was in desperate need of an explosive reinvigoration. A strange combination of compelling character and mundane execution, in its worst moments it felt like the overall design had been constructed from side-quests scooped up from the cutting room floor of every other triple-A open world game out there. *Just Cause 3* is the antithesis of that. It sets itself apart by handling spectacle with a smattering of self-mockery. This isn't a game that takes itself seriously, and it's oddly refreshing.

Whereas the likes of *Assassin's Creed*, *Far Cry*, and *Mad Max* position themselves as sprawling maim-and-kill fantasies, with enough collectibles and quests to incite a migraine headache, *Just Cause 3* runs wild. It simply wants you to grab as much C4 as you can carry, some tethers, and go create carnage with whatever you can find. The result is incredibly satisfying – this is about enjoying blockbuster violence with an air of silliness, rather than reverence. If you are starting

Throughout the story you'll meet a handful of memorable resistance members who will occasionally aid you in big engagements.



SIZE MATTERS

COMPARING THE SIZE OF OPEN WORLDS... REMEMBER, WE ARE GAMES JOURNALISTS NOT MATHEMATICIANS

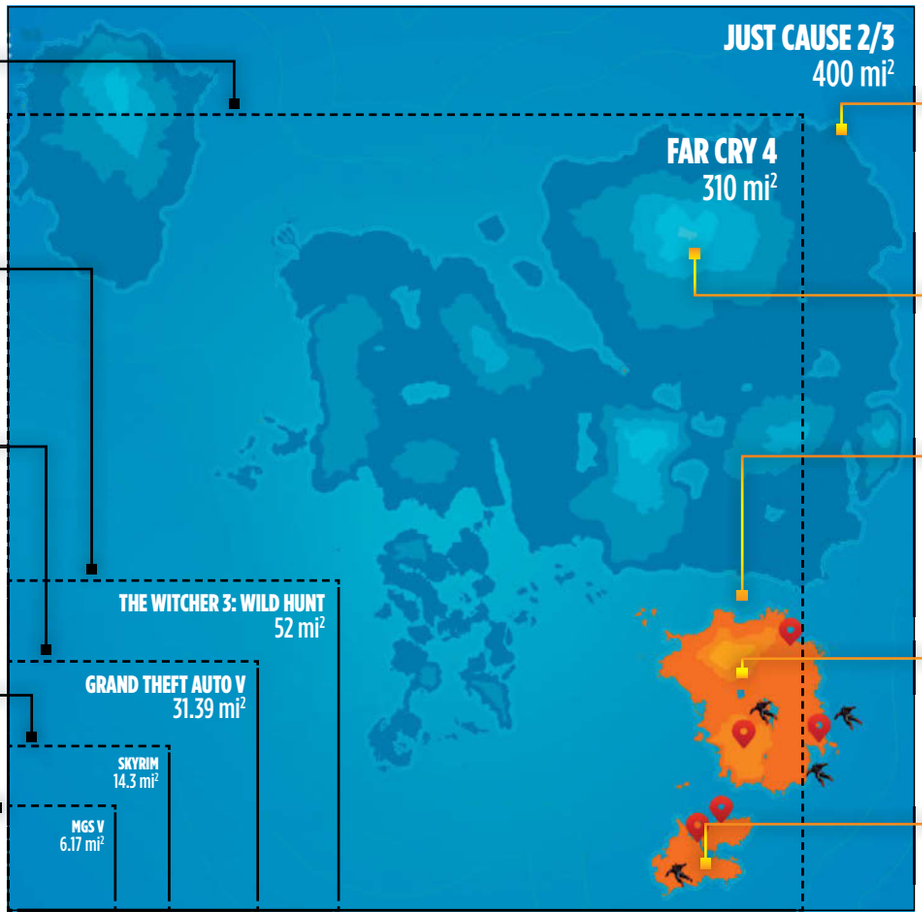
FAR CRY 4
It's roughly the same size as its predecessor, though far denser, ensuring there's always an outpost to raid, animal to hunt or tower to capture.

THE WITCHER III: WILD HUND
Said to be roughly 35 times the size of *The Witcher II*, *Wild Hunt* is an open-world triumph. It's a beautiful, epic fantasy romp.

GTA V
While *Grand Theft Auto V* boasts a giant playable space, a large percentage of it is impossible to cross due to it being ocean and out-of-bounds mountains.

THE ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM
What *Skyrim* lacks in size it makes up for with density, boasting an organic world that seems to live and learn in response to your actions.

MGS V: THE PHANTOM PAIN
TPP might seem small in comparison, but it's worth bearing in mind that this is just the open world Afghanistan map.



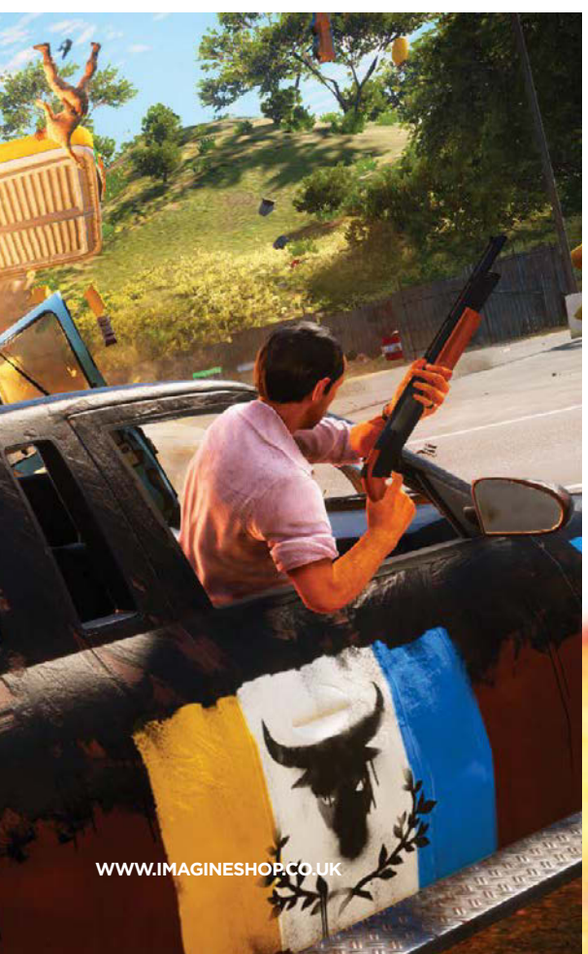
SIZE MATTERS
Like *Just Cause 2* before it, Avalanche has created a genuinely impressive and sizeable land for you to explore and conquer, it's a legit achievement.

THE SIGHTS
This is a dangerous area to go to without upgraded mods, but the tallest mountains can be found here and presents beautiful views, especially at night.

WATER-BOUND
Get enough initial lift – and luck with passing boats to grapple – and it's possible to wingsuit freely between islands, which is insanely awesome to pull off.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF
While the game will guide you to towns to liberate, we found *Just Cause 3* at its best when you discover areas where you're not prepared for the challenge.

RUN WILD
Whether you are piloting a plane, hijacking a ship or wingsuiting under bridges, the more you explore and identify zones, the more you'll get out of the game.



to feel a little burnt out on the idea of tackling yet another sprawling open world in 2015, *Just Cause 3* is here to invite you to play in its sandbox for a few hours, to have a little fun, and then walk away feeling content, as long as you've got the imagination and patience to really bring it to life.

TOURIST TO WAR

One thing that really struck us following our hands-on session of *Just Cause 3* is how quickly Avalanche gets you into the action. The studio has created a game world of 1,000km², making it one of the biggest open worlds in gaming, though you won't have to wait a lifetime to see it all. Within fifteen minutes of the opening setpiece – which sees Rico firing a rocket launcher from atop a plane, parachuting down into his home country of Medici behind a sky of fire, slaughtering rebels with twin-pistols and taking selfies with his reunited bestie – the game world is completely open to be explored. It wouldn't be easy, but in theory you could immediately sack off the challenges and missions, take to the skies and explore all three of *Just Cause 3*'s sprawling Mediterranean islands.

It's a liberating feeling. Open world games often struggle with their freedom. *Just Cause 3* has freedom in abundance, though it doesn't have traditional engagement hooks. Avalanche's struggle will be keeping *Just Cause 3* fun past the first few hours. This is partly due to its unconventional design; it revolves around the idea that, with just three tools, the knowledge that anything with a red stripe can be destroyed, and the notion that just about anything can be manipulated by its insane physics engine, you are free to create your own sun-soaked fun.

Those three tools are the returning grappling hook and parachute from *Just Cause 2*, with the addition of a wingsuit. There's a small learning curve, but within 30 minutes you'll be using them in tandem to navigate giant spaces and cause chaos. The grappling hook is not only used to latch onto other objects, but it can also catapult Rico into the air – giving you the option of whipping out the parachute or wingsuit to aid movement. Once airborne, you'll be able to quickly tether yourself to objects and the environment, allowing you to build momentum and speed.

Using the three tools feels great; returning to *Just Cause 2* after our hands-on session revealed how archaic the five-year-old shooter now feels in comparison. *JC3* gives you total freedom; the ability to soar across the map and scout out your next targets without having to constantly flick between the menu map and game overworld. The trinity of tools sounds so simple that you might wonder how it has such a large impact on gameplay, but you need to play it to believe it. The only time you'll want to use a vehicle to get around is when it's a helicopter – more specifically, one sporting dual mini-guns.

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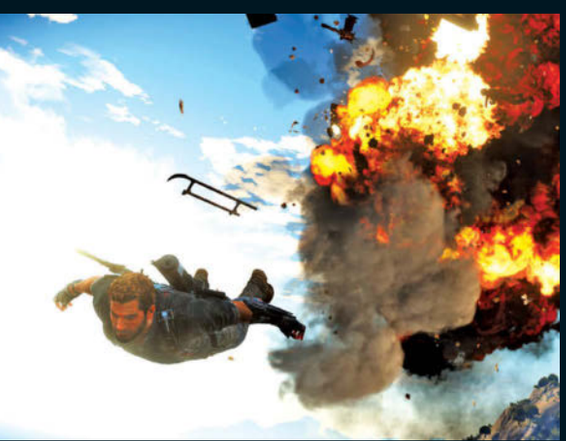
DISCUSSING MULTIPLAYER

YOU CAN PLAY WITH FRIENDS, JUST NOT HOW YOU MIGHT EXPECT

Truth be told, we were a little surprised to learn that *Just Cause 3* wouldn't be featuring traditional multiplayer. As much as we feel more confident with an Xbox controller in our hands, we have been known to drift over to the PC from time to time to jump back into *Just Cause 2.* The reason? Because it features fantastic multiplayer thanks to a few mods made by an eager community. Blowing a ton of stuff up on your own is fun and everything, but you should see the sort of chaos that a group can make when working together for mutually assured destruction.

Avalanche wouldn't be drawn on a definitive reason for the lack of competitive multiplayer – though we imagine it was a concession made to keep the frame-rate locked down – but that doesn't mean you won't have your achievements recorded. Everything you do in *Just Cause 3* is recorded by the game for its asynchronous multiplayer; pitting your best wingsuit glides, biggest kill counts and most epic destruction sessions against that of your friends across Xbox Live. It's a small feature, but in a game that revels in taking chaos to the next level, seeing how your friends are doing is a fantastic incentive to get even more creative with the tools at your disposal.





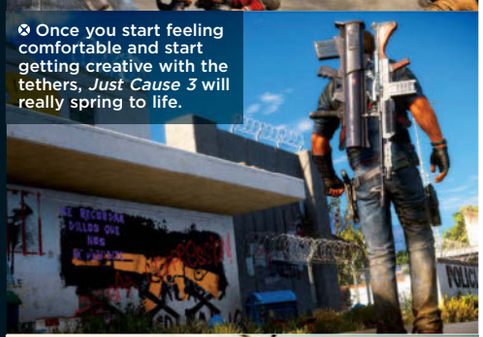


See something you want to explode? A button press has you leap from out onto the hood to facilitate your urges.



Despite the odds being stacked against you, Rico makes a Herculean effort to inflict as much pain on the dictatorship as inhumanly possible.





Once you start feeling comfortable and start getting creative with the tethers, *Just Cause 3* will really spring to life.



CREATING PURE CHAOS

Soaring across the map at height reveals just how strikingly beautiful *Just Cause 3* truly is. It's a game world bathed in sunlight and colour; rolling green hills and tropical small towns – every single one of them waiting to have a glorious explosion painted across it. Which, thankfully, is a behaviour the game is only more than happy to indulge.

The heart of the gameplay in *Just Cause 3* is found in three main tasks. Challenges, such as races and total destruction time trials; Story missions, which lead you through chaotically cinematic set-pieces; and, the task you'll do the most, liberating towns and military bases by wiping out the presence of General Di Ravello's dictatorship. This usually involves Rico swooping in, killing a few enemies and destroying a billboard or two before dismantling a statue of Di Ravello and raising a resistance flag.

If that doesn't sound particularly interesting, it's because it isn't. The completion checklist presented to us every time we approached one of these areas wasn't exactly enticing, but this is where your imagination comes into play. While you can tackle each objective by simply running and gunning, mowing down every enemy in sight with an abundant supply of ammunition and auto lock-on, if you want to enjoy your time with *Just Cause 3* you need to get creative.

WHAT'S AN ACTION GAME WITHOUT A RED BARREL?

WE JUDGE ASPECTS OF JUST CAUSE 3 BY ITS MOST VALUABLE COMMODITY: RED BARRELS



THE SCALE OF AWESOMENESS

- LEAKY BARREL
- CONTROLLED
- WEAK SAUCE
- WARMING
- BLISTERING
- CHARGRILLED
- FIRESTARTER
- UNCONTROLLABLE
- PURE CHAOS
- MEGA DEATH

STORY

CHARACTERS

OPEN WORLD

PHYSICS

CHAOS POTENTIAL

DESTRUCTIBILITY

THINGS TO DO

PRESENTATION

FUN

That grappling hook can also be used to tether items, objects and people together for hilarious, destructive results. Upgraded from *Just Cause 2*, you can now strap at least three things together at once; an armoured soldier can be tethered to a moving vehicle – propelling them along the street at speed – while you can then tether said car to a stationary fuel tank, for example. What happens next? Well, a pull of LT causes the tethers to retract, pulling the soldier closer to the car and the car straight into the fuel tank for a giant, earth-shattering explosion. At this point, fire rains down upon everything in sight, your renegade level shoots through the roof and enemies start descending upon your location with deadly intent. Once you learn how to tether properly, it'll become instinctive and incredibly satisfying. An aggressive enemy helicopter? Well, *of course* we're tethering it to an overhead aeroplane, whilst simultaneously lining passing vehicles with C4 and connecting as many soldiers to them as possible. What else?

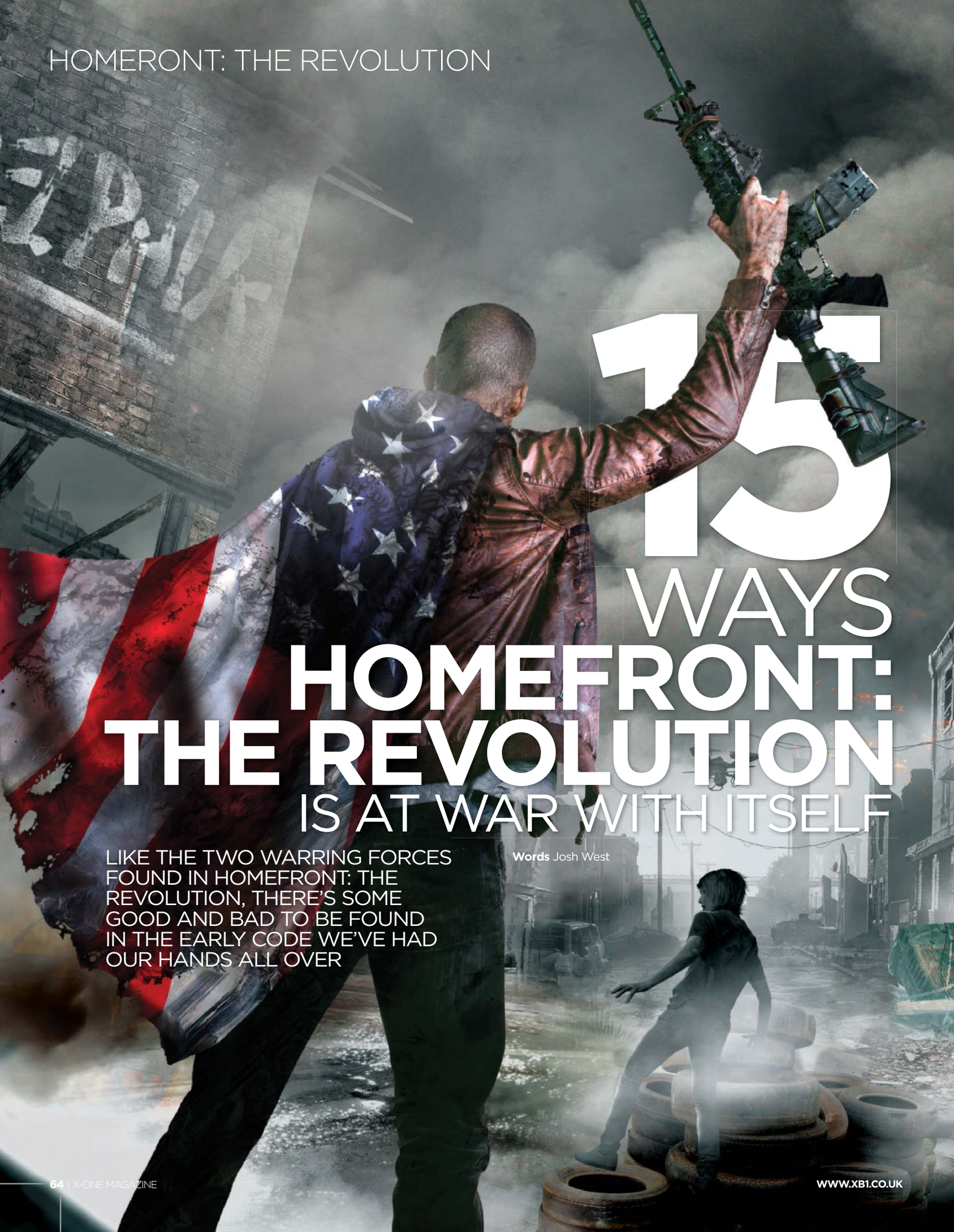
It's a lot of fun, but it's also completely dependent on your willingness to try new strategies and be consistently entertained by the results. *Just Cause 3* is chaos connected to a controller, but it also feels like it has a short-shelf life by its very nature – though this could change if the story picks up and gains some traction in the final release. Avalanche has done its best to counter *Just Cause 3*'s potentially short life-span by including two other interesting features: mods and something called a Rebel Drop.

REBEL YELL

Rebel Drop allows you to call in air drops on any vehicles and weapons that you've unlocked, while mods are awarded for completing challenges and running riot. Both allow you to really expand on the core gameplay insanity and push the engine – which seemingly stayed locked at a solid 60fps during even the most intensive explosive sessions – to its limits. There are dozens of these mods for Rico, and they do everything from adding a turbo boost to vehicles, to allowing you to tether your grappling hook to two separate objects, increase your glide distance, or even cause your C4 to propel objects forwards before exploding. Several mods can even be turned on at once, allowing you to greatly increase Rico's abilities and making him a super-heroic agent of destruction.

How does this all come together in the game? Let us paint you a picture. We had just come from gliding down from the tallest mountain in the game and landed on a bridge. At this point, we decided to Rebel Drop a harrier jet in, strap a load of modded C4 to the back of it and proceeded to plan a situation wherein we would take the jet to top speed, nosedive it into the largest military base we could find and – as we jumped out, LMG in hand – would activate the C4, causing it to career into the ground and cause a freaking gigantic mess of fire. What actually happened: a train appeared behind us, off-camera, smashing through the wing of the plane and making the C4 ignite, at which point we tethered the plane to the train and the train to the bridge. The plane whirled off into the air, pulling the giant train with it and – as we wing-suited to safety – we retracted the tethers, pulling it all back into the bridge and causing everything to explode and crumble. We were so busy watching this unfold, with a smile planted on our face, that we didn't even notice the passenger jet meandering into our flightpath as it attempted to dodge debris, killing us instantly. It was awesome. It was insanely awesome.

That's what *Just Cause 3* is: insane. It makes you a tourist. Initially to war, we thought, but really, to itself. Rico will always struggle against some kind of dictator – it is in his nature – and you are simply dropping in from time to time to help him along his way. This is a game built and designed around pick-up-and-play; we don't see it supporting lengthy gaming sessions, but for those times you want to revel in some chaos, *Just Cause 3* will indulge you. Avalanche has created a game that's number one intention is to have fun, and there's something incredibly liberating about that.



15 WAYS HOMEFRONT: THE REVOLUTION IS AT WAR WITH ITSELF

LIKE THE TWO WARRING FORCES FOUND IN HOMEFRONT: THE REVOLUTION, THERE'S SOME GOOD AND BAD TO BE FOUND IN THE EARLY CODE WE'VE HAD OUR HANDS ALL OVER

Words Josh West



HANDLES LIKE A RUSTY RESISTANCE VEHICLE

You'd think a first-person shooter would focus on ensuring that its movement is as tight as possible, but the build of *Homefront: The Revolution* we played revealed a distressing truth: it still handles like a mid-tier THQ game. Since changing hands from the publisher in 2013, it's been under the watchful gaze of both Crytek and Deep Silver, but neither developer has successfully tightened up that core experience. Movement feels sluggish, but not in a weighty fashion like *Gears Of War* – it's just not satisfying.



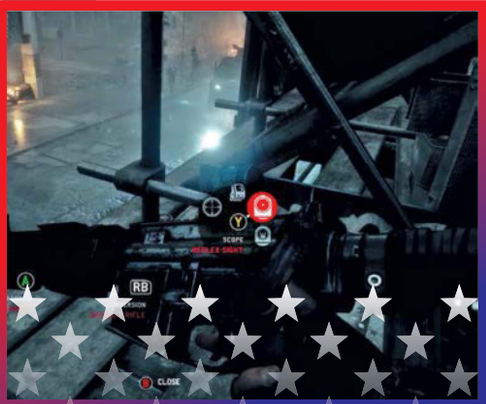
GUERRILLA WARFARE ROCKS

FPS games tend to favour direct engagements, big set pieces and unrealistically explosive action segments. *Homefront: The Revolution*'s focus on hit-and-run tactics and smaller gunfights is a refreshing change of pace. You're a regular dude with home-made armour and weapons, and your backup is a small insurgence force made up of parents, trade workers and students, so direct combat is out of the question. Due to the shift in power, you need to approach every fight with a solid plan for turning the tide – or escaping.



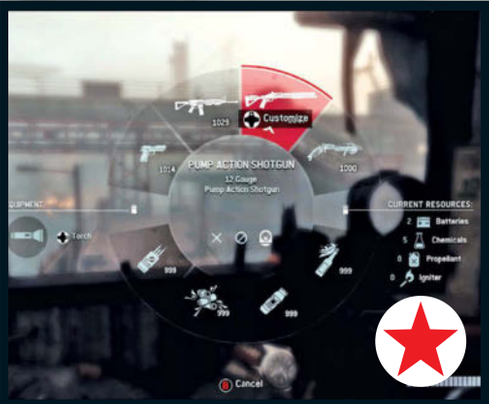
WEAPON FEEDBACK IS LACKLUSTRE

Criticise *Call Of Duty* all you want, there's no denying that its weapon feedback is unrivalled. Infinity Ward set the bar with *Modern Warfare*, ensuring that when you shot your weapon, it bloody felt like it. *Homefront* has an array of awesome-looking guns, but it isn't satisfying to shoot them. Nailing a headshot doesn't give a 'Fuck yeah!' endorphin rush; you never get a true sense of your impact. Whether this comes in a tactile sense – better use of the Xbox One's rumbling Impulse Triggers – or better weapon recoil and animations, something needs changing.



CUSTOMISING ITS WAY INTO OUR HEARTS

Due to the occupation of Korean forces, most weapons and attachments are all crudely created, making your equipment rather unique. One of the coolest features of *Homefront* is that everything can be customised on the fly; need a short-range reflex scope? Just duck behind cover and change it. From what we've seen, the options range from basic upgrades like new underbarrels and grips, up to powerful enhancements that let you fire incendiary buckshots from your shotgun. It means you always have a few options to tackle enemies and blockades, and can switch up your tactics.



IMPOSSIBLE CONTROLS

True, we have only had a couple of opportunities to play *Homefront*, but it isn't pick-up-and-play by any stretch of the imagination. The controls aren't intuitive at this stage in development; *so many things* are mapped to the same buttons that it can be all too easy to accidentally unclip your belt and get caught with your pants around your ankles by GKR forces, just because you were just trying to equip a scope onto your rifle. Want to quickly throw a grenade or check the map for objectives? Well, now you are driving an explosive-strapped RC car into your own legs by accident. This *really* needs to be tightened up before *Homefront* launches in 2016.



A HOLE IN THE RESISTANCE

At one point in our demo, we were able to leap onto a motorbike and tear through the city. This gave us an opportunity to get around quickly, revving across rooftops and through derelict buildings. The driving was pretty solid, conjuring memories of *Half-Life 2* and *Far Cry 4*'s most cinematic moments, while also introducing us to the scope of the game itself. *Homefront* is built so that some fights are impossible to win, and it's during these moments that the tension really does rise to fever-pitch excitement levels. Speeding off, with bullets ricocheting all around you and explosions shattering the horizon, is pretty god-damned amazing.



WHO ASKED FOR A RED DAWN SEQUEL?

Look, we all love *Red Dawn* – it's Patrick Swayze's best film, after *Ghost* (who doesn't love a bit of clay sculpting?) – but this whole "in our time no foreign army has ever occupied American soil... until now" jam feels a little overplayed. The first *Homefront* was co-written by *Red Dawn* director John Milius, and even though he is no longer involved with this reboot/spiritual sequel, his fingerprints are all over it. America has been invaded by Korea – all of it – and you and your band of untrained, disgruntled citizens are the last line of defence against the tyranny. Yawntacular.



BETTER WITH FRIENDS

Homefront feels like a game that's going to benefit greatly from co-operative gameplay. With friends by your side – and the difficulty ramped up – there's potential for planning and executing elaborate traps against unsuspecting GKR forces. There's so much potential in *Homefront*, it seems built to thrive on letting you run riot against the game in ways the developer never anticipated – this will truly shine through when you've got friends with headsets alongside you. It'll also be interesting to see how this factors into progression; with so much scope for weapon customisation, it'll be great to see how different setups work together for maximum carnage.



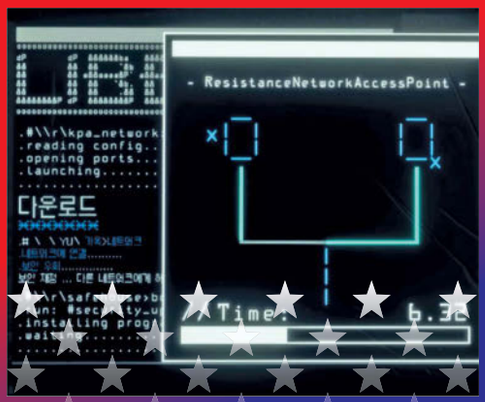
WEST PHILLY STREETS

Designing an open world can be tricky business; ensuring every area feels packed with enough points of interest to keep your engagement up – without overwhelming you – is something the *Assassin's Creed* and *Far Cry* have struggled with for years. *Homefront* doesn't feel like a revolution in this regard. Wandering through the Red Zone – the area in which you are likely to be shot on sight – it felt a little empty. Patrolling packs of enemies are everywhere but, as we mentioned, combat isn't particularly mind-blowing right now. The level design is a little mundane for our liking, though this could change once we are allowed into the civilised Yellow Zone slums.



A FEAST FOR YOUR RETINAS

While *Homefront* can certainly be accused of occupying a disappointingly bland colour palette – what is it about Korean oppression that summons gradients of grey and brown we never knew existed? – it's actually rather beautiful thanks to some clever lighting and environmental effects. This will only improve as development rockets along, and we are excited to see if the game can continue to uphold its beauty and solid frame-rate once the game world opens up completely; these gameplay slices have a tendency to run a little disconnected from the final product. Still, the studio knows the CryEngine back to front, so we're excited.



TECH EVOLVES QUICKLY UNDER DURESS

You know what's pretty great? Seeing the kind of hyper-tech the Korean forces have deployed all over the city. Considering the rather crappy equipment you carry on your person, it's genuinely thrilling when you run into a flying drone that alerts nearby forces to your location, or giant APCs capable of destroying you in seconds. That's when you have to get inventive, using environmental traps, IEDs and cover to appropriately tackle those in your path. That said, we hope we eventually get our hands on some of that future tech weaponry – it looks awesome.



YOU OCCUPIED *ALL* OF IT?

We are honestly baffled by the notion that this occupation of America ever succeeded. We know that *Homefront* is still in development, and that we played but a slice of what the game has to offer, but the enemy AI left a lot to be desired – we'd honestly be surprised if they were able to overthrow a kid's birthday party. Out in the open world, we noticed some making a valiant effort to flank our position, though many decided to just stand there and take the bullets like good faceless henchmen should. In buildings, the tactics seem to be designed around running directly at our position in order to join their buddies in the digital afterlife. This needs be tightened up, urgently.



IT'S ALL IN THE DETAIL

Gunplay and handling might not be great, but the weapon detail is very impressive. It's the little details that left us impressed: belt clips rattling on the top of an assault rifle because of the recoil, and the satisfying click that a new attached underbarrel makes as it slots into place. It's easy to see the Crytek influence on the game here – that's a studio that knows how to make some seriously satisfying gun porn. So long as Dambuster can get the other FPS components up to scratch, it should have something pretty special on its hands. It's all in the detail when it comes to looks, but it's hollow without good gameplay surrounding it.



THE END IS NOW IN SIGHT

Homefront has had something of a troubled development cycle. It's survived multiple studio cuts, bankruptcies and closures, and, extraordinarily, it's still alive. It has obviously seen its release date pushed into 2016, at the earliest, but at least the end is in sight. It's clear that there's a lot of work to be done here, but all of the issues we've shone the spotlight on here can be fixed through the natural course of development. It isn't going to be easy, but we've got faith Dambuster can turn this around. We're extremely excited to see the Yellow and Green zones, not to mention co-op, in action. We just hope the studio doesn't take forever – we've been waiting long enough.



OPEN WORLD IS TRICKY

Our playtest tasked us with having to overthrow a communication relay station to take control of the surrounding area, and involved us gunning our way through stationary soldiers and hacking into a box with a little minigame. After that, we were lost, and it wasn't the most exciting mission in the world to begin with. Despite having the same basic idea as *Fallout*'s outpost capture, it didn't summon the same feeling of exuberance after beating seemingly impossible odds. From there, the old Nokia-style mobile phone we had was supposed to point us in the direction of more areas to capture, but it wasn't the most inspiring of critical paths.

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XBOX ONE



GAME DETAILS

PUBLISHER
EA

DEVELOPER
EA Sports

GAME TYPE
Another FIFA Game

PLAYERS
1-22

DLC
No

ACHIEVEMENT DIFFICULTY
Moderate

NEED TO UNLOCK
Go For It [15G]

IN BRIEF

Another year, another *FIFA* game designed to dominate your time, wallet and attention. But with *PES 2016* stepping up its game, EA Sports finally has some competition for the title this year.

ALSO ON

XBOX 360



⊗ Critical changes to the pace and flow make *FIFA 16* feel like it's pushing against the engine limits.



⊗ *FIFA* is best enjoyed with friends, it's a game that seems to inspire and thrive with rivalries.



⊗ EA, why does the final hour of deadline day pass without the ability to confirm signings in Career Mode?



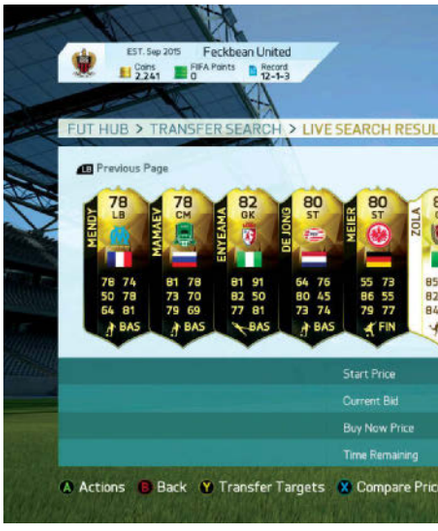
⊗ *FIFA* has always excelled at player likenesses, and that hasn't changed here.



TRENDING

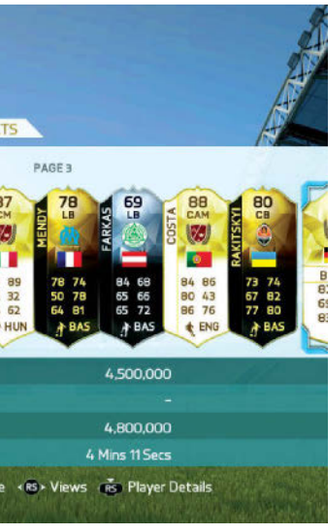
#MAKING STRIDES

■ The addition of women's international teams is fun, but the lack of integration into FUT or career mode makes it something of a half-arsed addition.









FIFA 16

easports.com/FIFA-16 /easportsfifa @EASPORTSFIFA

Benched following an unprecedented drop in form

FIFA is beginning to show its age faster than Robin van Persie draped in the devil's red. Aside from a handful of minor new features, additions and performance updates, there isn't a great deal in *FIFA 16* that sets it apart from its predecessor, let alone the competition. Which, we feel inclined to add, just got fiercer than ever thanks to a simply incredible turnaround from Konami with *PES 2016*.

That makes *FIFA 16* something of an incremental improvement, with some long-standing issues continuing to hold it back from being the best football game around. The upsetting reality is that this year's edition could (and should) have been a wonder goal for EA, but instead it forcefully hits the side netting. Preview builds revealed a general overhaul to the pace and flow of your typical game of *FIFA*; the best battles were found in midfield, shifting play was venomous to inattentive players and passes flowed across the pitch with an electrifying fluidity. So where, we scream into the void of heartless Sky Sports-style branding that's splashed across every inch of the game, is that version of *FIFA 16* to be found?

The intent and ambition is still there, hidden beneath an array of gameplay balances and the unavoidable restrictions of an ageing engine – before being further neutered to help draw attention to the handful of new on-field features. Let's be clear, despite its faults, *FIFA 16* is better than *FIFA 15*. Whether it's better than *PES 2016* is entirely debatable. The argument could be made that *FIFA* is for the Saturday afternoon pub-fans, while *PES* caters towards the fantasy football nerds. Looking for match day authenticity? *FIFA* has your back. For player authenticity, perhaps it's time to switch allegiances.

It's easy to complain about *FIFA*, but the subtle changes made to the dynamics in the EA Sports dressing room have had an important impact across the pitch. Ball control is tighter, limiting the amount of wayward passes. Keepers have been vastly improved over last year's travesty, with the player between the sticks more eager to make intelligent decisions and goal saving punches to create more of those classic *FIFA* 'leap-out-your-seat' moments. The presentation is also stunning – despite the truly vomitous soundtrack – with star players looking scarily accurate, stadiums looking rammed and the multitude of menus being intuitively cleaned up (for the most part, anyway).

> "Scoring a screamer will still have you up and dancing faster than Tay Swift's latest banger"

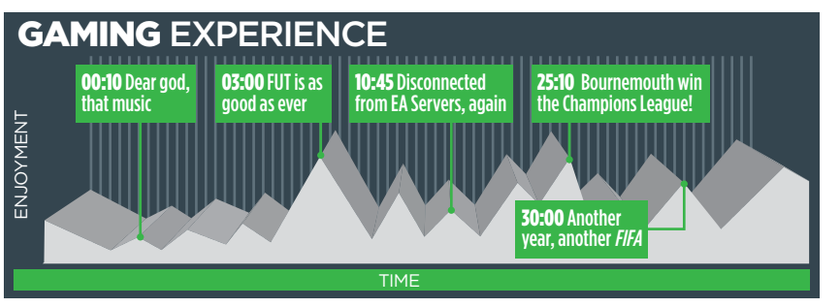
Where *FIFA* once again impresses with its looks, we all know that what's inside has to count for something. Sadly, there isn't a great deal of depth or new content to get truly excited over. Truth be told, without a little help from the tutorials constantly thrown down your throat from the second you boot the game up, you might struggle to define what's new and special about the game.

No-touch dribbling introduces the opportunity to dink and feint while in possession in an attempt to coax defenders into making early challenges but, truth be told, it won't have a huge impact on your style of play. Using pace, space and off-the ball runs is still the best way to break through the congested midfield battles. Drilled passes are a nice idea too, though the execution is lacking. Nailing balls diagonally, in theory, gives you the opportunity to switch play and open up midfield – not to mention an alternative to attempting to float a ball over – but the reality is you'll often find them being intercepted. The ball doesn't seem to move fast enough, and on the rare occasion it does make a connection, players often fumble it in the final third. Whether it's the limited player animations simply unable to receive the new passes, or a system in desperate need of a post-launch tweak, it wouldn't be such an issue but its inclusion has made regular passes feel weaker and through-balls woefully ineffective.

The lack of fluidity and response time in the final third has also impacted defenders, who seem to outpace and dispossess even the quickest and strongest forwards. If you want to exist in a world where Héctor Bellerín can outmuscle Diego Costa on the ball then be our guest, but this is where *FIFA*'s long-standing lack of player authenticity comes to the forefront. For all the work that's been done improving the defensive side of the game, with standing and slide tackles easier to recover from, it's disappointing to see big games essentially come down to whoever is fitter, instead of a stand off between strength, skill and speed.

Look, smashing in a goal is still as satisfying as ever. Scoring a 40-yard screamer will have you up and dancing around faster than Tay Swift's latest banger looping around on Radio One. Ultimate Team is still the greatest time-sink and microtransaction-integration ever introduced in a console game and career mode – whether you're taking Bradford to the Champions League or jumping straight in with (clearly the best team in the game) Arsenal to finally sign a new striker – is still a slick and investing experience. But ultimately *FIFA 16* is still *FIFA 15* with some core tweaks and forgettable new mechanics.

JOSH WEST



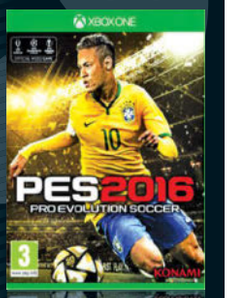
VERDICT

FIFA has *PES* beaten when it comes to attention to presentational detail and atmosphere, but maybe that isn't enough any more. For flowing football, though, you should look elsewhere.

X-ONE scored **7** for FIFA 16

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

XBOX ONE



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2016

www.pes.konami.com /PES @officialPES

Thus ends the plight of the lost generation

GAME DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
PES Productions

GAME TYPE
Soccer kickball-'em-up

PLAYERS
1-4

DLC
Free player update packs

ACHIEVEMENT DIFFICULTY
Easy

NEED TO UNLOCK
Won 6 in a row in Super Star (40G)

IN BRIEF

It's a football game, in which you kick balls with your feet while playing as some of the best and worst teams in the world. Come on, you know this – it's a 20-year-old series.

ALSO ON
XBOX 360

Immediately after kick-off, *PES 2016* clicks. It feels right, it plays smoothly and snappily, it gives us the chance to host epic tournaments in living rooms, bedrooms and offices around the world, and it's intensely satisfying. After waiting years to be able to say it – and mean it – we finally can: *PES* is back.

The *PES* series has suffered – the previous generation, starting with *PES 6* on the Xbox 360, never quite got its footing, struggling online and offering little in the face of stiff competition. It's sad and frustrating but we have to look to the now, and forget about that lost generation of could-have and should-have-beens. Because *PES 2016* comes out and acts as if none of that happened; as if we're back to the generation-before-last's superb soccer sims.

It's football, so you already know what to expect there. But if you've been avoiding *PES* for the past few years you might not know how it's been making big steps towards improvement. The change to Kojima Productions' FOX Engine makes for an attractive game, smooth animations and all that good stuff, but the past couple of years it wasn't backed up with the best footballing experience. *PES 2016*, however, has refined everything to a brilliant standard.

Passing is responsive and crisp, minute-to-minute play is superbly physical, defending is smooth and tactical while build-up play is as slow-paced and methodical or as nippy and lobbed-through-ball-y as you want it to be. It plays a damn good game of soccerball.

Modes throughout *PES* are at the very least satisfying, and in many cases they're outright brilliant fun. *PES 2016*'s

> "We're back to the generation-before-last's superb quality of soccer sims"

attempt at grabbing a bit of extra cash from you, MyClub, is perfectly possible to play through without paying a penny, and the fact you can develop player stats rather than just stick with what you have has a big impact on longevity. Then there's the zero microtransactions of the revamped Master League – building your world-conquering team from a bunch of (above-)average starter players is as compulsive and satisfying as it's ever been. Be a Pro also returns, mixing a hands-off version of Master League with the very personal journey of a player you create, from a 17-year-old riddled with potential to an overweight, lazy midfielder who can't be bothered running but still gets picked every week for Man Utd. Yes, we're making a joke about Anderson, deal with it. Basically, there's something here for everyone before you even step out on the pitch.

There are quirks and issues, some of which will surely be sorted by patches, but for the time being are present and annoying. Referees are intensely lenient towards fouling, meaning the AI often gets away with bloody murder. Having said that, you can get away with just as much, so it balances out, but it would be good to see more than two free kicks per match. There are also a few peculiarities, like players calling for a pass then proceeding to circle the player with the ball at their feet constantly, until receiving the pass they so desperately crave. It's weird, and while it doesn't affect much, it's worth pointing out.

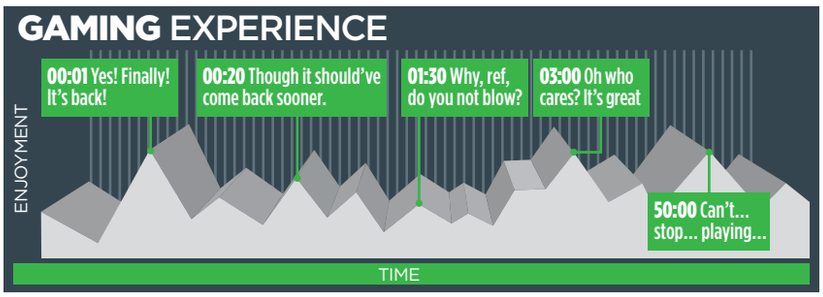
It's also impossible to overlook the fact that *PES 2016* still doesn't have much in the way of licenses. There are baby steps each year, with the Champions League and Europa League officially represented, while South American tournaments are shown off in all their samba-sporting glory (thanks to *PES* being the beloved soccer series throughout the continent), and a fair few players are spitting images of their real life counterparts. But it's not on a par with the competition, and there is a feeling of 'cheapness' about *PES 2016* that's hard to ignore, especially when it sits side-by-side with *FIFA 16*.

But there are two things that stand out in this regard: one, that you can edit and modify teams, kits and players as much as you like. So, while you sadly can't import kits or other information like you can in the PS4 version, you won't have to play as West Midlands Village or East Dorsetshire for long (that's Aston Villa and Bournemouth, for those wondering). The second thing is that... well, it doesn't matter, does it? We're retreading an argument from the pre-Xbox 360 era of *PES*, but it still rings true: looks and presentation aren't everything, and they pale into insignificance when the game plays this damn well.

PES 2016 isn't the most accurate representation of football out there – that award goes elsewhere, as it has for the past seven or so years. But it doesn't matter, because *PES 2016* is a fantastic *game*: it's superb fun to play; it's responsive and satisfying just to control; and it has that *feel* everyone struggles so hard to explain. It's so good to be saying this – and truly, honestly meaning it – *PES* is back. Welcome home, champ.

IAN DRANSFIELD

GAMING EXPERIENCE



VERDICT

Destiny might be dealing with taken Kings, but *PES* is more concerned with the return of the king. Finally, the great one is back – it looks cheap, but it plays exceptionally.

9

X-ONE scored **9** for
Pro Evolution Soccer 2016

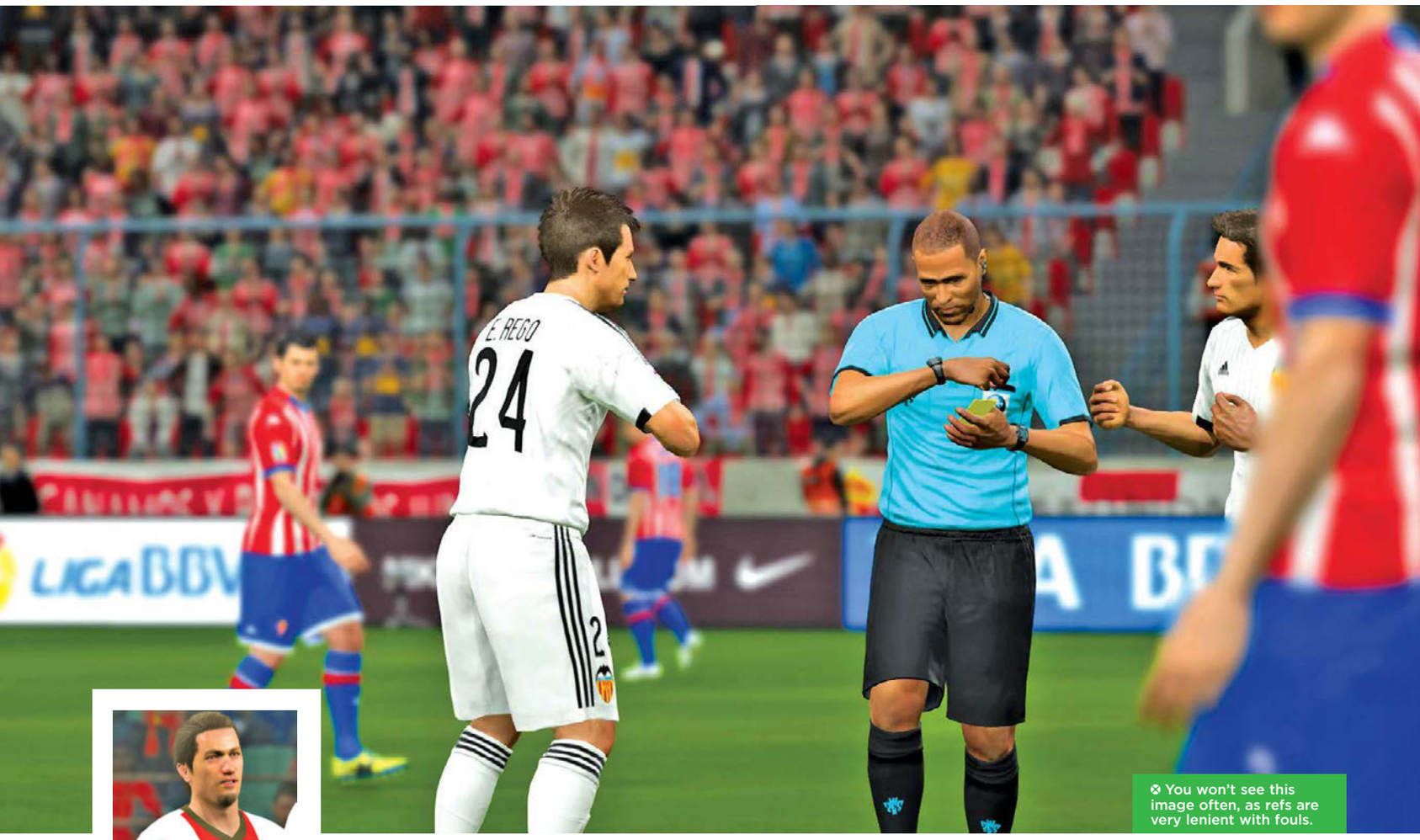
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Penalties are still the bane of many an English footballer's existence.



Shooting is crisp, powerful and produces a lot of jump-out-your-seat moments.

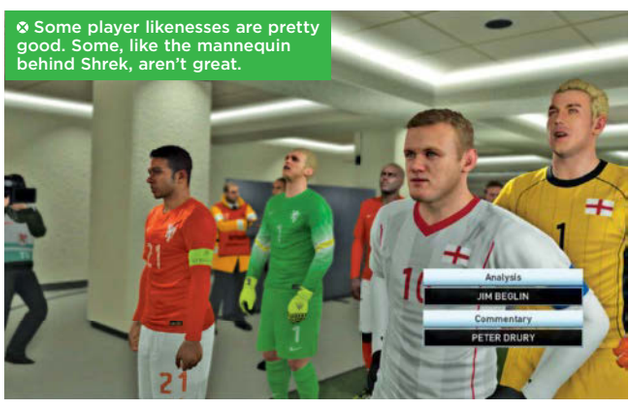


You won't see this image often, as refs are very lenient with fouls.

TRENDING

#HOLYCRAP IT'SBACK

FIFA is still great, but there's a certain section of football fans who'll no doubt be incredibly excited on social media about *PES*.



Some player likenesses are pretty good. Some, like the mannequin behind Shrek, aren't great.



The hilariously silly fake team names return, though you can edit pretty much everything§.

XBOX ONE



MINECRAFT STORY MODE

www.telltalegames.com/minecraftstorymode /minecraft @telltalegames

The hasty cash-in train? Nah, you missed that one

GAME DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Telltale Games

DEVELOPER
In-house

GAME TYPE
Blocky adventure, beat-'em-up

PLAYERS
1

DLC
Four further episodes, available individually or by purchasing season pass

ACHIEVEMENT DIFFICULTY
Easy

NEED TO UNLOCK
Leveraging Resources (20G)

IN BRIEF

The blocky builder's universe of *Minecraft* gets a makeover courtesy of episodic adventure game-makers Telltale

ALSO ON
XBOX 360

In the grand pantheon of things that annoy us about games, the hasty cash-in has to be the worst. It's cynical, preying on the devout fandom of those who love something more than life itself. It's bad, giving us a game that's been in development for about three weeks (slight exaggeration), released as a buggy, broken mess. It's frustrating, because it sells really well despite being awful.

Minecraft: Story Mode does not take a seat in this grand pantheon of cynics, cash-grabs and utter *bastardry*. What could very easily have been a licence fobbed off to 'that company which makes adventure games' has instead ended up being one of the biggest surprises of the year. In fact, *Minecraft: Story Mode* is nigh-on essential.

The basic setup will be familiar to anyone who's picked up a Telltale game since *The Walking Dead*: it's more focused on story than anything else; you choose what to say and it matters. You're also forced into difficult either/or decisions but there's not a huge amount of control. If you want a different game where you are in direct control of a character and there are barely any cutscenes, other games do exist. The rest of us should be happy with this, though.

Choosing your avatar from a selection of six, players make their way through *Story Mode* as main character Jesse – male or female, it's up to you, and both are fully voiced. From there you begin your adventure in the world of *Minecraft* – everything looks almost exactly as it does in the game, down to the low-fi animations (though some are a bit cleaned up to make things look better) and endless appearances of chickens.

> "Tonally, it's perfect. Stylistically, it's near-flawless (albeit still blocky). And design-wise, Story Mode is spot on"

To actually explain what goes on would be to ruin it, so we'll avoid details. Safe to say there's crafting, à la pure *Minecraft*, but only when explicitly directed; there's combat, with some actual real-time action at work; there's quick-time events, and for once they're not tedious; and there's plenty of well-written, genuinely funny comedy and action that ratchets up as you progress through this first episode.

Sometimes you're let loose to explore and interact with the world, but it's of limited scope – it's not the real thing, remember. But generally speaking it's hard to classify – *Story Mode* is a mix of a few different styles, and it genuinely all blends together really well. With a focus more on an all-ages crowd, we wouldn't expect to have to choose one friend or the other to die any time soon, but there are still some hard – and vaguely saddening – choices to be made from this opening salvo. Though fortunately we avoided giving the awesome Reuben, the pig, a black eye. Phew.

We didn't take our time through the first episode of *Story Mode*, and it by no means speaks for how long any of the follow-up episodes will last, but it's roughly about two hours. It took us one hour and 47 minutes to play through to be precise, but other reports are all around that magical double-hour figure.

That's actually a perfect amount of time to play through; the sort of thing you can complete in a single sitting, with the company of others joining in the decision-making process or just idly watching. And you know what? Those not holding the controller will be just as entertained as the person actually carrying out those inputs.

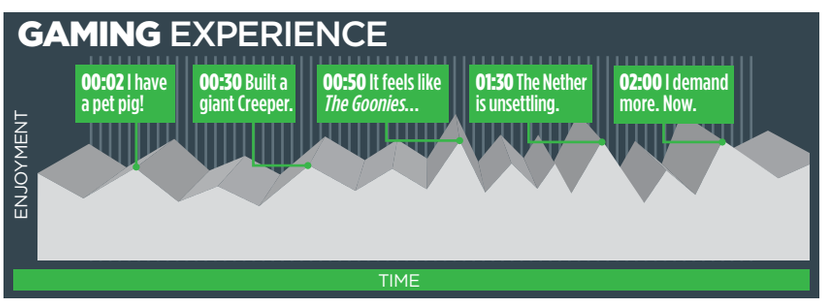
And there you see another triumph in Telltale's design of *Minecraft: Story Mode*. While it is fun to play alone, it's actually a game clearly designed with more than one person watching/involved in mind. Action sequences relying on individual skill do pop up, but they're far less frequent than those that can see input from other folks in the room – deciding what to say, what to do, what to interact with and so on. Previous Telltale games have felt like this, but it's never seemed to be so clearly designed with this element in mind until this *Minecraft* tie-in.

That's the big reason why *Minecraft: Story Mode* feels so fresh, even though it's following the basic template laid down by many other titles from the same developer: it's clear, concise and effective in its design. Rather than being a licence that has been handed off with strict limitations as to what can be done, or with the involvement of a creator who – however well-meaning – doesn't actually *do* videogames, Telltale and Mojang have clearly worked together on a huge amount of *Story Mode*.

Tonally, it's perfect. Stylistically, it's near-flawless (albeit still blocky). And design-wise, *Story Mode* is spot on. For a first episode to hit the ground running like this is a huge surprise, and for us to be looking forward to the next four episodes as much as we are is totally unexpected.

IAN DRANSFIELD

GAMING EXPERIENCE



VERDICT

Minecraft fans will adore it, Telltale fans will love it, those who like neither might find something to enjoy, and those who like both will literally explode with joy.



X-ONE scored **9** for
Minecraft: Story Mode

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



You don't see a lot of the game like this, but this is the central element: exploring and interacting with... things.



Your gang changes in size and actual members – depending on choices made – but every character is interesting and fleshed out.

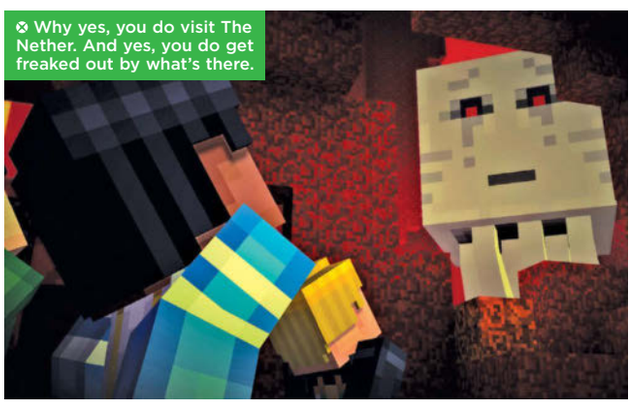


Reuben is Jesse's pig friend. You will immediately fall in love with your porcine chum.

TRENDING

#BILLYWESTFORKING

■ *Story Mode*'s voice-acting pool is varied, talented and – sometimes – surprisng. Also it features Billy West: the greatest of all.



Why yes, you do visit The Nether. And yes, you do get freaked out by what's there.



This is not one of Telltale's famous 'choice' moments, but it might give you an idea of what to expect...

XBOX ONE



GAME DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
Vicarious Visions

GAME TYPE
Adventure racing game

PLAYERS
1-2

DLC
Physical, in the form of characters, vehicles and racing packs, priced £12.99-£34.99

ACHIEVEMENT DIFFICULTY
Easy

NEED TO UNLOCK
Chicken Bites (20G)

IN BRIEF

The popular toys-to-life franchise which plays like a child-friendly version of *Diablo* is back for another yearly instalment, and this time it's brought plastic vehicles that aren't very good.

ALSO ON

XBOX 360



As with previous *Skylanders* games, the puzzles are relatively basic and offer no real challenge.



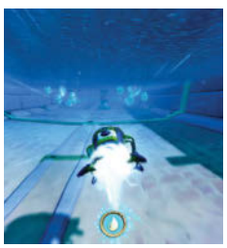
SuperChargers would be so much better if the racing sections didn't exist.



There are some nice levels, like when you leap into a story book to continue your adventure.



Skystones has been suitably upgraded and remains a very entertaining minigame.



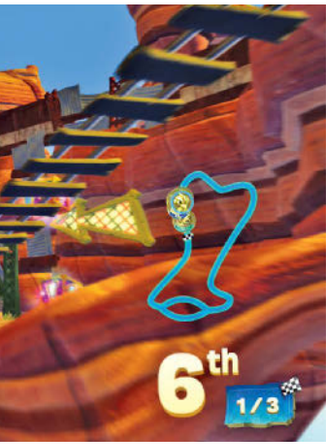
TRENDING

#SINKING SKYLANDERS

It's amazing to think that the developers thought poorly-designed sea levels would make for good gameplay.



Do yourselves a favour and steer clear of the water sections, they're the weakest part of the game.



SKYLANDERS SUPERCHARGERS

www.skylanders.com/video-games/skylanders-SuperChargers /SkylandersGame @SkylandersGame

Back with another new gimmick

So this is an indication that the toys-to-life bubble is preparing to burst. After all, can parents really support *Skylanders*, *Disney Infinity* and *Lego Dimensions*? It's an answer we honestly can't give, but what we do know is that if Activision wants to stay on top it's going to have to try a lot harder than this year's mediocre entry to the Skylanders franchise.

We've no problem that *Skylanders SuperChargers* involves a gigantic gimmick, because every single game in the series has revolved around them. Giants, trapping creatures, swappable body parts... it's all good – and it's not a problem because the yearly gimmick is normally integrated into the *Diablo*-lite gameplay well. This year, however, is the first time that we've seen it hold back the actual game.

Vehicles sounds like a great idea for the Skylanders brand but they're about as welcome as a punch to the gut that's been delivered by a giant wearing knuckle-dusters. The car that comes with the base set handles poorly, has no real weight to it and just isn't fun to drive. While some of the track ideas are inventive – riding along the back of a dragon is a particular highlight – they're incredibly boring in their design, offering no challenge whatsoever. Equally disappointing are the new arena-like areas that allow you to tear around in your new vehicles to complete objectives. The controls here are the same as they are for traditional *Skylanders* and, as a result, feel a little weird. It doesn't help that two players have to share a vehicle in co-op too, meaning the person controlling the firing gets the short straw.

As uninteresting as the land vehicles in *SuperChargers* are, they're still far more fun to drive than the air and water variants that are available as additional purchases. The plane sections are relatively enjoyable, although they suffer from twitchy controls and some dull missions, but it's the water vehicles that are the real disappointment. They're incredibly clunky to control, have the most simplistic and joyless missions and just aren't fun. Yes there's an additional game mode in the form of a *Mario Kart*-style racing game, but the track selection is limited to whatever vehicles you've purchased and they again suffer from lacklustre design. When you consider that half of the game is devoted to racing and driving you begin to realise what a wasted opportunity *SuperChargers* is.

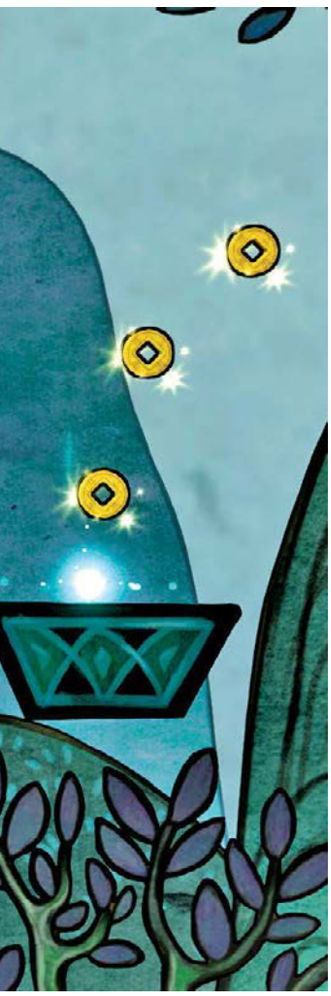
> "While some of the track ideas are inventive, they're incredibly boring in their design, offering no challenge whatsoever"

And that really is a pity, because once you get over the disappointment of all the new vehicles you begin to realise that this is arguably one of the most inventive additions to the series yet. Initially the stage design is every bit as bland as the new vehicles, but once you get to the Land Of The Undead, things really begin to pick up. Its levels take on an Escher-like design with portals leading to closed off areas where you fight upside down and defy gravity as you retrieve keys and pummel baddies. It's a great addition to the series and even starts to stretch the old grey matter a little, as it doesn't feel as linear as previous games. Later stages shrink you down in size and have you avoiding gigantic oversized feet; turn you into a Godzilla-like behemoth and let you loose on equally oversized monsters, and even turn you into a living magnet, where you have the ability to push and pull doors to navigate the labyrinth-styled mazes you find yourself in.

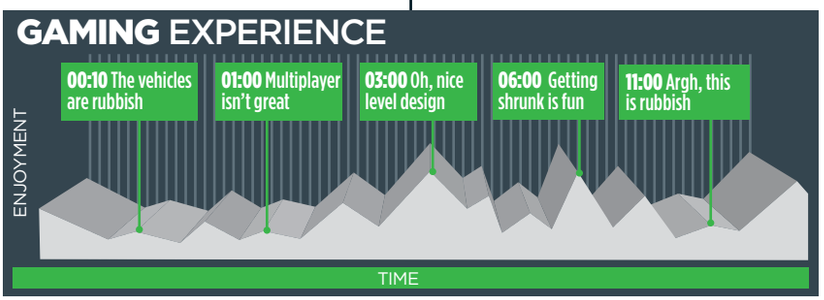
While the inventive level design really elevates this half of *Skylanders*, it's also highlights just how poor the rest of *SuperChargers* is and you'll find yourself wishing that the pointless vehicles were dropped in favour of more of these clever stages. Even though *SuperChargers* feels far more inventive than previous games in the series it's also a lot easier and its overall lack of challenge means it won't be too long until you've completed the ten hour-plus adventure. Of course, there's still plenty to do once the game is completed, but you'll need to have the additional vehicles in order to fully complete the game. *Skylanders* has always felt cynical in the way it pushes new tat on kids, but it feels brazen this time and it fares poorly against the integration seen in *Disney Infinity 3.0*.

SuperChargers is definitely the weakest game in the series but it isn't a total disaster. The Skystones minigame returns and is far better, the ability to customise vehicles is a nice touch, the hub is far easier to navigate and offers a surprising amount to do and it's finally possible to play online, which ensures you always have someone to play with. Finally, the backwards compatibility is as good as ever, with all your previous *Skylanders* working perfectly with the new toys. But, despite the inventiveness on offer, there's no doubt that the popular series feels like it's starting to run out of steam.

DARRAN JONES







VERDICT

Yes, it has some inventive level design and the ability to play online is welcome, but the vehicle sections really drag this latest *Skylanders* down. It's a disappointing addition to the series.

X-ONE scored **6** for Skylanders SuperChargers

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

XBOX ONE



TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 5

www.tonyhawkvideogame.com /TonyHawkGames @TonyHawkGames

What a grind

GAME DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
Robomodo

GAME TYPE
Skateboarding

PLAYERS
1-20

DLC
Free pack containing two new stages and five extra skaters announced. Release TBC

ACHIEVEMENT DIFFICULTY
Moderate

NEED TO UNLOCK
...Really? (10G)

IN BRIEF

A supposed return to the roots of the *Tony Hawk's* series, *Pro Skater 5* tries to combine fast gameplay, rapid point scoring and crazy challenges with colourful level and character design

ALSO ON
XBOX 360

No pun intended, but we were really game for this one. *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 5*. Imagine that! After all these years, and all these sports games like *Forza* and *Skate* edging closer to realism, we'd finally have a return to playfulness and flair. Do you remember the old *Tony Hawk's* games? Do you remember how breezy and accessible and fun there were, how you could just flip them on, jump in, muck around with some combos whilst listening to great music? Remember the level builder? Remember Ollie the Magic Bum, the school level, the Alcatraz shopping cart challenge? Remember the funny bail videos and unlocking Jango Fett? Remember all that? Yeah? Do you?

Well that's all dead. It's all dead, son. *THPS 5* is so knackered, so broken down and disappointing, that from now on whenever you want to talk about how good the *Pro Skater* series is, you'll have to remember to add a modifier: "except for the fifth one". It's a blemish on an otherwise pleasant memory. It's like your dad got drunk at your sister's wedding: "Oh, we had a lovely day, except when Gary hit that bloke in the car park". We really were game for *Tony Hawk's 5* , but rather than a triumphant return to form, it feels like a bitter epitaph.

It's the glitches. In the world of modern videogames, where writing, performance and real artistic intent are moving closer and closer to the foreground, you have to be a bit of a boring sod to get hung up on things like frame-rate and texture pop-in. But *Tony Hawk's 5* essentially doesn't work. In the middle of a trick, your skater might simply, inexplicably, just fall off his board, ending your combo chain and forcing you to retry a challenge. Level assets like ramps and rails, for example, seemingly pop in and out of existence. Characters can fall through floors and solid walls. The music cuts out randomly. You can't move up and down in the menus. Most infuriating of all though, the game will sometimes seemingly just go 'Oh, bollocks to it' and quit by itself, returning back to the main menu. You can't blame *Tony Hawk's 5* for just giving up like that – it must be really hard for this game to look at itself in the mirror without breaking down into tears.

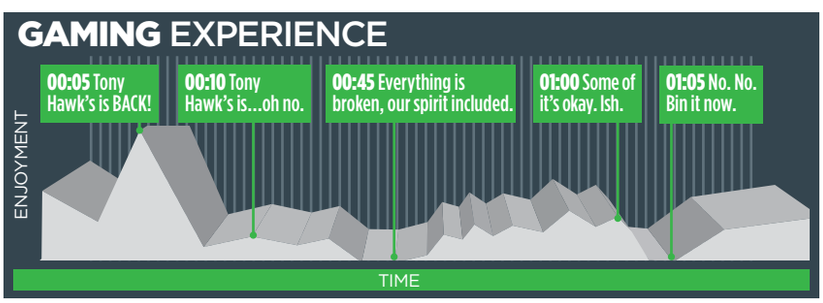
> "Despite our initial enthusiasm, this is one franchise revival the world just didn't need"

And then there are all these weird niggles, bits of unfinished videogame that feel as if they haven't been sanded off in time for release. If you enter a level, you can select challenges by riding up to flashing goal markers and holding down X. However, you can also access them, straight away, by just going into the pause menu and scrolling down. Why have both systems? It seems as if there was only meant to be one way – the markers or the menu – but Robomodo wasn't given enough time to decide on which method it wanted to keep. Lack of time, actually, seems to be the main problem. Aside from a general absence of polish, *Tony Hawk's 5* feels incredibly dead and incomplete, comprising small, unimaginative levels and a lot of repeating challenges and assets. You'll spend a lot of the game racing through floating rings. You'll spend even more completing idle high-score challenges. There's a touch of humour here and there (in some goals, if you don't keep landing tricks, your skater's head will explode) but it feels desperate and shoehorned, an arbitrary touch of absurdity just to try and liven things up. In Robomodo's defence, the old *Tony Hawk's* games did this as well – a lot of *Pro Skater 5*'s weakest moments are just following franchise tradition. Maybe, despite our initial enthusiasm for *Pro Skater 5*, this is one franchise revival the world just didn't need.

Even the addition of up to 19 friends in multiplayer doesn't liven things up. In fact when played online, *THPS 5* is even worse. Your characters move so sluggishly and the controls are so unresponsive that it's impossible to really 'play' together – when you go online, instead of you and your pal joining forces to finish challenges, you just get two people falling over endlessly, and glitching through the floor, instead of one. It's a mess. The whole game's a bloody mess. It's not just the technical foibles, the dead levels and the malfunctioning, intrusive menus, it's the very idea of doing a *Pro Skater 5* in the first place. We love nostalgia in videogames. We relish the opportunity to go back to our childhood. But in the same way Pogs, *Digimon* and Smash Mouth would seem ridiculous in 2015, what worked back then doesn't necessarily work now; *Pro Skater* was perhaps best left in the videogame scrap book. Without question, Robomodo and Activision have blown it, and this could have been much, *much* better, but it can't have been an easy idea to work with in the first place. We can all agree now, surely, to leave *Tony Hawk*'s in the past.

EDWARD SMITH

GAMING EXPERIENCE



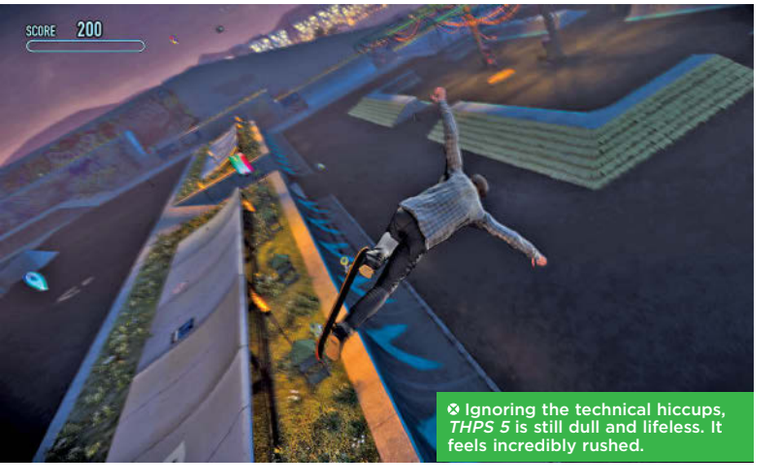
VERDICT

Despite some noble efforts to take *Tony Hawk's* back to its roots, *Pro Skater 5* is ruined by glitches, sluggish movement and dull, lifeless levels. What might have been a glorious return ends up an unfortunate swan song.

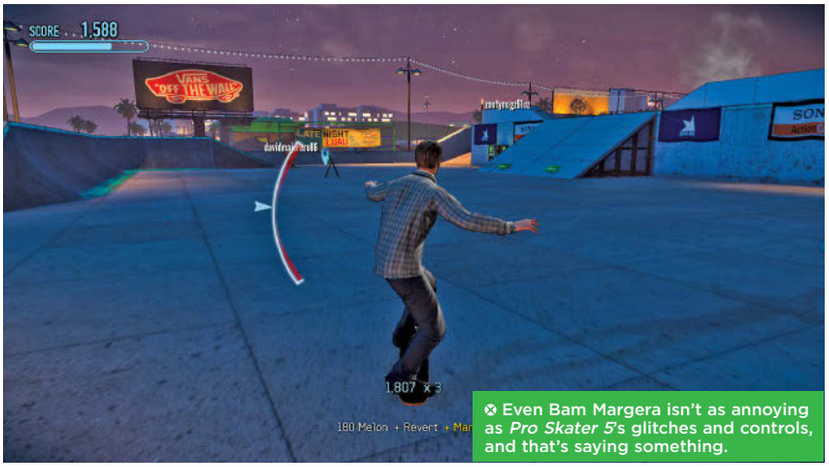
3

X-ONE scored **3** for
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 5

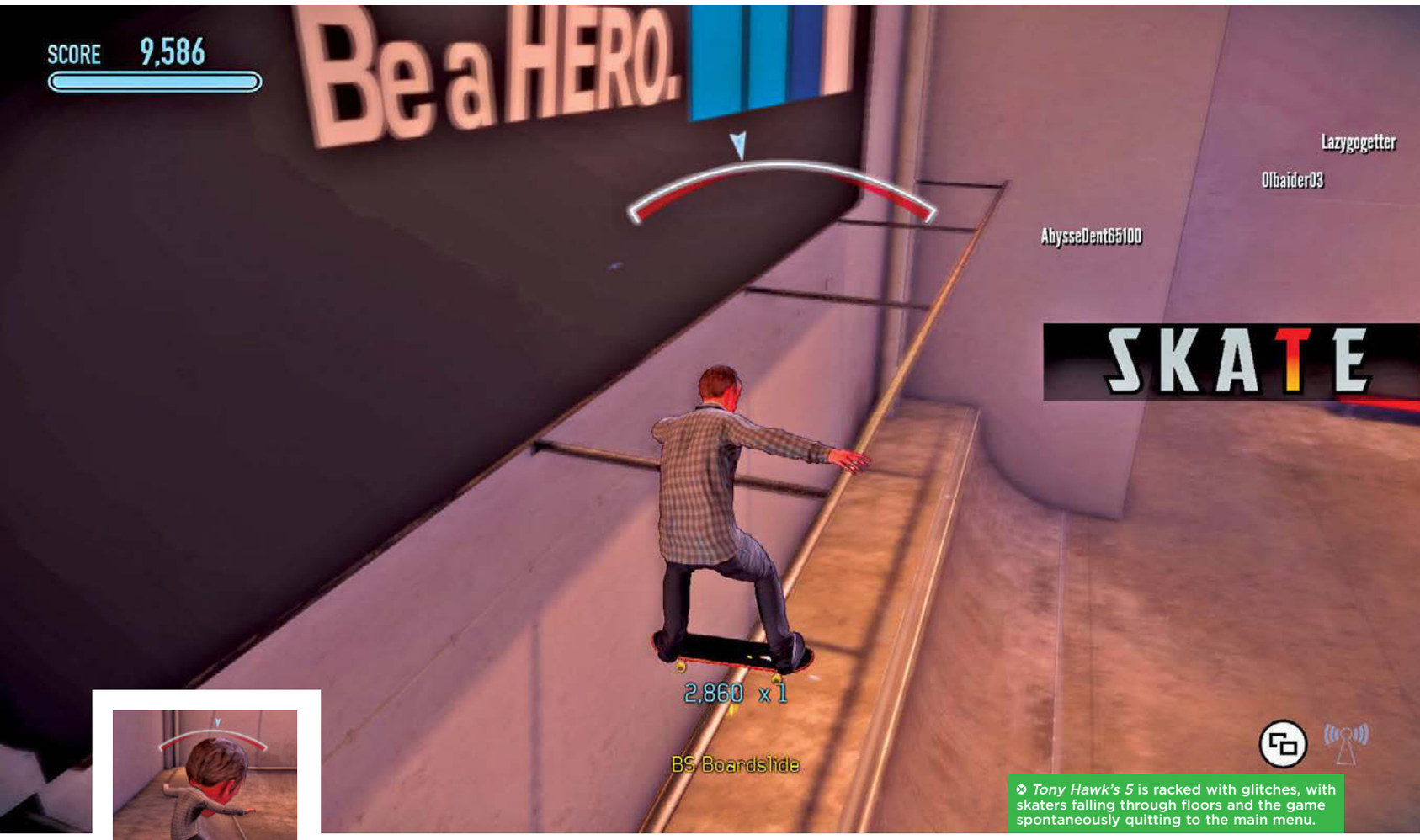
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⊗ Ignoring the technical hiccups, *THPS 5* is still dull and lifeless. It feels incredibly rushed.



⊗ Even Bam Margera isn't as annoying as *Pro Skater 5*'s glitches and controls, and that's saying something.



⊗ *Tony Hawk's 5* is racked with glitches, with skaters falling through floors and the game spontaneously quitting to the main menu.

TRENDING

#LIFESAGLITCH

■ **Forget *Tony Hawk's* crazy, colourful challenges – it's the outlandish glitches and technical hiccups that are begging to go viral.**



⊗ Some of the game's challenges are classic *Hawk's*, but the sluggish controls stop them being fun.



⊗ Robomodo and Activision have done a bad job, but *THPS* was probably best left in the past in the first place.

XBOX ONE



GAME DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Warner Bros.

DEVELOPER
Traveller's Tales

GAME TYPE
Toys-to-life

PLAYERS
1-2

DLC
Extra characters, levels and hubs unlock when you buy more themed packs

ACHIEVEMENT DIFFICULTY
Medium

NEED TO UNLOCK
Na na na na na na na upgrades! (25G)

IN BRIEF

The evil Lord Vortech seeks to bring together the powerful Foundational Elements, in order to merge all the universes under his control. Heroes like Batman, Gandalf, Wyldstyle, Homer Simpson, the Doctor and many more join forces from across the universes to stop him.

ALSO ON

XBOX 360



⊗ The characters are voiced flawlessly, and when a new one appears through a Gateway they deliver a natty one-liner.



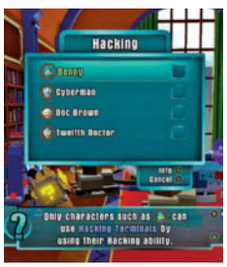
⊗ The Gateway adds a whole new element to the puzzling, and it's a really welcome change.



⊗ The voice cast is ridiculous. Michael J Fox, Elizabeth Banks, Peter Capaldi, Chris Pratt and Liam Neeson all reprise previous roles.



⊗ Here, Wyldstyle rides the Batmobile over to a *Portal* puzzle in a Riddler-controlled Minas Tirith. Still with us?



TRENDING

#TOTHEBANK

■ With extra character and vehicle packs costing anywhere from £17 to £30, Warner Bros. must be raking it in.



⊗ £80 may seem expensive, but there are a *lot* of hours of content included in the base game pack.



LEGO DIMENSIONS

www.lego.com/dimensions /LEGODimensions @LEGODimensions

Break the bank and watch Gandalf rebuild it as the Batmobile





LEGO Dimensions is one of two things. It's either the best *LEGO* game Travellers Tales has ever made, or it's the worst money-grab that Travellers Tales has ever made. Which is it? That depends entirely on you and what you want from the game.

Let's make this clear right from the start: this game can be goddamn expensive. We're talking hundreds of pounds, oh-my-god-why-are-there-so-many-toys kind of expensive. If you want to complete every part of the main game, including all the collectibles and gold bricks, you'll need to spend 80 quid on top of the base set at the very least to buy the extra characters and vehicles that are needed to open new areas and unearth the collectibles.

Unlike the other games in the series – in which you could 'buy' characters using the studs you collected and then use them on any level that you revisited – now you have to physically buy them. Using real-life cash... that you collected through doing your day job. That's going to rankle some players, but it's worth noting that you can complete the entirety of the story campaign – and get 1000 gamerscore, if that's your thing – without buying another character or vehicle toy.

Nevertheless, when you're playing through a level, it can become frustrating. You see a section that requires a different character, and rather than thinking 'I'll come back to that later!' you'll instead check the price of the character on Amazon. £29? Wow. Okay, maybe I'll manage without that collectible...

But, having said all that, there's no doubt in our minds that this *is* the best *LEGO* game we've played yet. The format remains pretty much identical to the older games in the series, and you can expect to be running around levels smashing everything to bits, building things and solving puzzles just like you have many times before. But the LEGO Gateway, which is what you place the toys upon to make them appear on-screen, takes the puzzles to a whole new level. Before, you would punch stuff, build stuff, and then use a specific character's skill to open up the next area. In *Dimensions*, Travellers Tales has done what no toys-to-life game has managed before by making the portal part of the puzzle.

> "The best way to enjoy this game is, without a doubt, for a parent and child to sit down together"

As you progress through the game, your Gateway gains new features. For example, early on you find switches that make your characters glow a certain colour when you run over them. Above a door you'll see a small diagram that looks *just like* the Gateway, with each section a different colour. Interesting... You take Batman and run onto the red switch. The Gateway, sitting in front of you, flashes and the section that Batman is standing on changes colour. It's red! But that doesn't match the diagram. So you pick up Batman and put him on the right section, and that goes red too. Now you switch to Wyldstyle, colour her blue, and move her to the left area. Gandalf turns yellow and takes the last spot and boom – door open. It's simple, but *brilliant*.

This is just one example – in later levels there are up to five different powers on offer, and in some puzzles you will need to use every one of them, in the right order, to get through the door. Which brings us onto our next point neatly: this game is not easy.

The puzzles require far more brain power than we've seen in previous *LEGO* games. For older gamers, this isn't a bad thing – the extra challenge is good fun. But for parents picking this up for their children to play alone, it may well be too tough. The best way to enjoy this game is, without a doubt, for a parent and child to sit down together. The parents can enjoy the tougher puzzles, and have fun helping their kids work out how to solve them. The kids will enjoy not only the game itself, but the mixing of characters and universes (which works fantastically), the writing (which is excellent, and is delivered by a stellar cast) and the fact that they will be able to play with actual LEGO when the game is switched off.

And that's worth bearing in mind, too; the game is expensive, but you have to remember that you are also getting real, useable LEGO characters and vehicles that you and any children in your house can enjoy. You need to put the characters together before you put them on the podium, and the vehicles have instruction booklets within the game – we'd forgotten how fun it is to build LEGO.

Perhaps that's why we think there are two ways to describe this game. We loved the building side of things, we loved the gameplay and puzzles the Gateway brings, and we loved the characters that pop up (GLaDOS, Doc Brown and the Ghostbusters are just a few of our many favourites). But not being able to collect everything without breaking the bank will annoy some. Whether or not you can deal with this annoyance and still enjoy the brilliant game hidden beneath it – that's the dealbreaker.

STEPHEN ASHBY

GAMING EXPERIENCE



VERDICT

There is so much to love about *LEGO Dimensions;* clever design decisions, an excellent script and some real standout moments. But that paywall will either kill your bank account, or frustrate you.

7

X-ONE scored **7** for LEGO Dimensions

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

XBOX ONE



GAME DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Team17

DEVELOPER
Mouldy Toof Studios

GAME TYPE
RPG

PLAYERS
1

DLC
N/A

ACHIEVEMENT DIFFICULTY
Moderate

NEED TO UNLOCK
On The Move (50G)

IN BRIEF

Prison escape sim The Escapists meets hit comic book and TV series The Walking Dead in an attempt to repeat the success Telltale had with its adaptation of the same series.



"Doing laundry as Rick Grimes is something no Walking Dead fan has ever had a desire to do"

Survivors occasionally spout a random line of dialogue that will make sense to anyone familiar with *The Walking Dead*, but it doesn't add anything to the game.

THE ESCAPISTS THE WALKING DEAD

www.team17.com /Team17 @MouldyToof

Lock it up and throw away the key

With any crossover, what you want is for the two constituent parts to enhance each other in some way. The problem with *The Escapists: The Walking Dead* is that, if anything, it does the opposite.

One of the great things about *The Escapists* was that there was always an element of creativity to it. In trying to escape prison, you might disguise yourself as a guard, escape through a vent, or dig a hole through your cell wall. You might even adapt your approach based on the items that happened to come your way. Compare that to a scenario in this game based on the Greene Family Farm where your primary objective is to clear out the zombies in the barn. There's only one way to do that: equip yourself and your followers with weapons and armour, and level up your stats. You're no longer coming up with your own plan and going about finding a way to execute it, you're simply passing time until you've found the items and hit the requisite numbers the game has decided you need to follow the pre-defined narrative of the series the game has to remain loyal to.

What we are getting at here is that the structure of what was a prison escape sim just doesn't translate well into a game based on *The Walking Dead*. Take the monotonous routine the game forces you to adhere to. In *The Escapists*, the prison setting not only made the strict routine make sense, but there was something appealing in trying to subvert it. You nominally followed the rules, but only in order to avoid the guards' attention while you, for example, exploited laundry duty to steal a guard uniform. In *The Escapists: The Walking Dead*, you're just doing laundry as Rick Grimes, and we guarantee that's something no *Walking Dead* fan has ever had a desire to do. Following morning roll call, performing chores, and other such tasks, are justified as a means of keeping the zombie threat level low, but it's transparently there because that's the structure of *The Escapists*, so it had to be shoehorned into the game.

We enjoyed *The Escapists*, even though we failed to escape its harder prisons. The only thing that can't be escaped in this game is the fact that awkwardly twisting its structure around *The Walking Dead* has made it a lot less fun to play.

PAUL WALKER-EMIG

VERDICT

It's not awful, but splicing these two series together adds no value for fans of either one. It is both an inferior *Walking Dead* game and an inferior *Escapists*.

4 X-ONE scored **4** for The Escapists: The Walking Dead

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

XBOX ONE



EXTREME EXORCISM

www.extremeexorcism.com /goldenrubygames @goldenrubygames

I ain't afraid of my ghost

GAME DETAILS

PUBLISHER **Ripstone**

DEVELOPER **Golden Ruby Games**

GAME TYPE **2D platform brawler**

PLAYERS **1-4**

DLC **N/A**

ACHIEVEMENT DIFFICULTY **Medium**

NEED TO UNLOCK **It's A Party! (50g)**

IN BRIEF

An arcade brawler with its heart pointed squarely at the 16-bit games of old, you play a bunch of exorcists who attempt to rid a haunted house of its spectral squatters by using swords, sub-machineguns and rocket launchers.

After all these years of overcoming increasingly tough AI and outflanking online players with near god-like reflexes, NYC-based indie studio Golden Ruby Games poses one last dastardly (and rather existential) challenge: can you beat *you*? That's the central spooky hook behind its latest offering, *Extreme Exorcism*, and it makes for one of the most engaging but frustrating games to arrive on Xbox One.

A love letter to the single-screen 16-bit classics of yesteryear, *EE* punts you, screaming, into a haunted house and tasks you with banishing a bunch of gun-toting ghosts back into the void. And of course, like any exorcist worth their salt, you're also packing plenty of heat – instead of Bibles and holy water, expect swords, harpoon guns and plenty of rocket launchers. You can even wield three of these implements of death at once, adding a nasty barrage of customisable destruction to encounters.

However, after successfully completing a round you'll find that one of your spectral foes has taken on some of your platforming and death-dealing habits. Did you spend most of your time camping on a high ledge waiting to pop a harpoon through a phantom noggin? If so, you'll find said ghoulish villain infringing your tactical copyright in the very next round.

It's a mechanic that shines brightest in single-player or co-op, especially during the Arcade mode that splits said haunted abode into ten areas (with five levels a piece). Each level is divided into rounds that run indefinitely, with the aim to score enough points to unlock the next one. With more ghosts added to the mix with each successive round, and the random generation of weapons around each map, there's an addictive risk/reward factor as you make a bid for a tasty gun while your old self is spraying fire like a madman.

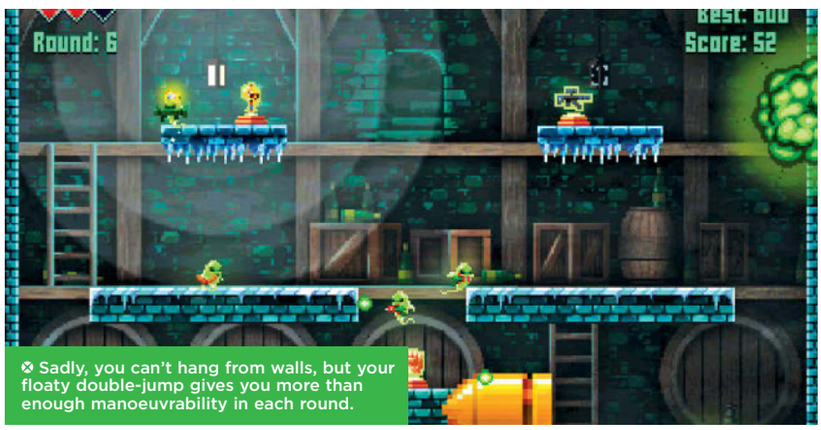
Unfortunately, in the realm of *EE*'s local-only multiplayer Deathmatch mode (which supports up to four players), that central player-mimicking gimmick tends to get a little lost in the mix. As a straight-up free-for-all brawler it works just fine, but with three other players unleashing bullet hell in a bid to be the last exorcist standing, the benefit of that ghostly imitator is rendered inert by so many players on screen.

There's plenty of content here to keep you coming back for more, including a 50 mission-strong Challenge mode that adds tricky stipulations onto a match, but it's the exponential riot of the centrepiece Arcade offering that'll steal most of your time. It's just a shame its couchplay-friendly multiplayer fails to capitalise on the spooky hook that works so well elsewhere.

DOM RESEIGH-LINCOLN



A pair of rather handy angel wings conjure a pink-tinged black hole that kills any nearby ghosts while granting temporary invulnerability.



Sadly, you can't hang from walls, but your floaty double-jump gives you more than enough manoeuvrability in each round.

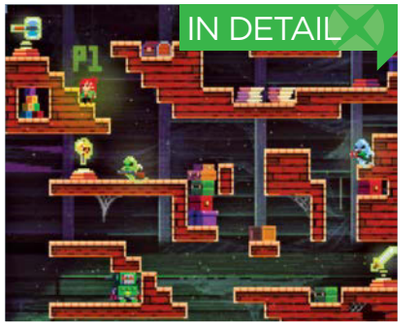
VERDICT

A paranormal platformer that enables you to hunt your own ghost? Yes, please. Just don't expect to be blown away by its competent but unfortunately forgettable local multiplayer component.

7 X-ONE scored **7** for Extreme Exorcism

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

IN DETAIL



WE LIKE TO MOVE IT

Each level is full of platforms that move and dangerously placed weapon pads, adding an extra layer of depth and danger.

XBOX ONE



GAME DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Focus Home Interactive

DEVELOPER
Cyanide

GAME TYPE
High fantasy American football

PLAYERS
1-2

DLC
Extra, expensive races

ACHIEVEMENT DIFFICULTY
Easy

NEED TO UNLOCK
Favour of the Amethyst College (50G)

IN BRIEF

A turn-based take on Games Workshop's pastiche of American football, made with a lot of knowledge and love for the source material. That statement alone should tell you whether or not you'll be interested.



The commentary ranges from annoying to actually quite funny... though it's mainly the former.

BLOOD BOWL 2

www.bloodbowl-game.com /bloodbowlgame @BloodBowl_Game

The gaming tradition of making sports more violent continues

You might look at *Blood Bowl 2* and see something exciting and *vital*; a game that evokes the visceral thrills of *Speedball 2* and dredges up long lost memories of *Brutal Sports Football*. American football with the violence amped up, littered with the fantasy creations of the *Warhammer* universe – it's a great mix, and the sort of thing you can allow the nerdiest part of your brain to get excited about. So it's a shame that this turn-based take on Games Workshop's gridiron pastiche is so very slow – and with that, often dull.

What *Blood Bowl 2* gets right sits firmly in the camp of 'things that are better than last time around'. Presentation goes from *awful* to good; there's a tutorial in the campaign mode, so you can have half an idea of what's happening; tweaks have been made to make underlying systems clearer and heavier on the feedback. Generally speaking, it's a sequel that has very much learned from the mistakes of its forebear.

Such a shame, then, that the core action we're left with doesn't ignite much passion in casual GW fans. Taking turns in each match, dodging and blocking, smashing skulls and lobbing passes, is a slow, laborious task with little excitement. While it's great to now know how much of a chance each move has – do you risk running within blocking range of that ork, with a 64 per cent chance of avoiding the tackle? – the whole routine of selecting, confirming, double-confirming and watching things play out takes *way* longer than it has any right to, even when you skip the close-up cutscenes.

When it gets things right, *Blood Bowl 2* is good fun. Strategically, the game nails the fundamentals – you have to think, plan, execute and take chances when they present themselves to be successful. Random elements, like crowd riots, bring in a lottery effect; generally speaking if you sit down and think, you're rewarded with a good performance. It's odd how few strategy games actually do that.

Given a bit more trimming of the fat, a whole host of fixes to make the game useable by mere humans and a move to make things more 'game-y', *Blood Bowl 2* could have been excellent. For the time being, though, it'll have to remain firmly in the territory of one for the fans – and the non-fans who don't mind everything being... so... very... slow.

IAN DRANSFIELD

VERDICT

If you're patient and able to get your head around a challenging set of rules, there's fun to be had with *Blood Bowl 2*. Otherwise it's one that's only going to appeal when you're in the right mood.

6

X-ONE scored **6** for Blood Bowl 2

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

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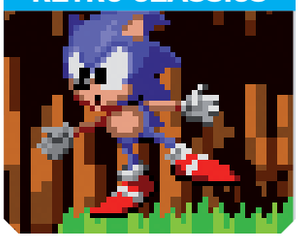
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PRO TIPS
The ultimate guide to *Halo 5*'s Warzone mode

LIVE
Our full review of *Destiny: The Taken King*

SOCIAL
Josh and Steve argue over *Assassin's Creed*

IN-DEPTH
Zombies return in *Dying Light: The Following*

DLC
The Witcher's massive DLC leads the charge

HIGHLIGHT
We pick ten of the best female protagonists



EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW...

HALO 5 GUARDIANS' WARZONE

GET SET FOR HALO'S BIGGEST MULTIPLAYER MODE WITH THESE KILLER TIPS AND HINTS

Warzone is *Halo*'s future. Multiplayer has always been a giant part of the *Halo* experience, but 343 Industries has really taken it to the next level. Sure, Arena is fun for those times you want to get together with three other friends and flex your True Skill abilities, but Warzone is where you'll want to be for the ultimate in big team-battling. 24 Spartans face off across giant battlegrounds, fighting over objectives and home bases, all while AI-controlled Prometheans and Covenant forces drop in, looking to cause a little extra chaos for good measure. It can, admittedly, be difficult to get your head around to begin with. With Warzone's own dedicated levelling system, shifting objectives, boss battles, escalating loadout options and supercharged Spartans to think about, the balance of power and superiority can shift strikingly quickly. But we've got you covered – join **X-ONE** as we break down the Warzone basics and reveal the content you can expect to find, and follow our handy tips and tricks to get straight into the battle right now, so you can start dominating those leaderboards right off the bat. Good luck, Spartan. You're going to need it.

KNOW THE BASICS

Warzone drops 24 Spartans, split into two teams of 12, together through matchmaking. The first team to score 1000 points or destroy the enemy team's core wins. Points can be earned by defeating players, killing the AI-controlled enemies patrolling the map, completing objectives, as well as capturing and defending bases. You'll also earn Energy Points throughout the 15-minute games for kills and assists, which can then be spent to call in better weapons and vehicles at REQ Stations.



THE CONTROLS



Thanks to an array of new Spartan Abilities that are being introduced into *Halo 5: Guardians*, the traditional *Halo* controls are being altered to accommodate powers such as the Spartan Slide, Charge and Ground Pound. You'll want to commit this to memory as quickly as possible; so much of the *Halo* multiplayer experience is defined by your quick reactions and ability to rely on that muscle memory you'll develop over hours of post-launch *Halo* action.

MATCHMAKING



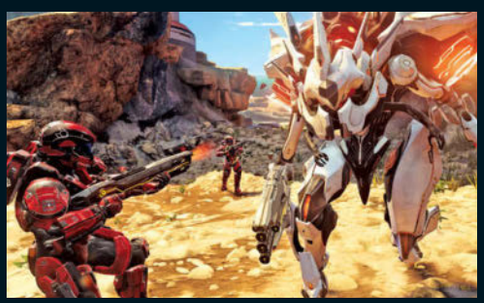
"Warzone doesn't feature a skill-based ranking system like CSR [for Arena], but we do use a hidden MMR value to track and match players according to skill, so that teams remain balanced," revealed studio head Josh Holmes in a recent 343 Q&A. He did note, however, "We allow people to enter matchmaking for Warzone with up to 12 people in a party, so it is possible to put together a 12-person squad to take on the world."

THE CONTENT



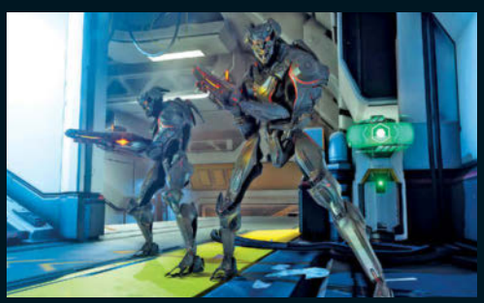
Warzone will launch with six maps, each said to be *four times* the size of anything we've seen in *Halo*'s multiplayer to date. Designed with large-scale warfare in mind, there's a ton of verticality, secret paths and routes are revealed via destruction, and there are chokeholds to create those classic close-quarters *Halo* skirmishes. Better still, Warzone will deliver six new DLC maps, for free, between now and June 2016.

EARN QUICK VICTORY POINTS



Victory Points can be earned from doing all manner of activities in Warzone, and, while you might be tempted to avoid killing the AI and instead focus on Spartans, they are an easy way to earn quick points. Keep an eye out for HUD updates identifying bosses such as a Sangheli General, which will get you 25 easy VP for a quick kill. Legendary bosses will spawn in periodically, each carrying a 200 VP bounty.

AI SPAWN POINTS

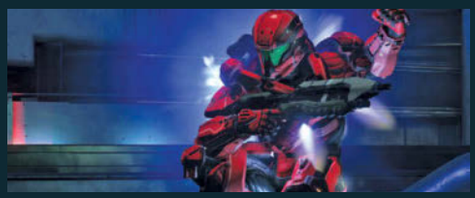


Spartans with a flair for teamwork can tactically hunt down the biggest point-earning bosses. "Each of the bosses has set spawn locations so that players can learn the maps and apply strategy," explains Holmes. "Boss areas are carefully crafted and positioned in locations that facilitate map movement while maintaining team balance. We place Legendary bosses in central locations to give both teams a fair shot."

WHEN TO USE THE NEW SPARTAN ABILITIES

HERE ARE THE SLICK NEW WAYS THAT YOU CAN MOVE AND KILL IN HALO 5: GUARDIANS

SPARTAN CHARGE



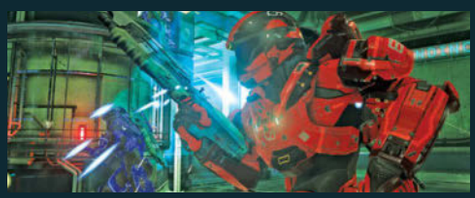
This deadly attack, unleashed with RB, sees your Spartan charge at an enemy full-force for a devastating melee beatdown. It's awesome to use, but if you miss then it'll leave you open to counter-attack. Use this when you're worried that a traditional melee back-and-forth might backfire on you.

GROUND POUND



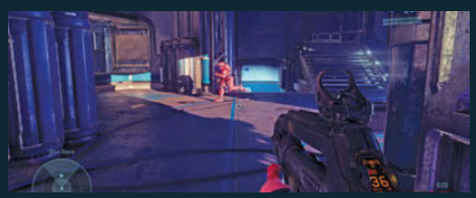
Holding down the RT while jumping will give you the opportunity to charge up and ground pound an area in your near vicinity. It's a guaranteed kill if you hit an enemy dead on, but it's so difficult to get right. This should mainly be attempted inside tight corridors and when capturing bases.

SPRINTING



Sprinting still feels a little weird inside *Halo*, but at least it's been balanced since *Halo 4*. Running is an essential part of navigating the large maps, but beware of overusing the ability – your shields don't recharge while sprinting, which makes you an easy target for the enemy if you're beating a tactical retreat.

ADS



The ability to aim down sights is a controversial addition to *Halo 5* – even with the return of descoping – but you should take advantage of this as often as possible. At medium-to-long distances it groups your shots, making it easier to nail an enemy that's on the move.

WARZONE'S LEVELLING EXPLAINED

GET EQUIPPED WITH WARZONE'S DEPLOYMENT STATIONS

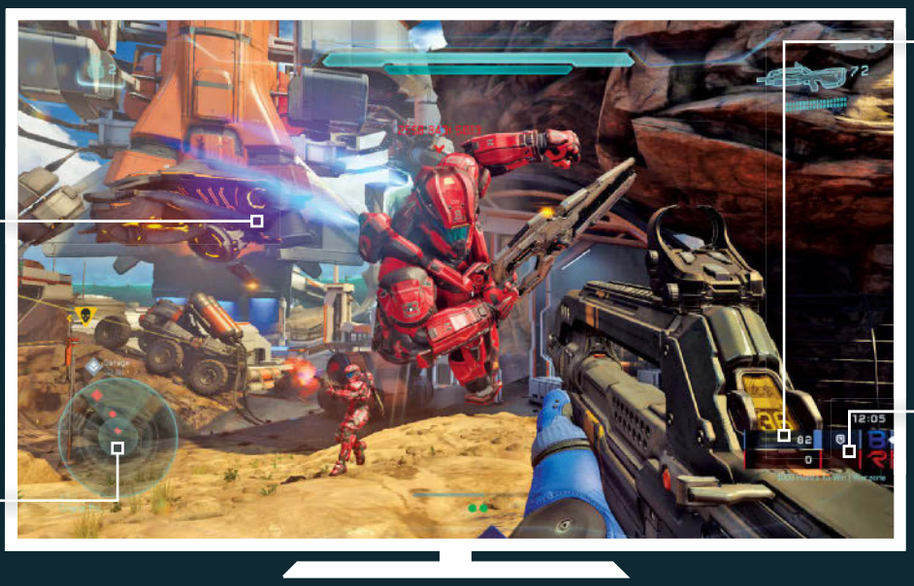
"Within each of the bases located around the map in Warzone are Requisition Stations. Players can interact with these stations and use any REQ cards within their collection to deploy weapons, vehicles and power-ups," Holmes tells us. It's worth noting that you can't just spam your best cards from the off – vehicles like the Banshee, for example, and power weapons like the Rocket Launcher – as summoning these items will cost Energy. "Everybody starts at REQ Level 1 at the beginning of each match and you gain levels based on your actions in the game. Capturing bases, killing AI, taking out AI Bosses and killing enemy players will help you level up within the match," continues Holmes. "The higher your REQ Level, the more energy you can store and use to deploy REQs."



HEADS UP

DROP SHIP
If you see one of these coming in, it's time to rally some friends and get moving. This means a group of enemy AI is about to drop in – and killing them all is a great way to earn some easy points – or that you're about to get the chance to take down a legendary boss.

POINTS
This details how many points your team currently has. Remember, first to 1000 points wins – although don't be surprised if teams stage massive comebacks by storming your core as your score ticks close to the magic number.



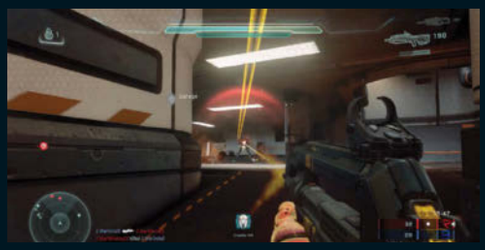
RADAR
Keep an eye on this at all times, not only looking out for enemy Spartans firing or using their Spartan Abilities. It will also highlight objectives, dead team mates and enemy AI in your vicinity, so you can be more aware of your surroundings.

BASE DEFENCE
These shields indicate how many bases your team has currently captured of the three on each map. If one starts to flash, get your ass over to that location and start defending it from the onrushing opposing team for a massive point boost!

BREAKING DOWN THE REQ SYSTEM

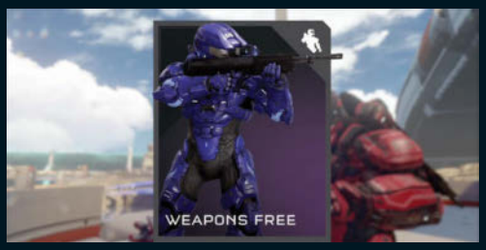
The quicker you get your head around this, the better

1: REQ POINTS



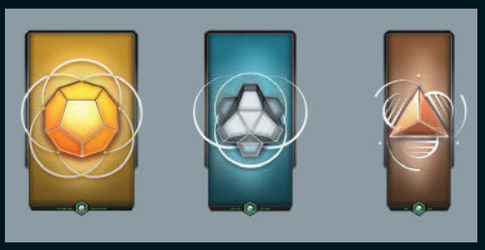
You will be able to earn REQ Points during every game of Warzone, which you can then start using in order to obtain REQ Packs. These packs contain a variety of REQ Cards, which in turn give you unlockable weapons, armour and vehicles for use in another game. It's worth getting hold of some packs nice and early.

2: REQ CARDS



REQ Cards come in both single-use and permanent item varieties. Single-use cards are powerful but can only be deployed once, such as a Wraith or Sniper Rifle. While permanent cards can be deployed multiple times, these are usually general loadout changes, armour mods, emblems and assassination animations.

3: REQ PACKS



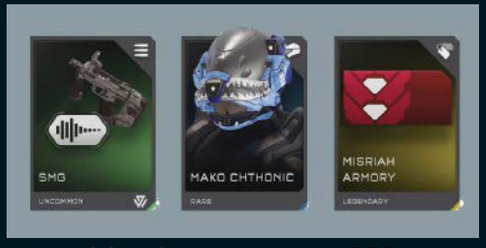
Each pack contains an array of items, and they can be purchased with REQ Points earned in-game or with real-world money. There are different tiers of packs as well – bronze, silver, gold and premium – and each of these offer different rewards and increase your chance of getting even more rare cards.

4: REQ STORE



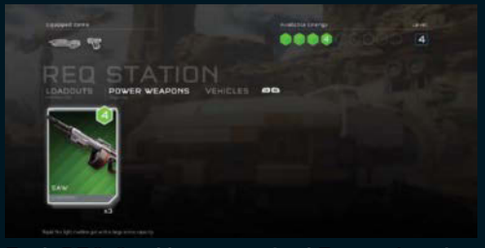
The REQ Store can be accessed from the Spartan Hub. Aside from a few exclusive items, everything in the REQ System can be acquired and purchased through regular pay by earning REQ points. Those of you who are feeling a little impatient will be able to purchase packs with real cash.

5: REQ COLLECTION



It's worth keeping an eye on your REQ Collection, because it lets you examine both the cards that you've already obtained and also those that you've yet to unlock. From here, you will also be able to sell single-use REQ Cards for REQ Points and then unlock addition cards.

6: ENERGY LEVELS



Each REQ Card has a required Energy Level before it can be used in-game. As you play through a standard round of Warzone, you'll see your Energy Level rising as you level-up; pressing the View button on your pad while you're respawning will let you view your Energy and available cards.

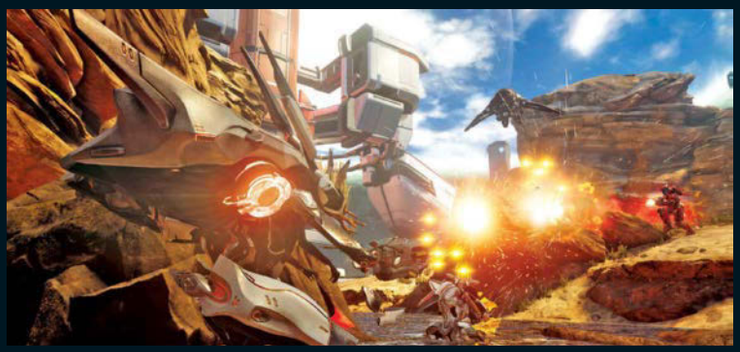
TIPS & TRICKS

DESTROYING THE CORE



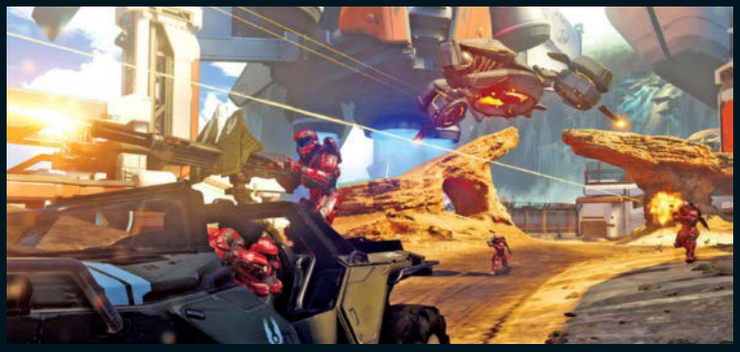
Getting to 1000 points isn't the only way to win Warzone. If your team is able to successfully capture three bases, they will then be able to move towards the enemy home base and being attacking the core directly. It absolutely will take a *lot* of firepower to pull off, so you'd better be prepared for the big assault, but destroying this will end the game prematurely. Be warned: it's in the heart of the enemy base so expect strong resistance.

NO RECIPE FOR SUCCESS



As Josh Holmes puts it, there is no direct recipe for success with Warzone. As with many of the massive multiplayer games that pique our interest, it's the creative and reactionary players that will succeed. "The best teams find the right balance between capturing and holding bases, hunting down bosses and killing members of the opposing team," says Holmes. "All three have a direct impact on your team's score, and knowing where and when to focus as a team is critical to victory."

USE VEHICLES WISELY



One more thing that we have noticed is that vehicles can very quickly turn the tide of any battle. Because of their high REQ and Energy Level cost, they appear pretty infrequently, but most players aren't prepared for a Banshee to swoop in, or for a Warthog to tear through an area with two other Spartans in the gunner seats. Deploy these vehicles wisely as you find them, get the enemy on the counter-attack and make them regret their lack of preparation.

REQ CARD DETAILED

ENERGY LEVEL



In Warzone, calling in Power Weapons, Vehicles and Power Ups requires an expenditure of Energy. Each REQ Card has an Energy cost and it takes time for this resource to recharge.

REQ LEVEL



Players can increase their REQ Level from 1 to 9 during a round by taking out enemy Spartans, destroying Bosses and completing objectives. This will give you access to more powerful cards.

RARITY



REQ Cards have a rarity attached to them indicating their value to your loadout. The tiering is: common, uncommon, rare, ultra-rare and legendary. The better the card, the more useful it will be.

MYTHIC

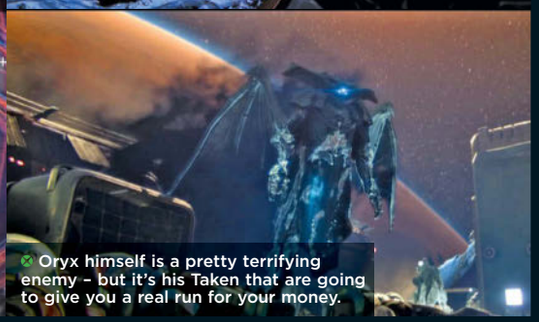


Some legendary items are so bloody rare that they are considered Mythic; these are classic weapons from the loadouts of famous Spartans and characters from the *Halo* universe.



The new, more modular levelling system makes the end-game far more bearable than before.


The new story levels are chock-full of secret bits of lore and even meta puzzles – players are *still* trying to figure them out.


Oryx himself is a pretty terrifying enemy – but it's his Taken that are going to give you a real run for your money.

THE TAKEN KING

We've woken the Hive...

PUBLISHER **Activision** | DEVELOPER **Bungie** | PRICE **£49.99/$59.99** | GAME REQUIRED **Destiny**

Destiny is a different game now. Year One of Bungie's experimental FPS may have been problematic, but with *The Taken King* the game is now, finally, 'out of beta'. It felt like everything that's been going on with the game for the last 12 months was experimental – there were teething problems – but *Destiny* 2.0 sets the record straight.

The smartest thing the game does is change the way you play. Whether you've been raiding every week, or you're picking up the game for the first time since launch, you'll notice two main things in level-to-level play: one, the new enemies fundamentally change the gunplay you're engaging in; and two, there's a renewed focus on enemy placement and tactics.

The new enemy types – The Taken – are almost lazily constructed. They all use existing character models with a new lick of cosmic paint, but the way they *work* is anything but lazy. Across all races, there are Taken variants, and these new enemies provide fantastic new FPS/puzzle encounters. Think you're safe up there sniping? Wait for that Taken Thrall to teleport towards you.

> "Everything that's been going on with Destiny for the last 12 months was experimental – now Destiny 2.0 sets the record straight"

Story-wise, the game is taking steps in the right direction, even if it isn't quite there yet. Nolan North's voice acting gives the new missions a excellent sense of urgency and desperation, but his redo of all the old stuff... well, no one's going to work well with that script, are they? Characterisation of the supporting NPCs of *Destiny* has stepped up tenfold, though; we actually care about the Vanguards and the vendors now. Mission design itself is a breath of fresh air – the platforming sections and miniboss fights that make the Raids *so good* are lightly fed into story missions.

The UI has seen vast improvements, too, meaning you can track everything with ease. If you're not an everyday player, the new progression system means you can make progress with your level and gear, a bit at a time, and never lose out because you're not dedicating *46 hours a week* to the Exotic loot grind.

Speaking of loot, the game is much more liberal with how it dishes out weapons and armour. We played for about ten hours at launch, and quickly replaced our (top level!) Year One gear with Rares and Commons that out-performed them. You can rent guns from the gunsmith to get a taste for what you like, too, which is cool.

The Taken King is more than just a DLC drop. Yes, it's expensive but if you can stomach that £50 investment, you're be able to build on those slipshod foundations Bungie put down last year and get into a game that will probably last you well into Spring 2016.

DOM PEPPIATT

CLASS WARFARE

The new subclasses available (Titan, Warlock and Hunter) are a whole new way *Destiny* changes up the balance. In PvP, you can't move for electric wizards covering the screen. In PvE, the new Titan hammer-monger rains death upon anyone foolish enough to cross it... and



across both, the Hunter – with his anchoring bow – actually forms a perfect trinity with the classes. You get a good fireteam together with good synergy and you'll understand *exactly* how the balancing has been laid out. Just don't play this game solo.

VERDICT

Don't play it for story, do play it for the loot cycle – *Destiny*, as an FPS, is now impeccable. Just don't expect *Halo*'s campaign or *COD*'s levelling system.

8

X-ONE scored **8** for The Taken King

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

HEAD TO HEAD



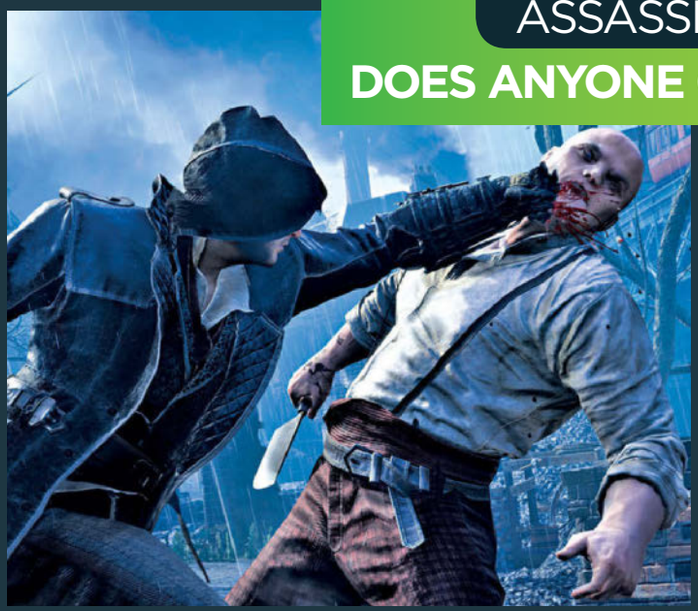
JOSH WEST
GT: Origami Kid

VS

STEVE ASHBY
GT: Seryph01



ASSASSIN'S CREED
DOES ANYONE CARE ANY MORE?





"It's the triple-A behemoth with an embarrassing amount of basic problems"

Would you pay £49.99 to be slapped in the face? Wait, you *wouldn't* like that? Well why on earth do you keep dropping the bomb on Ubisoft's biggest franchise every year? If *Unity* proved anything, it's that *Assassin's Creed* has shit the proverbial bed for the last time, and anyone still interested in it has clearly desynchronised from reality.

It isn't even the bugs that left my skin crawling, it's that when all was said, (patched) and done, the steaming remnants were proof that *Assassin's Creed*'s ambition and scope is matched and marred by wild abandon towards core mechanics and systems.

The Xbox One has enough power to deliver an *Assassin's Creed* game with serious game-changing prowess – instead we get a new city to explore, enough collectibles to incite a war inside my head and the same old problems. *Assassin's Creed* is and has always been centred around parkour with jittery movement mechanics, a stealth game with debatably detestable sneaking options, a violence-intensive experience with a thoroughly weightless combat system, an inherently story-driven experience about magic apples. It's the triple-A behemoth with an embarrassing amount of basic problems.

It is time that we received an *Assassin's Creed* game that functions *and* plays like it has come from this generation. If that can't be delivered, then perhaps it's time the franchise was laid to rest – at least until an Ubi studio can completely overhaul it. Go grab the shovel, I shouldn't have to dig this hole alone anymore.

"Pushing the Xbox's technology to its limit is something to be praised"

People (mostly Josh) are getting far too angry about *Assassin's Creed*. Yes, *Unity* was buggy when it launched last year, and of course that's *totally not okay*. But I did what others maybe should've done – left it a few months, picked it up in February after all the patches had been released, and played what I can only assume the final game was supposed to be. And you know what? It was freaking awesome.

I still can't get over the city that Ubisoft created. Paris was absolutely *stunning*, and the crowds moving through it made the city feel more real than any game I can remember playing. The assassinations, with multiple options for completion, moved much closer to what I want from an *Assassin's Creed* title too – picking my own way to kill a bastard.

I can't help but feel like, every year, the team behind the series has a great idea for what they want to do. They're ambitious. They're brave. But then the sales team jump in, tell them that it needs to be finished by August and they have to rush.

But that ambition still shows though, and pushing the Xbox's technology to its limit is something to be praised. These aren't boring, safe sequels; the team takes risks, adds new gameplay mechanics, and creates cities that are so accurate and interesting that you could teach a class of kids about an era by having them run around in the game. I, for one, am hugely excited for *Syndicate*. It might not revolutionise the series, but does it really have to? Bring on Victorian London – I can't wait to explore.

DO YOU AGREE? GET IN TOUCH:

xb1.co.uk | /XONEmag | youtube/XONEmag | @XONE_magazine | forum/xb1 | twitch/XONEmag



"Size wise, it's as big as all the maps of the main game combined"

Driving the buggies through the terrain, especially with friends, is pretty damned fun – not to mention wholly chaotic.

RETURNING TO THE APOCALYPSE

Dying Light: The Following is Techland's first major expansion for its open-world zombie game, but is it worth re-installing for?

The quicker we clear this up the better: you aren't going to be playing *Dying Light 2: Get Zombified* (the tentative, and not at all true, title) any time soon, if at all. Techland's open-world apocalypse simulator only launched back in January 2015, but eager fans have jumped on the studio for a sequel faster than a zombie on a fat kid at summer camp. The response from Techland is essentially this: the ideas it is floating for a fully-fledged sequel are too ambitious for current gen consoles and it doesn't want to compromise on its vision - *oof.*

That's why we are looking towards *Dying Light: The Following* to get our much-needed Antizen fix, the giant expansion that's shattering all expectations. Techland is done with launching little bits of DLC, *The Following* is bringing a host of new weapons, vehicles, abilities and challenges to an new area, one that's bigger than everything released for vanilla-*Dying Light* so far.

"[*The Following*] offers you a brand-new map and everything that comes with it: new environments, characters, quests, and secrets to discover," revealed *Dying Light: The Following*'s producer Tymon Smektała. "We're also designing new types of weapons to make the combat fresh even for players who spent hours with *Dying Light*."

Weapons (with a focus on range) and more open-ended quests (to



Should you be a Season Pass holder, *Dying Light: The Following* will actually be included for free as a gesture of good will.

make storytelling less linear) are all well and good, but is it enough to get you to re-install *Dying Light*, especially in this day and age where hard drive space is a valuable commodity? We're going to go for a resounding *hell yes* – from what we've seen so far at least. *The Following* takes place in the Harran outback, and it isn't just huge, but it also changes the way you approach everything from movement to combat in the open world.

Compared with the Old Town or Slums? "The map for *Dying Light: The Following* is really expansive and covers a wide range of terrains. Size wise, it's as big as all the maps of the main game combined," Smektała revealed, adding. "The very nature of the region also ensures a change in how you play. There are vast open areas where parkour can't save you, so you need to come up with new ways to survive... the land is much more open and that transforms the well-known gameplay pillars of *Dying Light* into a brand-new experience. An important part of this experience is commandeering all-terrain buggies and enjoying the game's creative brutality and freedom of movement in high gear."

Buggies make it easy to manoeuvre across the off-road terrain, especially if you're joining up with three other friends online. In a nice addition, completing challenges and hitting zombies gains experience for your Driver Rank, which lets you upgrade your buggy with add-ons such as UV headlights, bigger fuel tanks and better handling. There are also destructive add-ons to be made, such as mines, spikes and bull bars, as well as cosmetic items to find like paintjobs and decals.

But what we are really excited about, is how parkour will adapt. It's such a crucial part of the *Dying Light* experience, but with the outback areas of Harran covering a wide range of terrains, you'll no longer be able to just dart up the nearest building to escape gnashing jaws. Basically, *Dying Light: The Following* is the best type of expansion; taking familiar gameplay and turning it on its head with enough new items to make the character you've already spent tens of hours with feel renewed. *Dying Light* has had fantastic post-launch support and we hope this continues into the future. Who even needs *Dying Light 2*?

Dying Light: The Following is expected to launch on Xbox One in early 2016.

JOSH WEST

DRIVE ANGRY

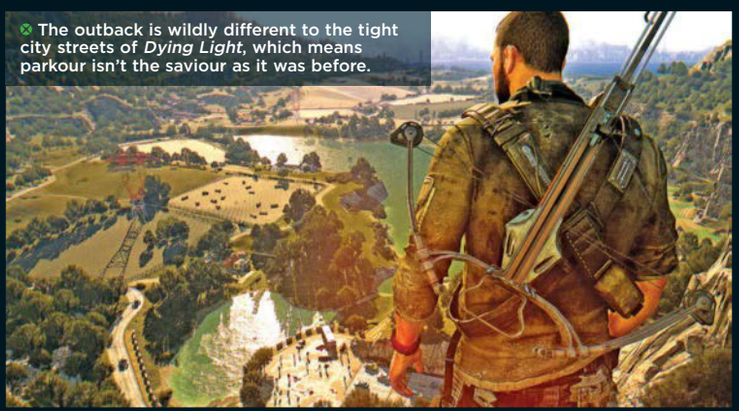


THE OUTBACK
Dying Light: The Following takes place outside of the infected area, in the outback of Harran. Not only will you find zombies out here, but you'll also find survivors who are just as terrified of the living.

PARTY UP
Like the basic *Dying Light* game experience, *The Following* will also support four-player online cooperative play. This is better than ever as every player has fully customisable vehicles.

THE BUGGY
Your buggy isn't just a cool new addition to *The Following*, it's also an integral way of getting around the outback. Due to the flat open spaces, parkour isn't as useful as it was in the city.

TOUGHER THAN EVER
Techland is boasting a tough experience, even for *Dying Light* veterans. Your progress will of course carry over, but there's an array of new weapons, skills and abilities to unlock for your character.



The outback is wildly different to the tight city streets of *Dying Light*, which means parkour isn't the saviour as it was before.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

GAME TIME
10+

PRICE
£14.99

CO-OP

GAME REQUIRED



DLC REVIEW

THE WITCHER III
HEARTS OF STONE

One of Geralt's biggest and best adventures ever

PUBLISHER **Namco Bandai Games** | DEVELOPER **CD Projekt RED** | PRICE **£9.99**

Cast your minds back to *GTA IV*. It was a rather serious affair, right? That's what made its second major expansion, *The Ballad Of Gay Tony*, back in 2009 such fun; it played with the established conventions of Liberty City and revealed a different side to its stoic protagonist. That's the best way to think of *Hearts Of Stone*, the first expansion for *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt*. It's a medieval *Ballad Of Gay Tony;* with just as much leather, and a few more swords thrown in for good measure.

Across twelve hours of new content, *Hearts Of Stone* will take you on one of Geralt's wildest adventures yet. We're talking about battling immortal bandit captains, rolling out on a heist, spending a night partying with a ghost, and fighting some of the craziest creatures CD Projekt RED has conceived yet. *Hearts Of Stone* is a fantastic way to expand *The Witcher III* after you've finished it.

That said, even if you are still battling through *Wild Hunt*, that doesn't mean that this is off limits. While high-end level characters will be able to immediately seek out the content in the world, other players can also jump into the chaos from the menu – with the game generating an end-game level avatar on your behalf – which is a nice touch. While it's true that the expansion doesn't add many new mechanics or new locations, it does deliver a wonderful, character-driven quest. It plays on the moments that made *Wild Hunt* so memorable and expands on them, and, in a rare move, Geralt also seems to be having a good time – it's refreshing after all the growling and glaring.

Regardless of whether you're battling through the hundreds of hours of content or looking for a new adventure, *The Witcher III: Hearts Of Stone* expands on the best elements of the base game, while delivering a fun, memorable and exciting adventure that's full of heart. CD Projekt RED has already proved that it is more than capable of mastering post launch support with its waves of free-DLC, and we can't wait to see what it does with its final major expansion *Blood And Wine* early next year.

JOSH WEST

VERDICT

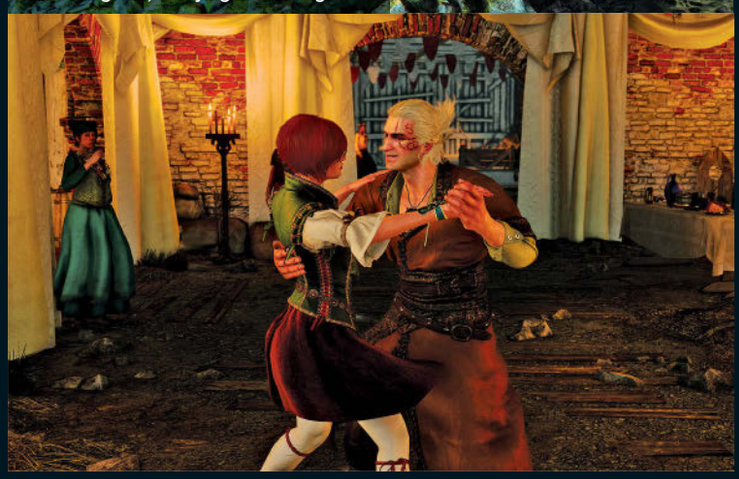
For the price of entry, you'll get yourself one of the biggest and best quest lines to be found in *The Witcher III*. Don't miss out.



The scope of *The Witcher III*'s *Heart Of Stone* is pretty impressive for an expansion, offering 12+ hours of gameplay.



The enemy design is pretty creepy, which, considering the state of monsters in the base game, is saying something.



FIVE THINGS TO FIND IN HEARTS OF STONE



GWENT

Are you a Gwent fan? You better start becoming one, because *Hearts Of Stone* features a whole host of new card-battling challenges.



ADVENTURE

To get into the expansion you'll need a level 35 character. If you don't have one, you can create a brand new one at the cap right from the off.



ROMANCE

Forget Yennefer, draw the curtains and lock the door; there are plenty of new persons of interest to make the sexy times with.



RUNESWORDS

Combine your sword glyphs properly and you'll get to unlock new powerful attacks, which will also be used to solve puzzles in the new quests.



MONSTERS

Obviously, there are plenty of monsters to hunt – including a rather disgusting looking giant toad who's just begging to be slain.

BATTLEFIELD HARDLINE

ROBBERY – Next-level cops and criminals

Visceral Games has made a pretty good run of *Battlefield Hardline*'s DLC, ensuring the game has kept a lively server base way after the game launched. The latest, *Robbery*, has probably been the best released to date – introducing four new maps, a new 5v5 game mode, new weapons and gadgets, and two new vehicles. The Big Score sees criminal teams plan and execute the perfect heist while the officers of the law attempt to stop the crooks before they can pull it off.

Squad Mode is an interesting take on the *Hardline* formula, pushing teams to work together more than ever. It's a multi-stage mode that provides a great alternative to the ever broken *Payday 2* in many ways; criminals have the most fun as they grab drills, break into vaults, nab the loot and plot an escape. Precinct 7, B*attlefield Hardline*'s first snow map, is fantastically designed with plenty of chokepoints for all-out criminal warfare engagements, while Museum, the first 100% indoor map, will force teams to change loadouts and plan different tactics. With *Hardline* beginning to wind down as EA prepares to launch *Star Wars Battlefront* – not to mention plan next year's inevitable *Battlefield 5* – this is fantastic way to squeeze a little bit more life out of one of 2015's best and most entertaining shooters.



Criminals will need to really work together in the new game mode if they want any chance of success.

VERDICT

Battlefield Hardline proved to be more than your standard *Battlefield* re-skin and we relish any opportunity to jump back in – be sure to get involved!

DISNEY INFINITY 3.0

RISE AGAINST THE EMPIRE – The best playset so far

One of the best things about *Disney Infinity 3.0* was its core playset, *Twilight Of The Republic*. We're delighted to say that *Rise Of The Empire* is even better. While it's clearly been abridged so that all the characters are always together, this is everything you'd expect from a game based on the original set of films. There are speeder bike chases, taking down AT-ATs, whooshing through an asteroid field, flying down one of the most famous trenches in movie history and lightsaber battles galore. In short, it's wonderful.

As with *Twilight Of The Republic*, there are numerous planets to explore and they can all be returned to at any time so you can complete the numerous side quests. One minute you're reuniting the band members of the Mos Eisley Cantina, the next you're going on a treasure hunt for Jabba The Hut, stealing a scout walker, or saving soldiers from dangerous wampas. The variety is strong, so it's pity that only a handful can be replayed on each planet.



The core story will only take you around six hours to complete, but the well realised worlds are so vast you'll spend far more time exploring them. We may have gotten the short end of the stick due to PS4 owners getting the pack as a timed exclusive, but believe us, it's worth the wait.

VERDICT

An excellent playset that not only does justice to the original films, but is packed with an insane amount of content.

INDIE ROUND-UP

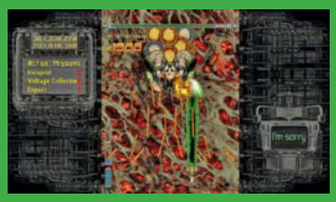
KAIJU PANIC

This cute action-strategy game tasks you with rescuing survivors and guiding them to safety while giant monsters tear through a city. It's an interesting take, forcing you to build, fight and rescue your way around the world. While it's fun, you might find that it's a little disposable.



TESLAPUNK

We don't get many classic 2D shoot-em-ups these days, which means we are more than a little rusty. Still, *Teslapunk* might offer the same fast-paced arcade gameplay that it is so clearly inspired by, but not all of the fun. Six levels and good music awaits, though.



BATTLE ISLANDS

Real-time, World War 2 themed battle strategy game Battle Islands lands on Xbox One, another F2P game that can barely hide its simplicity behind a wall of microtransaction paywalls. This is a difficult genre to crack – you'd be better off just playing *World Of Tanks*.



POLYCHROMATIC

There comes a time where there's physically no more *Geometry Wars* fun to be had, and so we look to other places to get our fix. *Polychromatic* is a competent wave based shooter, with a simple art style and soundtrack. It's a decent enough distraction.





10 GAMES WITH KICKASS FEMALE PROTAGONISTS

LARA CROFT AND EVIE FRYE ARE JUST TWO OF THE HEROINES TO GRACE OUR COVERS IN THE LAST FEW MONTHS. BUT THEY AREN'T THE ONLY AWESOME LEADING LADIES...



FAITH CONNORS
MIRROR'S EDGE

Console: Xbox 360
Developer: DICE
Release Date: 2008

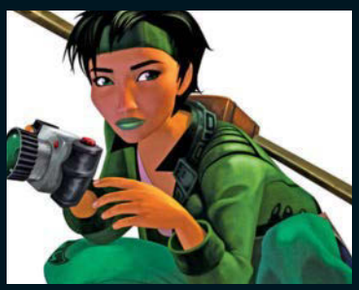
Faith might be mostly unseen during *Mirror's Edge* – you only catch brief glimpses of her in reflections – but she has the ability to clamber up drainpipes, leap across enormous gaps, and kick the crap out of people. What's more, her design breaks many of gaming's most outdated conventions – she's not a sex object; she's been designed as a realistic, athletic woman whose design is all about making a cool protagonist. The only downside was her lack of back story, but we'll be getting that in *Catalyst* next year.



COMMANDER SHEPARD
MASS EFFECT 2

Console: Xbox 360
Developer: Bioware
Release Date: 2010

BioWare certainly wasn't the first developer to let you choose your main character's gender, but for a mainstream title like *Mass Effect* to include such an option was great. Creating your own, customised version of Shepard was fantastic, especially considering that the male and female Shepards were given equal validity with the overarching plot of the series, and the team you could form along the way. Keep an eye out; all three *ME* titles should be back on Xbox One through backwards compatibility soon.



JADE
BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

- Console: **Xbox**
- Developer: **Ubisoft**
- Release Date: **2003**

Michel Ancel's goal when creating Jade was to create a realistic *person* – something that was not the norm for women in games in 2003. The focus is on her role, situation and the meaning of her actions, rather than on her design, and the game benefits hugely from it. The title remains one of our favourite original Xbox games; varied levels and some fantastic mechanics made this an adventure that we're still desperate to see a sequel to. *BG&E 2* has been rumoured for years, so we may still see it on the Xbox One...



BAYONETTA
BAYONETTA

- Console: **Xbox 360**
- Developer: **Platinum Games**
- Release Date: **2009**

Bayonetta is one of the few strong female characters in videogames, thanks to the fact that she can kick some serious ass. One of only two remaining Umbran Witches, Bayonetta has the power to summon creatures to attack her enemies, or strike with her four guns – Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme. She is undoubtedly sexualised, but her characterisation within the game is so well done that she is arguably more interesting than the plot of the game. Still, the game itself – especially the combat – is excellent and worth revisiting.



LARA CROFT
TOMB RAIDER

- Console: **Xbox 360**
- Developer: **Crystal Dynamics**
- Release Date: **2013**

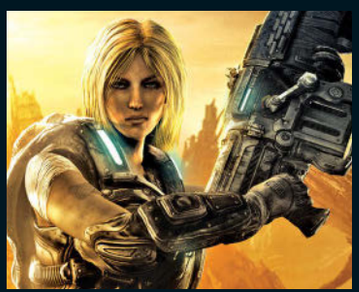
Lara Croft has, of course, been a sex object since she (and her pointy, polygonal breasts) first appeared on the PS1, but the 2013 reboot of the series toned down the sex appeal and toned up the realism, making Lara a character we actually cared about. It wasn't perfect, but some great graphics, an interesting story and some fantastic characterisation brought Lara right into the 21st Century. The *Definitive Edition* was free through Games With Gold in September, and it's worth picking up ahead of Lara's return in *Rise Of The Tomb Raider* next month.



CHELL
PORTAL 2

- Console: **Xbox 360**
- Developer: **Valve Corporation**
- Release Date: **2011**

It's odd to include a character that has literally never said a word out loud, but it's her actions and the reactions of the people (read: robots) around her that make her strength clear. Chell is the one behind the portal gun in both titles in the series, and, while she is mute, the fear GLaDOS expresses when Chell finally wins, and the way in which she coolly passes through the test chambers, makes her awesome. You can glimpse her if you shoot the portals *just right*, but the rest of the game is so utterly brilliant that we didn't keep trying for long.



ANYA STROUD
GEARS OF WAR 3

- Console: **Xbox 360**
- Developer: **Epic Games**
- Release Date: **2011**

Anya was your friend, contact and intel-provider throughout *Gears 1* and *2*, but in *Gears 3* she finally straps on some COG Armour, picks up a Lancer and starts kicking some serious ass. You'll need to enter a four-player co-op game to control her, sadly (and she doesn't even appear in every mission), but for the times when you get to use her, she is totally badass and can curb-stomp with the best of them. The game was pretty bloody good, too – and if you buy and play *Gears Ultimate* right now, you'll get it for free when the new system update launches.



JILL VALENTINE
RESIDENT EVIL HD

- Console: **Xbox One**
- Developer: **Capcom**
- Release Date: **2015**

We'll tell you why we love Jill Valentine. A zombie outbreak takes over a city, and rather than wait to be saved like a videogame princess by a big, strapping hero, Jill picks up a shotgun and goes to town. She's a badass, popping up in several *Resi* games since, but her first appearance is still our favourite. And, thanks to the HD remake recently on Xbox One, you can now go back and play through the original mansion all over again. Yes, the camera angles can be awkward and the save system is outdated, but goddamn does it nail the terror.



JOANNA DARK
PERFECT DARK

- Console: **Xbox**
- Developer: **Rare/4J Studios**
- Release Date: **2010**

Jo Dark had a huge impact on our younger gaming brains. The British spy was not only one of the coolest characters in videogames in 2000 when the title first launched, she also starred in one of the best first-person shooters ever. When *Perfect Dark Zero* was announced as a 360 launch title we were pumped, but it sadly never quite reached the same heights. Thankfully, the original title re-released as an HD remake in 2010, allowing us to relive our younger days again, and remember why we loved Agent Dark so much in the first place.



FEMALE FOOTBALLERS
FIFA 16

- Console: **Xbox One**
- Developer: **EA**
- Release Date: **2015**

It might seem like an odd choice, but the importance of including female footballers in a mainstream *FIFA* title cannot be overstated. Women's football has really taken off in the last few years, with the Women's World Cup shown around the world, and this year EA has finally been able to transfer this popularity into *FIFA*. You'll find 12 teams available to choose from within *FIFA 16*, and while they can only play against other women's teams (just like real life) it's still a major step forward for the game.



NEXT ISSUE

Dark Souls III

Has From Software got us praising the sun or is the Souls series finally in for a dramatic death of its own?

+

TEN YEARS OF XBOX 360 CELEBRATED

FIRST FAR CRY: PRIMAL DETAILS REVEALED

Note: While we'll do our best to ensure that the above fits into **X-ONE**, it might fall by the wayside. This isn't necessarily our fault, but we'll do everything we can to keep our promises.

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